

Investigating the Piano Concertos of Nikolai Medtner: an intertextual and narrative application

Abstract

The piano concertos and sonatas of Nikolai Karlovich Medtner (1880-1951) form an imperative part of his oeuvre. Substantial research has been conducted on Medtner's sonatas, culminating in Wendelin Bitzan's painstaking analysis of his fourteen piano sonatas. A comprehensive study on Medtner's piano concertos is warranted, and this forms the core of this dissertation.

Medtner's dual cultural heritage (Russian and Germanic) is highlighted by influences from prolific composers and poets including his mutually beneficial friendship with the Symbolist poet and theorist, Andrei Bely. Even though Medtner was largely an auto-didact, he had consultations and discussions regarding musical form and structural problems with Taneev. Medtner and his contemporaries include Prokofiev, Rachmaninoff and Scriabin, developed the concerto genre from the nineteenth to the twentieth century. They each innovatively stamped the genre with their own individuality and originality.

Medtner's First Piano Concerto in C minor, Op. 33 (1914-1918) though experimental, is a mature example of *Two-Dimensional Sonata Form*. Medtner's Second Piano Concerto in C minor, Op. 50 (1920-1927), has three movements which perspicuously alludes to neoclassicism and triggers a broad spectrum of intertextual and narrative implications. His Third Piano Concerto in E minor, Op. 60 (*Ballade*), is the non plus ultra of all his concertos and one of his most advanced compositions. It has structural, semantic and hermeneutic parallels to his *Sonata Ballade* for solo piano in F-sharp Major, Op. 27. Even though there are some aspects of symbolism in Medtner's First Piano Concerto, it is in his Third Piano Concerto, more than most of Medtner's other instrumental compositions, where he exhibits strong literary connections (referencing Lermontov's *Rusalka*) and vast programmatic dimensions opening up fruitful intertextual implications. Medtner's position in history, which was tainted by a neglected niche and facets of Russian Symbolism, calls for an in-depth examination. Medtner's Third Piano Concerto together with his Piano Quintet in C Major, Op. posth, unequivocally position him amongst the foremost of the symbolist composers. Therefore, in order to provide a dexterous account of Medtner's concertos, a theory of intertextuality is deemed optimal for this study.

This dissertation not only discusses Medtner's piano concertos from various analytical perspectives, but also positions the piano concertos intertextually and narratively within the genre history and approaches them with reference to other relevant composers' compositions. A comprehensive biographical account of Medtner and considers the important socio-political developments during his lifetime is provided. Moreover, a history of intertextuality is mapped out. Comprehensive arguments regarding the pros, cons, flaws, contradictions, merits and solutions that many relevant theorists and

writers have outlined regarding intertextuality and narrativity are included. A genre history of the piano concerto until the late nineteenth century, with particular emphasis on Russia, is highlighted and includes a detailed and comprehensive account of Medtner's piano concertos. Moreover, with the consideration of recent musical analysis methods and theories, an exemplification of the merits of intertextual and narrative implications is confronted.