Harmony and Climax in the Late Works of Sergei Rachmaninoff

by

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Finally, my dear Kaye, without whom I would never have survived the ordeal. I cannot express the extent of her contribution and therefore will not try to do so. I will instead only promise a return to something approaching normal life in the coming months.
Preface

It has not been possible to include scores of the works analyzed in the dissertation. In many cases the analytic figures and reductions provided contain sufficient information to make scores unnecessary, but the reader is nevertheless encouraged to have copies at hand if possible. Works composed before Rachmaninoff left Russia in 1917 (Opp. 1–39) are in the public domain and may be found in numerous editions. References in the dissertation to the late concert works (Opp. 40, 41, 43, 44, and 45) and to the revised version of the Sonata No. 2, Op. 36 follow the most recent Boosey & Hawkes editions (listed in the bibliography), with the exception of Op. 41, which has no North American publisher and is available only in old Soviet editions.

References to specific locations in scores are made using measure numbers or rehearsal numbers as appropriate for a given work, and occasionally using both. In the body of the dissertation, rehearsal numbers are printed in boldface (e.g. 22). A subscript attached to a rehearsal number indicates a specific number of measures after the rehearsal number. Thus, $22_7$ = seven measures after 22. In the captions of figures, rehearsal numbers are abbreviated “r.” while measure and measures are abbreviated “m.” and “mm.” In the body of the dissertation and in captions to figures, works identified only by title are Rachmaninoff’s. Works not by Rachmaninoff are identified by composer, title and, where appropriate, opus number, etc.

Russian names are given in the transliterations most familiar to a general reader. Thus, “Rachmaninoff,” “Prokofiev,” “Scriabin,” “Tchaikovsky,” and “Rimsky-Korsakov,” not “Rakhmaninov,” “Prokofieff,” “Skryabin,” “Chaikovsky,” and “Rimsky-Korsakoff.” (Rachmaninoff’s preference for the “-off” spelling of his name as opposed to the “-ov” spelling is respected.) Terms in Russian are italicized in the dissertation (e.g. nega, peremennost). Such terms are without exception drawn from published research on Russian music, and transliterations follow those of the sources.
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Abstract

This dissertation develops a framework for interpreting the interaction of functional tonal structures, equal-interval chromatic structures, and modal structures in Sergei Rachmaninoff’s mature compositions (1909–1940). Three areas of research are involved: 1) harmonic materials, compositional techniques, and expressive characteristics in Rachmaninoff’s style; 2) chromatic and modal theories in general but with special emphasis on Russian repertories; and 3) theories of tonal tension, expressive shape, and climax as applied to Postromantic music.

The harmonic language of Rachmaninoff’s mature works may be understood as an amalgam of well formed, differentiated components drawn from the Western common practice and Russian musical traditions. I show that different harmonic components have different rhetorical associations in the works studied; that different components are generally associated with different locations in form; and that acknowledging the interaction of different kinds of harmonic structures in a work contributes significantly to an understanding of expressive trajectory and large-scale organization, and—especially—to exegesis of climax events.

Previous studies of Rachmaninoff’s works have with rare exceptions downplayed the significance of both Russian idioms and climax in his works. I argue that reevaluation is warranted on both counts. Although scholars have generally treated climax events as problems to be contained in tonal analysis, I treat them as core events around which to organize an analysis using a strongly tension-oriented approach.

Chapters 1 and 2 address issues of form and harmony in Postromantic works in general and Rachmaninoff’s works in particular. I develop a theory of hyperdissonance to aid interpretation of extraordinary harmonic tensions and formal problems that resist explanation in conventional tonal and Formenlehre terms. Chapter 3 outlines the rhetorical associations that the variegated components of Rachmaninoff’s harmonic
language have. Chapters 4 and 5 address equal-interval chromatic structures (octatonic, hexatonic, whole-tone) and modal structures (church modes, *peremennost, nega*) in Rachmaninoff’s mature works. In Chapter 6, the interpretive apparatus of Chapters 1 through 3 and the technical apparatus of Chapters 4 and 5 are applied to Rachmaninoff’s last three compositions: *Rhapsody on a Theme by Paganini*, Op. 43 (1934), Symphony No. 3, Op. 44 (1936), and Symphonic Dances, Op. 45 (1940).
Chapter 1
Introduction

Rachmaninoff does not retreat before extremely complex problems, having worked out already his technical methods and the characteristics of his style. Of these, the greatest power in his creative hands and his favorite is harmony—which is full of colour, lush, often bold and sometimes even rather tough.¹

Rejecting a cherished modus operandi of Rachmaninoff scholars, I will not begin this study with a defense of the composer. If recent trends can be trusted, the scholarly tide has turned and a fuller reckoning of his achievements may be forthcoming. The brutal dismissal of the composer in the 5th edition of Grove’s Dictionary of Music and Musicians has been supplanted by Geoffrey Norris’s far more sympathetic account in recent print and online editions; and, as the preliminary review of literature in this chapter testifies, several high-grade dissertations and books have appeared during the last quarter-century.² These advances provide traction for new research on Rachmaninoff’s works.

The topic of this dissertation developed from a desire to better understand certain complex chromatic and modal structures in Rachmaninoff’s mature works. Three main questions are addressed:

1. How do the special chromatic and modal structures identified in the dissertation interact with the strong functional tonal bases of Rachmaninoff’s works?

2. Can an interpretive framework be developed that allows the analyst to gather meaning from the identification of special chromatic and modal structures, without denying the desire to hear Rachmaninoff’s works as powerfully integrated and tonally unified?

3. What implications does awareness of special chromatic and modal structures have for the interpretation of form, expressive/rhetorical trajectories, and climax events?

The dissertation incorporates three distinct areas of research: 1) harmonic materials, compositional techniques, and expressive characteristics in Rachmaninoff’s mature style; 2) chromatic and modal theories in general but with special emphasis on Russian repertories; and 3) theories of tonal tension, expressive shape, and climax in late Romantic and Postromantic music. I have therefore distributed the requisite survey of literature over multiple sections in the dissertation. Incorporated into this introductory chapter is a survey of pertinent sources concerned primarily or wholly with Rachmaninoff’s compositions and a preliminary review of chromatic theories. The topics in Chapters 2 and 3 of the dissertation emerge from a more extensive review of literature on chromatic theory, the analysis of Postromantic works, and tonal tension and climax. Chapters 4 and 5 incorporate a survey of literature on chromatic and modal structures in Russian music.

The selection of harmony as a main focus for study is not arbitrary. As Ossovsky’s comments (quoted at the head of the chapter) indicate, Rachmaninoff’s highly individual pitch language was noticed quite early in his career. Even in his early compositions there is a “boldness”—a “toughness,” even—of harmony, which got amplified in the jagged, intensely chromatic works of the composer’s later years. I suggest that this boldness remains to be understood, and that it involves not just a high level of local dissonance resulting from complex linear elaboration of functional tonal syntax, but also, crucially, special chromatic and modal structures that have as yet been largely unexamined in his music.

The boldness was recognized and valued by Rachmaninoff’s Russian contemporaries and by later Soviet musicologists. K.A. Kuznetsov observed in 1945 that Rachmaninoff’s “musical language is invariably progressive even if permanently connected with sane foundations of Russian and world classicism,” and that the
“harmonic boldness” (Kuznetsov uses the same term as Ossovsky) of works composed in the 1910s “exemplifies a certain tribute paid by him…to modernism.”\(^3\) Such remarks seem mildly astonishing to us in an academic culture that has conventionally considered Rachmaninoff to be, as Gerald Abraham put it, a “pale shadow” of his Russian musical forebears.\(^4\) When, writing at various points in the 1940s, Kuznetsov, Soviet musicologist Daniel Zhitomirski, and Russian-born writer Nicholas Slonimsky all point out, as Geoffrey Norris has done more recently, similarities between Rachmaninoff’s and Prokofiev’s works, conventional musicological wisdom about Rachmaninoff is turned on its head.\(^5\) Norris is explicit about the new features of works composed by Rachmaninoff after leaving Russia in 1917, noting their “biting chromaticism,” “curious, shifting harmonies,” “rhythmic incisiveness,” and “almost Prokofiev-like grotesquery,” though he provides no analytic support for these points.\(^6\)

I will go somewhat further than Norris in the initial chapters of this study, suggesting and demonstrating through analysis certain similarities between Rachmaninoff and not just Prokofiev but a number of other composers with whom Rachmaninoff has traditionally been contrasted, not compared—Rimsky-Korsakov, Scriabin, Mahler, Richard Strauss, and even Shostakovich—before making a strategic retreat to ensure that Rachmaninoff’s own style does not disappear under the weight of too many comparisons. As Zhitomirski put it, Rachmaninoff “overcame the stylistic inertia of modernism by selecting and transfiguring in his own way the most fresh and vital musical agglomerations of the first quarter of the century.”\(^7\) Barrie Martyn has echoed this observation more recently, noting that “the fundamental fact of Rachmaninoff’s place in Russian musical history is that he stands Janus-like between the old Russia and the new, looking back to the flowering of Russian nineteenth-century ‘classical’ music as also ahead to the first generation of Soviet Composers.”\(^8\)

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\(^5\) Zhitomirski and Slonimsky are quoted in Yasser, “Progressive Tendencies,” 23.
\(^7\) Quoted in Yasser, “Progressive Tendencies,” 22.
Overview of the Repertory and Preliminary Survey of Literature

Detailed analyses of Rachmaninoff’s compositions are rare in the scholarly literature. The well-known biographies of the composer written by Sergei Bertensson and Jay Leyda, John Culshaw, Geoffrey Norris, and Barrie Martyn contain only superficial analytic notes, though a wealth of background and contextual information. Most dissertations on Rachmaninoff’s works have been addressed to the performer or general reader. Among the relatively few serious studies of Rachmaninoff’s music that have appeared, the late works have been generally neglected, despite a general agreement that the mature style, represented by works composed from the 1910s through the 1930s, has unique characteristics in relation to the repertory in general and Rachmaninoff’s earlier works in particular. The most thorough study of Rachmaninoff’s harmonic language yet produced, Robert Cunningham’s impressive dissertation of 1999, includes in-depth analyses of several of the Op. 33 and Op. 39 Etudes-Tableaux (1911, 1917), but does not include any music composed after 1931 and considers only one work composed after 1917, the “Corelli” Variations, Op. 42 (1931), which cannot be called Rachmaninoff’s most analytically challenging late composition. Charles J. Smith’s short, unpublished study of Rachmaninoff’s chromatic techniques deals with works Rachmaninoff composed before leaving Russia. David Cannata analyzes the tonal design and form of the Symphony No. 3, Op. 44 (1936) in his important and scholarly 1999 book (developed from a dissertation of 1992), but he does this as much by examining manuscripts and

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detailing compositional process as by analyzing the music itself.\textsuperscript{13} The Symphonic Dances, Op. 45 (1940) have yet to be seriously examined, as do the Piano Concerto No. 4, Op. 40 (1926; revised several times) and the Three Russian Songs, Op. 41 (1926).

Scholarly treatment of works composed before 1917 is more erratic. The many important vocal works composed by Rachmaninoff during the 1910s have been neglected. The Op. 34 and Op. 38 songs (published in 1912 and 1916, respectively) and the choral symphony The Bells, Op. 35 (1913) have yet to enter into the scholarly discourse. Stephen H. Prussing’s dissertation on the choral Vespers, Op. 37 (1915) is the only substantial, analysis-oriented document about the work.\textsuperscript{14} Not surprisingly, piano works from all periods have received more attention; but here the tendency toward performer-oriented documents is especially noted. Heejung Kang’s recent dissertation on the Rhapsody on a Theme by Paganini, Op. 43 (1934) is representative of such documents.\textsuperscript{15} This document is perhaps more analytic in orientation than most, but aims to demonstrate that conventional tonal and stylistic principles apply relatively unchanged; the work is treated, albeit lovingly, as outdated. A similar perspective is common even among serious analysts of Rachmaninoff’s works. For example, in his dissertation on Rachmaninoff’s symphonies, Dana Collins states his central point as follows: “the harmonic analysis traces and helps evaluate [Rachmaninoff’s] progression from a daring to an anachronistic composer.”\textsuperscript{16} I reject this view as too limited, and believe that rigorous study of Rachmaninoff’s later works must be undertaken to overturn such blanket evaluations of his late style.

In part to fill this vacuum, and in part because I believe Rachmaninoff’s later works are richer and more complex than his earlier ones, I focus in the dissertation on works composed after 1909, and especially on the relatively few works composed after 1926.\textsuperscript{17} With the exception of a few shorter passages meant to demonstrate core

\textsuperscript{13} David Butler Cannata, Rachmaninoff and the Symphony (Innsbruck: Studien-Verlag, 1999).
\textsuperscript{14} Stephen H. Prussing, “Compositional Techniques in Rachmaninoff’s ‘Vespers, Opus 37’” (Ph.D. diss., The Catholic University of America, 1980).
\textsuperscript{16} Dana Livingston Collins, “Form, Harmony, and Tonality in S. Rakhmaninov’s Three Symphonies” (Ph.D. diss., The University of Arizona, 1988), abstract.
\textsuperscript{17} Rachmaninoff composed nothing of substance between 1917 and 1926.
techniques or to show precedents for complex structures in later works, all of the analyses
in this study are of works from 1909 or later.

Cannata has divided the composer’s output into four periods: 1890–1896 (Opp. 1–16), 1900–1908 (Opp. 17–28), 1909–1917 (Opp. 30–39), and 1926–1940 (Opp. 40–45),
which for the sake of clarity I refer to as the “early Russian,” “middle Russian,” “late
Russian,” and “exile” periods, respectively.18 For Cannata, *Isle of the Dead*, Op. 29
(1909) sits between periods, and represents a landmark in Rachmaninoff’s development.
The seventeen opuses written between 1909 and 1940 (*Isle of the Dead* through the
Symphonic Dances, Op. 45, the last composition) show Rachmaninoff’s style in varying
degrees of its full maturity, and, while a number of earlier works are as or more famous
(for example the Concerto No. 2, Op. 18, the Symphony No. 2, Op. 27, several of the Op.
23 preludes, and of course the C# minor prelude, Op. 3, No. 2), it is to the later works
that one must turn if the composer’s development is to be charted. In this study, particular
attention will be paid Rachmaninoff’s last three compositions, all of which are large
concert works: the *Rhapsody on a Theme by Paganini*, the Symphony No. 3, and the
Symphonic Dances. This choice has been made partly because the characteristics and
techniques described in this study are particularly evident in Opp. 43–45, and partly
because these three works have received scant treatment in the scholarly literature.

The Compound Harmonic Syntax of Rachmaninoff’s Mature Works

Analysts of Rachmaninoff’s works have generally concentrated on demonstrating
the music’s tonal and/or motivic coherence. Comparatively little attention has been paid
to ways that sharp contrasts—harmonic, rhetorical, motivic/thematic, etc.—are set up and
exploited.19 Rachmaninoff had something of a Dionysian side as a composer, which
comes through especially clearly in works from the late Russian and exile periods.
Apollonian analytic approaches disguise the extent to which he was, like many Russian
composers before and after him, an eclectic composer in whose music the fusion of
different melodic-harmonic idioms sometimes seems as much a mad improvisation as a

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19 As discussed below and in Chapter 6, Cannata’s analyses of Rachmaninoff’s large concert works are
exceptions; they are very “problem-oriented.”
conventionally-formed musical argument. This is not to say that a convincing argument is not to be found, only that, as Gerald Abraham put it, “compositional superabundance”—textural, melodic, and especially harmonic—is a recognizable characteristic of Rachmaninoff’s style. Abraham means the term disparagingly, but it need not be taken so. In my view, the superabundance is not just on the musical surface (“a lot of notes”), but something deeper that emerges from Rachmaninoff’s unusual position as an inheritor of two traditions: the conventional European tonal practice and the less conventional nineteenth-century Russian practice. No other composer absorbed both as fully as Rachmaninoff did. In the works studied, I recognize a confluence of three musical streams. One is generic; two have distinctly “Russian” overtones. These constitute three components of a rich, compound harmonic syntax:

1. Functional tonal organization.
2. “Fantastic” equal-interval chromatic structures.
3. Special modal structures.

Each category is outlined in brief below, preliminary to more detailed discussion in later chapters.

*Functional Tonal Organization*

The first and, in terms of structure if not necessarily expressive content, most important component is diatonic-functional tonal organization, which forms the basis of Rachmaninoff’s works even at their most tonally advanced. By functional, I mean goal-oriented tonal organization in which root-relations by perfect fifth and tendency tone resolutions are critical. In the analytic diagrams in the dissertation, functional tonal patterns are often represented using an adaptation of the formula outlined by Marion Guck and also used by Steven Laitz as the basis of his “phrase model.” Authentic tonal progressions are represented by the formula $T_1 - (x) - PD - D - T_2$, where $T_1$ an $T_2$

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indicate initial and goal tonics, D indicates dominant function, PD indicates predominant function and (x) indicates any number of potential contrapuntal and harmonic expansions of the initial tonic.\textsuperscript{22} Recognizing that, as Anatole Leikin has put it, “in Rachmaninov, plagality becomes quintessential,” subdominant-oriented tonal progressions (rarer than authentic, but sometimes structurally significant in the works analyzed) are represented by the formula $T_1 - (x) - SD - T_2$, where SD represents subdominant function (as distinct from predominant function).\textsuperscript{23}

As a young composer, Rachmaninoff was strongly influenced by Moscow-based composers Tchaikovsky and Taneyev, and if, as Joseph Yasser argued a half century ago, Rachmaninoff outgrew the Muscovite aesthetic and harmonic limitations fairly early in his career, he nevertheless depended throughout his career on functional tonal patterns and goal-oriented, arc-shaped phrase designs derived from common-practice models more than St. Petersburg composers Mussorgsky or Rimsky-Korsakov did.\textsuperscript{24} Indeed, arc-shaped melodic structures, and the clear departure-return strategies they suggest on various scales (discussed more fully in Chapter 2), may be Rachmaninoff’s principle inheritance from Tchaikovsky. The prominence of arc shapes in many musical dimensions (melodic contour, harmonic organization, form) strongly differentiates Rachmaninoff’s works from those of more progressive Russian composers working at the same time (especially Scriabin and Stravinsky). Although Rachmaninoff’s harmonic language can be considerably more adventurous and variegated than is generally recognized, expressive trajectories retain a basis in nineteenth-century models.

This has encouraged many scholars to approach Rachmaninoff’s works entirely through the door of the German common practice and its late-Romantic extensions. Cunningham, whose detailed analyses are easily the best yet produced by a Rachmaninoff scholar, speaks very much from within the Schenkerian tradition even as he addresses the tonally complex compositions of the late Russian and exile periods.

\textsuperscript{22} When unambiguous, conventional Roman numerals and figures are also used.
\textsuperscript{24} Yasser, “Progressive Tendencies.”
Cunningham extends the Schenkerian perspective in moderate ways: by referring to Daniel Harrison’s influential dualist theory, by acknowledging Deborah Stein’s recognition that, in late tonal music, the “plagal axis” may occasionally match the tonic-dominant polarity in structural significance, and by incorporating Howard Cinnamon’s work (also undertaken from within the Schenkerian tradition) on equal division of the octave in Liszt’s music. However, Cunningham’s stated goal is a fundamentally conservative one: to show “the solid tonal foundations beneath Rachmaninoff’s progressive harmonies.” For him, “symmetrical pitch structures such as the octatonic collection and progressions by equal divisions of the octave are deployed in contexts where they emphasize deeper-level harmonies and strong, tonality-affirming chordal motion…These innovations arise within complex but generally unambiguous structures, which enhance a listener’s grasp of the work’s tonal conception.” For David Cannata, Rachmaninoff’s works represent a Russian culmination of post-Wagnerian, Post-Liszian syntax. But, as Rachmaninoff biographer Max Harrison put it, “whatever the music looks like, it never really sounds like Wagner.”

For all the insights Cunningham and Cannata’s studies have provided, they fail to account for the crucial structural and expressive roles played by other kinds of melodic-harmonic organization. The analyses in this study suggest that it may be more interpretively useful to construe marked chromatic and modal structures in Rachmaninoff’s works as having the potential to problematize or disrupt conventional tonal patterns. This has significant implications for the analysis of large-scale design, expressive shapes, and climax. The Russian accretions in Rachmaninoff’s idiom—the second and third components of the compound syntax—are perhaps not so easily dismissed.

27 Ibid., xvi (abstract).
28 Cannata, Rachmaninoff and the Symphony, 29-37.
29 Max Harrison, Rachmaninoff (London: Continuum, 2005), 351.
“Fantastic” Chromatic Structures

This category has gone largely unrecognized in Rachmaninoff’s works despite being a subject of considerable interest in studies of other Russian composers’ music. It involves Rachmaninoff’s use (and highly individual extensions) of equal-interval chromatic structures—what Richard Taruskin has called Russian “fantastic” harmony, common in Russian works from the last decades of the nineteenth century and the first two of the twentieth.\(^{30}\) As discussed in Chapters 2 through 4, “fantastic” chromaticism transcends raw structure and emerges as a kind of expressive topic in Rachmaninoff’s mature works.\(^{31}\) Here, Rachmaninoff’s deep but little-known interest in the music of progressive St. Petersburg composers one generation his senior (Mussorgsky and, especially, Rimsky-Korsakov) is relevant. It may also be that Rachmaninoff’s performances of Scriabin’s works after the latter composer’s death in 1915 helped spur the intense chromatic developments of 1916–1917 (the six songs published as Op. 38 and the Etudes-Tableaux, Op. 39 are among Rachmaninoff’s most harmonically complex works), though the important concert pieces of 1913 (The Bells, Op. 35, and the Piano Sonata No. 2, Op. 36) already show traces of the new chromatic procedures.\(^{32}\)

Appreciation of this side of Rachmaninoff’s compositional persona has suffered from the traditional differentiation, part fact and part musicological fiction, of the Moscow and St. Petersburg musical traditions. However, the once pervasive idea that Rachmaninoff was simply a conservative Muscovite—Abraham’s “pale shadow”—is now generally rejected by scholars. Norris has suggested that Rimsky-Korsakov exerted as powerful an influence on Rachmaninoff as Tchaikovsky; and Martyn has noted that the influence of Rimsky-Korsakov’s chromatic experiments on Rachmaninoff’s harmonic language actually increased after 1909—that is to say, during the late Russian and Exile

\(^{30}\) Richard Taruskin, *Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); see especially Chapter 4, “From Chernomor to Kashchey: Harmonic Sorcery” (255-306), Chapter 5, “Bells, Bees, and Roman Candles” (307-368), and Chapter 10, “Punch into Pierrot (Petrushka)” (661-778). Taruskin’s work is considered in more detail in Chapter 3.

\(^{31}\) As outlined in Chapters 2 and 3 and discussed more fully in Chapter 4 (pp.104ff.), fixed zero labels are used for identification of equal-interval structures, e.g. OCT\(_{(0,1)}\) for the octatonic collection containing C and D\(_{b}\), and HEX\(_{(1,2)}\) for the hexatonic collection containing C\# and D.

\(^{32}\) On Rachmaninoff’s performances of Scriabin works, see Martyn, *Rachmaninoff*, 261 and 435-436.
Rachmaninoff himself described his indebtedness to the central figures of both Moscow and St. Petersburg, while maintaining his individuality:

My music is the product of my temperament, and so it is Russian music; I never consciously attempted to write Russian music, or any other kind of music. I have been strongly influenced by Tchaikovsky and Rimsky-Korsakov; but I have never, to the best of my knowledge, imitated anyone.34

Rachmaninoff’s words support Adolfo Salazar’s brief summary of the composer’s place in Russian music history: “After Glazunov…it is no longer possible to differentiate between the two schools [Moscow and St. Petersburg], which finally become firmly united in Rachmaninoff.”35

Modal Structures

The third component of the compound harmonic syntax I describe in this study comprises a variety of well-defined modal structures. As detailed in Chapter 5, some of the modal structures in the works studied—for example, the basic church modes—are familiar and need little theoretical description. However, others have origins in Russian liturgical and folk traditions and may be unfamiliar even to readers with extensive knowledge in music theory, and will therefore require significantly more description and analytic demonstration in that chapter. Michel Dimitri Calvocoressi described the importance of modal structures in Mussorgsky’s works as follows: “Exactly as Mussorgsky’s syntax represents and adjustment between the tonal principle and the modal (including particular treatment of modes exemplified in Russian folk-music), so do his most interesting forms.”36 Calvocoressi’s words apply to Rachmaninoff, too, although it must be recognized that Rachmaninoff’s works show considerably greater reliance on conventional tonal structures than Mussorgsky’s.

34 From a 1941 interview with David Ewen in The Etude, quoted in Bertensson and Leyda, Sergei Rachmaninoff, 369.
Rachmaninoff’s “Russian-ness” has often been claimed, even if there has been no agreement on what exactly this means or what effects it may have had on his composing. Nikolai Medtner commented that “Rachmaninov is so profoundly Russian himself that he has no need of folk music.” In the book Artists in Exile, Joseph Horowitz claims somewhat amusingly that “amid the Russian musical floodtide sweeping the United States in the early twentieth century … Rachmaninoff was the most complete musician—and the most incurably Russian.” Alexander Goedicke recalled the diversity of Rachmaninoff’s liturgical and folk music interests:

“[Rachmaninoff] loved church singing very much and quite often, even in winter, would get up at seven o’clock in the morning and hail a cab in the darkness, mostly to drive to the Taganka, to the Andronyev monastery, where he stood in the half-darkness … listening to the austere ancient chants from the Oktoekhos, sung by the monks in parallel fifths … It commonly happened that on the same evening he would go to a symphony concert … and then, more often than not, go on to have supper at the restaurant Yar or the Strelna, where he would stay late into the night, listening with great enthusiasm to the singing of the gypsies.”

While this would seem to indicate that close scrutiny of actual Russian liturgical and folk music might yield significant insights into the nature of Rachmaninoff’s tonal language, Alfred J. Swan pointed out that the “verisimilitude [of Rachmaninoff’s modal structures] was still vastly handicapped by his own view of harmony. At best he arrived at only a sort of semi-modal conception.” Swan recognized the crucial point: modal structures in Rachmaninoff’s works are invariably combined with non-modal melodic and harmonic structures. As a result, an attempt to understand modal structures in Rachmaninoff’s music by rigorous comparison with actual Russian chant, actual Russian folk music, or Russian modal theory will likely be as “handicapped” as the modal structures themselves. To avoid compounding the handicap, the description of modal structures in Chapter 5 is therefore limited to only four clearly defined, frequently encountered, and rhetorically significant types.

39 Alexander Goedicke, quoted in Martyn, Rachmaninoff, 30.
40 Swan, Russian Music, 176.
One goal of this dissertation is to detail through analysis the specific special chromatic and modal structures used in Rachmaninoff’s mature works. A difficulty emerges, however, when moving from descriptions of melodic-harmonic components to consideration of the compositional whole. The difficulty is not unique to Rachmaninoff’s works, but rather affects a wide range of extended tonal works from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in which traditional tonal methods and a variety of extreme chromatic procedures are often applied simultaneously. Music analysts have in general been concerned primarily with demonstrating unity in compositions, not with describing in a convincing and meaningful way the interactions of different structural types in a single composition. The crucial question here is how “abnormal” harmonic and melodic structures in extended late tonal works, and particularly in Rachmaninoff’s mature compositions, can be made essential to interpretation. This question is the central concern of the dissertation as a whole and Chapters 2 and 3 in particular.

Characteristics of Rachmaninoff’s Style, 1909–1940

Analysis of a large number of Rachmaninoff’s works has suggested some preliminary observations about the nature of his mature style in comparison to his earlier works. The music composed after *Isle of the Dead*, Op. 29 and the Piano Concerto No. 3, Op. 30, which, as discussed earlier, represent a landmark in the composer’s development, especially with regard to tonal design and harmonic complexity, is characterized by the following eight characteristics:

1. Greater concision of thematic material. Although long-spun melodies remain in the later works (several are in fact quite famous), they are fewer than in earlier works. Thematic material in works from the late Russian and exile periods tends to be broken up into shorter units, and, overall, less musical time is spent in exposition.

2. Increased transparency of texture and orchestration, as noted by Barrie Martyn.⁴¹

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3. Greater rhythmic and metric complexity. Changing meters are increasingly common, as are syncopated patterns. In the case of certain figures that appear in the *Rhapsody on a Theme by Paganini*, Rachmaninoff’s acknowledged interest in jazz may have been a factor, as may his familiarity with Gershwin’s *Rhapsody in Blue* in particular.\(^{42}\)

4. Greater amounts of local dissonance corresponding to the use of more complex vertical sonorities and more adventuresome linear treatment of the ordinary materials of tonal syntax. (This is the central topic of Cunningham’s dissertation.)

5. Increasingly prominent use of the *Dies irae* chant, or its distinctive melodic pattern, generalized. Rachmaninoff’s interest in—obsession with, perhaps—the *Dies irae* is well-documented, but will probably never be adequately explained.\(^{43}\)

6. Increased emphasis on idiosyncratic melodic and harmonic structures referable to recognized Russian chromatic and modal idioms.

7. Emphasis on a special kind of structural melodic-harmonic tension that I call *Hyperdissonance*. Marked hyperdissonance events are anomalous in Rachmaninoff’s earlier works, but represent a regular expressive and structural feature of the later works.

8. Increasing problematization of core formal strategies, especially the departure-return principle and conventional tonal structures with which it is associated.

Nos. 1 through 4 on the list are not addressed with any rigor in the dissertation. No. 5 is addressed on a case-by-case basis in the works studied. Nos. 6 through 8 constitute the core of the dissertation. These three characteristics are closely related, and transport Rachmaninoff’s style past the nineteenth century in distinctive ways. No. 6 is the subject of Chapters 4 and 5 of the dissertation. No. 7 is treated in Chapter 2 of the dissertation.

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\(^{42}\) Harrison, *Rachmaninoff*, 246.

\(^{43}\) But see discussion in Martyn, *Rachmaninoff*, 98-99. As described by Martyn, the *Dies irae* is used thematically in the Symphony No. 1, Op. 13, where it is related to the biblical epigraph “Vengeance is mine, I will repay.” Martyn states on p.99 that “after the traumatizing catastrophe of the [symphony’s] premiere, it is hardly surprising that the symphony’s musical motto was to haunt the composer throughout his life, appearing in his work with increasing insistence as he grew older and approached his own day of judgment.” On the use of the *Dies irae* in concert music generally and in Rachmaninoff’s works specifically, see Malcolm Boyd, “*Dies Irae*: Some Recent Manifestations,” *Music & Letters* 49 (1968), 347-356; Robin Gregory, “*Dies Irae*,” *Music & Letters* 34 (1953), 133-139; and Susan Jeanne Woodard, “The *Dies Irae* as Used by Sergei Rachmaninoff: Some Sources, Antecedents, and Applications” (D.M.A. diss., The Ohio State University, 1984).
dissertation. No. 8 is treated in Chapters 2 and 3 of the dissertation, and forms the basis for the longer analyses in Chapter 6.

Consideration of the style characteristics identified above reveals limitations in existing Rachmaninoff scholarship. Cunningham’s analyses are penetrating and technically excellent; but characteristics Nos. 5 through 7 of the list cannot be incorporated into his approach, for the following reasons:

1. The Schenkerian perspective cannot easily account for expressive trajectories and structural tensions that emerge from the interaction and layering of variegated components of a compound syntax. As discussed in more detail in Chapters 2 and 3, I consider such interactions to be crucial to meaningful interpretation of the works studied.

2. More specifically, within Cunningham’s framework, it is not possible to consider the rhetorical associations that special chromatic and modal components may have, or the general locations (in relation to the functional tonal basis and in relation to form) at which they are most likely to be found. However, analysis of a large number of works suggests that special modal idioms are generally introductory, expository, or post-climactic, and are therefore found at the beginnings and ends of sections, whereas idioms derived from “fantastic” equal-interval chromaticism are generally associated with intensification, destabilization, and climax.

I agree with Robert Hatten that, following Saussure, “musical meaning is difference.” In fact, the special modal and chromatic idioms described in this dissertation may be “topics” in the sense that Hatten and Ratner have used the term; the idioms are certainly “marked,” and beyond question rhetorically differentiated. Unlike Cunningham, I want unorthodox tonal features in Rachmaninoff’s works late works to remain unorthodox in the interpretation, in order to capture the meaning that difference can engender, while developing analytic contexts in which the features can be understood as part of a coherent whole. Cunningham’s Schenkerian graphs achieve his stated goal of providing “a frame of reference whereby the analyst, listener, or performer can effectively grasp the structure of a work and recognize idiomatic features of the

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composer’s style.” However, the analytic agenda motivating the graphs—demonstration that complex chromatic events invariably fold into and prolong basic tonal functions, and, more controversially, perhaps, demonstration that the traditional scholarly view of nineteenth-century chromatic expansion as a challenge to conventional tonal organization and a seed in the destruction of that organization—prohibits incorporation of expressive and structural features that in my view depend on differentiation.

Cunningham renders nonessential those features of each work that arguably carry the greatest expressive weight, and that most immediately identify the work as “a Rachmaninoff.” In Cunningham’s approach, background structures are predetermined to the extent that the individual elements in a Postromantic composition cannot easily be used as a basis for interpreting the work’s unique expressive qualities. In the final assessment, as demonstrations of analytic muscle, Cunningham’s graphs are impressive; but they are interpretively limp, because he fails to recognize the rewards offered by a somewhat more flexible tonal ontology. As Joseph Dubiel has put it, “the best understanding clearly lies not in the simplest explanation of the data, but in the most complex interpretation of them.”

David Cannata’s interpretations, on the other hand, suppose no strict form of predetermined background structure. Cannata’s analytic approach derives mainly from Robert Bailey’s work on Wagner. Cannata emphasizes large-scale key relations, and complex structures that emerge from the exploitation of Bailey’s “double-tonic complexes.” As a result, he is able to propose individualized structures for each work analyzed, several of which are very convincing. However, within the large structures

49 It should be noted that analysis is only one component of Cannata’s project; his excellent study of sketches and compositional process is of great value.
51 Bailey’s double-tonic complexes are developed theoretically in Patrick McCreless, Wagner’s “Siegfried”: Its Drama, History, and Music (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1982).
Cannata describes, details are generally lacking, and in the case of the Symphony No. 3, his interpretation is significantly weakened by a failure to recognize important special modal and chromatic structures. (See the analysis of the Symphony in Chapter 6 of the dissertation.) This fault might have been remedied had Cannata studied more works by other Russian composers while preparing the analyses. For, while Rachmaninoff was certainly post-Wagnerian, he was also post-Mussorgskian, post-Rimsky-Korsakovian, post-Borodinian. In fact, the only Russian composer other than Rachmaninoff treated in Cannata’s book is Tchaikovsky, whose Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Symphonies are presented in brief as a prelude to analysis of Rachmaninoff’s works. But, as I have already suggested, by 1909 (to say nothing of 1917, when Rachmaninoff composed his last Russian-period works, or 1936, when the Symphony No. 3 was premiered), the influence of Tchaikovsky on Rachmaninoff was significantly diminished.

Although her work does not approach Cunningham’s in analytic sophistication or detail, nor Cannata’s in musicological sophistication, Patricia Brady’s dissertation on the Etudes-Tableaux, Op. 33 and Op. 39 is a document of some substance. In it, she suggests that diatonic-functional tonal methods are not unassailable pillars in Rachmaninoff’s works, though she recognizes that functional tonal organization is ultimately the paramount factor in each work’s structure. Proceeding from the very point of view that Cunningham vehemently rejects, she observes that “many etudes contain certain forces which establish or reinforce tonality and other forces which weaken it.” She notes more specifically that “the use of modal harmony is a characteristic feature of Rachmaninoff’s writing. Modal structures appear in most of the seventeen etudes.” In her view, chromatic and modal structures not only decorate but have an effect on the tonal basis:

Insofar as the nature of tonality is concerned, the Etudes-Tableaux are typical of many late nineteenth century compositions. Both chromaticism and modality—two opposing forces which serve to weaken and obscure functional major-minor tonality—are conspicuously present in the etudes... [The] “B”

52 Cannata, Rachmaninoff and the Symphony, 66-68.
53 Patricia Brady, “Rachmaninoff’s Etudes-Tableaux” (D.M. diss., Indiana University, 1986).
54 Ibid., 112.
55 Ibid., 124.
sections of most etudes are characterized by increased chromaticism, often to the degree that tonal center is completely obscured.”

Brady’s remarks echo the observations made decades earlier by the Russian and Soviet authors quoted at the beginning of the Introduction; and, although her analyses lack rigor and therefore cannot be considered strong scholarly statements, she to some degree anticipates some of my central points:

1) A compound melodic-harmonic syntax applies in Rachmaninoff’s mature works. The compound syntax is based on diatonic-functional tonal structures, but incorporates distinct chromatic and modal components that have as much expressive and formal significance as the diatonic-functional framework, and in some cases more.

2) Tension between components of the compound syntax—that is to say, between special chromatic and/or modal structures and the diatonic-functional framework—has implications for the interpretation of tonal structure, expressive design and form.

3) Certain chromatic and modal components used with great frequency by Rachmaninoff (especially after 1909) can be loosely associated with specific rhetorical functions, and with particular locations in relation to musical form. Brady notes that most “B” sections of the Etudes-tableaux are “characterized by increased chromaticism”—this, combined with the observation that most of the “B” sections are climactic, suggests the tantalizing possibility that clear associations of pitch structure, location, and rhetorical function may be developed.

**Toward an Interpretive Model: Chromaticism, Climax, and Culmination**

As the discussion above suggests, music analysts have differed greatly in their approaches to the problem of interpreting challenging chromatic structures in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century works in which functional tonal methods still apply. Figure 1.1 is a diagrammatic overview of a number of well known and influential analytic approaches. The figure provides a context in which to outline the hermeneutic I adopt in this dissertation.

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56 Ibid., 106-7.
In Figure 1.1, theories are identified by author and organized into four boxes according to the degree to which extreme chromatic events in works that retain tonal methods (in varying amounts) are or are not subsumed by diatonic-functional tonal contexts. The theorists in box 1 (Howard Cinnamon, Robert Cunningham, and Heinrich Schenker) present extreme chromatic structures as only superficially complex; chromatic structures at the foreground and middleground levels do not disrupt but in fact support an underlying diatonic-functional framework, and they are entirely dependent on voice leading operations. These theorists present extreme chromatic structures as occurring in conventional tonal methods.

The theorists in box 2 (Daniel Harrison, David Kopp, and Charles E. Smith) and box 3 (Robert Bailey, David Cannata, Patrick McCreless, and Arnold Schoenberg) differ greatly from one another in important ways; but they all present extreme chromatic structures as at least partly independent of diatonic-functional ones. According to theorists in box 2, in late tonal music, new, independent chromatic functions emerge. These are legitimate on their own terms, and equal in significance to the diatonic-functional functions, even if they ultimately derive in important ways from the diatonic-functional ones. In box 2 theories, voice leading is only partly responsible for the coherence of chromatic structures. According to theorists in box 3, tonality is expanded by advanced chromatic procedures to the point that, as McCreless put it, “the background is no longer given but chosen” and a true twelve-tone context exists. Theorists in boxes 2 and 3 present extreme chromatic structures as tonal methods.

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57 See entries under these authors' names in the bibliography.
Figure 1.1. Selected theoretic and analytic approaches to chromatic music

1. Extreme chromatic structures **as** tonal methods
   - Chromatic elements are subsumed by diatonic-functional contexts
   - Dependent on voice leading
   - Traditional elements are subsumed and transformed by new contexts
   - Not always dependent on voice leading
   - Tension between pitch structures sometimes emphasized
   - Authors: Cinnamon, Cunningham, Schenker, Baker, Samson, Straus, Wilson, Zimmerman

2. Independent chromatic harmonic functions emerge
   - Partly dependent on voice leading
   - Tension not emphasized
   - Authors: Harrison, Kopp, Smith

3. Tonal “background” freely chosen in true twelve-tone chromatic context
   - “Expanded” tonality in dialogue with conventional tonal methods
   - Authors: Bailey, Cannata, McCreless, Schoenberg

4. Extreme chromatic structures **and/against/around** tonal methods
   - Traditional elements are subsumed and transformed by new contexts
   - Not always dependent on voice leading
   - Tension between pitch structures sometimes emphasized

- Harmonic boundaries in Rachmaninoff’s mature works
- Atonality
Theorists in box 4 (James Baker, Jim Samson, Joseph Straus, Paul Wilson, and Daniel Zimmerman) go a step further, developing interpretive contexts in which chromatically-expanded tonal syntax leads to and then interacts with early atonal (or post-tonal) structures. In their theories and analyses, extreme chromatic structures are presented not in or as tonal methods, but and/against/around tonal methods, to the point that tonal methods are themselves sometimes subsumed by the emergent contexts. Some of the repertories treated in these theories are clearly more radical in matters of pitch organization than Rachmaninoff’s works; but as examples of a particular way of thinking about chromatic structures in relation to conventional tonal ones, they stand. Because they emphasize the special tensions this sometimes creates in musical works, the findings of Samson, Straus, and occasionally Zimmerman are consonant with those in the present study. As Straus points out, “twentieth-century works often incorporate traditional elements that are structurally distinct from the prevailing musical syntax...Our understanding of them will be enriched if we can fully appreciate their clash of distinct structures.”

Rachmaninoff’s mature works challenge in part because, as shown at the bottom of Figure 1.1, tonal organization is variegated in such a way as to make each of the four categories of theory potentially applicable in different ways for different works or passages, or in different interpretive contexts. This variegation allows Cunningham’s approach, with its rigid precompositional system, to seem plausible in some contexts, while also encouraging something like Paul Wilson’s theory of “structural overlay” in the music of Béla Bartók, in which different pitch structures are activated simultaneously in a work, and precompositional systems are avoided as a matter of principle.

In response to this challenge, Chapters 2 and 3 of the dissertation develop an interpretive approach that synthesizes features from the different boxes in Figure 1.1. Linear analysis techniques are used extensively, but I propose no Schenkerian Urlinien or Ursätze. Following Bailey, Cannata and McCreless, the global structure of each work studied is uniquely determined. The kind of compound syntaxes developed by Baker,

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59 See entries under these authors’ names in the bibliography.
Straus, Wilson and Zimmerman provide traction for the (more conservative) compound syntax I find in Rachmaninoff’s mature works. Like Wilson, I develop an analytic approach in which different structures are conceived as different *layers* in a compound, stratified melodic-harmonic environment.

The interaction of different—and, as discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, differentiated—harmonic structures in a work is a central factor in the interpretation of the work. While Daniel Harrison’s elegant theory proposes a synthesis of function and chromaticism, I prefer to savor the tension that can exist between functional tonal “norms” and chromatic or modal “abnorms.” As explored more fully in the following chapters, Rachmaninoff’s works are climax-centric. Form is organized around climax events to a degree matched perhaps only in the works of Mahler; and climaxes are very often characterized by dramatic changes in the nature of the interaction of layers in the compound melodic-harmonic environment—changes, that is to say, in the relative status of the norms and the abnorms. This has led me to the interpretive model outlined in Figure 1.2.

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62 The concept of “norms” and “abnorms” is developed in Joseph Dubiel, “Contradictory Criteria.”
This loose hermeneutic is based in part on close study of many compositions from the late Russian and exile periods and in part on Rachmaninoff’s own understanding of musical form as a process that directs every musical work toward a “point” of “culmination,” which “must seem a liberation from the last material obstacle, the last barrier.”63 “The composition itself determines this culmination; the point may come at its end or in the middle, it may be loud or soft...”64 I offer no strict interpretation of Rachmaninoff’s theory. “Culmination” in Rachmaninoff’s terms resists precise definition. Furthermore, “culmination” (as conceived by Rachmaninoff) and “climax” (as generally understood) are not necessarily coextensive, though they are in many cases

63 From a letter to Marietta Shaginyan, quoted in Bertessson and Leyda, Sergei Rachmaninoff, 195.
64 Ibid.
closely associated. According to Rachmaninoff, a point of culmination may be quiet; but a climax is virtually always a noisy affair, involving a simultaneous intensification of many musical parameters—dynamics, melodic tessitura, textural density, rhythmic activity, harmonic tension, chromatic activity—toward what V. Kofi Agawu calls a “highpoint.”

Agawu observes that “the phenomenon of climax is central to our musical experience,” but that existing music-theoretic approaches tend to de-emphasize it in the interest of greater “seriousness.” Indeed, attempts to organize analyses of Rachmaninoff’s works around climax events are conspicuously absent from the literature. An exception to this is Jason T. Stell’s master’s thesis, which, drawing from Agawu and others, deals directly with climax events in three piano preludes (one each from the early Russian, middle Russian, and late Russian periods). Stell’s “expressive curves” share some features with the “tension arcs” I develop in Chapter 2 of the dissertation. For Stell, a “highpoint” is a “crux” in Robert Hatten’s sense of the word—“the point of expressive focus or greatest intensity in an entire piece.” This recalls Rachmaninoff’s point of culmination, which need not be a noisy affair (and is therefore unlike climax in a narrow sense), but which need always be the point of expressive focus in a work.

This being said, in the large majority of cases climax and culmination are coextensive—the climax is usually the “point.” The Oxford English Dictionary defines “climax” in the proper rhetorical sense as “a figure in which a number of propositions or ideas are set forth so as to form a series in which each rises above the preceding in force or effectiveness of expression.” Many of the climax events analyzed in the dissertation fit this definition—a series of stages of gradually increasing intensity. However, the same dictionary defines “climax” in the general sense as “the highest point of anything reached

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66 Ibid., 159-160. Agawu identifies Peter Bergquist’s Schenkerian analysis of the first movement of Mahler’s Tenth Symphony, in which a pair of extraordinary climax events are reduced to “foreground events,” as a particularly egregious case in point.
69 Stell, “Rachmaninov’s Expressive Strategies,” 17. Stell magnifies Hatten’s original definition of crux—“the point of expressive focus or greatest intensity in a phrase or gesture” (Hatten, *Musical Meaning in Beethoven*, 289).
by gradual ascent; the culmination, height, acme, apex,” suggesting the degree to which climax and culmination may overlap.\textsuperscript{71}

Analyses in the dissertation are organized to show how climax events relate to interactions of diatonic, chromatic, and modal structures in a work; how expressive focal points (cruxes) emerge as different structures (with different rhetorical associations and expressive implications) come together or culminate; and how variegated melodic and harmonic materials may be integrated in a climax- and culmination-oriented conception of musical form.

* * *

The dangers of over-interpretation and over-systematization threaten a project such as this one. I have made every effort to avoid these dangers without sacrificing music-theoretic rigor or analytic detail. A passage from an article written by Jay Reise on the music of Scriabin is appropriate here:

When we teach the Bach chorales to beginning harmony students, we do not seek to present an airtight system of composition but rather the elements of a style. Similarly, I am not trying to reveal a rigid system in Skriabin’s work, but rather a few components of a relatively flexible method of composition, which can explain or at least describe certain characteristics of his style.\textsuperscript{72}

Similarly, the goal of this dissertation is explanation (or at least description) of certain characteristics of Rachmaninoff’s mature style, not the presentation of an “airtight system.”

**Organization of the Dissertation**

The dissertation is in six chapters (including this introductory chapter), which fall loosely into three parts. In Chapters 2 and 3, the interpretive apparatus sketched above is

\textsuperscript{71} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{72} Jay Reise, “Late Skriabin: Some Principles Behind the Style,” 19\textsuperscript{th} Century Music 6 (1983), 226.
developed. These chapters may be of interest even to readers who are unfamiliar with Rachmaninoff’s mature works. In Chapters 4 and 5, the special chromatic and modal structures that appear most frequently in the works analyzed are described in detail. By no means are Chapters 4 and 5 meant to be a comprehensive survey of Rachmaninoff’s tonal language; additional research will surely expand the view presented here. Throughout Chapters 1 through 5, numerous analytic vignettes are presented, showing how theory and concepts in the chapters may be applied to the interpretation of climax events in works from the mature period. Most of these shorter analyses are of partial works, of single movements, or of complete short works. In Chapter 6, the full interpretive apparatus of Chapters 2 and 3 and the full technical apparatus of Chapters 4 and 5 are applied to the three large concert works Rachmaninoff composed during his final decade: Rhapsody on a Theme by Paganini, Op. 43, Symphony No. 3, Op. 44, and Symphonic Dances, Op. 45.
Chapter 2

Conceptualizing Harmonic Tension in Rachmaninoff’s Mature Style

The term “Postromantic” has recently fallen somewhat into disuse.¹ The term was accepted enough in the recent past to be used as a subchapter heading in the well-known fourth edition of the ubiquitous undergraduate textbook *A History of Western Music.*² But it is entirely absent from the sixth and seventh editions of the same text, due perhaps to increasing awareness that historical demarcations of this sort may be more fluid than scholars sometimes imagine them to be.³ The standard music dictionaries currently have no entries for the term. However, I believe “Postromantic” has value, and would reclaim it for a repertory from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that displays a certain set of aesthetic and technical characteristics. A comprehensive description of these characteristics is surely impossible, given the extraordinary diversity of tonal and quasi-tonal music written during the period ca. 1890–1940 (which I take as reasonable outer limits of Postromanticism, and which correspond very nearly to the boundaries of Rachmaninoff’s working years). However, the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* provides a starting point:

[A] musical style typical of the last decades of the 19th century and first decades of the 20th century and characterized by exaggeration of certain elements of the musical Romanticism of the 19th century. Postromanticism exhibits extreme largeness of scope and design, a mixture of various musical forms (e.g., opera and symphony), and heightened contrapuntal complexity (i.e., a long or vast

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¹ An earlier draft of material from this chapter was read at the 2007 Annual Meeting of the Society for Music Theory in Baltimore as “Maximally Rough and Loving It: Appreciating Expressive Hyperdissonance in the Early Twentieth Century.”
array, or both, of simultaneous but independent musical lines or events). Often Postromanticism also embraces vivid religious or mystical fervour, a sense of longing, and a sense of the grim and the grotesque.⁴

“Exaggeration” and “vast array…of simultaneous but independent musical lines or events” are particularly telling. From them, I offer a more specific observation: if the Romantic is characterized by chromatic expansion and the development of striking elaborations of linear tonal syntax, then the Postromantic is characterized by exaggeration and ultimately fragmentation of tonal syntax, and the juxtaposition or superimposition of conventional functional tonal structures and intense chromatic and/or modal structures that challenge and even deform the functional tonal basis. In my view, complex interaction of variegated melodic-harmonic components is one source of the continuing fascination Postromantic music holds.

A basic claim in the present document is that Rachmaninoff was a Postromantic composer, not an anachronistic Romantic composer. Echoing many of the authors quoted in Chapter 1, who hear in Rachmaninoff’s music something progressive or at least idiosyncratically “modern,” the analyses in this study demonstrate that Rachmaninoff was not unaffected by musical developments in “Silver Age” Russia or in the early twentieth century generally.⁵ Peter Burkholder has aptly suggested the difficulty of categorizing composers of Rachmaninoff’s generation in the most recent revision of the venerable history textbook cited above, asking the question, “Late Romantic or Modern?” and then responding, “all the composers of this generation have aspects of both eras, combining nineteenth-century elements with twentieth-century sensibilities.”⁶ The characteristics of Rachmaninoff’s mature style identified in Chapter 1 of the dissertation—especially Nos. 6–8 on the list, which involve the articulation of conventional tonal and formal structures and unconventional structures that challenge and disrupt them—correspond in clear ways to the above description of general Postromantic characteristics.

⁵ “Silver Age” is the term generally preferred over fin de siècle by scholars of Russian arts and literature.
To be sure, tonal configurations that simultaneously engage more than one kind of melodic-harmonic structure have their origin in the music of nineteenth century composers. In his dissertation on Liszt’s music, Ramon Satyendra writes that “chromatic tonality is best seen not as an exclusively diatonic or exclusively chromatic system but as an interaction between pitch-space systems” in which distinct pitch structures may exist simultaneously in “stacked spaces.” In Postromantic and early modernist works, however, stacked or layered configurations involving conventionally tonal and unconventional structures are taken to new heights of explicitness and complexity. Recognizing this, Joseph Straus has written that “twentieth-century composers use traditional methods, but transform them.” Straus suggests that “what we need now is a critical framework for understanding this sort of thing. The framework we need should, above all, be sensitive to the tension in these works between the traditional elements and the new musical context that transforms them.” The present chapter outlines one possible framework, tailored for highly chromatic late tonal works in general and Rachmaninoff’s mature compositions in particular.

**Postromantic Deformations and Structural Tensions**

Marked dialogue between different kinds of musical organization—that is to say, between conventional structures and unconventional structures, or, to borrow again from Joseph Dubiel, between tonal “norms” and “abnorms”—may be considered a defining characteristic of Postromantic and nascent modernist styles. Such a dialogue might be primarily one of melody and harmony, or one of phrase design and/or form; it might occur on a large scale or a small one; but it will almost certainly have implications for the interpretation of a work’s overall design and expressive trajectory. James Hepokoski has observed that “a central feature of the modernist aesthetic game…was to implicitly or fragmentarily refer to the generic formal conventions, perhaps as lost gestures or the founding gestures of the game, but then to override them. By the last third of the

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7 Ramon Satyendra, “Chromatic Tonality and Semitonal Relationships in Liszt's Late Style” (Ph.D. diss., The University of Chicago, 1992), vi.
9 Ibid., 435.
10 Dubiel, “Contradictory Criteria.”
nineteenth century there had arisen a whole arsenal of … ‘deformations’ of the Formenlehre (standard-textbook) structures.”¹¹ That is to say, comprehension of form and expressive trajectory in a Postromantic work can depend on recognizing that the “game” involves an interaction between conventional bases and new structures that may conflict with those bases. In Postromantic repertory, there is often a sense that conventional tonal organization is somehow endangered, and that the danger is part of an aesthetic stance. As Charles Wilson has put it, “hence, for instance, in the symphonies of Sibelius and Nielsen, the long-range articulations of functional tonality prevail only after a prolonged struggle, even then leaving a palpable sense of their impermanence and vulnerability.”¹²

However it is taken aesthetically, this entanglement of functional syntax and chromatic procedures in late tonal music has fascinated theorists for a long time. Gregory Proctor has formulated a “double syntax” for certain repertories.¹³ Daniel Zimmerman, James Baker, and Allen Forte have developed a variety of “compound analysis” techniques.¹⁴ Daniel Harrison’s powerful theory offers a synthesis of function and chromaticism, as does David Kopp’s recent book; but other scholars prefer to emphasize the friction that can arise between tonal norms and chromatic abnormalities, variously defined.¹⁵ Thinking in terms of Dubiel’s “norms” and “abnorms” suits many passages in

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early twentieth century works very well—passages in which there is a clear diatonic-functional basis, and intense, well-defined chromatic activity interacts with and complicates essential premises of that basis.

In theories of the common practice, dissonance results from tension between contrapuntal elements in a single well-formed syntax. In extended tonal works from the early twentieth century, traditional dissonance of course remains; but a higher-order dissonance is often suggested as well—a kind of hyperdissonance that results from tension between different layers of a stratified compound harmonic environment. In such a configuration, a chromatic structure in one harmonic layer may exaggerate, distort, or even directly contradict the functional tonal premises stated in another layer. I suggest that analysis of hyperdissonance events allows better appreciation of the harmonic roughness and expressive tensions that characterize Postromantic music; and, furthermore, that the construction of hyperdissonance as a category provides firmer music-theoretic ground for the style observations made by Hepokoski and Straus.

It will be useful to examine instances of hyperdissonance in short passages from the early twentieth-century repertory in general before turning specifically to the interpretation of climax events in Rachmaninoff’s works.16

Figure 2.1 is a passage from Strauss’s Elektra (1908) David Murray writes that Strauss’s Elektra “absolutely presupposes a secure tonal norm against which to measure its harsh, disorienting dramatic effects for an audience with late Romantic ears.”17 In Figure 2.1, there is a layer of functional, “normal” tonal activity, and there is a “disorienting” chromatic layer.

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16 In this chapter, only diatonic-functional structures and chromatic structures are considered. Modal structures are added in Chapter 3 and described more fully in Chapter 5.
In a well-known article on Schoenberg’s music, Edward T. Cone examines the interaction of “sound and syntax” in highly chromatic music.18 “Sound” in this context refers (primarily) to vertical sonority, while “syntax” refers to harmonic progression. Analysis of sound and syntax in Figure 2.1 provides a way into the passage, and lays the groundwork for interpreting longer passages and, ultimately, entire works. Figure 2.2 is an analysis of the first two measures of the Elektra passage; in the figure, two harmonic “layers” are identified. As shown in Figure 2.2, the harmonic syntax implied in layer $x$ and the vertical sounds produced by the $x+y$ compound are not concordant. Layer $x$ implies a three-point design, stable-unstable-stable based on leading-tone activity, as indicated on the figure; but the addition of layer $y$ distorts this. The resolution to tonic in layer $x$ at timepoint 3 is contradicted: harmonic tension of the $x+y$ compound is increased at timepoint 3 rather than decreased. That is to say, a basic premise of basic tonal

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organization—resolution to the tonic—has been contradicted and a kind of tonal tension not to be found anywhere in the common practice obtains.

Figure 2.2. *Elektra*, r. 177–177₂, analysis

The analysis is continued through rehearsal 178 in Figure 2.3a. As shown by Roman numerals in the example, layer \( x \) implies a complete functional progression, chromatically altered but coherent. Layer \( y \) is a string of chromatically-descending diminished triads that does not engage that syntax. Layer \( z \) provides a constant B minor reference-point. Timepoints 3, 6, and 9 are all points of local leading-tone-type resolution to functional pillars inside layer \( x \). But intervallically, they are points of maximal tension in the \( x+y \) compound, as shown by the tension diagram at the bottom of Figure 2.3a and supported by examination of interval vectors in Figure 2.3b. The effect is perhaps related to the textbook deceptive cadence, whose melodic leading-tone resolution is undermined by a failure to resolve to tonic harmonically. However, harmonic roughness in the *Elektra* passage is much greater than in that common-practice prototype, because the entire triads of resolution are actually heard in layer \( x \).
The Elektra passage suggests an analogy from the visual domain: the “interference pattern” created when two grid patterns are superimposed, as in Figure 2.4. In the figure, the appearance of an ordinary grid is distorted by the superimposition of a second grid. Both grids are well-defined. It is not a case of seeing either the one grid or the other; the visual surface is both grids including the interference pattern created. The analogy is offered informally; but it suggests a more general schema for the complicated
tonal energetics of the *Elektra* passage: layers $x$ and $y$ may be likened to the two grids. The functional activity in layer $x$ is distorted by superimposition of non-diatonic layer $y$. A paradox of tonal energetics results: timepoints 3, 6, and 9 are recognizably stable and undeniably unstable at the same time.

Figure 2.4. Moiré interference pattern and analogy with *Elektra* passage

The embedding of a familiar tonal idiom in an extraordinary chromatic environment can have the effect of “defamiliarizing” the tonal idiom, creating new expressive or rhetorical effects while maintaining a functional tonal basis. Figure 2.5, analysis of the opening of the “Elegy” section in Richard Strauss’s *An Alpine Symphony* (1915), demonstrates.
In the *Elektra* passage, the different harmonic layers are quite explicit; in the “Elegy” passage, they are implicit but still clear. In Figure 2.5, layer A contains actual musical material from the passage; layer B shows a simple functional i – V – i prototype that provides a basis for understanding layer A: A is interpreted as a chromatic substitute for B. In the third measure of the passage, leading tone E♯ is treated instead as enharmonically-equivalent F♮, and harmonized with an F major triad rather than the hypothetical C♯ major triad (or dominant-seventh chord, etc.) shown in B. It is not difficult to hear A as fulfilling the same basic tonal and phrase functions as B, but in a more energetic way. One striking effect of the chromatic inflection is that passing tone F♯ (the tonic of the passage) in measures 3 and 4 of A is intensely dissonant with the F♮ root of the triad, whereas in prototype version B passing tone F♯ is only a mild dissonance. Similarly, melodic tone C♯ in the second half of measure 4 is, because of the
inflection, dissonant with C♯ of the F major triad, whereas it is a chord member in B. These are more than foreground details. The melody of the passage, which retains the implications of diatonic-functional B, sounds highly charged—even grotesque, to recall the Encyclopedia Britannica entry—in the chromatic context.; yet its notes have not been changed, only the context in which they are heard. Specific melodic pitches (the F♯'s, the C♯) which are not problematic in hypothetical layer B have quite different effects in layer A. The leading tone has been exaggerated by enharmonic reinterpretation (E♯ → F♮) and chromatic substitution to such a degree that the diatonic basis of the melody is problematized.\(^{19}\) Because it has not been adapted to suit the chromatically inflected context, the melody sounds like it does not belong; the result is a tension between the melody and the harmonic setting.

The event in Figure 2.5 is quickly followed in the work by a more powerful corruption of diatonic-functional premises involving the same melodic material. As shown in Figure 2.6, at the beginning of the “Calm Before the Storm,” melodic material from the “Elegy” is implanted at pitch into the key of B minor. In the B minor context, primary melodic tone C♯ (marked 𝒵₁ in Figure 2.6) is now extremely dissonant; and the dissonance is never resolved. Instead, C♯, reiterated in the oboe part throughout the section (as D♭), is gradually transformed into the upper third of B♭ minor—the global tonic of the work, which appears as dissonant 𝒵₂ in Figure 2.6—as the “Calm” continues.\(^{20}\) The change in tonal orientation over the course of the passage is understood as a shift in the status of the norms and abnorms. An overview of the entire section is shown in Figure 2.7. At the beginning of Figure 2.7, elements in layer y are heard as the

\(^{19}\) Even more basically, the raw melodic structure can be heard as an arpeggiation of the tonic triad over the course of five measures: C#6 down to C#5 at a rate of one chord tone per measure. This interpretation makes the actual chromatic setting even more remarkable.

\(^{20}\) I reject Charles Youmans’s claim that the Alpine Symphony should be understood entirely in the key of E♭, beginning and ending on the minor dominant. See Youmans, “The Twentieth-Century Symphonies of Richard Strauss,” The Musical Quarterly 84 (2000): 247. B♭ is the first and final tonic in the Alpine Symphony. Youmans, however, interprets the entire work as a dysfunctional sonata form in E♭ major. In his scenario, the opening of the work articulates the dominant (minor, then major), and the recapitulation takes place entirely in the minor dominant. I agree that there is conflict between B♭ and E♭ in the Alpine Symphony, but a global E♭ interpretation actually lessens the impact of the large-scale tonal conflict. Better to say that E♭ implications—and even a form in E♭—are embedded into the global B♭ minor context, and work against that context. It then becomes clear that the work embodies a large-scale tonal deformation similar in many ways to the smaller-scale ones analyzed in the “Elegy” and “Calm Before the Storm” episodes.
local norm, while elements in layer $x$ are dissonant abnorms. At the end of the figure, as the next section of the work (“Thunder and Storm”) begins, precisely the reverse holds. By the end of the passage in Figure 2.7, the torque applied to elements in layer $x$ has dissipated, but not as the result of any clear functional process. Rather, a chromatic progression—$c$ elements in Figure 2.6—leading to a diminished seventh chord at the midpoint of the passage acts as connective tissue.

Figure 2.6. *An Alpine Symphony*, “Calm Before the Storm,” mm. 1-6, analysis

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**“Elegy”**

melody implanted from F♯ minor into B minor

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**“Calm Before the Storm,”** clarinet solo

anticipated ordinary resolution of A♯ and C♯ to B
Figure 2.7. *An Alpine Symphony*, “Calm Before the Storm,” analytic overview

Layer x

21 measures

Layer y

21 measures

B minor/E minor “conglomerate”

“Slide” from B minor triad to E minor triad.

NB. Actual musical surface extremely angular.

dim7 pivot
In the “Calm Before the Storm,” local tonal function in B minor is distorted by the implantation of thematic material in another key. At the same time, a different tonic (B♭ minor) insinuates itself into the passage in an unconventional way—as a dissonance ultimately made consonant as though by force of compositional will. The result is a compound structure that simultaneously articulates diatonic-functional syntax, with its precise implications of tension and resolution, and an intense chromatic structure that undermines those implications.

Hyperdissonance: Definition and Initial Analytic Applications

Although the core concept is intuitively clear, hyperdissonance has proved difficult to define with precision. It is perhaps as much an epistemological anchor in a repertory that has sometimes seemed intractable as a bona fide technique. Nevertheless, I offer the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>hyperdissonance</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In a Postromantic work, tension between a diatonic-functional tonal basis and some explicit chromatic (or potentially modal) structure or structures, resulting in exaggeration, distortion; neutralization of functional premises, fragmentation of tonal patterns; and/or deformation on larger scales. Hyperdissonance is associated with higher-order structural processes, as variegated components of a compound melodic-harmonic environment are juxtaposed and worked out. In Rachmaninoff’s mature style, hyperdissonance is often associated with climax.</td>
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Hyperdissonance events occur frequently in works Rachmaninoff composed during the late Russian and exile periods, providing support for the claim that they are fundamentally Postromantic, not Romantic, in expressive and rhetorical orientation.
Common practice models are invoked, but deformed. In the works studied, hyperdissonance and climax are very often associated. Figure 2.8 is an analytic reduction of the climax before recapitulation in the first movement of Rachmaninoff’s Symphony No. 3 in A minor, Op. 44. The climax is interpreted as involving a tension between conventional harmonic functions embedded in *Dies irae*-like layer A and characteristically Russian “fantastic” chromaticism in layer B. The basis of layer A is the establishment of dominant-type leading-tone energy and the functional resolution to tonic, as shown. The “fantastic” chromatic setting distorts the functional basis, yet preserves the pitch-class framework that defines the basis.

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21 “Fantastic” chromatic structures involving equal division of the octave—octatonic, hexatonic, and whole-tone—are treated more fully in Chapter 4. The convention of using Arabic numerals to represent pitch classes to avoid issues of enharmonic notation is adopted in this dissertation. For example, following Joseph Straus, OCT(0,1) refers to the octatonic collection containing pitch classes C and C♯ (or D♭). See Straus, *An Introduction to Post-Tonal Theory*, 3rd ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson/Prentice Hall, 2005).
2.8. Symphony No. 3, Op. 44, i, analysis of climax at the end of the development

Layer A melodic material retained; chromatic setting distorts basis

Layer B

Plausible setting: minor Dominant major harm. discharge Tonic

Layer A & Gb primary tones E♭ & G♯ primary tones

Possible interpretations

1) A minor
2) C♯ minor

NB. C♯/D is important tonal center in Symph.

Severe distortion Tonic highly charged

“Avisible” discharge

“Invisible” discharge

Oct (1,2) Oct (0,1) whole-tone dissonant? Tonic 32 measures!

[A♯ of tonic breaks whole-tone]

Increasing chromatic “roughening” of functional layer, distortion of diatonic values

Tonic achieved in Layer A yet tension increases

Harmonic tension
A fundamental premise of tonality is that achieving the tonic corresponds to a lowering of harmonic tension. At the climax of the Rachmaninoff symphony passage, as in the *Elektra* passage, that principle is turned on its head: arrival of the tonic triad after rehearsal 21—made especially clear by a tonic statement of the symphony’s motto theme in the brass at 215 and the rising melody in the violins at rehearsal 22—coincides with a heightening of tension, because the intense chromatic activity (specifically, the long-held G#–F# seventh in the lower staff of layer B) does not accept the resolution.22

To say that this tonic triad is stable throughout the climax, that it simply takes some time for the other elements to catch up to it (at rehearsal 25), is to miss the dramatic point, especially as it takes a full 32 measures for the others to catch up. In Figure 2.7, the tonic and the image of a progression that achieves that tonic are recognizable, but the chromatic context has dramatically defamiliarized them. The tonic triad is under considerable duress.23 When the melodic and dynamic apex of the passage is achieved, ff, in the flutes and violins at rehearsal 23 the leading tone G# is finally resolved in register; yet even here the long-held G# - F# minor seventh in the lower staff of layer B does not support the resolution to tonic. Only at the actual moment of recapitulation (rehearsal 25) is the tonic stabilized; the discharge of its unusual energy is invisible, but not inaudible—that is to say, unlike a conventional dissonance, the dissonant tonic does not itself move to resolve; rather, the context is adjusted around it, correcting the tonal error, as it were.

There are some partial precedents for such an event in the common practice. A rhetorically emphasized cadential 6 may raise tonic awareness even in an unstable context. This happens, for example, when Beethoven in the first movement of his “Appassionata” Sonata, and Rachmaninoff in the first movement of his Second Symphony, Op. 27 (rehearsal 1717), begin a movement’s recapitulation over a dominant pedal. Another precedent may be heard in the first movement of Beethoven’s “Eroica”

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22 The sense of A minor as tonic is inescapable. At the same time, the suggestion of possible dominant function in the key of C# throughout the climax (V13, with B# spelled as C; see “Possible interpretations” box at top right of Figure) is important. As discussed in the longer analysis of the Symphony in Chapter 6 the dissertation, C#/Db has a special significance as a tonal center in the Symphony, and is an extremely important key in Rachmaninoff’s works in general. To put it another way, Rachmaninoff’s adherence to the conventions of monotonal sonata form demands that the climax chord be resolved to A minor, but the chord itself has additional potential.

Symphony. In the “Eroica,” at what Leonard Ratner identifies as the point of furthest remove in the development (the location of greatest tonal stress in a conventional sonata form), tonic note E♭ is re-imagined as highly-charged D♯, the leading-tone of distant E minor.24 The unstable tonic chord in Figure 2.8 is different, however, in that it occurs not at a point of remove, but at a point of return; tonal tension is measured not in terms of distance from the tonic, but in terms of what has been done to the tonic triad to give it special meaning. The climax in the “Eroica” movement is an extraordinary (early) Romantic tension event; the climax in Figure 2.8, on the other hand, is an extraordinary Postromantic tension event.

Such dramatic maltreatment of the tonic as a result of intense equal-interval chromatic structures plays a special role at climaxes in many of Rachmaninoff’s works—indeed, as discussed more fully in Chapters 3 and 4, intensification and climax are the two rhetorical characteristics most clearly associated with special chromatic structures in his mature works. Whereas composers of late tonal music often withhold the tonic to heighten the sense of tension, Rachmaninoff is often keen to emphasize the tonic, which in extremely chromatic contexts can create a very different kind of tension. “To postpone the first clear presentation of a composition’s tonic is a characteristic Brahmsian gambit,” Dubiel writes.25 One might say that to insist upon a composition’s tonic even in chromatic contexts that apparently deny it is a characteristic Rachmaninoffian strategy.26

**Formalizing the Model: Tension Arcs**

Research on tonal tension, expressive shape, rhetorical design, and climax suggests ways to develop a more precise conceptual and interpretive framework for events like the one in the Symphony No. 3 passage analyzed above. Leonard Ratner has described the tonal design of classic sonata form as a “two-stage action”: “centrifugal motion (away from I)” begins during the exposition and continues until a “critical point”

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26 Such emphasis on the tonic even (especially) in highly chromatic contexts recalls Joseph Yasser’s observation that Rachmaninoff’s chromatic language is characterized by strong “intra-tonal” organization, as opposed to the “inter-tonal” organization of Wagner’s chromaticism. See Yasser, “Progressive Tendencies,” 21.
(a “point of furthest remove”) is reached in the development, after which “centripetal motion (toward I)” begins.\textsuperscript{27} Therefore, in his view, the “principal object of the development … is to regain the tonic.”\textsuperscript{28} Ratner’s model suggests applications beyond sonata form. A generalized version is shown in Figure 2.9.

![Figure 2.9. Generalized tension arc](image)

Figure 2.9, which I refer to as a “tension arc,” recalls Ratner’s own “dynamic curves,” which were briefly discussed at the end of Chapter 1. The arc applies in many musical contexts, not just in sonata form movements, and it may be used to model tonal and formal events on many scales. One premise of the Figure 2.9 model is that the \textit{crisis} at the apex of the tension arc (the point of greatest tonal instability and, most likely, expressive focus—the “crux,” or “highpoint” in Hatten’s, Stell’s, and Agawu’s sense) and the \textit{resolution} to tonic are separate events in separate locations. As noted above, in the Rachmaninoff Symphony No. 3 passage, this premise is radically undermined. Arrival of the tonic after rehearsal 21 coincides with a heightening of tension, because the intense chromatic context, involving symmetrical harmonic idioms of a characteristic Russian sort, does not support the embedded resolution to tonic. The tension arc suggested by the functional tonal framework and, more generally, the tenets of sonata form, is deformed, as shown in Figure 2.10.

\textsuperscript{27} Ratner, \textit{Classic Music}, 209, 225.

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., 225.
Tension arcs provide a way to represent the effects that hyperdissonance can have on the expressive trajectory of a Postromantic passage or work. There is considerable support for such a model. Departure-return metaphors, and various kinds of arch or arc diagrams to show goal-orientation, expressive shape and/or the ebb and flow of tension, are found throughout the literature. Leonard Ratner’s description of sonata form and his “dynamic curves” have already been noted, as has Jason T. Stell’s discussion of “expressive curves” in select piano preludes by Rachmaninoff. Similarly, in Candace Brower’s cognitive theory of musical meaning, departure and return (one example of her more general “source-path-goal” model) is a primary “music-metaphorical schema”—a basic pattern to which musical events are matched and from which musical meaning is gathered.\(^{29}\) Brower’s Figure 27 (reproduced here as Figure 2.11) provides a prototype for “how the phrases of a musical work can be understood as a series of goal-directed motions, with smaller arcs of motion nested within larger ones. The diagram “captures the way that harmony, melody, and rhythm work together to articulate a series of completed motions within an overall progression of departure and return. In its depiction of a specific number of phrases and relatively specific tonal plan, it constitutes more of a prototype than a schema.”\(^{30}\) Brower’s description echoes Ratner: “the overall trajectory of harmonic motion shows the expected cycling of harmony away from the tonic and

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\(^{30}\) Ibid., 350.
expansion of the tonic-dominant cycle...revealing a general tendency toward motion leading away from tonic to a point of greatest tonal distance followed by a motion of return...Each phrase is represented as having two distinct goals: the climax of the phrase—the turning point between tension and relaxation, and the maximally stable event at the end of the phrase.”

For both Ratner and Brower, some kind of crisis—a limit, a change of direction or conceptual reversal, a climax—happens at the point of furthest harmonic remove. The apex of the arc in Brower’s diagram is, then, quite likely to be a tensional highpoint in Agawu’s terms; and in Brower’s diagram, it is represented as an actual melodic peak, too.

Fred Lerdahl’s theory of tonal tension also generates arc-shaped diagrams for tonal structures, showing melodic and harmonic fluctuation around a referential tonic (a pitch in the case of melody, a chord in the case of harmony). Wallace Berry has gone so far as to suggest that in chromatic contexts, “one is almost tempted to assert that tonal structure is best characterized not in terms of specific tonics, but, rather, in terms of the pattern (tripartite) stability-fluctuation-stability.” Berry recognizes that, even when a passage resists description in functional or linear terms, a trajectory referable to basic

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31 Ibid.
33 Wallace Berry, Structural Functions in Music (New York: Dover, 1987), 140.
tonal premises often remains. I take this to be a core feature of Postromantic works in general.

**Exaggeration of Tonal Premises**

There are three basic ways that hyperdissonance can impact a passage’s expressive shape, or, more formally, its tension arc: *exaggeration, distortion, and neutralization*. I suggest that each of these is a kind of deformation in Hepokoski’s generalized sense of the word. The first two are dealt with at length in the following pages. The third (neutralization) represents a more radical tonal possibility that has little practical application in the analysis of Rachmaninoff’s music, and is therefore presented only in passing.\(^3^4\) Although I have attempted to define exaggeration and distortion as precisely as possible to maximize their potential in analysis, in the final assessment they represent a way of thinking about the expressive effects of unusual kinds of pitch organization, not a strict system of classification.

If tension between diatonic-functional premises and a chromatic structure does not explicitly undermine the resolution to tonic (or other strong local goal), but, rather, amplifies the tension arc to an extent not possible in conventional tonal syntax alone, then *exaggeration* occurs. This may be thought of as hyperdissonance at the point of remove, as diagrammed in Figure 2.12. Essential tonal premises—departure/fluctuation generates tension, functional resolution to a goal provides stability—are not undermined, but greatly amplified. In such situations, the exaggeration itself can be the most significant expressive, rhetorical, or style factor, overtaking the functional tonal basis in significance.

\(^{34}\) But see the comparison of Rachmaninoff’s and Skryabin’s equal-interval structures in Chapter 4, where the possibility of functional neutralization is considered in more detail.
Figure 2.12. Hyperdissonant exaggeration

Figure 2.13 gives an example of hyperdissonant exaggeration at rehearsal 87 in the second movement of Prokofiev’s Piano Concerto No. 3, Op. 26 (1921). As shown in the figure, a plagal gesture in the orchestra at 87 in the orchestra is converted into an octatonic version in the solo piano part two measures later. Although the resolution to E minor is not seriously disrupted, substitution of an OCT(1,2) structure for the plagal one has a number of unusual effects. Tonic note E♯, part of the plagal sonority, is instead momentarily dissonant in the octatonic version; and the subdominant “root” (A♯), must be understood as a non-collection tone. These local effects are not powerful enough to seriously disturb (or distort) the tonal basis, but the octatonic substitution turns the solo piano version into something mildly grotesque.

A similar event in the *Rhapsody on a Theme by Paganini* is analyzed in Figure 2.14. The figure shows (1) Paganini’s theme as it is first heard at measure 33 in the *Rhapsody*, (2) a passage from Variation VIII, and (3) a passage from Variation IX. Paganini’s theme is in binary form; the first part is repeated, but the second is not. (Rachmaninoff invariably writes the repeat out in full to allow double-variations procedures; I have used a repeat sign in Figure 2.14 to save space.) Of interest at present are the first four measures of the second part of the theme (mm. 37–40 of (1) in Figure 2.14). The measures are sequential, tonicizing iv and then III, and they contain the first harmonies other than tonic and dominant in the theme. Note the appearance of B♭ in measure 37, which strengthens the tonicization of iv. Measures 37–40 represent a clear
departure, and are followed by a clear return over the course of the rest of the theme and, ultimately, a strong resolution to tonic.

Figure 2.13. Prokofiev, Piano Concerto No. 3, Op. 26, ii, analysis of r. 87

Plagal resolution  Octatonic exaggeration

* original SD “root” (A♯) 
not member of collection
Figure 2.14. Hyperdissonant exaggeration in passages from *Rhapsody on a Theme by Paganini*, Op. 43.
At the corresponding location in Variation VIII (2), which Rachmaninoff marks \(ff\), a B\(\flat\) minor triad is substituted for V of iv, resulting in not a fifth root relation but a chromatic major third root relation (marked with an asterisk in Figure 2.14). As a result, the roles played by A\(\sharp\) and B\(\flat\) in the melody are exchanged. This is shown by the stemming in Figure 2.15, whose (1), (2), and (3) correspond to those in Figure 2.14. A\(\sharp\), primary in (1), is dissonant in (2); B\(\flat\), dissonant in (1), is a local chord root in (2). Although the local resolution to iv and then to III is maintained in Variation VIII, the \(ff\) chromatic outburst has exaggerated the departure stage of the form, and mildly problematized certain basic tonal details of the functional tonal theme.\(^{35}\)

Figure 2.15. *Rhapsody on a Theme by Paganini*, mm. 41–42, 300–303, 344–347, analysis

In Variation IX, chromatic complication of basic tonal syntax is taken a step further at the corresponding location (m. 344). The B\(\flat\) minor triad is retained (it is in fact held for three measures rather than two); however, it resolves in measure 347 not to a D minor triad but to an A minor triad—that is to say, to the tonic triad. This is shown in simplified form in Figure 2.15 (3). This has the effect of more seriously deforming the functional tonal basis of the theme. A clear resolution to the tonic triad in the departure stage of syntax or form—even as a passing event—is usually of considerable interest. At measure 347 in Variation IX (Figure 2.15 (3)), the tonic results from a gradual process of chromatic substitution. Step 1: in Variation VIII, a chromatic chord substitutes for V of iv.

\(^{35}\) As the longer analysis of the *Rhapsody* in Chapter 6 dissertation shows, the substitution of a chromatic third relation for a diatonic relation in Variation VIII has implications for the large-scale structure of the work, which can be understood as involving a cycle of major thirds.
iv. Step 2: in Variation IX, the chromatic chord is retained, but a different chord is substituted for its resolution, altering the shape of the passage.

Comparison of Figure 2.14 and Figure 2.15 (3) with Figure 2.16, Heinrich Schenker’s analysis of the theme, suggests the extent of the deformation, while also revealing that core tonal premises nevertheless remain intact.36

Figure 2.16. Schenker’s analysis of Paganini’s theme (Free Composition, Fig. 40, 9)

As shown in Figure 2.15, the process of chromatic substitution process changes the structure of the top voice in Variations VIII and IX: in Figure 2.15 (2) and 2.15 (3), the descent to F♮ and D♮ is stunted as the melody remains focused on A♮, and Schenker’s scale degree 4 (see Figure 2.16) is therefore eliminated. If a 5-line reading is to obtain, all the events which follow the chromatic substitution must be reevaluated. Such an interpretation is possible, as shown in Figure 2.17, suggesting that tonal premises have not truly been undermined in Variation IX. Nevertheless, the effect of the chromatic intensification is pronounced. Indeed, the dynamic, textural, and registral characteristics of the passage, shown crudely in Figure 2.17 and more precisely in Figure 2.15, suggest that Rachmaninoff intended the chromatic substitution in Variations VIII and IX to be jarring. In Variation IX, the return of comparatively normal tonal functions later in the

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passage is, by contrast, rhetorically unmarked. The exaggeration of the tension arc is the main issue in these two variations.

Figure 2.17. A Quasi-Schenkerian reading of *Rhapsody*, Variation IX, r. 26

Chromatic exaggerations such as those in the Prokofiev and Rachmaninoff passages just analyzed are of course not entirely new in the Postromantic. Chromaticism in more conventional contexts may generally be thought of as intensifying the departure/fluctuation stage of tonal organization, sometimes to the point that the instability that results seems the defining musical characteristic. For example, Geoffrey Chew has examined the effects of intense chromaticism on local climaxes in the *Abschied* from Act II of Wagner’s *Tristan und Isolde* along lines suggested by Ernst Kurth. Chew observes that, while in Schenker’s theory the tonic and dominant are stable pillars to which all other contrapuntal and harmonic events are at some point bound in analysis, in a Kurthian interpretation of harmonic “instability” in chromatic contexts, events neither

the tonic nor the dominant may be considerably more crucial, and may in a sense become the conceptual pillars. Chew notes that:

“...Dominant harmonies at the end of the refrains are points at which the emotion (dependent on leading-note tension) has passed its peak and subsided...The climaxes themselves – the points of greatest tension and instability – give the Abschied its characteristic dramatic shape, and so they may have some claim to be thought of as Grundpfeiler in a Kurthian sense, even though they cannot be regarded as such in any Schenkerian sense.”

In other words, intense chromaticism achieves its most powerful effects before the dominant stage of syntax, and the phrase or passage is thereby restructured in some sense. As Kurth put it:

“...One experiences the leading-note effect in these contexts the more strongly where originally, in the blandest and most hackneyed form of the scale, no semitones occur; for this reason, every chromatically altered note has an effect even stronger than the chromatic tension of the leading note in its normal position...”

This relocation of harmonic tension from the dominant to the predominant stage in syntax is, for Chew, a defining characteristic of the chromatic idiom.

It is possible to map functional progressions onto a basic tension arc in a way that successfully models a majority of cases, reflecting Brower’s, Kurth’s, and Chew’s observation that the predominant stage of a functionally-organized phrase or passage is, in chromatic Romantic and Postromantic works, generally the most intense and the most rhetorically accented. (See Figure 2.18.)

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38 Ibid., 187.
Many passages in Rachmaninoff works from all periods follow this plan without necessarily suggesting interpretation in layers or hyperdissonance as an analytic framework. Figures 2.19 and 2.20 present an overview of the main climax in the well-known middle-Russian-period Prelude in D major, Op. 23, No. 4 (1903). The chromatic materials in the passage are of a very conventional kind, including modal mixture and the Neapolitan, and neither hyperdissonance nor harmonic stratification is suggested.

In Figure 2.19(a), the motivic material of the prelude is shown: a neighbor figure (N), and a rising figure (R). The piece is in ternary form. Figure 2.19(b) shows that the A section is periodic; its defining perfect authentic cadence in measure 35 overlaps with the beginning of the B section. Although the period is parallel, there is development within the A section. Most obviously, a countermelody in triplets is added in the consequent phrase. Less obviously is the emphasis on a new chromatic tone in the consequent phrase: E♭ joins A#/B♭, as shown in Figure 2.19(b).

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40 This prelude is discussed in Stell, “Rachmaninov’s Expressive Strategies,” 77–92. Many of my findings are consonant with his. One difference, however, is that I adhere to a ternary form interpretation of the work, while he finds a ternary interpretation insufficient.
a) Motivic material

![Motivic material diagram]

b) Period design and introduction of chromatic tones

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period:</th>
<th>Antecedent</th>
<th>Consequent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intro</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

B♭/A♯ introduced  B♭/A♯ developed  E♭ introduced

These basic materials are developed into the climax shown in Figure 2.19. The neighbor figure is retained, and the rising figure is gradually extended. The climax that arrives in measure 51 is unmistakable. It is the moment of peak chromatic intensity in the piece, an arrival at registral extremes following an ascent in the upper voice and a descent in the bass, the occasion of peak textural and dynamic intensity (ff; compare the pp at the beginning of the section); and it immediately impels a reversal of melodic directionality.⁴¹ The climax chord—♭II in measure 50—represents a synthesis of the two

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⁴¹ Stell considers the expressive implications of the reversal in detail on pp. 87–92.
chromatic tones exposed in the two phrases of the A section (see again Figure 2.18(b)). But the Neapolitan is not treated conventionally. As Stell has noted, the addition of C♯ in an upper register suggests the German augmented sixth of G major/minor, correct resolution of which would continue the wedge shape in the outer voices.\textsuperscript{42} Instead, however, ♭II is directly replaced by ♯II in a fashion that Rachmaninoff would duplicate four years later in the D major second theme of the Symphony No. 2’s finale.\textsuperscript{43} At the moment of climax, B♭ in the right hand part becomes A♯ and pushes to B♯, while E♭ is blocked from taking the next step (to D♯), and leads back to E♯.

Hyperdissonant exaggeration may be considered an extreme, historically specific form of chromatic amplification. Analysts have previously recognized its significance in Postromantic works, but have never to my knowledge named or formalized it. Richard Kaplan’s analysis of the dense chord heard at the $f$f’ climax near the end of Richard Strauss’s \textit{Salome} is one example. His analysis is reproduced in Figure 2.21; the passage is shown in reduction in his system “a” and parsed into two neighbor chords in his system “b”.\textsuperscript{44} Kaplan interprets the climax chord as a compound of the two neighbor chords, entangled yet clarified by register. The chord shown on the top staff of system “b” is “generated principally by the diatonic melody” and as such is tightly bound to the diatonic-functional basis, as its Roman numeral label suggests.\textsuperscript{45} Kaplan observes that the chromatic neighbor chord in the bottom staff of system “b” “combines as dissonantly as possible with this melody: each pitch class of the lower chord forms a semitonal relationship with a pitch class of the upper chord.”\textsuperscript{46}

\textsuperscript{42} Stell, “Rachmaninov’s Expressive Strategies,” 84–86.
\textsuperscript{43} See mm. 185–188 of the symphony movement. The prelude and the symphony theme have other features in common, including a wedge formation of the outer voices and the gradual exposition of chromatic tones B♭ and E♭. The similarities suggest that the prelude might have served as a model for the symphony theme.
\textsuperscript{44} Kaplan, “The Musical Language of \textit{Elektra},” 48
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid.
Figure 2.20. Prelude in D major, analysis of climax in B section (mm. 35–53)
Figure 2.21. Richard Strauss, *Salome*, Op. 54, 360, 361 (Kaplan’s Example 1-25)

In Figure 2.22, I contextualize Kaplan’s analysis using the current framework; the three harmonies (tonic–compound neighbor chord–tonic) are mapped onto a three-point tension arc. As the figure shows, intense friction between the two neighbor chords exaggerates the basic shape suggested by the diatonic melody. Both neighbor chords resolve to tonic; nevertheless, the friction at the point of remove—a moment of hyperdissonance in a layered configuration—essentially defines the moment. That is to say, the complex, unstable sonority, not the tonic resolution, is the conceptual anchor of the event.
Similarly, the famous nine-note chord heard at the climax in the first movement of Mahler’s Tenth Symphony (measure 208), has been interpreted by Kaplan, and Agawu following him, as a radical, layered chromatic exaggeration of a functional basis. The chord is considered a compound sonority referring to two keys at once—V₉ of F♯ major plus V₉ of B♭ major, both of which key areas are significant in the work, but only one of which (F♯ major) emerges from the climax event. Figure 2.23 contextualizes their analysis according to the current theory. As the figure shows, the event demands tonal comprehension, yet depends almost entirely on a unique set of structural circumstances that reside outside ordinary tonal grammar.

Figure 2.22. Diagram of hyperdissonant exaggeration at the Salome climax

Similarly, the famous nine-note chord heard at the climax in the first movement of Mahler’s Tenth Symphony (measure 208), has been interpreted by Kaplan, and Agawu following him, as a radical, layered chromatic exaggeration of a functional basis. The chord is considered a compound sonority referring to two keys at once—V₉ of F♯ major plus V₉ of B♭ major, both of which key areas are significant in the work, but only one of which (F♯ major) emerges from the climax event. Figure 2.23 contextualizes their analysis according to the current theory. As the figure shows, the event demands tonal comprehension, yet depends almost entirely on a unique set of structural circumstances that reside outside ordinary tonal grammar.

Distortion of Tonal Premises

If a clear statement of tonic or resolution to some other strong local goal in one harmonic layer is explicitly contradicted by a well-defined structure in another layer, as happens in the Symphony No. 3 passage analyzed earlier in this chapter, then a kind of distortion occurs. An essential tonal premise has been undermined, and an extremely conflicted, powerfully marked tonal situation results. As demonstrated in the analysis of the Symphony No. 3 climax in Figure 2.8, this may be thought of as hyperdissonance at the point of return (or, occasionally, at the point of departure), and is diagrammed in
Figure 2.24. In such a case, the chromatic “abnorms” overwhelm and distort tonal premises, which nevertheless remains in another layer. Although there are some partial precedents for hyperdissonant distortion in the common practice, I believe it is for the most part a Postromantic trait, and as yet little understood. The theory developed here is only a starting point for the interpretation of such events; further work in the repertory will be necessary before the extent to which this model applies in a wider repertory will be determined.

Figure 2.24. Hyperdissonant distortion

Figure 2.25 presents an analytic overview of the climax in Rachmaninoff’s song “A-ul!” Op. 38, No. 6 (1916). The climax involves clear hyperdissonant distortion—that is to say, severe conflict between some functional tonal premise and a strong, well-defined chromatic structure at a point of return. Specifically, the climax is interpreted as the result of conflict between OCT\((1,2)\) and OCT\((2,3)\) structures in layer 2 and D♭ major tonic elements in layer 1. Layer 1 is organized around dyad F/A♭ (motivic in the song) and includes pitch class D♭ (C#) after measure 24. Functional D♭ major is established at the start of the song (not shown in Figure 2.25) by passing from the tonic to the dominant between measure 1 and measure 4; but it is largely abandoned (or at least radically de-emphasized) as octatonic methods gradually intrude and come to prominence. As shown

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48 In Figure 2.25, the poem by Konstantin Balmont is omitted from the vocal part except at the climax. The song’s title comes from the shriek heard at the climax.
in Figure 2.25, the return of tonic—really more a tortured projection of the tonic, prepared by scale degree 5 (A♭) throughout measure 23—at the box in measure 24 is extremely tense. Restabilization is a gradual process, not complete until measure 28 (if even then), and, like the restabilization of tonic in the Symphony No. 3 passage (see again Figure 2.8), more an “invisible discharge” as layers are reoriented than a genuine resolution of the unstable tone(s).

Figure 2.26 provides a more detailed analysis of layer 2 octatonic activity at the “A-ul!” climax. Figure 2.26(a) shows how an octatonic oscillation like that in the “Coronation Scene” of Mussorgksy’s opera Boris Godunov is extended to the form heard in measures 24–25.49 This is connected to measures 26–27 in Figure 2.26(b), showing how the two diminished-seventh chords contained in Oct(1,2) (labeled #1 and #2) are entangled, creating a dense OCT(1,2) frame against which the projection of D♭ major tonic is highly unstable.

Figure 2.25. “A-u!” Op. 38, No. 6, analysis of climax (mm. 21–28)

Layer 1
- D♭ tonic elements
- C♯ disrupts oct.
- Tonic
- Oct (2,3)
- Oct (1,2)
- Dim7 #1

Layer 2
- Octatonic
- Dim7 #2

D♭ major global tonic

Layers merge

Maximally rough

Layer 1 highly charged

Restabilization
Figure 2.26. Analysis of OCT\(_{(1,2)}\) structure at the “A-u!” climax

(a) Extension of “Coronation”-type octatonic oscillation

prototype octatonic binary

\[
\text{dim7 respelled} \quad \text{app.} \quad \text{P}
\]

(b) Entanglement of diminished-seventh chords and OCT\(_{(1,2)}\) melodic segment

\[
\text{dim7} \quad \text{dim7 #1} \quad \text{dim7 #2}
\]

The climax event has an effect on the harmonic material of the song’s postlude. As Figures 2.27(a) and 2.27(b) show, layers 1 and 2 merge to create a sort of hybrid D\(\flat\) major collection that is partly diatonic and partly octatonic; and things are left dangling at the end, in D\(\flat\), but with a quasi-octatonic binary that looks elsewhere as it were (Figure 2.27(c)).\(^{50}\) Figure 2.28 provides a schema for the entire passage: at the climax, “little” D\(\flat\) major on top is highly unstable in relation to the octatonic layer, which is, however, highly charged in relation to “big” D\(\flat\) major underneath. It is a wrenching moment—the

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\(^{50}\) The hybrid and the dangling E\(\flat\) recall measure 2 of the song, where they occur in passing. The hybrid is in fact the so-called “acoustic collection,” whose significance in other Russian works from the period is discussed in Clifton Callender, “Voice-Leading Parsimony in the Music of Alexander Skryabin,” *Journal of Music Theory* 42 (1998): 219-33; and Zimmerman, “Families without Clusters.”
point of maximally roughness and expressive intensity in the song; the climax, and, as the tension recedes into the postlude, probably the point of culmination, too.

Figure 2.27. “A-u!” postlude, analysis

(a) “A-u!” postlude (mm.28-end)

(b) Analysis of hybrid collection

(c) M.34 Quasi-octatonic binary in relation to earlier octatonic binary
In “A-u!” there is no real harmonic activity after the climax event; as though all energy has been spent, the postlude takes place over what I call a “post-climactic pedal point”—common in Rachmaninoff’s mature works, as subsequent analyses in the dissertation will show.

In each of the examples presented so far, juxtaposition of a diatonic-syntactic basis and recalcitrant chromaticism creates some sort of intense anxiety about the tonic. In the Strauss and Mahler passages, the separation into harmonic layers, individual but interactive, is texturally and registrally obvious. The Rachmaninoff examples are perhaps not as obviously counter-traditional, nor are their harmonic layers quite as explicit, but they are equally dramatic: insistence upon the tonic triad in unremitting chromatic contexts creates moments of climactic roughness—quite the opposite of what one expects from a statement of tonic. In the case of the Rachmaninoff Symphony No. 3 passage (see again Figures 2.8 and 2.10), the result is a dramatic twist, a hyperdissonant accent, on what was by 1936 utterly passé: the return of tonic at a sonata-form recapitulation.

While I believe that hyperdissonant distortion, in particular, is characteristic of Rachmaninoff’s mature style (that is to say, of works composed in the late Russian and
exile periods), there is at least one clear precedent in the early Russian period: the climax in the Elegy in E♭ minor, Op. 3, No. 1 (1892). As the analysis in Figure 2.29 shows, the event shares important features with the “A-ul” climax, and might even be heard as a prototype for it.

Figure 2.29. Elegy in E♭ minor, Op. 3, No. 1, analysis of climax
The piece is in ternary form (ABA). Its main melodic material can be understood as emerging from a basic $\hat{3} - \hat{2} - \hat{1}$ descent in measures 3–5. This provides the kernel for the hyperdissonant distortion event at the climax. As shown in Figure 2.29, the B section (a departure in Ratner’s sense) progresses through III to V, the latter of which hosts a wedge progression that “should” prepare the return of tonic but goes to far, leading to the climax event that begins in measure 80. At the climax, tonic E♭ is entangled with A major, resulting in an octatonic-type binary reminiscent of the ones at the “A-u!” climax in Figure 2.25. In this case, however, the melodic material does not follow suit: it is not octatonic. E♭ emerges at measure 82, but as a major-minor seventh chord (again, characteristic of octatonic organization)—not a minor triad. As shown in the boxes in the A sections of Figure 2.28, this sonority functions as V⁷ of iv in the functionally normative A sections of the piece. At the climax, hyperdissonance emancipates it from a functional role.

Figure 2.30. Elegy, analysis of distorted cadential figure at climax

As Figure 2.30 shows, a basic cadential formula ($\hat{3} - \hat{2} - \hat{1}$) is contradicted by extreme chromatic activity at the climax, applying a kind of expressive torque to the tonic triad. As shown in Figure 2.29, the discharge of the hyperdissonance occurs during a one measure cadenza-like passage that Rachmaninoff notated in small noteheads. Although it is perhaps possible to hear an A♭ minor sonority in the cadenza, suggesting functional
resolution of the $E_b^7$ chord, such an interpretation is weak. I prefer to hear the same kind of “invisible” discharge as that featured in the “A-u!” and Symphony No. 3 passages analyzed above. As the A section of the Elegy begins again in measure 87, the extraordinary climax chord is restored to its original, ordinary function ($V^7$ of iv).

A Parenthesis: Neutralization of Tonal Premises

As stated above, the third possible effect that hyperdissonance can have on a functional tonal basis—neutralization of functional premises rather than exaggeration or distortion of them—does not appear to have much analytic usefulness when it comes to Rachmaninoff’s works. Tonal underpinnings are simply too strong. However, recognizing that such neutralization is possible provides a way to differentiate Rachmaninoff’s works from works that use similar or identical chromatic structures to different ends. The music of Alexander Scriabin is a particularly good case in point.

As I demonstrate analytically in Chapter 4, the equal interval structures that many authors have identified in Scriabin’s works are in and of themselves not unlike those in Rachmaninoff’s mature works. However, the effect of the structures is very different indeed. Simon Morrison describes octatonic and whole-tone materials (and the so-called “mystic” chord that combines features of both) in Scriabin’s works as “inert acoustic structures modeled on traditional harmonies but devoid of functionality.” Taruskin’s view is similar: “Since it is harmonic progression that had always articulated the structural rhythm of music, which is to say its sense of directed unfolding in time, a music based on universal invariant harmonies becomes quite literally timeless, as well as emotionally quiescent.” On the other hand, I have suggested, and will do so more forcefully in Chapters 3 and 4, that equal interval structures in Rachmaninoff’s works are associated with intensification and climax. According to the above authors, in Scriabin’s late works, equal-interval structures, though modeled on “traditional harmonies” (translation: they are tertian sonorities) do not engage tonal functions at all. Tonal

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51 See again notes in Chapter 1 on Rachmaninoff’s performances of Skryabin’s works in the 1910s. The two composers were classmates.
53 Taruskin, Defining Russia Musically, 348-349.
premises are therefore neutralized by symmetrical pitch structures in Scriabin’s works, while they are exaggerated or distorted by the same in Rachmaninoff’s. (Rachmaninoff’s and Scriabin’s equal-interval structures are compared in more detail in Chapter 4.)

Conclusion

“Practically anything in music can be labelled passing-note or appoggiatura,” Calvocoressi warns us. The interpretive framework Calvocoressi develops for Mussorgsky’s music to some degree resonates with the one I am proposing for Rachmaninoff’s, insofar as both proceed from the premise that an interaction of functional tonal structures and special chromatic and modal structures is significant. Calvocoressi suggests that expansion of tonal premises is only part of that significance:

[Mussorgsky’s] music embodies the genre omnitonique foretold by Liszt, but in a form depending upon the fundamental properties of Mussorgsky’s ideas, melodic and harmonic, rather than upon the artifices by means of which his Western contemporaries were extending the boundaries of the major-minor system.

In a similar vein, Jim Samson has suggested that “there is…a distinction between the expansion of classical tonality from within and its modification from without. In the music of the Russian nationalist composers the modification of tonality was particularly thoroughgoing…The remarkable flowering of Russian music in the nineteenth century was characterized by a fascinating dialogue between indigenous traits–often the product of a distinctive folksong heritage–and Western traditions which were alternately embraced and rejected.” That is to say, the means by which Russian composers developed new melodic and harmonic resources in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were only in part related to the “internal” expansion of syntax that characterizes late Romantic music in the West. For example, numerous octatonic passages occur in the works of Chopin and Liszt as a result of internal tonal expansion. In a great deal of

54 Michel Dimitri Calvocoressi, Mussorgsky (London: Rockliff, 1956), 238.
55 Ibid., 257.
Russian music from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, on the other hand, octatonicism (along with other “fantastic” chromatic structures) is treated as a source—a topic, something conceptually marked, expressively accented.

While, as the analyses in this chapter all demonstrate, the insights afforded by linear analysis are invaluable for the interpretation of tonal music from any era, such methods are not necessarily well configured to capture certain kinds of melodic-harmonic configurations—especially configurations that involve idioms which may have topical associations or special kinds of motivic significance, or when stratification and hyperdissonance may be involved. As melodic-harmonic configurations gain in complexity and explicit or implicit deformational procedures become a central point in the undertaking, analysis emerges from considerations of foreground, middleground, and background levels into a grayer area that recalls Roland Barthes’s familiar claim: “to interpret a text is not to apply meaning to it, but on the contrary to appreciate the plurality that constitutes it.”

Put simply, conventional linear analysis methods and functional analysis methods require supplementation in the study of Postromantic music. It is my hope that the interpretive framework sketched in this chapter has suggested the potential benefits of an approach that incorporates the abnormal as abnormal, that allows a “surface-level” deformation or anomaly to in fact be deformational or anomalous. Identification of a linear or a functional prototype is therefore only a starting point for interpretation.


Figure 2.31 contains the first four measures of the song. Three features stand out: a plagal orientation, various statements of the melodic figure E♭-C or F- E♭-C (marked y in Figure 2.31), and a striking harmonic relation that is extracted into a box on the figure. It is tempting to interpret the harmonic event—a “harmonic motive”—in exclusively linear terms. Motion from the unstable first chord into the second is characterized by semitones in all voices. Resolution of the leading tone (E → F) is amplified by simultaneous resolution of three additional, “artificial” leading tones (D♭ → C, B → C,

57 I have already suggested that by reducing octatonicism to a simple prolongational technique in Rachmaninoff’s works, Cunningham eliminates an important rhetorical consideration.

and $A_b \rightarrow A^\flat$). The spelling of the chromatic chord, in fact, makes the linear basis entirely clear: Rachmaninoff has chosen a non-tertian spelling of what sounds like a $D_b$ minor seventh chord, thereby emphasizing the quadruple semitonal voice-leading resolution.

Figure 2.31. “Daisies,” Op. 38, No. 3, analysis of mm. 1–4

However, this harmonic formula, which if considered without regard to spelling involves root motion by chromatic major third, has a deep structural and motivic significance in the song. This is made clear at the climax (measures 1–18). Measures 17–18 of the song are clearly climactic: the piano part achieves its highest and lowest registers (the low $D_b$ represents a plunge more than two octaves below anything previously heard in the song), and the voice achieves its highest dynamic indication, $f$, and its highest note upon the word gotov’ (“prepare”). An overview of the climax in the context of the entire song is shown in Figure 2.32. As shown in Figure 2.32, the climax results from a gradual ascent, in stages (marked 1a, 2, 3, and 4 on the figure) in the vocal
line, which is rendered in simplified form. The climax occurs on D♭ major—previously the unstable chord in the harmonic motive; and it is setup up by an F⁷ chord. Figure 2.32 reveals a kind reciprocal relationship between F major (the overall tonic of the song) and D♭. In other words, the harmonic motive can be reversed: either chord can be the basis of a seventh chord that resolves into the other chord. The chromatic major-third relationship is motivic, and, because it is exploited on the largest scale of the song’s harmonic structure, and provides the source of a climax event, it is structural. The potential reciprocality of the chromatic major-third relation heard at the onset of the song is actualized at the climax.

Figures 2.33 and 2.34, in conjunction with the annotations of measures 1–4 in Figure 2.31, show how the melodic material in the song reflects the reciprocal nature of the harmonic motive. The melodic figure labeled y in Figure 2.30 establishes pitch class E♭ as a significant melodic feature; as shown in Figure 2.32(a), this combines with frequently sounded B♮ (which is also contained in the harmonic motive) to suggest the F acoustic scale, which contains an F Lydian pentachord. In the climactic D♭ region of the song, melodic tone G♯ is emphasized. As shown in Figure 2.32(b), this creates a Lydian pentachord. Figure 2.33 shows the relationship between the F and D♭ Lydian pentachords and the two chords of the harmonic motive, and shows that, collectively, all of these features suggest a symmetrical background source: WT₁, or the whole-tone scale containing D♭. WT₁ and the chromatic major third relationship in the harmonic motive both suggest equal division of the octave, which, as discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, is strongly associated with intensification and climax in the works studied.

In view of all of these features, the F⁷ chord leading into the climax is in my view not a passing event, but rather represents a kind of tonal involution. The main harmonic motive of the piece is reversed in its directionality—its “charge”—and in being reversed is made to serve not a composed-out “tonical” structure but a chromatic, non-tonical background harmonic source. The large-scale design and the melodic material of the work therefore reflect, or perhaps rely on, the harmonic motive.
Figure 2.32. “Daisies,” analytic overview of climax

Part 1 (28-31):
- harmonic motive echoes
- postlude
- post-climactic pedal

Part 2 (32-37):
- plagal-oriented closure in climax registers

F major
- 11
- 14
- 18
- 24
- 28

Db
- 8\textsuperscript{a}
- D
- T

climax

vocal line, simplified

reversal of harmonic motive

tonic charged

departure

return

F major
Figure 2.33. Scales and pentachords in “Daisies”

Figure 2.34. Relationship between the harmonic motive and the scales in “Daisies”
The climax in “Daisies” is neither as gritty as the “A-u!” climax nor as grim as the Symphony No. 3 climax; it is, on the contrary, a kind of expressive breakthrough at a point of remove, not a collapse at the point of return. The projection of a charged, unstable tonic at the point of remove, recalling the climax in the development of Beethoven’s “Eroica” (see discussion of that work in relation to the Symphony No. 3 first movement climax, above), brings the chromatic distance traveled—the dislocation, the defamiliarization, or, to be precise, the exaggeration—into expressive focus. Certainly there is no diatonic structure of comparable significance; and, as in the “A-u!” climax, everything following the climax unfolds over a post-climactic pedal point, as though emphasizing that the chromatic climax event is the event in the song.

* * *

It is perhaps typical of Rachmaninoff that “extraordinary” chromaticism is in the end somehow subsumed under some “ordinary” tonal procedure—if this failed to happen, he would be not a Postromantic composer but a modernist one. Yet the moments when the “extraordinary” overwhelms the “ordinary” largely define the music’s expressive content. In considering tonal design in the usual sense, the emphasis may be on harmonic norms; but emphasis on the effects of the abnorms reveals more dynamic designs that are reminiscent of Wallace Berry’s “intensity curves.”  

59 Lee A. Rothfarb has traced Berry’s idea back to Ernst Kurth, who was working around the same time Rachmaninoff.  

60 Kurth’s theories, with their emphasis on disruptive, even destructive forces, perhaps reflect the tonal music of his own day better than generally recognized. In the examples presented in this chapter, tension between components of a variegated harmonic language shapes larger structural and expressive processes, and, to borrow a phrase from Kurth, “contradictions are thus transformed into an overpowering accord.”

59 Berry, Structural Functions, 4.  
60 Rothfarb, Ernst Kurth: Selected Writings, 33.  
61 Ibid., 191.
Chapter 3

Overview of Harmonic Structures and Their Rhetorical Associations

In Chapters 4 and 5 of the dissertation, the special chromatic and modal components of Rachmaninoff’s mature harmonic language are described in detail, and their technical characteristics are defined in order to prepare the longer analyses in Chapter 6. The present chapter modulates, as it were, from the abstraction of Chapters 1 and 2 to the specificity of Chapters 4 and 5 by considering the rhetorical and expressive characteristics that special chromatic and modal structures have in the context of the interpretive model developed in Chapters 1 and 2.

Figure 3.1 provides an overview of the compound harmonic language described in Chapters 4 and 5. In addition to listing the main melodic and harmonic components found in the works studied and a number of the most important techniques through which they are articulated, Figure 3.1 lists the salient characteristics of each (bulleted and italicized) to make clear some of their essential differences. Some of the chromatic and modal types listed in the figure, e.g. the ordinary church modes, will be familiar to a reader with even limited knowledge of music theory and therefore require little discussion. Others, e.g. peremennost, may be unfamiliar even to a reader conversant in the literature, and will therefore require more extensive theoretical description in Chapters 4 and 5.

The present chapter details the rhetorical associations that special chromatic and modal structures have in Rachmaninoff’s mature style. The goal is to demonstrate in analysis that Rachmaninoff used different kinds of pitch organization for different rhetorical purposes, and that interpretation of form and climax events in the works analyzed benefits substantially from awareness of these rhetorical associations, which depends in turn on not reducing the special chromatic and modal structures to diatonic prototypes.
As suggested in Chapters 1 and 2, Rachmaninoff’s music is not unique in combining diatonic-functional syntax and special chromatic and modal idioms. Research on late Romantic, Postromantic, and early modernist works written by composers of many nationalities has suggested various kinds of compound syntax. However, as Jim Samson has pointed out, Russian music from the late nineteenth and early twentieth
centuries is characterized by such combinations to an especially large degree, and scholars have not been reluctant to incorporate this into their analyses.¹

James Baker’s work on Scriabin and Michel Dimitri Calvocoressi’s description of functional, modal and chromatic structures in Mussorgsky’s works have been cited in Chapters 1 and 2. Simon Morrison has written about Rimsky-Korsakov’s Sadko in similar terms.² Morrison recognizes a kind of triple syntax, noting "the equivalency of the ‘diatonic,’ ‘modal,’ and ‘octatonic’ passages. No single musical syntax dominates."³ Morrison suggests that the dialogue between special chromatic music (in this case, octatonic) and modal music is not just structural in Sadko; it is meaningful. Octatonic music is “supernatural,” and associated with the character Volkhova (she is a fantasy, a projection of the imagination), while modal music is “natural,” and associated with the title character, Sadko. “That her "supernatural" (octatonic) music derives from his "natural" (modal) music signals that she is as much an aural as a visual object of masculine conjuring, a product, in short, of synaesthesia."⁴ Differentiation of pitch structures is therefore crucial in Morrison’s interpretation of the opera.

I argue that differentiation is similarly useful in the interpretation of Rachmaninoff’s mature works, though in less precise, less “plotted” ways than in Morrison’s interpretation of Sadko. Analysis of a large number of works suggests that different kinds of pitch structures in Rachmaninoff’s works are generally associated with different basic rhetorical functions. Figure 3.2 lists the most important special chromatic and modal components and their basic rhetorical associations. As the table shows, recognition of rhetorical characteristics makes possible the identification of probable locations of special chromatic and modal structures in relation to the underlying functional tonal framework.

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¹ Samson, Music in Transition, 9-12.
³ Ibid., 291.
⁴ Ibid., 269.
As shown in Figure 3.2, functional tonal organization (almost invariably decorated by generic linear chromatic events, which should not be confused with special, “fantastic” chromatic structures) provides the structural framework for all Rachmaninoff’s works, even in the most extreme chromatic and/or modal contexts. In most cases, modal structures—including the familiar church modes, *peremennost* techniques, and the related *nega* idiom, all of which are discussed in Chapter 5—appear in introductory passages, serve to initiate thematic exposition or to close a section (after a highpoint or climax), or, occasionally, appear as digressions inside longer sections. In most cases, “fantastic” chromatic structures—that is to say, structures that can be understood as involving equal division of the octave, possibly extended to include additional tones—appear in passages that intensify, destabilize, and lead to climaxes on various scales. (The Phrygian mode is a special case treated at length in Chapter 5.)

Figure 3.3 shows the probable locations of these structures in relation to the prototypical, Ratnerian tension arc developed in Chapter 2. The figure also identifies a few additional musical characteristics toward the goal of enhancing the associations being made between specific pitch structures and expressive trajectories: processes of intensification generally engage several musical parameters simultaneously, including
harmonic structure, dynamics, texture, rhythm, and register; and, as demonstrated in several analyses in this and later chapters, pedal points following climaxes are a common feature in Rachmaninoff’s works, and may coincide with post-climactic modal structures.

Figure 3.3. Probable locations of special chromatic and modal structures

Figures 3.2 and 3.3 are not meant to present an iron-clad formula. Rather, they are based on the observation that, in the works analyzed, clear modal organization is more likely toward the beginning or end of an episode or a section or a work, while equal-interval chromatic structures are more likely in passages that intensify and at highpoints and climaxes. This by no means implies that modal organization is found at the beginning and at the end of every section of music in the works analyzed, nor that equal-interval chromaticism is found at every intense moment or climax. Many passages and even entire works are composed using primarily or only functional tonal methods. But when modal and/or “fantastic” methods are emphasized to a substantial degree, the result is likely to follow the broad outlines given in Figures 3.2 and 3.3.

Four short analyses demonstrate the point. In these analyses, I will of necessity anticipate some of the technical points made more fully in Chapters 4 and 5, and I will use terminology and labels from those chapters in the interest of consistency throughout
the document, even at the risk that some details in the present analyses may not yet be fully understood. However, the importance of the main point these analyses are intended to make—that clear rhetorical differentiation of special chromatic and modal structures exists and is significant—supersedes any organizational drawback.

**Four Short Analyses**

*“From the Gospel of St. John,” WoO (1915)*

Figure 3.4 is an analysis of the posthumously published song “From the Gospel of St. John,” composed in the late Russian period. The song is little more than a fragment. It is only thirteen measures long (lasting about a minute and a half in performance), and lacks any real resolution at the end; it ends as it begins—on a first-inversion A major triad. The song has no key signature, but A major serves as the tonic, melodically and harmonically (never, however, in root position). There is a limited amount of functional tonal activity, which, together with the A major tonic, serves as a framework for interpretation.

As Figure 3.4 shows, the piano prelude suggests the Lydian mode, with the exception of F♯, which may be interpreted as a neighbor tone. With the entry of the voice in measure 3, the mode is disrupted, and linear chromatic activity prepares the arrival of V₆ in measure 5. (This motion from I₆ to V₆ represents the extent of functional tonal progression in the song.) As Figure 3.4 shows, the complex passage that follows (mm.6-8) may be understood as an ornamented version of an octatonic chord cycle, as shown more clearly in Figure 3.5. Octatonic structures are formally discussed in Chapter 4, and the full details of Figures 3.4 and 3.5 may not be clear until then; however, some analytic observations pertinent to this particular song are possible now.

As Figure 3.4 shows, the octatonic cycle in “From the Gospel of St. John” involves minor third root relations. It emerges from the initial A major triad, proceeds through seventh and ninth chords on roots F♯, E♭ (or D♯), and C♮, and is ornamented by passing and neighbor tones that to some degree obfuscate the octatonic basis. Simultaneously, two different diminished seventh chords are articulated in the passage.
(labeled °7: [0,3,6,9] and °7: [1,4,7,10] in the figure); these diminished seventh chords combine to form the complete OCT_(0,1) collection. The vocal part presents a tonic triad “frame,” which, with the addition of a few chromatic tones, represents a composing-out—in inversion—of the motive labeled “x” in the piano prelude, as shown in Figure 3.6.

As Figure 3.4 shows, the song’s climax occurs as the octatonic cycle reaches its limit (the C♭9 chord in measure 8) and then cycles back to I^(6). The dynamic marked is ff, and there is a clear acceleration into and through the climax event. The appearance of G♯ at the end of measure 8 (marked “*” in Figure 3.4) represents the dissolution of octatonicism (G♯ does not belong to the OCT_(0,1) collection) and a return of Lydian organization, now in a post-climactic capacity and above a post-climactic pedal point. A Lydian and OCT_(0,1) are closely related. As Figure 3.7 shows, they share many tones—most significantly for present purposes, A♮ and D♯/E♭. D♯ characterizes the Lydian mode on A, and participates as a chord root in the climactic OCT_(0,1) cycle; and both the Lydian and octatonic collections contain the A major tonic triad. In the absence of genuine tonal progression, the “modulation” from Lydian A to OCT_(0,1) and back to Lydian A is perhaps the most important factor in the song’s overall harmonic design.

In “From the Gospel of St. John,” octatonicism is associated quite explicitly with intensification and climax, while Lydian organization fulfills initiating and post-climactic rhetorical functions. Furthermore, the tension that exists between the large-scale tonic frame in the voice and the octatonic structure in the piano has taken the place of functional tonal progression as the main event of harmonic interest, and serves as grist for the climax. Figure 3.8 summarizes these points in a diagram.
Figure 3.4. “From the Gospel of St. John,” WoO, analysis
Figure 3.5. “From the Gospel of St. John,” overview

Figure 3.6. “From the Gospel of St. John,” motivic analysis

Figure 3.7. The relationship between A Lydian and OCT_{(0,1)}
Similar associations between modal structures and initiating or post-climactic rhetorical functions, and between “fantastic” chromatic structures and intensifying or climactic rhetorical functions obtain even in works or passages whose overall tonal designs are more conventional than “From the Gospel of St. John.” Figure 3.9 is an analytic overview of the main climax in the first movement of The Bells, Op. 35 (1913). In this movement, functional tonal organization is considerably more prominent than it is in “From the Gospel of St. John”; but similar chromatic and modal structures may be heard, and the same basic rhetorical associations exist.
Figure 3.9 The Bells, Op. 35, i, analysis of climax (mm. 106–162)

**B section**

**A’ section**

**intensification to climax**

Figure 3.9 The Bells, Op. 35, i, analysis of climax (mm. 106–162)
The movement is in ternary form, and its tonic is A♭ major. Figure 3.9 shows, in a simplified form, the B section and then, in more detail, the A’ section, followed by a portion of the coda. Rehearsal numbers and measure numbers are provided. Marked “n” throughout Figure 3.9 is a neighbor figure of significance throughout the movement. In measure 1 of the movement (not shown in the diagram), the upper neighbor of A♭ and the upper neighbor of E♭ are activated simultaneously; in Figure 3.9, neighbor figures on A♭ and E♭ occur several times. Marked “x” throughout Figure 3.9 are various forms of a separate motivic figure that plays a more direct role in the climax event. Motive x saturates both the A section (not shown) and the climactic A’ section.

As Figure 3.9 shows, the climax event is framed by functional tonal activity in the key of A♭ major, but itself has a strong octatonic basis. OCT(2,3) is articulated by seventh chords on “nodes” D, B, and G#. As shown in Figure 2.10, The seeds for the climactic octatonic structure are planted in the first A section: the seventh chords on C (B) and D in measures 33, 35, and 38 are the first substantive chromatic events heard in the work. In this early passage, the C and D sonorities are combined with A♭ major tonic elements in a complex layered structure, and an A♭ seventh chord is heard as well, heightening the suggestion of octatonic organization. This early passage sets up the OCT(2,3) events exploited in the climax.

As Figure 3.9 shows, several non-collection tones may be heard in the climactic octatonic passage. These may be interpreted as passing events within the octatonic structure, and do not significantly disrupt the overall octatonic structure of the measures. Furthermore, the non-octatonic events all involve the same type of sonority as the structural octatonic harmonies—major-minor seventh chord—and they occur when the dynamic is reduced down to p before another buildup to ff (into measure 152) that is associated once more with explicitly octatonic organization.
In Figure 3.9, as in “From the Gospel of St. John,” two different diminished seventh chords are simultaneously articulated in different registers; these combine to form OCT\(_{\{2,3\}}\). One of the diminished seventh chords (º7: [0,3,6,9]) emerges from the functionally significant E♭ in the melody—more specifically, it emerges from chromatic inflection of motive x. Diatonic x in measure 139 spans a perfect fourth from primary note E♭ down to B♭. With OCT\(_{\{2,3\}}\), diatonic x is inflected to x’, which spans a tritone and is therefore integrated into the octatonic structure and 9º7: [0,3,6,9]. After rehearsal 23, x’ is simplified to just the tritone—in this context, an especially raw signifier of octatonicism.

In the A’ section, the octatonic structure is associated with a process of intensification, and directly sets up the movement’s climax. By sharp contrast, the coda, which commences in measure 155, begins with a passage in the Lydian mode. The D♭
from OCT\(_{(2,3)}\) (which, as described above, is set up early in the movement) is thus retained in the coda, but the rhetorical effect is different. Here, modal organization, as in “From the Gospel of St. John,” is post-climactic; and again there is a post-climactic tonic pedal point. In the coda, the falling melodic contours (heard most clearly in the sequential figure marked “*” in Figure 3.9), supported by a long diminuendo, contrast sharply with the rising tessitura and crescendo of the octatonic passage.

*Etude-Tableaux in E\(\flat\) minor, Op. 39, No. 5 (1917), First Section*

The previous two analyses demonstrate the utility of Figures 3.2 and 3.3 in the analysis of large-scale climax events. A third analysis demonstrates that similar structures and associations can apply even in passages whose climaxes are of local rather than global significance. Figures 3.11 and 3.12 present in two parts an analytic overview of most of the first section (section A of a ternary form) of the well-known Etude-Tableaux in E\(\flat\) minor, Op. 39, No. 5.
3.11. Etude-Tableaux in Eb minor, Op. 39, No. 5, mm. 1–12, analysis

- Phrase 1: linear chromatic elaboration of tonic frame and basic T - PD - D - T syntax over a tonic pedal
3.12. Etude-Tableaux in E♭ minor, mm. 12–22, analysis

- Phrase 2: reharmonization of phrase 1 initiated using peremennost technique
- Elaboration of tonic frame and basic T - PD - D - T syntax is disrupted by octatonic structure, leading to a local climax event
As shown in Figure 3.11, phrase 1 of the etude is organized around a clear T–PD–D–T progression over a tonic pedal point. (The pedal point also includes the upper fifth, B♭, enriching the texture and adding dissonance.) Pitch classes of the tonic triad serve as a frame for the melody; this partly explains the V13 in measure 11.5 Phrase 2 (mm. 12–22), shown in Figure 3.12, begins with a reharmonization of phrase 1 melodic material. In the reharmonization, the melodic tones are supported with different diatonically-related triads in a manner suggesting the peremennost idiom described in Chapter 5: G♭ major, III, and D♭ major, VII or III of B♭ minor, the goal of the passage. The modal (or, in this particular case, perhaps only quasi-modal) structure initiates the phrase, supporting the general associations outlined in Figure 3.3. The new diatonic chords in phrase 2 are presented using a strategy of suggestion followed by confirmation. G♭ major is suggested in measure 13, but under a dissonant melodic tone (because the melodic structure is the same as that in phrase 1), and confirmed as a local goal in measure 16 (marked “√” in Figure 3.12). Because the melody in measures 1–4 and 6–7 is set sequentially, a similar strategy of suggestion-confirmation is suggested for the D♭ major triad, as shown in Figure 3.12, but on a larger scale owing to the interference of an intensifying octatonic passage that begins in measure 18.

As shown in Figure 3.12, the octatonic passage interrupts the (reharmonized) tonic frame and functional tonal progression, leading to a local climax event. The octatonic passage shares many superficial characteristics with the climax-inducing octatonic passages in “From the Gospel of St. John” and the first movement of The Bells: heightening melodic tessitura, increasing dynamic level, faster rhythms, and so on. It also features the same basic octatonic structure: two different diminished seventh chords articulated in different registers, and emphasis on seventh chords whose roots are related by minor third. To these the passage adds a third, even more explicitly octatonic technique: transposition of a melodic segment, along with its harmonic support, up by minor third (T3).6 A number of non-collection tones can be understood as passing and neighbor events within the octatonic structure.

5 Cunningham recognizes blurring of tonal functions as a significant feature in Rachmaninoff’s style, calling it “hybrid function.” See Cunningham, “Harmonic Prolongation,” 99-112.
6 Octatonic structures are treated in more detail in Chapter 4.
Even very brief passages on occasion display the rhetorical functions identified in Figure 3.2 and Figure 3.3. Figure 3.13 is an analytic reduction of the first nine measures of the *Rhapsody on a Theme by Paganini*. These measures are labeled “Introduction.” In the passage, a tonic frame (referable to the initial motive of Paganini’s theme) is decorated by a neighbor figure (E♮-F♮-E♮, which, as discussed in Chapter 6, comes to climactic prominence later in the work). The tonic frame is sustained throughout the passage. At the same time, an ascending OCT\(_{(0,1)}\) scale in the bass supports a clear octatonic seventh chord cycle through roots F♯, A♮, C♮, and E♭, which are boxed in Figure 3.13; the chord “nodes” are connected by non-OCT\(_{(0,1)}\) sonorities that provide harmonic support for the motivic neighbor figure while maintaining smooth voice-leading throughout the passage.

The passage begins fairly loudly (f); nevertheless, a crescendo is indicated before the sf in measure 7, so that the octatonic structure is once again associated with a process of intensification. The rhetorical association is maintained even in this brief introductory flourish. In a manner very similar to that of “From the Gospel of St. John,” which in some ways anticipates the structure of the *Rhapsody* passage, the octatonic structure coexists with a tonic frame. The moment of maximal tension between the two structures—one “structuring,” referable to the tonic triad, and proceeding into a functional tonal progression (V\(^7\) – i), the other intensifying, involving equal division of the octave, and referable to Russian “fantastic” chromatic techniques—is the occasion of a climax event—or, as seems more appropriate for this very brief passage, a “highpoint.” Although the passage differs from the other three passages analyzed in this chapter in that no modal structures occur in the passage, even in this very limited context, the basic rhetorical premises suggested in Figures 3.2 and 3.3 may be heard.
The analysis in Figure 3.13 suggests three additional analytic points:

1. In the passage, an octatonic structure is itself the subject of contrapuntal elaboration. This demonstrates that octatonic idioms are well-defined in Rachmaninoff’s works. Even if equal-interval structures in the tonal repertory have their origins in elaboration of common-practice tonal structures, they demonstrate a degree of self-sufficiency in works from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This observation conflicts with Cunningham’s interpretation of equal-interval structures in Rachmaninoff’s works.7

2. There is a clear change in functional orientation over the course of the octatonic cycle— from tonic function to predominant function. The passage is therefore not strictly prolongational.8

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7 See again the discussion of Cunningham’s methodology in Chapter 1.
8 This assumes that “predominant” is a recognized tonal function. As explained in Chapter 2, I regard intensification of the predominant stage of syntax to be a significant component of late Romantic and Postromantic style.
3. Neither the OCT\(_{(0,1)}\) structure nor the tonal interpretation alone can account for the passage’s effect; it is necessary to recognize the conflict that results from the superimposition of the tonic frame and the octatonic structure.

As discussed in more detail in the longer analysis of the *Rhapsody* in Chapter 6 of the dissertation, the passage in Figure 3.13 has a larger significance in the composition. The rhetorical procedure exposed in the passage—statement of the tonic, simultaneous statement of a clear octatonic structure, and exploitation of a tension that exists between them—is the subject of a much larger climax in Variation XXII, involving precisely the same pitch structures as Figure 3.13.\(^9\)

**Conclusion**

Passages that contradict the rhetorical associations and probable locations identified in Figures 3.2 and 3.3 of course exist: the theory does not prescribe. Exceptions to the general rhetorical associations/locations, are, however, usually strongly marked. Climaxes at which modal structures are emphasized rather than chromatic structures, do occur—I take them to be special events.\(^{10}\) Other passages contradict the general rhetorical associations because some modal or special chromatic idiom has especially strong motivic significance in a work and is therefore found in a greater variety of contexts than suggested in Figures 3.2 and 3.3. Some passages contradict the basic rhetorical associations and locations described in this chapter on account of special expressive circumstances—particularly potent is the effect of a passage that begins intensely or even

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\(^9\) See the analysis of the *Rhapsody* in Chapter 6 of the dissertation, with special focus on rehearsal 66–68 in the work.

\(^{10}\) Examples of climaxes featuring strongly articulated modal structures may be found in the Prelude in B minor, Op. 32 No. 10 (1910); the second movement of the Piano Sonata No. 2, Op. 36 (1913), which is analyzed in Chapter 5; the Etude-tableaux in C minor, Op. 39 No. 7 (1917). All of these climaxes involve *peremennost*-derived “diatonic stacks,” which are discussed in Chapter 5.
hyperdissonantly and therefore has an unusually deformed tension arc. This may be heard in several works analyzed later in the dissertation.\(^{11}\)

However, the simple view outlined in Figures 3.2 and 3.3 provides a useable starting-point for interpreting Rachmaninoff’s compound syntax, and, moreover, encourages appreciation of the special expressive effects that exceptional passages such can produce.

**Summary of Chapters 2 and 3**

In Chapter 2, a framework for interpreting the interactions of variegated components in a compound harmonic environment was sketched, suitable for the analysis of Postromantic works in general and Rachmaninoff’s late Russian and exile works in particular. Tension between different components was characterized as a kind of hyperdissonance, which can have the effect of exaggerating, distorting, or (exceptionally) neutralizing conventional tonal and formal premises. Following the work of several scholars, it was suggested that the Postromantic style may be understood as involving a variety of “deformations” and structural tensions, to which hyperdissonance events were added as a category.

In Chapter 3, the basic rhetorical associations that “fantastic” chromatic and modal structures have in Rachmaninoff’s mature works were identified. Close reading of several works suggested that a trend toward increasing symmetry of pitch organization is likely to correspond to processes of intensification and/or climax in a given passage or work, while explicitly modal structures are likely to be associated with introductory, expository, and/or post-climactic functions.

\(^{11}\) See form example the analysis of the second movement of *The Bells* in Chapter 4 and the analysis of the Etude-Tableaux in D major, Op. 39, No. 9 in Chapter 5.
Chapter 4

“Fantastic” Chromatic Structures

William Benjamin has suggested that chromatic structures in late tonal works may do more than “fill in the cracks” between parts of a composed-out conventional tonal structure.¹ Although many chromatic events in Rachmaninoff’s works can be understood as embellishments of functional syntax, analyses in Chapters 2 and 3 have shown that some chromatic structures resist such description—and that the resistant structures are often rhetorically marked. Most of these have involved equal division of the octave—primarily chromatic minor-third relations (referable to the octatonic collection) and chromatic major-third relations (referable to the hexatonic collection or to a background whole-tone collection or augmented triad). Chromatic third relations in general have been treated extensively by Gregory Proctor, Richard Cohn, Matthew Bribitzer-Stull, Howard Cinnamon, David Kopp, and others.²

Richard Taruskin has traced the history of chromatic third relations in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Russian music from Glinka through Stravinsky; drawing from his work, I refer to such idioms collectively as “fantastic” chromatic structures.³ Although Taruskin is concerned primarily with octatonic organization, he also recognizes whole-tone organization, and he cites a number of passages that suggest hexatonic organization without, however, using that term. In Taruskin’s outline, equal-interval devices are traced from Schubert to Glinka and from Liszt to Rimsky-Korsakov.⁴ The Russians absorbed equal-interval devices into the national idiom, and, in the process,

² See entries under these authors’ names in the bibliography, and discussion later in the present chapter.
³ Taruskin, Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions, in particular Chapter 4, “Chernomor to Kashchey: Harmonic Sorcery” (255-306) and Chapter 10, “Punch into Pierrot (Petrushka)” (661-778, with special focus on 737-59).
⁴ Ibid., 255-72.
certain technical features and the general rhetorical associations of chromatic third-relations took on a uniquely Russian character, which Taruskin summarizes as follows:

1. “In Russian music...there is a notable tendency to make the symmetry of the third-relations explicit in a literal way that composers to the west normally did not exploit.”

2. Octatonic and whole-tone structures are “equivalents: both were outgrowths of mediant interval cycles, both were originally used as modulatory devices, both first appeared as descending basses; and both, for Russian composers, were evocative of evil magic.” This observation may be extended to hexatonic structures.

In other words, Russian composers converted equal-interval operations from something occurring “inside” syntax and therefore comparatively generic into something “fantastic”—more explicitly symmetrical than similar chromatic devices in German works, and transmitting a kind of expressive code. Taruskin’s view has been influential; take for example the following comments by Anatole Leikin:

Rimsky-Korsakov applied the octatonic scale…to portray fantastic creatures in his orchestral fantasy Sadko…All this constitutes the beginning of the long-standing tradition of representing the supernatural in music…The whole-tone scale, the augmented triad, and the octatonic scale have not acquired similar semantic connotations in Western music.

When Taruskin says that chromatic third relations are “modulatory,” he means that they are unsettling or disruptive in either a structural or a rhetorical sense (or both), even in cases where the passage in question begins and ends in the same key or on the same chord (as many of Taruskin’s examples do). Taruskin’s approach to the analysis of equal-interval chromatic structures is thus consonant in important ways with the ideas presented in the first three chapters of this dissertation. It differs from the approach adopted by theorists such as Cinnamon and Cunningham, who re-genericize chromatic...

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5 Ibid., 261-62.
6 Ibid., 267.
7 Leikin, “From Paganism to Orthodoxy to Theosophy,” 31.
third relations, treat them invariably as prolongations of tonic or dominant, and therefore consider them fundamentally supportive of syntax, not disruptive.  

Although in Rachmaninoff’s works the specific semantic connotations of equal-interval chromaticism (evil magic, the supernatural, etc.) are largely abandoned, its markedness remains. In his use of octatonic structures (and extended structures derived from octatonicism), especially, Rachmaninoff reveals a kinship with “progressive” Russian composers with whom he is not often associated, including Rimsky-Korsakov, whose extensive development of octatonic devices has been covered at length by Taruskin; Rimsky-Korsakov’s student Stravinsky, as covered by Arthur Berger, Pieter van den Toorn, Taruskin, and others; and Mussorgsky, Scriabin and Prokofiev, as covered by Allen Forte, James Baker and Daniel Zimmerman, respectively. As discussed in Chapter 1, the influence of Rimsky-Korsakov on Rachmaninoff seems to have been especially significant. When Rachmaninoff fled Russia in late 1917, he took with him only a single score by another composer: Rimsky-Korsakov’s Golden Cockerel. Of the harmonic materials in this opera Rachmaninoff is reported to have exclaimed: “And then the chromaticism. This is where the source of all the wretched modernism lies hidden. But with Rimsky it is in the hands of a genius.” Still later, when preparing for a summer of composing in 1934 (which resulted in the Rhapsody on a Theme by Paganini), Rachmaninoff studied his own All-Night Vigil, Op. 37 and Rimsky-Korsakov’s The Golden Cockerel and Kitezh. “The true greatness of Rimsky-Korsakov dawned on me gradually,” he said, “and I was very sorry that I never got to be his pupil.”

One notes a significant increase in passages based on equal-interval devices in

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8 See again the discussion in Chapter 1.
9 Taruskin, Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions, 255-306.
11 Martyn, Rachmaninoff, 287.
13 Harrison, Rachmaninoff, 301.
Rachmaninoff’s late Russian and exile periods—that is to say, after *Isle of the Dead* (1909). Vladimir Ashkenazy has suggested that Rachmaninoff’s late works, in contradistinction to the works of earlier Russian composers and Rachmaninoff’s own earlier compositions, are “no longer outgoing”—harmonies are “closing in on themselves” in ways that “Tchaikovsky would never have dreamed of.”[15] Although Ashkenazy’s observation resists easy definition in music-theoretic terms, I take it to be in part a response to the increased emphasis—especially at moments of structural or rhetorical importance—on symmetrical chromatic structures.

The following pages describe in detail the special chromatic structures introduced informally in analyses in Chapters 2 and 3. The structures described may be understood as ultimately deriving from various kinds of equal-interval oscillation or rotation operations. Rachmaninoff developed several idiosyncratic extensions and combinations of “fantastic” structures, without, however, altering the basic technical procedures or rhetorical associations. As described in Chapters 1 and 2, the appearance of equal-interval pitch devices in a functional tonal environment represents in Rachmaninoff’s music a kind of stress upon the functional system, which, as discussed in Chapter 3, is often exploited expressively. In many of the analyses presented thus far, intensification, tonal instability, and climax coincide with a trend towards symmetry in pitch organization. These associations obtain in a large majority of works analyzed in the dissertation. In this one regard, at least, Rachmaninoff is perhaps not so different from the early Stravinsky after all. In Taruskin’s view, octatonic harmony in Stravinsky’s *Petrushka* "is animistic; the *Petrushka* chord is conceived, nay motivated, by a sense of struggle, and antagonism of order and chaos reflecting the roles of pianist versus orchestra...We are meant to hear C and F-sharp in terms of an active, not a static, polarity—as competing centers, not merely as docile constituents of a single, static, octatonically referable "hyperharmony," to borrow an apt term from Rimsky-Korsakov's own vocabulary.”[16]

“Fantastic” chromaticism differs from functional tonal organization not so much in the specific scale or collection involved (the eight-note octatonic or six-note hexatonic and whole-tone collections as opposed to the seven-note diatonic collection) as in the

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non-goal-directedness of the harmonic structures that result from the “fantastic”
collections’ inherent symmetries. Whereas functional tonality may be regarded as
basically goal-oriented (see Chapters 1 and 2), equal-interval chromatic structures are
primarily based on oscillation and rotation. See again Figure 3.1; the techniques outlined
in that figure are described more formally below.

Octatonic Structures (Interval 3/6/9 Basis)

“Octatonic” refers to a symmetrical eight-note scale or collection in which
semitones and whole-tones alternate. Assuming enharmonic equivalence, only three
transpositions of the scale are possible, as shown in Figure 4.1. In this dissertation, Pieter
van den Toorn’s “model A” (semitone + whole-tone) is used exclusively. As stated in
Chapter 2 of the dissertation, to deal with issues of enharmonic equivalence (e.g. C♯ =
D♭), I follow Joseph Straus’s fixed-zero labels: OCT(0,1), OCT(1,2), and OCT(2,3), as shown
in Figure 4.1. (There is no OCT(3,4), as it would duplicate the pitch-class content of
OCT(0,1).)

Figure 4.1. Octatonic scales

OCT(0,1)  OCT(1,2)  OCT(2,3)

In Rachmaninoff’s works, octatonic structures are characterized by four closely-
related melodic-harmonic techniques, often in some combination:

1. Melodic presentation of segments referable to an octatonic scale
2. Rotation or oscillation of triads/seventh chords whose roots are related by minor
   third or tritone
3. Special techniques involving diminished seventh chords
4. Transposition of melodic segments (purely octatonic or not) by T3, T6, or T9

17 Van den Toorn’s technical system is described in The Music of Igor Stravinsky, 31-72. His “Model B”
octatonic scale has a whole-tone + semitone configuration.
Although technique 1 above might be considered sufficient for defining “octatonicism,” recognition of techniques 2 through 4 allows identification of octatonic structures in contexts that are not exclusively based on an octatonic scale—i.e. contexts in which other harmonic structures are simultaneously articulated, or in which an octatonic framework is itself chromatically decorated and the underlying scale is therefore disguised. The word “octatonic” therefore means a *modus operandi* as much as a referential collection, insofar as it indicates not only a source for melodic and harmonic material, but a set of particular ways that that material is used in actual musical contexts, and insofar as a structure might be clearly octatonic even if more than eight unique pitch classes are used.\(^\text{18}\) As Vincent Persichetti observed more generally, a procedural melodic or harmonic conception in fact often precedes a scalar conception: “It is advisable that scales be allowed to form as a result of the impetus of melodic or harmonic patterns; the material generated by thematic ideas may then be gathered up and placed into scale formation.”\(^\text{19}\) This has already been shown informally in several short analyses. (See especially the analysis of the first nine measures of the *Rhapsody on a Theme by Paganini* and the analysis of “From the Gospel of St. John” in Chapter 3.)

*Cycles and oscillations*

Russian octatonicism through the era of Scriabin and Rachmaninoff is fundamentally tertian, distinguishing it from the Bartók’s scale-oriented melodic octatonicism. The octatonic is unique among symmetrical collections in the variety and abundance of triads and seventh chords that may be obtained from it: major, minor, and diminished triads, and major-minor, minor-minor, half-diminished, and fully-diminished seventh chords. Rotations (or cycles; the terms are interchangeable in the present context) of triads and/or seventh chords built upon the first, third, fifth, and seventh notes of the scale, which are related by minor thirds) are a common manifestation of octatonicism in Russian music from the late nineteenth century on. Oscillation between two chords is equally common. Figure 4.2 gives sample cycles and oscillations in OCT\(_{(0,1)}\).

\(^{18}\) A similar understanding of noncollection tones in octatonic and whole-tone structures in Scriabin’s works is suggested in Jay Reise, “Late Skriabin: Some Principles Behind the Style.”

A well-known example of octatonic oscillation is the tritone-related pair of major-minor seventh chords used extensively in the “Coronation Scene” from the prologue of Mussorgsky’s *Boris Godunov* (see Figure 4.3). The octatonic basis of the chord pair is clear despite the fact that the collection is incomplete (as shown in the figure, only six pitch classes are used). In more complex contexts, tertian sonorities may be superimposed, as for example with the F♯ and C major triads of Stravinsky’s “Petrushka chord,” or at the climax of Rachmaninoff’s “A-u!” in the Chapter 2 analysis.

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20 See also Forte, “Musorgsky as Modernist.”
As the analysis of the Elegy in E♭ minor, Op. 3, No. 1 in Chapter 2 has shown, passages that suggest equal-interval chromaticism appear in some early Rachmaninoff works. However, extensive use of equal-interval chromatic structures and—more tellingly—emphasis on such structures at important formal or expressive junctures constitute in my view an important characteristic of the late Russian and exile periods. This observation is consonant with David Cannata’s view, discussed in Chapter 1, that *Isle of the Dead* (1909) represents Rachmaninoff’s real coming of age as a composer. The tonal scheme used in *Isle of the Dead* “testifies to a stylistic sophistication hitherto unknown in his works.”

21 The structure Cannata describes is a complete rotation of keys related by minor third: A minor – C minor – E♭ major – F# minor – A minor, as shown in Figure 4.4.22 Cannata observes that the tonal structure is summarized in a remarkable passage (beginning eleven measures after rehearsal 22) in which the Dies irae is treated canonically, with entries beginning on C, E♭, A and F#—that is to say, with entries on the key notes of the work.23 The canonic passage is shown in Figure 4.5.

22 Cannata’s study of manuscripts has revealed that the E♭ and F# areas were added after the initial drafting of the work. See Cannata, *Rachmaninoff and the Symphony*, 78-83.
23 Ibid., 81. Cannata suggests that the F# entry of the Dies irae is left incomplete to reflect the instability of F# as a key center in the work.
What Cannata does not discuss is that the chromatic minor thirds key scheme suggests a large-scale octatonic cycle, and that the canonic summary is explicitly octatonic, as shown in Figure 4.5. Moreover, as Figure 4.6 shows, the summary canon emerges from a climax event in which the four principal tones involved (A, C, Eb, and F#) are fused into a diminished seventh chord. The diminished seventh chord (º7: [0,3,6,9] on the figure) is shared by OCT_{(0,1)} (global key scheme) and OCT_{(2,3)} (canonic passage).
The first movement of the next work composed by Rachmaninoff, the Piano Concerto No. 3 in D minor, Op. 30 (1909), is similar in certain ways to the *Isle of the Dead*. Although Op. 29 and Op. 30 are in different keys (A minor, D minor), the climax in the first movement of Op. 30 uses almost exactly the same structure—at pitch—as that shown in Figures 4.4 through 4.6. The movement follows a conventional concerto movement plan, and the music through measure 203 is characterized by strong functional tonal organization. As shown in Figure 4.7, the first theme is in D minor, the second theme (measure 93 and following) is in B♭ major, and the middle-section development (starting with the false repeat of the first theme at measure 167) begins in fairly unproblematic fashion. At measure 203, the minor dominant is attained. At this point, as shown in Figure 4.8, an octatonic structure similar to those described in *Isle of the Dead* replaces—or, perhaps, displaces—the conventional tonal organization displayed in the movement up to that point. (The melodic transposition techniques indicated in Figure 4.8...
are not discussed until later in this chapter; the reader is encouraged to return to Figure 4.8 at that point.)

Figure 4.7. Concerto No. 3, Op. 30, i, analytic overview of mm. 1–203

As shown in Figure 4.8, the climax at measure 235 is prepared by an extensive octatonic structure, and involves diminished seventh chord [0,3,6,9]. (The octatonic intensification into the climax is reflected by a crescendo—mf to ff to fff—and an accelerando—Più vivo at measure 203, then Allegro at measure 223.) As shown in Figure 4.9, the climax chord and the OCT\((2,3)\) melodic cell heard several times at the climax and in the measures following it are not unlike the climax chord and Dies irae motive at the *Isle of the Dead* climax (see again Figures 4.5 and 4.6).

However, the event in the concerto has additional, opus-specific significance. If D♯ is respelled as Eb, it becomes clear that the climax event may be interpreted as a development of the Eb introduced into the movement’s main theme in measure 12 (Figure 4.10). This early Eb is the first chromatic tone heard in the composition (other than the ordinary leading tone, C♯). In measures 12 and 14 it tonicizes G minor (iv). At measure 235, at the climactic apex of an octatonic structure, the Eb is radically exaggerated. As shown in Figures 4.9 and 4.11, the climactic D♯/Eb carries through the cadenza (which contains a recapitulation of the first theme) into the flute solo which follows at rehearsal 19 and, ultimately, into the recapitulation of the second theme, which occurs in the key of Eb major.
Figure 4.8. Concerto No. 3, i, analytic overview of mm. 203–235

 música basis: OCT_{(2,3)}

Più vivo

203

mf cres.

chord cycle: OCT_{(8,1)}

º7: \([0, 3, 6, 9]\)

OCT_{(2,3)}

melodic cell

non-OCT: chromatic ascent

WT ascent

ff

º7

climax (aborted)

Allegro

223

º7: \([0, 3, 6, 9]\)

climax
Figure 4.9. Concerto No. 3, i, m. 235 through recapitulation in cadenza

Climax

Figure 4.10. Concerto No. 3, i, main theme, introduction of E♭
In Figure 4.11, pitch class E♭ is associated with a neighbor figure (marked “N” on the figure), which is finally absorbed back into D minor at the coda. (However, even here the story is not over. See rehearsal 48 in the third movement, where the first movement’s
second theme material is again treated in E♭ major; and see also the apotheosis E♭ major chord, fff, now in the context of D major, after rehearsal 77 near the end of the concerto.)

To summarize: lowered scale degree 2, introduced conventionally early in the first movement, is exploited octatonically at the movement’s climax, creating a structural dissonance that is only resolved at the end of the first movement (and which has implications for a point of culmination at the end of the third movement).

The *Isle of the Dead* and Piano Concerto No. 3 passages feature cyclical (or rotational) articulation of octatonic structures. Similar cycles were featured in several of the analytic vignettes in Chapters 1 and 2, including “From the Gospel of St. John,” and the E♭ minor Etude-Tableaux, Op. 39, No. 5. Oscillations between two octatonically-related chords are also common in Rachmaninoff’s mature works (and, exceptionally, earlier works such as the Elegy in E♭ minor, Op. 3, No. 1), usually appearing at strongly marked moments. (See for example analysis of the “A-u!” climax in Chapter 2.) Figure 4.12 shows an octatonic oscillation used in conjunction with a motivic melodic cell in the finale of the Symphony No. 3, Op. 44. The passage, from rehearsal 79 through rehearsal 80, contains the end of the movement’s exposition, and forms a bridge to the fugal episode that substitutes for a proper development in the movement. Fuller analysis of the passage must wait until Chapter 6, where it is interpreted in the context of the entire symphony; but some initial observations are possible here.
The second theme group ends in E♭ major (rehearsal 79), quietly. At rehearsal 80, intensification of dynamics, texture, and instrumentation coincides with the onset of an octatonic oscillation and a statement of the symphony’s motto theme in the trumpets on C♯. In Figure 4.13, the events of Figure 4.12 are summarized. The motto is not explicitly octatonic, being capable of numerous harmonizations; but it is, in this context, an OCT\(_{(1,2)}\) melodic cell. The chord oscillation is of the “Coronation” tritone type.

\(^{24}\) As discussed in Chapter 6, the motto theme is heard at a variety of pitch levels in the symphony: most significantly on A in the first movement, and on C♯ in the second and third movements.
Dynamics and instrumentation make clear the passage’s rhetorical significance. The passage is also structurally significant, as shown in the analytic overview in Figure 4.14. (The events in Figure 4.14 are described more fully in Chapter 6.) The OCT\(_{(1,2)}\) oscillation at the end of the exposition (Figure 4.12) initiates a much larger cycle that ultimately leads into the recapitulation by way of E\(^\flat\), supporting V\(^7\) of the global tonic A major. The fugue which substitutes for a proper development in the movement begins in D major and climaxes on B major at rehearsal 93, as shown. The extraordinary pp passage after rehearsal 94—an interruption, raw in its “orientalism”—occupies the B\(^\flat\) OCT\(_{(1,2)}\) node, preparing the large-scale dominant which follows. As shown in Figure 4.14, the primary melodic tones and highpoints from rehearsal 80 through the recapitulation involve notes from the motto theme on C\(^\#\) heard in the trumpets at 80. This large-scale articulation of the motto carries over into the movement’s coda (after rehearsal 110), at which point the motto is again stated on C\(^\#\), but this time in A major—and note how the C\(^\#\) major-minor seventh chord from rehearsal 80 is incorporated into the motto statement.
Diminished seventh techniques

Because octatonic structures are characterized by minor thirds and tritones, diminished seventh chords are particularly easy to come by. (See again the *Isle of the Dead* climax chord in Figure 4.5, the analysis of the Concerto No. 3 first movement climax in Figure 4.10, and numerous analyses in Chapters 2 and 3.) Any given octatonic scale contains two different diminished seventh chords, which leads directly to several notable techniques in the works studied. The first technique is shown in Figure 4.15a: octatonic decoration of a (functional) diminished seventh chord with passing tones. However, Taruskin dismisses such decorated diminished seventh chords as only superficially octatonic: “true octatonicism preempts functions normally exercised by the circles of fifths, whether by a rotation of thirds or, more radically, by a tonally stable diminished harmony.” More idiomatically octatonic is the technique shown in Figure 4.15b: two diminished seventh chords, which combine to form a complete octatonic.

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25 The *Dies irae* canon in *Isle of the Dead* may be interpreted as articulating an ornamented diminished seventh chord.

collection as shown in Figure 4.15d, are entangled. Entangled diminished seventh chords in octatonic contexts were featured but not discussed in detail in several analyses in Chapters 2 and 3.

Figure 4.15. Octatonic diminished seventh chord techniques

a) decorated º7
b) entangled º7's
c) related dom7 cycle
d) º7's combine to octatonic

Although the entangled diminished seventh chords of Figure 4.15b are clearly related to the chord cycle shown in Figure 4.15c, melodic emphasis in a given passage may bring out the entanglement, greatly increasing the intensity of dissonance in the passage. Figure 4.16 is such a case. (The passage has a D♭ major key signature in the score but is notated without a key signature in Figure 4.16 to make plainer the interval structure.) In this passage, tones of [2,5,8,11] are emphasized in the melodic material, while the roots of the OCT(1,2) chord rotation emphasize [1,4,7,10].
Figure 4.16. Symphonic Dances, Op. 45, iii, analysis of local climax at r. 79

OCT\textsubscript{(1,2)} melodic cell, transposed

\[ T_9 \]

OCT\textsubscript{(1,2)} chord rotation + auxilliary tones

\[ \text{SD} \quad \text{T} \]

\textit{gradual discharge}

\textit{hyperdissonant climax}

\textit{resolution to tonic distorted by octatonic structure}

\[ ff \quad p \]
Transposition of melodic segments by $T_3$, $T_6$, or $T_9$

Because the octatonic collection (0134679t) features an interval pattern that recurs at the distance of a minor third, any octatonic material (melodic, harmonic or both) transposed by minor third up or down or by tritone will stay inside the given octatonic collection. Particular clear examples of this will be found in passages analyzed in the section above, and in several analyses in Chapters 1 and 2 of the dissertation. The $T_3/T_6/T_9$ technique can be extended to involve transposition of material that is not exclusively octatonic: when several $T_3$, $T_6$, or $T_9$ operations are used in succession, the effect may be “octatonic” even if the segment so transposed is not itself exclusively octatonic. Figure 4.17, an annotated reduction of the opening of Rimsky-Korsakov’s *Golden Cockerel*, demonstrates. (The passage features all of the octatonic techniques identified above.)

In Figure 4.17, the pair of triads outlined in the first six measures—$D_b$ major and $F_b$ (or $E$) major—establish $OCT_{(1,2)}$ as a potential basis for the passage; $D_b$ and $E$ are two of the four $OCT_{(1,2)}$ nodes. In measures 7 – 12 of the passage, diminished seventh chord $[2,5,8,11]$ is outlined by chain transposition of a melodic theme at $T_9$. (The structure is similar to that in Figure 4.15, but on a larger scale. Other similarities between *The Golden Cockerel* and Rachmaninoff’s Symphonic Dances are noted below.) The transposition process, and the diminished seventh chord it generates are disguised but not undone by the presence of many non-octatonic auxiliary tones in the melodic motive itself.

After measure 11, diminished seventh chord $[2,5,8,11]$ is sustained above bass note $G^\#$ (a third $OCT_{(1,2)}$ node). Octatonic organization gradually dissolves after measure 13, and a non-octatonic passage follows at measure 19. However, octatonic structures again characterize the music at measure 27: $OCT_{(1,2)}$ node $E^\#$ in the bass, diminished seventh $[1,4,7,10]$ (the other $OCT_{(1,2)}$ diminished seventh chord), and $T_9$ transpositions of the melodic theme. The fourth $OCT_{(1,2)}$ node, $B>$, arrives at measure 38 (marked by an asterisk); but by this point, $OCT_{(1,2)}$ has been left behind in favor of $OCT_{(0,1)}$, which is the setting for similar $T_9$ and diminished seventh techniques leading into measure 38.
Figure 4.17. Rimsky-Korsakov, *The Golden Cockerel*, Prologue, analysis of mm. 1–38

Basis: OCT\(_{0,1}\)

º7: [2,5,8,11] over G

º7: [1,4,7,10]

º7: [2,5,8,11] over E (sim.)

º7: [0,3,6,9] over E (sim.)

º7: [2,5,8,11] over E

Basis: OCT\(_{0,1}\)
Figure 4.18 is an analytic overview of the entire passage, showing OCT_{1,2} nodes D\#, E, G, and B\# and diminished seventh chords that result from T9 treatment of the melodic theme. Triads belonging to OCT_{1,2} or, later in the passage, OCT_{2,3} are boxed.

As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, Rachmaninoff showed great interest in *The Golden Cockerel* over a period of many years. Barrie Martyn has noted a specific melodic similarity between a theme in the Prologue of *The Golden Cockerel* and a theme from the first movement of Rachmaninoff’s Symphonic Dances without, however, developing the observation analytically. Recognition of octatonic structures allows a more detailed comparison of the themes. Figure 4.19 shows the two themes; an analytic reduction is shown beneath each theme. (Figure 4.19b is the melodic theme from Figure 4.17.)
The similarity of the themes’ general contours is obvious. Less obvious is the fact that both themes outline a diminished seventh chord, and that the chord is decorated by a descending chromatic line, which creates the distinctive contour. The similarity does not end here. Figure 4.20 shows that the entire opening passage of Rachmaninoff’s dance resembles the opening of *Golden Cockerel*.27

27 Bertensson and Leyda report Rachmaninoff’s recollection, many years after the fact, of an occasion when he, Rimsky-Korsakov, and Scriabin discussed *The Golden Cockerel* (still a work in progress) at a café.
As shown in Figure 4.20, many non-octatonic tones are present in the sixteen measure introduction to dance. It might be correct to say that the OCT\textsubscript{(2,3)} material shown in Figure 4.20 is only a framework upon which a complex, highly individual structure is built. However, certain features are common to the Rimsky-Korsakov and Rachmaninoff passages: the diminished-seventh oriented melodic material at measure 10, and the gradually filled-in diminished seventh chord of the opening measures. The Rachmaninoff passage is perhaps richer than the Rimsky-Korsakov passage, however, because the OCT\textsubscript{(2,3)} material is only one component of the structure. Of the three triads arpeggiated

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Rachmaninoff comments, “What untold riches there are in the Coq d’Or! The beginning alone—how novel… I don’t know what impression this conversation made on Scriabin. But I was deeply stirred.” (Bertensson and Leyda, *Sergei Rachmaninoff*, 138-39).
at the beginning of the passage (bracketed and marked with an asterisk), only two belong to the $\text{OCT}_{(2,3)}$ collection—the D major and A♭ major triads are part of the collection, but the G♭ major triad does not belong (though the sustained G♭ does). Similarly, the A minor triad at measure 7 and measure 14 is treated as a kind of non-octatonic alternative to the A♭ major triad (a neighbor chord, perhaps); it enriches the harmonic content of the passage, without, however, necessarily undoing the octatonic framework. The octatonic structure of the introduction is “dirty”; but the dirtiness is significant, because the three bracketed triads (plus the A minor triad) comprise a chord group that is used motivically in all three movements. (See the longer analysis of Op. 45 in Chapter 6.) The octatonic framework in this late Rachmaninoff passage is itself extensively elaborated and decorated—it is given the same kind of flexible treatment that familiar tonal idioms are given in the mature common practice.

I have been at pains to suggest throughout this dissertation that functional tonal syntax remains central in Rachmaninoff’s idiom even when special chromatic and modal structures are emphasized. Figure 4.20 is a good case in point. As marked on the figure, tonal functions in C minor are engaged as the introduction ends, and a lengthy span of music in C minor (actually C Aeolian) begins in measure 16. (That section is analyzed later in the present chapter). No similarly clear functional engagement occurs within the octatonic structure in the _Golden Cockerel_ opening.

**Rachmaninoff’s and Scriabin’s Symmetrical Structures Compared**

By now, the exaggeration and distortion effected by equal-interval chromatic structures in many passages from Rachmaninoff’s mature works are clear. These are, I believe, a hallmark of the composer’s mature style. It is interesting to compare such passages as the Symphony No. 3 first movement climax, the “A-u!” climax, and the “Daisies” climax to the same kinds of symmetrical pitch structures as they occur in Scriabin’s late music.

Figure 4.21 is an analytic overview of the first half of Scriabin’s Prelude, Op. 74, No. 3 (1914). The prelude is almost entirely octatonic. It falls into two parallel halves, followed by a short “tag” (measures 25–26). As Figure 4.21a and 4.21b show, the
octatonic techniques in the piece are similar to those used by Rachmaninoff and Rimsky-Korsakov: a melodic motive ($\chi$) is transposed at T6 and T9; major-minor seventh chords related by tritone appear; two different diminished seventh chords are entangled, summing to $\text{OCT}_{(0,1)}$ (as shown in Figure 4.22); and in measures 9–12, an extended segment of octatonic melodic patterns is transposed up by minor third to close the section.

As shown in Figure 4.23, the second half of Scriabin’s prelude is a transposition by tritone of the first half.\(^{28}\) The entire prelude remains inside one octatonic collection. There is motion within the collection, but otherwise no motion at all, recalling Taruskin’s observation (quoted in Chapter 2) that “music based on universal invariant harmonies becomes quite literally timeless, as well as emotionally quiescent.”\(^{29}\) How different from Rachmaninoff’s boiling octatonic climaxes! Although the equal-interval pitch structures in Scriabin’s prelude and Rachmaninoff’s “A-u!” (see Figures 2.25, 2.26, and 2.27) are nearly identical, all being derived from tertian models, and all involving the same kinds of root relations, transposition operations, and diminished seventh techniques, the rhetorical effects of the structures in the two passages could hardly be more different—distortion and climax in the Rachmaninoff, invariant, changeless quiescence (motion without motion) in the Scriabin. In Scriabin’s late style, functional premises are effectively neutralized. In Rachmaninoff’s late style, a tension between conventional functions and symmetrical chromaticism remains.

\(^{28}\) Commonly available editions have a misprint in measure 21, which has unfortunately been followed in many performances and recordings. On the lower staff, the $\#$ before G should instead be before D. This restores the chord to $\text{OCT}_{(0,1)}$, and makes it an exact analog (at T6) to the chord in measure 9.

\(^{29}\) Taruskin, *Defining Russia Musically*, 348-49.
Figure 4.21. Skryabin, Prelude, Op. 74, No. 3, analytic overview of mm. 1–13

(a) OCT\textsubscript{(0,1)} materials in measures 1 - 5: motive \( x \), melodic segments and seventh chords at T6

(b) Analysis of measures 1 - 13

emphasized melodic tones (motive \( x \))
Consider, as a contrast to the Scriabin prelude, the second movement of The Bells, Op. 35 (1913), an intensely chromatic work almost certainly composed with Scriabin’s and Rimsky-Korsakov’s harmonic experiments in mind. The movement is in D major. The previous movement is in A♭ major (see again the discussion of the first movement in Chapter 2). The tritone relation between the first movement’s A♭ major and the second movement’s D major suggests octatonic possibilities. As suggested in Figure 4.24 (boxes 1 and 2) and in Figures 2.26 and 2.27, an octatonic structure is articulated when the two keys—or, rather, triads representing the two keys—are superimposed at the beginning of the second movement. The movement therefore begins, unusually for Rachmaninoff, with a marked octatonic structure.

30 The Bells does not begin and end in the same key. David Cannata has suggested that the entire composition is organized around the fourth movement’s C♯ minor/D♭ major. See Cannata, Rachmaninoff and the Symphony, 83-87.
Figure 4.24. *The Bells*, Op. 35, ii, annotated reduction of mm. 1–14

Lento

violas (con sordini)

formation of theme d

poco a poco cresc.

strings pizz., clarinets, and harp

horns and trumpets

OCT\(_{(2,3)}\) oscillation

(“Coronation”-type)

violins I and II

sforz.

sforz.

p

pp
Figure 4.25. *The Bells*, ii, overview of thematic material

(a) Formation of theme *d* during the hyperdissonant opening

Lento

\[
\text{theme } d
\]

violas (con sordini)

poco a poco cresc.

(b) Theme *d* in tonic D major

\[
\text{theme } d
\]

violins I and II

cellos

(c) Chromatic theme

\[
\text{violin I}
\]

\[
\text{oboe}
\]

\[
\text{p dolce}
\]

dim.
As shown in Figure 4.24, the opening measures of the second movement feature a gradual spinning-out of thematic material (theme \(d\), so labeled because of the contour similarity with the \textit{Dies irae}) to fill in the interval between pitch class \(E\) and pitch class \(A\). This interval may be interpreted as a sort of holdover from the first movement’s tonic. (Note that the \(D\) gives this material an \(A\) Lydian character, which is the modal form heard at the end of the first movement. See again the analysis of that movement in Chapter 3.) Theme \(d\) is important throughout the second movement, appearing in a number of forms: see Figure 4.25a and 4.25b. The only other significant thematic material, the “chromatic theme” shown in Figure 4.25c, is probably derived from the cello countermelody to theme \(d\) shown in Figure 4.25b. Throughout the movement, the sixteenth-note version of theme \(d\) shown in Figures 4.24 and 4.25a is associated with octatonic structures.

The OCT\(_{(2,3)}\) oscillation at the beginning of the movement (Figure 4.24) is one of the more remarkable “fantastic” passages in Rachmaninoff’s works. It is similar in several ways to Mussorgsky’s “Coronation Scene” prototype: it features two sonorities related by tritone (here rooted on \(D\) and \(A\)) and it features the same kind of antiphonal \textit{blagovest} bell texture wherein the harmonic material is separated into two sonic layers, one in the upper register and one in the lower.\(^{31}\) The \textit{blagovest} texture in Mussorgsky’s “Coronation” is explicitly associated with bells; in the Rachmaninoff movement, no actual bells sound, but the title of the composition and the poem make the association plain. The octatonic structure of the opening measures is detailed in Figure 4.26. Because the D major tonic of the movement is entangled in a noisy octatonic structure at the opening of the movement, this may be interpreted as hyperdissonance at not the point of remove nor the point of return, but at the point of departure (or perhaps, if the first

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\(^{31}\) See Edward V. Williams, “The Blagovest Theme in Russian Music,” \textit{Kennan Institute for Advanced Russian Studies Colloquium} (Washington, D.C.: Wilson Center, 1987). Williams defines the idiom as a two-part sonic texture or “sound complex” referable to bells (Williams, “The Blagovest Theme in Russian Music,” 40), and he identifies the opening of Concerto No. 2, Op. 18 as the paradigmatic example of the idiom in Rachmaninoff’s music. Jason T. Stell identifies the \textit{blagovest} idiom in some of Rachmaninoff’s solo piano works, drawing from Williams’s research (“Rachmaninov’s Expressive Strategies,” 23-25). Stell notes that “blagovest permeates Rachmaninov’s music to such an extent that it becomes a recurrent topic” (“Rachmaninov’s Expressive Strategies,” 24).
movement is taken into account, the point of continuation). The unusual tension of the event—an unstable tonic at the opening of a movement, not treated as an applied chord (as for example the first chord in Beethoven’s Symphony No. 1)—is reflected in a dynamic and textural crescendo across the opening measures. As shown in Figure 4.26c, the clarification of D major as tonic at rehearsal 31 is entirely non-functional. Up to that point, thematic presentation has strongly suggested that A♭ major will be the movement’s tonic. When D major emerges as the legitimate tonic, at 31, the violins take up theme d and give it an entirely new rhythmic and textural character.

Figure 4.26. The Bells, ii, OCT_{(2,3)} in mm. 1–10

![Diagram](image)

Figure 4.27 is an analytic overview of the entire movement. (Some material is omitted to save space.) The figure shows the return of octatonic structures at several points, and shows how the climactic E♭ major at measure 97 may be understood as emerging from the octatonically-induced tension between E♭/A♭ and D major in the first ten measures.\(^{32}\) I am tempted to say that the hyperdissonant opening—an unusual and

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\(^{32}\) In David Cannata’s short analysis of the movement, he emphasizes the E♭ major/G♭ major material from rehearsal 41 through 44 (including the climax event at measure 97) as a “contrasting tonal plateau,”
striking thing in Rachmaninoff’s works, to be sure—carries over into the climax. Significantly, the climax event features theme $d$ at the same pitch level heard in the opening measures of the movement; and theme $d$ is prominent in all of the octatonic oscillations and at the climax event. As shown in Figure 4.28, the third octatonic passage in the movement (at measure 111) connects back to the first, returning to $\text{OCT}_{(2,3)}$; it is post-climactic, and marked $p$, unlike the two octatonic passages that came before. As shown in Figure 4.27, a final $\text{OCT}_{(2,3)}$ event at measure 151 confirms D major as tonic.

All of this is to say that, while the “fantastic” structures used by Rachmaninoff and Scariabin are similar in many superficial regards (and sometimes virtually identical), the active, tensive hyperdissonance exploited by Rachmaninoff is expressively far different from the static, “timeless” condition engendered by Scariabin’s symmetrical structures. In the former case, insistence upon functional tonal premises as an underlying basis leads to a structural tug of war (to exaggeration, to distortion, and ultimately to climax events that exploit the tension); in the latter case, insistence that those premises shall not—must not—apply results in their neutralization.

without, however, associating the event with any earlier events in the movement or work. See Cannata Rachmaninoff and the Symphony, 86-87.
Figure 4.27. *The Bells*, ii, analytic overview

1st movement
2nd movement

E♭ elements

structural hyperdissonance with tonic D major

climax

(material omitted)

(material omitted)

D major elements

OCT\(_{(2,3)}\)

OCT\(_{(0,1)}\)

OCT\(_{(2,3)}\)

OCT\(_{(2,3)}\)

etc.

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<td>OCT(_{(2,3)})</td>
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<td>OCT(_{(2,3)})</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>theme d</td>
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E♭ elements

OCT\(_{(2,3)}\)

OCT\(_{(0,1)}\)

ff

ff

pp

p < f ≤ pp

D major elements

bII\(^\text{7}\) V\(^\text{6,5}\) I

IV I
Figure 4.28. The Bells, ii, octatonic oscillations in measures 1, 72, and 111

Hexatonic Structures (Interval 4/8 Basis)

“Hexatonic” refers to a symmetrical six-note collection in which semitones and minor thirds alternate, of which there are four distinct transpositions as shown in Figure 4.29 (transposition of any hexatonic scale by major third up or down duplicates pitch-class content). Again, fixed-zero labels are used. If octatonicism is characterized by consistent interval 3/6/9 and/or T3/T6/T9 operations and diminished seventh chord techniques in a tertian context, hexatonicism is characterized by interval 4/8 patterns and T4/T8 transposition activity in a tertian context, even if—as already suggested for octatonicism—tones foreign to the hexatonic collection are present.

33 The term “hexatonic” was introduced in Vincent Persichetti, Twentieth-Century Harmony, 2nd ed. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1961), 53; see especially his Example 2-37, where the term covers a variety of different six-note collections. The more restricted definition adopted in the dissertation has been popularized by Richard Cohn, “Maximally Smooth Cycles, Hexatonic Systems, and the Analysis of Late-Romantic Triadic Progressions,” Music Analysis 15 (1990): 9-40.
34 These labels are derived from Straus’s octatonic labels, and are also suggested in Miguel A. Roig-Francoli, Understanding Post-Tonal Music (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2008), 57-58.
As with octatonicism, structures based on chord rotation and oscillation are common in the works analyzed. Samples are shown in simple form in Figure 4.30. In Figure 4.30, note the inclusion of some “extended” hexatonic structures—that is to say, structures involving seventh chords with tones foreign to the hexatonic collection. A pure hexatonic collection does not allow major-minor seventh chords; but they are commonly used in hexatonic-type progressions. In such a case, the structure may be said to have \( \text{HEX}_{(x,x)} \) as a basis, without necessarily committing to \( \text{HEX}_{(x,x)} \) for its full content. (A hexatonic-type structure involving a seventh chord not purely of the collection was analyzed, though not labeled as such, in the song “Daisies,” Op. 38, No. 3 in Chapter 2; the basic structure is reproduced in Figure 4.30h.)
Unlike octatonic rotations and oscillations, hexatonic rotations and oscillations may simulate V – I or iv – I resolutions, including melodic resolution of the leading tone or melodic resolution of scale degree 6 (lowered) to scale degree 5, or both. In other words, although hexatonic structures deny root relations by perfect fifth just as octatonic structures do, hexatonic structures do not completely eliminate tendency-tone activity.\(^{35}\) (In Figure 4.30, some tendency tones, are shown by small noteheads in parentheses.) The availability of functional tendency tones allows hexatonic structures to substitute for diatonic functional ones in some cases, making explicit the interaction of functional syntax and symmetrical chromaticism and simplifying the introduction of equal-interval chromaticism as a structuring mechanism.\(^{36}\) (See again the analysis of the*Rhapsody on a Theme by Paganini*, Theme and Variations VIII and IX in Chapter 2.)

Figure 4.31 shows a $\text{HEX}_{(3,4)}$ cycle substituting for functional syntax in a work by Prokofiev. Figure 4.31a is an analytic reduction of the first two measures of “The Girl Juliet,” from the ballet*Romeo and Juliet* (composed 1935–36; later revised). Figures 4.31b through 4.31e detail the relationship of the hexatonic structure to an underlying syntactical model—the hexatonic structure may be taken as chromatic exaggeration of a kind not unlike that discussed in Chapter 1. Figure 4.31b shows a basic I – V – I prototype. Figures 4.31c and 4.31d show the hypothetical inflection that yields the version used in the passage. Figure 4.31e details the tendency tones that remain. As Kevin J. Swinden has observed in his analysis of Wagner’s “Tarnhelm” motive, chromatic major-third relations may be thought of as functional hybrids, combining aspects of authentic and plagal harmonic motion.\(^{37}\) This is shown in Figure 4.31e by the resolution of scale degree 7 (associated with dominant function) to scale degree 1 and the resolution of lowered scale degree 6 (associated with subdominant function) to scale degree 5.


\(^{36}\) However, an important difference should be noted: as discussed in relation to the “Daisies” climax in Chapter 1, chromatic major third relations, quite unlike the arrangement of proper dominant and tonic in functional syntax, are reciprocal—a chord may be constructed on any “root” in a hexatonic collection so as to contain the leading tone of any other major or minor triad in the same collection, which means that a chord “tonicized” hexatonically might well turn around and tonicize the chord that tonicized it.

Perhaps because of the relative ease with which chromatic major-third relations and tonal functions can be fused, hexatonic structures do not have the strong extra-musical associations (evil magic, the supernatural, etc.) that octatonic structures do in Russian music. However, in his article on “Fantastic” chromaticism, Taruskin identifies a number of passages based on chromatic major-third relations. His statement, quoted earlier in the chapter, that octatonic and whole-tone structures are functional “equivalents” might be revised to read as follows: “octatonic, hexatonic and whole-tone organization are (to some degree) functional equivalents.”

Important recent contributions to scholarship on chromatic major-third relations in general have been made by Richard Cohn, Matthew Bribitzer-Stull, and David Kopp. These scholars differ greatly in their basic conceptions, however.\(^\text{38}\) Cohn emphasizes the “smoothness” of his chromatic major-third cycles.\(^\text{39}\) Bribitzer-Stull’s chromatic major-third relations, on the other hand, are full of tension, reminiscent of the disruptive third-relations Taruskin describes. And yet Cohn’s theory has value for the present study, because he allows chromatic major-third relations to exist separately functional syntax—indeed, he insists that they exist outside functional syntax, whereas Bribitzer-Stull, like


\(^{39}\) He means “smooth” from the standpoint of underlying voice-leading; but I find it difficult to separate the technical smoothness from a rhetorical smoothness.
Cinnamon and Cunningham, is concerned primarily with the occurrence of chromatic third relations inside functional organization. David Kopp’s theory of chromatic third relations (major and minor) to some degree resembles Cohn’s in that it is based on a belief that chromatic third relations “possess an identity and a quality which are independent of the fifth relations and diatonic third relations of the tonal system, displaying an independent functional identity.”

Kopp, however, presents a larger, “well-ordered harmonic system” of “common-tone tonality” that, like Daniel Harrison’s theory, effectively eliminates a basis for any friction between diatonic and chromatic structures. This I regard as deeply problematic for Rachmaninoff’s music, for reasons that I hope are clear by this point.

A sort of theoretical compromise is offered: chromatic major-third relations, like chromatic minor-third relations, are presented as conceptually independent of functional syntax in the present description of Rachmaninoff’s harmonic language; yet, unlike Cohn’s hexatonic cycles, they do not always occur separately from syntax—in Rachmaninoff’s dense, layered harmonic environments, they may be quite simultaneous. They are not smooth (in any expressive or rhetorical sense, at least), and “component [pitch-classes] are certainly” not “equally weighted,” as they are in Cohn’s cycles. For the sake of simplicity, Cohn’s term “hexatonic” is retained to refer to chromatic major-third relations in general; but his terms “Northern,” “Southern,” “Eastern,” and “Western” for the four possible systems are not used. At the same time, Bribitzer-Stull’s point is not lost, and his observation that consecutive chromatic major-third relations can seriously disrupt a tonal context is taken seriously. Bribitzer-Stull’s research has been primarily on works from the common practice. By the Postromantic era, the structures he describes represent a common way of going about harmonic business—yet the disruptive effects of chromatic major-third relations are never fully lost in Rachmaninoff’s works. (See for example the analysis of “Daisies” in Chapter 2.)

As discussed in more detail in Chapter 6, hexatonic structures are especially important in the Rhapsody on a Theme by Paganini, participating on the small scale and

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40 Kopp, Chromatic Transformations in Nineteenth-Century Music, 3.
41 Ibid., 263.
43 Ibid., 17.
the large. The introduction of hexatonic-type chromatic major-third relations as a kind of hyperdissonant exaggeration in Variations VIII and IX of the work has already been discussed (see the analysis of the passage in Chapter 2). Figure 4.32 shows a similarly intense hexatonic structure in Variation XIII. At the beginning of the variation, a diatonic tonic-dominant (i – V) alternation originating in the arpeggio motive of Paganini’s theme (labeled \( x \) on the figure) and a strong \( \text{HEX}_{4,2} \) cycle are combined. In fact, the material labeled “1” in Figure 4.32 and the hexatonic material labeled “2” are in a state of friction with one another throughout the variation. The friction is intensified by upper and lower pedal points: \( A^\# \) in the upper register (marked “3” on the figure) and \( D^\# \) in the lower, which combine to maintain a sense of the local tonic amidst the intense chromaticism. Note that, following the precedent established in Variations VIII and IX, the hexatonic structure is marked \( \text{ff} \), supporting the rhetorical associations developed in Chapter 3 of the dissertation. In Variation XIII, hexatonic organization is associated with a state of heightened dynamic, textural, and expressive intensity.

Figure 4.32. Rhapsody on a Theme by Paganini, Op. 43, Variation XIII, analysis
In the second half of Variation XIII (rehearsal 34, repeated with slight alterations at rehearsal 35), the hexatonic structure of the opening measures is mitigated—but, as shown by the dashed beam on the upper staff of Figure 4.32, a remnant remains. (The chord marked “*” on the figure is variable in the Variation, and Rachmaninoff’s full score and two-piano reductions do not completely agree on its pitch-class content: in the two-piano reduction, it contains A♭ and B♭ after rehearsal 34 and A♯ and B♭ after rehearsal 35, while in the full score it contains A♯ and B♭ after rehearsal 34 and just A♯ after rehearsal 35. B♭ goes against a HEX(1,2) reading, but the overall content of the chord suggests a connection with the hexatonic framework established earlier in the variation.)

Engaged dramatically in Variation XIII, hexatonic organization carries over into the following variation, as shown in Figure 4.33. A HEX(0,1) relation substitutes for dominant-tonic resolution to F major (the new local tonic) at the beginning of Variation XIV, and the HEX(0,1) chord pair, C♯ minor – F major, is stated many times over the course of the variation. As shown on Figure 4.33, arpeggio motive x (see again Figure 3-32) is inverted in Variation XIV, preliminary to the more famous inversion of the entire theme in Variation XVIII. At the same time, a new version of the original (non-inverted) motive, marked y on Figure 4.33, is introduced. (The derivation of y from arpeggio motive x is not obvious in Figure 4.33, but is instantly audible, especially when rhythm is considered.)

Figure 4.33. *Rhapsody on a Theme by Paganini*, Variation XIII into Variation XIV
As detailed in Figure 4.34, melodic idea $y$, the \( \text{HEX}_{(0,1)} \) structure with which it is associated, and the underlying functional syntax model bear an interesting three-way relationship. In the figure, (a) through (d) show the derivation of the \( \text{HEX}_{(0,1)} \) relation used in Variation XIV from a diatonic prototype. (Note that Figure 4.34d invokes the dominant-subdominant hybrid function proposed by Swinden.) As shown in the figure, pitch class $D_\flat$ in melodic idea $y$ is treated by Rachmaninoff as lowered scale degree 6, moving down to $C_\natural$ (scale degree 5). Hexatonic chord root $C_\#$, however, is not treated as lowered scale degree 6, and does not move down to $C_\natural$. In Figure 4.34e, melodic idea $y$ is split into two voices to make plain its content in relation to the \( \text{HEX}_{(0,1)} \) relation underneath it. Figure 4.34 reveals a momentary clash between hexatonic values and diatonic values.

Figure 4.34. *Rhapsody on a Theme by Paganini*, Variation XIV, \( \text{HEX}_{(0,1)} \) analysis

Unlike octatonic structures, which are rare in Rachmaninoff’s works before the late Russian period, hexatonic structures—including cycles of chords (or, on a larger scale, keys) related by chromatic major third and substitution of hexatonic oscillation for conventional dominant-tonic or subdominant-tonic progressions—appear fairly
frequently in works from the early and middle Russian periods. This is perhaps because chromatic major-third relations are more generic than octatonic ones, and because hexatonic structures and conventional tonal functions may be synthesized more easily than octatonic structures and tonal functions. Figure 4.35 shows the use of $\text{HEX}_{(0,1)}$ organization in the early Waltz, Op. 10, No. 2 (1893-94).

In the waltz, the secondary key area of $D\flat$ major bears a hexatonic relationship with the home key of $A$ major, suggesting the $\text{HEX}_{(0,1)}$ cycle shown in Figure 3-36a. The $A-D\flat$ key relationship in an of itself is probably not enough to suggest that the work is “hexatonic” in orientation; but the chords marked “*” on Figure 4.35 support a hexatonic reading. The “*” chords are all seventh chords built on triads from the $\text{HEX}_{(0,1)}$ cycle, including $F$ major (which does not appear as a key area in the piece)—auxiliary seventh chords that create local hexatonic relations that mirror the large-scale chromatic major-thirds structure of the work. The “*” seventh chords are extracted in Figure 4.36b.; when the seventh chords are considered, all three hexatonic “roots” ($A$, $F$, and $C\#$/$D\flat$) are accounted for.

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Figure 4.35. Waltz in A major, Op. 10, No. 2, analytic reduction

A major

HEX\textsubscript{(0,1)} basis
Figure 4.36. Waltz, Op. 10, No. 2, HEX$_{(0,1)}$ cycle and auxiliary seventh chords

(a) HEX$_{(0,1)}$ cycle  (b) overview of Waltz, Op. 10, No. 2

Figure 4.37. Waltz, Op. 10, No. 2, auxiliary seventh chords and melodic details

Examples of C♯ and F seventh chords in the waltz are boxed in Figure 4.37. (The C♯ seventh chord at measure 53 is superimposed above tonic A♮.) Figure 4.37 also shows how the reciprocal nature of the underlying hexatonic structure is manifest in certain surface melodic details of the work. Melodic cell $x$ in measures 53 – 56 connects a C♯
auxiliary seventh chord to a restatement of thematic material in A major at measure 57; note the connection of measure 57 to measure 1. The same melodic cell is adapted in measure 135 and following to connect an F auxiliary seventh chord (following the D♭ major section) to restatement of thematic material in A major. An enharmonic pun bridges the change of key signature, and again suggests the symmetrical, reciprocal nature of the underlying harmonic basis: C♮-D♭-E♭ = B♯-C♯-D♯.46

The Hexatonic junctures of the waltz, though colorful, are not rhetorically marked to any great extent. The chromatic major-thirds structure of the work seems on the contrary a kind alternative tonal plan, not a disruption or intensification—very much as Kopp would have it. By the late Russian period, however, the rhetorical associations presented in Chapter 3 crystallized—equal-interval and diatonic structures are increasingly differentiated, tension between them is emphasized, and explicitly layered formations come to the fore.

In the first movement of Rachmaninoff’s Sonata No. 2 in B♭ minor, Op. 36 (1913), for example, hyperdissonance resulting from an interaction of hexatonic and diatonic structures at the beginning of the recapitulation results in a climax event and in a substantial modification of traditional sonata form tonal design and rhetorical strategy.47

The passage shown in Figure 4.38 contains a climax in the proper rhetorical sense: a series of events arranged in stages of increasing intensity—in this case, increasing chromatic intensity. The stages are marked 1 through 3 in the figure.

46 In connection with the present discussion, see also the Mazurka in D♭ major, Op. 10, No. 7. In that work, composed around the same time and published at the same time as the waltz, the same hexatonic cycle (HEX(0,1)) is used; but D♭ major is the global tonic, F major is the key of the middle-section digression, and A major triads are used as auxiliary chords. See especially the last 25 measures of the Mazurka, in which the A major auxiliary chord is tonicized, ffff, and an explicit HEX(0,1) cycle is presented as a kind of summary.

47 The analysis is based on the revised version of 1931.
In Figure 4.38, the music is separated into layers. Layer C is a harmonic framework; layer B contains the three highly unstable chords at the highpoints of the three stages of climax; and layer A contains, simply, tonic elements B♭ and D♭. The *blagovest* texture of the passage (alternating material in the high register and in the lower

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48 It is worth noting that the three unstable “highpoint” chords in Layer B represent the three key areas in which the second theme is heard in the Sonata: D♭ major in the first movement exposition, F♯ (G♯) major in the first movement recapitulation, and F♯ (E) major at the end of the second movement.
register, creating a bell-like effect; see again the discussion of blagovest in the second movement of *The Bells* earlier in this chapter) accentuates the highpoint chords in layer B. The climax reaches its peak with the F♯ major triad inside stage 3. Maximal expressive intensity is thus attached to a highly-charged chord that contains, enharmonically, the defining third of the just re-established global tonic, B♭ minor. At the climax, a powerful chromatic torque is applied to tonic elements.

Figure 4.39. Sonata No. 2, i, diatonic and hexatonic third relations in the exposition

(a) Diatonic (modal) third relation in exposition

(b) Hexatonic relation in exposition coda

[Compare Climax Stage 3]
Stages 1 and 3 of the climax are defined by different kinds of third relations: stage 1 contains a diatonic (or modal) minor-third relation, B♭ minor – D♭ major, and stage 3 contains a chromatic major-third relation, D major – F♯ major (that is to say, a HEX₁,₂ relation). As Figure 4.39a and 4.39b show, both kinds of third relation are established earlier in the piece: the minor-third relation in the exposition, the hexatonic relation in the exposition coda. (The diatonic minor-third relation is related to the modal peremennost idiom discussed in Chapter 5; it is sufficient for now to simply regard it as differentiated from the hexatonic relation.)

Figure 4.40 compares the beginning of the recapitulation to the exposition. As the dotted lines show, stages 1 and 2 of the recapitulation and the music following stage 3 all correspond to parts of the exposition. But climactic stage 3 is new. Stage 3 represents a chromatic insertion that distorts what was in the exposition a plainly functional large progression, tonic-predominant-dominant-tonic. The recapitulation moves from B♭ minor to G♭ major for the second theme; this, too, could have been a straightforward, basically diatonic course. The insertion of stage 3, however, means that an extraordinary chromatic path is traveled instead. As a result, a larger chain of major thirds is suggested for marked events in the recapitulation as a whole, as beaming in Figure 4.40 indicates.

As shown in Figure 4.41, the start of the recapitulation at measure 98, the climax at measure 104, the return of the second theme at measure 112, and the coda at measure 124 all occupy nodes in a large chain of HEX₁,₂ major thirds. Climax occurs inside the D major node—the chromatically rough stage 3 climax, which contains the highly-charged F♯ major triad. In his recent article on chromatic major-third relations, Matthew Bribitzer-Stull notes that successive chromatic major-third relations can seriously disrupt an ordinary tonal context. Stage 3 of the Rachmaninoff climax is such an event. There is first a chromatic major-third move from B♭ to D♭ between stage 2 and stage 3, and then a chromatic major-third relation inside stage 3, which distorts tonic elements B♭ and D♭. The F♯ major triad represents an unstable chromatic complication inside a larger unstable chromatic complication.

50 In Bribitzer-Stull’s article, disruptive successive major-third relations occur at the same level of tonal hierarchy. In the Rachmaninoff passage, they do not; but the principle—disruption crucial premises of ordinary tonal design, in this case tonic elements—is similar.
Figure 4.40. Sonata No. 2, i, comparison of exposition and recapitulation

[Diagram showing the comparison of exposition and recapitulation with notes on highpoint chords, climax, and thematic development.]
Figure 4.41. Sonata No. 2, i, schema of recapitulation climax and solution

Layer A

Layer B

Layer C

B-flat minor

M3 framework

HEX\(1,2\)

hyperdissonant climax

tension

chromatic pressure
distorts tonic elements

B flat minor = global tonic

G-flat major

B-flat major \(\rightarrow\) minor

diatonic restabilization

climax

2nd theme recap.

coda

entirely stable

highly charged

more stable

stable

stage 1

stage 2

stage 3

98
101
104
106
112
117
124
Between measures 106 and 112, a “proper” pathway is found, to stabilize “F♯-ness” into more legitimate G♭ major. The second theme is thus set in G♭ major in the recapitulation, not in B♭. The need to discharge the lingering tension from stage 3 of the climax is more compelling than the urge to flatten the recapitulation into a single key. The large-scale tonal crisis inherent in sonata form is as a result extended past the development into the recapitulation—it is in fact greatly amplified in the recapitulation, creating a context for the unconventionally located tension climax and delaying full solution of the tonal problem.  

At the bottom of Figure 4.41 is a diagram of the entire recapitulation, showing how equal-interval chromatic pressure is associated with a climax event, and how the tension is then released in stages over the rest of the movement. In connection with this, it is worth noting that the disruptive hexatonic progression of the climax is essentially reversed at the start of the coda in measure 124. As Figure 4.42a shows, hexatonic and diatonic/modal relations from stages 1, 2, and 3 are engaged in reverse; and for good measure, as Figure 4.42b shows, the diatonic/modal minor-third relation is heard one final time at the very end of the movement. Significantly, neither the direct reversal at measure 124 nor the final minor-third relation at the end of the movement happens in the original 1913 version of the sonata; they happen only in the revised version of 1931, which suggests that Rachmaninoff’s controversial revisions go somewhat deeper than generally recognized.

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51 In the first movement of Rachmaninoff’s Symphony No. 2, Op. 27 (1907), the tonal crisis in the development is similarly extended into the recapitulation. In the symphony movement the mechanism is considerably simpler than in the sonata movement: reprise of exposition material over a dominant pedal-point.
Figure 4.42. Sonata No. 2, i, hexatonic and diatonic/modal third relations in coda

(a) mm. 112 – 126

2nd theme recap  Coda

climax chord stabilized

NB. Essentially reverses the order of events at climax

(b) mm. 136 – end

diatonic/modal minor-third relation
Whole-Tone Structures (Interval 2 Basis) and Hybrid Structures

Strict whole-tone organization in Rachmaninoff’s works is comparatively rare, perhaps because the whole-tone collection contains no major or minor triads, only augmented ones, and because there are only two distinct transpositions of the collection—WT₀ and WT₁, starting on C and D♭, respectively. The idiom therefore has a certain stagnant quality. Only a few whole-tone passages have been identified thus far in the dissertation. A brief WT₀ passage was analyzed in first movement of the Symphony No. 3 as part of a general trend toward equal-interval organization at an important structural and expressive moment (see Figure 2.7); and a whole-tone ascent in the bass was identified in the first movement of the Concerto No. 3 (see Figure 4.8), again as part of a general trend toward increased symmetry of pitch organization associated with an intensification leading to a climax event.

Figure 4.43 shows whole-tone (and octatonic) organization at the climax in the middle section of the Etude-Tableaux in E♭ minor, Op. 39, No. 5. (See again the analysis of the etude’s first section in Chapter 3.) The structures shown in the figure are not entirely whole-tone: whole-tone scales are involved, and T2 operations, but triads outside the whole-tone collection are used.⁵²

The climax in Figure 4.43 is associated with both octatonic and whole-tone structures, and with gradual intensification of register, texture and dynamics. Roman numerals shown on the figure are in relation to the global tonic, E♭ minor. As suggested on the figure, each stage of functional syntax is exaggerated by equal-interval structures. (Not shown on the figure is the resolution of V⁷ to E♭ minor for the reprise at measure 53; note that the entire reprise occurs over a post-climactic pedal point.)

⁵² Taruskin has identified a similar structure—a whole tone scale connecting triads related by chromatic major third—in the overture to Glinka’s Ruslan and Lyudmila. See Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions, 261-62.
Figure 4.43. Etude-Tableaux in E♭ minor, Op. 39, No. 5, climax in middle section
In Figure 4.43, different kinds of equal-interval structure are used in close proximity at a climax event. In the late Russian and exile periods, the strong association between equal-interval structures and processes of intensification and climax results in many situations where more than one kind of “fantastic” structure is articulated at the same time. Such a case is shown in Figures 4.44 and 4.45, an analysis of measures 16–78 of the first movement of the Symphonic Dances, Op. 45. The dance is in ternary form (A1–B–A2), with an introduction and a coda. (The introduction was analyzed in Figures 4.19 and 4.20. Note that the “arpeggio motive” from the introduction is retained in Figures 4.44 and 4.45.) Figure 4.44 is an analytic reduction of the thematic exposition (measures 16–40) in the first A section. As shown in the figure, thematic exposition is associated with modal organization (as suggested more generally in Chapter 3)—specifically, an Aeolian structure in which the tonic and (minor) dominant are entangled until the end of the first phrase. Following this, between measures 29 and 32, a chromatic structure leads to a local highpoint; as indicated on the figure, the highpoint suggests hexatonic organization without committing to it.

Figure 4.45 is an analytic reduction of the measures which follow—that is to say, the rest of the A section, including a local climax event leading into measure 79 (note the crescendo to ff). The passage may be understood as involving a large-scale HEX\(_{3,4}\) structure, important nodes of which are connected by marked whole-tone ascents (such that WT\(_0\) is filled out in the structural bass over the course of the section), and above which is superimposed a cycle of diminished seventh chords. To put it more plainly, three different kinds of equal-interval structure are combined in this section. None of them by itself is sufficient to account for the structure or expressive content of the passage; but collectively, as a kind of general trend toward harmonic symmetry leading to the A section climax—all the more potent after the modal exposition in Figure 4.44. As a last piece of evidence that equal-interval structures in Rachmaninoff’s works may lead to unorthodox kinds of tonal tension, observe that the point of furthest tonal remove in Figure 4.45 (measure 62, marked with an exclamation point on the figure) is a hexatonic node that involves the tonic note, C\(#\), arrived at by whole-tone ascent in the bass, and entangled with diminished seventh chord [1,4,7,10], creating a nonfunctional, nonresolving ninth chord on the tonic root.
Figure 4.44. Symphonic Dances, Op. 45, i, mm. 16–40, analytic reduction
Figure 4.45. Symphonic Dances, i, mm. 42–78, analytic reduction

C minor tonic frame:

HEX(3,4) basis: A♭ C E

WT ascent

"7 overlays: "7: [0,3,6,9] "7: [2,5,8,11] "7: [0,3,6,9]

"7: [1,4,7,10] "7: [2,5,8,11] "7: [0,3,6,9]

WT ascent

"7: [0,3,6,9]

WT ascent

cresc.

ff
Conclusion

The analyses in this chapter have suggested that identification of equal-interval chromatic structures in Rachmaninoff’s works allows more meaningful interpretation of large- and small-scale organization, and contributes to better understanding of expressive trajectory and climax events. Idioms featuring symmetrical pitch organization are thereby rehabilitated: genericized in much recent music theory, they become “fantastic” once again when it is recognized that they serve specific rhetorical functions in the works analyzed—intensification, climax, disruption—and are therefore strongly differentiated from the underlying functional tonal basis and from modal structures. The analyses have also shown Rachmaninoff’s connection with the post-Wagnerian chromatic tradition in general and—perhaps more tellingly—with progressive Russian composers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in particular.
Chapter 5
Modal Structures

This chapter is devoted to detailed technical description of specific modal structures that appear with frequency in Rachmaninoff’s mature works. Many of the modal structures described may be considered extensions of recognized Russian idioms with origins in liturgical or folk music; in some cases, the modal structures are more generic. To avoid the risk of suggesting ad hoc structures, this chapter is limited to only four kinds of modal organization. I consider the following to be clearly defined, particularly common, and structurally significant in the works analyzed:

1. Use of the traditional church modes (Dorian, Aeolian, Lydian, etc.) as straightforward substitutes for conventional major/minor tonality.

2. Russian peremennost idioms and extended diatonic tertian structures that can result from their application.

3. A distinctive melodic-harmonic idiom Taruskin has associated with the Russian word “nega.” Nega is related to peremennost but has its own expressive and structural qualities.

4. Phrygian organization, which has particularly complex structural implications and which in Rachmaninoff’s oeuvre seems to be associated with “gypsy” music.

Previous treatments of modality in studies of Rachmaninoff’s music have been limited to category 1 above. (Anatole Leikin’s brief comments on peremennost, discussed below, are an exception.1) It is hoped, therefore, that the present chapter may provide a starting point for more extensive work on the topic. Throughout the analyses in this chapter, the general rhetorical associations established in Chapter 3 apply: modal

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1 Leikin, “From Paganism to Orthodoxy to Theosophy,” 36-37.
structures in Rachmaninoff’s mature works are generally associated with introductory, initiating, digressive, and/or post-climactic rhetorical functions in the context of the section in which they are heard or possibly in the context of the entire work. Phrygian organization is a special case, as described later in this chapter. Phrygian structures are especially important in the Symphony No. 3 and the Symphonic Dances, excerpts from both of which are presented at the end of the chapter.

The Church Modes

The familiar church modes require no special treatment in the present context (again, with the exception of the Phrygian mode). Passages referable to church modes were identified in several works earlier in the dissertation—e.g. Lydian organization in the opening and closing measures of the song “From the Gospel of St. John” in Chapter 3. In many passages in the works analyzed, a structure in a church mode substitutes in a clear way for a conventional functional tonal structure.

Figure 5.1b shows Aeolian substitutions for conventional tonic-dominant relations in Variation VII of the *Rhapsody on a Theme by Paganini*. Variation VII contains the first explicit statement of the *Dies irae* theme in the composition (the *Dies irae* is indicated on the figure), and the modal structure can therefore be considered expository. The syntax of Paganini’s theme is shown in Figure 5.1a. (The repetition of the first four measures of the theme is written out in Figure 5.1a to simplify comparison with Figure 5.1a; recall that in the *Rhapsody* Rachmaninoff invariably writes out the repetition to multiply the opportunities for variation.) In Variation VII, modal inflection results in a “neutral”-sounding treatment of the theme: the leading tone (scale degree 7, G♯) is eliminated in the Aeolian mode.

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2 The *Dies irae* chant is in the Dorian mode. However, Rachmaninoff’s setting of its first seven notes in Variation VII includes F♯ at prominent points, suggesting A Aeolian rather than A Dorian.
Figure 5.1. *Rhapsody on a Theme by Paganini*, Op. 43, analysis of Variation VII

(a) Paired i – V gestures in Paganini’s theme

![Diagram of paired i – V gestures in Paganini’s theme](image)

(b) Exposition of *Dies irae* in Variation VII and Aeolian substitutions for i – V

(Meno mosso, a tempo moderato)

![Diagram of Dies irae and Aeolian substitutions](image)

Figure 5.2 shows a similar modal substitution at the end of Variation VII, this time as an explicit reharmonization of the motive from Paganini’s theme; again, the leading tone is eliminated. Recall that hexatonic structures are noisily articulated in following two variations. (See again the analysis of Variations VIII and IX in Chapter 2.) Variation VII (modal) is expository, initiating, neutral; Variations VIII and IX (hexatonic) are intensifying. The dynamics marked throughout these variations support this rhetorical framework—modal structures are generally *p* or *pp*, while hexatonic structures are louder.
A similar but more rapid juxtaposition of modal and symmetrical chromatic structures within a similar rhetorical framework may be heard in the introduction to the first movement of the Symphony No. 3, as shown in Figure 5.3. The symphony’s Phrygian motto theme is heard, unharmonized, on A♮ in the opening measures. Modal organization gives way to chromatic organization as the passage intensifies—tones from the Phrygian “cell,” A, B♭, and G act as pitch-class pivots between the modal opening and the chromatic structure in measures 6 – 8. As shown on the figure, in measures 9 and 10 a HEX(0,1) relation substitutes for V – i; then, an Aeolian echo initiates a decrescendo preliminary to the (modal) exposition of the primary theme in the following measures. As in Variation VII of the Rhapsody, the Aeolian substitution for conventional V – i has a de-intensifying effect, especially in proximity to the intense HEX(0,1) version.

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3 The Phrygian motto is discussed again at the end of the chapter, and more fully in Chapter 6.
Figure 5.3. Symphony No. 3, Op. 44, i, analytic reduction of mm. 1–10 (introduction)
**Peremennost, Diatonic Oscillation, and Diatonic Stacks**

Certain unconventional harmonic structures in Rachmaninoff’s mature works may be understood as based on his idiosyncratic extensions of the so-called *ladovaya peremennost* (or simply *peremennost*) in traditional Russian music. The term is translated as “modal mutability” by Anatole Leikin and as “tonal mutability” by Richard Taruskin.\(^4\)

Leikin, citing Russian musicologist Andrey Myasoyedov, defines *peremennost* as a shifting of harmony “between at least two equal tonics.”\(^5\) Taruskin’s definition is similar:

> “the quality…whereby a tune seemed to oscillate between two equally stable points of rest, as if it were two ‘tonics’.”\(^6\)

Leikin, again citing Myasoyedov, suggests that *peremennost* developed from a kind of “protoharmony” found in “older liturgical chants”—a system of melodic organization in which each of four pitches “can and does carry the function of a temporary ‘tonic’ in a melody” so that there is “no single unifying center, since each member of the protoharmony tends to be equal and independent.”\(^7\)

The quotation marks placed around “tonic” by both Taruskin and Leikin are significant; for “tonic” is in general too strong a word when *peremennost* idioms are applied in art music contexts (as opposed to genuine liturgical or folk contexts). Rather, *peremennost* idioms involve some kind of oscillation between or superimposition of diatonically but non-functionally related chords, one of which is tonally more important than the others, but which together form a kind of harmonic network that is distinctly less center-specific than conventional tonal syntax and in some cases even approaches a limited form of pan-diatonicism. In the present context, “peremennost” refers to a family of related, non-functional diatonic structures. *Peremennost* idioms in Rachmaninoff’s usage usually involve chords related by diatonic third.

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\(^4\) Leikin, “From Paganism to Orthodoxy to Theosophy,” 37; Taruskin, *Defining Russian Musically*, 133. The term is used with or without an apostrophe—*peremennost* or *peremennost*.

\(^5\) Leikin, “From Paganism to Orthodoxy to Theosophy,” 37, citing Andrey Myasoyedov, *O garmonii russkoy muzyki* (Moscow: Prest, 1998), 33-34, 49.

\(^6\) Taruskin, *Defining Russia Musically*, 133.

\(^7\) Leikin, “From Paganism to Orthodoxy to Theosophy,” 36, citing Myesoyedov, *O garmonii russkoy muzyki*, 18-21. Leikin notes that Myasoyedov has identified protoharmony in several Rachmaninoff’s middle-Russian period works, but I have not had access to this research. Leikin also suggests that protoharmony may be the basis of the emphasis on “plagality” in Russian music in general and Rachmaninoff’s music in particular (“From Paganism to Orthodoxy to Theosophy,” 37), which agrees with the my finding that *peremennost* idioms intensify plagal action in several passages analyzed.
Although *peremennost* idioms are like “fantastic” chromatic idioms in that they are based on oscillation and superimposition of tertian sonorities as opposed to functional, goal-oriented syntax patterns, they differ from “fantastic” structures in two important ways:

1) Interval content. *Peremennost* idioms do not involve equal-interval structures, but rather diatonically related triads (and seventh chords).

2) Rhetorical associations. *Peremennost* idioms, with few exceptions, generally have introductory, expository, or post-climactic functions whereas equal-interval structures (octatonic in particular) tend to be intensifying and climactic.

Central to *peremennost* is the articulation of a kind of melodic-harmonic structure in which a specific pitch center is de-emphasized while a diatonic basis remains clear. The concept of center-less (or multi-center) tonal systems figures prominently in a wide range of scholarship on Russian liturgical, traditional, and concert music. In his introduction to the Musica Russica edition of Rachmaninoff’s complete sacred choral works, Vladimir Morosan notes that “equal emphasis between a key and its relative major (or minor) is frequently found in both Russian Orthodox liturgical music and Russian music in general, to the point that it may be deemed a stylistic trait.”

The late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Russian musicologist Stepan Smolensky developed a pattern-oriented theory of mode for Russian liturgical music. In Smolensky’s view, a mode is determined not by a “final” note and a scale built around that final, but rather by a set of characteristic melodic patterns, which might be organized around one or more of many different finals.

Rachmaninoff knew Smolensky well and dedicated the *All-Night Vigil*, Op. 37 (1915) to his memory. (Yekovlev, writing in 1911—before the composition of the

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9 Smolensky’s theories of Znamenny chant were introduced to English readers in Alfred J. Swan, “The Znamenny Chant of the Russian Church,” *The Musical Quarterly* 26 (1940): 232-43, 365-80. Smolensky’s pattern or motive-oriented rather than scalar view is similar to Gustav Reese’s statement that a mode “is composed of a number of MOTIVES (i.e. short music figures or groups of tones) within a certain scale” (Gustav Reese, *Music in the Middle Ages* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1940), 10).
All-Night Vigil—offers the tantalizing observation that “Rachmaninoff is under the influence of the theories of S.V. Smolensky,” but adds nothing more.10)

Similar multi-tonic or multi-center interpretations of tonal structures in nineteenth-century works by non-Russian composers have been presented by a number of scholars. The well-known book The Second Practice of Nineteenth-Century Tonality takes the “double-tonic complex” as one theoretical and analytical starting-point.11 Charles Rosen has suggested that tonal structures in nineteenth-century European music generally may be understood as involving a conceptual fusion of relative major and minor, greatly enlarging the number of possible tonal structures while at the same time reducing the traditional tonal polarity between relative keys.12 However, peremennost idioms as described above differ from the generic tonal relationships described by Rosen et al. in three important ways:

1. Fluctuation between members of the peremennost pair or group is considerably more immediate and explicit in Russian music than it is in mainstream European music of the nineteenth century. This recalls Taruskin’s observation that the oscillations and rotations of chromatic third relations are more explicit in Russian music than in Western European music. In some cases, members of the peremennost pair or group are superimposed, resulting in extended diatonic “stacks” that to my knowledge have no real counterpart in Western music of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As mentioned above and shown in several analyses below, a limited pan-diatonicism can even result.

2. Specific melodic and harmonic idioms—in the works studied, often ostinato patterns—are associated with peremennost, and these can retain their identity even when used in complex, compound harmonic environments.

3. A significant differentiation between peremennost-type structures, the chromatic structures described in Chapter 4, and the underlying functional tonal basis is maintained in a majority of cases in the works studied, whereas in Rosen’s generalized formulation, no rhetorical differentiation is suggested or perhaps even possible.

10 Quoted in Stuart Campbell, Russians on Russian Music, 1880–1917 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 184. Yekovlev’s comments are not about the All-Night Vigil but about the Liturgy for St. John Chrysostom, Op. 31, then recently composed.
David Cannata, drawing more on Robert Bailey’s theory of double tonic complexes than on anything in Russian music theory, has identified structures involving multiple tonal centers on a large scale in several of Rachmaninoff’s large concert works, suggested that Rachmaninoff used a number double-tonic complexes involving relative keys in his concert works and that he “equated relative keys to an advanced degree.” 13 Although I suggest that in the strong “intra-tonal” contexts of Rachmaninoff’s compositions there will rarely be any real ambiguity about a work’s governing or global tonic, Cannata argues that the global tonic is in fact uncertain in some works until the advent of some clarifying event (generally late in the work). I believe he overstates the case here. I prefer the view, explained in Chapters 1 through 4, that problematization of the tonic is not ambiguity, per se, but, rather, a kind of hyperdissonance resulting from tension between different components of a compound melodic-harmonic environment—a Postromantic structural and aesthetic idiosyncrasy that occurs as known tonal premises are disrupted by unconventional tonal events. Whichever view of large-scale tonal design is accepted, however, “de-centered” harmonic structures referable to peremennost are fairly common in Rachmaninoff’s mature works. Such structures may involve any or all of three specific techniques:

- Oscillation between and/or superimposition of diatonically related triads, often with a melodic ostinato. 14 Such oscillations often appear in the opening and closing measures of a composition.

- Extended tertian structures—“diatonic stacks”—resulting from the superimposition of two or more diatonically related triads. Often, these may be interpreted as elaborations of the subdominant in structural plagal structures.

- Modal reharmonization: statement of a melodic segment in one diatonic harmonization, followed by restatement of the segment at its original pitch level but with a different diatonic harmonization that emphasizes a different local pitch center, such that a larger-scale oscillation between pitch centers occurs around an unchanging melody.

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14 Taruskin has suggested that Stravinsky’s well-known penchant for ostinatos was derived from Russian folk music models (Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions, 957, 961). My analysis of a peremennost ostinato in the first of Rachmaninoff’s Three Russian Songs, Op. 41 (see Figures 5.8 and 5.9) suggests a similar connection between peremennost ostinatos and folk music.
Note that in this conception *peremennost*-derived structures do not necessarily involve “tonic(s),” specifically, but rather a conceptual fusion of tertian sonorities in a variety of melodic-harmonic contexts. In the works studied, a *peremennost* idiom may occur inside any stage of functional syntax, or it may resist a syntactical interpretation altogether. In Rachmaninoff’s works, superimposition of tertian sonorities, as opposed to oscillation between them (that is to say, vertical rather than horizontal *peremennost*), may be considered a development in the late Russian and exile periods, as may the limited pan-diatonicism that results from the *peremennost*-based extended tertian stacks and reharmonization techniques described below.¹⁵

A number of structures involving *peremennost* may be found in passages analyzed earlier in the dissertation. The diatonic/modal minor-third relations discussed in the analysis of the first movement of the Sonata No. 2, Op. 36 in Chapter 4 may be interpreted as a simple *peremennost*-based oscillation/superimposition. (See again Figures 4.x through 4.x; B♭ minor and D♭ major are the triads involved; they are clarified by a two-layer, bell-like blagovest texture.) Following closely the rhetorical associations laid out in Chapter 3, the *peremennost* idiom in the sonata analysis initiates the recapitulation and concludes the coda, while the more harmonically intense hexatonic relation is associated with climax. The analysis of the first section of the Etude-Tableaux in E♭ minor, Op. 39, No. 5 in Chapter 2 suggests *peremennost*-based diatonic reharmonization of a melodic segment to emphasize different local centers without, however, changing the melodic segment itself. (See again Figures 2.x and 2.x.) In the analysis of the A section of the first Symphonic Dance in Chapter 4, the C minor tonic and the minor dominant are superimposed in an Aeolian passage. (See Figure 4.x.) A number of more striking *peremennost* structures are described below.

The last movement of *The Bells* features a particularly clear *peremennost* oscillation as an ostinato in the opening measures. Figure 5.4 is an analytic overview of measures 1–19. Although a voice-leading reduction of the oscillation might suggest its origin in a neighbor figure (G♯–A–G♯), examination of the full score shows that Rachmaninoff took pains to emphasize the chords of the oscillation (a rocking back and

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¹⁵ Joseph Straus has suggested that overlapping or superimposed triads are an important component of Stravinsky’s harmonic vocabulary, even at the level of deep structure. See Straus, “Stravinsky’s ‘Tonal Axis’,” *Journal of Music Theory* 26 (1982): 261–290.
forth between C♯ minor and A major triads), not the abstract neighbor figure. The 5-6 contrapuntal motion has been hypostasized in a repeating chord pair. The oscillation itself has several components: a drone in the harp, a layer in the upper strings, and a layer in the lower strings. On Figure 5.4, the peremennost pattern (marked pp), which supports statements of thematic material in the english horn, is thrice interrupted by triads in the winds: A minor – F minor – D minor, marked forte. (A fourth disruption, involving a B♭ minor triad in measure 20, is shown in Figure 5.5.) The disruption triads bear various chromatic relationships with the C♯ minor tonic, and chromatic third relations with each other. Note that the triads on F and D are foreshadowed underneath the A minor triad in measure 6, drawing the chromatic disruptions into an especially close association that will bear climactic fruit later in the movement. As indicated on Figure 5.4, falling contours characterize the opening measures of the movement. This may be heard most clearly in the three english horn phrases shown in the figure (the descending melodic line in each phrase is beamed); but the diatonic oscillation in the strings and harp is also downward-oriented, as is the trajectory of the three chromatic disruption chords on a somewhat larger scale.
Figure 5.4. *The Bells*, Op. 35, iv, analytic overview of mm. 1–19.
Figure 5.5. *The Bells*, iv, analytic overview of mm. 20–138

**climax 1**

**climax 2**

Gradual declining action to C♯ minor

Diatonic oscillation (expanded)

Diatonic stack

Diatonic stack

iv (ext.)

Maximal chromatic pressure in relation to tonic

C minor

Rising contours

WT₀

Non-functional
Several elements from the opening passage are developed climactically later in the movement, as shown in Figure 5.5. (As indicated on the figure, several passages are omitted to save space. Changes of key signature are not shown, to make plainer the relationships of all events to the global tonic, C♯ minor.) At measure 24, the diatonic oscillation from the opening measures is expanded. This expanded *peremennost* structure leads to the first climax event at measure 54. From measure 50 onward, contours generally rise as dynamic levels generally increase. *Dies irae*-related theme d (see again the analysis of the second movement of the work in Chapter 4) returns, leading at measure 54 to a climactic extended diatonic stack—vertical *peremennost* as a culmination of the horizontal *peremennost* that has characterized the movement thus far: C♯ minor and A major triads (the two members of the oscillation at the beginning of the movement) above F♯, suggesting a diatonic elaboration of the subdominant.

After this, an increase in tempo leads to a second, more powerful climax event beginning at measure 113. As indicated on Figure 5.5, the second climax event may be interpreted as involving greatly enlarged, intensified versions of the first three chromatic disruptions heard at the beginning of the movement (A minor, F minor and D minor). The F minor sonority is heard only in passing; but the A minor sonority is intensified by its own *peremennost* diatonic stack, and the D minor sonority is intensified by a WT₀ structure that acts as a kind of large equal-interval appoggiatura. The second climax event, then, may be interpreted as a synthesis of the *peremennost* structures from the movement’s exposition and intense chromatic structures more typical of Rachmaninoff’s approach to climax. As shown in Figure 5.6, the movement closes in D♭ major—and the final event in the work synthesizes the fourth chromatic disruption triad (B♭ minor; see again Figure 5.5) and a *peremennost*-derived diatonic stack in a culminating plagal gesture.
Figure 5.6. *The Bells*, iv, analytic reduction of mm. 138–end
Peremennost structures are quite common in the late Russian and exile periods. Although in Rachmaninoff’s oeuvre peremennost is removed from its folk and liturgical associations to a large degree, the appearance of particularly explicit peremennost idioms in several liturgical and folk-based compositions suggest that the tether is not completely severed. Figures 5.7 through 5.9 show that peremennost is a main structural component in the first of the Three Russian Songs, Op. 41, No. 1 (1926), “Across the River.” The composition is a setting of the folk song “Cherez rechku,” which, according to Barrie Martyn, tells “the pathetic tale of a drake escorting a duck over a bridge; the duck becomes frightened and flies away, leaving the drake forlorn and weeping.”

The five phrases sung by the chorus of men’s voices are shown in Figure 5.7. Note the gradual increase in tessitura, culminating in pitch E4 at rehearsal 8. Figure 5.8 contains an analytic reduction of the setting of the first three phrases. A peremennost oscillation between E minor and C major is established as an ostinato in the opening measures. Although there is little doubt that E minor (or E Aeolian) is the tonic of the song, the C major component of the peremennost oscillation is solidified to a large degree between rehearsal 1 and rehearsal 3, as shown on Figure 5.8. Between rehearsal 6 and rehearsal 8, a limited pan-diatonicism emerges from the peremennost structure.

The climax of the song occurs with the choral highpoint at rehearsal 8. As shown in Figure 5.9, the ff arrival of E4 in the chorus is distorted by an OCT\((0,1)\) structure. The OCT\((0,1)\) structure, which incorporates a C major-minor seventh chord (first heard at rehearsal 5, then more powerfully after rehearsal 8) may be interpreted as an outgrowth of the C major member of the peremennost oscillation. The hyperdissonant clash at rehearsal 8 between the arrival of tonic highpoint E4 in the chorus and the OCT\((0,1)\) structure is therefore a climactic compounding of equal-interval chromaticism and peremennost. The diatonic oscillation returns with choral phrase 5 at rehearsal 10, as the two diatonic chords (E minor and C major) are superimposed. E minor emerges cleanly only at the very end of the song. Following closely the general rhetorical associations laid out in this study, peremennost is associated with the opening (introductory, expository) and closing (post-climactic) portions of “Across the River,” while an equal-interval structure characterizes the climax event.

16 Martyn, Rachmaninoff, 309.
Figure 5.7. Three Russian Songs, Op. 41, i, melodic highpoints in the five chorus phrases
Figure 5.8. Three Russian Songs, i, analytic overview through r. 7

peremennost

ostinato

“C major”

E minor (Aeolian)

limited modal pan-diatonicism

[chorus]

(to OCT climax)

pp

mf

[no real bass]

[chorus]

etc.
Figure 5.9. Three Russian Songs, i, analytic overview of climax through end

- **hyperdissonant climax**
  - Arrival on E4 in chorus phrase 4 distorted by intense chromatic structure

- **equal-interval structure**

- **modal structure**

- **OCT\(_{(0,1)}\)** (OCT broken)

- **peremennost ostinato**
Figure 5.10. *All-Night Vigil*, Op. 37, \(v\), analytic reduction of phrases 1 through 4

- **Phrase 1**: gradual ascent
- **Phrase 2**: peremennost oscillation
- **Phrase 3**: climax
- **Phrase 4 (canonic)**
- **Phrase 4 (concluded)**

**Chromatic Activity**
The best-known number in Rachmaninoff’s *All-Night Vigil*, Op. 37 (1915)—No. 5, “Nyne otpushaeshi,” a setting of the Nunc dimitis (Luke 2:29-32)—features extensive use of a similar *peremennost* oscillation in the opening and closing measures, contrasted with a chromatic climax event. Figure 5.10 provides an analytic reduction of the first four phrases of the work. As shown in the figure, a *peremennost* oscillation—caught midway between B♭ minor (i), G♭ major (VI), and D♭ major (III), as it were—is established as a wordless ostinato in the opening measures. In phrase 4, the text “which Thou hast prepared before the face of all people” is set canonically, and increasingly chromatically, leading to the climax at measure 22, where the D♭ major component (III) of the *peremennost* oscillation emerges, **ff**, as a highpoint on the way to a straightforward half cadence. As shown in Figure 5.11, *peremennost* returns in phrases 5 and 6. Figure 5.12 gives an overview of the entire composition.

Figure 5.11. *All-Night Vigil*, v, analysis of phrases 5 and 6

![Figure 5.11. All-Night Vigil, v, analysis of phrases 5 and 6](image)
In Rachmaninoff’s late Russian and exile compositions, *peremennost* techniques reach a point where the diatonic members are freely superimposed and even used in place of one another. Figure 5.13 is an analytic overview of the opening measures of the second movement of the Sonata in B♭ minor, Op. 36. Measures 1–6 of the movement establish D major as a dominant-function sonority. As shown in Figure 5.13, this resolves not to G major but to E minor for the start of “phrase A” (the start of the movement proper)—that is to say, the dominant of G major is used directly as the dominant of *peremennost*-related E minor. E and G chords are then interchanged and superimposed throughout phrase A and phrase B. Note in particular the structure of phrase B—G major at measure 16, then G major and E minor superimposed at measure 18, then E minor and A minor superimposed before the arrival of the dominant at measure 20. As shown in Figure 5.14, the climax later in the movement involves a similar but more intense *peremennost*-type superimposition as an elaboration of the subdominant, leading to the major tonic (E major) at measure 64. (This is one of comparatively few climax events featuring modal rather than chromatic structures in Rachmaninoff’s mature works.)

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17 Note that chords on F♯ and D bookend the introduction, recalling sonorities from the first movement climax event. See again the analysis of that movement in Chapter 4.
Figure 5.13. Sonata No. 2 in B♭ minor, Op. 36, ii, analysis of mm. 1–23
Figure 5.14. Sonata No. 2, ii, analysis of climax in mm. 53–62
A *peremennost*-based superimposition in the transition from the first A section to the B section in the first movement of the Symphonic Dances, Op. 45 is shown in Figure 5.15. As in the Sonata No. 2 passage above, the *peremennost* event may be interpreted as an intensification of the subdominant.

Figure 5.15. Symphonic Dances, Op. 45, i, analysis of transition, mm. 91–98

*Peremennost* provides a basis for understanding certain unconventional harmonic events in works otherwise not strongly characterized by modal structures. Figure 5.16 shows an unconventional resolution to tonic in the well-known “Vocalise,” Op. 34, No. 14. As indicated on the figure, in measures 34–35 of the song, a tonicization of E major (III) is strongly implied; but the expected resolution to E is denied, as the dominant of E major instead resolves directly to the tonic C# minor at measure 36 in a manner reminiscent of the resolution of D major directly to E minor in Figure 5.13. It is a
moment of considerable expressive weight in the song: an expected blossoming into the major mode is undercut by a peremennost-derived substitution. The perfect authentic cadence that follows in measure 37 occurs entirely in the shadow of the peremennost event.

Figure 5.16. “Vocalise,” Op. 34, No. 14, peremennost resolution in mm. 31–36

A final example of peremennost demonstrates the large-scale implications that the idiom may acquire in the complex contexts of Rachmaninoff’s mature works. Figure 5.17 shows the exposition of the second theme area in the third movement of the Symphony No. 3, Op. 44. (The symphony is discussed more fully in Chapter 6; several passages have already been analyzed in the dissertation.) As shown in Figure 5.17, the material is

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layered: the melody strongly implies C# minor, and even introduces the leading tone of that key (B#). Underneath this material, A major and, at rehearsal 77, E major are superimposed—that is to say, the notes of the movement’s overall tonic (A, C#, and E) provide a basis for the expanded peremennost domain in which the theme is heard. Figure 5.18 puts this theme in the context of the exposition. The figure shows the opening of the movement in A major, a transition that moves to the gamut of D♭/C#, the peremennost-inflected second theme area (Figure 5.17), the ff “chromaticization” of C# before around 78, the closure of the exposition—unexpectedly—in E♭ major, and the octatonic statement of the symphony’s motto theme on C# at rehearsal 80 that prepares the large-scale statement of the motto over the course of the fugue that follows. (See again the analysis of rehearsal 80 and following in Chapter 4; Figures 4.x through 4.x.) In Figure 5.18, arrows indicate points where C# in some form is strongly emphasized. Recall that the hyperdissonant climax in the first movement (analyzed in Chapter 1; see again Figure 1.x) strongly suggested potential resolution to D♭/C#. All of this material suggests that the incorporation of D♭/C# into the symphony’s global A minor/major is a central concern in the work. (Further evidence for this view is provided in the analysis of the second movement later in the present chapter.) In this interpretive context, the thematic statement in Figure 5.17 represents a synthesis of the respective tonal gamuts—A major and its dominant, E major, and thematic material in C#—via peremennost.
Figure 5.17. Symphony No. 3, Op. 44, iii, analysis of *peremennost* in the second theme (exposition)
Figure 5.18. Symphony No. 3, iii, overview of exposition

- **motto**
- **augmented triad**
- **transition**
- **mf**
- **f**
- **ff**
- **pp**

**Theme area I**

**Theme area II**

**fusion of C# minor**
- A major
- E major

**emphasis on C#**

**octatonic**

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Nega

An interesting structure results when a peremennost-type oscillation between mediant-related triads is filled in chromatically, as in Figure 5.19. (A similar device may be clearly heard in Figure 5.17 after rehearsal 77—the E major and C# minor components of the peremennost compound are connected the B#.) Figure 5.19 resembles the expressively-packed nega idiom that Taruskin has discussed at length. As he tells it, the word nega “is usually translated as ‘sweet bliss,’ but it really connotes gratified desire, a tender lassitude…In opera and song, nega often simply denotes S-E-X à la russe, desired or achieved.” In its original musical form, nega is part of the standard late nineteenth-century Russian “orientalist” package. Although certain rhythms and textures are associated with nega, it is a melodic figure that really defines the idiom: “the reversible chromatic pass between the fifth and sixth [scale] degrees is in fact the essential nega undulation,” as Taruskin presents it. See again Figures 5.19; a corollary in the minor mode is shown in Figure 5.20. Because a chromatic tone is involved, nega is not strictly modal; but I view the idiom as an outgrowth of peremennost, and, as several analyses below show, its general rhetorical associations (expository or digressive—in middle sections—as opposed to climactic) support inclusion in the modal category.

Figure 5.19. Basic nega idiom in D♭ major

19 Taruskin, Defining Russian Musically, 165. Taruskin discusses the “orientalist” implications of nega at length.
Figure 5.20. Basic nega idiom in B♭ minor

Taruskin identifies the nega idiom in works by Glinka, Borodin, Tchaikovsky, and even the young Rachmaninoff (“Ne poy, kravitsa,” Op. 4, No. 4 of 1892, which does not fare well in Taruskin’s hands). A particularly clear example of the idiom (clear both musically and in terms of its strong exotic associations) not mentioned by Taruskin is in the third movement of Rimsky-Korsakov’s Scheherazade (1888), “The Young Prince and The Young Princess.” An analysis of the passage is given in Figure 5.21.

Figure 5.21. Rimsky-Korsakov, Scheherazade, iii, analysis of mm. 1–8

(a) annotated reduction

(b) analysis

unstable nega tone: ascending and descending forms

unstable nega tone

I vi I

pedal

22 In later editions of the work, Rimsky-Korsakov removed the movements’ programmatic titles. The third movement came to be known simply as Andantino quasi allegretto.
Several compositions from Rachmaninoff’s early Russian period feature the nega idiom in a straightforward form—that is to say, emphasis on the “reversible chromatic pass” between scale degrees 5 and 6 (in the major mode), effecting a rocking back and forth between I and vi (as in Figure 5.19), often above a pedal tone. The nega idiom often occurs at the beginnings of sections (and is in such contexts associated with thematic exposition); and usually the idiom occurs in lyrical middle episodes or movements. Figure 5.22, from middle section of the Elegy in E♭ minor, Op. 3, No. 1, contains a structure quite like the one in the Scheherazade. (The hyperdissonant climax at the end of the middle section of the Elegy was analyzed in Chapter 2; see again Figures 2.29 and 2.30.)

Figure 5.22. Elegy in E♭ minor, Op. 3, No. 1, analysis of middle section

(a) annotated score excerpt

(b) analysis
Figure 5.23 shows Rachmaninoff’s use of the *nega* melodic idiom in a somewhat more complex harmonic environment; the reversible chromatic pass is clear, however. Like the excerpt from the Elegy above, the excerpt in Figure 5.23 is from the beginning of a lyrical middle section. Note that the expressive focal point of the phrase is the area of maximal *nega* activity. The straightforward cadential progression that follows is, by comparison, unremarkable—and unmarked.

Figure 5.23. Musical Moment in B♭ minor, Op. 16, No. 1, analysis of mm. 38–41
Analysis of works from the middle Russian, late Russian, and exile periods suggests that Rachmaninoff maintained an interest in the *nega* idiom throughout his career, developing it, however, in distinctive ways that transport it beyond the basic nineteenth-century forms described above. In all the cases I have identified, an association with romance (in song), with middle-section lyrical episodes (in shorter instrumental works, or inside individual movements of longer instrumental works), or with slow movements is retained. To take an especially well-known work as an example, *nega* provides a starting point for interpreting the second movement of the Piano Concerto No. 2, Op. 18. Figure 5.24a shows a suggestion of *nega* underneath the flute solo in measures 9–11. Figure 5.24b shows *nega* more fully developed in the harmonization of the main theme in measures 13–19: note the characteristic move from I to vi and back, and the characteristic interplay of scale degrees 5 and 6 (here in an inner voice), as indicated by arrows on the figure. As discussed below, in the context of the entire movement, *nega*, combined with hexatonic organization, provides a basis for interpretation of climax.
Figure 5.24. Piano Concerto No. 2, Op. 18, ii, analysis

(a) *nega* in mm. 9–11

(b) *nega* in main theme, mm. 13–19
As shown in Figure 5.25, the movement opens with a short HEX\(_{(3,4)}\) passage that effects a transition from the first movement’s C minor to the second movement’s E major.\(^{23}\) As detailed above, *nega* in the movement involves E major (I) and C\# minor (vi), bridged by the unstable *nega* tone C\#/B\#. The *nega* tone, then, is established in the HEX\(_{(3,4)}\) structure in the movement’s opening measures. While the G\# major triad in the HEX\(_{(3,4)}\) structure resolves directly to E major in measure 5, it may also be interpreted as diatonic V of the *nega* alternate, C\# minor—that is to say, V of vi. (Note that, in the HEX\(_{(3,4)}\) opening, a *forte* dynamic strongly emphasizes the G\# major triad in a generally *pp* context.) At measure 105 in the movement (rehearsal 23), a large-scale, *ff* resolution to VI—here C\# major rather than C\# minor—occurs. Figure 5.26 puts the climax event in a larger context.

\(^{23}\) As noted in Chapter 4, chromatic major-third relations are identified in the movement in Bribitzer-Stull, “The A-flat–C–E Complex,” 186.
Figure 5.26. Piano Concerto No. 2, ii, analysis of climax

Climax, part 1

Piu animato

ascent (WT)

(C major)

(apex)

D

(HEX)

cadenza

Climax, part 2

Tempo I

(E major)

Return

(cont.)
As detailed in Figure 5.26, the C♯ major triad (VI) is the first part of a two-part climax that synthesizes the nega idiom and hexatonicism. A large articulation of the nega figure (C♯-C♮-B) connects VI to IV at rehearsal 24 in the wake of the first stage of climax. A second intensification at rehearsal 25 leads to a cadenza on the Neapolitan (F major), which is hexatonically related to the C♯ major event. This may be interpreted as large-scale harmonization of the nega tone. Figure 5.27 shows the two-stage climax in the context of the entire movement.

In such a rich harmonic structure, peremennost, the “chromatic pass,” Taruskin’s nega as an expressive topic, and hexatonic organization bleed together into a complex multilayered environment. Certainly, any specific folk or liturgical implications are long since erased. The harmonic materials involved are nevertheless strongly marked in relation to the general functional tonal context, and retain the basic rhetorical associations identified in Chapter 2: nega/peremennost in a straightforward form characterizes thematic exposition in the movement, while emphasis on hexatonic structure characterizes the climax events. The second movement of the Piano Concerto No. 2 demonstrates a kind of structural interaction taken to new heights in the late Russian and exile periods.

Figure 5.27. Piano Concerto No. 2, ii, analytic overview
Figure 5.28. Prelude in E major, Op. 32, No. 3, analysis of mm. 1–40

Allegro vivace
(Octave doublings freely omitted)

Peremennost reharmonization of \( x \) (I - vi)

No bass support
A similar structure may be heard in the much shorter E major Prelude, Op. 32, No. 3 (1910). Again, an intersection of nega, peremennost and hexatonic structures is involved. Figure 5.28 provides an analytic overview of the prelude’s first forty measures. As shown in the figure, a simple motive (x) is set in a number of contexts. Measure 22 is a significant point of arrival in the work, establishing the G♯ major triad as a double-function chord: it is hexatonically related to the E major tonic, and it is V of vi (the peremennost partner of the E major tonic). Figure 5.29 shows this more plainly. As shown in Figure 5.30, later in the prelude, pitch-class B♯ from the G♯ major triad is treated as a nega tone underneath continued treatment of motive x, culminating in a more explicit HEX(0,1) harmonization. As shown in Figure 5.31, motive x is harmonized with a more straightforward E major tonic in the prelude’s coda.

Figure 5.29. Prelude in E major, analytic overview
Figure 5.30. Prelude in E major, mm. 50–55

Figure 5.31. Prelude in E major, motive \( x \) in the coda (m. 55–57)

Figure 5.32 shows in generalized form the “hexatonicization” of the \( nega \) idiom suggested in the analyses of the Concerto No. 2 movement and the E major prelude. The figure shows chromatic harmonization of the \( nega \) tone such that the same major-minor seventh chord (on root F\(^\natural\) in Figure 5.32) is used as the “dominant” of both \( \text{peremennost} \)-related diatonic chords (I and vi). In Figure 5.32, the first resolution of the \( nega \) tone is “diatonic”—in the sense that the major-minor seventh chord acts as a conventional applied chord (V\(^7\) of vi)—while the second resolution of the \( nega \) tone is hexatonic.
(specifically, $\text{HEX}_{(0,1)}$; recall from Chapter 4 that relations based on hexatonicism may in the works analyzed contain extended tones foreign to the collection—in this case, the seventh, E♭, is not a member of $\text{HEX}_{(0,1)}$).

Figure 5.32. Chromatic harmonization of the nega tone

Figure 5.33 shows the structure from Figure 5.32 as it appears in the opening of the song, “A-u!” Op. 38, No. 6. (The octatonic, hyperdissonant climax of the song was analyzed in Chapter 2; see again Figures 2.25 through 2.28.) In the beginning of the song, a chromatic descent in the accompaniment provides a framework for the music from measure 1 through the arrival on $V^7$ in measure 4. In measure 5, the “other” dominant seventh chord from Figure 5.32, $V^7$ of vi, replaces diatonic $V^7$, resolving to a fused $D♭/B♭$ (I/vi) sonority and ultimately progressing to $B♭$ minor (vi)—above the tonic note $D♭$, however—to end the first section of the song. After a fermata, a new section of music begins (measure 12). In measures 12 and 13, the nega melodic figure implicit in the structure of the first 11 measures of the song is made explicit (circling around the unstable nega tone, $A^♯$), providing the basis for a complex, quasi-octatonic oscillation that will later develop into the true octatonic structure heard at the climax. (See again Figure 2.26.)
Figure 5.3. “A-u!” Op. 38, No. 6, analysis of mm. 1–13

Andante

- **voice**: piano, pp
- **cresc.**: ff
- **dim.**: p

- **I**: V7
- **V7 (of vi)**
- **fusion**: D#B# (I/vi)
- **quasi-OCT**: (develops into climax)

- **play on nega tone A♭**

- **I V7 V7 (of vi) vi6**

- **tempo piu vivo. Appassionato**

- **peremennost**:
Figure 5.34. “In the Soul of Each of Us,” Op. 34, No. 2, analysis of mm. 1–14
Figure 5.34 shows an intersection of *nega* and hexatonic structures in the first fourteen measures of the late-Russian period song “In the Soul of Each of Us,” Op. 34, No. 2. Although the *nega* tones are disguised by the chromatic context, the essence of *nega* remains: the reversible chromatic pass and the exchange of I and vi (with iv added in this context) are embedded in the passage.

As discussed earlier in the chapter, Rachmaninoff extended *peremennost* techniques to include the possibility of vertical as well as horizontal presentation. The *nega* idiom is similarly extended in several of the works analyzed: the “reversible chromatic pass” may be resolved both up and down at the same time—i.e. the *nega* tone, and any chord with which it is associated, may be resolved to two different diatonically related chords simultaneously, as shown in Figures 5.35a and 5.35b. In the figure, the *nega* tone has two enharmonic meanings at once. It is simultaneously scale degree ♯5 rising to scale degree 6 as the root of vi, and scale degree ♯6 (spelled enharmonically in the figure) resolving to scale degree 5 as the fifth of the tonic triad, resulting in conventional and chromatic resolutions at the same time. (In the figure, the superimposed sonorities are labeled simply I¹⁺⁶.) The principle outlined in Figure 5.35 suggests a basis for understanding certain complex structures in the Postromantic repertory more generally. Figure 5.36, from the last movement of Gustav Holst’s *The Planets*, shows the simultaneous resolution of a tendency tone in two directions at once.

Figure 5.35. Complex resolution of a chromaticized *nega* chord
Figure 5.36. Gustav Holst, *The Planets*, vii (“Neptune”), m. 101

As explored more fully in Chapter 6, *nega/peremennost* is elevated in the *Rhapsody on a Theme by Paganini* to the point that a hyperdissonant climax event in the famous eighteenth variation may be interpreted as an outgrowth of *nega* on the global scale. Although a detailed description of that moment must wait, a few preliminary observations are possible here. Figure 5.37 shows an excerpt from Variation XVI in the key of B♭ minor. The figure shows a momentary *peremennost*-derived superimposition of B♭ minor and D♭ major, the latter of which will emerge as the key of Variation XVIII, which is the centerpiece of the *Rhapsody*. B♭ minor is retained throughout the excerpt; but melodic and harmonic resolutions to D♭ major as “tonic” are articulated. In the next variation (XVII), more pronounced superimposition of B♭ minor and D♭ major is enhanced by articulation of the *nega* idiom, as shown in Figure 5.38a. Throughout Variation XVII, A♯ is treated as an unstable *nega* tone, resolving up to B♭ as the root of B♭ minor and down to A♭, as the fifth of D♭ major, and, at measure 621, to both simultaneously.

The climactic culmination of A♯ *nega* in Variation XVIII (where it is compounded hexatonically) is taken up in Chapter 6. That the doubly-unstable *nega* tone
A♮ used throughout Variations XVII and XVIII is in fact the *global tonic* of the *Rhapsody* constitutes one of the most intricate expressions of hyperdissonant exaggeration in any of the works analyzed.

Figure 5.37. *Rhapsody on a Theme by Paganini*, Op. 43, Variation XVI, mm. 575–577
Figure 5.38. *Rhapsody on a Theme by Paganini*, Variation XVII, mm. 613–622

(a) Continued play on the nega tone

(b) 

XVI and XVII

XVIII

B\textsuperscript{♭} minor

D\textsuperscript{♭} major
Phrygian Organization

Several analyses earlier in the dissertation featured flat scale degree 2 at strongly marked moments. (See again the analyses of the second and fourth movements of The Bells in Chapter 4 and the present chapter, respectively; and the analysis of the first movement of the Piano Concerto No. 3 in Chapter 4.) While many such cases may be interpreted as articulating the Neapolitan as a conventional chromatic predominant harmony, in some works the lowered second scale degree is emphasized to such a degree that a genuine Phrygian organization results.

Figure 5.39. Symphony No. 3, Phrygian motto theme in mm. 1–5

![Figure 5.39. Symphony No. 3, Phrygian motto theme in mm. 1–5](image)

Figure 5.39 shows the motto theme of Rachmaninoff’s Symphony No. 3 as it is first heard in measures 1–5 of the work. Its most distinctive characteristic is the Phrygian tone B♭. The motto may be understood as an upper and lower neighbor figure—B♭ and G♮ orbiting tonic A♮. The motto is one in a distinguished line of opening Phrygian gestures in Rachmaninoff’s concert works. Figure 5.40 shows a Phrygian figure used extensively in the opening of Rachmaninoff’s opera Aleko (1892; the opera was his graduation work). A similar figure at the opening of the Symphony No. 1, Op. 13 (1896) is shown in Figure 5.41. Like the Symphony No. 3 motto, the figure circled in Figure 5.41 serves as a kind of connective tissue across the movements of the symphony. These are probably all descendents of the essentially Phrygian theme heard at the opening of Alexander Borodin’s Symphony No. 2 (1876), shown in Figure 5.42.

David Cannata’s interpretation of the Symphony No. 3 also centers on the B♭ (Cannata, Rachmaninoff and the Symphony, 125-30). However, his conclusions are quite different from my own, as explored more fully in Chapter 6. For Cannata, the B♭ suggests a large-scale D minor/major implication, which I regard as insufficient, particularly as there is only one extended passage in the key of D in all three movements. My reading of the work suggests a more intricate structure that emerges in part from the Phrygian nature of the motto theme.
Figure 5.40. *Aleko*, Phrygian organization in the introduction

Andante cantabile

Phrygian neighbor figure (etc.)

Figure 5.41. Symphony No. 1, Op. 13, i, Phrygian opening gesture

Allegro ma non troppo

Phrygian

Figure 5.42. Borodin, Symphony No. 2, i, Phrygian organization in mm. 1–3
Both *Aleko* and the Symphony No. 1 explicitly invoke a non-Western context.
The libretto of *Aleko* is an adaptation of Pushkin’s poem “The Gypsies.” Barrie Martyn has observed that the Symphony No. 1 represents a synthesis of liturgical music and gypsy music in a symphonic context. In both cases, Phrygian material is associated with a strongly marked musical and cultural content. Martyn tells how Rachmaninoff’s teacher Nikolai Zverev introduced the composer to gypsy performers as a young man:

Like many Russian musicians Zverev himself was greatly attracted by gypsy music, and in the course of preparing his ‘cubs’ for life he used to take them to the fashionable Moscow restaurants at which gypsy musicians played and stirred the Russian soul.

Of perhaps more personal significance was Rachmaninoff’s close association (and entirely unrequited infatuation) with the gypsy singer Anna Lodzihensky in the early 1890s. Memories of the association might partly explain the gypsy melodic “sobs” and strong Phrygian elements in the late Russian period song, “To Her,” Op. 38, No. 2 (1916). The poem of the song, by Andrei Bely (pseudonym for Boris Nikolayevich Bugayev), “tells of a lover who hears, or imagines he hears, his beloved call to him but waits for her in vain.”

Figure 5.43 details the Phrygian structure of the opening measures: a melodic ostinato based on an upper and lower neighbor figure not unlike the Symphony No. 3 motto theme, and a recurring Phrygian resolution to F major/minor.

Figure 5.44 shows these features more plainly; the arrow shows the essential three-note Phrygian cell. An analytic overview of the entire song is given in Figure 5.45. Two different kinds of music are involved. “A” sections are based on the ostinato shown in Figure 5.43. “B” sections, which do not contain the ostinato, involve local highpoints and, in measures 33–35, the song’s climax. As shown by beams on the top staff of Figure 5.45, the first half of the song (measures 1–26, sections A1–B2) can be understood as a large-scale articulation of a Phrygian melodic structure derived from the ostinato: the essential tones are the highpoints of the vocal line, F- Eb-Gb-F-Ab-F.

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26 Ibid., 56.
27 Ibid.
28 Ibid., 265.
Phrygian organization largely disappears in the second half of the song (sections A3, B3 and A4). However, the climax in section B3, which continues the trajectory of highpoints in the vocal line begun in the first half of the song, involves a larger-scale version of the F minor-major alternation that characterized the Phrygian opening measures (see again Figure 5.43): F minor, with pitch class E♭ at the climax, resolves to F major for the postlude. The resolution to F major involves the same Phrygian chord heard at the opening of the song; both are marked “*” in Figure 5.45. At measure 39 in the postlude, the ostinato figure is set in conventional F major rather than F Phrygian.
Figure 5.45. “To Her,” analytic overview

A1     B1     A2     B2

voice

V

I/i

“III”

V

vi

A3     B3     A4 (postlude)

highpoint of vocal part

end of vocal part

climax

| i |

V

| i |

I

I

I
The above examples suggest that Phrygian structures in Rachmaninoff’s works have expressive associations and structural implications quite unlike those of the other church modes. The Phrygian is for Rachmaninoff not a pseudo-religious mode, but a pseudo-exotic one. Here, Rachmaninoff as an “Eastern” composer comes to the fore, even if such a label may be problematic. The Phrygian mode is, like nega, a harmonic sign for something not at all of the Western common practice. It is therefore strongly differentiated from conventional tonal structures in Rachmaninoff’s music.

Figure 5.46. Rimsky-Korsakov, Capriccio Espagnol, iv, excerpts

(a) mm. 7–11

(b) mm. 22–25

Rimsky-Korsakov used Phrygian organization extensively in the fourth movement of his Capriccio Espagnol (1887), “Scena e canto Gitano”—again, to portray a non-mainstream European culture. Figure 5.46 shows two representative passages from the movement; their tonal substance is extracted into Figure 5.47. As shown in Figure 5.47,

29 Taruskin considers the problem of locating Russian music between East and West in detail, historically, hermeneutically, and aesthetically in Defining Russia Musically.
A♯ Phrygian major is involved. The one-flat key signature of the fourth movement must not be construed as suggesting simply D minor, though that key may be suggested in due course. Rimsky-Korsakov’s music does more than hover around the dominant of D minor—A♯ clearly emerges as the legitimate pitch center of the movement. As shown in Figure 5.48, the B♭ necessary for the mode may be interpreted as a holdover from the flat regions in the second and third movements. A♯ Phrygian major is replaced by conventional A major in the fifth movement.

Figure 5.47. *Capriccio Espagnol*, iv, Phrygian organization

![Phrygian cell](image)

Figure 5.48. *Capriccio Espagnol*, overview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I. Alborada</th>
<th>II. Variazioni</th>
<th>III. Alborada</th>
<th>IV. Scena e canto gitano</th>
<th>V. Fandango asturiano</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Mussorgsky used Phrygian organization in conjunction with other modal structures in the sixth number of *Pictures at an Exhibition* (1874), “Samuel Goldenberg und Schmuyle.” Figures 5.49 and 5.50 provide analytic highlights. The piece is in ternary form (A1-B-A2). As shown in Figure 5.49a and in Figure 5.50, the A sections are based on the so-called “gypsy” minor scale, which is closely associated with OCT\(_{(1,2)}\) (see the

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\(^{30}\) The Prelude to Act IV of Bizet’s opera *Carmen* involves the same pitch structure, again with a one-flat key signature. The opera predates Rimsky-Korsakov’s work by more than a decade.
line labeled “1” on the figure). The B section is based on D♭ Phrygian, which is similarly closely associated with OCT\(_{(1,2)}\) (see the line labeled “2” on the figure). The minor third relation between the D♭ tonic of the B section and the B♭ tonic of the A sections may be interpreted as a manifestation of this quasi-octatonic background association.\(^3\)

Figure 5.49. Mussorgksy, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, No. 6, overview

(a) mm. 1–2

(b) mm. 9–19 (portions omitted)

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\(^{3}\) Joel Lester has identified a similar intersection of OCT\(_{(1,2)}\) and E Phrygian organization in the opening measures of Part I in Stravinsky’s *Symphony of Psalms* (Joel Lester, *Analytic Approaches to Twentieth-Century Music* (New York: Norton, 1989), 166–167).
The foregoing discussion of non-mainstream European cultures and musical representations is not meant to advance any specific hermeneutic agenda, nor to suggest any specific extramusical content to the works analyzed, but, rather, to establish the specialness of Phrygian organization in Rachmaninoff’s works. This may be understood as an outgrowth of work undertaken by his Russian predecessors, and to some degree continued by his Russian successors. See for example the Phrygian-type modes described in Ellon D. Carpenter’s study of modality in Shostakovich’s music. In Rachmaninoff’s works, Phrygian organization is in some ways a thing apart. It is unlike the functional tonal basis and, as discussed below, problematic for that basis in many regards; and it is

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also unlike other modal structures and “fantastic” structures, although it may interface with them in interesting ways.

Lori Burns considers Phrygian structures in conventional tonal contexts in detail in *Bach’s Modal Chorales.*\(^{33}\) A number of her observations are relevant here. She recognizes a Phrygian upper and lower neighbor formula similar to the neighbor-tone formulas used by Rachmaninoff in the Symphony No. 3 motto, in the song “To Her,” and in other Phrygian contexts discussed below and in Chapter 6.\(^{34}\) Burns suggests that the Phrygian mode poses special problems in tonal contexts, because a Phrygian tonic may be understood as a dominant in a conventional tonal context, and, conversely, what seems like a tonic to tonal ears may be understood as the subdominant of a *bona fide* Phrygian tonic.\(^{35}\) Burns concludes that interpretation of a larger context is generally necessary to determine whether the modal final has a tonic function, or whether it should be interpreted as an articulation of the dominant.\(^{36}\) A Phrygian final or “tonic,” then, may have a number of potential tonal implications—and harmonic function and tonal stability/instability may be very much in flux.

In Rachmaninoff’s Phrygian settings, it is sometimes neither possible nor desirable to decide which of the above implications is in effect. In a number of the works analyzed, a Phrygian tonic’s different implications are explored without complete resolution of the issue. A tonic established in a Phrygian context may be unstable, wanting, as it were, to become a dominant; yet “dominant” is in many cases too simple. That, in Burns’s theory, two apparently identical structures might be interpreted quite differently in different cases (tonic vs. dominant) points to the familiar premise that in music analysis context is everything; but it also suggests something more directly relevant to the study of Rachmaninoff’s (and other Postromantic) works: centricity and tonal function may be quite distinct, and a tussle between the two may be quite salient.

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34 Ibid., 53-54.
35 Ibid., 41-46.
36 See for example her analysis of “Aus tiefer Not schrei ich zu dir,” 61-84.
Figure 5.51. “Polichinelle,” Op. 3, No. 4, analytic reduction of mm. 1–56

F♯ Phrygian (major)

primarily modal

increasingly “fantastic”

modal

climax of A section

F♯ Phrygian

peremennost oscillations

peremennost oscillations

peremennost oscillations

basis: HEX(1,2)

(WT₁)

mm.36 - 55 = mm.16 - 35

to B section
The early piano work “Polichinelle,” Op. 3, No. 4 (1892) is a compelling case in point. The piece is in ternary form. As shown in Figure 5.41, F♯ Phrygian major organization is articulated in the opening and closing measures of the A section, along with peremnност oscillations and equal-interval patterns at the local climax. To conventional tonal ears, the F♯ Phrygian major tonic sounds very tentative. The bulk of thematic statement in measures 11 through 26 involves not F♯ but peremnност-related D major and B minor, which to some degree act as surrogate tonics. F♯ major, by comparison with D and B, sounds quite charged, even unstable. Yet F♯ cannot be interpreted simply as an unresolved dominant—the three-sharp key signature chosen by Rachmaninoff prohibits this. The only sensible interpretation of the key signature is F♯, suggesting that Rachmaninoff considered that to be the effective tonic of the work.

As shown in Figure 5.52, the return of Phrygian F♯ at the reprise of the A section follows a climactic passage at the end of the B section in which the hexatonicism suggested at the local climax in the A section is developed into a stronger and more explicit hexatonic relation between B minor, one of the surrogate tonics in Figure 5.51, and G minor, which emerges as the link back to Phrygian organization. As shown in Figure 5.53, the piece ends in F♯ Phrygian major.

“Polichinelle” establishes a fairly straightforward precedent for the interpretation of complex Phrygian structures in Rachmaninoff’s later works. Rachmaninoff’s most elaborate essays involving Phrygian organization may be found in his last two compositions—the Symphony No. 3, Op. 44 and the Symphonic Dances, Op. 45—in which, as discussed more fully in Chapter 6, Phrygian organization emerges as a central structural concern in large-scale, hyperdissonance-oriented Postromantic organization. In the case of the symphony, key signature is again a significant clue to Rachmaninoff’s structural conception.

37 There is some uncertainty about the exact bass pitches in measure 30 and following (at the location marked “*” in Figure 5.51). In published scores, both E♯ and E♮ appear as neighbor tones to F♯. However, in his Ampico piano roll recording of the piece (date?), Rachmaninoff plays exclusively E♮, bringing the passage into even closer association with the Phrygian figure used in measures 1–10.
38 Note that F♯ is related to B minor as a conventional dominant and to D major as a “V of VI” dominant (D major acting as “I”).
39 The use of an F♯ minor key signature rather than an F♯ major key signature, which might seem more appropriate, may have been expediency on Rachmaninoff’s part, or, perhaps, an attempt to more closely approximate the pitch-class content of the Phrygian major mode.
Figure 5.52. “Polichinelle,” analysis of climax, mm. 83–98

Material omitted (hexatonic) return of F♯ Phrygian
A Phrygian link between the early Russian-period “Polichinelle” and Opp. 44 and 45—a gap of almost 50 years to fill—may be found in the last published work of the late Russian period, the Etude-Tableaux in D major, Op. 39, No. 9 (1917). As is standard in Rachmaninoff’s etudes-tableaux (and his character pieces in general), the work is in ternary form. As shown in Figure 5.54, initial statement of the D major tonic is entangled with a quasi-hexatonic structure in the introduction to the etude. Phrygian organization emerges with the start of the section A1 proper in measure 5, and is maintained throughout the exposition of thematic material in measures 6–14. Figure 5.55 details Phrygian events (emphasizing E♭ in relation to D♮) in these measures.

An overview of the entire etude is given in Figure 5.56. As discussed above, Phrygian organization in general may be construed as hybridizing tonic and dominant functions. As shown in Figure 5.56, section B in G major may be interpreted as a resolution of this hybrid function, and the arrival on C major at the end of section A1 may be interpreted a large-scale harmonization of C♯, which, as suggested throughout Figure 5.55, is involved in a majority of Phrygian events in the opening measures.⁴⁰

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⁴⁰ In a functional tonal D major context, C♯ has no clear role; but, in a D Phrygian major context, it is not at all out of place.
Figure 5.54. Etude-Tableaux in D major, Op. 39, No. 9, analytic reduction of mm. 1–8

**Introduction**

1

**A section**

3

5

6

8

*quasi - HEX* \(_{(0,2)}\)

Phrygian

[main theme]

**D major**

hyperdissonant opening

thematic exposition
Figure 5.55. Etude-Tableaux in D major, Phrygian events in the main theme, mm. 6–14
Figure 5.56. Etude-Tableaux in D major, overview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section A1</th>
<th>Section B</th>
<th>Section A2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Introduction</strong></td>
<td><strong>Transition</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 - 4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>quasi</td>
<td>quasi</td>
<td>quasi</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- D major
- Phrygian
- C major
- G major
- D major
- Phrygian

Diatonic D major

Phrygian climax event
Figure 5.57. Etude-Tableaux in D major, analysis of climax in section A2, mm. 78–83
Figure 5.58. Etude-Tableaux in D major, mm. 89–92

complex harmonization of Phrygian ascent

quasi - HEX_{0,0}
The climax of the etude at measure 79 in section A2 is shown in both Figure 5.56 and Figure 5.57, and can be interpreted as a culmination of Phrygian organization. The climax event—E♭ major in a larger D major context—is not unlike those analyzed earlier in the dissertation in the first movement of the Piano Concerto No. 3 (see Figures 4.7 through 4.11) and second movement of The Bells (see Figures 4.25 through 4.28). As shown in Figure 5.58, the final measures of the etude emerge from a reprise of the quasi-hexatonic structure following a complex passage in which a clear dominant-tonic pattern in one layer is set against a striking chromatic harmonization of a Phrygian ascent in another layer.

It is interesting to note that the last movement of the last work of Rachmaninoff’s exile period (the third movement of the Symphonic Dances, Op. 45)—and therefore the last product of his career as a composer—and the last work in the last opus of the late Russian period (the D major Etude-Tableaux just analyzed) are similar in several ways. As shown in Figure 5.59, the third movement of the Symphonic Dances begins in D Phrygian major with material derived from the Dies irae. As in several examples above, the Phrygian tonic has a dominant function embedded in it. The exposition of the main theme (also derived from the Dies irae) at rehearsal 58 is plainly derived from the opening measures of the introduction. As discussed in Chapter 6, Phrygian organization reaches a zenith in the central episode of the dance, interfacing with octatonic structure in a climactic moment of extreme hyperdissonance that integrates the Dies irae, the Phrygian mode, octatonic organization, and Rachmaninoff’s favorite “marked” key area, D♭ major.
Figure 5.59. Symphonic Dances, Op. 45, iii, analytic reduction of mm. 1–30

Introduction

Lento assai

Dies irae

Dies irae

Allegro vivace

56

I

(V)

(iv)

(interval of 5)

Phrygian

57

(HEX)

Phrygian

Dies irae Dies irae

Phrygian

Introduction
A final brief analysis will pave the way to the last chapter of the dissertation and bring the exposition of technical material to a close. Figure 5.61 contains an analytic reduction of the opening measures of the second movement of the Symphony No. 3, Op. 44. As indicated on the figure, Phrygian C♯ organization accompanies a statement of the symphony’s Phrygian-inflected motto theme in C♯. (Note that Rachmaninoff provides no key signature for the movement, suggesting that its complex harmonic structure is to be understood in the larger context of the symphony’s A minor/major, and suggesting a certain amount of tonal flux.) As may be expected in a strong Phrygian passage, C♯ has a double meaning: it is Phrygian tonic, and it is the dominant of F♯, the focus on which however is to some undermined by a preponderance of extended tertian sonorities—in fact, only with the resolution to C♯ major in measure 10 is a clear triad articulated.41

Figure 5.62 contains a reduction of the final measures in the movement, showing a statement of the motto theme on C♯ as a closing gesture, following some forty-one measures in which C♯ is essentially never absent. As discussed earlier in the present chapter and in Chapter 4, the motto theme is stated once more on C♯ at rehearsal 80 in the third movement. The C♯ “problem,” so to speak, is ultimately solved only in the coda of the third movement.

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41 Cannata treats the movement as simply in the key of F♯ (Rachmaninoff and the Symphony, 127-28), though he states that it is F♯ minor (which is defensible) on one page (127) and F♯ major (which is indefensible) on another page (128).
Figure 5.61. Symphony No. 3, Op. 44, ii, analysis of mm. 1–14

local highpoint: tones of Phrygian motto verticalized

horn

p → f → dim → p

violin solo

harp

winds

F♯ minor

i⁰

iv⁹

SD

T

C♯ Phrygian major

I

V
The most straightforward tonal explanation of the material in Figure 5.61 is that it establishes the dominant of F♯ minor. But this explanation seems quite insufficient in the last third of the movement, as C♯ becomes increasingly the focus, and especially in the closing measures of the movement, as the Phrygian motto theme is stated on C♯ in a manner analogous to its statement on A♯ at the end of the first movement (where it is undeniably a tonic). A better explanation of the material in Figure 5.61 is that it strongly establishes C♯ as a pitch center, and that the Phrygian context allows an interaction of tonic and dominant functions within and around that center. It is too simple to say, as Cannata does, that C♯ in the second movement of the symphony is simply the dominant of F♯. Such a view misses the significance of Phrygian organization in Rachmaninoff’s oeuvre generally, the central role C♯ plays in the symphony more specifically, and the absence of a key signature in the movement most specifically.

A tension seems to be inherent in Phrygian organization—especially Phrygian organization around a major tonic, as for example in the fourth movement of Capriccio Espagnol, in “Polichinelle,” in the Etude-Tableaux in D major, in the third movement of

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the Symphonic Dances, and in the second movement of the Symphony No. 3. As already shown in the analyses of the second movement of *The Bells* and the first movement of the Concerto No. 3, a tug of war between the tonic note and the lowered second scale degree—the Phrygian tone—is not infrequently associated with climax even when Phrygian modal organization *per se* is not otherwise strongly indicated in a passage or a movement. The rhetorical and expressive associations of Phrygian structures are unusually complex: clearly modal, and frequently expository or initiating; yet also a stimulus for climax, which makes it unlike other modal structures in Rachmaninoff’s works.

**Conclusion**

By recognizing types of modal organization whose significance is not acknowledged in existing Rachmaninoff scholarship (*peremennost*, *nega*, and the Phrygian mode), it has been possible in the present chapter to amplify the framework of rhetorical associations laid out in Chapter 3. Although *peremennost* and *nega* are similar in some regards to certain tonal formations used in mainstream European music of the late nineteenth century, they remain at least implicitly “Russian” in Rachmaninoff’s mature works. Modality emerges as more than an adornment of ordinary diatonic-functional tonal syntax. Modal structures are marked in the works studied, and their contributions to form, in large-scale tonal design, and in expressive trajectory are generally different from the contributions of the functional basis and “fantastic” chromaticism.

**Summary of Chapters 4 and 5**

Whereas Chapters 2 and 3 of the dissertation constitute an interpretive apparatus suitable for Rachmaninoff’s late works, Chapters 4 and 5 constitute a technical apparatus. In Chapter 4, equal-interval structures originating in traditional Russian representations of the “fantastic” in music were described. Analysis of many works demonstrated
Rachmaninoff’s extensive use of octatonic, hexatonic, whole-tone, and hybrid structures throughout the late Russian and exile periods. In Chapter 5, Rachmaninoff’s use of the church modes, of peremennost-based diatonic oscillation and superimposition techniques, of the expressively-packed nega idiom, and of complex Phrygian structures was detailed. The analyses in Chapter 5 also featured increasingly complex combinations of functional tonal, equal-interval chromatic, and modal structures, laying groundwork for the more comprehensive analyses in Chapter 6.
In this final chapter, the focus shifts from microscopic descriptions of individual passages such as those in Chapters 2 through 5 to a macroscopic consideration of Rachmaninoff’s last three compositions—*Rhapsody on a Theme by Paganini*, Op. 43, Symphony No. 3 in A minor, Op. 44, and Symphonic Dances, Op. 45—as exemplars of a hyperdissonance-oriented approach to large-scale Postromantic form. This chapter is therefore an application of the interpretive and technical apparatuses developed in the dissertation to large works in their entireties. Several passages from Opp. 43, 44, and 45 were analyzed in Chapters 2–5. This material is reviewed and expanded in the following pages as it is incorporated into more comprehensive analyses. Rachmaninoff’s last three opuses, composed in bursts of activity between 1934 and 1940, represent in many ways a culmination—the composer’s own word seems appropriate—of his entire oeuvre. In these works can be heard a powerful synthesis of four threads that had occupied Rachmaninoff increasingly after the watershed works of 1909:

1. Complex combinations of functional tonal structures, equal-interval structures, and modal structures within the general framework of rhetorical and expressive associations described in Chapters 2 through 5.

2. Emphasis on points of intense hyperdissonant exaggeration and hyperdissonant distortion as a way to articulate large form in a Postromantic—that is to say, in a deformation-oriented—melodic and harmonic context.

3. Extensive use of the *Dies irae* as thematic material.

4. Emphasis on the region of D♭ major as a structural linchpin and expressive crux, regardless of the global tonic of the work.
Items 1 and 2 above involve techniques and tendencies described at length in the preceding five chapters. Items 3 and 4 need special discussion here.

**The Dies irae in Opp. 43, 44, and 45**

Rachmaninoff’s use of the *Dies irae* melodic incipit—four notes, which might be extended as a generic sequential pattern—was shown in several analyses in earlier chapters.¹ (See again the analysis of the second and fourth movements of *The Bells* in Chapters 4 and 5, and the analytic overview of the fugal episode in the finale of the Symphony No. 3 in Chapter 4.) The incipit is used prominently in many compositions from the Symphony No. 1, Op. 13 on; yet Rachmaninoff apparently had no substantial direct knowledge of the chant until after he completed the Corelli Variations, Op. 42 in 1931:

Shortly after the composition of the *Corelli Variations* Rachmaninoff had at last tried to find out more about the theme which had never ceased to haunt him since the disaster of the First Symphony and about which, paradoxically, he was still ignorant, asking the musicologist Joseph Yasser about its origins, its full form (Rachmaninoff invariably quotes only its opening phrase) and its meaning, without giving him any clues as to why.²

Rachmaninoff’s familiarity with the *Dies irae* before his communication with Yasser seems to have been gathered mainly from the general concert repertory, in which the chant incipit had long been used as a motivic signal for death, judgment, and so on. In the *Rhapsody on a Theme by Paganini*, which was the first work composed after the Corelli Variations, the appearance of the *Dies irae* in something closer to its actual chant form—a distinct opening phrase of seven notes rather than a generic set of four notes that might be extended sequentially—is probably a result of the composer’s correspondence with Yasser.

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¹ Additional research on appearances of the *Dies irae* in Rachmaninoff’s and other composers’ works was cited in Chapter 1, and is listed in the bibliography.
In the finale of the Symphony No. 3 and the third movement of the Symphonic Dances, the *Dies irae* effectively displaces all other thematic material, as discussed in more detail below. However, as stated in Chapter 1, no rigorous basis for understanding Rachmaninoff’s frequent recourse to the *Dies irae* in the late works suggests itself. Rachmaninoff claimed a quasi-programmatic meaning for the *Dies irae* in the *Rhapsody* in a letter written to choreographer Michael Fokine when a ballet version of the work was being planned: “all variations on the Dies irae would be for the evil spirit.” But the spirited, even celebratory nature of the chant’s treatment in the third movement of the Symphonic Dances and at the end of the final of the symphony suggest that a view in which the chant is a straightforward sign for evil and/or death is too limited. In the end, despite the consistency with which it appears, the *Dies irae* remains something of an enigma in Rachmaninoff’s works.

**D♭-Major Focal Points**

Crucial to the analyses in this chapter is “D♭ major”—as a key area, as a concept. The key of D♭ major has a special significance in Rachmaninoff’s oeuvre as a whole, shared to a lesser extent by the enharmonic parallel minor, C♯ minor. It is the global tonic of several important works. The most famous early composition is the Prelude in C♯ minor, Op. 3, No. 2 (1892). Eighteen years later, Rachmaninoff concluded his cycle of twenty-four preludes in the key of D♭ major (Op. 32, No. 13), borrowing motivic material from the early C♯ minor piece for the last prelude and thereby making a pair of bookends for the cycle. The fourth movement of the *The Bells* begins in C♯ minor and ends in D♭ major, and Cannata has suggested that the entire four movement composition can be heard in the gamut of D♭. (See again the analysis of the fourth movement in Chapter 5.)

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work</th>
<th>Movement</th>
<th>Key</th>
<th>Event or Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prelude No.1 in C# minor, Op.3, No.2</td>
<td></td>
<td>C# minor</td>
<td>First published prelude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trio élégiaque in D minor, Op.9</td>
<td>ii</td>
<td>F major</td>
<td>Lyric episode in D# major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symphony No.1 in D minor, Op.13</td>
<td>ii</td>
<td>F major</td>
<td>D# major as a hexatonic partner to F major throughout lyric movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concerto No.2 in C minor, Op.18</td>
<td>ii</td>
<td>E major</td>
<td>Climax on C# major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>iii</td>
<td>C minor</td>
<td>Lyric second theme in D# major in recapitulation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chopin Variations, Op.22</td>
<td></td>
<td>C minor</td>
<td>Lyric penultimate variation (XXI) in D# major (derived from theme)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonata No.1 in D minor, Op.28</td>
<td>i</td>
<td>D minor</td>
<td>Lyric movement involves directly before recapitulation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concerto No.3 in D minor, Op.30</td>
<td>ii</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>Lyric movement involves an interaction of D# major and F# minor</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>* probably a prototype for the second movement of Op.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prelude No.24 in D# major, Op.32, No.13</td>
<td></td>
<td>D# major</td>
<td>Last published prelude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Vocalise,” Op.34, No.14</td>
<td></td>
<td>C# minor</td>
<td>Lyric final song of the set is in C# minor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Bells, Op.35</td>
<td></td>
<td>D# major</td>
<td>Entire composition organized around final culmination in D# major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonata No.2 in B# minor, Op.36</td>
<td>i</td>
<td>B# minor</td>
<td>Lyric second theme in D# major in exposition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All-Night Vigil, Op.37, v</td>
<td></td>
<td>B# minor</td>
<td>Climax on D# major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Daisies,” Op.38, No.3</td>
<td></td>
<td>F major</td>
<td>Climax on D# major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Dreams,” Op.38, No.5</td>
<td></td>
<td>D# major</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“A-u!” Op.38, No.6</td>
<td></td>
<td>D# major</td>
<td>Last song cycle closes in lyric D# major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concerto No.4 in G minor, Op.40</td>
<td>iii</td>
<td>G minor</td>
<td>Lyric second theme in D# major in exposition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corelli Variations, Op.42</td>
<td></td>
<td>D minor</td>
<td>Lyric variations (XIV and XV) in D# major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhapsody on a Theme by Paganini, Op.43</td>
<td>iii</td>
<td>A minor</td>
<td>Lyric variation XVIII in D# major; just one variation in the key</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symphony No.3 in A minor, Op.44</td>
<td>i</td>
<td>A minor</td>
<td>Central climax event suggests D#; climax on D# major in recapitulation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ii</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>* Lyric movement involves an interaction of C# Phrygian major and F# minor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>iii</td>
<td>A major</td>
<td>Lyric second theme in exposition involves C# minor</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Fugue/development emerges from C# octatonic event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symphonic Dances, Op.45</td>
<td>i</td>
<td>C minor</td>
<td>Lyric middle section in C# minor; climax on D# major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ii</td>
<td>G minor</td>
<td>(Middle section skirts D# major, but deflects)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>iii</td>
<td>D major</td>
<td>Lyric middle section in D# major</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Even more significant are the many interior climax events and expressively-packed lyric episodes on or in D♭ major in works from all four periods. Figure 6.1 is a list of important events involving D♭/C# major/minor in a number of well-known works. The list suggests the special significance this key area had for the composer. Of principal interest at present are occasions in the large concert works composed after 1926 when marked D♭ major moments (climaxes or lyric episodes/movements) emerge in the contexts of D minor, A minor, G minor, and so on—that is to say, in keys with which D♭ major is only distantly related.\footnote{For comments on a general trend in the nineteenth and early twentieth century music toward extreme flat and sharp keys, see Hugh MacDonald, “[G-Flat Major Key Signature],” \textit{19th-Century Music} 11 (1988): 221-37. For related but more abstract comments, see Bertold Hoeckner, “Schumann and Romantic Distance,” \textit{Journal of the American Musicological Society} 50 (1997): 55-132.} As shown in Figure 6.1, a majority of Rachmaninoff’s large instrumental works are in natural keys, in which contexts D♭ major sounds very striking.

D♭ major looms throughout the analyses in this chapter. It is an expressive and structural focal point in Rachmaninoff’s last works to such a degree that conventional, relativistic key relationships (expressible in generic terms by Roman numerals, e.g. “I – V” or “i – III”) seem replaced in part by a kind of “absolute” tonal organization in which D♭ major emerges as a setting for important events regardless of what overall key is in use. None of the last concert works is set in the key of D♭ major. Yet the \textit{Rhapsody}, the Symphony No. 3, and the Symphonic Dances all revolve in large part around core events in or about D♭ major. It becomes not a question of if D♭ major will appear, but a question of in what larger context it will appear, and through what technical means its role in structure will be articulated. In Opp. 43, 44, and 45, D♭ major represents a realm of the interior—distant, often lyrical, usually introspective by comparison with the more active music on either side, and expressively packed.

\textbf{Organization of the Analyses}

Limitations of space make complete analytic reductions of Opp. 43, 44, and 45 impossible. (The three works take up approximately 480 pages in full score.) Myriad
features of interest must go without comment in the interest of holistic treatment. Instead, in this chapter, synopses of form, thematic material, and tonal design on the large scale provide frameworks in which analytic snapshots of structurally significant climax events may be meaningful. Here, Rachmaninoff’s theory of “culminating points,” discussed in Chapter 1, comes to fruition.

Figure 6.2. Synthesis of thematic material, form, and hyperdissonant climax events
In each of the following analyses, I show a clear correlation between large-scale climax events (at most two or three in an entire composition) and large-scale hyperdissonance events resulting from strong articulation of specific “fantastic” chromatic and special modal structures at formal and expressive junctures. It is not necessary to account for every note in each work to demonstrate how such climaxes are developed. It is necessary only to show how Rachmaninoff unifies these large compositions by drawing thematic material, harmonic structure, large-scale form and tonal design, and hyperdissonance climax events into close associations. One way to conceptualize such a synthesis is shown in Figure 6.2.

As suggested in Figure 6.2, the thematic materials used in Opp. 43, 44, and 45 have idiosyncracies that suggest various non-diatonic structures. The modal and chromatic structures that result engender hyperdissonant climax events by complicating or deforming a work’s large-scale tension arc (that is to say, its tonally- and formally-derived trajectory of departure and return, as explored in Chapter 1). Structural resolution is achieved at some late stage in a work as the melodic and harmonic components involved are brought into a more harmonious arrangement, solving problems and conflicts established earlier in the work. Rachmaninoff’s Postromantic aesthetic position, as opposed to a Romantic position or to a modernist position, is clear: conflict, fragmentation, distortion, and exaggeration beyond the boundaries of the Romantic, yes; but also, in the end, unity of design and structural resolutions tied to conventional roots that true modernists tried to sever.

With regard to the last point in the preceding paragraph, Olin Downes’s early review of the Symphony No. 3 is compelling: “There is the impression of frustrated strength, which gathers, to crash helplessly against some obstacle… His idiom is more his own than ever before, and free of the indebtedness it once had to Tchaikovsky.”6 Jason T. Stell has noted in his study of Rachmaninoff’s piano works that the composer’s practice setting up of musical obstacles to be overcome climactically later in a work resembles processes in Bruckner’s music.7 Stell notes Warren Darcy’s study of “blocked tendencies” and sonata deformations in Bruckner’s symphonies, specifically noting

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6 Quoted in Bertensson and Leyda, Sergei Rachmaninoff, 325. Downes’s review, however, is generally negative.
Darcy’s comment that “Bruckner causes all these achievements to converge and resonate sympathetically in a climactic moment of splendor.” Yet, as the following analyses show, the results here are uniquely Rachmaninoffian, insofar as they involve alloys of functional tonal, “fantastic” chromatic and special modal structures that are unique to his mature style.

**Rhapsody on a Theme by Paganini, Op. 43 (1934)**

The *Rhapsody* has a double-function form. The twenty-four variations (plus Introduction and Thema) are played essentially without a break, forming a single large movement. This large movement, however, may be understood as simultaneously suggesting a multi-movement plan. Although Martyn claims that the *Rhapsody* “divides naturally into three sections, corresponding to the form of a sonata or concerto,” several factors suggest the four-movement plan shown in Figure 6.3.

Martyn’s analysis treats Variations XII through XVIII as a single movement. Indeed, Rachmaninoff had made a single hybrid movement from slow movement and scherzo in the Piano Concerto No. 3, and he would do so again in the second movement of the Symphony No. 3. However, in the *Rhapsody*, tempos and key structures (D minor and F major as a pair of relatives, B♭ minor and D♭ major as a second pair of relatives) suggest that Variations XII through XVIII represent two distinct stages in the composition. Further support for a four-movement interpretation is provided by the codas appended to the ends of Variation XV (at rehearsal 40) and Variation XVIII (at rehearsal 51), which add material not suggested by the structure of Paganini’s theme and not included in any other variations. The codas strongly suggest that Variations XV and XVIII should be heard as concluding utterances in separate internal movements.

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As shown in Figure 6.3, Variation XI may be interpreted as a transitional, modulating episode between the first and second movements. Variation XI is also the first of three cadenzas. The second cadenza is at the end of Variation XXII, and the third cadenza is at the end of Variation XXIII. The cadenzas punctuate stages in a large trajectory of tonal departure through the slow movement (motion to regions increasingly distant from A minor throughout Variations XII and XVIII) and return (with Variation XIX and following) that forms a basis for interpretation of two main climax events in the work. As shown in Figure 6.4, the first climax event occurs in Variation XVIII—the point of furthest remove in the work, and the only variation in D♭ major. The second, arguably more powerful climax event occurs in Variation XXII—around the point of return. Climax #1 is associated with a hexatonic structure and with nega; Climax #2 is associated with an octatonic structure.

In addition to the double-function form outlined above, I propose another interpretation of the Rhapsody’s form: the large-scale structure of the work, including the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First movement</th>
<th>Introduction</th>
<th>A minor</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Variation I (precedente)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tema</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Variations II - X</td>
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<tr>
<td>transition</td>
<td>Variation XI</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>cadenza #1</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minuet / Scherzo</td>
<td>Variations XII - XV</td>
<td>D minor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>F major</td>
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<tr>
<td>Slow movement</td>
<td>Variations XVI - XVIII</td>
<td>B♭ minor</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>D♭ major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finale</td>
<td>Variations XIX - XXIV</td>
<td>A minor</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Figure 6.3. *Rhapsody on a Theme by Paganini* as a four-movement structure
two climax events and the overall trajectory of departure and return, closely follows the structure of Paganini’s theme, to such an extent that the work as a whole may be considered an enormous variation on the theme. This is shown in more detail in Figure 6.5.¹⁰

Figure 6.4. Overview of main climax events in *Rhapsody on a Theme by Paganini*

[Diagram showing the structure of the theme with climax events and tonal/structural tension]

The figure reveals strong correspondences between the theme (A) and the *Rhapsody* as a whole (B). The first stage of activity in both establishes A minor as tonic. Tonal departure begins with motion to the subdominant as part of a sequence. In both, there is a provisional return to A minor (measure 10 in the theme; Variation XIX in the *Rhapsody*), followed by a more powerful functional affirmation of A minor as tonic. The three cadenzas in the *Rhapsody* (see again Figure 6.3) are indicated by fermatas on Figure 6.5. As dotted lines on Figure 6.5 show, the cadenzas are associated with the moments of chromatic activity in Paganini’s theme. As explained more fully below, cadenza #1 establishes *nega* in the work by bringing pitch class B♭ into play; and cadenzas #2 and #3 are based on pitch classes E♭ and F, which may be interpreted as large-scale manifestations of the two tones articulating the Italian augmented sixth chord in Paganini’s theme, at the corresponding location in the large form of the *Rhapsody*. In other words, specific chromatic moments in Paganini’s theme provide a basis for specific large-scale structural features in the work.

¹⁰ For purposes of comparison, see again Heinrich Schenker’s analysis of the theme (Figure 2.16).
Figure 6.5. Comparison of (A) Paganini’s theme and (B) *Rhapsody on a Theme by Paganini*

(A) Theme

(B) *Rhapsody*

**Intro**

Var I (Precedente)

Tema

Variations: II

first movement

minuet/scherzo

slow movement

finale
However, Figure 6.5 also reveals a crucial difference between the structure of Paganini’s theme and the structure of the *Rhapsody*. Whereas the sequential passage in Paganini’s theme is a conventional circle of fifths motion, the sequential structure at the corresponding location in the *Rhapsody* is a $\text{HEX}_{(0,1)}$ structure. Recall from Chapter 2 that hexatonicism is introduced as an intensifying device in Variations VIII and IX.\(^{11}\) In Figure 6.5 (B), the basically diatonic framework of Paganini’s theme is deformed hexatonically; the theme’s pattern of departure and return is thereby greatly exaggerated. As a result, $D_b$ major emerges as the point of greatest difference between the *Rhapsody*’s structure and Paganini’s theme, and the point of furthest remove in the *Rhapsody*. As observed above, Rachmaninoff includes only a single variation in the key, thereby bringing its special status into focus.

An earlier, fleeting suggestion of $D_b$ major may be heard at rehearsal 31 in transitional Variation XI (the first cadenza), as shown in Figure 6.6. This tonal foreshadowing is concomitant with a statement of a *nega* figure that will be featured throughout the flat-key slow movement variations (XVI – XVIII). Figure 6.6 shows an entanglement of A minor/major (the tonic of the preceding variations, which emerges as the dominant of D minor), D minor (the tonic of Variations XII and XIII), and $D_b$ major (something yet to come, later the setting of a major climax event), underneath the *nega*-type melodic figure.

As suggested in Figure 6.7, the *nega* figure is derived from the $B_b$ in the fifth measure of Paganini’s theme. The *nega* configuration of the melodic gesture—$A\sharp$ as an unstable tone oscillating up to $B_b$ and down to $G\sharp/ B_b$—is actually first heard in Variation VIII, where it is clearly associated with the introduction of hexatonicism. Recall from Chapter 5 that *peremennost* and *nega* techniques strongly characterize the $B_b$ minor portion of the *Rhapsody* (Variations XVI and XVII), bringing these variations into close association with the $D_b$ major that is to come. (See again Figures 5.37 and 5.38, recalling that *nega* idiom is generally associated with lyric movements, or lyric episodes and digressions.

\(^{11}\) See again Figures 2.14–2.17.
Figure 6.6. *Rhapsody on a Theme by Paganini*, Variation XI, *nega* figure at r. 31

Figure 6.7. Derivation of *nega* figure from Paganini’s theme

(a) Paganini’s theme, measures 5 - 6

(b) *nega* figure + HEX in Variation VIII (at rehearsal 31)

(c) *nega* figure in Variation XI (after rehearsal 21)
As shown in Figure 6.5, the emphasis on nega in Variations XVI and XVII occurs within a framework of large-scale hexatonic exaggeration resulting from chromatic deformation of the sequential episode in Paganini’s theme. To put it another way: as the Rhapsody approaches its hexatonically-defined point of furthest remove, the tonic note A♭ is treated as an unstable nega tone, suggesting a structural hyperdissonance involving the tonic. Throughout Variation XVII, not just pitch class A♭ but whole triads on root A♭ are repeatedly articulated. Rachmaninoff keeps the global tonic triad in circulation even in the distant key of B♭ minor, calling attention to the chromatic distance traveled.

Nega and HEX(0,1) come together powerfully at Climax #1 in Variation XVIII. Figure 6.8 is an analytic reduction of the variation. As is well known, the famous melody in Variation XVIII results from the inversion of Paganini’s theme.12 (Recall from Chapter 4 that the F major variations, XIV and XV featured partial inversion of the theme along with hexatonic structures. Variation XVIII represents a more complete inversion.) The inversion of the opening decorated arpeggio figure (x) in Variation XVIII is indicated on Figure 6.8.14 Inversion procedures are continued throughout the variation. Whereas the theme features a descending sequence leading to cadence, Variation XVIII features an ascending sequence. The theme is treated doubly in the variation, resulting in a two-phrase periodic structure. Phrase 1 cadences on the dominant. Climactic phrase 2 cadences on the tonic. A coda follows, featuring continued play on the nega tones (A♭ - A♮ - B♭) above a post-climactic D♭ pedal point (not shown on Figure 6.8).

As shown in Figure 6.8, climax #1 may be understood an integration of a HEX(0,1) cycle (A minor – F minor – D♭ major), which reflects the large-scale tonal design of the

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12 Cannata’s study of draft materials has revealed that a sketch of the inversion of the theme was among the first things Rachmaninoff produced when beginning work on the Rhapsody, and that the sketch dates from the 1920s (Cannata, Rachmaninoff and the Symphony, 55–57). Paul Vining and Rollo Piaf have suggested that the melody of Variation XVIII is also derived from the Credo of William Byrd’s Mass for three voices, a performance of which they claim Rachmaninoff directed at Foulis Castle in Scotland in 1934 (before composing the Rhapsody). See Paul Vining and Rollo Piaf, “Byrd Plagiarized,” Musical Times 118 (1977): 300. I have been unable to confirm Rachmaninoff’s participation in the Byrd performance, and Cannata’s research suggests that the inversion of Paganini’s theme had been sketched before the 1934 Byrd performance. If Vining and Piaf’s report is accurate, however, it might add another layer of meaning to Rachmaninoff’s famous melody.

13 See again Figures 4.33 and 4.34.

14 The subdominant / tonic oscillations and subdominant-dominant hybrid / tonic oscillations in the opening measures of the variation may also be interpreted as a kind of inversion—that is to say, a harmonic inversion of the dominant / tonic oscillation featured in the opening measures of Paganini’s theme.
entire opus, and the *nega* figure from Variations XI and XVII in the key of D♭ major. The harmonic material of the climax is clearly stratified: the $\text{HEX}_{(0,1)}$ cycle is articulated in the upper register, while a functional D♭ major progression is propelled by the bass motion. The most intensely dissonant element at the climax is the A minor triad. The climax is therefore a hyperdissonant exaggeration in which the global tonic is entangled in a hexatonic structure at a point of furthest remove at the end of a hexatonic structure on a much larger scale. The event recalls the climax of the song “Daisies,” Op. 38, No. 3, which also features an unstable tonic sonority at a hexatonically produced point of remove.\(^{15}\)

At the climax in Variation XVIII, the global tonic is treated as an unstable element in both the *nega* idiom and the hexatonic structure that resolves to D♭ major. Figure 6.8 also shows how the melodic structure of the sequential/climactic portion in both phrases may be interpreted as articulating a large neighbor tone that seems to belong more to A minor than to the local tonic D♭ major: C♯ – B♮ – C♯ in phrase 1, F♯ – E♯ – F♯ in phrase 2. The F♯ – E♯ – F♯ figure specifically recalls the opening measures of the *Rhapsody*, which featured a recurring E♯ – F♯ – E♯ melodic figure. The connection between the opening measures of the Introduction and Variation XVIII is shown more clearly in Figure 6.9. The first chord heard in the *Rhapsody*—an A minor triad with F♯/G♭ underneath—returns at the Variation XVIII climax, but in entirely different tonal circumstances. The relative values of E♯ and F♯ are reversed: F♯ resolves to E♯ in the Introduction, but E♯ (associated with tonic A minor) resolves to F♯ in Variation XVIII. Figure 6.10 shows how this is part of a more general tonal “inversion” that characterizes Variations XVI through XVIII as a whole. Pitch classes which are stable in the key of A minor are, on the contrary, highly charged in B♭ minor and D♭ major, and vice versa—including, because of the *nega* idiom in used throughout the flat-key variations, the tonic A♯.

\(^{15}\) See again Figure 2.32.
Figure 6.8. *Rhapsody on a Theme by Paganini*, Variation XVIII, analytic overview of climax #1

Phrase 1

Sequence begins on V

C - B - C

Ascending fifths sequence

Phrase 2

Octave doublings omitted

Sequence begins on I

F - E - F

Climax

Ascending sequence (altered)

Coda above post-climactic pedal point follows
The Introduction to the work also provides a basis for interpreting the second climax event, which occurs in Variation XXII. In Chapter 3, an OCT\(_{(0,1)}\) cycle in the
Introduction was analyzed. A tension between the A minor tonic and the octatonic cycle characterizes these measures, building to a direct clash between A minor and E♭ in measure 7. As shown in Figure 6.11, a large version of the same conflict is involved at the Variation XXII climax.

The Dies irae returns in Variation XXII before the climax. It is set chromatically, building in intensity until A minor is “broken” after rehearsal 64. The A major-F♯ minor compound at rehearsal 67 (again recalling the very first chord of the composition) is extremely unstable in the context of the E♭ major-minor seventh chord that is the basis of those measures. As in climax #1 (Variation XVIII), a projection of the global tonic is highly charged; but in Variation XXII, the climax occurs at the point of return in the large-scale departure-return arc, not the point of remove. Climax #2 is therefore interpreted as an large-scale hyperdissonant distortion according to the criteria established in Chapter 2. The second cadenza in the work follows, expanding E♭. The beginning of Variation XXIII capitalizes on the tonal dislocation effected in climax #2 and in the cadenza, as the piano and orchestra momentarily disagree about what key to play in: the orchestra returns to A minor, but the piano resolves the E♭ seventh chord to A♭ minor.

As described above, the two main climaxes in the Rhapsody may be understood as involving hexatonic structures, octatonic structures, and nega ultimately developed from marked chromatic tones in Paganini’s theme: B♭ and D♯/E♭. As shown in Figure 6.12, a final statement of the Dies irae in Variation XXIV synthesizes these two pitch classes firmly into the gamut of A minor (they are marked by arrows in the figure), and a peremennost flourish recalling the now-familiar A/F♯ compound brings the work to an end. The Dies irae statement may be interpreted as a final moment of culmination. The “problems” caused by B♭/E♭ are fully resolved, and the hexatonic and octatonic climaxes are contextualized.

16 See again Figure 3.13.
Figure 6.11. *Rhapsody on a Theme by Paganini*, Variation XXII, analytic overview of climax #2

61 62 63

Paganini theme

64

OCT(0,1)

Dies irae

increasing chromaticism

(Phrygian)

Climax #2

hyperdissonant distortion (octatonic): tonic highly dissonant

65 66

A major

67

Cadenza #2

The Symphony No. 3 is in the same key as the *Rhapsody*, and echoes of the earlier work may be heard throughout the symphony. Particularly salient here are the incorporation of pitch class B♭ into the gamut of A minor/major, the use of HEX_{(0,1)}, and an intervallically complex climax sonority that resembles the A minor/major + F♯ compound used prominently in the *Rhapsody* (most notably at its climaxes). Several passages from the symphony were analyzed in other chapters of the dissertation. The climax at the end of the development in the first movement was discussed in Chapter 2.\(^\text{17}\) The Phrygian motto theme stated in the opening and closing measures of the first movement was discussed in Chapter 5.\(^\text{18}\) The C♯ Phrygian major statement of the motto theme in the second movement was also described in Chapter 5.\(^\text{19}\) Modal structures in the third movement’s second theme area, the octatonic statement of the motto theme at rehearsal 80 in the third movement, and the large-scale articulation of the motto theme

\(^{17}\) See again Figure 2.8.
\(^{18}\) See again Figures 5.3 and 5.41.
\(^{19}\) See again Figures 5.61 and 5.62.
over the course of the central, developmental fugal episode in the movement were described at various points in Chapters 4 and 5.  

These features can be synthesized into a coherent view of the entire work. In the following analyses, two main components are highlighted:

1. Phrygian structures referable to the motto theme.
2. A large-scale hexatonic structure suggested by and emerging from the climax event at the end of the development in the first movement.

The shattering climax event at the end of the development section in the sonata-form first movement was presented in Chapter 2 as an example of hyperdissonant distortion at a point of structural return. At the climax, intense equal-interval structures, punctuated by the appearance of Dies irae-like material at rehearsal 20, undermine a clearly-articulated return of the tonic (A minor) before rehearsal 22. A snapshot of the beginning of the event is shown in Figure 6.13.

Figure 6.13. Symphony No. 3, Op. 44, i, hyperdissonant climax at the end of the development

20 See again Figures 4.12–4.14 and 5.18.
The passage, which lasts over 40 measures (from before rehearsal 22 to rehearsal 25), is of such intensity and of such dimensions that it calls for interpretation well outside the conventional tonal box. As explored more fully below, it is the central event in the first movement, on which the movement’s entire structure hinges; and the other two movements emerge from its shadow. To put it more bluntly, the hyperdissonance of the climax is not completely resolved until the coda of the third movement.

In the Rhapsody, pitch class B♭, derived from the first chromatic tone in Paganini’s theme, plays an important structural role in several ways. However, suggestions of bona fide Phrygian organization are limited to the beginning of Variation XXII (see again Figure 6.11) and a handful of other locations. In the Symphony No. 3, the Phrygian potential of the B♭ in the opening statement of the motto theme is much greater, taking three movements to work out in full.21 Throughout the symphony, the melodic motive A♮ - B♭ (with or without G♮, which is the other tone in the motto and the other neighbor tone in the basic Phrygian cell), sometimes accompanied by auxiliary tones from further on the flat side (especially E♭—again, the Rhapsody seems to be a precedent), appears with such frequency and in such a variety of contexts that it would be virtually impossible to list them all. As the following analysis suggests, this may be taken as surface evidence of a deeper structural concern for integrating pitch class B♭ and the Phrygian motto theme into the gamut of A minor/major.

*The climax at the end of the development in the first movement, revisited*

The first movement of the symphony has an outwardly conventional sonata form, as shown in Figure 6.14. The opening and closing measures of the movement are characterized by clear statements of the Phrygian motto theme. The proportions of the movement are fairly balanced, as suggested by the fact that the midpoint of the

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21 As cited earlier, the B♭ plays and important role in Cannata’s interpretation of the Symphony, too. For Cannata, it implies a large-scale, subdominant-oriented double-tonic complex oriented, A minor-D minor, which is resolved in favor of A in the finale following the D major fugal episode after rehearsal 80 (Cannata, *Rachmaninoff and the Symphony*, 125-30). Although the fugal episode is undoubtedly significant, the present analysis suggests a more complex structure for the work as a whole than the one suggested by Cannata. Cannata struggles to incorporate the second movement into his interpretation; and largely fails to account for the general absence of significant passages in D minor or D major throughout the first and second movements.
development section (measures 162) and the midpoint of the movement as a whole (measure 159) are almost the same.

Figure 6.14. Symphony No. 3, i, form

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 – 11</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>motto theme: A Phrygian minor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 – 97a</td>
<td>Exposition</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>96b – 229</td>
<td>Development</td>
<td>midpoint of movement: 159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>midpoint of development: 162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>230 – 310</td>
<td>Recapitulation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>311 – 318</td>
<td>Coda</td>
<td>motto theme: A Phrygian major</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The core event of the first movement is the hyperdissonant climax at the end of the development section (rehearsal 21 through 24, resolving at rehearsal 25). The climax, which occurs at a point of expected tonal and formal return, seriously disrupts the sense of regularity and balance that the movement’s proportions engender. The climax event is of such length, and is so strongly emphasized, that the hyperdissonant tail threatens to wag the tonal dog, so to speak.

Analysis of the harmonic material at the climax provides important clues to interpreting the symphony’s overall organization. The material is condensed in Figure 6.15a. The similarity between Figure 6.15a and Figures 6.8 and 6.9 (climax #1 in the Rhapsody) is striking. In both, the global tonic of the work (A minor in both cases) is a highly charged body, entangled in a complex structure involving G#/A♭ and F#/G♭. In the Rhapsody, the structure occurs in the nega-inflected context of D♭ major. In the symphony, embattled A minor emerges as tonic (at rehearsal 25); but the gamut of D♭/C♯ is nevertheless strongly implied, as shown in hypothetical Figure 6.15b. In Figure 6.15b, as in the climax in Variation XVIII of the Rhapsody, a conventional tonic – dominant resolution and a hexatonic resolution (A minor – C♯ minor/major) are combined.
Figure 6.15. Symphony No. 3, i, harmonic content of the first movement climax chord

The chord shown in figure 6.15b is in fact an extended dominant sonority familiar in Rachmaninoff’s works. Figures 6.16a and 6.16b show the appearance of the same type of chord at climax events in the first and third movements of the Piano Concerto No. 4 in G minor, Op. 40 (1926; rev. 1941). Figure 6.16a occurs at the hyperdissonant climax at rehearsal 21 in the first movement of the concerto. The movement is in the key of G minor. A long dominant pedal point (D♭) precedes the climax shown in Figure 6.16a, which means that the climax represents a powerful harmonic and expressive breakthrough to a new tonal level at a point where harmonic and formal processes have led the listener to expect a return to G minor. At the climax, the movement’s tonic, G♭, and pitch class A♭, which has figured prominently throughout the movement, are entangled, resulting in an extended dominant chord that resolves to C major. In the third movement, the same kind of extended dominant chord is used, climactically but not hyperdissonantly, along with the same thematic material, between rehearsal 79 and 80, this time resolving to G major. The climaxes of the first and third movements are

---

22 C major is the tonic of the concerto’s second movement, which has its own hyperdissonant climax at rehearsal 36.
therefore closely associated, and it might be said that the event in the third movement corrects the hyperdissonant “error” in the first.

Figure 6.16. Piano Concerto No. 4, Op. 40, i and iii, climax events

(a) First movement, hyperdissonant climax at end of development

(b) Third movement, climax at coda
The evidence in Figure 6.15b and Figures 6.16a and 6.16b supports the claim that the climactic sonority at the end of the development in the first movement of the Symphony No. 3 (Figure 6.15a) may be heard as having strong implications in the key of D♭ major/minor in addition to its more obvious (and realized) function as a gateway to recapitulation in the key of A minor. As shown in Figure 6.17, the structure of the first movement hinges on this implication: D♭ major is explicitly articulated at a climax event at rehearsal 32 in the recapitulation, conceptually resolving the “other” side of the hyperdissonance at rehearsal 22 and following. As also shown in Figure 6.17, the exposition climaxes on F major. The climax events in the movement therefore articulate a HEX\(_{(0,1)}\) structure within the global A minor/major tonic context: A minor/major itself, F major at the end of the exposition, D♭ major in the recapitulation, and the complex sonority at the end of the development that simultaneously suggests both A minor/major and D♭. Figure 6.17 shows how the tonal settings of the second theme material in both the exposition and the recapitulation are “adjusted” in mid-stride to create the HEX\(_{(0,1)}\) climax events: from E major up to F major between rehearsal 7 and rehearsal 9 in the exposition, and from C major/minor through A♭ major to D♭ major and, ultimately, to global tonic A major between rehearsal 27 and rehearsal 33 in the recapitulation. In other words, the key in which the second theme material is first heard—E major, the dominant—turns out to be the “wrong” key for the HEX\(_{(0,1)}\) structure; it is replaced by F major as indicated on Figure 6.17. A more complex tonal structure characterizes the second theme material in the recapitulation; but again manipulations are undertaken to ensure a climax on D♭ major.

As shown in Figure 6.17, the hyperdissonant climax at the end of the development (indicated by an asterisk on the figure) is entangled in both the large-scale functional tonal structure and the HEX\(_{(0,1)}\) structure of the climax events; and the global tonic, A minor, is entangled in the climax chord.
Figure 6.17. Symphony No. 3, i, analytic overview
Hexatonic and Phrygian structures synthesized in the second and third movements

The structures just described, and the Phrygian motto theme, carry over into the second and third movements of the symphony. The second movement has a hybrid form: slow movement plus scherzo, as suggested in Figure 6.18. The figure provides an overview of the movement, showing the F♯ minor / C♯ Phrygian major pitch centers of the slow movement frame and the F minor tonic of the interior scherzo portion. As suggested in the brief analysis of the movement in Chapter 5, tonic and dominant functions are entangled in the C♯ Phrygian major setting of the motto theme in the outer sections, and the fact that Rachmaninoff provided no key signature for the movement suggests that the movement’s complex harmonic structure is to be interpreted in the larger context of A minor/major. As suggested on Figure 6.18, the movement may be interpreted as a synthesis of a HEX\(_{(0,1)}\) structure from the first movement and Phrygian organization, bringing it into close association with the events in the first movement.

The association between first and second movements is made explicit at the climax in the second movement. As shown on Figure 6.18, the climax occurs shortly between rehearsal 57, which is the midpoint of the scherzo portion of the movement (Allegro vivace) and therefore conceptually of the symphony as a whole, and rehearsal 58. As the figure shows, the complex climax sonority from the end of the development in the first movement reappears at the midpoint of the F minor scherzo. The three participants in the HEX\(_{(0,1)}\) structure—A minor/major, C♯ minor/major, and F minor/major—are thereby bound across two movements by common association with the climax chord.

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23 As suggested in Figure 6.1, the prototype for this movement seems to have been the second movement of the Piano Concerto No. 3, which is also a slow movement – scherzo hybrid, and which involves the same two pitch centers—F♯ and D♭.

24 See again Figures 5.61 and 5.62.
Figure 6.18. Symphony No. 3, ii, analytic overview

Central climax chord

Motto

F# minor

C# Phrygian major

T/D

F minor

Midpoint of Scherzo

Rehearsal #

36 39 40 41 43 44 45 47 51 53 56 57 58 59 60 61 66 67 68 69 70

37 42 46 48 52 54 55

38 49 50

Slow movement
(Adagio ma non troppo)

Scherzo
(Allegro vivace)

Slow movement
As suggested in Chapter 5, the last forty-one measures of the second movement, including a final clear statement of the motto theme on C#, strongly favor C# Phrygian major as a center over F# minor. As a result, the overall structure of the symphony takes on the shape of a large-scale HEX_{(0,1)} structure organized around climax events, and in which the Phrygian motto theme acts as a kind of periodic structural articulation across movements. The third movement, in A major, features C# prominently in several ways, as discussed earlier in relation to Figures 4.12–4.14:

- The *peremennost*-inflected second theme area superimposes triads on C#, A, and E around rehearsal 77 in the exposition.

- The central fugue, in which the motto theme and the *Dies irae* are brought together, emerges from an OCT_{(1,2)} statement of the motto theme on C# (rehearsal 80) that explicitly recalls the C# statements of the motto theme in the second movement. (The *Dies irae* pervades the rest of the movement.) The fugue articulates a large-scale version of the motto theme on C#, creating a large OCT_{(1,2)} cycle that achieves the home dominant.

- Most significantly, in the coda, the motto theme on C# is set in the key of A major, with C# major triads explicitly incorporated into the gamut of the home tonic (the Allegretto after rehearsal 110).

With these events, the structural tensions ultimately referable to the Phrygian motto in the opening measures of the first movement and to the hyperdissonant climax at the end of the development in the first movement are resolved. Recalling the end of the *Rhapsody*, a flourish on the *Dies irae* in the last two measures of the symphony brings the B♭ back into play (along with modal associate G♭ and auxiliary tone E♭)—a reminder, perhaps, of the Phrygian starting point.
The Symphonic Dances differ from the *Rhapsody* and the Symphony No. 3 in that there is no single global tonic.\textsuperscript{25} The three movements are in three different keys: C minor, G minor, and D major. But they are unified around a common group of chromatic chords, which is shown in Figure 6.19.\textsuperscript{26} As briefly discussed in Chapter 4, these four chords are first heard in measures 1–8 of the first movement.\textsuperscript{27} They appear in prominent locations elsewhere in the first movement and in the other two movements, and I therefore take them to be motivic material. Their distribution across the three movements is of great analytic interest. I suggest that in Op. 45, unity is provided not by a large-scale composing-out of a tonic nor even by shared thematic material, but by inter-movement manipulation of a highly chromatic, distinctly non-tonical motivic chord group. Because the motivic chords are stated plainly at the start of the opus, in a C minor context that scarcely accommodates them tonally, one might say that a certain amount of hyperdissonance is loaded into the work from the very start. The following analysis traces the roles played by the motivic chords (singly or collectively) in the Symphonic Dances, especially at climax events. I describe a gradual unfolding through the first two movements leading to an acme in the third movement, where octatonic, hexatonic, and Phrygian structures—all suggested by the motivic chord group—are brought together.

The motivic chord group resists easy description in functional tonal terms, especially in the keys of C minor, G minor, and D major. Rachmaninoff took care to present them at the beginning of the first movement in a way that obscures clear voice-leading. (See again example Figure 4.20, where the triads are arpeggiated in different instruments and in different registers.) In other words, Rachmaninoff establishes them as *chords*, not as results of linear activity. The chords provide raw chromatic material that

\textsuperscript{25} In the present context, there is no compelling reason to make a distinction between the orchestral and two-piano versions of the Symphonic Dances, which Rachmaninoff worked on simultaneously.

\textsuperscript{26} Another commonality between the three movements are the clear quotations from or references to Rachmaninoff’s own earlier compositions. Several of these are indicated on the figures in this section of the chapter, and are discussed at appropriate points in the analysis. At the end of the first dance, Rachmaninoff appears to quote the primary theme from the first movement of the Symphony No. 1, Op. 13. In the third dance, he refers to a passage (beginning three measures after rehearsal 10) in *Isle of the Dead*, Op. 29, and he uses material from the ninth number (Blagosloven es, Gospodi) of the *All-Night Vigil*, Op. 37.

\textsuperscript{27} See again Figure 4.20.
Rachmaninoff works into a variety of contexts. In the group, root relations by tritone, major third, and minor third suggest the possibility of various “fantastic” structures, as shown on Figure 6.19. The Phrygian structures that figure prominently in the following analysis may similarly be understood as suggested by the motivic chord group. The chord group therefore presents in a concentrated form several of the harmonic structures preferred by Rachmaninoff in the late Russian and exile periods. In the analytic figures that follow, the chords in the group are identified by circled Arabic numerals from 1 to 4, corresponding to the order in which they are shown in Figure 6.19.

Figure 6.19. Motivic chord group in Symphonic Dances, Op. 45

![Motivic chord group](image)

Phrygian

1 2 3 4
HEX OCT

OCT

Overview of movements i and ii

Each of the three movements in Op. 45 is in some kind or large ternary form. Figure 6.20 is an analytic overview of the first movement. The introduction to the first movement was analyzed in Chapter 4, as was section A1. Recall that the motivic chord group is first heard in a “fantastic” context in the introduction, but that the thematic

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28 See again figures 4.20, 4.44, and 4.45.
exposition beginning at rehearsal 2 is modal. As section A1 intensifies, equal-interval structures come to the fore, confirming the general rhetorical associations outlined in Chapter 3—but also calling attention to the tonally unsettled nature of the motivic chord group as it is stated at the beginning of the movement.

As shown in Figure 6.20, the first movement incorporates motivic chord 1 (F♯ or G♭ major) at an internal climax event, inside a large Phrygian structure (sections A1 and A2 in C♯, section B1 and B2 a half-step higher in C♯/D♭). As in the Rhapsody and the Symphony No. 3, C♯/D♭ emerges as the centerpiece in the overall design. The trajectory of the B music mirrors the larger trajectory of the A music: motion from the minor mode to the major mode. The key of C major at the end of the movement (starting four measures before rehearsal 27) is the setting for what appears to be a loose quotation of the primary theme from the composer’s Symphony No. 1, Op. 13.29

Figure 6.21 shows how motivic chords 2, 3, and 4 (on D, A♭, and A) are incorporated into the key of G minor in the introductory measures of the second movement. As suggested in Figure 6.17, the tritone root relation between chords 2 and 3 suggests an octatonicism that is realized at the beginning of the second movement. The “slide” between A minor and A♭ major after rehearsal 31 recalls the similar slide between the same two triads before rehearsal 2 in the first dance; but the tonal context is of course different. An overview of section A1 of the large ternary in the second movement is given in Figure 6.22. Section A1 itself describes a smaller ternary structure. As shown on Figure 6.22, the section modulates from G minor to A♭ minor, which may be understood as a larger articulation of motivic chord 3. Note also that motivic chord 1, on root F♯, is suggested briefly at a local highpoint at rehearsal 36.

29 But note that the symphony theme is itself related to the incipit of the Dies irae. Martyn has suggested that the melody which appears at the end of the first dance may be a reference more to the chant than to the symphony theme (Martyn, Rachmaninoff, 350).
Figure 6.20. Symphonic Dances, i, analytic overview

Intro | A1 | B1 | B2 | A2 | Coda

chord group

"fantastic" modal  "fantastic" modal

chord

I  I (Phrygian)  I

chord

I

peremennost

C minor (Aeolian)  D# major  T

terminal climax

C minor  C major

quotation from Symphony No.1
Figure 6.21. Symphonic Dances, ii, analysis of the introduction
Climax and culmination in movement iii

The events in the first and second movements lay groundwork for the D major third movement, which represents a high-water mark in Rachmaninoff’s structural thinking. Two passages from the movement were analyzed earlier in the dissertation. Phrygian organization and the use of the Dies irae in the opening measures of the movement were shown in Chapter 5. The internal climax of the central B section was briefly presented in Chapter 4 as an example of hyperdissonant distortion involving an octatonic structure at a point where resolution to the (local) tonic is expected. These observations provide a framework for more comprehensive analysis.

Figure 6.23 provides an overview of section A1 in the third movement. The introduction establishes Phrygian organization as structurally significant (involving pitch class E♭ in a D major context, as discussed in Chapter 5), and it establishes the Dies irae as thematic material. The Dies irae is taken up as theme I at measure 30, as shown in Figure 6.24. The Dies irae appears in two main forms in the movement: the form stated at

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30 See again Figures 5.60 and 5.61. It was suggested that the movement resembles the Etude-Tableaux in D major, Op. 39, No. 9.
31 See again Figure 4.16.
measure 30 involves short rhythmic values (shown in Figure 6.24, and marked “Dies irae: short” in Figure 6.23), while a form introduced later in the movement involves longer rhythmic values (shown in Figure 6.28).

Figure 6.23. Symphonic Dances, iii, overview of section A1

As shown in Figure 6.23, the goal of the first portion of section A1 is G major, which reflects the smaller motion from D to G in measure 6 of the movement—a resolution of the dominant side of the Phrygian tonic. *Peremennost*-type fusion of G major and E minor leads to theme II, which is an extensive reworking of “Blagosloven esì, Gospodi,” No. 9 from the *All-Night Vigil*, Op. 37. The beginning of this material is shown in Figure 6.25. The E major climax of section A1 follows in measures 114–123, and involves a hybridization of Phrygian and OCT\textsubscript{(1,2)} idioms, shown in Figure 6.26.
Pitch class C♮ (measure 118 and following) does not belong to OCT\(_{(1,2)}\), but may be understood as associated with the clearly articulated Phrygian upper and lower neighbor figure cell. Pitch class D♯ in the bass is more problematic from a harmonic analysis standpoint, being strictly associated with neither OCT\(_{(1,2)}\) nor Phrygian E; but it does not disrupts the overall sense of Phrygian and octatonic structures at the section A1 climax.

Figure 6.25. Symphonic Dances, iii, theme II, beginning

An overview of section B in the third movement is given in Figure 6.27. The figure shows the emergence of D♭ major as an octatonic associate of E major in what amounts to an extension of the OCT\(_{(1,2)}\) structure from the climax at the end of section A1. At measure 133, the Dies irae is stated in longer rhythmic values (marked “Dies irae: long” in Figure 6.27), as shown more clearly in Figure 6.28. Both the form of the Dies irae and the harmonic material in this passage refer to Isle of the Dead: compare...
measure 133 and following in the dance to the passage beginning three measures after rehearsal 10 in the earlier work.

Figure 6.27. Symphonic Dances, iii, overview of section B

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Intro</th>
<th>Lyrical Core: D♭ major</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>124</td>
<td>Dies irae: long (Isle of the Dead)</td>
<td>G♭ major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>133</td>
<td>E major</td>
<td>D♭ major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>152</td>
<td>OCT (1,2)</td>
<td>OCT (1,2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 6.28. Symphonic Dances, iii, Dies irae in long rhythmic values

Figure 6.27 provides a context for the local climax event in measures 208 – 214. As shown more clearly in Figure 6.29, an accumulation of Phrygian and octatonic idioms in the D♭ major music precedes a strong move to the subdominant—G♭ major, or motivic chord 1—at measure 200. The incorporation of motivic chord 1 into D♭ major recalls central section of the first movement. Resolution of the subdominant to local tonic D♭ major is powerfully distorted by the entangled diminished seventh chords of the OCT (1,2)

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32 See again Figure 6.20.
structure at measure 208. A post-climactic pedal point follows, above which echoes of octatonic and Phrygian idioms are heard.

Figure 6.29. Symphonic Dances, iii, climax in section B

Section A2 returns to the tempo and material of section A1; but it is organized very differently, as shown in Figure 6.30. The reprise of theme I in D major is delayed until measure 334, making measure 235 and following more developmental than recapitulatory. In section A2, the short and long forms of the Dies irae are brought together, synthesizing material from section A1 and section B. Two strongly marked statements of the long form in section A2 frame the main climax event of the movement: a statement on A♭ major, preceding a long dominant pedal beginning in measure 287, and a statement on D major at measure 328, as shown in Figure 6.30.

Figure 6.30 shows that the main climax of the movement may be interpreted as a culmination involving the entire motivic chord group. The statement of the Dies irae on A♭ major (motivic chord 3) is the goal of the first portion of section A1. The long dominant pedal on A♭ (motivic chord 4) resolves to D major (motivic chord 2, and the tonic of the movement) at measure 318. But the resolution is a passing event, not a structural one, as the process of intensification begun at the start of section A2 continues,
pushing through D major to E major at measure 322 (thus recalling the climax at the end of section A1) and then, climactically, to F♯ major (motivic chord 1—the first marked event heard in the first movement of the opus, and associated with several earlier climaxes) at measure 326.

Figure 6.30. Symphonic Dances, iii, overview of section A2

Figure 6.31. Symphonic Dances, iii, octatonic–Phrygian hybrid at section A2 climax
The hexatonic resolution of F♯ major to D major in measure 328 coincides with a ff statement of the long-form Dies irae, prefacing the radically truncated reprise of theme I at measure 334. The All-Night Vigil material returns as theme II at measure 349, leading to a final climax event that, like the climax event at the end of section A1, may be understood as involving a hybridization of Phrygian and octatonic structures (Figure 6.31).

These points are contextualized in Figure 6.32, an analytic overview of the entire movement. The figure shows how a large-scale ascent across all three sections culminates in a main climax event that integrates the motivic chord group fully into the gamut of D major. The conventional dominant – tonic resolution at measure 318 is entirely subordinate to the “fantastic” F♯ major–D major event in measures 326–328, which may be understood the goal of the entire opus—the resolution of a global, opus-long hyperdissonance between the symmetrical chromatic and Phrygian implications of the motivic chord group and conventional tonal structures. The interaction of these variegated components in such a powerfully climax-centric context makes the movement a fitting culmination of the late Russian and exile periods as a whole.

Figure 6.32. Symphonic Dances, iii, analytic overview
Concluding Remarks: Rachmaninoff in Context

Rachmaninoff’s openly stated disdain for the “modern music” of his day—“about modern music I feel as about interviews before breakfast,” he told the San Francisco press in 1937—has perhaps clouded scholarly judgment of his music’s aesthetic and stylistic characteristics. It has been too easy to consider him an anachronism. A Webern he was not; nor a Stravinsky; but neither was he a Tchaikovsky, or even a Glazunov. To dismiss him as such is to accuse him of a kind of musical parochialism. A number of photographs held by the Glinka Museum in Moscow show Rachmaninoff as a young man in the early 1890s at the rural estate at Ivanovka (now a museum), rake in hand, his relatives the Satins with him and (in at least one) Father Nikolay, their dour-looking priest, at the rear. The photographs were perhaps intentionally stylized, but, still, to twenty-first-century eyes Rachmaninoff appears very old-fashioned—a hay-bale, horse-and-buggy figure. Forty years later he was a lover of motorboats and fast cars, a man who enjoyed jazz, a cosmopolitan, globe-trotting figure. The cultural collision recalls the musical collision described by Peter Burkholder: “All the composers of this generation have aspects of both eras, combining nineteenth-century elements with twentieth-century sensibilities.”

By the same token, I have shown through analysis of many works that Rachmaninoff’s mature music resists characterization exclusively in conventional tonal terms. My analytic lens has suggested connections between Rachmaninoff’s mature works and progressive European music of the early twentieth century, and suggested that his Russian heritage is neither superficial nor dismissible. Particular modal and chromatic

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1 Quoted in Bertensson and Leyda, Sergei Rachmaninoff, 327.
2 These photographs are in the public domain and may be viewed online in many locations. See for example http://www.tstu.ru/en/tambov/kultur/composer rahm/s1.htm (accessed April 23, 2009).
3 On Rachmaninoff and motorboats, see Bertensson and Leyda, Sergei Rachmaninoff, 319-20.
structures have identities in the works studied. They are marked, and have clear rhetorical associations: intensification, climax, and disruption in the case of “fantastic” equal-interval structures; introduction, exposition, digression, and post-climax in the case of modal structures (although Phrygian organization, as shown in several cases, has more complex associations).

The challenge of developing an analytic strategy rigorous enough yet flexible enough for such variegated harmonic environments has led me to reject existing approaches that treat chromatic events as invariably adornments of functional structures. Rachmaninoff was a Postromantic composer, and expressive trajectories in his music involve processes of deformation, exaggeration, and distortion that result in part from frictions between and integrations of differentiated components in a complex, compound harmonic environment. Generalized, such processes may be taken as representative of the Postromantic repertory in general. Analyses of several works by other composers in Chapter 2 suggest potential applications of the approach developed in that chapter to a larger repertory.

Rachmaninoff’s approach to form is at once Procrustean and plastic. This apparent paradox, too, may be taken as a Postromantic trait. In his music we hear a fusion of clear, conventional plans (ternary form and sonata form are preferred) and *sui generis*, hyperdissonance-oriented shapes. The former supply frameworks; the latter supply energy, and inform the interpretation of climax in the works analyzed. To return to a metaphor suggested early in the dissertation, Dionysius is bound by Apollo; but he nevertheless impels the action. In the works studied, interpretation of hyperdissonance and climax has shown that a kind of expressive form is imposed on conventional form and tonal design in flexible ways.

* * *

The analyses in the dissertation represent a departure from existing Rachmaninoff scholarship in methodology, in depth of analysis, and in the variety of musical genres considered. Though Robert Cunningham’s dissertation equals the present work in analytic detail, his approach emphasizes a kind of unity and integration very different
from mine, because he fails to incorporate what I deem to be essential Russian chromatic and modal idioms into his analyses. As analyses throughout the present dissertation have shown, important rhetorical information is packed into these idioms.

If Barrie Martyn is correct and Rachmaninoff does indeed stand “Janus-like between the old Russia and the new, looking back to the flowering of Russian nineteenth-century ‘classical’ music as also ahead to the first generation of Soviet Composers,” then it may be possible to hear in the works of later composers some of the structures and techniques identified in the dissertation. In Chapters 2 and 4, analysis of octatonic and hexatonic exaggeration in passages from Prokofiev’s works validated Geoffrey Norris’s claim that similarities between the two composers may be more extensive than earlier generations of musicians and scholars realized. In Chapter 5, Rachmaninoff’s extensive use of Phrygian organization was shown to be a continuation of a practice established by his Russian predecessors, and it was briefly suggested that Shostakovich continued the practice (in, however, a radically adapted form).

But perhaps more revealing are ways that Rachmaninoff’s hyperdissonance-oriented approach to musical form may resemble approaches in later composers’ works. Yuriy Kholopov comments on Shostakovich:

Shostakovich’s new solution as a twentieth-century composer consists of finding new effective means of contrast, an even higher order of dissonance. In the develop section he now starts to place contrasted sound-layers one on top of another. The unity of the harmony in the vertical dimension is broken. The layers of polyharmony dissonantly contradict one another, as if the voices somehow are not listening to one another; in some places they even try to out-shout one another to see who can make the most noise. In places it becomes impossible to sense any tonality whatsoever. Supercharging the discordant mass of sound leads to a huge ‘proclamation’ at the beginning of the recapitulation, where uncoordinated shouting lines suddenly merge into a mighty unison. This type of solution imparts new life to sonata form and other symphonised forms…

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5 Martyn, Rachmaninoff, 3.
6 See again discussion of Norris’s view in Chapter 1.
Kholopov’s comments recall with surprising clarity observations made in this dissertation, suggesting that the characteristics he describes are not new in Shostakovich’s music, only new in the extent to which they are featured. A “higher order of dissonance” results from harmonic stratification. Conflict and contradiction generate new kinds of expressive trajectories and rejuvenated formal processes. The “shouting lines” finally come to some agreement, and the higher order of dissonance—the hyperdissonance—is solved at a moment of climactic culmination.

It is true that harmonic materials in Rachmaninoff’s music are not as explicitly stratified as they sometimes are in Shostakovich’s (or Richard Strauss’s)\(^8\). But a passage like the one in Figure 5.58 is not far off: it features an unyielding layer of tonic triads on the very bottom, functional resolutions to those tonics in the middle, and, on top, an increasingly tense chromatic harmonization of a Phrygian ascent.

It is interesting to consider how hyperdissonant exaggeration, distortion, and—perhaps more significantly—neutralization (as demonstrated in Skryabin’s Prelude, Op. 74, No. 3) may be manifest in radical but still recognizable ways in modernist works from the first half of the twentieth century.\(^9\) At present, this is more speculation than theory. The ground here is not at all firm underneath the analyst’s feet; but consider, for example, the opening of Arnold Schoenberg’s twelve-tone Violin Concerto, Op. 36 (1936), shown in Figure C.1.\(^{10}\)

Figure C.1. Arnold Schoenberg, Violin Concerto, Op. 36, i, reduction of mm. 1–4

\(^8\) See again the analyses of Elektra and the Alpine Symphony in Chapter 2.

\(^9\) On the Skryabin prelude, see again Figures 4.21–4.23.

\(^{10}\) I am grateful to Andrew Mead for calling my attention to this passage.
Taken on its own, the solo violin part seems to suggest a pair of tonal gestures in B♭ minor (shown by arrows on the figure). A conventional goal-oriented rhythmic figure leads to the downbeat as “leading-tone” resolves to “tonic” in measure 1; the second gesture behaves similarly. The accompaniment in the strings of course completely denies such an interpretation; but are the implications of the melody entirely lost, or just embedded so deeply that it takes a kind of tonal archaeology to reveal them? I am tempted to suggest in this very limited context that hyperdissonance—melodic implications distorted or neutralized by the “chromatic” (really twelve-tone) context—is so fully incorporated into the language of the piece that it is insoluble. The tension is frozen in place, so to speak, and new harmonic processes are required to give shape to the music.

Of course, nothing of this sort occurs anywhere in Rachmaninoff’s works. Hyperdissonance is prepared; or, in the rare cases where a work begins hyperdissonantly (e.g. the Etude-Tableaux in D major, Op. 39, No. 9 and the second movement of The Bells, both analyzed elsewhere in the dissertation), it is at least resolved. Even the dangling quasi-tonic at the end of “A-u!” comes nowhere near atonality.11 Rachmaninoff’s is a Postromantic ethos. But seeds planted in the Postromantic grew into modernist plants. It is a quirk of musicology that modernism is perhaps better understood than late Romanticism or Postromanticism. Continued work along lines suggested in the dissertation, undertaken without preconceptions or prejudices, might fill in some of the gaps.

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Much remains to be done in the study of Rachmaninoff’s works. This dissertation has of necessity been limited in scope and subject. Rhythm, texture, and orchestration have not been considered in any detail, and have in fact never been taken up with any rigor in the Rachmaninoff literature.

Also needed is a comprehensive comparison of Rachmaninoff and his schoolmate Skryabin. Steps were taken in Chapter 4 of the dissertation, but many more will be

11 See again Figure 2.27.
necessary before century-old assumptions are replaced by solid conclusions. Skryabin
was perhaps not as utterly radical as James Baker has suggested; and Rachmaninoff was
surely not as utterly conservative as the literature has generally suggested.12 When
Rachmaninoff died in 1943, Skryabin had been dead nearly thirty years. Had
Rachmaninoff also died in 1915 (just after the Op. 34 songs, The Bells, the Sonata No. 2,
and the first set of Etudes-Tableaux, and with the Op. 38 songs and second set of Etudes-
Tableaux on the horizon), he would likely be remembered quite differently. His style did
not change radically after 1917; but this should be taken as refinement, not regression.13

Rachmaninoff’s adjacency to the German Postromantic tradition was suggested
by comparisons to Strauss and Mahler in Chapter 2. Further investigation will likely
reveal more parallels, and confirm Rachmaninoff’s position as a central figure in
Postromantic music. It would be satisfying to see his perennial popularity in the concert
hall reflected in a more widespread scholarly appreciation of his place in the repertory.
As Rachmaninoff put it, “taken individually the people in an audience may be poor critics
of music, but as a complete body, the audience never errs.”14

13 For discussion of similar “refinement” in the apparently conservative late works of Richard Strauss, see
14 Bertensson and Leyda, Sergei Rachmaninoff, 362.
Bibliography


