

A STRUCTURAL AND PRACTICE-STRATEGY ANALYSIS OF  
SERGE RACHMANINOFF'S  
PRELUDE OP. 23, NO. 4 IN D MAJOR FROM THE PIANIST'S PERSPECTIVE

A CREATIVE PROJECT  
SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL  
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

FOR THE DEGREE

MASTER OF MUSIC

BY

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MUNCIE, INDIANA

JULY 2017

## Chapter 1: Introduction

I performed my Master of Music degree recital on Saturday, December 10, 2016, at Ball State University in Sursa Hall. The program consisted of Serge Rachmaninoff's Prelude op. 23, no. 4 in D Major, Joseph Haydn's Sonata in E-flat Major Hob. XVI:52, and Robert Schumann's *Symphonic Etudes*. The repertoire I chose for this recital was exceptionally challenging for me due to difficult technical and musical aspects of the pieces including phrasing, voicing, quality of sound production, and expression. My piano instructor at Ball State University, Dr. Robert Palmer, guided and inspired me throughout all of my preparation for this degree recital.

Although each piece on my degree recital was challenging in different ways, Rachmaninoff's Prelude op. 23, no. 4 in D Major offers many difficulties in phrasing, voicing the melodic line, playing large leaps, maintaining clarity of the texture in each voice, and emphasizing harmonic progressions. Furthermore, the many aspects of this prelude were complicated by the relatively small size of my hands. Consequently, I was forced to reevaluate my technique and approach to the instrument in order to play this short yet demanding work. Therefore, the purpose of this creative project is to explore the technical and musical challenges I faced in this prelude.

First, I will offer background information on the prelude genre and Rachmaninoff's Prelude op. 23, no. 4 in D Major. Next, I will provide an analysis of this work, investigating tonality, formal structure, and musical gestures. When applicable, I include analysis with musical examples of score excerpts from other composers' works that help illustrate their stylistic influences on Rachmaninoff's Prelude op. 23, no. 4 in D Major. Following the analysis, I discuss performance practice considerations for this prelude. Performance practice discussion addresses stylistic choices in performance, musical and technical difficulties, and practicing strategies.

## The Prelude Genre

A piece within the prelude genre is a short composition typically used as an introduction for more complex musical movements.<sup>1</sup> However, preludes during the Romantic era were not treated solely as introductory pieces. During this time, preludes were performed often as individual pieces. Johann Sebastian Bach's *The Well-Tempered Clavier* of the Baroque era is among the most important works that includes numerous preludes. It consists of two books of prelude-fugue pairs, a pair for each of the twenty-four major and minor keys. The two books follow a clear organization: the first pair begins in C major, and the second pair is in the parallel minor. Then, this major-minor pattern continues in chromatic ascending order until all keys are covered, thus there are twenty-four prelude/fugue pairs per book, bringing the aggregate total to forty-eight. *The Well-Tempered Clavier* influenced many composers in later centuries such as Frédéric Chopin, Alexander Scriabin, and Serge Rachmaninoff. Chopin wrote his own complete set of twenty-four preludes in all the major and minor keys in his op. 28. Unlike Bach's *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, Chopin's preludes are not paired with fugues. His key structure organization also differs from Bach's: the first prelude begins in C major. The second prelude is in the relative minor of C major. Subsequent preludes continue this major/relative-minor pattern by moving clockwise around the circle of fifths until all keys are covered. Chopin's preludes are short character pieces based on small motives. Pianists commonly play Chopin's preludes either individually in performance or as a complete set.<sup>2</sup>

During the nineteenth century, Russian composers such as Scriabin and Rachmaninoff began following Chopin's model of composing preludes as independent, self-contained works.

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<sup>1</sup> David Ledbetter and Ferguson Howard, "Prelude," *Grove Music Online*, Accessed March 1, 2017, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/43302>

<sup>2</sup> Anthony La Magra, "A Source Book for the Study of Rachmaninoff's Preludes." (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1966), 40.

Both Rachmaninoff and Scriabin wrote several piano preludes in many different characters and moods. Like Chopin, Scriabin also wrote twenty-four preludes covering each key. Additionally, Scriabin's preludes distinctly feature his style of romantic harmonic progressions and textures. Unlike Bach and Chopin, Rachmaninoff did not write and publish a full cycle of twenty-four preludes simultaneously.

However, Rachmaninoff further cemented the concept of writing a piece in the genre prelude as an independent, self-contained work. In 1892, Rachmaninoff composed his first prelude, Prelude op. 3, no. 2 in C-sharp Minor, after graduating from the Moscow Conservatory. In an effort to alleviate his financial difficulties, Rachmaninoff turned to composition for income. Prelude op. 3, no. 2 in C-sharp Minor was one of the resultant pieces. This prelude became among his most popular works. In addition to this prelude, Rachmaninoff wrote two sets of preludes, op. 23 and op. 32. Rachmaninoff composed the op. 23 set in 1902 and the op. 32 set in 1910.<sup>3</sup> Each prelude in op. 23 and op. 32 is in a different key and encompasses broad structural and clear stylistic contrasts.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> La Marga, "A Source Book for the Study of Rachmaninoff's Preludes," 40.

<sup>4</sup> La Marga, "A Source Book for the Study of Rachmaninoff's Preludes," 40.

## Serge Rachmaninoff: Biography

Serge Rachmaninoff was born at the Oneg Estate in the Novgorod Province of Russia in April 1, 1873. His family had a military background with his mother being the daughter of an army general and his grandfather being a former army officer. Rachmaninoff's family also had a strong musical background. Rachmaninoff was raised in an artistic household, and his mother was a piano teacher.<sup>5</sup> Rachmaninoff studied with his mother and learned piano music quickly. When Rachmaninoff was young, his family moved from Novgorod to St. Petersburg where he began studies at the St. Petersburg Conservatory. Following a series of family hardships, Rachmaninoff left St. Petersburg Conservatory and, with the help of his cousin Alexander Siloti, moved to Moscow to continue his studies at Moscow Conservatory. Nikolay Zverev, Rachmaninoff's instructor at Moscow Conservatory, was strict with practice regiments and required his students to attend various cultural events. At these events, Rachmaninoff met many eminent composers of his time such as Pyotr Tchaikovsky and Anton Rubinstein.<sup>6</sup>

In 1888, Rachmaninoff began composition and music-theory lessons, focusing on counterpoint and harmony, at the Moscow Conservatory. Rachmaninoff graduated with high honors from the Moscow Conservatory and was awarded the Great Gold Medal. At the same time he also finished writing Piano Concerto no. 1 in F-sharp Minor, op. 1.<sup>7</sup> Rachmaninoff's professional career began in 1892 when he signed a publishing contract with Y.A. Gutheil. Through this opportunity he was able to publish Prelude op. 3, no. 2 in C-sharp Minor. Around this time, Rachmaninoff also composed Symphony no. 1, op. 13 in D Minor, a piece that was

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<sup>5</sup> Geoffrey Norris, "Rachmaninoff, Serge," *Grove Music Online*, Accessed January 1, 2017, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/50146>.

<sup>6</sup> Norris, "Rachmaninoff."

<sup>7</sup> Phillip Michael Blaine, "A Technical and Musical Approach to Rachmaninoff's Etudes Tableaux" (Creative Project, Ball State University, 2012)

met with negative critical reaction upon its premiere. Consequently, Rachmaninoff lost confidence in his abilities as a composer. However, following a series of hypnotherapy treatments from Nikolai Dahl, Rachmaninoff reinvigorated his spirit and returned to composition. In 1902, Rachmaninoff premiered Piano Concerto no. 2, op. 18 in C Minor to critical acclaim. Other significant works Rachmaninoff composed around this time period include the Cello Sonata op. 19 in G Minor and Preludes op. 23.<sup>8</sup>

In 1909, Rachmaninoff toured America frequently performing his Piano Concerto no. 3, op. 30 in D Minor. Despite many contract offers from American companies, Rachmaninoff decided to return to the Ivanovka estate.<sup>9</sup> During his stay at the Ivanovka Estate, Rachmaninoff finished the Preludes op.32 and the Piano Sonata no. 2, op. 36 in B-flat Minor.

In 1918, Rachmaninoff moved to Stockholm to avoid political chaos and unrest in Russia during the Russian Revolution. Societal hardships forced Rachmaninoff to leave most of his money and belongings in Russia during the move to Stockholm. Toward the end of 1918, Rachmaninoff accepted an offer to work in the United States as a concert pianist and recording artist. Aside from providing financial security, immediately after World War I these job opportunities also allowed Rachmaninoff to tour Europe. While in America, Rachmaninoff took time off from composition to focus on his performance career.

In 1926, Rachmaninoff returned to composition and completed the Piano Concerto no. 4, op 40; his Variations on a Theme by Corelli, op. 42; the Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini, op. 43; and his final work, *Symphonic Dances*, op. 45.<sup>10</sup> Rachmaninoff wrote a vast amount of music in various genres including piano concertos, preludes, etudes, symphonies, operas, and

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<sup>8</sup> Norris, "Rachmaninoff."

<sup>9</sup> Yoon-Wha Roh, "A Comparative Study of the Twenty-Four Preludes of Alexander Scriabin and Sergei Rachmaninoff" (DMA diss., Indiana University, 2015), 18.

<sup>10</sup> Norris, "Rachmaninoff."

choral works. Among Rachmaninoff's most notable works are his piano preludes, which are still discussed and critically analyzed today in scholarly journals.

### Serge Rachmaninoff's Preludes

As mentioned earlier, Rachmaninoff started writing his preludes after graduating from the Moscow Conservatory as a means to earn a living. Prelude op. 3, no. 2 in C-sharp Minor was dedicated to his professor, Anton Arensky.<sup>11</sup> From 1901-1903, Rachmaninoff was in a state of depression because of his financial hardships. Rachmaninoff finished the Preludes op. 23 in 1903, and the prelude set premiered in Moscow on February 10 of that year for the Ladies' Charity Prison Committee. Preludes op. 23 was dedicated to his sponsor, Alexander Siloti, and it was later published by Y.A. Gutheil in February, 1904.<sup>12</sup> Each prelude is in a different key, and each prelude exhibits its own individual characteristics. In this set of preludes, Rachmaninoff creates climatic tension through the use of stepwise chromatic patterns in the inner voices of chord progressions as well as with non-diatonic harmonically enriched chords.

The first prelude in op. 23 is in the key of F-sharp minor. This prelude features a slow tempo with a combination of ternary and variation form.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, this prelude contains beautiful melodic lines with chromatic ascending and descending accompaniment patterns in the left hand. Prelude no. 2 in B-flat major has significant technical demands due to advanced rhythmic patterns and rapid, successive note figurations. This prelude is dramatic, energetic, and full of emotional drive. One of the challenges in this work is to play the left-hand ostinato line against the rhythmic melodic line of the right hand. Prelude no. 3 in D Minor is a ternary form with march-like characteristics and a variety of contrasting articulation markings. Rachmaninoff

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<sup>11</sup> La Marga, "A Source Book for the Study of Rachmaninoff's Preludes," 42.

<sup>12</sup> Yoon-Wha Roh, "A Comparative Study of the Twenty-Four Preludes of Alexander Scriabin and Sergei Rachmaninoff" (DMA diss., Indiana University, 2015), 8.

<sup>13</sup> Angela Glover, "An Annotated Catalogue of The Major Piano Works of Sergei Rachmaninoff" (PhD diss., Florida State University, 2003), 19.

used different contrapuntal devices in this prelude such as stretto, diminution, and augmentation.<sup>14</sup>

Prelude no. 4 in D Major contains beautiful melodic lines with a triplet accompaniment throughout the piece. The many harmonic progressions help create an intense buildup to the climax of the piece. Details of this prelude ensue in the body of this document. Prelude no. 5 in G Minor is one of the most well-known preludes written by Rachmaninoff. It is a ternary form with significant contrasts between the A and B sections. The first section is rhythmic and resembles a military march. The second section is lyrical with a legato melodic line in the right hand over repeated arpeggiated patterns.

Prelude no. 6 in E-flat Major is similar to a nocturne. Rachmaninoff used two main elements throughout the work: one of the elements is the short right-hand motive and its various permutations that altogether create a longer melodic line. The second element is the sixteenth-note chromatic accompaniment line in the left hand. Prelude no. 7 in C Minor is virtuosic. The prelude starts with rapid sixteenth-note figures that create energy and intensity throughout the piece with the juxtaposition of a slow-moving melodic line over quick running notes. This etude-like virtuosic passage requires facile technique to perform it well.

Prelude no. 8 in A-flat major has two melodic lines; the primary melodic line is in the left hand with long phrases, and the secondary melodic line is in the right hand with broken-chord sixteenth notes. A significant challenge of this prelude is bringing out the melodic line in the right hand while playing the broken chords. Prelude no. 9 in E-flat Minor is one of the most difficult of the ten preludes in op. 23. It requires the performer to play double-notes in a variety of different intervals. The combinations of intervals include seconds, thirds, fourths, and sixths. Prelude no. 10 in G-flat major is one of the shorter works in op. 23. This prelude features

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<sup>14</sup> Glover, "An Annotated Catalogue," 19.

beautiful melodic lines in the left hand with syncopated chords in the right hand. This prelude also has a number of color changes and stark mood shifts.

## Chapter 2: Prelude op. 23, no. 4 in D Major: Analysis

Rachmaninoff composed the Prelude op. 23, no. 4 in D Major in 1903. This prelude is reminiscent of a nocturne or barcarolle.<sup>15</sup> The nocturne is a type of composition that portrays music for a nighttime setting, and it features a melody with a broken-chord pattern accompaniment. The barcarolle is a Venetian boat song that features a tuneful melodic line with repeated accompaniment figure. Rachmaninoff's prelude op. 23, no. 4 is through-composed, but the piece can also be interpreted as a variation form; if interpreted as a variation form, the work begins with the theme and is followed by three variations with a coda at the end. Rachmaninoff establishes the D-major tonality in the first two measures through arpeggiated figurations. The theme is stated from mm. 3-18 with a triplet accompaniment figure in the left hand. The prelude's theme is simple and lyrical.

The first variation of the piece starts at m. 19 and ends in m. 34. The theme of the first variation is in the alto voice, and Rachmaninoff adds another layer on top of the melodic line in the right hand. The second variation starts at m. 35. Rachmaninoff employs rhythmic alternations in the variation and uses this technique to build energy leading up to the climax of the piece. The third variation starts in m. 53. At this third variation, the theme returns in the chords within the original rhythm. The coda of the work is exceptionally short and begins in m. 73. Table 1 provides a visual representation of the structure of the form of this work.

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<sup>15</sup> Glover, "An Annotated Catalogue," 19.

Intro	Measure 1-2
Theme	Measure 3-18
Variation 1	Measure 19-34
Variation 2	Measure 35-53
Variation 3	Measure 53-72
Coda	Measure 73-End

Table 1. The form of the Prelude op. 23, no. 4 in D major

The overall tonal structure of this prelude begins with D major established as the tonic. Each variation begins in D major but travels to different keys. From the beginning in D major, Rachmaninoff modulates to F-sharp minor in m. 11. Modulations to other keys continue until m. 15 where the key of B minor is established. The first variation, which begins in m. 19, brings the tonal center back to D major. However, this tonal affirmation on D major is short-lived; once again modulation ensues until m. 29, where the tonal center settles in the key of B minor. In m. 35, the key returns to D major, and in m. 43, the key modulates to G major. The *pianissimo* at m. 43 signifies the beginning of the build up to the climax; in the following measures, frequent modulations and chromaticism in both hands create tension leading to the climax at the downbeat of m. 51. This section modulates to the following keys: G major/G Minor, B-flat Major/G minor, and, following the aftermath of the climax, a return to D major in m. 53.

Measure 53 marks the beginning of the third variation. The original theme is restated in the tonic key of D major. Although the third variation contains modulation and chromaticism, no major shifts in tonality occur. The third variation ends with a coda in the tonic key of D major. Table 2 displays a visual representation of the key structures in Prelude op. 23, no. 4 in D Major.

Section	Measures	Key area
Theme	1-10	D major
Theme	11-14	F-Sharp minor
Theme	15-18	B minor
Variation 1	19-28	D major
Variation 1	29-34	B minor
Variation 1	35-42	D major
Variation 2	43-52	G Major/G Minor, B-flat Major/G minor, D major
Variation 3	53-72	D major
Coda	73-End	D major

Table 2. A Summary of the Structural and Key areas within Rachmaninoff's Prelude op. 23, no. 4 in D Major.

Aside from the overall tonal structure, Rachmaninoff employed other traditional harmonic devices in the prelude, such as brief shifts from the tonic to closely related keys. These shifts include moving from the tonic to the subdominant, or from the tonic to the relative-minor key. For instance, the prelude begins from m. 1 in D major and shifts to G major in m. 7 (Example 1). Another closely related shift occurs from mm. 28-29 where the tonality progresses from D major to the relative key of B minor (Example 2).

Rachmaninoff also frequently shifts from a major key to its parallel minor.<sup>16</sup> For example, from mm. 40-42, A major immediately changes to A minor (Example 3). This phenomenon also occurs in mm. 45-47, where the tonality shifts suddenly from G major to G minor (Example 4).

Example 1. Rachmaninoff Prelude op. 23, no. 4 in D Major, mm. 4-7. A shift from D Major to G Major.



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<sup>16</sup> La Marga, "A Source Book for the Study of Rachmaninoff's Preludes," 89.

Example 2. Rachmaninoff Prelude op. 23, no. 4 in D Major, mm. 28-30. A shift from D Major to B minor.

Musical score for Example 2, showing measures 28-30. The score is in D Major and features a shift to B minor. The right hand has a melodic line with a triplet and a fermata, while the left hand has a steady accompaniment. Dynamics include *mf* and *dim.*

Example 3. Rachmaninoff Prelude op. 23, no. 4 in D Major, mm. 40-42. A shift from A Major to A minor.

Musical score for Example 3, showing measures 40-42. The score is in A Major and features a shift to A minor. The right hand has a melodic line with a fermata, and the left hand has a steady accompaniment. Dynamics include *mf* and *rit. e dim.*

Example 4. Rachmaninoff Prelude op. 23, no. 4 in D Major, mm. 44-47. A shift from G Major to G minor.

Musical score for Example 4, showing measures 44-47. The score is in G Major and features a shift to G minor. The right hand has a melodic line with a fermata, and the left hand has a steady accompaniment. Dynamics include *mf*, *p*, and *cresc.*

Rachmaninoff also uses harmonic progressions to create triadic outlines of the theme.<sup>17</sup>

The harmonic progression moves from the tonic to the mediant or the mediant back to the tonic. Rachmaninoff employed this progression in his other compositions such as Preludes op. 23, nos. 2, 3, and 4, and Preludes op. 32, nos. 5 and 7. In Prelude op. 23, no. 4, this type of progression occurs in several places, including m. 11, and from mm. 58-63. Example 5 illustrates this progression from mediant to tonic.

Additionally, Rachmaninoff uses dissonances and chromaticism for increasing musical tension. For instance, diminished seventh chords and short chromatic figures create intensity that blossom at the climax of this prelude, which happens from mm. 49-51 (Example 6).

Example 5. Rachmaninoff Prelude op. 23, no. 4 in D Major, mm. 60-61. Progression from the mediant to the tonic.



Example 6. Rachmaninoff Prelude op. 23, no. 4 in D Major, mm. 49-52. Chromatic section of the prelude.

 Musical score for Example 6, showing the chromatic section of Rachmaninoff's Prelude op. 23, no. 4, mm. 49-52. The score is in D major and 4/4 time. It features a piano accompaniment with a chromatic bass line and a treble staff with chords and melodic fragments. The section is characterized by chromaticism and dissonance, including diminished seventh chords. Dynamics include *ff* and *dim.*

<sup>17</sup> Yoon-Wha Roh, "A Comparative Study of the Twenty-Four," 48.

In addition to his distinct treatment of harmony, Rachmaninoff's melodic development also stands out as a vital component of the prelude.<sup>18</sup> The prelude begins with a simple melody and long phrasing. Rachmaninoff used a variety of techniques to expand the melody or develop the melody into figurations. Some of these techniques include adding voices above the melodic line, using different chords to color the melody, shifting the melody to other pitch registers, and using different rhythms in the melody or accompaniment. All of these techniques allow pianists to create a wide gamut of color in Prelude op. 23, no. 4 in D Major.

Rachmaninoff begins the first theme in the right hand with an arpeggiated accompaniment. The pitch range of the accompaniment extends far beyond the reach of nearly any pianist's left-hand span. This introductory theme can be divided into two long phrases (Example 7).

Beginning in m. 19, the first variation begins by adding voices on top of the melodic line. The right hand has two voices: the soprano voice with a triplet accompaniment, and the alto voice that carries the melodic line. This type of multi-layered texture is also known as the "podgolosky"; Ruttle defines podgolosky as a melodic line that has one or more quasi-contrapuntal countermelodies.<sup>19</sup> The left hand has arpeggiated figures with a wide pitch range. The left-hand accompaniment and right-hand upper voice create a two-against-three rhythmic conflict (Example 8).

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<sup>18</sup> Mark Ruttle, "Aspects of a Late Style in Sergei Rachmaninoff's Variations on a Theme of Corelli, Op.42: A Lecture Recital Together with Three Recitals of Selected Works of J. Brahms, L.V. Beethoven, F. Chopin, C. Debussy, Zoltan Kodaly, M. Moussorgsky, and S. Prokofiev," (DMA diss., University of North Texas, 1989), 4.

<sup>19</sup> Mark Ruttle, "Aspects of a Late Style in Sergei Rachmaninoff's Variations on a Theme of Corelli," 6.

Example 7. Rachmaninoff Prelude op. 23, no. 4 in D Major, mm. 3-5. Wide range left-hand accompaniment.

The image shows a musical score for three measures of Rachmaninoff's Prelude op. 23, no. 4. The right hand (treble clef) features a melodic line with a slur and the instruction "sempre cantabile". The left hand (bass clef) features a wide range accompaniment consisting of a triplet of eighth notes in each measure. The key signature is D major (two sharps) and the time signature is 3/4.

Example 8. Rachmaninoff Prelude op. 23, no. 4 in D Major, mm. 19-21. Two-against-three rhythmic conflict.

The image shows a musical score for three measures of Rachmaninoff's Prelude op. 23, no. 4, illustrating a two-against-three rhythmic conflict. The right hand (treble clef) has a triplet melody of eighth notes. The left hand (bass clef) has a triplet accompaniment of eighth notes. The dynamic marking "pp" (pianissimo) is present in the first measure. The key signature is D major (two sharps) and the time signature is 3/4.

In the second variation, Rachmaninoff uses a combination of syncopation and diminution of the right-hand melody clashing against the triplet accompaniment of the left hand. He uses a fragmented version of the melodic line to create more musical intensity. Furthermore, Rachmaninoff frequently uses modulation, dissonant harmonies, and expansive, rich chords in this variation. This variation contains the climax of this prelude and features many chromatic harmonies, significant dynamic contrasts, syncopation with rhythmic alternation, and a vast pitch range (Example 9).

Example 9. Rachmaninoff Prelude op. 23, no. 4 in D Major, mm. 35-37. Syncopation with rhythmic alternation



The last variation returns to the original theme with the original rhythm from the first variation. The theme expands to expansive, rich chords with the soprano voice carrying the melody. The alto answers sympathetically with the soprano voice and also incorporates rhythmic syncopations. Rachmaninoff used the ringing-like quality of the upper pitch range of the piano in the right hand to create glittery effects known as “Russian” Bells sonorities.<sup>20</sup> The triplet accompaniment in the left hand continues from the previous variation on top of the melodic line, as demonstrated in Example 10.<sup>21</sup> In the coda, Rachmaninoff derives the rhythm and melodic figures from the second variation.

Example 10. Rachmaninoff Prelude op. 23, no. 4 in D Major, mm. 53-55. “Russian” Bells sonorities with melodic line

<sup>20</sup> Mark Ruttle, “Aspects of a Late Style in Sergei Rachmaninoff’s Variations on a Theme of Corelli,” 15.

<sup>21</sup> La Marga, “A Source Book for the Study of Rachmaninoff’s Preludes,” 87.

### Chapter 3: Performance Practice

Prelude op. 23, no. 4 in D Major sounds simple and elegant. However, despite the pleasant character and sonority, this prelude is challenging to perform with its wide array of musical and technical challenges. These difficulties demand from the pianist the patience and discipline of incorporating slow practice and critical listening skills. These numerous challenges include:

- Phrasing
- Voicing the melodic line within a multi-layered texture
- Playing large leaps, especially for pianists with small hands
- Maintaining clarity of the texture in each voice
- Accurately executing syncopated rhythms
- Effectively performing long and expansive dynamic contrasts
- Playing legato with controlled sound
- Emphasizing the harmonic progressions

The constantly changing texture complicates the ability of the pianist to consistently voice the upper melodic line. This consistency in tone production is crucial in creating and upholding a convincing melodic line. In order to produce the highest quality of sound, I suggest that the performer:

1. Relax elbows, wrists, shoulders, and arms.
2. Use arm weight instead of the wrist to produce the sound. Freedom in these joints will create a higher quality and consistency of the sound; the shoulder and elbow allows the hand to fall naturally into the keys. The weight from gravity does most of the

work of depressing keys rather than the performer using power from muscle.<sup>22</sup>

Pianists should strive to minimize tension and strive for a flowing, natural sound.

In addition to maintaining consistent sound production of the melody, the multi-layered textures and hand crossings of the accompaniment prove to be significant challenges. Pianists might want to consider distributing sections with hand-crossings across both hands instead of playing the figures with only the left hand. However, distribution across both hands might cause issues with maintaining consistency of sound in the accompaniment. I chose to play these hand-crossing moments with only the left hand in order to maintain consistency of sound quality. The accompaniment should have a subordinate relationship with the melodic line at all times. Careful hands-separate practice should help address the melodic balance.

The pianist's approach to practice has a profound impact on the performance quality. Thus, I approached each practice session thoughtfully and prudently with the purpose of achieving a specific set of goals. Some of the most common goals I established in the practice room for Preludes op. 23, no. 4 in D Major were the following:

1. Produce a focused sound without creating any excess tension in the hands, wrists, elbows, arms, back, or any other parts of the body.
2. Practice sections in isolation, e.g., playing the accompaniment without the melodic line; during this type of practice, I focused on precise execution of rhythm and production of a light yet rich sound.

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<sup>22</sup> Kevin Nadolski. "Listening to Our Bodies: How Pianists Can Create Unnecessary Difficulties Through Excessively Rule-Bound Approaches to Legato and Fingering." (DMA diss., Texas Tech University 2015), 6.

3. Play only the bass line with the melodic line in order to hear the harmonic progression.
4. Play the melodic line with the soprano line (applies to sections where the melody is not carried in the soprano) for the purpose of practicing two contrasting textures in one hand. In this regard, slow, thoughtful practice is mandatory in producing good results.

## Chapter 4: Conclusion

Preparing this piece for my recital was an intense experience nurtured by my dedicated work in the practice room. In order to craft this recital program into a performance-level quality, I required daily practice for a minimum of six to eight hours per day. Despite the extended period of effort and dedication, the learning process was a rewarding experience that forced me to adjust old habits for the purpose of delivering a solid performance. Examples of aspects I refined included the crafting of sound production, the voicing and phrasing of the melodic line, and devising effective methods of practicing demanding technical and musical sections of the work.

As this prelude was among the first works I have learned and performed from Rachmaninoff's oeuvre, Prelude op. 23, no. 4 in D Major has become my gateway into the composer's repertoire and the world of Russian Romanticism. The analysis of this composition enabled me to dissect the complex texture and understand the musical structure of the work. I hope that the findings of this document may be used a guide for aspiring pianists learning Prelude op. 23, no. 4 in D Major.

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