

A TECHNICAL AND MUSICAL APPROACH TO RACHMANINOFF'S *ÉTUDES-*
TABLEAUX

A RESEARCH PAPER

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FOR THE DEGREE

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BY

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On Thursday, February 16, 2012, at 7:30 PM in Sursa Hall, my Master of Music in Piano Performance Recital took place. The program consisted of Beethoven's Piano Sonata No. 24 in F-sharp major, Op. 78; Debussy's *Images*: Book I, L110; Sonata in C major, K. 132, and Sonata in A minor, K. 54 by Domenico Scarlatti; and five *Études-Tableaux* by Sergei Rachmaninoff: Op. 39, No.3 in F-sharp minor; Op. 39, No. 2 in A minor; Op. 39, No. 5 in E-flat minor; Op. 33, No. 3 in C minor; and Op. 33, No. 9 (No. 6) in C-sharp minor. This program proved to be unprecedented in length and difficulty in comparison to other solo piano recitals I have performed in the past and often filled me with doubt as to whether or not I was truly capable of delivering a polished performance. Every lesson with my instructor, Dr. Raymond Kilburn, challenged me to fix and refine technical and musical aspects of the repertoire while maintaining and making progress in all my other recital pieces. However, through reconstruction of old habits and regular implementation of efficient and isolated daily practice, I persevered and successfully delivered the recital program.

In this creative paper, I shall explore the technical and musical challenges I faced with this recital program. While each piece was indeed remarkably difficult in its own right, I will focus exclusively on Rachmaninoff's *Études-Tableaux* due to the especially intense poise, determination, and efficiency I needed to achieve mastery of each étude's unique and focused technical and musical difficulties. Common challenges within the *Études-Tableaux* to be discussed include tackling dense, chordal passages covering extremities of the keyboard, quick passages that require meticulous management and a full bodied sound to maintain clarity and textural significance, and carrying a consistent melodic phrase and/or musical mood over long periods of time. The paper shall begin

with biographical information related to Rachmaninoff and the *Études-Tableaux*, followed by a description of individual technical and musical challenges present across the *Études-Tableaux* and ways in which to overcome them, and concluded with an assessment of the recital's overall impact on my personal growth and potential in future studies and career paths as a musician.

Sergei Vasil'evich Rachmaninoff was born at the Oneg Estate in the Novgorod Province of Russia on April 1, 1873. He was of an aristocratic family, with his grandfather working as an army officer and his mother being the daughter of an army general. As Rachmaninoff was immersed with the arts consistently from a young age, his musical skills developed quickly. Rachmaninoff's family moved to St. Petersburg to allow him to study at St. Petersburg Conservatory, while his grandmother took him to cathedrals in the city. These visits exposed him to choral music and bells, influences that are evident in much of his compositional output. Unfortunately, family struggles, including the death of his sister Sofiya during the 1885 diphtheria outbreak and poor relations with his father Vasily, set back his growth. Furthermore, Rachmaninoff was not focused on his studies, harboring a lazy approach to all his classes. Thus, he failed out of St. Petersburg conservatory.¹

At the suggestion of Alexander Siloti, Rachmaninoff's cousin and a student of Franz Liszt, the young pianist was sent to live and study with Nikolai Zverev at Moscow Conservatory to maximize his development under the strict discipline of his new instructor. Zverev forced his students to maintain a strenuous daily practice routine in

¹ Robert Cunningham, *Sergei Rachmaninoff: A Bio-Bibliography* (Westport, Connecticut : Greenwood Press, 2000), 1-2.

addition to attending mandatory cultural events, which led to Rachmaninoff meeting major current figures in music such as Tchaikovsky and Anton and Nicholas Rubenstein.²

In the spring of 1888, Rachmaninoff began piano studies with Siloti and also attended various classes in harmony and counterpoint, extending his exposure to genres such as Russian folk, chant, and church music. As Zverev saw Rachmaninoff only as a pianist, he was greatly angered by the composer's desire to be given special circumstances to allow him to compose in the harsh performance-oriented environment. This development of poor relations forced Rachmaninoff to move in with the family of his father's sister, Varvara Satina. However, his studies continued at the conservatory as he pursued piano in addition to composition.³

In 1891, Rachmaninoff graduated with highest honors, with his opera *Aleko* being awarded the conservatory's prestigious Great Gold Medal. From 1892 on, *Aleko* as well as his famous Prelude in C-sharp minor Op. 3/2 catapulted him to international fame, garnering positive remarks from major musical figures, including Tchaikovsky. Following his rise to fame, Rachmaninoff maintained a highly productive schedule as a composer and pianist.⁴

However, following the critical failure of the premiere of his Symphony No. 1 in D minor, Op. 13 conducted under Alexander Glazunov in 1895, Rachmaninoff plummeted into severe depression and withdrew from composition. Rachmaninoff turned to Nikolai Dahl, a psychotherapist specializing in hypnosis, for treatment of his psychologically unhealthy state. He made a full recovery, beginning anew with the

² Ibid., 2.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid., 3.

premiere of his Piano Concerto No. 2, Op. 18 in 1900-1901 that reestablished his fame as a composer.⁵

Following marriage to his first cousin, Natalia Satina, in May 1902, Rachmaninoff managed to compose new pieces despite a hectic and ongoing performance schedule, including works such as his Symphony No. 2 in E minor, Op. 27 (1906-1907); his Piano Sonata No. 1 in D minor, Op. 28 (1907); and *The Isle of the Dead*, Op. 29 (1909), a tone poem inspired by a painting of the same name by Arnold Böcklin.⁶ Rachmaninoff toured the United States in 1909-1910; the repertoire included performances of his Piano Concerto No. 3 in D minor, Op. 30. More concertizing immediately followed in Russia.⁷

In the Ivanovka Estate near Tambov, Russia, Rachmaninoff completed his Thirteen Preludes, Op. 32 (1910) and *Études-Tableaux*, Op. 33 (1911).⁸ This estate, with its tranquil location in the country, permitted Rachmaninoff a relaxed environment ideal for composing. Thus, he did a significant amount of composition there. Other occasions, such as his vacations to Switzerland and Rome in 1912, allowed him similar relaxing environments and mental breaks. These moments of respite enabled him to increase productivity and work towards completion of works such as Choral Symphony: The Bells (1913), the first version of his Piano Sonata No. 2, Op. 36 (1913), and *Études-Tableaux*, Op. 39 (1916-1917).⁹

⁵ Ibid., 4.

⁶ Geoffrey Norris, "Rachmaninoff, Serge," In *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/50146> (accessed April 30, 2012).

⁷ Cunningham, 5.

⁸ Norris, "Rachmaninoff, Serge."

⁹ Cunningham, 5.

Upon publication of *Études-Tableaux* of Op. 33 in 1914 and Op. 39 in 1917, numbering issues arose between the études in both sets. This is due to Rachmaninoff's publication decisions. During the publication process of Op. 33, Rachmaninoff originally included nine études. However, the composer withdrew three of these études shortly before completion of publication in 1914, resulting in only six études being included in Op. 33. One of the withdrawn études, Op. 33, No. 4 in A minor, was later added to Op. 39 as No. 6 of that set. The other two études were published posthumously and are now often included in Op. 33 as No. 3 in C minor and No. 5 in D minor. Modern publications of the *Études-Tableaux*, Op. 33 will sometimes include the numbering of the original nine études in parenthesis as an aside in addition to the numbering of the current six.¹⁰

Following the fall of the Tsar and the rise of what would become the Soviet Union after the Russian Revolution, Rachmaninoff desired exit from the country, for he and his family would be subjected to questionable treatment, especially considering his aristocratic background. Following an unsuccessful attempt to be granted leave from the country in June 1917, Rachmaninoff was able to obtain visas later that year before Christmas due to an invitation to perform concerts in Stockholm. The composer immediately fled with his wife and two daughters. Facing tough financial times from leaving the majority of his belongings and wealth behind, Rachmaninoff moved to New York in November 1918 to improve his financial opportunities and make a living concertizing and recording piano rolls. He abandoned composition altogether once again.¹¹

¹⁰ Norris, "Rachmaninoff, Serge."

¹¹ Cunningham, 5.

In 1926, after an eight-year hiatus, Rachmaninoff returned to composition. He completed his Piano Concerto No. 4, Op. 40 that same year. His last solo piano composition, Variations on a Theme by Corelli, Op. 42 (1931), was completed in a French villa, as was the revision of his Piano Sonata No. 2, Op. 36, (1931). Other major works completed in the years following include his famous Variations on a Theme by Paganini for Piano and Orchestra, Op. 43 (1934); Symphony No. 3 Op. 44 (1935-1936, rev. 1938); and, his final composition, Symphonic Dances, Op. 45 (1940).¹²

Due to health complications, at his doctor's suggestion, Rachmaninoff moved to Beverly Hills. He and his wife became naturalized U.S. citizens in 1943, and he performed his last concert on February 17 in Knoxville, Tennessee. As Rachmaninoff's health took a turn for the worse, he was flown to Los Angeles and diagnosed with cancer. Rachmaninoff died on March 28, 1943.¹³

Rachmaninoff's compositional style may be characterized by a broad expressive range, characteristic and memorable lyricism, rich and dense orchestration, and often a serious and personal tone. His compositional output may be divided into three time periods: early works dating through the failure of Symphony No. 1 in D minor (Opp. 1-16), works from the Symphony No. 1's failure through the Russian Revolution (Opp. 17-39), and works following Rachmaninoff's departure for the United States (Opp. 40-45).¹⁴ As the change and evolution in Rachmaninoff's style is gradual in nature, the basis for division is simply for convenience and to establish markings of major personal changes in the composer's life. Early works such as his Trio Elegiaque, Op. 9 and Moments

¹² Ibid., 6.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Barrie Martyn, *Rachmaninoff: Composer, Pianist, Conductor* (Brookfield, Vermont : Gower Publications Co., 1990), 19-21.

Musicaux, Op. 16 exhibit lush melodies and harmonies with influences from Tchaikovsky and Rimsky-Korsokav. Works in the middle period demonstrate refinement of compositional writing over previous works with a tendency to carry specific musical moods, often as character pieces. This is evident when comparing works such as the Prelude in C-sharp minor Op. 3/2 to the Preludes of Op. 23 and Op. 32 and *Études-Tableaux*, Op. 33 and Op. 39. Works from the third period, from Piano Concerto No. 4, Op. 40 on, appear to be somewhat experimental, with less density in texture, less focus on crafting memorable melodies, and more emphasis on carrying the musical mood with development of texture and sonority.¹⁵

While Rachmaninoff's *Études-Tableaux* have considerable technical and musical challenges to overcome, most of them do not have the same singular focus as other étude sets, such as the Chopin études, Op. 10, and Op. 25. Instead, each piece in Rachmaninoff's *Études-Tableaux* demands the pianist to utilize a broad variety of techniques in order to successfully interpret a singular musical idea. As the title literally translates to "Study-Pictures," each étude in either set, Op. 33 and Op. 39, vividly paints a picture and mood. The composer's prelude sets Op. 23 and Op. 32 may have functioned as precursors to the *Études-Tableaux* with each designed to convey a particular image. Rachmaninoff even programmed *Études-Tableaux*, Op. 33 as "Prelude-Pictures" in his own performance of them in St. Petersburg on December 1911.¹⁶

In addition to characterization of pictures for each étude, Rachmaninoff may have intended to carry a singular character across an entire set. For instance, Op. 39 may have

¹⁵ Cunningham, 7.

¹⁶ Martyn, 230-233.

thematic ties to death; it was completed in 1916 shortly following his father's death.

Around this time, Rachmaninoff made inquiries and rhetorical questions regarding the concept of death in his letters written to his close friend, poet Marietta Shaginyan.

Suggestions of death themes also exist in melodic and harmonic content. For example, the outlining of the opening left-hand melodic material in Op. 39, No. 2 bears a striking resemblance to the *Dies Irae* theme. Furthermore, the Op. 39 set makes sparse use of major keys; only Op. 39, No. 9 is written in a major key (D major).¹⁷

The myriad of technical and musical difficulties encompassed within Rachmaninoff's *Études-Tableaux* commanded from me polish and stamina that was beyond my ability initially from the outset. For example, dense textures and chords spanned across the extremities of the keyboard consistently running at a moderate pace quickly wore down the stamina in my hands and arms. Opus. 39, No. 5 in E-flat minor is a strong example of this. The étude begins with a strong and dramatic tenor voice played mostly with the fourth and fifth fingers of the right hand, the weakest fingers, while the left hand and the remaining fingers of the right hand drive the piece with a constant flow of dense chords (see examples 1 and 2). Similar issues arise in *Études-Tableaux*, Op. 33, No. 9 (No. 6) in C-sharp minor. However, in this scenario, the large leaps within the dense texture encompass an even larger range of the piano (see examples 3 and 4).

¹⁷ Ibid., 271-272.

Appassionato
molto marcato

Example 1: Rachmaninoff, *Études-Tableaux*, Op. 39, No. 5 in E-flat minor, mm. 1-4.

The upper RH voice is played with that respective hand's weakest fingers, while the remaining fingers and the LH fill out the texture with dense chords. The LH also jumps to catch the E-flat bass note without losing tempo and drive.

Tempo I
pesante
molto marcato

Example 2: Rachmaninoff, *Études-Tableaux*, Op. 39, No. 5 in E-flat minor, mm. 53-54.

Notice the thick, filled in RH chords that stretch the hand out while playing *marcato* and *pesante*. Simultaneously with the RH, the LH jumps around catching the reappearance of the beginning tenor melody, the bass pedal tones, and additional filled in harmonies.

Example 3: Rachmaninoff, *Études-Tableaux*, Op. 33, No. 9 (No. 6) in C-sharp minor, mm.
23-27.

Both the LH and RH jump frequently playing thick chords at a brisk pace at a predominantly loud dynamic. There is not a single dynamic marking in the entire score softer than *mf*.

Example 4: Rachmaninoff, *Études-Tableaux*, Op. 33, No. 9 (No. 6) in C-sharp minor, m. 36.
The LH range is huge, spanning a reach of four octaves. Meanwhile, the RH simultaneously plays a top melody while jumping down to play accented *fff* octaves. These octaves form a descending chromatic line in counterpoint to the soprano line.

When approaching such thick chordal passages spanning the utmost extremities of the piano found in examples 1-4, I found in lessons and in practice that I most improved through slow and deliberate playing with strict adherence to tempo, phrasing, and markings while ensuring that my fingers depressed to the bottom of the keys for every chord and note. However, I had to take care to depress the keys with my entire arm and body weight and not just my forearms or wrists. Not only did my body weight create a more full bodied and ringing sound, but playing only with my forearms led to severe fatigue and pain, which would in turn prohibit practice for extended periods of time. Practicing hands separately while one hand experienced fatigue mitigated this issue somewhat, and it also presented me the opportunity to focus on improving the technique of a singular arm in an isolated fashion.

When faced with isolated practice of a single hand, I played slowly with deep focus to fine tune accuracy, clarity, and management of chordal texture through regroupings of rhythm, maintaining firm fingers without holding tension, and critical listening and adjustment of voices. In the instance of example 2, when practicing only the right hand, I maintained a slow and consistent tempo. I would stop on the first eighth note of each triplet for a value equivalent to one beat, then resume in time for the other two eighth notes and stop on the first eighth-note triplet of the second beat. I would continue this pattern throughout the passage. Once I felt confident with this exercise, I would switch to stopping for one beat on the second and third eighth note with the same pattern. While practicing and imagining this grouping in my mind, I made sure not to accent the beat I stopped on and played as quietly and evenly as possible, voicing the top and depressing to the bottom of the keys. Within about one week, clarity, textural coherence,

and accuracy improved many times over and raised my ability to manage dense, chordal textures.

On the other hand, when faced with dense passages at a fast tempo, I required a slightly different approach. Opus. 39, No. 3 in F-sharp minor was a prime example of this issue. While the piece also has a dense texture of frequent double-note passages, playing with respect to the *Allegro molto* tempo marking made it difficult for my fingers to speak clearly (see example 5). Initially, I approached the passagework with the idea that depressing the keys just far enough to make the note sound while preparing for approaching material as quickly as possible would allow for quicker movement and be the most efficient approach. But, this approach backfired and led to a sound that had no substance and conviction. Unspoken notes became far too frequent. Furthermore, I was using mostly large arm movements to play these quick passages, which led to fatigue and obscurity of precision.

The image shows a musical score for Rachmaninoff's Études-Tableaux, Op. 39, No. 3 in F-sharp minor, measures 1-7. The tempo is marked 'Allegro molto'. The score is in 3/8 time and features a dense texture of double-note passages. The right hand (RH) plays rapid double-note passages, while the left hand (LH) plays large chordal and double-note jumps. The score includes dynamic markings such as 'mf' and 'f'.

Example 5: Rachmaninoff, *Études-Tableaux*, Op. 39, No. 3 in F-sharp minor, mm. 1-7.

Note the quick double note passages in the RH and large chordal and double note jumps in the LH.

Example 6: Rachmaninoff, *Études-Tableaux*, Op. 39, No. 3 in F-sharp minor, mm. 134-137.

In practice sessions, double note passages such as in this example required not only regroupings of rhythms, but also individual playing of each voice with regroupings and proper fingerings to enhance top voice clarity, overall balance, and control.

In the case of this étude, the solution was not only to ensure playing to the bottom of each key, but also to raise my awareness and efficiency of when it was appropriate to use more or less finger, wrist, and arm muscles. In order to fine tune my awareness, I needed to play up to tempo in extremely isolated groups, literally starting with one to two double notes at a time and eventually working my way up to larger groupings. For instance, in the opening right-hand passage of example 5, I began learning the piece with slow practice reminiscent of the techniques in Op. 39, No. 5 and Op. 33, No. 9 (No. 6). Although helpful with accuracy, it did little to prepare my hands and arms for the brisk *Allegro molto* tempo. Lessons with my instructor opened me to practicing the right-hand opening passage by itself, starting by playing only the initial right hand F-sharp octaves until I was happy with the sound. In order to acquire a quick, clear, and accented *forte* sound, I needed to use my arm weight and release it immediately following depression of the F-sharp octaves while voicing the top note. Letting go of tension is crucial; if the tension is not released, the double notes from mm. 1-2 would inevitably suffer due to loss

of mobility from holding over the firm contraction in my hands of the first notes. Once I was able to keep my hand relaxed after the first octave, I moved on to the following double-note passages. I started playing only the G-sharp octaves with the goal of attaining a light yet clear sound. This was accomplished by using almost exclusively wrist and hand motion as effortlessly and efficiently as possible while voicing the top. Then, I would add one more double note to the G-sharp octaves up to tempo with the same adherence to sound quality and technique. The cycle would repeat in an additive process until I reached the end of the sixteenth-note passage in m. 2.

To bolster clarity and rhythmic control further, I was also instructed to practice in groupings dictated by comfortable hand positions. In the same right-hand passagework of example 5, I would play only the first two double notes up to tempo, octave G-sharps and the F-sharp to C-sharp fourth, and stop for the equivalent of one beat on the second double note while holding all the notes I played. Then, I would add the next grouping (octave F-sharps and the C-sharp to E third) to the exercise and stop for a beat on every second note. I repeated the process until every grouping was included with absolute clarity. Finally, I would challenge myself by reversing the stopped note to the first note of each group or add more or less notes to each group. As I continued this practice regime for remaining passages in the *étude*, particularly mm. 134-142, I achieved a level of polish I previously held as highly improbable for me to attain (see example 6). As this was an *étude* I felt was far out of my reach to perform publically, I was delighted to discover that I could program it into the recital.

Despite these two intense technical challenges evident in Op. 33, No. 9 (No. 6); Op. 39, No. 3; and Op. 39, No. 5, the stamina needed to carry musical coherence and

prevent redundant phrasing often seemed more difficult. This was true for Op. 39, No. 2 in A minor and Op. 33, No. 3 in C minor. While the notes were not difficult to accurately learn in comparison to the other three etudes, it was challenging to keep phrases from sounding too similar or imbalanced. Opus. 39, No. 2 was by far the most demanding in this regard due to the slow tempo in combination with being the longest in time duration of any of Rachmaninoff's etudes. Frequent returns of the opening thematic material and the necessity to depict a singular musical mood throughout the piece made maintaining a fluid and interesting longer overall line problematic (see example 7). Opus 33, No. 3 also challenged me with structural issues, especially with regard to balancing dynamics (see example 8).

The image shows a musical score for Rachmaninoff's Études-Tableaux, Op. 39, No. 2 in A minor, measures 1-8. The score is in 3/4 time and marked 'Lento assai'. It features a right hand (RH) with a melodic line of fourths and fifths, and a left hand (LH) with a triplet-based accompaniment. Dynamics include 'p' (piano) and 'poco cresc.' (poco crescendo).

Example 7: Rachmaninoff, *Études-Tableaux*, Op. 39, No. 2 in A minor, mm. 1-8.

The RH fourths and fifths serve as melodic and thematic material that frequently recurs. The first eighth note of every LH triplet comes together to form a melody that is difficult to shape in a musically interesting manner due to its stagnancy (with the exception of the D sharp and the E in m. 8, only the three notes of A-B-C confined within a minor third are used for LH melodic material); longer lines become essential through imagining larger phrases and are vital to delivering a musically convincing performance of this etude.

Grave

Example 8: Rachmaninoff, *Études-Tableaux*, Op. 33, No. 3 in C minor, mm. 1-8.

Special attention to dynamic architecture was the main point of concern here; I would often give too much volume and emphasis to the *f* in m. 3, which would take away from the impact of the climactic *ff* in m. 8.

The solution suggested by my instructor in lesson was to imagine the piece with clear musical intentions for each moment and to organize it in one large structural hierarchy. Reviewing mm. 103-114 of Op. 39, No. 2 in lesson demonstrated this need most clearly to me (see example 9). Measure 103 marks the return of thematic material from the beginning of the etude and is repeated three times in a progressively quieter and more intimate manner, from the initial *mp* marking of the first repetition in m. 103 to *p* in

m. 107 and finally to *pp* in m. 112. The first time I played this passage in lesson, I began the first statement in m. 103 too softly, which detracted from the increasingly softer and more intimate character of the second and third repetitions. Therefore, I was instructed to play only the third statement. Then, I was directed to play only the first one in m. 103. The goal was to adjust the levels of intimacy and dynamics between the first and third thematic statements by repeating them in alternation until they were musically and structurally balanced. Once satisfactory progress was made, I was subsequently instructed to play through larger passages containing two of the three thematic statements while keeping the structural hierarchy in mind. For instance, I needed to take care in the third repetition not to diminish to the point where the line would no longer be audible or possible to coherently phrase. Finally, I played the three repetitions in their entirety, beginning in the retransitioning material the few measures leading into the first thematic statement in m. 103. This manner of practice greatly improved my structural awareness. Therefore, I applied this technique to other sections, such as mm. 1-8 from Op. 33, No. 3 (see example 8). This precise attention to structure enveloped my musical soul with a rush of gratification; the extra effort was essential in separating a good performance from a truly remarkable and memorable one indicative of the highest level of musical polish.

The image shows a musical score for Rachmaninoff's Études-Tableaux, Op. 39, No. 2 in A minor, measures 103-114. The score is in 3/4 time and consists of three systems of piano and right-hand staves. The first system starts with "Tempo I" and "mp". The second system has "p" and "dim.". The third system has "pp", "poco più vivo", and "p". The right hand plays a melodic line with slurs and ties, while the left hand plays a steady eighth-note accompaniment.

Example 9: Rachmaninoff: *Études-Tableaux*, Op. 39, No. 2 in A minor, mm. 103-114.

Careful attention to dynamics and structural hierarchy in this passage led to production of beautiful sounds, especially at the third repetition at *pp* in m. 112. All sounds and phrasing must be relative to others; if everything is *pp* or *ff* or has the exact same sound quality, then **nothing is special.**

Maintaining intense and consistent daily practice for anywhere from five to eight hours a day in the months leading up to my Master's Recital program was difficult and sometimes discouraging when I felt like I was not accomplishing the goals I established each day. However, sheer determination to do the repertoire musical justice and prevent myself from crumbling before reaching the goal kept me going towards the eventual successful performance of my Master's Recital.

Indeed, the success of my recital has pushed my limits as a musician, and the fruits of my labor are bountiful. First, technically, significant advancements in dexterity, strength, efficiency, and increased awareness of the movements of my arm, wrist, fingers, and finger digits has allowed me to tire far less during practice and performance, greatly reducing the risk of injury and fatigue. Second, musically, increased awareness in structure and hierarchy of elements such as dynamics and character now allow me to reach higher levels of musical maturity in performance. Third, my increased efficiency with practicing has led to superior time management. Previous approaches of mindlessly learning notes and repeating passages with progressively diminishing returns have been transformed; I have revised my methodology to actively isolate problematic passages, analyze issues, and conjure up the best solutions through appropriate practice exercises.

Due to my thorough enjoyment of Rachmaninoff's *Études-Tableaux* and the benefits to overcoming the challenges present in this repertoire, I am inspired to learn the remaining etudes in Op. 33 and Op. 39 and potentially make them my dissertation topic in doctoral study. As I spend the next few years mastering each etude and building my skills, I can keep close track of my practicing habits and improvements. Perhaps I could then compile my findings into an interactive DVD that would contain clips of me physically demonstrating appropriate solutions to technical challenges and different possibilities for phrasing certain passages. I am hopeful that this research would be a valuable reference for developing pianists. Following completion of this project, I would be confident that my skills would be polished enough to master and pedagogically assess nearly any repertoire I encounter as I shape my future career towards the path of university study, teaching, and performance.

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