



The Performing Style of Alexander Scriabin

By Anatole Leikin

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When Alexander Nikolayevich Scriabin's music was performed during his lifetime, it always elicited ecstatic responses from the listeners. Wilhelm Gericke, conductor of the Vienna opera, rushed backstage after one of Scriabin's concerts and fell on his knees crying, 'It's genius, it's genius...'. After the composer's death in 1915, however, his music steadily lost the captivating appeal it once held. The main reason for this drastic change in the listeners' attitude is an enormous gap existing between the printed scores of Scriabin's music and the way the composer himself played his works. Apparently, what Scriabin's audiences heard at the time was significantly different from, and vastly superior to, modern performances that are based primarily on published scores. Scriabin recorded nineteen of his compositions on the Hupfeld and Welte-Mignon reproducing pianos in 1908 and 1910, respectively. Full score transcriptions of the piano rolls, which are included in the book, provide many substantial features of Scriabin's performance: exact pitches and their timing against each other, rhythms, tempo fluctuations, articulation, dynamics and essential pedal application. Using these transcriptions and other historical documents as the groundwork for his research, Anatole Leikin explores Scriabin's performing style within the broader context of Romantic performance practice.

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Editorial Review

Review

'Carefully written, filled with interesting sidelights, and rich in detail, this book includes an excellent bibliography and three interesting photo/figures... Highly recommended.' Choice '... the best of the piano roll transcriptions do throw interesting light on his practices and enable modern musicians to understand better the immense following he enjoyed as a pianist. One of the most striking points of comparison is the discrepancy between the published scores and the piano roll recordings, the latter being far more complex than the music from which modern pianists play... [a] thorough, groundbreaking work... This study deserves to be read by pianists, critics and musicologists who take a serious interest in the Romantic tradition.'

Slavonic and East European Review '... fascinating book... Leikin's commentaries on the nine short pieces and two sonatas presented in this way are a model of detailed observation and sensitive commentary, picking their way through a minefield of possible objections and alternative explanations.' Music and Letters

About the Author

Anatole Leikin is Professor of Music at the University of California, Santa Cruz. His scholarly research, published worldwide in various musicological journals and essay collections, explores such topics as Romantic performance practice; early tonality; structural and hermeneutic analysis; the music of Chopin, Scriabin, Rachmaninov, Shostakovich, and Granados. Professor Leikin regularly performs as a solo and chamber pianist, fortepianist, and harpsichordist. He has also recorded piano works of Scriabin, Chopin, and Cope, and serves as an editor for The Complete Chopin - A New Critical Edition..

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