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Nom/Name: **Alexey Shafirov**

Classe de/Class of: **Prof. Ilya Poletaev**

*These program notes are written by the student performing and are presented by the student in partial fulfillment of the requirements of their course.*

*Ces notes de programme sont écrites par l'étudiant-interprète et sont présentées en tant que réalisation partielle des critères de leur cours.*

## **Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750)**

### **Prelude and Fugue in B-flat minor from WTC Book II, BWV 891**

Bach's art was received with criticism by the proponents of the new homophonic style. While his many works for church and chamber were seldom heard, the *Well-Tempered Clavier* attained canonical status before it was published. This set of studies had never been forgotten and thus was never “rediscovered” alongside other Bach's compositions after Mendelssohn's revival of *St. Matthew Passion* in 1819. The set of forty-eight preludes and fugues features compositional techniques and harmonic and polyphonic structures that keep being analyzed to this day from a variety of theoretical perspectives—formal, Schenkerian, and topical—to name just a few.

The Prelude is written in a trio-sonata texture within a ternary form. The five-measure subject suits the somber B-flat minor key in its melancholic, tragic, *cantabile* melody. The fugue is one of the longest and most imposing within the *WTC*. According to Raymond Monelle's essay “Life and Death in a fugue of Bach,” the fugue's subject is a solemn minor-mode *sarabande*, and as such it generates a chromatic countersubject. Monelle's further claims that unlike in most sarabandes, the swing of the dance is missing in this fugue. Bach avoids combinatorial possibilities manipulating the theme, and instead, presents the subject in a series of close canons. Such are the 5th, 6th, 11th, 12th, 13th, 14th, and 15th appearance of the subject; the 15th and the last—involving all four parts.

## **Franz Schubert (1797–1828)**

### **Fantasie in C major “Wanderer”, D. 760**

While the Enlightenment is associated with reason and sociability, it was also the era when Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel introduced the death of God, when the idea of *Sturm und Drang* dove deeper into human

expression, and the concept of “wandering” entered German poetry. This early Romantic image of the *Wanderer* embodied the dualistic world picture that emerged from the collapse of older certainties, and was reflected in a whole set of archetypes in art, poetry, as well as instrumental and vocal music.

“Pure landscape in paint—or in verse or prose—now attempted to render the sense of natural, not human, history, the visible evidence of past time in the personal sensation...The picturesque landscape with ruins of the eighteenth century was replaced by landscape as itself a progressive ruin—the process of corruption and renewal of Nature.” — Charles Rosen, *The Romantic Generation*

Schubert’s Fantasy in C major was composed in 1822, same year he composed his *Unfinished* Symphony. Often free in form and improvisatory in style, the *Fantasia* style appeared in music by C.P.E. Bach, J.S. Bach, Mozart and Beethoven. In his fantasia, Schubert is bound to even less conservative structural idioms, creating this four-movement largescale work. The *Wanderer’s Fantasie* is based on a single rhythmic pattern and a melodic line taken from his song *Der Wanderer*, written on the poem by *Schmidt von Lubeck*. The motivic transformation of these two musical ideas establishes an organic thematic unity, even within four movements of four distinct characters, sonorities, and instrumentations.

Despite many structural resemblances, the first movement differs from the traditional *sonata form* in the key relations between the themes, but also because the development leads straight into the *Adagio* movement. The slow movement presents a theme and variations, intermittently passing from C-sharp minor to C-sharp major. Some variations end with a stormy transitional material that leads to the next ones. The last transitional section, which is also the dramatic climax, arguably of the whole work, leads to the surprising beginning of the *Scherzo-Trio* third movement in A-flat major. The lively and dance-like *Scherzo* is derived directly from the first movement’s main theme. It features alterations between tumultuous waves of symphonic *arpeggios* and a *waltz*-like dotted style. The *Trio* is based on the first movement’s third theme and, therefore, is more intimate and lyrical, resembling chamber music. The *Scherzo* returns and continues into the next movement through a challenging transition. Written in a *rondo* form, the *Finale* movement starts fugally, granting it a learned style and almost vocal texture. It soon assumes a virtuosic character, leading to a rousing coda. Despite its technical difficulty, the keyboard writing avoids the empty virtuosity of many Schubert’s contemporaries’ fantasies.

## Alexander Scriabin (1871–1915) Piano Sonata No. 10, Op. 70

Alexander Scriabin assumed a leading role in the transition from the Romantic period to the avant-garde. Influenced by Chopin and Liszt in his early period, Scriabin evolved into daring experimentations that stand alongside those of Schoenberg, Bartok, Stravinsky, and Debussy. The debate over what exactly makes Scriabin's music so recognizable, be it his pitch organization, modal quality, transpositional invariance, or specific types of scales and chords,—is still ongoing. In Scriabin's late works, all these exceptional qualities are inspired by Scriabin's mystical and philosophical preoccupations. As we know, Scriabin was intrigued by the idea of the spirit leaving the *physical* world and entering the *cosmic* one.

Scriabin's last sonata was completed about the same time as the Eighth and Ninth sonatas in the summer of 1913. This sonata is considered difficult to comprehend due to the complex polyphonic textures and superimposed motives, especially because all these involve luminous trills at almost all times. The structural boundaries of the *sonata form*, however, are crystal clear, so the performer faces the challenge of maneuvering within this framework. The analysis of the sonata reveals that the main motivic building blocks that comprise both main and subordinate themes are present already within the first four measures of the introduction. A meticulous process of thematic transformation creates a cohesive, whole, compressed, almost Beethovenian, *sonata form* movement. The use of philosophical indications such as *très doux et pur, avec élan, lumineux, vibrant, crystalline, avec une joyeuse exaltation*, grant this piece its philosophical narrative of dematerialization with radiant, ecstatic, and languorous emotions.

*“My Tenth Sonata is a sonata of insects. Insects are born from the sun...they are the sun's kisses...How unified world-understanding is when you look at things this way. In science all is dis-unified, not made into one...all is analysis, not synthesis.”* — Alexander Scriabin

## Arno Babadjanian (1921–1983) Violin Sonata in B-flat Minor

The accomplished Armenian composer, pianist, and pedagogue, Arno Harutyunovich Babadjanian has blazed new paths in twentieth-century music. Babadjanian occupied a worthy place in the constellation of many Soviet pianists, and his virtuosic compositions stand alongside those of Aram Khachaturyan and

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Sergei Rachmaninoff. Babadjanian's unique style reveals influences from Armenian folk music, Romanticism, Impressionism, Neoclassicism, jazz, and serialism.

Babadjanian was born in Yerevan, Armenia USSR to a musical family. He played the piano at the age of seven and composed before he was fifteen. He acquired his musical education in piano and composition at the Yerevan Conservatory, the Gnesin School of Music, and the Moscow Conservatory. During WWII he was evacuated to Yerevan, where he organized army amateur shows from 1941 to 1945. Being subject to the Soviet regime, Babadjanian's style changed according to the encouragements and demands of Soviet theorists and composers. Similar fluctuations in style are associated with Dmitry Shostakovich, the dedicatee of Babadjanian's violin sonata, and also his colleague and friend, who helped build Babadjanian's reputation as a major figure in the Soviet Union's musical life. After being appointed to the faculty of the Yerevan Conservatory, Babadjanian continued to produce major classical works, but also popular songs, music for jazz bands, and movie soundtracks.

Written in 1959, the Violin Sonata breaks away from the conventional use of folk music and speaks in a fresh and daring manner. At this point in his career, Babadjanian became more interested in twentieth-century compositional techniques such as serialism. The first movement is in Sonata-allegro form with an introduction. Both main and subordinate themes are of clear Armenian folk music origin; but the dark and threatening color of the first and the melancholic quality of the second, along with the employed compositional techniques, immediately associate this composition with Shostakovich's writing.

The second movement is in ternary form. The A section introduces a dichotomy between a beautiful melody and a sarcastic accompaniment. They interplay with each other with a certain awkwardness, suspending time as if trying to keep each other distracted. As soon as the A section sets the scene for complete calmness and stability, the incredibly fast tempo of the B section's light figurations sounds like a fast-forward replay, skimming through information, having no time to memorize what is being read. Time runs out and the threatening force from the first movement wakes up sensing that something is wrong. But the thieves have escaped, letting the awkward A section patrol again in the silence of the night.

The last movement starts with a violent folk tune that repeats itself with gradating levels of intensity. The *perpetuum mobile* alterations between 6/8, 5/8, and 4/8 meter continue into the subordinate theme, where the folk tune is reincarnated within an atonal setting. After volcanic eruptions reminiscent of the first movement, this time, we spend some time in B-flat major before B-flat minor puts a tragic end to this story.