

SERGEI RACHMANINOFF'S PERSONAL STYLIZED RHYTHMIC FORMULA

Annotation. *The subject of the article is presented by the specific method of fixation of compositional authorship in a musical work. In the annotated article the musical legacy of Sergei Vasilyevich Rachmaninoff is researched in the aspect of segregation and individualization in it of certain constant elements of the composer's musical language, which in an invariant or a somewhat modified way migrate from one musical composition to another. Bearing in mind such personal stylistic emblems of Rachmaninoff as the "Rachmaninoff subdominant" and the Dies Irae motive, the author of the article focuses on a personal specific resource of this composer's musical rhythm. The article's methodology is presented as an aggregate of analytic and synthesizing methods fundamental to musical scholarship with a specially active application of comparative procedures. The conclusion that is presented in the annotated article is that Sergei Vasilyevich Rachmaninoff is in a certain sense obsessed by the declarative fixation of his compositional authorship, the idea of a ubiquitous implementation of the emblem studies of its individual style. The circumstance that on the rhythmic plane this directedness of the Russian musician appears, in all likelihood, even more explicitly and insistently than in harmony and melody, is seen as extraordinary. The novelty of the article is that it contains information about a previously unknown stylistic rhythmic emblem of Rachmaninoff, discovered during the course of research, one that spans and permeates through his compositions that are the most representative in the repertoire.*

Keywords: *Rachmaninoff, musical style, musical language, rhythm, stylistic constants, symbols, emblems, the Rachmaninoff rhythmic formula, fixation of compositional authorship, musical phenomenon.*

The world of Rachmaninoff's rhythm is remarkably immense, and its historical connections are most diverse. Thereby, the composer was faced with the aim of preserving the unity of his style. This problem was solved to a considerable degree by his preferential approach towards musical phenomena of the past, among which the composer flawlessly discovered musical elements that were "stylistically kindred" to him. Nonetheless, while making avid use of stable, historically established rhythmic formations, upon analogy the composer could not but create something original, which would represent in itself a succinct and laconic symbol of individual rhythmical style — a sign with which Rachmaninoff would be able to convey in the guise of his epistles for new generations. For this reason the integrity and singularity of Rachmaninoff's rhythm determines to a great degree the emergence in his music of individual rhythmical formulas, integral rhythmical formations that possess in themselves certain expressive and semantic meanings and present the rhythmical image of the composer's music, just as the "Rachmaninoff subdominant" contains in a concentrated form the intonational singularity of his harmony.

An original rhythmic construction created by the composer exists, one that may be found in most of his works. Its characteristic brightly individual tinge makes it possible to describe this construction

as Rachmaninoff's personal rhythmic formula, one that presented an important stylistic constant of his music. The extensive incorporation of this rhythmical formula in Rachmaninoff's music makes it possible to discern its generalizing, colligating significance for the composer's rhythmic style, which generally combines nobly sounding lyricism with a discipline of feelings, concentration and unhurriedness with dynamics and will. The rhythmic formula has been discerned in its basic form and in expanded form, whether explicit or concealed, possessing various different expressive aims.

The basic version of Rachmaninoff's rhythmic formula contains its constructive core (Fig. 1).

The concrete appearance of the rhythmic formula may alter, but the correlation of its durations remains the same.

EXAMPLE 1

In its expanded guise, the rhythmic formula demonstrates itself in such cases, when the composer additionally adds to its left side a primary independent rhythmic unit (Fig. 2).

EXAMPLE 2

The range of application of the rhythmic formula, either in its primary or expanded versions, is rather broad — in manifests itself in completions of melodic



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3

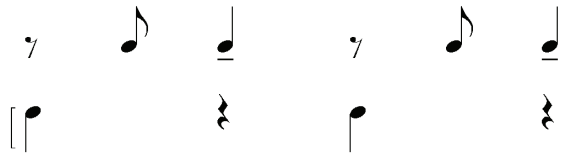


Fig. 4

Example 1

<p>a Allegro moderato</p>	<p><i>Symphony No.2, First Movement, Primary Theme</i></p>
<p>б Allegro vivace</p>	<p><i>Ibid. Finale, first episode, 4 measures before rehearsal number 60</i></p>
<p>в Allegro vivace</p>	<p><i>Ibid. Subsidiary Theme</i></p>
<p>г Maestoso</p>	<p><i>Piano Concerto No.2, Coda of Finale, rehearsal number 66</i></p>
<p>д Alla breve</p>	<p><i>Piano Concerto No.3, Finale, after rehearsal number 66</i></p>
<p>е Cantabile</p>	<p><i>Piano Concerto No.4, Finale, 7th measure after rehearsal number 51</i></p>

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themes, in beginnings of new sections of themes, or in developmental constructions of the middle sections.

An important factor strengthening the stability of the rhythmic formula is served by its characteristic feature of penetration into diverse manifestations of metrical functions (most often, it appears in even-numbered metrical indications).

The rhythmic formula frequently assumes upon itself the functions of the constructive foundation for various diverse rhythmical constructions, which upon

first impression do not have anything in common with it, presenting themselves as models. Examples of this include: Prelude, opus 23, No.2; Symphony No. 3, First Movement, Primary Theme; the "Vocalise"; Piano Sonata No.2, Subsidiary Theme; Piano Concerto No.3, Second Movement, three measures before rehearsal number 32, Piano Concerto No.4, Finale, theme in D-flat major; Etude-Tableau, opus 39, No.9; "Oh, Cease thy Singing, Maiden Fair," opus 3, No.4; "Lilacs," opus 21, No.5.

Example 2

a *Moderato* *Piano Concerto No.2, First Movement, Primary Theme, 4 measures before rehearsal number 4*

b *Moderato* *Ibid. Rehearsal number 1*

b *Tempo di Minuetto* *Prelude, opus 23 No.3, Middle Section*

c *Allegro* *Prelude 32, No.12, Coda*

d *Allegro* *Ibid.*

e *Allegro moderato* *Symphony No.2, First Movement, conclusive cadence of the Primary Theme*

nc *Allegro molto* *Ibid. Main Theme of the Scherzo*

3 *Allegro ma non troppo* *Ibid. episode, 6 measures after rehearsal number 29*

u *Allegro ma non troppo* *Piano Concerto No.3, First Movement, Subsidiary Theme*

K *Scherzando* *Ibid. Finale, Episode*

n *A tempo come prima* *rit.* *Ibid*

m *Vivace* *Ibid. Finale, Coda, 6 measures after rehearsal number 69*

The image displays a musical score with eight staves, each featuring a tempo or mood marking and a corresponding source reference. The staves are as follows:

- Staff 1:** Tempo marking: *Un poco meno mosso*. Source: *Ibid*.
- Staff 2:** Tempo marking: *Grave*. Source: *Ibid*.
- Staff 3:** Tempo marking: *Etude-Tableau, opus 33 No.6, developing fragment*.
- Staff 4:** Tempo marking: *[Allegro agitato]*. Source: *Piano Sonata No.2, First Movement, Development Section*.
- Staff 5:** Tempo marking: *A tempo meno mosso*. Source: *Piano Concerto No.4, Finale, rehearsal number 51*.
- Staff 6:** Tempo marking: *[Marziale]*. Source: *Rhapsody on a Theme by Paganini 5th measure after rehearsal number 68*.
- Staff 7:** Tempo marking: *Allegro moderato*. Source: *Symphony No.3 First Movement, Primary Theme*.
- Staff 8:** Tempo marking: *Allegro*. Source: *Ibid. Finale, 4 measures after 73*.
- Staff 9:** Tempo marking: *Non allegro*. Source: *Symphonic Dances, First Movement, rehearsal number 20*.

Example 3a

Symphony No. 2, First Movement, Primary Theme

Example 3b

Piano Concerto No. 2, First Movement, Primary Theme

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The composer's remarkable adherence to his rhythmic formula induces the researcher to study with great attention its inner construction, and to disclose its intriguing features. First of all, it must be taken into account that the character of sound of the rhythmic formula may change in each concrete case of its use. An emphatically energetic, rhetorical type of exposition exists alongside with a more restrained and balanced variety, making it possible to discern in it the presence of various rhythmical prototypes. The extroverted type and character of sound of the rhythmic formula demonstrates one of the most important principles of Rachmaninoff's musical thinking — the historical penetration and supra-national branching of the rhythmic roots. In the present case, there is a particularly discernible influence of contrapuntal syncopation, carrying, as will be shown later, an important function in the rhythmic aspect of the composer's music. Musical constructions greatly resembling and approaching Rachmaninoff's rhythmic formula can often be found in the themes and contrapuntal melodic lines of those compositions which are polyphonically saturating.

The distinctness of the smooth prolongation is not lost even in those cases when the position of the rhythmic formula in regards to the barline is changed and the effect of the direct syncopation disappears:

The important dynamic impulse of Rachmaninoff's rhythmic formula consists of the accented principle of the "reflected strong beat." (Fig. 4).

From the perspective of the measure system the rhythmic formula reveals adduction of the motive, ranging from discrepancy with the measure, to rhythmical correspondence with it, the latter presenting resolution of the rhythmical dissonance to a consonance.

Despite its relative brevity and simplicity, the rhythmic formula shows itself as a complex, intricately organized organism, affected by the activity of diverse musical laws, providing great amplitude to the com-

posers work. It possesses such a brilliantly individual sound, that its "chance" appearance in the works of other composers endows their music with a tinge of Rachmaninoff's style. Thereby, Rachmaninoff's rhythmic formula pertains to a number of the composer's active stylistic features on which his individual musical manner is based.

The rhythmic formula holds a special position in a category of leitmotifs in Rachmaninoff's music. While the composer's fascination with leit-harmony at the end, turned out to be a passing episode in his musical legacy, the rhythmic formula never departed from the sphere of his attention up to his very last work — the "Symphonic Dances."

Rachmaninoff's turn to the system of recurring leit-elements of his music, particularly, to the rhythmic formula, was in all likelihood conditioned by the profound necessities of the composer's musical nature — to show the unlimited possibilities of his artistic fantasy, even in those cases when it turned out to be "fettered" by certain frameworks. In truth, while adhering in the strictest possible way to the classical-romantic norms of harmony and tonality, the composer created in his music a "fantasy on one chord" (the "Rachmaninoff subdominant"), demonstrating an unlimited number of variants of the connection of this construction with other chords and inner altering transformations. Making use of the simplest secundal and tertial intervallic intonations and progressions, akin to the theme of *Dies Irae*, the composer achieves a bright distinctness of the sound of his melodic and thematic material. Stemming from a single rhythmic formula, Rachmaninoff intonates it in different ways, endowing it with diverse image-related and emotional interpretations, many of them providing discrepancies with each other. There remains only one question, principal in its importance: if Rachmaninoff throughout all his life conveyed one very concise rhythmic model into the

sphere of his music, was it not, in addition, formulated by some kind of inherent words? The answer may be given by citing a curious song, presenting an address to a colleague — “A Letter to Konstantin Stanislavsky from Rachmaninoff,” set to his own text. The end of this “address” is highlighted by a musical-verbal signature: “Vash, Sergei Rahmaninov” [“Yours, Sergei Rachmaninoff”]. These words contain the aforementioned rhythmic formula, albeit, starting not on the upbeat, but on the strong beat. So, after all, the rhythmic formula turned out to be the composer’s own monogram! Various different versions of the formula that begin on the strong beat can also be traced in the composer’s music, for instance in Symphony No.2, First Movement, Primary Theme, as well as in the Piano Concerto No.2, First Movement, Primary Theme.

EXAMPLE 3A, B

As for the formula with the upbeat, its text underlay could be deciphered as: “Ves’ vash, Sergei Rahmaninov” [Yours entirely, Sergei Rachmaninoff], or, otherwise, in the shortened version of: “Sergei Rahmaninov” [“Sergei Rachmaninoff”]. In any case, the principle of

the composer’s monogram makes itself discernible here, albeit, not in the form of a melody — such as BACH or DSCH,— but as a stably organized rhythm.

The observations expounded here were presented for the first time in the author’s diploma work “Ritmika Rahmaninova v yeyo istoricheskikh svyazyakh” [“Rachmaninoff’s Rhythm in its Historical Connections”] (Moscow Conservatory, 1985). Valentina Kholopova demonstrated the given rhythmic formula (citing the aforementioned work) with the text underlay of “Sergei Vasil’ [yev]ich Rachmaninoff” in her book “Muzyka kak vid iskusstva” [“Music as an Art”] in connection with the issue of canonic models (Moscow, 1990, 1994, St. Petersburg, 2000, 2002). In 2006, G. Ginzburg’s article “Leitmotiv ‘Ya’ v muzyke Rahmaninova” [“The Leitmotif of ‘I’ in Rachmaninoff’s Music”] (published in the collection “S. Rahmaninov na perelome stoletiy” [“Sergei Rachmaninoff at the Turn of the Centuries”], Kharkov, pp.101–105) put forward the idea of the selfsame rhythmic formula of Rachmaninoff, albeit, not of a solely rhythmic character, but more of a melodic type. As it appears, coincidences of thought expounded at a distance from each other testify to the truth...

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