



Five Preludes Op. 74

by Alexander Scriabin

Edited by Peter Billam

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Five Preludes, Alexander Scriabin op.74, 1914

The following analysis is largely distilled from Manfred Kelkel's book *Alexandre Scriabine: Sa vie, l'ésotérisme et le langage musical dans son oeuvre*, Éditions Honoré Champion, 7 quai Malaquais, Paris, 1978. Kelkel's analysis seems to me investigative and insightful; previous analyses seem more procrustean.

Scriabin's Six, Seven, Eight, Nine, and Ten-note scales

Danilewitsch quotes Scriabin: "my melody is a decomposed harmony, and my harmony is condensed melody." The harmony notes are not a subset, selected for lower tension, of the melody notes; they are all of them. The euphony desirable in longer notes is attained by careful spacing; this in turn encourages some arpeggiation in performance, which further blurs the border between the harmonic and melodic realms. In the following they're called scales, but they could also be called chords.

The Six-note scales : (op.60 ...) Scriabin uses two kinds of six-note scale: one derived from a whole-tone scale by raising one of the notes, i.e. 2+2+2+3+1+2 semitones; the second by also lowering the opposite note (three away) from the raised one, i.e. 1+3+2+3+1+2. I will call them **6A** and **6B** respectively.

The Seven-note scales : (op.62 ...) Scriabin uses two kinds of seven-note scale: one derived from a whole-tone scale by splitting one of the notes into two, i.e. 2+2+2+1+2+1+2 semitones; the second by also lowering the opposite note (three away) from the split one, i.e. 1+3+2+1+2+1+2. I will call them **7A** and **7B** respectively.

The Eight-note scale : (op.55, 64...) Scriabin used the scale 1+2+1+2+1+2+1+2 semitones, which repeats every three semitones, has only three distinct transpositions and was later adopted by Messiaen. The eight-note chord *D# E F# G A Bb c db*, for example, I will call **8 (D#,E)**. In op.74 nos.3 and 5 the eight-note chord is used to end a section.

The Nine-note scales : (op.67 ...) Scriabin uses two, perhaps three kinds of nine-note scale: one derived from the eight-note scale by adding one of the missing notes, i.e. 1+2+1+2+1+1+1+1+2, which has twelve transpositions; the second using 2+1+1+2+1+1+2+1+1 semitones which repeats every four semitones and has only four distinct transpositions and was later adopted by Messiaen; the third with the lower half-octave in tones and the upper completely chromatic i.e. 2+2+2+1+1+1+1+1+1. I will call them **9A**, **9B** and **9C** respectively.

The Ten-note scales : (op.74) Scriabin uses two kinds of ten-note scale: one in which the missing notes are three semitones apart, i.e. 1+2+1+2+1+1+1+1+1+1 which has a lower half-octave with an eight-note character but an upper half which is completely chromatic; the other in which the missing notes are six semitones apart, i.e. 1+2+1+1+1+1+2+1+1+1 which repeats every six semitones and has only six distinct transpositions. I will call them **10A** and **10B** respectively.

Structure and rhythm

Scriabin studied composition under Georges Conyus from 1883. Georges Conyus had devised a neat method of rhythmic and metric analysis : *Le diagnose metrotectonique de la forme des organismes musicaux* which, much later in 1933, was published as a book. As Kelkel points out, Scriabin's pieces are particularly clearly shaped, when looked at with Conyus' method.

Scriabin also used palindromic (non-retrogradable) rhythms, and also many forms of augmentation or diminution, such as addition or subtraction of the dot or long/short inversion, which were later used by Messiaen.

The overall layout of the op. 74 preludes is simply, fast, slow, fast, slow, fast; and also (structurally) binary, ternary, binary, ternary, binary. As Kelkel points out, the numbers of bars of the preludes, and of neighbouring groups of the preludes, contain a significantly high proportion of the Lucas numbers: 1 3 4 7 11 18 29 47 76 etc, which is a Fibonacci-like series beginning with 1 and 3 instead of 1 and 2.

No. 4 has the old Minnesänger form of the *Bar*, as explained by *David* in Act I Scene 3 and Act III Scene 2 of the *Meistersinger*. It can also be seen as spun by repeating the last 6, 3, or 2 beats, somewhat varied (usually upwards), in a classical condensation and liquidation, leading to the recapitulation with written-out ritardandi.

Editions

In this edition the notes are right but many expression marks are not, partly through the constraints of my music-typesetting software *muscript*. Long slurs have been omitted, and the arpeggiation symbols are missing. If you're considering playing these pieces, make sure you consult a more authoritative edition.

Op.74 is not included in the Peters Edition *Band III Preludes and Poems* edited by Gunther Philipp.

In the 1967 *Muzyka* edition, reprinted by *Dover* in 1973, there seem to be misprints in:

no.1 bar 1, RH top voice 2nd-last note should be an e#, not an e

no.4 bar 9, LH third triplet-quarter-note should surely be a gb, not a g

no.5 bar 3, RH last note c# should be tied over to the first note of bar 4

no.5 bar 11, LH middle phrase, the first of the tied chords should be <G_ G> not <G_ E>

Five Preludes, Op. 74 (1914)

Douloureux, déchirant

p cresc. 3 molto

3

5

7

10

15

No. 2

Très lent, contemplatif

pp

5

10

15

pp dim. smorz.

Detailed description: This system contains the first four measures of the piece. The music is in 4/8 time and D major. The right hand features a melodic line with grace notes and slurs, while the left hand provides a harmonic accompaniment with chords and moving lines. A piano (*pp*) dynamic marking is present. Measure numbers 5, 10, and 15 are indicated at the start of their respective systems.

5

Detailed description: This system contains measures 5 through 9. The right hand continues its melodic development with more complex rhythmic patterns and slurs. The left hand maintains its accompaniment. Measure number 5 is indicated at the start.

10

Detailed description: This system contains measures 10 through 14. The right hand features a dense texture with many beamed notes. The left hand continues with its accompaniment. Measure number 10 is indicated at the start.

15

Detailed description: This system contains measures 15 through 19. The right hand has a melodic line with grace notes and slurs. The left hand continues with its accompaniment. Measure number 15 is indicated at the start.

pp dim. smorz.

Detailed description: This system contains measures 20 through 24. The right hand has a melodic line with grace notes and slurs. The left hand continues with its accompaniment. Dynamic markings *pp*, *dim.*, and *smorz.* are present. Measure number 15 is indicated at the start.

Allegro drammatico

The first system of the musical score consists of two staves. The right-hand staff begins with a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 9/8 time signature. It features a melodic line with a slur and a fermata over the first two measures, followed by a series of eighth notes. The left-hand staff starts with a bass clef and a 9/8 time signature, playing a rhythmic accompaniment of eighth notes. A *cresc...* marking is placed between the two staves.

The second system continues the piece. The right-hand staff includes dynamic markings *f comme un cri* and *p subito*, along with fingering numbers 7 and 5. The left-hand staff continues its accompaniment. A *cresc.* marking is present at the end of the system.

The third system features a melodic line in the right hand with a slur and a fermata, and a bass line with a slur and a fermata. A fingering number 7 is shown above the first measure, and a fingering number 10 is shown above the final measure.

The fourth system shows a melodic line in the right hand with a slur and a fermata, and a bass line with a slur and a fermata. Dynamic markings *dim.*, *p*, and *cresc.* are included.

15

p subito *cresc.*

20

dim.

No. 4

Lent, vague, indécis

p cresc... pochiss.

3

3

5

3

10

3

3

dim.

accel.

rit.

15

3

Fier, belliqueux

First system of the musical score. The piece is in 3/2 time. The right hand features a melodic line with sixteenth-note runs, marked with a piano (*p*) dynamic and a *cresc...* instruction. It includes sixteenth-note triplets and a triplet of eighth notes. The left hand provides a harmonic accompaniment with chords and moving lines, including a five-fingered scale in the final measure.

Second system of the musical score. The right hand continues with melodic motifs, including a triplet of eighth notes. The left hand features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with a '7' marking, and concludes with a five-fingered scale in the final measure.

Third system of the musical score. The right hand begins with a triplet of eighth notes and continues with a melodic line. The left hand features a bass line with a '3' marking and a '7' marking, and concludes with a five-fingered scale in the final measure.

Fourth system of the musical score. The right hand features a melodic line with a '7' marking and a '3' marking. The left hand features a bass line with a '7' marking and a '3' marking, and concludes with a five-fingered scale in the final measure.

6 6 6 3 10

p *cresc...*

5 5

This system contains the first two measures of the piece. The right hand features sixteenth-note runs with slurs and accents, marked with a '6' above the notes. The left hand plays a steady accompaniment of eighth notes. The first measure is marked *p* and *cresc...*. The system ends with a measure marked '10' and a '3' above the notes.

6 6 6 3

p *cresc...*

5 5

This system contains the next two measures. The right hand continues with sixteenth-note runs, marked with a '6' above the notes. The left hand accompaniment remains consistent. The first measure is marked *p* and *cresc...*. The system ends with a measure marked '3' above the notes.

3

3

This system contains the next two measures. The right hand features a triplet of eighth notes, marked with a '3' above the notes. The left hand accompaniment continues. The system ends with a measure marked '3' above the notes.

15

This system contains the next two measures. The right hand features a triplet of eighth notes, marked with a '3' above the notes. The left hand accompaniment continues. The system ends with a measure marked '15' above the notes.

f

This system contains the final two measures. The right hand features a triplet of eighth notes, marked with a '3' above the notes. The left hand accompaniment continues. The first measure is marked *f*. The system ends with a measure marked '3' above the notes.

Five Preludes, Op. 74 (1914)

Alexander Scriabin

Douloureux, déchirant

p cresc. ³ *molto*

5 3

First section:
10A (no B or D)

10A (no D or F)

6-beat phrase, 7 melody-notes . . .

12-beat phrase, 7 notes

5

10A (no G# or B)

6-beat phrase, 7 melody-notes . . .

10A (no B or D)

10A (no F or G#)

Second section:

6-beat phrase, 7 melody-notes . . .

6-beat phrase, 7 melody-notes . . .

Coda :
10A (no G# or B)

12-beat phrase, 3 melody-notes repeated 3 times . . .

7-beat phrase, 3 melody-notes

So the phrase-lengths, in notes, are : 7, 7, 7, 7, 3x3, 3

Très lent, contemplatif

Opening section:

9A (added F)

Second section:

9A (added B)

9A (added F)

5

9A (added D)

+ E#
passing note, or

Central section:

9A (added B)

10

9A (added F)

8 (F,Gb)

9A (added F)

9A (added D)

+ E#, G#
passing notes

Fourth section:

8 (F,Gb) 9A (added F) 9A (added G#) 9A (added F)

4 bars . . .

15

pp *dim.* *smorz.*

Final section:

9A (added B) 9A (added F)

2 bars . . .

So the phrase-lengths, in bars, are symmetrical : 2, 4, 4, 4, 2

Allegro drammatico

7-note phrase
9A (added G#)

cresc...

9A (added D)

First section : 12 bars ...

f comme un cri

p subito

cresc.

9A (added G#)

9A (added F)

10

9A (added D)

8 (D#,E) closes off the section ...

dim.

p

cresc.

9A (added D)

Second section : 12 bars ...

No. 4

Lent, vague, indécis

p cresc... pochiss.

3

9B (C#,D#,E) 8 (D#,E) 8 (F,Gb) 9B (C#,D#,E) 9B (C,D,Eb) 9B (C#,D#,E)

5

3

8 (D#,E) 8 (F,Gb) 9B (C#,D#,E) 9B (C,D,Eb) 9B (C#,D#,E)

10

3

3

9B (C,D,Eb) 9B (C#,D#,E) non-scale passing-notes 9B (C,D,Eb) 9B (C#,D#,E)

... 9B (C#,D#,E) sempre ...

passing -notes

passing -notes

... 9B (C#,D#,E) sempre ...

20

8 (D#,E) 8 (F,Gb) 9B (C,D,Eb) 8 (E,F) 8 (D#,E)

Fier, belliqueux

p *cresc...*

Bar 1 RH 5/3 faster

7A (B split to Bb, c)

6A (C# up to D)

6A (A up to Bb)

6B (also Eb down to Ebb)

7A (G split to Gb, Ab)

6A (A up to A#)

6A (F up to F#)

6B (also B down to Bb)

8 (C, C# etc)

%

eight-note chord used to end the section . . .

7A (B split to Bb, c) 6A (C# up to D) 6A (A up to Bb) 6B (also Eb down to Ebb)

7A (C# split to C, D) 6A (D# up to E) 6A (B up to C) 6B (also F down to Fb)

Peter Billam was born in London in 1948, studied piano, and lived in Switzerland from 1973 to 1983, where he studied composition, classical guitar, flute and voice, worked as Musical Director of the *Théâtre Populaire Romand*, and as recording engineer, record producer and computer programmer. He moved to Tasmania in 1983, lectured in composition at the Conservatorium, conducted recorder ensembles and choirs, studied recorder, voice and harpsichord. He founded **www.pjb.com.au**, becoming the first composer to sell scores on-line, with on-line delivery, taking scores from Composer to Performer in one immediate step. *Www.pjb.com.au* offers a new approach to music publishing. These pieces are **written to be read, made to be played !**

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Arrangements include: By J. S. Bach: *Trio BWV 655*, piano and flute; *Vor deinen Thron BWV 668*, piano; *Fugue in F minor BWV 689*, SATB recorders; *Flute Sonata BWV 1031* transposed into G major for alto recorder and keyboard; *Flute Sonata BWV 1032* completed by Peter Billam for flute and keyboard, also in C major for alto recorder, and in G major for descant; *Ricercare a 3*, from the *Musikalisches Opfer* for keyboard; *Ricercare a 6*, for sSATBG recorders, or strings, or two keyboards; *Fuga Canonica in Epiadiapente* for keyboard and melody instrument; from the *Art of Fugue: Contrapuncti 1, 4 and 9* for keyboard, and *Contrapunctus 14* as completed by D. F. Tovey, for keyboard, or for SATB recorders, or for strings; *Passacaglia and Fugue in c* for piano four hands; *Chorales with Descant* for melody instrument and piano; *Cello Suites I, II and III* for flute or alto recorder, *Forty Chorales* for piano, *Der Geist hilft* for SATB-SATB recorders. By Johannes Brahms: *Fugue in Ab minor for organ*, for SATB recorders and gamba, in A minor; *Choralvorspiele for organ* with previous settings by Isaac, Bach, Praetorius, recorders. *John Carr*, *Divisions on an Italian Ground*, flute or recorder and guitar. By G. F. Händel: *Concerto Grosso in A minor op 6 no 4*, harpsichord and recorders; *Recorder Sonata in Bb no 5*, in G for tenor recorder and keyboard. *Claudio Monteverdi*, *Ecco Mormorar l'Onde*, SSATB recorders. By Franz Schubert: *Four Songs*, voice and guitar; *Schubert Dances*, recorders and guitar, *Schubert Dances*, piano 4 hands. *Scriabin*, *Two Preludes op.67*; *Five Preludes op.74*, piano. *Telemann*, *Twelve Flute Fantasias*, recorder. *John Wilbye*, *Draw on sweet Night*, SSATB recorders, and for flute choir. *Twelve Italian Songs*, voice and guitar; *Fourteen Folk Dance Tunes*, recorder and guitar; *Bushband Dances*, violin, piano accordeon and banjo; *Easy Classical Pieces*, Bb trumpet and piano.

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