

# Five Preludes Op. 74

*by Alexander Scriabin*

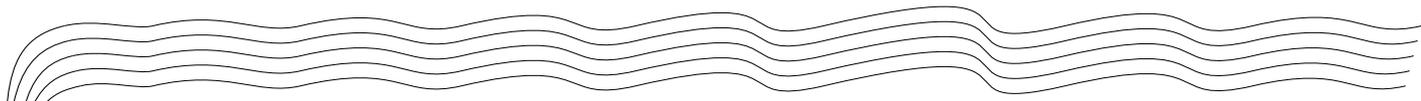
*Edited by Peter Billam*

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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.

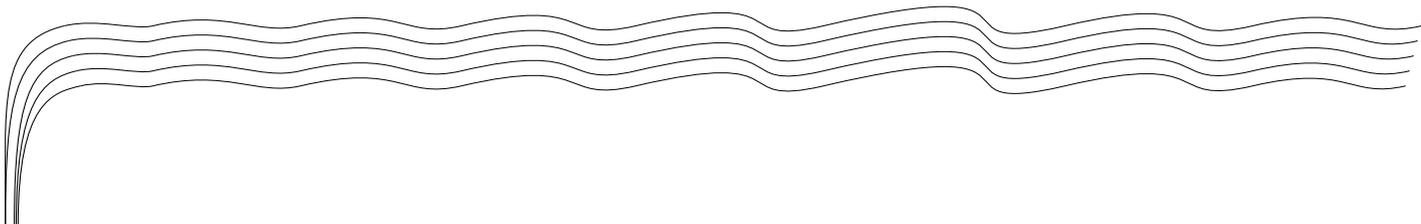
**The Six-note scales :** (op.60 ...) Scriabin uses two kinds of six-note scale: one derived from a whole-tone scale by raising one of the notes, i.e. 2+2+2+3+1+2 semitones; the second by also lowering the opposite note (three away) from the raised one, i.e. 1+3+2+3+1+2. I will call them **6A** and **6B**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

5 3

5

10

5 3

15

# No. 2

*Très lent, contemplatif*

pp

Musical notation for measures 1-4. Treble clef, 4/8 time signature. Bass clef, 4/8 time signature. The piece begins with a piano (*pp*) dynamic. The right hand features a melodic line with a trill in the fourth measure, while the left hand provides a harmonic accompaniment.

5

Musical notation for measures 5-8. The right hand continues with a melodic line, and the left hand maintains the accompaniment. A trill is present in the eighth measure of the right hand.

10

Musical notation for measures 9-12. The right hand features a trill in the ninth measure. The left hand accompaniment continues.

Musical notation for measures 13-14. The right hand continues with a melodic line, and the left hand maintains the accompaniment.

15

pp dim. smorz.

Musical notation for measures 15-18. The piece concludes with a piano (*pp*) dynamic, followed by a *dim.* (diminuendo) and *smorz.* (ritardando) section. The right hand has a trill in the final measure.

# No. 3

## Allegro drammatico

First system of musical notation. The treble staff begins with a melodic line in G major, marked with a fermata and a *cresc...* dynamic. The bass staff provides a rhythmic accompaniment with eighth notes. The system concludes with a key signature change to G minor.

Second system of musical notation. The treble staff features a complex melodic line with a fermata, marked *f comme un cri*. The bass staff continues with eighth-note accompaniment. A *p subito* marking appears in the middle of the system. The system ends with a *cresc.* marking.

Third system of musical notation. The treble staff continues with a melodic line, marked with a fermata and a measure number *10*. The bass staff features a series of sustained chords. The system concludes with a key signature change to G major.

Fourth system of musical notation. The treble staff has a melodic line with a fermata, marked *dim.*. The bass staff features sustained chords. The system concludes with a *p* marking in the treble and a *cresc.* marking in the bass.

15

Musical score for measures 15-17. Measure 15 features a complex chord in the right hand and a descending eighth-note line in the left hand. Measure 16 shows a melodic line in the right hand and a descending eighth-note line in the left hand. Measure 17 contains a complex chord in the right hand and a descending eighth-note line in the left hand. The key signature is one sharp (F#).

*p subito* *cresc.*

Musical score for measures 18-20. Measure 18 features a melodic line in the right hand and a descending eighth-note line in the left hand. Measure 19 shows a complex chord in the right hand and a descending eighth-note line in the left hand. Measure 20 contains a melodic line in the right hand and a descending eighth-note line in the left hand. The key signature is one sharp (F#).

20

Musical score for measures 21-23. Measure 21 features a melodic line in the right hand and a descending eighth-note line in the left hand. Measure 22 shows a complex chord in the right hand and a descending eighth-note line in the left hand. Measure 23 contains a complex chord in the right hand and a descending eighth-note line in the left hand. The key signature is one sharp (F#).

*dim.*

Musical score for measures 24-26. Measure 24 features a melodic line in the right hand and a descending eighth-note line in the left hand. Measure 25 shows a complex chord in the right hand and a descending eighth-note line in the left hand. Measure 26 contains a complex chord in the right hand and a descending eighth-note line in the left hand. The key signature is one sharp (F#).

# No. 4

*Lent, vague, indécis*

*p cresc. ... pochiss.*

3

5

3

10

3

3

3

3

15

*dim. accel. rit.*

3

20

# No. 5

## *Fier, belliqueux*

First system of the musical score for 'Fier, belliqueux'. It consists of two staves, treble and bass. The treble staff begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic and a *cresc...* marking. It features sixteenth-note runs with fingering numbers 6 and 3. The bass staff has a similar rhythmic pattern with fingering numbers 5 and 5. The key signature has two flats and the time signature is 3/2.

Second system of the musical score for 'Fier, belliqueux'. It continues the two-staff format. The treble staff has a triplet of eighth notes with a '3' above it. The bass staff features a triplet of eighth notes with a '7' above it. The piece concludes with a descending scale in the bass staff marked with a '5'.

Third system of the musical score for 'Fier, belliqueux'. The treble staff is marked with a '5' and *impérieux*. It features a triplet of eighth notes with a '3' above it. The bass staff has a triplet of eighth notes with a '3' below it. The music is characterized by block chords and sustained notes.

Fourth system of the musical score for 'Fier, belliqueux'. The treble staff has a triplet of eighth notes with a '3' above it. The bass staff features a triplet of eighth notes with a '7' above it. The system ends with a descending scale in the bass staff marked with a '7'.

6 6 6 3  
*p* *cresc...*  
5 5  
10

6 6 6 3  
*p* *cresc...*  
5 5

3  
3

15

*f*

# Five Preludes, Op. 74 (1914)

Alexander Scriabin

## *Douloureux, déchirant*

*p cresc.* <sup>3</sup> *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 . . .



# No. 2

*Très lent, contemplatif*

pp

Opening section:  
9A (added F)  
2 bars, 7 notes ...

Second section:  
9A (added B)  
4 bars ...

9A (added F)

5

9A (added D) + E#  
passing note, or  
10A (missing G#,B)

Central section:  
9A (added B)  
4 bars ...

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

Final section:  
9A (added F)  
2 bars ...

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

# No. 3

## Allegro drammatico

7-note phrase  
9A (added G#)

9A (added D)

First section : 12 bars ...

9A (added G#)

9A (added F)

9A (added D)

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

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)

3

5

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

10

3

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

12 13 14 15

3

3

*dim.*

*accel.*

*rit.*

... 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)



% %

*p* *cresc...* 6 6 6 3 10 5 5

7A (B split to B $\flat$ , c) 6A (C $\sharp$  up to D) 6A (A up to B $\flat$ ) 6B (also E $\flat$  down to E $\flat\flat$ )

*p* *cresc...* 6 6 6 3 5 5

7A (C $\sharp$  split to C, D) 6A (D $\sharp$  up to E) 6A (B up to C) 6B (also F down to F $\flat$ )

8 (C, Db etc)

**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](http://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. *Wwww.pjb.com.au* offers a new approach to music publishing. These pieces are **written to be read, made to be played !**

**Compositions** at [www.pjb.com.au](http://www.pjb.com.au) include: *Five Short Pieces*, guitar, 1979; *Divisions on an Italian Ground*, flute and guitar, 1980; *De Profundis* and *Nacht*, on poems by Lama Anagarika Govinda, voice and piano, 1980; *Fünf Bagatellen*, piano, 1980; *Five Rounds*, choir, 1986; *Go Forth and Multiply*, choir, 1986; *Three Violin Duets*, 1987; *Fable*, for piano, 1987; *To Erich Jantsch*, SAATTB recorders, 1988; *A Suite of Curves*, trombone (or horn) and piano, 1990; *Two Recorder Duets*, alto recorders, or other melody instruments, 1991; *Trombone Quintet*, trombone, flute, piano, bass, and percussion, 1994; *Three Songs*, on poems by Jack Kerouac, Vikram Seth and Dylan Thomas, voice and piano (only the first and third of these are available), 1994; *Piano Study*, piano, 1994; *Four Dances*, various ensembles including recorder quartet, string quartet, 1995; *The Poet in the Clouds*, on a poem by S. T. Coleridge, SATB choir, 1995; *Tres Casidas del Diván del Tamarit*, on poems by Federico García Lorca, voice and piano, 1997; *Three Suites*, for the solo line, piano, and piano and a solo line, 2000; *Die Zeiten*, on poems by Kästner, Bachman and Jünger, choir (only the second and third of these are available), 2000; *Three Duets* for flutes, 2001; *For Four Hands* for piano four hands, 2002; *Three Preludes* for piano, 2003; *Second Solo Suite* for flute, violin, viola or cello, 2003; *Guitar Duet* for two guitars, 2006; *We Who Mourn* for choir, 2007; *Trio With Guitar* for guitar and two clarinets or two recorders or two violas, 2008; *Canons* for two- and four-hand piano, 2009; *Flute Trio*, 2012; *Keyboard Studies*, 2013.

**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; *Four Duets BWV 802-5*, keyboard; *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 Epi diapente* 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* plus 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 Arnold Schoenberg: *Verklärte Nacht* for piano. By Franz Schubert: *Four Songs*, voice and guitar; *Dances*, recorders and guitar, *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*, SSATTB 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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