

*SONATA FOR PIANO* (1963) BY SERGEI MICHAILOVICH SLONIMSKY:  
MUSICAL ANALYSIS AND A DISCUSSION ON INTERPRETATION AND  
PERFORMANCE

Nikita Fitenko, B.M., M.M.

Dissertation Prepared for the Degree of  
DOCTOR OF MUSICAL ARTS

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS

May 2002

APPROVED:

Joseph Banowetz, Major Professor  
Jeffrey Snider, Minor Professor  
Adam Wodnicki, Committee Member  
Thomas Sovik, Committee Member  
John Scott, Chair of the DMA Committee in the  
College of Music  
C. Neal Tate, Dean of the Robert B. Toulouse  
School of Graduate Studies

Fitenko, Nikita. *Sonata for Piano (1963) by Sergei Michailovich Slonimsky: Musical Analysis and Discussion on Interpretation and Performance.* Doctor of Musical Arts

(Performance), May 2002, 25 pp., 8 musical examples, references, 50 titles.

The essay begins with the overview of Russian-Soviet piano music from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Then, biographical information about Sergei Slonimsky and an overview of his major compositions is provided. The majority of the paper focuses on Slonimsky's *Sonata for Piano* (1963). A brief discussion of the *Sonata*'s compositional history is followed by the formal analysis of the overall structure of the work. Slonimsky's original principle of organization of the music is emphasized: the system of constant interrelation of the main thematic material combined with elements of the sonata-allegro form. In the analysis of the harmonic language of the piece, the composer's extensive use of Russian folk elements such as diatonic melodies, sigh motives, parallel triads, and simultaneous use of the lower third with the major triad is pointed out. The rest of the paper focuses on issues of interpretation and performance. Special notice is given to the problem of incorporating a percussive type of playing with the elements of folk cantilena singing. The paper concludes with the history of *Sonata*'s performances and a discussion of current recordings.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF MUSICAL EXAMPLES .....	iii
SHORT HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE HISTORY OF RUSSIAN-SOVIET PIANO MUSIC FROM MIKHAIL GLINKA (1804-1857) TO THE END OF THE 20 <sup>TH</sup> CENTURY ....	1
Sergei Slonimsky: Biographical Information and Overview of Major Compositions .....	1
Slonimsky's Family and Early Education.....	1
Higher Education .....	4
COMPOSITIONAL OUTPUT .....	7
Piano Works by the Composer .....	9
SONATA FOR PIANO (1963).....	11
The <i>Sonata's</i> Compositional History.....	11
The Form: Analysis of the Overall Structure, Discussion of the Nature and Structure of the Main Themes of the Work .....	12
Interpretation and Performance: Problems of Incorporating Percussive Qualities with the Elements of Folk Cantilena Singing .....	18
CONCLUSION.....	20
History of <i>Sonata's</i> Performance and Current Recordings and Reviews .....	20
List of All Piano Works by the Composer, and a Discussion of Technical and Stylistic Differences of the Major Works with Practical Recommendations. ....	20
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	22
Dictionaries .....	22
Monographs .....	22
Articles in Periodicals .....	24
Websites.....	25
Discography of Slonimsky's Piano Works .....	25

## LIST OF MUSICAL EXAMPLES

	Page
Example 1. Page 39, score 1, mm. 1-2.....	12
Example 2. Page 2, scores 1-3 .....	14
Example 3. Page 3, score 3-4.....	15
Example 4. Page 4, score 5 .....	16
Example 5. Page 25, scores 3-4 .....	16
Example 6. Page 6, scores 4-5 .....	17
Example 7. Page 10, score 4 .....	17
Example 8. Page 7, score 1 .....	18

## SHORT HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE HISTORY OF RUSSIAN-SOVIET PIANO MUSIC FROM MIKHAIL GLINKA (1804-1857) TO THE END OF THE 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

The term “Russian music” from the classical viewpoint started with Mikhail Glinka (1804-1857), the first well-known Russian composer and creator of Russian national opera. Then it was developed by the “Mighty Five,” as well as by Peter Tchaikovsky in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. By the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Russian school of composition, as represented by such composers as Sergei Rachmaninov, Alexander Skriabin, Sergei Prokofiev, and Igor Stravinsky, had become one of the most influential trends in the world of classical music. After the Bolsheviks came to power in 1917, the term “Soviet music” originated. Unfortunately, Soviet composers continually had to cope with the Communist Party officials and were forced to compose a great number of works in order to please the regime.

Several important compositional techniques, such as serialism, polytonality, devices of the avant-garde style, and some others, invented and used by Western composers in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, were prohibited until the late 1950s in Soviet Russia. In spite of that, a great number of progressive works were created by such composers as Nikolai Myaskovsky, Dmitri Shostakovich, and Sergei Prokofiev. With the change of political climate in the late 1950s, there came a new generation of Russian composers that included Sofia Gubaidulina, Alfred Schnittke, Edison Denisov, Georgy Sviridov, Andrei Gavrilin, Rodion Shchedrin, Boris Tishchenko, and Sergei Slonimsky.

### Sergei Slonimsky: Biographical Information and Overview of Major Compositions

#### Slonimsky’s Family and Early Education

Sergei Slonimsky, one of the most influential Russian composers of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, was born on August 12, 1932 in St. Petersburg (formerly Leningrad). He came

from a very intelligent and educated family. His grandfather was a famous scientist who invented one of the first calculators; for that he received the Demidov award in 1885. He was a highly educated person who spoke twenty foreign languages and published a great number of articles in such areas as astronomy, engineering, and development of the telephone. The composer's father, Michail Leonidoich Slonimsky (1897-1972), was a writer and critic, and a member of the famous literary group The Serapion Brothers, founded in Petrograd in 1921. Besides M. L. Slonimsky, that group included such famous Russian writers and poets as Konstantin Fedin, Vsevolod Ivanov, Michail Zoshchenko, Nikolai Tikhonov, and Veniamin Kaverin. The composer's aunt, Isabel Vengerova, was first a professor of piano performance at the St. Petersburg Conservatory, then later at the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia. Slonimsky's uncle was the legendary American musicologist Nicolas (Nikolay Leonidovich) Slonimsky (longtime editor of Baker's Biographical Dictionary of Musicians and author of many articles and books on music for the general public and specialists alike). Levon Hakobian, in his article about Sergei Slonimsky, pointed out that "the young composer's cultural background was largely determined by the presence of a number of notable artists, men of letters, and musicians among his parents' friends and acquaintances."<sup>1</sup>

Slonimsky started his musical education at the age of 8, studying piano under A. Artobolevskaya. In spite of the fact that he demonstrated musical talent at an early age, he was not a child prodigy. His parents never forced his musical education. Instead, they were trying to gradually develop his natural creativity and give him a well-rounded education. Because of Sergei's love and natural talent for musical improvisation, his parents particularly encouraged his compositional efforts. In 1941, he started taking lessons in composition from

---

<sup>1</sup> Hakobian 1998, p. 327.

V. Y. Wolfenson, who was a teacher at the Leningrad Central Music School affiliated with the Leningrad State Conservatory. These studies were interrupted by World War II. The Slonimsky family was evacuated to Perm, where they lived for two years from 1941 to 1943. During these years Sergei did not attend any formal music school, although he took lessons from I. E. Sherman, a conductor at the Kirov Theater who also was evacuated to Perm for the same period of time. These lessons became extremely important in Sergei's development as a musician. Sherman was not just teaching his student the technical aspects of piano playing, composition, and music theory, but instead focused on the music itself and helped Slonimsky's individual growth. According to Marina Ryzareva, "These lessons helped the composer form such a particularly important characteristic of his style as the vivid imagination in the context of precise and strict musical forms – the music without excessive notes."<sup>2</sup>

In 1943, M. L. Slonimsky showed Sergei's early compositions to Dmitri Shostakovich, and asked him advice about Sergei's further studies. Shostakovich spoke highly about the young composer's music and recommended him to attend the Moscow Central Music School for talented children affiliated with the Moscow State Conservatory – one of the most prestigious educational institutions in Russia. Sergei spent three years in Moscow, from 1943 to 1946, after which his family moved back to Leningrad where he transferred to a similar type of school there. These two music schools have remained centers of musical education for children in Russia.

During the eleven-year course of study, students get the highest level of musical training from well-known teachers who are mostly Conservatory professors. It needs to be pointed out that the greatest Russian musicians have graduated from these two schools. Slonimsky was one

---

<sup>2</sup> Ryzareva 1991, p. 28.

of them and his name is listed among such famous alumni as Temirkanov, Bashmet, Spivakov, Tretiyakov, Tishchenko, Shchedrin and many others.

During those school years, Slonimsky accumulated musical knowledge and impressions. He had an opportunity to attend numerous concerts and opera productions, including premieres of Shostakovich's *Ninth Symphony*, Prokofiev's *Sixth Symphony* and the opera *War and Peace*. All this music, as well as compositions by other composers including symphonic works by Bruckner and Mahler, were later discussed and analyzed in Slonimsky's classes in school.

### Higher Education

In 1950 the composer was accepted at the Leningrad State Conservatory, majoring in both piano and composition. The years of study at the Conservatory (1950-1955) gave him a great fundamental knowledge of the essence of music on which he based all of his compositions, theoretical essays, and musicological and critical publications. Two important teachers were major influences. Slonimsky studied composition, instrumentation, and form analysis with B. A. Arapov, himself a well-rounded musician and talented composer. According to Slonimsky, "the main idea of his lectures was to always keep the content of the work as the most important goal of the composition and use all the technical elements as the resources for reaching this goal."<sup>3</sup> In the instrumentation class, Arapov tried to persuade his students to treat orchestral instruments very personally and individually. Polyphony was taught by N. D. Uspensky, one of the most eminent researchers of the history of Western polyphony, as well as an expert in Russian Orthodox polyphonic singing. As a result, in many of his later works Slonimsky incorporated elements of polyphonic development, found particularly in the tradition of Russian monophonic linear structures associated with old Russian church and folk singing.

---

<sup>3</sup> Interview.



Historically, it was a very difficult time to study and practice composing. In 1948, a famous article appeared in the central newspaper *Pravda* signed by V. I. Muradeli, where the author accused Prokofiev, Shostakovich, and several other Soviet composers of “musical formalism.” As an immediate result, Shostakovich was fired from the Leningrad Conservatory and a number of works by both the composers were prohibited. The ultimate consequences were even worse: several important compositional techniques were banned,<sup>4</sup> as well as music by such authors as Richard Strauss and Igor Stravinsky. Anyone at any time could be accused of formalism; therefore, the majority of composers were afraid to create anything strikingly original. This is probably the reason why Slonimsky’s musical individuality was not formed by the time he graduated from the Conservatory. During his years of studying, he never was able to create any major works that could please the Communist Party officials. In 1955, Slonimsky was even criticized by the Soviet Composers Union for his compositions. It was pointed out that most of his works were not imaginative, brilliant, and individual enough. How could they be under such circumstances? The composer himself does not like to talk about his early works<sup>5</sup> and considers the overture *Carnival* (1959) as his first mature composition.

It is again necessary to point out the political changes in the USSR in the mid 1950s, and then apply them to the composer’s life and works. According to Marina Ryzareva: “In the life of each artist the most important elements sometimes are certain historical changes and their consequences to an artist’s development.”<sup>6</sup> In Sergei Slonimsky’s life, such a moment happened in 1956, the year of the 20<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Communist Party, which started a new era in the cultural development of the entire country. From this point on, Slonimsky as well as other

---

<sup>4</sup> Serialism, use of polytonality, devices of avant-garde and others.

<sup>5</sup> *String Quartet*, *Concerto for Violin and Orchestra*, and *Opera Scene* (after the novel *The Northern Aurora* by N. Nikitin) are among the most important compositions of that period.

<sup>6</sup> Ryzareva 1991, p. 42.

Soviet musicians received freedom to compose and experiment with all kinds of musical forms and compositional techniques. In 1959, he wrote his first orchestral work the *Carnival* overture. In this composition, many of Slonimsky's unique compositional features already can be found: his personal treatment of the melodic material closely associated with the style of Russian folk songs and his interesting use of a minor third in a tonic triad, which sometimes appears together with a major one in a different voice. These two main features of the composer's compositional technique later will be fully developed in his symphonies and operas, as well as in such instrumental works as *Suite for Viola and Piano* (1959), *Sonata for Violin Solo* (1960), and *Sonata for Piano* (1963).

## COMPOSITIONAL OUTPUT

Viewing Slonimsky's output thus far in its entirety, there can be found a clear structure of progression, which may perhaps be linked to the sonata form: the stormy exposition of the 1950s and 1960s, in which the composer tried many stylistic trends; the development section which includes works of 1970s and 1980s; and after that a recapitulation in which the principal features are brought together and reconciled. In the song-cycle *Songs of Freedom* (1959), the composer first propounded the "Russian theme" which can be traced throughout many of his works. This feature came out of Slonimsky's close interest in the art of Russian folk singing. During his Conservatory years, the composer more than once participated in folklore expeditions to remote regions of Russia in order to collect folk songs. In an interview, Slonimsky applied a remarkable term to describe the importance of the "Russian theme" in his music by calling it a "musical vitamin."<sup>7</sup> However, it needs to be pointed out that Slonimsky very seldom uses actual themes from the folk songs in his works. He approaches thematic material in a very personal way through trying to transform actual folk tunes into his own melodic structures. Anatoly Milka thinks that "Slonimsky uses folk music in his works not as a main element for building thematic material or indirect quotations but for creating a certain emotional level by transforming the actual tunes into his own, very personal melodies."<sup>8</sup>

This notable feature also can be found in the cantata *The Voice from the Choir* (1962-1965), *Sonata for Piano* (1963) and the opera *Virineya* (1967). This opera continues the traditions of Russian opera established by Mussorgsky, Prokofiev, and Shostakovich and has entered the repertory alongside the works of these major figures. The ballet *Ikar* (1965-1971) is based on a theme taken from ancient mythology. This interest in the past is continued in

---

<sup>7</sup> Interview.

Slonimsky's operas-monodies *Master and Margarita* (1972), *The Tsar Iksion* (1994) and in the symphonic poem *Appolon and Mars* (1991).

On the other hand, aspects of Middle-Eastern music appear in such works as *Farewell to a Friend in the Desert* (1966) and *Monologues* (1967). Slonimsky adopted avant-garde methods, using them in *Sonata for Violin Solo* (1960) and in the quartet *Antiphonies* (1968-1970), which was one of the first examples of "instrumental theater" in Russian music. During a performance of this work, the players need to change their positions on the stage, with all these changes being indicated in the score. However, Boris Schwarz in his book *Music and Musical Life in Soviet Russia* describes Slonimsky more as a modernist operating with avant-garde style devices.

In the 1970s, Slonimsky became fascinated by the symphonic genre, and wrote eight symphonies in close succession. The fourth is remarkable for its emotional directness, Mahlerian development, and intensity of its themes. Dedicated to the composer's father, the work follows a nontraditional layout, with a funeral march at the end. Lyric works such as *Ten Poems of Akhmatova* (1974) and *Songs of the Troubadours* (1975) foreshadow the ballad-opera *Maria Stuart*, one of Slonimsky's most important works from the 1970s and 1980s.

In the 1990s, Slonimsky turned increasingly to the genre of the symphonic poem in his *Appolon and Mars* (1991) and *St. Petersburg Visions* (1995). Before this period, there was a marked distinction between the composer's use of tonality in large-scale works and atonality in his chamber music. However, starting with *Appolon and Mars*, with its quartal harmonies, polyrhythm and micropolyphonic structure, something of a reversal sets in, and it is now in the large-scale works where atonality prevails, while the small lyric forms adhere to more traditional harmonic roots.

---

<sup>8</sup> Milka 1976, p. 6.

The 10<sup>th</sup> symphony, *Circles of Hell* (1992) after Dante, is one of the composer's most remarkable works. This symphony synthesizes the composer's achievements in many different genres and shares a stylistic unity with the opera *Hamlet* (1991). In both works, Slonimsky turns to classical texts and uses monodic thematic material.

Today, Sergei Slonimsky is considered one of the most prominent and influential Russian composers of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He is professor of composition and orchestration in both the St. Petersburg State Conservatory and Samara Pedagogical University. He also holds honorary membership as an academician in the Russian Academy of Education and the title of "People's Artist," the highest musical award in the Russian Federation. Slonimsky's output includes more than a hundred compositions, among them ten symphonies, six operas, and the ballet *Icar*.

Slonimsky's music is notable for its quality of vision and for the variety of images, colors, and stylistic effects. The remarkably diverse styles which are drawn from antique modes, folk music, dodecaphony, and the music of the ancient East have become in themselves a kind of unified style, through the seamlessness with which Slonimsky melds them into an organic whole.

#### Piano Works by the Composer

Piano has always been an important part of the composer's life. Slonimsky is a very good pianist himself, having graduated with a degree in piano performance from the St. Petersburg Conservatory and having studied with Vladimir Nielsen, one of the most influential pedagogues of that time<sup>9</sup>. This is probably the reason why piano works occupy such an important place in Slonimsky's output. His major piano compositions include *Sonata for Piano* (1963), *Twenty-four*

---

<sup>9</sup> Slonimsky was a student of Nielsen from 1950 to 1955.

*Preludes and Fugues*, and several collections of shorter works for piano, as well as a number of piano duets.

According to the composer, Nielsen had a large impact on the development of his musical taste. During his lessons, Slonimsky not only received fine musical training in piano performance, but also, together with his teacher, played and discussed piano works by contemporary composers, which helped Slonimsky later when he was working on his own piano compositions.<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> Interview.

## SONATA FOR PIANO (1963)

### The *Sonata's* Compositional History

The idea of composing a large-scale work for piano first came in 1959, when a close friend of Slonimsky, Arkady Aronov,<sup>11</sup> asked the composer to write a work for piano. *Sonata* was finished only in 1963, so it can be imagined that conceiving and composing the work was a long process. Anatoly Milka points out that “in that period Slonimsky was working slower than usual, which was understandable since this was at a period when the composer’s methods, style, and aesthetics were forming.”<sup>12</sup>

Several important compositions precede the piece, including *Suite for Viola and Piano* (1959), the vocal cycle *Songs of Freedom* (1959), *Sonata for Solo Violin* (1960), as well as first explorations in the genres of symphonic music. In all of these compositions Slonimsky tried different techniques, and explored different ideas for content and design. However, one detail unites all these compositions, namely Slonimsky’s interest in the elements of Russian folklore. In the span of five years (1958-1963), the composer made several trips to the rural regions of Russia in order to collect folk songs and tunes. This is probably the main reason why elements of Russian music can be found in all these works. *Sonata for Piano* is not an exception, for it is built entirely on thematic figurations that are closely associated with Russian folk music. As in the composer’s other works, his use of folk music is quite unique. In the entire piece there is only one original theme that was collected during a 1960 expedition,<sup>13</sup> which can be found in the middle section of the *Sonata* (Example 1).

---

<sup>11</sup> Former professor of piano at Leningrad State Conservatory, now on the faculty at Manhattan School of Music.

<sup>12</sup> Milka 1976, p. 74-75.

<sup>13</sup> “Uzh ty svacha, ty moja” (original Russian folk song).



Example 1. Page 39, score 1, mm. 1-2

Although all other melodic material may sound “Russian,” those melodies are original with Slonimsky, while being designed in the traditions of Russian archaic church or folk singing. Another reason for employing types of melody closely linked with singing was that Slonimsky felt that the piano had been gradually turned into “a percussive” instrument. Since the beginning of the century, much music with percussive qualities had already been written for the piano. His desire has been to underline the ability of the piano to sing.

#### The Form: Analysis of the Overall Structure, Discussion of the Nature and Structure of the Main Themes of the Work

The composition is entitled a “sonata,” which immediately invokes a thought that it probably should be a multi-movement composition with a sonata-allegro structure employed at least once. However, Slonimsky decides to design his *Sonata* as a large one-movement work that escapes the traditional sonata-allegro form. The composer uses a different principle of organization of the music: the system of constant interrelation of the main thematic material, called by the composer a “chain reaction form,”<sup>14</sup> combined with elements of the sonata-allegro form. This principle of organization was used in Russian music previously. For example, it can be found in Prokofiev’s symphonies. The main idea is not to build and develop a composition using two main themes, as it is implied by the sonata-allegro form, but to develop the

---

<sup>14</sup> Interview.



composition using a number of themes, which are thematically connected to each other. In other words, the second theme is built on the motives of the first one; the third theme includes elements of the two previous themes, etc. As a result, a constant renewal of thematic material intertwines with elements of polyphonic development.

On the other hand, some characteristics of the sonata form can be found in Slonimsky's work. Marina Ryzareva in her monograph not only finds the three main sections, but also calls the opening theme "the main theme" and one of the following themes as "the second theme."<sup>15</sup> By no means, however, can the form of the work be analyzed as a strict sonata-allegro structure. No traditional tonal relationship between themes can be found, and the last section sounds more like a coda than the recapitulation.

The *Sonata* opens with a long first theme, which is played in the lowest register of the piano and has a quality reminiscent of monody singing (Example 2).

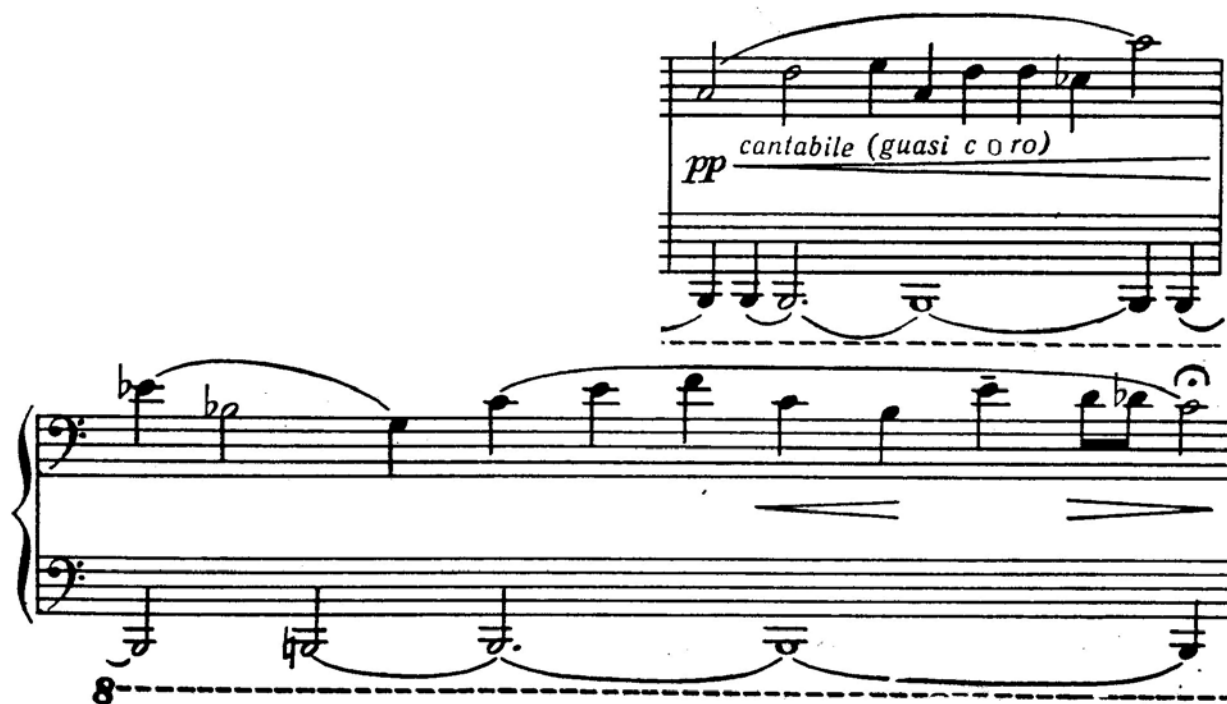
---

<sup>15</sup> Ryzareva 1991, pp. 68-69.



Example 2. Page 2, scores 1-3

The most interesting detail about this theme is that in the first half of it, elements of serial technique can be found which are immediately followed by idiomatic sigh motives formed in Russian folk songs. This is the only theme in the entire *Sonata* where Slonimsky employs the elements of dodecaphony. Although the character of the first theme is dark and serious, nevertheless the large expressive leaps in its first half, as well as the repeated motives towards D, bring the feeling of hidden power and the beginning of the drama. The second theme immediately answers in the right-hand part (Example 3).



Example 3. Page 3, score 3-4

Here, the first case of the thematic connection between themes can be found, with the second theme sounding as a continuation of the first one. It is achieved by employing a number of expressive motives taken from the first theme. The second theme is presented twice, each time accompanied by sustained bell-like accompaniment in the outer registers of the piano. This is one of the main ideas of the composition, namely to juxtapose the choral and singing elements against the percussive qualities of the piano. In the first and last sections, choral elements prevail. As a contrast, the entire middle section is designed as a violent dance underlining percussive qualities of the instrument. The most interesting detail is that all the themes employed in the middle section are taken from the first “choral” section. However, they dramatically change their qualities. For example, the third major theme of *Sonata* is first presented in a quiet and sustained mood in the opening part (Example 4),



Example 4. Page 4, score 5

And later is transformed into an energetic, percussive type of formation in the middle section of the work (Example 5).



Example 5. Page 25, scores 3-4

A similar type of transformation occurs with other major themes of the opening section. They often lose their vocal qualities and become a part of a violent dance presented in the central section of the work. According to Slonimsky, more than ten major themes on which the entire composition is built can be found in the first section of the work. Some of them are longer and easier to detect, as for instance in the D minor episode (*Poco più mosso*) (Example 6).



Example 6. Page 6, scores 4-5

whereas the others are only short motives (Example 7).



Example 7. Page 10, score 4

As mentioned before, all of the thematic material is interconnected, which unites *Sonata* and creates a feeling of cohesion.

From a traditional harmonic standpoint, all of the main themes of the piece are diatonic, with the exception of the first half of the opening theme. However, one significant approach in the composer's harmonic language needs to be discussed. Slonimsky often lowers the third in a major triad, employing it simultaneously with the original third (Example 8).



**Example 8. Page 7, score 1**

Some musicologists consider the roots of this device to lie in the tradition of Russian folk singing. It is well known that the major or minor quality of a triad is determined by its lower third (either major or minor), which Milka refers to as a “neutral third.”<sup>16</sup> He also notices that, quite often, Russian folk singers perform this third sometimes as major, sometimes as minor, and sometimes as something in between – “neutral.” This phenomenon has caused a lot of confusion among editors and composers, who often tried to “correct” it and make it fit in as a part of traditional musical language. Only a few composers dared to fight these modifications so as to preserve the authenticity of Russian folk song. Slonimsky, for whom the “neutral third,” parallel triads, and other nonconventional elements found in Russian folk songs were favorite musical devices, has been one of these composers. In this context, it is also important to mention the name of Igor Stravinsky, who also extensively used the elements discussed above.

Interpretation and Performance: Problems of Incorporating Percussive Qualities with the  
Elements of Folk Cantilena Singing

The most challenging problem is the necessity of incorporating two different types of pianism: the percussive, which needs to be used in the dynamic middle section of the work, and the cantilena, which needs to be used in projecting long folk-like themes in the extended opening section as well as in the coda. According to the composer, “the piano is treated as a choir or an

organ.<sup>17</sup> Each register (octave) has its specific characteristics or timbres. Therefore, a performer should try to produce different colors based on the register used by the composer. It is especially challenging in the episodes with two or more voices, where each line has to have a unique timbre similar to the organ.

Another problem may occur in the opening part. This extended section of slow and sustained music continues for nearly 16 pages. The challenge for the performer is to find the way to constantly keep it interesting for listeners. The easiest solution is to use the composer's authorized cuts,<sup>18</sup> whereas the more challenging way would be to play it in its original form and to make the development of the music always unpredictable and interesting. The extended use of dynamics, agogics, and a skillful use of registers' colors can help solve this problem.

Without a doubt, the most technically challenging part of the work is its middle section. Marina Ryzareva calls it "transcendental in its difficulty."<sup>19</sup> Moreover, during the span of pages, the performer does not have a single pause. In this section, Slonimsky again uses all registers of the instrument, but this time to underline the percussive possibilities of the piano. Here, the first solution for a successful performance again can be the use of the authorized composer's cuts, and the second is a careful tempi selection. The most complicated textures appear at the end of the section, so it is extremely important to choose the right tempo in the beginning in order to "stay alive."

---

<sup>16</sup> Milka 1976, p. 8.

<sup>17</sup> Interview.

<sup>18</sup> There are two major authorized cuts in the *Sonata*, one in the slow section and the other cut is in the fast middle section. In addition to this, there are several lines of the part of the right hand in the final section where the repeated figurations are optional and can be omitted by a performer.

<sup>19</sup> Ryzareva 1991, p. 67.

## CONCLUSION

### History of *Sonata*'s Performance and Current Recordings and Reviews

*Sonata* was performed for the first time by Arkady Aronov in the Glinka Hall of the St. Petersburg Philharmony in the Fall of 1963. Other performers have included Anatoly Ugorsky (Small Hall of Moscow Conservatory, 1965),<sup>20</sup> Gabriel Talroze, and Anatoly Zatin. In 1994 Zedmara Zakarian<sup>21</sup> gave the North American premiere of this work at Oberlin Conservatory in Ohio.

There are two commercial recordings of the work. The *Sonata* was initially recorded by Zedmara Zakarian on the Albany label. This compact disk was released and reviewed in 1997. The second recording was also released in 1997 on the Altarus label as performed by Nikita Fitenko. It came out as a part of the world premiere recording of Slonimsky's cycle of *Twenty-four Preludes and Fugues*. Jonathan Powell writes about Slonimsky's *Sonata*: "The piano sonata will, I'm sure, emerge as not only one of the most significant extended works written for the instrument by a Russian composer, but also as an example of the manner in which a pluralist style (one which came to be widespread in Russia and elsewhere during the decades after Slonimsky wrote this work) can produce not only the unfocused, linguistically meandering works one associates with artistic omnivorism, but also a highly taut composition such as this."<sup>22</sup>

### List of All Piano Works by the Composer, and a Discussion of Technical and Stylistic Differences of the Major Works with Practical Recommendations.

The other major work for the piano by the composer is the cycle of *Twenty-four Preludes and Fugues*, which was inspired by J. S. Bach and can comfortably take a place with similar

---

<sup>20</sup> This performance took place as a part of the music festival entitled "Days of the Music by the Leningrad Composers in Moscow."

<sup>21</sup> She is a former professor at Leningrad State Conservatory and is currently on the faculty of the Oberlin Conservatory of Music.



contrapuntal cycles by Slonimsky's countrymen Shostakovich and Shchedrin. According to Lehman, "The music is skillfully and idiomatically written, packed with pleasing tunes and devices, and must be as enjoyable to play as it is to listen to..."<sup>23</sup> Powell adds, "Many of these pieces offer a real thrill, while others – such as the extended fugue – demonstrate a profound sensibility which, while aware of its precursors in Bach and Shostakovich, is utterly personal."<sup>24</sup> Besides those two major works, Slonimsky composed several important collections, which he called *From Five to Fifty*. These collections include works for two hands as well as compositions written for four hands. Lehman describes them as "...mostly undemanding numbers that run a likable gamut from capricious whimsy and gentle nostalgia to merry high spirits."<sup>25</sup> Some of these works can be used as part of a 'serious program' but most of them can very usefully serve as teaching material for children and adults.

---

<sup>22</sup> *International Piano*, September/October 2001, p. 79.

<sup>23</sup> *American Record Guide*, March/April 2001, p. 166.

<sup>24</sup> *International Piano*, September/October 2001, p. 80.

<sup>25</sup> *American Record Guide*, March/April 2001, p. 166.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Dictionaries

- Abraham, Gerald. *The New Grove Russian Masters 2: Rimsky-Korsakov, Skryabin, Rachmaninoff, Prokofiev, Shostakovich*. London: Macmillan, 1986.
- Bernard, Grigorii and Izrail Ampolsky, eds. *Sovetkie kompozitory i muzykovedy: spravocchnik v treh tomah [Soviet Composers and Musicologists: Dictionary in Three Volumes]*. Moscow, Russia: Sovetskii kompositor, 1978.
- Danko, Larisa. "Slonimsky, Sergei Mikhaylovich," in vol. 23 of *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Edited by Stanley Sadie. London: Macmillan, 2001.
- Ho, Allan Benedict and Dmitry Feofanov, eds. *Biographical Dictionary of Russian/Soviet Composers*. Westpoint, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1989.
- Moldon, David. *A Bibliography of Russian Composers*. London: White Lion Publishers, 1976.
- Orlov, Genrikh. "Slonimsky, Sergei Mikhaylovich," in vol. 17 of *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 1<sup>st</sup> edition. Edited by Stanley Sadie. London: MacMillan, 1980.
- Slonimsky, Nicolas. "Slonimsky, Sergei Mikhaylovich," in *Baker's Biographical Dictionary of Musicians*, 8<sup>th</sup> ed. New York: Schirmer Books, 1992.
- Vodarsky-Shiraeff, Alexandra. *Russian Composers and Musicians: A Biographical Dictionary*. New York: The H.W. Wilson Company, 1983.

### Monographs

- Abraham, Gerald. *Eight Soviet Composers*. Westpoint, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1976.
- Aleksandrova, Elena. *Faktory ladovoj differenciacii v slozhnotonalnyh strukturah sovremennoj muzyki. K probleme teorii lada [Factors of Modal Differentiation in Complex Tonal Structures Found in Contemporary Music: On the Problem of the Theory of Modality]*. (Ph.D. dissertation). St. Petersburg, Russia: St. Petersburg State Conservatory, 1984.
- Afanasiev, Leonid. *Soviet Composers*. Moscow, Russia: Mezhdunarodnaya Kniga, 1979.
- Demesko, Galina. *Problema sonatnosti v instrumental'nom tvorchestve sovetskih kompozitorov 60-70h godov [The Problem of Sonata Form in the Instrumental Works of Soviet Composers of the 1960s and 1970s]*. (MA dissertation). Moscow, Russia: Gnessin State Pedagogical Institute, 1980.
- Ersova, Elena. *Voprosy formy v tvorchestve sovetskih kompozitorov [Problems of Form in the Works of Soviet Composers]*. Saratov, Russia: Saratovskij Universitet, 1991.

- Golovinskii, Grigorii and Natalia Shakhnazarova, eds. *Sovetskaya muzyka na sovremennom etape: stat'i i interv'iu* [Contemporary Soviet Music: Essays and Interviews]. Moscow, Russia: Sovetskii Kompozitor, 1981.
- Hakobian, Levon. *Music of the Soviet Age 1917-1987*. Stockholm, Sweden: Kantat HB, 1998.
- Kjuregian, Tatiana. *Evoluciya pricipov muzykal'noj formy v tvorchestve sovetskih kompositorov 50-70h godov* [On the Principles of Musical Form and Their Evolution in the Works of Soviet Composers from the 1950s to the 1970s]. (Ph.D. dissertation). Moscow, Russia: Moscow State Conservatory, 1982.
- Krebs, Stanley Dale. *Soviet Composers and the Development of Soviet Music*. (Ph.D. dissertation). Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Press, 1964.
- Kuharskij, Vasilij. *O muzyke i muzykantah nashih dnei* [On Music and Musicians of Our Day]. Moscow, Russia: Sovetskij kompozitor, 1979.
- Milka, Anatoly. *Sergei Slonimsky: monograficheskij ocherk* [Sergei Slonimsky: A Monographic Sketch]. St. Petersburg, Russia: Pechatnyi Dvor, 1976.
- Mitchinson, Paul Gregory. *Music and Politics in Early Soviet Russia*. (Ph.D. dissertation). Harvard University Press, 1997.
- Nikitina, Ludmila. *Sovetskaya muzyka: istoriya i sovremennost'* [Soviet Music: History and Modernity]. Moscow, Russia: Muzyka, 1991.
- Olkhovsky, Andrey. *Music under the Soviets: The Agony of an Art*. London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1955.
- Ovsyannikova, Tatiana. *Problemy polifonicheskogo tematizma i polifonicheskoi formy v sovetskoj muzyke (na materiale proizvedenij 60-70h godov)* [Thematic and Formal Problems in the Polyphony of Soviet Composers (Analyzed on the Basis of Compositions from the 1960s and 1970s)]. (Ph.D. dissertation). Vilnius, Lithuania, Vilnius State Conservatory, 1982.
- Pekelis, Mikhail, Tamara Livanova, Tatiana Popova, Daniel Zhitomirskii, and Yurii Keldysh. *Istoriya russkoi muzyki* [The History of Russian Music]. Moscow, Russia: Muzgiz, 1940.
- Poliakova, Ludmila. *Soviet Music*. Moscow, Russia: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1985.
- Rytsareva, Marina. *Kompositor Sergei Slonimsky: Monografiya* {Composer Sergei Slonimsky: A Monograph}. St. Petersburg, Russia: Pechatnyi Dvor, 1991.
- Schwarz, Boris. *Music and Musical Life in Soviet Russia 1917-1970*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1972.

- Sevljakov, Evgenij. *Neoklassicism i otechestvennaya muzyka 1960 – 80h godov* [Neoclassicism and Domestic Music from 1960s to the 1980s]. Rostov-na-Donu, Russia: Rostovskij Pedagogicheskij Institute, 1992.
- Sitikova, Raisa. *Russkaya sovetskaya fortepiannaya sonata 1917-1932h godov* [The Piano Sonata in Soviet Russia, 1917-1932]. (Ph.D. dissertation). St. Petersburg, Russia: St. Petersburg State Conservatory, 1981.
- Slonimsky, Nicolas. *Development of Soviet Music*. New York: The American Russian Institute for Cultural Relations with the Soviet Union, 1937.
- Smirnov, Mstislav. *Russkaya fortepiannaya muzyka. Cherty svoeobraziya* [Russian Piano Music: Distinctive Features]. Moscow, Russia: Muzyka, 1983.
- Solodovshchikov, Ivan, Lev Ginzburg, Iakov Platek, and Eleonora Fedosova. *Outstanding Russian and Soviet Composers*. Moscow, Russia: Mezhdunarodnaya Kniga, 1980.
- Stepanova, Irina and Irina Brezneva, eds. *Problemy stilevogo obnoveniya v russkoj klassicheskoj i sovetskoj muzyke. Sbornik nauchnyh trudov Moskovskoj konservatorii* [Problems of Stylistic Renewal in Russian Classical and Soviet Music: A Collection of Articles by Faculty Members of the Moscow Conservatory]. Moscow, Russia: Muzyka, 1983.
- Tretiakova, Lilia. *Stranitsy sovetskoi muzyki* [The History of Soviet Music]. Moscow, Russia: Znanie, 1980.
- Zemcovskij, Izrail. *Folklor i kompozitor. Teoreticheskie etyudy o russkoj sovetskoj muzyke* [Folklore and the Composer: Theoretical Studies on Russian Soviet Music]. Moscow, Russia: Sovetskij Kompozitor, 1978.

#### Articles in Periodicals

- Eshpai, Andrey. "The Soviet Union Young Composers." *Music Educators Journal*, vol. XX/1 (September 1973): 48-49.
- Grigor'eva, Galina. "Stylistic Aspects of Soviet Music." *Current Musicology*, no. 52, 1993: 44-47.
- Lehman. "Slonimsky: Piano Works" (review). *American Record Guide*, vol. 64, No. 2 (March/April 2001): 166.
- Mazo, Margarita. "The Present and the Unpredictable Past: Music and Musical Life of St. Petersburg and Moscow since the 1960s." *International Journal of Musicology*, vol. 5, 1996: 371-400.
- Powell, Jonathan. "Slonimsky's Piano Works" (review). *International Piano*, September/October 2001: 79-80.

Rahmanova, Marina. "On Folklore in Contemporary Russian Music." *Sovetskaya Muzyka*, USSR, vol. 11 (November 1984): 46-56.

Seaman, Gerald. "Recent Trends in Soviet Music." *Australian, Slavonic and East European Studies*, vol. 3 no. 1, 1989: 107-118.

#### Websites

MacDonald, Ian. *Music under Soviet Rule*. <http://www.siu.edu/~msov/msov.html>

Slonimsky, Sergei. *Sergei Slonimsky's Home Page*. <http://www.classicalmusic.spb.ru/slonsimsky/>

Van Rijen, Onno. *Onno van Rijen's Home Page*. <http://www.home-1.worldonline.nl/~Eovar/>

Van Rijen, Onno. *Sergei Slonimsky*. <http://www.ovar.myweb.nl/slonsim.htm>

#### Discography of Slonimsky's Piano Works

Fitenko, Nikita. *Piano Sonata and 24 Preludes and Fugues, Book 1*, by Sergey Slonimsky. Altarus 9085, 2000.

Fitenko, Nikita. *24 Preludes and Fugues, Book 2 and Piano Pieces "From Five to Fifty,"* by Sergey Slonimsky. Altarus 9085, 2000.

Zakarian, Sedmara. *Rudstein Plays Slonimsky, Tischenko*. Albany 135, 1994.

Zakarian, Sedmara. *Rudstein Plays Russian Piano Music*. Albany 279, 19.