

AN HISTORICAL AND ANALYTICAL SURVEY OF THE TRANSCENDENTAL
ETUDES BY SERGEI LIAPUNOV

Igor Chernyshev, B.A., M.M.

Dissertation Prepared for the Degree of
DOCTOR OF MUSICAL ARTS

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS

August 2007

APPROVED:

Joseph Banowetz, Major Professor
Adam Wodnicki, Committee Member
Jeffrey Snider, Committee Member
Lynn Eustis, Chair of the Graduate Performance
Degrees Committee
Graham Phipps, Director of Graduate Studies in
the College of Music
James C. Scott, Dean of the College of Music
Sandra L. Terrell, Dean of the Robert B. Toulouse
School of Graduate Studies

Chernyshev, Igor. *An historical and analytical survey of the Transcendental Etudes by Sergei Liapunov*. Doctor of Musical Arts (Performance), August 2007, 41 pages, 32 musical examples, references, 19 titles.

Sergei Mikhailovich Liapunov (1859-1924) was a distinguished Russian composer, pianist and teacher of the late 19th and early 20th century whose works are relatively unknown. His piano pieces were highly regarded and performed by pianists such as Konstantin Igumnov, Josef Hofmann, Josef Lhévinne, Ferruccio Busoni, and Vladimir Horowitz. However, they are rarely included in modern pianists' repertoire both in Russia and abroad, and are often viewed merely for their historic significance.

Works of Liapunov are characterized by a life-affirming character and monumental beauty largely inspired by the images of nature as well as the sounds of his native Russian folk songs and dances. His music rarely conveys the urgency or profound melancholy which is often seen in the music composed during the same period by Rachmaninoff and Scriabin. Liapunov continued and enriched the great traditions of Russian music started by Glinka and *The Mighty Five*. He did not discover bold new ways of composing, and at the same time did not succumb to the temptation of following contemporary musical trends.

The *Twelve Transcendental Etudes, op. 11*, dedicated to the memory of Franz Liszt, are masterpieces of immense value both from a technical and artistic standpoint. Just like Liszt's *études*, they were not designed merely to display virtuosity, but to demonstrate that the piano is capable of achieving orchestral sounds and tone painting. There is no doubt that the virtuosic style of Franz Liszt as well as the Russian Romantic tradition and folklore had the greatest influence on Liapunov's *Transcendental Etudes*. It is also clear that Chopin's works must have occupied a large part of his repertoire. This paper will examine both Russian and Western European influences on Liapunov's style as demonstrated in this *étude* cycle.

Copyright 2007

by

Igor Chernyshev

INTRODUCTION

Sergei Mikhailovich Liapunov (1859-1924) was a distinguished Russian composer, pianist and teacher of the late 19th and early 20th century whose works are relatively unknown. His piano pieces were highly regarded and performed by pianists such as Konstantin Igumnov, Josef Hofmann, Josef Lhévinne, Ferruccio Busoni, and Vladimir Horowitz.¹ However, they are rarely included in modern pianists' repertoire both in Russia and abroad, and are often viewed merely for their historic significance. By composing works such as *Transcendental Etudes*, seven *Preludes*, a *Piano Sonata*, two *Piano Concertos*, and *Rhapsody on Ukrainian Themes for Piano and Orchestra*, Liapunov made an important contribution to piano literature.

Works of Liapunov are characterized by a life-affirming character and monumental beauty largely inspired by the images of nature as well as the sounds of his native Russian folk songs and dances. His music rarely conveys the urgency or profound melancholy which is often seen in the music composed during the same period by Rachmaninoff and Scriabin. Liapunov continued and enriched the great traditions of Russian music started by Glinka² and *The Mighty Five*.³ He did not discover bold new ways of composing, and at the same time did not succumb to the temptation of following contemporary musical trends. Mikhail Shifman refers to Liapunov as “The Last of the Mohicans” of the Balakirev school.⁴

¹ Shifman, *Voprosy muzykal'no-ispolnitel'skogo isskustva*, p. 374.

² Mikhail Glinka (1804-1857), mostly known for his operas, is considered by many the father of Russian music.

³ *The Mighty Five* or *The Mighty Handful* (*Moguchaya Kuchka*) is the title given by the music critic Vladimir Stasov to Mily Balakirev, Cesar Cui, Modest Mussorgsky Alexander Borodin and Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov.

⁴ Shifman. *S. M. Liapunov, Ocherk Zhizni i Tvorchestva*, p. 5.

The Twelve Transcendental Etudes, op. 11, dedicated to the memory of Franz Liszt, are masterpieces of immense value both from a technical and artistic standpoint. Russian musicologist B. R. Asafiev wrote: “These *études* contain all of the best qualities and techniques of Balakirev-Liapunov piano style.”⁵ While Mily Balakirev played an important role in Liapunov’s life and creative output, the works and pianism of Franz Liszt cannot be overlooked as an important element in his development as a composer. In the following chapters, I will examine both Russian and Western European influences on Liapunov’s style as demonstrated in his *étude* cycle.

BIOGRAPHY OF LIAPUNOV

Sergei Liapunov was born in Yaroslavl into a highly educated family. His father, Mikhail Liapunov (1820-1868), was an astronomer at the Kazan University, studied with a distinguished mathematician, N. I. Lobachevski, and in his last years served as the director of Demidov Lyceum in Yaroslavl. His older brother, Alexander Liapunov (1857-1918), is considered one of the greatest Russian mathematicians. His younger brother, Boris Liapunov (1862-1943), was a philologist and a member of the USSR Academy of Science.⁶

The mother of the composer, Sofia Liapunova, had a very broad education with music occupying her largest interest. In his autobiography, Liapunov wrote:

My mother was a music amateur, and played the piano quite well. Nobody could be compared to her at least in our family. Her repertoire was small, but it included highly virtuosic pieces such as opera transcriptions by Liszt and Thalberg, *Concerto in A Minor* by Hummel, *Sonata pathétique* by Beethoven, etc. She generally expressed a much larger interest in music literature than most amateurs of that time.⁷

⁵ Asafiev, p. 263.

⁶ Shifman. *S. M. Liapunov, Ocherk Zhizni i Tvorchestva*, p. 7.

⁷ Shifman. pp. 7-8 (translated by Igor Chernyshev).

Sofia Liapunova discovered the musical gift of her son Sergei and took it upon herself to give him early piano lessons. After his father's sudden death in 1868, she also had to assume the responsibility of general education for young Sergei.

Sergei Liapunov spent most of his childhood in his mother's estate in the village of Bolobonovo located in the Central Volga region. The picturesque images of nature, the country life-style, and the sounds of folk music had a profound influence in his development both as a person and a musician. In 1870 Liapunov's family moved to Nizhniy Novgorod, where eleven-year-old Sergei continued his musical studies in the Gymnasium at the Imperial Music Society under the direction of pianist and composer V. Y. Villoing.⁸ During that time, he composed some of his early works, including a sonata for violin and piano that impressed Villoing very much. According to the memoirs of Liapunov's daughter, Olga Liapunova, Villoing was unsuccessful in correcting some problems with his hand position, and this pedagogical mistake was probably the reason why Liapunov did not have a more extensive concert career in the future.⁹ During his time in Nizhniy Novgorod, Liapunov had the opportunity to attend concerts by Nikolai Rubinstein which left a lasting impression on the young musician.

After graduating from the Gymnasium in 1878, Liapunov moved to Moscow and in the fall of the same year was accepted to the Moscow Conservatory for a major in piano performance and composition. During his five years there, he studied piano with V. I. Wilborg, Karl Klindworth, and Paul Pabst. Klindworth and Pabst were both former students of Franz Liszt. While he respected Pabst's musicality, he later admitted that he

⁸ V. Y. Villoing was a nephew and a cousin of A. I. Villoing who taught both Nikolai and Anton Rubinstein.

⁹ Shifman, p. 9.

learned more from Klindworth in one year than from all of his other piano teachers combined. He consequently dedicated his piano sonata to Klindworth.¹⁰

Liapunov studied composition with Nikolai Hubert and Sergei Taneyev, a former student of Tchaikovsky.¹¹ Taneyev, who dedicated much of his time studying the works of Renaissance and Baroque composers, became Liapunov's most influential composition teacher. It is possible that the frequent occurrence of counterpoint in Liapunov's works is due to Taneyev's influence.

In 1883 Liapunov graduated from the Moscow Conservatory with a Gold Medal. Even though Liapunov acquired an invaluable musical and pianistic foundation there, the Moscow Conservatory did not define his artistic taste. After the death of its founder Nikolai Rubinstein in 1881, the Moscow Conservatory was dominated mostly by German professors. Liapunov resented the "Teutonic" atmosphere in Moscow, and felt that Russian repertoire was significantly neglected. He gravitated more toward the music of *The Mighty Five* of St Petersburg, which at the time did not get much recognition in Moscow, and during the last years of his studies, Liapunov wrote that the true path for Russian music lay in St Petersburg.¹²

In 1884 Liapunov declined a teaching position at the Moscow Conservatory and traveled to St Petersburg to fulfill his life-long dream of getting close to the composers of *The New Russian School*, in particular to Balakirev. He met Balakirev, Rimsky-Korsakov, the Stasov brothers, Glazunov, and Liadov and immediately gained their respect after dazzling them with a performance of Balakirev's *Islamey*. Balakirev was

¹⁰ Shifman, 11.

¹¹ Some Western sources claim that Liapunov studied with Tchaikovsky himself, but there is no mention of it in any of the Russian sources that I found. Also, according to the Groves Dictionary, Tchaikovsky left Moscow Conservatory in 1877.

¹² Shifman, 15.

also impressed after looking over the score of Liapunov's *Overture in C-sharp Minor* which was premiered the following year under the direction of Rimsky-Korsakov.

After settling permanently in St Petersburg in 1885, Liapunov began his twenty-five-year-long association with Balakirev who became his mentor and friend. In addition to sharing similar attitudes toward music, Liapunov felt close to Balakirev because of his honesty and idealism. In the biography published by Liapunov in 1911, he states:

He [Balakirev] astonished everyone by his bravery and independence of thought. ... He was unrelenting in his discussions, never allowing compromise, but at the same time showing incredible kindness of heart when defending those who have been wronged. He could not stand anything fake or insincere. He was always brutally honest and would not bend the truth for the sake of compassion. He would immediately break relationships with the people who showed any signs of hypocrisy or artificiality.¹³

At the end of the 1880's, Balakirev broke his relationship with M. P. Beliaev, who was one of Russia's foremost music publishers and benefactors. Balakirev felt that Beliaev used his wealth to lure talented young musicians from under his influence. To show his loyalty to Balakirev, Liapunov consequently declined the highly coveted Glinka Prize awarded to him in 1904 for his *Piano Concerto No. 1 in E-flat Minor*. The 500-ruble monetary prize came from the Beliaev Estate. This action characterizes Liapunov as a man of high integrity, incapable of any compromises with his own conscience.¹⁴

In 1893 Liapunov was accepted to the Imperial Geographical Society which commissioned him, along with Balakirev and Liadov, to collect folksongs from the regions of Vologda, Vyatka, and Kostroma, to the north-east of Moscow.¹⁵ They collected approximately 300 songs, 165 of which were published by the society in 1894

¹³ Shifman, 23-24 (translated by Igor Chernyshev).

¹⁴ At that time Liapunov struggled financially. Russian ruble before the Revolution was based on the gold standard, and 500 rubles would have been sufficient to live comfortably for a year.

¹⁵ Garden, *Lyapunov, Sergey Michaylovich*, Grove Music Online, ed. L Macy.
<http://www.grovemusic.com>

as the *Songs of the Russian People*. From the collected material, Liapunov created several volumes of songs for voice and piano accompaniment. This ethno-musicological research played a useful role in helping to bring Russian folklore to a wider audience. It also gave Liapunov an enormous reserve of musical impressions, and from that time, the folk element entered securely into his musical idiom.¹⁶

In 1905, Liapunov became the director of Balakirev's Free School of Music.¹⁷ In the last years of his life Balakirev entrusted Liapunov with the completion of his compositions, notably the finale of his *Piano Concerto No. 2*. Liapunov also taught the younger, less experienced composition students of Balakirev. When Balakirev died in 1910, he left Liapunov all of his copy rights, manuscripts, music archives, and instruments. Liapunov orchestrated Balakirev's *Islamey*, and arranged several other orchestral works for piano four hands.

In 1910 Liapunov accepted a position at the St Petersburg Conservatory as a professor of piano, music history and composition. He accepted only the most advanced students to his piano studio and focused his teaching on interpretation. He required his students to be faithful to the score and preferred a simple and strict approach to the music without too much *rubato* or mannerism. He considered exaggerated expression of feelings to be a caricature. As an example of a good practice, he referred to the performance style of Balakirev, and spoke very highly of Josef Hofmann.¹⁸

The political unrest in Russia which culminated in World War I in 1914 and the Socialist Revolution in 1917 took a toll on Liapunov. He emigrated to Paris in 1923, where he directed a school of music for Russian émigrés. The following year he died of a

¹⁶ Liapunova, 92.

¹⁷ Garden, <http://www.grovemusic.com>

¹⁸ Shifman, 106.

heart attack.¹⁹ He was buried in Paris. The Soviet authorities reported that Liapunov died while touring in Paris, refusing to make public the fact that he had no intention of returning to his homeland.

THE TWELVE TRANSCENDENTAL ETUDES, OPUS 11 (1897-1905)

Concert étude as a genre was created by Chopin, who liberated *étude* from being defined as a merely technical exercise in the tradition of Clementi, Cramer, and Czerny. Franz Liszt continued in the tradition of Chopin by composing series of *études* which became an indispensable part of the piano repertoire. In Russia, *concert études* were composed by Anton Rubinstein, Balakirev, Tchaikovsky, Arensky, Glazunov, Liadov and Blumenfeld. Several of Blumenfeld's *études* such as *Morye* (Sea) and *Notch'* (Night) contain programmatic elements.²⁰ Liapunov continued in their path by composing a cycle of picturesque programmatic *études*.²¹

Liapunov's Opus 11 completed the key scheme used by Liszt in his famous cycle.²² Liszt began with C Major and progressed through the flat keys to B-flat Minor using ascending fourth and parallel minor key structure (C-Major, A-minor, F Major, D Minor, etc). Liapunov took up where Liszt left off, beginning with F-sharp Major and continuing through the sharp keys to E Minor. In the letter to Balakirev, Liapunov stated:

It would be impolite for me to mention in the title that they serve as a continuation of Liszt's *études* because I am relatively unknown in the world of music, and it might be construed as bragging. It would be more appropriate to dedicate the *études* to Liszt, which might attract attention, but allow them to be judged on their own merit.²³

¹⁹ Garden, <http://www.grovemusic.com>

²⁰ Shifman, *Voprosy muzykal'no-ispolnitel'skogo isskustva*, p. 375.

²¹ Rachmaninoff composed his *Etudes-tableaux* a decade later.

²² Liszt composed three versions of *The Twelve Transcendental Etudes* published in 1826, 1837, and 1852.

Liapunov was most likely influenced by the 1852 version.

²³ Shifman, 376 (translated by Igor Chernyshev).

Liapunov thought that the dedication to the memory of Franz Liszt stated in the title was not a sufficient enough tribute to the great Hungarian composer. The twelfth *étude* bears the title *Elégie en mémoire de François Liszt* and represents a defining feature of Liszt's musical idiom – *Lento capriccioso. All'ungarese in modo funebre*.

It took almost eight years (1897-1905) for Liapunov to complete the cycle, which was partially due to the fact that at the same time he was busy editing Glinka's works for publication. Liapunov paid homage to Liszt, whose artistic principles and pianism played a huge role in the formation of his own style. At one point Liapunov actually expressed concern to Balakirev about an "overbearing" influence of Liszt on his style:

I began to compose my second piano concerto. ... I cannot rid myself from Liszt's influence in the use of form. When it comes to virtuosic writing, I feel completely enslaved by Liszt.

Balakirev responds:

Do not try to avoid Lisztian pianism. A good composer must not force himself, but follow his natural tendencies. ... You must not feel enslaved because while using Lisztian pianism you can still display your own personality.²⁴

The validity of Balakirev's words is definitely seen in the final outcome of Liapunov's *Transcendental Etudes*. Liapunov certainly adapted many aspects of Lisztian pianism while making them unique through the use of Russian melodic style and folk elements. Each of the *études* has a programmatic title in Russian which was later translated into French for publication by Zimmermann. The following is the list of the twelve *études*:

Etude I: *Berceuse* (F-sharp Major)

Etude II: *Rondo des fantômes* (D-sharp Minor)

Etude III: *Carillon* (B Major)

²⁴ Shifman, 376 (translated by Igor Chernyshev).

- Etude IV: *Térek* (G-sharp Minor)
- Etude V: *Nuit d'été* (E Major)
- Etude VI: *Tempête* (C-sharp Minor)
- Etude VII: *Idylle* (A Major)
- Etude VIII: *Chant épique* (F-sharp Minor)
- Etude IX: *Harpes éoliennes* (D Major)
- Etude X: *Lesghinka* (B Minor)
- Etude XI: *Rondo des sylphes* (G Major)
- Etude XII: *Elégie en mémoire de François Liszt* (E Minor)

Berceuse (Lullaby) (1897-98) opens the cycle as a calm, melodically

transparent piece in contrast to Liszt's set which begins with a brilliant *étude*. Influenced by the Russian folk song, its two themes are used as a verse and a refrain. It opens with a four-note motif which serves as an introduction and later returns as a refrain (Example 1).

Example 1. *Berceuse*, measures 1-3.



Berceuse, measures 25-27.



The section representing the verse is motivically related to the introductory theme and has a flowing character. It is accompanied by a wave-like arpeggiated figure which represents a gentle rocking of a cradle. In the reprise, the verse returns with an elaborate triplet figuration in the middle voice (Example 2).

Example 2. *Berceuse*, measures 8-12.



Berceuse, measures 50-54.



Berceuse demonstrates that the melodic style of Chopin played a large role in the development of Liapunov's style. It consists of a simple melody accompanied by broken chord figurations which span over an octave. The simple texture relies on the sustaining pedal for its effect. All of this is very similar to the style found in many of Chopin's and John Field's nocturnes.

Rondo des fantômes (Dance of the Ghosts) (1897-98) is written in a five-part form with a brief introduction and coda. It consists of continuous eighth-note triplet figuration and makes use of rapid expansion and contraction in both hands, sometimes requiring very large stretches and leaps. In this *étude*, Liapunov makes use of the material from the *Fantasy in E-flat Minor*, which he composed during his years in the Moscow Conservatory (Example 3).

Example 3. *Fantasy in E-flat Minor*.²⁵



There are two main musical ideas in *Rondo des fantômes*. The first one is made up of broken chords that open and close in contrary motion which evokes a fantastic world of fleeting shadows (Example 4).

Example 4. *Rondo des fantômes*, measures 7-12.



The second one is a chromatic melody played staccato over the triplet figures and then repeated in the left hand which depicts the eerie dancing of ghosts (Example 5).

²⁵ Shifman, 379.

Example 5. *Rondo des fantômes*, op. 11, No. 2, measures 79-88.

Much of this *étude* calls for a light touch, but in the latter part there is a violent explosive climax that winds down to a coda in which the ghost figures fade into silence over a low sinister-sounding D-sharp pedal.

What makes this *étude* distinctly Russian is the recurring *i-iv-i-v-i* progression in the main theme. The use of minor *v* instead of traditional dominant *V* implies natural minor, which is a typical example of modal harmony often used in Russian folk and liturgical music (see Example 4 on page 11).

Carillon (The Sounds of the Bells) (1901) includes Liapunov's own descriptive program:

In the distance is heard the ringing of a bell, across the measured strokes of which come the sounds of a hymn. The ringing grows louder and louder and the church-chimes blend with the sounds of the principal bell. The solemn tones of the hymn alternate with the sounds of the bells, ending in general majestic choral effect interspersed with the deep sounds of the great bell.²⁶

²⁶ Liapunov, *Douze études d'exécution transcendante*, op. 11, No. 3.

This *étude* is based on the sounds of the bells which Liapunov recorded during his 1893 expedition.²⁷ It is distinguished by the orchestral sounds which portray a celebratory ringing of the bells against the backdrop of a joyful Russian melody. Several Russian composers have been inspired by the sounds of the church bells, most notably Mussorgsky in *The Great Gate of Kiev* from *Pictures at an Exhibition*.

The musical material which is related to Liszt's *Transcendental Etude No. 11 in D-flat Major, Harmonies du soir* (Example 7) portrays a chordal bell motive and appears at the beginning of the extensive introductory section. At first, it is built on the low F-sharp dominant pedal and later uses the bell imitatively in diminution (Example 6).

Example 6. *Carillon*, op. 11, No. 3, measures 1-3.



Liszt, *Harmonies du soir*, measures 1-3.



Carillon is divided into three main sections followed by coda. Each section features a variation of the main theme, which was first introduced in measure 7 (Example 7). Most of *Carillon* is written on three staves, and even four in the last fifteen measures,

²⁷ Shifman, *Ocherk Zhizni i Tvorchestva*, 64.

in the tradition pioneered by Liszt. Extra staves were necessary to accommodate the ranges of sonority from the low bass of the great bell to the high treble of the smaller bells, as well as to provide visual clarity.

Example 7. *Carillon*, measures 7-12.



Térek (1900), which was composed a year before *Carillon*, is a vivid description of the violent Georgian river *Térek* which is portrayed by Lermontov's poem *Dari Téreka* (The Gifts of *Térek*) and quoted at the head of the music:

Térek moans, wild and wicked,
 Among steep mountains,
 Like a cry of a storm,
 Whose tears are airborne,
 Scattering through the plains,
 He appears cunning,
 And in sweet adulation,
 Murmurs at the Caspian Sea ²⁸

The two images portrayed in this *étude* are the violent current of the mountain river and the contrasting calm as it is about to join with the Caspian Sea. The main theme begins with the murmuring figure first in the left hand and then in both hands. The right-hand broken octave figure is greatly extended in range, while the left hand changes to wide skips which outline the harmony in staccato eighth notes (Example 8).

²⁸ English translation is provided Igor Chernyshev. The *Zimmermann* edition only contains the Russian original and the German translation of the poem.

Example 8, *Térek*, measures 1-8.

The tumultuous opening section is followed by a quiet *scherzando* section which modulates to B-flat Major. This charming melody which portrays the “sweet adulation” of *Térek* is reminiscent of Borodin’s *Polovetsian Dances* from the opera *Prince Igor*.²⁹ (Example 9).

²⁹ Liapounov pays another tribute to Borodin’s *Polovetsian Dances* in *Lesghinka*, which is not a surprise because both *études* are based on Caucasian themes.

Example 9, *Terek*, measures 35-42.

The image displays a musical score for Example 9, *Terek*, measures 35-42. The score is written for piano and is in G major and 4/4 time. It is divided into two main sections. The first section, marked *quasi Flauto* and *p scherzando*, features a delicate melody in the right hand and a rhythmic accompaniment in the left hand. The second section, marked *quasi Piccolo* and *pp lusingando*, features a more intricate and virtuosic melody in the right hand and a complex accompaniment in the left hand. The score includes various musical notations such as dynamics, articulation, and fingering.

Borodin, a theme from *Polovetsian Dances*.

The image displays a musical score for Borodin, a theme from *Polovetsian Dances*. The score is written for piano and is in G major and 4/4 time. It features a single melodic line with various rhythmic patterns and articulation. The score is marked *p*.

The *étude* combines a variety of virtuosic devices such as chord repetition, wide leaps, broken octaves and tenths, and streaming passages which encompass all ranges of the keyboard. Liapunov utilizes the high register of the piano with delicate melodies, which are marked *quasi flauto* and *quasi piccolo*. All of this effectively evokes the exotic images of the Caucasus and masterfully illustrates the poetic language of Lermontov.

Nuit d'été (Summer Night) (1900) is the most extended lyrical *étude* of the cycle, written in the form of an expanded nocturne. This *étude* was most likely modeled after Liszt's *Transcendental Etude No. 9 in A-flat Major, Ricordanza*. Both pieces reveal a similar fragment of melodic material in the introduction (Example 10).

Example 10. *Nuit d'été*, measures 1-5.

Liszt, *Ricordanza*, measures. 1-3.

Nuit d'été begins with a long introduction which establishes a nocturne-like atmosphere. The first cadenza, *leggierissimo*, leads into the A-section, in the tonic, where the principal theme derived from the opening material is stated twice. The transition to the B-section in F Minor and then A-flat Major is made via reiterated G-sharps, which change enharmonically to A-flat. Although different, this section seems to have some relationship to a corresponding passage in *Ricordanza* (Example 11).

Example 11, *Nuit d'été*, measures 74-77.

L'istesso tempo. 19

p dol.

Ped. *

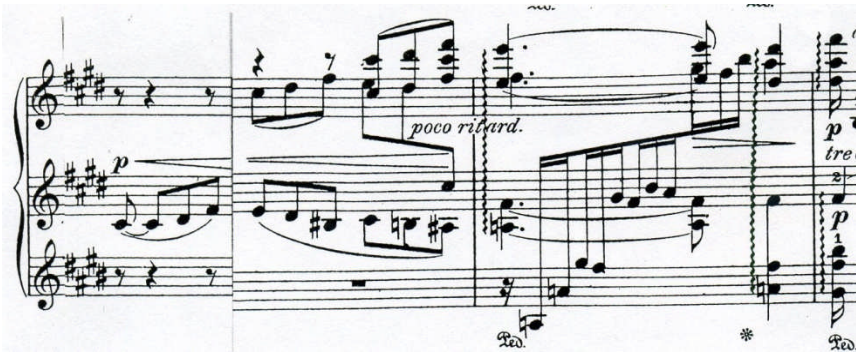
Liszt, *Ricordanza*, measures 51-53.

largamente molto espressivo

Ped. *

A transition of an improvisatory character is motivically related to Chopin's *Ballade No. 4 in F Minor, op. 5*, and uses imitation in a similar fashion (Example 12).

Example 12. *Nuit d'été*, measures 94-97.



Chopin, *Ballade No.4*, measures 124-26.



It is followed by a return to the A-section material written on three staves with trills above the principal theme. After a brief reappearance of the opening motive there is a *molto appassionato* climax, which reaches its highest point in the cadenza. The piece ends with the final reference to the opening measures, followed by gently rolled chords and the resolution of a long appoggiatura.

Tempête (Storm) (1897) was the first *étude* of Opus 11 to be completed.

Liapunov uses Liszt's *Transcendental Etude No. 10 in F Minor* as a model. Both *études* share the tempo indication, *Allegro agitato molto*. The technical difficulty of this *étude* is presented by almost non-stop rotating broken-chord figurations. Furious triplets in which the thumb of the right hand brings out the melody are combined with leaping two-note motifs (Example 13).

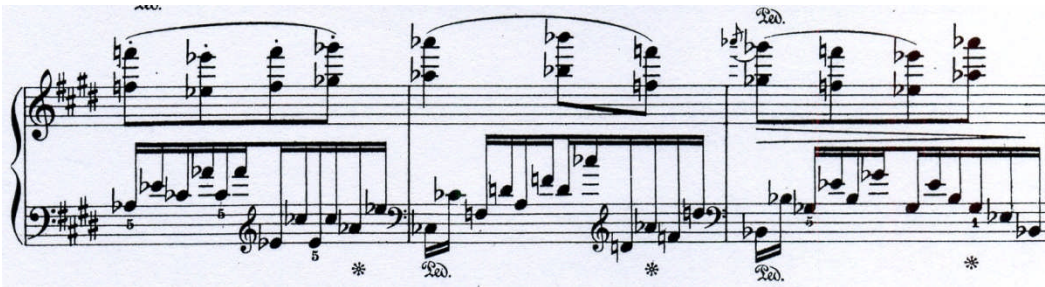
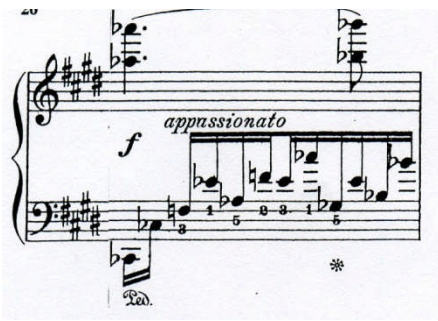
The second lyrical theme, marked *appassionato*, soars in octaves above rapid sixteenth notes. It offers an excellent contrast to the opening material and shares

significant similarity with Liszt's corresponding *Transcendental Etude No. 10* (Example 14). The second theme is repeated softly in the left hand, accompanied by ascending arpeggios in the right hand. A brief development built on the opening material is followed by a short recapitulation, where the first theme reappears in the rumbling octaves in the bass, accompanied by the highly virtuosic arpeggios in the right hand. The second theme is heard once again, but this time its repetition in the left hand is heard in a triumphant *fortissimo*. The opening material returns and sets the stage for a violent coda that builds to a climactic final resolution in the tonic key.

Example 13, *Tempête*, measures 1-5.

The image displays a musical score for the first five measures of 'Tempête'. The tempo is 'Allegro agitato molto' with a metronome marking of quarter note = 96. The key signature is D major (two sharps) and the time signature is 2/4. The score is written for piano, with a treble and bass clef. The first measure is marked 'p' (piano). The right hand features a series of ascending arpeggios, while the left hand plays a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The second measure continues this pattern. The third measure introduces a new theme in the left hand, marked with an 'x' above the notes. The fourth measure continues the development of this theme. The fifth measure is marked 'f' (fortissimo) and features a more complex rhythmic pattern in the right hand, including a four-measure rest (4) and a final chord marked with a red 'x' and a fermata. The score concludes with a double bar line and a repeat sign.

Example 14. *Tempête*, measures 39-42.



Liszt, *Transcendental Etude No. 10*, measures 31-36.

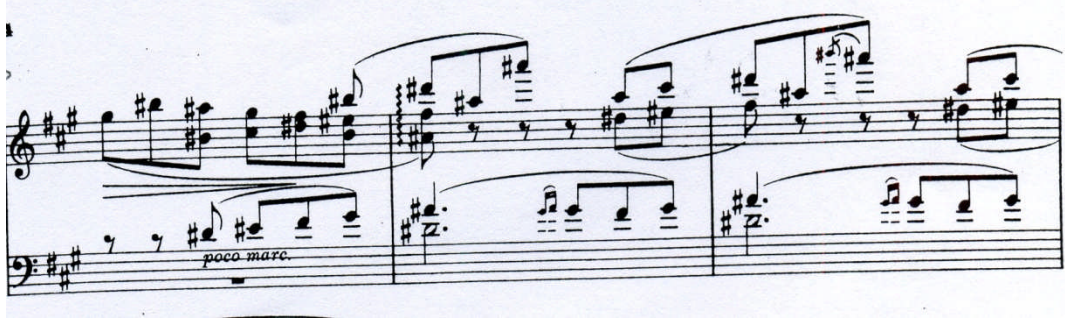


Idylle (Idyll) (1901) paints an image of a peaceful Russian landscape. Shifman suggests that this piece was probably inspired by his childhood years in the village of Bolobonovo.³⁰ Cast in three parts with a coda, *Idylle* is a tasteful, modest, yet carefully

³⁰ Shifman, 71.

conceived work which makes use of two graceful themes. The second theme is introduced in the tenor voice and suggests a shepherd's pipe tune³¹ (Example 15).

Example 15. *Idylle*, measures 38-40.



The Russian title of *Chant épique*, composed in 1903, is a *Bylina* which is an epic song of Kievan Russia³² dating back to the time period between the ninth and twelfth centuries. *Bylinas* depicted a heroic struggle of Russian people against various invaders - from the Mongols in the South to the Vikings in the North.

This *étude* is based on one of the songs that Liapunov collected during his 1893 expedition. It is an epic soldier's song *Iz-za lesu, lesu temnogo* (Out of the woods, dark woods).³³ The prolonged introduction consists of short fragments of the song stated in augmentation in the bass paired with harp-like arpeggios (Example 16). Eventually the song is stated in its completion in toccata-like manner depicting the galloping of a horse (Example 17). The intensity grows, portraying a violent battle as the dynamic level increases and the texture thickens with more figurations being added. A strumming transitional figure leads into the contrasting secondary theme composed in a manner of a folk dance (Example 18).

³¹ Shifman, 71.

³² The city of Kiev used to be the capital of the ancient Russia. It is now the capital of Ukraine.

³³ Shifman 73.

The secondary theme is then repeated several times in an amplified sonority and leads into the return of the first theme paired with the arpeggios similar to the introduction. The main theme takes over again, and as the intensity grows, Liapunov introduces an *ossia* that uses sixteenth-note figurations in the right hand as a less strenuous alternative to the octaves. After that, the second theme appears, transformed into interlocking chords, and proceeds to a coda which becomes a patriotic dance in celebration of victory over the invaders and the traditional happy ending to the *Bylina*.

Example 16. *Chant épique*, measures 1-8.

The image displays a musical score for the first eight measures of 'Chant épique'. The score is written for piano and is in the key of D major (two sharps) and 3/4 time. The tempo is marked 'Allegro maestoso' with a metronome marking of M.M. $\text{♩} = 60$. The score is divided into three systems. The first system (measures 1-4) features a bass line with a *p pesante* marking and a right hand that is mostly silent. The second system (measures 5-6) shows the right hand entering with a *p armoniosa saltante saltato* marking, playing a series of sixteenth-note arpeggios. The third system (measures 7-8) continues the sixteenth-note arpeggios in the right hand, while the bass line remains mostly silent. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings.

Example 17. *Chant épique*, measures 36-44.



Example 18. *Chant épique*, measures 122-25.



Harpes éoliennes (1902) shares its title with Chopin's *Etude in A-flat Major, op. 25, No. 1* which is known as the *Aeolian Harp Etude*³⁴. The title *Aeolian* is taken from the name of the Greek god of the winds and depicts the blowing of the wind. However, other than its perpetual motion, Liapunov's *Harpes éoliennes* has nothing in

³⁴ *Aeolian Harps* were featured in several Romantic-era poems by Samuel Taylor Coleridge. *Aeolian Harp Etude* is a nickname given to Chopin's *Etude op. 25 No. 1* by Robert Schumann.

common with its Chopin counterpart. The real inspiration for this *étude* must have been Liszt's *Transcendental Etude No. 12 in B-flat Minor, Chasse-neige*, which is also based on continuous rapid tremolos (Example 19).

Example 19. *Harpes éoliennes*, measure 1-2.

Liszt, *Chasse-neige*, measures 1-2.

Harpes éoliennes is written entirely in sixty-fourth notes except for the melody, which is subjected to imitation in the same fashion as *Chasse-neige*. Each measure of the *étude* takes up the whole line, which almost gives the appearance of the absence of time signature and may seem intimidating to a performer. Both *Harpes éoliennes* and *Chasse-neige* have compound time signatures - 9/8 and 6/8 respectively.

Harpes éoliennes is based on only one recurring theme. This scheme is used only twice in Opus 11, the other being the eleventh *étude*, *Rondo des sylphes*. The theme of *Harpes éoliennes* is transformed by being stated in different registers with varying dynamic coloring. The light tremolo figuration provides a rich harmonic background portraying the strings of the harp being vibrated by the wind.

Lesghinka (1903) is Liapunov's most famous composition, partially due to the subtitle, *Style Balakirev*, and its obvious connection to *Islamey*. Both pieces share Caucasian dance character, 12/16 time signature, driven character, and *ABA* ternary form with a relaxed lyrical middle section. *Lesghinka* even uses two of Balakirev's favorite keys – B Minor and D-flat Major.³⁵

Lesghinka is a courtship dance of the *Lesghians*, a Muhammedian tribe of the Caucasus Mountains. The following is a brief description of the dance by the Encyclopedia Britannica:

It is a male solo dance (often with a sword) and also a couple dance. The man, imitating the eagle, falls to his knees, leaps up, and dances with concise steps and strong, sharp arm and body movements. When the dance is performed in pairs, couples do not touch; the woman dances quietly as she regards the man's display.³⁶

The dance *Lesghinka* was previously used by Glinka in the Act IV of his opera *Ruslan and Ludmila* (1837-42), which is based on the famous epic poem of the same name by Aleksandr Pushkin.³⁷

Unlike *Islamey*, which introduces its main theme in the beginning of the piece, *Lesghinka* starts with a ten-measure introduction which sets the tone for the entire piece.

³⁵ Shifman, 77.

³⁶ Encyclopedia Britannica. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9048050>

³⁷ Mellers, 50.

The use of augmented second in the very first measure sets a distinctly Eastern character (Example 20).

Example 20. *Lesghinka*, measures 1-2.

Allegro con fuoco. M.M. ♩ = 176

S. Liapounow, Op. 11.

mf risoluto

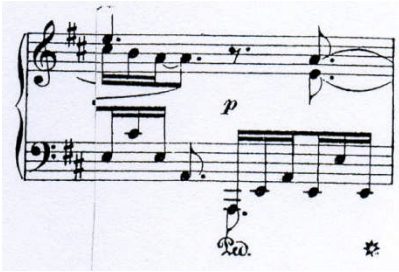
The image shows the first two measures of the piano introduction for 'Lesghinka'. The music is in 18/16 time and D major. The first measure features a prominent augmented second interval between the first and second notes of the right hand. The tempo is marked 'Allegro con fuoco' with a metronome marking of 176. The dynamic is 'mf risoluto'. The score is by S. Liapounow, Op. 11.

The first theme, portraying the man's dance, is free-flowing, driven, and marked with syncopated accents (Example 21). The second theme of similar character (Example 22) is introduced soon after that and resembles the second theme of *Islamey*.

Example 21. *Lesghinka*, measures 10-14.

The image shows two systems of musical notation for measures 10-14 of 'Lesghinka'. The first system covers measures 10 and 11, and the second system covers measures 12, 13, and 14. The music is in 18/16 time and D major. The first system includes a dynamic marking of 'p' and a syncopated accent. The second system features a series of syncopated accents marked with asterisks and the letters 'Ra'. The tempo and character are consistent with the previous examples.

Example 22. *Lesghinka*, measures 26-30.



Balakirev, *Islamey*, measures 45-48.



After several variations of the two themes and the introductory motif, which grows to a climax, there is a relaxing modulation to D-flat Major, and the introduction of *B* section which portrays a woman's response. This lyrical and graceful melody, marked *Poco più tranquillo*, is reminiscent of Borodin's *Polovetsian Dances* from the opera *Prince Igor* (Example 23).³⁸

³⁸ See Example 9 on page 16 for a theme from Borodin's *Polovetsian Dances*.

Example 23. *Lesghinka*, measures 100-02.



The rhythm of the lyrical section is combined with the descending chromatic scale and builds sequentially to a climax where its sonority is enlarged by massive chords, after which it settles into a delicate cadenza. After a repeat of an effectively amplified introduction, the first theme returns. Its treatment suggests galloping horses (Example 24).

Example 24. *Lesghinka*, measures 166-71.



It gradually gathers momentum and climaxes in whirling figurations covering the full length of the keyboard. The lyrical *B* theme returns in the key of D Major and grows more intense as it modulates to the tonic key of B Minor. This leads into a coda which

restates the introductory motive using interlocking chords,³⁹ then concludes in a triumphant cascade in the major mode.

Rondo des sylphes (Dance of the elves) (1905) deals with the world of the supernatural, similar to the earlier *Rondo des fantômes*. In the earlier *étude*, Liapunov portrays the eerie movements of the shadows, but in this one, he reveals the fairy-tale world of elves, with their grace and jubilation.

Rondo des sylphes is related to Liszt's *Transcendental Etude No. 5 in B-flat Major, Feux follets*, and shares its delicacy, transparent texture, and some similar technical problems. It is primarily a study in double notes and wide leaps, but it also deals with staccatos, chord figurations and octaves. The opening of *Rondo des sylphes* bears striking similarity to *Feux follets*. Both pieces start on the off-beat, and create weightless atmosphere with the diminished-seventh-chord harmony (Example 25).

The single theme is made up of two motifs which permeate the piece, together with recurring double-note and accompaniment figures. The two motifs are presented at the beginning of the main part of the *étude*, forming one complete eight-measure idea (Example 26). Motif one is similar to a playful left-hand figure that occurs in Liszt's *Feux follets* (Example 27), while motif two and the double-note figure are closely related to recurring ideas first heard in Liszt's introduction (Example 25, measure 9).

After the main section, the two motifs are subjected to modulation, various repetitions, inversions, and imitations. Then follows the central portion of the *étude*, where motif two is repeated in sequential modulations that build to a climax. It then uses an extension of the opening passage of the introduction to settle into a brief *scherzando*

³⁹ Interlocking chords and octaves were often used by Liszt. A performer must emphasize the thumbs and minimize outer fingers, otherwise they will sound disjunct.

section, which brings back both motifs and repeats another variation of motif two. After a transitional passage, the first two motifs along with the double-note introductory motif are used in sequential modulation to return to the tonic. The brief restatement of the main section leads into the coda where the hands seem to “run each other out of the keyboard”⁴⁰ in an interlocking figure portraying the elves scattering into the air (Example 28).

⁴⁰ Smith, 26.

Example 25. *Rondo des sylphes*, mesures 1-5.

Allegretto scherzando. M.M. ♩=144

Piano

p

poco marcato

leggerissimo

Rea *

Liszt, *Feux follets*, mesures 1-9.

Allegretto. (M. M. ♩=120-126)

p leggiero

dolce

pp leggerissimo

Rea *

Example 26. *Rondo des sylphes*, mesures 16-23.

The image shows a musical score for Example 26, measures 16-23 of *Rondo des sylphes*. The score is written for piano and consists of four systems of two staves each. The first system begins with the instruction *p lusingando*. The music features a complex texture with many beamed sixteenth notes in the right hand and a more rhythmic bass line in the left hand. There are several dynamic markings, including *Rea* and ** Rea*, and articulation marks like asterisks. The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic hairpins.

Example 27. Liszt, *Feux follets* 85-87.

The image shows a musical score for Example 27, measures 85-87 of Liszt's *Feux follets*. The score is written for piano and consists of two systems of two staves each. The first system begins with the instruction *scherzando, grazioso*. The music is characterized by rapid sixteenth-note passages in the right hand and a steady bass line in the left hand. There are several dynamic markings, including *Rea* and ** Rea*, and articulation marks like asterisks. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#) and the time signature is 3/4. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic hairpins.

Example 28. *Rondo des sylphes*, measures 128-31.



The cycle closes with *Elégie en mémoire de François Liszt* (1905), which was conceived on the larger scale than the rest of the *études*. Shifman makes a distinction between the first eleven *études*, which he classifies as *musical pictures* because of their programmatic content, and this *étude*, which he calls a *musical portrait*.⁴¹ This *étude* is designed to be the last and the most monumental tribute to Liapunov's hero, Franz Liszt.

Liapunov captures the Hungarian characteristics of Liszt's style from the beginning. The first theme is reminiscent of the *recitative* opening of *Liszt's Hungarian Rhapsody No. 1* (Example 29).

⁴¹ Shifman, 80.

Example 29. *Elégie en mémoire de François Liszt*, mesures 1-7.

Lento capriccioso M. M. ♩ = 108
All'ungarese, in modo funebre. S. Liapounow, Op. 11

ben accentuato
sf

The image shows the first seven measures of a piano piece. The score is written for piano with a treble and bass clef. The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The tempo and mood are indicated as 'Lento capriccioso' with a metronome marking of 108. The style is 'All'ungarese, in modo funebre'. The first measure is marked 'ben accentuato' and 'sf'. The music features a series of chords and single notes in the bass line, with some grace notes.

rit.
rinfz
trm

The image shows measures 8-10 of Liszt's Hungarian Rhapsody No. 1. The score is written for piano with a treble and bass clef. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#) and the time signature is 3/4. The tempo is marked 'rit.'. The music features a series of chords and single notes in the bass line, with some grace notes. The first measure is marked 'rinfz' and 'trm'.

Liszt, *Hungarian Rhapsody No. 1*, measures 8-10.

Recitativo.
ff

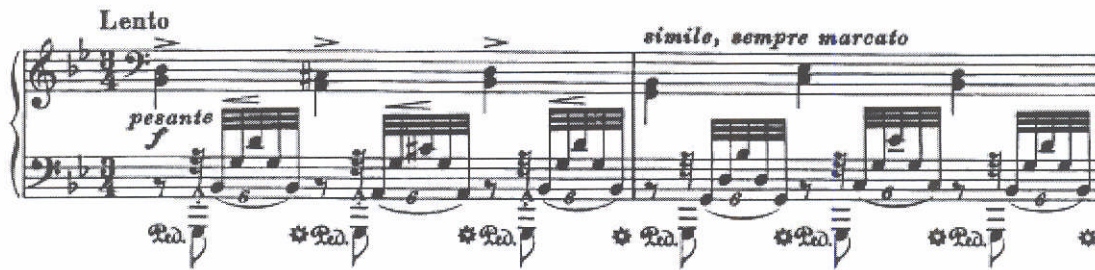
The image shows measures 8-10 of Liszt's Hungarian Rhapsody No. 1. The score is written for piano with a treble and bass clef. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#) and the time signature is 3/4. The tempo is marked 'Recitativo.'. The music features a series of chords and single notes in the bass line, with some grace notes. The first measure is marked 'ff'.

The second theme in thirds is accompanied by the rumbling arpeggios in the left hand which are similar the ones used in Liszt's *Transcendental Etude No. 6 in G Minor, Vision* (Example 30).

Example 30. *Elégie en mémoire de François Liszt*, mesures 8-9.



Liszt, *Vision*, mesures 1-2.



The two themes are repeated, enhanced by harp-like arpeggios reminiscent of Liszt's *Rhapsodie espagnole* (Example 31).

Example 31. *Elégie en mémoire de François Liszt*, measure 32.



Liszt, *Rhapsodie espagnole*, measure 15.



The following A section combines elements of both themes, accompanied by rumbling arpeggios. After several variations, it relaxes into a new lyrical B section in D-

flat Major marked *L'istesso tempo, molto tranquillo*. The D-flat key which was also used in *Lesghinka's* lyrical section may be seen as yet another tribute to Balakirev who was known to favor this tonality. Unlike the lyrical section in *Lesghinka*, which has a romantic character expressed by the triplets (see Example 23 on page 29), this section has a heroic undertone, conveyed by the dotted rhythms (Example 32).

Example 32. *Elégie en mémoire de François Liszt*, measures 88-91.



This theme is then repeated with more elaborate figuration and imitation between the hands. The melody is played by the thumbs while the rest of the fingers cover the broken-chord figurations, a technique often employed by Liszt. Eventually the melody builds up to a passionate passage of triplet chords over widely-spaced arpeggios in a three-against-four rhythm. This is followed by a cadenza leading into a transitional section of octaves which increase in intensity and connect to a powerful restatement of the A section. The theme is punctuated by the rumbling arpeggios which are now greatly magnified. This is followed by the second theme which is developed sequentially in imitation, in an ascending passage which moves “step by step as if assaulting Everest itself.”⁴² It culminates in a cadenza which consists of interlocking octaves⁴³ and arpeggios that cover a full length of keyboard in preparation of a massive transformation of B theme. An expanded coda brings back the first theme and combines it with the

⁴² Davis, 195.

⁴³ See footnote #39 on page 30.

elements of the lyrical theme. This is followed by the second theme which leads into the coda of ascending tremolos bringing the *étude* to a brilliant end.

CONCLUSION

Liapunov's *Transcendental Etudes* were premiered outside of Russia by G. Freidenberg in 1912 in the concert dedicated to the memory of Franz Liszt. Liapunov himself performed the complete cycle along with other selected original works in St Petersburg on April 30, 1906.⁴⁴

Liapunov's *Transcendental Etudes* are certainly valuable from the pedagogical standpoint. However, just like Liszt's *études*, they were not designed merely to display virtuosity, but to demonstrate that the piano is capable of achieving orchestral sounds and tone painting. Liapunov's *études* have an enormous artistic value. Many aspects of Russian folk tradition were represented, namely lullaby song, folk dance, shepherd's pipe, as well as poetic impressions of the forest, sounds of the wind and the river. Rimsky-Korsakov, who was also largely inspired by the Russian folklore, refers to those objects as "the voices of nature."⁴⁵ Some other programmatic elements taken from Liapunov's personal experiences were the sounds of the bell, the splashing of the waves, the shrill of the storm, and the galloping of a horse. These programmatic elements are often portrayed by the first theme, while the second, contrasting theme deals with the composer's impressions and a more reflective interpretation of programmatic content. The two contrasting themes are often motivically related to each other.

The virtuosic expression in the *études* is generally created from the main themes combined with various figurations such as arpeggios, chords, and octaves. The melodies

⁴⁴ Shifman, 84.

⁴⁵ Shifman, 82.

are often subjected to rhythmic and harmonic variations. In addition, Liapunov utilizes various means of imitation to achieve the contrapuntal enhancement of the melodic line. There is no doubt that the virtuosic style of Franz Liszt as well as the Russian Romantic tradition and folklore had the greatest influence on Liapunov's *Transcendental Etudes*. It is also clear that Chopin's works must have occupied a large part of his repertoire.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Asafiev, Boris V. *Russkaya Muzyka Nachala 19go Veka* (Russian Music since the Early 19th Century. Muzgiz. Moscow, 1930.
- Davis, Richard. *Sergei Lyapunov (1859-1924), The Piano Works: A Short Appreciation. The Music Review*, vol. 21, No. 1 (February 1960.)
- Encyclopedia Britannica. 2006. Encyclopedia Britannica Online. 20 Nov. 2006.
<http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9048050>
- Garden, Edward. *Lyapunov, Sergey Mikhaylovich. Grove Music Online* ed. L. Macy. 15 Nov. 2006. <http://www.grovemusic.com/>
- Liapunova, A. S., *S. M. Liapunov, Sovetskaya Muzyka* (Soviet Music), No. 9 (September 1950.)
- Mellers, Wilfrid. *Man and His Music*. Schocken Books. New York, 1969.
- Shifman, Mikhail Y. *S. M. Liapunov, Ocherk Zhizni i Tvorchestva*. (S. M. Liapunov, Life and Works) Muzgiz. Moscow, 1960.
- _____. *Dvenadtsat' Etudov Liapunova i Nekotorye voprosy ih interpretatsii* (Twelve Etudes of Liapunov, and Some Questions Regarding their Interpretation) *Voprosy muzykal'no-ispolnitel'skogo isskustva*, ed. L.S. Ginsburg and A. A. Solovstov. Moscow, 1958.
- Smith, Ellan Louise. *Liapunov, S. M. Etudes d'exécution transcendante*. Thesis (MM). North Texas State University. Denton, 1967.

SCORES

- Balakirev, Mily Alekseevich. *Islamey: Fantaisie orientale*. Fischer. New York, 1927.
- Borodin, Alexander. Themes from the *Polovetsian Dances*.
<http://content.answers.com/main/content/wp/en-commons/thumb/3/3c/700px-BorPolDancesThemes.png>
- Chopin, Frédéric. *Ballades*. Wiener Urtext Edition, 1986.
- Liapounow, S. *Etudes d'exécution transcendante pour le piano*. Musikverlag Zimmermann. Frankfurt am Main, 1958.
- Liszt, Franz. *12 Etudes d'exécution transcendante*. Editio Musica. Budapest, 1972.
- Liszt, Franz. *Complete études for solo piano, edited by Ferruccio Busoni*. Dover Publications. New York, 1988.

RECORDINGS

Liszt, Franz. *12 Transcendental Etudes, First Version (1827) and Final Version (1852.)* Joseph Banowetz, piano. Educo 3084-85, 1971.

Liszt, Franz. *Transcendental Etudes and Other Works for Piano, Lazar Berman, Piano.* Musical Heritage Society, 1978.

Liapunov, Sergei, *Transcendental Etudes, op. 11, Konstantin Scherbakov, Piano.* Marco Polo, 1994.

Lyapunov, Sergei. *12 Transcendental Etudes, Louis Kentner, Piano.* Pavilion Records Ltd. 2002.