


Nikolay Myaskovsky's Piano Sonata No. 2 A Compositional Analysis

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Abstract

The research aims to determine the structural principles underlying Myaskovsky's Piano Sonata No. 2 across its various compositional levels. The work was selected for its complexity and novelty in terms of melodic forms, overall structure, and tonal plan – features that are characteristic of Myaskovsky's output and Russian-Soviet compositional experiments during the first two decades of the 20th century. The study uses a descriptive-analytical approach, integrating formal processual descriptions and systematic compositional analysis.

The research identifies an inventive combinatorial complex of intricate thematic, tonal and gestural cycles of recurrences on various levels of the musical structure and form, which include a higher-level binary structure of "exposition/development" and "recapitulation/coda", and an overall sonata form with a coda. It also identifies lower-level theme and variations cycles that include the main and secondary subjects, the Dies Irae theme, and cycles of recurring tonal relations. These structural levels lead to a reinterpretation of the underlying sonata form.

Keywords: Myaskovsky, descriptive-analytical method, Sonata form, Cyclic structures of recurrence, Tonal relations, Tonal plan

السوناتا الثانية للبيانو لنيكولاي مياسكوفسكي: تحليل تأليفي

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الملخص

يهدف البحث إلى تحديد المبادئ البنيوية في السوناتا الثانية للبيانو لمياسكوفسكي على المستويات الهيكلية المختلفة. وقد جاء اختيار العمل نتيجة لتعقيده وحدائته فيما يتعلق بالأشكال اللحنية والبنية العامة والخطة المقامية، التي تعتبر نمطية لإنتاج مياسكوفسكي وللتجارب التأليفية الروسية-السوفييتية خلال العقدين الأولين من القرن العشرين. وتستخدم الدراسة نهجاً وصفيًا-تحليليًا يجمع بين الوصف الإجرائي للقالب والتحليل البنيوي التأليفي.

في النتائج يحدد البحث مجموعة مركبة من الدورات اللحنية والمقامية والإيحائية المعقدة والمتداخلة من التكرارات والإعادات على مستويات مختلفة من البنية والقالب الموسيقيين. وتشمل هذه الدورات على المستوى الأعلى بنية ثنائية من "العرض/التطوير" مقابل "إعادة العرض/الكودا"، وقالب سوناتا كلي مع كودا مضافة. كما يحدد على المستويات الدنيا سلسلات الألحان وتنويعات تشمل اللحن الرئيسي والثانوي ولحن Dies Irae، ودورات في العلاقات المقامية المختلفة والمتكررة. وتؤدي هذه المستويات البنيوية المختلفة إلى إعادة تفسير لقالب السوناتا.

الكلمات المفتاحية: مياسكوفسكي، النهج الوصفي-التحليلي، قالب السوناتا، البنيات الدورية للتكرار، العلاقات المقامية، الخطة المقامية.

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Nikolay Yakovlevich Myaskovsky (1881-1950) is one of the most significant Russian and Soviet composers of the twentieth century that inhabited the vast sound universes of Soviet music. Socially shy, withdrawn and reclusive, he, nevertheless, achieved great authority and recognition, though he remained outside of the trio of composers, who gained widespread fame and favor in the West: D. Shostakovich, S. Prokofiev and A. Khachaturian. His extensive oeuvre encompasses twenty-seven symphonies, concertos for violin and for cello, string quartets, instrumental sonatas, including nine for the piano alongside a diverse repertoire of pieces for the piano, romance and choral compositions. Despite the subtle power of his musical language and his movement within the traditional genres of classical music, Myaskovsky remains relatively little known to Western audiences, often regarded as a composer compliant with the Soviet regime and

submissive to its ideological demands and aesthetic tastes. And indeed, Soviet musicology had been in no need of vehement or painstaking efforts to accommodate Myaskovsky's work within the general ideological framework of the aesthetic requirements of social-realism. However, two extensive biographic monographs have been published during the past decade that reflect new, in-depth attempts to understand and appreciate the composer's music in the light intensive and comprehensive background inquiry and exploration; Gregor Tassie's *Nikolay Myaskovsky: The conscience of Russian music* (Tassie 2014), and Patrick Zuk's *Nikolay Myaskovsky: A Composer and his Times* (Zuk 2021). Both books propose a more positive and sympathetic assessment of Myaskovsky's oeuvre, a reinterpretation of it that would take into account both his private, almost introvert character, as well as the complex outside formal and ideological circumstances surrounding his life and work. Zuk was particularly effective in placing the composer's work in the context of a detailed description of his private and professional life that also includes relations with his teachers A. Glazunov and A. Lyadov, and with fellow students, such as S. Prokofiev and B. Asafiev.

The current research aims to determine the structural principles underlying the unfolding of Myaskovsky's Piano Sonata No. 2 on its various compositional levels, which include the overall formal structure of the work, as well as various cyclic structures of recurrences and transfigurations in its unfolding on the thematic, tonal and gestural levels. Such a multi-layered analytic approach is crucial when analyzing 20th-century music, as compositions often present a polyphony of structural processes, parallelly unfolding on several formal levels. A similar approach has been employed in the analysis of the Passacaglia from D. Shostakovich's Symphony No. 8 (Mohammad 2017) and B. Bartok's Improvisation op. 20 no. 3 (Mohammad 2022) and can also be found in the analytic writings of Soviet musicologists such as Y. Kholopov V. Karatigin and E. Dolinskaya, pertaining to 20th-century soviet composition. In addition, the monographs on Myaskovsky by G. Tassie and P. Zuk were essential for establishing a socio-historical context, as were earlier, ideologically colored Soviet references. The choice of the work was guided primarily by its complexity and innovation in thematic forms, structure and tonal plan, as well as by the fact that it is one of Myaskovsky's first mature embodiments of a complex one-part sonata-composition. The study employs a descriptive-analytical approach that combines formal processual description with systematic structural and compositional analysis.

1. Piano Sonata No. 2 in F sharp minor, op. 13

Myaskovsky wrote his Second Piano Sonata in the spring of 1912, a year after being warded his Conservatoire Diploma. By that time, he had already written two symphonies, the symphonic poem *Silence* and some minor works for orchestra, ensembles or piano. The Sonata represents a one-movement composition in the sonata form. Its emotions, while rooted in the late-romantic paradigm of monumental-tragic composition, as embodied in the symphonies of Brahms, Bruckner and Mahler, with additional evident influences of Tchaikovsky and Skryabin, emanate the sense of timelessness, anxiety and premonition, characteristic of the *fin de siècle*, in reality extending over August 1914 and, in Russia, up to the beginning of the 1920s. Only when the civil war had ended, the NEP (Lenin's New Economic Policy) overcome, and collectivism established, did aesthetic demands start to be gradually formulated and verbalized, terminating in the infamous 1936 article *Muddle Instead of Music*, denouncing the "formalist" style in the face of D. Shostakovich's opera *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* (1934). Ideological impositions of "meaning" upon Myaskovsky's works will also occur regularly throughout the composer's life, the most prominent case being the title of his Symphony No. 12 – "Collective Farm", which, together with its putative program-meaning, was foisted on the score by others, without the composer authorization or even prior knowledge (Zuk 2021, xxvi).

At the same time – returning to our subject – the Sonata also reflects a deep sense of artistic ethical responsibility and inner strength, even of artistic mission that will remain characteristic of Myaskovsky throughout his life; its most rigorous embodiment would be the composer's Sixth Symphony (1921-23). P. Zuk, referring to the Myaskovsky's critical reviews, written during this period for V. Derzhanovsky's journal *Muzika*, remarks that: "<...> it is readily evident from his reviews that he held a very exalted view of the nature and purpose of artistic creation, shaped to some extent by the ethos of the symbolist movement and ultimately derived from German Romanticism. He had stringent expectations not only in regard of the technical competence that musical works should exhibit, but also their content. There were strict limits to the kinds of emotional experience that he considered worthy of musical embodiment: these were predominantly serious in nature and demanded a correspondingly elevated style." [Zuk 2021: 78]

With regard to both emotional and ideological content, Soviet musicology has typically struggled with paradoxes of incongruence and attempted to reformulate and remold compositions' semantic content in favor of a more optimistic, life-affirming and elevated narrative, conforming with the aesthetics of social realism¹. Thus, Yelena B. Dolinskaya, notwithstanding her own earlier quotation from Myaskovsky's *Avtobiograficheskiye Zametki* (Autobiographic Notes), in which he describes his compositions in the period between 1909 and 1914 as "bearing the imprint of deep pessimism", the following: "<...> In Myaskovsky's musical-psychological dramas, which the Second and Third Symphonies, the Second Sonata and the poem *Alastor* all represent, there is no place for pessimistic renunciation of life, passivity, apathy. The pathos and affect that permeate these works, reflect the tragic sufferings of a substantial personality, they personify the strength of the human spirit. It is hard to overlook certain resemblance of Myaskovsky's pre-revolutionary works to expressionism. In the Second Sonata, for example, dark images of fatal doom play a large role; emotions, reflected in the Sonata, are strained to the extreme and inflated. Yet these images do not exhaust the composition's ideal-artistic content. The Second Sonata has absorbed into itself the richness and diversity of living impressions: tense drama is combined with penetrating lyricism, vicious irony – with tragedy. It is precisely this multi-dimensionality that provides the work's ideal conception its imaginative articulateness." [Dolinskaya 1980: 35-36] It is obvious that such "dialectical" arguments are an attempt to reposition the work from an ideological point of view, retaining, at the same time, some of its original imagery. However, it also reflects a distinctive ambivalence innate to the Sonata's dramatic unfolding.

G. Tassie, conversely, regards the work as an embodiment of the image of death: "The F sharp minor Sonata is structured like a symphonic poem through its concise ideas and timescale. The use of the ancient *Dies Irae* is significant, as it is associated with the eternally contrasting forces of life and death. This was a theme that would return frequently throughout his works. Here is a depiction where man is shown as a traveler; at his shoulder there stands the figure of death with a reaper. Through the music's development, one encounters the terrible theme of the *Dies Irae* as a symbol of awful, tearing, inescapable death." [Tassie 2014, 51] In our opinion, Dolinskaya's interpretation, though ideologically tainted, reflects a wider range of images and emotions born by the Sonata. And although the relation to the genre of the symphonic poem is valid, the allusion to the image of a traveler seems too emotionally distant for the work under consideration.

2. Descriptive Analysis

2.1. Prologue

The sonata opens with a slow and heavy chordal prologue (*Lento, ma deciso*), with an additional dynamic marking (*pesante*). It does not, however, evoke a sense of hyper-romantic dramatism that would precede a dramatic conflict *sonata-allegro*. These

meanings are mitigated by the intrinsic softness of the chordal texture and structures that become more dissonant only in sequences of passing chromatic chords. These chromatic chords sound as result of contrapuntal voice leading (melodic voices moving parallelly), partially of what in Russian musicology is called *opevaniye* (lit: singing around). It refers to a singing figuration formed around, similar to the baroque figure *circulatio*, an implied central pitch (which may or may not appear in the figure itself), that can include diatonic as well as chromatic neighboring notes. *Opevaniye* is a characteristic feature of eastern European Slavic traditional folk music (especially in the context of social and religious rituals), and thus often appears in the music of professional composers of that tradition. It is a distinctive feature of Myaskovsky's melodic and harmonic expressive language, especially often appearing in his polyphonic textures. Such figurations can here be heard in the upper and lower voices of bars 3, 4 and 6, where the tonic note F# occurs only once (more likely to be perceived as a passing note), while the repeated notes E# and G circulate around an implied center that remains to the end unattained. The opening phrase is also characterized by an ambivalence between B minor and D major, evoked by the I_2^{b7} chord (the tonic seventh chord with a natural seventh note) in the upbeat to bar 1 and the in the whole of bar 2 (including the bass line). We also notice the encroaching chromatic notes in the bass of the upbeat to bar 2, rising toward (A#), and which are further developed in the following two bars in the bass and middle voice of the left hand (Ex. 1). The first six-bar phrase is repeated an octave lower and marked (p), with the original 3rd inversion tonic minor-major² seventh chord (I_2^{b7}) returned to the root position; thus the sounding is softened further. In the opening of both phrases the descending chords are imitated by church-bell-like tolls resonating in the low bass, reminiscent of Mussorgsky and Rachmaninov. These bell tolls are an important religious trope in Russian music, invoked by deep octaves in the bass and rich two-hand parallel chord in the upper register. Both phrases end on interesting half cadences (HC) in the achieved key. The first (b. 6) closes on the diminished seventh degree (VII°_{65} : G#-E#-B-D), the second – on the dominant root position ninth chord (V_9 : C#-E#-G#-B-D). In both chords the leading-note (E#) in the upper voice is preceded by a Gb (the lowered 2nd degree), sounding simultaneously with its natural counterpart (G#), which evokes Skryabin's dominant complexes with a split 5th (e.g., in F sharp minor, C#-E#-Gb-Gx-B), along with its multitude of enharmonic equivalences³.

Example 1. Introduction, first phrase (bb. 1-6)

With regard to the tonal unfolding of the prologue, we hear it opening in the not-yet-discernible-as-such subdominant key of B minor, with each of the two phrases modulating to F sharp minor by its end. Plagality is an intrinsic and integral constituent of the harmonic, tonal and modal thinking of many Russian composers⁴, but in Myaskovsky's Sonata we observe an ambivalent and ambiguous bi-tonal core that is only reinforced throughout the work, to become a morbid dual center, at the heart of the unfolding affective narrative.

The opening is a prologue, not an introduction, in that it foresees the encroaching forlornness, the futility of the human endeavor, submerging the listener into an atmosphere of nostalgic lyrical submission. Its lyric is that of meditative reminiscence. As such it evokes the prologues to compositions of Tchaikovsky, a figure that overshadows Myaskovsky's oeuvre. The spatiality of the prologue is that of descending in depth, toward the CC♯ of the human soul. Only the final two four-bar phrases of, a bassoonish pp monologue, depict a reluctant look, thrown toward the world, ending on an anacrusic standstill on the leading-note. Then – a pause.

2.2. Exposition

The main subject (MS; see Example 2) begins with two bars that establish the tumultuous emergence of the Skryabinesque *mysterium*⁵ of primordial inanimate volition; a *rhythme tremblant* of triplet eighth-notes, that form a chromatic descending sequence of parallel minor thirds, foreshadowing the *Dies Irae*, yet to sound in the closing section. This texture is maintained throughout the main subject, in both exposition and recapitulation, a sustained counter-texture, as if the rising main subject's shadow, *Doppelgänger* (an apparition or a double of a living person), unless its counterpart is the mediaeval sequence itself. One exception: when it runs from itself, in the fugue, and even here, the sequence reemerges in the recapitulation. The subject is presented in two asymmetric phrases (4+6). The first, in F sharp minor, is divided into (1+1+2), with the last segment sub-divided between two right-hand voices into ($\frac{1}{2}+\frac{1}{2}+1$). The second phrase — in B minor, is divided into (1+1+2+2), with the two-bar segments sub-divided into ($\frac{1}{2}+1\frac{1}{2}$) and ($\frac{1}{2}+\frac{1}{2}+1$) respectively.

The main subject's thematic material is laden with associations of texture, intonation and gesture. Its first bar presents the germinal proto-motif; its melodic contour is segmental and embodies a volitional striving to transcend its point of birth, the dominant c♯¹. The melody rises turbulently, through various leaps, from (c♯¹) to (f♯²) and resolved back to (d²). Its segments include dissonant descending leaps (m. 9th twice, dim. 8^{ve}) and augmented or other dissonant rising intervals (b. 23 — aug. 2nd, b. 24 — aug. 5th, b. 26 — min. 7th), while its final segment ends with a chromatic descending *passus duriusculus* (F♯²- eb²).

The left-hand voices of bars 25-26 exhibit Myaskovsky's contrapuntal interpretation of harmonic voice leading. We hear the bassline, heretofore fixated to (FF♯), descending chromatically from (F♯) to reach (C♯), its triton, at the beginning of bar 26, establishing the temporary key of C minor. Located a triton from the home key, (C♯) will consequently resolve into BB at the beginning of bar 27, like an anacrusic leading-note. In the left hand, two parallel lines descend chromatically from (c¹) to (F♯) and from (eb¹) to (c♯¹) respectively, forming, together with the right-hand (a♯¹) and (eb²), an altered dominant seventh chord with lowered 5th and 7th (c♯, eb) to the ensuing key of B minor.

Example 2: MS, first and second phrases (bb. 21-32)

The second phrase in B minor consists of six bars (bb. 27-32). It develops the antecedent's structure extending it to (1+1+2+2), with its middle two-bar-segment altered to (½+1½), and the ascending leaps widened to encompass a diminished octave. Bars 33-36 present a sequence of the preceding two sub-phrases transposed up a minor 3rd to sound in C minor, in reality initiating a developmental middle section that emerges out of the preceding section. The ensuing four bars sequentially develop the opening germinal motif in the triton keys of C sharp minor and g minor (bb. 37-38), sounding twice with minor variations. This leads to a local climax (b. 41), after which a three-bar and four-octave descending chromatic passage, followed by an ascending two-bar (three-octave) passage based on the germinal motif, arrive at a fermata on the leading-note e^{#2}.

The recapitulation section (bb. 47-58) returns to the home key of F sharp minor and presents the main subject in inverted register disposition of the thematic and the chromatic accompanying materials. The most interesting detail of the section is, however, its structure. Its two phrases (bb. 49-58) are symmetrically structured as (5 [1+1+3] + 5 [1+1+3]). Both of them begin with the opening two bars of the subject. The first phrase continues to elaborate the germinal motif in half-bars (½+½+½+1½), with the bass descending in minor thirds (FF[#]-DD[#]-CC[♯]); the last one-and-a-half bars arpeggiate the dominant 7th chord with a natural and lowered fifth (G[#]/G[♯]; cf. the prologue). The second phrase (bb. 54-58) proceeds to develop the same motif in a one-bar semi-tone-paced chromatic sequence. The overall microstructure of the main subject in the exposition is shown in table 1.

Table 1: MS: microstructure

Main Subject (bb. 21-58; 38bb.)									
A (bb. 21-32)			Middle section (bb. 33-46)					Recapitulation (bb. 47-58)	
	a	a ¹	4		6 (tr.)			a ²	a ³
2	4	6	4	4 (seq.)	1 +	3 +	2	5	5
	1+1+ 2(.5+5+1)	1+1+2(.5+1.5)+ 2(.5+5+1)	2(.5+1.5)+ 2(.5+5+1)	1+1 (%)	1 +	3 +	2	1+1+3(.5+5+2)	1+1+3(1+1+1 seq.)
f [#]	f [#]	b	c		climax	desc.	asc.		f [#]

The final segment of the sequence fluently moves into the transition, which, already in A major and melodically anticipating the secondary subject, gradually transforms the tempo to a more relaxed and calmer pace of quarter-notes (bb. 59-64; see Ex. 3). The broad cantilena in the upper left-hand voice engenders a sense of tranquility and its melodic line anticipates the characteristic circulating opevaniye intonation of the secondary subject. Most of the transition (bb. 59-62) is permeated by a fluent sixteenth-note passage, encompassing four-and-a-half octaves, from g^3 to $C\sharp$, from which a semi-tone ascent leads to the third of the secondary key of A major. The transition does not offer significant thematic material, nor is its modulatory function strictly required; it primarily plays a mediatory role in the aspects of tempo and affect.

in tempo, ma poco a poco ritenente

Example 3: transition (bb. 59-64)

The secondary subject (SS) Gestalt unfolds in two phases (bb. 65-68; 69-73). The first phase (bb. 65-67) presents the subject in two symmetric two-bar phrases, both of which end on a half cadence. The subject is characteristic in its two underlying motifs: two descending semi-tones followed by a rising major-sixth-leap (b. 65), and the circulating figure at the phrases' end (b. 66), already familiar from both the prologue and the transition. Its peculiar languorous and yearning lyrical tone, reminiscent of Tristan and Skryabin, is rendered more emphatic by chromatics passes and rhythmic rubato-like variation, articulated by tenuto in the second phrase. The ensuing five bars produce two short modulating sequences (bb. 69-73), developing the preceding intonations, using secondary dominants, in which the anticipated tonics, and, later on, the dominants themselves, are substituted by augmented tonic chords. The five-bar structure is subdivided into one-bar segments of (2+3; Ex. 4).

Example 4: SS first phase (bb. 65-73)

In the ensuing second phase (bb. 74-86) the secondary subject is transfigured into a sublime celestial sounding; it shifts, through a remarkable VII chord with a split third (Gb/G#) to the Schubertian key of the lowered sixth (bVI), the pastoral F major, often with its own lowered sixth degree (Db). The pace is slowed down discernibly, not only by the tempo indication (Poco meno mosso), but also through augmented of note durations. The texture evokes a Lisztian fantastic aura. The originally languorous subject, with its winding contours, is transposed into a magical ethereal realm, accompanied, in the right hand, by a whirl of thirty-second-note figurations of ascending arpeggios with interpolated chromatics, almost entirely in the third octave, and descending wide arpeggios in the left. The original two-phrase structure of the theme is preserved, and the three-bar sequence of bars 71-73 is symmetrically reflected in bars 82-84. This is followed by a rising, then a falling passages, the latter spanning four-and-a-half octaves, resolving into the low-register dominant pedal point Ab of the closing theme (bb. 85-86).

For the closing theme (CT; bb. 87-98), Myaskovsky invokes the opening two phrases of the canonic sequence Dies Irae (Ex. 5). Its melodic line implies the B flat Dorian mode, though this is counter-effected by the harmonic idiom of parallel major triads erected over its austere intonations. The A flat pedal point, on the other hand, strongly suggests a dominant pedal-point to D flat, i.e. the key of the lowered sixth (bVI) in relation to the preceding F major, also the dominant to the home key. The closing theme

is structured as (3+4). Its first phrase resolves into a B flat major triad, further dropping on its last beat to an eighth-note staccato A major triad. In the second phrase, the root-position triads are substituted by third inversion seventh chords resulting from the restless chromatic sixteenth-note motion in the bass, and the final A major chord is followed by a C sharp minor triad over the bass-note G#. A four-bar transition, rising from the contra-octave and recalling the last eight bars of the prologue, leads to the development section.

Example 5: CT, first phrase (bb. 88-94)

The invocation of the mediaeval sequentia, in the low register and surrounded by a major-mode harmonic halo, which is in the second phrase undermined by the tremulous chromatic roaring beneath it, has the Gestalt of a lugubrious, ominous and rigid imperative, of a dictate, rather than of an equal subject of eventing, equal to the preceding main and secondary subjects. It is like an arc, thrown from the prologue, an ancient Chorus.

Table 2 shows the exposition encompassing a total of 96 bars and lasting, in the average, between five and six minutes⁶. The internal ratio of the main subject to the remainder of the exposition is 38:40. It is an exposition par excellence, in which the themes, though developed each within its own section, do not exhibit discernible relatedness. However, the aforementioned affinity between the descending texture of the accompaniment to the main subject and the melodic line of the Dies Irae spans an arc over the whole exposition, reaching retrospectively from the closing theme back to the opening of the main subject.

There is a multitude of referential cycles of ascending, descending and circulating gestures, that permeate the exposition and the Sonata as a whole. In the prologue the descending gesture is dominating up to bar 12, counter-effected by the ascending gesture of the final eight-bar passage. Circulating figures emerge throughout the octave-doubled melodic line (bb. 3,4,6, 9-12). In the main subject the striving, volitional segmented rising gesture is prevalent in the theme, countered by the falling line of the left-hand accompaniment. Only after the climax of bar 41 does a rapid descent towards CC# occur,

followed by a two-bar passage reaching a halt on the leading-note (bb. 41-46). The secondary subject combines languorous diatonic and chromatic descending lines, including circulating figures, on the one hand, with wide yearning ascending leaps, usually once in each phrase or melodic segment, on the other. In its second phase, the thirty-second-note figurations of rising arpeggios are added above the theme, while at its end a two-bar climactic passage sounds (b. 85-86), mirroring the similar episode at the border of the main subject's middle and recapitulative sections (bb. 41-46). The sum of these falling, descending gestures in passages tumbling down into the depths of the lower register evoke a sense of succumbing, brokenness and desperation, preparing the appearance of the theme of death in the closing theme. The latter, with its further-descending and serpentine-circulating contour, ends with a slow chromatic ascent towards the development. It evokes a sense of tense anticipation, emotionally preparing the listener for the coming section.

Table 2: Microstructure of Exposition (bb. 65-73)

Main Subject (bb. 21-58; 38bb.)										
A (bb. 21-32)			Middle section (bb. 33-46)					Recapitulation (bb. 47-58)		
	a	a ¹						Intr.	a ¹	a ¹
2	4	6	4	4 (seq.)		6 (tr.)		2	5	5
	1+1+2	1+1+2+2	2+2	2 (seq.)	2 (seq.)	1 +	3 +	2	1+1+3	1+1+3
f#	f#	b	c			climax	desc.	asc.		f#

Transition (bb. 59-64; 6bb.)	Secondary Subject (bb. 65-86; 22bb.)								Closing Theme (bb. 87-98; 12bb.)				
	Phase I (bb. 65-73)				Phase II (bb. 74-86)								
	a	a ¹	seq.	seq.		a	a ¹	Seq.	tr.	a	a ¹	tr.	
6	2	2	2	2	+1	4	4	3	2	1	3	4	4
3+3			(1+1)	(1+1)				(1.5+1.5)	Asc./desc.				
	A	A				F				Db..... (A)	Db... (A-c#)	c#	
										Dom. Ped.			
										P.			

2.3. Development

The development section unfolds in three phases. The first phase (Allegro con moto e tenebroso, bb. 99-140) develops, in three sections, the elements of the main subject over the deep measured pace of the Dies Irae opening phrase. It presents a dark undulating Scherzando that under its surface reveals a multitude of intermingled dynamic, motivic and articulation surges and falls, ascending and descending like tempestuous oceanic waves. The first section (bb. 99-116; Example 6) consists of three symmetric six-bar phrases: the first two phrases are in C sharp and A respectively, and unfold in the right hand structured as (1+1+4), while the left hand presents the Dies Irae motif in a unitary line with a three-bar prolonged final note. The right- and left-hand strata are juxtaposed in rhythmic pace and articulation; the first consisting entirely of eight-notes performed staccato Scherzando, while the latter presents its line in solemn half-notes performed tenuto. The third phrase (bb. 99-116; Example 6) transforms the Dies Irae theme over three octaves into a Lizstian Danse macabre, with its staccato and accented articulation. The main subject intonations are incorporated into the right-hand accompaniment figurations. It is structured (1+1+2+2) and presented in C minor, the triton key to the home key and the key of the main subject's middle section. The melody's final accented c#², replacing the anticipated c¹, initiates a tonal shift toward B flat for the ensuing section. The latter almost literally reproduces the first in structure and tonal plan. Its starts in B flat, subsequently moving to F sharp minor and A minor, and sounding in overall stronger dynamics. The ensuing transitory six bars descend from the germinal main subject motif to a triplet dominant pedal point on A, referring back to the closing theme and preparing the D major of the ensuing development phase. The overall structure of this developmental phase is thus formulated as following: 2.[2.(1+1+4) + (1+1+2+2)] + 6-b. transition, resulting in a total of forty-two bars⁷.

99 Allegro con moto e tenebroso

103

107

111

115

Example 6: Development, 1st phase (bb. 99-118)

In the second phase of development (bb. 141-164) the preceding tempo is upheld, and the Dies Irae theme is integrated into a lyrical texture with phantastique resonating harmonies and a light, translucent layout. The first period (bb. 141-152) presents the two Dies Irae phrases in D major, accompanied by descending arpeggiations of parallel major triads, similar to those heard in the exposition, albeit on a characteristic dominant pedal-note A (Example 7). A short three-bar transition, containing in its middle voice the opening motif of the secondary subject, leads to the second period. The structure of this period is represented by the asymmetric diminishing structure (5+4+3). The ensuing period (bb. 153-164) reproduces its predecessor a semi-tone higher, i.e. in E flat major, together with its structure, dominant pedal-note and final appended transition, now leading to the second phase of development. The overall structure of this developmental phase is formulated as: 2.(5+4+3), with a total of twenty-four bars.

l'istesso tempo

141 *dolce pp*

p

146 *m.s.*

cresc. espress.

+

151 *mf*

p

Example 7: Development, 2nd phase (bb. 141-153)

In the third and final phase of development (festivamente, *ma in tempo*, bb. 165-208; Example 8) the secondary subject's opening motif is transposed from its initial languorous lyricism to an affirming festive gesture; the motif sounds in imitation between the deep bass and the tenor twice, accompanied by festive chime-of-bells texture. The first phrase starts in the preceding key of E flat major, the tenor responds a major second lower, the second — in G major with a similar interval for the tenor-*risposta*. With the addition of a six-bar redirection to the recapitulation, this third phase yields the following structure: (6+6 + 6-bar-transition, i.e. 18 bars). Its tonal plan moves from E flat major (notice the V_7 in b. 165), through G major, reaching F major at the end (also notice the V_7 in b. 175 and further). The third inversion dominant seventh chord to F major, in the final eight bars of the development, are written in bar 182 as enharmonic to VII_7^{b3} (the leading-note seventh chord with a lowered 3rd, i.e. lowered 2nd degree) to the ensuing B minor of the recapitulation.

festivamente, ma in tempo

165 8

f sempre staccato

il tema marcato ed espressivo

169 8

più f

173 8

177

marcatissimo

5

5 molto f

6

simile

180

crescendo

poco rall.

Example 8: Development, 3rd phase (bb. 165-181)

Thus, the development presents a field of thematic interaction, in which, however, the descending and circulating Dies Irae represents the dominating Gestalt. In the first phase it is solemnly tolling in the depth, beneath the fragile and apprehensive fragments of the main subject, then rising over them for a danse macabre in the third phrases. In the second phase it is the soloist, impersonating empathy and fragility, and eliciting the secondary subject from its refuge. Only in the third phase do we hear the secondary subject in the solitude of a grotesque masquerade festivity, marching toward the prologue/recapitulation.

The tonal relations of the exposition are in the recapitulation transposed up a perfect fourth, so that the main subject is here heard in the subdominant key B minor. Further modulations within the scheme of the tonal plan ensue accordingly moving through D major, B flat major and arriving at F sharp minor in the closing theme. Thus, Myaskovsky presents the listener with “a discernible duplicity of tonal organization — an ambivalent vacillating between the keys of F sharp minor and B minor, each of which claiming its

primacy” (Dolinskaya 1980, 51). Variation and changes concerning the thematic material and its layout are kept to the minimum in relation to the original exposition. Accordingly, the introduction begins in E minor and only by its end modulates to B minor. Its overall dynamic level is, however, higher (ff – f), falling to (p *calando*) only at the slightly altered transition. The main subject maintains its tonal structure and syntax. It begins in B minor, moving to E minor in the second phrase; the middle section starts a semitone higher in F minor and, through a double-dominant C# in the bass, arrives back to B minor for the subject’s recapitulation. The transition is maintained as well, though transposed, leading to D major for the recapitulation of the secondary subject. The latter sounds in both its hypostases, in D major and B flat major respectively. The closing theme also remains unaltered, sounding here in the key of G flat major, though notated as F sharp major, only at its very end falling into a short accented F sharp minor triad. Its harmonic design, together with the dominant pedal point at its beginning remains unchanged.

2.4. Recapitulation

The restatement of the whole prologue, constitutes the climax of the development, especially its grotesque-festive third phase, and of the Sonata as a whole. As such, it coincides with the beginning of the recapitulation, and is located, scholastically, at the border to the last third of the sonata form, if we concede to disregard the extended coda. The recapitulation as a whole, could be described as rigid, uninventive and orthodox, were it not for the ensuing elaborated coda, on one hand, and the tonal plan, on the other. There is an austerity that sharply contrasts with, even contradicts the richness and fecundity of its ample original thematic material. In the transposition of the whole recapitulation a perfect fourth higher, to start in the secondary subdominant key of E minor, one senses an overwhelm of plagality, as elusiveness and ambivalence, that infers upon the work an intrinsic instability and lability. It is, in its plagality, at once, the expression of resignation and contemplation. Only in the closing theme do we first take hold of the home tonic of F sharp, albeit in its oblique dorian adumbration. Notwithstanding the fact that this was Myaskovsky’s first attempt at a large-scale one-movement composition, we find that a straightforward recapitulation is permissible, taking into consideration the development and transformation that the thematic material has already undergone in both the exposition and development sections. What transpires through its restraint, mainly due to the tonal plan, is the absence of a sense of completeness, as none has been accomplished, though all meaning has been explored and exhausted.

2.5. Coda

The sonata’s final part, the Coda, follows after a short *rallentando* transition. Fundamentally rooted in the tonic key, the coda consists of three discernible sections, throughout which various motifs of the preceding thematic material continue to develop. Its first section (*Allegro I e poco a poco più agitato*; bb. 277-317) presents an elaborate four-voice fughetta, the subject of which is elicited from the main subject’s opening motif, and developed into a toccata-like theme, rhythmically juxtaposing triplets and regular eight-notes articulated staccato. The subject is highly chromaticized and encompasses a compound minor sixth (Example 9). Following the idiom of the whole Sonata, the fughetta is plagal, the real answer sounding in the subdominant key. The four obligatory entries of the exposition are arranged in the voices in the sequence S A B T, starting on c#, F#, C# and again F# respectively. An additional redundant stretto double-entry in the tonic key follows, in which the lower voice sounds in augmentation and is doubled an octave lower in the contra-octave, ending the exposition. Similar to the latter, are the two double-entries with inverted voices, constituting the middle part of the fughetta and sounding in B flat minor and D minor (starting on F and A) respectively. The fugal recapitulation is substituted by the coda’s second section, returning to F sharp minor.



Example 9: Coda, 1st Section (bb. 277-279)

The second section of the coda (*Più mosso*; bb. 318-354) functions as the recapitulation of the preceding fughetta. It presents an inventive combination of the fugal subject with the opening phrase of the *Dies Irae*, which sounds twice — in the home key of F sharp minor and in the key of D minor. A despairing yet festive final appearance of the secondary subject (b. 342) transforms into an accelerating culmination of chromatic dominant-function tremolos — a dramatic Rachmaninovian tolling.

The third and final section of the coda (*Allegro disperato*; bb. 355-368) for a last time restates the main subject, segmented, as it appeared in the internal recapitulation (compare bb. 54-57, 234-237, 355-358), together with the opening four notes of the *Dies Irae* (Example 10). V. Karatigin, in his review of Myaskovsky's *Sonata No. 2*, draws attention to its repeated and prolonged characteristic final cadence, consisting of two harmonic complexes: a tonic seventh chord in the right hand (f#-a-c#-e#) and a subdominant second inversion triad with an omitted fifth (d-b) in the left. Together they resolve repeatedly into a tonic triad with a melodic fifth (i.e. is located in the fifth in the upper voice); only at the end do they resolve into an ambivalent and ambiguous tonic with a melodic third (a). Karatigin interestingly classifies the cadence as plagal, identifying the first chord as a first inversion eleventh subdominant chord (Karatigin 1959, 117). The composition is thus consummated, the penultimate plagal turn accomplished — an interrogative figure of resignation. The home key, ambiguous as ever, has been, in all its vulnerability and fragility, ostensibly achieved. The overall impact of the recapitulation and coda upon the listener is indecisive, illusional. Despite of the stabilizing effect of the home key, the overall narrative is rendered indefinite and emotionally ambiguous by the tonal vacillation in the recapitulation and further development of the thematic material in the coda, but also by the vulnerability and fragility of the final plagal cadence.

355 *Allegro disperato*

357

359 *molto pesante*

361

363 *sff*

Example 10: Coda, 3rd Section (bb. 355-368)

3. Structural Analysis

E. Dolinskaya, in her analysis of Myaskovsky's Second Piano Sonata, uses two charts to demonstrate structural particularities in the work's design. The first chart [Dolinskaya 1980, 49] shows the conventional sections and elements of the sonata form including the coda, albeit with an emphasized subdivision of both the latter and the development, each into a development section proper and a "climactic zone". The chart also demonstrates the correlations between the various sections (Table 3). The second chart [Dolinskaya 1980, 52] identifies the overall tonal plan according to the tonal-duplicity paradigm (Table 4).

Table 3

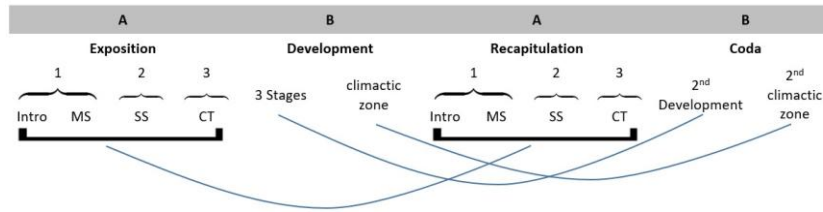
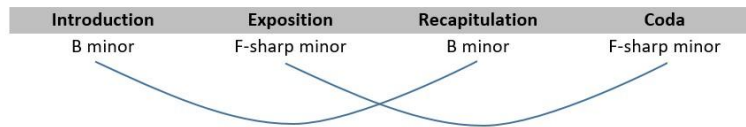


Table 4



It also follows from Dolinskaya's analysis that the recapitulation only starts with the entrance of the main subject in B minor, while the return of the introduction is seen as part of the development. This corresponds not only with the second tonal chart (but not with the first), but also follows from the number of bars she indicates for the two B sections, i.e. the development and the coda (92 and 85 bb. respectively). Without disputing the separate facts of such a description in themselves, we, nevertheless, think it to be rather general, lacking in detail, and in no way exhausting the thematic and tonal relations inherent in the work, its composition. In addition, Table 4 demonstrates a tonal symmetry, which exists, however, between two couples of musical-structural sections that are comparable neither in function, proportion nor in thematic content.

Two factors speak for Dolinskaya's interpretation in regard with the beginning of the recapitulation. First, the key of B minor "returns" only with the return of the main subject, while the introduction sounds in the heretofore-absent key of E minor. Second, the return of the introduction is heard as a continuation of the preceding momentum of the third phase of the development, and with the indication *In Tempo (Allegro)*, in comparison to the original *Lento*, but with augmented (doubled) rhythmic durations. This latter factor seems to us more of a formality, notwithstanding it implying an elevated tempo and affect. With regard to the tonal factor, it seems to us unjustified to consider it decisive, since the whole of the recapitulation displays a transposed, alternative tonal plan to that of the exhibition, in which the home tonic F sharp does not return until the closing theme. It is, rather, a plagal recapitulation, in which the original tonal plan [b-f#-A-(F)-Db] is transposed to become [e-b-D-(Bb)-F#], bringing about an effective retrograde motion toward the home key.

Dolinskaya also suggests a higher-level structure implied in the sonata form, namely, that of a sonata cycle. As she writes, "... the sonata form is further complicated by cyclic features, which immerge as a result of the continuous rethinking and re-forming of the main themes within the frame of relatively independent and enclosed sections. From this point of view, the exposition can be compared to an opening movement of the cycle, the first and second phases of the development — to a scherzo and a slow movement, and the large-scale elaborate recapitulation with the coda — to a summarizing symphonic Finale" [Dolinskaya 1980, 49]. Such an interpretation in the paradigm of Liszt's Sonata in B major, though plausible, seems more of an attempt to impose an a priori schematic conception on the work, rather than illicit or deduce a structural Gestalt from the composition itself.

In addition to the sonata form and the overall four-movement sonata cycle, Dolinskaya describes a distinct lower-level cycle of variations, unfolding parallel to these higher-level structures. It is initiated by the first appearance of the Dies Irae at the closing theme

respectively. We, of course, take into consideration the abovementioned symmetric proportions of the two slow soundings of the introduction material, as well as the correspondence between the two statements of the secondary subject (in the exposition and the recapitulation), which are both in a more restrained tempo. The maximal deviation in proportion thus occurs between the exposition and the development, equal to only fourteen bars; this fact, evidently, reflects the inclusion, in the first, of the introduction. However, the chart demonstrates another, more balanced and more significant, two-part symmetry. This is a symmetry in proportion as well as function in the unfolding of the two double-sections “exposition and development” juxtaposed to “recapitulation and coda/2nd development”). This symmetry of 182 to 186 bars respectively, with both halves symmetrically including the similar slower sections, yields an overarching binary, bi-wave unfolding, to which the overall eventing of the Sonata succumbs. This binary form, reminiscent of the Baroque two-part form, often identified also in J. S. Bach’s fugues of the WTC⁸, is outlined by the resounding Gestalt of the prologue, announcing return, beginning-a-new and recapitulation proper.

The other, subordinate structural aspect that deserves our attention is the unfolding tonal plan. Permeating the whole composition is the dual tonal-center of F sharp minor/B minor, allocated at the poles of a feminine-ambivalent plagal correlation, and overshadowing the entirety of its unfolding. F sharp minor is the intimate primary key. Only through it, do all other keys — A, F, Db(C#) in the exposition, and b, D, Bb in the recapitulation — acquire their meaning as correlating aspects of the overall tonal-structural context. The plagal dual tonal center ambivalence is heightened to the extreme, as the second phrase of the main subject section sounds in the same subdominant key, tone or Stimmung (tuning), as the introduction — in both the exposition (bb. 27) and the recapitulation (b. 213). Only in the recapitulative phases of these sections, is each of the two poles of the dual-center affirmatively established respectively, or, rather, in juxtaposition with, and opposition to each other (b. 47 vs. b. 229).

Another structural aspect of eventing is the Gestalt of the minor triad transpiring throughout the texture of tonal unfolding of the archetypal stages of the sonata form. Thus, clearly discernible are the outlines of the two minor triads of F sharp minor and B minor, determining the tierce sequence of tonalities in the exposition and the recapitulation: F sharp minor – A major – D flat major and B minor – D major – F sharp major respectively. Each of them has a subdominant upbeat to them in the form of the two B minor and E minor prologue soundings. Minor triads are implicitly present in the development as well – the B flat minor triad in the series C#-Bb-F of the starting-tonalities of the three sections of its first phase (bb. 99, 117, 135), and the D minor triad F-A-D on the border of its second and third phases.

Also clearly perceivable is the tonal relational pairing, heard in the recurring shifts to the key of the lowered sixth, often, but not exclusively, accompanying the secondary subject. It emerges as this subject unfolds in both the exposition and the recapitulation; A major – F major and D major – B flat major. It is also present at the end of the closing theme, when the C sharp major phrase “stumbles into” an A major-triad-closing, while in the second phrase it runs through it toward the final C sharp minor “local tonic triad”, ending the exposition. A similar trajectory, F sharp major – D major, is observed in the corresponding section of the recapitulation. The lowered-sixth-relation recurs in the first period of the first phase of the development. Here the first phrase sounds in C sharp major, the second in A major, while the third, more unitary phrase, sound in an expressive grotesque C minor, stating both Dies Irae’s phrases. Here, however, the lowered-sixth gesture is transfigured into the quasi-geometric figure of a falling-major-third/rising-minor-third, which is repeated in the ensuing period in the keys of B flat major, F sharp major and A minor. If we want to take this intellectual construct and search for similar tonal figure in other sections of the work, we can find its retrograde

version in the tonal relation of the main subject and the two keys of the secondary subject, namely, the figure rising minor third – falling major third: F sharp minor – A major – F major in the exposition, and the corresponding B minor – D major – B flat major in the recapitulation.

One final characteristic of the sonata's tonal plan is the leading-note semi-tone relation. It is most clearly perceived in the general tonal clambering of tonalities in the development. The semi-tone rising motion that is initiated by the D flat major/C sharp minor in the closing theme and the C sharp major of the first phase of development. The key crawl upward, first to D major, then to E flat major, at the beginnings of the second and third phase respectively. However, this crawling does not end at that, as it continues toward the E minor of the returning prologue, initiating the recapitulation, and even further, to the F minor of the middle section of the main subject restatement, then throwing over a still wider arc toward the final home key of F sharp major/minor, with F constituting the leading-note and Predikt to F#. In an allegoric engraving this would represent an inversion of the archetype of the descending *passus duriusculus* of a *Passacaglia* bass-line rising toward the dominant.

The anacrusic leading-note gesture, common and natural as it is, nevertheless represents an unusually regularly recurring mode of modulation in the Sonata. The most obvious examples being the tonal shift from B minor to C minor at the border of the main subject's second phrase and its middle section in the exposition (b. 33), and from E minor to F minor at the corresponding place in the recapitulation (b. 217). Many a transition approaches its goal in a similar manner throughout the Sonata. Furthermore, the two aforementioned examples, astounding as they are in their "strategic positioning", represent, inside the main subject sections, the only detectable moments of triton key-relations in this work.

4. Conclusion

We were thus able to identify a combinatory complex of intricate and intermingling thematic, tonal and gestural cycles of recurrences on various levels of the musical structure and form, which can be thus summarized. On the higher level there unfold two structures: a symmetric in function and content, binary structure of "exposition/development" and "recapitulation/coda", indicated by the re-sounding of the prologue, and an overall sonata form with an added coda. The latter unfolds through an inverted tonal plan that only at its end leads back to the home key. Parallel to these, there unfold, first, a cycle of theme and variations initiated by the *Dies Irae* theme in the closing section of the exposition with four variations sounding in the development and coda; second, a cycle of varied recurrences of the main subject, with its variations located in the development and the coda, mostly accompanied by the *Dies Irae* theme; and, third, a similar cycle of the secondary subject, which is already significantly transfigured within its original exposition- and recapitulation-appearances, with its variations located in the development and the coda, also mostly combined with the *Dies Irae* theme. On the tonal level we found a series of recurring tonal relations that include: a) a dual plagal tonal core that is reflected in recurring plagal tonal relations permeating the Sonata; b) the minor triad Gestalt determining the tonal plan of the exposition and development, and transpiring in the development as well; c) a series of semi-tone tonal progressions leading from the end of the exposition, through the development, and up to the beginning of the recapitulation; d) the lowered-sixth tonal relation, initiated inside the exposition of the secondary subject and reappearing in the development, recapitulation and coda; e) the anacrusic leading-note gesture as a dominant mode of modulation throughout the Sonata. And, finally, on the level of musical gesture we discovered a series of rising and of falling, tumbling into the depth passages sounding at pivotal moments of the musical form and reappearing as innate elements of gesture in both thematic and accompanying materials.

- ¹ For more on this subject see [Zuk 2014].
- ² A minor triad with an added major 7th, as opposed to the traditional dominant major-minor 7th chord.
- ³ Enharmonic equivalents are notes that are the same in sounding but written differently. For more on this subject see [Dernova 1967].
- ⁴ Plagality, the subdominant function and plagal progressions in general, play an important role in Russian and eastern European folklore musical tradition and, consequently, in professional music, in the works of composers such as M. Glinka, P. Tchaikovsky, M. Mussorgsky, N. Rimsky-Korsakov and A. Skryabin.
- ⁵ Alexander Skryabin is famous for his mystic conception on music. He started working on the composition is a work in 1903 but never finished. Skryabin planned for it to be *synthetic*, exploiting the senses of smell and touch as well as hearing.
- ⁶ Compare the recordings by Idil Biret (from 1976), where the duration of the exposition is 4'35" (Biret I., Performer (1976) *Idil Biret Archive Edition 7*. Naxos, Cat# 8.571281, 2010), by Murray McLachlan — 5'12" (McLachlan M., Performer *Complete Piano Sonata*. Olympia, Cat# OCD 704 ABC, 1998), by Boris Lvov — 5'35" (Lvov B., Performer (1991) *Russian Romanticism*. Aurophon, UPC. 071083314742, 1993), and, finally, the extremely slow recording by Endre Hegedus — 6'53" (Hegedus E., Performer *Myaskovsky: Piano Sonatas Vol. I*. Marco Polo. Cat# 8223156, 2000).
- ⁷ Our attention was draw to subdivisions in phrases, especially in the development, by the respective remarks in V. Karatigin's article, though they differ in detail from our divisions in some places [Karatigin 1959, 116].
- ⁸ For more on the binary structure of Bach fugues of the WTC see the analyses in A. Chugayev's book [Chugayev 1975].

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