



Five Preludes Op. 74

by Alexander Scriabin

Edited by Peter Billam

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Five Preludes, Alexander Scriabin op.74, 1914

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Structure and rhythm

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

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

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

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

Editions

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Five Preludes, Op. 74 (1914)

Douloureux, déchirant

p cresc. 3 molto

3

5

7

10

15

No. 2

Très lent, contemplatif

pp

Measures 1-4 of the piece. The music is in 4/8 time. The right hand features a melodic line with a trill in measure 4. The left hand has a sustained chord in measure 1 and a rhythmic accompaniment of eighth notes.

5

Measures 5-8. The right hand continues with a melodic line, and the left hand maintains a steady eighth-note accompaniment.

10

Measures 9-12. The right hand has a more complex melodic texture with some chords. The left hand continues with eighth notes.

Measures 13-14. The right hand features a trill in measure 14. The left hand continues with eighth notes.

15

pp dim. smorz.

Measures 15-18. The piece concludes with a final melodic phrase in the right hand and a sustained chord in the left hand. The dynamics are marked *pp*, *dim.*, and *smorz.*

Allegro drammatico

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

The second system continues the piece. The right-hand staff includes a fermata over a measure, followed by a five-measure phrase marked with a '5' and a slur. It then features a dynamic shift from *f* to *p subito*. The left-hand staff continues with its rhythmic accompaniment. A *cresc.* marking appears at the end of the system.

The third system shows the right-hand staff with a seven-measure phrase marked with a '7' and a slur, followed by a ten-measure phrase marked with a '10' and a slur. The left-hand staff features a series of sustained chords with a slur. The key signature changes to two sharps (F# and C#) in the second measure of this system.

The fourth system features a melodic line in the right-hand staff that begins with a *dim.* marking and ends with a *cresc.* marking. The left-hand staff continues with sustained chords. A dynamic marking of *p* is placed at the beginning of the right-hand staff in the second measure of this system.

15

Musical score for measures 15-17. Measure 15 features a treble clef with a whole note chord (F#4, A#4, C#5) and a bass clef with a whole note chord (F#2, A2, C3). Measure 16 has a treble clef with a half note (F#4) and a bass clef with a half note (F#2). Measure 17 has a treble clef with a half note (F#4) and a bass clef with a half note (F#2). Dynamic markings include accents (>) in measures 16 and 17.

p subito *cresc.*

Musical score for measures 18-20. Measure 18 has a treble clef with a half note (F#4) and a bass clef with a half note (F#2). Measure 19 has a treble clef with a half note (F#4) and a bass clef with a half note (F#2). Measure 20 has a treble clef with a half note (F#4) and a bass clef with a half note (F#2). Dynamic markings include *p subito* in measure 18 and *cresc.* in measure 20.

20

Musical score for measures 21-23. Measure 21 has a treble clef with a half note (F#4) and a bass clef with a half note (F#2). Measure 22 has a treble clef with a half note (F#4) and a bass clef with a half note (F#2). Measure 23 has a treble clef with a half note (F#4) and a bass clef with a half note (F#2).

dim.

Musical score for measures 24-26. Measure 24 has a treble clef with a half note (F#4) and a bass clef with a half note (F#2). Measure 25 has a treble clef with a half note (F#4) and a bass clef with a half note (F#2). Measure 26 has a treble clef with a half note (F#4) and a bass clef with a half note (F#2). Dynamic marking includes *dim.* in measure 24.

No. 4

Lent, vague, indécis

p cresc... pochiss.

3

This system contains the first four measures of the piece. The music is in 3/4 time with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The first measure starts with a piano (*p*) dynamic and includes a crescendo (*cresc...*) and a hairpin ending in a pianissimo (*pochiss.*) dynamic. The right hand features a melodic line with a triplet of eighth notes in the third measure. The left hand provides a harmonic accompaniment with chords and single notes.

3 5

This system contains measures 5 through 8. The right hand continues its melodic development with a triplet of eighth notes in measure 5 and a quintuplet of eighth notes in measure 6. The left hand accompaniment remains consistent with the first system.

10

3 3 3

This system contains measures 9 through 12. The right hand features a triplet of eighth notes in measure 9 and a decuplet of eighth notes in measure 10. The left hand accompaniment continues with chords and single notes.

3 3 15

dim. accel. rit.

This system contains measures 13 through 16. The right hand has a triplet of eighth notes in measure 13 and a quintuplet of eighth notes in measure 15. The left hand accompaniment continues. Dynamic markings include *dim.* (diminuendo) in measure 14, *accel.* (accelerando) in measure 15, and *rit.* (ritardando) in measure 16.

This system contains measures 17 through 19. The right hand features a melodic line with a half note in measure 17 and a quarter note in measure 18. The left hand accompaniment continues with chords and single notes.

20

This system contains measures 20 through 23. The right hand features a melodic line with a half note in measure 20 and a quarter note in measure 21. The left hand accompaniment continues with chords and single notes.

Fier, belliqueux

First system of the musical score for 'Fier, belliqueux'. The piece is in 3/2 time. The right hand features a melodic line with sixteenth-note runs, marked with a piano (*p*) dynamic and a *cresc...* instruction. It includes sixteenth-note triplets and a triplet of eighth notes. The left hand provides a harmonic accompaniment with chords and descending lines, marked with a *5* fingering.

Second system of the musical score. The right hand continues with sixteenth-note patterns and a triplet of eighth notes. The left hand features chords and descending lines, marked with a *7* fingering and a *5* fingering.

Third system of the musical score. The right hand begins with a triplet of eighth notes and continues with sixteenth-note patterns. The left hand features chords and descending lines, marked with a *5* fingering and a *3* fingering.

Fourth system of the musical score. The right hand features sixteenth-note patterns and a triplet of eighth notes. The left hand features chords and descending lines, marked with a *7* fingering and a *5* fingering.

6 6 6 3 10

p *cresc...*

5 5

This system contains the first two measures of the piece. The right hand features sixteenth-note runs with slurs and fingering numbers 6 and 3. The left hand has a steady accompaniment of eighth notes. Dynamics include piano (*p*) and a crescendo (*cresc...*). Measure numbers 6, 6, 6, 3, and 10 are indicated above the staff. Fingering numbers 5 and 5 are shown below the left hand.

6 6 6 3

p *cresc...*

5 5

This system contains the next two measures. The right hand continues with sixteenth-note runs, including a triplet of sixteenth notes. The left hand accompaniment remains consistent. Dynamics include piano (*p*) and a crescendo (*cresc...*). Measure numbers 6, 6, 6, and 3 are indicated above the staff. Fingering numbers 5 and 5 are shown below the left hand.

3

3

This system contains the next two measures. The right hand has a triplet of eighth notes followed by a half note. The left hand features a series of chords and a triplet of eighth notes. Measure numbers 3 and 3 are indicated above the staff.

15

This system contains the next two measures. The right hand has a series of chords with a triplet of eighth notes. The left hand has a steady accompaniment of eighth notes. Measure number 15 is indicated above the staff.

f

This system contains the final two measures. The right hand has a series of chords and a half note. The left hand has a steady accompaniment of eighth notes. Dynamics include forte (*f*). Measure numbers 15 and 15 are indicated above the staff.

Five Preludes, Op. 74 (1914)

Alexander Scriabin

Douloureux, déchirant

p cresc. ³ *molto*

5 3

7 7

The first system consists of a grand staff with treble and bass clefs. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#). The time signature is 3/4. The music features a complex texture with multiple voices in both hands, including triplets and a five-note chord. The dynamics are marked *p cresc.* and *molto*.

First section:
10A (no B or D)

10A (no D or F)

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

12-beat phrase, 7 notes

This block shows two horizontal lines of musical notation. The left line represents a 6-beat phrase with 7 melody notes. The right line represents a 12-beat phrase with 7 notes.

5

The second system continues the musical texture from the first system, featuring similar complex voicings and a five-note chord marked with a '5'. The dynamics and tempo markings are consistent with the first system.

10A (no G# or B)

This block shows a horizontal line of musical notation for the second section of the second system, labeled '10A (no G# or B)'. It consists of a sequence of notes on a single staff.

The third system continues the musical texture, showing further development of the complex voicings and melodic lines in both hands.

10A (no B or D)

10A (no F or G#)

Second section:

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

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

This block shows two horizontal lines of musical notation for the second section of the third system. The left line is labeled '10A (no B or D)' and the right line is labeled '10A (no F or G#)'. Both are described as 6-beat phrases with 7 melody notes.

10

5 3

Coda :
10A (no G# or B)

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

15

7-beat phrase, 3 melody-notes

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

Très lent, contemplatif

pp

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

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

9A (added F)

5

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

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

9A (added F)

10

9A (added F)

8 (F,Gb)

9A (added F)

9A (added D) + E#, G#
passing notes

Fourth section:
8 (F,Gb) 9A (added F) 9A (added G#) 9A (added F)

4 bars . . .

15

pp *dim.* *smorz.*

Final section:
9A (added B) 9A (added F)

2 bars . . .

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

Allegro drammatico

7-note phrase
9A (added G#)

cresc...

9A (added D)

First section : 12 bars ...

f comme un cri

p subito

cresc.

9A (added G#)

9A (added F)

10

9A (added D)

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

dim.

p

cresc.

9A (added D)

Second section : 12 bars ...

15

9A (added B) 9A (added D)

p subito *cresc.*

9A (added B)

20

9A (added G#) 8 (D#,E) closes off the section and the piece

dim.

Final section : 2 bars . . .

No. 4

Lent, vague, indécis

p cresc... pochiss.

3

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

3

5

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

10

3

3

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

3

3

dim.

accel.

15

rit.

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

passing -notes

passing -notes

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

20

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

Fier, belliqueux

p *cresc...*

Bar 1 RH 5/3 faster

7A (B split to Bb, c)

6A (C# up to D)

6A (A up to Bb)

6B (also Eb down to Ebb)

7A (G split to Gb, Ab)

6A (A up to A#)

6A (F up to F#)

6B (also B down to Bb)

5 *impéieux*

8 (C, C# etc)

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

Two percentage signs (%) are located on a lower staff below the grand staff.

p *cresc...*

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

p *cresc...*

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

3

3

8 (C, Db etc)

15

%

%

f

%

%

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

Compositions at *www.pjb.com.au* include: *Five Short Pieces*, guitar, 1979; *Divisions on an Italian Ground*, flute and guitar, 1980; *De Profundis* and *Nacht*, on poems by Lama Anagarika Govinda, voice and piano, 1980; *Fünf Bagatellen*, piano, 1980; *Five Rounds*, choir, 1986; *Go Forth and Multiply*, choir, 1986; *Three Violin Duets*, 1987; *Fable*, for piano, 1987; *To Erich Jantsch*, SAATB recorders, 1988; *A Suite of Curves*, trombone (or horn) and piano, 1990; *Two Recorder Duets*, alto recorders, or other melody instruments, 1991; *Trombone Quintet*, trombone, flute, piano, bass, and percussion, 1994; *Three Songs*, on poems by Jack Kerouac, Vikram Seth and Dylan Thomas, voice and piano (only the first and third of these are available), 1994; *Piano Study*, piano, 1994; *Four Dances*, various ensembles including recorder quartet, string quartet, 1995; *The Poet in the Clouds*, on a poem by S. T. Coleridge, SATB choir, 1995; *Tres Casidas del Diván del Tamarit*, on poems by Federico García Lorca, voice and piano, 1997; *Three Suites*, for the solo line, piano, and piano and a solo line, 2000; *Die Zeiten*, on poems by Kästner, Bachman and Jünger, choir (only the second and third of these are available), 2000; *Three Duets* for flutes, 2001; *For Four Hands* for piano four hands, 2002; *Three Preludes* for piano, 2003; *Second Solo Suite* for flute, violin, viola or cello, 2003; *Guitar Duet* for two guitars, 2006; *We Who Mourn* for choir, 2007; *Trio With Guitar* for guitar and two clarinets or two recorders or two violas, 2008; *Canons* for two- and four-hand piano, 2009; *Flute Trio*, 2012; *Twenty Studies* for piano, 2013-14; *Music for Strings* and *Two Encores for Strings* for 2vln, 2vla, 2vlc, 2015.

Arrangements include: By J. S. Bach: *Trio BWV 655*, piano and flute; *Vor deinen Thron BWV 668*, piano; *Fugue in F minor BWV 689*, SATB recorders; *Four Duets BWV 802-5*, keyboard; *Six Preludes and Fugues* from Book I, keyboard; *Flute Sonata BWV 1031* transposed into G major for alto recorder and keyboard; *Flute Sonata BWV 1032* completed by Peter Billam for flute and keyboard, also in C major for alto recorder, and in G major for descant; *Ricercare a 3*, from the *Musikalisches Opfer* for keyboard; *Ricercare a 6*, for sSATBG recorders, or strings, or two keyboards; and *Fuga Canonica in Epidiapente*; from the *Art of Fugue: Contrapuncti 1, 4 and 9* for keyboard, and *Contrapunctus 14* as completed by D. F. Tovey, for keyboard, or for SATB recorders, or for strings; *Passacaglia and Fugue in c* for piano four hands; *Chorales with Descant* for melody instrument and piano; *Cello Suites I, II and III* for flute or alto recorder, *Forty Chorales* for piano, *Der Geist hilft* for SATB-SATB recorders. By Brahms: *Fugue in Ab minor for organ*, for SATB recorders and gamba, in A minor; *Choralvorspiele for organ* plus settings by Isaac, Bach, Praetorius, recorders. John Carr, *Divisions on an Italian Ground*, flute or recorder and guitar. Franz Liszt, *Late piano pieces*, G.F. Händel: *Concerto Grosso in A minor* op 6 no 4, harpsichord and recorders; *Recorder Sonata in Bb* no 5, in G for tenor recorder and keyboard. Claudio Monteverdi, *Ecco Mormorar l'Onde*, SSATB recorders. Arnold Schoenberg: *Verklärte Nacht* for piano. Franz Schubert: *Four Songs*, voice and guitar; *Dances*, recorders and guitar, *Dances*, piano 4 hands. Scriabin, *Two Preludes op.67*; *Five Preludes op.74*, piano. Telemann, *Twelve Flute Fantasias*, recorder. Wilbye, *Draw on sweet Night*, SSATTB recorders, and for flute choir. *Twelve Italian Songs*, voice and guitar; *Seven English Songs*, voice and guitar; *Fourteen Folk Dance Tunes*, recorder and guitar; *Bushband Dances*, violin, accordeon and banjo; *Easy Classical Pieces*, Bb trumpet and piano; *Famous Beginnings*, for piano.

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