



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

The musical score is written for piano in 3/4 time. It consists of five systems of two staves each (treble and bass clef). The first system begins with the tempo and dynamic markings *p cresc. 3 molto*. The piece is characterized by dense, chromatic textures and expressive phrasing. Measure numbers 5, 10, and 15 are clearly marked. The notation includes various accidentals, slurs, and dynamic markings throughout.

No. 2

Très lent, contemplatif

pp

5

Detailed description: This system contains the first five measures of the piece. The right hand (treble clef) features a melodic line with various intervals and ornaments, including a trill in measure 4. The left hand (bass clef) provides a harmonic accompaniment with chords and moving lines. A dynamic marking of *pp* is present at the beginning.

5

Detailed description: This system contains measures 6 through 10. The musical texture continues with intricate fingerings and a steady harmonic progression in the left hand.

10

Detailed description: This system contains measures 11 through 15. The right hand has more complex rhythmic patterns, and the left hand maintains its accompaniment.

Detailed description: This system contains measures 16 through 20. The melodic line in the right hand continues to develop, with some slurs and accents.

15

pp dim. smorz.

Detailed description: This system contains the final five measures (21-25). The piece concludes with a *pp* dynamic marking and a *smorz.* (ritardando) instruction. The left hand features a long, sustained chord in the final measure.

No. 3

Allegro drammatico

The first system of music consists of two staves, treble and bass clef. The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 9/8. The melody in the treble clef begins with a dotted quarter note followed by eighth notes, with a *cresc...* marking. The bass clef accompaniment features a steady eighth-note pattern.

The second system continues the piece. It includes dynamic markings *f comme un cri*, *p subito*, and *cresc.*. Fingerings of 7 and 5 are indicated in the treble clef. The bass clef accompaniment continues with eighth-note patterns and some chordal textures.

The third system shows the continuation of the melody and accompaniment. A measure number '10' is placed above the treble clef staff. The bass clef accompaniment features sustained chords.

The fourth system concludes the piece. It features a *dim.* marking in the treble clef and a *p cresc.* marking in the bass clef. The treble clef melody is accompanied by the bass clef accompaniment.

15

20

No. 4

Lent, vague, indécis

p cresc... pochiss.

3

5

3

10

3

3

15

3

dim. accel. rit.

20

No. 5

Fier, belliqueux

The first system of the musical score for 'Fier, belliqueux' is in 3/2 time. The right hand begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic and features a series of sixteenth-note runs, each marked with a '6' above the staff. The piece gradually increases in volume, indicated by the *cresc...* marking. The left hand provides a steady accompaniment with chords and moving lines. The system concludes with a triplet of eighth notes in the right hand and a descending fifth-finger scale in the left hand.

The second system continues the musical development. The right hand's sixteenth-note runs are interspersed with chords. The left hand maintains its accompaniment, with some chords marked with a '7' above the staff. The system ends with a triplet of eighth notes in the right hand and a descending fifth-finger scale in the left hand.

The third system is marked with a tempo change to *impérieux* and a dynamic of *f*. The right hand features a triplet of eighth notes followed by a series of chords. The left hand continues with its accompaniment, including a triplet of eighth notes. The system concludes with a triplet of eighth notes in the right hand and a descending fifth-finger scale in the left hand.

The fourth system continues the *impérieux* section. The right hand features a series of chords and a descending sixteenth-note run. The left hand provides a steady accompaniment with chords and moving lines. The system concludes with a triplet of eighth notes in the right hand and a descending fifth-finger scale in the left hand.

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

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

3
3

15
3

f

Five Preludes, Op. 74 (1914)

Alexander Scriabin

Douloureux, déchirant

p cresc. ³ *molto*

5 3

First section:
10A (no B or D)

10A (no D or F)

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

12-beat phrase, 7 notes

5

10A (no G# or B)

10A (no B or D)

10A (no F or G#)

Second section:

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

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

Coda :
10A (no G# or B)

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

7-beat phrase, 3 melody-notes

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

No. 2

Très lent, contemplatif

pp

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

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

5

Central section:
9A (added D) + E# passing note, or
10A (missing G#,B) 9A (added B)
4 bars ...

10

9A (added F) 8 (F,Gb) 9A (added F) 9A (added D) + E#,G# passing notes

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

15

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

No. 3

Allegro drammatico

cresc...

7-note phrase

9A (added G#)

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)

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

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

Musical score for measures 12-15. The system consists of two staves. The upper staff is in treble clef with a key signature of one flat (B-flat) and a time signature of 3/4. It contains a melodic line with a triplet of eighth notes in measure 12, followed by eighth and sixteenth notes. The lower staff is in bass clef with a key signature of one flat and a time signature of 3/4, containing a bass line with a triplet of eighth notes in measure 12 and various chords. Performance markings include *dim.* (diminuendo) and *accel.* (accelerando) between measures 13 and 14, and *rit.* (ritardando) in measure 15. The number 15 is written above the final measure.

Chordal accompaniment for measures 12-15. The staff is in treble clef with a key signature of one flat. It shows the chord progression: ... 9B (C#,D#,E) sempre ... passing -notes ... passing -notes.

Musical score for measures 16-19. The system consists of two staves. The upper staff is in treble clef with a key signature of one flat and a time signature of 3/4, featuring a melodic line with slurs and ties. The lower staff is in bass clef with a key signature of one flat and a time signature of 3/4, featuring a bass line with slurs and ties.

Chordal accompaniment for measures 16-19. The staff is in treble clef with a key signature of one flat. It shows the chord progression: ... 9B (C#,D#,E) sempre ...

Musical score for measures 20-23. The system consists of two staves. The upper staff is in treble clef with a key signature of one flat and a time signature of 3/4, featuring a melodic line with slurs and ties. The lower staff is in bass clef with a key signature of one flat and a time signature of 3/4, featuring a bass line with slurs and ties.

Chordal accompaniment for measures 20-23. The staff is in treble clef with a key signature of one flat. It shows the chord progression: 8 (D#,E) 8 (F,Gb) 9B (C,D,Eb) 8 (E,F) 8 (D#,E).

7A (B split to Bb, c) 6A (C# up to D) 6A (A up to Bb) 6B (also Eb down to Ebb)

7A (C# split to C, D) 6A (D# up to E) 6A (B up to C) 6B (also F down to Fb)

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

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