Scriabin's Implicit Tonality

by James M. Baker

Alexander Scriabin (1872–1915) would have resented being remembered merely as a composer. True, he was raised in the tradition of European keyboard music, and his career began conventionally enough with the composition of "miniatures" for the piano in the same generic categories as the shorter works of Chopin. However, he came increasingly under the influence of diverse aesthetic, philosophical, and mystical doctrines, which impelled him toward an artistic vision of unprecedented grandiosity. Around the turn of the century he became impressed with Wagner's conception of a *Gesamtkunstwerk,* and this influence is strongly felt in the *Divine Poem* op. 43 (1903), Scriabin's third symphony, which is based on a Nietzschean program. His later symphonies, the *Poem of Ecstasy* op. 54 (1905–07) and *Prometheus* op. 60 (1909–10), reflect other influences as well. By the time these works were written, Scriabin had admitted many of the tenets of Theosophy into his own highly idiosyncratic philosophy, and he had also assimilated many ideas which originated in the symbolist movement in Russian poetry. At the time of his death, he was at work on a gigantic multi-media work, the *Mystery,* through which he believed the end of the world would be accomplished.

In view of this extraordinary career, there can be little wonder that Scriabin is generally remembered today not as a practitioner of the craft of composition in the traditional sense (although he began well within this tradition), but rather as an eccentric visionary whose mission led him so far afield that he lost touch with traditional musical structures as they were evolving. Hence it is widely believed that Scriabin simply made a complete break from traditional tonal structures and procedures around 1910, adopting totally novel methods of structure in *Prometheus* and later works. It is difficult to imagine—at least for me—how any composer firmly grounded in the craft of tonal composition could suddenly completely escape his musical past. Actually, Scriabin was one of a very few composers who began by writing thoroughly conventional, tonal works but who ultimately did succeed in breaking out of the tonal system entirely. However, in Scriabin's case the departure from tonality was not abrupt—rather, he made a gradual transition from tonality to atonality over a period of years, beginning as early as 1903. In this article I shall discuss only one aspect of this transition: Scriabin's extension of traditional tonality. Another equally important part of Scriabin's evolution was the gradual incorporation of atonal components and procedures into music whose basic structure remained tonal. This fascinating topic is simply beyond the scope of an article.[1]

[1]For a thorough study of Scriabin's transition, see my Ph.D. dissertation, "Alexander Scriabin: The Transition from Tonality to Atonality" (Yale University, 1977).

Those whose attention is focussed solely on Scriabin's large works and their mystical aspirations lose sight of another equally important aspect of his career; for even in the midst of his striving for magnificent ecstatic effects in his symphonies and sonatas, Scriabin continued to write small pieces, often exquisitely delicate miniatures, for the keyboard. It should be emphasized that Scriabin's smaller pieces stand in a special relationship to his larger works. In few cases, if any, are they mere *Kleinigkeiten* tossed off for a few extra rubles. On the contrary, some of his short pieces were intended for incorporation into projected larger works which never got off the ground. (For example, Scriabin wrote the Poem op. 32/2—one of the examples which shall be discussed here—as an aria for his opera based on Nietzschean themes, which never even approached completion.) Many short works in effect are studies for the larger works (e.g., the Albumleaf op. 58, in which Scriabin exploits the potential of the mystic chord of *Prometheus* op. 60). Nearly every short piece appears to be devoted to the exploration of the compositional possibilities of some novel component or procedure or to the working out of a particular technical problem. In short, these pieces are of primary importance for Scriabin's transition to atonality. Because they concentrate heavily on innovative structural procedures, they are ideal source material for the study of this evolution. In this article, therefore, I shall focus on several of Scriabin's shorter works.

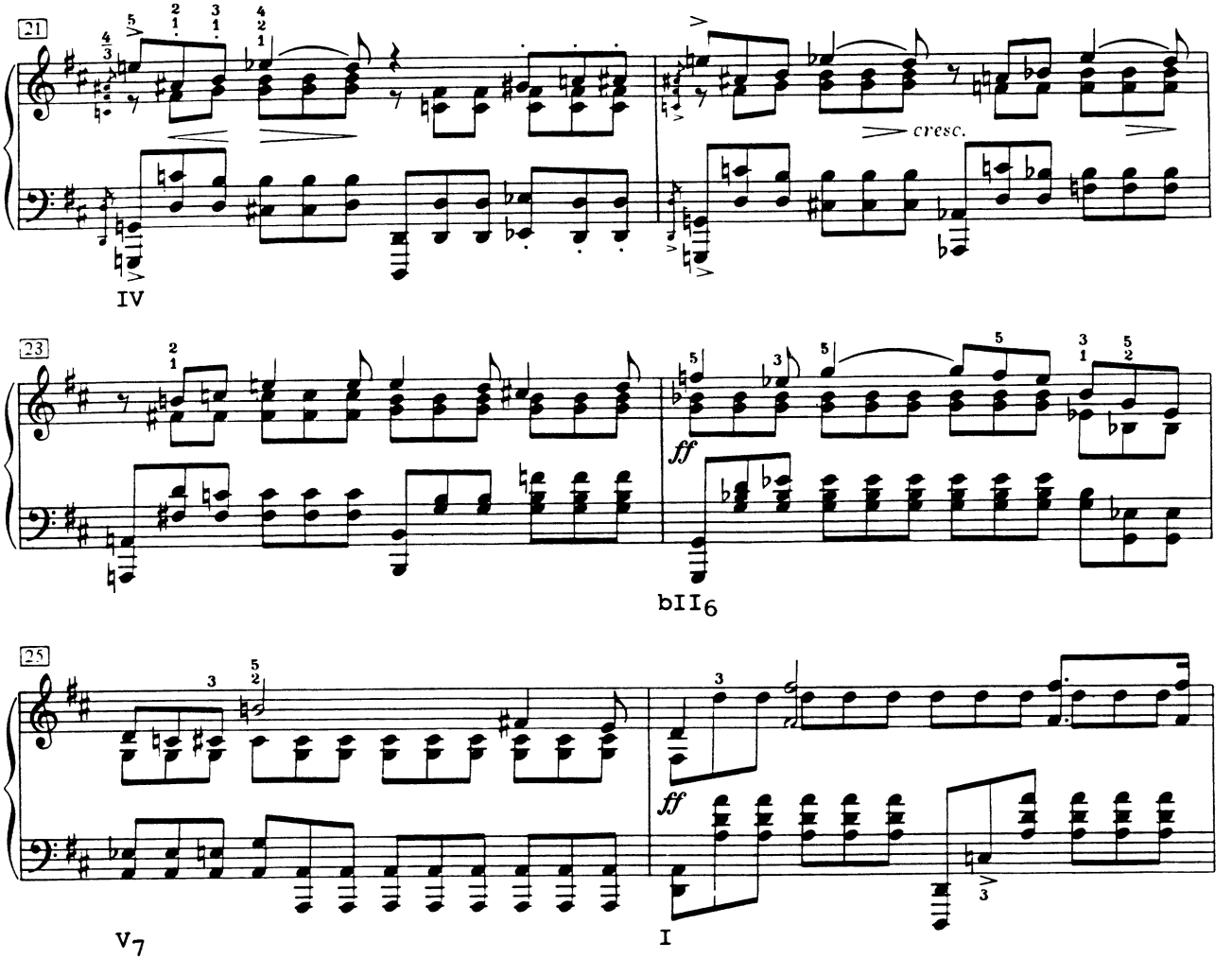
Before commencing the discussion of these compositions, I would like to mention several of the most characteristic harmonies and harmonic progressions found in Scriabin's tonal music. The most important harmonic function in this music, aside from those of tonic and dominant which determine the axis of tonality, is flat-II. Occasionally this chord may be found as a traditional Neapolitan sixth chord preparing the dominant, as at the climax of the Poem op. 32/2 (Example 1).[2] More often flat-II occurs in root position in its dominant-preparatory role, as in the final cadential progression of the Prelude op. 45/3 (Example 2). One of the important effects of this progression is that an exotic juxtaposition of chords separated by tritone (flat-II and V) is achieved.

Scriabin usually avoids stating the full triad at the beginning of a composition. However, the tonic root is frequently found at the beginning, but as the bass of a dissonant chord, often V_7/IV. For instance, the E-flat tonic of the Prelude op. 56/1 is heard as a complete consonance only at the end of the first phrase (Example 3). At the beginning, one cannot possibly surmise that E-flat is the tonic note, since it is the bass of a dominant flat-7/flat-5 of A-flat (IV), to which it progresses in m.2. A large portion of Scriabin's tonal works open with phrases whose initial harmonies are quite indefinite but whose progression becomes gradually more determinate until an important harmonic function is established by means of a cadence culminating the phrase.

A final preliminary remark: I believe strongly that Scriabin's transition from tonality to atonality can be best studied and discussed in terms of the specific alterations and modifications which he introduced into the traditional tonal system. These can be discerned only through a comprehensive, detailed analysis, followed by a thorough comparison of his novel techniques with conventional procedures of counterpoint and harmony. I have adopted such a detailed analytical approach for this article. I shall examine quite closely the structures of passages from several less problematic pieces composed during the earlier phases of Scriabin's transition. I believe this approach will lead to valid and significant conclusions concerning the technical

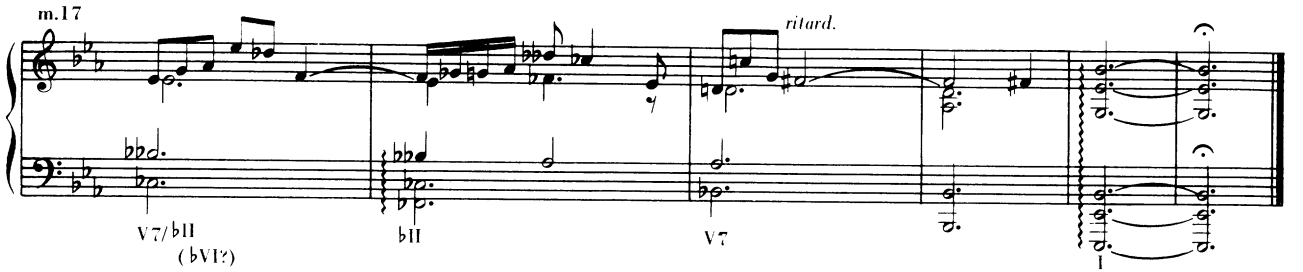
[2]Scriabin's voice leading is characteristically complicated, generating many dissonant chords at the surface of the music. For purposes of commencing a description of Scriabin's harmony, the discussion shall be limited at first to the underlying harmony as determined by the progression of the bass. The precise methods for discerning harmony underlying the surface of the music shall be dealt with in later portions of the article. For now, the reader is requested to observe especially closely the progressions of low bass tones.

Example 1. Poem op. 32/2 (1903)

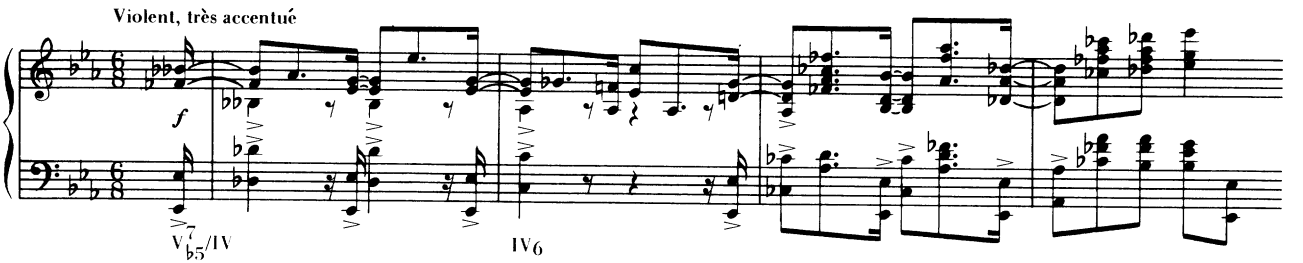


Reprinted by permission of C. F. Peters Corporation.

Example 2. Prelude op. 45/3 (1905)



Example 3. Prelude op. 56/1 (1907)



craftsmanship behind Scriabin's innovative compositions.

Scriabin's tonal structures, as one might expect, are achieved by means of prolongational procedures which make possible the expansion of his characteristic components and progressions, several of which I have just mentioned. These prolongational procedures are essentially the same as those first described by Heinrich Schenker which are found in most tonal music of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries—although in Scriabin's music of 1903 and later they are seldom carried out in a straightforward manner. Instead of embarking on a summary of Schenker's analytical approach, with which I assume most readers are familiar, I shall discuss in detail the prolongational forces at work in a passage from one of Scriabin's more conventional pieces, the Albumleaf op. 45/1.

Even in the unusually simple opening phrase of the Albumleaf (Example 4), there are significant deviations from standard tonal procedures. The entire passage cited in this example constitutes a circular progression, involving an extended opening progression from the tonic unison at the beginning to the dominant reached at the end of the eight-measure phrase, which then immediately cadences back to the tonic with the return of the opening material. Such circular progressions always serve to prolong a simple harmony—in this case the tonic—but here the presentation of the tonic triad is deliberately more tentative than in similar unfoldings in the majority of the strongly tonal works dealt with by Schenker.

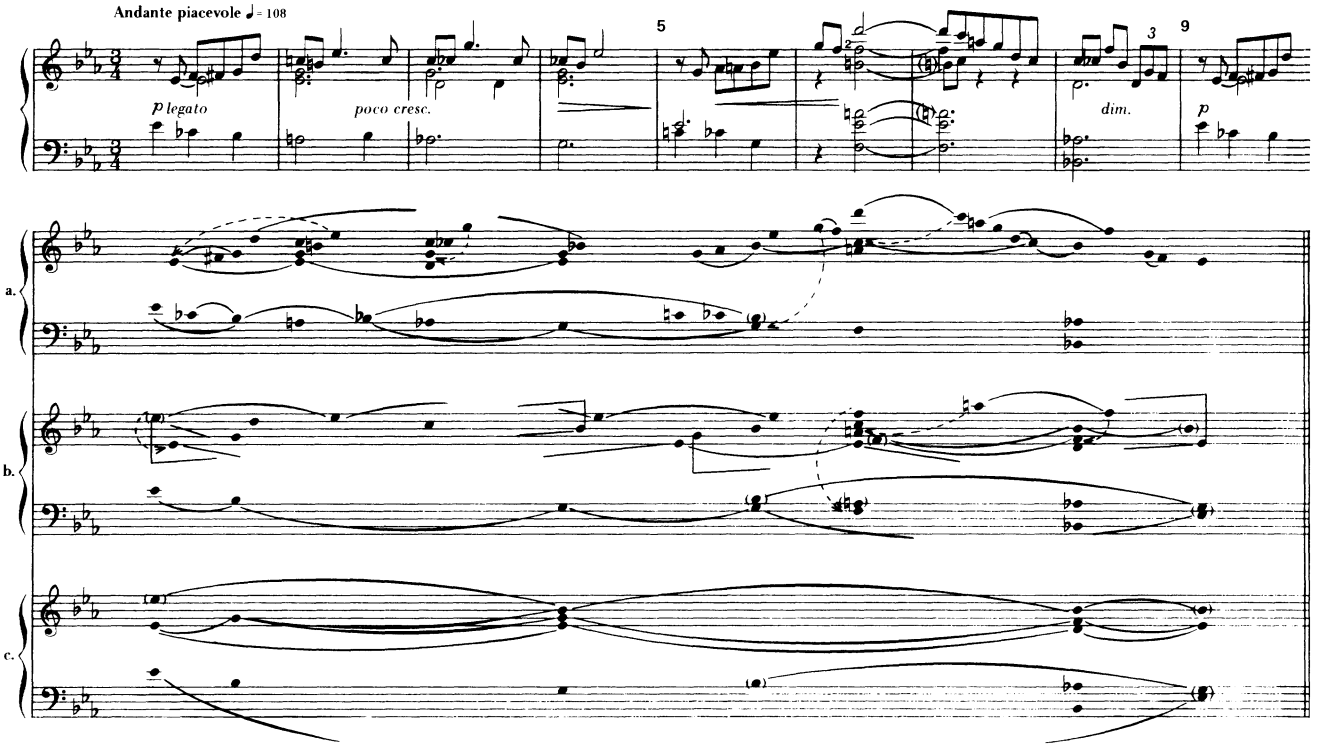
The opening four measures serve to arpeggiate (in incomplete fashion) the tonic triad, and certain intervals of this harmony are "filled in" or connected by means of passing notes (both diatonic and chromatic). Sketch 4a demonstrates the connecting function of these passing notes by means of slurs, while Sketch 4b reduces the passage to the underlying arpeggiations which are the structural underpinnings of the voice leading.[3] The clearest arpeggiation occurs in the bass from the tonic root at the beginning descending through B-flat in mm.1–2 to the G which supports I_6 in m.4. The B-flat is embellished by chromatic upper and lower auxiliary notes (the latter occurring with metrical emphasis) before the diatonic A-flat connects it with G. At the same time an arpeggiation proceeds upward from the initial tonic unison, moving right away to G (m.1) and eventually to B-flat in m.4. This latter motion is much less explicit since the G is retained, almost as a pedal tone, for the rest of the phrase—but in a middle voice, not the melody. This melodic B-flat (m.4) is the goal of an important linear motion from above. Beginning with D in m.1, this line is interrupted, but not concealed, by upward leaps to the chord tones E-flat and G. (These pitches, also sustained in middle voices, may be said to *overlap* the main melodic motion. Overlappings are indicated in the sketches by dotted lines with arrows pointing to the pitches in the main structural register.)

Listeners familiar with tonal voice-leading practice will recognize a significant deviation; for D, the leading tone, would not ordinarily be the point of initiation for such a melodic motion. Rather, it would typically serve as a passing note connecting two chord tones. In this case one would have expected E-flat to precede the D, producing a conventional linear motion spanning an interval of the tonic triad. Here the span is incomplete, although not a great deal of tension is generated, due to the presence of E-flat in another voice at the beginning, where one would assume the complete span would begin. Ironically, E-flat does occur in the proper melodic register in mm.2 and 4, but only after the descending motion from D has commenced, therefore only serving as a reminder of the lapse from conventional voice leading at the beginning of the phrase. Note, too, that a contrast is provided in a middle voice, where D is resolved properly as the lower auxiliary note to the tonic root. The *incomplete span* is one of Scriabin's most characteristic and frequently encountered prolongational procedures, but often this device occurs without benefit of the missing elements being supplied in other voices. Even when the implicit completion is obvious, as in the above example, the effect of incomplete spans is to attentuate the tonal strength of prolongations.

It should be clear that the opening phrase in mm.1–4 of the Albumleaf contains only one real harmony—the tonic triad. It begins as a unison, but changes inversion-forms as the bass arpeggiates the triad downwards, and by the end of the phrase the chord occurs in first inversion. Any other harmonies occurring here, characteristic though they may be, are simply the results of linear or embellishing motions which expand the presentation of the tonic triad. In contrast, the consequent phrase in mm.5–8 contains definite harmonies which prepare

[3]In the musical examples for this discussion, all analytical sketches will be aligned directly beneath examples. Reference to the sketches will be made according to the numbers of the examples which they illustrate. Thus, Sketches 4a through c contain analyses of Example 4.

Example 4. Albumleaf op. 45/1 (1905)



and then effect a V–I cadence (see Sketches 4a and b). The harmonies are concealed by less direct linear connections and unprepared dissonances, yet they are still clear by virtue of the bass motion; they are I_6 (m.5), V_7/V (mm.6–7), V (m.8), and I (m.9).

The material in m.5 more or less continues the harmony of the preceding measure, but melodic events sustain interest here. The melody makes explicit the arpeggiation from the root to the fifth of the triad completed at m.4, by filling in the span from the third to the fifth chromatically. The bass motion bears a similar-

ity to that of m.1, but here C-flat may only be assumed to resolve to B-flat in the same register, the note of resolution actually being supplied only in the melody. (Therefore in the conventional voice leading shown in Sketch 4a the understood note of resolution is placed in parentheses.) The V_7/V (m.6), the first real change of harmony in the piece, occurs at the climax of the phrase, and is made more poignant by unessential dissonances which resolve only after the downbeat of m.7.[4] The most crucial dissonance is the high D, which, being unprepared and approached by leap, is clearly related motivically to the D in m.1. The other dissonance is B-natural, a chromatic passing tone which connects B-flat of I_6 with C of V_7/V. Note, too, that B-flat (m.5) also resolves downward to A-natural of V_7/V, which would subsequently move to A-flat of V_7 (m.8). The A-flat actually occurs only in the tenor register, shifting back to the original point of departure of a single line, C–C-flat–B-flat–A-natural–A-flat, which would hypothetically occur in a single register but actually is divided between two. Sketch 4b shows the basic descent from B-flat to A-flat in a single voice (the tenor, where it seems more permanently established), with pitches occurring out of the register shown in parentheses. The melody of m.7 arpeggiates (in an unconventional way) the underlying harmony. Note, however, that this arpeggiation is left incomplete in the uppermost register, where G (which ordinarily would connect A-natural with F) is momentarily left dangling unresolved. The expected F in the proper register occurs conspicuously in the next measure as a member of V_7. This interrupted linear connection is indicated in the sketch by a slur. The melodic motion which interrupts this line is yet another line from a dissonant D (m.7) to a consonant B-flat (m.8) occurring in the register of the primary melodic line. By the end of m.8 the melody has descended into the middle-voice region, ready to recommence the initial material as the harmony cadences back to the tonic.

As might be expected, several important melodic gestures are left dangling incomplete after the completion of the eight-measure opening phrase. Most conspicuous, the melodic F in the upper voice of m.8 does not resolve to E-flat as would be expected (though the proper resolution does occur in a middle voice). Similarly, A-flat in the tenor voice (m.8) does not resolve to G in the same register. Perhaps most significant, a strong E-flat in the bass is denied at m.9. Not only would this bass E-flat have served as an effective resolution of the dominant bass note (m.8); even more important, it would also have completed an arpeggiation of the tonic triad in the bass. This arpeggiation had proceeded as far as the third of the triad (G) by m.4. Motion was then carried down linearly by F (the bass of V_7/V) in mm.6–7, but significantly this F dropped out of the bass register in m.8 and thus the expected span from G to E-flat is not completed in the bass register. (Once again, the complete span may be found in the middle-voice range.)

It should now be apparent that the circular progression formed by the entire opening eight-measure phrase and its return to the tonic constitutes an artfully expanded statement of the tonic triad. Even V_7/V and V_7, those most conspicuous "other" harmonies involved in the basic progression, support notes which have a connective function in the presentation of intervallic spans of the underlying tonic harmony. The sense of never having progressed far from the tonic is strongly confirmed by the return of the initial material (m.9). Without doubt, tensions have been set up in the piece by the end of the opening phrase, but these result not from having traversed any great harmonic distance, but rather from the expectations thwarted by melodic spans left incomplete in various registers.

The incomplete spans of the passage from op. 45/1 just

[4] I use the term "unessential dissonance" in precisely the same sense as did J. P. Kirnberger (1721–83), who originally coined it. Kirnberger classified all dissonances which take the place of consonances within a given harmony as "unessential." These would ideally resolve before a change of harmony takes place. The only essential dissonance, which resolves with a change of harmony, is the seventh.

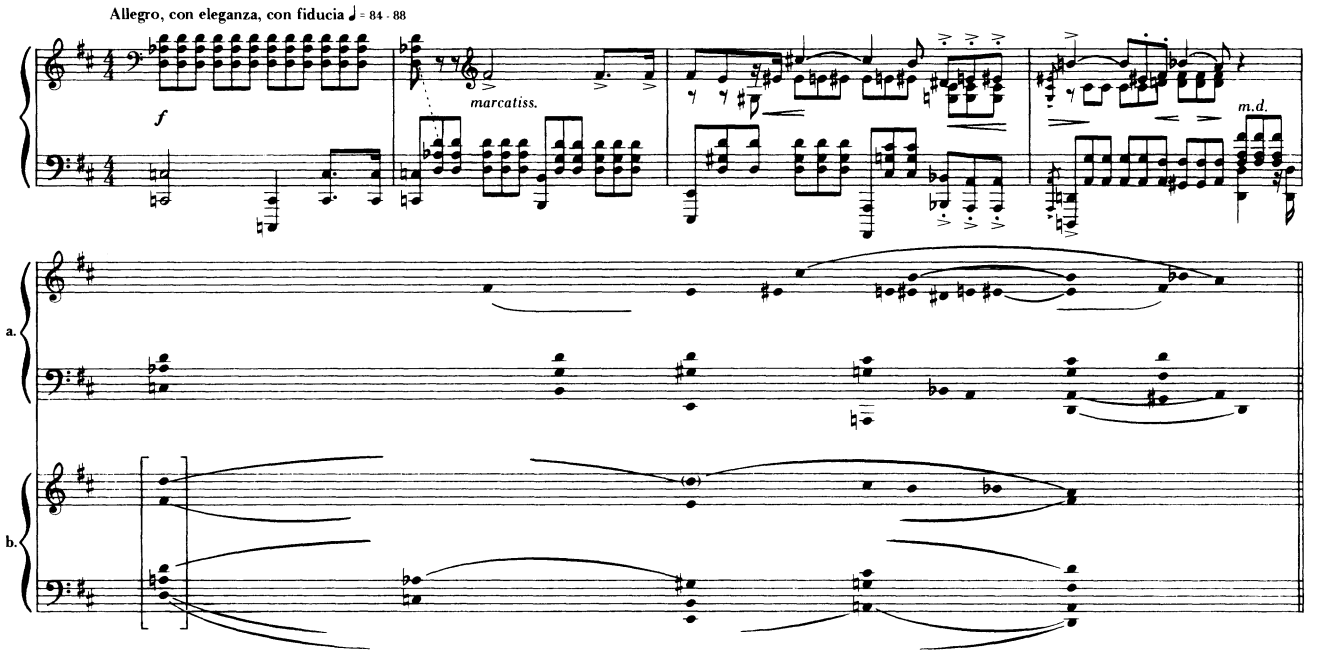
discussed are easily understood because the elements missing from these spans are supplied by other voices in other registers. In themselves, these particular spans do not deviate to a large degree from voice-leading procedures involving registral transfers which are frequently encountered in traditional tonal music. As mentioned above, the Albumleaf is an unusually straightforward piece; yet its voice leading is nevertheless indicative of the procedures found in Scriabin's more dissonant, complicated works. For example, the typical dissonant opening which progresses by the end of the initial phrase to a definite harmony is almost always the result of a prolongation of that harmony—but a prolongation that is incomplete due to one or several voices beginning in mid-span.

The opening of the Poem op. 32/2 provides a good example whose structure incidentally bears a strong resemblance to that of the opening of op. 45/1 (see Example 5). The passage begins with a pseudo-French-sixth chord which progresses through V/V at the beginning of m.3 to V (second half of m.3), which cadences to I heard first as a suspension chord at the beginning of m.4 but as a consonance by the end of that measure. Sketch 5a reveals direct linear connections for each of several registrally differentiated voices. A tenor voice prolongs the tonic root, D, embellishing it with its lower auxiliary. In m.2 and following, the alto voice sustains F-sharp a third above in similar fashion, although the neighbor motion is complicated by constant chromatic fluctuations which embellish the auxilliary note. These two elements of the tonic triad are thus sustained throughout the passage. The other voices begin on non-harmonic tones but move linearly (often chromatically) to notes of the tonic chord by the end of the phrase. The uppermost voice begins on C-sharp, the leading tone, and proceeds downward to A, the fifth of the tonic. Standard voice-leading procedure would reinforce the C-sharp of this line by having it occur as a member of the dominant, and the line would then move down quickly so that the arrival of A would coincide with the tonic. Clearly Scriabin distributes these pitches in an entirely unexpected manner to insure maximum dissonance. The C-sharp enters unprepared a beat ahead of time (m.3), creating a startling dissonance, and after the arrival of V moves quickly to a dissonant B-natural which is further suspended over the tonic (m.4) before resolving chromatically to A. The consonant A itself receives negligible durational or rhythmic emphasis.

Two other lines begin on non-harmonic tones here, but are synchronized with the harmonic progression. Another tenor line begins on A-flat, which is subsequently reinterpreted as G-sharp of V_7/V. The G-sharp moves to G-natural of V and on to F-sharp of I. Finally, the bass begins with C-natural and progresses to B, which would ordinarily be an element of V/V. This B ultimately descends to A of V, with a chromatic connection through B-flat supplied in the normal register of this voice.

The most important difference between the incomplete spans of this passage from op. 32/2 and those of Example 4 is that here several incomplete spans begin dissonantly at the same time, and no particular preceding voice leadings may necessarily be understood at the moment these spans are initiated. However, as the harmony becomes more and more determinate, it is possible to surmise without difficulty the understood points of origin of these lines within the tonal context. Sketch 5b indicates these as elements of an understood tonic triad preceding the actual beginning of the piece. By itself the voice leading shown in Sketch 5b appears to be ordinary in every respect. There is yet more confirmation for this reading within the piece itself. In mm.12–13 the dominant finally arrives and is sustained after an extended preparation. The dominant then progresses in m.14 not to a clear tonic triad, but rather to a repetition of the opening material (see Example 6a). This cadential progression, which admittedly has a "deceptive" effect, still depends on the close relation of the dissonant chord (m.1) to the expected tonic. The relationship becomes astonishingly clear at the end of the piece, when the entire opening passage occurs over a tonic pedal as the triumphant culmination of the piece (see Example 6b). Here A-natural replaces A-flat and the bass note C-natural fulfills a

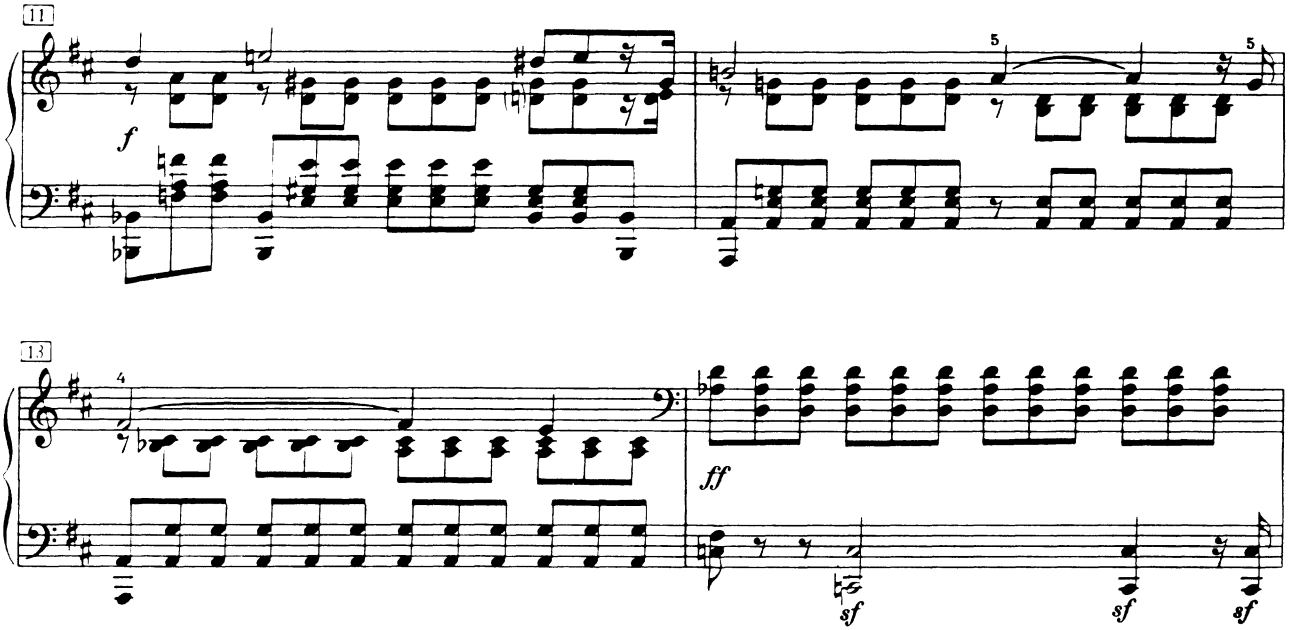
Example 5. Poem op. 32/2 (1903)



clearly connecting function (see the accented bass notes), all within a forthright tonic prolongation. The final chord even resolves in the proper register the leading tone dangling from the incomplete span beginning with C-sharp (m.27).

It is frequently the case that direct linear progressions underlying the structure of a passage may be quite concealed due to rapid changes of register involving overlappings of the basic melodic motion. In dealing with passages such as the opening of the Prelude op. 56/1 (Example 7), the analyst must determine the main register established for each line and trace the progress of each line as it would conform to normal voice-leading procedures. Usually the lower voices contain the most direct linear motion, while upper voices may be replete with overlappings. Such is the case in Example 7 (see Sketches 7a through c). The bass voice is easiest to trace, being an E-flat tonic pedal point. The tenor voices are also fairly direct. One voice begins on D-flat and proceeds down chromatically in the same register, reaching B-flat by the end of the passage. Another voice in the

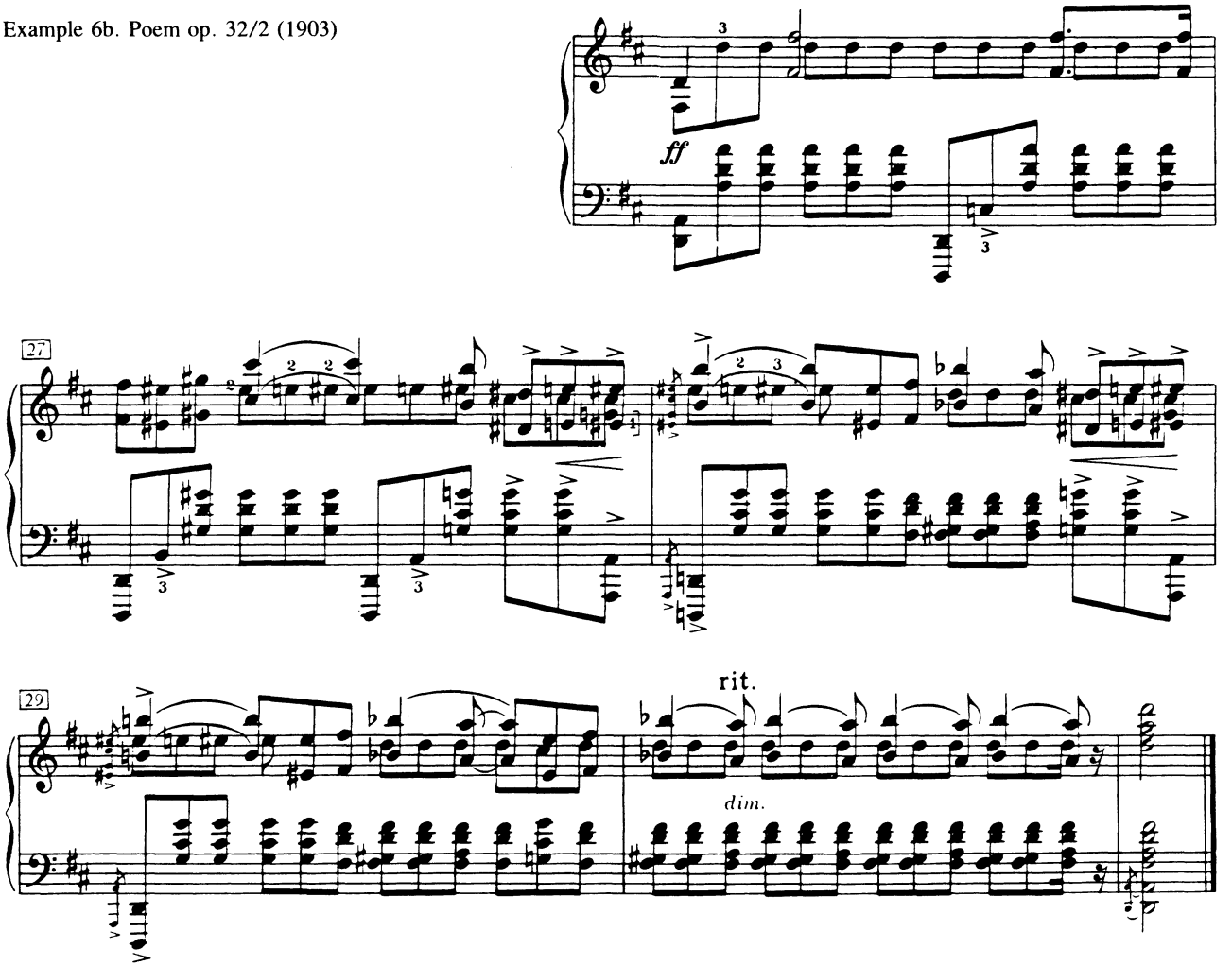
Example 6a. Poem op. 32/2 (1903)



lower register (written so as to be played at first by the thumb of the right hand) begins on B-double flat and moves to A-flat in m.2. The A-flat resolves to G by the end of the phrase, but is not allowed to do so in the same register, but only in two higher registers. An alto voice proceeds from F-flat at the beginning to E-flat in m.1, through D-natural at the end of m.2, to D-flat at the end of the following measure. From this point on, the voice leading is questionable. In a lower register in m.4, D-flat appears to merge into the upper tenor line, moving via C-flat to B-flat. At the same time D-flat appears to be embellished in an upper voice by a lower auxiliary C-flat before moving up to E-flat, the tonic note—in defiance of the descending tendency of these altered sixth and seventh degrees of the descending melodic minor scale. This voice leading poses a problem which I shall address in a moment.

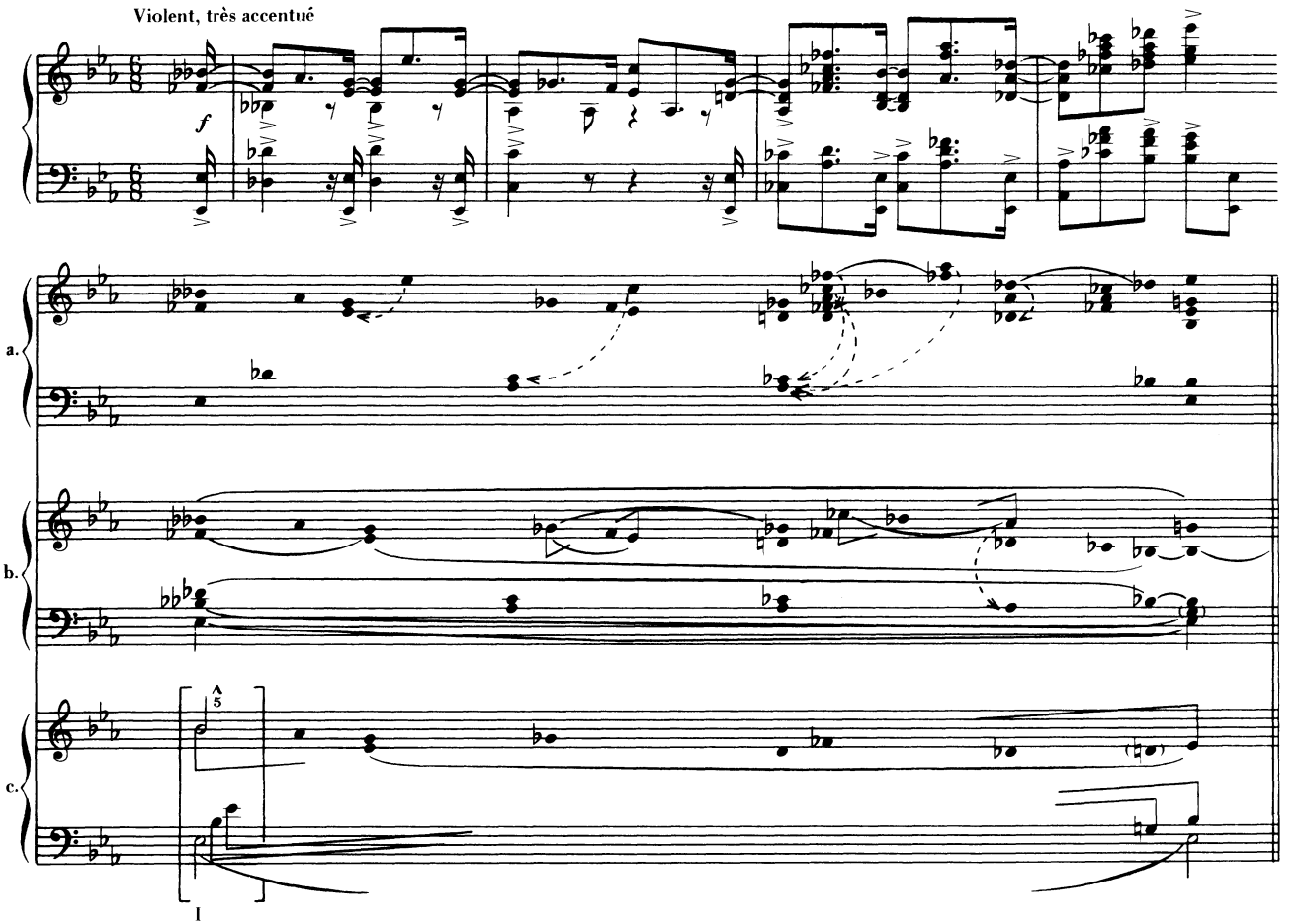
Having traced these lower-voice lines, we are prepared to deal with the melody itself. The basic melodic line begins on B-double flat moving to G before a leap up to E-flat (m.1), an overlapping note from the alto voice. The melody then continues down through G-flat and F, reaching E-flat at the same

Example 6b. Poem op. 32/2 (1903)



Reprinted by permission of C. F. Peters Corporation.

Example 7. Prelude op. 56/1 (1907)



time that C from a tenor line overlaps (m.2). The next melodic note is G-flat which recalls the G-flat heard earlier in the measure, emphasizing the fact that the quick descent from G-flat to E-flat is actually a motion from the melody to an inner voice, the alto, and not a true melodic motion (see Sketch 7b). The G-flat, thus still in force melodically at the end of m.2, then moves to F-flat in the same register as several inner voices overlap at once. At the end of the phrase, F-flat resolves to E-flat, again in the same register, although more and more frequent overlappings have obscured the direct progress of this line.

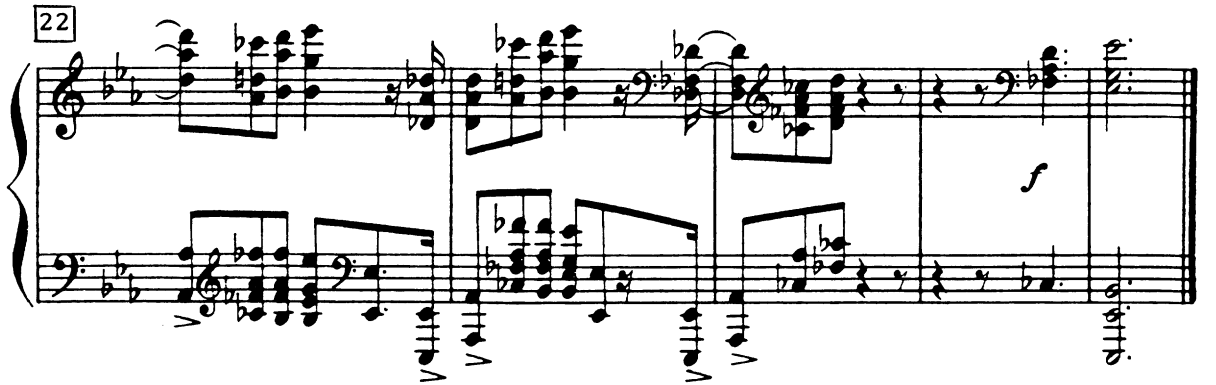
It should be evident that, no matter how violent the upward leaps of this phrase are, the chords involved are nevertheless the bearers of motion which has as its basis strict tonal contrapuntal procedures. In this case the overlapping elements are generally merely duplications of members of voices proceeding normally in lower registers. In only one instance do these upper parts initiate an independent motion. This is in m.3, where an upper voice moves from C-flat via B-flat to A-flat (see Sketch 7b). Even here, though this motion occurs in no other voice, the C-flat–A-flat interval thus spanned is the interval formed between two voices in the tenor range at this point, and thus this "independent" motion is of no great melodic significance. By omitting overlapping voices, one obtains the reduction shown as Sketch 7c, which demonstrates the basic voice leading. Once again, it is not difficult to posit points of initiation for each line which would yield complete spans of a prolonged tonic triad, as shown in Sketch 7c.

Excerpts such as Examples 5 and 7 shed considerable light on Scriabin's practice, mentioned at the beginning of this article, of converting an initial tonic chord into a dissonant V_7/IV. In both of these examples such a function is realized to a certain extent, but in both cases the V/IV–IV progression is greatly subsidiary to the prolongational motions of lines spanning (at least implicitly) intervals of the tonic triad. The minor seventh of the tonic chord is introduced specifically to direct motion away from the tonic root and down to the dominant tone. Given the tendency of the lowered seventh to descend, it is curious that in m.4 of Example 7 Scriabin retains the D-flat in cadencing to the E-flat tonic. The result is more like a Phrygian cadence with the E-flat chord heard as a dominant. This effect is not totally dispelled even at the end, when D-natural is introduced in the auxiliary chord which resolves to the tonic; this is perhaps because the auxiliary chord behaves as a German sixth resolving to a dominant (see Example 8). It is possible that this functional ambiguity is the effect desired by the composer. However, it is significant that, with the return of the opening material in registrally expanded form, the problematic melodic D-flat (m.4) is converted in the corresponding melody to D-natural.[5] It appears that this change was deemed necessary for the firm closure of the piece, since the D-natural checks the descending tendency of D-flat and leads back to the tonic root.

It has been shown that Scriabin's tonal harmonic-melodic progressions fulfill prolongational purposes and that individual harmonic or melodic elements are always subsidiary to the single prolonged harmonic event and its intervals which are spanned melodically. Most often, however, the elements forming the melodic spans—and especially the particular elements embellishing the basic lines—must be analyzed according to whether they belong to chords of the progression which is the harmonic underpinning of the prolongation. In many cases these chords forming this progression are not clearly stated at the foreground of the music due to rhythmic displacement of some of their elements. Nevertheless, after careful evaluation of the

[5]In the Peters Edition (Alexander Skrjabin, *Ausgewählte Klavierwerke*, Vol. II: *Préludes, Poèmes*, ed. Günter Philipp [Leipzig: Edition Peters, 1967], p. 58), an editorial revision of this D-natural to D-flat is made. This revision is questionable since it is made solely on the basis that the repeated passage does not parallel its original. The editor ignores the fact that the passages are not otherwise parallel anyway, since a deliberately notated D-natural occurs in a middle voice of m.22—an addition to the corresponding chord of m.4. Further, Philipp's revision creates a highly uncharacteristic cross-relation between the D-natural and his suggested D-flat.

Example 8. Prelude op. 56/1 (1907)

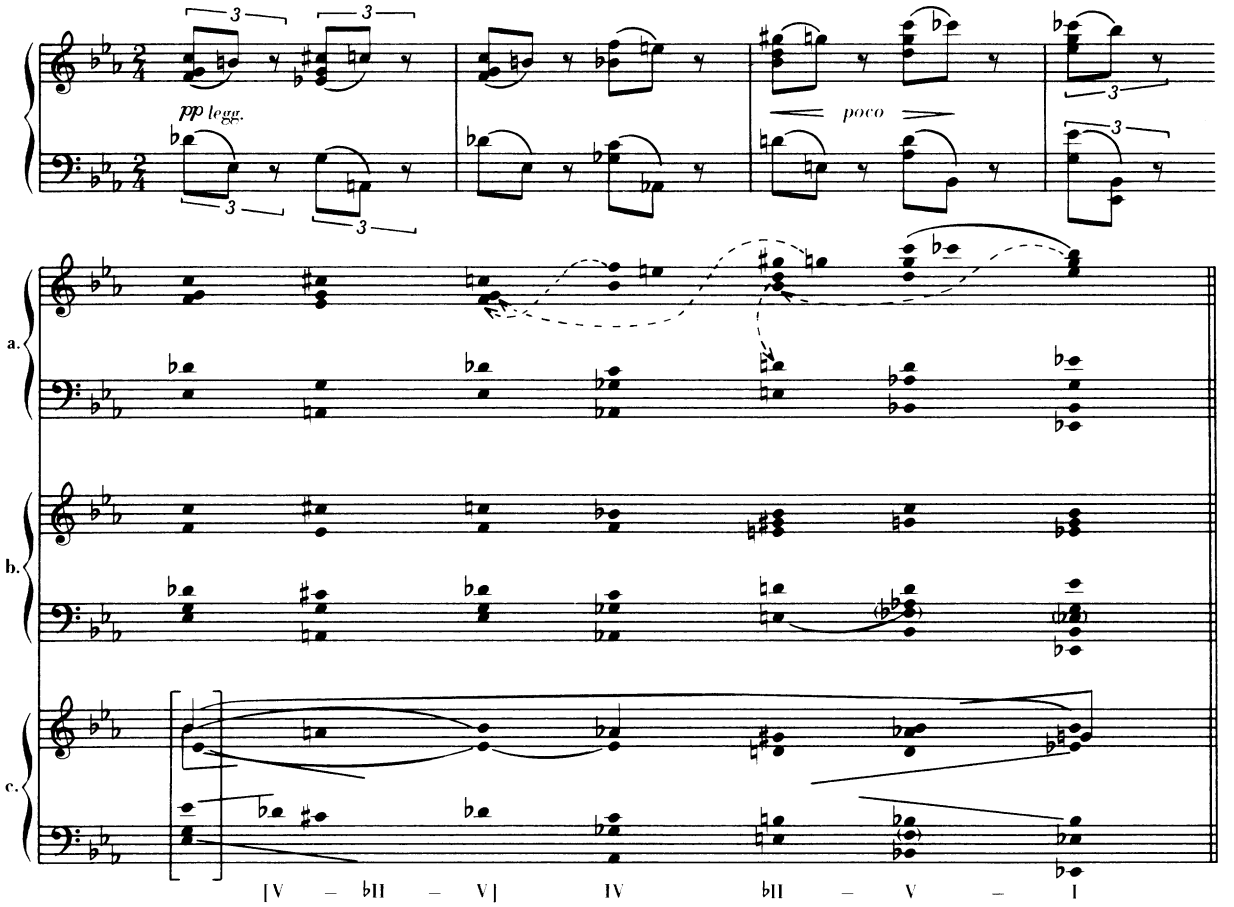


progress of the prologational spans, it is usually possible and useful to infer a logical harmonic progression which, together with the contrapuntal motion, determines the prolongation. The harmonies of such a progression, it must be emphasized, are subsidiary to the prolongation it creates, but in order to understand fully the melodic motion of the prolongational spans, one must recognize the harmonic progression which is coincident with the voice leading.

The opening passage of the Etude op. 49/1 offers an example whose voice leading becomes clarified after an underlying harmonic progression has been discerned (see Example 9). Sketch 9a demonstrates the continuations of basic lines by various overlapping voices. Sketch 9b then restricts the progress of each line to the particular register in which it is most strongly established. Each line moves to an element of the E-flat tonic triad by the end of the phrase. The initial bass tone is also E-flat, and the bass line strongly suggests the progression from the subdominant (on A-flat in m.2) to the dominant (on B-flat in m.3) to the tonic (m.4). One may surmise that this passage prolongs the tonic triad and therefore may begin to search for elements crucial to this prolongation which have been displaced from positions where they would receive strongest harmonic reinforcement. This search is most easily begun with the cadence to the definitive tonic harmony, which is quite clearly stated, delayed only momentarily by the melodic C-flat suspended from the preceding chord. This preceding harmony is quite definitely a dominant function, but is clouded by several unessential dissonances which remain unresolved for its entire duration. Sketch 9c shows the underlying harmonies, assuming that all unessential dissonances were resolved. The melodic pitches C and C-flat should resolve to B-flat (and for this reason they are considered an overlapping linear continuation from B-flat in the main melodic register—see Sketch 9a), but this resolution is delayed until the arrival of the tonic. The G-natural anticipates the resolution of A-flat in the tenor voice.

The chord preceding the dominant is almost certainly the

Example 9. Etude op. 49/1 (1905)



enharmonic equivalent of flat-II_7 (spelled for convenience as E major instead of F-flat major), the characteristic dominant preparation which I described earlier. Here the unessential dissonances are created by flat-5 (a characteristic alteration)—which does not resolve to natural-5 but is retained as the root of the succeeding dominant chord—and by G-natural, an even earlier anticipation of this element of the tonic triad. The chord immediately preceding flat-II_7 is IV_7, as speculated earlier. (Note that a reconsideration of this harmony would have been in order had the progression of IV to those succeeding harmonies already ascertained defied logic.) Here B-flat and F fail to resolve downward to chord members A-flat and E-flat. The pitch F also takes the place of E-flat in V_7/IV, the chord at the beginning of m.2. The melodic notes C and B-natural within the V_7/IV are also dissonant, but never resolve to B-flat as would be expected. Note that the opening chord is the same V_7/IV (with the same unresolved dissonances). There remains, then, one chord whose function is in doubt—the chord at the end of m.1 on A-natural. This chord actually stands in the same relationship to V/IV and IV as does the chord on E-natural in m.3 (which is a literal transposition up seven half steps of the chord in question) to V and I. Therefore it is heard as flat-II 7/flat-5 of IV preparing V/IV.

An examination of the underlying voice leading of the passage (shown in Sketch 9c) discloses prolongational procedures which for the most part are different from the incomplete spans discussed earlier. Here most spans are complete, except for the tenor voice beginning on D-flat, the lowered seventh of the tonic chord, which renders the tonic a V_7/IV. (If an E-flat is posited as the understood point of initiation of this line, then the tonic prolongation is quite complete.) In the upper voices, the elements basic to the prolongation are embellished by extended upper auxiliary notes, and these voices are allowed to run their courses without benefit of more than implicit reinforcement from the harmonic progression. Only one pitch, C-sharp, of the entire melodic progression shown in Sketch 9b is heard as a consonance (with the exception of the final B-flat). All of the others are unessential dissonances displacing chord tones. The same situation is true for the alto voice beginning with F-natural. The lower voices, however, contain without exception elements of the underlying harmonies.

Scriabin allows the upper voices in this passage a virtually unprecedented degree of independence from the majority of parts, which define the regular harmonic-contrapuntal progression. Yet these lines are directed by prolongational forces as strongly as any of the voices, and each of their dissonant elements has a particular meaning with respect to the chord sounding at the time. These voices are simply drastically out of synchrony with the regular progression. For instance, the initial melodic C shown in Sketch 9b should have resolved immediately to B-flat, whereupon the progression would have continued as in Sketch 9c. However, by the time C actually descends to B-flat (m.2), this latter note is dissonant against the A-flat in the bass. The overlapping high C (m.3) then embellishes B-flat, which is only heard as a consonance for the first time in m.4. In a sense, the simple resolution of a dissonant upper neighbor has been expanded to become the primary melodic gesture of the entire phrase, and this expansion is emphasized by the repetition at the end of m.3 of the original C–B-natural motive from m.1, spelled C–C-flat to signify a real descent to a strong B-flat. In the same manner, what should have been an immediate resolution of F to E-flat at the beginning of the alto line instead takes the entire duration of the phrase. (In this voice, E-natural serves as a chromatic passing tone down to E-flat, and technically should be spelled F-flat. The E-natural spelling results from Scriabin's having chosen the more convenient spelling of the entire flat-II_7 harmony, as mentioned earlier.)

This passage offers an example of another highly idiosyncratic prolongational procedure of fundamental importance in Scriabin's later tonal works. This process depends upon the retention of pitches in the typical progression of flat-II to V_7, and its basic effect is to expand the dominant function. An ordinary

flat-II$_7$ progressing to an ordinary V$_7$ would involve the retention of two pitches. For instance, the third and the seventh of flat-II in m.3 (G-sharp and D-natural) become, respectively, the seventh and third of V$_7$ (A-flat and D). However, Scriabin employs an altered version of flat-II, lowering the fifth, which makes possible the retention of another pitch—for B-flat, flat-5 of the flat-II harmony, becomes the root of V$_7$. Moreover, the retention of the fourth pitch of the two basic chords is implicit here. The V$_7$ actually contains no fifth, but, as noted previously, E-natural functions melodically as F-flat in a line moving to the E-flat tonic root in m.4. Hence E-natural is carried over implicitly into the dominant chord, serving as flat-5. Thus flat-II 7/flat-5 and V 7/flat-5 contain precisely the same pitches.

It should be mentioned that these retained pitches comprise a subset of the whole-tone scale and that the progression from flat-II 7/flat-5 to V 7/flat-5 often provides a basis for forming an entire whole-tone aggregate. This is the case with the V–flat-II–V progression (in the area of the subdominant) at the beginning of the passage. All pitches of the whole-tone scale beginning, say, on D-flat are present in the first measure, in addition to a single non-whole-tone element, C-natural. By virtue of pitch retention, the flat-II harmony is in effect assimilated into the dominant harmony which frames it. It is frequently the case that the V–flat-II–V progression constitutes a prolongation of V, and this is most certainly the effect of this progression in mm.1–2. But the flat-II 7/flat-5 harmony does occur as a separate entity within the dominant prolongation, in order to set up additional tensions in the bass, by progressing by tritone directly to V. The tension is resolved when the bass of flat-II moves chromatically down to the root of the tonic.

After the first measure-and-a-half of this passage, which contains a complete whole-tone scale on D-flat, a shift is effected to the complementary whole-tone scale (on, say, C). All elements of this latter scale are contained in the next three beats—that is, the latter half of m.2 and all of m.3. This effect of shifting whole-tone planes is quite common in Scriabin's transitional music, and is usually coincident with the arrival of a tonic harmony at a cadence.

The reason that I emphasize the whole-tone scale is that it lies at the basis of pitch-retention procedures in Scriabin's transitional music. It is not generally recognized that Scriabin's mystic chord from *Prometheus* is closely related to the whole-tone scale, containing five elements of that scale plus a single non-whole-tone element. This chord actually occurs frequently throughout the transitional works, but not often in the chord-of-fourths disposition which is so frequently associated with its use as an atonal component. It can be found in m.3 of Example 9, comprised of every pitch in that measure except for the final melodic note, C-flat. Here the registral arrangement even corresponds to the form it takes in *Prometheus:* B-flat–E–A-flat–D–G–C!

To sum up: We have found that even in his earlier transitional works, whose fundamental structures are clearly tonal, Scriabin introduced the following innovations:

1) incomplete spans;

2) spans whose elements are widely scattered among several registers; and,

3) spans which run their courses almost entirely out of synchrony with each other and with the majority of parts defining the harmonic progression.

The incomplete spans observed here were found in conjunction with initial phrases of compositions, and they are open-ended only at their beginnings. These spans work together in counterpoint, leading ultimately to a cadence on a definite tonic harmony. Implicit before the beginning of these spans is a tonic harmony whose elements would serve as the ideal points of departure of the spans. The effect of this type of incomplete span is to open a composition with harmonies of quite uncertain function. The harmonic progression which follows becomes more and more determinate, culminating in the cadence. Later

in his transitional period, Scriabin also began to experiment with incomplete spans which are open-ended at the conclusion of a composition, so that the prevailing tonic harmony of the composition need never be explicitly stated, yet may be understood to exist both before and after the actual music.

By throwing off the synchronization of spans within a prolongation, Scriabin was able to obscure or conceal the conventional harmonic progression underlying the prolongation. By means of this asynchronous voice leading, he created novel harmonic components at the foreground, or surface, of the music. He quickly developed a preference for harmonies in which a majority of the elements are members of a single whole-tone scale, probably because of their rather special properties relating to pitch retention after transposition. The mystic chord of *Prometheus* is such a harmony, and, as we have seen, this harmony can be found in compositions whose structures are clearly tonal. Thus the remarkable fact emerges that Scriabin began to experiment with atonal components and procedures long before he abandoned tonality. In his transitional compositions dating from 1903–09, tonal and atonal procedures—which traditionally have been considered to be mutually exclusive—are both operative within integral musical structures. In this music, the use of atonal procedures is limited to levels of structure near the foreground, while overall coherence is guaranteed by the underlying tonal framework. It was this method which enabled Scriabin to progress gradually toward atonality. He never broke his routine of composition in order to master the new atonal craft. Rather, he incorporated his atonal experimentation into compositions which consistently maintained the level of complexity and elegance evinced by his earlier works.