Anton Rubinstein's *Deux Fantaisies sur des chansons populaires Russes*, Op. 2 and *Six Preludes*, Op. 24:

A Performance Guide and Recording

by

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A Research Paper Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Musical Arts

Approved November 2023 by the
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ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

December 2023

ABSTRACT

Anton Rubinstein was a notable pianist as well as a valued music educator; however, the lack of recognition for him as a composer motivated me to look more deeply into his compositions. Some of his pieces have never been recorded and are rarely performed today. Composer César Cui wrote a music critique titled "Anton Rubinstein" in *The Musical World*, that "his music has skilled harmonies and flowing melodies, but without innovations compared to his predecessors". My hope is that this research project will foster more appreciation for his compositions from musicians and music enthusiasts.

This project focuses on two of Anton Rubinstein's works. The first, *Deux Fantaisies sur des chansons populaires Russes*, Op. 2, is based on two meditative and melancholic popular Russian tunes. For the second piece, *Six Preludes*, Op. 24, I will focus primarily on the first three preludes. This research paper includes the composer's educational background, as well as the major figures surrounding him and highlighting potential influences on his compositions. A descriptive analysis of the works mentioned above is given for the purpose of better understanding the works through the perspectives of forms, comparisons to other compositions, and discussion of compositional styles. A performance guide is provided, giving practice tips for the musical and technical challenges in these pieces.

DEDICATION

To my beloved grandmother Mrs. Jinlan Huang

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I started to play piano at the age of four, beginning in a small town in China, then to the provincial capital, to Beijing, to New York, and finally to Arizona. It has been about twenty-five years from my first encounters with the keyboard until now, as I'm achieving the highest diploma in piano performance. I never stopped practicing, except for special occasions like traveling. When I was little, I even practiced piano on the day of the most important Chinese festival, Lunar New Year. Piano is not only part of my life, but its foundation. I could not imagine my life without this part. When I imagine the future, I can see that piano will continue to be important to me.

For the long history of my piano practice, twenty-five years out of twenty-nine, many people have helped me in different stages of my life. I want to thank my parents and my grandmother first, who stood by me and supported me in everything I wanted to do. They respect me and my decisions. They are like my friends, never ordering me to do anything, but instead supporting me with all their hearts and finances. Without them, there is no possibility that I could live the life I want. I also want to thank my first professional teacher at Shenyang Conservatory of Music, Mrs. Ni Ni, and my teachers from Central Conservatory of Music, Mr. Jin Zhang, Mr. Chun Wang, and Dr. Bo Tong. They helped me to build a very solid foundation, corrected my bad piano playing habits,

and supported me to go further in order to see more of the musical world. During my six years in the Manhattan School of Music, I saw Professor Phillip Kawin devote his whole life to music education. I still miss him today and hope he can live a more relaxed life in heaven.

While pursuing my DMA at ASU, Professor Robert Hamilton has fully supported me for my three recitals, as well as this recording project. As one of the most important figures in my life, he helped me overcome my stage fright and helped me to fully enjoy each moment during performances. I would like to thank Professor Hannah Creviston, who took over as committee chair after Professor Hamilton's retirement and supported me on this project and my musical career. I also would like to thank my other committee member Dr. Jody Rockmaker and my previous committee member Dr. Peter Schmelz, who provided their valuable guidance. I want to thank Samantha Hamilton for her hard work on editing this paper and Qize Liu for his professional help on the recordings. Finally, I would like to thank my friends, colleagues, and my peers. I'm always inspired by their innovative ideas and optimistic attitude. With their surrounding support and warmth, I always feel lucky to be who I am.

Without these people, I wouldn't be the complete person that I am today. There are never enough words to express my appreciation to those beloved and that I love. I will enjoy my life, help others, love music, and be my best self.

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INTRODUCTION

1.1 Anton Rubinstein's Life and Musical Career

Anton Rubinstein was born in southern Russia on Nov. 16th, 1829, the third child in his family. Before his autobiography was released, his birthdate was unclear due to the challenge of self-identification surrounding Jews.[1] His younger brother Nicolas Rubinstein became the director of Moscow Conservatory. Rubinstein began studying piano with his mother, Katerina Christoforovna, at the age of five. Although physical discipline was common in their lessons, Rubinstein still described himself as owing his mother "a debt of gratitude".[2] According to Rubinstein, his mother spent more time teaching him than his siblings once she discovered his fondness for music, despite not having any desire to further his musical career at that time. The repertoire he learned included Hummel, Hertz, Moscheles, Kalkbrenner, Czerny, Diabelli and Clementi.[3]

Following a friend's suggestion, Rubinstein began piano studies with Alexander Villoing, a respected instructor in Moscow, to further develop his skills. Because of young Rubinstein's talent and the family's inability to pay his expensive tuition fee, Villoing agreed to teach him free of charge. Rubinstein came to consider Villoing a friend and second father who helped him build a solid musical foundation, which was crucial to his future career.[4]

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[1] Anton Rubinstein, *Autobiography of Anton Rubinstein*, Translated by Aline Delano, Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1890, 2.
[2] Ibid., 2.
[3] Ibid., 5.
[4] Ibid., 8.

Anton Rubinstein gave his first concert in Moscow in 1839, at the age of ten. It was a huge success which led to a concert tour in Europe. With the company of Villoing, Rubinstein traveled across Holland, England, Norway, Sweden and finally to Germany, giving hundreds of concerts over the span of three years. He played for high-profile audiences, such as the Queen Anna Pàvlovna of Holland and Queen Victoria in England and was considered a child prodigy, a very popular concept at that time. Rubinstein's mother held a different view for his musical career than Villoing, and tried to get Rubinstein admitted to the Paris Conservatory. Either because he was too young or due to the interference of his teacher, in the end Rubinstein was not admitted to the Paris Conservatory, and Villoing kept him away from everyone for one year. Rubinstein still played in small concerts or salons, with Liszt, Chopin, Meyerbeer and other musical celebrities present.[5] Liszt suggested that Rubinstein should have a formal musical education in Germany, but it was not realized until years later. Rubinstein admired Liszt and often imitated him in his manners and movements when performing his concerts in Europe.

In 1843, Rubinstein's mother, still wanting him to have a well-rounded education, took Rubinstein and his brother and sister to Berlin to study composition with Siegfried Dehn. Glinka, a composer that Rubinstein greatly admired, also studied with Dehn. His mother's friends, Felix Mendelssohn and Giacomo Meyerbeer also made suggestions for Rubinstein's musical career. Rubinstein's studies included counterpoint, harmonization,

[5] Rubinstein, *Autobiography of Anton Rubinstein,* 13.

and formal analysis. His mother also arranged for Rubinstein and his siblings to have language lessons in Russian, German, and French.

When Rubinstein's father became severely ill in 1846, his mother took his siblings and went back to Russia, leaving Rubinstein alone in Berlin. The next three years marked the hardest time of his life. He traveled to Vienna, the big music epicenter in Europe, where Liszt also lived. He wrote many letters to his acquaintances, including Liszt, asking for guidance. However, Liszt turned him down, saying that Rubinstein needed to find his own ambition without outside help. Rubinstein lived in squalor in his small attic, surviving on only a meager teacher's salary as his income, and often went hungry. Months later, Liszt paid Rubinstein a visit after a busy concert tour and was shocked by his condition. Rubinstein recalls Liszt being physically shaken by the visit.[6] Liszt took him out for dinner and kept a close relationship with him from then on.

In 1848, Rubinstein planned an American tour with his friends, Heindl and Baron Fuhl, but was discouraged by Dehn. Rubinstein recalled Dehn's opposition in his *Autobiography:* "Are you mad? Is it possible that you can find nothing to do in Europe? You are still but a lad, you have seen nothing of your own country, and yet you would recklessly rush off to America, where you are likely to meet with any kind of misfortune."[7] Consequently, after six years in Europe, he returned to Russia at the age of nineteen. He was shocked when border officials said he needed a passport to cross. When he had left his country years ago at a young age, his identity was linked with his mother's

[6] Philip Taylor, *Anton Rubinstein: A Life in Music,* Indiana University Press, 2007, 20.
[7] Rubinstein, *Autobiography of Anton Rubinstein,* 36-37.

on her passport. Since he had no passport, the luggage containing his manuscripts was held at the border with the promise that it would be mailed to his home. He never received his luggage or manuscripts, and most were auctioned as wastepaper.[8]

Rubinstein stayed in Russia for a few years where he completed his first opera. In 1854, he traveled to Europe for another concert tour, staying in Weimar with Liszt. Rubinstein and Liszt sometimes traveled together for concert tours and music festivals. However, disagreements arose due to Liszt's support of Berlioz and Wagner and their new music. Rubinstein wrote in a letter: "We completely disagree on the principal points of his views on music, which consist in the fact that he sees in Wagner the prophet of the future in opera, and in Berlioz, the prophet of the future in the domain of the symphony".[9] Rubinstein's view of music was more traditionally aligned with Mendelssohn, Chopin, and Brahms, and against the innovative music of Wagner, Berlioz, and Liszt. He promoted his own symphonies and operas, and although the reviews were divided, he was ultimately able to publish his works.

In 1859, Rubinstein founded the Russian Music Society and St. Petersburg Conservatory, the first music conservatory in Russia. During his extended time as its first director from 1862 to 1867, he expanded the school from two to seven hundred pupils.[10] His goal was for the conservatory to maintain a high quality of education, rather than focusing on numbers, so as to not become a music factory.

[8] Rubinstein, *Autobiography of Anton Rubinstein,* 49-50.
[9] Taylor, *A Life in Music,* 51.
[10] Rubinstein, *Autobiography of Anton Rubinstein,* 106-110.

From 1872 to 1873, Rubinstein arranged an American tour sponsored by Steinway & Sons. He performed four to seven concerts a week for thirty-five consecutive weeks, initially centered around New York but later expanding to New Orleans and other southern cities. He planned to return to Russia in May of 1873 due to homesickness, as he detailed in a letter to his mother. Before leaving, he performed a concert series over a ten-day period at Steinway Hall in New York, showcasing periods spanning the Baroque to Romantic eras, including the works of J. S. Bach, C. P. E. Bach, Handel, Haydn, Scarlatti, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, Weber, Mendelssohn, Schumann, Chopin, Field, Henselt, Thalberg, Liszt, and Rubinstein himself. He dedicated entire concerts to Beethoven, Chopin, Schumann, and his own works respectively.[11]

Rubinstein returned to St. Petersburg Conservatory in 1887, suggesting a focus on instrumental music, as opposed to his brother Nicolas's Moscow Conservatory which focused on vocals. He insisted that the conservatory should be under the government's supervision and support like other fine arts schools in Russia while disagreeing that smaller music schools should gain parallel status with conservatories. While at the conservatory, he promoted Russian operas and provided many opportunities for local musicians.

1.2 Anton Rubinstein as a Composer

Anton Rubinstein held clear opinions about other composers and their works. He considered J. S. Bach, Beethoven, Schubert, Chopin, and Glinka as first-tier composers,

[11] Taylor, *A Life in Music*, 155.

while second-tier composers included Handel, Haydn, and Mozart.[12] He had a strong preference for instrumental music over vocal music, even operas. He believed that instruments do not have limits like the human voice. Additionally, he believed that feelings in music are not possible to express through the words in vocal music, since emotions are often simply "inexpressible".[13] He believed that the reason opera gained more popularity than symphonies in his time was because the words helped audiences to understand the music, unlike symphonies, which required a certain degree of musical knowledge.[14] He claimed that composers often composed for a certain mood, with the title and markings on the score meant as a direction for understanding the music, rather than a strict rule to follow. This reflected his attitude toward programmatic music, as mentioned previously, and the new type of music led by Liszt, Wagner, and Berlioz.

Rubinstein's compositions can be divided into two period. The first period, composed before his return from Europe at the age of nineteen, is comprised of ten works. His first composition, *Undine*, a study piece for piano, was published by Schlesinger and gained the attention of Robert Schumann, who paid attention to the young generation's works as documented in his *Music and Musicians*.[15] Although just ten pieces were printed during his years in Vienna, the carpet in his small apartment was covered with his unpublished manuscripts.[16]

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[12] Anton Rubinstein, *A Conversation on Music*, Translated by John P. Morgan, First pub. 1892, New York: Da Capo Press, 1982, 3.
[13] Rubinstein, *A Conversation on Music*, 4.
[14] Ibid., 6.
[15] Rubinstein, *Autobiography of Anton Rubinstein*, 27.
[16] Ibid., 33.

Composed after 1848, Rubinstein's mature period is charactized by original melodies and "Mendelssohnian motifs".[17] He composed six symphonies, of which the second, "Ocean", was his most famous. It was compared to Beethoven's "Pastoral" symphony by musical critic Ambros.[18] Rubinstein promoted this piece and finally performed it in the Gewandhaus. Rubinstein's 4th symphony in d minor demonstrated his mastery of orchestration and rich motifs. He composed 13 operas, and the most famous, "Demon", gained popularity in both Russia and abroad during the 1970s. Young Rachmaninoff was in the audience when the opera was performed in Europe, with Rubinstein himself conducting. He also composed three musical portraits, including *Don Quixote* and *Faust*, as well as chamber music, including trios, quartets, quintets, etc.

Although many know him as an acclaimed pianist, Rubinstein's compositions are undervalued by today's pianists. He has an extensive catalog of compositions, including four piano sonatas (three of which were composed within a standard four-movement structure) and five piano concertos, with the fourth being the most famous and the only one that is still performed today. He also composed many character pieces, such as *Berceuses*, *Impromptus*, *Fantasies*, *Preludes*, *Barcarolles*, and *Scherzos*, among others. Through his compositions, Rubinstein bridged the traditional values of his predecessors—Mendelssohn, Chopin, and Meyerbeer—and influenced the next generation of composers, such as Rachmaninoff, Tchaikovsky and Scriabin.

[17] Ibid., 142-143.
[18] Rubinstein, *Autobiography of Anton Rubinstein*, 151.

CHAPTER 2

DEUX FANTAISIES SUR DES CHANSONS POPULAIRES RUSSES, OP. 2

2.1 Overview of *Deux Fantaisies sur des chansons populaires Russes,* Op. 2

Deux Fantaisies sur des chansons populaires Russes, Op. 2（translated: Two Fantasies on Russian folk songs) was composed in 1850 shortly after Rubinstein's return to Russia. The eight years away from his homeland, including three years of loneliness in Vienna, inspired him to compose these fantasies upon folk tunes from his home country. Russian folk songs from the 17th and 18th centuries fall into two categories: *protyazhnaya* (drawn-out song) and *urban song*. They both evoke desolate and melancholic inner feelings. *Protyazhnaya* focuses on a long, slow, and lonely melody itself, like the Russian river, while the urban song is similar but accompanied by western harmonies.[19] The two well-known Russian folk melodies: “Down the Mother Volga” and “Torch Light”, used on these two fantasies by Rubinstein, represent *protyazhnaya* and *urban song* respectively.

A significant influence on Rubinstein while writing the piece came from Liszt, who had been a mentor figure throughout his last three years in Vienna. Rubinstein emulated Liszt’s worldview, stage mannerisms, and, most importantly, composing techniques. Liszt composed many variations on the themes of composers such as J. S. Bach, Diabelli, Mozart, Beethoven, Paganini, as well as a multitude of piano transcriptions of songs by

[19] Maya Pritsker, liner notes for Russian Soul, Moscow Chamber Orchestra, Constantine Orbelian, conductor, Corey Cerovsek, violin, recorded November 24-27, 1998, Virtual Reality Recording, 2016, CD,1–2. https://dbooks.s3.amazonaws.com/DE3244Dbook.pdf

Schubert, Schumann, and numerous opera arias. Anton Rubinstein employed Liszt's unique compositional techniques in these two fantasies. He presents the melody of the *Deux Fantaisies sur des chansons populaires Russes,* Op. 2, No. 1 in the warm and rich register below middle C, then alternates the melody between both hands with various accompaniment patterns, that create dramatic moments effortlessly. This technique will be discussed later in this chapter.

Sigismond Thalberg was another considerable influence on Rubinstein. Thalberg, who was born in Australia in 1812, was already a successful virtuoso pianist and composer when Rubinstein was just beginning his musical training. Rubinstein studied Thalberg's works in his formative years when he still took lessons from his mother. In his first successful concert in Moscow, Rubinstein performed a piece by Thalberg, a fantasy on themes from Rossini's opera, *Moïse*.[20] During the second year of Rubinstein's first European tour, he performed Thalberg's *Deux Airs Russes Varies, Op. 17* (translated: Two Variations on Russian songs) for the first time in Paris and multiple times thereafter.[21] When he played the piece in England, he was called "Thalberg 'in embryo'"by a music critic after the concert. Frequently compared to Thalberg and Liszt, Rubinstein was dubbed "the greatest pianist after Thalberg and Liszt" in a London newspaper in 1859.[22]

[20] Taylor, *A Life in Music*, 9.
[21] Ibid., 12
[22] Ibid., 79.

2.2 Performance guide of *Deux Fantaisies sur des chansons populaires Russes*, Op. 2, No. 1

The first phrase of the Russian folk song, "Down the Mother Volga" is presented as a solo melody at the beginning of *Deux Fantaisies sur des chansons populaires Russes* in the warm and rich register below middle C. The sound created expresses inner loneliness. Liszt was known to present melodies in this register in his own pieces such as at the beginning of *Vallée de Obermann*, at the most important transformation to a new melody in his *Ballade* in B minor, as well as for the first aria in his transcription of *Don Juan*. To produce a rich and warm tone quality in this register, pianists must pay attention to the articulation, particularly the weight of the fingertips on the keys. Using weighted fingers, with partial weight from the wrist or forearm, the fingers must remain on the keys rather than being lifted. Patient practice in search of the best resonance is time well-spent.

The aria is then interrupted by an arpeggiated figure in the next two measures (see figure 2.2.1).

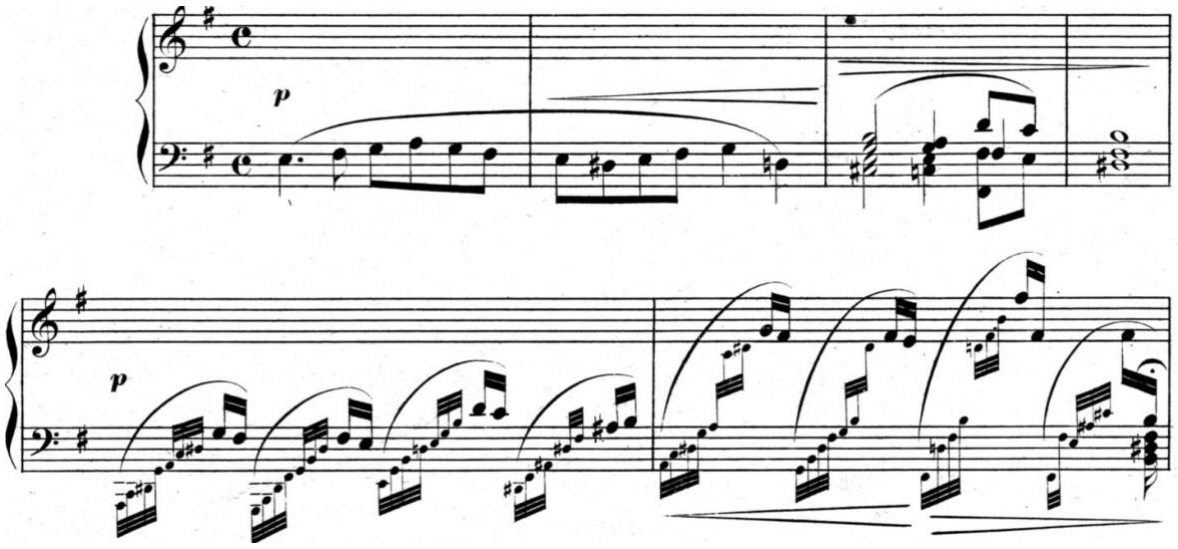

Figure 2.2.1: Anton Rubinstein, *Deux Fantaisies sur des chansons populaires Russes,* Op. 2, No. 1, mm. 1–6.[1]

These running figures are notated as both small and regular-sized notes (mm. 5–6). The last two notated pitches appear as regular sixteenth notes of each beat with a preceding group of thirty-second notes as small notes. Performers should pay attention to two things. First, the tempo must not drag, but stay consistent with the previous melodic parts. If one plays a different tempo, the sense of continuity will be lost. When encountering a fantasy form like this, the player must consider the structure in order to avoid confusing the audience. The performer should also pay attention to the differing regular and small notes in measures five and six. No matter the interpretation of the value of the notes, or the size of the notation, the sixteenth notes are more important, like an inner melody. The thirty-second notes should be played soft and fast, in order to highlight the underlying melody in the aforementioned sixteenth notes. Overall, these two

measures serve as a feature of fantasy, and should be played as if it is an extension of the melody, rather than as a new phrase.

The melodic fragment from the first two measures is present in the following passages, accompanied by different textures. The list of these different textures are as follows: the first two measures of melody as the top line, accompanied by a polyphonic texture from measure 14 (see figure 2.2.2); a running sixteenth note pattern in measures 22 and 23, emphasizing the parallel major key of E major, compared to the original e minor, with the right-hand melody also playing the first two measures of the folk tune (see figure 2.2.3), and finally, a melody played by the left hand in measure 60, with a complicated rhythmic accompaniment combining sixteenth triplets and two sixteenth notes leaping over different registers on the keyboard (see figure 2.2.4). These accompanying textures share a common character, adding many notes in a complex rhythm underneath the melody. However, the characters of the accompanying gestures are more important than hearing each note, to avoid the main melodic line being overshadowed.

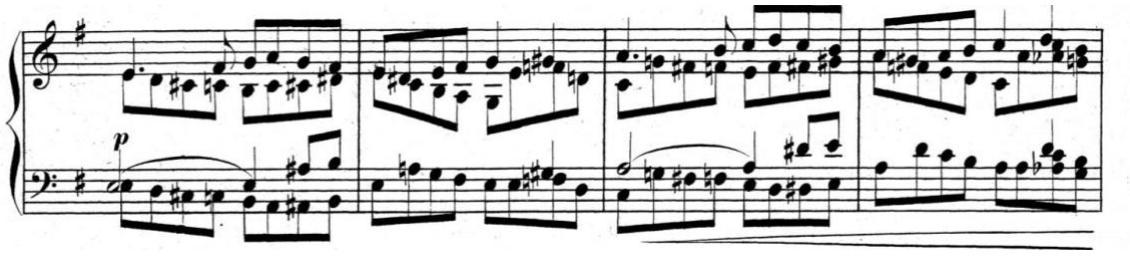

Figure 2.2.2: Anton Rubinstein, *Deux Fantaisies sur des chansons populaires Russes*, Op. 2, No. 1, mm. 14–17.

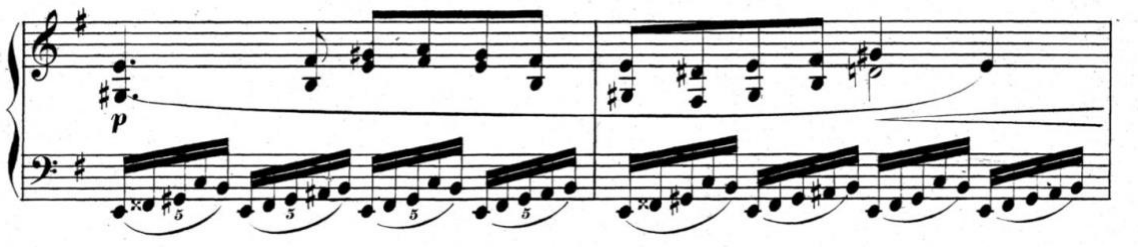

Figure 2.2.3: Anton Rubinstein, *Deux Fantaisies sur des chansons populaires Russes*, Op. 2, No. 1, mm. 22–23.

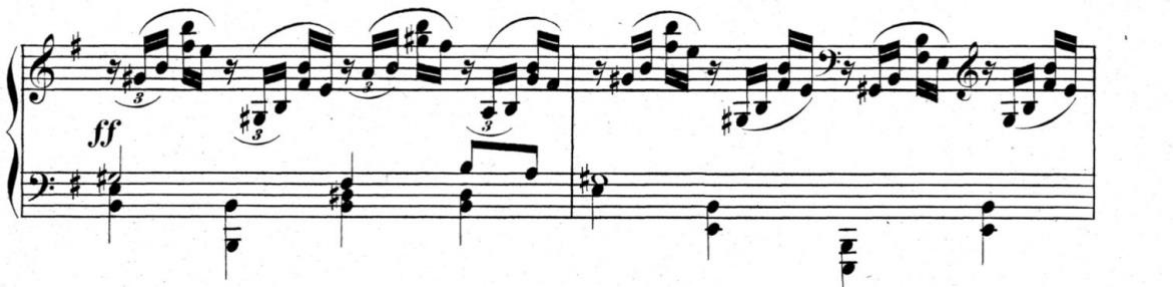

Figure 2.2.4: Anton Rubinstein, *Deux Fantaisies sur des chansons populaires Russes*, Op. 2, No. 1, mm. 60–61.

Rubinstein uses octave tremolos in measure 81 to create a rich resonance (see figure 2.2.5). Liszt, a phenomenal virtuosic pianist, invented this pianistic compositional technique of using minimum effort to achieve a big effect or resonance. When approaching this passage, performers can reference Liszt's pieces, such as *Vallée d'Obermann* in measure 184 (see figure 2.2.6), or his "Dante" sonata at measure 293 (see figure 2.2.7). When playing such a passage, pianists are encouraged to create a soft and colorful background resonance in order to hear the moving inner lines instead of treating the notes like an exercise. A similar technique can be found in measures 85 and 86, this time with chordal tremolos (see figure 2.2.8). Performers should consider all of the notes within each harmony as a whole in order to create the appropriate resonance and color.

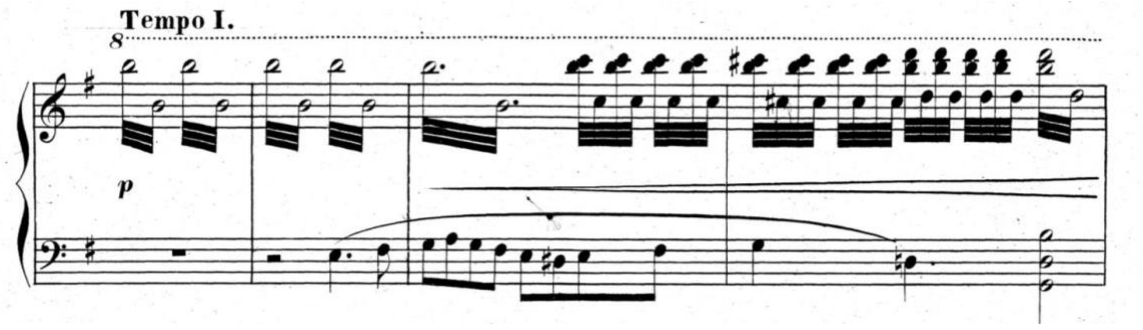

Figure 2.2.5: Anton Rubinstein, *Deux Fantaisies sur des chansons populaires Russes*, Op. 2, No. 1, mm. 81–84.

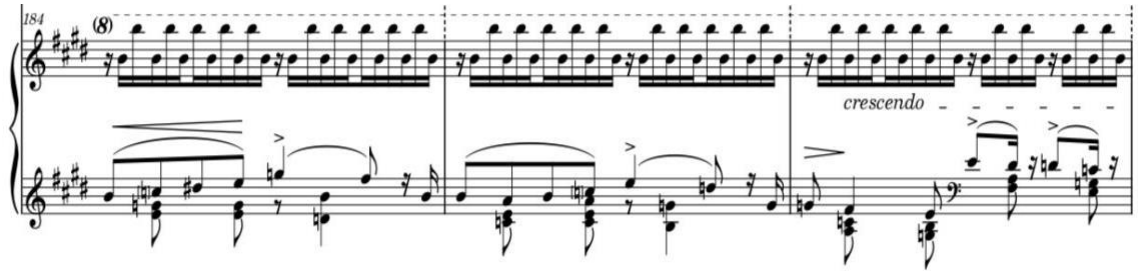

Figure 2.2.6: Franz Liszt, *Vallée d'Obermann*, S. 160, No. 6, mm. 184–186.[1]

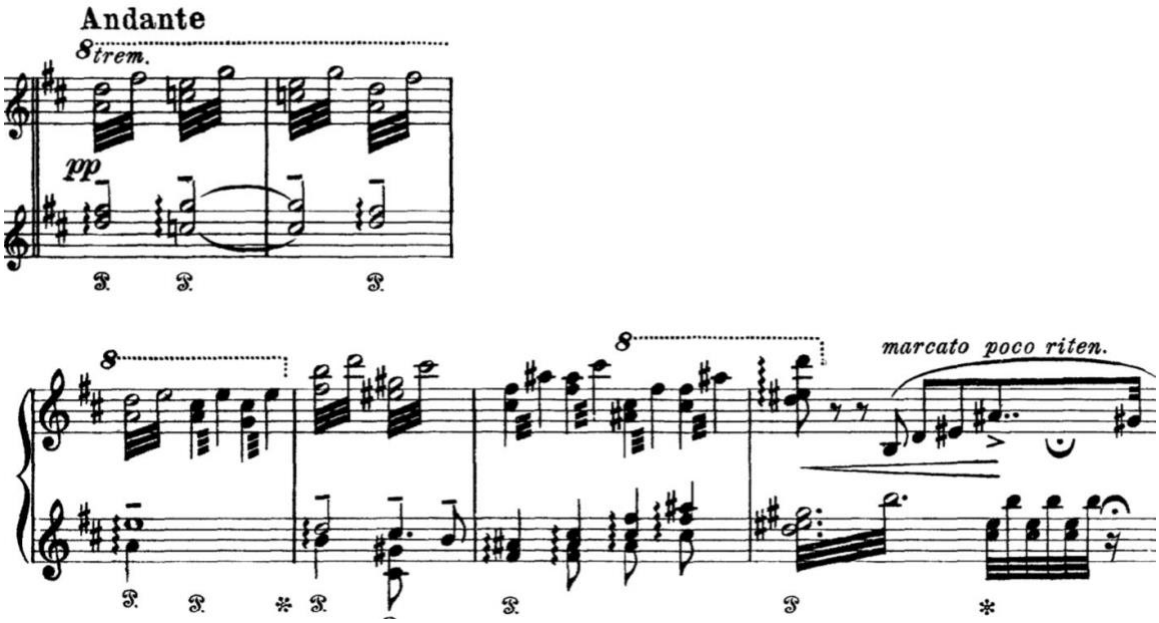

Figure 2.2.7: Franz Liszt, *Après une Lecture du Dante*, S. 161, No. 7, mm. 293–298.[1]

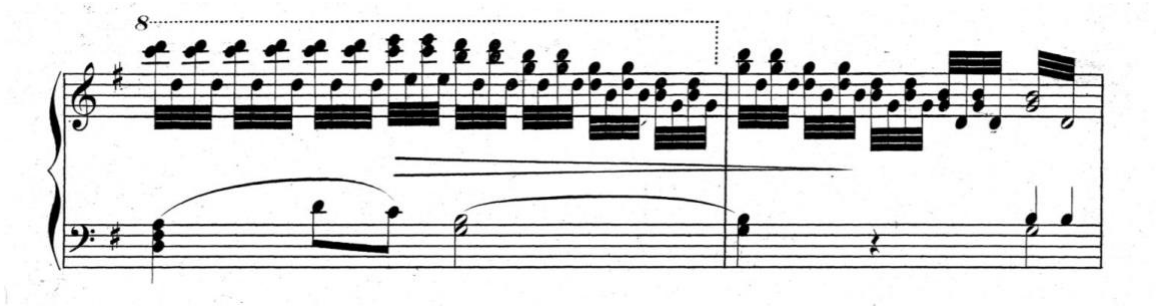

Figure 2.2.8: Anton Rubinstein, *Deux Fantaisies sur des chansons populaires Russes*, Op. 2, No. 1, mm. 85–86.

As mentioned above, the melody is played only in fragments until measure 35. The entire eight measure melody first appears beginning in measure 36 (see figure 2.2.9).

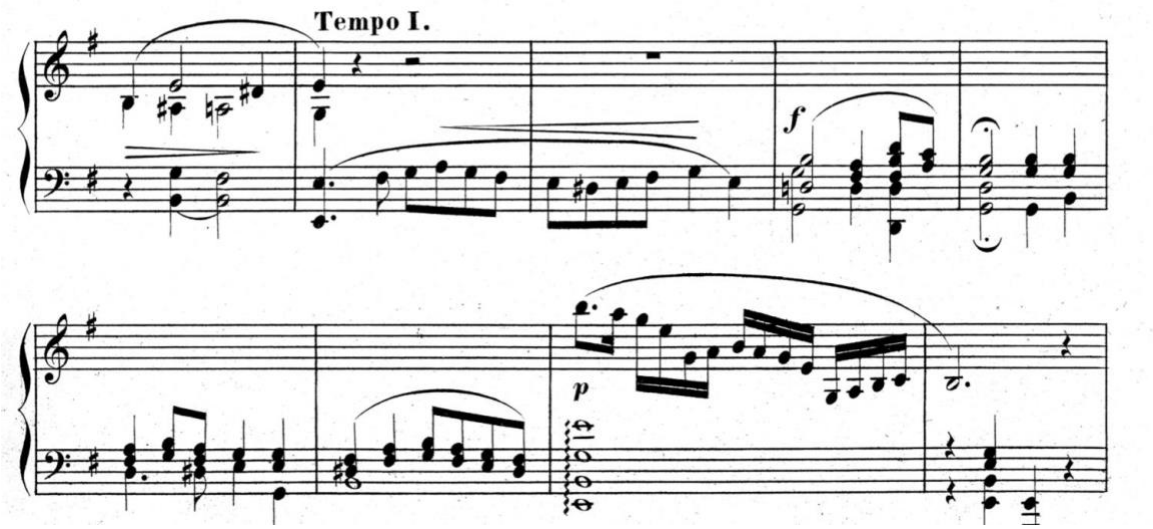

Figure 2.2.9: Anton Rubinstein, *Deux Fantaisies sur des chansons populaires Russes*, Op. 2, No. 1, mm. 35–43.

The melodic theme is repeated the last time in octaves in a very soft, low register at the end of the piece, while the right-hand plays tremolos above it and echoes the left hand with its inner melody. One can imagine this passage conjuring the image of a boat floating away on the waves of the Volga River as the right-hand tremolos create a wave-like atmosphere through changing intervals.

2.3 Performance guide for *Deux Fantaisies sur des chansons populaires Russes*, Op. 2, No. 2.

Fantasy No. 2 of *Deux Fantaisies sur des chansons populaires Russes*, Op. 2 was composed based on the Russian folk song "Torch Light", three pages longer than Fantasy No. 1, making the whole piece twelve pages in total. Unlike Fantasy No. 1, the entire folk song is presented in the opening eight measures with a harmonic accompaniment (see figure 2.3.1).

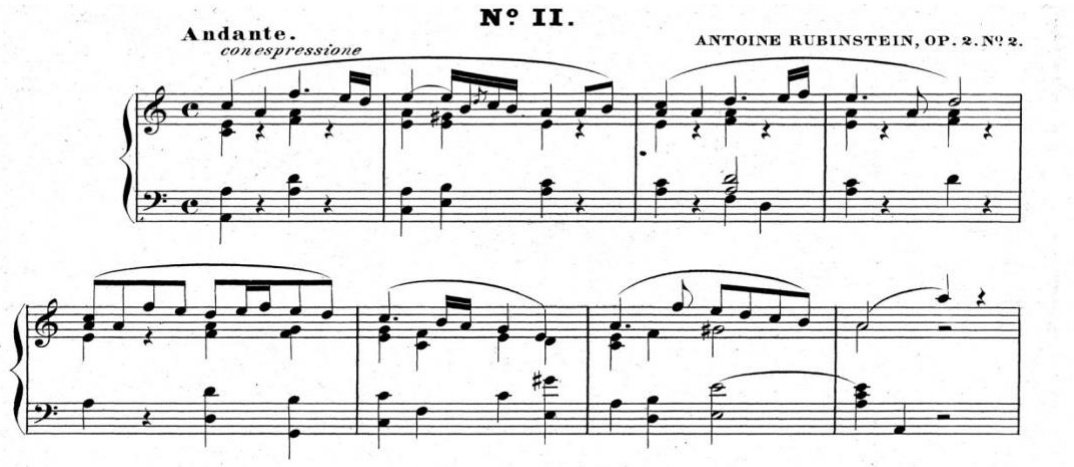

Figure 2.3.1: Anton Rubinstein, *Deux Fantaisies sur des chansons populaires Russes*, Op. 2, No. 2, mm. 1–8.

No dynamics are marked in the score for the first eight measures of the melody, so the performer chooses the dynamic themselves. I suggest starting the piece at a dynamic of *piano* or *mezzo-piano*, slowly crescendoing and then diminuendoing at the end of this eight-measure phrase, to create a feeling that sounds like a folk tune sung from far away.

Technically speaking, Fantasy No. 2 is more difficult than the previous work. A running sixteenth-note passage with broken chords immediately follows the folk tune (see figure 2.3.2). Unlike the comfortable tremolo technique used in Fantasy No.1, Anton

Rubinstein here uses a compositional technique that is unfriendly for pianists. Instead of alternating between the upper and lower fingers for the right hand, pianists are required to quickly reverse the first two sixteenths, incurring quick double hits with the same fingers that can be difficult to execute cleanly and also cause tightening of the hand and wrist. A relaxed hand and flexible wrist are imperative, along with very light execution of the sixteenths between accents for those falling on the beats. This challenge is made more difficult by its presence in more than a third of the entire composition (mm. 15–36,45–48,95–102, and 109–117).

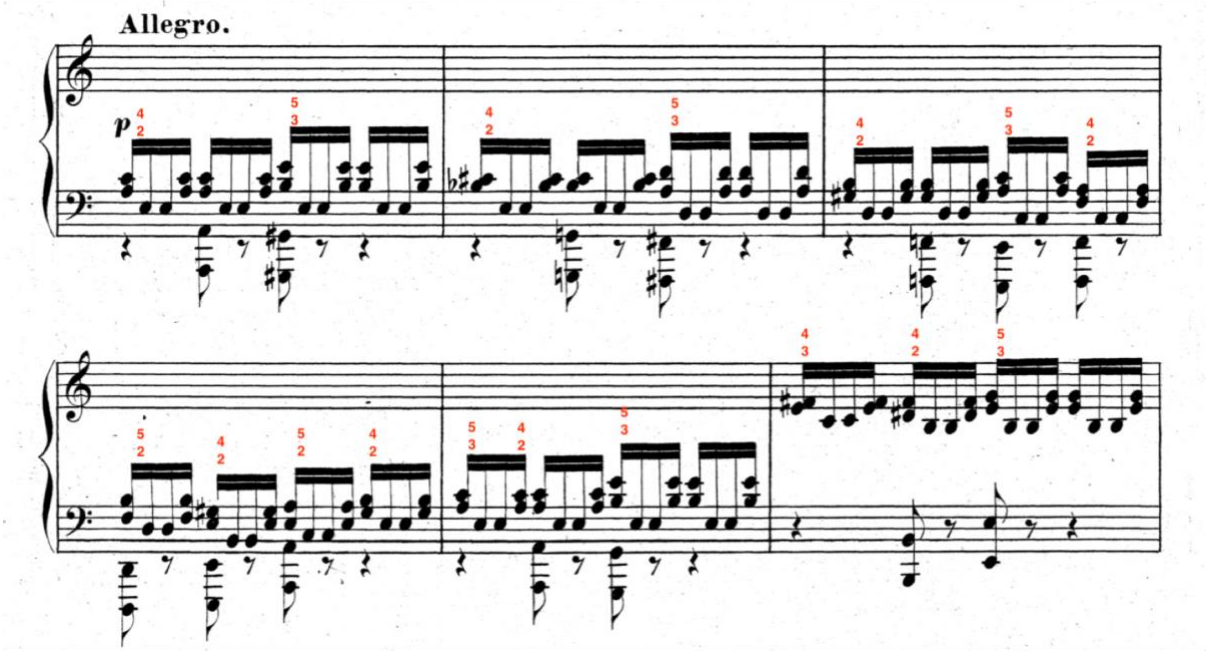

Figure 2.3.2: Anton Rubinstein, *Deux Fantaisies sur des chansons populaires Russes*, Op. 2, No. 2, mm. 9–14.

This demanding technique can also create an imbalance with the melody, especially in measures 17-36 and 95-117 where the busy sixteenth-notes are above the slow singing

melody. Pianists must take care to balance the voices, projecting the melody to where it represents at least sixty percent of the total produced sound. Thinking of the accompaniment as a clustered background can aid this situation.

In the last section, Rubinstein brings back the folk melody at full volume, marked *fortissimo*. The right hand plays the soaring melody in octaves with additional octave support from the left, and there is a thunder-like chord tremolo of both hands in the middle (see figure 2.3.3).

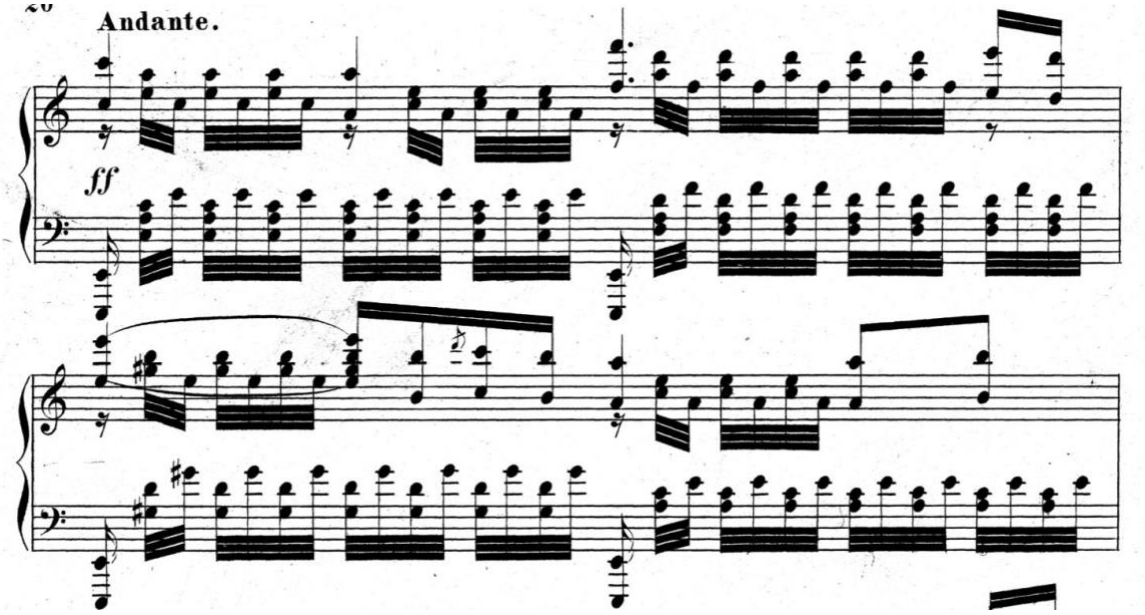

Figure 2.3.3: Anton Rubinstein, *Deux Fantaisies sur des chansons populaires Russes*, Op. 2, No. 2, mm. 118–119.

This fortissimo passage, the loudest part in the entire composition, marks the climax of the piece. To avoid overpowering the melody and forcing the sound, the dynamic marking of *ff* must be understood for the passage as a whole, rather than for each single note. In effect, this means the middle 32nd notes will mostly reside in the *mezzo* areas.

As is often found in fantasies, a cadenza-like arpeggio moves from the low to the high register in order to showcase the brilliant fingers of the pianist (see figure 2.3.4). Liszt often used this technique (an example is in the "Dante" sonata from measures 177 to 178 (see figure 2.3.5)). The challenge in playing this passage is to create a crescendo as the notes go up in register, to accumulate energy and help build the climax. Since the higher register is difficult to play loudly and clearly, especially when the lower arpeggiated notes with pedal create a strong resonance, one needs to practice each note so that the fingers become stronger and louder gradually in the high register. An appropriate pause before the last note could be considered for the resonance to grow. This technique creates the gradual crescendo effect that the composer implies.

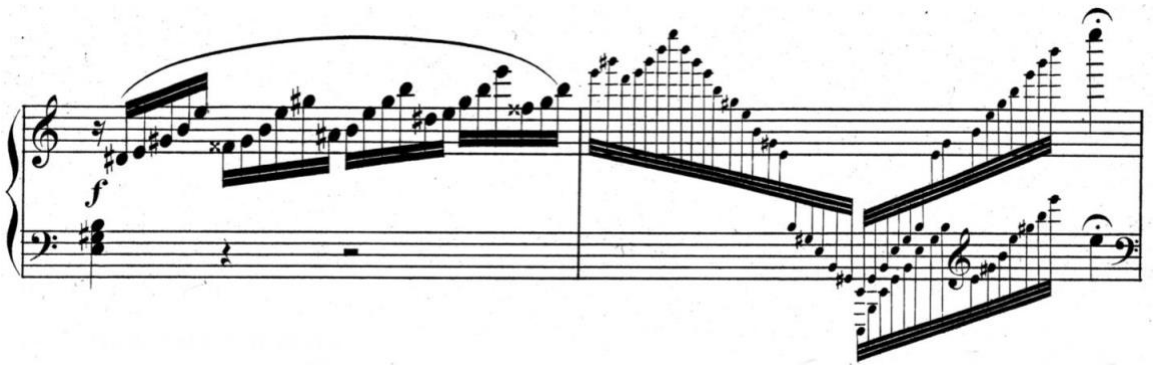

Figure 2.3.4: Anton Rubinstein, *Deux Fantaisies sur des chansons populaires Russes*, Op. 2, No. 2, mm. 51–52.

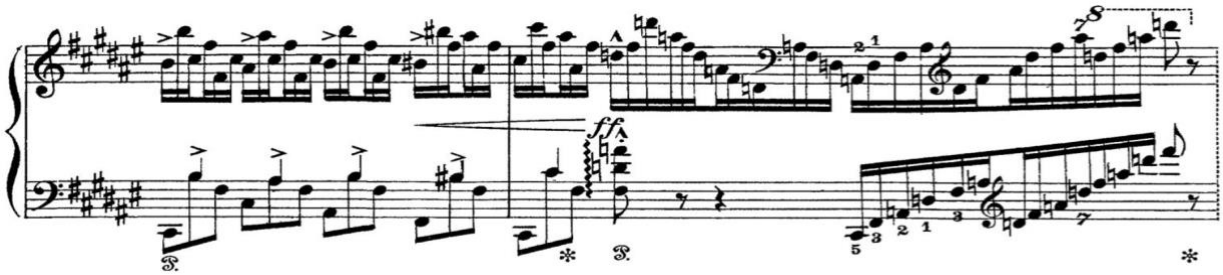

Figure 2.3.5: Franz Liszt, *Après une Lecture du Dante*, *S. 161*, *No. 7*, mm. 177–178.

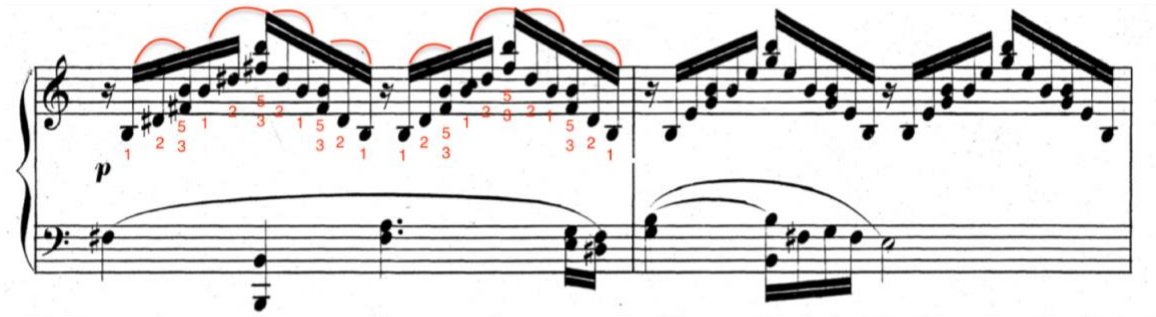

Figure 2.3.6: Anton Rubinstein, *Deux Fantaisies sur des chansons populaires Russes,* Op. 2, No. 2, mm. 81–82.

Another arpeggio-like pattern, in measure 81, is similar to the compositional style in Liszt's *Two Legends,* S. 175, No. 2 (see figure 2.3.7 circled in red). To create the balance of running notes under the melody, performers should practice the right hand softly and smoothly. Grouping the running notes into blocked chords, as well as practicing the chords in fixed hand positions in tempo, will help achieve the soft fluency that the passage requires (see figure 2.3.6).

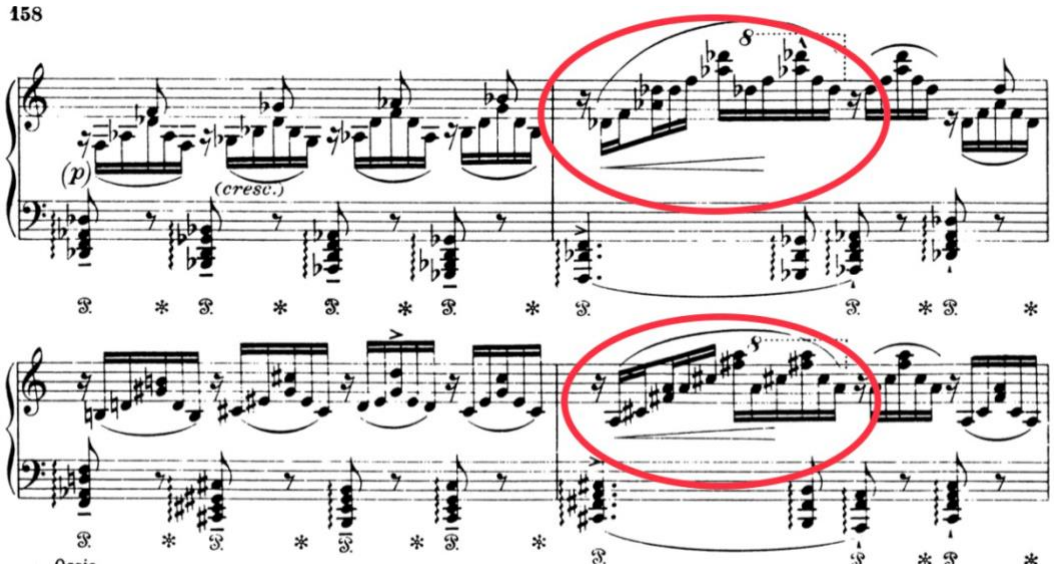

Figure 2.3.7: Franz Liszt, *Two Legends*, S. 175, No. 2, mm. 68—69.[1]

CHAPTER 3 *SIX PRELUDES,* OP. 24

3.1 Overview of Anton Rubinstein's *Six Preludes,* Op. 24

This chapter looks at Anton Rubinstein's set of *Six Preludes*, Op. 24, with performance suggestions for the first three preludes. The set was composed in 1854, during Rubinstein's second tour of Europe. In a letter, Rubinstein detailed his interests in Clara Schumann and Joseph Joachim's concert at *Gewandhaus* in Leipzig in December 1854. His own solo recital was presented at the same venue a few days later. Soon after, he began to compose *Six Preludes*, dedicating it to Clara.[23] These pieces were composed in his mature period, along with his third symphony, a set of German songs, and three pieces each for violin, viola, and cello. These preludes are five to ten pages long with no relationship between the keys or content between each work. Because of this lack of continuity, it is unnecessary to play all six preludes as a set.

3.2 Performance guide for *Six preludes*, Op. 24, No. 1

The first prelude is in A flat major and marked *Moderato con moto*. There is a pedal point throughout except in the cadenza (see figure 3.2.1).

[23] Taylor, *A Life in Music*, 58.

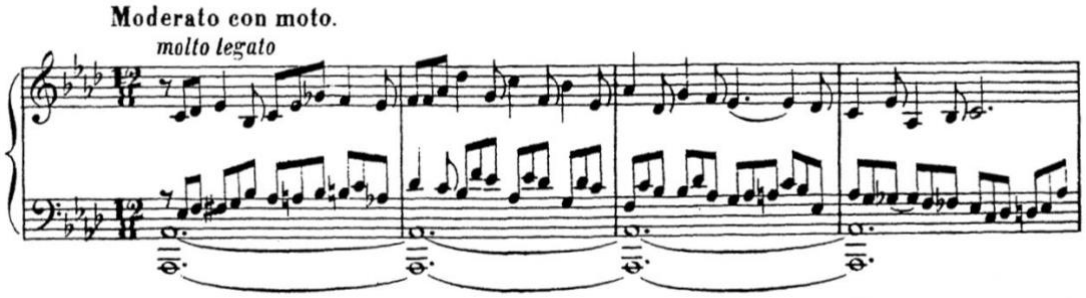

Figure 3.2.1: Anton Rubinstein, *Six preludes*, Op. 24, No. 1, mm. 1–4.[1]

A low register A flat octave is held for four measures at the beginning, with a polyphonic texture above. The middle pedal is suggested here to maintain the low octave, while both hands play the upper two voices. The two upper lines are important; however, due to the close register and same timbre on piano, it is difficult to distinguish one from the other if both are played at the same volume. Usually, the upper line is more important when playing in such situation. However, it is unnecessary to always keep the lower melody secondary when the upper notes are holding, or an interesting new idea emerges in the lower melody. One can practice the lower melodic line alone to create a natural shaping. The little gestures will stay when adding the top line, making a more colorful and interesting counterpoint.

It is worth mentioning that Anton Rubinstein uses a Baroque *recitativo* texture in measure 70 (see figure 3.2.2). One may notice a similar instance in Bach's *Chromatic Fantasia and Fugue* in d minor, which also extends the recitative-like melody from a chord (see figure 3.2.3).

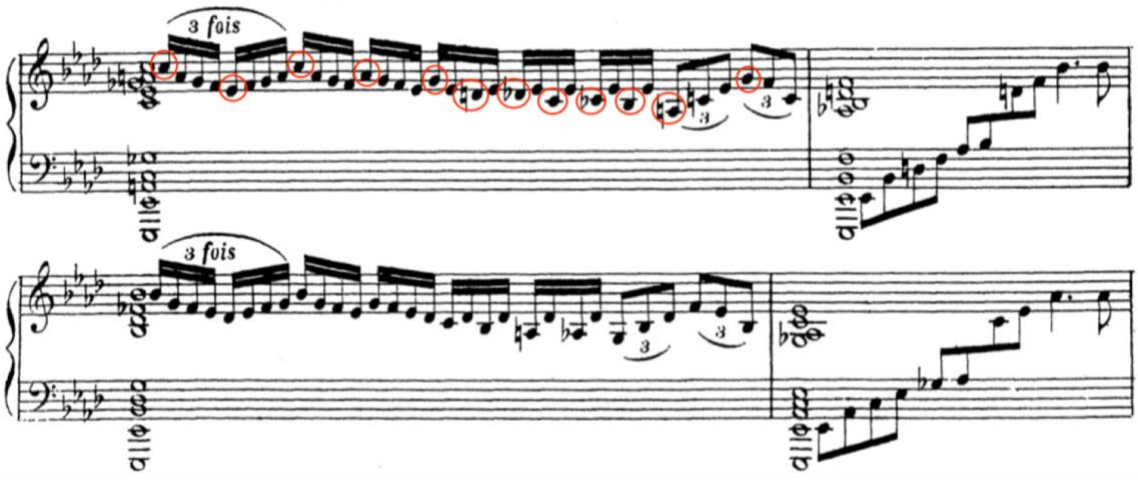

Figure 3.2.2: Anton Rubinstein, *Six preludes*, Op. 24, No. 1, mm. 70–73.

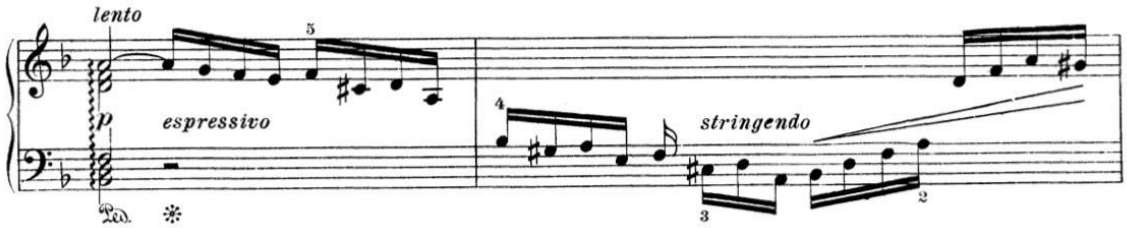

Figure 3.2.3: J. S. Bach, *Chromatic Fantasia and Fugue in d minor*, BWV 903, mm. 42–43.[1]

When approaching this type of passage, one should consider the stylistic interpretation of Bach and other Baroque composers and present the recitative with *rubato*—in other words, like an improvisation. Grouping the sixteenth notes will also help the feeling of improvisation, as if the performer is searching for the right notes. Using measure 70 as an example, the notes circled in red could be used as anchors, while the other notes are played more lightly (see figure 3.2.2).

3.3 Performance guide for *Six Preludes*, Op. 24, No. 2

The eight pages of the second prelude contain unending sixteenth notes from the beginning to the end of the piece, except for the last two concluding measures which are chordal. This etude-like prelude could be likened to one of Chopin's etudes (e.g. Op.10, No. 8 and 12) (see figure 3.3.1).

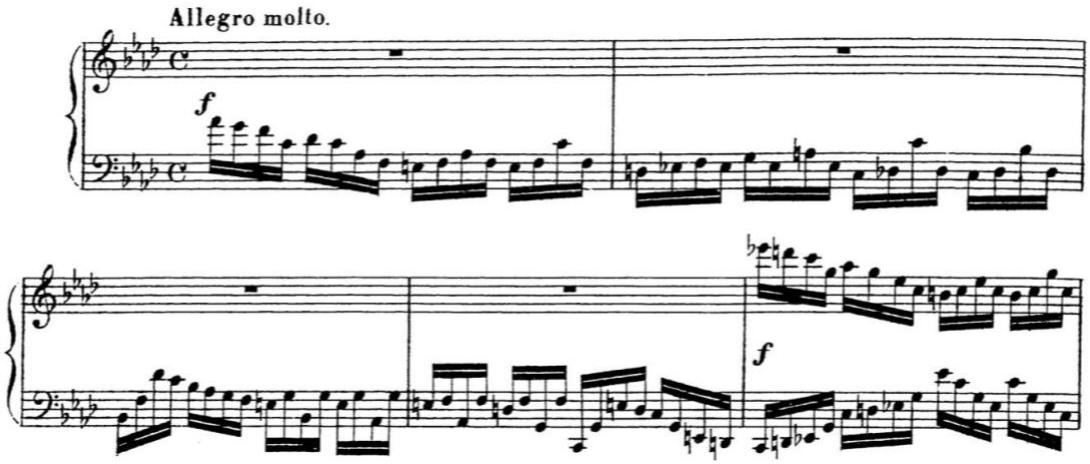

Figure 3.3.1, *Six preludes*, Op. 24, No. 2, Anton Rubinstein, mm 1–5.

Because of this similarity, one can implement the same practice methods used in learning a Chopin etude. Unlike Rubinstein's Op. 2 (see previous chapter), where it is important to emphasize the clusters or groups of notes for the sound effect, this piece requires every note to speak in a good quality. Some rhythmic finger exercises are suggested to improve the sound quality of any weak fingers. One possible aid is to play the sixteenth-note runs in both hands simultaneously, but with one hand playing a rhythmic variation such as the Lombard rhythm (an accented short note followed by a longer note; see example 1), and then reversing hands.

Example 1: Lombard rhythm.

A note-grouping exercise could help to build finger agility and technical security. There are many ways to approach this issue, such as playing four-note groups in tempo separated by a beat of rest (later the groups could be lengthened to eight notes or more for four beats). A second approach is to stop at the fifth note and then the ninth, repeating this pattern throughout the phrases. Finally, one might play the first five notes as a group, and then repeat the last note and land on the next fifth note. Then one can start the cycle of practice on the second, third or fourth note, until every note is fully covered. A larger grouping of eight notes landing on the ninth is also a possibility. Practicing with both hands together will enhance their coordination.

Along with strength and clarity, musicality is also an important element. As with Chopin's etudes, these pieces are not finger exercises, but complete musical masterpieces appropriate to perform on stage. Great freedom of *rubato*, varieties of dynamics and melodic running sixteenths can all help the music to avoid sounding like a rote exercise.

3.4 Performance Guide for *Six Preludes*, Op. 24, No. 3

The third prelude is in E Major, with the tempo marked *Allegretto con moto*, meaning a flowing but easygoing tempo. Marked *dolce*, with a graceful and singing melody, the first part of Prelude No. 3 begins with a syncopated melody (see figure 3.4.1).

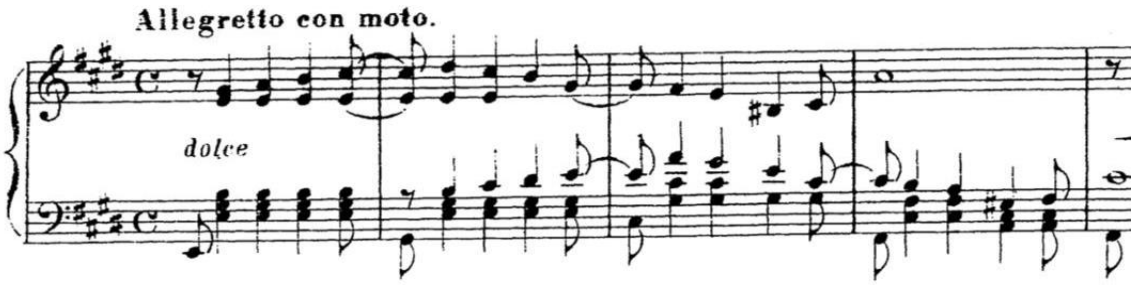

Figure 3.4.1: Anton Rubinstein, *Six preludes*, Op. 24, No. 3, mm. 1–4.

One encounters similar melodic settings in Schumann's music. For example, the second theme of the first movement of his second piano sonata also presents a syncopated melody (see figure 3.4.2). Each melodic, syncopated note creates rhythmic dissonance, which is one of Schumann's typical compositional techniques for accumulating anxiety. The melody finally lands on the downbeat, giving a rhythmic resolution. Similarly, in Rubinstein's work, these rhythmic dissonances are resolved when the melody arrives on downbeats of every fourth measures, shattering the syncopated illusion by dragging the melody back on the actual downbeats. This back-and-forth rhythm increases the sense of struggle and release in the rhythmic structure. The rhythmic pattern in Rubinstein's work continues throughout the twenty-four measures of the first theme section.

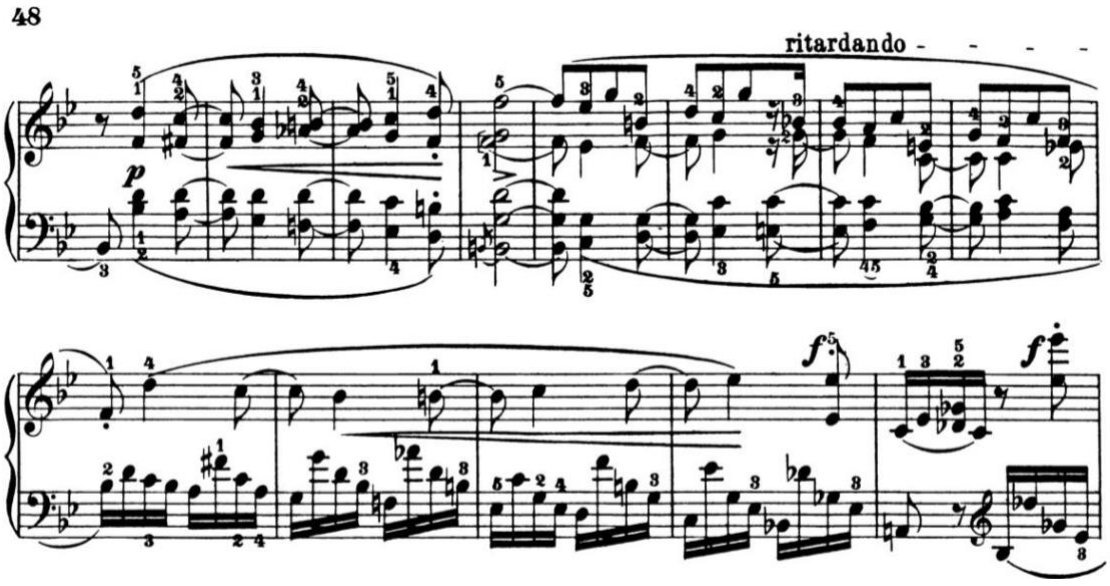

Figure 3.4.2: Robert Schumann, Piano Sonata No. 2, “1st movement”, Op. 22, mm. 59–71.[1]

A legato marking should be added every four measures of the phrase for the first theme section. Pianists must produce a smooth singing melody by connecting the melodic notes, using finger legato. When finger legato is not physically possible, I suggest that the performer audiate legato in order to create an illusion of legato sound.

The left hand echoes the right hand's melody a measure later. This echo should be played only loud enough so it does not overshadow the main melody. To achieve this effect, pianists can lower the left hand’s volume, except the top notes of each chord, to gently project the echo. The hands’ roles are reversed when the first theme comes back later.

The pedal is not marked in the score, but it is impossible to leave it out. For the first theme sections, I suggest changing the pedal partially instead of completely, except at the key changes. For example, if one changes the pedal completely at measure two following

the bass note, the low G sharp will be clean; however, it will leave a gap in the right-hand melody. The C sharp (last top note of the first measure) will be disconnected from the D sharp in the following measure. During a performance of this piece, one should listen carefully to the pedaling in order to make the resonance clean.

The second theme sections are marked by driving pulses with a dotted eighth-sixteenth note pattern, which are more frantic and contrasts significantly with the previous gentle first theme sections. It requires the performer to have a plan in mind in order to play the structure effectively. The section begins *piano*, gradually growing to the highest and loudest point at measure 41 (measure 17 in this section), and then declining, leading back to the first theme.

The third and last time the main theme returns, in measure 101, every melodic note is on the downbeat (see figure 3.4.3).

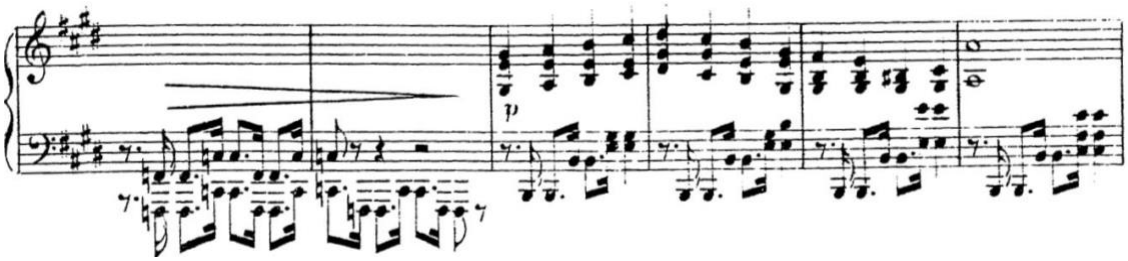

Figure 3.4.3: Anton Rubinstein, *Six preludes*, Op. 24, No. 3, mm. 99–104.

The downbeat melody is emphasized by the left hand dotted-eighth rhythm, which is carried over from the second theme section. The two most important components of this piece, the lovely melody from the first theme section and the rhythmic motive from the second theme section — finally join together. The previously driving and anxious

rhythmic pattern from the second theme helps to secure the melody on the downbeat, creating a sense of rhythmic resolution. In contrast to the rhythmic struggle in previous sections, a smooth and *dolce* sound—which is not marked on the score—is suggested.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

Anton Rubinstein has always been regarded as one of the most important pianists in the 19th century. He was closely associated with his contemporary musical celebrities, such as Mendelssohn, Chopin, Thalberg, and Liszt, and was also a pioneer for the next generation of composers including Tchaikovsky, Rachmaninoff and Scriabin. By founding the first conservatory in Russia, the St. Petersburg Conservatory, Anton Rubinstein devoted himself to the next generation's musicians. As a composer, he wrote over one hundred works including a large collection of pieces for piano, most of which were unpopular and are still underestimated today.

This project has addressed two of his stylistic compositions: *Deux Fantaisies sur des chansons populaires Russes*, Op. 2, and *Six Preludes*, Op. 24. Both of the compositions were composed by Rubinstein at a young age and include compositional influence from his predecessors. Romanticism was reflected in the former with his nostalgia and patriotism, and traditions from pioneers in both the Baroque period and classical period were employed in the later character pieces.

A digital recording of *Deux Fantaisies sur des chansons populaires Russes,* Op. 2 and the first three preludes of *Six Preludes*, Op. 24 accompany this document. With no existing recordings of the first piece and only one of the latter, I hope this recording project brings more attention to this under-valued composer and inspires musicians to explore his huge collection of instrumental music.

A performance guide for both of these contrasting pieces, based on a form analysis and comparisons to other compositions for reference, includes advice on the use of pedal, fingering, dynamics, and expression. Techniques for practicing these pieces have also been covered, with the understanding that there is not just one correct approach when interpreting a piece. In his book *A Conservation on Music,* Anton Rubinstein says that there are a range of possibilities for the interpretation of a composer's marks, unless using an absolute opposite perspective. All advice herein can be considered as an initial approach to these pieces, but the final decisions are ultimately up to each individual.

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APPENDIX A

DIGITAL RECORDINGS, BY MEIRU CHEN, PIANO

Filename	Format
Deux Fantaisies sur des chansons populaires Russes, Op. 2, No. 1	Digital, MP3
Deux Fantaisies sur des chansons populaires Russes, Op. 2, No. 2	Digital, MP3
Six Preludes, Op. 24, No. 1	Digital, MP3
Six Preludes, Op. 24, No. 2	Digital, MP3
Six Preludes, Op. 24, No. 3	Digital, MP3