



*Pianist Haig Yaghoobian*  
*Performing Alexander Scriabin*

A Benefit Concert To Support  
The Bell Street Chapel Music Series

Providence, Rhode Island  
Sunday, October 26, 2008



### **Alexander Nikolaevich Scriabin**

Born: 25 December, 1871  
Moscow (Russia)

Died: 14 April, 1915  
Moscow (Russia)

“I want the maximum expression  
with the minimum means.”

Scriabin has been called the last, great Russian Romantic as well as the father of modern harmony. Both appellations have merit. For the first half of his life, his compositions certainly reflect great admiration for and emulation of Chopin. Yet even in his early work, he introduced unique musical concepts that signaled a fundamentally new approach toward the integration of melody and harmony.

As his ideas and structures developed, his music became radically different than anything else being produced or heard at the time. If we believe that music is a reflection of the times, Scriabin's later music qualifies as a soundtrack for the most tumultuous time in Russian history: the Bolshevik Revolution. His essential artistic philosophy – the elevation and transportation of man from this mundane world to a newer, better place – was consistent enough with the rise of the everyday man to earn him approval of revolutionary leaders, although it is doubtful that was his objective (although it didn't hurt that for the most part, he despised high society). In fact, he was completely self-absorbed, and didn't really care about linking his art to anything or anyone else.

The key word in understanding Scriabin, it seems to me, is “transcendence”. Everything in his music speaks to me of transition and evolution, from one set of themes and harmonies to another. He believed in the transformative nature of music, and deliberately and consistently attempted to evoke musical states that would elevate the listener to a higher plane of understanding and meaning.

His dabbling with Theosophy (a trendy doctrine of religious philosophy, which asserts that every event – every thing – is a building block to an immortal, higher self) was less a commitment to an ethic than a justification for breaking the rules. At a minimum, it provided him with a rationale for his final, grand works: “a religious synthesis of all arts which would herald the birth of a new world”, as he modestly put it.

Scriabin created a musical language of his own based upon a “mystic chord” of his own invention (C, F#, Bb, E, A, D, G), from which he developed a system of composition as carefully organized as that of Arnold Schoenberg's 12-tone technique. But unlike the latter, it gained no followers.<sup>1</sup>

Mysticism dominated his music. He sincerely believed in the synthesis of sounds, colors, smells, taste, movement and poetry. He had the ability to see colors while hearing tones (a condition known as synesthesia or photism). Coupling this with his interest in Far-Eastern music and other arts, he embarked on ambitious projects to implement a keyboard of light that would project changing colors as a pianist played. Unfortunately the technology to accomplish this did not exist at the time, although it is commonplace today. On a less grand scale, he regularly uses repetitive notes, especially in climaxes, to evoke the sound of bells tolling – summoning the devotees, heralding the end.

Faubion Bowers, the great musicologist and biographer, summed it up nicely:

Looking at Scriabin compositions, we see at every turn how he worked for non-piano effects, to make the piano a kind of celestial orchestra of unearthly sounds. He considered music to be like prisms of crystals reflecting and refracting thousands of lights and colors. And these, indeed, are impossible demands to make on pianists, demands which Scriabin, as if by sleight of hand, appeared to have achieved during his lifetime.<sup>2</sup>

The works presented in this program have been chosen as a survey of his life and the development of his art: Etudes and Preludes from his rebellious and romantic teens and twenties; Preludes and Languides from his thirties, his most creative and desperate, dark times; and concluding with his five last works for piano, Opus 74 – packed with resurgent emotion and anticipation of his end (which he could not have known was coming).

Each is like a miniature cosmos from which he drew much for his longer, larger works. Setting aside the impossibility (for me) of playing those, there is significance in each selection here. In Scriabin's words:

The microcosm is contained in the macrocosm, and vice versa.  
Melody is harmony unfurled. Harmony is furled melody.  
All is one. Less is more. Complexity is the path to simplicity.

This is an exploration and exposition of the sheer beauty of piano sounds: a profusion of musical ideas, unusual modulations, fluctuating tonalities, remarkable dissonances, and a freedom of metrical combinations.<sup>3</sup> This is pure musical idealism, timeless and new with each overlay on today.

#### PROFILE OF THE ARTIST

Recently returned to his native Rhode Island, Haig Yaghoobian is a musician by avocation and an accomplished recital pianist. In his early years, Mr. Yaghoobian was active in local classical music organizations, and auditioned frequently with the National Federation of Music Clubs and the National Guild of Piano Teachers. He has been a regular performer at chamber music venues throughout the country for more than 50 years. In Boston, where Mr. Yaghoobian went to university, he has been heard in concert on WGBH-FM's "Performance" series, and at the Berklee Recital Hall. He has also performed publicly in New York, San Francisco, and London.

In his business life, Mr. Yaghoobian is the Managing Partner of AKHBAR, LLC, a private consulting firm specialized in strategic development and business transformation. After more than twenty-five years of commercial practice, he has spent the better part of the past five years working with nonprofit organizations, including serving as Executive Director of the Diocese of the Armenian Church of America.

Mr. Yaghoobian holds an M.S. in Computer Science and a B.A. in Psychology from Boston University. He has also earned an Executive MBA, and postgraduate certificates in International Leadership and Intellectual Property law.

In expression of other of his interests and pastimes, Mr. Yaghoobian has mounted two one-man photography shows, and has been a breeder and exhibitor of award-winning Hungarian Pulik (sheepdogs).

<sup>1,3</sup> *Alexander Scriabin, A Highlight Collection Of His Best Loved Original Works*, California Music Press, Inc., ©1975

<sup>2</sup> Faubion Bowers, *The New Scriabin*, St. Martin's Press, ©1973

## PROGRAM

1– Etude, Op. 2, No. 1, C Sharp Minor	1887
2– Etude, Op. 8, No. 11, B Flat Major	1894
3– Etude, Op. 8, No. 12, D Sharp Minor	1894
4– Prelude, Op. 13, No. 1, C Major	1895
5– Prelude, Op. 13, No. 2, A Minor	1895
6– Prelude, Op. 13, No. 3, G Major	1895
7– Prelude, Op. 13, No. 4, E Minor	1895
8– Prelude, Op. 13, No. 5, D Major	1895
9– Prelude, Op. 13, No. 6, B Minor	1895
10– The Mystic Chord	
11– Prelude, Op. 27, No. 1, G Minor	1900
12– Prelude, Op. 27, No. 2, B Major	1900
13– Prelude, Op. 45, No. 3, E Flat Major	1904
14– Prelude, Op. 51, No. 2, A Minor	1906
15– Danse languide, Op. 51, No. 4, G Major	1906
16– Poème languide, Op. 52, No. 3, B Major	1905-7
17– Prelude, Op. 74, No. 1, Dououreux, déchirant	1914 1914
18– Prelude, Op. 74, No. 2, Très lent, contemplatif	1914 1914
19– Prelude, Op. 74, No. 3, Allegro drammatico	1914
20– Prelude, Op. 74, No. 4, Lent, vague, indécis	
21– Prelude, Op. 74, No. 5, Fier, belliqueux	

Bonus track – Prelude, Op. 2, No. 2

