"And the stream leapt and danced and rushed noisily on": Philosophy, Personality, and Poetry in the Works of Nikolai Medtner

George Wu Teng

Maîtrise en musique, interprétation de piano

Sujet spécial

Prof. Paul Stewart

Université de Montréal

06 janvier 2020

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INTRODUCTION

The relative obscurity of Russian composer Nikolai Karlovich Medtner (1880 – 1951) is at once unfortunate, and understandable; Barrie Martyn, in the liner notes for pianist Marc-André Hamelin's album *Medtner: The Complete Piano Sonatas, Forgotten Melodies I, II*, concisely ascribes this obscurity to "Medtner's personality, the circumstances of a difficult life, the spirit of the times in which he lived and the particular nature of his art," all of which he considered factors leading to the "eclips[ing]" of what was otherwise a career which "began with great promise."[1] Hamelin himself opined on Medtner's status as a lesser-known composer: "I think one of the reasons Medtner hasn't had a chance is that his music needs very, very committed performances. If you play his works passively, the juice of his music is really not going to be extracted—it's simply not going to come out." He continues, stating that Medtner himself was not "the best possible advocate of his own works," and also states that he finds Medtner, in general, "a little uninteresting and cold, sometimes … At first, the thematic material is not of a kind that makes the greatest appeal." Hamelin concludes, "if you keep with Medtner, I think he will take hold of you, and you're very likely to become a fan."[2]

From this brief overview from two individuals, the former, a Medtner scholar, and the latter, one of the few concertising pianists actively performing Medtner's music, one comes away with an impression of a composer whose temperament deserves particular examination with relation to their approach to musical composition. One may also glean that this composer's works may present uniquely taxing challenges, especially on first appearances, to listeners. Indeed, one of Medtner's most large-scale works is his monolithic Sonata in E minor, op. 25 no. 2, "Night Wind," a single-movement, nearly 35-minute affair, whose immediately sprawling, ceaseless, and chaotic motion only stops with the close of the entire work, ending with two hushed, rapid, rising arpeggios: even after making their way through half an hour of extremely dense piano writing, necessitating "rather active listening,"[3] the audience is given no satisfying, definitive conclusion.

This work, as well, features an intriguing inclusion: at the top of the score, Medtner places two stanzas of poetry from the Russian poet Fyodor Tyutchev. The poem, set at night, describes a

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[1] Barrie Martyn, liner notes for *Medtner: The Complete Piano Sonatas, Forgotten Melodies I, II*, Marc-André Hamelin, Hyperion CDA67221/4, 1996, CD.
[2] Marc-André Hamelin, Elijah Ho, "Marc-André Hamelin," The Counterpoints, 2013, http://www.thecounterpoints.com/interviews/2015/10/28/marc-andr-hamelin.
[3] Ibid.

narrator posing a series of questions to a howling wind, and features, in its sixteen lines, themes of primaeval chaos, the boundless Infinite, and the subconscious of the mind.

This poetic inclusion introduces a constant throughout Medtner's compositional career, and, indeed, life—a close relationship and interaction with poetry. Medtner, a composer who, even as a child, was entrenched in romantic poetry, held, quite uniquely within the sphere of late 19th-century and early 20th-century composers, what may be termed a distinctly literary approach to music-making.

The complete oeuvre of Nikolai Medtner includes fourteen piano sonatas, three piano concerti, three violin sonatas, various other shorter works for the piano, and one-hundred-and-eight songs.[4] Among this vast output of songs, exclusively set in Russian or German, one can identify four authors whom Medtner repeatedly selects: Mikhail Lermontov, Fyodor Tyutchev, Alexander Pushkin, and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe.

These four names continue to feature prominently in Medtner's solo piano music itself: the first of the three Fantasy-Improvisations, op. 2, and his 2nd Improvisation, op. 47, both bear the titular inclusion "Rusalka," a Slavic female folkloric entity which Pushkin featured in one of his ballades (Medtner stated privately that this ballade also inspired his third piano concerto, aptly titled "Ballade."[5]) His Sonaten-Triade, op. 11 holds a section of Goethe's *Trilogy of Passion* at the top of the score. In the Sonata in E minor, op. 25 no. 2, Medtner includes the entirety of Tyutchev's poem "Why do you howl, Night Wind?" as an epigraph. The Fairy Tales, too, contain literary inclusions: in the second of the op. 34 set, a line from Tyutchev ("When all the things we called our own, are gone from us forever…"), and, in the fourth, a line from Pushkin ("There lived a poor knight…" In the op. 35 set, the fourth piece bears an inscription from another author, Shakespeare, from *King Lear:* "Blow, wind, and crack your cheeks!"

It is clear that many of Medtner's pieces feature direct poetic inclusions, or allude to poetry, through specific descriptive titles, or through generic titles borrowed from poetry. Furthermore, Medtner often returned to the same poetic texts, else frequently employed texts which share common themes, motifs, or archetypal characters. An examination of these poems and poets, their various subjects, and the figures and archetypes they employ, leads to the formation of a distinctive

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[4] Chris Crocker, "Catalogue of works and discography," Nicolas Medtner, last modified 11 December 2020, https://www.medtner.org.uk/works.html.

[5] Kevin Bazzana, "Programme Notes – Medtner: Piano Concerto No. 3," Toronto Symphony Orchestra, 2011, https://web.archive.org/web/20110916094551/http://www.tso.ca/Plan-Your-Experience/Programme-Notes/Medtner-Piano-Concerto-No-3.aspx?ID=2054.

framework from which one can better understand both Medtner the man, and the music he composed.

In the proceeding first section, Medtner's childhood and early education are first discussed, and defining traits identified. From there, a move to Medtner as a matured composer will analyse how these dispositions apparent in Medtner's youth further manifested themselves in his outlook towards musical composition, and the role of the composer. Afterwards, the second section will critically analyse various poets and poems which Medtner repeatedly turned to throughout his life, focusing on certain recurrent tropes, features, archetypes, images, and motifs. The final section will synthesise the previous two, exploring the role of poetry in the development of Medtner as a composer, as well as examining how parallels in Medtner's preferred poems and poets informed his compositions.

UPBRINGING AND EDUCATION

Nikolai Medtner was raised in a comfortable middle-class environment. His father, Karl, a successful businessman and managing director of a Moscow lace factory, provided for Nikolai, his four older siblings, and Nikolai's mother, Alexandra.[6] More crucially, both Karl and Alexandra were well versed in literary, musical, and other intellectual fields. Alexandra's ancestral tree, in particular, held many authors, actors, musicians, painters, and scholars.[7] Karl, too, read poetry and philosophy since his youth, loving, especially, German and Russian literature; similarly, like his wife's grandfather, he held special appreciation for Goethe.[8]

It was Alexandra who first gave Medtner piano lessons at the age of six, after identifying some musical inclinations in the child.[9] By all accounts, he progressed rapidly, already improvising and composing before the age of ten. Interestingly, Nikolai intensely disliked "children's music," and instead focused his efforts on the compositions of Bach, Beethoven, Mozart, and Scarlatti.[10] At the age of ten, upon entering gymnasium, a secondary educational institute, Medtner made it not two years, before declaring to his parents his desire to instead transfer out of the more academically-oriented school, and instead enroll in a music school, something which, after some convincing from

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[6] Barrie Martyn, *Nicolas Medtner: His Life and Music* (London: Routledge, 2016), 18.
[7] Ibid., 15-17.
[8] Ibid., 17.
[9] Ibid., 18.
[10] Ibid., 19.

Nikolai's older brother, eventually transpired; Medtner was only twelve when he commenced his full time studies at the Moscow Conservatory.[11]

This portrait of Medtner's earliest years reveals several compelling details which form a specific foundation from which Medtner continued to develop. Firstly, his relatively privileged upbringing ensured that he had ample time to develop himself not only musically, but scholastically; that Medtner had, from birth, access to a piano, and a piano teacher, cannot be taken for granted. Furthermore, the number of children who have even heard of Goethe, let alone were actively read his poetry, is certainly an extremely low percentage of the general population.

Secondly, that this sort of upbringing necessarily isolated Nikolai, especially with respect to the lives and activities of peers of a similar age; to be enmeshed in music to the point of already sketching out musical ideas at a young age is a differentiating factor in and of itself, further exacerbated by an early introduction to some of the poets which Nikolai would continually return to throughout his life. To find children of a similar age engaged in the same studies (alongside the cherry-on-top of Nikolai already engaging in philosophy), would not be an everyday happening.

Thirdly, that Nikolai, even as a child, was exhibiting remarkably independent and self-assured behaviour. The decision to choose which repertoire to study at the keyboard is not one ordinarily given to beginner pianists, especially children, nor a decision many children hold strong convictions over; the precocious decision to transfer from a typical gymnasium education, to a conservatory one, further highlights these manifesting traits of independence and self-assuredness.

These personality traits further exhibited themselves early on in his studies at the Moscow Conservatory. One such instance of this are three autograph lists of composition projects, the first of which Medtner penned when still twelve years of age; among these proposed seventeen works are three separate piano concerti, several Songs Without Words, two symphonies for two-hands and four-hands, two piano sonatas, and a violin concerto. The nature of such a structured and planned approach, combined with the young composer's ambitiousness—indeed, loftiness—and confidence in their own abilities, draws many similarities to other Apollonian figures like Italy's Ferruccio Busoni, himself a child prodigy, whose compositions and career plans from extremely young ages mirrors those of Medtner.[12]

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[11] Ibid., 19-20.
[12] Hugo Leichtentritt. "Ferruccio Busoni as a Composer." *The Musical Quarterly* 3, no. 1 (1917): 70-71.

A second instance of this manifestation occurred in the schooling itself. In 1894, after finishing the junior course at the conservatory, Medtner passed into the school's senior department, and had to decide on his courses; Barrie Martyn notes that "potential composers ordinarily combined a study of their chosen instrument with courses in counterpoint, fugue and a final two years of 'free composition,'" but that Medtner instead "opted for Arensky's alternative general course, *Encyclopaedia*, whose syllabus embraced such subjects as musical analysis and form, polyphony, aesthetics, instrumentation and musical history." One can draw definite connections between the holistic nature of Medtner's upbringing, and the less straightforward structure of Arensky's program.

Another supporting inclusion involves Medtner's brief stint studying with master contrapuntalist Sergei Taneyev. Medtner joined this counterpoint class in 1897, though dropped out halfway through, though not as a result of any acrimonious dispute or hostility between himself and Taneyev—there was an instance in which Medtner was attempting to resolve a contrapuntal issue, and brought the matter to Taneyev, who suggested to simply move one of the contrapuntal lines to another place "'like rearranging furniture in a room.'"[13] Medtner could not reconcile this utilitarian approach to composition with his own beliefs of the importance of organic musical growth, and subsequently left the course, choosing instead to learn composition by himself alone (Taneyev, however, still asked that Medtner bring him any new compositions, eventually stating his surprise that Medtner had became a "real composer" despite not having "thoroughly learned counterpoint."[14] [15])

These factors taken together all indicate a young student who, at the beginnings of his studies, held not only precocious abilities both in performance and composition, but precocious self-assuredness in his abilities, going so far as to choose to teach himself composition, whilst attending a conservatory with masterful composition professors. This student, too, bore the marks of someone intensely independent, even stubborn in certain beliefs, however early in their career this student was. The upbringing and temperament of the student meant that they were less interested in a highly linear, highly technically oriented study plan, and more interested in one which explored more branching fields of theory and aesthetics.

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[13] Barrie Martyn, *Nicolas Medtner*, 20.
[14] Ibid.
[15] A cursory glance at some of Medtner's compositions indicates a mastery of counterpoint, albeit one which Nikolai perhaps acquired through his own methods, in the same vein of independence which stretches through his life.

These incepting traits and characteristics are seen already apparent in the young Medtner, at the start of his compositional career. How they evolved, however, may be most aptly seen in the production of Medtner's only book, *The Muse and the Fashion, being a defence of the foundations of the art of music*. This text, a personal statement first published in 1935 some 43 years after the young Medtner started at the conservatory, displays in no uncertain terms the development of the traits discussed above, and provides a platform to analyse Medtner as a matured composer.

MUSICAL IDEALS AND THE MUSE

At the time of *The Muse and the Fashion*'s publication, Medtner was 55 years of age. He had already published two of his three piano concerti and eleven piano sonatas, alongside numerous collections of Skazi ("fairy tales) and songs for voice and piano—by all accounts, he was a firmly established, experienced, matured composer. Medtner elucidates the purpose of the text in its preface, stating that he felt a "painful bewilderment when confronted by most phenomena of the 'progressive' musical world."[16] He explains that he is "addressing [him]self primarily to the young generation of musicians who in studying music and perceiving its laws, believe neither in its unity nor in its autonomous existence."[17] This goal, to express his distaste towards what he felt were poor contemporary developments in the musical arts—developments which, to Medtner, seemed contrived, and strayed from fundamental, incontrovertible musical truths—were similarly expressed in an earlier book, *Modernismus und Musik*, that he had written alongside his brother, Emil.[18]

Medtner splits *The Muse and the Fashion* into two large sections, the first containing 88 pages, and the second, 49; this disparity in length reflects the scope of each section. The first part, though untitled, predominantly discusses purely musical concepts, which Medtner terms "senses," a word that, in Russian, is only used exclusively as the opposite of "nonsense,"[19] and not in the alternative English connotation of the term, as in one's "sense of smell." Medtner's structuring of this first part moves linearly in an easily understood manner, is painstakingly partitioned, and spares no words in the pursuit of highly specified clarity in what is being discussed. The second part, in contrast, is titled "The Mirror of the Muse," and is instead broken into seventeen constituent parts, each concerning larger, more general fields, such as modernism, work and business, and fine art. Here, Medtner speaks more freely, offering a less scientific, more opinionated discussion on these disparate

[16] Nikolai Medtner, *The Muse and the Fashion* (Haverford: Haverford College Bookstore, 1951), 2.
[17] Ibid., 1.
[18] Malcolm Boyd, "Metner and the Muse" *The Musical Times*, vol. 121 no. 1643 (1980): 22.
[19] Medtner, *Muse and Fashion*, 2.

concepts and spheres. Within each of these two sections, Medtner continually repeats common phrases or terms, and ceaselessly revisits a handful of concepts. In order to best understand and examine the evolution of certain traits present in Medtner's youth, a focused examination of the text must be conducted; indeed, such a text existing is remarkably unique within the realm of classical composers, being a personal account of a composer's views not only on the technique of composition, but on their opinions towards aesthetics, the musical arts, and society as a whole.[20]

Two poems introduced very early in *The Muse* provide an indispensable framework to investigate the book as a whole. The first poem, by Lermontov, is situated after a brief preface, at the start of the introduction to the first section of the book:

The Angel

An angel flew along the midnight sky,
And he sang a quiet song;
And the moon, and the stars, and the clouds in a throng
Listened to this holy song.

He sang about the bliss of sinless spirits
Under the covers of heavenly gardens;
He sang about the great God, and his praise
Was not feigned.

He carried in his embraces a young soul
For the world of sadness and tears;
And the sound of his song in the young soul
Remained—wordless, but alive.

And for a long time it languished in the world,
Full of a wondrous desire;
And the dull songs of earth
Could not replace for it the sounds of the heavens.[21]

This was not the first time Medtner referenced this poem: in his first opus, *Acht Stimmungsbilder*, composed 39 years prior, he quotes the same poem as an epigraph to the first piece of the set; more tellingly, Medtner also set the poem to song, in an isolated and singular piece sharing this same opus one designation. These pieces, with the exception of key, are functionally identical, with their identical melodies perfectly contoured to the text. The effect of this intertextual inclusion, both in the first opus, and in *The Muse and the Fashion*, feels almost Miltonic, paralleling John Milton's own

[20] Ibid., i.
[21] Michael Wachtel, *The Cambridge Introduction to Russian Poetry* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 85.

invoking of the Holy Spirit itself as the muse to bless his *Paradise Lost*[22] (why waste time with Urania when one can claim divine inspiration from the Lord?) In the Lermontov, one of God's own angels sings a soft song while cradling a young human, who is transported not to Eden, as referenced in the poem's second stanza, but Earth, the "world of sadness and tears." This child is bestowed with the angel's heavenly gift of divine song, something they carry within themselves throughout their time on the planet, though unable to ever find music on earth to match those divinely inspired melodies.

To posit that Medtner viewed himself akin to this child would present too large a substantive leap; nonetheless, the poem introduces several recurrent themes present in the book as a whole: a divine muse whose song finds no equal to those on earth; an individual striving to recreate this wondrous music, and, though inherently unable to do so, ever attempting to; a concept of "languishing" through toil in endeavouring to fulfill some heavenly inspiration; and, that the song this angel sings concerns the purity of humans before sin, and of God's glory. Malcolm Boyd succinctly condenses these concepts: "For [Medtner], the true essence of the art lay in the *pesn'*: the unheard, God-given 'song' to which all human songs aspired."[23]

These themes are again brought to the foreground in the second poetic inclusion, occurring at the start of the first chapter, following the preface and introduction, this time, by Pushkin:

The Muse

She loved me as a child, ah, yes, she loved me ever
And handed me the pipe and bade that I endeavour
With childish lips and eager fingers if I can
To play for her this seven-reeded pipe of Pan.
And with a gentle smile she listened to me striving
To play the stately airs from hymns of Gods' deriving,
And then the peaceful songs the Phrygian shepherds play
From morn till night on many a sunny summer day
With diligence I strove to profit by her teaching,
And then at times the mystic maid at my beseeching
With toss of golden curls from off her lovely brow
Herself took up the reed and sought to show me how.
And as the tones with breath divine I heard her capture
My heart and soul rejoiced and thrilled with holy rapture.[24] [25]

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[22] John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Barbara K. Lewalski (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), 11-12.
[23] Boyd, "Metner and the Muse," 22.
[24] Medtner, *The Muse and the Fashion*, 19.
[25] One may also observe another Miltonic connection in lines 2-4, mirroring the opening to Milton's *Lycidas*: "Yet once more, O ye laurels, and once more/Ye myrtles brown, with ivy never sere,/I come to pluck your Berries harsh and crude,/And with forc'd fingers rude/Shatter your leaves before the mellowing year."

This poem, again, features themes of work and effort (lines 8 and 9), music as coming from a divine source (lines 2 and 6), and music inspired by the muse as being separate and higher—geographically, and hierarchically—from earthly music. As well, another new concept is introduced in lines nine and twelve: that of the muse not only inspiring song, but literally instructing.

These recurrent features may be summarised as statements:

1. Music originated from a divine source
2. This divinely inspired music exists within humans, but is not directly accessible
3. Humans should aspire to connect to this divinely inspired music
4. The muse acts as both an inspiring, and an instructive source

Finally, the concept of dualism must also be noted; each poem features descriptions which operate as binary opposites. In *The Angel*, the "moon, and the stars, and the clouds," along with the "bliss of sinless spirits" and "heavenly gardens" are contrasted with the "world of sadness and tears." In both, music originating from the heavens is contrasted with inferior music from earth.

The manifestations of these tenets are myriad and ever-present throughout the book. In arguing against what Medtner felt were unnatural, indeed, dangerous[26] digressions from proper ways of music making, he employs these concepts to posit that music must always aspire towards unity, and a coordination of diversity.[27] Medtner's defense of this revolves around a fundamental law of coordination into unity,[28] which originates from this divine source previously outlined.[29] Medtner argues that, as song originated from the heavenly muse, and was imparted onto us from the divine, it follows that all humans possess a natural and internal ability to differentiate what music strives for expressing this inexpressible, heavenly music, and what music disregards this ultimate goal;[30] he continues, opining that any music created without this goal in mind represents "action without contemplation," and is inherently "absurd and lawless."[31]

From these initial statements, Medtner goes on to present the schema with which to best pursue the objective of expressing the muse's song.[32] In a remarkably clear table, he enumerates the fundamental senses of musical language, grouping them in terms of what operates as the centre, or

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[26] Medtner, *The Muse and the Fashion*, 81-82.
[27] Ibid., 6.
[28] Ibid., 11.
[29] Ibid., 7.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid., 14.
[32] Ibid., 21-22.

ultimate resolving goal, and that which acts as their opposite, breaking off and orbiting around this centre, before necessarily returning to it: dissonance resolves into consonance; the dominant leads to the tonic; chromaticism returns to diatonicism. It is necessary to state that Medtner does not consider these two categories in a geographically hierarchical manner similar to the Christian sense of Heaven and Hell, nor does he view one category as more preferable to the other; instead, he acknowledges that both are necessary in order to synthesise towards some unity—the overabundance of consonance or dissonance, of simplicity or complexity, on either side, tilts the balance such that true unity cannot be achieved.[33] Notably, this black-and-white manner of observing compositional goals reflects the black-and-white contrasts of the two introductory poems, and is a feature of Medtner's philosophy that returns frequently in proceeding sections.

The next chapters of the book elaborate on this proposed schema, discussing, in detail, separate facets of musical compositions, and contain many thematic ties with the aforementioned poems. In the second chapter, Medtner focuses on theme, melody, harmony, and rhythm. When discussing theme, Medtner asserts that "theme[s] [are] ineffable," that they are born out of intuition;[34] he states that themes necessarily originate from silence: "If silence does not reveal anything to [the composer], he will never learn anything. But if he fakes thematic intuition he will merely learn to fake the whole work from a faked theme."[35] Again, Medtner brings up a dichotomy, stating that "the absence of such a genuine intuition always forces the composer to invent the greatest possible number of interesting details which by their complexity can cover up the nakedness of the theme."[36] Here, simplicity is contrasted with complexity, operating as two more polar forces. Perhaps more interestingly, we see here an instance in which Medtner directly draws from the concept of divine inspiration; to Medtner, a theme is not something one concocts in a studied, architectural sense. Barrie Martyn notes that Medtner always had a sketchbook close at hand, and would record any sudden musical ideas that came to him; if the same theme came to him at another point in time, he would jot it down once more, and prioritise its use in future compositions.[37] Such a behaviour of awaiting thematic inspiration as if gifted from an intangible, inhuman source reflects strongly Medtner's views towards divine inspiration from the muse. This view is solidified when Medtner writes that "composers have … no right to the prefix or epithet 'creator.'"[38]

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[33] Ibid., 6.
[34] Ibid., 43.
[35] Ibid., 44.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Martyn, *Nicolas Medtner*, 135.
[38] Medtner, *The Muse and the Fashion*, 53.

Medtner, unsurprisingly, then devotes an entire chapter to the defence of past music theory, a necessity if one is to present an argument against contemporary trends which stray from this past. The chapter reads in an almost Hobbesian way, with Medtner first stating that any musical rule is simply an "attempt to sense the law."[39] He compares musical theory to the "grammar of a language," stating that they both exist "first of all to make unnoticeable the technique of composition, the technique of human speech … And in order that any technique should be unnoticeable, as a result, it is necessary that the preparatory process of surmounting it should be somehow noticed."[40] To Medtner, once these rules are fully assimilated, as grammar is to a fluently speaking individual, they "die out by themselves."[41] Medtner then quite explicitly aligns himself to the view that music contains immutable natural laws when he writes that past music theory wasn't invented, only documented: "The authors of these handbooks did not style themselves authors of the theory itself, but merely compilers of handbooks on theory."[42] Such views run parallel to the concept of music having originated from a divine source, and thus is inherently imbued with a natural order inaccessible but present on the human earth.

Of final relevance in the text are chapters six and seven, concerning, respectively, the "accident," and the "self-sufficient dissonance." In these two chapters, Medtner directly addresses what he felt were definitive and incorrect decisions modern composers and musicians were making, which undermined the natural order of the musical arts. Medtner tellingly opens these chapters by declaring that all artists must "carry a burden,"[43] this burden being a necessity to, before commencing composing in an idiosyncratic way, fully understand and assimilate the prior standard practices of composition as represented by the great composers, namely, Beethoven. This recalls the theme of work present in the opening two poems. To Medtner, many of the new crop of composers neglected to put in adequate work in understanding more traditional Western musical theory; he references Goethe, who also wrote of the tendency of people to not want to "plumb the depths" of their art, and instead immediately seek out individuality without first comprehensive understanding.[44] Medtner continues, highlighting that good composition may contain "peculiar accentuations" of these natural musical senses, but not an erasure of any essential musical sense—if one were to, for

[39] Ibid., 56.
[40] Ibid., 56-57.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid., 60-61.
[43] Ibid., 78.
[44] Ibid., 101.

instance, compose in a non-diatonic manner altogether, this would represent a distinct cut in the fabric of natural music senses, and feel, to Medtner, "like a [car] crash."[45]

Instead, Medtner advocates against the modernist, structuralist manner of viewing all musical senses as being relative to one another; he states that, in contemporary composition, everything became relative to everything else, *except* "to their relation to music as a unified art."[46] He includes an analogy, describing that dissonance in music operates as it does in life, that, if there is too much dissonance in one's life, they would naturally seek concordance, in the same way dissonance in music necessarily translates to consonance.[47] Medtner argues that this non-acceptance of a natural underlying order, with naturally necessary senses in music, came about as a result of "dilettantes," who perceived the muse either as only "inspiring" and not "instructive," or who simply did not consider the muse a part of their creative process at all. Medtner believed this misunderstanding, or shunning of the muse to be a most significant "accident" in the evolution of composition. "True evolution," Medtner writes, involves "eternal encirclement and not withdraw" towards those immutable and central musical senses which he outlines in his previous schema.[48]

Through *The Muse and the Fashion*, the developments of certain traits of Medtner, already present in his childhood, are made clear. To Medtner, composition operates as the mechanism to allow humans to attempt to represent the heavenly voice imparted to them from the muse. These attempts must be tempered through hard labour, in order to understand and fully assimilate the natural laws of music. Music must also be balanced in all facets, with no one sense overpowering another, and center itself around unity, and the coordination of diversity. With these concepts in mind, we may turn our attention to an analysis of certain poems which feature repeatedly or significantly in Medtner's oeuvre, to distinguish what, in them, compelled Medtner.

MEDTNER'S MUSE IN POETICS

The Rusalka Pieces

Fantasy-Improvisation, op. 2, no. 1
Improvisation op.47, no. 2
Piano Concerto no.3, op.60

Each of these three pieces feature an allusion to the Slavic folkloric legend of rusalka, a female creature often associated with water, frequently depicted as a seductive figure malicious to

[45] Ibid., 81.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Ibid., 82.
[48] Ibid., 108.

mankind. In the Fantasy-Improvisation No. 1, Op. 2, Medtner includes the simple title of rusalka, "Русалка," roughly translating to "mermaid," or "water-nymph." In the Improvisation No. 1, Op. 47, the note "Song of the Water Nymph" is included. For the Third Concerto, as mentioned in the introduction of this paper, Medtner felt inspired by Lermontov's ballad *Rusalka*, copied below:

The Mermaid

A young mermaid once swam and splashed in a stream
That was lit by a full moon's bright beam,
And she struck at the waves, for she wanted to send
The white foam to the moon overhead.

And the stream leapt and danced and rushed noisily on.
And the clouds in its depths whirled and spun.
And the mermaid she sang, and her song echoed o'er
The blue water and high, rocky shore.

Sang the mermaid: "Deep down, hid from everyone's sight,
There are flashes of colour and light,
Crystal cities that give off a magical glow,
Golden fishes that flit to and fro.

"On bright pillows of sand, in the stream's cool embrace,
With the sea grasses shading his face,
Sleeps a knight, of the jealous blue waters the prey,
Sleeps a knight from a land faraway.

"And my sisters and I, when we tire of our play,
By the side of the knight like to stay,
And we comb his silk locks with a gold comb, and his
Ashen brow and pale lips gently kiss.

"But the knight never stirs and, I cannot tell why,
To our kisses he does not reply.
Cold and still lies he there, by a deep slumber bound,
And no murmur escapes him, no sound."

So the mermaid she sang, filled with sadness and pain,
With a sorrow she could not explain,
And the stream leapt and danced and rushed noisily on,
And the clouds in its depths whirled and spun.[49]

[49] Natasha Bulashova and Greg Cole, "Michael Lermontov," Russian Literature 19th Century, 1996, http://friends-partners.org/friends/literature/19century/lermontov/lermontov6.html.

The poem opens with imagery which contrasts the full moon in the sky, to the stream that the mermaid inhabits; this geographic disparity is enhanced by the mermaid wishing to literally splash water high enough that it would reach the moon. The water, too, is also described with relation to vertical height, the mermaid singing of "crystal cities," "golden fishes," and "flashes of colour and light" which are "hid[den] from everyone's sight."

In the fourth stanza, the only other character is introduced: a stranded knight from a distant land. This knight, unlike the singing mermaid, has no speaking role; in fact, the knight makes no sound whatsoever: "no murmur escapes him, no sound." He also seems catatonic—often asleep, and, when not, entirely unresponsive to the mermaid and her sisters' physical advances. Here also lies the point of action and conflict in the ballade: in the fifth stanza, the mermaid, wishing to seduce (and, presumably, drown) the knight attempts to gain his affection through combing the knight's hair, or imparting kisses to his brow and lips. The knight gives no response to these advances, and so, at the close of the poem, the mermaid once again sings, though this time whilst "filled with sadness and pain,/With a sorrow she could not explain." The final two lines close with another description of the stream below, and the clouds above, reflected against the water.

Sonata in E minor, op. 25, no. 2, "Night Wind"

Included with the Sonata in E minor, one of Medtner's most taxing, complex, and lengthy works, is the full text of a Tyutchev poem, originally untitled, though referred to either by its first line, or, simply, "Night Wind":

> What do you howl about, night wind?
> What do you lament so wildly?
> What does your strange voice mean,
> Now mutely, now noisily complaining?
> In a language comprehensible to the heart
> You reiterate incomprehensible torment—
> And you burrow and arouse in the heart
> Sounds that are at times furious!
>
> O, do not sing these terrible songs
> About ancient, native chaos!
> How greedily the world of the night soul
> Drinks in its favorite tale!
> It tears itself from the mortal breast,
> It strives to fuse with the infinite!
> O, do not rouse storms that have fallen asleep—
> Beneath them chaos stirs![50]

[50] Wachtel, *Introduction to Russian Poetry*, 118.

Medtner would again return to this poem, setting it to voice as the final song in his Op. 37 set, "5 Poems." There exists, too, an allusion in *The Muse and the Fashion*, where Medtner quotes Tyutchev, and the final line of the poem: "Like poetry, music may at times tell us about chaos. But a song must always remain a song, even when 'chaos roars underneath it.'"[51]

An immediately noticeable feature of the poem is its two-stanza makeup, which immediately accentuates any contrasts present not only in each of the stanzas comparatively, but any contrasts present in the poem as a whole. The nocturnal poem opens with three questions posed by a nameless, faceless narrator, directed towards a loud wind that they are hearing. To this wind, they attribute human emotions, and perceive its various gusts and howlings as unknowable thoughts that the wind is expressing. These thoughts seem distinctly negative to the narrator, who describes the wind as "lament[ing]," or "torment[ed]." The wind, however, is inherently incomprehensible in its chaotic gusts, and the narrator, for the first stanza, is relegated to only posing questions, and commenting on the ebb-and-flow of the wind's noise.

A rapid change occurs in the first line of the second stanza, where the narrator, rather than commenting on, or questioning the wind, directly addresses the wind with a request—the wind, sounding, to the narrator, tortured, seems to be singing songs of "ancient, native chaos." Being nighttime, the narrator feels all-too-predisposed towards feeling similar somber, dark themes: "How greedily the world of the night soul drinks in its favorite tale!" The poem closes without resolution: the narrator again directs a request to the wind, beseeching it to not, in the narrator, exhume these negative thoughts of torment and chaos that were otherwise dormant.

Several features in this poem are idiosyncratic and fascinating. Firstly, like the preceding rusalka poem, *Night Wind* is a nature poem. Unlike the preceding poem, however, Tyutchev decides for his subject something both intangible and non-visible. The wind, by definition, may only be described in terms of its actions against other objects: wind, on its own, creates no sound, and only does so when passing by or between objects; it is not visible, unless it flings a leaf across a field; its only tactile sensation is when it gusts over skin.

The wind's personified actions, as well, are peculiarly described. A wind "howling" is a common occurrence, and to ascribe this "howling," especially at night, to an ersatz tortured scream, is also common in literature. Tyutchev, though, in the second stanza, describes this night wind as "sing[ing] these terrible songs," not a term often ascribed to a raucous gust.

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[51] Medtner, *The Muse and the Fashion*, 54.

Another dualistic motif is present here, that of the "mortal breast," and the "infinite." To the narrator, the nighttime hours incite, in the soul, a desire to free itself from mortal boundaries, and instead return to "ancient, native chaos." The wind, here, is framed as being an inciting force in reminding the soul of the chaos contained within it.

"Fairy Tales"
Tales Op. 34, No. 2 and No. 4

Tale, Op. 35, No. 4

Though ostensibly programmatic due to their designation as "tales," Medtner never assigned any definitive programs to these works. Boris Asafyev, a founder of Soviet musicology, commented, "These are not descriptive tales or tales relating adventures of some kind. These are tales about personal experiences, about the conflicts of a man's inner life."[52] Nevertheless, the opus 34 set of fairy tales each contain extramusical inclusions in the form of quotations Medtner pens at the top of each piece. The first is titled "The Magic Violin," and the third, "Wood Goblin (but kind and plaintive)." The remaining two have more direct poetic inclusions: in the second, the beginning of another of Tyutchev's poems, "Peace," and, in the fourth, the opening line of a ballad by Pushkin: "There once lived a poor knight."

The first of the poems:

Peace [Tranquility]

When all the things we called our own
Are gone from us forever,
And have become as heavy to us
As graveyard monuments,

Then let us go and cast our eyes
There, at the waterside,
There where the streams impetuous rush,
There where the torrent speeds.

In emulation of one another
They rush, the currents run
In answer to a fateful call
That they have heard far off.

In vain it is we follow them;
They will not come again.
But the longer that we go on gazing,

[52] Martyn, *Nicolas Medtner*, 36.

The easier we breathe.

And now the tears gush from our eyes
And through the tears we see
How all, in billowing and rolling,
Is quickly borne away.

The soul falls into heavy sleep,
And has the clear sensation
That an o'erpowering river wave
Is bearing it away.

again by Tyutchev, describes another river, this one bereft of any residents. This river is extremely fast moving, and the narrator speaks of the "torrent speed[ing]." The narrator then relates the ceaseless, natural, forward-moving motion of the river to the inevitability of continual forward propulsion in life. The poem, however, is not purely pessimistic—though the narrator speaks of "tears gush[ing] from our eyes," and opens the poem by describing "when all the things we called our own/Are gone from us forever," the poem is, nonetheless, comforting. The narrator suggests, in times of loss, to witness a river, and to understand that, like the river, with its rapid stream and inevitable progression, so too our lives will soon be "borne away." They suggest that, "the longer that we go on gazing [at the river],/The easier we breathe," implying that an acceptance of life's transience, as well as the little control one has on it, leads not to dysphoria, but peace. The poem ends by describing—in contrast to the soul wishing to leap out of one's mortal constraints, as in the *Night Wind*—a soul falling "into heavy sleep," accepting that it will one day be swept away by the river.

Of the previous poems, this one features the most straightforward and visually descriptive characterisation of nature, and most direct connections between nature, and the soul (yet another motif of two diametric entities), drawing a clear parallel between the soul of humans, and the flow of water. Here, nature is described as unmitigable—though we may attempt to, "in vain … follow [the currents]," it is impossible for us ever to catch up to them: "They will not come again." Intriguingly, these currents are described as running "to a fateful call/That they have heard far off." This call is never elaborated on, and is only used to describe an unknowable source that the waters answer to.

The fourth piece of this opus 34 set also features a poem from Pushkin:

The Poor Knight

There was once a poor knight living
All alone in the wide world;

His appearance grim and livid,
But his spirit true and bold.

He once saw a saintly vision,
Something dazzling he did see,
And profoundly the impression
Cut into his memory.

For Geneva bound, he tarried
By the road; beside a cross
He beheld the Virgin Mary,
Mother of the Holy Christ.

Since that time, his soul on fire,
He at females never glanced;
Til his dying day drew nigher,
Didn't address them ever once.

Since that time, an iron lattice
Never lifted form his face—
And the scarf gone—where the neck is,
Hung a rosary in its place.

To take prayers to the Father,
Or the Spirit, or the Son,
Was, it being an odd thing rather,
Something he had never done.

He would spend his nights entire
Bowed before the Virgin's brow,
Weeping quietly—with dire
Tears, that melancholy flow.

Full of faith, enamored dearly
Of his pious dream, with blood
Ave, Mater Dei clearly
He inscribed upon his shield.

While the cavalry of errants
Through the Palestinian plains
Ran at trembling adversaries,
Calling the beloved names,

Lumen coelum, sancta rosa!
He called louder than the rest,
As the Muslim threats came closer
To his head from every nest.

Then, returning to his castle,
Lived, with no one by his side.
Still enamored, still bedazzled,
Uncommunioned he died.

As he readied to expire,
Lo, the Evil Spirit came.
Keen to, as the time drew nigher,
Drag his soul into His realm.

Saying, he has said no prayers.
Saying, he has held no fast;
And not properly made passes
At the mother of the Christ,

But the Holy Virgin pleaded
For his soul before the King,
Letting into Heaven's kingdom
Her beloved paladin.[53]

Though lengthy, the poem is very readily understood, and, in contrast to the previous poems, is not a nature poem, and rather acts as a retelling of a knight's life. The poem opens in describing a poor knight living a solitary existence, though his spirit was "true and bold." After witnessing a divine vision that is never revealed to the reader, he becomes devoutly religious, and shuns all desires of flesh. He replaces his scarf with a rosary, he dons a helmet he never removes, and he inscribes "Hail Mother of God" on his shield.

The knight, as a final act, defends against a Muslim attack, and returns to his castle, where, still alone, he dies. "As [the knight] readied to expire," however, Satan arrives, and attempts to drag the Knight with him down to Hell. Thankfully, the Holy Virgin Mary, evidently a great admirer of the knight, pleads with God, who accepts her request, and ferries the knight into the Kingdom of Heaven.

Few obscurities or oddities arise from this poem, which reads as a linear, summarised account of a once-poor knight, who finds, in religion, new life. Through the knight's pious and unwavering efforts, as well as his conviction and willingness to fight for Christ, he transcends through human existence into Heaven. Two features, though, are of note, the first being the insistence the man has on "be[holding]" the Virgin Mary; it is not "Hail Christ" that he inscribes on

[53] Genia Gurarie, "Aleksandr Pushkin," The Literature Network Forums, 2007, http://www.online-literature.com/forums/showthread.php?19271-Aleksandr-Pushkin/page3.

his shield, nor is it God, nor Jesus, that, at the end of the knight's life, communes his spirit to Heaven. Instead, it is the Holy Virgin. The second is the fourth stanza, which specifically highlights the knight's chosen celibacy; aside from the knight rushing into battle and his prayers, this decision is the only other observable manner in which the knight is depicted as devoutly religious. Rather than describing the knight's abstinence from alcohol, or his becoming extremely generous and charitable, Pushkin instead only describes his refraining from engaging physically with women, similar to Lermontov's knight, in *The Mermaid*.

Finally, Medtner's Tale in C-sharp minor, Op. 35, No. 4, is prefaced with a passage from Shakespeare's *King Lear*, Act III, scene 2:

> *King Lear*, Act III, scene 2 – *Another part of the Heath. Storm continues.*
> *Enter* Lear *and* Fool
>
> LEAR. Blow, wind, and crack your cheeks! rage! blow!
> You cataracts and hurricanoes, spout
> Till you have drench'd our steeples, drown'd the cocks!
> You sulphurous and thought-executing fires,
> Vaunt-couriers to oak-cleaving thunder-bolts,
> Singe my white head! And thou, all-shaking thunder,
> Strike flat the thick rotundity o' the world!
> Crack nature's moulds, all germens spill at once,
> That make ingrateful man!
>
> FOOL. O nuncle, court holy water in a dry house
> is better than this rainwater out o'door.
> Good nuncle, in, and ask thy daughters
> Blessing. Here's a night pities neither wise man nor fool.
>
> LEAR. Rumble thy bellyful! Spit, fire! spout, rain!
> Nor rain, wind, thunder, fire, are my daughter:
> I tax not you, you elements, with unkindness;
> I never gave you kingdom, call'd you children,
> You owe me no subscription; then let fall
> Your horrible pleasure; here I stand, your slave,
> A poor, infirm, weak, and despis'd old man:—
> But yet I call you servile ministers,
> That have with two pernicious daughters join'd
> Your high-engender'd battles' gainst a head
> So old and white as this. O! O! 't is foul! (III, 2, 1-24).[54]

[54] William Shakespeare, *King Lear* in *The Complete Illustrated Shakespeare*, Vol. 3, ed. Howard Staunton (New York: Park Lane, 1979), 84.

Here, the now-mad King addresses nature, and, specifically, wind, as in the Tyutchev poem, though in a far more violent, demanding manner. The wind, in the King's words, is still personified, having cheeks, but, in contrast to the Tyutchev, rather than questioning the wind, and wishing it not stir up primaeval chaos, the King instead wants the exact opposite: he wishes the wind, which "owe[s] [him] no subscription," rage entirely untethered. Though the King acknowledges that the wind owes him no obedience, he states that he still may accuse the wind of conspiring with two of his three daughters against him, describing himself as a now "poor, infirm, weak, and despised old man."

The main focus of this excerpt lies with the King's complete acceptance, and acknowledgement, of the lack of control he holds against nature. There exists, too, extremely evocative imagery of the tumultuous storm, described with such force that all earthly, human-made creations pose no issues against the ferocity of the wind. The King specifically asks the "all-shaking thunder" to "strike flat the thick rotundity o' the world," as if, against the face of nature's chaos, even the planet as a whole cannot defend itself. He goes on to ask the thunder to crack open all the molds of nature, and to spill the seeds from which "ingrateful [men]" are born.

Again, this passage features a split, this time even more extreme, between two entities, in this case, nature, and man. Nature is described with treacherous intensity, as a force entirely unstoppable by mankind, and one which the King, helpless, surrenders to, even going so far as to call himself nature's "slave." The Fool's brief but telling interjection confirms these themes: he advises the King that the storm holds pity for neither wise men nor fools: in its apathy, nature's wrath is both equal to all and unavoidable.

THE COORDINATION INTO UNITY OF MEDTNER'S LITERARY INCLUSIONS

Medtner's choice of textual inclusions present a conciseness and brevity of repeated motifs. Two of these passages, Tyutchev's *Night Wind*, and Shakespeare's "Blow, wind, and crack your cheeks!" focus heavily on wind. Two further focus on rivers, Lermontov's *The Mermaid*, and Tyutchev's *Peace*. As well, a knight is featured in Pushkin's poem, and in Lermontov's *Mermaid*. The following table enumerates these motifs, and introduces other similarities to be discussed:

Lermontov: *The Mermaid*	Knight Water Celibacy Singing Madness Heavens
Tyutchev: *Night Wind*	Night Wind Chaos Singing Primaeval
Tyutchev: *Peace*	Water Voice Primaeval Heavens
Pushkin: *There once lived a poor knight*	Knight Madness Primaeval Heavens Celibacy
Shakespeare: "Blow, wind, and crack your cheeks!"	Madness Night Wind Primaeval Chaos

The repetition of various motifs may be observed with their individual colours or highlighted backgrounds. While some of these motifs are more obvious—the appearance of a knight, for instance—others are more surprising. Madness, for instance, is most prominent in the *King Lear* excerpt: here, at a climactic moment in the play, it is made clear to the audience that the King himself has become quite unhinged. So too, though, is the knight in Pushkin's poem, who, after witnessing a personal divine vision, decides to upend his life and focus entirely on the Virgin Mary.

A lesser example, but still interesting, is in Lermontov's *The Mermaid*, where the knight is described, but is never allotted any agency; this knight makes no discernible action whatsoever, and is described as being perpetually asleep, and immune to the mermaids' advances. This dormant stupor may be viewed as another type of madness.

The connections between Medtner's philosophies, and some of these texts, are clearer than others; in the two Tyutchevs, each focus themselves on depictions of nature, and discuss primaeval aspects found within it. This connects directly with Medtner's views on the inherent existence of natural laws, and the futility in attempting to ignore them; Shakespeare's excerpt interfaces strongly with the latter of these two views, though, so too does *Peace*, albeit in a far less violent manner. There is also an unknowable quality in these three texts, with nature behaving in a way which is unclear to each narrator: in *Night Wind*, the narrator is not sure what the wind represents; in *Peace*, the narrator does not know where the water is flowing to, or to what source it answers to; in "Blow, wind, and crack your cheeks!", the narrator understands only of nature's unstoppable power, and not in its indifference.

Medtner's muse appears quite literally in a couple of these texts as well. In *The Mermaid*, the titular nymph, an otherworldly character by definition, is described as singing, first of the world underneath the water's surface that humans are oblivious too, and then, of her incomprehensible sadness that the knight does not reciprocate her affection. The wind, in *Night Wind*, is depicted as singing, and, to a lesser degree, the water in *Peace* is said to be reacting to a "voice" communicating with it. Tellingly, in each of these examples, that which is singing is never a human entity, nor one even borne from earth's evolution. Each singing voice originates either from a primaeval source, as the wind, or, from a mythic origin, as the rusalka, connecting them with the concept of a divine muse. This inspiring, instructive muse can be seen to make an appearance in Pushkin's knight's life as well: rather than some tangible event occurring, such as a near-death experience, the knight is inspired to lead a pious life through a divine vision; this, by definition, must have originated from a holy source not of the earth.

That the texts concerned with nature focus either on rivers, or on wind, is also very informative: each of these elements follow a natural directional flow. Water passes downwards in accordance to gravity along the path of least resistance, while wind, resulting from uneven heating of the earth's surface, always moves from high pressure areas, to low pressure, also along a path of least resistance. Each encapsulates the concept of an immutable order in nature that even other elements

do not: fire, for instance, spreads as a result of the wind's direction and intensity, and does not contain, in itself, these sorts of inherent properties.

Celibacy lends itself to the concept of work, as it frequently, as in the Pushkin, is associated with piousness and religion, and that, understandably, it would require more concerted effort to remain celibate if one has a group of water nymphs attempting to seduce them, however malicious their true intent may be, than to behave in an opposite manner.

Madness, and mad characters, as a trope in literature, often hold a deep connection with truth. Shakespeare scholar Marjorie Garber writes:

> "…madness permits the maddened victim to speak the truth, like a licensed fool, and be *dis*believed. A madman or madwoman is a sublime version of a fool—in the confines of the theater. He or she can echo the prevailing madness of the world, speaking through the onstage audience to an audience in the theater asserting, proclaiming, or establishing contestatory and unwelcome 'truths' about the human condition."[55]

This connection brings up another of Medtner's central tenets, that of harmony and unity within two extremes; by operating either under madness, or under the guise of madness, one becomes closer in access to speaking truths of the world, more so than if they posited themselves a conventionally lucid person. In the former, one who is mad reflects onto an audience the madness and chaos of the world. In the latter, any sane individual may make statements on chaos, but they fail to truly inhabit it, and operate only as an outsider providing commentary. Medtner's fondness for this dichotomy is further presented in the final "Fairy Tale," Op. 51, No. 6, where he selects, as a subject, the folkloric stock character of Ivan the Fool.

Other instances of dichotomies must also be examined. In Lermontov's *Mermaid*, the sky is contrasted with the earth, and, in particular, the unknowable depths beneath the water of the earth. In *Night Wind*, primaeval, boundless, infinite chaos is contrasted with the constraints of mortal flesh. Tyutchev outlines, in *Peace*, differences between human life, and the endless, unstoppable flow of nature which it ultimately returns to. The Shakespeare, too, strongly contrasts man's futility against nature's awe-inspiring, terrific power.

These binary systems all reflect the centralising concept in Medtner's philosophy towards composition: that balance must be observed when dealing with all of music's senses. Only in choosing poems in which two opposing concepts are held against one another can a theme of

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[55] Kendra Preston Leonard, *Shakespeare, Madness, and Music: Scoring Insanity in Cinematic Adaptations* (Lanham, Maryland: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2009) 98.

balance be observed: no balance may be felt by a poem which only discusses unknowable chaos, and not that which contrasts with it.

Taken together, the poems present themselves as clear literary and poetic reflections of Medtner and his personal philosophies. If there is an inspiring, alluring, or coercive force in any of the texts, it does not originate from a human source, but a heavenly one. If there is a character singing or speaking, they are similarly inhuman, and, if this voice is inspiring or instructive, they are seen as a muse-like figure. Forces and concepts are presented always in tandem with its opposite: chaos with calm, the sky with the earth, temporary inner humanistic turmoil with the eternal external flow of nature, madness with truth. Dedication and work are held as premiums: these knights do not fall prey to carnal desires, and, in Pushkin's case, lives his life post-revelation infallibly. Finally, humans present no force in comparison to nature's power: winds are unstoppable and unknowable, and rivers similarly opaque to human minds and vision, unalterable in flow. In these texts, nature is completely and totally separated from man as an entity which is at once inherently immutable, with forces inscrutable to humans.

CONCLUSION

Kaikhosru Sorabji writes of Medtner:

> "Like Sibelius, Medtner does not flout current fashions, he does not even deliberately ignore them, but so intent going his own individual way is he that he is simply unconscious of their very existence … He has made for himself, by the sheer strength of his own personality, that impregnable inner shrine and retreat that only the finest spirits either dare or can inhabit."[56]

Rachmaninoff, as well: "I repeat what I already said to you in Russia: you are, in my opinion, the greatest composer of our time."[57] From youth, Medtner felt a relation to, and inspiration from the heavens, and a devotion to expressing, in composition, this instructive muse's song. More so than any other composer of his time, Medtner incorporated and integrated poetic and literary texts in his music, his aesthetic, and his philosophy towards composition and the production of the musical arts. Girded, since childhood, with a highly personal sense of purpose, and an idiosyncratic education, these concepts informed and evolved Medtner to the position of a distinctly literary composer, one whose stalwart beliefs and inclinations revealed themselves in the specific selection of select works of poetry and prose, manifested through music. Most significantly, these beliefs were, to Medtner,

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[56] Yevgeny Sudbin, liner notes to *Rachmaninov 4, Medtner 2*, Yevgeny Sudbin, BIS SACD-1728, 2009, CD.
[57] Martyn, *Nicolas Medtner*, 145.

non-negotiable: as a child, and as a matured composer, the romantic ideals in which he enmeshed himself were inevitable. The muse was the sole inspiration he sought. These concepts which Medtner focused on: a unity of extremes, the striving towards a preternatural sense of heaven's song, the unknowable and inherent essence of nature and its power, a devotion to labour, present themselves absolutely in Medtner's output, from his early years, to his last.

Medtner has yet to reach a renaissance period of recognition, or re-recognition in the 21st century, as other previously neglected keyboard composers found themselves in—as an Alkan, or a Scriabin. His unyielding ethos and philosophy, his hardened views on aesthetics, and his disparaging views of then-contemporary trends in the musical arts certainly did not lend his compositions to easy listening, neither to a musically educated audience, nor, especially, to a general one. Nonetheless, these convictions he held, and their intensity, produced a body of work which, if one is willing and open to experience, is not only astonishing in aural effect, but is as divinely inspiring as the muse he answered to.

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