

= Six moments musicaux (Rachmaninoff) =

Six moments musicaux (French for " Six Musical Moments " ; Russian : ????? ????????????? ?????????? , Шест ? музыкál ? nykh moméntov) , Op. 16 , is a set of solo piano pieces composed by the Russian composer Sergei Rachmaninoff between October and December , 1896 . Each Moment musical reproduces a musical form characteristic of a previous musical era . The forms that appear in Rachmaninoff 's incarnation are the nocturne , song without words , barcarolle , virtuoso étude , and theme and variations .

The individual pieces have been described as " true concert works , being best served on a stage and with a concert grand . " Although composed as part of a set , each piece stands on its own as a concert solo with individual themes and moods . The pieces span a variety of themes ranging from the somber funeral march of number three to the majestic canon of number six , the Moments musicaux are both Rachmaninoff 's return to and revolution of solo piano composition . A typical performance lasts 30 minutes .

In an interview in 1941 , Rachmaninoff said , " What I try to do , when writing down my music , is to make it say simply and directly that which is in my heart when I am composing . " Even though Moments musicaux were written because he was short of money , the pieces summarize his knowledge of piano composition up to that point . Andantino opens the set with a long , reflective melody that develops into a rapid climax . The second piece , Allegretto , is the first of the few in the set that reveal his mastery of piano technique . Andante cantabile is a contrast to its two surrounding pieces , explicitly named " funeral march " and " lament . " Presto draws inspiration from several sources , including the Preludes of Frédéric Chopin , to synthesize an explosion of melodic intensity . The fifth , Adagio sostenuto is a respite in barcarolle form , before the finale Maestoso , which closes the set in a thick three @-@ part texture . In six musical moments , Rachmaninoff illustrates completely , " that which is in my heart . "

= = Background = =

By the fall of 1896 , 23 @-@ year old Rachmaninoff 's financial status was precarious , not helped by his being robbed of money on an earlier train trip . Pressed for time , both financially and by those expecting a symphony , he " rushed into production . " On December 7 , he wrote to Aleksandr Zatayevich , a Russian composer he had met before he had composed the work , saying , " I hurry in order to get money I need by a certain date ... This perpetual financial pressure is , on the one hand , quite beneficial ... by the 20th of this month I have to write six piano pieces . " Rachmaninoff completed all six during October and December 1896 , and dedicated all to Zatayevich . Despite the hasty circumstances , the work evidences his early virtuosity , and sets an example for the quality of his future works .

Six moments musicaux is a sophisticated work that is of longer duration , thicker textures , and greater virtuosic demands on the performer than any of Rachmaninoff 's previous solo piano works . It is similar to Alexander Scriabin 's momentous Étude in D @-@ sharp minor (Op. 8 , No. 12) ? in both compositions , detail is more functional than ornamentative in their musical argument . It is here , rather than in Morceaux de fantaisie (Op. 3 , 1892) or Morceaux de salon (Op. 10 , 1894) , that Rachmaninoff places specific qualities of his own playing into his music . There is passionate lyricism in numbers three and five , but the others require a pianist with virtuoso technique and musical perception . These were composed during the middle of Rachmaninoff 's career , and created a foundation of inner voices that he would elaborate on in his Preludes (Op. 23) and Études @-@ Tableaux (Op. 33) . Although he usually gave the première of his own piano works , he was not the first to perform these , and the date of the first public performance has not yet been determined .

The set 's name is inspired by Franz Schubert 's piano cycle , also called Six moments musicaux (Op. 94 , 1828) , which are written on a much more intimate scale .

= = Composition = =

== = 1 . Andantino , B @-@ flat minor == =

The first piece has an andantino (moderate) tempo , is 113 measures long , and is marked at 72 quarter notes per minute . It is divided into three distinct sections . The first presents a theme in common time (4 / 4) with a typical nocturne figure for the left hand . A mid @-@ piece pause at roughly the same area in Schubert 's first Moments musicaux further emphasizes the influence of Schubert . The second part is marked con moto (with motion) , at 76 quarter notes per minute , and is a variation of the first theme in the unusual configuration of seven quarter notes per measure (7 / 4) . This part ends in a cadenza . The third section presents the last variation of the theme , again in common time , but in the fastest tempo yet , Andantino con moto , at 84 quarter notes per minute . The piece ends in a coda that returns to the first tempo , and repeats portions of the previous three parts . It ends with a perfect authentic cadence into B @-@ flat minor .

Andantino is the longest in the set by playing time (about 8 : 30) . It is described as a " generic @-@ hybrid , " combining elements of the nocturne and theme and variation genres . The melody is chromatic , syncopated , and long , all idiosyncratic elements Rachmaninoff often includes in his works . Because of this , the Andantino is sometimes called an extension of his Nocturne in A minor of the Morceaux de Salon set (Op. 10 , No. 1 , 1894) . However , Andantino stands on its own with difficulties , such as the sections with multiple phrases in a single hand .

== = 2 . Allegretto , E @-@ flat minor == =

The second piece , referred to as a " glittering showpiece " , is positioned in contrast to the lyrical and " atmospheric " melody of the first piece . The piece is in the quick tempo allegretto (quickly) , at 92 quarter notes per minute . It is 131 measures long , the most of all six pieces , but the second shortest in terms of playing time , usually no longer than three and a half minutes (the shortest is number four) . This piece represents a typical nineteenth @-@ century étude , similar in style to Frédéric Chopin 's Études (Opp . 10 , 25) , with a melody interspersed between rapid sextuplet figures . It is in strict ternary form with a coda : identical beginning and ending sections beginning on measures 1 and 85 , and a contrasting middle section starting on measure 45 . The second section radically changes dynamics , constantly changing from piano to fortissimo and even sforzando . It is , throughout , a relentless torrent of descending half steps and a cascading left hand figure reminiscent of Chopin 's Revolutionary Étude (Op. 10 , No. 12 , 1831) . Ending the piece is a slow coda in Adagio (at ease) which closes with a perfect authentic cadence in E @-@ flat Minor .

Rachmaninoff revised this piece in March 1940 , changing the melody but leaving the constant sextuplets , proving that the rushing figures are not simple bravura or flair .

== = 3 . Andante cantabile , B minor == =

The continual gauntlets of number two are relieved by the third piece in the set , an " introspective rêverie [daydream] . " Drawing on the previous illustration of a " generic hybrid , " this piece is described as a mixture between the song without words and funeral march genres , to create what is called the " most Russian " piece of the set , containing both sonorous bass and a solid melody , characteristics of Russian music .

Comprising only 55 measures , this piece is one of the shortest but has one of the longer playing times of about seven minutes . The piece is structured as a three @-@ part form . The theme of the first section is played entirely in minor thirds , accompanied by a left hand figure of open fifths and octaves . The middle section has the melody in minor sixths , alongside a staccato octave bass . The lament of the opening theme transforms into an explicit funeral march as the left @-@ hand octaves become regular .

== = 4 . Presto , E minor == =

The fourth piece is similar to the second in the quality of its performance . The fourth piece reveals resemblance to Chopin 's Revolutionary étude in the taxing left hand figure place throughout . The piece is 67 measures long , with a duration of about three minutes , and has the fastest tempo of the set , Presto (quick) at 104 quarter notes per minute , and is the shortest work in terms of playing time .

Presto is in ternary form with a coda . The piece begins with a fortissimo introduction with a thick texture in the left hand consisting of chromatic sextuplets . The melody is a " rising quasi @-@ military " idea , interspersed between replications of the left hand figure , the mostly two @-@ note melody being a strong unifying element . The middle section is a brief period of pianississimo falling figures in the right hand and rising scales in the left . The third section is marked Più vivo (more life) and is played even faster than the intro , 112 quarter notes per minute . At this point the piece develops a very thick texture , with the original left hand figure played in both hands in varying registers . The technique of rapidly changing the octave in which a melody is played , sometimes called " registral displacement " , is used to present the figure in a more dramatic form that increases the intensity of the ending . The ending , a coda in Prestissimo (very quick) , 116 quarter notes per minute , is a final , sweeping reiteration of the theme that closes in a heavy E minor chord , which revisits Rachmaninoff 's preoccupation with bell sounds , prominent in his Piano Concerto No. 2 and Prelude in C @-@ sharp minor (Op. 3 , No. 2) .

The piece is a major exercise in endurance and accuracy : the introduction opens in a left hand figure requiring span of a tenth interval . Additionally , octave intervals invariably appear before fast sextuplet runs , making quick wrists and arm action necessary . The double melodies Rachmaninoff uses in this work exists purposely to " keep both hands occupied , " obscuring the melody and making it difficult for the right hand to project . This is the only piece in the set with indicated pedal markings .

= = = 5 . Adagio sostenuto , D @-@ flat major = = =

The piece is similar to the form of a barcarolle , a folk song with a rhythmic triplet accompaniment . Playing it takes approximately five minutes , and it is 53 measures long , the shortest in terms of measures . It is an adagio sostenuto (sustained at ease) at 54 quarter notes per minute , with a simple melody presented in ternary form .

Lacking any prodigious figures or difficult runs , the piece displays Rachmaninoff 's capability for musical lyricism . Although the piece seems simple , the mood must be sustained by playing simultaneously restrained but dynamic triplet figures in the left hand . The melody , a chordal texture with frequent suspended tones , creates a difficult task in voicing , and placing the correct emphasis on the correct notes . Its relatively short melody lines are a direct contrast to Rachmaninoff 's characteristically long lines , giving a shorter time to bring out the phrases .

= = = 6 . Maestoso , C major = = =

The last piece in the set is a quintessential nineteenth @-@ century work , and has been described as an " apotheosis or completion of struggle . " The piece was once summarized as :

The final piece or movement of a cycle that is virtuosic and brilliant , employing the entire range of dynamics and sonorities available to the piano , bringing a set of pieces to a glorious conclusion .

This " stormy , agitated " work contains a " vehemently triple @-@ dotted main theme and only some brief midsection hazy sunshine [that lightens] the storm before fortississimo thunders return and finally dominate . " Despite the dark imagery presented to describe the piece , the work is in C major , and the end result is more light @-@ hearted than dark , but not as triumphal as the Maestoso would make it sound .

Like the second and fourth pieces , number six is written in the form of an étude , with a repetitive but technically challenging chordal melody that is doubled in both hands . In all , the work has three distinct elements played simultaneously : the main melody , the continuous thirty @-@ second note

broken chord figures , and a descending eighth note motif . Dynamics play a large part in this piece : the fortissimo marked at the beginning is maintained all throughout the first section , with only brief respites to mezzo forte . The middle section is wholly softer , and contains two areas with significant mounting tension , creating the aforementioned " apotheosis effect " with dramatic " false starts . " Here , Rachmaninoff manipulates the theme contrapuntally to develop a canonic effect . This " triple counterpoint . . . is titanic both in size and impact , and in potential for disaster , " referring to the tension , waiting for the final climax , in this " continuing explosion . " Immediately before the coda , the thick texture and canon suddenly disappear and the piece becomes piano . Upon entering the coda , the work resumes the forte theme and amalgamates to a majestic ending played fortississimo .

Maestoso is one of the most difficult pieces in the set . Stamina and strength are required to sustain a full resonant sound , while the continuous thirty @-@ second figure can be tiring for the pianist . Consistent tempo is a problem for this piece , due to the melody being interspersed with two other elements . Additionally , the dynamics , mostly " loud " and " very loud , " indicate that an accurate vision of relative volume is necessary . Maintaining this accuracy while managing every other element of the piece and successfully presenting a musically solid performance continues to be the ultimate challenge of all .

= = Reception = =

The Six moments musicaux were well received by critics . During the writing of his Symphony No. 1 , Rachmaninoff was distracted from solo piano work , and the Moments were regarded as his return to mature composition . Although revolutionary and grand in style , they retain the charm of his early works , as mentioned by pianist Elizabeth Wolff : " They are typical of his early works , dense , rich in counterpoint , highly chromatic , poignantly nationalistic , deeply felt , and of course , exceptionally challenging to the pianist . " Later performances of this work would reveal that Rachmaninoff had hidden a subtle rhythm and vitality that emerged under the long , melodic phrases , furthering his acclaim as an incredibly complex musician . The Moments go as far as to " confirm the inexplicable inherent in genius " , with " exquisite melody , wondrous harmonic changes , ' heavenly brevity ' , " while maintaining " a sense of contrast and variety that allows each miniature to stand alone while complementing the work on either side of it . " Although it is unknown whether the financial reaction of this composition recouped his stolen money , the emotional reaction to it would be overshadowed for the following years by the catastrophic premiere in 1897 of his two @-@ years ' labor : the Symphony No. 1 , Op. 13 , 1895 .