

PREFACE

Biographical Note

Nikolai Medtner was born in 1880 in Moscow. He started piano lessons at an early age with his mother and later had lessons with his uncle Fyodor Goedicke (the father of the composer Alexander Goedicke). In 1891 he was accepted into the Moscow Conservatorium, where his teachers there included Pavel Pabst (student of Franz Liszt and teacher of Sergei Lyapunov), Vasily Safonov (who also taught Alexander Scriabin) and Sergei Taneyev (student of Tchaikovsky and teacher of Alexander Scriabin, Sergei Rachmaninoff, and Reinhold Glière). On completing his piano degree in 1900, Medtner was awarded the small gold medal (the great gold medal was reserved for those that completed two subjects such as composition and piano, as did Rachmaninoff in 1892). After completing several successful performing tours around Europe, in 1908 Medtner accepted the invitation to become a professor of piano at the Moscow Conservatorium, but taught for only a year before giving up the position to dedicate his time to composition. He had another, longer stint as a professor of the Conservatorium from 1915 to 1921. Medtner stayed in Russia during the First World War, the Revolution, Civil War and early years of the Soviet Regime, leaving first for Germany and then England, where he settled in London. He died there in 1951. Medtner was admired by Rachmaninoff (who was also a close friend)

Although he was a virtuoso pianist, Medtner focused predominantly on composition. However, all of his music is written for, or features the piano, and includes works such as the 14 piano sonatas, 3 violin sonatas and a piano quintet, over 100 songs, 3 piano concertos and several works for two pianos and numerous miniatures. His works catalogue consists of 61 works with allocated opus numbers, as well as numerous works without opus numbers which include early works, unfinished or sketched works. His most popular and most performed works are doubtless the *Skazki* - Fairy Tales.

The 6 Preludes

This edition—the first publication of this work—is based on a manuscript consisting of five double-sided pages in portrait format located in the manuscript section of the State Central Museum of Musical Culture, Moscow (GCMMK) under the archive number: RUS-Mcm, Estate. 132 (N. Medtner), No. 9. Page 1 of the manuscript is reproduced below in **Illustration 1**.

The manuscript is a fair copy, and is neatly written with very few minor corrections. Details such as phrasing or articulations are not consistently entered, with some preludes having no instructions and others notated with details.

Medtner composed the 6 Preludes in 1896-1897, when he was 16-17 years old. The Preludes Nos. 5 and 6 (in G-sharp minor and E-flat minor) were later revised, and published as Nos. 2 and 3 in his Op.1 - *Acht Stimmungsbilder* [Eight Mood-Pictures], in 1903 by P. Jurgenson in Moscow. The other Preludes (Nos. 1-4) remained unpublished.

That this early cycle was important to Medtner is seen not only from the revisions of Preludes 5 and 6 and their subsequent inclusion into Op. 1. There are earlier versions of Prelude 5 (RUS-Mcm, Estate. 132 (N. Medtner), No. 168), and of Prelude 6 (RUS-Mcm, Estate. 132 (N.

Medtner), No. 14; No. 195). There are also several shorter works dated from the same time that were rejected and replaced by the current pieces:

- the short piece in E major from 1897, which has no title, but the roman numeral *IV* (RUS-Mcm, Estate. 132 (N. Medtner), No. 10)
- the Prelude in C major, later renamed Pastorale (also unpublished) (RUS-Mcm, Estate. 132 (N. Medtner), No. 65)
- and possibly the Prelude in B minor (RUS-Mcm, Estate. 132 (N. Medtner), No. 14)

The Preludes were possibly written under the guidance of his composition teachers at this time. Nevertheless, these short works already reveal an originality in his use of textures and character of the pieces. The preludes form an attractive cycle for both the performer and audience. They are compact works that are melodious, and contrasting, with the progression of the pieces carefully thought out, both in terms of keys, time signatures, characters, and textures. For example, Nos. 1, 3 and 5, and 6 feature dotted/double dotted rhythms, and nos, 2 and 4 are melodious and lyrical. Prelude 1 is a dramatic opening to the cycle, while Prelude 2 is has a youthful, carefree air to it. Prelude 3 is a *marcia funebre*, while 4 is lyrical. The cycle contains some effective and quite challenging writing, both from the compositional and pianistic perspectives, and offers much contrast, employing a variety of textures (chordal, arpeggio, imitative) and using various musical archetypes (most notably the lyrical, dance, and the virtuosic).

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Sydney, 2024