

ALFRED SCHNITTKE'S CONCERTO FOR PIANO AND
STRINGS WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF HIS PIANO WORKS

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ABSTRACT

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The musical compositions of Alfred Schnittke (1934-1998) have their own unique voice, and the Concerto for Piano and Strings is not an exception. Through the examination of Schnittke's life and piano works in the context of the art and literature of his time, this monograph introduces Schnittke's Concerto for Piano and Strings as something much more than just the analysis of a typical piano concerto while giving meaning to the polystylism existent in his works.

Alfred Schnittke was of Jewish and German background and experienced living in the Soviet Union during World War II. An internal struggle for identity and the conflict present in the world at that time is evident in the works of Schnittke, which juxtaposes the dichotomy of good and evil. One cannot clearly understand the meaning behind the many different techniques and compositional devices of Schnittke's music without a deeper knowledge of his life and the literature and art of the time; his music poses many poignant questions about religion and philosophy.

The paper that follows consists of five chapters which begin with an introduction to Schnittke's life, followed by a discussion of his pianistic style, an analysis of his works for piano, and a discussion of his piano concertos. The sections consist of a discussion of his Concerto for

Piano and Strings within the context of his other works of the time and works of literature. Part of this discussion draws important parallels between Schnittke's Concerto for Piano and Strings and two literary works: *The Master and Margarita* by Mikhail Bulgakov and *Doctor Faustus* by Thomas Mann. It is hoped that this paper will bring a greater interest in Schnittke's Concerto for Piano and Strings and his other piano works which are not frequently performed.

DEDICATION

To my teacher Dr. Charles Abramovic

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Schnittke is a unique and prolific composer who wrote hundreds of compositions in different styles and genres. In his works, he experimented with form and sound and polystylism became his trademark:

My search is for a synthesis of styles, juxtaposing different elements. One must learn to listen to music intuitively.... I believe future generations will bridge the abyss between all types of music.... including jazz, rock, classical, and folk.¹

Born in 1934 in Soviet Russia, Alfred Schnittke witnessed Leninism, Stalinism, World War II, the Cold War, and the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Having lived through very difficult times, Schnittke reflected the drama of his entire generation in his creative writings.

After his mother died in 1972, Schnittke became very religious. He was baptized as a Catholic, but never considered the segregation between Christian religions and attended both Orthodox and Catholic services. Schnittke wrote many religious compositions reflecting the idea of life's meaning, as well as the nature of good and evil. He used thematic material of Orthodox and Catholic chants, mixing them together so the music would not reflect ideas of a certain religion, but sound spiritual.

¹ Claire Polin. "The Composer as Seer, but not Prophet," *Tempo, New Series* No. 190, (Cambridge University, 1994), p.13

In 1973 Schnittke became very ill after having a stroke, after which his compositions began to convey ideas of life and death. In an interview, he states that while in the hospital, he had been “there” and experienced life after death. It is of interest to notice that Schnittke predicted many events, including his own death. While making a proposal to his wife Irina, he informed her that he would die because of a stroke -- it was true, the composer died in 1998 after his fourth stroke.

The music of Schnittke became particularly well-known abroad after the 1990s, when he immigrated to Europe. Since then, interest in his music has kept growing; his works are part of concert programs of the best orchestras, including the Philadelphia Orchestra. There are also many recordings available on CDs. Hundreds of articles and books about Schnittke’s music and personality have been published internationally.

There is something special about the hypnotizing power of Schnittke’s music. My mother was a student of the Novosibirsk Conservatory when Schnittke’s *Faustus Cantata* was premiered in Novosibirsk in 1983. Being a violinist in the orchestra for more than thirty years and playing multiple recitals, she still describes that concert as the most memorable in her life. The concert hall of the conservatory was completely filled. People were sitting on the stairs in between seats because there was not enough space for everyone and the entrance doors to the lobby were left open so the crowd there could also hear the performance.

One of the audience members at a concert of Schnittke’s music in Moscow describes the atmosphere:

There were never enough tickets, and the public would take the doors into the small hall of the House of Composers by storm, and would doggedly force their way to the

Conservatoire through cordons of mounted police. Everyone knew that at such concerts one might acquire some of the most memorable impressions of one's life. These concerts had little in common with the usual evenings of classical music: to listen to Schnittke, though not "forbidden," was not recommended. Today, having lost their scandalous aura, these same works sound – as they should – like "pure music," they are more serene. Possibly, it is only now that we are beginning to take their measure, that the time has come to have another look at them.²

Schnittke's music was admired and performed by many outstanding musicians during his lifetime. Alexander Ivashkin, a musicologist and close friend of the composer, did tremendous work organizing and publishing interviews with Schnittke. Since the work of Ivashkin, many books and articles were written about Schnittke's music; however, Schnittke wrote hundreds of compositions, most of which are still not well-known and not well-researched. As a pianist, I decided to narrow my research to his piano music, specifically the Concerto for Piano and Strings, which is one of his most important piano works. It is hoped that an analysis and understanding of the context of Schnittke's piano works will help lead the reader to a better understanding of Schnittke's style.

² Alfred Schnittke, *Complete Piano Sonatas*, Igor Tchetaev. Booklet by Anna Andrushkevich, Caro Mitis label compact disc, 2005.

CHAPTER 2

THE PIANISTIC STYLE OF ALFRED SCHNITTKE

Alfred Schnittke included the piano in many of his compositions. He considered the piano as an instrument that provided a special timbre and an individual color in his orchestral and chamber music works. Although Schnittke did not write many compositions for solo piano, most of his piano works are very serious and full of depth. When analyzing Schnittke's piano style, it is important to understand how he was connected to this instrument. Schnittke was not a professional pianist as were many Russian composers who wrote for piano, such as Rachmaninov, Prokofiev, Medtner, and Shchedrin.

Alfred Schnittke's path to becoming a professional musician was very different than that of most Russian composers of the twentieth century. He started studying music professionally only after the age of fourteen. His parents did not play musical instruments but loved music. Schnittke's father had a collection of music recordings. In 1946 the Schnittke family moved to Vienna where Alfred started playing accordion. The instrument was given to his father as a gift and Alfred taught himself to play it. Later, in 1949, Schnittke composed a concerto for this instrument. In Vienna Schnittke also began taking piano and music theory lessons. His first piano teacher was Charlotte Rubber who tried to convince Alfred's parents to give him a professional musical education. His family did not own a piano, so Schnittke practiced in his friends' houses, cafés, and casinos.

This short period in Vienna was very important for the composer. He attended multiple symphony orchestra concerts and opera performances where he heard symphonies of Beethoven, Schubert, Brahms, and Bruckner, and he saw operas by Mozart, Leoncavallo, and Wagner. The Schnittke family spent only two years in Vienna, but the high standards of music performed in this city determined the basic criteria of the composer's future taste and became an essential part of Schnittke's musical language. Schnittke describes this period of his life as follows:

Between 1946 and 1948, I lived in Vienna. It was of decisive importance for my life, for it was there that I began my musical studies. In Vienna, I received important impulses, both musical (Ludwig van Beethoven's Ninth Symphony under Josef Krips, Bruckner's Eighth under Klemperer, the *Entführung aus dem Serail* under Knappertsbusch and so on) and also general (including the scene in *Everyman* where Death appears – a scene which always induces fear in me. I saw this scene in three Salzburg productions of the play) I recall a basic musical tone, a certain Mozart-Schubert sound which I carried within me for decades and which was confirmed upon my next stay in Austria some 30 years later.³

When his family returned to Russia, Schnittke auditioned for the October Revolution Music College, which is now named after him (the Schnittke State Music Institute). Having had very little musical training and performance experience, he was accepted to the choirmasters' department. This was his only chance to study music professionally. His piano teacher was Vassily Shaternikov, who helped Schnittke to acquire a fundamental piano technique. Many of Shaternikov's students became well-known musicians, such as Rodion Shchedrin and Karen Khachaturian. Shaternikov

³ Alfred Schnittke. "(K)ein Sommernachtstraum," Introduction to the score. Universal Edition, (Vienna, 2003), p. 2.

introduced his students to the piano music of Scriabin, whose music was very rarely performed at that time, and Rachmaninov. As a piano student, Schnittke also performed compositions of Haydn, Mozart, Schubert, Chopin, and Grieg.

Later, in the Moscow conservatory, Schnittke reached a high level in performing and played some challenging pieces of the piano repertoire, for example Schumann's Second Piano Sonata and Rachmaninov's Second Piano Concerto. Nevertheless, Schnittke never considered himself to be a concert pianist. Discussing his Second Piano Sonata, Schnittke said:

I'm not a pianist and have played the piano only rarely or as an accompanist, so that I lack a well-developed relationship to the keyboard. Little by little I stopped thinking in terms of keys, passage-work and pedaling, and concentrated instead on the actual content of what I was writing.⁴

Even though he was very modest about his piano playing, Schnittke often performed the piano and harpsichord parts of his orchestral compositions. His first concert tour abroad was as a harpsichordist and pianist for his Concerto Grosso No.1 and Arvo Pärt's *Tabula Rasa*. This trip was planned after the grandiose success of this program in Leningrad, with Gidon Kremer as a soloist.

The atmosphere of the Moscow Conservatory had a huge influence on Schnittke's early style. His classmates included Edison Denisov (avant-garde composer and musicologist), Rodion Shchedrin (pianist and composer), Alemdar Karamanov (film composer), and other important musicians. Edison Denisov established a society named

⁴ Maria Krivenski. "The Interpretation of Schnittke's Piano Pieces: Raising Some Questions," *Seeking the soul. The music of Alfred Schnittke*. The Guildhall School of Music and Drama, (London, 2002), p. 63

the Students' Association, which had a tremendous impact on Schnittke's development as a composer. Members of the association studied music of significant twentieth-century composers, such as Messiaen, Stravinsky, Bartok, Schoenberg, Berg, Webern, and others. Most of these composers were banned in Soviet Russia, and for many students of the Conservatory it was the only chance to hear this music. These meetings were also useful for members of the society to perform their own compositions and get the opinion and advice of their colleagues.

In addition to practicing piano and learning piano music of other composers, Schnittke had a professional relationship and friendship with many outstanding Russian pianists. Most of his works were dedicated to specific artists and written under the influence of their performance style. Schnittke worked with his performers very closely. Sometimes this mutual creative process would occur before a piece would even be started, with performers participating throughout the entire process of composition. He identified phrasing, articulation, and dynamics with his performers. For example, Gidon Kremer's dramatic and passionate manner inspired Schnittke's Concerto Grosso No.5. However, when Schnittke wrote for another violinist, Oleg Kagan, whose playing is more lyrical, his writing became less virtuosic. Schnittke's Cello Concerto No. 1 was written for Natalya Gutman, whose strong and powerful playing matched Schnittke's music perfectly.

Schnittke dedicated most of his piano compositions to pianists that he had close relationships with. Many of his later works were written for his wife, Irina Schnittke, who was a concert pianist. Schnittke's First Piano Sonata was dedicated to Vladimir Feltsman – one of his best friends and an outstanding pianist. With such close relationships existing

during the compositional process, it proves helpful to analyze the recordings of the musicians who directly received interpretive ideas from the composer himself. Such analysis helps us to understand Schnittke's writing.

Additionally, when analyzing Schnittke's piano style, much can be learned from researching the Russian tradition of piano performance. The composer was part of it in many ways - as a piano student of Russian conservatories, as a composer working with concert pianists, whose performing style he captured in his music, and as a listener. As a composer, Schnittke continued the tradition of his great predecessors Scriabin, Rachmaninov, Prokofiev, Stravinsky, and Shostakovich, whose concertos, solo works, and chamber music compositions are now a standard part of the concert repertoire. Dmitri Alexeev, a representative of the Russian piano school, said:

It is difficult to describe in words what the characteristics of great Russian piano playing are. Generally, things are different between Western and Russian playing. First of all, there is the quality of sound and style of phrasing. The attitude to musical performance is different: it is usually more romantic, more emotional and warm.⁵

For Schnittke, the emotional context of his compositions was tremendously important. He was able to achieve large emotional projections while writing in minimalistic style. Sometimes he would make changes in his music just before the concert or recording, to help the individual performer reach the desired effect or emotional state. He would change pedaling, the length of notes, dynamics, and phrasing, but he never changed this in his publications and actual printed scores.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 65-66

Two important features can be discussed when describing Schnittke's pianistic style: imitation and innovation. Schnittke's compositions imitate the musical styles of different epochs, but he innovates upon the existing style. He thoroughly imitates certain techniques, or musical ideas, but he uses them in a new way, adding original elements to express specific emotional states. For example, simple Alberti bass figures can be used to suggest emptiness, loneliness, the moment of expectation before catastrophe, or the primitivism or banality of music.

Some elements of Schnittke's scores look very innovative, and at first seem to be quite complicated for the performer. But the composer provides an explanation for each symbol. Schnittke uses his own symbols for certain piano techniques: clusters, lines of improvisation, and chord glissandos. Once the performer learns his symbols and gets used to them, the music becomes very logical.

Example 1. Schnittke. Second Piano Sonata, 3rd movement, mm. 34-38

The image displays a musical score for the 3rd movement of Schnittke's Second Piano Sonata, measures 34-38. The score is written for piano and consists of two systems. The first system shows a treble and bass clef with a key signature of one flat. The right hand plays a series of chords with accents, while the left hand plays a similar pattern. The second system shows a transition to a new key signature (one sharp) and features a section marked '(improvvisare)*' with wavy lines indicating improvisation in both hands.

Schnittke uses various techniques to convey time in music to the performer. Sometimes Schnittke omits bar lines and time signatures for some sections of a piece,

giving the performer just the note values. This lack of traditional musical punctuation gives performers the freedom to shape phrases in their own individual way. Additionally, as with many composers of the twentieth century, Schnittke changes time signature frequently, especially in cadenza-like episodes. For example, the first page of the Concerto for Piano and Strings shows the time signature changing ten times in fourteen measures.

Example 2. Schnittke Concerto for Piano and String Orchestra, mm 1-14

The image shows a page of musical notation for the first 14 measures of Schnittke's Concerto for Piano and String Orchestra. The tempo is marked 'Moderato' and the dynamics range from piano (p) to mezzo-piano (mp). The score is characterized by frequent time signature changes, indicated by the '2/2' and '3/2' markings. The piano part is written in the upper staves, and the string orchestra parts are in the lower staves. The notation includes various rhythmic patterns, slurs, and accents, reflecting the complex and expressive nature of the piece.

Schnittke uses Italian terminology for the indication of tempo in the beginning of a piece or episode, but he never uses metronome markings. There can be two explanations for this: he would discuss the tempo with performers during rehearsals, and he believed each performer would find the appropriate tempo for a convincing interpretation. Schnittke suggests *rubato* very rarely, although the emotional intensity of the music and

the piano writing itself often suggests a romantic style where *rubato* would be appropriate.

One of the characteristic features of Schnittke's piano music is pedaling. His pedal indications are very detailed. Most of his indications are for coloristic effects or for sustaining bass-notes and harmonies. There is one special type of pedaling in his piano music, which can be considered as his signature pedaling. This is a very long-lasting pedal without changing for many measures, which produces a certain sound effect to blend all sounds together and create one growing sonority. This can be considered as a type of *crescendo* in his music, when the pedal sustains multiple sounds to extend the *forte* possibility of the instrument. For example, the piano cadenza in Concerto for Piano and Strings begins with passages in the low register sounding very softly on the damper pedal. Then, the composer starts adding new elements – first, there is just one repeating note in addition to the soft passages, then two repeating notes, then chords, then passages, and so on with the same pedal, until it grows into large-sounding cloud of sound in *ffff*.

Example 3. Schnittke Concerto for Piano and Strings, m.35

The image shows a musical score for measures 35 through 40 of Schnittke's Concerto for Piano and Strings. The score is written for piano and strings. Measure 35 is marked with a box containing the number 35. The piano part begins with a *pp* dynamic, followed by a *mp* dynamic. The string part is marked *sed. sempre* and *mf*. Measure 36 is marked *mf*. Measure 37 is marked *ff* and includes the instruction *simile (варьировать акценты)*. Measure 38 is marked *ff*. Measure 39 is marked *ff*. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

Sometimes, Schnittke avoids use of the pedal. There are entire sections marked *senza pedale* in his compositions. In such sections Schnittke wants to hear a more classical, authentic piano style with clear and detailed articulation. However, he does not give any indications of *una corda*, leaving its use completely up to the performer.

Another element that Schnittke uses frequently in his piano writing is the tone-cluster. Schnittke uses two types of clusters: the first type is when all notes that the performer should play are written directly in the score, and the second type is when the performer is supposed to play every single note between two notated pitches. For

example, the coda of the Piano Sonata No. 1 ends with a large cluster which covers four octaves of black and white keys. The performer should use both arms (from fingers to elbows) to press as many keys as possible. The natural and flat signs refer to black and white keys.

Example 4. Alfred Schnittke, Piano Sonata No.1, IV movement, mm. 173-174



Such large clusters appear mostly in the culminations of Schnittke's compositions. Maria Kostakeva describes these clusters as follows:

In Schnittke's perception, the loud, sharp and cutting sound lies within the field of evil. This kind of sound, which suggests a catastrophe, can evoke only disquiet, anxiety and horror: what the sound is trying to achieve is in this case nothing more than the portrayal of the disintegration caused by destruction.⁶

Another important feature of Schnittke's piano music is articulation. The composer's articulation is very detailed, but not complicated. He has a very specific idea of how he wants some phrases to sound, and to convey this, he gives very detailed *tenuto* marks, accents, short slurs, and phrasal slurs. These detailed articulation and phrasal

⁶ Maria Kostakeva. "Artistic Individuality in Schnittke's Overture and his New Political Mythology," *Seeking the Soul. The Music of Alfred Schnittke*. The Guildhall School of Music and Drama, (London, 2002), p. 21

indications, together with various dynamic markings, make it easy for the performer to shape the music expressively. Additionally, there are many episodes in Schnittke's music marked *recitando*, which are written in the style of recitation used in the Orthodox liturgy when a priest reads a prayer. This type of recitation can be associated with spiritual ideas in Schnittke's music.

Schnittke's method of developing pianistic texture is distinguished as well. The composer often uses repetition, adding only small details or changing harmonies. His minimalistic style of writing allows small changes of texture to become very noticeable. For the listener this minimalistic style of writing can create a hypnotic state, expanding time and space. Additionally, the composer also uses the tone-clusters discussed above to expand the texture.

Most of Schnittke's compositions were written after he had met Irina Katayeva in 1961, who later became his wife. Irina was a concert pianist and had substantial influence on Schnittke's piano works. She studied in Leningrad Conservatory and Gnesin Institute and was a specialist in Russian music of the twentieth century. She performed many chamber recitals playing Schnittke's music with Mstislav Rostropovich, Mark Lubotsky, Gidon Kremer, and the Kronos Quartet. Schnittke dedicated many compositions to her.

CHAPTER 3

SCHNITTKE'S COMPOSITIONS FOR PIANO

Schnittke's piano compositions can be divided into two periods: compositions written before the 1970s, and compositions written after the 1970s. The first period includes the following works: *Poème for Piano and Orchestra* (1953), *Concerto for Piano and Orchestra* (1960), *Music for Piano and Chamber Orchestra* (1964), *Prelude and Fugue* (1963), *Improvisation and Fugue*, and *Variations on a Chord* (1965). The second period includes: *Concerto for Piano and Strings* (1979), *Concerto for Piano Four Hands and Chamber Orchestra* (1988), *Three Piano Sonatas* (1987, 1991, 1992), and *Five Aphorisms* (1990).

These periods are separated according to different styles in which the composer was writing. During his first period Schnittke was continuing the stylistic traditions of his predecessors – Stravinsky, Prokofiev, and Shostakovich. After the 1970s Schnittke's compositional language became more individual and switched to polystylism as a main idea. Schnittke's piano compositions can be subdivided into three categories: piano miniatures, piano sonatas, and piano concertos.

Piano Miniatures

Improvisation and Fugue was written in 1965. The work was commissioned by the Ministry of Culture for the 1966 Tchaikovsky Competition; however, the competitors did not choose Schnittke's piece. Because of this, it was premiered later. One of the

performers was Vladimir Krainev, to whom later Schnittke dedicated his Concerto for Piano and Strings.

Although he used complicated compositional techniques, Schnittke did not like to describe the technical process of his writing. Describing *Improvisation and Fugue*, Schnittke says:

This work is written without any particular pretensions: a virtuoso, polyphonic work, written to a pattern that was totally in keeping with pieces of this sort; recitative and aria, improvisation and fugue... The fugue is fairly free in its structure, I do not even know for sure how many voices it has. It is more of a motor work, with the contours of a fugue, rather than a fugue proper.⁷

An analysis of his work, however, can help the performer gain a better understanding of its meaning as Anna Andrushkevich states:

Schnittke compared “technique” to a net into which an idea falls – i.e., in analyzing what is “hidden” in harmony, texture and form, we are studying the net rather than the butterfly that sits within it. But at the same time, in answering the question, “how is it written?” we are also answering the question, “how should we listen to it?” and we then arrive at reflections on the theme “what does it all mean?”⁸

The *Improvisation and Fugue* is only five minutes long but contains many compositional and characteristic ideas. The first part, *Improvisation*, is very short. The piece starts from grand chords and clusters marked *ff*.

⁷ Alfred Schnittke, *Complete Piano Sonatas*, Igor Tchetaev, Booklet by Anna Andrushkevich, Caro Mitis label compact disc, 2005.

⁸ *Ibid.*

Example 5. Alfred Schnittke. Improvisation and Fugue. mm. 1-6



The whole composition is a representation of twelve-tone technique. The first chord contains just one tone, the next one – two tones, and so on. With each chord Schnittke adds another tone until there are twelve tones sounding at the same time. The grand opening marked *lento* is followed by fast anxious phrases marked *vivo*, which prepare the atmosphere of the fast and energetic Fugue.

The Fugue is a virtuosic composition written in the serial technique. Here the composer continues the tradition of Schoenberg. The Fugue starts *ppp* with the theme of the Fugue using twelve tones in the same order they appear in the top voice of the opening *Improvisation* as noted in the sample above. Then, in each measure, Schnittke adds more varieties of these tones until the texture becomes a pulsing *ostinato* of eighth notes.

Example 6. Alfred Schnittke. *Improvisation and Fugue*. mm. 25-33



Variations on One Chord was written in 1965 for Irina Schnittke. The composer wrote this piece for his wife to perform on a concert of contemporary music at the Gnesin Academy of Music in Moscow. This piece is short, about seven minutes long, and the compositional manner is similar to *Improvisation and Fugue*. In *Variations on One Chord* Schnittke continues use of the dodecaphonic style.

The idea of this work is quite unusual: the variations were written not on a theme, but on a chord. The inspiration came from Anton Webern's *Variations for Piano*, op.27, where the main theme is varied without changing the exact pitch of each note. In his interview Schnittke says:

The idea of limitation is shown in the compositional technique, where each sound can appear only in a certain octave, and one twelve-tone chord is given once and forever, then, you have only one option – to “walk” on these sounds, trying to find all possible contrasts in this situation.⁹

⁹ Dmitry Shulgin. *Alfred Schnittke's Obscure Years* (Moscow, 1993), p. 45

Using this compositional technique, Schnittke wanted to challenge himself to write a set of variations from the limited musical material. The piece is very compact, with each variation consisting of just several measures. Describing his *Variations on One Chord*, the composer says: “The pitch is a kernel of form development and poly-stylistic variety through all variations.”¹⁰ The source for the variations is one twelve-tone chord presented in the first measure with the tempo marking of *Grave*. It should be noted that the composer calls this a chord, but it is not a chord in the traditional sense. The pedal marking makes all twelve notes sound as one chord by the end of the first measure.

Example 7. Alfred Schnittke. *Variations on One Chord*. m.1



The *Grave* is followed by a set of variations that are based off the twelve tones presented. Despite this challenging compositional technique, Schnittke’s *Variations on One Chord* is not just a compositional exercise, but each variation is a miniature with individual character and style. In these variations Schnittke combines the

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 45

impressionistic style with modern writing. This work contains many ideas (sketches), which Schnittke develops later in his larger compositions.

Eight Pieces for Piano is a set of miniatures for young pianists. These pieces were written in 1971 for Schnittke's son, Andrei. Schnittke's eight pieces are tonal, and each piece has a title: "Folk Song," "In the Mountains," "Cuckoo and Woodpecker," "Melody," "Tale," "Play," "Children's Piece," and "March." These pieces are written in the tradition of Russian romanticism.

Five Aphorisms for piano were written for the Carnegie Hall debut of Alexander Slobodyanik in 1990. The dedication has two names: A. Slobodyanik and I. Brodsky, the latter of whose poems were recited in between pieces at the Carnegie Hall performance. The idea of Schnittke's *Aphorisms* is associated with a similar composition of Shostakovich, who wrote *Ten Aphorisms for Piano*, op. 13, in 1927. The form of the cycle has similarities to many of Schnittke's multimovement chamber compositions, many of which have slow movements at the beginning and at the end. The first and second pieces are much longer than the third, fourth, and fifth. Therefore, the cycle can be divided into larger episodes: pieces 1 and 2 as a first part, and pieces 3, 4, and 5 as a second part of the cycle.

The atmosphere of slow and quiet music in Schnittke's *Aphorisms* has an association with his arrangement of "Silent Night" (1978), which is very dark. This emotional affect is conveyed by a special sound effect; the famous melody of "Silent Night" is performed by the solo violin while very soft tone-clusters in the low register are played by the piano. These clusters are so quiet that the listener almost does not

notice them by ear, but is able to notice that “Silent Night” does not sound as familiar and tonal as it does in the original version.

Five Aphorisms for piano is a very introspective work. It is one of Schnittke’s last compositions for piano, with the very last being Sonata for Piano No.3 written in 1992. During this period Schnittke was working on compositions that include: *Historia von D. Johann Fausten*, based on the story of Faust, the opera *Gesualdo*, and music for the movie *The Master and Margarita*, based on a Bulgakov’s novel. These late compositions have deep philosophical contexts about life and death and good and evil.

Five Aphorisms represents similar ideas. The subject of a chorale in the first and second pieces symbolizes hope, but during the last three pieces the chorale does not sound again. Schnittke ends each *Aphorism* on *pianissimo*, with long notes and rests that allow the music to fade into silence, as if there would be no resolution, and no hope. “Hope” was something important that Schnittke was searching for in his compositions. Describing his earlier Concerto for Piano and Strings, he says:

I found the desired somnambulistic security in the approach to triteness in form and dynamics—and in the immediate avoidance of the same,... where everything — unable to create the balance between “sunshine” and “storm clouds”—shatters finally into a thousand pieces.... The Coda consists of dream-like soft recollections of all that came before. Only at the end does a new uncertainty arise - maybe not without hope?¹¹

¹¹ Elena Simonyants. “The Piano Concerto by Alfred Schnittke – The Piano Concerto by Efreim Podgaitis: “At the Last Line,” *Music and Time*, (Moscow, 2013), p. 39

Piano Sonatas

The three piano sonatas of Alfred Schnittke belong to his late period, when the composer was moving from the neoclassical style to atonality. They were written between 1987 and 1992. The genre of sonata was one of Schnittke's favorites; he wrote three sonatas for violin and piano (1963, 1968, 1994), *Trio-Sonata* for violin, cello, piano, and chamber orchestra (1968), *Quasi una Sonata* for violin and orchestra (1987), and two cello sonatas (1978, 1994). Writing in sonata form, Schnittke simplifies the textual structure and increases the emotional content of music by using motivic development. A similar approach was used in the sonatas of other Soviet composers such as Shostakovich, Ustvolskaya, and Shchedrin.

In his compositions Schnittke was looking for conceptualism and creating a universal musical language by combining many different styles and techniques. He says: "Writing a composition, I create a whole world."¹² In his sonatas Schnittke does not avoid the principles of the genre, such as contrast between themes and conceptual connections between movements. He combines the classical form of sonata with innovative techniques of the twentieth century, such as serialism, experimental sonority, aleatoric technique, and pointillism.

The three piano sonatas were all written in the same period and have similar form. The First and Third Sonatas have identical movements: *Lento – Allegro (Allegretto) – Lento – Allegro*. The composer uses conceptual arches in between movements of each sonata and in between all three sonatas. Some movements of the

¹² Dmitry Shulgin. *Alfred Schnittke's Obscure Years*, (Moscow, 1993), p. 3

sonatas have similar musical material and style. For example, the themes of the Second Sonata and Third Sonata are written in the style of a *sarabande* and have similar melodies.

Schnittke's piano sonatas are tragic and deep in context. One of the ideas, which unites his piano sonatas, is a chant. Schnittke uses religious chorales and chants in his compositions quite often. He quotes original Orthodox and Catholic melodies, as well as his own melodies, stylized as traditional chants. The ideas of chorale-like phrases are often symbolic and have spiritual meaning. Such chants can symbolize a prayer or to raise meaningful questions in Schnittke's music.

In all three sonatas, Schnittke uses imitation of bells. This is a traditional feature of Russian music associated with cathedral bells. It symbolizes a vision of the Slavic middle ages of Russia, sacred monasteries, and a sense of the vast Russian landscape with ancient forests and lakes. Imitating bells in his music, Schnittke continues the traditions of Borodin, Musorgsky, Tchaikovsky, Rachmaninov, Shostakovich, and many other Russian composers.

Thus, having many common ideas and musical features, the three piano sonatas of Schnittke can be considered as a piano cycle, similarly to the three "War" sonatas of Sergei Prokofiev. In each sonata, Schnittke exposes meditative and lyrical images, which have dramatic and expressive development, but instead of reaching a climax, the music arrives to a final crisis. Irina Ryabuhova, a professor at the Schnittke Institute, states:

Schnittke's compositions reflect one of the leading tendencies of avant garde music – reconceptualization of

the sound. The new concept of sound is connected to symbolism, philosophy, and religion.¹³

Often in his piano sonatas Schnittke uses sarcastic and ironic melodies, written in a banal style. He associated the banal style with the devil. Describing the theme of his First Symphony, he says:

I take two notes of Dies Irae, which are by coincidence identical to the popular tune, and it all turns into triviality – which in this case is not wrong, because there are connections between the Dies Irae and the Devil’s banality.¹⁴

The composer also considered Soviet mass culture as evil; therefore, many dance forms, such as the waltz and tango, which were popular at that time, were represented in the diabolic images of Schnittke’s music. Describing the contrasting ideas of Schnittke’s music, Maria Kostakeva says:

Whereas the sphere of evil and Devil is revealed through trivial music, the sphere of goodness is expressed through the language of baroque, classical-romantic and expressionistic music, on the one hand, and the liturgical traditions of different religions, on the other hand.¹⁵

In his piano sonatas, Schnittke prefers coloristic sound effects. He extends the dynamic range from *pppp* to *ffff*, where the softest sonorities appear as shadows, and the

¹³ Natalya Ryabuhova. *Piano Sonatas of A. Schnittke as a Classical Heritage of Modern Musical Culture*, (Moscow, 2014), p. 332

¹⁴ Maria Kostakeva. “Artistic Individuality in Schnittke’s Overture and His New Political Mythology,” *Seeking the Soul. The music of Alfred Schnittke*, (London, 2002), p. 20

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 20

loudest clusters symbolize the conflict of a human being with the reality of the world. Using the loudest and softest dynamics, Schnittke extends the auditory range of the music. He says: “The real music is just the smallest part of a gigantic music world, but if a man will be very attentive, he may feel this gigantic illusive world.”¹⁶

All three sonatas end very quietly. As A. Ivashkin says: “Schnittke’s compositions do not have resolution, or a real ending. The music returns to its original source – silence.”¹⁷ Schnittke does not reach a conclusion at the end, but just stops suddenly with a tone-cluster or dies away, as if the conversation would be continued. Each sonata is a discussion of important philosophical ideas, which cannot be explained or understood completely in one composition. To portray these ideas musically, Schnittke leaves room at the end of each sonata for continuation. The composer expresses similar ideas in his other compositions of this period, such as Symphony No. 6 and Symphony No. 9, Concerto for Piano Four Hands, and the “Faust Cantata.”

Discussing the unusual endings of Schnittke’s piano sonatas, Anna Andrushkevich writes:

What did Schnittke hear in this music? All three sonatas end tragically. The First breaks off in a chaotic cluster; the Second ends with the desolate dying away of the chorale; the Third - with a nervous, muddled passage, lost without trace in the final chord. It seems that, looking at these three works, Schnittke might have reiterated the words of the poet Georgy Ivanov: “The mirrors reflect each other,

¹⁶ Alfred Schnittke. “The Reality, Which I Was Waiting for My Entire Life,” *Soviet Music* No. 9, (Moscow, 1988), p. 21

¹⁷ Alexander Ivashkin. *Preview to Schnittke’s Piano Compositions*. (St.-Petersburg, 2009), p. 3

mutually distorting the reflection. I believe not in the invincibility of evil, but just in the inevitability of defeat.¹⁸

Schnittke's piano sonatas are compositions that possess much meaning beyond the notes. Similar to his other works, in the sonatas he raises very important questions such as: the meaning of life and death, good versus evil, tragic events in life, and spirituality. The music of the sonatas is not programmatic but contains multiple hidden meanings and leaves the larger field for interpretation. Schnittke says: "I have come to the conclusion, that the more everything is 'hidden' in a piece of music, the more it gains in depth and infinity."¹⁹

Piano Concertos

The genre of concerto was very popular with Soviet composers. In the 1960s and 1970s, many Russian avant-garde composers such as Shchedrin, Gubaidullina, Denisov, and Schnittke, wrote in this genre. The concerto was one of Schnittke's favorite genres, composing 26 works in all. His first written composition was the Concerto for Accordion and Orchestra. Although Schnittke's concertos derived many new features from modern music, the form is traditional. Schnittke expressed novelty in his concertos through other musical aspects.

The musical material in Schnittke's concertos was more expositional than developmental. His themes are not long and melodic, but rather short and laconic.

¹⁸ Alfred Schnittke, *Complete Piano Sonatas*, Igor Tchetaev, Booklet by Anna Andrushkevich, Caro Mitis label compact disc, 2005.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

Furthermore, the thematic material is not influenced by Russian folklore as it was in the concertos of Tchaikovsky and Prokofiev. Additionally, the role of improvisation in Schnittke's concertos is very important. He uses extended cadenzas and episodes, where the piano part sounds improvised. This feature relates Schnittke's concerto style to a baroque and classical concerto.

The combination of orchestral timbres and balance between *tutti* and *soli* is also similar to the baroque period concerti of Corelli, Vivaldi, and Bach. The orchestral groups are treated individually, as it would be with a large ensemble with many soloists. Schnittke's orchestral writing is not for large forces, as it was for many twentieth-century concertos of other composers; he preferred the chamber orchestra. The composer also individualizes orchestral parts and adds unusual timbres such as electric instruments and harpsichord. Schnittke also uses percussive sound effects in his concertos extensively. Often, the piano and strings are interpreted as percussive instruments, and are called to use such techniques such as *col legno* for strings and tone-clusters for the piano part.

The contextual depth is often reached by writing opposing orchestral and solo parts. For example, while the piano has tone-clusters and mechanical sounds, the orchestra plays a soft chant-like melody, or the orchestra and soloist will play each episode separately, one at a time, as if they would exist in two separate realities. In this way, the role of timbre in Schnittke's music is different from the classical and romantic tradition. Through combining and opposing different colors, he achieves a certain emotional state, where the shape of melody is often not important and the timbre becomes the primary focal point. Describing Schnittke's concerto style, Alex Ross says:

The philosopher and musicologist T. W. Adorno, who studied with Berg, called his teacher's valedictory work a "concerto for composer and orchestra." Schnittke's concertos are seemingly a series of fantasies on this idea, with the soloist ventriloquizing the composer's lonely voice as he negotiates his way across the minefield of tradition.²⁰

Poème for Piano and Orchestra

His first work for piano, *Poème for Piano and Orchestra*, was written in 1953 and was neither published nor performed. As of the year 2018, it still has not been performed. The manuscript is in Schnittke's archive in London.

Concerto for Piano and Orchestra

Concerto for Piano and Orchestra is one of the composer's early works. It was written in 1960 when Schnittke was applying to study composition as a student at the Moscow Conservatory. This concerto has three movements: *Allegro*, *Andante*, and *Allegro*. Golubev, Schnittke's future teacher in composition at the conservatory, liked this work very much and suggested that he apply with it. The work is Schnittke's longest piano concerto, about thirty minutes in length. It was performed and recorded once during Schnittke's life time by the pianist Leonid Brumberg and The Orchestra of USSR Radio.

This concerto has never been printed in Russia and has thus been performed very few times since it was written. Sikorski, the official publisher of Schnittke's music in Germany, published the score of the concerto, taking into consideration three manuscript

²⁰ Alex Ross. "Connoisseur of Chaos: Schnittke," *The New Republic*, (1992), p. 5

sources (not all Schnittke's). The orchestral score as well as the piano reduction were prepared by someone else, so there were many spots where the text could not be clarified. Nevertheless, this concerto was the only composition among his early works that Schnittke wanted to list in his catalogue.

Concerto for Piano and Orchestra is written in a traditional form and resembles the concerto style of Stravinsky, Prokofiev, and Shostakovich. Describing it, Schnittke says:

The concerto is quite traditional: with a toccata style first movement, classical slow movement, and motor finale. I was interested in the music of Hindemith during that time – this is where fourths and linear harmonic structure come from.²¹

The first movement – *Allegro* – is written in concerto form with two contrasting themes. There is a notable influence of Russian symphonic music and folk tradition. The second movement – *Andante* – is lyrical music, with some sadness and nostalgia. It has several large culminations. Proportionally, the second movement is much longer than the first and third movements. The piano cadenza is placed after the second movement and developed in a grandiose style. It is similar to the cadenza from Prokofiev's Second Piano Concerto. The third movement is a virtuosic *Allegro*. There are some jazz elements in the piano part and orchestra. This movement is developed with a *crescendo* towards the end leading to an exciting coda.

The Concerto for Piano and Orchestra is unusual example of Schnittke's writing style and emotional context. The work shows less use of modern compositional

²¹ Dmitry Shulgin. "Years of Unknown Schnittke," *Direct Media*, (2016), p. 16

techniques, that Schnittke later adopted and used frequently. The music does not convey feelings of tragedy and darkness, which are moods frequently inferred from his later compositions. The uniqueness of this work is in its emotional context. It shows a different Schnittke: optimistic, energetic, bright, and hopeful.

Music for Piano and Chamber Orchestra

Schnittke's piano concertos are not numbered, which makes it unclear how many works exist in this genre. *Music for Piano and Chamber Orchestra* is not literally a concerto, which further confuses the issue. This composition was written in 1964, when Schnittke was finishing his degree at the Moscow Conservatory. The piece belongs to Schnittke's early period, and it does not reflect the unique style that he later developed. During this period Schnittke was using serialist principles in his music. In a conversation with Dmitry Shulgin he describes these principles as follows:

In the second movement I used a very interesting idea, called "The tree," meaning the compositional form. The body of the "tree" is a chain of serial transpositions, a passacaglia, which changes the key and the rhythm; "benches" – is a unison, with which new serial transposition starts. The general idea of "the tree" still looks interesting for me, but now I feel less passionate about this piece, because it is too overdried by serial technique.²²

The piece had a successful performance history: it was performed at a contemporary music festival, "Warsaw Autumn," in Poland; in Leningrad under the

²² *Ibid.*, p. 14

conducting of Gennady Rozhdestvensky; as well as in Belgium and the United States. Because of its complex ensemble, *Music for Piano and Chamber Orchestra* is not performed often.

Music for Piano and Chamber Orchestra was written for string orchestra, with the addition of flute, clarinet, bassoon, trumpet, and percussion. The piano is considered part of the orchestra most of the time, rather than being a solo instrument. The orchestra has the role of a large ensemble of soloists, where each performer has an individual solo part.

The form is quite unusual; there are four movements, and the Cadenza is placed as a single movement. The titles for movements are also not standard: 1st movement – “Variazione,” 2nd movement – “Cantus Firmus,” 3rd movement – “Cadenza,” and 4th movement – “Basso Ostinato.” The last movement was written under the influence of Shchedrin’s “Basso Ostinato,” a piece for piano solo written in 1961 that was very popular.

The first movement - “Variazione” – does not develop the theme in the traditional form of variations. The variety of musical material occurs because of serial development. The music is not divided into sections or variations, but it grows as one general crescendo from the beginning to the end. The piano acts as a percussion instrument with many clusters.

The second movement, “Cantus firmus,” is written in a rhapsodic improvisational manner, where orchestral episodes occur between large piano solos. The soloist and orchestra do not collaborate as in a traditional concerto, but rather play

as almost two separate entities. The movement begins with a long piano solo. Melodic notes are in the left hand in the low register with various chords in the right hand. The material is based on serial technique. This piano solo episode is followed by a *tutti*, which has some stylistic features of Scriabin's music. In this movement the orchestra is subdivided into smaller ensembles and solo parts. Each orchestral timbre has an individuality while simultaneously being a part of the larger group. The timbre of the bell is a very special color in the whole texture.

The piano Cadenza can be considered as a short individual movement. It is written in an improvisational manner and serves as a transition between the poetic second movement and energetic *finale*.

The fourth movement, "Basso Ostinato," is written in a pointillistic style, beginning with a phrase where each note of the melody is played on a different instrument. The number of notes increases, creating the image of a complicated engine, where each part has its own function. Speeding up, it crashes at the end with loud tone-clusters. This is a rare ending where Schnittke uses loud dynamics and exciting rhythms. Most of his works have very soft and questioning last phrases, as if the antecedent would be left without a consequent. The pointillistic manner of the last movement shows that Schnittke treated each musician in the orchestra as an individual soloist.

Concerto for Piano Four Hands and Chamber Orchestra

It is considered unusual to write a concerto for one piano four-hands. Many composers have written concertos for two pianos and orchestra, but Schnittke wanted to demonstrate the duality of one instrument, as if it would have two different natures. The concerto was written in 1988 for Irina Schnittke and Viktoria Postnikova (the wife of the conductor, Gennady Rozhdestvensky), and was premiered in 1990. This concerto was not published in Russia. In the preview to the compact disc, recorded in 1992 in London, Schnittke says:

I had several tasks, working on this concerto. One of them was the development of the form. Here two pianists have absolutely different functions. After thinking a lot, I, finally, found a solution: the concerto starts with obvious contrasts, and ends with temporary reconciliation.²³

The concerto has a Liszt-inspired one-movement form with three episodes: slow – fast – slow. The culmination of the concerto is written in a dramatic, surrealistic manner. Writing for piano four hands, Schnittke conceives of the piano differently. He gets more sound from the instrument through making more complex textures, which would be impossible for only one performer. Also, he likes the idea of the duality of one instrument, possibly referring to his late philosophical views regarding Faust and Mephistopheles, good and evil.

²³ Alfred Schnittke, *Concerto for Piano Four Hands and Chamber Orchestra*, London Sinfonietta, Gennadi Rojdestvenski, Victoria Postnikova, Irina Schnittke. Erato Label compact disc, London, 1992.

The orchestra is seen as one organism, not as a large ensemble of soloists, as it was in most of Schnittke's other concertos. In addition to the string chamber orchestra, there are parts for flute, oboe, clarinet, trumpet, trombone, and percussion.

This concerto reflects Schnittke's late stylistic features and can conceptually be related to his piano sonatas and *Aphorisms*, where the line between evil and good is very ambiguous. In a conversation with the composer,²⁴ Valentina Kholopova describes the conceptual principles of symphonic music, such as the confrontation of opposite forces with a meaningful conclusion at the end. In this context she said that Schnittke continues the tradition of great symphonists – Beethoven, Mahler, Tchaikovsky, and Shostakovich. Surprisingly, Schnittke insisted on excluding himself from this tradition, explaining that the polarity between light and dark was now reduced, and existence should be accepted with this reality, without subdividing it into black and white or good and evil. He believes that this is the way it was before Beethoven, in the music of Palestrina and Guillaume de Machaut, and the same way it appears in the twentieth century in the music of Webern and Messiaen.

²⁴ Valentina Kholopova and Elena Chigariova, *Alfred Schnittke*, (Moscow, 2003), p. 134

CHAPTER 4

CONCERTO FOR PIANO AND STRINGS

The Concerto for Piano and Strings is one of the most important and popular works among Schnittke's compositions. It was written in 1979 during the composer's late period. I discovered this composition in 2001 at a concert given by the Omsk Philharmonic by Larisa Smeshko (pianist) and Yuri Nikolaevsky (conductor and friend of the composer). The music was so deeply dramatic that after the musicians finished the last chords no one in the audience moved. There was complete silence in the crowded concert hall for almost one minute, followed by a huge standing ovation. I have never experienced such a reaction to music in my life - it was mesmerizing. In October 2017 I had chance to perform the Concerto for Piano and Strings with the Temple University Orchestra, conducted by Andreas Delfs.

The music of Schnittke is very unusual. Sometimes it is shocking, and unpleasant, but it never leaves a listener indifferent. As Anna Andrushkevich says:

Schnittke's world, like *Solaris*, puts the person who wishes to enter it to the test and does not admit everyone. But once one has understood this music, once one has submitted to its aim, it is impossible to return to one's previous point of equilibrium.²⁵

The Concerto for Piano and String Orchestra was dedicated to Vladimir Krainev, a Laureate of the 1970 International Tchaikovsky Competition and soloist with the Moscow Philharmonic. The concerto was premiered in 1979 in Leningrad. Referring to

²⁵ Alfred Schnittke, *Complete Piano Sonatas*, Igor Tchetaev, Booklet by Anna Andrushkevich, Caro Mitis label compact disc, 2005.

the conception of its form and poly-stylistic elements, Schnittke describes the work as follows:

I found the desired somnambulistic security in the approach to triteness in form and dynamics—and in the immediate avoidance of the same,... where everything—unable to create the balance between “sunshine” and “storm clouds”—shatters finally into a thousand pieces. The Coda consists of dream-like soft recollections of all that came before. Only at the end does a new uncertainty arise - maybe not without hope?²⁶

The dramatic events in the composer’s life outlined in the first chapter of this paper influenced his music tremendously. Schnittke said: “When you work on your composition, you create a world.”²⁷ The tragic concept of the concerto refers to the basic problems of human existence and the eternal question about the finiteness of life. Schnittke’s Concerto for Piano and Strings became a declaration of his style and an important step in the development of this genre.

The form of the concerto is quite unusual; it is in a one-movement variation form, but the theme of the variations appears only at the very end. The first motives can be considered as a source for development of the variations, moving to the final point – the theme at the end. The following analysis of the concerto has similarities to the programmatic approach of Tibor Szasz in his article about Liszt’s B Minor Sonata.²⁸

²⁶ Alexander Ivashkin. *Conversations with Alfred Schnittke*. (Moscow, 1994), p. 15

²⁷ Elena Simonyants. “The Piano Concerto by Alfred Schnittke – The Piano Concerto by Efreim Podgaitis: “At the Last Line,” *Music and Time* No. 11, (Moscow, 2013), p. 45

²⁸ Tibor Szasz. “Liszt’s Symbols for the Divine and Diabolical: Their Revelation of a Program in the B Minor Sonata,” *Journal of the American Liszt Society*, (1984), pp. 39-95

According to V. Kholopova,²⁹ Schnittke's unusual approach to the form is based on the following programmatic concept of the concerto: a human being seeks for the meaning of life, living through dramatic reality and death, but there is possibly hope after the end of life.

There are two editions of this concerto, which have minor differences in text: the Sikorski Edition (Hamburg, 2009), which is based on two manuscript sources, and the Soviet Composer Edition (Moscow, 1982). These differences are not mistakes, they are two slightly different versions, and it is up to the performer which one to choose. When Schnittke was working with soloists, he would slightly change the text for each individual performer, but he never changed the original score. This is where the discrepancies amongst the scores comes from.

The variation form of the concerto does not have a clear structure. As in Schnittke's *Variations on One Chord*, he does not number each variation. Sometimes it is difficult to tell where a new variation starts, and where there is another episode of the same variation. Schnittke was not interested in variation form as a traditional genre. Rather, he considered it as a kaleidoscopic variety of thematic material seen from different angles. Nine episodes (variations) can be distinguished in the concerto. In contrast to *Variations on One Chord*, where every variation is a miniature sketch, here each variation has its individual emotional sphere, character, and form. Schnittke makes transitions between them, developing thematic material in a rhapsodic way, as if each variation would be a chapter of a novel.

²⁹ Valentina Kholopova and Elena Chigariova. *Alfred Schnittke*, (Moscow, 2003), p. 125

One of the important thematic ideas in the concerto is Russian Orthodox chant, which symbolizes another reality and eternal life. The piano solos are in opposition to the strings and are not written in the standard concerto style. The piano writing uses percussive principles of touch, which symbolizes dramatic and tragic ideas juxtaposed against the strings that are smoother in timbre but dissonant in harmony.

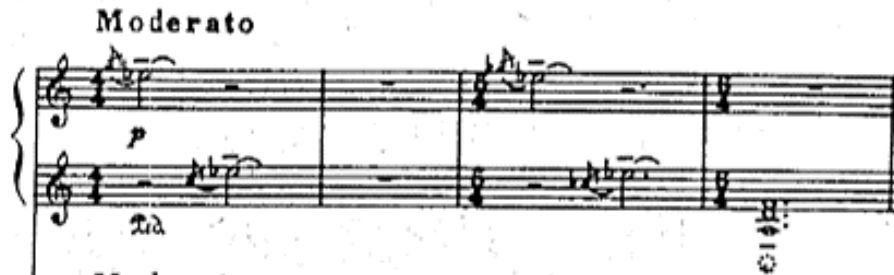
In the concerto Schnittke uses many baroque and classical stylistic principles. One of the main features of this work is *ostinato*. Almost every variation has *ostinato* phrases and rhythms. Additionally, Schnittke realizes the *crescendo* in a baroque manner; he adds an increasing number of notes in the piano part to have more sound instead of using the natural *crescendo* capability of the instrument. In this aspect, he continues the traditions of Domenico Scarlatti, who added more notes in chords to achieve louder sound in his harpsichord sonatas. In general, the *crescendo* is used mostly in culminations. In other passages, Schnittke prefers terrace dynamics. Lastly, some other features of baroque music in this concerto are grace notes and trills; the concerto starts from two motives with grace notes.

Analysis

The concerto starts with a slow piano solo (*Moderato*), which consists of only two soft motifs and a minor chord. The texture is very minimalistic and creates an atmosphere of loneliness and emptiness. These motifs sound as questions, which the author establishes in the beginning of the composition and then goes through different

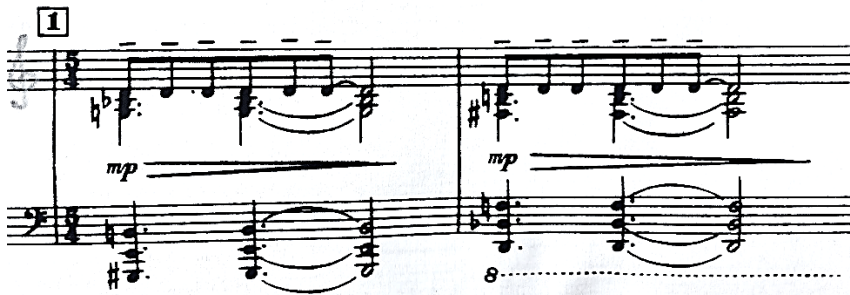
circumstances (variations) trying to find an answer. As such, these simple motifs become the source for the musical development of variations.

Example 8. Alfred Schnittke. Concerto for Piano and Strings. mm. 1-4



The second part of the piano solo is a recitation on one tone. This recitation is an imitation of Orthodox chant and can be pronounced as a prayer: *Го-спо-ди по-ми-луй* (go-spo-di po-mi-lui), which means: *Lord, have mercy*.

Example 9. Alfred Schnittke. Concerto for Piano and Strings. mm. 9-10



These two elements – lonely motifs and chant – become the main musical ideas of the concerto. Schnittke uses recitation (chanting on one tone) very often in his music. He describes his interest of repetition in the piano part as follows:

I recommend this experiment to everybody: press the right pedal and play one note for multiple times, better to play it in the low register.... At a certain moment you will realize that you start hearing other overtones: octave, fifth, third. So, you start understanding, that this note is not the only note there, and you press this note with the same speed and depth, but you understand that they all are absolutely different.³⁰

When using very simple minimalistic ideas, Schnittke makes them sound very expressive. He achieves this by using various dynamics (each phrase has a dynamic marking), articulation (accents and tenuto), complex harmonization, and registration. This can be seen in the example below.

Example 10. Alfred Schnittke. Concerto for Piano and Strings. mm. 14-23

The orchestra joins the piano in the first variation (*Andante*). The entrance of the orchestra is not a *tutti* opening but is a single *pp* note. The piano texture in the *Andante* is based on a very simple and tonal repeated pattern, which is developed from the opening motifs. This minimalistic texture makes the appearance of subtle, shadow-like tone-

³⁰ Elena Chigariova. *The Artistic World of Alfred Schnittke*, (St.-Petersburg, 2012), p. 267

clusters and dissonances sound frightening, as they interrupt the purity of this simple music.

Example 11. Alfred Schnittke. Concerto for Piano and Strings. mm. 24-32

The musical score for Example 11, Alfred Schnittke's Concerto for Piano and Strings, measures 24-32, is presented in two systems. The top system shows the piano part, and the bottom system shows the string quartet. Both are marked 'Andante'. The piano part begins with a descending chromatic scale in the right hand, marked 'pp'. The string quartet enters with a similar descending chromatic scale in the first violin, marked 'ppp'. The piano part continues with a series of chords, and the string quartet plays a chorale-like texture. The piano part concludes with a large chord, marked 'ppp'.

The very first orchestral phrase is a descending chromatic scale which covers all pitches from *c* to *c#*. Later, this grows into a chaotic-sounding episode written in serial technique. During the first twenty-two measures, the piano and orchestral parts do not collaborate or coincide but move as two parallel entities. Then, in the culmination they come to a confrontation; the orchestra plays a chorale based on the recitation from the beginning (*Lord, have mercy*), while the piano plays large chords that are reminiscent of bells.

These two textures represent two different symbols. The chorale is a symbol of faith, and the bells, while also having religious implications, were traditionally used to describe mighty Russia. This is how bells were used in the works of Borodin, Mussorgsky, Rachmaninov, and many other Russian composers. However, in the Concerto for Piano and Strings bells do not sound in a traditional way but rather they are

damaged by dissonances and represent ugliness instead. Schnittke imitates bells in the bass-note of the piano as is illustrated in rehearsal number five of example below. The same bass *c* continues to repeat during eleven measures, which creates the idea of persistence: nothing can be avoided or changed.

Example 12. Alfred Schnittke. Concerto for Piano and Strings. mm. 45-47

Mixing two textures (chorale in the orchestra and bells in the piano part), Schnittke creates a powerful emotion in the music. There are many ways to interpret this episode, as it has hidden programmatic meanings. When Schnittke was working on this concerto in 1979, Soviet Russia was still an atheistic country. While religion was not completely prohibited, it was strongly discouraged and in the 1930s multiple cathedrals were destroyed. Religious events and holy days were no longer holidays, and children were not allowed to be baptized. People were forced to think in a certain way and to accept reality as it existed with no complaints. Mussorgsky and Rachmaninov were describing ideals of nineteenth-century Russia, imitating bells of cathedrals and

monasteries as they represented strength, happiness, and belief, while Schnittke was showing how much these ideals were damaged and destroyed in the Soviet reality.

During the culmination of this variation, the chorale in the orchestra sounds in a traditional and tonal *tutti*. This signifies noble ideals, but the beautiful sound of the orchestra is interrupted several times by piano tone-clusters, as if some opposite force would intrude and break up these noble traditions. Here, in the piano part Schnittke uses “mirror chords,” which are chords that symmetrically have the same intervals in both hands, located as if they would be a reflection of one another. This is illustrated in the example below.

Example 13. Alfred Schnittke. Concerto for Piano and Strings. mm. 69-70

The image shows a musical score for piano, specifically measures 69 and 70. The score is written for both the right and left hands. The right hand is in the treble clef and the left hand is in the bass clef. The music consists of a series of chords that are symmetrically placed around a central axis, creating a mirror effect. The chords are primarily triads and dyads, with some more complex structures. The notation includes stems, beams, and various accidentals (sharps and flats). The overall texture is dense and complex, characteristic of Schnittke's style.

This large climatic episode is followed by a contrasting second variation (*Tempo D*). The piano part is written in the style of Chopin’s Nocturnes and the orchestra plays sliding *glissandi* between pitches, which sound like moans. Starting from a single tone, each group in the orchestra adds a few notes in chromatic order, which grows into a dissonant texture. This is outlined in the example below.

Example 14. Alfred Schnittke. Concerto for Piano and Strings. mm. 73-75

The musical score for Example 14 is divided into two systems. The first system contains the piano part, featuring a melodic line with triplets and a 'sim.' (sostenuto) marking. The second system contains the string ensemble, with dynamics ranging from *mp* to *p*. The score is written in a key with one flat and a 3/4 time signature.

The music of this concerto is not always dramatic. There are some lyrical episodes, which sound unique amongst the larger tragic context of the composition. These rare moments represent a dream-like state, but always return to the dramatic reality and the main question (the recitation theme). This can be seen in the example below; the first and second measures are written in a lyrical mood, and the third and fourth measures outline the recitation theme.

Example 15. Alfred Schnittke. Concerto for Piano and Strings. mm. 93-96

The musical score for Example 15 is a single system showing the piano and string parts. The piano part has dynamics *mp* and *mf*, and the string part has a dynamic of *mp*. The score includes tempo markings: *poco accelerando*, *rit.*, *a tempo*, and *rit.*. The score is written in a key with one flat and a 3/4 time signature.

The third variation is an energetic *scherzo* (*Allegro*). The piano is written as an integral part of the orchestral texture similar to the piano or harpsichord parts in Schnittke's *Concerto Grossi*. The texture of the strings is reminiscent of Vivaldi concertos. Throughout this variation, the piano part has very energetic mechanical figurations, which give the feeling of a motor. In the strings, Schnittke writes baroque style phrases but uses short *glissandi* in between notes, adding sarcasm and projecting a darker mood. The piano part has *ostinato* accents on the second and fourth beats, which give the music a limping effect. In the darker context of the variation, this feature can be related to images of the devil who is often portrayed as limping.

Example 16. Alfred Schnittke. Concerto for Piano and Strings. mm. 138-140

The image shows a page of a musical score for measures 138-140. The score is arranged in a system with the following parts from top to bottom: Piano solo, Violin I (V-n I), Violin II (V-n II), Viola (V-la), Violoncello (V-c, 4 parts), and Contrabass (C-b, 2 parts). The piano part is marked 'P.no solo' and features a complex, motoric rhythmic pattern with accents on the second and fourth beats. The string parts (Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Violoncello, and Contrabass) play baroque-style phrases with short glissandi between notes. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

In the middle of the variation, Schnittke places the first phrase of the concerto (two motifs with grace-notes), written with a *fortissimo* dynamic marking and accents in the piano that give it a percussive nature. The orchestral part is a reference to the recitation (*Lord, have mercy*). In a measure of common time, Schnittke places an accent every three beats, which gives the aural allusion of a shifting downbeat.

Example 17. Alfred Schnittke. Concerto for Piano and Strings. mm. 158-160

The end of the third variation is a canon on the recitation from the beginning of the concerto but Schnittke now changes its manner (example 18). First, the theme shifts from the piano *solo* to the orchestral *tutti*. Second, the tempo is much faster and the rhythm is very precise compared to the *rubato* manner of the beginning. Lastly, the dynamic level is raised from *mp* to *f*.

Example 18. Alfred Schnittke. Concerto for Piano and Strings. mm. 176-177

Musical score for measures 176-177, featuring five staves: V-ni I, V-ni II, V-la, V-c., and C-b. The score is marked with a box containing the number 17. The V-ni I and V-ni II staves are marked "div. in 3 sul pont." and "div. in 3 sul pont." respectively. The V-la and V-c. staves are marked "tutti div. in 3 sul pont." and "tutti div. in 3 sul pont." respectively. The V-c. staff also has a "div. pizz." marking. The C-b. staff has a "div. pizz." marking. The music consists of rhythmic patterns of eighth notes and quarter notes, with some triplets and accents.

This canon leads to a culmination, during which the chorale sounds in C major with no added distortion for the first time in the concerto.

Example 19. Alfred Schnittke. Concerto for Piano and Strings. mm. 184-189

Musical score for measures 184-189, featuring five staves: V-ni I, V-ni II, V-la, V-c., and C-b. The score is marked with a box containing the number 18. The V-ni I, V-ni II, V-la, and V-c. staves are marked "ord." and "ord." respectively. The C-b. staff is marked "ord. arco". The music consists of rhythmic patterns of eighth notes and quarter notes, with some triplets and accents. The V-ni I and V-ni II staves have a "div. in 3 sul pont." marking. The V-la and V-c. staves have a "tutti div. in 3 sul pont." marking. The C-b. staff has a "div. pizz." marking.

Following this variation, a short piano solo returns the music to dissonance. It is a transition between the contrasting third and fourth variations. In this piano passage Schnittke again uses the “mirror” technique – there are the same intervals between notes of the passage, which makes it look like a symmetrical reflection. Similar ideas regarding symmetry and reflection in music were also used by Olivier Messiaen.

Example 20. Alfred Schnittke. Concerto for Piano and Strings. m. 190



The fourth variation (*Moderato*) shows an influence of jazz. Schnittke often uses jazz elements in his music, even in his early works written during the period when jazz was strictly prohibited in Russia. The jazz features in Schnittke’s music are not always completely obvious, but they are just another layer in his multistylistic texture. In the fourth variation of the concerto, the double bass plays a *pizzicato* phrase in jazz style, while the piano has phrases in an improvisational manner. There is an unusual suggestion in the piano part – *subito molto rubato*. The piano part does not sound jazzy, though it has some exotic intonations. This variation has multiple trills and tremolos, as if everything would have some electricity and vibration. The texture could be compared to Scriabin’s Sonata No.10 (“Insect Sonata”). The whole variation is very free-flowing, as if there would be no time-signature or bar lines, leaving the listener with the feeling of a dream-like state or illusion.

Example 21. Alfred Schnittke. Concerto for piano and strings. mm. 193-194

The image shows a musical score for piano and strings, measures 193-194. The piano part is written in a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The first staff (treble clef) contains a complex melodic line with many accidentals and ornaments. The second staff (bass clef) contains a bass line with a sequence of notes. The string part consists of seven staves (violin I, violin II, viola, cello I, cello II, double bass, and a seventh staff). The string parts are mostly sustained notes with some tremolos and accents. The score is in a key with one flat (B-flat major or D minor) and a 3/4 time signature.

The fifth variation, *Tempo di Valse*, is the center of the concerto. Starting from this variation, the composition develops to a more negative emotional state. The waltz starts in the piano part in the low register. The second and third beats are based on the opening theme. The bass line is a sequence, based on the “cross motif,” similar to Bach’s cryptogram (B-A-C-H).

Example 22. Alfred Schnittke. Concerto for Piano and Strings. mm. 217-226

The image shows a musical score for measures 217-226 of Alfred Schnittke's Concerto for Piano and Strings. The score is divided into two systems. The first system is for the piano, with the right hand playing a melody and the left hand playing a bass line. The tempo is marked 'Tempo di Valse' and the dynamics are 'f poco pesante'. The second system is for the strings, with the first violin (Vcllo) and first violin (Vclni) parts. The string parts are marked 'Vcllo' and 'Vclni'.

Schnittke emphasizes the stylistic features of the traditional waltz, making it sound banal and vulgar. The orchestra plays the melody which remotely resembles Tchaikovsky's "Waltz of the Flowers" from the ballet "Sleeping Beauty." However, Schnittke distorts the tonality of a traditional waltz, making it sound ugly. The interpretation of the waltz as a demonic dance was previously used by many composers through history, including Liszt, Saint-Saens, and Ravel.

Example 23. Alfred Schnittke. Concerto for Piano and Strings. mm. 241-244

The image shows a musical score for measures 241-244 of Alfred Schnittke's Concerto for Piano and Strings. The score is divided into five systems. The first system is for the piano, with the right hand playing a melody and the left hand playing a bass line. The piano part is marked 'P.no solo' and 'mp'. The second system is for the first violin (Vn.I), with the dynamics 'p cresc.' and 'unis.'. The third system is for the second violin (Vn.II), with the dynamics 'p cresc.' and 'unis.'. The fourth system is for the viola (Vc.), with the dynamics 'p cresc.', 'tutti', 'mp cresc.', and 'aim.'. The fifth system is for the cello (C.b.), with the dynamics 'p cresc.', 'mp cresc.', 'aim.', and 'mp cresc.'.

The culmination of the waltz is very powerful. The orchestra plays the chorale chords outlining the cross motif, while the piano part plays the first theme written in tone-clusters sounding in *ff*. The bass line of the piano part also outlines the cross motif. With religious connotations of the chorale melody outlined earlier paired with the religious connections of the cross motif in both the orchestra and the piano, this section of the concerto can be seen to possess a deep spiritual meaning beyond the music. However, this is not a culmination in a traditional tonal sense, but rather a powerful crash of spiritual ideas in a cacophony of sound.

Example 24. Alfred Schnittke. Concerto for Piano and Strings. mm. 269-272

At the end of the variation, the beginning of the first theme is repeated twelve times in tone-clusters in *fff*, while the orchestra has descending chromatic chords. It

sounds brutal and creates a large cloud of sound at the end, because each of these twelve phrases are played with sustained damper pedal. In many compositions Schnittke uses a similar effect, where he repeats a chordal figure, or phrase twelve times without changing anything, as if it was an *idée fixe* (for example, the end of his *Improvisation and Fugue*). The number twelve has many significant meanings including Jesus's twelve disciples, twelve months in a year, twelve tones in the chromatic scale, twelve tribes of Israel in Judaism, and many others.

Example 25. Alfred Schnittke. Concerto for Piano and Strings. mm. 284-286

The image shows a page of a musical score for measures 284-286. The top staff is for the Piano solo, with a melodic line and a triplet of eighth notes marked '30' and 'sempre'. Below it are the string parts: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Violoncello (3 parts), and Contrabasso (2 parts). The strings play a rhythmic accompaniment with a triplet of eighth notes marked 'div. in 3' and 'sim.'. The score is in a key with one flat and a 3/4 time signature.

After the large culmination at the end of the fifth variation, Schnittke puts a *fermata* and general pause to create a moment of silence before the next episode starts. The sixth variation is a piano cadenza (*Moderato*). It is an emotional reaction to the diabolic waltz. The cadenza starts from the recitation (*Lord, have mercy*), but here it

conveys a feeling of hopelessness as it sounds in the low register in *pp*. Each phrase dies away with a *diminuendo* and there is some emotional exhaustion and emptiness.

Example 26. Alfred Schnittke. Concerto for Piano and Strings. mm. 298-303



The beginning of the cadenza has a similar atmosphere to the opening of the concerto. This is a philosophical monologue, where an author returns to the same ideas again, but interprets them differently after living through many difficult circumstances. The first phrase of the opening appears here again but sounds very nervous and even hysterical.

Example 27. Alfred Schnittke. Concerto for Piano and Strings. mm. 319-321



The second half of the cadenza is an example of Schnittke's unique *crescendo*. The following features make it unusual:

1. It starts from fast repetitive passages sounding very softly in the extreme low register where pitch is almost not distinguished to the listener. This gives the effect of feeling the presence of a low noise but not a musical phrase.
2. There is no general *crescendo*: Schnittke uses terrace dynamics where each new phrase (element) has a louder dynamic compared to the previous.
3. Each new element is a more complex version of the previous element, this way the texture finally grows into a tone-cluster.
4. There is sustained damper pedal throughout the entire episode, so the echo and overtones from all elements stays and creates more space and sound.

Example 28. Alfred Schnittke. Concerto for Piano and Strings. m. 325

The musical score consists of five systems. The first system is for the piano, with a treble and bass clef, marked *pp* and *rit. sempre*. The second system is for the strings, marked *mf*. The third system is for the piano, marked *sf* and *f*, with the instruction *simile (закрепить акценты)*. The fourth system is for the strings, marked *f*. The fifth system is for the piano, marked *f*. The score includes various dynamics and markings, and ends with a double bar line and a repeat sign.

The *crescendo* section does not have bar lines. However, this episode consists of a number of elements, which Schnittke adds one at a time to create the main climax of the composition.

The first element is a passage in the low register in *pp*. It is based on two triads: B major and C minor. This phrase will be repeated the same way multiple times and after

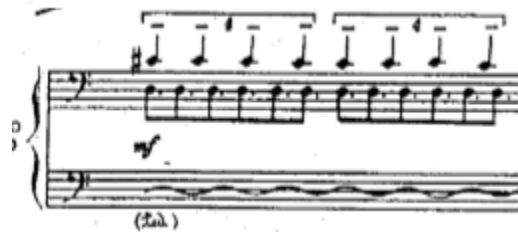
its initial appearance is marked as a wavy line, instead of notes, to make it easier for the performer to read the text.



The second element is the note *d* repeated twelve times in *mp*.



The third element includes the note *d* sounding twelve times in the middle voice plus the note *c#* sounding eight times in the soprano voice with both played at *mf*. Together, they sound in polyrhythm, like the sound of a carillon.



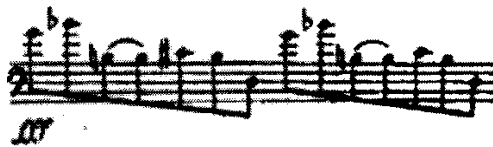
The fourth element contains the same notes, *d* and *c#*, plus the note *b*. Together they make a motif, repeated four times in *forte*. Schnittke writes accents on the first, second, third, and again first note of each motif. He also recommends adding accents to the following phrases using same logic. This way of accentuation also belongs to carillon style.



The fifth element has the note *b flat* in addition to the prior existing notes. The dynamic grows to *fortissimo*.



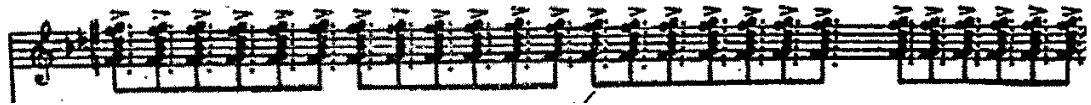
The sixth element sounds on *fff* and has the note *g* in addition.



The eighth element is *ffff* and has the note *f#* in addition. The *ffff* mark is listed only in the Sikorski Edition. The Soviet Composer Edition lists *fff* for this element, but logistically it would be correct to play *ffff* here in the increasing range of dynamics in each new element.



The ninth element serves as a final point. This is a tone-cluster, repeated multiple times.



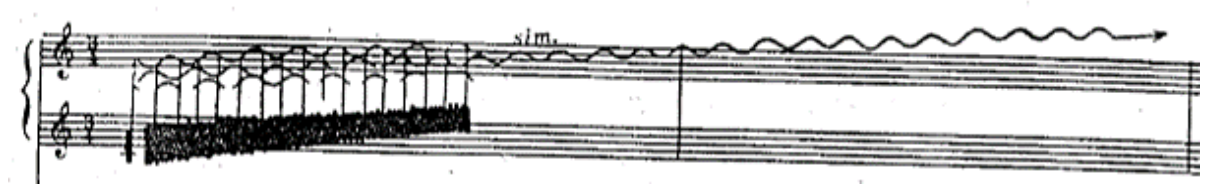
The cadenza leads to the seventh variation (*Moderato*), which starts with a bell-like texture in the piano part (example 29, rehearsal number 36). Here Schnittke imitates the bells in the traditional style that was used by such composers as Rachmaninov and Tchaikovsky. The piano part sounds very monumental. The orchestra joins the piano with tango-like rhythms, which sound very inappropriate in such a serious moment. This creates a clashing situation, where the piano represents some drama, while the orchestra has a sarcastic mocking part.

Example 29. Alfred Schnittke. Concerto for Piano and Strings. mm. 326-328

A musical score for Example 29, Alfred Schnittke's Concerto for Piano and Strings, measures 326-328. The score is divided into two systems. The first system shows the piano part (measures 326-328) and the beginning of the string parts (measures 326-328). The piano part is marked '(Moderato)' and '36' in a box. The string parts are marked '(Moderato)' and '36' in a box. The piano part features a bell-like texture with repeated notes. The string parts feature tango-like rhythms. The second system shows the continuation of the piano part (measures 329-332) and the string parts (measures 329-332). The piano part is marked '(Moderato)' and '36' in a box. The string parts are marked '(Moderato)' and '36' in a box. The piano part features a bell-like texture with repeated notes. The string parts feature tango-like rhythms. The score includes various musical notations such as clefs, key signatures, and dynamics.

The eighth variation (*Maestoso*) is a return to the chorale. This variation is very similar to the second variation, where the chorale in the orchestra is interrupted by dissonant chords in the piano part. The end of this variation is tragic; the chorale gets destroyed. Schnittke reaches this effect by the following technique: the whole orchestra holds the final chord of the chorale, and then, stand by stand, musicians start playing different motifs, so finally the chorale turns into cacophony. There is an unusual passage in the piano part with clusters on white keys, played very fast by the palm, which creates the effect of *glissando* in clusters.

Example 30. Alfred Schnittke. Concerto for Piano and Strings. mm. 355-356



The beginning of the ninth variation is very surprising: the orchestral cacophony unnoticeably turns into an A major chord in *ppp*. Schnittke reaches this effect by using only the first stand of violins and cellos, who each plays a *glissando* from a dissonance to a single note in each part that comprises a consonant triad. This moment is very beautiful, as if a grey dusty cloud would evaporate under a small beam of light. This little beam is like an icon-lamp in the darkness.

If the concept of these variations was considered upside-down, with the theme at the end, this is the place where the new theme occurs. It does not sound new, as elements

of this theme have sounded previously. At first, it is not noticeable and appears as a shadow in the cello *pizzicato* phrase. This theme grows from the cross motif.

Example 31. Alfred Schnittke. Concerto for Piano and Strings. mm. 386-389

Then, Schnittke returns to the opening theme, which sounds calmly in the high register of the piano. Its appearance here makes a logical arch in the form, and could be referred to the literary idea of a character living through a long journey with many tragic events, after which s/he returns to the initial point. This concept is similar to Bach's

Goldberg Variations, where the Aria sounds at the beginning and at the end of thirty-two variations.

Example 32. Alfred Schnittke. Concerto for Piano and Strings. mm. 394-399

The image shows a musical score for Example 32, Alfred Schnittke's Concerto for Piano and Strings, measures 394-399. It consists of two systems. The first system features a piano (Pf. s.) part with two staves and a violin (Vc.) part with one staff. The piano part begins with a cluster of notes, followed by a glissando indicated by a dotted line with a wavy line underneath. The violin part is marked 'non vibr. arco' and 'ppp'. The second system continues the piano part with another cluster and glissando. The piano part is marked 'p' and 'tab'.

The opening theme is interrupted by cluster *glissando* in the piano part. There are flat and natural signs in front of the chord, which means that the clusters are supposed to be played on the white and black keys.

Example 33. Alfred Schnittke. Concerto for Piano and Strings. mm. 407-408

The image shows a musical score for Example 33, Alfred Schnittke's Concerto for Piano and Strings, measures 407-408. It features a piano (Pf. s.) part with two staves and a violin (Vc.) part with one staff. The piano part begins with a cluster of notes, followed by a glissando indicated by a dotted line with a wavy line underneath. The violin part is marked 'sim.' and 'ff'. The piano part is marked 'ff' and 'Red.'.

The very last phrase in the piano part is a theme (the first line of the example below), which previously sounded in the cello part. The conclusion of this dramatic work leaves a feeling of melancholy. The first three notes of the phrase are based on the cross motif. The last four measures are a very soft recitation of *Lord, have mercy*. The low bass-note in the orchestra and the recitation in the high register of the piano sounding together form a tritone, ending the composition without a resolution. Schnittke uses a *diminuendo* in the dynamics and a rhythmic augmentation in time: the first phrase sounds in *p* with a 4/4 time signature, the second phrase is *pp* with a 5/4 time signature, and the last phrase is *ppp* with a 7/4 time signature, which then has a *diminuendo* to silence.

Example 34. Alfred Schnittke. Concerto for Piano and Strings. mm. 412-422

412

p

mp

pp

ppp

sempre

sempre

(8)

(8)

This concerto represents Schnittke's philosophy of his late period, where he tries to find a meaning for life. He thinks that a human being can find the truth only through difficult circumstances, and that the suffering leads one to oneself. This idea became a concept for many of his works, where the musical theme sounds only at the end of the composition, as a symbol of the found meaning. At first, Schnittke even was going to add

the title to his concerto: "Variations not on a theme."³¹ This concept was used by Shchedrin in his Third Piano Concerto with the title *Variations and the Theme*.

The music of the Schnittke's Concerto for Piano and Strings signifies connections among different epochs with polystylism as a main principle. The stylistic ideas of the past symbolize an ideal world in the perception of the twentieth-century artist. The nostalgia for classical ideals in Schnittke's music is an illusion, which does not solve today's problems.

*Contextual parallels with novels:
Doctor Faustus and The Master and Margarita*

The philosophical concept of the Faustus legend had a tremendous impact on Schnittke's ideology. Such ideas as the confrontation between evil and good, the value of the soul of each human being, the position of the artist in the world, and endless search for the truth were essential for Schnittke. These philosophical ideas flow as a red line through his late compositions and appear in such works as: *Faust Cantata* (1983), the ballet *Peer Gynt* (1988), operas *History of Doctor Faustus* (1994), *Gesualdo* (1993), and *Life with an Idiot* (1992). The Concerto for Piano and Strings does not have a written program, but its concept is connected to the same ideas.

The character Faust was an inspiration for such composers as Liszt, Boito, Berlioz, Wagner, Mahler, Stravinsky, and many other artists. Among multiple sources of the

³¹ Valentina Kholopova. "Alfred Schnittke. The Essay on Life and Music," *Soviet Composer*, (Moscow, 1990), p. 140

Faustus legend, Schnittke chose the novel of Thomas Mann, *Doctor Faustus: The Life of the German Composer Adrian Leverkühn, Told by a Friend*. It was written in 1943 and published in 1947. The novel re-tells the story of Faust in the reality of the twentieth century, where Faust is a composer – a fictional character, whose music has parallels with the real inventions of Schoenberg. Leverkühn has syphilis, and because of the nervous delirium he sees Mephistopheles, who gives him inspiration to write outstanding works. Leverkühn dies performing his cantata *The Lamentation of Doctor Faust*. This novel has multiple layers: the historical situation in Nazi Germany, the interpretation of medieval legend, and Leverkühn's madness with the appearance of devil, who says: "The fact, that you can only see me because you are mad, does not mean that I do not exist."³²

In his Concerto for Piano and Strings Schnittke embodies the life of a human being in a religious and philosophical concept. Sergei Vartanov, a pianist and musicologist, writes about the hidden program of Schnittke's concerto in his book *Schnittke as a Creator and Philosopher*.³³ He makes his conclusions by researching the programmatic context of Schnittke's other works of that period and finding conceptual parallels with the concerto. According to Vartanov, the main hero of Schnittke's concerto has characteristic features of Doctor Faustus, as well as similar fictional characters in novels of Pushkin (*The Queen of Spades*), Oscar Wilde (*The Portrait of Dorian Gray*), and Lermontov (*The Hero of Our Time*). Because of the constant imbalance of evil and good in his life, the main hero lives an unsatisfied life, with a futile search for inner harmony.

³² Thomas Mann. *Doctor Faustus: The Life of the German Composer Adrian Leverkühn, Told by a Friend*, (New York, 1947), p. 57

³³ Sergei Vartanov. *Schnittke as a Creator and Philosopher*, (Moscow, 2003).

The story of the main hero culminates with the crash of his soul. Trying to escape emptiness and inanity, he makes a deal with the devil, and starts understanding how fatal his mistake is only when it is too late. The main hero dies, but his repentance leads him to enlightenment and spiritual catharsis.

Schnittke had his own understanding of the devil, who, for him, was not just a character from a medieval legend. Witnessing some of the most difficult episodes of history, Schnittke believed that the devil is present, and he is always around us. Referring to such political demagogues as Stalin and Hitler, he says:

This is the eternal demonic figure that is always reappearing.... That is precisely the Devil at work. Millions of human beings participate in the satanic theatre, for years they are hoodwinked.... It is inconceivable, that such a thing was still possible after the nineteenth century, after the apparent victory of humanism. All at once this darkness, a darkness more dreadful than the whole history of mankind.³⁴

Outlining this idea of the devil being present in the modern world, parallels can be drawn between another important twentieth-century novel, *The Master and Margarita* by Mikhail Bulgakov, and Schnittke's Concerto for Piano and Strings. This novel has a mysterious history. It was written between 1928 and 1940, but the work was never published during Bulgakov's lifetime. It was first published in France in 1967.

The novel is written in the genre of fantasy and mysticism with the main story based on the devil visiting 1930s Soviet Moscow. It has multiple plots: the love story of the writer (Master), the story of Jesus and Pontius Pilate, and tricks of the devil in

³⁴ Ronald Weitzman. "Schnittke and Shadow-sounds," *Seeking the Soul, The Music of Alfred Schnittke*. (London, 2002), p. 14

Moscow. These stories do not have connections at first, and are developed as three parallels, but by the end they all are connected.

This novel could not be published during the time it was written, because it has multiple topics that were prohibited in Soviet Russia, including politics, religion, and criticism of the government and society. The novel was available only in unofficial typewriter print, which people shared in between each other and read secretly. There is no evidence as to when exactly Schnittke had read this novel, but it is known that the novel was published with cuts in *Moscow* magazine in 1966, and then the complete version was printed in 1973. It became the most popular twentieth-century Russian novel in the 1990s.

Many ideas of Bulgakov's novel echo the Faust story. In one of Bulgakov's first versions, the Master was called Faust. Bulgakov's philosophical and religious concepts are very similar to Schnittke's. Both artists have hidden layers in their works that are difficult to interpret directly. The religious aspect for both authors is not understood in its traditional way, and sometimes it is seen from the negative side. In 2003 a deacon, Andrei Kuraev, published a brochure about Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita*, named *The Master and Margarita: For Christ or Against Him?*³⁵ where he tries to prove that Bulgakov's religious views were not negative, because when the work is read, it seems to place religion in a negative light. The same question could be assessed of Schnittke's music, which portrays religious chorales, incantations, and cross motifs in a dissonant

³⁵ Andrei Kuraev. *The Master and Margarita: "For Christ or Against Him?"* (Moscow, 2003)

and dark manner. This leaves the listener with the impression that Schnittke viewed religion in a negative way.

The love between the Master and Margarita meets multiple obstacles in Bulgakov's novel. The Master who searches for the truth, the tragic ending of the story, and the devil among people are all ideas close to the concepts portrayed in the Schnittke's concerto.

In 1993 Schnittke was asked to compose the music for the movie *The Master and Margarita*. This movie was one of the most expensive and promising projects in Russian cinematography. Due to different circumstances it was released only as much shorter version sixteen years after it was filmed, when many people who worked on the project, including Schnittke, were already dead. The leitmotif of Margarita from the movie is reminiscent of one of the rare lyrical episodes of the Concerto for Piano and Strings.

Example 35. Alfred Schnittke. Concerto for Piano and Strings. m. 105



Another conceptual parallel can be made between the concerto and Bulgakov's novel. The waltz in the concerto, where Schnittke represents diabolic images that end with catastrophe, can be referred to a Satan's ball in the novel. Both, Schnittke's waltz and Bulgakov's ball, are culminations of the composition, after which, the story develops

in a negative and dark manner. In Bulgakov's novel, Woland (the devil) organizes the ball in the Moscow apartment, and he asks Margarita to stand by his side to welcome the dark celebrants of the past, arriving directly from hell.

The way Bulgakov describes different realities where physical measurements do not exist, and all action happens only in an imaginary sphere, is also close to Schnittke's perception of time and space. Describing the end of his Concerto for Piano and Strings, Schnittke says:

The epilogue is a fourth reality. Here everything is repeated again, but on the new level. I can't explain it, as I can't explain the idea of the fourth reality, which always "blinks." This is not a surrealism, but a realism, which is different from the terrestrial type. I was trying to represent this novelty in my music.³⁶

The end of Schnittke's concerto, with its tragic atmosphere and questioning affect, is also similar to Bulgakov's novel. The composer asks at the end of the concerto: "maybe not without hope?,"³⁷ meaning that there is possibly another reality after death. In Bulgakov's ending, the Master and Margarita get the "peace," because they did not lose their hope in humanity, but they do not get the "light," because they had connections to the devil. They are spending eternity together in a shadowy region in between heaven and hell, because they do not earn the glory of heaven, but yet, they do not deserve the punishment of hell.

³⁶ Sergei Vartanov. *Schnittke as a Creator and Philosopher*. (Moscow, 2003), p. 121

³⁷ Alexander Ivashkin. *Conversations with Alfred Schnittke*. (Moscow, 2003), p. 153

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Schnittke's Concerto for Piano and Strings reflects the ideas which he developed in his larger works: symphonies, ballets, and operas. His writing in the concerto genre does not use traditional development of the form. The orchestra and soloist represent two different realities, where the piano often is associated with the inner world of the hero, a philosopher, seeking for the truth, while the orchestra shows the outside world with its catastrophes and ugliness.

The antithesis of evil and good in Schnittke's music is connected to his religious and philosophical views, as well as the Faust legend, which was described in many of his later works. The sphere of Mephistopheles is shown by atonal writing and the use of clusters. The composer often interprets jazz improvisation and dance genres in his music as evil, such as the waltz of his Concerto for Piano and Strings. The stylistic features of *toccata* and *scherzo* in Schnittke's works often typify the technological world, which absorbs individualism and personality. These images are opposed in Schnittke's slow episodes, where the composer addresses the meaning of life, the value of spiritual world, and the aspect of time. In such episodes the composer prefers minimalism. His spiritual world is realized through the chorale and use of baroque style.

Schnittke's music is associated with polystylism, which was not completely invented by him. Such composers as Poulenc, Stravinsky, and Shostakovich used similar ideas in their music, but Schnittke brought this method to a different level, considering it as a principal source of compositional development. Polystylism in Schnittke's music

includes multiple meanings, such as the combination of different levels of musical heritage, the representation of the past and future in the present moment, and the depiction of chaos and Mephistophelian world, while the spiritual sphere is shown simultaneously.

Finishing the discussion about Schnittke's music, I would like to recall a quotation of Charles Ives, who says: "Nature creates valleys and hills, and people build fences and attach labels."³⁸ It is difficult to tell how much time it will take before Schnittke's compositions will be seen properly as an integral part of music history. Nevertheless, it is obvious that he expressed the very essence of the dramatic twentieth century, which took humanity through multiple wars, nuclear catastrophes, disintegrations of countries, and loss of hope. He pushed music out of its comfortable isolation and confinement of particular styles, techniques, tonal language, and genres. He demolished these fences of tradition to create his own unique style to convey true meaning.

³⁸ Alexander Ivashkin. *A Schnittke Reader*, (Indiana University Press, 2002), p. xiv

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- 1992 – Viktoria Postnikova (piano), Gennadi Rozhdestvensky (conductor), London Sinfonietta (orchestra), Erato label.
- 1993 – Roland Pontinen (piano), Lev Markiz (conductor), New Stockholm Chamber Orchestra, Bis Label
- 1993 – Vladimir Krainev (piano), Vladimir Spivakov (conductor), Moscow Virtuosi (orchestra), RCA Legacy Label.
- 1994 – Isabella Margalit (piano), Donald Barra (conductor), Moscow Philharmonic (orchestra), Koch Label
- 1997 – Ralf Gothoni (piano and conductor), Virtuosi di Kuhmo (orchestra), Ondine label
- 1997 - Igor Khudolei (piano), Valery Polyansky (conductor), Russian State Symphony Orchestra, Chandos Records
- 2008 – Viktoria Lyubitskaya (piano), Mark Gorenstein (conductor), Russian State Academy Orchestra, Fuga Libera Label
- 2008 – Ksenia Bashmet (pianist), Yuri Bashmet (conductor), Moscow Soloists (Orchestra), Quartz Label
- 2012 – Ewa Kupiec, Frank Strobel (conductor), The Berlin Radio Symphony Orchestra, Delta Classics Label
- 2014 - Denys Proshayev (piano), Alexander Dmitriev (conductor), St. Petersburg String Soloists (orchestra), Piano Classics Label
- 2014 – Yakov Kasman (piano), Emmanuel Leducq-Barome (conductor), Kaliningrad Philharmonic Chamber Orchestra

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Appendix

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CONCERTO FOR PIANO AND STRINGS (1979)

By Alfred Schnittke

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