

ІСТОРІЯ ТА ТЕОРІЯ МУЗИЧНОГО МИСТЕЦТВА І КУЛЬТУРИ

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Christoph Flamm,

ORCID: 0000-0002-6621-3573

Professor of Musicology

Heidelberg University

christoph.flamm@zegk.uni-heidelberg.de

LIFE AND ART: N. MEDTNER'S MUSIC AND ITS MEANING

The purpose of the article. A deeper understanding of Medtner's music can be obtained both by considering the symbolical layers of his works with regard to his personal life, and by juxtaposing possible or obvious influences of other composers' music on his own compositions. **The methodology** of the article is determined by the combination of musicological and aesthetic approaches to Medtner's musical thinking. **The scientific novelty.** Most of the traces of Medtner's private life in certain vocal and instrumental compositions are shown for the first time. The discussion of the connections of Medtner's music to other composers is decisively broadened. **Conclusions.** We are lucky to live in a time where the aesthetic battles of the 20th century up to Adorno and his disciples have become meaningless. But that does not prevent us from realizing that Medtner, as a person and in his art, has been part of this battle, and a very active one. His writings and his compositions are imbued with his convictions. It would be naive to ignore these convictions when quoting from his writings – and it would be naive to ignore them when playing or hearing his music. This is even true for his seemingly non-programmatic piano music, especially the sonatas whose flexible structures are directly shaped by the poetic content lying beneath the skin. One cannot tune out the symbolic dimensions of Medtner's music without damaging its message. If we really want to understand Medtner, we must face the contradictions that are part of his person and his aesthetics. Many of Medtner's works, his songs and sonatas, are symbolic signs: they

bear witness to traumatic experiences, and they represent creative attempts to cope with monstros burdens – predominantly by transcending earthly dimensions and seeking for ideal realms of spirituality and religion, be that a Goethean past or Christian faith. Contextualizing Medtner in terms of style and worldview would help us seeing him as a child of his time, a time brutally torn apart by ideologies. In a typical symbolist manner, Medtner has encoded personal and private messages and subtexts in many of his compositions. A re-lecture of diaries, letters, memories and other biographical sources can open new paths towards a deeper deciphering of the hidden messages of his works. At the same time, his music is not as isolated and unique in his time as usually has been stated by music historians: Motivic findings, structural solutions and psychological narratives can in some cases be traced back not only to models like Beethoven, Chopin, or Wagner, but to contemporary composers like Grieg, Catoire, or Rachmaninoff.

Key words: *Nicholas Medtner, hidden private messages in music, symbolical layers in works, contemporary influences on Medtner.*

Кристоф Флам, професор музикознавства в Гейдельберзькому університеті

Життя та мистецтво: музика М. Метнера та її значення

Мета статті. Глибше розуміння музики Метнера можна отримати, розглядаючи символічні шари його творів з урахуванням його особистого життя, а також узгоджуючи можливі чи очевидні впливи музики інших композиторів на його власні композиції. **Методологія** статті визначається поєднанням музикологічного й естетичного підходів до музичного мислення Метнера. **Наукова новизна.** Більшість слідів особистого життя Метнера в певних вокально-інструментальних композиціях показані вперше. Обговорення зв'язків музики Метнера з іншими композиторами рішуче розширюється. **Висновки.** Нам пощастило жити в часи, коли естетичні битви ХХ-го століття аж до Адорно і його учнів стали безглуздими. Але це не заважає нам усвідомити, що Метнер як людина у своєму мистецтві був частиною цієї битви, причому дуже активною. Його твори наповнені його переконаннями. Було б наївно ігнорувати ці переконання під час цитування його творів – й було б наївно ігнорувати їх, граючи або слухаючи його музику. Це справедливо навіть для його, здавалося б, непрозранної фортепіанної музики, особливо сонат, гнучкі структури яких безпосередньо формуються поетичним змістом, що лежить не на поверхні. Неможливо відключити символічні вимірювання музики Метнера, не пошкодивши її послання. Якщо ми дійсно хочемо зрозуміти Метнера, ми повинні зіткнутися із суперечностями, які є частиною його особистості і його естетики. Багато творів Метнера, його пісні й сонати є символічними знаками: вони свідчать про травматичні переживання та представляють творчі спроби впоратися з тягарями страхів – переважно шляхом перевищення земних вимірів і пошуку ідеальних царств духовності й релігії, будь то Гетевське минуле або християнська віра. Контекстуалізація Метнера з боку стилю та

світогляду допомогла б нам бачити його дитиною свого часу, часу, жорстоко розірваного ідеологіями. У типовому символістському образі Метнер закодував особисті й приватні повідомлення та підтексти в багатьох своїх композиціях. Повторне вивчення щоденників, листів, спогадів та інших біографічних джерел може відкрити нові шляхи до глибшого розшифрування прихованих повідомлень його творів. Водночас його музика не настільки ізольована й неповторна для свого часу, як це зазвичай заявляли історики музики: мотивні вирішення, структурні прийоми й психологічні наративи в деяких випадках простежуються не лише до таких першовізірів, як Бетховен, Шопен чи інші, як Вагнер, але й до сучасних для Метнера композиторів, таких, як Григ, Катур або Рахманінов.

Ключові слова: Микола Метнер, приховані особистісні повідомлення в музиці, символічні шари у творах, сучасний вплив на Метнера.

Кристоф Фламм, професор музикознавства в Гейдельберзькому університеті

Жизнь и искусство: музыка М. Метнера и ее значение

Цель статьи. Более глубокое понимание музыки Метнера можно получить, рассматривая символические слои его произведений с учетом его личной жизни, а также согласовывая возможные или очевидные влияния музыки других композиторов на его собственные композиции. **Методология статьи** определяется сочетанием музыкологического и эстетического подходов к музыкальному мышлению Метнера. **Научная новизна.** Большинство следов личной жизни Метнера в определенных вокально-инструментальных композициях показаны впервые. Обсуждение связей музыки Метнера с другими композиторами решительно расширяется. **Выводы.** Нам повезло жить во времена, когда эстетические битвы XX века до Адорно и его учеников стали бессмысленными. Но это не мешает нам осознать, что Метнер как человек в своем искусстве был частью этой битвы, причем очень активной. Его произведения наполнены его убеждениями. Было бы наивно игнорировать эти убеждения при цитировании его произведений – и было бы наивно игнорировать их, играя или слушая его музыку. Это справедливо даже для его, казалось бы, непрограммной фортепианной музыки, особенно сонат, гибкие структуры которых непосредственно формируются поэтическим содержанием, лежат не на поверхности. Невозможно отключить символические измерения музыки Метнера, не повредив ее послание. Если мы действительно хотим понять Метнера, мы должны столкнуться с противоречиями, которые являются частью его личности и его эстетики. Многие произведения Метнера, его песни и сонаты являются символическими знаками: они свидетельствуют о травматических переживаниях и представляют творческие попытки справиться с бременем ужасов – преимущественно путем превышения земных измерений и поиска идеальных царств духовности и религии, будь то гетевское прошлое или христианская вера. Контекстуализация Метнера с точки зрения стиля и мировоззрения помогла бы нам видеть его ребенком

своего времени, времени, жестоко разорванного идеологиями. В типичном символистском образе Медтнер закодировал личные и частные сообщения и подтексты во многих своих композициях. Повторное изучение дневников, писем, воспоминаний и других биографических источников может открыть новые пути к более глубокой расшифровке скрытых сообщений его произведений. В то же время его музыка не столь изолирована и неповторима для своего времени, как это обычно заявляли историки музыки: мотивные решения, структурные приемы и психологические нарративы в некоторых случаях прослеживаются не только у таких первоисточников, как Бетховен, Шопен или другие, как Вагнер, но и у современных для Медтнера композиторов, таких как Григ, Катур или Рахманинов.

Ключевые слова: Николай Медтнер, скрытые личностные сообщения в музыке, символические слои в произведениях, современное влияние на Медтнера.

Relevance of research topic. A deeper understanding of Medtner's music can be obtained both by considering the symbolical layers of his works with regard to his personal life, and by juxtaposing possible or obvious influences of other composers' music on his own compositions.

The purpose of the article. A deeper understanding of Medtner's music can be obtained both by considering the symbolical layers of his works with regard to his personal life, and by juxtaposing possible or obvious influences of other composers' music on his own compositions.

The scientific novelty. Most of the traces of Medtner's private life in certain vocal and instrumental compositions are shown for the first time. The discussion of the connections of Medtner's music to other composers is decisively broadened.

Main content of the research. I. *Hidden in music: Medtner's private life*

It is a well-known fact that any attempt of equalizing life and work of a composer is highly problematic. Yet some elements of Medtner's private life doubtlessly help understand better his aesthetics and his specific artistic choices which sometimes seem strange and isolated in his time. In a more direct way, some of these private elements are reflected in his music, especially in his songs.

Without any doubt, at the centre of Nicolai Medtner's private life stands his intimate relationship with his brother Emilii (or Emil) and with his companion in life, Anna. Emilii, being his elder brother, had taken the role as an intellectual educator

of Nicolai in terms of philosophy, literature, aesthetical thinking, or simply *Weltanschauung*. Anna Bratenshi, a violin student, was acquainted with both brothers, she married Emilii in late 1902. As Emilii's biographer, the Swedish slavist Magnus Ljunggren, has pointed out, the marriage was problematic from the beginning, "marked by physical estrangement and emotional anxieties. <...> In letters and in early writings dealing with both music and the new Symbolist literature, he reiterated warnings against erotic mysticism and orgiastic tendencies which obviously had something to do with his marital problems" [4, p. 18]. To make things worse, not only did the bond of love between Anna and Emilii prove fragile, but the amorous feelings between Nicolai and Anna became stronger and finally broke out in summer 1903. Anna has left a description of this cathartic moment when the three of them stayed in Nizhny Novgorod, where Emilii was working as censor for literary publications:

"In the evening I went into [Nicolai's] room and found him in a terrible state of dejection, his head in his hands and almost in tears. It was then that I confessed to him my real relationship with Emil, we spoke together, and the scales fell from our eyes. How to help the situation? We told Emil everything with total frankness, and he was magnanimous and understanding, but he begged us, out of consideration for his parents, particularly his mother, not to take any steps for the moment" [5, p. 27]. It was not until 1909 that Medtner's parents became fully aware of the situation. Barrie Martyn, the author of the standard English language monography on Nicolai Medtner, states that "[e]ven then Alexandra Medtner preferred not to acknowledge reality, refusing to allow any disturbance in the facade of bourgeois propriety which the family presented to the world. This remained her attitude until her death, in 1918" [5, p. 27]. Martyn continues: "For some considerable time, Anna continued to play the role of loyal wife for the sake of Emil's career and his parents' feelings, though her false domestic situation became increasingly painful and embarrassing. The voluminous correspondence between Anna and Emil in later years bears witness to the fact that their affection and respect for one another never diminished. The deep bond between Emil and Nicolas equally remarkably survived unscathed, though Nicolas carried a burden of guilt with him to the end of his days, once remarking after Emil's death that he had done his brother a terrible wrong for which he would never be forgiven" [5, p. 28].

Given the many years which Anna, Emilii and Nicolai spent more or less together before World War I – physically in lengthy journeys to Germany as well as on shorter holiday trips, spiritually by means of daily correspondence and diaries written for each other, – it seems as if these three persons would form another of those love triangles which were a distinguishing mark of the Russian Silver Age, especially among poets. It may suffice here to mention the famous love triangle of Zinaida Gippius (Hippius), Dmitry Filosofov, and Dmitry Merezhkovsky; or the much more ephemeral relation between Alexander Blok, his wife Lyubov Mendeleyeva, and Andrey Bely. In each instance, the balance between flesh and spirit was precarious. Gippius and Merezhkovsky created a sort of religion around their triangle which lasted for decades and ultimately aimed at the sublimation of Eros, transforming the sensual into the spiritual; whereas Bely's flattering aroused sympathy with Blok's wife Lyubov not least because Blok refused to consummate the marriage [cf. 6]. But what about the Medtners? Magnus Ljunggren sees their ménage a trois within the context of the moral breakup in the Russian intelligentsia. But this is doubtful.

The Medtners' affair was not a deliberate erotic experiment, but a burden shouldered unwillingly by all three. Soon, their burden became a tragedy. Magnus Ljunggren has found evidence in the unpublished correspondence of Emilii, partially kept in private archives. In 1904, according to Ljunggren, "Nikolai and Anna had <...> begun a sexual relationship. [Emilii] began planning a trip for the three of them to Germany which would ease the pressure and also introduce Nikolai to German musical life. The pressure soon became intense when Anna discovered that she was pregnant. A social catastrophe seemed imminent, for she was about to give birth to a child not by her husband but by her brother-in-law. She evidently saw no solution to her shameful situation" [4, p. 21]. In late December 1904, shortly after Nikolai had given a concert with his recent piano works in Berlin, Anna (who had already moved to Weimar together with Emilii) went to hospital "for acute abdominal pains. On 2 January 1905 she gave birth to a stillborn child. That same day, [Emilii] Medtner informed Nikolai of her pregnancy and what had happened. He suggested that his brother immediately come to Weimar <...>. There is much to suggest that the stillbirth was caused by Anna's anxiety and reluctance to become a mother. The three of them were now linked even more tightly together by guilt and pain. No one, not even their parents,

knew their secret. Anna seems not to have been prepared to forego either of her two men. She needed both, for they complemented each other and, bound together as intensely as they were, were in essence a kind of single cohesive personality” [4, p. 21–22]. As if that weren’t enough, in summer 1907, “Anna was again carrying Nikolai’s child, and the prospect of giving birth aroused the same anguish as in 1904” [4, p. 29]. The trio once again travelled to Weimar. “In early October Nikolai went to Dresden, where a few days later he was overtaken by the same alarming news as three years previously. Soon Anna gave birth to another stillborn baby. The tragedy had repeated itself, and once again shame and sorrow bound the triad together” [4, p. 29].

It is difficult to imagine the full dimensions of this tragedy and the impact it had on the lives and personalities of Anna, Nicolai and Emili. Emili, for his part, turned away from cultural criticism to psychotherapy, he joined Carl Gustav Jung in Switzerland and translated his writings into Russian. He described his recurring dreams to Jung, they reveal a deeply disturbing suppression of sexuality which lasted until the end of his life. Seemingly, he came to terms with his neurosis by admiring not only musical leadership, like that of Nikisch, but political and military leadership, like that of Napoleon – and Hitler [cf. 4].

Nicolai, as I would assume, tried to cope with the tragedy of his life by writing music. His upbringing in a protestant family of German descent which adored Goethe, German thought and German music since Bach, especially Beethoven and Wagner, put him on an eccentric position in early 20th century Russian music which for the most part tried to overcome German influence, not to embrace it. Medtner’s aesthetic and stylistic conservatism is partly based on an idealization of German culture, partly due to the conservative moral standards of his family, and surely the catastrophic experience of his own love and sexuality resulting in guilt and pain played a decisive role in forming his rejection of sensuality in life and in art.

Interestingly enough, already in one of his very first songs, written in summer 1903, Medtner, then a young man of 23 years, gave expression to the feeling of having already outlived his passions, setting music to Pushkin’s *Ya perezhil svoi zhelaniya* (“I have outlived my dreams”, op. 3 No. 2). This romance is remarkably near in its motivic structure and atmosphere to other Medtner pieces in e minor which speak of loss, of perishing and decline, e.g. the

Skazka op. 34 No. 2 bearing as motto Tyutchev's verses "Kogda chto zvali my svoim navek ot nas ushlo", and above all the monumental Night Wind Sonata op. 25 No. 2, bearing another motto by Tyutchev, "O chem ty voesh', vetr nochnoy". In both of them, at the end the music is winding upwards in a similar manner and thus dissolving, disappearing as it were in complete annihilation.

That brings us to the question in how far Medtner has connected his life to his art. In his first piano sonata op. 5, the lyrical second theme of the first movement and of the finale – originally appearing piano as a soft melodic line, finally returning as an apothecic hymn in broad fortissimo chords – was a symbolic representation of his hidden love Anna.

Such hidden messages and personifications are known through anecdotal comments in letters, diaries and memories. What is more, there are interesting parallels with Andrey Bely's literary "symphonies" in which the poet as well depicted adored women, such as Margerita Morozova named "Skazka" in his second symphony [cf. 2, p. 97–98, 585–586].

In the first series of Goethe-Lieder op. 6, the personal lives of Nicolai, Emil and Anna are interwoven even more tightly into the music, not only because of the appropriate dedication on the title page ("Emil und Anna Medtner gewidmet"). The final song "Gefunden" is called Epithalamium: it symbolizes the marriage with Anna, and already Andrey Bely remarked in his review of the opus 6 songs [1, p. 107] that Medtner here was quite heavily drawing on *Parsifal*.

But the personal dimension of the Goethe Lieder went farther. In setting to music Goethe's ballad "Vor Gericht" (op. 15 no. 6) in February 1907, Nicolai directly broached the issue of the illegitimate child. He even started an orchestration which has survived in fragmentary form, a step he never tried again. We realize how deep this wound must have been.

Vor Gericht (Goethe)

Von wem ich es habe, das sag' ich euch nicht,

Das Kind in meinem Leib. –

Pfui! speit ihr aus: die Hure da! –

Bin doch ein ehrlich Weib.

Mit wem ich mich traute, das sag' ich euch nicht.

Mein Schatz ist lieb und gut,

Trögt er eine goldene Kett' am Hals,

*Trögt er einen strohernen Hut.
Soll Spott und Hohn getragen sein,
Trag' ich allein den Hohn.
Ich kenn' ihn wohl, er kennt mich wohl,
Und Gott weiß auch davon.
Herr Pfarrer und Herr Amtmann ihr,
Ich bitte, laßt mich in Ruh!
Es ist mein Kind, es bleibt mein Kind,
Ihr gebt mir ja nichts dazu.*

Before the Court (Goethe)

*From whom I got it, I'm not going to tell you,
The baby in my womb,
"Shame!" you spit at me: "The harlot there!"
Yet I'm an honourable woman.
With whom I trusted myself, I'm not going to tell you.
My darling is dear and good,
Whether he wears a gold chain round his neck,
Or wears a (poor) straw hat.
If one must bear mockery and scorn,
I'll bear the scorn alone.
I know him well, he knows me well,
And God knows of it too.
You clergyman and you magistrate,
I pray you leave me in peace!
It is my child, it remains my child,
You have nothing to do with it.*

Now many of the vocal texts of Medtner's songs are in dark mood, either depicting nightmarish states of the soul or the futility of our earthly existence; and if not, they speak of the holiness of art or the sacred act of inspiration. In his later years, Medtner preferred overtly religious subjects. Many of us would agree that Medtner's music is very strong when speaking of despair and ruin. But it can be convincing as well when brightness, happiness, joy comes to the fore. Interestingly, such happiness for the most part is clothed in stylized naivety, for example evoking the pastoral idyll of Goethe's *Singspiele*. Here, love has almost no erotic dimension, it is rather displaying serenity and emotional equilibrium, it is an abstraction, a philosophical state of mind. (One of the rare exceptions seems to be "Sie liebt mich" out of the second series of

Goethe-Lieder op. 15, written around 1906/07. Here, the outburst of joy, the unleashed feeling of love is unrestrained and exuberant.)

There is a very unmasking, yet almost unknown source which gives us insight into Medtner's morality, into his aesthetics of chasteness: a small guide through the exhibition of paintings in Palazzo Pitti, Florence, which Medtner visited in 1924 [cf. 3, p. 109–110]. The guide bears annotations of Medtner in pencil. It seems that he marked those paintings which impressed him most. Among these figure predominantly Madonnas of Renaissance painters such as Perugino, Raphael, and Lippi. On the other hand, next to the description of Rubens' *Sacra famiglia*, Medtner noted "porco" (directed at the painter) or maybe "porca" (that is the holy family itself had become swinish under Rubens' hands). Such typical baroque sensuality with its interest in bodies and flesh was already exceeding Medtner's idealistic imagination of holiness or moral integrity.

When speaking about Paul Gauguin's *Nativity of Tahitian Christ*, a painting which Medtner most probably had seen in the house of the famous art collector Sergey Shchukin, Nicolai referred to it as "hottentot Madonna" and argued that the disgusting postimpressionist style of painting resulted from the blasphemous motif itself [3, p. 109]. For Medtner, ethics and aesthetics were inseparably linked together.

In his pamphlet *The Muse and the Fashion*, published in 1935 thanks to Rachmaninov's encouragement and financial support [8], Medtner tried to view all contemporary phenomena of breaking with musical tradition as immoral and decadent, as violations of the eternal laws of art. In a postscript written in his last years [reproduced in 3, p. 246–247], he deepens his reproaches by connecting these eternal laws to Christian faith and arguing with sentences of the Bible: for him, musical modernism had now become a sin against God. But already before the revolution, Medtner's disgust towards Strauss' operas or French impressionism resulted both from the frivolous subjects behind the notes, and from the fact that the sonic qualities of such music had achieved a hitherto unknown significance. The model of Nicolai's book was Emilii Medtner's collection of diatribes, published in the arts journal *Zolotoe runo / La toison d'or* around 1910, and re-printed in 1912 under the title *Modernism and music* [7]. He condemns Liszt, for example, not only for the virtuoso attitude of his music, but for his immorality as well, a combination which Emilii ironically coined: "Liszt oder Die Schule der Gelďufigkeit nach Weibern" (Liszt or: The School of Velocity/Running after skirts).

It is not possible to enter more deeply into Medtner's aesthetic thinking here. But some of its main aspects may have become clear: a thoroughly anti-modernistic attitude which is based less on musical than on moral categories – which later became religious convictions. By a cruel twist of fate, Nicolai and his brother Emilii were themselves leading sinful lives, at least according to their own restrictive moral standards. It might be that the despotic furor of Emilii the critic as well as the increasingly apodictic conservatism of Nicolai the composer was fueled by their own unresolved complexes, by their first-hand experience of sensuality and eroticism leading inevitably to guilt, pain and shame. Seen from this perspective, many of Medtner's works, his songs and sonatas, are symbolic signs: they bear witness to traumatic experiences, and they represent creative attempts to cope with monstrous burdens – predominantly by transcending earthly dimensions and seeking for ideal realms of spirituality and religion, be that a Goethean past or Christian faith. But under the surface, the suppressed passions were seething dramatically, resulting in a constant turmoil of the soul. It is this image of sexual longing as a dark and ultimately devastating desire which Nicolai found in Pushkin's "Mechtatelyu" (To a Dreamer, op. 32 no. 6), set to music in 1915.

Мечтателю (Пушкин)

*Ты в страсти горестной находишь наслажденье;
тебе приятно слёзы лить,
напрасным пламенем томить воображенье
и в сердце тихое уныние таить.
Поверь, не любишь ты, неопытный мечтатель!*

*О, если бы тебя, унылых чувств искатель,
постигло страшное безумие любви;
когда б весь яд её кипел в твоей крови;
когда бы в долгие часы бессонной ночи
на ложе, медленно терзаемый тоской,
ты звал обманчивый покой,
вотще смыкая скорбны очи,
покровы жаркие, рыдая, обнимал
и сохнул в бешенстве бесплодного желанья, -
поверь, тогда б ты не питал
неблагодарного мечтанья!*

*Нет, нет! в слезах упав к ногам
своей любовницы надменной,
дрожащий, бледный, испуганный,
тогда б воскликнул ты к богам:
«Отдайте, боги, мне рассудок омраченный,
возьмите от меня сей образ роковой!
Довольно я любил; отдайте мне покой!»
Но мрачная любовь и образ незабвенный
остались вечно бы с тобой.*

To a dreamer (Pushkin)

*In melancholy passion you delight,
Shedding tears brings you joy,
You simmer in the vain flame of imagination
And hide your despondence in a silent heart.
Believe me, you do not love, inexperienced dreamer!
O, if you seek despair,
Understood the terrible madness of love;
When its heavy poison boiled in your blood;
When in the long hours of a sleepless night,
In bed, slowly tormented by anguish,
You called the deceiving rest,
Closing your mournful eyes in vain,
Under hot covers, sobbing, you embraced
And withered in the rage of fruitless desires,
Believe me, then you would not have fed
Your ungrateful dreams!*

*No! No! In tears falling at the feet
Of your haughty mistress,
Trembling, pale, feverish,
It was then that you cried out to the gods:
“Return to me, O gods, my saddened mind,
And take from me this fatal image!
I’ve loved enough, please give me rest!”
But gloomy love and an unforgettable image
Will remain with you forever.*

II. Medtner in context

Putting Medtner in context here means to look for relationships between his music and the music of other composers. The

British Medtner specialist Francis Pott has once pointed out (in an unpublished speech at an International Study Day dedicated to Medtner which took place at the British Library, London, on 29 January 2016) that more than often these other composers are “ghosts” hovering through Medtner’s music, hardly ever to be identified clearly. Yet some personal and musical relations between Medtner and his surrounding are so evident that it seems almost unnecessary to speak about them, for example Medtner and Rachmaninoff. But in a certain sense, it feels like even here we’re far away from the last word. Of course, there have always been stylistic comparisons between the two of them, but seldom do they plunge into analytical depths. One special case might help to our understanding of the similarities and differences in their music.

In Medtner’s sonata g minor op. 22, the Interludium starts *andante lugubre* with a repetition of brooding chords, hesitantly moving in and out, not getting anywhere. It takes several attempts until some melodic flowing evolves *più sereno e con moto*. Something very similar can be found in the first movement of Rachmaninoff’s famous *élégiacque* piano trio op. 9, written as a lament to Tchaikovsky’s death. After the intense mourning of the first theme which is spread out and developed to great extent, the relief of the second theme is not given at once. Instead, Rachmaninoff inserts a *Meno mosso* section. The music is as it were pausing for a moment; only after such introspective reflexion are new vital forces resurging.

In Rachmaninoff’s case, confidence is regained by a breathtaking unfolding of chant-like chordal structures leading to hymnical heights. In Medtner’s case, the basic structure is somehow similar, but more complex, both on a structural and on a psychological scale. Medtner could have had in mind, consciously or not, a reminiscence of the way his colleague’s piano trio moves from despair and stagnation through meditation to new confidence. His gesture is kindred to Rachmaninoff’s, but it is moulded in a different overall sonata structure and in a different narrative, where hope and glory are but fleeting and ultimately unachievable goals.

Probably comparisons of this sort could contribute to our understanding of Medtner, and not Medtner alone. By doing so, it would become more evident that Medtner’s position is not so isolated as we are often used to think. After all, why are we? The myth of Medtner’s extreme isolation is nourished from several sources.

First, the composer himself, at least as an *émigré*, would express unceasingly the unbridgeable chasm between him and the

aesthetical and compositional tendencies of his time, the common public and the music critics, not to speak of nearly all composers who enjoyed more success than he himself.

Second, already in pre-Revolutionary Russia Medtner's position had been sort of special. For a Muscovite composer, rejecting the folkloristic nationalist traditions of the Petersburg school embodied by Rimsky-Korsakov was nothing unusual, so did Taneyev, Scriabin and Rachmaninoff, all of whom have seldom if ever drawn on collected or imitated folk songs or dances. But Medtner's ideal was, due to the family tradition, shaped by his brother Emilii and the literary and philosophical circle surrounding them, emphatically German. Since long had Russian artists tried to overcome the standards of European culture, standards which felt like bonds hindering the development of an own Russian voice. Claiming for a new synthesis of German and Russian culture, as the Medtners did, inevitably resulted in an eccentric position, at least in music. But eccentric does not necessarily mean isolated. And above all, Medtner's favour for German culture and music did not prevent him to search for a Russianness under the surface, devoid of folkloristic patterns. It is more the Russian tongue of Dostoyevsky that can be heard and seen in his music, something philosophical and spiritual, a central part of his *Weltanschauung*.

One song stands for both facets of Medtner at once, since the respective Goethe poem had been translated by Afanasy Fet metrically: "Auf dem See" or "Na ozere" op. 3 no. 3. In composing, Medtner could have chosen either of the two text versions. This song is connected to Medtner's outburst of interest in Goethe; to his brother Emil, Nicholas wrote in the summer of 1903 about this revelation: "I have detected in myself very serious symptoms of a passion for Goethe. <...> This passion was provoked by the song after his Poem Auf dem See" [9, p. 47–50]. We can hear that this song is transporting not only Goethe's exuberant joy of nature, but a young artist's discovery of new shores of inspiration. The result is neither German nor Russian – it is real Medtner, more exactly: Medtnerian happiness. Be that as it may, music critics like Sabaneyev and others singled Medtner out as someone standing apart from the main trends, and exactly this is one of the reasons why he was compared not only to Rachmaninoff, but to Scriabin as well.

There is at least one further source for the general notion of Medtner being isolated in the history of music. It is lying in ourselves. Being convenors of a Medtner conference, we all are aware of the excep-

tional qualities and beauties of Medtner's music, we are convinced of its greatness (admittedly, this expression is highly problematic). Usually, admiring great works of art does not lead to seeking for dependencies. Few are interested in a balanced comparison let's say of Beethoven and Reicha, or Beethoven and Hummel, despite the many connections in their lives and their music. No, on the contrary, admiration often leads in the end to detaching artists and their works, because greatness in itself implies singularity. It is not an easy task to overcome such, so to say, inborne patterns of reception and behaviour, and to accept that Medtner's music does have many ties to the music of his time. This does not in the least diminish its value.

Another example, maybe less obvious than Rachmaninoff, is Georgi Katuar, or Georges Catoire, a Muscovite composer one generation older than Medtner which only very recently has been rediscovered. After studying in Berlin, Moscow and Petersburg, Catoire retired for several years to the countryside, but he continued to write music, before becoming professor for music theory and composition in 1917. We do not know very much about the relation of Catoire and Medtner, stylistically they are worlds apart, so it seems. But there must have been a rather close relation between them in personal terms, something like real appreciation. Catoire dedicated his First Violin Sonata op. 15, published by Jurgenson in 1904, "A Monsieur N. Medtner". Medtner returned this gesture by dedicating his Sonata g minor op. 22 to Catoire. One could easily dismiss such dedications as insignificant with regard to the music itself. But there are links on a deeper level as well. Catoire's Piano Concerto op. 21, printed in 1912 in Koussevitzky's *Éditions Russes de Musique* (the very publishing house where Medtner was member of the committee and had his own works published), has three movements. In its first movement, Catoire unusually replaces the development section by a series of variations. The second of these variations is called "Interludium", and the eighth variation (as well as the Finale) in a most typically Medtnerian manner bears the tempo indication "Allegro risoluto". Writing his own first Piano Concerto op. 33 from 1914 onwards, Medtner adapts Catoire's idea of shaping the development in form of variations. And it even might be that Medtner derived the central motive right at the beginning of his concerto, a massive chordal dissonance, sighing in pain, from Catoire's equally cyclical orchestral motive immediately preceding the variation aka development section and labelled "Dramatico".

The relation between Catoire's and Medtner's music seems reciprocal. In 1910, Catoire published his Second violin sonata op. 20, dedicated to the pianist Alexander Goldenweiser, someone who in his own (little known) piano music is displaying severe Medtnerian traits. Catoire's Violin sonata is a one-movement work, cast in three unseparated sections *Andante*, *Allegro moderato* and *Allegro risoluto*, and bearing the subtitle *Poume*, thus displaying influences from Scriabin and Medtner alike. In the second section, one of the main recurring motifs is a melodic formula which has a very long history and tradition, it may suffice to name Beethoven's "Muss es sein" from his last String quartet in F major and César Franck's d minor Symphony. But it is as well a central feature of Medtner's first piano sonata op. 5, to be heard in the Second movement, *Intermezzo*, in a similar augmented chordal display, marked *pesante*.

The hypothesis would be that Catoire did not rely primarily on Beethoven (as most probably Medtner did in his sonata) or anybody else, but on the dramatically charged model he could find in the piano work of his younger colleague with whom he shared, so it seems, some musical symbols. It is an exchange of ideas in art itself, and as such an evidence to the contrary regarding the alleged isolation of Medtner: he formed actively and passively part of Russian music.

To talk about the inspiration Medtner's music gave to younger composers like for example Prokofiev or Anatoly Alexandrov would merit a thorough study in its own right. Here, I want to close this modest attempt to put Medtner back into his environment with an indication of the models Medtner chose from composers of older generations. This aspect has not yet been studied as seriously as it should. Despite the recurring references in Medtner's letters and writings to Beethoven and Wagner, it is not so easy to explain precisely in how far these influences can be detected in the printed score of Medtner's works. For the time being, I would assume that Beethoven has shaped Medtner's fundamental understanding of the sonata form as a process to be redefined in every single work anew, individual solutions to dialectical poetical ideas lying behind. Wagner was important with respect to the symphonic breadth and psychological depth of instrumental narratives, and all in all the benchmark in harmony. It seems that Medtner only seldom integrates motifs in his music which stem from Beethoven, Wagner or even Chopin. He was able to transfer their characteristics on a more abstract level, to personalize and adapt them.

But there are some instances showing more direct borrowings – from Grieg. Grieg was one of Medtner’s favourite composers, not least because of his modesty. Among all the other qualities of Grieg’s music, there is one Medtner couldn’t find in other composers’ music of the late 19th century: overt simplicity. In 1898, he and his brother Alexander played Grieg’s c minor violin sonata op. 45 in a musical soiree in the family’s flat. It must have been a lasting impression for the composer, in fact, in a certain sense to the very end of his life. The second theme of the final movement of Medtner’s piano quintet, labelled “quasi hymn”, is shaped along the lines of the main theme of Grieg’s finale. Even closer to Grieg’s sonata is the beginning of the Coda. Here, the accelerated last return of the hymn theme is identical to Grieg’s Coda both harmonically and in the stepwise diverging of the outer voices that follows.

One could claim that, in any case, these spots do not reflect the composer’s own mature inventiveness, since he had begun work on the quintet as early as in 1904, in other words, only some years after having played the Grieg sonata himself. Yet there is another ‘borrowing’ in a work of Medtner’s pinnacle period: the Sonata-ballade op. 27. It is the so-called Muse motif itself, which has a predecessor in the slow middle movement of Grieg’s violin sonata. Grieg makes use of it to prepare the return of the beautiful main section with its lyrical melody. In Medtner’s Sonata-Ballade, the Muse motif is being introduced in the slow movement as well, and equally leading to the restatement of its main theme. Here, once again, not only the melodic shape, but form and function have been transferred from one work to another.

This last example points to an important aspect. The so-called “Muse motif” has many semantical layers and implications in different works of Medtner, such as the song “The Muse” op. 29 no. 1. My hypothesis would be that, for the composer, this motif embodied something especially holy, for the reason that it stemmed from a very early, pure and beautiful experience, unharmed from any aesthetical or theoretical discussion – an ideal world. Medtner, maybe unwittingly, has saved a small piece of this unspoilt world in form of what usually is called the Muse motif.

On a large scale, we could ask ourselves: doesn’t Medtner’s music as a whole represent something similar to such a piece of an unspoilt world of music? Could it be that all those feelings of kind of holiness, which from the beginning many musicians and listeners have expressed with regard to Medtner’s music, has to do not

only with the lofty poetic and sometimes religious subjects he has chosen, but on a deeper level with the fact that he is transporting aesthetical and mental ideals of the late 18th to the middle 19th century well in modern times? His stylistic conservatism, seen like this, would mean something different from aesthetical immobility: it would mean preservation of precious elements from the past, leaving them almost untouched. Such a perspective may lie behind some of the efforts of present-day Russia to embrace Medtner once again as the prodigal son of his homeland. But it may lie as well behind our own yearning for the spiritual in music, for consolation (or even salvation) coming from works of art which reflect integrity in times of trouble.

Conclusions. So, in the end, there are many different explanations of the priestly attitude which composer, performers and audience alike have often displayed. It's a pity that Medtner himself would not be able to recognize the spiritual qualities of the music of others like Messiaen. Maybe he could have accepted Arvo Pärt, but that remains doubtful. It is not the spiritual dimension in Medtner which might be disturbing, on the contrary, but his aggressiveness towards everything incompatible with his own convictions. His treatise *The Muse and the Fashion* is a combat organ, not so far from the hatred of Emilii Medtner foaming at everything modernist, experimental and jewish. Nicholas considered even some of his compositions as a sort of weapon in his quixotic fight against modernity. Medtner's poetic images of the poor knight in the service of God or Mary, taken from Russian literature, all too clearly show his self-stylization (e.g. in the *Skazka* op. 34 no. 4 or the third Piano concerto op. 60).

We are lucky to live in a time where the aesthetic battles of the 20th century up to Adorno and his disciples have become meaningless. But that does not prevent us from realizing that Medtner, as a person and in his art, has been part of this battle, and a very active one. His writings and his compositions are imbued with his convictions. It would be naive to ignore these convictions when quoting from his writings – and it would be naive to ignore them when playing or hearing his music. This is even true for his seemingly non-programmatic piano music, especially the sonatas whose flexible structures are directly shaped by the poetic content lying beneath the skin. One cannot tune out the symbolic dimensions of Medtner's music without damaging its message. If we really want to understand Medtner, we must face the contradictions that are

part of his person and his aesthetics. All these controversial elements are deeply imbedded in the European culture before the Great War. Contextualizing Medtner in terms of style and worldview would help us seeing him as a child of his time, a time brutally torn apart by ideologies. The one thing we shouldn't do is ignoring this background, the more so since our own time as well knows of old – and new – cultural battles.

In a typical symbolist manner, Medtner has encoded personal and private messages and subtexts in many of his compositions. A re-lecture of diaries, letters, memories and other biographical sources can open new paths towards a deeper deciphering of the hidden messages of his works. At the same time, his music is not as isolated and unique in his time as usually has been stated by music historians: Motivic findings, structural solutions and psychological narratives can in some cases be traced back not only to models like Beethoven, Chopin, or Wagner, but to contemporary composers like Grieg, Catoire, or Rachmaninoff.

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Марина Романовна Черкашина-Губаренко

ORCID: 0000-0002-7347-4309

доктор искусствоведения, профессор

*Национальной музыкальной академии Украины имени П. И. Чайковского,
академик*

*Национальной академии искусств Украины
gubaresha@ukr.net*

НИКОЛАЙ И ЭМИЛИЙ МЕТНЕРЫ, РИХАРД ВАГНЕР И КУЛЬТУРА РУССКОГО СЕРЕБРЯНОГО ВЕКА

*Цель статьи – представить освоение идей и восприятие музыкальных новаций Вагнера русским обществом как многоэтапный и многоуровневый процесс, имеющий свои важные вехи. **Методология** работы определяется историографическим и эстетическим стилевым подходами, реализованными в русле музыковедческого систематического стилистического анализа. **Научная новизна** статьи обусловлена параллельным охватом и сведением в общий динамический ряд разных исследовательских аспектов данной темы, также выявлением не лежащих на поверхности связей с фигурой Вагнера и с его личностью семьи Метнеров. Обнаруживается, что семейная история так или иначе повлияла на отношение к Вагнеру как старшего Эмилия Метнера, так и его*