

Nikolai Medtner's Skazki (Fairy Tales), Op. 51

A Conservative Russian Romantic Composer's Flights of Fancy

By

Yumin Na

Submitted to

Michigan State University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

DOCTOR OF MUSICAL ARTS

College of Music

December 2019

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF EXAMPLES	iii
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 1 - Nikolai Karlovich Medtner	2
CHAPTER 2 - Medtner's Piano Music and the Fairy Tales	7
CHAPTER 3 - <i>Six Fairy Tales, Op. 51</i>	11
CONCLUSION	43
BIBLIOGRAPHY	44

LIST OF EXAMPLES

Ex. 1 Medtner, <i>Fairy Tale Op. 51, No. 1</i> , mm. 1-16	14
Ex. 2 Medtner, <i>Fairy Tale Op. 51, No. 1</i> , m. 14 and m. 22	14
Ex. 3 Medtner, <i>Fairy Tale Op. 51, No. 1</i> , m. 17 - Great Russian and Ukrainian versions	15
Ex. 4 Medtner, <i>Fairy Tale Op. 51, No. 1</i> , mm. 22-25	15
Ex. 5 Medtner, <i>Fairy Tale Op. 51, No. 1</i> , mm. 35-38 and mm. 56-59	16
Ex. 6 Medtner, <i>Fairy Tale Op. 51, No. 1</i> , Introduction and mm. 64-70	16
Ex. 7 Medtner, <i>Fairy Tale Op. 51, No. 1</i> , mm. 111-123	17
Ex. 8 Medtner, <i>Fairy Tale Op. 51, No. 1</i> , mm. 124-135	17
Ex. 9 Medtner, <i>Fairy Tale Op. 51, No. 1</i> , return of musical ideas from introduction and A	18
Ex. 10 Medtner, <i>Fairy Tale Op. 51, No. 1</i> , mm. 213-231	18
Ex. 11 Medtner, <i>Fairy Tale Op. 51, No. 1</i> , mm. 246-262	19
Ex. 12a Medtner, <i>Fairy Tale Op. 51, No. 1</i> , mm. 262-267	19
Ex. 12b Medtner, <i>Fairy Tale Op. 51, No. 1</i> , mm. 270-273	20
Ex. 13 Medtner, <i>Fairy Tale Op. 51, No. 1</i> ; Rachmaninoff, <i>Piano Concerto No. 3, Op. 30/I</i>	20
Ex. 14 Medtner, <i>Fairy Tale Op. 51, No. 1</i> , mm. 305-312	21
Ex. 15 Medtner, <i>Fairy Tale Op. 51, No. 2</i> , mm. 1-2 and mm. 13-16	22
Ex. 16 Medtner, <i>Fairy Tales Op. 51, Nos. 1 and 2</i> , shared notes	22
Ex. 17 Medtner, <i>Fairy Tale Op. 51, No. 2</i> , addition of extra measures from m. 28	23
Ex. 18 Medtner, <i>Fairy Tale Op. 51, No. 2</i> , mm. 65-72	24
Ex. 19 Medtner, <i>Fairy Tale Op. 51, No. 2</i> , mm. 69-74; Schumann, <i>Piano Concerto, Op. 54/III</i>	25
Ex. 20 Medtner, <i>Fairy Tale Op. 51, 2</i> , similarities with Tchaikovsky and Medtner	26
Ex. 21 Medtner, <i>Fairy Tale Op. 51, No. 2</i> , mm. 100-103	26

Ex. 22 Medtner, <i>Fairy Tales Op. 51, Nos. 1 and 3</i>	27
Ex. 23a Prokunin, <i>65 Russian Folk Songs, No. 23</i>	28
Ex. 23b Medtner, <i>Fairy Tale Op. 51, No. 3</i>	28
Ex. 23c Rimsky-Korsakov, <i>Russian Easter Overture</i>	28
Ex. 24 Medtner, <i>Fairy Tale Op. 51, No. 3</i> , mm. 67-76	29
Ex. 25 Medtner, <i>Fairy Tale Op. 51, No. 3</i> , mm. 77-85	30
Ex. 26 Medtner, <i>Fairy Tale Op. 51, No. 3</i> , mm. 90-97	30
Ex. 27 Medtner, <i>Fairy Tale Op. 51, No. 3</i> , compared to Brahms, Dohnányi, and Rachmaninoff	31
Ex. 28 Medtner, <i>Fairy Tale Op. 51, No. 4</i> , mm. 1-11	32
Ex. 29 Medtner, <i>Fairy Tale Op. 51, No. 4</i> , mm. 6-30	32
Ex. 30 Medtner, <i>Fairy Tale Op. 51, No. 4</i> , mm. 38-43	33
Ex. 31 Medtner, <i>Fairy Tale Op. 51, No. 5</i> , mm. 1-4	34
Ex. 32 Medtner, <i>Fairy Tales Op. 51, Nos. 4 and 5</i>	34
Ex. 33 Medtner, <i>Fairy Tale Op. 51, No. 5</i> ; Mussorgsky, <i>The Fair at Sorochyntsi</i>	35
Ex. 34 Medtner, <i>Fairy Tale Op. 51, No. 5</i> , mm. 41-60	36
Ex. 35 Medtner, <i>Fairy Tales Op. 51, Nos. 2 and 5</i>	37
Ex. 36 Medtner, <i>Fairy Tale Op. 51, No. 5</i> , mm. 73-84	37
Ex. 37 Medtner, <i>Fairy Tale Op. 51, No. 5</i> ; Rachmaninoff, <i>Barcarolle, Op. 10, No. 3</i>	38
Ex. 38 Medtner, <i>Fairy Tale Op. 51, No. 6</i> , mm. 5-9	39
Ex. 39 Medtner, <i>Fairy Tales Op. 51, Nos. 1, 2, and 6</i>	39
Ex. 40 Medtner, <i>Fairy Tale Op. 51, No. 6</i> ; Mozart, <i>Piano Concerto No. 20, K. 466/III</i>	40
Ex. 41a Medtner, <i>Fairy Tale Op. 51, No. 6</i> , mm. 91-94 and 99-102	41
Ex. 41b Medtner, <i>Fairy Tale Op. 51, No. 6</i> , mm. 149-152	41
Ex. 42 Medtner, <i>Fairy Tale Op. 51, No. 6</i> ; Rachmaninoff, <i>Paganini Rhapsody, Op. 43</i>	42

INTRODUCTION

Russian fairy tales inspired many Romantic Russian composers to create colorful musical works. The first to use Russian folk motives was Mikhail Glinka (1804-1857), in his operas *Ivan Susanin: A Life for the Tsar*, and *Ruslan and Lyudmila*.¹ Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov (1844-1908) followed suit with the operas *The Legend of the Invisible City of Kitezh and the Maiden Fevroniya*, *The Golden Cockerel*, and *The Snow Maiden*. Russian folk tales served as source material for famous ballets, such as *Swan Lake* by Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893), and *The Firebird* and *Petrushka* by Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971). Along with operas and ballets, tales also influenced Russian orchestral music. Some notable examples are: the symphonic poem *Tamara* by Mily Balakirev (1837-1910); the tone poems *Baba Yaga* and *Kikimora* by Anatoly Lyadov (1855-1914); and *Symphony No. 3 “Il’ya Muromets”* by Reinhold Glière (1875-1956).

Nikolai Karlovich Medtner (1880-1951) was the first Russian to write piano pieces specifically titled *Skazka*.² His oeuvre includes a number of *Skazki* (Fairy Tales), one of the genres he focused on throughout his compositional life.

In my lecture/recital and this document, I will explore Medtner’s *Skazki, Op. 51*, inspired by, and dedicated to two Russian folklore characters, *Zolushka* (Cinderella) and *Ivanushka the Fool* (The good simpleton).³

¹ Ray Alston, “Singing the Myths of the Nation: Historical Themes in Russian Nineteenth-Century Opera” (PhD diss., The Ohio State University, 2018), 24-5.

² William Charles Bloomquist Jr., “The ‘Fairy Tales’ of Nikolai Medtner” (DMA diss., The University of Texas at Austin, 1993), 49.

³ Barrie Martyn, *Nikolai Medtner: His Life and Music* (England: Ashgate Publishing Company, 1995), 193.

CHAPTER 1 - Nikolai Karlovich Medtner

Nikolai Karlovich Medtner was born in Moscow on January 5, 1880. A lesser-known contemporary of Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873-1943) and Alexander Scriabin (1871-1915), he inherited his musical talent from both sides of his family.⁴ Medtner's great-grandfather, Friedrich Gebhard, an actor and singer at St. Petersburg theaters, studied theology and music in his youth, and wrote plays and poems. His grandfather Karl Goedicke was a well-known teacher, conductor, and occasional composer, and his grandmother, Polina Gebhard was a coloratura soprano and singing teacher in Moscow. Medtner's father, Karl, was not a musician, but loved German and Russian literature, and read and translated plays and poetry. He and Nikolai's great-grandfather were admirers of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832), whose works were a source for the composer's early songs.⁵ It is reasonable to assume that Medtner's family would have fueled his interest in plays and literature, and piqued his curiosity about characters in fairy tales.

Medtner was not only a composer, but also a great pianist.⁶ He began piano lessons at age six with his mother Alexandra Goedicke, a singer in her youth, who played piano with a deep understanding of music. Although he did not have knowledge of music theory, he started to compose, conveying his thoughts using the piano.⁷ According to his wife, Anna Medtner (1877-1965), "the boy covered with music every bit of paper he could lay hold of. It was, however, to the piano that he turned to express the music that was in him."⁸

⁴ Barrie Martyn, *Nikolai Medtner: His Life and Music* (England: Ashgate Publishing Company, 1995), 1-2.

⁵ Ibid., 29-32, 50-54, 61-65.

⁶ Ibid., 2-3.

⁷ Robert Rimm, *The Composer-Pianists: Hamelin and The Eight* (Portland: Amadeus Press, 2002), 118.

⁸ Zarui Apetyan, ed., *N.K. Medtner: Vospominaniya, stat'i, materialy* [Reminiscences, Articles, Materials] (Moscow: Sovetskiy kompozitor, 1981), 38.

Nikolai went to the Moscow Conservatory at age 12, where he took piano lessons, studied music theory and general science, and distinguished himself as a composer and pianist.⁹ Sergei Taneyev (1856-1915), Medtner's counterpoint teacher, remarked, "Medtner was born with sonata form."¹⁰ Medtner could not accept Taneyev's counterpoint instruction due to their difference in compositional approach, and eventually withdrew from his class. However, his teacher respected his decision, and later commented on Medtner's works, "Until now I thought that it was impossible to become a real composer without having thoroughly learned counterpoint, but now I see from our example that I was mistaken in this."¹¹

He received many awards in his last year, including a "small gold medal" for piano upon graduation, and "first honorable mention" in the Third International Music Competition, held in honor of the great Russian pianist Anton Rubinstein (1829-1894).¹² He became a professor at the Moscow Conservatory in 1908, but resigned in order to compose and perform more. In 1915, he accepted this position again, and worked as a professor until he left his native country. Most professors at the Moscow Conservatory had over one hundred students, but Medtner taught only eight to ten students, and held group lessons once a week with all of them. Even after he departed Russia in 1921, his students kept meeting and giving advice to each other.¹³

The Russian Revolution broke out in 1917, and it was difficult to obtain food and supplies.¹⁴ Despite the uncertainties of life, Medtner continued composing, and playing concerts. However, the political situation in Russia made him consider leaving his country, following the lead of

⁹ Anne Medtner, "A Short Biography," in *Nicolas Medtner (1879-1951) A Tribute to his art and personality*, ed. Richard Holt (London: D. Dobson, 1955), 18-19.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹¹ Barrie Martyn, *Nicolas Medtner: His Life and Music* (England: Ashgate Publishing Company, 1995), 6.

¹² *Ibid.*, 9.

¹³ William Charles Bloomquist Jr., "The 'Fairy Tales' of Nikolai Medtner" (DMA diss., The University of Texas at Austin, 1993), 8.

¹⁴ Barrie Martyn, *Nicolas Medtner: His Life and Music* (England: Ashgate Publishing Company, 1995), 128-135.

Rachmaninoff, who was already establishing his fame as a concert pianist. Rachmaninoff wrote to Medtner, advising him to undertake a concert tour of the United States, and commenting about Medtner's songs, Op. 36 and Op. 37, "I repeat what I already said to you in Russia, you are, in my opinion, the greatest composer of our time."¹⁵

Medtner and his wife moved to Germany in 1921, where his struggle to build a career continued.¹⁶ He gave a recital on New Year's Day 1922, playing his own music, including twelve of the *Forgotten Melodies*. The critic Erich Urban wrote in *Berliner Zeitung*, "The *Forgotten Melodies* will quickly be forgotten...the music pours out unbridled and incessant, without purpose and moderation, without heights and depths, without rising to a culminating point."¹⁷ Medtner decided to leave Germany due to lack of concert opportunities, and mounting financial problems.¹⁸

In 1924, Medtner settled down in New York, where he met the musicologist Alfred Swan, and started his first concert tour, playing his *Piano Concerto* with The Philadelphia Orchestra under the direction of Leopold Stokowski at the Academy of Music.¹⁹ However, at the end of this period, he had only two recitals in two months, and the failure of the contract made him conclude his tour of America.²⁰

In 1925, Medtner and Anna relocated to France, where they resided for ten years, while he performed in England, Warsaw, Berlin, Leipzig, Riga, and Reval (later Tallinn).²¹ In 1927, he visited

¹⁵ Barrie Martyn, *Nicolas Medtner: His Life and Music* (England: Ashgate Publishing Company, 1995), 145.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 146.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 149.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 155.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 167.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 168-170.

²¹ Anne Medtner, "A Short Biography," in *Nicolas Medtner (1879-1951) A Tribute to his art and personality*, ed. Richard Holt (London: D. Dobson, 1955), 19-20.

Russia for thirteen concerts and recitals, including the premiere of his *Piano Concerto No. 2, Op. 50*, at the Moscow Conservatory.²²

After returning from Russia to Paris, Medtner received a letter from the Russian soprano Tatiana Makushina, who was inspired by his songs. She invited him to collaborate in a London recital, which was broadcast by the BBC. It was a short visit, but recitals he gave in London were a great success with the public. According to Anna, “The warm welcome, the deathly silence during the performance, had so good an effect on Kolya that he played altogether exceptionally and in a way that even for me was new...He got a heap of letters with greetings, expressions of thanks, requests to meet and so on.” As a result, Medtner was invited by the Royal Philharmonic Society to perform his *Piano Concerto No. 2*.²³

In 1929-30, he had a concert tour of the USA and Canada, and performances in London and Liverpool, followed by a brief concert tour of Britain in 1931, including a recital organized by the Russian Musical Society. During this period, he started to write notes of his thoughts, which were published by *Tair*, Rachmaninoff’s daughters’ Paris publishing house, under the title *The Muse and the Fashion* (in Russian) in 1935.²⁴

The Medtners left France and settled in England in 1935. He had the first sign of a heart attack in 1943, but kept playing on stage and occasional radio broadcasts, even though his health condition was not good.²⁵ In autumn 1946, the 31-year-old Indian Maharaja of Mysore, captivated by Medtner’s music, desired to form a “Nicolas Medtner Society” to support the composer and promote his works. On October 19, 1946, the Maharaja issued a mandate to his Trade Commissioner in London:

²² Barrie Martyn, *Nicolas Medtner: His Life and Music* (England: Ashgate Publishing Company, 1995), 184-187.

²³ *Ibid.*, 191-192.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 208-211, 216.

²⁵ Anne Medtner, “A Short Biography,” in *Nicolas Medtner (1879-1951) A Tribute to his art and personality*, ed. Richard Holt (London: D. Dobson, 1955), 18.

This letter is to inform you that His Highness is specially interested in the music of Nicolas Medtner, a great modern composer and pianist, and wishes to form a 'Nicolas Medtner Society', through which it may be possible to make live in the history of music the compositions of a great composer as interpreted by himself. [...]

It may be possible to have it done as was done before [...] through publishing a series of albums of 8 or 10 records each, covering completely the whole range of Medtner's compositions. His Highness would be willing to come forward at once with a donation of £2000 (later £5000) towards getting such a Society started [...] His Highness suggests the three Piano Concertos, all his piano music, the songs [...]²⁶

Through the Medtner Society, he recorded all of his concerti, the *Canzona matinata*, *Sonata tragica*, *Sonata-Vocalise*, *Violin Sonata No. 1*, songs, and some smaller pieces. His *Piano Concerto No. 3*, *Op. 60* was dedicated to the Maharaja in gratitude for his support. At the end of 1947, Medtner wanted to stop recording in order to finish one of his last works, the *Piano Quintet, Op. posth.* He had started to compose this piece in 1904, and took more than 40 years to complete it.²⁷

In 1947-48, another concert tour of the United States was organized by Alfred Swan and Swan's friend, Henry Drinker, a prominent attorney and music lover. However, Medtner had to postpone the tour, as recurring heart attacks and weakness forced him to stop working.²⁸ In 1951, Medtner felt that his life was coming to an end. On October 31, he sat at his piano, played his *Sonata minacciosa, Op. 53, No. 2*, for the last time, and told Anna, "You know, my fingers can play but my heart can do no more; it is as if I have a mountain to lift up." His condition quickly deteriorated, and he died in the early morning of November 13, 1951.²⁹

²⁶ Barrie Martyn, *Nicolas Medtner: His Life and Music* (England: Ashgate Publishing Company, 1995), 246-7.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 247-8.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 246.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 257-9.

CHAPTER 2 - Medtner's Piano Music and the Fairy Tales

Medtner's music focuses on the piano, as was the case with Frédéric Chopin (1810-1849), and Charles-Valentin Alkan (1813-1888).³⁰ All of his compositions include the piano – fourteen sonatas, shorter piano pieces, three concertos, a quintet, songs, and works for violin and piano. Medtner followed traditional compositional techniques, but at the same time, infused his music with his personal concepts:

We cannot visualize contents outside of form, just as form turns into a dead scheme the minute we consciously separate it from contents. Therefore, whenever we directly approach a living work of art, the two above notions will automatically merge into one. Musical contents are ineffable. Musical form is nothing else than musical contents directed towards out musical consciousness.³¹

Medtner's philosophy resulted in a unique genre, *Skazki*, and variously titled piano pieces, including *Arabesques*, *Dithyrambs*, *Elegies*, *Fantasy-Improvisations*, *Forgotten Melodies*, *Poems*, and *Romances*. Similar to Liszt's *Dante Sonata*, and Scriabin's *Sonate-Fantaisie No. 2*, eleven of Medtner's fourteen piano sonatas have descriptive titles, such as *Märchen-Sonate, Op. 25, No. 1*; *Winter Wind, Op. 25, No. 2*; *Sonata-Reminiscenza, Op. 38, No. 1*; *Sonata romantica, Op. 53, No. 1*; *Sonata minacciosa, Op. 53, No. 2*; and *Sonata-Idyll, Op. 56*.³² Medtner's *Sonata tragica, Op. 39, No. 5*, the final work from the second cycle of *Forgotten Melodies*, displays narrative and descriptive traits. He always insisted to play *Sonata tragica* right after *Canzona matinata* (Morning Song), the fourth piece from the *Forgotten Melodies*, in order to contrast the bright mood that depicts youth, the morning of life, with the tragedies of later life.³³ His performance indications, such as *dolente* (sorrowful,

³⁰ Barrie Martyn, Program notes to *Medtner: The Complete Piano Sonatas*, performed by Marc-André Hamelin, piano, Hyperion Records CDA67221/4, 1998, CD.

³¹ Nicolas Medtner. *The Muse and the Fashion*, trans. Alfred Swan (Haverford, PA: Haverford College Bookstore, 1951), 122-3.

³² Op. 11 has three sonatas bound together under the title *Sonaten-Triade* with the subtitle "Elegy" for the D minor.

³³ Barrie Martyn, *Nicolas Medtner: His Life and Music* (England: Ashgate Publishing Company, 1995), 139-141.

painful), *tenebroso* (dark, gloomy, murky), *irato* (angry), and *pietoso* (pitiable, merciful), help narrate the story of the piece.

Medtner composed *Skazki* (Tales) throughout his life.³⁴ The term *Skazka* originated with Rimsky-Korsakov, who had composed an orchestral work with that title in 1880. Medtner likely was inspired by the Russian master, but used *Märchen*, the German word, meaning “tale” or “story” in his first set of tales, Op. 8, rather than *Skazka*.³⁵ He adopted *Märchen* from the German Romantic poetry he read, and had already used Goethe’s *Tragedy Fragment in Three Arabesques*, Op. 7.³⁶ *Skazka* does not exactly translate to “fairy tale” in English. It has more implications than just fairy tale, including the meaning of legend or *bylina*, a traditional East Slavic oral epic poem.³⁷

Medtner preferred the simple title “Tales” but approved the term “Fairy Tales” for the publication of Op. 48 and Op. 51, and gramophone recordings.³⁸ However, according to Hamish Milne, a British pianist who recorded Medtner’s complete *Skazki*, Medtner accepted the use of the English translation “Fairy Tales” for this genre after his first tour in America.³⁹

Medtner’s *Skazki* show his abundant creativity. The Canadian pianist and composer Marc-André Hamelin remarked that, as they contain numerous vibrant musical ideas in a short space, the audience might more easily absorb them. In contrast, the densely constructed sonatas require of the listener greater concentration, and familiarity with the content.⁴⁰ And the writer Richard Holt noted, “No contribution to piano literature is more original or more enthralling in its abundance of lively

³⁴ Robert Rimm, *The Composer-Pianists: Hamelin and The Eight* (Portland: Amadeus Press, 2002), 130.

³⁵ Jonathan Paul Tauscheck, “A Performance Guide to Two Fairy Tales of Nikolai Medtner” (DMA diss., The University of Iowa, 2012), 34.

³⁶ Barrie Martyn, *Nicolas Medtner: His Life and Music* (England: Ashgate Publishing Company, 1995), 36.

³⁷ Ekaterina Chernaya-Oh, “The *Skazki* (Fairy Tales) of Nikolai Medtner: The Evolution and Characteristics of The Genre with Compositional and Performance Aspects of Selected Fairy Tales” (DMA diss., University of North Texas, 2008), 6.

³⁸ Barrie Martyn, *Nicolas Medtner: His Life and Music* (England: Ashgate Publishing Company, 1995), 36.

³⁹ Hamish Milne, one of Britain’s leading pianists, <http://www.hamishmilne.com>

⁴⁰ Marc-André Hamelin, “Notes,” in *Nikolai Medtner: Complete Fairy Tales for Solo Piano* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2001), 9.

picturesque episodes than this series of Fairy Tales.”⁴¹ The famous Russian pianist and pedagogue Heinrich Neuhaus (1888-1964) wrote:

One of Medtner’s favorite piano genres was fairy tale - little musical novellas. This genre is close to novelettes of Schumann and to intermezzos of Brahms, but is quite new and original due to program-poetic content, even though not indicated.⁴²

Medtner composed a total of 38 tales over a span of twenty-eight years:

Two Tales, Op. 8 (1905)

Three Tales, Op. 9 (1904-6)

Two Tales, Op. 14 (1906-7)

Two Tales, Op. 20 (1909)

Four Tales, Op. 26 (ca. 1912)

“*Tale*” from *Three Pieces, Op. 31* (ca. 1914-15)

Tale (without opus number) (1915)

Four Tales, Op. 34 (ca. 1916-17)

Four Tales, Op. 35 (ca. 1916-17)

Three Tales, Op. 42 (ca. 1921-23)

Two Tales, Op. 48 (ca. 1926)

Six Tales, Op. 51 (ca. 1928)

“*Tales*” from *Romantic Sketches for the Young, Op. 54* (ca. 1932)

Medtner’s captivating music was inspired by various sources such as literature, nature, and Russian folklore. Some tales have epigraphs from literature or poetry: “When we have called a thing ours, It departs from us forever” from Tyutchev’s poem in *Fairy Tale, Op. 34, No. 2*; “There lived in

⁴¹ Richard Holt, *Medtner and his Music* (London: Rimington, Van Wyck, 1948), 20.

⁴² Heinrich Neuhaus, “The Contemporary of Scriabin and Rachmaninov” in *Memories Articles, Materials*, ed. Z. A. Apetyan (Moskva: Soviet Composer, 1981). 33.

the world a poor knight” from Pushkin’s poem in *Fairy Tale, Op. 34, No. 4*; and, “Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks!” from Shakespeare’s play *King Lear*. In addition, *Fairy Tale, Op. 14, No. 1* is subtitled *Ophelia’s Song*, referring to the young woman in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*.

Other tales with titles are: *March of the Paladin, Op. 14, No. 2*; *Campanella, Op. 20, No. 2* (with the note “a song or tale told by a bell and not about a bell”); *The Magic Violin, Op. 34, No. 1*; *Russian Folktale, Op. 42, No. 1*; *Phrygian Mode, Op. 42, No. 2*; *Dance Tale, Op. 48, No. 1*; *Tale of the Elves, Op. 48, No. 2*; and *Bird’s Tale, Tale–Scherzo, Tale–The Organ Grinder, and Tale–The Beggar* from *Romantic Sketches for the Young, Op. 54*.

Medtner’s performance indication *Narrante* (narrating) at the beginning of some pieces further makes clear the story-telling nature of the music.

CHAPTER 3 - *Six Fairy Tales, Op. 51*

Medtner was averse to modernism, as was Rachmaninoff. He believed, “program music is only music in which the form itself and contents are dictated and justified by a certain program or subject matter.”⁴³ *Skazki, Op. 51* reflects his thoughts in terms of design and characterization. For example, he uses traditional structures such as sonata form (Nos. 3, 4 and 6), and ternary form (Nos. 2 and 5), but imbues the tales with Russian folkloristic qualities. Other than the dedication to *Zolushka* and *Ivanushka the Fool*, the piano score has no titles or other programmatic information for any of the six tales. However, a very brief description of this piece appeared in program notes for Medtner’s recital at Bryn Mawr College, Pennsylvania on January 14, 1930: “In the first tale the characters are introduced, the second is a song of Cinderella, the last a dance of the Fool.”⁴⁴ Without this valuable source, it is difficult, if not impossible to discern what the work is about. This single sentence is a key to building a story line, based on the two characters, and the musical content.

These two characters may be thought to belong to separate, or totally different stories. But according to the Soviet folklorist and scholar Vladimir Propp (1895-1970), there is a relationship among many folk tales, and he introduces common features of the two figures.⁴⁵ He mentions that *Zolushka* is different from the female character *Zamarashka* (Dirty-Face) in Russian folklore. *Zolushka* is linked with the German *Aschenbrödel* or *Asche*, and the French *Cendrillon*. The English adaptation, Cinderella, associates the young woman with cinders, or ashes.⁴⁶ *Ivanushka the Fool* is also linked

⁴³ Nicolas Medtner. *The Muse and the Fashion*, trans. Alfred Swan (Haverford, PA: Haverford College Bookstore, 1951), 124.

⁴⁴ Hamish Milne, Program notes to *Medtner: The Complete Skazki*, performed by Hamish Milne, piano, Hyperion Records CDA67491/2, 2006, CD.

⁴⁵ Vladimir Propp, *The Russian Folktale*, ed. Sibelan Forrester (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2012), 148.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 210.

with “cinders.” In the tale, he always sits on the stove, in the cinders, and is dubbed “Ivan Behind-the-Stove.”⁴⁷

These characters are humble, diligent, often soiled, and scorned by their respective two siblings. They are aided by the Fairy Godmother (Cinderella) and *Sivka-Burka*, the magic horse (Ivan), so they can meet the prince (Cinderella) or princess (Ivan) at the palace. Cinderella’s glass slipper, and a ring seal of a star placed on Ivan’s forehead by the princess lead to the reunion with their partners. Finally, Cinderella and Ivan live happily ever after with their loved ones.



Skazki, Op. 51 was written in 1928, and comprises six fairy tales, in which Medtner’s unique and distinguished compositional style is displayed in full bloom. After hearing Medtner play the work, Rachmaninoff remarked, “No one tells such tales as Kolya!”⁴⁸ There are common features between the pieces. Five of the six tales have an introduction (except for No. 3), where important musical ideas first appear, and then are sprinkled throughout the piece. Medtner’s writing has been described as “textural music” by many scholars and his admirers, and contains a variety of textures made up of a sophisticated combination of rhythms, articulations, and voice layers.⁴⁹ With regard to articulation, Karpeyev writes that *articolando* is the most frequently mentioned word in notes compiled by the English pianist Edna Iles (1905-2003), Medtner’s last pupil.⁵⁰ In their lessons, Medtner never allowed her to play in a “flimsy” or “feeble” manner.⁵¹

Medtner provided increasingly specific pedal directions such as *con Pedale*, *senza Pedale*, *con pochissimo Pedale*, vibrating pedals, short pedals in No. 3, and even an 1/16th pedal in No. 5. The first

⁴⁷ Ibid., 161.

⁴⁸ Hamish Milne, “Foreword,” in *Nikolai Medtner: Complete Fairy Tales for Solo Piano* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2001), 7.

⁴⁹ Hiroko Nagahata, “Medtner’s Fairy Tales: Texture and Subtlety” (DMA diss., Michigan State University, 2012), 8.

⁵⁰ Alexander Karpeyev, “New Light on Nikolay Medtner as Pianist and Teacher, The Edna Iles Medtner Collection (EIMC) at the British Library” (DMA diss., City University London, 2014), 48.

⁵¹ Ibid., 48.

and fifth tales also include timings. Yasser mentions, “Each number of this set has at least one theme that is spiced with unquestionable folklorisms.”⁵² For example, Nos. 1, 3 and 4 contain folk-like features at the end of themes; Nos. 2 and 5 use actual tunes from other composers; and, the theme of No. 6 is written in both minor and major modes, a characteristic of certain folk music, varying some spots in order to adjust for the change in tonality.

My interpretation of the stories of *Zolushka* and *Ivanushka the Fool* contained in the six tales is based on information contained in the score, and the vividly descriptive nature of the actual music.



Tale No. 1, *Allegro molto vivace al rigore de tempo e sempre leggierissimo*, is in D minor.

Medtner indicated on the first page, “Dedication: To Cinderella and Young Ivan the Fool [another folktale character].” There are many features that refer to the main (Cinderella and Ivan) and other characters, as they are introduced in this tale.

The structure is **ABCA'**, and the piece opens with an Introduction in an ambiguous key (mm. 1-13). Medtner presents important material at the beginning that will reappear in later sections. He develops and tosses around these musical seeds (D–C–A in m. 1, chromatic figuration in mm. 4-6, resolute chords in mm. 9-13) throughout the music.

⁵² Josef Yasser, “N. K. Medtner,” in *Nicolas Medtner, 1879-1951: A tribute to his art and personality*, ed. Richard Holt (London: Dennis Dobson, 1955), 59-60.



Ex. 1 Medtner, *Fairy Tale Op. 51, No. 1*, mm. 1-16

The A section starts with a folk melody in m. 14. The material (D–C–A) from the introduction is used for the first (A–D, m. 14) and second (A–C, m. 22) themes. This naïve-sounding theme introducing Ivan contains traits of Russian folk music, such as limited range, few skips larger than a 4th, stepwise rising 3^{rds}, and extended repetition of a single pitch.⁵³ These features are found throughout the tale.



Ex. 2 Medtner, *Fairy Tale Op. 51, No. 1*, m. 14 and m. 22

⁵³ William Charles Bloomquist Jr., “The ‘Fairy Tales’ of Nikolai Medtner” (DMA diss., The University of Texas at Austin, 1993), 64-5.

According to Yasser, the phrase ending of this first theme (C–A) is “in the Great Russian version,” and when repeated in A', it is in the Ukrainian version, with the interval of augmented second (C-sharp–B-flat–A).⁵⁴



Ex. 3 Medtner, *Fairy Tale Op. 51, No. 1*, m. 17 - Great Russian and Ukrainian versions

The second theme at m. 22 depicts Ivan’s dance, due to its dance-like melody with *tenuto* weak beats.



Ex. 4 Medtner, *Fairy Tale Op. 51, No. 1*, mm. 22-25

Both hands have the same 8th note and quarter note figuration in mm. 36-38, suggesting Ivan the Fool being pushed around by his two older brothers. Chromatic quarter notes tossed between the hands conjure up their jostling (mm. 36-38), and their reappearance a few bars later in full chords demonstrates their greater mistreatment of Ivan (mm. 56-59).

⁵⁴ Josef Yasser, “N. K. Medtner,” in *Nicolas Medtner, 1879-1951: A tribute to his art and personality*, ed. Richard Holt (London: Dennis Dobson, 1955), 59.



Ex. 5 Medtner, *Fairy Tale Op. 51, No. 1*, mm. 35-38 and mm. 56-59

B (mm. 64-111) has a dance-like character, with the material from the introduction in diminution: quarter notes → 8th notes → 16th notes (mm. 64-69).



Ex. 6 Medtner, *Fairy Tale Op. 51, No. 1*, Introduction and mm. 64-70

Medtner's *Strepitoso* (noisy) indication in m. 73, and the chromatic figuration in mm. 96-97 raise the level of the brothers' mistreatment of Ivan. The combination of 8th and quarter notes that prevail in **A**, and the rest of the tale, is presented backwards in mm. 85-86. The first theme then follows in augmentation with chromatic figures. Before **B** ends, a two-against-three figure appears, preparing for new material in **C**.

C (mm. 112-261) starts with gloomy melodies in A minor that invoke Cinderella's doleful predicament, and develops materials from the introduction and A with new ideas. These seem completely different, but are actually rhythmically derived from the previous part.



Ex. 7 Medtner, *Fairy Tale Op. 51, No. 1*, mm. 111-123

The two sisters come in (mm. 124-131), and push Cinderella around, while the two-against-three rhythmic combination that was used in B reappears, with a new melody in thirds and chords. The following gentle dotted rhythm figuration illustrates Cinderella's sweeping with a broom (mm. 132-135).



Ex. 8 Medtner, *Fairy Tale Op. 51, No. 1*, mm. 124-135

In the middle section of C (mm. 140-212), chromatically heightened musical ideas from the introduction and A return, as the conflict between the characters increases.

Ex. 9 Medtner, *Fairy Tale Op. 51, No. 1*, return of musical ideas from introduction and A

In mm. 213-231, three figures from A reappear, as Ivan tussles with his brothers.

Ex. 10 Medtner, *Fairy Tale Op. 51, No. 1*, mm. 213-231

In mm. 246-262, the *Strepitoso* and build-up to the *fff* climax signify the height of the mean siblings' abuse. The resolute chords with chromatic movement increase dramatic tension, as the struggle intensifies.



Ex. 11 Medtner, *Fairy Tale Op. 51, No. 1*, mm. 246-262

When A' returns in m. 262 with the main theme, the rhythm is presented in augmentation (quarters), and then ornamented.



Ex. 12a Medtner, *Fairy Tale Op. 51, No. 1*, mm. 262-267



Ex. 12b Medtner, *Fairy Tale Op. 51, No. 1*, mm. 270-273

The melody in mm. 280-281 recalls Rachmaninoff's *Piano Concerto No. 3 in D minor, Op. 30*, composed in 1909.



Ex. 13 Medtner, *Fairy Tale Op. 51, No. 1*; Rachmaninoff, *Piano Concerto No. 3, Op. 30/I*

After the second theme in m. 278, the main theme keeps appearing in mm. 305-329 with chromatic 16th notes in the left-hand. This theme is added in the bass in augmentation, grappling and alternating between the hands as it leads to the coda.



Ex. 14 Medtner, *Fairy Tale Op. 51, No. 1*, mm. 305-312

A coda closes the piece with running notes that give sense of what will follow, as a similar figuration is used in No. 2.



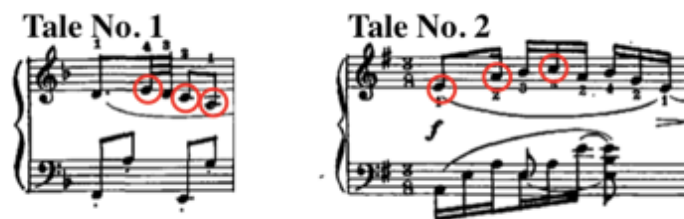
Tale No. 2, *Cantabile, tranquillo*, the song of Cinderella, is in **ABA'** form in Dorian mode on A. In mm. 1-12, the right-hand melody outlines the main theme. Like the introduction of No. 1, its texture and rhythmic patterns contrast with the next section. The repeated *accelerando* figurations begin the unfolding of Cinderella's story.

Medtner develops the motivic material ("Cinderella theme") in the first measure of **A** (mm. 13-46) throughout the piece. The atmosphere of the theme in Dorian mode on A evokes Cinderella's sad circumstances, as her stepmother and stepsisters are maltreating her. The main melody in the left-hand is from the introduction, but transformed to a *siciliano* rhythm.



Ex. 15 Medtner, *Fairy Tale Op. 51, No. 2*, mm. 1-2 and mm. 13-16

This thematic material shares the notes E–C–A with Tale No. 1 (m. 17, “the Great Russian version”).⁵⁵



Ex. 16 Medtner, *Fairy Tales Op. 51, Nos. 1 and 2*, shared notes

In mm. 13-27, Cinderella begins singing softly (*tranquillo*), while sweeping with a broom (ascending figures), but starts to sing out (*f*), with deeper emotion in m. 28. Medtner uses an interesting

⁵⁵ Josef Yasser, “N. K. Medtner,” in *Nicolas Medtner, 1879-1951: A tribute to his art and personality*, ed. Richard Holt (London: Dennis Dobson, 1955), 59

phrasing plan in A. There are four phrases before the transition: the first phrase has seven measures, and one measure is added incrementally to each of the following three phrases.

Allegretto cantabile ed espressivo 1/2: 50-55

p tranquillo

7 measures

poco più risoluto

crescendo *cantabile*

8 measures

diminuendo

9 measures

f *espress.* *diminuendo*

poco ritenuto

10 measures

Ex. 17 Medtner, *Fairy Tale Op. 51, No. 2*, addition of extra measures from m. 28

In the transition (mm. 47-68), the *siciliano* melody continues in C major but the right-hand's accompaniment has a different figuration, developing a delightful dance-like rhythm that prepares the next part. Cinderella is becoming excited, dressing up for the royal ball at the palace with the Fairy Godmother's help, as the music whirls *più vivo* and *più mosso* towards **B**, in A major (mm 55-68). The "Cinderella theme" keeps appearing in the left hand, while the right hand figuration changes from 64th notes to 16th notes, as the *siciliano* gradually becomes a waltz. The E–A–G-sharp figure in m. 65 piles up from the lower to the upper register (mm. 65-68), leading to its diminution in 16^{ths}, as the **B** section begins.



Ex. 18 Medtner, *Fairy Tale Op. 51, No. 2*, mm. 65-72

B (mm. 69-108) is a swirling waltz in A major, illustrating Cinderella's dance with the Prince. This section brings to mind the third movement of *Piano Concerto in A minor, Op. 54* by Robert Schumann (1810-1854).



Ex. 19 Medtner, *Fairy Tale Op. 51, No. 2*, mm. 69-74; Schumann, *Piano Concerto, Op. 54/III*

The new idea in this section is inspired by *Wine Feast* from Tchaikovsky's *50 Russian Folk Songs*.⁵⁶ Medtner also quoted this in a later work, in the last movement of his *Sonata for Violin and Piano, Op. 57, No. 3*.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Josef Yasser, "N. K. Medtner," in *Nicolas Medtner, 1879-1951: A tribute to his art and personality*, ed. Richard Holt (London: Dennis Dobson, 1955), 59.

⁵⁷ Oliver H. Markson, "A Study of Nikolai Medtner's Compositional Technique: Form and Narrative in Tales" (DMA diss., The City University of New York, 2017), 53.

Tchaikovsky 'Wine Feast'

Умеренно



Medtner Fairy Tale

poco a poco a tempo giocoso



Medtner Sonata for violin and piano "Epica" Op. 57, No. 3

poco più sostenuto ♩ = 120



Ex. 20 Medtner, *Fairy Tale* Op. 51, No. 2, similarities with Tchaikovsky and Medtner

In mm. 93-108, Cinderella notices the clock approaching midnight, while dancing with the prince. She flees from the ballroom, but loses her glass slipper (*sf* trill in m. 100), and limps away with one shoe (off-beat accents in mm. 101-103).



Ex. 21 Medtner, *Fairy Tale* Op. 51, No. 2, mm. 100-103

In A', Cinderella sings the *siciliano* melody in Dorian mode on A (mm. 109-126), portraying the return to her normal life. She falls asleep in the coda (mm. 127-142), dreaming of her prince.



Tale No. 3, *Allegretto tranquillo e grazioso*, is in A major. This tale has a wholesome and charming character, with a sense of urgency at the same time. The form could be considered as sonata-allegro, since it has two contrasting themes in related keys, tonal fluctuation in the development, and a return to the main key in the recapitulation.⁵⁸

A dreamy melody appears, as Cinderella wakes up thinking of the prince, hoping he will come to find her. This piece is similar to *Tale No. 1* in terms of usage of rhythms and syncopations with accents on weak beats, and the first theme (Cinderella) summons up the notes A–C-sharp–E (Ukrainian version).



Ex. 22 Medtner, *Fairy Tales Op. 51*, Nos. 1 and 3

Along with Nos. 1 and 6, No. 3 has many characteristics of Russian folk music in its melodies. The first theme has no skips larger than a 4th, and there are many stepwise rising thirds. Repeated notes, a feature of Russian folk music, are used at the beginning of the second theme (mm. 5-6), recalling the *Russian Easter Overture* of Rimsky-Korsakov.

⁵⁸ Ekaterina Chernaya-Oh, "The Skazki (Fairy Tales) of Nikolai Medtner: The Evolution and Characteristics of The Genre with Compositional and Performance Aspects of Selected Fairy Tales" (DMA diss., University of North Texas, 2008), 50.

Умеренно (Moderato) V. Prokunin '65 Russian Folk Songs' No. 23

У во - рот, во - рот, во - рот, У ка - ли - но - вых во -

- рот, ах! Ду - най мой, Ду - най, Ве - се - лый Ду - най. Ра - зы -

Ex. 23a Prokunin, *65 Russian Folk Songs*, No. 23

legatissimo

Ex. 23b Medtner, *Fairy Tale Op. 51, No. 3*

Rimsky-Korsakov
Russian Easter Festival Overture, Op. 36

Lento mystico. $\text{♩} = 84$

p Hois.

Ex. 23c Rimsky-Korsakov, *Russian Easter Overture*

The second theme (mm. 26-64) portrays the prince on his horse, galloping around to find the woman who fits the glass slipper. This theme is tonally unstable, consisting of expanded repeated notes

along with a stepwise rising third. According to Bloomquist, these features are widespread in Medtner's *Fairy Tales*.⁵⁹ He mentions that stepwise rising thirds occur in more than half of them, and the use of repeated notes is a common Medtnerian melodic trait.⁶⁰

The prince stops for a rest, thinking of Cinderella with a lyrical melody at m. 54, and resumes his quest in the development (mm. 65-97), which starts with the second theme in C major. The prince arrives at Cinderella's house (m. 68), where the two sisters try hard to fit into the slipper (mm. 72-75), their efforts shown by the many breath marks between sequences.



Ex. 24 Medtner, *Fairy Tale Op. 51, No. 3*, mm. 67-76

In mm. 78-84, the repeated *tenebroso* tritones express the prince's dejection.

⁵⁹ William Charles Bloomquist Jr., "The 'Fairy Tales' of Nikolai Medtner" (DMA diss., The University of Texas at Austin, 1993), 65.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 66.



Ex. 25 Medtner, *Fairy Tale Op. 51, No. 3*, mm. 77-85

He sprints away to continue his search (m. 86), but turns around, having caught a glimpse of Cinderella hiding by the fireplace. The two sisters protest, and try to prevent him from reaching her (*Strepitoso* at mm. 90-93), but he prevails, tries the glass slipper on Cinderella, and it fits perfectly (return to A major in mm. 96-97).



Ex. 26 Medtner, *Fairy Tale Op. 51, No. 3*, mm. 90-97

The difficult passage in mm. 90-91 is reminiscent of Variation 11 from *Variations on a Theme by Paganini, Op. 35, Book 2* (1863) by Johannes Brahms (1833-1897), and Variation 6 from *Variations on a Nursery Tune, Op. 25* (1914) by Ernő Dohnányi (1877-1960). One wonders if it may have influenced Variation 10 from Rachmaninoff's *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini, Op. 43* (1934).



Ex. 27 Medtner, *Fairy Tale Op. 51, No. 3*, compared to Brahms, Dohnányi, and Rachmaninoff

The recapitulation (mm. 98-127) returns to the dreamy “Cinderella theme” in A major with arpeggiated accompaniment, evoking her contentment. The lyrical prince theme suggests he is with Cinderella (mm. 120-127), and leads to the coda, where the prince takes her on his horse and rides away. The last four measures, *Andante*, derive from the first theme, as the story comes to a happy end.



Tale No. 4, Allegretto con moto flessibile, is in F-sharp minor. This piece unfolds the story of *Ivanushka the Fool*, a character in the Russian fairy tale *Sivka-Burka* who is always sitting on the stove, in the cinders. An aging father tells his three sons “Children! When I die, you each in turn come to my grave to sleep for three nights.”⁶¹

The form is sonata-allegro, with an introduction. The initial idea C-sharp–F-sharp–A (mm. 1-6), used throughout the piece, is an integral part of the first theme, presented reversed, and in augmentation.

⁶¹ Vladimir Propp, *The Russian Folktale*, ed. Sibelan Forrester (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2012), 173.



Ex. 28 Medtner, *Fairy Tale Op. 51, No. 4*, mm. 1-11

The somber first theme (*magico*) appears in different voices, describing the three brothers' discussion about visiting their father's grave (mm. 7-30). The two older brothers, being lazy or afraid, force their younger sibling, Ivan, to go to the grave in their stead. This theme contains many folkloristic traits, including ten repeated notes, a limited range, and no leaps larger than a 4th. Each phrase has five measures, and ends with F-sharp–C-sharp, first in quarters, then in 8^{ths}.



Ex. 29 Medtner, *Fairy Tale Op. 51, No. 4*, mm. 6-30

The second theme, *molto cantabile* in C-sharp minor, evokes Ivan's grief for his dead father, as he sits and waits until his father rises from the grave at midnight (from m. 38).



Ex. 30 Medtner, *Fairy Tale Op. 51, No. 4*, mm. 38-43

In the development, Ivan's father asks who is sitting there (mm. 80-83), and then summons the magic horse *Sivka-Burka*. He presents it to Ivan, saying, "Here, my son, is a good horse for you. And you, horse, serve him as you have served me." He then lies back down in his grave (mm. 84-89).⁶² At m. 90, the magic horse appears after a short breath, followed by ambiguous key changes and quick tempo alternations (*poco stretto*–*allargando*–*poco a poco accelerando*).

In the first theme of the recapitulation, Ivan returns home (mm. 108-128), where his brothers ask him about their father. He tells them about the encounter, but says nothing about the magic horse. One day, Ivan and his brothers hear the tsar's proclamation, "Whoever can kiss my daughter, princess Dear-Face on the lips while jumping up to the third floor on his horse, I will marry her to that man."⁶³ The second theme begins *cantabile* in F-sharp minor (mm. 138-161), becoming agitated as it drives toward the end, showing Ivan's resolution to enter and win the contest. It finally arrives at a *presto ff*, and then withdraws quickly, before a short, accented F-sharp minor chord brings the tale to an unexpected end.



⁶² Vladimir Propp, *The Russian Folktale*, ed. Sibelan Forrester (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2012), 173.

⁶³ Ibid.

Tale No. 5, *Presto*, is in F-sharp minor, and describes Ivan's ride on the magic horse, as he seeks to find the princess. Its fast tempo and restless passages allude to the suitors who are trying to jump on their horses over the pillars to kiss the princess sitting at the top of the tower.

In the introduction (mm. 1-26), the up-and-down, two-against-three figures and hemiolas depict the many suitors' attempts, and the difficulty of climbing up, struggling, and then falling down (off-beats).



Ex. 31 Medtner, *Fairy Tale Op. 51, No. 5*, mm. 1-4

In terms of form, the thematic material suggests a binary plan: first theme (mm. 29-44), second theme (mm. 45-74), first theme (mm 75-94), and second theme (mm. 94-111).⁶⁴ However, the harmonic scheme (i-III-i) reveals an **ABA'** form.

In **A** (mm. 29-58), the first theme enters in the left-hand, over continuing triplets from the introduction. It shares the same notes C-sharp–F-sharp–A with *Tale No. 4*.



Ex. 32 Medtner, *Fairy Tales Op. 51, Nos. 4 and 5*

⁶⁴ William Charles Bloomquist Jr., "The 'Fairy Tales' of Nikolai Medtner" (DMA diss., The University of Texas at Austin, 1993), 78.

Yasser mentions that this theme is similar to the folk-like love song from Mussorgsky's opera *The Fair at Sorochyntsi*.⁶⁵

Ex. 33 Medtner, *Fairy Tale Op. 51, No. 5*; Mussorgsky, *The Fair at Sorochyntsi*

The second theme enters on an offbeat at m. 44, implying the princess's anticipation. There are three phrases of the princess theme in B minor: the first phrase has six measures, and one measure is sequentially elided in each of the following phrases, as Ivan is getting closer to her. The arrival to the **B** section, with the same theme now in A major and on the main beat, signifies the princess's relief at finally seeing Ivan approach (mm. 59-94).

⁶⁵ Josef Yasser, "N. K. Medtner," in *Nicolas Medtner, 1879-1951: A tribute to his art and personality*, ed. Richard Holt (London: Dennis Dobson, 1955), 60.

6 measures

5 measures

4 measures

p *dimin.* *pp*

crescendo

diminuendo

sempre a tempo *p dolce, cantabile*

Ex. 34 Medtner, *Fairy Tale Op. 51, No. 5*, mm. 41-60

The second theme in **B** depicts the plaintive song of the princess (mm. 59-71), as she waits for her future husband, and then sees Ivan in m. 68. This princess theme is linked to the “Cinderella theme” of *Tale No. 2* (E–A–B).



Ex. 35 Medtner, *Fairy Tales Op. 51, Nos. 2 and 5*

Ivan jumps thrice to reach to the princess with the magic horse's help (mm. 75-87). On his third attempt, with a big leap he finally reaches and kisses the princess (mm. 83-86), and she stamps a star mark on his forehead with her seal-ring (m. 87).



Ex. 36 Medtner, *Fairy Tale Op. 51, No. 5*, mm. 73-84

However, in the coda, Ivan suddenly turns and gallops away, nowhere to be found, as the tale ends.

This piece bears a resemblance to Rachmaninoff's *Barcarolle in G minor, Op. 10, No. 3*. The two works have melodies in the middle register against swirling triplets or 16th notes in a quiet mood. In the Codas of both pieces, arpeggio chords appear against the right-hand fading out toward the mysterious ending of the final bars.

Medtner



Rachmaninoff



Ex. 37 Medtner, *Fairy Tale Op. 51, No. 5*; Rachmaninoff, *Barcarolle, Op. 10, No. 3*



Tale No. 6, *Allegro vivace sempre al rigore di tempo*, is also in sonata-allegro form, in G major. The tsar has ordered a feast and invited all the suitors, so the princess's love may be revealed. After looking for him among all the guests, the princess finds her star mark stamped on Ivan's forehead. He washes off the soot, calls the magic horse, and turns into the handsomest young man. The pleased tsar then gives a big wedding banquet to celebrate their love.

The tale opens full of humor with unexpected accents, trumpet sounds signaling the commencement of the banquet (mm. 1-4). The exposition (mm. 5-65) begins with a jaunty first theme, with accents on different beats in each measure representing the dance of the happy, love-stricken Ivan.



Ex. 38 Medtner, *Fairy Tale Op. 51, No. 6*, mm. 5-9

The thematic material A–E–C is summoned up from previous tales.



Ex. 39 Medtner, *Fairy Tales Op. 51, Nos. 1, 2, and 6*

There is a striking similarity between this theme and the ending of the third movement of *Piano Concerto No. 20 in D minor, K. 466* by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791). This serious, dramatic concerto has an unexpectedly light and optimistic ending, and appears to have inspired Medtner to quote it in this final tale.

Medtner

Mozart

Ex. 40 Medtner, *Fairy Tale Op. 51, No. 6*; Mozart, *Piano Concerto No. 20, K. 466/III*

The tritones (mm. 91-94, 99-102) and chromatic figures (mm. 149-152) in the development indicate the jealousy of Ivan's two older brothers, as he finds his true love.



Ex. 41a Medtner, *Fairy Tale Op. 51, No. 6*, mm. 91-94 and 99-102



Ex. 41b Medtner, *Fairy Tale Op. 51, No. 6*, mm. 149-152

The descending figure (mm. 161-164) in the coda is curiously similar to a passage in Variation 15 from Rachmaninoff's *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini*, Op. 43 (1934).



Ex. 42 Medtner, *Fairy Tale* Op. 51, No. 6; Rachmaninoff, *Paganini Rhapsody*, Op. 43

The music bustles along towards the exultant conclusion of brightly ringing trumpets, and a final G major chord flourish.

CONCLUSION

Nikolai Medtner's piano music has received little attention over the years. His writing style, an amalgam of traditional compositional techniques, contrapuntal elements, and frequently dense, complicated piano writing, is not conducive to easy, effortless listening. Although accused of composing "in the past," Medtner nevertheless has a very compelling, personal voice that is better absorbed and understood through close study and repeated hearings.

His interest in literature and Russian folk stories led him to compose many *Skazki* throughout his life. In contrast to his difficult to grasp piano sonatas, the *Skazki* are more accessible, as the various musical ideas and concepts are presented in a short time span. The *Six Fairy Tales, Op. 51*, are a wonderful example of Medtner's narrative writing, unfolding in a captivating manner the stories of *Zolushka* (Cinderella) and *Ivanushka the Fool* (the good simpleton). Although at first the two seem unrelated, delving deeply into the content of the two characters' stories reveals a strong kinship. Both live around cinders or ashes, mistreated by two siblings. They are helped to find their future mates by a fairy godmother and a magic horse. A prince and a princess discover them via a glass slipper and a star mark, and they finally wed to live happily thereafter.

The composer's narrative writing is masterful, as he incorporates thematic ideas of one story into the other, intermingling the two stories to demonstrate the connection. Medtner's mastery in handling musical material, while relating, and uniting the two "cinder" characters, results in delightful flights of fancy that bring *Zolushka* and *Ivanushka the Fool* to life.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Alston, Ray. "Singing the Myths of the Nation: Historical Themes in Russian Nineteenth-Century Opera." PhD diss., The Ohio State University, 2018.
- Apetyan, Zarui, ed. *N.K. Medtner: Vospominaniya, stat'i, materiali* [Reminiscences, Articles, Materials]. Moscow: Sovetskiy Kompozitor, 1981.
- Benson, Stephen. *The Greenwood Encyclopedia of Folktales and Fairy Tales, vol.2*. Edited by Donald Haase. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2008.
- Bertensson, Sergei and Jay Leyda. *Sergei Rachmaninoff*. New York: New York University Press, 1956.
- Bloomquist, William Charles, Jr. "The 'Fairy Tales' of Nikolai Medtner." DMA diss., The University of Texas at Austin, 1993.
- Chernaya-Oh, Ekaterina. "The Skazki (Fairy Tales) of Nikolai Medtner: The Evolution and Characteristics of The Genre with Compositional and Performance Aspects of Selected Fairy Tales." DMA diss., University of North Texas, 2008.
- Covatta, Sister M. Annette Teresa. "The Piano Solo Music in Smaller Forms of Nicolas Medtner." DMA diss., Boston University, 1965.
- Emerson, Bradley James. "Medtner's Sonata-Ballade: Interpreting Its Dramatic Trajectory through Virtual Subjectivities." DMA diss., The University of Texas at Austin, 2016.
- Hamelin, Marc-André. "Notes." In *Nikolai Medtner: Complete Fairy Tales for Solo Piano*, 9. Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2001.
- Hartnett, Owen J. "Comparing Russian Trends in the Piano Sonatas of Rachmaninoff and Medtner." PhD diss., Indiana University, 2014.
- Holt, Richard. *Medtner and his Music*. London: Rimington, Van Wyck, 1948
- Hyperion. "Albums." Hyperion Records Limited. Last modified 2007, Accessed January 27, 2019. <https://www.hyperion-records.co.uk/notes/67491-B.pdf>
- Karpeyev, Alexander. "New Light on Nikolay Medtner as Pianist and Teacher." DMA diss., City University London, 2014.
- Markson, Oliver H. "A Study of Nikolai Medtner's Compositional Technique: Form and Narrative in Tales." DMA diss., The City University of New York, 2017.
- Martyn, Barrie. *Nicolas Medtner: His Life and Music*. England: Ashgate Publishing Company, 1995.

- Medtner, Anne. "A Short Biography." In *Nicolas Medtner (1879-1951) A Tribute to his art and personality*. Edited by Richard Holt, 17-21. London: D. Dobson, 1955.
- Medtner, Nicolas. *The Muse and the Fashion*. Translated by Alfred Swan. Haverford, PA: Haverford College Bookstore, 1951.
- Milne, Hamish. "Foreword." In *Nikolai Medtner: Complete Fairy Tales for Solo Piano*, 7. Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2001.
- Milne, Hamish. "Medtner and the Muse." Lecture, University of London, London, February 26, 2003.
- Nagahata, Hiroko. "Medtner's *Fairy Tales*: Texture and Subtlety." DMA diss., Michigan State University, 2012.
- Newman, Ernest. "Medtner." *The Musical Times* 56, no.863 (January 1915): 9-11.
- Propp, Vladimir. *The Russian Folktale*. Edited by Sibelan Forrester. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2012.
- Rimm, Robert. *The Composer-Pianists: Hamelin and The Eight*. Portland: Amadeus Press, 2002.
- Routledge, George & Sons. *Cinderella*. London & New York: G. Routledge and Sons, Between 1865 and 1889.
- Sabaneev, Leonid. "Nikolai Medtner." *The Musical Times* 69, no.1019 (March 1928): 209-210.
- Skvorak, David John. "Thematic Unity in Nicolas Medtner's Works for Piano: Skazki, Sonatas, and Piano Quintet." DMA diss., University of Cincinnati, 2003.
- Swan, Alfred J. "Das Leben Nicolai Medtner's [The Life of Nikolai Medtner]," *Musik des Ostens* 4 (1967): 65-116.
- Tauscheck, Jonathan Paul. "A Performance Guide to Two Fairy Tales of Nickolai Medtner." DMA diss., The University of Iowa, 2012.
- Tolstoy, Leo. *Ivan the Fool*. New York: C. L. Webster and Company, 1891.
- Wehrmeyer, Andreas. *Rakhmaninov*. London: St. Haus Publishing, 2004.
- Zaitseva, Ekaterina. "The Culmination of The Russian Romantic Piano School as Represented by Early and Late Works of Rachmaninoff, Scriabin, and Medtner." DMA diss., University of Maryland, 2017.