

Medtner's *Fairy Tales*: Texture and Subtlety

By

Hiroko Nagahata

A DOCUMENT

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirement
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF MUSICAL ARTS

Piano Performance

2012

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF EXAMPLES	iii
INTRODUCTION	1
BIOGRAPHY	2
Family Background.....	2
Training and Early Career.....	3
Exile to the West.....	5
AESTHETIC AND CREATIVE PROCESS.....	6
Source of Inspiration: Master of Musical Poetry.....	6
COMPOSITIONAL STYLE REGARDING TEXTURE.....	8
Keyboard Realization	8
Rhythmic Treatment	9
Voice Leading.....	11
Composer Indications	12
Elaboration.....	13
FAIRY TALES: STORY AND POEMS	15
History of <i>Skazki</i>	15
Medtner's <i>Fairy Tales</i>	16
STORIES AND POEMS OF FAIRY TALES OP. 34.....	17
<i>Fairy Tale</i> Op. 34 No. 1 "The Magic Violin".....	17
<i>Fairy Tale</i> OP. 34 No. 2 in E minor.....	20
<i>Fairy Tale</i> Op. 34 No. 3.....	21
<i>Fairy Tale</i> Op. 34 No. 4 in D minor	23
TEXTURE AND IMAGES OF FAIRY TALES OP. 34.....	25
<i>Fairy Tale</i> Op. 34 No. 1 "The Magic Violin".....	25
<i>Fairy Tale</i> OP. 34 No. 2 in E minor	29
<i>Fairy Tale</i> Op. 34 No. 3.....	33
<i>Fairy Tale</i> Op. 34 No. 4 in D minor	38
CONCLUSION.....	46
BIBLIOGRAPHY	48

LIST OF EXAMPLES

Example 1. <i>Fairy Tale</i> Op. 9 No. 3 mm.1-3.....	9
Example 2. <i>Fairy Tale</i> Op. 26 No. 1 mm.18-23.....	10
Example 3. <i>Fairy Tale</i> Op. 26 No. 3 mm. 67-75.....	11
Example 4. <i>Fairy Tale</i> Op. 34 No. 1 “The Magic Violin” mm.21-24.....	11
Example 5. <i>Fairy Tale</i> Op. 14 No. 1 “Ophelia’s Song” mm.23-38.....	12
Example 6. <i>Fairy Tale</i> Op. 35 No. 2 mm.65-74.....	13
Example 7. <i>Fairy Tale</i> Op. 34 No. 4 mm.1-2.....	14
Example 8. <i>Fairy Tale</i> Op. 34 No, 4 mm.9-10.....	14
Example 9. <i>Fairy Tale</i> Op. 34 No. 2 mm.25-27.....	21
Example 10. <i>Fairy Tale</i> Op. 34 No. 1 “Magic Violin” mm.1-9.....	26
Example 11. <i>Fairy Tale</i> Op. 34 No. 1 “Magic Violin” mm. 6-24.....	27
Example 12. <i>Fairy Tale</i> Op. 34 No. 1 “Magic Violin” mm.25-28.....	28
Example 13. <i>Fairy Tale</i> Op. 34 No. 1 “Magic Violin” mm.67-74.....	28
Example 14. <i>Fairy Tale</i> Op. 34 No. 1 “Magic Violin” mm.231-233	29
Example 15. Rachmaninoff: <i>Moment Musicaux</i> in E minor Op. 16 No. 4 mm.1-4	30
Example 16. <i>Fairy Tale</i> Op. 34 No. 2 mm.1-4.....	30
Example 17. <i>Fairy Tale</i> Op. 34 No. 2 mm.5-10.....	31
Example 18. Chopin: <i>Prelude</i> in G Major Op. 28 No. 3 mm.1-6	32
Example 19. Chopin: <i>Etude</i> in F Minor Op. 25 No. 2 mm.1-3	32
Example 20. <i>Fairy Tale</i> Op. 34 No. 3 mm.1-8.....	35
Example 21. <i>Fairy Tale</i> Op. 34 No. 3 mm.9-12.....	35
Example 22. <i>Fairy Tale</i> Op. 34 No. 3 mm.13-21	36

Example 23. <i>Fairy Tale</i> Op. 34 No. 3 mm.128-131	36
Example 24. <i>Fairy Tale</i> Op. 34 No. 3 mm.32-138	37
Example 25 Themes of <i>Fairy Tale</i> Op. 34 No. 4	38
Example 26. <i>Fairy Tale</i> Op. 34 No. 4 mm.1-4.....	39
Example 27. <i>Fairy Tale</i> Op. 34 No. 4 mm.15-19.....	40
Example 28. <i>Fairy Tale</i> Op. 34 No. 4 mm.26-29.....	41
Example 29. <i>Fairy Tale</i> Op. 34 No. 4 mm.32-35.....	42
Example 30. <i>Fairy Tale</i> Op. 34 No. 4 mm.38-41.....	43
Example 31. <i>Fairy Tale</i> Op. 34 No. 4 mm.46-48.....	44
Example 32. <i>Fairy Tale</i> Op. 34 No. 4 mm.51-53.....	45
Example 33. <i>Fairy Tale</i> Op. 34 No. 4 mm.57-61	46

Introduction

Russian composers from the late nineteenth century through the early twentieth century expanded the piano repertoire in ways that are still evident today. Piano music by composers such as Alexander Scriabin, Sergei Rachmaninoff, and Sergei Prokofiev has emerged in performance programs. Nikolai Medtner (1879-1951) wrote thirty-eight small-scale pieces called *Fairy Tales*. This is one of his most notable works. Originally named “*Skazki*” or “tales” in Russian, the cycle belongs to the Russian miniature piano works¹ that demand supreme piano technique, especially with regard to texture. Far less famous than his Russian contemporaries, Medtner’s works have gained admiration by both his contemporaries and legendary pianists including Vladimir Horowitz and Emil Gilels.

The virtue of Medtner’s music resides within the subtleties of his compositional style. A well-known contemporary pianist Mark-André Hamelin comments:

Medtner’s music is unfortunately of a kind that rarely makes the best impression at first hearing. It is not particularly melodically generous, like for example Rachmaninoff tends to be. But if you give Medtner time, if you give [him] the second chance and the third chance, if you listen, listen and listen again, he will reveal himself to you. And you will not be able to get rid of him afterwards.²

Medtner’s compositions include complex, delicate, and subtle textures that demand a high level of attention to detail. Skilled performances reveal the true beauty of Medtner’s music, highlighting the elaborate textures for the listener. Medtner’s music requires not only virtuosic technique, but also understanding of technique that can draw subtle, intimate expressions from piano.

¹ Ekaterina Chemaya-Oh, “The Skazki (Fairly 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), 7.

² Mark-André Hamelin, interview, *Super Virtuoso Documentary*, YouTube, (accessed October 20, 2012).

In *Fairy Tales*, Medtner's stylistic virtue, textural creativity, and aesthetic ideas come to the fore. Inspired by traditional folk tales as well as Russian poets, Medtner investigated the relationship between music and literature. In *Fairy Tales*, Medtner's compositional style—including his treatment of rhythm, voicing, expressive suggestions, and slurs—successfully crafts textures that embody the “tales” that inspired him. His *Fairy Tales* reflect his attitude as an artist, as well as the rich culture of the Russian fairy tale tradition.

Biography

Family Background

Medtner was born in 1880 in Moscow into a family that appreciated music, art, theater, philosophy, and literature. His mother, who first taught him piano, was one of several musicians in her family. Her brother, Fyodor Goedicke, who was a professor at the Moscow Conservatory, taught Medtner piano as a boy. Medtner's father, who was a successful businessman, worked for a lace factory in Moscow and loved Russian and German literature. The oldest brother, Emil, became a music and literature critic and was devoted to Wagner's music, German literature, and Moscow symbolist poets.³ Medtner's music strongly reflects his taste in literature and art. The intellectual and cultural environment that his family provided influenced his artistic orientation for life.

Training and Early Career

Medtner started writing music at age ten. He entered the Moscow Conservatoire two years later, just after both Scriabin and Rachmaninoff graduated from the school. Scriabin, Rachmaninoff, and Medtner, studied both piano and composition. All of these pianist-composers received a gold medal for piano upon graduation. Medtner's education

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

at the Moscow Conservatoire prepared him to become a concert pianist rather than a composer. Although Medtner received some composition training at the Moscow Conservatoire, he was essentially a self-taught composer. The education systems of both the Moscow Conservatoire and the St. Petersburg Conservatoire offered programs that allowed students to pursue both composition and piano equally. Piano was Medtner's principal study at the Conservatoire, and he took concurrent theory and composition courses. The system created the tradition of "pianist-composers", and many who taught in those schools were pianist-composers.⁴

Medtner studied counterpoint with Sergei Taneyev. For Medtner, Taneyev's counterpoint theory was too rigid and he decided not to attend his class. Taneyev who highly valued Medtner's talent, accepted his decision, and offered him guidance whenever he wanted it. Medtner's compositions satisfied Taneyev, despite Taneyev's belief that no one could be a great composer without perfecting theoretical counterpoint. Medtner also chose to drop the "Free Composition" class, a course for composition students, and instead took more general music analysis classes taught by Anton Arensky. His personal compositional style shows no particular influence of either of his composition teachers.⁵

Regarding piano, he mainly studied with Vasily Safonov and Paul Pabst—a pupil of Franz Liszt. After Pabst's sudden death, Medtner studied with the director of the Conservatoire, Safonov, who also taught Scriabin. He was a distinguished pianist and conductor as well as a famous pedagogue. Medtner stayed in the conservatoire an additional two years to study with Safonov. Safonov highly valued Medtner as a pianist.

⁴ Ibid, 6.

⁵ Ibid, 6.

Medtner graduated from the Moscow Conservatoire as the most distinguished piano student in 1900.⁶

Medtner competed in the Rubinstein Competition for pianists and composers in Vienna in 1900. Ultimately his compositions were not ready to be submitted and he only competed in piano. Although he received an honorable mention, he did not enjoy competing. Safonov as a conductor offered Medtner an extensive concert tour, playing the Piano Concerto No. 5 by Anton Rubinstein. However, Medtner's ambition was to be a composer and he decided to focus on composing instead of performing in the following two years, surprising many who thought he would pursue piano as his career. He later restarted concert activities, but primarily played his own compositions.⁷ Medtner restarted his concert activities at the end of 1903 including his own music in programs. His work, *Stimmungsbilder* (Mood Pictures), Op. 1 was published in the next year.

Medtner's fame as a composer grew quickly in Russia, where he "...was a beloved figure, viewed on a par with Scriabin and Rachmaninov. His First Sonata, Op. 5, was played and widely discussed, and students at the Moscow Conservatory pored over his works. Although such artists as Vladimir Horowitz and Emil Gilels enjoyed tremendous success performing Medtner in Russia, in the West they found the public generally unresponsive to his music, for Medtner's work was not immediately accessible. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the intimate Russian musical soul was apparently best experienced on home soil."⁸

⁶ Ibid, 7-9.

⁷ Barrie Martyn. "Medtner, Nikolas." *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press, accessed November 1, 2012, www.oxfordmusiconline.com.

⁸ Robert Rimm, *The Composer-Pianists: Hamelin and The Eight* (Portland, Oregon: Amadeus Press, 2002), 119.

Medtner started teaching a piano class at the Moscow Conservatory in 1909. Resigning in 1915 to focus on composing after the academic year, he returned to teach until he left Russia in 1921.⁹

Exile to the West

Medtner was one of the many Russian émigré composers. Medtner and his wife, Anna, left for the West in 1921. Most of his contemporary peers from Russia kept their compositional style within a traditional framework after they left for the West.

Medtner and Anna stayed in Germany for two years and went on a concert tour in the U.S. It was Rachmaninoff who helped Medtner to land some concert engagements in the U.S. After the tour, he settled in France and stayed there for ten years. However, *Les Six*, Ravel, Stravinsky, Prokofiev, and other innovative composers dominated the music scene in France.

Stravinsky was an innovative and influential composer who was accepted in the West. His Russian folklore-inspired music was used for collaboration with Sergei Diaghilev's Ballet Russes. *The Firebird* was premiered in 1910, followed by *Petrushka* in 1911 and *The Rite of Spring* in 1913. Even Prokofiev, who was called "modernist" in Russia, was not stylistically so innovative in this period of time in the West. Medtner strongly opposed the new styles of music and criticized the trend in his book *The Muse and the Fashion*. Although he had achieved recognition in Russia, his music got little attention in France because of the mismatch of his aesthetic and the musical trend of the

⁹ Anna Medtner, "A Short Biography" in Richard Holt, ed. *Nikolas Medtner, A Tribute to His Art and Personality* (London, Dennis Dobson LTD, 1955), 19.

time. Richard Taruskin states that Medtner would have enjoyed wider recognition if he had been a composer in 1880's.¹⁰

He decided to move to England, where he found a small circle of admirers and was invited to participate in a recording project sponsored by an Indian Maharaja. He continued composing and recorded many of his own works. He lived in a suburb of London until his death in 1951.

Aesthetic and Creative Process

Source of Inspiration: Master of Musical Poetry

Like other Romantic composers, Medtner attempted to tie literature and instrumental music. He viewed poetry and music as the highest form of art. Indeed, he treated poetry and music composition as similar activities. In his collection of essays *The Muse and the Fashion*, Medtner uses poems and poetry to clarify his artistic standpoint. For example, he decrees:

There are no limits to musical and poetic quality of contents, forms, images. But when it comes to subject matter, these qualities are far from equally limitless, and a violent broadening of these boundaries is an equal profanation of music and poetry and subjects themselves.¹¹

As further explanation of his views on the similarities between music and poetry, he writes, "A neglect of rhythm makes musical-form the prose, and not the poetry, of sound."¹²

Medtner devoted himself mainly to German and Russian Romantic poetry. In his music, he used poems written by the three great Russian poets Alexander Pushkin, Fyodor

¹⁰ Richard Taruskin, *Oxford History of Western Music* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

¹¹ Nikolai Medtner, *The Muse and the Fashion* translated by Alfred Swan (Haverford, PA: Haverford College Bookstore, 1951), 124.

¹² Nikolai Medtner, "The Muse and the Fashion" in Richard Holt, ed. *Nikolai Medtner: A tribute to his art and personality* (London, U.K.: Dennis Dobson Ltd, 1955), 224.

Tyutchev, and Mikhail Lermontov, as well as the Germans Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Heinrich Heine. He used the texts either for song lyrics or as epigraphs in solo piano pieces.

While Romantic composers often combined music and literature, Medtner's approach differed from composers such as Schumann and Liszt. Schumann and Liszt both wrote music directly corresponding to large literary works. In contrast, Medtner favored smaller works of poetry and often only suggested or hinted at the poems. His music gave the audience room for their own imagination. From the beginning of his career, he introduced poetry as part of his music. Medtner prefaces both *Stimmungsbilder* (Mood Pictures) Op. 1 (1895-1902), and *Three Fantastic Improvisations* Op. 2 (1896-1900) with a poem, as he later did in his *Fairy Tales*. He started writing *Fairy Tales* Op. 8 in 1905. Martyn points out:

The title of the set has a certain significance in that it signals what was to be Medtner's general approach to writing music throughout his life: he eschewed programmes as such but sought to capture the mood of an impression, typically from a poem or painting, often giving a clue in a title or marking and occasionally in a poetic epigraph.¹³

Medtner became a master of the small-scale work, inspired by his love of short literary works and poetry. Medtner was not fond of writing long music on a gigantic scale. He wrote more than 100 songs, violin sonatas, and a piano quintet: his compositions always included piano. Most of his solo piano pieces are relatively short except for the Piano Concerti, the Piano Sonata in G minor Op. 22, and the Piano Sonata in E minor Op. 25 *Night Wind*.

Medtner's *Fairy Tales* is a significant contribution to the Russian miniature piano works. Ekaterina Chernaya-Oh describes:

¹³ Martyn, *Nikolas Medtner*, 17.

The evolution of small-form pieces reached a culmination in the small-form pieces of Scriabin (études, preludes, poems), Rachmaninoff (preludes, *études-tableaux*), and Medtner (fairy tales). The genre of miniature achieved a significance equal to that of large-scale works.¹⁴

Medtner's *Fairy Tales*, similar to poetry in its small scale, is filled with narrative lines, story, and description. In the world of "miniature," the textual beauty and subtlety of his compositional style shine most effectively.

Compositional Style Regarding Texture

Scholars and Medtner's admirers often mention the word "texture" when they describe his music. Medtner lived in a time that privileged texture in composition. The works by Schoenberg or Webern are progressive in terms of texture along with their other compositional qualities. In contrast with his contemporaries, Medtner challenged the possibilities of textures within a more conservative, Romantic style. Medtner's detailed writing for layers of voice, rhythm, articulation, and tempo markings comprise a variety of textures in his music.

Keyboard Realization

After he started learning piano from his mother, he wrote music without learning music theory. He talks about his method of composing in a letter he wrote.

No single theoretical knowledge, catalogues, tables, or methods are able to substitute the practical knowledge of the instrument, which gave me the possibility to find the only way of expressing my thoughts. The touch is as necessary for me as inner hearing; it gives me the possibility to imagine difficult harmonies and counterpoint, or feeling of the form, directed well by my thought.¹⁵

¹⁴ Ekaterina Chemaya-Oh, 7.

¹⁵ Ibid, 11

Mark-André Hamlin notes, “Very often in Medtner, the musical idea and its instrumental realization are so intricately joined that it becomes impossible to determine exactly which came first—if indeed they did not occur to the composer at the very same time.”¹⁶

Rhythmic Treatment

Medtner uses many varieties and subtle changes of rhythmic patterns. Biographer Barrie Martin remarks, “...unusual meters and syncopation are often distinctive features of the fabric of the music.”¹⁷

Medtner often uses cross-rhythms. In *Fairy Tale* Op. 9 No. 3 in G major, he uses different combinations of rhythms: two different voices contrast in sixteenth triplets and eighteenth note triplets, while the third voice plays eighth notes in duplet meter.

Example 1



Beginning of *Fairy Tale* Op. 9 No. 3

Surprisingly, this complex rhythm sounds natural and flowing. The right-hand melody consists of only eighth notes at a *piano* dynamic level. The left hand triplets give the piece a delicate fluidity.

Another example of cross rhythms using triplets can be seen in Op. 26 No. 1 in E-flat major. In this piece, the left-hand triplet figuration creates a sense of flow.

¹⁶ Mark-André Hamelin, Introduction to Complete *Fairy Tales* for Solo Piano (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 2001), ix.

¹⁷ Barrie Martyn, *Nicolas Medtner: His Life and Music* (Hants, England: Scolar Press, 1995), xii.

Additionally, the middle section (m.18), the combination of triplet and sixteenth note figures and syncopations gives an illusion of metric freedom within the 4/4 rhythms.

Example 2



Fairy Tale Op. 26 No. 1 m. 18-23

Medtner uses rhythmic patterns to change the mood of a piece. In Op. 26 No. 3, at the end of the piece (m.71), sixteenth notes in the right hand accompany the left-hand melody as it disappears. Medtner writes to play the section with a light touch in a fast tempo (*sempre più mosso*) to create a special effect. The melodic soprano part transforms into these unusual figures at the end, a refreshing and surprising moment.

Example 3



Fairy Tale Op. 26 No. 3 m. 67-75

Voice Leading

In many of his works, Medtner uses slurs or simply writes a dotted line to indicate the melodic connection of two pitches. Often the notes are far apart, or located in a different voice, but Medtner makes the clear indication that two notes are grouped in one melodic line (or in scale). In *Fairy Tale* Op. 34 No. 1 “The Magic Violin,” the pitches of the bass line move up by step. Medtner shows his intention clearly by using *tenute* markings. Without these indications, or if the pianist does not bring out the bass line, it would sound choppy because of the leaps.

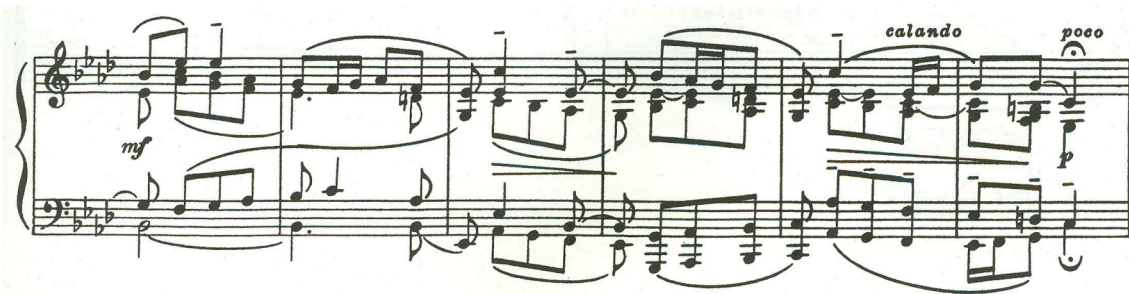
Example 4



Fairy Tale Op. 34 No. 1 “The Magic Violin” m. 21-24

One of the examples of the slurred connections between two notes in different voices can be found in Op. 14 No. 1 “Ophelia’s Song.” The F in the tenor at m. 23 is connected with G in the alto at m. 25 by a slur. This slur shows the melodic line of the tenor voice whose ending is overlapped at the G in the alto. Also, this slur helps the performer listen to this F, which is sustaining and resolving to the G. This kind of treatment is often seen in Medtner’s works.

Example 5



Fairy Tale Op. 14 No. 1 “Ophelia’s Song” m. 23-28

Composer Indications

Medtner uses many changes in articulation, dynamic and tempo. He specifically wrote out performance directions and his indications are very detailed; it is difficult to find other Romantic composers who verbally directed more than Medtner did. Oda Slobodskaya, a singer who worked with Medtner recalled, “I remember too that he was mercilessly insistent on the faithful observation of all expression marks.”¹⁸

Heinrich Neuhaus states:

The editorial aspect in Medtner’s works impresses me. Medtner’s indications in terms of tempos; dynamics; slurs; accents; descriptive words such as ‘con timidezza,’ ‘irrisoluto,’ ‘sfrenatamente,’ ‘acciacato,’ etc. wonderfully and exactly, characterize, explain the sense of music and help to perform it.¹⁹

¹⁸ Holt, *Nikolai Medtner*, 120.

¹⁹ Heinrich Neuhaus, “The Contemporary of Scriabin and Rachmaninov” in *Memories, Articles, Materials*, Z. Apetyan, ed. translated from the Russian by Ekaterina Cheyama-Oh. (Moscow: Soviet Composer, 1981), 33.

In many of his pieces, the detailed indications are designed to work together. Combinations such as tempo changes, dynamics, and articulation create an interesting effect. In Op. 35 No. 2, in the *vivo* section, he switches the pair of *resolute* and *rinforzando* and the pair of *cantando* and *tranquillo* markings in a very short span of one or two measures. The same rhythmic pattern, in different pitch, changes the character rapidly. *Tenute* and *staccato*, *crescendo* and *diminuendo* add to the rapid musical switches.

Example 6



Fairy Tale Op. 35 No. 2 m. 65-74

Elaboration

Medtner's music has detailed elaboration, which may seem unnecessarily complex at first glance. Yet several scholars and artists support Medtner's elaboration as an essential component of his compositions.²⁰

²⁰ Scholes, Percy and David Nice. "Medtner, Nikolas." *The Oxford Companion to Music*. Ed. Alison Latham. Oxford Music Online. Oxford University Press, (accessed November 1, 2012), www.oxfordmusiconline.com.

We can see the importance of elaboration in the first ten measures of Op. 34 No. 4 in D minor, in contrast to the following part. There are frequent repeated notes, such as grace notes, or sixteenth notes in almost every measure in the opening ten measures. In addition, several extra factors, such as suspension-like tied notes (m. 4, 8) do not seem necessarily for harmonic progression. Instead, these elaborations function by interrupting the flow of the music in a very subtle way. It offers the vulnerable impression as the opening of this piece describes “dying paladin.” From m. 10, the repeated note pattern stops and the music sounds clearer and more stable. Clearly, such elaborations create a subtlety in Medtner’s music. Without the elaborations in the first ten measures, the piece would have a static beginning. Thus, this example of textual elaboration is a part of the “essential design”²¹ in his compositions.

Example 7



Fairy Tale Op. 34 No. 4 m. 1-2

Example 8



Fairy Tale Op. 34 No. 4 m. 9-10

²¹ Ibid.

Fairy Tales: Stories and Poems

History of Skazki

Medtner found his stylistic characteristic suitable for fairy tales: a genre, which holds a special position in Russian literature and culture and on which he worked for almost thirty years. The popularity of fairy tales in Russia has been enormous. The number of Russian fairy tales is more than 1000.²²

“Fairy tales” is the English translation of a Russian word, *Skazki*, but in fact there is no exact translation. Simply “tales” would be the closest to the real meaning. They are not mere stories for children.

In medieval Russia, they were orally conveyed, and began to be recorded in the late eighteenth century. Storytellers, who had a different class, told the tales in the form of oral poetry. The peasants believed the story tellers had magical power and avoided contact with them at certain times of the year and certain times of the day; they were afraid something bad might happen. In time, listening and telling the tales became more of a casual custom, and people began gathering at one another’s homes to share the tales. Medtner’s *Fairy Tales* often has a narrative quality reflecting this oral tradition.

In the mid-eighteenth century, *Skazki* became a genre of literature. Aleksander Afanasev, who was a pioneer of the written Russian fairy tale, like the Grimm brothers were for German folk tales, collected and published the tales. National poets such as

²² Jack V. Haney, *An Introduction to the Russian Folktale*. (New York, London: M.E. Sharpe, 1999), 11.

Pushkin also contributed to the genre. His *Skazki* in the form of verses include “The Tale of the Dead Princess” and “The Tale of Golden Cockerel”.

The characteristics of the *Skazki* vary. Some tales are about everyday life (*bytovye skazki*), animals (*skazka o zhivotnykh*), magic (*volshebnaia skazka*), and religion. The tales involve magic, supernatural creatures, and often take place in a mysterious forest or mountain. In the wonder tales, *Baba Yaga*, a witch-like creature flies in the air. One of the famous tales is a story that features a firebird, and a gray wolf. Animals think and speak just like human beings. In one of the examples of the religious tales, an angel sent to the human world lives in a village while pretending to be a man. This motif can be seen in Tolstoy’s short story written later. Usually good and evil are clearly delineated and the evil loses out in the end. Everyday tales are short, silly, comical ones.

Medtner’s Fairy Tales

Medtner was deeply influenced since childhood by *Skazki* in different forms. Medtner must have found this flexible genre to be a proper choice to unite music, literature, and thought. He first named his music *Skazki* and later renamed it *Fairy Tales* to introduce it to the abroad audience in more familiar terms. However, Medtner did not intend his music to describe the Russian fairy tales directly, but just included some pieces with titles or epigraphs. Among thirty-eight *Fairy Tales*, only twelve have titles, such as “March of the Paladin” (Op. 14 No. 2), “*Campanella*” (Op. 20 No. 2), and “The Magic Violin” (Op. 34 No. 1), etc. All the pieces in *Fairy Tales* have an Italian indication. Three of them have a word *Narrante*, which means “narrating” or “telling a story”. Some of

them have suggestive epigraphs. Medtner took words from Russian poetry (Op. 34 No. 2, 4) or a play of Shakespeare (Op. 35 No. 4).

In Op. 20 No. 2 “*Companella*”, he indicates, “Song or tale of the bell, but not about the bell.” Compared to Franz Liszt’s Etude No. 3 titled “*La Campanella*”, Medtner’s version begins very heavy and tragic. While Liszt describes the sound of bells in a more direct way as sound depiction, Medtner tries to draw the story of the bell. Interestingly, he does not tell what kind of the story it is. Instead he gives the audience little and mysterious hints through these titles and indications. Cheyama-Oh states,

Similar to Rachmaninov’s *Étude-tableaux* (studies-pictures), each of Medtner’s fairy tales is a picture, image or story where there are associations, although sometimes there is no referral and the composer gives freedom to the performer and listener to follow their own imaginations.²³

Stories and Poems of *Fairy Tales* Op. 34

Fairy Tale Op. 34 No. 1 “The Magic Violin”

It is uncertain where Medtner got the inspiration for this piece. Possibilities include inspiration from folklore or from a poem titled “The Magic Violin” by Nikolai Gumilev, as Hamish Milne assumed.²⁴ The poem was written 6 years before Medtner composed Op. 34.

Many different stories about a magic violin exist. In some stories, the magic violin relates to dance. The magic violin often has the power to make people dance. In Brother Grimm’s “The Jew in the Brambles,”²⁵ the youth receives a magic violin that makes

²³ Ekaterina Chernaya-Oh, 7.

²⁴ Hamish Milne, *Medtner: The Complete Skazki*, Hyperion Records CDA67491/2, 2007, compact disc.

²⁵ Leonid Livak, *The Jewish Persona in the European imagination: A Case of Russian Literature*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 52.

people dance. The magic power of the violin forces the bad people to dance and saves the youth.

A Belarusian folktale called “The Magic Fiddle (violin)”, which might have inspired Medtner also includes a unique dance scene. A dance section in Medtner’s Op. 34 No. 1 corresponds to the dance scenes in the folktale. The story contains a scene where the magic fiddle makes everything around it dance.

In the story, the youth plays the fiddle he made. It has a magical, joyous power to make the nature around him dance. The demons disguised in two lords invite him to play in a ball, but he discovers their identity and destroys them with the power of the fiddle. The poetic description of the nature dance scene inspires a vivid visual image. “The fiddle spoke out like a living thing, and its sweet music resounded in the forest.” “So well did he play that earth and sky gave ear to him, seeming ready to hear forever. Then he struck up a gay tune, and all around began to dance—the stars whirled like snow in a blizzard, the clouds floated across the sky keeping time, and fish leaped up and thrashed about until the river seethed like boiling water. Even the king of water spirits joined the dancing, and such capers did he cut that the river overflowed its banks.”²⁶

The poem by Gumilev is the following:

The Magic Violin

Pretty boy,
you are so merry
and your smile's - so light, so sunny.
Don't you ask me for this passion
that is poison to the worlds.

²⁶ Miriam Morton, *Harvest of Russian Children's Literature*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 147.

You don't know, don't know how dreadful
is this Magic Violin, sonny,
And how gloomy is the horror
of the one who strikes the cords.

He who took it one fine morning
in his hands, so strong and speedy,
Lost for ever, lost for ever
tranquil light of his bright eyes.
Hades' spirits like to listen
to these regal sounds, kiddy.
Rabid wolves are wandering near
not to miss the violin cries.

You must keep these ever ringing
strings of Violin crying, singing
And the fiddle stick beating, twisting,
whipping, whirling, going mad...
When the summer Sun is shining,
when the snow is whirling, swinging,
When the West is burning crimson,
when the East is blushing red.

You'll get tired and slow down breaking singing
just to sense it
that you can't that very minute
breath or sigh -
you are all pangs
For at once the rabid monsters'll rush at you –
blood thirsty, frenzied,
Tramp your chest with their forefoes,
pierce your throat with their fangs.

Then you'll realize how foully
laughed at you
all that was singing.
Tardy, but all-mighty fear
will appear in your eyes.
Melancholy, dreary death cold'll
wrap your head,
your ears ringing...
And your bride will burst out crying,
friends will have a sad surmise.

Kiddy, further! Won't meet here
neither merriment nor riches!
But I see that you are smiling
and these gazes are two rays.
Take the Violin, see the abyss
in the eyes of beast-like creatures,
die the glorious and the horrid
Death
that crowns musicians' ways.²⁷

Fairy Tale Op. 34 No. 2 in E minor

The other three pieces do not have a title like the “Magic Violin”. Instead, in No. 2, Medtner uses an epigraph from a Tyutchev’s poem called *Peace*. The poem has a quiet mood. It describes the peace of mind after things have gone away and never come back. Tyutchev uses the motif of water to represent the things that come and go.

Peace

When what we called our own
has left us forever.
And, as if we lay in our grave,
there’s a heavy weight upon us,

We can always cast a fleeting glance
across the water’s slope
where streams flow headlong,
wherever the current leads.

Jostling each other,
the currents run, hurry
to some fateful summons
they’ve heard in the distance.

Vanity we observe them.

²⁷ Olga Slobolokina, Lib/ru, Nikolai Gumilev, “The Magic Violin,” (accessed 2/20/12), http://lit.lib.ru/s/slobodkina_o/magicviolindoc.shtml.

They'll never return,
but the longer we watch,
the easier we breathe.

Tears spring to our eyes
and through them we see,
excitedly bubbling
everything more swiftly born away.

The soul becomes obvious
and feels right then.²⁸

The poet's metaphor of water as life or death matches Medtner's left-hand figurations of this piece. The E minor key supports the dark, quiet, and haunting mood. The composer suggests *allegro cantabile e leggiero* and the dynamic range does not go beyond *forte*. Although there are some climactic moments, (m. 10-11), the piece maintains a quiet sense of loss. It is not a tragic screaming, but rather "tears spring" as the poem shows. Even in the sense of loss, the poem displays a calm and philosophical peace of mind as the title shows. A brief B major part (m. 25-28), which has the highest pitch D-sharp, shows the transformation into the mood of hope.

Example 9

²⁸ *The Complete Poems of Tyutchev*, trans. F. Jude, (accessed 12/20/12), <http://knigo.com/t/tutchew/english.html>.



Fairy Tale Op. 34 No. 2 m. 25-27

At the ending, first time both the right and left hand plays the sixteen note figurations and disappears, as the water in the poem is gone away.

Fairy Tale No. 34 No. 3

The epigraph (instead of title) says, “Forest Spirit” (but a kind, plaintive one). There are folktales about forest spirits all over the world. *Leshii* are forest spirits associated with death in Russia.²⁹ Although Medtner specifies that this spirit is “a kind, plaintive one”, there is a bass line theme that suggests *Dies Irae* (Day of Wrath) in this piece. The piece has a dark, mysterious atmosphere.

There is one story that presents a kind forest spirit. In the story of “The Prince and His “Uncle”,³⁰ a King catches a forest spirit and snared in his garden. The forest spirit asks the prince to release him. The prince is exiled because of releasing the forest spirit. The uncle accompanies the prince to the foreign country and betrays the prince. The

²⁹ Helen Pilnovsky, *Russian Fairy Tales Part II: Baba Yaga's Domain*, <http://www/indicott-studio.com/rdrm/r/BabaYaga.html>.

³⁰ Jack V. Haney, ed. *An Anthology of Russian Folktales*. (Armonk, NY: M.E.Sharpe, 2008), 89.

prince must become a servant of the king in the foreign country. Then, the forest spirit appears with his three daughters. Each of the three daughters has a gift for him, which has a magical power. The forest spirit rewards the prince.

Medtner's Op. 34 No.3 starts with quick and light *staccato*. This articulation helps to describe the friendly characteristics of the forest spirit Medtner had in his mind rather than a scary, harmful spirit.

Fairy Tale Op. 34 No. 4 in D minor

The epigraph "There lived in the world a poor knight" comes from the beginning part of Pushkin's poem (ballad) "The Poor Knight." Dostoevsky used this poem in "The Idiot." It is a poem describing a knight who was dying after a battle against the Muslims in Palestine. The evil spirit tries to draw his soul to hell, but the Virgin Mary whom the knight admires pleads to God to let him into heaven. The piece has two big sections including an extended coda in triumphant D major that suggests the knight's admission to heaven.

The Poor Knight

There was once a poor knight living
All alone in the wide world;
His appearance grim and livid,
But his spirit true and bold.

He once saw a saintly vision,
Something dazzling he did see,
And profoundly the impression
Cut into his memory.

For Geneva bound, he tarried
By the road; beside a cross
He beheld the Virgin Mary,
Mother of the Holy Christ.

Since that time, his soul on fire,
He at females never glanced;
Til his dying day drew nigher,
Didn't address them ever once.

Since that time, an iron lattice
Never lifted from his face –
And the scarf gone – where the neck is,
Hung a rosary in its place.

To take prayers to the Father,
Or the Spirit, or the Son,
Was, it being an odd thing rather,
Something he had never done.

He would spend his nights entire
Bowed before the Virgin's brow,
Weeping quietly – with dire
Tears, that melancholy flow.

Full of faith, enamored dearly
Of his pious dream, with blood
Ave, Mater Dei clearly
He inscribed upon his shield.

While the cavalry of errants
Through the Palestinian plains
Ran at trembling adversaries,
Calling the beloved names,

Lumen coelum, sancta rosa!
He called louder than the rest,
As the Muslim threats came closer
To his head from every nest.

Then, returning to his castle,
Lived, with no one by his side.
Still enamored, still bedazzled,
Uncommunied he died.

As he readied to expire,
Lo, the Evil Spirit came.

Keen to, as the time drew nigher,
Drag his soul into His realm.

Saying, he has said no prayers.
Saying, he has held no fast;
And not properly made passes
At the mother of the Christ,

But the Holy Virgin pleaded
For his soul before the King,
Letting into Heaven's kingdom
Her beloved paladin.
(Translated by Genia Gurarie)³¹

Textures and Images of *Fairy Tales* Op. 34

The earliest “Fairy Tale” pieces in Medtner’s catalog date back to 1905. *Fairy Tales*, Op. 34 was composed in 1916. The composer himself premiered them in Moscow in the following year. Op. 34 shows a variety of *Skazki* qualities such as magic, supernatural creatures, storytelling and poems.

Although there are not many pianists who play *Fairy Tales* as a set, Medtner strongly preferred that the same opus numbers be played together. We can see unity in these four pieces in Op. 34 in the key relationship and structure of the pieces. The cycle progresses through the circle of fifths; No. 1 is in B minor, No. 2 is in E minor. (The introduction of No. 1 is also almost in E minor because of C instead of C-sharp.) No. 3 is highly chromatic and hard to determine the key, but strongly implies A minor. No. 1 “Magic Violin” is the only one that has an introduction and No. 4 is the only one that has a long coda and ends in major key. This contributes to a sense of beginning and ending the set as a whole.

³¹ The Literature Network Forums, www.online-literature.com, (accessed 03/01/12).

Fairy Tale Op. 34 No. 1 “Magic Violin”

In Op. 34 No. 1 “Magic Violin” No. 1, Medtner uses effective textural changes including different use of rhythms in each section to suggest the different scenes in the story.

The combination of use of rhythm and technical indications (pedal, slurs, tempo) creates many interesting textural effects in this piece. The beginning theme played in unison announces the start of the story. The sixteenth notes from m. 5 that are highly chromatic in harmony are the first change of texture. Medtner indicates *leggierissimo* in a dynamic level of *pianissimo*, and *più mosso* followed by *accelerando*. This indication and pedal sustained for four measures of chromatic harmonies create a mysterious, smoky effect, which hints at the appearance of magic.

Example 10

Tempo cangiando, abbandonamente $\text{♩} = 2$
Largamente, cantando

mf

rilen

pp *più mosso* *accelerando*

leggerissimo

p

pp *mp* *espressivo* *sognando*

poco calando

The beginning of Fairy Tale Op. 34 No. 1 “Magic Violin” m. 1-9

Medtner often uses subtly hidden linear motion, which adds an extra layer to the texture. In the theme's second appearance the left hand outlines a rising scale. In m. 9-12, the bass moves up through a B minor scale fragment (with one chromatic passing motion in m. 11-12) on beats 1 and 3 of each measure. The same technique appears in the left hand at the third theme appearance and closing of the section as well. (m. 17-24) The right hand *tenute* highlights the chromatic motion (A-natural-G-sharp- G natural-F-sharp) going down.

Example 11

The musical score for Example 11, from Medtner's *Fairy Tale Op. 34 No. 1 "Magic Violin"*, measures 6-24. The score is written for piano in G major (one sharp) and 2/4 time. It consists of four systems of music. The first system (measures 6-9) shows a right hand with a melodic line and a left hand with a rising scale. The second system (measures 10-13) features a right hand with a descending chromatic line and a left hand with a rising scale. The third system (measures 14-17) continues the descending chromatic line in the right hand and the rising scale in the left hand. The fourth system (measures 18-24) concludes the section with a final descending chromatic line in the right hand and a rising scale in the left hand. Performance markings include *poco calando*, *pp*, *mp*, *espressivo*, *sognando*, *ten.*, *dolce diminuendo*, *poco accel.*, *poco rit.*, and *silenzio*.

Fairy Tale Op. 34 No. 1 "Magic Violin" m. 6-24

From m. 25, the B section in the rondo form starts right after a quarter note rest written *silenza*. The new section changes mood completely. There is a rare indication *automatico* here. From the beginning to here, weaving melodies lead the music. This section features a traditional waltz rhythm with automatic functional movements of hands, which makes the texture change even more drastic. The change to the major key and galloping rhythms (the crisp rhythms of combination of sixteenth note and rest, and eighth note) in the right hand combine to produce a much more animated texture. The sixteenth notes that precede each beat act almost as fanciful grace notes, lending extra crispness to the melody.

Example 12



Fairy Tale Op. 34 No. 1 m. 25-28

In the C section from m. 67, *staccato* chords of both hands in different phrasing are played in presto throughout this section. (m. 67-106). It is rare that both hands play in *staccato* simultaneously, which creates a unique texture. The challenge of this part is to play the both hands *staccato*, at the same time, phrasing each hand in different groupings of slurs and strong beat and accents. The pattern of the left hand starts from the third beat whereas the right hand has an emphasis, using *crescendo* dynamics, on the first beat.

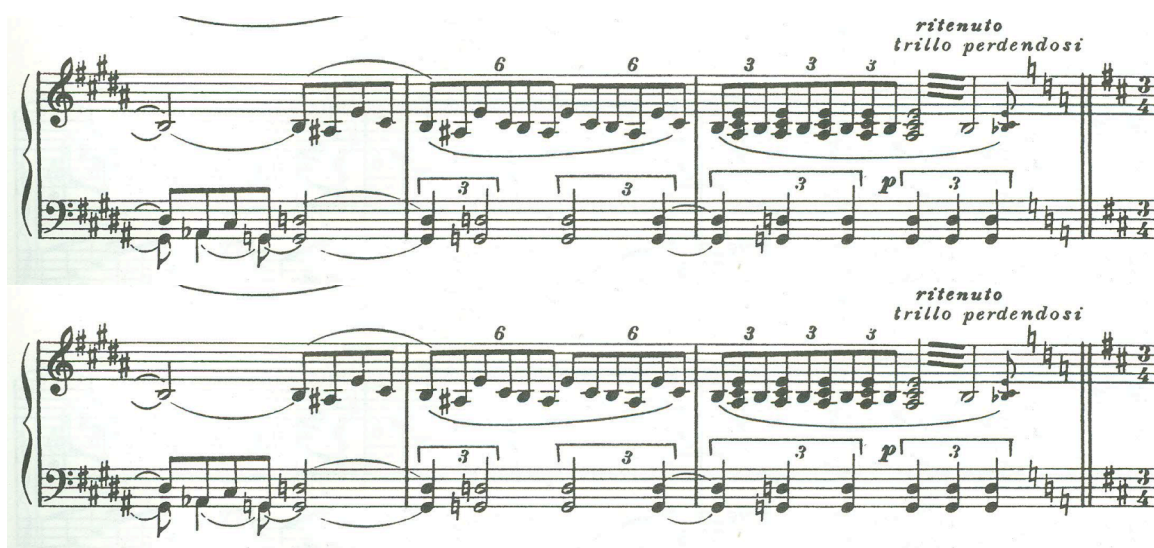
Example 13



Fairy Tale Op. 34 No. 1 m. 67-74

Barrie Martyn describes the rhythmic aspect of this piece as “relentless vigor and obsessive rhythm.” The rhythmic treatment is more difficult for actual performance because of Medtner’s numerous tempo indications. Performers are required to play the complex rhythm in the context of the frequent tempo change indications. How he or she sets the tempo would change the effect of the piece very much. The climactic moment (m. 232-233) right before *Tempo di Valse* is a good example. Combinations of quarter note triplets, eighth note sextuplets, and eighth note triplets create intense rhythmic tension, followed by *ritenute* and *trillo perdendosi*.

Example 14



Fairy Tale Op. 34 No. 1 m. 231-233

Fairy Tale Op. 34 No. 2 in E minor

The piece presents a style found in many works for piano: restless, fast accompaniment in the left hand, and a song-like melody in the right hand. The piece visually shows textural similarity with Rachmaninoff's *Moments Musicaux* Op. 16 No. 4 in E minor written in 1896, long before Medtner wrote the *Fairy Tales*. In both pieces, the left-hand figurations are written in sextuplets in 4/4 and both pieces are written in the same key.

Example 15

The image shows the first four measures of Rachmaninoff's *Moment Musicaux* in E minor, Op. 16 No. 4. The tempo is marked 'Presto' with a quarter note equal to 104 beats per minute. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The right hand plays a simple, song-like melody, while the left hand features a complex, restless accompaniment consisting of sextuplets. The notation includes various fingerings and articulation marks like 'fz' and 'fz.'.

Rachmaninoff: *Moment Musicaux* in E minor Op. 16 No. 4 m. 1-4

Example 16



Medtner: Fairy Tale Op. 34 No. 2 in E minor m. 1-4

However, the two pieces convey very different aural impressions. First, the performance indications make a big difference. Rachmaninoff's *Moments Musicaux* in E minor starts with the dynamic level of *fortissimo* and loud dynamics dominate the piece except for a few short sections. Also the right-hand melody has frequent accent markings. Medtner's *Fairy Tales* Op. 34 No. 2 is written mostly in a *piano* dynamic with *forte* in some climactic moments with *tenute* and slurs rather than accents. Medtner indicates *Allegro cantabile leggiero* in the beginning. That *leggiero* indication is a key to making the fast passages light and airy rather than aggressive. Although the figurations of sextuplets are common in the two pieces, Medtner's softer dynamics create more flow.

Another difference between Rachmaninoff's *Moments Musicaux* in E minor and Medtner's *Fairy Tale* Op. 34 No. 2 is the subtle middle voice Medtner includes. There is an alto melody in the right hand, sometimes in parallel motion with the soprano voice, other times contrary (m. 6), which then becomes more independent at the climactic moment (m. 9). At m. 37, D in alto voice is connected with a slur to the tenor voice indicating the connection of down a step motion between D to C.

Example 17

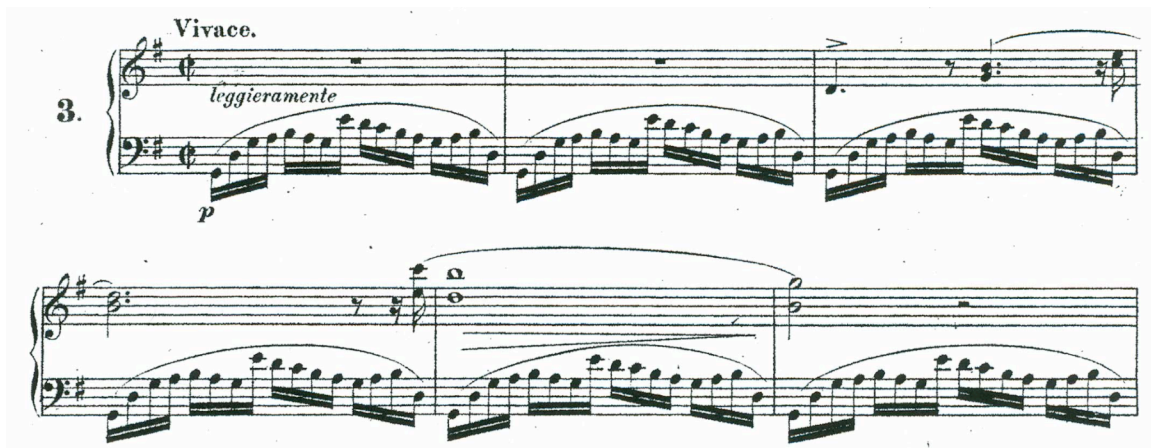
The musical score for Example 17 is written for piano in E major (one sharp) and 3/4 time. It consists of three systems of staves. The first system shows the beginning of the piece with a treble staff containing chords and a bass staff with a continuous eighth-note pattern. The second system continues the eighth-note pattern in the bass and adds a melody in the treble. The third system features a 'crescendo' marking, a 'f' (forte) dynamic, and a 'rit.' (ritardando) marking. The piece concludes with a final chord in the treble and a sustained eighth-note pattern in the bass.

Fairy Tale Op. 34 No. 2 m. 5-10

The style of both pieces stems from pieces of Chopin. According to Max Harrison, who is a biographer of Rachmaninoff, “*Moments Musicaux* No. 4 in E minor

looks, sounds and feels as if it began as an improvisation on Chopin's Prelude in (the related) G major although it is incomparably more elaborate and sustained."³²

Example 18



Chopin: Prelude in G major Op. 28 No. 3 m. 1-6

Medtner mentioned that his *Fairy Tale* Op. 34 No.2 required similar technique to Chopin's Etude Op. 25 No. 2 in F minor. "In all fast passages (except the legato ones) practice with light touch on the keys, with flat fingers, non legato, so that the fingers do not get stuck, but rebound off the keys easily."³³

Example 19

³² Max Harrison, *Rachmaninoff: Life, Works, Recordings*. (London: Continuum International Publishing Group Ltd., 2006), 73.

³³ Nikolai Medtner, *The Daily Work of the Pianist and Composer*, 80.



Chopin: Etude Op. 25 No. 2 F minor m. 1-3

Fairy Tale Op. 34 No. 2 deliberately attempts to capture the effect of the text. The second verse of the poem is significant for the texture of this piece:

We can always cast a fleeting glance
 across the water's slope
 where streams flow headlong,
 wherever the current leads.

Related to the poem, the *piano* sixteenth note figuration of the left hand shows the water running like the stream mentioned in the second verse of the poem. Also, the upward and downward motions of this piece reflect the water running “slope” in the same verse. *Mancando* means “missing” or “dying away” in English, and the runs that disappear into the highest register of the instrument reflect the sentence of “what we called our own has left.”

Fairy Tale Op. 34 No. 3

To draw a fantasy creature “Forest spirit,” this piece contains many unusual textures. The desired textures of this piece require rapid, articulate, and crisp finger movement for an effective performance. There is little tonal stability, and the fast rhythms convolute the harmonies even further.

This piece conveys a sense of thrilling pursuit; the forest spirit’s teasing disappearances give way to silence before the runaway reappears. Relentless sixteenth

notes with *staccatos* and some harmonies lengthened by repetition at the end of the phrase reflect the story.

The mysterious four-measure introduction is similar to the one of Op. 34 No. 1 that blends the arpeggiated harmonies with pedal. In No. 3, there is a very rare indication *Con vibrazione*; this seems to suggest a rapid up-down motion of the pedal.

In m. 4, the *staccato* is explained specifically. “In this piece, *staccato* is absolutely not performed with the hand, but with the fingers.” As Medtner mentioned, the touch and his compositional ideas are closely related in his creative process. When it is played with *staccato* in *forte* dynamic with vertical touch, the shape of the melody requires frequent switch of the hand position note by note. However, if a pianist tries to flatten the fingers and use only fingers with suggested *piano* dynamic, the four sixteenth notes within one beat can be played in one hand position. The shape of the melody seems more natural in light of this; it is designed with consideration of a specific kind of touch and technique.

Example 20

“Forest spirit” (but a kindly, plaintive one)

Allegretto tenebroso ♩ = 92 = 100
sempre al rigore di tempo

p *dolcissimo* *pp* *semp-*
re sostenuto *te-*

Re (con vibrazione)

- nebroso

The beginning of *Fairy Tale* Op. 34 No. 3

The technical challenge includes some spots that require a rapid finger movement in some unnatural positions. In m. 9, the rapid sixteenth triplets in the bass line while the thumb is holding a note in tenor is technically demanding.

Example 21



Fairy Tale Op. 34 No. 3 m. 9-12

From m. 12-22, the half cadence is extended as if the spirit is slowly appearing in front of us; as the wispy arpeggios come to an abrupt stop in m. 20, the sudden silence feels like a naughty disappearance of the spirit. The fermata over the rest that follows heightens the tension of the dissonant dominant.

Example 22



Fairy Tale Op. 34 No. 3 m. 13-21

The *Dies Irae* theme in the bass used throughout the piece suggests the fear of the forest spirit's power, or the anger of the forest spirit at the evil minds of the people who

try to catch him. In most of its appearances, the theme is accented only on the first beat. The only time all the notes of the *Dies Irae* theme are accented is m. 129 indicated *Pesante*. This suggests the anger of either the forest spirit or his captors.

Example 23



Fairy Tale Op. 34 No. 3 m. 128-131

Following the sextuplet sixteenth rhythms at m. 134, the agitation culminates at m. 137, where both hands play sixteenth notes indicated *quasi trillo*. Including other neighboring sextuplets, (m. 25, m. 27-28) regular trills (m. 52-60, m. 101-104, m. 117-118, m. 128, m. 131-132) there are frequent half-step trills in this piece that add oddness. In this last “quasi trillo,” the texture sounds more aggressive because of the exactly simultaneous rhythms with the right-hand sextuplets in *fortissimo* dynamics at m. 137, which quickly calms down toward the end. The forest spirit may have completely disappeared at the end leaving the lowest note A on the keyboard at the end.

Example 24



Fairy Tale Op. 34 No. 3 m. 128-131

Following the sextuplet sixteenth rhythms at m. 134, the agitation culminates at m. 137, where both hands play sixteenth notes indicated *quasi trillo*. Including other neighboring sextuplets, (m. 25, m. 27-28) regular trills (m. 52-60, m. 101-104, m. 117-118, m.128, m. 131-132) there are frequent half-step trills in this piece that add oddness. In this last “quasi trillo,” the texture sounds more aggressive because of the exactly simultaneous rhythms with the right-hand sextuplets in *fortissimo* dynamics at m. 137, which quickly calms down toward the end. The forest spirit may have completely disappeared at the end leaving the lowest note A on the keyboard at the end.

Example 24

The image displays a musical score for a piano piece, specifically measures 132 through 138. The score is written for two staves, treble and bass clef. The first system (measures 132-134) includes the instruction "poco a poco più mosso" and features sextuplets and triplets. The second system (measures 135-136) begins with a forte "f" dynamic. The third system (measures 137-138) is marked "ff presto quasi trillo" and shows rapid sixteenth-note passages in both hands, with the right hand playing sextuplets and the left hand playing sixteenth notes.

Fairy Tale Op. 34 No. 4

The piece has three melodic themes used throughout in two big sections. How the themes and texture transform draw the story. In the first part, the texture is mostly contrapuntal and rhythmically spacious with softer dynamics. The themes transform into a long Coda whose texture is denser with many fast notes and increasing dynamics.

The first part in D minor describes the struggle of the knight (paladin) who is dying after a battle. Starting with a pitiful, soft opening, it is a spiritual struggle of the knight whose admission to heaven hangs in the balance. The music up to the Coda captures the drama of his struggles and hope and the Coda describes his admission to heaven with transformed themes in triumphant D major.

The first theme A is from m. 1 to 9, and has an extended cadence. Theme A represents the struggle of the paladin with minor mode, expressive ornaments, and a poignant D-sharp at m. 8. Theme B is a fragment derived from theme A at m. 3, a repetition of a leaping third. It sounds as an independent theme in a major key from m. 10. Perhaps it suggests a “hope” which is hidden in “struggle.” The theme C from m. 17 in a major key represents the Virgin Mary with the expressive indication *pietoso*.

Example 25

Theme A



Theme B



Theme C



In Medtner's pieces, slurs are often short even when he indicates *cantabile*. The short slurs suggest the phrasing, the emphasis of the melody. In the first four-bar phrase of Theme A, there are eight slurs written in the first four measures.

Example 26

"There lived in the world a poor knight."
A. Pushkin

Molto sostenuto e semplice $\text{♩} = 50$
cantabile

Fairy Tale Op. 34 No. 1 m. 1-4

Short gaps between the frequent slurs, eighth note rests, and *staccatos* in m. 3 help the melody line sounds hesitant and vulnerable. Medtner writes off-pedal markings so that the left-hand sounds are cleared off at each rest. These short slurs and rests create an image of the inconsistent breath of the dying paladin.

Medtner sets both Theme A and Theme C in unisons. After m. 10-12 of brief C major of Theme B, there are sequences in *espressivo*. (m. 13-16) The unison movements, dragging octaves and chords of the theme describe the voice of rejection from heaven. After a short silence the “Virgin Mary” theme in F major follows in m. 17. The left hand’s regular quarter notes in the bass (made steadier by Medtner’s insistence, “*sempre al rigore di tempo*”) make the texture smoother—perhaps even chorale-like; they suggest the gentleness and compassionate image of the Virgin Mary.

Example 27



Fairy Tale Op. 34 No. 4 m. 15-19

Responding to the strong *espressivo* unison in Theme A five measures before, Theme C also features unison registration. This describes Virgin Mary’s pleading to heaven to admit the paladin. A series of dramatic upward chords with *resolute* to half cadence at m. 27 is the climax of the plea.

At m. 27, the three themes start to combine contrapuntally. Themes A and C play simultaneously -- Theme A in the left hand, Theme C in the right hand. Theme B appears at m. 29. The texture is dense because of the chords in close register, and fast rhythms such as thirty-second triplets of left hand at m.28. Overall, the part from m. 27 to m. 34 is a building conflict, reflecting the anxious uncertainty of the paladin's potential admission or rejection from heaven.

Example 28

The musical score for Example 28 consists of two systems of piano music. The first system covers measures 27 to 30. In measure 27, the left hand has a triplet of thirty-second notes, and the right hand has a triplet of eighth notes. The texture is dense with many chords. The marking *irrisoluto* is above the first measure, and *risoluto* is above the second measure. The marking *meno f concentrando* is above the third measure. The second system covers measures 31 to 34. The marking *crescendo* is above the first measure of this system. The marking *f* is above the third measure of this system. The score features complex contrapuntal textures with dense chords and fast rhythms, including thirty-second triplets in the left hand at measure 28.

Fairy Tale Op. 34 No. 4 m. 26-29

The unusual disjunction of *crescendo* in the right hand and simultaneous *diminuendo* in the left hand at the same time in m. 32 and 33 produce a dynamic instability. At m. 34

ascending *staccato* chords in the right hand and accents in the left hand amplify the tension.

The reduced texture of the next part is similar to the first part. After a moment of silence the regretful G minor takes a few measures to reach the cadence, evincing slow acceptance of the disappointing result.

Example 29

The image displays a musical score for piano, consisting of two systems of staves. The first system shows a right hand with ascending staccato chords and a left hand with accents. The second system includes a moment of silence followed by a cadence in G minor, marked 'dolce' and 'p legatissimo'.

Fairy Tale Op. 34 No. 4 m. 32-35

At m. 38 Theme C is in the soprano, this time in G minor, with the same left hand accompaniment as in m. 17. Theme A in the alto and tenor voices is marked *marcato espressivo*. *Marcato* seems a strange indication in soft dynamics; Medtner most likely

wishes to highlight Theme A. The bass octaves and single notes fall down to the lowest register C-sharp in the piece at m. 41, suggesting desperation.

Example 30

The image displays two systems of musical notation for a piano piece. The first system consists of two staves (treble and bass clef) with a key signature of one flat (B-flat). Above the first measure of the first system, there are fingering numbers: '5 3 2' for the right hand and '5 3 2' for the left hand. The instruction 'marcato espress.' is written below the first measure. The second system also consists of two staves, continuing the musical piece. Below the first measure of the second system, there is a 'ca.' (crescendo) marking and an asterisk (*) below the second measure. The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

Fairy Tale Op. 34 No. 4 m. 38-41

In the next measure, Theme C appears in D minor, indicated *marcato espressivo* at a *pianissimo* dynamic. The *sempre calando* (disappearing tone and speed) at m.45 insinuates the paladin's death.

In m. 42 Theme A and Theme C sound together, and they do not end before the Coda; instead they are elided with the Coda's first bar at m. 48. At m. 46-47 is a magical transformation moment where the tonal balance shifts towards D major from D minor; the appearance of B-natural instead of B-flat suggests the coming major mode; F-sharp's brief presence in m. 47 gives rise to a fleeting D major triad; the rhythmic augmentation of the theme in the soprano gives the moment of mystical prolongation. This all prepares the Coda, which depicts the paladin's admission to heaven in triumphant D major.

Example 31

The image displays a musical score for a piano piece, specifically Example 31. It consists of two systems of music. The first system is marked 'lento' and 'm.d.' (mezzo-dolce). It features a complex texture with multiple voices, including a soprano line with rhythmic augmentation. The second system is marked 'Coda', 'Poco a poco svegliando', and 'pp' (pianissimo). It includes a pedal indication 'con vibrazione' and a 'canta' marking. The score is written in D major, as indicated by the key signature of two sharps (F# and C#).

Fairy Tale Op. 34 No. 4 m. 46-48

The Coda shimmers with contrapuntal melodies and accompanimental thirty-second notes throughout, sounding almost like a light from heaven. The indication *poco a poco svegliando* (awakening) and the pedal indication of *con vibrazione* suggest that this moment is very special.

The fragment from the second half of Theme A (m.5 ff.) transforms into a joyful D major melody throughout m. 49 to 56 in the left hand. The second half of Theme C appears at m. 51 in soprano transforms to be one theme combines with the fragment from Theme A. (m. 51-52) The dynamics grows louder and louder from m. 53 on and the texture gets thicker with octaves presenting Theme A fragment.

Example 32



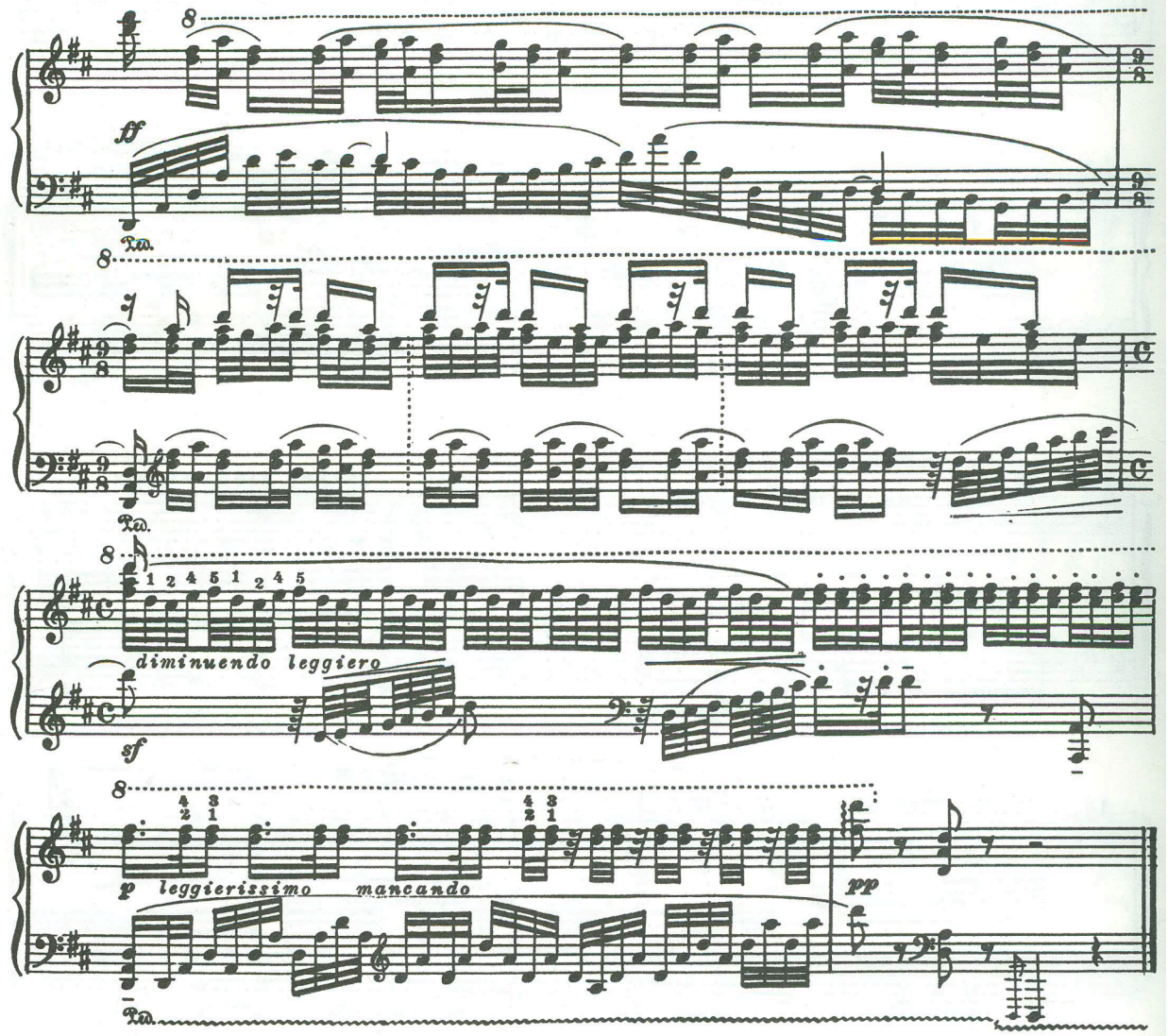
Fairy Tale Op.34 No. 4 m. 51-53

The right hand's flourishes in m. 57 are a transformation of Theme B, and *fortissimo* dynamics in the high register recall the sound of trumpets with their myriad associations with the divine.

The meter changes to 9/8 for one measure in m. 58 before returning to 4/4. This may be a brief suggestion of the “perfect” prolation that accompany 9/8.³⁴ Theme B appears in treble clef in the left hand while the right hand's fanfare-like motifs ring out in the highest register. There are five voices in three different rhythms in this measure.

Example 33

³⁴ “Prolation.” *The Oxford Dictionary of Music*, 2nd ed. rev.. *Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press, (accessed November 1, 2012), www.oxfordmusiconline.com.



Fairy Tale Op. 34 No. 4 m. 57-61

At m. 60, the arpeggiated perfect fifth interval moving up through the left hand and the repeating third in the soprano line create a spacious texture and the *leggierissimo* indication describes disappearing—paladin's rising to heaven.

CONCLUSION

While it is possible to approach Medtner's music with particular attention to harmony or structure, I chose to approach his music through observation of the texture. Texture is a broad term and it can mean many things. Accordingly, this document covers many subdivided elements that contribute to musical texture.

While listeners initially pay attention to the melody, rhythm, harmony, dynamics, and color, they ultimately remember the texture of the music. The genius of Medtner's composition is that he makes this texture so complex, delicate, and subtle. His music supported by his sensitivity to musical texture offers listeners a special experience to feel textural elaboration at a high level.

In his *Fairy Tales* cycle, the concept of the texture is related to the images of the *Skazki* and poems. Medtner crafted the subtle beauty of texture with many ideas about layering, articulations, and expressive indications that came from his practical and masterful knowledge of the piano. Some of his writing seems almost impossible to realize, but it will contribute to create his desired textures.

I hope this study may help to give interpretational options to pianists who wish to play Medtner's music. I sincerely hope that Medtner's music will be heard in concert halls more often. His music opens the listener's ear to textual subtlety, an essential beauty of piano playing.

Bibliography

- Balina, Marina and Helena Goscilo and Mark Lipovetsky, ed. *Politicizing Magic: An anthology of Russian and Soviet Fairy Tales*. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2005.
- Balzer, Marjorie Mandelstam, ed. *Russian Traditional Culture: Religion, Gender, and Customary Law*. Armonk, New York: M.E. Shape, 1992.
- Bloomquist, William Charles, Jr.. "The "Fairy Tales" of Nikolai Medtner." DMA diss. The University of Texas at Austin, 1993.
- Bonder, Liudmila. "Nikolas Medtner: Composer, Pianist, and Teacher (Translation of Medtner's Notes Compiled into Book, "The Daily Work of the Pianist and Composer")". M.M. thesis. Michigan State University, 2003.
- Chemaya-Oh, Ekaterina. "The *Skazki* (Fairly Tales) of Nikolai Medtner: The evolution and characteristics of the genre with compositional and performance aspects of selected fairly tales." D.M.A. diss. University of North Texas, 2008.
- Gerstle, Henry S. "The Piano Music of Nikolai Medtner." *The Musical Quarterly* 10, no. 4 (1924): 500-510.
- Hamelin, Marc-André. Foreward to *Complete Fairy Tales for Solo Piano*, edited by Stanley Appelbaum. Mineora, NY: Dover Publications, Inc., 2001.
- Hamelin, Mark-André. interview. *Super Virtuoso Documentary*. YouTube. (accessed October 20, 2012).
- Haney, Jack V. *An Introduction to the Russian Folktale*. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1998.
- Harrington, James. "Sketzki: Romantic Sketches for the young." *American Record Guide* 70 no. 6. (2007): 143
- Harrison, Max. *Rachmaninoff: Life, Works, Recordings*. London: Continuum International Publishing Group Ltd., 2006.
- Hartland, Edwin Sidney. *The Science of Fairy Tales: An inquiry into Fairy Mythology*. London: Methuen & Co. Ltd, 1925.
- Holt, Richard, ed. *Nicolas Medtner: A Tribute to his art and personality*, London: Dennis Dobson LTD, 1955.
- Ilyin, Ivan. "Sonata Form in Medtner" In Holt, Richard, ed. *Nicolas Medtner: A Tribute to his art and personality*. London: Dennis Dobson LTD, 1955.

- Ivanitts, Linda. *Russian Folk Belief*. Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1989.
- Kalendarev, Natalya. "Medtner: His beliefs, influences and work." D.M.A. diss. University of Washington, 2005.
- Livak, Leonid. *The Jewish Persona in the European Imagination: A Case of Russian Literature*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010.
- Martens, Frederik H. "The Modern Russian Pianoforte Sonata (Based on an Interview with M. Serge Prokofieff)." *The Musical Quarterly* 5 no. 3 (1919): 257-269.
- Martyn, Barrie. "Medtner, Nicolas." *Grove Music Online*. Oxford University Press, accessed September 21, 2009, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/18517>.
- Martyn, Barrie. *Nicolas Medtner: His Life and Music*. Hants, England: Scolar Press, 1995.
- Medtner, Nikolai. *Complete Fairy Tales for Solo Piano* edited by Stanley Appelbaum. Mineora, New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 2001.
- Medtner, Nikolai. *The Muse and the Fashion* translated by Alfred Swan. Haverford: Haverford College Bookstore, 1951.
- Milne, Hamish. *Medtner: The Complete Skazki*. Hyperion Records CDA67491/2, 2007, compact disc
- Morton, Miriam. *Harvest of Russian Children's Literature*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968.
- Rimm, Robert. *The Composer-Pianists: Hamelin and The Eight*. Portland: Amadeus Press, 2002.
- Rimm, Robert. "The Re-discovered Russian." *Piano and Keyboard* 196 (1996): 40-46.
- Schultze, Sydney. *Culture and Customs of Russia*. Westport: Greenwood Press, 2000.
- Scholes, Percy and David Nice. "Medtner, Nikolas." *The Oxford Companion to Music*. Ed. Alison Latham. *Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press. accessed November 1, 2012. www.oxfordmusiconline.com.
- Swann, Alfred J. "Present State of Russian Music." *The Musical Quarterly* 13 no. 1 (1927): 29-38.

- Taruskin, Richard. *The Oxford History of Western Music* Vol. 4. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Zeitlin, Ida, ed. *Skazki: Tales and Legends of Old Russia*. Murray Hill, New York: George H. Doran Company, 1926.
- Zipes, Jack David, ed. *The Oxford companion to Fairy tales*, Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Slobodkina, Olga. Lib.ru/Nikolai Gumilev "The Magic Violin." accessed February 20, 2012. http://lit.lib.ru/s/slobodkina_o/magicviolindoc.shtml.
- Jude, F. *The Complete Poems of Tyutchev in an English*. trans. F. Jude. accessed December 20, 2012. <http://knigo.com/t/TUTCHEW/english.html>.
- Pilnovsky, Helen. *Russian Fairy Tales Part II: Baba Yaga's Domain*. accessed January 10, 2012. <http://www/endicott-studio.com/rdrm/rrBabaYaga.html>.
- The Literature Network Forums. accessed March 1, 2012. www.online-literature.com.