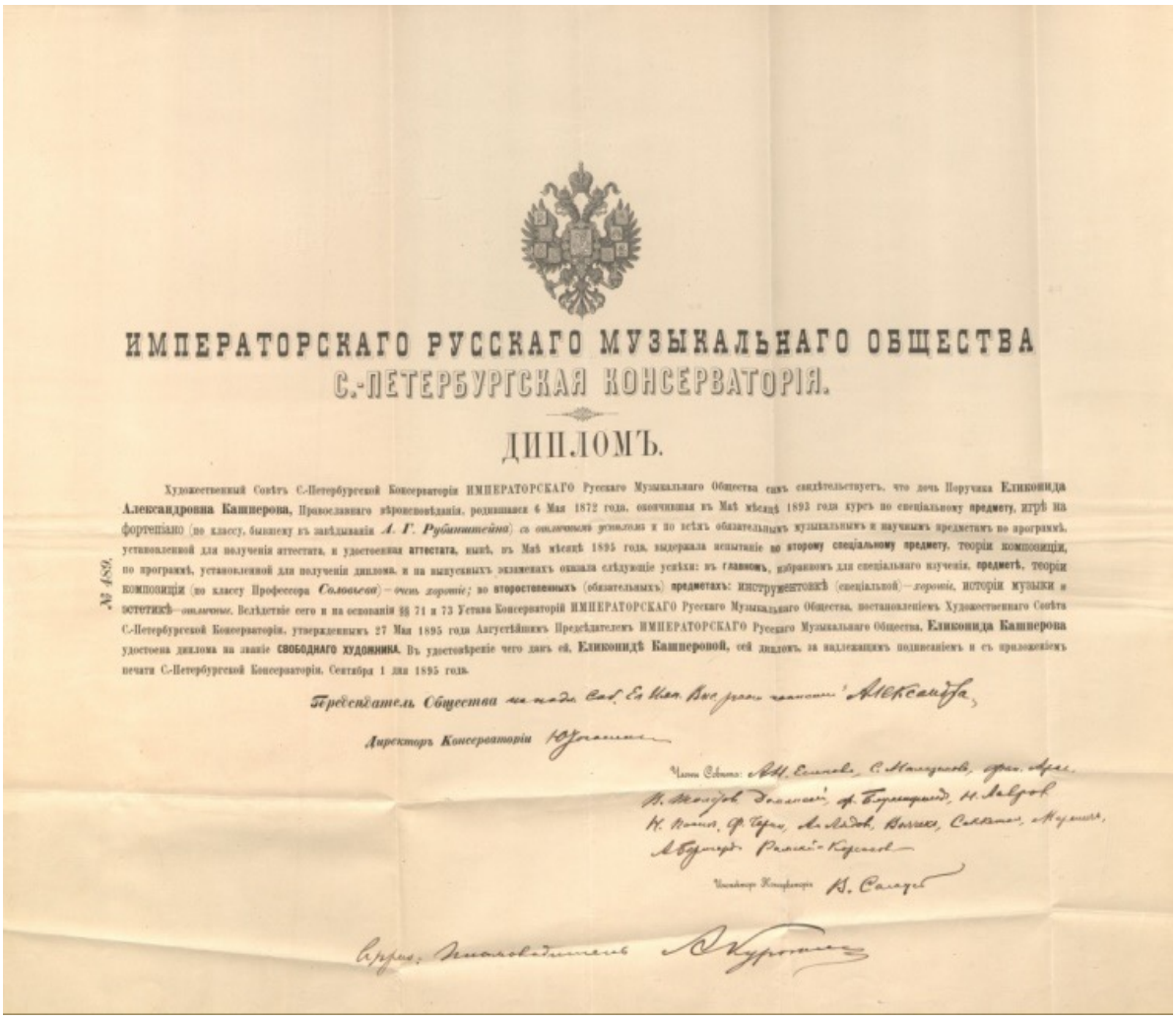
# Appendix: Additional Figures and Recollections of Anton Rubinstein (1929/1968) [translated]

## Figures


**FIG. A .** *Ysadba Bochatino, ca. 1920.* (‘Bochatino Estate, 1920s’). The Kashperov family manor house and estate at Bochatino, near Lyubim, Yaroslavl Oblast (district). Built in the early 1800s, its architecture was influenced by the English Regency style, fashionable at the time in Russia, and was modelled on the Assembly Hall of the Nobility in Kostroma.

**Fig. AA:** The St Petersburg Conservatoire in 1894



ИМПЕРАТОРСКАГО РУССКАГО МУЗЫКАЛЬНАГО ОБЩЕСТВА
С.-ПЕТЕРБУРГСКАЯ КОНСЕРВАТОРІЯ.

ДИПЛОМЪ.

№ 488.

Художественный Совѣтъ С.-Петербургской Консерваторіи ИМПЕРАТОРСКАГО Русскаго Музыкальнаго Общества симъ свидѣтельствуетъ, что дочь Поручика **Еликонида Александровна Кашперова**, Православнаго вѣроисповѣданія, родившаяся 6 Мая 1872 года, окончившая въ Маѣ мѣсяцѣ 1893 года курсъ по специальному предмету, игрѣ на фортепіано (по классу, бывшему въ завѣдываніи *А. Г. Рубинштейна*) *съ отличнымъ успѣхомъ* и по всѣхъ обязательныхъ музыкальныхъ и научныхъ предметахъ по программѣ, установленной для полученія аттестата, и удостоена **аттестата**, какъ, въ Маѣ мѣсяцѣ 1895 года, выдержала испытаніе **по второму специальному предмету**, теоріи композиціи, по программѣ, установленной для полученія диплома, и на выпускныхъ экзаменахъ оказала слѣдующіе успѣхи: въ **главномъ**, избранномъ для специальнаго изученія, **предметѣ**, теоріи композиціи (по классу Профессора *Соловьева*) — *очень хорошіе;* во **второстепенныхъ** (обязательныхъ) **предметахъ**: инструментовкѣ (спеціальной) — *хорошіе*, исторіи музыки и эстетикѣ — *отличные*. Вслѣдствіе сего и на основаніи §§ 71 и 73 Устава Консерваторій ИМПЕРАТОРСКАГО Русскаго Музыкальнаго Общества, постановленіемъ Художественнаго Совѣта С.-Петербургской Консерваторіи, утвержденныхъ 27 Мая 1895 года Августѣйшимъ Предсѣдателемъ ИМПЕРАТОРСКАГО Русскаго Музыкальнаго Общества, **Еликонида Кашперова** удостоена диплома на званіе **СВОБОДНАГО ХУДОЖНИКА**. Въ удостовѣреніе чего дано ей, **Еликонидѣ Кашперовой**, сей дипломъ, за надлежащими подписаніемъ и съ приложеніемъ печати С.-Петербургской Консерваторіи. Сентября 1 дня 1895 года.

*Предсѣдатель Общества* [illegible]

*Директоръ Консерваторіи* [illegible]

Члены Совѣта: [illegible]

Секретарь Конференціи [illegible]

[illegible]

**FIG. B:** L. A. Kashperova's second and final graduation diploma from the St Petersburg Conservatoire (May 1895). The last-named of the fourteen signatories (three lines up from the foot of the document) is N. A. Rimsky-Korsakov.

*Image: courtesy of the Russian State Historical Archive, St. Petersburg: Archive 7/Inventory 2/File 1793. With thanks to Andrey Georgievich Rumyantsev.*

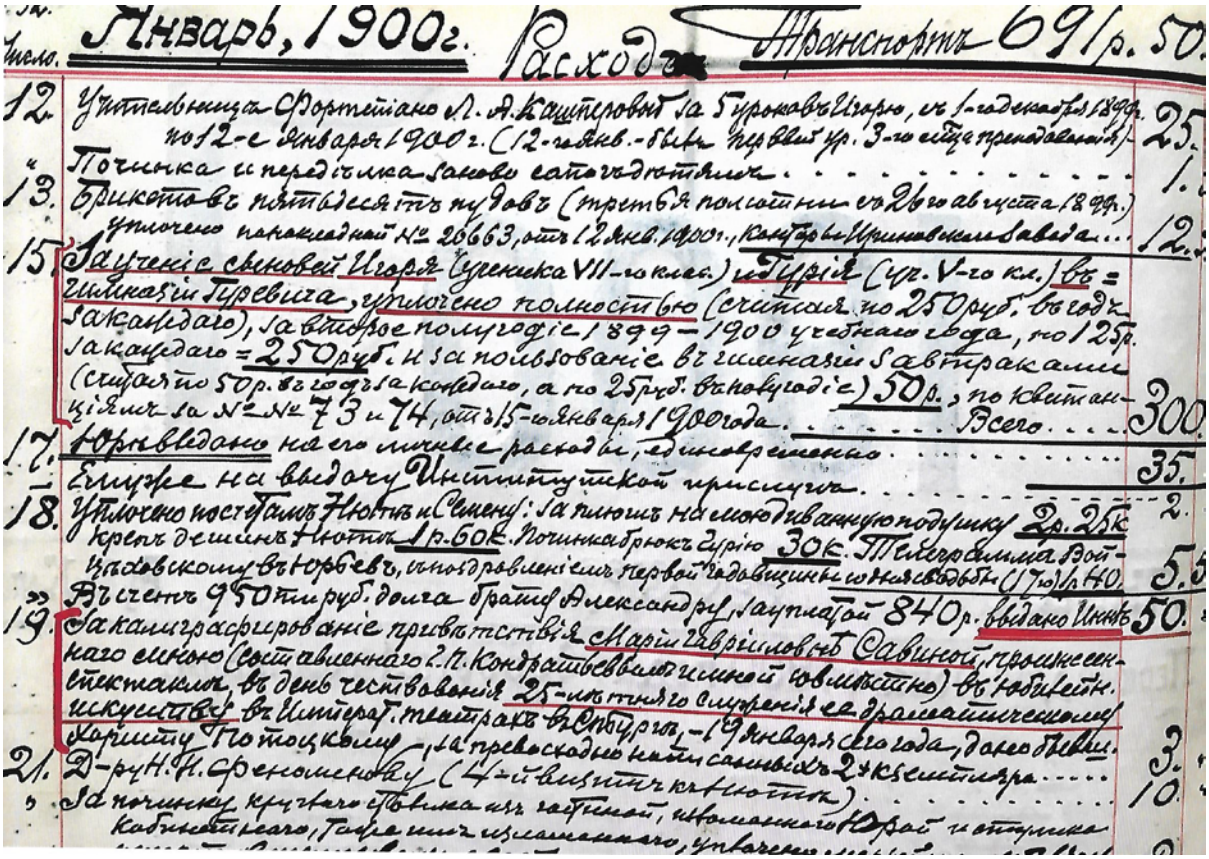
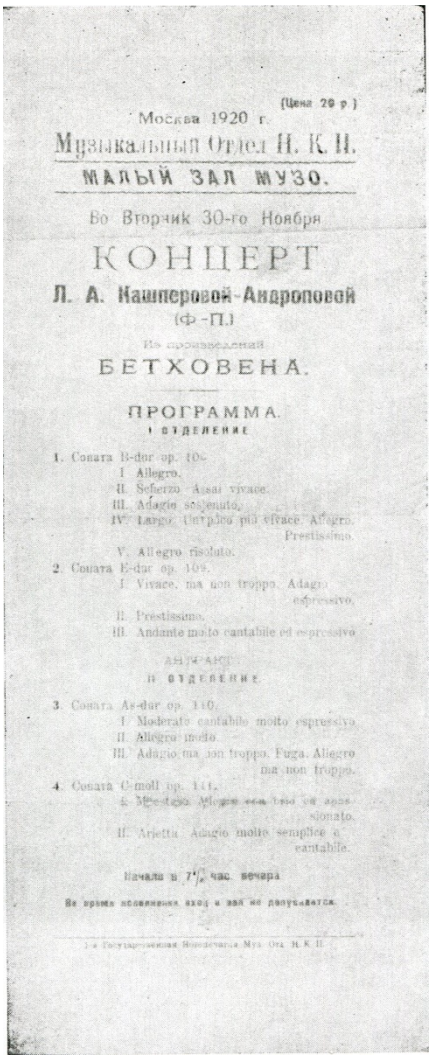



**Fig. BB***:* The first of many entries in Fyodor Stravinsky's account books which mention Kashperova appears on 12 [24] January 1900. See the top line: 'To the piano teacher L. A. Kashperova. 5 lessons given to Igor since 1 December 1899 – 25 roubles'.
*Image: courtesy of the F. I. Stravinsky Family Fund (Moscow & Venice).*



(Цена 20 р.)

Москва 1920 г.

Музыкальный Отдел Н. К. П.

МАЛЫЙ ЗАЛ МУЗО.

Во Вторник 30-го Ноября

КОНЦЕРТ

Л. А. Кашперовой-Андроповой

(Ф.-П.)

Из произведений

БЕТХОВЕНА.

ПРОГРАММА.

I ОТДЕЛЕНИЕ

1. Соната B-dur op. 106.
   I. Allegro.
   II. Scherzo. Assai vivace.
   III. Adagio sostenuto.
   IV. Largo. Un'poco più vivace. Allegro. Prestissimo.
   V. Allegro risoluto.
2. Соната E-dur op. 109.
   I. Vivace, ma non troppo. Adagio espressivo.
   II. Prestissimo.
   III. Andante molto cantabile ed espressivo

АНТРАКТ

II ОТДЕЛЕНИЕ

3. Соната As-dur op. 110.
   I. Moderato cantabile molto espressivo.
   II. Allegro molto.
   III. Adagio ma non troppo. Fuga. Allegro ma non troppo.
4. Соната C-moll op. 111.
   I. Maestoso. Allegro con brio ed appassionato.
   II. Arietta. Adagio molto semplice e cantabile.

Начало в 7½ час. вечера

Во время исполнения вход в зал не допускается.

1-я Государственная Типография Муз. Отд. Н. К. П.

**FIG. C:** The concert programme for a Beethoven recital presented by L. A. Kashperova-Andropova (sic) in Moscow on 30 November 1920 when she performed the four final sonatas, Opp. 106, 109, 110 and 111; and, as an encore, op. 81a 'Les Adieux'.

*Image: published in L. A. Kashperova Воспоминания (Vospominaniya: 'Memoirs'), 1929/1968.)*

**FIG. D:** Image originally published in L. A. Kashperova, Воспоминания (*Vospominaniya*; ‘Memoirs’) in Музыкальное наследство (*Muzikal’noye Nasledstvo*; ‘Musical Legacy’) Volume 2, Part 2 , ed. N. G. Fesenkova, (Moscow: Muzyka, 1968).

# *Recollections of Anton Rubinstein* (1929/1968)

## *By Leokadiya A. Kashperova*

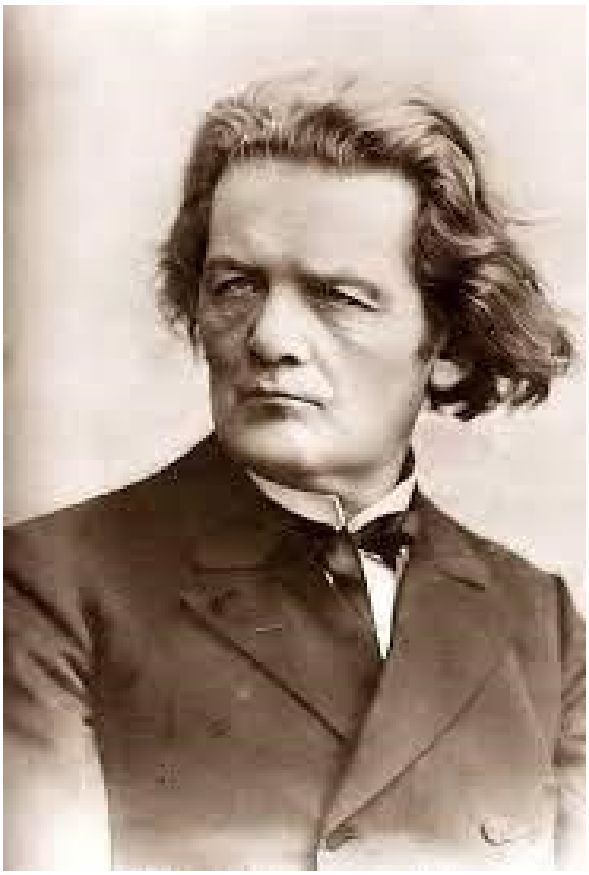
(Ed. Graham Griffiths.)

*The following translation from the original is by Dr Roger Cockrell, translator of Russia's literary giants for Alma Classics.*[1]

The *Recollections* are followed by the original Notes provided by N. S. Fesenkova (Moscow, 1968) and use her original footnote numbering (7 to 14), this being a continuation of the sequence (1 to 6) used in *Memoirs*. Fesenkova's original Notes are indicated within square brackets, e.g., [7].

Text within square brackets indicates additional information [provided by the editor].

[1] Translation: Roger Cockrell, 2019. L. A. Kashperova, ed. N. G. Fesenkova, Воспоминания (*Vospominaniya*; 'Memoirs') in Музыкальное наследство (*Muzikal'noye Nasledstvo*; 'Musical Legacy') Volume 2, Part 2 (Moscow: Muzyka, 1968), pp.135-45. Anton Grigorevich Rubinstein (28 November 1829 - 20 November 1894), composer, concert pianist, conductor, founder of the St Petersburg Conservatoire (1862).



Anton Rubinstein (1829-94), Russian pianist, composer, conductor. Founder of the St Petersburg Conservatoire. Leokadiya Kashperova's piano teacher and the subject of her 'Recollections of A. G. Rubinstein' written in 1929, first published in Moscow in 1968 and here published in translation for the first time.

The end of this year will mark the one hundredth anniversary of Anton Rubinstein's birth.**[7]** But before speaking about him I would like to call to mind what Nikolai Solovyov said during his farewell speech at Rubinstein's graveside[2]: after referring to Anton Grigoryevitch's greatness he quoted from Minsky's poem[3] that had been dedicated to him.**[8]** As you can see, his contemporaries referred to his greatness. But this of course lay not only in his exterior qualities, or in the incomparable virtuosity at the piano with which he enraptured his audience. He was someone who possessed a particular moral force in his music as well as in life, a force that was as powerful as it was profoundly expressive – his untiring dedication to his work, his scrupulous honesty,

[2] See Fesenkova's correction, Note **[8]**: it was the pianist Vasily Safonov (1852-1918), not Solovyov, who delivered this eulogy at Rubinstein's grave in the Tikhin Cemetery, Alexander Nevsky Monastery, St Petersburg.
[3] Nikolai Maksimovich Minsky (pseudonym for Nikolai Maksimovich Valenkin, 1855 - d. Paris, 1937), poet of the Silver Age of Russian poetry and a founder-member of the Religious-Philosophical Society (1902).

his eschewing of any kind of compromise, his astonishing simplicity, sincerity, and independence of thought. I met him in all kinds of social circumstances and never noticed any sign of prejudice towards anyone in him. He was a person with very broad horizons, interested not only in the individual but in whole nations. He used to react to people's suffering with passionate sympathy and without stinting himself, by organizing, for example, concerts in support of the starving.

The main aim of his life was the inculcation of a musical education in his homeland. This task he, together with his brother, was to fulfil brilliantly.[4] At the same time, in addition to his incomparable performances on the piano, he was able to produce a number of talented compositions, many of which will live on for ever: *The Demon* [his opera, 1871], the fourth Piano Concerto [in D minor, op. 70, 1864], the Romances [e.g. *Persian Love Songs*, op. 35]. He possessed a formidable intellect (as evidence of which, see his 'aphorisms') and, thanks to his great erudition, was a highly-educated person.[5]

I knew him when he was already sixty, but this was scarcely believable: right up to the end of his life he retained a genuinely youthful and cheerful temperament and outlook on life. His energy never diminished, and he devoted his whole life to his work. He would usually compose from 7 to 9 a.m., spend the day from 9 to 5 p.m. at the Conservatoire in his post as director, and in the evening, if there was no concert, relax by playing a simple game of cards with a group of friends. At 11 p.m. he would stop and take his leave of everyone. If he happened to have guests at home, they would all leave at that time, knowing his habits and always keeping strictly to this routine. As someone who never indulged in drinking bouts and other excessive pastimes, he stayed strong and healthy for the rest of his life.

I was to see him a few days before his death: he was conducting a rehearsal for a performance at the Conservatoire and giving his observations – they were putting on one of his own operas. And then, just some two days before he died, he was sitting in a friend's house, playing a Beethoven trio in his own inimitable way.

**1**

Anyone who ever knew Anton Rubinstein as a mature man would have been struck by his imposing appearance, something that inspired so much respect in everybody, together with a feeling of timidity in some. He wasn't especially tall or strongly-built, but everything about him had an especially harmonious quality – he had been carved as if out of a single piece of granite. And that was precisely how his incomparable playing seemed. No matter how engaging or brilliant the details of his playing were, they nonetheless never detracted

[4] Nikolai Rubinstein (1835-81), concert-pianist, founder of the Moscow Conservatoire (1866).
[5] Concerning Rubinstein's celebrated aphorisms, see Section 3: Introduction to *Recollections to Anton Rubinstein.*

from its impact as a whole: the audience was compelled to become intensely involved in the music's development, in its climactic point and conclusion – that is, in its structure as a whole and, in Rubinstein's case, this structure was astonishingly artistic and complete, as aesthetically pleasing as a whole as he was himself. His manner of playing was exactly the same.

The first piece I heard him perform was Weber's *Momento Capriccioso* [in Bb, op. 12] when my impression was of someone juggling with balls with extraordinary rapidity – every staccato crotchet that he played made an incredibly finished and rounded sound. No matter how he played, fast or slow, *forte* or tenderly, every note filled the room; the lyrical quality of his playing was profound and bewitching, and its power titanic. His audience was overwhelmed by the dramatic, impassioned character of his playing, which was especially striking in Beethoven's 'Promethean' sonatas. At the end of the *Appassionata* [Sonata no. 23 in F minor, op. 57], for example, he attacked the music with such power that it took the audience's breath away. At the same time, he possessed an exceptional ability to sustain the overall rhythm of the piece. This was not, of course, a dry, metronomic rhythmicality, but one with a lifegiving pulse: he didn't slur or gloss over a single phrase – everything, up to the least significant note in the quickest passages was lucidly clear and precise, forming an essential part of the musical structure as a whole. It was this that made the structure so complete, and that so profoundly engaged the audience.

In conversation he was as well-rounded as in his music. Whenever he spoke, it was in a dominating way – but never deliberately so, and never because of an overbearingly powerful manner, but because of the correctness and sincerity of what he was saying. I have never met a more direct and honest person in my life. He always came straight to the point – as I once experienced for myself. I used to dream about conducting my own compositions, but Rubinstein was adamantly against women ever taking the conductor's baton. When I asked 'why?' he replied curtly 'just a farcical idea', not wishing to elaborate on a topic he clearly wished to avoid.

As is well known, Rubinstein considered that music ended with Chopin, and that, as far as Russian composers were concerned, he recognized only Glinka – and even that only in a token sense – as a representative of his nation's music. He didn't like Wagner, but he appreciated Liszt, although with some scepticism; he liked Lyadov [Anatoly Lyadov, 1855-1914], and valued Balakirev's *Islamey* [*Islamey: Oriental Fantasy*, op. 18 (1869)] quite highly, performing it at concerts. On the whole the 'New Russian School' was not to his taste, and he therefore did not talk about it or apparently even acknowledge its existence.

I can remember Glazunov [Aleksandr Glazunov (1865-1936) composer, director of the St Petersburg Conservatoire 1905-30], as a young man, playing him the first movement of his fourth Symphony [in Eb, op. 48 (1893)]. When he finished, Anton Grigorevich said nothing at all, but a few minutes later asked: 'Would you like to know my opinion?'. Hearing Glazunov's answer in the positive, he advised him to adopt a livelier tempo

in some section or other, saying that the whole piece sounded rather monotonous. That was all he said, and I shall never forget the depressing effect these dry words had on Glazunov. It would have been far more natural to have spotted just how talented and brilliant a musician Glazunov was, to have gone into detail about his composition, to have asked him to play it again, and to have shown interest in the other man's creative approach. But to soften his attitude towards anything that was not to his taste was quite foreign to his nature.

How fortunate I was that such a man should have students and have concerned himself with them.[6] I look back on his gentle and indulgent attitude towards us [the four students in his elite piano class, 1888-91] with a sense of profound gratitude. On occasion he could yell at us, hurl the music onto the floor, make unpleasant comments, but it was never with any malice; it was simply the fully justified indignation of an exceptional musician.

Anton Grigorevich wasn't a teacher in the normally accepted sense of the word. He used to say: 'I don't give lessons, I give advice!'. He generally disliked focusing on the technical side of playing and when asked about fingering he would reply: 'Play it with your nose, if you like, I don't care!'. But his greatness lay in his ability to inspire an undying love for great music in his pupils. I can remember the thunder in his voice as he shouted: 'You are playing a Sonata by Beethoven! Down on your knees!'. He infected us all with his passion for great music. Whenever he played a piece, his mind throughout was only on that particular piece and the composer, and not at all on himself as a virtuoso player or on the effects he himself might be able to achieve. It was just such a chaste attitude towards performing that he strove to inculcate in his students.

At that time, the years 1888 to 1891, Rubinstein had only four students in all. He would give each of us two lessons a week, with the lesson lasting at least an hour, often longer. The lessons took place in his study at the Conservatoire. We would sit at one piano, he at another. The music of the pieces we were playing lay on the stand in front of him, and he would follow what we were playing, closely observing every detail, and sometimes playing through any passage as necessary again and again. He was astonishingly conscientious: he would begin his lessons precisely at the agreed time, and despite being involved in a whole series of concerts to celebrate his sixtieth birthday (this was in 1889), he never missed a single class.[7]

In his teaching methods Anton Grigorevich, as in much else, went his own way, not adopting generally accepted custom. In the space of only three years his students managed to learn almost all Beethoven's sonatas, the two volumes of Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier* [BWV 846-893], his 'Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue' [in D minor, BWV 903] the third Toccata [in D major, BWV 912], the English Suites [BWV 806-811] nos. 2, 3 and

[6] In 1890 Rubinstein had resigned for the second time as director of the St Petersburg Conservatoire in disagreement with his colleagues' policy of offering musical education to those students who were less-than-excellent. In an 1899 letter to his publisher Bartholf Senff in Berlin (which came to light in 1912) he writes: 'I am devoting all my time to the preparation of young composers and performers well aware that these efforts are absolutely wasted'. See: Victor Walter, 'Reminiscences of Anton Rubinstein', trans. D. A. Modell, in *The Musical Quarterly*, Vol.5, No.1 (Jan. 1919), pp.10-19. For this reason, he latterly only accepted a Special Piano Class of four pupils, including Kashperova.
[7] The original text has 'fiftieth' birthday – RC.

6, Handel's Suites [HWV 426-433], a number of sonatas and other pieces by Haydn and Mozart, some Scarlatti sonatas and other pieces by some of the early clavichord composers, Weber's Ab major and D minor Sonatas [nos. 2 and 3], his *Polacca* [*Polacca brillante*, op. 72], *Invitation to a Dance* [op. 65] and *Momento Capriccioso* [op. 12]; Mendelssohn's *Songs Without Words*, his E minor Prelude and Fugue [op. 35, no. 1] and *Variations sérieuses* [op. 54], all the more substantial pieces by Schubert, Schumann and Chopin, some of Liszt's fantasies and Hungarian rhapsodies, together with a few pieces by Russian composers.

Not all these pieces of course were to be technically perfect or learnt by heart, but they were all played in the spirit and character demanded by the music. Only when the musical sense had been correctly established did he move on to the next piece. When beginning a new piece with a student, he would first of all ask about its character, for his main task was to get the student to convey the true character of that particular piece of music. He always talked interestingly about the details of the piece, the sound effects and so on, but this was only to bring out the music's character in sharper relief.

Regrettably such an approach has now been forgotten. Nowadays, a teacher will usually turn to his student and say: 'Make the sound like this; it will be very lovely' – that is to say, the production of a lovely sound becomes the main aim. It was totally different as far as Anton Grigorevich was concerned. For him, a lovely sound was a means to an end or, rather, the inevitable result of an intense almost spiritual feeling. The question of a sound's particular colouring only arose with him when he was striving to emulate the orchestra's sound. He was particularly fond of this and achieved it extraordinarily well, in Schumann's *Etudes Symphoniques* [op. 13], for instance.

He used to demand that the orchestra's sound be mirrored during the orchestral sections in piano concertos. I remember how difficult it was to convey the sound of the horn in the second movement of his D minor Concerto [no. 4]. He kept a very strict eye on such accompanying sections in the orchestra, demanding that the rhythm be absolutely faultless and, as with everything, hating it whenever the correct tempo was not immediately established. You can quite often hear even outstanding pianists failing to pick up the correct tempo immediately, so that in the opening bars you're able to sense a barely perceptible speeding up or slowing down. Anton Grigorevich demanded that as soon as his students sat down at the piano, they should start concentrating and imagining to themselves exactly how the work's tempo should conform to its character, and to employ the correct tempo as soon as they began playing. He also demanded that his students convey the composer's style correctly. As a result, his students became extremely anxious when they were examined on how well they had succeeded in mastering the style of the piece, especially during their first evening recitals as a solo pianist.

The first of his students to perform in this way were [Sofia] Poznanskaya and [Eugene] Holliday [see *Memoirs*]. Rubinstein decided exactly what they were going to play and carefully went through the pieces with them, anxious about the quality of their first solo performance. But in class he would analyse their playing

extremely strictly, and he would compel the two junior students [i.e., Kashperova and Sophie Yakimovskaya] to criticize their playing at the evening recitals. I recall being asked to comment critically on Poznanskaya's performance – she was then his very best student. He: 'So, how did you find Bach's 'Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue'? I: 'Not grand enough'. He: 'Correct!'. [Then, referring to Liszt's Schubert transcriptions] '*Du bist die Ruh'*?, 'Wonderful!', '*Der Erlkönig'*? 'Absolutely appalling!' and so on. His critical judgement was so unbiased that he didn't spare even his very best student. During symphony and chamber concerts he sat in his usual seat, everyone's eyes trained on him. By the expression on his face you could always tell what he thought of the performance.

In those years, the symphony concerts were under the baton of Leopold Auer. Auer was also the lead violinist in the [Russian Musical Society] quartet concerts.**[9]** He was a wonderful musician, a very close colleague of Anton Grigorevich. His conducting stood out for its interpretive depth. [As a violinist] his tone, never particularly forceful, was distinguished for its tenderness and nobility. During the quartet concerts these qualities became particularly apparent in the playing of Auer's colleague, the brilliant cellist Alexander Verzhbilovich [see *Memoirs*]. Particularly striking was his captivating strength of tone, also his ability to capture the whole gamut of expression, from impassioned drama to incomparable tenderness and intimacy. As a great artist and profound musician, [Verzhbilovich] possessed sufficient awareness never to dominate or conceal the violin; he and Auer used to complement each other's playing wonderfully well. For the audience, these [quartet concerts] were a profound as well as a very pleasurable experience.

As the musical heart and soul of St Petersburg, Anton Grigorevich never missed any of these concerts. But whenever he himself gave a performance it became a musical feast that stayed in the memory for a very long time. His appearance alone created a sensation: his leonine head, his unhurried movements and the stern, no-nonsense expression on his face – all left an indelible impression.

Those who knew him well were sensitively aware of his every thought while performing. Otherwise he remained quite impenetrable. If he disliked some new composition he never showed it. When, on the day following the performance, someone from his intimate circle asked his opinion about it, he would confine himself to some brief, but curt, comment along the lines of 'Oh, I get so tired of them all!', putting a stop to all further conversation on the topic. When, for example, he first became acquainted with Borodin's B-minor Symphony [Symphony no. 2, 1869-76] , it was clear that the words 'them all' referred to the new school of Russian music in its entirety [i.e. the 'Mighty Handful', in Stasov's description of 1867].

When I was enraptured after first hearing Wagner's Ring cycle, he told me that my taste was not yet fully developed. I'm sorry I never got around to talking to him about Brahms; it seemed to me that his sympathies in this case would have been crystal clear. But his name never came up in our discussions.

In general, I found talking with him about music, or indeed about anything serious, difficult, as he always made a sharp distinction when talking with people, depending on whether it was a man or a woman. He always conversed willingly with men, and they were all struck by his engaging manner, his naturally lucid and original mind, and his wide erudition. Although he used to adopt a sympathetic and chivalrously polite manner with women, he never treated them as equals, but with a kind of good-natured scorn, confining himself for the most part to jokes. In class, of course, he treated everyone equally seriously, but occasionally, even in such circumstances, especially when he was less than totally pleased with something, he would address his female students in a bantering manner, such as 'You're playing like a young princess!', or 'Keep all that energy for your husband, when you get married!'. We found this reference to marriage very offensive, but all the same we could tell from his tone if he was angry with us or if it was simply a good-hearted joke.

Whenever we made a mistake he usually reacted by shouting 'Oh! Les femmes, les femmes!' ('Oh, women, women!') but we were never offended. We studied his every movement. Of course, while playing, we never dared look at him, but we could see, or rather, we could sense whether or not he was pleased with us. If we had correctly grasped the music's character, he would lean slightly forward and start rocking almost imperceptibly in time with the music; but if we hadn't, he would nervously run his hand through his hair, look down at his hands, or shift around on his chair, as if finding it uncomfortable. Whenever he heard a wrong note, he was more forgiving, confining himself to shouting 'Well!' or 'That bit was horrible!' He demanded absolute clarity from us – something he demanded from his own performances. Restraint in both rhythm and tempo had always to be exemplary. He couldn't abide any sign of overindulgence or sentimentality, saying: 'Le trop c'est l'ennemie du bien' ('Excess is the enemy of the good'). If we had correctly grasped the character of the music, but there had been some serious technical error, he would say: 'That wouldn't have been so bad, if it had been any good!'. But worst of all as far as we were concerned, was when he fell silent after we'd finished playing and then wait for a few moments before saying: 'That was pathetic!'. On the other hand, we were so happy whenever we were able to play a whole piece with uniformly intense concentration and uninterrupted commitment to the spirit of the music! On such occasions he was able to praise us with particular warmth: he would shake our hand, making some brief comment, but with such affection that it seemed to us as if the sun had just risen; and when he next met us, he would remember and start praising us again. In the event of the opposite happening, he would never hold our mistakes against us, and was always kind to us even after an unsuccessful performance. Whenever this happened to me, I can remember the way I used to back away from him a little and look at him in absolute astonishment. But he would simply gently reproach me. 'Why be so serious?', he would ask. But, on such occasions, I used to be more critical of myself than my teacher, and after every lesson that had not gone well, I would take myself to task for three days, recovering only when it got to the following lesson. He forgave us because he didn't want to burden himself with any unpleasant memories outside the class. But we were unable to forgive ourselves as we knew just how much he disliked any loss of

attention, any carelessness in our playing, and just how highly he valued music. Any crime committed against him was, for us, a crime against art which he had taught us to love unreservedly.

To forget about such a high priest of art would mean to deprive oneself of one of the most significant wellsprings for one's own musical development. To say that he had grown old would mean to forget that not every building is destroyed and demands to be rebuilt, but that there are buildings with such firm foundations that you can build another building on top of them, and that there are buildings of such size and significance that you have to leave them exactly as they are, so that, by studying them, you are able to create other great buildings and thereby further the cause of art.

**2**

After graduating, young people often feel insufficiently able to stand on their own two feet. Not everyone is fully prepared to start working independently. It is particularly important at this time to pay great attention to what the virtuosi have to say and to study their methods so that they become a source of support when playing independently – either that or try to find yourself a new teacher. The main difficulty is that each virtuoso has their own particular method, many of which are successful. Josef Hofmann [b. Krakow, 1876, d. Los Angeles, 1957], for example, sits very low down at the piano with his hands close to the keys. This gives support to his third finger joints, and his *forte* chords, coming straight from the hands, are very strong, while his fingers remain especially firm and independent. Hofmann is a very strong player with dazzling technique. At the same time there are pianists who keep their hands in a convex shape, so that their hands seem to be suspended and supported. This method can also mean great strength while playing, and the arched position gives the hand lightness and mobility. Pianists with small hands quite often play with their hands in this position.

There was once a Moscow professor who taught his students the Eugene d'Albert [1864-1932] method, that he himself had mastered abroad. As far as I can understand from what one of his students told me, the nub of the method was to make circular movements with the hands, thereby freeing and developing the 'roots' of the fingers – that is where the bottom of the fingers joined the actual hand.

Alexander Siloti [1863-1945] has an extremely interesting approach: among other things, he has developed a particular technique for playing octaves *pianissimo*, with the hands in a decidedly arched position.

The main practice exercise, which he invariably uses himself, and which he recommends to his students, is to play the first few pages of Paul de Schlözer's [1841-98] A flat major study [op. 1, no. 2] in the following manner: to play the semiquaver passages *pianissimo* with each hand separately and very slowly, but in such a

way so that each finger is suspended for a moment absolutely motionless in the air and then press it down onto the keys, meaning that even though the playing stays *pianissimo* each sound the finger makes as it strikes the keyboard is just audible. Using this method, the hand is able to move smoothly, but to maintain a precise angle, so that each finger is situated exactly above the particular key it is about to strike. This exercise, which he adopted from Moriz Rosenthal [pupil of Liszt, 1862-1946], helps the fingers develop an astonishing evenness and independence. Once students have mastered this technique, they are able to play that particular study *forte* – together with the first studies of Clementi's [1752-1832] *Gradus ad Parnassum* [1826], which also demand that the fingers fall down on the keys from a height.

As against this, certain classes at the St Petersburg Conservatoire have adopted the method whereby students play with their whole hand, seamlessly placing the weight on fingers that are practically motionless.

There is also the method whereby you deliberately arch the third finger joint and press down on the keys with your fingertips.

There are many different methods and techniques; some are complex, occasionally even rather mannered; 'not all roads lead to Rome', as they say, so the choice can be very difficult. The main deciding factor has to be the structure of the hand. And here you can be faced with quite a challenging task: to learn to study one's own hand in order to find the most appropriate way to develop one's technique. And in this process, you shouldn't adopt anybody else's method until you have tried it out during an actual performance.

Take *Gewichtstechnik* (arm weight technique) as an example. This technique is widely used in Germany and possibly one deriving from Liszt, who, according to Siloti, said that when you are playing you should feel that your entire body, right down to the small of your back, is involved. This doesn't mean your entire body should move, but that the fingers should never feel isolated and that the sound must come from 'the whole body'. In *Gewichtstechnik* the movement comes from the shoulder, so that the shoulder affects the sound you make, transferring it into the fingers. This is a very old technique, and one young pianist who had learnt it from a certain teacher who had never given a public performance, found he had to stop playing because of the sharp pain in his shoulder. You should clearly not approach such matters purely theoretically, but you need to learn them from a virtuoso with real, practical experience.**[10]**

Bearing all this in mind, it becomes clear how simple Rubinstein's approach to technique was! He related to his instrument as he did to other people – honestly, straightforwardly, and sometimes with a trusting naivety, one of his character traits which was particularly engaging. A distinguishing feature of his technique was the directness with which he brought his fingers down on to the keys: for the most part he played notes, whether *forte* or *piano*, whether as a chord or at the beginning of a melodic section, as it were from above, keeping his hand particularly free, and this made the sound he made astonishingly like the human voice. The raising of the

free hand is like the intake of breath, the lowering of the hand on the keyboard is the sound of a totally pure voice as it begins sing, like a bell. This is especially valued by teachers of singing, though some who demand that their students use this technique tend to exaggerate, and it turns into a so-called ‘coup de glotte’.

As a young man Rubinstein famously used to sit for hours at the piano, trying to imitate the tenor voice of Giovanni [Battista] Rubini [1794-1854], which had made such an impression on him. And, indeed, his piano used to sing with such a young, fresh and captivatingly naïve voice.

You often hear it said that the special Rubinstein sound has been lost. This is absolutely correct. In order to achieve a sound such as Rubinstein’s, a sound that embraces all the nuances of strength and tenderness, you need phenomenal restraint and sense of calm – that is, the absence of any sign of anxiety. That was very evident in Rubinstein’s case; everything combined in him to result in a favourable outcome: his excellent health, complemented by a strictly observed lifestyle; ideally formed hands, meaning that any tension, uncertainty, or anxiety in his tone was out of the question, enabling him easily and spontaneously to obtain a whole range of different sounds from his instrument with a spontaneous, light touch of his hands on the piano.

To have small hands is agonizing for a pianist: it means there is always tension and feelings of doubt and anxiety when performing. To have large, flat hands, on the other hand, can lead to feelings of awkwardness, or the concern that your hands will be too large for the keys in certain passages and that you will inadvertently strike the wrong notes. I heard about this from a certain pianist. Such feelings no doubt explained why Siloti once confessed to me that he never liked playing the scherzo from Glazunov’s second Sonata [in E minor, op. 75 (1901)].

Of all Rubinstein’s students it was Josef Hofmann who came closest in his style of playing. There is something of the same magical tone in Sofia Poznanskaya’s case, but in general there is no one who can convey the exact qualities of Rubinstein’s piano playing. So I shall now attempt to do just that, to the best of my ability, by means of a detailed analysis.

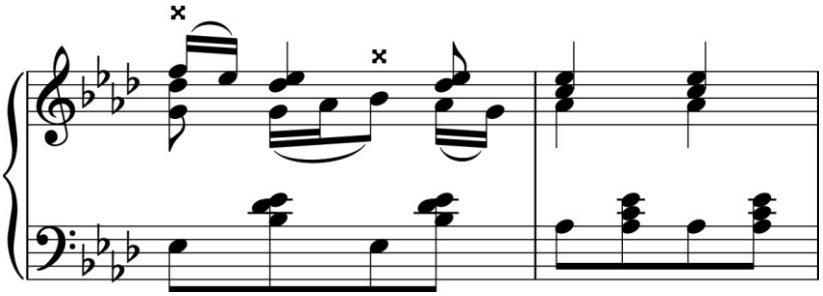
Anton Rubinstein (1828-94).

*Image:* Wikipedia Images

**3**

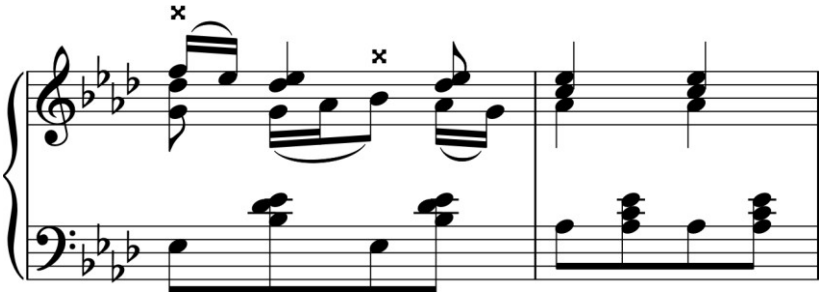
Of all his favourite composers, Rubinstein had a particular love for Schubert. In discussing Schubert's works he would take his students on an interesting and affectionate journey, lovingly dwelling on every detail. He would point out original features in even the simplest of pieces. He had a particular view of the all-too-often played third 'Moment Musical', for example, seeing it as a melancholy dance, and therefore taking it at a slower pace than usual and demanding a gentle, lyrical phrasing, so that the usual jolly and therefore somewhat banal approach to playing the piece disappeared, to be replaced by something far more affectionate each phrase to end expressively, while allowing for a slight ritardando, so that the F in the top part and the B flat in the second part could be emphasized, as in the following example:

**Music ex. 1:**



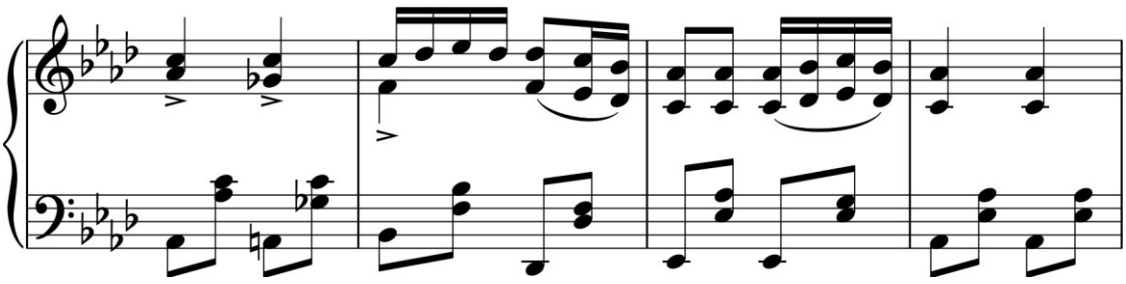
A slight ritardando could also be permitted in the middle of the phrase, so that there would be enough time to gently remove your hand from the upper B flat and freely place it on to the following sixth:

**Music ex. 2:**



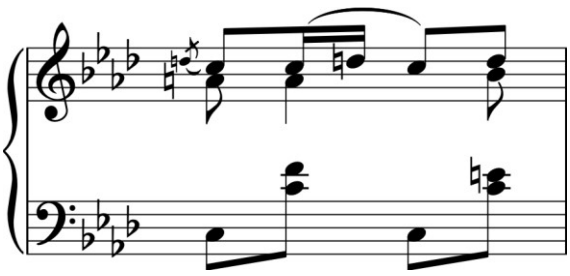
or so as to emphasize the development of the middle part in the first bar and then lead on to the sixths in the second bar, which should be played legato and with particular tenderness in the following bar:

**Music ex. 3:**



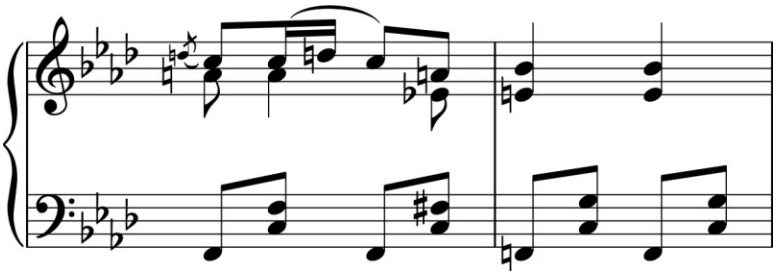
At the end of this section, with the bar being repeated three times, he demanded that the final third be played in a special way, obtained by loosely lifting the hand, despite the *piano,* so that it could slightly accentuate the D natural, indicating a major key:

**Music ex. 4:**



And the same thing further on, so as to emphasize the diminished seventh:

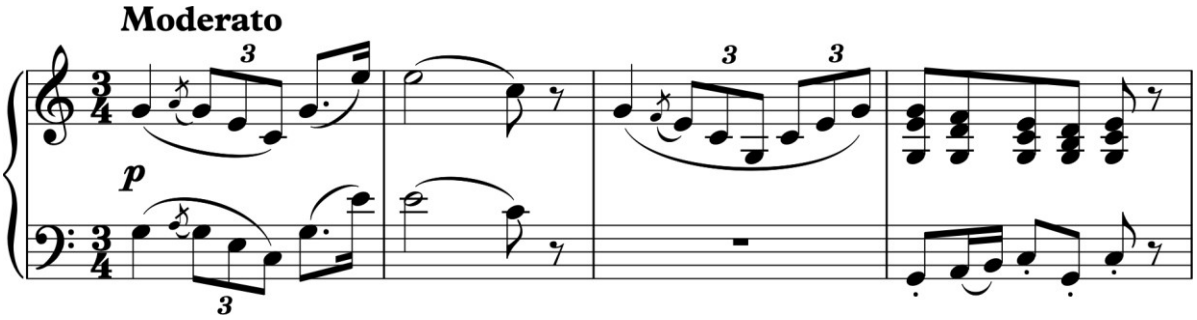
**Music ex. 5:**



The result was a totally new, but absolutely natural, way of playing the piece.

As far as the first 'Moment Musical' was concerned, he said that the first two bars should sound like a horn, and then, further on, like the strings.

**Music ex. 6:**




The second section should be played with the hand raised and a little more forcefully, but then, with the return to the major key, *piano*.

At this point a particular difficulty became evident: after the *forte* section and the bar pause, the repetitive two-note phrases had to be played *piano*, but so that the first note sounded a little stronger and moved smoothly on to the next; this required a general diminuendo using just the pedal, against which the left hand playing the opening horn phrase could be heard. This proved to be extremely difficult, and he had to play the passage several times, with us repeating it after him. In the central, G major, section there were two *pianissimo* moments of interest: one in in the second period with the ground bass, the other in the third period at the return of the G major.

In the main section of the second 'Moment Musical' the difficulty lay in trying to achieve a total legato in every little phrase. The octaves led all too easily to unevenness. He would play this section as if singing it, and we would do our best to imitate him. At the end of this section the final phrase is repeated, firstly in the minor, and then in the major. He would play the upper F sharp *piano*, giving the total illusion that you might have been

listening to a human voice. One other detail: the eight-time repetition of the E flat with a single pedal, with the sound dying away, was typical of his method.

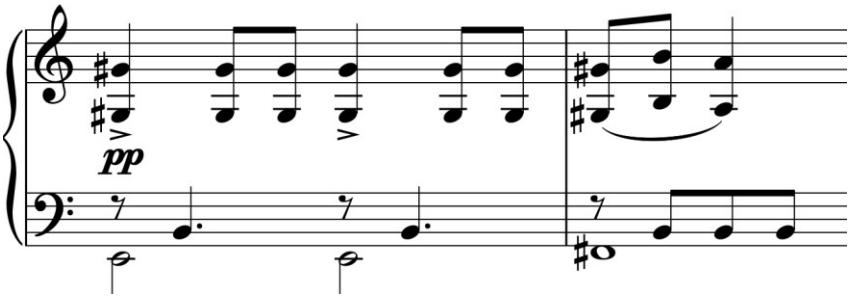
The total opposite of these intimate pieces was Schubert's heroic C major Fantasy ['Der Wanderer', op. 15]. Here he was rather more reticent, but from his facial expression or his body movement we grasped he was inspiring us to play more forcefully

**Music ex. 7:**

and to articulate the piece's rhythm with greater energy.

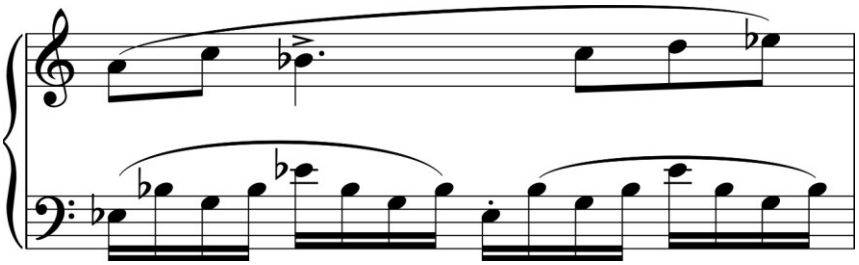
One difficult detail: the phrase in the second theme

**Music ex. 8:**



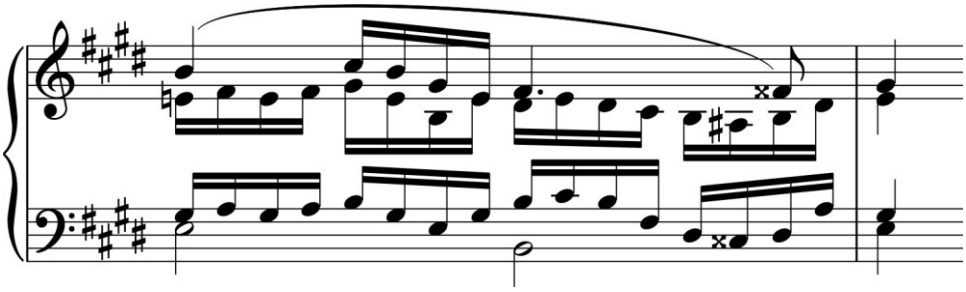

needed to be played extremely legato and gently towards the end, playing the A as if it were the very end of the phrase, rather than as a syncopated note that had to be emphasized, as the phrasing in the following example shows:

**Music ex. 9:**



During the A flat repetition the grace notes on the tenths need to be played cleanly and lightly, and the accompaniment evenly and lucidly. The long diminuendo section going into the second movement caused particular difficulties. Here, the opening chords had to be played darkly, mysteriously, dramatically, and the ends of phrases *piano*. At the transition to E major [b.8 of the *Adagio*] the upper D sharp had to be *piano*, played as expressively as possible, even with a certain rallentando:

**Music ex. 10:**



After the first stormy section during the reprise of the theme there should be more varied colouring each time it reappears: a light singing tone in the major, a melancholy tone in the minor and a restrained excitement in the accompaniment, which must be exceptionally clear and expressive at this point; the second time the major section appeared the sound had to be fuller, stronger, and more passionate; in the minor section, a melancholy singing tone in the left hand and ethereal demisemiquavers in the right. After the second stormy section, the theme should return with quite a different colouring – sounding as if it were like an anguished voice singing from somewhere far away.

In general Rubinstein possessed the astonishing ability to vary the endless repetitions that are characteristic of Schubert. An especially clear example of this is the *Impromptu* [in Ab minor, op. 90, no. 4], one of his favourite pieces. The number of different variations in tone seemed endless: the theme would appear now in its basic, serious, and dramatic form, and now tenderly, mysteriously or as if in a dream. His interpretation of the dramatic upward sweep and consoling close of the central section was astonishing.**[11]**

On account of their length, Schubert's sonatas are hardly ever performed in public, apart perhaps from the graceful third Sonata [in E major, D. 459], but Rubinstein loved the brilliant D major Sonata [D. 850] and above all the B flat [op. posth, D. 960] – gentle and dreamlike, especially in its first two movements. The first theme, warm and heartfelt, is difficult to phrase properly because of the octaves. In the second bar and all similar bars the fourth crotchet should not be emphasized, but should merge seamlessly with the preceding dotted minim, which for these purposes should be particularly melodiously played. This can take time to master. By and large this singing tone characteristic of these (to use Schumann's expression) 'himmlische Länge' sections must continue indefinitely with an even, clear accompaniment. The second movement, *Andante*, also contains much of interest, permitting sometimes a rallentando – this may be a little sentimental, but Schubert's style does not suffer as a result. The long notes of the melody must sing with such resonance that the characteristic rhythm of the accompaniment must not be allowed to overpower it. After the first eight bars there is a short phrase with a build-up of tone; this needs to be played expressively (with a rise on the high note and a fall on the final note). It should express an anguished longing, *Sehnsucht*. In the final, highest, and strongest repeat of the phrase the very last chord should resonate throughout the following bar; then the E major sixth should be *piano*, and, in the next bar, the middle part should be emphasized – leading to an astonishing sound [an effect of wonderment, astonishment]. As well as the purely aesthetic enjoyment arising from the study of Schubert it also had for us an educative significance: as a great songwriter, his pieces for piano also have a songlike quality. It was through the simple, wonderful pages of Schubert's piano works that we were able to able to understand Rubinstein's intentions and objectives. He inspired us to play Schubert with a feeling of love, which was in turn to teach us the importance of expressive phrasing, together with the search for beauty and variation of sound. Furthermore, Schubert's powerful, profoundly dramatic sensibility was to prepare us for the more serious sonatas of Beethoven, and his dreamlike lyricism for the works of Schumann and Chopin. Schubert marked the first step in our musical development. Having assimilated him we could move on to more challenging tasks.

**4**

Rubinstein paid particular attention to the correct way of conveying the style of each composer. With his mighty genius, Beethoven was closest to his heart, and for that reason his understanding of that composer was uniquely profound, and the demands he made on performing him especially high.

One of Rubinstein's main demands applied to rhythm. With regard to Schubert, changes in rhythm and pace were freely permitted. Beethoven, on the other hand, demanded a strictly controlled rhythm, since it was precisely this that exemplified his power and style. It should be noted that Rubinstein used the word 'rhythm',

both in the sense of the need to maintain consistency of tempo, as well as the need to play the rhythmical figures with absolute precision – the first depended on the second, for if you failed to play the rhythmic figures with sufficient precision then the tempo would become inconsistent. In both cases, therefore, he would call out 'No rhythm!'. Tempo changes in Beethoven's works were permitted only in those cases where they had been indicated by the composer himself – Beethoven was always very precise in indicating his intentions with regard to the dynamic marking of a particular phrase and tempo. That was why Rubinstein always demanded that all the dynamic markings in the printed score be strictly observed.

I would now like to say a few words which I hope young musicians will find of some use: the correct choice of tempo in a piece is one of the hardest things to get right – and here the principle contained in the Greek teaching on rhythm might help to substantiate this. With the Greeks, the fundamental unit of rhythm was not taken to be the longest note, as with us, but the very shortest, consisting, when singing, of a single syllable. The Greek word for this is *mora*.**[12]** In order to find a piece's correct tempo you need to look for its *mora*. For that, you need to place some text or other under the melody and the shortest note corresponding to a syllable will be the *mora*. This note must be played precisely and emphasized in a meaningful way, not just at the speed of a mere virtuoso passage. The *mora* in the first movement of Beethoven's first Piano Sonata, for example, is clearly a quaver, in the second movement a semiquaver, in the third a quaver again, and in the fourth a crotchet.

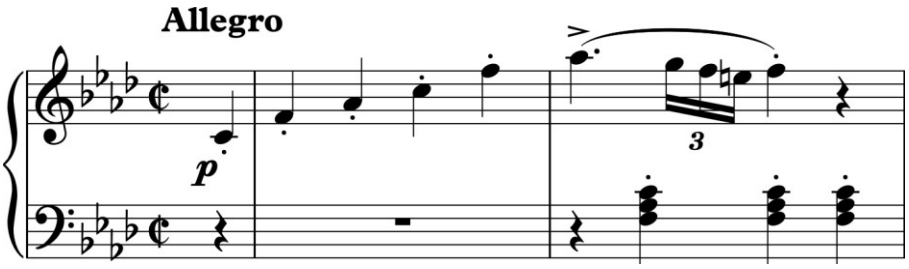
If Rubinstein's characteristic sound has been lost, then his attitude towards tempo even more so. Nowadays, you can no longer hear such consistency of tempo or such a lively sense of pulse in performance. With Rubinstein's guidance still fresh in his mind, Hofmann came close to achieving this in the first few years after Rubinstein's death, but his tempi have become more capricious and unstable over time, and his talent is now inclined more to Chopin than to Beethoven. Now, whenever he performs Beethoven, you can constantly hear him wilfully deviating from the tempo; this is due either to lack of energy, or uncertainty arising from anxiety.

When performing, Rubinstein identified himself with the composer and with the piece he was playing. He was not interested in the impression he was making on the audience as a virtuoso, and so there was such emotional purity and total involvement in the music he was performing. This was a quality that will never be repeated: the more time goes on, the more anxious performers become, because they are unable to behave towards the public with such magnificent disdain, concerned as they are with the impression they are making and unable to sense a similar strength within themselves. As a result, with even the most brilliant virtuoso performers, you can observe the following phenomenon: at the appearance of a new theme, in a sonata for example, they can start playing too forcefully, first slowing down the tempo, then speeding it up again, as if to say: 'Look at me, look how fast I can play it!'. In such cases Rubinstein always used to say: 'Man merkt die Absicht and wird verstimmt' ('People become aware of the change and get confused').

In his strict observance of tempo and rhythm his main aim was the creation of the piece's overall mood. Tempo is one of the most important factors for conveying the mood of the piece. The other is expressive phrasing. In this, to achieve the effect he desired, Rubinstein was unsparing in the demands he made on himself.

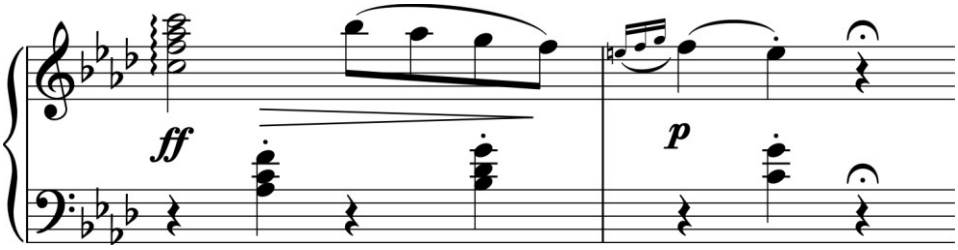
In Beethoven's first Sonata, op. 2, no. 1 the first phrase needed to be played *piano,* but at the same time emphasizing the top A flat, and then the triplet in diminuendo, neither drawing it out, nor cutting it off too soon:

**Music ex. 11:**




The following rising phrases should be treated in the same way, but each time more strongly; then, after the *forte* sixth chord, play the end of the phrase *piano*, but maintaining the tempo:

**Music ex. 12:**



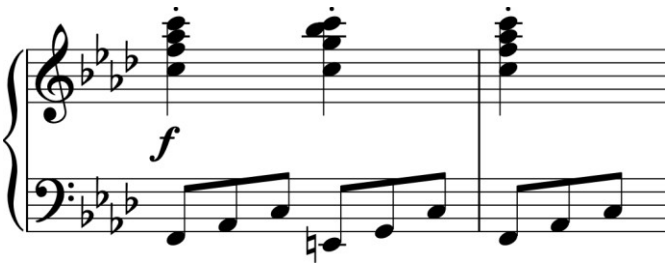

This might seem easy and uncomplicated, but even with such simple things it was difficult to fully please him. It needed a lot of effort on our part. No single note should leap out or shout out, yet neither should it become smudged in any way – one note should flow seamlessly on to the next. Having been brought up on Bach (we had to play some Bach at every lesson), we found this all very familiar and understandable. But even here we couldn't always manage to please him. Now he would reproach us for not playing it sufficiently expressively, now he would shout: 'Le trop c'est l'ennemie du bien!' ('Excess is the enemy of the good!', i.e. the enemy of quality).

During the transition to the second theme (the linking section) the chords needed to be played in a singing tone, and the triplets precisely; then, in the three repetitions of the following phrase you had to play a gradually insistent crescendo. In the second theme it was difficult to master the sforzandos: they had to be sufficiently expressive, but at the same time stay within the bounds of beauty – otherwise he would shout: 'You sound like some street cleaner, clattering away like that!'

A little further on there is an extended crescendo and, in the concluding passage, sforzandos again, reflecting the piece's dramatic character. In the development section he looked for a large build-up during the syncopated section, then, at the pedal point, the precision of the three trills. Here he demanded these should be genuine trills, and not just turns. I noticed the particular way he would often play his trills: he would take the first two notes slightly ahead of time, meaning the separate notes didn't become blurred and the whole trill kept in tempo. Although he never said that was what he was doing, I always began myself trying to follow his example, but never quite succeeding in doing it correctly. This showed that he allowed us on occasion some independence. I can remember an analogous situation with Bach. On one occasion he said that you should play Bach without a pedal. With my small hands this made no sense at all, but I didn't dare disobey him openly. So I decided to play with a 'secret pedal', that is the whole time, but imperceptibly. Throughout the three years I was his student I never once heard him say anything about my pedal-playing in Bach, even though he was undoubtedly aware of my crafty scheme.

Let me return now to Beethoven's first sonata. If the first movement's dramatic character is typical of Beethoven, then the second movement shows the influence of Haydn and Mozart. Rubinstein was therefore above all concerned to emphasize the music's beauty and elegance – the rounded phrases and evenness of rhythm in the difficult sections during the repeat of the first theme with variations. In the third movement the main problem lay in overcoming particular technical challenges: the trills, the difficult section with the sixth chords – it all had to be crystal clear and transparent. In the dramatic, stormy finale he would once again become inspired, working through the fantastic Beethoven contrasts in the beginning section with his students and, in the conclusion of the development, at the transition into the reprise, the switch from the long diminuendo to *fortissimo*. Here, too, you had to take care the beauty was sustained and not allow the diminuendo to be accompanied by the slightest rallentando. The *forte* chords had to be played from above, in order to give them 'added weight'. This he called 'correct posture'.

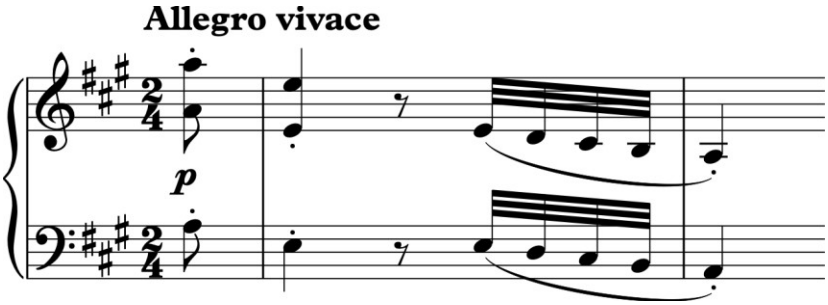
**Music ex. 13:**




This was especially important at the very end, where the off-beat accent caused us no end of trouble.

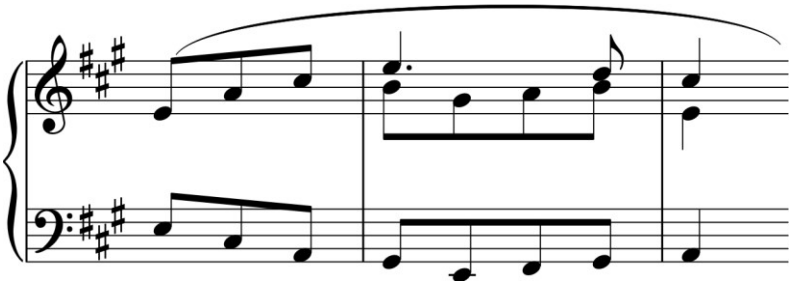
In the gracious and brilliant first movement of [Beethoven's] second Sonata [in A, op. 2, no. 2], the opening theme was played lightly and ethereally, the descending demisemiquavers clearly articulated.

**Music ex. 14:**



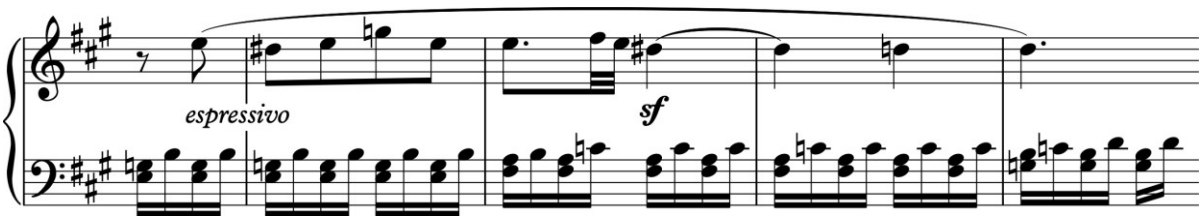

Further on, expressive in both the upper and lower part:

**Music ex. 15:**



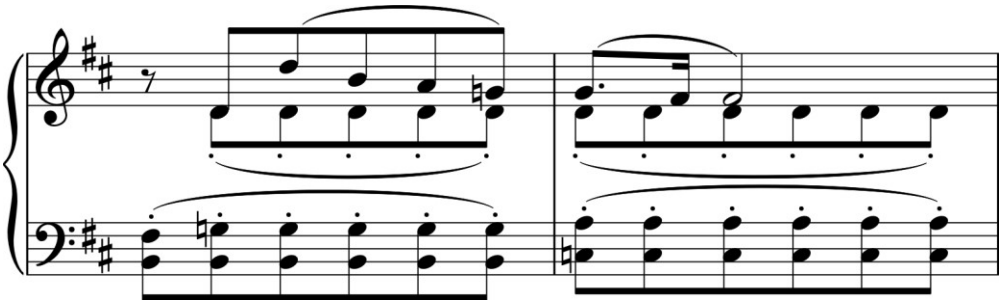
The second theme, in the minor, had to be sung and again accentuated, but always 'remaining beautiful' arising from the generally melodic character of the theme:

**Music ex. 16:**



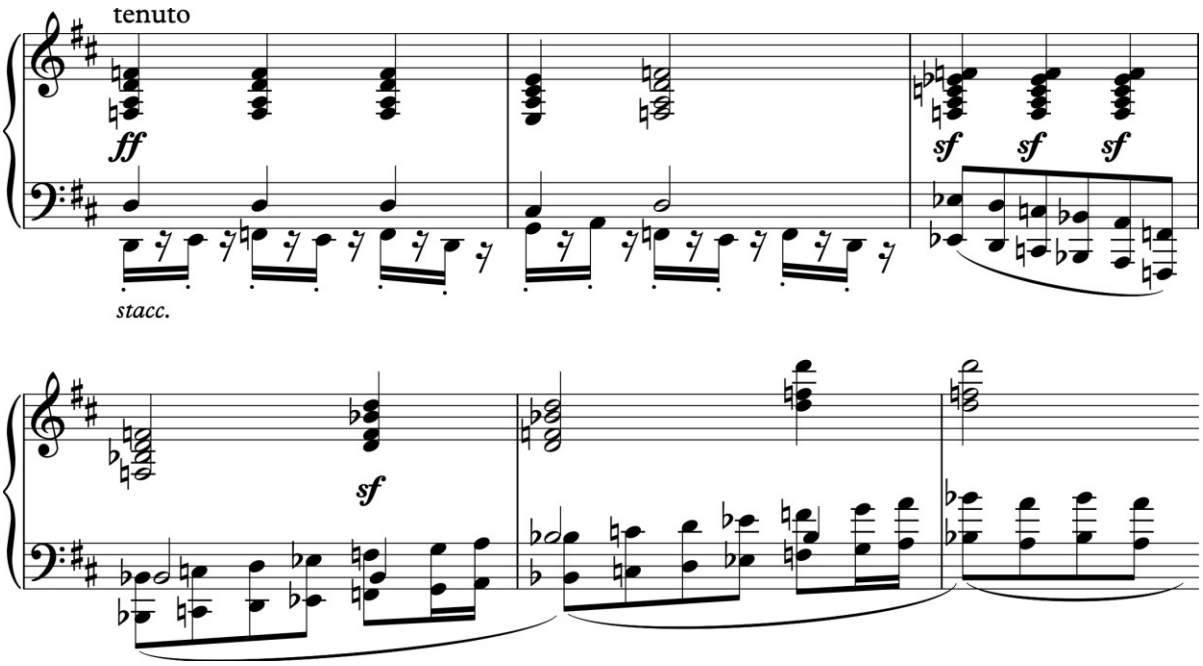

In the concluding theme the bass note of the pedal point should resonate and remain *piano* whilst retaining a singing tone in the upper part. The development strong and brilliant. Difficult section with the trill imitations, which had to be clear, transparent, and rhythmical. The reprise as graceful and as expressive as the exposition. In this second movement [*Largo appassionato*] the question of sonority [timbre] first appears, since the first material suggests an orchestra – the [strings] with the double basses pizzicato. Small crescendo to the B and a gentle concluding phrase. As much heartfelt feeling and warmth as possible in the G major section:

**Music ex. 17:**



At the repeat of the opening theme, mighty chords in the minor and strong bass notes moving upwards in octaves:

**Music ex. 18:**



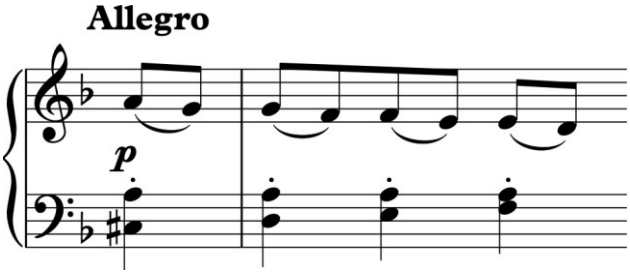

As far as the brilliant scherzo and graceful final movement are concerned it is necessary to talk more about the technical details and questions of phrasing. While working on the gentle, graceful phrases of the final movement, Rubinstein would exclaim: ‘Show your piano how much you love it! Caress it!’.

In the opening movement of the next, uplifting, Sonata op. 2, no. 3 he would insist on strong, muscular *forte* chords, while in the second movement he would magically demonstrate his ability to use soft hands in the *piano* sections. His students would experience a sense of real bliss as they played such phrases, modelling their playing after him, legato, emulating the way he shaped his hands. He used the same technique, shaping and moving his hands freely about in just such a supple way, in the finale of the Sonata op. 53, with an extraordinarily graceful result, not without a quite unexpected touch of humour.

Anton Rubinstein’s main task in his lessons was to show us all these points himself sitting at his piano. He used to repeat each phrase many times, continuing until the student had totally grasped the point he was making. He would speak in monosyllables, sometimes using irony, not always very pleasantly from his students’ point of view. While working on one of the most difficult sonatas, op. 90, for example, he said to his students: ‘You need to play it simply, but not like an absolute duffer, but that’s what you’re doing.’

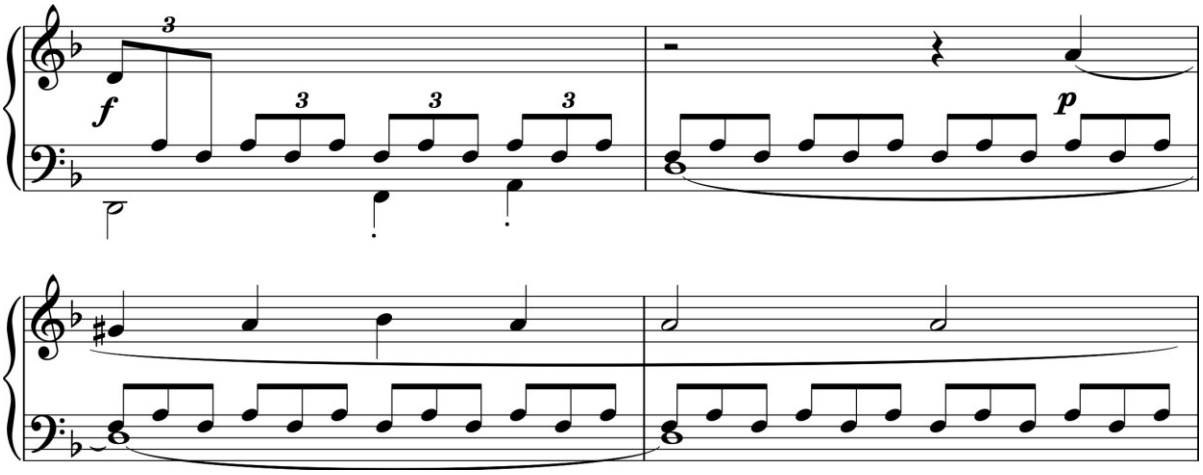
He used to demonstrate how to play the Sonata op. 31, no. 2 in an astonishing way: after the first few introductory bars many thought you had to play the *allegro* quickly and with a kind of ethereal lightness, but he would immediately stop his students and order them to play it not so quickly so as to allow the linked two-note phrases to be given dramatic expression, accentuating the first note of each pairing:

**Music ex. 19:**




This meant that you could indeed really hear the note of suffering and dramatic quality he was talking about, and this dramatic quality grew and grew, increasing to *forte* in the left hand, broken by the reversed hand playing the plaintive *piano*:

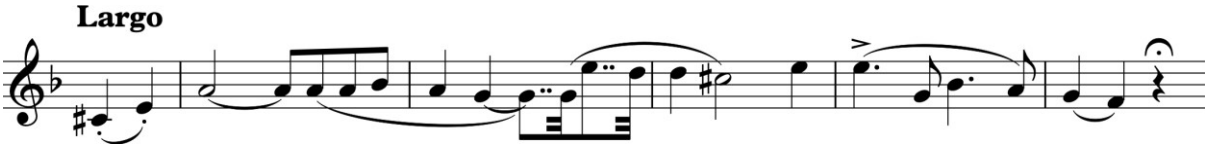
**Music ex. 20:**




But he was able to demonstrate the moment after the *forte* in the reversed left hand and the sudden switch to the *piano* so well! At this point, he demanded it be played with an expression of profound suffering. He would repeat this little passage dozens of times until his students had mastered it. In the reprise he would play this episode *forte*, with exactly the same intensity of suffering. But it was the recitative that we found especially difficult. The A in the second bar had to be highlighted, but not so as to interrupt the overall lyrical nature of the bar. The crescendo up to the E had to be played equally carefully, keeping a sense of proportion – as did the accent of the D in the following bar, without, however, shortening it too much or, indeed, lengthening the

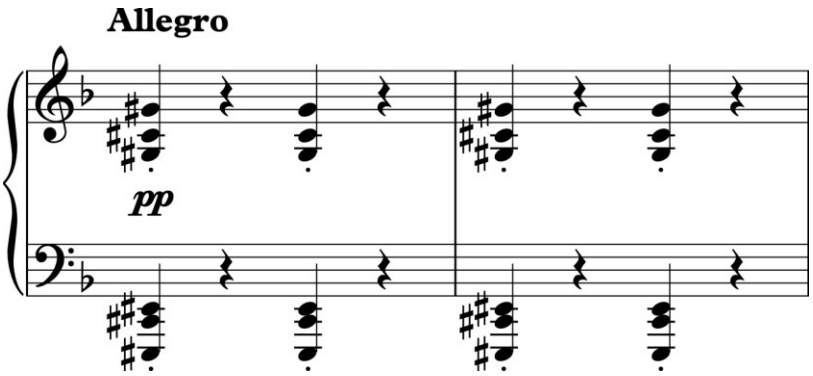
demisemiquavers. Rubinstein also drew our attention to the following details: he demanded that the B flat in the next bar be played with sufficient expression, and the F at the end of phrase *piano*:

**Music ex. 21:**




The 'suffering' in the quavers should be legato, and the second recitative more exalted in tone. Once again the difficulty lies at the conclusion to the D to B flat phrase, with a diminuendo by the end, and an expressive (but not overly so) D flat, and at the end the demand that all notes should sing, without especially accentuating either the C or the G. Then the mysterious *pianissimo* chords:

**Music ex. 22:**

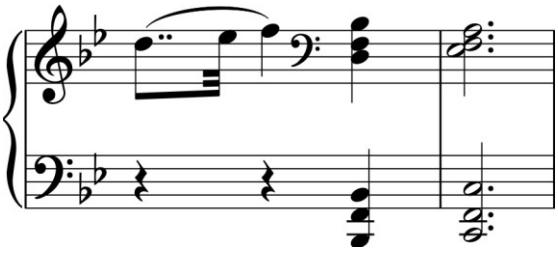



And then, further on, the tragic *forte* quavers, and at the end the *pianissimo* passages, while two bars (perhaps even earlier) before the semibreves the need to remove your foot from the pedal.

We were to hear Anton Grigorevich give a concert performance of this Sonata on a number of occasions, and we were always particularly struck by the second movement. From start to finish, he played this movement to make it sound essentially like a song. We often asked ourselves why it was so incredibly difficult to imitate the wonderful songlike nature of this movement. And we realized that one of the reasons for this was that Anton

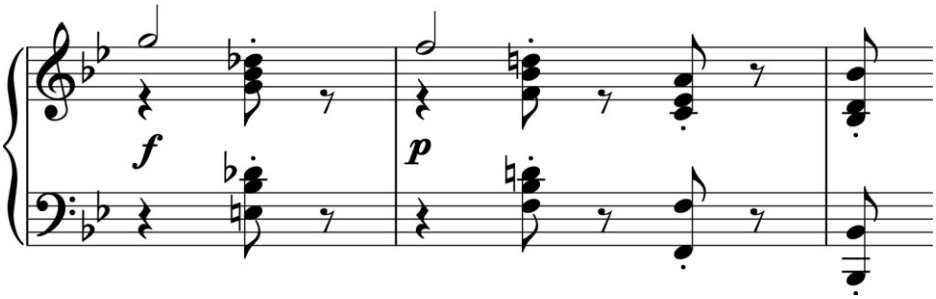
Grigorevich had such a profound love for the music that he never allowed himself to ignore the slightest detail. Above all, his tempo throughout this movement was impeccable. Anyone who has seriously and lovingly studied this music knows how difficult this is. In Beethoven's own markings there isn't the slightest equivocation in the tempo, and Anton Grigorevich demanded that all the particular dynamic markings in the original score be observed. The single exception was that he played *forte* rather than *piano* at the reprise in this Sonata's first movement. So then: above all you had to learn to play the second movement in strict tempo. And then: the difficulties in the phrasing begin as early as the second bar, with the D as the first note, and then the F at the top of the phrase:

**Music ex. 23:**



Clearly the D and not the F must be the most songlike, otherwise the whole bar will suffer as a result. With a slow tempo it is extremely difficult to do this correctly. The D, the main note, as the first crotchet, but the F, as the top note must continue to sing its whole length, while in a diminuendo. After the chords, this phrase is repeated and then the scale that was played so inimitably by Anton Grigorevich. At the end of the phrase the trill, played calmly and *cantabile* but never hastily; also the second phrase with the turns. It is very difficult to play all the trills, turns and accents calmly and in a songlike way. Especially the accent on the third crotchet at the end of the phrase and then the *piano* on the first beat, while at the same time the F should be played in such a songlike way that it should continue to resonate right up until the change of pedal at the third crotchet.

**Music ex. 24:**



This was all difficult enough for us, but the greatest difficulties still lay ahead: to make the chords sing in such a way that the triplets acted as an accompaniment, without drowning the singing tone. At the return of the theme and variations, the difficulty lay in playing the demisemiquavers sufficiently smoothly – so that they sounded just 'like a ribbon', as Anton Grigorevich put it. In the concluding part we simply had to emulate the astonishingly even and gentle way Anton Grigorevich played the scale. Even more difficult the piece's conclusion, using the pedal on every crotchet, but so that the third crotchet was played gently.

Anton Grigorevich never allowed himself to play the *Allegretto* quickly, as is the usual way, and demanded that each of the repeating phrases be played expressively, while maintaining their own dramatic quality, reflected in their agitated and melancholic nature.

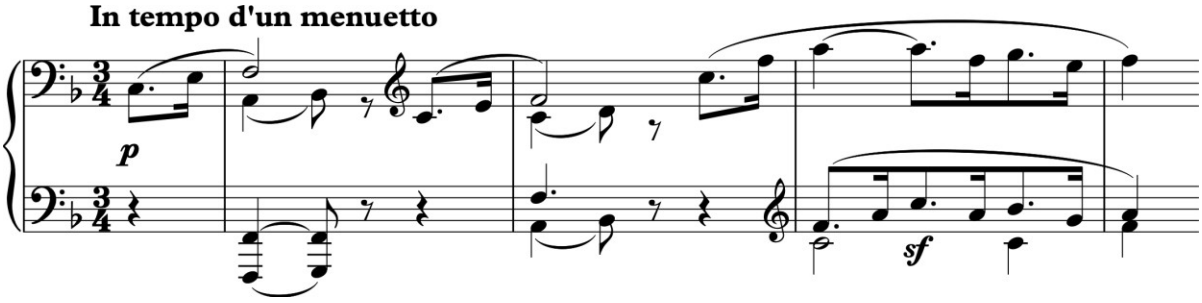
The Sonata op. 31, no. 3 [in Eb, 'The Hunt'] was remarkable for the fact that, from the very first chord, Rubinstein demanded especially expressive playing, as if making just a gentle request: the opening chord had to sing, and the final note of the phase played softly; and the chord should be played *piano*, while making an especially beautiful sound – something which Anton Grigorevich demonstrated at the piano and which is difficult to express in words, just as it is difficult to convey what he wanted when performing the Sonata's scherzo: the staccato, which Anton Grigorevich achieved with a free hand movement, sounded mysterious at the same time. In the *pianissimo* section he reproduced the sound of woodwind instruments, attaining the required resonance.

In general he often spoke about technique, especially insisting on playing with a loose hand, something he himself did inimitably. In Weber's *Momento Capriccioso* [op.12], for example, he seemed to be juggling with balls, with a specially resonant and light touch.

Rubinstein's interpretation is clearly evident in Hofmann's performance of the scherzo in Beethoven's Sonata op. 31, no 3. Hofmann played it simply, as a brilliant virtuoso piece and at a very fast tempo.

In the first movement of the op. 54 Sonata the phrasing caused particular difficulties. It was very difficult to convey the gracefulness, or as Anton Grigorevich used to say, the 'tenderness' of the opening phrases which demanded a songlike quality and the quietness of the concluding phrases, as he wanted:

**Music ex. 25:**




In the third bar and its repeats the accent on the C in the left hand threatened to drown the singing quality of the A in the right hand, and in the semiquaver section it was in general difficult to maintain a singing tone, in order to avoid something that Anton Grigorevich detested: notes leaping into prominence during a weak tempo. In any event, he demanded a genuine songlike quality with well-rounded phrases.

When the students played the *Appassionata* Sonata [in F minor, op. 57] Rubinstein's spirit was barely evident. If the piece were not played at a strict tempo its dramatic nature would be lost.

In the first movement performers are particularly inclined to let the tension in the tempo slip, thereby weakening the music's impact. When performing the second movement Anton Grigorevich used to demonstrate a particular magical ability of his: in the second variation he highlighted the theme by playing it in an especially wonderful song-like way, enhancing the music's expressive quality in the second and fourth bars of the second half, while maintaining a strict tempo. The third variation used to come across wonderfully well (something he often showed when playing Beethoven): as some kind of heavenly conversation, a heavenly caress. In the third movement there was nothing easier than maintaining the tension in the tempo that was characteristic of the whole sonata, but the difficulty lay in ensuring that this movement never turned into mere virtuosity. The seemingly unending, mysteriously ominous and stormy nature of the music at the beginning of the second part of the final section, the howling of the syncopations when they are introduced (particularly appalling when they're played staccato), then the terrible, mysterious pauses and the arpeggio of the diminished seventh chord with the *pianissimo* quavers and, finally, those minims, and the terrifying climax, in which the majority of pianists lapsed into ordinary virtuosity. But what a tempest emerged when Anton Grigorevich was playing! Nobody else could have expressed the raging violence of this music in the way he did. 'What a God of music!', his awestruck public would exclaim, bowing their knees [as it were] before an artist who epitomized the incomparably great Beethoven.

Anton Grigorevich performed all the Beethoven sonatas brilliantly, but there was one that was especially close to his heart: the 'Farewell' sonata, 'Les Adieux' [op. 81a]. [Kashperova performed this as her encore at her Moscow debut in 1920, surely in respectful remembrance of Rubinstein. See *Biography*.]

He took his students through the 'hundreds', the late sonatas [i.e., opp. 101, 106, 109, 110, 111] with especial affection. He [would] entrust Sonata op. 106 [ in Bb, 'Das Hammerklavier', 1818] only to an especially gifted student. [Kashperova opened her Moscow recital with this work.] But everyone studied all the other sonatas in this category, and since he himself played them all, we had an ideal teacher to guide us. Of Sonata op. 109 [in E, 1820] he said that, before performing it, we should work with the metronome. When talking about this sonata, you cannot but refer to the way Rubinstein played the theme and first variation in the third movement. It is difficult to convey all the heartfelt quality he invested in this glorious, songlike music. Just as inspired was his performance of Sonata op. 110, [in Eb, 1821] with the profound grief of the *Adagio* and the radiant joy of the conclusion. But most remarkable of all was the way he played the ending of Sonata op. 111 [in C minor, 1822].

Most important, therefore, was the ability to convey each movement's particular character. The cult of making a particular effect was only allowable in special circumstances – when emulating an orchestral sound or the human voice, for example. The most difficult demand that Anton Grigorevich made of us was to combine the seamless expressiveness of each phrase with the absolute strictness and purity that were inevitably present [when performing] Beethoven. Every single phrase had to have significance. Every single note in a phrase had to be played according to the degree of its importance within the piece's overall mood and atmosphere, without allowing the music to drag or too obviously to parade one's intentions. Any changes in tempo could only be made according to those indications marked by the composer himself; no others would be permitted. Details existed only to serve the whole; to exploit them merely for virtuoso effect was totally impermissible, since it was inartistic.

We, his students, were just ordinary mortals. It was only possible to make such severe demands on ourselves and on the music we were being asked to play because we had the constant attention of an absolutely brilliant teacher. There was not one of us who continued to carry out everything Rubinstein required of us to the letter, not even Josef Hofmann, the most talented among us.[8] It is therefore no wonder that in the case of those pianists who never studied under Rubinstein – and I boldly maintain that there never was and never has been anyone with such an understanding of Beethoven as Rubinstein – they can have their successful moments, but they are disconnected successful moments resulting in the loss of the *whole* Beethoven and, to a greater or lesser extent, shattered into little pieces.

**5**

[8] Josef Hofmann was Rubinstein's only private pupil. He received forty-two weekly lessons in 1892 in Dresden's Hotel d'Europe. Kashperova and the others were clearly aware of Rubinstein's regular 'commute'. Hofmann made his professional debut in Hamburg on 14 March 1894 in Rubinstein's Piano Concerto no. 4 in D minor, op. 70, with the composer conducting.

Rubinstein held his lessons on Wednesdays and Saturdays from 2 until 6, occasionally for longer. He gave us a full hour each. But we could of course stay behind to listen to the others, and that didn't apply only to us but to anyone who wanted to be present, since professors and other music students came to our classes. Anton Grigorievich's little study was filled with the public; in order to accommodate everyone the doors used to be opened, with people standing in the doorway listening. I can remember the first time I was present at one of his classes. Holliday was playing Beethoven's Sonata op. 90 [in E minor, 1814]. Rubinstein's comments, as in everything he said, were imbued with the same simplicity, sincerity, and spontaneity as were his musical performances. From his students he demanded above all simplicity. In life, as in class, he never used many words, but they were always witty and to the point. Sometimes he would say something that would make everyone burst out laughing and the students would crumple up with laughter. As a rule, whenever he was not happy with something he would express himself strongly, along the lines of 'that was absolutely useless', or 'that was appalling, horrible, ghastly, unspeakably bad'. The students would just sit there in silence, not making excuses, or expressing regret. When, on one occasion, one of his female students burst into tears, he told her to stop fretting so much, but with such irony that she never did it again. Everyone was aware of the significance of the occasion: in his great kindness a great musician has agreed to listen to us playing wrong notes and to correct our errors, sacrificing the best hours of his invaluable time for our sake.

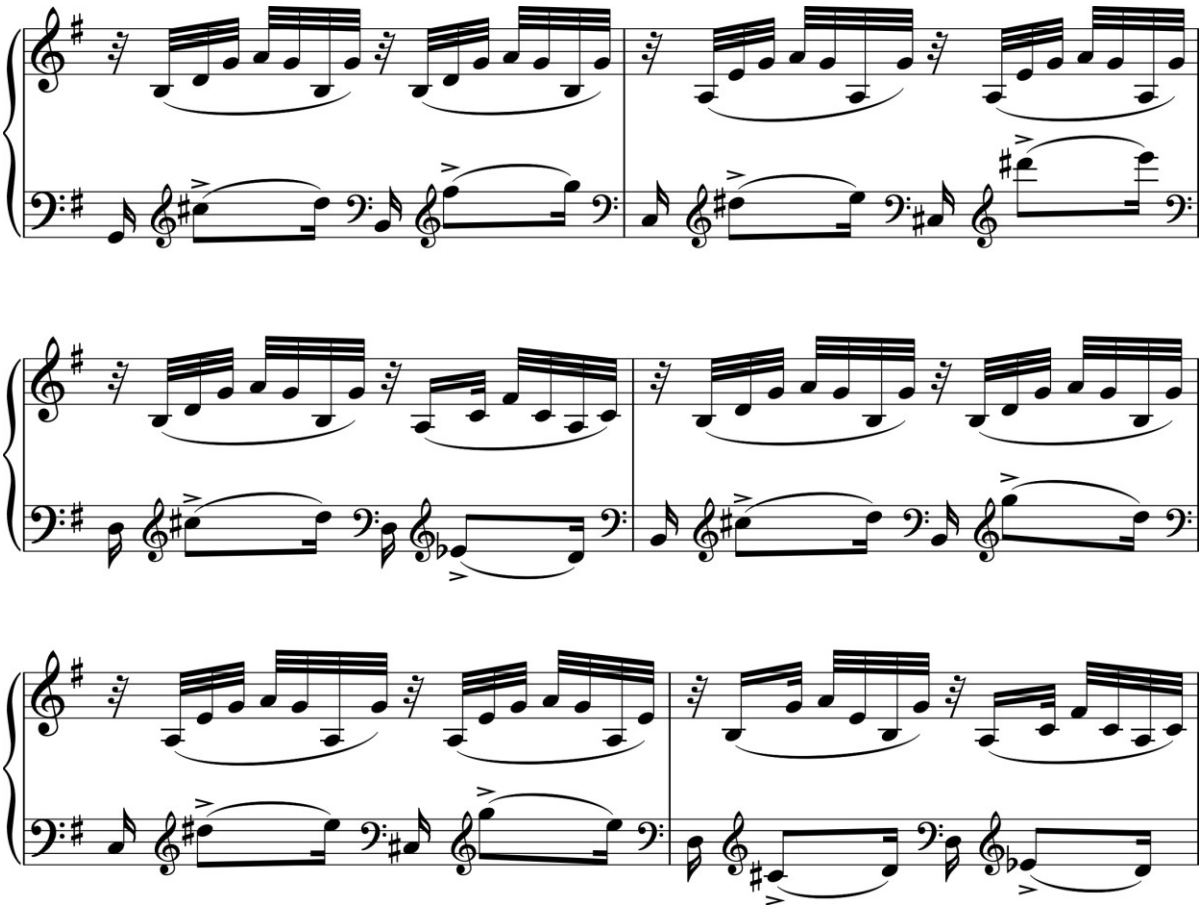
The public would sit there quietly, hidden away. Next to Rubinstein, to his right, stood Sofia Alexandrovna Malozyomova (he himself sat at his own piano, to the left of which was the student sitting at another piano); beside the desk sat a large lady, whose job it was to bring the necessary music from the library and hand it to Rubinstein (he used to play from the score).

Professors N. S. Lavrov [for piano] and Felix Mikhailovich Blumenfeld [1863-1931, professor at the Conservatoire 1885-1918, teacher of Maria Yudina] were almost always present at these lessons. There were many students, both male and female, who were subsequently to become well-known, including, for example, Paul de Conne [1874-1959], Georgiy Narbut, and A. M. Miklashevsky [author of arrangements of music by Samuel Maikapar]. Throughout the three years of my time as a student I only once saw Malozyomova's student Sandra Droucker [1876-1959] in my class [as an observer]; I was later to be astonished that she was the person who had written the little volume [Leipzig, 1904] about Rubinstein as a teacher.**[13]** Incidentally, while on the subject of literary material, a constant presence at our classes was the figure of A. McArthur [Alexander McArthur], the Irish pianist and writer on music, who had come to Russia specially to write Rubinstein's biography – a small, but interesting and sympathetically written book.[9]

[9] Alexander McArthur, *Anton Rubinstein: A Biographical Sketch* (Edinburgh: Adam & Charles Black, 1889).

To return to my very first lesson with Rubinstein. I had brought with me Beethoven's third Sonata. This Sonata's vigorous spirit had always fascinated me, and I played it strongly and animatedly, disregarding the dynamic markings. Generally speaking, at Muromtseva's classes [in Moscow] there was never any talk of the printed dynamic markings, with the teacher herself suggesting her own [i.e., Rubinstein's strict observance of the composer's markings was unusual]. Muromtseva was a talented figure, but she wasn't a classically-trained pianist and never once mentioned the fact that Beethoven had inserted his own dynamic markings. I began *forte*. After the first two bars Rubinstein stopped me: 'Come here!'. I went over to his piano. He pointed at the music. 'What does it say here?'. '*Piano'*. 'Well, play it *piano* then'. I sat down and played it again. 'No, that's still not *piano'*. I played it again. 'No, that's still not sufficiently *piano'*. It was only after I had played it five times that he was satisfied. And that's how it was for every dynamic marking. He liked the way I played strong chords. 'That's good, that's how it should sound!' In the *Adagio* he began talking about expression. In the short phrases of the minor section, with the hands reversed, he demanded particularly tender playing, with the first note sounding songlike, and the second to be played gently, *piano*:

**Music ex. 26:**



This was astonishingly beautiful, sounding like a sigh or a complaint. He always played individual phrases himself and then made us repeat what he had just played dozens of times until we got it right. We spent a whole hour on these two movements.

It was never possible to get any advice from Anton Grigorevich, about how one should study a piece or develop one's technique. He would only mention how to play exercises or how best to devise them from the pieces you are playing in passing. He never said anything about the playing of scales. Once, when trying to get him to tell me how best to study a particular piece, I said: 'Anton Grigorevich, I can't seem to get it right!'. He replied: 'It's entirely up to you'. I took this literally and began working through the night. It was more difficult for me than for any other student. When I started studying under him I had no idea about many of the pieces; he, for his part, told me to start playing the piece immediately in tempo, while conveying its character. If, for example, I arrived at his class bringing with me only one movement of a sonata, he was displeased: 'Why so little?'. As such a demanding person, he was never indulgent of our mistakes. To miss a class or to say 'I didn't have time to prepare for this' was out of the question. He never acknowledged even the possibility of illness. Once I had to miss a class because I was ill. Later someone told me what he had said: 'Kashperova's not here; she must be suffering from some Chopin fantasy'; and when we next met, he would ask 'Well, how's your Chopin sickness coming along?'. And all protestations on my part fell on stony ground. Similarly, he never took into account the size of one's hands. On one occasion, for example, when playing Beethoven's Sonata op. 90, I couldn't manage the [semiquaver] tenths [in the left hand], but he was unable to believe that such miserably-sized hands could exist.

Having said that Rubinstein avoided talking about how to play scales, I can remember one instance which took place, not in a regular class, but during my entrance examination into the Conservatoire.

Rubinstein made me take one particular note, and then play, from the top down, all the scales and arpeggios in which that note appeared. The difficulty for me lay precisely in that downward movement. This small instance showed that Rubinstein not only allowed the playing of scales, but that he was concerned to introduce a different approach to playing them.

In Muromtseva's opinion, Nikolai Rubinstein used to give his students scales and arpeggios, the fingering of which enabled the development of a strict technique, in contradistinction to his brother, who never liked talking about such matters. Both [Anton and Nikolai] raised slow, strong playing into a cult: the fingers had to play with a strong downward pressure, and the quality of the note being played had to be deep and resonant. Once I asked Anton Grigorevich why you needed to study a piece so slowly and with such strong hands. From his reply, I understood that the technical preparation for such strong playing must become an acquired skill, something that should never be talked about; discussion should only concern the music's character. It was

probably this forceful downward movement of the hand, practised by Nikolai Rubinstein's students, that influenced Alexander Siloti's method of playing: after all, Siloti was also one of Nikolai Rubinstein's students.

Incidentally, while on the subject of Siloti: he was adamantly opposed to scales, never playing them himself and never recommending that his students play them.**[14]** In this respect he was at odds with his second teacher, Franz Liszt, who devoted such a large part of his 'Technical Exercises' to the playing of scales. Personally, I consider scales are not only necessary for the development of an impeccable technique in orde14r to cope with the difficult passages you often come across, but also of one's technique in general. I have been told that, a day or two before a concert, Thalberg [Sigismond Thalberg, 1812-71] played only scales. After all, the point of acquiring a good technique is not simply to be able to blithely cope with difficult passages – it's something which has to come from the brain, ears, and heart in the tips of your fingers. Anyone who has performed at a public concert will know how difficult it is, how often it can go wrong, and how much can depend on chance – if, for example, the room is cold, or you feel under the weather. Sometimes it can simply be the atmosphere in the room: an insufficiently responsive audience, for example. You need therefore to work very hard on the suppleness and sensitivity of your fingers, to prevent any chance circumstances affecting the current emanating from your emotions and your willpower and passing on down into your fingers. Any weakening of this current can manifest itself while performing in two ways: either the sound you are making loses its resonance and becomes dry and rather listless, unresponsive to the performer's artistic intentions, or the rhythm in the dynamic and dramatic passages becomes blurred and lacking in energy; your fingers start moving of their own accord and playing at a faster tempo against your will; one's playing becomes much less expressive, and the piece's character loses its shape. Siloti was to have this agonizing experience many times while performing publicly. For all his considerable technical ability he is very liable to become nervous, and his anxiety manifests itself, not with regard to the sound he is of making – this retains its songlike resonance whatever the circumstances – but the rhythm. Once when applying Siloti's method playing Schlözer's study I too experienced how the rhythm can run away with itself. But how much I was to be helped later by practising scales, playing them as *piano* and as legato as possible!

In St Petersburg I heard from the violinist Ioannes Romanovich Nalbandyan that, just before her concerts, Yefimova used to play through the pieces she was to perform only in a slow tempo. I too tried this method and became convinced of its usefulness.

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**Notes by F. S. Fesenkova 'with the assistance of J. I. Milstein' (Moscow, 1968):**

[For Notes 1-6 see Kashperova's *Memoirs*]

7. Leokadiya Aleksandrovna Kashperova wrote 'My Memories of Anton Grigorevich Rubinstein' in 1929.
8. The various St Petersburg newspaper accounts of Anton Rubinstein's funeral mention Vasily Safonov's [pianist, 1852-1918] graveside speech, in which he indeed referred to Rubinstein's 'greatness'. Leokadiya Kashperova, who wrote her memories many years after the funeral, must evidently have become confused and therefore wrongly ascribed this remark to her teacher Nikolai Solovyov; there is in fact no record of what [Safonov] may or may not have said at this event. In his poem 'To Rubinstein' the poet Nikolai Minsky refers to 'the epitome of greatness' (N.M. Minsky, *The Complete Poems*, vol. 1, *White Nights*, 4th edition, St Petersburg, pp. 190-91).
9. In the years 1883-84 and 1887-92 Leopold Auer was the chief conductor of a number of St Petersburg orchestras, including the Conservatoire, and in the years 1887-1905 the leader of the string quartet of the Russian Musical Society. The quartet's cellist during this same period was Aleksandr Verzhbilovich [dedicatee, and duo partner with Kashperova, of the two Cello Sonatas, op.1 (1895-6)].
10. The last paragraph talks about Breithaupt's book[s] on musical theory. [*Die natürliche Klaviertechnik*, vols. 1 & 2, Leipzig, 1905-12; *Natural Piano-Technic*, vol.2, Forgotten Books, 2019] Although making a number of interesting comments on the essential features of piano playing, Breithaupt commits a serious error, when he subjects the question of the nature of sound to an analysis of the various means and forms of movement in a musical piece. His concept of sound in piano playing is divorced from the ideas relating to musical style and character; it is devoid of any link with concrete musical tasks and challenges. The same applies to the term 'arm weight technique', as discussed by Kashperova in her memories of Rubinstein; Breithaupt's understanding of this term is clearly flawed, as his theory contains a number of serious errors, in particular his rejection of the part played by fingers in piano playing.
11. The reference is evidently to Schubert's *Impromptu* in A flat minor.
12. *Mora* is a fraction, a part of the whole, a basic element of metrical rhythm, expressed either by a short syllable or by a minimal pause (equal to the length of a short syllable). In antiquity this fraction of the whole was called *mora*, or *chronos protos*.
13. See *Erinnerungen an Anton Rubinstein. Bemerkungen, Andeutungen and Besprechungen in seinen Klassen in St-Petersburger Konservatorium*, Leipzig, 1904.
14. Leokadiya Kashperova's assertion that Aleksandr Siloti had a negative attitude towards scales as one of the important features of piano study does not fully correspond to the real state of affairs. At one time Siloti may have adopted a sceptical attitude towards scales, focusing his students' attention mainly on other aspects of teaching (studies, virtuoso pieces etc.) But it is hardly likely that he could have been opposed to scales *in principle*. Firstly, such an attitude goes against Liszt's basic principles relating to technique; as is well known, Liszt placed considerable weight on the importance of scales when teaching his students (and Siloti remained a faithful disciple of Liszt for his whole life); and, secondly, you will not find such a view confirmed in any other analysis of Siloti's musical views (in particular, the works of Konstantin Igumnov and Aleksandr Goldenweiser, both of whom studied under Siloti for many years at the Moscow Conservatoire).