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Aleksiej Stanczinski [Aleksey Stanchinsky] (1888–1914): the Forgotten Composer of the Russian Silver Age. A Contribution to Further Research

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to introduce the reader to the figure of Aleksey Stanchinsky and to briefly characterize his work created during the decline of tsarist Russia. The text is divided into three parts. The first one provides a picture of the cultural context in which this artist worked. It is an outline of the leading artistic tendencies and trends in Russia, including the artistic milieu at the turn of the 20th century. The second part contains a biographical sketch of the composer, whose illness, unhappy life and, as a consequence, his premature death had a fundamental impact on his legacy. The third part constitutes an attempt to classify and characterize Stanchinsky's work based on available materials and own research.

Keywords: piano, piano music, compositional techniques, Aleksey Stanchinsky, Russia, Russian Silver Age.

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Preliminary Considerations

The Polish scientific literature concerning the composer discussed in this article is limited to a single entry in the biographical section of the PWM Encyclopaedia of Music¹, where the spelling of the composer's name appears in the Polish version: Aleksiej Stanczinski. As this article is created in the Polish academic environment, but is addressed not only to a Polish audience, it was decided to use both the Polish version of the spelling of the composer's name, as well as its more widely accepted English version, Aleksey Stanchinsky, transliterated in square brackets. However, for the reader wishing to further explore the artist and his work, it is recommended to consider all versions of the spelling of the composer's name: the original Cyrillic version, Алексей Владимирович Станчинский [Aleksey Vladimirovich Stanchinsky], the English, Polish versions, and the version closer to the original Russian pronunciation – Aleksei Stanchinski.

1. Outline of Russian Culture at the Turn of the 20th Century²

As early as the reign of Tsar Peter the Great, two leading cultural currents and worldviews began to form in the Russian Empire and dominated the social discourse in the 19th century. The Occidentalists were fascinated by everything that was Western, European, and rejected the archaic Slavism. This worldview, which was particularly prevalent among the nobility, encouraged the learning of French, the lingua franca of the day, sending children to military academies, and travelling abroad, naturally to the West, in order to better absorb European traditions and customs. The sanctuary of the pro-Western thought was St Petersburg, built entirely by Peter the Great on land torn up by the sea, to be the capital of a modern state modelled on the metropolises of Europe. The Russian Occidentalists emulated Western societies by gravitating towards social and economic liberalism. They also sought to model themselves artistically on Western achievements. In music, this was perhaps most fully reflected in the works of the pianist Anton Rubinstein or Pyotr Tchaikovsky, whose oeuvre, while obviously not devoid of typically Russian elements such as traditional Russian dances or national historical themes, became one of the most important Russian contributions to world musical culture. At the opposite end of the spectrum were

¹ See U. Mieszkielto, *Stanczinski Aleksiej*, [in:] *Encyklopedia PWM. Część biograficzna*, vol. S–Ś, ed. E. Dziębowska, Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne SA, Kraków 2007, pp.75–75.

² Cf. N.V. Riasanovsky, M.D. Steinberg, *Historia Rosji*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, Kraków 2009; L. Bazyłow, *Historia Rosji*, Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, Wrocław – Warszawa – Kraków 1969; J. Billington, *Ikona i topór. Historia kultury rosyjskiej*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, Kraków 2008.

the Slavophiles, who instead revered all things traditionally Russian and Slavic. While expressing their attachment to the traditions and culture of Rus', they mostly rejected European aesthetics as inauthentic and disconnected from their cultural roots. On musical grounds, there was a tendency to draw on the resources and traditions of Slavic culture. These traditions inspired The Five, a group of composers established by Mily Balakirev that included perhaps Russia's greatest musical innovator since Mikhail Glinka, Modest Mussorgsky, who sought to give music a new folk style. His two great historical operas, *Boris Godunov* and *Khovanshchina*, approached chronologically, begin on the eve of the Smuta and end with the arrival of the reign of Peter the Great. They represent a musical manifesto of the concept of Slavism, whose cornerstone was to elevate the common people of Russia, whom Mussorgsky made the true protagonists of his works. The musical culmination of Slavophile ideas was *Prince Igor*, an opera by Alexander Borodin. The work was completed after the composer's death by Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov and Alexander Glazunov and combines an epic story with a musical masterpiece and a historical spectacle.

Instrumental music also did not shy away from drawing on the resources of folk tradition. National schools often drew inspiration from the themes found in folk songs and hymns. An example of this is the second motif in the first movement of Pyotr Tchaikovsky's *Piano Concerto No. 1 in B-flat minor*, Op. 23, which is a traditional Ukrainian song that the composer heard performed by a blind beggar at a market in a village near Kiev.

The first half of the 19th century in Russian art was characterised by Romanticism. This movement was exemplified in music by A. Rubinstein and P. Tchaikovsky. Ivan Aivazovsky gained fame as a painter due to his massive canvases, which often depicted ships being tossed about by turbulent waves. While they inspired respect, their sheer size overwhelmed viewers at exhibitions. Aivazovsky was highly regarded by the elite, including the Tsarist court, who commissioned numerous works from him. But the early 19th century was primarily a golden age of literature in Russian culture.

Beginning with the reign of Alexander I, Russia developed a remarkable and unique literary culture. Over time, it became a universally accepted standard of excellence in the homeland, as well as a model for many writers in other countries. The golden age of Russian literature is generally considered to have taken place between 1820 and 1880. That is, from the time of Pushkin's first great poems to the publication of Dostoyevsky's last novel³.

At the time, culture and education were limited to the nobility, who had exclusive access to its resources. This is exemplified in the novels *War and Peace*

³ N.V. Riasanovsky, M.D. Steinberg, *Historia Rosji*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, Kraków 2009, p. 359.

by Leo Tolstoy and *Home of the Gentry* by Ivan Turgenev. The first half of the 19th century was also a time of development for Russian poetry, which flourished upon the crystallised modern Russian language. During this period, Alexander Pushkin, Nikolai Gogol, and Mikhail Lermontov were prominent poets and achieved the status of bards. The works by Pushkin were particularly influential on music and inspired later composers. His works provided the basis for more than twenty operas composed by M. Glinka, M. Mussorgsky, M. Rimsky-Korsakov, P. Tchaikovsky, S. Rachmaninoff and I. Stravinsky. The latter half of the century saw the rise of prose, particularly in the form of great novels, thanks to the contributions of literary figures such as Ivan Turgenev, Leo Tolstoy, and Fyodor Dostoyevsky. Following their passing, the great traditions of Russian prose were cultivated by Anton Chekhov, Maxim Gorky and several other prominent writers. The second half of the 19th century witnessed the shift towards new movements and trends. One trend that gained importance, not only in Russia but almost all over Europe, was realism. It involved a more practical approach to art, which should address everyday issues and concerns of ordinary people, rather than engage in moral preaching or depict utopian visions. The principles of realism became present in all artistic disciplines. In music, their ideals were represented by The Five. However, it was painting that became the most significant stronghold of realism in Russian art. Also in this area, it is easy to identify when the turn to realism took place. In 1863, fourteen graduates of the Academy of Arts, an entire class, refused to paint a feast in Valhalla as part of their examination. Their wish was to paint in the Realist style. By organising several, hugely successful, touring exhibitions and causing more painters to join their manifestos, they were soon to become known as *The Itinerants* or *Peredvizhniki*. While adhering to the principles of realism, they believed that content was more important than form and that art must serve a higher purpose. The subjects of their paintings included the hardships of rural life, the drunkenness of the clergy, and police brutality. The most important representative of this trend was Ilya Repin.

The very end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century saw another revival of Russian literature and art, sometimes referred to as the Silver Age⁴. [...] The Silver Age [...] brought a significant reinvigoration and a new dose of creative originality to the culture of the tsarist empire⁵.

This term, although initially used in reference to literature, quickly became associated with Russian *fin de siècle* art in all its forms. The Silver Age was a period of remarkable creative productivity. Again, as with Realism, dating is remarkably straightforward. The Silver Age is generally considered to have begun in 1898 with the birth of the influential journal *Mir iskusstva*, published by

⁴ Ibidem, p. 460.

⁵ Ibidem, p. 469.

Sergei Diaghilev and Alexandre Benois. It called for the rejection of previous Realist work and a move towards new movements such as Impressionism and Symbolism. Especially Symbolism has gained great importance in Russia and was practised in all areas of art and philosophy. Symbolism rejected the literalism of the world of feelings, recognising that they cannot be fully expressed in words or comprehended by reason. A more subtle form of expression, such as a symbol, is needed. It recognised the importance of the artistry of the form of the message and the power of emotional expression. It also searched for utopian, Arcadian worlds, detached from the telluric nature of realistic representations. It was closely linked to a newly developed religiosity that sought wisdom and enlightenment in ecstasy, demonism, or the distant and exotic cultures of the Far East. Always present was a philosophical element, especially Nietzscheanism, which was popular at the time. The influence of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis is also evident. One of the main themes explored was the concept of self, self-discovery, personality, and self-realisation. The Silver Age literature was dominated by poets such as Alexander Blok, Konstantin Balmont, and Anna Akhmatova – arguably the last Russian female poet of the highest rank.

In the field of painting, the trend was represented by the titans of the period: Mark Chagall, who sought to find the balance between faithfulness to representation and fluidity of lines, Vasily Kandinsky, who explored abstraction, and Kazimir Malevich, who concentrated on geometric shapes and futurism. In the music of the Silver Age, the most important position was held by Alexander Scriabin. His works are filled with musical symbols hidden in chordal structures and melodic motifs. The composer regarded his entire body of work as a mere outline, a prelude to a more significant piece of almost creationist importance, thus fulfilling the religious and mystical premises of the period. The composer's *magnum opus*, *Mysterium*, is a musical, dance, and visual performance intended to elevate mankind to a new, transcendent level of existence. This goal was to be accomplished through a synthesis of the arts, and the result was to be a new human being corresponding to the ideas of the new age. However, the performance planned at a temple in India never took place due to A. Scriabin's death. Although his work gained immortality later on, it did not enjoy much success, or at least understanding, beyond Russia's musical elite. By contrast, this cannot be said about Ballets Russes: an artistic group that included a plethora of giants of Russian art at the time. With ballet performances all over the world, the group has gained legendary status. The group was composed of several notable figures, including founder and impresario Sergei Diaghilev, choreographer Michael Fokine, and legends of the ballet world Anna Pavlova and Vaslav Nijinsky, as well as composer Igor Stravinsky. Stravinsky's ballets, including *The Rite of Spring*, *The Firebird*, and *Petrushka*, were successfully performed by Ballets Russes. However, some performances were met with scandal, such as the Paris opening

of *The Rite of Spring* in 1913, which reportedly incited a riot due to the artistic tension surrounding the performance. Ballets Russes also collaborated on visuals with artists such as Mark Chagall, Henri Matisse, and Pablo Picasso.

In a way, the new ballet masterpieces [...] expressed to the fullest the cultural taste, artistic craftsmanship and richness of the silver age⁶.

In parallel, works with a more romantic aesthetic were created by other composers: Sergei Bortkiewicz, Nikolai Medtner and, of course, Sergei Rachmaninoff. Rachmaninoff, in particular, gained immense popularity due to his ability to compose beautiful, melancholic, and lyrical phrases. All three remained more or less faithful to Romantic ideas until the end of their lives. However, they introduced symbolist elements into their works, such as the motif of bells, characteristic of Russian music, or the motif of fate, borrowed from Ludwig van Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, which they transformed into a leitmotif with an existential dimension. In their works, like in Scriabin's, philosophical mysticism is present, although in a more disguised form.

The Silver Age proved to be a bridge between the fading Romanticism and the rising Modernism. It was a harbinger of the emerging new artistic ideas of the 20th century. There was another common denominator for artists of this era: fatalism, pessimism, and a sense of impending disaster.

According to some, the Silver Age was not only a manifestation of the flourishing of Russian culture, but also of the restless spirit and cultural atmosphere of that era. [...] The uncertainty and pessimism so typical of the Silver Age also shaped its distinct aesthetic. Artists were said to sense the imminent end of the old world but were nevertheless determined to make its death beautiful⁷.

2. Alexei Stanchinsky: Biographical Sketch

Алексей Владимирович Станчинский [transliterated as Alexei Vladimirovich Stanchinsky] was born on 9 March 1888 in Obolsunovo, a small village in the Ivanovo Oblast, approximately two hundred kilometres north of Moscow. After a few days he was baptised in the church of the village of Alferovo, where he was given the name Alexei, probably because of the patron saint's day celebrated on 17 March. Alyosha was fortunate to be born into a family with cultural aspirations and financial stability. Both of his parents had musical training. As was the custom in the 19th century, songs and chamber music were performed at the Stanchinsky home. Lydia, Alyosha's older sister, also showed musical talent. She later graduated from the Moscow Conservatory as a pianist, where her younger brother also studied. Already at an early age, the piano in the house

⁶ Ibidem, p. 473.

⁷ Ibidem, pp. 470–471.

started to attract the attention of the sensitive young boy. At the age of five, he received his first playing lessons from his mother. His father, a chemical engineer, worked in a nearby textile factory to support his family. The Stanchinsky family was not considered wealthy. However, in contrast to the poverty of Russian provinces, it was likely to be considered relatively affluent, as shown by the ability to organise musical evenings and musical education for children at home. At that time, for rather political reasons, university students and educators headed out into the countryside to spread knowledge among the people. This is why Alexander Gretchaninov, later an acclaimed Russian composer and one of Stanchinsky's teachers, came to Obolsunovo. Grechaninov quickly recognised the boy's talent and offered him further guidance. Unfortunately, however, Vladimir Nikolaevich, father, and breadwinner, was forced to change his place of work. Moving frequently was an integral part of the life of a chemical engineer living in a massive country like Russia during a period of industrialisation and modernisation. The Stanchinsky family therefore lived successively in Vladimir, Tallinn (where young Alexei attended the Mayer Music School), Tver, Pskov, Smolensk, and finally settled in Logachyovo in the Smolensk oblast, where Glinka also spent his early years. From 1899 to 1907, Stanchinsky was a student at the Smolensk Gymnasium.

Young Alexei absorbed everything related to art. In addition to music, he was also interested in poetry, literature, and painting, and studied foreign languages. At his school piano performances, he played works by Bach, Beethoven, Chopin, Liszt, Grieg, Schumann, and other composers. He maintained his relationship with his first teacher, Grechaninov. Grechaninov, who already held the position of theory teacher at the Moscow Conservatory, decided to introduce Alexei to the most important figure of the academy at the time, Sergei Taneyev. This famous composer and theorist, rector of the Conservatory, student of Pyotr Tchaikovsky and firm artistic conservative, recognised Stanchinsky's talent as quickly as Grechaninov did. He soon became his favourite student, often invited for additional lessons. Alexei had been visiting Moscow since 1904, at which time his sister Lydia was in her graduation year. He studied piano under Iosif Levin, Konstantin Eiges, and Konstantin Igumnov, and received instruction in composition and music theory from Alexander Grechaninov. In 1907, Alexei was accepted as a student at the Moscow Conservatory. Thanks to Taneyev's recommendations, Stanchinsky studied harmony and composition with Nikolai Zhilyayev, who later became his close friend, teacher, and promoter of his work. In the 1920s, almost all of Stanchinsky's piano compositions were published, in separate editions, edited by Nikolai Zilayev and Anatoly Alexandrov. However, his mentor continued to be S. Taneyev, with whom Alexei studied composition and counterpoint. For many, including Stanchinsky, Taneyev was considered a great Russian composer and educator, and the leader of the so-called 'Russian music school', making him

a role model. His authority, intelligence, musical and educational erudition, openness, and serious attitude towards students had a strong influence on those around him. Taneyev believed in a practical approach to learning theory and counterpoint. During lessons, Stanchinsky conducted meticulous analyses of Bach fugues, Mozart and Beethoven sonatas and quartets. The teacher aimed to develop the intellectual abilities and expand the musical thinking of their student. He gave him sheet music and books. They attended concerts together and reflected on the music. However, their opinions were not always aligned, even on relatively straightforward matters. On one occasion, when Stanchinsky asked: 'What is your favourite time of day?', Taneyev replied: 'The day!'. The student, after a short moment of reflection, said: [And I enjoy] 'the night'⁸. But above all, they differed in their views on new music. Alexei was fascinated by the works of Scriabin and Debussy. Taneyev openly acknowledged that he did not comprehend their music. In his opinion:

[...] only that beauty was eternal which possessed mathematical attributes and premises, simple mathematical results of certain rigid laws which must be sought and found⁹.

This discord is underlined by entries in diaries, which they both meticulously maintained, after hearing Scriabin's Prometheus. Taneyev wrote (20 February 1909):

I feel like I've been beaten with clubs¹⁰.

He also wrote about the monotonous harmony (regarding the repetition of the same chord, Scriabin commented: '[...] this is what evolution is about')¹¹. In contrast, Stanchinsky stated (in an entry under the date 8 March 1909) that:

Scriabin's symphony is really impressive. There is so much inspiration in it!¹².

A similar cognitive dissonance involved Stanchinsky's own composition: Taneyev noted (28 January 1909):

Today Stanchinsky played his Etude in G minor, which I didn't like. It is crowded with unnecessary figurations and runs that obscure the melody¹³.

After the meeting, Stanchinsky wrote (28th January 1909):

I had a lesson with Taneyev. He was pleased with my work. I played my *Etude* for him. He was displeased with me, very displeased. He doesn't understand that kind of music¹⁴.

⁸ From Taneyev's diary 1986, vol. 3, p. 156, as cited in: V. Loginova, *Avtorskii stil Alekseia Vladimirovicha Stanchinskogo (The Author's. Style: Aleksey Vladimirovich Stanchinsky)*, translated into Polish by A. Holovenko and further into English by B. Sanecki.

⁹ L. Sabaneev, *Modern Russian Composers*, Ayer Co Pub, New York 1927, p. 27.

¹⁰ V. Loginova, op. cit., p. 6.

¹¹ *Ibidem*.

¹² *Ibidem*.

¹³ *Ibidem*.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*.

Alexei maintained a diary throughout most of his life. The volumes of these records, now in Moscow's Glinka Museum, provide valuable insight into the composer's life. The entries show the sensitivity of the young artist and his susceptibility to the influence of literature, music, and poetry, which he himself created. They are also evidence of a developing mental illness. Inspired by his reading of F. Dostoevsky, Stanchinsky was constantly searching for answers to the fundamental questions of existence: 'What is sin? What is evil? How does evil affect people?' The tone of expression in his notes and diaries is a somewhat nervous. Frequent changes of mood (and even of writing style), feeling unwell, volatility and criticism of self, including creativity, nervousness of expression and mistrust of those around him. By contrast, in his poems, a shadow of Scriabin's idealisation and admiration of oneself shines through:

Everything was blossoming for me.
For me, I was king.
For me, I was God.
This is how much I loved myself.

Stanchinsky's diaries frequently use the expression 'dark void', even before his illness. This is how his morbid consciousness referred to creative weakness, which for the young composer was like death:

And what will happen if I fail to bring my idea to life? What if I have no strength?¹⁵ (24 April 1909).

The relentless pursuit of perfection had a destructive effect on the young composer, who became increasingly haunted by the thought that:

[...] only in suffering and asceticism can the spirit know inspiration. My goal is clear. Bring my technique to shining perfection¹⁶. (26 August 1909).

Stanchinsky always set high goals for himself in developing his talent:

In performance technique, I must achieve supreme beauty¹⁷. (8 August 1909).

On his journey towards his 'clear goal', Stanchinsky deliberately placed himself and his spirituality in extreme conditions in which a sensitive and refined person like himself could not survive. By constantly controlling and inventing non-existent rules, and doing everything against his own wishes, the composer's physical and spiritual strength were slowly being exhausted. Stanchinsky's diaries inspire admiration for his determination to grow. He pursued spiritual development passionately and intensely, shaping his unshakeable willpower. He actively pursued a moral ideal, asking himself questions: 'What is good, evil, joy, love?' All this suggests fairly early manifestations of philosophical thought.

¹⁵ Ibidem, p. 8.

¹⁶ Ibidem.

¹⁷ Ibidem.

In 1908, Sergei Taneyev introduced Stanchinsky to Leo Tolstoy, the renowned writer whose work greatly influenced the young composer. Taneyev and Stanchinsky visited Yasnaya Polyana, where Tolstoy spent his final years living a reclusive life, a lifestyle not unfamiliar to Taneyev, who lived in a hut without electricity for his entire life. The three of them spent time talking, and Alexei also performed his compositions. One of the fruits of this meeting are undoubtedly the four songs that Stanchinsky wrote to Tolstoy's words. He shared the philosophical views and concerns of the author of *War and Peace*. Tolstoy was horrified by the meaninglessness of life, Stanchinsky by a life without inspiration or creation. Towards the end of his life, Tolstoy drew closer to the simple religious people, wanderers, monks, people without any education, he renounced all worldly possessions. Stanchinsky chose the path of suffering. He believed that it alone would lead him to perfection and to 'true joy'¹⁸ (diary entry dated 7 June 1909), and he did so at the very beginning of his career, when he was only 21.

He was also interested in Russia itself, the beauty of its nature and the traditions of its people. Stanchinsky felt and loved popular works (fairy tales, dumkas, songs) as well as the nature of central Russia.

Oh, how beautiful Russia is! Everything is beautiful, its poor villages, the high snows in winter... and the villagers, the horses, the sleighs, all inseparable. How free, how wonderful things are in Russia. How much I love you, Russia, Mother. Eternal mystery and infinite source, storm of joy, storm of sorrow. Such joy is nowhere else to be found (diary, 1 January 1910)¹⁹.

Stanchinsky enjoyed watching the games and khorovods²⁰ of young people in the village of Logachyovo. At times, he danced himself. He wrote down and collected songs and old chants. In many of his works, inspirations from Russian folklore can be found.

During his studies in Moscow, Stanchinsky slowly began to develop his own creative language. He started with purely exercise pieces, educational exercises such as his own arrangements of motifs by J.S. Bach, L. van Beethoven and E. Grieg. He went through a phase of creating his own compositions but was strongly influenced by other composers such as F. Chopin and A. Scriabin. As early as 1908, he started writing completely innovative works such as the *Canon in B minor* and the *Prelude in Lydian Mode*, followed a year later by the *Prelude and Fugue*. These works signal the forthcoming development of his own independent musical language, which would fully emerge after 1910.

The composer started to gain a certain popularity in Moscow musical circles.

¹⁸ Ibidem.

¹⁹ Ibidem, s. 9.

²⁰ Folk circle dance.

The youthful Alyosha Stanchinsky became the fashionable rising star in the musical circles of Moscow; his compositions in manuscript copies circulated in the capital, far ahead of their publication, rousing perplexity on the part of some and rapture in others. The beginning of his musical career was really extraordinarily brilliant, and early success and even the word genius was, perhaps prematurely, used in connection with him²¹.

However, Alexei's gentle nature and personal struggles did not make him very popular in student circles. Extremely sensitive, lively, with a distinctive nervous laugh, he seemed not quite normal to his colleagues. However, he had a group of friends who later played a significant role in preserving his artistic legacy.

Alexei Stanchinsky's artistic rise was interrupted by a brutally traumatic event in 1910²². In January of that year, while Alexei was preparing to travel to Logachyovo to celebrate the New Year²³, Vladimir Nikolaevich, Alexei's father, died unexpectedly in Moscow. Strongly attached to his father, Alexei suffered a violent nervous breakdown. After spending the entire night in the chapel where his father's body was displayed, he was found the next morning in a state of total loss of mental faculties. He was then taken to a private clinic, where he was diagnosed with *dementia praecox*, a disorder no longer recognised by modern medicine, now called early dementia, and considered a stage of schizophrenia. Alexei remained in the psychiatric hospital from several months to almost a year, depending on the source. The exact time and location of the psychiatric facility remain unknown. It is certain, however, that in the same year, 1910, Stanchinsky left the hospital, abandoned his studies at the conservatory and returned to the family estate in Logachyovo. There, he recovered by contemplating nature and popular customs. He also continued to study with S. Taneyev by correspondence, perhaps the first documented case of its kind in the history of music. Thanks to this correspondence, many of his works were preserved after his death. The source material repeatedly mentions that Stanchinsky would destroy his own works in a moment of rage, influenced by mood swings. Some of them were reconstructed later by his friends, including A. Gretchaninov and N. Zilayev.

It was during this period that the composer developed his completely original style. He created his most significant works, including *Sketches* Op. 1, two sonatas, *Canon-Preludes*, *Trio*, and *Allegro*.

Stanchinsky eventually rejoined the Moscow Conservatory as a student. However, he was unable to tolerate the challenges of living in a large city, and

²¹ L. Sabaneev, op. cit., p. 191.

²² Various sources give different dates ranging from 1907 to 1910. However, sources which in the author's opinion are most reliable, V. Loginova and Ch. Hepburn, indicate 1910. This is also supported by the composer's correspondence and diaries.

²³ Orthodox Christians observe the Julian calendar and celebrate the New Year on the night of 13–14 January.

he continued his studies by correspondence. Nevertheless, upon the encouragement of S. Taneyev, he agreed to take part in a student concert organised at the Conservatory on 2 March 1914. The event was a great success. In a letter dated 4 March, probably addressed to his beloved, Elena Bai, Stanchinsky wrote:

Dear Galia,

My concert went well, but it was very scary to play. There were a lot of new experiences. I have not felt the excitement, but [not legible] [unwrought?]. [Everyone] suddenly noticed that my fingers did not give in - I was so worried somewhere inside. I was, quite unexpectedly, presented with flowers. In general, the public treated me with great [not discernible] and congratulations. Deisha Sionitskaia, immediately, after the concert invited me to Crimea in May. I guess I'll go...

I am sending you a big kiss. Love, Alyosha²⁴.

Stanchinsky did indeed spend the summer holidays of 1914 in the Crimea. He planned to return there with Nikolai Medtner, a composer who greatly admired him. This, however, did not happen. Just when everything seemed to be going in the right direction, the young composer's life was suddenly cut short by fate. On 6 October 1914, Alexei Stanchinsky was found dead on the riverbank near the family estate in Logachyovo. The paramedic present at the examination of the body at the scene determined that the cause of death was drowning, which led to cardiac arrest. Nevertheless, the circumstances remain unclear. The theories range from unfortunate accident through murder to suicide. Given the mental illness and resulting extreme mood swings, the latter seems the most likely. Although an unfortunate accident cannot be excluded as Alexei was known to experience hallucinations and visions that could have pushed him into the current. It remains, therefore, in the realm of conjecture and is one of many topics that deserve the attention of researchers.

Alexei Vladimirovich Stanchinsky passed away at the young age of 26. He was buried in Smolensk. The world of Russian and world music has certainly lost a great talent who was on the verge of defining a new style and new directions in music. It is known that Stanchinsky studied instrumentation techniques extensively before his death. It is therefore possible that he was planning to take up symphonic composition. He left sketches of several unfinished works, including choral and violin pieces. On 1 November 1914, the weekly magazine 'Music' published an article by Leonid Sabaneev entitled *Can he be forgotten?* Among other things, the author wrote:

The illness took him early, before his great and timeless talent could fully manifest itself. Sickly, sophisticated, and reminiscent of an exotic flower that requires eternal protection²⁵.

²⁴ Ch. Hepburn, *Aleksey Stanchinsky (1888–1914), A Guide to Research*, Texas Tech University, Lubbock 2015, s. 20.

²⁵ V. Loginova, op. cit., p. 1., quote from the article: L. Sabaneev, *Can he be forgotten?*, 'Music' 1914, no. 195, Moscow.

3. Characteristics of the Creative Style of the Composer

The limited literature on Stanchinsky's works generally distinguishes between his 'early' and 'late' works. However, the line is not clearly drawn. Determining what should be considered Stanchinsky's 'early' works is therefore difficult. Should it be those that display the characteristics of other artists, or perhaps those that were written before the nervous breakdown, or maybe only those that Stanchinsky created as part of his education? During the course of this research, two comprehensive attempts to organize the composer's works were identified. These are undertaken by Christopher Hepburn in his publication *Aleksy Stanchinsky (1888–1914), A Guide to Research* and Valentina Loginova in the dissertation *Avtorskii stil Alekseia Vladimirovicha Stanchinskogo*. They make different distinctions using different ordering criteria. Hepburn classifies the works chronologically based on their creation dates. He marks the distinctive character of the first works, which were only intended to improve technique within the framework of compositional studies. However, he does not classify the remaining works according to musical content. The periodisation is based solely on the date of creation of the work, and therefore constitutes a purely biographical ordering of the oeuvre (see Table 1).

Table 1. Compilation of works by A. Stanchinsky according to Ch. Hepburn

First Grouping [1888-1906]	Second Grouping [1906-1910]	Third Grouping [1911-1914]
J.S. Bach - Stanchinsky: (n.d.) Five Chorales	Piano Sonata in E-flat minor (1906)	Twelve Sketches Op. 1 (1911)
L. van Beethoven - Stanchinsky: (n.d.) Sonata For Piano	Nocturne for Piano (1907)	Variations in A minor (1911)
E. Grieg - Stanchinsky: (n.d.) Piece from Suite 'Peer Gynt', Scenes from opera 'Snow- maiden'	Etude in G minor (1907) Etude in F minor/A-flat Major (1907) Etude in B major (1908)	Prelude in C minor (1911)
Songs Without Words (1904)	Three Preludes (1907)	Five Preludes for Piano (1912)
Two Mazurkas (1905)	Canon in B minor (1908)	Allegro Op. 2 for Piano (1912)
Three Sketches (1905)	Prelude in E major (1908)	Piano Sonata no. 1 in F minor (1912)
Humoresque (1906)	Prelude in Lydian Mode (1908)	Piano Sonata no. 2 in G minor (1912)
Tears (1906)	10 Scottish Songs to Poems by Robert Burnes (1909)	Four Canon-Preludes (1913)
—	Prelude and Fugue in G minor (1909)	—
—	Piano Trio in D Major (1910)	—

Source: Ch. Hepburn *Aleksy Stanchinsky (1888–1914), A Guide to Research*, Texas Tech University, Lubbock 2015, p. 32.

Another criterion is used by Loginova, who classifies the composer's work based on the degree of his mastery of compositional technique. To avoid distorting the message, here is the passage in full:

The composer's works shall be examined and classified into three groups based on genre and diachronic aspects, demonstrating the evolution of the compositions. The initial group comprises early compositions (1904-1909) that represent the composer's formative phase, his search for his own musical language and his use of Romantic genres: songs without words, preludes, nocturnes, humoresques, etudes, mazurkas, and programmatic miniatures. The second group includes neoclassical pieces: Variations, sonatas, Piano Trios (1910-1912). These works expand and enrich the illustrative and emotional sphere, the diapason of genres, as well as display the perfection of the previously acquired compositional skills. This group also includes the early *Sonata in E-flat minor* (1906), which could be considered preparatory for the group. The third group comprises works of exceptional excellence and originality, in which a unique style and distinctive musical language have already been established. This group represents a central point in the composer's work. It comprises series of sketches (*Three Sketches*, *Twelve Sketches*), Preludes in the form of canons (1912-1914). They also include earlier compositions that represent the author's polyphonic style, such as the *Canon in B minor* (1908) and the *Prelude and Fugue in G minor* (1909-1910)²⁶.

In principle, the above classification is acceptable, but not without reservations. Firstly, this classification does not take into account all the works, leaving out, for example, the *Allegro*, the songs or all the 'formative' pieces that Hepburn includes. But most importantly, the applied criterion assesses the compositions based on their genre. The use of the prelude or nocturne form becomes a factor that degrades the work to the first or second group, which, according to the author, is only a preparation for the creation of works of the third group. In fact, the works in this group make up the most interesting part of the composer's oeuvre. Compared to the compositions of other artists of the time, they have a distinct originality, and they form the core of the work of the young Russian. However, earlier works should not be regarded as incomplete, preparatory, or imperfect. Each individual piece in the first and second groups is a work of high artistic and pianistic quality. The quality of the technique is always a matter of debate, but these works cannot be considered to be lacklustre. As a matter of fact, Loginova does not imply this. Her approach, however, still classifies these works as preparatory or formative. Nor is it possible to fully agree with a classification that groups together works that are as fundamentally different as the *Sonata in E-flat minor* and the *Sonatas in F major* and *G major*.

Therefore, with a certain degree of dissatisfaction, I would like to propose my own classification of Stanchinsky's works, based on the distinction between original works and those influenced by other artists. Of course, even this classi-

²⁶ V. Loginova, op. cit., p. 12, translated into Polish by A. Holovenko and further into English by B. Sanecki.

fication is not perfect. Neither work was created in an artistic vacuum. Each of them incorporates elements from other artistic movements and works by other artists. In the case of Stanchinsky, however, it is possible to draw a clear line between works written under the strong influence of a particular movement or composer, and those in which the composer follows his own artistic path. Therefore, the presented periodisation is similar to that made by Loginova, but is based on a different criterion and does not attempt to assess the works. Similar to Loginova, works created for the sole purpose of study under the guidance of a teacher were excluded as they were designed to be exercises to improve compositional technique.

Table 2. Compilation of works by A. Stanchinsky according to the author

Inspired works	Original works
<i>Two Mazurkas</i>	<i>Three Sketches</i>
<i>Humoresque</i>	<i>Twelve Sketches</i>
<i>Nocturne</i>	<i>Variations</i>
<i>Three Preludes</i>	<i>Allegro</i>
<i>Five Preludes</i>	<i>Sonata in F major</i>
<i>Three Etudes</i>	<i>Sonata in G major</i>
<i>Songs Without Words</i>	<i>Piano Trio</i>
<i>Tears</i>	<i>Canon-Preludes</i>
<i>Sonata in E-flat minor</i>	<i>Prelude in Mixolydian Mode</i>
<i>Songs to Poems by Robert Burns</i>	<i>Prelude in Lydian Mode</i>
	<i>Canon in B minor</i>
	<i>Prelude and Fugue</i>

Source: Own elaboration.

The category of inspired works comprises those in which the influence of other artists and movements is clearly discernible. Autonomous works, on the other hand, are those in which Stanchinsky explores artistically uncharted territories and searches for his own language of musical expression. Therefore, the classification criterion is based solely on the musical content of the work, regardless of its composition date or genre. Of course, this is not the only possible distinction, nor is it any more appropriate than those proposed by the musicologists mentioned above.

There are also several unfinished works, such as the *Serenade* for violin and piano. It was completed after the death of the composer and performed at the Moscow Conservatory in 2018. I own the score for this piece, as well as for an unfinished choral piece and several others. As these are unfinished and unpublished works, it was chosen not to include them in my compilation. Also not

listed are the Sextet and the String Trio, both of which are mentioned by Larry Sitsky in his book *Music of the Repressed Russian Avant-Garde 1900-1929* in the chapter devoted to the composer²⁷. Despite searches, no evidence of the existence of these works was found. The songs are a separate issue. Stanchinsky composed at least four songs to Tolstoy's words, as he mentions in his diary. They do not appear on any list of his works, nor have they been published. They may have been lost. Similarly, the ten unreleased songs with lyrics by Robert Burns were considered lost. It was only many years later that they were found in private collections. However, as of yet, they have not been published, recorded, or performed.

Let us examine the influences on Stanchinsky's works from the group of inspired works. The influence of the Romantic period, especially Chopin, is particularly evident. Stanchinsky thus becomes part of a wider group of Russian late-Romantic composers who were strongly influenced by Chopin's work. This group includes Alexander Scriabin, Sergei Rachmaninoff, Anatoly Lyadov, Sergei Lyapunov, Sergei Bortkevich, and others. Echoes of Chopin's lyricism can be heard in Stanchinsky's cantilena in the *Nocturne* or in the first piece of the *Five Preludes*. The two *Mazurkas* also exhibit a clear influence from Chopin. The very selection of these genres as a means of expression may suggest Chopin connotations. But there are others. *Songs Without Words* is an obvious reference to Mendelssohn. The texture and accompaniment used in *Humoresque* evoke the styles of Grieg, Liszt, and Schumann. Furthermore, Stanchinsky's only programmatic miniature, *Tears*, is reminiscent in form of a genre that was highly favoured during the Romantic era (see example 1).



Example 1. A. Stanchinsky, *Mazurka in D-flat major*, mm. 5–12

²⁷ L. Sitsky, *Music of the Repressed Russian Avant-Garde 1900–1929*, Greenwood, Westport 1994, p. 37.

The second, even more significant movement that the composer was exploring was, of course, Russian music, especially that of Alexander Scriabin. Living in the time of the Scriabinists, direct contact with the composer himself and great admiration for his artistic achievements must have left their mark on the young Stanchinsky's work. This influence is clearly reflected in early works such as the *Three Preludes*, where Scriabin's harmony is evident, displaying the extended functions of chords through numerous alterations and additions of intervals such as fifths, tritones, sevenths or ninths. The second *Prelude* from this collection is also a demonstration of Scriabin's harmonic approach, where 'melody is extended harmony, and harmony is concentrated melody'²⁸. Nowhere, however, is the influence of the work of the author of *Prometheus* more strongly manifested than in the *Sonata in E-flat minor*, which is an homage to Scriabin's work. The similarities to his *Sonata No. 3*, the harmonic language, and the motif, which is almost a direct quotation from the famous *Etude in D minor*, Op. 8 No. 12, demonstrate this. However, Stanchinsky's work is also influenced by other Russian artists. The heavy texture of *Humoresque* is reminiscent of Mussorgsky's work, while the inspiration by folk art, present in many of Stanchinsky's works, clearly refers to Glinka. It is evident that, similar to many emerging artists, the young composer explored familiar genres and various styles at the start of his creative journey. Examples found in his early works indicate both a reference to the tradition of the great Romanticists and piano virtuosos, and the overwhelming influence of contemporary trends in Russian art. Stanchinsky's admiration for Scriabin is documented in his diary. It is clear that, along with the works of the great poet of the piano, Chopin, it is the work of Scriabin, the most visionary of Stanchinsky's contemporaries, that had the greatest influence on the works of the young composer. In some of the pieces (e.g., in the climaxes in the *Nocturne* or the *Prelude in Lydian Mode*), the textural monumentalism of the great Russian Romantics, such as Rachmaninoff and Medtner, reverberates prominently. Having developed his creative personality during the era of Russian post-Romanticism, it was natural for Stanchinsky to occasionally indulge in this aesthetic (see example 2).

Stanchinsky's Romantic works are characterised by a high degree of expressiveness. Pieces such as *Songs without Words*, *Nocturne*, and the *Preludes* show Stanchinsky to be a gifted melodist. His themes are elastic, melodious and memorable. With a lyrical and cantilena character, they are distinctive for their use of devices unconventional for Romanticism, such as the tritone interval and augmented chord structure. The themes are presented in a precisely developed

²⁸ P. Kędzierski, *Język muzyki fortepianowej Skriabina*, [in:] *Skriabin. Mistyczna droga muzyki*, ed. J. Szeszenowicz, Akademia Muzyczna im. Grażyny i Kiejstuta Bacewiczów w Łodzi, Łódź 2016, p. 257; Here Kędzierski quotes Lissa, who cites the same quotation after Danilewicz, who in turn refers to *Prometeische Phantasien* by Scriabin himself.

homophonic and harmonic texture, typically chordal and choral, with a pulsating rhythm, and abundant runs and figurations. The harmony, although still purely functional and contained within the traditional major-minor system, is embellished by the use of altered chords: lowered 2nd and 3rd degrees, minor 6th degree (Schubert chord). Distant tonal relationships are applied, as for example D minor/B minor between the parts of the second *Song without Words*. The narrative is shaped by a rich palette of emotions and mental states presented in the works. The minor mode is predominant which also reflects the composer's attitude towards the reality around him.

The early works show a wide range of different shades of lyrical imagery – from the bright and sublime to the solemn, passionate and dramatic. The main characteristic of Stanchinsky's music is the intensity of inner experience²⁹.

Example 2. A. Stanchinsky, *Sonata* in E-flat minor, first theme, mm. 5–9

The intensity of experiences may be evidenced by the performance indications in the piece: *con dolore*, *dolente*, *sospirando*, *dolce*, *teneramente*, *agitato*, *appassionato impetuoso*, *precipitando*, *patetico*. The composer uses forms common in the Romantic period, but does not give them titles (the exception being *Tears*). The range of emotions and the intensity of the images encapsulated in the music need no additional title, they speak for themselves.

It was not in Stanchinsky's nature to pay homage to existing movements. He refused to be a passive imitator of someone else's style.

²⁹ V. Loginova, op. cit., p. 13.

Stanchinsky developed the classical and romantic traditions of the past, indicating the way for the future development of piano art³⁰.

He had a strong creative impulse, a need for constant discovery and self-improvement. As a result, he quickly began to search for his own language of expression. But what is so distinctive about Stanchinsky's musical language? Certainly, there are a few key characteristics that should be highlighted:

1. **Strong chromaticism** – this is certainly one of the defining characteristics of the composer's late works. Harmony is chromaticised by frequent additions of a second interval, which he liked to use to colour the chords and add a rough quality to them. The best example of this is the cycle of *12 sketches*, and among the larger forms, the *Sonatas* and *Canon-Preludes* [A] and [B] are the most important ones. The melody, both leading (*Canon-Prelude* [D]) and contrapuntal (*Fugue*), is also chromaticised. The tonal system's limits are challenged in works such as the *Fugue*, *Three Sketches*, or the *Canon in B minor*. In these works, melody and counterpoint become so chromaticised that the perception of tonality becomes blurred while the sound material itself begins to resemble the work of the Viennese School (see example 3).

Example 3. A. Stanchinsky, *Canon in B minor*, mm. 1–7

2. **Multi-layered texture** – Stanchinsky's admiration for Bach and love for polyphonic music was translated into his work. Almost all of his later works demonstrate multi-level thinking in music. The most obvious examples here are strictly polyphonic forms, such as the fugue or the canon, but even in the more free-form pieces display polyphony and multiple layers. Stanchinsky also enjoyed using polyphony, even where he did not have to. For instance, taking in-

³⁰ Ibidem, p. 10.

spiration from Bach's *Das Wohltemperierte Klavier*, he could have composed a prelude in the form of a toccata or a more lyrical piece. But he decided to arrange the lyrical, contemplative content in the form of a double canon. He also employed the canon technique in the *Piano Trio*. When analysing the score of some of the works, such as the *Canon-Prelude* [C] (see example 4), one might get the impression of looking at a reduced orchestral or choral score. Thinking in planes, in layers, more than instrumental, pianistic thinking typical of pianist-composers, is evident.

Example 4. A. Stanchinsky, *Canon-Prelude* [C], mm. 10–11

3. **Rich harmony** – the fourth-fifth chord became a distinctive feature, a hallmark for Stanchinsky. A type of harmony that is remarkably stable, symmetrical in structure and tone, and eagerly used both in the texture of the piece and at its end. This is especially noticeable in those works where the composer tries to avoid defining tonality and goes beyond the established framework of the major-minor system, for example in the *Prelude in Lydian Mode* or the *Canon-Preludes* [C]. However, this type of harmony is used in almost every work. Also distinctive is the use of numerous added notes in the chords, not only those of Scriabinian provenance, such as the tritone, the seventh or the ninth. Additionally, the use of multiple variations of chord components, along with the addition of extra tones. The result is a harmony on the edge of tonality, often aimed more at achieving a tonal effect than at performing a function, in which the composer gets close to Impressionism. Harmonising sevenths and ninths, a feature typical of impressionistic music, is often used to create a larger sound plane as a tonal background. A good example of such impressionistic harmony is the *Canon-Prelude* [C]. The composer, with his wide hand span, tends also to reach for the tenth interval or even wider which allows him to build complex, multi-tonal chordal structures.

5. **Modality** – Stanchinsky frequently uses harmony and modal scales, both as a component of the piece and as its foundation. The *Prelude in Lydian Mode*, *Prelude in Mixolydian Mode*, and *Canon-Prelude* [C] are all good examples of modality being the foundation of the piece. All three pieces are linked by their

tendency to avoid a tonal centre, thus disrupting the dominant-tonic relationship, aided by the work's reliance on a modal scale with a disrupted traditional tetrachord arrangement. The *Prelude in Lydian Mode* (see example 5) is the most glaring example of this, as throughout the piece there is neither a single dominant nor a function that can play its role. Modality, as a permanent element of folk art, also has a stylistic function in works intended to evoke connotations of Russian folklore.

The image shows a musical score for two staves, likely piano and violin/viola. The top staff is in treble clef and the bottom staff is in bass clef. The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The time signature is 8/16. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings. Key markings include 'mp' (mezzo-piano), 'm.s.' (musica sospesa), 'poco a poco cresc. ed agitato', and 'Ossia?'. There are also some unusual rhythmic markings like '8' above certain notes.

Example 5. A. Stanchinsky, *Prelude in Lydian Mode*, mm. 12–13

5. **Complex metro-rhythm** – another feature of Stanchinsky's works. To create a sense of unsteadiness and instability, the composer, from the very beginning of his career, employs irregular metre, like in the second prelude of the *Three Preludes* cycle, which uses 7/8 metre, or even polymetre, as seen in the *Etude in B major*, which uses 9/16 and 5/8 metre. Later on, the use of complex metrorhythms becomes even more important. He uses a fragmented metre to slow down the narrative (21/16 in the *Prelude in Lydian Mode*, 8/16 in the *Canon in B minor*, 6/16 in the *Fugue* opening the *Sonata in G major* and a peculiar irregular 11/8 in the conclusion), or, contrarily, to cover a larger area – a half note metre (4/2 in the last of the *Five Preludes*, composed in 1912, or 5/2 in the *Canon-Prelude* [B]). Stanchinsky also frequently employs irregular metre in his later works, using, in addition to those mentioned above, the 5/4 metre in the *Prelude in Mixolydian Mode*. The quintuple meter, which is extremely rare, appears to be primarily used in Russian music. Examples of its use can be found in Glinka's opera *A Life for the Tsar*, in the second movement of Tchaikovsky's *Symphony No. 6*, in Mussorgsky's *Promenade* from *Pictures at an Exhibition* or in Rachmaninoff's symphonic poem *Isle of the Dead*. Interestingly, another of the rare examples of the use of this metre can be found in Chopin, in the slow movement of the *Sonata in C minor*, Op. 4.

6. **Stylised folklore** – whether through adaptation or direct transfer of a folk melody to the piano, is an area that warrants further research. According to Loginova, the composer did not use direct quotations. However, his work often contains numerous features that suggest an attempt at folk stylisation.

The theme in the Prelude in B-flat minor is in the style of a dumka. There are distinctive elements of a dumka: the range of a sixth (Ab-F), fourth-fifth and trichord chants, melodic and rhythmic variation, variable metre (3/2, 4/2), Dorian scale³¹.

The quintuple meter used by Stanchinsky also has a folk origin. For instance, it can be found in songs and chants of a ritual and religious nature, also in the Polish folk tradition. Therefore, in the aforementioned example from Glinka's opera, the pentasyllabic folk song used to celebrate nuptials is provided in the original version, in quintuple metre. Also, in another of Glinka's operas, *Ruslan and Lyudmila*, the chorus sings an epitaph to Lel, the Slavic god of love, in quintuple metre. Stanchinsky, while recovering in Logachyovo after a stay in a mental institution, observed the local rituals and was interested in participating in the dancing himself. This was reflected in his work and is perhaps best exemplified in the dance-like *Canon-Prelude* [B], which is, of course, in 5/2 metre (see example 6).

The theme of *Canon-Prelude* #2 (G major, Vivace, 5/2) shares features with the ideas played by folk instruments, is based on the pentatonic scale, folk scales (D Mixolydian, D Phrygian), and is infused with tetrachord chants, fourth-fifth intonations, and precise rhythms of quavers and semiquavers. The variability in themes is constantly changing due to folk variants³².

[B]

Соль мажорIn G major

Vivace $\text{♩} = 138$

Example 6. A. Stanchinsky, *Canon-Prelude* [B], m. 1

7. **Psychologism** – Stanchinsky's later compositions are characterised by a dark aura, which offers insight into the composer's soul, as revealed in his diaries. The gradual deterioration of health is reflected in the grim, minor-key har-

³¹ Ibidem, p. 19.

³² Ibidem, p. 34.

monies with which these compositions are infused. The apparently 'brighter' ones also have an element of unease and perversity in them, which Loginova describes as 'grim-demonic fantasy'³³.

A unique and important aspect of Stanchinsky's work is the exploration of the theme of the fantastic-demonic, the terrifying, and the mad. Undoubtedly, he was influenced by his disturbed psyche and mystical phantoms. In all this, the composer appears to have come into contact with the phenomenon of European Expressionism in music and painting, which carried with it a tension and a nervous atmosphere in anticipation of the tragedy of the early 20th century. The composer's premature death occurred shortly after the start of World War I, embodying the tragedy that Stanchinsky intuited and expressed in his grim and fantastic music³⁴.

The sense of impending catastrophe is the common denominator that largely defines the works of artists from various disciplines of the Russian Silver Age. This feeling reflected the social unrest, the tension that could be sensed in people who felt, perhaps unconsciously, that dark and difficult times were approaching. As is well known, they were right. This same atmosphere can be felt in Alexei Stanchinsky's compositions, dark and fatalistic, full of dissonances, violent contrasts, music that sounds disturbingly strange for the times in which it was written. This was of course compounded by the composer's private philosophical concerns and health problems. However, it is also possible to encounter musical experiences that are the exact opposite – rapture, bliss, nirvana. They are musically painted in such works as the *Prelude* from the *Prelude and Fugue*, the *Prelude in Lydian Mode* and the *Canon-Prelude* [C].

8. **Eclecticism** – Stanchinsky's works, although highly original, show the influence of other musical styles and movements. In them one can find romantic lyricism, impressionistic love for hues and colours, expressionistic violence, vitalistic energy, neoclassical order in the love for classical forms, even dodeca- phonic structuralism.

9. **Melismatics** – although the late compositions are dominated by vertical features, a vector directed towards harmony and multifaceted and polyphonic thinking, there are also arabesque fragments present. For example, in the *Fugue* from the *Sonata in G Major* or the *Canon-Prelude* [C]. These are not episodes of virtuosic character, rather, the dominant feature is the building of a sonic plane through passages of short notes. However, the resulting effect often differs significantly from the dominant texture (see example 7).

³³ Ibidem, p. 31.

³⁴ Ibidem, p. 11.

Example 7. A. Stanchinsky, *Sonata in E-flat minor*, mm. 150–154

10. **Structuralism** – In Stanchinsky’s later compositions, specifically the *Canon-Preludes*, we do not find purely abstract contrapuntal structures but rather their perfect development and organization throughout the composition. The composer was increasingly drawn to constructivism. He felt a growing desire to create a structure for the whole composition, to carefully balance the counterpoint. This was related to the phenomenon of structuralism, which initially emerged in abstract painting.

When it comes to Stanchinsky, ‘geometry destroyed musical intuition’ wrote L. Sabaneyev when comparing the sophisticated structure and schematism of his music with the works of Čiurlionis (Lithuanian artist and composer, representative of symbolism, abstractionism, and surrealism)³⁵.

Although revolutionary in terms of sonic material, Stanchinsky had a conservative approach to preserving the structure of the form. In this aspect, he adopted the teachings of his mentor, S. Taneyev. Consistency in the construction

³⁵ Ibidem.

of form and the logic behind musical structures and runs is evident in all of Stanchinsky's compositions. In this regard, he was close to the neoclassicists who, like him, injected innovative content into classical forms.

The composer's approach to the instrument is noteworthy. Stanchinsky utilises the full range of the piano, occasionally reaching both the highest notes and the sub-contra octave. He wanted to maximise the sound of the instrument in the true spirit of Liszt. Studying the original manuscripts of the works can also be an interesting experience. Sometimes, precisely annotated performance indications can be found, while other times one finds only 'blank' text, only notes, without definitions of tempo, articulation, or dynamics. For instance, this is true of pieces like the *Prelude in Lydian Mode* or the *Canon-Prelude* [C], which share a similar spirit and expression. Here, the composer left the score *blank*, trusting the performer to decipher the musical idea behind the piece. Similarly, in the *Fugue* from the *Prelude and Fugue* and the *Canon in B minor*, the composer did not provide any indications. These works might be considered a type of musical puzzle. There is a multitude of interpretation possibilities available to the performer, which are determined by various factors, including the absence of performance indications.

The significant impact of literature on the developing artistic mind of the young Russians must not be overlooked. In particular, Russian literature masterpieces, such as *Crime and Punishment* by Dostoevsky, *Ruslan and Lyudmila* or *Eugene Onegin* by Pushkin, and *The Fair at Sorochyntsi* by Gogol, made a significant impression on him. This inspired him to undertake his own literary pursuits in addition to his meticulously kept diary. He attempted poetry and wrote a collection of extraordinary stories. This aspect of his biography had a significant impact on the further development of his work. Literature strengthened his connection to Russian culture. This is evident in several works from the later period, where a dance-like meter or a folk-style melody can be observed. There are also more subtle analogies with themes from Russian culture, such as the monumentalism of painting of the time, reflected in the texture of the works, or the rupture expressed in the extreme and violent changes of musical mood, similar to the inner rupture experienced by the protagonists of novels read by Stanchinsky. Another one is the motif of bells, which is iconic in Russian music (Mussorgsky's *Great Gate of Kiev*, Rachmaninoff's *The Bells*).

Russia suffering, Russia in the ringing of church bells, Russia great and wide. This is the image of the homeland in Stanchinsky's works³⁶.

The last theme to be developed remains the presence of the dodecaphonic technique in Stanchinsky's works. This presence can be found in three works: *Three Sketches*, *Canon in B minor*, and *Prelude and Fugue*. Chromaticism is the foundation of the *Canon in B minor*. The theme uses the entire the twelve-tone

³⁶ Ibidem.

scale. However, the theme is purely functional. Therefore, the dodecapronic material presented is a result of strong chromatisation, rather than an end in itself. The theme of the *Fugue*, which is the core of what is essentially a diatonic piece, also makes full use of the twelve-tone scale. Does the fact that the piece was written in October of 1909 make Alexei Stanchinsky a pioneer of dodecaphony? This statement may be too bold and require further research. Perhaps the question should be rephrased as follows: Was Stanchinsky aware of the emerging ideas related to the ordering of sound material? Stanchinsky was slowly recovering at his family estate in Logachyovo in the Smolensk oblast, effectively isolated from the outside world. He was captivated by the singing of birds and the traditional music of the Russian countryside and spent his time absorbing the beauty of the surrounding world. He studied at the Moscow Conservatory only by exchanging letters with his mentor Taneyev. But Taneyev was no modernist, quite the opposite. He was the last stronghold of traditional music, a devout believer in the works of the Renaissance and Baroque. He did not and would not understand the new music that was emerging around him. He despised the work of the Impressionists. When it came to his students, he held Rachmaninoff in much higher esteem than Scriabin. It is therefore unlikely that a teacher with such a disposition would have introduced and enthused his pupil with novelties such as dodecaphony and serialism. Moreover, these techniques were just beginning to develop. Stanchinsky's awareness of the musical revolution taking place in Vienna seems unlikely. So, did the young Russian discover dodecaphony on his own? In my view, this statement may be considered too bold. The thematic material of the *Fugue* appears to be a result of the chromatic expansion of the musical language already established in the *Canon in B minor*. Although the theme uses the entire twelve-tone scale, it is also the building block of a work firmly rooted in the major-minor system. The strong chromaticism of this piece does not prevent one from finding dominant-tonic relationships or cadential phrases. The use of a dodecapronic theme can be seen as a natural progression in the development of a chromatic language, rather than a groundbreaking discovery. This is supported by the fact that Stanchinsky did not create any further works based on this system. It is the result of the composer's exploration and attempts to expand the existing diatonic system, taking the form of dodecapronic material. The subsequent works, which represent a mature stage in the composer's career, move towards neo-classicism (*Twelve Sketches*, *Three Sketches*, *Trio*, *Allegro*, and *Variations*). They also explore the potential offered by polyphonic technique, as seen in the *Canon-Preludes*, the fugue from the *Sonata in G major*, and the *Trio*. Only in the third of the *Three Sketches* is there twelve-tone scale material in the theme with several repetitions. Again, it appears that this is a derivative of strong chromatisation. This 'Unconscious' discovery of dodecaphony remained unexplored. Although per-

haps to accuse a composer of Stanchinsky's stature of an 'unconscious' discovery is to do him a disservice. This is one of the themes in the composer's work that, by its very existence, demands further research (see example 8).



Example 8. A. Stanchinsky, *Fugue in G minor*, mm. 1–2

Conclusion

Alexei Stanchinsky's compositions conform to the principles of the Russian Silver Age. However, they also extend beyond the period in which the author composed. Initially, Stanchinsky drew on the legacy of Romanticism. He created works that echoed the passing era in terms of both form and means of expression. His pursuit of an autonomous language of expression led him into artistic territories now associated with the works of composers of later periods and movements, such as Hindemith, Prokofiev, or Shostakovich. Works from his mature creative period reflect his love for polyphony. However, they are characterised by a neoclassical approach to form and harmonic language. Some of his works also contain a dodecaphonic element. The works are definitely dominated by piano compositions. However, drafts of unfinished choral, violin, and other works suggest the path of artistic development that the composer intended to follow. His premature death places him in the company of other brilliant composers such as Pergolesi, Schubert and Karłowicz. Stanchinsky's works are characterised by an innovative fusion of different musical styles and an original musical language. Alexei Stanchinsky's works call for in-depth research and analysis. They certainly deserve greater recognition among musicologists and music lovers.

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Aleksiej Stanczinski [Aleksey Stanchinsky] (1888–1914) – zapomniany kompozytor rosyjskiego srebrnego wieku. Przyczynek do dalszych badań

Streszczenie

Niniejszy artykuł ma na celu przybliżyć czytelnikowi postać Aleksieja Stanczinskiego [Alekseja Stanchinsky'ego] oraz pokrótce scharakteryzować jego twórczość powstałą w czasach schyłku carskiej Rosji. Tekst podzielony jest na trzy części. Pierwsza jest szkicem kontekstu kulturowego, w którym artyście przyszło tworzyć. Jest to zarys wiodących w Rosji tendencji artystycznych, nurtów, z uwzględnieniem środowiska artystycznego na przełomie wieków XIX i XX. Część druga zawiera rys biograficzny kompozytora, którego choroba, nieszczęśliwe życie i w konsekwencji przedwczesna śmierć miały fundamentalny wpływ na pozostawioną twórczość. Część trzecia stanowi próbę klasyfikacji i charakteryzacji twórczości Stanczinskiego, w oparciu o dostępne materiały oraz przeprowadzone badania własne.

Słowa kluczowe: fortepian, muzyka fortepianowa, środki techniki kompozytorskiej, Aleksiej Stanczinski [Aleksey Stanchinsky], Rosja, rosyjski srebrny wiek.