

The Influence of Adolf von Henselt on Sergei Rachmaninoff: A Comparative Analysis of Henselt's  
Piano Concerto Op.16 and Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto Op.18

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## Purpose

Sergei Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto no. 2 is one of the most frequently performed and beloved works. It is ironic that, however, despite its great popularity, there are not many in-depth studies of this concerto, offering pianists few opportunities to examine the work from an analytical perspective. Due to its thick and complicated texture, the interpretation of which poses considerable challenges, a detailed analysis will be beneficial for performers in terms of their musical development. Furthermore, a study of the Henselt Piano Concerto, which served as a compositional model, will enhance our understanding of Rachmaninoff's masterwork. There is evidence, both external and internal, that Rachmaninoff's piano concertos and other pieces, especially his early Preludes, reflect the strong influence of Adolf von Henselt (1814-1889). While von Henselt's importance for Russian music has been generally recognized, his impact, especially upon Rachmaninoff, has received insufficient attention in the scholarly literature. His Piano Concerto Op. 16 in F minor, published in 1846, inspired a number of composers, such as Balakirev, Lyapunov, along with Rachmaninoff.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the influence of Rachmaninoff's teacher, Sergei Taneyev (1856-1915), can also be traced in Rachmaninoff's works.<sup>2</sup> Based on the idea of the Henselt-Rachmaninoff connection, an additional study of the Piano Concerto in E-flat major by Taneyev will contribute to understanding how Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto No. 2 is developed from that of his teacher.

In this study, I will analyze both the Henselt and Rachmaninoff concertos, and suggest ways in which Rachmaninoff's Second Piano Concerto developed from its precursors. More specifically, I shall argue that Rachmaninoff adopted Henselt's 6-5-1 motto from Henselt's concerto, which, in this piece in F minor is Db-C-F. That motto also occurs in the first movement of Taneyev's Piano Concerto in E-flat major, which will be discussed as well.

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<sup>1</sup> Jeremy Norris, *The Russian concerto: Volume 1 The Nineteenth Century* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 54-55.

<sup>2</sup> Victor Seroff, *Rachmaninoff* (London: Cassell, 1951), 33.

Exploring the 6-5-1 motto, which possibly has semantic significance in these concertos, is the kernel of an analysis. Raymond Monelle states in his book regarding musical signification: “A grasp of signification enables us to find meaningful items in this [infinitely ramified] continuum and thus to begin the process of analysis. Analysis engages with signifier and signified together, and thus reveals musical *text*, which is a great deal more than merely the score.”<sup>3</sup> Concerning the possible meaning of the 6-5-1 motto, I consider the repetition of the motto to be an emblem “inexorable destiny”— a man or woman can struggle against his or her destiny to try to change its course, but ultimately must yield to its will. The motto recurs throughout, either obviously or latently, reflecting the unfolding of destiny.

For the detailed analysis of the music, I will adopt a Schenkerian approach to show how this motto operates at all levels – background, middleground, and foreground. The analytical sketches elucidate melody, harmony, and form, examining musical relationships at different structural levels, so that readers can grasp and compare both concertos aurally and visually.

### **Significance and State of Research**

Although Henselt’s influence on Russian piano music was substantial in the nineteenth century, it received no scholarly attention at the time. Not until the twentieth century did scholars begin to acknowledge his great contribution to the development of Russian music, including that of Rachmaninoff, especially with regard to shaping piano figuration and extending certain harmonic procedures.<sup>4</sup> It has recently been noted that Rachmaninoff derived several features from Henselt’s F minor Piano Concerto, in addition to the style of piano writing. Furthermore, it should be noted that Rachmaninoff’s famous Prelude in C-sharp minor Op. 3 No. 2 is based on the same motto of 6-5-1 (A-

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<sup>3</sup> Raymond Monelle, *The Sense of Music : Semiotic Essays*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 11, accessed February 17, 2020, <https://libproxy.library.unt.edu:2160/lib/unt/detail.action?docID=616667>.

<sup>4</sup> Richard B. Davis, “Henselt and the Russian Piano Music of his time 1.” *Musical Opinion* 138 (Oct 2014): 17.

G#-C in Rachmaninoff) as in Henselt's Concerto.<sup>5</sup>

However, there is still a paucity of studies on Henselt and the Henselt-Rachmaninoff connection. Research on Henselt has been conducted by a number of scholars, who provide general information, but most do not delve into the music of both composers in depth. Wilhelm von Lenz offers general biographies and describes some of the characteristics of Henselt's music in his book, *The Great Piano Virtuosos of Our Time*.<sup>6</sup> This author also delineates Henselt's compositional style, which developed from the "good old school" encompassing French salon-music along with German classicism. Lenz often mentions Weber and Chopin's works to compare them with Henselt's compositions. Additionally, Lenz highlights the great technical demands of Henselt's compositions, and describes his performances based on his own experience as an acquaintance. The "Henselt" section in this book helps us to understand his musical ideas and personal characteristics. Based on Bettina Walker's experiences, who was one of Henselt's pupils, Arne Steinberg also describes Henselt as a teacher, pianist and composer in his article on "Adolf von Henselt."<sup>7</sup> Steinberg focuses on how Henselt wanted students to produce varied tone colors on the piano. Henselt's Etudes are often selected to illuminate his compositional style in his piano compositions as compared with those of Chopin. Steinberg also briefly mentions Henselt's profound influence on Russian music, especially his Piano Concerto in F minor, on Rachmaninoff's C-sharp minor Prelude, which supports my hypothesis.

Most recent research on Henselt is of more practical use to my study. In his article, "I Have but Given Proof that I Might Have Been a Composer: A Formal Analysis of Henselt's Concerto for Piano and Orchestra in F Minor, Op. 16,"<sup>8</sup> Steve Lindeman presents a detailed formal analysis, comparing it to other concertos in double-exposition form. Specifically, Lindeman contextualizes the Henselt

<sup>5</sup> Steve Lindeman, "I Have but Given Proof that I Might Have Been a Composer: A Formal Analysis of Henselt's Concerto for Piano and Orchestra in F Minor, Op. 16." *Adolph Henselt und der musikkulturelle Dialog zwischen dem westlichen und östlichen Europa* 19 (2004): 229.

<sup>6</sup> Wilhelm von Lenz, *The Great Piano Virtuosos of Our Time* (London: Regency Press, 1971).

<sup>7</sup> Arne Steinberg, "Adolf von Henselt." *The piano quarterly* no.152 (1990-91): 43-9.

<sup>8</sup> Lindeman, "I Have but Given Proof," 221-235.

Concerto with reference to concertos by Mozart, Weber, Cramer, and Mendelssohn. He explains the harmonic and melodic relations between movements, analyzing musical materials of each of the themes, and the interval relations of all of the material in every single movement as well. Although Lindeman takes a different analytical approach, his study is a significant resource for my own because it is the only existing analysis of Henselt's Piano Concerto. Most recently, Richard Beattie Davis offers more details on his article "Henselt and the Russian Piano Music of His Time" illustrated with some examples of Henselt's piano works, demonstrating technical aspects which influenced other Russian composers. Particularly, this article provides a relatively detailed account of the first and second movements of Henselt's Piano Concerto and its influences. This source gives a detailed outline of Henselt's Piano Concerto and asserts its broader influence on Russian music.

Since there are relatively plentiful resources on Rachmaninoff, my discussion of the Rachmaninoff bibliography will focus primarily on sources that engage with his Second Piano Concerto. While many resources provide general biographies, some address the Second Piano Concerto in at least one chapter. For example, *Sergei Rachmaninoff, a Lifetime in Music* by S. Bertensson comprises twenty three chapters treating the main events and compositions in chronological order.<sup>9</sup> One of those chapters is devoted to the Second Piano Concerto, and delineates the concerto's compositional background by referring to letters from Rachmaninoff and his friends, acquaintances, family, etc. This account is a valuable resource for Rachmaninoff's thoughts on this concerto and the particular circumstances of its composition. Similarly, *Rachmaninoff* by Victor Seroff provides details of chronology and discusses musical influences from contemporary musicians and teachers.<sup>10</sup> Some information is more detailed and useful, such as the composer's comment on the C-sharp minor Prelude, which plays an important role in my study. Max Harrison's *Rachmaninoff: Life, Works, Recordings* is also similar to those sources, while

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<sup>9</sup> Sergei Bertensson, Jay Leyda, and Sophia Satina, *Sergei Rachmaninoff, a Lifetime in music* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001).

<sup>10</sup> Victor Seroff, *Rachmaninoff* (London: Cassell, 1951).

most frequently offering evidence of musical relationships between Henselt and Rachmaninoff.<sup>11</sup> The British composer and pianist Patrick Piggott introduces Rachmaninoff's orchestral music in his book *Rachmaninov Orchestral Music*.<sup>12</sup> Its contents consist of a discussion of eight works for orchestra including the three symphonies, along with the four piano concertos and *Rhapsody on a Theme by Paganini, Op. 43*. This source provides useful information about historical performances, and the characteristics of individual movements illustrated with musical examples. In particular, by showing how certain motivic materials are derived from Rachmaninoff's other compositions, the book affords further insight into this work.

In addition to the published sources, several dissertations deal directly with the Second Piano Concerto. "An analysis of Rachmaninoff's Concerto No. 2 in C minor Opus 18: Aids towards Performance" by So-Ham K. Chung provides useful information concerning the wider context of nineteenth-century Russian music, Rachmaninoff, and his Second Piano Concerto.<sup>13</sup> Chapter III contains a detailed explanation of how the work flows, presenting fragmentary materials of each section of each movement, but does not analyze how these musical materials are organically related. Chung also suggests technical approaches for performance which in itself is beneficial for pianists, but she does not discuss the relationship between piano techniques and analysis. "A Study of Tyzen Hsiao's Piano Concerto, Op. 53: A Comparison with Rachmaninoff's Piano concerto No. 2" by Lin-Min Chang is one of the most recent studies of Rachmaninoff's Second Piano Concerto.<sup>14</sup> However, this thesis is focused on the Piano Concerto by Tyzen Hsiao, a Taiwanese composer, suggesting ways that Hsiao was influenced by Rachmaninoff. The third chapter compares the two compositions, and the author mainly deals with the musical aspects of orchestration, structure, phrasing, piano technique, dynamics, and

<sup>11</sup> Max Harrison, *Rachmaninoff: Life, Works, Recordings* (London: Continuum, 2005).

<sup>12</sup> Patrick Piggott, *Rachmaninov Orchestral Music* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1974).

<sup>13</sup> So-Ham K. Chung, "An analysis of Rachmaninoff's Concerto No. 2 in C minor Opus 18: Aids towards Performance" (DMA diss., The Ohio State University, 1988).

<sup>14</sup> Lin-Min Chang, "A Study of Tyzen Hsiao's Piano Concerto, Op. 53: A Comparison with Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto No. 2" (DMA diss., The Ohio State University, 2018).

harmony, providing musical examples. This study explores in detail certain characteristics of the two concertos, but is far removed from systematic musical analysis. “Rachmaninoff and Russian Pianism: Performance Issues in the Piano Concerto in C minor, Opus 18”<sup>15</sup> by Natalya V. Lundtvedt, presents research on interpretive issues in the performance of the work. This thesis discusses ways to achieve textual fidelity and realize the composer’s intentions by comparing Rachmaninoff’s own recordings with the actual markings in the music. Also, the author compares other historical recordings – such as Moiseiwitsch’s, Richter’s, Cliburn’s, and Ashkenazy’s – with Rachmaninoff’s to illuminate different interpretative possibilities. For performers, this study should be regarded as an important reference alongside analytical studies.

However, none of those sources offers an in-depth analysis of Henselt’s Piano Concerto and Rachmaninoff’s Second Piano Concerto. My study will present an analysis of both, elucidating how these concertos are related by their use of the same three-note 6-5-1 motto. In addition to facilitating deeper insight into Rachmaninoff’s Second Piano Concerto, I expect my project to cast light on the forgotten composer Adolf von Henselt’s Piano Concerto in F minor, and demonstrate its influence on Rachmaninoff’s masterpiece.

## **Method**

The main body of this study will consist of an analysis of two concertos. As mentioned earlier, I will use a Schenkerian analytical methodology. This analytical method reveals how a work is “composed,” in hierarchically ordered structural levels – background, middleground, and foreground.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Natalya V. Lundtvedt, “Rachmaninoff and Russian Pianism: Performance Issues in the Piano Concerto in C minor, Opus 18” (DMA diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2008).

<sup>16</sup> Charles Burkhart, “Schenker’s Theory of Levels and Musical Performance.” *Aspects of Schenkerian Theory*, Ed. David Beach (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 95.

Ian Bent explains concerning these three structural levels:

... the ‘foreground’ contains the elements of the contrapuntal design that are immediately perceptible, eliminating only ornamentation and note repetition from the surface of the work. The ‘middleground,’ which might consist of more than one layer, presents the work without any of its surface detail, and so brings together structural elements that might be widely separated in the foreground. The ‘background’ presents the basic core, with as little as one melody note and harmonic function representing a theme or section of the work.<sup>17</sup>

The aim of my analysis is to show the development of the motto, scale degrees 6-5-1, Db-C-F in Henselt and Ab-G-C in Rachmaninoff; the Schenkerian graphs will illustrate how this motto, presented in the initial measures, is developed throughout both concertos. Example 1 shows motto and its presentation in the bass at the beginning of the Henselt; this three-note motto dominates whole concerto. Also, it operates in an analogous way in Rachmaninoff. Detailed graphs of both concertos demonstrate this point.

EX 1: Henselt's Piano Concerto mm. 1-4

As an analytical strategy, I will first present background sketches of each movement to elucidate formal and harmonic structures, beginning with Henselt's Concerto. Example 2 denotes the harmonic structure of the ritornello in the exposition of the first movement of Henselt's Concerto. Examining its bass line, it conforms to the motto by moving from the Db-bass of  $II_5^6$  (m. 49) to C as the root of V (m. 50), and F as I (m. 52). In other words, the bass here proclaims an enlargement of the motto presented in the initial measures. It is important – indeed essential – to observe that, although the second theme appears in A-flat major lasting eighteen measures (mm.32-49, see example 3 for the beginning of A-flat major area), the Ab chord does not project III as a structural harmony. Rather, this Ab chord occurs at a

<sup>17</sup> Ian Bent and William Drabkin, *Analysis* (New York: Norton, 1987), 84.



later structural level prolonging I as its “upper third,” such that the true harmonic goal becomes the  $\text{II}_5^6$  in m. 49. This structural devaluation of the  $\text{Ab}$  chord, albeit supporting the second theme, enables the  $\text{Db}$  in the bass in m. 49 to be heard as the real goal, functioning as a predominant, leading to C and F. In this way, the  $\text{Db-C-F}$  motto is projected across mm. 1-52.

I V I

measure number : 27 32 49 50 52

EX 2: Background Sketch of the 1<sup>st</sup> mvt of Henselt Concerto mm.1-52

m.30 *dim.* *p* Ab Major → *cresc.* *dim.* *pp*

EX 3: 1<sup>st</sup> mvt of Henselt Piano Concerto, mm. 30-43

For more detailed analysis, I will provide middleground and foreground sketches. Example 4 shows the middleground sketch of mm.1-32 in the first movement of Henselt's Concerto. While this passage is just the beginning of the movement, the motto persistently recurs in the bass and the upper voice, moving towards F to close certain phrases (see the red square brackets in the sketch). As the movement progresses, the motto will be transformed and transposed. Recurring statements will be identified and discussed in detail in the document.

EX 4: Middleground Sketch of mm. 1-32, 1<sup>st</sup> mvt of Henselt Piano Concerto

Since it can be shown that the compositional style of Henselt's Concerto influenced Rachmaninoff's Prelude in C-sharp minor, Op. 3 No. 2, this study will also present an analysis of the Prelude.<sup>18</sup> The discussion of this Prelude will also be focused on the three-note motto plays in the piece. Example 5 shows how the motto, A-G#-C#, occurs in the first two measures almost exactly as it is presented at the outset of Henselt's Concerto; prominent recurrences throughout the piece are indicated by red circles.

<sup>18</sup> Richard B. Davis, "Henselt and the Russian Piano Music of his Time 1." *Musical Opinion* 138 (Jan 2015): 21.

EX 5: Rachmaninoff Prelude Op. 3 No. 2 mm.1-13

The middleground sketch of mm. 1 - 44 (see example 6) delineates recurring mottos in the bass line persistently preserving the C-sharp minor tonality from the beginning to the end. Theodor Adorno in his *Quasi una Fantasia: Essays on Modern Music* remarks that “the [Rachmaninov] Prelude is just one long cadence...It parodies the passacaglia progression by taking three cadence-forming bass notes...”<sup>19</sup> One of the noteworthy features is the greatly emphasized harmonic progression spanning mm. 21-27 in which the harmony moves to VI in m. 22, then progresses to V in m. 26, and back to I in m. 27. This progression, an expansion of the motto, is a feature reminiscent of Henselt’s enlargement of the VI-V-I progression in the exposition of his concerto as demonstrated above, and – significantly – it reappears in Rachmaninoff’s Second Piano Concerto, as we shall now see (Examples 7-8).

<sup>19</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Quasi una Fantasia: Essays on Modern Music*, Trans. Rodney Livingstone (New York: Verso, 1998),

measure number:      4      6      9      14      17      21      26      27      30      35      43

EX 6: Middleground Sketch of Rachmaninoff's C# Minor Prelude, mm. 1-45

As in his C-sharp minor Prelude, Rachmaninoff states the motto at the very beginning of his Second Concerto, marking clear the commonalities between abovementioned works (see Example 7).

The image shows a musical score for the first movement of Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto, measures 1-19. The score is in 3/4 time, marked Moderato (♩ = 66). It features a piano introduction with a three-note motto (Ab-G-C) highlighted in red circles. The score includes dynamics like *pp*, *poco a poco cresc.*, and *ff con passione*, and tempo markings such as *rit.* and *a tempo*. The score is written for piano and includes a first ending bracket.

EX 7: 1<sup>st</sup> mvt of Rachmaninoff Piano Concerto, mm. 1-19

The three-note motto, Ab-G-C, is also hidden in the thematic melody and harmonies, and the graphs will reveal those elements. Example 8 demonstrates the harmonic plan of the first movement of this Concerto, focusing on its development. The development section explores various tonalities, passing through F major in bar 169, to D major in bar 177, and B-flat major from bar 181. Nevertheless, as the graph of Example 8 clearly shows, all motion is directed toward the goal in m. 201, namely the climactic German-sixth chord on G# with minor ninth (A natural), which, enharmonically, is equivalent to Ab-C-Eb-F#-Bbb. The G-sharp (really A-flat), VI, resolves to the V, the dominant in m. 227, which returns to I at the beginning of the recapitulation, recomposing the VI-V-I motto across the development.

Exposition	Development						Recap
measure number:	161	169	177	181	193	201 217 225	227

  

EX 8: Bass-Line Sketch of the 1<sup>st</sup> mvt of Rachmaninoff Piano Concerto, mm.1-245

In conjunction with this large-scale projection of the motto by the harmonic design, smaller-scale progressions delineated by the motto are also embedded, and even concealed, within the voice leading; they will be dealt with in the document. Detailed graphs of all movements of each concerto will be presented and discussed as well. Due to the characteristics of analytical method of drawing graphs horizontally, scores of two-pianos reductions will be used for convenience.

## Tentative Chapter Headings

### Chapter I. Introduction

1. Purpose of Study and State of Research
2. The Influences of Forerunners on Rachmaninoff

1) Henselt's Influence on Rachmaninoff: This chapter will introduce Henselt's musical style and trace its influence on Rachmaninoff's works. With a brief explanation of the motto in Henselt's Concerto, an analysis of Rachmaninoff's Prelude Op. 3 No. 2, the foreshadower of his Concerto No. 2, will be presented as an introductory example.

2) Taneyev's Influence on Rachmaninoff: This chapter will present information concerning Taneyev, tracing his influence on Rachmaninoff. I will provide an analysis of the first movement of Taneyev's Piano Concerto, focusing on his use of the 6-5-1 motto, which Rachmaninoff employs to his Second Piano Concerto.

### Chapter II. Analysis of Henselt's Piano Concerto Op. 16 in F minor

1. *Allegro patetico*
2. *Larghetto*
3. *Allegro agitato*

This chapter will provide an analysis of form, harmony, melody, and other elements of Henselt's Piano Concerto at various levels illustrated by Schenkerian graphs. The sections on each movement will be subdivided into background, middleground, and foreground analysis. Each graph will demonstrate how the motto develops in the work. Detailed explanations will be appended to each graph.

### Chapter III. Analysis of Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto Op. 18 in C minor

1. *Moderato*

2. *Adagio sostenuto*

3. *Allegro scherzando*

This chapter will provide an analysis of Rachmaninoff's Concerto No. 2 employing graphs with detailed descriptions, showing musical relationships with Henselt's Piano Concerto.

### Chapter IV. Conclusion

This chapter will restate the significance of studying Rachmaninoff's Second Piano Concerto in analytical perspective and examining influence of Henselt and his works. I will summarize how the famous concerto was inspired by its forerunner and the importance of knowing those relationships.



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