

Five Preludes Op. 74

by Alexander Scriabin

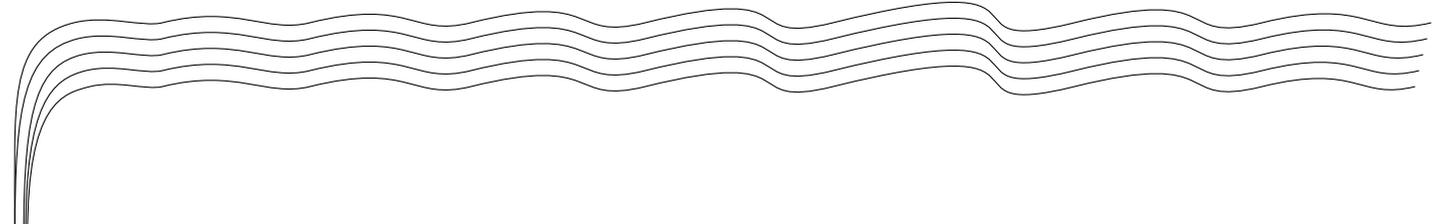
Edited by Peter Billam

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Five Preludes, Alexander Scriabin op.74, 1914

The following analysis is largely distilled from Manfred Kelkel's book *Alexandre Scriabine: Sa vie, l'ésotérisme et le langage musical dans son oeuvre*, Éditions Honoré Champion, 7 quai Malaquais, Paris, 1978. Kelkel's analysis seems to me investigative and insightful; previous analyses seem more procrustean.

Scriabin's Six, Seven, Eight, Nine, and Ten-note scales

Danilewitsch quotes Scriabin: "my melody is a decomposed harmony, and my harmony is condensed melody." The harmony notes are not a subset, selected for lower tension, of the melody notes; they are all of them. The euphony desirable in longer notes is attained by careful spacing; this in turn encourages some arpeggiation in performance, which further blurs the border between the harmonic and melodic realms. In the following they're called scales, but they could also be called chords.

The Six-note scales : (op.60 ...) Scriabin uses two kinds of six-note scale: one derived from a whole-tone scale by raising one of the notes, i.e. 2+2+2+3+1+2 semitones; the second by also lowering the opposite note (three away) from the raised one, i.e. 1+3+2+3+1+2. I will call them **6A** and **6B** respectively.

The Seven-note scales : (op.62 ...) Scriabin uses two kinds of seven-note scale: one derived from a whole-tone scale by splitting one of the notes into two, i.e. 2+2+2+1+2+1+2 semitones; the second by also lowering the opposite note (three away) from the split one, i.e. 1+3+2+1+2+1+2. I will call them **7A** and **7B** respectively.

The Eight-note scale : (op.55, 64...) Scriabin used the scale 1+2+1+2+1+2+1+2 semitones, which repeats every three semitones, has only three distinct transpositions and was later adopted by Messiaen. The eight-note chord *D# E F# G A Bb c db*, for example, I will call **8 (D#,E)**. In op.74 nos.3 and 5 the eight-note chord is used to end a section.

The Nine-note scales : (op.67 ...) Scriabin uses two, perhaps three kinds of nine-note scale: one derived from the eight-note scale by adding one of the missing notes, i.e. 1+2+1+2+1+1+1+1+2, which has twelve transpositions; the second using 2+1+1+2+1+1+2+1+1 semitones which repeats every four semitones and has only four distinct transpositions and was later adopted by Messiaen; the third with the lower half-octave in tones and the upper completely chromatic i.e. 2+2+2+1+1+1+1+1+1. I will call them **9A**, **9B** and **9C** respectively.

The Ten-note scales : (op.74) Scriabin uses two kinds of ten-note scale: one in which the missing notes are three semitones apart, i.e. 1+2+1+2+1+1+1+1+1+1 which has a lower half-octave with an eight-note character but an upper half which is completely chromatic; the other in which the missing notes are six semitones apart, i.e. 1+2+1+1+1+1+2+1+1+1 which repeats every six semitones and has only six distinct transpositions. I will call them **10A** and **10B** respectively.

Structure and rhythm

Scriabin studied composition under Georges Conyus from 1883. Georges Conyus had devised a neat method of rhythmic and metric analysis : *Le diagnose metrotectonique de la forme des organismes musicaux* which, much later in 1933, was published as a book. As Kelkel points out, Scriabin's pieces are particularly clearly shaped, when looked at with Conyus' method.

Scriabin also used palindromic (non-retrogradable) rhythms, and also many forms of augmentation or diminution, such as addition or subtraction of the dot or long/short inversion, which were later used by Messiaen.

The overall layout of the op. 74 preludes is simply, fast, slow, fast, slow, fast; and also (structurally) binary, ternary, binary, ternary, binary. As Kelkel points out, the numbers of bars of the preludes, and of neighbouring groups of the preludes, contain a significantly high proportion of the Lucas numbers: 1 3 4 7 11 18 29 47 76 etc, which is a Fibonacci-like series beginning with 1 and 3 instead of 1 and 2.

No. 4 has the old Minnesänger form of the *Bar*, as explained by *David* in Act I Scene 3 and Act III Scene 2 of the *Meistersinger*. It can also be seen as spun by repeating the last 6, 3, or 2 beats, somewhat varied (usually upwards), in a classical condensation and liquidation, leading to the recapitulation with written-out ritardandi.

Editions

In this edition the notes are right but many expression marks are not, partly through the constraints of my music-typesetting software *muscript*. Long slurs have been omitted, and the arpeggiation symbols are missing. If you're considering playing these pieces, make sure you consult a more authoritative edition.

Op.74 is not included in the Peters Edition *Band III Preludes and Poems* edited by Gunther Philipp.

In the 1967 *Muzyka* edition, reprinted by *Dover* in 1973, there seem to be misprints in:

no.1 bar 1, RH top voice 2nd-last note should be an e#, not an e

no.4 bar 9, LH third triplet-quarter-note should surely be a gb, not a g

no.5 bar 3, RH last note c# should be tied over to the first note of bar 4

no.5 bar 11, LH middle phrase, the first of the tied chords should be <G_ G> not <G_ E>

Five Preludes, Op. 74 (1914)

Douloureux, déchirant

The first system of the musical score for the first prelude. It consists of two staves: a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The tempo and mood are indicated as *p cresc. 3 molto*. The first measure of the treble staff contains a triplet of eighth notes. The bass staff has a whole note chord. The second measure features a five-fingered chord in the treble and a whole note chord in the bass. The third measure has a triplet of eighth notes in the treble and a whole note chord in the bass. The fourth measure contains a whole note chord in the treble and a whole note chord in the bass.

The second system of the musical score. The treble staff has a five-fingered chord in the first measure, followed by a whole note chord in the second measure, and a five-fingered chord in the third measure. The bass staff has a whole note chord in the first measure, followed by a whole note chord in the second measure, and a five-fingered chord in the third measure.

The third system of the musical score. The treble staff has a five-fingered chord in the first measure, followed by a whole note chord in the second measure, and a five-fingered chord in the third measure. The bass staff has a whole note chord in the first measure, followed by a whole note chord in the second measure, and a five-fingered chord in the third measure.

The fourth system of the musical score. The treble staff has a five-fingered chord in the first measure, followed by a whole note chord in the second measure, and a five-fingered chord in the third measure. The bass staff has a five-fingered chord in the first measure, followed by a whole note chord in the second measure, and a five-fingered chord in the third measure. The number 10 is written above the second measure.

The fifth system of the musical score. The treble staff has a five-fingered chord in the first measure, followed by a whole note chord in the second measure, and a five-fingered chord in the third measure. The bass staff has a whole note chord in the first measure, followed by a whole note chord in the second measure, and a five-fingered chord in the third measure. The number 15 is written above the second measure.

No. 2

Très lent, contemplatif

pp

5

10

15

pp dim. smorz.

Detailed description: This system contains the first four measures of the piece. The music is in 4/8 time and D major. The right hand features a melodic line with grace notes and slurs, while the left hand provides a harmonic accompaniment of chords and dyads. A piano (*pp*) dynamic marking is present. Measure numbers 5, 10, and 15 are indicated at the start of their respective systems.

5

Detailed description: This system contains measures 5 through 9. The right hand continues its melodic development with more complex rhythmic patterns and slurs. The left hand accompaniment remains consistent with the first system.

10

Detailed description: This system contains measures 10 through 14. The right hand features a dense, chromatic texture with many beamed notes. The left hand accompaniment continues with dyads and chords.

15

Detailed description: This system contains measures 15 through 19. The right hand continues with its intricate melodic and harmonic patterns. The left hand accompaniment provides a steady harmonic foundation.

15

pp dim. smorz.

Detailed description: This system contains measures 20 through 24, which conclude the piece. The right hand has a final melodic flourish. The left hand features a long, sustained chord in the final measure, marked with a piano (*pp*) dynamic and a *dim. smorz.* (diminuendo and *smorzando*) instruction.

Allegro drammatico

The first system of the musical score consists of two staves. The right-hand staff begins with a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a time signature of 9/8. It features a melodic line with a slur and a fermata over the first two measures, followed by a series of eighth notes. The left-hand staff starts with a bass clef and contains a rhythmic accompaniment of eighth notes. A dynamic marking *cresc...* is placed between the staves.

The second system continues the piece. The right-hand staff includes a fermata and a dynamic marking *f comme un cri*. It features a melodic line with a slur and a fermata, followed by a series of eighth notes. The left-hand staff continues with a rhythmic accompaniment. A dynamic marking *p subito* is placed between the staves. The system concludes with a dynamic marking *cresc.*

The third system of the musical score consists of two staves. The right-hand staff begins with a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a time signature of 9/8. It features a melodic line with a slur and a fermata, followed by a series of eighth notes. The left-hand staff contains a rhythmic accompaniment. A dynamic marking *10* is placed above the right-hand staff.

The fourth system of the musical score consists of two staves. The right-hand staff begins with a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a time signature of 9/8. It features a melodic line with a slur and a fermata, followed by a series of eighth notes. The left-hand staff contains a rhythmic accompaniment. A dynamic marking *dim.* is placed between the staves. The system concludes with a dynamic marking *p* and *cresc.*

15

p subito *cresc.*

20

dim.

No. 4

Lent, vague, indécis

p cresc... pochiss.

3

3

5

10

3

3

dim. accel. rit.

15

20

Fier, belliqueux

First system of the musical score for 'Fier, belliqueux'. The piece is in 3/2 time. The right hand features a melodic line with sixteenth-note runs, marked with a piano (*p*) dynamic and a *cresc...* instruction. It includes sixteenth-note triplets and a triplet of eighth notes. The left hand provides a rhythmic accompaniment with chords and moving lines, including a descending fifth-finger scale in the final measure.

Second system of the musical score. The right hand continues with melodic motifs, including a triplet of eighth notes. The left hand features chords and moving lines, with a descending fifth-finger scale in the final measure.

Third system of the musical score, starting with the tempo marking *5 impérieux*. The right hand has a melodic line with a triplet of eighth notes. The left hand features chords and moving lines, including a triplet of eighth notes.

Fourth system of the musical score. The right hand features a melodic line with a triplet of eighth notes. The left hand features chords and moving lines, including a triplet of eighth notes.

6 6 6 3 10

p *cresc...*

5 5

This system contains the first two measures of the piece. The right hand features sixteenth-note runs with slurs and accents, marked with a '6' above the notes. The left hand plays a steady accompaniment of eighth notes. The first measure is marked *p* and *cresc...*. The system ends with a measure marked '10' and a '3' above the notes, followed by two measures with a '5' below the notes.

6 6 6 3

p *cresc...*

5 5

This system contains the next two measures. The right hand continues with sixteenth-note runs, marked with a '6' above the notes. The left hand accompaniment remains consistent. The first measure is marked *p* and *cresc...*. The system ends with a measure marked '3' above the notes, followed by two measures with a '5' below the notes.

3

3

This system contains the next two measures. The right hand features a triplet of eighth notes, marked with a '3' above the notes. The left hand accompaniment continues. The first measure is marked with a '3' above the notes.

15

This system contains the next two measures. The right hand features a sequence of chords, marked with a '15' above the notes. The left hand accompaniment continues.

f

This system contains the final two measures. The right hand features a descending sixteenth-note run, marked with a '*f*' below the notes. The left hand accompaniment continues. The system ends with a measure marked with a '*f*' below the notes.

Five Preludes, Op. 74 (1914)

Alexander Scriabin

Douloureux, déchirant

p cresc. ³ *molto*

5 3

7 7

The first system consists of two staves. The upper staff is in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 3/4 time signature. It begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic and a *crescendo* marking. The tempo is marked *molto*. The music features a triplet of eighth notes in the first measure, followed by a five-measure phrase with a slur and a '5' above it, and a three-measure phrase with a slur and a '3' above it. The lower staff is in bass clef with the same key signature and time signature. It features a seven-measure phrase with a slur and a '7' below it, followed by another seven-measure phrase with a slur and a '7' below it.

First section:
10A (no B or D)

10A (no D or F)

6-beat phrase, 7 melody-notes . . .

12-beat phrase, 7 notes

The first section is shown as two horizontal lines of musical notation. The left line represents a 6-beat phrase with 7 melody notes, and the right line represents a 12-beat phrase with 7 notes.

5

The second system consists of two staves. The upper staff is in treble clef with a key signature of two flats (Bb, Eb) and a 3/4 time signature. It features a five-measure phrase with a slur and a '5' above it. The lower staff is in bass clef with the same key signature and time signature. It features a five-measure phrase with a slur and a '5' above it.

10A (no G# or B)

The second section is shown as a horizontal line of musical notation representing a 6-beat phrase with 7 melody notes.

The third system consists of two staves. The upper staff is in treble clef with a key signature of two flats (Bb, Eb) and a 3/4 time signature. It features a five-measure phrase with a slur and a '5' above it. The lower staff is in bass clef with the same key signature and time signature. It features a five-measure phrase with a slur and a '5' above it.

10A (no B or D)

10A (no F or G#)

Second section:

6-beat phrase, 7 melody-notes . . .

6-beat phrase, 7 melody-notes . . .

The second section is shown as two horizontal lines of musical notation. The left line represents a 6-beat phrase with 7 melody notes, and the right line represents a 6-beat phrase with 7 melody notes.

Coda :
10A (no G# or B)

12-beat phrase, 3 melody-notes repeated 3 times . . .

7-beat phrase, 3 melody-notes

So the phrase-lengths, in notes, are : 7, 7, 7, 7, 3x3, 3

Très lent, contemplatif

Opening section:

9A (added F)

Second section:

9A (added B)

9A (added F)

2 bars, 7 notes ...

4 bars ...

5

9A (added D)

+ E#
passing note, or

Central section:

9A (added B)

10A (missing G#,B)

4 bars ...

10

9A (added F)

8 (F,Gb)

9A (added F)

9A (added D)

+ E#, G#
passing notes

Fourth section:
8 (F,Gb) 9A (added F) 9A (added G#) 9A (added F)

4 bars . . .

15

pp *dim.* *smorz.*

Final section:
9A (added B) 9A (added F)

2 bars . . .

So the phrase-lengths, in bars, are symmetrical : 2, 4, 4, 4, 2

Allegro drammatico

7-note phrase
9A (added G#)

cresc...

9A (added D)

First section : 12 bars ...

f comme un cri

p subito

cresc.

9A (added G#)

9A (added F)

10

9A (added D)

8 (D#,E) closes off the section ...

dim.

p

cresc.

9A (added D)

Second section : 12 bars ...

No. 4

Lent, vague, indécis

p cresc... pochiss.

3

9B (C#,D#,E) 8 (D#,E) 8 (F,Gb) 9B (C#,D#,E) 9B (C,D,Eb) 9B (C#,D#,E)

5

3

8 (D#,E) 8 (F,Gb) 9B (C#,D#,E) 9B (C,D,Eb) 9B (C#,D#,E)

10

3

3

9B (C,D,Eb) 9B (C#,D#,E) non-scale passing notes 9B (C,D,Eb) 9B (C#,D#,E)

3

3

dim.

accel.

15

rit.

... 9B (C#,D#,E) sempre ...

passing -notes

passing -notes

3

3

dim.

accel.

15

rit.

... 9B (C#,D#,E) sempre ...

20

3

3

dim.

accel.

rit.

8 (D#,E) 8 (F,Gb) 9B (C,D,Eb) 8 (E,F) 8 (D#,E)

Fier, belliqueux

Bar 1 RH 5/3 faster

7A (B split to Bb, c)

6A (C# up to D)

6A (A up to Bb)

6B (also Eb down to Ebb)

7A (G split to Gb, Ab)

6A (A up to A#)

6A (F up to F#)

6B (also B down to Bb)

5 *impéieux*

8 (C, C# etc)

eight-note chord used to end the section . . .

Two percentage signs (%) are located on a lower staff below the grand staff.

7A (B split to Bb, c) 6A (C# up to D) 6A (A up to Bb) 6B (also Eb down to Ebb)

7A (C# split to C, D) 6A (D# up to E) 6A (B up to C) 6B (also F down to Fb)

Peter Billam was born in London in 1948, studied piano, and lived in Switzerland from 1973 to 1983, where he studied composition, classical guitar, flute and voice, worked as Musical Director of the *Théâtre Populaire Romand*, and as recording engineer, record producer and computer programmer. He moved to Tasmania in 1983, lectured in composition at the Conservatorium, conducted recorder ensembles and choirs, studied recorder, voice and harpsichord. He founded **www.pjb.com.au**, becoming the first composer to sell scores on-line, with on-line delivery, taking scores from Composer to Performer in one immediate step. *Www.pjb.com.au* offers a new approach to music publishing. These pieces are **written to be read, made to be played !**

Compositions at *www.pjb.com.au* include: *Five Short Pieces*, guitar, 1979; *Divisions on an Italian Ground*, flute and guitar, 1980; *De Profundis* and *Nacht*, on poems by Lama Anagarika Govinda, voice and piano, 1980; *Fünf Bagatellen*, piano, 1980; *Five Rounds*, choir, 1986; *Go Forth and Multiply*, choir, 1986; *Three Violin Duets*, 1987; *Fable*, for piano, 1987; *To Erich Jantsch*, SAATB recorders, 1988; *A Suite of Curves*, trombone (or horn) and piano, 1990; *Two Recorder Duets*, alto recorders, or other melody instruments, 1991; *Trombone Quintet*, trombone, flute, piano, bass, and percussion, 1994; *Three Songs*, on poems by Jack Kerouac, Vikram Seth and Dylan Thomas, voice and piano (only the first and third of these are available), 1994; *Piano Study*, piano, 1994; *Four Dances*, various ensembles including recorder quartet, string quartet, 1995; *The Poet in the Clouds*, on a poem by S. T. Coleridge, SATB choir, 1995; *Tres Casidas del Diván del Tamarit*, on poems by Federico García Lorca, voice and piano, 1997; *Three Suites*, for the solo line, piano, and piano and a solo line, 2000; *Die Zeiten*, on poems by Kästner, Bachman and Jünger, choir (only the second and third of these are available), 2000; *Three Duets* for flutes, 2001; *For Four Hands* for piano four hands, 2002; *Three Preludes* for piano, 2003; *Second Solo Suite* for flute, violin, viola or cello, 2003; *Guitar Duet* for two guitars, 2006; *We Who Mourn* for choir, 2007; *Trio With Guitar* for guitar and two clarinets or two recorders or two violas, 2008; *Canons* for two- and four-hand piano, 2009; *Flute Trio*, 2012; *Keyboard Studies*, 2013.

Arrangements include: By J. S. Bach: *Trio BWV 655*, piano and flute; *Vor deinen Thron BWV 668*, piano; *Fugue in F minor BWV 689*, SATB recorders; *Four Duets BWV 802-5*, keyboard; *Flute Sonata BWV 1031* transposed into G major for alto recorder and keyboard; *Flute Sonata BWV 1032* completed by Peter Billam for flute and keyboard, also in C major for alto recorder, and in G major for descant; *Ricercare a 3*, from the *Musikalisches Opfer* for keyboard; *Ricercare a 6*, for sSATBG recorders, or strings, or two keyboards; *Fuga Canonica in Epidiapente* for keyboard and melody instrument; from the *Art of Fugue: Contrapuncti 1, 4 and 9* for keyboard, and *Contrapunctus 14* as completed by D. F. Tovey, for keyboard, or for SATB recorders, or for strings; *Passacaglia and Fugue in c* for piano four hands; *Chorales with Descant* for melody instrument and piano; *Cello Suites I, II and III* for flute or alto recorder, *Forty Chorales* for piano, *Der Geist hilft* for SATB-SATB recorders. By Johannes Brahms: *Fugue in Ab minor for organ*, for SATB recorders and gamba, in A minor; *Choralvorspiele for organ* plus settings by Isaac, Bach, Praetorius, recorders. *John Carr*, *Divisions on an Italian Ground*, flute or recorder and guitar. By G. F. Händel: *Concerto Grosso in A minor op 6 no 4*, harpsichord and recorders; *Recorder Sonata in Bb no 5*, in G for tenor recorder and keyboard. *Claudio Monteverdi*, *Ecco Mormorar l'Onde*, SSATB recorders. By Arnold Schoenberg: *Verklärte Nacht* for piano. By Franz Schubert: *Four Songs*, voice and guitar; *Dances*, recorders and guitar, *Dances*, piano 4 hands. *Scriabin*, *Two Preludes op.67*; *Five Preludes op.74*, piano. *Telemann*, *Twelve Flute Fantasias*, recorder. *John Wilbye*, *Draw on sweet Night*, SSATB recorders, and for flute choir. *Twelve Italian Songs*, voice and guitar; *Fourteen Folk Dance Tunes*, recorder and guitar; *Bushband Dances*, violin, piano accordeon and banjo; *Easy Classical Pieces*, Bb trumpet and piano.

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