

Development of Russian Piano School and Techniques Used in Russian Piano Education

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ABSTRACT

Throughout the history of classical music piano, various schools have emerged, often named after cities such as London, Vienna, and Hamburg. Today, it is widely accepted that there are three major piano schools: the French, German, and Russian schools. This study briefly mentions the history of Russian classical music and the development of the piano school in the country. It explores the individuals who played a significant role in this process and the techniques they employed in piano education. The main objective of the study is to determine the development of the piano school in Russia, the key influencers in this process, and the techniques used in piano education. The study employed a literature review and semi-structured interviews. As a result of the study it can be said that many important artists and teachers, especially Anton and Nicolai Rubinstein, created a classical music culture and tradition in Russia. Piano education based on a solid foundation, combined with the musical talent of the Russian nation, has enabled Russia to become one of the leading countries in piano performance today.

Keywords: Russian piano school, Russian piano education, Russian piano technique

INTRODUCTION

In the realm of contemporary classical piano performance, Russian pianists are widely regarded as more prominent than their international counterparts. The Russian school of piano performance, characterized by unique techniques and musical interpretations, distinguishes itself from other schools. It is worth noting that Russia began its classical music tradition later than many other European countries. Although they were not part of the chronological development of Classical music, such as the Renaissance, Baroque, and Classical periods, they still produced great composers and performers who made history.

Classical music in Russia originated in the 1730s when Tsarina Anna Ivanovna invited an Italian opera company to perform for her court (Britannica, 2023). Although the Conservatory in 1866. They both applied the education they received in the conservatories they founded upon returning to Russia and contributed to the training of valuable Russian musicians.

During the 18th century, Saint Petersburg was a renowned artistic center frequently visited by musicians. Some came solely for concerts or brief lectures, while others extended their short-term visits and resided in Saint Petersburg for an extended period. In 1839, Sigismund Thalberg (1812-1871) visited for a short period. Alexander Dreyschock (1818-1869) visited in 1840-41, followed by Franz Liszt in 1842, Clara and Robert Schumann in 1844, and Hector Berlioz in 1847 (Taylor, 2007: 22). Johann Nepomuk Hummel (1778-1837), Nicola Paganini (1782-1840), and Karol Lipinski (1790-

1861) also visited during this time (Samson, 1996: 24). Long-term visitors to the area included several important musical figures, such as Max Erdmannsdörffer (1848-1905), Hans von Bülow (1830-1894), the Irish piano virtuoso and composer John Field (1782-1837), and the piano virtuoso and teacher Theodor Leschetizky (1830-1915). Leschetizky would later play a significant role in Anton Rubinstein's life.

In the 19th century, various influential figures came to or settled in Russia and contributed to the development of education and music. While they represented different schools, it can be assumed that the Russian piano school was initially influenced by them. However, over time, the Russian piano school has taken its current form within the framework of its own cultural and musical understanding. Russian piano performances often emphasise perfect technique and melody, creating a singing-like performance. This ideology of perfect

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playing emerged during the Soviet period, where music was used as a propaganda tool and Russia was closed off from the outside world.

Purpose of the Study

The aim of this study is to provide information on the development of the Russian piano school, including the influential educators, musicians, and institutions, as well as the methods and techniques used in Russian piano education.

METHOD

This is a descriptive research study based on a literature review. Due to the lack of sources in Turkish, foreign theses, articles, and books were examined. Additionally, experts in the field were interviewed using a semi-structured interview form. The collected data were then systematically processed and interpreted. During the interviews, expert opinions were obtained and the interview questions were finalized after incorporating the corrections and suggestions provided by the experts.

Development of the Russian Piano School

Anton Rubinstein (1829-1894)

Anton Rubinstein is considered the central figure in Russian music due to his contributions to the history of Russian classical music and education, as well as his vision. His schools produced many famous performers, composers, conductors, and musicians, including Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893), Sergei Rachmaninov (1873-1943), and Dmitri Shostakovich (1906-1975). Rubinstein was an accomplished pianist, educator, and composer. The current state of Russian music is attributed to his pioneering and innovative thinking.

Anton Grigoryevich Rubinstein started his piano lessons with his mother Kaleriya Khristoforovna. Later, his mother took him and his brother to Alexander Villoing (1808-1878), a piano teacher who was one of John Field's most valued students (Taylor, 2007:8). In 1839, after his public recital in Moscow, he performed concerts with Villoing in Paris, London, Holland, Germany, and Sweden in 1840 (Britannica, 2023). During a visit to Paris in 1941, Chopin played Anton Rubinstein the manuscript of his Op. 36 No. 2 Impromptu. Rubinstein remembered this experience for the rest of his life (Taylor, 2007:13, 285). Rubinstein's musical talent is widely recognized, and he and his brother Nikolai were sent to Berlin to study music, which was a common path for Russians seeking higher education and music training at the time (Kofman, 2001:14-16).

In 1844, he traveled with his mother and brother Nikolai to Berlin, where they stayed until 1848. Berlin was the center

of the Jewish Haskala, an 18th and 19th-century Jewish enlightenment, and the city where Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1886), Felix Mendelssohn's grandfather, lived. Therefore, it can be said that his mother chose this city for her education. Another possible reason for choosing Berlin could have been the presence of Giacomo Meyerbeer, a renowned opera composer of the time, and Felix Bartholdy Mendelssohn (1809-1847), who served as the director of the Berlin Opera during the 1943-1944 season (although he was rarely able to visit Berlin due to his newly established music academy in Leipzig and his role as conductor at the Gewandhaus) (Taylor, 2007: 17). Meyerbeer and Mendelssohn, who took a keen interest in the Rubinstein brothers' education, decided that Anton Rubinstein, who was about 16 years old, was capable of developing his piano playing on his own. They determined that only his brother Nikolai needed piano lessons from Theodor Kullak, a pupil of Siegfried Dehn. Both brothers were enrolled in theory lessons with Siegfried Dehn, the renowned theory teacher in Berlin. Glinka had also taken lessons from Dehn in the 1830s (Taylor, 2007: 18).

Anton Rubinstein studied and composed in Europe, particularly in Berlin and Vienna, where he absorbed musical impressions and the spirit of his academic environment. However, the Revolution of 1848 forced him to return to Russia. For the next five years, he mainly taught at the Imperial court in Saint Petersburg and gave frequent concerts. His most loyal patroness was the Grand Duchess Elena Pavlovna, sister-in-law of Tsar Nicholas I. By 1852, Anton Rubinstein had become one of the prominent figures in the musical life of Saint Petersburg. He performed as a soloist and collaborated with some of the leading artists who came to the Russian capital (Sachs, 1982: 69). In the same year, Rubinstein's first opera, 'Dmitry Donskoy', was staged at the Bolshoi Theater in Saint Petersburg. However, only the overture of the opera has survived. Taylor (2007: 56-59) notes that the composer later performed and conducted many of his works, including the original four-movement Ocean Symphony, the Second Piano Concerto, and several solo works, before going abroad again.

Russian Music Society (1859)

The period of great reforms in Russian history is commonly referred to as the time following the demise of Nicholas I in 1855 and the accession of his son Alexander II (r. 1855-81) as Tsar (Taylor, 2007: 82). In 1859, Anton Rubinstein returned to Saint Petersburg and, with the assistance of Grand Duchess Elena Pavlovna (Tsar Alexander II's aunt), founded the Russian Music Society. The society aimed to improve the standard of music in the country and promote music education (Warrack, 1973:33). Rubinstein's presence as a pianist and composer brought great prestige to the Russian

Music Society. (Brown, 1978: 59-60) notes that Rubinstein possessed unusual qualities for a musician born in Russia at the time.

The Russian Music Society held its inaugural concert in 1859. The program, conducted by Anton Rubinstein, featured Glinka's 'Ruslan and Lyudmila', Beethoven's Eighth Symphony, a fragment from Mendelssohn's 'Loreley', and the final movement of Handel's oratorio 'Jephtha'. Rubinstein also performed his own composition, Piano Concerto No. 3, accompanied by the orchestra conducted by Carl Schuberth (Taylor, 2007: 85). The open music lessons that began to be given within the scope of the Russian Music Association were more important than the concerts. They enabled students to rise to the rank of professor (Poznansky, 1991: 62). Before the establishment of the Russian Music Society, there was no music school in Russia that provided basic vocational education in music. At that time, music education was limited to the homes of the aristocracy and private schools. In summary, there were few native Russian musicians and artists. Typically, classical music concerts were performed by foreign musicians, particularly Germans (Brown, 1978: 60). In 1860, Nikolai Rubinstein and Prince Nikolai Petrovich Troubetzkoy established the Moscow branch of the Russian Music Society in Rubinstein's home with the assistance and encouragement of his brother Anton. The branch was so successful that it had to relocate to a larger venue to expand its activities (Warrack, 1973:42).

Saint Petersburg Conservatory (1862)

On 17th October 1861, the Conservatory statute was published. The first paragraph states that a music school will be established under the auspices of the Russian Musical Society to provide education in all disciplines of musical art. The school is under the direct patronage of Her Majesty the Grand Duchess Yelena Pavlovna, on the same level as the Society. Rubinstein desired the new institution to be known as a conservatory, but the government objected to the foreign-sounding word and insisted on calling it a 'school'. The title 'conservatory' was not officially adopted until 1873 (Taylor, 2007: 97).

It is believed that the establishment of the St. Petersburg Conservatory in 1862 by A. Rubinstein was met with disapproval from several composers and school owners. According to Maes, Mily Balakirev (1837-1910) vehemently opposed the academy. He believed that academic training was of no assistance to musical imagination and even posed a threat. This concern was not unfounded, as Rubinstein's lack of technical training was evident in his attitude towards music, which was merely a rationalization for his own shortcomings.

Musicians, including M. Balakirev and supporters of the Free Music School, founded to promote Russian national music, were concerned that A. Rubinstein's music school, which was established under German influence, would impede the development of Russian classical music. Rubinstein and Balakirev became sworn rivals. Balakirev's attitude towards Anton Rubinstein was due to Rubinstein's 1855 article in which he criticised M. Glinka. Musorgsky also joined in the criticism and condemned the Saint Petersburg Conservatory, Rubinstein, and Nikolai Zarembo (1821-1979), stating that they 'wore professional, anti-musical togas' and 'first polluted the minds of their students and then sealed them with various abominations' (Maes, 1996: 39). Rubinstein wrote in his autobiography, 'I am a Christian for Jews, a Jew for Christians, a Russian for Germans, a German for Russians, an innovator for classicists, a classicist for innovators, etc. Conclusion: Neither fish nor meat. I am a poor person' (Rubinstein, 1983: 186).

During the 19th century in Russia, the nobility commonly used French in both education and daily life. In his autobiography, Anton Rubinstein, who was accused of having foreign sympathies, stated that he gave theory lessons in Russian at the Petersburg Conservatory. This caused surprise and confusion among the students (Rubinstein, 1983: 91).

The initial faculty of the Saint Petersburg Conservatory included the following individuals:

Piano: Anton Rubinstein, Alexander Dreyschok, and Anton Gerke, along with their assistants Frants Czerny, Pavel Petersen, and Karl Karlovich Fan Ark

- Music theory: Nikolay Zarembo, Otto Deutsch, and Konstantin Lyadov
- Violin: Henryk Wieniawski
- Cello: Carl Schuberth
- Double Bass: Ivan Ferrero
- Flute: Cesare Ciardi
- Oboe: Johann Heinrich Luft
- Clarinet: Ernesto Cavallini
- Bassoon: Krankenhagen
- French Horn and Trumpet: Hermann Metzdorf
- Harp: Albert Heinrich Zabel
- Organ: Heinrich Stiehl
- Singing: Henrietta Nissen-Saloman, Gamieri; Catalano; and Piccioli
- Other Teachers: Karl Davidov and Theodor Leschetizky (Taylor, 2007: 101).

Anton Rubinstein was involved in the school as an administrator and teacher, but did not establish his own class. His series of concerts were significant for student education. Rubinstein emphasised the romantic approach to piano performance, a key characteristic of the Russian piano school that remains influential today. Beginning with Anton Rubinstein, the Russian school is characterised by spontaneity rather than analysis. It is oriented towards feelings and intuition rather than cold, impersonal rationality. In fact, the romantic spontaneity that became one of the defining characteristics of the Russian school was derived from Anton Rubinstein's playing (Kofman, 2001:18).

In addition to A. Rubinstein, Theodor Leschetizky was also a significant figure in the St. Petersburg school and played a crucial role in training important pianists. One of Leschetizky's students was Vladimir Puhalsky, who was instrumental in establishing the Kiev Conservatory and later taught there for an extended period. Boris Ivorsky and Leonid Nikolaev, students of Puhalsky, were prominent teachers at the Leningrad Conservatory, which was originally known as the Saint Petersburg Conservatory but was renamed after the revolution. Leschetizky's students in Vienna after he left Russia included Ignaz Friedman (1882-1948), Ignacy Jan Paderewski (1860-1941), and Artur Schnabel (1882-1951) (Kofman, 2001:19).

Moscow Conservatory (1866)

Nikolai Rubinstein, brother of Anton Rubinstein, founded and served as the director of the Moscow Conservatory from 1864 until his death. Nikolai was a renowned pianist of his time, known not only for his brother's success but also for his own tremendous emotional intensity that inspired incredible images and creative fantasies (Alekseev, 1948: 233). Anton Rubinstein achieved great success with the St. Petersburg Conservatory, while his younger brother Nikolai Rubinstein (1853-1881) gave theory and choral lessons at the Moscow branch of the Russian Musical Society, which he had founded in 1860 with his brother's encouragement. In 1863, he also began teaching piano. The lessons gradually expanded, and in 1866, the Moscow Conservatory was established. On the recommendation of Liszt, the founding teachers were invited by N. Rubinstein. These teachers included pianist Joseph Wieniawski, who was a piano student of Liszt, and violinist Ferdinand Laub and cellist Bernhard Cossmann, both of whom had played in the orchestra when Liszt was conducting in Weimar (Zenkin, 2001: 98).

N. Rubinstein recruited several notable individuals, such as pianists Karl Klindworth (1830-1916), Anton Door (1833-1919), and Rafael Joseffy (1852-1915), vocal educator Giacomo

Galvani (1825-1889), renowned composer Piotr Tchaikovsky (1840-1893), and Nikolai Hubert (1840-1888), who later became a professor of theory and succeeded N. Rubinstein as the director of the Conservatory. In 1871, Nikolai Zverev (1832-1893), a renowned pianist and piano teacher whose students included Sergei Rachmaninov (1873-1943) and Alexander Scriabin (1872-1915), joined the staff of the Moscow Conservatory. The first curriculum for piano lessons and classes at the Conservatory was written by N. Rubinstein, Anton Door (1833-1919), and Alexander Dubuque (1812-1898). Dubuque was one of J. Field's best students and Balakriev's teacher (Wan, 2016: 64-65). The curriculum comprised three groups of works: Classical works (including Beethoven, Schumann, Mendelssohn, Hummel, and Bach), virtuoso works (such as those by Liszt, Friedrich Kullak, Hummel, and Weber), and works that are significant in the piano repertoire (such as Mendelssohn's *Lieder ohne Worte*, Field or Chopin's Nocturnes, and Schubert-Liszt transcriptions). N. Rubinstein's education included intensive technical training in touch sensitivity and tone production, in addition to the traditional teaching of the music of the Russian Orthodox Church. At the early years of the Conservatory, instrumental training lasted for 6 years. However, in 1879, it was extended to 9 years for pianists, violinists, and cellists (Barnes, 2008: xvii).

At the Moscow Conservatory, pianists received instruction in accompaniment and chamber music in addition to instrumental lessons, similar to the program at the St. Petersburg Conservatory. However, N. Rubinstein believed that this was insufficient and introduced additional lessons in sight-reading, transposition, theory, and analysis (Wan: 2016: 65).

Anton Arensky (1861-1906), a contemporary of Rachmaninov and a graduate of the Saint Petersburg Conservatory, said the following: "When I moved from the St. Petersburg Conservatory to Moscow, I noticed a significant difference in the theory classes. In St. Petersburg, there was no discipline in classes other than the main one, and they were not taken seriously. Consequently, students did not learn much from these lessons. In contrast, every lesson in Moscow was taken very seriously. Even a lazy student at the Moscow Conservatory could outperform a good student at the Petersburg Conservatory. This was because non-major courses were taught by Tchaikovsky." (Arensky, 1898:161).

Techniques Used in Russian Piano Education

The Russian piano school was formed by Anton Rubinstein's approach to musicality in performance and the application of Theodore Leschetizky's technical principles from an early age through a rigorous and continuous program of discipline. A

strong command of the instrument, the ability to produce an emotional singing tone, and especially a command of the vast piano repertoire from Beethoven to the late Romantics, and the idea that playing the instrument is not an end in itself, but a means of conveying emotions through music, are the most striking characteristics of Russian pianists (Wallace, 1976: 15).

How to sit on the piano

When analysing the seating recommendations of 19th-century pianists and piano teachers, three important elements emerge: the height of the piano stool, the distance between the stool and the piano, and body movement (Chang, 1994:9). Leschetizky suggested that the stool should be slightly higher than the keyboard (Bree, 1902:1), while Anton Rubinstein suggested that the elbow should be in line with the keyboard (Droucker, 1908:359). Isabella Vengerova (1877-1906), a graduate of the St. Petersburg Conservatory and professor of piano at the Curtis Institute, suggested an alternative approach to hand positioning. According to Vengerova, aligning the thumb and wrist when pressing the keys, rather than aligning the arms with the keyboard, would result in a more comfortable performance (Schick, 1982: 22).

Vengerova also suggested that the pianist should sit far enough away from the keyboard so that the right hand can comfortably reach the low keys and the left hand can comfortably reach the high keys (Schick, 1982:22). For the distance between the stool and the piano, Leschetizky suggested that the student's arms should be able to bend comfortably and the feet should be able to reach the pedal. In addition, Leschetizky emphasized that the body should bow with arm movement, while not allowing the body to lean too close to the keyboard or lean backwards, or excessive facial expressions during performance (Bree, 1902:1). Anton Rubinstein, on the other hand, for body movement on the piano, does not allow the body to lean forward in difficult passages of the piece (Chang, 1994: 9).

Hand Position

The Russian piano school emphasises the importance of hand position, including finger placement, wrist movements, and various techniques.

Anton Rubinstein believed that wrist movement was the most crucial element of technique and advocated for a relaxed hand position without squeezing. According to Rubinstein, the fingers should be curled, forming an arc and staying close to the keys. He also discouraged raising the wrist, as it could impede finger movement (Jordan 1992: 25).

Leschetizky stated that a good hand position requires a flexible wrist, a muscular palm, and stiff fingertips. Like A. Rubinstein, Leschetizky supports the idea that the fingers

should curl into an arc shape. This allows the keys to be pressed vertically without breaking the fingertips, and the wrist can remain at a lower level than the tops of the fingers. However, the thumb should be pressed with the tip touching the edge of the keys, and the joint (the first joint above the nail) should be bent (Chang, 1994:11). According to Keduk (2023), in the Russian school of piano playing, the force applied to the keys should originate from the shoulders and move down to the fingertips, with small wrist movements used to press the keys to the bottom. It is important to maintain a clear and logical structure when explaining technical concepts.

Musical Understanding

It is worth noting that Russian composers often explore themes of Romanticism, passion, and love in their works. The expression in Russian music is both broad and extensive, as exemplified by the works of Rahmaninov and Tchaikovsky. The use of long phrases in their compositions symbolizes the vastness of the Russian Empire. As the Russians considered their country to be a mighty and powerful state, they wrote their music in grandiose forms and with magnificent structures (Szymczak, 2023). In Russian schools, performance is based on singing and keyboard skills. This is related to choir performances (Ünalı, 2023). Russian performances are often described as more romantic, pastoral, and passionate compared to other schools (K. Basmacıoğlu, 2023).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Russian Classical Music originated in the 19th century, during the Romantic period. This skipped the previous periods and may have contributed to the Russians' weaker grasp of the style compared to other nations. Glinka and the Rubinstein brothers were prominent composers during this time. According to Keduk (2023), the Russians skipped periods such as Renaissance, Baroque and Classical and started Classical music from the Romantic period. This resulted in them not mastering the genres and forms characteristic of these periods, such as counterpoint, polyphony, form and style, and consequently, they were unable to fully comprehend many important aspects. Classical music spread in Tsarist Russia due to its origin in the palace and subsequent support from Czarina Catherine, as well as the establishment of national conservatories. The post-revolutionary Soviet government also embraced and supported this music. Similarly, Szymczak (2023) argues that the grandeur of Russian composers' works in terms of form and harmony is attributed to the country's powerful state. This allowed for rapid progress in this genre of music despite a late start, resulting in the emergence of valuable composers and performers.

The Russian piano school is characterised by a romantic approach to the works and a performance style that emphasises the singing quality of the keyboard (cantabile). According to Keduk (2023), playing the piano is considered a singing tool for Russians. The most important aspect is to extract the melody and create beautiful musical phrases, regardless of the piece's period. Similarly, Ünalı (2023) suggests that extending the sounds during piano performance brings singing on the keyboard, which is related to choral culture.

Keduk (2023) stated that the three fulcrum points of the Russian piano technique are the feet, hips, and back. He emphasized the importance of bringing power comfortably from the feet to the hips, then to the back, and finally to the arms and fingertips. In contrast, K. Basmacıoğlu (2023) argued that power should be transferred from the shoulder to the fingertips, with all weight gathered on a single fingertip. Additionally, it is important to keep the arms, elbows, and wrists relaxed while performing. Faryniarz (2023) emphasises that technique is a personal matter, and that there may be differences in sitting and hand positions between performers. The most important element in performance is the sound and tone understanding.

The Russian piano school is characterised by virtuosic and cantabile performance, legato phrases played in an elongated manner, and a thorough study of the piece. The Russian state's support for this genre of music, despite their late introduction to classical music, not only made them among the best in the world but also enabled the Russian piano school to be used as an educational tool globally. The Saint Petersburg Conservatory and the Moscow Conservatory (Tchaikovsky Conservatory) are among the world's top music schools today. They were established as part of the classical music reform.

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