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Underestimated Music of Sergei Rachmaninoff

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Annotated bibliography

Bakulina, Olga. “The Problem of Tonal Disunity in Rachmaninoff’s “All Night Vigil,” Op.37.” Phd Diss., The City University of New York, 2015.

The dissertation covers in great detail one of Rachmaninoff’s most famous pieces, the ‘All night Vigil’. The issues that are covered in the paper concern the use of style, tonality, technique, and genre in the piece. These elements are crucial to understanding Rachmaninoff’s compositional style and the idea of him being “too advanced” for his own time. Furthermore, they provide certain answers on why the composer’s works could be misunderstood and, therefore, underestimated by the contemporaries.

Bertensson, Sergei and Jay Leyda. *Sergei Rachmaninoff: A Lifetime in Music*. New York: New York University Press, 1956.

This source is extremely valid as Sophia Satina to whom Rachmaninoff was a brother in law greatly assisted in writing the book. While the book outlines the composer’s biography, it does so in a very detailed manner. Moreover, the first half of the book is focused on the composer’s years in Russia, while the second half outlines his years in the US. That being said, the source is crucial in comparing his compositional styles, lifestyles, and reception in the two periods.

Campbell, Stuart. *Russians on Russian Music, 1880-1917*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

This book is an anthology of writings on Russian music from 1880 to 1917. Since this time frame ends with the year of the Bolshevik Revolution, the source is extremely crucial in

understanding both the reasons that prompted Rachmaninoff to leave Russia (Soviet Union at the time), as well as the views that the Russian people had on the music of the time and his music in particular. The source marks the crucial period in the composer's life right before his immigration to the United States.

Flanagan, William. "Sergei Rachmaninoff: A Twentieth-Century Composer." *Tempo*, no. 22 (Winter 1952), pp. 4-8.

The article among many others discusses the reasons why Rachmaninoff's music was so controversial. Suggesting that the Rachmaninoff's music was widely ignored by the twentieth-century critical minds, Flanagan labels Rachmaninoff's music as being a "Post-Romantic eclecticism." Flanagan further discusses the short forms that were composed by Rachmaninoff with analyses of their structure. The source is helpful in seeing certain limiting aspects of Rachmaninoff's compositional style and its possible effects on his reception.

Garcia, E. E. "Rachmaninoff's Emotional Collapse and Recovery: The First Symphony and its Aftermath." *Psychoanalytic Review* 91, no. 2 (2004), pp 221-38.

The article talks about the impact that the premiere of his *First Symphony* left on the composer. The disastrous first performance lead to not only a shift in his compositional style, but also his serious psychological problems. The article is extremely important as it provides an insight on the composer's poor reception in his home country.

Harrison, Max. *Rachmaninoff. Life, Works, Recordings*. London: Continuum, 2005.

The book introduces the reader to the main aspects of Rachmaninoff's biography

including his most famous works and his recordings. Harrison provides an overview of how the composer's works were looked at during his lifetime. The detailed score and recording analysis could also provide helpful insights to the composer's approach to tonality and harmony and how they could have possibly affected his reception by his contemporaries. This source is crucial for looking at Rachmaninoff's reception and understanding the reasons behind its controversy.

Oestrich, James R. "Suddenly Seeing More in Rachmaninoff." *The New York Times* (September 2001).

The article compares the composer's reception in the 20th vs the 21st century. Oestrich highlights the fact that in the twentieth century only a couple of Rachmaninoff's works were popular and even those were disregarded by the serious musicians of the time. Yet, in the XXIc there are numerous events happening all over the United States to commemorate the composer and his compositions as being almost genius. Oestrich, furthermore, mentions that the "Rachmaninoff" entry in the New Grove dictionary has undergone certain changes depicting the shift in the composer's reception. This source would be extremely helpful in depicting the apparent contrast between the composer's reception between the centuries.

Martyn, Barrie. *Rachmaninoff: Composer, Pianist, Conductor*. New York: Routledge Press, 1990.

At first glance, the book seems to be only biographical, however, Barrie seems to provide a rather detailed overview of the composer's works. This is done to provide the overview of the composer's growth over time. We see the different aspects of Rachmaninoff as a composer, a pianist, and a conductor. This idea is important in determining what qualifications of Rachmaninoff were actually being perceived in Russia and the US accordingly.

Reesor, Keenan. "Rachmaninoff in Music Lexicons, 1900-2013. Toward a History of the Composer's Reception." Phd diss., The University of Southern Carolina, 2016.

The dissertation discusses Rachmaninoff's reception and the fact that his music was not taken seriously by his contemporaries. The limitations of the composer's music are widely brought up in the dissertation and provide one view on why Rachmaninoff's compositions were not received warmly. The source is useful in uncovering the possible reasons behind the composer's failure in his home country.

Taruskin, Richard. *Defining Russia Musically*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997.

The monograph provides an overview of Russian Nationalism, how it was originated, and to what level it affected the music of the Soviet and Post Soviet time composers. Taruskin highlights the fact that music composed at that time in Russia had to be different from the music of both East and West. This notion could be used as an evidence of how Rachmaninoff's music could be misunderstood due to the nationalistic ideas.

Walsh, Stephen. "Sergei Rachmaninoff 1873-1943." *Tempo*, no. 105 (June 1973), pp. 12-21.

The article discusses the fact that while Rachmaninoff's music never truly gained serious consideration during his time, it survived to the point where his more experimental contemporaries did not. The article compares the music of Rachmaninoff and Scriabin as to determine why they never gained the same popularity. The source is crucial to my topic as it raises an important question of why the composer's music was extremely popular, yet widely disregarded by serious musicians and intellectuals for being too sweet and repetitive. The article, furthermore, brings up the idea of the composer's music not belonging to his time. This notion

that was believed in by the composer himself also provides an evidence for why his music was poorly received in certain circles.

“Rachmaninoff Work is Received Warmly.” *The New York Times*. (Nov 8, 1936).

ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

The article provides a unique glance at the Rachmaninoff’s reception in the United States during his lifetime. The article was printed immediately after the premiere of the *Third Symphony* in Philadelphia. The composer was greeted on the stage three times, as the audience would not let him go. This is an extremely important article as it provides a glance on how the composer’s music was actually perceived in the United States during his time.