

Function and Deformation in Sergei Rachmaninoff's Etudes-Tableaux op. 39,
Nos. 5 and 6

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Abstract

The categories of formal function (William Caplin) and deformation (Warren Darcy and James Hepokoski) have become a staple of today's understanding of musical form in the West. Russian theoretical thought has had a number of achievements along the same lines. The understanding of music of Sergei Rachmaninoff can benefit from application of these two most advanced approaches to musical form. Rachmaninoff seems to work with classical postulate by means of transformation and deformation of their structural and processual aspect. The formal functional design of a theme in op. 39 presents a heterogeneous set of ideas, ranging from the techniques of ancient Russian chants to some 20th-century strategies. In many cases traditional musical formal strategies yield their places to theatrical dramaturgy, morphology of a fairy tale, cinematic montage and aspects of literary form like dialogic consciousness (Mikhail Bakhtin). This makes the analysis revealing in both interpretation of inner meaning of Rachmaninoff's music and in further development of the analytical techniques, offered by Caplin, Darcy and Hepokoski.