### **DLA Thesis**

# Nóra Tatai Rachmaninoff's romances as seen through dedications

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Budapest 2021

## I. The background for the research

Music written for voice played a key role in Rachmaninoff's ouvre, even though he is mostly remembered by the history of music as a virtuoso pianist and author of pieces composed for piano and symphonic orchestra. The Russian romance, popular in his family circle, was one of his earliest musical experiences, and even his career as a composer started with an opera composed for an exam whose premier was arranged by Tchaikovsky himself. Later, already in the status of an opera conductor, he not only discovered the world of musical theater, but also started close friendships with many of the most well-known singers of the time. Those friendships have defined his vocal pieces, and majority of his romances were dedicated to performing artists. The dedication is an almost indispensable part of Rachmaninoff's art, especially when it comes to vocal pieces. In my dissertation, I analyze Rachmaninoff's romances through these dedications and relationships tying him to the dedicatees.

#### II. Sources

Essential sources for a research on Rachmaninoff are available in two languages – Russian and English, since the composer spent his life in those two linguistic environments in Russia and USA. The monograph most often referenced in English-language sources was put together by Sergei Bretensson and Jay Leyda. From it, one can learn Rachmaninoff's biography in rich detail. The summarizing work of Barrie Martyn portrays Rachmaninoff as a composer, a pianist and a conductor, as well as dealing with his works in detail. In his 2014 book Richard D. Sylvester, discusses every single romance and presents the circumstances around their creation. His musical analysis is not especially detailed, but he provides abundant information about pronounciation, translation and existing recordings of all of these romances.

In the Russian-language literature the book by Bryantseva is a similar summary work which presents music composed by Rachmaninoff next to the details from his biography. The works mentioned above often quote the three- and the two-volume editions of compendium put together by Zarui Apetian – *Literary Heritage* (*Literaturnoe nasledie*) which contains Rachmaninoff's letters and published writings; and *Reminiscences about* 

Rachmaninoff (Vospominaniia o Rakhmaninove). The latter one is an antology of writings of varying sizes by relatives, colleagues and friends. These volumes were the main sources for my dissertation helping me to understand the relationship between Rachmaninoff and the dedicatees (and, as such, between him and the dedications themselves) and to map out the relationship network connecting all these people to one another. In the writing of the network science chapter, I relied largely on the book Network Science by Albert-László Barabási.

## III. Methodology

In my dissertation, I analyze selected romances from the performer's standpoint, while also trying to shed light on the relationship between the dedication and the piece itself. For this purpose, I produced a table containing all of Rachmaninoff's published works with dedications forming one of the columns of the table. The table was also the starting point for the network which I assembled with the purpose of systematizing the relationships that existed between various dedicatees. Based on available sources and with an emphasis on their friendship circles, I attempted to learn as much as possible about each of the 61 people to whom Rachmaninoff dedicated his works. The resulting

network contains 1569 people and 2547 relationships between them. The relationships in the network are weighted based on the strength of the connection as represented by the closeness of the relationship (relatives, friends, student-mentor, colleagues, etc.) between any two people.

#### IV. Results

In the first chapter, I briefly present the Russian romance as a genre, the history of its creation, its distinctive features. I examine the role that was fulfilled in Rachmaninoff's ouvre by the romance, and also those among the life events of the composer that influenced his vocal works. With the help of quotes and letter excerpts, I present those experiences which inspired Rachmaninoff to compose romances, such as his time at the family's estate of Ivanovka which was so important to him.

In the second and the third chapters, I examine selected romances in detail, grouped by dedicatees. In the second chapter a separate sub-chapter describes romances dedicated to the composer's early loves and to his wife. In the third chapter, I analyze romances dedicated to performing artists and explain in detail the impact that Rachmaninoff's relationships with Marietta Shaginian

and Nina Koshetz had on his work. In the fourth chapter, I briefly introduce the most important people in the network and with the help of images describe the data obtained from analysing the network.

V. Documentation of activity related to the topic of the dissertation.

#### Concerts

2017 Februrary – Music about Pictures – a chamber concert, Hermina Gallery, Budapest – program included romances by Mussorgsky and Rachmaninoff – with pianist Ferenc János Szabó

2018 March – Female Fates – a series of chamber concerts, Budapest (CEU October hall), Pécs (House of Arts and Literature), Szarvas (Museum of Sámuel Tessedik) – program included romances by Rachmaninoff – with pianist Ferenc János Szabó

2019 September-November – Old and New Songs - À la Russe – a series of chamber concerts, Budapest (FUGA), Szarvas (Museum of Sámuel Tessedik) – program included romances by Rachmaninoff – with pianist Ferenc János Szabó

2021 May – Podium for Young Artists, a concert recording in the Marble Hall of Hungarian Radio – program included *Dissonance* by Rachmaninoff – with pianist Ferenc János Szabó

2021 June – songs by Liszt and Rachmaninoff – chamber concert organized by the Liszt Society, Institute of Musical Science of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Museum of Music History – with pianist Ferenc János Szabó