

Aleksandr Skrjabin, the Russian Orpheus

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Abstract

This article presents Russian composer and pianist, Aleksandr Skrjabin (1872-1915), as the creator of myths about the origin and destiny of the universe and mankind. Within the framework of those myths, laid out in his *Preparatory Act*, Skrjabin himself would assume a role that seems inspired by that of Orpheus in Classical mythology.

Keywords

Skrjabin, *Preparatory Act*, Orpheus.

*To the memory of Vjačeslav Ivanov (1866-1949),
who noticed Skrjabin's affinity with Orpheus.¹*

1. Introduction

In the early stages of his career, the Russian composer and pianist Aleksandr Skrjabin (1872-1915) was considered a romantic artist along the likes of Chopin, Liszt, Schumann, and Wagner. From 1903 onwards, however, and as his intellectual curiosity in philosophy and theosophy grew, Skrjabin quickly developed a highly personal, innovative style - especially in the field of harmony, which put him at the forefront of musical modernism (Schloezer 1975, Macdonald 1986, Bowers 1996, Kelkel 1999, and Verdi 2010). Around 1902, Skryabin began drafting a *Gesamtkunstwerk* (total artwork) which would ultimately be entitled *Mysterium* and involve not only music, poetry, drama, and dance (which could remind us of the musical dramas by Wagner, whom Skrjabin admired), but also coloured lights, flavours, caresses, and tastes.² Undaunted in the face of his own unbridled fantasies, the composer planned to gather all mankind for the première of his *Mysterium* in a temple built on a lake in India, where the limits between performers and audience would disappear, with everyone taking part in the action (Сабанеев 1916, 34-5, 95-6; Сабанеев 1925, 214; Schloezer 1975, 127, and Morrison 2002, 195 and 197). Thus, a purifying ecstasy would surface, leading to the dissolution of the universe and mankind in their current material conditions, and to their transformation and elevation to a higher level in the hierarchy of being.³

Whatever Skrjabin's achievements might have been with such a visionary project, they would always have fallen short of the composer's grandiose goals. In 1913, Skrjabin began composing a *Preparatory Act* (*Предварительное действие*, in Russian), not only as an introduction, but also as a summary of what the whole

Mysterium would be (Шлецер 1919, 102 and 114; Сабанеев 1916, 103-5; Сабанеев 1925, 169 and 214, and Schloezer, 1975, 207-18). Scriabin wrote a first version of the libretto for the *Preparatory Act* in the summer of 1914, and by year-end, had read it aloud for his friends, the Symbolist poets Vjačeslav Ivanov, Jurgis Baltrušaitis, and Konstantin Bal'mont. Perhaps following the suggestions of such qualified listeners, the composer started a second, revised version that remained unfinished at his untimely death in 1915 (Шлецер 1919, 102-3; Bowers² 1996, II, 253-4; Kelkel 1999, 225-6, and Verdi 2010, 72 and 138).⁴ The basis of this article will be the first version of the *Preparatory Act*, which - despite not being the definitive one - is the only one that presents the myths we will be addressing here - namely those which can represent a return, under a new guise, of the myth of Orpheus' magical music.⁵

In his *Preparatory Act*, Scriabin created a personal mythology about the spirit's descent into matter, and the return of both to unity (Шлецер 1919, 114).⁶ The process would involve the origin of the universe, the birth of the male and female principles (represented by the Wave and Lightning images), the birth of creatures and mankind, the fall of mankind into the abyss of evil, and the intervention of a 'prophet,' whose sacrifice brings a liberating truth to mankind. As we aim to show in this article, Scriabin, quite modestly, identified - at least in part - with said prophet.⁷ We shall, in due course, examine the degree of coincidence between Scriabin and the prophet in the *Preparatory Act*. Now we can say that the liberation, carried out by the new "messiah" Scriabin thought himself to be, would consist in leading mankind and the entire universe to a purifying ecstasy and an immaterial state of being by means of the artwork to which the *Preparatory Act* would be the introduction (Скрябин †1919, 154; Сабанеев 1916, 3-4, 49, 57, and 88; Сабанеев 1925, 120 and 182, and Molina Moreno 2004, 220, and 2005-6, 22). Yearning for that ontological transformation of the universe and mankind to be accomplished through art, Scriabin was placing himself - perhaps even consciously - above Orpheus, who - according to the sources of ancient Greek and Roman literature and art - also exerted a magical influence over nature, mankind, and the gods, through his music.

2. The Prophet of the *Preparatory Act*

The *Preparatory Act* begins with a cosmogony and a cosmology (ll. 1-430, in Скрябин †1919, 202-15, and Morrison 2002, 313-26), including the birth of human beings from the union of the Wave and the Lightning (symbols of the female and male principles; cf. ll. 361-2). Although the text does not include any directions about who is speaking in each passage, we may guess that, in ll. 469-91, the whole of mankind is addressing a character endowed with Promethean traits (Скрябин †1919, 216-7, and Morrison 2002, 328). As an answer to those pleadings, the following verses show said speaker teaching his captive audience (ll. 492-7):

Въ храмѣ любви въ ослѣпляющей славѣ на тронѣ горящемъ
Свѣтлый внимавшихъ ему поучаль: кто законъ мой единый
Вѣчной любви и смиренія вѣчнаго дерзко преступить
Будеть повергнуть въ великую скорбь и тоску отлученья.

495

Смертные, вамъ я повѣдаю тайны небесныхъ гармоній
Да раздаются гимны и славы на солнечной лирѣ! (Скрябин †1919, 217)
[In the cathedral of love in dazzling splendor on a blazing throne
The radiant one preached to those heeding him: who dares to violate
My sole law of eternal love and eternal humility
Will be cast into the great sorrow and anguish of excommunication. 495

Mortals, I will reveal to you the secret of celestial harmonies
May hymns and praises resound on the sun lyre!] (Morrison 2002, 328-9)

Besides the law of eternal love and eternal humility (ll. 493-4), the speaker promises to teach mankind “the mystery of celestial harmonies” (l. 496), an allusion to cosmic music also hinted at in ll. 428-30:

Сей храмъ – какъ свѣтлый гимнъ, сей міръ – какъ звѣздный храмъ
Эфиръ наполненъ золотымъ зазывномъ звономъ
Что души емлетъ къ недоступнымъ небесамъ. 430
(Скрябин †1919, 215)

[This cathedral is like a bright hymn, this world is like a starry cathedral

The ether reverberates with a golden summons
That takes souls into the inaccessible heavens.] 430
(Morrison 2002, 326)

This cosmic music was already anticipated in l. 63 of the first version (“the harmonious choirs of the worlds”; cf. Скрябин †1919, 204; our translation). Thereafter, the wish that hymns of glory would resound on the sun lyre (l. 497), brings to mind the fact that the ancient Greeks - at least from the fifth century B. C. E. - and later also the Romans, associated the Sun with Apollo, who was imagined ruling the universe with his lyre.⁸

After those words of the anonymous prophet, promising he would teach mankind the mystery of celestial harmonies, the narrator in the *Preparatory Act* tells how “the people, searching for consonant sonorities, touch the strings that are alien to them” (l. 498, in Скрябин †1919, 217, and Morrison 2002, 329). Mankind falls into the abyss of evil, described in a section of the poem entitled *Song – Dance of the Fallen Ones* (ll. 581-616, in Скрябин †1919, 220-1, and Morrison 2002, 331-2). In that passage, the verses 607-8 are especially meaningful:

Пѣснямъ неба, намъ докучнымъ
Наши пѣсни не созвучны (Скрябин †1919, 221)

[Our songs are not consonant
With the songs of heaven, which are tedious to us.] (Morrison 2002, 332).

That is an adequate way to express the conflict between that wayward mankind, and the remaining part of the universe: if, as we had seen, the latter consists of

harmonious choirs (l. 63 of the first version), “not to be in harmony” can mean “disagree”. The songs of those who do not agree with anything, therefore, can be said not to be in harmony therewith.

From l. 657 onwards, the first person plural that had thus far been referring to humanity as a whole (in the description of its own mad violence and wickedness) is replaced by the first person singular. Here, we are likely facing a man intoxicated by his own power, who believes himself to be equal to God, and who tries to keep and enlarge his own loathsome power by means of a bloody and endless fight against all his fellow human beings.

That violent monster, however, becomes conscious of the horror he had triggered (ll. 673-95), and listens then to the voice of what seems to be the eternal female principle (ll. 708-15, in Скрязин †1919, 224, and Morrison 2002, 336). It could seem odd that the eternal female principle is identified with a personification of Death, but here, we are dealing with a ‘liberating’ Death, as is evident if we compare ll. 708-15 with 35-40.⁹ Despite the lack of indications, it seems that it is the human being (represented by the riotous individual of ll. 657-72, later repentant in ll. 673-95) who wants to join the eternal female principle, identified with a liberating Death (ll. 736-7, in Скрязин †1919, 225, and Morrison 2002, 337). But, according to the eternal female principle, the riotous individual has not yet expiated his fault (ll. 738-9); he must approach his fellow human beings, put himself at their service and “bring the tidings of heaven / to the dying” (ll. 746-75, in Скрязин †1919, 225-6, and Morrison 2002, 337-8).

The repentant monster, then, tries to play the prophet’s role assigned to him by the eternal female principle, but mankind rejects him (ll. 780-95, in Скрязин †1919, 226-7, and Morrison 2002, 338-9). In his dialogue with mankind, the prophet describes the universe with sumptuous references to the Pythagorean doctrine of the music of the spheres (ll. 844-59):

Онъ – созерцаніе гармоній	
И всеединства міра сновъ	845
А міръ – роскошная симфонія	
Его различныхъ голосовъ	
Земныя истины созвучныя	
А съ ними истины небесъ	
Слились въ аккорды полнозвучные	850
Изъ струнъ исторгнутыхъ чудесъ	
Ему грядущія мгновенія	
Несутъ созвучій новый строй	
Онъ весь – святое упоеніе	
Своей божественной игрой	855
И подъ десницею божественной	
Послушна каждая струна	
На солнце- лирѣ гимнъ торжественный	
Играетъ пламени волна.(Скрязин †1919, 228-9)	

[He¹⁰ is the contemplation of harmony
 And of the all-unity of the world of dreams 845
 And the world is a splendid symphony
 of his various voices

Earthly consonant truths
 And heavenly truths
 Combined in sonorous chords 850
 Of wonders emanating from strings

The coming moments
 Bring a new order of consonance to him
 He is engulfed in holy ecstasy
 By his divine playing 855

And each dutiful string
 Is under his divine right hand
 A flaming wave performs
 A solemn hymn on the sun lyre.] (Morrison 2002, 341)

The prophet's statement that his world is contemplation of harmony reminds us that Skrjabin told Sabaneev that the contemplation of harmony was mandatory to achieve dematerialization, and that this was a logical consequence of the principle of unity (Сабанеев 1925, 42, 50, and 86). While it is not clear what "the principle of unity" meant for Skrjabin, Sabaneev hinted at it when he wrote:

Его творчество представлялось ему точным подобием мирового процесса—так должно было быть и по его теории. Микрокосм человека отражал в своем творчестве микрокосм мира—и законы были одни и те-же. В этом и был «принцип Единства», который он так любил и в который верил так догматически.(Сабанеев 1925, 221)

[His work seemed to him an exact image of the cosmic process –and it should be so, according to his theory–. The microcosm of the human being reflected, in his own work, the microcosm of the universe, and their laws were identical. The 'principle of unity' lay just in that fact (that principle of unity that he cherished so much, and in which he believed in such a dogmatic way.)¹¹

The connection between Skrjabin's longing for dematerialization and for unity can be understood if we remember that, in the cosmogony of the *Preparatory Act*, the genesis of the material world was due to differentiation (ll. 11-2, 143, 503-10¹²); so, if primordial unity could be recovered, dematerialization would follow. We must realize that, for bringing the universe back to its primordial unity, a synthesis of all arts was analogically required (Сабанеев 1916, 58 and 95-6). According to Sabaneev, Skrjabin believed that music - like everything else - should be dematerialized, and held his own music as a gigantic step towards dematerialization.¹³

Besides the statement that his world is contemplation of harmony, the passage we quoted above (ll. 844-59) offers a dazzling description of the universe that is in line

with other passages of the *Preparatory Act*: we may remember the “harmonious choirs of the worlds” (l. 63, in Скрябин †1919, 204) and the “golden summons” of ether (ll. 429-30, in Скрябин †1919, 215, and Morrison 2002, 326); in l. 496, the prophet had promised to teach mankind the mystery of celestial harmonies (a promise he seems to be fulfilling in ll. 844-59); in l. 497, he wished that glorious hymns would resound on the sun lyre. Now it seems that one of those hymns is actually resounding on the sun lyre. Skrjabin did not specify whose divine right hand was playing the hymn, but we may remember Apollo’s at the Orphic hymn No. 34 (cf. Molina-Moreno 2013, 155-60). That celestial lyre, identified with the Sun in Skrjabin’s poem (l. 858), can remind us of Jean Delville’s drawing for the cover of the score of Skrjabin’s *Prometheus, the Poem of Fire* (cf., for example, Kelkel 1999, 265). There we see a lyre, the arms of which hold a large flower or star with a human face in the middle; the lyre’s strings go through the flower and reappear above it, reaching the lower half of a Sun which occupies the upper part of the sheet.

After describing that splendid and musical universe, the prophet invites his audience to a cosmic festival (ll. 860-3):

Все напряженнѣй струны лирныя	860
Все глубже смотритъ въ душу взоръ	
До дна испейте чаши пирныя	
Звучи, свѣтися, звѣздный хоръ. (Скрябин †1919, 229)	
[Ever tighter the lyre strings	860
Ever deeper the glance into the soul	
Empty the ceremonial chalices	
Sound, shine, starry chorus.] (Morrison 2002, 341)	

But the prophet’s insistence on his message irritates mankind, which kills the prophet. However, the prophet will forgive his murderers (ll. 864-94).¹⁴ Then, mankind expresses its nostalgia for the prophet (ll. 895-920, in Скрябин †1919, 230-1, and Morrison 2002, 343-4), who - from the other world - prophesies final liberation and orders the construction of a new temple, where mankind could achieve its dreams (ll. 921-40, in Скрябин †1919, 231, and Morrison 2002, 344). This time, mankind accepts the prophet’s words (ll. 941-50, in Скрябин †1919, 231-2, and Morrison 2002, 344), and the rest of the poem describes the cosmic festival through which final ecstasy and dematerialization would be achieved.

3. The Eschatology of the *Preparatory Act*

After mankind’s acceptance of the prophet’s message (ll. 941-50), the narrator (or perhaps the whole of humanity, including the narrator) describes the temple where the great cosmic festival would take place (ll. 951-68):

Стѣны храма какъ гимны свободѣ горять
И сверкаетъ столповъ ослѣпительный рядъ.

Каждый камень волшебнo-поющей звѣздой
Со струны солнце-лирной упаль огневой.

Онъ блаженно упаль 955
 Какъ звенящій кристалъ
 Какъ сверкающій звукъ
 Полный сладостныхъ мукъ
 И блеститъ какъ топазь,
 Гиацинтъ, хризопразъ 960
 Какъ карбункуль, опаль,
 Сардоникса кристалъ
 Какъ смарагдъ, маргарить
 Халкедонъ, хризолитъ
 Какъ небесный сапфиръ 965
 Как ласкающій міръ
 Онъ горитъ, какъ единый всецвѣтный алмазь
 Этотъ храмъ — наша жизнь, нашъ расцвѣтъ, нашъ экстазь
 (Скрябин †1919, 232)

[The walls of the cathedral burn as hymns to freedom
 And the dazzling row of columns sparkle
 Each stone, as a magical singing star
 Fell from a burning string of the sun lyre.
 It blissfully fell 955
 Like chiming crystal
 Like sparkling sound
 Full of sweet torments
 And they glitter like topaz,
 Hyacinth, chrysoprase, 960
 Like carbuncle, opal,
 Crystal of sardonyx
 Like emerald, margarite
 Chalcedony, chrysolite
 Like heavenly sapphire 965
 Like the caressing world
 It burns, like a single multicolored diamond
 This cathedral—our life, our blooming, our ecstasy.]

(Morrison 2002, 344-5)

The whole passage recalls what Skrjabin had anticipated in the preceding parts of the poem: the walls that glow like hymns to freedom (l. 951) bring to mind that - according to l. 428 - the temple would be “like a hymn of light”; we may also remember the prophet’s wish that hymns of glory would resound on the sun lyre (l. 497). Now it seems that all those wishes are coming true. Last, the multi-coloured precious gems with which the temple is being built (ll. 959-65) join all its colours into a “unique, all-coloured diamond,” and the temple is compared with the glowing of that diamond in ll.

967-8. This makes us remember Scriabin's longing for a recovered unity of all beings, and the text adds that such a temple is the life, the flower, and the ecstasy of all mankind.

The comparison of the temple with the flower and the ecstasy of all mankind deserves further comment. To begin with, we could remember that, already in *The Poem of Ecstasy*, published in 1907 as a programme for the symphonic poem of the same title, flowers are a symbol of the creations of the spirit (ll. 35-8, in Скрибин †1919, 193, Bowers ²1996, II, 131). Then, in the same text of the *Preparatory Act*, a flower is taken as a symbol of the new existence aimed at by the composer (l. 755, in Скрибин †1919, 225, and Morrison 2002, 338). Other passages of the *Preparatory Act* are also meaningful in this connection (ll. 557-8, in Скрибин †1919, 219, and Morrison 2002, 330; ll. 895-6, in Скрибин †1919, 230, and Morrison 2002, 343). Most importantly, in the *Preparatory Act*, the very process of flowering and flourishing (both words being etymologically cognate with one another, but both meanings being conveyed by the same Russian word) means "to reach the peak of satisfaction," as we can see in l. 979-80 (Скрибин †1919, 233, and Morrison 2002, 345). Further, in ll. 985-8, the same word is referred to reaching the summit of being (Скрибин †1919, 233, and Morrison 2002, 345-6), and the same can be seen in the end of the poem (ll. 1036-42):

И въ блескъ роскошномъ
 Расцвѣта послѣдняго
 Являясь другъ
 Въ красъ обнаженной
 Сверкающихъ душъ 1040
 Исчезнемъ...
 Растаемъ... (Скрибин †1919, 234-5)

[And in the splendid luster
 Of the final flourish
 Appearing to each other
 In the exposed beauty
 Of sparkling souls 1040
 We will disappear...
 Dissolve...] (Morrison 2002, 347)

In Scriabin's notebooks, we also find many passages illustrating what the images of blossoming, flowering, and flourishing meant to the composer. In his notes from 1904-5 (that is, the years in which he was beginning to plan his *Mysterium*), we can see that his ultimate goal was a universal blossoming:

Послѣдняя цѣль – абсолютное бытѣ – есть общій расцвѣтъ. Это послѣдній моментъ, въ который свершится божественный синтезъ. Это расцвѣтъ всеобъемлющей индивидуальности, это возстановленіе міровой гармоніи, экстазъ, возвращающій меня къ покою. (Скрибин †1919, 171)

[The ultimate goal is the absolute existence, that is, the universal blossoming. That is the last instant, when divine synthesis is fulfilled. That is the blossoming of my all-encompassing individuality, that is the restoration of cosmic harmony, the ecstasy that will get me back to rest.]

And the connection of blossoming with ecstasy is obvious in another passage:

Въ формѣ мышленія экстазъ есть высшій синтезъ. Въ формѣ чувства экстазъ есть высшее блаженство. Въ формѣ пространства экстазъ есть высшій расцвѣтъ и уничтоженіе (Скрябин †1919, 163; cf. Schloezer 1975, 99).

[In the shape of thought, ecstasy is the supreme synthesis. In the shape of feeling, it is the supreme joy. In the shape of space, it is the supreme blossoming and annihilation.]

We will be going on to present further evidence of flourishing and ecstasy in Skrjabin's conception. As an introduction to it, let us now turn to the text of the *Preparatory Act*. After describing the temple where the final cosmic festival will take place, the prophet invites mankind to it (ll. 969-72), and sings (ll. 973-1004):

Я слетѣвшій съ небесъ
Богъ любовиныхъ чудесъ. 975
Не учить, а ласкать
Душъ воскрыльную рать
Ихъ позвавшій на пиръ
Я пришелъ на этотъ міръ!
Каждой жадѣ въ отвѣтъ
Приношу я расцвѣтъ. 980
То не истины гнетъ,
Къ вамъ свобода грядетъ!

Я утвержденіе всеоживляющее,
Я отрицаніе всесоздающее
Раздѣляйтесь, расцвѣтайте, 985
На высоты возлетайте,
И побѣду надъ стихіей
Въ пляскѣ празднуйте священной
Въ красотѣ Іерархіи
Въ красотѣ неизрѣченной 990

Пляска — первая причина
И суда вершитель правый
Все содѣлаетъ единой
И сверкающей державой!

I am the diamond of the galaxy,
I am freedom, I am ecstasy!] (Morrison 2002, 345-6)

Let us notice, in that fragment, that the passage ll. 979-80:

In answer to each craving
I offer blooming (Morrison 2002, 345-6)

can be compared with this note by Skrjabin:

Я пришелъ спасти мѣръ отъ тиранов-царей, как и отъ тирана-народа. Я принесъ безграничную свободу и справедливость, принесъ полный расцвѣтъ, божественную радость творчества (Скрябин †1919, 154).

[I have come to save the world from the tyrants that are the tsars and from the tyrant that is the people. I have brought limitless freedom and justice to the world, I have brought full blossoming, the divine joy of creation.]

Likewise, the passage ll. 983-4:

I am the all reviving confirmation,
I am the all creating negation

can be compared with another passage of Skrjabin's notebooks, where we can see that blossoming, for the composer, was a metaphor of his own creative activity:

Я создаю каждый мигъ, чтобы отрицать его въ слѣдующій. Я всегда протестъ, всегда желаніе новаго, другого. Я вѣчное отрицаніе прошлаго, я вѣчная любовь, вѣчный расцвѣтъ (Скрябин †1919, 158-9)

[I create every instant, for denying it at the next instant. I am always protest, always desire of what is new, what is other. I am the eternal negation of the past, I am the eternal love, the eternal blossoming.]

Those passages suggest that Skrjabin identified himself with the prophet of the *Preparatory Act*.¹⁵

If we come back now to the *Preparatory Act*, we shall see that the answer of mankind to the prophet's words (in the above quoted ll. 973-1004) is enthusiastic (ll. 1005-8, in Скрябин †1919, 233-4; cf. Morrison 2002, 346), and, after a transition, the work concludes with a splendid dematerialization of the world (ll. 1021-42):

Мы, увлеченныя
Смерти видѣніемъ
Мы, увлеченныя
Въ нашемъ движеніи

Зажгись, священный храмъ от пламени сердець
Зажгись и стань святымъ пожаромъ
Смѣсись блаженно въ насъ, о сладостный отецъ,
Смѣсись со смертью въ танцъ яромъ!

1025

Въ этотъ послѣдній мигъ совлеченья
 Вбросимъ мы вѣчности нашихъ мгновений 1030
 Въ этомъ послѣднѣмъ звучіи лирномъ
 Всѣ мы растаемъ въ вихрѣ эфирномъ

Родимся въ вихрѣ!
 Проснемся въ небо!
 Смѣшаемъ чувства въ волнѣ единой! 1035
 И въ блескѣ роскошномъ
 Расцвѣта послѣдняго
 Являясь другъ другу
 Въ красѣ обнаженной
 Сверкающихъ душъ 1040
 Исчезнемъ...
 Растаемъ... (Скрябин †1919, 234-5)

[We are carried away
 By the vision of death
 We are calmed
 In our motion

Ignite, sacred temple from hearts' flame 1025
 Ignite and become a sacred fire
 Merge blessedly in us, o ravishing father,
 Merge with death in a heated dance!

In this final moment of divestment
 We will cast off the eternities of our instants 1030
 Into this final lyre consonance
 We will dissolve in the ethereal whirlwind

We will be born in the whirlwind!
 We will awaken in heaven!
 We will merge emotions in a united wave! 1035
 And in the splendid luster
 Of the final flourish
 Appearing to each other
 In the exposed beauty
 Of sparkling souls 1040
 We will disappear...
 Dissolve...] (Morrison 2002, 347)

[That which menaced
 Is now seduction
 That which frightened
 Is now pleasure.
 And the bites of panther and hyena 360
 Are new caresses
 A new torment
 And the serpent's sting
 Is but a burning kiss.] (Bowers ²1996, II, p. 135)

Moreover, the erotic character of that ecstatic dematerialization is obvious in a conversation recorded by Skrjabin's student Margarita Kirillovna Morozova. While visiting the Louvre, in 1907, she recalled:

Александр Николаевич мне объяснил подробно, как он представлял себе самый *экстаз*. Как мировое, космическое слияние мужского и женского начала, духа и материи. *Вселенский экстаз* – это эротический акт, блаженный конец, возвращение к единству (Морозова †1997, 57)

[Aleksandr Nikolaevič explained to me in detail how he imagined *ecstasy* itself. Like a universal, cosmic fusion of the male and female principles, of spirit and matter. *Universal ecstasy* is an erotic act, a blissful end, the return to Unity.]

Likewise, among Skrjabin's notes of 1905-6, we read:

Какъ челоѡкъ во время полового акта въ минуту экстаза теряетъ *сознаніе и весь его организмъ* во всѣхъ точкахъ переживаетъ блаженство, такъ и Богъ-челоѡкъ, переживая экстазъ, наполнить вселенную блаженствомъ и зажжетъ пожаръ (Скрябин †1919, 189).

[Like the human being, during the sexual act, in a minute of ecstasy, loses conscience, and all his / her organism, in all its points, experiences satisfaction, the same way the God-human being, while experiencing ecstasy, fills with bliss the universe and triggers fire.]

In the same notes, a bit later, we read more about that “God-human being,” with whom Skrjabin (we can be almost sure) dreamt of identifying himself: the “God-human being” will be able to transform the world into a divine organism; that will be ecstasy, and the universe will give in to the “God-human being,” “like a woman to her lover:”

Если личность пріобрѣтетъ способность воздѣйствія на внѣшній міръ въ той степени, при которой будетъ въ состояніи по произволу измѣнять систему отношеній въ каждый данный моментъ, то такая личность будетъ обладать божескимъ могуществомъ. Такая личность обратитъ вселенную въ божественный организмъ. Это будетъ достиженіемъ полной гармоніи, предѣломъ подъема творчества, экстазомъ. Такая личность будетъ *общей потребностью*, потребностью созерцать божественную красоту. Міръ отдастся ей, какъ женщина — любовнику (Скрябин †1919, 191).

[If an individual acquires the ability of influencing on the external world to such a degree as to modifying at will the system of relationships in every given moment, such an individual will have a divine power. Such an individual will transform the universe into a divine organism. That will be the achievement of full harmony, the peak of creative enthusiasm, ecstasy. Such an individual will be a general requirement, the requirement to contemplate divine beauty. The Universe will give in to such an individual, like a woman to her lover.]

Last but not least, we must remember another note by Skrjabin, later set into verse in *The Poem of Ecstasy* (ll. 236-41), where we can see that the ideas of separation, flowering, pleasure, and re-unification were intertwined in Skrjabin's conception of ecstasy:

Раздѣляйтесь, расцвѣтайте,
 Возставайте другъ на друга,
 Возноситесь на высоты,
 Чтобы въ сладостномъ блаженствѣ
 Вамъ познать себя единствомъ, 240
 Уничтожиться во мнѣ! (Скрябин †1919, 198, and cf. *ibid.*, 153)

[Fragment and flower
 Separately
 Rise up one against another
 Flee to the summits
 That in sweetest bliss
 You may know all your oneness 240
 Annihilated within me!] (Bowers ²1996, vol. II, 134)

But perhaps the most alluring aspect of Skrjabin's eschatology is that, according to l. 1031 of the *Preparatory Act*, dematerialization and ecstasy will be fulfilled in the "final lyre consonance." We believe that this lyre is the one identified with the Sun in ll. 497 and 856-9 of the *Preparatory Act*. That is, the universe and mankind, in their current disastrous state, would disappear with the sound of that lyre, or - more precisely: the current state of loss of cosmic harmony would come to an end and be replaced by a new recovered harmony. This makes sense if we remember that, according to l. 5 of both versions of the *Preparatory Act*, the universe had originated with an explosion (Скрябин †1919, 202 and 235, and Morrison 2002, 313). Opposite to that initial, indeterminate, chaotic bang, there will be, at the end of the current era, the tuned sound of a lyre, an instrument that, at human level, is a fruit of civilization. Moreover, for the ancient Greeks, the lyre belonged to Apollo, the god of most rational and orderly artistic manifestations. It was also the instrument with which Orpheus calmed storms and wild beasts (cf., on this topic, Molina-Moreno 2008 a). And it was this very instrument, endowed with a cosmic dimension through its association with the Sun, which would raise the world and mankind to a higher state in the scale of being.¹⁶

It is obvious that Skrjabin achieved a high logical consistency by placing sound at the core of his mythical cosmogony, cosmology, and eschatology. This can be due not only to his being a musician, but - more specifically - to the fact that since he was a musician, he wanted sound to have a magical, enchanting power. And, to support this belief, it was necessary to admit that sound was at the very origin and constitution of the universe, according to a psychological “law” governing magical beliefs: *similia similibus*, similar things are influenced by similar things.¹⁷ In this connection, Sabaneev remembers how Skrjabin admired Hans von Bülow’s saying “in the beginning was rhythm,” which the author of the *Preparatory Act* quickly referred to the idea that the world had arisen by means of rhythm. Moreover, Skrjabin saw in rhythm the basis of all magic, and in music the highest magic.¹⁸

Skrjabin’s concern with magic, especially in connection with his *Mysterium*, is also obvious in Sabaneev’s memories: for Skrjabin, he wrote, established forms of religious cult were degenerate descendants of what was before, when there was true magic in cult, and Skrjabin wanted to see that magic reborn (Сабанеев 1925, 119; cf. Сабанеев 1925, 287-8, and Сабанеев 1916, 59, 89-92 and 228-30). In this connection, Skrjabin wished to make use of alliteration in his verses (like the poets of his time), in order for those alliterations to act like a spell, like hypnosis (Сабанеев 1925, 251). Likewise, according to Sabaneev, Skrjabin stated that the first theme of his *Ninth Sonata* was neither music nor melody, but “a spell in sounds,” and that it could not simply be played. Indeed, one had to enchant when playing it (Сабанеев 1925, 139). Skrjabin also told Sabaneev that he was convinced that with the help of the “light symphony” (that is, his *Prometheus or the Poem of Fire*) it was possible to heal anybody from whatever disease (Сабанеев 1925, 204; cf. Сабанеев 1916, 79, 213, and 228-30). Sabaneev also points out that harmony was the aspect of music where the magic effect desired by Skrjabin can most easily be achieved, and that it was namely in the field of harmony where Skrjabin was most innovative (Сабанеев 1916, 144-5, 187, 190-2, and 213).

4. Conclusion: The Prophet of the *Preparatory Act*, Orpheus, and Skrjabin

Let us focus on the prophet of the *Preparatory Act* again. He had brought mankind a religious revelation (ll. 492-7); more specifically, he had promised to reveal the mysteries of celestial harmonies to mankind (l. 496). This in turn immediately brings to mind Orpheus doing the same, according to the Latin grammarian Servius, in his *scholium* to Vergil’s *Aeneis*, 6, 645. More generally, Orpheus was held to be the founder of mystery cults (Jiménez San Cristóbal 2008).

Conversely, the prophet in the *Preparatory Act* echoes the statements of the composer himself. According to his notes from 1904-5, Skrjabin wanted to captivate the world by means of the marvellous beauty of his work, to attract the world to a divine flight without destiny, to his free play (Скрябин †1919, 139 and 146; cf. also Скрябин †1919, 191, quoted above; Сабанеев 1916, 75, and Морозова †1997, 52). This desire can be connected with Skrjabin’s goal of the audience of his *Mysterium* also enacting it. Then again, Skrjabin also wrote that the highest power was the power

of charm, power without violence, and therefore to destroy the enemy could not give any satisfaction; for our composer, to dominate meant to include in the own self (Скрябин †1919, 146). Besides the emphasis on attraction and charm we must pay attention to the fact that Skrjabin wished to attract the world to his “free play” - what he called his own creative activity (Скрябин †1919, 139-43). We also have to notice that the Russian word «игра» means both “play” and “to make music on an instrument” just as it does in the English word, “play.” All this reminds us again of the effects of Orpheus’ music on nature, mankind, and the gods (Molina-Moreno 2008). Perhaps without being entirely aware of it, Skrjabin wished to be a new Orpheus: in this connection, Bowers states that, through the translations of ancient Greek literature by Sergej Trubeckoj and Vladimir Solov’ev, Skrjabin got acquainted with ancient Greek myths, and often alluded to Orpheus and Amphion. As for Orpheus, Bowers’ statement is confirmed by Skrjabin’s brother-in-law, Boris de Schloezer (Bowers ²1996, I, 319; Schloezer 1975, 118, 163-6, and Сабанеев 1916, 7, 11, 18, and especially 38-40, with the critical remarks by Schloezer 1975, 166-75; cf. also Сабанеев 1916, 47 and 98).

Did Skrjabin see himself as the prophet of his *Preparatory Act*? We believe he did - but only in part. Actually, the prophet does not bring about, but only foresees dematerialization and ecstasy. Skrjabin’s real desire was to elicit an ontological transformation of the world (Сабанеев 1916, 75; Сабанеев 1925, 100; Морозова †1997, 52). Actually, the end of this world, according to the *Preparatory Act*, coincides with what Skrjabin wanted his *Mysterium* to be. In particular, when our composer wanted the audience to take part in the enactment of the *Mysterium*, that meant not only the suppression of limits and the recovery of primordial unity (Сабанеев 1925, 103), but also the transformation of the entire universe into a work of art or - perhaps better yet - into artistic activity (Сабанеев 1916, 58). In this respect, we can mention that after a performance of *The Poem of Ecstasy*, the composer, exultant, said:

А я, правда, так люблю это праздничное настроение после концерта... Никогда не хочется домой, хочется продолжения праздника... хочется, чтобы празднество ширилось, росло, умножалось, чтобы оно стало вечным, чтобы оно захватило мир. Это и есть моя мистерия, когда этот праздник охватит все человечество... (Сабанеев 1925, 67).

[I really love this festive atmosphere after the concert... I would never go back home, I would like that the party continued... I would like that the party spread, grew, multiplied, became eternal, encompassed the world. That is my *Mysterium*: when this party will encompass the whole of mankind.]

Related to that wish of identification between life and art, we must remember that Skrjabin did not want his *Mysterium* to be a performance, but an effective enactment of universal ecstasy (Schloezer, 1975, 124-31; cf. Сабанеев 1916, 88). Therefore, we can say that the ontological transformation of the universe, which Skrjabin sought to achieve through his artwork, was a superhuman feat (cf. Скрябин †1919, 191, quoted above) - even superior to those of Orpheus: a metaphysical revolution, through which Skrjabin endowed himself with the traits of a mythical hero. Thus, Skrjabin’s self-

mythification, as we can trace it in the *Preparatory Act* and in the composer's notebooks, represents a return of the myth of Orpheus' magical music, taken to a new dimension of incredible audacity, consistency, and beauty.

Notes

1. ИВАНОВ (1915, 11-8).
2. Сабанеев (1916, 85-97), and Morrison (2002, 190-2, 194). Despite Skrjabin's admiration for Wagner (cf. Морозова †1997, 48, and Энгель 1916, 51), the respective composers' artistic goals differed (Сабанеев 1916, 255; Энгель 1916, 56, and Schloezer 1975, 49-51). Generally speaking, Skrjabin did not want his *Mysterium* to be represented, but rather enacted (Сабанеев 1916, 34-5 and 88, about the *Preparatory Act*; Schloezer 1975, 124-31, and Morrison 2002, 197).
3. About Skrjabin's *Mysterium*, cf. Сабанеев (1911, 287-8); Сабанеев (1916, 12-3, 37-84, 97-103, and 228-9); Энгель (1916, 50, 56, 67, 71, and 88-92); Rieseemann (1924, 11-9); Сабанеев (1925, 20, 44-6, 58, 82-3, 86, 106-8, 119-20, 122, 149-50, 160, 171, 205-6, 214-5, 229, 233, 267-72, and 284); Schloezer (1975, 121-206); Scriabine (1975, 14 and 17); Bowers (1996, II, 49-50, quoting Энгель 1916, 56-7); Морозова (†1997, 49 and 54); Kelkel (1999, 225-6, and 351); Morrison (2002, 184-241), and Verdi (2010, 66, 72, 126, 128-42, 190, and 319; in his p. 131, Verdi quotes p. 150 of the German version of Сабанеев 1911, but the actual citation is Сабанеев 1925, 150).
4. Skrjabin revised just the first 425 verses of his first version. The original Russian text of the second, revised version of the *Preparatory Act* can be found in Скрябин (†1919, 235-47); cf. Bowers (1996, II, 271-6), and Morrison (2002, 313-26).
5. The original Russian text of the first version of the *Preparatory Act* can be found in Скрябин (†1919, 202-35). So far as we know, there are no full translations of the first version of the *Preparatory Act* into English; instead of ll. 1-425 of the first version, Morrison (2002, 313-26), has translated the text of the second, revised version (having 332 verses), followed by the text of the first one from l. 426 (Morrison 2002, 326-47). Here we shall follow the verse numbering of the first version.
6. Сабанеев (1925, 106) remembers a talk in which Skrjabin attributed the same "programme" to his symphonic poem *Prometheus, the Poem of Fire*.
7. Our author even established analogies between Jesus Christ and himself, on the basis that he was born on December 25th, according to the Julian calendar still in use at the time in Russia (Macdonald 1986, 51; Сабанеев 1925, 290, and Bowers 1996, II, 49-50, quoting Энгель 1916, 56-7).
8. On the association or even identification between the Sun and Apollo, cf. Molina Moreno (2013, 147-8 with the notes on pp. 163-4). Apollo appeared playing the cithara already in Homer's *Iliad*, 1, 602; as for his ruling the course of the universe with his instrument, cf. Molina-Moreno (2013, 155-60). Lastly, cf. Proclus, *Hymn to Helios*, ll. 15-23, esp. 18-20, to which we shall return in due course.
9. Скрябин (†1919, 203) and Morrison (2002, 314). Сабанеев (1925, 270) tells that Skrjabin - after playing his *Prelude, op. 74, N° 2* for him - told him that it expressed

“death as the manifestation of the Female that leads to reunification. Death and love... Death is, as I call her in the *Preparatory Act*, a Sister. There must not be an element of terror before her; she is the highest reconciliation, the white sound...” Judging from those words by Skrjabin, so clearly bringing to our minds the passage we are dealing with, we could think that Skrjabin’s *Prelude, op. 74, N° 2*, was a sketch of what would have been a part of the music of the *Preparatory Act*... and of the *Mysterium*, because, according to Sabaneev, Skrjabin also told him: “–This is the mystery... Look, perhaps you feel, Leonid Leonidovič, that actually this is not just music, and it must not be just music. Here an occult ceremony is beginning...” (cf. Сабанеев 1925, 271).

10. The pronoun used makes it difficult to determine who is alluded to here. At first glance, it would seem that the pronoun “онъ” (= “he”), in the Russian original, refers to the prophet’s own universe (миръ, grammatically masculine in Russian), which has been alluded to in ll. 840-1; but if so, it should rather be translated as “it.” However, the passage seems a bit awkward, since two verses later (846-7), the universe is mentioned again, as something contrasted to what is described in ll. 844-5. Perhaps Skrjabin had in mind an “alternative” god, distinct from that of established religions; but then we could ask why he wrote “онъ” (= “he” / “it”), instead of “богъ” (= “god”), which is metrically equivalent.
11. Excepting the passages quoted from the *Preparatory Act* and *The Poem of Ecstasy*, all translations from the Russian are by the author of this article. It may seem a bit strange that Sabaneev wrote “microcosm” when he referred to both the human being and the universe, instead of talking of the “microcosm of human beings” and the “macrocosm of the universe;” perhaps we are dealing with a *lapsus calami*.
12. Cf. certain passages of Skrjabin’s notebooks which show that the composer was well aware of the relationship between creation, differentiation, multiplicity, space, and time (Скрябин †1919, 136, 147, 149, 161, and 166-7, and Scriabine 1979, 12, 27, 29, 44, and 50-2; cf. Schloezer 1975, 136).
13. Сабанеев (1925, 102 and 228-9), and Энгель (1916, 85); as for how that ideal was reflected in Skrjabin’s music, cf. Сабанеев (1916, 206-7). Lastly, Skrjabin saw in atomic decay proof that dematerialization was possible (Сабанеев 1925, 151).
14. Скрябин (†1919, 229-30), and Morrison (2002, 341-3). This entire episode is reminiscent of the Passion of the Christ; we have already said that Skrjabin dared even to draw parallels between Jesus Christ and himself (cf. our n. 7). However, Сабанеев (1925, 120) remembers Skrjabin’s wish that his *Mysterium* would be something more substantial and have more substantial results than Christian mystery (cf. also Schloezer 1975, 74-6 and 143).
15. According to Morrison (2002: 185 and 195 quoting Энгель 1916, 90), Skrjabin assigned himself the role of the Narrator in the *Preparatory Act*. We were, however, unable to find that in Engel’s paper.
16. Cf. Proclus (fifth century C. E.), *Hymn to Helios*, ll. 18-20: “Apollo, singing inspired songs to the accompaniment of the kithara, calms the great wave of deep-roaring becoming” (cf. Berg 2001, 148, 150, and 168-9).

17. Vid. Combarieu (1909, 12), Schneider (1951, 141-3), Müller (1965), and Molina-Moreno (2008 b), as well as Иванов (1915, 11-2). In particular, Schloezer (1975, 164), says that Combarieu's theory that the origin of music was to be found in magic spells seemed to Scriabin the confirmation of his own ideas by a scientist who was far from mysticism. Cf. also Сабанеев (1916, 30-1 and 38-40), with the critical remarks from Schloezer (1975, 166-75).
18. Сабанеев (1925, 111); cf. the quotation from Hans von Bülow in Walker (1993, 175). The primal character of rhythm is also obvious in this note by Scriabin: "Первое усилие, первый порывъ къ освобожденію есть первая ритмическая фигура времени, первая жизнь, первое сознание, пронизавшее хаосъ и создавшее 2-ю степень (стадію), первую" (Скрябин †1919, 153), i.e., "The first effort, the first impetus towards liberation, is the first rhythmic figure of time, the first life, the first conscience that went through chaos and that created the second period (the second stage), the first limit." Although there are no clear allusions to rhythm in the cosmogony of the *Preparatory Act*, both versions of the poem mention sound phenomena in ll. 5-12 (Скрябин †1919, 202 and 235, and Morrison 2002, 313). Cf. also Сабанеев (1916, 57) and Сабанеев (1925, 266-7).

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