The Opus 41 Vocalises of Nikolai Medtner:

Background, Analysis, and Performer's Guide

by

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ABSTRACT

The concert vocalise, a dazzling wordless vocal etude intended for performance, is largely a phenomenon of the twentieth century. Made famous by composers such as Sergei Rachmaninoff and Maurice Ravel, the concert vocalise is generally a short, non-programmatic work with a relatively simple form. In contrast, Nikolai Medtner’s two monumental Op. 41 vocalises, the Sonata-Vocalise mit einem Motto “Geweihter Platz” and the Suite Vocalise, are staggering in their length and formal complexity. They are also programatically conceived, sharing the Goethe poem “Geweihter Platz” as their inspiration.

The innovation of adding a textual element to a traditionally textless genre introduces a tantalizing new layer of complexity that demands further research and exploration. However, as with any innovation, it also offers new challenges to performers wishing to program either or both works. Current scholarship has yet to offer any kind of in-depth analysis of either work, leaving questions as to the structural and motivic elements which bind these large works together, not to mention questions related to exactly how Medtner addresses the challenge of linking specific parts of Goethe’s text to the textless portions of music. Furthermore, neither work is considered standard repertoire, and recordings and performances are limited, leaving aspiring performers in something of an informational desert.

In this paper, I endeavor to fill this informational gap for performers and scholars alike by providing them with a brief biography of Medtner, an outline of the development of the concert vocalise genre, and the background of the Goethe poem that inspired Medtner. Then my in-depth analyses reveal underlying structural, motivic, and
programmatic links both within and between the works. Finally, my performer’s guide, based on the analyses and my experience performing both works, offers suggestions regarding the interpretational, ensemble, and technical challenges presented by these great works.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

The concert vocalise, a dazzling wordless vocal etude intended for performance, is largely a phenomenon of the twentieth century. Although the beginnings of the genre can be traced to the mid-nineteenth century, the concert vocalise was made famous by composers such as Sergei Rachmaninoff and Maurice Ravel, probably the two most well-known vocalise composers, during the early twentieth century. Ravel wrote his Vocalise-Étude en Forme de Habanera first, in March of 1907.¹ Subsequently, Rachmaninoff wrote his Vocalise, Op. 34, No. 14 eight years later in 1915, although it is frequently miscited as having been written earlier.² Both works are typical of the concert vocalise genre in that they are short, relatively simple in form, and designed primarily as showpieces for virtuoso singers. Ravel’s Vocalise-Étude, for example, is a mere 59 measures long, with two separate measure-long cadenzas and a myriad of ornate trills and delicate ornaments designed to highlight the technical skills of the performer. These two eternally popular pieces of Rachmaninoff and Ravel are also excellent examples of the unique property of the modern concert vocalise: its complete lack of text.

The two monumental concert vocalises that comprise Medtner’s Op. 41, however, are quite different from the typical concert vocalise. Both the Sonata-Vocalise mit einem

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Motto “Geweihter Platz,” Op. 41, No. 1 and the Suite Vocalise, Op. 41, No. 2 are large-scale works with complex forms. Furthermore, although each piece demands a high level of virtuosity from both pianist and singer due to sheer size and scope, neither piece is written in an overtly virtuosic style. And finally, both the Sonata-Vocalise and the Suite Vocalise are programmatically based on a shared text: Goethe’s poem “Geweihter Platz.”

By basing the Sonata-Vocalise and the Suite Vocalise on a specific text, Medtner cleverly bridges the gap between art song and concert vocalise. The innovation of adding a textual element to a traditionally textless genre introduces a tantalizing new layer of complexity that demands further research and exploration. However, as with any innovation, it also offers new challenges to performers wishing to program either or both works. Current scholarship has yet to offer any kind of in-depth analysis of either work, leaving questions as to the structural and motivic elements that bind these large works together, not to mention questions related to exactly how Medtner addresses the challenge of linking specific parts of Goethe’s text to the textless portions of music. Furthermore, neither work is considered standard repertoire, and recordings and performances are limited, which leaves aspiring performers in something of an informational desert.

The lack of resources associated with Medtner’s Sonata-Vocalise and Suite Vocalise, combined with the size, complexity, and interpretational challenges of these

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3 As an example, one needs only compare the relatively under-spoken compositional style of the Suite Vocalise to Glière’s flashy Concerto for Coloratura and Orchestra, Op. 82, another twentieth-century attempt at the large-scale concert vocalise, written in 1943.
works, is enough to give even the most ambitious aspiring performer pause before approaching them. In this paper, I endeavor to fill that gap for performers and scholars alike. I will provide context first, with a brief biography of Medtner, an outline of the development of the concert vocalise genre, and the background of the Goethe poem that inspired Medtner. Then my in-depth analyses reveal underlying structural, motivic, and programmatic links both within and between the works. Finally, my performer’s guide, based on the analyses and my experience with performing both works, offers suggestions regarding the interpretational, ensemble, and technical challenges presented by these two works.
CHAPTER 2
BIOGRAPHY

Nikolai Medtner was born in Moscow on January 5, 1880 to an extremely cultured family. His father, Karl Medtner, was manager of a lace factory who enjoyed reading both German and Russian literature, especially Goethe. His mother, Alexandra Goedicke, was a talented pianist and singer who began to instruct Nikolai in piano when he was only six years old. At the piano, young Nikolai excelled at technique, as well as improvisation and composition, and he was enrolled in the Moscow Conservatory at the age of twelve in 1892. Medtner’s classmates included Sergei Rachmaninoff and Alexander Scriabin, although Medtner was the youngest of the three. He studied piano with Vasily Safonov, graduating in 1900 with highest honors. While there, Medtner also took a counterpoint class taught by the famous Russian composition teacher Sergei Taneev. Despite dropping the class before completing it, Medtner continued to consult Taneev in matters of composition during his years at the Moscow Conservatory.

Following his graduation, Medtner was a composer first and a performer second; although he gained significant notoriety in Russia, he could sometimes be a difficult and uncompromising personality with whom to work. Medtner travelled a great deal during the early years of his career, spending time in Germany, Great Britain, France, Italy, and

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6 Martyn, p. 6.
the United States. He was hired as a Professor of Music at the Moscow Conservatory in 1909, where he taught piano. He continued to teach on and off at the Conservatory, simultaneously composing and concertizing during the First World War, until his final departure from Russia in 1921 following the Bolshevik Revolution.

Medtner and his wife were staying in Neuendorf, Germany in 1922 when he completed his *Sonata-Vocalise*, Op. 41, No. 1, inspired in part by Rachmaninoff’s 1915 *Vocalise*, according to Medtner’s biographer Barrie Martyn. He wrote the *Suite Vocalise*, Op. 41, No. 2 during the years 1926-1927 while in Paris. Martyn suggests that perhaps Medtner was so fond of “Geweihter Platz,” the Goethe poem that inspires both works, due to his “obsessional concern with the mystery of artistic creation.” In between writing the two giant vocalises, Medtner set the same Goethe poem in his *Sieben Lieder*, Op. 46, No. 2 (composed 1922-1924).

Medtner moved to England in 1935 and resided there for the rest of his life. He never achieved the same fame as his contemporary and close friend Rachmaninoff, who was not only a composer, but also a touring virtuoso pianist and conductor. Medtner was so devoted to his art that he simply refused to concertize unless he was performing his...
own music, and this stubbornness created continual financial difficulties for Medtner and his wife. As a composer, Medtner was extremely devoted to the old masters such as Bach, Mozart, and Beethoven. This devotion shines through both in his fondness for sonata form and counterpoint, and in his uncompromising refusal to abandon traditional tonality. In his all-but-unknown book, *The Muse and the Fashion*, published in 1935 in Paris, the composer dismissed modernism as nothing more than an unfortunate trend, defending more traditional, tonal musical concepts as, in the words of Martyn, “eternal and immutable laws of art.”

Not surprisingly, being raised in a family with such refined literary tastes — aside from his father’s literary inclinations, Medtner’s eldest brother, Emil, was also an important Russian literary figure associated with the Symbolists — Medtner was intensely interested in both Russian and German literature. He masterfully set the poetry of Goethe, Heine, and Pushkin among others in his 108 art-song settings for voice and piano. In these inspired settings, the piano is often given a prominent role. When the piano does have a stronger accompanimental role, as in *Winter Evening*, Op. 13, No. 1, it is still firmly grounded in painting the text of the poem, never just idly providing harmony.

Being a former student of Taneev, Medtner included passages rich with complex and fascinating counterpoint in both his vocal and his instrumental works. Further, in his sonatas for solo piano as well as his duo sonatas for piano and violin, Medtner’s ability to construct large-scale forms from tiny motivic fragments is nothing short of astounding.

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13 Martyn, p. 216.
Compared to the music of Rachmaninoff, the intellectual properties of which never interfered with its accessibility, some of Medtner’s more intellectual music may initially seem inaccessible due to the complexity of his musical ideas; but as with any true artist, study of Medtner’s music yields lucrative and highly satisfying rewards beyond what appears on the surface. However, in many instances, such as the famous *Sonata Reminiscenza*, Op. 38, No. 1, the *Fairy Tale in A major*, Op. 51, No. 3, or the two works of Op. 41, Medtner’s work is immediately accessible to audiences of all levels, full of lyricism, rhythmic playfulness, and both haunting and enchanting melodies.

When examining Medtner both as an artist and a person, one cannot help but be impressed by his tremendous sense of loyalty and duty toward his art. Although he never approached the recognition and popularity he deserved, he maintained throughout his life a small but loyal group of supporters and enthusiasts. To this day, pianists continue to be amazed when stumbling upon the music of Medtner for the first time. There is also a devoted group of scholars and pianists who continue to study and promote the work of this great Russian composer. Whether by a few or by many, Medtner’s rich and diverse body of work is sure to be continually explored, promoted, and enjoyed for many years.
CHAPTER 3
THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CONCERT VOCALISE GENRE

As Larry Stickler points out in his 1989 dissertation on concert vocalises, the evolution of the concert vocalise is similar to the rise of the concert etude for piano, the development of which preceded the concert vocalise slightly.\textsuperscript{14} Like the piano exercises of the famous nineteenth-century piano pedagogues Carl Czerny and Charles-Louis Hanon, most early examples of the vocalise were never intended to be performed for even the most modest audience. Stickler refers to this type of pedagogical vocalise as a “vocal warm-up exercise” to distinguish it from the concert vocalise.\textsuperscript{15} The wordlessness of these exercises, as Stickler writes, was to the advantage of both student and teacher: “Not having to consider pronunciation, diction, translation, word stress, or interpretation when working on concert vocalises allows the student to concentrate on the technical aspects of vocal production and musical phrasing.”\textsuperscript{16}

Pedagogical vocalises, both unaccompanied and accompanied, were historically written by vocal pedagogues specifically for the benefit of their own students. Kathleen Rose DeJardin, in her 1992 dissertation on the vocalise, traces the history of the pedagogical vocalise back to voice pedagogue and composer Giulio Caccini (1551-1618),


\textsuperscript{15} Stickler, 3-4.

\textsuperscript{16} Stickler, 4.
who wrote vocalises to help students improve their “rhythm, attack, and sight-reading.”

Other well-known vocal pedagogues who followed Caccini also composed exercises for their students, including Pierfrancesco Tosi (1656-1732), Giovanni Battista Mancini (1716-1800), and Giovanni Marco Bordogni (1789-1856). The vocalises of Bordogni show a marked development in the quality of composition, and each vocalise has a written-out, often elaborate piano accompaniment as well as a tuneful melody.

Somewhat contrary to the modern conception of the vocalise, six of Bordogni’s *12 Nouvelle Vocalises*, written in the early nineteenth century, even include Italian text. These pieces make no great attempt to programmatically connect the text and music, but rather provide an opportunity for singers to improve their Italian diction outside of the standard opera and Italian art song repertoire. As vocal exercises, DeJardin writes, Bordogni’s vocalises are “considered to be some of the more difficult of those in print.”

In fact, Bordogni’s vocalises are well-known in the low brass community because many of them were arranged for trombone by Joannès Rochut in his *Melodious Etudes*, published in 1928.

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18 DeJardin, 15-18.

19 DeJardin, 18.

It is nearly impossible to cite the very first concert vocalise. Many references list a work entitled *Sonatina* by Louis Spohr, Op. 138, written in 1848 for voice and piano, as the first formal concert vocalise. In Spohr’s *Sonatina* “the voice is used very much like a solo instrument,” according to Owen Jander’s *Grove Music Online* article on the vocalise. The same work is also cited in Lalage Cochrane’s article on the vocalise from *The Oxford Companion to Music* as an early example of a concert vocalise. However, this assertion is strongly disputed by Susan Owen-Leinert and Michael Leinert, distinguished Spohr scholars and editors of the first complete edition of Spohr’s songs. They emphatically maintain that the *Sonatina* was a setting of Johann Karl Ritter Braun von Braunthal’s poem “An Sie am Clavier,” as indicated by Spohr himself in his own list of works. They also cite the title of Kassel’s first edition of the work in 1848, which is given as *An Sie am Clavier* (edited by Luckhardt). In their complete edition, they have published the *Sonatina* along with the text, as it was originally intended by the composer.

Regardless of who is responsible for the first concert vocalise, the blossoming of the genre did undisputedly occur in the early twentieth century, with the publication of

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A.L. Hettich’s *Repertoire Moderne de Vocalises-Études*. Hettich, a professor at the Paris Conservatory, commissioned several contemporary composers, including Maurice Ravel, Heitor Villa-Lobos, Carl Nielsen, Gabriel Fauré, and Francis Poulenc, to write exercises for his voice students, specifically to be used in their final examinations at the school. The collection is in multiple volumes, and was published over the course of several years beginning in 1907.\(^{25}\) By commissioning and publishing vocalises by so many composers of distinction, Hettich was primarily responsible for the popularity that the concert vocalise enjoyed in the early twentieth century. Medtner, who finished his two vocalises in 1922 and 1927, would have surely been aware of this musical trend. It speaks volumes that even a composer as conservative as Medtner, who considered modernism in music to be sacrilegious, was swept up in the vogue of the vocalise! Throughout the century, the genre grew substantially, and continues to grow. In fact, in her impressively comprehensive dissertation from 1991, Kathryn Susan Chilcote lists over 200 composers who have written concert vocalises.\(^{26}\)

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CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS OF SONATA-VOCALISE MIT EINEM MOTTO "GEWEIHTER PLATZ"

OP. 41 NO. 1

The Sonata-Vocalise mit einem Motto “Geweihter Platz” is unique within the genre for its length, form, and programmatic links. At 270 measures, Medtner’s vocalise is substantially longer than most other vocalises; the vocalises of Ravel and Rachmaninoff, for example, are 59 measures and 39 measures, respectively. This extreme length results from Medtner’s use of sonata form, which aligns it more closely to his piano sonatas than to other vocalises. Most important, whereas most concert vocalises are textless and non-programmatic, Medtner’s Sonata-Vocalise is linked to a text: the Goethe poem “Geweihter Platz,” which is set as a typical art song in the first movement.

At first glance, the two movements of the Sonata-Vocalise appear to have little in common, and current scholarship has yet to discover any meaningful links between them, although admittedly, very little scholarly work has been completed in relation to the Sonata-Vocalise. Christoph Flamm and Barrie Martyn, both highly accomplished Medtner scholars, each mention the work in their individual books, but only provide brief descriptions of the two movements. In Nicolas Medtner: His Life and Music, Martyn writes:
Although the setting of the ‘motto’ has the same key and metre as the Sonata itself, its musical material is for the most part distinct, though the falling first three notes of the C major scale which inform the piano’s introductory figure are taken up again in the Sonata’s coda, and the singer’s final line anticipates its opening theme.”27

This quote reflects the general opinion of current scholarship on the *Sonata-Vocalise*, that besides surface-level connections such as key and meter, the two movements appear to be bound together by little else. However, a detailed analysis reveals not only the inner structures of each movement, especially the sonata movement, but also deep and intentional structural, motivic, and programmatic connections between the two movements. On a surface level, the two movements share the key of C major, compound meters 6/8 and 9/8, and dotted-rhythm patterns. More deeply, though, the tonal plan of the sonata form of the sonata movement is directly derived from the key areas of the texted movement, which are, with a few exceptions, closely related to the tonic key of C major. Also, fundamental motivic and melodic-resolution connections exist both within and between the two movements. Finally, the two movements are linked programmatically, in that the *Sonata-Vocalise* is an abstract musical representation of the poem of the first movement.

**Movement I: “Motto”**

The Goethe text of the first movement was especially significant to Medtner. As Flamm points out in his book, *Der Russische Komponist Nikolaj Metner*, the same Goethe text that Medtner used in the *Sonata-Vocalise* is the basis not only for the *Suite*  

27 Martyn, p. 151.
Vocalise, Op. 41, No. 2, but also for the Op. 46, No. 2 song, “Geweihter Platz.” Flamm argues that this text and the music it inspired play a crucial role in understanding Medtner. He writes, “For Medtner himself, these pieces must have had a special meaning, so much so that they are a very important key to understanding his music as a whole.”

Goethe’s poem, the title of which means “Sanctified Place,” is from a set of poems called Antiker Form sich nähernd (Poems in the manner of the antique), first published in 1815 in Goethe’s own edition of his collected works. These thirty-one poems are inspired by, and are an attempt to emulate, the poetry of antiquity. As he did with the other poems in the set, Goethe accomplishes this by referring to figures and locations derived from Greek mythology, including Mount Olympus, the Graces, nymphs, and the Muses, and by writing in imitation of the hexameter of classical Greek poetry, with each line containing six stressed syllables.

The poem “Geweihter Platz” depicts a poet secretly observing a nocturnal gathering of nymphs and the Graces. As Figure 1 shows, the poem is divided into two halves or verses, each verse containing four lines. In the first half, the poet, spying on the supernatural beings, hears their beautiful songs and sees their secretive dances. In the second half, he has visions of the splendors of heaven and earth. Overwhelmed by his encounter and ensuing reveries, he excitedly attempts to describe his experience to the


Muses, but they instruct him to speak modestly about what he has seen, so as not to anger the gods.
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<tr>
<th><strong>Geweihter Platz</strong></th>
<th><strong>Section</strong></th>
<th><strong>Key Area</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Wenn zu den Reihen der Nymphen versammelt, in heiliger Mondnacht</strong>&lt;br&gt;When, in ranks, the Nymphs assemble in the sacred moonlit night.(^{30})</td>
<td>1 (22)</td>
<td>C major/A minor mm. 1-14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sich die Grazien heimlich herab vom Olympus gesellen.</strong>&lt;br&gt;Joined in the sacred moonlit night by the Graces, sneaking down from Olympus.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hier belauscht sie der Dichter und hört die schönen Gesänge,</strong>&lt;br&gt;Here, the poet eavesdrops on them and hears the beautiful Songs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>sieht verschwiegener Tänze geheimnisvolle Bewegung.</strong>&lt;br&gt;and sees the mysterious movements of their secretive dances.</td>
<td></td>
<td>G major mm. 15-22 (PAC in m. 19 + 4-bar ext.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Was der Himmel nur herrliches hat, Was glücklich die Erde</strong>&lt;br&gt;What splendor only the Heavens have, what fortunate loveliness</td>
<td>2a (11)</td>
<td>E minor m. 23 (Meter change from 6/8 to 9/8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reizendes immer gebar, Das erscheint dem wachenden Träumer.</strong>&lt;br&gt;the Earth bore, appear to this watching [waking] dreamer.</td>
<td></td>
<td>E-flat major m. 29 D minor mm. 30-33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Alles erzählt er den Musen, und daß die Götter nicht zürnen,</strong>&lt;br&gt;All this he tells to the Muses, and so as not to anger the gods,</td>
<td>2b (14)</td>
<td>D minor mm. 34-37 (F major m. 37)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>lehren die Musen ihn gleich bescheiden Geheimnisse sprechen.</strong>&lt;br&gt;The Muses teach him to speak of these secrets modestly.</td>
<td></td>
<td>C major mm. 38 (PAC: m. 42 + 5-bar ext.) (Meter change from 9/8 to 6/8 in m. 42)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 1.** Form Diagram of ““Motto”” from Sonata-Vocalise.

\(^{30}\) Translation by the author.
The texted first movement of Medtner’s *Sonata-Vocalise* is through-composed, but follows the poem’s two-part division, with each half being about the same length, 22 and 25 measures, respectively (see Figure 2). Section 1, unified throughout by a dotted-rhythm ostinato in 6/8 meter, begins in the tonic key of C major and ends in the dominant key of G major. In the contrasting Section 2, the accompaniment abandons the dotted-rhythm ostinato and instead becomes more chordal. The meter changes to a more expansive 9/8 and the more chromatic harmonic language contrasts with the relatively diatonic language of the first half. Unlike the first section, which sets the entire first half of the text, Medtner divides Section 2 into two subsections, 2a and 2b. Section 2a begins in E minor, the relative minor of the dominant, and moves by way of thematic sequence to a surprising E-flat major harmony, followed by an octatonic-like chromatic passage depicting the word “dreamer.” Section 2b, which begins in D minor, returns eventually to C major by way of an F major pivot chord.

The sonata-form second movement closely follows the same tonal plan, as illustrated in Figure 2. The first two key areas of the sonata movement, C major and its relative minor, correspond to the key areas of the opening section of the texted movement. The order of the next two key areas of the texted movement, G major to e minor, is reversed in the sonata movement for formal reasons. Both movements then move from E-flat to D minor, and eventually to the pivot F major, followed by a return to tonic, C major, in the coda.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mvt. I</th>
<th>Key</th>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>Mvt. II</th>
<th>Key</th>
<th>Measures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Section 1</td>
<td>C/a</td>
<td>1-14</td>
<td>Primary Theme</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>1-18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Transition</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>19-37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Second Theme A</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>37-54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>G</td>
<td>15-22</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section 2a</td>
<td>e</td>
<td>23-28</td>
<td>Second Theme B</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>55-75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Closing Theme</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>75-86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>E-flat</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>G/E-flat featured</td>
<td>G/E-flat featured</td>
<td>87-94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Development I</td>
<td>G/E-flat featured</td>
<td>95-110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Development II</td>
<td>e-flat/f</td>
<td>111-132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>d</td>
<td>30-33</td>
<td>Development III</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>133-159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section 2b</td>
<td>d</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>[Retransition]</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>159-167</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>[Primary Theme]</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>168-186</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>[Transition]</td>
<td>E-flat/A-flat</td>
<td>187-203</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>[Second Theme A]</td>
<td>b-flat</td>
<td>203-220</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>[Second Theme B]</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>221-233</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F (pivot)</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Closing theme</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>233-252</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C</td>
<td>39-47</td>
<td>Coda</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>253-270</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 2.** Shared Key Plan, Movements I and II from *Sonata-Vocalise*.

The strong motivic connections within the texted movement reveal Medtner’s penchant for simple motives ripe for expansion or variation. Initially, the motives consist of the smaller intervals of seconds and thirds. Motive 1, centered around the third scale
degree and introduced in the piano, is comprised of an ascending and descending major second followed by a descending major third, or E-D-E-C, as shown in Example 1.

Example 1: *Sonata-Vocalise*, Movement I, mm. 1-8.\(^{31}\)

The dotted-rhythm ostinato on each beat, which is itself motivic, persists through the entire first section, save the two measures leading to the final chord of the ending cadence in mm. 18-19. As the voice enters in m. 3, it repeats the first three notes of Motive 1, but instead of descending a major third to C, it ascends a minor to G, thus emphasizing the dominant pitch. This variation of Motive 1, labeled here as Motive 1a, immediately sets up two issues that will demand closure by the end of the movement: the

avoidance of the desired implied motion of closure, scale degrees 3-2-1, or in this case, E-D-C, and the possibility that the closure come from the completed ascending triad, E-G-C, thus ending on the upper octave.

Tonally, the first 14 measures of Section 1 are in C major, but are heavily shaded by A minor. Medtner accomplishes this by frequently emphasizing the submediant chord, and by using an added-sixth, shown in Example 2, to destabilize both the tonic and dominant triads.

Example 2: *Sonata-Vocalise*, Movement I, mm. 9-16.

The vocal line, carefully constructed from Motives 1 and 1a, gradually ascends to a G5 in mm. 15-16, which is accompanied by a modulation to the dominant key of G major. The first section cadences in that key in m. 19 after an extended trill figure in the accompaniment, derived from Motive 1, as seen in Example 3.
Also shown in Example 3 is the vocal line traversing scale degrees 3-2-1, but in the “wrong” key of the dominant. The perfect authentic cadence in m. 19 is followed by a four-bar cadential extension in the dominant, ending Section 1.

Section 2a, which is still heavily inundated with variants of Motives 1 and 1a, begins suddenly in m. 23 in the relative minor of the dominant, the only preparation being a stepwise motion in the bass from G to E begun in the previous measure (m. 22). The first phrase concludes in m. 26 with a half cadence in the key of the minor dominant, D minor. A two-measure piano interlude prepares the listener for an eventual cadence in that key, but instead, in m. 29, Medtner, moves surprisingly to E-flat major, as seen in Example 4. The sudden transition to E-flat major, which has a shared-third relationship.
with the starting key of E minor, is facilitated by the tonic resolution of an augmented-sixth chord in D-minor in m. 28.

![Midi notation](image1)

Example 4: *Sonata-Vocalise*, Movement I, mm. 28-29.

An octatonic-like chromatic motive, which returns in the *Sonata-Vocalise* movement (mm. 121-124), illustrates the word “Träumer” or “dreamer” in the accompaniment to the F5 to E-flat5 in the vocal part, shown in Example 5.

![Midi notation](image2)

Example 5: *Sonata-Vocalise*, Movement I, mm. 30-31.
In Section 2b, the vocal line, colored by fragments of Motive 1 in the piano accompaniment, continues to ascend. The movement reaches its climax in m. 38 as the voice sings its highest note of the piece, A5, offset by the lowest note in the piano part, F1, and marked *piano* by the composer. As shown in Example 6, Medtner uses the F-major harmony of this climactic moment to pivot back to the tonic key of C major.

![Example 6: Sonata-Vocalise, Movement I, mm. 38-47.](image)

The extended trill figure in the accompaniment which had ended Section 1 is repeated, but now in the tonic key, and the voice sings the expected scale degrees 3-2-1, but in a higher register, while the piano doubles this closing motive in the same register as the beginning. As the movement closes, the 6/8 meter of Section 1 is restored, and the piano
repeats the cadential extension of Section 1, this time in tonic but with additional closing measures that resolve the leading tone appropriately.

The sophistication and subtle beauty of the texted movement is a testament to Medtner’s skill as a composer of art song. For example, the whispering dotted-rhythm ostinato combined with the tonal ambiguity of Section 1 evokes the nocturnal secretiveness of the first stanza of poetry. In Section 2a, the metric expansion and the full, majestic accompanimental chords, as well as the exotic E-flat major tonality (the only non-diatonic key area of the movement) all depict the splendorous visions revealed to the poet. The chromatic “dreamer” motive has an impressionistic quality that further portrays the dreamlike visions of the poet. Finally, the *poco mobile crescendo* leading to the sudden and unexpected *piano* in m. 38, as well as the contradiction between the climactic high A in the vocal line and the single low F in the piano bass, musically depicts the idea of the Muses teaching the poet to subdue his almost incontrollable ecstasy to avoid angering the gods.

**Movement II: Sonata-Vocalise**

The *Sonata-Vocalise* movement adheres to a very traditional sonata-allegro form, shown below in the formal diagram of Figure 3. The exposition contains the usual four sections, each of which, except for the closing theme, features a separate theme, with the bonus of an additional secondary theme, for a total of four themes. The movement is proportionately well-balanced; the exposition and recapitulation are nearly equal, with a shorter development and a concluding coda. One reason for the length of this movement
**Exposition: mm. 1-94**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary Theme</th>
<th>Transition</th>
<th>Secondary Theme A</th>
<th>Secondary Theme B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CM: I</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>vi</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mm. 1-18</td>
<td>mm. 19-37</td>
<td>mm. 37-54</td>
<td>mm. 55-75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Closing Theme (P/T/SA)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>V</th>
<th>mm. 75-94</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>=94</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Development: mm. 95-166**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section I (P)</th>
<th>Section II (S)</th>
<th>Section III (P/SA)</th>
<th>Retransition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td>b iii, iv</td>
<td>ii (fugue), iv</td>
<td>I (V)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mm. 95-110</td>
<td>mm. 111-132</td>
<td>mm. 133-159</td>
<td>mm. 159-167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| =72           |                |                     |              |

**Recapitulation: mm. 167-270**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary Theme</th>
<th>Transition</th>
<th>Secondary Theme A</th>
<th>Secondary Theme B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>b III, b VI</td>
<td>B-flat minor</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mm. 168-186</td>
<td>mm. 187-203</td>
<td>mm. 203-220</td>
<td>mm. 221-233</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Closing Theme**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coda</th>
<th>mm. 253-270</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>mm. 253-270</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>mm. 253-270</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total measures = 270**

**Figure 3.** Form Diagram of Movement II, *Sonata-Vocalise.*
is the balanced thematic division of labor between voice and piano: themes introduced by one instrument are often presented in varied repetition by the other. Programmatically and tonally, the 94-measure exposition corresponds largely to Section 1 of the texted first movement, with its key areas of C major, A minor, E minor, and G major, just as the 72-measure development corresponds programmatically and tonally to Section 2.

This development is divided into three sections, both by key and motivic material. Section I, still in the dominant, develops material from the primary theme; Section II develops material from secondary themes A and B in the plan keys of E-flat minor and F minor; Section III combines the motivic material from the primary theme and secondary theme A in an exciting fugue, in the keys of D minor and F minor, also familiar from the key plan of Movement I. The development concludes with an eight-bar retransition emphasizing the dominant, which cadences in the tonic key of C major for the recapitulation.

Because of the repetitive nature of the recapitulation, most of it is outside the scope of the tonal plan of the texted movement. However, to add spice to it, rather than simply restating secondary themes A and B in tonic, Medtner instead restates them in the foreign key areas of B-flat minor and F-minor respectively, a half step higher than their original statements. This transposition to F minor enables Medtner to return to the original tonal plan with the closing theme in F major playing a pivotal role in the return to C major, just as he did towards the end of the texted first movement. However, being a master of sonata form, Medtner inserts the head motives of both secondary themes in the
tonic key of C major into the coda, thereby finally providing the necessary tonal closure at the very end of the work.

The 10-measure primary theme of the sonata movement, mm. 5-14 in the voice, with a varied repeat in the piano, mm. 15-18, is connected to the opening of the texted movement not only in key area and meter, but also in motive. Example 7 shows Motive 1 from the texted movement imbedded in the vocal line not once, but twice. In contrast to the melody of the song, which began on the third scale degree E4 and gradually worked its way up to G5, here Medtner focuses the voice on the octave from G4 to G5, ending on the lower G in m. 14, which coincides with the opening of the piano statement two octaves lower. While the vocal statement emphasizes C major, with its opening rocking motion from tonic to dominant that concludes on a pedal C in the bass, the piano repeat emphasizes the dominant G major, and ends the entire primary section on the dominant. It is surely no accident that a piece entitled Vocalise begins with a series of intervals which gradually increase in size; after all, the concert vocalise genre did evolve from vocal exercises, and a passage of gradually increasing intervals makes a spectacular vocal warmup exercise! Yet, instead of sounding like a pedantic exercise, the primary theme of the Sonata-Vocalise exudes a warm, nocturnal excitement with its legato melody and flowing accompaniment.
Example 7: *Sonata-Vocalise*, Movement II, mm. 1-12.

In the transition, again consisting of two sections, mm. 19-26 and mm. 27-36, the second this time presenting a vocal obbligato over the theme in the piano, the key moves from C major to A minor in each. In the first half, the harmonic motion is motivated in the bass by a slow motion up the scale from E2 to A3. In the second half, this bass motion is interrupted (m. 31) to end on a more conclusive half cadence in A minor, which is extended for four measures (mm. 33-36) to prepare for the secondary theme. Overall, the pitch emphasis in the melody gradually descends from C5 to E4 in m. 25, with an ascending flourish up to G5 in preparation for the second half, and a gradual descent from E5 to B4, which prepares for the entry of A4 as the main pitch at the beginning of the secondary theme. Programmatically, the music of the primary theme and transition sets the scene for the meeting of nymphs and the Graces on which our poet is eavesdropping.
In the secondary theme A, a stable parallel period (mm. 37-44) followed by a varied repeat (mm. 45-51), more direct ties to the texted movement begin to surface. As in the primary theme, secondary theme A is motivically derived from Motive 1 of the texted movement. As illuminated in Example 8, the ascent of a second followed by the descent of a third, which was characteristic of the final three notes of Motive 1, is embedded into secondary theme A on the notes B-C-A, marked in blue. The improvisational mordent, marked in red, along with the stepwise simplicity of the vocal line and the sparse accompaniment and harmonization in the piano, evokes a Russian folksong. The melodic patterning remains focused on the a-minor triad; each period begins and ends on A4. The motivic similarities, along with the familiar key area of A minor, link secondary theme A to Section 1 of the texted movement, and more specifically, to the beautiful songs of the nymphs and the Graces heard by the poet.
Further motivic and programmatic links can be found in secondary theme B, mm. 55-75, which is in the key of E minor. As Example 9 demonstrates, Secondary theme B also contains two separate varied statements of Motive 1, marked in blue.
In the first statement (mm. 55-51), made up of the notes C-B-C-A, the characteristic descending third is filled in by a passing tone. The second occurrence of Motive 1 on the notes B-A-B-G, is an exact quote of the original, transposed up a perfect fifth. The patternning in the vocal melody again outlines a triad, with the main pitch B4 first ascending up to E5 and then descending to E4 by the end of the first statement (m. 51). In the second statement (mm. 62-66), the vocal line remains focused on B4, with an ambitus from G5 to G4 in the middle. Furthermore, secondary theme B is in the waltz-like triple meter of 9/8, which has the quality of a festive dance. Along with the triple meter, the dotted rhythms and syncopations are a very intentional programmatic representation of the “secretive dances” observed by the poet in Section 1 of the first movement. Two-measure fragments of both secondary themes A and B alternate in mm. 67-75 to end the entire secondary theme section. Through some fun chromaticism, Medtner brings the key area back to G major, and the vocal pitch to D5, in time for the closing section.

The closing theme of the exposition (mm. 75-94), in the key of the dominant, as was the end of Section 1 of the texted movement, consists of a canonic treatment at the fifth of the transition theme (mm. 75-82), followed by a repeat of material from secondary theme A (mm. 83-90 = mm. 45-48 twice, the second statement of the parallel period) and a restatement of the primary theme. In the secondary theme A repeat (mm. 87-90), Medtner moves suddenly in m. 87 to an unexpected E-flat major-seventh chord in first inversion, marked in Example 10, which conflates the expected G major ending of the exposition with Eb, the flat-sixth scale degree (and the minor third of the tonic key of
the movement). Over this harmony, Medtner then repeats the primary theme starting on G (mm. 91-94 in the voice), over an unstable chord (C-G-D-F-A), which then resolves to C minor in m. 94, and C4 in the vocal part. The tempo markings indicate this as end of the exposition. See Example 11.

Example 10: Sonata-Vocalise, Movement II, mm. 85-88.

Medtner’s use of E-flat here, both in the voice and in the accompaniment, corresponds to the comparable section in the introductory song in m. 29. In m. 87 of the concluding theme, the voice sings E-flat5, which resolves down to D, then, in an extended repeat, F-E-flat-D, which foreshadows the eventual melodic closure of the movement. This aurally arresting E-flat major seventh chord signals the imminent arrival of the development, and also recalls the visions appearing to the poet as harmonized by a surprising E-flat major chord in the song. Further, the use of E-flat bridges the transition from the exposition to the development. As shown in Example 11, E-flat features prominently in the restatement of the primary theme in the voice beginning in m. 91, the end of the exposition, as well as in the bass as a pedal-tone for three-and-a-half measures below a G-major harmony in mm. 95-98, also accompanying a statement in the piano of
the primary theme for the opening of the development. Although the vocal part, by holding a long G4, seems to indicate closure of sorts for the exposition, the tempo marking *poco a poco con moto*, indicates not an ending but a beginning. The actual G-major chord that would close the exposition in a more traditional sonata form does not appear until m. 99, by which time the development is already underway. The vocal part states a repeat of the primary theme in the dominant, mm. 99-103, and ends with another flourish up to a long G5, over agitated sixteenth-note motion in the piano part.

Example 11: *Sonata-Vocalise*, Movement II, mm. 95-98.

This first section of the development is 16 measures long (mm. 95-110); the succeeding sections II and III are 22 and 26 measures, respectively, with a retransition of eight measures. The E-flat emphasis continues in chromatic color chords alternating with G-major triads until m. 109, when Medtner reaches an E-flat-minor orientation, with the
pitch E-flat acting as a fulcrum linking it to an A-flat major triad, presented here in second inversion as shown in Example 12. As mentioned, these references to the important E-flat major harmony in Section 2a of the texted movement give a programmatic context for Sections I and II of the development. Certainly all of the complex motivic interplay, foreign key areas, and mysterious harmonies correspond nicely with the idea of the poet experiencing visions of indescribable beauty.


Section II (mm. 111-132) illustrates yet another strong motivic connection between the texted movement and the sonata movement; this occurs shortly after the move to E-flat minor, when in mm. 121-124, as seen in Example 13a, the piano plays a familiar-sounding chromatic flourish. This is clearly a reference to the chromatic
“dreamer” motive from mm. 30-31 of the texted movement, shown at the bottom of Example 13b.

Example 13a: *Sonata-Vocalise*, Movement II, mm. 121-124.

Example 13b: *Sonata-Vocalise*, Movement I, mm. 30-33.

Most immediately noticeable is that both passages share a similar contour. Furthermore, comparing the first measure of each passage (see Example 14) shows that both contain several notes in common from the same octatonic scale including F-sharp (G-flat), B-flat, C, and C-sharp (D-flat), although neither passage is strictly octatonic.
Example 14: *Sonata-Vocalise*, Movement I, m. 30, Movement II, m. 121.

Finally, in both cases, Medtner instructs the pianist to leave the damper pedal depressed for the entire passage, to further evoke the dreamlike visions of the poet. This reference to specific musical material from the texted movement corresponding to the word “dreamer” in the Goethe text further supports the idea that the music of the development is programmatically linked to Section 2a of the first movement.

Section III of the development (mm. 133-158) begins with an exciting fugue in the key of D minor, and corresponds to Section 2b of the texted movement, in the same key. Medtner, who was a master of counterpoint, uses the technique here to illustrate the section of the text in which the poet attempts to describe his visions to the Muses. The fugue that opens this section, with all its interrupting subject entries in various voices, aurally captures the image of the excited poet stumbling over his own words, jumping from idea to idea as he attempts to describe what he has seen to the Muses. As the music becomes more agitated, moving into the retransition beginning in m. 159, the building enthusiasm of the poet almost seems to explode as the recapitulation begins in m. 167.

The coda (mm. 253-270) contains the final melodic closure for both movements. At its beginning, the voice convincingly ends the restatement of the primary theme from
the closing area, now completely harmonized only with a G-major dominant eleventh chord, with the notes E-D-C (or scale degrees 3-2-1) in the same register as Motive 1a from the texted movement. However, the same motive a third higher, G-F-E, is played in the piano in the same register, thereby “overriding” the closure in the vocal part. Then, at the same time as the dominant-seventh chord resolves, on beat two of m. 253, the motive is restated on scale degrees 6-5-4 in the piano. This overlapping of motives between the piano and the voice, on different pitch and register levels, continues for the first half of the coda, through m. 261 (nine measures). A dotted-rhythm bass pattern, which recalls the prominent rhythm pattern from the first movement, accompanies in the piano part. The final statement of 3-2-1 in octave 5 ends this section and overlaps with the beginning of the next, which is an extended final cadence of a French augmented-sixth chord moving to V in F. The voice has a written-out trill and additional flourishes on the pitches A-G-F-E before a final arpeggio outlining the C-major triad from E4 to E5 (m. 268). The piano part also arpeggiates the C-major triad with an added D, for the reverse of the closure, C-D-E. Medtner gives the final statement of 3-2-1 to the piano, in octave 4, as required by the opening of the song, and accompanies it with a traditional harmonization, V9/V-V7-I.

Finally, the coda also plays a crucial programmatic role. It is so quiet and unassuming, which raises the question: After such a virtuosic work, why would the composer choose to end so softly and even on the weak beat of the last measure? The answer lies once again in Goethe’s text from the first movement. The poet is taught by the Muses to speak modestly about his transcendental experience, and therefore the
Sonata-Vocalise must end modestly as well. Without the direct programmatic and melodic link to the first movement, this ending would make little sense. However, knowing the text to which the coda certainly refers, the ending is nothing short of magical.

It is impossible to know for sure whether Medtner identified himself with the poet in “Geweihter Platz.” Nonetheless, it is not difficult to imagine that a composer, whose compositional voice was considered by others to be relatively modest during an era of brazen musical experimentation and upheaval, might relate to the protagonist of Goethe’s poem. It is clear from a thorough analysis that Medtner went to great lengths to compose specific structural, motivic, and programmatic links between the movements, which can help to inform a successful performance of this masterful, thought-provoking, and unique work.
CHAPTER 5
PERFORMER’S GUIDE TO SONATA-VOCALISE MIT EINEM MOTTO "GEWEIHTER PLATZ" OP. 41, NO. 1

“Motto” (Movement I)\textsuperscript{32}

The “Motto” that begins the Sonata-Vocalise serves various functions, not the least of which is to introduce the text of Goethe’s poem, “Geweihter Platz,” upon which the entire Op. 41 is based. This is clear from Medtner’s setting, written in a declamatory style like the operatic music of Richard Wagner, or the well-known Lieder of Hugo Wolf. Medtner is completely uninterested in forcing the text to conform to a preconceived melody. Rather, the melody of the voice is carefully crafted to mimic the sound and inflection of spoken German. This can be easily verified by first reading the text aloud arhythmically, and then speaking the same text with the rhythms of the vocal melody written by Medtner. For this reason, it is essential that any singer endeavoring to perform this work first and foremost develop a firm grasp of the diction and inflection of Goethe’s poem. This is also true of the pianist, who must always be aware of stressed and unstressed syllables, especially during the first sixteen measures. Otherwise, due to the repetitive nature of the piano’s rhythmic ostinato, it is easy for the music to become mechanical and uninspired.

The opening bars of the “Motto” provide an excellent example of the interpretive subtleties that abound in Medtner’s vocal music. The piano ostinato repeated in mm. 1-3

\footnotesize
\textsuperscript{32} Although it is not explicitly stated in the score, it is assumed that the voice part is written for a female singer, due to the composer’s use of treble clef in the score, and the fact that if sung by a male voice, the vocal line would frequently clash with the piano part. For these reasons, I will refer to the singer as “she” throughout my Performer’s Guides.
is felt in two, with an emphasized downbeat and a de-emphasized upbeat. If this pattern is continued into mm. 3-4, the words “Wenn” and “Nymphen” will be the most heavily emphasized, and the word “Reihen,” the first syllable of which falls on the upbeat of m. 3, will be de-emphasized. This is a valid interpretation, and one could argue that it is the interpretation suggested by the score. Performers should, however, consider an alternate interpretation. In m. 3, because the voice is entering in such a low register and in such a soft dynamic, it is feasible to prioritize the beats so that the downbeat “Wenn” is de-emphasized and the upbeat is emphasized, building momentum to the most important word, “Nymphen.” The difference between the two interpretations is subtle. But the first interpretation — stressed/unstressed/stressed — has an almost simplistic triteness, whereas the second interpretation — unstressed/more stressed/most stressed — has a mysterious, inviting quality that is more sophisticated. If the second interpretation is to be successful, the pianist must take care not to accent the downbeat of m. 3, a reading that is supported by the score, which indicates a diminuendo from piano to pianissimo in mm. 1-2.

In mm. 6-7, Medtner marks a poco a poco crescendo in both the vocal and piano parts, raising important interpretation questions. Unfortunately, Medtner does not indicate the end of the crescendo, and it is incumbent on the performers to decide where it arrives. One possible arrival point for the crescendo is in mm. 10-11, when the bass of the piano finally enters, giving the ensemble an added richness of sound and a more grounded sense of tonality, because of the dominant-tonic relationship implied in the motion from G2 to C3 in the bass clef of the piano. But because the vocal line continues to rise in
register until the upbeat of m. 14, when it reaches a G5 on the adjective “geheimnisvolle,” it would make little or no sense to end the crescendo four measures earlier. Therefore, the most logical place for the poco a poco crescendo to end is the upbeat of m. 14. Further, Medtner does not indicate to what dynamic the poco a poco crescendo leads. The text gives a clue with the word “belauscht” or “eavesdrops,” an activity that is generally done quietly, so the highest dynamic of the crescendo will still be in the context of a person who is trying not to attract attention to himself. A second clue can be found in mm. 14-15, where Medtner indicates a quick decrescendo to the dynamic piano directly after the G5 climax of the crescendo. This suggests that the arrival of the crescendo ought to be close enough to piano to return there relatively quickly. From these two clues, the performers would be wise to pick a dynamic somewhere between mezzo-piano and mezzo-forte for the upbeat of m. 14. That way, the music can continue to serve the nocturnal stillness of the text, while still gathering momentum to support the ascending vocal line in mm. 6-14.

In mm. 15-18, there is some important text-painting in both parts on the word “Bewegung” or “movements.” In mm. 15-16, the voice intones the piano’s rhythmic ostinato three times. The singer can help to bring out the text painting by singing this rhythm with playful levity, in contrast to the mysterious and secretive music that precedes it. The pianist can also help by bringing out the syncopation on beats 3 and 6 of m. 16 in the right hand, which adds to the dance-like character of this section, corresponding to the “mysterious movements of their mysterious dances.” In mm. 17-18, the singer can help the pianist by observing the crescendo in m. 17, which will allow the pianist to leave the
damper pedal depressed, building up a rich and exciting sound, without needing to worry about covering up the voice.

In mm. 19-22, which act as a short interlude between the first and second sections of the “Motto,” the pianist should return to the original tempo by the upbeat of m. 19, as indicated by Medtner. The short *ritenuto* in m. 22 is very important, because it sets up the mood change that occurs in the next measure. The meter is elongated to 9/8, and the use of the dotted-rhythm ostinato becomes much sparser. The *poco pesantamente* [sic] indicates not only a heavier, weightier sound, but also a tempo which is slightly slower than the original tempo. The *crescendo* to the word “herrlichs” or “splendor” is very important for the singer to observe because of the low range of the vocal line and the dense chords in the piano in mm. 23-24. It is crucial here that the pianist voices each chord carefully and keeps the pedal clear so as not to cover up the vocal line.

Perhaps the most surprising moment in the “Motto” comes in m. 29, as the piano rolls an E-flat major chord. As I discussed in the analysis, this chord is foreign and strange, and only distantly related to the tonic key of C major. Aside from taking time in m. 28 to set up this special chord, the pianist should also take care to bring out the descending chromatic line of the bass in mm. 27-28. The meandering chromatic line helps add to the listener’s sense of tonal disorientation as the music gradually slips away from the shores of tonal stability. The chromatic flourish in the piano under the word “Träumer” also helps to depict musically the poet’s own disorientation after having glimpsed, for a moment, the Eternal. Medtner indicates that the damper pedal should be depressed for at least two measures, mm. 30-31. This works best with only the softest
dynamic and a crisp articulation in the right hand. There should be almost no crescendo, except that provided by the building sound of the depressed damper pedal, concerning which Medtner reminds the pianist with two pianissimo markings in both m. 30 and m. 32. Because the word “Träumer” ends with a neutral schwa sound rather than a consonant sound, a wonderful effect can be achieved by the singer letting her sound disappear into the murky piano texture. This adds to the hazy dreaminess of this magical section.

The final section of the “Motto” contains the climax of this short movement, in m. 38. The vocal line in mm. 34-38 gradually ascends, reaching the climactic A5 on the first beat of m. 38, which is marked suddenly piano in both the vocal and piano parts. Like the entire movement, these four measures are in the complete service of the text, which describes how the poet excitedly tells the Muses what he has seen, only to be told by the Muses to lower his voice and speak modestly. The sudden piano marking and the extremely low F1 in the piano contrast with the highest note of the movement, creating a wonderful sense of tension. This tension perfectly captures the feeling of subdued excitement, and there are several important things both performers can do to make sure that the maximum effect of this moment is achieved. Because the words explain to the audience the purpose of m. 38, the pianist must take special care not to cover up the vocal line, especially in mm. 34-36 when the singer is in her middle range. Also, the singer must be the one to lead the crescendo that begins in m. 35, because the piano can easily become thick and overbearing. Further, the singer should crescendo all the way through the end of m. 37, so that the piano in m. 38 is shocking to the audience. And finally, the
pianist should give the singer as much time as she needs to fully pronounce the word “gleich” and breathe before moving forward. When executed correctly, this moment, which seems so unusual at first glance, has the power to elicit gasps from an audience!

The piece ends with a quote of musical material from mm. 15-22. The piano postlude should be extremely quiet, but not necessarily calm. The *con moto* in mm. 42-43 suggests that the pianist should sustain the rhythmic integrity of the ostinato until m. 45. A helpful metaphor for the final measures of the “Motto” is a person who is excitedly whispering *sotto voce*. There is still a great deal of energy, even though the dynamic is subdued.

**Sonata-Vocalise (Movement II)**

The sonata movement is a vast, sprawling landscape, with an incredible variety of thematic material, as is the text upon which it is based. Although the four-bar piano introduction is marked *mezzo-piano*, the pianist should not begin a movement of this scope too timidly. If the richness of the register of the piano bass clef and the *tenuto* markings in the piano treble clef are any indication, the pianist should begin with a very healthy and full sound, even within the context of *mezzo-piano*. In fact, if the opening dynamic is too reserved, it makes it almost impossible for the pianist to expressively execute the two-chord slurs in the right hand of the piano in mm. 3-4.

Programmatically, the opening of the sonata movement matches the first two lines of poetry, which set the scene for the assembling of the Nymphs and the nocturnal procession of the Graces. Through this music the performers should express all the
excitement and anticipation associated with a group gathering together. In contrast to the vocal melody of the “Motto” which began in a low range, the principal theme of the Sonata movement begins with a jubilant octave leap from G4 to G5. The singer and the pianist need not worry about balance because of the high register in which the vocal melody begins. As the voice descends into the lower regions of the treble clef in mm. 8-9, Medtner responds appropriately by shifting the piano bass up an octave, to avoid covering the voice. In m. 10, the singer begins a crescendo that leads to the upbeat of m. 12. The piano joins a bar later, and the ensemble shares a fermata on the downbeat of m. 13. If necessary, the singer can breathe before continuing after the fermata. However, with careful planning, the pianist can create extra time for a substantial breath in m. 9, allowing the singer to complete the phrase in one breath.

The five-bar cadential extension in mm. 14-18 in the accompaniment is a musical response to the jubilance of the voice’s principal theme. Two musical gestures help to give this musical response the vivacity it demands. The pianist must bring out the syncopated rhythm in the bass clef of m. 15. Although this rhythm is familiar from the vocal melody in m. 5, there it was legato, and here it is dancelike. Further, the pianist should feel free to observe a slight accelerando in mm. 16-17, so that as the melody of the left-hand ends, the right hand has a sense of spilling over with excitement in m. 17.

The transition in mm. 19-37 is much more subdued than the principle theme with which the piece opened. The voice introduces a grace note, which will eventually transform into a 32nd-note mordent during the second theme. The vocal melody is given to the piano in m. 27, and the pianist should take advantage of the hemiola in m. 25 to
bring the piano from background to foreground. The vocal line during mm. 27-33 is a
descant, and should be treated as an accompaniment to the piano melody.

The second theme group is divided into two distinct sections. Programmatically,
the first portion of the second theme group (Second Theme A, or mm. 37-54) has a
folksong quality that links it to the portion of text, “und hört die schönen Gesänge.” The
singer, in executing this melody, should strive for an improvisational feel, especially in
relation to the written-out mordents. Medtner marks expressive breath marks, indicating
that the singer should pause before each mordent. The piano has a very basic role, which
is to provide harmony and nothing else.

In the transition (mm. 51-54) to Second Theme B, which begins in m. 55, the
meter shifts to a more dancelike 9/8 meter. The next portion of thematic material
Corresponds to the portion of the text, “Sieht verschwiegener Tänze geheimnisvolle
Bewegung,” and it is incumbent on the pianist to alter the mood from the tuneful nymph
song to an exciting dance. The correct execution of Medtner’s phrase marking in mm.
52-54 is crucial to making a successful transition. In mm. 52-53, the pianist’s left hand
must crescendo from beat one to beat three, while the right hand must simultaneously
decrescendo from beat one to beat three. After the allargando in m. 54, the music should
be firmly and unquestionably felt in triple meter, providing a firm foundation for the
voice in m. 57.

The vocal melody of Second Theme B is so playful and dancelike that it is
difficult not to imagine the whimsical twirls and leaps of a skilled ballet dancer. The
singer should strive to bring out every syncopation and every unexpected rhythmic
variation. For example, in m. 58, the accent, both in the voice and in the piano, is the
second subdivision of each beat. This measure is marked *pesante*, and it calls to mind a
dancer making very large leaps into the air, so it is appropriate for the performers to be a
little behind the beat to allow the amount of time such leaps might take. Furthermore, the
rhythmic playfulness of the piano in mm. 59-60 is a small but important detail. Both
measures are in 6/8, but the former is felt in duple and the latter felt in triple. This metric
variation gives the music an exciting and almost improvisational feel, which matches
perfectly with the image of a mysterious dance.

As the exposition closes, some thematic material, both from the transition and
Second Theme A, is reprised. The music of the closing theme should have the feeling of
fading away, becoming softer and gradually losing forward momentum. Medtner even
marks *expressivo e poco languido* in m. 87, or “expressively and languishing a little.” As
I discussed in the analysis, m. 87 is harmonically surprising, and mm. 87-90 should be
played and sung with a sense of suspense and foreboding. The singer especially must
emphasize the dissonant F5 *appoggiatura* on the downbeat of m. 89, before resolving to
E-flat5 on the last beat of the measure. The chord on the downbeat of m. 9, and the
following reprise of the principal theme harmonized by a C-minor chord should be
suddenly *forte*, as if the singer were taking one last gasp before being submerged in the
foreign and dreamlike world of the ensuing development.

The first and second sections of the development (mm. 95-132) are
programmatically linked with the waking dreams of the poet observing, “What splendor
only the Heavens have, and what fortunate loveliness the Earth bore.” The chief
difficulty for performers is balance. The piano has a very thick and busy part, while the voice is mostly, although not entirely, written in the middle and low ranges. For example, in mm. 95-98, the score demands that the pianist use damper pedal, but if the damper pedal is not fluttered or cleared frequently, the sixteenth notes easily cover the sustained G4 of the singer. Furthermore, in mm. 111-118, as thematic material from Second Theme A is being developed, the piano part is incredibly dense, and written in a very low register, as is the vocal melody. During this portion of the development, the pianist should consider using almost no damper pedal, and voicing only the top (in the right hand) or bottom (in the left hand) notes of chords. In addition, because the development is related programatically to dreaming, the pianist might want to experiment with using the soft pedal in mm. 111-112, as well as mm. 115-116. This will not only help to achieve a distant, otherworldly sound, but also further prevent the piano from covering the voice, which is in its lowest register.

The pacing of mm. 111-124 is also crucial to successful performance, especially because it is somewhat repetitive, and can become stale very easily. The phrase structure is made up of two four-measure sub-phrases and a six-measure sub-phrase. Each of these three sub-phrases must increase in both dynamic and intensity. The last sub-phrase, marked agitato, should also be a faster tempo than the two sub-phrases preceding it, although the subito pianissimo in m. 121 is extremely important, because this passage is reminiscent of the octatonic-like flourish of the “Motto” in mm. 130-133 under the word “Träumer.” The pianist should again consider using soft pedal through m. 133 to help
produce a muffled, dreamlike sound. Finally, the pianist may need to flutter the damper pedal, especially in mm. 132-133, in order to observe the decrescendo and pianissimo.

The eight measures leading to the third and final section of the development use material from Second Theme B. The character change between m. 133 and m. 134 should be sudden and marked. The pianist and singer should slightly delay the sixteenth notes of the dancelike figure that they trade between them. This will add a rhythmic playfulness that will help the audience to immediately connect this music to the original material of the exposition.

The third section of the development and retransition, mm. 133-167, are linked programatically to the portion of the text which says, “Alles erzählt er den Musen,” or “All this he tells to the Muses.” The contrapuntal style of writing, with the building excitement and confusion of voices entering, and the combination of thematic material from both the first and second theme groups, all embody the poet, stumbling over his own words as he attempts to frantically describe to the Muses what he has experienced. The chief difficulty for performers of this section will be pacing, because the entire section is essentially one long crescendo. The pianist can help extend the crescendo by carefully observing the places where the dynamic drops down, such as m. 151, m. 155, and m. 159. This will clear the sound, and allow room for continued growth all the way to m. 167, which is the climax of the development and, in fact, the entire Sonata movement.

The recapitulation follows the plan of the exposition, with themes appearing largely as they did in the exposition with the exception of key modifications. The final
four measures of the recapitulation are somewhat different than their expository equivalent, which had been previously marked *forte* and *risoluto*. In mm. 249-252, they are marked *mezzo-piano* with a far less bombastic piano accompaniment. In fact, the piano is completely silent during most of mm. 251-252. This portion of music is meant to be anticlimactic, and performers can help to achieve this effect by taking a slow tempo and exaggerating the fermata which appears in m. 250. The tempo should continue to relax as the singer gradually settles into the coda, beginning in m. 253.

The coda is programmatically matched with the final portion of the poem, in which the Muses teach the poet to speak modestly about what he has seen. It is therefore fitting that the music is resigned and subtle. The performers can add to the sense of modesty by taking a tempo that is like the tempo of the “Motto:” slow but still with a strong sense of duple meter. The pianist must not overuse the damper pedal, because the separated articulation of the left hand makes a nice contrast to the falling *legato* lines of the voice and right hand. When the material from Second Theme B returns in mm. 264 and 266, the performers should still slightly delay the sixteenth-note to mimic, albeit in a more subdued context, the dancelike character of the original theme. Because the singer ends on scale degree three rather than the tonic pitch, it is very important that this note be transferred down an octave to the right hand of the piano so that the final E-D-C, or scale degrees 3-2-1, be heard as the final gesture. This can be achieved in the piano by carefully hearing the dynamic and quality of the final vocal pitch, and trying to match it as exactly as possible in the right hand. The voicing must be incredibly clear, so that the top voice of the piano part sounds like an echo of the singer herself. Without this level of
attentiveness, the ending may seem somewhat lackluster, but with it, the ending is nothing short of spellbinding.
Nikolai Medtner’s Suite Vocalise Op. 41 No. 2 was composed during 1926 and 1927, four years after the composition of the Sonata-Vocalise mit einem Motto “Geweihter Platz.” That they share the same opus number is evidence enough that Medtner thought of the two works as closely related, but in addition to this, the two pieces share several fundamental characteristics. While both works are based on the same text by Goethe, with the exception of the “Motto,” neither work relies on traditional text setting to convey the specific programmatic ideas expressed in Goethe’s poem. Consequently, each piece is internally connected by intricate motivic, thematic, and structural devices that unify these large textless works.

The Sonata-Vocalise and Suite Vocalise also differ in several ways, the most notable being Medtner’s treatment of the text of Goethe’s poem within each. In the case of the Sonata-Vocalise, the poem is set to music in an introductory movement entitled “Motto,” which is essentially an art song, a small form at which Medtner excelled. The wordless sonata that follows is a separate movement based on programmatic themes contained in the poem itself, as well as motivic and harmonic ideas introduced musically in the introductory movement. In the case of the Suite Vocalise, the words are completely removed from the music, with the notable exception of the movement titles, each of which refers to a specific theme or idea found in the poem. Some of the titles are very clear, while others are more cryptic, demanding further investigation and interpretation.
Another difference between the works is the composer’s choice of form. As is implied in the title, the *Sonata-Vocalise* adheres to a rather strict sonata-allegro form with a clear exposition, development, and recapitulation. In a way, the *Sonata-Vocalise* represents a merging of two disparate forms: the small-scale art song and the large-scale sonata. In the *Suite Vocalise*, the larger work is broken apart into smaller movements, each adhering to its own small-scale binary or ternary form, as in the traditional Baroque suite. In this sense, the form of the *Suite Vocalise* gave Medtner the best of both worlds: the chance to create a large-scale programmatic work while still utilizing small-scale forms for each individual movement.

But the greater formal freedom of the *Suite Vocalise* also comes with its own set of problems. Because the *Suite Vocalise* relies much less on the actual text of “Geweihter Platz” than the *Sonata-Vocalise*, the piece is seemingly much more abstract and difficult to comprehend. Therefore, it is crucial to understand the underlying musical threads from which the individual movements are woven together into a whole. Furthermore, because the work is so closely related to the *Sonata-Vocalise*, it is imperative to understand specific connections between the two pieces. In this chapter I illuminate previously unexplored motivic, rhythmic, and formal ideas that not only serve to unify the *Suite Vocalise*, but also directly tie it to its predecessor, the *Sonata-Vocalise*.

**Titles and Their Relation to Goethe’s Poem “Geweihter Platz”**

After the first movement, simply entitled “Introduction,” each individual movement title of the *Suite Vocalise* refers to a specific part of Goethe’s poem
“Geweihter Platz.” The titles of Movements II and IV are relatively straightforward: “Song of the Nymphs” and “Procession of the Graces” refer to specific events mentioned in the poem, which are witnessed by the eavesdropping poet.

Movement III, “Secrets,” is slightly more complex, and requires additional interpretation. The poem mentions secrets twice. In line 4, the poet “sees the mysterious movements of their [the nymphs] secretive dances,” and later, in line 8, the Muses teach the poet “to speak of these secrets/mysteries modestly.” In the latter case, the German word *Geheimnisse*, or secrets, is referring to the entirety of the poet’s experience, including the procession of the Graces, the Nymphs’ song, and all the glories of Heaven. In the former example, the word *geheimnisvolle* is an adjective, meaning ‘secretive,’ referring specifically to the secretive dances of the nymphs. It is clear from its position in the *Suite Vocalise* and from its pervasive, dance-like dotted rhythm ostinato that Movement III refers specifically to the secretive dances that the poet saw.

Movement V is titled “What the Poet Says,” which is a reference to line 7 of the poem, which begins, “All this he tells to the Muses.” In this case, the title refers not to a specific event witnessed by the poet, but to his interpretation of all the events he witnessed. Interestingly, Movements III and V, which share the programmatic connection between the words *geheimnisvolle* in line 4 of the text and *Geheimnisse* in line 8, also open with the same musical material, reinforcing their ties to one another.
Overview and Unifying Elements

Medtner’s *Suite Vocalise* is comprised of five separate movements. Three of the movements, I, II, and V, are in the key of F minor, the main key of the piece. Movement III is in the key of C minor, the minor dominant, and Movement IV is in the key of A-flat major, the relative major. Since mediant relationships, both diatonic and chromatic, are a common device used throughout the suite, it is no surprise that the three main keys of the *Suite Vocalise* spell out the notes of an F-minor triad, and that the triadic pattern is descending, from Movements III through V, following the initial key establishment in Movements I and II: F-F-C-A-flat-F. This key pattern logically provides a form of tonal closure for the *Suite Vocalise*.

Symmetry also plays a very important role throughout the *Suite Vocalise* on both small and large scales. For example, the entire suite is framed by the material from the “Introduction,” which is repeated at the very end of the final movement in the form of a *Coda*, set apart by Medtner from the rest of the movement. This large-scale symmetry also shows up throughout the work on a smaller scale. For example, the first seven notes of the vocal line, F-G-A-flat-G-A-flat-G-F (or scale degrees 1-2-3-2-3-2-1), form a perfectly symmetrical musical palindrome; and, at a more granular level, Medtner utilizes symmetry throughout the suite both motivically and formally.

Five motives consistently appear throughout the *Suite Vocalise*, thus unifying the work on a large scale. The first and most fundamental motive is introduced in m. 3 of the “Introduction,” and is marked in Example 15. It consists of a descending and ascending minor second followed by a descending minor third, or scale degrees 3-2-3-1 (A-flat-G-
A-flat-F). This motive is familiar from the *Sonata-Vocalise* where it also serves to connect the “Motto” and the “Sonata-Vocalise” movements. The use of this motive

Example 15: *Suite Vocalise*, “Introduction,” m. 1-5.  

both at the very beginning of the *Suite Vocalise* as well as throughout the work serves a very concrete purpose. Because the *Suite Vocalise* is only linked to Goethe’s text through the titles of each movement, the use of Motive 1 in the *Suite Vocalise* serves to motivically link the somewhat more abstract setting of the *Suite Vocalise* directly to the music, and therefore the text, of the *Sonata-Vocalise*.

A second fundamental unifying motive is the dotted rhythm, which permeates all movements of the work. This dotted-rhythm motive, characterized by a dotted-eighth note followed by a sixteenth note and another eighth note, is referred to as Motive 2.

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Movements I, II, and V, all in compound duple meter (6/8), this motive occurs within the beat; however, in Movements III and IV, which are in simple duple meters, either 2/4 or 4/4, Medtner divides it to conform to the prevailing meter. Further, in Movement IV, Medtner slurs the three notes of Motive 2 together, to make it look more like its original manifestation in duple compound meter. Like Motive 1, Motive 2 can be traced to the “Motto” of the Sonata-Vocalise, Op. 41, No. 1, where it originated. Rocking and nocturnal, this rhythmic motive thus forms another concrete link to the Sonata-Vocalise and the text set in the “Motto.” Although subtly introduced in m. 5 of the “Introduction,” by m. 15 this rhythm has all but taken over the movement. Perhaps even more so than in the Sonata-Vocalise, Motive 2 is pervasive throughout all five movements of the Suite Vocalise.

A third motive that unifies the entire work and acts as a concrete link to the Sonata-Vocalise is the melodic use of the perfect-fifth interval as well as its inversion, the perfect fourth. This interval is introduced almost immediately in the vocal line of the “Introduction,” and it is even foreshadowed by the open perfect fifth in the piano in mm. 1-2. Melodically, the first sub-phrase of the vocal melody is punctuated by an ascending and descending leap of a perfect fifth in mm. 3-4, shown in Example 16. The melodic
Example 16: *Suite Vocalise*, “Introduction,” mm. 1-5.

quartal-quintal motive, or Motive 3, shows up frequently both in the piano and voice of the *Suite Vocalise*, giving the music a folk-like, pastoral quality, matching the setting of the poetry perfectly. As with Motives 1 and 2, Motive 3 is also frequently utilized in the *Sonata-Vocalise*, and serves as a direct link to the *Suite Vocalise*’s predecessor.

Another motive, seemingly innocuous, is introduced in mm. 7-10 of the “Introduction” in the piano part. A rising chromatic line, or Motive 4, set over a circle-of-fifths sequence in the bass supports the melody of the voice, shown in Example 17.

---

34 Consider for example, the perfect fourths and fifths which accompany second theme A and B of Movement II of the *Sonata-Vocalise*, m. 37 and m. 57 respectively.
A chromatic line might normally not be considered motivic, but rather a fundamental aspect of voice leading. However, here it is clearly motivic. Motive 4 recurs several times in Movement II, and in Movement III it is combined with Motive 1 to form an entirely new motive, which also recurs frequently for the duration of the suite.

A fifth motive that plays an extremely important role throughout the work is not introduced until Movement III, “Secrets.” This motive, Motive 5, is characterized by a series of falling thirds, a downward sequence of ascending sixths punctuated by chromaticism, followed by another series of falling thirds. Motive 5, shown in Example 18, is derived from Motive 1 and Motive 4.
Example 18: *Suite Vocalise*, “Secrets,” mm. 1-3.

The final three notes of Motive 1, a step followed by a skip (G-A-flat-F), correspond to the descending-sixth figures of Motive 5, except the shape has been inverted and the minor third has been replaced by a minor sixth. Furthermore, Motive 5 contains a descending version of Motive 4, the ascending chromatic line, marked in Example 19.


Motive 5 also exhibits the characteristic symmetry displayed throughout the suite. It begins and ends with falling thirds, and the middle contains four varied but identical versions of Motive 1. If one were to exclude the last three notes of m. 2, the phrase displays almost perfect motivic symmetry. And finally, the falling thirds found at the beginning and end of Motive 5 reflect the importance of mediant-key-relationships between the movements of the *Suite Vocalise*. 

60
Aside from Motives 1-5, there are several other smaller, yet important, unifying features that carry through the entire suite and link it to the *Sonata-Vocalise*. One such feature is a tendency to begin phrases with an octave leap. This small but very noticeable gesture can be traced back to the Primary Theme of the sonata movement, which begins with one such octave leap, from G4 to G5 in mm. 4-5. In the *Suite Vocalise*, the melody of Movement II begins similarly with an octave leap from C4 to C5 (the C4 being the last note of Movement I, which proceeds *attacca* into Movement II). In Movement III, Theme A also begins with an octave leap, in this case from G3 to G4 in mm. 3-4. Similarly, in Movement IV, Theme A is an octave interval from E-flat4 to E-flat5 filled in with the chord tones A-flat and C. And Movement V, which begins with a melodic perfect fifth, ends with a final leap in the voice from F4 to F5 in mm. 90-91. In each of the movements, except for Movement V, the octave leap occurs on scale degree 5 of whatever the prevailing key happens to be.

Another non-motivic feature which is heard frequently throughout the *Suite Vocalise* is Medtner’s penchant for setting themes in canon, between the voice and the piano, within the piano part itself, or in some cases, between the voice, treble and bass of the piano. The canonic treatment of themes recurs in every movement of the suite in one form or another. Skillful counterpoint, which was also heavily utilized in the *Sonata-Vocalise*, is endemic to the music of Medtner, who studied composition with the famed counterpoint instructor Sergei Taneev at the Moscow Conservatory. Medtner’s use of counterpoint throughout the *Suite Vocalise* is another thread with which the five movements are woven together.
Movement I: “Introduction”

The “Introduction” formally consists only of a simple contrasting period with an introduction and cadential extension at the end ([2 + 8] + [8 +4]), punctuated by a half cadence at the end of Phrase 1 (measure 10), and a perfect authentic cadence at the end of Phrase 2, mm. 17-18 (see Figure 4). Although short, the movement is motivically rich and full of harmonic foreshadowing. Motive 1 is introduced at the beginning of Phrase 1, the eight-bar antecedent phrase, in m. 3, and Motive 3 is introduced in m. 5. Motive 2 is heard for the first time in m. 4, but as the movement progresses it becomes increasingly pervasive, transforming into a rhythmic ostinato in mm. 15-22, encompassing the end of the movement. The opening vocal melody of mm. 2-5, which forms the first sub-phrase of the Phrase 1, outlines the notes of an F-minor triad. This foreshadows the three most important and prominent key areas of the entire suite – F minor (Movement II and V), C minor/major (Movement III), and A-flat major (Movement IV).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Introduction</th>
<th>Phrase 1: Antecedent</th>
<th>Phrase 2: Consequent</th>
<th>Extension</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F minor:</td>
<td>i</td>
<td>iv</td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mm.</td>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>3-10</td>
<td>11-18</td>
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<tr>
<td>#mm:</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
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</table>

Figure 4. Movement I: “Introduction”: Simple Period.

The “Introduction” is monothematic, and development of the theme is not extensive, given that the main purpose of the movement is to introduce motivic material. However, the theme of the introduction is developed in the first half of Phrase 2, mm. 11-
14, where a reduced version of the theme is presented by the singer and the pianist in a three-part canon, harmonized by the subdominant. During the second half, mm. 15-18, the theme is developed by further reduction in the piano part while the voice part holds the tonic pitch. A perfect-authentic cadence in mm. 18-19 in the tonic is followed by a four-measure cadential extension containing Motives 1, 2, and 3, as shown in Ex. 20.

Example 20: *Suite Vocalise*, “Introduction,” mm. 18-22.

The motivic parallels between the final four measures of the “Introduction” and mm. 42-45 of the “Motto” from the *Sonata-Vocalise* are difficult to ignore. Both sections are constructed with the same rhythmic ostinato, oscillating between tonic and dominant chords. The main difference is that while the “Motto” ends with two cadential chords, the “Introduction” simply leads *attacca* into “Song of the Nymphs.”

**Movement II: “Song of the Nymphs”**

Even though “Song of the Nymphs” is a compact 74 measures, the depth and complexity of the music is staggering. The movement is a large simple binary form in F minor (see Figure 5). Section A (mm. 1-26) introduces Theme A in mm. 1-12, and Section B presents Theme B in mm. 27-34. Each theme is further divided into two
motivically distinct portions, Theme A1 (mm. 1-8), Theme A2 (mm. 9-12), Theme B1 (mm. 27-30), and Theme B2 (mm. 31-34). As expected with any binary form, Sections A and B are repeated as A' (mm. 47-60) and B' (mm. 61-74). While sections A and B are a combined 46 measures in length, their varied repeats, Sections A' and B', add up to only 28 measures, including a 4-bar cadential extension in mm. 71-74.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>27-46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fm: i,</td>
<td>v</td>
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<td>#mm: 26</td>
<td>= 46</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section A'</th>
<th>Section B'</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mm.: 47-60</td>
<td>61-74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fm: i, iv</td>
<td>iv, i</td>
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<tr>
<td>#mm: 14</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>= 28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total measures:** = 74

**Theme A** (mm. 1-12) = **Theme A1** (mm. 1-8) + **Theme A2** (mm. 9-12)

**Theme B** (mm. 27-34) = **Theme B1** (mm. 27-30) + **Theme B2** (mm. 31-34)

**Figure 5.** Movement II: “Song of the Nymphs”: Simple Binary.

Regarding the tonal layout of the movement, Section A is in the tonic key of F minor, while Section B is in the key of C minor, the minor dominant. Section A' begins in F minor and modulates to B-flat minor, the subdominant, in m. 55, and Section B' begins in B-flat minor and returns to the tonic key of F minor in m. 69. Sections A and B are linked harmonically by the key of E-flat major, which is tonicized in mm. 17-22; this might mean that Medtner is leading to a secondary key of A-flat major, the relative major of the tonic F minor. Instead, it leads to a surprising E-flat major-minor seventh chord on the downbeat of m. 23, which functions as an enharmonically-spelled German
augmented-sixth chord in the supertonic key of G minor (ii). In a further twist, instead of resolving appropriately in the key G minor, the enharmonic German augmented-sixth chord leads to a half-diminished G-minor ninth chord in m. 25, which in turn is transformed into a secondary dominant chord in m. 27, cadencing in C minor, the minor dominant, in m. 28. Section B and Section A' are linked by an 8-measure transition in mm. 39-46, which consists of a D-major dominant-seventh chord (V7 of ii) moving to a G half-diminished seventh chord via an ascending chromatic passage in the bass of the piano, which in turn moves to a C-major dominant-seventh chord facilitating a cadence in F minor in m. 47.

Motivically, the unfolding “Song of the Nymphs” is handled masterfully by the composer. Section A is a large parallel period, consisting of a 12-measure antecedent phrase ending with a half cadence in m. 12, and a 13-measure consequent phrase, which repeats a 6-measure variant of Theme A1 and two 4-measure variants of Theme A2 ([12 + 8] + [6 + 4 + 4]). Theme A1 begins with a leap of an octave C4 to C5, just as the Primary Theme of the Sonata-Vocalise did (G5-G6). The treble clef of the piano accompaniment, which acts as the undercurrent of Theme A1, is derived from Motive 1, and shares the same notes, shown in Example 21.

---

35 The C4 is the last note in the vocal line of the “Introduction” (m. 22), which leads *attacca* into the second movement.
Example 21: *Suite Vocalise*, “Song of the Nymphs,” mm. 1-2.

The vocal melody is also heavily reliant on variants of Motive 1. The piano bass is derived from Motive 3, and the repeated motion from scale degree 1 to scale degree 5 gives the piece a sense of forward momentum even as the vocal melody hovers above, fixed around the pitch C5. Melodically, Theme A1 seems purposefully constructed to avoid the expected motion from pitch C5 to either F4 or F5. The initial descent from C to A-flat implies continued descending motion to F4; however, this does not occur. Instead, in m. 3, the pitch C5 moves teasingly to E-flat5 in the vocal line, a mere whole-step short of one of the expected pitches, F5. This deceptive outline of the A-flat major triad prolongs the true closure of either F4 or F5, which never occurs with the tonic triad on a strong beat until the end of the song, in mm. 72-73 at the end of the movement, and the ending of the vocal part on F5.

Another very important aspect of Theme A1 is the generous use of thirds in its construction. On a larger scale, the pitches C, E-flat, and A-flat form the skeleton for the melody. In mm. 1-2, the vocal melody centers around pitch C5, and in m. 4 the melodic
motion pushes up to E-flat5, which stands out as the high note of the phrase. In mm. 5-6, the vocal melody centers around A-flat4, and in mm. 7-8 it returns to C5 as a focal point. On a smaller scale, the melody is completely overrun by thirds. For example, the first two measures form a major third from C5 to A-flat4 filled in by a passing tone, and mm. 3-4 contain the melodic third from C5 to E-flat5 and back, as well as the third from G4 to Bb4. The high-level tertiary skeleton of Theme A1 (C-E-flat-A-flat) foreshadows the key structure of Movements III and IV, each of which share a mediant relationship with the key of Movement I.

Theme A2 is derived largely from Motive 1, as shown in Example 22. The exact notes of Motive 1 appear in the vocal line in m. 9. Furthermore, a transposed inversion of the final three notes of Motive 1 appear in the piano treble clef, and a similar variation appears in the piano bass clef, with the interval of a minor third being replaced by a perfect fourth. Theme A2 also contains Motive 4 in the piano bass of mm. 11-12, also shown in Example 22.

Example 22: *Suite Vocalise*, “Song of the Nymphs,” mm. 8-11.
Both Theme B1 and Theme B2 are not only derived from the motivic material of the “Introduction,” but they are also connected to Themes A1 and A2. Each theme is a 4-measure phrase, with Theme B1 being repeated after the statement of Theme B2. Theme B1 is accompanied in the piano by a rising chain of major seconds, separated by alternating melodic perfect-fourth and perfect-fifth intervals. In fact, nearly the entire basis for Theme B1 is Motive 3, the melodic perfect-fourth/perfect fifth interval. The theme is treated canonically, appearing first in the voice in mm. 27, and then echoed in the piano bass transposed down a fifth. As was the case with Theme A1, Theme B1 also centers around the pitch C5, returning to it no fewer than six times over the course of four measures. Similarly, Theme B2 is centered around the pitch Bb4 in mm. 31-32, as was Theme A2. Themes A2 and B2 also share the rhythmic pattern of two sixteenth notes followed by two eighth notes, as can be seen in the vocal line of each. Furthermore, the harmonic sequence in mm. 33-34 is reminiscent of the sequence that previously occurred in mm. 11-12, 21-22, and 25-26, all in connection with Theme A2.

The final portion of Section B, mm. 39-46, combines thematic material from Sections A and B, and acts as a bridge to the varied repetition of Theme A1 in the tonic key in Section A’. In mm. 39-49, Theme B2 is accompanied by the ascending chromatic octaves in the piano bass from mm. 11-12 of Theme A2. In mm. 41-42, the voice continues Theme B2 while the piano treble part features a series of descending thirds, heralding the return of Theme A1. In mm. 43-46, the voice and treble voice of the piano part take a quote directly from mm. 3-4 of Theme A1 and perform it in canon at the fourth, supported in the inner voice of the piano texture with a derivation of Motive 1, as
shown in Example 23. This canon leads to a C dominant-seventh chord in m. 46, which resolves to tonic in m. 47 as Section A' begins its restatement of Theme A1.

Example 23: *Suite Vocalise*, “Song of the Nymphs,” mm. 42-45.

Although the return of Theme A1 in the tonic key provides a certain amount of closure formally, it does not provide any melodic closure. The transitional section directly preceding the varied repeat of Theme A1 begins and ends with the pitch of C5 in the voice. There is a noticeable movement of C5 to F5 in the voice part in mm. 44-45, but the F5 is harmonized by a half-diminished G-minor seventh chord, not the expected tonic chord. And of course, the varied repeat of Theme A1 also begins on the pitch C5. Medtner will not provide total closure until the very end of the movement.

Sections A' and B' are largely restatements of Sections A and B, with some of the transitional material missing. Theme A1 is presented without any significant alteration, although the repetition of Theme A2 (mm. 55-60) in the subdominant is extended by two measures. In mm. 61-68, Theme B1 is again presented in a canon between the voice and piano. Instead of moving directly into a restatement of Theme B2, as occurred in the original statement of Theme B, Medtner extends Theme B1 by four measures, allowing
the music to move back to the key of F minor for the truncated repetition of Theme B2 in mm. 69-70. The following 4-bar cadential extension features a series of descending thirds in the vocal melody, as the piano plays an ascending and then descending F-minor flourish.

The vocal line of the last four measures provides both closure and anticipation. For closure, it provides the desired melodic statement of C5 moving to F5 in mm. 72-73, recalls the prominent thirds of Theme A1 one final time, and spans the distance of an octave between F4 and F5 for its final four pitches (F-A-flat-C-F), just as the very beginning of the movement began with an octave leap between C4-C5. As for anticipation, the series of falling thirds in the vocal line foreshadows the impending introduction of Motive 5, which also begins with falling thirds, and occurs at the beginning of the Movement III.

**Movement III: “Secrets”**

The third movement of the *Suite Vocalise* is another example of Medtner’s mastery of small forms, in this case binary with a slight twist, as the two sections are reversed in the repetition (see Figure 6). This reversal reinforces the use of the three-measure melody that frames the movement (mm. 1-3 and 48-50). Minus this frame, each half is 22 measures long, for a total of 50 measures. Yet the two main sections of each half are not identical in length, due to key changes and extensions within the main key of C minor. Further, the voice does not sound in Section A, in which the piano part carries the melody. In the repeat, Section A’, the voice carries the melody, and Medtner adds two measures for additional closure in tonic.
The phrasing of the two main sections, A and B, is similar: \([2 + 2] + 4\) for Section A and \([2 + 2] + 5\) for most of the B section. Although this phrasing is kept intact for the repeated Sections A' and B', both they and the original Section B include additional measures for tonal reasons. Tonally, the 3-measure introduction and Section A are in the tonic key of C minor; however, the submediant A-flat-major is emphasized in the second phrase of Section A (mm. 8-11), yet with a perfect authentic cadence in the tonic (m. 11).

**Frame** | **Section A** | **Section B**
---|---|---
mm.: | 1-3 | 4-11 | 12-25
cm: | i | i | III v i iv
#mm: | 3 | 8 | 14 = 25

**Section B'** | **Section A'** | **Frame (=1-3)**
---|---|---
mm.: | 26-37 (26-33 = 12-19) | 38-47 (38-45 = 4-11) | 48-50
cm: | iv III | i | i
#mm: | 12 | 10 | 3 = 25

**Total measures:** = 50

**Figure 6.** Movement III: “Secrets”: Binary (Arch) Form

Beginning in C minor, Section B quickly introduces the relative major key of E-flat major (mm. 14-17), followed by a perfect authentic cadence in the dominant (mm. 19-20), which encompasses the phrasing provided above. The following five measures (mm. 21-25) constitute a return to the tonic from the dominant and a further motion to the minor subdominant for the transposed repeat, Section B', which is presented a fourth higher. Section B' thus presents the keys of F minor and the A-flat major key (mm. 29-33). Section A' is reprised in the tonic, still with the A-flat major emphasis in the second phrase; so rather than merely cadencing on tonic at the end of the phrase, as he did
initially (m. 44 = m. 11), Medtner prolongs and strengthens the final perfect-authentic cadence through additional melodic emphases and a harmonically colorful cadence (mm. 46-47), followed by a repetition of the frame in mm. 48-50, also in tonic.

Motivically, much of Movement III is derived from Motive 5, stated in mm. 1-3, which is itself a fascinating example of Medtnerian symmetry. The unaccompanied piano line begins and ends with a series of falling thirds from E-flat-C-A-flat-G. It should be noted that these first four notes are the same as the key areas contained in the movement, C minor, E-flat major, G minor, and A-flat major. The middle portion of the introduction consists of a bi-level descending melodic line, one level diatonic, the other chromatic, derived from Motive 1 and Motive 4. Somewhat reminiscent of a Bach fugue subject, with slower, larger intervals followed by faster, more chromatic ones, this theme embodies perfectly the mysterious dancing to which it refers programmatically. The twists and turns of the melody contrasted by the symmetrical beauty of the line suggest a sultry, sensuous dance.

The melody of Section A is derived in part from the three-measure frame that precedes it, as well as motivic material from previous movements. For example, the melody of Section A outlines a C-minor triad, as did the falling thirds of the Introduction, shown in Example 24.

This melodic triad outline links Section A of “Secrets” to Movement I, where the opening theme outlined an F-minor triad (mm. 2-4), and Theme A of “Song of the Nymphs,” which outlined an A-flat triad (mm. 1-3). Motive 3, the melodic perfect fifth, also appears frequently, not only in the dotted-rhythm ostinato between C and G found in the bass clef of the piano, but also in the piano melody in mm. 5 and 7 (G4-C4).

Additionally, the melodic figure that appears in m. 8 and is repeated in m. 9 is a transposition of the opening motive, shown in Example 25.
Example 25: *Suite Vocalise*, “Secrets,” m. 1 and m. 8.

Finally, the unusually large melodic minor tenth interval, which occurs in the piano melody in mm. 5-6 and recurs later in the voice during mm. 39-40 of Section A', is also derived from Motive 5 of the frame, shown in Example 26.

Melodically, Section A sets a strong expectation for a perfect-authentic cadence on the downbeat of m. 11, with a C5 in the melody. This cadence is postponed by the tonicization of A-flat major in mm. 8-10, where C5 is embellished with the upper and lower neighbor tones of D-flat5 and B4, which form the augmented-sixth chord of F minor. The expected cadence on the downbeat of m. 11 is thwarted as the C5 occurs not on the downbeat, but on the final sixteenth-note subdivision of the downbeat. This weakens the cadence in m. 11, and sets up the need for a perfect-authentic cadence in the tonic key of C minor, with the voice singing a C5 on a downbeat.

Section B continues to develop several motivic ideas from Motive 5 and Section A. As the bass of the piano continues its dotted-rhythm ostinato, the highly-embellished vocal melody of mm. 12-13 outlines a C-minor triad, as did the piano melody of Section A. The G4 of m. 12 is decorated first by a quick mordent, and next by a rapid turn figure before falling unceremoniously to an E-flat4 and a C4 in m. 13. This idea is repeated with slight variation transposed down a whole step in mm. 14-15. The slow-moving harmonies acting as a perfect foil to the highly-ornamented melody of Section B create a wonderful image of a slow but sultry dance, full of mysteries and secrets. As Section B continues, the melody is presented as a canon between the voice and the bass of the piano in mm. 15-17. At the half cadence in Section B (mm. 19-20), a transposed statement of the first six notes of the movement occurs in the bass of the piano, shown in Example 27.

The extension of Section B, mm. 21-25, combines motivic material from Motive 5, Section A, and Section B, and, as mentioned, brings about the modulation to F minor. The motive stated in the voice in m. 21 is again derived from the first six notes of Motive 5 in m. 1. This motive occurs four times consecutively, each time transposed down a third. Each of these transpositions begins on a specific note derived directly from the end of m. 2 of the frame shown in Example 28a, or G3-E-flat-C3-Ab2-G2.

These exact same notes can be found at the beginning of each transposition in the voice in mm. 21 (G5), 22 (E-flat5), 23 (C5), 24 (Ab4), and 25 (G4), shown in Example 28b.

Furthermore, the accompaniment of thirty-second-note triplets is derived from the turn figure introduced in m. 12 on beat 3 of Section B.

In section B’, Medtner introduces a new motivic tie to Movements I and II. Beginning in m. 26, the familiar thirty-second-note rhythm in the piano treble part is accompanied by a circle-of-fifths sequence (mm. 26-27: F-Bb-Eb-Ab-Db), which gives way to an ascending stepwise sequence in mm. 27-28, shown in Example 29, mirrored in the bass a tenth below, beginning on beat 2 of m. 27. Although this line is by no means chromatic, its stepwise ascent and proximity to the circle-of-fifths sequence in the previous measure are reminiscent of Motive 4, the rising chromatic line motive, which was set directly over a similar circle-of-fifths sequence in mm. 7-10 of the Movement I. This section serves to bring about the modulation to A-flat major, the transposition of the comparable E-flat section in Section B.

![Example 29: Suite Vocalise, “Secrets,” m. 26-28.](image)

Section A’ finally provides closure to several expectations set in its original statement. It occurs in the tonic key of C minor, fulfilling the expectation set up by the
unresolved G pedal at the end of Section B. In addition, Medtner gives the melody to the voice, thereby utilizing the full ensemble rather than just solo piano, as was the case in the original statement. Finally, after a two-bar extension in mm. 45-46 which builds some suspense, the expected perfect-authentic cadence with C5 on the downbeat occurs in m. 47. The codetta in mm. 48-50 closes the movement as mysteriously as it began.

**Movement IV: “Procession of the Graces”**

The fourth movement of the *Suite Vocalise* is both similar and yet different from the other movements. In still another example of motivic unity and complexity, Medtner makes creative use of all five main motives of the *Suite Vocalise* in its three main themes. However, unlike the minor keys of the other four movements, “Procession of the Graces” is in A-flat major, the relative major of F minor, both of which were prominent key areas in the previous movement. Also as in the previous movement, Medtner begins and ends Movement IV with a short frame (four measures this time), yet another example of Medtner’s fondness for symmetry. As in Movement III, the duple simple meter (2/4 this time) is again utilized. However, the form is more complicated than any of the other movements. In modified compound ternary form, Movement IV consists of three parts: The first two parts are ternary (A B A’, mm. 1-54; and C D C’, mm. 55-98, respectively), while the third section (mm. 99-118) is not ternary as expected but consists only of a varied repeat of the first part of the A section (mm. 99-115 = mm. 5-21) plus the frame (mm. 115-118 = 1-4). See Figure 7.
The key of F minor is scarce in this movement. The first and third parts are in A-flat major, with the contrasting section of the first part in the dominant key, E-flat major. For the contrasting second section, Medtner has chosen the key of C major, not a closely related key to A-flat major but with which it shares a chromatic mediant relationship. As contrasting key for this middle section, Medtner again follows practice and uses the dominant of C major, G major. Medtner links the sections through chromatic means—a common-tone modulation to link the first two sections (mm. 54-55), and a chromatic progression (mm. 91-94) that leads to the dominant (m. 95) of the expected tonic of A-flat major, finally reached in m. 99, to link the second and final sections.

**Section I:**

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<th>A'</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>#mm: 21</td>
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<th>C'</th>
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<td>87-98</td>
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<tr>
<td>CM: I V I (V/A-flat)</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>mm. 16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>= 44</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Section III:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A''</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mm.: 99-118 (=5-20 + 1-4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AbM: I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>= 20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total measures:**

| = 118 |

**Theme A** (mm. 5-21) = **Theme A1** (mm. 5-12) + **Theme A2** (mm. 13-21)

**Theme C** (mm. 55-62)

**Figure 7.** Movement IV: “Procession of the Graces”: Compound Ternary (Modified)
As expected, the thematic material of Movement IV is constructed of motives familiar from previous movements. Medtner immediately utilizes two known motives, Motives 2 and 3, in the four-measure piano frame that introduces the movement. Despite being in 2/4, Motive 2, the dotted-rhythm motive, is found in each of the first four measures, and the three notes of this motive are even slurred together to emphasize their origin, shown in Example 30.


Motive 3, also shown in Example 30, is present in the bass of the piano as it moves between A-flat and E-flat in various registers. The movement is also highly canonic, and the interplay between piano and voice, even when not technically in canon, is still highly imitative.

Medtner concentrates the thematic material in two areas, the primary theme of the first ternary form, labeled Theme A, and the primary theme of the second ternary form, labeled Theme C (as shown in Figure 7). Motivically and formally, Theme A (mm. 5-21) is divided into two halves, Themes A1 (mm. 5-12) and A2 (mm. 13-21). Together
Themes A1 and A2 form a large modulating contrasting period \(([4 + 4] + [4 + 4])\), punctuated in the middle with an imperfect-authentic cadence in the tonic (mm. 11-12) and at the end with a perfect-authentic cadence in the key of the dominant, E-flat major (mm. 20-21). Each phrase, though, is subdivided into two four-measure subphrases, the second one of which is a varied repeat of the first. Oddly, the first subphrase ends with a perfect-authentic cadence; however, this more closed cadence overlaps in m. 9 with the repeat of the main theme so it less noticeable as a closed formal unit.

As Theme A1 unfolds, motivic links to the previous two movements emerge. Parts of the vocal melody are based on derivations of Motive 1, shown in Example 31. The theme itself is triadic, beginning in m. 5 with an arpeggio (quickly imitated in the piano part) from tonic to dominant (with a dominant pickup in m. 4). This ascending triadic motion sets the expectation for further motion to the upper tonic, A-flat5, which does not occur until the end of the movement (mm. 117-118).

Example 31: *Suite Vocalise*, “Procession of the Graces,” mm. 7-12.

The thirty-second-note piano trills in mm. 6, 7, 10, and 11, are derived from the thirty-second-note ornaments of Movement III (introduced in mm. 12 and 14, and developed
throughout that movement). Also, the sixteenth-note figure of the voice in mm. 7 and 11, or D-C-B-flat-D, is a perfect transposition of the first four pitches of Movement II, C-B-flat-A-flat-C. Finally, the imitative relationship between the vocal melody and the treble part of the piano creates a hint of counterpoint, a distinctive tool used by Medtner in all three previous movements.

Theme A2, which contrasts the arpeggios of the first theme with motion centered around scale degrees 2, 3, and 4, is inundated with derivations of Motive 1, shown in Example 32. This includes a statement in mm. 14-15, an inverted statement in m. 14, and fragments in mm 13 and 16.

![Motive 1 inversion and variant](image)


Motive 3, which was already observed in the introduction, is the foundation for the left-hand accompaniment of the piano. Astonishingly, almost every interval in the bass of the piano consists of either a perfect-fourth or a perfect-fifth interval. It is marvelous that
within the first twenty-one measures of Movement IV, Medtner has solidified links with the previous three movements, and made use of three of the five main motivic elements of the work (Motive 4, or the rising chromatic line, will make its appearance in Section II).

The B section of the first ternary form is based on Theme A1 and is divided into three sections based on theme and harmonic motion. The opening phrase, mm. 21-24, begins with a transposition of Theme A1 in the dominant in the piano (overlapping with the cadence in m. 21), and is immediately imitated at its fifth (B-flat) in the vocal part, m. 22. The second phrase repeats this imitation, this time from B-flat to F, with an emphasis on the Motive 1 variant from m. 7, mm. 25-30. A dominant pedal in the tonic key of A-flat, mm. 31-35, prepares for the return of Theme A and the A' section, mm. 35-51. Oddly, the A' section ends with a plagal cadence (mm. 50-51), which overlaps with the next phrase. The final four measures, mm. 51-54, constitute a repeat of the opening frame of mm. 1-4. Although in this frame, the piano part achieves melodic closure with a leap at the end from E-flat to A-flat, the vocal part remains on A-flat (mm. 50-51). Closure in the vocal part is not reached.

Section II, like Section I, is filled with motivic material connecting it to Movements I, II, and III. A new theme, Theme C, which is closely related to Theme A2, is introduced in mm. 55-62. Theme C is the antecedent phrase of a large modulating parallel period, ([4 + 4] + [4 +4]), with a half-cadence in m. 62. The consequent phrase (mm. 63-70) begins similarly (the first five vocal pitches equal those in mm. 55-56), but take a harmonic turn towards first E major (mm. 64-66) at the end of the first subphrase,
then quickly reach G major for the second subphrase (mm. 67-70), with a perfect authentic cadence in mm. 70. Like Theme A2, the main building block of Theme C is a skip-step figure derived from Motive 1. It appears in the vocal melody of the antecedent phrase in mm. 55 and 59. Additionally, a retrograde variation of Motive 1 appears in mm. 57-58, as well as an inverted statement in mm. 60-61, both also shown in Example 33.


Motive 4, the ascending chromatic line, initially appears in Movement IV in all three sections of the ternary form: in the bass of the piano in mm. 59-62 (end of antecedent phrase of C section), again in mm. 71-73 (beginning of contrasting D section in G major), and most importantly, in mm. 91-94 (end of C' section) as the music returns to the original tonic key of A-flat major for the final section, A". The descending thirds of Motive 5 also appear in the C section: in m. 62, the voice has a series of sixteenth notes descending by thirds, and in mm. 67-70, the sixteenth-note descending thirds are developed in the voice and piano parts.
The middle portion of Section II (the D section) combines motivic material from Theme A and Theme C. Formally, the section consists of four four-measure phrases. In the first phrase (mm. 71-74), the sixteenth-note descending thirds are transformed into a piano accompaniment beginning in m. 71, as the voice simultaneously sings a chromatic variation of Theme C. The voice melody is in counterpoint with the piano bass, which forms the ascending chromatic line of Motive 4 in mm. 71-73, as mentioned. In mm. 75-78, the second phrase, the vocal line is a variation of Theme A1 in the key of D minor, accompanied by a version of the sixteenth-note descending thirds in the piano. In the third phrase (mm. 79-82), the voice presents a chromatic version of Theme C accompanied by another ascending chromatic line in the bass of the piano. As Theme A1 is referenced again in the voice of mm. 83-86, the fourth phrase, the music modulates back to the key of C major, in preparation for the varied repeat of Theme C in mm. 87-98.

The varied repeat of Theme C adds an imitative element between voice and piano, reminiscent of the imitation heard in Theme A1 in Section I. For example, in mm. 87-88, the vocal melody is repeated in the piano accompaniment an octave lower, just as it is in mm. 89-90. In the final portion of Section II, Medtner uses another ascending chromatic line in the piano bass to drive the vocal line to a G5 in m. 95, harmonized by an E-flat major dominant-seventh chord. This facilitates the return to the tonic key of A-flat major, punctuated by a perfect-authentic cadence in m. 99, corresponding with the beginning of the reprise of Section A from the first ternary form. Although the vocal
melody rises to a G5 in m. 95, it falls short of reaching an A-flat5, the melodic pitch expected for closure.

For Section III, rather than simply repeat the entire first section as would occur in a traditional compound ternary, Medtner restates Theme A, but with a different piano accompaniment and an appropriate closed ending from Section A’. The piano accompaniment for this varied repetition is a holdover from Section II. Motive 4, the ascending chromatic line, also makes a final appearance in the piano bass in mm. 109-111, another element of Section II which is combined with Theme A in Section III. The plagal cadence from Section A’ is embellished with an additional chromatic twist from the circle-of-fifths: G-flat precedes the Db-Ab final plagal cadence in mm. 111-115. The final four measures (mm 115-118) repeat the four-bar frame, which ends with a perfect-authentic cadence and with the addition of the voice. The voice once again sings the head triadic motive of Theme A, but instead of ending on E-flat5, or scale degree 5, the voice rockets up to A-flat5, or scale degree 1, giving the movement the internal closure it requires. This high A-flat is mirrored in the low bass motion from E-flat2 to A-flat1, both with a triple piano dynamic marking. Triple piano is the softest dynamic marking in the entire Suite, and applying it to the highest vocal note in the entire work is a bold choice by Medtner, making for an impressive and unforgettable ending to Movement IV.

**Movement V: “What the Poet Says”**

Movement V, as appropriate for a concluding movement, not only returns to the original key (F minor) and meter (duple compound, 6/8), but also combines motivic
elements from each of the preceding movements into a unified whole. Although its form is uncomplicated, a monothematic simple binary form (designated by repeat signs), it concludes with a lengthy coda which provides closure for the entire Suite Vocalise (see Figure 8). Proportionally, the two main sections A and B are almost equal in size, 28 and 26 mm., respectively; but as befits the final section of the Suite, the 33-measure coda is longer than either section, although it is not repeated as are Sections A and B. As is typical for a simple binary form, Section A modulates to the dominant, C minor, ending with a perfect authentic cadence in m. 32b; and Section B reverses the process, beginning in C minor but cadencing in F minor in m. 58.

| Introduction | || Section A || Section B || Coda |
|--------------|----------------|-----------------|------|
| mm.: 1-4    | 5-32           | 33-58           | 59-91|
| fm: i       | i v            | v i             | i    |
| #mm: 4      | 28             | 26              | 33   |

**Total measures = 91**

**Figure 8.** Movement V: “What the Poet Says”: Simple Binary.

Even though the binary portion is primarily monothematic, as was the “Introduction” (Movement I), this movement also, as mentioned, includes all of the Suite’s main motives, in whole or in part, as an essential contribution to a summarizing, concluding movement. As part of this closure process, Medtner again uses the Motive 5 frame from Movement III, presenting it this time, as expected, in the tonic of F minor. He emphasizes it additionally through contrapuntal treatment in the coda, and also brings back the main theme from Movement I in the coda. Motive 2, the dotted-rhythm motive
that was so prevalent in Movements III and IV, acts as an ostinato throughout Sections A and B. Motive 3, the melodic quartal-quintal motive, immediately appears after the frame, in the piano bass of mm. 5-6 as well as the first two notes of the voice melody in mm. 6-7. Although Motive 4, the chromatic line over a circle-of-fifths sequence, is not present, there are two extremely important circle-of-fifths sequences in Movement V, the first in mm. 37-50 (as part of the harmonic return to the tonic in Section B) and the second in mm. 71-74 of the coda.

The main four-measure theme of both sections, labeled A and presented in the vocal part first in mm. 6-9 in tonic (see Example 34), outlines a descending tonic triad, but lacks any sounding of the lower tonic pitch, thus thwarting closure. (This expectation for closure resembles Theme A1 in Movement II, “Song of the Nymphs.”) The theme begins with a leap from F5 to C5 in mm. 6-7 and continues to descend stepwise to G4 (scale degrees 5-4-3-2). An ascending linear return to C5 is answered by an ascending leap to F5 and descending return to C5. This emphasis on pitch C5 is illustrated in Example 34 and continues throughout this movement.
Example 34: *Suite Vocalise*, “What the Poet Says,” mm. 5-12.

This theme is then repeated in the voice, mm. 10-13, with variations. The F4 needed for completion of the triadic pattern is initially missing, and although it is reached at the end of the repeat in m. 13, the harmony and accompaniment are not congruent with it, thereby foregoing any significant closure. Medtner accompanies these two statements in the piano with three repeated statements of the first six pitches of theme A in the right-hand part (mm. 7-12).

The counterpart of theme A in Section B is stated in canon between the piano and voice in the dominant, mm. 33-36, and immediately sequenced a half-step higher in C-sharp minor, mm. 37-40. In both sections, this theme is then developed, amid chromatic harmonic motion to effect the necessary modulations. In Section A the key of the minor
dominant is clearly reached by m. 22 amid motivically-similar motion first emphasizing G4, and then again C5, once the new key is reached. A leap from C5 to G5 in mm. 28-29 begins the last phrase of Section A, the melody of which moves back down to C5 through repeated linear motion over a subdominant pedal in the bass accompaniment, leading to a perfect authentic cadence in mm. 31-32b. Although strong, the harmonic and tonal closure is in the wrong key.

As Section B progresses, Medtner continues to demonstrate his contrapuntal skills with canonic imitation between the piano and the voice, using three different free and varied inversions of Theme A, mm. 40-49, still in the key of C minor. In the last canonic statement, both the piano and the voice return to C5 (the fulcrum point for this movement) and then reach G5 stepwise (mm. 45-48), followed by a descending leap to C5 in the voice, which coincides with a V\(^{6/2}\) in F minor, mm. 48-49, that resolves appropriately to i\(^6\) in m. 50, thus signaling the return to F minor. In the harmony in mm. 37-50, beginning with the C-sharp minor sequence in m. 37, Medtner utilizes a quintal harmonic pattern, C-sharp-F-sharp-B-E-A-D-G-C-F. At this point theme A is repeated, but with an E-natural5 as substitute for F5; the final statement of Theme A begins with a Db5 instead of F5 (m. 52), but continues exactly as the original, ending over a B-flat pedal (IV), which introduces a final four-measure phrase ending with a perfect authentic cadence and the vocal part emphasizing E-natural5-F5, mm. 55-58. Thus Medtner returns to the same F5 pitch with which he began the vocal melody in m. 6.

Overall, the first two sections of “What the Poet Says” have a reflective, almost meditative quality. The undulating motion of the dotted-rhythm piano accompaniment
shares much with the dotted-rhythm ostinato of the “Motto” from the *Sonata-Vocalise*. This gentle rocking and the very slow harmonic motion evoke a nocturnal atmosphere, while the falling thirds in the tenor voice of the piano from A-flat3 to F3 (mm. 5-8) sound like tired sighs at the end of a long journey. The vocal melody is also reminiscent of the melody Theme A1 from “Song of the Nymphs.” Both center around the pitch C5, and both share landmarks on the pitches E-flat5 and A-flat4, before meandering down to C4. This is fitting with the imagery of the poem, as the poet attempts to describe to the Muses what he has witnessed after the fact. The vocal melody seems to be trying to recall Theme A1 of “Song of the Nymphs,” just as the poet is trying to recall what he has just experienced.

The coda, marked *tranquillo*, quotes the melody from Movement I that began the entire *Suite Vocalise* two-and-one-half times. The vocal melodies of mm. 59-66 and mm. 67-74 are each exact quotes of the vocal melody from mm. 3-10 of Movement I. Furthermore, the piano quotes the first half (mm. 3-6) in mm. 64-67, first an octave higher than the voice, then at the correct pitch, as a link between the first two statements. Yet another circle-of-fifths sequence in the bass accompanies this piano statement. Two more circle-of-fifths sequences (mm.71-74, then 75-77) accompany the end of the second statement and the lead-in to the third partial statement, mm. 77-80. This final statement of the first half of the main theme from the “Introduction” leads to an F-minor cadential 6/4 chord with a *fermata* in m. 81. A canonic treatment of Motive 5 (mm. 81-85) ensues, with entrances beginning on the pitches A-flat4, C5, and finally F5 in m. 85, spelling out an F-minor triad, shown in Example 35.
The final statement of Motive 5 is the only one that begins and ends on scale degree 1, F4 to F5, providing melodic closure. In mm. 88-90, two falling thirds in the voice recall the falling thirds in the piano during mm. 73-74 of Movement II, accompanied in the piano by pastoral hunting horn calls that adhere to the dotted-rhythm from Section A of Movement V. For the first time since the end of Movement II, the voice leaps a full octave from F4 to F5, over a tonic F-minor harmony in root position in the piano accompaniment, providing final melodic closure to Movement V as well as the entire Suite Vocalise.
Movement I: “Introduction”

The “Introduction” of the Suite Vocalise is marked Allegretto espressivo and shares many programmatic and motivic characteristics with Movement I of the Sonata-Vocalise. Therefore, it is not surprising that the tempo of the “Introduction” is similar to the tempo of the “Motto,” which is marked Allegretto tranquillo e sereno. As I pointed out in the analysis of the Suite Vocalise, the “Motto” and the “Introduction” also share the same meter and the same dotted-rhythm motive, so the performers should have the tempo and feeling of the “Motto” in mind when starting this movement.

Unlike the “Motto,” which starts softly, the “Introduction” begins with an assertive open fifth, marked forte, as if a bell were calling to attention the Nymphs and Graces gathering in the moonlight. It should also highlight for the audience the importance of the opening theme, which returns at the very end of this large work in the coda of the final movement. In mm. 7-9, both singer and pianist must work together to make a long crescendo together toward the surprising G-flat major chord in m. 9. The opening 10-measure antecedent is answered by a consequent phrase, which begins in m. 11 with a three-voice canon between the voice, the piano treble clef, and the piano bass clef. The pianist must work diligently to bring out both voices of the canon contained in the piano part, the first beginning in m. 10 and the second beginning in m. 11. The most important voice is in the right hand of the piano, because it begins on the same notes as
the vocal line did in the antecedent. The *accelerando* marked in m. 15 is crucial not only from a musical standpoint, but also to prevent the singer from running out of air as she sustains an F5 for four measures.

The transition into the next movement, “Song of the Nymphs,” is intentionally subtle. Although it may be tempting for the pianist to significantly reduce the tempo in mm. 21-22, where Medtner has marked *ritenuto*, such an action would make it awkward for the singer to execute the pickup note into the next movement. The pianist should simply strive to achieve the chosen tempo of the next movement by the end of m. 22, allowing the singer to begin the new melody in tempo. If Medtner had wanted a more dramatic transition, he certainly would not have made the transition *attacca*.

**Movement II: “Song of the Nymphs”**

The second movement features one of Medtner’s most lyrical melodies. The performers can highlight the lyrical, classically-oriented phrase structure by striving for long, horizontal lines and always keeping the large-scale phrase shape in mind. For example, the first phrase is twelve measures long, but the phrase is subdivided into much smaller, two-measure segments. If the performers do not plan carefully, it is easy for this opening phrase to come across as four separate two-measure phrases (mm. 1-8) plus a four-measure phrase (mm. 9-12). A much more elegant interpretation would be to treat the first eight measures as two four-measure phrases, and the following four measures as another phrase.
The texture in the piano part of the first twelve measures of “Song of the Nymphs” is very Schubertian. The left hand of the piano and the vocal melody are essentially a duet, and the right hand of the piano provides the rhythmic energy that gives the music its forward momentum. Therefore, although the right hand is much more complicated to execute from a technical standpoint, the left hand is actually more important by acting as a counterbalance to the melody. The pianist should be especially aware of the right-hand patter, because it is easy to let its complexity negatively affect the ensemble’s balance. It may be beneficial for the performers to practice with only the left hand of the piano and the voice, with the pianist adding in the right hand at a later point.

Certain portions of the second movement require the pianist to pay special attention to balance. One such especially difficult section is mm. 19-22. The vocal line is written in the lowest and least audible range, and the piano part is unusually dense with thick harmonies in both the left and right hands. The pianist can avoid overwhelming the singer here by voicing the thumb of the right hand, which plays an eighth-note countermelody against the vocal melody.

Another concern for the pianist is, of course, pedaling. Because portions of the second movement become intricately chromatic, creating the proper balance can be difficult. For the most part, the pianist will want to pedal twice per measure, on the downbeat and on the upbeat. In sections like mm. 11-12, or mm. 25-26, however, the piano is essentially playing a decorated ascending chromatic line. Depending on the performance venue, the pianist should consider using half-pedal or even fluttering the pedal and relying on finger legato. This is more difficult in sections like mm. 21-22
where it is nearly impossible to connect the sequence of intervals in the left hand, so a combination of half-pedal and finger legato is necessary.

Voicing is especially important for the pianist in mm. 39-46, which are also extremely difficult from an ensemble perspective. In mm. 39-42, the top voice of the right hand is the melody, and is very easily overpowered by the left-hand octaves and the right-hand off-beats. In m. 43, the middle voice is second only to the melody of the voice, and in m. 44, the upper voice of the piano is most important, being in canon with the vocal melody. Mm. 45-46 are extremely awkward for the pianist, but the singer can help by observing first the calmando in m. 45, and then the ritardando in m. 46, giving the pianist ample time to break or roll the left-hand chords.

The final four measure of the second movement are challenging to execute. The singer can make the pianist’s job slightly easier here by taking charge of tempo, and maintaining a feeling of two in mm. 71-72. Medtner marks no ritardando at the end of the movement, and though it may seem tempting to slow down in m. 73, the pianist should strive to maintain tempo until the second half of m. 73, when a slight liberty may be taken to ease into the final chord in m. 74. If too much time is taken however, the falling third motive of the left hand in m. 73 will become unrecognizable.

**Movement III: “Secrets”**

The third movement of the *Suite Vocalise* is deceptively challenging. Although the tempo is slow, the plethora of ornaments is rather complicated, and the performers
must walk a fine line between sounding overly metronomic on one hand versus rhythmically haphazard on the other. This is compounded by the near ubiquity of the dotted rhythm in each beat in at least one of the two parts, except for the short introduction and postlude. The repetitiveness of the dotted rhythm makes it far more aurally perceptible when one or both performers are even slightly inaccurate with their counting.

Another challenge in the third movement is phrasing. Because of the slow tempo and the relatively slow harmonic motion, it is difficult to execute phrasing which does not become over-exaggeratedly loud or soft. For example, in mm. 26-30, there is a four-measure crescendo which, if not carefully paced, can easily reach its peak prematurely. Furthermore, there are other sections, such as mm. 38-42, where very little instruction is given, and the performers must decide for themselves which phrasing to plan and execute.

Further, the dotted rhythm itself can be challenging. The sixteenth note of the rhythmic ostinato should be slightly delayed, to enhance the sultry, dancelike quality of the music. If the rhythm is played exactly as written, the music becomes very square and boring. But the sixteenth note cannot be delayed too much, or the music will begin to sound less like a slow dance and more like a regal march. Another consideration is that eventually the piano must fit a thirty-second-note triplet into the span of one sixteenth note (mm. 21-25). Therefore, the performers must agree beforehand on the style of the dotted-rhythm ostinato and maintain it throughout the movement.
Finally, as with any music which employs a rhythmic ostinato, there is a danger of the music becoming pedantic. Medtner’s music masterfully depicts the programmatic material of the mysterious and sensual dances of otherworldly creatures, observed by the eavesdropping poet in the dark of night. The slow but relentless dance rhythm, the wild, undulating ornaments, and the breathtaking leaps of the melody are all available to performers to enhance their interpretation. This movement requires an engaging and well-executed performance to bring the music alive to the audience.

The introduction and piano solo, which lasts until the first entrance of the singer in m. 12, is more difficult musically than technically. The first two measures of the movement, before the left-hand ostinato begins in m. 3, may be thought of as an instrumental solo in an orchestral work, perhaps for an exotic-sounding double-reed instrument, such as bassoon, or a lush and lyrical instrument like the cello. Whatever the choice, the phrasing should be incredibly expressive, and the use of rubato can be generous. For most of the movement, rubato is problematic because of the ever-present dotted-rhythm ostinato, so the pianist should take advantage of the freedom allowed by the first two measures!

The voice is tacet from the opening melody (mm. 3-11), and so it is incumbent upon the pianist to play the melody as lyrically as possible. Much of this melody’s excitement comes from the accents that fall on the sixteenth notes of the melody. The pianist needs to observe the syncopation of the accents, which give the melody a flirtatious quality, but within the context of the pianissimo dynamic marked by the composer in m. 3 and reiterated in m. 6. The unusual harmonies on the third beats of
mm. 8-9 (D-flat minor and G-flat minor respectively) can be colored by the soft pedal to give them an especially mysterious sound.

One of the most difficult sections of the third movement to interpret is mm. 21-26. Because the music is so complex in this section, both harmonically and rhythmically, there are some steps the performers should take to clarify the music for the audience. The canon between the vocal line and the treble clef of the piano should be the performers’ primary focus. Each separate entrance, whether in the voice or the piano, should be incredibly clear. Also, the pianist should strive to use as little damper pedal as possible, so that the thirty-second note triplets are audible in the left hand. Finally, although it is not marked, each canonic entrance should be at a slightly lower dynamic than the last, to give this section a sense of direction. The lowest point of this gradual decrescendo should be the end of m. 25, when a new idea begins.

One of the most special places of “Secrets” is when the main melody returns in m. 38, sung by the singer for the first time. The pianist should consider having the soft pedal depressed for at least the first four measures of this section, both to provide a very fine and blanketeted sound, and to allow the singer to sing her melody as gently as possible without fear of being covered by the thick accompaniment. The leap of a tenth between m. 39 and m. 40 is vocally difficult, especially with the marked decrescendo from the first to the second note. The pianist should allow the singer as much time as she needs to successfully navigate this difficulty.

As the piece closes, and the material from the introduction returns as a postlude, the pianist should again feel free to take as much rubato as is tasteful. The fermata on
the second beat of m. 48 should also be held for as long as possible, because it is the first
time in forty-five measures that the dotted-sixteenth ostinato is not present. As a
movement, “Secrets,” is extremely challenging to interpret, but it is also one of the most
rewarding. Few other works of Medtner offer performers such freedom of interpretation.

Movement IV: “Procession of the Graces”

The fourth movement of the Suite Vocalise is by far the most jubilant.

Programmatically, it is based on the idea of a procession of Nymphs and the Graces down
Mount Olympus. It is the only movement in a major key, and the quick 2/4 meter is
clearly evocative of a jaunty march rather than a solemn procession. However, if the
tempo becomes too fast, the music quickly devolves into a frantic and undisciplined
mess. Medtner warns against such an overly fast tempo with his marking Allegretto
sempre al rigore di tempo.

As is often the case in Medtner’s music, piano and voice frequently share the
melody throughout the movement. Furthermore, in many places the accompaniment is so
compelling that it should be thought of less as an accompaniment and more as a
countermelody or even a duet. One such example is the opening phrase of the
movement, mm. 5-12. The voice clearly has the melody, but the countermelody in the
treble clef of the piano is very cleverly written and should be thought of as second
melody by the pianist.

Another example of equal importance of the piano and voice is mm. 35-42, where
the piano has the main melody in its bass clef, the countermelody in its treble clef, and
the singer has a descant made of new material. In this example, the main theme is accompanied by two separate countermelodies, and there is a case to be made that each voice of this trio is equally important because of the contrapuntal style of writing. Regardless of how the three melodies are prioritized by the performers, each melody should have its own independent phrasing. In a section with such complex architecture, it is the independence of each voice, rather than the prioritizing of one melody over another, that will give the section the aural clarity it needs to be comprehended by an audience.

The interior section of the fourth movement is written in a style that contrasts with the section that precedes it. The dotted-sixteenth-note rhythms that were so pervasive in the first section disappear, and a more stepwise and lyrical style prevails. Although Medtner is very clear that the tempo should remain constant throughout the entire movement, performers can still highlight the contrasts of the interior section by executing long legato lines with graceful flourishes of sixteenth notes in m. 62 and mm. 67-68. The surprising and temporary emergence of the main theme in mm. 83-86 should be treated like a false recapitulation in a sonata-allegro movement, making the eventual return of the main theme in m. 99 even more satisfying.

The almost seamless merging of thematic material in mm. 99-118 sounds so natural that the performers need to make a real effort to bring it out. The main melody of the voice should have the same rigorous enthusiasm that it had at the opening of the piece. But the sixteenth notes found in the treble clef of the piano must retain the graceful lyricism of the interior section, even while the bass clef of the piano plays its
march-like rhythm. The pianist should also voice the descending chromatic line that begins in m. 99 and lasts a staggering eight measures. This chromaticism is another holdover from the more-chromatic interior section, and is an important feature in the final portion of the fourth movement.

**Movement V: “What the Poet Says”**

The final movement of the *Suite Vocalise* is entirely different from the other movements from a programmatic point of view. Whereas the other movements describe scenes witnessed firsthand by the poet (and therefore also by the audience), the final movement consists of the poet’s own description of what he has seen, heard, and experienced. In the original text, the poet describes what he has seen to the Muses, and they teach him to speak modestly about what he has witnessed so as not to anger the gods:

*Alles erzählt er den Musen, und daß die Götter nicht zürnen,*

*lehren die Musen ihn gleich bescheiden Geheimnisse sprechen.*

This programmatic shift from firsthand to secondhand helps to inform the performers’ interpretation throughout the final movement.

The modesty with which the poet learns to describe his experience shows up throughout the entire fifth movement. For example, during the first four measures of the piece, the piano has the introductory motive from Movement III, “Secrets,” now in the tonic key of F minor. But whereas previously this theme was marked *espressivo*, with a
dynamic of *mezzo-forte*, this statement is marked *tranquillo* with a much softer dynamic of *piano* and the additional marking of *legatissimo*. These new markings indicate that the pianist should interpret the statement in a much more subdued, modest style. The first four measures of the fifth movement are a secondhand account of the original statement of the “secrets” of the third movement.

Other examples of secondhand accounts from previous movements are scattered throughout the final movement. For example, the piano ostinato, which is present throughout most of the movement, is derived from the last four measures of the “Introduction,” which in turn was derived from the original setting of Goethe’s poem in the “Motto” of the *Sonata-Vocalise*. The pianist should attempt to match the tempo of the first movement to highlight this link. Furthermore, as I discussed in the analysis, the vocal line beginning in m. 6 shares similarities with the vocal melody of Movement II, “Song of the Nymphs.” Therefore, the singer should rely on the ensemble’s interpretation of the second movement to inform melodic choices in “What the Poet Says.” Another example of a secondhand musical account is the canon between voice and piano in mm. 33-40. This canon is relatively simplistic compared to the complex canonical treatment Medtner gives thematic material in each of the previous movements, but it should still be brought out by the performers by emphasizing each independent voice’s entrance.

There are other details that performers can choose to highlight in their interpretation in order to bring out elements of the movement’s program. In m. 23 the *subito piano* should be sudden and surprising, as if the poet were begin hushed by the
Muses. The *forte* markings in m. 28, m. 48, and m. 55 should all be within the context of a somewhat tranquil and nocturnal mood. None of these *forte* markings is sustained for more than a measure, and in the case of m. 48 Medtner indicates that the performers should begin to *decrescendo* immediately following the *forte*. Finally, although there are opportunities for *rubato*, the tempo should never push ahead too drastically, ruining the subtle modesty of the movement.

The Coda, marked *tranquillo*, requires careful pacing from both performers. It begins in m. 59 with the marking *pianissimo*, and in m. 63 Medtner indicates *poco a poco crescendo* which lasts until m. 71. Similarly, a *diminuendo* that begins in m. 74 lasts until m. 81. Both long phrase markings require discipline and planning. For example, the *poco forte* at mm. 66-67 is subsidiary to the *forte pieno* (“full *forte*”) marked in m. 71. The Coda ends with a three-voice canon of the introductory material from “Secrets.” The piano enters with duple octaves in the bass clef of mm. 86-87, which must be very gentle and still in the style of *tranquillo*, rather than forceful. The most important statement of the theme, presented by the singer in mm. 85-88, is the only one which starts on the tonic note of F. The music of the Coda ends in a similar fashion to the “Introduction” from which it is derived. The pianist should again strive to match the original tempo in m. 88, and no real tempo variance is necessary, except to give the singer as much time as she needs to execute her octave-leap in mm. 90-91.

Although there are no words sung by the singer in Medtner’s *Suite Vocalise*, the performance is still deeply rooted in the specific programmatic material of Goethe’s poem, “Geweihter Platz.” Because there are also motivic and thematic links to the
Sonata-Vocalise, the performers should ideally be familiar with the Sonata-Vocalise when performing the Suite Vocalise, although the links are subtle enough that familiarity with the poem should suffice. Regardless, any performance that fails to take into account the underlying program intended by Medtner will be incomplete and lacking. The music of Medtner is constructed with such beauty and care, however, that any performance that successfully brings the program alive through careful planning and attention to detail cannot be anything other than a magical and memorable experience for both performers and audience alike.
CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

The *Sonata-Vocalise mit einem Motto “Geweihter Platz”* and the *Suite Vocalise* are somewhat difficult works for performers to program, as evidenced by their relative obscurity, for two primary reasons. First, both works are large and complex, relative to most concert vocalises. Second, because of the lack of sung text in most of the *Sonata-Vocalise* and the entire *Suite Vocalise*, performers accustomed to the traditions of art song are faced with myriad interpretational challenges in addition to formidable technical challenges. However, detailed analyses of each work show Medtner’s mastery of both the small and large forms, as well as his fondness for developing small motivic connections both within and between movements. The analyses also reveal Medtner’s careful attention to the key plans of each work, further unifying these large-scale compositions. Most importantly, the analyses demonstrate that the wordless vocalise portions of each piece are a very specific and intentional representation of Goethe’s poem “Geweihter Platz.”

An understanding of this underlying program linking the *Sonata-Vocalise* and the *Suite Vocalise* will help to guide performers who wish to program these works. Furthermore, the author’s own experience of studying and performing both works lays the foundation for the two performer’s guides, which offer aspiring performers insight in how to surmount the challenges of ensemble, technique, and interpretation. Finally, a short biography of Medtner and a history of the development of the concert vocalise genre help to put these monumental works into greater context.
Although there are few words sung in Medtner’s two Op. 41 vocalises, both pieces are still deeply rooted in specific programmatic material of Goethe’s poem, “Geweihter Platz.” Any performance which fails to take into account the underlying program intended by Medtner will be incomplete. However, the music of Medtner is constructed with such beauty and care that any performance which successfully brings the program alive through careful planning and attention to detail will be a magical and memorable experience for both performers and audience alike. By shedding more light on the Sonata-Vocalise and Suite Vocalise, I am hopeful that these works will with time come to be better understood, more frequently performed, and perhaps one day, regarded as the inspired masterpieces which they are.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


APPENDIX A

TRANSLATION OF GOETHE’S POEM “GEWEIHTER PLATZ”
Geweihter Platz

Wenn zu den Reihen der Nymphen, versammelt in heiliger Mondnacht,

Sich die Grazien heimlich herab vom Olympus gesellen:

Hier belauscht sie der Dichter und hört die schönen Gesänge,

Sieht verschwiegener Tänze geheimnisvolle Bewegung.

Was der Himmel nur Herrliches hat, was glücklich die Erde

Reizendes immer gebar, das erscheint dem wachenden Träumer.

Alles erzählt er den Musen, und daß die Götter nicht zürnen,

Lehren die Musen ihn gleich bescheiden Geheimnisse sprechen.

Santified Place

In the sacred moon-lit night, when the Graces secretly descend from

Olympus and join the assembled ranks of Nymphs:

Here the poet eavesdrops on them, hears the beautiful songs,

and sees the mysterious movements of their secretive dances.

What splendor only the Heavens have, and what fortunate loveliness

the Earth bore, appear to this watching [waking] Dreamer.

All this he tells to the Muses, and so as not to anger the gods,

the Muses teach him to speak of these secrets in modesty.


37 Translation by the author.
APPENDIX B

TRANSLATION OF CHRISTOPH FLAMM’S DER RUSSISCHE KOMPONIST

NIKOLAJ METNER: STUDIEN UND MATERIALIEN: MIT EINEM AUSFÜHRLICHEN WERKVERZEICHNIS, EINEM VOLLSTÄNDIGEN VERZEICHNIS DER VON IHN SELBST EINGE SPIELTEN SCHALLPLATTENAUFNAHMEN UND EINER “BIBLIOGRAPHIE DER INTERNATIONALEN LITERATUR ÜBER NIKOLAJ METNER VON 1903 BIS 1994,” PAGES 203-207
3.4.4 Instrumental Works

In Medtner’s later creative stage, as it is portrayed in this book, the literary and/or programmatic additions to the instrumental works of his compositions increased rather than decreased. Ultimately this also means that the “Fairytales,” which had so far largely been treated neutrally, are now further clarified (Russian Fairytale Op. 42/1, Dance Fairytale and Elf Fairytale Op. 48).

The most impressive examples of this integration of textually ‘defined’ and instrumentally ‘undefined’ forms are Medtner’s multiple settings of Goethe’s poem Geweihter Platz. First, there is the “Motto” to Sonata-Vocalise Op. 41/1: a fragile song, first in a dotted, swaying 6/8 meter, later in a majestic 9/8 meter leading to a quiet culmination after which the song quietly dies away. His "magic" rests upon the gradual increase of the vocal range, which in the first measure includes only the notes C, D and E – the left hand of the piano does not enter until measure 10 – until eventually, in measure 38, the high A in the voice part and the F in the piano stand “bare” facing one another (the beloved metaphor "gaping chasm" does not lend itself here very well for thematic reasons); after which a reduction to the "cell" of the first three notes recurs, such that the development in the closing section finds its way back to its beginning. With Op. 46/2, a second song based on the same text which appeared only a few years later, Medtner this time composed the passage "What splendor only the Heavens have, what fortunate

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loveliness the Earth bore” (V. 5f) as a quotation of the same section from the “Motto” from Sonata-Vocalise (there with the change to 9/8 meter and unified with the movement): it correlates the measures 27-31 in Op. 46/2 with measures 23-27 in Op. 41/1. Clearly Medtner was not concerned here, as was the case of Op. 3/2 ad Op. 29/5, with how to create a “better” composition, but rather how to create a “partly different” composition. In addition to these two songs, the Goethe poem is also the foundation for the Sonata-Vocalise itself (otherwise the previously mentioned motto would not precede) as well as the Suite Vocalise Op. 41/2, created several years later. Formally, the Sonata-Vocalise appears just as its title implies, a sonata movement with a wordless voice part as the soloist instrument. It has an exposition with four themes and each has a different tonality (C, C/E, a, e), which includes a varied repetition of the themes (measures 1-110), a relatively short development with modulations to remote keys and thematic work (measures 111-170), and only a slightly abbreviated reprise with tonal alterations (C, E-flat/F, b-flat, f), but without thematic adjustment (measures 171-253), and a coda (measures 253-270). Goethe’s poem describes how the poet sees in a waking dream the “beautiful singing” of the Graces and Nymphs and their concealed dance’s mysterious movements, how he reports to the Muses on this fortunate union – which by the will of the gods is to remain hidden to humans – of worldly (nymphs) and heavenly (graces), and how they teach him, in a way which is pleasing to the gods, “to speak modestly of these secrets.” The theme, therefore, is the metaphysical act of creative inspiration and its transformation in a (linguistic) work of art under the guide of the muses, that is to say,
through compliance with “superhuman” rules. Beginning and end of art lies in the concealed, and only the artist has the power to see and to shape it.

An interpretation of the Sonata-Vocalise must first ask, what Medtner, after he already had musically set the entire substance of the poem in the motto, still wanted to portray: the vision (elusive, yet not in words) of the secrets, or the language used by the poet? If Medtner had identified himself (even subliminally) with the poet figure from the poem, as a musician he had to renounce words, for his language is the tonal language, so that the representation of the fantastic visions as well as the portrayal of the “regular” aesthetics of these impressions became one and the same, namely, purely instrumental sound images. Medtner, by using the voice part as an instrument and letting it be a vocalise, undertakes to suggest the “beauty of the Earth and the Heavens” as lying either (still) in the language of regular people or already in the language of artists, which is present in the voice part. Evidently so far no one has attempted to understand, neither contemporary critics nor later authors, the unusual casting of this sonata as the result or interpretation of the preceding Goethe-Motto, although the subject-matter of the artist at the end suggests language. In light of the self-explanatory passages without text in his songs, the interpretation of the sonata as an intentional experiment, as it is often considered, is certainly false. Experiments were hated by Medtner. The titles of the later-created Suite-Vocalise (which Medtner considered so closely related to Sonata-Vocalise that he subsequently expanded the numbers of Opus 41) each has a caption: Introduction, Song of the Nymphs, Secrets, Procession of the Graces, What the Poet Says. Obviously, the single movements reflect the plot of the poem. The poet enters the scene
and first perceives the song of the Graces [sic], sees the “Secrets” (Dances?), and then after the Graces, begins eventually to “speak” himself (this formulation Medtner has probably based on Schumann’s *Kindersczenen*). Without even entering clarification on the formal layout of the Suite – the second movement for example is a sonata form without development – it is not totally improbable that Medtner already knew he would realize some kind of relation. If one must go as far as to give the many unusual themes of the sonata such “titles” as above the movement names, is but questionable, especially because the development of these themes do not correspond with the structure of the poem: here it would be likely to gain from speaking a harmonic proof of the specified vision.

Overall, the settings of *Sanctified Place* form one of the most important group of works for Medtner’s aesthetic. In these pieces, the composer attempts to define his artistic self-understanding and to make it musically convincing. By comparison, the often-summoned “Muses themes” from Op. 27 and Op. 29/1 convey a much less meaningful message, since both works are based on several different source texts, and in both cases the theme is only a part of the whole. But to this day, the above-mentioned settings are among the at least known works of the composer: recordings of Op. 46/2 and Op. 41/2 were never made, and only the *Sonata-Vocalise* exists in very few historical recordings, including one with Medtner himself at the piano. This unbelievable reticence is partially due to the special sound beauty required: clearly no artist has the courage, skill, colors and expression to sing the vocalise (why it is not so with Glière’s *Concerto for Coloratura Soprano* Op. 82, Rachmaninoff’s *Vocalise* Op. 34/12 or Debussy’s
*Sirèns?*); in the case of the Songs there is no excuse. For Medtner himself these pieces must have had a special meaning, so much so that they are the most important key to understanding his music as a whole – for this reason, because they demonstrate, that with even his “absolute” shining compositions, they can be entirely based on an ulterior motive (of literary trimmings).