ANATOLY ALEXANDROV

COMPLETE PIANO SONATAS

CLARISSE TEO, PIANO

DISC 1

1.		Sonata No. 1 in F–sharp minor, Op. 4 '*Sonata–Skazka*' (1914)	7:31
2.		Sonata No. 2 in D minor, Op. 12 (1918)	13:21
3.		Sonata No. 3 in F–sharp minor, Op. 18 (1920, rev. 1956 and 1967)	15:48
		Sonata No. 4 in C major, Op. 19 (1922, rev. 1954)	
4.	I.	*Agitato mosso, con slancio vigoroso e gran'passione*	7:39
5.	II.	*Andante meditativo*	5:17
6.	III.	*Invocando, un poco sostenuto – Con fuoco, tragicamente*	5:07
		Sonata No. 5 in G–sharp minor, Op. 22 (1923, rev. 1938)	
7.	I.	*Quasi andantino sempre molto flessibile*	8:36
8.	II.	Variazioni [Tema: *Tranquillo (Mesure diverse)* - Var. 1: *L'istesso tempo* - Var. 2: *Più mosso, gaio* - Var. 3: *Veloce* - Var. 4: *Non troppo lento, misterioso* - Var. 5: *Più mosso, molto risoluto* - Var. 6: *L'istesso tempo, ma più flessibile ed un poco agitato (Mesure diverse)* - Var. 7: *a tempo (l'istesso tempo) giocoso* - Var. 8: *Lo stesso tempo* - Var. 9 (Fuga): *Tempo giusto (mesure diverse)* - Var. 10 (Coda): *Meno mosso, tranquillo (Mesure diverse)*]	12:16
			Total playing time 75:53

DISC 2

Sonata No. 6 in G major, Op. 26 (1925)

1.	I.	*Allegro grazioso*	4:58
2.	II.	*Adagio non troppo*	5:35
3.	III.	*Intrada, alla improvisata (non slentando) – Alla marcia stravaganta*	4:55

Sonata No. 7 in D major, Op. 42 '*Sonatina*' (1932) - *Premiere Recording*

4.	I.	*Allegretto flessibile*	2:50
5.	II.	Canzona	3:17
6.	III.	Rondo	6:04

Sonata No. 8 in B–flat major, Op. 50 (1939–44)

7.	I.	*Allegretto giocoso*	4:35
8.	II.	*Andante cantabile e pensieroso*	4:04
9.	III.	*Energico. Con moto assai – Alla danza energica con moto assai, ma un poco sostenuto*	8:01

Sonata No. 9 in C minor, Op. 61 (1945) - *Premiere Recording*

10.	I.	*Allegro moderato*	4:20
11.	II.	*Andante ma non troppo*	3:30
12.	III.	*Allegro*	4:25

Sonata No. 10 in F major, Op. 72 (1951)

13.	I.	*Allegro moderato*	9:47
14.	II.	*Andante semplice*	3:44
15.	III.	*Con moto ed agitato*	4:31

Total playing time 75:00

DISC 3

Sonata No. 11 in C major, Op. 81 '*Sonata–Fantasia*' (1955)

1.	I.	*Tranquillo ma, con alcuna licenza*	2:53
2.	II.	*Allegro agitato*	3:04
3.	III.	*Andante cantabile*	5:48

Sonata No. 12 in B minor, Op. 87 (1962) - *Premiere Recording*

4.	I.	*Impetuoso, un poco sostenuto – Un poco più mosso, animato assai*	9:30
5.	II.	*Andante cantabile, dolce espressivo*	5:38
6.	III.	*Con moto, energico*	4:51

7.		Sonata No. 13 in F–sharp minor, Op. 90 *'Sonata–Skazka*' (1964)	6:50

Sonata No. 14 in E major, Op. 97 (1971)

8.	I.	*Allegretto carezzevole*	7:33
9.	II.	Tema: *Andante narrativo* - Var. 1: *Più mosso, allegretto* - Var. 2: *Andante amoroso* - Var. 3: *Allegretto scherzoso* - Interludium: *Liberamente, assai con moto* - Var. 4: *Marcia funebre* - Var. 5: *Con moto Gaio* - Interludium - Var. 6 (Coda): *Un poco meno mosso ch'il tema, molto espressivo*	13:28

Total playing time 59:53

ANATOLY ALEXANDROV

& THE SONATA

NOTES BY CLARISSE TEO

Despite the longstanding prestige of the piano sonata and its associated form in the Western art music canon since Beethoven's monumental accomplishments in the field, subsequent generations of composers preferred to explore other forms and styles instead.[1] However, the piano sonata experienced an unexpected and unprecedented resurgence in popularity in early 20th Century Russia[2] that was unmatched elsewhere even when there was some revival of interest in the genre due to neo-Classicism.

Although predecessors like Tchaikovsky, Anton Rubinstein and Glazunov had written piano sonatas,[3] the subsequent boom in the genre's popularity was primarily driven by Alexander Scriabin[4] and Nikolai Medtner,[5] the foremost Moscow composer-pianists of pre-Revolutionary Russia, who composed ten and fourteen piano sonatas respectively. Despite their contrasting aesthetic outlooks, they pursued similar paths that pushed the boundaries of the genre beyond the explorations of the Romantic era composers, including experimenting with the number of movements, employing unconventional key relationships, incorporating programmatic elements, and fusing the piano sonata with other genres.

Consequently, many aspiring Russian and Soviet composers (mostly composer-pianists) tried writing piano sonatas and adopting the above-mentioned ideas, although few eventually persevered. Particularly until the 1920s under the liberal artistic direction of Anatoly

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1 Some reasons for composers turning away from piano sonatas include the difficulty they encountered in breaking out of the textbook sonata mould codified by Beethoven's student Czerny, and the wave of 20th Century movements (like Impressionism and the Second Viennese School's serialism) that challenged the strict tonal relationships and structure that characterised sonata form.

2 The genre's popularity diminished during the implementation of the cultural policy of Social Realism in the Soviet Union.

3 Tchaikovsky, Anton Rubinstein and Glazunov wrote two, four and two piano sonatas respectively.

4 A unique visionary figure in Russia's musical history, Scriabin's impact extended beyond his early death to later generations of composers. His ten piano sonatas depict his evolution from the late-Romantic Chopin-influenced style of his earlier works to the more *avantgarde* and mystical bent of his later works that he has become famous for.

5 Today, Medtner's reputation is inextricably bound to his fourteen piano sonatas and his collection of thirty-eight character pieces for solo piano titled *Skazki*. His piano sonatas showcase his attempts to expand the perimeters of both the genre and sonata form, but his experiments with sonata form extend beyond the scope of piano sonatas. For instance, he applied it to *Skazka* Op. 8 No. 2 (1904-05), and even tried integrating variations into sonata form in his Piano Concerto No. 1 in C minor, Op. 33 (1914-18).

Lunacharsky,[6] piano sonatas proliferated and the resultant rich body of work exhibits a diverse range of compositional styles, from the late-Romantic language of Sergei Rachmaninov and Sergei Bortkiewicz to the more experimental approaches of Nikolai Roslavets and Alexander Mosolov, with pieces by composers like Nikolai Myaskovsky, Anatoly Alexandrov,[7] Alexei Stanchinsky, Samuil Feinberg and Sergei Prokofiev falling somewhere in between.

Once heralded alongside Myaskovsky and Feinberg as one of the most prominent representatives of the new musical period by the Soviet musicologist and music critic Viktor Belyayev in 1927,[8] Alexandrov (1888-1982) has since faded into obscurity despite his apparently successful and long-lived career as an extremely prolific composer-pianist[9] and an established pedagogue at the Moscow Conservatory from 1923 to 1964,[10] who received multiple awards from the Soviet government between 1941 to 1971.[11]

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6 The head of Narkompros (*Narodny Komissariat Prosveshcheniya* (People's Commissariat for Enlightenment)) from 1917 to 1929.

7 Full name being Anatoly Nikolayevich Alexandrov, also transliterated as Anatolii Nikolayevich Aleksandrov.

8 Viktor Belyayev, *Anatoly Nikolaevich Aleksandrov* (Moscow: Muzykal'ny Sektor, Gosudarstvennoe Izdatel'stvo, 1927) as quoted in Christoph Flamm, liner notes to Anatoly Alexandrov, *Piano Music*, Hyperion CDA67328, 2002, compact disc, accessed 23 July 2024, https://www.hyperion-records.co.uk/dc.asp?dc=D_CDA67328.

9 Alexandrov's vast catalogue of 112 opuses spans most major genres, with solo piano works and vocal music dominating his output, and he also composed approximately hundred unnumbered folk song arrangements, pedagogical works, children's music and music for film and drama.

10 Many of Alexandrov's students became composers who actively contributed to Soviet music culture by writing pieces incorporating the folk tunes of their homeland, music for children and works for dramatic forms. Some of his other students like the pianists Victor Bunin and his brother Vladimir Bunin championed Alexandrov's piano music and recorded some of Alexandrov's piano works for the Melodiya label.

11 Highlights include the Stalin Prize in 1951 and the prestigious People's Artist of the USSR award in 1971. See Irina Pevzner, "Forgotten Russian Piano Music: the Sonatas of Anatoly Aleksandrov" (Master's thesis, University of South Carolina, 2013) ["Pevzner, "Forgotten Russian Piano Music"], 23-24 for a complete list of awards.

The fourteen piano sonatas by Alexandrov are noteworthy for being one of the larger contributions to the genre amongst his contemporaries.[12] Additionally, being the major genre for solo piano that he composed most prolifically and consistently in throughout his life,[13] piano sonatas hold particular importance within Alexandrov's own substantial catalogue[14] as they showcase his artistic evolution being shaped by the socio-political pressures of the era.

The second of three surviving children, Alexandrov was born in Moscow in 1888 to a musical family with close ties to Tchaikovsky by way of his mother, a concert pianist and piano teacher who had studied harmony with Tchaikovsky at the Moscow Conservatory.[15] Alexandrov initially studied philosophy at Moscow University from 1906 but upon his mother's direction, he soon commenced private lessons with the renowned composition doyen Sergei Taneyev and Taneyev's ex-student Nikolai Zhilyaev.[16] Through them, Alexandrov was exposed to diametrically opposed musical perspectives – Taneyev trained him in traditional techniques like counterpoint while Zhilyayev introduced him to contemporary music like those by Scriabin and Debussy and convinced him that an artist's output 'must open new horizons'.[17] Additionally, they introduced Alexandrov to Scriabin and Medtner, both of whom became formative influences on Alexandrov's compositional development.[18]

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12 Other composers of this generation who composed relatively large quantities of piano sonatas include Nikolai Myaskovsky, Samuil Feinberg and Sergei Prokofiev, who wrote nine, twelve and nine examples respectively.

13 Apart from miniatures, the solo piano genres that Alexandrov composed for include preludes, etudes and ballades.

14 A comprehensive catalogue can be found in Vladimir Kokushkin, *Anatoly Aleksandrov* (Moscow: Sovetskiy Kompozitor, 1987).

15 Tchaikovsky had been Alexandrov's mother's harmony tutor at the Moscow Conservatory.

16 Vladimir Blok, ed., *A. N. Aleksandrov: Vospominanija, stat'i, pis'ma* (Moscow: Sovetskiy Kompozitor, 1979) ["Blok, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Vospominanija, stat'i, pis'ma*"], 38.

17 Vladimir Blok and Elena Polenova, eds., *A. N. Aleksandrov: Stranitsy iz zhizni i tvorchestva* (Moscow: Sovetskiy Kompozitor, 1990) ["Blok and Polenova, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Stranitsy iz zhizni i tvorchestva*"], 9.

18 Alexandrov's acknowledgment of their impact can be observed in his late work *Five Pieces,* Op. 110 (1979), where the first four pieces pay homage to composers that influenced him, namely Feinberg, Scriabin, Rachmaninov and Medtner in this order.

Alexandrov subsequently entered the Moscow Conservatory in 1909, where he studied the piano with Konstantin Igumnov. The next year, he started learning composition with Alexander Ilyinsky and Sergei Vasilenko as well, and finally dropped out of his Philosophy course.[19] Written during his student days, **Piano Sonata No. 1 in F-sharp minor, Op. 4 "*Sonata-Skazka*" (1914)** is dedicated to Alexandrov's younger brother, Vladimir, with whom he shared an extremely close bond.[20] Alexandrov recalled being so consumed with the creation of this piece that he paid no heed to the ongoing turmoil arising from World War I and did not even venture outside until he had finished the work.[21]

Typical of Alexandrov's early piano music, the influence of Scriabin and Medtner is evident here. Although there was precedence for a one-movement sonata in Liszt's works,[22] Medtner was the first amongst the Russian and Soviet composers to write one-movement sonatas with *Sonaten-Triade*, Op. 11 (1904–7),[23] and thereafter others including Scriabin, Myaskovsky, Prokofiev, Roslavets and Feinberg followed suit. Next, the title of Alexandrov's sonata references Medtner's innovations – Medtner pioneered the adoption of the term *Skazka*[24] (loosely

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19 Pevzner, "Forgotten Russian Piano Music," 20.

20 There was a two-year age gap between the brothers. Although Vladimir had lived in Switzerland since 1910, where he was a professor of physics and mathematics at the University of Zurich, the brothers maintained their close relationship through lifelong correspondence: see Blok and Polenova, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Stranitsy iz zhizni i tvorchestva*, 86 and 101.

21 Blok and Polenova, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Stranitsy iz zhizni i tvorchestva*, 209

22 Namely Liszt's Sonata in B minor and *Après une lecture du Dante—Fantasia quasi Sonata* from *Années de pèlerinage, deuxième année – Italie*, S161. However, the one-movement structure was not pursued by other Romantic composers.

23 Despite the title, the three sonatas were published separately and not necessarily meant to be played together – Medtner himself never did so (Barrie Martyn, liner notes to Nikolai Medtner, *The Complete Piano Sonatas*, Hyperion CDA67221/4, 1998, compact disc, accessed 23 July 2024, http://www.hyperion-records.co.uk/dc.asp?dc=D_CDA67221/4&vw=dc).

24 The term *Skazka* originally referred to a Russian literary genre encompassing folk tales and some stories by Alexander Pushkin, which later inspired compositions by Rimsky-Korsakov and the narratives of Stravinsky's early ballets.

translated as *Fairy Tale*) for thirty-eight of his character pieces for piano,[25] experimented with applying sonata form to *Skazka* Op. 8 No. 2, and created the hybrid genre of *Sonata-Skazka* in Op. 25 No. 1.[26] Like Medtner's *Sonata-Skazka*, Alexandrov's version is mercurial with an underlying fantastical narrative. He conveys this through numerous character changes and a restless quintuplet motif that pervades the piece.

After graduating the Conservatory in 1916 with a gold medal for his two-act opera *Dva mira* [*Two Worlds*], Alexandrov was engaged in multiple roles including that of a performer, composer and educator. Unlike some of his contemporaries who migrated due to political turbulence,[27] Alexandrov was swept up by revolutionary fervour. He stayed on and joined the Red Army during the Russian Civil War (1919-20) where he was designated a non-combatant due to his poor eyesight. Instead, he served as an entertainment pianist accompanying singers, instrumentalists and dancers before being discharged for illness.[28] Subsequently, Alexandrov was involved in various capacities with several state organisations concerned with shaping Soviet musical culture like the State Publishing House.[29]

These years were also a time of great creativity and productivity, whereby Alexandrov wrote his next six piano sonatas between 1918 to 1925, almost one per year. Upon Alexandrov's request, the single-movement **Piano Sonata No. 2 in D minor, Op. 12 (1918)** is dedicated to Medtner.[30] The work again evinces Alexandrov's synthesis of different styles, from Medtnerian

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25 These works typically possess 'a narrative tone, occasionally bearing descriptive subtitles, labels, or poetic mottos' (Wendelin Bitzan, "The Sonata as an Ageless Principle. Nikolai Medtner's Early Piano Sonatas: Analytic Studies on their Genesis, Style, and Compositional Technique" (PhD diss., University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna, 2018), 124, dx.doi.org/10.25366/2019.15).

26 Apart from Alexandrov, other composers who wrote *Sonata-Skazka* include Issay Dobrowen and Ilya Aizberg.

27 The Russian Revolution of 1905-07, World War I broke out in 1914, followed by the 1917 October Revolution and the Civil War in 1918-21. Some contemporaries who migrated include Rachmaninov and Medtner.

28 Further details on Alexandrov's time in the Red Army can be found in Blok and Polenova, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Stranitsy iz zhizni i tvorchestva*, 10-29.

29 Further details on Alexandrov's employment during this period can be found in Blok and Polenova, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Stranitsy iz zhizni i tvorchestva*, 123-124 and Kokushkin, *Anatoly Aleksandrov*, 11.

30 Blok, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Vospominanija, stat'i, pis'ma,* 248.

lyric-narrative melodies and polyphonic passages, impressionistic textures to moments of Scriabinesque ecstasy.

In the recapitulation, Alexandrov subverts the traditional harmonic relationships of sonata form on several occasions – the second half of the first subject is stated a semitone lower, the second subject appears in B-flat major and finally the home key of D minor only returns in the closing theme. However, in the coda, the piece pivots to the parallel major of D major and concludes triumphantly in this key, albeit through a chromatic approach instead of a perfect cadence.

The uplifting nature of this sonata is supported by the inclusion of two literary quotes in the manuscript. The epigraph was a Russian translation by an unknown author of the first stanza of an untitled poem from Heinrich Heine's collection "Book of Songs" ("Heart, my heart, let naught o'ercome you; / Bear your destiny and pain. / Spring will bring you back again / What the Winter's taken from you."[31]), whilst a Russian translation of a line by the Greek poet Archilochus appeared right before the coda[32] ("The immortal gods have embedded powerful courage into our spirit."[33]). Ultimately, these stirring words were excluded from publication as Alexandrov felt that the sonata's ideas transcended that expressed by the poetry.

Dedicated to his gymnasium schoolmate V. F. Bulgakov,[34] **Piano Sonata No. 3 in F-sharp minor, Op. 18 (1920, rev. 1956 and 1967)** was composed before Alexandrov left for Melitopol for military service with the Red Army during the Russian Civil War and finished after he returned to Moscow from the front. Thus, the Soviet musicologist Vladimir Kokushkin suggests that Alexandrov's wartime experiences likely influenced this composition, resulting in the sonata's nervous unease and intensely dramatic character that are atypical of Alexandrov's style.[35]

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31 English translation from Louis Untermeyer, *Poems of Heinrich Heine* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1917), 118.

32 Kokushkin, *Anatoly Aleksandrov*, 113; Pevzner, "Forgotten Russian Piano Music," 91.

33 Translation from Pevzner, "Forgotten Russian Piano Music," 91.

34 Bulgakov gifted Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Representation* to Alexandrov, whereby this work had a significant impact on Alexandrov (Blok and Polenova, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Stranitsy iz zhizni i tvorchestva*, 200).

35 Kokushkin, *Anatoly Aleksandrov*, 114 footnote 3 mentions that Myaskovsky's Piano Sonata No. 3 in C minor, Op. 19 (1920) and Feinberg's Piano Sonata No. 6 in B minor, Op. 13 (1925) also convey similar tensions.

Additionally, Piano Sonata No. 3 is unique amongst Alexandrov's sonatas for its substantial introduction. The first half of the introduction comprises two differing ideas – a meandering line marked *come se ricordando di qualche cosa* (as if remembering something) and an angular and detached motif, whereby these ideas later form the basis for the first and second subject groups' materials. The first subject is presented as a fugato, which Kokushkin notes is a rare approach to thematic statements in sonata form,[36] after which it segues into the *dolce* and *cantabile* second subject. The start of the tumultuous development is delayed by a calm *Interludio* section with a lyrical and yearning melody reminiscent of Russian songs with echoes of Medtner. In a similar vein to Alexandrov's experiments in the previous sonata, the return of the introductory material of this sonata before the recapitulation is stated a tone higher than that at the beginning, and the second subject in the recapitulation is similarly transposed up a tone instead of returning in the tonic key. The coda revisits the first and second subject groups while firmly establishing the home key of F-sharp minor, before concluding with an emphatic restatement of the introduction's theme.

From **Piano Sonata No. 4 in C major, Op. 19 (1922, rev. 1954)** onwards, Alexandrov tended towards a multi-movement sonata format coupled with cyclic form. The dedicatee of this piece, Maria Vassilievna Moritz, was the daughter of the famous Russian artist Vasily Polenov and the aunt of Alexandrov's other daughter Elena Polenova. Alexandrov and the Polenov family shared a close relationship,[37] and his next piano sonata was composed during a sojourn with them.[38]

Like Piano Sonata No. 2, every movement in Piano Sonata No. 4 possessed a title in the manuscript but these also remained unpublished. Originally known as the 'Exultant Tragedy',[39] the sonata form first movement abounds with numerous contrasting themes lined up in close succession in its exposition. Even in the development, Alexandrov introduced new ideas in the form of edgy sarcastic passages reminiscent of Prokofiev and Shostakovich. Thus, likely due to the breadth of the dramatic and musical concepts presented[40], Alexandrov opined that this

36 Kokushkin, *Anatoly Aleksandrov*, 115 notes that such a technique is later found in the first movement of Myaskovksy's Piano Sonata No. 4 in C minor, Op. 27 (1924).

37 Blok and Polenova, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Stranitsy iz zhizni i tvorchestva*, 127.

38 Blok, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Vospominanija, stat'i, pis'ma,* 83.

39 On other occasions, Alexandrov offered the alternative suggestions of 'Challenge' (Kokushkin, *Anatoly Aleksandrov*, 117) and 'Outburst' (Blok, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Vospominanija, stat'i, pis'ma*, 181).

40 Pevzner, "Forgotten Russian Piano Music," 109.

movement could function as a standalone piece.[41]

Alexandrov conceived the meditative central movement as contemplating the question 'Is this so?',[42] an idea echoed in the manuscript's inscribed title of 'Reflection'.[43] The introspective opening leads into an especially wistful and expressive melody that returns in the final movement. The contour of the ensuing fugato's subject is inspired by the opening theme, and this segues into a resolute march-like passage, which Kokushkin notes is the first instance of militaristic themes in Alexandrov's sonatas.

The impassioned finale initially went by 'Fire',[44] but Alexandrov offers a more detailed outline of his intentions:

> [It] starts with a dramatic theme that depicts troublesome life, which makes the first movement's victory incomplete. The second theme is whimpering, and in the recapitulation it is weeping heavily. In the middle, the reflection becomes more and more intense. The ending of this movement is tragic, and the reminiscence of the first theme from the first movement begins as the apotheosis, the confirmation of the victory that happened in the first movement.[45]

Moreover, a sense of tragedy permeates this movement, indicated through the first subject's marking of *Con fuoco, tragicamente* and cemented by the weaving of the Gregorian plainchant *Dies irae*[46] into the musical fabric – the first four notes are hinted at in the first subject and the first half of the ensuing stormy connecting passage, before the proper quotation finally appears in the latter half of the passage. This was possibly Alexandrov's way of remembering the

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41 Blok, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Vospominanija, stat'i, pis'ma,* 181.

42 Blok and Polenova, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Stranitsy iz zhizni i tvorchestva*, 118.

43 Kokushkin, *Anatoly Aleksandrov*, 117.

44 *Ibid*.

45 Blok and Polenova, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Stranitsy iz zhizni i tvorchestva*, 118, translation from Pevzner, "Forgotten Russian Piano Music," 111.

46 Often used in Western secular instrumental music from the 19th Century onwards as a musical representation of death since Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique*, other Russian and Soviet composers like Tchaikovsky, Rachmaninov and Myaskovsky have quoted the *Dies irae* in their compositions.

victims of recent socio-political events in Russia[47] or a means of expressing his feelings on the tumultuous climate of the time. Unusually, most of the development section is used to develop the second movement's key themes instead, and it ends peacefully on a C major chord before the restless recapitulation begins. In the coda, the first movement's first subject and introduction return, reaffirming the first movement's triumph and reinforcing Alexandrov's description of this sonata as 'the only composition where everything is defeated by the first theme of the first movement, which embodies the unbeatable outburst of life'.[48] In the concluding bars, the *Dies irae* motif is harmonically altered to suit the home key of C major, which seems to portray the musical conquest of death.

Piano Sonata No. 5 in G-sharp minor, Op. 22 (1923, rev. 1938), like Alexandrov's final sonata, follows the two-movement structure of Beethoven's last piano sonata (Op. 111 in C minor) where the first movement is in sonata form and the second consists of theme and variations. This piece demonstrates the culmination of Alexandrov's modernist tendencies within his corpus of piano sonatas – even after removing particularly dissonant sections (primarily in the first movement) upon revision, a relatively high degree of complexity remains in aspects such as harmony, rhythm and texture. Perhaps this was also Alexandrov paying homage to his lifelong friend and fellow composer-pianist Feinberg, the dedicatee of this piece, whose early piano sonatas exhibit similar inclinations.

The first movement opens with a charming and meandering first subject, but the reverie is quickly dispelled by a steep build up to an exclamation. Thereafter, a rhythmically displaced pleading connecting theme and a solemn and mournful second subject are introduced, and they dominate the development section. Subsequently, the recapitulation is truncated, with the second subject replaced by a new improvisatory-sounding section that takes on a life of its own.

The second movement's theme is written in free time without a time signature, the tranquil monophonic first half evoking a folk song whilst the second half explores the lower registers in octave unison, giving it a dark and mysterious character. The ten variations explore a range of characters, but the most substantial and complex of them is the Variation 9 (Fuga), a fugue in intervals of fifths which features the climatic return of the first movement's second subject. The final variation (Coda) circles back to the tranquil atmosphere of the theme and concludes on an unusual twist on a plagal cadence.

47 Such as the October Revolution from 1917-22 and a famine in 1921-22.

48 Blok and Polenova, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Stranitsy iz zhizni i tvorchestva*, 118.

Written a mere two years later, **Piano Sonata No. 6 in G major, Op. 26 (1925)** is a significant departure from the preceding sonatas with its leaner textures, clearly outlined themes and more economical usage of its material, which illustrates Alexandrov's ongoing quest for his own voice.[49] The first movement recalls the Classical style[50] with the melody of the graceful and light-hearted first subject being accompanied by a lilting V-I two-note slurred *ostinato*. Conversely, the serious and yearning second subject in the relative minor is constructed as a long and sustained phrase over broken chords. In the development, a mysterious five-note motif is introduced. Altogether, it appears thrice in each of the first two movements[51] before being thrust into the spotlight in the final movement, where it forms the basis of the introduction and the first theme.[52]

In the introspective and brooding middle movement in E-flat minor, the steady *ostinato* accompaniment from the A section takes centre stage in the B section's second emotional climax, before it retreats into the background again to prepare for the reprise of the A section. The music draws to a close after the third appearance of the five-note motif in this movement.

Following an improvisatory introduction, the rondo finale features an eclectic collection of characters that juxtapose a series of grotesque imagery (consisting of an extravagant march derived from the five-note motif, a Russian dance and an elegant foxtrot) with a simple theme in the spirit of a mass song.[53] The grotesque themes, with their capricious and fragmented melody, dissonant harmonies and whimsical rhythm, have echoes of Prokofiev, Stravinsky and the young Shostakovich.[54]

The seven-year break between Piano Sonata No. 6 and **Piano Sonata No. 7 in D major, Op. 42 "*Sonatina*" (1932)** was due to Alexandrov's mild creative depression from the late 1920s to early 1930s.[55] During this period, the ideological conflict between the Russian Association of Proletarian Musicians (RAPM) and the *Associacija sovremennoj muzyki* (Association of

49 Pevzner, "Forgotten Russian Piano Music," 117.

50 Kokushkin, *Anatoly Aleksandrov*, 123.

51 Once in the development and twice in the recapitulation of the first movement.

52 Kokushkin, *Anatoly Aleksandrov*, 125.

53 Kokushkin, *Anatoly Aleksandrov*, 123.

54 Kokushkin, *Anatoly Aleksandrov*, 124.

55 Kokushkin, *Anatoly Aleksandrov*, 19.

Contemporary Music) (ASM)[56] intensified. As an active member of the ASM,[57] Alexandrov was one of several composers attacked by the RAPM for 'modernist' tendencies,[58] which hurt him deeply and caused the abovementioned depression.

Alexandrov's artistic drought ended with the state-decreed disbanding of all artistic unions including the ASM and RAPM in 1932, and the establishment of the Union of Soviet Composers.[59] After hearing Prokofiev's sonatinas[60] at a gathering in the music critic Vladimir Derzhanovsky's home,[61] Alexandrov was so inspired to write a sonatina that he improvised the first subject of the first movement upon returning home. According to Kokushkin, this is the sole instance of an improvised theme in Alexandrov's work.[62] Although there is no obvious reference to Prokofiev's work, a lighter mood and simpler textural writing is similarly present here, continuing in the neo-Classical vein of Alexandrov's previous sonata. However, Kokushkin posits that this piece's emotional expressiveness veers away from neo-Classicism's inclination

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56 Established in 1923, *Associacija sovremennoj muzyki* (Association of Contemporary Music) (ASM) was an organisation founded in 1923 by prominent musical figures of the Moscow music circle like Myaskovsky, Lamm, and music critics Vladimir Derzhanovsky, Viktor Belyayev and Leonid Sabaneyev. Compared to the Russian Association of Proletarian Musicians (RAPM), the ASM espoused a more modernist musical approach which was receptive to Western music. In addition to organising concerts in Moscow featuring music by overseas composers, ASM's link with the International Society for Contemporary Music (ISCM) enabled Soviet composers to share and premiere their work overseas. Many ASM members including Alexandrov occupied positions in important state and music organisations like Narkompros, the State Publishing House and the Moscow Conservatory. The ASM was renamed the Russian National Society of Modern Music in 1928.

57 Alexandrov actively contributed to the ASM's activities, writing many publications for its journals *Contemporary Music* and *To the New Shores* in addition to being in the editorial committee. Additionally, his works were performed at almost every performance organised by the ASM (see Pevzner, "Forgotten Russian Piano Music," 36).

58 Other composers like Myaskovsky, Roslavets and Feinberg were also criticised by the RAPM.

59 Kokushkin, *Anatoly Aleksandrov*, 19.

60 It is unclear which are the sonatinas in question. Pevzner, "Forgotten Russian Piano Music," 124 makes the note that it is *Two Sonatinas*, Op. 54 (1931-32), but Kokushkin, *Anatoly Aleksandrov*, 125 says the sonatina in question is in C major, which likely refers to the third movement of Prokofiev's *3 Pieces for Piano*, Op. 59 (1933-34).

61 Aleksandr Alekseev, *Sovetskaya fortepiannaya muzyka, 1917-1945* (Moscow: Muzyka, 1974), 156.

62 Kokushkin, *Anatoly Aleksandrov*, 126.

towards restraining emotions.[63]

The first subject of the compact and light-hearted first movement is teasing with early moments of rubato, but after regaining the momentum it maintains a constant flow until the buoyant second subject enters in an imitative fashion. The first half of the development is dominated by a busy *ostinato* adapted from the first subject, which accompanies punchy statements of the second subject. Before the recapitulation, an augmented version of the first four notes of the first subject acquires a militaristic bent, accompanied by drum-roll-like figurations in the low registers, which highlights its similarity to the melody of Alexandrov's mass song "March of the Red Front Fighters" (1931).[64] However, it is unclear whether Alexandrov intended to draw such a link between his works.[65]

The second movement ('*Canzona'*) was described by Kokushkin as ancient vocal improvisations accompanied by a lute,[66] albeit with modern twists in the form of the continuous 5/4 *ostinato* figure and unusual key progressions.

The finale ('*Rondo'*) returns to the jocular mood of the first movement, where the first movement's first subject is adapted to form the first theme of this movement. The second theme later forms the subject of a fugato, the final instance of fugues and fugatos in Alexandrov's sonatas. The serious central episode that follows was described by Alexandrov as an orator speaking during a funeral at a cemetery, with deep silence ensuing after his speech.[67]

Despite the end of factionalism, the cultural climate worsened over the next decade starting with the institution of the doctrine of Social Realism in 1934.[68] Although there was much difficulty defining its application to music, Social Realism effectively required composers to

63 Kokushkin, *Anatoly Aleksandrov*, 128.

64 Kokushkin, *Anatoly Aleksandrov*, 126; Alekseev, *Sovetskaya fortepiannaya muzyka*, 157.

65 See Pevzner, "Forgotten Russian Piano Music," 125 for further discussion.

66 Kokushkin, *Anatoly Aleksandrov*, 127.

67 Alekseev, *Sovetskaya fortepiannaya muzyka*, 157.

68 First announced at a Congress of Writers in 1934, Social Realism was soon applied to all art forms including music. Defined as '*partiynost'*, '*ideynost'*, and '*narodnost'*, terms roughly translatable as '"serving the ends of the Party," "having correct ideological content," and "being accessible to all of the people all of the time"', there was much difficulty defining its application to music (Richard Taruskin, *On Russian Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 367).

compose patriotic and rousing music that was accessible and preferably incorporated elements relating to the state, folk music or an extra-musical programme. Any stylistic experimentation was condemned as 'formalism',[69] and the infamous 1936 'Muddle instead of Music' affair[70] and the Great Terror[71] of 1936-38 were chilling reminders of the consequences of not complying.

Hence, Alexandrov appears to make a conscious effort to adhere to such requirements in **Piano Sonata No. 8 in B-flat major, Op. 50 (1939-44)**.[72] For one, he incorporated two folk songs from his earlier work *Eight Pieces on USSR Folk Melodies*, Op. 46 (1937) in the second and third movements and utilises numerous folk-inspired gestures throughout the sonata. Kokushkin even claims this is the first Soviet sonata to be almost completely based on folk songs and idiom.[73] Furthermore, another factor affecting Alexandrov's productivity was the outbreak of the Great Patriotic War in 1941,[74] resulting in this sonata's comparatively extended compositional timeline. Originally conceived as a four-movement work, the first two movements were composed before the war, and the last two movements throughout the war, but Alexandrov ultimately scrapped the third movement and revised the fourth to form the finale.[75]

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69 Marina Frolova-Walker et al., "Russian Federation" in *Grove Music Online,* ed. Deane Root, accessed 23 July 2024, https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.40456 ["Frolova-Walker et al., "Russian Federation""].

70 Where Shostakovich and his opera *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* were attacked for 'formalism'.

71 Alternatively called the Great Purge. Victims of these purges included Alexandrov's teacher Zhilyayev, Zhilyayev's close friend the music-loving marshal Mikhail Tukhachevsky, and Shostakovich's composer friend Ivan Sollertinsky.

72 Interestingly, this sonata was orchestrated by Alexandrov in 1978 as *Symphony No. 2*, Op. 109.

73 Kokushkin, *Anatoly Aleksandrov*, 131.

74 Alexandrov and his family were evacuated alongside numerous other Moscow Conservatory colleagues (like Myaskovsky, Lamm, Feinberg and Prokofiev) and their families first to Nalchik in 1941, then Tbilisi and finally Frunze (now known as Bishek) in 1942. See Patrick Zuk, *Nikolay Myaskovsky* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 2021), 381-417 for more details.

75 Kokushkin, *Anatoly Aleksandrov*, 128.

Alexandrov described the first movement as bright and festive, like a village festival or merry market in a fictional happy place.[76] The lively and dance-like first and second subjects convey such a joyous atmosphere and rustic imagery through simple and forthright melodies, modal colouring (the former is based on the B-flat major pentatonic scale and the latter uses the F Lydian mode), and busy *ostinato* accompaniment that recall folk instruments.

The start of the second movement quotes the Chuvash folk song '*Batyushkin Sad'* ('*Father's Garden'*), which Alexandrov opined revolves around images of love and nature.[77] This song becomes a basis for a series of increasingly free improvisations which builds toward the climax where a 'dreadful outcall'[78] occurs thrice (an octave higher each time) – this motif returns in the coda of the last movement as a triumphant fanfare.

Finally, Alexandrov formerly planned to portray the war in the rondo-sonata finale, but it ended up depicting a celebration as the war was ending by then.[79] It kicks off with an introduction based on the brief fanfare motif that concluded the first movement. Several dance-inspired episodes follow, including an energetic first theme quoting the Russian dance song '*I went to kindergarten*' and a severe and solemn dance forming the second theme.[80] In the sonata's final eight bars, the second movement's 'dreadful outcall' is followed by the victorious return of the first movement's second subject and fanfare motif, thus concluding this work on a high note.

After the Great Patriotic War ended in 1945, Alexandrov and many of his fellow evacuees returned to Moscow. Following the postwar trend of piano works exploring the theme of youth,[81] **Piano Sonata No. 9 in C minor, Op. 61 (1945)** was initially conceived as a single-movement sonatina for children but grew into a three-movement piece 'for adults about youth'.[82] Such

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76 Blok and Polenova, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Stranitsy iz zhizni i tvorchestva*, 133-134.

77 Blok and Polenova, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Stranitsy iz zhizni i tvorchestva*, 134.

78 Pevzner, "Forgotten Russian Piano Music," 135.

79 Blok and Polenova, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Stranitsy iz zhizni i tvorchestva*, 134.

80 Kokushkin, *Anatoly Aleksandrov*, 130.

81 Other works exploring such a theme include Prokofiev's Piano Sonata No. 9 in C major, Op. 103 (1947), Kabalevsky's Piano Sonata No. 3 in F major, Op. 46 (1946) and Piano Concerto No. 3 in D major, Op. 50 "Youth" (1952), and Shostakovich's Piano Concerto No. 2 in F major, Op. 102 (1957) (see Kokushkin, *Anatoly Aleksandrov*, 132).

82 Kokushkin, *Anatoly Aleksandrov*, 132.

intentions are exhibited in the straightforward yet plaintive themes, the streamlined textures, and the educator Elena Fabianovna Gnessina being the dedicatee.[83]

The first movement evokes a Classical sonatina with the first subject's simple and direct melody accompanied by a chromatically-tinged Alberti bass figure. A militaristic connecting theme leads into the stately and contemplative chordal second subject. The development section is driven by a staccato three-note *ostinato*, and the movement concludes with a tranquil coda.

Like several of Alexandrov's other sonatas, the lyrical middle movement is in ternary form. Here, the outer A sections feature a contemplative melody accompanied by a simple chordal *ostinato*, creating a timeless feel. The brooding B section gets increasingly agitated, pushed forward by the off-beat left-hand figurations, but the tension subsides, and serenity resumes upon the reprise of the A section. The movement then ends with a little epilogue combining the themes of both sections.

Like the rondo-sonata finales of Sonatas No. 7, 8 and 12, Sonata No. 9's features a calm and sublime central lyrical episode surrounded by propulsive outer sections. Moreover, in a gesture last observed in the finale of Sonata No. 4, the *Dies irae's* presence permeates this movement. The first four notes of the first theme's staccato inner voice imitate the contour of the plainchant's first four notes, albeit with the minor third melodic interval between the third and fourth notes replaced by a diminished fifth. Subsequently, a variant of the first episode's modified *Dies irae* motif is heard in the second episode and the actual quotation finally appears in the coda just before the end. Being written soon after the war, it is possible that Alexandrov intended to honour the numerous casualties through this musical reference.

Although cultural censorship was relaxed during the Great Patriotic War, it returned with a vengeance, culminating in the 1948 Zhdanov decree and reorganisation of the Union of Soviet Composers. Several leading contemporaries like Shostakovich, Prokofiev, Khachaturian and Myaskovsky were accused of 'formalistic distortions and anti-democratic tendencies'[84] and forced to publicly apologise at the First All-Union Congress of Composers held from 19 to 25

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83 The children's music composer and educator Elena Fabianovna Gnessina, who co-founded the Gnessin Institute in Moscow (now known as the Gnessin State Musical College) with her sisters.

84 Boris Schwarz, "Soviet Music since the Second World War," *The Musical Quarterly* 51, no. 1, Special Fiftieth Anniversary Issue: Contemporary Music in Europe: A Comprehensive Survey (January 1965): 259.

April 1948.[85] Additionally, various professors at the Moscow Conservatory such as Shostakovich and Vissarion Shebalin (who was the director of the Conservatory and Myaskovsky's student) were fired.[86] Despite being named in a secret document in 1947 leading up to the 1948 Zhdanov decree, Alexandrov was ultimately unmentioned[87] and appeared to escape the harrowing ordeal unscathed, likely because he was not as prominent as colleagues like Shostakovich or Prokofiev.

Composed amidst this fraught cultural environment, it is unsurprising that Alexandrov's **Piano Sonata No. 10 in F major, Op. 72 (1951)** seems designed to signal his adherence to the demands of the regime through its patently rousing and optimistic mood, usage of popular music and the inclusion of epigraphs.[88] Originally named 'Hymn to Life' based on Lou Andreas-Salome's poem of the same title,[89] the grand and energetic first movement in sonata form quotes a dramatic line from Alexander Blok's poem "Oh, Spring..." ("I discover you, life! I accept you! / And welcome you with a clang of the shield!"[90]). The overall mood remains full of vigour as the movement is dominated by material derived from the first subject's dignified fanfare idea, as heard in the connecting theme, development, coda and even the final few bars of this movement.

Intended as a light recollection of departed friends,[91] the slow movement had a proposed title of 'Elegy' and its published inscription cites the renowned Russian poet Alexander Pushkin (1799-1837) ("I feel sadness and relief. My sorrow is light."[92]). The pensive melody and texturally sparse accompaniment of the first section is followed by a restless and anxious B section that is characterised by a chromatically-tinged running accompaniment. The music

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85 Frolova-Walker et al., "Russian Federation".

86 Inna Barsova, "Shebalin, Vissarion Yakovlevich" in *Grove Music Online,* ed. Deane Root, accessed 23 July 2024, https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.25617.

87 Levon Hakobian, *Music of the Soviet Era: 1917–1991*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2016), 175.

88 This is the only sonata in which Alexandrov retained the literary quotes for publication.

89 Lou Andreas-Salome (1861-1937) was a Russian-born psychoanalyst whose company included the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud and poet Rainer Maria Rilke.

90 "Spring is in the air: 10 paintings and quotes from Russians about the best time of year," Russia Beyond, accessed 24 October 2023, https://www.rbth.com/arts/327797-10-paintings-quotes-russia-spring.

91 Blok, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Vospominanija, stat'i, pis'ma,* 124.

92 Translation from Pevzner, "Forgotten Russian Piano Music," 144.

becomes increasingly agitated during the build up to the emotional climax, especially when the off-beat statements of a fragment of the opening melody joins in. After beating a hasty retreat from the brief but explosive climax, the reprise of the A section is still plagued with anxiety as its rhythmically-displaced melody is superimposed on the running accompaniment of the B section. The momentum comes to a halt in the final few bars where the movement concludes solemnly with a few sustained chords.

Goethe's *Faust* provides the epigraph to the spirited sonata-rondo last movement that was initially called 'Finale' ("Of freedom and of life he only is deserving / Who every day must conquer them anew."[93]). Militaristic dotted rhythms are interspersed throughout the movement, first appearing in the connecting theme between the first and second themes, before being expanded to form two stirring march episodes where Alexandrov incorporated the chorus of Alexander Novikov's anti-war mass song "Hymn of the Democratic Youth"[94] in the inner voice, as he felt that this song represented the fight for life. Alexandrov also spins a more elaborate countermelody in the topmost line based on this song, making it more heroic and inspiring for his purposes. Finally, the movement ends with the same triumphant fanfare as the first movement.

Written after the start of what Boris Schwarz terms 'The Cultural Honeymoon' (1953-1964)[95] that occurred after Stalin's death in 1953, **Piano Sonata No. 11 in C major, Op. 81 "*Sonata-Fantasia*" (1955)** marks another stylistic turning point for Alexandrov. Composed during Alexandrov's stay at the Nikolina Mountain near Moscow,[96] the inspiring surroundings likely

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93 Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Goethe: Faust I & II,* ed. and trans. Stuart Atkins (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), line 11575.

94 This song was the official song for the first World Festival of Youth and Students in 1947, which became an 'essential element' in subsequent Festivals (Pia Koivunen, *Performing Peace and Friendship: The World Youth Festivals and Soviet Cultural Diplomacy* (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2022), 44).

95 During the 'Cultural Honeymoon', a 'more humane approach to the creative process, contrasted with Stalin's dehumanized dogmatism' was advocated (Boris Schwarz, *Music and Musical Life in Soviet Russia: Enlarged Edition, 1917-1981* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), 306). While works previously criticised as formalist were re-evaluated and cultural exchange with the West resumed, the Second Congress of the Composers' Union statement of 1953 still required composers to be guided by Social Realism (Pevzner, "Forgotten Russian Piano Music," 40).

96 Other composers who enjoyed vacationing there included Myaskovsky, Prokofiev and Shebalin (Kokushkin, *Anatoly Aleksandrov*, 138).

contributed to this sonata's intimate character and predominantly pastoral imagery.[97]

The atmospheric first movement opens with a pentatonic melody primarily in parallel fourths set against a backdrop of impressionistic blurred harmonies, and it then meanders through a series of ideas, with one marked *con importanza* reappearing in the final bars of the last movement – Kokushkin terms this motif a 'warning cue'.[98] After the reprise of the opening, the movement concludes quietly with note clusters in the high registers that evoke the tinkling of faraway chimes.

Moving *attacca* to the second movement, the air of calm is immediately dispelled by the drive of the first subject's staccato triplets and dotted rhythms. The undercurrent of agitation persists even throughout the lyrical and melancholic second subject, compelled by the dotted rhythms in the inner textures. A fragment of the first subject leads the final push to the development section's climax, where an augmented and octave-thickened version of the first movement's opening theme returns in a frenzied outburst. The recapitulation is unusually compact, with Alexandrov going straight to the second subject instead,[99] but the first subject reappears in the brief coda where it is deconstructed and fades away. However, the music refuses to go gently, resulting in a final exclamation before its muted end.

The expansive and expressive folk-inspired narrative theme which begins the third movement is a soothing balm after the earlier tension. Part of the first movement's pentatonic opening returns just before the lilting central section, whereby the latter's material is based on a modified fragment of the pentatonic theme. In the recapitulation, Alexandrov juxtaposes this movement's opening theme with the lilting central section's material, and it builds towards another passionate climax featuring only the former's melody. The tranquil coda references ideas from the first movement, such as descending pentatonic lines, distant chime-like clusters in the high register and the return of the *con importanza* motif, which imbues the work with a sense of homecoming and closure before concluding on a calm and contented note.

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97 Pevzner, "Forgotten Russian Piano Music," 147.

98 Kokushkin, *Anatoly Aleksandrov*, 138.

99 Kokushkin, *Anatoly Aleksandrov*, 141.

This piece's evocative title situates it within a small subset of Russian and Soviet piano sonatas which adopted a similar title after Scriabin's example.[100] Living up to its title, this work sounds rather improvisatory and gives the impression of the music constantly evolving in an organic manner – this is achieved through thematic transformation, cyclic form, and a more flexible treatment of form where some sections are shortened through the exclusion of certain themes. Additionally, Alexandrov sets the fantastical scene by utilising exotic harmonies such as the pentatonic scale, octatonic scale, modes, and quartal and quintal chords.[101] Overall, this work has been noted by Kokushkin and Irina Pevzner as one of the most original of Alexandrov's piano sonatas.[102]

Conversely, **Piano Sonata No. 12 in B minor, Op. 87 (1962)** takes a turbulent turn. A sense of restlessness drives the first movement, from the brief introduction's impetuous descending triplet motif, on which the first subject builds upon, to the whirling connecting passage marked *quasi burrasca lontanta* (like a distant storm) between the first and second subjects. The second subject is continually developed throughout the movement such that it is omitted from the recapitulation.

The second movement's A section features a yearning and winding melody accompanied by a lilting off-beat motif. The playful scherzo-like middle section (*Allegretto giocoso*) segues into the melody from the later part of the A section before leading into the truncated return of the A section.

Primarily in 5/8 rhythm, the episodic third movement alternates between energetic sections and calmer lyrical ones. The momentum is interrupted by a pensive and expressive central episode in 4/4, but it picks up again when the 5/8 rhythmic material returns.

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100 Apart from Scriabin's Sonata No. 2 in G-sharp minor, Op. 19 "*Sonata-Fantasy*" (1892-97) and early work *Sonate-fantaisie* in G-sharp minor, Op. posth. (1886), other composers who wrote *Sonata-Fantasies* are Felix Blumenfeld (*Sonata-Fantaisie* in B minor, Op. 46 (1913)), Alexander Goldenweiser (*Sonata-Fantasie* "*Song of Sorrows"*, Op. 37 (1957-59)) and Fedir [Théodore] Akimenko (*Sonate fantastique*, Op. 44 (1909) and *Sonata-Fantasia* No. 2, Op. 60 (1913)).

101 Pevzner, "Forgotten Russian Piano Music," 147.

102 Kokushkin, *Anatoly Aleksandrov*, 143; Pevzner, "Forgotten Russian Piano Music," 151.

In 1964, Alexandrov retired from the Moscow Conservatory.[103] That same year, the editor-in-chief of *Pravda* signed off on a statement that encouraged even greater experimentation and objected to the authorities intervening with artistic work.[104] However, despite the more permissive cultural climate, Alexandrov's compositional language remained mostly the same and he did not suddenly embrace *avantgarde* techniques, as observed in his post-retirement output, which included genres he heretofore had not explored (namely two symphonies,[105] one piano concerto and a cello sonata[106]).

Moreover, Alexandrov started curating and revising his extensive oeuvre for publication by the State Music Publisher.[107] This probably prompted him to revisit his youthful Piano Sonata No. 1, which he confessed he was dissatisfied with,[108] resulting in **Piano Sonata No. 13 in F-sharp minor, Op. 90 "*Sonata-Skazka*" (1964)**. In the 1968 edition of Piano Sonata No. 13, Alexandrov emphasised that it is not a mere revision, but rather a 'new sonata on an old theme' – he kept the quintuplet motif, fragments of the first subject and most of the coda, but introduced a different second subject, development and recapitulation. Between the development and recapitulation, Alexandrov also added a new section in D major featuring an ethereal melody based on a Russian horn folk tune[109] which paves the way for the recapitulation starting in the unexpected key of D minor (a choice which Kokushin notes is like Schubert's vi degree[110]). Compared to the earlier work, Piano Sonata No. 13 has more streamlined textures

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103 Pevzner, "Forgotten Russian Piano Music," 24 suggests that Alexandrov's decision to retire was due to the recent deaths of many of his loved ones, namely his younger brother Vladimir in 1958, his close friend Feinberg in 1962, his wife Nina Georgievna Geiman-Alexandrova and Natalya Polenova (Elena Polenova's mother) in 1964.

104 Schwarz, *Music and Musical Life in Soviet Russia*, 441.

105 Symphony No. 2 is actually an orchestration of Alexandrov's Piano Sonata No. 8.

106 Unfortunately, the Cello Sonata, Op. 112 (1981-2) was incomplete at the time of Alexandrov's death. His student Vladmir Blok completed and edited the piece and it was published posthumously in 1986.

107 Four collected volumes of solo piano pieces (Volumes 1 to 3 between 1966-70 and Volume 4 in 1977) and five volumes of vocal music (Volumes 1 to 4 in 1970 and the last volume in 1990) were published.

108 Alexandrov felt that he did not combine the Medtnerian narrative style with the Scriabinesque traits in a natural way (Kokushkin, *Anatoly Aleksandrov*, 112).

109 Kokushkin, *Anatoly Aleksandrov*, 145.

110 Kokushkin, *Anatoly Aleksandrov*, 146

and rhythms, melodies that draw more on folk music, and more skilfully developed ideas,[111] all of which are characteristic of Alexandrov's mature style. On a bittersweet note, Alexandrov retained the dedication to his younger brother Vladimir, who had died earlier in 1958.

Although Alexandrov intended to compose three movements for **Piano Sonata No. 14 in E major, Op. 97 (1971)** (like his initial plans for Piano Sonata No. 13), he ended up deciding that the two-movement architecture[112] was more natural.[113] This piece is dedicated to his student, the pianist Victor Bunin, who championed Alexandrov's piano music and recorded some of them for the state-owned Melodiya label.

The first movement adopts a relatively straightforward and traditional sonata form, complete with a repeated exposition,[114] the exception rather than rule amongst Alexandrov's piano sonatas. The serene and winding first subject is disrupted by a tritone call that Alexandrov termed a '"tragic hint" or threat'.[115] It is followed by a motif comprising three repeated notes, which serves as inspiration for the troubled second subject in the distant key of G-sharp minor. Compared to the first subject, the texture of the second subject is enriched by imitation and countermelodies. A rising three-note horn-call motif appears in the closing theme, and it recurs several times in the recapitulation and coda.[116] The development relies primarily on the techniques of canon, imitation and slightly varied repetitions to present its material, and the repeated three note motif (which also functions as an inverted dominant pedal) leads the transition into the recapitulation. Similarly, the repeated Bs lead into the final three E major chords that conclude the movement.

Part of the final movement was conceived as the second movement of Piano Sonata No. 13, but Alexandrov abandoned that idea and repurposed the theme and three variations for Piano Sonata No. 14 when the first (and sole) movement of the prior piece became sufficiently

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111 Pevzner, "Forgotten Russian Piano Music," 156-158.

112 Both Alexandrov's Piano Sonata No. 5 and Piano Sonata No. 14 follow the two-movement model of Beethoven's last piano sonata.

113 Blok and Polenova, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Stranitsy iz zhizni i tvorchestva*, 137.

114 Pevzner, "Forgotten Russian Piano Music," 159.

115 Blok and Polenova, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Stranitsy iz zhizni i tvorchestva*, 138.

116 Pevzner, "Forgotten Russian Piano Music," 160.

substantial. [117] The expansive theme is reminiscent of a folk song with its modal harmony and major-minor alternations. All six variations had descriptive subtitles in the manuscript[118] but these were again unpublished, as Alexandrov feared they made the movement too much like a suite and would detract from illustrating the material's continuous development.[119] Revealing the subtle link to Alexandrov's *Skazka* subtitle and his original aims for Piano Sonata No. 13, Variation 1 is characterised by the quintuplet motif that pervades Alexandrov's *Sonata-Skazki*, and Alexandrov himself also acknowledged the connection.[120] Various ideas from the first movement reappear on several occasions. For one, the first *Interludium* passage preceding Variation 4's funeral march is built on the same tritone as the first movement's 'tragic hint',[121] which prepares for the sombre mood of Variation 4. Next, the first movement's first subject forms the source of inspiration for cheerful Variation 5, and the ensuing *Interludium* section sees the return of both the first and second subjects in that order, with the former presented in a three-part canon. The poignant reprise of the theme in C-sharp minor in Variation 6 (Coda) is bittersweet, but peace and contentment return by the time the movement ends in E major.

As a composer living and working in the Soviet Union, Alexandrov's stylistic evolution was inevitably impacted by numerous socio-political events, and this is evinced in varying degrees across his fourteen piano sonatas. Nevertheless, Alexandrov's gift for lyricism is the common thread amongst these pieces, which aligns with his belief that one 'generally expresses oneself with melody'.[122] As early as 1916, Alexandrov's lyrical talents were recognised by Rachmaninov who had proclaimed Alexandrov a 'true vocal composer'.[123] A similar sentiment was echoed a decade later by Belyayev, who wrote:

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117 Kokushkin, *Anatoly Aleksandrov*, 144-45.

118 The subtitles were Variation 1 (*The Fairy Tale*), Variation 2 (*The Nocturne*), Variation 3 (*The Game (Scherzino)*), Variation 4 (*The Funeral Procession*), Variation 5 (*The Echoes*), and Variation 6 (*The Epitaph (Coda)*).

119 Kokushkin, *Anatoly Aleksandrov*, 147.

120 Blok and Polenova, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Stranitsy iz zhizni i tvorchestva*, 139.

121 Pevzner, "Forgotten Russian Piano Music," 162.

122 Blok and Polenova, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Stranitsy iz zhizni i tvorchestva*, 52.

123 Blok, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Vospominanija, stat'i, pis'ma,* 88.

> If Myaskovsky is a thinker and Feinberg a psychologist, then Alexandrov is above all a poet... Poeticism is the basic quality of his artistic individuality and his compositions... Alexandrov is a lyrical poet who combines delicacy and integrity. His lyricism is simple and expressive at the same time.[124]

The combination of Alexandrov's innate lyrical ability, the simplification of his compositional language and other concessions made to the demands of Social Realism likely enabled him to toe the line for much of his career and avoid much of the controversy that plagued his other colleagues. It also probably helped that he distanced himself from public music life from around the 1930s onwards and kept a low profile.[125]

Up until his death, Alexandrov continued working tirelessly. Beyond composing, he wrote about composers he knew,[126] prepared material for his memoirs, collaborated with Kokushkin on a comprehensive monograph surveying his numbered compositions, appeared as the subject of two documentaries,[127] and even recorded a selection of his piano miniatures for the Soviet company Melodiya.[128] After a long life devoted to music and outliving many of his loved ones, Alexandrov died on 16 April 1982 in Moscow, his final words being 'No music.'[129]

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124 Viktor Belyayev, "Anatoly Aleksandrov," *Contemporary Music*, no. 12 (1926): 47-48 as translated by Pevzner, "Forgotten Russian Piano Music," 172.

125 Flamm, liner notes; Malcolm MacDonald, liner notes to Anatoly Alexandrov, *Piano Music, Volume One*, Toccata Classics 0186, 2013, compact disc, 4.

126 Alexandrov's articles about Taneyev, Zhilyaev, Medtner and Stanchinsky were published in their state-published memoirs and the Composer Union's music journal *Sovetskaya muzyka* (*Soviet Music*).

127 Produced by Ekran, a subdivision of the state broadcasting department, the 1975 documentary is about an hour long, while the 1981 film is shorter and focused on Alexandrov's *Five Pieces*, Op. 110. See Blok and Polenova, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Stranitsy iz zhizni i tvorchestva,* 199-203 for further details.

128 Anatoly Alexandrov, *Anatoly Alexandrov: Pieces for Piano*, Melodiya 33D-012202, 1970, compact disc.

129 Blok and Polenova, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Stranitsy iz zhizni i tvorchestva*, 207.

CLARISSE TEO - PIANO

An avid advocate for lesser-known music and contemporary music known for her "confidently eclectic tastes", (The Straits Times, 2022), Singaporean pianist Clarisse Teo has appeared internationally both as a soloist and chamber musician. Her 2018 solo recital in Singapore was named by The Straits Times as one of Singapore's best Classical concerts of the year and she has been featured in the album *Rarities of Piano Music at "Schloss vor Husum" from the 2019 Festival* (*Danacord Records*).

As a chamber musician, her wide-ranging collaborative piano experience encompasses instrumental, vocal and ballet music, and she has been engaged by organisations including the National University of Singapore's Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music, Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, Scottish Chamber Orchestra and Singapore Dance Theatre. Recent highlights include performing the orchestral reduction for a recital version of a two-act contemporary opera by Jacquelyn Hazle and collaborating with singers for a programme of Russian songs by Nikolai Medtner and Anatoly Alexandrov.

Under the tutelage of Timothy Ku (piano) and Marietta Ku (violin and viola), Clarisse obtained a FRSM in piano, DipABRSM (Distinction) in violin and DipABRSM in viola. After reading Law at the National University of Singapore, where she was a performer and Student Music Director with the university's piano ensemble, she studied with Sinae Lee at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland on a partial scholarship and attained a Master of Music in piano performance. Funded by the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland Trust and the Trailblazer Foundation Ltd (Singapore), Clarisse graduated from the University of St Andrews with a Doctor of Performing Arts degree, where under the supervision of Sinae Lee and Dr. Christina Guillaumier, she researched and performed all fourteen piano sonatas by the 20th Century Soviet composer Anatoly Alexandrov.

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