

# Piano Performing Art of Russia: Major Development Trends in the 20th Century

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## ABSTRACT

*The purpose of the article is to identify features of the development of piano playing in Russia in the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the context of key trends and leading genre and styles. In connection with the goal, the following tasks were identifying: to consider Essence of Definition “Russian Piano School”; to characterize Russian Piano School in Conditions of Reorganization of System of Music Education after 1917; to consider Russian Piano Performance Art in 1930–1950s; to describe Russian Pianism in 1960–1990s. This work elucidates the Russian Piano School’s evolving characteristics, its tendencies and styles, and how it received such authority and respect throughout the world. This article also reveals the Russian Piano School’s principal musical pedagogical figures, and how diverse and original they are, especially modern Russian pianists. The unique and pivotal influence of these artists is clearly defined in the context of an emerging and distinct Russian Piano School.*

**Keywords:** Russian piano school, music education, pianism, piano performance art, pianists

### 1. Introduction

More than one hundred years have passed since the birth of the Russian piano school. Russian pianistic school enjoys well-deserved worldwide recognition. Abroad widely known names of outstanding pianists Anton and Nikolay Rubinstein, Sergei Rachmaninov, Heinrich Neuhaus, Lev Oborin, Sviatoslav Richter, Vladimir Sofronitzki.

Russian piano music came to the world stage in the second half of the nineteenth century and immediately forced to talk about themselves as unique and bright phenomenon. With this time related to the activities of composers, performers and world class faculty – such as Anna Yesipova, Felix Blumenfeld, Leonid Nikolayev, Maria Barinova, Dmitriy Shostakovich, Sergey Prokofiev, Emil Gilels.

The great traditions of the Russian piano school continue, undiminished by time. They carry on from generation to generation, from teacher to student, from hands to hands. These traditions bring to us the experience of great art, and unforgettable moments of pleasure in music.

The Russian music education system has always been rather shrouded in mythology and outsiders have tended to regard the Russian approach as mechanical, with an extreme emphasis on highly-honed technique over musicianship. Critics of the Russian School point to an emphasis on power in playing, which can be overwhelming, and lacking in light and shade, and an undue focus on producing competition winners, which is of course good for national prestige.

The Russian School is notable for its full orchestral, projected sound, physicality in playing (an emphasis on use of the arms which drag the hands up and down the keyboard) and the ability to focus talent from a very young age (the result of a national network of specialist state music schools where students learn the rudiments of music in detail). The great pianist-teachers such as A. B. Goldenweiser and Heinrich Neuhaus sought to discover and encourage these characteristics in their pupils, and the Russian Piano School has produced many outstanding pianists including Rachmaninov, Prokofiev, Richter, Gilels, Ashkenazy, Leonskaja and Pletnev – all musicians who display prodigious and immaculate technique, passion, dramatic power, intense emotional expressiveness and physical vitality in their playing. Younger graduates of the Russian School include Evgeny Kissin, Rustem Hayroudinov, Denis Matsuev, Daniil Trifonov and Anna Tsybuleva.

The actuality of the study determined the current situation in China is characterized by the growth of national consciousness, a qualitative change of value orientations, the appeal to universal and national traditions. The problem of the relation of spirituality, culture and education actualizarea during periods of changing lifestyles and tenets in the society. It is education, due to its mass and systematic “translates” the values of the world culture in the sphere of the emerging new social consciousness, thus influencing the processes taking place in the spiritual, cultural, economic and political life of the country.

The object of study was Piano Performance Art in Russia of the 20th century. The subject of study was composition and performance skills of the leading Russian pianists of the 20th century. The purpose of the article is to identify features of the development of Piano Performance Art in Russia in the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the context of key trends and leading genre and styles.

### 2. First task –to consider Essence of Definition “Russian Piano School”

The concept of “piano school” includes different facets. These are: 1) an educational structure headed by a prominent musician (for example, Heinrich Neuhaus, Alexander Goldenweiser); 2) an educational, creative team, a community of pianists working under the guidance of the head of the school to solve any educational or creative tasks; 3) a direction that under certain socio-historical conditions acquires a national or international

character (German, French, Russian piano schools); 4) the methodical system of a particular teacher, which is published in printed form as a teaching aid, a collection of sketches or exercises (“Steps Toward Parnassus” by Muzio Clementi, etudes “School of fluency”, op. 299 Carl Czerny and others).

Russian piano art took shape in the process of dialectical interaction of the general and the individual, national and international. Its formation began in the second half of XVIII. The result of the development of the Russian pianistic school in the twentieth century was one of the world’s largest and most authoritative pianistic schools. It is based on rich traditions, generations of Russian musicians worked out by creativity. At present, the Russian musical and pedagogical tradition is a complex, multifaceted structure that incorporates various types of musical activity.

### **3. second task – to characterize Russian Piano School in Conditions of Reorganization of System of Music Education after 1917**

It was established that Social transformations in Russia after 1917 have had a mixed impact on the development of piano performing art. Irreplaceable were the losses from emigration. From Russia left Sergei Vasilyevich Rakhmaninov, Nikolai Karlovich Medtner. The traditions of private home teaching of music were lost, which drastically reduced the level of musical culture of the younger generation. Despite this, Russian pianists managed to preserve the basis of professional music education and strengthen its organizational structure. As a result, of numerous transformations, successful forms of professional music education have been found, preserved in the whole throughout the twentieth century.

The most important factor in preserving the musical culture was the continuation of the activities of the Moscow and Petrograd (later Leningrad) conservatories, in unbearable conditions that support a high level of education. The first stage was formed by children’s music schools (since 1933 – seven-year), the second – the school, and the third, the higher – the conservatory. There were also 10-year schools combining 1 and 2 steps. Another positive aspect of the Soviet period – the government gave a real opportunity to teach gifted children.

### **4. Third task – to consider Russian Piano Performance Art in 1930–1950s– led to the following conclusion.**

An outstanding role in pianism in 20<sup>th</sup> century belongs to two Soviet schools – Moscow (Konstantin Igumnov, Alexander Goldenweiser, Samuel Feinberg, Heinrich Neuhaus and their pupils Lev Oborin, Grigory Ginzburg, Yakov Flier, Yakov Zak, Svyatoslav Richter, Emil Gilels and others) and Leningrad (Leonid Nikolaev and his disciples Maria Yudina, Vladimir Sofronitsky, and others). Continuing and developing on a new basis the realistic traditions of the major representatives of Russian pianism in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (Anton and Nikolas Rubinstein, Anna Yesipova), the best Soviet pianists combined in their play a true and meaningful transfer of the author’s design with high technical skill.

Despite the differences in the content and methods of teaching appropriate to the individual characteristics of these teachers, there were common strategic directions or principles in their activities: 1) movement from the internal to the external, from the artistic image of the performed work to the technical means of its implementation; 2) intellectualization of the learning process; 3) activation of cognitive activity aimed at increasing the independence of students; 4) the moral direction of the educational process; 5) the principle of cooperation between the teacher and students.

### **5. Fourth task – to describe Russian Pianism in 1960–1990s**

It was established that the largest Soviet piano schools in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were given by a number of high-performing musicians and highly skilled piano teachers such as Emil Gilels, Viktor Merzhanov, Tatyana Nikolaeva, Stanislav Neuhaus, Lev Vlasenko, Yevgeny Malinin, Dmitry Bashkirov, Vladimir Krainev, Alexei Lyubimov, Mikhail Pletnev. The achievements of the Soviet (after 1991 – Russian) pianism led to a worldwide recognition of the national pianistic school. Many Soviet pianists received awards (including the first) at international competitions.

The piano art of Russian pianists of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century fits in two directions: expressive and graphic. Thus, in piano compositions the performers of the “expressive direction” express the idea of the composer through the prism of his spiritual world, the attitude towards the work, making searches for it in the historical and philosophical panorama. Pianists of the “pictorial direction” show us the idea of the work, its meaning in the context of their personal professional capabilities, drawing with images an image. Both these directions continue to develop in the Russian pianism of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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