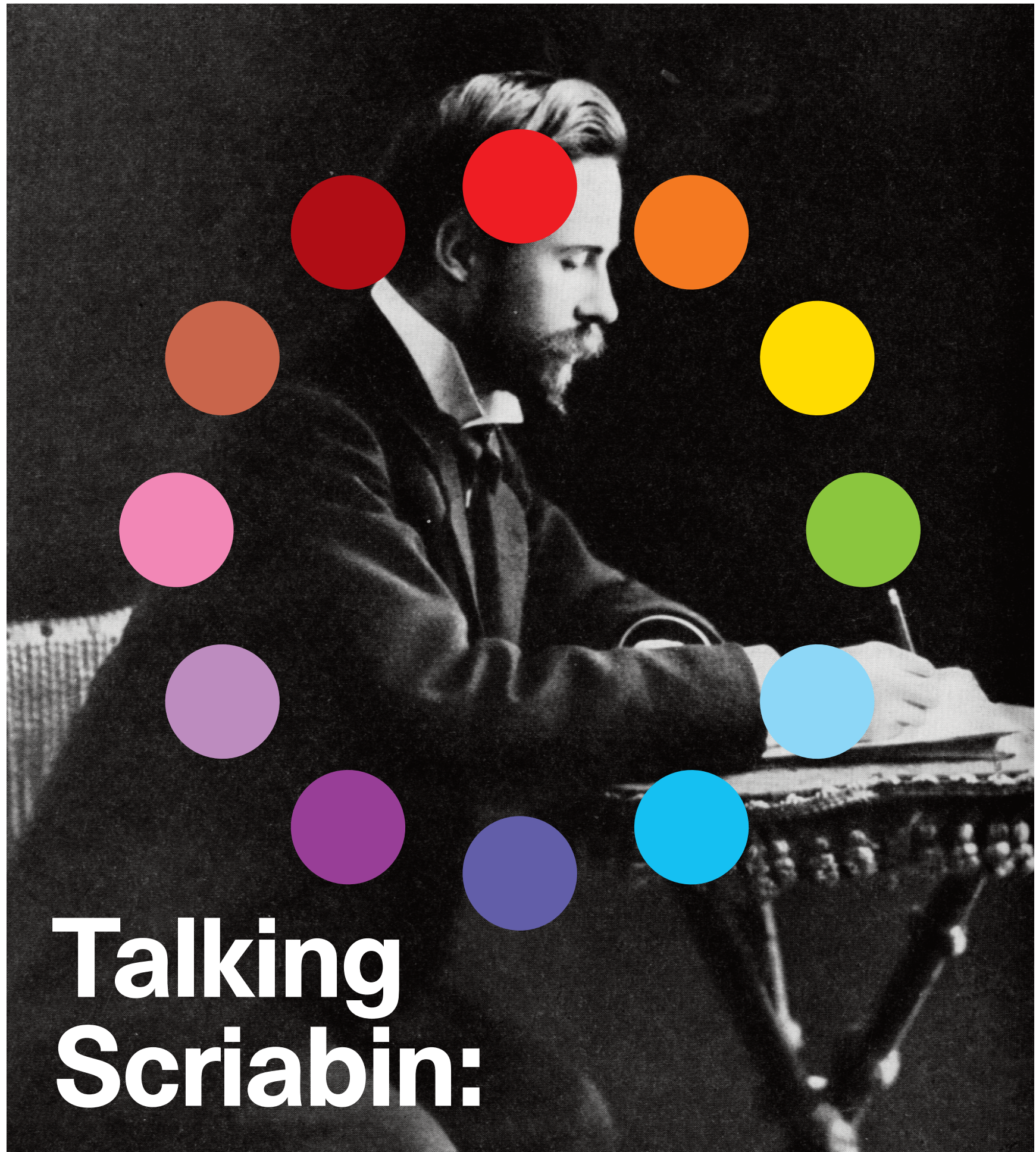


Ideas & Influence

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Talking Scriabin:

Discussion and visual exploration

**Pianist/
Yekaterina Lebedeva**

**Artist/
Martin Firrell**

**Designer/
Paul Bagshawe**

Talking Scriabin:

One evening in April, three passionate Scriabin enthusiasts got together to discuss their views on this complex and visionary composer.

Over the course of the next few hours they touched on his ideas and his influences, and how they had shaped his life and musical development.

In the late 19th century, the anticipation of change in Russia was conducive to agents of the new – Alexander Nikolayevich Scriabin was one such agent.

Scriabin was a religious man who thought of himself as God's translator, his messenger; he believed in the unique. He was both an intuitive and spiritual being. His ideas transcended reality.

First and foremost Scriabin was a musician and, ahead of her upcoming concert at London's Purcell Room, Yekaterina Lebedeva also talks about her approach to the technical challenges of playing Scriabin's music.

19:00
12 April 2012
Wardour Street
London

Pianist/
Yekaterina Lebedeva

Artist/
Martin Firrell

Designer/
Paul Bagshawe

Mysterium

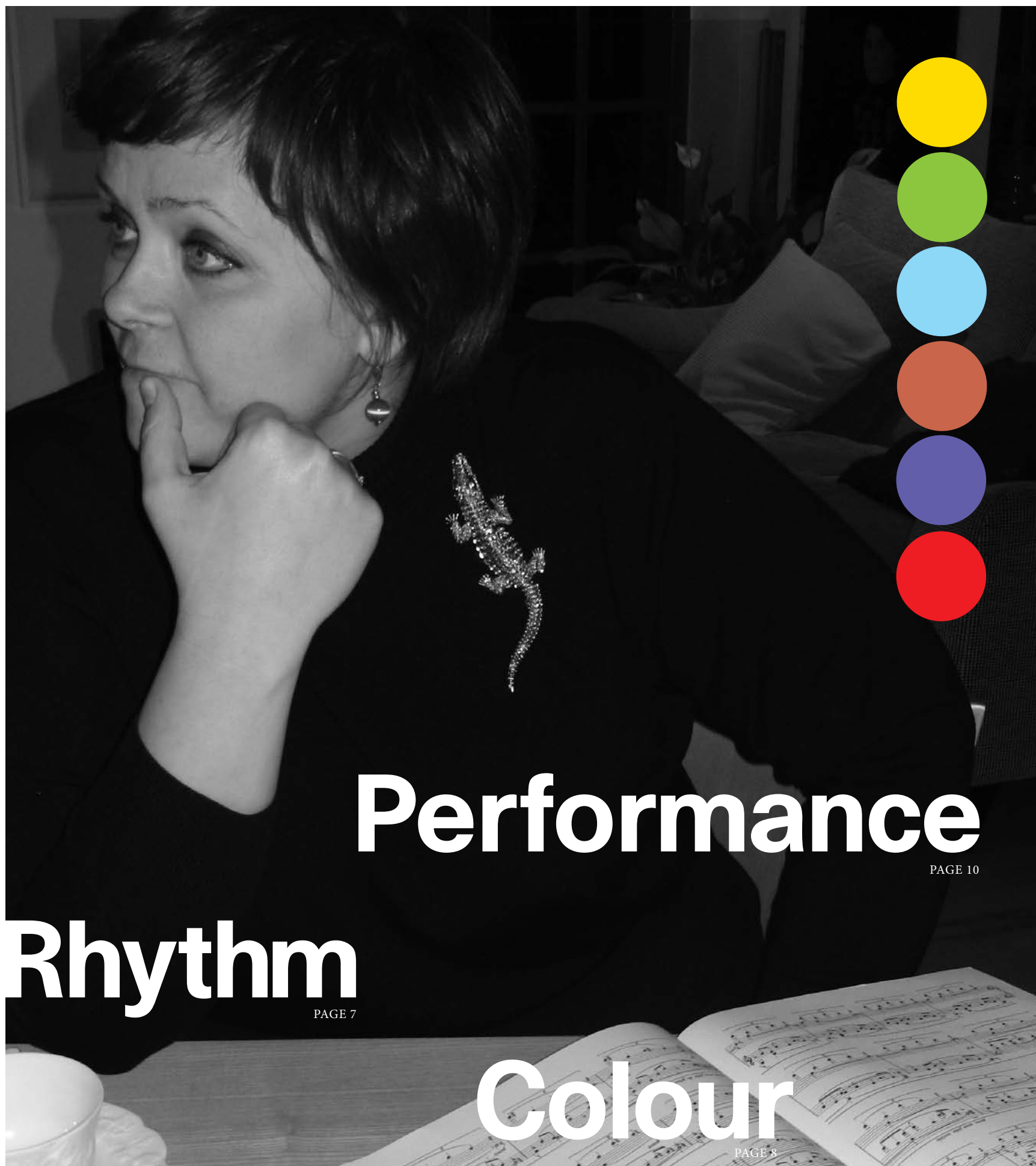
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Yekaterina Lebedeva, London 2012

Interpretation

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“So Scriabin’s death was supposed to be the end of the Cosmos?”
Martin Firrell



Mysterium

“

Paul Bagshaw I think these fragments of manuscripts are all part of the big piece he was working on before he died and then Alexander Nemkin spent 25 years trying to put them together to conclude what he thought Scriabin was trying to do.

Yekaterina Lebedeva This is interesting because he started working on it quite some time before he died, let’s say in the middle of his life, but I think he was afraid to work on it. It was a bit like the story of Mozart and his Requiem there is this mystery – like somebody coming knocking on the door and saying “please write this funeral piece for me”, a Mass, and Mozart was convinced it was about his own funeral.

PB Do you think Scriabin was worried about letting the genie out of the bottle by creating it?

YL No, I think he was just self-conscious that he wouldn’t be good enough and he was waiting for the moment when everything will be

in place to make it happen. He thought that he was the servant of God, he was the missionary and he really believed that his spiritual persona was occupied by this super-being, by the Unique. He believed that he was the one who was going to deliver the final message to the world and actually with his death the collapse of the cosmos would happen, so no wonder he was not worried about writing it!

Martin Firrell So Scriabin’s death was supposed to be the end of the Cosmos?

YL Oh yes, he was supposed to sacrifice himself at the end of the *Mysterium*.

MF Quite an ego then isn’t it?

YL Oh yes. Scriabin has marked the main theme of the *Poème de l’extase* with the words “I am” as a theme of self-assertion. However there is a duality. Who is this “I”? “In time and space I obey the laws of time and space, but these laws are formulated by my greater “I”

(the consciousness of the Unique) – he said. He also said “I am nothing. I do not exist! But if nothing exists in reality, then everything exists if I ordain it to exist by an act of creation” – “If nothing exists, then all is possible”. What he is really saying in a very egocentric way is that the world is a product of his imagination (or of his “greater I”).

MF Also all artists have a degree of arrogance don’t they, because you have to believe you have something to say that is important enough to warrant the making of it? Performers as well, there is also a degree of arrogance in saying “when I play these works they will have a value which is worth people hearing” but it’s the fact that I’m playing this because if you didn’t believe that why would you play it to an audience?

YL I have a problem with the word arrogance, I’m not sure about the word arrogance – but you need to have confidence.



Scriabin’s “Mystic Chord”. Shown in direct relationship to the colours that he attributed to the component notes

Fin de siècle

MF The first thing that interested me and made me think I need to do some proper research was the discovery that he was born two years before Gertrude Stein, so they were contemporaries at an extraordinary time when everyone was reinventing everything and I thought that was a really good place to start. I was wondering how you felt about him being a reinventor of things, a changer, a maker of the new? Have I told you the story about Matisse giving lessons to a young Russian painter, a woman who had painted a picture full of blood and gore and dismembered limbs? Being a good teacher Matisse says “What were you trying for, what was your objective?” and she said “I was trying for the modern, the new” and all the other students applauded and this struck me as the spirit of the time, typical of the era and I was reading that with

revelation and he perceived it with his entire being, all senses involved.

MF In the sense of translating the Divine?

YL Absolutely, in this respect he is not too dissimilar to Mozart. I do find similarities between him and Mozart.

MF I can’t bear Mozart he is so dull!

YL There is an exact analogy however with Scriabin, Mozart used to say that when a work comes to me, it comes as a whole I hear the whole thing from the beginning to the end and I just can’t bear holding the thing inside me, I have to write it all down. What this means of course is that the whole piece, with the structure and the harmonies and melodies, everything comes to you at once and Mozart said he felt intoxicated by it. I think Scriabin was exactly the same. He used to perceive works as

elements, the structure, looking at everything in it, looking into the details and then perfecting the details (act of analysis – second phase) so that the end result is sublime new integral image (third phase). He is given this in the way a parent is given a child to look after and to care for. So he is watering it, educating, helping it grow but it doesn’t belong to him. I don’t think he would actually be thinking of himself as an inventor.

MF I see what you are saying, but equally it was a time of invention wasn’t it, or revelation of the new?

YL I think it was a time of certain creative freedom more or less. That’s why people went into different ways because it was allowed to happen, there was a certain readiness of people to actually hear something new. Do you know what I mean? You didn’t have to come into the world thinking I am an inventor, but if you are coming into a world that has its ears open inevitably you are going to be doing something because you know that people are ready and willing to listen. I think it was something about that time there was a sort of openness.

MF I love that idea that there has to be a space for this to happen, a kind of conceptual space. And once there is a space it is almost like someone, a creative person, will enter into it and fill it up with something, but if there isn’t the space nothing can happen. Were the conditions around him very conducive to the new?

YL Oh yes absolutely. In Russia at the time there was the breeding of the revolution, there were a lot of changes and anticipation of change in all circles of society. People were feeling that perhaps whatever the old ways they had weren’t right or they needed change. It was a time of great flexibility and momentum which creates space.

MF So were the old structures breaking down, was there a feeling of dissolution and therefore freedom. Was it a frightening time?

YL I don’t think it was a frightening time, it was a time of certain freedom, people were quiet free to travel abroad and there were a lot of influences from musicians who were coming over. If we think about Russian classical music, starting with Tchaikovsky or Glinka before him, it actually wasn’t that long before the era of Scriabin. So what Tchaikovsky and Glinka did was establish a classical art pretty much based on the Western tradition of structure and

form and melodies which was quite conservative. Of course once you have the base the national instinct kicks in and people think we can actually do something with this, we can create new life because we have these wonderful themes that lay dormant, that belong only to let’s say the Folk Art. So this comes in and there is a wonderful symbiosis created everywhere. There are musical sects being formed with people following the old and people who break with tradition and go with the new. So I don’t think there was a concern because most musicians are apolitical people. In relation to the State politics I don’t think they are or were at the time.

PB Listening to what Martin said about the space being there to create something new, do you think there was a conscious decision that Scriabin felt to move away quickly from playing the Chopin-type compositions into the new space, that he saw it as part of musical development, or possibly it was to do with what you said earlier about it coming from within?

YL A bit of both because the thing is that at around the turn of the twentieth century there was a great intellectual life in Russia and Russians particularly love debates and philosophical discussions – there isn’t small talk in Russia, they don’t do it very easily. Scriabin most certainly had a great passion for debate. So I think there were a lot of different schools of thought, not just in the musical world but others like the philosophical world and there were all eagerly discussed in Russia at the time. Scriabin was influenced by theosophy and some Oriental, especially Indian religious ideas. It was there he hoped to build a great temple for the production of *Mysterium*. There were lots of other philosophical ideas coming from France, for example.

MF The impression I’m getting from you is, some of one’s sense of the modernity in Scriabin is actually a misunderstanding in that the music sounds on the surface terribly disruptive and like the modern and new which is obviously what people like Kandinsky were doing, they were just creating new pictorial forms but it sounds to me as if what you are saying is that wasn’t where his head was and that he was serving a spiritual mission and it just happened to look like this exciting new world of breaking rules and



Scriabin at the piano
Drawing by R. Schterlya

Scriabin his early works were very influenced by Chopin but very rapidly his own strange new kind of world emerged.

YL I don’t think it is the same for Scriabin because he didn’t believe in reinventing anything. I don’t think he thought of himself as an inventor. He himself said “I am but the translator”. I believe that he experienced music as an instant

a whole from his intuition.

MF All at once do you think?

YL Yes, all at once.

MF Like a revelation?

YL Yes, that’s why he used to say, “I am a translator”. The way that he worked is that once he is given/conceives this wonderful piece of work and he writes it out (act of harmonious unity – first phase) then he starts looking at the

“Yes, I think that after his music is played it is kind of hanging in the air, there is a presence”
Yekaterina Lebedeva

modernism but in his own sense he didn't identify himself as a great avant garde artist and I didn't realise that because my impression was that they were all in it together, all these brilliantly mad painters using Folk Art in weird and strange new ways and he was in that as part of that group.

YL No he wasn't. I think he was quite a religious person and he really believed in the Unique, he didn't call it a God as if it would simplify it unnecessary, but “the Unique.” He always wanted to write something with words but he found it difficult to formulate something because of the lack of literary skills. “I feel like an amateur in literature”, he used to say. He had uneasy relationship with words and got frustrated because there was so much miscommunication created over different interpretation of words and he thought wouldn't it be great if just the basic concepts could be clarified around the world so that people could understand each other. I don't think he would have said that towards the end of his life because he understood that the purpose of his work was to actually emphasise the contradictions and not look for false ways of unification and bringing things together. He was totally religious, he really truly believed. He was in a sense a possessed man. The idea of Ecstasy was central to his creative work. It is when two become one, when “I Scriabin” should come together with the Unique. There is a lot of sexuality involved in this as well. God is love, but for Scriabin this love contained an erotic and sensual element. The apocalyptic element of the *Mysterium* was supposed to be like a grandiose sexual act. He was trying to recreate that in music with two beginnings, masculine and feminine, depictions of Spirit and Matter. Also when you look at his colour spectrum there are a lot of material colours but there are also colours that belong to the spiritual world/life. Not too far from Christianity actually.



Spiritual

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Martin Firrell Can we talk about the spiritual side? I was reading about his interest in theosophy and Helena Blavatsky, that there is this idea of the essential unique. He was terribly influenced by that thinking and this idea wasn't he, and thought that anyone who thought in this way was part of theosophy. Anyone who is seeking to understand the idea of the union with the whole, the ultimate truth, then they are all members of the theosophical movement. He was actually on a spiritual mission more than an artistic one.

Yekaterina Lebedeva It's an interesting one. I think he was not an erudite. I think he had snippets of ideas from different schools of theosophy from here and there, but I don't think he actually studied anything in depth.

MF Do you think he felt it more?

YL Well this is the thing I love about Scriabin, this kind of complexity. On the one hand he loved and respected people who had been erudite and well educated and were able to hold a debate and intellectual conversa-

tion. On the other hand he was saying, “Oh you can't understand me it's too rational”. So there is this other idea that he thinks intuition in an artist is perhaps more important. Two things I think really fought in him – this desire to rationalise things, yet also thinking the intuitive is most important. The artist, in order to create, has to have an intuition, to be able to see things in an intuitive way. It goes through the same spectrum of realisation and thinking about it and it comes back to the intuitive. With intuition you can develop it, it becomes an absolute knowledge.

MF You kind of feel that you know rather than trying to intellectualise how. Was he a peasant?

YL Most certainly not – have you seen his pictures?

MF Well when you were talking about erudition I thought maybe he didn't have a formal education other than music? You find people don't you who have such a gift that they then don't have a great breadth of understanding about other things. I thought maybe he was admiring rationality because he didn't have it himself.

YL I think his personality was quite neurotic, and I think this is why when you listen to his music you can think it sounds like little fragments of thought. I think he was a neurotic because of

(a) The Conflict inside himself and (b) wanting to deliver the message. Is it good enough, am I saying the truth? Speaking in musical terms, one of the things I cherish as a pianist is his use of Italian or French terminology in his works. I love what he is trying to describe with the words. He uses a lot of words in the notation, even sometimes he makes them up to convey a feeling! When he conceived the whole it was not just the musical structure he conceived the sense, he conceived the colours, and he conceived the touch all at the same time. He was the man who was dreaming of using touch so that the body could be the resounding organ too.

MF What so that somehow you would be manipulated by something? How thrilling! Sounds like the Orgasmatron in Barbarella where they try to kill Jane Fonda with sexual pleasure! I remember seeing some tiny concert pieces by Webern at the Southbank, and I sat in either the first or second row and there was a massive amount of percussion and it was so big that it did start to resonant inside my chest cavity – I could hear it but I

could also feel it and it was thrilling. It makes sense, the synthesis of the experiences so that it is complete and immersive, an overwhelming experience.

YL Yes I think that after his music is played it is kind of hanging in the air, there is a presence.

Paul Bagshawe It's almost like in jazz terms ending with a suspended fourth which is waiting to resolve. Its common in jazz to keep it in suspense rather than in classical terms and although he is not using the same chords he is creating the same openness and you just think empty and then some other fragment drifts in particularly in *Preparation for the Final Mystery* and although that is admittedly fragments when you hear these things that aren't fragments there is this very detached empty, open, expansive feel to his music, that's what attracted me to his music I thought it was very revolutionary. What were your first brushes with Scriabin's music?

YL I think the early preludes from Op.11 which were more in the Chopin style, but I was more attracted to the later works. I didn't start playing Scriabin at a very early age as I think his music requires a certain degree of worldliness!

MF How can you interpret what is a spiritual endeavour if you don't have any sense of the spiritual? You need to realise that you are discreet individual, born seeking purpose and you will die and with all the challenges that brings and then try to understand and interpret the music. Can we talk about his neuroticism. Is his music neurotic to play as well?

YL Well the most difficult thing about his music is getting around rhythm...



A.N. Scriabin (1909)
signed by composer “Evenings of
modern music” and autographs
from the Fourth Sonata and “Poem
of Ecstasy”

Rhythm

... Music is a very highly organised form of art. It has structures in harmonies, structures in melodies, and you have to think of the overall picture. Rhythm is something quite rigid. So what was he trying to do when he wrote “elusive” on his score for example? How do you play “elusive”?! What about these wonderful use of the language in *Ver la flamme*: “turbulent like a sea” or “like being born” or “joy at being born”, how do you play that, I don’t remember being born?! So then you think how do I get to this beyond the notes? You see huge rhythmical complexities and you think this is just cruel! He would have nine against five with one hand playing nine notes

another playing five, and that is only for the first beat of the bar. Then he will change and play nine against four and then he changes back to nine and five and then back to nine and four. It keeps changing like that the whole time, just constantly keeps changing. You almost feel that your hands move through each other. Then when you go through the absolutely cruel discipline of counting and fitting things in the best mathematical way you can because you can’t divide nine by five! Then when you actually internalise it and start playing it and you are beginning to feel rather than count, you realise what he is trying to do is break away from this rigidity of a beat and

create a flow, a momentum. I think this is part of the neurotic. It is very hard to achieve but when you actually get to it, where all you are aware of is the heartbeat, then it is just wonderful! This happens in jazz too. You are aware of the beat but it is in the background and it just sort of carries you with a steady flow and when this flow has to change it is absolutely thrilling.

PB I think you have to be aware of it, but also just let your subconscious take you. If you try to be aware of it it’s very difficult, you need to internalise it and not be aware of it.

MF Do you find that after you have done all of the counting and getting to grips with it, at some point it also makes some other kind of sense in that you can relax and find the music.

YL I don’t think you can ever quite relax, but suddenly you feel the music lifting off the page and that’s quite a thrilling feeling because you feel the momentum, it is amazing. There is a recording of Horowitz playing *Vers la Flamme* and he changed a lot of things that Scriabin wrote, he has actually written his own ending to intensify the effect and even though it is terribly exciting performance, I don’t think Scriabin would have forgiven him if he heard it!

I feel like a High Priestess of some mystic cult when playing this piece... It is very very dark beginning with some flares and then there is a beginning of a movement, five against three, and you can see Horowitz almost physically going into the swing of it, because he wanted to be in the flow of it and it is quite interesting to see how he moves at that point. In *Vers la Flamme* there are absolutely mad tremolos where you just trill in one hand, the playing is erratic and your other hand moves here there everywhere, it is just amazing!

MF That’s interesting because you know we talked about the idea of the body being involved as you listen to the music, obviously as you play the music you are involved physically, your whole body is connected to the music in a way that the audiences isn’t because they can just sit still, it’s not just your fingers is it?

YL Well I think that is pretty true for a lot of composers, but particularly with Scriabin because he is trying to transcend the bars and the beats, you are much more aware of it.

MF But surely it is particularly

significant in the case of someone who is very interested in the physical, and the physical sensation of receiving the music, it’s more interesting that you are physically involved in the music as well. It is almost as if you could just connect the audience to your own body, so they could all experience the music actively rather than passively, we could all be rocking around in perfect synchronicity. Clearly that would change the feeling of receiving the music. You would be connected to the maker of the music as well.

YL The other interesting thing about his writing is that quite early on in his career he did away with long phrases that consist of a series of notes and embraced motifs, which is really two or three notes in combination, little snippets of sounds and I think partly he did that because he thought that whatever the musical composition he was writing was like a little cosmos in itself. He tries to create a little mini-world where these motives will exist and speak to each other and communicate. Classical music is largely based on the conflict whereas Scriabin music is much more about interaction between motives.

PB How much of that exact emotion and technical observation you have made is relevant to his early work – do you feel it is there at the beginning of his work? You talked about how you are much more interested in his later works.

YL I will start the concert with Opus 3 which he wrote when he was still a student at the Conservatoire, it is a very early piece. Mazurka is dance and he was influenced by Chopin at the moment, so it is fairly traditional. But if you look at his early preludes, for example like Opus 11, he has started to develop his own style in this brief form already.

PB I wanted to also ask how you decide on a program of music – how to go from the first part of the concert and then switch to the mystical of Scriabin?

Fragment of *Vers la Flamme*, the melody highlighted in yellow juxtaposed against the alternating 9/5 and 9/4 rhythm

YL I did want to start with the very early Scriabin because it is fascinating how he progressed and how he changed. The sonata is actually quite significant because it is written at the same time as he was working on the Poem of Ecstasy and developing as Scriabin the Philosopher, the mystic and the thinker. The sonata is called States of the Soul as a subtitle with each movement reflecting different state of the Soul. Before the Sonata however, I’m playing two poems which are quite significant in his creative development. I think at this stage his thinking is much more crystallized and I wanted to play that before the sonata to show the developed elements of the kind of heavenly spirit, which is in the first poem and then the joy of unification with the unique, the significance of the “I”. It is interesting to play the Sonata then and see how he has arrived at that point. At the end of the concert I will play an exciting piece *Vers La Flamme* which is one of his late works. I think for him the fire was the cleansing, like in some mystical cults you burn yourself or something to achieve purity and transport yourself into eternity.

PB I’ll have to look at the manuscript to see how the Sonata links to a normal sonata form.

YL It is the last sonata he did in the classical form, in separate movements. The following sonatas are all one movement which makes perfect sense because that’s when he understood that his music is the Cosmos, the Universe in itself and therefore movements are unthinkable, they progress in a continuous flow. “The world is my creative act and my creative act comprises the world” – became his philosophy.

Colour

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Martin Firrell Can we talk about the colour because obviously that's a really, really simple interesting strangeness about him and his approach, and also the spooky philosophical connections as well. It's not just about colour it's also philosophical values and qualities associated with colour and music.

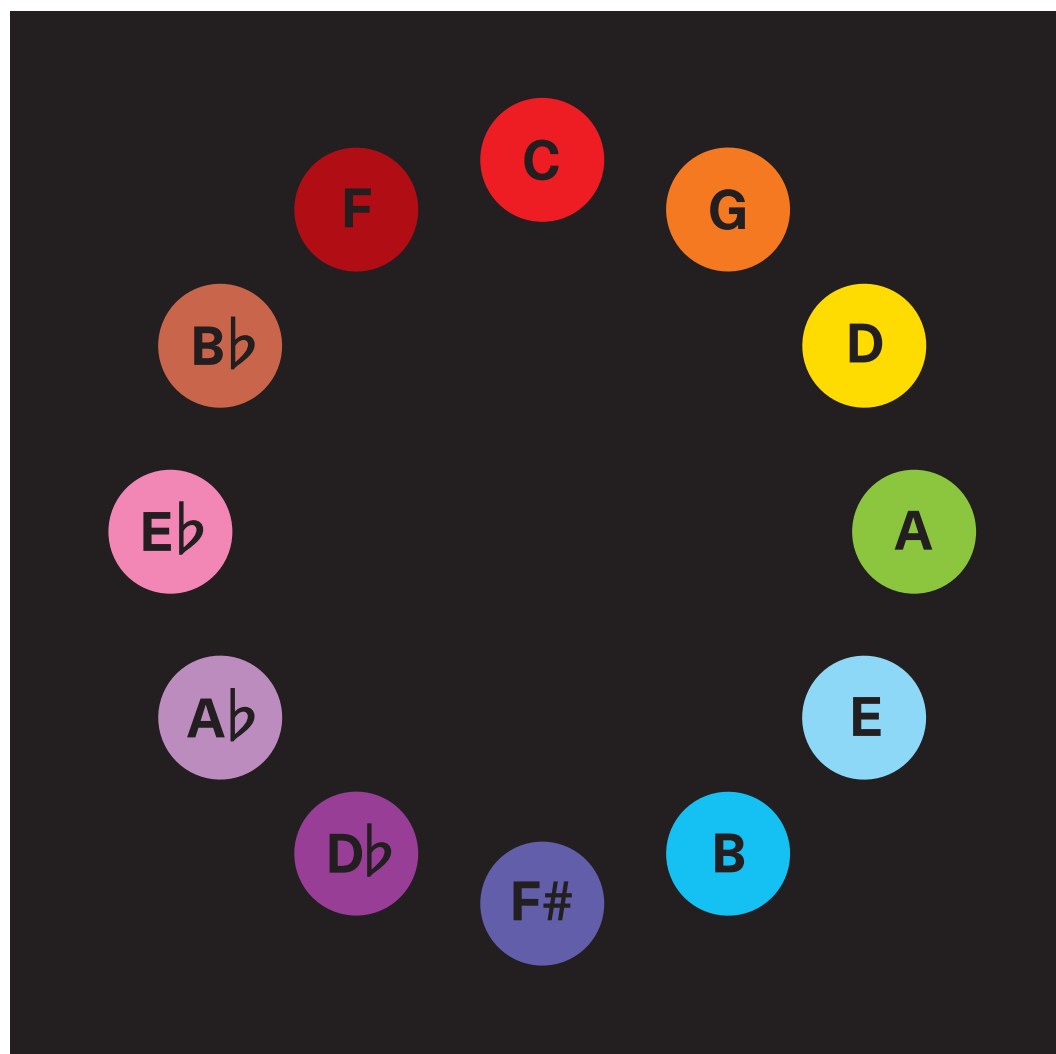
Yekaterina Lebedeva It is all spiritual qualities.

Paul Bagshawe After what Katya has already said I almost feel that the colour associations with the music were something he had to do because he had no choice because he saw these colours, he couldn't ignore them.

MF But isn't there an argument that he didn't experience synesthesia himself but that he knew of it. I read a piece that said he didn't actually have that ability, he was intrigued by it and so tried to create his own connection with colour but that actually it was based on Newton's optics, it was actually quite a scientific approach. He was wanting to be very rational as well and wanted it to be scientifically based on the previous work of Newton and then trying to build his own reference system, but he didn't actually see the colours himself or hear them.

YL There is a book with records of

The colour/light machine (called a "Luca") was created and designed by engineer A.E. Mozer



Scriabin's colour system – unlike most synesthetic experience, accords with the circle of fifths: it was a thought-out system based on Sir Isaac Newton's Opticks

Scriabin playing his own works to his friends and he would often say when this music is performed there should be violet on the stage and he used to actually say the colour being attached to the sound so I'm not sure.

MF But you don't have to experience synesthesia to have a view do you because we can all do that and say "I feel this is a violent, violet passionate moment!" It feels like what I would like to see but you don't have to actually have to have that weird cross over stimulus and perceptual experience to have a view on it.

YL No and it is also very different from person to person.

MF And also the fact that he had those spiritual experiences that are clearly not within the world of that physiological of seeing what you hear and hearing what you see, that is something else entirely.

YL Don't you think again it comes from this concept of being conceived as a whole?

MF And the intuition. I think he needed to have a perception for the intuition would just make it work as a whole... through a different route, not necessarily through

perception because he felt it intuitively.

YL But if you follow the spiritual transcription of colours you will see that it talks about the will and the unification of the will and the Divine and the Spirit – all those things that he was interested in. He really believed himself to be a deliverer.

MF Do those inform your playing?

YL Not really.

MF You clearly must have your own internal sense of this music.
YL I really believe that when he was writing this music, despite all the theological ideas, he was first of all a musician. I think there is a need for an artist to explain his creation. Again the same thing could be said with a parent and a child, because you are constantly analysing and questioning. You try to explain things all the time! I think he was trying to find theories about this, but I think when he was writing this must have been purely musical and when he played it was about the music. I have come across people who talk about the Divine and the elusiveness, but they actually can't play the right rhythm! If you can't play the right rhythm there isn't Divine and there isn't elusive!

MF That's a real reality check – there is this music but can you play it and then let's worry about what it all means!

YL I believe that things are written on the page for you to interpret, you have to be true to what is there before you start engaging in the philosophical explanations. Of course knowing the character of the personality behind it helps but it is just only one part of it.

MF Of course and everything has to live within its own time, it's all connected. It's an interesting thought that this is primarily about music and all these other bits, the colour and philosophical, spiritual ideas are all very interesting but ultimately it was music to be performed at the piano it's not a Mass, it's not religious, it's not a ritual or philosophy it is music – and that is quite a big reality check! I got quite carried away that he had all these philosophical and theosophical views and the colour and was he creating this kind of bigger artifice of which music was a subset. A big subset but there were other things, but I love it that you say "Actually we are talking about music!" and you clearly don't need the colour fields to be able to play the music and I think that's the difference. You clearly couldn't have a film without the picture,



Demonstration of the colour-light music at the "Colour Light Studio" at the A.N. Scriabin National Museum, controlled by the director of the studio, M.S. Malkov

you couldn't just listen to the sound – it would be radio.

PB There is a very tenuous link I think because there are sound waves you can hear and light waves you can see both types of waves and thinking there is more to it than what we see and what we hear but you can't logically link them you have to start interpreting but the music.

YL Yes music is music. People will always have their own interpretations of it. One of the most powerful senses we have is vision and so yes of course if you have colour and sound together it will have an affect .

MF You know the last concert in London when you turned the lights off that had a really powerful affect – you asking the audience to imagine a visual accompaniment whilst denying the visual sense that was so clever to make people feel their imaginative power and focus on their response to the music. I found it really amazing because you confounded people's expectations of what a concert is. When the lights went off everyone was really alert and listening anew I thought that was so bold. That's



Soviet engineer K.A Leontev was the first to investigate the issue of colour light/music/ on a scientific basis. He created experimental colour light instrument using the latest technology

what I love about your performances, they are bold and you do engage the whole audience, you don't really say just sit there and listen, have some music and we'll all go home, you do require more from the audience. You yourself are a spiritual seeker.
YL I suppose I am like Scriabin in some ways, I feel the battle between the rational and the intuitive inside myself.

Performance



“What I think is really interesting is that you yourself are quite Cosmic”

Martin Firrell

“

Martin Firrell Do you think this comes from the great Slavonic soul?

Yekaterina Lebedeva There is a lot of spirituality in Slavs, we haven't really been Christians for that long, we were Pagans and I think if you scratch any Russian under the surface you will find a Pagan inside! That is very spiritual, and perhaps more so than Christianity offers because you are more in connection with the elements. I am not a Pagan! If you think about it I grew up in the Soviet Union where we supposed to be atheists but where my parents were worshipping Christianity behind closed doors. My Mum had very high positions so she couldn't be found going to the Church. I had no religious education and then I came to this country and think I have to follow in my Mum's steps, and then I marry someone who is a scientist. I go from better to worse! So for me looking at people like Scriabin it is admirable in a way that I admire people who have a strong Faith. But I have worked out one thing, I believe in goodness. There is something about life, there is goodness in it and that's what I believe in.

MF Like Iris Murdoch, her novels just look and examine the idea of the good. Good will prevail, good will show itself, in the end it is good that will triumph. You don't know how and sometimes it is hidden in people. All the great thinkers say the only way forward is to forgive, however terrible it is because it is the only possible way to have a future.

YL Scriabin had such grand designs for himself and ideas of sacrificing himself and that it would bring the end of the Universe. He really believed that. Because of his strong beliefs he was convinced that he could cure himself with the power of thought and he in fact did it once! When he was at the Conservatoire he had a problem with his right hand, he couldn't use it, but he focused his mind on this problem and kept telling himself he had this mission to perform and cured his hand to enable him to play again!

MF What was wrong with his hand?

YL I'm not sure but he couldn't use his right hand and through the power of focus he actually cured himself, not through medical intervention.

MF What I think is really interesting is that you yourself are quite Cosmic and I think this is a good marrying of this music and of you yourself. I think you give great depth. You said to me don't confuse depth with quantity and I had confused the two. I thought this comprehensive knowledge you can have from quantity means you have great depth and it doesn't. If you have just three things that are very profound you can have great depth. I think you do give out really good spiritual advice so I see the music and you as a really great fit.

YL I like music that I can lift off the page and help to transcend. I'm very drawn to that idea.

MF Also it's all somewhere between the bits isn't it, all the magic happens in a "between place"? It's all in the transitions between things that interesting things happen.

What's your creative ambition for the concert?

YL To survive!

Paul Bagshawe It's a formidable programme, a very serious collection of pieces. How many of the pieces do you know very well and which are new pieces for you?

YL It's like all concerts a bit of familiar pieces that I know quite well and new pieces. The third Sonata is a very difficult piece and I have played it before but now I have come back to it after years and years so it feels like new.

I played it years and years ago to a very old Professor at the Moscow Conservatoire and in the first movement the score says to play "drammatico" and then it gives a metronome mark suggestion which is fairly slow and you think "Come on, that's not dramatico". So I engaged with the actions and he looked at me, he was about 70 at the time, and he said, "My dear it says dramatico not hysterico!"

PB Did Scriabin teach Rachmaninoff at all?

YL No they had the same piano professor.

MF I read a quote that no one was more famous in his lifetime and instantly forgotten on his death. And it wasn't until about the 1970s that his star started to rise again and he came back to prominence. But he did disappear into absolute obscurity after his death.

YL But you know why, because the Revolution happened and we weren't interested in all this "unique and elusive".

*“My dear,
it says *drammatico*
not *hysterico*!”*

Yekaterina Lebedeva

MF For me the whole idea of pre- and post- Soviet Revolution is completely linked in my mind with you because you are my contact with that world. Because when you were young you were a very good Communist and denounced Capitalism and the West because you got brownie points for it didn't you? You got advantage if you could stand up and talk about the scourge of the West and the evils of Capitalism, you got advantage didn't you? You figured this is what they want this is what I'll give them.

YL I think it goes with the idea of musicians being apolitical.

MF I think it is fascinating how in the early days there was so much support for experimental ideas and for Art. It was a great thing to be making new works because you were making a new world. Then all of a sudden the reverse happened and no one was allowed to make anything new.

YL It is really interesting in terms of writing because they had to hide what they were doing.

MF What a brave thing to do, to try to remake the World in a more fair way. We can't help but be influenced by our times even if we don't know it, so I was thinking a lot about the science fiction project I'm working on at the moment. It is just responding to the great weight of American popular culture. It's kind of like saying “yes that is what's coming our way” an endless wave of excellent, very popular, seductive “chewing gum” culture. Obviously there will come a time when it will be Chinese culture coming quite quickly. Obviously someone will look back and say all this interest in American culture is like the dying embers and so it was fascinating to look at that late exhalation of an Empire because we can't but help be part of our time can we? Even if we try to be independent you can't help but be involved it's osmotic.



And all those years ago now I thought you were so recent from the Soviet Union and then Perestroika.

Perestroika was just happening wasn't it as you left?

YL Well slightly before.

MF So what an amazing time it was for you. My sense of all that comes from you, because you are a direct connection to it.

YL I haven't played in the Purcell Room since my son was born so I'm thrilled.

DRAMMATICO
ALLEGRETTO
ANDANTE
PRESTO CON FUOCO

“Dynamics” usually refer to the volume of a sound or note, but can also refer to every aspect of the execution of a given piece, either stylistic (staccato, legato etc.) or functional (velocity).

The above dynamics are the initial expressions to each of the 4 parts of Scriabin's 3rd Sonata.

Interpretation

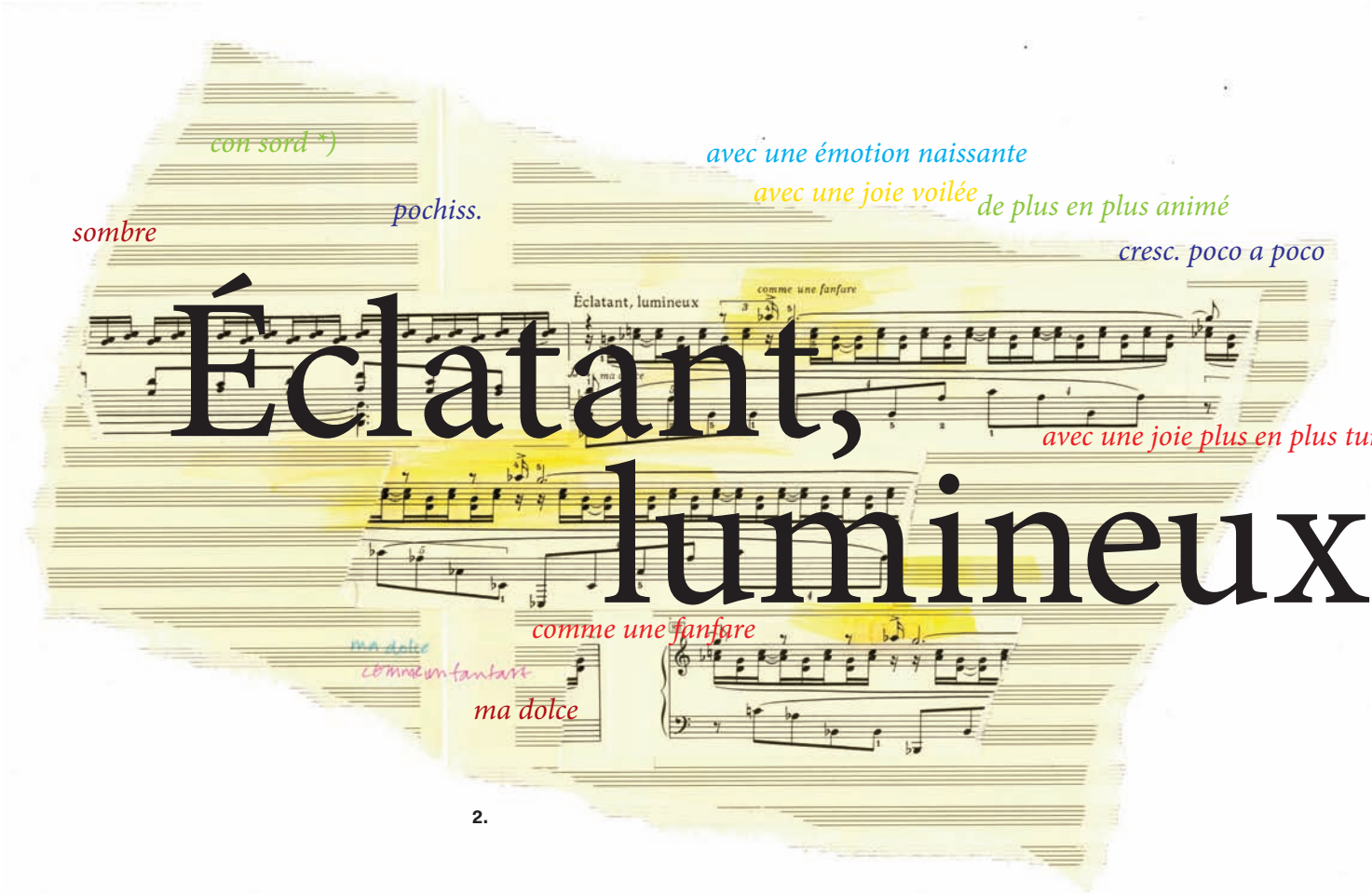
1.
Five Intervals of the Mystic Chord
Photography and Typography
500mm x 420mm

2.
Vers La Flamme – Fragment 6
Mixed Media Collage
Dimensions Variable

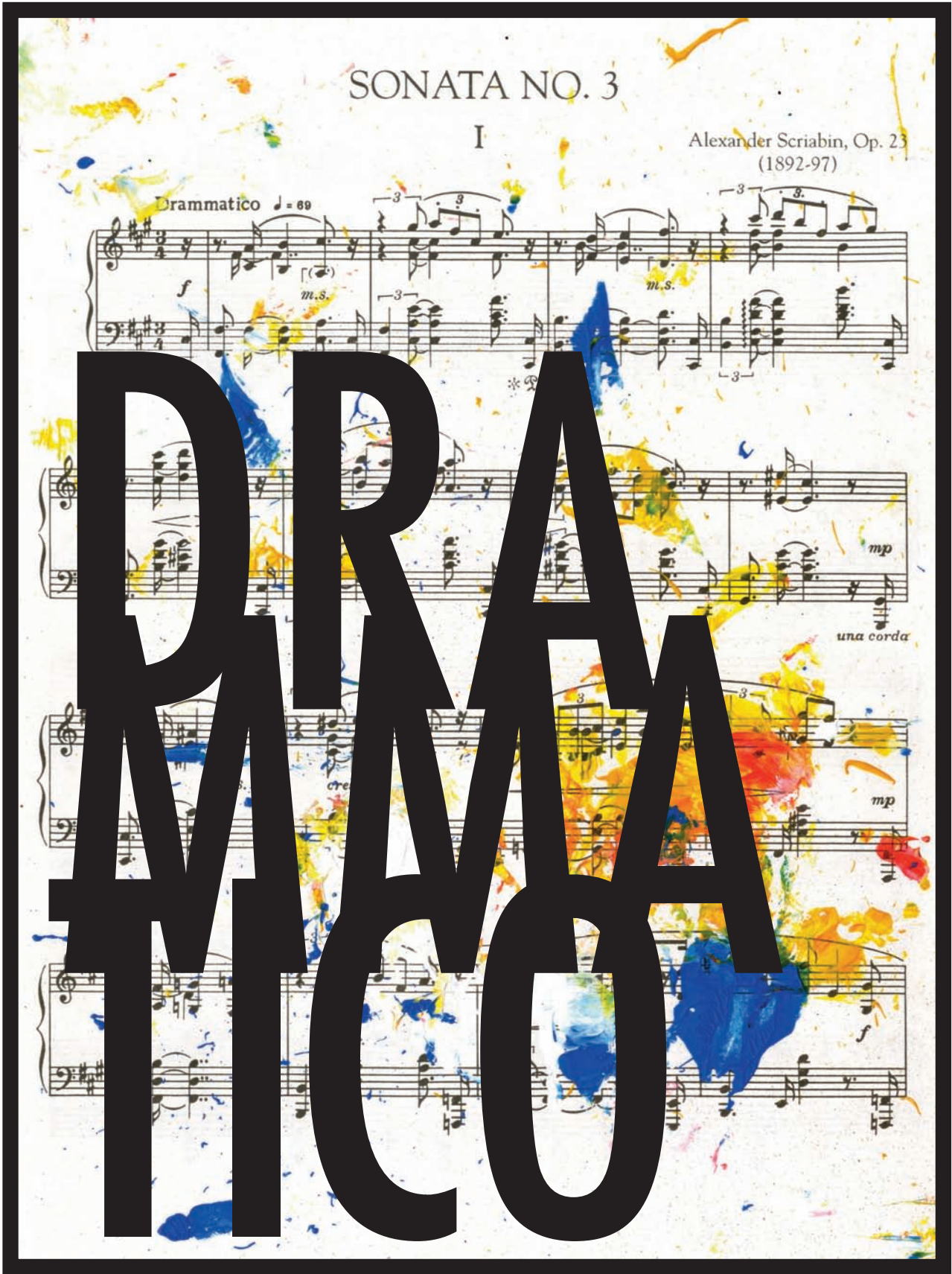
Paul Bagshawe
April 2012



1.

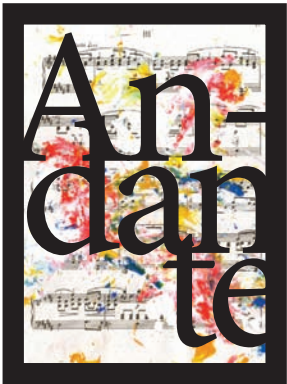


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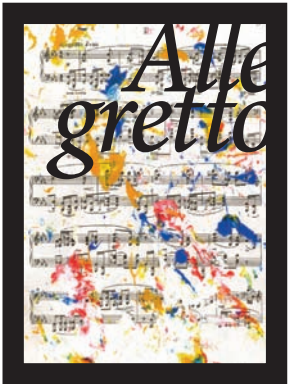


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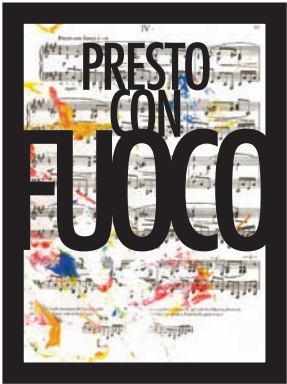
- 3. Sonata No. 3 / I
Mixed Media Collage
300mm x 220mm
 - 4. Sonata No. 3 / II
Mixed Media Collage
300mm x 220mm
 - 5. Sonata No. 3 / III
Mixed Media Collage
300mm x 220mm
 - 6. Sonata No. 3 / IV
Mixed Media Collage
300mm x 220mm
- Paul Bagshawe
April 2012



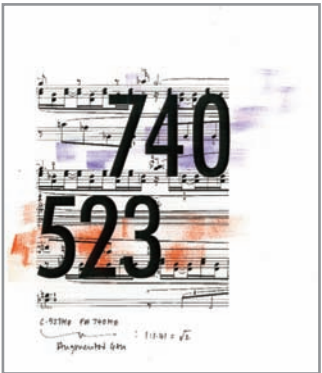
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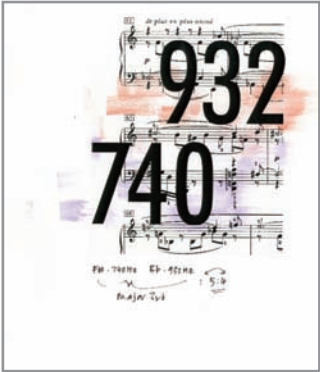
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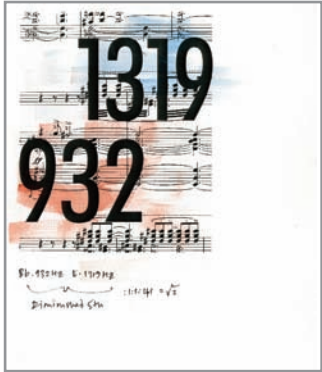
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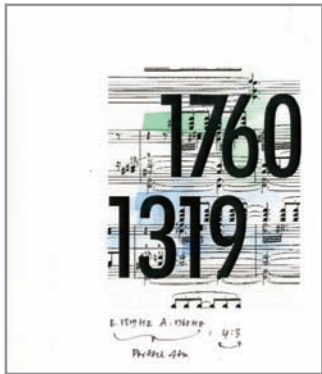
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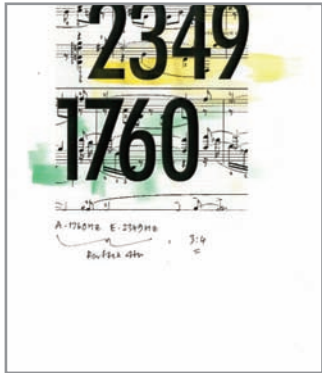
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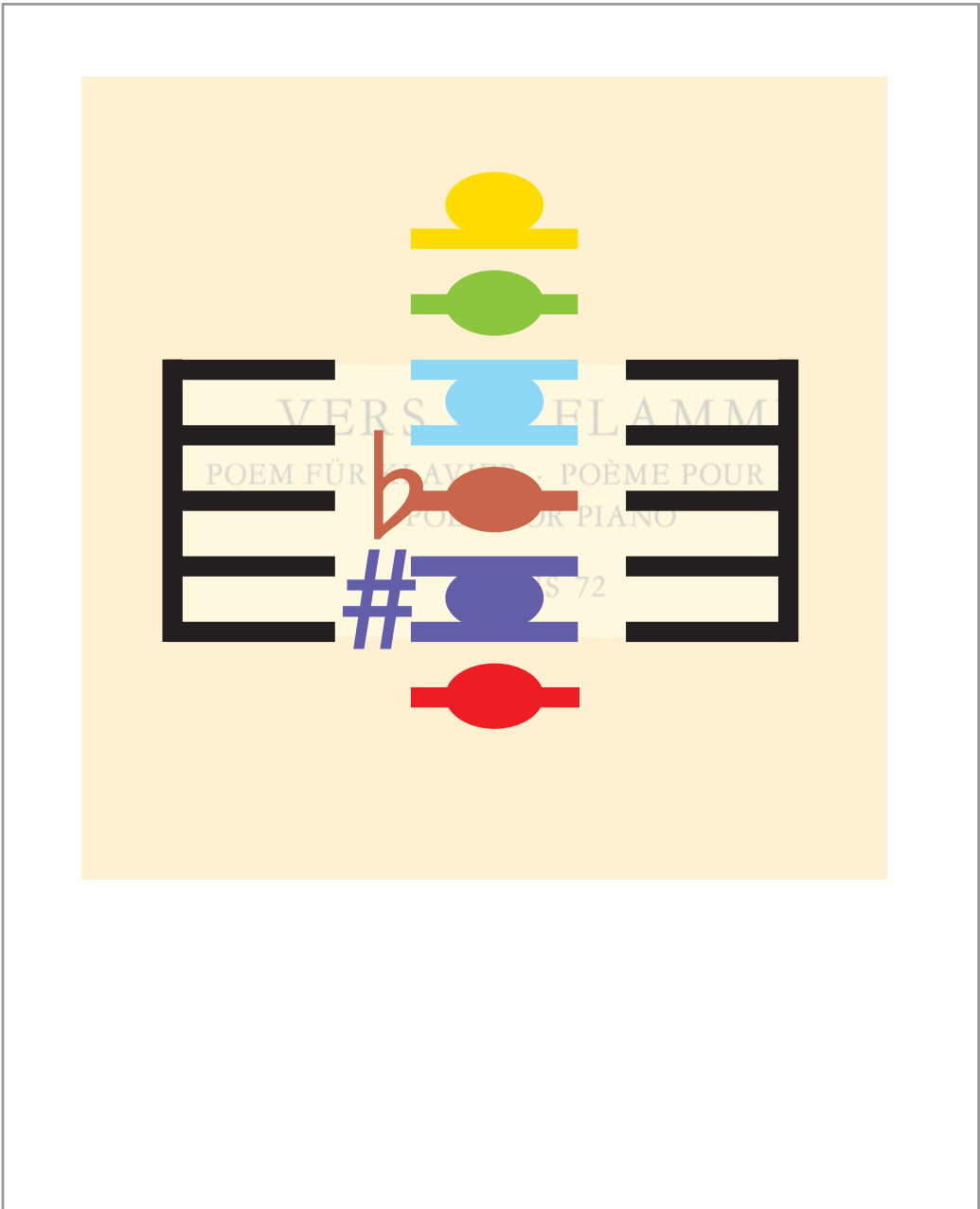
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11.

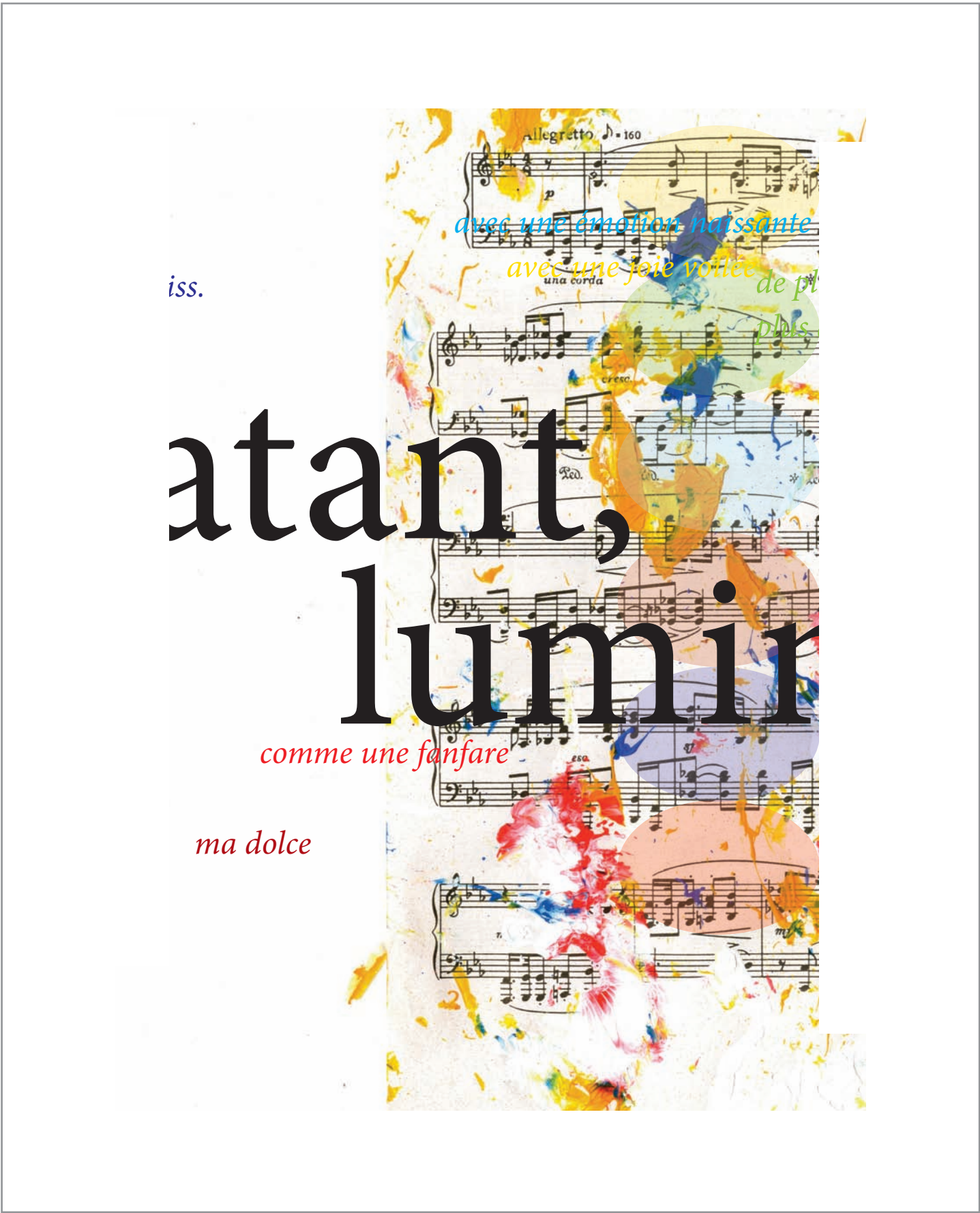


12.

7. – 11.
Mystic Chord:
Hertz Equivalents I–V
Mixed Media Collage
320mm x 235mm

12.
Intervals of the Mystic Chord
Mixed Media Collage
800mm x 600mm

Paul Bagshawe
April 2012



13.

13.
3rd Piano Sonata – Fragment 3a
Mixed Media Collage
Dimensions Variable

Paul Bagshawe
April 2012



Students and teachers
of the music academy
named after Scriabin.
The composers
A.V. Aleksandrov,
D.B. Kabavevskiy,
G.V. Kirkov,
V.N. Kochetov,
Director VI.G. Sokolov
are amongst the group.
The poster above is to
advertise a concert by
the students



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