May 2007

Visions Fugitives: Insights into Prokofiev's Compositional Vision

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Visions Fugitives, Opus 22:
Insights into Sergei Prokofiev’s Compositional Vision

By

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A Doctoral Document

Presented to the Faculty of
The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Doctor of Musical Arts

Major: Music

Under the Supervision of Professor Mark Clinton

Lincoln, Nebraska

April, 2007
Visions Fugitives, Opus 22: Insights into Sergei Prokofiev’s Compositional Vision

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University of Nebraska, 2007

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In his autobiographical notes, Sergei Prokofiev detailed “five lines” along which his early work had developed. This analysis concerned works composed until his graduation from the St. Petersburg Conservatoire in 1914. The five lines are termed: classical, modern, toccata, lyrical and grotesque. The analysis portion of this document will incorporate these five lines. Furthermore, I will concurrently analyze the Visions Fugitives using my own list of 10 characteristics as a foundation. The 10 characteristics are: (1) dissipating endings - or, endings that do not end emphatically, (2) sharp dynamic contrasts, (3) disjunct melody, (4) chromatic melody and free counterpoint, (5) homophonic accompanimental figures (as one might find in a Romantic nocturne), (6) structures based on the tritone, (7) frequent use of the 3rd, (8) use of the 7th - creating an unstable harmonic function, (9) ternary form - providing contrasting sections and (10) abrupt shifts to distant tonalities (in the pieces that do have a sense of some tonal center). These 10 characteristics create both variety and unity within the set: they link the pieces together while creating contrast. Chapter 4 provides an aural examination of Prokofiev’s gramophone recording of the Visions Fugitives. From this recording, I will focus on Prokofiev’s style of interpretation and pianism concerning the Visions. This recording also offers evidence that the Opus 22 does not need to be performed in its entirety nor in numerical order. Finally, a chart in the appendix outlines the analysis of chapter 3.
I respectfully dedicate this thesis to my mother, who, through her tireless efforts, continues to encourage and support my musical endeavors.
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Introduction

I will begin with a brief account of the development of Prokofiev as a pianist-composer, including his early teachers and influences. Prokofiev’s childhood experiences led to his entrance into the St. Petersburg Conservatoire in 1904; the first chapter will provide an explanation on why this was an important artistic event for the composer, who was barely 13. In chapter two, I shed light on the many similarities found between the works of representative composers of the early 20th century and the *Visions Fugitives*. I will also contrast the Opus 22 with Prokofiev’s earlier miniature forms for piano composed throughout his Conservatoire years. These pieces demonstrate a remarkable compositional evolution. In the autobiography, Prokofiev provided a brief analysis of his compositional development during the Conservatoire years. In the analysis portion of my document (chapter 3), I incorporate Prokofiev’s own analysis, consisting of his “five lines”. I will reveal which line the composer favored. Furthermore, I have devised another means by which to analyze the Opus 22: how the 20 pieces in the set are related using my list of 10 characteristics. These elements also create remarkable variety within the pieces. Chapter 4 focuses on Prokofiev as a recording artist and technophile. My aural analysis of the primary source material (Prokofiev’s recording on a gramophone) will support the argument that he was, contrary to many critics’ accounts, a sensitive and highly polished pianist. With an unedited version of the score, I will show that Prokofiev, the performer, did not always heed his own indications.
Chapter 1

Prokofiev: Developing Composer: 1891-1918

The piano was a prominent vehicle for Sergei Prokofiev’s musical expression. The piano works have been steadily composed throughout his life, from the Piano Sonata No. 1, Op. 1 (1909) to the Piano Sonata No. 9, Op. 103 (1947) and the revised Piano Sonata No. 5, Op. 135 (1952-3). During his youth, Prokofiev’s miniature pieces for piano were often more forward-looking than his larger forms (compare Sonata No. 1 to the four pieces of Opp. 3 and 4). The Visions Fugitives, Opus 22, may be redolent of sets of preludes by other composers. But Prokofiev’s Opus 22 contains only 20 pieces, not the traditional 24 found in the sets of Bach, Chopin or Shostakovich, nor do they conform to any key scheme such as the circle of fifths. Prokofiev, from his early years, was aware of the current compositional techniques of the time: planing, symmetrical pitch structures (whole tone and octatonic scales), modality and bitonality. These elements are also manifest in Opus 22. Prokofiev utilized unusual meters in his compositions (Etude, Op. 2 No. 2), however, there are no unusual meters in the Visions Fugitives with the slight exception of No. 20: 6/8 in the right hand and 3/4 in the left hand. Rhythms employed throughout the Opus 22 are not groundbreaking. Stravinsky can be credited as the figure responsible for the emancipation of rhythm; the dissonant repetition and frequently changing meters in Prokofiev’s fifth Sarcasm may have been influenced by the Rite of Spring (1913). The Visions Fugitives do not contain such daring rhythmic structure.
Many of the *Visions Fugitives* are in ABA form. Prokofiev’s use of formal structure is based on traditional models, and he was satisfied with traditional forms:

In that field [instrumental or symphonic music], I am well content with the forms already perfected. I want nothing better, nothing more flexible or more complete, than the sonata form, which contains everything necessary to my structural purposes.¹

Prokofiev’s mother, Maria Grigoryevna, was the first musical influence for him. Prokofiev wrote in his autobiography:

When I was put to bed in the evenings and did not want to sleep, I would lie and listen to the faint sound of Beethoven’s sonatas being played several rooms away from the nursery. My mother used to play the sonatas of the first volume mostly; then came Chopin preludes, mazurkas and waltzes. Occasionally something of Liszt, not too difficult; and the Russian composers, Chaikovsky and Rubinstein.²

His mother played the piano quite well according to Prokofiev, who recollected his piano lessons with her:

My mother took great pains with my musical education. She believed that a child should be kept interested and not repelled by tiresome exercises, and that a minimum of time should be spent on scales so as to leave as much time as possible for reading music... allowing me to play a vast amount of compositions and discussing them with me, encouraging me to say why I liked or disliked one or another piece. In this way I learned to form independent judgment at an early age.³

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³Ibid, 16.
By age 5 he composed short tunes at the piano, which were notated by his mother. By age 6, he was able to notate his own music. Also at an early age, he was interested in the ambitious prospect of writing an opera, for at age 8 his parents brought him to Moscow to attend opera performances. Indeed his childhood opera, *The Giant*, was performed for family members in 1900.

Prokofiev studied harmony, form and orchestration with Reinhold Glière in 1902-04. Glière, a composer, taught young Prokofiev the basics of harmony, form and orchestration, and used Beethoven Sonatas to outline form during a lesson. With the help of Glière, he had already composed nearly seventy piano miniatures (Prokofiev called them ‘little songs’) by the time he was 12 years old. This would later prove valuable, for when Prokofiev was 13 years old he headed to St. Petersburg and applied for admittance to the Conservatoire, and Rimsky-Korsakov was impressed with the amount of original compositions accompanying the boy.

Sergei Taneyev, a close friend of Tchaikovsky, was a composer and pianist who, in 1875, gave the first performance in Moscow of Tchaikovsky’s First Piano Concerto. When Taneyev heard the twelve-year-old Prokofiev’s composition *Symphony in G*, he remarked that the harmony was crude, joking that it consisted mostly of I, IV, & V. According to Prokofiev, once this statement had been planted in his head, it germinated and caused his eventual harmonic experimentation. Eight years later, Sergei and his mother traveled to Moscow to perform some of his little pieces for Taneyev, via an arrangement set by Yuri Nikolayevich Pomerantsev, a friend of the family who was studying at the Moscow Conservatory. Prokofiev played his *Etudes*, Op. 2 for Taneyev, who grumbled, “Far too many false notes”. When Prokofiev reminded him of what he
once said about his harmonies, Taneyev clutched his head in mock horror and said, “So it was I who launched you on that slippery path!”

In 1904, Alexander Glazunov, who was a student of Rimsky-Korsakov, urged his parents to send him to the Conservatoire in St. Petersburg and focus on becoming an artist. At the Conservatoire, the composer, Anatoly Konstantinovich Lyadov taught harmony and counterpoint and insisted on a strict observance of voice-leading rules. Prokofiev also studied orchestration with Rimsky-Korsakov, but did not like the overcrowded conditions of the class and felt that he learned nothing. During Prokofiev’s early years as a student in the Conservatoire, contact with older students offered him the opportunity to engage in musical discussion and participate in sessions of listening to music and other activities. Prokofiev noted in 1906 that he loved Schumann, especially his sonatas and Carnaval. In that same year, Prokofiev and Nicolai Myaskovsky became acquainted; this was the beginning of a long and productive friendship. Prokofiev and his older friend shared much in common and there are 312 letters from Prokofiev to Myaskovsky (written over a period of nearly 43 years) extant today. Since Myaskovsky was ten years Prokofiev’s senior, he was a sort of musical father figure, encouraging Sergei’s creativity and promoting his work on the stage. Together, they would play 4-hand arrangements of Beethoven’s symphonies, Rimsky-Korsakov’s Scheherazade, and many other works. As they played these works, discourse concerning the work would follow. In addition to playing works of other composers, they would regularly show each other their new compositions, consulting each other on matters of form, harmony and orchestration. This close bond continued until Myaskovsky’s death nearly forty-five

\[4 \text{ Ibid, 20.}\]
years later. This “odd couple” (Myaskovsky was a twenty-five-year-old officer, reserved, educated, grave, while the fifteen-year-old Prokofiev had a reputation as a spoiled trouble-maker) was to break away from the tired conventions of composers who passively imitated the traditional models of Glazunov and Rimsky-Korsakov. It was Myaskovsky who introduced the adolescent Prokofiev to the latest music of Western Europe and Russia, which was especially desired since it was adamantly rejected at the Conservatoire. Their interests quickly turned from Grieg, Tchaikovsky, and Rimsky-Korsakov to Debussy, Richard Strauss and Max Reger. Prokofiev even witnessed Reger conducting his own works at a concert in St. Petersburg in 1906. Prokofiev studied the piano works of Reger, such as the tremendous Variations and Fugue on a Theme by J.S. Bach. Prokofiev and Myaskovsky not only studied and performed works for 4-hand piano, but also included such modern symphonic transcriptions as Reger’s Serenade in G major and Strauss’s tone poems Don Juan, Thus Spake Zarathustra and Death and Transfiguration. Prokofiev also adored the work of Scriabin.

The Evenings of Modern Music, which took place on Thursdays in a piano shop, was a host to first performances of works by such modern composers as Strauss, Reger, Debussy, Ravel, Schönberg and Stravinsky. Traditionalists Rimsky-Korsakov and Liadov excoriated these evening performances and the people associated with them, calling them “impudent and earless.”5 It was at one of these evenings, during the 1910-1911 season, when Prokofiev premiered the work of Schönberg in Russia. During the performance of Schönberg, one critic noted, “Homerice laughter broke out in the hall.”6 Prokofiev met

6 Nestyev, Israel V, Prokofiev, trans. Florence Jonas with a forward by Nicolas
Stravinsky at one of these evenings, where he heard the composer play a piano arrangement of his new ballet *The Firebird*. Prokofiev did not like it at all. These were also attended by leading critics and musicians interested in hearing new compositions. During Prokofiev’s “Evening” debut as a composer on December 31, 1908, he played the pieces of Opus 4 plus two other short pieces. Stravinsky attended this performance and later commented that the performance was, “remarkable – but I have always liked his music hearing him play it – and the music had personality.”  

A newspaper review of this performance read:

S. Prokofiev’s small pieces for the piano, played from manuscript by the composer himself, were extremely original. The young composer, who has not yet completed his musical education, belongs to the ultra-modernist trend and goes much farther than the French modernists in boldness and originality. The unmistakable glow of talent shines through all the whims and caprices of this rich creative fantasy, a talent that is not yet quite balanced and which still succumbs to every gust of feeling…

Other critics wrote:

If one views all of these rather confused compositions – or, to be more exact, rough drafts and sketches – as a test for the composer’s pen, then perhaps here and there one may find a trace of talent in them.

In all the vagaries of this rich creative imagination, one can detect a great and indisputable talent, a talent still unstable, still surrendering to every passion, enamored of extravagant combinations of sound, yet with great skill finding a logical basis for the most hazardous modulations.

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7 Gutman, David, *Prokofiev*, 37.
Lyadov was known to lose his temper when Prokofiev brought his exercises to the counterpoint lessons, which Lyadov considered contaminated by modernism. Lyadov said, “I guess I should be studying with you, not you with me. Go to Richard Strauss or Debussy, but for Heaven’s sake, don’t study with me.”¹⁰ Likewise, patrons of the Evenings of Modern Music openly declared the Glazunov-Lyadov school “conservative.” As a result of this discord, Prokofiev never showed his compositions to Lyadov, only the required coursework. However, one must acknowledge the value of Lyadov’s class when analyzing the piano works of Prokofiev. As one glances through the Visions Fugitives, the eye can spot diligent horizontal textures that seem to originate from rigid formal training. Myaskovsky later recalled, “I cannot help admitting that his extraordinary rigid requirements (even his carping), the exceptional lucidity of his method, his unusual taste, and his extremely keen critical sense fixed our technique firmly and developed our feeling for style.”¹¹ The piano miniatures during 1906-1909 reveal more of Prokofiev’s unique voice than his large-scale works, such as the F-minor Sonata, Opus 1, clearly influenced by the German Romantic school (especially Schumann). Perhaps these miniatures were vehicles for the composer’s experimentation with the new musical ideas he was hearing outside of the Conservatoire walls in St. Petersburg. The Suggestion Diabolique is a vivid example of this phenomenon. Prokofiev’s reputation would further prove to benefit from performances given in cooperation with a group of musical progressives from Moscow, which was supported by the Russian magazine

¹¹ Nestyev, Israel V, Prokofiev, 27.
Contemporary Music (Rachmaninov and Medtner heard Prokofiev’s chamber works performed at an occasion in February 1917).

Meanwhile, Prokofiev continued to study with his first piano professor at the Conservatoire, Alexander Winkler, playing pieces such as Rubinstein’s *Etude* in C major and Schumann’s *Toccata* in C major. A feuilleton published in the *St. Petersburg Gazette* describes in 1913 the manner of Prokofiev’s playing on the piano, which was just as famous as his compositions. Referring to a performance of the 2nd Concerto, it mentions that he had a sharp, dry touch and some members of the audience were offended by the performance and left. However, the forward-looking critics thought he was brilliant and original.

In 1910, Prokofiev sent some of his work to the Russian Music Publishers, which was founded by Koussevitzky. Scriabin, Rachmaninov and Medtner were among the adjudicators of the compositional submissions. Prokofiev felt that they too easily dismissed works that contained any hint of novelty. In 1911, Prokofiev finally managed to publish some early piano works with the Russian publisher, Jurgenson.

When Prokofiev was eighteen years old and faced with the question of what to do after receiving his certificate from the Conservatoire, he decided to transfer from Winkler to Anna Nikolayevna Yesipova, who graduated from the St. Petersburg Conservatoire where she studied with (and later married) Leschetizky. Prokofiev was known to have outstanding virtuosity as a performer, but with a careless and unpolished interpretation of traditional piano music. Glazunov noted about the young Prokofiev’s performance at an examination: “Technical preparation exceedingly brilliant. Interpretation unique, original,

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but not always in the best artistic taste.” In fact, Prokofiev developed scorn for traditional music: “They say that you can’t give a piano recital without Chopin. I’ll prove that we can do quite well without Chopin!” Furthermore, he added corrections to pieces he played. For example, in a copy of Tchaikovsky’s Scherzo a la Russe, Prokofiev crossed out notes in the figurations he believed to be superfluous, added octaves to bass notes, wrote in staccatos and accelerandos and transposed chords an octave higher. In his own gramophone recording of the Visions Fugitives, one can detect Prokofiev taking similar liberties with his own score. Before long, Yesipova and her famous student clashed: “Has assimilated little of my method. Very talented but rather unpolished” was her characterization of Prokofiev at a piano examination in the spring of 1910. With Yesipova, Prokofiev studied Schumann’s Sonata in F-sharp minor, Liszt’s Sonata in B minor, a transcription from Wagner’s Tannhäuser, Medtner’s Fairy Tales (Skazki) Op. 48, Glazunov’s Sonata in E minor and pieces by Rachmaninov and Tchaikovsky. He was familiar with the counterpoint of Bach (which may have influenced the textures of the Visions Fugitives). For example, during his final piano examination in the spring of 1914 he played a fugue from Bach’s Kunst der Fugue and performed differing dynamic levels on different voices.¹³

Prokofiev did however enjoy his studies in conducting with Nikolai Tcherepnin, who was a student of Rimsky-Korsakov in 1895-98.¹⁴ Prokofiev conducted a performance of Mozart’s The Marriage of Figaro by the end of the course. Throughout the conducting course, Prokofiev conducted many other orchestral works, and developed

¹³ Ibid, 34.
¹⁴ Ibid, 28.
(or redeveloped) an appreciation for the composers of the classical era, which came through in his own “classical” works. He felt that he learned more about orchestration through the hands-on experience of studying conducting under Tcherepnin than in the orchestration class of Rimsky-Korsakov. As a result, he was composing orchestral works including the First Piano Concerto (dedicated to Tcherepnin) in 1911 and the Second Piano Concerto in 1912-13.

The literary work of Konstantin Balmont found its way into Prokofiev’s compositions as early as 1909 when the composer wrote *The White Swan* and *The Wave* for female voices and orchestra. Prokofiev felt that the poems of Balmont had a musical quality and appealed to him profoundly. He also wrote a song, *There Are Other Planets*, Op. 9, based on Balmont, whose fashionable verses have also been set by Tcherepnin, Myaskovsky and Stravinsky, to name a few. The title with which Prokofiev furnished the Opus 22 is from a poem by Balmont entitled, “I do not know wisdom”. In the poem, Balmont uses the word “Mimolyotnosti”, which means ‘transiences’. The word has been translated as “Visions Fugitives.” The short poem comes from a set of poems from 1903:

```plaintext
I do not know wisdom – leave that to others –
I only turn fugitive visions into verse.
In each fugitive vision I see worlds,
Full of the changing play of rainbows.
Don’t curse me, you wise ones. What are you to me?
The fact is I’m only a cloudlet, full of fire.
The fact is I’m only a cloudlet. Look: I’m floating.
And I summon dreamers… You I summon not.
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15 Ibid, 30.
In Prokofiev’s autobiography he writes of five lines along which his work had developed up to his graduation from the Conservatoire. These are: classical, modern, toccata, lyrical and grotesque. The classical line includes the use of traditional forms and genres such as concerto, symphony, sonata, gavotte, waltz, march, etc. Sometimes his music imitates the mid to late 18th century style, as in the Classical Symphony. These traditional ties coexist with his unique brand of modernism. The modern line is rooted in that fateful meeting with Taneyev when he remarked that Prokofiev’s harmonies (of the Symphony in G, 1902) were crude. Therefore, the modern line refers to his use of experimental and innovative harmony. From his autobiography he states:

At first the (modern trend) took the form of a search for my own harmonic language, developing later into a search for a language in which to express powerful emotions… Although this line covers harmonic language mainly, it also includes new departures in melody, orchestration and drama.\textsuperscript{17}

This is evident in the Diabolical Suggestion or Vision Fugitive No. 19. The toccata line refers to the driving, motoristic rhythm as found in the Toccata, Op. 11. According to Prokofiev’s autobiography, Schumann’s Toccata in C, Op. 7 made a powerful impression on him when he heard it as a young boy. The lyrical line describes a thoughtful, meditative mood. Others ascribed the grotesque line to Prokofiev. He regards it as a deviation from the other lines. It represents a mingling of traditional tonal structures with innovation or experimentation, producing a comical wrong note effect. Prokofiev disliked the term grotesque as he thought it became a hackneyed description and preferred other

\textsuperscript{17} Prokofiev, Sergei, \textit{Autobiography, Articles, Reminiscences}, 36.
words to describe his music, such as “scherzo-ish”, “whimsical”, “laughter” and “mockery”.

After Prokofiev’s graduation from the Conservatoire he traveled to London where he met Diaghilev. He performed for him the 2nd Piano Concerto. While in London he witnessed Strauss conducting his own new works. He also played a 4-hand arrangement of Petrushka with the composer, Stravinsky. This experience was thrilling for the young Prokofiev who was associating with a progressive composer of such a high caliber. Stravinsky’s Le Sacre du Printemps also had a direct influence on Prokofiev, especially with regard to the conception of the orchestral work, Scythian Suite. During 1915, the year he began Visions Fugitives, Prokofiev had performed his 2nd Piano Concerto in Rome (his first foreign public appearance), and was working on Scythian Suite and the ballet, The Buffoon. He was also working on an opera based on Dostoyevsky’s The Gambler. Although Diaghilev discouraged the composition of opera (he thought opera was dying out and ballet was flourishing),

Although Diaghilev discouraged the composition of opera (he thought opera was dying out and ballet was flourishing), Prokofiev was fortunate to have Albert Coates, conductor of the Marinsky Theater in St. Petersburg, to spur the creation of The Gambler. However, due to political uprising in 1917, the work was never performed.

As noted in the critics’ reviews, Prokofiev’s premieres often left people scandalized. Perhaps Prokofiev is referring to the calming of this effect when he mentioned that the Visions Fugitives contain a “softening of temper.” This may also be a reference to the lyrical line, which not only describes melody, but a thoughtful and meditative mood. In any case, it seems these pieces were not directly influenced by the

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18 Ibid, 37.
19 Ibid, 38.
20 Ibid, 43.
primitivism of Diaghilev or Stravinsky. The twenty Visions Fugitives were composed in 1915 (nos. 5, 6, 10, 16 and 17), 1916 (nos. 2, 3, 7, 12, 13 and 20) and 1917 (nos. 1, 4, 8, 9, 11, 14, 15, 18 and 19). Karatygin, critic of Prokofiev, wrote in the Russian newspaper Nash Vek, “Prokofiev and tenderness – you don’t believe it? You will see for yourself when this charming suite is published.” Prokofiev stated about the twenty Vision Fugitives, “No. 5 was composed first, No. 19 last; the order in which they appear in the collection was dictated by artistic and not chronological considerations.” They were published along with some songs (Opp. 9, 23 and 27) with the publishing firm Gutheil, which Koussevitsky took over in 1916. He was unsure whether he would be able to play the Visions Fugitives in a recital in Petrograd in 1917, since there was fighting in the streets:

The February Revolution found me in Petrograd. I and those I associated with welcomed it with open arms. I was in the streets of Petrograd while the fighting was going on, hiding behind house corners when the shooting came too close. Number 19 of the Fugitive Visions written at this time partly reflected my impressions – the feeling of the crowd rather than the inner essence of the Revolution.

In the summer of 1917, Prokofiev stayed alone in a country near Petrograd, continuing work on the Classical Symphony, They Are Seven (based on Balmont’s poem Cries from Primeval Times), the Violin Concerto Op. 19 and Piano Sonata No. 4. Prokofiev was unable to return to the capital cities until March 1918. He began to have thoughts of going to America, where he hoped to compose and perform, as Russia, he

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21 Karatygin in Nash Vek (3 May 1918), quoted in Nestyev, 133.
22 Prokofiev, Sergei, Autobiography, Articles, Reminiscences, 44.
23 Ibid, 46.
thought, had no use for music at the moment. The next year he left for America. Before
he left, he debuted the *Visions Fugitives* in a recital along with the 3rd and 4th sonatas
(Petrograd, April 1918). In his autobiography, he admits the untimely decision of
traveling to America, which caused him to miss the birth of the new Russia. He arrived in
New York in September 1918. Rachmaninov arrived in New York about two months
later.
Chapter 2

Comparison of *Visions Fugitives* with Other Works

Below is a list of the piano works by Prokofiev, written up to 1917:

- **Opus 1**, Sonata No. 1 in F minor, 1909
- **Opus 2**, *Four Etudes*, 1909
- **Opus 3**, *Four Pieces*, 1911
  - *Story, Badinage, March, Phantom.*
- **Opus 4**, *Four Pieces*, 1908-12
  - *Reminiscences, Elan, Despair, Diabolical suggestion*
- **Opus 11**, *Toccata* in D minor, 1912
- **Opus 12**, *Ten Pieces*, 1906-13
- **Opus 14**, Sonata No. 2 in D minor, 1912
- **Opus 17**, *Sarcasms*, 1912-14
- **Opus 22**, *Visions Fugitives*, 1915-17
- **Opus 28**, Sonata No. 3 in A minor, 1917
- **Opus 29**, Sonata No. 4 in C minor, 1917

By 1917, he had already composed the first four piano sonatas, six substantial sets of short pieces and the *Toccata*.

Below is a list of prominent piano works that are contemporary with the early piano works of Prokofiev, including the *Visions Fugitives*. This list allows the works of Prokofiev to be placed into historical perspective:

In France:

- **Debussy**:
  - 1903: *Estampes*
  - 1904: *L’isle joyeuse*
1905: *Images*, Book I
1906-8: *Children’s Corner Suite*
1907: *Images*, Book II
1909: *Le Petite Negre*
1910: *Preludes*, Book I
1911-13: *Preludes*, Book II
1915: *Etudes*

**Ravel:**

1901: *Jeux d’eau*
1903-05: *Sonatine*
1904-05: *Miroirs*
1908: *Gaspard de la nuit*
1911: *Valses nobles et sentimentales*
1914-17: *Le tombeau de Couperin*

**In Russia:**

**Scriabin:**

1907: Sonata No. 5, Op. 53
1911: Sonata No. 6, Op. 62
1911: *Deux Poèmes*
1911: Sonata No. 7, Op. 64 (“White Mass”)
1912: *Trois études*, Op. 65
1912-13: Sonata No. 8, Op. 66
1912-13: *Deux préludes*
1912-13: *Deux poèmes*, Op 69
1912-13: Sonata No. 10, Op. 70
1914: *Vers la flamme*
1914: *Deux danse*
1914: *Cinq préludes*

**Rachmaninov:**

1903: 10 Preludes, Op. 23
1910: 13 Preludes, Op. 32
1911: *Etudes-tableaux*, Op. 33
1913/31: Sonata No. 2, Op. 36
1916-17: *Etudes-tableaux*, Op. 39

**In Vienna:**
Schönberg:

1909: *Drei Klavierstücke*, Op. 11
1911: *Sechs Kleine Klavierstücke*, Op. 19

Berg:

1908: Sonata, Op. 1

In Hungary:

Bartók:

1904: *Rhapsody*, Op. 1
1908: *Fourteen Bagatelles*, Op. 6
1908-10: *Two Elegies*, Op. 8B
1908-10: *For Children*
1909-10: *Two Romanian Dances*, Op. 8A
1908-11: *Seven Sketches*, Op. 9B
1908-10: *Three Burlesques*, Op. 8C
1909-10: *Four Dirges*, Op. 9A
1911: *Allegro barbaro*

I will compare some of these prominent works (focusing on the shorter forms) with characteristics in the *Visions Fugitives*.

I will begin with Debussy’s *Estampes*. Most of the thematic material in *Pagodes* is based on the pentatonic scale. No. 12 (*Assai moderato*) of the *Visions Fugitives* contains a pentatonic scale in measure 15. Although No. 7 (*Harp*) of the *Visions Fugitives* doesn’t contain use of the pentatonic scale, the resonances heard in the piece, due to open fifths in the bass clef and the use of pedal, resemble those in *Pagodes*, which was inspired by a Javanese gamelan orchestra. Planing, which can be heard in *La soirée dans Grenade* (measures 17-21, 29-36, 76-81, etc), can also be heard in the left hand of *Vision Fugitive* No. 1, *Lentamente*. The analysis portion of this document (chapter 3),
will further explore Prokofiev’s planing technique within Opus 22. The *Soirée* also employs the Arabic scale, with its distinctive flat second, for the primary theme. Prokofiev uses the flat second in *Vision Fugitive* No. 17 (*Poetico*), particularly in measures 19-32 (the oscillation between B-flat and C-flat). If one interprets No. 18 (*Con una dolce lentezza*) as in the key of B minor, the C-natural of measures 2, 5, 6, etc., functions as a flat second. Whole-tone harmonies in *Jardins sous la pluie* (measures 56-63) may have been inspiration for Prokofiev. Chapter 3 of this document will provide more details about the use of whole tones in some of the *Visions Fugitives*: Nos. 4, 10, and 20 (left hand of measures 9-13).

The Bagatelles, Op. 6, of Bartok contain many similarities in relation to Prokofiev’s Opus 22. Bartok’s use of rhythm in this set is very square and traditional (with the exception of No. 12, *Rubato*), much like Prokofiev’s use of rhythm in the Opus 22. Bagatelle No. 1, *Molto sostenuto*, utilizes a unique key signature: four sharps in the upper staff and four flats in the lower staff. Although there is no similar treatment of key structure in the *Visions Fugitives*, polytonality exists on occasion (No. 9, *Allegro tranquillo*, measures 26-28).

The second Bagatelle, *Allegro giocoso*, contains chord clusters, with hand crossings throughout. Although *Vision Fugitive* No. 14, *Feroce*, is much more strident than Bartok’s Bagatelle, it contains similar texture. Another notable feature of this Bagatelle is its initial appearance on a major second. Prokofiev also had no qualms about starting a piece with such an irresolute interval (*Vision Fugitive* No. 3). Measures 5 and 8-9 of the Bagatelle contain two-note sigh motives that are also found in the *Visions Fugitives* (No. 19, measures 5-8). Bartok’s *Allegro giocoso* contains use of unorthodox
triadic progressions in measures 8-10. The striking feature about these chords is the fact that they are not in the root position, giving them a distinctive quality, as in the left hand of *Vision Fugitive* No. 13, *Allegretto* (mm. 1-5). This Bagatelle, much like the other Bagatelles in this set, contains use of the interval of a third (measure 7). Chapter 3 of this document will thoroughly analyze the use of thirds in the *Visions Fugitives*.

The second Bagatelle ends in much the same manner as No. 4 of the *Visions Fugitives*, providing this piece with a conclusion that is common in many of the *Visions Fugitives*: an ending that seems to disappear rather than end conclusively.

The texture of Bagatelle No. 3, *Andante* is much like that of No. 17, *Poetico*, of the *Visions*. Like the *Poetico*, Bartok’s figures in the right hand span the interval of a third (although they are quintuplets unlike the figures in *Poetico*), and are heard against the left hand’s melody. Furthermore, both pieces contain a similar range of the tritone C and F-sharp/G-flat: measures 11-14 of *Poetico* and the melody of the Bagatelle both begin with F-sharp and ends on C.

Bagatelle No. 4, *Grave*, contains Aeolian mode mixed with chromaticism (measure 8). Prokofiev uses this sort of pitch language in No. 3, *Allegretto*.

Bagatelle No. 5, *Vivo*, consists of a driving, motoristic quality that belongs to Prokofiev’s toccata line. This Bagatelle ends on a sustained G: much the same manner as *Vision Fugitive* No. 4.

The mysterious and chromatic melody of Bagatelle No. 6, *Lento*, comprises the harmonic qualities belonging to Prokofiev’s modern line, which can be found in *Vision Fugitive* No. 13, *Allegretto*. This Bagatelle ends in a manner that seems to dissipate.
A notable characteristic in Bagatelle No. 9, *Allegretto grazioso*, is the texture, based on an octave. Prokofiev utilizes this in the B section of No. 11, *Con vivacità*, of the *Visions*.

Bagatelle No. 10 contains many elements similar with the Opus 22 of Prokofiev. The chords in measures 10-14 are based on augmented triads, major sevenths and tritones. Furthermore, these chords descend by the interval of a minor third. The final 4 measures contain thirds descending by the interval of a third. These thirds are each prefaced with a grace note on the seventh, hence outlining seventh chords. The analysis portion of this document will focus on these issues occurring in the Opus 22. The Bagatelle begins with a dissonant minor ninth. *Visions Fugitives* Nos. 2, 6, 10, 12, 13, 15 and 16 each begin with such dissonance. The hand crossings of measures 32-40 are reminiscent of and may have inspired those contained in No. 14, measures 7-12 of the *Visions*. The unusual left hand pattern in the B section of *Vision Fugitive* No. 3 (the oscillation of seconds) may have derived from similar patterns found in measures 52-62 of Bagatelle No. 10. The rolled open fourths of measures 85-98 of the Bagatelle have a harp-like quality similar to the texture of *Vision Fugitive* No. 7. While the Bagatelles share many similar qualities with the piano miniatures of Prokofiev, they retain the voice of Bartok.

A brief examination of the Suite, Opus 14, will compare a later work by Bartok with the Opus 22 of Prokofiev. The last piece in the Suite, Opus 14, *Sostenuto*, closes the set in much the same way as the *Lento* in Prokofiev’s *Visions*: with a motionless and enigmatic conclusion. Similar chromatic movement of major thirds appears in both works: measures 22-25 of the *Sostenuto*, and measures 10-15 of the *Lento*. Many of the
same compositional elements found in the Bagatelles and in Prokofiev’s Opus 22 are also present in the Suite, Opus 14. One significant characteristic of the Suite is the use of the tritone, particularly in Nos. 1 and 3. In No. 1 of the Suite, the harmonies in measures 1-11 alternate between B-flat major and E major, a tritone relation. The driving ostinato in No. 3, Allegro molto, is a diminished fifth scale. The descending augmented figures of No. 2, Scherzo, are strikingly similar to those of measures 1-16 of Vision Fugitive No. 4, Animato. The Animato was written one year later than the Scherzo.

The Etude in Sevenths, Opus 65 No. 2, Allegretto, of Scriabin and No. 1, Lentamente, of the Visions share the same introspective and late-Romantic idiomatic language while incorporating consecutive sevenths in the melodic line. The consecutive sevenths in the Lentamente occur in the accompanimental material. Measures 15-20 and 33-39 of the Etude directs the performer thusly: molto accel. and presto volando. This creates a sudden fleeting motion. Schönberg uses a similar direction, fliessender, in the Drei Klavierstücke, Opus 11 (No. 1, measure 34 and No. 2, measure 16). There is no such instruction found in the score of Prokofiev’s Visions, but chapter 4 of this document will provide an examination of tempo in Prokofiev’s recording of excerpts from the Opus 22, which illustrates his use of this technique in performance. Scriabin’s Etudes may have demonstrated to the young Prokofiev how a composition can conclude unresolved, particularly with sevenths.

Ravel’s Valses Nobles et Sentimentales were completed in 1911, while Prokofiev, who was 20 years old, was studying orchestration with Tcherepnin and completing his Piano Concerto No. 1. The formal plan for most of the Waltzes is ABA. Prokofiev, who composed in traditional forms, employs ABA form in eight of the twenty Visions
Fugitives. When comparing the compositions of Ravel to those of Prokofiev, it becomes clear that both composers were masters of creating melodious thematic material, while retaining their respective modernistic qualities. Waltz No. 1 contains dissonant tone clusters at the outset, which is the manner that begins No. 14 of the Visions. Measures 39-43 of the Waltz contain movement in the bass by a tritone. This is followed by an alternating motion to distant tonal centers in measures 45-48, by way of a major second relationship. Such shifting of tonal centers can be found throughout No. 7 of the Visions. A chromatic ascending chord progression occurs in measures 48-60. Vision Fugitive No. 15 also contains chromatic ascending chords.

Waltz No. 2 begins on a major 7th chord and continues with a sequence built on augmented triads, creating a sense of mystery for this Waltz. Chapter 3 of this document will analyze similar elements in the Op. 22. The theme of the Waltz is based on Dorian mode (in chapter 3 of this document I will shed light on the use of Dorian mode in No. 3 of the Visions). The chromatic movement of the chords in 2nd inversion (measures 25-29) is reminiscent of similar delicate patterns in No. 18 (measures 21-23 and 30-31) of the Visions.

Waltz No. 3 also contains use of mode: Aeolian (in the primary thematic material). There is a long sequence in the right hand based entirely on seventh chords in measures 33-48.

The chromatic, contrapuntal texture in the right hand of Waltz No. 5 is similar to that of No. 18 of the Visions. Prokofiev, as a pianist-composer, would have gained from Ravel the rich texture and smooth interplay between the hands that is so characteristic of the Romantic pianist-composers from a previous generation. It is significant to note that
the final Waltz, like the final piece in the *Visions Fugitives*, is languorous and has a mystical quality. However, the final Waltz serves as an epilogue to the suite. Prokofiev must have been influenced by this manner of ending a suite with a sort of hazy tone, in which the damper pedal plays a major role in sustaining tones for a prolonged period of time.

I will now focus on the earlier piano miniatures of Prokofiev, contrasting them with the *Visions Fugitives*. The *Sarcasms*, Op. 17, is a set of five pieces composed immediately before the *Visions Fugitives*. By contrast, the *Sarcasms* contain more rich, Romantic-inspired piano textures (especially in No. 1), and much more liberal rhythmic structures. A pianist must come to terms with the difficult and whimsical rhythms in No. 2 while learning this piece. The *Sarcasms* also contain more aggressive toccata line features (in all pieces, but especially Nos. 3 and 5). No. 3 contains two different key signatures: three sharps in the right hand (upper staff) and five flats in the left hand (lower staff). The *Visions* contain no such treatment of key structure.

The Ten Pieces of Opus 12, written while Prokofiev was between the ages of 15 – 22, display a wide variety of characteristics. There is a strong influence of traditional forms and rhythm (especially in the dance movements), and elements that comprise the grotesque line (especially in Nos. 1 and 2). In the third piece, *Rigaudon*, the listener hears hints of modernistic harmonic language, but always in the tonal framework of traditional harmonic function. In the fourth piece, *Mazurka*, tradition gives way to parallel consecutive fourths lasting throughout the entire piece, in both hands. No. 5 introduces a mystical element in the chromatic contrapuntal line (measures 5-8 and 18-21). Chapter 3 of this document will also focus on this characteristic in the *Visions*. Prokofiev introduces
parallel fifths to the set with No. 6, *Legend*; Scriabin’s Etude in Fifths, Opus 65, No. 3, was written around the same time (1911-12). The *Harp* Prelude (No. 7) has obvious ties with No. 7 of *Visions*, however there is a more Romantic and virtuosic piano texture in the *Harp* of Opus 12. Prokofiev also included plenty of glissandi, which is not found in the *Harp* of Opus 22. The *Humorous scherzo* (No. 9) imitates another instrument: the bassoon. Prokofiev has written a piano piece that would also work for four bassoons because it has been written in four strict parts. The high level of pianistic virtuosity required in the Opus 12 (particularly in Nos. 2 and 10) is unmatched in comparison to the *Visions Fugitives*.

The Four Pieces, Opus 4, contain a diverse mix of styles. Prokofiev’s earlier opuses for piano sometimes show a strong penchant for the Romantic style. The first piece of the group, *Reminiscences*, could almost have been composed by Rachmaninoff. The remaining pieces from the suite are entirely modernistic and embrace the true voice of Prokofiev. *Diabolical suggestion*, is the most famous from this set, and can be performed as a stand-alone piece, perhaps as an effective encore. It demonstrates elements comprising the primitive style: short melodic units spanning a small range (introduced in measures 1-5), repetitive dissonant figures, large contrast of dynamics (measure 110) and harsh accentuation. No 15 of the *Visions Fugitives* contains the same features: repetitive motivic units of a minor third, strong contrasts of dynamics and strong accents.

Piano sets as early as Opuses 2 and 3, contain pieces written in untraditional meters such as 5/8 (*Phantom*, Opus 3 No. 4) or 18/16 in one hand and 4/4 in the other hand (Etude No. 2, Opus 2). The Etudes clearly demonstrate the teenaged composer’s
unusual technical and virtuosic mastery of the piano. The Etudes are not merely studies in keyboard mechanics, but are entirely satisfactory on a musical level. The *Visions Fugitives* do not require the same level of physical effort, but Prokofiev had the facility to effectively translate the vision of his mind’s eye to the vehicle on which he was most proficient, the piano.
Chapter 3.

Analysis

My analysis of the *Visions Fugitives* is based on characteristics prevalent in this opus. These characteristics, which cover a wide range of musical elements, serve as a unifying force as well as provide variety within the individual pieces and the work as a whole. The following list is a brief description:

1. Dissipating endings - or, endings that evaporate, or dissolve
2. Sharp dynamic contrast
3. Disjunct melody (melodies that are difficult to sing)
4. Chromatic melody and free counterpoint (often creating mysterious qualities)
5. Homophonic accompanimental figures (as one might find in a Romantic nocturne)
6. The use of the tritone
7. The use of the 3rd
8. The use of the 7th, creating an unstable harmonic function
9. Ternary form - providing contrasting sections
10. Abrupt travel to distant tonal centers (in the pieces that do have some sense of tonality)

Furthermore, using Prokofiev’s five compositional lines as a guide, I will select a relevant compositional line for each of the *Visions Fugitives*. Although each piece in the set contains traits belonging to more than one of the compositional lines, I will most often narrow them down to one. Other aspects included in the analysis are (1) comparison and
contrast between individual pieces, (2) any link that serves to connect adjacent pieces and (3) Prokofiev’s use of symmetrical tonal structures: equal division of the octave into major 3rds (augmented triads and the related whole-tone scale) and minor 3rds (sometimes resulting in the octatonic scale).

The thoughtful, meditative mood of Vision Fugitive No. 1, Lentamente, is created by the insistent pianissimo markings, reflective melody and tempo indication, placing this piece into the lyrical line. The loudest moment occurs at the mezzo-piano in measure 24. The rather disjunct eight-bar melody starting in measure 1 and, again, in measure 14 gives the impression of wandering as it does not lead strongly into a cadence, which is further emphasized by the series of descending 7th chords that utilize the technique of planing.

Example 3.1. Vision Fugitive No. 1, Lentamente, measures 1-4.

The contrasting the 5-bar phrase starting in measures 9 and 22, labeled misterioso, is also based on planing. The Lentamente is tinged with Impressionism, due to the use of planing. In addition, this passage reveals the composer’s penchant for the interval of a 3rd. It is appropriate that the set begins with a piece such as this after Prokofiev’s statement, “a certain ‘softening of temper’ may be noted in the Fugitive Visions.” The second
occurrence of the eight-bar melodic phrase in measure 14 is accompanied by a mysterious descending chromatic scale; perhaps it is a response to the *misterioso* of measure 9.

Example 3.2. *Vision Fugitive No. 1, Lentamente*, measures 14-17.

![Example 3.2. *Vision Fugitive No. 1, Lentamente*, measures 14-17.

The last four measures contain a cadence based on a tritone: the lowest note of the chord on the third beat in measure 24 is a B-flat, which resolves to an E in measure 26. This, along with the descending chromatic line in the right hand of the last four measures, creates ambiguity. The G on the second beat of measure 25 (part of the melodic line that begins on A, beat 3, in the previous measure) is the same pitch that begins on the second beat of *Vision Fugitive No. 2, Andante* (example 3.4).

Example 3.3. *Vision Fugitive No. 1, Lentamente*, measures 22-27.

![Example 3.3. *Vision Fugitive No. 1, Lentamente*, measures 22-27.

The second piece of the set, *Andante*, belongs to the modern trend because of its harmonic and melodic structures that are based on diminished harmony, octatonic scales and dissonant intervals of a 7th. Despite these strikingly modern elements, Prokofiev
placed the melodic material in a traditional homophonic setting, like one might find in a nocturne by Chopin. Not unlike the *Lentamente*, the *Andante* begins at once with a 7th, creating a sense of tonal ambiguity; but the A-flat on beat one in the left hand followed by the G on beat two in the right hand creates a stronger dissonance with the major 7th. The first eight notes of the right hand are based on the octatonic scale: G, A-flat, B-flat, B, D-flat, D, E, F. The melodic line is more disjunct throughout this piece than that of No. 1, *Lentamente*. The left hand accompanimental figure outlines the same octatonic scale with a diminished triad.


There is an interjection labeled *misterioso* in measures 5-6, which is similar to that of No. 1, measures 9-13. Furthermore, both pieces end with the *misterioso* sections. The *Andante* is in ternary form. In the B section, beginning at measure 7, Prokofiev continues to use the major 7th by contrasting the C natural on beat one of measures 7-11 with the C# on beat 2 of the left hand.

Example 3.5. *Vision Fugitive No. 2, Andante*, measures 7-12.
When the A section returns, there is sharp dynamic contrast with a loud, interrupting bell-like figure in the uppermost staff. The end of the piece seems to dissolve into thin air, as the tones fade while the performer depresses the damper pedal. The final four measures are similar to the first measure because the A-flat in the left hand is answered by the G in the right hand, creating a major 7th.


In *Vision Fugitive* No. 3, *Allegretto*, it becomes apparent that the sequence of tempi in Opus 22 is becoming progressively faster. No. 3 has a clear ternary structure in which the A section belongs to the classical line and the B section falls into the modern line. The chords of the right hand in the A section constitute a fauxbourdon texture, which contributes a modal flavor, particularly the Aeolian and Dorian modes. The left hand chromatic passage of the A section is in contrast with the fauxbourdon of the right hand.

Prokofiev further enriches the texture in measure 9 by adding organum to the melody. The A section is made up of traditional four-measure phrases. Because measures 16 and 20 in the contrasting B section are marked 2/4, this causes a change in the phrase structure: a 3 1/2 measure phrase starting in measures 13 and 17. The B section is based on the octatonic scale: C, D-flat, E-flat, E, F-sharp, G, A, B-flat. There are similarities between the A and B sections with the four-note ascending motive in the right hand of measure 13, which is derived from the right hand motive of measure 1. The accompanimental pattern in the B section is an oscillation of note clusters forming a tritone.


In the return of the A section, there is a brief diversion to D-flat (measure 25), a distant tonality. In the analogous section, measure 3, Prokofiev simply moves to the closely
related key center of D. The final cadence in D Dorian confirms the once ambiguous key for this piece. The half-note oscillation on the notes B and C in the penultimate measure reflects the half-step movement that permeates the next piece, especially in the right hand chords of measures 29-48 (example 3-12).


*Vision Fugitive* No. 4, *Animato*, begins with a descending symmetrical sequence that divides the octave into major thirds, creating an augmented structure. Much of the material in this piece stems from a simple half step motion that can be seen within the first four notes (B to C).


The half step motion is further emphasized with both hands in measures 5-8, including a sudden rise and fall of dynamics. The reprise of the opening material is accompanied by a pattern based on an augmented chord, which creates a dissonance with the opening.
material: a major $7^{th}$ on the first beat. Sudden dynamic contrast is achieved with a series of broken major $7^{th}$ chords in the left hand falling by half step, which are marked pianissimo subito.


The final 21 measures in No. 4 further emphasize the rising and falling pattern of half steps with chords in the right hand. The thematic material is accompanied in the left hand by an ostinato in minor thirds, and ends unexpectedly on a tied G, perhaps offering a clue to the questionable tonality of the following piece, *Molto giocoso*. Because of the lack of clear tonality and multiple augmented triads and major 7ths, this piece belongs to the modern line.


*Vision Fugitive* No. 5 contains rising and falling half steps on a macro level, involving a “battle” of two distant tonalities: G and G-flat (or enharmonic F#). From the beginning, every other measure concludes with one of these tonalities.

The key of G major appears to win the “battle” in measures 8-11, until a final polytonal bout, marked *brioso*, that lasts until the penultimate measure. The piece ends emphatically on a G major chord. Because of the “scherzo-ish” quality and humorous treatment of opposing tonalities, No. 5 belongs to the grotesque line. The first complete measure begins with a 7th chord, as in numbers 1, 2 and 3 (if the major 2nd in the left hand is inverted). The disjunct melodic element is utilized in this piece to create a humorous effect rather than reflective as in No. 1. The ascending 3rd (C to E) at the start of *Vision Fugitive* No. 6 is a response to the descending 3rd (E to C) in the final measure of No. 5.


Number 6, *Con eleganza*, begins with a 3rd, which is followed by a quick reply in the left hand. The chromatic thematic material has an enigmatic aura that can be found in
the chromatic passages of *Visions Fugitives* nos. 1 and 3. It also contains a similar disjunct quality that can be found in Nos. 2 and 5.


The tonality of A minor is implied in this piece, and it displays qualities of the grotesque line because of the timely inclusion of “wrong notes” in the tonal setting. One such instance occurs in the accompanimental pattern of measures 9-16, with the appearance of E-flat and A-flat. This juxtaposition of distant tonalities, related by a half step, is not dissimilar to that of the harmonic struggle in the previous piece. In measure 16 there is a cadence in the distant tonality of A-flat. The piece ends with a clear V-I cadence in A minor, which is also the tonality of the next piece.

Example 3.16. *Vision Fugitive* No. 6, *Con eleganza*, measures 9-16

*Vision Fugitive* No. 7, *Harp*, entitled, *Pittoresco*, or “picturesque”, contains qualities belonging to the lyrical line. The nocturne-style accompanimental figure, which
serves as an introduction in the first 2 measures, provides a homophonic backdrop for this scenic work. The “harp” indication is achieved through the use of the damper pedal with the left hand’s open fifths, as well as the right hand’s arpeggiated stacking of thirds in the high register.


The piece moves to several distant tonal centers before finally ending on A. Each of the tonal centers creates rich harmonic color using quartal harmony. There is an appearance in measures 21-24 of the juxtaposing G and F# triads of *Vision Fugitive* No. 5. The penultimate measure contains a brief excursion to a distant tonal area when the left hand contains A-flat and E-flat. This measure, the only one marked *forte*, provides a stark contrast to the otherwise bucolic atmosphere. The figure on beats 3 and 4 of the right hand in the final measure forecasts the similar ascending gesture on A in the first measure of No. 8. The end evaporates into thin air.
A modern/lyric hybrid best summarizes *Vision Fugitive* No. 8, *Commodo*. Harmonic and formal structures are based on 3rd relationships. A nocturne-style accompaniment provides a homophonic texture throughout the piece. Starting in measure 6 there is a sequence of descending 3rds, which together span a 7th: G down to A. When the original thematic material returns in measure 11, it is accompanied in the right hand by a sequence of 3rds. This return of the thematic material is centered on C, which is related to the original statement by a 3rd.


Like No. 7, this piece also dissipates into thin air. Nos. 8 and 9 share the same key signature and a similar accompanimental pattern.

At the start of *Vision Fugitive* No. 9, *Allegretto tranquillo*, Prokofiev writes a statement in 10ths (3rds plus an octave). The 16th note figures starting in measure 2 are accompanied in the left hand by a pattern spanning a major 7th: D – C#. Although the piece has four sharps, its tonal center is A, resulting in Lydian mode.


Qualities of the modern line exist in the harmonic structure. Beginning in measure 5 there is a sequence in the right hand based on an E major scale, while the left hand contains a pattern based on quartal harmonies, with G# as a pedal point. This pedal point continues in measure 8 under a broken C# minor accompanimental figure, while the right hand contains a descending sequence following the circle fifths: E, B, F#, C#. The noodling figure that centers on F# in the right hand of measure 10 creates harmony based on the 7th with the G# pedal point. The frequently occurring A# in the right hand of measures 10-13 becomes a pedal point in the left hand of measure 14. The new pedal point creates more harmony based on the 7th with the right hand’s G# augmented broken chord figure. A-Lydian is established with the key signature combined with a statement that belongs to that key (measure 1). Modulation to distant tonal centers continues in measure 5 and the
tonic doesn’t reappear until the final cadence in measures 29-30. Prokofiev writes a clever reply to the opening statement following a polytonal scale (A and D-flat) in measures 26-27. The D-flat scale is a preparation for the tonality of No. 10.


The humor implied by the heading, *Ridicolosamente*, clearly places No. 10 in the grotesque line. The “ridiculous” quality comes from the pairing of the incessant accompanimental pattern with the humorous repetition of the slurred two-note motives in the right hand. A vague yet identifiable key center of G-flat is established in the first two measures. As the left hand pattern continues softly on a first inversion G-flat chord, the right hand plays a sharply contrasting F-natural. At this point it becomes unclear whether the piece is in G-flat major or B-flat minor.

As the piece progresses, new motives consisting of augmented harmonies are introduced (measure 11). An unusual cadence based on the tritone occurs in measures 20-21 and at the end in measures 37-38: E dom. 7th to B-flat minor. A stroke of genius by Prokofiev in measures 36-37 results in a halt of the incessant rhythm before concluding with five brief beats on a I-IV-V-I cadence in B-flat minor.


3rds are a prominent factor in the makeup of No. 10. The left hand pattern is almost always in 3rds. Prokofiev also continues the pattern in this particular set of starting the piece with harmonies based on a 7th: the F-natural in measure 3 against the G-flat harmonic backdrop. As in No. 5, the disjunct melodic element creates a humorous effect.

Vision Fugitive No. 11, Con vivacità, shares a characteristic with the preceding piece: an incessant accompanimental pattern marked staccato paired with a short, slurred motive in the right hand. Yet, I am inclined to assign No. 11 to the modern line because the pitch language is without a tonal center, thus containing no humorous wrong-note effect associated with the grotesque line. The left hand pattern consists of a falling and rising half step within an E-minor chord over a D pedal point. Fluctuation of the half step is also present in No. 4 (see above). The repetitive right hand gestures continually accent beats 2 and 4 of the measure. The sequence of adjacent accented notes in the right hand
of the opening measures comprise minor 3rds and major 7ths: A, C, A, F#, G, F#, G, F#, A, etc.


The B section, which is introduced by a sudden percussive strike on C (in both hands), is a calm and lyrical antithesis to the A section. The disjunct and fragmented melodic content of the A section is juxtaposed with the longer phrases and conjunct melodic line found in the B section. There is a definite finality at the end of the piece with a restatement of the accented C in both hands.

After some consideration, I feel *Vision Fugitive* No. 12, *Assai moderato*, ultimately belongs to the grotesque line. One might hear classical implications with the waltz pattern in the bass, however the title “Waltz” does not appear on the score. The two-measure introduction establishes the key of A minor, with an unorthodox use of parallel fifths that enhance qualities of the grotesque line. The opening thematic material, which begins both at a tritone and a major 7th from the root of the left hand pattern, consists of a series of rising and falling half steps. It also utilizes a short, slurred motive reminiscent of nos. 10 and 11. The thematic material consists of four-measure phrases.

The phrase in measures 16-19 contains ascending 3rds that provide a kind of mysterious chromatic counterpoint. After a brief reflective moment in measure 27, introduced by a short segment in 3rds, the piece vanishes with sparkly effervescence. Sudden dynamic contrast is achieved with the use of pianissimo in measures 15 and 28. The G#, D and F played by the left hand in the penultimate measure are the same notes to form the first chord in No. 13. The B and E in the last measure of No. 12 are also heard in inversion at the beginning of No. 13.


The disjunct melody and its accompaniment in *Vision Fugitive* No. 13, *Allegretto*, both belong to the modern line. The A section consists of a five-bar phrase that cadences with a tritone in the right hand. The whimsical A section differs from the mysterious B section, whose thematic content is based on a descending chromatic line.
The pattern in the left hand, which creates a homophonic texture in the B section, alternates on pitches at the tritone: B-flat and E. According to the slurs in the right hand of the B section, there are eight strands that comprise the melodic content, each starting at a tritone higher from the previous one. The strands are organized into four larger equal segments, each beginning on an accented D. The piece ends exactly as it began, creating a true ABA form.

Vision Fugitive No. 14, Feroce, finally adds to the set a piece belonging to the toccata line, containing a driving, motoristic rhythm. The ferocious quality is achieved with a syncopated disjunct melody over a barbaric accompaniment and sharp dynamic contrasts, especially between the A and B sections.

In measures 7-12 there is an ascending and descending sequence built on 3rds accompanying the thematic material, which is shared between both hands. Immediately following this, the right hand contains a pattern of ascending broken 7th chords against a disjunct pattern in the left hand. The more lyrical B section begins on the upbeat to measure 17. The downbeat of measure 17 begins on a major 7th. The descending chromatic melody in measures 19 and 27 serves to bind this section with that of No. 13. There is a restatement in the final two measures of the intense rhythmic figure found in the first measure, thus concluding No. 14 emphatically.

Vision Fugitive No. 15, Inquieto, offers a different interpretation of the toccata line. As in No. 14, the left hand begins the piece with a two-bar unrelenting pulsating pattern. This pattern, heard throughout the piece, is based on a minor 3rd. The right hand enters with an ascending chordal line, outlining a chromatic scale. Here, the C-natural in the right hand is heard against the C# of the left hand, providing a dissonant major 7th from the start. In this context, the chromatic scale conveys a growing intensity rather than mysticism.

Example 3.31. Vision Fugitive No. 15, Inquieto measures 1-3.

Like the previous piece, wild dynamic contrast creates a sense of agitation, especially in measures 7-8. The final six measures contain clever contrapuntal treatment, in three voices, of the accompanimental ostinato. In these measures, each statement of the ostinato pattern progressively occurs in a lower register and twice as slow. Prokofiev managed to compose this section with the result that all voices end on the C# simultaneously. The following E, which is anticipated by the listener, is recovered in the first measure of No. 16.

The thematic material of No. 16, *Dolente*, begins with a descending chromatic line, perhaps a complement to the rising motion of No. 15. The mournful quality is achieved by the long descending phrase occurring in both hands, which repeats itself five times before the end. Therefore, the piece belongs to the introspective lyrical line. A wailing effect results from the forte marking that accompanies the thematic material. The E pedal point sounds on the off beats of the measure, providing a sort of agonizing pulse for the dissonant upper voices.

Example 3.33. *Vision Fugitive* No. 16, *Dolente* measures 1-5.

The contrasting B section, starting in measure 9, is a temporary relief from the grievousness of the A section. The lighthearted two-note slurred motive recalls that of
Visions Fugitives nos. 10, 11 and 12. The accompanimental pattern is built on an unstable tritone. This work ends as it simply thins out, with some help from the damper pedal, until only the E can be heard.

No. 17, Poetico, begins on B-flat, creating a tritone with the final pitch of the previous piece. The pattern that starts the piece spans the interval of a 3rd: B-flat – D-flat. The half step motion between the 3rd fluctuates between C and C-flat. The melodic line in measures 5-9 spans the interval of a 3rd. If the A-flat of measure 5 is inverted, it creates a minor 7th with the B-flat in the right hand. Furthermore, it begins with a falling chromatic line as in No. 16, although the pianissimo marking in No. 17 creates a more enigmatic effect.

Example 3.34. Vision Fugitive No. 17, Poetico measures 1-10.

Tritones are utilized to create a disjunct melody in measures 11-14 and in the cadence of measures 18-19. The descending broken chordal patterns of measures 38-43 utilize an impressionistic planing technique against the static pattern of the right hand, creating a kaleidoscopic effect. Measures 33-34 contain another element that points toward impressionism - the whole tone scale. The piece fades away into nothingness. The
“Poetico” indication at the beginning of the piece suggests that this piece represents the lyrical line.

No. 18, *Con una dolce lentezza*, has an air of sultriness, which is achieved through the swinging rhythm of the left hand pattern in 3/4 coupled with the sinuous quality of the ascending line in the right hand. The rising broken triads of the right hand form a pattern built on a tritone relationship: B minor – F major. The unstable harmonic language is further intensified with the accompanimental pattern based on the 7th. In the first measure of the left hand, the low E is paired with a D minor chord, while in the second measure the low B is paired with the same chord. The low E forms a 7th with the D in the chord, and the low B forms a 7th with the A in the chord. This piece belongs to the lyrical line because of the soft temperament and the words “dolce lentezza” in the tempo indication, which doesn’t seem to correspond with the other lines.

Example 3.35. *Vision Fugitive* No. 18, *Con una dolce lentezza* measures 1-5.

When the main thematic material returns in measure 12, it is accompanied by a somewhat mystical chromatic free counterpoint. This continues in the new section from measures 16-21. As the piece ends on a D minor chord in 2nd inversion in the left hand against the B in the right hand, the result is dissipative, like a cloud of smoke.
As the set of Opus 22 gradually comes to an end on a soft note, No. 19, *Presto agitatissimo e molto accentuato*, creates a scene of twisted metal, broken concrete and shattered glass. There is no introductory material and no melodious content; in the first measure, both hands are involved in an intense series of patterns that seem to have been occurring before the piece began. The left hand contains an ascending chromatic line in 3rds, while the right hand struggles against the 3/4 meter with syncopated accents and a wild looping motion. Sharp dynamic contrast, which is prevalent in No. 19, shocks the listener in measure 8. In measures 5-8, chromatic free counterpoint is pitted against the two-note sigh motive.


The piece ends with a climactic eruption: in measure 32, an intense series of climbing 3rds leads to two tremolos and two powerful blows. This was the last *Vision Fugitive* written and displays a mastery of utilizing a powerful idiosyncratic harmonic language in order to express powerful emotions.
The last piece in the set, *Lento irrealmente*, is the only piece in the entire set with two different time signatures. This is the most opaque of the set. It begins with a low E, an octave higher than the lowest note at the end of No. 19. The melody enters on a C# against the B in the left hand, which, if inverted, creates a 7th. It continues to outline a minor 3rd (an octave higher). The disjunct melody in a homophonic texture suggests a sort of illusory song. In measures 4-5 there is a phrase consisting of two descents of a fifth, related to each other by a tritone: C# – F# and G – C. A juxtaposition of different time signatures is apparent in measures 5-8, as both hands have rhythmic patterns that pertain to their meter.


A motivic sequence based on an octatonic scale is heard in opposition to augmented broken chords in measures 9-13. In measures 10, 12 and 14, Prokofiev composes chromatic counterpoint in 3rds recalling a similar moment in No. 12, measures 16-19. When the melodic content of measures 1-5 returns in measure 17, it is accompanied by a
series of descending chords that are based on quartal harmony. Prokofiev composed this section using a planing technique in the left hand. With the aid of the damper pedal, the pianist is able to suspend the tones in the final measures. With Vision Fugitive No. 20, the entire set fades away.

The appendix at the end of this document provides a chart, which places each piece in their respective categorical lines. The chart also includes the list of 10 characteristics, serving to outline the analysis.
Chapter 4.

Examination of the 1935 Gramophone Recording

Prokofiev lived in Paris from 1923-36. Aside from the 1935 gramophone recording that he made in Paris, Prokofiev recorded on piano rolls for Duo-Art in New York in 1926. He was fascinated by modern technology as he explained in a letter to Myaskovsky:

The Duo-Art is a mechanical piano which, by means of electricity and forced air, sets down all the nuances of performance, and does it quite well! In February I’ll be in New York again to make corrections in the completed tapes. I’ll be able to clean up the pedal and indicate dynamics and voice-leading with greater precision – not to mention fixing wrong notes! In fact, you can fix everything except mistakes in rhythm.

Aside from his own Ten Pieces, Op 12, and Tales of an Old Grandmother, he recorded his arrangement of Rimsky-Korsakov’s Scheherazade (Fantasia on Themes of “Scheherazade”), and short pieces by Glazunov, Myaskovsky and Scriabin on piano rolls. He did not record the Visions Fugitives on piano rolls.

Another letter to Myaskovsky reveals his reservation about his first experience with gramophone recording when he traveled to London to record the Third Piano Concerto with conductor, Piero Coppola, and the London Symphony Orchestra in 1932:

It’s a new emotion, since I have never played for the gramophone before… Just think, there can be no sneezing or messing up!”

When he was recording the Visions Fugitives on the gramophone, he wrote to Myaskovsky:
The recording of gramophone records demands a responsible attitude, since during the four minutes the disc lasts, you can’t hit a single wrong note. As a result, I’ve had to whip all the things I am playing into even better shape than I would for a concert performance.

This recording, released by Naxos on CD, includes the recording of the Third Piano Concerto. It also contains Suggestion Diabolique, Op. 4, No. 4, Gavotte from the “Classical” Symphony, Op. 25, excerpts from Tales of the Old Grandmother, and other piano solos. Of the Visions Fugitives, it contains nos. 3, 5, 6, 9, 10, 11, 16, 17 and 18. The Visions Fugitives were recorded in Paris on February 12 and 25, 1935, in the Pathé Studios and the Salle Rameau. One might wonder if Prokofiev didn’t purposefully select his most Impressionistic pieces from the Opus 22 since he was to record in Paris. The CD contains all of Prokofiev’s known commercial recordings.

Prokofiev gave many recitals in Europe and America between the time he left Russia in 1918 and his return to the Soviet Union in 1936. Prokofiev’s playing was described by Yakov Milstein, professor at the Moscow Conservatory, as he listened to a performance of the Third Concerto in 1927:

Prokofiev’s playing…was remarkably original, integral and clear. Many of us had expected a tempestuous, daring, superficially striking Prokofiev. But instead we heard a pianist who played austerely, laconically and very simply. The rhythm was clear-cut, the sound resilient and full, the phrasing clear and brilliantly molded, the accents sharp and rapidly alternating. Yet there was no harshness or unnecessary noise in the playing. We were listening to a pianist who played not only with remarkable forcefulness and rhythmical fervour, but also with warmth, sincerity, poetic softness, the ability to handle the melodic line fluently and smoothly.”

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24 Sovietskaya Muzyka No. 8, 1962.
Prokofiev’s premier of the Second Piano Concerto in the Russian town, Pavlovsk, received a review that is characteristic of the bewildered audiences at the time:

On the platform appears a youth with the face of a Peterschule student. It is Sergey Prokofiev. He seats himself at the piano and begins to strike the keyboard with a sharp, dry touch. He seems to be either dusting or testing the keys. The audience is bewildered. Some are indignant. One couple stands up and runs toward the exit. ‘Such music is enough to drive you crazy!’ “What is he doing, making fun of us?’ More listeners follow the first couple from various parts of the hall. Prokofiev plays the second movement of his Concerto. Again the rhythmical collection of sounds. The most daring members of the audience hiss. Here and there seats become empty. Finally the young artist ends his Concerto with a mercilessly discordant combination of brasses. The audience is scandalized. The majority hiss. Prokofiev bows defiantly and plays an encore. The audience rushes away. On all sides there are exclamations: ‘To the devil with all this futuristic music! We came here to enjoy ourselves. The cats at home can make music like this.”

Russian-American composer/song-writer Vernon Duke recalls hearing Prokofiev play the First Piano Concerto in 1914 (Vernon was barely ten years old) and paints a vivid, more positive, description of Prokofiev the pianist:

…a tall young man of extraordinary appearance. He had white-blond hair, a small head with a large mouth and very thick lips…(Prokofiev was then nicknamed the ‘White Negro’) and very long, awkwardly dangling arms, terminating in a bruiser’s powerful hands. Prokofiev wore dazzlingly elegant tails, a beautifully cut waistcoat and flashing black pumps. The strangely gauche manner in which he traversed the stage was no indication of what was to follow; after sitting down and adjusting the piano stool with an abrupt jerk, Prokofiev let go with an unrelenting muscular exhibition of a completely novel kind of piano playing. The prevailing fashion in those days was the languorous hothouse manner of a Scriabin or the shimmering post-Debussy impressionistic tinklings of a harp and celesta. This young man’s music and his performances of it reminded me of the onrushing forwards in my one unfortunate soccer experience – nothing but unrelenting energy and athletic joy of living. No wonder the first four notes of the concerto, oft-repeated, were later nicknamed ‘po cherepoo’ (‘hit on the head’), which was Prokofiev’s exact intention…

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There was frenetic applause, and no less than six flower horseshoes, were handed to Prokofiev, who was now greeted with astonished laughter. He bowed clumsily, dropping his head almost to his knees, and recovering with a yank.26

Prokofiev recorded only excerpts from the *Visions Fugitives*, which proves that the Opus 22 does not require performance in its entirety. Furthermore, they are not presented in published order, although there is no existing commentary serving to explain any deliberation by the composer in that regard. The selections are played in the following order: No. 9 *Allegro tranquillo*, No. 3 *Allegretto*, No. 17 *Poetico*, No. 18 *Con una dolce lentezza*, No. 11 *Con vivacità*, No. 10 *Ridicolosamente*, No. 16 *Dolente*, No. 6 *Con eleganza*, No. 5 *Molto giocosa*.

I will use the Kalmus edition, an unedited version, for my analysis of Prokofiev’s interpretation of the Opus 22. I will compare and contrast the score with the composer’s performance. It is interesting to note that Prokofiev did not add any suggestions for pedaling, with the exception of No. 7 (*Harp*), in which the pedal serves to heighten the harp effect. It is expected that the performer will use the pedal judiciously according to personal taste. In other instances, such as in No. 16, measures 19-31, it was not necessary to add a pedal marking since the three-staff texture implies that the pedal should be used to sustain the pedal point (the C and G in the bass). For this analysis, it is understood that each allusion to “pedal” will refer to the damper pedal.

In No 3, *Allegretto*, Prokofiev uses the pedal to achieve the highest degree of legato in the chords of the right hand as well as the melodic material of the left. This function of the pedal remains incredibly lucid throughout the A section (measures 1-12).

Prokofiev does not use pedal in the B section (measures 12-22) in order to create contrast with the A section due to the staccato figures in the melodic material of the right hand. However, the accompanimental figures in the left hand of the B section remain exceptionally smooth without the aid of the pedal. The melody in this performance remains very clear to the listener amid the thick chords of the right hand. In measure 5, Prokofiev carefully places a slight pause before the melody re-enters, so it is clear on which beat it occurs (between the first and second beats). This melody is heard four times throughout the piece (in measures 1, 5, 9 and 23), but it only begins between the first and second beats on one occasion (in measure 5). In the B section, Prokofiev characterizes the fleeting sixteenth-note passages with the aid of an accelerando (measures 14-16 and 18-20). This accelerando is not indicated in the score. He places a ritardando in measure 12, which serves as a formal marker at the end of the A section. This use of ritardando seems to be a kind of performance practice in this set, since it is not indicated in the score for this piece, yet is indicated in other pieces.

In No. 5, *Molto giocoso*, Prokofiev seems to have a very active right foot, using only half-pedal and lifting frequently. In the A section (measures 1-7), Prokofiev lifts the pedal in order to highlight the comical gestures occurring in the staccato figures on the last beat of measures 1, 3, 5 and 7. Furthermore, he puts a slight emphatic pause after these staccato figures, creating a strong metrical statement on the downbeat of the following measures. Prokofiev uses pedal throughout the B section (measures 8-19), clearing it on every quarter-note beat. Prokofiev places staccatos on all of the sixteenth-note figures in the B section, but his use of pedal in the recording gives them a bell-like sonority. He chooses two different tempi in this piece, highlighting the binary form. The
A section has a fleeting quality, which is reflected in Prokofiev’s choice of a faster tempo. The slower tempo of the B section enables it to have a more primitive quality.

Prokofiev’s pedaling in No. 6 (Con eleganza) is surprisingly judicious and its function is clear to the listener. There is no use of the pedal until measure 7, where it serves to highlight the contrast, resulting with the first appearance of a quarter note with a tenuto in both hands; the preceding measures are marked by nimble gestures separated by rests. Prokofiev’s use of the pedal in this piece also serves as a structural marker. He uses the pedal at the end of the A section (measures 7-8), at the end of the B section (measures 9-16) and at the end of the piece. He also uses the pedal in measures 10-12, in order to express a slight growing of intensity in conjunction with the accent on the B-natural. No. 6 is the shortest of the set, lasting only 18 seconds in Prokofiev’s performance. He plays very quickly and steadily throughout. In measure 16 of the score, he writes a fermata on the eighth rest, but he hardly plays one in the recording. He doesn’t always observe the dynamic markings of the score, but provides plenty of dynamic contrast nonetheless.

In No. 9 (Allegretto tranquillo), Prokofiev uses the pedal in the early measures (1-6) to create a smooth line. He lifts the pedal on every quarter note so the sixteenth-note line is not blurred. In the first measure, the score indicates a staccato with a tenuto over the quarter notes in the right hand. Prokofiev pedals each one, and, as a result, there is no break between them. He uses the pedal similarly in measures 16-17 and 29-30, creating the same effect as in measure 1, although the latter measures contain no tenuto. Perhaps the tenuto was an indication to play slightly slower. The same figures in the final bars are played very slowly, which seems to result from a spontaneous decision of Prokofiev to place a ritardando at the end of the piece. In measures 8-11, he leaves the pedal down so
the G-sharp pedal point can be heard throughout. In measures 13-15, Prokofiev does not use pedal, making it possible to decrescendo to a pianissimo. He does not use the pedal during the polytonal scale in measures 26-28, in order to maintain the leggiermente indication in the score. Prokofiev applies two different tempi in this piece. A slower tempo is used in such instances as measures 1, 7, 16 or 28-30, when there are no sixteenth-note passages. A quicker tempo is used during the longer sections containing sixteenth-note passages, which gives these passages a fleeting quality. This allows for a compelling freedom and flexibility in the performance. Furthermore, this sudden shift of tempo is not indicated in the score. The polytonal scale in measures 26-27 is played with an accelerando, which makes it sound like it was tossed off in a burst of inspiration, or improvised. I have also noticed that Prokofiev will typically place a very slight break before an accent or important moment, resulting in more emphasis on the accented note (measures 12 or 18-19).

The pedaling of No. 10 (Ridicolosamente) is very sparse. Prokofiev does not use pedal in order to create consistency in the left hand articulation. His use of the pedal in this piece adds to the intensity of an accent: for example, on the downbeat of measures 23 and 25. The first two measures are marked sostenuto. One might think that this applies to the whole piece. However, in the recording, Prokofiev accelerates the tempo after the opening measures. In measures 15-16, when there are new, quicker gestures, he strategically utilizes an accelerando to break the monotony and create comical frenzy. He places slight pauses before the downbeats of measures 17, 18, 25 and 26, creating metrical accent. The sustained D-flat of the right hand in measures 26-27 is heard against the descending contrapuntal line with great clarity, resulting in the intelligible mastery,
however steeped in simplicity, of this unbroken line. His handling of dynamics is extraordinarily clear and precise. In the performance of this piece, he adhered to the markings indicated in the score, but when he did not follow the markings of a score, the dynamic shadings of his performance were exquisite.

The same level of sparsity, in regard to the use of the pedal, can be found in No. 11 (Con vivacitâ). The pedal is used only to highlight accents and the intensity of a crescendo, in measures 7-8 and 15. Prokofiev performs with a very steady pulse and uses an accelerando to express a slight rising of intensity in measure 4. He also uses an accelerando in measure 15, on beats 3 and 4, along with pedal, creating a quivering gesture. In the B section (measures 17-24), he places a tasteful poco ritardando at the end of the four-measure phrase (measure 20).

Prokofiev’s pedaling in No. 16 (Dolente) remains consistent, clearing the pedal on every quarter-note pulse. It may come as a surprise that Prokofiev pedals through the eighth-note rests written in the right hand of the B section (measures 9-18). Although he uses the pedal during the rests allowing the sound to ring, one can still hear the articulation created by the two-note gestures: an accented quarter note slurred to an eighth note followed by a rest. Within the four-bar phrases of measures 1-4, 5-8 and all analogous sections, Prokofiev places an accelerando followed by a ritardando in order to shape the phrase. This is highlighted with so-called “hairpins”: a crescendo followed by a decrescendo. He also begins each four-bar phrase with a tenuto on the E. On occasion, he will linger on a beat (the F-sharp in measures 3 and 7). The melody is made clear to the listener throughout, and Prokofiev seems to greatly enjoy the dissonance occurring with
the right hand’s D-sharp against the F and the E in the left hand on the third beat of measures 1 and 5.

The use of Pedal in No. 17 (Poetico) is executed with the utmost care. If Prokofiev is using the pedal in the opening measures, it is really difficult to hear. In measures 15-47, he uses a flutter pedal technique, and probably avoided fully depressing the pedal. Prokofiev’s tempo is steady throughout this piece, but he applies a very slight accelerando in measures 35-42, in order to highlight the crescendo gesture. He also adds slight hesitations of the pulse on the downbeats in measures 16-17, creating metrical accent. The melody is consistently clear throughout the piece against the wavering backdrop.

His use of pedal in No 18 (Con una dolce lentezza) is slightly heavier than that of No. 17. However, he presents the contrapuntal intertwinstment with utmost lucidity. In measures 8-11, the melodic material can be clearly heard against the descending pattern in the same register. This is especially significant since this must be done in one hand, a testament to Prokofiev’s dexterity. In measures 23-25, there is a merging of the end of a phrase with the beginning of another phrase, and a sort of musical “patch” occurring between the phrases. Prokofiev performs this with great care. In regard to meter, Prokofiev is steady throughout the piece, but uses a slight ritardando at the ends of phrases as they merge with the beginnings of new phrases.

This recording offers evidence that the Visions Fugitives were not necessarily intended to be performed in their entirety, nor in numerical order. In this recording, I was impressed with the level of clarity in regard to: the use of pedal, articulation, expression of dynamics, expression of rhythm and agogic accents, the legato line, the defining of
contrasting sections and the ability to make explicit and distinguish all the contrapuntal lines. Despite all of the great care to these details, the performance lives and breathes with an improvisatory quality and flexibility, particularly through the utilization of rubato and manipulation of rhythm.
Chapter 5.

Summary and Conclusion

The piano served as a vehicle for creative expression throughout the life of Sergei Prokofiev. He was on the leading edge of the modernist movement while retaining traditional harmonic and formal elements in his music. During his childhood, Sergei had a strong penchant for composing, and with his mother’s help, was able to compose many tunes for the piano. In 1902, his teachers included Pomerantsev and R.M. Gliere by recommendation of the composer Taneyev. He studied harmony, composition and orchestration from these men. At this point, the young composer’s creative output exploded.

After Prokofiev’s admission into the St. Petersburg Conservatoire in 1904, he began to study music with even more intensity and developed a strong compositional voice with the help of his great friend and colleague, Myaskovsky. The Evenings of Modern Music proved to be a major factor in the promotion of Prokofiev’s work and in furthering his unique personal voice. There, his compositions were heard by leading critics and composers, and gave Prokofiev an opportunity to introduce new works of other modern composers, such as Schönberg. His involvement within the modernist movement infuriated some of the professors at the Conservatoire. However, the training received from the professors would prove to be beneficial. While at the Conservatoire, Prokofiev discovered the literary work of Konstantin Balmont, which played a role in the
conception of the *Visions Fugitives*. Just before composing his *Visions Fugitives*, Prokofiev detailed in his autobiography five lines along which his work developed: classical, modern, lyrical, toccata and grotesque. His pieces often contain traces of more than one line.

In London, after graduation, his career in composition continued to grow with the meeting of such men as Sergei Diaghilev and Stravinsky. In March of 1918, he began to think about traveling to America. This was due to the fact that he had no significant interest in politics and the revolutions were keeping him from performing his music.

In chapter two, I offered a brief comparison of the *Visions Fugitives* with a representative selection of short forms for piano from other major composers of the early 20th century, which shed light on many striking similarities found between the works. Prokofiev had at his disposal ideas in new compositional techniques provided by the work of Debussy, Ravel, Bartok and other modernist composers. Planing, exotic scales and whole tone structures used by Debussy were fused into Prokofiev’s personal language. Bartok was using compositional techniques such as polytonality, chord clusters, tonal ambiguity, non-traditional chord progressions and chord voicings, modality and primitive repetition before Prokofiev composed his first Opus. There were other similarities between the representative works of Bartok and the *Visions Fugitives*: hand-crossing textures, a mysterious quality of the chromatic line and endings that seem to waft out of existence, to name a few significant points. Prokofiev’s own performance revealed a manner in which tempo would suddenly gain speed and then return to normal tempo. Both the scores of Scriabin and Schönberg include similar indications of this gesture. Prokofiev’s score never contains this specific direction, but he incorporates it
into his recording of the *Visions* nonetheless. Ravel’s compositions provided a supreme example of traditional forms such as ABA, very distinctive melodies and pianistic writing that fits comfortably into the hands.

It is also interesting to note the extreme contrasts that exist between different opuses of Prokofiev. The *Sarcasms*, Op. 17, contain a thicker piano texture and less conservative rhythmic structures in comparison to the *Visions Fugitives*. The earlier sets of Prokofiev (Opp. 2, 3, 4 and 12) contain more virtuosic piano writing in comparison with the Opus 22.

In my analysis of the *Visions Fugitives*, I focused on these characteristics: dissipating endings, sharp dynamic contrast, disjunct melody, chromatic melody and free counterpoint, homophonic texture, use of the tritone, 3rd and 7th (both on a micro and macro level), ternary form and travel to distant tonal centers. I also placed the pieces of the Opus 22 each into a category consisting of one of the five compositional lines (three of the pieces were placed into two of the five lines). My analysis of the *Visions* revealed many things. Although the pieces were not arranged in chronological order, many of them are interconnected (usually with final measures of the preceding piece sharing some element of similarity with the opening measures of the next piece). The chart in the appendix of this document summarizes the analysis of each piece under the heading of one of the five lines, and will also highlight the characteristics that were present in each piece.

One can see, according to the chart, that some pieces fall into more than one line (nos. 3, 8 and 11). The A section of No. 3 falls into the classical line, while the B section falls into the modern line. No. 8 was described in the analysis of chapter 3 as a
modern/lyric hybrid because of lyrical qualities combined with structures that are consistently based on 3rds and 7ths. The B section of No. 11 is comprised of a conjunct and lyrical melodic line, creating a stark contrast with the disjunct and modernistic A section. The chart highlights the fact that some pieces in similar lines are paired: nos. 5 & 6, nos. 14 & 15 and, finally, nos. 16, 17 & 18. The chart also highlights the fact that there is very little in this set belonging to the classical line. Prokofiev favored homophonic texture (there are fifteen pieces that belong to this characteristic). Sharp dynamic contrast was reserved for pieces belonging to the modern, toccata and grotesque lines. There seems to be an even distribution of the ten characteristics throughout the lines (with the exception of the rare classical line). Most of the Visions Fugitives fall into the modern line (nine pieces), while six pieces fall into the lyrical line.

Prokofiev had an interest in the latest technology and was involved in recording piano rolls for Duo-Art in New York in 1926. However, he did not record the Visions Fugitives on piano rolls. It was not until 1935 that he recorded the Visions on the gramophone. He expressed his excitement as well as anxiety in letters to Myaskovsky. One discovers in reviews, a wide range of responses concerning Prokofiev’s works for the piano and his manner of performance on the stage. However, the recordings provide indisputable evidence of Prokofiev’s sensitivity, pianism, interpretive mastery and clarity of expression. The recording also offers evidence that the Visions Fugitives were not necessarily intended to be performed in their entirety, nor in numerical order. An analysis, conducted using an unedited edition, served to compare Prokofiev’s notation with his interpretation of the work as captured on the recording. I was impressed with Prokofiev’s polished performance of the Visions. The judicious use of pedal, articulation,
and agogic accents, the expression of dynamics, the clear definition of contrasting sections and the ability to distinguish all the contrapuntal lines were present in the recording. Yet, despite all of the great pains taken to focus on these details, the performance lives and breathes with an improvisatory effortlessness.

In conclusion, I have provided an account, in chapter 1, of the development of Prokofiev as a composer and pianist throughout his childhood and years at the Conservatoire, highlighting important factors in his musical life. Chapter two provided evidence that the composer learned modernistic compositional elements by poring over the scores of Debussy, Ravel, Bartok and Scriabin. Prokofiev’s own early piano sets show rapid evolution of a unique and powerfully expressive personal language. According to the chart in the appendix of this document, one can conclude that Prokofiev favored characteristics belonging to the modern line. The gramophone recording of 1935 serves as a valuable primary source for the performer of this opus, who must maintain the same high level of refinement whether following the composer’s indications in the score or not. Furthermore, the performer should take note of the clarity of Prokofiev’s pedaling, and should emulate the same standard of proficiency in that respect. Overall, the Visions Fugitives, demonstrate Prokofiev’s ability as a composer and performer to show the world something innovative in the field of music. The listener is intrigued by the logic of the printed score and the charm of the composer’s performance.
Bibliography

Books:


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**Scores Consulted:**


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Recordings Consulted:

Appendix A

Outline of the Analysis in Chapter Three.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Lyrical</th>
<th>Modern</th>
<th>Classical</th>
<th>Toccata</th>
<th>Grotesque</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Dissipating Endings</strong></td>
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<td>Nos. 2, 4, 8, 20</td>
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<td>No. 12</td>
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<td><strong>Sharp Dynamic Contrast</strong></td>
<td>No. 7</td>
<td>Nos. 2, 4, 11, 19</td>
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<td>Nos. 14, 15</td>
<td>No. 12</td>
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<td><strong>Disjunct Melody</strong></td>
<td>Nos. 1, 17</td>
<td>Nos. 2, 11, 13, 19, 20</td>
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<td>Nos. 5, 6, 10</td>
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<td>Nos. 13, 19, 20</td>
<td>No. 3</td>
<td>Nos. 14, 15</td>
<td>Nos. 6, 12</td>
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