TOCCATA CLASSICS

Grigory KREIN

PIANO MUSIC

CORTÈGE MYSTIQUE, OP. 22
DEUX MAZURKAS, OP. 19
CINQ PRÉLUDES, OP. 5A
TROIS POÈMES, OP. 24
DEUX POÈMES, OP. 5B
DEUX POÈMES, OP. 10
SONATA NO. 2, OP. 27
PRÉLUDE, OP. 5
POÈME, OP. 16

Jonathan Powell

INCLUDES FIRST RECORDINGS

GRIGORY KREIN, FORGOTTEN RUSSIAN RADICAL

by Jonathan Powell

Grigory Krein (1879–1955) and his brother Alexander (or Aleksandr; 1883–1951) were among a number of Russian-Jewish composers who, during the first three decades of the twentieth century, not only embraced contemporary Russian and foreign musical trends but also strove – to varying degrees – to create an art that was essentially Jewish. The group also included Joseph Achron, Mikhail Gnesin, Alexander Veprik and others. They were linked by an approach that, broadly speaking, combined Russian-European modernist styles (which contained late-Romantic and Impressionist elements) with Jewish secular and sacred musical motifs.

Grigory's family background almost pre-ordained him for a life in music. His father, Abram Gershevich Krein, was a klezmer violinist, poet and collector of folklore, and all seven of his sons became musicians. Four were violinists, of whom David (1869–1926) was the most illustrious, being leader of the Imperial Orchestra of the Bolshoi Theatre, Professor at the Moscow Conservatoire and one of the founders of the Moscow Trio (after his death in 1926, his son Boris took over). Grigory and Alexander both emerged as outstanding modernist composers in the early years of the twentieth century, the latter continuing to find success during the Soviet era, the former falling into obscurity.[1] Their mother was Chai-Aleksandra, from the Kaluga province, who had married Abram at the age of fourteen.

The decade, the end of which was marked by Grigory's birth, had witnessed a change for the Krein family that had hugely positive consequences: they were able to

[1] Yulian, Grigory's son, was a wunderkind of the 1920s, who aged thirteen went to study with Dukas in Paris: at fifteen his *Symphonic Preludes* were performed by Stokowski and the Philadelphia Orchestra. Cortot and Casals also played his music, as did Neuhaus, Gilels and Oistrakh at home. In later life, in the USSR, he, like his father, was largely overlooked.

move outside the Pale of Settlement[2] to Nizhni-Novgorod because Abram was officially recognised as a piano technician – members of certain professions were then allowed to break from the geographical constraints that had previously prevented free movement of Jews within the Russian empire. Abram had a lasting influence on his son's life. Alexander later recalled:

> by the standards of the time, Abram was well educated. He was conversant with both Jewish and Christian religious teachings, and could speak Estonian, Latvian and German [and, presumably, Russian]. These people were his neighbours to his family, in old Kurlyandiya.[3] He was a great story teller, […] kindhearted but with a fiery temper.[4]

He wrote poetry, which he recited to his children at bedtime. When he died in 1921, he was in his eighties, and still very energetic. Alexander describes him as 'an unusually gifted man who, like J. S. Bach, created several generations of musicians'.[5] Abram and his sons[6] 'played in an ensemble at weddings […] while his solo violin improvisations were accompanied by the cimbalom'.[7] These trips involved carrying 'heavy loads, with gruelling performances through the night, where tired boys had to fall asleep next to other people's fur coats'.[8]

[2] Черта одседлости ('Cherta odsedlosti', usually translated as 'The Pale of Settlement'), an area including most of present-day Ukraine, Belarus, eastern Poland, Moldova, Lithuania, some of western Russia and Latvia, created by Catherine the Great in 1791 in which Jews had to live. Those with university educations and military careers, and members of certain guilds and craftsmen, were exempted.

[3] The Курляндская Губерния (Kurlyandskaya Guberniya) was a historic administrative region (1796–1920) of Russia in present-day Latvia. In 1897 Jews were the third-largest ethnic group after Latvians and Germans.

[4] A. Krein, 'Наброски к автобиографии' ('Sketches for an Autobiography') in Yu. I. De-Klerk (ed.), *Музыкальная династия Крейн и ко. (Всероссийское музейное объединение музыкальной культуры имени М. И. Глинки*, ('The Musical Dynasty of the Kreins and Co.'), All-Russian Museum Association of Musical Cultural named after M. I. Glinka, Moscow, 2014, p. 5.

[5] *Ibid*., p. 5.

[6] The other sons were Efraim (1862–1929), the eldest, who became a military Kapellmeister; Fedor (1869–1933), the third son, was a good flautist and played in provincial opera houses; and two other brothers emigrated to England in the early 1900s – Lazar, a trumpeter, and the violinist Yakov (born 1875, who had studied with Auer in the St Petersburg Conservatoire). Yakov's son Henry (who was born and died in London, 1905–93) became a celebrated accordionist in the UK, performing with leading light-music ensembles.

[7] Yu. Krein, 'Воспоминания об отце' ('Reminiscences of my Father'), in De-Klerk, *op. cit*., p. 7.

[8] *Ibid*.

Outside the home, Grigory received his first formal musical education at the Nizhni-Novgorod Music School of the Russian Musical Association, as a violin student of the founder and director of the institution, Vasily Villoing.[9] Later, his brother Yakov secured a position as violinist in the opera theatre in Tbilisi, and when Grigory was only sixteen, Yakov found him work there, too; Grigory did well, eventually playing first violin. Grigory then joined Alexander and David (living in the latter's apartment) in Moscow in 1900. Alexander had entered the Moscow Conservatoire three years earlier (to study the cello); Grigory also enrolled as a performer, joining the class of Jan Hřímalý, a Czech violinist who was admired by Tchaikovsky.[10] Neither Grigory nor Alexander were considered especially gifted virtuosi, equipped with that particular form of perseverance necessary for resounding success as performers, and so perhaps it should come as little surprise that both brothers should turn their attention to composition, around the year 1900.[11]

When writing about his father's early influences and preferences, Yulian Krein recalled:

> in those years, by far the greatest impression made on both brothers was their initiation into the music of Skryabin, himself still young. Grigory was more than indifferent to German classical music which formed the basis of his education. Since that time he never liked Beethoven. On the other hand, he loved Bach greatly, likewise the Italian Baroque and Renaissance, Chopin and especially Grieg who, for a long time, was his favourite composer.[12]

After graduating in 1905, Grigory gave private violin lessons. One of his students, Anya Sekretareva, was later to become his wife, but not before her adoptive mother –

[9] Vasily Yul´yevich Villoing (or Виллуан – Villuan – in its Russian form, 1850–1922) was an all-round musician, active as pianist, violinist, composer, conductor, educator and organiser. He had studied with Tchaikovsky and Nikolay Rubinstein at the Moscow Conservatoire, before the latter dispatched him to Nizhni-Novgorod to establish the local branch of the Russian Musical Society and school there. His students included Issay Dobrowen, Lyapunov, Vera Isakovich-Skryabin (pianist and first wife of the composer) and Grigory's brother Alexander. Among his 70-plus compositions are three operas and four string quartets.

[10] Hřímalý (1844–1915) taught at the Moscow Conservatoire for some 46 years; his students included Glière, Stolyarsky (the teacher of Oistrakh and Milstein) and Roslavets.

[11] According to Yulian Krein, *loc. cit.*, p. 9.

[12] *Ibid.,* p. 9.

who had considerable faith in Grigory's future as a composer – organised a trip for the three of them to Germany (Leipzig and Berlin) so that Grigory could study composition there. In Berlin, the future couple heard Strauss conduct *Salome* and Saint-Saëns and d'Indy perform their own works. In 1907 they heard Grieg give his final concert. In the same year, Grigory was invited to join Max Reger's composition class in Leipzig. According to Yulian, 'the pieces Grigory showed Reger made an extremely positive impression. After a few lessons, Reger announced "I'll publish these myself"'.[13] Reger apparently suggested adding a couple of more light-hearted pieces, which Grigory didn't want to do and so didn't take advantage of the offer. Even so, it was a German publisher – Zimmermann in Leipzig – which issued several of Krein's early works, in 1911.[14] After falling out with Reger, Grigory took classes with Glière, then living in Leipzig, but Yulian reports that 'Grigory's obstinate nature infuriated even the patient Glière'.[15] During this period abroad Grigory was bowled over by hearing Debussy's *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*, and his own songs (Op. 7) written soon after demonstrate a new stylistic direction. In 1908 they returned to Moscow, and Grigory underwent a 'noticeable revival'[16] after feelings of loneliness in Germany.

It seems likely that both Grigory's and Alexander's music first received professional public performances at the 'Evenings of Contemporary Music', which began in 1909 and were organised by the critic Vladimir Derzhanovsky, his wife the singer Yekaterina Koposova, and the conductor Konstantin Saradzhev. Emboldened by the success of their first concert (devoted to contemporary French music), Derzhanovsky *et al*. organised a second, to take place on 11 March 1909 in the Small Hall of the Moscow Conservatoire. Skryabin, Taneyev and Medtner attended the final rehearsal; Yulian wrote that 'Alexander's compositions were received very favourably, but Grigory's Sonata caused a complete storm'.[17] From around 1910 both brothers began to play a more noticeable role in Moscow

[13] *Ibid.*

[14] Including the *Préludes*, Op. 5a, and *Poèmes*, Op. 5b.

[15] Yu. Krein, *loc. cit.*, p. 11.

[16] *Ibid*.

[17] *Ibid*., p. 12. This sonata must be the one from 1913 for violin and piano.

musical life. Grigory's compositions were supported in Derzhanovsky's periodical *Muzïka*, and supportive reviews and articles appeared about the brothers' works in this and other journals, the writers including Boris Asaf´yev and Nikolai Myaskovsky (appearing under the pseudonyms Igor Glebov and Mizantrop respectively).

Another early milestone was an event which united Alexander and Grigory with three of the rising stars of Russian modernist music: on 2 March 1914 a concert took place in the Small Hall[18] of the Moscow Conservatoire, organised jointly by Derzhanovsky's 'Evenings' and the journal *Maski*, consisting of music by Alexander and Grigory Krein, Yevgeny Gunst, Leonid Sabaneyev and Aleksey Stanchinsky;[19] the 171st issue of the journal *Muzïka* (1 March 1914) published a group photo of the participants, replete with biographical information. The Kreins' mother told her sons that Skryabin came to the concert and bought a programme from her.

On 18 February 1915 another concert in the Conservatoire featured three of the five composers from the event the previous year (minus Stanchinsky, who was now dead, and Sabaneyev, then entering a period of compositional silence). An unnamed critic in the journal *Muzïka* wrote:

> Grigory Krein, who differs from his colleagues of the evening in his much greater depth of thought and artistic boldness, offered a few new romances and a Sonata for violin and piano, performed by David Krein [by then a very well known violinist in Moscow] and the author. It's highly likely that this sonata is the most brilliant and significant piece that Grigory Krein has written to this date.[20]

In 1915 and 1916 Jürgenson, the leading music publisher in Moscow, issued several of Grigory's romances, and the piano pieces *Trois fragments*, Op. 6, the *Deux poèmes*, Op. 10, and *Cortège mystique*, Op. 22.

[18] By usual standards, the name 'Small Hall' is slightly misleading, as the venue accommodates an audience of nearly 500.

[19] Yevgeny Gunst (1877–1950) and Leonid Sabaneyev (1881–1968) were both close to Skryabin in the latter years of his life, and both emigrated to and died in France; Stanchinsky (1888–1914) was a prodigy who produced a handful of remarkable piano compositions notable for their use of complex polyphony, rhythmic originality and modal ingenuity. He suffered from schizophrenia and drowned in a river in the west of Russia.

[20] Quoted in Yu. Krein, *loc. cit.*, p. 13.

Yulian writes that in 1917 his 'father welcomed with joy the fall of the autocracy'[21] but does not elaborate. During that year Grigory wrote incidental music for Cervantes' *Theatre of Miracles*[22] for a Spanish-themed evening, introduced by Skryabin's friend, the poet Konstantin Balmont, who also read a cycle of his poems about Spain, held at the House of Free Art during Easter week. It was in 1918 that Grigory Krein first showed interest in the attempts by composers of Jewish origin to create a type of 'national' art. According to his son, it was in his *Two Vocalises* – the second 'Psalm' in particular – and the *Poème*, Op. 25, for violin and piano, that Jewish elements were overtly incorporated into his music. The first post-revolutionary years were difficult for Grigory, who was compelled for financial reasons to give lessons in choral singing in children's homes. But musical life staggered on through the turbulent times: in 1919 he performed his own piano works in a concert at the Conservatoire, and in 1921 his Sonata for violin and piano was published by Gosizdat, the State Music Publishers (newly founded on the sequestrated Jürgenson). In 1923 he again played some of his piano pieces – both of the sets of mazurkas he had written by then, and the *Cortège mystique* – at a series called 'Composer Exhibitions'.

As the 1920s progressed, opportunities for performance of new music improved, mainly due to the stabilisation of society post-Civil War, the activities of the newly founded Association of Contemporary Music (or ASM in its Russian acronym, founded by Myaskovsky and others, which was modernist but in the broadest sense), and the pre-existing Society of Jewish Music (founded by Yury Engel, and which counted Gnesin, Veprik and the Kreins among its membership). Both groups organised concerts and promoted their work with journals. On 20 January 1926 the Society of Jewish Music presented a portrait concert of music by Grigory Krein, which Yulian describes as 'a major event for him'.[23] For the concert he hurriedly finished his two-movement *Hebrew Rhapsody*[24] for piano, string quartet and clarinet; it was played along with a *Prélude*

[21] *Ibid*., p. 14.
[22] *El retablo de las maravillas* (1615).
[23] *Ibid*., p. 17.
[24] Larry Sitsky, in his *Music of the Repressed Russian Avant Garde* (Greenwood Press, Westport (CT), 1994), p. 229, lists a *Rhapsodie Hebraique* (*recte*: *Hébraïque*), Op. 32, as being written in 1947.

for flute, string quartet and piano, a string quartet (the newly formed Quartet of the Moscow Conservatoire were working hard that evening), the Violin Sonata, some vocal works (all with the composer at the piano) and, finally, the young composer Varvara Gaygerova[25] (still a student at the Conservatoire) played the huge Second Piano Sonata. Myaskovsky, Gnesin and, naturally, Alexander Krein were all at the concert; after the concert a party took place at the composer's home; Yulian remembers lots of 'artistic excitement, and exaggerated praise of my father'.[26] In addition to growing recognition at home, Universal Edition in Vienna published several of his works (jointly with the State Music Publishers) and organised (with the ASM) two chamber concerts of music (including Krein's Violin Sonata) by Soviet composers.

Until 1926 Krein had managed to make some kind of living teaching the violin in Moscow, but at some point during that year he took his son (and perhaps his wife as well) abroad, staying a while in Vienna before moving to Paris on 18 April 1927 (to the rue Vaugirard in the XVième). Yulian studied with Dukas in the École Normale in Paris from 1928 until 1932, and appeared as a pianist in France until 1934. During the time in Paris Grigory composed a Violin Concerto and a *Poème* for violin and orchestra (the latter received its only performance, in Tashkent, in 1942).

This period abroad meant that both father and son avoided participation in the rivalry and controversy between the ASM and proletarian music organisations. When they returned to the USSR in 1934, all these institutions had been replaced by the Composers' Union; Grigory Krein had been mostly forgotten, falling into what Yulian describes as 'honourable obscurity'.[27] From 1939 he worked for the All-Union Concert Tour Organisation and received commissions for chamber works, including a quartet for clarinet and piano trio (1939–40)[28] and a quintet for flute, clarinet and piano trio (1941).

[25] Gaygerova (sometimes Gaigerova, 1903–44) was a composition student of Myaskovsky and Catoire, and a piano student of Neuhaus. Earlier works are typical but outstanding examples of Moscow modernism of the 1920s, whereas later pieces employ folk materials of various south-eastern regions of the USSR.

[26] Yu. Krein, *loc. cit.*, p. 17.

[27] *Ibid.*, p. 18.

[28] Yulian recalls 'listening to the Quartet on the radio with [his uncle] Alexander: we were both astonished that such a brave piece, completely not in the spirit of contemporary trends, should be broadcast' – *ibid.*, pp. 19–20.

According to Yulian, none of his works dating from before 1928 was played in the Soviet Union, with the exception of one concert in 1937 at the Beethoven Hall of the Bolshoi Theatre. Three *Concert Waltzes* for violin and piano date from the later 1930s and were recommended by David Oistrakh (in vain, it seems) for publication. The family was evacuated to Tashkent during the worst years of the Second World War, but Grigory was unable to compose there, due in part to serious malnutrition and vitamin deficiencies. In autumn 1942 his Quintet was performed at the Composers' Union and at the Opera Theatre in Tashkent, in an 'antifascist' programme of works by Jewish composers exiled in Tashkent. In July 1943 the family returned to their flat on 3 Miusskaya Street in Moscow, in a move that Yulian thinks saved his father's life. Grigory started work on a Symphony, completing it in 1946. The following year, Yulian persuaded Levon Atovmyan, the director of Muzfond (the organisation within the Composers' Union responsible for copyright and materials), to have a set of parts prepared. Several sections of the work were played in closed rehearsals, and even a 'closed' performance of the work was mooted; however, all such plans were shelved due to the musical furore of 1948. In 1954, Yulian organised, 'at the cost of a lot of trouble', a 75th-birthday chamber concert for his father at the Central House of Composers. Grigory died the following January in Komarovo, by the sea just outside of St Petersburg.

In addition to the works already mentioned, Krein's output includes the symphonic poem *Saul et David*, Op. 26, *Cortège*, Op. 31, two *Poems* (1928 and 1929) and a *Ballade* (1947) for orchestra; two *Poems* (1922 and 1934), a Concerto (1934) and *Concert Fantasy* (1948) for violin and orchestra; pieces for both violin and cello with piano; and songs (including three sets of *Peintures vocales*) and vocalises. Judging by his concert appearances in his own works, Krein was not only a good violinist but also a pianist capable of handling his often complex solo pieces. His Op. 1 consists of two piano pieces – 'Au crépuscule' and a mazurka – which were published in the same volume as the *Prélude* designated Op. 5.[29] An early sonata (Op. 2), written in 1906, was apparently destroyed; the same fate may well have befallen the *Scherzo fantastique*, Op. 3. Other

[29] Confusingly, Krein then went on to use Op. 5b for two *Poèmes* and Op. 5a for Five Preludes, some of which sound as though they were written later.

piano works not appearing on this recording and not already mentioned include *Trois fragments*, Op. 6 (1906, published by Jürgenson), *Deux pièces*, Op. 17 (of which only the first – 'Vision' – was published), and *Zwei Stimmungsbilder*, Op. 12, *Trois pièces*, Op. 14, *Quatre pièces*, Op. 23, Sonata No. 3, Op. 29, *Mon epitaphe*, Op. 33, and *Trois pièces*, Op. 40, all unpublished.

Krein's harmonic thinking is what most commentators have found most remarkable about his music. When considering the Violin Sonata (1913), Yulian Krein writes that 'the composer used so many spices, so much polytonal layering and deviations, that these lent the music not only an impressionistic but also a decadent hue'.[30] Leonid Sabaneyev wrote in 1925:

> Grigory Krein set out as a pioneer in uncharted realms of harmony, hypnotic with their strange combinations of sounds, and radiant with some eerie joy. It was a world of half-tones,[31] half-shadows, but a world saturated with original emotion. These harmonies were more complex than those of Ravel or Skryabin, but there's no reason to compare them as these artists arrived at these new sonorities independently. Grigory Krein is one of the first melodists of our time. But he really is, I propose, one of the most complex and original harmonic thinkers.[32]

Krein was equally admired by the most committed of modernists, Nikolay Roslavets, who admitted:

> every time I have a look at any new work by Grigory Krein, I unwillingly come to the conclusion that we pay him an unforgivably small amount of attention. In fact, we utterly ignore him. However, Grigory Krein's music, by all rights, demands careful attention. The heroic struggle of the composer in search of his individual style […,] the stubborn will to self-determination, all authoritatively convince us that in G. Krein we have someone of great and original gifts, someone we can be fully sure of in our most serious future.[33]

[30] *Loc. cit.*, p. 12.

[31] Sabaneyev uses the phrase 'мир полутонов, полутеней' – полутон is the standard Russian word for a semitone, but the presence of полутень (nominative case) afterwards gives it an ambiguous character.

[32] 'Gr. Kreyn', in *Вестник работников искусств* ('The Arts Workers' Courier') (Moscow) 1925, No. 7, p. 13.

[33] In a review of the Opp. 15 and 19 mazurkas in the journal К новым берегам ('Towards New Shores'), 1923, No. 1.

If one were to search for the tangible influence of Grieg, apparently so admired by Krein, it is in the *Prélude*, Op. 5 [8], and the two pieces, Op. 1, published alongside it. The *Prélude* has a sarabande-type quality, with a sinuous melody superimposed on slowly pulsating chords. It's perhaps in the stark presentation of the melody, and the unexpected twists in harmonic progressions, that one can detect the influence of Grieg most specifically.

Already at the very opening of the first of the *Cinq préludes*, Op. 5a, *Andante con moto* [3], one is instantly aware of entering another world. Gargantuan by the standards of most preludes, this piece has the ambition of a sonata movement – replete with first and second subjects, stormy development and a restatement of the initial theme in luxuriant textures highly reminiscent of the reprise in the first movement of Skryabin's Second Sonata. The second prelude, *Lento* [4], is brooding, and inhabits the less complex world of the stand-alone *Prélude*, Op. 5. The third prelude, *Allegretto* [5], is dedicated to the notable pianist Yelena Bekman-Shcherbina,[34] and although it starts timidly enough, the music mutates wildly, headlong into a tragic restatement of the opening. Similarly, the opening of the fourth prelude, an *Andante* marked *rêveusement* [6], gives no hint of what follows. The fifth prelude, ♩ = 42 [7], also hints at Grieg's influence, with its wistful melody, initially heard in the tenor, accompanied again by throbbing chords in the right hand. Twice, a recitative passage rising from the bass presages a restatement of the mostly diatonic and modal main material.

The *Deux poèmes*, Op. 5b, present another leap forward in Krein's development. They probably slightly pre-date his studies with Reger, but with their harmonic complexity, textural saturation and tendency towards unusual and rapid modulations, one can see why Krein was drawn to study with him. Although the scores possess a visual similarity to Reger's, the musical material is often un-Regerian; the sweep of colour (marked *meno mosso* at 1:25) in the central section of the first *Poème* [1] sounds French or Russian, whereas the lyrical melos of the second [2] appears quite home-grown.

[34] Bekman-Shcherbina (1881/2–1951) premiered several of Skryabin's works, including the Sonata No. 6, introduced the piano music of Debussy and Ravel to Russian audiences, and performed Alexander Krein's mighty Piano Sonata (he also dedicated the 'Arabesque' and 'Nocturne', Nos. 3 and 4 of his *Esquisses de jeunesse*, Op. 2, to her). She was also a composer of works including *Кролик* ('The Rabbit'), for solo piano. Her children's song В лесу родилась ёлочка ('In the forest, a little fir tree was born') attained the status of a folksong.

The *Deux poèmes*, Op. 10, show that Reger's shadow has been left behind, and in these pieces one encounters Krein's mature harmonic language for the first time. It is worth noting that these pieces were written when Skryabin was writing his later works, and not afterwards, and though there are similarities with Skryabin's late harmonic thinking, the differences outweigh the affinities and show Krein himself to have been an innovator in this respect. Unlike Skryabin's practice, the pitch material of harmony and melody is usually not shared, and the resulting dissonance gives Krein's work a dynamism that some find absent in Skryabin's later pieces. Although the melody of the first *Poème*, *Andante* 9, is mainly constructed from diatonic and even pentatonic fragments, it is underpinned by extravagant harmonies that increase in density and chromaticism as the piece moves towards its climactic point. The first *Poème* also admirably illustrates Sabaneyev's evaluation of Krein, as having 'no particular leaning towards miniature forms of self-expression; even in his minor pieces he preferred the more expansive forms'.[35] The second *Poème*, *Lento* 10, is elegiac in comparison to its explosive predecessor and, for Krein, is unusual with its long stretches of modal diatonic harmony.

The *Poème*, Op. 16 11, fills a more ambitious canvas than Krein's previous essays in this most Skryabinesque of genres. The work is prefaced by a verse of poetry:

> The soul still a prisoner of earthly sorrow,
> But the distant gloom has already uncovered
> Those lands we recognise only in dreams
> Where, to the peal of funereal bells,
> In frozen abysses, dull and mournful
> Only the shadows of the dead wander alone.[36]

[35] In *Modern Russian Composers*, Books for Libraries Press, New York, 1927, p. 189.

[36] Еще душа в плену земной печали,
Но уж раскрылись сумрачныя дали
Тех стран, что узнаем мы лишь во сне,
Где под напевы звонов погребальных,
В застывших безднах, тусклых и печальных
Лишь тени мертвыя скитаются одне

I have not traced the author, only identified by Krein as 'A.K.'.[37] The music, unsurprisingly, is awash with bell sounds – so often evoked by Russian composers in their piano works. The long melody heard at the beginning and end of the piece is contrasted in a middle section in which ever more wild arabesques are subsumed by manic tolling.

Yulian Krein states that in 1915 Grigory was writing piano mazurkas,[38] but the opus number given to the second group – *Deux mazurkas*, Op. 19 – may indicate a later date of composition. Far from their Chopinesque models (and also possessing little in common with Skryabin's numerous mazurkas), Sabaneyev 'correctly discerned [in the Op. 19 set] an as yet unconscious orientalism – one which Krein richly developed in later pieces permeated with Jewish melos'.[39] As before, rich chromatic harmonies contrast the diatonic melodies which they underpin. Although melodic and rhythmic archetypes of the mazurka are present, in both pieces – the first marked *Lento ma non troppo* 12 and the second *Mobile* 13 – Krein undermines them by exaggeration, transformation and repetition.

Five years separate the first from the second and third of the *Trois poèmes*, Op. 24, and one can hear the shift in development that occurred during the intervening years. The first, entitled *Poème dramatique* (1918) 15, occupies territory familiar from the Op. 10 set (especially the diatonic melody superimposed over the chromatic harmonies), but the second – *Poème lyrique* 16 – inhabits a harmonic and expressive world of 'Bergian'[40] richness. The third – *Poème antique* 17 – leaves its companions far behind in terms of scale: it lasts over eight minutes. Sitsky suggests that this piece 'is not, as the title may suggest, an obvious neoclassic exercise at all; the suggestion of ancient music is by most subtle melodic and harmonic means, reminding one at times of Ravel'.[41] The

[37] Of well-known Russian poets active by 1916, only Aleksey Kol´tsov and Aleksey Kruchyonïkh have the initials A. K., but it is unlikely the author was either of them. It's entirely possible, however, that this is the work of Grigory's wife, Anna, who wrote poetry – or, possibly, his brother.

[38] He doesn't specify whether he means the Op. 15 or Op. 19 set, or perhaps both. The two sets were later published by the State Music Publishers, Op. 15 in 1922, Op. 19 in 1926.

[39] Yu. Krein, *loc. cit.*, p. 13; source of Sabaneyev quotation unknown.

[40] Sitsky, *op. cit.*, p. 226.

[41] *Ibid.*

opening theme follows Krein's now-familiar habit of alternating long notes with groups of shorter ones. Until the late 1910s, Grigory appears to have distanced himself from the goal espoused by his brother Alexander and several others of creating a 'national' Jewish school of composition. If he had previously seen his modernist language and Jewish materials as incompatible, he later started to reconcile them – a second theme (appearing at 2:43) shares elements with those used during this period by his brother Alexander, who described them as Jewish.

It is perhaps not too fanciful to imagine that, if the cortège in the title of Krein's Op. 22 – *Cortège mystique* 14 – is of the funereal variety, it could refer to that of Skryabin, who had died a year before the work was composed. Still, much of the work doesn't move at a pace usually associated with burials, and so the broader implications of the French word – meaning also 'procession' – must be considered. The music is more repetitive than much of Krein's writing, invoking a ritualistic atmosphere; the harmonies and textures are half-lit, the whole enwrapped by trills approached by fast arpeggiated figures (so beloved of Skryabin), all propelled by a constant dance-like triple metre (rather than a march-like quadruple one).

Over the two decades starting around 1910, a huge number of piano sonatas were written by Russian and other Soviet composers. Following Skryabin's example, many of these were single-movement affairs, and they are often highly virtuosic, as would befit an era so well endowed with not only pianists but also composer-pianists. Sonatas by Feinberg, Alexandrov, Mosolov, Roslavets, to name but a few, have received recent recordings and forays into the concert hall, over a century after they were written. Of the composers associated with the Jewish national tendency, there are fine examples by Alexander Krein[42] and Alexander Veprik.[43] Of Grigory Krein's three sonatas, only the Second Sonata, Op. 27 (1924) 18, was published,[44] the first having apparently been

[42] Composed in 1922, dedicated to Neuhaus, and performed by him, Goldenweiser and Bekman-Shcherbina, Alexander Krein's Sonata has received recent performances by myself (I recorded it in 1996, on Largo 5136) and Hiroaki Takenouchi, in concert.
[43] His Second Sonata has recently been championed by Yevgeny Kissin.
[44] By the State Music Publishers in 1926, publication 6260, with the print-run a surprisingly large 1,000 (most modernist piano works received a paltry 250).

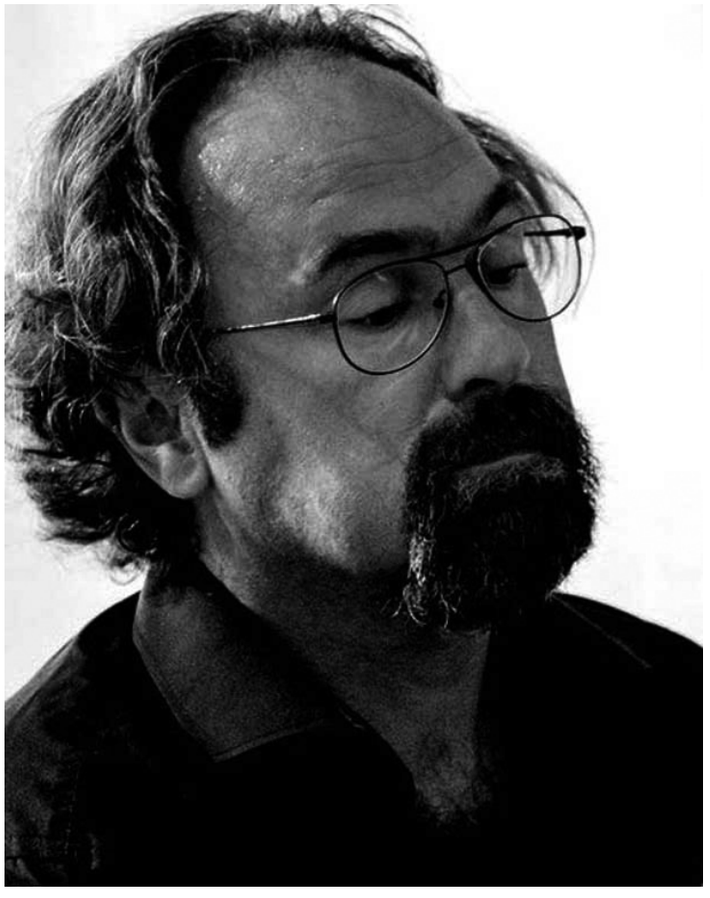
destroyed and the third remaining in manuscript. It is on an epic scale, consisting of a single 23-minute sonata-form movement featuring the usual exposition of two contrasting subjects, development section, recapitulation (in which the two subjects are presented quite differently, with new transitional material), and – following Skryabin's example – an extended coda. The work was described as 'splendid' by Sabaneyev,[45] who offers the following caveat: 'the enormous technical difficulties in which his compositions abound are among the causes which stand in the way of their becoming familiar even among musicians. In general, they are among the most complex and difficult compositions that have ever been written'[46] – and in this assessment he is not exaggerating. Even alongside the most thorny works of Feinberg or Roslavets, this sonata must rank as one of the most challenging works of its era, making the 23-year-old Gaygerova's premiere all the more remarkable. Larry Sitsky writes that the 'opening [of the sonata] establishes immediately that the music is harmonically more daring than that of his brother',[47] and describes the writing as a whole as 'rich and passionate, not unlike Szymanowski's saturated chromatic language'.[48]

The introvert start of the work is soon cast aside in favour of a restless, highly dynamic form of musical prose in which areas of harmonic stability are offset by chromatically complex passages. After a build-up of bell sonorities one encounters a brief but direct quotation (at 2:52) from Medtner's 'Night Wind' Sonata, Op. 25, No. 1, which leads immediately to the second subject. This theme 'contains remnants of Hebraic chant'[49] and is generally less harmonically restless than the preceding material. The development section (beginning at 5:03) consists of a series of ever-increasing waves, with respite offered only at 8:48, whereupon the second subject undergoes various contrapuntal and harmonic transformations. The bell sonorities reappear at 10:32, heralding a second treatment of the first subject, this more stormy than the first. At 11:58 one hears a

[45] *Modern Russian Composers*, p. 189.
[46] *Ibid.*
[47] *Op. cit.*, p. 225.
[48] *Ibid.*, p. 226.
[49] *Ibid.*

glimpse of chordal configuration taken almost directly from Skryabin's Fifth Sonata. After a triumphant contrapuntal statement of a subsidiary theme – across the entire range of the instrument (12:32 *et seq*.) – the heat is again turned up on the first subject, reaching a conclusion of symphonic proportions at 14:21. Among the new material found in the recapitulation, a restatement of the subsidiary theme (16:46) – this time distant and *pianissimo* – and the ominous filigree passage that follows stand out. The coda (starting at 19:32) again consists of a series of waves, building to a moment of savagery (at 20:48, reminiscent of early Ornstein), before subsiding into tragedy (21:28). A final peal of bells (22:39) heralds the stormy, polytonal conclusion.[50]

Jonathan Powell made his London debut at the Purcell Room aged twenty, but devoted much of the following decade to composition (his works were performed by the Arditti Quartet, the London Sinfonietta and Nicolas Hodges) and musicology (his PhD concerns the influence of Skryabin). He then undertook intensive study with Sulamita Aronovsky (previously, in his late teens, he had been guided by Denis Matthews), resulting in a shift in emphasis towards performance. A series of CD recordings and international engagements followed. He is a passionate advocate of music from the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, especially from Russia and eastern Europe, but is also a proponent of contemporary music, having premiered works by Ambrosini, Dufourt, Finnissy and others. His repertoire also includes much standard material (Beethoven, Schubert, Chopin, Schumann). In 2009 he gave the first of his many performances of



[50] Sitsky describes the final build-up of chords thus: 'the triads of F major, D major, and B major sound simultaneously over an E bass, *fff*. His music has not Skryabin's caressing sound; the approach was harsher, more strident' (*ibid*., p. 226).

Skryabin's ten sonatas. During 2013 he toured Messiaen's *Vingt regards sur l'enfant Jésus* and Albéniz' *Iberia*, and 2015 featured numerous performances of Beethoven's 'Hammerklavier' Sonata and Reger's Bach Variations. Recent activities have included a tour of the complete piano works of Xenakis and, in 2017, Liszt's Sonata, Stockhausen's *Klavierstücke* and several performances of Sorabji's *Opus clavicembalisticum*. In 2018 he gave six performances of Shostakovich's 24 Preludes and Fugues.

Solo recitals have taken him to the Festival Radio France Montpellier, the Elbphilharmonie (sold out), the Raritäten der Klaviermusik am Schloss vor Husum, Vredenburg Muziekcentrum in Utrecht, across the USA, to Musica Sacra in Maastricht, the series Fundación BBVA in Bilbao and the Moscow Conservatoire. In recent years, he has broadcast for Radio France, Radio Netherlands, Radio Deutschland Kultur, the BBC and Czech Radio. He is a featured artist at the Jacqueline du Pré Music Building in Oxford, giving three annual concerts, as well as teaching and leading workshops for students. He has also appeared at the 'Indian Summer in Levoča' Festival (Slovakia) every year since its inception in 2007, as recitalist, chamber musician and soloist with orchestra. He has recently given master-classes in Brno, Darmstadt, Denmark, Katowice, London, Oxford and Seattle. In May 2020 he won the Preis der deutschen Schallplattenkritik for his recording of Sorabji's *Sequentia cyclica*, a seven-CD set on Piano Classics.

TOCCATA DISCOVERY CLUB

Join today to discover unknown music from the Renaissance to the present day. Experience our Classical music discoveries from around the world before anyone else!

toccataclassics.com/discovery

Recorded on 17 and 18 September 2018 at the Jacqueline du Pré Music Building, St Hilda's College, Oxford
Engineer and editing: Adaq Khan
Producing and editing: Jonathan Powell
Piano technician: Joseph Taylor
Piano: Steinway D

Acknowledgements
Thanks to David Shields, Veniamin Smotrov and Malcolm Henbury-Ballan (for locating and providing scores), Dinara Klinton for help in providing correct translations for two passages of Yulian Krein's memoirs, to James Loeffler, who provided me with a copy of the catalogue of the exhibition about the Krein family (containing Yulian Krein's memoirs), to Martyn Harry and Joel Baldwin of the Jacqueline du Pré Music Building and, not least, to Irena Powell

Jonathan Powell

Booklet notes: Jonathan Powell
Cover design: David M. Baker (david@notneverknow.com)
Typesetting and lay-out: KerryPress, St Albans

Executive Producer: Martin Anderson

GRIGORY KREIN Piano Music

***Deux poèmes*, Op. 5b**	**6:41**
1 No. 1 *Drammatico*	3:06
2 No. 2 *Andante*	3:35
***Cinq préludes*, Op. 5a**	**13:29**
3 No. 1 *Andante con moto*	3:01
4 No. 2 *Lento*	4:32
5 No. 3 *Allegretto*	2:05
6 No. 4 *Andante*	1:44
7 No. 5 ♩ = 42	2:07
8 ***Prélude*, Op. 5**	**2:01**
***Deux poèmes*, Op. 10** (publ. 1915)	**6:31**
9 No. 1 *Andante*	2:06
10 No. 2 *Lento*	4:25
11 ***Poème*, Op. 16** (1916)	**6:22**
***Deux mazurkas*, Op. 19** (publ. 1926)	**6:02**
12 No. 1 *Lento ma non troppo*	2:35
13 No. 2 *Mobile*	3:27
14 ***Cortège mystique*, Op. 22** (1916)	**6:02**
***Trois poèmes*, Op. 24**	**12:59**
15 No. 1 *Poème dramatique* (1918)	1:52
16 No. 2 *Poème lyrique* (1923)	2:42
17 No. 3 *Poème antique* (1923)	8:25
18 **Sonata No. 2, Op. 27** (1924)*	**23:51**

Jonathan Powell, piano TT **84:01**

ALL EXCEPT * FIRST RECORDINGS