TONICAL AMBIGUITY
IN THREE PIECES BY SERGEI PROKOFIEV

by

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B.Mus., The University of British Columbia, 1992

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

(School of Music)

We accept this thesis as conforming
to the required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

October 1996

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Date **October 11, 1996**.
ABSTRACT

There is much that is traditional in the compositional style of Sergei Prokofiev, invoking the stylistic spirit of the preceding two hundred years. One familiar element is the harmonic vocabulary, as evidenced by the frequent use of simple triadic sonorities, but these seemingly simple sonorities are frequently instilled with a sense of multiple meaning, and help to facilitate a tonal style which differs from the classical norm. In this style, the conditions of monotonality do not necessarily apply; there is often a sense of the coexistence of several “tonical” possibilities. An examination of three pieces shows varying applications of Prokofiev’s ambiguous tonal style. In the Pensée, op. 62 no. 2, tonical ambiguity pervades the entire piece. In the “Promenade,” op. 59 no. 1, an initial suggestion of monotonality leads to a state of multiple tonics. In the last movement of the Sonata for Violin and Piano, op. 80, areas of ambiguous tonal focus are, in a more traditional fashion, subservient to a strong overall tonic. Because Prokofiev does not employ a classical tonal style, traditional methods of analysis only provide a limited basis of understanding. In this thesis, Schoenberg’s concepts of “fluctuating tonality,” Peter Deane Roberts’s ideas about “polymodality,” and Richard Bass’s “chromatic shadows” provide starting points for an examination of this music.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract ii
Table of Contents iii
List of Tables iv
List of Examples v
Chapter One Introduction 1
Chapter Two \textit{Pensée}, op. 62 no. 2 12
Chapter Three "Promenade", op. 59 no. 1 25
Chapter Four Sonata for Violin and Piano, op. 80, Last Movement 47
Chapter Five Conclusions 59
Sources Consulted 67
LIST OF TABLES

Table 4.1  Prokofiev, Sonata for Violin and Piano, op. 80 (fourth movement), stable harmonic areas 48
# LIST OF EXAMPLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Prokofiev, &quot;Promenade,&quot; op. 59 no. 1, mm. 42 - 50</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1 Prokofiev, <em>Pensée</em>, op. 62 no. 2, paradigmatic graph</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 Prokofiev, <em>Pensée</em>, op. 62 no. 2, interpretations of opening tritones</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3 Prokofiev, <em>Pensée</em>, op. 62 no. 2, hypothetical B-minor rendition of mm. 3 - 5</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4 Prokofiev, <em>Pensée</em>, op. 62 no. 2, voice-leading graph of first two sections (to return)</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5 Prokofiev, <em>Pensée</em>, op. 62 no. 2, interpretations of tritones at start of second phrase</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6 Prokofiev, <em>Pensée</em>, op. 62 no. 2, hypothetical C-major rendition of mm. 9 - 12</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Prokofiev, &quot;Promenade,&quot; op. 59 no. 1, paradigmatic graph</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 Prokofiev, &quot;Promenade,&quot; op. 59 no. 1, voice-leading graph of mm. 1 - 31</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3 Prokofiev, &quot;Promenade,&quot; op. 59 no. 1, voice-leading graph of mm. 31 - 42</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4 Prokofiev, &quot;Promenade,&quot; op. 59 no. 1, voice-leading graph of mm. 42 - 68</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5 Prokofiev, &quot;Promenade,&quot; op. 59 no. 1, voice-leading graph of mm. 68 - 84</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6 Prokofiev, &quot;Promenade,&quot; op. 59 no. 1, voice-leading graph of mm. 84 - 99</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.7 Prokofiev, &quot;Promenade,&quot; op. 59 no. 1, key-area relationships</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.8 Prokofiev, &quot;Promenade,&quot; op. 59 no. 1, voice-leading graph of mm. 99 - 119</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.9 Prokofiev, &quot;Promenade,&quot; op. 59 no. 1, relationship of structures at mm. 42, 84, and 99</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.10 Prokofiev, “Promenade,” op. 59 no. 1, voice-leading graph of mm. 119 - end</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1 Prokofiev, Sonata for Violin and Piano, op. 80 (fourth movement), general tonal plan</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2 Prokofiev, Sonata for Violin and Piano, op. 80 (fourth movement), voice-leading graph of mm. 30 - 53</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3 Prokofiev, Sonata for Violin and Piano, op. 80 (fourth movement), voice-leading graph of mm. 84 - 102</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4 Prokofiev, Sonata for Violin and Piano, op. 80 (fourth movement), voice-leading graph of mm. 114 - 159</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5 Prokofiev, Sonata for Violin and Piano, op. 80 (fourth movement), voice-leading graph of mm. 164 - 195</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

When the music of Sergei Prokofiev is discussed, “wrong notes” is a frequently-encountered expression. The idea that there are wrong notes in Prokofiev’s compositions is not meant to suggest, of course, that these are notes that he didn’t mean to include or ought not to have written, but to give a sense that, in his music, there are passages which jar in an otherwise unjarring or familiar context. As well, frequent mention of “wrong notes” has another source: the phrase initiated with a well-known anecdote related by Prokofiev in his autobiography. Discussing one of his early compositions, he wrote:

In November I showed the symphony to Taneev. We played it in four-hand arrangement, Taneev playing the accompaniment. He praised the counterpoint (which Glüer had inserted in the development), but remarked that the harmony was a little too crude. “Mostly I, IV and V,” he said, and laughed. I was deeply offended. Not that I cried or lost any sleep over it, but somewhere the thought that my harmony was crude rankled. The seed had been planted and a long period of germination began. It was not until four years later that my harmonic experiments began to be noticed, and when some eight years later I played Taneev my Etudes op. 2 and he grumbled, “Far too many wrong notes,” I reminded him of what he had said that time. Clutching his head in mock horror he exclaimed, “So it was I who launched you on that slippery path!”

From this anecdote we can gain some sense that the wrong notes, as Prokofiev conceived them, are harmonic in origin. Indeed, he considered the search for his “own harmonic language” as the manifestation of what he termed the “modern trend” in his compositional style. Prokofiev cited this trend as one of the four stylistic lines which can be traced through his music: the classical (apparent as “neoclassic form” or an “imitation of the eighteenth century”); the modern (apparent in the “harmonic language” and arising from the expression of “powerful emotions”); the toccata (“least important”); and the lyrical (corresponding to a “thoughtful and meditative mood” and manifest as “long melody”).

Interestingly, while Prokofiev both admitted a neoclassic tendency and first used the term “wrong notes” himself, he also paired the two concepts in a very critical way, terming Stravinsky’s neoclassicism “Bach on the wrong notes.” 3  
Ironically, this comment about Stravinsky’s style reflects on the presence of the same tensions in Prokofiev’s own style, and perhaps in any style which juxtaposes elements of old and new. Both Stravinsky and Prokofiev employ certain normative approaches to aspects of a composition which bring with them, by virtue of their histories, certain expectations about the control of its pitch materials; when the pitches are not manipulated in the expected way, they can be considered “wrong” against the background of these pre-established norms.

We will attempt an investigation of Prokofiev’s harmonic style—his “wrong” notes—by examining three of his pieces, two of which could be said to originate in the middle of his compositional career, from around the time when he was considering a return to the Soviet Union. One of these, the second of his Pensées, op. 62, he considered “one of the best things [he] had ever written”; both it and “Promenade”, the first of the Three Pieces for Piano, op. 59, were written in 1933. 4  
The third piece we will be looking at, the last movement of the Sonata for Violin and Piano, op. 80, was written between 1938 and 1946, after Soviet policies against “formalism” may have had more effect on his compositional style.

There is much that is familiar in the musical fabric of these three pieces—much that, consistent with the self-described “classical” facet of Prokofiev’s compositional style, invokes the stylistic spirit of the preceding two hundred years. One familiar ingredient is the chordal vocabulary. Not only are triadic harmonies present, but they tend to be plentiful and prominent, though not conventionally deployed. Another familiar component is the musical texture, which often places the melody in the topmost voice, with traditional accompanimental patterns below. Phrase structure is a further familiar element: a classical sensibility for balance and proportion is evident in the clear, often symmetrical arrangement

3 Victor Seroff, Sergei Prokofiev: A Soviet Tragedy (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1968), 126; in a reference to the same anecdote in Prokofiev’s “Autobiography” the translator (probably Christopher Palmer or David Mather) uses the term “pseudo-bachism” (p. 273).
of antecedent and consequent phrasing. Furthermore, a sense of balance and proportion extends to the formal arrangement of melodic/thematic content, which involves much repetition of blocks of material. All three pieces can be codified by standard formal descriptors: the Penseé as ternary, and both the “Promenade” and the Violin Sonata’s last movement as some sort of sonata or rondo form.

While useful, a melodic/thematic view of form can be somewhat limited; applied to the works by Prokofiev, it gives no sense of how they differ from the classical tradition. Such an approach is, of course, also limited when applied to the traditional canon; besides thematic arrangement, a classical or quasi-classical understanding of form must take into account the tonal structure of the musical language, for the two are inextricably linked. However, it is the tonal structure which tends to be the unfamiliar element in Prokofiev’s style. In a traditional tonal structure, drawing on the norms established in the preceding two centuries, harmonic language is governed by a tonic, both locally and at the scale of a whole piece. Passages of uncertain tonal focus resolve to a local tonic, and both they and the local tonics are subordinate to the overall tonic. In Prokofiev’s compositions, however, there are passages where the tonic is uncertain, and there is no sense of resolution. In fact, the uncertainty may be extended to the level of the whole piece, such that a single, overall tonic is impossible to adduce, or that the best explanation is a multiplicity of foci. In other words, in a traditional system there may be more than one harmonic pole, but they do not exist simultaneously, one pole is primary and the other(s) subordinate, and any conflict is resolved by a return to the primary element. In these pieces by Prokofiev, while there may also be more than one tonal centre, there is not the a priori expectation of a hierarchy amongst them; the conditions of monotonality no longer necessarily apply.5

A specific example helps to illustrate both the familiar elements of Prokofiev’s style, and the less familiar, ambiguous harmonic language. Consider, for instance, mm. 42 - 49 of the “Promenade,” op. 59 no. 1 (example 1.1). Listening to this passage, one might notice that the melody consists of an antecedent made up of two four-measure phrases, followed by a parallel consequent. One might also notice the steady, rhythmic

accompaniment pattern, the simple triadic nature of the left hand, the 2/4 time signature, and
the bass line in which four-measure segments are delineated by periodic returns to the pitch
C. However, one would also be aware that this is not Mozart; indeed, there is something
confusing about this passage, for while many of the devices employed by Prokofiev
suggest a reference to stylistic norms of the preceding two hundred years, the pitches
themselves confound this understanding. One might be tempted by the first measure of this
passage to expect a continuation in C major, and some of the features outlined above would
make one comfortable hearing such a tonicity, but matters are confused by the liberal
sprinkling of notes and triadic shapes that don’t fit—for instance, the F# which suggests a
D-major triad in the right hand of m. 43, or the parallel triads in the left hand, which move
between C major and Eb major. While the four-measure groupings in the bass and the
clear harmonic vocabulary of the first measure suggest the influence of C major, these other
elements seem to represent interference from other key areas. The effect is as if there are
several keys present at once—as if the passage can’t decide what its tonic is; yet, while it is
not possible to confidently identify a single key for this passage, it is surely not atonal.
This is a curious little passage, but all in all, not very uncommon for Prokofiev.

Example 1.1. Prokofiev, “Promenade,” op. 59 no. 1, mm. 42 - 50.
Localised operation of this vague or multivalent tonal language, shown in the example from the “Promenade,” is also common to the Pensée and the Violin Sonata. However, the application of this language applies differently to each at the level of the whole piece. The Pensée, despite showing a classical sensibility in its phrase structure and formal design, exhibits little or no classical organisation in its tonality; the harmonic ambiguity encompasses the whole piece, beginning to end. In the last movement of the Violin Sonata, the opposite situation obtains: there are local passages of ambiguous tonality which give the impression of simultaneous key foci, but the whole movement is ruled by a single, strong tonal focus. The “Promenade” offers a situation somewhere between the other two. It begins in what appears to be a tonic key, but over the course of the piece this tonic dissolves into an ambiguous tonal scheme; by the end, the original tonic is just one element in a multivalent system. These three particular situations will be examined in detail in the following three chapters.

A harmonic language characterised by ambiguous or ambivalent tonal foci is not a new phenomenon, nor one limited to the works of Prokofiev. A number of theorists have tried to describe a sort of tonality where distinctions between key areas are blurred, tonal foci are not established by the traditional harmonic syntax, and the traditional association with a strong overall tonic is loosened. The most significant treatment of this subject matter is perhaps by Arnold Schoenberg; Rudolph Réti also dealt with the issue, and Peter Deane Roberts attempted to examine its Russian manifestations, including the work of Prokofiev.

In the nineteenth chapter of his Theory of Harmony, Schoenberg reserves a short section to discuss what he considers to be two related concepts: fluctuating and suspended tonality. He devotes little explanation to this topic, providing a scant two pages of text with no written-out musical examples, but he does refer to examples from his own work and from that of Wagner. According to his discussion, it seems that Schoenberg considers a tonality to be fluctuating (Roy Carter’s translation is as “not yet decided”) where the tonic of a piece or passage is held in balance between more than one possibility, with neither possible focus superior over the other. Suspended tonality seems to be a situation where

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even though the harmonic language is tonal, no particular tonic or set of tonics can be adduced with certainty, or where a tonic is only implied and not stated outright. Particularly important to suspended or fluctuating tonality are what Schoenberg calls “vagrant harmonies”—diminished, augmented, and added-tone chords—which are able to relate chromatically to many possible key centres, or to yet more such chords.

While Schoenberg’s concepts relate very closely to the tonal phenomena we will be examining in Prokofiev’s work, they are not completely applicable to Prokofiev’s style, for they pertain to a heavily chromatic harmonic language in which this loosening of the control of the tonic is a signpost on the road toward total chromaticism. Using Schoenberg’s ideas as a starting point, a fair amount of discussion about multivalent and ambiguous tonality has arisen, usually within the context of a nineteenth-century German-Romantic repertory. Terms such as “progressive,” “directional,” and “interlocking” tonality have been applied to these phenomena, in discussions of Mahler, Bruckner, Schoenberg, and particularly of Wagner.7 Patrick McCreless suggests that “diatonic tonal space” is no longer controlling “chromatic tonal space” in the standard, post-Wagnerian, Romantic repertoire: “Schoenbergian twelve-tone space,” he maintains, is the “deepest harmonic space through which we process whole operas or post-Wagnerian symphonies.”8 While a chromatically receptive mindset may be necessary to understand the ambiguity of Prokofiev’s tonal designs, much as it would be for those of Wagner or Schoenberg, one senses that, for Prokofiev, twelve-tone space is not the deepest harmonic space; rather, there is a stubborn persistence of a diatonic mode of thinking, apparent at the musical surface in the very un-Schoenbergian abundance of plain triads. Prokofiev’s harmonic language is empowered by nineteenth-century chromaticism, but it would not be valid to say that chromatic space is controlling diatonic space in his music.

Réti discusses “fluctuating harmonies” in Tonality-Atonality-Pantonality, but he may be indebted to Schoenberg for the concept, considering that he was familiar with the

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Harmonielehre. Réti defines them as a “specific atmosphere of oscillating tonical relationships” where “no unequivocal tonality actually reigns”—a definition that is more or less identical to Schoenberg’s. He mentions the concept as a sort of component in, or departure point for, understanding “pantonality,” which he conceives as a higher state that synthesizes atonality and tonality. Unfortunately, his insights into fluctuating harmony tend to get a bit lost in the rather rapid and tangled shift to a discussion of this broader concept.

Peter Deane Roberts’ Modernism in Russian Piano Music considers matters very similar to those identified by Schoenberg, describing situations where multiple tonal centres are held in flux within particular pieces. However, Roberts works in the historical context of Russian folk music, and therefore he uses different terminology—usually either bimodality, polymodality, or multimodality:

Compared with Western experiments in bitonality, there is a large area of pitch experiment in Russian music which may . . . be described as polymodal. It consists most frequently of a dual or triple pitch emphasis within a single flexible scale and owes its origin to the variable modes of folk music. . . .

After attempting to show that this technique has its roots in Russian folk song, he gives examples of a number of short works by Prokofiev and his Russian contemporaries which “maintain a nice balance of emphasis between two or more pitch [centres] over an extended period of time.” However, Roberts’s discussions disappoint on two accounts: firstly, his examples are copious, but few of his discussions of these—and none of those on Prokofiev—are very detailed, going beyond a short paragraph of description. Secondly, even though Schoenberg was discussing related phenomena several decades earlier, Roberts makes very little of any parallels between the Russian and German traditions (other than the general observation that atonality is less significant in Russian music). This is despite pointing out that some contact existed between the avant-gardes in Europe and

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10 Réti, Tonality, 65.
12 Roberts, Modernism, 82.
Russia.

More useful is Roberts's enumeration of techniques used by Russian composers to achieve polymodality. Many of these techniques, which he gleans from his examples, will appear in our discussions of the Pensée, "Promenade," and Violin Sonata in the subsequent chapters. Roberts's list is as follows:

1. Provision of a tonally neutral or tonally weakened background by the use of such devices as double [stacked] 4ths, augmented triads, or other symmetrical formations
2. The straight juxtaposition of two chords
3. The successive statement of two cadences or implied cadences in different modes
4. The use of neighbouring-tone technique to create an ambiguous situation
5. Emphasis on a single tone in the bass in opposition to a tonic stated or implied elsewhere
6. Combination of tonally suggestive harmony in one part with modal or scalar emphasis on another pitch in a different layer
7. Combination of voice-leading emphasis with a pedal [this seems redundant in light of category (5)]
8. Substitution of an unexpected chord in place of an anticipated one to create a new emphasis. The use of the mediant in place of the tonic... is a fairly common procedure...
9. The use of control pitches to effect a balance between two rival pitch centers.13

Lacking from the discussions of Schoenberg, Réti, and Roberts are suggestions of how to approach this ambiguous, fluctuating, or polymodal harmonic language from a detailed, analytic standpoint; and, to be sure, securing such a standpoint presents certain obstacles. Because form and harmony are to some degree at odds in Prokofiev's music, and because there is often no clear controlling tonic, classicism provides only a limited basis for understanding the music. Accordingly, while its form and certain aspects of its harmonic content may seem to invite the use of traditional methods of analysis, such methods would have only limited use. Motivic analysis or Schenkerian analysis are applicable in varying degrees and up to a certain point, but extrapolation beyond that point can result in misleading or superficial conclusions. Many problematic analyses of

13 Roberts, Modernism, 87 - 88. In a note on pp. 149 - 151 Roberts explains "control pitches" as tones which "keep the tonal gravitations of a passage under control," presumably by being added, as nonfunctional, dissonant tones, to an otherwise strongly tonal harmonic vocabulary. Roberts gives the tritone as an example: "together with its associated triad it subverts either the tonic or the dominant according to whether the tritone functions as an x4 or a o5 of the scale."
Prokofiev have resulted from attempts to extend these techniques too far. Conversely, because the music is not atonal, typical methods of analysing twentieth-century music, such as set theory, are also of limited usefulness.

Analyses of both the *Pensée* and the “Promenade,” along with analyses of nearly every other piano piece Prokofiev wrote, appear in Patricia Ashley’s dissertation, “Prokofiev’s Piano Music: Line, Chord, Key.” Unfortunately, Ashley’s descriptions tend toward a limited motivic approach, and amount essentially to catalogues of surface features, resulting in vague generalisations. The *Pensée* she describes as “largely atonal, with sometime leanings toward tonalities on C, G, and E.” The discernment of atonality is erroneous, and she makes no attempt to explain how the leanings toward the tonalities interact with each other, let alone how they can exist in an atonal context. Furthermore, she altogether fails to notice a tonal tendency toward B which is equally as strong as the three she mentions. For the “Promenade,” Ashley catalogues some of the musical detail in the first and third thematic areas. She places the piece in C major, but makes no attempt to describe the secondary tonal areas or to explain the tonally enigmatic coda. As a detailed explanation of the peculiar tonal style of these pieces, Ashley’s work is of little use; her techniques of analysis and description not only tend to be superficial or cursory, but they fail to respond to the uniqueness of the musical style.

The Sonata for Violin and Piano, op. 80 is examined in Rebecca Sue Kaufman’s 1987 dissertation, “Expanded Tonality in the Late Chamber Works of Sergei Prokofiev.” Kaufman views Prokofiev’s music as entirely tonal, but her perception of “the functional relationship between tonic and dominant” as generally providing “the framework for Prokofiev’s style and musical language” may be due to her Schenkerian bias. To be sure, a strong tonic-dominant relationship is at the heart of the last movement of op. 80, but it is not behind every one of Prokofiev’s pieces: for instance, its background influence is

16 Rebecca Sue Kaufman, “Expanded Tonality in the Late Chamber Works of Sergei Prokofiev” (Ph.D. diss, University of Kansas, 1987).
dubious in the "Promenade," and all but absent in the Pensée. On the other hand, Kaufman does admit to the limits of applying a Schenkerian approach to expanded tonality, particularly in regard to the three standard Ursatz patterns and the "limited role of dissonance," but she feels that "the benefits of the approach, particularly in its capacity to show hierarchical tonal functions, outweigh the obvious difficulties." All the same, it seems that her Schenkerian approach is still too orthodox for this music. For instance, in her analysis of the Violin Sonata, she offers a structural background which, while it reflects this movement relatively well, still clings to the idea of a fundamental line, despite the fact that half the notes of the descent cannot be harmonized. Furthermore, her conclusion that "all of the structural backgrounds [of the Violin Sonata, op. 80] are unconventional" offers little other than a confirmation that the tonal design of the piece is not traditional—yet this is one of Prokofiev’s more classically-oriented pieces. Attempts at structural backgrounds for pieces in which multivalent tonality plays a greater role would be particularly problematic. In actual fact, it is Kaufman’s middleground reductions that offer the most insight into the unique flavour of each piece; unfortunately, she reserves the bulk of her commentary for the usual catalogue of surface events and motivic description.

Benjamin Boretz stated, in 1973, that "no explanation of a minimum adequacy reasonably comparable to that which would routinely be demanded of tonal or 12-tone music has yet been offered" for the music of a group of composers in which he included Prokofiev. Richard Bass, after quoting Boretz in his insightful article "Prokofiev’s Technique of Chromatic Displacement," remarks that "commentary thus far has been successful only to the extent to which customary descriptions of keys, themes and motives apply, and has provided only superficial observations concerning the more idiomatic characteristics of [Prokofiev’s] music." By way of response to an idiomatic characteristic of Prokofiev’s music, Bass describes how Prokofiev tends to shift by a

semitone notes or passages within a diatonic structure. He postulates that the shifted sections create a "shadow" in the second key a semitone away, allowing the prolongation of a harmonic structure by semitone-related material at the musical surface.

Despite focusing on the chromatic shift as a specific, idiomatic characteristic of Prokofiev's music, Bass does approach the larger issue of multivalent harmonic design when he suggests that there is "something approaching equivalency" between the two chromatically-related key areas. But a multivalent harmonic language, when it extends to the structural level of a piece, is more than a mere "idiomatic characteristic" of Prokofiev's style; rather, it is akin to the tonal personality of that piece. A sensitivity to this "personality" is a must, if an analysis is to approach the degree of "minimum adequacy reasonably comparable to that which would routinely be demanded" for monotonal music.

While we will use Bass's idea of chromatic shadows in our analysis of the Pensée, it is his modification of the Schenkerian environment to show these shadows that will particularly interest us. Bass's method presents parallel graphs showing the two chromatically-related keys, with each graph "shadowing" the other, in turn, when its key area is not operative on the surface level. We will adopt this parallel-graphing technique to show the multiple tonal possibilities within a multivalent (fluctuating or polymodal) system. In areas where more than one tonic is possible, as many parallel graphs can be deployed as are necessary to show these possibilities. In other words, we will be adapting the Schenkerian idea of stratification to show not just hierarchical levels of musical structure, but also to show simultaneous, discrete, and equal prolongational strata. Where appropriate, we will apply this technique to the three Prokofiev pieces, in order to elucidate the unique harmonic language in terms of the tonal ambiguity described by Schoenberg and Réti, and more recently by Roberts.

Prokofiev considered the second of the three short piano pieces entitled *Pensées* to be one of his best works.\(^1\) It may seem to be something of a strange choice for a personal best; besides being rather short, it displays none of the flashy techniques for which Prokofiev was known, and its language is rather obtuse. Indeed, its introspective nature makes this piece deserving of its title, and perhaps also makes it no wonder that it was not a personal favourite of Israel Nestyev, Prokofiev’s official Soviet biographer.\(^2\) It seems to have left other people cold as well; it is seldom performed, and has met little understanding—"it has even been mistaken for atonal."\(^3\) Just what personal thoughts concerned Prokofiev when he wrote this “musical thought” is beyond speculation, but the harmonic language of this little piece does emerge as a very personal statement: harmonic ambivalence, substitution, and ambiguity run through much of his music to a greater or lesser degree, but they seem particularly concentrated in this piece, where they are free of any encumbrances of large-scale flash and dash. The cleverness of this language well rewards the effort of deciphering it, and for the performer, the multiple interpretations possible for even such simple matters as tonics and cadences make this piece very interesting indeed.

Example 2.1 is a paradigmatic graph of the second *Pensée*, showing the repetition

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\(^3\) See Ashley, “Prokofiev’s Piano Music,” 235 - 237. In reference to the second *Pensée* she says “there is no avoiding the fact of atonality here.”
of musical material and an outline of the phrase structure. From this graph we can see that approximately the first third of the piece is repeated, intact, as the last third, while different material makes up the middle portion. The phrase structure indicated in the graph is very clearly evident in the music; the ends of the first two phrases (mm. 5 and 8) are marked by caesuras, as are the ends of the phrases at mm. 20 and 23. The end of the third phrase, which when repeated serves as the end of the piece, is emphasised with a ritardando, a pause in the motion of the music, and an eighth rest of complete silence. The second statement of the first two phrases (mm. 24 - 36) is not exact: the melody is transferred to an inner voice while the right hand provides scalar embellishment. Despite this difference, the three phrases are returned intact and complete. If one accepts melodic phrase structure and repetition as indicators of form, one could describe this piece as a simplethree-part structure (A-B-A').

![Example 2.1. Prokofiev, Pensée, op. 62 no. 2, paradigmatic graph.](image)

Harmonically, however, the Pensée is not so easily described. While its phrases correspond very clearly with the melodic and rhythmic aspects of the music, they present much more ambiguous connections with the harmonic realm. All of the phrases end with what superficially appear to be standard triadic sonorities, but almost all of these triads are subverted by a lack of traditional tonal connection to the surrounding material, or by some form of unstable presentation. The only clear and unequivocal cadence is to B minor in

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4 The paradigmatic graph deals with the piece on a measure-by-measure basis. Correspondence (repetition) of musical material is indicated by vertical alignment of measure numbers. The graph should be read left-to-right and up-to-down.

5 The measure numbering system used here begins with the first incomplete measure counted as measure 1, since when this material returns after the middle section, its two quarter-notes are assigned their own measure of music (m. 24).
m. 20, at a phrase ending which is buried in the middle of the middle section of the piece. The other phrase endings are considerably more vexing. The Bb-minor chord at the end of the first phrase somehow slips out of the preceding material, apparently without any sort of harmonic cadence. The G-major triad in m. 8 does not sound like a G-major harmony at all; some sort of D harmony might sound more at home here, and indeed the G triad is in six-four position. However, even a D sonority would seem to make sense only in a very local way. The “E minor triad” at m. 12 contains only one E, yet it incorporates five Bs, and is approached by a chord which suggests a cadence to B rather than E. The G triad at the end of the middle section is not approached with a clear cadence either, and while it could relate to the note C beginning the next phrase, the placement of the V on a weak beat and the I on an anacrusis would make this an awkward interpretation. In short, with the exception of the B minor at m. 20, none of these apparent triads seems to function even as a local tonic, let alone to represent an overall tonic for the piece. Some of them (m. 8, m. 12) do not even seem to represent their own standard “root” or “fundamental”. As it turns out, this lack of harmonic stability is not really a problem, for such ambiguity is what the “tonality” of this little piece is about. Since a particular harmonic ambivalence is one possible “meaning” for this Pensée, the interpretation of that meaning--effectively, the choice of a tonic--is more an aesthetic matter than with some other music, where the indicators of tonic are clear and reinforce one another.

The first phrase of the piece begins very ambiguously: a tritone (F#, C) is neighboured by a tritone one semitone lower (E#, B). Since the tritones are presented as a parallel melodic pair, and since each tritone is not presented with any other pitches to aid in its interpretation, it is very difficult to get any sense of a tonal grounding from this opening. In the following two measures, however, a sense of B minor begins to emerge, up to the third beat of m. 3. This encourages an interpretation of the opening tritone, together with the C and E in m. 2, as an altered V of B minor, with the (E#, B) tritone as a lower neighbour (example 2.2a). Before this hearing can become too firmly established, things go off track as the music slips somehow down to Bb minor (m. 4). This possibility has

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6 I am using the term “altered” to describe a dominant-function sonority with a raised or lowered fifth, and a raised or lowered ninth. Such a dominant chord, in its lowered-fifth form, is enharmonically equivalent to the same sort of dominant a tritone away.
been built into the opening figure: the E# can be heard as the root of the altered dominant of Bb, incorporating the upper tritone (F#, C) as part of the eight-note dominant scale (or collection) built on F or E# (example 2.2b). Because an altered dominant built on B could also function as the dominant of Bb, the sense of B minor that had been emerging before the chromatic shift down to Bb minor can be heard to prepare this shift. Note that the entire melody in the first four measures (up to the F-natural) consists of the eight-note dominant scale on B, and a portion of it is present vertically at the end of m. 3. However, the interpretation of this chromatic shift as some sort of dominant-tonic function may not be a likely explanation for what seems to be basically a voice-leading (melodic?) phenomenon.

\begin{align*}
\text{a.} \\
\text{V}\quad\text{i}
\end{align*}

\begin{align*}
\text{b.} \\
\text{V}\quad\text{i} \\
\text{8-note dominant of Bb.}
\end{align*}


The impression created at the fourth beat of m. 3 is that the musical texture seems to slip one semitone down in much the same way as one steps from one tread to the next while descending a staircase. This can be quite convincingly demonstrated by rendering the music as it might appear without this chromatic shift, replacing the movement to Bb

\footnote{The eight-note dominant scale refers to the octatonic scale which incorporates the dominant chord with altered ninths. The same scale also incorporates the dominant chord one tritone removed, and thus supports the idea of tritone-equivalency of dominant harmonies. For instance, the eight-note dominant scale of B (and of F) is \<F#, G, A, A#, C, C#, Eb, E\>. The eight-note dominant of Bb is \<F, F#, Ab, A, B, C, D, Eb\>. Strictly speaking, this scale contains the #4 chord-tone rather than the b5; nevertheless, we will be using the term "altered dominant" loosely to refer to a dominant chord based on this scale.}
minor with a movement back to B minor (example 2.3). This alternate rendering involves substituting all the pitches on beat 4 of m. 3 and on the first three beats of m. 4 with pitches one semitone higher. The counterpoint works just as well as in the original, and the music sounds quite convincing. This new version of the music incorporates the otherwise enigmatic E-minor triad on the last beat of m. 4 as a diatonic embellishment of the B-minor sonority, or as leading to an implied B-minor half cadence, in which the V chord is implied by the (Bb, Db) dyad on the second beat of m. 5.

Example 2.3. Prokofiev, *Pensée*, op. 62 no. 2, hypothetical B-minor rendition of mm. 3 - 5

Richard Bass described this sort of chromatic shift in his article “Prokofiev’s Technique of Chromatic Displacement.” He refers to the key implied by the chromatically shifted notes as a “shadow”; in this case, the surface moves to Bb minor, but its shadow remains in B minor. In this sense, the Bb-minor sonority is not what it appears to be; it is standing in for a B-minor sonority, and thus is not really a Bb triad at any but the surface level. Thus two parallel interpretations are possible for this first phrase, depending on how one views the movement to Bb. These possibilities are graphed on a parallel system (derived from Richard Bass’s technique) in example 2.4. The upper graph (example 2.4a) shows a B-minor interpretation, while the lower graph (example 2.4b) represents other tonal hearings, in this case Bb minor. In each case, where chromatic shadows of actual sonorities support a particular interpretation, they are included in the graph as hollow,

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8 Bass, “Prokofiev’s Technique,” 197 - 214.
Example 2.4. Prokofiev, *Pensée*, op. 62 no. 2, voice-leading graph of first two sections (to return).
Example 2.4. Continued.
diamond-shaped noteheads. For instance, the hypothetical version of mm. 3 and 4 shown in example 2.3 appears as diamond-shaped notes in example 2.4a.

The second phrase begins, as did the first, with the ambiguity of unadorned tritones, again presented in parallel, the lower one (A, D#) sandwiched between two statements of the upper one (Bb, E). However, this time we are not hearing the tritones stated without a context; we have the preceding music to colour our interpretation of them even before we hear what follows. In this context, one might be tempted to still hear the F# of the bass from m. 1 (the first and lowest note of the bass thus far, except for the E# which in this case would be a leading-note to the F#), and thereby incorporate the (Bb, E) tritone into an F# seventh chord, as V of B (minor). This interpretation not only places the tritone (Bb, E) in its traditional role as third and seventh, but includes the lower tritone (A, D#) as part of the eight-note dominant scale on F# (example 2.5).

Example 2.5. Prokofiev, Pensée, op. 62 no. 2, interpretations of tritones at start of second phrase.

The music which follows leads to yet another interpretation. The downbeat of m. 7 gives a fairly strong impression of an A-minor sonority with a 9-8 suspension, heightened
by the rising-fourth movement in the bass, E to A. This suggests the (Bb, E) tritone be considered as part of an altered dominant of A, as shown in example 2.5b. This cycle of fifths continues from A in m. 7 to D as represented by the bass of the last chord in m. 8, and the D-minor sonority beginning the next phrase (m. 9). It is perhaps worth noting that the eight-note dominant scale of D (in other words, built on A) incorporates both of the tritones at the beginning of this phrase, making possible their interpretation as altered V of D (example 2.5c). However, the lack of a third or seventh in this inferred chord makes the audibility of this interpretation somewhat questionable. It is also worth noting that the music in mm. 7 - 8 begins to take on a bit of a C-major quality, with the cycle of fifths E - A - D sounding like III - VI - II (see graph, example 2.4b). The bass in mm. 7 - 8 composes out an F-major triad, suggesting F major or C major, but the B-natural at the last half of m. 8 destroys the sense of F major; in fact, the G-major sonority on the last half of m. 8 sounds either like a V chord of C major has arrived while the bass is still on scale degree 2, or like a second-inversion chord with D as its root. Thus this second phrase also ends with a triadic sonority that is not what it appears to be. This second-inversion G triad would be in the same relationship to the implied D chord in m. 8 that the E-minor triad is in with the shadow B-minor chord at the end of the previous phrase (m. 4, beat 4). Actually, the music is still quite close to B minor, even though the only real hint of this at the surface is in the alto's approach to the cadence (from B4 on the first beat of m. 7, through D4 and C#4 to B3 in m. 8). The G-major sonority, if interpreted as such, is just a semitone away from V of B minor, and while hearing it as a shadow of an F# chord is unlikely, it can convincingly be rendered as a VI chord in B minor, as one can observe by playing a V - I cadence directly after m. 8.

Harmonically, the third phrase picks up where the second ended, with a D-minor sonority, sounding like II of C major in a chain of fifths (m. 9). However, the music quickly slips into a harmony (m. 10) recalling the Bb minor of the first phrase, which in turn, through the addition of the pitch E-natural, and the changing of F to F# or Gb, metamorphoses into an altered dominant of B (every pitch in m. 11 belongs to the eight-note dominant scale of B, and the triad is composed out very clearly in the bass, with the seventh sounding in the top voice). In light of this strong dominant, it seems prudent to
evaluate the chord in m. 12 as having B as its root, despite the fact that its content is that of an E-minor triad. There are, after all, five Bs in this chord, as compared to one E. This B-minor interpretation—which reads, in effect, as a sort of “deceptive” cadence—is shown in the upper portion of the graph (example 2.4a).

Example 2.6. Prokofiev, Pensée, op. 62 no. 2, hypothetical C-major rendition of mm. 9 - 12.

Despite the strength of the cadence to B minor and its affinity with the suggestions of B minor in the first phrase, we cannot unequivocally decide B minor is the tonic of the music up to this point. For, just as the chromatic shift from B to Bb in the first phrase allowed us to hear a chromatic shadow of the music still remaining in B, a similar event in this phrase allows the interpretation of a shadow tonality remaining in C major. Once again, the point is illustrated by a rendering of the music as it might have been, without the shift. In example 2.6, beginning with the last two bass notes in m. 9, and continuing with all the pitches thereafter, the music is rendered one half step higher than it actually appears on the surface. In this rewritten musical surface, the voice leading is still convincing, and if a “deceptive” cadence in C minor provides a weaker sense of harmonic arrival, certain C-major tendencies which we will observe in the next phrase can easily fulfill the role. Thus, just as the first phrase slipped from B to Bb yet continued to prolong B, this phrase slips from C to B but continues to suggest C on another level. In fact, the shadows of the V and I scale steps of mm. 11 and 12 very neatly complete the cycle-of-fifths progression that
was initiated in C major, and the subversion of the stack of five Bs representing I of B
minor in m. 12 by the E-minor triadic sonority could be viewed as a subversion of B minor
by elements closer to C major (specifically, G and E). Interestingly, the “E-minor”
sonority is in the same relationship to B at the end of this phrase as it is at the end of the
first phrase, and as G is to D at the end of the second phrase. This “E-minor” sonority also
offers yet another interpretation of the opening tritones, which, at the same time as they
suggest altered V of B flat, also suggest altered V of E as part of the same eight-note
dominant scale. Furthermore, as the Bb sonority becomes V of B minor at the surface of
mm. 10 - 11, it incorporates elements which can be included in an altered dominant of C
(for instance, the pitches Bb, E, and Db). Reference to the graph (example 2.4) shows that
at this stage in the piece, an equilibrium has been established between B minor and a
complex of sonorities representing, but never outrightly stating, C major. This dichotomy
of keys was in fact foreshadowed in the upper line of the opening tritone pair, <C, B, C>.

The fourth phrase begins the middle section of the piece—the portion which does
not receive a second statement. This phrase begins promisingly in C major, lending
support and credence to the interpretation of a C-major shadow in mm. 10 - 12, and
completing the circle of fifths initiated in the previous two phrases (note the movement
from G2 to C2 in the bass, and from G4 to E5 in the treble, coalescing to a C-major triad
on the second quarter of m. 14). In mm. 13 - 14, the bass describes a movement from G
to C and the right hand composes out the C-major triad. C major seems valid as a basis for
the music as far as m. 16, where an altered dominant of C is clearly stated in the first two
beats. But already the stability is being undermined: the introduction of an Eb and an F# in
m. 14, while just chromatic passing tones, begins to undermine the sense of C as the local
tonic. Additionally, the pitches of m. 15 can suggest an F#-seventh chord, particularly the
(F#, E) interval in the last eighth of the left hand; as a result, one could replace the music of
m. 16 with a B-minor triad to fairly good effect, suggesting a possible (but very theoretical)
B-minor shadow of the movement to C major in mm. 13 - 14. In m. 17 a chromatic ascent
begins in the bass, by which G passes to Bb through Ab and A-natural. Bb is then
transferred to the top voice as the leading tone of B minor at measure 19, where its registral
extent links it to the <B, A#, B> leading-tone motive of m. 12 (see graph, example 2.4a).
This movement casts the G-seventh chord in m. 16 (altered dominant of C) in new light as a deceptive resolution of the F# in m. 15, and also perhaps of the F# of m. 11 (see upper graph, example 2.4a). Once again, C major has been subverted by B minor. This cadence at m. 19, involving the registrally extreme leading tone, represents the strongest cadence in the piece: it is clearly a V - I cadence, with both the dominant and the tonic chords explicitly stated, though not in a completely orthodox way. However, as has been pointed out, it is not the end of this section of the piece; there is still another phrase in this middle portion of the Pensée and, as can be expected, it muddies the strong perception of B minor established by this cadence.

At measure 21, the B-minor sonority becomes major, and functions locally as a V of the E-minor sonority in m. 22. This E-minor sonority, in second inversion, recalls the ends of the first and third phrases, and preserves the B in the lowest voice to move it chromatically up to C in m. 23 (as a sort of leading tone). Thus elements of C major once again undermine the perception of B minor. Throughout this passage we are very much in a state of flux; an example of this is how the G# and A# which form the ascending scale to B are reinterpreted from m. 21 to m. 22 as Bb and Ab, part of the eight-note dominant scale leading to G, and expressing altered V of C. In m. 23, as the voices converge on a clear G triad, these same pitches are cast in their double role: supported in thirds by E and F#, they suggest V of B at the same time as they work with the G triad as part of the octatonic collection suggesting a dominant of C.

The G triad of m. 23 is followed by the reprise of the first phrase. At the return of the original material, the movement <C, B, C> is initially not paired with its tritone parallel <F#, E#, F#>; this strengthens the perception of a perfect cadence into C from m. 23 to m. 24. But because of the mixing of elements from the two keys throughout the fifth phrase, the G triad can almost more convincingly be heard as VI in B minor—the replacement of m. 24 by a V - I cadence in B minor would convincingly bring about closure of the piece as a two-part composition. This is, of course, not the case—the original three phrases are restated, extending the ambiguity right until the end, where the third phrase is repeated almost exactly, complete with the cadence to the B tonic disguised as an E-minor triad. In this last bar, the <B, A#, B> leading-tone movement is augmented by an oscillation
between B and C, further emphasising the importance of C as a parallel tonic. While it is clear that the A# is embellishing the B, the overlapping of the Bs and Cs into a minor ninth and a major seventh implies that C embellishes B, but B is also a leading tone to C.

A few other differences between the first and second statements of the first two phrases bear examination. The scalar material added in the right hand of m. 25 (equivalent to m. 2) makes it very clear that B is an important tone by repeating it as the highest note of the figuration; when the music slips to Bb at m. 27, elements of the B minor are preserved in the running notes (for instance, B-natural and E-natural). At mm. 30 and 31, by its emphasis of F-natural the filigree makes it clear that the G chord in m. 32 is part of C major. Curiously, the right hand of m. 30 less clearly expresses A minor than it did in m. 7; the extra inclusion of Bb (m. 30, beat 3) seems to make a stronger drive for D minor/F major, or at least weaken the sense of C major.

The tonal style of this piece is particularly individual. Depending on how one chooses to hear the piece, one could maintain that it was in B minor, C major, or some combination of the two. In the case of a combination, one could come up with varying mixtures, from a view in which two keys balance each other, to a view where C major subverts B minor, but B minor is still superior to C major. In either case, it is interesting that one of the principal keys is only clearly stated in the middle of the piece, while the other is not clearly stated at all, but merely implied. This is established by a clever system of multi-purposed sonorities (such as the tritones which open the first and second phrases) and triads that are not what they appear to be, despite their critical placement at phrase articulations. It is important to note, however, that this piece is not in the least way atonal; the emphasis on the pitches-classes B and C and the fact that all the other material can be related to them in some way establishes them as true tonics for this piece.
CHAPTER 3

“PROMENADE,” OP. 59 NO. 1

Like the *Pensées*, the Three Pieces for Piano, op. 59, were written between 1933 and 1934, in the middle of Prokofiev’s compositional career and on the cusp of his return to Russia. Despite their greater lengths, Prokofiev refers to them as being simpler in character than the *Pensées*.\(^1\) The first of the Three Pieces, entitled “Promenade,” is interesting because it combines elements of the sort of ambiguous tonal design found in the second *Pensée* with elements of a more traditional and stable tonality, such as is more readily associated with “common practice” or classical harmony.

The organisation of the “Promenade” suggests a strong affinity with classical forms. The music is clearly articulated into sections, and some of these sections are repeated, sometimes exactly. Example 3.1 is a paradigmatic analysis of the Promenade, using vertical alignment to show exact repetition and close correspondence between musical materials.\(^2\) A glance through the analysis makes clear the degree to which the repetition of material is integral to the structure of this piece. The first sixteen measures, in a sort of C major, are paralleled by measures 17 - 30. The section from m. 31 through m. 41 presents material different in style (new melody, flowing eighth-note runs, less-rhythmic accompaniment) and in a new key, Db major. At m. 42 the style is similar to that of the first sections, but the harmonic and melodic aspects are new. This material is restated in a reworked form beginning again at m. 50 and m. 60; a fourth idea is interjected at m. 68 (characterised by the dotted rhythmic pattern); and the material from m. 42 is presented in

\(^2\) The paradigmatic analysis charts the piece by measure number; corresponding measures are aligned vertically, with exact repetition shown by a box, and transposition indicated. The chart should be read left-to-right and top-to-bottom.
Example 3.1. Prokofiev, “Promenade,” op. 59 no. 1, paradigmatic graph.
transposed form at m. 84.

The *Tempo inizial* (m. 99) marks a return to the original material in what we might assume to be the home key of C major, but the following section (m. 119) brings back the fourth idea (from m. 68), which is here transposed to Db after having been presented originally on C. The return to the first idea in the “home” key suggests comparison to a classical model, but evidently there is something slightly unconventional at work here: following the return of the first idea at m. 99, a return of the second idea (from m. 31), transposed to the home key from its original Db major, would have been in line with classical practice, and would have done more to strengthen the tonic in the last half of the piece. By bringing back the “wrong” section in the “wrong” key, Prokofiev has chosen to weaken the focus on the tonic when he could have strengthened it.

Tonal focus is further weakened in the coda, which fails to provide convincing closure in the home key. The last three measures, following at least 27 measures of ambiguous counterpoint, contain a mixture of G-major, E-minor, and C-major sonorities. An interesting experiment is to perform the coda without the very last measure, thereby eliminating C from the final sonority; one finds that the ending is still aurally satisfying, whether one infers G or E as the tonic, or whether one hears the C as root. The uncertainty among these three key areas, which gets progressively greater over the course of the piece and culminates in the tonal vagueness of the coda, is part of the piece’s meaning. We will explore this by examining the harmonic structure of the “Promenade,” section by section, to see where and how the focus may be unclear, and where and how it is firmly established.

The first section (mm. 1 - 16) seems quite conventional in its design, being roughly divisible into two phrases and clearly delimited by the exact repetition of its opening measures which follows. The very first measure establishes a 3-2-1 descent in C major, and establishes B-natural as a leading tone. C major is confirmed in a number of ways. The bass composes out a C triad and a fifth-ascent from C2 to G2, just before the return to a unison C at the beginning of the second phrase (m. 8). In the first nine measures the counterpoint is mainly diatonic to C major, with the exceptions (m. 3 and m. 7) interpretable as chromatic decorations of diatonic tones. While there is some more remote
Example 3.2. Continued.
harmony in the second phrase (mm. 8 - 15), both phrases end with sonorities easily heard as dominants in C major. In each case, the major third (C, E) is strongly stated following the dominant, such that the \( \hat{3} \hat{2} \hat{1} \) descent in m. 1 is complemented by a \( \hat{1} \hat{2} \hat{3} \) ascent in m. 8, and again by a descent in m. 16 (the beginning of the repeat). In this way the third (C, E) is emphasised, and seen in a strong context of C major. Example 3.2b shows some of the musical continuities which support C major in the first section.

The second statement of this section (mm. 17 - 30) very closely parallels the first. The same music establishes the key of C major (mm. 16 - 20), although this is followed with new material, in which a strong arrival on G (m. 23) is reached through a movement to a B-minor sonority containing strong traces of D major. This sonority (m. 22) would accordingly seem to be a local dominant of G. The material which follows reinterprets the material of mm. 10 - 15 to lead to a dominant (Ab7) of Db major, the key of the next section (mm. 31 - 41).

Up to this point there is no reason to believe that any key other than C major will be the tonic of the "Promenade." There are some chromatic passages (mm. 10 - 14 and mm. 23 - 29), but these are subject to the overall tonal context, centred on C and moving toward a secondary area on Db. At the same time, a few subtleties are worth noting at this stage (see example 3.2b). The \( \hat{3} \hat{2} \hat{1} \) descent which sets up C major at the beginning is mirrored in the bass of m. 22, this time as a \( \hat{3} \hat{2} \hat{1} \) descent to G. This descent takes place beneath the chord which functions as a local dominant of G, but which spells a B-minor triad, more than one of D major. This dominant of G reflects the structure of the dominant of C in m. 7 (and to a lesser degree the one in mm. 15 - 16), which contains the pitch E as strongly as it contains the pitch D. Thus there is a tendency in these opening sections of the "Promenade" to represent dominant function with the mediant chord (iii as a dominant), which in turn adds special emphasis to the upper pitch of the various \( \hat{3} \hat{2} \hat{1} \) descents as not only the third of the tonic or local tonic triad, but also as a root of its dominant. It is true that this tendency can be eliminated at deeper levels of analysis, but it is a pointedly consistent surface feature which will take on greater significance later in the work.

The section of the "Promenade" beginning at m. 31 invites comparison to the traditional secondary key area of classical form. It is the first new material to appear; it is
set in a contrasting style; and it is in a new key area which exactly corresponds with the
degree of the section as defined by melodic and stylistic criteria, and which often appears as
a tritone-related substitution for the dominant in chromatic functional harmony. The key of
this section is Db major (example 3.3), but the distinction between the major and relative
minor are somewhat blurred; both modes are operative, but Bb minor seems contained
within the major. Except for this slight blurring of the (diatonically-related) key, this
section is harmonically static, remaining firmly in Db throughout. At the end of the section
(m. 42) the music returns to C through what could be an augmented-sixth sonority (Db, F,
Ab, B); however, these final measures contain the pitch Bb4, not the B-natural which
would lead to C at m. 42. Whether this sort of semitone-related harmonic movement (Db
to C) needs a functional explanation is questionable; Prokofiev often used such chromatic
shifting to change tonical focus by a half step.\(^3\)

Example 3.3. Prokofiev, “Promenade,” op. 59 no. 1, voice-leading graph of mm. 31 - 42.

The section from m. 42 to m. 67 is quite strange, suggesting several keys, but
residing firmly in none of them. It is possible to interpret the section as suggesting C-
major, G-major, or E-minor tonalities. C major would initially seem to be the most logical

\(^3\) Bass, “Prokofiev’s Technique,” 197 - 214. While this shift of a semitone is typical of
Prokofiev’s sound, there is not much of a case to be made here for what Bass calls
“shadowing,” in which one of the surface key areas would actually be standing in for the
key area a semitone away. The Db key area here is distinct from the C key area, not a
shadow of movements actually on a deeper level taking place in C.
choice; indeed, the first measure of this section is diatonic to that key, and expresses it through strong triadic and scalar means. For this section to be in C major would be a logical and satisfying state of affairs, since a return to the opening key would be consistent with traditional models (for instance, rondo form). But, while mm. 46, 50 and 64 are also diatonic to C major, the sense of this key is in each case immediately negated by the following material. The second and third measures of the section (mm. 43 - 44) express D-major/minor and Eb-major harmonies as strongly as the first measure expresses C major; the result is a parallel structure that is not diatonic to C major (example 3.4a). Still, several factors force the listener to consider prolongation of C major. The music here forms a four-measure pattern, returning to C in mm. 46, 50, 60, and 64. Specific voice movements emphasise the pitch C, such as the descent through a fourth to G2 from m. 50 to m. 54, followed by a stepwise return to C3 in m. 60. Of particular significance is the placement of the C-major harmonies in prominent, metrically accented places, such as at the beginnings of phrases. Example 3.4b shows some of the C-major tendencies in this section. Despite these factors, the overall voice leading is incongruous with a strong C-major reading, and those C-major materials which are aurally strong sound as foreign to the surrounding material within the section as that surrounding material sounds foreign to C major.

It is also possible to hear a tendency toward a G tonality in this section (see example 3.4c). This perception is partly due to the D triads in mm. 43, 45, 49, 51, 61 and 63, which sound like local dominants of G. Such a hearing would not be inconsistent with a C tonality, since G is readily tonicised within a C major context; alternately, if one hears G as the overall tonality of this passage, the C chords emerge as subdominants. The melodic contour also supports perception of a G tonality: after expressing a C-major descent in the initial bar (m. 42), the top voice sounds quite convincingly as if it is describing G major. In m. 43 - 44 it outlines the dominant of G, resolves this dominant in m. 44 - 45, and begins to compose out a G-major triad beginning with the high D in m. 45. The final note of this arpeggiation would be a G on the downbeat of m. 50, but this resolution is usurped by a return to the C-major material. A similar situation exists with the melody from m. 60
to m. 67; performed without the accompaniment, the melody creates a strong desire to end on a G-major harmony in m. 68. As it stands, because of the lack of a strong cadence or any direct statement of a G chord, the passage is no more convincingly in G than in C. In fact, because the motions in the bass voice tend to prolong C while specific motions in the soprano tend to suggest G, there is a sense of both foci being maintained at the same time.

A third possibility for this section is a reading in E minor (example 3.4d). Three factors contribute to the perception of an E-minor focus. The bass may be read as ascending to E through scale degrees 6, 7, and 7 (spelled as Eb) in mm. 42 - 50, and as ascending with the same chromatic figure from scale degree 3 to scale degree 5 in mm. 54 - 57. This is supported by a harmonic progression, IV to V, from m. 53 to m. 57. Out of the whole passage, the following two measures (mm. 58 and 59) are the most convincing evidence of an E-minor tonality. The melodic materials here are drawn directly from an E-minor scale, descending from the fifth degree, and the supporting harmony is an unadulterated B-major triad; together they form an unmistakable impression of V7 in E minor. Once again, however, the resolution is avoided: the expected E-minor harmony is avoided, and once again, it is the C-major pattern that takes its place (m. 60). Despite this, the E-minor reading is perhaps the strongest of the three possible readings, since the passage can be subsumed by this tonality (G major is diatonically equivalent to E minor, and the C-major harmonies can be explained as bVI), and the V7 of E set up in mm. 58 - 59 is the clearest functional harmonic implication in the whole section. One could even consider the E-minor tendencies to include C major in a manner approaching interchangeability, analogous to the G major/E minor equivalency noted earlier; note how the bass prolongs both pitches, and how C major replaces E minor at the cadence to m. 60.

From an examination of this passage, one senses that three tonalities—C major, G major, and E minor—are present throughout in a critical balance, with each emerging to the surface at various points, but none allowed to become so firmly established that the others can be dismissed. This balance is accomplished through a careful interweaving of the prolongational devices for each key (for instance, the way the motion of the bass voice expresses both C major and E minor); through avoidance of resolutions at critical moments;
and through stating the tonic harmony outright, or stating its supporting harmonies, but not
both. For instance, C-major triads repeatedly appear, as directly and clearly stated
harmony, but the surrounding harmonic material is foreign to that key; on the other hand,
both G major and E minor are well-supported by the voice-leading and melodic designs,
but their tonic harmonies are not directly stated.

This balance of C, G, and E is interesting in light of our previous observations
about E minor chords functioning as dominants to C major in the first section of the
"Promenade." While the suggested equivalency between the dominant and mediants of C
major was very much a surface phenomenon, the blurring of tonical focus in this section
suggests a deeper aspect to the issue. Equivalency might not be the right term for the
relationship between C, E and G in this passage, but there is a coexistence or a fusing of
these key areas that allows them to be held in balance--each one is valid, but none is
superior. The peculiar flavour of the music in this section is the result of this three-way
fusion.

The music begins a new section at m. 68 (example 3.5), delineated by a change in
rhythmic patterns and by entirely new melodic material. Again we are presented with C
major, but this time it seems fairly well supported by functional harmonies. The bass
describes fifths to A, to F, and from G to C, suggesting a strong VI - IV - V - I
progression in C. Except for the chromatic passing tones, the voice leading in the upper
voices is diatonic to C major, and supports the tonal drive of the bass line (the A in the bass
is harmonised as II or IV\(^6\)). However, the upper voice leading becomes rhythmically
shifted away from the bass, with the result that the cadence in mm 74 - 75 is to a G triad
(V) over C in the bass (I). This sonority is still diatomic to C major; it can be understood as
a I chord with added major seventh and major ninth (see example 3.5b). However, the
melodic contour in the highest voice is composing out a G-major triad; once again, there is
harmonic ambivalence in the texture. The music is diatonically in C major, and the bass
movement is in this key; however, the upper voice suggests a focus on a G-major triad,
emphasised by a repeated insistence on the pitch D, which appears as the highest note in the
section, accented, in mm. 72, 76, and 78 (example 3.5c).
The prolongation of D helps to neutralise any sense of a prolongation of C, and also functions as a leading tone to Eb major in the next section (m. 84). The music in mm. 76 - 79 sets up a sense of the dominant for Eb; the E-minor triad, emphasised by the rising chromatic figure (mm. 80 - 83), can be included as part of an altered dominant of Eb. It can also be realised as an element of G major or C major, thus tying together all the tendencies of this section.

The next section, at m. 84, consists of a transposition of mm. 42 - 50 up by a
minor third (example 3.6). Therefore, the resulting tonal implications are transposed from C, E, and G to Eb major, G minor, and Bb major. Of these, the G tonality is perhaps the easiest to reconcile with the surrounding context, since elements of G were prolonged from m. 42 to m. 83. From another point of view, the transposed section can be viewed as a contrasting tonal area: much as the stable Db-major section at m. 31 contrasted with the C-major sections prior to it, the complex of key implications at m. 84 could be seen as a contrast to the C-E-G key-complex at m. 42; the only common thread would be the focus on G, with the mode now changed to minor. Yet another understanding of this section interprets the Eb in a leading-tone relation to the various instances of E-minor tonality, both those prior, and those yet to come (mm. 97 - 98, 107, and in the coda). Perception of Bb major, the third possible key area in the transposed complex, is weak because of the short duration of this section and the lack of much of a role for Bb in the surrounding context, other than as a leading tone to B minor (m. 93).

The transition to the return of the first material (mm. 93 - 99) seems to be a fulcrum for the whole piece. The opening motif, which had originally expressed a strong 3-2-1 descent in C major, is now expanded in a chain-like fashion to include the complete complex of key areas which have appeared in flux with C major. The statement of the figure in mm. 93 and 95 has G as its goal, but suggests a B-minor harmony (realised in the accompaniment). The G is reached at m. 96, beginning its own descending figure with E as its goal, but extended to end on a D and suggest a G-major tonality. The E is then retaken as the beginning of the original 3-2-1 descent to C major. The scale formed by the chain of 3-2-1 descents can be thought of as G major, E natural-minor, C major with raised fourth (lydian), or even B natural-minor (there is no C present until m. 99).

The use of the same descending-third figure to connect B to G (m. 95) and E to C (m.98) suggests that there is an equivalency to these relationships. For instance, the start of the chain directly recalls m. 22, thus clarifying that earlier event’s relationship to the start of the piece and confirming the same mediant-dominant function for both B minor and E minor. Similarly, the fusion of E minor and C major encountered in mm. 42 - 67 can be extrapolated to B minor and G major, since this passage (mm. 93 - 99) not only relates B minor, as dominant, to G major, but also, as leading tone, to C major. Thus B minor is
both dominant to G, and equivalent to G as a preparation for C.

While the leading-tone relationship of B to C and the restatement of the original E\(\uparrow\) statement in C reinforce a return to C major, the presence of F\# (mm. 94, 95, and 96) and the careful reiteration and emphasis of the note D (mm. 96, 97, and 98) suggest a strong tendency toward G major in this passage. Therefore, in their ability to express either C major or its dominant, E-minor tendencies are revealed as expressing the flux between C and G--maybe even as generated by that flux. B-minor tendencies relate to G as E minor relates to C, thus completing the system around both poles. The chain of descents illuminates the tertian nature of the relationship among these keys, as tabulated in example 3.7. It seems that, if C major had been fairly strong at the start of the piece, it is now losing influence to these other keys, particularly G major. This state of affairs is reflected in the final section of the piece.

Example 3.7. Prokofiev, “Promenade,” op. 59 no. 1, key-area relationships.

Example 3.9. Prokofiev, “Promenade,” op. 59 no. 1, relationship of structures at mm. 42, 84, and 99.

Measure 99 brings back the original material from the first section of the piece, but with a number of changes (see example 3.8). Mm. 99 - 102 expand the original mm. 2 and 3 and add an ascent in the bass from the third (A2, C#3), through (B2, D#3), before reaching (C3, E3) (this rising-thirds pattern is related to the structures of the sections at
mm. 42 and 84, as shown in example 3.9). The "first theme" is compressed, joining the equivalent of m. 8 to that of m. 20 (m. 107 to m. 108). The ascent in m. 107 (m. 8) no longer begins on a unison C, but places an E in the lower voice, destabilising the tonical strength of C. Other than these changes, the materials are repeated almost note-for-note from their original statement; however, events such as the movement to G in m. 111, the presence of E minor in a dominant role, and the large number of F# harmonies are cast in a new light by the previous sections. For the same reason, C major no longer seems as convincingly to be the primary tonic.

At m. 119 there is a cadence into Db major, just as there was in the first half of the piece (m. 31), and the entire section from mm. 68 - 78 is presented in Db, instead of its original C/G major (Example 3.10a graphs the voice leading from this section through the coda). This is further evidence of a weakening of the power of C major; here in the recapitulatory section of the piece, if we were to strengthen the "home key" by following the classical model, material which was originally in a secondary key ought to be transposed to the tonic key. Following this model, we would expect the Db major section from mm. 31 to 41 to be brought back in C major here, but instead it is ignored in favour of transposing mm. 68 - 78 away from the original main key.

The Db tonality begins to dissolve around m. 126, and at m. 129 a low B is reached, the transposition of the Bb which, at m. 78, represented a dominant of Eb. A parallel in the function of these events would suggest a dominant role, perhaps to E at m. 132 or m. 148 (see example 3.10b). In fact, this B is prolonged by repeated instances of B in the bass, and by B-minor arpeggations and harmonies in the right hand, through to m. 140, where it is sounded against C# and resolved as a leading tone to unison Cs. This is probably the strongest suggestion of a B focus in the entire piece, but it has been set up by events such as those at mm. 22 and 110, and by occurrences of F# harmonies in some of the earliest parts of the piece. Looking to the way B minor has functioned in previous occurrences, one expects some sort of dominant-type relation to G major, or perhaps even to E minor, in addition to the leading tone function seen at m. 141. Indeed, the last measures of this piece fuel just such an interpretation.

The last three measures of the "Promenade" present the listener with a series of
Example 3.10. Prokofiev, “Promenade,” op. 59 no. 1, voice-leading graph of mm. 119 - end.
three sonorities, the meaning of which is typically uncertain. The third- and second-to-last of these combine E minor and G major triads (an Em$^7$ chord) over a G bass. In several places E minor has substituted for G major; here they are fused into one harmony. If one were to stop the performance of the piece without sounding the last measure, a satisfying sense of (at least local) closure on a G tonality would be created; there is no sense of a need to resolve these two chords. However, the pitch C is added to this sonority in the ultimate measure, creating a C-major chord in which the B and D are an added seventh and ninth. This recalls the sonority of m. 75, when the right hand was composing out G major while the left hand cadenced in C, and a similar blurring of key area was created.

There is support in the music of the coda for both tonal interpretations of the final sounds of the piece. A receptive context for a C-major closure is created by the piece as a whole, especially by the events of the first half which suggest C major as a home key. There are a number of local details which support a C-major ending; these are shown in Example 3.10b. One of these is the B material functioning as leading tone to the strong C unison at m. 141--clearly a structural point in the coda. Another is the E unison at m. 148, which serves to delimit the major third (C, E) and to identify E minor as part of C major, not as the relative minor of G, and which can be led through the D$^5$ at m. 153 to the Cs in the last measure to state the $\wedge3\wedge2\wedge1$ motive in its original transposition. Still another is the voice-movement of the bass, which is diatonic to C major. Descending from C$^3$ (m. 141) through B$^2$ to A$^2$ (m. 146), its possible goal on scale-degree $\wedge 5$ is supplanted by E$^2$, a pitch holding possible dominant connotations in C major. In m. 151, the bass returns to C, before realising the goal on scale-degree $\wedge 5$ three measures before the end, and completing the true dominant motion to C in the final bar. Despite these factors, the interpretation of a C-major ending is uneasy. It is subverted by the liberal sprinkling of accidentals, the weak construction of the dominant three measures from the end, and the lack of an effectively composed-out dominant in the counterpoint of the upper voices following m. 141. While the unison C at m. 141 and the C in the final bar are acceptable tonics vis-a-vis the piece as a whole, they both sound out of place compared to their immediate surroundings.

On the other hand, example 3.10c shows how a sense of G major is composed out
through the last sections of the “Promenade.” Part of the support for this interpretation is
the area of B minor at mm. 129 - 140. As discussed previously, this material can be heard
(or expected) to function as a mediant-dominant of G, not only as a leading tone to C.
Specific voice movement from m. 141 onward can also be seen to support G major, despite
the strong reiteration of C in the bass. The upwardly-flagged notes from m. 141 to the end
in the score, including the high G in m. 146, suggest a dominant - tonic movement in G
major, and include a composing-out of a G-major triad similar to the movement which
suggested Bb minor in the second section of the piece (mm. 31 - 41). The proliferation of
F#s and Ebs or D#s—the only accidentals after m. 141, with the exception of the chromatic
passage at m. 146 - 147—also create a tendency toward G major: F# as leading tone, and
Eb as intensification of the fifth, and D# as leading tone in the relative minor. The
prominent clash of C and D seven measures from the end recalls the same clash in mm. 68
- 80, suggesting a C - G conflict. There is also a sense of C as an upper neighbour (♭6) to
B between m. 140 and m. 144; this creates an expectation of B as a dominant to E or G.
Despite these features, G major is just as uneasy an interpretation as was C major; amongst
other things, the lack of a truly clear dominant and the stubborn persistence of the pitch C
render it unsatisfactory as a solitary tonic.

All in all, the “Promenade” gives the impression of starting strongly in C major,
with hints of other keys (E minor and particularly G major) in a subordinate role. Through
the traditional use of a secondary key (Db major), but also through a less traditional fusing
or blending of C major, E minor, G major, and B minor, the centrality of C major is cast
into doubt. By the midpoint, C major is one key like any other, and the return of the
original material fails to reestablish its superiority. By the end, it is not possible to
distinguish C major as the tonic, rather than E minor or G major. Essentially, this change
is accomplished through a system of interrelated keys based on a tertian model.4 Initially,
one of the keys in this complex is (arbitrarily?) portrayed in a more important or central
role; over the course of the piece this weighting shifts to a balance within the system. The

4 This interrelation of harmonies based on thirds, and particularly the way two triads a third
apart and having two notes in common (e.g. C and Em) can be equivalent and substitute for
each other, is often identified in jazz theory by the concept of “plurality.” See, for instance,
materials of the piece are generated out of the flux and interrelation between the elements of this system, particularly in such a way that they become indistinct from each other. Even if one were to view C as the progenitor of the complex, the situation in this piece is opposite to the classical scheme in which the tonic ultimately subsumes the related keys; here the related keys are ultimately in a state of coexistence. Consequently, by the end of the piece the C-E-G-B key-complex more accurately describes the tonic than does C major.
CHAPTER 4
SONATA FOR VIOLIN AND PIANO, OP. 80, LAST MOVEMENT

In both the Pensée, op. 62 no. 2, and the “Promenade”, op. 59 no. 1, there exists a certain ambiguity of tonical focus. In the case of the Pensée, the entire piece could be considered to consist of harmonically ambivalent material: not only are there no distinct sections focussed on a particular tonic, but no single tonic governs the piece. On the other hand, the “Promenade” has sections with clear, localised tonical focus, but they are subordinate to an overall tonal design which expresses an increasing ambiguity as the piece progresses. By the end of the “Promenade”, therefore, the presence of a single governing tonic is likewise unclear. The tonal situation in the last movement of Prokofiev’s Sonata No. 1 for Violin and Piano in F Minor is quite different. As with the “Promenade”, there are sections of clear local tonal focus and sections of tonal ambiguity; in the Sonata, however, the tonally ambiguous material is subordinate to the focussed sections, a scenario exactly opposite to that which obtains in the “Promenade”. A clear, single tonic governs the entire last movement of op. 80, thereby providing a context for the ambiguous material--a context which was lacking in either the Pensée or the “Promenade”. The ambiguous tonal material of the sonata is worth examining because of the similarity of its language to that of the other two pieces, but, because of the context, meaning for this material will be imposed upon it by the tonally clear material surrounding it; harmonic ambivalence will not be able to be projected to the scale of the whole piece.

There are essentially six sections in the last movement of op. 80 which express clear, local key areas. Each of these sections is self-contained in the expression of its local key focus, and expresses only one such focus, valid throughout the section. In a sense, each section could be considered tonally stable or even static, especially when it is
compared to the ambiguous tonal areas which border it. Considered together, however, these stable key areas work to express and support the overall tonic; no one of the key areas expressed by any one of these sections undermines the larger tonal focus. Besides harmonic factors, a number of other features help to delineate these sections. They tend to have a melodic orientation, as opposed to the motivic or contrapuntal orientation characterising the tonally ambiguous areas, and their melodic structure is generally very strongly linked with their harmonic structure. Large blocks of music tend to be repeated intact, also correlating with the melodic and harmonic structure. Table 4.1 lists these areas of clear and singular tonal focus.

Table 4.1.--Prokofiev, Sonata for Violin and Piano, op. 80 (fourth movement), stable harmonic areas.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Length (approx.)</th>
<th>Focus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mm. 1 - 31</td>
<td>31 mm.</td>
<td>F major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mm. 53 - 82</td>
<td>30 mm.</td>
<td>F major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mm. 159 - 163</td>
<td>5 mm.</td>
<td>Bb major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mm. 195 - 226</td>
<td>32 mm.</td>
<td>F “minor”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mm. 227 - 233</td>
<td>7 mm.</td>
<td>F “major”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The stability of the first of these sections is established through a four-measure melodic cell which is strongly triadic in its design. This cell is stated three times, once each on the tonic, subdominant, and dominant scale steps. Its three statements thus outline a movement from I to IV, IV to V, and V to I, clearly establishing an F-major tonality. This is followed by a slight variation of the four-measure cell, moving from I to IV and then to V (mm. 13 - 21), and then by an incomplete statement of the first 12 measures, interrupted at scale degree V (m. 31). Thus an overall movement from F to F, and then twice to C, establishes F major as the main key, and moves in a very conventional way toward the dominant.

The second stable section is, as might be expected, in the dominant key area, describing movements from C to C (mm. 53 - 59), C to G (mm. 60 - 72), and C to C (mm.
74 - 82). Also in a rather traditional way, this second thematic area is marked *piu tranquillo* and displays a longer, more lyric melody line than the first section. The third stable area (mm. 102 - 113) is an exact repetition of the first twelve measures, thus reestablishing the tonic key, F major. The fourth area (mm. 159 - 163) repeats the same melodic cell, this time beginning on the subdominant (and moving to the subdominant of the subdominant).

At m. 195, the closing sections of the movement begin, not with material from either the first or second sections, but with an expanded statement of material originally found in the first movement (mm. 19 - 83 or 84 - 88), thereby bringing a sense of closure to the whole sonata. This material, in F minor,\(^1\) establishes the key more through the use of a pandiatonic harmonic language than a functional one—the piano plays a series of diatonic chords over a tonic pedal, while the violin alternates between scalar passages (with a little chromaticism) and an emphasis of the pitch classes F and C (mm. 198 - 199; 204 - 205; 208 - 211). Two more (original-length) statements of this music follow (mm. 213 - 217 and 218 - 222), with the violin playing purely diatonic scales. That this section is in F minor could be considered a deviation from the traditional tonal model, but the tonic pitch-class is strongly reestablished, if not in the same mode. Furthermore, the F-minor material is followed by a sort of codetta (the sixth area in table 4.1) which restates in F major the melody from the second section (originally in C major; mm. 60 - 65), thus reintegrating the major mode.

Despite the slight muddying of matters by modal mixture, these stable areas outline a clear, single tonality, solidly focused on F. The necessary relations to establish this focus are all present--the C and Bb areas sandwiched with F areas provide an away-and-back narrative based on the fifth--without considering the unstable material found between the stable sections (see example 4.1). The well-balanced relative lengths of the stable sections also support the viability of the overall tonic: both the first F-major area and the C-major area are about thirty measures long, and the final F areas are about forty measures in total. The eminently legible and logical tonal outline thus established could probably be considered compatible with a "classical" model.

\(^1\) Rebecca Kaufman calls these 'minor' sections Aeolian, a distinction I am not making. Kaufman, "Expanded Tonality," 296.
Example 4.1. Prokofiev, Sonata for Violin and Piano, op. 80 (fourth movement), general tonal plan.

In contrast to the areas of clear tonical focus outlined above, there are four sections where the tonality seems less focused—where the stability is somehow suspended. These sections, which can be regarded as transitional passages, are characterised by an ambiguous harmonic language: rather than the major- and minor-triad-based language of the stable areas, there is an abundance of diminished-seventh chords, partially-voiced chords, and strong, locally-unresolved dissonance.

The first of these passages, found between the first F-major area and the C-major area (mm. 32 - 53; see example 4.2), begins when a Gb harmony interrupts the V scale step of F major in m. 32, a striking event after nothing but I, IV, and V thus far in the movement. The V scale step that is interrupted had F as its expected goal (as was the case at the parallel spot in mm. 9 - 12), and this Gb triad can actually be interpreted as part of the dominant of F, especially since it moves back in m. 37 to a C7 chord. Thus, by means of a dissonance and a chromaticism which contrast with the preceding simple harmonic vocabulary, mm. 32 - 38 begin to destabilise the musical language, but stay within the context of C as a dominant. One could say that the instability thus far is harmonic in nature (at the surface), but not yet tonal.

In m. 39, however, comes the first true taste of ambiguity: the violin and the right hand of the piano begin to compose out a what is primarily a G-minor triad (though with hints of E diminished) while the left hand of the piano hammers away at the pitch-class C#. Not only is this dissonance in sharp contrast to the preceding section, but it offers an opportunity for multiple interpretations. For instance, the G-minor triad, distinct because of its registral separation from the C#, can be heard as ii in F major, an interpretation
Example 4.2. Prokofiev, Sonata for Violin and Piano, op. 80 (fourth movement), voice-leading graph of mm. 30 - 53.
consistent with the preceding stable key area. On the other hand, if one takes the upper voices to be composing an E-diminished shape rather than G minor, then together with the C# in the bass there could be hints of a dominant sound in F. Both these interpretations suggest a continuance of the F-major key area, but a third approach offers an interesting alternative: the G-minor triad together with the C# bass are a subset of the eight-note dominant (octatonic) scale of C; in other words, they suggest the dominant of the next stable key area. Thus the dissonances and vague harmonies here not only provide aural contrast to the simpler triadic harmonies of the preceding stable section, but provide a connection from the one stable section to the next by means of harmony that is a sort of amalgam of simpler harmonies from either key. At m. 46 there is an F#m7 harmony which acts as a chromatic neighbour chord to the G minor, which is again mixed with C#o7 harmonies. This leads into a chromatic passage, essentially dominant in function, leading to the C-major section.

The second transitional passage (mm. 84 - 102; example 4.3) connects the section in C major to the return of the original F-major material. While the previous transitional passage had some sense of a layering of elements from the stable areas bordering it, this passage seems to describe a linear progression from the one tonical focus to the next. It begins with a fifth motion, from C to G and back, which reinforces the C focus of the preceding tonal area. However, the return from the G to the C is through a sequential pattern of seventh chords, G7 - F7 - C7, thereby reintroducing a dominant sound to C major (mm. 89 - 94), and encapsulating the motion (down a second and then a fourth) between stable key areas over the course of the piece: C - (F) - Bb - F. The material which follows could be considered a prolongation of the dominant of F, leading to elements of the C eight-note dominant scale in mm. 100 - 101, which set up the F major of m. 102. A couple of features in this material are worthy of note. At m. 97 there is a reintroduction of C# in the piano, remembered from the previous transitional passage but now to be reinterpreted as an approach to the dominant in F (b6 - 5), rather than as having a dominant tendency in its own right. Oddly, this C# is part of a localised A-major triad, which recalls the F#m7 chords of the previous ambiguous passage; the presence of this triad in the approach to F major recalls the localised E triads in the approach to C major (m. 51).
Example 4.3. Prokofiev, Sonata for Violin and Piano, op. 80 (fourth movement), voice-leading graph of mm. 84 - 102.
Example 4.4. Prokofiev, Sonata for Violin and Piano, op. 80 (fourth movement), voice-leading graph of mm. 114 - 159.
Interspersed with this is a combination of F- and G-major triads (mm. 97 - 99). These could be considered a voice-leading device, approaching C from both the upper and the lower fifth, but they also suggest a mixture of the dominants of F and C major, a mixture appropriate to this transitional passage.

The next passage to be considered (mm. 114 - 158) is graphed in example 4.4. It follows twelve measures of solid F major, and it also begins with fifth motions, from F to C, C to G, and then back from G to C. This last motion is accomplished with the same sequence as was used in mm. 89 - 94 to reestablish a dominant function for C. However, the meaning is not as clear here: this C7 chord does not move directly to a passage in F, but rather to a passage with B as its bass. Of course, a C7 chord could adequately function as a dominant of B, but the B bass at m. 131 is part of material which is diatonic to C major, not any sort of B tonality. Thus the B bass (made prominent by registral separation and its fortissimo feroce treatment) expresses an ambivalence: it has a tendency to be heard as the goal of the C7 harmony (a tritone-related replacement for F major), and to be heard as the leading tone of C major. This ambivalence is picked up by a statement of the sequential seventh-chord pattern, describing the fifth <F, (Eb), Bb>, under which the B-natural continues to be prolonged, feroce, in the bass (mm. 138 - 143). What follows is a combination of the bass B-natural with a diminished-seventh shape in which the Ab is led upwards, through A, as a leading tone to Bb (mm. 144 - 159). Consequently, especially in light of the sequence of seventh chords from F7 to Bb7, the B-natural calls for a third interpretation, as part of an altered dominant of Bb. Thus the important events of this passage integrate elements of all three important key areas—tonic, dominant, and subdominant. It should be noted that the accented notes controlling the movement of the bass (B, m. 151; B and Bb, mm. 157 - 159) are derived from the melodic incipit of the second movement. This pattern is fully realised by similar accented bass notes in the next transitional passage.

The final passage of ambiguous harmony, graphed in example 4.5, picks up on scale degree IV of the Bb section (m. 164), and ends with the introduction of the F-minor material from the first movement (m. 195). The passage begins with a sequence of stretto
Example 4.5. Prokofiev, Sonata for Violin and Piano, op. 80 (fourth movement), voice-leading graph of mm. 164 - 195.
entries starting on Eb, A, D, and G; the music remains diatonic to Bb major. This series leads to another figure which will turn out to have multiple meanings: a minor-third pattern (C, D, Eb) over the feroce emphasis of C in the bass (mm. 168 - 171). Recalling the feroce B-natural in the bass of the last transitory passage, one can hear these two strongly-emphasised pitches in a semitone relationship, implying a leading-tone movement with the C as the goal; at the same time, the Bb major diatonicity of the music at this point suggests the minor third figure be heard as part of ii or V7 in Bb. The transposition of the sequential pattern of mm. 89 - 94 and mm. 138 - 143, now describing seventh chords on A, G and D (mm. 173 - 177), offers yet another interpretation of the minor-third figure, as part of the dominant of G minor (chord tones 7 and b9). This interpretation is boosted by the transposition of the minor-third figure to (F#, G#, A) following the sequential pattern; together the two minor-third figures describe a diminished seventh shape (C, Eb, F#, A) that can be heard as having a dominant function in G minor. This goal is realised in mm. 186 - 190 with the clear arpeggiation of G minor, and the transposition of the minor-third figure to (G, A, Bb); the violin further emphasises this goal with a two-octave scalar statement of the leading tone, <F#4, F#6, G6>, in mm. 184 - 186. On the other hand, the G-minor interpretation is overwhelmed by the continued sounding of the feroce C in the bass, moving through B to B-flat. While this represents the G-minor dominant-tonic progression in an inversional form (V4 - I6), the octatonic scale from F# to F# in the violin (mm. 184 - 185) can be interpreted as the eight-note dominant of Bb; the movement from B to Bb in the bass then suggests a dominant-tonic progression with Bb as the goal. Furthermore, the diminished-seventh shape (C, Eb, F#, A) is a subset of the eight-note dominant scale on C (altered V7 of F), an interpretation which is consistent with the ultimate goal (F minor in m. 195). In this hearing, the feroce C (mm. 171 and 182) is more important than the B or Bb (mm. 184 - 186), and the pitches in the piano in the last four measures of this passage (to m. 194) are encompassed in the dominant harmony. Thus the materials of this passage can be heard as suggesting dominant-type sounds with Bb major, G minor, or F major or minor as their goals. A reading which favours Bb suggests the importance of a plagal movement to the final stable key area. A reading which
favours G minor stresses the importance of the major mode right up to the appearance of F minor at m. 195 (G diminished is more consistent with the minor mode). A reading which favours C as a dominant emphasises a strong, functional approach to the final key area.

All four of the transitional passages in the last movement of op. 80 exhibit the sort of tonal language characteristic of both the “Promenade” and the *Pensée*—a tonal language based on harmonic ambivalence, substitution, and ambiguity. In all four passages of op. 80, however, this tonal language is subject to a singular, focused tonality, expressed in large, stable blocks of localised tonical focus. The role of the ambiguous tonal material in op. 80, therefore, is not to cast the tonality of the whole piece into flux, but to provide contrast to the areas of stable, clear harmonic language, and to provide transitions between those areas. This role is very similar to the traditional role of such harmony in a classical tonal scheme; the only major difference is in the style of harmonically ambiguous language used, which emphasises a fusing or combination of key areas, rather than a linear progression from one to the next.
CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSIONS

Our goal in the preceding chapters has been to respond to a particular tonal language found in each of three pieces by Prokofiev: the *Pensée*, op. 62 no. 2; the “Promenade,” op. 59 no. 1; and the last movement of the Violin Sonata, op. 80. This language lacks the clarity of a focus on a single tonic which we associate with common-practice tonal structures; instead there is a tonical uncertainty, an ambivalence or ambiguity between two or among more than two tonal centres. The choice of the term *tonical* is a conscious one, for while the tonic may be uncertain, tonality in the general sense of the word is not under question. None of these pieces is atonal, although this type of harmonic language has occasionally been mistaken for atonality.1

Each of the three pieces we have examined employs tonical ambiguity or ambivalence in a different way. We have seen that almost nowhere in the *Pensée* is a singular tonic clearly established. In this piece, whenever the tonic seems about to emerge from the texture to clarify itself, it is immediately subverted, unseated or avoided. For the duration of the piece, the harmonic language is ambivalent, simultaneously expressing two tonical possibilities. Thus there emerges a sense of critical balance in the tonality of the *Pensée*, in which it is fairly clear that either C or B is the tonic, but neither can satisfactorily be considered superior.

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1 Ashley, “Prokofiev’s Piano Music,” 235. Neil B. Minturn also approaches Prokofiev’s music from a partly atonal understanding: his dissertation abstract states that it is “unsatisfactory” to try to “bring all events in Prokofiev’s music under a tonal rubric....One concludes that Prokofiev’s music is dualistic and contains both tonal and nontonal elements.” “An Integral Approach to the Music of Sergey Prokofiev Using Tonal and Set Theoretic Analytical Techniques,” *Dissertation Abstracts International A*: 50:3789 A (June 1990).
The “Promenade” displays a tonality that at first seems more conventional than that of the *Pensée*. The first portion of the piece suggests a strong, singular tonic on C, and even a traditional contrasting key area, in Db major. However, in the middle of the piece the main key area begins to disperse, never to be returned to supremacy. While the sense of Db as a secondary key area remains more-or-less intact, C major yields to the ambiguity of a system of third-related foci, on C, E, G, and B. As the piece ends, none of these is established in a primary role.

The most traditional system of tonality belongs to the last movement of the Sonata for Violin and Piano. Well-defined secondary key areas (Bb and C major) support the overall F tonic in the clear and cohesive tonal plan of this work. Ambiguous tonal areas provide contrast with this stability, and fulfil a transitional role by fusing the elements of bordering key areas. Thus the ambiguous harmony here is subordinate to the rule of the tonic.

Common to all three of these pieces is the presence of a simultaneity, coexistence, or fusion of harmonic possibilities. Such a situation is not new to music; the simple example of a pivot chord in a common-practice modulation provides a related instance of multiple possibilities. But in Prokofiev’s language in these pieces, the ambiguity goes far beyond the commonplace level represented by a pivot chord. A whole passage (as in the Sonata), the entire second half of a piece (as in the “Promenade”), or even a whole piece itself (as in the *Pensée*) may sustain the multivalence; it is this sense of simultaneity that helps to generate the distinctiveness of the style. Even in the more traditional Violin Sonata, there is a sense--in transitional passages--of the fusion of key areas, rather than the progression between them that would characterise the classical model they emulate.

We have seen that Arnold Schoenberg described a tonal situation similar to the ambiguous harmony in these pieces by Prokofiev, and that Schoenberg’s ideas have engendered a number of considerations of this phenomenon in a German-Romantic context. In Schoenberg’s “fluctuating tonality,” there is an oscillation or uncertainty between closely related key areas, such that it is not possible to say which of them is primary. In his “suspended tonality,” the uncertainty may even increase to the point that no particular tonal centre(s) may be identified. Peter Deane Roberts also describes ambivalent
tonal language, but, unlike Schoenberg, his ideas are a direct response to a Russian, not a German, context. Rather than emphasising the idea of closely-related keys and increasing chromaticism, he derives his "polymodality" from the idea of multiple tonal centres established by "imposing different modal interpretations on the same scale with chromatic inflections."²

How, then, should one distinguish between Schoenberg's and Roberts's concepts? Is fluctuating tonality oriented toward total chromaticism while pantonality has the combination of diatonic fields as its goal? Can one regard Robert's concept as expressing equality of foci through temporal concurrence, while Schoenberg's concept expresses the same equality through the rapid alternation of foci? Is fluctuating tonality more apposite to functional harmony, and pantonality to a nonfunctional harmony? Do polymodality's interrelated diatonicities imply a melodic origin, while fluctuating tonality's reliance on chromaticism is more harmonic? Generally, these are all true; but, in actual fact, the two concepts overlap to such a great a degree that an attempt to clearly distinguish one from the other is bound to be a frustrating endeavour. For instance, the oscillating nature of the suggestions of B and C tonics in the Pensee suggests Schoenberg's fluctuating tonality, as does the often chromatic harmonic vocabulary of the piece. However, Roberts would surely consider it to be a prime example of polymodality; indeed, the last chord of the piece suggests a single scalar source with a rivalry between C and B as its final. Likewise, the third-related tonal centres of the "Promenade" invoke the spirit of polymodalism, yet there is no shortage of functional relationships between these centres. And in the Violin Sonata, both the functional context and the obvious parallels to classical development sections encourage comparison to Schoenberg's ideas, yet the sense of layering and simultaneity is suggestive of polymodality.

In the first chapter we reproduced a list of techniques which Roberts suggested were characteristic of polymodality. All the devices in the list are present in the three pieces we have been examining. The "provision of a tonally weak background" is exemplified by the unadorned tritones which start the first and second phrases of the Pensee. The

² Roberts, Modernism, 156.
“juxtaposition of two chords” can be found in both the last sonority of the “Promenade,” and the F/G bichord in the last movement of op. 80, mm. 97 - 99. The “successive statement of two cadences in different modes” is illustrated in mm. 21 - 23 of the “Promenade,” where the cadence to B minor quickly moves on to G major, foreshadowing the role of these two keys in the key-complex which governs the end of the piece. The use of “neighbouring tone technique” -- this seems to include structural use of semitone-related chords or notes -- is evident in the chromatic shifts of the Pensée, or in the Db, B, and C emphases leading into the coda of the “Promenade.” The feroce bass-notes which allude to the second movement in the Violin Sonata (C#, mm. 39 - 45; B-natural, mm. 131 - 133, 147, 151 - 152, and 157; and C-natural, mm. 170 - 171 and 181 - 182) illustrate an “emphasis on a single tone in the bass in opposition to a tonic stated or implied elsewhere.” The simultaneous composing-out of C major and G major in the section at m. 68 of the “Promenade” exemplifies the “combination of tonally suggestive harmony in one part with emphasis on another pitch in a different layer.” The “combination of voice-leading emphasis with a pedal” is a very similar technique, illustrated by the repeated D5 in the same section of that piece. A “substitution of an unexpected chord in place of an anticipated one” happens in mm. 58 - 60 of the “Promenade,” where the E-major cadence, one of the strongest in the piece, has its goal replaced with C major. And finally, the F# and Eb/D# in the coda of the same piece could be considered “control pitches” which lessen the gravity of either C or G major as a closing tonic.

Any of these techniques could probably be used in a fluctuating tonal scheme as described by Schoenberg, although some might be less appropriate (for instance, the straight juxtaposition of two chords) than others (provision of a tonally weak background) to the type of chromatic, late-Romantic music he had in mind. There are, however, two things we might add to Roberts’s list, both of which were alluded to by Schoenberg. Firstly, in each of the three pieces we have examined, there were ample opportunities for functional interpretations of the relationships between rival keys, and ample examples of functional progressions which could be interpreted in terms of more than one tonality. Secondly, Richard Bass’s technique of chromatic displacement (and the shadowing of key areas a semitone away) would also have to be mentioned. This is related to Roberts’s
category based on the "neighbouring-tone technique," but is a more specific and complex technique.

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A discussion of Prokofiev's compositional style inevitably brings up questions about the influence on his work of Soviet policies toward the arts. Behind these policies was the aesthetic principle, largely accepted in the Soviet Union, but strongly questioned in the West, that music was not absolute: capable of extramusical expression, music could also, "of itself, be wholesome or unwholesome in effect." Of particular interest in discussions about music in Soviet Russia is the concept of "formalism," defined by the president of the Union of Soviet Composers as follows:

Every composition should be considered formalistic in which the composer fundamentally does not have as his aim the presenting of new social meaning, but focuses his interest only on inventing new combinations of sounds that have not been used before. Formalism is the sacrifice of the ideological and emotional content of a musical composition to a search for new tricks in the realm of musical elements—rhythm, timbre, harmonic combinations, etc.

Indeed, both the Pensee and the "Promenade" fit the formalist bill quite well. As we have seen, their rather complicated tonal language offers no opportunity for easy or cut-and-dried interpretations; it would seem quite valid to regard these two pieces as engaging in a "search for new combinations of sounds" through the exploration of harmonic combinations which challenge some of the conventions of traditional tonality.

Furthermore, neither the Pensee nor the "Promenade" yields any obvious clues to its emotional or philosophical content: the generally subdued musical textures of both pieces provide few of the musical gestures traditionally associated (at least by listeners) with particular feelings or attitudes, and the titles themselves are closed-lipped: Thoughts of what? "Promenade" where and why?

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4 Nikolai Chelyapov, speech, possibly to the Moscow Union of Composers, February 1936; quoted in Seroff, Prokofiev, 188.
These reasons may be exactly why Prokofiev’s Soviet biographer so soundly condemned both these pieces, finding them “coldly intellectual” in style, and saying that “intense emotion and impulsive youthful vigor had faded into colorless outlines.” In fact, there are ten mentions of the *Pensees* and four mentions of the *Three Pieces for Piano* in Israel Nestyev’s 1957 biography of the composer; none is positive. On the other hand, Nestyev wrote of the Sonata for Violin and Piano, op. 80, with enthusiasm, describing it as “one of the most powerful and original of Prokofiev’s instrumental chamber works,” and seeing in it the influence of “heroic Russian epics.”

Does this mean that the Violin Sonata is less “formalistic” than the other two pieces? The Sonata does, as we have seen, have a more traditional tonal scheme, in which tonal ambivalence does not operate at the level of the whole piece, but is instead subjected to a strong, conventionally-articulated, overall tonic. It is also a more recent piece than the other two: initially sketched in 1938, but not fleshed out until 1946, it was composed entirely after Prokofiev’s 1936 permanent return to the Soviet Union. Considering that Nestyev regarded the time of Prokofiev’s resettlement as marking a change toward a simpler, less abstract style which rejected the Western “formalism” that had crept into his work, one might be tempted to conclude that the Sonata’s lesser use of the ambiguous harmonic language is representative of this later style. By extension, one might conclude that the complex, multivalent tonal schemes are part of the rejected formalism.

The notion of this style change may originate with Nestyev, who saw the *Pensees*, along with the *Three Pieces for Piano*, the Cello Concerto, op. 58, the *Symphonic Song*, op. 57, and the Suite from *Sur le Borysthene*, as representing a “summing up of the Paris period.” While there is a general consensus amongst Prokofiev’s biographers regarding this stylistic shift, there is not as much agreement on the reasons for it, or on whether it represented a change for the better. In opposition to Nestyev’s orthodox Soviet opinions, Victor Seroff, writing from an American point of view in his 1968 biography *Prokofiev: a Soviet Tragedy*, saw the totalitarian hand of the Soviet political system humiliatingly

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7 Nestyev, *Prokofiev*, 255.
imposing change upon the composer. A more moderate view was articulated by David Gutman, who hinted that either Soviet policy or ambivalent audience reaction could have influenced the composer to modify his style. Gutman saw the Second Violin Concerto and Romeo and Juliet as marking a "volte-face in Prokofiev's creative life," a reaction to recent failures such as the première of the Symphonic Song:

The première of the Symphonic Song in Moscow on 14 April 1934, was a notable disaster. According to Miaskovsky: ‘There were literally three claps in the hall.’ Soviet audiences would never accept such gloomy abstractions, warned the journal Sovetskaya Muzyka. . . . Prokofiev’s ‘Westernized’ outlook would have to change.  

Obviously, most evaluations of the evolution of Prokofiev’s style are influenced by political philosophy. For both Cold-War Americans and their Soviet counterparts, the return to the Soviet Union of such a prominent artist from the "freedom" of the West was laden with political significance. Nestyev and Seroff wrote their biographies of the composer from opposite camps at the height of the Cold War, and each is equally slanted in his view of the matter; only Gutman, in 1988, was writing after the political rivalry had begun to thaw. It is in fact possible that the supposed changes in Prokofiev’s style are over-emphasised because of this Cold War influence; there are, after all, many continuities in his style. The Violin Sonata, op. 80, which Nestyev praised, does contain traces of the same harmonic language as found in the Pensée and the “Promenade”, and while its use is somewhat subdued in the last movement, that movement is the most conservative in the piece.

One should be careful in making generalisations about Prokofiev’s intentions and motives. Discussion of his motives in transforming his style usually turn out to be mere speculation: after all, how is one to prove that the Violin Sonata is not formalistic (the last movement is, after all, the most tonally conservative of the four)? How does its modified sonata-form express “ideology” or “social meaning” any more than does the Pensée? And it should be recalled that the Pensée, which epitomises this formalistic, multivalent harmony, was declared by Prokofiev to be one of his best works. Furthermore, even if

8 Seroff, Prokofiev, 199, 224 - 25; chapter 24 details the political process.
one can agree about what sort of musical traits constitute formalist tendencies, whether there is anything “bad” about formalism depends as much on a listener’s political views as on his musical taste. In actuality, the traits which distinguish a piece as acceptable to Nestyev are seldom truly technical; they have more to do with the complexity of the musical language’s presentation than with the language itself.

Ultimately, the change in Prokofiev’s style and specifically in his use of ambivalent harmonic language could be as much due to synthesis and maturation in the composer’s style as it is a result either of audience reaction or of politics. Whatever the case, the tonal language discussed in this paper remained a component of Prokofiev’s style on at least some level throughout his compositional career. Indeed, as both Roberts and Bass concede, this particular tonal language characterises most modern Russian music. Thus an understanding of this language is not only helpful for a comprehension of Prokofiev’s work, but for that of his contemporaries as well. Whatever analytic methods are applied to this music, they must be flexible enough to take this harmonic ambiguity into account, and they must provide the tools to describe it accurately.
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67


