

POLYPHONICIZED RECAPITULATION IN RACHMANINOFF'S SECOND PIANO CONCERTO

ELLEN BAKULINA, University of North Texas. TSMT 2022

This paper seeks to renew a theoretical interest in texture by suggesting that textural changes across large spans of time can serve as an important form-building strategy. I offer the concept of a polyphonicized recapitulation, a large-scale thematic return where the original theme is counterpointed by a prominent different melody. The countermelody to the main theme may (1) be entirely new, (2) be the result of a gradual thematic development (teleological recapitulation), or (3) have existed independently in an earlier section prior to the recap. Relevant concepts include the apotheosis (Edward T. Cone) and statistical parameters of music (Leonard Meyer). Based on relative phrase-structural independence of the countermelody, one can also “measure,” relatively speaking, the degree of polyphonicization in a recapitulation. I then analyze an extreme example of a teleological polyphonic recapitulation—movement 1 of Rachmaninoff’s Second Piano Concerto. There, the countermelody is a fully-fledged telos in James Hepokoski’s (1993) sense—the endpoint of a lengthy thematic generation of a goal theme—and additionally a powerful expressive climax of the movement.

EXAMPLES OF POLYPHONICIZED RECAPITULATIONS in the 19th century and onwards

Work	Degree of polyphonicization in the recap	Recap climactic or not
Chaikovsky. Romance op. 5	Mildly polyphonicized	Post-climactic
Chaikovsky. “June” from <i>The Seasons</i>, op. 37a. m. 54	Mildly polyphonicized	Post-climactic
Chaikovsky. Symphony no. 4, mvt 1, MT return in D minor	Significantly polyphonicized. Countermelody in trombones	Climax
Chaikovsky. Symphony no. 6, mvt 1, m. 3 after letter N	Mildly polyphonicized	Local climax on the way to a later, more intense climax
Rachmaninoff. “Oh, never sing,” op. 4 no. 4, m. 39	Recap combines two thematic strands	Pianissimo dynamic, can be heard as a quiet climax
Rachmaninoff. Preludes: Op. 23 no 4, D major, m. 53	Mildly polyphonicized	Post-climactic.
Op. 23 no. 6, Eb major, m. 23	Mildly polyphonicized	Post-climactic
Op. 23 no. 10. Gb maj, m. 35	Significantly polyphonicized	Post-climactic
Op. 32 no. 13, Db maj, m. 42	Significantly polyphonicized, teleological	Climax (+ telos?)
Rachmaninoff. SECOND CONCERTO, mvt 1	Extremely polyphonicized, teleological	Climax + telos
Wagner. Tannhäuser overture	Recap combines two thematic strands	Post-climactic; later reaches another climax
Grieg. Holberg Suite, no. 4	Mildly polyphonicized	Post-climactic
Bizet. L’Arlesienne, Farandole	Recap combines two thematic strands	
Britten. Guide to the Orchestra	Recap combines two thematic strands	Climax

EXAMPLES OF POLYPHONICIZED RECAPITULATIONS from Chaikovsky and Rachmaninoff

Chaikovsky, *The Seasons*, op. 37a, “June (Barcarolle).” Mildly polyphonicized: countermelody is fragmentary and not phrase-structurally independent.

54 *a tempo.* *p* *espress.* *p*

main theme
new countermelody

The image shows a musical score for the piano part of Chaikovsky's "June (Barcarolle)". It features two staves: a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The treble staff begins with a melodic line labeled "main theme" in red, starting at measure 54. The bass staff provides accompaniment, with a new melodic line labeled "new countermelody" in red. Dynamics include piano (*p*) and *espress.* (espressivo). The tempo is marked *a tempo.*

Rachmaninoff, “Oh, never sing,” op. 4 no. 4, m. 39. Two melodies, each with a clear phrase structure, borrowed from two separate sections of form, counterpoint each other.

pp Voice: main theme return (A' section of a ternary form)
на - ють мнѣ о - нѣ Дру - гу - ю жизнь и бе - регъ даль - ний

Piano: introductory theme
ppp

The image shows a musical score for Rachmaninoff's "Oh, never sing". It features a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line is labeled "Voice: main theme return (A' section of a ternary form)" in red and includes Russian lyrics. The piano accompaniment is labeled "Piano: introductory theme" in red and features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. Dynamics include *pp* and *ppp*.

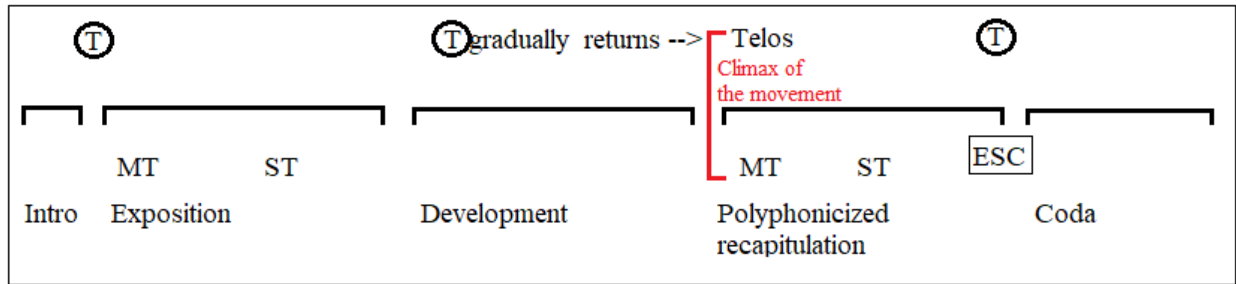
Rachmaninoff, Piano prelude in Db major, op. 32 no. 13. Polyphonic recap is (mildly) teleological: rhythmic motive in countermelody had been gradually introduced in the middle section.

m.42 Grave. upper voice: opening theme
alto: new countermelody
rhythmic motive from middle section

The image shows a musical score for Rachmaninoff's "Piano prelude in Db major". It features two staves: a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The treble staff begins with a melodic line labeled "upper voice: opening theme" in red. The bass staff provides accompaniment, with a new melodic line labeled "alto: new countermelody" in red. A red arrow points to a rhythmic motive in the bass staff labeled "rhythmic motive from middle section". Dynamics include *ff* and *6* (sextuplet). The tempo is marked *Grave.*

RACHMANINOFF, SECOND PIANO CONCERTO, movement 1. Formal diagram.

“T” stands for the telos motive



TELEOLOGICAL GENESIS: selected statements of the telos motive and theme

Four musical excerpts illustrating the teleological genesis of the telos motive:

- Intro (m. 7):** Piano part, marked *rit.* and *a tempo con passione*. The telos motive is circled in the piano part.
- Dev. m. 152:** Brass section (Cor., Tr-be, Tr-ni, Tuba). The telos motive is circled in the Cor. part.
- Dev. m. 161:** Oboe (MT material) and strings. The telos motive is circled in the strings part.
- m. 184:** Piano and Strings. The telos motive is circled in the Piano part.

Polyphonic recap: telos m. 245

Maestoso. (Alla marcia.)

piano
Telos theme *ff*
central motive
Orchestra. Main theme *ff*

End of recapitulation m. 314

Flute *mf cresc. f dim. dim.*
Piano *f dim. mf dim.*
Low strings *f dim. mf dim.*
ESC

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