



Rachmaninoff and Dies Irae

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Introduction and Precedents

Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873-1943) was a formidable composer-pianist-conductor who continued Moscow's nineteenth-century tradition far into the twentieth century. His compositional style remained mostly unchanged throughout his career, a quality which appeals to admirers and critics alike. Defenders of the composer can claim that Rachmaninoff remained forever true to the beauty of his inner muse. Critics often claim that Rachmaninoff did not have anything new to say musically; that or he was writing in a musical idiom which had exhausted itself by the turn of the twentieth century.

However one hears and understands this aspect of Rachmaninoff's music, it is apparent that throughout his compositions he uses a number of idiosyncratic devices to help transmit his message. The influence and quotations of chants from the Russian Orthodox church can be found in a number of works. The ill-fated 1st Symphony, the Vespers, and the Symphonic Dances are among the compositions which borrow from the chants of his faith. The sounds of bells are also powerfully incorporated into much of his music. The 1st Suite for 2 Pianos and the finale of the 2nd Symphony contain majestic representations of ringing bells. One also need look no farther than the choral symphonic work *The Bells* (inspired by Poe's poem) or the work that launched him into stardom, the C# minor Prelude.

It is the *Dies irae*, however, which Rachmaninoff returned to most frequently in his compositions. He is the most well-known composer to most prolifically incorporate the *Dies irae* melody into his writings. This medieval chant had made its way into the Catholic Mass of the Dead, but far more significantly had made its way into the classical music world as a "death theme". Treatments of the theme by Berlioz and Liszt forever gave the melody diabolical extramusical associations. Musorgsky, Saint-Saëns, and Tchaikovsky further notably applied the tune for subtle and not so subtle effects. The theme has appeared in many Hollywood scores, especially for such macabre fare as Elfmans score for *The Nightmare Before Christmas* and Wendy Carlos's score for *The Shining*.

For Rachmaninoff, who was familiar with the applications of the *Dies irae* of his predecessors, the melody somehow became of great importance. Most often he would employ the first notes of the tune into a four-note motif, then easily used as melodic fragment, brief counterpoint, or figuration. Applications of the *Dies irae* in various forms can be found in over a third of Rachmaninoff's 45 numbered works, something approaching a lifelong *idée fixe*. Considering his popular image, this may also come as no surprise. He maintained a dark, tall, brooding, and frowning public image, and performed at the piano rather silent, stoic, and immobile. "A six-and-a-half foot tall scowl" is how Stravinsky would famously describe him. It is not difficult to imagine the composer as a man fixated with death (who else would write a piece called *Isle of the Dead*?) and intent on displaying it through his music.

This paper attempts to investigate a brief history of the *Dies irae*, show its prototypical use by Rachmaninoff's predecessors and probable influences, and document Rachmaninoff's extensive use of the motif in his own compositions. There is no serious attempt in the musicological literature to provide a justification of such extensive quotations (and the composer himself provided none), and this paper continues that sad trend. At its heart, this paper is just a glorified list of Rachmaninoff's compositions which I hear as using the *Dies irae*.

The *Dies irae*

The musical theme *Dies irae* takes its title from the first words of the most famous medieval Latin sequence. The text of the poem is generally attributed to 13th century Franciscan monk Tomaso de Celano (c. 1200 c. 1255), disciple and biographer of St. Francis of Assisi.¹ The poem consists of 17 stanzas of triple rhymes in trochaic meter. The text quickly gained popularity during the 13th and 14th century, finding its way into French and Italian missals, and getting set to music by an unknown composer. The hymn proved so popular that with the addition of three catalectic rhymed couplets at the end, *Dies irae* survived the purge of Latin sequences from the liturgy during the Council of Trent (1545-1563). The chant thus officially entered the Catholic liturgy as part of the Mass of the Dead (the Requiem Mass) as well as the

¹ The main evidence is based on the testimony in Bartholomew of Pisa's 1385 book *Liber Conformitatum s. Francisci cum vita Domini Nostri Iesu Christi* ("Prosam de mortuis, quae cantatur in Missa, Dies irae, dies illa, dicitur fecisse" "From Gih, page 1). Many other potential authors of the hymn have been put forward by various scholars, including contemporaries Pope Innocent III, predecessors Pope Gregory I (from many centuries earlier), and followers Agostino Biella (two centuries later). For good reads into the authorship, see Julian and Foley.

liturgy for All Soul's Day. After Vatican II in 1964, the hymn was dropped from all rites of the church except the liturgy for All Soul's Day in the United States Diocese.

The text itself is a vivid, desperate first-person account of the Last Judgment, a topic of vital concern to Christians of the Middle Ages. The title *Dies irae* is commonly translated as 'Day of Wrath', and this is the unforgiving mood that the sequence intends to convey to its reader. Particularly frightful are the first seven stanzas, which describe the physical environment: trumpets calling, dead bodies rising, and burning fires. The narrator spends the rest of the poem pleading the Judge for mercy; particularly effective is the 14th stanza which reads 'My prayers are unworthy; but you, the Good, show me favour, lest I be burnt up in eternal fire.'² The hymn serves as a reminder of the darker nature of the Resurrection, and as a warning to both the lost and the saved of the wages of sin.

As is typical of medieval plainchant, each note of the musical line corresponds to a single syllable of the text. Following the rhyming structure of a sequence, the end of each musical phrase in a stanza always returns to the same note.³ Both of these characteristics help lend a stark and immediate mood to the music, one quite befitting the subject of the hymn. Here are the opening stanzas of the tune of *Dies irae*:

The image displays three stanzas of the opening of the hymn *Dies irae*, each with a musical staff in G-clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The notes are connected by a single melodic line across the stanzas, with lyrics written below. The first stanza has two versions: 1. 'Di - es ir - ae, di - es il - la' and 1. 'Day of wrath! O day of mourn - ing'. The second stanza has two versions: 2. 'Quan - tus tre - mor est fu - ti - rus,' and 2. 'Oh, what fear man's bos - om ren - deth'. The third stanza has two versions: 1. 'sol - vet sse - x - hum in fa - vil - la:' and 1. 'See ful - filled the prop - hets' warn - ing'. The fourth stanza has two versions: 2. 'quan - do in dex - est ven - tu - rus,' and 2. 'When from heav'n the Judge des - cen - deth'. The fifth stanza has two versions: 1. 'te - ste Da - vid cum Sib - yl - la.' and 1. 'Heav'n and earth in ash - es burn - ing.' The sixth stanza has two versions: 2. 'cunc - ta stric - te dis - cus - su - rus!' and 2. 'Oh, whose sen - tence all de - pend - eth.'

Example 1: Opening stanzas of *Dies irae*

Dies irae has been employed by many composers dating back several centuries. Early seventeenth century efforts like those by Victoria and Brummel treated polyphonic settings of the tune and text. As similar treatments of the hymn became more secularized over the following centuries, the use of *Dies irae* by composers would fall into two categories. The first category is free musical settings of the text, generally done as a free setting of the entire Requiem mass. Mozart's and Verdi's settings of the text are the most well-known today, but there are hundreds of examples.

The second adaptation of *Dies irae* is one which employs the plainchant but not the text. The general idea with this method is that listeners will identify the tune and will then draw parallels between the music and themes of fire, the Last Judgment, and death. Very often, the tune was used in musical representations of the Totentanz (Danse Macabre), the piece of medieval folklore where Death usually playing a fiddle led people of all walks of life into their graves. Composers do not use the entire tune, however, which can stretch to several minutes. Varying degrees of length are used, ranging from entire phrases of the first two stanzas to just the first four notes. Rachmaninoff in employing the *Dies irae* in his compositions, generally used between four and seven notes (the first phrase of the chant), and often added prefixes and suffixes to those notes when composing a theme. What follows is a survey of the compositions employing the *Dies irae* in a number of guises that likely influenced Rachmaninoff in a direct way, even after having reached maturity as a composer.

Berlioz: *Symphonie fantastique* (1830)

The most famous musical occurrence of *Dies irae* is in Hector Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique*. As far as I can tell, it is also the first occurrence of the tune in a secular setting. This revolutionary work of

² Julian, page 295.

³ It has been suggested that Latin sequences and their music developed as a mnemonic device to remember the words to various parts of the liturgy.

1830 allowed for the continuation and advancement of the symphonic form, which had reached a stylistic standstill after Beethoven. It also threw open the doors for programmatic compositions so typical of the Romantic era. It is Berlioz's semi-autobiographical tale of unrequited love for English actress Harriet Smithson, not so subtly subtitled "Episode in the Life of an Artist". In the fourth episode of the symphony, the March to the Scaffold, the artist attempts to commit suicide by taking an overdose of opium, but the drug proves too weak to be fatal, instead induces fearsome dreams. In these crazed visions, Berlioz is marched to the guillotine and executed.

In the fifth episode, the Dream of a Witches' Sabbath, the hallucinations continue. This time, the scenario is at the burial of the decapitated artist, where witches have gathered to celebrate. To his horror, the beloved has also come to attend his burial and is dancing among the witches! The first two phrases of the *Dies irae* theme is heard first after the ringing of bells, stated by bassoons and ophicleides, and even noted in the score:

Dies irae
sans presser

Example 2: Berlioz, Symphonie fantastique, Dream of a Witches' Sabbath, mm. 127-145
then immediately and hurriedly repeated by the horns and trombones:

Example 3: Berlioz, Symphonie fantastique, Dream of a Witches' Sabbath, mm. 147-157
then plucked 2 octaves higher by violins and woodwinds in even further diminution, altering the rhythm:

Example 4: Berlioz, Symphonie fantastique, Dream of a Witches' Sabbath, mm. 157-162

This three-fold treatment of the music is repeated twice, imprinting the dance-like melody in the listener's memory. A round of witches dancing follows which is then treated to a fugal development, where a few hints of *Dies irae* are thrown in. At the climax of the piece the two themes are combined in a section of the score subtitled "Dies irae et Ronde du Sabbat ensemble", with the witches' dance played by the strings and the *Dies irae* played by everyone else.

Dies irae et Ronde du Sabbat ensemble

Example 5: Berlioz, Symphonie fantastique, Dream of a Witches' Sabbath, mm. 414-422

The *Symphonie fantastique* firmly establishes the use of *Dies irae* to invoke a dark mood, usually of death and grief in programmatic compositions. By all accounts, the inspiration of most (if not all) future occurrences of the *Dies irae* tune in music can be traced back to this work. Unfortunately, not much is known (or written) about Berlioz's personal connection to the tune. In 1836, six years after the composition of the *Symphonie fantastique*, he would set the text to original music in his *Grande Messe des Morts*. We see in a letter written just after the work's completion his acknowledgment of its liturgical source: "The ceremony begins; the bells toll, the whole hellish cohort prostrates itself; a chorus chants the plainsong sequence of the dead (*Dies irae*), two other choruses repeat it in a burlesque parody. Finally, the sabbath round-dance whirls. At its violent climax it mingles with the *Dies irae*, and the vision ends."⁴ Berlioz's program notes that were distributed at the premiere contain a footnote which slightly further show his connection with the tune: "Funeral knell, burlesque parody of the *Dies irae* (Hymn sung in the funeral

⁴ Cairns, page 360.

rites of the Catholic Church), sabbath round-dance. The sabbath round and the *Dies irae* combined.⁵ It is also likely that the literal inspiration for using the tune came from Goethe's *Faust*, which Berlioz had enthusiastically discovered (and would later introduce to Liszt) in 1828. In the Cathedral scene which precedes Gretchen's decapitation, the *Dies irae* is to be sung to an organ accompaniment. It is tempting to trace all current use of the *Dies irae* through Berlioz back to Goethe, the ultimate source of Romanticism.

Rachmaninoff was well-acquainted with this work (not to mention the *Faust* story). His earliest documented encounter was during his first tour of the United States, in 1910. Along with his 3rd Concerto, the *Symphonie fantastique* was on the program at the NY Philharmonic, masterfully conducted by Mahler. Rachmaninoff was quite smitten with the work; he placed it on the opening program for Moscow Philharmonic's 1912 season and a letter from that time affirmed his respect for Berlioz.⁶

The path down the musical family tree between Berlioz and Rachmaninoff is also quite short, and it is probable that even without the performance mentioned above, Rachmaninoff would have been familiar with the *Symphonie fantastique*. Berlioz introduced the work in person during his 2nd tour of Russia in 1867, greatly influencing St. Petersburg's trailing progressives The Mighty Handful and also the Moscow school. Alexander Siloti, Rachmaninoff's cousin and mentor, was a student of Liszt, the most famous proponent of the *Symphonie fantastique*. Aaron Copland even noted that the history of nineteenth-century Russian music (Rachmaninoff's formative milieu) is unthinkable without Berlioz, noting Stravinsky's intimate familiarity with the tune from his St. Petersburg days.

Liszt: Totentanz (Paraphrase über Dies Irae) (1859)

Franz Liszt (1811-1886) wrote the next major piece featuring the *Dies irae*, and Berlioz's influence cannot be clearer. Liszt was in attendance at the *Symphonie fantastique*'s premiere in Paris and gave it rave reviews, declaring it the work of genius. He admired the work so much he wrote a well-known piano transcription of the piece in 1834, four years after its premiere. Sir Charles Hallé recollected a concert where Berlioz conducted the March to the Scaffold, followed by Liszt playing his transcription of the same movement, with an effect even surpassing that of the full orchestra, and creating an indescribable *furor*.⁷

Clearly, Berlioz's use of *Dies irae* could not have escaped Liszt. But when combined with his religious beliefs and knowledge of the Catholic liturgy (he had a devout Catholic upbringing and late in life would take minor religious orders, becoming the Abbé Lisztö), the theme must have had a deep personal impact. The musical result, which one might expect as inevitable, is *Totentanz*, a massive virtuoso set of variations of the *Dies irae* for piano and orchestra. The work was first conceived by Liszt in 1839, not fully realized until 1859, and first premiered in 1865 with famed conductor-pianist Hans von Bülow (his son-in-law) as the soloist. On top of Berlioz's inspiration, two other sources have been quoted as influencing Liszt's *Totentanz*, the fourteenth century fresco *The Triumph of Death* and the Holbein *Totentanz* woodcuts.

Like Berlioz, Liszt used all three phrases from the entire first verse of the text. The work consists of the theme (various presentations of *Dies irae*), six variations (the last of which is in itself a theme and variations), and a coda. The *Dies irae* and virtuoso piano writing are prominently featured throughout, without much emphasis on traditional theme-and-variation development (the kind which would later be perfected by Brahms). Here, for example, is the introduction to the work, a menacing statement of *Dies irae* over a highly chromatic sequence on the piano:

The image shows a musical score for the introduction of Liszt's *Totentanz*. It is divided into two staves: 'Piano Solo' and 'Piano II (Orchestra)'. The 'Piano Solo' staff is marked 'Andante' and 'marcato', and the 'Piano II (Orchestra)' staff is marked 'Andante'. The Piano Solo part features a highly chromatic sequence in the right hand and a more rhythmic accompaniment in the left hand. The Piano II part features a series of chords in the right hand and a more rhythmic accompaniment in the left hand.

⁵ Cone, page 25.

⁶ In a letter to his formerly secret admirer Marietta Shaginyan, he wrote "Your reproaches in reference to Berlioz and Liszt convince me that you regard these composers negatively. I can only regret that we do not think alike of these composers." Bertensson, pages 181-182.

⁷ Hallé, page 57.

Example 6: Liszt, Totentanz, mm. 1-10

To include other examples would be redundant, for the whole work consists entirely of all imaginable combinations of virtuoso piano concerto writing and the *Dies irae*. Most notably about Liszt's use of the *Dies irae*, however, is the establishment of an excerpt of the first four notes of the melody as a fully realized quotation of *Dies irae*. This set the precedent for the four-note quotations that Rachmaninoff and others would grow fond of.

Rachmaninoff's exposure to Totentanz surely came through Siloti. Siloti, one of Liszt's last pupils, returned from his studies to Russia with a copy of the score, and in 1911 would publish a famous edition of the work. Between 1902 and 1904, Rachmaninoff conducted the work three times, all three with Siloti as soloist. Rachmaninoff's first public performance of the work as soloist was late in his career, in 1939.

The *Symphonie fantastique* and Totentanz comprise the two seminal examples of secular musical use of *Dies irae*, and two that Rachmaninoff was intimately familiar with. The former is a supreme example of its use as expressive means, the latter a supreme example of its use as formal means. As the nineteenth century progressed, under the influence of these two works, composers found newer ways to incorporate the *Dies irae* into their music. There are other late nineteenth century examples of applications of the *Dies irae* which Rachmaninoff encountered. Musorgsky would use four-note motifs in *Night On Bald Mountain* and in *Songs and Dances of Death*. Saint-Saëns would employ it in his *Danse Macabre*. Rachmaninoff's Russian contemporary Glazunov (who disastrously conducted the premiere of his 1st Symphony) worked into his suite *Les Moyens Ages*. Strauss penned in a single blaring quotation in his *Till Eulenspiegel*. Rachmaninoff's idol Tchaikovsky used it in his 3rd Suite and more subtly at the end of his 5th Symphony.

Musorgsky: St. John's Night on Bald Mountain (1867)

As early as 1860, Musorgsky had been mulling writing a piece on the subject of a diabolical St. John's Night celebration on Bald Mountain. From Rimsky-Korsakov's recollections it is known that hearing the Russian premiere of Liszt's Totentanz in March 1866 (a piece which immediately was accepted by the Mighty Handful) inspired Musorgsky to complete the task. He finished St. John's Night on Bald Mountain in 1867 but never published or performed it (the original version would be famously discovered and published in 1968). The work would undergo many revisions: three by Musorgsky himself (a fantasy for piano and orchestra in obvious homage to Liszt, a scene in the collectively composed opera-ballet *Mlada*, and a reduced version for the *Sorochintsy Fair*), a famous 1886 revision by Rimsky-Korsakov (which was a major revision of Musorgsky's last *Sorochintsy Fair* version), and a lesser known revision by Stokowski.

Night on Bald Mountain, as the piece's title is commonly shortened to, is a wild symphonic work representing Tchernobog (the Satan figure of Russian lore) and his witches gathering on top of Bald Mountain for a night of dancing and revelry on St. John's Eve. The programmatic nature of the work was detailed in a letter to Rimsky-Korsakov written shortly after completion of the work: "I have finished St. John's Night on Bald Mountain, a musical picture with the following program: (1) assembly of the witches, their chatter and gossip; (2) cortege of Satan; (3) unholy gratification of Satan; and (4) witches' sabbath."⁸

A more easily traceable account of the programme is the score's inscription: "Subterranean sounds of supernatural voices—Appearance of the spirits of darkness, followed by that of Satan himself. Glorification of Satan and celebration of the Black Mass. The Sabbath Revels. At the height of the orgies the bell of the village church, sounding in the distance, disperses the spirits of darkness. Daybreak."⁹

It practically comes as no surprise, then, that Liszt-inspired outbursts of the *Dies irae* are strewn throughout the piece, most effectively at its orgiastic climax. Rimsky-Korsakov clearly recognized the reference and left them in his revision. The whirlwind which opens the piece starts with a brief four-note phrase in the lower strings which more than hints at the *Dies irae*:

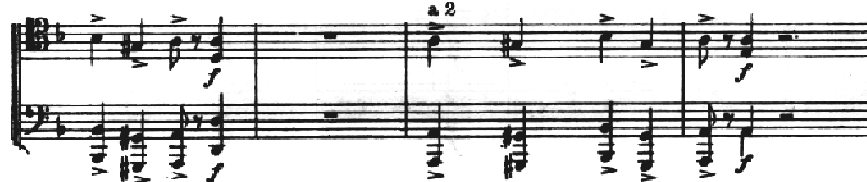


⁸ Brown, page 88.

⁹ Woodard, page 40.

Example 7: Musorgsky, Night on Bald Mountain, mm. 2-4

After the introduction is restated to preface Tchernobog's entrance, a variety of themes are tossed about, culminating in a wild dance prior to the village bells' peals of dawn. At the peak of this witches' sabbath (a clear tip of the hat to Berlioz), the celebrations are punctuated by various brass and woodwind utterances of the same type of distorted four-note *Dies irae* quotations:



Example 8: Musorgsky, Night on Bald Mountain, mm. 2-5 after [R]



Example 9: Musorgsky, Night on Bald Mountain, mm. 4-1 before [V]

Rachmaninoff loved this work, and conducted it seven times, making it his most-conducted non-operatic work by another composer. The first time was in 1905, it appeared in his United States conducting debut in 1909, and it was also on the program the only time he performed the *Symphonie fantastique* in 1912.

Saint-Saëns: Danse Macabre, op. 40 (1874)

Saint-Saëns, a lifelong fan of the *Symphonie fantastique* and early friend of both Berlioz and Liszt, paid tribute to both in a way when composing his light-hearted *Danse Macabre*. The orchestral showpiece featuring Death on a fiddle integrates the *Danse Macabre* of medieval lore, *Dies irae*, and the literary influences of Lahor and Cazalis. The popular success of this piece has helped to make some of its musical devices, the *Dies irae* included, cliché. Some are his own, such as the xylophones used to represent clattering skeleton bones, and the solo violin's e-string tuned a semitone lower to exploit the tritone (the devil's interval) across open strings. Others are borrowed from Berlioz, such as playing col legno and a quotation from the *Dies irae*. Musorgsky didn't care at all for the trivialization of the *Dies irae* that this work implied: "The trend of M. de Saint-Saëns' mind was capable of digesting such an indigestible thought (a deliberation, perhaps?) and confronts the oppressive and aching 'Dies Irae' Danse macabre of the Abbé Liszt with a sentimental miniature 'violin solo danse macabre M. de Saint-Saëns.' This is no matter for brains."¹⁰

After the dazzling fugue on the devil's waltzing theme in section C, the *Dies irae* makes its entrance. It is slightly melodically transformed, and rhythmically nearly unrecognizable. Saint-Saëns gives the theme first to the woodwinds and then to the brass. The first time it's played the initial interval is a major second (shown here), but the second time the initial interval is the traditional minor second.



Example 10: Saint-Saëns, Danse Macabre, mm. 1-7 after [D]

Rachmaninoff only performed this work once, with Siloti, in an arrangement for two pianos. This occurred in 1900, probably at the same concert in which he performed *Trepak* with Chaliapin.

Musorgsky: Trepak, from Songs and Dances of Death (1875)

Rachmaninoff wrote over eighty songs, a medium of composition which, like Musorgsky, he would indulge in throughout his career. Musorgsky's last song cycle, *Songs and Dances of Death*, is a masterpiece of progressive harmonic and voice writing, and stands tall as the greatest Russian song cycle. *Trepak*, the third song, is saturated with four-note quotations of the *Dies irae* motif. It opens with the fragment deep in the bass of the piano:

¹⁰ Wanninger, page 74.

Lento assai. Tranquillo

Lento assai. Tranquillo

Example 11: Musorgsky, Trepak, mm. 1-3

The theme and its bass accompaniment are treated to seemingly random rhythmic variations, giving the entire piece a sense of aimlessness. The text of the poem depicts Death dancing with a drunk farmer lost in a blizzard, urging the man to rest and fall asleep in the cold.

Rachmaninoff performed Trepak publicly once early in his career in 1900, accompanying Chaliapin (his best friend and the most celebrated Russian bass of all time).

Tchaikovsky: Orchestral Suite #3, op. 55 (1884)

This work likely began life as a symphony, but over the course of its composition became a suite of four unrelated movements. The last movement of this Suite takes the form of a theme and variations. In the 4th variation, a single uncalled-for fortissimo quotation of the *Dies irae* interrupts the bizarre polka. There are no convincing clues as to the reason for the tune's inclusion:

Example 12: Tchaikovsky, Orchestral Suite #3, op. 55, IV, Variation 4, mm. 17-21

Rachmaninoff's only performance of this suite was the finale of the Suite in 1913 (Tchaikovsky's multiple conducting performances of the piece also included only the variations finale). He probably was aware of the *Dies irae* in this piece if he selected the only movement of its occurrence to perform. Also on this program was Tchaikovsky's 4th Symphony, a piece famous for representing the composer's fear of death through its 'fate knocking at the door' motif.

Tchaikovsky: Manfred Symphony, op. 58 (1885)

This symphony was likely the first orchestral score Rachmaninoff ever studied, having picked it up at age 13 when starting his studies with Arensky at the Moscow Conservatory. He was so smitten with the work he made a four-hand piano transcription of the work and even performed it for the master. This close and early involvement with the work quite likely provided a young Rachmaninoff with his first introduction to the *Dies irae* theme. It certainly inspired him enough in other ways: he was to write a symphonic poem on the same subject four years later and borrow some of its themes for his Elegiac Trio in G minor.

Tchaikovsky composed this symphony based on the Byron's Manfred at the urgings of Balakirev. The introduction to the finale, *Allegro con fuoco*, reads 'The subterranean palace of Arimanes. Manfred appears in the midst of a bacchanale. Invocation of the phantom of Astarte. She predicts the end of his earthly misery. Manfred's death.'¹¹ The symphony seems headed for a furious finale borrowed from the epic first movement, until it is interrupted: Tchaikovsky had followed Balakirev's suggestion that Manfred's death should be scored with organ. In the final *ff* largo passages with the organ, Manfred's lasts

¹¹ Tchaikovsky, Eulenburg Edition of score to Manfred Symphony, page 198.

gasps are underscored by the *Dies irae* melody. In fact, the exact point of his death is likely in the second phrase of the tune which isn't completed but rests on the F# chord:



Example 13: Tchaikovsky, *Manfred* Symphony, IV, mm. 472-475

As the symphony ebbs away after these measures, the basses pick up the *Dies irae* from the organ. They start with a six-note repeated phrase which quickly disintegrates to the final minor-third interval finishing on the final B.

Tchaikovsky: Symphony #5, op. 64 (1888)

Tchaikovsky's fifth symphony, like his fourth, has a programme. But unlike the fourth, the programme is largely unknown; there exist vague inscriptions on the manuscript: "Murmurs, doubts, laments, reproaches against XXX."¹² His own view of the piece after the premiere sounds exactly like many of comments Rachmaninoff would later say about his own compositions: "I have come to the conclusion that it is not successful. It contains something repellent, an excess of color and insincerity, something labored that audiences recognize instinctively."¹³

The symphony is classical in form but contains a recurring motif (which, like the recurring motif in the 4th, has come to be known as a "fate" motif) it bears similarity to a theme from Chopin's "Heroic" polonaise) which appears at several places without regard to conventions of style. It is in the 4th movement that *Dies irae* briefly appears.

A drum roll introduces the second theme, a fearful descent down the E-minor scale. The strings introduce an agitated sequence of four notes calling out the *Dies irae* melody (all notes played with downbows), but with a final interval of a fourth (instead of the usual minor third), followed closely by doubled eighth notes to finish the descent.



Example 14: Tchaikovsky, Symphony #5, IV, mm. 12-18 after [C]

What follows this statement is an immediate passage of varied presentations of this theme, some of which remind more of *Dies irae* than others, like this woodwind passage:

¹² Weinstock, page 299.

¹³ Weinstock, page 302.



Example 15: Tchaikovsky, Symphony #5, IV, mm. 9-13 after [E]

Later, after loud and dramatic restatements of the symphony's motif, Tchaikovsky uses the first four notes of that second theme as rapid accompaniment for further statements of the motif and the movement's first theme. Here is an example of the accompaniment during the lead-in to the 3rd theme:



Example 16: Tchaikovsky, Symphony #5, IV, mm. 218-221

Masterful contrapuntal weaving of the four-note fragment and the entire 2nd theme occurs throughout the rest of the movement. While that theme might be questioned as an actual quotation of the *Dies irae*, its nearness would not have escaped Rachmaninoff. Its treatment, particularly in the developmental sections, foreshadows similar treatment in his 2nd Symphony and in the *Isle of the Dead*.

Rachmaninoff conducted this work three times, twice in 1905 and once in 1912. It is important to note that Rachmaninoff thought so highly of this piece as to make it the first non-operatic work he conducted professionally.

Brahms: Intermezzo in E-flat Minor, op. 118 no. 6 (1893)

This intermezzo is the crowning achievement of the opus 118 set of six piano pieces. It is one of the last piano works Brahms wrote (there is evidence that the 4 Pieces, opus 119 were written several years earlier). The germinal musical idea, presented *p* and *pp* in the opening measures (over an arpeggiated *ppp*, *una corda* bass line), is an elaboration on the four-note *Dies irae* motif:

Andante, largo e mesto



Example 17: Brahms, Intermezzo in E-flat Minor, mm. 1-3

A middle theme is presented in *f* and *ff*, but the attention is quickly grabbed again by *Dies irae* theme until the end. The quotation of the chant, along with the extreme dynamic ranges and *una corda*

instructions, impart a grave and serious mood to the piece, one which Rachmaninoff surely took pleasure in. The piece was in his repertoire, and Olga Samaroff's account of a 1927 New York concert exposes his understanding of the work (and the *Dies irae* quotations in the opening measures): "Brahms clearly indicated the establishment of this general mood in the opening section of the said work by marking the first four measures *piano*, *otto voce* and the repetition of the phrase beginning at the fifth measure *pianissimo* in the treble with a triple *pianissimo* in the bass. Mr. Rachmaninoff played all these measures *forte* or *mezzo forte*, thus throwing a clear, decisive light on the outlines of the music."¹⁴

Strauss: Till Eulenspiegel (1894)

In this tone-poem which dabbles in the metaphysics of humor in its portrayal of that merry prankster of Austrian myth, one of the many expressive motifs used is a four-note blurt of the *Dies irae*. Strauss's inspiration for the tone poem was likely the 1869 book *The Glorious Adventures of Tyl Ulenspiegel* by Belgian Charles de Coster, a book taking place in medieval times and steeped in references to the Catholic church and All Souls Day. In fact, the banishment that sets Till on his adventures was punishment for critical remarks made about the Church after an All Souls Day service (at which, presumably, the *Dies irae* was heard).

As the music follows Master Till along his journeys, one of the scenes depicts him disguised as a priest and delivering a solemn sermon. This sermon is interrupted by a premonition of the dangerous consequences his mockery of religion will have – three quick turns on the violins of the four-note *Dies irae* motif:



Example 18: Strauss, Till Eulenspiegel, mm. 185-187

With a glissando by the solo violin, such dismal thoughts are quickly forgotten in the narrative and the merry pranking continues. At the end, the musical premonition becomes reality and is recalled once, wretchedly as Till is hanged from the gallows.



Example 19: Strauss, Till Eulenspiegel, m. 593

Rachmaninoff, an outspoken admirer of Strauss's music, conducted this work twice with the Moscow Philharmonic, first in 1909 and later in 1912.

Glazunov: 'From the Middle Ages' Orchestral Suite, op. 79 (1902)

This ballet music from Glazunov presents four scenes from the stereotypical Middle Ages. The composer added notes detailing the programmes of each of the movements. The second movement, Scherzo, bears the description "A street theatre presents a Dance of Death. Death strikes up on the violin and cajoles the watchers to dance."¹⁵

After a jarring introduction by Death on the violins (including an augmented 4th interval played by trombones), the Dance begins with an oboe quotation of the first two phrases of the *Dies irae*. The open-

¹⁴ Bertensson & Leyda, pages 247-248.

¹⁵ Cox, page 4.

string fifths bouncing across the string instruments is borrowed from Saint-Saëns's *Danse Macabre*. Here is the opening of the second phrase of the tune:



Example 20: Glazunov, *From the Middle Ages*, Scherzo, mm. 40-46

The rest of the Scherzo relies on fragmentary treatment and combinations of the jaunty rhythm and pieces of the *Dies irae* rhythm.

The *Dies irae* shows up once more in the Finale: The Crusaders. The second theme of the movement sounds like one of the motifs from Rimsky-Korsakov's *Scheherazade*, and during several of its treatments it begins to sound a bit like the *Dies irae*. The most notable part is at section 18, just before the army marches away to the cheers of the crowd.¹⁶

Rachmaninoff conducted this work with the Moscow Philharmonic Society in July 1912. Night on Bald Mountain was also on the program that day. It is also of note that Glazunov was a direct contemporary of Rachmaninoff's and by 1902 may have been influenced by him in writing this ballet music. It was Glazunov who conducted at the debut of Rachmaninoff's first symphony, a work saturated with the *Dies irae* motif.

***Dies irae* in Rachmaninoff's Compositions**

It is surprising then, that given his familiarity with the *Dies irae* in these works (not to mention his own works), Rachmaninoff first began researching the *Dies irae* later in life, in 1931. Musicologist Joseph Yasser, friend of the composer, reported that:

He began to tell me that he was then very much interested in the familiar medieval chant, *Dies Irae*, usually known to musicians (including himself) only by its first lines, used so often in various works as a Death theme. However, he wished to obtain the whole music of this funeral chant, if it existed (though he wasn't sure of this). He also asked about its origin without offering a word of explanation for his keen interest in this.¹⁷

Yasser unfortunately doesn't say what resulted from the research or what Rachmaninoff's reactions were, but two important notes can be made. He clearly recognizes thematic use of the *Dies irae* in his predecessors (in all the works discussed above, and possibly some others). Secondly, he acknowledges his own use of the first lines of the *Dies irae*. This is important when examining his compositions, as appearances of the *Dies irae* can then be viewed as conscious inclusions, even outside of known programmatic compositions. The only three compositions SVR wrote after this encounter (the Paganini Rhapsody, the 3rd Symphony, and the Symphonic Dances) contain the most overt references to the chant since the *Isle of the Dead* from 1909.

What follows is a chronological exploration of such use, beginning with the unnumbered student work *Prince Rostislav* and ending with the *Symphonic Dances*, his final composition.

Prince Rostislav, Symphonic Poem after Alexei Tolstoy, no opus number (1891)

This early symphonic poem was written in one week in 1891, and owes much to Rimsky-Korsakov's similar tone poem *Sadko*. The inspiration for this work was Tolstoy's 1856 ballad of the same name, in which a defeated retreating prince languishes after drowning in the Dnieper River.¹⁸ After some lengthy peaceful exchanges with the current and the water nymphs, the prince calls out three desperate

¹⁶ Cox, page 5.

¹⁷ Woodard, page 43.

¹⁸ Some sources claim the inspiration was Tolstoy's *The Lady of Igor's Campaign* (not *Prince Rostislav*).

times: once for his wife, once for his brother, and a final appeal for his priest. The calls go unanswered and the prince is doomed to his watery grave.

The prince's three outbursts by full orchestra are the climax of the literary work and this symphonic poem. They are scored almost identically to the early outbursts from the 1st movement of Tchaikovsky's *Manfred* Symphony. Rachmaninoff doesn't hesitate to make the cries close quotations of the four-note *Dies irae* motif:



Example 21: Prince Rostislav, mm. 0-1 after 40

Symphony #1, op. 13 (1895)

If one work were selected to represent Rachmaninoff's expert employment of the *Dies irae*, it very likely may be this symphony. This early work is full of thematic use of the *Dies irae* that would come to characterize much of his later works. The four-note motif takes center stage as a main theme yet is seamlessly integrated into the overall form. It is remarkable to note that while the critical reviews of the work would cripple him artistically for three years, this style of writing would remain with him forever. Additionally, the score's epigraph reveals a programme quite fitting for use of the *Dies irae*:

“Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.”¹⁹

Rachmaninoff's first attempt at symphonic form suffered one of the most disastrous premieres in music history in 1897. The work, already privately panned by his former teacher Taneyev and by Rimsky-Korsakov, was poorly conducted by a supposedly inebriated 32-year-old Glazunov in St. Petersburg. The worst review came from César Cui, whose harsh criticism read:

“If there's a Conservatory in Hell, and one of its gifted pupils should be given the problem of writing a programmatic symphony on the Seven Plagues of Egypt, and if he should write a symphony resembling Mr. Rachmaninoff's symphony his problem would have been carried out brilliantly and he would enchant all the inmates of Hell.”²⁰

One wonders if Cui's infernal comparisons were coincidence or consciously drawn as a result of hearing the persistent death theme. Either way, so deeply was Rachmaninoff affected that the piece was never performed again in his lifetime (after the premiere, he would sink into a depression and not write any music until coaxed by the hypnotherapy of Dr. Nikolai Dahl, dedicatee of the 2nd Concerto). The symphony was rediscovered and entered the repertoire once more (with greater success) in Moscow in 1945.

Rachmaninoff does not wait to spring the *Dies irae* onto the audience. After the introductory horn call of the orchestra, the four-note motif is immediately played and briefly expanded by the strings, before a final horn call finishes the introduction.



Example 22: Symphony #1, I, mm. 1-5

The motif is then stated as the main theme of the movement, and Rachmaninoff treats it in typical form, gradually bouncing it around the orchestra in between hints of a lush second theme until a small climax before the development section. On the way, he even manages to give *Dies irae* a fugal treatment:



Example 23: Symphony #1, I, mm. 11-5 before 4

After an unsuccessful attempt by the second theme to gain control, the *Dies irae* accompanies the trombones to a fantastic grotesque finish.

¹⁹ This is a quote from the bible, Romans, xii, 19. This is the same epigraph used by Tolstoy (an idol of Rachmaninoff's second only to Tchaikovsky) in *Anna Karenina*.

²⁰ Bertensson & Leyda, page 71.

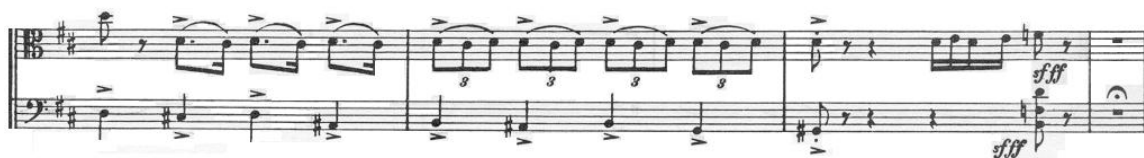
The second movement opens with the same ideas, this time in a different key and with a subdued pastoral mood. The *Dies irae* quotations from the first movement are never far, as the main theme hinges on the interval of a minor third while a modified version of the symphony's theme provides nearly constant counterpoint.

The third movement could rank among the greatest of Russian adagios if it weren't for the symphony's rough history (and if it weren't actually a larghetto). In this movement, the lyrical promise of the first movement's second theme is fulfilled. At the climax, Rachmaninoff inserts a clear quotation of the *Dies irae* motif in the accompanying French horns. It is a testament to the beauty of Rachmaninoff's orchestration and to the versatility of the motif itself that the reference seems the perfect counterpoint to the relaxing theme.



Example 24: Symphony #1, III, mm. 3-5 after 44

The fourth movement begins to wrap things up in typical Tchaikovskian fashion. After a cheery introductory fanfare, very brief quotations of the *Dies irae* are worked into the piece (a tuba quotation in section 47 and a full orchestral statement in section 49). This leads to a fiery premature climax with the trombones and tuba blazing with the *Dies irae* theme, culminating in a strikingly un-Tchaikovskian crash of the gong.



Example 25: Symphony #1, IV, mm. 4-7 after 60

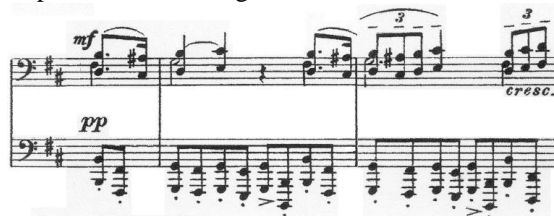
What follows the gong stroke is a dark and somber Largo finale whose mood quite closely resembles that of the *Isle of the Dead*, a work to be composed ten years later. The persistent quotation from the low strings in between crashes of the orchestra and gong is an unmistakable combination of the roll (which opens every movement and introduces each major element) and the ultimate minor third interval of the *Dies irae*:



Example 26: Symphony #1, IV, mm. 11-10 before end

Moment Musical, op. 16 no. 3 (1898)

This somber Moment Musical is sandwiched between the more impressive pianistic achievements of Numbers 2 and 4. The set was written after the composition of the Symphony #1 but before its premiere. This slowly unfolding miniature takes the form ABCABC, but the principle theme played in the right hand remains mostly unchanged between the three sections. Thus the driving energy of the piece rests in the treatment of the varying left-hand accompaniments. The B section is identified by staccato eighth-note octaves which stand out from the legato treatment of the theme in the right hand. The initial bars of this march-like treatment are brief quotes of the first phrase of the *Dies irae*. This contrapuntal device is fitting since the right hand's repeated melodic fragment is a mirror of a four-note *Dies irae* quotation.



Example 27: Moment Musical, op. 16 no. 3, mm. 33-35

Woodard states that the brief quotation of *Dies irae* highlights an otherwise undetectable likelihood that the principle theme was consciously composed as a freely inverted form of the *Dies irae*. I would rather believe that the outline and rhythmic form of the principle theme is highly typical of Rachmaninoff, and the *Dies irae* was molded to accent the principle idea.

2nd Suite for 2 Pianos, op. 17 (1901)

Rachmaninoff's next work contained all the tunes and pianistic wizardry that would come to typify the composer, but this time with twice as much force. This work, written around the same time as the 2nd Concerto, also contains some references to the *Dies irae*. This time, the references are very cleverly veiled.

He sneaks the first instance at the very end of the first movement, Introduction. Just as this movement is winding down, the melodic line seamlessly transforms into a *mezzo-forte* proclamation of the *Dies irae* in the 2nd piano, slightly altered:



Example 28: 2nd Suite for 2 pianos, Introduction, mm. 9-16 after [7]

Woodard claims that this quote foreshadows the two uses of *Dies irae* in the following Valse. Her claim that *Dies irae* is the base for the whirlwind accompaniment is a bold stretch of the aural imagination, but if true, does give evidence to Rachmaninoff's dry humor. In contrast, the slightly stretched four-note quotation as the main theme of the trio section of the Valse movement is unmistakable.



Example 29: 2nd Suite for 2 pianos, Valse, mm. 24-31 after [11]

Piano Sonata #1, op. 28 (1907)

Rachmaninoff's first piano sonata would be the first of several significant works completed while he lived in Dresden. This sonata is also his first explicitly programmatic work, based on the story of Faust (Faust as a programme would turn up later in his Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini). The programme of his works are important for they are as close as we can come to the deceased composer's intentions (from the point of view of quoting *Dies irae*). Unfortunately, we get the feeling that much of Rachmaninoff's inspiration will remain hidden to us:

“When composing, I find it of great help to have in mind a book just recently read, or a beautiful picture, or a poem. Sometimes a definite story is kept in mind, which I try to convert into tones without disclosing the source of my inspiration.”²¹

²¹ Bertensson and Leyda, page 156.

In various correspondences with the likes of Fokine and Respighi we have learned the programme for a small number of his works. In the case of the first piano sonata, the programme has been revealed, but as an early correspondence indicates, we are lucky to have it.

“The sonata is certainly wild and interminable. I think it takes about 45 minutes. I was lured into this length by its guiding idea. This is of three contrasting types from a literary work. Of course no program will be indicated, though I begin to think that the sonata would be clearer if the program were revealed.”²²

Fortunately, Rachmaninoff did reveal the explicit programme to Konstantin Igumnov, who premiered the work in Moscow in 1908. Igumnov reported the following program:

“I learned from him that when he composed this Sonata he had Goethe’s Faust in mind, and that the first movement corresponds to Faust, the second to Gretchen, and the third, to the flight of Brocken, and Mephistopheles, in the exact order of Liszt’s ‘Faust’ Symphony.”²³

As seen with Berlioz, application of *Dies irae* in implementing this programme isn’t too far-fetched. In the 3rd ‘Mephistopheles’ movement, naturally, Rachmaninoff uses an extended version of the 7-note phrase as one of the main themes to the movement. It makes its first appearance in a march-like passage in the middle and lower registers:



Example 30: Sonata #1, III, mm. 85-87

Later in the movement, Rachmaninoff uses the theme in the same setting in repeated contrasts with quotations from the main theme from the first movement.²⁴ The development reaches a fever pitch as it approaches a *fortissimo* passage, underscored by the theme in half notes:



Example 31: Sonata #1, III, mm. 263-266

The full references to this movement’s theme end at that passage, but there is one more reference to the *Dies irae* in the passage leading up to the final measures. In the *poco a poco accelerando* section, four-note references (with a wider interval of a fourth, indicating its genesis was separate from the theme already discussed) are stressed in the middle voices. These four-note ideas and the movement’s main theme show that the *Dies irae* played an important role in the composition of this sonata.



²² Bertensson and Leyda, page 138.

²³ Woodard, page 44.

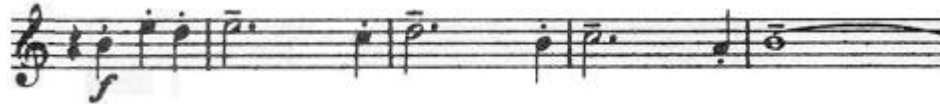
²⁴ Woodard would have found particular importance in the pages which alternate quotations of the 3rd movement’s *Dies irae* theme with the main theme from the 1st movement. She considers the 1st movement’s main theme a freely inverted form of the typical four-note *Dies irae* quotation.

Example 32: Sonata #1, III, mm. 446

Symphony #2, op. 27 (1907)

More than any other work, the 2nd Symphony has proven Rachmaninoff as a popular and successful composer for orchestral forces. At this point in the catalog of works, it may come as a surprise that *Dies irae* does not play a primary role in this symphony. The four-note motif is never far, however. A slightly twisted version of the motif is used as the main theme of the 2nd movement, and is further recollected in the last movement.²⁵

Like the opening measures of the first symphony, Rachmaninoff quickly introduces us to his *Dies irae*-based theme, as it is brayed by the French horns over galloping strings. A few notes are added to the front and back of the actual notes of the chant, a practice which adds rhythmic flexibility to the theme.



Example 33: Symphony #2, II, mm. 3-7

The second theme is a typically lush melody prefaced and accompanied by a four-note motif of the major triad. After various statements of the two themes and a dazzling interruption by a fugue, the movement closes with some somber brass chorales restating the 1st theme. Over a quiet timpani roll, they twice play the first theme but without the dressing of the *ö*prefixö:



Example 34: Symphony #2, II, mm. 12-17 after 44

After the pathos-laden 3rd movement, the 4th movement crashes along, stirring the senses and bringing to a close themes from all prior movements. The most effective quotation is at the climax of the movement (and of the entire piece), when the theme from the 2nd movement is gloriously recalled by the brass (in A):



Example 35: Symphony #2, IV, mm. 4-10 after 89

Rachmaninoff believed that each piece he played was designed around a culminating point. How the development and performance of the music preceding and following the point was played was critical to the success of the piece. If the point of the piece was not satisfactorily performed, it caused Rachmaninoff great anguish.²⁶ This amateurish Schenkerian treatment was of great importance to Rachmaninoff in both his compositions and his performances. It is a great testament to Rachmaninoff's inseparable relationship with the *Dies irae* to see him place the chant at the moment of greatest tension and release of this symphony.

Isle of the Dead, op. 29 (1909)

The inspiration for this symphonic poem is the Arnold Böcklin painting of the same name. Rachmaninoff had viewed a reproduction of the painting at an exhibition in Paris, and the image implanted itself in his mind. The gloomy painting depicts a dark rocky island jutting out from water, and a lone figure in a rowboat at the entrance to the island's inky lagoon. The 3rd (öLeipzigö) version of the painting is the one pictured on the title page of this paper.²⁷

²⁵ David Rubin's briefly study on the subject of the *Dies irae* in the 2nd symphony is gathering steam in critical circles. His article suggests that the tune plays as important a role in this work as in Rachmaninoff's first symphony, but this time around more subtly and brilliantly woven into the architecture of the work. Particularly of interest is his reading of the *Dies irae* in the famous melody from the 3rd movement, which is slowly coming into common acceptance (except here).

²⁶ For a revealing description of Rachmaninoff's mood after missing the point, see Marietta Shaginyan's recollections in Bertensson & Leyda, page 195.

²⁷ There are many curious facts surrounding Böcklin and the music he inspired. For instance, two years after the celebrated *Isle of the Dead*, Böcklin painted an *Isle of Life*. Rachmaninoff preferred the black-and-white reproduction of the painting to the colored originals. Four years after the writing of *Isle of the*

The bulk of the musical material is derived from two motifs: a pulsing 5/8 rhythm representing waves lapping at shore, and the *Dies irae*. Much like in the 2nd movement of the 2nd symphony, there is much material throughout the piece which reminds the listener of the *Dies irae*, and the feelings are confirmed by the literal quotation of the *Dies irae* which is withheld until the final bars of the piece, as the music fades away.

After a long pianissimo introduction of the 5/8 rhythm, the very first hint at the *Dies irae* theme is dropped by a single French horn:



Example 36: *Isle of the Dead*, mm. 25-29

Solo introductions of this motif are slowly passed around the brass and woodwinds while the strings continue lapping against the shore. For the first several minutes the strings' ostinato is still the driving musical force, but they eventually become relegated to the background as the *Dies irae* motif is given more prominence. After a grave and urgent proclamation of the wave theme and an equally funereal echo of the *Dies irae* motif, the piece yields to a middle section of entirely different character.

Woodard claims that the theme of this middle passage is both a variant and derivative of the *Dies irae*, but this makes little sense to the ears. Its character is different, being more lyrical and chromatic, and in a different key. In addition, we know from the composer in a letter to Stokowski that this tune was somehow injected into the work:

It should be a great contrast to all the rest of the work – faster, more nervous and more emotional – as that passage does not belong to the picture, it is in reality a supplement to the picture which in fact makes the contrast all the more necessary. In the former is death – in the latter is life.²⁸

Of even greater importance in the above quote is the admission of death as pervading the outside moods of the piece, particularly since Rachmaninoff was so secretive in revealing the inspirations or programmes of his works. After this middle theme combines with the *Dies irae* motif to rush to the crashing climax of the piece in measure 365, the music begins a long process of ebbing away. The first step is a creepy tremolo canon on the *Dies irae* motif.

Dead, Max Reger composed a set of four tone poems based on Böcklin, one of which was another *Isle of the Dead*. Böcklin's painting *Morning* was the inspiration for the *Etude-Tableau* Opus 33 Number 8. His painting *The Waves* was the inspiration for the *Etude-Tableau* Opus 39 Number 1 (also put to music by Reger as the 2nd in his Böcklin set). Rachmaninoff's inspiration for his *Prelude in B minor* was Böcklin's painting *The Return*; this fact was discovered when Moiseiwitsch revealed to the composer that the same painting was his mental image of the prelude!

²⁸ Martyn, page 205.

Example 37: Isle of the Dead, mm. 16-21 after [22]

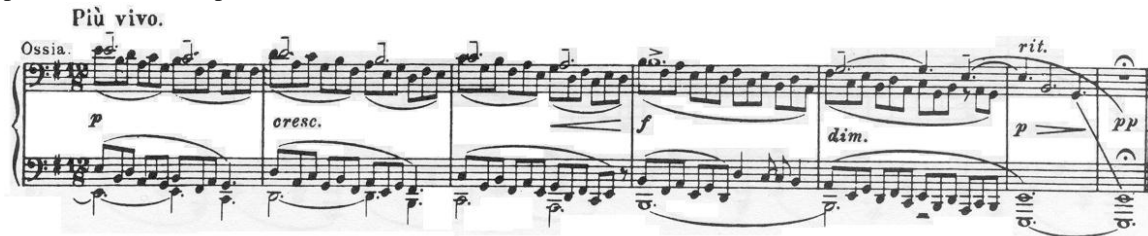
After this canon, the music continues to die away gloomily, mirroring the movement of the opening half of the piece. At the closing pianissimo bars of the piece, the cellos and bassoons have a note-for-note quotation of the first phrase of the *Dies irae* played to the rocking waves accompaniment:

**Example 38: Isle of the Dead, mm. 0-6 after [26]**

One wonders what Rachmaninoff's impetus was for saying the obvious at the end of *Isle of the Dead*. Perhaps he was consciously forming a style for use of the *Dies irae* which is typical of the Dresden works, where quasi-veiled or just slightly altered versions of the *Dies irae* theme were used throughout a work but unveiled just at the end (hear the end of the 1st Sonata's 3rd movement or the 2nd Symphony's 2nd movement). One might surmise that he was helping his audience identify that dark je-ne-sais-quoi which permeated his works. I am inclined to believe that the final true quotation of the *Dies irae* adds remarkable weight to the twenty minutes of music that had just preceded. The truly adventurous listeners will claim that this final cello quotation of the *Dies irae* actually is the crux and climax of the piece.

Prelude in E minor, op. 32 no. 4 (1910)

Rachmaninoff was fresh off the successful premieres of his 3rd Concerto when writing the Opus 32 Preludes. The superhuman *ossia* from that concerto's 1st movement was surely in his mind when composing the miniature *ossia* for this prelude. Rachmaninoff saves the *Dies irae* quotation for the very end of the piece, but this time he places it in the *ossia*. An accented quotation in dotted half-notes (continuing beyond the typical minor third to a fourth) lays over the descending figurations which have pervaded the entire piece.

**Example 39: Prelude in E Minor, op. 32 no. 4, ossia, mm. 152-158**

As is typical of Rachmaninoff's works composed in Dresden, he has saved the quotation for the very end of the piece.

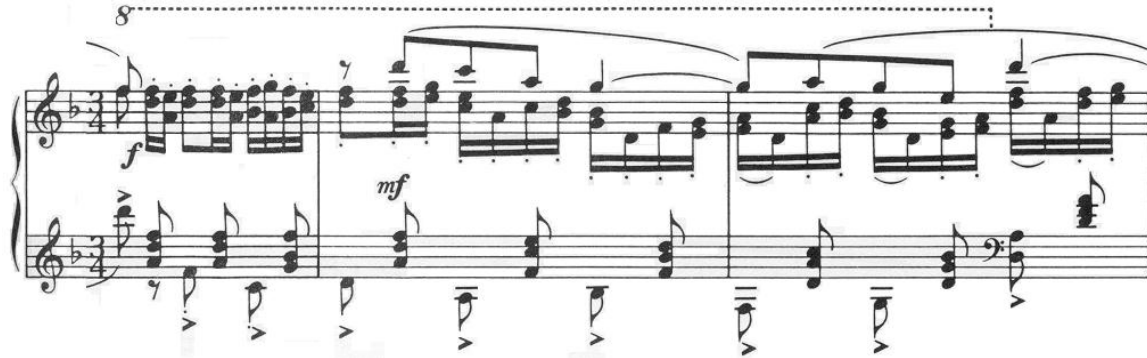
Etude-Tableau, op. 33 no. 1 (1911)

Near the end of Rachmaninoff's very first Etude-Tableau lies an extremely brief quotation of the *Dies irae* which brilliantly dissolves into the texture of the rest of the ending. In this ending, which finally breaks character from the urgent march of the rest of the etude, the four-note theme can be heard outlined by the top notes in the right hand for one measure. In the next measure, the motif is spread through the top notes and the right hand's inner voices. By two measures later, without a major change in character of the ending, no semblance of the motif can be heard.

**Example 40: Etude-Tableau, op. 33 no. 1, mm. 62-66****Etude-Tableau, op. 33 no. 4 (1911)**

This etude was discovered after the composer's death; he had never intended this work to be published. The single and brief quotation of *Dies irae* occurs at the musical peak of the piece, just after the

dramatic turning point. The left hand plays the theme in accented eighth notes, even stretching a few extra notes to fit the phrase, quite similar to the quotation in the first movement of the 1st Sonata.



Example 41: Etude-Tableau, op. 33 no. 4, mm. 52-54

The Bells, op. 35 (1913)

In the drowsy quiet of a Roman afternoon, with Poe's verses before me, I heard the bell voices, and tried to set down on paper their lovely tones that seemed to express the varying shades of human experience.²⁹ Such was the environment of the genesis of Rachmaninoff's favorite among his own compositions, the choral symphony *The Bells*. While working in Rome, Rachmaninoff received an anonymous letter containing a copy of Konstantin Balmont's extremely liberal translation of Poe's poem *The Bells*. The letter urged him that Balmont's verses would make for music ideally suited to the composer. This unique inspiration combined with unfinished plans for a new symphony to produce the choral symphony *The Bells*.

In the poem, a different bell is symbolically assigned to the four phases of human life, mirrored in the titles of the symphony's four movements: Silver Sleigh-Bells for birth, Mellow Wedding Bells for marriage, Loud Alarum Bells for a raging fire, and Mournful Iron Bells for death. It should come as no surprise that the closer the music approaches the final deathly phrase, the *Dies irae* becomes more prominent. In fact, Rachmaninoff recognized that the overall tone of his work in four movements would have to begin cheerful and end somber. He felt comfortable with this outline, recognizing the similar precedent set by Tchaikovsky in his *Pathétique* Symphony.

The first movement is one of the most joyful the composer ever wrote. Even so, for purposes of unity throughout the work, Rachmaninoff worked in a subtle reference to the *Dies irae*. It appears in the aftermath of the movement's climax, swaying in the strings:



Example 42: *The Bells*, I, mm. 157-160

The first few bars of the *Lento* second movement is taken directly from this quotation, a compositional device also used between the first two movements of the 2nd Concerto. This theme, half-way between full quotation of *Dies irae* and glimmering tolling of bells, remains in the foreground until the soprano begins her quasi-lament. Even as the soprano sings her second verse, it is intoned by strings and flutes, but most magically by the English horn, serving as a grim reminder of mortality amidst the joy of love and marriage:

²⁹ Bertensson & Leyda, page 185.

Example 43: The Bells, II, mm. 121-125

The *Dies irae* also makes a few hints at appearances in the frightening and demonic *Presto* third movement. In this movement, the quotations are used as musical introductions to certain verses sung by the chorus. The quote (still similar in content to that used in the first and second movements) can be heard before the lines *On affright, Now approaching, now receding/Rings their message through the night*, *Toll their frantic supplication/To the ruthless conflagration/Grows discordant, faint and weak*, and at the musical climax which occurs at *How the danger falls and rises like the tides that ebb and flow*.

In *The Mournful Iron Bells*, the inevitable *Dies irae* mention is delayed until late in the movement, at the climax. The familiar four-note theme can be heard in figuration emerging from the shimmering cymbal:

Example 44: The Bells, III, mm. 56-57

After this point, however, the *Dies irae* pervades most of the rest of the piece. During the brief interlude after the soloists' reentrance following this E-major climax, the celeste plays a brief quotation:

Example 45: The Bells, IV, m. 63

A bassoon quotation then introduces the soloists' lines *Those relentless voices rolling/Seem to take a joy in tolling/For the sinner and the just*:

Example 46: The Bells, IV, m. 69

After the chorus joins in, brief quotations can be heard throughout, especially in some outbursts by the trumpets and again by the xylophones. The somber mood changes drastically, however, immediately after the soloist has sung his last lines (*There is neither rest nor respite, save the quiet of the tomb!*). The Bells ends with a gorgeous short section in the major key which opened the work. It gently climbs into the most serene soundscape where the troubles of the previous movements are forgotten.

In My Garden at Night, op. 38 no. 1 (1916)

The six songs in Opus 38 would be Rachmaninoff's last songs, and one of the last works written in Russia. The first number is a setting of Avetik Isaakian's short poem In My Garden At Night. The poem describes a willow who cries all night but dries her tears come sunup. This isn't the most ideal literary inspiration for an application of *Dies irae*, but somehow Rachmaninoff saw fit to do so. In the rest between the soprano's two stanzas, the upper register of the piano takes up a bell-like intonation of the *Dies irae* theme. It ushers in the singer's second stanza and disappears shortly afterward:

Example 47: In My Garden at Night, op. 38 no. 1, mm. 8-10

Etude-Tableau in A minor, op. 39 no. 2 (1917)

Respighi orchestrated five of the Etudes-Tableaux, and from his correspondences with Rachmaninoff we know some of the composer's inspirations for these pieces. This etude-tableau represents the Sea and Seagulls. [This program was suggested by Mme. Rachmaninoff]³⁰

The few bars of introduction to this piece are a nearly naked quotation of the *Dies irae* played in the left hand:

Example 48: Etude-Tableau op. 39 no. 2, mm. 1-4

This left hand pattern becomes an ostinato for the right hand for the rest of the piece, with the disjointed right-hand melody mostly poking in between the main notes of the *Dies irae*. Like the Isle of the Dead, Rachmaninoff's other seafaring composition, this work beautifully fades away after one last statement of the *Dies irae* in the bass register.

4th Piano Concerto, op. 40 (1927)

The 4th Concerto continues to remain Rachmaninoff's most under-appreciated large-scale work. It suffered not only from lackluster critical response in its debut but from drastic and repeated revisions from the composer. The work was first sketched out (if not fully mentally realized) in Russia before Rachmaninoff's emigration in 1917, and penned and premiered in 1926. The composer was entirely displeased with the work, saying to Medtner (the work's dedicatee): "Just before leaving Dresden I received the copied piano score of my new concerto. I glanced at its size and I was terrified! Out of sheer cowardice I haven't yet checked its time. It will have to be performed like the Ring on several nights in succession! Apparently the whole trouble lies in the third movement. What I must have piled up there!"³¹

In the summer following the work's premiere in Philadelphia, Rachmaninoff made drastic revisions to the work, reducing its length by over 100 bars. This was the revision of the work which was

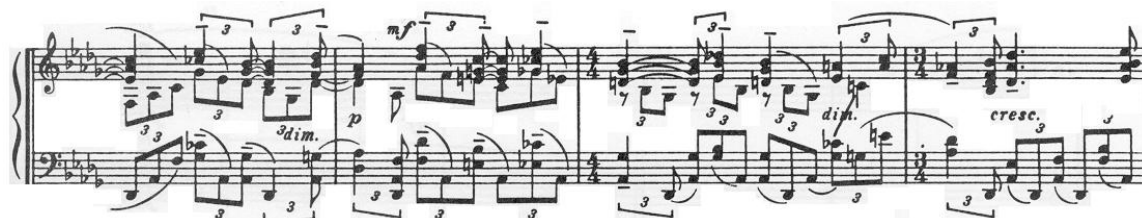
³⁰ Bertensson & Leyda, page 262.

³¹ Martyn, page 299.

first published in 1928. The work still displeased both critics and composer, and it was revisited one last time in 1941, further cutting the work (with most changes in the last movement). It is this final revision that Rachmaninoff recorded (his final performance of the piece, in fact).

In the original version of the work, *Dies irae* features prominently. It is heard as a main theme of the 3rd movement, and can be found tucked away in various guises throughout the 1st and 3rd movements. The result of Rachmaninoff's drastic cuts is that the *Dies irae*-based 2nd theme of the last movement is practically wiped out to compress and make room for the movement's other two themes. Only a single brief quotation of the original treatment of the theme remains in the final version as well as slight traces of the fragments from the earlier movements.

Here is the first occurrence of the 2nd theme of the last movement of the original version of the concerto, stated by the piano:



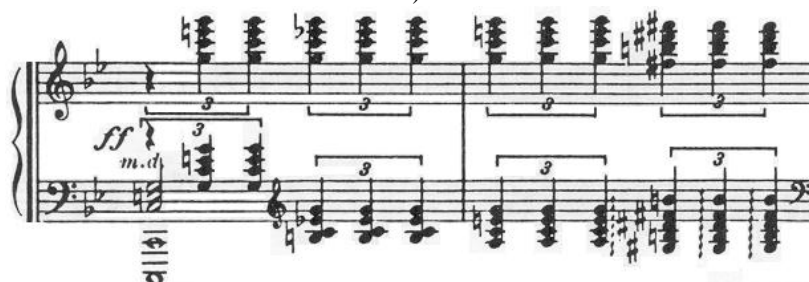
Example 49: Piano Concerto #4, original version, III, mm. 3-6 after 49

This theme is given a number of treatments, throughout the piano and orchestra, in a fashion similar to the 2nd movement of the 2nd symphony. Hearing the theme is important to identifying and tying together the fragmentary quotations that are scattered throughout (one is found plucked by strings in the very opening bars). Rachmaninoff was particularly harsh when revisiting this work several years after its composition. In the final revised version of the work, only one brief solo horn statement of this theme remains, which is then echoed by a solo violin:



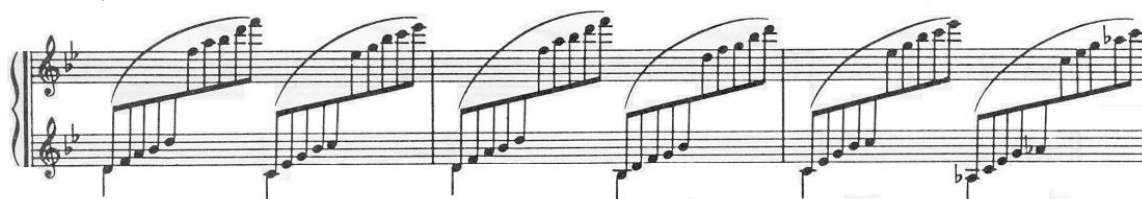
Example 50: Piano Concerto #4, 1942 revision, III, mm. 12-17 after 50

There are a few references to *Dies irae* throughout that are common to all versions of the concerto. The most overt is during the climax of the first movement, when in a fashion similar to the outbursts in Prince Rostislav, the crashing piano chords seem to hover around the four-note motif (this same climax occurs once more toward the end of the 3rd movement):



Example 51: Piano Concerto #4, original version, I, mm. 2-3 after 21

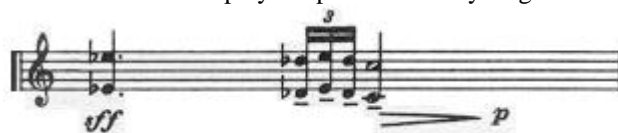
As the first movement appears to be winding to a quiet ending, the *Dies irae* is heard outlined in the piano's left hand accompaniment (in similar fashion to the early numbers in the Opus 39 Etudes-Tableaux). This treatment is common to all versions of the concerto:



Example 52: Piano Concerto #4, original version, I, mm. 6-8 after 30

One final reference to the *Dies irae* was worked into the 2nd movement. A brief rising piano cadence based on the four-note motif is presented shortly after first theme is played and elaborated. It is

capped by a single horn four-note quotation before returning to original material. In the original version, this horn quotation is still there but the lead-up by the piano is thickly disguised:



Example 53: Piano Concerto #4, 1942 revision, II, m. 4 after 36

Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini, op. 43 (1934)

Pitts Sanborn comically panned this tour-de-force favorite of Rachmaninoff as sounding sometimes like a plague of insects in the Amazon valley, sometimes like a miniature of the Day of Judgment and for a change goes lachrymose.³² While the references to plagues and tears are unbased, the reference to the Day of Judgment is founded by the multiple references to *Dies irae* found throughout the work.

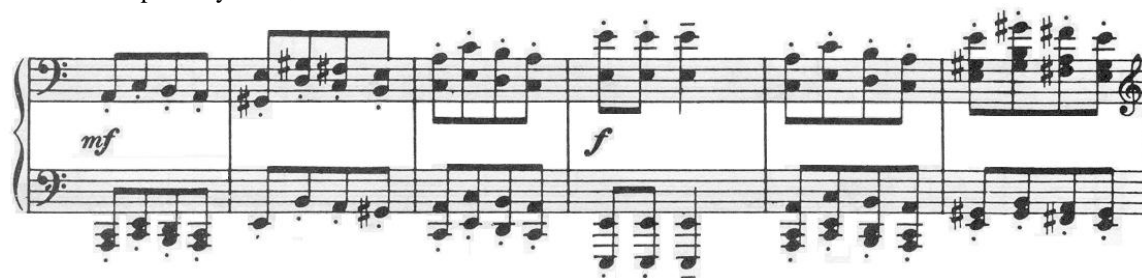
This work for piano soloist and orchestra is a virtuoso theme and variations on a melody familiar to many of the main theme of Paganini's 24th Caprice for solo violin (the 24th caprice is itself a theme and variations). Prior to Rachmaninoff, the theme had been successfully set to variation treatment by Liszt and Brahms (among many other lesser-known versions, including Piatigorsky and Lutoslawski). The work, consisting of 24 variations, peaks musically in the 18th variation (the most famous melody Rachmaninoff wrote) and then hurtles toward a fantastic climax. References to the *Dies irae* are found in four of the early variations and throughout the finale.

The first encounter of the melody is at the 7th variation. In fact, the melody is the main subject of this variation and is clearly stated by the piano while muted strings play the semi-quaver figure from the Paganini theme in diminution:



Example 54: Paganini Rhapsody, Variation VII, mm. 1-7

The 8th variation also features the melody, but this time varied so that the notes aren't played in the same melodic outline, and final interval has been stretched to a fourth (A-G#-A-E). The notes propel up through the width of the keyboard in a manner of *Dies irae* transfiguration new to Rachmaninoff but doubtless inspired by Liszt's Totentanz.



Example 55: Paganini Rhapsody, Variation VIII, mm. 1-6

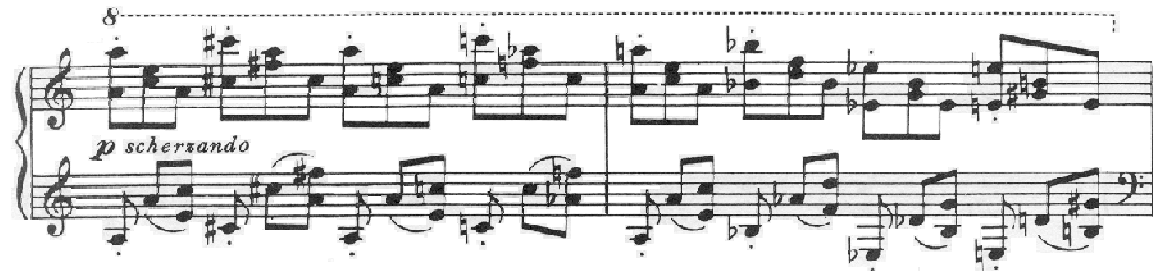
The ninth variation is an angry, off-beat exploration of the A minor triad. The *Dies irae* does not appear, but the mood and structure of the material are based upon those of the 8th variation. In the 10th variation the tune once again features as prominently as in the 7th. It begins as the main tune of a spooky march, played like the previous three variations in the low registers of the piano:

³² Slonimsky, page 137.



Example 56: Paganini Rhapsody, Variation X, mm. 1-3

The tune is then bounced around between strings, horns, and piano for the rest of the variation. It lies dormant for a while, making way for the serene waltz in the 12th variation and the showstopping 18th variation. Beginning with the *quasi pizzicato* 19th variation, the work snowballs to breathtaking dimensions of sound and virtuosity, with snippets of the original Paganini theme, the *Dies irae*, and some sounds of bells. The 23rd variation contains a pure statement of Paganini's theme combined with some virtuoso piano writing. After this display, the piece seems headed for a wholesome ending, until the mood takes a turn for the devilish in the last variation. The *Dies irae*'s first reappearance is a subtle hint, a sly inversion outlined in the staccato octaves:



Example 57: Paganini Rhapsody, Variation XXIV, mm. 23-24

This little insertion does not, however, anticipate the final rude outburst of the *Dies irae* by the entire orchestra just seconds later:



Example 58: Paganini Rhapsody, Variation XXIV, mm. 39-44

This last outburst would be the lasting memory of the work, and would indeed govern the listener's overall comprehension, if it weren't for Rachmaninoff's stroke of weighty comic genius to abruptly end with a single quiet flirtation with the Paganini theme.³³

Three years after its composition, Rachmaninoff and his friend Mikhail Fokine produced a ballet using the Rhapsody as its score. The mythical life of Paganini was to be the subject of the ballet. The correspondence between Rachmaninoff and Fokine are important because it contains one of the Rachmaninoff's indisputable references of *Dies irae* to his compositions:

Why not recreate the legend of Paganini selling his soul to the Evil Spirit for perfection in art and also for a woman? All the variations on *Dies irae* represent the Evil Spirit. All those in the middle, from

³³ In his analysis of the Rhapsody, Culshaw finds the first notes of the *Dies irae* hidden in the second phrase of Paganini's theme. Apparently, this is proof that Rachmaninoff's intention was to make clear the relationship he discovered between the *Dies irae* and Paganini's theme: "their freakish relationship by this time [variation 23] obvious."

variation 11 to 18, are the love episodes. Paganini appears (for the first time) in the "Theme" and, defeated, appears for the last time in the 23rd variation – the first 12 bars – after which, until the end, it is the triumph of his conquerors.³⁴

3rd Symphony, op. 44 (1936)

Rachmaninoff began composing his third and final symphony in 1935, though there exists some evidence that parts had been planned as early as the 1910s. His confidence was buoyed by the success of the Paganini Rhapsody a year earlier. *Dies irae* features prominently in the last movement, where the treatment is so integrated that it might be considered one of the themes.

The tune's inclusion in the last movement is briefly hinted at once in the first movement. It occurs immediately after the main climax, after the two main themes battled themselves into an orchestral high. The orchestral sigh which follows is a descending string of four-note *Dies irae* quotations:



Example 59: Symphony #3, I, mm. 0-5 after [23]

Formally speaking, *Dies irae* doesn't occur until late in the last movement. Rachmaninoff chooses a new, third, theme as the subject of an *allegro vivace* fugue. As the fugue unfolds, *Dies irae* becomes more audible. It begins in sixteenth notes as a brief four-note part of the main melodic line of the fugue:



Example 60: Symphony #3, III, mm. 11-15 after [80]

It then appears, still during fugal treatment, as rapid-fire punctuation marks by the trumpets, then shortly after as clear trumpet quotations:



Example 61: Symphony #3, III, mm. 0-1 after [85]

From this point on, *Dies irae* dominates in importance throughout the rest of the movement. It appears in a trumpet quotation during the calm section following the fugue. An extended orchestral fanfare of the tune ushers in the movement's first theme into the recapitulation:



Example 62: Symphony #3, III, mm. 0-3 after [99]

After the recapitulation, a pastoral interlude for flute is introduced by a bridge based on the *Dies irae* (this time less menacing than heard previously):

³⁴ Martyn, page 327. The variations on *Dies irae* are variations 7 through 10.



Example 63: Symphony #3, III, mm. 2-6 after 107

That pastoral interlude leads directly into the coda which pits *Dies irae* against the movement's first theme. After *Dies irae* stakes its claim to the final word in the piece, the first theme steps in and seems poised to end the work. One last orchestral interruption by an accented *Dies irae* ends the piece, one of the few times in Rachmaninoff's output where it can claim musical victory:



Example 64: Symphony #3, III, last 2 measures

Symphonic Dances, op. 45 (1941)

Much musical evidence points to a conclusion that Rachmaninoff knew these three "fantastic" dances for orchestra would be his swan song. For once in his life, here was a composition he was openly content with and did not subject to rewriting. There is an unprecedented amount of self-quotation in the outer movements (from the Vespers, the 2nd Concerto, the 2nd Symphony, some Etude-Tableaux, and the 1st Symphony). Two of his favorite compositional devices, bells and Russian liturgical chants, make appearances. There's the new and sometimes ethereal scoring of instruments (listen to the saxophone solo in the first movement, or the strings accompanied by piano, harp, and glockenspiel). Not least of all, Rachmaninoff uses *Dies irae* in his most rhythmic and seamless adaptation yet.

Like the 3rd Symphony, the tune is found in the outer movements with the more explicit quotations found in the third. The first quotation in the first movement occurs in at the end of the middle section. A slight melodic variant of the tune, smoothly emerging from the melody of the central section, is signed by the strings:



Example 65: Symphonic Dances, I, mm. 3-6 after 16

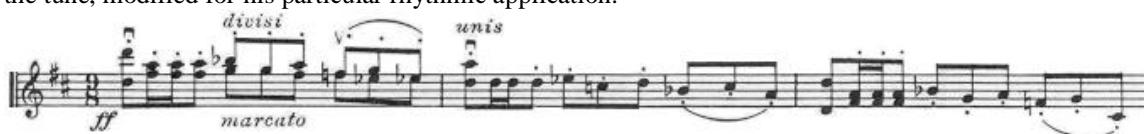
This single whisper leads into the bridge where the movement revives itself to the vigorous *allegro* of the opening themes. This all leads to an apparent climax which would normally end the movement, but instead leads to a dreamy tinkering afterthought which peacefully ends the piece. The gorgeous melody in this short section is a slight reworking of the previous quotation, played by the strings (Rachmaninoff surely had the Philadelphia Orchestra's renowned string section in mind) accompanied by piano, harp, and glockenspiel playing a variant:



Example 66: Symphonic Dances, I, mm. 6-10 after 26

After the sinister waltz of the middle dance, the *Dies irae* references reach a furious and definitive pitch in the final movement, even among an abundance of other musical ideas. Similar to the first

movement but in a much more subdued manner, this one begins with a descending chord motif.³⁵ This mood doesn't last for long. Two shouts pierce the calm and there are twelve tolls of bells ushering in a frenzied *allegro vivace* section heavily based on the *Dies irae*.³⁶ Here the composer uses the first phrase of the tune, modified for his particular rhythmic application:



Example 67: Symphonic Dances, III, mm. 0-3 after 58

This section yields to a second theme which is essentially a restatement of the main theme from the last movement of the 1st Symphony. An extended bridge leads into the slow middle section, one of Rachmaninoff's most dramatic passages. After a series of heart-wrenching sobs from the trumpets that are echoed by the strings, a seemingly unrecoverable mood of desperation has been reached. It is quietly overcome, however, under the gentle and assuring hand of another slight alteration of *Dies irae*, the most unlikely candidate for the cause:



Example 68: Symphonic Dances, III, mm. 7-12 after 80

The passage from the *allegro vivace* is then recalled as the inevitable rush to the conclusion begins. This time, however, pure and undeniable quotations to *Dies irae* are peppered throughout, like this first outburst by the trumpets:



Example 69: Symphonic Dances, III, mm. 2-3 after 85

There is one final full exclamation of *Dies irae* led by the horns which, as in the first movement, ought to bring the end of the piece:



Example 70: Symphonic Dances, III, mm. 2-5 after section 93

In a conclusion somewhat opposite that of the first movement, however, it is the *Dies irae* theme which is finally vanquished and the movement's other main theme which concludes the piece. This theme is recycled from the alleluias of the ninth number of the (much) earlier composition All-Night Vigil. At this point in the manuscript, Rachmaninoff wrote "Alliluya" an act which for musicologists marks a convenient finale to the last of Rachmaninoff's compositions. For among other musical evidence (not discussed here) that Rachmaninoff knew he was finishing what would be his last work, he concluded the work with a musical statement of "Alliluya" after the *Dies irae*: a triumph of life over death.

So What?

In examining the whole of Rachmaninoff's compositional output, three patterns do emerge regarding his use of the *Dies irae*.

Sometimes he used the tune for effect, either as an express quotation of a death motif (like in *Isle of the Dead*) or as brazen contrast to an otherwise cheerful tune (like in the *Paganini Rhapsody*). This type of use was already musically clichéd by Rachmaninoff's day (and he was intimately aware of the reasons why), and continues unabashedly today. One of the important reasons for recognizing this representative

³⁵ It should be noted that in the introductory opening chords of both of these movements, Martyn hears a highly contorted quotation of the *Dies irae*. This would lend even greater importance of the tune to the work.

³⁶ Rachmaninoff had originally planned to assign the programmes "Noon", "Evening", and "Midnight" to the three movements. This frenzied dance based on *Dies irae* occurring at midnight bears the influence of Musorgsky's *Night on Bald Mountain* on the composer.

use in his work might be to help to identify a work's programme or inspiration, particularly since Rachmaninoff was extremely reluctant to divulge such information himself.

Rachmaninoff frequently used the tune as thematic material, having first slightly altered its structure musically and rhythmically. In works like the 1st Symphony, the thematic material is just the opening four notes. More frequently, the theme is an altered or extended version of the entire first musical phrase of the *Dies irae*, like in *The Bells* or the 4th Concerto. In this respect of extensive use of the *Dies irae* as a formal thematic material, Rachmaninoff stands unique among other composers.

The final way in which Rachmaninoff employs the *Dies irae* is as an integral part of the work's form, but not as musical theme. This was observed mostly in the solo piano works, particularly the miniatures like the *Etudes-Tableaux*, and generally in two distinct ways. The *Dies irae* can be heard in the rapid figuration accompaniment which typifies many of the small works, or a single reference to the *Dies irae* is intoned after the climax of the piece. Musorgsky's works and Tchaikovsky's 5th Symphony were likely examples for how to contrapuntally weave an unheralded reference of the theme into the texture of a work.

When the quotations are in this fashion, however, it is difficult to delineate between the quotations intended by the composer and those discovered by various investigators. There are several works which various sources mentioned as referencing or quoting the *Dies irae* that I could not hear. Prominent examples are the 2nd Sonata, many of the Opus 39 *Etudes-Tableaux*, and the *All-Night Vigil*.³⁷ I attempted to draw that line with only my ears, discussing only works in which I could hear at least the four-note motif of the *Dies irae*. There were many instances in my research where good cases were made on paper for the use (or treatments and transformations) of the theme, but my ears could not pick out the tune. An excellent example of a piece which didn't make the aural cut is the G# minor Prelude:

Example 71: Prelude in G# minor, op. 32 no. 12, mm. 1-4

The rapid four-note figuration in the right hand consists of the same melodic outline as the four-note *Dies irae* motif, but on much larger intervals. On paper, the melody in the left hand resembles the first phrase of the *Dies irae* tune, possibly even a cousin of the themes mentioned earlier in *The Bells* and the 4th Concerto. Neither of the pianist's hands, however, is playing anything which sounds like *Dies irae*.

The big question remains: Why did Rachmaninoff use *Dies irae* in so many of his compositions? A commonly supplied but incorrect answer is that he was a man with a dark and macabre personality, and

³⁷ The Vespers, however, just about straddles the line. In the *Nunc dimittis*, the tenor solo sings an arching melody over an insistent sequence of rocking chords. These chords sound like a distant cousin to the rocking *Dies irae*-like theme from *The Bells*. At one point, a recognizable series of four chords flows effortlessly from the rocking counterpoint, coincidentally and quietly calling the *Dies irae*. This alone, however, is still not enough to warrant a quotation for the ear to latch onto. What does raise one's eyebrows, however, is that Rachmaninoff wanted the *Nunc dimittis* performed at his funeral. Apart from the fact that it's one of the most beautiful pieces he wrote (particularly the basses' final descent to the subterranean B-flat), a reference to *Dies irae* might make another good reason to play the piece at the funeral.

the frequent use of *Dies irae* illustrates a conscious expression of this persona. John Culshaw stated that "one can imagine that in this wonderful theme Rachmaninov saw the quintessence of his message."³⁸ The answer is not so dramatic or easy; Rachmaninoff had much more musical meaning to transmit than a simple "death" theme. The closest clue the composer left us was the following quote: "My constant desire to compose music is actually the urge within me to give tonal expression to my feelings, just as I speak to give utterance to my thoughts."³⁹ In realizing his compositional disposition, Rachmaninoff had a natural mannerism which lent itself with great facility and frequency to *Dies irae*. This mannerism was part of his musical idiom; it was something he couldn't escape.

³⁸ Culshaw, page 51.

³⁹ Martyn, page 32.

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Before publication of Barrie Martyn's biography in 1990, this book was the authoritative biography of Rachmaninoff. It benefits from being the first complete investigation into his life, and from obviously detailed discussions with Rachmaninoff's sister-in-law and surviving family. It remains the best general biography.

Boyd, Malcolm. "Dies Irae: Some Recent Manifestations." *Music and Letters* 49 (October 1968): 347-356.

A self-professed "amplification" of Robin Gregory's article fifteen years previously. It discusses nine more examples and adds a list of undiscussed compositions incorporating the chant.

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Culshaw, John. Rachmaninov: the Man and His Music. New York: Oxford University Press, 1950.

This book by British author Culshaw is not so much a biography of Rachmaninov as it is an in-depth introduction to his musical output. He justifies this work by being the first Rachmaninoff scholar to consult Medtner (by 1949, Riesemann's and Lyle's biographies had already been published). Written in 1949, much of the author's dismissive conclusions about some of the composer's works are already out of vogue (the panning of the 2nd Sonata is a prime example).

De Coster, Charles. The Glorious Adventures of Tyl Ulenspiegel. Translated by Allan Ross Macdougall. New York: Pantheon Books, 1943.

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A brushed up edition of Morgenstern's massive 1956 compilation of composers' writings and thoughts about all things musical.

Foley, James L. A Study of the Dies Irae: Its Backgrounds in Literature and Art, Its Imagery and Origin, and Its Usage in Liturgy, Music, and Literature. M.A. thesis. University of Kansas, 1972.

The best study into the hymnology of the *Dies irae*, with plenty of tangential information and some brief explorations into its artistic use. Examples are plenty and particularly helpful if the reader reads Latin.

Freed, Richard. "Discoveries and Rediscoveries: Rachmaninoff's Works for Orchestra." Liner notes for CDs "Rachmaninoff: Orchestral Music", TMK VoxBox CD3X, 2003.

Gihl, Nicholas. Dies Irae: the Sequence of the Mass for the Dead: Dogmatically and Ascetically Interpreted for Devotional Reading and Meditation. 4th ed. Translated by Joseph J. Schmit. St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1927.

This is a rather dull book intended for personal study of the hymn and its meaning. It does contain one nugget of gold on the very first page, however, providing the actual text of the main body of evidence attributing the text of the hymn to Tomaso de Celano.

Gregory, Robin. "Dies Irae." *Music and Letters* 34 (1953), 133-139.

An article summing up the history and secularization of *Dies irae* and descriptions of its most famous occurrences in eight examples.

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Martyn, Barrie. Rachmaninoff: Composer, Conductor, Pianist. Brookfield VT: Grower Publishing Co., 1990.

The best book on Rachmaninoff's professional life and output. Contains in-depth descriptions of all known compositions (including the lost ones), complete discography and repertoire information (the source for most of the repertoire information cited in this study).

Norris, Geoffrey. Rakhmaninov. London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1976.

A short biography from an eminent Rachmaninoff scholar (see Threlfall and Norris), this book focuses more on the works than the life, and in this respect is much more successful than Culshaw.

Palmieri, Robert. Sergei Vasil'evich Rachmaninoff: A Guide to Research. New York: Garland Publishing, 1985.

A research guide to the composer's works and output that is now mostly eclipsed by Martyn's book (which presents such things as works, repertoire, and recordings in a much more concise manner). Still of note in this book, however, is a list of publications of Rachmaninoff's various works (just about the only thing that Martyn's biography lacks), and a lengthy bibliography with descriptions of books (including the Russian ones) and magazine articles about the composer.

Rosenblatt, Jay. The Liszt Companion. Ben Arnold, ed. Westbrook CT: Greenwood Press, 2002.

Rubin, David. "Transformations of the Dies Irae in Rachmaninov's Second Symphony." *The Music Review* 23 (1962), 132-136.

A succinct article where the first half lays down some historical precedent with the secular use of the chant, and in the second half points out a myriad of varied presentations of the theme throughout the 2nd Symphony.

Slonimsky, Nicolas. Lexicon of Musical Invective: Critical Assaults on Composers Since Beethoven's Time. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2000.

The "supermarket tabloid of classical music criticism", collected and compiled from the awesome musicologist Slonimsky, who was a brief acquaintance of Rachmaninoff's. If you've never heard of Slonimsky, it's worth looking him up to read about some of the feats he accomplished in his 100+ years. The man reviewed his own autobiography!

Stryker, Melancthon Woolsey. Dies Irae: the Great Dirge of Thomas de Celano. New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1892.

A curious old book from a New York hymnologist and president of Hamilton College. The first half of the book is dedicated to an account of the hymn, especially its recent (as of 1892) translations into English. Stryker unhesitatingly attributes the text to Thomas de Celano. The second half of the book presents the author's three new translations of the Latin text.

Threlfall, Robert and Geoffrey Norris. A Catalogue of the Compositions of S. Rachmaninoff. London: Scholar Press, 1982.

The first published complete catalog of Rachmaninoff's works, a work of vital importance to Rachmaninoff scholars. Includes dates, dedications, scoring, publication, Rachmaninoff's recordings, notable arrangements, and interesting notes collected by the authors.

Vellekoop, Kees. Dies Irae Dies Illa: Studien zur Frühgeschichte einer Sequenz. Bithoven: A. B. Creighton, 1978.

Hailing from the Netherlands, written in German, this doctoral thesis is a must-read for anyone seriously interested in the *Dies irae* and its history (including musical). The title translates to "Dies Irae Dies Illa: Studies on the Early History of a Sequence". Highlights include verse-by-verse comparisons of 15 earliest known (to Vellekoop, and thus to academia) manuscripts of the sequence, reviews of the earliest known printed versions, an in-depth literal and rhythmic analysis of the texts, and a brief review of the liturgical and secular uses of the text and tune. Vellekoop, one of the most famous medieval musicologists, died in a car crash in 2003.

Wanninger, Forrest Irving. *“Dies Irae: Its Use in Non-Liturgical Music From the Beginning of the Nineteenth Century.”* Ph.D. diss., Northwestern University, 1962.

Like this effort, Wanninger’s dissertation is a glorified list. His is longer, of course, involves a few more composers, and spends a great deal of time in the beginning discussing the historical background of the *Dies Irae*. 23 of its 170 pages discuss Rachmaninoff’s music, citing examples of the *Dies irae* melody in the *Isle of the Dead*, *The Bells*, the *Paganini Rhapsody*, the 3rd Symphony, and the *Symphonic Dances*. He goes on to use examples from the 3rd piano concerto to show how unconsciously the four-note melody had worked its way into some of the composer’s pieces.

Warren, Charles F. S. *The Authorship, Text, and History of the Hymn Dies Irae, with Critical, Historical and Biographical Notes*. London: Thomas Baker, 1902.

Along with Julian, this is a peak of nineteenth-century investigation into the *Dies irae*. This one spends most of its 150 pages analyzing various English translations of the text, stanza by stanza! The early historical information provided on the text and authorship probably all comes from material in Duffield, which is cited as a source.

Weinstock, Herbert. *Tchaikovsky*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1944.

Woodard, Susan Jeanne. *The Dies Irae as used by Sergei Rachmaninoff: Some Sources, Antecedents, and Applications*. D.M.A., Ohio State University, 1984.

Susan Woodard wrote this wonderful paper as part of her preparations for a Ph.D. in music performance (on the piano, of course). Indeed, hers was the paper I was mostly intending to write when I first embarked on the research for this paper. It is not intended to be a comprehensive survey of the subject. It is my hope that this paper can stand up next to hers as another fine and mostly untechnical investigation into Rachmaninoff and the *Dies irae*.

There are a few spots where we disagree on where *Dies irae* can be found in Rachmaninoff’s music. Rachmaninoff was particularly fond of fast sixteenth-note figurations whose melodic outline follows that of *Dies irae*. In many of these instances, Woodard hears the *Dies irae*. I am inclined to believe that such figuration was an idiom inherent to Rachmaninoff’s musical language. That the first few notes of the *Dies irae* fit into this idiom makes for remarkably seamless integration of the *Dies irae* into much of Rachmaninoff’s music, but not all instances of such figuration can be constituted as quotations of the chant. Works that Woodard discusses that I do not are: 1st Concerto, Prelude in A minor (op. 32 no. 8), and the 2nd Sonata.

Yasser, Joseph. *“Dies Irae, the Famous Medieval Chant.”* *Musical Courier* (6 October 1927), pp. 6,39.

The earliest published examination into secular musical use of the *Dies irae*! Yasser includes three other examples not covered in this paper (Schelling, Simonds, and Loeffler).

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Emil von Sauer was one of Liszt’s most vaunted pupils. His piano recordings (some of the earliest recordings ever) are the closest links we have to Liszt’s pianistic style.

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