

Russians in Paris: Alexander Scriabin (1872-1915)

Scriabin was a musical descendent of the “Russian Five” (Rimsky-Korsakov, Mussorgsky, Borodin, Balakirev, Cui), especially Balakirev. He wrote mostly piano or orchestral works; early piano works show influence of Chopin. He was very interested in philosophy, metaphysics and mysticism throughout his life, and these influenced his works.

- Earlier works have very tertian harmony, although more coloristic than functional, **romantic** in orchestration and gesture. An example is the *Poem of Ecstasy* (1908).
- Around 1908 he experimented with a less tonal approach to harmony, e.g. harmony in 4ths, and harmony derived from other scale resources.



- The **Mystic Chord** is derived from the overtone series (raised 4th, flat 7th), or from whole tone scale with one member altered in either direction. It is a series of 4ths as written (Perfect, Augmented, or Diminished): it suggests attempt at quartal harmony. This sonority is used prominently in *Prometheus*, an orchestral work (subtitled Poem of Fire). The mystic chord is used in a structural and symbolic way.
- Scriabin believed there would be a **cataclysmic world event** that would lead to regeneration of humanity; this is the theme of *Prometheus*
- **Scriabin and Color:** had a set of pitches he associated with hues on color wheel (synesthesia); it corresponds with the circle of 5ths
- Scriabin wanted to incorporate **all the senses** in music, e.g. *Mysterium* was intended to combine music, color, poetry, mime and even smell (perfume organ to spray different essences into concert hall at various times in the piece). Like Prometheus, the theme of the piece was rebirth of man