The Breadth of Chopin's Influence on French and Russian Piano Music of the Late 19th and Early 20th Centuries

Frederic Chopin's legacy as a pianist and composer served as inspiration for generations of later composers of piano music, especially in France and Russia. Singing melodies, arpeggiated basses, sensitivity to sonorities, the use of rubato, pedal points, and the full range of the keyboard, plus the frequent use of character pieces as compositional forms characterize Chopin's compositional style. Future composers Claude Debussy, Sergei Rachmaninoff, Alexander Scriabin, Nikolai Medtner, Gabriel Faure, and Maurice Ravel each paid homage to Chopin and his legacy by incorporating and enhancing aspects of his writing style into their own respective works. Despite the disparate compositional trajectories of each of these composers, Chopin's influence on the development of their individual styles is clearly present. Such influence served as one of the bases for Romantic virtuoso works that came to predominate the late 19th and early 20th century piano literature. This dissertation was completed by performing selected works of Claude Debussy, Sergei Rachmaninoff, Alexander Scriabin, Gabriel Faure, Nikolai Medtner, and Maurice Ravel, in three recitals at the Gildenhorn Recital Hall in the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center of the University of Maryland. Compact Disc recordings of the recital are housed in the University's Michelle Smith Performing Arts Library.
Debussy (1862-1918) Claude Debussy is considered to be the closest heir to Chopin’s tradition. The music and teaching of Fryderyk Chopin undoubtedly influenced the French School’s emphasis on touch, flexibility and a certain emotional restraint, while French piano manufacturers such as Pleyel (whose pianos Chopin favoured) produced instruments with a lighter action more akin to that of the harpsichord which responded to a piano technique founded on articulation and finger suppleness rather than upper body strength. With Debussy and Ravel, both significant heirs to Chopin, fine finger technique became the vehicle for highly articulated playing to produce myriad of musical colours and tex... The English School of piano playing developed in the early part of the twentieth century, of whom Tobias Matthay was a significant figure. During the 20th century there was a huge increase in the variety of music that people had access to. Prior to the invention of mass market gramophone records (developed in 1892) and radio broadcasting (first commercially done ca. 1919–20), people mainly listened to music at live Classical music concerts or musical theatre shows, which were too expensive for many lower-income people; on early phonograph players (a technology invented in 1877 which was not mass-marketed until the mid-1890s); or by