

**An Analysis and Performance Guide to  
Alexander Mosolov's Second Piano Sonata**

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## Abstract

In this project, I aim to provide a detailed analysis and performance guide to Alexander Mosolov's Piano Sonata No. 2, Op. 4 (1924). In general, this sonata is vastly underrated. While Mosolov's modernist composition *Zavod* (Iron Foundry) has been celebrated as the iconic Futurist music, musicologists and peer composers like Prokofiev and Denisov have expressed regret that such a short and limited composition as *Zavod* overshadowed more diverse compositions like his earlier piano sonatas. This paper will discuss various elements that influenced the Second Piano Sonata (Mosolov's earliest known published work) and how he fused different techniques and motives to develop his own unique style as a representative of a new generation of Soviet music after the Russian Civil War. Furthermore, as he wrote this work for himself, a virtuosic pianist, I will include a performance guide to explain some considerations for performers, to assist with understanding the sonata.

## Introduction

Alexander Mosolov (1900-1973) was the iconic victim of the Socialist Realism policy of the Soviet Union. Although he wrote musical compositions for many decades, one is forced when discussing his musical career to focus on his earlier years, especially the works of the 1920s. As an honorably discharged veteran of the Russian civil war with several awards he had received for injuries, he enrolled at the Moscow Conservatory in 1921 to study under Reinhold Glière and Nikolai Myaskovsky. Within a few years of enrolling, his modernist composition, *Zavod* (The Iron Foundry) from a ballet suite *Stal* (Steel, 1927), left a deep impression on Western audiences. His earlier works, including piano sonatas and a concerto, were highly praised by his contemporaries as exemplary Russian modernist works, and upon his graduation in 1925, Mosolov became a core member of the Association of Contemporary Music (ACM). At the same time, however, Mosolov became a target of criticism by proletarian musicians, especially through articles published by the Russian Association of Proletarian Musicians (RAPM). While the Soviet Union maintained ties with the Western world through the New Economic Policy (1921-1928), Mosolov represented his nation in several festivals organized by the International Society for Contemporary Music. Nonetheless when Socialist Realism was forced upon the artists of the USSR, Modernist works of Mosolov like *Three Children's Scenes* (1926) and *Four Newspaper Articles* (1926) angered the regulating authorities on account of their dissonance and unidealized portrayal of the reality. Unable to work or get his music published, a frustrated Mosolov wrote a pleading letter to Stalin<sup>1</sup>, which was ignored; afterwards he was neither able to travel nor voice his opinion publicly. Political opponents of Mosolov took further advantage when he was involved in a drunk brawl with a waiter in 1936, accused of shouting anti-revolutionary

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<sup>1</sup> In his 1932 letter, Mosolov regretted that he had been the object of badgering from 1926 by proletarian musicians and their followers. He requested Stalin to allow him to work for USSR or permit him to go abroad, where his music is more appreciated, to represent USSR.

words, and ultimately got sentenced for 8 years in a gulag. While the imprisonment was reduced to an exile, as his friends and teacher submitted many letters defending Mosolov, the progressive-minded composer had been finally silenced. During the exile and years after, Mosolov composed Russian and regional folk-based songs, tonal symphonies, and patriotic tunes, which most studies on Mosolov judge unremarkable, devoid of his previous innovative spirit.<sup>2</sup>

The majority of studies on Mosolov focuses on the unfortunate oppression that hindered the creativity of experimental Soviet composers in the 1920s. As researched by many musicologists,<sup>3</sup> the social and political environment heavily influenced cultural activities during the Soviet era. However, additional attention is needed concerning Soviet music of the early 1920s, as during this period, there was no strict state censorship in effect yet.<sup>4</sup> The early 1920s was the period when artists were inspired by a revolutionary spirit, as they fought to build a new future upon the destruction caused by the civil war. There was conspicuous economic growth compared to the previously impoverished state and a vast influx of new ideas, aided by the technological progress that connected Russia to the Western world. Although one might classify the music from this period as “avant-garde,” due to its experimental and dissonant sounds, certain considerations make this classification problematic. As Taruskin and others have noted, Russian composers of the early 1920s, having studied at Moscow and St. Petersburg Conservatory both Russian musical traditions and concurrent Western musical trends, synthesized what they had learned to create an

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<sup>2</sup> Hakobian, *Music of the Soviet Age*. p. 55.

<sup>3</sup> See, Sitsky, *Music of the Repressed Russian Avant-Garde*, and Schwarz, *Music and Musical Life in Soviet Russia*.

<sup>4</sup> The official “Socialist Realism” began on May 23, 1932, with foundation of the Union of Soviet Writers, although soon after Joseph Stalin claimed leadership position in 1928, the state began to restrict financial support. As one of the consequences, ACM ceased to publish its journal in 1929. See Natalia Ostroumova, “*Sovremenaya muzyka*,” The RIPM music periodicals preservation series, 2017, <https://ripm.org/index.php?page=JournalInfo&ABB=CTM>.

original Russian type of music.<sup>5</sup> At the same time, misconceptions about progressive music like Futurism were being spread by the RAPM, the political opponents of the ACM and of conservatory-educated composers like Mosolov. “Proletarian musicians,” aligned with the RAPM, advocated marches, chants, and Socialist Realism; they attacked experimental and Western-influenced composers for being excessively “bourgeois” and for destroying Russian musical heritage. After the RAPM, favored by the Soviet regime, came to control musical media and music critics around 1926,<sup>6</sup> Western observers tended to conclude that the experimental musicians aligned with the ACM were overthrowing Russian musical traditions and should be considered “avant-garde.” But to do so is to apply in a misleading way a label more appropriate for Western musicians.<sup>7</sup>

Mosolov’s teacher at the Moscow Conservatory, Nikolai Myaskovsky, in a letter to his colleague and friend Sergei Prokofiev in 1927, expressed excitement about his new pupil: “Mosolov—though our censorship cannot bear him—is very talented.”<sup>8</sup> Considering the context of the letter, Myaskovsky must have been referring to Mosolov’s earlier compositions including the piano sonatas. It is unclear how Prokofiev immediately responded, but he evidently took Myaskovsky’s opinion seriously. Notwithstanding his skepticism about Iron Foundry, Prokofiev respected Mosolov enough to recommend him to the ballet impresario Sergei Diaghilev.<sup>9,10</sup> It was not only Myaskovsky and Prokofiev who rated his earlier works

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<sup>5</sup> Taruskin 1997 criticizes the term “avant-gardes” for conservatory-educated composers, considering that their music was not completely original but was influenced by established earlier composers.

<sup>6</sup> Some music critics who were favorable towards ACM were forced to write under aliases.

<sup>7</sup> Taruskin considers most of the music written by ACM members to be uninteresting, second-rate derivatives of Scriabin or Stravinsky-influenced futurism, all descending ultimately from the school of Belyayev. Taruskin even proposes that the label “avant-garde” would be better applied to the followers of the RAPM, since they “wanted to throw out all sophisticated traditions and build a new Soviet music on the rubble.”

<sup>8</sup> Prokofiev—Myaskovsky “Perepiska A. V. Mosolova,” Rimsky, *Iz proshlovo sovetskoy muzikalonovo kultura*, Ed., Livanova, Moscow: Kompositor, 1982, 263.

<sup>9</sup> Letter found in Sergei Diaghilev 1982, p. 142-143, translated in Tassie 2021, p. 251.

<sup>10</sup> In a letter to Myaskovsky on April 15, 1931, Prokofiev displayed disappointment about Mosolov’s *Iron Foundry*: “It sounds [...] magnificently; and yet it seems to me that the piece is very poor in material. Besides, I feel irritated by the constant repetitions of bars, though I myself did the same in the times of the *Scythian Suite*.” Prokofiev-Myaskovsky 1977, p. 355, translated in Tarasti 1978, p. 27.

highly. One of the leading figures of Russian modernism, Nikolai Roslavets, frequently referred to as “the Russian Schoenberg,” also praised Mosolov’s sonatas as “a true encyclopedia of modernism where one can find gathered all the ... tricks of the most audaciously high-pitched ‘sensations’ in the spirit of Prokofiev, Stravinsky, [and] the Western masters of polytonality.”<sup>11</sup>

Among post-civil-war compositions from Russian conservatories, Mosolov’s Second Piano Sonata is one of the most notable for several reasons. First, thanks to his family background (described in the next chapter) Mosolov enjoyed a diverse musical education encompassing Russian and Western classical traditions, as well as newer artistic movements such as Impressionism and Futurism. The sonata reflects this history and also includes varied elements that Mosolov reused in his later works. Secondly, the sonata has a very direct and interesting narrative alongside its complex harmonic and expressive language. Although the sonata lacks the explicit title of *Zavod* or George Antheil’s “The Airplane Sonata,” we will see that it reveals a gloomy philosophical narrative similar to Scriabin’s, even though much of the musical material is closer to Prokofiev’s. Lastly, having been written by a virtuosic pianist, the sonata has many challenging techniques for the performer. As the sonata includes all the difficult techniques that Mosolov used in his later works, it can serve as an etude for playing his other music.

To summarize, this research hopes to focus on four aspects of the Second Sonata: the influence of Mosolov’s musical background, a comparison with the works of his peers and teachers, the influence of this work on his later works, and a performance guide to the sonata with a review of some existing recordings and their reception.

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<sup>11</sup> Anton Uglov “Drugaya Kamerny muziki,” *Izvestiya*, February 1927, translated in Tassie 2021, p. 233.

## Review of Literature

For a general understanding of post-revolutionary Soviet music, Boris Schwarz provides a useful overview of each historical era, relating the impact of political policies on many Soviet musicians' lives, with a helpful timeline of Soviet compositions and premieres.<sup>12</sup> Stanley D. Krebs's book focuses on the generations of composers educated at Russian music schools in Moscow and St. Petersburg.<sup>13</sup> Levon Hakobian discusses how diverse political ideologies before the reign of Stalin brought on the "Silver Age" of Russian music.<sup>14</sup> A catalogue of Soviet composers in the early twentieth century by Igor Belza shows how contemporary Westerners understood Russian music. Probably due to geographical, technological, and political limitations, such articles concerning Russian composers provide few details, but they illustrate the West's interest in foreign music.<sup>15</sup>

For research on the foundations of Russian music, several books examine Mikhail Glinka, who first made the music of Russia known to the Western world and paved the way for Tchaikovsky and the *Mighty Handful*, who contributed immensely to Russian musical nationalism. Marina Frolova-Walker analyzes how Glinka used elements from Russian folk music, sometimes intentionally shunning styles of foreign composers.<sup>16</sup> Richard Taruskin discusses how Tchaikovsky, Scriabin, Stravinsky, and Shostakovich created unique schools of Russian music. However, he seems to neglect the originality of some composers such as Prokofiev, Roslavets, and Mosolov, along with their affinity for Western influences like Beethoven, Schoenberg, and others.<sup>17</sup>

The most detailed accounts of Mosolov come from Inna Barsova, a musicologist from

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<sup>12</sup> Boris Schwarz, *Music and Musical Life in Soviet Russia* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983).

<sup>13</sup> Stanley D. Krebs, *Soviet Composers and Development of Soviet Music* (London: George Allan and Unwin, 1970).

<sup>14</sup> Levon Hakobian, *Music of the Soviet Age 1917–1987* (Stockholm: Melos Music Literature, 1998).

<sup>15</sup> Igor Belza, *Handbook of Soviet Musicians*, ed. Alan Bush (London: Pilot Press, 1943).

<sup>16</sup> Marina Frolova-Walker, *Russian Music and Nationalism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).

<sup>17</sup> Richard Taruskin, *Defining Russia Musically* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

the Moscow Conservatory. Her compilation of Mosolov diaries and writings in 1976 is the basis of most research on Mosolov.<sup>18</sup> Her research cites several articles in *Sovremennaya muzika* by V. Belyayev, published by the ACM, showing the reception of Mosolov by his contemporary critics. Collections of articles and memoirs on Mosolov were published starting in 1978, with the most extensive work written by Barsova, Meshko, and Rimsky, edited by N. K. Meshko and published in 1986.<sup>19</sup> In her description of Mosolov's works, Barsova makes frequent reference to Scriabin and the serious, dark themes in his compositions.

Regarding the analysis of Mosolov's sonatas, Yuri Kholopov<sup>20</sup> and Larry Sitsky<sup>21</sup> made the first detailed study of their formal and tonal structures. They both agree that Prokofiev influenced Mosolov's percussion-like bass figures and his ostinatos. Yet both focused primarily on the First and Fifth Sonatas, only mentioning the Second Sonata in relation to the other sonatas. Peter Deane Roberts was the first scholar to analyze the first movement of the Second Sonata from a music-theoretical perspective, dissecting its tonal structure.<sup>22</sup> Nonetheless, there has been no analysis of the Second Sonata from a performer's perspective, despite the importance of the narratives and virtuosic techniques that Mosolov incorporated.

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<sup>18</sup> Inna Barsova, "А. Александр Мосолов: Двадцатые годы," *Sovetskaya muzika*, 12 (1976): 77–87 has been the foundational source in Mosolov scholarship.

<sup>19</sup> NK Meshko ed., *Aleksandr Vasil'evich Mosolov. Stat'i i vospominaniia* (Moscow: Kompozitor, 1986).

<sup>20</sup> Yuri Kholopov, "Alexander Mosolov I evo fortepiannaya muzyka," in *A. Mosolov. Izbranniye Sochineniya dlya fortepiano* (Moscow: Muzyka, 1991).

<sup>21</sup> Larry Sitsky, "Aleksandr V. Mosolov: The Man of Steel," in *Music of the Repressed Russian Avant-Garde, 1900–1929* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1994):60–84.

<sup>22</sup> Peter Deane Roberts, "Sonata Forms," in *Modernism in Russian Piano Music* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993): 101–104.

## The Background

### Folk Influences

Mosolov was born to an artistic family. While his biological father, Vasily Alexandrovich Mosolov, was a lawyer in Kyiv who provided financial support, his mother Nina Alexandrovna was a gifted opera singer and a pianist who studied at Kyiv Music School. As his mother performed professionally at the Bolshoi and several other regional theaters under pseudonyms, Mosolov must have been raised listening to many Russian songs that inspired melodies in his later compositions. Therefore, understanding the characteristics of Russian folk music seems critical in studying Mosolov's music.

According to studies centered on Glinka and Russian folk music,<sup>23</sup> one of the most common characteristics of Russian tonality is the ambiguous treatment of the major and minor modes:

#### Example 1.<sup>24</sup>

C  
a

Русская народная песня "Ходила младёшенька"  
[Russian folk song "Khodila mladioshen'ka"]

Хо-ди-ла мла-дѐ-шенька по бо-роч-ку, брала, брала я - год-ку земля-нич-ку.

This example illustrates the tonal ambiguity, even bitonality, of Russian folk music. Measures 2-5 seem to signal C major, but in the subsequent bars (mm 6-8) the key is mutated to A minor. These keys are reinforced by emphasizing triads, which is another typical characteristic of the style. We will see that Mosolov uses these devices even in highly chromatic works like the Second Sonata.

<sup>23</sup> Marina Frolova-Walker, *Russian Music and Nationalism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 108-109.

<sup>24</sup> Kholopov 1988. Ex. 114a

## Arts

Soon after Mosolov's family moved to Moscow from Kyiv (when he was five years old), he lost his father, and his mother soon remarried in order to resolve the financial difficulties and support her family. Mosolov's first stepfather was Boris Vladimirovich Podgoretsky, a Ukrainian composer who wrote several songs for Nina to perform at her recitals. Through Boris's connections, Mosolov's family traveled across Europe, giving young Alexander international experience and fluency in multiple languages. The marriage did not last long, and he soon had a second stepfather, Mikhail Varfolomeyevich Leblanc, who is said to have had the most significant influence on the young Mosolov. As an Impressionist painter educated in Paris, Leblanc established an art studio in Moscow that attracted many progressive artists from Russia and abroad. He was known to be a great teacher, nurturing students such as V. F. Stepanova, F. S. Bogorodsky, A. A. Pomanskii and others. Mosolov's parents held regular musical and artistic meetings at home. With French and German being commonly spoken languages at home, renowned guests such as Aleksandr Shenshin and Reinhold Glière attended the meetings and taught young Mosolov piano and composition.

During these artistic meetings, Mosolov must have become acquainted with the latest artistic trends. His affinity towards new techniques and modern ideology originated from this early education in various artforms. In his early piano music, it can be difficult to pinpoint his exact influences. Although an inexperienced artist, Mosolov took elements from many different sources, from folk music to his teachers' compositions to experimentalism from the West. His inclination to learn and integrate exotic artistic source made him interested in oriental folk melodies, in contrast to the majority of Soviet composers who researched Russian and regional folk songs only after they were forced to do so by the Soviet authorities in name of Soviet Realism after 1927. In this sense, Mosolov was already writing "Russian"

music in the years before RAPM and “Realist” critics chastised him for his Western affinities. Despite pursuing the ideology of the Soviet Union by unifying sounds from its industrial cities and the countryside, he was the victim of the conservative musical purists who could not accept his new Russian amalgam.

### **The Composition of the Second Sonata**

Mosolov's Second Piano Sonata is currently thought to be his earliest surviving composition.<sup>25</sup> As the composer progressed towards the complex forms and tonality of his following works, this sonata represents a significant step in his evolution away from traditional compositional methods. Although Mosolov employed many conventional structures and themes in his Second Sonata, significant portions of the work are dissonant and nearly atonal. The following analysis will highlight some compositional norms and modernist elements that Mosolov fused together in his work.

The sonata is subtitled "From Old Notebooks." Interestingly, the third and fourth piano sonatas of Sergei Prokofiev also mention "Old Notebooks" on their title pages. As Mosolov's teacher Myaskovsky was a close friend with Prokofiev, it is possible that Prokofiev's sonatas inspired Mosolov to use this subtitle. Various critics including Taruskin have pointed out similarities between Mosolov and Prokofiev's styles, such as their usage of percussion-like sonorities in the bass. Nevertheless, comparing Mosolov's sonata with Prokofiev's, there are not that many similarities to be found. If in fact Prokofiev inspired Mosolov, the influence is somewhat indirect, and investigating it requires that we examine the relationship between Prokofiev, Myaskovsky, and Mosolov.

Despite being the youngest and oldest members of their conservatory class, Prokofiev and Myaskovsky were very close to each other and maintained a long-lasting friendship. Both jointly worked on a lost or unfinished symphonic work during their student years. Although the score is missing, some materials from the symphony were reused in their later works, such as in Tenth String Quartet, Fifth and Sixth Piano Sonatas of Myaskovsky, and the Third

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<sup>25</sup> Mosolov started working on the Second Sonata from 1921, and finished later than the First Sonata published the same year in 1922.

and Fourth piano sonatas of Prokofiev. As Myaskovsky had knowledge of how Prokofiev composed his piano sonatas, it would have been natural to share such anecdotes with Mosolov, one of his favorite disciples.<sup>26</sup> Through the subtitle of the sonata, Mosolov may be making a secondhand homage to Prokofiev, not necessarily taking any motive but instead composing in a similar fashion, using the tools acquired from his teacher.

The Second Sonata consists of three movements: I. Sonata, Andante non troppo; II. Adagio, Espressivo, sostenuto e severo (Allegretto); and III. Final, Allegro tumultuoso, infernale. Similar to conventional classical sonatas, the tempos follow a faster – slower – faster pattern. However, there exist some tempo instructions that seemingly conflict with each other. Those will be further discussed in the following text.

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<sup>26</sup> Myaskovsky revealed positive impression of Mosolov to his friend, Prokofiev in several letters, as in Prokofiev—Myaskovsky “Perepiska A. V. Mosolova,” *Iz proshlovo sovetskoy muzikalnoy kultura*, Ed., Livanova, (Moscow: Kompositor, 1982), 263

## **First Movement**

In all of his sonatas, Mosolov added titles at the top of each movement, some of which seem quite unusual. The first movement of the second sonata is an example, being marked with the title: “Sonata.” Possibly this designation reflects how much Mosolov paid attention to traditional sonata structures while crafting the movement. The seriousness with which Mosolov studied traditional compositional techniques had earned him favorable reviews from his conservatory teachers, Reinhold Glière and Nikolai Myaskovsky. Adhering to its title, the structure of the first movement fits in a sonata form with the fundamental elements of exposition, development, and recapitulation. A primary theme and a secondary theme are also clearly present in the movement. For the tonality, however, Mosolov did not strictly follow the classical traditions but applied traditional Russian elements along with modernist techniques. Heavy usage of dissonance and overlapping chords makes the tonality difficult to recognize. Nonetheless, Mosolov did in some cases hint at harmonic principles such as Tonic–Dominant–Tonic.

## **Exposition**

A ghost-like dissonant ostinato is featured at the very beginning of the exposition in the right hand. The dissonance is created by the conflict between two similar voices, which sound tonal when played separately but dissonant when combined. Such uses of ostinato and obscured tonality are key features of Mosolov’s style used throughout his later compositions. Meanwhile large chords that require wide leaps are played by the left hand, which hints at Mosolov’s virtuosity and his large hands. As Mosolov stated in the title that the sonata’s key is B minor, the lower voice (highlighted with the red box in figure 1.1) contains the tonic and the leading tone of B minor, while the middle voice (highlighted with the blue box in figure

1.1) contains the tonic and the dominant chords of D major. Mixing relative major and minor keys together as one harmony creates a conflicted atmosphere. It may reflect the influence of Russian folk tonality, where the music shifts frequently in between relative major and minor keys. However, Mosolov's use of both tonalities simultaneously creates a distinctive effect.

Figure 1.1. Second Piano Sonata, movement I, mm. 1–3.

The image shows a musical score for the first three measures of the Second Piano Sonata, movement I, by Mosolov. The tempo is marked "Andante non troppo". The score is in 4/4 time and D major. The top staff (treble clef) features a melodic line with a repeating eighth-note pattern, marked "pp" and "lugubre". The bottom staff (bass clef) features a bass line with a repeating eighth-note pattern, marked "mf" and "f". A blue box highlights the first two measures of the bass line, and a red box highlights the first two measures of the treble line.

The ostinato pattern shifts into triplets in m. 9, along with a *Più Mosso* tempo marking. Furthermore, the ascending B Dorian scale in the bass line in m. 14 with a crescendo tends to push the music forward as well. On the other hand, Mosolov includes various fermatas and the indication *lugubre*, meaning gloomy, to prevent the music from progressing too energetically in the introduction; he thus sets the mood for the first theme, which appears in m. 21. A new contrapuntal pattern begins in m. 17, with chromatic scales in the top voice, a B Phrygian scale in the middle voice, and the triadic figures shifting between major and minor keys in the bottom voice. (See figure 1.2.) Each individual line sounds consonant when played separately. However, by combining them Mosolov made the music more dissonant to supplement the gloomy tone.

Figure 1.2. Second Piano Sonata, movement I, mm. 17–18.



The primary theme arrives in m. 21 on a dominant chord (F-sharp major), marked *scherzando (irato)*. (See figure 1.3.) *Scherzando* means joking while *irato* means angry. Being joking and angry at the same time may sound paradoxical. This is not the first time Mosolov gave contradictory instructions in this sonata. Back at the very beginning, *f* was present together with *lugubre*, contrasting instructions suggesting that performers not overdo the *forte*. In general, Mosolov specified his intention first, and then fine-tuned his meaning through subsequent instructions. For m. 21, Mosolov first wrote *scherzando* and put *irato* after, which may imply that he wanted more *scherzando* and less *irato*. In the following measures, some crazy leaps are introduced for the first time, one of the ways Mosolov displayed his virtuosity. Such leaps in fast contexts happen frequently throughout this composition and future works.

Figure 1.3. Second Piano Sonata, movement I, mm. 21–22.



The tempo slows down to *Andante* in m. 34 with the recurring material in B minor (together with D major) from the introduction. The dominant chord in the bass line in m. 38 lands on F-sharp making the music sound tonal for one moment. (See figure 1.4.) This whole section (mm. 34–42) almost sounds like a codetta although it comes not at the end of the exposition, but of the primary theme. The bass notes drop from F♯ to E to E♭, which indicates the new key in the following secondary theme section – E-flat major.

**Figure 1.4. Second Piano Sonata, movement I, mm. 37–42.**

The image shows a musical score for two systems. The first system covers measures 37 to 39 and is marked 'ritenuto molto'. The second system covers measures 40 to 42 and is marked 'al'. In the first system, a red circle highlights a dominant chord in the bass line of measure 38, labeled 'Dominant'. In the second system, blue circles and arrows in the bass line show a sequence of notes: F# in measure 40, E in measure 41, and Eb in measure 42, indicating a key change from B minor to E-flat major.

The secondary theme appears in m. 43 with *Lento* as the tempo marking. (See figure 1.5.) As in traditional sonatas, the secondary theme contrasts with the primary theme. The primary theme is fast, active, and detached while the secondary theme is slow, expressive, and legato. The secondary theme consists of the melody in the top line as an octatonic scale, a descending chromatic motive in the middle line, and an E♭ major chord followed by Phrygian and Lydian scales in the bass line. The secondary theme shows Mosolov's typical superposing of simple melodic lines to form complex polyphony. In m. 50, the harmony briefly modulates from E-flat to A-flat. Then, the music is pulled back to *Lento* with E-flat in

m. 59 in a much lower register. The connection between the secondary theme and the true codetta occurs when an A-flat major chord shifts to A major in the bass during mm. 65–66. The descending chromatic material with *calando* in m. 64 creates an atmosphere of doom, perhaps representing the disappearance or death of a character in the drama.

**Figure 1.5. Second Piano Sonata, movement I, mm. 43–45.**



The codetta is marked *Elegiaco* in m. 66. *Elegiaco* means elegiac, which relates to a sorrowful expression or a funeral. This is an important hint regarding the narrative of the later movements discussed below. We encounter a series of false octaves (which is to say, diminished octaves or major sevenths) happening in the right hand that sounds especially harsh and expresses the sorrowful mood. Repeating A major broken chords in the bass signal the return of D major (A major being the dominant of D major). However, the music then shifts to D minor unexpectedly, marking the start of the development.

**Table 1.1. Form of Second Piano Sonata, Mvt. I, Exposition.**

Measures	Elements	Tempo or expression indications
1–16	Introduction	Andante non troppo, mm. 1-8 Più Mosso, mm. 9-16
17–20	Transition	Allegro molto
21–33	Primary theme	Scherzando (irato)

34–42	Introduction material	Andante (poco a poco calando)
43–65	Secondary theme	Lento (molto espressivo)
66–72	Codetta	Elegiaco

### Development

*Allegretto* is the tempo given at the beginning of the development. Mosolov also wrote *misterioso* and *maestoso* at the same time, two somewhat conflicting terms. The right-hand features detached chords which can create a mysterious atmosphere, while the left-hand contains crazy leaps with some slurs, which can imply a majestic sound. To perform this section accurately, some fingering tricks are needed, which will be further discussed in the Performance Guide.

The tempo quickly changes to *Allegro* after seven measures. In m. 80, superhuman stretches (highlighted in the red box in figure 1.6) make the music sound especially orchestral. (See figure 1.6.) Both outer voices feature an ostinato while the middle voice presents a severe and dignified melody.

**Figure 1.6. Second Piano Sonata, movement I, mm. 80–81.**

**Allegro lugubre**

severo e maestoso

*f*

The music finally pushes to the first climax in mm. 88–89 with a *Grave* marking. Dense harmonies in both hands are extremely harsh and dissonant and are all marked with *sff*

accents within an *fff* dynamic. *Andante* follows, in m. 90, with the additional marking *Semplice*, highlighting the contrast with the preceding craziness. The melody in the middle voice derives from the secondary thematic material. The peaceful music does not last long and gets interrupted suddenly by the following *Presto* section. (See figure 1.7.)

Figure 1.7. Second Piano Sonata, movement I, mm. 86–93.

The image shows a musical score for the development section of the Second Piano Sonata, movement I, measures 86-93. The score is divided into three sections:

- Measures 86-87:** This section is marked *Allegro lugubre*. It features a dense, orchestral texture with a *fff* dynamic. A red box highlights a cluster of notes in the right hand, and another red box highlights a *fff* dynamic marking in the left hand.
- Measures 88-89:** This section is marked *Grave*. It features a slower tempo and a more somber mood. A red box highlights a cluster of notes in the right hand, and another red box highlights a *sf* dynamic marking in the left hand.
- Measures 90-93:** This section is marked *Andante semplice* and *Presto*. It features a transition to a more peaceful mood. The dynamics are *mf* and *p*. The *Presto* marking is indicated by a blue box.

Table 1.2. Form of Second Piano Sonata, Mvt. I, Development.

Measures	Content	Tempo or expression indications
73–79	Clown-like steps	Allegretto misterioso
80–87	Orchestra-like mass	Allegro lugubre
88–89	Climax	Grave
90–92	Transition	Andante semplice

## Recapitulation

The primary theme as presented in the exposition is rather short lasting only for two measures. The recurrence in m. 95, however, does expand this material. In typical Mosolov fashion, big leaps are again used to vary the theme. Unlike in traditional sonata form, where the recapitulation should begin in the same key as the exposition, Mosolov chose to retain the harmony of the previous transition, which is in C-sharp minor, and follow it with E major. The theme is further expanded and the accompaniment rises up to A-flat major in m. 97. (See figure 1.8.)

**Figure 1.8. Second Piano Sonata, movement I, mm. 90–98.**

The image shows a musical score for the recapitulation section of the Second Piano Sonata, movement I, measures 90-98. The score is divided into two systems. The first system (measures 90-94) is marked 'Andante semplice' and features a piano accompaniment of chords. The second system (measures 94-98) is marked 'Presto' and features a more complex piano accompaniment. Red boxes highlight specific harmonic changes: C-sharp minor (measures 95-96), E major (measures 97-98), and A-flat major (measures 97-98). The score includes dynamic markings such as *mf*, *p*, and *f*, and performance instructions like 'm. d.'.

The next new tempo, *Allegro molto*, occurs in m. 116. (See figure 1.9.) Compared to the previous Presto section, this part should be relatively slower. Yet the right-hand is crammed with the thirty-second notes while the previous section mostly has sixteenth-notes. Therefore, the tempos might actually sound similar.

Figure 1.9. Second Piano Sonata, movement I, mm. 116–118.

**Allegro molto**

The musical score consists of two systems. The first system shows the right hand playing a rapid, ascending scale-like passage with wide intervals, marked with a forte (*f*) dynamic. The left hand provides a rhythmic accompaniment with eighth and sixteenth notes. The second system continues the right hand's melodic line, which is highly chromatic and features many wide intervals, while the left hand continues its rhythmic pattern. The tempo is marked 'Allegro molto'.

Almost always, each section gets interrupted quickly. After just three measures of passagework, the primary material returns with unexpected slurs (highlighted in the pink box in figure 1.10.) After only two bars of a calm mood, the music shifts again to *furioso* and *prestissimo*. (See figure 1.10.) Although the dynamic is only a single *f* here, the widely-spaced writing and the term *furioso* both imply a second climax. Throughout this section, Mosolov is generous with markings that suggest wild, aggressive playing. In addition, F-sharp occurs many times in the bass, potentially signaling the return of B minor.

Figure 1.10. Second Piano Sonata, movement I, mm. 119–124.

The image shows two systems of musical notation for a piano sonata. The first system, circled in pink, features a treble clef with a melodic line and a bass clef with a rhythmic accompaniment. Above the first system, the marking *furiioso (prestissimo)* is written. The second system continues the piece with similar notation and includes a dynamic marking of *f* (forte).

The secondary theme returns in C-sharp minor in m. 139. While untraditional, such alterations are not so surprising for Mosolov. Unlike the first appearance in the exposition with its *espressivo* marking, this version comes with *Con festività Grandioso*, meaning “festive and grand.” The melody is also expanded into octaves spanning a wide register. (See figure 1.11.)

Figure 1.11. Second Piano Sonata, mvt. I, comparison of the secondary theme in the exposition with the recapitulation.

The image shows two systems of musical notation for a piano sonata. The first system is marked *Lento (molto espressivo)* and features a treble clef with a melodic line and a bass clef with a rhythmic accompaniment. The second system is marked *mf poco dolce* and continues the piece with similar notation.

**Con festività. Grandioso**

The image displays a musical score for a piano piece. At the top right, the tempo and mood are indicated as "Con festività. Grandioso". The score is written for piano, with a treble and bass clef. The main section of the score shows a complex right-hand melody with slurs and accents, and a left-hand accompaniment with chords and a "m. d." marking. The coda is marked "Con festività. Grandioso" and "ff", featuring a more rhythmic right-hand part with slurs and accents, and a left-hand part with a low F-sharp bass note. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings.

The coda starts at m. 153. The bass lands on the very low F-sharp again, leading back to the mixture of B minor and D major in m. 162. The material in the coda is not taken from the previous content. Two chromatic lines twist together in the right hand, circling around B minor. The interesting notation of the right hand suggests a special grouping. Instead of a regular 4+4, Mosolov begins with an eighth rest followed by two accented notes and then a slur for the following five notes. This creates an unequal 3+5 effect, against the square rhythms of the left hand. (See figure 1.12.) The signature mixture of B minor (highlighted in the red box in figure 1.13) and D major (highlighted in the blue box in figure 1.13) reoccurs in m. 162 with the bass landing on B minor and the right-hand holding the D major chord. The material in mm. 162–166 is a combination of the motives from m. 31 and m. 34. (See figure 1.13.)

Figure 1.12. Second Piano Sonata, movement I, Coda, mm. 153-154.

3 + 5  
Tumultuoso (ma triomphale)  
sempre  
4 + 4

Figure 1.13. Second Piano Sonata, movement I, Coda, mm. 162-163.

8-  
ff  
8-

After this five-bar reminiscence, the action resumes with the bass emphasizing A-sharp, which is the leading tone of B minor. Later the A-sharp gradually moves down stepwise until it reaches the lowest F-sharp in m. 176. After several solid repetitions of the dominant note, the first movement finally arrives at a D major chord in m. 180, followed with a final bass B in the bass in the next measure. Mosolov uses the typical Picardy third cadence to end the movement in B major instead of B minor.

**Table 1.3. Form of Second Piano Sonata, Mvt. I, Recapitulation.**

<b>Measures</b>	<b>Content</b>	<b>Tempo or expression indications</b>
93–103	Primary theme	Presto Scherzando
104–115	Transition	Various tempo shifts Many accelerando and ritardando
116–120	Continuation	Allegro molto – Legato
121–138	Transition to secondary theme	Furioso Prestissimo
139–152	Secondary theme	Con festività Grandioso
153–161	Coda	Tumultuoso (ma triomphale)
162–183	Coda continuation	Maestoso

## Second Movement

The title of the second movement is “Adagio,” typical for traditional multi-movement sonatas. Yet again, frequent tempo and expression markings indicate that Mosolov, while adhering to the conventional form, wanted to experiment with a more complex structure. Overall, the second movement is structured as a variant of Rondo form, consisting of several individual sections where the motives are played out differently. As described in the table below, the movement can be summarized as an AB – A’C – A’’D structure.

**Table 2.1. Form of Second Piano Sonata, Mvt. II.**

Measures	Content	Tempo or expression indications
1–22	A Dies Irae	Espressivo, sostenuti e severo (Allegretto)
23–41	B Development	Più Mosso Lento lento (Half-note = quarter-note)
42–61	A’ Dies Irae	Adagio (Half-note = quarter-note)
61–70	C Poetic transition	Poetico
71–88	A’’ Dies Irae	Adagio, ma più mosso
89–96	D Ending	Feroce

The theme of the Second Sonata clearly manifests in the second movement.

Following the example of the *Elegiaco* codetta in the first movement, the second movement opens with a “Dies Irae” motive. (See figure 2.1.) “Dies Irae” – “the Day of Wrath” in Latin – originates from a medieval Latin poem that describes the last judgement day in Christian belief, when the souls of the dead are brought before God to learn whether they will be sent to heaven or hell. Since its official adoption by the Roman Church to be sung during the

requiem rites, the hymn, especially its first four or eight notes, was frequently used as a symbol of ominous foreboding in musical contexts. Thus, this motive's appearance drives the narrative of the sonata forward, a narrative that the performer is obliged to highlight. The motive is introduced right at the start of section A, combined with a tritone ostinato in the bass and chromatic scales in the top voice:

**Figure 2.1. Second Piano Sonata, mvt. II, mm. 1–4, “Dies Irae.”**



Historically, many renowned composers had quoted the “Dies Irae” motive such as in the Requiems of Mozart and Verdi. It is likely that Mosolov learned about these works at the conservatory, and it is notable that his composition teacher Myaskovsky also used the “Dies Irae” theme in his single-movement Second Piano Sonata, Op. 13, written in 1912. (See figure 2.2.) Mosolov’s usage of the theme indeed resembles his teacher’s, as both composers quote the “Dies Irae” multiple times in different registers and rhythms in the sonatas’ middle sections. The resemblance is consistent with the fact that Mosolov subtitled his Second Sonata as “From Old Notebooks”; he was recompiling what he had learned in his lessons and putting the knowledge to use.

Figure 2.2. Myaskovsky's Second Piano Sonata, mm. 91–92, "Dies Irae."



Regarding tonality, Mosolov as usual shows a preference for ambiguous progressions and heavy chromaticism. Zavlunov in his analysis<sup>27</sup> called the technique “quasi-serialism,” comparing it to Viennese serialism, which emphasized using every note of the scale without repetition to obscure the tonality. Mosolov’s way of avoiding tonality was more direct: often he supplemented a standard chromatic scale in the right hand by inserting neighboring notes in the left hand, heightening the dissonance. In the Second Sonata’s Adagio, the left hand, after presenting the “Dies Irae” motive, elaborates with a quasi-serial line – one in which most notes of the chromatic scale appear. (Highlighted in Figure 2.3, this is a line that I recommend be highlighted by the performer.) All of Mosolov’s techniques for unsettling the tonal center combine to create an ominous tone, suggestive of lost and unsettled souls.

<sup>27</sup> Daniil Zavlunov, “Alexander Mosolov’s Piano Sonata No. 1 and Its Synthetic Modernism,” in *Analytical Approaches to 20th-Century Russian Music: Tonality, Modernism, Serialism*, Inessa Bazayev and Christopher Segall, eds (New York: Routledge, 2020), 152

Figure 2.3. Second Piano Sonata, mvt. II, mm. 5–13

“Quasi-serial” melodies appeared even more clearly in Mosolov’s other sonatas.

Examples somewhat similar to what we have seen appear in the first and fifth sonatas, written around the same time; these also feature descending chromatic lines with occasional jumps by a fourth and fifth. In the first sonata, this melody is played as a monotone voice with greater sonority, while in the fifth sonata, the section containing the melody is played *Andante tranquillo* with soft intensity. (See figure 2.4.) The melody is accompanied by chromatic harmonies in every sonata, emphasizing a sense of tonal ambiguity. The technique of overlapping chromatic lines developed throughout Mosolov’s career, peaking in “Iron Foundry” where numerous voices of this sort intersect.

Figure 2.4. First Piano Sonata, mm. 1–8

and Fifth Piano Sonata, mvt. I, mm. 30–35

The image shows a musical score for measures 30-35 of the first movement of the Fifth Piano Sonata. The score is in 2/4 time and consists of two staves: a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The treble clef staff features a melodic line with a pink highlight and a fermata over measures 30-35. The bass clef staff has a steady accompaniment. The tempo marking 'Andante tranquillo.' is at the beginning. The dynamic marking 'pp' is under the first measure, 'p' is under the second measure, and 'mp' is under the last measure. The marking 'espressivo molto' is written above the treble line. There are also some markings in parentheses, such as '(m.o.)'.

The tempo markings that appear in the second movement can be quite confusing. Sometimes multiple markings appear concurrently, causing different performers to choose divergent tempos. At the start, Mosolov writes *Allegretto*, albeit in parenthesis, seemingly contradicting the “Adagio” title appearing on the same page, as well as the “Adagio” markings given when the *Dies Irae*” recurs later on. (See table 2.1 for precise locations.) My own inclination is to keep the opening theme moderately slow and defer *Allegretto* playing until I approach the *Più Mosso* (seen in figure 2.5). At that point, the tempo naturally accelerates with quintuplets and other shorter values though I believe the composer still hoped to preserve the slowness of a typical slower second movement. The *Più Mosso* measure also contains the seemingly paradoxical tempo marking *Lento lento*; we may never know for certain what Mosolov’s intentions were when including the latter marking.

Figure 2.5. Second Piano Sonata, mvt. II, mm. 23–25.



Notice that Mosolov includes an additional ambiguous instruction at this moment, ♩=♩. The same marking also appears in m. 42 (see figure 2.6). Many composers have used such markings inconsistently, so they can cause confusion for performers. My personal opinion is: Mosolov might have mis-written ♩=♩ in m. 23, where it should be ♩=♩ (that is, the ♩ of the later section equals the ♩ of the earlier section). Interpreting the instruction this way is most consistent with the *Lento lento* marking. The following instruction *Più Mosso* could be understood as Mosolov requesting that the quarters be slightly shorter than twice their prior duration. With the difficulties compounded by concurrent tempo markings, it is no surprise that many pianists responded differently. According to table 2.2, Herbert Hench, Antonin Bagetov, and Yuri Lisichenko more or less agree with my idea. On the other hand, Olga Andryushchenko seems to take Mosolov ♩=♩ instruction more seriously; she plays the A section at ♩=64 and B section at ♩=84.

**Table 2.2. Different tempos of performances on the Second Piano Sonata, Mvt. II.**

Performer	A section	B section
Herbert Hench	♩ = 65	♩ = 55
Antonin Bagetov	♩ = 53	♩ = 43
Yuri Lisichenko	♩ = 73	♩ = 42
Olga Andryushchenko	♩ = 64	♩ = 84

In m. 42, on the other hand, I believe that the  $\text{♩}=\text{♩}$  marking is correct (the new  $\text{♩}$  equals the old  $\text{♩}$ ) – implying that the lower voices maintain the same motion they had in the prior section.

**Figure 2.6. Second Piano Sonata, mvt. II, mm. 40–42.**

As I have previously stated, it is easy for the audience to miss the second iteration of the “Dies Irae” in the A’ section as the middle voice line looks like a continuation of the previous section, and the same can be said about the bass (see the highlighting in figure 2.6). Compared to the accompanying voices at the beginning, the outer voices of the A’ section are more complicated and serial-like. This complexity further distracts the listeners from hearing the “Dies Irae.”

The C section (mm. 61-70), lying between A’ and A’’, features hand crossings, one of

Mosolov’s favorite tricks. The left hand covers both the bass line and the melody line in the top voice while the right hand plays an ostinato in the middle voice. Pianists learning Mosolov’s music who are unfamiliar with his use of this technique may have trouble in this section. Mosolov apparently recognized these difficulties; when he introduced hand crossings in later sonatas, he gave more specific instructions about their execution. (For example, see figure 2.7.) It is worth pointing out that the sostenuto pedal may be of assistance for preserving bass notes in passages like these.

Figure 2.7. Comparison of Second Piano Sonata, mvt. II, mm. 62–65.

with Fourth Piano Sonata, mm. 5–7.

The A'' section (mm. 71–88) reintroduces the “Dies Irae,” in an Adagio tempo. While the A' section conceals the main motive beneath material derived from the B section, the A'' section makes the “Dies Irae” easy to hear, amplifying it with major ninth chords and a fortissimo dynamic level. Thus, the theme plays a starring role at the movement’s climax.

The coda, or D section (mm. 89–96), features strong and succinct closing material, tying together various important themes and revealing harmonic material that connects with the next movement. The lower melody from A' (highlighted in blue in figure 2.6) returns in the upper and lower voices, in octaves, with longer note values and a *fff* + *feroce* dynamic level. The music becomes extremely harsh, foreshadowing the *infernale* mood of the third movement.

In the final two measures of the second movement, after long stretches of atonal ambiguity, Mosolov inserts notes that signal the tonality of the movement. (See figure 2.8.) Similar to the way he previously applied Russian folk tonality in the first movement with the mixture of B minor and D major, he uses E-flat in the lowest register and middle C, which both represent keys with three flats. The concluding B-flat, which is the dominant of E-flat, confirms the primacy of E-flat major. The same note also functions as the prelude of the following movement in B minor since it is enharmonically the same as B minor's leading tone. Mosolov emphasized this dual function of the B-flat, by specifically instructing that it remains sounding after all other notes get released. The long note values might seem to imply a final fermata, but as he specifically notated fermatas in other sections, it must be assumed that the composer wanted the notes to be played precisely at the specified length.

Figure 2.8. Second Piano Sonata, mvt. II, mm. 95–96.

Mosolov never explained why he used the “Dies Irae” theme in this sonata. His upbringing had given him an excellent knowledge of European culture and literature, and evidently a flair for dramatic storytelling, characteristics that impressed his composition teachers. He was also one of the rare musicians who had fought in bloody battles, being wounded twice and then discharged honorably near the end of the civil war. While other composers have fought in wars, such as Maurice Ravel, Alban Berg, and Ralph Vaughan Williams, very few actively participated in combat, instead enlisting in supportive roles like medical transportation drivers. Many artists who experienced wars firsthand created artworks with rather gloomy and dark themes; for example, wartime experiences inspired masterpieces by Leo Tolstoy and J.R.R. Tolkien. Most of the known accounts of Mosolov were written after his participation in the war. As they all confirmed his stubborn and serious personality, it seems likely that his experience in the war had shaped him and influenced his works, the Second Sonata’s Adagio in particular.

### Third Movement

Just as the marking *Elegiaco* in the first movement signals the sonata's overall narrative, and the "Dies Irae" theme advances this narrative, the *infernale* marking in the final movement signals the story's climax. Following the leading tone of B-flat (A-sharp) at the end of the previous movement, a B minor harmony initiates the finale. The third movement can be divided into three sections, reminiscent of sonata allegro form. However, it does not strictly match this form.

**Table 3.1. Form of Second Piano Sonata, Mvt. III.**

Measures	Content	Tempo or expression indications
1-64	Exposition	Allegro tumultuoso, infernale
1-8	Primary theme from mvt. I	Scherzando
9-36	E-B-G	Scherzando
36-45	"Tip toeing"	Meno mosso
45-64	E-B-G	Scherzando
65-91	Development	
65-72	Transition material from mvt. I	Allegro
73-91	Secondary theme from mvt. I	Moderato comodo Triumphale
92-166	Recapitulation	
92-99	Primary theme from mvt. I	Presto Feroce
100-122	E-B-G	Scherzando
123-131	"Tip toeing"	Meno mosso

132–166	E-B-G	Sempre presto, poco più grave Furioso
167–189	Coda	Allegro maestoso Lento

The exposition opens with a hint of the primary theme from the first movement, featuring daunting leaps. In this case, an abrupt B major chord in the higher register interrupts the theme before it fully develops. This interruption perhaps reminds us of a clown-like mime, an appropriately ironic image within the larger *lugubre* atmosphere.

Figure 3.1. Comparison of mvt. III, mm. 3–5

with mvt. I, mm. 21–22:

The material that is repeated throughout the exposition and recapitulation is first introduced in m. 9, when the right hand plays the motive E-B-G. (See figure 3.2.)

Figure 3.2. Second Piano Sonata, mvt. III, mm. 9–12.

The continuation of this motive features legato eighth-notes with rolled chords and quintuplets added. The melody alternates between the middle voice and the top voice while the accompanying voice includes decorative arpeggiations. In later passages the rolled chords occur both upward and downward; in figure 3.3, the upward rolls at m. 49 are highlighted with pink boxes, while the downward rolls in m. 53 are highlighted with green boxes. (The publisher made the downward arrowheads somewhat difficult to see.)

Figure 3.3. Second Piano Sonata, mvt. III, mm. 13–16

and its variation, mm. 49–53.

The image displays two systems of musical notation. The top system consists of two staves. The upper staff has a pink rectangular box around a group of notes and a yellow rectangular box around a variation of that group. The lower staff has a yellow rectangular box around a variation of the notes in the upper staff. A yellow line connects the yellow box in the top system to the yellow box in the bottom system. The bottom system also consists of two staves, with a yellow box around a variation of the notes in the upper staff.

The second important element in the last movement is what I call the “tiptoeing” section starting from m. 37. At the opening of Mosolov’s Fifth Piano Sonata, mvt. II, we find the left hand sharing similar walking detached chords. The title of this latter movement is *Elegia*, which echoes the overall dark mood of the Second Sonata. (See figure 3.4.)

Figure 3.4. Comparison of Second Piano Sonata, mvt. III, mm. 37–38

The image shows a musical score for the second movement of the Second Piano Sonata. The tempo is marked 'Meno mosso' and the dynamics are 'mf'. The score is in 4/4 time and D major. The left hand plays walking detached chords, and the right hand plays a melodic line. The score is in 4/4 time and D major. The left hand starts with a forte 'ff' dynamic.

with Fifth Piano Sonata, mvt. II, mm. 1–2.

**Lento.**

*p* *indifferente*

*pp* *sempre staccato*

The development involves two subsections, both referencing material from the first movement. Since the primary theme has been quoted at the opening already, it is absent in the development. Instead, Mosolov borrows material from one of the transition sections in the first movement at m. 65. (See figure 3.5.) Although he slightly changes the order of materials in detail, the music still flows naturally in both cases.

Figure 3.5. Comparison of Second Piano Sonata, mvt. III, mm. 65–66

**accelerando**

5 6

*sf*

with Second Piano Sonata, mvt. I, m. 115.

**Allegro molto**

*f*

Following a transition involving fast passagework, material from the secondary theme of the first movement arrives in m. 73, in a *Moderato* tempo. Unlike the original version, this time the melody is hidden in the middle voice and later travels to the top line (highlighted in yellow). (See figure 3.6.) It is in total 16 measures, which is twice as short as it was in the first movement. However, the outline of this secondary subsection remains the same, only abbreviated.

Figure 3.6. Comparison of Second Piano Sonata, mvt. III, mm. 73–81

**Moderato commodo. Triomphale**

The image shows a musical score for the second piano sonata, movement III, measures 73-81. The score is in G major and 2/4 time. It features a piano accompaniment in the left hand and a melody in the right hand. The melody is highlighted in yellow. The tempo is Moderato commodo and the mood is Triomphale. The score includes dynamic markings such as *f*, *sempre f*, and *gliss.* The melody starts in the middle voice and moves to the top line.

with Second Piano Sonata, mvt. I, mm. 43–48.

**Lento (molto espressivo)**

*mf poco dolce*

*gliss.*

The interesting ending of the development in mm. 89–91 contains a row of choppy repeating chords, slowing down like a robot running out of batteries. This reminds me of the end of the Prokofiev Sonata No. 6, mvt. II, where both hands play similar ideas, and the music eventually dies off. Although the Prokofiev Sonata No. 6 came much later than Mosolov’s Second Sonata, their themes can both potentially relate to “wars.” (See figure 3.7.)

**Figure 3.7. Comparison of Second Piano Sonata, mvt. III, mm. 89–91**

with Prokofiev's Sixth Piano Sonata, mvt. II, mm. 155–160



The recapitulation arrives clearly in m. 92 with the exact same pattern in the left hand as at the opening. Overall, the recapitulation contains almost the same elements as the exposition except in a modified order. Mosolov rewrote some subsections with additional difficult techniques to show off and build up the climaxes. For instance, beginning at m. 136, the core motive E-B-G is decorated with demanding fast octaves in the right hand and rolled chords involving crazy jumps in the left hand. (See figure 3.8.) The somewhat contradictory tempo marking *sempre presto, poco più grave*, marked on the previous line, suggests that Mosolov is once again depicting hellish scenes.

Figure 3.8. Second Piano Sonata, mvt. III, mm. 136–139.



The closing of the recapitulation is similar to the ending of the exposition, with the E-B-G motive, followed by a low D in the bass. Overall, we see the bass progress downward from F-sharp, to E-sharp, and finally to D (highlighted in the green boxes in figure 3.9.) This

motion seems like a strong signal of the closure of the sonata; however, the coda, starting with the familiar fast left-hand patterns, now interrupts and leads to a further climax in m. 167. Unlike the *Presto* tempo in the recapitulation, we find an *Allegro maestoso* marking in the coda, which creates a feeling of fatigue despite the continued *fff* marking. (See figure 3.10.)

Figure 3.9. Second Piano Sonata, mvt. III, mm. 153–166.

The image displays a musical score for the second piano sonata, movement III, measures 153–166. The score is written for piano and consists of three systems of staves. The first system shows measures 153 and 154, with a yellow box highlighting a vertical sequence of notes in the right hand of measure 153. The second system shows measures 155 and 156, with a yellow box highlighting a vertical sequence of notes in the left hand of measure 155. The third system shows measures 165 and 166, with a yellow box highlighting a vertical sequence of notes in the left hand of measure 166. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

Figure 3.10. . Comparison of Second Piano Sonata, mvt. III, mm. 167–169

**Allegro maestoso**

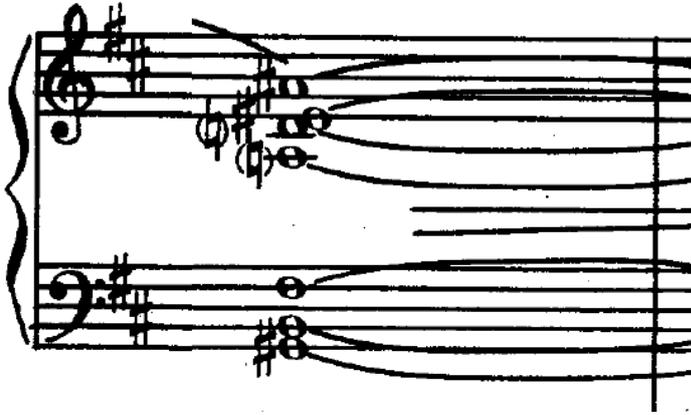
with Second Piano Sonata, mvt. III, mm. 92–93.

**Presto (Tempo I)**

The fast patterns in the left hand rise from E towards F-sharp in m. 177, where the tempo starts to get slower, eventually reaching *Lento* in m. 182. After 9 measures of “dancing” on F-sharp (the dominant of B minor), the sonata finally reaches its conclusion. The very unusual chord in m. 187 spelled as G-sharp, B, F-sharp, A, D, E-sharp and A-sharp, in fact contains both a B minor chord and a D major chord, though the added G-sharp, A-

sharp and E-sharp significantly weaken the tonality. (See figure 3.11.)

**Figure 3.11.** Second Piano Sonata, mvt. III, mm. 187.



The return of the mixed B minor and D major chords echoes the opening of the first movement, restating the special tonality of this sonata. Mosolov put much effort into making the endings of each movement memorable. For the finale, he appended one extra line in the bass consisting of octaves on C-sharp, E and A-sharp, the first and last of which are the leading tones of D major and B minor. (See figure 3.12.) Once again Mosolov demonstrates his fascination with subtle tonal ambiguity and the juxtaposition of major and minor.

**Figure 3.12.** Second Piano Sonata, mvt. III, mm. 187–189.



### Conclusion – Legacy of the Sonata

The analysis above shows that Mosolov took advantage of all the many resources available to him. His ability to quickly absorb new materials from others, along with his mastery of new concepts and virtuosic pianism, surely inspired his contemporaries and made him a central figure among Russian modernist composers. His brashness did make his friends worry. Glière, Shostakovich, and other contemporaries described Mosolov as “audacious,”<sup>28</sup> as not “know[ing] how to behave,”<sup>29</sup> and as an “explosive character” making people “fear his cane.”<sup>30</sup> Most musicologists writing about Mosolov believe that his personality contributed to his suffering in the following decade – his headstrong nature and lack of modesty ultimately caught up with him.

Students studying Mosolov must remember, however, that he was an injured veteran of war, who fought on the battlefield for four years and only started to study composition at the age of twenty-one. Although there were other, younger talents at the Moscow Conservatory, like Shostakovich, Mosolov retained his self-assurance. His courage and ardent musical efforts, even when faced with negative reactions from society, serve as an inspiration for musicians today. Mosolov in a letter remarked that “the epoch has made us drunk... We sense new rhythms, forms, thoughts... We need to learn how to master them... speed, movement, rhythms. Faster, faster... It is impossible to stop.”<sup>31</sup> In the twenty-first century, we face an even greater surplus of musical ideas and materials, old and new, analyzed and performed by multiple generations of scholars and musicians. The example of Mosolov shows that, even under the most adverse conditions, creative artists can still find ways to adapt earlier traditions to serve their current needs, and thereby produce compelling

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<sup>28</sup> Letter from Glière to Mosolov, February 19, 1924, “Perepiska A. V. Mosolova,” Rimsky, *Iz proshlovo sovetskoy muzikalnoy kultura*, Ed., Livanova, Moscow: Kompositor, 1982, 55.

<sup>29</sup> Tassie 2021, p 238. From author’s interview with Inna Barsova on 2017.

<sup>30</sup> Dulova, Elena, V., from Kapustin, M., ‘Vera Dulova,’ Moscow, 1981, 32., quoted in Tassie 2021, p. 241.

<sup>31</sup> Archieve of Nine Meshko, translated in Tassie p. 238.

and original legacies.

### Performance Guide to Sonata No. 2

As discussed above, the performers of Mosolov's sonata must consider the narrative, sonority, and tempo to bring out the intended virtuosity. After several performances I have noted in the score many points that require special attention. For brevity, I used some abbreviations for the performance guide. Below is the chart showing the abbreviations:

Abbreviation	Meaning
SP	Sostenuto pedal
UC	Una corda
Drop (with a downwards arrow)	Drop the dynamic
Push (with a rightwards arrow)	Push the tempo
Pull (with a leftwards arrow)	Pull the tempo
P (in a box)	Primary theme
S (in a box)	Secondary theme
Tr. (in a box)	Transition
0% Legato – 100% Legato	Completely detached – completely connected

In order to separate the tone quality of the two voices, the performer can use the thumb for A and D to help bring out the top.

Before the start, press down these two chords silently and use the SP to keep the dampers up. Then start the performance regularly.

Е. Ф. Колобовой  
**СОНАТА**  
(Из старых тетрадей)

**№ 2**  
(h-moll)

Frau Hélène Kolobowa zugeeignet  
**SONATE**  
(Aus alten Heften)

A. МОСОЛОВ. Соч. 5  
A. MOSSOLOV. Op. 4

Exposition

I. Sonata

Andante non troppo

Despite the forte, Lugubre suggests performers avoid playing the chords too harshly or violently.

Release SP

The rhythm pattern changes to triplets which makes the music sound naturally faster. Therefore, one should not speed up too much despite the Più mosso.

Ostinata pattern changes to triplets as well as the notes in each voice. Bringing out the alternating quarter notes in each voice may help audience hear the change.

Lugubre reminds performers not to build up too much yet.

Accents in the middle voice should not be treated as harsh sounds. Performers may also drop the dynamic to p in order to build up later to f.

Less irato (aggressive) more scherzando (joking).

Fast attack and dry

Using multiple fingers for one note can help accuracy and strength.

Taking over the D-sharp with the LH may avoid the difficulty of big leaps in the RH.

27

*ff* *cresc. molto*

*m. s.* *m. d.*

31

*ff* *sf* *sf* *sf*

*SP* *SP* *SP*

Andante (poco a poco calando)

Biting, dry and non-legato

34

*f* *lugubre maestoso*

Suggesting a funeral

37

*ritenuito molto*

Enjoy the dominant note F-sharp by giving it extra attention with a different tone color. It is one of a few tonal satisfying moments of the movement.

40

*al*

Hear the drop from E to E-flat.

**Lento (molto espressivo) Octatonic scale**

43 **S**

*mf poco dolce*

Although a slur is written, to avoid having too much blurry sound, performers may use 60%-70% of Legato and very little pedal.

46

*gliss.*

A big breath is needed here to show the dramatic dynamic shift.

49

*ff* *p* *sf*

Appreciate the pure octaves after the massive mixture of multiple keys above. Make sure to use strong fingers (like fingers 123) to play them. Clean pedals may also help.

52

Exchanging hands is possible.

55

*accel.*

The secondary theme reappears in *f* in a much lower register. Performers need to be careful of too much pedal use. RH should be as legato as possible with fingers while LH retains a clear sound by playing something like 30-35% legato.

58

*Lento*

*f*

SP

The use of SP can ensure the ornaments are clear.

61

*f*

SP

*f*

The calando between *f* and *p*, lasting for one and half measures, requires the performer to do a dramatic and quick diminuendo. The tempo may slow down slightly.

As in m. 34, *lugubre maestoso* indicates a funeral section.

**Elegiaco**

64

*calando*

*p*

Red.

67

Red.

*mf*

Red.

Performers can change pedal more frequently here.

70

*ritenuto*

*pp*

Red.

**Development**  
**Allegretto misterioso**

The *maestoso* only applies on the notes highlighted in blue, while *misterioso* applies on repeating chords.

Using 4 and 5 here can make the leaps to the thumb easier, even though these are weaker fingers.

**Allegro lugubre**

Performers need to shift the music quickly to a severe mood.

It is impossible for a human hand to reach both notes at the same time. Thus, there are two solutions:

1. Ignore the third in the bass. Does not interrupt the melody in the
2. Arpeggiate chords. Can keep all the notes.

A more extreme version of the *lugubre* marking.

A series of false-octave chords in *fff* with accents and *sff* marking, results in extreme dissonance.

**Grave**

Performers should use full body-energy and full pedal to produce a roaring sound.

**TR** The music turns simple and lyrical here. Performers need to hold back the continuous impulse.

The use of multiple fingers on the D-sharp may improve accuracy.

Scherzando here is delayed. Possibly because Mosolov wanted the beginning of the recapitulation to be strong enough to interrupt the Andante transition.

**Recapitulation**  
Presto

The recapitulation is marked Presto, which is faster than the Allegro given in m. 21. Yet the music here contains many sixteenth notes and big leaps, which makes the tempo sound naturally faster already. Thus, speeding up excessively is not necessary.

Performers should try to use strong fingers (123) as much as possible.

Breath

Hidden accelerando is easy to miss. Due to the low register, 30% legato is recommended.

Performers should switch the music to a very thin texture.

Drop first and then build up the volume and tempo.

109 *più fe più mosso*

*Allegro molto*

114

The series of thirty-second notes can easily make the sound chaotic. Thus, less pedal use and 40% legato in the RH can solve the problem.

117

*furioso (prestissimo)*

119

The RH should bring out the quarter notes in green circles.

122

*Prestissimo* is the fastest tempo-marking in this sonata. Furthermore, *furioso* is the strongest emotion description so far. Performers are encouraged to play recklessly.

I personally play this section more legato and lyrically. I consider it a resting moment after the chaotic chords, glissando and dissonant doubled Aeolian scales in m. 125.

The same furioso material comes back again after the short resting section. This time, to make the music sound less boring, a different way to highlight notes is suggested. Instead of bringing out the quarter notes, we can highlight the top descending chromatic line.

Although *fff* is written here, performers need to avoid banging the chords since it is still important to keep the melody legato in order to clearly show audience the return of the secondary theme.

145

SP

149

accel.

Play the slurs strictly to create a walking sound.

152

**Coda**

**Tumultuoso (ma triomphale)**

sempre

155

mf

Although Mosolov writes *sempre* in m. 153, it is essential to plan ahead for this long repetitive section. Slightly dropping the volume in m. 155-157 is recommended in order to re-build from m. 158.

158

ff

In this coda section, the RH ostinato features a 3+5 pattern with accents on the beat 2 and 3 (if we count as 8 per measure). Separating the 3 and 5 is the key to make this regular meter (4/4) sound uneven. Making the 5-note extra legato would help as well. The LH, however, is against the RH with a square 4+4 rhythm.

To deal with the conflicting slurs, one solution is to do small diminuendos while not detaching the notes.

**Maestoso**

162 *ff* 1 2 3 *ff*

165 *ff* 4 5 *ff*

169 *sempre f e maestoso, ma poco a*

173 *poco diminuendo e ritenuto poco sf*

177 *lugubre*

G-sharp

G

F-sharp

Performers can drop down the volume by reducing their body weight in order to make sounds thinner from 1-5. The fifth should still sound strong and forceful but exhausted.

Each note in the blue line should be played with 2 and 3 as combined fingers to ring out the melody.

Take time before each of the bass-note changes to bring out the chromatic descending line from G-sharp to G and then F-sharp (as the dominant of B minor).

NO FERMATA at the end.

Bell-like. The LH can be used to play F-sharp in order to have a perfect sonority of the last chord.

Enjoy the last time playing D and B as the core of the first movement.

## II. Adagio

Espressivo, sostenuto e severo (Allegretto)

Bring out Dies Irae. Play bass line softly to not break the Dies Irae.

The top and middle voices don't share the same phrasing. Performers need to plan ahead to shape them differently.

The A-flat and G may sound too harsh. Play them not perfectly together to reduce the dissonance.

23 *Più mosso.* *Lento lento*  $\text{♩} = \text{♩}$  1 3 2 1

1 Prepare to jump

*più f*

Avoid accent on the chord despite the awkward 1-5 fingering shift

26

30

The music gets faster here, close to the Allegretto/Adagio tempo at the beginning.

33

36

38

Build up

Drop

Breath

Play the blue line with the right hand.

This section of the score covers measures 38 to 40. It features a piano accompaniment with a blue line in the right hand. A red arrow labeled 'Build up' points to the right across the top staff. A red arrow labeled 'Drop' points down to the first measure. Red arrows labeled 'Breath' point to the top staff in measures 39 and 40. The text 'Play the blue line with the right hand.' is written in blue. Dynamics include *mf* and *f*. A tempo change to *Adagio* is indicated at the start of measure 40.

40

Play the blue line with stable rhythm and shape it well to get ready for the return of **Dies Irae.**

Adagio  $\text{♩} = \text{♩}$

43

The top voice features descending chromatic groups. Mini diminuendos can help achieve the sighing effects.

This section covers measures 40 to 43. The tempo is *Adagio* with a note equal to a half note. A blue line is present in the right hand of the piano part. Red arrows point to descending chromatic lines in the top voice. The text 'Play the blue line with stable rhythm and shape it well to get ready for the return of Dies Irae.' is in blue. The text 'The top voice features descending chromatic groups. Mini diminuendos can help achieve the sighing effects.' is in red.

47

High point

This section covers measures 47 to 50. A red box highlights the first measure of this section. A red arrow points to the right across the top staff. The text 'High point' is in red.

51

This section covers measures 51 to 54. It continues the piano accompaniment with various rhythmic patterns and dynamics.

55

The LH takes over the melody when the Dies Irae returns.

59

Push

Poético

*sf m. s.*

subito allegro

SP

62

66

70

Adagio, ma più mosso

*m. d. Dies Irae*

Instead of using the LH to jump for the B, performers can use the right thumb for both C and B, if the performer's hand is capable of reaching the ninth.

The purple highlighted notes should be played by the LH.

Still in the slow tempo but can move forward slightly, getting ready for the "severo" section.

Detailed description: The image shows a page of a musical score for piano, spanning measures 55 to 70. The score is in a key with two flats (B-flat and E-flat) and a common time signature. The left hand (LH) plays a steady accompaniment of eighth notes, while the right hand (RH) plays a more complex melodic line. Annotations include: a green highlight on the LH melody in measures 55-58; a red arrow labeled 'Push' pointing to the RH in measure 59; a red 'V' symbol labeled 'Poético' above measure 59; the instruction 'subito allegro' below measure 59; a red 'SP' marking below measure 62; purple highlights on the RH notes in measures 62-66; a red oval around the tempo marking 'Adagio, ma più mosso' above measure 70; and a green highlight on the LH melody in measure 70 labeled 'm. d. Dies Irae'. The page number '63' is in the top right corner.

75 *sempre più cresc*

80 *ff*

84

88 *Feroce*  
*fff*  
*slentando*

93 *ff*  
*sf*  
*ppp*  
*una corda*  
*SP ppp*

The RH should delineate clearly the shape of the line (see blue lines).

The motive from m. 39 is accompanied with false octaves which make it rather dissonant. Performers can either choose to weaken the dissonance by playing the half-notes softer OR let all of them ring since Mosolov writes *Feroce* here and later added more dissonant notes (see red circles).

Use the left foot to press down both UC and SP together.

### III. Final

Allegro tumultuoso, infernale Death - Funeral - and now HELL

*sf (poco)* *p* *ten.*

LH:  
20-30%  
legato,  
very clear  
sound.

*scherzando, p* *sf* *ten.* *ten.*

Surprise!

Legato with  
phrasing on  
the little slur

5% legato

*f*

Bring out the core material  
of the third movement.

*f scherzando*

Keep  
highlighted  
notes  
legato  
while not  
over-holdin  
g other  
notes.

The quintuplets should be evenly  
played, avoiding playing like ornaments.

Although the audience might get tired of these 3-note motives, Mosolov still insists on keeping them conspicuous.

Alternate fingers 2 and 5, with 1 and 4.

Use multiple fingers to play the notes in the red circles and slightly delay to highlight their descent.

Two options:  
1. Play exactly for one beat since it is a quarter-note.

No crescendo is recommended. (SP)

2. The long slur starting from B is carefully observed. Use SP to keep the sound ringing.

43 *accel.* *schierzando, f a tempo*

Swapping middle notes can help with tight hand position.

47

Roll the chord from top to bottom.

51

54 *Drop* *accelerando*

Although Mosolov writes double lines here, the music flows directly to the next section. It is not recommended to take too much time.

58 *Tempo I*

Avoid accelerating excessively since the quintuplets in the RH already speed up the pace.  
*accelerando*

Shifting from finger 5 to 1 is awkward but it is necessary to use finger 1 on each beat.

Change pedal more frequently in this section to avoid blurry sound.

It is possible to play the highlighted notes with the RH.

Play this section with lyrical shapes and relaxing the tempo to remind the audience of the return of the secondary theme from the first movement.

82 *accel.*

m.d.

The lower voice in the RH should not overpower the melody on the top line.

86 *Molto rit.*

Slowing down like a robot running out of battery.

91 *Presto (Tempo 1)*

*sf* *feroce* *p*

Forceful then quickly go soft

94 *mf* *sf*

Surprise!

96 *ten.* *sf*

100% legato

98

*furioso*

*scherzando*

Highlighted notes should not overwhelm the crucial motive in the middle voice.

102

More marcato less accent.

107

*sempre*

110

*f* *ff*

Leaning the weight to the thumb-side palm on the RH to bring out the melody.

115

119

2 1 3

accel.

123 *Meno mosso*

mf

ff

SP

126

mf

130

accel.

Faster but softer

f

sf

Instead of short strokes, use heavy movement to enrich the sound.

Use finger 1 for the after jump.

132

*sempre presto, poco più grave*

5 4 2

ff

136

*fff*

*fff*

140

*più mosso*

Push the tempo for more passion until m. 149.

145

*ff*

*Furioso*

151

Use fingers 3, 4 and 5 to make the top chromatic line extremely legato.

157



Use all the remaining power to play out **ffff**

Flatten the LH and hold it horizontally to press all 4 clack-key notes.

Bring out the hidden chromatic line highlighted.

Release the bass and top  
Retain only the C major  
chord in the RH and "fist  
chord" in the LH.

Use the left foot to press down  
both SP and UC at the same time.

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