

*Music Graduate Students' Symposium Lecture-Recital*

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## **Form and Notation: The Piano Miniature of the Russian Avant-garde**

### **Abstract**

The 1910's and 1920's witnessed a period of unprecedented experimentation in Russian music. Following the turbulent revolution of 1917, Soviet composers were officially encouraged to experiment and write "new" music for the new world, with the creative boom continuing well into the 1920's. This surge of creativity came to a halt during the subsequent crystallization of the dictatorial regime in the late 1920's and early 1930's, during which time history was "rewritten", the more progressive composers persecuted, performances banned, and names removed from textbooks, lost to the rest of the world until the 1980's.

The piano was often used by the Russian Avant-garde as a means for exploration, and the piano miniature offered a convenient vehicle to try out and present new ideas in a short form. The proposed lecture-recital will present two sets of radical piano miniatures by the most important representatives of the Russian and Soviet Avant-garde, Nikolai Andreevich Roslavets (1881-1944) and Arthur Vincent Lourié (1892-1966).

The *Five Preludes* (1919-1922) of Roslavets reflect the composer's innovative search for structure and his use of "synthetic chords", or tone-fields. Attributed with writing the first Russian "atonal" composition in 1913, a violin sonata, Roslavets went on to develop his own "ultra-chromatic" system of 12-tone organization and enjoyed a period of productivity and influence prior to simplifying his language in order to protect his position in the mid-1920's.

Arthur Lourié began working with 12-tone complexes in 1912 and produced his most innovative work before voluntary exile from the Soviet Union in 1923, which earned the composer a "traitor" label. The 1915 set of three pieces *Formes en l'air*, dedicated to Picasso, offers an early and stark example of graphic notation, with the staves of the score arranged visually on the pages in collage-form.

The lecture-recital will address the influence of politics on the music of the time and discuss the contributions of Roslavets and Lourié to the piano miniature genre, arguing the reasons for reintroducing their output into the repertoire.