

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Nikolai Kapustin has been active as a composer since the late 1950s though he has only become known in the West during the last decade. His scores are relatively difficult to obtain and costly, and his own recordings are available only through foreign sources.¹ Two prominent pianists, Steven Osbourne and Marc-André Hamelin, have recorded all-Kapustin CDs and these recordings have generated most of the articles about Kapustin in western music magazines over the last few years.² Most critics have appropriately commented on Kapustin's astute marriage of classical form with jazz style. This study seeks to quantify these claims through an analysis of his informed use of jazz style as well as his command of classical form. In this study, I will attempt to show, through stylistic and formal analysis, that Kapustin has combined a classical approach to composition with an authentic command of jazz styles in the *Twenty-four Preludes*, Opus 53. Kapustin's assimilation of the stylistic language of jazz and its application to written composition presents interesting questions about stylistic boundaries, the notation and performance of jazz scores, and the musical similarities between jazz piano music and classical piano music. This study will explore some of these questions in relation to the *Preludes* and to substantiate the observations others have made about his stylistic influences, while presenting a detailed analysis of his compositional style.

¹ For information on recordings and scores, see www.nikolaikapustin.net. Recordings are available through HMV Japan and scores through Tutti UK. See Reference section for complete information.

² Marc-André Hamelin, *Nikolai Kapustin Piano Music*, Hyperion CDA67433, 2004, and Steven Osbourne, *Nikolai Kapustin Piano Music*, Hyperion CDA67159, 2000.

Most observers who comment on Kapustin's music focus on his combination of jazz harmonic and rhythmic language with classical form. Besides his ability to recreate the styles of Art Tatum, Oscar Peterson, and Erroll Garner, there is also a unique and sophisticated craftsmanship at work. Stuart Isacoff refers to the "organic cohesiveness of the compositions, the technical flair of a pianist/composer, ... [and] the lyricism and adventurousness found in much early twentieth-century Russian music."³ Other composers have written music with a combination of jazz and classical influences, but it is possible that no one has combined the two in such an integrated way.⁴ In reference to his jazz influences, Jed Distler has said, "[h]e hasn't merely appropriated but truly internalized the music's stylistic and textural evolution from Scott Joplin to Keith Jarrett."⁵ Though Distler, Isacoff, and others have written knowledgably about Kapustin and his music, these articles have appeared in liner notes and popular magazines like *Piano Today* and *International Piano*. In the one existing scholarly paper on Kapustin to date, Jonathan Mann states "...a jazz vernacular is presented in a contrapuntally dense framework of thematic organization, development, and restatement."⁶ I agree with Isacoff that Kapustin's work combines classical and jazz in a more integrated way than many others who have attempted such a syntheses and it is the author's intention to corroborate this claim through detailed analysis. It is my intention to continue a scholarly discussion

³ Stuart Isacoff, "Marc-André Hamelin Plays the Wild and Jazzy Music of Nikolai Kapustin," *Piano Today* 24, no. 4 (Fall 2004): 5.

⁴ Kirsten Joan Helgeland, "Jazz and the Classics: A study of American crossover piano works from 1920 to 1935" (PhD diss., University of Cincinnati, 1999).

⁵ Jed Distler, notes to *Nikolai Kapustin Piano Music*, Hyperion CDA67433, 2004.

⁶ Jonathan Edward Mann, "Red, White, and Blue Notes: The Symbiotic Music of Nikolai Kapustin" (D.M.A. diss., University of Cincinnati, 2007):2.

of Kapustin's work with the present study of stylistic and structural elements of the *Preludes* with the hope that future scholars will continue to discuss, analyze, enjoy, and disseminate the music of Kapustin.

The way that Kapustin uses the raw material of jazz recalls Bach's use of contemporary dance forms and the use of folk music by many nineteenth and twentieth century composers.⁷ Just as Bach turned the vernacular dance styles of the era into art music, so Kapustin seems to have used the raw material of twentieth century jazz to create concert music that is modern, refreshing, pays homage to its jazz sources, and speaks to contemporary audiences in a unique way.

From the vantage point of the early twenty-first century, it seems that the world of art music is embracing a wide variety of musical styles as never before, and jazz-oriented music is one of the main influences. Contemporary classical performers are including transcriptions of Art Tatum, Bill Evans, and Fats Waller in their recordings and concert programs, and audiences seem curious if not eager to hear this music in a new context.⁸ These developments raise interesting questions about classification and context. They also tend to elucidate elements of jazz style—elements that, because they are truly based in an aural/oral tradition, defy notation and often befuddle performers who are not steeped in that tradition. Kapustin's music fits nicely into this trend, presenting performers with fully notated scores that require significant insight into jazz performance

⁷ Meredith Little and Natalie Jenne, *Dance and the Music of J. S. Bach* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001).

⁸ Recordings of Art Tatum's music by Steven Mayer, Fats Waller's music by Paul Posner, and Bill Evans's music by Jean-Yves Thibaudet are current examples. See Bibliography for details on recordings.

practice. Only time will tell if this trend will continue to blur the boundaries of the great classical-jazz divide.