Rachmaninoff and Stravinsky in Los Angeles to 1943

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[Refer to appended slideshow, beginning here with slide 1]

By the time they moved to Beverly Hills in the early 1940s, Rachmaninoff and Stravinsky were two of the most famous living composers, Russian or otherwise. It was not the first time they had lived near each other. Rachmaninoff, as a nine-year-old boy, had moved with his family to St. Petersburg in 1882 at about the same time Stravinsky was born there. Rachmaninoff studied for three years at the St. Petersburg Conservatory before moving to Moscow, but had he remained in St. Petersburg, he probably would have ended up studying with Rimsky-Korsakov, like Stravinsky, and the two would have met much sooner. As things were, Rachmaninoff's international career was already well under way by the time Stravinsky began composing in earnest in 1902; Stravinsky thus came to know Rachmaninoff from a distance rather than as a colleague, recalling later that during this period he "had often heard [Rachmaninoff] perform, and had admired his music."[1] Years later, in the 1920s and 30s, the two brushed shoulders in Paris, where Stravinsky was based and where Rachmaninoff often performed, visited, and summered. On one occasion, for example, Rachmaninoff attended a performance, conducted by Stravinsky, of the latter's "burlesque in song and dance" *Renard* at

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The title of this presentation has been revised from its original form, "Commercial Music? Rachmaninoff and Stravinsky in Los Angeles, 1940–42."

[1] Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Memories and Commentaries* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002), 230; see also Stravinsky's letter to Vladimir Rimsky-Korsakov, July 3/16, 1904, translated and quoted in Stephen Walsh, *Stravinsky: A Creative Spring: Russia and France, 1882–1934* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999), 36–37.

Diaghilev's Ballets Russes.[2] Already exiles of their native Russia, they became exiles again when World War II engulfed Europe. Moving to Los Angeles brought them into contact not only with Walt Disney (see slide 2) but also with a thriving community of Russian émigrés and, as two of its most recent and eminent additions, with each other.

Until then they stood just out of reach—much as they appear in a 1925 photograph taken at a reception at Steinway Hall in New York (see slide 3)—moving in similar cosmopolitan musical circles but rarely if ever communicating with each other. Perhaps they felt they had little to discuss. After all, Rachmaninoff and Stravinsky embody the early-twentieth-century tug-of-war between the musical old and new as much as any other conceivable pair of composers. Rachmaninoff set the tenor for his public discourse on modern music in his first known published interview in the West, given in 1909 on the occasion of his first American tour. "I have scant sympathy," he told *Musical America*, "with those who have allowed themselves to succumb to the wanton eccentricities of latter-day musical sensationalism. . . . The methods of Strauss and Reger have come to stay. But I, for one, shall steer clear of them."[3] Not only were

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[2] The concert, which took place on May 21, 1929, also featured the premiere of Prokofiev's *The Prodigal Son*. Prokofiev, *Soviet Diary 1927 and Other Writings*, trans. and ed. Oleg Prokofiev (London: Faber and Faber, 1991), 287. Rachmaninoff mentioned attending this concert (without, however, describing it) in a letter to the Somovs, May 30, 1929. Rachmaninoff, *Literaturnoe nasledia, II. Pis'ma*, ed. Zarui Apetian (Moscow: Sovetskii kompozitor, 1980), 255.

[3] "Modernism is Rachmaninoff's Bane," *Musical America* 11, no. 2 (November 1909): 23. Reporters frequently sought Rachmaninoff's opinion on modern music, with the result that a high proportion of his interviews contain commentary on the subject. Though nuanced in various ways, his opinion was perhaps most succinctly expressed in an unknown interview with the *Scotsman*: "Modern music? Is it music? I think we will not talk about it—it is too horrible." It should be added, however, that in this same interview he indicated that "I do not dislike all the modern composers. Ravel's music I admire enormously, and I am most anxious to get hold of the new concerto [in G] and try it." "Modern Music Disliked," *Scotsman*, March 10, 1932. Rachmaninoff was a known advocate of his compatriots Medtner and Scriabin and also admired, as I discuss below, the early ballets of Stravinsky—that is, he tended to admire the late- and post-romantic strains of twentieth-century composition, to which his own music of the period also belongs. In addition to Medtner and Scriabin, his repertoire included some Debussy, Poulenc,

such methods here to stay, but Stravinsky brought new meaning to musical sensationalism in 1913, when the premiere of his *Rite of Spring* provoked the most famous riot in music history. That event earned Stravinsky a lasting reputation as a "futurist,"[4] though he would later claim his music was "neither 'futurist' nor passé-ist,' only the music of today."[5] Rachmaninoff rejected "the bitter tonalities of today," noting that "they reflect our times, but they don't reflect the warmth and depth of compassion in human nature which is timeless."[6] He once defined music as "a calm moonlit night, a rustling of summer foliage. Music is the distant peal of bells at eventide! Music is born only in the heart and it appeals only to the heart; it is Love!"[7] Stravinsky declared that "music is, by its very nature, essentially powerless to *express* anything at all, whether a feeling, an attitude of mind, a psychological mood, a phenomenon of nature, etc."[8] In light of these differences, it is perhaps not surprising that what ultimately brought the composers into contact was shared personal, rather than musical, concerns, as we will see below.

Rachmaninoff and Stravinsky nonetheless maintained a healthy, if qualified, respect for each other's work. Rachmaninoff appears to have liked Stravinsky's early ballets more than the later music. In 1918 Rachmaninoff described Stravinsky as "a force to be reckoned with," noting

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and Ravel. For a full list of his piano repertoire, see Barrie Martyn, *Rachmaninoff: Composer, Pianist, Conductor* (Aldershot, England: Scolar Press, 1990), 416–38.

[4] This term, rarely used today to describe early twentieth-century modernism in music, was then current. See, for example, *Baker's Biographical Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 3rd ed., ed. Alfred Remy (New York: G. Schirmer, 1919), s.v. "Stravinsky, Igor Fedorovitch."

[5] "Igor Stravinsky Not a 'Modernist,'" *New York Times*, January 6, 1925.

[6] Glenn Quilty, "Rachmaninoff—the Last Romantic Composer," *HiFi Review*, October 1959, 28.

[7] Rachmaninoff to Walter E. Koons, after December 13, 1932, quoted in Sergei Bertensson and Jan Leyda, *Sergei Rachmaninoff: A Lifetime in Music* (1956; repr., with a new introduction by David Butler Cannata, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 291.

[8] Stravinsky, *Chronicle of My Life*, translated from French (London: V. Gollancz, 1936), 91.

that the early ballets "represented a high order of talent, if not of genius."[9] However, in early 1930, less than a year after he heard *Renard* in Paris, Rachmaninoff privately expressed skepticism about Stravinsky's music, saying that although to some "Stravinsky's music is clear, to me it is not."[10] This did not reflect a reversal of opinion concerning the ballets, for which Rachmaninoff's guarded approbation eventually gave way to open appreciation. According to personal acquaintances, Rachmaninoff "had always praised both *The Fire Bird* and *Petrushka* as works of genius."[11] In a 1941 article that he wrote for *The Etude*, Rachmaninoff criticized modern music as usual but reserved praise for *The Rite of Spring*, whose "solid musical merits in the form of imaginative harmonies and energetic rhythms" he attributed to Stravinsky's rigorous training in "classical forms and style."[12] Most of all, Rachmaninoff loved *The Firebird*. "I shall never forget," wrote a friend of Rachmaninoff's California period, "how, when we were listening together [on the radio] to the solemn yet joyous finale of *The Fire Bird*, Rachmaninoff's eyes filled with tears, and he exclaimed, 'Lord, how much more than genius this is—it is real Russia!'"[13]

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[9] "Rakhmaninov Returns to America," *Boston Evening Transcript*, November 20, 1918.

[10] The conversation took place on February 18, 1930. Alfred J. Swan and Katherine Swan, "Rachmaninoff: Personal Recollections—Part I," *Musical Quarterly* 30, no. 1 (January 1944): 11, 15–16.

[11] Praised but, as we have seen, not *always* as works of genius. Sergei Bertensson and Jan Leyda, *Sergei Rachmaninoff: A Lifetime in Music*, 374. This statement is regarded as authoritative on account of Bertensson's personal acquaintance with the composer during this period and because the biography was written with the assistance of Sophia Satina, the composer's cousin and sister-in-law.

[12] Rachmaninoff, "Music Should Speak from the Heart," *Etude*, December 1941, 804.

[13] Bertensson, "Rachmaninoff As I knew Him," *Etude*, March 1948, 193, incorporated in Bertensson and Leyda, *Sergei Rachmaninoff: A Lifetime in Music*, 373. It seems likely that Stravinsky had Bertensson in mind when he said that Rachmaninoff "told mutual Russian

Stravinsky's early admiration for Rachmaninoff was mentioned above. In his only recorded assessment of Rachmaninoff's music, published almost twenty years after the latter's death, Stravinsky stopped short agreeing with those who said he didn't like Rachmaninoff's music but admitted that "it is true we composed very differently." Stravinsky described Rachmaninoff's earliest pieces as "watercolors" but said that "at twenty-five he turned to 'oils' and became a very old composer. But," he continued,

> do not expect me to denigrate him for that. In fact he was an awesome man, and there are too many others to be denigrated long before him. As I think about him, his silence looms as a noble contrast to the self-approbations that are the only conversation of most musicians. Besides, he was the only pianist I have ever seen who did not grimace when he played. That says a great deal.[14]

Stravinsky's accepting attitude toward Rachmaninoff's devotion to traditional musical norms inevitably comes as a surprise, since his music helped establish and maintain stylistic contemporaneity as a fundamental parameter for the evaluation of twentieth-century music. But in general, musical commentators who have championed stylistic progress as an essential feature of twentieth-century music have more often dispensed with Stravinsky's benevolent circumspection toward Rachmaninoff, openly denigrating the latter's music because of its defining ties to the past. For such, Rachmaninoff's melodious beauty was inauthentic, no matter how sincere—"an evocation of adolescence,"[15] "totally unimportant goo,"[16] "junk,"[17] "trash,"[18]

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refugee friends that he thought *Firebird* the greatest creation in all Russian music." Stravinsky and Craft, *Memories and Commentaries*, 230.

[14] Stravinsky and Craft, *Memories and Commentaries*, 230–31.

[15] Virgil Thomson, review of *Music in a New Found Land* by Wilfrid Mellers, *New York Review of Books*, June 3, 1965, quoted in *A Virgil Thomson Reader* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1981), 410.

[16] Paul Hume, "Summer Is Abloom With Lovely Sound," *Washington Post Times Herald*, August 20, 1961.

"cozy schlock,"[19] to quote a few. Rachmaninoff and Stravinsky have sometimes elicited direct comparison, as in a 1971 letter to the *Los Angeles Times* by Lawrence Morton, a personal friend to Stravinsky and known advocate of contemporary music in Southern California (to offer an example relevant to the region):

> Heart is cheap in music, possessed in abundance by composers of the third rank and below—Chaminade, for example, and Moszkowski, Katchaturian, Suppe, Turina, Rachmaninoff, et al. Composers with heads shaped like Monteverdi's, Bach's, Mozart's, Beethoven's, Stravinsky's, Schoenberg's, Weber[n]'s—these have the better of it, for their hearts were stimulated by rigorous brain work rather than by domestic felicity (or crises), and they ended with a marvelous wholeness rather than a head-heart dichotomy.[20]

Not content merely to dismiss the music itself, some commentators have called Rachmaninoff's sincerity itself into question, suggesting that his music was motivated by commercial interests: "There was always a fight in him between material success and creative ambition," wrote Wilfrid Mellers in 1962.[21]

To examine Rachmaninoff and Stravinsky in Los Angeles in the years leading up to and including their brief, overlapping residency here is to return to a time before these stereotypes

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[17] Gary Graffman, *I Really Should be Practicing* (New York: Avon Books, 1981), 142. Walter Piston made this comment to Graffman after the latter performed Rachmaninoff's Second Concerto with the Boston Symphony Orchestra 1961.

[18] Samuel Lipman, *Music After Modernism* (New York: Basic Books, 1979), 92. Lipman quotes an unnamed American composer who made the remark following Horowitz's 1978 performance of Rachmaninoff's Third Concerto with the New York Philharmonic.

[19] Bernard Holland, "Basking in the Glow of the Golden Arches," *New York Times*, December 22, 1996. Holland here bewails the attention that the 1996 film *Shine* garnered for Rachmaninoff's Third Concerto.

[20] Lawrence Morton, Letter to the Editor, *Los Angeles Times*, December 19, 1971. Morton's failure to cite a single romantic composer among those who, in his opinion, strike "a marvelous wholeness" would seem to belie the operation of an anti-romantic zeitgeist in his taste.

[21] Wilfrid Mellers, *Man and His Music: Romanticism and the Twentieth Century* (New York: Schocken, 1962), 90.

had gained traction in the press—when Rachmaninoff's outlier-detractors did not yet represent a cohesive voice and when Stravinsky's importance was acknowledged but had not yet placed his music beyond the reach of criticism. The *Los Angeles Times* music critics of the period were, to be sure, as conscious of Rachmaninoff's ties to the past and Stravinsky's closeness to the present as later writers have been. But they did not feel compelled to dismiss Rachmaninoff's music on this basis or to compare the two composers to the advantage or disadvantage of either. Notions of greatness were attached to both in different ways. Additionally, the composers' personal financial circumstances during their Los Angeles years influenced their output in ways that rather reverse their posthumous stereotypes. Ultimately, their early reception in Los Angeles suggests that admiration for one does not preclude admiration for the other, as has sometimes seemed the case.

(See slide 4.) The music of Rachmaninoff and Stravinsky naturally reached Los Angeles long before they did. Rachmaninoff's name first appeared in the *Los Angeles Times* on February 23, 1899, before the young man had even stepped outside the borders of his own country. What brought him to the attention of Los Angeles, and the rest of the musical world outside of Russia, was his Prelude in C-sharp Minor, which had been causing a sensation since it was introduced to American and European audiences by Alexander Ziloti the previous year. It was being played in Los Angeles by amateurs and traveling virtuosos alike, including Josef Hofmann in 1904. A performance of the piece in 1911 by a young Warsaw pianist named Herschel Hendler elicited a response from *Times* critic Julian Johnson that contrasts strongly with cynical retrospective critiques. Theodor Adorno, for example, would later dismiss the prelude as a faux showpiece that

appeals to "infantile adults" by gratifying "the Nero complex."[22] Johnson, however, singled out the prelude as the high point—"real music"—of a program that consisted otherwise of virtuosic potpourri and praised Hendler's performance of it for its lack of "any physical gyration whatever." Johnson heard in the piece a distillation of life's entire course—"the feeble cry of birth, the spring-time joy of youth, the resolute, calm achievement of middle life, the melancholy of life's autumn, the quiet, mysterious solemnity of death, the dying away of life into nothingness"—praising its composer as "the remarkable young Russian."[23] All of the dozen or so reported performances of Rachmaninoff's music up to 1919, many of them by locals, are of two preludes (the other being in G minor) and various songs.

Just how Johnson could refer to Rachmaninoff as "the remarkable young Russian" on the basis of such a small sampling of his music might be explained by Rachmaninoff's American tour in 1909. Although Rachmaninoff did not appear in Los Angeles on that occasion, the *Times* reported his arrival in New York, duly listing his major accomplishments: his reception of the Moscow Conservatory's coveted gold medal, the successful premiere of his early opera *Aleko*, and the praise his Second Symphony had recently received in Dresden as "the best Russian production of its sort since Tschaikowsky's sixth." (Rachmaninoff's achievements and compositions to date were also listed by this time in *Baker's Biographical Dictionary of Music and Musicians* and *Grove's Dictionary of Music*.) The article also stated Rachmaninoff's perceived relation to national and international musical trends: "A pupil of Tschaikowsky," it

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[22] Theodor Adorno, "Commodity Music Analysed," in *Quasi Una Fantasia: Essays on Modern Music*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: Verso, 1998), 38–40. For a recent, sympathetic explanation of this critique, see Karen M. Bottge, "Reading Adorno's Reading of the Rachmaninov Prelude in C-sharp Minor: Metaphors of Destruction, Gestures of Power," *Music Theory Online* 17, no. 4 (December 2011): 1–13.

[23] Julian Johnson, "Hendler, the Piano Creatore," *Los Angeles Times*, September 26, 1911.

reads, "it is said that he has adhered to the style of that master, and remains in the 'old school' rather than the 'new school,' of which he said on his arrival that it remained to be shown that it was a success."[24] As the music of the Five had yet to make itself strongly felt in Los Angeles, Rachmaninoff was regarded by "the ordinary public" as a quintessential exponent of Russian music along side Rubinstein and Tchaikovsky.[25]

The year 1919 was a turning point in Rachmaninoff's reception in Los Angeles. Interest in his music was beginning to spread outward from his smaller pieces to his larger works. That year his D minor piano trio and Second Symphony were performed there for the first time, the latter by the Los Angeles Symphony Orchestra. *Times* critic Jeanne Redman praised the symphony, observing that "Rachmaninoff combines a serious musicianship with a curious penchant for attracting the layman, and his second symphony has this same quality of universality, observable in his lesser works." Rachmaninoff was no longer "the remarkable young Russian" but, to Redman, "a Russian master."[26] "Probably none of the modern Russian composers is so well liked in America as Rachmaninoff," she wrote in a follow-up assessment. Rachmaninoff was regarded increasingly as an orchestral composer. The Second Symphony, Redman wrote, was by now "a familiar part of the American concert program," and she could cite the tone poem *Isle of the Dead* as "probably Rachmaninoff's best work, in spite of the great popularity in America, of his Prelude."[27] Rachmaninoff's performing gifts were also known to Los Angeles: this same year, William Andrews Clark, Jr., offered Rachmaninoff the inaugural

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[24] "Rachmaninoff in New York," *Los Angeles Times*, November 14, 1909.

[25] "Calendar of Music News: Passive Race Producing Good Music," *Los Angeles Times*, May 4, 1913.

[26] Jeanne Redman, "A Russian Master," *Los Angeles Times*, May 3, 1919.

[27] Redman, "A Russian Tone-Painter," *Los Angeles Times*, May 25, 1919.

conductorship of the Los Angeles Philharmonic, which the latter refused.[28] Having fled Bolshevik Russia the previous year, Rachmaninoff had decided to make his living as a pianist and had already turned down similar offers from the Boston Symphony Orchestra and the Cincinnati Symphony.

In 1923, Rachmaninoff appeared in person for the first time in Los Angeles—not as composer but as pianist. His performance was greeted with ecstasy by *Times* critic Edwin Schallert. "Art and the personality in art assumed a new significance with the first piano concert of Sergei Rachmaninoff in this city," he wrote. "He played last night at Trinity Auditorium, and before a throng that had apparently long anticipated his appearance proved himself a giant of the keyboard."[29] Rachmaninoff would offer in total twenty-eight performances in the greater Los Angeles area.[30] (See slides 5–12, which show the major Los Angeles performing venues of the early-twentieth century in which Rachmaninoff appeared between 1923 and 1942.) In only six of these did he appear with orchestra in performance of his own music; the vast majority of the music he played in Los Angeles was by other composers. But in their ecstatic praise of his abilities as an interpreter, reviewers never lost sight of Rachmaninoff's identity as a composer. They heard the composer in the interpreter, and praise of both aspects of his creative personality intermingled in their commentary. "He plays and through the voice of Rachmaninoff his listeners

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[28] William E. Conway and Robert Stevenson, *William Andrews Clark, Jr.: His Cultural Legacy* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985), 35.

[29] Edwin Schallert, "Rachmaninoff: Noted Composer Enthralls Audience at Trinity," February 3, 1923.

[30] For a complete listing of Rachmaninoff's American performances, see Robin Gehl, "Reassessing a Legacy: Rachmaninoff in America, 1918–43," PhD dissertation (University of Cincinnati, 2008), 252–77.

also hear the glorified voice of the composer," reads a recital announcement from 1925.[31] Reviewing that recital, Francis Kendig described Rachmaninoff as a "transcendent genius" who "played as only he can play"—which, Kendig went on to describe, is "with a conception such as is only given to those who love greatly, feel deeply, suffer silently and give generously and beautifully. . . . Yet, for all this," Kendig continued, "Rachmaninoff is wasting his time by playing for people, while the creative genius slumbers within him. While the world would be much poorer without his performances, his compositions reveal depths and beauties which are new."[32] During these years, the *Times* described Rachmaninoff variously as "one of the foremost living composers,"[33] "one of the greatest living composers,"[34] "one of the great composers,"[35] and so forth. He excited learned interest as well, being the subject of a special lecture given in 1931 by Alexis Kall, a slightly younger Russian émigré from St. Petersburg and an old acquaintance of Stravinsky.[36]

Isabel Morse Jones, principal *Times* critic from 1925 to 1947, wrote most of Rachmaninoff's Los Angeles reviews and likewise held him in the highest esteem. "Rachmaninoff, the great one, played in Los Angeles last night," reads the opening line of her first review of the composer;[37] she often referred to him simply as "the master." On other

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[31] "Rachmaninoff Plays," *Los Angeles Times*, February 5, 1925.

[32] Francis Kendig, "Rachmaninoff Plays: Famed Russian Pianist Enthralls with Colossal Art," *Los Angeles Times*, February 7, 1925.

[33] "Rachmaninoff in Recital," *Los Angeles Times*, February 26, 1929.

[34] "Sergei Rachmaninoff to Appear at Philharmonic," *Los Angeles Times*, January 17, 1937.

[35] "Russian to Play Here This Week," *Los Angeles Times*, March 1, 1931.

[36] "Rachmaninoff Lecture Booked," *Los Angeles Times*, May 13, 1931.

[37] Isabel Morse Jones, "Pianist Awes by Perfection," *Los Angeles Times*, February 28, 1929.

occasions she described him as "one of the most profound thinkers in the musical world,"[38] a "philosopher of music,"[39] and asserted that his discerning performance of Scriabin belied his claim not to understand modern music.[40] When Rachmaninoff made his Philharmonic debut with Leopold Stokowski in 1940 at Pantages Theater, Jones thought his performance the high point of the program, which also featured Stravinsky's *Firebird*:

> The splendid moments [of the program] came with the playing of Rachmaninoff. His second concerto has so much of nostalgia, of longing for and realization of beauty that hearing him play it created a wave of emotional warmth and appreciation in the listeners such as we seldom enjoy in a concert. The audience stood to applaud this grand and ageless master.[41]

Later that year, Jones singled out the Rachmaninoff-Fokine ballet *Paganini* as the highlight of the five ballets presented there by the Ballet Russe that fall.[42]

The year 1942 was Rachmaninoff's culminating year in Los Angeles. In her review of his recital that winter, Jones dubbed Rachmaninoff "an independent creative genius"[43] and, though praising his pianism, wrote that "his achievements in composition and conducting are broader, greater musically and will live longer in the memories of musicians."[44] Jones could make this statement on the basis of an aural familiarity with many of Rachmaninoff's large works: by

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[38] Jones, "Highest Promise Seen in Wallenstein, Conductor," *Los Angeles Times*, June 5, 1932.

[39] Jones, "Coming Artists of Note Whet Musical Appetites," *Los Angeles Times*, September 4, 1932.

[40] Jones, "Rachmaninoff Mysticism Revealed in His Concert," *Los Angeles Times*, December 2, 1934.

[41] Jones, "Conductor and Soloist Win Acclaim," *Los Angeles Times*, January 26, 1940.

[42] Jones, "Repetition of 'Paganini' Ballet Wins High Favor," *Los Angeles Times*, October 18, 1940; Jones, "Ballet Russe Accorded Recognition in Last Days," *Los Angeles Times*, October 21, 1940.

[43] Jones, "The Week's High Note in Music," *Los Angeles Times*, February 8, 1942.

[44] Jones, "Noted Pianist Holds Throng at Recital," *Los Angeles Times*, February 23, 1942.

1942, the Second Piano Sonata, Second and Third Piano Concertos, Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini, *Isle of the Dead*, Second Symphony, and choral symphony *The Bells*, had all been presented in Los Angeles, some of them multiple times. This sustained exposure was not the work of a group of local devotees: his music had been performed by an array of illustrious musicians, among them pianists Josef Hofmann, Vladimir Horowitz, and Benno Moiseiwitsch and conductors Albert Coates, Eugene Goossens, Otto Klemperer, Pierre Monteux, Artur Rodzinski, Leopold Stokowski, and Bruno Walter. He had come to be regarded in Los Angeles as one of the greatest pianists and composers of his time. The capstone of it all was Rachmaninoff's Hollywood Bowl debut—also his last appearance in the city—in two performances of his Second Concerto on July 17 and 18 (see slide 13). "It was an occasion," wrote Isabel Morse Jones. "The large audience was aware of its significance and offered . . . the revered pianist, who now makes his home here, homage and appreciation." The orchestra, too, "greeted him by rising when he came in. . . . It was resplendent music Rachmaninoff made last night."[45] As Jones noted, the Rachmaninoffs had just moved to Los Angeles. In May they rented the house at 9941 Tower Lane in Beverly Hills (see slide 14) and, enjoying the atmosphere, decided immediately to buy a house nearby at 610 North Elm Drive.

Although in leaving Russia Rachmaninoff forsook virtually all his material property, his success as a pianist was such that by 1925 he had become one of the two highest paid musicians in America, second only to Paderewski.[46] This success placed him in peculiar circumstances creatively. It left him without much time to compose, but it meant that that when he did

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[45] Jones, "Crowd Pays Homage to Russians," *Los Angeles Times*, July 18, 1942.

[46] According to the income taxes of one hundred famous American published by *Time* in 1925. "Publicity," *Time*, September 14, 1925, 8–9. See Gehl, "Reassessing a Legacy: Rachmaninoff in America, 1918–43," 57, for a summary of Rachmaninoff's earnings as reported at various times in *Time*.

compose, he was free to do so on his own terms, without any consideration for market demand or commercial gain. He was fully aware of this state of affairs. In 1921 he told an interviewer of receiving a request from a publisher "to compose and 'submit to him for his approval,' some piano pieces in Grade III." Rachmaninoff twice refused this request. "He meant no offence, I suppose," Rachmaninoff said, "and yet his letter was offensive. You see, I have never written 'commercially.' Composition, the creation of a new musical idea, the clothing it in the beauty of tone, ought to be something sacred."[47] Later, in 1936, he would reiterate this position: "My composing I must do in my summer vacations, and sometimes they are very short. At least I can say this for my music: it is written from an inner motive. It is not written from unmusical and ulterior motives."[48] He certainly had opportunities to compose for commercial gain. That same year, the *Times* reported that Paramount was seeking Rachmaninoff's collaboration on a production and that the composer was "very much interested."[49] Yet nothing ever came of this.

It is a good thing, too, that Rachmaninoff did not rely on composing for his income, because five of the six original opuses he composed after leaving Russia were comparative failures (although time has largely reversed that verdict). His music changed in important ways that lessened its appeal to audiences who were still clamoring for works he had composed decades earlier. It grew cooler and less idealistic. His gift for luscious melody remained but showed itself less frequently, and there were no more cathartic culminations. The once pervasive warmth and richness of his textures gave way to more variety. Occasionally, sharp contrasts in

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[47] Frederick H. Martens, "Sergei Rachmaninoff Talks of Russia and America," *Musical Observer* 20, no. 4 (April 1922): 11.

[48] Basil Maine, "Conversation with Rachmaninoff," *Musical Opinion* 60, no. 709 (October 1936): 15.

[49] Schallert, "Rachmaninoff to Work for Paramount," *Los Angeles Times*, April 29, 1936.

texture, dynamics, and harmony—between movements, sections, or gestures—impart a sense of dislocation. At the same time, Rachmaninoff's harmony admitted dissonance more prominently and more frequently—not only by drawing from symmetrical scales (which he had been doing occasionally from very early on) but also by overlaying functional harmonic progressions with non-functional harmonies arising from underlying chromatic contrapuntal processes. These incidental harmonies can be triadic, when the chromatic lines that produce them move in parallel motion—in which case they can sometimes be heard as expansions of passing tones into "passing chords," including angular motion in strident fifths or sevenths—or non-triadic, when the lines move in similar, oblique, or contrary motion. Although Rachmaninoff's contrapuntal procedure had long yielded such harmonies, in his later music they become more detached from their immediate harmonic context and are more often non-triadic; they tend to distort the musical surface, sometimes grotesquely.[50] Some passages exhibit both triadic and non-triadic non-functional harmonies at the same time, as in the retransition of the finale of the Third Symphony (a similar procedure is used to close the principal theme of the finale of the revised version of the First Concerto). Because these features move in opposition to romanticism without negating it altogether, they might justifiably be termed postromantic.[51]

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[50] For a thorough Schenkerian explanation of the idiosyncrasies of Rachmaninoff's voice-leading, see Robert E. Cunningham, Jr., "Harmonic Prolongation in Selected Works of Rachmaninoff, 1910–1931" (PhD diss., Florida State University, 1999), 26–70. As Cunningham's approach, being Schenkerian, emphasizes the integration of Rachmaninoff's chromatic dissonances into their tonal context, he does not stress the aural prominence of these features as a special aspect of Rachmaninoff's later style. For a more flexible analytical approach that emphasizes the autonomy of special harmonic features of Rachmaninoff's later music, see Brian Johnston, "Harmony and Climax in the Late Works of Sergei Rachmaninoff" (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2009). Johnston describes his position vis-à-vis Cunningham on pp. 8–15.

[51] For a discussion of Rachmaninoff and post-romanticism, see Johnston, "Harmony and Climax in the Late Works of Sergei Rachmaninoff," 28–29.

Of these features, the presence of these dissonant harmonic elements in Rachmaninoff's later music has especially excited commentators. They have described the feature variously. Stephen Walsh termed it the "side-step" or "sideslip" technique, mentioning its presence in Strauss's music as well.[52] Charles Fisk has described it as "explorations of chromatic voice leading."[53] Blair Johnston, in the most far-reaching technical analysis of Rachmaninoff's music yet to appear, recently proposed not merely a term but a well-wrought theory of *hyperdissonance* to explain these chromatic features—a structural type of dissonance occurring between distinct diatonic-functional and chromatic-harmonic layers in a tonal context used variously by Rachmaninoff and his contemporaries to manipulate the expressive shape or "tension arc" of a passage or work. Johnston's theory strongly situates Rachmaninoff among his contemporaries, rather than his predecessors, with recourse to shared post-romantic features.[54]

If Johnston is the theorist among these commentators, it is Fisk who dwells on the hermeneutical significance of the features of Rachmaninoff's later style. Through the juxtaposition of disparate harmonic elements in this music, Fisk argues, Rachmaninoff captures

> the poignancy of his longing for a never-to-be-recovered world and mode of expression, and thus the existential complexity of his own cultural and historical position: that of an endangered species in a new world, a composer who responded to every new discovery by adapting it to the musical language he had learned in his homeland at the end of the nineteenth century; but one whose music not only was written but could only have been written in the twentieth.[55]

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[52] Stephen Walsh, "Sergei Rachmaninoff, 1873–1973," *Tempo* 105 (June, 1973): 18–19.

[53] Charles Fisk, "Nineteenth-Century Music? The Case of Rachmaninov," *19th-century Music* 31, no. 3 (Spring 2008): 251.

[54] For Johnston's exposition of the theory, see his "Harmony and Climax in the Late Works of Sergei Rachmaninoff," 27–78. Johnston defines hyperdissonance on p. 40.

[55] Fisk, "Nineteenth-Century Music?" 265.

Taken together, Fisk's and Johnston's theses provide a solid foundation for the theoretical, cultural, and personal authenticity of Rachmaninoff's music.

Rachmaninoff's Humoresque demonstrates the stylistic heterogeneity of his late style well. The piece is perfectly suited for the task, since it was composed in 1894, at the beginning of his career—one of Stravinsky's "watercolors"—and revised in 1940, near his career's end. It is one of seven *Morceaux de salon*, op. 10, which he composed at a time of financial need. Unlike the earlier *Morceaux de fantaisie*, op. 3—which included the famous Prelude in C-sharp Minor and which Rachmaninoff kept in his repertoire throughout his career—op. 10 seems to have been directed squarely at the domestic market, and the quality is lower. As Barrie Martyn wrote, opus 10 "represent[s] Rachmaninoff at his least inspired."[56] Nevertheless, Rachmaninoff considered two of the pieces, the Barcarolle and Humoresque, worthy of public performance, and he frequently played them as encores, including the latter, in its revised form, in Los Angeles in February 1942. In addition to revising the piano writing to be more varied and brilliant, Rachmaninoff inscribed hyperdissonance into several passages. The descending opening phrase originally culminated with an accented upper-neighbor tone that, in the revised version, became a non-functional non-triadic chromatic neighboring harmony through the addition of two more chromatic neighbors in the bass (see slide 15). What had been a set of chromatic neighbors in the ascending transition to the second theme likewise became expanded into chromatic neighboring chords (see slide 16). Meanwhile, the main theme originally featured a normal sequence of chords related by third and each of its measures could be heard as independent units. In the revised version, these harmonies are deformed, becoming non-functional seventh chords, by the superimposition of independent chromatic lines that necessitate apprehension at the level of the

[56] Martyn, *Rachmaninoff: Composer, Pianist, Conductor*, 89.

phrase (see slide 17; these harmonies are slightly different, but similarly deformed, when reiterated at the climactic statement of this theme). These grotesque harmonic distortions amplify existing harmonic tension without obscuring tonal trajectory—what Johnston considers hyperdissonance of *exaggeration*.[57] They objectify the romantic flavor of the piece, mirroring in a subtle but tangible way the irreversible deformations of Rachmaninoff's native Russia wrought by war and revolution. *[At this point I performed Rachmaninoff's Humoresque.]*

Rachmaninoff's transcription of Tchaikovsky's Lullaby is also specially representative of his final years. Composed in 1941 after he revised his Fourth Concerto, the transcription represents Rachmaninoff's final compositional act, and he recorded the piece at his final recording session, in Hollywood in early 1942. Rachmaninoff expands the plaintive chromatic lines in Tchaikovsky's original into angular chromatic harmonies in the transcription's central interlude in thirds (see slide 18). This mild hyperdissonance is similar technically to what we observed in the Humoresque, except that its effect is one of bitterness rather than grotesqueness. The piece represents at once a fitting tribute to Rachmaninoff's stylistic predecessor and at the same time a poignant farewell to that style by way of hyperdissonant distortion. But the piece quite possibly could have had a more personal significance for Rachmaninoff. His daughter and grandson were living in France when it fell to the Nazis in 1940; he had not seen them since 1939 and was increasingly anxious for their welfare. At some point, Rachmaninoff lost touch with them entirely. "There is no way of hearing from them," he told an interviewer in early 1943. "I don't know whether they are hungry are not."[58] Around the same time he wrote to a close

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[57] Johnston, "Harmony and Climax in the Late Works of Sergei Rachmaninoff," 48.

[58] Victor Seroff, "The Great Rachmaninoff," *Vogue*, April 1, 1943, 43.

friend that his anguish "could be measured in yards."[59] As the piece had little utility—it is among the least virtuosic of his transcriptions and his recording of it wasn't released until after his death—it is not difficult to imagine that he might have transcribed this mournful lullaby with his posterity in mind. *[At this point I performed the Lullaby.]*

Rachmaninoff knew that Stravinsky also had family stranded in France, and it was this concern that prompted him in 1942 to establish contact with Stravinsky, who was then living just three miles away in West Hollywood. Whether the composers had ever spoken before is not known. Stravinsky had conveyed his regards to Rachmaninoff in a 1919 letter to their mutual friend Nikolai Struve, but according to Robert Craft, the two composers were not on good terms by the 1930s.[60] Whatever their unrecorded interactions, things were about to improve. "I'm eager to meet someone whose family, like mine, is over there," Rachmaninoff told Sergei Bertensson,

> and with whom I could discuss ways to send money and other things. As I know how much Igor Fyodorovich has always disliked my compositions, even though he respects me as a pianist, and he must know my attitude to modern music, I'm not sure whether I could invite him and his wife to my house—which I'd love to do—because I don't know how he would receive my invitation. Would you be so kind as to send out a feeler to gauge his reaction to such an idea?" I [i.e., Bertensson] called Vera Arturovna [Stravinsky], and her immediate response was "delighted"—they would be glad to go to the Rachmaninoffs' for dinner. When I telephoned to Rachmaninoff that he could invite them directly, I was asked to come, too.[61]

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[59] Rachmaninoff to Evgenii Somov, January 21, 1943, quoted in Bertensson and Leyda, *Sergei Rachmaninoff: A Lifetime in Music*, 379.

[60] *Stravinsky: Selected Correspondence, I*, ed. Robert Craft (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982), 10n21.

[61] Bertensson and Leyda, *Sergei Rachmaninoff*, 374.

Walsh aptly notes that the meeting ought to have been "one of those classic encounters between artists of similar background but radically different outlook that one feels ought to change the course of civilization."[62] But alas . . .

> Before dinner and during it, besides comparing notes on their families in France, they had a very lively discussion of musical matters—but not word about compositions. They talked about managers, concert bureaus, agents, ASCAP, royalties. It was a cordial meeting; both composers were glad to have the old barrier broken down.[63]

Rachmaninoff learned that Stravinsky was fond of honey, and a few days later Rachmaninoff silently deposited a large jar of it on Stravinsky's doorstep.[64] The Stravinskys in turn hosted the Rachmaninoffs, but Stravinsky later noted that "to sustain social relations with [Rachmaninoff] required perseverance. In fact, my meetings with him during our mutual California period were rather with his wife, for he remained silent."[65] Artur Rubinstein was present when the Rachmaninoffs and Stravinsky met again the evening after Rachmaninoff's Bowl debut, and once again what little conversation the two composers shared centered on royalties.[66]

That fall Rachmaninoff embarked on what he had planned would be his final season. In February, he fell seriously ill and returned to Los Angeles. After ailing for a few weeks, he died of cancer on March 28, 1943, at his home in Beverly Hills. His death elicited two obituaries in the *Los Angeles Times* (see slide 19). "Death yesterday stilled the agile fingers of Sergei V.

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[62] Walsh, *Stravinsky: The Second Exile: France and America, 1934–1971* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), 146.

[63] Bertensson and Leyda, *Sergei Rachmaninoff*, 374. Incidentally, Rachmaninoff had been sending things through the caretaker of his Swiss estate but wasn't sure if they were reaching Tatiana. Ibid. Stravinsky was able to send money to his children through Darius Milhaud and the latter's mother. Walsh, *Stravinsky: The Second Exile*, 130–31.

[64] Ibid.; Stravinsky and Craft, *Memories and Commentaries*, 230.

[65] Ibid.

[66] Arthur Rubinstein, *My Many Years* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1980), 489–90.

Rachmaninoff, 69, Russian pianist, composer and conductor," read the front page, "who for 56 years had been a leader in the world of music on two continents."[67] Jones authored the one that appeared in the music section a few days later: "Years ago he told me he lived for the day when he could stop concertizing and devote himself to composing. But the public would not let him go. A vast audience waited to hear him play or conduct his own works every season."[68]

Stravinsky entered the musical life of Los Angeles very differently from Rachmaninoff (see slide 20). Rachmaninoff's music preceded him and fostered interest in the man; Stravinsky was preceded by his reputation as a modernist, and curiosity about the music followed. From his first, sporadic mentions in the *Times* during the mid 1910s and early 20s, his name functions as a synonym for the latest in music.[69] In 1924, *Fireworks* was played at the Bowl and was later described as "one of the high points" of that season,[70] and in December Eva Gauthier included Stravinsky's music on a vocal recital at Philharmonic Auditorium.[71] In 1925 the famed music critic W. J. Henderson offered a series of lectures in which he offered explanation of "Stravinsky and his masterpieces."[72] That summer Los Angeles got its first real taste of Stravinsky when Fritz Reiner conducted *Firebird* and *Petrushka* at the Bowl. The works were received well, and *Petrushka* was repeated on popular demand at a subsequent concert. "Probably one of Reiner's largest contributions to the Bowl season has been his Stravinsky readings," wrote Jones. "Not

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[67] "Noted Russia Pianist Dies Here at 69," *Los Angeles Times*, March 29, 1943.

[68] Jones, "Music World Mourns Death of Rachmaninoff," *Los Angeles Times*, April 4, 1943.

[69] Redman, "Modern Music Iconoclasts," *Los Angeles Times*, July 23, 1916; Pierre Key, "Pierre Key's Music Article," *Los Angeles Times*, September 26, 1920.

[70] "New Names on Bowl Program This Week," *Los Angeles Times*, July 19, 1925.

[71] "Interview Gauthier, Sings Here Tonight," *Los Angeles Times*, December 29, 1924.

[72] "Critic to Talk on Music," *Los Angeles Times*, June 21, 1925.

being familiar with this composer, the listeners have liked the adventure into new music fields."[73] No doubt, Stravinsky's American tour in early 1925 contributed to this increasing interest, even though he did not visit Los Angeles himself. *Firebird* and *Petrushka* would be heard repeatedly from this point on.

In 1927 Stravinsky had the opportunity to speak for himself when the *Los Angeles Times* printed an interview taken in France. "The new school in music needs neither press agents nor apologists," the report reads. "It is the legitimate outgrowth of the present age and will be the salvation of the art." Stravinsky noted that he was "proud to be called one of the leaders of the modernists," and his Neoclassic attitude toward music was already fully evident. "Music is outside of its sphere when it attempts to teach philosophy or morality or tries to tell an anecdote," he said. "The composers of the new school know this to be true, and the gradual evolution along these lines will produce the great music of the future."[74]

Meanwhile, Los Angeles was still getting to know the early ballets from which Stravinsky's style had already moved on. In 1928, Eugene Goossens conducted the Los Angeles premiere of *Rite of Spring*. Jones indicated that the work was "marked by a cordial reception from the audience," but her response was certainly more than cordial: "'Sacre du Printemps' is a soul-stirring, compelling and monumental masterpiece of modern art, and it is to be earnestly hoped that it will be heard soon again in the West."[75] Curiously, when the work was given again, at the Bowl in 1931, Jones was more circumspect in her praise: "[Rodzinski] conducted this momentous modern prophecy with a magnetic excitement that amounted to ecstasy. Whether one

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[73] Jones, "Reiner's Farewell Bowl Concert," *Los Angeles Times*, August 3, 1925.

[74] "Modern Trend of Music Told," *Los Angeles Times*, December 19, 1927.

[75] Jones, "Stravinsky Spring Rite Performed," *Los Angeles Times*, September 1, 1928.

likes the work or not, and I am one who does not, one is bound to respect the compelling drive of its violence and to honor the magnificent performance Dr. Rodzinski gave it."[76]

In her circumspection, Jones might still have been recovering from the Los Angeles premiere of his Wind Octet the year before. The work, she wrote,

> did not fare so well with the audience. It is an intellectual diversion and the listeners, not grasping it, laughed to cover their confusion. It is an intense work and the tension is maintained too long for comfort. Dissonances on the piano or stringed instruments are becoming quite bearable, but prolonged woodwind and brass dissonance, being excruciatingly new, can drive one outside.[77]

But she was an open-minded listener. She referred to Stravinsky as a "genius" in her 1930 review of Stokowski's recording of *Rite of Spring*, and subsequent record reviews of *Capriccio* and *Symphony of Psalms* are not only favorable but thoughtful.[78]

By the time Stravinsky first visited Los Angeles in 1935, his early ballets were well-known and many of his other works had been introduced. He was firmly regarded there as the foremost modern composer. His first conducting appearance was awaited with fevered excitement. "Stravinsky, genius of modern music, . . . has been in Los Angeles four days and the town is agog," wrote Jones. "Only the visit of Einstein, the other man whom only three people in the world understand, has created as much interest."[79] Stravinsky conducted his first concert here on February 21, 1935, a program that included his *Apollon Musagète*, *Petrushka*, *Firebird*, and *Eight Little Pieces for Small Orchestra*—all of which, Jones notes, Goossens had already

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[76] Jones, "Modern Music Marks Concert," *Los Angeles Times*, January 17, 1931.

[77] Jones, "'Sinfonietta' by Halffter Offered," *Los Angeles Times*, April 22, 1930.

[78] Jones, "Epochal Work Available," *Los Angeles Times*, June 8, 1930; Jones, "Records Hold New Music," *Los Angeles Times*, March 29, 1931; Jones, "New Records Reviewed," *Los Angeles Times*, October 18, 1931.

[79] Jones, "Modern Musical Genius, Igor Stravinsky, Will Conduct Philharmonic Tonight," *Los Angeles Times*, February 21, 1935.

introduced to the city. Jones viewed the event not only as an item of peculiar interest on account of its illustrious composer-performer but as a milestone in the relationship of the listening public with modern music. She was effusive:

> Los Angeles, said to be this and that in its attitude toward ultra-modernists, received Igor Stravinsky, the greatest modernist of them all, with a sold-out house last night at Philharmonic Auditorium.
>
> . . . [The listeners] were unusually interested. The music Stravinsky presented with the completely devoted Philharmonic Orchestra was compelling, stimulating, and at times thrilling. . . .
>
> . . . Stravinsky succeeded in penetrating the minds of 2000 listeners whose ears had been closed to modern music before through more or less hidden prejudice.
>
> The consensus of opinion was: "If this is modern music, we like it."[80]

Stravinsky was greeted with comparable enthusiasm when he appeared in Los Angeles again in 1937 to conduct a ballet production of *Petrushka*.

Stravinsky's rise in Los Angeles coincided with a broader ongoing dialogue in the *Times* (as elsewhere) about contemporary music that would gradually effect a shift in the usage of the word *modern* with reference to music. Recall that in 1919, Jeanne Redman referred to Rachmaninoff as probably the most well-liked "of the modern Russian composers." Here "modern" denotes that which is contemporary, with no apparent stylistic implications. At this time, additional specifying language was necessary to denote musical progressives. For example, "modern music *iconoclasts* [emphasis mine]" was how Redman referred to Leo Ornstein, Schoenberg, and Stravinsky in 1916.[81] *Modern music* could denote recent composition of any style: not just Strauss, Debussy, Schoenberg, Bartók, and Stravinsky, but also Chadwick, Puccini, Ravel, and Shrecker. It could also denote jazz (see slide 21), recalling Paul Whiteman's

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[80] Jones, "Capacity Audience at Philharmonic Acclaims Great Modernist, Igor Stravinsky," *Los Angeles Times*, February 22, 1935.

[81] Redman, "Modern Music Iconoclasts," *Los Angeles Times*, July 23, 1916.

famous "experiments in modern music" of the 1920s and 30s.[82] In Los Angeles, too, Whiteman was described in 1926 as "America's greatest exponent of modern music," and a 1931 concert announcement pairs Stravinsky and Gershwin together under the rubric of "modern music."[83] As late as 1937, Gershwin's obituary described him as a "leader in modern music."[84]

Change, however, was taking place. In 1927 the *Times* devoted attention to the latest contemporary musical trends, not only in Stravinsky's interview but also in an article conveying a recent explanation by Dane Rudhyar that "new music is founded upon dissonances."[85] While this article speaks of "contemporary" and "new" music, a Berlin interview with Mascagni, likewise appearing in 1927, suggests that "modern" was coming to denote dissonance in music. "Modern music is as dangerous as cocaine," he said. "I am not opposed to modernity, but I do oppose atonality. Music must be tune and not noise."[86] An announcement for a Rachmaninoff recital in 1931 still referred to him as "modern composer and pianist," but in 1932 Jones would describe Rachmaninoff as one "who lives today but thinks beautifully in the musical language of yesterday."[87] In 1937 the *Times* ran an interview with Schoenberg (then teaching at UCLA) whose title presented the word *modern* in quotation marks—"What is 'Modern' Music?"—

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[82] Ibid; Schallert, "Dead Level in Composing," *Los Angeles Times*, September 26, 1920; "Gasoline Alley—Modern Music," *Los Angeles Times*, March 28, 1921.

[83] Jones, "Paul Whiteman and His Band of Merry Syncopators Here," *Los Angeles Times*, September 19, 1926; Jones, "Modern Music Marks Concert," *Los Angeles Times*, January 17, 1931.

[84] "Composer Gershwin Called by Death," *Los Angeles Times*, June 12, 1937.

[85] Jones, "Explains Contemporary Music," *Los Angeles Times*, October 23, 1927.

[86] "Mascagni Hits Modern Music," *Los Angeles Times*, December 11, 1927.

[87] "Rachmaninoff Plays Tonight," *Los Angeles Times*, March 3, 1931; Jones, "Philharmonic Dominated by Spirit of Industry," *Los Angeles Times*, February 7, 1932.

clearly suggesting that the term was acquiring special stylistic connotations; jazz was no longer de facto modern.[88] These connotations are further evident in a review of a lecture on "modern music" given in 1940 by Adolph Weiss (a former Schoenberg student).[89] By 1941, Rachmaninoff was no longer "modern" but "one of the musical monarchs of an age almost past."[90]

This is the musical climate in which Stravinsky found himself when he moved to Los Angeles in 1940. He had come to the country in 1939 to deliver six lectures at Harvard and undertake another tour, but diminishing prospects in an increasingly war-torn Europe led him to stay indefinitely. On August 27, 1940, he made his Bowl debut, conducting Adolf Bolm's stage choreography of *Firebird*, which Jones greeted with the usual enthusiasm (see slide 22). In 1941, Stravinsky bought a home at 1260 North Wetherly Drive, where he and his wife Vera would live for the next twenty-four years. Stravinsky's conducting schedule was evidence enough that the United States could offer him a living, but his finances were anything but ideal. Reflecting on this period two decades later, Stravinsky commented that several works composed at this time had been "journeyman jobs, commissions I was forced to accept because the war in Europe had so suddenly reduced the income from my compositions."[91] It was in this period of instability that he composed his Tango and "Circus Polka for a Young Elephant." Although both would be published for piano solo, they were conceived for different media: the tango for small ensemble and voice (though the intended lyrics never materialized), and the "Circus Polka"—no mere

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[88] Louis Banks, "What is 'Modern' Music?" *Los Angeles Times*, June 27, 1937.

[89] "Modern Music Discussed," *Los Angeles Times*, April 18, 1940.

[90] Shirley Boyes, "Noted Pianist Calm Master of Classics," *Los Angeles Times*, February 3, 1941.

[91] Stravinsky and Craft, *Memories and Commentaries*, 234.

fanciful title—for band in order to accompany a Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey Circus elephant ballet choreographed by George Balanchine. Commentators have sometimes expressed embarrassment over these pieces. Stephen Walsh sees in the "straightforward dance-hall metrical regularity of the [tango] . . . a concession that shows a hitherto unheard-of readiness on Stravinsky's part to compromise in order to break into the marketplace."[92] Walsh similarly wrote that, "as a piece of barefaced opportunism, the *Circus Polka* would be hard to beat."[93] Charles M. Joseph described the tango as "one of Stravinsky's more innocuously faddish escapades," the polka as "commercially inspired twaddle."[94] Albert Goldberg perhaps put it more kindly in his review of the orchestral premiere of the polka in the *Times* in 1948: "in no way monumental, but . . . charming and imbued with genuine Stravinskyan vitality."[95] *[At this point I performed Stravinsky's Tango and "Circus Polka."]*

In the end, charges of commercialism leveled at composers who were willing to compose for money must not be taken too seriously on that basis alone. Few celebrated composers have enjoyed patronage so generous and constant as to absolve them of all financial concern. Stravinsky's Tango and "Circus Polka" bear the composer's authentic imprint, even if they do not attempt a degree of stylization found in his earlier works. Rachmaninoff's Humoresque especially complicates binary charges of commercialism, since the distortions it acquired in its revised form betray, however subtly, their sober origins in Rachmaninoff's experience as an exile.

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[92] Walsh, *Stravinsky: The Second Exile*, 121.

[93] Ibid., 136.

[94] Charles M. Joseph, *Stravinsky and the Piano* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1983), 215.

[95] Albert Goldberg, "Stravinsky Dominates Musical Event," *Los Angeles Times*, March 19, 1948.

In conclusion, when Rachmaninoff and Stravinsky moved to Los Angeles in the early 1940s, they were not only two of the most *famous* living composers; they were regarded there as two of the *greatest*. Interest in their music preceded their own appearances in the city, and while their performing activities eventually fed this interest, the sustained advocacy of others was ultimately the deciding factor in the establishment of their reputations. Although Rachmaninoff's music was considered modern when it was first being heard in Los Angeles, the rise of Stravinsky's music contributed to a redefinition of modernism in music that rendered Rachmaninoff's style old-fashioned—hyperdissonance and all. But while some posthumous commentators have rejected Rachmaninoff's music on this basis, the musical observers who witnessed this period of change in Los Angeles maintained sincere appreciation for both composers, and their music was performed by the same illustrious conductors, often on the same programs. The composers themselves maintained respect for each other, and their fellow Russian émigrés in Los Angeles admired both—individuals such as Bertensson and Kall. Consider the latter. Kall lectured not only on Rachmaninoff, as mentioned above, but on Scriabin, too, even playing the part of the "color keyboard" in a 1926 performance of *Prometheus* (the program also featured *Isle of the Dead*).[96] Kall also personally hosted Stravinsky during his visits to Los Angeles in 1935 and 1937, assisting him with various administrative tasks.[97] His admiration for one composer did not hinder his admiration for the others.[98]

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[96] Schallert, "Color Experiment."

[97] See Walsh, *Stravinsky: The Second Exile*," 6–7.

[98] Kall recognized their differences but regarded all three as the distinguished representatives of their generation among Russian composers. Kall, "Nationalism in Russian Music," *Art and Archaeology* 13, no. 2 (February 1922): 82.

After Rachmaninoff's death, Stravinsky had the musical pulse of Los Angeles to himself, and the premieres of his works were greeted with great interest, just as Rachmaninoff's performances had been. When Stravinsky died on April 6, 1971, two years after moving to New York, his place in history was assured (see slide 23): "Igor Stravinsky," read the front page of the *Los Angeles Times*, "called 'the Einstein of musical art' and considered the foremost composer of the 20th century, died Tuesday. He was 88."[99] But what about Rachmaninoff's place in history? Is it possible that Rachmaninoff, in his own way, was as relevant to his time as Stravinsky? Is it possible to revere Stravinsky, the "genius of modern music," without "denigrating" Rachmaninoff, the "independent creative genius" whose music stood (un)fashionably apart from modernist developments? Their early reception in Los Angeles suggests that the answer is yes.

[99] "Stravinsky Dies at 88; Hailed as Musical Genius," *Los Angeles Times*, April 7, 1971.

Rachmaninoff and Stravinsky In Los Angeles to 1943

Keenan Reesor ~ April 18, 2015 ~ Villa Aurora

Rachmaninoff and Stravinsky With Walt Disney

Steinway Hall, New York, 1925

Philharmonic Auditorium, c1920

Opened in 1906

Pasadena High School/ Junior College Auditorium, 1920s

Opened 1913

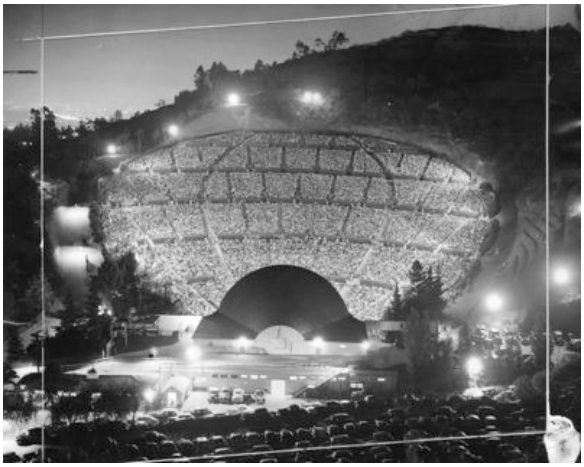
Trinity Auditorium, c1920

Opened in 1914

Hollywood Bowl, 1920
(“Daisy Dell”)

Hollywood Bowl

c1922
(opening season)



c1942

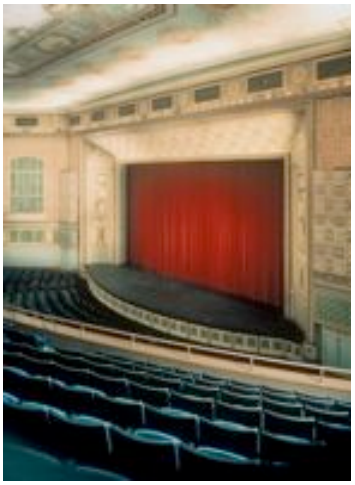
Pantages Theater (Hollywood)

Opened 1930

Bridges Hall (Claremont)

Opened in 1932

Pasadena Civic Auditorium



Opened 1932

Rachmaninoff, Hollywood Bowl Debut, 1942

Friday–Saturday Concerts, July 17-18
7:42 P. M.

PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA OF LOS ANGELES

SERGEI RACHMANINOFF

Piano Soloist

VLADIMIR BAKALEINIKOFF

Conductor

Introduction to Act I, "Tsar Saltan" . . . . . *Nicolai Korsakoff*

Symphonic Poem "Scaldo Rosso" . . . . . *Glazounow*

Overture "1812" . . . . . *Tchaikowsky*

Intermission—Fifteen Minutes

Concerto No. 2, in C minor, for pianoforte with orchestra, Op. 18 . . . . . *Rachmaninoff*

(The composer as soloist)

1. *Moderato*
2. *Adagio sostenuto*
3. *Allegro scherzando*

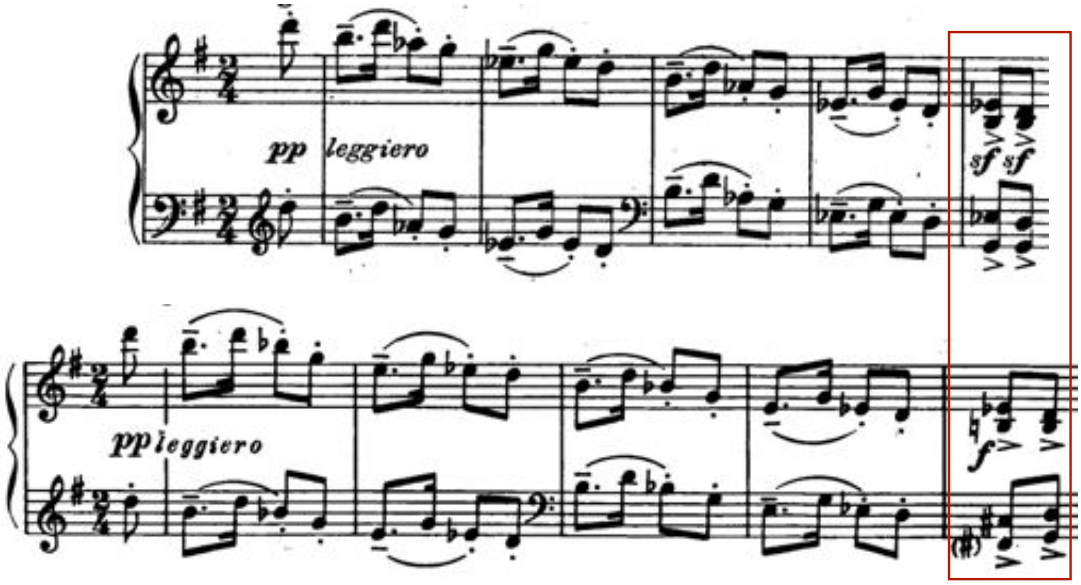
*

Mr. Rachmaninoff plays the Steinway piano . . . . Courtesy Barker Bros.

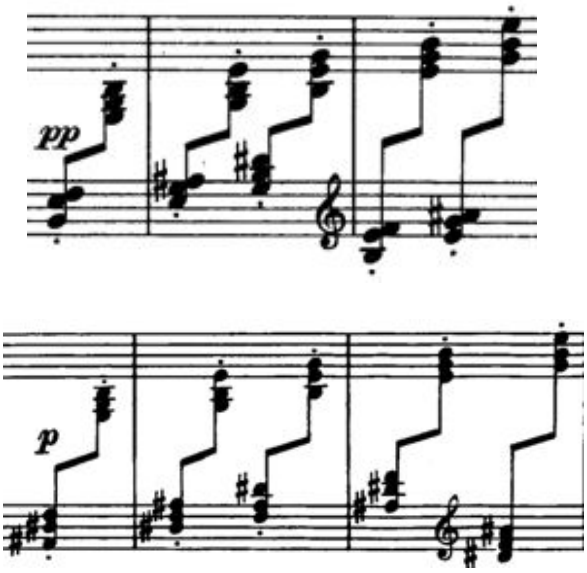
21st ANNIVERSARY SEASON—FIRST SEASON UNDER THE JOINT SPONSORSHIP CALIFORNIA SYMPHONY ASSOCIATION

Rachmaninoffs, Beverly Hills, 1942

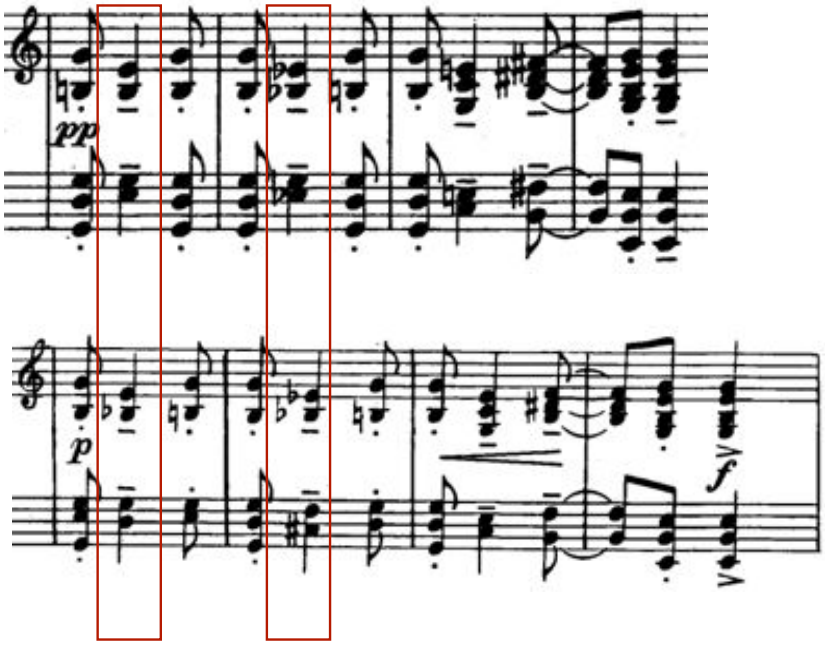
Humoresque, Opening



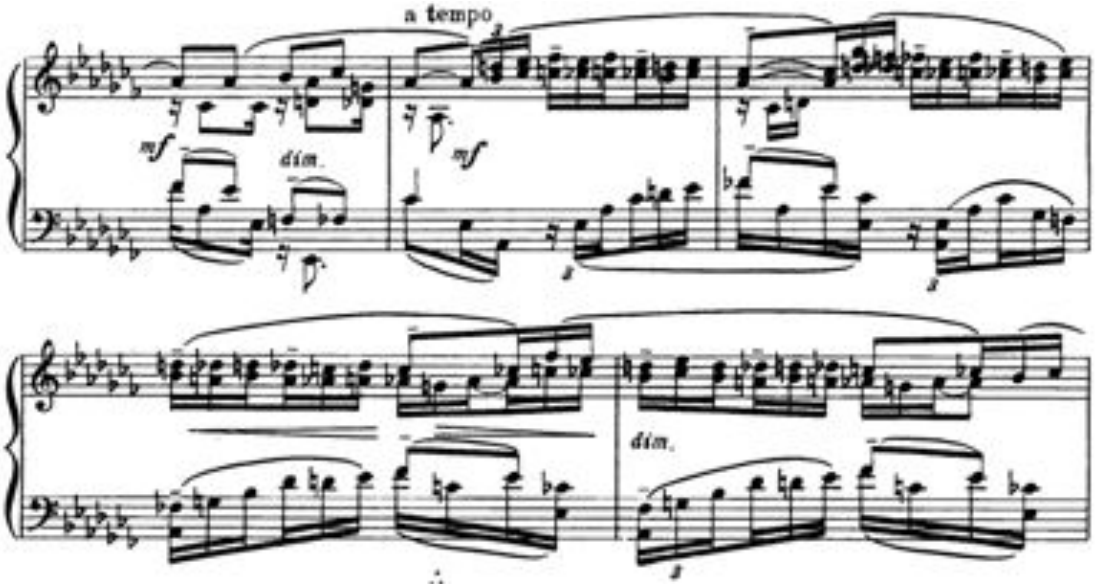
Humoresque, Transition



Humoresque, Main Theme



Lullaby, Central Interlude



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VOL. LXII — CC — MONDAY MORNING, MARCH 29, 1943 — DAILY, FIVE CENTS

Meat Dealers and Public Set for Rationing

Retailers Dubious About Obtaining Adequate Supplies

To an anxious public and an equally worried meat industry today will be given the answer to the much-discussed question of whether rationing will insure an equal amount of meat for everyone.

Generally, Los Angeles meat packers and retailers were dubious yesterday about any immediate relief because of the continued shortage and the fact that packers are reaching the end of their first quarterly killing quota.

The public, however, which has endured a virtual meat famine in some sections of Los Angeles County for many months, is hoping for a same situation to that which took place when canned goods were released and immediately replenished in quantity on market shelves.

Market Men Uncertain

Market men could give no

GREAT FINGERS STILLED —Sergei V. Rachmaninoff, who died at 69.

Wickard May Get Food Post Outside Cabinet

WASHINGTON, March 28 (AP)—Secretary of Agriculture Wickard may be asked by President Roosevelt to take a consultation to help coordinate the food production programs of the United States, Great Britain and Russia and to develop a production program for North Africa, it

Noted Russia Pianist Dies Here at 69

Sergei Rachmaninoff Succumbs in Beverly Hills Home

Death yesterday stilled the agile fingers of Sergei V. Rachmaninoff, 69, Russian pianist, composer and conductor, who for 50 years had been a leader in the world of music on two continents.

The celebrated musician died at his Beverly Hills home of complications resulting from exhaustion and pneumonia, which first caused him to cancel recitals scheduled here this month.

To until already his dual ailments, the soft, gentle virtuoso thought his illness would pass. He mentioned only to friends that he had a "rheumatism" in his side.

Requiem was celebrated last night at the Russian Orthodox Church and another will be offered tonight at 8 o'clock. Funeral services, arranged for Paris from Beverly Hills mortuary, will be held tomorrow at 11 a.m. at the church.

SCORES A REAL FIRST—Maj. Sy Bartlett, former Hollywood writer who was first American Army officer to bomb Berlin, is shown with his actress-wife, Ellen Drew.

Hollywood Man First U.S. Flyer to Bomb Berlin

Maj. Sy Bartlett, Former Film Writer, Drops 4000-Pound 'Cookie' on Target in Nazi Capital

LONDON, March 28. (AP)—Sy Bartlett, former film writer, now an entertainment unit R.A.F. bomber officer, is one of some hero

U.S. SHIPS BATTLE JAP FLEET OFF ATTU

Aleutian Patrol Vessels Turn Back Heavy Force

WASHINGTON, March 28. (AP)—Shelling Japanese cruisers and destroyers at long range, American surface vessels in the North Pacific have halted, or at least diverted, an enemy force headed for the Aleutians.

The Navy reported today the engagement—first surface exchange between ships in the Aleutians—was fought Friday in the murky weather which has concealed much of the operations there since the Japanese first established a base at Kiska near the western end of the island chain.

Shell after shell whistled through the fog at the steady pace of two heavy cruisers, two light cruisers, four destroyers and two cargo vessels. They were joined and engaged by a light force of United States patrol craft, just what or ships, which is not clear, was of Kiska.

Results Not Reported

Results were not reported, nor did the Navy say whether the patrol craft were damaged in the long-range engagement (probably fought at a distance of from five to eleven miles.

"When the engagement was broken off the Japanese forces were observed heading westward," the Navy's communique said.

Berlin Shudders Under 900 Tons in Worst Raid

LONDON, March 29 (Monday) (AP) — R.A.F. bombers attacked targets in enemy-occupied territory last night in a swift follow-up to Saturday night's smashing raid on Berlin, the British announced today.

LONDON, March 28. (AP)—Berlin shuddered and exploded last night under the shattering impact of the R.A.F.'s heaviest raid, an attack described officially as twice as heavy as anything the luftwaffe ever inflicted on London, and United States bombers joined it today to keep up the revitalized pressure offensive against the Continent with a heavy daylight

Rommel Trap Almost Closed; Yanks Advance

BY HAROLD DE LEON

ALLIED HEADQUARTERS IN NORTH AFRICA, March 28. (AP) — A British drive, relentlessly enveloping the Mareth Line was only 15 miles short of snapping shut that Rommel's fortification troops sought, while in Central Tunisia United States forces swept into Fondouk to assure a

“Modern Music,” 1921

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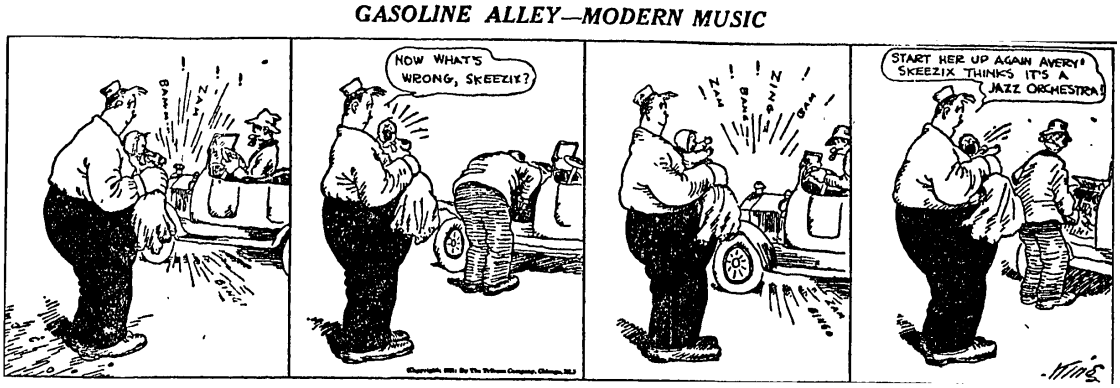
Los Angeles Times (1886-1922); Mar 28, 1921; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times
pg. II2



Stravinsky, Adolf Bolm, and Nana Gollner, 1940

Calley Prosecutor Raps Nixon

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Los Angeles Times

FINAL

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Berkeley Elects 3 Radicals

6 ON COUNCIL WIN: POTTER IN RUNOFF

AFTER HITLER

German Jews: Why They Still Call It Home

STRAVINSKY DIES AT 88; HAILED AS MUSICAL GENIUS

L.A. Sewer Bond Issue Passes but Public Works Plan Loses

Runoffs Set in All Except One College, School Board Race