

Mysterium on Paper: Scriabin Scores

Contributed by Tom Bradley

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Family Romance and We'll See Who Seduces Whom) are ekphrases. Ekphrasis is by definition synaesthetic: two or more art forms, under the aegides of disparate sense organs, mutually interpenetrate. And who is the greatest synaesthete of post-antiquity? Alexander Nikolayevich Scriabin.

Family Romance and We'll See Who Seduces Whom are Scriabinesque in their merging of visuals and verbals. In both books I have accepted the challenge posed by stacks of preexisting art. Nick Patterson is my collaborator in the former book, David Aronson in the latter. Their pictures came first, and I made the fiction and poetry, respectively, around them.

My method was derived explicitly from Scriabin's unfinished monstrosity: the Mysterium. It's a week-long rite, an apocalyptic liturgy of "omni-art" that absorbs and dissolves the entire sensorium: not just the visual, but auditory, tactile, olfactory, gustatory, and even the famous "sixth sense" of the Buddhists, comprising manas and dharma. My particular art form, literary, can be said to engage the sixth sense most directly.

While our books are contained between covers, Scriabin's Mysterium requires an entire gorge in the foothills of the Himalayas. It's meant to be celebrated in a strangely protean cathedral, built for the occasion. This edifice will writhe and swell like a transcendent amoeba. Scriabin says, "...it will not be constructed of one single type of stone, but will continually change with the atmosphere and motion of the Mysterium." The architecture is rendered malleable with psychoactive aerosols and the rhythmic projection of colors by a tastiera per luce, or "keyboard of lights."

Family Romance and We'll See Who Seduces Whom are less labor-intensive and don't require such a large budget, but the idea is the same: what corresponds to brick and mortar in a printed work becomes protoplasmic as Scriabin's venue. The illustrations of Nick Patterson and David Aronson, while divergent in style, share this shape-shifting quality. Though static in the literal sense, the longer these images are stared at, the more motion they communicate. It's only natural to intermingle them with prose and poetry: those two contrivances that traverse time and space more efficiently, and violate solidity more roundly, than any other human inventions.

Part of Debra Di Blasi's program at her great synaesthetical Jaded Ibis Press is to add a sound track to each of the books she publishes. I am recommending she make our track Alexander Nikolayevich Scriabin, for he just happens, by coincidence, to have written the perfect music to help me encompass my job of explaining how the Pattersonian and Aronsonian bizarreries came to be juxtaposed.

If Scriabin is the inner ear of our books, he comprises the entire central nervous system of the Mysterium. Cast in the role of Celebrant, he is seated at his grand piano in the very apse of the gaseous temple, directing what sounds like an orchestra of thousands. They are playing the strangest, most terrifyingly delirious music. A gigantic brace of mixed antiphonal choirs produce a roar without words, identified spontaneously in my mind with certain moiling mobs who stomp through Nick Patterson's paintings: grotesqueries with shoulder teeth, problematic crotches, and ostrich legs.

I came to call these physiologically peculiar choristers the Relic Amalekites. You might recall from the first book of Samuel the penalty of genocide having been declared upon their remote ancestors by Jehovah. Accordingly, Scriabin often causes their vocalizations to be washed away as by a current of God-cursed blood. So I have placed the Relic Amalekites' home turf--or, rather, home sand--on the banks of a river. When you listen to the Mysterium, you will understand why this waterway could only be called the Judeuphrates.

But from whose simultaneously super- and subhuman larynx issues the single voice that comes stabbing through the rout of Relic Amalekites? It's a horrifically sublime soprano soloist, also unendowed with the capability of human speech. I knew, of course, that she could only be the aural counterpart of the naked woman who haunts so many of our books' illustrations: a terrifying creature writhing and hemorrhaging across the pages.

Keeping in mind our Hindustani setting, I made her into the Kali-Avatar, the Tantric Initiatrix: sinister, ravenous, erotic Mom. Nude and protean, Mom often indulges a compulsion to mount the other creatures and characters who populate We'll See Who Seduces Whom. In Family Romance she feeds her spawn a jejune diet consisting solely of psychoactive mushrooms: a eucharistic shamanism answering to the entheogenically tintured mists that cause the walls and niches of the Mysterium cathedral to undulate like a unicellular protozoon.

Meanwhile, bells the size of yacht hulls, alloyed of platinum and electrum, are hung from cumulonimbic clouds that swell among the oozing cathedral's corbelled vaults. These clouds are engendered and seeded by entire metric tons of cinnamon and sandalwood, benzoin and mace, storax and galbanum, combusting in boundless bonfires and wafting over the attending multitudes. In their simultaneous week-long orgasm, Scriabin's spectators and performers gradually

become cloudlike themselves, indistinguishable one from another.

At this late point in my writing it became useful to supplement the *Mysterium* with another orchestral work, *Prometheus: The Poem of Fire*. Scriabin actually managed to finish this piece before he died, so it was consulted in the concoction of the climaxes and denouements of our twin ekphrases.

Up until the last chapters everything has been imbued with the famous Mystic Chord: C F# Bb E A D. All has been derived from iterations and inversions of this quartile pitch set. Miraculously, through a heroic act of will and faith on Scriabin's part, *Prometheus: The Poem of Fire* resolves the dissonance into a stable F# minor triad. This sonic normalcy rings out at the final moment, when Scriabin's commixed congregation and clergy are atomized in the perfumed clouds and drugged mists.

The promethean mystery has popped its climax: nothing less than the annihilation of humanity and the engendering of a more vigorous race of beings from primordial soup condensed in phosphorescing puddles on the cathedral pews. This corresponds perfectly to the moment, on the last page of *Family Romance*, where just such an extinction and transfiguration takes place in the consciousness of our protagonist. Nick Patterson depicts him as a blindfolded poet with huge hands, sweeping the strangest hieroglyphs upon a scroll that unfurls, roaring like a tidal wave. Scriabin can be sensed in that readable roar.