Capturing the magic of pianistic sound and touch: toward a synergy of ear and fingers in the creation of the artistic image

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Abstract

"To learn how to hear, to educate the ear, to develop a student's sense of voicing and timbre in nuanced hearing – this is the first task of a pedagogue-musician, a defining pillar of his work." These words of the great Russian musician, Grigory Kogan, shine light on the inspiring path of what it means for a teacher to simultaneously develop student's ears and fingers with the aim of building the artistic image of a composition. Of course, such instruction requires a holistic approach and, yet some approaches from the past were anything but that. Indeed, the 19th century saw a rise in mechanical finger training, which often resulted in injuries and stultified the ear. This article analyzes these and other past trends in piano teaching and performance and their influence on the training of fingers, ears or both. In addition, it offers practical advice on how best to foster the simultaneous schooling of ears and fingers, with the goal of nurturing a complete musician.

Keywords

etudes, mental practice, piano pedagogy, piano teaching, warm up exercises

A Bit of History

Looking back two centuries, we find a rapidly changing keyboard instrument, the piano, whose heavier keys were a novelty compared to the harpsichord's lighter action. As a result, the 19th century saw a growing interest in the development of the fingers. The concept of arm weight for sound production was not understood at the time. It had been avoided when playing the harpsichord as it produced no difference in its singular dynamic environment. In response to this novelty, pianists started training their fingers with great zeal.

Concurrently, the cult of the pianist-virtuoso emerged, blossoming with both the democratization of the society after the French Revolution of 1789, and the efforts of numerous instrumentalists of the day including Dussek, Hummel, Clementi, and Field. Their repertoire featured enormous pianistic difficulties, giving rise to the titans of Romantic pianism: Liszt, Chopin, Clara Schumann, Kalkbrenner, Tausig, Thalberg, Dreyschock, Godowsky, and Rubinstein, among others. The demand for concerts by these and others rose along with the rise of the middle class and availability of concerts. The Industrial Revolution of the 18th century aided in the mass production of pianos, whose use became a favorite pastime of middle-class families. With such increased interest, the need for professional training surged and conservatories sprang up throughout Europe, led by the performing stars of the day. The previously mentioned focus on fingers, coupled with the repertoire's demands, called for the development of finger exercises, similar to those of Phillippe, Pischna, and Hanon, as well as etudes: instructional at first, as in the work of Czerny, Clementi, Cramer, these were succeeded, in the latter part of the 19th and early 20th centuries, by the concert etudes of composers such as Chopin, Liszt, Rachmaninov, Debussy, Scriabin, and Stravinsky, to name but a few. There were some who, in their great desire to strengthen and develop the fingers, went to extremes, demanding countless hours of mechanical exercises and finger movement, during which students read books to avoid boredom. Others invented scary contraptions, one

of which fastened the hands of the pianist between two parallel rods aligned above the keyboard, allowing only the fingers to move. The most famous and notorious was the Chiroplast, invented by Logier. These methods excluded the use of arm weight and discouraged artistic listening, thereby producing an army of injured pianists. However, the contemporaneous teaching methods of superb teachers, such as Frederic Chopin or Friedrich Wieck (Clara Schumann's father), developed a more modern, flexible approach, relying on students' individuality, using the whole body, and cultivating the sensitive ear. They saw that while etudes and technical exercises are crucial parts of pianistic training, it is equally important to connect every sound to its artistic purpose, the idea, and discover the "artistic image," as celebrated Russian teacher Heinrich Neuhaus had indicated:

> My method of teaching, briefly, consists of ensuring that the player should as early as possible (after a preliminary acquaintance with the composition and mastering it, if only roughly) grasp what we call "the artistic image," that is: the content, meaning, the poetic substance, the essence of the music, and be able to understand thoroughly in theory of music (naming it, explaining it), what it is he is dealing with. A clear understanding of this goal enables player to strive for it, to attain it and embody it in his performance; and that is what "technique" is about.[1]

Be it an etude, a scale, an exercise, a sonata, a character piece, or a single sound the ear, via fingers, should never stop coaxing fine nuances from the instrument.

Chopin's student, Karol Mikuli described Chopin's teaching: "He never tired of inculcating that the appropriate exercises are not merely mechanical but claim the intelligence and entire will of the pupil…"[2] Robert Schumann, a student of Friedrich Wieck, stated in his *Rules for Young Musicians*: "A player may be very glib with finger-passages; they all in time grow common-place and must be changed. Only where such facility serves higher ends, is it of any worth."[3] Both Chopin and Schumann were stern critics of artless execution at the piano. Nothing irritated Chopin as much as uninspired interpretations. Schumann created an imaginary League of David (Davidsbund), with familiar characters like Florestan, Eusebius (two sides of Schumann's persona), Raro (Wieck), Chiara or Chiarina (Clara), Jeanquirit (Stephen Heller), and Meritis (Mendelssohn), who fought for good taste against the musical Philistines of the time. musicians indifferent to art and culture. The Philistines, according to Schumann, indulged in speed, virtuosity for its own sake, and overall bad taste.

Salvos against mechanical playing were launched as far back as the 18th century. One can't ignore the poetic analysis of C. P. E. Bach:

> Keyboardists whose chief asset is mere technique are clearly at a disadvantage… More often than not, one meets technicians, nimble keyboardists by profession, who… indeed astound us with their prowess without ever touching our sensibilities. They overwhelm our hearing without satisfying it and stun the mind without moving it… A musician cannot move others unless he too is moved. He must of necessity feel all the affects that he hopes to arouse in his audience, for the revealing of his own humor will stimulate a like humor in the listener. In languishing, sad passages, the performer must languish and grow sad…Similarly, in lively, joyous passages, the executant must again put

[1] Heinrich Neuhaus, The Art of Piano Playing, trans. K. A. Leibovitch (London: Kahn and Averill, 1993), 2.

[2] Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger, Chopin: pianist and teacher as seen by his pupils, trans. Shohet, Ososowitz and Howat (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 27.

[3] J. A. Graves Adams, Chapters from a Musical Life (Chicago: C. Adams, 1903), 132.

> himself into the appropriate mood. And so, constantly varying the passions, he will barely quiet one before he rouses another.[4]

According to Bach, a performer is obligated to feel all the affects in a composition and arouse them in his audience. This statement points to Neuhaus's "artistic image" of the piece and the necessity of training the mind and ear together with the fingers in order to accomplish the goal.

From the earliest contact with the instrument, it is important to cultivate the "artistic image." It is born from the successful interpretation of the affect or effects of the composition. Once achieved and internalized by the performer, it arouses similar experiences in the audiences, who respond to nuanced execution, subtle pacing, wide gradations, and genuine expression in performance. In this way, effective exchange between performer and audience becomes vibrant and nearly tangible. Such an atmosphere fosters the magic of artistic communication, conveying powerful emotional states without words and through the language of sound. The importance of mindful and refined ears in this process is supreme. I will return to the idea of the "artistic image" a number of times in this article, as it is fundamental to my theme.

The great French musician Nadia Boulanger said:

> In most elementary education, the right to learn how to listen, a child's birthright, is seldom taken into account. Children are made to see, they are made to feel a little (not a lot), they are made to choose (very seldom), but not to listen. All children, from the time they're four, know their right from their left hands. They know colours. I don't understand why they shouldn't know sounds, even if they are never to become musicians.[5]

Young children are flexible and malleable. They quickly and easily absorb and respond to influences from the outside world. In addition, their imagination often crosses over into reality, readily embracing imagery, fantasy, games, stories. Their minds are a fertile soil for cultivation and experimentation with sounds and the creation of a vibrant connection between ear and fingers. Starting in the earliest moments of piano instruction, a child should be inspired to create the "artistic image," based on the composition in question, no matter how simple, and to "recognize" the appropriate sound for its execution, as Boulanger had indicated. Constant reinforcement of this process will nurture a sensitive, alert, and sophisticated aural apparatus.

Sound piano pedagogy trains both the ear and fingers from an early age. The well-trained ear enables the fingers to create endless varieties and nuances of pianistic expression at the piano. C. P. E. Bach's statement in the18th century still holds true: "What comprises a good performance? The ability through singing or playing to make the ear conscious of the true content and affect of a composition."[6] For Chopin, music was a language. In order to speak well, one needs to think through the meaning, the expression, and the execution of a message. In Chopin's words, "We use sounds to make music just as we use words to make a language."[7] Our ears are of particular importance in supervising the process, whether in speech or artistic performance. The pianist hears with the inner ear before he plays. Once there is a solid understanding of the musical message one wishes to convey, the ear becomes vital for sculpting the sounds produced at the piano in accord with the desired goal. The

[4] Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, Essay on the True Art of Playing Keyboard Instruments, trans. William J. Mitchell (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1948), 147.

[5] Bruno Monsaingeon, Mademoiselle, trans. Robyn Marsack (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1988), 51.

[6] Bach, Essay on the True Art of Playing Keyboard Instruments, 148.

[7] Eigeldinger, Chopin, 195.

ear needs to respond to the feedback from the instrument and help the inner ear and mind to realize their imagined message with its myriad nuances.

In this article, I will explore two intimately related goals of piano pedagogy: the development of musical interpretation ("artistic image"), and the training of ear and fingers, thereby enabling a full expression of interpretation.

Work with Younger Students

"To learn how to hear, to educate the ear, to develop a student's sense of voicing and timbre in nuanced hearing–this is the first task of a pedagogue-musician, a defining pillar of his work"

G. M. Kogan[8]

I would like to suggest several methods, with examples, for developing and sensitizing a child's listening skills while working on finger dexterity and agility (in any order):

- Warm-up exercises
- Learning by ear
- Etudes
- Phrase analysis
- Improvisation
- Composition
- Programmatic pieces
- Sight-reading
- Duets

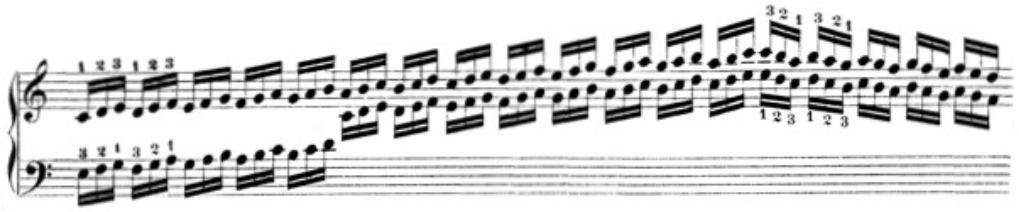
Warm-up exercises are a welcome part of the piano lesson. There are numerous ways of warming up, depending on current repertoire needs and technical goals. Among the many possible technical tasks is the development of a nuanced dynamic range: legato, staccato, velocity, flexibility, soft dynamics. Warm up exercises may be changed and varied based on the weekly needs of the student. I will focus on several works by Liszt, Couperin, Wieck, and Hanon, which provide some excellent examples.

In Technical Exercises for Piano, S.146, Book II (Examples 1 and 2), Liszt introduces samples based on groups of two, three, and more notes. Interestingly, as far back as the 18th century, Couperin presented similar exercises in *The Art of Playing the Harpsichord* (Example 3), for the purpose of "shaping (training) the hand."[9] All of them are appropriate for beginners and serve as a refreshing option for practicing the use of arm weight, agility and flexibility, while aurally supervising beautifully sculpted phrases. The first note in the group takes the weight as the second gently phrases off, carried by the hand and avoiding the accent. The ear monitors the sound quality and decrescendo. The same may be applied to groups of three, four notes, etc. In this way, long phrases will unfold as natural breaths with the guidance of one movement. In order to further challenge the ear, these exercises may be played in a variety of dynamics and in crescendo/decrescendo pattern, creating a useful union of finger and ear training.

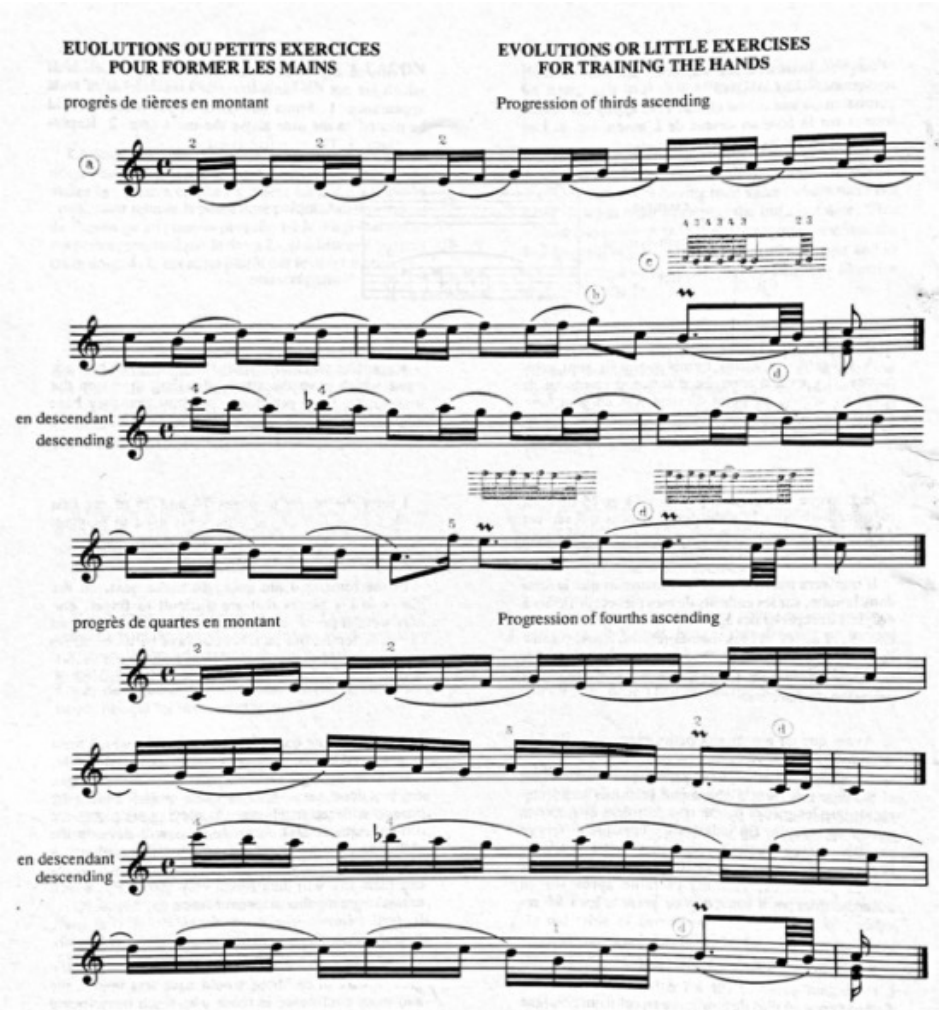
[8] Г. М. Цыпин, Обучение игре на фортепиано (Москва: Просвещение, 1984), 38. (trans. Vladimir Valjarevic) (G. M. Tsypin, Learning to play the piano (Moscow, Prosveshcheniye Publishers, 1984), 38.)

[9] François Couperin, The Art of Playing the Harpsichord (Van Nuys: Alfred Publishing, 2007), 40.

Example 1: Liszt, Technical Exercises for Piano, S.146



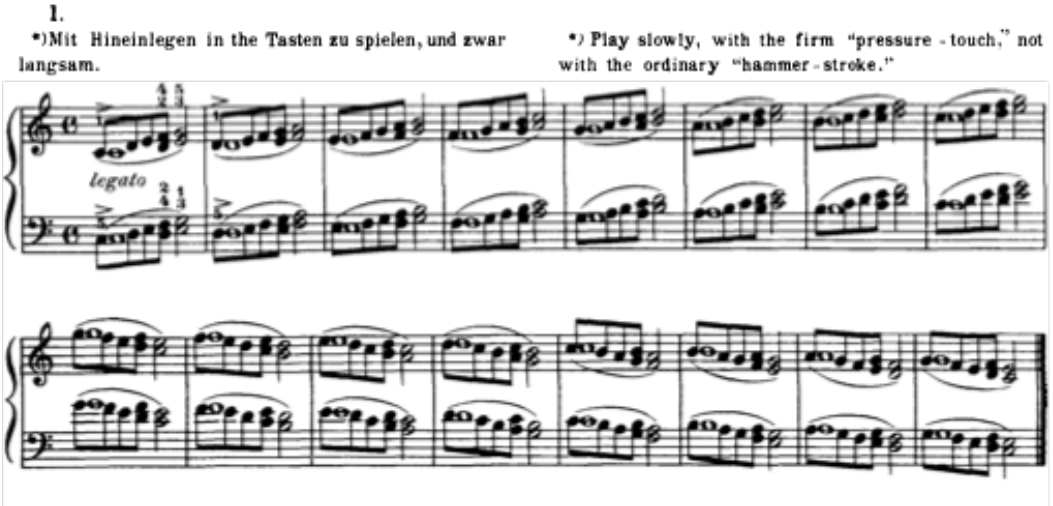
Example 2: Liszt, Technical Exercises for Piano, S146



Example 3: Couperin, The Art of Playing the Harpsichord

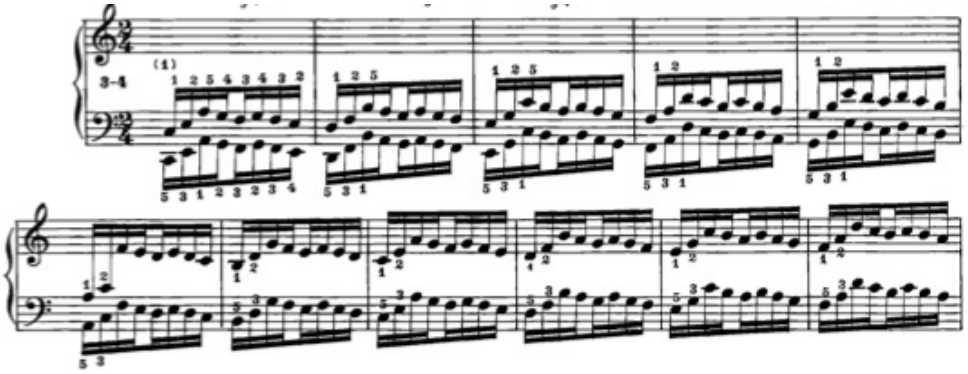
They may be prefaced or complemented by practice of a single note, played with a thumb at first, followed by all fingers, in a limited range of white keys. In this case, the student focuses on use of arm weight and variations of applied power, through which he creates ascending crescendo and descending decrescendo phrases. The gradations of sound are realized using more or less arm weight another synchronous application of ears and fingers.

Friedrich Wieck's methods were sophisticated and based solely on the needs of each individual student. He developed a set of exercises, dedicated to his daughters Clara and Marie, which are of great importance for warming up (Example 4), suitable for use from beginning and intermediate levels. Each one is short and based on a particular pianistic problem or set of problems. After learning an exercise, Wieck instructs the student to modulate to as many keys as possible. In this way, the ear travels through numerous tonalities and is affected by their colors. In addition, the hands adjust to the unique "geography" of every new key, becoming more agile and flexible. Incidentally, Couperin suggested the same multi-key treatment of his exercises in *The Art of Playing the Harpsichord*. The idea of one breath, one movement per one group, may be transferred to the piano, providing further practice in arm weight distribution and phrase shaping.



Example 4: Wieck, Pianoforte Studies

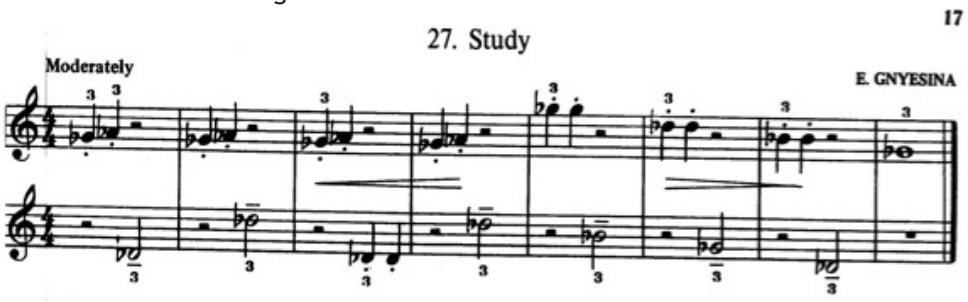
Another familiar set is Hanon's (Example 5). Steering away from a simple mechanical, note-by-note approach, the student will benefit from musical and imaginative practice techniques, introducing different articulations and gradations of sound (staccato, legato, slurs of two, forte, piano, crescendo/decrescendo, hands crossed), again with the goal of developing the ear and flexible hands.



Example 5: Hanon, Virtuoso Pianist

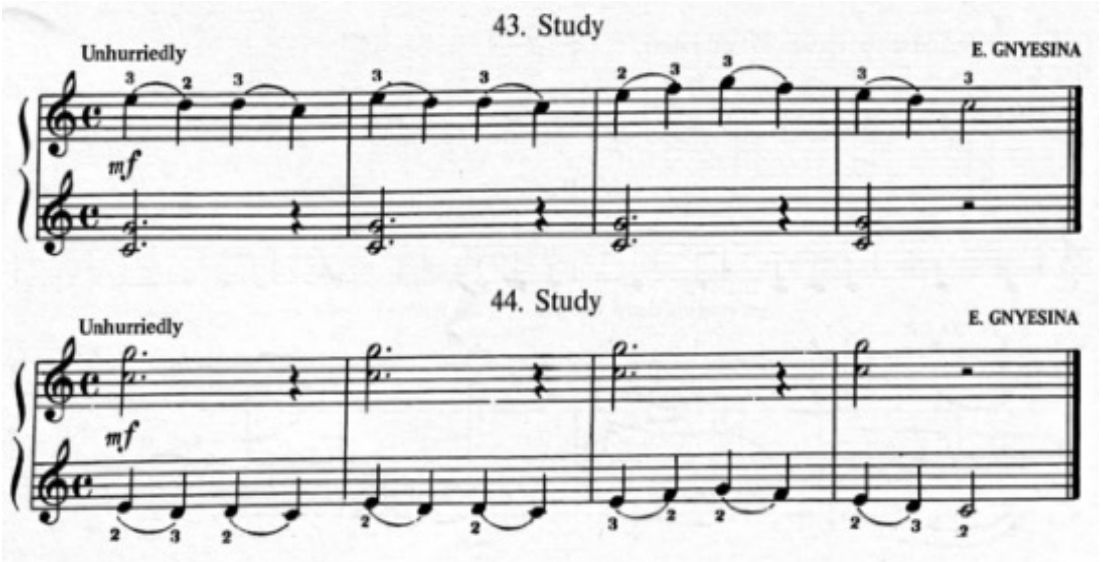
Learning by ear should be introduced from the earliest piano lessons. Folk tunes and nursery rhymes are preferable, as children respond with enthusiasm to melodies that they already know or are attracted to with their simplicity and tunefulness. Once learned, these melodies could be accompanied by the teacher, providing a duet experience, which will further train the ears through application of both richer harmony and stability of rhythm. Furthermore, as a welcome exercise for the ear, they can be transposed to a variety of keys. Learning by ear should always come paired with opportunities for note learning and reading.

Etudes are important avenues for the development of pianism. It is vital to use them as the training ground for the ear and overall musicality, not as an empty boost for mechanical finger movements. Etude No. 27 by Gnyesina (Example 6) is a suitable example from a great wealth of etude repertoire for beginners. It is a study with a charming artistic element. The piece is joyful, bouncy, playful, tongue-in-cheek with constant jumps hand-over-hand. It lends itself to immediate analysis of character and "artistic image." To make the image more vibrant, the student can practice in a variety of registers, dynamics, articulations (e.g., legato, or combination of detached and connected notes in varied degrees), transpositions (e.g., G major), always commenting on subtle or dramatic character changes. Through such fine tuning of "artistic image," ears, and fingers, the student will ultimately develop a definitive mode of expressive execution.



Example 6: Gnyesina, "Study," from The Russian School of Piano Playing, Book 1, Part I

Example No. 7 presents the challenge, already discussed in Liszt's and Couperin's examples, of shaping units. These studies, also by Gnyesina, shift the slurs from right hand in No. 43 to left hand in No. 44, allowing both to work on weight transfer, flexibility, and "singing melodic cells." The exercise shows a playful character, somewhat subdued in comparison to Example No. 6, perhaps similar to joyfully strolling along a lovely landscape. To achieve ease of movement, the student can practice the melodic material simultaneously with both hands, suggesting musical meaning. The effectiveness of both Etudes will be helped by an inventive duet accompaniment, with the teacher, improving both rhythmic stability and understanding of the more complex sonorities.



Example 7: Gnyesina, "Study No. 43" and "Study No. 44," from The Russian School of Piano Playing, Book 1, Part I

Such ***phrase analyses***, as those in Gnyesina's Etudes, may be applied to any composition. Once the preliminary character is established through inner hearing and stylistic considerations, working with a variety of dynamics, articulations, tempi, transpositions, registers, duets, hands separately and together, from smallest units to complete phrases, will offer numerous perspectives on the aural perception of musical thought. In this fashion, the ears will achieve greater invention, suppleness, spontaneity and imagination through constant change, be it subtle or major, of any given musical idea. The final interpretation of the score will be more nuanced and thoughtful.

Simple ***improvisation*** aids imagination, creativity, aural perception and sensitivity. In addition, it helps build confidence in public performance through the power of invention, and freedom from the confines of the printed page. I have chosen the following improvisation exercises from a wealth of possibilities:

- Guided improvisation: the teacher sets parameters for the student's improvisation, e.g.: range (e.g., A-a), white keys only, with sequenced use of note values, dynamics, articulation. The teacher commences by playing a repeated pattern, e.g., a descending fifth in whole notes on white keys (e.g., e to A) or a repeated note or interval, representing a drone (or a combination thereof). The student improvises, according to established guidelines, starting with whole notes (note against note with the teacher), moving on to half notes, quarter notes, and a combination of note values, while the teacher repeats the

original pattern. The improvisation benefits from working toward the "artistic image," such as a tender dream, a race, climbing up a mountain, bird's flight, or a jolly brook, immediately coloring the sound, touch, and character.

➢ Black key exercise: an elaboration on the previous improvisation and probably the students' favorite! The improvisation takes place only on black keys. The teacher plays a drone in the bass, such as a rhythmically steady interval of a broken fifth. The student may play any combination of notes in this pentatonic environment–slower, faster, intervals, chords, clusters. After some time, the performers switch: the student plays the drone in his register - an important exercise for rhythmic steadiness - and the teacher improvises. It is particularly useful to set the "artistic image" before doing the exercise and try to calibrate the sound and the character of the performance accordingly. This exercise is especially liberating since the dissonance is not as jarring in the pentatonic system, avoiding the impression of "wrong notes."

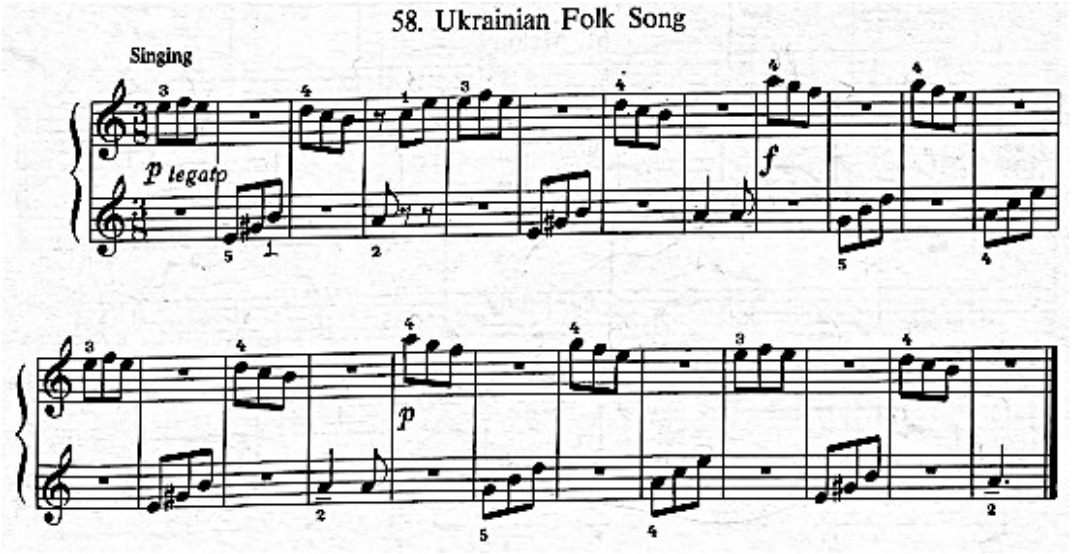
➢ Improvisation on piano strings: the student improvises by strumming on a grand piano's strings, finding a variety of images, textures and sounds. This may be done both solo and in duet with another student or teacher. This exercise helps demystify the instrument and what is behind black and white keys. Once the piano lid is open, a whole new world unfolds in front of the child's eyes and ears. The young pianist understands that there is a harp "sleeping" inside of the instrument and that each key ultimately connects to a string, which actually creates the sound. This improvisation probes students' imagination and invention in generating images such as a gentle breeze, a wind, a thunderstorm, rain drops, and many more. They can be achieved through plucking, patting, striking, drawing hand or nails over strings. With the successful application of this exercise, a child's ears and creative mind are greatly engaged as he becomes more at ease with the whole instrument.

Like improvisation, simple ***composition*** exercises aid creativity and the alertness of ear. I have chosen the following examples:

➢ Guided composition: as in the instance with guided improvisation, the student works within parameters previously established by the teacher. A composition may feature a predetermined number of measures, note values, dynamics, articulations, artistic images, texts. The possibilities are endless!

➢ Question-Answer phrases: the teacher composes a short one-voice question melody, ending on the dominant, while the student responds with the answer phrase, closing on the tonic. Teacher and student switch. Acquaintance with the main harmonic functions gives the student a sense of formal organization and structure of tonality, represented by its most important pillars: tonic (home) and dominant (far away), as well as predetermined organization of each phrase (time signature, key, number of measures, dynamics, articulation, etc.). Once composed, both exercises may be transposed or enriched by a duet part.

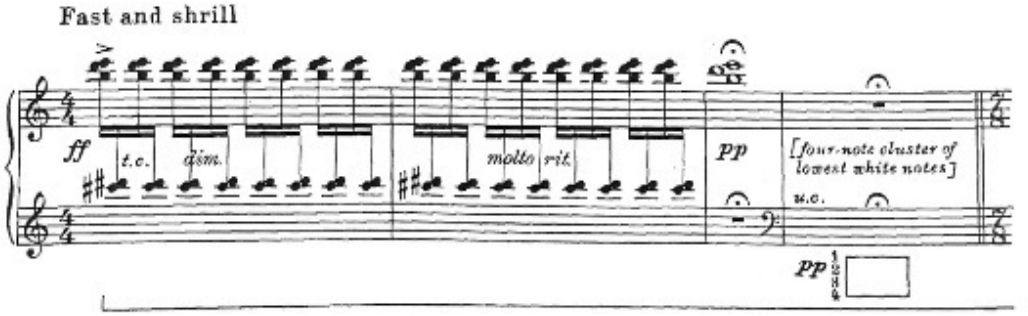
Programmatic pieces are inspiring and exciting for young students. They stimulate artistic imagination with their descriptive programs and titles. Such compositions could derive from a variety of stories, including those with folk motifs and their narratives. Example No. 8 presents a *Ukrainian Folk Song*, appropriate for a beginner. It offers a wealth of possibilities in working with sound through a sensitive dynamic structure and a beautifully sculpted melody. The unusual meter for a young piano student and melodic division between hands are both challenging and attractive. As in the previous examples, the piece may be transposed and accompanied by the teacher.



Example 8: "Ukrainian Folk Song," from The Russian School of Piano Playing, Book 1, Part I

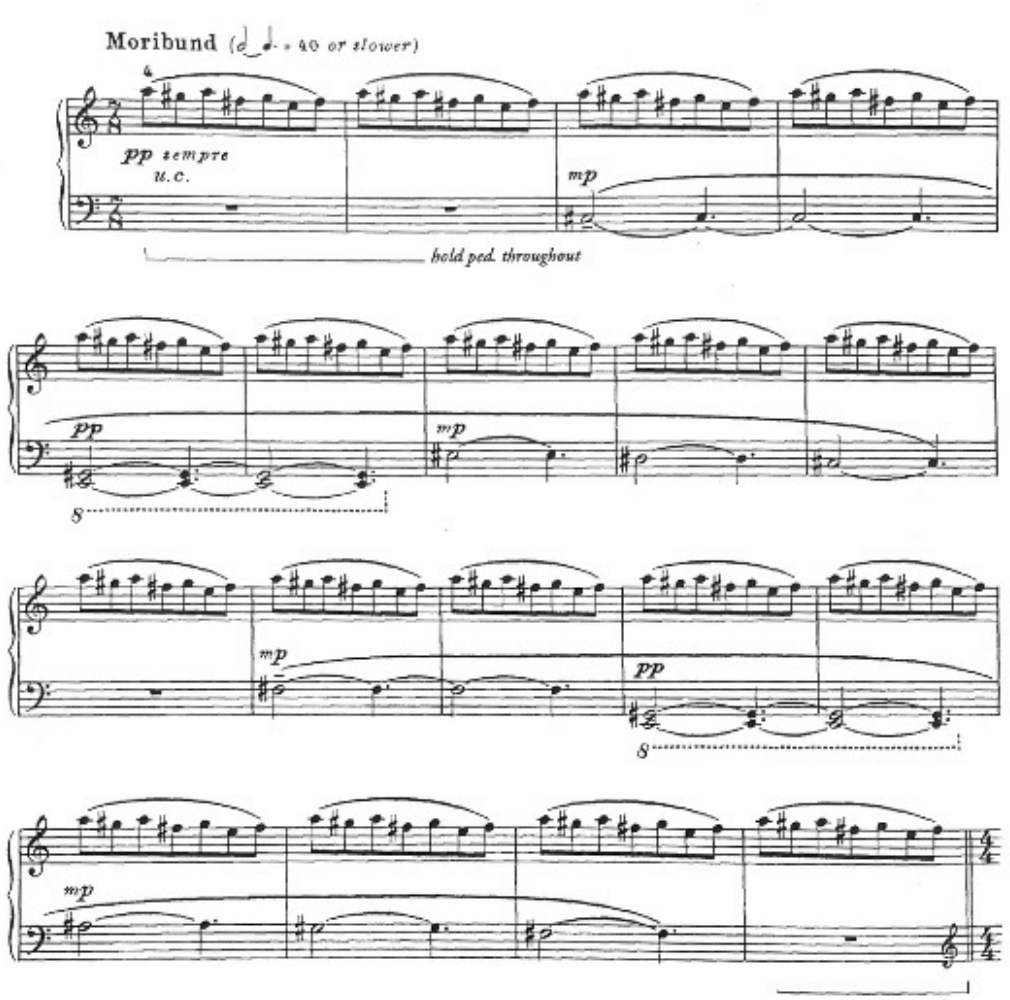
Musical Examples Nos. 9, 10, 11 come from the set titled Birds, written by American composer Seymour Bernstein, suitable for an intermediate student. Each movement is evocative of a bird with its special character, sounds, and behavior. I chose No. 6, *The Vulture*, and No. 4, *The Sea Gull*.

The Vulture showcases the *Dies Irae* motif in the right hand, alluding to the Judgment Day. The pattern continuously repeats, pianissimo until the end of the piece when it amplifies in sound, perhaps announcing the final moment of vulture's prey. The left-hand plays with a variety of registers and textures, including a left-hand cluster in the last measure of the musical example (Example 9). The cluster is prefaced by *Fast and shrill* section, in which the vulture possibly spots its victim.



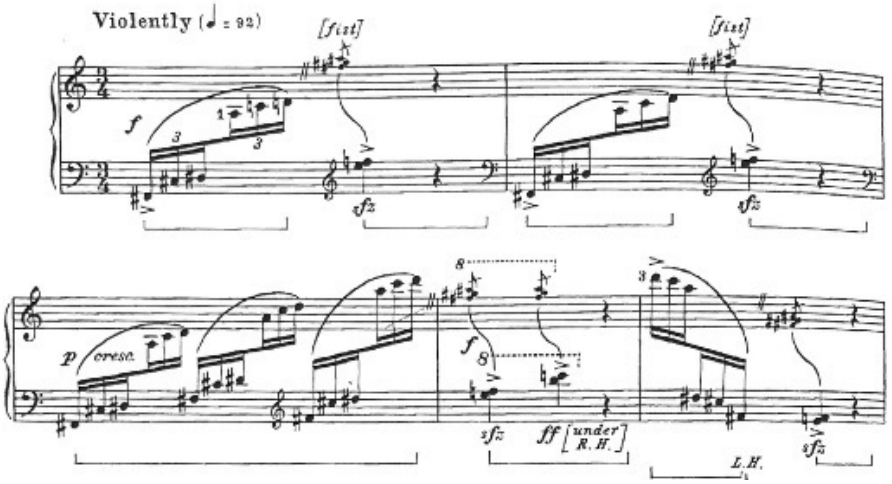
Example 9: Bernstein, "Vulture," from Birds, Book 1

The section from the opening of the piece to *Fast and shrill* may depict the vulture's menacing flight, circling around, searching (Example 10). The *Dies Irae* motive in the right hand, combined with left hand's layered textures, brings ominous feelings of suspense and fear.



Example 10: Bernstein, "Vulture," from Birds, Book 1

The Sea Gull takes the listener for a flight through constant sixteenth note triplet motifs. Particularly effective is the grace note cluster, played with the fist, leading into an accented interval of a second, depicting the familiar shriek of the sea gull (Example 11).



Example 11: Bernstein, "Sea Gull," from Birds, Book 1

Both pieces imaginatively introduce a young student to extended techniques at the piano.

Musical Example No. 12 introduces another inspired piece for an intermediate student, Starry Night, by American composer Lowell Liebermann. Starry Night is tender and dreamy, played throughout with una corda, generous damper pedal, unusual harmonies, and complex rhythmic alignment. These features enhance the mystery and the beauty of the starry night.

Example 12: Liebermann, "Starry Night," from Album for the Young

These are potent examples of building the "artistic image," which consequently sharpens the aural apparatus in search of successful execution.

Sight-reading is available from the earliest days of piano lessons. Different from methodical practicing, sight-reading requires playing through an unknown piece from the beginning to end, regardless of problems encountered along the way. Keeping the pulse, eyes on the score while reading slightly ahead, quickly crafting an artistic image, and recognizing patterns or musical chunks, are of great importance. The speed of recognition will depend on the sophistication of pianist's ear and knowledge of theory and ear training. The greater the sophistication and knowledge, the faster and easier it will be for the pianist to turn the symbols on the page, and their groupings (chunks, e.g., reading a chunk/concept of a C major chord instead of individual notes: c, e, g), into immediate interpretation. With the improvement of sight-reading, a young pianist will be able to learn lesson repertoire faster and with greater musical understanding. Sight-reading underscores the importance of early studies of theory and ear training, which become the very foundation of its successful application. Sight-reading should never be mechanical. The pianist sight-reads the artistic image of the piece, along with all other musical components, requiring a nimble and imaginative ear. The repertoire chosen for sight-reading should be easier than the lesson pieces or else the process will inevitably turn into practicing.

Thus far, I have frequently mentioned ***duets*** and their importance. Aside from composing accompaniments and improvising, the teacher and student may choose from a variety of existing repertoire options, including original pieces and arrangements. Some possibilities are Diabelli's *Melodious Exercises*, Tchaikovsky's *50 Russian Folk Songs*, or graded books by Cameron McGraw, *Four Centuries of Piano Duet Music*, all suitable for very young students and can be interpreted with nuanced dynamic planning and execution.

Working with Older Students

"Voice: Didn't Leschetizky have a certain way of producing a tone, or is that something we hear of only in this country?

Mr. Schnabel: He produced the tone, whichever in the endless variety of musical sonorities he wanted, with his ear. To try to serve music successfully with fingers is quite hopeless. Music does not care for fingers."[10]

Older students will benefit from the same level appropriate exercises, used with younger students: warm up samples, playing by ear, sight-reading, etudes, phrase analysis, improvisation, composition, programmatic pieces, duets. The creation of "artistic image" with older students should be influenced and informed through a complete awareness and analysis of the most important properties of a composition: sound, harmony, melody, rhythm, form, history and style. Each one of these categories creates a distinct imprint on the piece, which aids and enriches the flight of spontaneous artistic inspiration. The study of ear training and dictation, harmony, counterpoint, history and style will continuously shape alertness and sensitivity of the ear and the mind, and open new possibilities of understanding and interpreting the printed text. For these reasons, such subjects should be taught to students as early as possible.

Of similar impact is the exposure to chamber music. Be it duets or, preferably, ensembles with other instruments and/or singer. Chamber music shapes better listening skills of the whole group and individual instruments, artistic sensitivity, understanding of structure through analysis of every part in question, grasping and relating to the sound properties of different instruments and their subtle balance, steady rhythm, as well as interpersonal skills. Chamber music will challenge the

[10] Artur Schnabel, My Life and Music (New York: Dover, 2012), 126.

ear to develop and give it a thriving artistic environment.

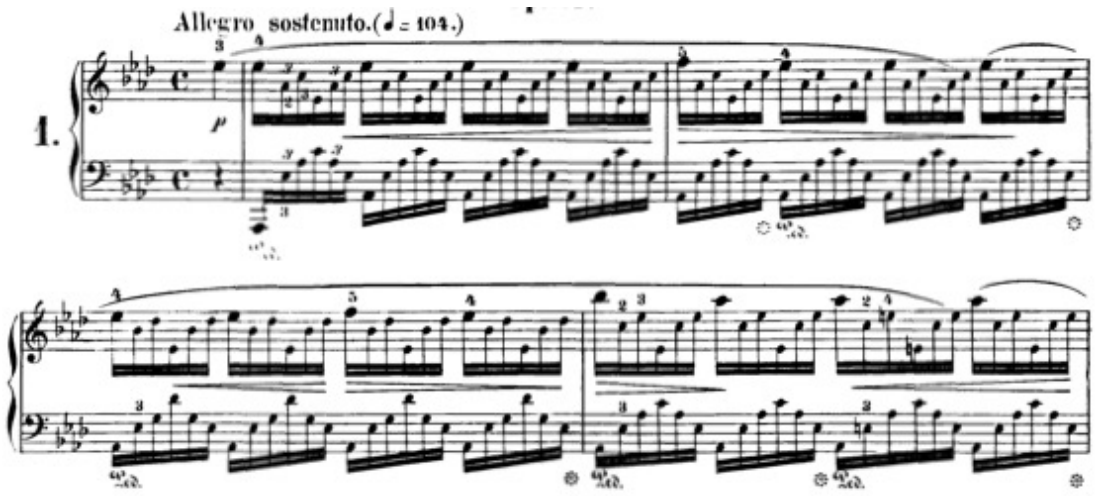
Older students may benefit from listening assignments in which they analyze multiple performances of a piece. It is important that they compare interpretations of different artists and be able to comment on both positive and negative aspects, according to their taste, knowledge, and understanding. They should be able to specifically explain each one of the positive and/or negative points. It is vital that students not copy a particular interpretation, be it of a teacher or of a recording, as they will never achieve artistic independence. Independence is molded through constant nurturing of the ear and the musical mind, coupled with thorough education in musical subjects and exposure to a variety of music-making opportunities (solo, chamber music, piano duets, work with singers, sight-reading, mini presentations, among others). The greatest gift a teacher can give to a student is independence. An independent student will reach new heights and be able to continue building on a solid foundation for as long as he lives. The great English pedagogue Tobias Matthay advised teachers:

> The wrong attitude is, to try to make the pupil directly imitate the musical effects, the "points," etc., which your musical sense tells you are required, but without explaining the why and the wherefore musically. Thus you turn your pupil into a mere responsive automaton… This is sheer "cramming," and can have no abiding influence educationally. The right attitude is to insist on your pupil trying to see for himself all the time, to the best of his capacity, musically and technically. You must force him to use his own judgement and imagination, so that that may prompt him all the time; and you must guide that judgement and imagination all the time, so that right seeing and thinking is learnt. In the first case you teach your pupil to play without thinking, whereas in the second case you teach him to play because he is thinking, and is thinking rightly.[11]

I would like to apply the analysis presented in the previous chapter to two pieces, suitable for advanced students: Chopin Etude Op. 25 No. 1 (Musical Example No. 13) and Debussy Prelude "The Girl with The Flaxen Hair" (Musical Example No. 14). Both pieces have extramusical program, original (Debussy) or attached (Chopin), and inspire with their narrative.

The program for Chopin's etude was created by Schumann and it remains the most powerful extramusical painting of this piece. Schumann suggests the vision of an Aeolian Harp, an ancient instrument activated by the power of the wind, which made its strings vibrate and produce tender sounds. It was very delicate and gentle, just as the character of Chopin's etude. The swaying of the wind is depicted by constant arpeggiation of chords in the inner voice of both the right hand and left hands. The disarmingly beautiful and simple melody takes flight in the top voice, undisturbed by the movement in other layers.

[11] Tobias Matthay, Musical Interpretation, Its Laws and Principles, And Their Application in Teaching and Performing (Boston: Stanhope Press, 1913), 157-158.



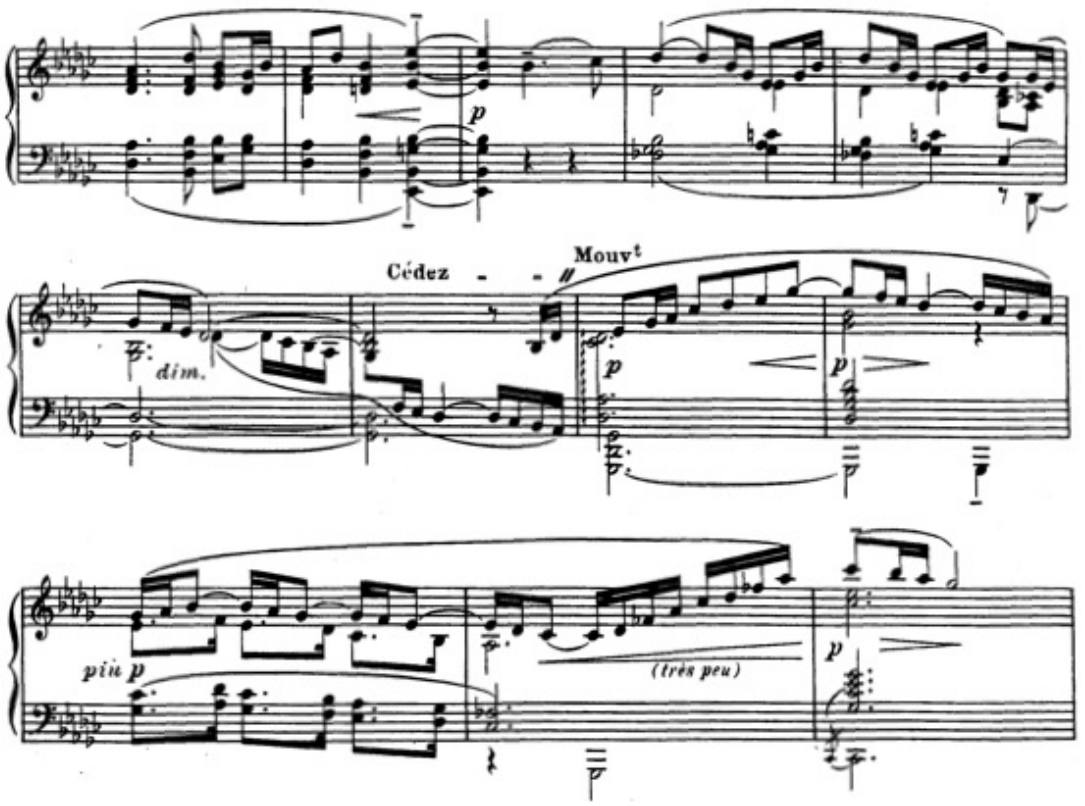
Example 13: Chopin, Etude, Op. 25 No. 1

It is exactly this sensitive balance between melody and harmonic accompaniment, the sculpting of the phrase, and the virtuosic rendition of pianissimo broken chords, that pose the main challenges of the piece and contribute to building the artistic image. A student may commence his work by carefully shaping the melody, then practicing the broken chords. It is important that the vocal quality of the melody come through. In doing so, one may remember Chopin's statement: "Il faut chanter avec les doigts!" ("One has to sing with the fingers!"[12]).

The chords may be practiced without pedal in order to achieve clarity and evenness. In addition, they may be blocked so that the student relates to the color of every harmonic function and their progressions. In order to achieve greater flexibility, a student may practice the chords with a variety of sounds and articulations such as piano/forte, staccato/legato, or sound-marking (touching the keys without producing sound). Frequent changes of practice approach develop flexibility of both ears and hands.

Debussy's prelude is inspired by a poem written by the French poet, Leconte de Lisle. In it, the narrator confesses his infatuation with a beautiful young maiden, generously describing her lovely physical attributes, especially her enchanting flaxen hair. De Lisle's poem and Debussy's prelude exude gentleness, transparency, dreaminess. To achieve these artistic images, a student should employ the ear in balancing all the voices. Each one should be treated polyphonically and have its distinct character translated into sound color and phrase shape. In such a way, the final result will display a finely nuanced vertical and horizontal element (chords and melodies).

[12] Eigeldinger, Chopin, 73



Example 14: Debussy, "Girl With The Flaxewn Hair" from Preludes, Book 1

Finally, I would like to suggest an exercise for the development of the inner ear, and mobilization of all intellectual and artistic abilities. Suitable for older students, it may be practiced with youngsters as well. It was presented in the Leimer-Gieseking Method, an approach developed by two great artists: Karl Leimer and his student, Walter Gieseking.[13] They proposed the study of the score *away* from the piano, paying careful attention to all the details mentioned previously: sound, harmony, melody, rhythm, form. In this way, a student will be able to learn a piece, even commit it to memory, away from the instrument. In the Leimer-Gieseking Method, the pianist concentrates on the aural and analytical element of the learning process, excluding the unwanted extreme focus on mechanical movement of fingers. Later, the kinesthetic element is added as a sculptor of firmly formed musical ideas rooted in the thoughtful interpretation of the score. A pianist creates a profound artistic understanding of a piece by feeding all elements in turn: the aural and the analytical, and later the kinesthetic, avoiding mindless automatization of movements created by overemphasis of empty finger work. Initial study away from piano should be done ideally, on much easier compositions than the student's current repertoire level.

As we near the end of this journey, attempting to capture the magical synergy of sound and touch, I ask Ruth Slenczynska, a splendid American pianist, to speak:

> A pianist's sound exists only in the performer's brain and inner ear. Before a pianist touches the keyboard of any instrument he must internally "hear" the wished-for-sound, then produce

[13] Walter Gieseking and Karl Leimer, Piano Technique (New York: Dover, 1972)

it.[14]

Simultaneous training of the ear and the fingers is of crucial importance for the development of a wholesome artist. I urge piano pedagogues to constantly renew their pedagogical toolbox, with the desire to continuously inspire and amaze students with music's otherworldly beauty. It all starts with the ear.

"One can say that the sound is born and blossoms with all its colors at the tip of a finger, like a flower at the tip of a stem. But, just like a flower, it must feed on "juices" from the inside, from the very root. Deprived of these juices, the flower dries up and withers." [15]

E. M. Timakin

[14] Ruth Slenczynska, "On Preparation for a Piano Competition," Chopin Foundation of the United States, accessed September 13, 2021, https://www.chopin.org/s/On-Preparation-for-a-Piano-Competition-Slenczynska.pdf

[15] Е. М. Тимакин, Воспитание пианиста (Москва: Советский Композитор, 1989), 69. (trans. Vladimir Valjarevic) (Е. М. Тимакин, Воспитание пианиста (Москва: Советский Композитор, 1989), 69.)

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