



A HANDBOOK OF
PIANO PLAYING

ERIC HOPE

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Edited by Percy M. Young

A HANDBOOK OF PIANO PLAYING

Eric Hope

The author is a young pianist with a European reputation. He has written a book which has all the authority to be expected from so distinguished an exponent of the art of pianoforte playing. The book is outstanding not only because the author knows his subject, but also because he knows how to express it so that Dr Young can say 'Having read this book for pleasure, I discovered myself at the keyboard with Mr Hope.'

Diploma candidates and other aspirants to competence at the keyboard will appreciate particularly the clarity and simplicity of Mr Hope's advice.

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To my teacher,
KATHLEEN ARNOLD,
in gratitude and admiration

INTRODUCTION

THE PIANIST'S LIFE is one of constant adventure. To his hand lie invitations extended to him by countless composers—invitations to visit, perhaps, the gay and languorous Spain of Isaac Albéniz and Manuel de Falla; to enter elegant Parisian salons with Chopin or to join him in the patriotic fervour of a polonaise; to go with Liszt to Hungary, Italy or Switzerland; or—a somewhat more esoteric experience—to journey with Beethoven among those dark realms of the mind and spirit to which his later sonatas give access. The immense repertoire of piano music offers every pianist far more than he can hope to accept during the course of a lifetime.

In the following pages we shall consider how best we may avail ourselves of these fascinating possibilities and, translating the hieroglyphs of notation into sound by means of musicianship, creative imagination and technique, realise most completely for ourselves and for our listeners the delights of music.

My warmest thanks are due to my friends Nina Pearson, B.Mus., Lecturer in Music in the University of Birmingham, and Peter Richards for their invaluable help and advice in the preparation of this book.

E.H.

I

WHAT IS MEANT BY 'TECHNIQUE'?

WHEN GRAPPLING OVER a period of years with the complex problems of piano playing it is only too easy to lose sight of our aims and the means by which they may be achieved—a state of affairs partly due, no doubt, to the fact that in learning to play a musical instrument intellectual, emotional and physical factors are involved to an unusual degree. Although it is ultimately impossible to separate them into water-tight compartments, it may be helpful at certain stages of our work to consider independently these three types of activity.

It is the intellectual side—the 'thinking' as opposed to the 'feeling' and 'doing'—that is so often neglected. Piano students must be persuaded of the value of—indeed, the necessity for—clear thinking in connection with their practising and playing. But, be it noted, *clear* thinking! This, rightly directed, will lead to precise, controlled physical action, and, guided by a positive and firmly held musical aim, to certainty in performance.

Let us try to look at piano playing afresh and reduce it to its simplest terms. What, from a physical point of view, must we do in order to play the piano? Two things: we must move the keys, and we must move the pedals. That is all! And the countless theories of touch, of arm weight, forearm rotation, high wrist, low wrist, bent finger, flat finger, curvilinear arm movements and so on almost *ad infinitum* are intended to help us to do the first of these things: to move the keys. The second, the use of the pedals, has not been the subject of so much analysis; it is perhaps surprising that theorists have not more fully brought their ingenuity also to bear on this.

Let us leave aside the problems of pedalling and confine

ourselves, for the present, to the work to be done by the fingers, hands and arms.

There are only four ways in which we can fail to play correctly—indeed, perfectly—from a physical point of view. Firstly, we may play ‘wrong notes’. In other words, we may move a key (or keys) other than those which, at any given moment, we intend to move. This is the most obvious form of error, and one from which even the greatest pianists, being human, are not immune; but although this may comfort students for a similar failing in their own performance, it must never be made an excuse for carelessness in practising. Clearly, perfection in the playing of right notes must be a constant aim.

The other ways in which we may fail are, perhaps, less obvious to the uninitiated.

Secondly, we may play any note a little too soon or too late—an error of rhythm, an error in the ‘when’ of the sound.

Thirdly, we may play any note too loudly or too softly—an error of dynamics, an error in the ‘how’ of the sound. This fault arises from a misjudgment of the amount of force needed to move the key. Should the force applied be too weak it may even fail to produce any sound at all—a very disconcerting occurrence.

Lastly, we may fail accurately to time the upward movement of the key. In other words, we may, having sounded the note, hold down the key for too long or too short a time—an error of duration. This kind of error is more serious than might at first appear. As we shall see later, the precise duration of sounds often has an important bearing on the question of tone quality.

These, then, are the only possible ways in which we may fail to play, from a physical point of view, perfectly: we may fail to play the right notes, we may fail to play the notes exactly *when* they should sound, we may fail to play the notes exactly *how* they should sound, and we may fail to control their duration.

WHAT IS MEANT BY 'TECHNIQUE'?

Let us now state our aims positively, and thus formulate a definition of technique:

Technique is the ability to make every right note sound exactly when, exactly how, and for the exact length of time we intend.

This may well seem at first sight to be an absurd oversimplification, but a little reflection will show that if, in the playing of any musical composition, each of these requirements is fulfilled, the performance will be technically (that is, physically) perfect. As far as technique goes, the greatest pianist can do no more. We are, of course, leaving aside for the moment all considerations of interpretation. From an interpretative point of view any performance, however technically perfect, may be open to criticism. Interpretation depends upon our musical intentions, and the way in which we intend each sound will determine whether our interpretations are musical or unmusical, artistic or inartistic, convincing or unconvincing.

Our intentions are governed by two things: the quality of our musicianship, and the quality of our artistic imagination. Our knowledge of music can never be too great, and knowledge is something all can acquire. The balance of phrases and the structure of melodies, the pointing of climax by the use of exciting harmonies, modulation, the importance of key-design in large works, the contrapuntal styles—in fact, all the things which together make form in music, provide fascinating material for study. The would-be artist should not stop here. The study of orchestral music will heighten his appreciation of tone-colour and further stimulate his imagination. The wider his field of musical experience, the deeper will be his insight into the music he wishes to interpret. But considerations of interpretation may well be left until the problems of technique have been examined more closely.

II

THE THREE PHASES IN PLAYING A NOTE:

(1) THE PREPARATION

A MUSICAL COMPOSITION, however beautiful, however inspired, may be regarded as the sum of a number of sounds. A piece of piano music may be regarded, from the point of view of the performer, as the sum of a number of *separately produced* sounds. A violinist can play many notes with a single movement of his bow; the player of a wind instrument can do the same with a single exhalation of the breath. In a *glissando* the pianist, also, can include many notes in a single movement, but this method of playing is exceptional. Normally a succession of sounds needs a succession of separate movements. The nature of the piano mechanism demands this.

In order to achieve perfection in the playing of any piece of piano music, every sound must exactly fulfil our intentions. If we fully understand what is entailed in the playing of a single note—and this means any and every note we wish to play—we shall go far in our understanding of the principles of technique. Let us consider this in some detail.

The playing of each note in every piece of piano music can usefully be divided into three stages. They are:

- (1) the preparation,
- (2) the actual descent of the key,
- (3) the holding down of the key for as long as we want the sound to continue, and its subsequent release.

(In extreme *staccato* there will, of course, be no holding

THE THREE PHASES IN PLAYING A NOTE (1)

down, and the same may be true of a sound prolonged by means of the sustaining pedal.)

Naturally, when playing we cannot always think separately of these three stages, nor is it in the least desirable that we should be able to do so. In performance these stages may seem to become fused into one continuous movement. A quick succession of notes may even appear to the performer to be the result of one impetus covering the entire passage. But in the study of technique (and no pianist ever passes finally beyond this) it is helpful to consider each of these stages separately. This analysis of touch will often reveal the exact cause of a technical difficulty, and point the way to its solution.

By the preparation of a note is meant the act of bringing the finger concerned either into actual contact with the key or to a position immediately above it. Preparation also includes the mental act or thought by which we imbue that finger with a feeling of anticipation, of magnetism, of life. This feeling should result in our eventually applying to the key just that amount of force needed to produce the sound we want—the sound which (it cannot be too often repeated) we already hear in the imagination.

Of course we do not always prepare notes one by one. The fingering of a passage should be chosen to enable us to place the fingers over several notes at once; thus speed of execution becomes possible. But the important point to keep in mind is that the act by which we bring our fingers over the keys is quite distinct from the action of depressing them. In the course of playing the piano this preparation of the fingers over the keys—in other words, finding the right notes—necessitates movements in a sideways direction; sideways movements of the arm from the shoulder, of the fore-arm from the elbow, of the hand from the wrist and even sideways movements of the fingers themselves. And sideways movements are quite distinct, muscularly, from the downward movements by means of which the keys are moved.

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In bringing the fingers into position in preparation for the actual sounding of the notes, the arm muscles—those controlling the shoulder, elbow, wrist and finger joints—should be as relaxed as possible; as relaxed, that is, as is consistent with our keeping the arm in the required piano-playing position. The only muscles which should be working with any vigour are those of the back and waist, and those which support the arm. The former will ensure a good upright posture without any drooping forward of the shoulders, and the latter should create within the arm a feeling of lightness. In this condition the arm will feel as if it were floating in the air. The sensitive finger-tips should be able to locate the right notes largely by means of the sense of touch; they should feel their way on to the surface of the keys. This can be done with certainty if the fingers are held freely. Moreover, this pre-condition of relaxation will enable us sensitively to become aware of, and exactly to time, the more or less vigorous exertion of the finger, hand and perhaps the arm, which will be needed to swing the key down at the moment when the sound is due.

In connection with this process of preparation, it is appropriate to consider the position of the body in relation to the keyboard, and the choice of fingering.

Regarding the former, it may be said that many students sit on too high a stool. Although a little individual variation may be desirable, the elbow should be approximately on a level with the white keys when the fingers are on the keyboard. To sit much higher than this may, strangely enough, be a contributory cause of nervousness and feelings of insecurity in playing; for in a high position it is less easy to obtain a good follow-through to the key-bed. (This is discussed in the next Section.) The player should sit well forward on the stool, which should be far enough away from the piano to allow the upper arm and the forearm, when in the playing position, to form a slightly obtuse angle. With these basic essentials in mind, each pianist must determine

THE THREE PHASES IN PLAYING A NOTE (1)

for himself the exact height and position of the piano stool, in accordance with his own height and the length of his arms. Such a decision, once made, should be final. Any variation in these matters is liable to upset technique.

In playing, the elbows should not be held too near to the sides of the body. If they are, the back of the hand, when the fingers are on the keys, will tend to slope downwards from the knuckle of the second finger to the knuckle of the fifth. Go to the piano and try to play a slow trill with the hand in this position, using the fourth and fifth fingers. You will find that these fingers—naturally the weakest—are sloping towards their respective keys at an angle which makes playing with them very difficult indeed, and control of tone almost impossible. Now move your elbow a few inches away from the side of your body and tilt your hand slightly in the opposite direction, so that the back of the hand now slopes slightly down towards the knuckle of the second finger. Try playing again with the fourth and fifth fingers. You will find that with your hand in this position playing with these fingers is much easier, and the angle at which they fall on the keys makes control of tone possible.

The four fingers, on the keyboard, should usually adopt a naturally curved position, so that the nail phalanges are approximately perpendicular to the surface of the keys. The knuckles should be arched, the back of the hand and the fore-arm forming more or less a straight line.

The position of the arm described above (with the elbow a few inches away from the sides) and the hand (with the knuckle of the fifth finger slightly higher than that of the second) is the normal posture in piano playing. Often, of course, in performance it becomes necessary momentarily to tilt the hand towards the fifth finger. Pianists with small hands, for example, may find it impossible to play even such a chord as

Beethoven: Sonata in E flat-Op. 31, No. 2



without sloping both hands in this direction; but such a departure should be followed as soon as possible by a return to the normal position which we have described.

Josef Hoffman recommends a tilting of the hand towards the fifth finger in the playing of very rapid *piano* or *pianissimo* scales, but only when a good finger action with the hand in the normal position has been mastered. Generally, no departure from the normal position should take place when playing scales and arpeggios. In turning the thumb under the fingers this correct sloping of the hand may even be intensified. Try this. You will find that the thumb now plays with its nail in contact with the key. It depresses the key by means of a movement away from the hand, and, having reached the key-bed, should, if the scale or arpeggio is to be continued, seem to lift the light, relaxed hand, bringing the fingers over the ensuing notes, still with the knuckle of the fifth finger slightly uppermost.

The choice of fingering is closely related to hand-position, and, it is repeated, the best fingering for any passage is usually that which will enable the fingers to be placed over several notes at once. Simple fingering is, as a rule, much more comfortable and much more efficient than the complications recommended by so many nineteenth-century editors of piano music. Take, for instance, the following (from a well-known edition of Chopin's *Etudes*):

THE THREE PHASES IN PLAYING A NOTE (1)

Chopin: Etude in F minor - Op. 25, No. 2

p molto legato

Try this, and observe the constant sideways shifting of the right hand which this fingering necessitates. How much safer is the following, where the hand has to make no change of position at all (the last two notes can easily be reached by a lateral extension of the fourth and fifth fingers, leaving the hand undisturbed):

p

Is there any reason at all, by the way, for playing the first two notes—the repeated C—with different fingers? In most editions, anyway, these notes are tied.

Or take the following example:

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Beethoven: Sonata - Op. 57



Is not this much better?—



Here a slight movement of the hand to the right must be made during the playing of the F and A flat in the first bar, in order to bring the fourth and fifth fingers into line with the C and D flat; and a movement to the left will occur immediately after the first note of the second bar to bring the fourth, third, second fingers and thumb over the remaining keys. Far less lateral movement is required by the second fingering than by the first, and accuracy in the playing of the notes and in the control of their tone will consequently be found easier, provided that the player has a well-developed finger technique.

THE THREE PHASES IN PLAYING A NOTE (1)

Another point in the choice of fingering is that, whenever possible, melodic sequences should be fingered similarly, and should this mean that you must occasionally play a black note with the thumb—never mind! The following type of fingering, for example, is recommended:

Bach: Two-part Invention

The image shows a musical score for Bach's Two-part Invention. It consists of two staves: a treble clef staff on top and a bass clef staff on the bottom. The treble staff contains a melodic line with several slurs and fingerings indicated by numbers 1 through 5. The bass staff contains a more complex, rhythmic accompaniment with many slurs and fingerings indicated by numbers 1 through 5. The fingering is carefully chosen to maintain consistency across similar melodic phrases.

It is by no means always necessary to regard editorial fingerings with suspicion, but by experimenting along these lines with the basic principles in mind, each student can decide upon the fingering which suits him best. Fingering must always remain to some extent a matter of individual adjustment, because of the almost infinite variations in the size and shape of the hands of different people.

The importance of this matter has been stressed here because, as will be seen in Section VII, it is essential to decide upon the fingering of any passage before practising a note of it. This is a subject which belongs obviously to the process of 'preparation'.

III

THE THREE PHASES IN PLAYING A NOTE :

(2) THE DESCENT OF THE KEY

THE 'PREPARATION' OF the notes in any piece of piano music will, as a result of the intelligent practising of that piece, become largely automatic. In other words, the pianist will be able to find his way on to the surface of the right notes without very much conscious thought. But the act of depressing the keys—the production of sound—must never be allowed to become automatic.

In considering the production of sound we come to the real heart of piano playing. The secret of success lies in the ability to time the descent of each key with accuracy. We must never forget that our task is simply to make each note sound in exact accordance with our preconceived musical intention—to make each note sound *when* and *how* we want it. The *how* is, as we shall see, just as much a matter of timing as the *when*.

As to the actual movements by which the keys are depressed—movements of the fingers from the knuckles, of the hand from the wrist, of the forearm from the elbow in either a rotary or a downward direction, of the upper arm from the shoulder either forwards or backwards, and even of the torso from the hip-joints—these can only lightly be touched upon. In any case, so greatly do people vary in their physical and mental make-up, and so complicated are the co-ordinations of movements which have to be employed, that only by personal instruction and supervision can these be taught. It is assumed that the reader has already received some such training, and will be able to apply to his existing technique such hints as are given here.

THE THREE PHASES IN PLAYING A NOTE (2)

In the first place, every act of tone production must be thought of as a swinging movement. We must not timidly *put* the keys down, nor must we insensitively *push* them; but by feeling their upward resistance to our fingers, and allying ourselves with it, we must *swing* the keys downward into sound.

If we consider the act of swinging a tennis racquet, for instance, in order to send a ball over the net, we shall find a helpful analogy. In such an act, we are first conscious of the weight of the racquet. It is by feeling and using this weight—the racquet's resistance to movement—that we are able to swing it towards the ball at, within limits, whatever speed is required: quickly if the ball is to travel far, less quickly for a shorter distance. The next thing we feel is the impact of the racquet on the ball. This is the culmination of the stroke, the point at which we have been aiming, and the point which we have had vividly present in imagination from the beginning of the movement. After this impact, the arm, with the hand carrying the racquet 'follows through', continuing the movement though with diminishing speed. To realise the importance of the 'follow-through' we have only to imagine how ineffectively we should strike the ball did we not intend this continuing movement. It is the *intention* to follow through that gives freedom and confidence in the performance of the entire action.

In swinging down a piano key we must remember that it is the amount of tone—the loudness or softness of the sound, according to our preconceived musical requirement—that determines the amount of speed we shall try to impart to the key. But whether we move the key quickly (for a loud tone) or more slowly (for a softer tone), it is by means of the upward-acting weight of the key—the resistance it offers to our downward exertion—that we can gauge the amount of energy needed and so control this speed. Although the movement of the key is on a much smaller scale, the analogy of the tennis racquet is always applicable.

The fingers cannot feel the impact of the hammer on the strings (analogous to the impact of the racquet on the ball) because, as an examination of the piano mechanism will show, the hammer will by this time have been thrown towards the string and will no longer be in contact with the key. But we must listen for this impact, for this is the *when* of the sound, the instant at which it comes into being—the instant which must as closely as possible coincide with our previously conceived intention.

The follow-through, however, we can—and must—feel physically. We must always (with one exception to be considered later) continue our downward movement with the key until we are stopped by the felts beneath; and, before relaxing the downward pressure, we must feel for every note, even in the quickest passages, an instant of repose upon this firm, secure bed of the key. Unless this follow-through is intended from the outset of the downward movement one is almost certain to play timidly, without a sense of mastery and without conviction. A superficial touch (that is, a touch in which there is no follow-through) is one of the most potent causes of nervousness and feelings of insecurity in playing—feelings which must inevitably hamper the fulfilment of our musical intention. The acquisition of a touch with a good, deep follow-through immediately gives confidence.

We have all heard students who play with a thin, unconvincing tone, some of whose notes, particularly in *pianissimo*, fail to sound at all; and we have heard those who play with a dull, heavy tone, entirely lacking in singing quality and brightness. In the former case, the players may certainly be feeling the upward resistance which the keys offer, but they do not follow-through. In the latter case, they are most probably digging their fingers deeply into the key-beds but without utilising the key-resistance to create sufficient speed at the beginning of the key's movement.

Sensitivity is required at both ends of the key's journey. We must feel the movement of the key from the instant at

THE THREE PHASES IN PLAYING A NOTE (2)

which it leaves its surface position, and we must enjoy the feeling of firmness and security which the key-bed gives us when we follow through. If both these things are done and if, through experiment and experience, we develop the capacity to move the key at an almost infinite variety of speeds, the possibility of controlling the *how* of each note—of producing for each note exactly the tone we require—will have been created.

The one exception to the necessity for the follow-through is in the execution of very rapid repeated notes. Here it is only by allowing the keys to rise to their starting position as soon as the sound has emerged, that the keys and the hammers will be ready to be used again for the next repetition of the note. (At this point we necessarily anticipate the subject of Section VI.) Consider, for example the passage beginning at bar 43 of *Alborada del Gracioso* by Ravel or the repeated notes in the same composer's *Scarbo* from *Gaspard de la Nuit*. In such cases there is not time to take the key down to its lowest position, much less to feel any repose upon the key-bed. In order, therefore, to produce the tone successfully, a particularly strong impetus must be given to the key at its surface position, and we must deliberately avoid taking it all the way down. Only in this way do extremely rapid repetitions of a note become possible.

It is obvious that muscular exertion must be used to swing down a key, and that the amount of this exertion will be determined by the speed at which we want the key to move. It is a matter of every-day experience that quick movements require the expenditure of more energy than slow ones. In piano playing, too, several keys often have to be moved simultaneously. The playing, for instance, of a five-note chord will take much more energy than that needed for sounding a single note at the same level of tone. Thus in *fortissimo* chords the muscular exertion required is very great indeed. But the length of time needed for the keys to accomplish their downward journey is a mere fraction of a second, and (as we

shall see in Section IV) no purpose is served by prolonging the possibly intense muscular effort after the completion of this movement—after we have, in the production of each note or chord, reached the key-bed and have experienced an instant of repose upon it. Indeed, if we do continue the exertion beyond this point we shall not be ready for the preparation of succeeding notes.

During the actual descent of the keys, then, be generous in your expenditure of muscular energy, applying to the key without stint the amount of exertion needed to produce the required tone—even applying, when the tone requires it, the maximum force of which your fingers, hands and arms are capable. This exertion must always be timed with the utmost accuracy, and the more relaxed are the arms, hands and fingers during the process of ‘preparation’, the more easily will accuracy in this respect be achieved.

IV

THE THREE PHASES IN PLAYING A NOTE :

(3) THE HOLDING AND RELEASE OF THE KEY

WHEN WE HAVE reached the key bed, we must do one of two things: we must release all pressure on the key and allow it to rise, or we must hold it down. In either case, the arm should return to its light, relaxed condition which will, of course, be needed for the preparation of succeeding notes.

For *staccato*, no pulling up of the arm or fingers is in the least necessary. With the release of pressure the key will return to its surface position, carrying up the relaxed finger; and, unless prevented by the pedal, the damper will return to the strings and cut off the sound.

Sometimes, in the playing of a loud *staccato* note or chord, the arm, in its light, relaxed condition, will feel driven up off the keyboard with a bouncing action—just as a ball, thrown to the ground, will bounce by reason of its own resilience and elasticity. This action of the arm should certainly be allowed and even encouraged, provided that there is time to perform this bouncing action and to resume contact with the keyboard before the next notes are due.

If the sound we have produced is required to last for some length of time, the damper must be kept away from the strings. This may be done by holding down the key, or by means of the pedal. (The question of pedalling will be considered in Section VI.) In holding down a key, we may be tempted to continue the same amount of pressure that was needed to swing the key down—and with the same muscles. But if this is done the arm cannot be ready for the preparation of the following notes.

When we are holding down a key or keys, the arm should, in fact, be as light and relaxed as in the process of 'preparation'—and, of course, when holding down one key we shall usually be preparing the notes which follow. How, then, is the key to be prevented from rising?

The keys must be held down with a firm but gentle pressure of the fingers—but of the fingers only. On no account must this pressure interfere with the freedom of the wrist or the lightness of the arm. With practice, this pressure may be quite considerable without any exertion extending to the wrist, and it should always be sufficient to give a feeling of real firmness and security on the key-bed.

Here is an exercise to develop this feeling of pressure with the fingers, combined with a light, relaxed arm. Sit at a table of approximately the same height as the piano keyboard and place your fingers upon it with the arm extended forward as for playing. See that your arm feels light and that all the joints are free, exactly as for the stage which we have called 'preparation'. Your finger-tips should rest lightly upon the table in the playing position. Now press down with one finger, at the same time moving your wrist freely—up and down, or from side to side, or with a circular motion; the direction does not matter so long as real freedom of movement is observed. The elbow and the shoulder will, of course, move too, with equal freedom and with a feeling of lightness. Keep the arm moving and increase the pressure of the finger so that, in imagination, you feel its tip sinking deeply into the table. Repeat this, using each finger in turn, and then with combinations of fingers. If you feel the slightest stiffening of the wrist you are calling into play the wrong set of muscles; but with practice you will find that you can press quite forcibly with the fingers alone. Now repeat the exercise without moving the arm but retaining within it the same feeling of lightness and freedom: you may have to return again and again to the moving arm before you can do this with certainty, but the knack will come.

THE THREE PHASES IN PLAYING A NOTE (3)

In playing *legato* passages composed of single or double notes (in *legato* chord passages we are usually forced to rely more or less entirely on the pedal to join the sounds) this pressure of the finger-tips should be felt as continuous, extending over the whole phrase. The pressure of one finger lasts until just after the next finger, having swung its key down, takes up a similar pressure.

It should be noticed that this pressure is completely unrelated to the loudness or softness of the passage in question. Obviously no more pressure need be used than will suffice to prevent the key from rising; but if we feel happier or technically more secure when applying greater pressure, there is no reason why we should not do this. The only proviso is that the pressure should be correctly applied.

In the playing of a string or wind instrument the actual production of the sound goes on for as long as the sound is to last, by means of a movement of the bow or an exhalation of the breath, and so the player inevitably experiences a feeling of physical continuity throughout a *legato* phrase. In the case of a pianist, this is not so. We know that, as a matter of scientific fact, we can do nothing in piano playing to influence the tone, apart from its duration, after the hammer has struck the strings. Realising this, many students seem to lose interest in a long note after the moment of its inception. Musically, we must listen to, be aware of, enjoy each sound for as long as it continues. By means of the correct pressure of the finger in holding down the key, we can feel that we are doing something to the sound for the whole of its duration. If, further, we can imagine that we, too, are still actually producing the sound for as long as it lasts, this is an illusion worth cultivating: by this means our *legato* playing will be greatly helped. We can then feel, even with our fingers, the connection between, the merging of, one note and the next. Thus a valuable link is forged between our musical intentions and the means of their fulfilment—technique.

This conscious pressure on the key-bed is most helpful in

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controlling the precise duration and the subsequent cessation of sounds which are not *legato*. Take the following :

Mozart: Fantasia in D minor

(Allegretto)



A string or wind player would, as a matter of course, give precisely the correct duration to each note and rest, but how many pianists take this trouble? Usually one hears the quaver chords played with a more or less indefinite staccato, and the final crotchet may be given the value of anything from a quaver to a minim. If we use the type of finger pressure described above, not only can we feel physically the prolonging of the sounds for the required length of time, but we can accurately time the cessation of such pressure, and with it the cessation of the sound, to coincide exactly with our preconceived intentions.

Try playing the phrase just quoted, with close attention to the exact duration of each chord, and hear how much more satisfying such a performance is than one in which this is not strictly observed.

V

TOUCH CONSIDERED AS A WHOLE, WITH SOME OBSERVATIONS ON TONE QUALITY

IN THE PRECEDING Sections we have considered in turn the three phases in the playing of a single note: the preparation, the descent, and the hold and release of the key. As was stated in Section II, it is not for a moment maintained we can always be conscious of these three separate phases in actual performance, but during our practising it will be helpful to return again and again to this detailed analysis.

When a first attempt is made to perform any complicated series of movements, success can only be attained by means of deliberate, conscious control. With repetition, such movements become easier because we tend to do more or less subconsciously what we had previously only been able to do consciously. Not that we should allow ourselves, when playing, to drift into a dreamlike state; nor, obviously, should the movements of piano technique occur without our volition. They must be prompted deliberately, purposefully, in accordance with our musical intentions; but their actual physical performance will require less mental effort. Herein lies the explanation of ease and speed in the performance of the complicated movements needed in piano playing.

It will have been seen that each act of tone production—the actual sounding of each note or chord—is a timed and short-lived muscular exertion, preceded and followed by some relaxation. In the playing of quick passages, the speed may seem to an observer to preclude the possibility of any relaxation between the notes; but it definitely is possible for the performer to feel an instant of such relaxation even at very considerable speeds. In passages of extreme velocity the final control may safely be left to the subconscious, provided that

in the slow practising of such passages there has been rigorous insistence upon a moment of relaxation before and after each exertion. The effect of such practising will be that, in performance, each exertion can be accurately timed. Without this separating relaxation in practising we shall never achieve this timing with certainty.

And now comes the question of tone colour. When we consider the way in which tone is produced by the mechanism of the piano, it would seem that our only hope of influencing the sound in any way (apart from the use of the pedals, of which more in Section VI) is during the descent of the key. All we can do is to move the key (and therefore the hammer towards the strings) quickly or less quickly—to make the tone loud or less loud. But this is merely a variation of tone amount. What, then, of tone colour? Here the scientist steps in and assures us that we can do nothing to influence tone colour as such; all we can do is to control tone amount by means of variations in key-speed. Experiments such as those conducted in America by Otto Ortmann would seem to be conclusive on this point.

Fortunately there is another aspect of the problem of tone colour. In listening to music we do not hear each note as a separate entity; we hear combinations and successions of sounds. And although our fingers cannot influence the quality of a single sound apart from its relative loudness or softness, we can create a variety of effects with a stream of sounds.

Besides the amount of tone we produce—and this itself can be varied considerably even during a single passage if such variation is appropriate to the music—there is, in addition, the factor of duration. With an almost infinite range of tone qualities between the extremes of *pianissimo* and *fortissimo*, combined with all shades of duration from *tenuto* (or *legatissimo* in the case of two or more successive sounds) to *staccatissimo*, we shall be able to create the illusion of a rich palette of tone colours.

In controlling the amount of tone it is the second phase—

TOUCH CONSIDERED AS A WHOLE

the depression of the key—to which attention must be given: in controlling the duration, the third phase—the holding and release of the key. The first phase—the preparation—should, theoretically, be uninfluenced by the intended intensity and duration of the sound which is subsequently produced. In fact, however, so quickly are the three phases accomplished that the pianist rarely has capacity to think, in performance, of each phase separately. Therefore at the stage of ‘preparation’, we must vividly imagine the physical feeling of the complete act of touch needed for that particular tone and duration, in addition to the sound.

In Section II we said that the preparation includes the mental act or thought by which we imbue the finger or fingers concerned with the feeling of anticipation, of magnetism, of life, which will result in our eventually applying to the key just that amount of force needed to produce the required sound. Now that we are in possession of sufficient knowledge concerning the complete act of touch, let us illustrate this point. Consider these notes:



Place your fingers over all five keys ready to play them. Now play the notes at a fairly slow tempo, *forte* and *staccatissimo*. Now again, this time concentrating on the sensations in your fingers and hand. Repeat the passage at the same tempo, but this time *piano* and *legato*. Do you not notice a difference in the feeling in each finger immediately before the production of each sound? Next consider a simple chord:



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Play it first—after having placed your fingers neatly upon the keys—*forte* and *tenuto*; now *forte* and *staccato*; and again, *piano* and *mezzo-staccato*. Do you not feel that each kind of tone requires a different mental preparation, giving a different feeling of anticipation in the fingers? We have insisted upon a relaxed condition of the muscles of the fingers, hands and arms during preparation. But it may be that the muscles, particularly those of the fingers, adopt a very slightly less relaxed condition when preparing for *forte* than for *piano*. However much it may interest scientists to investigate and measure such slight degrees of tension, it is of much greater advantage to the pianist to consider the condition of his muscles, immediately prior to key descent, as one of relaxation, and to think of the differences in the sensations for varying kinds of tone as being a sort of mental magnetising of the fingers. Any conscious tensing of the muscles at the stage of preparation will jeopardise our chances of timing the impetus accurately.

Let us consider how variations in intensity and duration may, over a succession of sounds, produce an audible impression of tone colouring. Examine a phrase such as this:

Chopin: Nocturne - Op. 32
Andante sostenuto

The musical score is for Chopin's Nocturne Op. 32, marked 'Andante sostenuto'. It features a treble clef staff with a melodic line and a bass clef staff with a supporting accompaniment. The key signature is G major (one sharp) and the time signature is 3/4. The piece is marked 'p' (piano). A large slur covers the entire phrase across both staves.

Here we obviously require what is known as a 'singing' tone. Play the phrase several times (or, better, ask someone to play it for you so that your aural impressions will not be modified by physical sensations). Listen to it first played *staccato*, at

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varying levels of tone from *pianissimo* to *fortissimo*. Does it 'sing'? Of course not. Ask your helper to repeat the phrase *legato* and *pianissimo*, *legato* and *fortissimo*, and with intermediate levels of intensity. Does it 'sing' now? Hardly, at the extreme levels of tone quantity; but somewhere in between we begin to feel that the much sought-after 'singing' tone is nearer at hand. Now listen to the phrase again, *legato* and *mezzo-piano*, with every note of precisely the same intensity. Again we hear that it is not satisfactory. But if the phrase is played *legato*, at any average level of tone between *piano* and *forte*, but with the tone graded from note to note (the longer notes slightly louder, the shorter more softly) and with a feeling for the melodic shape (a progression—or slight *crescendo*—towards the crotchet B, and a further slight progression, though more softly, towards the F sharp), we shall at last hear something like a singing tone. This will have been achieved by close attention to the duration and to the varying loudness, within the specified limits, of each note.

A further example:

Chopin: Valse in C sharp minor - Op. 64, No. 2



Here, according to the temperament of the player, we may employ a delicate rippling tone, or a slightly more brilliant effect—the type of touch which used to be known as *jeu perlé*. In the former case, experiment will show that a *legato* touch combined with slight variations in the relative intensity of the sounds (for example, a slight *decrescendo* from the first to the last notes of each bar) will, provided the average level of tone is not too loud, produce a rippling effect. On the other

hand, for a more brilliant tone we must play a little more loudly, considerably less *legato* (slow practising *staccato* will help in the acquisition of this touch) and with each note at approximately the same level of intensity. Which of these two types of tone he uses here depends on the personal feeling of the pianist; he may even use both in different repetitions of the passage, as, according to his recording, Paderewski did in his performance of this Valse.

It may be remarked that composers' markings of tonal levels can only be approximate. An accomplished pianist can produce far more degrees of intensity between *pianissimo* and *fortissimo* than *piano*, *mezzo-piano*, *mezzo-forte* and *forte*—but these (with their modifying *meno* and *più*) are the only terms at the composer's disposal. It is a great part of the interpreter's task to choose the exact level of *piano* or *forte* which he feels will best suit the requirements of the music he is playing, and to determine the minute inflections of that level which will reveal the shape of the phrase and its underlying emotion.

In some cases he must choose the precise duration of a *staccato*; in others, he must decide between a real *legato* and a somewhat less *legato* touch. It will have been noticed in the performance of the Chopin Valse quoted above that, when played with the necessary speed, the second type of touch does not sound *staccato*; so far as the ear can tell, the somewhat *staccato* touch merely imparts an added brilliancy to the passage. This *non-legato* touch can be used for all scales and arpeggios where a bright, sparkling tone is desired. Many characteristic eighteenth-century semiquaver passages, such as are found in nearly all the quicker movements of Mozart, need it.

In the playing of Bach we often require a slightly heavier tone, less sparkling, but with every note well articulated. In such figures as this:

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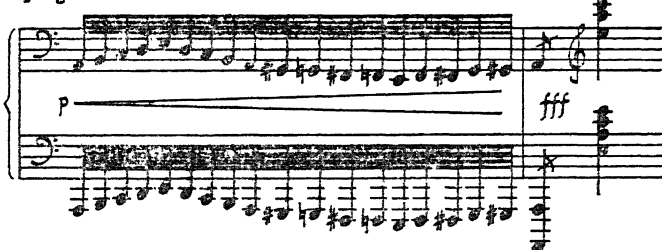
Bach: Toccata in E minor



we should use a more *legato* touch, taking care, however, to allow no more change of intensity from note to note than the rhythm demands. If we take each key down with almost the same speed and maintain *legato*, we shall avoid, on the one hand, an inappropriate *cantabile* (which, as we have seen, needs the finest tonal gradations from note to note) and, on the other, an equally inappropriate effect of brightness.

It is interesting to note that different qualities of tone belong peculiarly to different parts of the keyboard. We can only 'sparkle', for instance, in the upper register, and the higher we go the easier this tonal effect becomes. A 'singing' tone cannot be produced with notes of very high or very low pitch: this tone colour belongs to the middle four octaves or so. And a 'growling' effect, such as the following example needs, would only be possible in the lower register:

Grieg: Concerto in A minor



Here, in order to produce an appropriate 'growl', we must play with a *legato* touch and with a well graded *crescendo* over a wide range of intensity. The pedal, as we shall see in Section VI can help too.

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Sometimes it is necessary to produce two contrasting tone colours in the same hand, as in this example :

Beethoven: Sonata Op. 90

Nicht zu geschwind und sehr singbar vorzutragen



When a melody note and a note of accompaniment have to be played together, the problem is that of making the former sound with a greater amount of tone than the latter. Since we have said that tone quantity depends solely upon the speed with which the key travels downwards, it would appear that we must move (at the beginning of the first bar) the G sharp fairly quickly and the E less quickly—and yet make both keys arrive at their beds simultaneously. An impossible feat, you may say, and to attempt consciously to control such a combination of movements in the course of performance would indeed be hazardous. Fortunately this is not necessary. Our ears and our acquired muscular sensations will prove far more reliable guides to correct action in this case than will logical thought. We shall find that by feeling a sensation of greater strength in the fourth finger than in the second, by aiming more deeply into the keybed with the fourth finger, and by having, in advance, a perfect mental conception of the required sounds, we shall, after some practice, be able to obtain the effect with certainty.

In point of fact it has been experimentally shown¹ that, in such cases as this, the louder note usually sounds a few thousandths of a second before the softer. But this slight difference in timing is quite inaudible, and such investigations, though full of interest for the theorist, are of little practical help to the performer.

¹See Otto Ortmann: *The Physiological Mechanics of Piano Technique* (Kegan Paul).

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In playing chords, their harmonic flavour and therefore the tone colour of the music can be greatly influenced by the relative loudness of the component sounds. Music of a richly harmonic nature, such as that of Brahms, offers exciting possibilities in this direction. Consider the following:

Brahms: Intermezzo in A - Op. 118, No. 2

The image shows a musical score for Brahms' Intermezzo in A, Op. 118, No. 2. The score is written for piano and includes a treble clef and a bass clef. The key signature is one sharp (F#). The tempo is marked 'piu lento' and the dynamics are 'pp' (pianissimo). The score includes a 'Legato' instruction and a 'rit.' (ritardando) marking. Two chords are marked with an asterisk (*). The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and slurs.

At the chords marked * we may, perhaps, very slightly emphasise the G flat and the F in the right hand. Quite a different effect will result, however, if we apply this slight emphasis to the B flat and the A. Again, the top notes of the left hand part, the E flat and the C, may be given a slight prominence; or the upper E flat of the first chord and the lowest note played by the right hand (F) in the second. If two chords can supply such a wide range of possibilities, how richly may a whole composition be coloured in this way!

With the possible exception of some moderns who direct, in the course of their works, that 'a foot of the keyboard' is to be depressed by the forearm (!) no composer ever meant a chord to be played as a mere lump of sound, an insensitive mass of tone. The interpreter must discover which notes give the peculiar flavour to a harmony, and, in the case of a variety of possibilities, as in the case just quoted, which particular balance of tone will most adequately express the feeling of the music.

The above examples are by no means a complete list

of the ways in which treatment of the keys can influence tone colour. They are given simply to suggest the lines along which individual experiment may progress. The possibilities are endless.

From the foregoing it will be seen that all apparent variations in tone quality which our fingers, unaided by the pedals, can produce, resolve themselves into variations of tone quantity or intensity, and variations of duration. All we can do is to move the keys down at a greater or lesser speed, and, having moved them, to release them instantly or to hold them down for a longer or shorter period of time. Why, then, are differences of tone spoken of as 'sparkling', 'singing', 'growling' and so on? Would it not be simpler to describe sounds as merely louder or softer and of longer or shorter duration?

The answer to this lies in the fact that we are, happily, not machines but human beings. And one of our great attributes as human beings is imagination. Moreover, we cannot in playing, think of these questions of key-speed and duration consciously. When we have acquired the ability known as technique we shall be able to rely upon this ability to supply the means for the outward, audible realisation of our vividly imagined musical requirements. In the practice room we may derive the greatest help from logical analysis of touch, but in performance the imagination must guide us. And finally it is the quality of imagination which counts more than all else.

It used to be thought that the power to produce a beautiful tone at the piano was a gift from heaven; more recently it has been claimed that good tone-production can be learned by everyone. As far as the physical side of playing goes the second theory is right, for, as we have seen, the mechanical means by which such tone is obtained can be simply explained. But this, emphatically, is not enough. No, the sensitivity needed to perceive and order the minute adjustments of tone needed for a fine performance is not physical, and

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without this sensitivity our playing will be 'as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal'.

It is true that almost anyone can, with training, learn to perform the purely physical movements needed to play, for example, a cantabile melody; but it is the inner compulsion, the inner urge to create something beautiful, which must order these movements.

Ultimately, then, the motivating power of a beautiful touch must be looked for in realms other than the physical.

VI

PEDALLING

A FAMOUS TEACHER once remarked that pedalling is seventy-five per cent of good piano playing—a pardonable exaggeration if one remembers the number of times one has heard competent keyboard work ruined by a careless right foot. It must in fairness be admitted that the conventional signs for the depression and release of the sustaining pedal (Ped *) are often responsible for the sins of students in this respect. As well as being clumsy, these signs are often incorrectly placed.

There is only one reliable guide to correct pedalling, and that is the ear. Busoni used to say that, at his concerts, no one in the audience ever listened more carefully than he himself to every sound coming from the piano. In this remark by a very great pianist lies a lesson that none of us dares forget.

In playing, listening must be of two kinds: we must listen with the inner ear—with the imagination—to our preconceived mental image of the sounds we wish to produce, and with the physical ear we must, with supreme detachment, listen critically to the sounds we actually achieve. In some ways this is the most exacting feat demanded of a pianist. It is so difficult to listen with detachment to our own playing. It is so easy, in concentrating upon our mental conception, to let the imagination deceive the ear, and persuade us that the sounds we produce more nearly approach that mental conception than is in fact the case.

Wrong use of the sustaining pedal is rarely attributable to lack of knowledge. The action of this pedal in lifting all the dampers from the strings, thus allowing the notes played to continue to sound for as long as it is depressed, is too

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simple to cause any difficulty. But perhaps one or two illustrations may be helpful.

Chopin. Valse in A flat - Op 69, No. 1

Lento

P

Ped. Ped.

In most editions of waltzes by Chopin and other composers one finds pedal indications like this. And the uncritical student of course puts down the pedal promptly on the first beat of the bar. But if the right hand melody is played *legato*, as it should be, the damper of the D natural will not have time to return to the strings and arrest their vibration before all the dampers—including this one—are lifted by the pedal. This will produce an unpleasant clashing of D natural against D flat. In any case, is the use of the pedal really desirable during the first two beats of this bar? It will only obscure the melodic line, and, as far as the left hand is concerned, the fourth or the fifth finger is quite capable of holding down the dotted minim F without its aid, during the playing of the A flat and D flat on the second and third beats. Would it not be much better to pedal the opening bars of the Valse like this?

Lento

P

Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped.

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In any form of *legato* pedalling, whether in an example such as that given or in a series of chords (as in Chopin: Prelude in C minor, Op. 28 No. 20) the pedal should be lifted precisely as the new harmony is played, and not depressed again until the sounds forming the previous harmony have ceased; in this way a blur is avoided and *legato* achieved. In other words, as the keys go down the pedal comes up.

In pedalling *staccato* notes or chords, on the other hand, as in the following example, the keys and the pedal should go down simultaneously:

Beethoven: Sonata in G - Op. 14, No. 2

Andante

This is an instance of the use of the sustaining pedal, not to prolong sounds when the keys cannot be held down by the fingers, but as a means of influencing tone colour. When the pedal is depressed, thus raising all the dampers, all the strings of the piano are left free to vibrate in sympathy with those that are struck. In this way the tone takes on an added richness and fullness that fingers alone are incapable of giving. The use of the pedal in such a passage as this is entirely optional, and it is conceivable that one might prefer the clearer, slightly drier effect of the chords when played with no pedal whatever.

Although the pedal may be used in many cases, as in the following, without causing a clashing of harmonies, it by no means follows that its use is aesthetically justified:

PEDALLING

Haydn: Sonata in D

Allegro con brio

Music of this period needs to be played with especial clarity, and the pedalling indicated, if used on a modern piano, will produce an effect of sonority appropriate, perhaps, in a passage of similar construction by Chopin or Liszt, but quite wrong for Haydn. This is much better :

To know when not to use the pedal is sometimes of even more importance than to know when one might use it.

In music of the nineteenth century and later, the pedal really comes into its own. A performance of the following example would be impossible without its use :

Chopin: Nocturne in C minor - Op. 48

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Here the minim chord (*forte*) has to be sustained solely by means of the pedal, whilst the semiquaver octaves are played with a much softer tone. The result is a blur, unthinkable in connection with earlier music, which here gives an effect of sonority. The pedal is raised with the playing of the following chord, so that the discord is immediately resolved.

So much was the use of the pedal taken for granted by Chopin and his successors that some sounds, obviously meant to be prolonged, are often written in note-values not greater than, say, a crotchet. In the following example, for instance, the initial chord must be sustained by means of the pedal throughout the ensuing arpeggios:

Chopin. Scherzo in C sharp minor - Op. 39

The musical score is for Chopin's Scherzo in C sharp minor, Op. 39. It is written for piano in 3/4 time. The first measure features a forte (f) chord in the right hand and a semiquaver octave in the left hand. The second measure begins with a piano (p) dynamic and 'pizzicissimo' marking, with the left hand playing an arpeggio. A dashed line with the number 8 above it indicates the duration of the pedal. A 'Ped.' symbol is placed below the first measure.

The resistance of the pedal and the amount of its up and down movement vary considerably on different instruments. Students, when playing on an unfamiliar instrument, do not always take these possible differences into account. They often apply just that amount of pressure which they are accustomed to use on their own pianos, with the result that in the case of the sustaining pedal, the dampers may not be adequately lifted. The only way to combat such a tendency is to cultivate the habit of taking the pedal down always as far as it will go, until the foot can push it no further. In releasing the pedal care must be taken that it is allowed to rise completely, otherwise we can never be sure that the dampers will return to the strings in order to cut off unwanted sounds.

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Occasionally, as in the following example where a low note has to be sustained during changing harmonies at a higher pitch, the device known as 'half-pedalling' should be used:

Debussy: *La Cathédrale Engloutie*
Sonore sans dureté

ff

8° basse

Half-pedalling does not, as the term might seem to imply, mean taking the pedal half way down; it means that the pedal, having been depressed (in this case immediately after the low C), is allowed to rise about three-quarters of the way as each chord is played, and is very quickly depressed again. (Obviously we need not release the pedal at all until the third minim of the bar, yet it is surprising how many students quite irrationally allow it to rise with the second minim.) By means of this use of the pedal an undue blurring of the upper chords is avoided, while the low C continues to sound. This device is only available when sounds of a particularly low pitch have to be sustained against harmonies moving above them. The bass strings of the piano are longer and thicker than the higher ones, and vibrate more slowly; therefore they need a stronger application of the dampers to arrest their vibrations than do the shorter strings of a higher register. A very light touch of the dampers will cut off the higher sounds, while allowing the low-pitched strings to go on sounding.

In music written for the piano at an earlier stage of its development, we sometimes find pedal indications which are known to be authentic but which seem strange in view of our experience of playing a modern piano. Such an example

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occurs at the beginning of the slow movement of Beethoven's Piano Concerto in C minor, Op. 37:

Beethoven: Piano Concerto in C minor - Op. 37

However great our reverence for Beethoven—and this pedal marking is known to have been given by him—we cannot obey such an indication literally today. The instruments of Beethoven's time had much less sustaining power than ours, and to keep the pedal down as indicated when playing this passage on a modern piano would be to produce a most unpleasant muddle of sounds. The solution in such a case is to change the pedal very quickly with the changing harmonies, so that the veiled effect which is obviously required will be preserved. Similar pedal indications can be found in the last movement of the Waldstein Sonata, Op. 53.

Sometimes the pedal may be used during rapid scale passages. We have already quoted (page 35) from Grieg's Piano Concerto in A minor, where a 'growling' effect is needed. The pedal, used as indicated, will help to produce this. Similar pedalling is required in Liszt's Hungarian Rhapsody No. 15:

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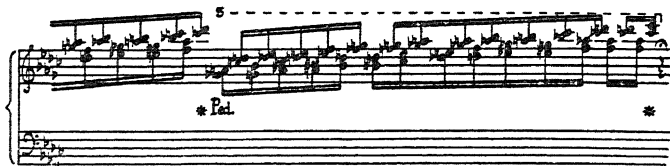
Liszt: Hungarian Rhapsody No. 15

The first system of the score shows a piano part with a treble and bass clef. The right hand has a melodic line with slurs and accents, marked with a piano dynamic 'p' and the instruction 'sotto voce'. The left hand has a rhythmic accompaniment. Below the staff, there are four 'Ped.' markings with lines extending to the right, indicating sustained pedal use. The second system shows a similar texture, with a 'p' dynamic marking and a '6' indicating a sixteenth-note figure in the left hand. Pedal markings are present at the beginning and end of the system.

Liszt was one of the first composers to use the 'impressionistic' effects which we associate particularly with Debussy and Ravel. Many passages in his works call for this somewhat exceptional use of the pedal. Consider the following:

Chopin-Liszt: Mosa Pieszczotha

The first system of the score is marked with a 'p' dynamic and a 'Ped.' marking. The right hand features a complex, rhythmic melody with many slurs and accents. The second system continues this texture, with a '*' Ped. marking indicating a specific pedal technique. The notation is dense and characteristic of Liszt's style.



Here the prescribed pedalling, provided the passage is played sufficiently *piano*, is quite possible on a modern instrument; it will give a magical, veiled quality quite unlike that produced by a clearly articulated, Czerny-like execution.

Enough has been said to show the necessity for extreme sensitivity in the use of the sustaining pedal—sensitivity, that is, in the exact timing of its descent and release.

Although pedalling can and must be worked out in a general way during practising, it should never become automatic; we must, at every performance, listen afresh to the sounds we produce and to the way in which we influence them by means of the pedal. Our pedalling must, in fact, be capable of some modification according to the response of different instruments and the acoustic properties of different rooms or concert halls. From the point of view of an experienced performer the 'instrument' upon which he plays comprises, in addition to the piano itself, the room or hall in which it is placed. In a very resonant hall, for instance, with a good deal of echo, comparatively little use must be made of the pedal if clear definition is to be obtained. In a 'dead' hall (one with little or no resonance) a more lavish use of the pedal will be necessary. Only by experience, and by renewed listening on the occasion of each performance, can we deal satisfactorily with such problems.

And now for a few words on the use of the soft pedal. In the horizontal or grand piano all the hammers, together with the entire keyboard, are moved slightly to the right when the soft pedal is depressed. In this position the hammers strike two strings instead of the three which are tuned to each note in the case of the middle and upper registers, and one string

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instead of two in the case of notes of lower pitch. The string which is not struck is left free to vibrate sympathetically, and the hammer now touches the other strings with the less used, and therefore softer, part of its felt covering. These two factors result in a remarkable change of tone-quality.

In an upright piano the action of the soft pedal is less satisfactory. Usually, the hammers are moved a little nearer to the strings. This gives a softer tone because the hammers now strike the strings with less momentum; but the actual quality of the sound is unchanged. In older upright pianos, one sometimes finds that the depression of the soft pedal causes a strip of felt to be inserted between the hammers and the strings. Certainly a very drastic change of tone-quality results, but the muffled sound is capable of scarcely any gradation.

In a grand piano the soft pedal mechanism opens up fascinating possibilities of tonal variation. So much, though, depends upon the tone-quality of individual instruments that it is impossible to give any but the most general suggestions for its use. In *pianissimo* passages of music written since the beginning of the nineteenth century—say from the time of the middle-period sonatas of Beethoven onwards—the soft pedal may often be used with good effect. Its use is usually inappropriate in eighteenth and pre-eighteenth century music, where a bright quality of tone is needed even in softer passages; but here, as in most cases, the discretion of the performer and the tone quality of the actual instrument being played are the deciding factors.

When playing on an instrument with a particularly hard or bright tone, the soft pedal may sometimes be used with advantage in the playing of cantabile melodies, even if these need so loud a tone as *mezzo-forte*. If the resulting tone quality is satisfactory—or more satisfactory than it would be without the soft pedal—then the use of this pedal is justified.

Let us repeat that our object in playing the piano is to make music. All the resources of this splendid instrument, the

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modern grand piano, are at our disposal and for our use in accomplishing this object. The only requirements and the only justification for their use are that the result—the sounds that we produce—shall be aesthetically satisfying and artistically appropriate to the music we seek to interpret.

VII

PRACTISING

'PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT' would seem to be an inspiring motto for the pianist. But after years of so-called practice the student finds, more often than not, that perfection still seems as far away as ever. Why is this?

A good deal of what passes for 'practice' does not achieve anything like perfection—does not, in fact, even lead in that direction but in precisely the opposite one. 'The more I practise the worse I play' is a remark which sounds ominously familiar to anyone who has taught students in the more advanced stages of piano playing. What has so often happened to bring about this unhappy state of affairs is that physical effort has been substituted for mental effort.

Consider the procedure adopted by the majority of students who have not been shown the best way of setting about their work.

Usually the composition which is to be learned is read through at the keyboard—played at sight 'to see how it goes'. Almost inevitably some wrong notes occur, and the fingering employed is bound to be haphazard. Then, perhaps, the more complicated passages are repeated, probably with various fingerings, until a degree of comfort in their execution is reached. There may be some slow practising, but as soon as the fingers can run a little faster this is abandoned. And nearly always there is the desire to 'make the piece go'—to bring about a condition in which the fingers, with as little help from the mind as possible, can play the right notes at the right speed and so produce a general impression of the music—usually an impression approximating to 'what it sounds like when So-and-so plays it'. The desire to make one's playing of a piece sound, as soon as possible, 'finished', is often responsible for the scamping or even the omission of those

steps by which may be built up something that is—not merely sounds something like—a real performance.

It is a truism to say that the fingers, hands and arms are servants of the mind. It is only by the exercise of our mental powers that we can direct those movements which will result in the production of the sounds we want to hear. In learning anything at all it is the mind which must be used; even at the later stage, when we can perform the pieces we have learned, the mind must be in supreme command. The act of learning consists of the acquisition of knowledge, the forming of sequences of thought or of mental patterns. It involves the act of remembering; there can be no learning without remembering—without, in fact, memorising. This statement holds good whether we wish ultimately to play ‘from memory’ or with the book before us. It is true even in the apparently physical process of learning the movements of technique, for only by remembering—by memorising—the sensations associated with any movement are we able to reproduce that movement. And, be it noted, if we have memorised, have established a clear mental image of such associated sensations, we can—provided the body is in good condition and not hampered by excessive cold, poor circulation, fatigue and so on—reproduce the movement at will. Movements learned in this way will be under our control. Then we shall have technique—the ability to produce, by means of physical movements, the exact sounds we require.

When we are learning a new movement or are applying our existing technique to unfamiliar passages (as in the learning of a new piece), our actions must be made as deliberately and consciously as possible. With repetition, movements tend to become automatic, to need less conscious thought for their direction, until, after a prolonged period of repetition, they may, if we allow it, seem almost to ‘perform themselves’ without conscious thought. This automatic performance of the movements of technique would seem to be the aim and ideal of most piano students. but here we come face to face with

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the greatest danger of all. How can we play convincingly unless, at the very moment of performance, we mean, consciously and purposefully, the precise tone, time and duration of every note or group of notes that we play?

We must never allow the movements of technique to become wholly automatic; if they pass too far beyond the realm of consciousness we can no longer control them, and the resulting sounds can have no real musical meaning or conviction. On the other hand, without a certain degree of automatic behaviour our playing will never become fluent. Automatic behaviour, up to a point, will result from the repetitions which must be made in practising; it is a natural process which we could not, even if we would, prevent. It will therefore be seen how vitally important it is that, in practising, repetitions of movements should be made with the greatest possible accuracy. If we carelessly repeat incorrect movements, these incorrect movements themselves will tend to become automatic, and in doing so will make it more and more difficult for us to perform the correct movements. This kind of misguided 'practising' is not merely a waste of time; it is definitely harmful, and can only lead the student further and further away from his goal.

Repeated movements will not become too automatic if we endeavour to remain constantly aware of them. For this reason, especially in the study of quick passages, we must return again and again to slow, deliberate, thoughtful practising; only thus can we keep movements under our immediate control. So once again we come back to the point which we have made repeatedly: in playing the piano, whether in practising or in performance, no physical movement is of value without a conscious directing thought.

Our first impressions of anything to be learned are so lasting that it is the most elementary common sense to make these first impressions as nearly perfect as possible. In beginning the study of a composition, therefore, the method of playing it through at sight in order to obtain a general

impression of the music is not recommended. But of course we do want to know 'how it goes'. The best way to survey the piece as a whole is by silent reading away from the keyboard.

All who aspire to the name of musician should find this quite easy in the case of all but the most complicated works—and in dealing with these (the last movement of Beethoven's Sonata Op. 106, for example) a run through at the keyboard is not likely to make matters much clearer. If, however, one finds it impossible to obtain an adequate idea of the music by silent reading, or if the temptation to play it at sight proves quite irresistible, several days should be allowed to elapse between such sight-reading and the beginning of serious study of the piece at the keyboard. By then the impressions made by any errors, such as wrong notes, incorrect rhythm, poor fingering and so on, will have faded somewhat from the mind. In any case, after we have made a general survey of the music there will be much to do before we are ready for any serious work at the keyboard.

Our first task must be to work out the fingering in the utmost detail. With experience, this can be done principally away from the piano. If it is necessary to compare possible alternative fingerings at the keyboard the passage under consideration should be played very lightly and with a very relaxed hand, in order to avoid making any very deep impression on the mind; all that need be done, very often, is to place the fingers on the surface of the keys without depressing them. In any case, we should resort to the keyboard only after having decided upon such alternatives. On no account must we 'have a shot' at playing the passage in order to see which fingers we happen to use. If desired, the entire composition can be fingered before any keyboard work is begun; the writing of the fingering above every note and chord is most earnestly advocated.

In starting work at the piano we should keep in mind two invaluable pieces of advice: Liszt said, 'Think ten times for

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every once that you play;' and Schumann, 'Slow practice is golden.'

We must *think* each passage, if necessary ten—or a hundred—times, before we attempt to play it, in order that our mental picture of the passage and of the means of its execution may be quite clear. Then we must play it slowly—far more slowly than most students ever think necessary—so that we may, while playing, consciously direct and control every movement.

Only small sections of the music should be taken at a time, the length of such sections varying with the complexity of the music and the capacity of the student. In the case of a work of some difficulty, sections of a bar or even half a bar may be chosen; in simpler music, perhaps four or eight bars—never more. The important thing is not to attempt too much. Absolute accuracy must be our aim, and half a bar learned well is better than a whole piece learned carelessly. If the difficulty of the piece makes it advisable, the hands may learn their parts separately; but they should play together as soon as this can be done with control and accuracy.

Let us suppose that we have played our small section once with absolute accuracy. Much will now have been accomplished. Next, this achievement must be consolidated; to do this, we must simply repeat four, five or six times what we have already done. If the thought has been sufficiently clear and detailed, it should be possible, after a few repetitions, to play the section from memory. With practice and experience it will be found possible to memorise each section simply by silently reading, analysing and thinking about it. When this can be done, all the repetitions of the section may be made without looking at the copy.

Having thus practised the first section we can go on, taking the next few notes or bars and learning them in exactly the same way; and so on, throughout the piece. It will be noticed that the repetitions are not made in order to improve our playing of the passage. Our first performance should be

accurate in every detail, and we must repeat it merely in order to establish it more firmly in our minds. One series of repetitions will rarely suffice to teach us the passage for ever. We shall probably find it necessary to go over the same ground several times, preferably on successive days, before we feel quite certain of it. And on each day we must remember not to omit the most important part of all—the thought before, and during, our playing.

In these early stages of learning a piece of music it is best to keep the small sections separate from each other. As these sections become more firmly fixed in the mind they should be combined to form longer sections. Eventually the whole piece can be played right through at a very slow speed, with complete accuracy, and possibly from memory. There must still be great mental concentration and conscious control of the physical movements. The time needed before this can be done will vary considerably with the length and difficulty of the composition in relation to the ability of the student and the frequency of the practising periods. Plenty of time should be allowed, for this stage of learning must never be hurried. On paper, this method may seem arduous; but if it is faithfully followed, reliable results will be achieved in a surprisingly short time.

After this, our task becomes easier. With continued repetitions the speed can be increased, and, in the process of quickening the tempo, the mental control of the physical movements will become somewhat less conscious. Instead of thinking so closely of the actual physical actions—though even in our most intense preoccupation with these we must not have neglected to listen, both inwardly and outwardly—we must now think more and more of the sounds we wish to produce. The preparatory work which we have done will largely take care of the right notes. Now is the time to give ourselves up to the mood of the music, the flow of the rhythm, the curve of the phrases with their points of climax and repose, and the shape of the piece as a whole. In this way our

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mental activity will gradually become transferred from technique to interpretation.

In the first stages of learning the composition, accuracy of notes was our primary objective. Our approach now will be rather different. We must allow ourselves to respond emotionally, to enjoy the music, for now that we have overcome most of the mechanical difficulties of playing it, we are in a position to do so. We must allow ourselves to play with greater ease and fluency. At this stage a wrong note or two are of little moment; if our first impressions have been correct and have been strengthened by thought and repetition, no lasting harm will ensue.

At first we shall respond to the music in a general way, but our further progress should be synonymous with the gradual growth of a more and more detailed awareness of the 'how' and the 'when' of every note; of the precise value, tonally and rhythmically, of every note in relation to its fellows, and in relation to the general scheme of the music. With the development of this detailed awareness, any occasional wrong note we may have played will be corrected.

In most pieces there will be found passages which seem more difficult than the rest and which require more purely technical practice. Such passages may tend to get 'out of hand' to some extent, however well we know the piece. In such cases the only solution lies in repeated thought, analysis and controlled slow practising. Indeed, this kind of work will be needed from time to time for any composition which is to be kept in one's repertoire, but it need never be dull; for increased familiarity with worth-while music always, given good, thoughtful practising, brings to light previously unnoticed details and with them a sense of increased power and achievement.

Although technique should be developed as far as possible through the study of real music, it is necessary to practise exercises designed solely for the overcoming of certain difficulties such as the playing of scales, arpeggios, trills,

octaves and so on. The days when pianists had no alternative but to obey Czerny's directions for the practice of his exercises ('Repeat each section twenty times') in the hope that at the end of so many repetitions they might, with luck, come a little nearer to the acquisition of a certain knack, are happily past. Today, an increased knowledge of mechanics, physiology and psychology has made possible a more rational approach to the problems of piano playing.

It has already been shown that the learning of physical movements is fundamentally a mental process, and even the practice of technical exercises should never be undertaken without a clear mental picture of the actions to be performed. Knowledge, concentration, and constant analysis of the physical sensations which accompany the various movements and muscular conditions of the parts of the body used in playing, are essential; and technique built up in this way will possess a permanency and reliability unobtainable by other methods.

In order to develop the muscles and stretch the fingers to fit them for the often strenuous work of piano playing, exercises away from the instrument are invaluable. The need for such exercises varies with individuals, those whose physical endowment is frail needing them more than those with a robust physique. But all who wish to play well will benefit from a little time spent regularly in this way. Free swinging movements of the arms are good to begin with, and can be practised by anyone; but the more specialised exercises should only be performed under expert guidance and supervision, otherwise an excess of zeal might prove permanently harmful, as in the case of Robert Schumann.

In concluding this Section let us, in the light of the foregoing, amend the motto with which we began: knowledge, concentration, patience and perseverance, combined with the right sort of practice, will make perfect—or as nearly perfect as human fallibility will allow.

VIII

SOME HINTS ON INTERPRETATION

MUSIC HAS BEEN called the language of the emotions. Like all other languages, it must be used in a disciplined and intelligent way if it is to convey any meaning. An uncontrolled display of emotion is like an incoherent welter of words; it can bring no enjoyment to others, and it will be powerless to move them except, perhaps, to feelings of pity or distaste. In the creation of a musical work emotion must be distilled and clothed in sounds and rhythms. Then, through the sensitivity and skill of an interpreter, music can speak, in the words of Haydn, 'from the heart to the heart'.

We may define the verb 'to interpret' as 'to make intelligible'. When interpreting music, it is not enough merely to allow the feelings which the music evokes to well up within ourselves, however pleasurable this may be. Our task is to play in such a manner that these feelings may be conveyed to our listeners; and we must not forget the obvious fact that sounds arranged in varying patterns and rhythms are our only means of expression. It is only too easy to play 'with feeling', in the fond imagination that our feelings will transmit themselves somehow, telepathically perhaps, to others.

The time for our most wholehearted abandonment to the emotions of the music we wish to play is during the period of study. It is then, when we have largely mastered any physical difficulties which the performance of the music may present, that we must respond most acutely to its emotional impact, and having so responded, we must ask ourselves how we can, by our playing, enable others to experience a similar response. In performing to others, it is 'emotion recollected in tranquillity' that counts. Not, indeed, necessarily in outwardly apparent tranquillity—some music calls, at least physically, for anything but that; but in an inward

tranquillity or serenity which enables us calmly and deliberately to sound the notes as we, at that very moment, desire. For the 'how' and the 'when' of each note must be controlled if the sounds are to be intelligible and eloquent, however impassioned the music may be.

In this state of tranquillity or serenity we must, of course, recollect, and to some extent re-live, the emotion, though the degree to which this is done varies enormously with different performers. It was said, for instance, of Sarah Bernhardt, that even when moving her audiences to tears she felt almost nothing herself; and a similar observation was made of Liszt by his pupil, Amy Fay. The important point is that 'in action' we must not be wholly given up to our feelings. Kathleen Arnold, one of our finest teachers, has remarked that, in playing, the heart must feel but the head must be cool. The heart of the veriest tyro can seethe with emotion, but it is the cool head of the experienced artist that will move audiences.

No two performances of the same music by the same performer will be exactly alike in every detail; if they were, they would be 'reproductions' instead of 'originals', to use a pictorial expression. (This may partly explain the comparatively 'flat' sensation of listening to a familiar gramophone record; after the first hearing, a reproduction can never again give that subtle sense of the unexpected which is always present in a 'live' performance.) We must naturally have decided, during our study period, upon the way in which we mean to play; we must have chosen those minute inflections of tone and time which, almost in spite of ourselves, will make the interpretation our own. But at the moment of performance we must mean every note afresh; the tiny, almost imperceptible variations which will occur—because we are human beings, not automata—will impart to our playing an air of conviction and spontaneity.

Perhaps, in deciding upon interpretation, our first consideration will relate to tempo. Almost every pianist who has made a gramophone record, and has afterwards listened critically to

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the reproduction, will have noticed a curious fact: in rapid passages the notes seem to follow each other more quickly than they appeared to do when he was playing. Various explanations of this phenomenon have been put forward, all of them, so far as is known, hypothetical; but, from such an experience, we may take it as axiomatic that a listener hears music at a slightly faster tempo than does the performer. In a large concert hall this phenomenon constitutes a real problem, which becomes even more urgent if the hall is particularly resonant. In such conditions the sounds need more time to 'get across' satisfactorily; it is therefore necessary to play more spaciouly than in a smaller room—in other and simpler words, more slowly.

From this it will be seen that one can make no absolute and final decision with regard to tempo, but it is nevertheless the interpreter's task to discover what seems to him to be the basically correct speed for the composition he wishes to play. When we are familiar with the music, the right tempo will seem to suggest itself, though the 'right' tempo may be by no means identical in the case of different performers. Nor can we look to the composer for any very precise help in this direction. Metronome marks, when given by living composers, have often been found to differ widely from the speed which the composers themselves approve in performance, and one can hardly assume that earlier writers were any more accurate in this matter. To add to the difficulty, there are countless works of Bach with no authoritative tempo indications whatever; and there is the case of Schumann, whose metronome is known to have been out of order.

In deciding this important matter of tempo, then, the intuition and musicianship of each performer must be the final arbiters—always assuming that the performer in question is sufficiently endowed with these qualities; and the tempo which is chosen should be varied very slightly according to varying conditions of performance. One good rule regarding the tempo of quick passages is—never feel in a hurry. A good

performer always gives the impression of having time to spare even in a *prestissimo*; a rapid passage played with controlled rhythm and clear articulation will always sound more convincing, more brilliant and exciting (should these qualities be needed) than if it is scrambled through at a speed too fast for the comfort of the player.

As in speech we lay emphasis on certain words in a sentence, so in music some notes call for more stress than others. The interpreter must discover which notes give special character or shape to a phrase, which give special impetus to rhythm, and which the flavour to a chord. It is necessary, too, to decide upon the relative importance of unemphasised notes. There is no easy formula by which such points can be settled. Only knowledge of musical structure, musicianship and artistry can help us here. One of the greatest aids to the development of these last is to listen to fine music finely performed. Not that such listening should be undertaken with a view to copying the interpretations of others—far from it; a copy will always remain only a copy. But by partaking of real artistic experiences the listener's vision may be enlarged and his reactions to the stimulus of music intensified. Such experiences should not be confined to music. Acquaintance with and enjoyment of the other arts will bring a heightened sensibility. The firm, eloquent line of a painting by Botticelli may help us more fully to appreciate similar qualities in the melody of a Chopin Nocturne or of Liszt's *Sonetti del Petrarca*; a piece of sculpture by Epstein may reveal to us more of the ruggedness and massiveness of Beethoven.

When, in a phrase of music, one note seems to us to be of greater importance than the rest, we may choose one of a variety of ways in which to give it prominence, always remembering that it is never one note in itself which is important. (It is amusing to recall the story of the lady who said she would rather hear one note by Beethoven than whole symphonies by any other composer!) Music consists of sounds in relation to each other, and it is the position of a

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note in relation to the other sounds which gives it any importance it may have. This relationship will indicate the kind of emphasis which is appropriate.

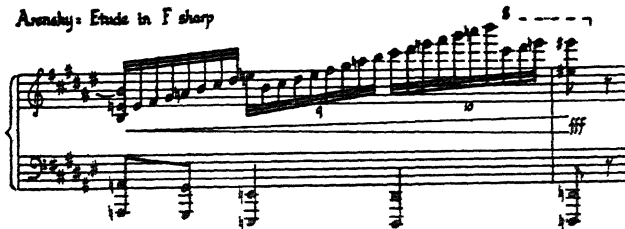
The most obvious way to stress a note is to play it more loudly than the others, but this is by no means the only way. Beethoven often indicates a *subito piano* at a point of climax, as if to draw attention to a note by introducing the element of surprise:

Beethoven: Sonata in C sharp minor - Op. 27, No. 2



Another way of drawing the attention of our hearers to an important note is by very slightly holding back the rhythm before playing it—a device which can be used with good effect provided that it is not allowed to degenerate into a mannerism. The climax in the following example will be greatly heightened if a tiny break in the rhythm is made immediately before the final octaves (left hand, D natural; right hand, E sharp):

Arensky: Etude in F sharp



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In the following example, the C sharp at the beginning of the second complete bar calls for emphasis, but anything in the nature of an accent would destroy the prevailing mood of the music:

Chopin: Nocturne in F sharp - Op. 15, No. 2

Larghetto

p sostenuto

If an almost infinitesimal *ritenuto* is made during the playing of the two preceding notes, exactly the right feeling of stress will be given.

Here we encounter the problem of *tempo rubato*, which may be defined as a slight departure from the strict, metronomic rhythm. Theories which attempt to analyse examples of *rubato* mathematically fall down again and again when tested by the playing of great pianists. The fact must be faced that here again no rule of thumb can guide us. If the music itself does not seem to tell us when and how to apply this slight rhythmic freedom, nothing else will, though a teacher who is an artist can suggest, largely by demonstration, means by which a pupil may himself become more susceptible to the exquisite possibilities lying 'between the lines'. But one serious warning: never make the idea of *tempo rubato* an excuse for slackness of rhythmical attention. 'Learn to keep time before you bend it,' said Chopin. Before any *rubato* is attempted at all, the music in question must be learned with the strictest regard for the exact rhythm. With this fundamental rhythm as

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a constant background, *rubato* can be applied artistically; without it only rhythmic chaos will result.

Before leaving these necessarily brief hints on interpretation, let us glance at the words *crescendo*, *diminuendo*, *rallentando*, *accelerando* and their synonyms. Each of these words signifies a gradual, not a sudden, change of dynamics or of tempo. Care must be taken that such changes are graded accordingly.

Above all, we must observe all that the composer tells us. Only after considering carefully all the composer's directions may we venture to assume any individual freedom. This freedom must be informed by an artistic conscience and, particularly in the case of earlier composers, by historical perspective.

Music written before the eighteenth century sets interesting problems for the pianist. It is beyond the scope of this book to discuss in any detail early keyboard instruments, but we may recall that the harpsichord (and its variants, the spinet and the virginals) and the clavichord produced tone qualities quite different from those of the modern piano. The question is: shall we, in playing this music, attempt to imitate the tone colours of these instruments, or not?

The keyboard music of the Elizabethans, written for the virginals, ranges from very simple pieces to those of great complexity. In the small pieces—for example *Pawles Wharfe* by Giles Farnaby, *Pavane: The Earle of Salisbury* by Byrd—the delicacy of the writing will be destroyed by any sort of 'pianistic' approach. The dynamic range should be kept within severe limits and a *non-legato* touch should be extensively used, so that we may faintly convey an impression of the thinner tone of the early instrument, with its lack of sustaining power. The pedal should be used very sparingly. But the music of any great composer is at times prophetic, and a piece like *The Bells* by John Bull, although written for the virginals, can use, and transform into glorious sound, the resources of the modern piano.

The music of the *clavecinistes*—Couperin, Rameau, Lully

and the rest—is distinguished by its extremely ornamental style. Here the pianist is at a disadvantage because the profusion of ornament, which owed its existence to the particular tone quality of the instruments of the period, sounds unconvincing on the piano. Good editions of this music can now be obtained and should be consulted with care; then the pianist can decide how much of the ornamentation may be retained. The type of piano technique used should approximate to that recommended for the smaller pieces of the Elizabethan period.

It is sometimes difficult to know the exact instrument for which certain compositions were written. Controversy still rages over the question of whether, for instance, the Preludes and Fugues of the '48' were written for the clavichord or the harpsichord. But Bach himself seems to have cared very little about the precise instruments on which his music was played, for he constantly transcribed both his own music and that of other composers for various instruments. One cannot escape the conviction that music as robust in architecture as Bach's is comparatively independent of the medium of its performance; this is a complete vindication of the nineteenth-century custom of transcribing his organ works for the piano.

In playing Bach's original works we should perhaps strive to present the spirit of the music rather than to achieve a tone something like that of his instruments. Such dynamic indications as Bach has given—if they can be distinguished from those of his numerous editors—must naturally be observed. We should also consider the limitations of Bach's instruments—their inability to give big *crescendi* or *diminuendi*, for instance—and grade the dynamics of our performance accordingly.

We must remember that the interpretation of certain tempo indications has changed somewhat since the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. An *allegro* by Mozart should be slower than one by Chopin; an *andante* by Haydn is a little quicker

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than one by Brahms; a minuet by Bach is less quick than one by Beethoven; and so on.

With such knowledge, combined with innate and developed musicianship, and with, above all, a burning desire to share the delights of music with others (or at least to realise them ever more fully for ourselves), we can undertake with confidence this fascinating pursuit of interpretation.

IX

PERFORMANCE

ALTHOUGH A LARGE proportion of a pianist's life may be spent in practising and playing in solitude, it is in performing to others—whether to a large audience in a concert hall or to a friend at home—that his greatest satisfaction is found. Even those, who, before performing, experience 'nerves' to such an extent that they vow they will never again submit to such a (supposed) ordeal, feel afterwards such a glow of pleasure and, if they have played well, such pride of achievement that they can hardly wait for the next time. And if, perhaps, they have not played so well, their greatest desire is usually to try again. So strong, in those whose enthusiasm for piano playing has brought them thus far, is the urge to artistic self-expression.

For, in fulfilling our duty to the composer and transmitting his message, we also inevitably express ourselves. Only by assimilating the music and the emotions which it expresses to the extent of making them our own can we hope to perform adequately. 'Make everything a grand improvisation', said Richter. Indeed, a great artist often does create the illusion that he is improvising, so closely has he allied himself with the feelings of the composer. Reacting, as we must needs do, through the medium of our own character to the feelings which the composer has embodied in his music, we share with him the joys of creation; but whereas the composer creates in solitude, the executant re-creates directly for his hearers, and re-creates anew for every performance.

The secret of a successful performance lies largely in the method of learning and practising, and this has already been considered in some detail. But unreasoning—and unreasonable—fears often assail the pianist before his performance, in spite of the most conscientious work. This unfortunate state

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of affairs can have many origins, some perhaps too deep for conscious fathoming. Man, though, is a reasoning being; and by taking thought we may be able to banish inhibiting 'nerves', or at least reduce their effect. Let us therefore use reason in looking at the problem.

Surely the performance of music which we love and enjoy—the sharing of our pleasure in music with others—should be a happy thing, and an opportunity to which we should look forward with eagerness. Unfortunately, performance is not always viewed in this light. More often it is looked upon as a test of the performer's powers. It is ourselves that we seem to be exhibiting to the gaze of our audience, ourselves upon whom judgment will be passed and ourselves who will be condemned if we should fail to perform a series of more or less acrobatic feats with something approaching perfection. If we allow ourselves to entertain such thoughts as these—and we may, upon self-examination, find them somewhere in our minds although we may be unwilling to acknowledge it openly—then we deserve to feel nervous. It is an immature conception of the situation, and one in which the constituent elements are out of focus. Performance is a responsibility, of course. But we should joyfully and gratefully acknowledge the powers with which, as human beings, we are inherently endowed, and by means of which we may confidently assume this responsibility.

We must try to see the situation in perspective. What we have to convey to our listeners is the spirit of the music, and in order to do this we have to depress certain keys of the piano in certain ways at certain speeds. The physical movements have, as a result of careful practising, been mastered, and we shall have proved to ourselves dozens of times in the practising room that physically the music presents no obstacle. (If, in the case of any piece, we still feel physically insecure, that piece is either too difficult for us at present or we have not practised it carefully enough or over a long enough period of time: in either case we are not yet ready to perform it to

others.) Having achieved a certain ease in the performance of the physical movements, we must not allow ourselves to worry about them.

What we must do now is to want to hear the music. We must want the rhythm, want the shape of each phrase, want the progression of the music to the climaxes and the points of repose. Above all, we must want to enjoy the music—and our own enjoyment of the music in performance is the best way of ensuring the enjoyment of our audience. If we do this, and if our enjoyment of and absorption in the music are sufficient, our thinking with regard to the actual physical movements of technique will be in the right perspective in relation to the whole of our performance. We shall not be in the least tempted to worry about technique, nor shall we think of the physical movements as important in themselves, but only as a natural and easy way of producing the sounds—of conveying the message—of talking to our listeners, in fact. Think about this idea of talking to the audience; it can be of direct help in every performance.

In speech, if we are intent upon relating an incident to a friend, we articulate clearly and talk at a reasonable speed in order to enable our friend to hear and follow us easily. Exactly the same principles hold good in the performance of music. In these days of widespread pianistic competence, no one is greatly impressed by a meaningless stream of sounds played at top speed; but the artist who makes the shape and the meaning of the music clear to his audience will always be welcome.

If the pianist is to perform without the copy, the fear of a lapse of memory may be a potent cause of anxiety. But assuming that the work has been well learned and a complete mental picture built up, the only factor which is likely to cause a breakdown is the fear itself. The negative, destructive emotion of fear can best be eliminated by dwelling on the positive virtues of confidence and enjoyment. 'Perfect love casteth out fear.' Love—or enjoyment—of the music, and

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love—or a feeling of goodwill and friendliness—towards our listeners, together with the knowledge that we have well and truly learned our task, will do much to ensure a feeling of confidence and poise.

But there is another kind of nervousness which is experienced by nearly all artists. Far from having the incapacitating effect of the pernicious 'nerves' which we have already discussed, this welcome, indeed indispensable nervousness heightens the sensibilities and stimulates us, so that our performance may possibly surpass anything we may normally achieve during our practising time. This nervous tension takes the form of a feeling of excitement and pleasurable anticipation, and if it makes the heart beat more rapidly and takes away the appetite, these are small prices to pay for the privilege of interpreting music. Should the appetite be impaired one should not force oneself to eat shortly before a performance, and in any case heavy, indigestible meals are even less desirable on the day of a concert than at other times. The keying-up process may tend to tense the muscles, and it is good to counteract this tendency by relaxing consciously. Relaxation will also help us to keep calm—and this is essential.

Immediately before playing, it is inadvisable to try to think in any detailed way about the music, but during the preceding few days a good deal of mental rehearsing should be done. Much work at the piano is not advised. At this point inexperienced pianists often tend to run through their pieces at the keyboard over and over again, just to see if they will 'come off'. To do this is to adopt an attitude towards performance quite opposite to that which purposeful music-making requires. It is better to go through the music in the mind only, hearing it, seeing it, both in its printed aspect and in its layout on the keyboard, and vividly imagining the physical sensations which its performance will entail. This should be done in the utmost detail. It is also helpful to imagine oneself in the surroundings in which one will play. One should see

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in imagination, and fully accept, the hall, the audience, the microphone, as the case may be; and at the same time one should try to induce, or at least to imagine, feelings of confidence, enjoyment, elation.

When at last the great moment arrives, the performer should walk, unhurried and serene, to the piano, feeling completely prepared and happy. Taking his place before the keyboard he should relax his arms, brace the muscles of his back, and, the moment before he begins, feel the rhythm of the opening bars. All that now remains is to trust himself to a generous providence, invoke the spirit of music—and play.

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