1998

Czerny, Leschetizky, Vengerova : a genealogical study of piano pedagogy technique

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31979/etd.qfup-ac54>
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**CZERNY, LESCHETIZKY, VENGEROVA:
A GENEALOGICAL STUDY OF PIANO
PEDAGOGY TECHNIQUE**

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the School of Music

San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Darrell G. Leffler

August 1998

UMI Number: 1391527

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ABSTRACT

CZERNY, LESCHETIZKY, VENGEROVA: A GENEALOGICAL STUDY OF PIANO PEDAGOGY TECHNIQUE

by Darrell G. Leffler

This thesis addresses three generations of piano pedagogical philosophies. It will detail the teaching philosophies of Carl Czerny, his student Theodore Leschetizky and Leschetizky's student, Isabelle Vengerova. A comparison will be made concerning their theories on hand position and posture, tone and articulation, and scales and pedaling. The comparison will detail the opinions which are obsolete, and views that are currently effective.

The goal of the thesis is to help piano teachers understand the important teaching philosophies of the three pedagogues, and discover concepts that can be appropriately applied to today's students. Through the personal experiences of the author, an overview will reveal techniques that have worked, failed or needed modification in order to help certain pedagogical problems.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Special thanks to Dr. Laurel Bretell who guided me through this project, both academically and spiritually. Thank you to Dr. Alfred Kanwischer who's in depth wisdom and expertise uncovered the layers of information. Thank you to Professor Currie, who paved the way and advised my direction in order for me to fulfill my goals. And special thanks to Dr. Joseph Rezits, who, in spite of his taxing schedule, lent his time to correspond and send me his book, *Beloved Tyranna*. I am deeply grateful to all of you.

DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY OF MRS. MARINA-GUSAK GRIN

I remember the first lesson with Mrs. Grin. I played a Haydn Sonata, with the thought that I did pretty well. As I looked into Mrs. Grin's eyes, I noticed a look of bewilderment. "That was awful, amateurish, and horrible!" she said without hesitation. I have never before heard those words in regards to my playing. Flustered and insulted, I immediately went to the department head and requested an immediate transfer. She said, "No!" I was forced to continue under this tyranny.

At that time, my life took a major turn. I was newly married with a new home and a new chapter of my life before me. This was an exciting time. But somehow, my only stress in life was "PIANO LESSONS WITH MRS. GRIN!"

She kept my discipline intact and I improved as the months went by. Her comments went from "horrible," to "splendid." But my motivation did not come from the urge to improve. It came from the terror I would face if I wasn't prepared!

She loved children and supported my work exposing them to music. To her, it was "a mission." Dear Mrs. Grin, I plan on continuing this mission.

Mrs. Grin is no longer with us in this world, but I am indeed honored to carry out the mission, with her influence and spirit beside me. I do miss her.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
INTRODUCTION.....	1
CARL CZERNY.....	3
Summary of Technique.....	7
Practice and Study.....	8
Posture and Hand Position.....	11
Articulation.....	13
Scales.....	18
Suggestions on Teaching.....	22
THEODORE LESCHETIZKY.....	25
The Leschetizky Method.....	28
Practice and Study.....	29
Anatomy of the Hand.....	32
Tone Quality.....	36
Articulation.....	39
Scale Technique.....	43
Pedaling	46

Conclusion.....	53
ISABELLE VENGEROVA.....	56
Practice and Study.....	60
Posture and Hand Position.....	61
Articulation.....	66
Scales and Arpeggios.....	70
Pedaling.....	78
Conclusion.....	79
SUMMARY.....	81
Practice and Study.....	81
Posture and Hand Position.....	87
Tone.....	90
Articulation.....	91
Scales.....	93
Pedaling.....	94
Conclusion.....	96

Czerny, Leschetizky, Vengerova: A Genealogical Study of Piano Pedagogy Technique

Greatness rarely comes easily. Nor does it necessarily happen over night.

Greatness often develops from modest and or exiguous origins. Like the Hope Diamond, greatness is many times carved from *the rough*. This includes some of Man's greatest achievements. These achievements require an x amount of time to develop through the success and hardships of trial and error. For example, the internal combustion engine developed through the improvements of the steam engines of the 17th and 18th centuries. The computer's impact on society would not be possible without the digital computer five decades ago. In Western music, the subtleties of counterpoint were hundreds of years in the developing.

Greatness and its influencing factors is present in any field or subject; including the art of piano pedagogy. The purpose of the following is to explore the genealogical pattern of three masterful and renowned piano teachers; Carl Czerny , Theodore Leschetizky and Isabelle Vengerova.

Our journey begins with Carl Czerny, a former student and close friend of Beethoven. Czerny is best known for his "sets of progressively difficult piano exercises,"¹ and his expert interpretations of Beethoven. His student, Theodore Leschetizky an Austrian born pianist, is regarded as "one of the most influential piano teachers of the

¹ "Czerny," Funk and Wagnalls New Encyclopedia, 1996 ed. CD-Rom. Infopedia: SoftKey Multimedia Inc., 1996.

19th century, and founder of the modern piano technique.”² Following Leschetizky will be an overview of his student, Isabelle Vengerova. Madame Vengerova’s pedagogical expertise “was developed in all its brilliance during her professorship at the St. Petersburg Conservatory.”³ She then completed her illustrious career at the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia.

We will explore how pedagogical philosophies beginning with Czerny (partly from Beethoven’s influence), reach Vengerova through Leschetizky. First will be a summary of their teaching techniques. Within these techniques are their opinions and suggestions on practice and study, body posture and hand position, tone quality, articulation, scales and arpeggios. In the discussion of Czerny, we will conclude with his advice for pedagogues. With Leschetizky and Vengerova, we will explore their views on dynamics and pedaling. The summary will be a comparison of the techniques that have survived and those which have faded.

Many of these techniques have disappeared as time passed. On the other hand, many are still appropriate for today’s student. Therefore a comparison will give us their common subject matter; for example, hand position and posture, tone, articulation and pedaling. Included in each survey are suggestions experienced by this author with the goal of helping the reader become a better teacher.

² “Leschetizky,” Funk and Wagnalls New Encyclopedia 1996 ed. CD-Rom. Infopedia: SoftKey Multimedia Inc., 1996.

³ Reginald Gerig, Famous Pianists and Their Technique (Washington: Robert B. Luce, Inc., 1974) 312-313.

Czerny

As a child, I remember the rigorous torture and endless hours of practice devoted to Czerny etudes. I, like many, believed that Czerny hated little ones such as myself and deliberately composed these ghastly exercises to punish my kind. I was right. There was speculation that he “hated children, and that he published his voluminous books of piano exercises to inflict pain on young pianists.”⁴ Carl Czerny’s musical influences include not only his 1000 or so compositions, but also his direct link between two masters; Beethoven and Liszt. As a student and confidant of Beethoven, he became an expert interpreter of Beethoven’s compositions. As an acclaimed pedagogue, his reputation extended to such pupils like Franz Liszt. His success as a deft mentor became his biggest influence on music and the study of piano pedagogy.

Carl Czerny was born in Vienna on February 21, 1791.⁵ His father, Wenzel Czerny gave him pianoforte lessons at an early age. As a strict disciplinarian, Wenzel rarely allowed Carl to associate with other children. Instead, he insisted on diligent practice whenever spare time permitted. Carl had an extraordinary memory and musical abilities. In “Recollections of My Life,” Czerny wrote:

My father had no intention whatever of making a superficial virtuoso out of me; rather, he strove to develop my sightreading ability through continuous study of new works and thus to develop musicianship. When I was ten I was already able to play cleanly and fluently nearly everything by Mozart, Clementi, and the other piano composers of the time; owing to my excellent musical memory I mostly performed without the music.⁶

⁴ “Czerny,” Baker’s Biographical Dictionary of Musicians. 7th ed.

⁵ “Czerny,” Baker’s Biographical Dictionary of Musicians. 7th ed.

⁶ Carl Czerny, “Erinnerungen aus meinem Leben,” Musical Quarterly, trans. Ernest Sanders, July 1956: 309.

At the age of ten, his father's friend Wenzel Krumpholz organized a soiree of prominent musicians to hear the young lad. The meeting took place in "a very slovenly room -[where] pieces of paper, articles of clothing, and a few suitcases were scattered all over the place, bare walls, hardly a chair, except the rickety one for the Walter piano."⁷ The sloppily kept room belonged to Beethoven.

Krumpholz, a loyal friend of Beethoven, persuaded the master to listen to the boy genius. Apprehensive to play one of Beethoven's works, Carl began with Mozart's *C major Concerto*. He was astonished when Beethoven played the orchestral themes as accompaniment. As his confidence swelled with fortitude he had the *bravura* to play the newly published, *Sonata pathétique*. "The boy is talented," exclaimed Beethoven, "I myself want to teach him and I accept him as my pupil."⁸

Czerny's first lessons were solely devoted to all scales, both major and minor. Beethoven taught Carl several "technical fundamentals, which were as yet unknown to most pianists."⁹ He also assigned several works from C.P.E. Bach's *Versuch über die wahre Art das Clavier zu spielen* (Essay on the True Art of Playing Keyboard Instruments). Unlike the fashionable detached style of Mozart's time, Beethoven insisted that Czerny play with legato technique; an avant-garde approach which drew much criticism in Beethoven's early period. The *legato technique*, which will be discussed momentarily, was a major technique of 19th century pianists and a common thread of the three masters. Although Czerny studied with Beethoven for three years, they became life

⁷ Czerny, "Erinnerungen aus meinem Leben," 306.

⁸ Czerny, "Erinnerungen aus meinem Leben," 307.

⁹ Czerny, "Erinnerungen aus meinem Leben," 307.

long confidants. But this brief encounter became the genesis of the *legato technique*.

Philip Hale, author of a biographical sketch on Czerny wrote "Although the instruction that Czerny received from Beethoven was irregular, it was the foundation of his own teaching."¹⁰

Another major influence was Johann Hummel, former student of Mozart and Clementi. Hummel's technical clarity and Beethoven's expression and virtuosity were the balancing factors for Czerny. He wrote, "While Beethoven's playing was remarkable for his enormous power, characteristic expression, and his unheard-of virtuosity and passage work, Hummel's performance was a model of cleanness, clarity, and of the most graceful elegance and tenderness."¹¹ Ironical is the bitter enmity which supporters of both Beethoven and Hummel felt. Czerny said:

Hummel's partisans accused Beethoven of mistreating the piano, of lacking all cleanness and clarity, of creating nothing but confused noise the way he used the pedal, and finally of writing willful, unnatural, unmelodic compositions, which were irregular besides. On the other hand, the Beethovenites maintained that Hummel lacked all genuine imagination, that his playing was as monotonous as a hurdy-gurdy, that the position of his fingers reminded them of spiders, and that his compositions were nothing more than arrangements of motifs by Mozart and Haydn. I myself was influenced by Hummel's manner of playing to the extent that it kindled in me a desire for greater cleanness and clarity.¹²

Czerny's teaching career began at the age of fifteen. As he matured, so did his reputation. His students were talented and plentiful earning him enough money to improve his family's living standards. Czerny began to socialize with the finest musicians in Vienna. One of the most influential meetings was with Clementi. Czerny wrote:

¹⁰ Carl Czerny, *The Art of Finger Dexterity* (New York: G.Schirmer, 1893) 1.

¹¹ Czerny, "Erinnerungen aus meinem Leben," 309.

¹² Czerny, "Erinnerungen aus meinem Leben," 309.

...Clementi was in Vienna, and I was fortunate enough to become a frequent visitor in a household where he spent most of his time as a friend of the family and teacher of the daughter of the house. Since I was very often present at these lessons, I became familiar with the teaching method of this celebrated master and foremost pianist of the time, and I primarily owe it to this circumstance that later I was fortunate enough to train many important students to a degree of perfection for which they became world famous.¹³

Czerny's students included Theodore Kullack and Theodore Leschitzky. But the most famous was Franz Liszt. At the age of nine, young Franz began his studies with Czerny. Franz was typical of most children; awkward and unassuming. Czerny wrote:

He was a pale, delicate-looking child and while playing swayed on the chair as if drunk so that I often thought he would fall to the floor. Moreover, his playing was completely irregular, careless, and confused, and he had so little knowledge of correct fingering that he threw his fingers over the keyboard in an altogether arbitrary fashion. Nevertheless, I was amazed by the talent with which Nature had equipped him...Never before had I had so eager, talented or industrious a student.¹⁴

The young boy's "unvarying liveliness and good humor, together with the extraordinary development of his talent"¹⁵ charmed Czerny. So charmed was he that he taught Franz Liszt for two years without monetary compensation

¹³ Czerny, "Erinnerungen aus meinem Leben," 312-313.

¹⁴ Czerny, "Erinnerungen aus meinem Leben," 314-315.

¹⁵ Czerny, "Erinnerungen aus meinem Leben," 316.

Summary of Technique

Czerny never claimed to have a method. He believed that each student had individual characteristics and making general methods were ineffective. To him, students like Liszt had mental gifts which were superior to physical strength. Young Franz's talent and mental vigor were far superior to his technical prowess. To combat the imbalance, Liszt began the first few months studying all scales. Once he played the scales with "masterful fluency,"¹⁶ he advanced to Clementi sonatas. Czerny believed the sonatas exposed many elements of music. Czerny wrote:

Through intensive study of Clementi's sonatas (which will always remain the best school for the pianist, *if one knows how to study them in his spirit*) I instill in him for the first time a firm feeling for rhythm and taught him beautiful touch and tone, correct fingering, and proper musical phrasing, even though these compositions at first struck the lively and always extremely alert boy as rather dry.¹⁷

Liszt then mastered the spirit and character of many composers such as Hummel, Ries, Moscheles Beethoven and Bach. His sight reading skills were so phenomenal that he could publicly sight-read the most difficult sonatas and still achieve a high quality performance, as if rehearsed.

Even at a young age, Franz had the charm and humor that became legendary. Czerny saw Franz as a family member and gave him lessons several nights a week. But to the chagrin of Czerny, Franz's father stopped the lessons to pursue the concert stage.

¹⁶ Czerny, "Erinnerungen aus meinem Leben," 315.

¹⁷ Czerny, "Erinnerungen aus meinem Leben," 315.

Liszt found success in Paris and London, “but he lost many years during which his life and his art became misdirected.”¹⁸

Czerny wrote many keyboard treatises that remedied the technical problems common among many students. In 1839, *Klavierschule* (Keyboard School) was published in both London and Paris. Its full title, *Complete Theoretical and Practical Pianoforte op. 500* was written in four volumes. The first volume contains 19 lessons that teach the fundamentals of beginning technique such as scales and arpeggios. The second volume has 16 chapters devoted to fingering technique. The most comprehensive volume, number three, has 20 chapters that discuss interpretation and expression. It covers many aspects of music including dynamics, pedaling, rhythm, improvising, sight reading, and even piano tuning. The fourth volume discusses interpretation of various composers to date, notably Beethoven.

The *Klavierschule* became the basis to other treatises like *The Art of Finger Dexterity*, op. 740 and, *School of the Virtuoso*, op. 365 whose influence can be found in the teachings of Kullack, Liszt and Leschetizky. Noted scholar Maurice Hinson said, “Much of the wisdom in Czerny’s *Klavierschule* was passed on to Leschetizky, who became one of the great piano teachers of all time. Indeed, many concert pianists can trace their pedagogical heritage back to Czerny...”¹⁹

Practice & Study

One of the largest hurdles facing today’s students and teachers is practicing. As a

¹⁸ Czerny, “Erinnerungen aus meinem Leben,” 316.

¹⁹ Maurice Hinson, “Carl Czerny Remembered,” *Clavier* October 1985: 10.

child, I remember the distraction I felt knowing that just beyond the front door, my buddies were playing ball. Pilfering my attention was the rhythmic “popping” of the mitt, and the chant “Is he finished yet Mrs. Leffler?” My tempo increased with the thought that I had cheated the hour required, only to realize that *Für Elise* sounded more like *Für le Race*. But that was many years ago. Today, distractions like computers, televisions and video games compete with practice. But in the eyes of Czerny, this torpid effort is unexceptionable.

Czerny believed that beginning students should have a one hour lesson per day in addition to one or two hours of practice. As documented in Letters to a Young Lady: on the Art of Playing the Pianoforte, Czerny wrote to a young girl, Cecilia:

It is very proper that your teacher gives you an hour's lesson every day. If, in addition to this, you daily dedicate another hour - or, if possible, two hours to practicing by yourself.²⁰

Czerny recommended the first five exercises of *Klavierschule* for the first few months. Most important was repetition and not duration. Czerny suggested fifteen minute intervals, three or four times daily. By following these suggestions Czerny promised that within a few months, students will “forever conquered all that is difficult or tedious in the elementary branches of playing.”²¹

Czerny's five suggestions for teaching notation can supplement any chosen method. His first four suggestions are verbal reinforcement. For example, students studying notes should. “name it aloud, and then seek for and strike the key which belongs

²⁰ Carl Czerny, Letters to a Young Lady on the Art of Playing the Pianoforte trans. J.A. Hamilton (New York: Da Capo Press, 1982) 9.

²¹ Czerny, Letters 9.

to it.”²² Second, randomly choose a white key, name it and identify it in a piece of music. Third, randomly play a white key, “name it aloud, and seek directly for the note belonging to it.”²³ (e.g. F, fourth line from the bottom of the staff in the bass clef.). Fourth, play some of the easier pieces slowly and note by note, “naming each note as you proceed.”²⁴ Fifth, and the most important is to write music. Czerny wrote, “Notes are much easier to write than letters; and, if you daily devote a short quarter of an hour to this task, in a couple of weeks you will become sufficiently expert at it.”²⁵

To strengthen hand and eye coordination, Czerny suggested sight reading fresh pieces. But he warned that too many new pieces would have little value if old pieces are not kept in good order. Every student should have several pieces ready in a moments notice.

Czerny’s suggestions on practice and study are not at all obsolete. His use of verbal identification allows a student to read with vision, reasoning and logic. It also gives the teacher an advantage in understanding the student’s thought process. As a teacher, I use Czerny’s method for beginning students in the following way. During the first reading, with separate hands, the student reads each note as they play them. This step allows me to evaluate and understand the notational progress of the student. During the second playing, the student plays both hands simultaneously while counting the rhythm out loud. Again, this allows me to understand the thought process of the student. If problems occur, the student is asked to write in the rhythm. By the third playing, the

²² Czerny, Letters 6.

²³ Czerny, Letters 7.

²⁴ Czerny, Letters 7.

²⁵ Czerny, Letters 7.

student should have the rhythmic and notational concepts understood. The student is then ready to concentrate on other elements such as articulation and expression. One can even take Czerny's skill to the next level by singing each pitch identified. With this method, students begin ear training immediately.

One might ask, "Doesn't playing with separate hands stifle sight reading skills?" My answer to that is "What sight-reading skills?" Beginning students have enough to worry about. As they progress and understand interval relationships and harmonic fundamentals, verbal exercises are no longer needed as sight-reading skills improve. Czerny's verbal approach is an excellent tool to help beginning students learn notation. But equally important is the application of rhythm as well; an approach not mentioned in his letter.

Posture & Hand Position

Czerny once said, "It is not merely that an awkward position is disagreeable and ridiculous, but it also impedes, if not prevents, the development of a free and elegant style of playing."²⁶ To be able to reach virtuosic qualities, energy must not be wasted on careless hand positions and poor posture. Although music flows from the fingertips, the energy begins with the body. Posture and hand position is one of the earliest fundamentals Czerny teaches.

He begins with the seating apparatus and how to use it. In one letter, Czerny wrote:

²⁶ Czerny, Letters 4.

The seat you must use must be just so high that the elbows, when hanging down freely, may be a very little less elevated than the upper surface of the keys... You must always seat yourself exactly facing the middle of the keyboard, and at such a distance from it that the tips of the elbows may be a little nearer to the keys.²⁷

Both the head and the upper part of the chest must remain relaxed and poised.

Forearms should be parallel to the ground forming a horizontal line from the elbow to the knuckles. The wrists should not allow the hand to slope up or down. The fingers as well as the thumb should be curved allowing the fleshy part of the fingertips to play each key. Although black keys require some extension, the fingers must always remain in a curved posture.

One must be careful when generalizing a universal method in any walk of life. For instance baseball players do not hold the bat *one* universal way in order to get the full potential out of their swing. Skiers do not choose one way to *cut on their edges* for optimum speed. Artists do not hold the brush one way to achieve the perfect stroke. As there are many individuals in our society, so are the number of physical differences that must be accounted for. It would be difficult for a student with a lengthy torso and short arms to have the arms parallel to the ground. A student with small hands will be uncomfortable maintaining a curved posture on large chordal passages. Teachers must take in account the physical presence of each individual student. Only then can hand position and posture suggestions be given. The whole concept of posture and hand size is discussed in detail in the discussion of Leschetizky and Vengerova, with the help of Otto Ortmann.

²⁷ Czerny, Letters 4.

Articulation

When considering the prolific work of Czerny and the scores of technical exercises he developed, one might think that his only interest was technical virtuosity. With exercises such as *School of Velocity*, *The Art of Finger Dexterity*, and *The School of the Virtuoso*, one could make a valid argument. But of utmost importance, and as we will see, the common thread of all our subjects (Leschetizky and Vengerova) was the quality of tone. Czerny wrote, "Purity of tone, equality of touch, equality in speed, equal agility of the fingers including the thumb, correct fingering, etc. all contribute to the final quality of tone."²⁸

Czerny believed that even the finest piano will not mask a clumsily played tone.

He said:

If it is not properly handled by the player, or if we merely thump and bang the keys, the best instrument will sound hard and unpleasant. On the other hand, if we employ too little force, or do not know how to use this power in a proper manner, the tone will be poor and dull, and the performance unintelligible.²⁹

To overcome these problems Czerny wrote five suggestions:

1. Strike each key perpendicularly; that is, straight downwards, and exactly in the middle and therefore not sideways nor obliquely.
2. When, after the percussion, each key is so firmly pressed down as to cause the full tone of the instrument to be audible.
3. When, before the percussion, we do not raise the finger too high: as otherwise. Along with the tone, there will be heard the blow on the key.

²⁸ Hinson, "Carl Czerny Remembered" 19.

²⁹ Czerny, Letters 11.

4. When the hand and arm, even when striking with considerable force, do not make any jumping, chopping or oscillating movement...the fingers cannot possibly play pleasantly and tranquilly when the hands and arms are unsteady.
5. When the player observes all these rules in rapid turns or even in skips and extensions, as strictly as in slow and quiet passages.³⁰

Commendable to Czerny's exercises is the variety of styles, composers and eras it is beneficial to. From pre-Beethoven to post-Rachmaninoff, his exercises are appropriate for proper articulation in most styles. Czerny's etudes are short in length allowing the pianist to concentrate on smaller passages, focusing their attention to specific problems. For example, a common problem for many pianists is the proper balance of melody and harmony when both are played with one hand, as in Schubert's Impromptu in C Minor, Op. 90, No. 1 (Fig 1). The weakest fingers, the fourth and fifth are required to maintain the melody while the strongest, the first second and third fingers maintain the harmonic accompaniment. What becomes difficult is the distribution of weight which requires the weaker fingers to bring out the melody while maintaining musical nuances such as dynamics and phrasing. By using Czerny's *Legato Melody with Broken Chords*³¹ (Fig. 2), found in The Art of Finger Dexterity for the Piano, these problems can be remedied. This particular etude strengthens the third, fourth and fifth of both hands.

Octaves can be cumbersome, especially in rapid staccato. After long passages, fatigue becomes a factor which can effect tone and tempo as in Beethoven's *Tempest Sonata* Op.31, No. 2 (Fig. 3). With the help of Czerny's *Light Motion in Quiet*

³⁰ Czerny, Letters 11-12.

³¹ Carl Czerny, The Art of Finger Dexterity for the Piano 158.

*Staccato*³² consistency in staccatos, speed and stamina can be improved (Fig. 4). To reach the full benefit of this exercise, the articulation should vary. For example, the left hand should play each sixteenth note with consistency and avoid a submissive treatment of the pedal points. In contrast, the pedal points should take a secondary role which will bring out the counter-melody, and in turn, become more musical and interesting. Both are equal in value, but must be addressed in tandem.

Fig. 1. Schubert's Impromptu in C Minor, Op. 90, No. 1

Fig. 2. Czerny's Legato Melody with Broken Chords

³² Czerny, *The Art of Finger Dexterity* 14.

Fig. 3. Beethoven's Tempest Sonata Op.31, No.2.

Fig. 4 Czerny's Light Motion in Quiet Staccato

Although most Czerny's exercises were written prior to 1850, one can find valuable use for pieces written in the present century. For example, in Rachmaninoff's *Bacarolle*, Op.10, No.3, articulation can get precarious with broken chords (Fig. 5).

Fig.5. Rachmaninoff's Bacarolle Op.10, No.3

Similar to the problems discussed in the Schubert example, the problem lies with proper balance of melody and harmony. However, Czerny's *Delicate and Distinct Touch in Broken Chords*³³ (Fig. 6) can remedy the problems for this 20th century piece.

Fig. 6. Czerny's Delicate and Distinct Touch in Broken Chords.

³³ Czerny, The Art of Finger Dexterity 164-167.

Scales

One of the most important but difficult aspects of piano pedagogy is the instruction of scales. For me, it is not because they are difficult to explain or demonstrate, but because they are so dull and boring for the student and myself. I find more joy taking out the diapers. But I must remember the words of Czerny: “scales are the *most necessary point of all*, not only for beginners, but even for pupils who are much advanced.”³⁴ Even Celia, to whom Czerny’s letters were addressed, thought of scales to be “truly a tedious story.”³⁵ But one must realize, in every melody lies the basis of some scale, whether diatonic or atonal. Czerny wrote:

In every piece, whether written today or one hundred years ago, they are the principal means by which every passage and every melody is formed. The diatonic scales, or the chords broken into arpeggios, you will every where find employed innumerable times.³⁶

What enhances a student’s perception is the mastering of functional harmony as well as scales. A good sight reader and fast learner is one who can identify the scalar passages and the harmonic progression in the melody and accompaniment. After all, most melody and accompaniment is based on scales or chords.

Technically, nothing is more important to a pianist than to have well developed fingers that are flexible, light and voluble. According to Czerny, “This cannot be acquired in any way so quickly as by the practice of the scales.”³⁷ Mastering the scales allows the pianist to quickly reach the stage of interpretation and expression which would

³⁴ Czerny, Letters 12-13.

³⁵ Czerny, Letters 12.

³⁶ Czerny, Letters 14.

³⁷ Czerny, Letters 14.

otherwise be spent on fingering, and other technical problems. After all, “the scales contain all the principal rules of fingering”³⁸ which eventually become instinctive.

Although Otto Ortmann is accredited for his expertise in the physiological nature of the pianists’ hands and arms, Czerny was one of the first pedagogues to address the topic. In his letter to Celia he wrote:

You know, Miss, that the five fingers are by no means equal to each other in natural strength. Thus, for example, the thumb is much stronger than any of the other fingers; the first finger [the index] is much stronger than the little finger, and the third finger [ring], on the contrary, is, with almost every person, the weakest of all. The pianist, however, must know how to employ these various degrees of power, so that in playing the scales all the fingers may strike their appropriate keys *with perfect equality of strength*. Scales sound well only when they are played in every respect *with the most equality*.³⁹

To achieve this goal, Czerny gave three suggestions. The first, *Equality of Strength*, not one note should “sound in the smallest degree louder than another” whether played with the thumb or any of the other fingers. The second, *Equality in quickness*, each note should “follow the preceding one strictly in the same degree of movement”⁴⁰ regardless of the chosen tempo. And third, *Equality in holding the notes down*, “no key must be held down longer or shorter time than the rest.”⁴¹ Each key should be played and released with precise consistency; especially the thumb which has a tendency to play longer when passing under the other fingers.

Another suggestion that I mention to students is the elimination of excess body movement; especially the elbows. Students often swing their elbows outward when

³⁸ Czerny, Letters 15.

³⁹ Czerny, Letters 15.

⁴⁰ Czerny, Letters 16.

⁴¹ Czerny, Letters 16.

crossing the third and fourth fingers over, or when the thumb passes under. This excess movement can cause an inconsistent and unwanted accent. Helpful too, is playing scales with varied articulations. Staccato, for instance, helps the student play consistently and at the same time remedy lazy and sluggish articulation. On the contrary, legato with dynamic shading, that is crescendo while ascending and diminuendo while descending, allows the student to practice scales with musical appeal. Of course, my suggestions cannot be expected without mastering the three suggestions of Czerny.

Czerny believed that the initial stages of practicing scales should be done “with the right hand only, and then with both hands, and, *at first, extremely slow.*”⁴² As stamina and confidence increase so should tempo. Czerny believed that the minimum of a half hour at the beginning of every practice session is sufficient. In addition, Czerny composed the following exercises as supplements. They should be played a third (Fig. 7), sixth (Fig. 8) and tenth apart (Fig. 9), as suggested in the School of the Virtuoso, Op. 365, Book 1, No.1.

Fig. 7

⁴² Czerny, Letters 16.

Fig. 8

Fig. 9

Although I agree with Czerny that scales, when first approached, should be practiced at a slow and comfortable tempo, my views of which hand should begin differ. Beginning with separate hands allows the student to concentrate on fingering, articulation and tone, one hand at a time. But automatically beginning with the *right hand* is too general of an approach. What if the student is left handed? Do we then begin with the left hand? My approach is quite the opposite. If the student is left handed, then I begin with the right. If the student is right handed then I begin with the left. It is similar to the bicyclist who would rather tackle the mountain at the beginning of the journey. Tackle the problem immediately with the weaker hand. Therefore the stronger hand will seem easier

boosting the student's confidence and attitude towards scales. Of course, this is generally speaking. Occasionally a student will have such a difficult time, that switching the approach might be necessary.

Suggestions on Teaching

Like students, teachers are individuals and there are never two who are exactly alike. But there are common qualities that teachers possess which make the good ones successful. In Volume IV of Carl Czerny's *Klavierschule*, Op. 500, he offers several suggestions which are beneficial to all teachers. For example, he believed that a teacher required a genial attitude. In his words:

I have always found that a reserved but friendly, amiable attitude, without a minimum sign of impatience is always the most efficacious way with pupils...it bends even the most extravagant temperaments to obedience and attention; from the most docile to the most obstinate...I have always tried to explain only that which is necessary...giving a pleasant approach to every topic in discussion, even the driest. A pleasant demeanor is of great value in teaching as well as in life in general.⁴³

Although his suggestions on attitude go without saying, significant in the preceding quote is *explain only that which is necessary*. Students, especially children, are eager to play. Long winded lectures often lose a student's attention and interest. Lectures should always be precise and expressed in the minimum of time.

Another suggestion is "A pleasant approach to difficulties can be obtained especially through the correct choice of compositions."⁴⁴ Through my experience, I have

⁴³ Hinson, "Carl Czerny Remembered," 18.

⁴⁴ Hinson, "Carl Czerny Remembered," 18.

learned that most students do well with pieces with varied degrees of difficulty. For example, one piece, the easiest of three, can be expected to be completed within a week or two. The second piece, one with a little more challenge, can be expected to be completed within two or three weeks. And the third, more like a project, can be expected to be completed in a month or more. With this system, lessons will be neoteric because of the high turn over of easier pieces, and challenging, because of the *project* pieces. In addition, these pieces do not have to be solely devoted to classical music. Various styles should be introduced to the student including, Jazz, Ragtime, and Popular selections. Not only will the student become a well rounded musician but will also improve their musicianship by way of the different harmonies and rhythmic pulses found in the varied styles.

Czerny also believed that students need performance as an impetus to improve.

He said:

Nothing spurs a pupil on to particular diligence in his practice as knowing that he must play it in public. The teacher must, at first, accustom the pupil to perform in front of parents and friends; then in front of small groups. With this method, one obtains the elimination of the shyness and fright that usually accompanies all first public performances.⁴⁵

Although a good idea, a teacher must be able to read the reaction of a child when playing in front of parents. Often times children are different when in the presence of their guardians. This can sometimes effect musicianship and concentration. If a student has these characteristics, there are other solutions. In most studios, students march in and out, one after the other. This is the time to take advantage of the captive audience

⁴⁵ Hinson "Carl Czerny Remembered," 18.

member. For example, the teacher can begin by saying, "Hey Johnny, Suzy has been working hard on her phrasing in *Für Elise*. Tell me what you think." In most cases students are often too congenial to render harsh criticism. Mainly, because there will be a day when they are the subject of scrutiny. Regardless, the student will be performing without even knowing it. Soon thereafter, the teacher can bring in small groups of students to perform for each other. By this time, a student's confidence will be so overwhelming that parents, grandparents, and even the teacher can be proud.

Czerny also believed that perfection should not get in the way of fresh, newer pieces. He wrote:

Even if a pupil does not play a composition at performance level, present him with a new one, but continue to demand the perfection of the first. The pupil must learn that ability lies in *how* one plays, not in *what* or *how much*.⁴⁶

This suggestion relates to the earlier system mentioned dealing with the choices of music and the various degrees of difficulty. With the introduction of new pieces, the student will not fall into a rut which occurs when playing a piece to perfection week after week, month after month. The easier and intermediate pieces will remedy Czerny's suggestion.

For suggestions which were given a century and a half ago, Czerny's thoughts are as valuable today.

⁴⁶ Hinson "Carl Czerny Remembered," 18.

Theodore Leschetizky

During the nineteenth century, the innovations and advances of piano technology allowed composers to expand their creative horizons. Advances such as the double escapement, invented by Sebastian Erard in 1821, allowed performers to play more rapidly and repeat notes more quickly. Soon after, tone altered and enriched when Henri Pape replaced leather with felt to cover the hammers. By the 1830's, resonance was enhanced when frames were made of iron, and strings of steel.⁴⁷ These innovations altered and enlarged the possibilities of musical qualities such as dynamics, articulation and interpretation. As the pianistic door of creativity opened, so did the need for greater pedagogical response. The proliferation of great piano literature (e.g., Beethoven, Chopin, Liszt, Schumann, etc.) provoked the need for increasingly sophisticated piano pedagogy and pedagogues. One pedagogue in particular was a former student of Carl Czerny. His name was Theodore Leschetizky.

Like his mentor, Leschetizky specialized in the art of technical virtuosity. But he recognized other dimensions of pedagogy which gave him his distinct style. He taught his students to listen intently to their work, project the crucial musical values in their playing, and concentrate intensely on all their pieces not allowing foreign thoughts or distractions to disrupt the flow of music performed. He also believed that each student was an individual requiring an exclusive lesson plan specifically designed for that individual's strengths and weaknesses. A former student, Ignace Paderewski (1860-1941) once said:

⁴⁷ W.V. McFerrin, The Piano: Its Acoustics (Boston: Tuners Supply Co. 1972) 14-15.

The method of Leschetizky is very simple. His pupils learn to evoke a fine tone from the instrument and to make music and not noise. There are principles, you will agree, that are to be uniformly inculcated in every pupil—that is, breadth, softness of touch and precision in rhythm. For the rest, every individual is treated according to the nature of his talent. In one word, it is the method of methods.⁴⁸

Biography

Theodore Leschetizky was born on June 22, 1830 at Lancut, Poland, to Josef Leschetizky and Thereses von Ullman. At the recommendation of Karl Czerny, Count Alfred Potocka employed Josef to be the music instructor for his daughters. At the age of five, Theodore also began lessons with his father. In 1841, the Leschetizkys moved to Vienna where Theodore began study under Carl Czerny. At the age of twelve, Theodore Leschetizky embarked on a series of successful concert tours. In 1852, Leschetizky moved to St. Petersburg, Russia, where he debuted at the Michael Theater before the Tzar, Nicholas I. In 1856, Leschetizky's reputation as a performer and instructor gained him a position as head of the piano department at St. Petersburg Conservatory under the musical direction of Anton Rubenstein. Twelve years later Leschetizky returned to Vienna to teach. There he attracted many gifted students who eventually became world renowned performers.⁴⁹ Reginald R. Gerig, author of Famous Pianists and Their Technique, states:

Theodore Leschetizky (1830-1915) had come to Vienna where he began developing many world famous pianists. Leschetizky eventually rivaled Liszt in his

⁴⁸ Harold C Schonberg, The Great Pianists (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1963) 279.

⁴⁹ "Theodore Leschetizky," Baker's Biographical Dictionary of Musicians, 7th ed., 1978.

total output of products for the concert world. This roster reads like a Who's Who in music; Paderewski, Schnabel, Hambourg, Friedman, Essipov, Brailowsky, Moisewitsch and many others.⁵⁰

Others include Ossip Gabrilowitch⁵¹ and Isabelle Vengerova.⁵² After an illustrious career as a teacher and performer, Theodore Leschetizky died in Dresden, Germany in 1915.⁵³

Leschetizky was influenced by the circle of concert pianists who toured Vienna during the late 1840s. The most inspirational of all was a Bohemian pianist named Julius Schulhoff. In 1850, Leschetizky attended one of Schulhoff's concerts. Schulhoff, a close acquaintance of Chopin, played in the lyrical style of the Polish composer.

Leschetizky was captivated and obsessed by Schulhoff's touch; the Bohemian's musical ability to make the piano *sing* greatly impressed him.⁵⁴ Describing the experience,

Leschetizky said:

Under his hands the piano seemed like another instrument. Seated in a corner, my heart overflowed with indescribable emotions as I listened. Not a note escaped me. I began to foresee a new style of playing. That melody standing out in bold relief, that wonderful sonority - all this must be due to a new and entirely different touch.⁵⁵

When asked about his thoughts on the concert, Leschetizky responded, "It is the playing of the future."⁵⁶ He added:

Schulhoff's playing was a revelation to me. From that day I tried to find that touch. I thought of it constantly, and studied the five fingers diligently to learn the method of production. I practiced incessantly, sometimes even

⁵⁰ Reginald R Gerig 271.

⁵¹ Schonberg 307.

⁵² Eileen Flissler, "The Venerable Vengerova: Magician of Pianoforte." Music Journal vol. 23 March 1965: 32.

⁵³ "Theodore Leschetizky," Baker's Biographical Dictionary of Musicians.

⁵⁴ Angele Comtesse Potocka, Theodore Leschetizky (New York: The Century Co., 1903) 89.

⁵⁵ Potocka 89.

⁵⁶ Potocka 90.

on a table, striving to attain firm finger-tips and a light wrist, which I felt to be the means to my end. I kept that beautiful sound well in my mind, and it made the driest work interesting.⁵⁷

Leschetizky immediately abandoned all his pieces and concentrated strictly on exercises.

When advised by his mother to return to his pieces, he answered “Oh, no! *it* is not ready -

I shall not have it for three months.”⁵⁸ When Leschetizky finally mastered the style

which inspired him, the *perfect* tone, the new discovery eventually became the driving force of his teachings.

THE LESCHETIZKY METHOD

Describing the Leschetizky method is difficult. According to the master himself, “I have no method and I will have no method.”⁵⁹ In fact, Leschetizky did not believe in any particular approach because he felt that each student was an individual. A standard method would not suffice for any person’s needs. He said, “I am personally against any fixed principle in instruction. Every pupil must, in my opinion, be treated differently according to circumstances.”⁶⁰

Leschetizky never published his own method or treatise. His philosophies are represented by the writings and teachings of former students, many of whom enjoyed successful careers as instructors themselves. Arguably the most celebrated was Malwine

⁵⁷ Potocka 90-91.

⁵⁸ Potocka 91.

⁵⁹ Ethel Newcomb, Leschetizky as I Knew Him. (New York: Da Capo Press, 1964) 107.

⁶⁰ Newcomb 107.

Bree.

Malwine Bree began her study with Leschetizky in 1882 and within ten years became one of his assistants. In 1902 she wrote and dedicated a book entitled The Groundwork of the Leschetizky Method which was endorsed by her mentor himself. In a letter to her dated February 24, 1902, he wrote:

HONORED MADAME: My best thanks for the dedication of your book, which I of course, accept most gladly. As you know, I am from principle no friend of theoretical Piano-methods; but your excellent work, which I have carefully examined, is such a brilliant exposition of my personal views, that I subscribe, word for word, to everything you advance therein...I declare your book to be the sole authorized publication explanatory of my method, and wish it all success and popularity.⁶¹

PRACTICE AND STUDY

Bree emphasizes the concentrated effort needed for practice and study. According to Bree, Leschetizky did not believe in “unreflective rattling-off of exercises by the hour.”⁶² He believed that a considerable portion of practice should be done away from the piano, allowing the artist to reflect on musical concepts. Leschetizky once said, “I study for hours when I am walking alone in the night. I look far down the street and imagine a beautiful voice, and I learn that far-away pianissimo quality.”⁶³ This method of interpretation “was of far more value than playing it a dozen times.”⁶⁴ In contrast to Czerny, Leschetizky recommended that practice at the piano be limited to two or three

⁶¹ Malwine Bree, The Groundwork of the Leschetizky Method, trans. from the German by Dr. Th. Baker (New York: G. Schirmer Inc., 1930) iv.

⁶² Bree 75.

⁶³ Newcomb 107.

⁶⁴ Newcomb 107.

hours a day believing that practice beyond this limit only leads to diminished concentration.

He also suggested that, at the beginning, one should practice at a slow and comfortable tempo, and, only at later stage, advance to the proper tempo as confidence builds. This included memorizing one or two measures at time. He insisted that his students not only memorize each measure or phrase note for note, but, as Bree states, “analyze it harmonically, and determine the fingering and pedaling.”⁶⁵ If memory fails on a particular note or passage, one should attempt to locate the problem through thought and avoid “groping with the fingers,”⁶⁶ or playing by ear. One should only refer to the score when the method fails. Once a piece has been thoroughly memorized, interpretive and dynamic considerations can be made. Leschetizky said, “Learning by this method is only apparently slow,” but guaranteed that “one never forgets a piece by this method, even when it (the piece) is not often repeated.”⁶⁷

Leschetizky believed that after a phrase or passage has been thoroughly memorized, then one could “proceed to filling and shading; impart animation to the phrases, and distribute light and shade.”⁶⁸ Once again these skills should be applied phrase by phrase, practicing each division separately.

However, there are some who disagree with this view point. Dr. Alfred Kanwischer, professor at San Jose State University, said:

⁶⁵ Bree 76.

⁶⁶ Bree 76

⁶⁷ Bree 77.

⁶⁸ Bree 76.

It is best to memorize on the large form. Only when the relative values of the form are clear, then one can best discern the fuller meanings of the tonalities, each chord of the chorale, the details of character of the melody, phrasing, inflection, dynamics, shaping, etc., and modulations of each individual section. If one doesn't memorize all this at the outset, then one must alter all one's habits when one 'inserts' them later. During the strain of performance, the habits of flat practice can so easily reappear, if they are the earliest impressions...I feel that tonality, harmonies, phrasing, dynamics, etc., should be taught before memorizing begins, especially with *beginning students*.⁶⁹

Dr. Joseph Rezits, professor at Indiana University said:

I do not agree with Leschetizky's premise that one must memorize 'at the beginning.' What's the rush? Why not have the score present as long as necessary to reinforce visually all the composer's directions? I do agree that when the music is memorized, it should be done as Professor Kanwischer suggests...with dynamics, shading and agogics. But if the music is not memorized at the beginning, there is ample time to refine these dimensions without having to make drastic changes. As an artist continues to practice and play, there will be a constant interpretive growth, otherwise artistic stagnation will result.⁷⁰

This author finds both approaches valid, depending on the level of the student. For the beginning student, especially children, he or she must approach the work much like an artist approaches the canvas. An artist begins with the background such as the sky and landscape. Once the background has been established, the focal subjects (e.g. barn or flower) are carefully added. The beginning student should approach each piece in the same manner. He or she must establish the background; the background being proper notation, rhythm and fingering. The details such as articulation, dynamic shading, tempo rubato (when appropriate), and phrasing can be applied once the background has been established and confidence secured. Students of this caliber need to absorb slowly and

⁶⁹ Alfred Kanwischer. Letter interview. 20 October 1997.

⁷⁰ Joseph Rezits. E-mail interview. 2 November 1997.

surely before reaching the next level of musical competence. Understanding notation, rhythm and fingering is a task in itself.

On the other hand, experienced students have the capabilities of comprehending music on a larger form.. With the experience and background, the more advanced student understands the large picture and develops the strategies of form and harmony. Once an overview is accomplished, the student can observe the agogics within a section. Once general decisions have been made, the student can focus on the minute details of each phrase. With the advanced student, this learning process can be made before the first key is played. The advanced student will thereby gain the confidence and security that will be beneficial in practice and performance.

ANATOMY OF THE HAND

Equally significant in the teachings of Leschetizky was his theory of the relationship between hand size and its effect on technique. To Ethel Newcomb, another *Vorbereiter*, the secret to Leschetizky's success began with the hands. She wrote:

...(Leschetizky) would discuss the hand from every point of view; what this sort of hand should do, and why another kind of hand should be held differently and should be required to do otherwise (qtd. in Schonberg).⁷¹

Leschetizky believed physical characteristics of a student's hand greatly influenced the course of the education. Musical elements such as tempo, articulation, interpretation, and repertoire are affected variously according to hand size. According to Bree:

Too large hands are not always advantageous at the piano; but too small hands are often a disadvantage even though such can generally bear fatigue better than large ones, and also more readily acquire the 'pearly' touch. Large hands, again, show superiority in widespread chords, which

⁷¹ Harold C. Schonberg, The Great Pianists (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1963) 278.

small hands have to make good by means of dexterity and suitable arrangement. For the rest, there have been, and are, pianists of the highest rank with large hands and with small hands. The method of holding them is the same for both.⁷²

Is Madame Bree suggesting that the physical nature of the hand should determine the technical, stylistic and repertoire decisions? Or does this mean certain pianists can become *specialists* as a result of their physical attributes? The question is, *why not?* Certainly the pianistic world would not be the first. After all, the maneuverability of a jet fighter require physical features much smaller than the bomber which is built to endure long hauls. In basketball, the appropriately titled *small forward*, requires a bantam framed player in order to maneuver the ball in and out of traffic, as opposed to the *center*, who needs a large physical prescence to gain position for rebounds. The matters of hand size and its influencing factors on pedagogy have been well documented by Otto Ortmann, author of The Physiological Mechanics of Piano Technique, one of the first scientific investigations of technical problems.

According to Ortmann, to “explain a surprisingly large number of technical difficulties,”⁷³ one must observe three factors, “hand-width, finger-length, and finger abduction, to which, of course, the similar thumb values must be added.”⁷⁴ To expect smaller hands to emulate the same technique and style of larger hands “is to expect the impossible.”⁷⁵ Therefore a student with large hands can *specialize* in large chordal

⁷² Bree 2.

⁷³ Otto Ortmann, The Physiological Mechanics of Piano Technique (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., Inc. 1929) 313.

⁷⁴ Ortmann 312 -313.

⁷⁵ Ortmann 318.

works such as Rachmaninoff's Prelude in D Flat Minor (Fig. 1) or Beethoven's *Hammer-Klavier Sonata* (Fig. 2). Students with smaller hands can master rapid, scalar and arpeggiated pieces such as Bach's *Prelude* in E minor (Fig. 3) or Schubert's *Impromptu* in Eb (Fig. 4).

Fig. 1. Rachmaninoff's Prelude in D Flat Minor

Fig. 2. Beethoven's Hammer-Klavier Sonata

In regards to hand posture, it is recommended in The Groundwork of the

Leschetizky Method that:

...the hand should assume a decidedly vaulted form for, apart from the unpleasing, amateurish impression made by playing with flat hands and fingers, the only way to get strength into the fingers is to hold the hand rounded upward.⁷⁶

The hand should be held in a vaulted position and “the wrist must be held somewhat lower than the knuckles.”⁷⁷ The fingers should be curved allowing the finger tips to rest vertically on the keyboard. The keys “are touched by the tips of the fingers only.”⁷⁸ The under side of the thumb, however, should lie flat on the key, bent at the tip-joint. Since the fingers are unequal in length, Bree says:

...their vertical tips cannot, of course, stand in a straight line side by side, but form a line curving outward from the thumb to the 3rd finger, and then inward to the 5th finger.⁷⁹

This author finds it difficult to believe that Leschetizky fully endorsed Madame Bree’s suggestions on hand position. As an advocate of individualism, how can she create such broad and generic suggestions? Flat, *amateurish* hands are necessary for large chordal passages, especially in rapid tempo. The keys are then played with the fleshy pads of the fingers when the hand is stretched and flattened. Smaller hands occasionally use the sides of the fingers. It is suggested by Arnold Schultz, author of The Riddle of the Pianist’s Finger, that flattened fingers can be as strong as curved. He wrote:

Since in the flat position of the finger the muscles pull at a less advantageous angle than in the bent, and since in the former position the fulcrum is farther removed from the resistance, this latter statement is the exact opposite of the truth. A flat finger works harder, and is therefore

⁷⁶ Bree 3.

⁷⁷ Bree 3.

⁷⁸ Bree 3.

⁷⁹ Bree 3.

exercised more vigorously, than a bent finger in the production of a given force-effect.⁸⁰

Perhaps Madame Bree considers her suggestion as the foundation to begin with. Like a family, good things come from a solid foundation. From this point, adjustments could be tailored to the student's physical features.

Proper hand position can only be supported by good posture. Fatigue and strain can be minimized if the student maintains proper posture. Leschetizky once advised:

Sit at the piano unconstrained and erect, like a good horseman on his horse, and yield to the movements of the arms, as far as necessary, as the rider yields to the movements of his horse.⁸¹

One should sit at the piano at a distance so the "finger-tips may rest on the keys without effort"⁸² when arms are bent at the elbow. Sit far from the piano to allow the hands to rest comfortably with elbows bent at the joint. The arms should be level and the elbows slightly higher than the keyboard and wrists. The elbows should neither be tightly against the torso nor too far from the body. A comfortable area between is ideal. When proper posture is achieved, the student is ready to learn the distinct tone favored by Leschetizky.

TONE QUALITY

Like Czerny, Leschetizky endorsed the value of scale technique, but more important was tone quality. Leschetizky said in his famous maxim; "C'est le ton qui fait la musique" (It is tone that makes music).⁸³ The *cantilena* style attained by his students was

⁸⁰ Arnold Schultz, The Riddle of the Pianist's Finger (New York: Carl Fischer, Inc., 1936) 67.

⁸¹ Bree 1.

⁸² Bree 1.

⁸³ Bree 28.

the distinguishing tone that caught the public's attention. They each had the ability to play forte without harshness and a pianissimo clear enough to be heard throughout a concert hall.

Leschetizky developed some general exercises which help the qualities of music such as dynamics, articulation, and dexterity. In The Groundwork of the Leschetizky Method, Bree illustrates several exercises recommended by Leschetizky. Initially, the exercises are short and simple, allowing the student to focus attention to both the fingers and wrist. In the "Single-Finger" exercise, four fingers hold the whole notes while one finger plays the quarter notes (Fig. 5). Each measure is to be repeated *ad libitum*. In playing this exercise, a light touch is needed to give each finger equal intensity in tone. The weaker fingers require more effort and attention to achieve this. Listening is of extreme importance; the ear is the true judge of success.

Fig. 5

The "Two-finger" exercise is quite similar but "the active fingers should play legato"⁸⁴ while the other three sustain their keys (Fig. 6).

⁸⁴ Bree 9.

Fig. 6

The same approach is suggested for the "Three-finger" (Fig. 7), "Four-finger" (Fig. 8), and "Five finger" (Fig. 9) exercises.

Fig. 7

Fig. 8

Fig. 9

As a general rule, Bree states:

Be careful not to hold the inactive fingers up spasmodically, for this would take too much strength from the active one. And do not worry if the 4th finger jerks a little when the 3rd finger plays, or if the 5th does likewise when the 4th plays. There is an anatomical reason for this, in the presence of a common tendon; so it does no harm. The breaking-up of this habit is a wearisome task, whose sole result would be, perhaps, a certain stiffness of the wrist.⁸⁵

Although Leschetizky's tone production exercises are helpful, students will fall short of their goals if the practice falls upon deaf ears. Proper tone production begins with good listening skills. Once proper tone production is achieved, one can concentrate on proper articulation.

ARTICULATION

The Harvard Concise Dictionary of Music describes articulation as, "In performance, the characteristics of attack and decay of single tones or groups of tones and

⁸⁵ Bree 11.

the means by which these characteristics are produced.”⁸⁶ For the purpose of this discussion, observations must be made on Leschetizky’s suggestions for legato in *cantilena* style and staccato.

Although pianists are incapable of making the instrument “sing” as the vocalist or violinist can do, they must do what they can to achieve this quality. A well-developed legato and practical pedaling is the basis for this achievement. Bree suggests that, “The finger is lifted-in the normal style-only when the next finger has struck its key.”⁸⁷ However, to play *legatissimo*, the sustained finger is held a little longer while the next note is played (Fig. 10).

Fig. 10

When playing legato in *cantilena*, Bree suggests:

...the strength of the fingers does not suffice, but must be reinforced by wrist-pressure in the following way: Touch the key lightly and force the finger to press it down deep (without losing contact with it) by means of a swift upward movement of the wrist; at this instant, wrist and finger-joints must be firm. The same effect may also be obtained by a rapid down-stroke of the wrist. Immediately after striking the tone, the wrist must return to its normal position, while the finger holds the key lightly.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ “Articulation,” Harvard Concise Dictionary of Music, (London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press) 1978.

⁸⁷ Bree 29.

⁸⁸ Bree 29.

Bree uses the term *wrist pressure* to describe the technique favored by Leschetizky. But what exactly is wrist-pressure? Does the arm have any effect on the tone? What is the role of the shoulder? To better understand this procedure, one can turn to the description of Otto Ortmann. Ortmann prefers the term *weight-transfer*. Weight transfer “is the act of transferring a given weight from one point of support... to another.”⁸⁹ Ortmann said:

The ‘Rollbewegung’ (rolling motion) is based upon the assumption that the arm-weight is literally rolled from one finger to another. And the use of the weight touch in legato melodies, although it is not accompanied, necessarily, being used for tone production be transferred from finger to finger as the melody is played. The mechanical principles already stated... indicate that this weight-transfer is not simple, uniform mechanical operation, but one varying with other factors of technique.⁹⁰

Not mentioned is the role of the shoulders which is the basis of all arm and hand movement. Most important pianistically, is its function “to permit the vertical movement of the fore-arm used”⁹¹ when playing chords. The shoulder also controls “the vertical, the lateral-horizontal, and forward-backward horizontal”⁹² movements of the arm. Ortmann agrees that “the importance of the shoulder-joint movements in piano-playing is manifest.”⁹³

In short, describing the tone so distinguishable of Leschetizky’s students, cannot be properly represented with a few shallow words. Other factors other than *wrist-pressure* must be included in the equation. Factors such as arm pressure, weight transfer and the role of the shoulders must be considered.

⁸⁹ Ortmann 134.

⁹⁰ Ortmann 134.

⁹¹ Ortmann 35.

⁹² Ortmann 36.

⁹³ Ortmann 36.

On staccato, Leschetizky suggests two methods: *finger staccato* and *wrist staccato*. Either way, the keys are struck from above as opposed to being pressed down. However, finger-staccato is played by thrusting the fingers upward immediately after the key is struck. One should swiftly strike the key with a bent finger and immediately retract with the relaxed and unmoved wrist.

The wrist staccato uses more of the body and more energy. In describing the wrist staccato, Bree says, “the bent finger is thrown upon the key without further ceremony, striking it smartly, and being instantly withdrawn by the wrist.”⁹⁴ Considering which technique to use depends on tempo, rhythm, and interpretation. Wrist staccato would be appropriate for slower tempos and less complicated rhythms and finger staccatos would be appropriate for faster tempos and rapid rhythmic passages. Styles and eras can also determine which staccato to use. For example, the wrist staccato would be apropos in the *staccatissimo* (a very short staccato) approach, popular in the Romantic Era (Fig. 11) while the wrist staccato would be suitable for detached notes appropriate in the Baroque era (Fig.12).

Fig. 11 Chopin's Nocturne in Ab Op.32, No.2.

⁹⁴ Bree 20.

Fig. 12 Bach's Fugue in C minor from Well Tempered Clavier

SCALE TECHNIQUE

One of the most challenging aspects of piano teaching is scale technique. If, as is a belief to many, we were made in our Creator's image, our Creator must not be a pianist. If so, we would have been born with eight fingers on each hand, allowing us to play a one-octave scale easily without turning the thumb under or a finger over. However, our physical deficiencies force pianists to make adjustments, which include awkward fingering. Leschetizky developed several exercises to ease some of the difficulties. Most problems occur where the first, third and fourth fingers are involved because of the over and under requirements of each scale. In one exercise, two of the three fingers are held down while the other finger maneuvers underneath (Fig. 13).

Fig. 13.

When the second and third finger are held down, as in measures three and six, the hand must be arched, which allows the thumb to maneuver without interference. In another exercise, the importance lies in the accent of the second and third finger (Fig. 14). Bree suggests that the thumb, beginning on C, pass immediately under the palm in a bent posture while the second finger strikes the key. The arms should move comfortably when the thumb turns under or a finger turns over.⁹⁵

Fig. 14

Leschetizky expands the exercise by sustaining three fingers, while one plays, (Fig. 15) and two fingers sustained while two play (Fig. 16). He also extends the exercise with accents, but with emphasis on the fourth and second finger (Fig. 17). Mastering these exercises completes the bulk of the work preparing the student for diatonic scales.

Fig. 15

⁹⁵ Bree 14.

Fig. 16

Fig. 17

Since there are twelve major scales plus related minors, several approaches are needed to cover them all. However, Leschetizky addressed some general rules that can be applied to each. First and foremost is the smoothness of movement. When the thumb turns under the lateral movement of the hand should glide evenly “much like a car on rails,”⁹⁶ avoiding any unnecessary jerking. The hand posture should remain vaulted and curved, as I discussed earlier. Each scale should begin at a slow tempo, evenly and strongly. Each note should be detached much like staccato, to reach the “pearly” sound. Once the scale is well studied, one can address faster tempos as well as dynamic shadings (Fig. 18). Each exercise should be transposed to all major keys as well as the relative minors.

⁹⁶ Bree 18.

Fig. 18

PEDALING

Although Mozart had a pedal mechanism built on his pianoforte around 1784, and “Haydn had made isolated requests for the ‘open [damper] pedal’ late in his pianistic career,”⁹⁷ it was Beethoven who began the “era of greater and more intense expressiveness, to which the pedals”⁹⁸ greatly contributed. Albeit the knee-lever damper controls were used on the early Stein pianos sampled by Mozart, the true pedal (operated by the foot) was not widely used until the turn of the century. At the same time action-shifting devices which allowed the hammers to strike fewer strings (*una corda*) became more sophisticated. By 1810, pedal markings began to appear in Beethoven’s manuscripts (e.g. *Für Elise*, WoO 59). In 1844, the *sustemuto* pedal, capable of sustaining specific tones without affecting others, was introduced in a Paris Exhibition by the Marseille firm of Boisselot and Sons. And in 1874, Albert Steinway of American Steinway took out a United States Patent on the *sostemuto* pedal.⁹⁹ Pedaling reinforces tones, connects phrases and produces special effects. Because of these innovations, different timbres were available leading to new and exciting musical interpretations.

⁹⁷ Joseph Banowetz, The Pianist’s Guide to Pedaling (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985) 142.

⁹⁸ Banowetz 142.

⁹⁹ Banowetz 4.

Leschetizky believed that most pianists fell into two camps. There are those who avoid all confrontations of harmonic law but appear too pedantic and scrupulous. These pianists avoid all innovation, but also sound too mechanical and uninteresting. Then there are those with a good ear who rely heavily on instinct. These pianists treat the pedal as an accessory and not an essential part of interpretation. Both camps need to improve listening skills because, as Bree states, “The regulator for correct pedaling is the ear.”¹⁰⁰

Leschetizky once said:

Good pedaling, good style, good taste all depend for the most part, on listening to your own playing. Piano playing is not all emotion, by any means. You must use your senses, and always have them with you, or your emotions count very little. If you listen well, that in itself is a means of attracting many emotional qualities.¹⁰¹

According to Bree there are two types of pedaling: simultaneous pedaling and syncopated. Bree wrote, “The simultaneous pedal undertakes to hold the tone where the finger must be withdrawn and the tone should continue sounding.”¹⁰² As the tone or chord is played the dampers rise concurrently. This technique will free the hand and allow the bass note to sustain through the duration of the chord (Fig 19).

Fig. 19

¹⁰⁰ Bree 64-65.

¹⁰¹ Newcomb 64.

¹⁰² Bree 62.

Joseph Banowetz, author of The Pianistic Guide to Pedaling, adds that “depressing the pedal simultaneously with the new note or chord will achieve the maximum amount of richness of tone color.”¹⁰³

Syncopated pedaling allows the note or chord to resolve to the next tone(s) without a separation in sound. Bree explains, “The syncopated pedal can be employed only where the tone or tones which should continue to sound can be held down by the fingers over the change of pedal.”¹⁰⁴ In this technique, the pedal is applied immediately after the initial tone is played, and lifted at the first tone of the harmonic change, only to repeat the process to each succeeding chord (Fig. 20).

Fig.20

The two pedaling techniques suggested by Bree, fall short of the several types of pedaling which are often used. The pedal can also be used to project rhythm, assist dynamics, and add special effects, especially in 20th century music.

Using the pedal to project rhythm can be very effective in dance forms such as Chopin's mazurkas. Unlike the waltz, where the natural accent falls on the first beat, the characteristic of the Polish dance requires accents on the first and third beat. Therefore the pedal is lifted between the second and third beat, giving the desired effect (Fig 21).

¹⁰³ Banowetz 72.

¹⁰⁴ Bree 62.

Fig.21

Syncopated rhythms are often difficult to maintain, especially for extended periods. One example is the first movement of Schumann's *Faschingschwank aus Wien*, Op. 26, (Fig. 22) which maintains the same syncopated rhythm for forty measures.

Banowetz said:

Although the rhythm remains clear on the printed page, to the listener it sounds as though each bar line comes one beat earlier. The pedaling... will help to project the actual rhythm by giving a slight swell and change of color in the sound, resulting from the release of sympathetic partials as the dampers are raised on each downbeat.¹⁰⁵

Fig. 22

Unlike the violinist, or vocalist, it is impossible for the pianist to increase a tone once the key is played. Each tone immediately decays. However, with proper pedaling, one can *fool* the listener's ear. For example, in passages marked *crescendo-decrescendo* over one note or chord, the effect of a slight swelling can be achieved if the pedal is depressed immediately following the desired note (Fig. 23).

¹⁰⁵ Banowetz 58.

Fig. 23

There are a great variety of pedaling techniques which enhance *crescendo* and *decrescendo* shadings. For example, in Schubert's *Impromptu* in C minor, op. 90, D. 899, the crescendo occurs on a repeated note. By pedaling between the second and third beat, the timbre changes complementing the increase in intensity (Fig. 24).

Fig.24

Pedaling during scales are often discouraged. However, rapid ascending scales with *crescendo* markings can be quite successful, even with a full pedal. One example can be found in Chopin's Concerto No. 1 (Fig. 25). Without proper pedaling, this particular passage would lack the color of Chopin's style.

Fig. 25

Even small bursts of pedal can be beneficial in reinforcing a crescendo. In Liszt's "Mazeppa" (from *Etudes d' exécution transcendante*) the pedal is applied to ascending passages and released on descending. Although the entire *cadenza* has an underling *crescendo*, the pedaling technique will change the color giving the impression of a wave-like *crescendo-decrescendo* effect as it ascends to the top (Fig. 26).

Fig. 26.

Regardless of the technique, Leschetizky submits three general rules. First, "In chords, the bass note must sound with its chords."¹⁰⁶ The pedal should be applied simultaneously to the bass tone in situations where the chord is wide spread. Second, "The pedal may be more freely employed in high positions than when playing low or in the middle of the keyboard; because the shorter sound waves of the treble produce shorter resonance."¹⁰⁷ Therefore, pianists must give special attention to the mid to low range tones when applying pedal in order to keep clarity. And third, "In connection with the pedal, the low bass tones are dangerous to the higher ones, because of their prolonged

¹⁰⁶ Bree 63.

¹⁰⁷ Bree 63.

resonance.”¹⁰⁸ The pedal should be released sooner on the lower tones, especially when ascending, to allow clarity in the higher tones.

Leschetizky's views on pedaling complement the compositions of his time. His technical as well as interpretive suggestions work well in the compositions of Brahms, Liszt, Chopin and even Beethoven. The large sonorities of a Brahms *intermezzo* or the distinct pulse of a Chopin waltz benefit greatly from the pedal. However, the same approach would not apply to the works of Bach or Mozart. In fact he once said in a reaction to Bach's *Well Tempered Clavier*, “Go ahead and play it if it interest you, but why waste time on it when there is all of Beethoven, Schumann, Chopin, Liszt and Brahms to master?”¹⁰⁹ Leschetizky's personal repertoire was based on these composers. Even at the age of seventy, he would occasionally perform from this list of virtuostic Romantic composers. Arthur Friedman said in reference to a concert in London in 1900, “He played the Chopin scherzo in a manner that was more masterly. I mention this because there is a general impression that he was never much of a performer.”¹¹⁰ Leschetizky mastered the works of many of his contemporaries, but found little interest in those before Beethoven.

¹⁰⁸ Bree 63.

¹⁰⁹ Schonberg 277.

¹¹⁰ Schonberg 266.

CONCLUSION

To understand the teachings of Leschetizky, one must understand his era. The piano was still fairly new, with an entirely different sound and action. Like the television of the sixties, the piano grew in popularity among the middle class because it was affordable and prestigious. In previous generations, the knowledge of music was only accessible to the higher classes of society. But the increased popularity caused a demand for innovative teachers like Leschetizky. But can today's student find value in his teachings? The answer is not as clear as it may seem.

His suggestions for practice and study are just as valuable today as then. Teachers are often consumed with technique and interpretation giving little attention to the art of practice. Leschetizky's approach to practice and study familiarizes the student with all facets of music, including harmonic analysis, dynamic control, and proper articulation. Leschetizky's approach allows the student to perform with better confidence and concentration.

Today's student can also find value in his suggestions for proper body and hand posture. Although the metaphor relating to horseback riding might not be as meaningful today, one can visualize the proper posture. Even his views on hand posture are appropriate in spite of the technological advances of today's piano.

However, arguments can be made against some of his views. For example, there are problems posed by Leschetizky's opinion on hand size and how to teach accordingly. His views on hand size might sometimes apply to adults, but what about children? The constant growth of a child's hand make categorizing impossible. If Leschetizky's opinions

are to be taken into consideration, the teacher must be flexible and adjust to the constant change of the young student's hand and physical growth.

Another area of difficulty lies in the approach to scales. Leschetizky's preparatory exercises are innovative and effective for each hand. But the key words in the last sentence are "each hand." Leschetizky's approach concerns one hand at a time. Other problems occur when scales are played with two hands simultaneously. Leschetizky, at least through the eyes of Bree, never addressed this situation.

Leschetizky can also be criticized for his choice of repertoire. Avoiding literature prior to Beethoven deprives the student of technical as well as interpretive skills. How can one master the counterpoint of Beethoven and Brahms without mastering that of Bach? How can one teach Chopin and the art of phrasing without the help of Haydn and Mozart? Not only will the student lack technical and interpretive skills, but be deprived of the musical and historical concepts that form the evolution of music.

Leschetizky's views on repertoire equally effects his views on pedaling. His suggestions for pedaling are excellent for nineteenth century music, but inappropriate for prior works. Unlike the large sonorities favored by the Romantics, pedaling for music of the Classical Era is quite subtle. However, his observations for syncopated as well as simultaneous pedaling can be effective in much keyboard literature.

Although it may appear that the "Leschetizky Method" may be overrated, it is this author's view that the strengths outweigh the weaknesses. How can one argue with his legion of successful pupils? Ironically, none of these pianists sounded or played alike. The reason, a valuable lesson to all pedagogues, is his point of view that all students are taught according to their individualistic attributes. Many of Leschetizky's pedagogical

theories draw some criticism, but his most influential views of body movement, tone quality, and interpretation, earned him his reputation. Gerig states, "...Leschetizky's vital emphasis on tone and an intensely live musical expression surely established him as one of the finest inspirational teachers of piano."¹¹¹

¹¹¹ Newcomb 284.

Isabella Vengerova

She was a heavy set woman who was known for her “enormous contradictions, and iron-clad opinions.”¹¹² She instilled fear in her students and did what she could to break their spirit. She was devoted to those who can handle the pressure “but hated those who broke under the strain.”¹¹³ “Vot do I care how you commit suicide?”¹¹⁴ was often heard when a student failed to follow precise instructions. When the student remedied the problem, she would say, “You may apologize now.”¹¹⁵ She had a stock pile of interesting phrases, but the most feared was “Come home for a lesson.”¹¹⁶

Eileen Flissler, a former student, wrote:

‘Come home for a lesson’ was the most upsetting, for it was based on that unpreparedness of which you were guilty, on her possessiveness which made you her property forever, and it must really have been torture for her to sit home and imagine how you were disgracing her in some far-off city, away from her control. No matter how you hid, she found you. She always knew where you were playing, and the phone would ring: ‘You are playing?’ ‘Yes, Madam.’ ‘Vizout a lesson?’ ‘Er, well, there wasn’t time to go to New York.’ ‘Vot you mean - no time? *Come home for a lesson.*’ ‘But Madam, I can’t afford the fare.’ ‘Vot do I care how you commit suicide?’ And *bang* would go the phone. Shortly after, the summons would be issued, by mail or phone: ‘You may apologize.’¹¹⁷

Although Isabelle Afanasievna Vengerova had a style of her own, her output of musical masters clearly reflect her success as a piano pedagogue. Her stable of renowned

¹¹² Eileen Flissler, “The Venerable Vengerova: Magician of Pianoforte,” Music Journal 23, (March 1965): 33.

¹¹³ Flissler 33.

¹¹⁴ Flissler 33.

¹¹⁵ Flissler 34.

¹¹⁶ Flissler 34.

¹¹⁷ Flissler 81.

pianists include Gary Graffman, Jacob Lateiner, Zadel Skolovsky, Sydney Foster, and Anthony di Bonaventura.¹¹⁸ Others, although they perform as pianists, are better known for their success as composers, conductors and pedagogues. This list includes Samuel Barber, Leonard Bernstein, Lucas Foss, Eileen Flissler, Joseph Rezits and Judith Jaimes.¹¹⁹ Although each have found different paths to success, all have survived the “Russian Reign of Terror”¹²⁰ one time or another.

Flissler wrote:

When she died, an entire era passed with her. I don't believe piano teaching will ever be like that again. Madam lives on in our memories. She will only cease to *be* when we all die. Our children will not be able to further the legend. They would never believe it!¹²¹

According to a brief biography, written by Russian pianist Jacob Millstein:

Vengerova was born in Minsk, in a highly cultured family. She attracted attention as a child by her unusual musical gift. After graduation from high school in Minsk, Vengerova went to Vienna, where she entered the Vienna Conservatory. She completed her studies there as a pianist in the class of Joseph Dachs; later she took a special course for two years with Leschetizky in Vienna and subsequently with Anna Essipova in St. Petersburg. In 1904 she passed the examination at the St. Petersburg for the degree of ‘free artist.’ Her pedagogical activities began in Kiev in the late 1890s after her return to from Vienna. And it was in Kiev where she began her concert career, first in chamber music, then as a soloist. From 1900 on she lived in St. Petersburg, and continued to appear in symphonic, chamber music and solo concerts. The critics noted in her playing a

¹¹⁸ Robert Schick, The Vengerova System of Piano Playing (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1982) viii.

¹¹⁹ Schick viii.

¹²⁰ Flissler 33.

¹²¹ Flissler 81.

substantive quality, fine taste and a broad artistic culture. Her innate musicianship was never in question, and soon she gained recognition among the most fastidious listeners. [With Kochanski and Joseph Press she took part in a Brahms cycle in St. Petersburg, playing for the first time in Russia most of the chamber works of that composer.] In 1906 she was appointed assistant [to Mme. Essipova] in the piano department of the St. Petersburg Conservatory, and in 1910 was appointed Professor. From 1923 on she lived in the United States, mostly in New York and Philadelphia, where she obtained the reputation of a brilliant pedagogue. During many years she taught [beginning 1924], along with Josef Hofmann and others, at the Curtis Institute of Philadelphia. [That institution granted her an honorary doctorate in 1950. She was also on the faculty of the Mannes College of Music in New York.] She was an enthusiastic teacher, possessing a truly maternal love for her students.¹²²

Like her mentor Leschetizky, Vengerova never claimed to have a particular method. However, common procedures and goals were expected from all her students.

Many of her former students agree that the essence of Vengerova's instruction was the quality of tone. Gary Graffman wrote, "She was interested primarily in sound - she had an obsession with beautiful sound and legato."¹²³ Another former student, Robert Schick confirmed, 'The proper production of a sound is the basis of her technique, and provides the foundation for the development of speed, flexibility, and power.'¹²⁴

According to Schick, the following points are major factors in her method of tone production:

1. *Non-percussive touch*. The fingers are to be close to the keys in contact with them before playing (This rule is disregarded only when playing a hand staccato).

¹²² Schick 1.

¹²³ Bob Doershuk and Dave Helland, "Gary Graffman: Classical Eclecticist" Contemporary Keyboard vol. 4 December 1978: 18.

¹²⁴ Schick 12.

2. *Flexible wrist.* The flexibility and power of the wrist must be developed.

3. *Accents.* It is important to be able to play an accent in any context desired. To produce an accent the wrist is raised and the fingertip prepared on the key. The hand is held firmly from the fingertips through the knuckles to the wrist, though without unnecessary tension before making the sound. At the moment of tone production the wrist is pushed sharply downward with its energy going into the fingertip and then into the key (The tone should not be harsh, however). One relaxes immediately afterward.

4. *Quiet upper arm.* At no time is the upper arm used directly in the production of an accent. When playing an accent, the power comes from the application to the key of pressure from the finger and wrist. The elbow stays in a relatively fixed position, and the upper arm remains quiet.

5. *Relaxation.* All muscles must be relaxed while playing except those involved in tone production. These, too, should be relaxed immediately afterward.

6. *Weight.* The correct application of weight into the key is essential. One directs a greater amount of weight into the keyboard for loud sounds, and a lesser amount for soft ones.

7. *Applications to music.* The hand must follow the fingers in whatever pattern they play (Indeed the proper hand motion can help the fingers find their notes). At the same time the weight is transferred from one key to the next. When combined with a 'close to the keys,' non percussive touch, these principles help produce good legato.¹²⁵

Like Leschetizky, Vengerova believed tone quality was the foundation of pianistic musicianship. She was interested in "how to coax the largest range of beautiful, subtle, dazzling, dramatic, velvety and singing sonorities from the intractable black beast"¹²⁶ known as the piano.

¹²⁵ Schick 12.

¹²⁶ Gary Graffman, *I Really should Be Practicing* (Garden City: Doubleday and Company, 1981) 44.

Practice & Study

Like other students of Leschetizky, she was expected to memorize her pieces note for note and phrase by phrase. In turn, she expected the same from her students. Each piece was to be memorized without expression or interpretation. Vitaly Neuman, a Russian pianist, music scholar and former student wrote:

Every new piece had to be played from memory at the very first lesson. 'Do not try to interpret the music with a definite expression on the beginning,' she used to tell her pupils. Nuances, articulation, phrasing and other particulars, she maintained, should derive from a deep emotional feeling and understanding of the style, and should not be mechanically attached to the notes, following a teacher's instruction or the editor's indications in the music.¹²⁷

The true authority of right and wrong is the ear. Newman adds, "Each melodic inflection was carefully analyzed, with minute attention paid to the ear's control over contrapuntal and harmonic parts."¹²⁸

Vengerova also insisted that her students understood the historical and cultural significance of each composer. She once wrote:

...when you play a Beethoven sonata, you must also form an idea of all other Beethoven sonatas. While playing a work of a certain composer, you must become familiar with the historical era of his time, his biography, his ideas and the musicians who influenced his creative imagination. You must also study scholarly and literary works devoted to this composer.¹²⁹

¹²⁷ Schick 108.

¹²⁸ Schick 108.

¹²⁹ Joseph Rezits, "Can a Second Generation Method be Successful? The Teaching of Isabelle Vengerova." The Piano Quarterly vol. 106 Summer 1979: 19.

With the prerequisites understood, the student was prepared for a lesson with Madame Vengerova.

Posture & Hand Position

She attested to the posture and hand position recommendations of Leschetizky but expanded on his general rules. According to Vitaly Neuman the rules requested, "... 1) the elbows to be kept away from the torso, 2) the wrists to be held with complete freedom, 3) the fingers to maintain a curved position, with strength and precision."¹³⁰ Once played, the finger immediately releases the key and positions itself for the next one.

In the basic five-finger position such as the *C position*, the torso should be far enough from the keyboard "so that the elbows can pass easily in front when the left hand moves towards the treble register or the right hand toward the bass."¹³¹ This allows the elbows to pass freely in front when the left hand plays the higher registers, or the right hand the lower registers. The position of the chair or piano bench also needs to be considered. Schick suggests that "the height of the chair should be adjusted so that the bottom of the thumb and wrist can rest comfortably in the same plane as the top of the depressed key."¹³²

The position of the fingers has a significant role as well. According to Schick, "The third finger (the longest) is nearest the black keys, the second and fourth fingers a

¹³⁰ Gerig 313.

¹³¹ Schick 22.

¹³² Schick 22.

little behind, the fifth finger about midway between the edge of the white keys, and thumb placed with just its nail on the key.”¹³³ With the knuckles arched, the hand is level and equally balanced so it does not slant towards the first or fifth finger.

To achieve proper curvature, Vengerova used a simple analogy asking students “to reverse the hand so that the back is down and the palm up, as if holding a ball, and then place the hand on the keyboard, maintaining the same shape.”¹³⁴ This author suggests the analogy of a *bubble*, rather than a ball. With this analogy, students can visualize the delicacy needed to ensure and maintain a relaxed hand position. Joseph Rezits said:

A curved position of the middle and nail joints [a ‘contracted’ or ‘arched’ position of the hand] gives greater potential force to the movements of the fingers than if the fingers were held in a straight position. A tone produced by a given amount of finger energy using a “curved” finger will be louder than a tone produced with the same amount of energy using a flat finger.¹³⁵

Many pianists believe that *curved* fingers produce a *bright* sound and flat fingers a *round* sound. But according to Rezits, “The latter is softer and therefore a different quality.”¹³⁶ The louder sound decays more rapidly than the softer sound creating a *sforzato* effect “giving special credence to the illusion of brightness.”¹³⁷

As mentioned earlier, (through the critique of Malwine Bree’s suggestions), both

¹³³ Schick 22.

¹³⁴ Schick 22.

¹³⁵ Rezits 18.

¹³⁶ Rezits 18.

¹³⁷ Rezits 18.

flat and curved fingers are acceptable depending on the circumstances. Flattened fingers are advantageous when playing *large chordal passages especially in rapid tempo*. It also enlarges your hand easing the strain on large and awkward intervals. It is just as practical when playing legato with lyrical phrasing. On the other *foot*, curved fingers are appropriate for passages with scales and small intervals. It also has the strength needed for accented notes or *marcato* excerpts. As a result, bent fingers allow more force with less muscle use, diminishing the possibilities of fatigue. Schultz wrote:

The bent finger secures a maximal intensity with a minimal muscular expenditure, but in the usual tonal succession it is incapable of securing a satisfactory legato. The flat finger gains its intensities with a greater expenditure of muscular energy, but it is more advantageous for legato.¹³⁸

To achieve the tone so important to Vengerova, not only does proper hand position and posture become an important variable, but also proper utilization of the wrists. According to Rezits, “The wrist is used extensively in practice and as a means of musical control.”¹³⁹ With the finger in contact with the key, the wrist moves downward “following a line that traces a vertical or outward course.”¹⁴⁰ The rotation of the wrist should be parallel to the edge of the keyboard and not perpendicular to the piano. He adds, “The key is depressed when the wrist is almost level. The wrist continues to move down until the ‘carry through motion’ is completed and the tension of the stroke essentially dissipated.”¹⁴¹ This entire movement is known as *the accent*. Schick adds:

¹³⁸ Schultz 134.

¹³⁹ Rezits 18.

¹⁴⁰ Rezits 18.

¹⁴¹ Rezits 17.

To play an accent the wrist is raised as high as possible beforehand but without losing the curvature of the fingers. The fingertip then presses firmly into the key, and the wrist drives down sharply and quickly at the same time in a strictly vertical plane.¹⁴²

When the accent is complete, “the wrist will be considerably lower than when it began, but should not go much lower”¹⁴³ than the depressed key. After the key is pressed, “the wrist motion continues past the moment when the sound is produced”;¹⁴⁴ much like a golfer who’s swing follows through well beyond the point of contact with the ball.

The accent allows a simple accompaniment to be played with six different dynamic levels. For example, in the accompaniment of Chopin’s Nocturne in G Major, beats 1 and 4 have a natural rhythmic pulse (Fig. 1). Therefore the wrist is at its lowest level, more so on the stronger beat one than weaker beat four. Beats 2 and 3 have similar roles as 5 and 6 but the latter less for the same reason as beat 4. Therefore the 2nd and 3rd beat, as well as the 5th and 6th work well when the wrist ascends before reaching the stronger beats of 1 or 4.

Fig. 1

¹⁴² Schick 22.

¹⁴³ Schick 22.

¹⁴⁴ Schick 22.

Rezit's wrote:

It is obvious that attempting to create this variety in levels by means of individual finger control would be extremely difficult. By having appropriate wrist movements take care of the volume differences., the musical result is achieved naturally and gracefully.¹⁴⁵

Therefore, the dynamic level of each beat is determined by the height of the wrist as opposed to the force of the hand or finger.

According to Rezits:

...these procedures form the basis for a highly controlled, effective and efficient means of transmitting the musical and technical wishes of the performer to the keyboard. The legato obtained by this manner of *practicing* is transferred to the actual *playing*, and the player's maximum inherent velocity is assured because of the absence of wasted finger motion.¹⁴⁶

Although the term, *accent*, might be used out of the context musicians are accustomed to, that is, "Emphasis on one pitch or chord,"¹⁴⁷ Schick suggests that the "looseness of terminology is harmless, however, since one is learning a technique that will be used to produce an accent in the proper context."¹⁴⁸ But to avoid confusion, the term used in our discussion will be written in italics.

Once students understood the importance of proper hand position, posture, the significance of the wrist, and its effect on the *accent*, they were ready for the Vengerova's system of technique and tone production.

¹⁴⁵ Rezits 17.

¹⁴⁶ Rezits 17-18.

¹⁴⁷ "Accent," Harvard Concise Dictionary of Music, 1978 ed.

¹⁴⁸ Schick 23.

Articulation

In the Vengerova System of Piano Playing, Schick illustrates several exercises used by Madame Vengerova. One of the earliest technical exercises is *playing in ones*. This exercise begins with a basic five-finger position such as C - D - E - F - G, with the thumb in the right hand on C, and the fifth finger of the left hand an octave below. Each key is accented while ascending and descending. Although this may appear elementary, this exercise allows the student to concentrate on tone, posture, and wrist movement. After mastering the five finger pattern, the student applies the same technique to one octave scales.

In his book, Robert Schick explained the pedagogical techniques he, Jacob Laitner, and Barbara Elliot Bailey experienced as students of Vengerova. Several points were discussed regarding proper practice of the *playing in ones* exercise (Fig. 2). They include fingertip preparation, weight and relaxation, dynamic level, the role of elbow and upper arm, and tempo.

Fig. 2

Fingertips should never leave the surface of the keys; even when playing *staccato*.

Schick wrote, "The fingertip must be in contact with the key at all times. The basic Vengerova touch is a prepared, non-percussive one."¹⁴⁹

The sequence of weight and relaxation are very important. When playing an *accent* the pianist must feel the weight of the arm upon the fingertip and the key when playing. Schick said, "Mme. Vengerova once told me to imagine that a ton was suddenly placed on my wrist forcing it down, with pressure going into the fingertip and then into the key."¹⁵⁰ After the key is played, the finger immediately relaxes with just enough pressure to hold down the key until the next one is played. It is this author's belief that students can learn the weight and relaxation sequence with the aid of a table or any hard surface. With both hands on the surface and in the position recommended by Vengerova, the student should press one finger at a time and feel the pressure for five seconds, then relax for the same amount of time.; much like isometrics. Then press for four seconds and relax for four, then three, two and finally one. Although a little fatigue might set in, the student will understand the weight and relaxation concept by the time the one second sequence has been reached. It is advisable to go to the piano immediately and apply the same exercise to the *playing in ones* exercise.

When playing the exercise, the dynamic level of each pitch "should emerge with a *forte* sound when doing this basic technical work."¹⁵¹ When applied to music literature,

¹⁴⁹ Schick 34.

¹⁵⁰ Schick 23.

¹⁵¹ Schick 23.

“one can modify the fingertip pressure and speed to vary the loudness of an accent.”¹⁵²

Although this author agrees with this approach, may it be suggested that the exercise be played with varying dynamics. Often times young students play *marcato* with too much intensity, making their hand rigid and tense. By lowering the dynamic level, students can relax and improve their tone. Once they have found a comfortable execution of the key, they can increase the dynamic level, but at the same time, remain relaxed.

The role of the elbow and upper arm are minimal, loud chords included. Schick wrote, “The elbow should be kept virtually motionless to prevent the energy from being dissipated and to direct it to the fingertip and the keyboard where the sound will be produced.”¹⁵³ The upper arm should not have any direct involvement when playing an *accent*. These tips are crucial especially for young students. Often times students who get caught up in the emotion of a piece sway back and forth like a buoy on the sea. Although it may appear to the student that musicality is enhanced, the listener and observer can be distracted by unnecessary movements. Teachers should encourage students to focus the excess energy to their music and not to physical waste.

The tempo for each exercise varies from person to person. Beginners require a second to a second and a half between each down-up cycle, whereas others need less. Ideally, tempo should be as fast as an even tempo can allow. Helpful to beginners would be to recite “down and up, and; down and up and...” giving each syllable an equal and even amount of time.

¹⁵² Schick 23.

¹⁵³ Schick 23.

Once the same technique has been applied to two octave scales, the student can accent every other note but the role of the varies. Although the wrist descends on the strong beat, it ascends to the original position on the off beat (Fig. 3) preparing for the next down beat. This exercise can be expanded to triplet and sixteenth note accents (Fig.4).

Fig. 3

Fig. 4

There are several advantages to Vengerova's system of *accent* exercises. The first is consistency in tone. By accenting each note, tone quality and articulation become even and consistent. By varying the intensity of each exercise, one can reach consistency in several dynamic levels. The second advantage is the execution of *legato*. Transferring the weight from fingertip to fingertip creates the connected tones. With dynamic shading, and tempo rubato, the lyrical phrasing of composers such as Chopin, Brahms and Schumann become more rewarding. Third, by omitting unnecessary arm and body movement, students can relax and focus the energy where needed; *in the music*.

Scales and Arpeggios

Regardless of the advantages, proper articulation does not solve the fingering problems associated with scales and arpeggios. Like Leschetizky, and Czerny before him, Vengerova had her students play major, harmonic and melodic minor scales using the standard fingering. Although she did not assign scales in contrary motion, her students played with both hands an octave, third, sixth and tenth apart. But significant to her approach was the exercises dealing with the thumb and third finger. The following exercises help solve problems associated with passing the thumb under.

Exercises associated with the thumb under or fingers over the thumb.

L.H.

R.H.

Although not all exercises need to be played, and in any chronological order, Schick lists the following recommendations of Vengerova:

1. They can be transposed to all keys, major and minor, with the fingering and pitch pattern adjusted to the placement of the thumb in that key.
2. It is not necessary to practice all of the exercises.
3. They are to be played with hands separately.
4. The thumbs must pass under the other fingers gradually without the
5. aid of lateral motions of the wrist.
6. Where accents are marked they are to be made in the usual Vengerova fashion.
7. The wrist drops on the long notes but without making an accent, or at least not a big one (The entire dynamic level was not more than mezzo piano, or at most mezzo forte.) The wrist rises on the short notes.¹⁵⁴

Her approach to arpeggios were similar to that of scales. Her students studied arpeggios in major, minor, diminished and dominant seventh forms. These too had general rules. According to Schick:

7

¹⁵⁴ Schick 35-36.

1. Her fingerings were traditional, and were based on the following principles according to my analysis:
2. In the right hand play the thumb as soon as possible; in the left had as late as possible. (Arpeggios are begun ascending.)
3. Avoid putting the thumb on a black key with the necessary exceptions of triad arpeggios in Eb minor and F# major.
4. Substitute the second finger where appropriate for another at the start of a right-hand arpeggio, or at the top of a left-hand one.¹⁵⁵

When to use the third or fourth finger is a dilemma for many pianists. She suggests using the fourth if the note in question is closer to the fifth finger than the second (Fig. 6).

Fig. 6

The third finger if the note in question is closer to the second than to the fifth (Fig. 7).

Fig. 7

¹⁵⁵ Schick 49.

Use the fourth finger if the note in question is equidistant on the keyboard between the second and fifth fingers (Fig. 8).

Fig. 8

Vengerova's system includes a table which satisfies the fingering in all arpeggios.

<i>Chord</i>	<i>Hand</i>	<i>Root Position</i>	<i>1st Inversion</i>	<i>2nd Inversion</i>
C, dm, em, F, G, am	R.H.	1231	1241	1241
	L.H.	5421	5421	5321
D, E, A	R.H.	1231	2124	1241
	L.H.	5321	3213	5321
cm, fm, gm	R.H.	1231	2123	1231
	L.H.	5421	4214	5321
Db, Eb, Ab	R.H.	2124	1241	2412
	L.H.	2142	5421	4214
c#m, f#m, g#m	R.H.	2124	1241	2412
	L.H.	2142	5421	4214
Bb	R.H.	2124	1241	1231
	L.H.	3213	5421	5321
Bbm	R.H.	2312	2123	1231
	L.H.	3213	2132	5321
B	R.H.	1231	2312	2123
	L.H.	5321	3213	2132
bm	R.H.	1231	1241	2123
	L.H.	5421	5421	4214
ebm	R.H.	1231	1241	1241
	L.H.	5421	5421	5321
F#	R.H.	1231	1241	1241
	L.H.	5421	5421	5321

Although the arpeggio exercises began with the hands an octave apart, “the initial distance between the hands varies from a fifth to an eleventh in these nine possible combinations”¹⁵⁶ (Fig. 9).

Fig. 9

Vengerova designed several exercises to remedy the technical problems of arpeggios. It is recommended that accents are left out and then placed when appropriate (Fig. 10).

¹⁵⁶ Schick 51-52.

Fig. 10 (Continued)

Although most of the recommended fingerings are suitable for adult sized hands, one must make adjustments for children. In the groups that includes the C major, D major, C minor, B major, and B minor, Vengerova suggests using 1-2-3-1 fingering. The largest interval in each arpeggio is a fourth played by the third and first finger, a stretch difficult for most pianists regardless of age. Ortmann agrees that “it is, therefore, doubly necessary that the third finger move promptly, with the result that the weight-transfer and even the legato are impaired.”¹⁵⁷ Without the aid of the sostenuto pedal, it is impossible for a child to maintain legato. It is the suggestion of this author to consider the right hand fingering of 2-1-2-4 in each of these cases except B major and B minor. With this adjustment, the interval of the fourth is played with the first and second finger (Fig. 11) maintaining *legato*; otherwise abandoned by conventional fingering.

¹⁵⁷ Ortmann 262.

<i>Chord</i>	<i>Hand</i>	<i>Root Position</i>	<i>1st Inversion</i>	<i>2nd Inversion</i>	<i>3rd Inversion</i>
C7	R.H.	1234	1234	1234	1234
	L.H.	5432	5432	5432	5432
G7, D7, A7	R.H.	1234	2123	1234	1234
	L.H.	5432	4321	5432	5432
E7	R.H.	1234	2312	2123	1234
	L.H.	5432	4321	3214	5432
B7	R.H.	2341	2312	2123	1234
	L.H.	4321	3214	2143	5432
F#7	R.H.	2123	1234	<u>2341</u>	1234
	L.H.	<u>2143</u>	5432	4321	5432
Db7, Ab7	R.H.	2123	1234	2341	2312
	L.H.	2143	5432	4321	3214
Eb	R.H.	2123	1234	1234	2312
	L.H.	1234	5432	5432	4321
Bb, F	R.H.	1234	1234	1234	2123
	L.H.	5432	5432	5432	4321

Vengerova designed the following exercises to overcome technical problems

(Fig. 13) . The starting finger should alternate between the second third and fourth finger:

Fig. 13

Pedaling

Being that tone is a significant factor in the Vengerova method, so is the importance of pedaling. Although she never gave formal lectures on pedaling, she did offer her thoughts on the subject. Vengerova wrote:

The use of the pedals likewise has become a subtle and complicated science in itself, with pianists no more relying helplessly and exclusively on 'intuition' and 'inspiration'; through conscious study and understanding we now control this important means of contributing to the richness and color of the piano's tone.¹⁵⁸

Most of her general rules on pedaling are not ground breaking suggestions. Rules such as "pedal according to the harmonies," "adjust pedaling to the dynamics involved," and "don't pedal through rests, or notes which are staccato or non-legato"¹⁵⁹ are common among many pedagogical methods. However, Vengerova does suggest several significant pedaling techniques. One suggestion she offers is to, "reinforce an accent with the pedal."¹⁶⁰ Not only will this technique give a note a degree of emphasis but also different timbre.

She also suggests that pedaling should match the style of the music. For example, the pedaling in a piece by Chopin is quite different from that of Mozart. Both composers, as well as their contemporaries, used different generations of instruments. The Stein forte-piano used by Mozart does not have the same nuances and effects as that of Chopin's Pleyelconcert grand piano. Classical compositions are often lighter in

¹⁵⁸ Isabelle Vengerova, "The Piano as It Seems to Me," Overtures February 1930: 116.

¹⁵⁹ Schick 88-89.

¹⁶⁰ Schick 89.

character and require less pedaling, if any. Romantic compositions require increased pedaling, creating the larger sonorities characteristic of the Romantic Period.

The pianist must “adjust the pedaling to his touch, the nature of the the piano, and the acoustics of the room.”¹⁶¹ Many factors such as humidity, room temperature or acoustics can change the conditions of a performance. It is important to quickly adjust the pedaling to overcome the various conditions that effect a performance.

Pedaling must be planned in order to avoid unwanted accents. Schick says, “Both depressing and lifting the pedal abruptly create accents (Depressing the pedal increases the resonance by sympathetic vibration; lifting it produces a negative accent, because the sudden absence of sound stands out).”¹⁶² Proper planning of pedal control will eliminate inappropriate accents and allow the proper accents to stand out.

Vengerova’s rules on pedaling are appropriate for most styles. One must take into account the era when the composition was written and use the pedal accordingly. After all, it wasn’t until Beethoven that the pedaling directions became an integral part of piano scores.

Conclusion

Madame Vengerova’s contributions were highly influenced by her mentor Leschetizky. Like Leschetizky, and Czerny before him, tone was of utmost importance. A pianist could be an expert on rhythm, notation, and even historical concepts. But

¹⁶¹ Schick 89.

¹⁶² Schick 89.

without the ability to produce a musical tone, the same pianist cannot produce music.

Therefore, one of her most significant contributions to piano pedagogy was *the accent*.

The accent was not developed overnight. Like most *great* things, *the accent's* origins date back to the *legato technique* studies Czerny received from Beethoven.

Czerny in turn, passed on his techniques on tone to Leschetizky. Leschetizky's believed *it is tone that makes music*. Therefore Leschetizky developed helpful exercises to *make music*. Leschetizky then taught the philosophies of tone to Vengerova. She not only attested to his approach, but also expanded on his technical exercises. As a result *the accent* became an important staple of her teachings.

Summary

Many of the techniques and viewpoints of Czerny have tested the passed the test of time and others faded away with an era. It is the intention of the following to illustrate the pedagogical viewpoints and techniques which have gained or lost value. expanded, or have outgrown their value. Comparisons will be made outlining the techniques that are in common, those that are opposed, and those which are still effective today.

Practice and Study

Leschetizky was not at all in agreement with Czerny on the subject of practice. Czerny believed that the student should receive one hour of lesson in addition to two hours of practice daily. As if rebellious, Leschetizky believed that unreflective rattling-off of practice after a couple of hours diminished concentration. Czerny believed that three hours of hard work and concentration at the piano would conquer “all that is difficult or tedious in the elementary branches of playing.”¹⁶³ In contrast, Leschetizky believed that part of practice should be done away from the piano. He suggested that portions of practice should take place during other musing activities like walking alone in the night.

It would be difficult to expect today’s student to follow the regiment of Czerny. But at the same time, it would be unusual to imagine students of the day walking and contemplating the crescendos and decrescendos of a passing fire truck, or the staccato

¹⁶³ Czerny, Letters 9.

of a car alarm. However, the proper amount of practice time can be found somewhere in the middle. Times have changed and life is more complicated for our youth today than that of Czerny's era. Today, many parents work hard and give their children the best upbringing available. Children have dance, gymnastics and soccer practice to attend. Adolescents have to contend with driving lessons, television and computers. Little time is left for music.

But the teacher can help. Often missing in a teacher's lesson plan is the instruction of how to practice. Students are often told what to do but never how. A common mistake is practicing pieces from beginning to end without pausing to polish rough areas. Students should be taught how to focus on troubled areas, one at a time. Focusing would include practicing in varied tempi and articulations.

For instance, in the example from Haydn's Piano Sonata in E minor, No. 2 (Fig. 1), between the second measure and the dominant in the sixth measure, one of my students had difficulty playing the melody and the bass evenly.

Fig. 1

The repeated note in the left hand caused coordination problems which stuttered the tempo. For her to solve this problem she must know how and what to practice. The example actually contains two problems., first the repeated note and, second ,the scale and arpeggio which ends a significant cadence in measure nine. At first, she played the section with a dotted rhythm effect; choppy and uneven. I asked her to play the passage without the repeated note, that is the melody and bass only. This would allow her to listen to the parallel and contrary motion of the two voices. As she improved, we changed her articulation to *marcato*. This allowed her to gain confidence in the two voices. Once she played with confidence, we added the metronome. She played at a slow and comfortable tempo with each beat of the metronome representing an eighth note. With this method, the student's tempo became solid. This of course was the easy part. It was time to tackle the main problem, the repeated note of the left hand. With the metronome at the same tempo, I asked her to play each note of the pedal point, between the beats, with a light *pianissimo* touch. She was surprised how easy this was. She was then asked to play the entire left hand section, and was instructed to *listen* to the bass line. With good listening skills a student can overcome many problematic situations. As she listened intently, her bass line became strong and her pedal point rhythmic. We then added the melody and soon her playing became even.

The second part of the problem occurred with the D major scale and arpeggio in the last three and a half measures. Problems like this are easy to overcome as long as the student has good fundamentals in scales and arpeggios. In this case, she did. We reviewed her D major scale and arpeggios, but with more intensity. Rather than play an

octave apart, I asked her to play each scale in contrary motion, a third, and a sixth apart. She did the same with the arpeggios. Soon thereafter, her problems were solved, but only temporarily. She needed to know how to practice at home. I asked her to verbally tell me how we overcame her problems, interjecting when she left a step out. After she realized the process, I then gave her specific instructions. First, practice the melody and bass exclusively with the metronome and with assigned tempi and varied articulation. For instance, with metronome markings of eighty-two, ninety-four, one-hundred twenty, and one-hundred forty-four. The tempo markings were randomly picked, but with varying speeds. Students too often practice at faster tempos, with little regard for clarity. With regulated tempi and good listening skills, bad habits will diminish. With varied articulation, that is, detached and connected notes, students will play each note with better precision, especially with staccato. Secondly she was asked to practice the repeated note section with the metronome, as discussed earlier. The third part includes all three voices, again, with the metronome. For the scales and arpeggios, she was asked to review previous exercises, both hands in contrary motion, a third and sixth apart. Hours and hours of practice were not required. Instead, she was asked to spend five minute intervals, three or four times daily on this section.

Although this is a specific example, the approach is general. Each case is different, not because of the difficulty of the passage, but because of the strengths and weaknesses of the student. A good, creative teacher will adjust to these benefits and deficiencies. But what is important is the instruction of how to practice. Time at the

piano is limited and precious. By asking the student to review how the problem was solved, then given specific directions, they will learn how to practice with efficiency.

Both Leschetizky and Vengerova were in agreement about memorization and when to make musical interpretations. They both believed that one should learn a piece, through memory, one measure or phrase at a time. Memorization includes harmonic analysis, fingering, pedaling and form. Once these factors have been mastered, musical interpretation becomes the final seasoning.

Not all are in agreement with this theory. As mentioned earlier, Dr. Kanwischer believes that memorization should be on the larger form, and Dr Rezits believes that there is no need to rush. It is the belief of this author that the decision depends on the individual student themselves. Less experienced students have enough difficulties with notation, rhythm, and fingering. Once they gain confidence, musical concepts can be introduced, one at a time. One of the best concepts to begin with is pedaling whenever appropriate. Pedaling can help establish the proper mood and sonority of a section or piece. From this point, musical ideas such as articulation, tempo rubato (again, when appropriate) and dynamic shadings can develop; one at a time. However, more advanced students can bear more complex levels of comprehension. Sometimes pedaling can be included with notation, rhythm and fingering. Sometimes articulation and dynamic shadings can be learned simultaneously. It all depends on the level and maturity of the student.

Czerny, Leschetizky and Vengerova have contributed other ideas which can be effective. For example, verbal reinforcement of notation, as suggested by Czerny is very

effective for beginning students. To improve sight-reading he suggested constantly refreshing the repertoire with new pieces, but with the assurance that older pieces would be completed. This suggestion can be valid with all styles of music including, classical, jazz, and pop. Students, especially adolescents, enjoy modern and varying styles. But it is important for the teacher to choose the right level of difficulty. Being that it is sight-reading, the piece should be at an easier level than the student is accustomed to; challenging but not frustrating.

Leschetizky's philosophy on learning a piece phrase by phrase is helpful in gaining confidence and security with memorization. One of my mentors, Marina-Gusak Grin, required that the piece be memorized phrase by phrase and at a very slow tempo. The perception and concentration levels learned with this method are very high making performance easier.

The historical knowledge suggested by Vengerova is very important for today's student. Piano lessons should be more than learning how to produce sounds from an eighty-eight keyed instrument. Instrumental instruction, no matter what instrument, should be a well rounded *music* lesson, including theory, performance practice and historical concepts. This allows the student to understand the differences of style, and better comprehend the uniqueness of each composer. After all, how can a student properly play a Prelude from Bach and successfully play a Prelude from Chopin without having historical knowledge of each composer? Therefore it is important to give a student various styles within a lesson. I usually give my student pieces from three different eras. It is not uncommon for a student's lesson to consist of a Bach Invention,

Mozart Sonatina and a Chopin Prelude. Advanced students would be assigned a Bach Prelude and Fugue, Mozart Sonata and a Chopin Ballade. After the student has mastered each work, they will be asked to compare and contrast the difference in; forms, harmonies, articulations, phrasings, tempi (even or tempo rubato), rhythmic configurations, and pedaling (if any). But this comparison only talks about the music. The teacher must also tie in social and personal anecdotes of each composer and their era. There are those who might believe that the subject of history might be too boring and sophisticated for young students. But with good research, a teacher can hold a student's interest with trivial facts. Instead of explaining the facts, teachers could draw the student into the subject through fun and trivial questions. Questions like, "Do you know how many children Bach had?" Or, "Do you know where Mozart is buried? If so, you are the only one!" Or, "Did you know that some speculate that Chopin dated a girl named George?" Young students enjoy trivial facts that they can share with friends and family. It is of extreme importance to share the cultural and historical background of each composer and era. Students without an adequate biographical and historical background will never know the joy of deeper engagement with the ideas and ideals of the great classical masters.

Posture and Hand Position

The opinions of posture and hand position haven't changed much over the years. Czerny believed that the height of the bench should allow the elbows to be slightly higher than the level of the keys, and should be positioned at the middle of the keyboard.

Leschetizky believed that a student should sit at the piano so that the finger-tips could rest on the keyboard without effort. Vengerova believed that the height of the chair or bench should be adjusted so the thumb and wrist could rest comfortably at the same level as the top of a depressed key. All of these suggestions complement each other.

Teaching proper sitting and posture are relatively easy to instruct. Most piano students naturally sit properly at the very first lesson. But for those who have problems, there is a cure. With my students, I ask them to aim the center point of their torso towards the piano insignia (e.g. Baldwin, Yamaha, etc.) which is usually centered just above the keyboard. Once the student is centered and upright, I then proceed to the head.

With the aid of masking tape, a student's slouching head can be easily solved. With most posture problems, students lean forward, dropping the chin. By placing a strip of tape from the top of the head to the top of the spine, students can remedy their own problems. If the student's head leans forward, the back of the neck will get a little tug. However, If a student leans back, the tape will be placed from the chin to the sternum. As the student feels this tugging sensation, they will quickly correct the posture themselves. Teachers should be aware that this particular method is not for everybody. This method is only for students who do not mind a little physical activity. Shy and introverted students should try something else.

Teaching the roles of wrists and hands is more complicated. Simply put, the more joints that are involved, the more detail is needed. Czerny, Leschetizky, and Vengerova all address the importance of the wrist. Students often raise their wrist in a high arch, or allow the wrist to fall below the level of the keys. The solution is simple. By

placing a poker chip or large coin on the back of the hand, the coin will fall off when the student raises the wrist, or dips below the keys. It is best to begin this exercise with a five-fingered, evenly ascending and descending exercise in the C position. The tempo should be slow at first then increase in speed as confidence builds. After several flawless attempts, the student then advances to scales. Once scales are complete, then the student could advance to four to eight measured phrases. Soon thereafter, students will be able to play entire pieces without dropping the coin. However, teachers must not let the student become too rigid and unmusical.

Each of the masters have an opinion on fore-arm and elbow positions. Czerny believed that the fore arms should be parallel to the ground forming a horizontal line from the elbow to the knuckles. Leschetizky and Vengerova believed that the elbows should not be too close to the body, but not too far from the piano. They all agreed on the importance of curved fingers. But we must be careful not to assume that curved fingers are always appropriate. Certain situations such as rapid chordal passages require certain adjustments.

One of Leschetizky's most significant contributions were his views on hand size and its effect on pianists. Leschetizky pointed out the importance of choosing repertoire according to the size and physical nature of the student's hands. It was Otto Ortmann who best documented the physiological aspects of the pianist's actions at the keyboard, but Leschetizky was a pioneer of the theory.

Vengerova's significant contribution stems from her opinion on wrists and the importance of their role. *The tone*, which became her signature, involved the wrists and

their control of the hand and fingers. Vengerova's method requires the wrist to act like a rotating shock absorber. As the wrist rotates in a circular motion, melodies and accompaniment transcend to the lyrical style favored by the Madame.

Tone

Common to each of their teaching philosophies was the significance of tone quality. Czerny lists the requirements for quality of tone, Leschetizky said "It is tone that makes music,"¹⁶⁴ and Vengerova prescribes exercises and thoughts on wrist rotation and its effect on tone.

But even more interesting is their unrelated ideas of teaching tone quality. Czerny offers five suggestions on proper tone. Although the suggestions were written over a century and a half ago, and for instruments archaic by today's standards, they are just as appropriate today.

Leschetizky, according to Malwine Bree, developed several exercises that improved dynamic, dexterity and tone quality. It must be understood that the proper playing of these exercises, or any exercise for that matter, will not be successful without good listening skills. Tone will not improve if the student is not listening.

Vengerova's tone involved the technique known as the accent. The accent uses the wrist to achieve varied dynamic levels. Her technique can be helpful for accompaniment. The accent is an important concept concerning articulation and will be discussed further in the summary of articulation

¹⁶⁴ Bree 9.

Articulation

Czerny 's prolific career as the composer of nearly a thousand etudes is evidence of his dedication to tone and articulation. Maurice Hinson wrote, "Czerny composed 1,000 works, many - such as etudes and exercises - with pedagogical purposes."¹⁶⁵ He added, "Many of them focus on increasing finger dexterity and velocity."¹⁶⁶ There is an exercise for virtually any technical problem possible. Whether it is a problem with an ornament of Bach, or a chordal passage of Rachmaninoff, Czerny had an exercise that would help. The Art of Finger Dexterity had titles describing the purpose of each etude. Names like "Mordent-Exercise"¹⁶⁷, "Crossing the hands quietly and with delicate touch,"¹⁶⁸ and "Changing the fingers on one and the same key"¹⁶⁹ makes it easy to understand the objective. But to gain full value from of these exercises, a little research is needed. By categorizing the etudes, one will have an arsenal of teaching tools for the articulation problems that will come up. For example, if a student's left hand needs work, the category "Left Handed Etudes" which includes "Light touch in the fingers of the left hand,"¹⁷⁰ "Action of the fingers of the left hand,"¹⁷¹ and "Flexibility of the left hand"¹⁷² are at one's disposal. Or if a student has problems with scales, the category "Scale Exercises" will have "Clearness in running passages,"¹⁷³ or "Minor scales in rapid tempo"¹⁷⁴ to

¹⁶⁵ Hinson 19.

¹⁶⁶ Hinson 19.

¹⁶⁷ Czerny, The Art of Finger Dexterity 107.

¹⁶⁸ Czerny, The Art of Finger Dexterity 66.

¹⁶⁹ Czerny, The Art of Finger Dexterity 25.

¹⁷⁰ Czerny, The Art of Finger Dexterity 84.

¹⁷¹ Czerny, The Art of Finger Dexterity 146.

¹⁷² Czerny, The Art of Finger Dexterity 42.

¹⁷³ Czerny, The Art of Finger Dexterity 92.

¹⁷⁴ Czerny, The Art of Finger Dexterity 62.

choose from. Other categories are; staccato, ornamentation, arpeggios, octaves, thirds and chords. By being familiar with a handful of Czerny etudes, a teacher can have a creditable collection of technical exercises all in one binder.

The theory of wrist pressure and the technique of weight-transfer (from one finger to the next) was first discussed by Leschetizky, and subsequently developed by Vengerova. Known as the *rollbewegung*, the rolling of the wrist plays such a vital role in the style of legato playing. Malwine Bree's description of *wrist pressure* asserted that the wrist was the main source of weight and energy. With the help of Otto Ortmann it was discovered that other parts of the body were vital participants as well. Ortmann's term weight-transfer, suggests that not only are the wrists involved, but also the shoulders which are the basis of all arm and hand movement.

What is important to remember is Leschetizky's pedagogical contribution. Leschetizky taught in an era in which a new approach to playing was discovered. Coming off the press were the fresh publications of composers like Schumann, Chopin and Liszt. Someone needed to come forward and guide young pianists to a new level of musicianship and virtuosity. It was Theodore Leschetizky who led the way.

Vengerova strongly attested to Leschetizky's theories on articulation. She took the responsibility to expand and perfect the methods learned from Leschetizky; thus, we have the accent. The accent was developed to teach the wrist the shock absorbing technique discussed earlier. The wrist controls dynamic level. The louder the tone, the lower the wrist; the softer the tone the higher the wrist. In a six beat passage with strong beats on one and four, the wrist would roll downward for the accented beats, and roll

upward on the weak beats in a circular rotation. The goal is to train the wrists to use more weight and less muscle for dynamic energy.

Scales

Views on the importance of scales, both major and minor are a common thread of all three pedagogues. Czerny believed that scales were the basis of all melodies, and that scales solved most fingering problems. Leschetizky and Vengerova composed several exercises exclusively for scales. Their students were expected to begin with separate hands and then proceed with both hands an octave, or sixth and or third apart.

Czerny and Leschetizky both had suggestions for scales , none of which are in common. However, they do complement one another. Czerny believed in Equality of Strength, Equality of Quickness, and, Equality Holding Notes Down. Leschetizky believed that the lateral movement of the wrist should glide the hand up and down the keyboard when playing scales, students should avoid any jerking movement, their hands should remain in a vaulted position, and, detach each note of the scale. The suggestions of Czerny and Leschetizky are an excellent set of guidelines for teachers and students.

Unlike Czerny, Leschetizky and Vengerova did not write extensive exercises. Instead, they wrote short drills for technical problems such as scales. When compared, Vengerova's exercises appear to be a spin-off of Leschetizky. However, Leschetizky preferred sustaining one to four fingers as the others play. Vengerova's were monophonic motifs designed to sharpen the accent. She took these motifs a step further

and developed exercises for arpeggios. Her suggestion of substituting the second finger whenever appropriate in arpeggios is valuable for smaller hands, especially children.

Pedaling

In Leschetizky's time, pedaling became a very important part of piano pedagogy. With the improved development of the pedal, a new dimension of teaching needed to develop. Leschetizky believed that most pianists fell into two camps; there were those who were too pedantic and scrupulous, and lacked creativity, and those who relied heavily on instinct and treated the pedal as an accessory. Leschetizky avowed, "Good pedaling, good style, good taste all depend for the most part, on listening to your own playing (qtd. in Bree)."¹⁷⁵

Vengerova believed that pedaling in itself was a subtle and complicated science and pianists rely helplessly and exclusively on intuition and inspiration. She insisted that pedaling be consciously planned, not improvised. Proper planning will avoid inappropriate accents and allow the proper accents to stand out clearly.

Leschetizky and Vengerova also endorsed distinct rules on pedaling. According to Leschetizky, when playing chords, the bass note must sound with its chord. With wide and spread out chords, the pedal should be applied simultaneously with the bass note. He also believed that pianists must take in consideration the register and the effect of pedaling. Being that the higher ranged notes with shorter strings require a smaller amount of time to decay, pedaling is less. On the other hand, the lower ranged notes with longer

¹⁷⁵ Bree 64-65.

strings take considerably longer to decay, therefore special attention is required. Careless pedaling will allow the accompaniment to overcome the melody and disrupting the balance of melody and harmony. Vengerova's suggestions include, pedal according to the harmonies, adjust pedaling to the dynamics involved, and don't pedal through rests, or notes which are staccato on non-legato. Many of her suggestions are found in other pedagogical philosophies, but her suggestion on the pedaling of accents is unique. By doing so, the accented note will stand out and have a distinct timbre.

With the importance regarded to pedaling, it is intriguing that more significant discussion hasn't been documented. Leschetizky did address two types of pedaling, syncopated and simultaneous, but Vengerova's lectures on pedaling were limited. In fairness to Leschetizky, times have changed and there is much more literature and styles to contend with in current times. But a pianist will fall short of the possibilities of pedaling if they limit their knowledge to two types. With the help of Joseph Banowitz, one could realize that other pedaling techniques include, rhythmic, syncopated, dynamic, and flutter pedaling. With the output of contemporary compositions, one must not restrict oneself to the limited techniques of Leschetizky's time. Vengerova was more innovated in her views on pedaling. Leschetizky generally limited his repertoire to his contemporaries, Schumann, Chopin and Brahms, whose composition pose many pedaling problem. Vengerova, on the other hand, believed that pedaling should match the style, of the music whether it's the subtle pedaling of a Mozart sonata, or the long extended pedaling of Debussy's *Images*. With Vengerova's point of view, one must take in account the composer and era before the pedaling considerations are made.

Conclusion

As we sift through the available information, we must choose those methods which are applicable to today's student. Methods like Czerny's verbal reinforcement of note reading, Leschetizky's phrase by phrase memorization, and Vengerova's historical concepts are as valuable today as it was in their time. Also valuable are Czerny's detailed technical etudes, Leschetizky's views on hand size, and Vengerova's drills for scales and arpeggios.

But the underlining theme of their concepts was individualism. Students were not considered part of a flock and generically trained. Each student's success in training was tailored to their musical capabilities and their physical features. Understandably, none of our pedagogues claimed to have a "method" to follow. Individualism would make it impossible to develop a single definitive method. Therefore it is wise to have a plan for each student and allow the student to adjust and grow therein. The teacher should be flexible and able to adjust strategies to the changing needs of the student. Children constantly change as they grow. As maturity and physical features change, so must the lesson plan.

The accomplishments of Czerny, Leschetizky, and Vengerova are mirrored in their output of pianists, composers and conductors. The collection of students influenced by the three are like a musicians "Who's Who." The honored list includes; Theodore Kullack, Franz Liszt, Sigismund Thalberg, Stephen Heller, Ignance Paderewski, Ossip Gabrilwitch, Leonard Bernstein, Joseph Rezits, Samuel Barber, Jacob Lateiner, Lucas

Foss and Gary Graffman. To our benefit, the list does not stop here. Through Vengerova's students like Graffman, Rezits , and Barber, her legend lives on and its thread continues to weave the future. So rather than saying, "The end," let us pause and say "To be continued."

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