

# Playing the piano

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“Playing the piano”: the phrase is misleading as it gives the impression that having learnt to press the keyboard keys with speed and precision is what is required to be able to interpret a musical work. That it would basically come down to a viewable skill game of the hands and fingers. But this only appears so to uninformed viewers; in reality, the piano is above all an invisible art.

Who says game implies rules to follow. At the piano, everyone must adapt them while applying them, by personalizing them both physically and mentally. It is an individual work of appropriation and re-creation of the pianistic rules.

In order to become the instrument of the musical expression of an artist, the piano requires a knowledge alongside with a know-how, extra-ordinary since unique among all other human activities and other arts.

Indeed, seated facing the piano, the pianist must first develop an intelligence and a representation of his musculature and motor apparatus. He is at the same time confronted with a major difficulty: in order to play and interpret correctly the musical work, he has to reconcile antithetical functions - in everyday life - i.e. mobilize his motor apparatus while reading, counting/listening, counting/listening/playing with the pedal, etc.

Thus, each work requires from the pianist the creation of an intelligence of the correct movement and gesture, specific and unique to a particular work. The difficulty resides in the effort that the pianist must exert to reconcile and accomplish on the piano functions which are not used simultaneously in everyday life's operations: if everybody knows how to count (in everyday life), few people are busy counting mentally while listening to themselves hum a light hearted song. And in everyday life, few people are conscious of the different operations carried out by each hand.

The realization of this effort by the pianist requires the creation, by his brain, of a neurological level superior to these functions so as to fabricate an adequate interpretation tool. In consequence, it is a learning extending on the whole span of life since the brain is, for each new work studied, re-solicited to create a diversity of neurological webs in relation to the interpreted works. In fact, “playing the piano” implies that the brain create simultaneously and ad hoc the necessary abstract and practical intelligence. It thus is not about applying rules but about creative intelligence, able to generate and realize at the piano a merger of the contradictory functions.

The art of piano is therefore not a complicated game but constitutes probably the most complex human activity as it has recourse to a wealth of abstract and concrete operations, and this at a level of abstraction and realization changing at every moment, in a different way, for each hand, given the interpreted work.

Of course, all human activities include an obvious level of complexity in terms of craft, art and science. They all require a creative intelligence. As do all sports at the highest level. Thus, the basketball player aiming at the basket implements the same capacities as the pianist: he feels, he aims, he mobilizes his motor apparatus. But he aims with a single arm; he does not have to make a contrary gesture with his other arm. The command of his gesture in the brain is not in contradiction with any other. F. ex., while doing so, he is not executing consciously another gesture with his other hand.

It is only the art of piano which requires at the highest level this total and perfect differentiation between the two hands, with furthermore the pedal playing as a supplementary finger with or between the two hands. When the right hand draws a circle in space, on its side the left hand is inscribing a rectangle or an isosceles triangle. This dissociation constitutes the neurological work unique to the art of piano.

It follows thenceforth that piano teaching is inevitably just as complex.

How to create in the student the awareness of the abstract and practical operations to carry out? How do get him to move with the help of his motor apparatus? How to transmit to him that this is a central activity which mobilizes all of his psychic and physical resources to address the division of time and space intrinsic to a work?

Time, space, movement, gesture, geometric forms carried out simultaneously in the abstract and on the piano ... to achieve the total and perfect dissociation between the two hand's play and become a true pianist.

Numerous pianists discover spontaneously, by themselves, how to mobilize their motor apparatus while playing, and succeed in creating the neurological web, necessary for unifying the contradictory functions required in the interpretation of a work. However, even such an aptitude does not necessarily qualify them as great pianists, and even as good pianists!

And numerous students are not able to make such a discovery on their own but that also is in no way predictive of their musical incompetence.

Understanding the invisible enables to better practice towards the realization of a work, more rapidly. Practicing while knowing the trajectory to follow is a better way of learning than the mere exploration by trial and error.

The teaching of piano cannot really be transmitted without the human and artistic presence of a Master who, on one hand, has himself mastered the invisible part of this so complex art, and on the other hand, has a deep intelligence both of the pedagogical art and of the nature of the difficulty for his student.

In the end, it is always about the artistic and creative interpretation, eminently individual because musical. If the knowledge and the know-how of piano are the essence of the pianistic techne (ancient Greek for art), the musical art yet still calls for other competences, of which notably the level of interiority depth of the student expressing how the work has touched him deep inside.

This site is a major contribution to the art and pedagogy of piano, the masterful work of a contemporary Master. To see, to be able to say the invisible and find the images to explain the unspoken and unexplained by so many piano teachers is already a prowess in the field. But transmitting, being capable to explain, demonstrating the rightness of one's point and knowing how to convince one's student so that he may progress in the fastest and exemplary manner possible rise to a stature which is altogether artistic, pedagogical and human.

I wish all students of Master Woronicki the same passion and the same pleasure that I enjoy working under his guidance.

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