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PIANO GROUP INSTRUCTION  
VERSUS INDIVIDUAL INSTRUCTION

by

Renate L. Meyer

A Thesis  
Submitted to the  
Faculty of the School of Graduate  
Studies in partial fulfillment  
of the  
Degree of Master of Music

Western Michigan University  
Kalamazoo, Michigan  
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## PIANO GROUP INSTRUCTION VERSUS INDIVIDUAL INSTRUCTION

Renate L. Meyer, M.M.

Western Michigan University, 1970

In this thesis an attempt has been made to discuss and clarify some aspects of piano group instruction and individual piano teaching. The writer has tried to examine the relative advantages and goals of each and to point out some of their pitfalls and problems. An attempt has been made to emphasize the tremendously important role which the teacher plays in group sessions, as well as in individual lessons. The different abilities, characteristics, levels, age groups and future plans of the students have been taken into consideration. Outlines of group lessons for beginners and an example of an individual lesson have contributed to the discussion and clarification of the topic.

As a result of his investigation, the author presents his own opinion of an ideal teaching situation based on the research done in this paper and personal teaching experience. A combination of both group instruction and the individual lesson are essential in the development of a broad musical background, a refined musicianship, and a cultivated art of piano playing.

## CHAPTER I

### HISTORY-EVOLUTION OF THE PIANO CLASS CONCEPT

Modern thinking in teaching music considers the piano an instrument especially suited for group teaching. The wide range of the instrument, the possibility of keeping several students occupied simultaneously, and the huge amount of literature are cited as reasons. The study of the piano is valuable and should be a must for any music student. (It is basic in music education and gives basic training in musicianship, knowledge and understanding of music) It supplies a foundation for any other musical study. Because of the reasons stated above, group instruction almost becomes a necessity.

The idea of teaching piano in classes or groups of students is not new. The schoolmasters of the sixteenth century had several clavichords in their classrooms to teach young students the fundamentals of music. The "modern" trend of teaching piano in groups is evidently at least four centuries old. It is really a revival of an old European educational custom. The master class has always been popular in Europe and was brought to America by great European teachers. Therefore, music instruction in the nineteenth century in the United States was basically influenced by the traditions of Europe.

But before the nineteenth century, which was "The Century of Piano and of Piano Music," we find a pioneer of piano

class teaching in early America: Alexander Reinagel.<sup>1</sup> Reinagel, the son of a hornplayer who had come to England from Australia, was born in Portsmouth, England. The advantage of growing up in a musical family where everyone played more than one instrument was naturally of great importance for the gifted child. At an early age, he was an excellent keyboard player. Reinagel spent some time in Glasgow, Scotland in 1778. After the Civil War (1786), he emigrated to the United States. He was the first keyboard player to advocate his new teaching approach in America: class piano and individual piano instruction. He soon became a leader in establishing cultivated musical traditions. Besides his unusual teaching methods, he organized concerts, performed himself, and composed a large collection of various compositions. Historically, it is rather interesting to discover that class teaching of a keyboard instrument existed as early as two hundred years ago. Reinagel wrote pedagogical material for group and individual piano teaching.

A Collection of the Most Favorite Scots Tunes with Variations are also worth mentioning. He recognized the dynamics and advantages of group teaching, but he was also aware of the necessity of private lessons in special cases. He was one of the first teachers to bring theory into the piano lesson. This "wise and experienced teacher is with his excellent

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<sup>1</sup>McClenny, Anne, "Alexander Reinagel." The American Music Teacher, (Sept.-Oct. 1969), 38-50.

taste and fine musicianship very important in the establishment of a musical tradition in the United States."<sup>2</sup>

Reinagel spent the last year of his life in Baltimore, where he died in 1809.

In spite of this early start, social pressures prevented the idea of class piano teaching from spreading widely in this country until 1920. The height of piano class teaching occurred in 1930, when many communities supported piano groups in their schools. During the Depression and World War II, the popularity of piano classes decreased again. Of course, one major reason was the inadequate knowledge and abilities of the teachers, who were, and often still are, insufficiently trained. A lack of musical, psychological, and pedagogical knowledge did not contribute in making the idea of class piano popular in this country.

In Europe the idea of group teaching is extremely common and has been developing rapidly during the last three decades. Group instruction is applied in almost every school, conservatory, or "Hochschule". Among others, Margit Varro, a student of Liszt who started her professional career as a concert pianist, was one of the pioneers of piano group teaching in Germany. She emigrated in 1938 to the United States, where she started to lecture and teach in the East and Middle West.

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<sup>2</sup>ibid., p. 49.

Private piano instruction in the nineteenth century was, more or less, a privilege of the aristocracy. Americans had to travel to Europe in order to study with a famous tutor. At the end of the nineteenth century, when the piano came into the home of the citizen and the common man (in Europe as well as in the States), the demand for good private lessons grew rapidly.

## CHAPTER II

### PIANO GROUP INSTRUCTION

#### Definition of Terms

The terms class piano, piano class, and group piano are collective names which include an incredible variety of types, forms, and manners of execution. (A class or group means everything that includes more than one person in a teaching situation.) We may find up to twenty-four students in the electronic music laboratory of an American university, where the electronic piano has to be considered a necessary tool. We might find sixteen industrious students studying and playing in turns, singing, moving, and using Orff's instruments; or three students and one teacher working together at one piano. One is unable to cite all the possibilities which are included in the terms class and group. Group and individual instruction should have one goal in common: to teach music at the piano. For future reference in this work only small groups are referred to--groups that consist of two to four students (up to six if absolutely necessary) and no more.

### Goals of Group Teaching

What are the general goals a piano teacher has to try to reach when he is instructing his groups of children, teenagers, or adults? It makes little or no difference if the teacher is preparing public school teachers or instructing a group of students who just want to play for the fun of it. The standards should be equally high. The student comes to the lesson to acquire musical literacy. Therefore, the instruction should set definite goals to see that each student acquires literacy. The teacher should prepare himself carefully for each lesson and have an outline of what he wants to accomplish in one, two, three or four years clearly established. Use a lesson plan each day.

The piano teacher should not only teach pieces, which will be soon forgotten; he should try to train and educate the complete musician in his students and guide them to the utmost capacity of their musical abilities in every respect.<sup>3</sup> Included in each lesson should be:

- analyzation and understanding of the structure of the music which is being studied (Music History).
- sightreading and accompanying (cover as much literature as possible).
- theory, meaning the use of basic harmonic material in harmonizing melodies.
- ear training with the help of transposing, grasping melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic features as a pattern of complete unity.

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<sup>3</sup>Mehr, Norman, "Developing Musical Literacy Through the Piano Class." Clavier, VI (January 1967), 17-19.

--improvization and playing by ear (very important in the beginning of group instruction of children).

These five major goals of piano instruction are excellently suited for teamwork. The students' ability to listen and be alert is stressed very much in a group. Which level should be reached after a year, for example, depends, of course, on the group, the age of the students, their ability to learn, the alertness and capacity of the teacher, and on the time spent for the actual instruction. Of course, not all of the five subjects mentioned can be stressed because of scheduling problems and time limitations. The teacher must then mark down the neglected areas and emphasize them in the next session. This helps also to make each lesson new and different, which is much more stimulating and interesting than following a set routine.

#### Group Dynamics

The most natural situation in which new knowledge and new skills can be learned is in a group of students. The human being is by nature a social creature and normally enjoys being with others and experiencing various activities with them. This is especially true for children. The joy of sharing a creative art is an important factor in group lessons with young ones. Inhibitions and fears recede and stimulations and interactions grow and make the lesson alive, interesting, and often superior to a private lesson. The children learn together, but they are not necessarily engaged in the same activities at the same time. This brings more vitality



into the group, and the attention span is longer. Even dull drills can become exciting when they are done by the group. Encouragement from the teacher and the other students helps some children to accomplish more than they normally would in a one to one situation. Performing becomes a very natural thing, since the children play constantly for each other. The more gifted child, the leader, learns to help his fellow students, which is beneficial to his own discipline. In a group lesson we have a constant give-and-take atmosphere of competition which encourages the child to think independently.

The same is true for the teenager and the college student. To cite just one example: try to have a teenager or college student sing a little phrase, a question or an answer. It is barely possible to guide him over his shyness. Now take a small group, sing the question, have each student sing a suitable answer. Divide the group: two sing a question and two sing an answer simultaneously. You will find that you get the result you want after a little while, but you might struggle endlessly in the one to one situation. This indicates that the encouraging spirit of a good group makes many things more natural, relaxed, stimulating, and rewarding.

The adult beginner also profits greatly from a group situation. He usually approaches the subject of learning a new instrument with a strong feeling of being defeated before he even starts, because it is too late anyway and you cannot

teach new tricks to an old dog.<sup>4</sup> But he would love to learn how to play the piano; he regrets very much that he gave it up when he was young. In this situation, a skillful teacher can have excellent results from group teaching, if he has the sensitivity to put the right students together.. This is naturally a prerequisite.

### The Organization of Piano Groups

If a piano teacher organizes piano groups he has to consider two important aspects--the age of the students and their learning ability. The children, teenagers, college students, and adults should be grouped as compatibly as possible. Since the rate of speed in learning might be different in children of the same age, it is wise to select groups based on their ages and learning abilities. It is usually not advisable to teach an advanced nine year old together with a seventeen year old student of the same level. Mature five to seven year old children, eight to twelve year old ones, and teenagers might work well as teams together. The individual progress of each child during the teaching sessions must also be considered, and it is a good idea to exchange students occasionally from one group to another to put them in a level more suitable for them. This also brings renewed life into a group and might help to refresh the group spirit. The unity of the group has to be preserved at

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<sup>4</sup> Edwards, Ruth, "Piano Study for the Adult." Clavier, II (September 1963), 19-22.

all times. Interest has to be maintained by a constant variety in activities. Pace the lesson and move quickly from one subject to the next one with as little talk as possible. Preferably, beginning children should be taught in groups, at least two to four students together. The ideal age to start group teaching with children is approximately seven. Singing, clapping, tapping, moving, using percussion instruments, and playing the piano--all these different creative activities belong in the first piano lessons of beginning children. It is even better to start three to five year olds in a preparatory music program, where the emphasis is on eurhythmics and the use of tonal percussion instruments. In other words, a readiness program which is strongly influenced by Carl Orff's Schulwerke ideas. In this case, each class can consist of ten to fifteen children who usually enjoy this sort of music teaching tremendously.

It is not advisable to switch a private piano student into a group situation; the teacher will have to face some difficulties. He will have to convince the student's parents that group teaching is not inferior to private instruction.

Piano groups can be taught at all levels. In college teaching, the students should be administered placement tests to facilitate their grouping according to intelligence, musical background, technical abilities, and speed of learning and progressing. The more advanced a group of students is, the smaller it should be. More individualized instruction is definitely needed for the very advanced piano student. The

instruction time for college groups should be fifty minutes; the class should meet at least twice a week. Teenager classes should meet once a week for sixty minutes of instruction, and beginning children twice a week for a session of twenty to thirty minutes. Practice periods of beginners should be short but frequent. In the piano groups of a private teacher in the community, the parents should consider the fact that they actually get more for their money in the group situation than in private lessons. The teacher, however, definitely spends more energy in a class situation than in a private lesson.

It is a very good idea to bring piano group instruction into the curriculum of the public school system in order to give all the children equal opportunities and to encourage their natural creative and musical abilities. Recorder groups are also extremely valuable, but should be taught, like the piano group lessons, only by a specially trained teacher. Some schools have taken piano group teaching into their curriculum a number of years ago.<sup>5</sup> Of course, the groups have to be larger; because, in the school system, the question of money is a very important factor that has to be considered.

#### The Role of the Teacher in Piano Group Instruction

The general qualifications of a piano group teacher have to be very similar to those of a classroom teacher.

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<sup>5</sup> The National Association of Secondary-school Principals, The Function of Music in the Secondary-School Curriculum, Music Educators National Conference, Chicago, 1952, 24-27.

His organizational abilities and his projective powers have to be superb. He faces the same situation as that of a classroom teacher because group dynamics and interactions are present among twenty-four students as well as among four students. Thus, the teacher has to have a sound understanding of the classroom situation and of his own behavior in this situation. He has to know the tools that are necessary to understand, guide, and constantly improve the learning process of his students. As a leader of this learning process, he interacts with the children. He has to be aware of the effect which his own behavior creates among the students. He intentionally guides and influences the activities of his group or class. He has to be able to accept, clarify, and use ideas of his students (teaching is not telling) to reflect accurately the ideas of others; to present summarized ideas in a group discussion; to encourage rather than discourage (and put his questions accordingly!); to use as little criticism as possible (praise accomplishes so much more); and to understand the emotional and psychological characteristics of his students. Since the ideas and methods of teaching the piano change rapidly, he has to keep up with a lot of reading in order to stay informed. He has to show enthusiasm for music because enthusiasm is contagious.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Amidon, Edmund J. and Ned A. Flanders, The Role of the Teacher in the Classroom (Minneapolis, Minn.: Paul S. Amidon & Associates, 1963), pp. 1-4.

The specific qualifications of a group piano instructor are of equal importance and very often underestimated. Above all, the teacher has to have a superior knowledge of the subject he is teaching--to be two levels ahead of his own students is by no means enough. The broader his whole cultural and musical background is, the more his students will profit--this includes the knowledge of languages, art, general history, etc. In other words, he has to be an excellently educated person himself, and his own standards regarding education should be very high. Only then can he set high goals for his students. Knowledge of piano literature, music history, music theory, performance abilities, piano methods, piano pedagogy, and psychology are a must for the good teacher. He must also be able to sightread fairly well and to accompany.<sup>7</sup> He should be familiar with instruments other than the piano and preferably be able to play one or more. His teaching ability, however, cannot only be judged by his performing abilities. A mistake often made by colleges is that of hiring a piano teacher from a tape recording only. The prospective teacher should be required to give some demonstration lessons in addition to submitting a performance tape, because teaching will be his main responsibility.

Not every excellent pianist is able to teach group or

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<sup>7</sup> Robinson, Helene and Richard L. Jarvis, ed., Teaching Piano in Classroom and Studio (Washington, D.C.: Music Educators National Conference, 1967), pp. 16-20.

individual lessons. A good teacher also needs another, very important, attribute--a sympathetic and sincere liking and understanding of people. The relationship of teacher and pupil does not suffer in the group situation if the group teacher is capable of handling the situation correctly.<sup>8</sup> It takes much more energy for the teacher to do group work. Of primary importance is the teacher's ability to keep the group together, plan the lesson to the minutest detail, and move with a fast pace from one subject to the next one. If a good musician lacks these abilities, group instruction accomplishes little or nothing.

The personal characteristics of the piano group teacher are also of great importance. They are the same as those of the classroom teacher--a pleasing personality, quiet enthusiasm for the subject he is teaching, professional loyalty, self-discipline, efficiency, alertness, and an abundance of physical energy. He has to be the leader of the group; develop respect; and establish discipline, good attitudes, and work habits among his students.

The ability to organize the subject and select definite goals for his piano groups have already been mentioned.

#### Pitfalls and Problems in Group Instruction

There are a few common dangers in piano group teaching

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<sup>8</sup> Bishop, Dorothy, "Class Piano and the Teacher-Pupil Relationship." *Clavier*, V, (November, 1966), 44-45.

which can be avoided if they are recognized in time. Perhaps it is helpful to keep the points listed below in mind.

1. Try to avoid giving a series of private lessons in a group session. Some group teachers are so concerned with the mistakes which a single student makes, that they forget the group situation. Always try to involve the entire group when you are teaching.

2. Avoid training your students to be concert artists. Very few piano students will become concert artists, or professional performers. The task of the teacher is to teach the basic fundamentals of music to his students, some understanding of it, and above all some facilities of making it. This has to be taught to students of exceptional, average, and below average abilities. A too rigid training is not necessary, but this does not mean to lower the standards and goals. The superior talent will soon be recognized (if it ever shows up in group teaching at all) and will be put under different requirements.

3. Emphasize the joy of making music. This is especially important for the beginning group. Joy brings the beginner to the lesson. It is his most valuable asset. Music is a creative language of the emotions--not the language of the ear, fingers, and mind only. In my opinion one of the most frequent mistakes in the teaching of any instrument is the joy is killed; and once this flame is smothered, the lessons become meaningless. The appreciation and love for music



might be lost for the student for the rest of his life. And do not forget what an important task and responsibility you have as a piano teacher. Even if you might not be teaching outstanding talents, you teach the amateur who may later play an important role in his community. You can develop a lifelong hobby for your students by teaching them to love music, which is needed so desperately in this hectic world of ours.

4. Avoid cramming too much knowledge into your students in the first lessons. Since the beginner comes to his lesson in order to make music, the experience at the keyboard should come before the written drills, symbols, or note reading. Start a group of beginners out by teaching them by rote; let them find the tune by ear. Let them first feel the rhythm with their bodies. Give only as many facts as the student can absorb and use immediately, because the teaching of too many facts before they are digested has no value. Try to lead your students, but do not push them. Try to guide the group with questions, and be patient about forgetfulness of facts. Yet be firm and have strict rules. Watch how you correct mistakes and do it in positive manner--encouraging, rather than discouraging, by asking the right questions or by having the students correct themselves among each other without hurting a player's feelings.

5. Reinforce correct playing habits so they become permanent. This especially refers to all technical problems such as incorrect hand and arm position (the whole playing mechanism), faulty fingering (fingering makes or breaks a

piece), wrong rhythm and notes, and sloppy pedalling. Teach your group how to practice in order to make the best use of the time set for this purpose--never play over a mistake without correcting the error immediately. Help the student learn to listen to what he plays. The balance between melody and accompaniment and the shape of phrases and dynamics are often neglected. These last three important aspects are, of course, especially hard to teach in a group situation, and thus require special attention. The dynamics and the emotional and musical contents of a composition have to be exaggerated in order to play a piece convincingly. It is difficult for a player to maintain the attention and interest of an audience. This brings us to the next point of group teaching.

6. Fight stage-fright right from the beginning of a young student's career and extinguish its roots as early as possible. Naturally, some nervousness in performing is normal; it is even necessary because an unemotional performer plays the same way too. The excessive fear of playing in front of others is not necessary and should be analyzed and discussed between teacher and student. Here, of course, the group situation is ideal--the students get used to playing for each other from the start. The teacher should have informal recitals and workshops as frequently as possible. The "one-recital-a-year" can become a terror for a child, and one breakdown in a performance of a young child can be a horrible experience taking all his joy of playing away from him for good.

There are many practical suggestions with which the teacher can help his students to control performance nerves.

1. Put your mind on your music and try to think of nothing else. Lose yourself completely in the spirit of this music. Love and breathe it; you are just a channel through which this music flows, so put your thoughts away from your own self.

2. Know every single note of your music. Know it two hundred percent, since you might lose one hundred percent in front of the audience. In order to have your music under complete control, you have to have it memorized with your ear, eye, mind, and fingers. You must know every detail concerning structure, analyzation, dynamics, fingering, etc. You should be able to start at any place in your performance piece and play from there; or write it down. Only a very few students have a photographic memory; most of them have to work hard in order to memorize completely safely.

3. Give many practice performances and put yourself in the mood of playing in front of an audience. Even if you have only one listener, this can be very helpful for your performance.

4. Always show poise and a confident attitude when you are on the stage. Never let the audience sense how you feel. Keep your dignity under all circumstances; consider the audience your friends.

5. Play in front of others as often as you can. Per-

forming is something which has to be done again and again in order to get used to it and maintain only normal nervousness. It takes, however, a tremendous amount of courage and will power to accomplish this goal and become a performer.

6. A positive mental attitude towards performing should be taught from the first lesson on and is another responsibility of the piano teacher--especially of the teacher of beginning students. Fear is contagious. Confidence should be encouraged and stressed. Always start your music out at a slower tempo than you actually had in mind. This is a very safe rule especially for the beginner. Under the excitement of a performance the tempo will speed up anyway and find its normal pace.

Never dismiss a slow student who is willing to learn and shows a lot of interest. Encourage and be patient with him; he might catch on later. At least you can keep his joy and his interest in music alive.

Do not keep a student who shows no interest in the subject at all. An uninterested student will not learn well and might even destroy the spirit and communication of your group. Find out what he would like to do--perhaps another instrument or a different field of creativity; such as art. But talk it over with the student and his parents in a kind, yet firm, manner. Do not just throw him out rudely. If you dismiss a student, do not be afraid of the financial loss of such a procedure. Your professional reputation will benefit, your honesty will be appreciated, and the vacancy will soon be filled.

### The Equipment of the Studio

To convert a piano studio into a group teaching room is not necessarily as expensive as one might think. Primarily each studio should have two pianos, a grand and an upright, no matter if the teacher gives private lessons or group instruction. A blackboard, a wooden keyboard for the demonstration of hand positions, a telephone, some chairs, tables and files are necessary. A portable record player and a tape recorder can be very helpful for teacher and group. It is important for the teacher to have as much teaching material--music and dictionaries--around as possible, all neatly arranged according to purpose, subject, and level. As a private and group teacher, one can never be certain what the next minute demands. The teacher should be prepared for all occasions. Silent keyboards are not necessary for small groups; they are, of course, very helpful in class piano. A music stand and some percussion instruments such as triangles, cymbals, and drums are a nice addition for a piano group--so are recorders. Never neglect the care of your instruments and keep them in perfect tune. Pianos have to be tuned at least twice a year. Put them at an inside wall, not too close to the heat. Try to keep the room temperature somewhat constant.

A waiting room with books and magazines should also be provided by the teacher. There should be enough place in the studio so that parents can come and visit the class frequently and informally.

Outlines of Group Lessons for Beginners

## How to learn and understand a new piece

The teaching of a new piece to a group of students can be done in an interesting and challenging manner by the piano teacher. The new composition can be used as a sightreading exercise. Two of the four students sit at the piano, and the other two stand behind the players. Each of the players plays one part of the piece with one hand. The third student taps the beat with a wood-block, and the fourth student taps the first beat of each measure with a triangle. Thus, rhythm, meter, and tempo have to be kept very strictly; the players cannot hesitate, correct, or get faster in their playing. It is advisable to start the music at a slow tempo on the first playing. On the second try the students change places. On the third try one student plays the composition alone, and the three others may form a soft percussive background using their imagination regarding the playing of the percussion instruments. More important than the technical aspect of a new piece is its musical contents. Without this grasping and understanding of a composition the students can never obtain the proper and meaningful interpretation. And what does the playing of empty notes mean? Absolutely nothing. No matter how short and simple a phrase or a piece is, it should always be played musically. This is one of the most important tasks the music teacher has--to teach his students to play musically. In a group situation, the different ideas and questions of the

students regarding the musical contents of a composition, can be very helpful for the teacher. The teacher of course has to adjust his preparation of a new piece to the age, level, and capacity of his group of students. He might ask questions to point out and clarify a new composition for his students.

For example:

What is the name of the lowest tone of the final chord? Let us compare this tone with some of the beginning ones. Do you find that they have something in common?

Look, the final chord related to the accidentals in beginning gives us the key of the piece.

Another point is that the beginning chord and final chord should be constructed out of the notes of the tonic chord of the key that we just found. Is this correct?

Can you find the dominant chord somewhere in this piece? Perhaps in the middle of the composition, before the repeat sign?

Where do we find the melodic climax of our piece? We should be able to recognize it from the highest note or group of notes. The dynamic climax should be at the same place--right?

Did you realize that almost all the pieces we have played so far consisted of measure groups which can be divided by four? Is the same true for the new piece?

Let us compare that with songs which are familiar to us. Count the measures--are they in groups of eight, twelve, or sixteen? Let us find out where you can take a breath in our piece. Where do the phrases end--where do they begin?

Let us sing the melody together to make that easier. We will find the phrases much better this way. Does the beginning melody return in the last part? Do you know some songs which are built the same way? Do you see that our piece has the same form as these songs?

Conclusion: Let the students discover by themselves. Guide them with your questions towards the right direction.

How to teach and clarify the rhythm of a new piece

This exercise is meant to be a preliminary study towards the acquisition of a new piece. Only the rhythmical structure of the whole composition is played:

--one student claps the upper voice, the second taps the rhythm with a woodblock, the third the meter with a hand drum and finally the fourth student plays a first beat of every measure with a triangle.

--one student taps the upper voice with a woodblock, the second claps the rhythm, the third the first beat of each measure with a triangle, and the fourth student the meter with a hand drum.

--do not use any percussion instruments but the clapping of your hands. Teach the students how to cultivate the clapping of their hands (it can produce vowels, and soft, and harsh sounds), and vary their tasks regarding which part of the piece they play.

There are a vast variety of possibilities in how to teach the rhythm of a new piece. Time dictation right from the first lesson helps, of course, to establish a feeling of pulse and beat and is necessary in the piano lesson, as well as pitch dictation. The more parts or voices a composition has, the more challenging and interesting can the teacher present the music to his students.

How to teach concentration

A very good mental exercise for the students' concentration is playing the new piece silently before it is played with sound. The fingers of the players rest loosely



upon the keys, each note is played in the mind, the fingers change position with a slight movement only, and the keys are not pushed down. This "silent finger playing" is also valuable in establishing the right fingerings. The same exercise can be done on the lid of the closed piano or on a silent keyboard.

### How to teach memorizing

Learning a new piece and memorizing it should happen simultaneously. From the beginning the students should learn to understand that there are four different senses that can be used in the process of memorizing:

--the mind memory--which demands that the student understand the structure, harmonic progressions, rhythmic patterns, musical ideas, and dynamics of the piece he is learning.

--the finger memory--an automatic, muscular feeling of where the student has to put his fingers; a physical skill. However, the most insecure memorizing aids in performance, if used by itself.

--the eye memory--a visual picture of the music on the page and on the keyboard is remembered. Some students have a fantastic photographic memory which is a natural gift.

--the ear memory--musically the most important of the four senses; the student relies upon the aural sounds, pitches, and rhythms he remembers.

None of the four senses, however, are completely reliable when used separately. All four have to work together in order to achieve the greatest accuracy and security in performance.

The teacher should try to bring the memorizing process right into his group lesson. For example: take any two measures from a new piece to be learned, and have the students

look with the greatest concentration at the music. Let them close their eyes, and have them try to see the note-picture. Let them open their eyes again and look once more at the measures in question. Now take the music away and let two students play what they can remember by eye memory. Now have the next two students play what they hear by ear.

Another teaching possibility is that each student memorizes only one part of the composition and that both students try to play the memorized music immediately. If it is an easy composition, they can transpose the melodic line of the memorized measures. Memorizing is easily improved and accomplished when taught right from the beginning. However, it has to be taught by the teacher to the students; the different "How tos..." have to be explained. It is not a task the students can achieve easily without any help in their practising time at home.

How to teach exercises and make them worthwhile

About the importance and the value of technical exercises in group lessons, a whole book could easily be written. Finger exercises, scales, arpeggios, and chords offer many possibilities and can be played in so many different ways that they will be discussed here only briefly. One fact the teacher should remember is that exercises do not have to be dull; they can be made interesting and challenging for the students, especially when they are played in a group situation:

- two students play a scale in octaves.
- two students play a scale in sixths.
- two students play a scale in tenths.
- two students play a scale in thirds.
- two students play a scale in contrary motion (left hand of the partner).
- two students play in counterpoint; two against one.
- two students play one part piano and the other forte.
- two students play in various rhythmic groupings.
- two students play all possible arrangements with four hands.
- two students play legato against staccato.
- three students play; one student using two hands, the other uses only one hand.
- one student plays a scale in legato with two hands, the other students accompany the player with various percussion instruments.

Group instruction demands new ideas and combinations regarding the playing of technical exercises; of course, this requires an imaginative and alert teacher.

#### How to teach duet playing

Ensemble or duet playing is one of the most important aspects in the piano lesson and cannot be emphasized enough. Sightreading, the key to ensemble playing, is learned best when students play together. They learn the art of leaving out the unimportant notes, playing wrong notes beautifully, grasping fingerings and rhythmic patterns quickly, and keeping a steady tempo throughout a composition. A great variety

of literature is published by various publishing companies\* where both parts of a duet are equally difficult. The teacher might have two students play together and help out only if it is absolutely necessary. The students should switch parts frequently, so that they are able to read bass- and treble-clef parts equally well. Students with other instruments should come into the lesson, in order to be accompanied.

To end a group session with ensemble playing is always a joy for everyone. It is a good way to round off a well balanced lesson.

#### How to play inspiring musical games with children

It is a fact that children love games and that they are eager to win. A creative teacher can make fun games out of otherwise dull drills, exercises, and ear training tasks. As a teacher, do not be afraid to give occasional rewards such as candy, a piece of gum, or the picture of a composer. Let the children learn one fact early: life rewards success.

The previous points were just a very few methodic hints that might be helpful in group instruction. There are many more subjects that should be touched upon regarding their place and importance in piano group instruction.

- rote teaching and playing by ear in a group lesson.
- improvising in a group lesson.
- the importance of the song in a group lesson.

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\*Schott in Mainz or Stipes in Champaign, Ill. for example.

--theory and ear training in a group lesson.

--music literature in a group lesson.

This would, however, carry this work too far and not leave enough space and room for the following chapters.

## CHAPTER III

### INDIVIDUAL PIANO INSTRUCTION

A definition of the term "individual piano instruction" is not necessary, since it applies to only one situation: the piano teacher and his piano student.

#### Goals of Individual Instruction

Piano teaching is the art of combining music instruction and personal leadership. It is not a mechanical process. On the contrary, its chief characteristic lies in the subtle very personal element, that is present in a teaching situation.

The musical goals of individual piano instruction are basically the same as in group instruction; however, they vary in degree. Perhaps it is safe to say that they are different in the depth and broadness with which they are explored.

Analyzation, sightreading, theory, ear training, and improvisation are present and stay valid in private piano instruction.

The emphasis, however, is on the teaching of piano literature and on the interpretation of the music which is being studied. The average teacher spends more time on the piece the student is playing than on the other musical subjects. This is partly due to the fact that the time is

more limited. Most students come for a lesson of thirty minutes. What can be done in thirty minutes? Piano playing thus might become more important than a broader general music education.

1. Piano technique is an important aspect of the lesson; each worthwhile technical exercise must have a musical goal.

2. Different touches are important and should be taught very diligently.

3. Pedalling is an art, and a student should be made thoroughly familiar with it from the first lesson. The correct and proper use of the pedal in a composition is very often responsible for a beautiful sound.

4. Detailed interpretation, the shaping of phrases, and the melodic and dynamic climax of a piece can be taught more in detail.

5. The art of practicing can be stressed and pointed out to the student.

6. Memorization should be explained and clarified. A mystery for many students, because they were never taught how to memorize, is actually seeing this accomplished.

The piano teacher has the great responsibility to select the teaching material carefully and according to the needs, levels, and talents of a student. The teacher must try to guide each individual toward the right direction of good taste.

These general suggestions can be applied to private piano lessons given to children and adults of all ages and levels. Since the time spent in a music lesson is much less than the time spent on other subjects--like daily reading, spelling, writing, and arithmetic lessons in school--rapid advances cannot be expected from the student. The teacher has the obligation to plan the lesson very carefully in order to make the most out of the assignment time. Each private lesson should be a valuable and varied musical experience for the student. Variety and the enthusiasm with which the teacher teaches his subject are very important.

An over-all plan for one year helps the teacher tremendously to give well organized lessons. The teacher should also establish definite goals which he should try to reach with each student within one year of study. The teacher should refer to this plan frequently. The accomplishment, of course, depends on the student's capacity and ability. Subjects in which the student is weak should be especially stressed. It does not hurt the student's progress to have a number of consecutive lessons with emphasize this one subject. This special "drive" might be for memorizing, ear training, sightreading or other aspects of piano playing. One primary rule for any piano lesson is: teach the student to hear every sound he produces. Regarding this point a string player has an advantage!) Technique and sight reading should be an experience for the ears as well as the eyes.



The presentation of a new piece can be done in many different ways. It depends on the student's capacity and the difficulty of the piece.

The last impression a student carries away from a piano lesson is very important; it should always be a musical one.

After the student has mastered the first difficulties and is able to read and play at a beginning level, he should play, or at least be exposed to, compositions from each era of music literature--from early Baroque through twentieth century. For children, a good approach is through folk-music and the folk-song taught by rote. Folk music presents the best possible material. It has inspired some of the greatest composers--Brahms, Bartok, etc. It helps to develop a sound musical taste in a child. Supplementary material should be chosen carefully.

However, if a student likes popular music and jazz, he should be allowed to play what he likes (but not exclusively). Let the student pick out some of his pieces by himself. A teacher should not force his taste regarding literature on the student, but guide him carefully in order to keep the joy of playing and the love for music alive.

The more lessons of preparation the teacher plans the less lessons of correction are needed. As a teacher, try to avoid negative suggestions, because they quite often produce the opposite of the intended result. If a student comes into the well planned lesson full of enthusiasm with a newly discovered piece and wants to play it, let him play the piece.

The mood of the child at the moment is more important than the organization of the lesson. The previous assignment can be heard later.

The most important goal of any music lesson is to establish musicianship and love for music.

### Student-Teacher Relationship

Many intangible factors are involved in the relationship between a student and a teacher. A prerequisite for a successful teacher is his sincere interest and love for his student. He should have understanding and be concerned about his pupil. The teacher should be open-minded and an example, in many respects in order to win the support, attention, and enthusiasm of his student. This applies to all levels and age groups of students. Also important for the private piano teacher is his relationship with the parents of his pupil.

For the child, the teacher becomes a person whom he usually adores. If the teacher handles the teaching situation right, the young student will be anxious to please and do his very best. He will open his mind and confide in his teacher as a friend. It is a matter of the teacher's ability to maintain rules and discipline.

It is definitely necessary for a student to have absolute trust and confidence in his teacher. Only then can his capacity of learning be made completely useful. For any teacher, some training in psychology is extremely helpful. Dynamic psychology and psychoanalytic knowledge can be of

inestimable value. Without a certain amount of this knowledge a teacher might face teaching failures which otherwise could have been teaching successes.

The relationship between a student and his teacher is an especially close one. The teacher can give his student confidence and support in his abilities and (for example) the encouragement, energy and enthusiasm which are necessary to enter a performing career. Stage fright, the fear of memory lapses, and concentration problems during a performance of a student require a lot of understanding and encouragement from the teacher. Naturally, the abilities, the talent, and the self-confidence of the student are important factors, too.

As a conclusion: teacher and student face a very special relationship which should bring forth confidence, success, and understanding in both.

### The Organization of the Individual Lesson

#### The lesson plan

It is not enough for a piano teacher to "love" music in order to teach. It takes years of studying and doing to acquire the qualifications that make a "good" teacher. Knowledge and experience broadens the teacher's horizon and makes him more diversified for the teaching of all age groups and levels of students.

Each teacher (as already mentioned in Chapter II), private or college instructor, should carefully establish the

goals he wants to reach with his student within a certain time and work after a lesson plan. Naturally each teacher has his own personal teaching approach depending on his musical gifts, his temperament, his abilities, and his opinions. Considering the goals it is also important to keep in mind who is being taught:

- a child
- a young private student
- a beginning adult
- a college student.

A few fundamental aims which can be applied to students of all ages and levels, and which should be touched upon in piano lessons, are:

- teach the development of a basic musicianship by means of acquiring the skill to read music.
- emphasize the listening to music by means of a listener's program, ear training and theory.
- encourage creativity by means of improvisation and composing.
- teach exercises to develop technical and musical abilities.
- guide the student carefully through the variety in the field of piano literature, including arrangements and scores.
- stress ensemble playing in the form of duets and accompanying.
- try not to interrupt a student in the process of playing an assigned piece. Remember all the mistakes and make the necessary corrections afterwards.
- always keep in mind: the approach you apply in the lesson of a certain student depends entirely upon the purpose established before.

--try to emphasize musical interpretation (phrasing, dynamics, pedalling), technique, and fingering in a composition.

--avoid to neglect performing.

--write down the definite assignments for the next lesson (of individual lessons it is invaluable ).

--demonstrate often for the student.

Most teachers have strong ideas of the way young piano students should be trained. However, flexibility in considering the approach should always be observed. For the student it is more important to maintain and keep alive the joy of making music than all the methods and organization.

#### Business Organization of the Private Teacher

A music teacher should be as well organized in teaching music as in business matters. This concerns, of course the private teacher only. He should be a member of a local, state, or national teacher's organization, in order to meet and exchange ideas with fellow musicians.

A few points regarding organization might be helpful for the private teacher (group or individual instructor).

--make a set of printed rules and give them to each parent when a new student enrolls. Secure agreement and understanding first before accepting the new student.

--be businesslike and strict about any regulations, set-ups, and financial matters.

--keep a double record of paid bills or bills due.

--keep an accurate record on file of each student's name, address, father's profession, and phone number.

--keep a record of each student's lesson. Mark down the assignments and the material and literature used. (card file).

Any person who is intelligent enough to learn and teach music should be able to act businesslike and orderly in his profession.<sup>9</sup>

### The Role of the Teacher in the Individual Lesson

As mentioned previously in Chapter II, the qualifications of the individual piano teacher are essentially the same as the attributes of the piano group teacher. Once again, one of the most important aspects in the personality of the teacher is to have desirable qualities: neat appearance, intelligence, flexibility, imagination, and willingness to be open-minded. Enthusiasm and love for the subject he is teaching are indispensable. Sincere interest in people and easy communication are invaluable. This is perhaps a problem which some teachers face who are more capable to perform than to teach--they have somehow lost this special "third sense" for the feeling of the student at the moment of his lesson. Perhaps because they have lived too long in the seclusion and isolation of their practice-studies. Very often an interest in teaching is also lacking. For some artists teaching is only a necessity, a must. This is understandable, but deplorable. However, it might explain some of the reasons why sometimes

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<sup>9</sup>Varner Bennett, Beulah "Piano Classes for Everyone." New York, Philosophical Library, Inc., 1969, pp. 51-54.

an excellent performing pianist is not a good teacher. The combination of an excellent performing artists and a good teacher is quite rare. The outstanding teacher is the piano teacher who brings the best musical and technical capacities forward in his students.

It is necessary for the piano teacher (as for the performer) to have faith, confidence, and self-assurance in his teaching abilities. This confidence will be transferred to the student and establish courage and reassurance.

The task of the piano teacher in a one to one situation is in general similar to the task of the group instructor. But, perhaps it is safe to say that it requires less energy to teach one student than to teach a group of four. In every grade and level of piano playing, low or high, the teacher can dwell more on the subtleties of the interpretation in a certain composition. He can pay more attention to the kind of sounds his student produces. The different manners of touch which characterize the piano tone might be explored to a greater degree and might be cultivated more exclusively.

If a piano teacher has been teaching a certain student for several years, both teacher and student are usually attached to one another. The teacher should always have an open ear for the personal problems his student might encounter. Even if he has occasionally to spend a lesson in counselling instead of piano teaching. Perhaps he has helped his student more in this one lesson, and this is important.

Kindness and firmness must go hand in hand. For a good teacher as for any educator this is obvious and the only natural teaching atmosphere.

### Pitfalls and Problems in Individual Instruction

The first threat and danger that encounters the private piano lesson (especially the lessons of beginning students) is the possibility that the teaching session becomes dull and repetitious. The teacher might be following the same lesson plan in every hour of teaching. The student knows what to expect every week when he comes to his piano lesson:

- scales and technical exercises.
- the assigned piece.
- some ear training, theory, and improvisation.
- sightreading.

There is nothing wrong with this outline of a lesson. But, start with something different occasionally. For example: have one student listen to a recording, play a piece for the pupil that is written by the composer of the composition he was supposed to play in his lesson, etc. In other words, the interest of the student has to be captured in each lesson.

This depends mainly on the alertness and the flexible teaching abilities of the teacher: do not fall into a dull routine. Try to change lesson plans frequently. Be inventive and inspiring, and try to make the lessons alive and interesting.



The second danger in a private lesson is a lack of challenge, of reality, and of interaction. All three forces are present in a group situation. In a private lesson the student and the teacher work in seclusion. Both have to try to accomplish the difficult structure of de-individualization which is the normal status in a group.<sup>10</sup> Thus, it is very important for the teacher in a private session to guide his student, to lessen his fears and inner-restraints, to encourage and challenge him, and to make him "ready" and "well prepared" for a group of listeners.

The third problematic aspect in the private lesson is the ensemble playing. This is sometimes neglected ( unless the piano teacher is able to play different instruments) due to the lack of possibilities, time, or both. However, ensemble playing, playing together with others, joining together in duets, and joining other instruments by accompanying them is real joy of playing and making music. It is, as a matter of fact, the Alpha and Omega for a musician and his musical education.

The fourth danger which might threaten the individual lesson is the need for the piano student to perform. (Some aspects on performing were already discussed above under Chapter II. Many private students almost never have the possibility to play in front of others. Frequent workshops

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<sup>10</sup> Amidon and Flanders, p. 140.

and informal recitals should be arranged by the teacher. Those recitals should be held as often as possible with an air of informality, especially for the benefit of the beginning piano student. The recitals may offer prizes, parties, or games as rewards. They might thus become a key to successful performance.

The experienced teacher knows how to encounter and deal with the problems and difficulties that arise in a lesson. Teaching experience acquired over many years is invaluable. The young and inexperienced teacher has to cope with many more problems and difficulties.<sup>11</sup> He has to prepare his lessons even more carefully to avoid losing time in correcting unnecessary errors. There are many books on piano teaching and piano pedagogy which give suggestions and helpful hints to the young teacher. And yet his best help is: Do it, teach for many years, learn constantly and acquire more knowledge. Never lose the enthusiasm and love which are necessary for the teaching of any subject.

A lack of communication between the private piano teacher and the public school music teacher is sometimes another unfortunate situation within a community. This lack of communicating is not healthy for the situation of the private teacher. He should work in close connection with the school music teacher and also with his colleagues.

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<sup>11</sup>Diller, Angela, The Splendor of Music (New York: Schirmer, 1957), p. 17.

The private piano teacher must also be certain to have the absolute cooperation of his students' parents. This cooperation can make it easier for him to reach his established goals.

### The Studio

It is one of the responsibilities of a piano teacher to provide proper studio facilities. If the teacher is employed by a college or school it is naturally the task of this institution to equip the teaching room, and the teacher should not have to worry about any details.

The studio of a piano teacher needs a certain minimum of equipment and space. One grand piano and one upright, or even better, two grand pianos are extremely helpful in the teaching situation. Very often the teacher wants to demonstrate a special feature in a composition to his student and can do so much more effectively on a second instrument. Music for two pianos can be played and concertos can be accompanied by the other instrument. It is superfluous to mention that the best available piano tuner should take regular care of the pianos. In many respects, it is very bad for the student to play on an instrument that is out of tune.

Of course, a teacher can also instruct with only one piano in his studio. But this is more difficult and more time consuming. Besides that, two-piano literature cannot be studied.

The adjustable piano chair gives students of all different sizes the possibility to sit comfortably and at the proper height in front of the keyboard. This adjustable chair is a must for any studio in order to develop the right posture at the instrument.

Ample shelving space should be provided; well supplied with teaching methods, sight reading material, literature, and compositions of the major composers from Baroque to the twentieth century. Great care should be taken to select and buy only good editions. Quite often the teacher wants to pursue a certain trend in a composition and demonstrate it to his student in hand with various other works. It is also necessary to have a least one good musical dictionary, a history book, biographies, theory books, and a biographical dictionary (already mentioned above under Chapter II). A desk containing the students' records and file cards, paper, pencils, etc., should be in the piano studio. A record player, records and tape recorder are optional but extremely useful.

The pianos should be placed out from the wall in order to give a better sound. A piano should never be kept near an outside wall or window.

If a waiting room for the students is not available, the studio should be large enough to have extra space near the door for some chairs and benches. A bulletin board should be placed close to the entrance door.

The private piano teacher must try to avoid teaching in a tiny room close to the front door and the telephone. He might have to face countless problems and frustrations if he tries to teach that way. To be undisturbed during a lesson and have complete privacy is essential for teacher and student.

The atmosphere of the studio room is quite important. It should offer the student a warm and friendly feeling. It is valuable to decorate the walls with good art, calendars, and pictures of famous composers. Students are very receptive to this.

### A Lesson on a Debussy Prelude

#### Biographical sketch

Achille-Claude Debussy was born on August 22, 1862, at Saint-Germain-en-Laye. Since his ancestors were simple and plain rural people, he did not receive a thorough education in his youth. However, in 1873, a friend of his family (a student of Chopin) took interest in him and helped him to be admitted at Lavignac's solfege class at the Conservatory. He soon became a student of Marmontel's piano class and began to win prizes and honorable mentions for his outstanding piano playing. When he became the pianist for Madame Nadiejda von Weck, he was able to travel. He visited Switzerland, Italy, and Russia. He studied composition with Ernest Guiraudin in Rome until 1884. In 1887 he returned to Paris and composed his famous "Suite Bergamasque" for piano in 1888.

Debussy was a slow and very diligent worker. He often went through the stages of "delirious enthusiasm" to the "most hopeless disappointment."<sup>12</sup>

His first symphonic work was "Prelude a l'a pres-midi d'un faune", 1892, followed by "Pelleas und Melisande". He needed ten years to finish the latter composition. Other important compositions are "Quateor a cordes," "Nocturnes" for orchestra, "Suite pour le piano," and "Estampes" for the piano (1903); the first real symphony, "La Mer"; and two selections of "Images" for piano; followed by the "Images" for orchestra. In 1910 the first book of the "Preludes" was finished (Debussy was in Vienna and Budapest at that time), in 1913 he completed the second book. In 1914 he traveled to Russia where he was received with triumph and honors. After the advent of World War I he was affected by an incurable disease which ended his life in painful agony in March 1918. His last compositions were the twelve "Etudes" for piano and sketches for "Nine Sonatas for various instruments."

"Love, tenderness and pity are at the depth of Debussy's soul."<sup>13</sup> He is an esthete, an utmost refined artist who loves the rare and exotic and who hates vulgarity. He conceived "liberation of music by nature."<sup>14</sup> Many forms of leaves found in nature inspire his sensitive and subtle music.

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<sup>12</sup> Schmitz, E. Robert, The Piano Works of Claude Debussy (New York: Dover Publishers, 1966), p. 3.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

Beginning children should be always taught in groups. But this author believes that more success can be achieved by teaching certain musical subtleties in the individual lesson. For example: Debussy's Prelude "Des Pas sur la neige".

### The Prelude

Prelude, Praeludium or Vorspiel was originally designed as a piece of music to be played as an introduction to a liturgical ceremony (an independent piece, the unconnected Prelude, fifteenth, sixteenth century! In the Baroque era, the Prelude is used as an introduction or first movement of a Fugue or Suite (the connected Prelude, 1690-1750); quite often a piece of fugal character itself, sometimes in free style. In the nineteenth century, however, this connotation was lost (the disconnected Prelude).<sup>15</sup> The Prelude designates simply a pianistic character piece, naturally based on a short, certain motive, a programme, or programmatic idea. One of the first composers of the Romantic Era to use the term Prelude merely as a title for his piano pieces was Frederic Chopin (twenty-four Preludes). His followers are Scriabin (eighty-five Preludes), Debussy with his reflective and poetic pieces (twenty-four Preludes, Book I and Book II) and Rachmaninov (approximately twenty-three).

### Analysis

The prelude, "Footprints in the Snow", is composed on three contrapuntal levels: (a) the constantly stumbling

rhythm of the footfalls which remain at nearly the same pitch throughout the piece and is missing only in measure seven, measures twelve through fifteen, measure twenty-five, measures twenty-nine through thirty-one, and the last two ending measures. (b) The melodic, extremely expressive, and sensitive line which keeps the composition flowing and moving and which consists of two elements. (c) The steady pedal-points which add color to the two other voices through their progressing dissonances and rough open fifths.

The composition can be divided into five sections:

#### Section I (measure one through measure seven)

The melodic material appears in the upper part after the first opening measure. The middle voice carries the stumbling rhythm of the footfalls. The lower voice carries the pedal point. The tonal center is D, and the melody has modal characteristics (transposed Aeolian mode).

#### Section II (measures eight through measures fifteen)

The new melodic material is now in the lower two voices. It has contrasting character and is diatonic-chromatic. It goes from the axis F-sharp to C-sharp to D-flat to A-flat and back in a short span of time. The pedal point lies in the middle voice. The upper voice carries the stumbling rhythm

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<sup>15</sup>Apel, Willi, Harvard Dictionary of Music (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968), p. 597.



at the usual pitch. In measure fourteen the footfall rhythm is at a different pitch and going down (F-sharp to C) in the bass voice. The melody rises in the upper voices. Measure fifteen forms the transition to the return of the first material in measure sixteen.

### Section III (measures sixteen through measures twenty-five)

The restatement of the melody in the upper voice is varied. It brings the emotional first climax in measure twenty-three (A-flat), and the melodic line then descends in minor thirds, slurred in two eighth notes (measures twenty-three to measures twenty-five). A double ostinato is another factor that changes the return of the familiar material, appearing in the lower voice (G - A-flat - B-flat). The middle voice carries the "footfall rhythm". The open fifths passage is now extending over five measures.

### Section IV (measures twenty-six through measures thirty-one)

In this section the stumbling rhythm starts again at the usual pitch level in the upper voice. The three lower voices present various descending chords (measure twenty-eight) and ascending chords with enharmonic changes. Beginning in measure twenty-nine ("like a tender and sad regret") through measure thirty-one, the stumbling rhythm is not present. The melodic line, delicately woven in the soprano, reaches the second emotional climax in the C-flat in measure thirty. This is found first descending then ascending in a whole

step scale. The melodic line then fades away with minor thirds like sighs or sobs, slurred in eighth notes. They end this section by crossing over the lower voices with a major third F - D-flat. The three lower voices ascend in a long, unbroken line of chords in parallel six-four position. They cross over the descending upper voice and reach their climax in a diminished tonic minor chord at the last beat of measure thirty-one.

Section V (measures thirty-two through measures thirty-six)

This last section starts with the stumbling rhythm in the upper and middle voice ("More slow"). Measures thirty-two and thirty-three illustrate especially well the character of an appoggiatura of this rhythmic figure. Both measures contain identical material. The pedal point D is in the middle voice (again slurred in two eighth notes) continue the outline of a diminished-seventh chord of d minor (C-sharp - E - G - B-flat). The last beat of each measure presents the subdominant seventh chord of d minor (G - B-flat - D - F). This chord actually ends the section reposing on the first three beats of measure thirty-four "very slow". The last remaining measures present the dying, falling, and falling away of the footsteps in the lower voice in a descending line (D - G - D - G - D - G - D:A). The composition ends with a five part d minor chord. The root and the third are doubled. The wide space between the upper three voices and the lower two emphasize the feeling of absolute, merciless desolation, and hopeless loneliness.

## Interpretation

Character; technique and touch; dynamics and pedalling.

Debussy paints in this desolate prelude a small snow-bound landscape, gloomy and deserted. The persistent, stumbling rhythm ("The rhythm should have a sounding value as a background of a sad and freezing landscape") shows the hopelessness of escape of all human beings out of the bondages of life, loneliness, and despair. The melody is a cry a sob or a sigh of the solitude of the human heart. The dissonances emphasize this feeling of desperation, and the open fifths passages and pedal points add to the change of harmonic color. The composition has to be played with the utmost sensitivity, feeling, and understanding of this appeal to the basic loneliness of all human beings.

After the piece has been analyzed and its character has been explored, the fingering should be established with great care.

The cultivated art of touch which is so essential in any composition of Debussy should then be taught and explained diligently:<sup>16</sup>

The fingers of the player should be in very close contact with the keys. The legato of the lines should be produced by an imperceptible nudge or minute squeeze of the keys

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<sup>16</sup>Dumm, Robert, "Lesson on a Debussy Prelude." Clavier, Vol. VI, (December, 1967), 18-20.

by the fingertips. Yet the fingers should be held firmly. The staccato should be like a soft, plucked sound, played from the shoulder joint with a movement of arm and hand as one joined lever. For the unbroken ascending chord line, the hand should maintain the chord shape, yet stay flexible and blend from chord to chord by noticeable dynamic increasings. The position in which the player sits at the instrument is important too for the fluctuation and breathing of the piece. He should sit rather close to the keyboard and keep his body weight well balanced and swinging.

The dynamics (like the touch) are conceived at several independent levels. Of course, they add to the very nature of the piece. Notice that the entire range of dynamics is restrained from piano over pianissimo to triple pianissimo. The melodic line should always be played a shade louder than the stumbling rhythm of the ostinato. In the first opening measure, the E is played louder than the ostinato D. (Debussy marked a crescendo and diminuendo sign). However, in measure two and the following measures, the D of the ostinato is played louder, thus, giving this rhythmic figure the true interpretation of an appoggiatura. Dynamics and articulation signs deserve the greatest attention and require the most sensitive touch in their execution in order to render the despairing message of the piece. The melodic curve reaches its greatest intensity after two-thirds of the piece; falling back and rising again in the last third of the composition.

The pedal in Debussy's Prelude adds all the color and variety of tone and makes the interpretation of all his works meaningful, rich, and warm in sound and timbre.<sup>17</sup> In "Des Pas sur la Neige," the pedalling must be done extremely carefully in order not to destroy the overlapping sounds:

--keep a soft pedal throughout the piece (una corda).

--change the damper pedal (syncopated pedal) immediately after the resolution of the appoggiatura in the ostinato.

--keep a "surface"-, "clouding"-, or "floating"- pedal whenever the melody requires it. (Measures three and four, measures eleven and twelve, and measures thirty-four through thirty-six.)

--use a "fading"-pedal (depress the pedal halfway and release very slowly) when the melodic line requires it (measures seven, measure twenty-five).

It would be helpful for the student to work out a musical design which shows in a diagram the coordination of melody, tonal levels, and dynamic fluctuation.

To close this lesson on a Prelude by Debussy, the composer should have the last word:

So, the very air, the movement of the leaves, and the perfume of the flowers would work together in mysterious union with music which would thus bring all the elements into such natural harmony that it would seem to form a part of each...in this way it could be proved without a doubt that music and poetry, alone of the arts, dwell in space...I may be mistaken, but it is my belief that this idea will be the dream of future generations..."<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Slenczynska, Ruth, "Added Color through Pedal Technique." Clavier, Vol VIII, (February, 1969), 19-20.

<sup>18</sup>Vallas, Leon, "The Theories of Claude Debussy," (New York: Dover publication, 1967), p. X.

PLATE I AND II

Prelude by Claude Debussy "...Des pas sur la neige"

# .VI.

COUNT

1 2 3

4 5 6

1 2 3

4 5 6

Triste et lent (♩ = 44)

[SAD AND SLOW]

① *pp* *EXPRESSIVE AND SWEET* *p expressif et douloureux* [CLOUDING]

VA CURDA BAR 20 PEDAL 4 3 3 *più pp*

Ce rythme doit avoir la valeur sonore  
d'un fond de paysage triste et glacé

[THE RHYTHM SHOULD HAVE THE MELODICUS SOUND  
OF A SAD AND FROZEN LANDSCAPE]

④ PEDAL *m.d.* [BLEAK OPEN FIFTH] [RALL.] [FADING PEDAL]

4 2 1 2

⑧ *pp* *expressif* [CLOUDING]

PEDAL [FALL BACK] [PLAY LIKE DOTS] [SUPPRESSED]

Cédez - -

Retenu - - //

⑫ PEDAL [BROADEN] (2/4) *pp* [SLOWER]

4 3

VARIED

⑬ *pp* *p* [SECOND OSTINATO] *pp*

4 3 3

PLATE II



Cédez - # a Tempo

[FALL BACK] -

*p* *expressif et tendre* [EXPRESSION] [MORE LIVELY AND ALWAYS WITH EXPRESSION]

(19) *piu p* *pp* FADING PEDAL

[BLEAK OPEN FIFTH]

EMOTIONAL CLIMAX

[SUPPRESSED] *Retenu* - - # a Tempo

FADING PEDAL RALL.

*pp*

[UNA CORDA]

[WITH SOFT AND SAD REGRET]

*p* Comme un tendre et triste regret

(27) *m.g.*

2 L.H.

EMOTIONAL CLIMAX

[A LITTLE SLOWER]

Plus lent

(30) *p* *pp* [PLAY LIKE BOYS]

[VERY SLOW]

Très lent

[CLOUDING PEDAL] [DYING AWAY] *morendo* *ppp*

[STEPS ON THE SNOW]

## CHAPTER IV

### COMPARISON OF GROUP AND INDIVIDUAL INSTRUCTION

#### Advantages of Group Instruction

Some of the advantages which piano group instruction definitely has over individual instruction have already been mentioned under Chapter II:

- performance problems can be minimized.
- ensemble playing can be emphasized.
- Group dynamics can be made useful in this natural learning situation.
- The general musical background can be considerably broadened.

Group instruction is especially recommended for a preparatory program of children and for the teaching of young beginning students. A prerequisite (as mentioned previously) is, of course, that the children are grouped according to their age, musical abilities, level, and intelligence.

The young private student who goes lonesome and alone to his piano lesson week after week can perhaps be pitied: What happens to the joy of music which is the most valuable and precious asset that brings a child to his first music lesson? It is usually quickly lost, and after some years, this enjoyment is forgotten altogether. This sad fact might be avoided when children are taught in small groups. They enjoy and share the creativity of making music; presuming.

of course, that the teacher is qualified. How long a group of children should be taught together depends entirely on the progress of the group and on the individual child. For some students, group instruction can be sufficient and the ideal situation throughout the complete period of their musical training. Others might need some individual instruction after two or three years of group teaching in order to overcome certain musical problems and proceed at their own pace.

To continue this work with a completely different age group, the author wants to show some aspects in the teaching of the adult beginner. As mentioned above, the beginning adult student usually comes to the private piano teacher with very little confidence. He feels, perhaps, that it is out of place to start a new instrument at such an age. Here again the group situation is helpful. The adult student usually becomes less inhibited when he finds others in the same circumstances. He does not want to become a skilled performer. He usually wants to improve his understanding about music, broaden his musical background, acquire some keyboard facilities, and play just for the joy of playing.

It is very essential to have piano class (the term class defines the larger number of students as explained above) instruction as an elective course in the curriculum of the public schools (some schools offer this program.)<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>"Traveling the Circuit with Piano Classes," Chicago: Music Educators National Conference, various articles, 1951, pp. 7-31.

Especially in high school and senior high school, an elective piano class might capture the interest and minds of the teenagers, stimulate their creativity, keep them busy, and guide them to a music appreciation they would otherwise not receive. A high school class piano teacher must have all the exceptional qualities of a versatile teacher, mentioned above; superb knowledge of the subject, excellent piano technique, teaching enthusiasm, and a good sense of humor. Such a teacher will be successful and can be sure that most of his students will reach the established goals set up for the class and that his teaching time was not a loss.

The educational significance of piano study for the college music student, regardless which instrument is his major one, has been emphasized already. Most colleges and universities provide basic piano classes for beginners for at least two years. Basic piano instruction for music education majors and minors taught in classes up to twenty-four (electronic piano laboratory) has a definite place in the college curriculum and firmly established goals. Group instruction and master classes contribute an essential part to successful and economic piano teaching at a university.

#### Advantages of Individual Instruction

There is no doubt about the fact that under certain conditions individual piano lessons are preferable to group instruction. The answer to the question which of the two teaching forms should be applied depends entirely on the circumstances

The decision must be made from one individual case to the next one.

A few points which might make the individual lesson, for a certain type of student, the more desirable one are listed below:

--the especially talented child who progresses rapidly and has outstanding musical talent and abilities.

--the child who does not fit and adjust well in a group or progresses slowly and needs individual encouragement and help.

--the advanced student for whom no matching partners can be found.

--the adult beginner or re-beginner who is too shy to feel relaxed and at ease in a group situation.

--the applied piano student at advanced college level who can proceed better at his own individual pace when taught alone.

--the future concert artist whose talent usually shows very early (there are some exceptions, however!).

Some other aspects regarding the teaching itself have to be taken into consideration in the discussion of individual piano instruction. Certain aspects of piano technique, for example, can be explored deeper and taught more exclusively and thoroughly when dealt with in an individual lesson...\*

- finger actions
- arm weight actions
- shoulder actions
- body movements and balance

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\*The author is aware of the fact that opinions regarding this statement vary among piano teachers.

- different touches or manners of touch  
The art of a cultivated touch is an extremely difficult ability to achieve. The secret of a good touch lies in the precise manner in which the key is depressed.
- dynamics and their entire palette of shading.
- the art of pedalling (which often determines the tone color).
- phrasing and articulation
- more detailed and intensive emphasis on the interpretation of the literature which is studied.

Of course, once again, it must be stressed how important and significant the teaching abilities of the piano teacher are and how much depends on his musical, psychological, and professional training.

### The Master Class

The master class situation was first cultivated in Europe several decades ago.<sup>20</sup> Master classes are now a firmly established teaching situation at universities, colleges, and private studios.<sup>21</sup> They are closely related to workshops and clinics.

In a master class, a close relationship is formed between the teacher, the performer, and the listening students. (Four to five or more students can form the audience and take turns performing.) A master class is a worthwhile, time-saving, profitable, and inspiring situation for all the participating members.

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<sup>20</sup> "Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart", Baerenreiter-verlag, Kassel, edited by Friedrich Blume, 1962, Band 10, pp. 574-619, "Paedagogik der Musik."

The master class contributes enormously to the minimization of performance problems. It also broadens the background of the listening students regarding their acquaintance with the literature which is performed. Master classes are usually taught by artists who are both: excellent performers and superb teachers.

The scores of compositions to be performed should be passed out to the participating students, an informal introduction given by the teacher should precede each performance to "break the ice". After the playing each performer should discuss the performed music under the sensitive leadership and guidance of the teacher. After each performance, it might be a good idea to present the composition or at least some important parts of it to the class on a recording played by a famous artist. Naturally, the teacher can demonstrate certain points and aspects himself.

It is probably safe to say that the master class situation is extremely important and helpful; especially for the college student majoring in applied piano. Master classes should meet once a week aside from the regular individual lesson time of sixty minutes assigned to each student.

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<sup>21</sup>Moravec, Ivan, "Come to a Master Class with Ivan Moravec" *Clavier*, IV, N.2, (February, 1970), pp. 19-20.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSIONS

In the preceding chapters, an attempt has been made to demonstrate different aspects of piano teaching. Since the piano is the ideal instrument for any person interested in music--for the professional or amateur musician who are searching for a broader musical background--it is the author's opinion that it is justified to spend considerable time on the discussion of the problem "Group Piano versus Individual Instruction". But does this question in reality have to present a problem? Is the "raging battle" (and it still is a battle) between group and individual piano teaching really necessary?

In Chapter II, the writer tried to explain the tremendous value that group instruction has for the teaching of the basic fundamentals of music and for development of a general musicianship and of a musical background.

In Chapter III, an attempt has been made to clarify some aspects and viewpoints of the individual lesson and its unreplaceable importance in the field of piano teaching.

In Chapter IV, by the comparison of the two teaching situations, the author has tried to make it evident that both conditions are necessary in music education of our cultural society. Perhaps it might have been better to formulate the sentence in question as "Piano Group Instruction and Piano



Individual Instruction" rather than using the word "verses"; because, the most important aspect is that group and individual instruction have to work hand in hand together. This leads to the final question: What is the ideal situation? It is the author's belief (based on teaching experience) that the ideal teaching situation is a combination of both group work and individual instrumental lessons. Many teachers might disagree and have different ideas. Each of the two situations require an alert, superbly trained, highly qualified, guiding, and participating teacher who teaches his subject with enthusiasm, keeps the joy of making music alive in his students, and whose lessons present a challenge to the group as well as to the single student. This fact of the important role and responsibility of the piano teacher cannot be emphasized enough.

Young beginning children (the exceptions have been mentioned above) should always be taught in groups. Two children taught together might eventually develop their musical talents more freely and lose their inhibitions faster than one child. Naturally at first it is not easy to convince the parents that group teaching is not inferior to the individual lesson and to win their cooperation. After one or two years, the students might be scheduled differently:

Student A receives thirty minutes individual instruction

Students receive thirty minutes group instruction

A & B

Student B receives thirty minutes individual instruction

Assuming that each student has enrolled for a lesson of forty-five minutes per week, the scheduling might be difficult at first.

It is the author's opinion, that this situation is ideal for students of all ages and levels. If the groups are larger (four to six) the scheduling is done accordingly to the time which is available for the teacher. This pattern can also be applied in the process of education for piano majors at a college or university. The active participation which is required from the student in this learning situation might bring to him (among other advantages) confidence in his own playing and abilities, security, a faster grasping of concepts and of learning principles, and stimulation from the intellectual dynamic interaction with his partner or partners.

Music is an art measured in time and yet it can never be destroyed. Great music lives through its own value. The music teacher's task is to teach the fleeting performing of this indestructable and vital art. Countless grateful students who love and enjoy music will be the measure of reward for the devoted, open minded, enthusiastic, and conscientious music teacher.

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