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Notas prévias:

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Organização da paginação: topo da página, entre parêntesis retos.

Notas de rodapé numeradas sequencialmente e no final do texto.

[1]

In Lieu of a Preface

To begin with - a few simple statements which I shall develop later.

1. Before beginning to learn an instrument, the learner, whether a child, adolescent or adult, should already be spiritually in possession of some music; he should, so to speak, carry it in his mind, keep it in his heart and hear it with his mind's ear. The whole secret of talent and of genius is that in the case of a person so gifted, music lives a full life in his brain before he even touches a keyboard or draws a bow across the strings. That is why Mozart as a small child could "at once" play the piano and the violin.

2. Every performance - the problems of performance will be the main subject of these pages - consists of three fundamental elements: the work performed (the music), the performer and the instrument. Only a complete mastery of these three elements (and first of all, the music) can ensure a good artistic performance. The simplest example of the "triple" nature of performance is the performance of a piano composition by a solo pianist (or a sonata for violin solo, or cello solo, etc.). These simple things have to be said because in actual teaching there are very frequent cases where emphasis is channelled in some particular direction as a result of which one of the three elements is bound to suffer; but specially (and this is saddest of all) one sees that the content, i.e. the music itself (what we call, "the artistic image") is not given its due, attention being focussed mainly on the technical mastery of the instrument. Another error - true, much less frequent among instrumentalists - consists of underestimating the difficulty of completely mastering an instrument in order to serve the cause of music [Nota 1](#); this also inevitably leads to imperfect playing from the "musical" point of view, playing tainted by amateurism.

[2]

3. A few words about technique. The clearer the goal (the content, music perfection of performance), the clearer the means of attaining it. This is an axiom and does not require proof. I shall have occasion to refer to it more than once. The "what" determines the "how", although in the long run the "how" determines the "what" (this is a dialectic law). My method of teaching, briefly, consists of ensuring that the player should as early as possible (after a preliminary acquaintance with the composition and mastering it, if only roughly) grasp what we call "the artistic image", that is: the content, meaning, the poetic substance, the essence of the music, and be able to understand thoroughly in terms of theory of music (naming it, explaining it), what it is he is dealing with. A

clear understanding of this goal enables the player to strive for it, to attain it and embody it in his performance; and that is what "technique" is about.

Since in these pages there will be frequent references to the "content", as hierarchically the most important principle of performance, and since I foresee that the word "content" (or "artistic image" or "poetic sense", etc.) can with frequent use irritate the young pianist, I imagined a possible protest on his part: "Content, everlasting content! But if I can manage to play well all the double thirds, sixths and octaves and other technical difficulties in the Paganini-Brahms Variations without forgetting about the music, then I shall have 'content', but if I splash or play wrong notes there won't be any 'content'."

Quite right! Golden words! One wise writer [Nota 2](#) said about writers: "To perfect a style is to perfect ideas. Anyone who does not at once agree with this is past salvation." This is the true meaning of technique (style). I often tell my pupils that the word "technique" comes from the Greek word ΤΕΧΝΕ and that ΤΕΧΝΕ means art. Any improvement of technique is an improvement of art itself and consequently helps to reveal the "content", the hidden meaning; in other words it is the material, the real body of art.

[3]

The trouble is that many who play the piano take the word "technique" to mean only velocity, evenness, bravura - sometimes meaning "flashing and bashing" - in other words, separate elements of technique and not *technique as a whole*, as it was understood by the Greeks and as any artist understands it. Technique = ΤΕΧΝΕ is something infinitely more complex and difficult. Such qualities as velocity, precision and even faultless reading of the notes do not in themselves ensure an artistic performance which is achieved only by real, thorough and inspired work. That is why with very gifted people it is so difficult to draw a distinction between work at technique and work at music (even if they happen to repeat the same passage a hundred times). It is all one. The ancient truth: repetition is the mother of tuition, is a law for the weakest as well as the strongest talents; in this sense they are on an equal footing (although the results of their work will, of course, be different). It is well known that Liszt would sometimes repeat a particularly difficult bit over a hundred times. When Sviatoslav Richter played me Prokofiev's Ninth Sonata (dedicated to him) for the first time, I could not help noticing that one very difficult, polyphonic and very lively bit (in the third movement, some ten bars, not more) came off particularly well. He said to me: "I practised this bit without interruption for two hours". This is the right method for it gives splendid results. The pianist works at attaining the best possible result, without putting it off till some later occasion. Once, in talking with a pupil, a girl who worked rather languidly and wasted a lot of time, I used the following metaphor from daily life: suppose you want to boil a kettle of water. You have to put the kettle on the stove and not take it off until it boils. But you bring the water up to a temperature of about 40° or 50°C, then turn off the flame, do something else, then you remember the kettle - the water having cooled in the meanwhile - you begin all over again and so on several times until you are so fed up with the whole thing that you wait the time required for the kettle to boil. In this way, you lose a lot of time and lower considerably your "working vitality".

Mastery of the art of working, of learning compositions - which is one of the reliable criteria of a pianist's maturity - is characterized by an unwavering determination and an ability not to waste time.

[4]

The greater the part played in this process by willpower (going straight to the goal) and concentration, the better the result. The greater the passivity and inertia - the greater the time needed for learning a composition, while interest in it inevitably flags. All this is well known, but to repeat it is not useless. (On technique, see Chapter IV as well as many other pages in this book. We did agree that *texve* is art.)

4. In order to speak and to be entitled to be heard it is essential not only to know how to speak, but first of all to have something to say. It is as simple as twice two makes four, yet it is not difficult to show that hundreds and even thousands are constantly guilty of breaking this rule.

A scholar [Nota 3](#) once said that in Greece everyone could speak well and that in France everyone can write well. Yet the truly great Greek orators and French writers can be counted on one's fingers and in this case they are the ones we are interested in. Anton Rubinstein used to say (not without a certain wistfulness) that in our day "everyone" can play well. Well, why not? It is by no means a bad thing; it is better that "everyone" should be able to play well than to play badly. But Rubinstein's words, with their wistful scepticism, have by no means lost their meaning.

I have since my youth had a feeling which persists to this day: every time I come in contact with a very great man, whether a writer, poet, musician or painter, Tolstoy or Pushkin, Beethoven or Michelangelo, I am convinced that for me the most important thing is that this man is great, that through his art I see a man of tremendous stature and that to some extent (in a way of speaking) it is immaterial to me whether he expresses himself in prose or poetry, in marble or sound. When I was about fifteen I was sorry that Beethoven had not turned his music into philosophy for I thought such philosophy would be better than that of [Nota 4](#), more profound, more right, more human.

I should like to tell here about one of my childish whims, which coincided in time with the thoughts I have just described (when I was about fifteen).

[5]

Thinking about art and science, about their mutual relationship and contradictions, I came to the conclusion, for some reason or other, that mathematics and music are situated at the extreme poles of the human spirit, that these two antipodes limit and determine the whole spiritual and creative activity of man and that situated between them is everything that mankind has created in the field of science and art. I was so carried away by that thought that I began to write a "treatise" on the subject. I mention these childish thoughts because (I crave the reader's indulgence) it seems to me even now that mathematics and music are two poles of the human spirit and perhaps, if my life had been different, I would have continued to reflect and wonder on the subject.

In spite of the fact that this is merely a childish fancy, there is a particle of truth in it and I only mentioned it because now, with my tremendous teaching experience, I know too well how often even talented pupils, able to cope with

their task, fail to realize with what tremendous manifestation of the human spirit they are dealing. Obviously this does not make for an artistic performance; in the best of cases they stagnate at the level of good workmanship.

I hope that in seeing such words as "great", "of tremendous stature", the reader will not suspect me of being a follower of Carlyle (*On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History*). The old theory of the hero and the crowd died, along with many past delusions. We know too well that the so-called great man is just as much of a product of his time as any other man but we also know that if such a "product" is called Pushkin or Mozart, he belongs to what is highest and most treasured among all our sinful earth has born. Moreover, there is in the whole world nothing more complex than this "product". It is more complex than the structure of the galaxies or of the atom's nucleus. In saying this, I want to emphasize the importance of impressing upon every pupil from the very beginning, just how precious is the stuff with which he will be dealing all his life if he really devotes himself to the service of art. I never fail to feel that I am in the presence of a miracle as I explain to my pupils the works of genius of the great musicians, and we strive together to the best of our abilities to fathom their depth, probe their mysteries, understand their structure and raise ourselves to their lofty heights.

[6]

I know that it is this awareness of the miracle and the joy it brings - the joy of sensing it and knowing it for what it is - which gives a meaning to my life, which forces me as a teacher to work much harder than "staff regulations" require and to give of myself without stinting.

I shall attempt to set down my thoughts on the individual elements of pianoforte playing as they occur to a methodologist: on the artistic image (which means music itself), on rhythm, on tone and on the various aspects of technique.

Notas de Rodapé

Nota 1 In other words the prevalence of musical development over technical and professional development. [Voltar Nota 1](#)

Nota 2 Nietzsche, ed. [Voltar Nota 2](#)

Nota 3 Nietzsche, ed. [Voltar Nota 3](#)

Nota 4 I need hardly say that at the time I knew very little about Kant and specially about Hegel, whereas my knowledge of Beethoven was fairly good. [Voltar Nota 4](#)