

Writings from Pianists

Collected by Wilma Jensen

Matthay, Tobias. 1932. *The Visible and Invisible in Pianoforte Technique*. London: Oxford University Press. Forward by Myra Hess, Jan. 1960.

“Matthay spent his whole life in eliminating difficulties, so that musical development was never delayed by the wrong kind of mechanical practice. We are all creatures of habit: therefore how important it is that we should form good ones, so that we may avoid an endless waste of time in hopeful but thoughtless work. We all know that it is not possible to play perfectly always; but the habit of right thinking and practicing will enable us to approach more often our ideal in performance. So, too, will Matthay’s never-failing injunction to a student going on the platform: “Enjoy the music”. ...It takes a lifetime to develop one’s individual musical nature. How grateful we can be, therefore, for the clear and timesaving guidance of Tobias Matthay.” (Foreword, p. vii-viii)

“Forearm rotary exertions and relaxations must be adjusted to every note you play. They are either repeated or reversed from note to note. Mostly, however, they are applied *WITHOUT any outward indication whatever of their presence or absence*. The Forearm Rotation Element applies all through your playing, and either makes or mars it.” (page 30)

“Understanding and mastery of Rotation is therefore usually the solution of most ‘finger-work’ troubles. Attention to it indeed largely constitutes ‘L’art de délier les doigts,’ or ‘Fingerfertigkeit [skill],’ to quote Czerny.” (page 31)

“To *sound* notes we have to use the “strong” flexor muscles of the fingers situated on the forearm, a fact we become conscious of by the sensation of tension through and at the lower side of the wrist-joint. Whereas, we can and should hold the Keys down quite lightly, after the sounding, by using only the activity of the “small” (or weak) muscles inside the hand—the “lumbricales” [the small muscles that help move the fingers].” (page 44)

“Don’t try to *see* the notes, *feel* them!

1. To find the right notes, however quick the passage you must physically *feel your way*, and must do so each time FROM the last-played note, --you must sense the *Physical Intervals* on the keyboard as well as the *Melodic Intervals!* Thus successfully *feeling* your way along the keyboard from finger to finger, you gain perfect security, and *cannot* sound “wrong notes”!

Note –The Blind are compelled thus to learn. Eyesight often proves an actual stumbling-block to one’s Pianistic Education!

2. This “feel” of the surface of the keyboard depends mainly on the *true sense of touch*—the sense of contact.” (page 80)

“Final Precepts

- I. Never touch the keyboard without meaning to make Music.
- II. Even in your first exercises—
 - Mean the *Moment* of each sound, and see that you get it.
 - Mean the *Kind of sound for each note*, and see that you get it.
- III. *Feel* what the musical effect should be- and *feel* the Key—and *how* you move it.

- IV. “*Elbow elastic*” for all thing singing, and big tone—during Key-descent—not rigid and pushed into the key
- V. “*Arm-off*” *in between* the sounding of all notes, and *during* all light running passages.
- VI. You have ten fingers! So do not forget that you usually need ten separate hands to help them, and often also ten separate arms!
- VII. The *Duration* of each note is as important as the *kind* of note.
- VIII. In the quickest passages *mean* every note.
- IX. Be a sentient human being, not a contemptible automaton musically.
- X. Cleanliness is said to be next to godliness. Sense of the Beautiful is sense of God.” (page 59 of the Epitome)

Matthay, Tobias. 1912. *The Fore-arm Rotation Principle in Pianoforte Playing: Its Application and Mastery*. Boston: The Boston Music Co. (G. Schirmer, Inc.)

“As the function of the rotary adjustments of the forearm has been made clear in my various works on Technique, very few words are here required.

The principle of the exertion and relaxations of the muscles which twist and un-twist the Forearm upon itself is probably more far-reaching than any other of the fundamental principle of Technique. Whether we describe this function of the forearm (accompanied by movement or not) as *rotary* or “rocking”, “rolling”, “twisting”, or “oscillating”, the term is immaterial, but its comprehension and application are vital.” (page 3)

Matthay, Tobias. 1913. *Musical Interpretation: Its Laws and Principles, and their Application in Teaching and Performing*. Boston: Boston Music Company.

“You must show [the student], that *time* in music always implies the *dividing* up of Space; and in this particular concrete case, that it means movement in equal divisions of time always *up to* the next following pulse-throb.” (page 47)

“Time-curves must only be gentle wavelets, they must not be in the nature of earthquakes!” (page 82)

“Rubato must always be more or less in the nature of a *curve*—it must be applied over more than one single note. Otherwise, in place of a beautifully curved effect (the very purpose of *Rubato*) we shall have time-spiked (notes actually out of time) sticking out all over our performance—spikes just as uncomfortable as physical spikes.” (page 104)

“Mr. Matthay then showed, that to enable one to render a piece *continuous* in performance, the *tempo* must be continuous, although it also depended on a correct laying out of tone-values and of the emotional stress. ‘Remember,’ he said, ‘a new Tempo means a new piece—a new train of thought, and that each change of Tempo needs a new adjustment of the listener’s attention. Constantly recurring ritardos, and accellerandos, unless on a large scale, are therefore fatal to Continuity. But we cannot express ourselves adequately without Time-*inflections*, hence the necessity of *Rubato*.’ Rubato was shown to be requisite in all music, although some of the older masters required it less than do our modern composers. Rubato should be taught even to children—real Rubato, not playing out of time.” (page 160)

“Without Rhythm there is but Emptiness.”

“What you have to learn is to intend every note you play – an intentional sound and an intentional time – and an intentional duration.”

“Freedom, rotationally, is a sine qua non in all playing.”

“If it is NOT music, then it is not worth worrying over. A typewriter will serve as well!”

“Technique is essentially an act of ‘aiming or timing’ the right activities of the limb at the musically right moment during the key descent—an accurate timing of the beginning, culmination, and cessation of the needed limb— exertions for each note. Solely by such Act of Timing, can you bind Technique and Music together.”

Marcus, Adele. 1979. *Great Pianists Speak with Adele Marcus*. Neptune, New Jersey: Paganiniana Publications, Inc.

“After a thorough grounding in mechanics, we learn to understand our physical relationship to the instrument. With a genuine pianistic talent, which usually manifests itself at an early age, this necessary groundwork is comparatively straightforward. It is the way to acquire facility. However, facility is *not technique*. Very often we hear extremely facile playing that sounds like ‘water running off a duck’s back.’ Though this type of playing frequently indicates a drilled and super mechanism, it is often totally uncommunicative and unimaginative in the treatment of a musical phrase. ...Musicianship, or the WHY of our musical explorations, adds reason and authority to our study.” (page 7-8)

Marcus, Adele. 1972. “Mechanics of Advanced Technique.” *Clavier*, Vol. XI, No. 6 (September): 14-23.

“When I was 19 I had the great privilege of playing for Giesecking. ‘What do you want from this audition?’ he asked. ... ‘I am contemplating studying in Europe,’ I answered, ‘and would like to study with you. I want to get a deeper viewpoint of interpretation and technique.’

‘But there is no difference between interpretation and technique,’ Giesecking said. ‘Every dynamic and nuance must be produced simultaneously by a technical means.’” (page 14)

“Someone, hearing myriad hues of beauty in a phrase Horowitz played, asked him how he does it. ‘Oh, it’s simple,’ he answered. ‘It took me my whole life.’ (page 23)

“You must realize that the faster the speed, the closer you must get to the keyboard. When you strike any given object slowly, you have a wide leverage; when you strike faster, you have to get closer to the object. And this is exactly the way the fingers work.” (page 17)

“The Importance of the Outside of the Hand: It is important to have the feeling that the thumb can reach out and still be light and that most of the weight, balance, and facility is in the outside of the hand.” (page 20)

“The thumb should be the lightest finger, only a pusher, like an animal crawling. Besides being light, the thumb should play on the end and be placed under the hand—as we have all

heard since we were children—simultaneously with the dropping of the second finger, with no movement in the wrist.” (page 20)

- *WJ comments: Many years ago I heard Adele Marcus in a workshop. She took considerable time in explaining how differently the thumb works as opposed to the fingers. When she says the thumb is a “pusher” she means you always should rotate the thumb. Do not raise and lower the thumb to play, but move the thumb sideways, “pushing” the thumb to the next note rather than lifting it. In contrast, the fingers swing vertically to the key from the knuckles. Separating these two motions can take a long time to accomplish. Very slow scale practice with exaggerated finger swings in contrast with the lateral motion of the thumb is usually necessary.*

“In [scale] exercises, the elbows are close to the body, but not rigid. But with scales, the elbow is removed from the body, so that the elbow leads.” (page 21)

“When the hand is properly developed, you should have the feeling that each hand is two hands: the fourth and fifth fingers are the stronger of the two hands; and the thumb, second, and third fingers, which feel less important, are an adjunct to the outer part of the hand. You have four hands with which to work, so-to-speak.” (page 20)

“So the torso is the moderator of our sonority. If we do not have mobility in the torso, we do not have control of the distribution of weight for our sound.” (page 16)

“*Torso moves with the arms.* Young people, in playing scales, often sit with their torso immobile, reaching out as they play high or low. You should not have the same position of the upper body when you are playing at the bottom or the top of the piano as when you are playing in the center. The upper part of the body should move with the arms. When you get to the top of the piano, your hands should feel as if they’re the same distance from the body—they should not be reaching out—as when you are playing the center of the piano. In other words, in practicing scales it is important to have the hands an equal distance from the body in every register of the piano as you ascend and descend four octaves. In this way the distribution of the weight to the hands from the torso creates an evenness of sound.” (page 20)

- *WJ comments: For free torso movement, be sure all your weight is on the bench with legs dangling freely. If you are holding legs up, the torso may not be relaxed and free. Proper height of the bench is not necessarily in relation to height of the person. Consideration needs to be given to the distance from the person’s “bottom” to the bend of the knees. If that distance is quite long the person will sit much farther back on the bench than a person with a shorter distance. Each person’s varying body proportion makes the bench height an individual decision. One must be able to “lean in” while keeping balance on the bench.*

“Octaves: The elbows, in playing octaves, should be close to the body, the feet flat on the floor. Raise the wrist as high as possible, without moving the arm, keeping the fingers free—the fifth finger straight, the thumb light, the second finger curved. That’s all you have to remember! The hand is geared primarily toward the fifth finger—a straight fifth finger from the knuckle—throwing the hand back, the fingers free and reaching towards the keyboard.

I suggest doing octaves at first very slowly (later in different speeds), chromatically, four times on each key, the fourth finger on the black notes. Then, using the same pattern, but playing six notes, then eight notes, the left hand two octaves below the right.

I never practice these exercises hands together; I begin with the left hand. I also work the left hand alone in all pieces. Josef Hofmann said, "By their left hand, you know them." If you don't have a comfortable left hand, you will never have the right sonority in passages that require holding up of the harmonic line." (page 21)

- *WJ comment: From teacher, Ernestine Scott: "In playing octaves the wrist and forearm are 'taut' and 'set' as opposed to a very relaxed and 'floppy' wrist."*

"I don't believe in total relaxation. When we're totally relaxed, we are in bed asleep. If I pick up a handkerchief, I don't have to tighten up some other part of my body, but I do have to have some tension in the hand...I differentiate between tension and intensity. I think of intensity as an emotional quality, whereas tension stifles freedom of feeling...The tension should be in the first finger joint, the joint having contact with the key. When we are young, our fingers often cave in due to weakness at the first joint. But weak first joints are ruinous. The first joints must be strengthened by proper exercises, stretching exercises or anything that will help to solidify the total tactile control. Furthermore, the wrist, which has eight bones in it and if not used enough will form small adhesions, must be malleable." (page 16)

Newman, William S. 1956. *The Pianist's Problems: A Modern Approach to Efficient Practice and Musicianly Performance*. New York: Harper & Row Publishers, Inc.

“The single most important thing the student can do about his rhythm, from the practical standpoint of this book, is to count. He should count the meter aloud in clear, crisp tones—not chant in weird, sustained tones, because then he is not defining the beats. He should not subdivide the beat with “ands” unless the tempo is actually so slow as to need subdivision—that is, where the use of “ands” is essential to the flow of the protracted beats. Otherwise, “ands” break up the beat, lose the sense of flow, and so defeat one important purpose of counting. Only when there is an irregular subdivision of the beat, as with dotted rhythms or the long and short notes of a triplet, may it be necessary to fill in the subdivisions temporarily. Thus, the student might count *one-de-de-de* to locate [a dotted eighth and sixteenth note] or [a sixteenth, eighth, sixteenth] correctly, but only on the beats where these occur. Such subdivisions often suffer distressing neglect. How ruinous to the heart of the rhythmic structure is the conversion of triplets into [two sixteenths and an eighth note] or dotted patterns into [a quarter note and eighth note in a triplet figure]!” (page 83)

“The reason for counting must be understood. The student must realize that effective rhythm depends on the opposition of two factors, 1) the underlying pulse or beat and 2) the pattern of notes that is superimposed on that pulse.... To turn this fact into practice, that is, to play with *rhythmic authority*, he must be able to feel both pulse and pattern simultaneously. This is what is accomplished by counting aloud while playing.

...The counting represents a pulse of definitely physical origin—a steady throb that takes place in the involuntary visceral muscles, so we are told. The act of counting aloud must be regarded as an exaggeration of what the student will later say to himself and of the pulse that he will come to feel inside. Mr. Loesser, who never fails to infuse his playing with rhythmic vitality, adds here,

‘I have found it useful to tell students to think of music not as a bunch of notes arranged into a rhythmic pattern, but rather as a skeleton of beats on which the notes are set, like the jewels on a sunburst. A note may be defined as something that fits on a beat, a sound that must be placed on its own exclusive *time-spot*. First come beats, then notes.’” (page 84)

“Without a firm support or base for his finger action, the pianist is in the position of a gardener who tries to weed with a rubber-handed hoe.”

Slenczynska, Ruth. 1961. *Music at Your Fingertips: Aspects of Pianoforte Technique*. New York: Cornerstone Library Publications.

“I remember how Rachmaninoff explained to me the problem of phrasing: he showed me an elastic band and stretched it slightly, then allowed it to bounce back; next, he stretched it beyond a certain point, and it snapped. He meant to say that no part of a musical line should be stretched out of proportion to the whole composition. We have a natural tendency to take a breath, so to speak, after each phrase, but we must be careful not to overdo it. Actually the end of one phrase should prepare the listener for the next, or at least blend into it so that the musical fabric remains strong and whole. There are even instances in which a whole series of phrases leads to a sort of gateway opening up a new mood; almost as if another light had been turned on.” (page 20)

“Once I know a passage thoroughly at a slow tempo, I take it a little faster, generally only two metronome numbers, so that the mind and hands hardly notice the change. At each playing I increase the speed by two metronome numbers until I reach a limit where I can still deliver the passage accurately but can’t exceed that speed. There I stop.

At the next practice period I start all over again from the original slow tempo, which already seems considerably easier than a few hours before. If it feels very much easier, I advance at the rate of three metronome numbers, taking care, however, that the fingers don’t feel the strain. I never go beyond the point of tension; this point advances by itself, day by day, week by week, without forcing, until I reach a point far beyond the speed I need. Yet, I still start slowly every day and seldom exceed a five-number advancement rate, because the muscles would feel the strain and the foundations of the kinesthetic response that I am trying to build might be shaken. At times this way of practicing seems monotonous, but I have found that the time spent is well invested. Incidentally, I learned it from Rachmaninoff, who felt it was the only way to gain firm fingers.” (page 30-31)

“Whenever hands are raised off the keyboard for rests or phrase endings, wrists should be *up* with the hands hanging in order to insure relaxation. If this becomes habitual you will have endurance even in a difficult composition.” (page 34)



“No one is at his peak all the time. On some days our minds will be more alert; on others our best practice will be at the functional muscular level; a third time our interpretative powers seem to have special inspiration. When we rotate our practice material, we can take special advantage of these bright periods. Much of the time, dull days are a symptom of our reluctance to getting started. With a variety of different material on which to work we are sure to be fascinated by some aspect of the practice routine if we give it half a chance. Sigmund Freud said that laziness is simply fear of not succeeding; I have found that consistency of effort at least prevents total failure, even if the spark of inspiration eludes us temporarily.” (page 94)

“I recommend use of the metronome from the very beginning, from the very first scale, throughout our musical lives. I still use it daily, even on tour, to maintain the discipline of daily practice and full mastery of the keyboard. I prefer to increase speed at regular intervals.”

- *WJ comments: The Sander book discusses the use of rotation, upper arm, forearm, wrist, and fingers in more detail than many other sources.*

Sandor, Gyorgy. 1981. *On Piano Playing: Motion, Sound and Expression*. New York: Schirmer Books.

“Scales and arpeggios constitute a large part of piano playing, and the technique required in this activity takes care of a major share of pianistic problems. Rotary motion of the forearm, however, is eminently important too. We call it simply *rotation* because we are seldom concerned with the rotary motion of any other part of the playing mechanism.” (page 79)

“Pure axial forearm rotation is used for small intervals, up to about a sixth or a seventh, depending on the size of the hand. The role of the forearm’s axial activity is to add power and speed to the fingers, which must be active at all times. The fingers should be slightly raised before playing, and both pronation and supination will add distance from the keys to the finger that is about to play.” (page 81)

“When we rotate on black keys, the general arm position is higher, and the upper arm is placed slightly forward and sideways (just as it is adjusted in free fall and scales). This position maintains the straight line between the elbow and the fingers. If the rotation is on one black and one white key, the position of the elbow must be changed accordingly. If the right thumb is on a black key and the fifth finger on a white key, the elbow moves closer to the body; if the reverse is true, the elbow moves outward.” (page 83)

“The reason that we go into such detail is that we are concerned with the learning processes, and it is in the slow tempo we use for practicing that these motions must be brought into play; however they are essential in any tempo.” (page 84)

“The fingers’ role can never be replaced by the rotating forearm; it can only be complemented by it. ...Even in fast rotation the fingers must be raised actively somewhat before and after playing. ...If both arms rotate simultaneously at the opposite, outer extremes of the keyboard, the body should lean forward to avoid stretching the arms unduly and placing the hands at an extreme angle.

The essence of rotary motion lies in a passive upper arm, an active forearm, an inactive hand and wrist, and slightly active fingers. The hand and fingers receive the side-swinging effects of the axially rotating forearm.” (page 85)

Bernstein, Seymour. 1981. *With Your Own Two Hands: Self-Discovery Through Music*. New York: G. Schirmer.

“Some pianists view the weakness of their fourth fingers as a personal disability. The fact is that nature alone is to blame for this condition since the muscular structure of the hand is such that your fourth finger is bound to your third. Instead of worrying about it, or worse still, attempting by foolish means to rectify a biological flaw (as Schumann did with tragic results), simply take more rational measures by compensating for your “trapped” fourth finger—that is, *increase your hand and arm pressure* when your fourth finger comes into play. When you articulate your fourth finger, your third finger, as you know, will move along with it, and vice versa. Do not inhibit these movements. Because the muscle of your third finger overlaps that of the fourth, such compensatory movements are natural and therefore add strength and articulation to your playing. Moreover, these movements actually aid the third and fourth fingers on all upward choreographic swings. Mustering whatever strength you can to aid the fourth finger facilitates fast playing especially.” (page 189)

Horowitz, Joseph. 1984. *Conversations with Arrau*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

“Arrau: I found out very early that playing in a relaxed way makes one more creative—because it is so natural; because the whole body is involved; because there is a unity of body and psyche.” (page 118)

“Friends and pupils often have heard me say that in my ideal music school, psychoanalysis would be a mandatory part of the general curriculum. That and the art of dancing.

Psychoanalysis to teach a young artist the needs and drives of his psyche; to make him come to know himself early rather than late and thus sooner to begin the process of fulfilling himself, which until the end of his life must become his main driving force as a human being and as an artist. Indeed, only insofar as this will be his goal, his conscious or unconscious goal, will he grow as an artist and become worthy of the name. I would include the art of modern dance for the use of its liberating, expressive movements in the release of psychophysiological blocks, tensions, and inhibitions and for the greater awareness and projection of feeling.” (page 239)

Gerig, Reginald. 1974. *Famous Pianists & their Technique*. Washington: Robert B. Luce, Inc.

“[Liszt] was... concerned enough about technique to have written twelve volumes of Technical Exercises between 1869 and 1879 which were published posthumously in 1886 by Alexander Winterberger. These emphasized all manner of technical problems. In every phase of technique, he was thoroughly progressive. In fingering, he advocated the thumb frequently passing over the fingers as well as under, ...he used a higher seat than many of his student later did and most pianists had before him. This position permitted the forearm to slant downward toward the hand and allow for greater power in arm playing. ... [Others] taught finger training by “stiff up and down movement, the wrist in the same way, and the arm hardly at all.” Liszt’s greatest contribution was in the musical inspiration and insight which he imparted to those who came to him.” (page 185-186)

Whiteside, Abby. 1961. *Indispensables of Piano Playing*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.

“It is most unfortunate that the movements which express emotion are labeled mannerisms, for we think of mannerisms as unnecessary. If they are always present with a great performance can they be unnecessary? Rather, isn't it safer to believe that they *are* necessary for the expression of the emotion which must be a part of any great performance?

There should be no prejudice against so-called mannerisms. We should just be thankful for the emotion which vivifies and heightens the output of a creative artist.” (page 16)

“It is the top arm plus the torso, the central force, which motivates the over-all rhythm. Unless the movements for articulation are inside the orbit of this rhythm- timed with it—no fundamental rhythm can be effective in phrase modeling.” (page 27)

“The activity involved in these “other techniques” has been unheeded because of the emphasis generally placed on the finger technique. It should have greater attention than fingers because it creates the rhythm and implements it, and because fingers are only the periphery of the total activity involved in playing. The action at periphery cannot promote the blended coordination demanded for virtuosity.” (page 31)

“*Torso*. In a sitting position the resistance which makes the delivery of power effective is the chair seat. ...It is easy to feel the rhythm of skating and dancing when movement is not restricted. It is less easy to feel the same rhythmic exhilaration when the sitting posture limits movement. But it is so exactly the same rhythmic response to the music which is so natural in dancing and skating that I needed for a thrilling performance at the piano—a response through the body.” (page 31)

“To annihilate this activity of the torso by labeling it mannerism and objectionable is to dam up a source of emotional expression without which a performance loses its reason for being.” (page 32)

“Only when this pull of the top arm is actively involved in sharing the production of all tones can full speed and power be achieved without the overburdening of small muscles. Such overburdening easily and frequently produces a crippling strain as well as inadequate facility.” (page 33)

- *WJ comments: Abby Whiteside has quite a different approach from many other pianists in her method of developing technique. She believes the upper arm ultimately activates the fingers. She does not believe drills by Czerny and Hanon are necessary.*

Whiteside, Abby. 1969. *Mastering the Chopin Etudes and Other Essays*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.

“The jazz player’s accomplishments in facility and brilliance are formidable and, in many cases, the result not of study but of his good ears and innate rhythm. It is the magic worked by the right kind of rhythm that made his learning fast and efficient, a rhythm that has the basic quality of continuity in action, that stop for nothing, all details being absorbed in its stride, which is as continuous as the movement of the slow-motion picture. It flows along from the first tone to the last, and no movement for producing tone disturbs it. It is always in this sense of continuity in action, related to and highlighting the form of the composition, that I use the word rhythm.” (page 170)

“Coordination for a full effective action takes place from the center of the radius of activity to the periphery; for playing, this means from the shoulder to the tips of the fingers (not from the fingers to the shoulder). If the fingers are trained to reach for the keys, this reaching action tends to have the finger activity disengaged from a concerted action.” (page 174)

“Control of distance at finger tips feels as different from control at the shoulder joint as the feeling of strain does from the feeling of ease. The former makes for difficulty and struggle while the latter assures facility and ease. The upper arm merely turns and gauges distance while all the other levers quite naturally and easily fit into the arm action controlled at the shoulder joint. ...Training fingers to produce the power for tone puts a burden upon small muscles that all too frequently results in neuritis.” (page 175)

“I know of no daily routine of scale playing that does not depend upon fingers for producing tone and that does not try to control dynamics with that power. The fact that such scale practice bores a child is reason enough for not using it, but the entire procedure is faulty for achieving facility and ease with the least expenditure of effort.” (page 176)

“Czerny has been responsible for untold boredom, and that is exactly why his exercises should be discarded. Creativeness in ideas is fostered by response to beauty, not to boredom. It is time we learned to use beautiful music for achieving results if we are interested in producing beautiful playing.

Hanon is used for developing independent fingers with equal hitting power. Obviously this cannot be accomplished. Each finger may gain more power, but there will still be inequality in the fingers. Fingers need to be expert only in transmitting the power of the arm. That is a different and far simpler problem, which does not demand mechanical and uninteresting patterns.” (page 177-178)

“Let the student be taught that he needs ‘strong and independent fingers, and a steel-like wrist,’ and from then on, all too often, his musical goose is cooked!”

Lhevinne, Josef. 1972, originally published 1924. *Basic Principles in Pianoforte Playing, with a new Foreward by Rosina Lhevinne.* New York: Dover Publications.

“Music is painted upon a canvas of silence. Mozart used to say, “Silence is the greatest effect in music.” ...Very often the effect of the rest is even greater than that of the notes.” (page 3)

“There are really three forms of staccato; but the average careless student either does not know about them or he plays all forms in the same identical manner.

The first form with the point is the shortest. This might be represented as cutting off three-fourths of the value of the note and leaving only one-quarter.



The second form is the dot, which cuts the note in half.



The third form is the dot and the dash, which slices off only one-quarter of the note and leaves three-quarters to be played.



This touch is sometimes called portamento; and it has a very distinct and important effect. These conceptions are general. They must not be taken too literally.” (page 5-6)

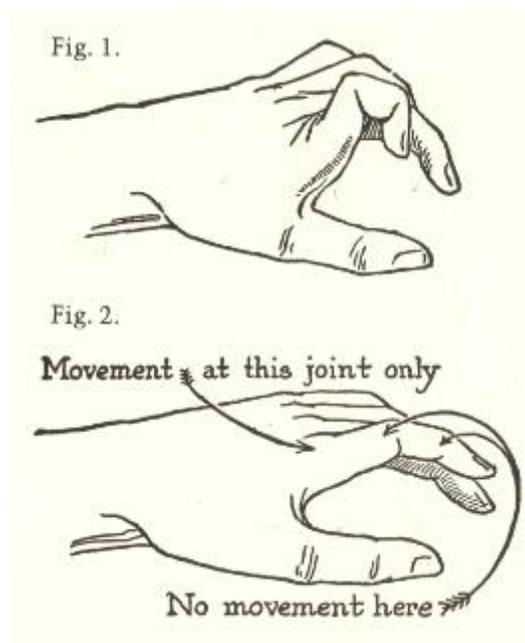
“Rhythm is spirit in music, the most human thing in music.” (page 7)

“Most pupils look upon scales as a kind of musical gymnasium for developing the muscles. They do that, of course, and there are few technical exercises that are as good; but their great practical value is for training the hand in fingering so that the best fingering in any key becomes automatic. In this way they save an enormous amount of time in later years. They also greatly facilitate sight reading, because the hand seems to lean instinctively to the most logical fingering, to elect it without thinking. Take it for granted, you may have too little scale practice, but you can never have too much.

The study of harmony is also a great time saver in piano playing. Know the chords and know the fingering of all the arpeggios, which is really logical fingering of most of the common chords.” (page 11)

“First of all, let us consider our playing members, the fingers, the hand, with its hinge at the wrist to the arm, and finally the torso—all of which enter into the problem of touch. With me, touch is a matter of elimination of non-essentials, so that the greatest artistic ends may be achieved with the simplest means.

...There was a time, I am told, when the great aim of the piano teacher was to insist that the hand be held as stiff and hard as a rock while the fingers rose to the position shown in Figure 1, in which all of the smaller joints were bent or crooked, and then the finger descended upon the key like a little sledgehammer. The effect was about as musical as though the pianist were pounding upon cobblestones. There was no elasticity, no richness of tone, nothing to contribute to the beauty of tone color of which the fine modern piano is so susceptible. Now, the finger arises in the position shown in Figure 2, and the movement up and down is solely at the point marked.” (page 12-13)



“The fingering must be the best possible for the given passage; it must be adhered to in every successive performance; and the hand position (or shall we say “hand slant”) must be the best adaptable to the passage. The easiest position is always the best. Often pupils struggle with difficult passages and declare them impossible, when a mere change of the hand position, such as raising or lowering the wrist or slanting the hand laterally, would solve the problem.” (page 34)

“Staccato, considered as touch, is often marred by surface noises of the fingers tapping on the keys. ...In some passages this percussive noise seems to contribute to the effect but in general it must be used with caution. A very simple expedient reduces this noise and increases the lightness and character of the staccato. It is merely the raising of the wrist. By raising the wrist, the stroke comes from a different angle, is lighter, but nonetheless secure and makes for ease in very fleet passages.” (page 35-36)

“Finger staccatos, produced by wiping the keys, are also effective when properly applied.” (page 36)

“Memorize phrase by phrase, not measure by measure. The phrase is the musical unit, not the measure, unless the phrase lengths happen to conform to the measure lengths. The thing to remember is the thought, not the symbols.” (page 42)

“Daily drill in memorizing, if only just a little, is better than studying memorizing now and then. It is the regular practice that counts.” (page 43)

“Variety in practice is most important. Repeating monotonously over and over again in treadmill fashion is the very worst kind of practice. It is both stupid and unnecessary. Take the scale of C. It may be played in hundreds of ways, with different rhythms, with different speeds and with different touches. The hands may be varied. One hand may play legato and the other staccato. Practice in this way, using your brains and your ingenuity, and your practice will not be a bore to you.” (page 44)

“Develop your weak points; the strong points will take care of themselves.” (page 46)

“Pedaling is all in the knowing how. I employ a full pedal, a half pedal and a one-quarter pedal or just a touch. In some of these effects the pedal just barely removes the dampers from the wires; sometimes they touch slightly, producing a delightful harp-like effect. (This effect is rarely heard upon an upright piano as the mechanism is different.)” (page 47)

Vartic, Ilinca. “Using the Piano Pedals – The Art Behind the Mechanism.” www.pianocareer.com.

Rubinstein once said that *the pedal is the soul of the piano*.

The sustain pedal has two functions:

1. Allowing the sound to continue even after we release the keys;
 2. Changing the timbre of the sound, making it deeper, warmer, more intense, more ‘alive’.
1. **The full pedal** – pressing the pedal all the way down, and then raising it (or changing it) all the way up. This pedal gradation is the easiest one, being used by all beginner and intermediate students.
 2. **The half pedal**-- there are two types of ‘half pedals’. In the first case, we press the pedal only halfway down, and raise it all the way up: this way, we raise the dampers, but they are still close to the strings, so the vibrations of the strings are limited and so is the sound continuity. In the second case, we press the pedal all the way down, but we don’t raise it – we only change it halfway up. This technique is extremely powerful: by skillfully using it, the lower notes will be sustained, while the notes in the higher registers will remain transparent and detached. This pedaling ‘gradation’ is useful when playing multi-layered music, for example piano transcriptions of Bach’s Organ works, where we originally had 3 staves instead of two. As you all probably know, on the organ we have the possibility of holding bass notes with the foot keyboard, while everything we play with our fingers remains perfectly detached. By using the half pedal technique, we can somehow imitate this effect.
 3. **The quarter pedal** and other subtle pedaling ‘tricks’. Professional pianists are not pedaling ‘by the book’. They ‘play’ with the sustain pedal, pressing it in thousands of different ways which cannot be described by simple written words.

- *WJ comments: Teacher Ernestine Scott spoke frequently of a **vibrated half-pedal**. Pressing the pedal halfway down keeps the warmth of the sound while maintaining clarity. For example, in a fast A major scale passage in a Mozart sonata, the pianist adds the sustain pedal halfway on the triadic notes, and lifts the pedal on the passing dissonant notes.*