

# **Piano Practice: practice routines and techniques for concert pianists**

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## Abstract

This study investigates the various types of practice concert pianists utilize in preparation for performance. There are surprisingly few published documents which examine the highest levels of piano practice, and this study examines these scarce ideas in comparison with the newly collected material given by eight selected concert pianists regarding their practice methods, techniques and regimes.

Keyboard practice techniques from the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century until the present are examined and presented here. Some of the techniques are physical applications of how to practice the instrument, and others are mental preparations which suggest philosophical guidance toward physical practice or enhance performance capabilities.

Advice from many famous (older) concert pianists regarding their practice is compared with the newer advice of the eight pianists selected for this study. The amalgamation of all the compiled suggestions should enlighten any pianist's approach toward practice, and could also be a helpful compendium to any professors of piano who wish to offer a wider variety of practice methods to their students.

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### 1.1 Background to the study

The subject of piano practicing has been of particular interest to me for many practical reasons. I am in the early stages of an international concert career and I spend many hours of my life practicing. My practice habits and structures have changed over the last ten years as I continually realize how much time is wasted during practice sessions. During my studies at The Juilliard School in New York and the Royal Academy of Music in London, I would often secretly listen to other (better) pianists practice in the hope of learning new techniques or ways of practicing which might enable my work to be more efficient. This clandestine listening provided more insight and help than any advice I was given by my teachers<sup>1</sup>. I also had numerous conversations with many of the pianists regarding how they practiced, and these discussions were very informative. When I explored and experimented with new ways to practice as suggested by my colleagues, I often found I could do much more quality work in less time<sup>2</sup>.

As I began to perform more frequently, I returned to my colleagues and discussed not just practical practice tips but other issues concerned with giving successful performances. I again found the advice of my colleagues more helpful than the advice of the teachers. I began to question why the practical advice of colleagues, who were not “experts,” was more helpful than the very expensive advice I was paying for at the music institutions. During my time in London, I had the opportunity to study with concert pianists who were not teachers, and the instruction I received was of a different nature to the instruction gleaned from teachers who mainly taught

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<sup>1</sup> In this document the word ‘teacher’ refers to practical music teachers at secondary and tertiary institutions.

<sup>2</sup> Further discussions regarding my personal experiences and motivation for this study appear in Chapter 7. They are not included here as they include discussions that would preempt information that appears in Chapters 5 and 6.

and no longer performed. After considering these circumstances, and following on from many subsequent discussions with numerous colleagues, I have concluded that there is a serious lack of practical information concerning efficient practice for the concert pianist, especially at the beginning of his or her career.

## **1.2 Motivation for the study**

Many young concert pianists attempt to study or perhaps have lessons and masterclasses with great performing artists, but continuous access to them is very limited. This leaves most students in the position of exclusively relying on their teachers at academic institutions to instruct them in the various techniques of practicing. I would like to suggest that in this respect there is a gap in the knowledge-exchange between students and teachers. There are, of course, numerous teachers who do their best to inculcate efficient practice methods in their students. But I have attempted to identify three different, but typical stereotypes of piano teachers who have corresponding limitations: (1) the teacher who currently performs (perhaps often) while also teaching; he has the most direct access to the experience of performing and should have the most experiential insight to offer students; (2) the teacher who used to perform but now devotes most his time to teaching; he may have a wealth of performance experience, but since he no longer performs there is a high likelihood that he may have forgotten some of the day-to-day struggles involved with mastering the instrument; (3) the teacher who never really performed and only teaches; he may have a wonderful understanding of music but may be severely limited in offering practical advice to the pianist.

There are two major areas where teachers attempt to engage students. The first and perhaps most essential element is a pianist's musicianship. Teachers spend a great majority of their time teaching the philosophy of good musicianship and most of this instruction is not necessarily related to a teacher's performance ability. The second element, the practical demonstration of these philosophical musical ideas, is derived from a teacher's musicianship and seeks to display in sound what a teacher describes in words. The conundrum is that there exist teachers who are incapable of performing on a musical level equivalent to the philosophical level they can describe with language, while other teachers can perform at the highest level, but are unable

to verbalize how they accomplish this. Both of these scenarios have obvious drawbacks.

This study is not an attempt to belittle the quality of piano instruction at the secondary or tertiary<sup>3</sup> level or to insult the competence of their teachers. Even the best students need specific types of instruction which are not related to a teacher's ability to perform. Often these teachers are better teachers than the current performers of today as they have honed their craft of communication to a much higher level than many professional performing musicians who have not had much teaching experience. Performing artists also have certain natural abilities and gifts which they may have difficulty explaining since these most likely developed at a very early age, and artists often do not take the time to investigate how they can share their abilities and gifts with other people. This study seeks to understand the interrelationships between student, teacher and performing artist, define the limitations of typical teacher/student and performing artist/student information exchange, and collect data from sources (young performing artists) not usually available to most students.

The word *practice* can be variously defined (usually quite vaguely), and I will describe what I intend to signify when I discuss the concept of practicing. I will use the term with some flexibility, not only representing the physical time at the instrument, but also with reference to the mental and psychological preparation which accompanies this physical labour.

### **1.3 Literature review**

The literature review (Chapters 2 and 3) will commence with a survey of the recorded thoughts concerning piano practice from the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Most of the surveyed authors (pre-1930) of Chapter 2 came from various "schools" of pianism, and most of this early commentary is decidedly focused on technical approaches to piano playing. The methods of Franz Liszt, Sigismund Lebert and Ludwig Stark (Stuttgart), Ludwig Deppe and Rudolph Breithaupt (Berlin), Anton and Nicholas Rubinstein (Russia), and Tobias Matthay (England) will highlight the

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<sup>3</sup> Tertiary music institutions include universities, colleges and conservatories.

progression of technical approaches which culminate in the highly technical and anatomical explanations of Otto Ortmann and Arnold Schultz in the early 1930's.

After World War Two, there have been many studies focused on the subject of piano practice, particularly examining the early to semi-professional levels of piano playing. Most of these publications are irrelevant to the high-level nature of this investigation, but a few of these works contain useful information applicable to this study. A short survey of contributive authors' material will include Bolton's *How to Practice, A Handbook for Pianoforte Students* (1937), D'Abreu's *Playing the Piano with Confidence* (1964), Kochevitsky's *The Art of Piano Playing* (1967), Neuhaus's *The Art of Piano Playing* (1973), Bernstein's *With Your Own Two Hands* (1981), Camp's *Developing Piano Performance* (1981), Sandor's *On Piano Playing* (1981), Newman's *The Pianists' Problems* (1984), Madeline Bruser's *The Art of Practicing* (1997), and Freymuth's *Mental Practice and Imagery for Musicians* (1999). There are a few significant studies which attempt to examine practice on a pseudo-scientific level, and contributive authors in this category include Linda Gruson, Kacper Miklaszewski, Sue Hallam, A. C. Lehmann and K. A. Ericsson. The last work to be considered in this category will be *Practicing Perfection: Memory and Piano Performance* (2002) written by Roger Chaffin, Gabriel Imreh and Mary Crawford.

All of these resources define the general parameters of successful practice, but they are not very informative in discussing how these ideas are implemented by a variety of pianists at the highest professional level. They discuss issues such as how to set aside time to practice, how much time to spend working on technique, how to approach a new piece technically and musically, how to practice slowly and methodically, how to use a metronome and how to memorize music efficiently and reliably. Some of the studies delve into deeper technical issues of how to produce beautiful tone, fingering suggestions, hand placement, and other physical issues of keyboard practice and performance. Some of the later works begin to explore the mental and psychological realm of practice and performance often giving philosophical advice about various issues. Although these studies explore most issues a concert pianist confronts, they do not give much practical advice on how these philosophical ideas are implemented by a wide spectrum of pianists in professional practice and performance.

The most helpful information regarding this topic of practice comes from publications consisting of multiple interviews and from a few biographies of famous pianists. But these sources are also limited, unorganized and do not explore in sufficient detail as biographers have not spent the appropriate amount of time investigating the evolution of famous pianists' practice, probably because most readers do not consider this topic to be particularly interesting; nor do short interviews allow for a serious examination of pianists' practice history. A selection of the books investigated includes Giesecking and Leimer's *The Shortest Way to Pianistic Perfection* (1932), Wolff's *The Teaching of Artur Schnabel* (1972), Graffman's *I Really Should Be Practicing* (1981), and Montsaingeon's *Sviatoslav Richter: Notebooks and Conversations* (2001). Also included will be information from interviews collected in Cooke's *Great Pianists on Piano Playing* (1917), Gerig's *Famous Pianists and Their Technique* (1974), Marcus's *Great Pianists Speak with Adele Marcus* (1979), Mach's *Great Pianists Speak for Themselves* (1980 & 1988), Dubal's *World of the Concert Pianist* (1985), and Noyle's *Pianists on Playing* (1987).

#### **1.4 Research questions**

There are several related and relevant research sub-questions which have been investigated in this study. All of them will be based on the following:

- Main research question:

**What practice techniques and routines are and have been successfully used by concert pianists?**

- Sub questions:

1. Where did past and present pianists initially learn how to practice?
2. In what way do practice techniques change as experience increases?
3. What sources helped them change, economize, and evolve their practice?

#### **1.5 Purpose of the study**

Besides increasing my own knowledge of practice techniques – thus allowing me to become a more insightful performer and teacher – the purpose of this study is to help young concert pianists find practical information concerning practice habits and

regimes which they may not find in the common conservatory milieu. As teachers and concert pianists alike have often forgotten (or decline to talk) about their own personal practicing experiences and how these helped them become the artists and/or teachers they are, this study may well revitalize their teaching and/or performing career(s).

## 1.6 Research Methods

This study was conducted by:

1. Researching the available literature which describes different types of practicing discussed by pedagogues, teachers and famous concert pianists in biographies, articles, and interviews. As the nature of these sources is seldom to study practice – except peripherally and perfunctorily – I have combined various, what I have generally discovered to be incomplete discussions and imprecise arguments into a collection of insightful and organized practical approaches to piano practice.
2. Analyzing the findings of this research and discussing theories why the practical information this study seeks has not yet been satisfactorily investigated.

The bulk of my research entails interviews with eight concert pianists who all have approximately ten to fifteen years of professional experience, who have recently been through this defining struggle of practice efficiency, and who have been able to openly talk about their successes and struggles with practice during their initial years of concert performing. All eight pianists have professional management and are currently playing major concerts throughout the world. I questioned them about how they were initially taught to practice and how these approaches have evolved after years of professional experience. I was particularly interested in the ways of practicing that *didn't* work for these artists and how they worked through these experiences. The interview was a much more effective tool in eliciting the detailed information necessary, rather than a questionnaire which would have been too rigid. The most interesting data emerged through the inherent flexibility of personal interviews while questioning these practice habits. Thus the research continued with:

3. Interviewing the selected eight concert pianists, specifically questioning them on the evolution of their practice and discussing issues neglected in their developmental stages. These interviews consisted of approximately 30 questions (see Appendix A) inquiring about the artists' history of practice, how their habits evolved, what experiences caused these changes, what they learned from other teachers and concert pianists, etc.
4. Identifying why these issues have been neglected.
5. Analyzing the new data looking for comparisons and similarities between the evolutions of each pianist's practice habits.
6. Analyzing the new findings in contrast with the limited information which currently exists, in order to formulate practice regimes and techniques for future concert pianists.

### **1.7 Delimitation of study**

This study was limited to the practice methods and routines exhibited by concert pianists. Although there are numerous studies of practicing at different levels, especially at the beginner and intermediate levels, this study only addresses and explores high level practice of concert pianists. It surveys most of the relevant biographies, articles, and interviews for complementary material applicable to this study. The concert pianists who were interviewed are all approximately 30 years old. The interviews probe the psychological nature of practice and performance, but this study does not propose to be an exhaustive investigation of the psychological battles leading up to and during public performance.

## Chapter 2

### Literature review part 1: Didactic material published concerning practice and performance

#### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter will examine a representative selection of the didactic material concerning practice, commencing with ideas from the middle to late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Most of the material is written by authors who are not known to be concert calibre musicians, although many of the authors were well-known and respected professors at famous conservatories. The only exception to this will be the first commentator to be mentioned, Franz Liszt, who was obviously a famous concert artist. Most of the discussions and analysis of practice stem from the initial attempts of students and professors who examined Liszt's approach to the piano. Other than Liszt, all other concert artists' advice will be presented in the following chapter.

The material explores a wide spectrum of thought; some books and articles focus on general practicing principles while others use advanced scientific principles to quantify and qualify practice regimes. This review will attempt to survey a chronological progression of the published information regarding practice methods. Many of these documents make very similar assessments of various standard methods of practice, but this survey will highlight some of the more interesting and advanced thoughts which are unique to each study.

Through some of Chopin's own writings and through notebooks of his students, scholars have discovered many descriptions and explanations of Fryderyk Chopin's approach to practice and performance; but Chopin's ideas did not influence Europe as much as did Liszt's. His personality was more reserved, and his performing career generated less of an international platform than Liszt, thus lessening the impact of his ideas. Chopin's most promising students also did not have the same international success as professional pianists as some of Liszt's pupils achieved (Eigeldinger 1986:5). Chopin's approach to music and technique was ahead of his

time and extremely innovative – similar in scope to the Western European approach 50 to 100 years later. His creative and contributive influence remained relatively hidden for many years. Chopin's valuable contributions will be examined in Chapter 3.

## **2.2 Literature review**

The earlier authors (mostly professors from European conservatories) who will be examined focused their studies on specific piano techniques and explored new approaches toward playing the heavier, more powerful instruments which began to appear in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. These theories are the first attempts at approaching the subject of piano practice, albeit from a mostly technical standpoint.

### **2.2.1 The influence of Franz Liszt**

Franz Liszt, the father of modern pianism, had certain ideas about piano technique and practice which can be found in various resources. Liszt never published any formal inquiries into the nature of practice, but a few comments, quoted from students and colleagues, introduce some of the concepts which eventually instigated critical thought and analysis from scholars, professors, and concert pianists. Alan Walker's biography about Liszt is a useful resource and the first volume (1987) contains a few relevant quotes related to his practice techniques.

Liszt's only teacher, apart from his father, was Czerny, with whom he worked for only fourteen months (until May 1823). For a short time Czerny forced Liszt to abandon all normal repertory and focus only on technical exercises. Liszt was irritated with having to drop all standard repertory for this time, but ultimately thanked Czerny throughout his career for the technical "foundation" he helped instill. A number of his works, most notably the *Transcendental Etudes*, are dedicated to Czerny. (Walker 1987:72.)

After his famous revelatory encounter with Paganini in 1832, Liszt described the type of practice he would have to accomplish in order to replicate, on the piano, what Paganini could do on the violin (Walker 1987:173-174):

For a whole fortnight my mind and my fingers have been working like two lost souls. Homer, the Bible, Plato, Locke, Byron, Hugo, Lamartine, Chateaubriand,

Beethoven, Bach, Hummel, Mozart, Weber are all around me. I study them, meditate on them, devour them with fury; besides this, I practise four to five hours of exercises (thirds, sixths, octaves, tremolos, repetition of notes, cadenzas, etc.) Ah! Provided I don't go mad you will find in me an artist! Yes, an artist—such as is required today.

A few more of Liszt's methods are described in another excerpt (Walker 1987:297):

According to his own testimony, Liszt sometimes practised for ten or twelve hours a day, and much of this labour was expended on endurance exercises—scales, arpeggios, trills, and repeated notes. He set great store by the absolute independence of each finger. Every scale was practised with the fingering of every other scale (using, say, C-major fingering for F-sharp major, and D-flat major fingering for C-major.)

Liszt spent a brief time as professor of the new Geneva Conservatoire of Music beginning in 1836. His duties were to include the creation of a “piano method,” the publishing costs of which he was going to underwrite himself. Unfortunately, this document was never constructed and was never spoken of again after July, 1836. (Walker 1987:216.)

Reginald Gerig wrote an influential book called *Famous Pianists and their Technique* (1974) which focuses on the specific physical mechanisms of piano (or keyboard) playing. The work presents an exhaustive chronology of keyboard techniques beginning with harpsichord and clavichord techniques. The technical ideas of influential classical artists (Hummel, Czerny, Clementi and Mozart) are explored as are the new ideas of Romantic pianism championed by Liszt. Gerig's chapter on Liszt focuses a significant amount of attention on biographical details, but a few interesting quotes concerning practice are noted below (Liszt advising a student in Gerig 1974:185):

In early years I was not patient enough to 'make haste slowly'—thoroughly to develop in an orderly, logical and progressive way. I was impatient for immediate results, and took short cuts, so to speak, and jumped through sheer force of will to the goal of my ambition. I wish now that I had progressed by logical steps instead of by leaps. It is true that I have been successful, but I do not advise you to follow my way, for you lack my personality.

Gerig presented a paper entitled “Observations of Franz Liszt's Piano Technique” (1985) for a conference in Baltimore which highlights some of the comments made by pupils of Liszt who described how he practiced, or how he asked them to practice.

There are a few comments in the diary of a student, Valérie Boissier, who studied with Liszt during her earlier years, recorded by her mother (Gerig 1985:7-8):

He required from Valerie two hours of practice on mechanical studies daily, entirely apart from the rest... Then he stressed the great need of flexing and relaxing the fingers in all directions by multiple exercises for at least three hours a day.

Gerig (1985:9) includes an interesting comment of another student, Amy Fay, who was more impressed with the teaching methods of Ludwig Deppe than of Liszt:

But Deppe, instead of saying, 'Oh, you'll get this after years of practice,' shows me how to conquer the difficult now. He takes a piece, and while he plays it with the most wonderful finesse of conception, he cold-bloodedly dissects the mechanical elements of it, separates them, and tells you how to use your hand so as to grasp them one after the other... So, without meaning any disparagement to the splendid masters to whom I owe all my previous musical culture, I cannot help feeling that I have at last got into the hands not of a mere piano virtuoso, however great, but, rather, of a profound musical savant—a man who himself, has made such a study of the piano, that probably all the pianists except Liszt might learn something from him.

Lastly, Amy Fay describes how Deppe would explain to her how Liszt played as he did (Gerig 1985:9):

As Liszt is a great experimentalist, he probably does all these things by instinct, and without reasoning it out, but that is why nobody else's playing sounds like his. Some of his scholars had the most dazzling techniques, and I used to rack my brains to find out how it was, that no matter how perfectly anybody else played, the minute Liszt sat down and played the same thing, the previous playing seemed rough in comparison.

In summary, it is clear that Liszt's pianistic achievements were evidently the model for every pianist to emulate. His technique seems to have been so superior to all others, but he may not have been able (or interested) to didactically describe what he was executing at the keyboard. His keyboard technical regimens, especially in his early years, contributed to his phenomenal facility, and he likewise required his own students to follow similar rigorous technical regimes during their earlier years.

### **2.2.2 Early technical methods**

Pianists and scholars began to form different schools of technique after the significant mechanical and structural changes to the piano in the early to mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, and after Liszt's revolutionary impact demonstrated the new capabilities of the larger instruments. One of the first "schools" of thought emerged in Stuttgart,

Germany around the mid-1850s. Sigismund Lebert and Ludwig Stark founded the Royal Conservatory in Stuttgart but unfortunately did not incorporate any of the new techniques which Liszt employed during his performances as Liszt had only recently started teaching at the time of the publication of these methods, and his didactical technical influence was not yet known all over Europe. Lebert and Stark continued the more dexterous finger school of Czerny and Hummel, and ultimately had a largely negative influence on many professors and schools throughout Europe. Their four volume work *Grosse Klavierschule (Grand Theoretical and Practical Piano School for Systematic Instruction in All Branches of Piano Playing from the First Elements to the Highest Perfection)* was promoted and endorsed by dozens of schools including the Paris Conservatoire, Cologne Conservatory, and Leipzig Conservatory. This work includes many types of dubious suggestions including the one mentioned below (Gerig 1974:230-31):

At first, play every piece slowly and forte throughout; in the beginning observe only the principal shadings, the *legato* and *staccato* in their different forms, and not until the piece can be executed without a mistake notice the lesser signs of expression. By a study of this kind a firm style of playing will be obtained.

Perhaps it was an advantageous event that such poor advice was collected and published as it gave many of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century pioneers of the new arm and “weight” techniques information against which to react. A few innovators of the new techniques were Ludwig Deppe and Rudolf Breithaupt (Germany), Theodor Leschetizky and Anton Rubinstein (Russia), William Mason and Otto Ortmann (America), and Tobias Matthay (England). Mason studied in Europe with Dreyshock (who came from the old dexterous finger school) and eventually with Liszt; he began to analyze the body movements of pianists, with particular emphasis on upper arm, shoulder and back movements. He also created the terms “clinging legato,” “elastic touch” and “plain legato” describing ways of using the whole arm and body to execute different types of playing. He returned to America in 1854 and influenced many of the pianists in New York during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. (Gerig 1974:239-41.)

### **2.2.3 The Russian school**

The Russian school of pianism which blossomed during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century was heavily influenced by Anton Rubinstein who founded the St. Petersburg

Conservatory in 1862. (His brother Nicholas helped found the Moscow Conservatory a few years later.) Both brothers studied in Berlin with Kullak (friend of Deppe and promoter of new “weight” school) and Anton also went to study in Vienna. Anton was known to be an enormous man in stature, and also possessed very large hands which would not have easily accommodated the old finger school. The new “weight” approach worked exceedingly well for Rubinstein, and he subsequently took it back to Russia influencing the next generation of Russian artists including Hoffmann, Rachmaninoff, Horowitz, and pedagogues Safonov (who taught Scriabin, and Josef and Rosina Lhevinne), Neuhaus, Levinskaya, and Vengerova.

Another major influence in the Russian school was Theodor Leschetizky who studied in Vienna, but moved to Russia for about 25 years of his teaching career. A few of his famous students include Paderewski, Schnabel, Friedman, Brailowsky and Moisewitsch, certainly major artists during that time, indicating the significant influence he had on the next generation of pianists. A technical treatise was published in 1902 with the title *The Groundwork of the Leschetizky Method*. Leschetizky stated on many occasions that he did not have a specific “method” for pianists to follow, and much of his teaching and advice was very different for each pianist. Moisewitsch stated that Leschetizky never taught a piece the same way to two different people (Gerig 1974:277). He did not promote any new ideas regarding the new “weight” school of Berlin, but he was certainly aware of these ideas and his general insights on artistry and musicianship are noteworthy for any serious pianist to consider. His methods are collectively represented by the term “Leschetizky Method.”

#### **2.2.4 The German and English methods**

Ludwig Deppe (Berlin) is credited with beginning the modern era study of piano technique. His descriptions of using relaxation combined with “dropping” the natural weight of the arm, in opposition to “striking” the keyboard, influenced all of the major thinkers (and artists) thereafter. Deppe died before much of his material and explanations could be formally published, but most of his ideas and thoughts became public knowledge in Berlin due to his teaching, and they were inspirational and foundational to Rudolph Breithaupt who formalized the

new “weight” technique with his publications. Breithaupt studied and worked with Liszt, Rubinstein, Hofmann, Godowsky, Bauer, and others, all of whom he used as examples by describing their use of natural “weight” in their playing. His first theoretical work was published in 1905 and was entitled *Die natürliche Klaviertechnik (The Natural Piano Technic)* and was followed by another work a year later in 1906 entitled *Die Grundlagen des Gewichtspiels (Principles of Weight-Touch)*. These became influential works all over Europe and the new “weight” school slowly replaced the old finger method in most conservatories. (Gerig 1974:330.)

Tobias Matthay was the most influential English thinker concerning piano technique, and he also published a few significant works which also garnered wide-spread acclaim and recognition. *The Act of Touch in All Its Diversity: An Analysis and Synthesis of Pianoforte Tone-Production* was his most influential work and was published in 1903, two years previous to Breithaupt’s work in Berlin. An excerpted summary given in the *First Principles of Pianoforte Playing* (1924), a published reduction from *The Act of Touch* (1903), gives a general overview of the new principles expounded by Matthay, Breithaupt, and others of the new “weight” school:

- A. Attention to the fact that tone-amount depends solely on the speed attained by the key during its descent. While—
- B. Beauty of tone depends on the gradual attainment of the required swiftness in key-descent.
- C. That *correctness* in expression (correspondence of tonal-result with that intended) depends on applying one’s work in answer to the key’s resistance, and *before it is too late to do so*: while—
- D. Agility and Staccato depend greatly on this same law being fulfilled—the avoidance of forcing the key upon its bed. Whence also we derive—
- E. The ‘two laws of Agility’—and of Staccato:
  1. Accuracy in aiming and ceasing all energy (intended to create sound) the moment that tone is reached in key-descent, —and which does not preclude the application of the Legato-element when required: and
  2. Self-support of the arm, to enable this to be done, —the arm supported in a balanced condition, off the fingers and keys.
- F. The avoidance of all key-hitting or tapping; while nevertheless insisting upon ample preliminary movements towards the keys, when the tempo of the passage admits of such, and when this is found helpful in individualising the finger.
- G. The use of Weight, instead of exertion, when singing tone is required; and—
- H. The related contrasts in the finger-methods employed respectively in singing-touches and brilliant passage-work.
- I. Attention to the constantly-required rotary adjustments of the Forearm

- J. A few obvious points as to Position; such as sufficient distance from the keyboard at all times; the greater curvature of the finger the more pronounced its preliminary raising in thrusting-touch; the position of the hand sideways and as to the height of the knuckle, etc.

Some of these suggestions may seem quite logical and obvious to most modern pianists, but this excerpt is representative of the first verbalized attempts to describe many of the technical actions pianists undertook at the instrument.

*The Act of Touch* also expounds detailed accounts of the principals concerning weighted touch and relaxation, perhaps with slightly different applications than Breithaupt. Matthay believed some of Breithaupt's theories focused too intensely on weight usage, often neglecting the importance of the finger coordination (Gerig 1974:383). He also objected to the lack of correct technical explanations and applications in Leschetizky's 1902 treatise. Thomas Fielden, another English writer who published a work entitled *The Science of Pianoforte Technique* (1927), gives an informative summation of the contributions and shortfalls of both Matthay and Breithaupt (Gerig 1974:399):

The foundation stone of the discoveries of the two masters was the use of the weight in the production of tone, and the use of relaxation both in producing that tone and in avoiding stiffness in the hands and arms...it is necessary to point out that neither of these men, Matthay less than Breithaupt, sufficiently emphasized the necessity for scientific knowledge of physiology, and the relations and coordinations of muscular actions; nor did they insist enough on a knowledge of the laws of mechanics, as far as the application of the laws of leverage was concerned.

This summation points the way toward the final authors to be examined, Otto Ortmann and Arnold Schultz. Ortmann's work *The Physiological Mechanics of Piano Technique* (1929) is a creative synthesis of the new insights yielded from the new "weight" school combined with a detailed relationship of "weight" playing to human anatomy and physiology. He also points out some obvious flaws in the techniques as described by Matthay and Breithaupt, usually due to their lack of knowledge in the field of physiology. Schultz was heavily influenced by Ortmann's surgical dissection of hand movements and was inspired to write *The Riddle of the Pianist's Finger and Its Relationship to a Touch-Scheme* (1936). Both works delve into the realm of hand physiology and debunk some of the flaws or inconsistencies in the claims made by

earlier authors. On a scientific level, the concepts of relaxation and weight become too broad; an analysis of how muscle groups contract in order to “relax,” and demonstrations of kinesthetic sensations of “weight,” which are shown not to be weight, confirm some of the limitations of the previous terms which had been used by most authors.

### **2.2.5 A return to more practical demonstrations of practice and technique**

After Schultz and Ortmann’s studies of hand physiology, there was a pronounced silence in the literature concerning piano technique for many years. This may have been caused by the limitations surrounding World War Two, or they may have explored an area which is too uncomfortable for most pianists to engage, namely, the scientific quantification of their artistic tools.

One of the earliest published books on practicing after the exhaustive scientific enquiries of Ortmann and Schultz is Hetty Bolton’s *How to Practice, A Handbook for Pianoforte Students* (1937). This concise summary discusses most of the typical types of practice which will later be described by the selected eight pianists (see Chapter 5) and avoids the over-analysis of scientific hand movements. It is a more practical approach to concepts of practice which are widely accepted and tangible. The introduction to her 1937 work suggests many of the same themes which will be explored in later chapters. Bolton (1937:5) relates that “In my student days I read every book I could find on practising, but I am afraid that in spite of my most conscientious efforts, much of my practising time was wasted,” adding “I have been waiting for many years for someone else to write this book.” These opening comments suggest that she may have been one of the earliest authors to collect organized thoughts about practice, realizing that there was a serious dearth of such writings. There are six short chapters which address most of the fundamental issues pianists deal with: concentration, technique, rhythm, listening, visual perception (memory) and interpretation. She concludes the work with a list of suggested practice techniques, providing one of the first collections of advice which is addressed to high level artists (Bolton 1937:6-7):

1. Technique is not only muscular. It requires clear thinking and mental control. If a passage seems almost impossible, try thinking it without playing. Imagine the muscular sensations and the keyboard, and catch hold of the keys mentally only.

2. Use judgment in deciding the type of touch a passage requires, and then practice the muscular sensations away from the keyboard, rhythmically. A passage that seems well-nigh impossible will be easy after practicing with hands separately and then together on knee or keyboard lid.
3. Choose the fingering you are going to use and write it in when you are certain of your choice. The right fingering is the easiest fingering that will give us right phrasing. Phrasing first, and then facility. It is right fingering because it is the most comfortable we can find. Take the trouble to find it, and having found it *keep to it*.
4. Remember there are two acts in making a sound:
  1. Getting over the key.
  2. Sending it down.

Practice the first of these alone by —

- (a) *In Runs*, practice on key-surfaces only, getting fingers right round to each key and coming into contact with it, i.e. not just ‘dabbing at’ but ‘catching hold.’
  - (b) *In Skips* do the same. Practice getting over the distant key quickly without sending it down. Obviously the various ways of sending a key down are practised, but it is the getting over it that is so often overlooked.
5. You should be able to find your way about the keyboard without looking at your fingers. This can be done by playing with one hand alone while the other hand holds the keyboard lid down slightly. Also, when you know a piece from memory, practice often with closed eyes, and judging your skips mentally.
  6. Think of your brain as being close to the fingers and key. Don’t lose all your mental grip through thinking so much of arm relaxation that you forget the control of the key by finger and brain. This does not necessarily mean that you are not to enjoy the sheer physical side of pianoforte technique. Surely the opening chords of the Tchaikovsky B flat minor Concerto, for instance, are as exhilarating physically as some strenuous and well-timed strokes in a game of tennis. Don’t overlook the musical side of technical pieces, though, while revelling in the technical side!
  7. Never allow a wrong or split note to pass. If you do, it may become a habit, and you will not realise how many wrong notes you play. You will have a vague idea at the back of your mind ‘that’s all right, I’ll see to that next time.’ The habit will grow. All un-aware of it, you will listen to others playing and say ‘what a pity they play so many wrong notes?’ That is, unless you have reached the final stages of this disease and your ears have become so dulled by continual wrong notes that you have ceased to hear them.
  8. Try to make the most difficult passages even more so; e.g., add an octave on to the skips, try to play the quick passages a little more quickly than necessary, or add an extra note in each group of repetition octaves such as the accompaniment to ‘Der Erlkönig.’ This will make them all seem easier when you play them as written.
  9. We might say that “Technique is the ability to play (a) the right sounds, (b) of the right duration, (c) exactly at the required moment and (d) with a definitely chosen quantity and quality of tone.”

After Bolton’s work, there is scarcely a book that directly references organized practice until the 1970s and 80s. There are a few books which describe simple practice techniques, including Gerald D’Abreu’s *Playing the Piano with Confidence*:

*An Analysis of Technique, Interpretation, Memory, and Performance* (1964). George Kochevitsky's *The Art of Piano Playing: A Scientific Approach* (1967) presents a scientific approach to piano playing, emanating from the previous studies incorporating the anatomical considerations of hand movements. He attempts to bring some of the new developments discussed by Ortmann to practical fruition, but not with much inspiration.

Heinrich Neuhaus, the great Russian pedagogue and teacher of both Gilels and Richter, published a work called *The Art of Piano Playing* (1973) which explored a number a musical and philosophical issues, but also neglected detailed views on practice. Neuhaus (1973:214) stated at the end of his book:

It occurs to me that it would be very interesting for young pianists to have more detailed information about the way in which prominent pianists prepare for recitals and about their concert work in general. A musical journal could send a brief questionnaire on the subject to our own and to foreign pianists. I imagine that many great pianists might wave it aside with a joke or some brief aphorism. But there would probably be some who would reply seriously and in detail.

Neuhaus also describes a few techniques which he would suggest to his students regarding methods of practice. He describes the “Tausig Method” (Neuhaus 1973:71):

It is told of Tausig, the famous pianist, that when he came home after a concert he would play the whole of his programme all over again, very softly and not too fast. An example worth following! Softly—that means with utmost concentration, carefully, conscientiously; accurately, painstakingly, with a beautiful tender tone; an excellent diet not only for the fingers but also for the ear, an instant correction of any inaccuracies or accidents that inevitably occur during an impassioned, temperamental concert performance!

Neuhaus (1973:214) further mentions that Ferruccio Busoni used this type of practice right before his concerts:

Zadora, a well-known pupil of Busoni, told me that on the day of a recital Busoni frequently played his whole programme from beginning to end slowly and without ‘expression’ which is what Tausig used to do after a recital (but as a matter of fact he probably did it before the recital too.)...It is very important to save one’s emotional energy on the day of a recital...I know this from bitter experience ...Once when I was due to play in the evening, I began rehearsing in the morning on a concert grand. The piano was good, I got carried away with the excitement, completely involved spiritually and emotionally and derived tremendous pleasure. In the evening I played twice as badly as I should have and could have done. Of course, the reverse can also happen, but such cases are exceptions and not the rule.

Neuhaus (1973:213) describes two methods he would suggest for students to learn a piece; the first (which he preferred) was borrowed from Josef Hoffman where he suggests that a pianist can learn a piece in four ways:

1. With the music at the piano
2. Without the music at the piano
3. With the music not at the piano
4. Without the music not at the piano.

Needless to say, most students often skip steps three and four, which are most likely the most meaningful and productive on the highest artistic levels.

Hoffmann suggested that a pianist should learn and then put away a piece three times before it was ready for public performance. This is not always or even usually possible. So for extreme cases, Neuhaus described his emergency method which he imparted to Sviatoslav Richter who used it on more than one famous occasion; he learned Prokofiev's *Sonata No. 7* in four days, Rachmaninoff's *Concerto No. 2* in one week, Schumann's *Humoureske* also in one week, and many other works at extremely short notice. Neuhaus describes his own experience learning Beethoven's *Hammerklavier Sonata Op. 106* which he memorized in six days after non-stop practice sixteen hours a day.

### **2.2.6 Bernstein, Camp and Sandor**

There are three major works all published in 1981 which initiated the next step in analyzing the art of piano performance. Seymour Bernstein's *With Your Own Two Hands: Self Discovery Through Music* (1981) is a highly detailed account which explores a wide variety of physical, mental, and psychological issues pianists struggle with. It does not reference much thought from outside the author's own opinion, but the suggestions are certainly worth reading and considering as the author was then a concert-calibre artist. The table of contents is very specific, and pianists can quickly find Bernstein's advice on most topics. Bernstein describes a few noteworthy explanations and suggestions which are not often found expounded elsewhere. In the section marked *Slow or Fast Practicing*, he makes a few interesting observations noting the different variables concerning speed, not only in duration between audible notes, but the differing speeds the fingers use in striking the keyboard. He states (Bernstein 1981:99):

1. If you wish to play softer, you must generate less speed to the hammers (the keys are lowered more slowly).
2. If you wish to play louder, you must generate more speed to the hammers (the keys are lowered more quickly).

After establishing the difference between the speed which creates linear velocity compared with the finger speed which creates dynamic contrast, he then explains how using too much finger speed combined with too much force creates a “banging” sound. “If your hands start two feet above the keys, you risk making a percussive sound caused by (1) the friction of your fingers striking the keys; (2) the “thud” of the keys striking against the key beds; and (3) the noise produced by the hammers flying too quickly to the strings. All of these extraneous noises result in banging.” He finally suggests staying as close to the keys as possible while playing loudly. (Bernstein 1981:99.)

The following section is a list of seven suggestions Bernstein has for acquiring speed. These will be noted so they can be evaluated, compared and contrasted later in the thesis. Concerning a difficult technical passage, he recommends the following (Bernstein 1981:104):

1. Practice the passage pyramid fashion: that is, start to play a few measures before the difficult passage begins and stop on the first note of it; start once again from the same place, but this time stop after the second note; continue to add one note at a time until you have played through the entire passage. This is perhaps one of the most useful approaches to mastering a technically difficult passage.
2. Play the passage backward; start on the last note, then play the last two notes, and so on, until you have worked through all the repetitions in their turn.
3. Set the difficult passage in its context: start one note before it and continue on through the passage to its completion; now start two notes before it and continue in the same fashion until, note by additional note, you have built a strong bridge to the difficult passage.
4. If, for example, the difficulty is in your right hand, play the same passage simultaneously with your left hand one octave lower. You will discover that one hand will influence the other, thereby affording you a fresh approach to what has been thus far resisting you.
5. Do the same thing, but this time cross your hands. First, try the left hand over the right and then the right hand over the left. A finger-arm twister, this method of practicing greatly improves your coordination.
6. We have already discussed how clear thinking influences your physical approach to the piano. Therefore, assume the following: *fast passages are slow passages played faster*. In other words, while you are playing fast, think slowly.
7. Practice at a tempo that is neither too slow nor beyond your present ability. Rather, choose a tempo that is only slightly faster than your ability to execute the passage

perfectly. This faster tempo challenges you to concentrate to the fullest extent thereby inducing your best efforts and, as is often the case, your best playing.

Bernstein suggests another interesting concept for practice not found in other studies; in experimenting with the concept of using arm weight, he suggests buying wrist weights (one pound for younger students, three pounds for older students) which can be strapped with velcro or magnetic grips around the forearms. He tested this practice in his student days and found an immediate difference in his sound (added richness and depth); he then also tried it with numerous students who also sensed an immediate difference in their sound production. After a short while a pianist is soon able to create this “weight” artificially with self-produced tension. He believes this feeling of attached weight allows a pianist to understand the illusive concept of playing with arm weight, allowing them to further experiment with different pressures on the keys, allowing much more flexibility and variety with sound textures and phrase nuances. (Bernstein 1981:128-129.)

After describing the effects of using added weights, he writes about other illusive subjects; how pianists use “natural” weight to produce sound and the concept of natural and controlled tensions (Bernstein 1981:129):

Tobias Matthay, one of England’s foremost piano pedagogues, wrote extensively on relaxation and the natural weight of the arm from the shoulder to the fingertips (‘dead’ weight). Never admitting at all to the necessity for controlled tension in piano playing, his exaggerated views on relaxation (he even used the phrase ‘The Gospel of Relaxation’) did, nevertheless, help many pianists whose training had been influenced by the rigid methods of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

There have been heated debates for over a century concerning the amount of “tension” with which pianists should play, ranging from the extremes of a very tight and controlled Russian school pianism, to the Dorothy Taubman techniques which advocate very little, if any tension. Bernstein believes that relaxed, tension-free playing is a myth, stating that pianists who push these concepts do use variously controlled tensions in their playing without realizing their presence. He believes that excessive tension “sabotages effort; *organized* tension facilitates effort.”

Proceeding, he expounds how muscular tension must not be confused with emotional tension, and that one must practice “until (1) you define the right kind of emotion you desire to express in each phrase that you play; and (2) you discover the corresponding physical sensation for that emotion.” (Bernstein 1981:130-32.)

He finally makes a universal correlation between the amount of tension in piano playing and dynamic intensity, stating “the louder you play, the greater the tension; the softer you play, the less tension you need” (Bernstein 1981:134). In my experience, this is simply not true. Many *piano* and *pianissimo* sections can be played with much more “weight” intensity than virtuoso forte sections. Pianists can use a significant amount of weight in quiet playing, often to accentuate deeper, more emotional moments in a softer section. This will be explored and further discussed in later chapters.

One of the most central issues all pianists deal with is memory. It is a crucial topic of concern, and this study will briefly examine a few noteworthy ideas, as many studies have already scrutinized this issue in detail. Bernstein gives many lists and examples of ways pianists can practice in order to better secure their memory skills, but his concluding ideas on how these various skills eventually coalesce in performance are more pertinent to this study. He then (Bernstein 1981:230) states that, after a pianist has mastered his unique individual set of exercises for aiding memory, “It is at this point that all your powers of concentration must be directed away from the details of your preparation and brought to bear instead on the functioning of your automatic pilot.” He discusses “automatic pilot” at length, describing different ways it functions in performing, and suggests helpful tips on how to “free” one’s “automatic pilot” in performance (Bernstein 1981:231):

...you must first condition it by dealing consciously with each and every facet of the music before you. Once your skills have been brought to the deepest level of automatic activity through repetition, it is time to allow your automatic pilot to function unimpeded. I am suggesting that it is now in your power to *free your automatic pilot consciously*...you can actually switch back and forth at will – even during a performance – from a state of mental awareness to one of emotional release.

Bernstein concludes his work by examining further issues surrounding nervousness (another subject which has been thoroughly explored). He gives his own prescription of what a pianist should do on the day of a concert; how he should tryout (run through) the piece in front of an audience (small) before the performance, and offers a number of answers to questions similar to those this study asked in interviewing the selected pianists. He gives very thoughtful, applicable and intelligent answers.

Another major text which was also published in 1981 is Maxwell Camp's *Developing Piano Performance: A Teaching Philosophy*. The most interesting section of Camp's book is his chapter on the history of piano (keyboard) instruction. It begins with a brief description and summarization of the influential texts which existed from the 15<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> centuries including Couperin's *L'art de toucher le clavecin*, Rameau's *Code de musique pratique*, and C.P.E Bach's *Versuch über die wahre Art das Clavier zu spielen*. Clementi and Czerny also contributed ideas on how the piano ought to be played, both focusing on a polarized technical/musical outlook. Until the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, piano playing was very finger-centered and orientated, with maximum practice energy and effort used to develop finger dexterity; using muscles above the wrists was unnecessary and not suggested, especially considering the nature of the lighter keyboard instruments. (Camp 1981:14-15.)

The 19<sup>th</sup> century developments in piano technology began to create a need for different technical approaches to the instrument as the power of the steel frame yielded new-found worlds of sound and capabilities to the instrument. Instead of working on technique for technique's sake, pedagogues began to use the musical imagination to guide pianists in their search for technical proficiency. There could have been more explanation of 19<sup>th</sup> century developments in this section of Camp's chapter as he completely omits any of Franz Liszt's contributions to technique, pedagogy and approaches to keyboard playing; perhaps a serious oversight considering the genealogy of most concert pianists today eventually leads back to Liszt and his pupils.

Camp makes some considerable summations and comparisons with a number of philosophies espoused by 20<sup>th</sup> century pianists and pedagogues. Texts by Hofmann, Matthay, Lhevinne, Eisenberg, Ramul, Giesecking and Petri represent a solid body of musical thought from the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. All have a holistic approach encompassing musical and technical ideas; all are displeased with pure technical approaches to music, and many stress rhythmical foundations and critical listening as the key concepts for artistic guidance. (Camp 1981:17-19). Camp subsequently appraises later 20<sup>th</sup> century texts of Marcus, Fleisher, Kirschbaum, Bryant, Bolton, Neuhaus and Schnabel. Collectively, they attempt to push the

boundaries of musical cognition and pedagogy to greater levels of depth. Most of the summations are broad in scope, accentuating universal pedagogical principles which are not always practical or applicable to the level of playing this study seeks to explore.

Gyorgy Sandor's *On Piano Playing: Motion, Sound and Expression* (1981) is quite similar to the other two works, and commentates on many of the standard principles used in high level piano playing. Sandor was a more famous pianist than the other two authors, and his insight into the instrument is probably the most convincing of the three works compared here. He also believed the "weight" school of Breithaupt was too confusing for most artists and made a brief summary of why he believed it was unclear (Sandor 1981:38):

Breithaupt advocated the substitution of force by weight; in his view the volume of sound produced is in proportion to the quantity of weight employed; more weight, more sound. However, the volume of sound depends exclusively on the speed with which the hammer hits the strings, regardless of the weight that generates that speed...The notion that the full weight of the arm produces more sound than a lighter weight is erroneous; the fact is that the activation of a longer lever generates more speed than a shorter one and therefore we add the upper arm to the forearm. The activation of the whole arm serves to increase the speed of the fingertips in a whip-like action. *We should not equate great tonal volume with a larger weight but rather with the speed that a longer lever can generate.*

Ortmann stated the same conclusion anatomically, but Sandor's explanation is much easier to understand. Sandor also has a specific chapter dedicated to practicing where he also eschews the practice etudes and exercises, other than those by Chopin and Liszt (Sandor 1981:189):

Since I do not believe in mechanical practicing, I recommend eliminating most studies that feature technique and not music (Hanon, Pischna, Czerny). Exercises and technical studies that employ certain technical patterns repetitiously tend to lead us to mechanical practicing. It is much more productive to assimilate a technical formula in its purest form and, when it is learned correctly, to employ it at once in a musical composition by adapting it to the specific demands of the piece. The piano repertoire is so immense—that it is foolish to spend time with inferior music when the same technical development can be achieved by working on great music.

### **2.2.7 Various modern studies on practice and performance**

In 1984 William Newman wrote a very similar book to the above mentioned works entitled *The Pianist's Problems: A Modern Approach to Efficient Practice and Musicianly Performance*. It is another collection of ideas directed more

toward high level amateur musicians, especially in the earlier chapters. His concluding chapters on performance practice and psychology (Chapter 5) are the most interesting for professional musicians, but there is very little new material that is not more thoroughly explored by Bernstein's earlier publication.

Burton Kaplan constructed a set of organizing documents accompanied by commentary entitled *The Musician's Practice Log: A Completely New Way to Increase Your Practice Effectiveness* (1985). This work is mostly designed for high level university students. Kaplan teaches at the Manhattan School of Music and has developed seminars directed at helping high level musicians practice more efficiently. His advice is most applicable to serious students and professionals who are spending significant quantities of time practicing. He developed the Musician's Practice Log (MPL) which includes a few specific items:

- charts on how many hours per day, per week, and per month that one practices;
- another copy of the same chart where a musician should chart their own plan for monthly practice (to eventually be compared with actual practice);
- a different chart where one records daily progress on specific pieces including tempos achieved, weaknesses and improvements, and weekly summaries;
- a final chart which is a summarization of the previously mentioned practice profile graphs; a musician is supposed to analyze his work on the previous two charts (planned practice and actual practice) and plot new strategies on areas of the previous month's work which were deemed insufficient.

Any level of musician could benefit from this type of pseudo-scientific analysis of their work, but most musicians seem not to be very interested in charting graphs and counting hours.

There are four other texts which all address musical practice from a more amateur perspective: Patricia Backhaus's *Practice: A Guide to Achieving Musical Success* (1995), Linda Gilbert's *The Practice Handbook: A Musicians's Guide to Positive Results in the Practice Room* (1993), Jeffery Whitton's *The Art of Practicing Piano* (1993) and William Westney's *The Perfect Wrong Note* (2003). All contain rudimentary practicing advice, but none of these texts offer much practical

information for more serious students or professionals. They are all excellent texts for high school musicians who may want to consider careers in music or for amateurs looking to maximize their personal gratification from their enhanced performance abilities.

Malva Freymuth wrote an explorative work called *Mental Practice and Imagery for Musicians: A Practical Guide for Optimizing Practice Time, Enhancing Performance, and Preventing Injury* (1999). Much of the material does not directly apply to performing concert pianists, and investigating the bibliography shows her resources drew more information from sports psychology and medicine. However, some of the psychological principles of this work could be helpful in making practice more efficient. For example (Freymuth 1999:22): “Mental practice is used as a supplement to physical practice, helping you to work more efficiently. By imagining how you want to sound and feel *before* physically playing the instrument, musical goals are clarified and the body is programmed to respond with accuracy and precision.”

Freymuth (1999:62) also suggests using mental pre-performance strategies:

Some researchers have investigated the use of mental rehearsal just prior to performance of a skill. In their studies the subjects used brief mental rehearsals of the immediate task (rather than imagining actions that might happen later on in the performance). The results showed that in addition to preparing the nerves and muscles for action, the mental rehearsals promoted concentration and helped many performers to maintain a sense of confidence.

She further explores the idea of using creative images to inspire performances; one universal image numerous people have used is white or golden light (Freymuth 1999:64): “To help you concentrate, imagine being surrounded by a bubble or barrier of light that shields you from distractions and from any perceived disapproval. If the emphasis is on communicating through music, imagine light connecting you with the audience and establishing rapport.” She concludes by giving advice on how to practice using these creative images; one must experiment with the visualization of these images in the practice room before trying the technique on stage as this exercise could easily distract and disrupt one’s concentration during a performance if it is not a natural and integrated part of the performer’s psyche.

Madeline Bruser is a highly sought-after commentator on the art of practicing. She gives numerous classes, workshops, training sessions and retreat weekends, all of which are designed to help high-level amateurs and professional musicians appreciate and enjoy their practicing through better, perhaps more efficient ways. While being thorough in the details of “correct” and efficient practice, her broader outlook is to integrate this refined work into one’s being, allowing this often mundane work of practice to have more meaning as it is related to life experiences. She is very concerned with musicians being emotionally and spiritually connected to all they are working on, and how these connections can transform the daily hard work of practice into an almost meditative journey. Her work *The Art of Practicing: A Guide to Making Music from the Heart* (1997) is more of an inspirational text, linking most technical problems with emotional issues a musician may yet be struggling to overcome.

### **2.2.8 Pseudo-scientific studies**

The following studies are all related in their scope of inquiry. Linda Gruson’s *Generative Processes in Music* investigated differences in the practicing of three concert artists compared with 40 students (1988). Kacper Miklaszewski’s “A case study of a pianist preparing a musical performance” and “Individual difference in preparing a musical composition for public performance” examined two case studies of pianists preparing musical performances (1989 and 1995), Sue Hallam’s “Professional Musicians’ Approaches to the Learning and Interpretation of Music” (1995a, 1995b, 1997a) interviewed 22 musicians in London in order to examine relationships between their practice habits, K.A. Ericsson and A.C. Lehmanns’ “Expert and Exceptional Performance” (1996) described another case study of a student at Florida State University who prepared a 50-minute recital of eight short works, and the book *Practicing Perfection; Memory and Piano Performance* was written by Roger Chaffin, Gabriela Imreh and Mary Crawford (2002).

Gruson’s investigations (Gruson 1988:91-112) initiated a more scientific inquiry into the nature of higher level, organized practice. Each of the 40 students recorded one practice session consisting of work on three different pieces. These students represented a complete range of proficiency in the Canadian exam system. A further twelve students recorded nine sessions each. After analyzing the data,

Gruson discovered that approximately 25% of practice time was spent on uninterrupted playing through. The remaining time was spent fixing errors, working on single notes, or on very short sections. The students made verbal comments during the recordings; the more advanced students understood more about the mechanics of practicing and could verbalize about the work they performed on isolated sections. She also discovered that the more expert musicians worked on longer, more extended isolated sections (usually longer than one bar) highlighted for special attention, and were therefore eventually able to integrate their “work” more readily into the final artistic vision of the piece.

Miklaszewski (1989:96) began with a short literature review of the previous related studies. He notes that Wicinski’s (1950) interviews with famous Moscow based pianists (including Richter, Gilels, and Neuhaus) described how seven of the pianists had three distinct stages they went through as they worked on new pieces, while another three pianists believed their work was mostly undifferentiated from the beginning to the end of the practicing process. One other notable previous study was conducted by Manturzevska (1969) on participants of the 1969 Chopin Competition. His findings suggested that there is a significant difference in the organization of the more successful students’ practice; not necessarily based on the quantity of hours practiced, but in the systematic and regular approach exemplified by them. After summarizing the previous material, Miklaszewski (1989:97) stated that “none of the above mentioned sources provide any theoretical proposals to model a performer’s large scale activity, nor do they present a detailed description of the process as it could be observed.”

Miklaszewski then proceeds to describe his own first study (1989). He videotaped four practice sessions of a second year pianist, from the Chopin Academy in Warsaw, as he prepared Debussy’s Prelude ...*Feux d’Artifice*. After recording the sessions, the pianist then viewed the taped practice excerpts and made 175 comments on the activities he had performed in the sessions. These comments were also analyzed for common themes and goal-oriented statements. The graphs and tables that were created to show various aspects of his work are largely superfluous. Ultimately though, a few simple conclusions were deduced: “...the more the piece is practised the longer are the fragments selected for attention and

the shorter is the time assigned for each fragment” and “...observing our subject we may say that what he has been doing is to prepare effective sub-routines of a more complex programme which in turn will make him able to perform the musical composition at a satisfactory level of proficiency.” (Miklaszewski 1989:107.)

The second study by Miklaszewski, undertaken in 1995, made use of a similar type of examination of three different pianists; two who were seniors at the Chopin Academy performing approximately ten to fifteen recitals per year, and another pianist, ten years older, who was performing approximately forty recitals per year. All were given a late-romantic work *Vom erlengrund* by Fr. Zierau and a 20<sup>th</sup> century set of variations by Rafal Augustyn to practice. In his final conclusions, Miklaszewski (1995:146) states that one of the noted differences was the allotted time given to each piece during the practice sessions. The older, more experienced pianist spent a more significant amount of time on the difficult 20<sup>th</sup> century work using more focused and concentrated methods of practice than the other two pianists. Students often practice unnecessary material out of habit or for a false sense of security, usually wasting valuable time which could be put to better use on sections that have a higher likelihood of causing performance problems. The older pianist was able to learn the easier romantic work more quickly, put it away, and was therefore able to focus his time more efficiently on the more complicated material.

Sue Hallam’s (1995a, 1995b, & 1997a) interviews with various musicians identified a few major categories used to describe how musicians practice. Most of the musicians (75%) interviewed used an *analytical* approach to learning their music: they played through the piece, studied the score, found and identified difficult sections which needed extra work, analyzed harmonic relationships, and used rhythms or strategies to master difficult sections. She speaks of a different *intuitive* approach to practice which was specifically and exclusively mentioned by only one musician; this individual insisted on being guided by the music itself as he began to practice, not super-imposing outside ideas and pre-formed thoughts on its structure and form. As he practiced, he intuitively felt that the piece would reveal itself, leading the musical ideas in the most natural direction. The remaining 20% of the musicians used a mix of the analytical and intuitive methods. There are some

discrepancies as to what constitutes the differences between analytical and intuitive practice, but the general categories have been identified in Hallam's work.

The study by Ericsson and Lehmann (1996) surveyed a larger musical sample; a pianist prepared a program of eight pieces for her masters degree. Three interviews were recorded as well as three recording sessions with each session consisting of two play-throughs of the entire program. She also compiled daily diaries which were also used in statistical analysis. The final conclusions display graphs comparing this pianist's practice history (hour counts) with others at her school; how much time (hourly) she spent on each piece practicing for a per-minute performance ratio (14.4 hours of practice for every minute performed in the recital), and how much more time proportionally was spent on more difficult material. A large section of this study contains an overly-enthusiastic interest in the tempi variations between the performances and interpretations. These differences suggest very little about the content and quality of the music, but are obviously one of the few quantifiable tests one could conduct with this type of project. There was also a questionable test of quality used to judge the performance; a computer program compared the variable factors of these performances with a few professional performances recorded on CD, and this program judged these test performances to be comparable and of a similar quality to the performances on the CD recordings. (Ericsson and Lehmann 1996:273-305.)

The most researched, structured and significant study undertaken concerning practice methods to date is *Practicing Perfection: Memory and Piano Performance*, published by Roger Chaffin, Gabriela Imreh and Mary Crawford in 2002. The central focus of this work is a thorough investigation into the cognitive aspects related to memory in piano performance, but the work also includes selections of quotes and advice related to a variety of performance and practice issues. The work defines the scientific parameters it seeks to study in very precise and specific terms, and the case study is analyzed with the most structured of presentations. Chaffin and Crawford are both psychologists but with two different viewpoints; Chaffin approaches the subject from an empiricist's point of view, and Crawford from a social constructivist's background. Gabriel Imreh, the pianist whose work and practice was studied, was also consulted throughout the project on the relevance of

the topics discussed. Clear delineations are mentioned on the difficulties of studying the arts through science, and all of the inter-relationships of the “experimenter” and “subject” were pre-examined in an attempt to remove any bias or unwanted prejudice relating to subjective facts; “..the recent research literature in cognitive psychology offers only tantalizing hints on how an experimenter and a ‘subject’ might collaborate as social and intellectual equals.” (Chaffin et al 2002:22.)

Chaffin et al (2002:30) also discuss the lack of pertinent material relating to this field of inquiry:

Part of the reason for the scarcity of good material is the cult of the performer, which often allows pianists to get away with drawing a veil over the details of how their magic is produced...At the final and highest level, the artist manifests his or her own individuality, musicality, personality, taste, sensitivity, and knowledge, all of which are reflected in the details that set one performance apart from others. This is the most rewarding level for the performer and the one that pianists tend to talk about when describing their own performances. Although these descriptions of expressive goals are interesting, they do not tell us how the performances were put together.

In deciding which supportive texts they would use Chaffin et al state (2002:30):

In the end, it turned out that interviews from a rather small number of books and two articles yielded the most useful material (Brower, 1926; Cooke, 1948; Cooke, 1999/1917; Elder, 1986; Dubal 1997; March, 1991/1980, 1988; Noyle, 1987; Portugheis, 1993, 1996). Although the collection is certainly not exhaustive, it does span the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and it does provide a good picture of the kind of information that is currently available to the discriminating reader about how concert pianists view their own preparation for performance.

This study is also based on and defined by similar parameters.

The actual case study consisted of Gabriela Imreh learning the third movement of Bach’s *Italian Concerto* BWV 971. She spent approximately 34 hours spread over 57 practice sessions, 45 of which were recorded. She was allowed to make comments during these practice sessions which were also recorded and analyzed. The analysis of multiple factors goes into incredible depth. The first major observation was that Imreh’s work could be generally classified into two categories, *runs* and *work*. The term *run* is used to describe a general playing through of a section in order to test its accuracy at first, and to test musical issues later. The term *work* is used to describe sections where the music is taken apart, worked slowly, or in rhythms, or hands separately (Chaffin et al 2002:47). This *work* is then usually tested in a *run* to see if the quality of the *work* was sufficient. Both of these

categories would fall under Hallam's *analytical* approach. Imreh's comments while practicing were also analyzed and placed into 20 categories. The recorded sessions were then examined in exhaustive detail and Chaffin et al created numerous charts of relationships between practice sessions, increased speeds, fewer mistakes, and the quality of the final result. Chaffin et al believe the conclusions are doubly verified as most of the entire literature concerning practice techniques is based on self-reporting; musicians tell interviewers what they think they do in practice, not necessarily what they actually do, as they themselves may not know. There were some instances where Imreh's self-reporting analysis contradicted the recorded data, and Chaffin et al believe the results of challenging these self-reports is a novel and innovative way for pianists to implement changes in their practice methods.

### **2.3 Summary of the examined literature**

Most of the applicable research (from scholars who are not necessarily concert pianists) related to this study has been produced since 1980. There are a few technical concepts which were discussed by the earlier professors in the 19<sup>th</sup> century which keep making appearances, often under differently named methods. These concepts will be elucidated over the next few chapters as they are mentioned by all the pianists referenced in this study. There seems to be a sudden scholastic interest in organized practice after 1980, perhaps due to the "golden age" generation of pianists dying out, along with the new interest of applying psychological studies to the arts and sports. Of all the texts considered in this literature review, three deserve special mention. Bernstein's *With Your Own Two Hands* (1981) and Sandor's *On Piano Playing* (1981) are the first collections of advice and material which address most of the issues pianists have to deal with concerning practice and other related factors of performance. The problem with both works is that most of the advice seems to come only from the authors, both of whom may well have been wonderful pianists, but since there seem to be a large variety of ways to deal with the problems addressed in these works, one requires more opinions on how a variety of pianists deal with these issues. The other work which is highly recommended is the Chaffin, Crawford and Imreh's *Practicing Perfection: Memory and Piano Performance* (2002). This work, while not addressing all of the concerns of Bernstein's and Sandor's works, penetrates deeply into many of the issues this study will examine. Chaffin et al include an exhaustive literature review in their text

which presents the work which had been published between Bernstein's text (1981) and their own (2002). The problem with the Chaffin et al study is that it is overly focused on one learning experiment (primarily memory based). While this study is the most exhaustive of its kind to date, deriving universal conclusions from the memorization of one movement of Bach's *Italian Concerto* is limited and does not address a number of other important problems concert pianists have to accommodate. One wishes there were unlimited funds to do multiple studies of this magnitude, but this may never be realized, and we may have to continue to rely on self-reporting as the most readily-available method of analyzing practice methods.

## Chapter 3

### Literature review part 2: Concert pianists' thoughts on practice and performance

#### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter will survey the suggestions, advice and thoughts of notable concert pianists. These ideas will be examined in a quasi-chronological progression beginning Chopin's influence, and then proceed with the advice of late 19<sup>th</sup> century pianists after Franz Liszt. Common themes will be discussed as some of these pianists do mention and apply the technical approaches addressed in the previous chapter. Following Liszt, two different approaches to piano playing begin to emerge: a philosophy which rests fully on technical supremacy developed through endless scales, arpeggios, exercises and etudes (largely supported by the Russian institutions), and another philosophy (arising later in the 20<sup>th</sup> century but initially suggested by Chopin) where technical exercises are regarded, in general, as a waste of time, and practice should only incorporate technical issues which exist in the music. There are very few specific sources in which concert pianists have spoken about their practice regimes in detail, so most of the information is derived from short conversations in selected collections of interviews with pianists.

#### 3.2 Chopin's influence

Chopin's most significant contribution toward piano playing, as it relates to this study, is found in his memoranda books for the years 1834, 1848, and 1849; in the annotated scores of pupils and associates, and in the statements of Chopin's students found in diaries, letters and reminiscences (Eigeldinger 1986:2).

Eigeldinger (1986:4) summarizes Chopin's status among his contemporaries, mentioning the difference between his approach to music and life, as compared with Liszt's:

Chopin, by nature a pure musician, was always shy of committing ideas to paper: 'The pen burns my fingers,' he would say by way of excuse... It is therefore hardly surprising that his correspondence, so reserved with regard to his work as a composer, carries scarcely any mention of his activities as a teacher, and is completely silent as to the tenor of his teaching. Nor is it surprising that he never completed his long-term project of writing a piano method, for which only a few initial sketches survive; even had he lived longer, he would probably have recoiled from the constraint of such a task. Besides, Chopin did not like to express himself on matters close to his heart except through music. He hardly ever spoke of his own aesthetic, pianistic or pedagogical views outside the narrow circle of his pupils and a few close friends... Unlike Clementi, Hummel, Kalkbrenner, or Czerny, Chopin did not create a school or institute a set tradition. It was not in his nature to impose his personality on pupils, in the way that the Liszt of Weimar did.

Eigeldinger continues (1986:5) to explain the ambiguity surrounding Chopin's influence by mentioning the lack of professional success demonstrated by many of his most notable students:

Questioned once on the subject of Chopin's pedagogical posterity, Liszt replied, 'Chopin was unfortunate in his pupils'. This remark is confirmed in many cases. Three of Chopin's most promising young talents died young (Filtsch, Caroline Hartmann, Paul Gunsberg). Among the most brilliant of his students, two renounced their careers at a very early stage (Emilie von Gretsck, Friederike Streicher), another two confined themselves to private teaching (Mme Dubois, Mme Rubio); while Pauline Viardot, a pianist of repute, had already taken to a singing career by the time she received any musical ideas from Chopin. We are left with about ten students, all men, who eventually embraced a serious professional career.

Despite the lack of his student's professional successes and Chopin's own quiet nature, he still imparted some of the most interesting philosophical approaches toward piano playing in the 19<sup>th</sup> century which foreshadowed many of the ideals of Backhaus, Schnabel, (Artur) Rubinstein, and other artists, many of whom reacted against the overly-technical Russian school. His influence did not pervade the universities of Europe in the immediate way that Liszt's approaches were accepted, and it took many years for his ideas to be internationally published and recognized. Chopin stated a few general comments regarding his approach to technique in his initial sketches for a piano method (which was never published) and these statements concisely revealed the difference in his approach to piano playing as compared with most pianists of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century (Eigeldinger 1986:23):

Intonation being the tuner's task, the piano is free of one of the greatest difficulties encountered in the study of an instrument. One needs only to study a certain positioning of the hand in relation to the keys to obtain with ease the most beautiful quality of sound, to know how to play long notes and short notes, and [to attain] unlimited dexterity.

To those who are studying the art of playing the piano I suggest some practical and *simple* ideas which I know from experience to be really useful...People have tried out all kinds of methods of learning to play the piano, methods that are tedious and useless and have nothing to do with the study of this instrument. It's like learning, for example, to walk on one's hands in order to go for a stroll. Eventually one is no longer able to walk properly on one's feet, and not very well on one's hands either. It doesn't teach us how to play the *music* itself—and the type of difficulty we are practicing is not the difficulty encountered in good music, the music of the great masters. It's an abstract difficulty, a new genre of *acrobatics*.

One limitation of Chopin's approach was that much of his advice focused on the technical abilities required to perform his own works. Throughout the quotations which Eigeldinger presents, Chopin continually relied on supple finger movements and careful fingerings as the primary means to most fully express and execute his own technical passages, but if one were to only apply these approaches to the more orchestral sounds of Liszt's or Brahms's piano music, Chopin's techniques would most likely not be very effective.

### **3.3 Concert pianists' thoughts on practice**

There are not many resources which highlight structured thoughts on practice from pianists. The subject is not very interesting to most people, and therefore publishing any in-depth material on the subject would have a severely limited audience. Most interviews with concert pianists tend to focus on more "musical" issues, and extracting information on daily practice methods or routines is usually neglected, perhaps as most writers themselves do not know the appropriate questions to ask regarding this topic.

This section begins with a collection of essays compiled by James Francis Cooke entitled *Great Pianists on Piano Playing*, originally published in 1917. Cooke had friendly relationships with most of the artists he interviewed and therefore had more insight into the daily work and struggles with which these artists had to contend. In the preface to his work he stated (Cooke 1999:22-23):

Some prefer to think of their artist heroes dreaming their lives away in the hectic cafés of Pesth or buried in the melancholy, absinthe and paresis of some morbid cabaret of Paris. As a matter of fact, the best known pianists live a totally different life—a life of grind, grind, grind—incessant study, endless practice and ceaseless search for means to raise their artistic standing.

Many of the older pianists continually mention that their technical exercises and routines were paramount to their success. In one of the first interviews Wilhelm Backhaus stated (Cooke 1999:53-55):

Personally, I practice scales in preference to all other forms of technical exercises when I am preparing for a concert. Add to this arpeggios and Bach, and you have the basis upon which my technical work stands...The ultra-modern teacher who is inclined to think scales old-fashioned should go to hear de Pachmann, who practices scales every day...Today his technique is more powerful and more comprehensive than ever, and he attributes it in a large measure to the simplest of means.

Fanny Bloomfield-Zeisler was a famous student of Leschetizky and also commented that his famous “method” was not really a method at all. She stated that “Leschetizky’s method is to have no fixed method” (Cooke 1999:84).

She also gave a few practical suggestions (Cooke 1999:92-94):

Concentrate during every second of your practice. To concentrate means to bring all your thinking power to bear upon one central point with the greatest possible intensity. Without such concentration nothing can be accomplished during the practice period. One hour of concentrated thinking is worth weeks of thoughtless practice...A famous thinker has said: ‘The evidence of superior genius is the power of intellectual concentration’...When studying, remember that practice is simply a means of cultivating habits. If you play correctly from the start you will form good habits: if you play carelessly and faultily your playing will grow continually worse.

Ferruccio Busoni was arguably an equally talented composer and pianist, and he spent many years of his career teaching piano in Finland, Russia, and eventually America. He has also noted a few important points regarding practice which mattered most to his artistry (Cooke 1999:97-98):

It is often perfection in the little things which distinguishes the performance of the great pianist from that of the novice. The novice usually manages to get the so-called main points, but he does not work for the little niceties of interpretation which are almost invariably the defining characteristic of the interpretations of the real artist—that is, the performer who has formed the habit of stopping at nothing short of his highest ideal of perfection...At my own recital no one in the audience listens more attentively than I do. I strive to hear every note and while I am playing my attention is so concentrated upon the one purpose of delivering the work in the most artistic manner dictated by the composer’s demands and my conception of the piece, that I am little conscious of anything else.

And regarding technique he suggested (Cooke 1999:102-103):

All technical exercises must be given to the pupil with great discretion and judgment just as poisonous medicines must be administered to the patient with great care. The indiscriminate giving of technical exercises may impede progress rather than advance the pupil...Your own difficulty is the difficulty which you should practice most. Why waste time in practicing passages which you can play perfectly well?

Leopold Godowsky is one of the first famous performing pianists to talk about the “weight” playing of Breithaupt and Matthay. Discussing changes to the mechanism of the piano, he wrote (Cooke 1999:136-37):

During this time many significant changes have been made in the mechanism of the instrument and in the methods of manufacture. These changes in the nature of the instrument have in themselves doubtless had much to do with the changes in methods of touch as have the natural evolutions coming through countless experiments made by teachers and performers. Thus we may speak of the subject of touch as being divided into three epochs, the first being that of Czerny (characterized by a stroke touch), the second being that of the famous Stuttgart Conservatory (characterized by a pressure touch), and the third or new epoch which is characterized by weight playing. All my own playing is based upon the last named method, and I had the honour of being one of the first to make application of it when I commenced teaching some twenty years ago...In this method of playing, the fingers are virtually ‘glued to the keys’ in that they leave them the least possible distance in order to accomplish their essential aims. This results in no waste of motion of any kind, no loss of power and consequently the greatest possible conservation of energy...In my experience as a pianist and as a teacher, I have observed that the weight touch allows the greatest possible opportunity for the proper application of those all-important divisions of technique without which piano playing is not only in-artistic, but devoid of all interest. Weight playing permits nothing to interfere with discriminative phrasing, complicated rhythmical problems, the infinitely subtle variation of time for expressive purposes now classed under the head of agogics, all shades of dynamic gradation; in fact everything that falls in the domain of the artist pianist.

Josef Hoffman suggested some interesting definitions or clarifications of practice compared with study (Cooke 1999:160-161):

The question of whether special technical studies of an arbitrary nature, such as scale studies, should be extensively used is one which has been widely debated, and I fear will be debated for years to come. Let us understand first, there is a wide difference between studying and practicing. They resemble each other only in so far as they both require energy and time. Many sincere and ambitious students make the great mistake of confounding these two very essential factors of pianistic success. Study and practice really are quite widely removed from each other, and at the same time they are virtually inseparable. The real difference lies in the amount and quality of the two elements. Practice means a large number of repetitions, and with a fair amount of attention to mere correctness of notes, fingering, etc. Under ordinary circumstances and conditions it usually means a great sacrifice of time and comparatively small investment of mentality.

Study, on the contrary, implies first of all mental activity of the highest and most concentrated type. It *presupposes* absolute accuracy in notes, time, fingerings, etc., and implies the closest possible attention to those things which are generally, though erroneously, regarded as lying outside of technique, such as tonal beauty, dynamic shading, rhythmical matter, and the like. Some have the happy gift of combining practice with study, but this is rare.

Hence, in the question of scale exercises, etc., if the word 'study' is meant in the true sense, I can only say that the study of scales is more than necessary—it is indispensable. The pedagogical experts of the world are practically unanimous upon this subject. The injunction, 'study,' applies not only to scales, but to all forms of technical discipline, which only too often are 'practiced' without being studied...The proportion in which mental and physical activity is compounded, determines, to my mind, the distinction between practicing and real study. One might also say that the proportion in which real study enters into the daily work of the student determines the success of the student.

Josef Lhevinne was one of the foremost Russian pianists of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century who ultimately went to America to perform and teach. In his interview he discussed the differences between the Russian technical background for students and the American technical background (Cooke 1999:176-77):

The Russian pianist is always famed for his technical ability. Even the mediocre artists possess that. The great artists realize that the mechanical side of piano playing is but the basis, but they would no sooner think of trying to do without that basis than they would of dispensing with the beautiful artistic temples which they build upon the substantial foundation which technique gives to them. The Russian pianists have earned fame for their technical grasp because they give adequate study to the matter...For instance, in the conservatory examinations the student is examined first upon technique. If he fails to pass the technical examination he is not even asked to perform his pieces. Lack of proficiency in technique is taken as an indication of lack of the right preparation and study, just as the lack of the ability to speak simple phrases correctly would be taken as a lack of preparation in the case of the actor.

Particular attention is given to the mechanical side of technique, the exercises, scales, and arpeggios. American readers should understand that the full course at the leading Russian conservatories is one of about eight or nine years. During the first five years, the pupil is supposed to be building the base upon which must rest the more advanced work of the artist. The last three or four years at the conservatory are given over to the study of master works. Only pupils who manifest great talent are permitted to remain during the last years. During the first five years the backbone of the daily work in all Russian schools is scales and arpeggios. All techniques revert to these simple materials and the student is made to understand this from his very entrance to the conservatory. As the time goes on the scales and arpeggios become more difficult, more varied, but they are never omitted from the daily work. The pupil who attempted complicated pieces without this preliminary technical drill would be laughed at in Russia. I have been amazed to find pupils coming from America who have been able to play a few pieces fairly well, but who wonder why they find it difficult to extend their musical sphere when the whole trouble lies in an almost total absence of regular daily technical work systematically pursued through several years. Of course, there must be other technical material in addition to scales, but the highest technique, broadly speaking, may be traced back to scales and arpeggios. The practice of scales and arpeggios need never be mechanical or uninteresting. This depends upon the attitude of mind in which the teacher places the pupil. In fact, the teacher is largely responsible if the pupil finds scale practice dry or tiresome. It is because the pupil has not been given enough to think about in scale playing, not enough to look out for in nuance, evenness, touch, rhythm, etc.

Sergei Rachmaninoff was convinced that the rudimentary technical background was necessary for all pianists to acquire. He also discussed and endorsed the structure of the technical program demanded of Russians in the conservatories (Cooke 1999: 210-211):

It goes without saying, that technical proficiency should be one of the first acquisitions of the student who would become a fine pianist. It is impossible to conceive of fine playing that is not marked by clean, fluent, distinct, elastic technique. The technical ability of the performer should be of such a nature that it can be applied immediately to all the artistic demands of the composition to be interpreted...In the music schools of Russia great stress is laid upon technique. Possibly this may be one of the reasons why some of the Russian pianists have been so favourably received in recent years. The work in the leading Russian conservatories is almost entirely under supervision of the Imperial Musical Society...Personally, I believe this matter of insisting upon a thorough technical knowledge is a very vital one. The mere ability to play a few pieces does not constitute musical proficiency. It is like those music boxes which possess only a few tunes. The student's technical grasp should be all-embracing.

Emil Sauer was another performing pianist and professor who was also convinced that technical prowess should be in place before musical details could be appropriately performed (Cooke 1999:240-242):

I have frequently told pupils in my 'Meisterschule' in Vienna, before I abandoned teaching for my work as a concert pianist, that they must learn to draw before they learn to paint. They will persist in trying to apply colours before they learn the art of making correct designs. This leads to dismal failure in almost every case. Technique first—then interpretation. The great concert-going public has no use for a player with a dirty, slovenly technique no matter how much he strives to make morbidly sentimental interpretations that are expected to reach the lovers of sensation. For such players a conscientious and exacting study of Czerny, Cramer, Clementi and others of similar design is good musical soap and water. It washes them into respectability and technical decency. The pianist with a bungling, slovenly technique, who at the same time attempts to perform the great masterpieces, reminds me of those persons who attempt to disguise the necessity for soap and water with nauseating perfume.

Regarding technical exercises, Sauer gets even more specific when he states (Cooke 1999:242):

The field of music is so enormous that I have often thought that the teacher should be very careful not to overdo the matter of giving technical exercises. Technical exercises are, at best, short cuts. They are necessary for the student. He should have a variety of them, and not be kept incessantly pounding away at one or two exercises. As Nicholas Rubinstein once said to me, 'Scales should never be dry. If you are not interested in them, work with them until you become interested in them.'

### **3.4 Moving away from the Russian school**

Ignaz Paderewski, Poland's most famous pianist who eventually became the Prime Minister of his country, aptly described the need for a practice system; not a specific approach for practice, but a general plan of working which one knows yields results (Cooke 1999:297):

One is often importuned for suggestions to help aspiring pianists in their practice. While one may welcome an opportunity to help others in this particular, there is very little that can be said. System is perhaps the most essential thing in practice. I do not mean a system that is so inelastic that it cannot be instantly adapted to changing needs, but I do refer to the fact that the student who wishes to progress regularly must have some system in his daily work. He must have some design, some chart, some plan for his development. A bad plan is better than no plan. In his daily practice, however, he should see to it that he does not narrow himself. His plan should be a comprehensive one and should embrace as many things as he can possibly do superlatively well, and no more.

Percy Grainger, the famous pianist from Australia, came out of Stuttgart's Lebert and Stark method (Todd 1982:105):

For all his talk of 'modernism' and 'modern virtuosity', Grainger perpetuated many of the technical methods which held sway in 19<sup>th</sup> century Germany and were systematized so thoroughly in the teaching of Sigismund Lebert and Ludwig Stark at the Royal Conservatorium of Stuttgart in the 1850's. Central to that teaching was the preparation of every piece through many hours of slow, fortissimo practice. The arm was to be kept firm, sometimes by holding a heavy book between the elbow and the side of the body...a much repeated exhortation of his (Grainger) was: 'Hold the wrists stiffly and play with the fingers alone.'

One is not surprised to discover that Grainger's reputation for technical excellence was quite poor considering his use of the old fashioned techniques from Stuttgart. Grainger had a huge personality and creative mind which often compensated for his technical faults. He did not fully subscribe to the Lebert and Stark method; his large chordal sonorities were derived from the playing methods of Busoni who used much more body weight in his playing, and much of Grainger's technical advice on tone projection is thought provoking and worth considering. (Todd 1982: 106-107.)

Walter Giesekeing was another influential pianist in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century who was involved in the publishing of two works with his teacher, Karl Leimer; *The Shortest Way to Pianistic Perfection* (1932) and *Rhythmics, Dynamics, Pedal and Other Problems of Piano Playing* (1938). Leimer claimed to have intimate knowledge of all the "modern" methods of the foremost pedagogical thinkers and believed that he and Giesekeing synthesized a new "method" which

surpassed the others. Both books are somewhat cumbersome reading, perhaps adding some musical insights, but nothing significantly new to the chronological progression of piano playing. Giesecking was an exceptional artist, perhaps different to most; he was gifted with a phenomenal memory and ear, and could do things technically (memorize pieces, transpose, maintain huge repertoire) which most other famous artists could not. It was risky to write a technical treatise based on the freakish abilities of one artist. Nevertheless, one interesting comment is worth mentioning from these two works (Giesecking 1972:46):

Most teachers have their pupil to practice their pieces for too short a time, and then go on to something new before the work in hand has been thoroughly mastered. In opposition to this, and from the results of long years of experience, I maintain that the greatest progress, both technically and musically, is made from that moment when the teacher usually gives the pupil a new piece although in regard to the old piece there is still much of the greatest importance to learn. Teachers do this because they fear the pupil's interest might lag, while they overlook the fact that it is through a minute and careful perfecting of all parts of a composition that the greatest profits are gained and that real progress is assured.

Harold Bauer suggested a different view of technical proficiency. Bauer trained initially as a violinist and made a very late switch to the piano, a transition which left him years behind his colleagues regarding technical studies (Cooke 1999:65):

When, as a result of circumstances entirely beyond my control, I abandoned the study of the violin in order to become a pianist, I was forced to realize, in view of my very imperfect technical equipment, that in order to take advantage of the opportunities that were offered for public performance it would be necessary for me to find some means of making my playing acceptable without spending months and probably years in acquiring mechanical proficiency. The only way of overcoming the difficulty seemed to be to devote myself entirely to the musical essentials of the composition I was interpreting in the hope that the purely technical deficiencies which I had neither time nor knowledge to enable me to correct would pass comparatively unnoticed, provided I was able to give sufficient interest and compel sufficient attention to the emotional values of the work.

Bauer was one of the first pianists to move away from the technical driven schemes which most thought were essential to play competently on a professional level, and his recordings attest to the fact that he did not need the hours of technical drilling suggested for most pianists.

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a new approach to technique and practice was beginning to emerge as a result of the over-emphasis and over-analysis of technical uses and abuses. Artur Schnabel was one of the first pianists to state that he did not teach technique. He had studied with Leschetizky in Vienna, and was certainly exposed to many technical exercises as a child, but Schnabel made a point of discussing technique from a philosophical perspective, and often let most of his students find their own ways of achieving acceptable technical results. Schnabel often focused his attention on the “*what*” of a musical problem instead of the “*how*”. Stanley Fletcher’s essay entitled *Artur Schnabel and Piano Technic* discussed a few of these ideas (Fletcher 1972: 17):

If he later took a dogmatic stand against study of ‘technic,’ as some later students have asserted, it was not because such study had been lacking in his early training, or neglected in his own further self-discipline. His artistry led him through a development that brought him finally in his playing and teaching to concentration on musically expressive resources, and on those alone. Exercises he evidently had practiced and had on occasion offered his students, but always with their relevance to expressive performance in mind.

Konrad Wolff collected ideas and thoughts of Schnabel into a work called *Schnabel’s Interpretation of Piano Music* (1972). Schnabel died long before it was finally published, but had approved most of the material before his death.

Wolff (1972:22-23) stated:

Piano technique, as Schnabel used the term and taught it, is the faculty to establish channels between the sound heard inwardly and its realization in all individualized subtlety, or, as one might say, channels between the ‘soul’ and ‘body’ of the interpretation of a score.

He further stated that Schnabel was highly skeptical of all the modern trends to scientifically analyze piano technique on the anatomical scale warning that (Wolff 1972:23):

Piano technique as such receives much attention, and its level is considerably raised through the elaborate study of its anatomical side and of the pertinently mechanical laws. This in turn causes many teachers to define technique in terms of body relaxation, hand position and the source and quality of physical movement, all of which has had much beneficial effect, but has also produced some seriously injurious consequences. The use of dumb piano has become increasingly common, anatomical studies are imposed on students, and gymnastic consideration have led some teachers to building their technical training on just *one* facet of body activity such as spreading elbows, dropping wrists, turning hands in and out depending on the direction of the arm, etc. The more advanced this kind of technical study, the less it helps a pianist with the specific technical problems arising out of the study of individual pieces. A glance

at the famous methods of Breithaupt and others confirms this. The authors rarely discuss such technical problems as proportion of sonorities in chord playing, differences between articulated fast scales and glissando-like scales, differences in trill and octave playing between right and left hand, etc. This is why Schnabel, on the whole, considered such books more dangerous than helpful.

Schnabel assumed his students would enter his studio with a certain level of technical understanding and expertise, and within his lessons he offered his own opinions and advice, but he was highly reticent to devise any universal technical principals which could be abused and misconstrued by less gifted professors. He even came up with a famous “notebook” of technical exercises which he repudiated in his later years. Lastly, Neuhaus refers to a statement Schnabel made in Moscow while in conversation with some students and professors at the Conservatoire (Neuhaus 1973:178):

He (Schnabel) said that for a man who was fated to become an artist it was almost immaterial whether he was taught well or badly at the beginning; whatever the case, when he reaches the age of fifteen to seventeen he will change everything according to his own lights, he will acquire his own habits, his own technique, he will go his own way which is the way of the true artist. I do not believe that for such a man the initial teaching is immaterial (good teaching is in all cases better than bad) but without a doubt there is a grain of truth in what Schnabel said.

Another pianist who also had a similar understanding of the role of technique in piano playing was the English pianist Clifford Curzon. He wrote a concise article called “Bring Music into Your Practice,” which elucidates many of the tenants which reverse the order of the typical Russian approach of technique first, then music. In describing how he first approaches a new work Curzon stated (Curzon 1951:14):

Everyone has his own way of approaching a work he has not played before. My own way begins with studying the music away from the piano, following the form, phrasing, emphases, transitions, developments, etc. After thus surveying the territory, I play the work through without thinking about technique, purely for the pleasure of revelling in the new music...I never play a phrase in public without having tried and discarded many other ways of playing it—at different speeds, with other dynamics, stressing different voices, etc...I plot out the music first, as music, and then go back to clean up technical work. The great danger of beginning with the mechanics and saving ‘music’ for later on, is that the ‘music’ never gets a fair chance. Phrases that are learned mechanically tend to express themselves in terms of technical difficulties. And in cleaning up mechanics, mere repetition in itself won’t help. In fact, if the passage is being practiced wrongly, every repetition will only make it worse instead of better. You must first find out what the difficulty is, and why it is difficult for you. In analyzing troublesome passages, you often find that the difficulty is not where you think it is, but in the measure (or even note) immediately preceding. You also discover that the

difficulties are not always in the passages, but sometimes in the individualities of your own hand!

Another few philosophical principles about technique are also included (Curzon 1951:13):

There is a vast difference between technique and finger facility. Technique means the ability to express music as completely as possible at every moment of playing. It includes finger facility, tone quality, dynamics, pedalling, and the inflecting of every note. Training for facility only, on the other hand, means simply keeping the muscles fit, as an athlete does, through proper exercise...The time for pure finger work is during the first few years of study when the hand must be accustomed to the keyboard and when the mind is not yet capable of mature musical thought. But once the hands are at home on the keys, there should be no cleavage between technique and music. If a note is played at all—whether in a scale or in a composition—it should express some desired musical effect.

Sviatoslav Richter was one of the most technically (and artistically) gifted pianists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. There are a few interesting observations stated in an article written by Jacques Leisler (Leisler 2000:18), an impresario who worked with Richter during his recording sessions for EMI. Richter used to practice at Leisler's apartment in Paris, and Leisler recalls many occasions where Richter insisted on practicing 12 hours a day. He would set a timer and work to the minute until all 12 hours were completed. Richter would only have dinner with friends later in the evening after working the entire day. Bruno Montsaingon's film *The Enigma* (2001) chronicled the perplexing life of Richter, and in one interview Richter stated that he usually only practiced two or three hours a day, but his wife contradicted his statements and claimed he certainly worked more than that amount, especially if he was practicing for a concert or recording. When listening to the technical prowess of Richter's recordings, it may not be unreasonable to believe he actually practiced this amount which, comparatively, is significantly more hours than any other pianist examined in this study would attest to. There are a few famous accounts where Richter learned pieces in a very short time: he learned Prokofiev's *Sonata No. 7 Op. 83* in four days for its premier, learned Rachmaninoff's *Concerto No. 2 Op. 18* in one week, and also performed Schumann's *Humoreske Op. 20* with one week of preparation. Richter stated (Montsaingon 2001:45):

I adopt a purely repetitive method whenever I've got to learn a piece. I identify all the fiddly bits and study them first, practicing them mechanically. I take a page at a time, go over it as often as I need and don't move on until the first one

is under my belt. However difficult it may be, there isn't a passage that doesn't become easy if practiced 100 times.

The next group of comments regarding practice come from three pianists who are regarded as being amongst the 20<sup>th</sup> century's elite piano instructors: Gary Graffman (Curtis Institute of Music) wrote an auto-biography entitled *I Really Should Be Practicing* (1981), Leon Fleischer (Peabody Conservatory of Music, Curtis Institute and The Juilliard School) has given multiple interviews where he discussed various elements of piano playing and practicing, and Adele Marcus (The Juilliard School) has been involved in selected publications where she discussed her technical and musical approaches toward piano playing.

Graffman's book does not investigate practice in the thorough way the title might imply, but some practical suggestions on dealing with life as a concert artist are interesting to note. He recalls a the story of how William Kapell called him the day after his second Carnegie Hall appearance and suggested he needed to revise his approach toward practicing (Graffman 1981:71-72):

He (William Kapell) phoned me occasionally to give advice and encouragement and then, a few years later, a Dutch uncle lecture [sic] that I never forgot. That was in 1950. Carnegie Hall was no longer sacrosanct to the elite, and I had just given my second recital there. The next morning I received a summons from Willy.

'I want to talk to you,' he announced portentously.

I went to his house. He didn't waste words. He had been at the recital and informed me, 'You played like a pig.' He then proceeded to tell me why, leaving no grace note unturned. In general, he diagnosed, the problem was that I was getting lazy, and in fact he had heard from Eugene (Istomin) that I hadn't been practicing as seriously as I should.

'You have to decide what road you are going to take,' he said. 'It's not that you can't have great success if you continue to play like a pig—in fact, some very successful performers *do* play like pigs' (he named a dozen) '—or not have success if you play like an artist. But you have to decide what you're going to do with your life.' He went on to say that he was simply informing me as to what I had to decide, since I was already twenty-two, and not getting any younger. He continued, firmly, 'By the age of twenty-five, a first-class artist is already first-class, or he never will be.' He then added, very seriously, 'Before my fee became one thousand dollars, I felt that even if I didn't play my best there was enough for the audience to get its money's worth. But now, now that I'm getting one thousand dollars' (which was a hefty sum for a concert in those days), 'there is *no* excuse. I really have to do everything in the best possible way.'

Willy certainly practiced what he preached. Years after his death, I heard a tape that had been made from a performance on what must have been a lousy piano in a small town in Australia—one of the last concerts he gave—and the playing was of a quality that could just as well have been in Carnegie Hall. Very few artists give so much of themselves under all situations, and he was one of the most uncompromising.

Graffman also discussed how he and a few colleagues would always get together and try out their new pieces in front of each other before walking on the concert stage (Graffman 1981:72-73):

One of the inoculations Dr. Istomin prescribed to lessen the horror of that 'awful moment' (when you walk out on stage and sit down at the piano and start to play—when it's too late to go back) and the awful moments to follow was a procedure I came to call 'devirginization.' This took place when we played a new piece for our merciless colleagues, who knew the problems as well as the score. We didn't let each other get away with anything. And although it was customary for the listening colleagues to cry 'Bravo!' whenever one of these performances came to its rip-roaring conclusion, the victim could sense from the tone of voice, the expression on the face, the very vibration that emanated from his audience how many 'buts...' would follow, and how serious they would be. I can't remember, though, that we ever gave each other criticism that wasn't constructive. We were always very careful not to say merely that something seemed wrong, but to try to verbalize or demonstrate how we thought it could be improved, no matter how harsh the judgment was. Most important of all was the ritual of the gradual 'devirginization' of a new concerto. Sometimes (very rarely, it is true) I feel sympathy for conductors, because they have no way of practicing privately. When they're conducting a piece for the first time they have to make their mistakes in front of the hundred or so pairs of beady eyes of their orchestra players, who know all and forgive nothing. For a soloist, playing a concerto for the first time at rehearsal is a similar experience. Unlike a solo piece, it requires not only fine playing, but meshing with the orchestra. It is especially unpleasant to have to do this nowadays with the new concerto at an orchestra rehearsal, because financial considerations have turned many of them into scarcely more than run-throughs. Incidentally, a soloist must never admit to the conductor (as I found out to my sorrow some years later) that he is playing a concerto for the first time, even when he is eighteen years old. The conductor will be sure to find more fault with his soloist's interpretation than he would if he thought the fellow had just played the concerto (exactly the same way) six times with the London Symphony. Some conductors, as I was to discover, felt insulted that a concerto was being 'tried out' on them. Others, more secure, would growl something like, 'Well, at least you're lucky to have me to make sure nothing goes wrong.' (One of the advantages of reaching middle age is that I can now use this same line with young conductors.)

More practically, Mr. Graffman described how he prefers to do a full day's practice at home on the day before a concert and then fly to the selected city later that evening (which would only be possible for local domestic flights). Then he has the entire day of the performance to practice in the hall and make himself comfortable with the piano. He tries to never be away from the piano for more than 24 hours, and finds that most places in the world (other than Japan) try and accommodate his type of practicing. He stated that on tour, the Japanese presenters expected him to arrive ready to play and regarded practice as unnecessary. He described a few of the situations he might encounter on tour (Graffman 1981:282):

A tour involves playing much more repertoire than is heard in any one place: the concerto I play tonight in Detroit is different from the one I play three days later in Buenos Aires, and the recital programs for Düsseldorf next week and Iowa city the week after have to be practiced as well...Although I am grateful for almost any kind of practice piano, I need to work at least a few hours on the instrument I'll be using at the performance as well. The more I can plumb its secret—and make my peace with it—before the concert, the better the chances for a good performance.

Leon Fleisher is one of the most sought-after piano pedagogues living today. After an injury to his right hand during the 1964-65 concert season, he devoted himself to teaching and conducting and has also given many interviews, masterclasses and public lessons. He is one of Schnabel's most famous students, perhaps most notably as Schnabel accepted him into his class at the early age of nine (Schnabel was known for hating child prodigies). He worked with Schnabel for ten years and developed a musical and artistic approach which is unique and has hundreds of students clamouring for lessons or masterclasses. He is known for his explication of technical problems through musical means (Fleisher 1963:12):

Usually when you are asked how you practice, the thing that is lost sight of is that technique is, first of all, just something that serves your musical demands, your musical ideas. It's your musical ideas that form or decide for you what kind of technique you are going to use. In other words, if you are trying to get a certain sound, a certain quality of sound, you just experiment around to find the movement that will get this sound. That is technique. Technique is not the ability to play fast octaves or fast scales. This is a low level type of technique, and it is something that everybody should have and eventually can achieve. The highest kind of technique is technique which serves your musical intention. And the greater your demand—the greater your imagination musically, the greater the demand that will be made on the technique, because you are looking for a great variety of things.

He further explores the idea in another interview (Noyle 1987:100):

You must have a certain intention, and the ability to do that is the index of your technique. If it takes you a long time to achieve your intention, your technique is not so hot. If you can immediately achieve what you want to achieve, then you have the best technique in the world. The question, then, is to keep wanting to achieve more, in other words, to make one's ideal higher and farther and more unachievable.

Adele Marcus used a different approach toward piano playing and teaching by advocating a more serious approach toward pure technique. She came out of the Russian School having studied with Rosina Lhevinne, and she usually insisted that all of her students learn a specified technical regime during the first year of their studies with her. She has published a number of these

exercises in various articles and in her book *Great Pianists Speak with Adele Marcus* (1979). She recounted a story about how her technical regimes had been successful (Marcus 1972:15):

When Rosina Lhevinne sent Byron Janis, one of my first pupils, to me—I taught children exclusively for ten years—she said, ‘You know he has ten fingers like spaghetti.’ ‘But,’ I interjected, ‘he’s only nine and one-half years old and he’s enormously musical. This other thing—mechanics—can be built.’ ‘Well, try,’ Madame Lhevinne replied. Well, I tried and was exceedingly happy with the result, especially when after seven years of work with Byron, he played for Vladimir Horowitz. Mr. Horowitz telephoned me the next day. ‘You know hees uctaves is faster than mine,’ he said. ‘But don’t you theenk I sound better?’ Teaching mechanics to Byron was a big challenge: whereas I had always found mechanical ability easy, Byron, more natively musical than pianistically geared, had to build it.

She eventually had numerous students who went on to achieve big performance careers, many of whom credit their success to the technical foundation she instilled. Any piano student interested in building a solid technical foundation should peruse some of her technical exercises and descriptions.

### **3.5 Collections of important interviews with contemporary pianists**

The last three works to be examined and compared offer the most densely concentrated selection of practice advice from multiple concert pianists. Elyse Mach’s *Great Contemporary Pianists Speak For Themselves Vols. 1 & 2* (1980 and 1988), David Dubal’s *The World of the Concert Pianist* (1985), and Linda Noyle’s *Pianists on Playing: Interviews with Twelve Concert Pianists* (1987) are excellent sources of information on the many facets of a concert pianist’s life. There are a number of pianists who gave interviews for more than one of these collections (a few were interviewed for all three texts), and in most cases the comments on practice are reiterated or expanded in subsequent interviews. The most relevant comments will be presented here from each text.

The first collection of interviews which will be examined are Mach’s *Great Contemporary Pianists Speak For Themselves Vols. 1 & 2* (1980 and 1988). This group of interviews is generally presented in a quasi-biographical format rather than the interview format used by both Dubal and Noyle. An occasional leading question by Mach may begin a presentation of a sequence of thoughts,

but in her preface she stated that she did not want to “put words in the pianist’s mouth” and also allow each artist to develop and expand upon the areas where he or she felt the most passion. This format yielded less detailed information about specific practice routines and regimes than Dubal’s collection as Dubal more insistently asked particular questions about how each pianist practiced, perhaps being intrigued by the comments which were published by Mach (1980) five years prior to Dubal’s text (1985). However, Mach’s interviews contain some wonderful thoughts on sub-routines pianists go through right before concerts, and also explore the appropriate accompanying mentalities which most successfully inspire each pianist’s performances. Dubal interviewed most of the artists who first contributed to Mach’s collection Volume 1(1980), and Mach’s Volume 2 (1988) included interviews with many of the other pianists which Dubal interviewed in 1985. There is a significant degree of overlap in the information presented by both authors, so the selection of material included here is selected from the more expanded source of information. A few notable comments were presented in multiple texts so a few pianists are mentioned more than once. Noyle’s interviews are the most exhaustive, but she interviewed far fewer artists and an analysis of these interviews will conclude this section.

### **3.6 Mach’s interviews (1980 and 1988)**

Alicia De Larrocha offered some detailed thoughts on how she approaches a piece (Mach 1980:58-59):

First of all, I’m not the kind of person who likes to sit down to a score and play it from beginning to end. I study the music carefully first to form an idea of what it is all about. Then I seek passages or sections which offer the most difficulty, especially in regard to fingering. For me, the fingering is very important. I may decide on using a certain finger to produce a particular tone, but if it doesn’t work, then I have to change the fingering accordingly. That’s why I don’t advocate practicing away from the piano as some pianists do; a decision on fingering may not be practical at the concert hall, and by that time it’s a little late to change. It’s better to have practical fingering worked out ahead of time, especially for me because fingering is the base of security, I think. Sometimes, too, I have to play a piece very slowly to solidify the memorization of the part. Slowness also helps to check note accuracy and phrasing, because when you play in slow motion, just as in viewing a movie run slowly, you see every detail and at the same time reinforce the memory. You are able to see chords more clearly, the form, the design, the harmonic groupings, and so on. It helps enormously to know the phrases, the ritardandos, and accent here, and accent there, an ending phrase, a starting phrase, that is, all the details...I’m also told

that I keep my fingers very close to the keyboard. Well, that's my system. It doesn't mean that it will work for everyone. I obtain the results I want doing it that way, and that's what counts. Systems change too. The instruments I learned to play were different from what I'm playing now, so I've had to adapt.

Misha Dichter briefly described a few basic ideas about his practice comparing the amount of time he spends practicing today in contrast to how much he worked in his youth (Mach 1980:63):

Once I made my decision (to be a concert pianist), I began practicing for long periods, sometimes as much as twelve hours a day. And instead of working on formal exercises, such as Czerny, or Clementi, I spent one solid year practicing various standard exercises such as scales, arpeggios, trills, and so forth just to develop my technique. Now I practice less—about four hours a day when I'm travelling; but when I'm learning new repertoire during the summer, I'm usually able to fit in six hours of daily practice.

Rudolf Firkušný discusses the different attitudes a pianist struggles with before performances (Mach 1980:82-83):

I guess I'll always suffer from nervousness and a bit of stage fright. In fact, I think they are increasing because, as I grow older, I feel more responsibility toward my music and my audience, so the feeling of tension increases. The tenseness, however, varies in approach and in intensity. Sometimes it starts days ahead of the concert, sometimes on the day itself, and sometimes just before going on stage; but it is always there. There have been occasions on which I've felt totally relaxed; the piano is in excellent condition, I'm rested, and it's not the kind of concert that will make or break me. I even look forward to getting started. Then all of a sudden comes the tension, and I feel more nervous than I would preceding a concert at Carnegie Hall. On other days, I feel very tired; I'm tempted to cancel the concert because it will surely come off badly. Yet somehow I get on stage to the piano and suddenly everything blossoms beautifully into a good performance. How and why this happens is as much a mystery to psychoanalysts as it is to the artists. The problem has been examined on all sides and from all angles, but no satisfactory answer has ever been offered. Usually we are told that the performer has done his homework well and has had so much experience that he is borne along by some sort of subconscious programming. In my case, once the program is under way, everything falls into place. I rest on the afternoon of a concert, then concentrate entirely on the music. I try to be totally oblivious to the presence or absence of an audience; the music becomes the center of my attention. I tell myself that each concert is a first; I try to pretend that I'm doing the work for the first time before a completely new audience, whether they be very knowledgeable or very unsophisticated, whether they be in New York City or the smallest town in Alaska. As an artist, I am responsible first to myself. Sometimes I succeed, sometimes I don't; I'm human, too. But I'll always do my best because I consider each performance a new experience, one to build on.

Vladimir Horowitz did not specifically address the way he practiced, but he did suggest a few philosophical ideas which guided his approach to practice and performance (Mach 1980:117-118):

Then there is the question of technique. So frequently am I asked about this so-called phenomenal technique which I have; but I have no phenomenal technique. There is that technique, the ability to play scales rapidly up and down the keyboard, which is necessary, but which becomes very boring after two or three minutes of listening. You see that piano over in the corner? That instrument is capable of sounds which are loud and soft; but in between there are many, many degrees of sounds which may be played. To be able to produce many varieties of sound, now that is what I call technique, and that is what I try to do. I don't adhere to any methods because I simply don't believe in them. I think each pianist must ultimately carve his own way, technically and stylistically...One suggestion I would offer is never to imitate. There is an old Chinese proverb which says, 'Do not seek to follow in the master's footsteps; seek what he sought.' Imitation is a caricature. Any imitation. Find out for yourself...Another bit of advice would be that the pianist should never be afraid to take risks. When I play for audiences, I take risks. Sometimes they're correct, sometimes they are not. But I am not afraid to take risks if I need to in order to bring through the correct spirit of the work. Perhaps, too, I can say that a work should never be played the same way. I never do. I may play the same program from one recital to the next, but I will play it differently, and because it is always different, it is always new.

Horowitz also gave a few comments concerning the effects of recordings on young pianists (Mach 1980:125-126):

I never listen to my own recordings because I don't want to influence myself. As I said earlier, each time I play it is different. The great danger in listening to records is imitation. When Chopin taught and his pupils tried to imitate him, he sent them home and told them to bring something of their own. So many times people who are studying piano study with recordings, and they are so used to hearing note-perfect performances on the record that they want to duplicate the same note-perfect performance in the concert hall. They are not concerned about projecting the spirit of the music because they are concentrating so much on the notes; it becomes an obsession with them. If they make a smudge or something, they think it is a bad performance. A few wrong notes are not a crime. As Toscanini once said, 'For false notes, no one was ever put in jail.' As I said earlier, imitation is a caricature. It is better not to listen to yourself. Find your own way each time. I grant you, though, that for some people imitation is a vehicle to discover themselves. As you seek to know, for instance, how Rachmaninoff created a work and do so by a synthesis, even if you do it differently, you are using his concepts to solidify your own concepts. But that is inspiration, too.

Jorge Bolet offered a few ideas on how he approaches a piece, emphasizing slow practice and mental practice (Mach 1988:28-29):

The first job is to learn the notes and whatever else is written down about the music on the score; the minimum here is getting the fingers to play the correct notes and play them in tempo. So you can't start out at top speed; you must first do everything slowly. In fact, I play very slowly at first; I practice very slowly, because I think it's the only way of impressing myself. During practice I have to make sure that every finger movement is well fixed; that's impressing myself. It's like feeding information carefully into a computer so as to guarantee accuracy of response.

I don't want to miss a letter! I must have that mechanical accuracy, and for mechanical accuracy the only way to practice is slowly, so as not to miss any of the nuances in the score; after all, the piece is written in many ways. Yet when it comes to memorizing the music, I do perhaps ninety-five to ninety-eight percent of it away from the piano. I look at the score, study it, go through it in my mind, and piece it all together. I wouldn't say, though, that I have a photographic memory. I like to practice for a time at the keyboard, then go away from it for a spell because now I have that music spinning around in my head, and I want to play it mentally. Then, when I get to a point where I'm stuck and I'm not sure what comes next or how the phrase would be rendered, I go back through my memory and begin the section again, and most of the time when I arrive at the spot at which I was stuck before, I sail through it without a hitch. But I never solved a major mechanical or interpretive problem *at* the keyboard, only *away* from it. Even when I sometimes become so completely baffled that I am utterly stuck for a direction in which to go, I return to the *music* and piece it out. I don't know about others but I do know that *I* have never solved a major mechanical or interpretive problem at the keyboard. I have always solved it in my mind.

Youri Egorov offered some advice on how he mentally prepares for his concerts (Mach 1988:47-48):

I have to admit that sometimes before a concert I get nervous. I try to avoid the jitters by preparing myself psychologically for the event. I begin my preparation about a week before the concert. I imagine myself already on the stage actually playing the concert. So then I go upstairs to my Steinway and, sure enough, the nerves begin the tingle, because I pretend that I'm on my way up to the stage and to the piano at which I'll sit and play the music. I also concentrate, as I would on the night of the concert, on the music itself, and review one more time just how I will perform it.

So the last week before the concert is consumed by my playing the intended composition over and over again, all the while imagining that the audience is right there listening to me. Some nervousness is still there, but I can now cope with it because I have more control over myself. The thing with nervousness is that when it occurs, the mind begins to speed up, and that leads to many mistakes.

Furthermore, it isn't only the mistakes; the sound changes, too. Because you are more tense at the piano, you tend to strike the keys differently, and what comes out isn't good. But I do believe in psychological preparation, because at least you've done *something* to combat the jitters and that will stand you in good stead on the night of the concert itself.

Egorov (Mach 1988:48) goes on to detail two practice techniques he uses; slow practice and pianissimo practice:

There are two concessions, however, I make to myself when practicing the music I'm going to play. The first is that I like to practice slowly, much more slowly than I would play at the concert. I keep the same movement, though, that I use in the regular tempo. Otherwise there's no sense to the practice or to the music. I also like to practice pianissimo. This forces more concentration, and you pay more attention to what you are doing, I think because you have to listen more carefully. Consequently, I keep everything pianissimo. In fact, the first study of Chopin I learned only by pianissimo. When you are playing a lot of the

same notes, the pianissimo especially is helpful because the sameness of the tone comes through.

Egorov also made a few statements on the unpredictability of performances (Mach 1988:59-60):

This whole thing of concertizing, audience response, preparation, and so on is very unpredictable. There are times when you say to yourself, 'I feel good tonight; I'm going to play very nicely tonight.' And then you go on the stage and have something terrible happen. And you begin to wonder. Then there are times when you feel almost sick, and you say, 'Ach, another concert tonight; I don't want to play.' But you drag yourself to the stage, begin playing; it goes wonderfully well. I just don't know what it is, what it all depends on, what the chemistry might be, but *something* is there... Maybe it's as Arrau once said, 'It's like something written in the stars.' Arrau admitted he never knew what was going to happen when he played.

Janina Fialkowska discussed her approach to practice on the day of a concert (Mach 1988:66-67):

I know it sounds paradoxical, but I'm almost happy when great pianists like Ashkenazy or Pollini—they're the most perfect ones—hit a wrong note, because it makes them so much more human. Naturally one should strive to do the most perfect thing, but if you start saying that you have this foolproof method that will prevent any repetition or forgetfulness, or keep you from going out of rhythm, or deter you from ever playing badly, then you're just fooling yourself.

For me, anyway, the big thing on tour is fatigue, and battling it. So I lead a very boring life. I get nine hours of sleep every night. I try to eat sensibly. I try to get a walk every day. Then, on the afternoon preceding the concert, I just lie down. I go over the piece in my head *all* the time. I try to be as prepared as I can be. I don't want to second-guess myself during the performance in that at some part of it or in the playing of a passage that I don't play particularly well I suddenly chide myself for not working harder. I try to avoid such moments at all cost. It's really just a matter of having practiced enough. So on the day of the concert, it's important to me to have played through the whole program or the whole concerto at least once. I avoid flying on the concert date as much as I possibly can so that no matter where I am, I can go to the hall, preferable onstage, sit at the piano, and go through the program once, slowly. Sometimes I get this done in the morning, but never past midday, because I like to have dinner around three and that's my last meal. After that comes the rest, and then the concert.

Fialkowska had a very close relationship with Rubinstein (having won the first Rubinstein International Piano Competition) and she described the most important idea he imparted to her (Mach 1988:81):

I would say that the single most important notion I learned from Rubinstein was the idea of *projection*. Being on stage and playing beautifully what you think is beautiful does not mean that the person in the back of the hall hears the same thing. And he made me aware of the audience at all times, aware, that is, of what *they* are hearing, not what *I* am hearing. He made me aware that to play too quietly on stage—this is a very simple and elementary example—forces people in the back of the hall to strain to hear you, and that's a no-no because

audiences don't like to strain just to hear the notes. Consequently, you somehow have to play much more loudly on the stage yet give the impression both to the people in the last row and to those nearest you that you're playing a delicate pianissimo. Now, that's difficult to learn, and you learn it by playing a great deal and by experimenting. Rubinstein didn't show me how to do it; he merely made me aware of the problem, and the necessity of having a beautiful singing tone to help overcome it.

The interview with Emil Gilels was the first interview he granted in over twenty years. He described a few of his thoughts on inspirational performances (Mach 1988:123):

When I am in top form, I imagine the music in almost a quasi-fantasy manner. But then, when I perform a work, each time I also play it differently. The ideas are always different. Sometimes I play with greater changes in the dynamics, sometimes with less. Sometimes the playing will be more energetic, and sometimes less so. The projection in totality is not the same, either. I must say that it is different each time I play, and it is a process which I would say includes the mastery of the work, knowing the detail, being comfortable with it, and then adding the fantasy. The imagination comes in when the spirit comes together with the fantasy. Of course, the technique must be there, but the imagination must go with it. You must also be caught in the spirit of the work, but at the same time you must remain true to the composer and yet independent as an artist. I know that when I play a concert, especially when I am not feeling very well, I have to try harder to get all of these elements together. Sometimes I even have to force it. Also, I have always been nervous before a concert, and I continue to this day to be so. I've never found a cure for it. But I find that by being reflective and meditative about it all, I can do it.

Stephen Hough was at the beginning of his career when he gave his interview (roughly the same age as the selected pianists interviewed in Chapter 5), and his comments on practice are very relevant to this study. He emphasized working on the "weak fingers" and the use of rhythms (Mach 1988:134-137):

My first teacher was very insistent on beginning with a lot of technical exercises. We did Beringer, Pischna, and Joseffy exercises, and I remember Heather (his teacher) watching my hands like a hawk to make sure that my fingers were not collapsing at the joints...I remember a time when almost every passage I practiced had technical difficulties which involved the weak, last three fingers—five, four, and three. I would repeat over and over again where they played to compensate for the discrepancy in the hand between the weak side and the strong side, and try various different ways of playing the same passages. Take, for instance, the coda of the F Minor Ballade of Chopin, which is a difficult passage. Now, there are a number of reasons why it's difficult, but it's mainly the way the hand has to change position, combined with the mixture of double notes with single notes; and there's also the fact that it has to be an expressive melodic line, not just a sort of technical stunt. So if I have real problems, I work with a passage in all sorts of rhythmic patterns. Some people say that such a system doesn't work, but I have found that it works for me. So with that particular passage, the very basic way of practicing with the rhythm would be to start with the triplet—to stop on the first note and play the second two notes at regular speed, then stop on the second note and play the first and third at

regular speed, then stop on the third, and so on. Then there's something else I like to do—say, if you have four triplets in a bar; play the first one fast, the second one slow, the third one fast, the fourth one slow (see Chapter 5 examples 8 and 9) ...If both hands are to play the same notes rapidly an octave apart, put them two octaves apart and practice them like that. Or practice them cross-handed, so that the left hand plays the notes that the right hand plays and the right hand plays the notes that the left hand is supposed to play.

Hough also suggested that playing passages in other keys can solidify a pianist's technical control:

If you can play a difficult passage in any key, you're pretty secure in the original one! This can also help in memorizing. But I wouldn't stretch it too far—say, to the coda of the F Minor Ballade—because you'd spend your whole time trying to transpose, and you'd have to be quite a wizard at it. Yet there are certain difficult combinations in which you can help yourself by transposing them and by playing them in another key, especially in the black keys. If you're having problems in E-flat, B-flat, A-flat major, and if you take them in D-flat and G-flat and add the extra black notes, you may have some measure of success. There are times when you just have to be inventive and experimental with all of this. And if something doesn't work, if you find the rhythms are not helping at all, then drop them. I don't think that there are any hard-and-fast rules about it.

Hough goes on to list a few more strategies which he found useful:

Another stratagem I find useful is to practice with my eyes closed. The brain is trained to use all the senses. The piano, though, seems confined to the sense of touch and hearing, obviously, and also the sense of sight—looking where you're playing on the keyboard. If you remove one of those senses, you make the other ones develop more strongly, because it has to overcompensate...One of the real problems in playing is listening objectively to yourself. I have found that if I have a problem with a passage, I have to be careful that I don't shut off my ears, because it's like looking into a very bright mirror: you are almost unwilling to see what's there sometimes! I think psychology plays such an important part in our musical development; if we understood and identified all of our problems, we'd probably not have problems at all! I remember Derrick Wyndham (former teacher) pointing out that the real problem with technique is not always how fast you can wiggle your fingers (anyone on the street can do that), but rather how they are positioned and how clearly your brain and hands are working together.

Hough offers a concise description of how nerves can affect his performances:

Quite apart from that, though, is the whole other question of nerves and the different ways that nerves affect the performer. First, there are the nerves, or the nervousness, one feels before a performance which dissipate when the concert begins. Then there is the confidence which suddenly fails the artist as he or she walks on to the stage. Or the failure can come in the middle of the performance whether through tiredness or distraction when the performer begins to question the value of tonight's playing and wonders why things aren't going well. The mind and the nerves can play various sorts of tricks on anyone. I know; at different times, I've been the victim of all of them.

Yet I can't say that I suffer from any kind of chronic nerves really, certainly not like some who are really paralyzed and unable to give their best. It's funny that

for me the size of the concert or the place of the concert often have relatively little to do with it. Sometimes it can be the smallest date somewhere, where nothing's really hanging on the outcome, that a bad case of nerves sets in. Yet for my debut, at the Hollywood Bowl I was really not at all nervous, and I know I probably should have been. Sometimes you just have to look at yourself as a human being and realize how small you are in the context of the world and in the context of the universe, and see how ridiculous it is to be nervous. Egon Petri, who was one of Gordon Green's teachers, apparently said that it is only vanity and ego that makes us nervous. If we only care about the music, we won't think of being nervous, but if we care what people think of us, then we will be. Now, I know that it's hard to rationalize these things in the context of a performance when you know that your career is often riding on how you play when you go out onto the stage. However, the performer must try to be divorced from all of that for the simple reason that no one can please everybody. There will always be some who like one's playing (or at least one hopes so!) and there will be some who hate it, or at least treat it indifferently. If the artist is always conscious of which critic will like this kind of playing, or which teacher would approve of this, or what student would emulate that, or how are my colleagues reacting, then it's no longer the artist performing, but a cripple. Each of us has to go out there with a crazy mixture of self-confidence and humility and whatever talent we have and try to do what he or she feels the music demands, and do as much as he or she can. Of course, all this is wonderful, philosophizing as we are over lunch, but of course when it comes to putting it into practice while actually standing in the wings, well, that's something else again.

Zoltán Kocsis suggested a few thoughts on his approach toward practice and the necessity of exercises for young pianists (Mach 1988:160-161):

Today I don't practice much. As a touring professional you can easily spoil your results if you practice more than four hours a day. I know there are many who practice ten, twelve, hours, but that's really not so good because it can't give you the results, often, that briefer but more concentrated practice can do. If I was to advise *young* pianists, I'd tell them to work on technical exercises. Through the years, I think that technical exercises are very important, not only scales and arpeggios but also certain parts of the most difficult, the most demanding piano works like Chopin etudes, Liszt etudes, and so on. Difficult sections from, let's say the Chopin Etude for thirds, the G-sharp Minor, the most difficult parts of certain Liszt etudes, as well as finger exercises written by Dohnányi and the famous ones—Czerny, Clementi: I would say they are very, very important in the early years of learning the piano. After that, technical exercises are less important, but one really has to concentrate on the aforementioned studies—Chopin, Liszt, Debussy.

Kocsis also confirmed reports on the amount of time Richter would practice (Mach 1988:163):

When it comes to practicing, he (Richter) can go at it for hour and hours but he doesn't spoil or overcook it. He's a person of deep concentration, and maybe that too is a sign he isn't 'normal.' But there are times when I've heard Richter still in the practicing room at ten in the evening when we had begun at eight in the morning. We began practicing four hands and worked at it for four hours; Richter went on for six more hours. Naturally, that wasn't done on a concert day.

Garrick Ohlsson described a few of his pre-concert struggles (Mach 1988:193):

Even when I'm walking on the stage to play, I try to think courageous thoughts. I think only of smiling at the audience. What kind of feeling is it? I call it defensive optimism. I'm generally quite happy by the time the concert arrives. It's the two hours before that that I've been unhappy. I don't become ill or anything like that, but I get this feeling that I'd like to go away, to hibernate, to go to the movies, to sleep. It's the escape thing that gets to me. Yet when I become jittery, I become almost too relaxed; I grow sort of 'soft.' That's when right before I go onstage I go and get a cup of coffee. People tell me they could never do that because they'd be too jittery. Sometimes I'm asked whether or not I could eat just before I went onstage, and my standard reply is, 'I can eat anytime.' It's one of my gifts and one of my biggest problems.

Murray Perahia does not suggest very much concerning the details of his practice, but he did mention the necessity of performing great works of art many times and related this to the ability of an artist to play "accurately" in both a technical and an emotional sense (Mach 1988:215-216):

What keeps me going is my love of doing what I'm doing: I love the playing, and most of all I love playing a piece many times. I feel this is a most important attitude for an artist to have, because I feel that to learn a piece one doesn't simply play it in one's home; one must play it in public. This is very important, because until one has played the work in public, one doesn't know all of the nuances of the piece. Playing the piece in public brings new knowledge of the music. One can learn it, one can sing the words, one can even feel it, but unless one has sung the song to somebody, in the presence of people, one hasn't really experienced the song. The chance to play in public gives me the opportunity to experience great compositions of Beethoven, Mozart, Schubert, many times under different conditions, and in different situations. This to me is extremely exciting and of utmost importance, because I can see a transformation take place. I feel as though I am actually closer to the piece when I play it many times. By playing the work in different circumstances, one can perfect one's vision of it so that in practicing it one gets the essence of the music and the essence of one's feeling; the task is then to get all of that across to the audience. If, for example, I play the same Mozart concerto at three different concerts, there are really three different Mozarts. This comes from having a different vision of the music at each concert. It's a great experience, and it is, I think, that challenge that really motivates me.

But that isn't all that there is to give the audience; there is an ideal, a modest ideal perhaps, but still a very difficult ideal—to play accurately. I know that word is tossed about a great deal, probably because of the many interpretations of the concept. When I say 'play accurately,' I don't mean accuracy in terms of the written notes; that is not the most essential quality, although it's more difficult than most people imagine. The idea of accuracy to me suggests first of all an attempt on the part of the pianist to understand the indications of the composer, trying to understand the moods, the ideas, not in the intellectual sense of idea, but the emotional idea; it involves an understanding of the composer's total message, grasping everything he wants to say. This involves that transformation we talked of a few moments ago; the artist must understand all these things I've talked about and then bring all of it across through *his own* emotions—an emotional transformation. But this must be done accurately. The

pianist must not use the music as a vehicle for his own emotions as they react to the music, whether the artist's emotions synchronize with the composer's or stand in opposition to them.

Ivo Pogorelich described some of the unorthodox ways he would practice while on tour. These include practicing directly after a concert and inventing his own exercises in the form of variations on his concert repertoire (Mach 1988:231-232):

To maintain the form during the tour, I sometimes had to remain in the hall after the concert for a few hours, knowing that I wouldn't have a chance to practice in the morning or in the afternoon. I know this is an unusual procedure, but there is a rationale for it.

You see, to give a concert is to expose, but what you expose tonight you have to expose tomorrow, as well. Yet there has to be a source, as it were, of all of this, and the source during a concert trip is achieved through the repetition of what has been done. You're always playing a different instrument in a different hall, so through the repetition you can control your playing and balance it against what you have done and what you intend to do. And sometimes you merely want to listen to a piece out of the program again, to hear it again.

Sometimes, of course, the next-day practice is out of the question because of some time conflict, or maybe because you have a flight. But I do it because I feel I just *need* to do it *now*, at this very moment. A concert is a form of art that is very much a gift from the artmaker, a gift on the part of the artist; yet it demands a great deal of the master of the ability to give of one's self. How else could you imagine someone like Laurence Olivier giving three performances of Shakespeare, one in the morning, one in the afternoon, and one in the evening—and all of them at the same level of expression?

However, I do not practice exercises. I just don't do that. But when I practice a particular piece of repertory, I do a few variations around it, and in this way I invent my own exercises to help me in that particular place. Technique is the art of variety, the art of knowing how to adjust your hand to a particular group of notes to produce a particular sound to fit the particular expectation of the ear. The real musician should have his ears working in many ways, not expecting his hands to do it all; there is a model which is to be matched by the actual execution of the material. So you have to listen all the time. This is why sometimes after the concert I go back and I play and I listen. I repeat passage after passage, and I listen, and I check everything, too, because I want to know everything about that music.

Pogorelich also offered one experience he had with the Tchaikovsky Concerto No. 1 which illuminates the type of practice he could use, reminiscent perhaps of Richter's methods (Mach 1988:244):

So in Buenos Aires I rented a piano and put it in my hotel. I was getting up at six o'clock in the morning and was playing eleven hours a day. I remember on one particular day I was playing the second theme of the concerto, and I found that that was the turning point, the key that turned the whole piece around and so made the whole piece mine. I had played that sequence of a few bars, but I had

spent hours at it; during those hours, I knew I was close, but I still could not find what I was looking for. I knew that I was almost there, but not quite; I kept wondering why this whole thing doesn't come together. Why does it not blend? What is missing? Something was there preventing me from playing what I wanted to play. I shall never forget that experience. I spent ten days in Buenos Aires, and the only streets I saw were those leading from my hotel to the concert hall and back again. All I did was rehearse, rehearse, rehearse, until I finally won; the concerto was mine.

### 3.7 Dubal interviews (1985)

David Dubal's book *The World of the Concert Pianist* (1985) contains more interviews than either of the Mach collections, and Dubal often asked more direct questions about how each pianist approached practice and/or performance. Dubal also discussed many of the other issues which pertain to concert pianists, but a brief selection of the applicable advice concerning practice and preparation will be presented here. The introduction described many of the fears and phobias each pianist must endure and conquer in order to successfully acquire the necessary skills for concert performances night after night. But even after acquiring a prodigious technique, William Kapell stated (Dubal 1985:12):

My great sadness is the realization that the first ten minutes of every concert are lost to me, while I get accustomed all over again to being there. In these ten or fifteen minutes, I suffer agony, because even if it is a heavenly piece of music, I can't feel deeply about it, as I am still in the process of getting over my embarrassment and discomfort. When this short but oh so long time has run its miserable course, I am all right, but until then, I must submit meekly to slips of the fingers, and to a heart that beats, but not enough to obliterate me, which is what I want...I am nervous and apprehensive because I may not 'have it' that particular night. Because I feel the piece is bigger than me, so big I may never be able to even touch it, let alone be the master.

Claudio Arrau remembered his teacher (Martin Krause) commenting on the necessity of being over-prepared (Dubal 1985:19):

'You must know the work so well that if you are awakened at four o'clock in the morning and told to play a concerto for a conductor, you can do it instantly and without complaint.' He (Krause) taught me not to be too finicky about conditions. For example, Krause would say 'Everybody can play well on a *good* piano; the trick is to play well on a *bad* piano.'

In measuring his practice time Arrau stated (Dubal 1985:31):

I think it's beautiful to practice; I *love* to practice. On the average I do now two to three hours a day. But sometimes I am a little bit lazy. Krause used to have me stay away from the piano for at least a month in the summer, so as not to get stale, and I still do it quite often. Then when I go back to the piano it's really an event.

Vladimir Ashkenazy described the necessity for automatic motor memory while performing (Dubal 1985:41):

If I am learning a Beethoven piano sonata, it has to become part of my motoric system, so to speak, so that I don't need to think about where my finger goes. It needs to become an organic part of me and this takes a very long time.

David Bar-Illan devised a "silent" practice method while on tour in Buenos Aires (Dubal 1985:60-61):

I can say without exaggerating that my way of practice has changed my pianistic life. I worked, as we all do, by playing the music out loud, until one day before a concert in Buenos Aires, I was rudely interrupted by a very unpleasant woman in the apartment below. Although it was daytime, she threatened to call the police. So, necessity being the mother of invention, I tried to practice as quietly as possible. I noticed that if I depressed the keys very, very slowly, there would be no sound at all. I quickly realized that this could give me some interesting results. First of all, since some of the motions were so slow, I found this to be a marvellous way of checking on how securely I had memorized the pieces. And after that day I continued to practice in this way because it became clear that the kind of pressure used in such careful depression of the keys strengthens the fingers to such an extent that when you play at the proper tempo, it seems easy. You've seen baseball players practicing their swing with two bats in order to feel the relative lightness of one bat. This kind of practice gives you a margin of strength and security on stage, where we may be performing somewhat below our optimum level. And of course on tour this has become one of the blessings of my existence.

Bar-Illan adjusted one of his practice instruments to a muted capacity in order to accentuate his legato practice:

I can practice on any bloody keyboard that is available. So many pianists say they can't practice because the piano is not good enough, and to me that's nonsense...As you well know, the piano is a percussive mechanism and, unlike a wind or string instrument, it is very difficult to achieve on it a legato effect, which is, of course, the connection and overlapping between the notes. I had one of my two concert grands muted in order to eliminate as much of the decay rate of the struck tone as possible. So on my piano there is almost no after-sound, which means that I am getting the minimal amount of legato. If I play on a very good, ringing piano, with long-lasting tone, I find that it becomes seductive to let the piano do the work. But then you are on one of those many concert stages where the acoustic is so dry and the decay rate is so fast that it never seems to get past the apron of the stage. So, to get a legato in a hall like this I struggle to achieve the maximum legato on the muted piano.

Dubal asked Stephen Kovacevich how he prepared for a concert on the day of the event (Dubal 1985:71):

I (Stephen) wish I could tell you that I had found a formula after all these years. For me there are no rules, though it certainly doesn't do to go out and play six sets of tennis and then walk out on the stage in the evening. And I find that it's a good idea not to touch any of the pieces you're due to play, but to practice other

things instead; get to know the piano, find your way into the new keyboard. And then rest.

Jorge Bolet had a different attitude toward practicing (Dubal 1985:78):

I have to be honest. I hate practicing. I've always disliked it. But it's a necessity. I have to do it because I love to play. I've always contended that I'm a performer, and that's why recording is even a horrendous experience to me, because I feel when I'm recording that I'm not performing.

Dubal mentioned Bolet's career ups-and-downs and asked what sustained him through those difficult times (Dubal 1985:80):

I absolutely refuse to give up. It really boils down to that. But, I must say, there have been so many times in my life when I've thought, 'You know, I'm just banging my head against a stone wall. I'm getting absolutely nowhere. Well, I'll give it one more year; and if I don't succeed, I'll just become a professional photographer.' Photography has been my great hobby for many years, ever since I was very young. But then something would happen. For instance, Rodzinsky heard me play in Havana and he raved about me. Another time I played for Mitropoulos and he said, 'How is it I never heard of you? Where have you been?' At that point I was already a man of forty years of age and I had been everywhere. The 'Where have you been?' happened again when I played for Koussevitzky—'How is it I've never heard of you?' When something like this would happen, I would tell myself: 'If conductors like these will engage me, I must not quit.'

Alfred Brendel stated a few comments about slow practicing (Dubal 1985:89-90):

I remember that I played Beethoven's *Hammerklavier Sonata* and the Liszt *Sonata* for him (Edward Steuermann). He had a wonderful way of teaching which still lives vividly in my memory. He did not like things to be worked out in a slower tempo. Instead he would split up passages into small units, have the student play, let's say, five notes up to tempo, then continue with the next five or six notes—whatever was suitable for that particular phrase. After that, the student had to put the whole thing together in the real tempo.

Dubal: That sounds very helpful. Slow practice can be very misguided.

Brendel: Yes, it can be a mistake to work out something in a tempo that does not really suit the requirements of the music. When I start to work on a piece it is important for me to work out everything—the suitable fingerings and the proper physical movement—in the real tempo in order to give the piece the right character.

John Browning was renowned for having a diligent work ethic at the keyboard and he offered a few of his comments on practice (Dubal 1985:114):

Many people work with tunnel vision. They work on one little section for days and days—or they whiz through the whole work quickly. I learn carefully, conscientiously observing every marking, so I don't have to undo bad habits. I then practice in a middle tempo, not too slow, which is the hardest tempo to practice in. When I feel more or less ready, I play the whole piece straight

through, three times in the day, no matter what goes wrong. I try to achieve a large arc, which is what you have to do in a performance. You cannot stop and correct yourself when you are onstage.

Browning regularly practiced six to eight hours a day and suggested a few more ideas about piano technique and double notes in particular (Dubal 1985:116-117):

I really think it's what you do before the age of sixteen that counts most. You cannot develop a major technique after the age of sixteen any more than you can develop an Olympic gymnast at that age. It has to be done from the age of four on.

Dubal: Can you give me an example of what teachers should be doing in those early years that is generally neglected?

Browning: First and foremost: Double notes and more double notes. They show up all the problems. This is the kind of Russian technique that we were taught by Mrs. Lhevinne. Unfortunately mine are not what they should be. I didn't really start working on double notes until I worked regularly with Mrs. Lhevinne at Juilliard.

Dubal: Some people have deficiencies in their technique no matter how excellent the training.

Browning: Yes, very definitely. For example, Ashkenazy probably has the best double-note technique of any living pianist and it is most likely natural with him. But I know that this is something I do not have naturally.

Dubal asked Bella Davidovich about how she practiced (Dubal 1985:126-127):

I usually play around three hours a day, though sometimes I end up playing one or two hours more than that. And after each hour I make sure to take a little break, even a little ten-minute one, in order not to lose my level of concentration. But for that hour between the breaks, I am very concentrated. During the break I drink tea, talk on the telephone, I just completely disconnect and do something besides music. But when I work I think about nothing but music. Nothing can disturb me, nothing can distract me. I am listening to myself.

Dubal: Do you practice hands separately and do you write in all your fingerings, the way so many pianist do?

Davidovich: No, I never separate hands, and I don't usually write anything into the notes. Occasionally I will put a little sign telling me to pay attention to a certain place in the composition.

Glenn Gould gave a fascinating account of his peculiar and unorthodox approach to practice (Dubal 1985:180-183):

Dubal: It seems many pianists are compulsive practicers but are as afraid of approaching the piano as they are of leaving it. You have stated that you do not necessarily 'practice' the piano. Do you separate the idea of practice from the idea of playing?

Gould: Well, quite frankly I'm at a loss to understand the compulsiveness that accompanies the notion of practice—that—in effect, most view as an appropriate relationship to the instrument. I've talked about this frequently, to be sure, and I'm in some considerable danger of repeating myself, but to me the relationship to the piano—to any instrument, really, but I can only speak of the piano with first-hand authority—which involves some sort of tactile servitude, which demands six or eight, or ten hours a day of kinetic contact, which seems to need, for example, backstage pianos at the ready so that, presumably, one can reassure oneself that one's relationship to the instrument remains secure before one walks on stage is simply beyond my ken. I couldn't even begin to emphasize how far from my own experience—my own belief—if you like—such a relationship really is...What was less unorthodox in those days (of his youth) was the amount of time I actually spent at the instrument per day. I never set myself time limits or anything (other than those limits imposed by the fact that I was going to school, and homework had to be accommodated, too) but it feels like something on the order of three hours a day or so would not be an exaggeration. Frankly, I don't know how I stood it, but it was the only period in my life when I had what might be thought of as a relatively regular and, by my standards, rigorous practice schedule—not surprising, really, in view of the fact that that was when one was forming a repertoire and going through new pieces for the first time.

Now, to bring matters up to date. These days and throughout my professional life, indeed, I've practiced only on an if-, as- and when-needed basis, and only for the purpose of consolidating a conception of a score—never for the sake of contact with the instrument per se. I'll give you an example. The most recent recording I've made as of the date of this interview is the Brahms Op. 10—the four ballades. I recorded them three weeks ago in New York. It happens that I'd never played them before—not even sight-read them—and, apart from the '*Edward*' Ballade, the first one in the set, the one a good many of my conservatory colleagues used to essay, I'd never even heard them played until I decided to record them.

Now, as it happens, I made that decision about two months before the recording was done and for approximately the next six weeks I studied the score from time to time, and developed a very clear conception of how I wanted to approach the ballades...But as for playing them, I spent only the last two weeks at the keyboard and, unlike the experiences of my youth, which I'm now hazy about, I can tell you almost exactly how much time I spent because, in recent years, I've taken to clocking myself at the piano—no sense in overdoing things and all that. Anyway, as is customary for me before a recording session, it averaged one hour a day. There were a couple of occasions when I doubled that because I perhaps had to be absent for an editing session, or whatever, on the following day, but that one hour gave me the opportunity to play through the ballades twice on each occasion (they're almost exactly half an hour in length) and think about the conceptual changes I wanted to make.

Now, those conceptual changes were reinforced, needless to say, by running the ballades through in my head many dozens of times when driving along in the car or conducting them in my studio. It's amazing—the least time spent was during the practice period as well as during the six weeks or so prior to the recording. Anyway, the recording sessions have now been over for three weeks and I haven't touched the piano since then...When I do, in due course the whole process will begin again and I fully expect to cap the last fortnight of that period with one-hour-a-day forays to the keyboard.

Dubal: Do you realize that this sounds quite unbelievable?

Gould: I do. I realize that it is contrary to common experience, but it's the truth.

Dubal: And when you go back to the instrument after all that time, after six weeks, or eight weeks, or whatever it may be, you don't find that the fingers simply refuse to cooperate at first, that it takes a certain number of days just to re-establish coordination?

Gould: On the contrary, when I do go back I probably play better than at any other time, purely in a physical sense, because the image, the mental image, which governs what one does is normally at that point at its strongest and its most precise because of the fact that it has not been exposed to the keyboard, and it has not, therefore, been distracted from the purity of its conception, of one's ideal relationship to the keyboard.

I'll give you a further bit of evidence for that, if you like. When I record, I deliberately cut off all contact with the piano about forty-eight hours in advance of the first session, and when I arrive at the studio I never touch the piano until the engineers are ready and somebody announces, 'Take One.' There are exceptions to that of course—if the piano has been under repairs, surgery of some kind—I have to find out in what way it had been changed and compensate accordingly, and for that matter made certain alterations in my coordinative allowances. But otherwise I stay as far from it as possible and, as a consequence, 'Take One' is very often the best thing we do because the mental image is at that point strongest and least subject to contradiction by the reality of an improperly adjusted instrument, or whatever.

Dubal: But this presupposes that one has a very specific and very secure conception of what is involved in playing the piano.

Gould: Oh, absolutely. It presupposes that at some point, one has hit upon precisely the coordinates that are involved and then frozen them, stored them in such a way that one can summon them at any time. What it all comes down to is that one does not play the piano with one's fingers, one plays the piano with one's mind. If you have a clear image of what you want to do, there's no reason it should ever need reinforcement. If you don't all the fine Czerny studies and Hanon exercises in the world aren't going to help you.

This lengthy description of Gould's practice habits, although most likely not practical for most pianists, even famous pianists, may define some of the philosophical goals to which pianists should aspire. It also highlights the relevance of mental practice, learning away from the piano.

Vladimir Horowitz gave a few brief comments about his practice and his attitude to performing (Dubal 1985:205):

Dubal: Do you still practice a great many hours a day, and do you think that scale and arpeggio practice is necessary?

Horowitz: Oh, I cannot play more than two hours a day, not more, and I don't play scales or exercises.

Dubal: You don't need it?

Horowitz: No, I need it, but I am lazy. I have other more important things to do. I do not want to get tired.

Dubal: Do you think many pianists, especially young pianists, compulsively over-practice—practice too much and think too little?

Horowitz: They may think, but often they think the wrong way. Just to remember music one must think. And pianists are not stupid. But they practice and practice, and repeat passages and parts a hundred times over. Then they go on the stage, and repeat them for the hundred-and-first time. And you hear it that way. You feel it. But performance must be more than just the next repetition; it must live and breathe. Too often the pianist thinks, 'Oh, I must not miss one passage.' They think it is so important to play all the notes. Maybe that attitude comes from recordings, or radio—from some machine—because that microphone hears things you can't hear on stage; it's more powerful than our ear drums. But, on stage, you have to take chances to make the music really live.

Byron Janis was one of the few pianists who studied with Horowitz, and he also gave a few suggestions emphasizing listening and attention (Dubal 1985:242):

Dubal: Tell us something about your approach to performance.

Janis: Before each performance I think it's very important to practice to the point where you feel that your technique and concept of the pieces you will be playing are ready. But then you have to let it all go and perform and create on stage, as though you hadn't practiced. Surprise yourself and listen, because if you don't listen, you're not going to play for the hall. It's more important to be spontaneous than to strive for perfection. I think 'perfection' is a very destructive concept and comparison is deadly. We must stop trying to make today's performance like yesterday's. You can't do it; you can never repeat a performance, and as soon as you say, 'God, I want to do that again,' you're finished. You will be strangled and impotent, and everything you do today will be spoiled. This is my attitude toward everything in life.

Dubal: What is the best state of mind for practicing?

Janis: You are at your best when you are in a state of *attention*. You are aware of everything, at the same time as you are focused on details. It's like looking at a painting—you see something in it that is very beautiful, and yet you see the whole painting too. Attentiveness means you've got the broadest vision. Only then are you able to listen to your own playing in the most meaningful way.

Murray Perahia briefly mentioned how helpful listening to taped recordings of his performances can be (Dubal 1985:260):

Dubal: Do you ever have your concerts taped so that you can listen to them later on?

Perahia: Yes, and it can be very instructive. When I hear it back, I think, 'Did I really play it *that* fast?' Or, 'why didn't I give that section more poetry or feeling?' This never fails to amaze me, because after a concert I am never sure how it went.

Ivo Pogorelich discussed a few details about his practicing, and made a few suggestions relating to programming and career advice (Dubal 1985:267-268):

Dubal: How do you practice and how much?

Pogorelich: I do five hours a day if possible, but it's getting more and more difficult with my engagements. For me the best practice is when I have a practical task to accomplish. If I manage to fulfil it, then I've had a good day's work. Of course there are many different levels of work. Sometimes there is that deceptive level when you think, "Oh, how easy this is going to be!" But sometimes it's the opposite. When I first looked at Ravel's *Scarbo*, from *Gaspard*, I could hardly read the text and I thought, 'I have to have a third hand to accomplish this!'

Dubal: I think your *Scarbo* is amazing piano playing.

Pogorelich: Thank you; I am pleased with the outcome of the recording. But what I went through to make it happen!

Dubal: Have you ever terminated a relationship with a piece that you performed often?

Pogorelich: Yes, I'm not going to play the Schumann *Symphonic Etudes* any longer, although I've recorded it, and it was one of my best stage works. I just don't have anything to say about it anymore. It's dry for me. Maybe I will come back to it in some years.

Dubal: Are you asked to play a large repertoire each season?

Pogorelich: I choose to play very little in public. Usually no more than two concerti per season, much less than my colleagues, and only one and a half or two recital programs per season. I try to keep my concert programs separate from what I work on at home.

Dubal: What is the most crucial aspect of playing on stage?

Pogorelich: For me it is always one thing, that it should be as effortless as possible. You must know everything about a work in order for it to go easily under whatever circumstances—bad hall, bad audience, bad digestion.

Dubal: Have you ever felt so exhilarated on stage that you became careless, or lost control?

Pogorelich: No, the control must never be lost. You are not there to be personally exhilarated. You are up there only to create art. You must be king on stage and dominate it.

Dubal: In your preparation, what do you concentrate on most?

Pogorelich: I research every sound. By that I mean being constantly attentive to what I am playing at the moment. This involves using the ears as much as the hand.

The majority of Peter Serkin's interview was based on his approach toward practice; a selected summary of his thoughts is presented below (Dubal 1985:300-304):

Dubal: May we talk about methods of practice?

Serkin: Yes, this is a subject which has always interested me. And, oddly, it's not something that we pianists talk about together very often. It's generally a private matter. Though in teaching, of course, one has to discuss this with the student.

Dubal: Are there practicing methods that you use? Of course the word 'method' is a difficult one.

Serkin: Yes it is; dangerous, even, because it often implies a very rigid application of rules.

Dubal: Do you practice every day?

Serkin: Not necessarily, especially when I'm on the road. I don't tend to practice all that much then.

Dubal: So you're not compulsive about it.

Serkin: No, not at all. In fact I'm quite the opposite. Even though I tend to practice every day, it's more a function of daily choice, a self-renewing kind of process rather than a guilt-ridden approach where if I don't practice I'll feel bad about it.

Dubal: Did you experience such guilt in connection with the piano? So many of us grow up with that feeling.

Serkin: Yes, I often thought in the past that pianists, like ballet dancers, need to do a certain amount of daily work in order to keep in shape. In fact, I had a whole set of formal exercises that I did every day. Lately, however, I find that I am rejecting formulas more and more.

Dubal: But did you feel better when you did these exercises?

Serkin: I thought I did, yes. I thought it was helpful, but now it's over with. I develop these methods or styles of practice for a while, but they tend to last maybe six months at a time at most. I'm always looking for a new approach.

Dubal: Do you practice with a metronome?

Serkin: Yes, once in a while, but my thinking about the metronome has changed. I used to think that one's sense of rhythm is something so internal, organic and biological that it had nothing to do with the mechanical regularity of the metronome. But now I have a very different point of view. So I sometimes

practice with a metronome if only to discover my idiosyncrasies; the presence of a metronome will reveal any odd things I might be doing.

Andre Watts gave a vivid description of his encounter with each piano as he enters a performance hall (Dubal 1985:326):

Here is my method, and when it works, it works like a charm. When I arrive at the hall I calmly gaze at it (the piano) for a long moment. This is my way of saying 'hello' to it. I never touch it right away. But then I sit down to play and the piano reveals its qualities to me. Very quickly I find out if the bass is muddy or the treble is weak, and here begins my psychological adjustment to the instrument. I now have to make a choice. Will I be friends with the instrument or will I spoil a whole evening fighting with it? In order to make friends, I must accept the weaknesses of the instrument. This is the state the piano is in. It's not trying to get you. It's not trying to do you out of your success with your concert. Of course this state of mind isn't always easy to achieve—it involves a very critical kind of adjustment. It's heartbreaking to realize that so many of the effects you have worked your guts out for will be lost. But there will inevitably be some place in the piece you're playing where a pianissimo will be aided by the weak treble; or where a blurry resonance will create a wonderful wash of sound. So you must allow yourself to feel that somehow the piano will help you.

Watts spoke of the advice he received from his teacher Leon Fleischer (Dubal 1985:327-328):

In general, Fleischer was good for me psychologically. He made me understand when I was practicing out of guilt instead of real need. His point to me was that there's nothing wrong with guilt-practicing, just as long as you know what it is. He made me realize that too many compulsive needs can spell grief for the touring artist. Anyway, I'm not so sure that practicing ten hours a day has anything to do with perfection. It has more to do with being virtuous. Because truly careful practicing cannot be sustained for that kind of stretch. It becomes rote—it's like doing calisthenics. And at a certain point in your life all those extra hours are not going to improve your technique.

### **3.8 Noyle's interviews**

The final text to be examined is Noyle's *Pianists on Playing: Interviews with Twelve Concert Pianists*. Noyle asked a very specific set of questions to each of the twelve pianists, and some of the questions are similar to the questions asked of the pianists in this study (Chapter 5). Nine of the twelve pianists were previously interviewed by Dubal (1985) and/or Mach (1980, 1988), and Noyle's interviews tend to be extensions of the various topics many of the pianists previously discussed in their prior interviews. Noyle presents the information directly as it was received from the pianists, but she refrains from making any type of analysis in comparing or contrasting the ideas. Each pianist was asked the same set of questions, so I will include here a few comparisons of my own.

There will also be further comparisons with this information in the concluding chapter (Chapter 6), relating these ideas with the other thoughts presented by the earlier (Chapter 2 and 3) and later mentioned pianists (Chapter 5). However, the comparisons made in this section will be limited to the twelve pianists interviewed in her book.

Noyle's first question to all the pianists inquired if they used any type of standard warm up exercises in their daily routine. Nine of the artists stated they did not do any type of warm-up and most stated they began work immediately on the pieces they were currently working on. Rudolf Firkušný was the only artist who claimed to warm-up with scales and arpeggios. John Browning warmed up with double-sixth stretches, and Bella Davidovich often played Chopin Etudes, slowly. A few suggestions were made to warm-up with technical difficulties in the current music to be performed, and Leon Fleischer believed that technical warm-ups with cold hands could be injurious. He believed that pianists should warm-up slowly with their current repertoire, and only when fully warmed up should technical exercises be practiced (Noyle 1987:90).

Noyle's next pertinent questions inquired how each pianist faced technical challenges and if they used a metronome. Only Bolet, Browning and Firkušný claimed to use the metronome to help them technically. Ashkenazy, Davidovich and Fialkowska stated they never used a metronome. The other pianists said they would occasionally use it as a reference to make sure they weren't rushing various sections in relation to other sections. Ashkenazy stated he did not use any methods, rhythms or the metronome, describing that his hands were very coordinated and that he did not know exactly how he addressed technical issues (Noyle 1987:6). Bolet described his combination of slow practice, practicing hands separately, and metronome work, increasing the speed tick by tick until an acceptable speed was achieved (Noyle 1987:16-17). John Browning also believed in using the metronome to achieve speeds and check tempos, but also suggested an interesting comparison between technical practice and insurance (Noyle 1987:29):

It's like insurance (practicing). I often have felt that practicing is really, maybe fifty percent necessary, and fifty percent insurance. You insure, you over-prepare, so that if you are distracted during a concert, if you're not feeling up to snuff, you have so much backlog of preparation that it will carry you through automatically.

Misha Dichter was opposed to slow practice for technical reasons. His former teacher, Aube Tzerko, believed that one must "practice quickly, but in impulse groupings." Dichter explained (Noyle 1987:52):

In effect, if there's a group of sixteenth notes that have a certain meaning in a certain tempo, then, rather than practicing at one fourth the tempo, you put in air spaces so that you have impulses of certain notes and groupings that are comfortable for the mind to absorb.

Dichter also described his practice of performing (Noyle 1987:55-56):

I'm constantly practicing a work as if I were performing it...I consciously recreate in the room, as close as I can, the mental impulses that will be going on, that have been going on since I learned the piece, that are going on that week before or the day before, and that will be going on during the concert. 'What am I thinking of right now?' If I stop concentrating on these things and start to be aware of extraneous things, I'll introduce nerves that are totally unnecessary. If I've built in this concentration, I never lose sight of that structure for a moment. And in the concert, I do not walk out thinking, 'Look, there are three thousand people here, and I hope I play well.' That's much too self-centered a thought. It's, 'What a wonderful piece. I think I really understand it now. Here we go. Let's try it.'

Janina Fialkowska gave a more detailed account of how she approaches her daily practice, and also described how she organizes her time to present newly learned works (Noyle 1987:64):

Noyle: At what tempo are you working?

Fialkowska: Playing very slowly, very carefully, and without any pedals, and that's the way I will practice it. At the end of the day maybe I'll try and play it for myself, and as it gets better, I'll be playing it more and more up to speed. But I'll always start and end the day playing it slowly without pedal and very carefully listening to each note, every voice, knowing exactly where everything is going. No cheating. No fluffing over. If it's a solo work, usually I allow myself a year. Because once I've memorized a piece, as I say, I don't know it for a year [sic], and I like to have a long time for it to assimilate. A concert year is perfect. What I do is, I learn the piece in June and I'll probably start performing it in September or October of the same year, but in smaller places, using them as guinea pigs. That doesn't mean that I'll give them the worst performance. It means that I will be less nervous. It will mature and develop, and the piece will reach its peak, usually (this is the way it has happened to me) the following March. That is the best it'll be, at that time. I will drop it then in April or May. And if I take it up the next year, it'll probably be really good. It'll be solid. I never consider that I know a piece until I've performed it at least five or six times, and a concerto even more. A concerto, I don't consider I know it until I've performed it at least eight

or nine times. Playing a concerto for the first time is the most terrifying experience in my life.

André-Michel Schub described the amount of hard work and numerous hours one must spend practicing to become a successful performing artist (Noyle 1987:108):

When I was studying at the conservatory, I practiced as many hours as I physically could. I have to admit more than six or seven hours a day. People forget the hard work they put in. When you read that this one didn't practice hard, don't believe it, because you tend to forget. I know that I did it, and I know that other people did it, too. There's no getting around the amount of work. At that time, it was basically learning the major concertos and some major recital pieces that I could see myself playing in the early part of my career and now. Running is the same thing. There is no getting around putting in those miles if you want to. You get to a different level of conditioning. With the piano, there's no way of getting around those hours at the piano if you practice to play correctly. It is what it does for your equipment and for the control of sound. What's even more important than how many notes you play is what you do with those notes. The more time you spend at the piano, the more control you have. Practicing has a lot to do with quality, but there has to be a certain number of hours of playing just to maintain a level. At present, there is no set amount of time. It varies with your state of mind, and it varies with the pieces you are playing. But if you fall below the maintenance level for too many days, even though you have a lot in reserve, it will ultimately show in your playing. For me, the way it shows most rapidly is through control of sound. The sound is not as controlled as it could be. My practicing is very pragmatic. It has to be. When you are a concertizing pianist, you have to use your time efficiently.

Schub also suggested a few ideas regarding performance practice (Noyle 1987:111):

If I play through a piece, I try to think of it as a performance. I'm quite aware of the fact that I'll be feeling differently on stage in a concert hall as opposed to the way I feel when I'm playing in my living room. There are passages that I know I should work on more. I guess a good barometer is if I can play the passage five times the way I would like it to sound, then I can chance it in a concert hall.

Schub's last suggestion explained his current practicing as compared with his student practicing (Noyle 1987:112):

I practice quite a lot less...Also when you reach a certain level of what you can do with the instrument, you don't practice to attain that level so much as you practice to attain the musical level of each piece that you're playing and project that. It's not like going to the health club and developing muscles. That element is not there.

Ralph Votapek mentioned a few ideas on balancing his work practice with his performance practice (Noyle 1987:137):

Roughly I could say about ten to one (practice to performance ratio), something like that. The ten is the practice and the one is the okay, let's see how it goes. Maybe even less sometimes. I always remember reading about Horowitz when he said he never played, only on the stage, and he didn't practice a lot either, although I don't necessarily believe this. He would practice a couple of hours a day, no more; he got tired if he did or whatever, a very interesting character. Anyway, that impressed me when he said he never played a piece except on stage, and I'm thinking that has to be an exaggeration. How would he know how it would go? No wonder he was so nervous. But when I first read that, I think I was still a student and then I think the ratio was maybe eight to two, where I would play eighty percent of the time and just have fun and then I would practice a little bit. I realized I had to spruce up a few spots and so I'd practice. But now as years have gone by, more and more I'm doing a little bit like Horowitz said he did, only I can't imagine it without playing a piece at least once every few days to see how it was going. I don't do that when I first sit down at the piano because I know I probably won't succeed. I practice more, play less. As I was saying, I go through the slow routine more and practice certain passage more and then I'll be checking myself periodically or having fun, I don't know. I've never dreaded practicing, never hated practicing, so I always go looking towards the end, toward the performance.

### **3.9 Conclusion**

A significant amount of information on concert pianists' practice has been presented above. There are a number of complementary and contrasting views which seem to emerge from these artists. A thorough analysis of these ideas in comparison with the thoughts of the pianists interviewed in Chapter 5 will be presented in Chapter 6.

## Chapter 4

### Introduction to selected pianists

#### 4.1 Introduction

The pianists who were selected for this study bring very diverse backgrounds and experiences to the information they shared in the following interviews. I met each of these pianists during my years of study at The Juilliard School and the Royal Academy of Music, and they all currently live in New York City. Collectively, they represent 5 different nationalities: American, Russian, Korean, Japanese/English and Israeli. They all have professional management and have performed throughout the world in the most famous concert halls and with many of the world's leading orchestras. They have received prestigious awards and won top prizes at numerous competitions.

#### 4.2 Orion Weiss

A native of Lyndhurst, Ohio, Mr. Weiss attended the Cleveland Institute of Music, where he studied with Paul Schenly. Other teachers include Daniel Shapiro, Sergei Babayan, Kathryn Brown and Edith Reed. In February of 1999, Mr. Weiss made his Cleveland Orchestra debut performing Liszt's Piano Concerto No. 1. In March 1999, with less than 24 hours' notice, Mr. Weiss stepped in to replace André Watts for a performance of Shostakovich's Piano Concerto No. 2 with the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra. He was immediately invited to return to the Orchestra for a performance of the Tchaikovsky Piano Concerto in October 1999. In 2004, he graduated from The Juilliard School, where he studied with Emanuel Ax.

During the 2011-12 season, Mr. Weiss performed with numerous orchestras including the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Alabama Symphony Orchestra, Phoenix Symphony, Albany Symphony, and Mexico City Philharmonic. He also made his recital debut in Washington D.C. at the Kennedy Center. Continuing his close relationships as a collaborator, Mr. Weiss performs regularly with his wife,

pianist Anna Polonsky, as well as working again with the Pacifica Quartet and multiple recital partners.

In the summer of 2011, Mr. Weiss made his debut with the Boston Symphony Orchestra at Tanglewood as a last-minute replacement for Leon Fleisher. In recent seasons, he has also performed with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, San Francisco Symphony, Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Philadelphia Orchestra, Pittsburgh Symphony, Toronto Symphony Orchestra, New World Symphony, National Arts Centre Orchestra, Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, Slovenian Philharmonic, and in duo summer concerts with the New York Philharmonic at both Lincoln Center and the Bravo! Vail Valley Festival. He has also appeared with the symphony orchestras of Houston, Indianapolis, Kansas City, Rochester, Albany, Annapolis, Louisville, Vancouver and Omaha, as well as the Minnesota Orchestra, Pacific Symphony and Oregon Symphony. He toured the US with the Orchester der Klangverwaltung Munich in October 2007. In 2005, he toured Israel with the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Itzhak Perlman.

As a recitalist and chamber musician, Mr. Weiss has appeared across the US at venues and festivals including Lincoln Center, the Ravinia Festival, Sheldon Concert Hall, the Seattle Chamber Music Festival, La Jolla Music Society Summerfest, Chamber Music Northwest, the Bard Music Festival, the Bridgehampton Chamber Music Festival, the Kennedy Center and Spivey Hall. He won the 2005 Juilliard William Petschek Award and made his New York recital debut at Alice Tully Hall that April. Also in 2005, he made his European debut in a recital at the Musée du Louvre in Paris. He was a member of the Chamber Music Society Two program of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center from 2002-2004, which included his appearance in the opening concert of the Society's 2002-03 season at Alice Tully Hall performing Ravel's *La Valse*. Mr. Weiss's list of awards includes the Gilmore Young Artist Award, an Avery Fisher Career Grant, the Gina Bachauer Scholarship at The Juilliard School and the Mieczyslaw Munz Scholarship.

### 4.3 Andrew von Oeyen

Born in the U.S. in 1979, Andrew von Oeyen began his piano studies at age 5 and made his solo orchestral debut at age 10. An alumnus of Columbia University and graduate of The Juilliard School, where his principal teachers were Herbert Stessin and Jerome Lowenthal, he has also worked with Alfred Brendel and Leon Fleisher. Mr. von Oeyen lives in New York and Paris.

Commanding an extensive and diverse repertoire, Mr. von Oeyen has performed the major concertos of the keyboard literature – Bartok, Barber, Beethoven, Brahms, Chopin, Liszt, Gershwin, Grieg, Mendelssohn, Mozart, Prokofiev, Rachmaninoff, Ravel, Schumann, Shostakovich, Tchaikovsky – with such ensembles as the Philadelphia Orchestra, Los Angeles Philharmonic, San Francisco Symphony, National Symphony, Detroit Symphony, Cincinnati Symphony, Saint Louis Symphony, Seattle Symphony, Atlanta Symphony, Berlin Symphony Orchestra, Singapore Symphony, Grant Park Orchestra, Ravinia Festival Orchestra, Utah Symphony, Rochester Philharmonic, Slovenian Philharmonic and Slovak Philharmonic. As both soloist and conductor he has led concerti and orchestral works by Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Ravel and Kurt Weill at Spoleto Festival USA. On July 4, 2009, von Oeyen performed at the U.S. Capitol with the National Symphony in "A Capitol Fourth," reaching millions worldwide in the multi-award-winning PBS live telecast.

Mr. von Oeyen has appeared in recital at Wigmore Hall and Barbican Hall in London, Lincoln Center in New York, the Kennedy Center in Washington, Boston's Symphony Hall, Zürich's Tonhalle, Tchaikovsky Hall in Moscow, Bolshoi Zal in St. Petersburg, Dublin's National Concert Hall, Royce Hall in Los Angeles, the Herbst Theater in San Francisco, Sala São Paulo, Teatro Olimpico in Rome, in Bucharest, Vietnam, Macau, and in every major concert hall of Japan and South Korea. During the 2009-2010 season, he toured Japan twice, performing Beethoven and Rachmaninoff concerti with the Berlin Symphony Orchestra, and later that season in recital. He also appeared in recital with violinist Sarah Chang throughout Europe, North America and Asia, which culminated in a recording for EMI Classics, in addition to regular guest appearances with orchestras worldwide and appearances at the Aspen and Saratoga music festivals. 2011 saw the release of an award-winning album of

Liszt works on the Delos label, including the Sonata in B Minor, *Vallée d'Obermann* and Wagner and Verdi opera transcriptions.

In recent seasons, Mr. von Oeyen has appeared at the festivals of Aspen, Ravinia, Saratoga, Spoleto, Schubertiade, Festival del Sole, Grant Park, Grand Teton, Mainly Mozart, Bellingham and Gilmore. He won the prestigious Gilmore Young Artist Award in 1999 and also took First Prize in the Leni Fe Bland Foundation National Piano Competition in 2001.

#### **4.4 Spencer Myer**

Spencer Myer is a graduate of The Juilliard School, where he studied with Julian Martin. Other teachers include Peter Takács, Joseph Schwartz and Christina Dahl. He spent two summers at the Music Academy of the West, studying with Jerome Lowenthal and, later, Vocal Accompanying with Warren Jones and Marilyn Horne. During the course of his undergraduate studies at the Oberlin Conservatory of Music, he was the recipient of numerous awards from that institution, while, in 2000, he was named a recipient of a four-year Jacob K. Javits Memorial Fellowship from the United States Department of Education. His Doctor of Musical Arts degree was conferred by Stony Brook University in 2005.

Spencer Myer's orchestral, recital and chamber music performances have been heard throughout North America, Canada, Europe, Africa and Asia. He has been soloist with The Cleveland Orchestra, Louisiana and Dayton Philharmonic Orchestras, the Baton Rouge, Bozeman, Indianapolis, Knoxville, New Haven, Phoenix, Richmond (IN), Santa Fe, Southeast Iowa, Tucson and Wyoming Symphony Orchestras, and Beijing's China National Symphony Orchestra, collaborating with, among others, conductors Nicholas Cleobury, Neal Gittleman, Jacques Lacombe, Jahja Ling, Maurice Peress, Matthew Savery, Klauspeter Seibel, Arjan Tien and Victor Yampolsky. In May 2005, his recital/orchestral tour of South Africa included a performance of the five piano concerti of Beethoven with the Chamber Orchestra of South Africa. Mr. Myer made his debut at the famed festival of the Blossom Music Center during the summer of 2007.

Spencer Myer's recital appearances have been presented in New York City's Weill Recital Hall, 92nd Street Y and Steinway Hall, Philadelphia's Kimmel Center for the Performing Arts and London's Wigmore Hall, as well as in Chicago, Cincinnati, Fort Worth, Knoxville, Logan and China, while many of his performances have been broadcast on WQXR (New York City), WHYY (Philadelphia), WCLV (Cleveland) and WFMT (Chicago). An avid chamber musician, he has also performed with the Blair, Jupiter, Miami and Pacifica String Quartets. In January 2007, Mr. Myer performed Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* at the Inaugural Festivities of Ohio's Governor Ted Strickland and Lieutenant Governor Lee Fisher.

In 2004, Spencer Myer captured First Prize in the 10th UNISA International Piano Competition in Pretoria, South Africa, as well as special prizes for the best performances of Bach, the commissioned work, the semi-final round recital and both concerto prizes in the final round. He is also a laureate in the 2007 William Kapell, 2005 Cleveland, 2005 Busoni (where he was also awarded the Audience Prize) and 2004 Montréal International Piano Competitions. Winner of the 2006 Christel DeHaan Classical Fellowship from the American Pianists Association, Mr. Myer also received both of the competition's special prizes in Chamber Music and Lieder Accompanying. He is also the winner of the 2000 Marilyn Horne Foundation Competition, and subsequently enjoys a growing reputation as a vocal collaborator. Mr. Myer was a member of Astral Artists' performance roster from 2003 to 2010, a result of winning their national auditions. He is currently a member of the performance roster of New York Concert Artists and Associates.

An enthusiastic supporter of the education of young musicians, Spencer Myer has been a frequent guest artist at workshops for students and teachers, including Indiana's Goshen College Piano Workshop and the Texas Conservatory for Young Artists in Dallas, and has served on the faculty of the Oberlin and Baldwin-Wallace College Conservatories of Music. He is also an advocate of contemporary music and inter-arts collaboration, and has worked with the Chicago- and New York-based ICE (International Contemporary Ensemble), Indianapolis Dance Kaleidoscope, Ohio Dance Theatre and New York City's New Triad for Collaborative Arts and The Juilliard School's "Composers and Choreographers" series.

Spencer Myer can be heard on the Dimension Records label, performing music of the late Cleveland composer Frederick Koch and on a composer-conducted Naxos CD in performances of three concerti from Huang Ruo's Chamber Concerto Cycle. His debut CD for Harmonia Mundi USA – music of Busoni, Copland, Debussy and Kohls – was released in the fall of 2007.

#### **4.5 Soyeon Lee**

Soyeon Lee earned her Bachelor's and Master's degrees, and the Artist Diploma from The Juilliard School, where she worked extensively with Robert McDonald and Jerome Lowenthal. While at Juilliard, she won every award granted to a pianist including the Rachmaninoff Concerto Competition, two consecutive Gina Bachauer Scholarship Competitions, Arthur Rubinstein Prize, Susan Rose Career Grant, and the William Petschek Piano Debut Award. First prize winner of the prestigious 2010 Naumburg International Piano Competition, Korean/American pianist Soyeon Lee has already been hailed by The New York Times as a pianist with "a huge, richly varied sound, a lively imagination and a firm sense of style," while The Washington Post has lauded her for her "stunning command of the keyboard."

Ms. Lee's 2011/12 season began with return engagements to Finland's Mantta Music Festival in an all-Liszt recital broadcast by the Finnish National Radio, Montreal Chamber Music Festival, and Music Mountain Chamber Music Festival, as well as debuts with the Orquesta de Valencia at the Palau de Musica and the Ulsan Symphony Orchestra of Korea. Highlights of this season also included return engagements to Chicago's Dame Myra Hess Series, Howland Chamber Music Circle Piano Series, Bozeman Symphony, and recitals at Weill Hall, Krannert Center for the Performing Arts, Candlelight Concert Society, Steinway Society of Western Pennsylvania, recital tour of Hawaii, as well as performances with the Abilene, Naples, and Santa Fe Symphony Orchestras. In December, she returned to the Glenn Gould Studio in Toronto for her second album with Naxos featuring the opera transcriptions of Franz Liszt.

Ms. Lee has been rapturously received as guest soloist with The Cleveland Orchestra and the London Symphony Orchestra, as well as the Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra, symphony orchestras of Columbus, Bangor, Bozeman,

Boca Raton, Wyoming, Bozeman, Cheyenne, Napa Valley, San Diego, Scottsdale, Shreveport and New York City's Park Avenue Chamber Symphony, the Daejeon Philharmonic Orchestra (South Korea) and Orquesta Sinfónica Nacional (Dominican Republic), including performances under the batons of Rafael Frühbeck de Burgos, Jahja Ling and Otto-Werner Mueller.

Recent recital appearances include New York City programs at Carnegie Hall's Zankel Hall and Weill Recital Hall, Merkin Concert Hall and Lincoln Center for the Performing Art's Alice Tully Hall, Washington's John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Cleveland's Severance Hall, the Ravinia Festival's "Rising Stars" series, Auditorio de Musica de Nacional in Madrid – part of a 13-city tour of Spain.

Ms Lee was featured on the January 2006 cover of *SYMPHONY* magazine's annual "Emerging Artists" issue and in the 2008 edition of Musical America's "More Thrills of Discovery." Her debut CD on the Naxos label, featuring sonatas of Scarlatti, was released in February 2007 to critical acclaim. KOCH International Classics released her second album in April 2009 for which she was awarded the 2009 Young Artist Award from the Classical Recording Foundation.

Ms Lee is a winner of the 2004 Concert Artists Guild International Competition, as well as the Second and Mozart prizes of the Cleveland International Piano Competition and the Bronze Medal of the Paloma O'Shea Santander International Piano Competition. Currently, Ms. Lee is pursuing her Doctoral of Musical Arts Degree at the Graduate Center at the City University of New York with Ursula Oppens and Richard Goode, where she has also worked with Wu Han. She serves as teaching assistant to Julian Martin at The Juilliard School, and joined the roster of Lincoln Center's Chamber Music Society Two in 2012.

#### **4.6 Vassily Primakov**

Vassily Primakov was born in Moscow in 1979. His first piano studies were with his mother, Marina Primakova. He entered Moscow's Central Special Music School at the age of eleven as a pupil of Vera Gornostaeva, and at 17 came to New York to pursue studies at The Juilliard School with the noted pianist, Jerome Lowenthal. At Juilliard Mr. Primakov won the William Petschek Piano Recital Award, which

presented his debut recital at Alice Tully Hall, and while at Juilliard, aided by a Susan W. Rose Career Grant, he won both the Silver Medal and the Audience Prize in the 2002 Gina Bachauer International Artists Piano Competition. Later that year Primakov won First Prize in the 2002 Young Concert Artists (YCA) International Auditions.

In 2007 he was named the Classical Recording Foundation's "Young Artist of the Year." In 2009, Mr. Primakov's Chopin Mazurkas recording was named "Best of the Year" by National Public Radio and that same year he began recording the 27 Mozart piano concertos in Denmark. *BBC Music Magazine* (November, 2010) praised the first volume of Mr. Primakov's Mozart concertos: "The piano playing is of exceptional quality: refined, multi-coloured, elegant of phrase and immaculately balanced, both in itself and in relation to the effortlessly stylish orchestra. The rhythm is both shapely and dynamic, the articulation a model of subtlety. By almost every objective criterion, Vassily Primakov is a Mozartian to the manner born, fit to stand as a role model to a new generation." Mr. Primakov's recent recordings include: Beethoven Sonatas, the Chopin Concertos, Tchaikovsky: *The Seasons* and *Grand Sonata*; Chopin: 21 Mazurkas; Schumann: *Carnaval, Kreisleriana, Arabeske*; Dvorak: *Piano Concerto, Op. 33; Poetic Tone-Pictures, Op. 85*; Schubert: *Dances and Impromptus*; Mozart Concertos, Vol. 1 and *Vassily Primakov plays Brahms, Chopin & Scriabin*, Mr. Primakov's first film, issued on DVD. In November of 2010 the first CD in a series of live performances, "Primakov in Concert, Vol. 1", was released including works by Brahms, Schubert, Tchaikovsky and Rachmaninoff.

In recent years, Vassily Primakov has been hailed as a pianist of world class importance. *Gramophone* wrote that "Primakov's empathy with Chopin's spirit could hardly be more complete," and the *American Record Guide* stated: "Since Gilels, how many pianists have the right touch? In Chopin, no one currently playing and recording sounds as good as this! This is a great Chopin pianist." *Music Web-International* called Primakov's Chopin concertos CD "one of the great Chopin recordings of recent times. These are performances of extraordinary power and beauty." In 1999, as a teen-aged prize winner of the Cleveland International Piano Competition, Primakov was praised by Donald Rosenberg of the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*: "How many pianists can make a line sing as the 19-year-old Moscow native

did on this occasion? Every poignant phrase took ethereal wing. Elsewhere the music soared with all of the turbulence and poetic vibrancy it possesses. We will be hearing much from this remarkable musician."

#### **4.7 Konstantin Soukhovetski**

Konstantin Soukhovetski was born in Moscow to a family of artists and began his music studies at the age of four. He studied at the Moscow Central Special Music School under the auspices of Moscow State Conservatory with Anatoly Ryabov. He is a recipient of over 15 international awards including: third prize in the 2011 Bösendorfer International Piano Competition, second prize and audience prize in the 2010 Ima Hogg International Competition, first prize and audience prize in the 2007 New Orleans International Piano Competition, the William Petschek Debut recital award, second prize in the 2004 UNISA International Piano Competition in Pretoria, South Africa, the Paul and Daisy Soros Fellowship for New Americans, third prize in the 2003 Cleveland International Piano Competition, The Juilliard School's Arthur Rubinstein Prize and Gina Bachauer Competition, first prize in the 2002 Hilton Head International Piano Competition, and second prize in the 2002 Walter W. Naumburg International Piano Competition.

Mr. Soukhovetski has worked with an array of distinguished conductors including: Daniel Meyer, Gérard Korsten, Rebecca Miller, James DePriest, Emmanuel Siffert, Jahja Ling, François-Xavier Roth, Doron Salomon, Timothy Muffitt, Conrad von Alphen, Michael Goodwin, Steven Ramsey, Mary Woodmansee Green, Enrique Bátiz, Alan Stephenson, David Scarr, Omri Hadari, Andrew Grams and Emil Tabakov.

Career highlights of the past several seasons include performances with the Asheville Symphony, Juilliard Symphony, Auburn Symphony Orchestra, Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra, 14-performance tour of South Africa in March of 2007, Rockefeller University, Louvre Museum, Paris, Pianofest Gala at Music Academy of The West, Amman, Jordan and Beirut, Lebanon, Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall, Pro Arte Musical, and San Juan, Puerto Rico. His radio appearances have included a one-hour live performance on NPR's *Performance Today* hosted by Fred Child; a

feature on WQXR's *Young Artist Showcase* and TV appearances on South Carolina's *Talk of the Town* and *Lowcountry Today* talk-shows.

Mr. Soukhovetski's Johannesburg debut recital was voted the third of ten top most important cultural events of the years 2005 and 2007 by South African National Newspaper *Die Burger*. During New York Winter Salon at Steinway Hall, December 2007, Mr. Soukhovetski debuted as a composer presenting two world premieres: transcription of the last scene from Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin* for violin and piano and choreographed scene for piano, soprano and a dancer *Olympian Dream*. Prior to entering The Juilliard School where he has earned his BM, MM and AD degrees under the tutelage of celebrated American pianist Jerome Lowenthal, Mr. Soukhovetski had toured France, Italy, Romania, Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania and North America.

#### **4.8 Tanya Bannister**

Born in Hong Kong, Tanya. Bannister holds degrees from the Royal Academy of Music in London, Yale University, where she studied with Claude Frank, and New York's Mannes School of Music, where she received an Artist Diploma as one of a handful of pianists selected to study with Richard Goode.

Ms Bannister's recent victories at the Concert Artists Guild International Competition and the New Orleans International Piano Competition confirm her status among the leading pianists of her generation. Receiving further distinction as an "Artist to Watch" on the cover of *Symphony* magazine, Ms. Bannister has performed recitals at the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, Salle Cortot in Paris, Teatro Communale in Bologna, Tokyo's Nikkei Hall, London's Queen Elizabeth and Wigmore Halls, The Kennedy Center in Washington DC, and Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall.

Orchestral highlights of Ms. Bannister's 2011-2012 season included Liszt's Concerto No. 1 with the Orquesta Sinfónica Nacional in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, Chopin's Concerto No. 2 in E minor with the Greenwich (CT) Symphony, and Mozart's Concerto in E-flat, K. 449 with the Arcadiana Symphony in Louisiana. Recent appearances, warmly praised by the New York Times, included the highly

regarded Amelia Island Chamber Music Festival, Look and Listen Festival in New York, South Windsor Concert Series, and AlpenKammerMusik in Austria, where she also serves as Artistic Director.

Ms. Bannister's debut recording, featuring three late piano sonatas of Muzio Clementi, was released in 2006 on the Naxos label. *BBC Music Magazine* declared: "Barenboim's EMI Beethoven sonata cycle is readily brought to mind. Yet although she possesses enviable articulate and accurate fingers, she is also sensitive to the music's many lyrical asides." Her latest recording for Albany Records, *This is the story she began*, features solo piano music of American composers David Del Tredici, Christopher Theofanidis, Suzanne Farrin and Sheila Silver; the *New American Record Guide* complemented her as "exceptionally talented...with a scintillating tone and subtle sense of chording."

Ms. Bannister has a special affinity for contemporary music. Her three appearances on the CAG/New Works Series at the Thalia featured premieres of the above-mentioned works, and a piano quintet, also by Suzanne Farrin, for which Ms. Bannister was joined by CAG's Parker String Quartet. She recently formed a new two-piano/percussion ensemble called Hammer/Klavier with pianist Stephen Buck and percussionists Svet Stoyanov and Eduardo Leandro, and featured performances of this quartet include the Chautauqua Institution.

Other recent recital performances include her debut at the Kennedy Center on the WPAS series, a concert for Market Square Concerts (PA) and a her second recital at London's Wigmore Hall. As a concerto soloist, she recently performed Mozart's Concerto No. 21 and Beethoven's *Emperor* Concerto with the Louisiana Philharmonic, Mozart's Concerto No. 23 with the Harrisburg Symphony, the Shostakovich Concerto No. 2 with the Victoria Symphony (Texas) and Mozart's Concerto in E-flat for Two Pianos, K.365 with pianist Stephen Buck and the Westchester Philharmonic.

#### **4.9 Inon Barnatan**

Born in Tel Aviv in 1979, Inon Barnatan started playing the piano at the age of three after his parents discovered he had perfect pitch, and he made his orchestral debut at eleven. His studies connect him to some of the 20<sup>th</sup> century's most illustrious pianists and teachers: he studied with Professor Victor Derevianko, who himself studied with the Russian master Heinrich Neuhaus, and in 1997 he moved to London to study at the Royal Academy of Music with Maria Curcio – who was a student of the legendary Artur Schnabel – and with Christopher Elton. Leon Fleisher has also been an influential teacher and mentor and in 2004 he invited Mr. Barnatan to study and perform Schubert sonatas as part of a Carnegie Hall workshop.

Since moving to the United States in 2006 Mr. Barnatan has made his orchestral debuts with the Cincinnati, Cleveland, Houston, Philadelphia and San Francisco Symphony Orchestras, and has performed in New York at Carnegie Hall, the 92nd Street Y, the Metropolitan Museum and Alice Tully Hall. In 2009 he was awarded a prestigious Avery Fisher Career Grant, an honor reflecting the strong impression he has made on the American music scene in such a short period of time.

In addition to his American appearances, Mr. Barnatan has appeared as a soloist with the Amsterdam Sinfonietta, Israel Philharmonic Orchestra, Netherlands Chamber Orchestra, Orchestre de la Suisse Romande, Shanghai Symphony Orchestra, Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra, London Soloists Chamber Orchestra, Orchestra of New Europe, the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra and a tour with the Academy of St. Martin in the Fields as a conductor and soloist.

An avid chamber musician, Mr. Barnatan recently completed three seasons as a member of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center's CMS Two program. In 2009 he curated a festival of Schubert's late solo piano, songs and chamber music works for the Society, the first musician other than the Society's Artistic Directors to be invited to program concerts. 'The Schubert Project' program has also been performed at the Concertgebouw, the Festival de México, and at the Library of Congress.

Other chamber music performances include the complete Beethoven piano and violin sonatas at the Concertgebouw, the Bergen International Festival in Norway, the Vancouver Chamber Music Festival, the Delft and the Verbier Festivals and the Lyon Musicades. His rigorous U.S. festival schedule has included a broad range of concerts at the Spoleto Festival USA, the Aspen and Bridgehampton Music Festivals, and the Santa Fe and Seattle Chamber Music Festivals. He has collaborated with musicians such as Liza Ferschtman, Miriam Fried, Martin Fröst, Gary Hoffman, Janine Jansen, the Jerusalem String Quartet, Ralph Kirshbaum, Cho-Liang Lin, Paul Neubauer and Alisa Weilerstein. In 2008 he received the Andrew Wolf Memorial Award in Rockport, awarded every two years to an exceptional chamber music pianist.

Mr. Barnatan's 2011-12 season appearances included a solo performance as part of the Lincoln Center's *Great Performers* series, chamber music appearances in New York and a U.S. tour with the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center and West Coast recitals including opening the Music@Menlo Winter Series and performances at the Portland Piano International. He made orchestral appearances with the Billings, Chattanooga, Eugene, Jacksonville and Oregon Symphony Orchestras and the Nordwestdeutschen Philharmonie with repertoire spanning a wide range of composers, including Beethoven, Brahms, Mozart, Ravel, Saint-Saëns and Tchaikovsky. In February 2012 he embarked on an eight-city European tour with cellist Alisa Weilerstein, preceded by concerto and chamber performances in Israel, and he will also undertake a three-week concerto and recital tour of South Africa in November.

In 2012, Mr. Barnatan released his second solo recording, *Darkness Visible* featuring wide-ranging but thematically-related works: Ravel's *Gaspard de la Nuit*, Thomas Adès's *Darknesse Visible*, Debussy's *Suite Bergamasque*, Ronald Stevenson's *Peter Grimes Fantasy* and Ravel's *La Valse*. Intrigued by the fact that all of these works were inspired by other works of art (Ravel's *Gaspard* is based on three poems by Aloysius Bertrand; *Darknesse Visible* is based on a John Dowland song; Debussy was inspired by a Verlaine poem; Stevenson's *Peter Grimes Fantasy* is based on the Benjamin Britten opera; and *La Valse* is inspired by a story by Edgar

Allen Poe), Mr. Barnatan examines how different characteristics of darkness are represented in music.

Passionate about contemporary music, Mr. Barnatan regularly commissions and performs music by living composers, including works by Thomas Adès, George Benjamin, George Crumb, Avner Dorman, Kaija Saariaho and Judith Weir among others. Last season, he participated in Carnegie Hall's "Making Music: James MacMillan" series, performing the composer's Piano Sonata and chamber piece *Raising Sparks*.

Mr. Barnatan's debut CD of Schubert piano works was released on Bridge Records in 2006. London's *Evening Standard* wrote: "The young, Israeli born pianist Inon Barnatan is a true poet of the keyboard: refined, searching, unfailingly communicative... This is musicianship of the highest caliber." *Gramophone* recommended the recording in its November 2006 award issue, calling Barnatan "a born Schubertian" and praising the CD's "sensitivity, poise and focus." His second CD of works for piano and violin by Beethoven and Schubert with violinist Liza Ferschtman was described by *All Music Guide* as "a magical listening experience."

## Chapter 5

### Interviews with selected concert pianists

This chapter contains an analysis of the data collected from each performer, highlighting various common and conflicting views. The interviews have been divided into five major categories of questions:

1. Examination of pianists' early practice history
2. University level practice habits, techniques and influences
3. Examination of specific practice techniques
4. Thoughts on practicing two weeks prior to a performance
5. Last thoughts on practice

The comments are discussed before a concluding analysis for each category is made.

#### 5.1 Examination of pianists' early practice history

The first category of questions concerns the early practice history of each pianist, inquiring about how their first teachers taught them to practice before they went to university. I asked each artist to summarize the ideas, habits, influences, and techniques they had regarding practicing at this early stage in their lives. A few of the common techniques which were mentioned by the artists were: they were all taught to use the metronome to some extent; they all mention slow-practice with varying levels of intensity and sophistication; many of them started using rhythms at this time, again at different levels of complexity; and a few mentioned hands-separate practice.

Four of the artists in this study –Andrew, Spencer, Inon, and Soyeon— all stated that they did not have a very structured, systematic way to practice before university. Andrew studied with his first teacher for ten years and her primary advice was to practice slowly. She would always tell him that slow practice is like “putting money in the bank,” and playing at full tempo is like “spending the money.” If one always

plays at full speed, one will quickly run out of “money.” He never used the rhythms, metronome or hands-separate types of practicing. Andrew went to study with Daniel Pollack when he was fifteen, and was given much stricter technical exercises to strengthen his hand. Pollack also talked about the “intentionality” of slow practice, and the importance of listening carefully to every detail and every voice while practicing slowly.

Spencer also studied with his first teacher for ten years. Her motto was to “play everything hands separately, working everything up on the metronome from 60-120.” He says he did not use this generalized system, and would usually simply play his pieces through again and again until they were ready. Spencer feels he missed quite a few important details at this time, but as he was a good performer and a good sight-reader, he got away with it.

Inon grew up in Tel Aviv, and his first teacher’s only practical advice was to practice slowly. When he was fourteen he switched to a Russian teacher at the conservatory in Tel Aviv who insisted on cleaner playing, giving some advice on how to do this, but without specifics. Inon was also a great sight-reader, he thus missed some details in his earlier years, but he believes it was a good thing to learn how to “enjoy the music” before going into too much detail. He believes most children quit the piano as they are pushed to practice too cautiously, often driven to focus on too many details, thus sacrificing the enjoyment of playing.

Soyeon relates that her early teachers never taught her how to practice. She never used the metronome, or rhythms, or hands-separate practice. She was not a great sight-reader when she was young, so she listened to a lot of recordings and tried to play through her pieces until they resembled a similar type of sound as she heard on the recordings. She did not use these recordings in order to “copy” them; they were used only as a reference for a standard of playing. Soyeon went to the Interlochen High School for musicians which formed the foundation of her musical training, but says she was not shown how to practice there either.

Overall these four pianists seem to have all dabbled with some of the above-mentioned practice techniques, but their basic impression of their early playing

habits is that they played their pieces over and over until they were at a reasonably proficient level, and good enough for acceptance into the top music schools. They all stated that they didn't learn much at all about practicing during these early years.

The next four artists –Orion, Konstantin, Vassily, and Tanya—were given more structured backgrounds regarding practice. Vassily and Konstantin came out of the strict Russian School, both growing up in Moscow and studying at two of the most prominent music schools for young students; the Central Special Music School, and the Gnessin Institute, respectively. Vassily began his piano studies at the late age of eight. His mother, who was a pianist, was wary of pushing her son into this difficult career, but he persisted and persuaded her to let him begin his studies. Within three years he was the youngest student ever accepted by Vera Gornostaeva at the Central Special Music School. His mother continued to supervise his practice daily until he was about fourteen. As he was closely supervised by his mother, Gornostaeva, and her assistant, he is one of the few pianists who said he was quite aware of how to practice properly when he went to university. He was instructed to use all the tools of metronome, rhythm, and slow practice, and he was able to refine this during his high school years.

Konstantin studied with many teachers at the Gnessin School, coming into contact with a wide range of both good and bad teaching. One early teacher insisted he should not move his wrists at all, and would put a coin on them for testing this. He then went to a student of Goldenweiser who showed him many different ways to use rhythms. Konstantin believes he was given a “blueprint” of how to practice according to the principles of the Russian School, but this “blueprint,” while perhaps helping most technical issues, did not help many pianists to grow musically.

Orion also had a carefully managed early career. He studied with many teachers before beginning to study with Paul Schenly at the Cleveland Institute of Music when he was 14. He started working with rhythms when he was nine and had a teacher at the Interlochen summer academy who showed him how to carefully work up tempi with the metronome, giving him specific speeds to achieve each week. Schenly taught him about high finger and hands separate practice, so at a young age he was exposed to most of the tools artists use. Orion also rigorously used these

techniques in high school and was quite competent at practicing by the time he reached university.

Tanya grew up in Hong Kong and her early practice was very tightly controlled. She practiced three hours a day, every day, with constant supervision from the age of six to twelve. She moved to London for one year and studied with Christopher Elton at the Royal Academy of Music, and then moved to Kansas where she worked with Sequeira Costa until she went to university. Costa brought up ideas of practicing different colours and sounds, and practicing away from the instrument using only her mind. Tanya believes he taught her how to “listen” to herself when she practiced, and how to “practice with intelligence,” not just sitting hour after hour pounding away at the instrument, but being aware of every detail, every second she was working. She does not think she achieved this full concentrated capacity at that age, although he pointed her in the right direction.

This second group of pianists had more intensive studies at earlier ages and were exposed to more of the “tools” of practice in comparison with the first four pianists. Some other differences that emerge include: pianists in the second group had more early teachers; they often had more than one lesson per week, perhaps giving them more exposure to the ideas pertaining to efficient practice; they practiced more hours during their early years in comparison with the first four artists.

## **5.2 University level practice habits, techniques and influences**

The second category of questions concerns the general practice habits, techniques, and influences during each pianist’s university level education. The first question in this category asked if the pianists were more competent at practice during their university years, or whether they still struggled to find efficient methods for practice. Considering the different practice histories these pianists brought with them to their respective universities, they all stated that they wasted significant practice time during their university years.

A few common ideas emerged from their selection of answers: many of the pianists felt they spent a lot of time learning repertoire at this stage of their lives, not fully exploring the depth of detail in the music; only two of the pianists (Tanya and

Soyeon) said they had a professor who talked about practicing in any meaningful, strategic way; and all the pianists felt they were “on their own” as far as knowing how to practice.

Vassily and Andrew had similar comments and experiences during this time. Both said they specifically focused on learning a significant amount of new repertoire. Andrew had felt it was possibly more important during these years to learn about being an artist, to explore the world, and learn about music, rather than find the most efficient way to practice. Vassily also found the university environment different as fast learning was encouraged, often at the expense of musical details. He stated that in Russia he could bring the same piece to a lesson week after week, but that his teacher at Juilliard encouraged him to bring many different pieces quite often and he was therefore pushed to prepare pieces at a much quicker pace. He was capable of handling a lot of repertoire exploration, but this issue of forced fast learning at university will be explored later in this chapter.

The other pianists made many related comments concerning the lack of direction and instruction with their practice during university. Orion believed he certainly wasted time, but was not sure how to quantify how much time was wasted, or which types of practicing wasted his time. Spencer also felt he learned a lot of repertoire, but lacking detail as he still was not sure how to practice. Konstantin believed his teacher was good at initiating the right thought-process regarding practice, but felt he did not give any specifics on how to practically achieve this. Inon believes most people waste a lot of time during these years of their life, himself included. He stated that he was often told when something was wrong with his playing, but he was often not shown how to fix the problems or how to practice correctly. Tanya felt that she was often not “present” in her mind while spending hours at the keyboard, and Soyeon stated she must have wasted “at least half of my practice time at Juilliard.”

The second question inquired whether their university professors had showed them ways to economize their practice, and most pianists said they received little or no instruction concerning this. Andrew, Spencer, Vassily, Konstantin, Orion, and Inon all stated they received virtually no advice on how to practice. It was assumed that

each pianist knew what he or she was doing, and that giving practice advice was not necessary.

Tanya spent one year of university in Hanover where she studied with Karl-Heinz Kämmerling. She believes he was the only teacher who gave her specific plans and ideas on how to practice. She then went to Yale where again no one spoke about practice. Soyeon eventually switched professors to study with Robert MacDonald in her final years at The Juilliard School, and she stated that he was her only teacher who gave very specific instructions on how to practice. She said he practiced “with me” in her lessons, showing her continually how to make sure every note had been accounted for and had enough weight and follow-through.

The final question in this category inquired if the pianists had ever spoken about or discussed practicing with friends or colleagues. Orion, Spencer, and Konstantin spoke at length with others about practicing; Inon, Soyeon and Tanya also mentioned some discussion with others, and Andrew and Vassily had not generally discussed practicing with others. Inon believes this is a perplexing discussion to have with other young artists as many pianists can be guarded about their practice, often over-stating or under-stating the amount of practice they actually do, “depending on their psychosis”. He also found it very beneficial when he knew someone else was listening to his practice as it heightened his awareness. He used to invite a friend to practice in the next room knowing that at any moment this friend might be listening to the quality of his work. Spencer found there were a number of different “schools” of piano playing at university, specifically the French, Russian and Taubman approaches to the keyboard. He stated that he had many fascinating discussions with colleagues and that he was allowed to sit in on many lessons which utilized these different methods.

Tanya discovered through some of her discussions that many successful pianists did not leave practicing to the last minute. Often talented artists can learn very quickly, but one can never replace the amount of time needed for a piece to be in prime shape. She states she was always able to leave things to the last minute, but that her performances were not as great as they could have been, and now she makes a concerted effort to plan her practice schedule more carefully.

### **5.3 Examination of specific practice techniques**

The interview contained a series of questions which specifically examined the types of practice each pianist uses or does not use. Answers were given throughout the interviews addressing this topic, but a focused presentation of the different types of practice will be addressed here.

There are five loosely-categorized methods in which these pianists tend to practice:

1. Hands separate
2. Rhythm practice
3. Using a metronome
4. Slow practice
5. Playing through

#### **5.3.1 Hands separate**

Hands separate practice was discussed by all eight pianists. Orion was the only pianist who stated he has never really utilized hands separate practice. Andrew and Inon both stated that they would occasionally use this technique for difficult passages, but that it was not one of their preferred practice methods. Spencer used this technique quite often, especially in his high school years. It was not one of his main strategies in his earlier university years, but he now finds it extremely helpful in his current practicing regimes. Vassily stated that he also often used hands separate practice in his youth, as part of the Russian system required students to specifically practice Bach fugues using all different combinations of different voices, often leading to hands-separate practice.

Konstantin stated that he uses this technique much more often now in his later years. He discussed how being aware of every detail of each hand helped enhance the musicality, artistry and security of each performance. Soyeon did not use the technique in her youth until a colleague at a summer festival mentioned to her that he would often play entire pieces through with each hand separately. Initially she thought it would be a waste of time for her to do this, but she quickly realized how much it helped, especially with left hand memory issues. Tanya also utilizes this technique in her current work as she also believes it is a vital tool for securing

memory, specifically in the left hand. Both Tanya and Soyeon stated that most memory problems originate with left hand insecurities.

One of the main problems with this technique is that it can take a long time to learn a piece, and therefore it is not perhaps the most economical way of practicing. Every pianist saw some value in the technique, but some were not prepared to use their time exploiting it.

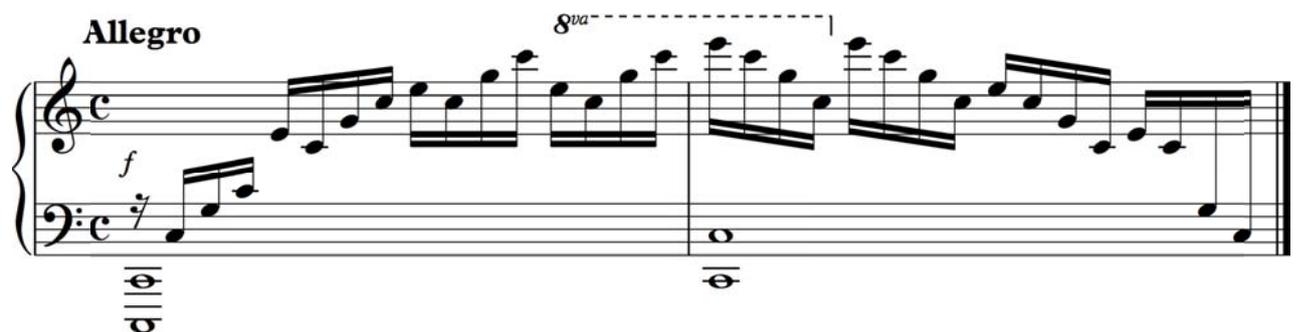
### 5.3.2 Rhythm practice

Rhythm practice is by far the most complex and one of the most utilized practice techniques discussed by the pianists. There are many different varieties of rhythm practice, and there are infinite ways to group and re-group musical patterns in using this device.

Orion is the most avid user of different types of rhythm practice. He was shown how to use rhythms when he was nine years old and has continually relied on them as his primary practice method. The most basic use of the tool is to use dotted and inverted dotted rhythms with a passage as illustrated below: The first two measures of Chopin's Etude No. 1 Op. 10 No. 1 will be used to demonstrate the varying rhythmic combinations:

#### Chopin Etude No. 1 Op. 10 No. 1

(Example 1)



This example below shows the first variation using a dotted rhythm:

(Example 2)

Allegro

*f*

8<sup>va</sup>

This musical score is for a piano piece in common time (C) with an **Allegro** tempo. It features a first variation using a dotted rhythm. The piece begins with a forte (*f*) dynamic. The right hand plays a sequence of eighth notes with a dotted rhythm, while the left hand provides a steady accompaniment. An *8<sup>va</sup>* (octave) marking is present above the right-hand staff. The score is divided into two measures by a bar line.

This example below shows the second variation of using an inverted dotted rhythm:

(Example 3)

Allegro

*f*

8<sup>va</sup>

This musical score is for a piano piece in common time (C) with an **Allegro** tempo. It features a second variation using an inverted dotted rhythm. The piece begins with a forte (*f*) dynamic. The right hand plays a sequence of eighth notes with an inverted dotted rhythm, while the left hand provides a steady accompaniment. An *8<sup>va</sup>* (octave) marking is present above the right-hand staff. The score is divided into two measures by a bar line.

The next level of sophistication is to break the passage into groups of four (or three if triplets), stopping on each note in the sequence:

(Example 4)

Allegro

*f*

8<sup>va</sup>

This musical score is for a piano piece in common time (C) with an **Allegro** tempo. It features a third variation where the passage is broken into groups of four notes, stopping on each note. The piece begins with a forte (*f*) dynamic. The right hand plays a sequence of eighth notes in groups of four, with a slur over each group and a fermata over the final note of each group. The left hand provides a steady accompaniment. An *8<sup>va</sup>* (octave) marking is present above the right-hand staff. The score is divided into two measures by a bar line.

(Example 5)

**Allegro**  
*f*  
8<sup>va</sup>

(Example 6)

**Allegro**  
*f*  
8<sup>va</sup>

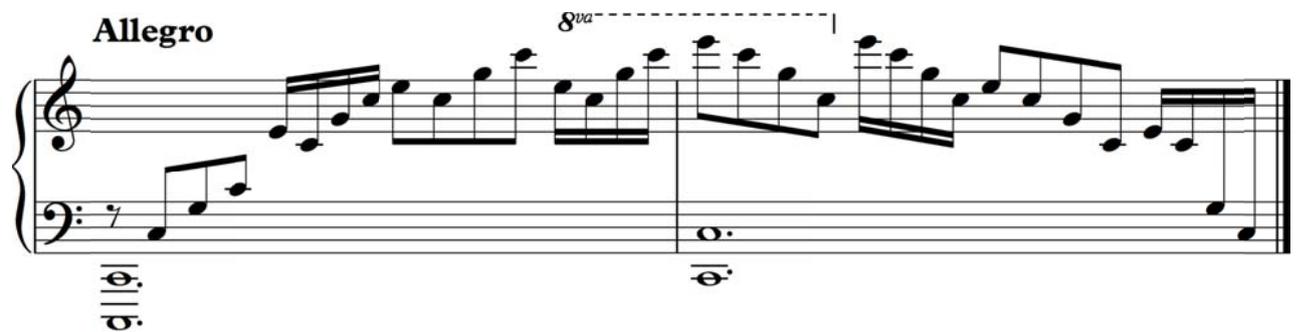
(Example 7)

**Allegro**  
*f*  
8<sup>va</sup>

Stephen Hough also uses these above-mentioned techniques, but the variations on them he suggested in Chapter 3 are printed below:

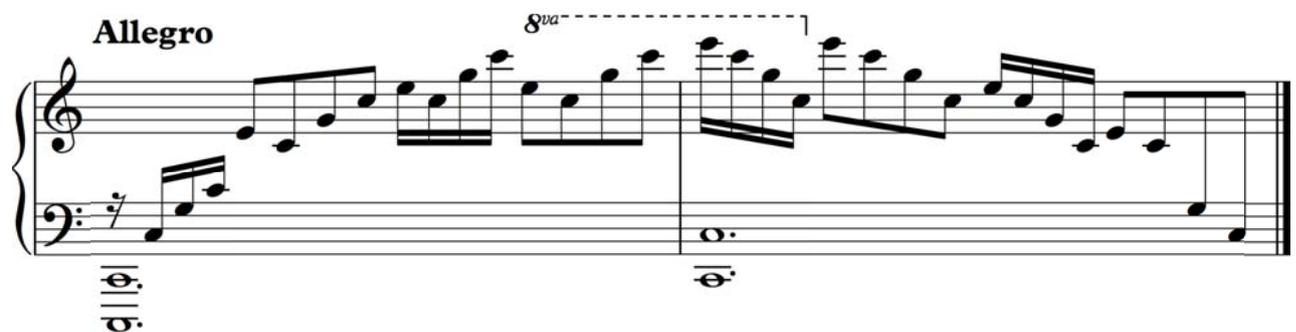
(Example 8)

**Allegro**



(Example 9)

**Allegro**



In Stravinski's *Petrouchka*, there are many awkward groupings of fives and sevens, often interspersed with other rhythmic groupings. In his earlier high school and university years, Orion would often practice each combination of different rhythms. He eventually stopped playing *Petrouchka* as the endless possibilities of rhythmic combinations finally exhausted him.

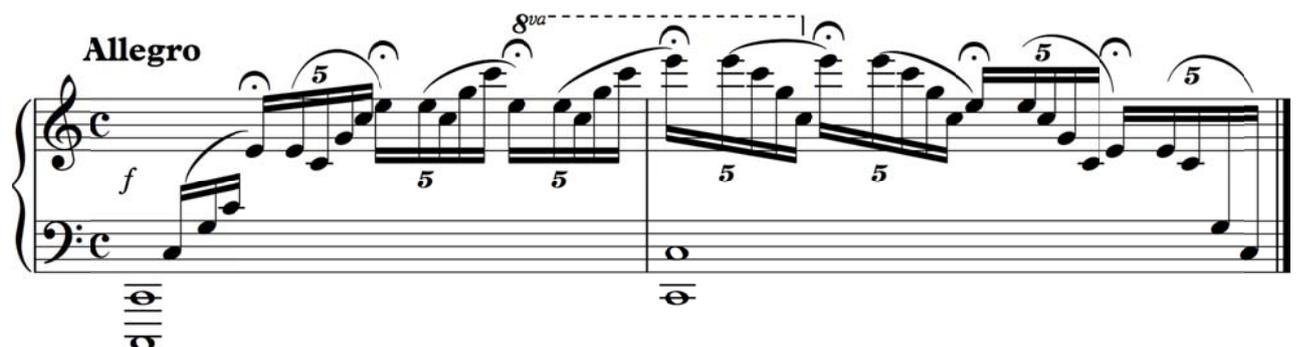
Orion even uses this type of rhythmic practice in slow movements, and famously (at Juilliard) would even use it in the slow movement of Beethoven's *Hammerklavier* Sonata Op. 106. He believes the rhythms focus his attention toward the music more than straight-forward slow practice, and he finds ways to manipulate these rhythms in every type of music. None of the other pianists use this technique quite to this level, but he is quite confident and convinced of its rewards and securities. He admittedly does not currently use the rhythms to the full extent he did in his earlier days, but he still focuses the majority of his work around this technique.

Konstantin uses similar rhythmic techniques, but also describes another technique which was shown to him by Jerome Lowenthal at Juilliard of exaggeratedly dropping the wrist on selected rhythmic beats. One could play a semi-quaver passage, first dropping the wrist on every single note, then every second, every fourth, and so on. This technique allows a significant amount of arm weight to be built into fast passages which tend to “get away from” the pianist if an insufficient amount of arm weight is not distributed correctly throughout each and every note of the passage. He mentions that he exclusively used these techniques for many years and felt they ultimately limited him. One has to know how and when to use these devices, and when to leave them.

Vassily used similar configurations of the rhythms above combined with staccato practice during his youth. He believes he does not need to rely on them the way he used to, but he will often use rhythmic techniques with a piece he knows “too well,” as it can help put the piece back into a rhythmic focus, removing his tendencies to continually rush.

Tanya studied with Karl Heinz Kämmerling who is well known for advocating rhythm practice. Kämmerling also has his students use the above-mentioned rhythmic methods but with one extra practice technique; instead of playing four notes immediately succeeded by the next set of four notes, one repeats the last note of the group when starting the next group to overemphasize the weight on each stop (effectively playing groups of five notes instead of only four):

(Example 10)



Once a student has moved through all combinations of the four configurations using Kämmerling's practice technique, each note has additionally been emphasized through one extra repetition. Kämmerling would spend the beginning of each lesson showing students how to use these rhythms to help them with their practice.

Spencer is another major advocate for rhythm practice. He stated that he did not use this technique in his earlier years, but currently he heavily relies on it for cleaning up technical sections. He uses the dotted, inverted dotted, and the stop-method for triplets, but does not go into as many variations as described above. Inon spoke about using rhythms with certain types of music, but spoke more at length about using appropriate practice techniques with corresponding musical sections. He believes that exclusively using rhythms for every type of music can be harmful and waste valuable time.

Soyeon is the only pianist who is opposed to rhythms. She never used them in her early years, and feels they limit her musicality. She believes her ear stops listening to every note when using the rhythmic groupings and the work becomes purely technical instead of artistic. She is not opposed to others using rhythms, but was quite emphatic they did not work for her.

### **5.3.3 Using a metronome**

The metronome plays a curious role in the practice methods of these pianists. They were all taught to use it in their early years, but some now hate to use it, while others still find it quite helpful. Orion used the metronome very often in his early years and is still happy to use it when necessary. Spencer also used the metronome in his youth and will also use it today if needed, but generally only in classical or baroque works for a relative sense of pulse. Inon and Vassily will use the metronome if necessary in suitable technical sections. Konstantin stated he rarely used the metronome in his youth and said he always hated to use it. He said the pianists of the older generation always tried to "sing" the music as a singer would, using a flexible sense of pulse, and he believes the metronome kills the flexibility of the musical line, and so he rarely uses it today. Tanya grew up with an abundance of strict metronome work, but now completely refuses to use it. Andrew occasionally

used the metronome in his youth, and also never uses it today. Soyeon never worked with the metronome in her youth and never currently uses it.

It seems that half of the pianists are interested in the benefits of metronome work, and the other half are completely opposed to its use. They admit that there is certainly a decline in the musical level when one plays with a metronome, but many of these pianists still feel the technical gain is worth the temporary un-musicality of their metronomic exercise.

#### **5.3.4 Slow practice**

Slow practice is certainly the most utilized tool for practicing. It is a difficult subject to examine as slow practice can mean many different things. Pianists most generally play slowly while working with the other techniques, so slow playing is somewhat incorporated into each of the previous methods. Most of the pianists had surprisingly few comments about slow practice, even though it is arguably the most common stated way of practicing. One of the main problems with slow practice, especially in the early years, is that pianists often equate slow speed with slow energy, or lack of intensity. Many of the pianists talked about the moment when they realized how to practice slowly with an inner intensity that was equivalent to the energy they would use if they were playing quickly. Tanya mentions that Kämmerling was very good at working with students at this slow speed, showing them how to keep the intensity while playing slow. Soyeon also talked about how Robert MacDonald spent a great majority of the time in a lesson working on how to practice slowly with appropriate intensity.

There are two main reasons to use slow practice: firstly for primarily technical reasons, allowing the hands and fingers to be placed over the notes in time, and secondly for musical reasons, where velocity ceases to be the final goal, and a maximization of the musical detail is brought into focus. Most pianists talked about a growing awareness of the inter-relationship of each note to each other note, and this relationship can be most fully explored in slow, concentrated playing. This ability is somewhat idiomatic to pianists (and conductors) as most other instrumentalists are usually only concerned with one note moving to the next. As pianists become more aware of these relational details between the notes, their appreciation of slow

practice continually grows. They find they are able to put more detail into a piece while working with it slowly as they have time to think and adjust at these slow speeds. So many of the integrated fast passages require very little thought in performance. Many of the pianists stated there is often no time to think during the execution of these types of fast passages. All the details need to have been worked out slowly beforehand, for both technical and musical reasons.

### **5.3.5 Playing through**

Playing through is the final practicing method. In theory, this type of playing perhaps should not be classified as practice, but a few comments on the practice of playing through should be mentioned.

Many of the pianists discussed how they often played through their music too often, especially in their early years when they were unaware of all the musical detail they were missing. Inon, Soyeon, Spencer, and Andrew all played through their music quite often in their early years. However, as all of the pianists grew to understand and explore deeper levels of musical detail, some of them became so focused on these details that they often forgot about the practice of playing through. Some of the pianists had a few bad performances where they had not utilized the practice of playing through enough. Spencer speaks of a performance class where his teacher commented afterward to him, “it sounded like you were still practicing.” Inon says university pianists usually practice “either too slowly (not playing through enough), or too quickly (playing through too often), both of which land them in a lousy performance.”

Andrew believes there is a limit to beneficial slow practice; real technique is developed by playing at full speed. He believes it is very important to play through pieces in their entirety, especially large ones, at full speed with performance spirit to practice “holding the line”. No amount of slow detailed work can help this very necessary component of a successful performance, and once a piece has been “detailed”, he believes it needs a number of real play-throughs to solidify the overall conception of the work. He also believes executing technical sections in a larger context also reveals strengths and weaknesses of a performance as it is easy to execute difficult sections in practice, but one really only finds out how solid a section

is when they encounter it for the first time in context. In contrast, Soyeon makes an effort not to play through too much. She has always been a natural performer and believes she did this too often when she was younger. Her continual focus is on the detail, and she believes the spirit of the moment in her performances will successfully guide her.

### **5.3.6 Unhelpful practice techniques**

The pianists were asked if there were any techniques which they thought were unhelpful or harmful. Three did not comment, but the others had a few thoughts. Konstantin thought scales and Hanon were a waste of time. He believes that instead of wasting time with exercises which have no musical value, one could easily play Chopin Etudes. He also is very opposed to fortissimo banging, a technique which is quite popular with many Russians which descended from the Lebert and Stark method. While developing some finger strength, it kills musicality and often leads to hand injuries. Vassily was opposed to high finger practice. This is a common technique, not mentioned by most pianists in this study, but one which is practiced quite frequently by pianists throughout the world. He believes one should find the most efficient way to move a finger from one note to the next, and raising the finger very high in between this procedure is a waste of time and energy. Inon was also opposed to slow, loud, deliberate fortissimo practice. He believes many pianists, even at top music schools, still have an ingrained mentality of technique first, then music. Students will often hammer in all the notes slowly, loudly, and deliberately, and then start to work on shaping the musical details. He believes this to be a total waste of time. Tanya found metronome practice unhelpful as it caused her to “switch off” musically. Soyeon was opposed to the rhythms, also stating they ruined her musicality.

The pianists were asked if there were any specific ways in which they must be able to play technically challenging sections in practice before they were confident to perform them in public. A few interesting answers emerged: Orion stated that most pianists often warm-up slowly right before they go on stage. He mentioned that he had a violinist friend who always warms up at full tempo before he goes on stage citing that the adrenaline rush can be too jolting if one has only been warming up slowly. To walk out under pressure and suddenly play quickly when one has only

been playing slowly does not work for him. Andrew states that no matter how much he practices, he always finds a few things that surprise him in a first performance, especially in leap passages. He believes focusing on the musicality of an exposed technical section often takes away much of the fear associated with it. Konstantin uses the psychology of overcompensation. He tries to practice faster tempos than he would ever perform, and then on stage he feels capable of controlling an 80% or 90% speed, knowing he could play it faster if he wanted to. He also applies this psychology to leap passages, practicing jumps faster than he would ever perform them. Vassily states that pianists can handicap themselves by trying to play any of the difficult sections too quickly. They get nervous and end up playing faster than they should, which makes it even more difficult to execute. Inon's advice was to make sure one can perform any section three or four times in a row, flawlessly. Pianists often underestimate the performance pressure, and being able to play something once in practice is not enough. He is much more confident to execute a difficult passage knowing he can play it in practice three or four times in a row. Soyeon believes if every note has been accounted for with intention and follow-through (weight), she usually does not have a problem with technical sections in performance.

The final question in this category asked if they had ever experimented with their practice habits, especially if they were trying to manage a significant amount of repertoire at one time. Orion believes he has always been obsessed with the way he practices and is constantly looking for more efficient ways to work on repertoire. Andrew says that in preparing for important concerts he tries to spend enough time with the pieces so that memory is not an issue. He states that the music must "be in his blood." If one is worrying about memory, one will not have the confidence to say something really interesting. Konstantin and Tanya both said they try and make smart decisions concerning repertoire. It was often impressive at school to learn something very quickly and play it for performances. Now in the professional world, if they have programmed too many new pieces and over-extended themselves, there is a good chance they may not play that well and will not be asked to come back. Inon believes it is very important to be over-prepared, especially if one is going on tour as practice facilities are often hard to arrange. There is very little time to fix problems in your program on tour.

#### 5.4 Thoughts on practicing two weeks prior to a performance

The following three sections investigate the different ways pianists practice at three varying times; two weeks prior, one day prior, and the day of a performance. All the pianists were asked if they ever set up their own practice performances for friends or colleagues before they perform on a professional stage and all the artists were strikingly convinced that this is an essential tool for successful performances. Orion will often set up run-throughs at a couple of different friends' homes, especially if he is giving a performance at a major venue without any "warm-up" performances. He says he likes to get a sense of his own nervousness in front of other people with the different works he will perform. He also records these run-throughs and listens to them. Andrew speaks of Rubinstein and how he would pay his doorman to come up and listen to new pieces he was about to perform, even though the doorman did not know anything about music. Just the human presence in the room changed the dynamics of Rubinstein's trial performances. Andrew also warns of carefully selecting *who* listens to these run-throughs. One must find a colleague who ideally holds the same musical principals, and knows what to say and what not to say. If one is performing in the next day or two, comments requiring a re-think of entire interpretations will be counter-productive. Spencer says he also feels better if he has performed his pieces for a small audience first, although if this is not possible, through experience he is more aware of how nervous he will be and can practice combating this to some extent in the practice room. He also says if he cannot play for a small audience, he will make sure to record a practice play-through before a concert.

Konstantin also tries to play his pieces through for friends before he performs them on stage. He states that it is very helpful to have warm-up concerts before big concerts even though things can happen on the big stage that do not happen in smaller concerts or while practicing. Vassily will also perform for friends or often sets up run-throughs at retirement homes if he needs to. He states that while practicing he can often lose perspective and finds himself at a stage where he only hears bad things in his playing. When he goes to play for people, it can revive his sense of spontaneity and purpose. This audience does not have to give any comments, the experience itself is uplifting and educational.

Inon says he will try new things out for friends, if possible, but sometimes it just is not possible. In school, the performance classes were always available to try new pieces, but now that he is finished with school, it can sometimes be difficult to arrange small play-throughs. He also often records himself and these trial run-throughs. Tanya also plays for friends if possible, and continually realizes how valuable the performance classes at school were in bringing performances to higher levels. Soyeon often returns to The Juilliard School where she will try out new and old pieces for David Dubal's evening division classes. He allows current and former students to try new pieces in these classes, and a significant number of Juilliard alumni use these classes continually for this purpose.

The next question asked the artists: if they were giving a recital in Carnegie Hall in two weeks time, how would they approach practicing their programs. Assuming they would all perform works they knew quite well, the question also asked what they might do to keep their music fresh and alive. Orion said he would try and set up two run-throughs, probably having a little break from the pieces for a day or two after the first run-through. Andrew spoke of a few experiences he had had with big performances. He played Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto No. 2 on tour thirteen times one summer. After a few performances, he said he did not even have to practice certain parts of the concerto. He would just practice sections of it slowly without too much intensity, otherwise he would not have anything inspirational to give to the performance, especially toward the end of the tour. He also recently performed a tour with Sarah Chang where they played the same program in 30 different cities around the world. They would often practice a movement or two in the hall before, but most of the program was not practiced very much. His main comment was that a performance has to have a spontaneity and life about it, and practicing too much can kill that spark.

Spencer believes in working through the pieces in a very detailed way which allows him to leave a particular piece for a day or two without causing too many problems. If a piece on the program does go stale, he will set it aside for a few days and then it usually finds a new energy. Konstantin talks about pianists generally over-practicing and over-worrying about performances. He tries to gain perspective during this time

and remembers that he is only playing a musical performance. Doctors have much more serious “performances” to fulfil, and when they make mistakes, people die, go blind, and become handicapped. Pianists might have a memory slip, or play sloppily, but this is “not the end of the world” to him. Even in the big halls, one might get a bad review, but even this is forgotten about a few weeks later.

Vassily talks about completely leaving a piece alone if it becomes stale. He may also go to play for a respected friend or an old teacher if he needs some inspirational feedback. Inon says one must know when to practice and when not to practice. He will often play his pieces in different keys if he is getting bored with a work. He said he would certainly do at least one big play-through for friends if he was going to perform a Carnegie recital. He also feels that bigger venues are often more motivational than scary as they inspire him to play on a higher level.

Tanya, Soyeon, and Konstantin all try and listen to inspirational artists before they play big concerts. Konstantin enjoys going to the Metropolitan Opera, Tanya listens to the conductor Carlos Kleiber, and Soyeon often listens to Horowitz. They all stated that these inspirational performers and performances raise their own artistic levels and standards right before major concerts.

### **5.5 Practice and preparation the day before and the day of a concert**

The pianists were asked a series of specific questions inquiring how they spend the day before and the day of a concert practicing and preparing, including the psychological and physical elements of preparation. Beginning with the day before, the pianists made a few comments about what they would do and what they would not do concerning their practice. Spencer, Konstantin, and Soyeon made strong points about not playing through their programs the day before (unless the program is very new). Konstantin emphasized that he prefers to save the “performance” for the performance, and playing through the day before can be deleterious to his performance psychology for a real concert. He likened it to the fact that the Metropolitan Opera often invites an audience for their dress rehearsals, and a stage manager will come out and announce that the singers will hold back with their voices for physical and emotional reasons.

Orion gave an account of his preparation for his New York debut recital where over-practicing nearly destroyed his performance. He had just performed Chopin's First Piano Concerto six nights in a row with the Israeli Philharmonic and he had to fly back to New York to play his debut four days later. Toward the end of the day before this debut, he remembers lying on the bed, paralyzed, unable to practice or even move. He had not even practiced the second half of his program as he had already exhausted himself practicing the pieces from the first half. He went to bed at six and slept until noon the day of the concert, still unable to play. Only two hours prior to his concert did he feel that he had the strength to sit at the piano. The performance went pretty well, but he learned a valuable lesson in over-preparation. He now leaves out some of the rhythm techniques which used to be too exhausting and tries to practice everything on the day before, also generally not playing through at performance intensity. Andrew was not so concerned about specific practice techniques the day before. There were a few other suggestions of techniques to avoid on the day before. Orion warned that changing fingerings the day before a concert is a very risky idea, as one day is often not enough time to ingrain such a physical change in the brain, especially in quick passages. Inon spoke of avoiding too much advice on the day before as one's conception of a work can be shaken if given another perspective too close to a concert.

The pianists were asked more detailed questions addressing issues on performance days. Every pianist was convinced that practicing too much on the performance day was a serious problem. Andrew spoke of this issue citing multiple times where he practiced too much on a concert day and lost energy and concentration for his performances. He believes that even if there are technical problems which should be addressed, it is more important to leave these and be fully rested for the concert. Konstantin felt he "walked" through many performances where he had practiced too much. Soyeon felt that when she was younger she could practice more on the day of a concert, but now feels she does not play as well if too tired from practice. All the pianists mentioned that there have been times when they were so unprepared that there was no choice but to practice all day on a performance day, but ideally this was not the most successful way to practice. Vassily mentioned that in these extreme cases where there was not enough time to be thoroughly prepared, one has to try and not think too much in the performance, letting the muscle reflexes do as

much of the work as possible. He finds the more he concentrates in an unprepared performance, the worse it usually goes.

The pianists were asked how they warmed up and for how long. These first comments were contingent on whether the performance was an orchestral or solo appearance. Considering solo performances first, they all gave very similar answers. Most liked to work for a few hours in the morning or early afternoon, and then rest until the concert. There were some slight variations in comments for this popular form of practice. Orion feels most secure if he can play everything on his program where as Inon, Andrew, and Vassily stated they would not play everything on the program. Not one of the pianists suggested working at full speed for this final practice. The protocol can differ somewhat if a concerto is being performed. Often the dress rehearsal occurs the morning of a performance, so pianists have to almost “perform” in this rehearsal. Konstantin makes a point of telling a conductor that he will not “play out” fully in order to save his “performance.” Most of the pianists stated they would practice a bit before this rehearsal, perhaps a little afterward, and then rest for the afternoon before the performance.

The final warm-up occurs just before the pianist walks on stage. All the pianists said they like at least 30 minutes to warm-up, and perhaps longer if they are performing a large concerto or long recital. There was some variety concerning what these pianists would do during these final minutes. Orion spoke of the importance of practicing the opening quite a few times as these initial moments are the most difficult in dealing with nervous energy. He studied with Emanuel Ax and stated he remembered hearing Mr. Ax practicing an opening over and over again of a concerto he was about to play. Andrew only hits various sections slowly without too much intensity. Spencer also usually focuses most of this time on technical sections, working through them slowly. He also commented that if he had access to a piano at intermission, he would only practice his first half material in his warm up, and he would practice some of the second half material at intermission. Konstantin said he would also work on technical sections, but might play something else to get his fingers moving but his mind off what he was going to perform. Vassily, Soyeon and Inon also had similar comments stating they might play other music other than what they would be performing. Soyeon commented that she does not like to play too

much of the program in case she finds a problem spot which psychologically can be unnerving just prior a performance.

The pianists were subsequently asked if there were any routines of mental preparation they went through during this last hour to calm their nerves or boost their confidence. There were some wonderful comments, practical and philosophical, which highlight each pianist's journey through years of these difficult moments. Orion tries to "sound good" for himself as he is warming up. If what he plays sounds interesting to him, he gains confidence. He tells himself that wrong notes are not the enemy and concerts are not a win-or-lose situation. Reminding himself of the philosophical principal of possibility, there must be the chance of a bad performance to create the chance of a great performance. Nothing fantastic can happen on stage without the possibility of something catastrophic also happening. If something goes wrong in a performance, he tries to forget about it by "grabbing hold of" the next phrase with even more tenacity and focus.

Andrew tries to remind himself that every performance, every hall, and every audience is different. One must forget about dress rehearsals (good or bad), past performances and be "in the moment". He also talks of the danger of trying to re-create other successful performances of your own, or others. Each concert is its own unique event and one must give what the moment requires.

Spencer's most calming exercise is to sit quietly with the score for a few minutes. He also may do this at intermission warning of a common problem of letting down one's guard, especially after a successful first half. Breathing is also an important component of a performance and he often reminds himself to breathe deeply to stay calm. He also comments about his psychology concerning wrong notes or memory slips. If he does have a slip or hits some sloppy passages, he will start to sing the music in his head, as loud as possible, until the adrenaline goes away and the mistake is forgotten. Konstantin tries to distract himself prior to a performance with some pleasant, or philosophical thoughts. If he can access the internet, he'll watch something sublime or ridiculous on YouTube.

Vassily recounts some advice he once received from a friend who is a jazz-rock singer. He was told to look at himself in the mirror and tell himself he looks great, he will play fantastically, and any other combination of ridiculous comments that will boost his confidence. One must not second-guess oneself in a concert, and it is much better to err on the side of over-confidence. If one is going to walk on stage and command everyone's attention for two hours, one has to believe in oneself, and he believes there is a certain level of vanity in the whole procedure. Vassily finally warns that after the concert, one must "return to earth" and back to a relatively humble state in order to judge how the performance really went. One must not try and judge oneself while on stage.

Inon also knows artists who motivate themselves by telling themselves they are Jesse Norman, or some other famous person right before a performance. However, he does not prefer this technique of confidence boosting and tries to shift the psychological focus away from how *he* plays a piece to how the piece itself should be played. He is not concerned with occasional little problems so long as there is an over-arching artistic statement. He tries to enjoy as much of the performance as possible and to remember that having a memory slip or playing wrong notes are not tragic events. The audience never comes afterward and states that a pianist messed up a particular bar; they usually judge the performance as a whole.

Soyeon talks about how as pianists get older, they often put more pressure on themselves to perform at continually higher levels, and their egos often get in the way of their performances or can put more pressure on their ability to perform. To avoid this, she sits quietly, breathes deeply, and tries to remove "herself" from herself, hoping the music will naturally come forth. She also speaks about living "in the moment" on stage, controlling the music from above, not letting it run away or control her. Everyone has moments of panic on stage, but she believes that if she has prepared and practiced correctly, her "auto-pilot" will get her through the troubled sections.

The artists were also asked about their dietary habits the day of a concert. Everyone said they avoid caffeine right before a performance and most said they would not eat too much before a concert. Orion never feels like eating anything the day of a

concert but forces himself to have something a few hours before. Andrew has water, fruit, and perhaps a sandwich a few hours prior. Spencer tries to eat vegetables and protein, staying away from carbohydrates. Konstantin and Vassily will have a large meal five hours before, then only drink water and perhaps eat bananas. Bananas were a common favourite cited by seven of the pianists. Inon also has a large lunch, not eating anything other than a banana right before a concert. He also comments that he tries not to have any specific routine as there are so many different situations one encounters for concerts that psychologically its risky to be dependent on a specific dietary schedule. Soyeon stated she once had an iced coffee before a performance and her foot could not pedal the instrument as it was shaking so much (she does not regularly drink caffeine). She now only eats a banana and drinks water.

The last question in this category inquired if the pianists use or had ever used beta-blockers. Orion, Andrew, Inon, Tanya, and Soyeon had never tried them. Spencer stated that he had used them frequently, especially for competitions or high pressure concerts. His hands shake when he gets particularly nervous and the beta-blockers remove the shaking. Konstantin said he tried them a few times and could not tell if they had any effect on him, wondering if the effect is more psychosomatic. He is not opposed to them, but feels that if the heart rate is slowed unnaturally, it could take something away from a performance. Vassily also took them a few times and was also not sure of the effects. He never took them in competitions as he felt it was somewhat unfair to use them in that situation. He had a recent back injury, and as he could not practice sufficiently he used beta-blockers with success to aid with this specific performance.

## **5.6 Last thoughts on practice**

The pianists were all asked a few final questions related to practicing. The first question asked if there was a time of day which suited them best for practicing. Andrew, Konstantin, Inon, Tanya, and Soyeon prefer to practice in the morning, leaving evenings free to relax and go out. Orion and Spencer hate morning practice and have some of their best practice hours in the late evening. Vassily does not have a preference, stating only that he prefers four or five uninterrupted hours.

The next question asked if the artists found it more difficult to practice while travelling and touring, and surprisingly five of the pianists found it easier to practice while on tour, citing the distractions at home were a bigger obstacle to their practice than the problems usually present on tour. Orion stated that he feels less guilty on tour as often there is only a certain amount of time allotted for practicing, where at home one could always be doing more. Andrew did find practicing on tour a little frustrating as there are always fewer hours available than one usually would like. He mentioned that his partner is a conductor and that they also continually struggle to get enough rehearsal time with the orchestras. He suggested knowing how to manage your repertoire is very important. Again he stated that one must be fully prepared before going on tour. Soyeon also struggled with practice time on tour as she feels it takes her a while to get into the mode of practicing, and when she only gets one or two hours for practicing it can be difficult. She did say that in general she found the presenters did make an effort to arrange more practice time if it was requested. The others all stated they enjoyed practicing more on tour, doing better work with fewer distractions, and having the end goal of the concert within sight.

The following question inquired whether any of the pianists had had a bad experience in a performance and if they could attribute this to something they did or did not do in preparation, and also if they had learned something from the experience. Inon, Spencer, and Vassily all mentioned situations where they were performing pieces they had played many times before, but they made the mistake of underestimating the amount of work needed to properly bring the work back to performance shape. Spencer now finds it more helpful to re-work on an old piece for two hours spread over three days, instead of six hours on one day. Tanya and Konstantin both mentioned over-scheduling themselves with new works and having bad experiences as there was not enough time to adequately “live” with the new works. Andrew spoke of occasionally using the score in a performance if a work was not fully solid in his memory (especially modern works), but refrains from doing this if at all possible as the score often got in the way of his performances. Now he tries to more carefully select his programs in order to give himself sufficient time for preparation and thus eliminating the need for scores. Soyeon spoke of performances being negatively affected if a conductor does not particularly like an artist. She and Andrew both spoke of practicing radically different tempi in their

concertos as the flexibility of the conductor to accommodate a pianist's tempi are often contingent on how well the conductor likes the pianist. One must be ready to play confidently even if the conductor picks completely different tempi. Vassily spoke about a recent recital where he was performing all three Chopin Sonatas, and how his over-practice of the recital resulted in a poor performance. He tried to play everything too fast and he felt it was not a successful concert. Orion made a final comment stating that even if a pianist is 110% prepared, sometimes things just go wrong in the performance. Sometimes he can look back and analyze why things went wrong, other times he cannot understand why they happened.

The final question in the interview asked if the pianists had any thoughts and advice for younger pianists, considering the nature of the previous questions and answers. Andrew suggested that pianists need to practice projecting emotion as much as the technical aspects of music. He believes too much practicing can distort the emotional presentation, and that pianists need to practice performing. Speaking of confidence, he states that whether one's musical ideas are right or wrong, pianists must believe in themselves, be their own "conductor," and make their own special performances. Spencer's advice to younger pianists would be to spend an extra hour or two daily at the instrument during their youth. He is convinced that Asian and Russian children are dominating the field as American and Western European children lack the discipline and sufficient time spent at the instrument when young. Konstantin's advice would be to never lose sight of the joy of music-making. One must always have a higher purpose when practicing all the technical and emotional tasks at the piano. Vassily gave a sardonic comment stating that one should not become a musician as the career is extremely hard and too painful. One should only pursue this career if there is really nothing else one can do. Tanya believes that young artists must learn discipline not only as a pianist, but as a musician. She believes pianists should know and be aware of the chamber, symphonic and operatic literature so as to enhance their musical, rather than merely their pianistic abilities.

Inon spoke of recording himself and how helpful this experience had been to his playing. Orion, Spencer, and Vassily also talked at length about recording themselves. Some of these artists often record their concerto rehearsals as they

find it particularly helpful to hear how they sound against the orchestra. There are always many sections which need to be played louder as the pianists usually underestimate how much sound they need to project over the orchestra. They often hide these recorders in their jacket pockets or bags and secretly place them out in the hall as they are not legally supposed to record these rehearsals, particularly with the more professional orchestras. It was also mentioned that recording sections of solo playing is also helpful for judging the acoustics of a hall. Pianists often cannot adequately judge the acoustics of a room from the stage; some stages are quite dead but the room is live, and vice versa. Pianists do need to be able to adjust tempi depending on the size of a hall. If the hall is dead, one may need to play a little faster and use more pedal for resonance, and if the hall is too “wet,” one may need to play slower and use much less pedal for clarity. The small recording devices available today give the pianists an added advantage in judging these acoustics on their own.

Some of the pianists had a few thoughts on professional recording as well. Vassily has recorded the most professionally, already having produced twelve CDs with Bridge Records, and he had some wonderful suggestions for the preparation of a recording. In his experience, he often found that being too rigid with one’s interpretation of a piece could be a limiting factor in the studio. He stated that he struggled more with recording pieces he had performed many times as he had very specific ideas he wanted to come across, but sometimes the microphone would not pick up his ideas as he thought it would. The acoustics of a room, or the placement of the microphone can distort what one thinks is a great musical idea, so one must be flexible to accommodate these factors. Inon recorded his first disc four years ago, and this experience is what motivated him to start using his own recording device regularly, as the difference between what a pianist thinks he is doing and what he is actually doing (captured on the recording) is often very great. Leon Fleischer once told him that a pianist needs three personalities: Pianist A - who dreams the performance; Pianists B - who actually performs it; and Pianist C - who listens and tells B what to do.

Konstantin feels it is very important to be well-rested before a recording. If a pianist has over-practiced right before a session, he will get too tired toward the end of it.

He believes the concert environment is quite different from the recording environment as one can gain energy and inspiration from an audience, even when one is getting tired. Recording energy is very much self-created as there is no audience to cheer one on if tiredness and frustration set in. Inon believes one must be 110% technically ready in the studio as psychologically a pianist needs to be as free and unrestrained as possible, not worrying about technical issues. The atmosphere of a recording is already tense, and worrying about technical issues usually leads to cautious playing without inspiration. Soyeon also discusses the psychological differences of a concert contrasted with a recording; a concert is often driven toward the “sweep” of the entire evening, an over-arching energy that binds one unique evening of music. A recording often fails to capture this atmosphere, so she believes one must focus on clarity in a recording, not allowing the “sweep” to affect the playing in any negative manner.

## Chapter 6

### Analysis of Practice Methods

This chapter will compare and contrast most of the accepted ideas about practice presented by the pianists and teachers in the previous chapters. There are a number of important ideas and thoughts mentioned in earlier chapters which will not be able to be “quantified” in this chapter, so those suggestions given previously will have to suffice on their own without further analysis. However, there is an abundance of inter-connected themes requiring further investigation and analysis, highlighting the most successful and up-to-date methods of concert pianists’ practice.

#### 6.1 Themes for investigation

Many of the questions which were asked to the selected eight pianists delve most directly into the issues this study seeks to recognize. A re-examination of the more important questions in comparison with input from the older sources should emphasize the most helpful views on approaching different types of practice. An examination of general technique, early practice habits, specific practice techniques, and pre-performance practice habits will adequately give a detailed summary of the most successful schemes currently used by concert pianists.

#### 6.2 Eastern and western European approaches toward technique

From the days of Franz Liszt until present, most young pianists everywhere have worked with some types of technical exercises (scales, arpeggios, thirds, sixths, Czerny and Clementi studies), which potentially have little musical value but most likely impart some technical benefits to pianists, especially in their youth. A very important question regarding piano technique is *when* do pianists begin their rigorous technical studies, if at all. Another interesting aspect to consider is the type of music concert pianists perform in relationship to their technical backgrounds. In today’s performing concert world there are two general stereotypes which managements use loosely to market their artists: there are the “virtuosos” who often

emerge internationally from a very early age with amazing technical abilities (i.e. Vladimir Horowitz, Sviatoslav Richter, Gyorgy Cziffra, Martha Argerich, Vladimir Ashkenazy, Ivo Pogorelich, Lang Lang), and then there are the “artists” (for lack of a better term) who often specialize in more western European music and often avoid or refuse to play the more purely virtuosic repertoire (Artur Rubinstein, Rudolf Serkin, Artur Schnabel, Andras Schiff, Radu Lupu, Mitsuko Uchida). It is difficult to stereotype all of these performers, but there is arguably an element of truth to these categorizations.

There are two questions to consider: did the virtuosos come from stronger technical backgrounds and are their technical abilities superior, or do some of the pianists (the artists) choose not to focus on the more virtuosic repertoire even though their technique might be just as capable? There are a number of factors to consider, but I believe there is some truth in the concept that the technical backgrounds of the eastern Europeans are generally stronger than their western counterparts, perhaps giving them opportunities to perform more varieties of music. It is difficult today to geographically judge this aspect of playing as both approaches have a major presence in America and in both eastern and western Europe, but by judging the pedigrees of both the pianists and their teachers, one can usually find an eastern or western root.

Some of the pianists in my interviews did not have strict eastern technical backgrounds, and a few of them stated they were not happy with their technical control until after their university years. The Russian system seems to be the one more focused on the technical side of piano playing. The two Russian pianists in this study, Vassily Primakov and Konstantin Soukhovetski, still use a very similar system that Josef Hoffmann, Sergei Rachmaninoff and Josef Lhevinne used a over century ago. Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century the Russians in America continued this technically-centered approach to piano playing, most notably with Rosina Lhevinne and Josef Lhevinne, and Adele Marcus and Sascha Gorodnitzky at The Juilliard School, who all produced numerous famous pianists. Many of the earlier 20<sup>th</sup> century Russian pianists spoke of their daily work on rudimentary technical exercises. However, the prevailing trend today across the world is that technical exercises, beyond childhood, are no longer necessary. Horowitz, Richter and

Ashkenazy were all great Russian 20<sup>th</sup> century virtuosos who never worked on technical exercises beyond their childhoods. Both Russian pianists Vassily and Konstantin never used technical exercises beyond their youth either, so it seems that the concentration on pure technical work has subsided.

In the western European tradition, technical exercises and pure technique were conceptually dismissed far earlier in the 20<sup>th</sup> century with Harold Bauer, Artur Schnabel, and Clifford Curzon who discussed theories regarding the importance of only incorporating technical ideas in musical ways (perhaps as the majority of the music they focused on was not exceedingly technical). This more western tradition of Schnabel, Curzon and Serkin later inspired pianists and teachers such as Gary Graffman, Leon Fleisher and Claude Frank, all of whom “specialized” in more western European music.

Artur Rubinstein, who artistically fits more into the western European mold, was not very concerned with pure technique, and there are numerous accounts that he only “cleaned up” his technical playing in his late thirties and early forties. He mentioned in the documentary *Rubinstein Remembered* that in order not to embarrass his family and his own reputation, he made a conscious effort to clean up his playing as so many of the performances he gave in his youth were not technically up to the standard of his colleagues.

These two different approaches to technique in relation to music are foundational to the specific practice habits analyzed in this study and how they are used. A separate study of these two approaches could be the subject of an entirely separate thesis, but an awareness of the influential factors is important for this study. Most of the pianists in my study have a mixed pedigree of influences.

### **6.3 Practice histories compared**

In all of the studies of concert pianists examined in chapters 2 and 3, there is virtually no information on their early practice methods or how they evolved to practice the way they eventually described in their interviews. Other than a few descriptions given by Rachmaninoff and Lhevinne concerning the early Russian school training, there was no real mention of any pianist’s early practice history.

This study is the first to examine how each pianist evolved in their practicing from their youth until maturity, so very few comparisons can be made between the pianists I interviewed and the older generation of pianists regarding this progression. Four of the selected pianists in this study stated they did not have very structured practice habits and routines before they matured, and the other four stated they were much more focused in their practice routines in their teenage years. This gave certain advantages to the more focused group earlier in their careers, but as they progressed, Schnabel's comment perhaps became relevant (Neuhaus 1973:178):

He (Schnabel) said that for a man who was fated to become an artist it was almost immaterial whether he was taught well or badly at the beginning; whatever the case, when he reaches the age of fifteen to seventeen he will change everything according to his own lights, he will acquire his own habits, his own technique, he will go his own way which is the way of the true artist. I do not believe that for such a man the initial teaching is immaterial (good teaching is in all cases better than bad) but without a doubt there is a grain of truth in what Schnabel said.

A few final comments should be mentioned regarding early practice history. Today's young virtuosos had incredibly rigorous upbringings. I did not have access to official sources as these pianists are too young to have been quoted in many publications, but rumors of work ethics abound in the concert world. Pianists Evgeny Kissin, Lang Lang, Yundi Li, Arcadi Volodos and Yuja Wang all had very strict early childhood routines. Kissin had lessons with his teacher nearly every day in his very early childhood, and once he began to tour internationally in his early teens, his teacher travelled with him and continued to give daily guidance to his practice. Lang Lang also claims that he practiced four to five hours a day, seven days a week from the age of five or six. There are more and more young pianists coming out of Asia and Eastern Europe who go through incredibly disciplined practice routines from significantly earlier ages, and the results are very obvious. Many conservatories throughout America and Europe are full of these highly practiced individuals, and it is getting more and more difficult for young talented pianists from America and western Europe to have any chance at performing careers without this rigorous childhood practicing as technical control has arguably become the most important factor in launching early careers.

## 6.4 Practice strategies compared and contrasted

### 6.4.1 Effective practice strategies

**Hands separate practice** was used regularly by seven of the eight pianists in this study. There were a few mentions of this technique by the older artists: Hetty Bolton regularly suggested it, Gabriela Imreh stated she used it while learning Bach's *Italian Concerto* in Chaffin et al's study, Jorge Bolet claimed to use it regularly; but Vladimir Ashkenazy and Bella Davidovich stated they did not use it. David Dubal told his performance classes at Juilliard that he often heard Horowitz use the technique. Had the older pianists been asked specifically about it, more may have commented about the technique, but considering the fact that it was not mentioned very often suggests that it is not the most common technique for concert pianists' practice. It was used for specific purposes: some used it for memory issues, particularly in the left hand, others used it for working out complicated technical issues, and some felt that being aware of the specifics of each hand helped them to further detail the musical elements of each hand.

**Rhythm practice** was used by seven of the eight pianists interviewed. This technique was also not mentioned very specifically by most of the older pianists. Steven Hough was the only one who gave a thorough explanation of how he used the rhythm techniques. He was quite young at the time of his interview and his descriptions were very similar to the descriptions given by the interviewed pianists in this study. This technique is often used on very technical sections where one needs to practice transferring as much weight over each key as quickly as possible. It may not be the most musically satisfying way to practice, which could be the reason it was not suggested by many of the older pianists. It may also be a newer technique that was not fully explored in earlier years. There is no description of this method in any of the previous didactic literature of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, but its use by most of the interviewed pianists attests to its current practical validity.

**Metronome practice** was used by four of the interviewed pianists and not used by the other four. In Noyle's study, which also directly probed the question of metronome use, three pianists stated they used it, three opposed the use of it, and two occasionally used it. Metronome practice is also somewhat anti-musical, but

clearly half of the artists still do find some use for it, most specifically for checking the pulse of classical and baroque works, and also for gradually speeding up technical sections.

**Slow practice** was certainly the most popular way of practicing, with most pianists from all studies suggesting different types of slow practice. It also is the most controversial as there were a number of artists who believe there are certain times and certain ways *not* to practice slowly. Brendel made the observation that it can be unproductive, musically, to practice certain types of sections in slow tempi. Many of the interviewed pianists spoke about the moment in their youth when they realized that slow practice was not merely a boring and unmusical exercise to execute more notes correctly, but became an opportunity in which to build inner harmonic intensity between the notes which would eventually express itself more suitably at full tempo.

Contrasting this, Richter made comments that he liked to work out many faster passages at a reasonably quick tempo as he believed he used very different motions at higher speeds than at slower speeds. Browning suggested using medium tempos most of the time as he thought they were the most difficult to control, and at this medium tempo a pianist should use more appropriate hand motions, similar to Richter's explanation. Misha Dichter believed it was better to work out fast passages with rhythm work, playing small groups of fast notes, rather than plain slow practice. He also believed the hand motions from the rhythms were more related to the actual performance hand motions. Andrew von Oeyen stated that real technical command is developed mostly by playing passages at full speed, so pianists must eventually know when to leave slow practice and accelerate their tempos to performance level.

**Playing through**, or practice performances was another important issue discussed by many pianists. There are many different types of playing through which are used in most of the different practicing stages: one might play through a short passage that has recently been dissected and put back together; one could play through a longer section of a particular piece; and lastly one could perform an entire piece play-through, a full recital play-through for themselves (perhaps with a recording device) and eventually a possible recital play-through for a friend or small group of

colleagues. This section will only explore the play-through of specific sections or single pieces, and the other larger scale play-throughs will be examined later.

The terminology of Chaffin et al in Gabriele's *work* (hands separate, slow practice, using rhythms, metronome) in contrast to her *runs* (where she tested the work to see if her problems were fixed) provides the best framework to discuss a few philosophical principals which seem to emerge from this last category of practice techniques. Most of the above-mentioned techniques could all be considered *work*, which eventually get tested in the *runs* (playing through) category. Gruson's study (of high school musicians) stated that 25% of the practice time which was recorded was spent on uninterrupted playing through. The percentages of Chaffin et al concerning Gabriele's *Italian Concerto* state that her *runs* comprised a much higher percentage of her time ranging from 60% in her first practice sessions to up to 90% of her later sessions. These few examples are hardly satisfactory in giving broad parameters for how much a student should *run* a piece as opposed to *work* on it, but these examples do highlight the related factors which combine to create a practice experience, and being aware of these concepts should help a student critically self-examine their own habits in order to modify or economize their activities.

John Browning stated he liked to successfully play through an entire piece three times in a row before he felt it was ready for performance. The conductor and violinist Victor Yampolsky recently recounted a chamber music rehearsal he had with Browning years ago where he insisted on repeating the scherzo movement from Mendelssohn's *Trio in D minor Op. 49* six times successively before he felt confident to perform it on stage. André-Michel Schub stated a good barometer for his success was being able to play a passage exactly the way he wanted it five times in a row. Inon Barnatan also believed it was important to be able to successfully navigate tricky passages three or four times in the practice room before one might reasonably be capable of succeeding on stage. Ralph Votapek mentioned the difference in his practice time (*work*) compared to his playing through (*run*) as a student and later as an artist; as a student he believed he most likely practiced 20% of the time and played through 80% of the time. In maturity, he roughly calculated his practice to playing through (*work* to *run*) ratio at 10:1.

#### **6.4.2 Ineffective practice strategies**

The only practice method which was universally concluded to be ineffective or damaging was the fortissimo practice described by Lebert and Stark. Most pianists, if they commented at all, suggested this type of practice could inhibit real musical growth or understanding, did not use the correct muscle groups, and wasted a pianist's time.

There was an occasional reference that a particular pianist did not like to use rhythms, or hand-separate practice, or the metronome, but all of these techniques were successfully used by a number of pianists. The concluding advice would be for a pianist to try all of these techniques thoroughly, not for a few days, but for a few weeks or even months, and then see which ones most aptly suit their particular technique and musical personality.

#### **6.5 Practice performances**

Practice performances, whether they are for oneself, for a recording device, or for a few friends or colleagues are considered by most all pianists to be of the utmost importance. After a pianist has done his/her own successful testing of passages or pieces in the practice room as described above, the opportunity to test it in front of a live audience is the next crucial stage in the practice process. This experience is one where pianists may hope to find their slips of the fingers or the mind, and test their technical and musical control with adrenaline flowing. A pianist can test the flaws in their "automatic pilot" as described in different ways by Seymour Bernstein, Ashkenazy, Browning and von Oeyen. Von Oeyen and Ashkenazy said they need to be beyond the cognitive stages of having to think about the notes they will play, especially for major performances. Memory should not be an issue at this point and a play-through will hopefully catch any last remaining dubious spots of memory failings. Browning's allusion to "insurance practicing" is also tested and reinforced during these experiences. Gary Graffman described his play-through and coaching sessions with colleagues in his New York apartment and they are very similar in approach to many of the play-through experiences described by the interviewed pianists.

## 6.6 Performance mindset

A number of the older pianists made comments relating to their specific mental states as they approached a performance. Youri Egorov spoke about his repeated performance practices the entire week before a concert. He always imagined himself at the concert and played through the entire program or concerto imagining the audience was listening. He believed it was not exactly the same as the real performance, but the added imagination did help control his nerves when it was time for the concert. Misha Dichter and André-Michel Schub described very comparable approaches in imagining they were really performing while practicing the previous week. The interviewed pianists also described similar approaches, cautioning that one should make sure not to get advice too close to a concert day, and also be cautious that there would not be a colleague present who might suggest too many changes, or ruin one's confidence for a performance.

Vladimir Horowitz, Byron Janis, Emil Gilels, Murray Perahia and many of the artists in this study all described various ways a pianist must cultivate their ability to let each and every performance be a unique experience, and most pianists correspondingly cautioned about attempting to re-create other great previous performances or recordings of their own or of others. Horowitz said one must take great risks in a concert to say something really compelling. He also avoided listening to his own recordings fearing that he might be tempted to re-create previous performances. Gilels strived to attain a quasi-fantasy mental state which allowed each of his performances to be completely different experiences. Janis also warned of trying to copy previous performances and mentioned that most pianists have difficulty completely "letting go" in a concert. Andrew von Oeyen also warned of the danger in trying to re-create "yesterday's" successful performances as every hall and every audience were different. A few of the interviewed pianists knew of musicians who would imagine themselves as famous artists right before they went on stage, trying to motivate themselves and build their confidence. No one admitted to doing this personally, but there most likely are a few pianists who did and continue to boost their self-esteem in this way. Lang Lang says that in China, there is always a "Number One" man for everything, be it in medicine, building, plumbing, or any other profession. He used to tell himself in his youth "I'm number one, I'm number one," right before he walked on stage to perform (Lang 2008:30). He later changed his

attitude toward performing once he arrived in America, but in his early years this attitude was used to boost his confidence.

### **6.7 Practice on the day of a concert**

There are a few similar themes which surfaced when the pianists described their practice on performance days. Almost every pianist who commented on this specific topic suggested they would do most their practice in the morning, and then have a long rest before the performance. Both Busoni and Tausig were reported to have performed slow play-throughs of their programs, without emotion, before a performance. Janina Fialkowska also stated she would play everything at least once slowly in the morning practice. Every interviewed pianist said they would also practice everything at slower tempos. Some wanted to make sure they played through each piece which would be performed on the evening in its entirety, while others were confident to leave much of the program alone, perhaps only touching up a few technical sections. Stephen Kovacevich and Soyeon Lee both suggested playing pieces other than their evening performance repertoire as they were wary of discovering a problem section which they may not have time to fix.

There are only three references from the older pianists on how they specifically warmed-up immediately before a concert. Horowitz stated that he never warmed up on a concert day. In Glenn Gould's lengthy description of his recording procedures, he also did not touch the piano until the recording light was on. He believed playing the pieces just prior to the performance diluted his strong mental imagery of the music. Orion Weiss related that he had heard Emanuel Ax warming-up by playing the opening section of a particular concerto over and over.

### **6.8 Practice after a concert**

Practicing after a concert was only mentioned by two artists, but it is an interesting concept to consider. Carl Tausig stated that he would go home after a concert and play through everything again, slowly and carefully, in an attempt to correct all of the small imperfections which inevitably came out during the performance. Ivo Pogorelich also stated he would occasionally do the same thing and described that he may not have another chance to practice until the next concert, or more often he

would stay afterward because he was a perfectionist and wanted to fix certain problems immediately.

## 6.9 Conclusion

There is an intriguing amount of collected advice which has been presented in this study. Many pianists from different cultures and backgrounds have commented on a number of relevant issues. The majority of the ideas and suggestions are found in sources from both the older and newer generations of pianists. There are very few conflicting ideas which adamantly declare that one method is far superior to another method. Each of these artists may have their preferred schemes or techniques for practicing, but none of them ever suggested that their way was the best or the only way to achieve something.

There were a few questions asked in the interviews for which corresponding advice could not be found from any of the older pianists. I could not find any important sources of information with regard to the following: there was no practice history or evolution of practice regimes to be found for the older artists; we do not know what any of the older pianists ate or drank before concerts; we do not know how long they warmed up just prior to a performance (other than a few comments from Horowitz and Gould which are most likely not very applicable to most pianists); and we are uncertain if any of the older pianists used beta-blockers or other chemicals to control their nerves.

Considering all of the information which has been collected, a few final conclusions can be stated:

1. The information and guidelines for good practice do exist and are to be found, but they are scattered throughout many different types of books and articles, and students are generally unaware of how to find this information.
2. The pianists in this study were exposed to very little of the information presented in the literature review. Most all of them felt lost and unsure of how they were working in their earlier years, and had they been exposed to this information, they may have been able to more readily establish their own routines with more varieties of practice techniques, and their self-confidence may have been stronger after reading about the performance advice offered.

3. There is clearly a lack of exposure to this information at the high school and university level, and making teachers aware of these studies might improve their teaching and help their students immeasurably.

There are a few suggestions I have for further research concerning this topic:

1. It would be beneficial to interview the most famous pianists of today's generation, both young and old, and ask a similar set of questions that were asked of my selected eight artists. Their answers may not be much different, but hearing the same ideas as expressed by different pianists would add further depth to this study.
2. The interviews could further explore the relationship between the *work* and *run* ideas as suggested by Chaffin et al in their study. Their attempt to record and quantify Gabriele's work in relation to her playing through could be performed on a larger scale with more artists and with different criteria.
3. Teachers have the strongest influence on students' practice habits. A set of interviews with heads of music departments could be useful to ascertain today's most current methodology on teaching students how to practice. This information may be very sparse or even non-existent.

# Chapter 7

## Personal thoughts on practice

After having examined all the thoughts, advice, techniques and habits of both the older and the younger pianists, I believe it would be appropriate to include some personal ideas on a number of issues discussed in previous chapters. I have presented the previous advice of the other pianists as objectively as possible, but I feel it necessary to isolate a few issues and concepts which have not been explained in sufficient detail. I will use the interview questions from Chapter 5 as a guide through this section, not answering each question, but commenting on topics within the different categories of questions that I deem to be in need of further accentuation and/or clarification.

### 7.1 Practice history

My early practice history was more related to the non-structured group of Andrew, Spencer, Inon and Soyeon. I initially began studies with a Suzuki piano teacher who taught me the rudimentary ways of practicing slowly, with simple dotted rhythms and with the metronome. I studied with her for nine years before changing to Eugene and Elizabeth Pridonoff who were professors at the University of Cincinnati's College Conservatory of Music. I was thirteen years old when I began working with these professors, a similar age to most of the pianists in this study who also moved to more advanced teachers during their early teen years. My professors showed me many of the previously mentioned techniques, but they did not incorporate much information on *how* to use them efficiently. They most likely assumed I was using them correctly even though I certainly was not. I spent many hours at the piano during my teenage years, so eventually the number of hours I practiced made up for the inefficient practice I was producing. I could have accomplished much more in a fraction of the time had I known more specifically what to do with various techniques.

When I arrived at Juilliard, my teacher did not speak at much length about practice habits. He also assumed that his students knew what to do, and unless there was a

serious technical problem, he left them to figure out their own practice routines. I was always a relatively fast learner of new music, but when I became a student at The Juilliard School, I met pianists who could learn much faster than I could, and this initially prompted me to consider whether they were just much more talented than I was or had acquired better practice techniques which they were using to learn repertoire quickly (or both). I hoped that they were not that much more talented than I was, so I began my own study of how the “better” pianists at Juilliard would practice.

## 7.2...Specific practice methods

I met Orion and Vassily during my earlier years at Juilliard, and they both inspired me to new levels of concentration and work habits. I was at *Pianofest*, a small summer festival in East Hampton, New York when I met Orion, and we all practiced in the same house. We often had to listen to each other practice as we were confined to a single house where nine different pianos were placed in separate rooms. I had heard rumors that he had learned Rachmaninoff’s Piano Concerto No. 3 Op. 30 and Ravel’s *Gaspard de la Nuit*, both in approximately two to three weeks, so I began to listen intently to how he practiced in hopes of discovering a “mysterious” technique which the rest of us were not using. I observed that he was obsessive about using the advanced rhythm techniques that he described previously in Chapter 5, so I asked him about how he used them and began to use them myself. I quickly noticed a significant change in my technical control, and in my increased capacity to learn and memorize music quickly. I also became highly obsessed with these rhythms, but I was not immediately successful in transitioning from using this highly analytical and contrived rhythmical approach in practice to performing with a free and uninhibited nature. Often my better technical control came with a loss of musical spontaneity and intuition. I had found a solid “method” for learning music, but knowing when and when not to use the rhythms took many years of experimentation.

After a year or two of using the rhythms in extensive detail they stopped helping my playing the way they had initially. Too much time was spent figuring out how to play

the different rhythms, and I found it difficult to work with a genuine musical inspiration while grinding out various combinations of three or four notes. It was around this stagnant time that I began to develop a fascination with hands-separate practice. I started learning every piece hands-separate, and I could eventually play all of my pieces through, in entirety, hands-separate. This was another interesting perspective through which to study music as it developed my polyphonic capabilities in much more refined ways, and secured my confidence with memory issues. I would imagine myself playing left hand accompaniments while sitting on stage in Carnegie Hall, to an imagined audience, trying to make every small detail as musical and meaningful as possible. The problem was that it took too long to practice each and every piece hands-separate, and as a few of the other pianists have mentioned, it wasted too much time to be considered efficient practice.

I have always enjoyed playing the big technical warhorses (Liszt Etudes, Rachmaninoff Sonatas, Horowitz transcriptions, Balakirev's *Islamey*, etc.) and always found the metronome to be an integral tool in speeding up difficult sections. I thought students were lying when they stated that they could speed up technical sections without a metronome. A few years ago my metronome broke and I was lazy to replace it. I knew that many pianists were completely opposed to metronome practice, so I thought I would try a new method (for myself) by speeding up technical sections without it. I quickly realized how much it had been used as a crutch in my practicing. I would often not feel confident to perform technical sections in concert without warming them up at three or four different metronome speeds on the day of a performance which often exhausted me before I had to play. It was also easy (and lazy) to let the metronome keep the pace which eventually led to many stage experiences where my tempi ran out of control. Once I realized that I could confidently practice and perform very technically complicated sections without the repeated warm-ups with the metronome, I saved myself from many unnecessary hours of work, and now save more energy on performance days. I will still occasionally use it to speed up various sections, but often I will deliberately not use it in order to avoid falling back into a false reliance on it, and to force myself to practice keeping control at high speeds without resting on the pace of the metronome.

Practicing slowly was a technique which I used frequently from my early childhood years, but I do not believe that I knew how to practice slowly – with deep musical intentions (as described earlier in Chapter 5.3.4) – until I had already graduated from Juilliard. This did not necessarily harm my playing as I would “perform” enough in the practice room to discover the appropriate musical details, but once I realized how many musical intentions could be incorporated at slow tempi, I again had another epiphany of efficiency. I remember working with a few professors at the Royal Academy of Music in London who continually demonstrated how they practiced at slow tempi, and once I “heard” what they were “looking” for in their own slow practice, it immediately enacted a paradigm shift in my own approach to slow practice.

After becoming obsessed with all these different practice techniques, I also struggled for a few years to “switch off” my practice mode and walk on stage with freedom and spontaneity. The importance of play-throughs began to emerge in my mind, and I am perpetually reminded of how important they continue to be. I always try to arrange some type of play-through before most performances, even if I am playing at a smaller venue. In judging the better performances of my own over the last few years, the better ones almost always had more previous play-through opportunities accompanying them than did my less successful performances. I can even attribute a few of my lesser performances very directly to a lack of play-throughs. I may have spent the same number of hours in preparation for these differing performances, but the confidence I gain from a play-through is vital to my psychological state for a performance.

It has been my experience that the brain needs to practice concentrating—at full capacity—for extended lengths of time before a performance. I try to simulate many full performances in the practice room a week or two before a concert. When one is practicing alone in the practice room, the brain invariably takes mini-breaks during the practice of a piece, even if it is a play-through for oneself. Concentration is not really tested until someone else is listening. Even if one’s concentration is very disciplined and unwavering, the flood of insecure emotions which can attack when things start to go wrong on stage are often repelled only by the confidence gained through previous successful performances. I have often been the victim of these

emotional attacks, especially when I do not have a recent successful practice performance to recall. Controlling these emotional feelings in a performance is as important as remembering the myriad of wonderful musical intentions one hopes to present.

### 7.3 Suggestions for efficient practice

After extensively experimenting with these five techniques for many years, I currently use the following regimen to guide my practice:

1. When learning a new piece, I use a modified version of hands-separate practice for a week or two until the piece is memorized. I play a page or a section at a time, both hands together, but completely focus all attention on the left hand during the first attempt, and focus all attention on the right hand during the second attempt. I pay attention to fingering, the physical shape of the hand movements and the musical details while I focus on one hand. This practice technique immediately integrates the hands, and requires the brain to focus specifically on one hand, while demanding the other hand keep up using auto-pilot, or the sub-conscious (which also helps one's sight-reading). I work at reasonably slow speeds during this initial phase, assimilating as much musical detail into the slow practice as possible. I also "over-press" each note during this learning phase (most likely a similar technique to Robert MacDonald's "follow-through" technique, described by Soyeon Lee in Chapter 5), using more weight than is necessary to produce the sound while making sure each note is completely pressed to the bottom of the keyboard (while keeping a flexible wrist).
2. If there are any specific technical sections which can easily be broken into rhythmic groupings (Orion's groupings), I will also add this technique to the learning process. While using the different rhythms, I may also specifically focus attention on separate hands while still applying the rhythm techniques. If there are large sections of technical material, I may alternate practice days using my hands-separate (but together) methods described above on day one, and with the rhythms on day two.
3. After the piece is learned and mostly memorized, I then sometimes use the metronome to speed up technical sections and iron out the rhythmic

inconsistencies if necessary; but once I can play it at full speed, I will most likely put the metronome away.

4. When the piece is in playable form, I will begin a different three day cycle. Day one will comprise practicing a piece slowly with my hands-separate method described above at medium tempo (often over-pressing each note again), with some specific attention given to certain technical sections which may be practiced with a few rhythms. This first day of mostly technical work prepares my mind for the musical explorations of day two and three. Days two and three will focus mostly on play-through attempts with a performance mentality, allowing me to *run* sections or whole movements I have *worked* on the previous day (using Chaffin's terminology). Richter's approach of practicing for long hours works particularly well at this stage. Once I can play through a piece (although imperfectly), I need to play it through a few times (in sections or movements) before I can start to control the musical details (without missing too many notes). For many years, I used to play difficult passages through four or five times and leave them for the next day. After experimenting with some more intense approaches (Richter's approach), I find that if I play sections or passages 10, 15, or 20 times, I can make rapid progress in cleaning up the piece to my performance standard. I have also found that practicing a section multiple times throughout the day (not all in one sitting) also enhances memory retention and technical proficiency. For example, if I am juggling four pieces in this semi-learned state, I find it much more productive to work very intensely on two of them for three days in a row, and then work on the next two for three days, instead of trying to get through all four pieces in one day. After two weeks of this more intense focus, my ability to control the music is much more advanced. The danger of this approach is that the multiple play-throughs can cease to be musical explorations and become technical exercises. This is only overcome by constant reminders to myself that I am exploring the music, not the technique.
5. When the recital or concerto is fully ready, I will slightly modify my three day schedule. I will only play through the pieces or concerto on the third day in their entirety (and perhaps record these if possible), and I will attempt to do this play-through having not warmed up so that I can see exactly where my problems are. If I can successfully (according to my own standards) complete

this play-through without warming up, then there should be very little reason to doubt that I could do it on stage.

6. After this three-day cycle, I will often return to the hands-separate maintenance practice as a few technical things will most likely have lost precision after two days of only playing through.
7. In preparing for a concert, I will often use this three-day approach, with the third day being the concert day. I try not to use the rigorous first-day work on the day of the concert, or the day before, as it forces my brain into a more rudimentary and judgmental state. I listen differently to myself on day one than I do on days two and three, for if that judgmental listening starts to occur during a concert, it can ruin the “magic” of the concert. But if I do not constantly return to this critical mentality and the practice techniques of day one, my playing gets sloppy and I lose focus and control. If I am very concerned with producing a clean performance (often associated with a high-profile venue or a first performance), I may play the technical sections numerous times the day before a concert, alternating rhythm practice with play-throughs.
8. During the morning rehearsal on the day of a performance, I try to play through everything at least once, without too much emotion or intensity, but often with my over-pressing technique. However, I do usually practice the technical sections a few times, without metronome, but in two or three different tempi. If I do not practice these sections, I always feel they are less controlled in the concert than if I had practiced them in the morning. I then rest in the afternoon.
9. Before the concert, I usually arrive about an hour early. I am always anxious to get to the piano and to warm-up my hands as they always feel sluggish when I initially start playing. After about 20 minutes, they start to feel good, so I often get up, rest a few minutes, play a few passages, rest, play a few more passages, rest, etc. until it is time to walk on stage. I will start the first piece a few times with good performance energy, and I will practice some of the technical sections in medium and fast tempi.
10. I try to conserve as much energy as possible on the performance day as I have also been guilty of over-practicing on a concert day. In my experience, I need to conserve my energy, not to make it through the physical playing of

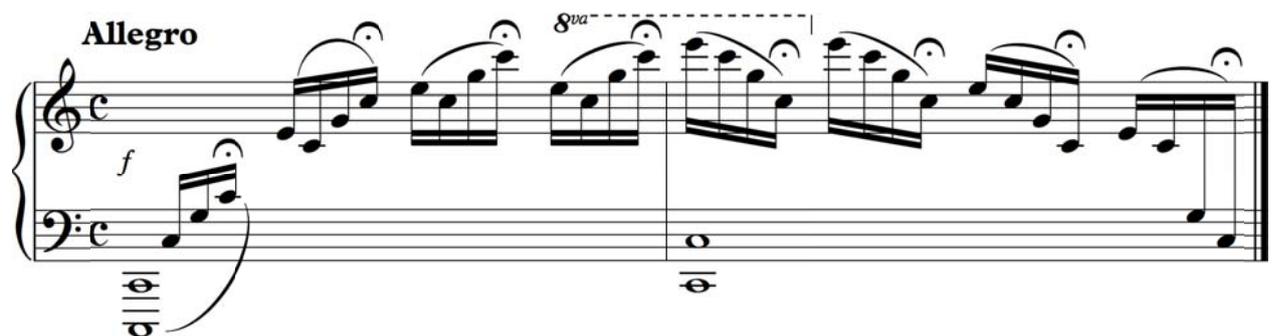
the performance, but to keep my mind fully alert and on guard to catch the negative emotions which can ruin performances. If I walk on stage and find that I am having a good night despite having felt tired beforehand, I probably will not have any problems and could most likely play for four hours. But if I encounter one of those occasional evenings where things start to go wrong and I do not have the mental energy to contest the negative emotions, I can have a dismal experience, and although the playing might not be that bad, I will feel that the performance was less than successful.

In practice, I am often not able to complete this schedule exactly the way I have suggested, but in theory, I try to maintain some semblance of these suggestions. This practice blueprint above forms the basis of how I would prepare a work for a first performance. If I have performed a recital or concerto many times in succession, I am continually able to get away with less and less preparation, but for security I still often return to my day one routine of hands-separate practice. If I am short on time, I may combine the tasks of day one and day two, perhaps focusing carefully on the technical work with strict techniques, but allowing some of the easier technical things to be played through only once. Sometimes I have so much repertoire to maintain that I have to make choices about what needs *work* and what can survive with *runs*. I am a firm believer in Paderewski's advice that "a bad plan is better than no plan" and my "system" gives me confidence that I have prepared to the best of my abilities.

I have never heard of anyone using my specific hands-separate approach, but I have found many benefits to the technique, both in learning new repertoire and with maintenance practice. In learning a piece, it compels me to focus on microscopic details contained in the score (highly increasing memory retention), and in maintenance practice, it engages both a specific brain concentration in one hand, while also constantly integrating the subconscious auto-pilot which controls the accompanying hand. This dual ability of the brain (specific concentration and subconscious auto-pilot) is often utilized in successful performance psychology. One needs the ability to spontaneously focus on various melodies, inner voices and rhythmic relationships, while also being able to fully rely on muscle memory (subconscious auto-pilot) to control the other lesser-focused material. My approach,

which does not require large amounts of time, allows both hands to have been fully exposed to both mental approaches, and theoretically should leave the performer free and flexible to hone in on whichever aspect of the music he or she wishes to express most fully.

There are also a few comments I would like to make about my rhythmic practice. I have gone through stages where I used rhythm techniques often, and other times when I left them completely. Nevertheless, I always return to them as I have not found a better way to clean-up technical passages more efficiently. On occasion I became bored with these techniques, as I tried to use them on passages where they were not required, or I did not get the full benefit of the practice as I was careless while performing the technique. I have found the rhythm which stops on the fourth note in a set to be the most helpful (see below).



This fourth note is often the most cheated note in any passage work of semi-quavers as the mind somehow jumps to the downbeat a fraction of a second too early, especially when nervous. I find that if I focus on the last note of each group, making sure I am not cheating it, my passage work is always much cleaner. While performing this technique, I also find that I have to make sure that I connect the note I have stopped on with the note which begins the next set. This is crucial in making the rhythmic practice effective. If the note that has been stopped on is not physically connected to the succeeding note, a significant amount of the benefit is lost. The hand must not be lifted from the keyboard to start the next set of notes, or the context of the passage is lost. Kämmerling's method of repeating the note which was stopped on before beginning the next sequence of notes removes this possibility of lifting the hand unnecessarily (see Chapter 5.3.2). Most brilliant

passage work is executed by keeping the same amount of pressure on the keyboard, while distributing the weight evenly amongst the moving fingers. I have found the above rhythm exercise to be the most efficient means to transfer this weight between the fingers, when practiced correctly.

#### **7.4 Conclusion**

The objective of this seventh chapter has been to supplement this study with a few ideas that may have been missing or unexplored in the earlier interviews. Through my own experience as a performing concert pianist and my contemplation of the research collected for use in this paper, I have interjected my own personal thoughts concerning practice methods in the hope that they prove to be complementary to the body of work presented here.

## Chapter 8

### Summary and recommendation

#### 8.1 Summary

A substantial amount of information has been presented regarding details of how pianists, from the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century until present, practice and perform. In attempting to answer the research question (see Chapter 1) I have organized and categorized the practice and performance techniques which I thought were the most utilized and most informative. Unfortunately, I found very few contributive sources in the literature review which approached the topics outlined in the sub-questions, so I was only able to analyze the information received from the eight selected pianists concerning these sub-questions.

The literature reviewed for this project contained a significant amount of information which could be complementary to this study, but also a considerable amount which was not directly applicable to it. I continually based the information which was eventually included on its close relationship to the questions I asked the selected pianists. I was previously only peripherally aware of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century figures in Chapter 2 who promoted theories of piano technique, but this project allowed me to find many intricate progressions within these theories and to connect many of the technical concepts, which are currently discussed, to ideas which were formed over a century ago. This is why I felt it necessary to include the progression towards modern piano technique in the beginning of Chapter 2. Many of those early thinkers believed that pure technique could solve most problems concerning piano performance, but the information presented here suggests that piano practice and performance has a much more complicated and complex existence, relying on many factors outside of pure technique.

Chapter 3 included a selection of the most relevant advice of famous pianists which relates to the questions I asked in my interviews. It was difficult to categorize and quantify many of the comments and suggestions made by the pianists, but

collectively it should provide a prominent source of “old” wisdom for any young pianist to embrace and consider, alongside the new information which was presented in Chapter 5. The comparisons and relationships between all of the information of younger and older pianists were explored in Chapter 6, with a broad overall conclusion that a pianist should explore and experiment with all of the methods suggested previously (except for Lebert and Stark’s methods), having become aware of the advantages and disadvantages of each particular technique. My own experiences with all of the techniques (Chapter 7) along with the advice of the other pianists should give current pianists a substantial set of real-life experiences regarding these ideas, through which they could investigate (or re-investigate) their own practice and performance habits.

There are a few final thoughts which require highlighting. I was very surprised in researching the lengthy biographies of many famous pianists to find a lack of information concerning their practice routines. I was anticipating that the larger biographical format would have allowed for some type of examination of their practice techniques or habits, in contrast with most of the shorter articles. But after researching nearly every major biography of famous pianists, there were scarcely any sources which were applicable to this study. I also read through a significant number of articles and books related to practice which also did not aptly suggest appropriately high-level material for this study. The lack of published information on this professional level concerning these topics is indisputable evidence that more investigation should be undertaken concerning high-level piano practice and performance.

In comparing all of the thoughts and advice of the pianists surveyed in this study, I hope that the verbal descriptions of their practice experiences will enlighten, challenge, inspire, and even antagonize some pianists to ponder and re-evaluate how they approach using their practice time at the keyboard. Ultimately, it may be difficult for younger pianists to understand many of these concepts and techniques without “hearing” what they sound like. In my own experience, I did not fully understand many of the concepts described here until I heard them demonstrated by teachers or utilized by colleagues, and conversely, I was often introduced to these concepts after I was exposed to hearing them. Listening to someone demonstrate

these techniques could be a more powerful introduction to them, rather than reading about them; but it could also be confusing to merely be exposed to demonstrations of them without developing an understanding of the principles behind the techniques. I am convinced that a young pianist, who is not very aware of these techniques, would have a more secure foundation on which to begin their experimentation with efficient practice after reading about the experiences of the pianists who were researched in this study.

## **8.2 Recommendation**

Considering the lack of helpful information concerning effective practice techniques that was exposed by this project, and using the information advocated by the interviewed pianists, an immensely helpful tool could be created by producing a DVD with explanations and demonstrations of all these techniques, described and performed by a variety of pianists. It would be a wonderful reference for any music library to possess. Instead of students relying exclusively on their teachers' practice instructions, if indeed practice instructions are given, or occasional comments received at masterclasses with famous artists, these students would be able to watch a demonstration of effective practice techniques along with hearing the thoughts and feelings of the performing artists concerning these very techniques. Perhaps a significant number of concert pianists could be persuaded to share their experiences through the unique medium this DVD would offer.

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## Appendix A:

### Interview schedule

#### **Practice history:**

Briefly describe where you learned how to practice.

Who were your major influences?

How much of your practice was experimental, and how did this contribute to your discovering your own regime that worked for you?

#### **Practice at tertiary level:**

Do you feel you were competent at practicing during your university/conservatory years or do you believe you wasted a lot of time practicing in ways that were not beneficial or necessary?

Did your teacher(s) show you how to economize your practice or did they allow you to discover how to practice on your own?

Did you ever listen to how your friends and/or colleagues practiced? Did you learn anything from these experiences?

Describe how you learned a piece back in high school or in your early tertiary years.

Did you have a rigorous structure you followed? (E.g. learning hands separately, using rhythms, using a metronome.)

Describe how differently you would approach learning a piece today.

#### **Questions about practice techniques:**

What specific practice techniques do you apply to difficult technical sections of music?

Describe a) where you learned these techniques, b) how you apply them, and c) how your application of them has altered since studying at an institution?

What techniques have you found unhelpful?

Are there specific ways you must be able to play a technically challenging section in the practice room before you know you can successfully perform it in public?

How do you experiment with your concert/recording preparation?

How have you changed practice habits in order to find more efficient ways to keep a large repertoire at your disposal?

### **Practicing for concerts/recordings:**

Do you play new pieces for a few friends or a small audience first, or are you confident to walk on to a concert platform and play a piece in public for the first time?

How has your preparation for this type of experience changed since ceasing your studies?

If you were giving a recital at Carnegie Hall in two weeks, how would you approach practicing your programme?

Assuming you have already played a programme/piece quite a few times, what would you do to keep the music fresh and alive?

Have you ever practiced a piece so much that it becomes stale? What do you do if this happens?

### **Practicing the day before a concert/recording:**

Do you have any set regimen for practicing the day before a concert? Are these regimens different for concertos than they are for recitals?

Which types of practice *don't* work the day before?

If you were preparing for a recording, would any of these regimens change?

### **Practicing the day of a concert/recording:**

How do you approach practicing on the day of a concert?

How is your preparation different for concertos, recitals, and recordings?

Have you ever practiced too much on a concert day? If so, describe what happened?

How long do you like to warm up before you go on stage?

How do you warm-up?

Do you have a routine of mental preparation you go through to help calm your nerves and/or boost your confidence?

What do you eat or drink before a concert?

Have you ever experimented with beta-blockers? If so, describe the experience.

Are there any specific mental/spiritual techniques you use to situate yourself in “performance mode?”

**Final questions:**

Do you have a specific practice routine and/or are there specific times of the day you find more productive to practice?

In what ways do you find it more difficult to practice while travelling and on tour?

Are there any concert/recording situations that were not successful and you attributed this experience to inappropriate preparation? What did you learn from this experience?

Can you relate the experience of colleagues that have made similar mistakes in their careers?

Considering your experience and the nature of the previous questions, what advice would you have for young pianists today?