

1 BACKGROUND AND STRUCTURE

1.1 Introduction

Piano tuition is a very challenging field, especially when working with beginners: challenging because of the enormous responsibility of giving the beginner a solid foundation to build an advanced technique on. Studies on the majority of beginner piano books, undertaken by the researcher, have shown a lack of structure and a discrepancy in the sequence of learning basic movements. Emphasis is placed upon the immediate use and development of the small levers (i.e. the fingers), while the larger levers (hand, forearm, upper arm and torso), the initiators of sound, are in the main ignored.

A well-founded piano-technical orientation is essential when teaching beginners. Literature study on piano technique, which consists mainly of piano pedagogues' empirical considerations, has indicated the existence of common strategies/theories regarding the creation of a basic piano technique. This fact is supported by Dean Elder's interviews on piano technique with well-known pianists such as Alfred Brendel, Ivo Pogorelich, Krystian Zimerman and Jeffrey Swan, as published in 'Clavier'. Generally accepted strategies towards the development of a well-founded and sound technique by leading authors, namely Matthay (1932), Booth (1934), Last (1954), Whiteside (1955), Gát (1958), Bastien (1977), Sandor (1981), Taylor (1983), Conus (1984) and Fink (1992), were studied. According to them, an objective but scientifically grounded approach to the development of piano technique pre-supposes a structured outline of the different levers (starting with the bigger levers and progressing to the smaller levers). Camp (1981), Clark (1992) and Uszler, Gordon and Mach (1991) support these strategies. Uszler et al criticise beginner books which only concentrate on the development of the fingers or small movements.

The use of big movements and bigger levers are described in the following quotation saying that:

Use of larger movements, in turn, encourages and fosters the feeling of arm-weight (and arm-weight release), which is the basis of rich tonal production. Such technical approaches are very different from immediate attention to the playing of adjacent finger, or five finger, legato - which has been, and continues to be the technical method of most books and teachers (Uszler et al 1991:114).

The different levers should, in conjunction with each other, be able to perform basic movements with specific results in sound. Although the specific results in sound will not be achieved immediately, as it is a process of development, the beginner pupil should master the basic movements as soon as possible.

According to Sandor the larger levers (forearm, upper arm, shoulder and torso) should be used in conjunction with the hand when playing the piano. The up and down motions should be distributed amongst four components instead of two. He continues his discussion on the larger levers in saying that:

... by using the powerful muscles of the upper arm and shoulders instead of only the weaker forearm muscles, we are infinitely better off in terms of economy, endurance, and tone quality (Sandor 1981:96).

The importance of learning the correct movements from the beginning speaks for itself. Last (1980:21) states that the success or failure as a pianist depends largely on the first year of tuition, when good or bad habits are being formed. Bastien (1977:165) names the forming of correct habits as the most important aspect of beginning lessons. Further complications arise when the correct movement has to be performed within a limited space of time or within a regular beat.

According to Sandor and Bastien in the next two quotations, there is a specific structure, as well as support, needed to perform certain movements in piano playing:

To pull in the forearm we activate the biceps and for the opposite motion we use the triceps. Both these muscles are located on the upper arm, and they are much stronger than the muscles of the forearm (Sandor 1981:30).

Slurs and phrases produced on the piano are dependent on the correct motions of the hand, wrist and arms (Bastien 1977:168).

The forearm is not able to perform effectively without the support of the upper arm. In a similar way the hand cannot execute the movement during phrasing on its own and is dependent on the correct movement of the wrist and arm.

This is why, during the course of this study, the emphasis is placed upon the correct use and development of all the levers from the first lesson.

The prerequisites of using the different levers from big to small and of performing the complementary movements from easy to more complicated, are not met by any of the most regularly used and generally accepted beginner courses using the method of legato five finger development, for example Thompson (1956), Burnam (1959), Pace (1961), Clark and Goss (1973), Bastien (1985), Watermann and Harewood (1988), Schaum (1996) and Palmer, Morton and Lethco (1999).

The need for a well-structured study on beginner books using the method of adjacent fingering and five finger legato playing is obvious. Van der Merwe (1996:8), who states that the use of pure finger technique can cause damage in the beginning stages of piano lessons, and have a negative influence on the development of technique, supports this point of view. The researcher plans to point out the demerits of beginner courses starting with the method of adjacent and five finger legato playing. The researcher aims to provide solutions on how the basic movements of the big levers (initiators of sound) can be taught to the beginner pupil. The researcher will refer to beginner courses like the Russian course Kisell, Natanson, Nikolaev and Sretenskaya (1978) and Olson, Bianchi and Blickenstaff (1983) when providing solutions on how big levers and their movements can be taught to beginner pupils.

A problem at the early stage of tuition is that the beginner is not able to read notes. Solutions concentrating on a specific movement, not on reading notes, are compiled by the researcher and can be performed by the beginner on the instrument within a regular beat.

1.2 Main research question

Which movements should young beginners be taught in order to develop a well founded, basic piano technique?

1.3 Sub-questions

1.3.1 Which levers are used in piano playing?

1.3.2 What are the basic movements that the different levers should be able to perform?

1.3.3 Which beginner books using the adjacent five finger legato method are generally accepted and regularly used by music teachers?

1.3.4 How do these beginner books measure up against the recommendations of leading authors in the field of piano technique?

1.3.5 How can solutions in the form of exercises be provided for each basic movement, easy enough for the beginner to perform within a regular beat?

1.4 Aim of the study

The aim of this study, therefore, is:

- to explore the literature on the basic movements of the different levers in piano playing and to measure beginner courses using the adjacent five finger legato starting method against the recommendations
- to provide a solution on how to teach these basic movements, with the consequent results in sound, to beginner pupils.

1.5 Value of this study

This study provides well founded solutions on how to teach basic movements in piano playing to beginner pupils. These solutions will outline the levers and their movements clearly, progressing from easy to more complicated movements and combinations of

these. Complementary compiled (composed) exercises for each movement are included, addressing the following aspects:

- using the levers from easy (big) to more complicated (small) as initiators of sound
- establishing the experience of a regular beat
- taking into account that the beginner is not able to read notes
- concentrating on the sound and correct movements while learning a keyboard sense.

1.6 Research methodology

1.6.1 To name the different levers in piano playing and structure their basic movements in order of difficulty (sub-questions 1.3.1 and 1.3.2), the methodology included the following:

- a thorough study of sources at the University of Pretoria library in order to determine the leading authors in the field of piano technique
- a comprehensive search on the internet, to ensure that no existing data on the subject was overseen. The search included the use of the "International University library" research tool.

1.6.2 To measure the most regularly used and generally accepted beginner books against the recommendations of leading authors in the field of piano technique (sub-questions 1.3.3 and 1.3.4), the methodology included the following:

- a thorough study of sources at the University of Pretoria library in order to find the most regularly used and generally accepted beginner books
- a comprehensive search on the internet. This search included the use of the "International University library" research tool, to ensure that the most regularly used and generally accepted beginner books were found. These beginner courses are accepted and used by the majority of teachers in the field of piano tuition
- a study of the designated beginner courses. These were subjected to the findings of sub-questions 1.3.1 and 1.3.2, in order to outline the shortcomings in structure and in the sequence of teaching the different movements to beginners.

1.6.3 To compile exercises and pieces for each basic movement (sub-question 1.3.5) easy enough for the beginner pupil to perform, a creative contribution based on research done in 1.6.1 and 1.6.2 was made.

1.7 Review of the literature

As the subject of 'piano technique' has been under close scrutiny for the past two centuries by pianists and pedagogues, a vast amount of information on the subject is available.

The early pianists brought with them techniques conditioned by the more familiar harpsichord and the development of a technique for the new instrument was a drawn-out process. The pianoforte called for a new technique due to the difference in touch and the various means of expression (new sound colours and dynamic ranges).

By the second half of the eighteenth century there were two recognised schools of piano playing, the 'Viennese' and the 'English'. Due to the different action, touch and tone of the two instruments manufactured in Vienna and London, the Viennese type being the lighter and the tone less sonorous than the English, a difference of opinion existed on the appropriate technique for the piano.

Mozart's (1756-1791) performances were in the style of the Viennese school and amongst his followers were Hummel (1778-1837), Czerny (1791-1857) and Moscheles (1794-1870). The characteristics of their playing were purity of tone, delicacy of nuance and lightness of touch. Clementi (1752-1837), who spent most of his life in England, preferred the English pianos and composed with them in mind. Amongst his followers was Field (1782-1837). Their playing had tremendous power and character with brilliance and facility.

The differences of opinion on piano technique continued until the completion of the modern piano's development by the second half of the nineteenth century. During this

time a harvest of pianistic giants was produced, including virtuosi such as Liszt (1811-1886), Anton Rubinstein (1829 -1894) and Tausig (1841-1871).

During the first half of the twentieth century the approach towards piano technique was extremely physical: books by leading authors included Matthay's *Visible and invisible in pianoforte technique* (1932) and Schultz's *The riddle of the pianist's finger* (1949).

Towards the second half of the twentieth century a more creative approach towards piano technique became obvious. Books like Whiteside's *Indispensables of piano playing* (1955), Kochevitsky's *The art of piano playing* (1967), Sandor's *On piano playing: Motion, sound and expression* (1981) and Taylor's *Principles of piano technique and interpretation* (1983), to name but a few, provided enough evidence of a new artistic and musical approach towards piano technique. Not only was the physical side of technique important, but also the musical or artistic side. In fact, they were linked. The modern approach towards technique is one of interdependency.

Very little was written on piano technique directed at the young beginner during the first half of the twentieth century. The reason for this was the drawn-out development process of the instrument, as well as the differences of opinion on piano technique amongst adult pianists throughout the nineteenth century.

The second half of the twentieth century produced much more information directed to the young beginner and more books, exercises and pieces were written specifically for the young pianist. Last's *The young pianist: A new approach for teachers and students* (1954), Ching's *On teaching piano technique to children* (1962), Bastien's *How to teach piano successfully* (1977) and many beginner courses like Bastien's *Bastien Piano Basics* (1985) and *Alfred's basic piano library* by Palmer et al (1999), are examples of these. These and other courses were studied by the researcher and though the need to use the bigger levers in combination with small levers is usually acknowledged, there is still a void for well-structured solutions clearly explaining the movements and use of the bigger levers.

1.8 Delimitation of the study

- It is not the aim of this study to explore all existing methods used in beginner piano courses.
- This study is confined to beginner courses using the adjacent five finger method as departure.

1.9 Chapters

Chapter 1 consists mainly of background information, a review of existing literature on the subject and the relevancy of the study.

Chapter 2 outlines the different levers with their basic movements based on the conclusions of the literature study named in 1.6.1.

Chapter 3 gives the conclusion of the literature study named in 1.6.2. The conclusion is described in detail to ensure a comprehensive and integrated guide filling the void left by existing beginner repertoire using the adjacent finger or five finger legato method.

Chapter 4 simultaneously describes the movements of the different levers, outlined in chapter 2, and gives exercises and pieces for practising purposes. Combinations of the use of different levers are also described, with exercises and pieces for practising purposes.

Chapter 5 provides the conclusion and recommendations for possible future studies.

1.10 Target groups

- Piano teachers and young beginner pianists are the main target groups in this study. Although mainly presented for young beginner pianists these exercises can also be used by older beginners.
- Even more advanced pianists can benefit and learn from the information given in this study.

1.11 Notes to the reader

Only the first lesson books in the different courses were used for the study. These are the books from which the pupil is taught the very first and basic movements in piano playing, and where the first habits are formed. Although most courses provide teacher guides, technique and performance books as well, no new information was found in these books and the concepts stated in the lesson book were only repeated.

If the different technical aspects that were dealt with were described more clearly in either the technique or performance books, the information was extracted and incorporated in the survey of the different courses.

GENERALLY ACCEPTED PIANO TECHNICAL STRATEGIES

Introduction

From the time we get up in the morning (assuming all our working parts are in order) the brain transmits a series of messages to the active muscles required to wash, brush our hair, put on our clothes, or even cook the breakfast! These movements do not need to be thought out, being directed by 'muscular memory'. But when unaccustomed activity, such as playing the piano, is introduced the brain has to give instructions to fingers and arms. If these are indecisive, opposite sets of muscles may come into conflict. Therefore the pianist needs to acquire a knowledge of the directional movements involved, whatever the technical demands of the music (Last 1980:14).