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NICOLAS MEDTNER- COMPOSER, PIANIST, AND
TEACHER (TRANSLATION OF MEDTNER'S NOTES
COMPILED INTO A BOOK *THE DAILY WORK OF THE
PIANIST AND COMPOSER* BY M. GURVICH AND L.
LUKOMSKY, WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY HIS STUDENT,
P. VASILIEV

presented by

Liudmila Bondar

has been accepted towards fulfillment
of the requirements for the

M.M.A degree in Piano Pedagogy

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(TRANSLATION OF MEDTNER'S NOTES COMPILED INTO A BOOK
THE DAILY WORK OF THE PIANIST AND COMPOSER
BY M. GURVICH AND L. LUKOMSKY,
WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY HIS STUDENT, P. VASILIEV)

By

Liudmila Bondar

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ABSTRACT

NICOLAS MEDTNER - COMPOSER, PIANIST, AND TEACHER
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The purpose of this research was a) to translate into English the book *The Daily Work of the Pianist and Composer* by the Russian pianist Nicolas Medtner; b) to help to improve piano instruction; and c) to obtain more information about his life, philosophy, and pedagogical principles. The specific problem was the translation itself. The book is a compilation of the pianist's private notes made during the process of his practice or lessons with his students and was not intended by him for publication. Therefore, many difficulties arose while trying to interpret the author's thoughts clearly and correctly. Sometimes one Russian word in his notes can have several meanings, so one must rely on context to find the English word or expression that exactly corresponds to that in the Russian language. In order to get more information about Medtner's life, philosophy, and pedagogical principles the researcher undertook a trip to Russia and England, and established contacts with Medtner's relatives and acquaintances and gained their consent to participate in the research. The methodology involved the taping of the interviews with these people, making copies of unpublished documents (letters, post cards, letters of recommendations, pictures) and collecting articles from periodicals and newspapers from their private collections. I have included much of this material in this project.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

About the Topic

Nicolas Karlovitch Medtner (1880-1951) was a wonderful Russian pianist, composer, and teacher. I found his book *The Daily Work of the Pianist and Composer* in the library of the Krasnoyarsk Institute of Arts, where I was studying at that time. I was preparing for my most important graduate recital, The State Exam, which is usually taken at the end of the last school year. The book overwhelmed me and helped me in preparing for my exam and in understanding my playing better. The composer's utterances, in spite of their personal nature, contained many interesting ideas. There were musical exercises included that Medtner himself practiced and recommended to his students. There is currently no English translation of this work, which is unfortunate, as it might help other pianists, as it has helped me. Therefore, I decided to translate the work. It would be the first translation of this book, since no attempt to interpret it into a different language has been undertaken before.

When I lived in the state of New York in 1995-96, I became acquainted with an elderly woman, Olga Nikolayevna Stember. At that time I only knew that her father was a pianist and that their family was somehow related to Medtner. When I was at her house I saw a picture of Prokofieff with an inscription dedicated to her father N. Stember. In addition, I saw some of the letters of Anna Medtner, who was N. Medtner's wife. Therefore, when I began to work on this thesis, I decided to contact Olga Nikolayevna. After getting in touch with her, I realized that her connection with Medtner was even

closer than I expected. Her father was not only Medtner's nephew, but also his student, and she had in her possession many things related to the composer, among them the unpublished personal letters to and by him.

The fact that Nicolas Stember was Medtner's nephew was avoided in press and publicity about Medtner. It was only mentioned that Stember was a student of Medtner's. The Soviet government tried to conceal everything that related to living abroad, because immigration to another country was considered a perpetration against the government itself. Thus, if a famous or historically important person had relatives abroad, those people would not be mentioned as relatives. The connection between Nicolas Stember and Nicolas Medtner exemplifies the Soviet regime.

Through Olga Stember I also discovered that there were other relatives of Medtner's in Moscow, and she recommended that I contact them. I telephoned them and obtained their consent to interview them in my research. Besides that, I learned some facts about the composer's life that were never published or mentioned in the Soviet press, due to state politics. I learned that Nicolas Medtner was a religious person and that his spiritual father, bishop Anthony Bloom still lived in London. Another further musical connection was that Bishop Bloom's mother was a sister of Alexander Scriabin. My meeting with Bishop Anthony Bloom took place in London during my trip in the summer of 2002.

Biography

*Dear Nikolay Karlovitch
You are not with us, but
until at least one of those
who knew You are still alive,
You will be our leading
light and guide, and,
what is more important-
our Musical Conscience
I. Dobrovein.¹*

Nicolas Medtner (1880 – 1951) played a great role in not only the history of Russian music, but of Western European music as well. However, being a contemporary of two other giants of Russian music, Scriabin and Rachmaninoff, he was and still is overshadowed by their glory. Musicologist L. Sabaneyev writes: “I think, that Medtner as a composer must be propagandized, for his music is not of the kind that comes to the audience by itself. It is necessary that the listener himself come to it and that he be helped in that.”² His name is undeservedly forgotten, though his contribution to music’s three spheres, i.e., composition, performance, and, most of all, pedagogy, is immense. He was a great philosopher, and his notes, which drew my attention, are perfect evidence of that.

Medtner was born on January 5, 1880, in Moscow. Nicolas was the fifth child of the Medtner family. His father, Karl Medtner, was a factory manager, but he had a great passion for poetry, as he was a Goethe-worshipper, and was a man with broad cultural interests. He contributed to his children’s love for art, literature, and music. Medtner’s

¹ Apetyan, Z. *Stati'i, materialy, vospominaniya*. [Recollections, articles, memories.]

² From a letter by music critic and musicologist L. Sabaneyev, date unknown (from private collection).

mother, Alexandra, came from a family of musicians and was a singer in her younger years. She was the first to give Nicolas piano lessons when he was 6 years old.

At the age of 10, Nicolas began taking lessons with Fyodor Goedike, his mother's brother, who was a professor at the Moscow Conservatory. Even at this early age the boy preferred to study the serious music of such composers as Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, and Scarlatti. Once, when he was 12, he came home from the high school and declared that he was quitting the gymnasium and going to the Conservatory. His parents were shocked by this statement, but his brother Emil and uncle Fyodor supported his decision to enter the Moscow Conservatory. There he studied piano with Anatoly Galli, Paul Pabst, Vasily Sapelnikov, and Vasily Safonov. These were the stars of the Russian piano world at that time; Pabst was a pupil of Liszt, Galli was a pupil of Zverev (the teacher of Rachmaninoff and Scriabin), and Safonov was the director of the Conservatory.

When Medtner was graduating from the conservatory he performed to public acclaim one of the most difficult of piano works - Balakirev's *Islamey*. He played it "with a swoop,"³ and it was very brilliant.

Upon graduation Medtner was awarded the 'Small Gold Medal' (the Great Gold Medal was awarded to those who finished with two majors - piano and composition). Safonov said about his student that "with so prodigious a talent, Medtner should have been given a diamond medal, had such a thing existed."⁴ Safonov predicted a brilliant pianistic future for his student, but Medtner wanted to dedicate himself to composition.

In 1908 Medtner was appointed professor of piano at the Moscow Conservatory. After one year, he resigned the position due to interference of his duties with his

³ Medtner, N. *The Daily Work of the Pianist and Composer*. Introduction by P. Vasiliev.

⁴ Martyn, B. *Nicolas Medtner: His Life and Music*. England: Scholar Press, 1995

compositional activities. In 1915 he accepted the position again and taught there until 1921, the year when the Medtners left their native country. The political situation in Russia during these years forced the Medtners to leave. On the 12th of March, 1917, the riots against the Tsar and his regime occurred. The Tsar was forced to abdicate his throne. The activities of the Bolshevik party were spurred by Lenin and were gaining more and more power over the entire situation. Finally, the Revolution broke out on November 7th, 1917.

Although Medtner said once that he understood nothing about politics, he could not ignore these events. As a representative of the intelligentsia, he was depressed about the Revolution and the new regime. His own family was to suffer a great deal at its hands.

“In Moscow, desperate shortages of food and fuel, the breakdown of public services, and the general chaos drove many of its citizens to seek refuge in the countryside... Those who could, looked for ways of escaping abroad. Among the first to go, in December 1917, was Rachmaninoff, who providentially had been offered a concert tour of neutral Scandinavia, enabling him to obtain an exit visa to travel there with his family; he never returned.”⁵

In 1918, Medtner’s mother died, which was a blow for Nicolas. All of the other members of the family were ill as well.

The political situation became dispiriting and the counter-revolution broke out. Many of the former tsarist officers were put in prison and then shot. Medtner’s brother, Karl, was one of those jailed officers and was awaiting the firing squad. When the

⁵ Martyn, B. *Nicolas Medtner: His life and Music*. England: Scolar press, 1995

Medtners learned this shocking news, Nicolas hurried at once to the jail. When those in charge found out that a brother of a 'luminary of Russian music' was being kept in prison, they immediately set Karl free. At the same time, Karl, when summoned from cells, thought that his last moment had come. The other blow that Medtner could not avoid was the state appropriation of the family business. This was very difficult for his father to accept and he never recovered from the shock.

In 1921 Nicolas Medtner and his wife Anna went to Germany. When Medtner traveled there earlier in 1905, he had been overwhelmed with German musical life and had acquired fame with the audiences there. Sadly, this time his optimism turned into disappointment. His discouragement came mostly from the change in people's attitudes towards music. His name was forgotten, he could not establish a steady concert schedule, and new names, such as Busoni and Schoenberg, whose music Medtner could not abide, were gaining greater popularity.

During the 1924-25 season, Rachmaninoff arranged a concert tour for Medtner in America. Medtner's "First impressions of America were more favorable than they had expected; the fine autumn weather helped, and soon the presence and active support of the Rachmaninoff family [...] as well as the friendship they developed with the musicologist Alfred Swan and his wife, were a source of great comfort in this bewilderingly new country, especially as Medtner was unable to speak English."⁶

Yet more encouraging were Medtner's concerts. American critics were enthusiastic about the pianist's performances and called him "a new luminary of the pianistic world, a veritable giant of the keyboard."⁷ The performance of his First

⁶ Martyn, B. *Nicolas Medtner: his Life and Music*

⁷ Martyn, B. *Nicolas Medtner: his Life and Music*

Concerto with Frederic Stock in Chicago, “created a sensation... and was recalled by vociferous applause, by shouts of approbation and much hand clapping.”⁸ His solo recitals were few and relatively minor occasions due to their haphazard organization.

Medtner’s tour in America, that started out so promisingly, came to a somewhat disappointing conclusion. After a recital at New York’s Aeolian Hall on February 2nd, 1925, musicologist Alfred Swan, who was Medtner’s friend said that the composer felt a gap between himself and his public. Critic Ernest Newman wrote:

[Medtner’s] music does not make an immediate appeal to the man in the street, but it certainly grows on the musician. It is as stark and strong as Brahms at his best; there is never a superfluous bar in it, never a superfluous note in the chord; it is sinewy, athletic, and for its weight amazingly flexible, for Medtner is a master of combined and contrasted rhythms. The thought is rarely on the surface, but when one makes it one’s own, it is the kind one likes to live with. It is sad to think of the *reclame* that has come to fifty mediocrities in the last decade or so, while a fine mind like Medtner’s goes on its way almost unregarded by the crowd.⁹

Following this the Medtners moved to France and stayed there for ten years. Right after their arrival in France they found a cottage that had no electricity or other conveniences. Since it was a secluded place with a garden of roses and fruit trees, the Medtners felt that they were in a peaceful and quiet sanctuary, far in spirit from the commercialized environment of America and from the ‘contaminated’ Parisian musical life. The musical climate of Germany, America, and France did not satisfy him, because

⁸ Martyn, B. *Nicolas Medtner: his Life and Music*

⁹ Martyn, B. *Nicolas Medtner: his Life and Music*

he could not find the solidarity of his views with the audiences in these countries. This made the composer feel nostalgic about Russia, where he could not return.

During this period, Medtner participated in concerts in Warsaw, Berlin, Leipzig, Riga, Tallinn, and England. In 1927, he had a concert tour in Russia, and in 1929-30 he played a number of concerts in America and Canada. Medtner left France in 1935 and settled in Golders Green, London, devoting himself to composing.

In 1943 Medtner started to feel the first signs of heart disease. In the second half of 1940s he started to make recordings of his music on commission of His Highness the Maharajah of Mysore, Jaya Chamaraja Wadiyar. The Maharaja was impressed by Medtner's music and wanted to bring it to the notice of a wider public. This work gave Medtner new strength and energy. The last two years of his life he struggled with heart attacks and increasing weakness. Medtner died in 1951 in London.

Medtner as pianist

The first professor who influenced Medtner was Paul Pabst, a virtuoso from Germany and a pupil of Liszt. He was a professor at Moscow Conservatory. Among his students were Konstantin Igumnov, Alexander Goldenweiser, Leonid Maximov, composer Sergei Liapunov, Alexander Goedicke, and others. Pabst's method was based on playing a piece through and writing some notes concerning its interpretation on the score, but speaking little about technical problems or correcting faults. Medtner will eventually use the same method for himself and his students. With Pabst, Medtner learned the works of Beethoven and Schumann's *Toccata and Concerto*, (which always remained in his repertoire), Liszt's *Rigoletto Paraphrase*, and others.

Medtner's next teacher was the Russian virtuoso Vasily Sapelnikov, who was a student of Alexander Villoing, and who had taught Anton and Nikolay Rubinstein, Theodore Leschetizsky, and Louis Brassin at the Conservatory in St. Petersburg. However the year with Sapelnikov did not prove to be successful, and in his last two years Medtner started to work with Vasily Safonov, who was the director of Moscow Conservatory and held a position as principal conductor of the New York Philharmonic. Among his students were Alexander Scriabin, Joseph and Rosa Lhevinne. "Safonov's unique pedagogical gift was to find and correct student's weaknesses so that the physiognomy of their playing would change within 3- 4 months."¹⁰ He published a book *New Formula*, in which he offered some exercises.

Medtner's playing was distinguished by "extraordinary" clarity, especially in the lower register of the piano. His phrasing and subtleties of nuances and pedaling were unforgettable traits of his playing. The range of different kinds of *staccato* - light, crisp, dancing and the use of short (comma-like) silences, the feeling for *rubato*, and strongly individual rhythms were personal characteristics of Medtner's performing art.

He was an extremely disciplined and diligent person and was convinced that the purpose of music was to 'elevate the soul', and the mission of the musician, to convey the meaning of music. His discipline revealed itself in everything, and he arranged all aspects of his life down to the smallest detail. He scheduled his practice, his concerts and recitals, his walks, and was even particular about the foods he ate.

During his practice, Medtner constantly kept notes in which he wrote down his thoughts about the methods of work on particular pieces, and to what he should pay special attention. The discipline, the organization, and control over his practice were

¹⁰ Martyn, B. *Nicolas Medtner: His Life and Music*

among the most important principles of his work. Medtner thought that everything, i.e., technique, emotions, mood, and spirit, ought to be controlled when practicing or performing. He did not encourage emotional exaggeration, but at the same time he was against merely virtuosic playing devoid of the warmth of the performer's soul. In treating technical problems, Medtner always suggested one to listen for the melodic line. Later on, these notes were compiled into the book "*The Daily Work of the Pianist and Composer.*" The notes in this book are informal but may give piano performers and instructors ideas and pedagogical principles that would be useful in their daily work.

Medtner's aesthetic principles

Medtner was a fighter for pure art. He was far from being a fashionable or popular composer and felt a great distaste for everything with these features. His life unfolded amidst a turbulent stream of new and revolutionary ideas in music, and Medtner, with all his passion and strength, swam against this new stream. This was the time when composers such as Prokofieff, Schoenberg, Stravinsky and others appeared on the musical scene. Medtner categorically rejected these peoples' work. He believed that they rejected old principles and proclaimed ugly artificial new ones. To him, it was as if the leaves and branches of one tree would say to its roots that the first can perfectly grow without the latter. He tried to convince public opinion that what those musicians did was false - a tree cannot grow without its roots; it will fall down. A house cannot be built without a foundation; it will collapse. And music cannot be created without traditions.

But his voice and voices of his friends and colleagues who were the adherents of the old school and venerators of traditions were lost in the ever-growing population of such innovators.

In his struggle for pure art, Medtner was called by Russian musicologist Dobrovein “the Musical Conscience.”¹¹ He also said: “A great happiness fell to my lot and to that of my contemporaries’, a happiness of knowing and loving such a person-the conscience, such a fine and pure as a child, knight without fear and without reproach on the walk of life and musical pursuits. This is Medtner.”¹² Medtner poured out all of his indignation about the overthrowing of the immutable laws of music by the new generation of composers in his book “*The Muse and the Fashion*.” There were some names in music whom Medtner read as anathema - for example, Prokofieff, Stravinsky, and Schoenberg. Nikolay Stember and Prokofieff studied together with Esipova. They were friends with each other, but Stember, knowing Medtner’s dislike for Prokofieff’s music, never pronounced the latter’s name in front of his teacher and uncle.

All my pianistic life, starting with the early teens and finishing with some meetings here in America, I never talked to uncle Kolia about Prokofieff, neither did I talk about his music, nor about his (uncle Kolia’s) attitude towards Prokofieff’s music. I even never said to uncle Kolia, that I know Prokofieff, that we studied together with Esipova and that we were sort of friends.¹³

One day Prokofieff came to Medtner without notifying him beforehand. While being ushered into the study, he said, “I know, Nikolay Karlovitch, that you do not like

¹¹ Apetyan, Z. *Vospominaniya, stat'i, materialy* [Recollections, articles, materials].

¹² Apetyan, Z. *Vospominaniya, stat'i, materialy* [Recollections, articles, materials].

¹³ Letter by N. Stember from America to his sister in Moscow, December 6, 1972.

my music, but perhaps this would please you,”¹⁴ and handed over a copy of his *Tales of the Old Grandmother*, Op. 31. Anna disappeared to prepare lunch, and, when she returned she was amazed to find the two composers in amicable conversation. However, whatever Medtner may have said out of politeness at that time, Prokofieff’s pieces did not impress him.

Here there is one more example of Medtner’s attitude towards contemporary musicians. When Medtner lived in Berlin he wrote to Goldenweiser in one of his letters:

“Do you know who teaches composition here in the Hochschule? None other than Ferruccio Busoni, a man possessing no understanding of composition, and who in print and otherwise mutilates the great composers but is himself unable to write even decent piano exercises...

Schoenberg too plays an important role here, but of him one can only speak after having taken a fair dose of bromide...”¹⁵

Medtner’s religion

The events and attitudes in the musical life of Russia was a smaller reflection of what was happening in politics of Russian government. At that time the new generation was shattering old traditions, and the newly formed Soviet State was destroying the foundations of people’s beliefs during and after the Revolution. Promising workers and peasants a better life, the new government with the hands of those workers and peasants, overturned the Tsar and declared that there was no God. The words of Karl Marx,

¹⁴ Martyn, B. *Nicolas Medtner: His Life And Music*.

¹⁵ Martyn, B. *Nicolas Medtner: His Life And Music*.

‘Religion is the opium of the people’, were cited by the Soviets who forbade religion. Any word pronounced by anyone in support of God or any religion could result in death for that individual. These conditions intimidated people, because it was like having a gun near one’s temple - one step in the wrong direction and the trigger is pulled. These conditions made life of for the deeply religious Medtners unbearable in Russia. They were forced to leave.

In her interview, Olga Stember stated that Medtner was a religious person and that he had a contact with the Orthodox bishop (priest at that time) Anthony Bloom, who had been living in London. Olga Stember told me that Bishop Anthony was Medtner’s Father-confessor (spiritual father). He blessed and confessed Medtner before he died. In addition, he performed his funeral service. Anthony Bloom knew Medtner well, because the relationships between the spiritual father and son are special in the Russian Orthodox church.

In the Soviet Union, during the time before the Perestroika, any relationships with the church were persecuted. Biographies of any famous person were devoid of information about their religious beliefs and relationships with the church. Soviet censors would eliminate this information, because atheism was the political and religious viewpoint of the government. Soviet media, with all its power, was corrupting facts about famous people. For this reason, published materials about Nicolas Medtner contain no mention of his religious faith, and it was only through my conversation with Olga Stember and other relatives that it became clear to me how deeply this part of his life affected him. During my trip to Russia I visited private collections and was given access

to many letters and post card greetings written on the occasion of religious holidays by Medtner or his wife to their relatives.

Elena Tarasova, Medtner's grandniece in Moscow, talked about one event that may indicate that the Medtners were religious people and show how much the Soviet people were terrified by the government for their beliefs. When Medtner's wife, Anna, was about to die, she lost her ability to speak, and by making some signs she tried to express a final wish. Finally, the mother of Elena Tarasova understood that she was asking for a priest to whom she could make her final confession. The priest came, gave her communion, and secretly served a funeral service (panikhida) in her apartment in Moscow where she lived since Nicolas Medtner's death. Interviewing Elena Tarasova I felt some tension in our conversation on the subject of religion. Even nowadays she was speaking about that with a fear, which was sown into people's hearts by the old regime.

There are many letters from Moscow and New York (collected by the researcher) that may also support the belief that the Medtners were religious people. This excerpt from Anna Medtner's letter is one of them:

"...the letters about Kolia are the best of all. There are a great number of them, I even did not expect that. Many of them are from unfamiliar people, for example, I got marvelous letters from the bishop Johan Shakhovskoi. All of his letters are good to be compiled into one book. I did not know that so many people loved Kolia. The flowers to be put on his coffin were coming from all countries, for example, from Canada. I ordered, that the funerals to be with full choirs and all four-funeral services. All foreigners were astounded with the solemnity of the Orthodox service, beauty of the

hymns. Many people, who do not understand the language, said that they could feel the entire deep meaning of what was going on in the temple.”¹⁶

Another example that may illustrate the religious attitudes of the Medtners is an Easter greeting card, written by Anna Medtner to Nadezhda Dmitrievna Stember, the mother of Nikolay Stember (the original Russian text is presented on the illustration on pg 145):

Truly He is risen!

I kiss you three times, my dear Nadezhda Dmitrievna, and ask You to forgive my late greetings, but they are always alive...

Soon I will write You in detail about my (Kolia's) businesses. The entire archive will be in Your country, in the Library on Congress. But we are far from everything being finished. May God grant us to live to that moment!

I embrace and kiss You warmly. God save You.

A. Medtner

The inscription on Medtner's Grave provides more evidence “for without Me you can do nothing” (John 15: 5).

Purpose and Problems

The purpose of the research is to introduce Medtner's teaching and performing principles as well as his music to the scholarly community in the United States.

¹⁶ A letter from Anna Medtner to N. Stember (date unknown), written after N. Medtner's death.

His life, philosophy, pianistic style, and most of all his pedagogical ideas are interesting sources of study. His attitude towards music was that it must not be polluted with heretical tendencies, such as modernism and that there always must be a desire for beauty. His life represented a struggle for preservation of its real values. His book *"The Muse and the Fashion"* is a good example of this struggle. He could not accept mere virtuosity in playing music. He considered the performance dead if it was not inspired with feelings. The soul must bring life to the music.

From both pedagogical and performance points of view, his most valuable contribution to music may be his notes that are compiled into the book entitled *"The Daily Work of the Pianist and Composer."* These are notes written for himself during his own practice or lessons with his students. The knowledge that one may gain from reading this book is incredible as I found when I was a young student. This is a written source that could be valuable for pianists, as they can discover many interesting technical and musical details that would help them in their playing. In fact, other musicians may benefit from it.

This thesis is a translation of his book *"The Daily Work of the Pianist and Composer"* and the purpose is to introduce American musicians to the philosophy and pedagogy of this great Russian pianist and composer. Because this book abounds with uncommon Russian expressions, and because Medtner did not mean this book to be published, the translation was cumbersome, and the result may seem disjunct and incomplete at times. The reader must remember that he wrote these notes for himself with words that perhaps only he understood. These notes serve a purpose of a reminder to Medtner himself about what was discovered during his previous practicing in order to

‘refresh his memory’ and remind him what he had discovered practicing a piece a while ago. Some sentences were difficult to explain even in Russian. For example, his expression about the touch ‘prima ballerina’ was translated word by word, and the people who helped me with editing questioned me what it meant. However, Medtner did not explain the meaning of it. Thus the readers will need to be more creative in interpreting the meaning of phrases of this kind. The other obstacle was to translate as close to the original as possible. Some of the expressions could not be rendered literally into English, because they are idiomatic and intrinsic only to Russian language. In such instances the researcher was compelled to find the compromise. For example, in the Russian language you can use one word for ‘arm,’ ‘hand,’ and ‘wrist,’ but when translating this book the researcher had to make a choice depending on the context.

Methodology

The biggest part of the research is the translation. The process of the work was hindered by the linguistic differences. Perhaps anyone who undertakes the attempt to interpret from one language to another would face these difficulties. In fact, the aggravating circumstance was that Medtner wrote these notes for himself and sometimes he did not bother to explain what he really meant by one phrase or another. These phrases served the purpose of memos or reminders in order for him to be most productive in future practice or work sessions.

In addition, this research was not confined to translation alone. The other goal was to find more information about the composer. For that purpose the researcher traveled to the state of New York and, thanks to the Grant from the Graduate school, to

Russia and England to meet Medtner's relatives and acquaintances. The researcher acquired information from the Moscow Conservatory, from the British Library, from private archives, and from interviewing the following people:

Olga Stember (b.1927) – Nikolay Stember's daughter.

Ksenia Litvinova (b.1920)- daughter of Nadezhda Stember (by husband Litvinova), Nikolay Stember's sister (Nikolay Stember was Medtner's nephew and pupil).

Elena Tarasova (b. 1929)- Medtner's grandniece, the daughter of Medtner's niece Vera Tarasova.

Metropolitan Anthony of Sourazh (Bloom), (b. 1914), who served Medtner's funeral service.

Deacon Peter Scorer – grandson of the philosopher S. Frank.

Anna Salaman – the daughter of the sculptor M. Salaman, who made Medtner's bust after the composer's death.

The compilation of Medtner's notes *The Daily Work of the Pianist and Composer*, the translation of which is offered herein, is supplemented with editorial comments written by compilers M. Gurvich and L. Lukomsky and the introductory article. The introductory article "Medtner's notebooks" and the text of the Appendix is written by Medtner's student P. Vasiliev. He was a professional pianist, but not a professional writer. Thus, his writing style is missing sequential and smooth transitions from one topic to another.

Medtner's notes were compiled into a book by M. Gurvich and L. Lukomsky, who broke them into four categories:

- I. General Maxims in Pianist's Work;
- II. Work on Certain Elements of Musical Performance;
- III. About exercise;
- IV. Notes on the work of the composer.

Each of these categories in turn is subdivided into smaller subtitles according to the thematic content.

The end of the book contains exercises which Medtner himself used and offered to his students.

The following chapter is the direct translation of the Russian edition of the book *The Daily Work of the Pianist and Composer*. Though difficulties arose in the process of translation, they were solved in order to preserve the peculiarities of the Russian language. The differences between the two languages are evident also in the fact that in Russian the sentences are structured in a different way than in English, and they could be long. This did not work well for the English language at all times. Thus, the researcher had to break the long sentences into short ones.

At the beginning of certain sections, number symbols may be seen, for example, 19/I, or 1924, or 5/II-1936 and others. These refer to the date of the notes. The first one stands for January 19 (no year), the second date indicates the year but gives no indication of day and month, and the last one is the most specific, since it provides both the day and month as well as the year – February 5th, 1936

Certain words or phrases in the Russian edition were typed with single spaces between each letter, most likely for extra emphasis. Apparently, Medtner somehow highlighted them in the original, either by underlining them or by writing them with more

space between the letters or somehow else. In order for these words and sentences “not to blend” with the others, the publishers found a way to highlight them in the printed edition by typing them with extra spacing. Thus, the English translation maintains the same style of type.

In addition, spacing of the diary is unusual, inconsistent. The translator made an attempt to keep format the same in the translation, as in the original

Chapter 2

N. K. Medtner

The Daily Work of the Pianist and Composer.

The pages from the notebooks

Compilers M. A. Gurvich and L. G. Lukomsky

(Translated into English by Liudmila Bondar)

Editorial Comments.

(by M. Gurvich and L.Lukomssky)

While composing or practicing, Nikolay Karlovitch Medtner usually kept brief notes. He wrote down the pieces he was working on, how much he practiced, and what required special attention. These notes were of diverse character. Sometimes they contained a principle or general point, but most often they were short reminders to himself, made at a certain stage of learning a piece. Medtner insistently recommended that his pupils immediately write down the thoughts that emerged during practice. He thought that it was unnecessary to overburden the memory, because simple and obvious truths can sometimes be forgotten during the work process.

Even though he was considered to be such an important musician and pianist, Medtner acknowledged it was necessary to constantly remind himself: “listen and listen, do not look at the keyboard”, “close your eyes”; “down with accents, sharp strokes, and any tightness”; “elbows apart and free; do not coerce the finger lever” and so on.

The notes are very intimate, and Medtner intended them only for himself. Therefore, some records of deeper thoughts are distinguished by such laconism that their meaning may not immediately be understood and demands a slow, thoughtful reading. For example, “everything must be at hand”; “remember tempos in connection with the tone of the given piano”; “give what comes naturally”; “remember about broad lines, waves, and perspectives”.

In his personal practice as well as in his work with students, Medtner was creatively looking for new ways, rejecting the dogmatic approach. Thus, although his indications seem sometimes contradictory, they are actually are an adjustment to the

peculiarities of psychology, to the shape of the hands of a performer, and to the interpretation of the different pieces depending on what stage the work is in.

Medtner's notebooks give us a rare opportunity to peek into the creative laboratory of this prominent composer and performer, who thought deeply about the process of his work and could organize it beautifully. Namely the latter allowed Medtner to create 62 opuses and in addition to reach remarkable perfection as a performer, although he spent no more than four hours a day on his piano practice (two hours each morning and evening). Many thoughts from these notes can help the young musicians find productive ways of working.

Exercises are given in the appendix. These are partly from Medtner's book and partly dictated by Medtner to his students. Besides the exercises, Medtner constantly used for training studies by Kramer, *Sonatas* by Scarlatti, preludes and fugues from the "*Well Tempered Clavier*" by J-S. Bach, *32 Variations* by Beethoven, almost all the *Etudes* by Chopin, some *Etudes* by Liszt for training.

In addition to his own works, Medtner's concert repertoire included a number of compositions by other composers:

J. S. Bach. Preludes and Fugues from the "*Well Tempered Clavier*: c minor, C# major, B flat major from the 1st volume, and d minor from the 2nd.

D. Scarlatti. Various Sonatas (B flat major, d minor, F major);

W. A. Mozart. Concerto in A major.

Beethoven. Concerto in G major, 32 Variations, Sonatas D major, op.10, #3

C major, op. 53, e minor, op. 90, f minor, op. 57, Turkish March transcribed by Rubinstein, "The Chorus of the Dervishes", transcribed by Saint- Saens;

Schumann. Toccata;

Chopin. All etudes op 10 and 25, Fantasy f minor, ballades F major and f minor, polonaises e flat minor and f# minor, preludes (especially G major, D flat major);

Liszt. Polonaise, 'Feux follets', 'Gnomenreigen';

Rachmaninoff. Etudes- Tableau and Preludes

The notebooks are preserved in the guise of separate pages, which are not always dated. The earliest notes are from the year 1916, the latest – from 1940.

In the present publication the notes are unified in the chapters where the thoughts on performance and composing are put together. The book consists of four chapters:

I. General indications in the pianist's work

II. Certain elements of musical performance

III. About the exercises

IV. Thoughts on the work of other composers

The peculiarities of the author's language are completely preserved. The footnotes and comments to the exercises are written by the compilers: M.A. Gurvich and L.G. Lukomsky ; the introductory article "About Medtner's notebooks" and the text of the Appendix are written by P.I. Vasiliev.

Medtner's notebooks.

(by P. Vasiliev)

Nearly one hundred years have passed since the birth of the prominent musician Nikolay Karlovitch Medtner. He lived a long life (from 1880 to 1951), and his formation as a person and composer relates to the end of the 19th century, and the years of his maturity –to the beginning of the 20th century. This must be kept in mind while reading his diary or notes, where sometimes expressions are encountered that are not entirely understandable to the modern reader, but which nevertheless very aptly characterize his creative process, full of inspired thoughts and feelings.

The expression that “artistic creative activity is mediumlike” means that talent and inspiration are the necessary conditions that create the environment in which to foster creativity. Medtner’s creative work is significant not just for its content, but for its scope as well. He needed much time to realize his plans. Therefore he sought “quietness and solitude”, and he was extremely careful of his time. He was oppressed by “the everyday hurly-burly and meetings with people” at unexpected hours. Being a master of the first rank in his art, one who did not write an arbitrary note, Medtner cared about the creation of conditions necessary for working out the absolute clarity and preciseness of his individual writing. Talking about “the struggle with the bustle” and “ the negative life phenomena,” he meant everything that bothered and distracted him from inspired creativity that was possible only with absolute “comfort of the soul.” His works are deeply humanistic in their substance, and in no way did he shut himself in an “ivory tower.”

Medtner left a bright and unique imprint not only on Russian art, but one can bravely admit, on the world's art, as well. He was born in Moscow on January 5, 1880 (December 24, 1879 old style). The composer's father, Karl Petrovich Medtner, came from the city of Parnu (Estonia) and in his young years studied philosophy with fascination and wrote poems. The composer's mother, Alexandra Karlovna, born Goedicke, passionately loved music and was the first to have an influence on the musical fate of her son. She began to teach him to play the piano when he was six years old. Medtner's piano studies continued later under the direction of Fyodor Karlovitch Goedicke, Alexandra Karlovna's brother, who prepared Medtner to enter the Moscow Conservatory.

In the junior division of the Conservatory, Medtner studied with A.I. Galli, when he moved to the senior division, he studied with P.A. Pabst, a pupil of Liszt. Pabst was a wonderful musician and a prominent pianist. With his sudden death their lessons came to an end, and during his last three years at the Conservatory, Medtner was taught by V. I. Safonov, the director of the Moscow Conservatoire and a talented conductor and chamber pianist. With Safonov's guidance, Medtner finished the Conservatory and was awarded the small gold medal (the great gold medal was awarded only to those who finished in two majors: both piano and composition).

An oral legend has preserved two stories that characterize Medtner's performing abilities at this time. Safonov himself declared once that Medtner should have been awarded the Diamond medal had such a thing existed. Medtner's performance in the open Conservatory student concert made a great impression on the famous pianist, Joseph Hofman, who was astounded not only by Medtner's playing but by the great endurance

and willful concentration of the young artist, who tossed off at full speed the "*Islamey*" by Balakirev.

Safonov prophesied a brilliant pianistic career, but Medtner rejected this career at first, preferring to dedicate his time to the studies of composition. Apparently, this decision had been growing in Medtner for a long time; he paid great attention to the direction of his studies. It is significant, for example, that he stopped attending counterpoint studies under Sergey Taneyev, whose attitudes on teaching of this discipline strongly contradicted with the inner order of Medtner's thoughts. In spite of everything, 'the dictates of the muse'(Pushkin, A.S.) even at that time powerfully indicated to the future composer the way that he should go, and helped overcome the influence of the authorities -- Safonov and Taneyev.

Taneyev sympathized with Nikolay Karlovitch's decision to concentrate his forces mainly on composition and move the piano practice into the background. This firm decision soon justified itself, when Medtner introduced his First Piano Sonata in F minor, Op. 5, (written during his twenties) to Taneyev, the former teacher highly praised the work, and said that Medtner was born with sonata form. In addition to this sonata, Medtner wrote many other works in this genre each extremely different in its thematic content, piano writing, and form. In these sonatas Medtner expressed his originality.

Besides the sonatas, Medtner wrote for the piano a great quantity of Fairytales (more than thirty), three books of 'Forgotten Melodies,' three 'Hymns to Labor', three 'Novels' and other works. His over one hundred songs, on the texts of the greatest German and Russian poets, deserve close attention. In these Medtner is revealed to us as an artist responding to the diverse subjects of the creation of the world and human

existence. The music here is organically fused with the human word, the meaning of which was keenly felt and musically realized, embodying the “word” into the very diverse melodic and harmonic images.

Thus, Medtner’s creative activity was given mainly to the piano and to the voice. His strength as a composer, in building large scale musical canvasses, revealed itself in full strength in his three concertos for piano and orchestra, of which the first, perhaps, is the most significant. His inexhaustible creative fantasy is especially felt in these three works, which are in no way alike.

Medtner wrote four monumental chamber works as well: three sonatas for piano and violin and a quintet for piano and string quartet. The quintet was his last work, wherein the freshness of inspiration is matched with his exclusive mastery of the form and content.

Like Chopin, Medtner is organically tied to the piano. From it he extracted his special “Medtnerian” melodies and harmonies. At the keyboard, familiar to him from the age of six, the composer heard new tone combinations and broadened the possibilities of the instrument, breathing an orchestral power and color into it.

Besides his creative gift, Medtner, as was stated above, possessed a distinctive talent as a performer. He beautifully interpreted all of his works, each time recreating for his listeners his artistic plans, which were fulfilled in his sonatas, fairy tales, and concertos. His playing was distinguished by utmost and, I would say, inspired precision of the tone. All musical elements: melody, harmony, rhythm, and dynamics, in relation to the coherence and revelation of the parts of the work - everything together formed the harmoniously sounding order, the name of which is Music.

Not fortuitously Medtner said once: “ Beauty is always preciseness.” In his writing and performance he was, to repeat, precise. This seems like a simple everyday word. However, it hides in itself a very voluminous, meaningful content, which has an immediate relationship to beauty. In conversations Medtner turned the attention of his students to the conception that “piano playing, on one hand gets into the circus.” In other words, like circus artists who have a perfect command of their bodies, a pianist must perfectly manage his fingers and hands. They must absolutely obey the executive will of an artist. Medtner said that it is not enough just to have piano technique, it is necessary to be able to use it in any circumstance, and that in this ability the whole purpose of technique is hidden. He disliked the word ‘technique’ by itself, applied to piano playing, thinking that it was absolutely unable to explain the complicated psychological process that lies at the basis of playing the piano.

These extractions from Medtner’s diaries, which relate to his piano practice, are extremely pithy, honest, and ingenuous self-confessions in which he writes about all of his goals in the field of pianism. This confession was not intended for publication, and it testifies to his incredible searching mind, which embraces, in this case, the tasks set before the pianist. Being on the whole, brief notes made by Medtner for himself, they acquire objective meaning and significance for pianists and other performers through their depth and sincerity in the essence of this subject. Medtner’s sober mind has a good understanding of all the difficulties, subtleties, and details of pianistic problems, and it also controls the human psychology with all its potentials and non-potentials. After reading Medtner’s diary, one gets the impression that he or she has spoken with a

psychiatrist from whom no nooks of the human mind can be hidden and who has learned its complicated and oftentimes intricate system.

In the notes our attention is drawn by two features that relate to Medtner himself as an incomparable poet of the piano. First, it is an unusual willful aspiration in resolving one problem or another, which he sets for himself for a given period of practice time. For example, he is not tired of writing down the commands that would remind him of his goal. Second, it is the complete subordination of the substance of the instrument and human organism to the superior principles of the mind and spirit of the artist. These principles justified and enlightened an analytical approach to acquiring a performer's mastery. These principles also covered Medtner's seeming, only seeming, rationality.

Extremely expressive in this aspect was his instruction about "gathering the notes" of the given piece into an "artistic picture." In other words, the notes by themselves are only the sounding matter, which really is brought to life only when the artist –performer inspiringly reads the meaning of these notes, filling them with the truth of poetry and beauty.

The notes in the chapter on instruments are interesting. Here we learn about Medtner's vivid attitude to "dead" substance, which he constantly wants to spiritualize: "The instrument never yields to the violence! The contact with the instrument is to be achieved by a more tender and subtle treatment of it!" Or: "A key loves tenderness! It answers with the beauty of tone only when it is touched tenderly!" Or: "Try to get (even on my leaden Steinway) beautiful tone, dolce legato even in exercises."

Medtner communicates with his Steinway as if he were talking with a living creature, calling it sometimes a "rude, furiously-willful beast," or simply "brute," and

after contrition about his behavior, he commands himself “never to part with the bad instrument,” to “try to get the best that is possible from every given instrument, and to not try to get more!!”

Medtner pays a great deal of attention to hearing and listening during piano practice, completely rejecting the metronome, for it is just a “thermometer and it is incompetent in artistic motion.” “Correct the sound by the ear and the plasticity of the motions – by the sense of touch!” In that sense he makes a straight forward, irrevocable, and decisive conclusion: “The obstacle for both the hearing and the sense of touch is the sight! Especially if the eyes are tired of the keyboard.” Consequently, if the sight bothers the hearing, “it must be remembered that it is possible to listen only with closed eyes, and thus no one piece is learned without playing with closed eyes. Listen!” And then: “Listen, listen, and listen. Draw the tones out of the deepest silence.”

In his last trip to his native Russia in 1927, Medtner still played with closed eyes, saying once that it is easier for him to “submerge into the performer’s dream.” In the words “to submerge into the performer’s dream,” we read an extremely bright and precise formulation of the substance of the interpretation of a piece of music. Medtner’s style of playing with closed eyes in no way was a mannerism intended for a cheap effect with audiences. The perfect command of the instrument, maintained with tireless loving labor, let him think not of the substance of “techniques,” but instead allowed him, having his eyes closed, to get into the Silence (Silence with a capital letter). As he asserts in one of his notes “everything must be born out of Silence.” In this sense, it is impossible not to recall the beginning of the tenth stanza of Pushkin’s poem “Autumn,” where the poet simply and clearly tells his readers about his artistic inspiration:

And I am forgetting the world – and in the sweetest silence
I am sweetly put asleep by my imagination,
Inside me, I can feel, the poetry awakens:
My soul is overwhelmed by lyric animation
It trembles, sounds and seeks, as if it's in a dream,
To let the feeling flow in free manifestation ...¹⁷

Pushkin, too, knew about the Silence, and his soul ached with “lyric animation,” and effused in a “free manifestation,” “as if it's in a dream.”

Medtner's piano diary is a tool that can be used in the attempt to explain, recreate, and recall his artistic image. From these notes we discover how inspired daily work led him to the heights of mastery. In glorification of Labor (with the capital letter, as well) three hymns by Medtner are included, or one might say “sung”. In the end of his book “The Muse and the Fashion” he openly said: “We ...must get works of art by hard labor, as workers in the mines, but not try to pick them as we would pick flowers during a stroll”¹⁸.

Performance and interpretation of a piece of music is an action that gives birth to every composition, and the more polished the interpreter's work, the more truthful and fresh is the recreation of the initial images of the composer's artistic intention. Medtner's piano diaries explain the meaning of the word “mastery.” They disclose a perspective for this word, satiating it with a perfectly concrete meaning of knowledge and ability.

¹⁷ A. S. Pushkin. Works, v. 1. Moscow, 1962, pg. 341.

¹⁸ Medtner. The Muse and the Fashion. Paris: TAIR, 1935. pg. 154.

In the correspondence between Tchaikovsky and Taneyev there is one passage that brightly characterizes the artistic images of both composers. At least, in this case their exchange of thoughts reveals the attitude of both composers regarding the process of creation. Taneyev writes that he has a question on how to write operas and tells about his ways of working, which are thoroughly thought over, and mentions long meditation embracing subject in all its details. Then he asks Tchaikovsky how he writes opera. Tchaikovsky answers, that “operas (as well as everything else) are to be written as God puts it into one’s heart.”¹⁹ Here are two polar views on the subject of the creative process. We can assume that Tchaikovsky, beset by the multitude of themes, melodies, and the abundance of inspiration, either did not think over the methodology of his work, or simply did not want to speak out about his personal world even in correspondence with his student and friend.

Something of this kind can be found in relation to two other prominent contemporary musicians in their attitude to their art. I refer to Rachmaninoff and Medtner. It is known that Nikolay Karlovitch tried several times to begin a conversation with Rachmaninoff on different topics related to musical art with which he was concerned. Every time, Rachmaninoff either did not answer the question or changed the subject. Nevertheless, it is known that Rachmaninoff spoke in praise of Medtner’s decision to write his book “The Muse and the Fashion”, which was published by Rachmaninoff’s publishing house “TAIR”.

From Rachmaninoff’s correspondence with Medtner it is seen that the former showed a great interest in the latter’s book and excitedly waited for its completion. This

¹⁹ P. I. Tchaikovsky. S. I. Taneyev. Pis'ma {The Letters} / Compiled and edited by Zhdanov. – Moscow, 1951, pg 169.

is what he wrote to Nikolay Karlovitch: “In California... I received the first part of your book. I read it at a stretch and want to express to you my congratulations in terms of your achievement in the new field. There is so much that is interesting, apt, sharp-witted, deep and timely! Even if this sickness²⁰ will be gone somehow, which I confess, I do not foresee, its description will remain forever. And what an apt name you gave to your book! On the whole, I am very satisfied and will happily publish your book as soon as I come to Europe. I am looking forward to seeing the second part of it!”²¹ From Rachmaninoff’s next letter it is clear that he received the second part. He tells Medtner: “Yesterday in the train all day long I read your book. What a miraculous and intelligent person you are!”²² This is Rachmaninoff’s attitude toward Medtner’s book, which appeared in print more than forty years ago but still maintains its meaning, in spite of its author’s idealistic attitudes.

Medtner’s notes, offered here to the readers and related to the “practical studies” (as Medtner called them), can be viewed, in essence, as a certain addition to his book *“The Muse and the Fashion,”* an addition, in which for us there is the same acute wit, desire to know himself and to figure out all the difficulties of a composer’s labor, inasmuch as his constant activity in the fields of composition and performance are not separated from one another. His assertions and conclusions are precise and definite: “An objective look and contemplation are important not only as general principles, but, in particular, as artistic ones.” In other words, Medtner asserted that an artistic principle is a consequence or only a part of the general maxims in the business of organization of one’s

²⁰ Meaning the ignorance by many modern composers of the major-minor system.

²¹ From the correspondence of N. Medtner and S. Rachmaninoff. – *Sovetskaya musica*, 1961, No. 11, pg. 85.

²² The above mentioned, pg. 86.

own intellect: “While, the subjective self-contemplation generates either conceited feelings or desperation, the objective one gives peace and silence (the same way, as peace and silence contribute to a certain extent to the development of this ability; that is why it is necessary to avoid the everyday bustle).”

Medtner talks about “fatigue”, which for him is a symptom of “senselessness;” talks about “impatience” which, as he asserts, is related to “stagnation and idleness...” Unusually expressive is his exclamation: “It is necessary to shake the will! It is essential to work out an economic and strategic plan during practice. Work less, but more intensively in respect to the plan. In this case, both strength and time will be saved.” Very expressive here is the word “strategic”. The composer is likened to a strategist, who must have in his field of vision all the circumstances of the struggle, the battle with himself.

Now we know how voluminous Medtner’s artistic work was because it encompasses his creative activity (over 60 opuses), his speculations on art (his book *“The Muse and the Fashion”* is the result of speculations over decades), his concert activity, and his pedagogy. All these considerations determine artistic ways Medtner has chosen and his awareness of the conditions that contributed to his growth. They are instructive for the artist himself and for the other musicians alike.

All his life Medtner lived under the burden of his creativity. It is not accidental that chapter six of his book starts with an expression which is essential and important to his aesthetic views: “Every artist, like Atlas, is destined to carry on his shoulders all the heavy load, i.e. burden, of all elements of his art. Every attempt to get rid of any element

depreciates his load.”²³ Apparently, the thought of a possibility of depreciation of the artist’s burden inescapably held Medtner’s mind. Medtner dedicated all his strength to the service of his art and he looked for ways that led to the best realization of his goal.

“The mind – is the lackey of the spirit, and it (in other words, the mind. – P.V.) is to be held in subordination for it did not take too much will.” “It is necessary to be able to write thoughts down, to write them in different ways. Write your thoughts down every day, for at least a half an hour a day.” “Do not think of publishing! Believe in your theme, in general!” “Do not pursue yourself, but just observe yourself. Remember that while disappointed, one should not contemplate one’s disappointment, for a person invariably gets used to what he contemplates.” “Remember that the thoughts are directed by the brain, which, though it is in the service of the spirit, at the same time is not a spirit but flesh, and thus requires regular rest, just like the arms and legs.” “Take rests more often! Make your imagination work! Imagine a piece (as if in a dream) in a final appearance, as if it were written down already and performed. Make your imagination work! By means of imagination climb out of your surroundings, out of the everyday things if they are not conducive to creative work...”

All of the above citations brightly reveal the artistic way Medtner had chosen and what goals he had set for himself in developing his musical speech, in which melody and its harmonic accompaniment, contrapuntal structure, rhythm, form and shape are all the fruits of inspired labor. He very much loved and valued Pushkin’s poem “The Muse”, which he set to music. Among the words there is this passage:

Since morning till night in the silent shadows of oaks

N. Medtner. The Muse and the Fashion.

I diligently listened to the lessons of a mysterious maid...²⁴

This diligent listening “to the lessons of a mysterious maid”, in other words, to his muse, led Medtner to the perfection of his musical speech, to the discovery of new, often unexpected findings in one and the same harmonic system which was used by Bach, Glinka, Mozart, Grieg, Chopin, and Tchaikovsky.

Once Medtner noticed: “Every composer is learning from his own themes.” This profound observation in the highest degree bears testimony to Medtner’s nature. He really listened to his themes and learned from them. They helped him to make out subtle considerations regarding the form of a piece of music in general. His “practical considerations about the development of melodical seeds” could have made up a superior philosophical-poetical chapter in a textbook on tonal forms. These sayings acquire special value because they are the living word of a great artist, who synthesizes his thoughts about creative activity, not the dead scholastic counting of schemes, advices, instructions, and allotments. Here we encounter the essence of the creative activity of Domenico Scarlatti, whom Medtner highly valued and about whom he once said: “How wonderful it would be if I could reach such clarity and transparency of writing!” Here we find both his peculiar view on the meaning of Wagnerian leitmotifs and the disclosing of the essence of variation form. In general, the book is the composer’s experience, as if he temporarily stops the flow of his creativity and looks and examines the very channel of this torrent...

“Think with images! In other words, detach yourself from the specifically musical process of thinking. But in addition to this beware of two dangers: formlessness on the one hand, and getting into ruts or stencils”.

²⁴ A. S. Pushkin. Compositions, v.1, pg. 123.

“Strategic plan” in Medtner’s own compositional work was tightly bound to the exact distribution of his daily work. He creatively referred to hours as to a “straw” which he was trying to catch, in order not to be drowned in the ocean of time. All of his notes, whether they are in the field of piano practice or composition, all speculations and expressions, stand as testaments that his artistic imagination was directed by a certain “straw,” a salutary compass, which did and has helped him to cross the ocean of art, avoiding chaos and “formlessness” on the one hand, and getting into “ruts and stencils” on the other.

We must think that boundless love to Truth and Beauty in art inspired Medtner to the zealous service of them.

P. Vasiliev.

Every artist must be
both modern and old
as world.

N. Medtner.

I

GENERAL MAXIMS IN PIANIST'S WORK.²⁵

08/24²⁶

First of all – seating posture! And lowering down the insides²⁷ - detendre.

1. Remember art, i.e. not of force and velocity alone, but of plasticity, grace, and expression which are given w i t h o u t t e n s i o n, along with the absolute freedom of feeling.

2. Polish entire sections and episodes in terms of tone and plasticity.

3. Listen more with eyes closed when playing – then the fingers will obey more.

4. In general the power over the material is acquired only when it is acquired above oneself.

5. Be the listener! Damn “emotions”, cramps, will and so on!

6. Remember the principle content is in the vertical line, not just in the horizontal line.

7. The harder the passage, the more placid and imperturbable must be the general condition of the performer.

8. Lower the eyelids and shoulders as if falling asleep.

²⁵ In the beginning of the first chapter there are several pages adduced from Medtner's notes on a certain day with no changes in the order of lay-out.

²⁶ The year of notes in this case, as well as in some other ones, was impossible to determine.

²⁷ “The lowering down of the insides” is to be understood in a sense of absolute physical and psychological relaxation.

9. Learn by isolating the difficulties! Each hand alone!
10. With the ear draw out the tone that you would like to hear.
11. Every day play a couple of pieces in polished condition, but without sweat.
12. Play chords and everything that requires stretches by shrinking, or gathering in, the hand.

*

1. Pauses of lifts, instances of silence, tapering-offs!!
2. Let your ear rest by sometimes playing the passage not only without pedal, but also not very legato, i.e. not holding over the keys.
3. Do not exhaust yourself only with strength, but also with speed, i n t e r c h a n g i n g tempos and techniques.
4. Always be aware of what you are working on, what you are doing precisely, what your goal is; i.e. while working a l w a y s t h i n k. However, when performing, s t o p t h i n k i n g , a n d o n l y listen.
5. In overcoming certain spots, make them more difficult, i.e. exaggerate their difficulty, but when performing, play them lightly, flexibly, and lithely.
6. Never lose the taste for tone. Everything always must sound beautifully.
7. Work mainly without the pedal!

19/I

Practice for evenness of tone w i t h o u t e v e n t h e s m a l l e s t o f a c c e n t s , and train the integrity and suppleness of the arms' movements.

This is necessary: prior to the beginning of the work, concentrate and know

w h a t to do and how to do it; read over the former notes that refer to piano practice; do not play even exercises mechanically, not to mention pieces.

Work always with f o c u s.

To the performers

1924

About putting together the notes of a given piece into an artistic picture. Putting together: 1) themes and melodies, 2) harmonies, 3) rhythm and tempo.

In the first i n s t a n c e – the art of highlighting a melody and counterpoising the secondary, d y n a m i c s and t o u c h, staccato and legato;

in the second i n s t a n c e – the role of consonances and dissonances; modulations and so on.

in the third – rests, long notes etc. Air! Placidity and movement.

*

S l o w must be able to become f a s t: forte – piano; piano – forte; staccato – legato; legato – staccato; e n e r g e t i c – g e n t l e; g e n t l e (tender) – energetic; d i f f i c u l t – e a s y; e a s y – m o d e r a t e .

January 1936

In practice, the presence of excessive *legato* (while playing fast passages in slow tempo), and excessive swampiness of fingers, is as unrealistic as excessive expression

and accentuation. Play lightly (*leggiero*),²⁸ and in general, possibly more evenly in tempo and tone, making only the most necessary nuances.

1. Reduce the whole piece to a common denominator in terms of tempo and coloring.
2. Remove any nervous tension from the performance.
3. Smile and do not get upset over trifles. Play with taste and delight!!
4. During practice the hands and arms must experience physical pleasure and comfort, as the ear must always experience the aesthetic pleasure!
5. If without delight -- either do not play pieces at all, or play them evenly, softly, without emotion.
6. The fingers must always be light and resilient. They should never get stuck in the keys, but bounce back off them²⁹ (this is especially important in “Feux follets”³⁰).

Relax more often. Shake the hand in order to shake out all the strength and speed that are hiding in it and cannot manifest itself in the presence of the excessively disciplined attitude to it.

Remember of the touché “prima ballerina” and apply it to all passages.

31/I –1936.

About the touché “prima ballerina”: after exaggerated *legato* (like wearing swamp boots for soil exploring) it is necessary to go over all the boggy places as if in ballet shoes, easy, stepping precisely and quickly taking the feet (fingers) away.

²⁸ Medtner considered playing *leggiero* (as is clear from further notes) an important method of exercise (practice)

²⁹ Here and in similar cases Medtner always had in mind that the finger stroke is so fast that afterwards the finger momentarily leaves the key.

³⁰ Medtner talks about Liszt’s etude “Feux follets”

Most importantly is ears, ears, and ears!!! If they lose their due attention, and cease listening and controlling each and every note in all its intensity, then everything consequently c r a w l s o f f in different directions and the f i n g e r s s t o p o b e y i n g.

Always remember pauses, breaths, and at least instant s i l e n c e s: without them music is t u r n e d i n t o a c h a o t i c n o i s e.

*

3/I

Do not let rapidity and bravura devour the artistic expression and the subtlety of nuances.

The instrument never yields to violence. The contact with it is to be reached by more gentle and subtle handling of it.

5/I

Remove all harsh movements, sounds and jabs!! Work more with supple motions!

Do not dash, do not be adventurous and do not play out of tune! Do not long for faster tempos!!!

Study in correct tempos that would be apt for performance!

Learn by rote all passages in a faster tempo than is necessary.³¹

Learn everything in correct sonority, avoid muddle and abruptness!

Play in medium tempo with all nuances and pedal.

When playing up to an exaggeratedly fast tempo, lessen the strength and pedal!

³¹ This directive is related to a certain stage of work on a piece.

Rely upon the most important thing, which is nonetheless unnoticeable to you –
.individual interpretation.

18/IX

1. Play more short pieces!
2. Learn the nuances! Constantly listen to what is important.
3. Do not exhaust the fingers and ears with excessive *legato*.

Play more cleanly in terms of lifting the finger that has played its note. Take away the fingers! Touché – prima ballerina!

4. Study the 1st movement of the Sonata-Ballada more.

19/IX

5. Play over the previously learned in two ways: a) slow precise tempo, *forte*, without p e d a l. o r g a n - Bach-style touch, playing everything but thoroughly taking the fingers and hands off; b) lively, precise, but supple tempo with the pedal thoroughly highlighting what is important and not p o u n d i n g out the details – while the hand remains flexible.

2/II – 1936

1. Shake out the rapidity and force.³²
2. But at the same time practice the subtle touches *ppp, dolcissimo!!*
3. Practice to soften the rhythmical lines! More lyricism!!
4. Do not over sharpen what already is sharp!!

³² Refer to page 69, about Rachmaninoff's technique.

3/II –1936

Remember the broad lines, waves, perspectives!!! Posture! Do not sit down carelessly!

4/II –1936

Freedom of the body! Concentrated tranquility! Think of what is important!

5/II –1936

Euphoria! Smile! Close the eyes literally and figuratively. Listen to what is important! Remove the secondary! Think with broad perspectives!

II

CERTAIN ELEMENTS OF MUSICAL PERFORMANCE.

[About tempo and rhythm]

Away with the metronome-thermometer. It is incompetent to artistic movement.

Always start with determining the tempo of the piece and the character of its motion (*al rigore*³³ or *flessibile*³⁴). The indications of the author – *Allegro*, *Andante* - are dependent on the imagination of the fullness or lack of motion. Look at the shortest note values in a piece. *Allegro* with the shortest note values of eight notes must be faster than the *Allegro* with the shortest note values of sixteenth or thirty-second notes. Tempo to a certain extent is dependent on the intensity of the touch of the performer, the tone of the piano, and finally, acoustics.

Rhythmic flexibility (“*rubato*”) consists of the barely noticeable consequence of accelerations and retardations, which do not disturb the due correlation of duration of the adjacent notes. This flexibility always maintains the main, common axis of tempo.

13/III – 1936

Start working with the pieces in performance tempo!³⁵

³³ In very strict time (It).

³⁴ Flexibly (It).

³⁵ The directive is related to the distribution of work, which is recommended to be started with such pieces that could already be performed in real tempo.

18/X –1936

Practice at first up to tempo, for only then do the difficulties and the ways of surmounting them get outlined.

[About imagination]

2/II [-1930]

It is necessary to lead yourself into the realm of imagination and technical methods according to each piece. By the way: one helps the other!

Remember that playing *pianissimo* the pieces that have already been learned does not weaken the fingers, but simply gives them a rest and therefore the strength! i.e. from *pp* to *ff* is the same way as from *ff* to *pp*.

3/XI –1932

Everything must come out, be born out of silence. Bring the silence into everything. The silence and the freedom of the fingers comes when the perspective of the thought, the red thread of the theme, is visible. Therefore, you should close your eyes!!!

24/IX – 1933

Remember that it is possible to listen only with closed eyes, and thus no piece is learned without playing with closed eyes. Listen!

26/X –1934

Listen, listen, and listen.

Draw the sounds out of the deepest silence.

21/IX– 1933

Play the learned pieces more often with eyes closed and with the presence of imagination, and listening to the entire tone picture. Use more touch and plasticity, as one would use in short pieces

22/-1933

Practice mainly playing through pieces in even, medium tempo, with absolute repose, and then with closed eyes – perform them in full tempo, as if in concert. Do not waste time in endless rote. Do not exhaust the 1st finger with excessive crossings.

2/I –1940

Practice playing pieces in tempo more, but observe plasticity of movements and tone quality!! Economy of pedal!

11/X – 1933

Learn the art waves, but not the single notes and fragments.

[Do not exhaust the hearing]

1/11 – 1937

1. The ear, exhausted by exercises, becomes unable to control and imagine. Once it is irritated, the whole playing becomes irritated, unequal, not precise.

2. Give yourself up to the memory of feeling and soul. A person who strains his rational memory can never remember the very essence.

19/IX –1933

When tired, set about only practicing s l o w, s i n g i n g a n d e a s y
p i e c e s, for which there is never enough of time.

*

January [1924]

Close the eyes! Listen! By listening correct the tone, and by sense of touch – the plasticity of movements! Both the hearing and the touch are bothered by the sight! Especially, if the eyes are tired of the keys.

Remember that exhausted hearing, as well as exhausted fingers, cannot control tone quality, and in general it is not able to function, but causes general irritation and antipathy for work.

For fruitful artistic work, the sense of pleasure and relish is necessary! In order to constantly have this feeling, the hearing is not to be exhausted by monotonous sounds (touch), especially *forte*. In addition, the hands are not to be tired by monotonous motions, technical difficulties, or ways of playing. It is necessary to change tone, touch, technique, and methods of playing constantly!! Do not get stagnated in anything, ever.

3/IX –1936

Play more without the pedal!!

Do not exhaust the hearing!!!

6/XI –1932

Melody, melody, and melody!

Smooth out the lines and accents!!!

7/XI-1932

Take care of your hearing! The hearing is more important than the fingers, its fatigue affects entire technique!

3/10 – 1933

D o n o t t i g h t e n u p w h e n t i r e d. Remember, that tension, too, imperceptibly gets learned!!

[The principles of work while learning a piece]

T h e e x e r c i s e i n *l e g a t o*!

13/XII –1939

Remember that *legatissimo* is so often missing in modern performers (even with singers) and that this is the basis of substantial sonority. For example, without this *legatissimo*, in “Tendre reproche” and the middle part of the “Hurdy-gurdy Player”³⁶ and the First Hymn –it is better not to play these sort of pieces. This could be reached not only by feeling but also by work, as well.

M o r e s u b t l e a r t i s t i c w o r k.

8/I -1939

Nothing sounds well! Put yourself together, think, find the reason why, and eliminate it!!!

9/I –1939

³⁶ “The tender reproach” and “The Hurdy-gurdy Player” –from “Romantic sketches”

Energetic touch, accents, *staccato* and so on are exhausting the fingers and especially the fingertips, i.e. the sense of touch. Thus, learn these sort of things (for the sake of finger memory) more often *legato*, with a level and tender touch. During this tender touch the fingers and hands are resting and become flexible.

Play more lightly (*leggiero*) and piano in concert tempo and even faster, to work out the l i g h t n e s s o f v e l o c i t y ! But observe absolute exactness!

2/I – 1936

The loss of *piano* dynamic is the loss of *forte*, and vice versa! Avoid the inert tone; *mezzo forte* is a symptom of weakness and loss of control of sound.

10/XII – 1939

Remember the action and the result:

1. In the action, i.e. in the hand movements, the stroke of every key, and position, - in everything there must be a feeling of the g r e a t e s t c o n v e n i e n c e a n d c o m f o r t.
2. In the result, try to achieve the utmost artistic b e a u t y o f t o n e.

7/X [-1936]

A key loves tenderness! Only to tenderness does it answer with the beauty of tone!

P l a y m o r e w i t h t h e n u a n c e s. Practice submerging yourself in l i s t e n i n g. Look for the subtle nuances.

22/XII – 1939

Play everything with separate hands! Correct every passage in terms of plasticity and tone color!

24/ XII –1939

Do not drag lyrical pieces!! Learn them fast and smoothly. “Hymn,” “Pastoral,” “Matinata.”³⁷

26/XI – 1939

Set to work more energetically.

Do not approach your work like in fumbling manner like a swimmer approaches cold water. Set about practicing a great number of pieces and passages! The more the work and its diversity, the better it comes off.

26/I – 1939

When only *forte* is needed, do not play *fortissimo*. Observe the economy of strength!!

Do not use energy where it is necessary to sing! Do not frown when you need to smile!

19/X –1924

Sometimes, to find the tone, emerge from a distance, *pianissimo*.

27/X –1932

³⁷ “Hymn,” op. 49; “Pastoral” from “Sonate-Idylle,” op. 56; “Canzona matinata,” op.39.

Remember that every episode, and even an entire piece, has its coloring, its internal gesture!

27/IX 1924

Play over the pieces in one planned tempo watching for equal tone.

26/I

Besides the qualities of a Steinway and the majority of other modern pianos, that demand much greater strength of the right hand, it is necessary, *i n g e n e r a l a n d a l w a y s t o m o d e r a t e t h e l e f t h a n d*, since most of the time it contains the accompanying voices'. Not only should the left hand be moderated in force, but in expression, too – *legato*, because extra fat and inadequate airiness of the left hand destroys the relief of the main part in the right hand.

1. Practice the left hand *leggiero* and *pianissimo*!!
2. Practice with light tone in general! Do not lose coloring during exercises!!
3. Practice in general liberation from accents, especially in octaves and in repeated notes. First, accent by 4, then by 8, by 16, by 32 and so on –until any accents are removed.

29/I

Try to listen to the total combination of all voices – the entire *v e r t i c a l l i n e*! In addition, listen to and peer into the perspective of the horizontal line, i.e. master the swells and tapering-offs (for example, the end of “Elfenmarchen”³⁸).

³⁸ “The tale of elves”, op. 48

[The red thread of the theme and tempo]

13/I –1934

Remember the even, slow tempo and immediately following it with *d o u b l e d* tempo (i.e. slow and twice as fast)... Remember the necessity of *c h a n g i n g* *t o u c h e s* in work, i.e. different types of strokes and movements, and changes of tempos, as well.

N e v e r play for a long time with one touch and in one tempo.

28/XII –1939

It is necessary to play through all pieces in a concert tempo with the nuances, but without temperamental excitement and charge.

Even though technique is energy, one needs to tell unadvanced sluggish students again and again that *e x c e s s i v e* energy makes technique *h e a v y* and *a w k w a r d*. Practice removal of energy, temperament, accents, sharp movements, jolts!

30/VIII –1933

P l a y over forgotten pieces – *piano, dolce*, and without the pedal. Do not get impatient – *molto tranquillo*.

*

In precise coordination of the hands (drop and lift), imitate an orchestra and chamber ensemble. *Tutti – solo*.³⁹

³⁹ In the records of Medtner's lessons, made by his student R. Fein, there is the following indication: "The strokes, slurs entrances, taking the hands off – all of it must have orchestral preciseness.

29/X –1932

Remember to exercise in light, lively execution of lyrical things, without pedal.

Play the first movement of the “Romantica” as a passage in medium tempo!⁴⁰

[About the pedal]

19/X [-1936]

P l a y i n g w i t h o u t t h e p e d a l enables our fingers to find the necessary nuances, movements, and positions and at the same time gives o u r e a r s a b r e a k and f u l l t r a n q u i l i t y t o o u r b o d y.

15/XI –1929

Pedal! Do not exhaust by it. More 1/8, 1/4, 1/2 pedal! Coordinate the mechanical change of the left and right pedals with the nuance: *solo and tutti!!*

23/X [-1936]

The most important exercise is the establishment of the external and internal center, which is especially evident when playing without the pedal⁴¹.

One must be one's own conductor and be the most possibly strict to the orchestra players – fingers.

Two main principles of work.

One - gymnastic, rough, technical – is to make everything more difficult.

Another –artistic, exquisitely technical, plastical –is to simplify everything.

In the first case, playing the simplest examples, say to oneself: 'How difficult everything is!' "

In the second, playing the most difficult examples, say to oneself: 'How easy everything is!' "

⁴⁰ Sonata-Romantica, op. 53 No. 1.

⁴¹ Refer to pg. 73 " About the center of movement"

[Work immediately before the concert performance]

7/IX – 1936

Before the performance, i.e. on the eve of the concert, leave out the rough gymnastic motions and training!!

Do not exhaust your hand and hearing!! Train only the comfort, lightness and flexibility of hands, and most important – the beauty of tone!!

13/II – 1936

In order not to get tired, play more (before the concert) in medium tempo, medium tone, with minimum pedal. Play over all pieces from beginning to end this way!!

Before the concert do not exhaust yourself with an excessive speed, nor excessive slowness, or force.

Straighten and release fingers! No violence whatsoever!!!

Yield to exhaustion!

7/X – 1933

Play through all the pieces of the program from beginning to end.

31/X – 1933

Execute all pieces in medium motion, with all the nuances!

3/XI – 1932

1. Tranquil playing of the entire program.
2. Training of difficult spots.
3. Performance.

7/XI – 1932

Before the concert play everything calmly and evenly, but give freedom to thoughts and imagination!

The freedom of gesture and imagination.

Before the concert do not get tired by over pedaling or extreme tempos. Everything is without pedal and in medium tempo.

Close your eyes and remember that all of this is not in resistance to the waves of artistic images and feelings. Only these waves can remove or expunge all the agitation. Give oneself up to changes of feelings, but do not stagnate in a single one.

[preparations for recording]

15/III – 1936

Evenness, exactness, smoothness.

Try to achieve the preciseness and evenness without tension in *piano* dynamic!!

Smooth out all the accents and level all the rhythmic and tempo nuances!!

Everything must be heard, but everything must be influenced by the main subject, i.e. thematic red line.

But most important is the economy of movements.

Everything must be under the hand.

Everything is concentric, balanced, and in everything tranquil power is to be present.

Lower the shoulders, freedom of breath!

Lower the body from the inside, less the fingers be

watching!

Less on accents, jolts and any mechanical energy.

Never force anything!

Give what comes naturally!

The mechanical energy (abundance of accents) and any forcing imperceptibly transform an artistic performance into a gymnastic exercise, in which, of course, it is impossible to do everything by taking the line of least resistance.

Forget about technique, work, the gymnastic element and other boring subjects.

[About instruments]

24/I – 1939

Do not try to curb the Steinway!

Every accent or stroke with temperament makes this gruff animal furiously obstinate. The more indifference, the better this beast works.

24/XI - 1939

Try to achieve at all costs (even on my leaden Steinway!), beautiful tone, *dolce*, *legato* – even in exercises.

2/I – 1936

Never complain about the instrument, but try to master it at all costs.

10/XII – 1939

Never get disappointed with a bad instrument. It is unproductive to whimper about bad pianos.

Try to put forth the best that can be produced on every given instrument, and do not worry about getting more!!

Take care of the fingers. The Steinway cannot be overpowered; play primarily *piano* dynamic. Moderate the left hand! The Steinway demands it! Without it, nothing can sound.

[Indications for certain pieces]

[Sonata-Reminiscenza]⁴²

23/IX –1933

For “Reminiscenza” and cantilenas in general:

1. Down with finger *articolando*;
2. Absolute preciseness and suppleness in the pressing and releasing of keys, and movements.
3. Absolutely different technique, but still technique;
4. The suppleness of tone; duration of long notes. Listen until the end!
5. The red thread of the melody-theme. Down with harsh accents, always a soft hand!
6. The evenness of perspective and motion

[Sonata-Romantica]

Slow, singing pieces, like “Reminiscenza” and the first movement of the “Romantica,” learn fast.

29/X –1932

⁴² Sonata-Reminiscenza from the first cycle of “Forgotten Melodies”, op. 38.

The first movement of the “Romantica”⁴³ play as a passage in medium tempo.
Remember to sometimes exercise singing pieces lightly and vividly, and without pedal.

[The Second Concerto]

31/VIII- 1936

The first and other movements of my concerto – present a diversity of colors and dynamics!!!!

A sustained straight line of tempo-rhythm motion! And possibly greater diversity of tonal colors.

10/VIII – 1936

Romantic character pieces are to be learned in a more level, smoother, calmer, livelier, and more balanced manner. [“Romanza” from the Second Concerto.]

Do not spoil the lyrical, tender *piano* sections with accents!

In general, less accents!!!

1/IX – 1936

Exercise the lightest and most tender touch to the keys! Melodica! Lyrics!

13/XII – 1939

Less passion and climaxes!

[The Fairy Tale a moll, op. 51. Novel]⁴⁴

15/VI – 1936

1. Do not waste strength (*ff*)!!!

⁴³ Sonata –Romantica, op.53 No. 1.

⁴⁴ Novel G-dur, op. 17.

2. Practice taperings (*piano*).

3 Play more lightly, lowering the nerves and the insides!!!

Singing pieces (Fairytale a-moll, op. 51 and Novels) play *piano cantabile* and flowing.

[The Sonata –Fairytale]⁴⁵

13/I – 1937

Andante from “Marchen-Sonata” - play in a more animated tempo and with a light, singing touch.

[The Fairytale e-moll, op. 14. Sonata g-moll]

29/ -1936

1. Do not play in slow tempos unrealistically, [but play] with a deep and *legato*-like touch...

It is necessary to use *rallentando* for the things that will be in a faster tempo.

2. For God’s sake, more affection, lyricism, tenderness – even in such things as “Ritterzug,”⁴⁶ and most important the g-minor Sonata!

3/III –1936

Remember the natural position of the elbows, especially the right arm, and particularly in C-major theme of the “Ritterzug.” There should be energy in the fingers in *piano* dynamic.

Practice more *diminuendo* taperings, for example, “Ritterzug’s” last page!

⁴⁵ “Sonata-Fairytale,” op. 25 No. 1.

⁴⁶ “The March of the Knights” from the Fairytale e-moll, op. 14 No. 2.

Pause, *piano*, and repose from pedal sonority!!

[Sonate-Idylle]

13/I [-1924]

Play everything more lightly, without pressure, without unnecessary expression, stresses, temperament and the like. Do not drag tempos and straighten out the line of motion and dynamic. This is especially important in Sonate –Idylle!!⁴⁷ Set free the nerves and muscles. Let the music sound by itself! Do not interfere!

3/II

Moderate “the sounding copper” of the Steinway!!! Take care of the ears!
Lessen the left hand!

This is especially important to apply in the Sonate –Idylle.

Play more in tempo without the pedal, checking out all the sustained notes and *legato*!!

Especially, do not forget about imagination in pieces like “Elfenmarchen” and “Sonate-Idylle.

8/II[- 1932]

Do not forget about the primary dynamic nuances in Sonate-Idylle, 1st movement
< | >; 2nd movement:



⁴⁷ Sonate-Idylle, op. 56.

Besides that, less pedal and more precision concerning the maturity of a note!!

In order to get yourself on track, do not forget about important dynamic nuances, such as phrase expression, and sing them along in your mind while executing! Expression is declamation.

In addition, it is necessary not to forget movement, i.e. the dance!

In addition, it is necessary not to forget the general tone, the coloring of a piece, and do not break out of it

18/X –1924

Free the tempo and tone, do not force it, but listen.

Perspective. Dance!!!

Expression. Declamation. Dance. General coloring.

[Fairytale e-moll, op. 34]

9/I –1937

Remember the necessity to learn the accompaniment and melody, or a passage and melody, or counterpoint and theme with different touches. It is especially important in the accompaniment and melody (for example, Fairytale e-moll, op. 34, and in all cases of passages in the left, and melody in the right hand). The touch of the passage is to be always *leggiero*, *piano-energico*, with light but resilient fingers. The touch of the melody is a deep, flexible *legatissimo*.

Adjustment of the elbows to the position of the hand!! Freedom of the elbows,

but along with their absolute concentration⁴⁸. In the Fairytale e-moll, op. 34 –the elbows are to be apart from the body.

13/II – 1936

In sitting posture remember the elbows! Elbows apart, lower the shoulders. Arms lower! The torso is to be moved depending on the position of arms!

All of this is important everywhere, but especially in the Chopin's Etude f-moll, op. 25 and in the Fairytale e-moll, op. 34. In the Etude f-moll remember as well the bass and pedal!!

Practice in sustained *piano*. "Tendre reproche," Fairytale e-moll, op.34, "Sarabande." And Fairytale-scherzo⁴⁹. The medium tempo is *Tranquillo cantabile*. Sustained notes! Shade the accompaniments. The evenness of the whole line.

13/III – 1936

Do not exaggerate the *articolando*, especially in the Fairytales in f-sharp minor⁵⁰ and e-moll, op.34.

The fingers are to be closer to the keys, and the whole coloring is to be maintained in *piano-dolce*.

Do not exaggerate the *articolando* and *al rigore di tempo*, as well.

Give ample scope to the melody's breath and to the difficult passages, but do not take hard tempos.

Everything is to be more light and singing!

Do not press down the melody! Give {Play} the *cantabile* lightly, freely, *piano*.

⁴⁸ "Concentration is understood in the sense of goal orientation, to which the words in the next phrase: 'the elbows are apart', indicate.

⁴⁹ "The Tender Reproach," "Sarabande," and "Fairytale-scherzo" are from the "Romantic Sketches." op.56.

⁵⁰ "The Fairytale" F-sharp-minor, op. 51.

Close the eyes.

Practice in tranquility, in order to not play too fast and not too slow.

[Sonata-Minacciosa]⁵¹

23/IX –1933

The difficult spots (like the “Thunder” fugue) play mainly in medium tempo, tranquilly, keenly, and with all the nuances.

The training of the fugue (the “Thunder”): play fast and light, but with all the contrasts and relief.

Do not jerk! Smooth out the unnecessary accents and heaviness.

[The Fairytale d-moll, op 51]

19/I

Play all the pieces in medium tempo more often without even the slightest tightening of hands {arms} and the insides! Especially, it is important for the Fairytale d-moll, op. 51.

21/I

Do not spend much time for exercises and slow tempos. Play more in medium and fast tempos. Draw the fingers to the keys as close as possible!!

3/II

About a technical method, for example, in the Fairytale d-moll, op. 51.

⁵¹ Sonata-Minacciosa, op.53 No. 2.

It is to be practiced only with this method, which lies in minimal separations of the hand from the keys (despite the *staccato-leggiero*), i.e. in almost absolute flat motion of the fingers and hands and in greatest lightness (*pp, leggero*) of the touch!!!⁵² In addition it is to be in tempo – *allegro*.

12/XI –1932

The Fairytale d-moll, op. 51, and the Finale of the Appassionata learn almost only in fast tempo, but alternate *forte* with *pianissimo*.

[Sonata-Epica]⁵³

5/I – 1939

In the Scherzo of the Epica play more *piano* and *legato*. Remember a feature of Steinways is deprivation of the strength of the tone in the presence of a sharp *staccato*. Listen and highlight the *dolce* of the theme (on the pedal).

[Beethoven]

23/X –1933

Do not rend the keys away! More smoothness and lightness. Remember the pauses – i.e. taking-offs of the hands, especially in Beethoven! Do not fidget the hand {arm}! Straighten out the fingers.

⁵² The analogous indication to the Elfenmarchen (op. 48): “Do not exaggerate when taking off the hands! Take off the hand more smoothly (without the sharpness of the staccato), especially while performing cantilenas! In general, both the falling down and taking off the hands are to be produced more flat to a lesser extent!”

⁵³ Sonata-Epica for violin and piano, op. 57.

For the sake of evenness of the scales – the sustained position. Practice the hard easily! I.e., for example. “Dervishes”⁵⁴ and alla Turca.

3/X – 1933

The pathetic spots practice exclusively technically, with suppleness, without pedal, and in precise tempo.

Tempo! Always faster.

2/IX – 1936

In “Dervishes” lessen the middle fingers. Practice faster, lighter, and many times in a row!!!

[Dithyramb E flat major}⁵⁵

19/III – 1936

What is hard is to be played lightly on purpose.

Bulky is to be brought to the lightest and equal sonority! Dithyramb!

The main sonorities are the bass and the melody!

The main thing in the piece structure is to execute the runs, intermediate voices in the motion to the perspective.⁵⁶

29/II

The pieces of a dense chordal style (like the Dithyramb) are to be learned more lively and with even tone, without any *rubatos*.

⁵⁴ L. Beethoven – K. Saint Saens. The Choir of the Dervishes.

⁵⁵ Dithyramb in E-flat major, op. 10.

⁵⁶ From the notes of R. Fein made during Medtner’s lessons: “While playing a piece, it is to be heard as if in perspective. Forward!”

[The Fairytale F-sharp minor, op. 51]

12/XI –1932

Level the tempo and tone.

Clear out the melodic line!

Euphony! Suppleness. The medium individual color of the piece. For [the Fairytale] f sharp minor there should be the harpsichord tone with only left pedal. Long and sustained notes. Start with actual tempos and then equalize.

[The Second “Hymn to Labor”]

The pieces like the Second Hymn⁵⁷ must be exercised as singing cantilena, but not only *tutti forte*.

⁵⁷ “At the Anvil” from the “Hymns to Labor,” op. 49.

III

ABOUT EXERCISE⁵⁸

[General maxims]

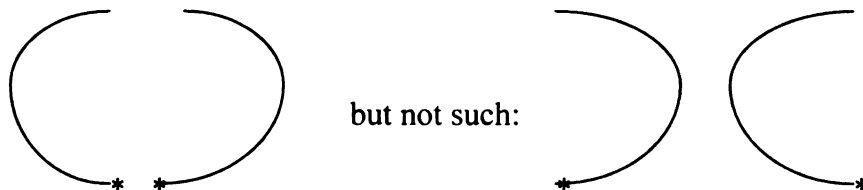
1924

1. The sitting posture

First, sit with as much comfort and stability as possible. The torso of the body must be the solid and stable center, but not in a state of convulsive tightness. It can reflect only the very wide lines of movements, but not the small ones. It can follow the movements of hands to the right and left (i.e. upward and downward), but possibly less in back and forth movements. The head must only think and listen but not dangle. It must belong to the concentrated listener and well as thinking performer, but not help the movements of arm's technical work.

2. Arm position

The most normal position of the arms is such that the elbows are moved away from the torso, i.e. as if they are going apart in opposite directions, and hands, visa verse, sort of meeting each other. Thus, the arms most of the time form such a figure:



⁵⁸The directions in the chapter III do not have purely technical character, because the sharp demarcation of virtuosic and artistic problems was not intrinsic to Medtner.

The condition and position of the elbows and hands already can be more free than that of the torso. The elbows already reflect the less broad lines than those of the torso, and the hands yet smaller. But still, these are the lines, i.e. the groups of notes but not separate notes, the movements of which are reflected just in the fingers, in other words in the smallest and thus the most mobile limb of the entire pianistic system.

21/I

Play fewer exercises and exercise more often using separate passages from pieces. Often such passages are passed by, and one does not notice their original specialty and does not see in them as a special technical problem. Pick out more specific spots and adjust the arm to them. The more examples you can adjust your arm to, the more different they are, and the more suppleness and ability to changes it acquires. Of exercises, the best of many in this respect are the famous ones from Tausig.⁵⁹

21/X

If the initiative of the stroke comes from just the finger lever – this is not a useful thing. Thus, it is necessary to develop those muscles of the hand, so that the finger becomes only a vehicle for the stroke, but not its initiator.

Rachmaninoff's technique - his energy, strength, fastness, and preciseness - are based in the way he shakes the motion from the inside; he never forces his fingers.

⁵⁹ Besides the Tausig's exercises Medtner often recommended the following numbers from the 1st book of exercises of J. Brahms: No. 2,3,7 – 19, 21 – 25 (refer to Brahms' The Everyday exercises).

[About mistakes of the fingers and finger touch]

1/I – 1936

1. Every awkwardness, knot, mistake, or confusion of the fingers happens mainly because of psychological reasons or because of nervousness. If a certain passage is learned thoroughly and is worked out both technically and plastically, then it is necessary to take away the reflex on details and play with the whole artistic wave

2. Less exercises, gymnastic, exaggeratingly slow tempos, exaggerated *legatissimo*-stretch, exaggerated pressure on the keys and so on.

3. Do not forget to play each hand separately.

2/I – 1936

A mistake and confusion of the fingers occur:

1. Either because of inability to spot the technical trimming in every difficult passage or part of it (the next to last page of the “Feux follets”).

2. Or because of wrong listening, that is when the ear is not concentrated on what constitutes the main content.

In addition, it is necessary to play more with the required touch and dynamic nuance.

5/VIII – 1929

1. Constantly think (in exercises, as well) about ease and freedom (Lockerheit) of the arms and fingers, and about beautiful tone as well.

2. Do not play too many exercises and gymnastic excerpts in a row. Constantly interchange this sort of practicing with the excerpts from pieces and cantilena fragments.

3. For the sake of purity of difficult passages:

Flat fingers in *legatissimo*, and most important – more cool-heartedness.

4. Down with all sharp, eccentric movements.

5. Sustain for a long time one even sonority (*pp*, *p*, *mf*, *f*) and then train the very gradual *crescendo* and *diminuendo* (on big perspectives).

6. Arm is to be lower and more tenacious.

7. Never accent on the wide line of *crescendo* or *diminuendo* – it breaks the line.

8. The most possible nearness of the fingers to the keys.

9. In work and exercises observe that everything is played to the degree of absolute clarity. For this it is useful sometimes to sustain longer the general background in *forte*.

3/XII – 1939

Remember:

1) The intensity of the stroke without tightening.

2) The suppleness of the movements without unnecessary reels and jolts.

3) The freshness of the hearing (the changing of the tone and smoothing out the accents).

4) The efficacy of the arm position along with its centralization.

5) Approach the maximum speed.

6) Straight fingers

20/I – 1936

Practice more the passages and touches found in actual pieces.

22/I – 1936

Along with the deep stroke, *legatissimo*, *Lento*, and *forte* practice more often in the fastest tempo, in the closest and lightest touch of the fingers, without arm jolts or accents, and *sempre pianissimo*, slightly bringing about the main content.

Exercise in contrasts, i.e. sudden change of *ff* and *pp* of *energico* and *dolce*.

24/I – 1936

Mirror!!⁶⁰

4/IX

1. Remember, that normally the right hand must be brighter than the left (in defiance of the sonority of modern pianos).

2. Exercise more in piece touché! I.e. play exercises with free arm {hand}, moderating the left hand, bringing about higher voices, and even using the pedal sometimes.

3. The technique of the subtlest touches to a key and of taking the fingers off!!

4. Practice not only in straightening the lines of tempo, but in smoothing out the unnecessary rhythmisation.

5. The elbows apart!

6. Practice more in bringing out the melody (for example, in the “Tragica”⁶¹).

⁶⁰ In order to get rid of unnecessary reflex movements or grimaces, Medtner recommended his students to put a mirror next to them (on the left or right side).

16/VIII – 1936

Fewer exercises.

Sculpture the passages! Deep stroke! The precise positions of the arm {hand}!
Do not play different things in the same manner. Every passage (every phase of the passage) has its own position, its nature!! In this sense, check the passages from Beethoven's Concerto⁶².

[About the center of the movement]

24/V – 1932

In piano playing, as well as in the whole musical action, the first and main thing is to find the axis, foothold, or center, around which the entire movement would gather. This refers to the seating posture, to determining the fingering, ways of movements and to dynamic and rhythmic nuances, in other words – to everything.

11/VIII – 1933

Always look for the center of gravity of the arm, from which one may move the arm in a certain direction, and change the positions, as well.

27/I – 1936

Look for an axis, common note, finger, buttress everywhere. Without it there is no clear playing and no confidence in the learned material!

24/I – 1933

Possibly more notes for one movement, in one position (axis), as if from one gut.

⁶¹ Sonata-Tragica, op.39 from the second cycle of the "Forgotten Melodies"

⁶² Meaning Beethoven's 4th concerto.

8/X

Drawing of the torso nearer and further in relation to the technique and positions of passages.

[Velocity]

30/VIII – 1936

Exercise all methods and touch, and execute them as clear as possible. Lifting up the fingers *articolando-staccato* (with fingers), *legatissimo* movements of the wrist – wing.

18/VIII – 1936

In small entangled passages lift the fingers less! Exercise execution without lifting fingers, both, slow and fast!

15/III – 1936

Do not torture the fingers (poor animals!)!!!

More freedom, less reflex!!

2/X – 1933

Exercise fingers first as if they were schoolchildren!⁶³

Lift, energetic stroke (in *piano*) in slow tempo and hand compression, concentration in slow tempo.

⁶³ This day Medtner was working on Chopin's C-sharp minor Etude, op.10 and wrote in his notes: "The fingers were getting stuck".

II/ - 1936

In general do not exhaust the fingers with unnecessary energy!!

During tiredness give a break to the fingers, even letting them play with flaccid strokes and not paying attention to some unevenness! After such a break they will play twice as evenly and precisely, than before!!

10/II – 1936

Passages and difficult spots are learned only when they can be executed with confidence and without emotions and tension – smoothly, with suppleness, tranquilly.

25/I – 1939

Exercise the quickness of the finger stroke (lever) along with absolute freedom (without any tension)... This stroke must come from within the hand and possess the plasticity of a ball or piano hammer, which would be the same when pressing a key and releasing it.

15/II – 1936

Velocity requires not only the light touch of the keys, but obliteration of accents, as well.

Velocity requires the utmost flatness and evenness devoid of tinges of strength, flatness and suppleness of hands, i.e. the absence of jolts, sharp lifts in *staccato* etc.

25/VIII – 1936

The difficulty of Bach's fugues lies in the initiative of the stroke of the fingers, just fingers.

16/IV – 1936

Unevenness is often caused by the intensity of accents. Set the fingers free without any accents, then they will play precisely and smoothly.

16/II – 1936

Pour the passages out like from a jar, in other words, the right elbow is to the right, the left is to the left.

19/X – 1924

Do not skip training in continuously fast pieces, for example , Chopin's etude in A-flat major, op. 25.

3/X – 1933

Play more pieces from beginning to end!! Endurance. Change tone more often in technical work.

11/X – 1933

Exercise with stops and sliding notes in difficult passages⁶⁴.

26/VIII

1. Do not lie heavily on the keys! Especially after the stroke!
2. Energetic *piano*!
3. All the energy must go into the keys, but not out of them.
4. Alternate the stretch with compressing the fingers, putting them together in a pinch (for example, in two octave chromatic scales which make use of the 5th finger).
5. Play the trills and tremolos as uninterrupted and closer to the keys as possible.

⁶⁴ Meaning, a stop is followed by a group of fast and light notes.

6. Change the consistency (condition) of the hand and therefore (character of) tone.

7. Play most of the time in even tempo. It means, that the tempo in general needs to be equalized the same way as the separate passages.

27/VIII

Constant definiteness, clarity of task during work!

12/ I – 1936

Practice in easy, free, and supple playing in tempo!

Get rid of even the slightest tension or accents!!

Quit the habit of always warming up on slow tempos with gymnastic techniques.
Start right away easily and in tempo.

Do not touch the keys with tension, fatigue, or onslaught! All of the playing, even in exercises, must boil down to comfort and euphony.

3/I – 1934

It is necessary to smooth out all the difficulties:

1. In terms of tone.
2. In terms of movements and sensations of hands.
3. In terms of tempo. Everything is in orbit! Everything is without effort and jolts.

26/XII –1939

Lubricate every movement, especially in arm's movement and in more difficult positions!!! This is as important in the singing pieces as it is in the fast ones.

3/II

Practice more in double tempos, i.e. slow and twice as fast.

In fast double tempos bring out the red thread of the melody.

Only the exercise in double tempos can bring you closer to the real speed!!!

Exercise both tone and touch in those tempos!!

2/II

Set the fingers and hands free more often! Down with any tension!

When practicing stretches, keep the flexibility of the hands and touch cantabile.

13/I – 1937

Exercises should not exceed half an hour at a time.

Breathe more freely and easily!

Absolute calmness internally and externally!!

Always produce beautiful tones, even in exercises!

22/XII – 1939

Play more in medium tempo *tranquilo*, evenly, *legato* (almost not detaching the fingers from the keys) and there should be absolutely no jolts and accents.

4/I – 1934

Play with free strength *ff* as well as *pp*, and slow, as well as fast.

7/XII – 1939

Choose certain excerpts and passages from pieces as exercises in stretch, velocity,

endurance, lightness, strength, melodiousness etc.

26/II

In all fast passages (except the *legato* ones) practice with light touch on the keys, with flat fingers, *non legato*, so that the fingers do not get stuck, but rebound off the keys easily. Example:

The Fairytale e-moll, op.34, Chopin's Etude f-moll, op.25. No. 2.

Quite opposite, dense harmonic chordal texture, which must sound cantabile (as, for example, it is in the Second Dithyramb), practice *molto legatissimo* and practice all the moments of stretch, required by the given chords⁶⁵

2/II [- 1934]

Aim for more fully played and leveled sound in the fastest tempos and without the pedal!

5/II [-1934]

Play all the way down to the depth of the keys. Work in even, *tranquillo* tempos. More gradations and colors in nuances.

1/IX – 1933

Do not forget about medium tempos. Rapidity by assault! Do not let the fingers sink in!

10/IX – 1933

Practice in such rapid tempo, in which there is no time to think.

Remember the free fingers (the stroke of S.V.R.)⁶⁶.

Remember positions for any given passage.

⁶⁵ I.e. practice separately every interval, which forms part of the chord.

⁶⁶ Meaning the stroke of S. V. Rachmaninoff.

18/X – 1933

The real technique: the elbows are apart, straight fingers, closed eyes, free breath, free hand, and absolute absence of the stretch.

Exercise with closed eyes!

The steadfast center is the axis of passages!

Smooth out the tempos (*rubato*).

Take yourself into your hands!

[About the function of the wrist]

29/VIII – 1936

Exercise setting free all the “hinges” of the arm!! (The Coda of Chopin’s Concerto!)

More lightness, gentleness, and evenness.

It is necessary for all passages to warm up and to exercise the hand, which is the wing! Along with that stop the initiative of the fingers – who are the levers.

But exercise this with energy, which means not flabby, but with certain rhythm and resilience of hand.

20/X – 1933

The wrist staccato! Hands lower. The exactitude of the stroke along with the fastest motion without groping (i.e. without *legatissimo*).

[Octaves]

31/VIII – 1936

Octaves: Sit deeper, lower, the torso should be further, lower the shoulders and insides, and set the arms free⁶⁷.

15/IV – 1936

The octaves are not to be played by the hand alone. Move the torso back, bring the shoulders higher, and the elbows apart. Push somewhat forward!!!

The center is the entire torso. It is not the octave that leads the torso, but the torso that leads the octaves.

11/II – 1936

Octaves – the wrist is to be exercised on the thumb! Especially the repeats!!

The position of the middle fingers in octave passages!!!

The 2nd and the 3rd fingers must be closer to one another.

12/I – 1936

In the octaves – the buttress is on the 1st finger!!

13/I – 1936

In the octaves watch only for the first finger and put it in a proper position⁶⁸.

17/I – 1934

In the octaves and octave chords the 1st finger should be the buttress for the sake confidence and clarity⁶⁹. Train rapidity and lightness.

1/III – 1936

⁶⁷ This indication is for octaves performed by the hand.

⁶⁸ Watch for the smoothness of the line in an octave passage, which depends on the move from the white to the black keys (it is important to determine precisely the position of 1st first finger on the keys – its closeness to the black ones).

⁶⁹ Meaning that the 1st finger is not relaxed.

Closer to the keys! Lower the hands [arms]!

Especially in octaves!

14/II – 1933

In difficult spots (especially tremolo, trills, octaves) lower down the insides!!

31/VII -1936

Remember the short, energetic stroke, especially in octaves.

[Double notes]

10/II – 1936

In the double notes set free the inside fingers!!⁷⁰

25/I – 1936

Exercise the wrist (*staccato*) in the double notes! For example, Liszt's "Feux Follets".

In "Feux Follets" the movement of the wrist upward is to be on the strong beats of the measure.

Compression of the hand in double stops! By all means do not stretch! Remember, that the body's stable tranquility must not transform to its wooden torpidity.

Relax the wrist and the fingers during training!

Exercise in moderate, airy sonority! Without extra fat!

10/X – 1933

Do not force the finger lever.

For the deep stroke (especially in double notes) make use of moving the fingers by the hand.

⁷⁰ Meaning that the legato is only in the outside voices.

Along with the deep stroke, exercise the lightest touches.

[Chords]

Do not learn everything forte. Chords lighter, with relaxed hand, and with the minimal distance between the fingers and hands from the keyboard.

13/I

In broad positions compress the hand on the chords (after taking the chords)⁷¹.

[Trills]

20/XII – 1939

The failure of the short trills is only because of the nervous breakdown. It is necessary to use the least tension and the least lift of the fingers, and to always learn the trills in *piano* dynamic.

24/VII – 1936

Try to learn the trills both *non legato* (with rebounding fingers) and *legatissimo*.

18/IX – 1933

Play exercises and especially trills *pianissimo leggiero* more often, and without effort.

19/IX – 1933

The trills (by 9-note triplets) in all major, minor, and chromatic scales *pianissimo*; flat fingers⁷².

⁷¹ Compress, meaning to put the hand together, as much as possible as the given chord permits.

9/II – 1936

Swing the wrist! In *staccato* and in *tremolo*! Broken octaves and sixths. The trill and the wrist!

24/X- 1932

The broken thirds, sixths, octaves, and trilled scales!

[Leaps]

2/IX – 1936

The leaps are to be taken more smoothly, without jolts, especially in the bass (the beginning of the development in the Concerto)⁷³.

17/I [- 1934]

Remember the necessity to smooth out the movements, especially in the leaps and risky spots.



IV

NOTES ON THE WORK OF THE COMPOSER

[On practical work]

The health

1. **D o n o t f a t i g u e.** To the tired imagination, the fruits of the greatest inspiration do not say anything, and, vice versa, to the fresh one a simple element, even a triad, is enough to give this imagination a push. At the beginning of the work there is always the sense of abundance in presence, and then, after a failure in some trifle – the desperation and the loss of the faith in oneself appear. These contrasts – are the fruits of the tiredness of the nerves.

The character, will

2. **T o l e r a t e.** Remember that the work on oneself is no less important than the work on the material of one's own talent. When else can a person work on oneself if not during the moments of stops, delays, failures in his constant work. Work on oneself, which plays a great role by itself, is at the same time important for everything else. Overcome desperation, restrain from wrath. Not to smoke an extra cigarette is not only good for you in general, but is also good for succeeding in private practice time. In other words, this is not only an exploit, but the labor, as well.

The health

1. **F a t i g u e** is insensibility. Fatigue is manifested mainly in being satiated with work and even in the insensibility to the subject. At the first hint of this condition, one must

immediately stop working and leave, for practicing in this condition is not only nonsensical and fruitless, but is a sacrilege. The duration of the break must depend on the intensity of this condition. Here comes the conclusion: rest for short whiles, but more often.

The character

2. I m p a t i e n c e is stagnation and sloth. Impatience often emanates from fatigue, as well, but in this case the above mentioned satiety is blended into this impatience. But sometimes impatience is manifested in insufficient concentration and focus in the work, whereas the subject itself may be contemplated with enough love. But this contemplation is not enough at all. You feel it with your consciousness, but your will is asleep. Here comes the impatience. Then, your will is to be given all sorts of tasks, that have or do not have direct relation to the subject of work: at all costs either write down what is contemplated, or transfer the contemplation to something else but with the aim to fix it, or, finally, set to some mechanical work, and so on. Therefore, it is necessary to shake up one's will! In general, it is necessary to work out economical and strategic principles of working. Work less, but more intensively in terms of work planning. Then you will save more strength and you will have more time left. It is necessary not only to be able to think, but to observe the way your thought goes. In short, equalize the contemplation and the mechanical processes of work.

3. V a n i t y a n d b u s t l e. A very personal, subjective, master's attitude to one's own health, to one's own character, and to one's own talent generates either conceited feelings, or desperation. To master health or character does not necessarily mean to get well at once or to change one's character sharply. To master, in this case,

means to accept the fact that there are certain things that are not up to our will to change. To master – means to think of one's own body and character as of "brother donkey."⁷⁴ Actually, it is possible for the character, i.e. the "brother donkey", to be changed only when a miracle is not required from it. Remember that all the miracles happen unnoticeably, quietly, and step by step, - the appearance of miracles in reality (not those in fairytales) is a long process, not an instantaneous one. He ["the brother donkey"] must work every day and train his will for every step.

[4] The principle of variety and unity is important not only in artistic shape, but in the process of work as well. The unity is to be adhered to in terms of the goal, which is outlined in work. But the diversity is in the ways of searching for this goal.

One should not put oneself away from main occupations too often. Even if you are setting about something different for recreation, you must first compare it to the main one. I.e. if you set about reading a book and feel that it diverts you from the main things that your thoughts are occupied with, quit it. But talking, meeting with people, and the everyday bustle divert you most from your goal. Therefore, seek silence and solitude.

*

Do not practice one and the same detail for a long time. The details often divert from the goal. In the case of fatigue from the main work, immediately set about doing something different. As much as this is done for the sake of the main goal, it will be very useful. One is not to be diverted from the main occupations if it is not for their sake, but for random purposes. It is necessary to

⁷⁴ "Brother donkey" is a figurative expression, borrowed by Medtner from Francis of Assisi.

have a list of current occupations, main and secondary ones. Take notes in a special notebook. What is important is to be always busy.

1916

The secondary occupations are:

- 1) The reading of works of music and literature (make notes in special notebook).
- 2) Playing piano.
- 3) Correspondence and writing down your thoughts.
- 4) Liquidation of unfinished works.
- 5) Working out and putting manuscripts into shape.

*

Write down the composed things. Instrumentation! Move the more advanced sketches. Put into shape, determine the accumulated rough drafts.

*

Try as quickly as possible to determine your own ability or lack of ability for creative work, and for your fitness to withstand. If efforts are fruitless, this makes a human unfit for any other work.

*

For the success of the composition one must start revising those parts of the sketch which are already more determined, and also those places and excerpts which are easier to move, and thus little by little submerge into the work, and embrace the whole. Do not persist if the work is not going well or when you are tired.

The theme in a piece must be developed by itself. This notion does not exist in modernists' practice. In place of the theme they develop their will by itself, which is withstood by nothing.

*

When moving ahead to work on a different draft, one should choose the same type of composition, not in terms of the character, but in terms of its purpose. In other words, if one tears oneself away from a concert draft, he is to set to work on a different concert piece. Therefore the composition of a work is not entirely interrupted because of an unsuccessful attempt.

*

When encountering a failure in work, dig more often into the material. It is not right to quit thousands of planned pieces because of two or three unsuccessful ones. Finally, it is much more shameful to destroy thousands of the seeds, than grow among several bad ones. Only mean ambition is afraid of the criticism; therefore, this fear is to be struggled against. Finally, no author is able to fully appraise his own works. He should feel some doubts about his impeccability in the role of a critic if he was not satisfied with his work for a long time or if for a long time he stayed in the state of self-contemplation.

Going through the material, try to determine the character of the drafts, i.e. search for and sort the introductory and intermediate motives, complementary figures, passages, etc. Determine whether they are pianistic, violinistic, vocalistic, or orchestral (i.e. polynomial).

*

Do not force the thoughts in terms of the sort of performance.

Out of the material choose mainly the most advanced drafts!

Spare no details, parts of the piece or the whole piece if it detains the entire course of work.

Do not be greedy! It is shameful!

*

If the thoughts get clear only by the end of the work, do not consider the earlier portion of work lost, but do not forget what finally got clear, and try, after putting it down somehow (either with notes or with words) to move over to the next day of work.

Remember that **t o w o r k m e a n s – t o l e a r n**. If you learn something in the course of the work and it gives you the completed fruit – say thanks; or in case of no fruit, do not get impatient; first of all, because one is not to work and to learn for the fruit; second of all, the absence of such fruit does not mean that you did not learn anything. It just seems so because there is no book from which you studied, and no pages that could be counted.

About the will in artistic creative activity

The will in artistic creative activity, which in its essence is mediumlike, very often is a synonym for arbitrariness.

Do not a r b i t r a t e either in the scheme, or in the expounding. Before you set about the “hot” work, close your eyes, and in the silence imagine to yourself the given thought developed into the piece, for it undoubtedly exists as a piece and your task is to uncover its certain images, but not to make them up. This sort of meditation should necessarily suggest the sonority of interpretation and the lines of the shape of the given theme. Notes should be made immediately, it does not matter how: where possible – by notes, in other places - by words, and others – in a form of a diagram. It is necessary to work out some c a l m n e s s a n d s e l f – p o s s e s s i o n in the process of the composer’s work. This work needs it no less than the virtuosic one. But the process never can be similar and constant.

*

Do not break your head when you are tied into knots and difficulties.

Curse everything that stops the thought and troubles you!!

Look for the simplest, but legitimate conclusions.

The motion of the will! But not the philistine will, but the artistic one.

About the spirit and the matter in modern art

The spirit now is “the spirit of denial, the spirit of doubt” (from the poem by Pushkin, A.S.), and in addition we can name the spirit of relativity, relativism ...

In the matter (due to this factor) the loss of basic music elements is observed. There is the lack of mastery of the simplest harmonies (of modulation), simplest forms and so on in the composition and the lack of performers’ mastery in performing the

simplest forms of the composition (chorale) or just a melody. In both cases there is an absence of *legato*, thought connection, thinking, amalgamation, solidity, continuity of feeling... The same it is in perception. The listener does not keep track of the theme and its development into an organic piece, he does not tend to yield to thematic hypnosis, i.e. to breathe with the breath of the themes. From the very beginning he develops counter hypnosis with his "critique" and he tries to breathe his own way. The listener aims only for piquant details, and if he does not find them, he rejects the whole piece.

Remember the nonstop struggle with "the spirit of denial and doubt!" The necessity of standing at one's post! The struggle with the bustle and the thoughts about external! Do not dig into the temperament and always remember the theme!

Do not forget the main things! Do not give yourself up to "soaring!"

The mind is the lackey of the spirit, and is to be held in subordination, so that it does not take too much will. A thought which became a feeling, or a feeling which became a thought, are spiritual and give real treasures. The mind is working constantly – it is ordinary. It gets tired, becomes tedious and invents something "interesting and curious," something that must not belong to art.

One should learn to write down one's thoughts, write them in all possible ways. Write every day, at least half an hour a day (besides the composition of current pieces), the material of the small pieces.

*

Do not think about publishing...

*

Develop in yourself great integrity and faithfulness to yourself – platonism is not matched with any earthly conceptions about times, terms, duties... Either fully “recall” what was seen for its own sake, or deliver the commodity for the sake of glory and money, but in this case one is not to become meticulous and precise in one’s reminiscences.

*

Out of all hindrances, the most terrible is the nerves. Nothing slackens the tempo and the rhythm of work as much as the nerves do. The feeling of rush, urge, throwing oneself from one thing to another, and the wish to do everything at once leads finally to hopeless fatigue and desperation. Realizing all this, it is necessary to have the command of the nerves, i.e., the command of the tempo and rhythm of one’s entire being, of every step and every thought. Then proceed to the work on a certain spot of musical matter, forgetting about the existence of all chaos of the matter. A proverb “the more haste, the less speed” is not made up for the neurotics.

B e l i e v e i n t h e m e s

This belief must be manifested not in quitting a theme as a useless one because of its unsuccessful development, and not in working it over again, for if it has some value, it will cast its beams on the succeeding material, even if what succeeds is not ‘extraordinarily interesting.’ Do not be worried about ‘interesting!’ It is the last business in art. The value and organic integrity of an artistic work is determined by its theme and the potential of the form concentrated in it, but not by “interesting” tricks or the size of the form.

B e l i e v e i n y o u r o w n t h e m e i n g e n e r a l

Eternal undermining of oneself, eternal urge and mistrust that something may turn well out of the planned work, - this is one of the main reasons of the failure in one's work. In this respect the memory suffers more than anything else.

Trying to remember something, one is able to strain his memory, but not to recall, and then the memory finally loses its precision.

*

Do not practice two pieces, which use one key, one time signature, tempo, and what is most important, one form of composition. Move from a piano piece to a vocal one, from a vocal piece to one for violin, etc.

*

Do not set about new thoughts, while exhausted and irritated with oneself by unsuccessful practice, for it will only spoil these thoughts.

In general, think of the calmness of the soul. If you feel sick at heart, do not set about anything with this sickness.

Do not require the immediate realization of dreams.

Do not be stingy with your labors.

*

R e p e t i t i o n is in the limits of the form and in general.

The repetitions in nature are never precise and literal.

Contrasts

- 1) Vivid or energetic movement – calm, singing movement.
- 2) Dense, thick writing – transparent, light writing.

- 3) Melodics – passage, motion.
- 4) Asserting cadences – questioning, evasive ones.
- 5) Homophonic style – polyphonic.
- 6) Briefness - longitude of themes.
- 7) Rhythm, registers, keys, etc.

*

Avoid unnecessary developments and runs in short pieces.

When having an abundance of the material, i.e. when having many sketches, and many variants in the limits of every sketch, it is necessary to stop being greedy, and to waste your time choosing variants or the sketches themselves, but recklessly discard everything that is harder, heavier, and more difficult, etc. To make it short – get ahead through the stacks of the piled material! Do not stop and do not look into this chaos!!

*

Do not pursue yourself, just observe yourself.

Remember that when disappointed one should not contemplate his disappointment, for a person always becomes drawn into what he contemplates. The most useful of all is to throw out of your mind everything that got you disappointed, and the disappointment itself. Make yourself think, speak, or read of other things.

Remember, that a thought is directed by the brain, and though the brain serves the spirit, it is not the spirit in essence, but the flesh and thus requires regular rests, as well as arms and legs. Rest more often!

While practicing mechanically, hide your feelings in your pocket.

Make your imagination work! Imagine a piece (as if in a dream) in a final look, as if it were already written and performed.

Make your imagination work! By means of imagination climb out of your surrounding, out of everyday things if they are not conducive to the creative work. In essence, we, no less than children, need to play the little horse game, or doll game, namely, we constantly need to transgress time and to change the so called reality, and if we no longer are able to do so, this is due mainly to the facetious and exaggerated respect to the so called real or childish “true.”

About the form

(P r a c t i c a l c o n c e p t i o n s)

The form is not separable from the content when one is inspired, but since the inspiration is not always to be counted on, the form sometimes introduces itself as any substance. If our soul and body were in constant health and harmony with each other, we would not separate them. We do separate our soul and body because we often lack something either in one or in the other. Everything positive always connects, whereas the negative separates. It is impossible not to take this fact into account. Even though our main task is supposed to be the struggle with the origin of the negative that separates, nevertheless we must be armed in the event of temporary victory of the negative, such as in the event of illness, otherwise the temporary victory may become the final one and the illness will terminate in death, which is final separation of the soul from the body, or of the content from the form.

[Practical considerations about the development of the melodic seeds]

1) The briefest sentence may have additions. Additions are a great motivating power in form. All of Scarlatti's form – is a sequence of additions.

2) Repetition in essence is the most undesirable factor in the form. But even this, taken in the form of variation, i.e. in form of development, abridgement, or changes, is able to give new light to what is said and thus is able to assist the form's development and growth. The degree of the potentials of variation form is seen in Wagner's leitmotifs, which played a colossal role in the development of the form.

3) The choice out of what has been said is a form of repetition, form of variation, or a leitmotif to a certain degree, but since in this case only the wretched part is chosen out of what has been said, as if, for example, we chose only one word, this method is more free and has a greater potential, than just a variation. It is a free discussion about what is said. A highlighted word, casting new light onto what has been said, at the same time is able to acquire its own thematic meaning.

4) The most ideal factor of the growth of the form is the attachment of the new to what has already been said. It is distinguished from an addition by the independence of its meaning. But this same independence makes this method the most difficult in terms of preservation of integrity and unity with the preceding material. This method is greatly depended on inspiration, since the independence of the new from the preceding material must only be the superficial, apparent one, and the ties – mysterious. However, it is possible to outline certain ways of preservation of those ties to a certain degree and thus sort of break the mysteriousness of it, but just "sort of" break, because the use of

these ways can not always guarantee the real internal ties. These ways are: the preservation of the unity of tempo, of the bar division, and of key, the unity of the conclusive harmony with that of the beginning of the new content, and, finally, the foretelling of the new content. The fewer these methods are, the more the attachment of the new may seem mechanical, arbitrary, and the more cyclic will be the form. This refers only to the pieces of limited size, since in a large scale piece or cycle, the same method will contribute to absence of the diversity along with the integrity of the form.

5) The composition of an introduction to the melody can play a role in the further development of it.

6) The great masters often interrupted the flow of the melody with passages, harmonic sequences, and so on, in other words, frankly rested from melodic tension. This method, though it is more suitable in a large scale forms, sonatas or symphonies, is still acceptable in small melodic forms.

7) Avoidance of frequent cadences.

8) Nuances.

9) Images, lines, and gestures. Having an idea of some images, graphic lines or gestures is sometimes able to lead the thought out of the dead end or clichés.

10) Expounding. Remember that the expounding often affects the way the thought goes. Very often the thought stagnates from working for a very long time on only piano, only vocal, or any other composition.

Move over from one to another!

*

Do not be afraid of an external non-logic or incoherence, but the internal one!!

Braver, more decisive, lighter, simpler!!!

Think not only with the themes and melodies, but with harmonies – modulations, passages, rhythms etc. as well.

Think with images! It means, sometimes isolate yourself from a specifically musical process of thinking. But along with this, look out for two dangers: on one hand the shapelessness and on the other hand getting into the rut or a stencil. First give your thought absolute freedom and write and outline its free flow, and only then relentlessly criticize.

*

Literary phrases or gestures are sometimes able to enliven the formal “depictiveness” much more than theoretical considerations.

*

Think by the nuances!

Simplicity! Remember, that in art (and in any creative activity) everything good and works well, if it is suitable. A dazzling motive, rhythm, harmony, or sonority, put in a wrong place and/or wrong time, lose its brilliance, and visa versa – the simplest elements are able to dazzle, if they are used in the right place.

Brevity! Add as few as possible flights of fancy to what naturally pours out. A lyrical poem is lyrical when it on the whole was poured out naturally. Regardless of how much the author would change it afterwards, any change must relate to the details but not the whole.

Expounding. Compose such forms of accompaniments, which are the most diverse, economized, and characteristic!!!

Think according to the nuances!!

The expounding is dependent upon the nuances of the thought – the general background is always better.

Think up to tempo!!

Do not think about everything at once! When any plan of a form or expounding comes into your mind, you should not immediately try to use and measure almost all the material into this plan, but calmly separate out of it the most suitable, and carefully, without force, try to fulfill the given plan using at least several motives. Do not consider every plan that strikes you as the only possible way of fulfillment of the material. It is better to write down and collect all of these plans for your memory.

Remember. Choose the work according to the pulse of the given day. One day the pulse is buoyant and energetic – then do not set about working on themes with a contemplative, calm mood. Likewise, do not set about brisk, lively themes when the pulse is weaker and is conducive to contemplation.

Do not block the main thoughts!

9/II – 1933

More air, rests! Do not fill all the registers up with harmonic notes, voices, and counterpoint. Do not be afraid of the wide position of the voices and of their notorious sonority! Take turns in letting each of them be silent or sound!

10/II – 1933

Think of tempo.

Look at the clock from time to time! Do not spend more than a half hour on one detail. Due to fatigue it only will slip away! Move over to something different!

More diversity in the expounding

- 1) *Tutti* and *solo* of the parts.
- 2) Nuances and the movement (figurations).
- 3) Dialogues and rests.
- 4) Relief of the voices and the relief of the accents in doubling.
- 5) Diversity and freedom of using registers.
- 6) Tapering-offs and swells.

*

The move to something different, I mean to a different theme, different tempo, or different key is necessary for the refreshment of the imagination and thus important not for this different work alone, but for the preceding one too, for after returning to the first work, everything becomes clearer and livelier. Therefore the first work is able to fascinate again.

10/II – 1933

It is not that music exists for the instrumentation, but visa versa.

Always proceed from the themes and from something of your own, and do not look at someone else's. The examples of alien instrumentation are related to alien music.

Do not let the negative phenomena of life pull down the spiritual strengths.

For the creative work (especially for the artistic one) it is necessary to be able to stop life!! It is impossible to paint a landscape while looking out of the windows of an express train!

March 1933

The rendering of the most sacred, the most musical thoughts is incomprehensible to the mind. Musical thoughts, i.e. the themes, grains cannot be and have never been the result of conscientious logical reasoning, but they fall from above in the guise of an unexpected surprise. All the following work (often called the development), though it occurs with the participation of conscientiousness, has meaning only when this conscientiousness is faithful to the theme.

28/III – 1933

The same as ‘play easily when difficult,’ - likewise write easily, when difficult, i.e. everywhere where there the knots are tied, where the musical fabric becomes viscid and difficult, write down this place in the most simplified way and go on.

“Look into the root.”⁷⁵

Leave the themes and thoughts, live their simplest, unfeigned life and do not think of the bustle of the technique.

Lowering down of the insides (the same as when playing!)

December 1936

Simplify and shorten as much as possible.

⁷⁵ Russian proverb

When experiencing the absence of the proper exaltation of the strengths or tone of your spirit, then occupy yourself with composition only in the mornings before the first meal.

Do not get stuck in one spot in the composition or into one sketch when the work is not coming along.

Work according to Dr. Spir's prescription: without tension and only with the presence of pleasure, not setting for yourself any tasks.

Sing and breathe more!

Develop in yourself the graphomany.

Every time lightly outline a general sketch for yourself.

Eliminate the external obstacles (pencils, bad paper and others).

When writing, do not think of the former sketches (which are the notes of a mad man), but write easily from memory as if a thought just struck your mind.

Look at the forest, not at the individual trees alone! Beyond the trees (the details) one must see the forest (the whole).

Remember as well, the composer's work is to be treated with more, not less respect than that of a performer.

Remember that graphomany is dangerous only for publishing, namely as a habit without control, as a process, given out as a result. But for the work process itself, the graphomany is a necessary passion, and woe to him who is afraid of a pen or a pencil.

Remember that the perfection of the form is not in the perfection of the details or single parts, and sometimes does not even lie in the perfection and depth of certain melodies and themes. The perfection of the form sometimes requires rest after depth,

strength, and tension of the material, sometimes requires neutrality or paleness of the details. Beethoven is thus the greatest creator of the form, because he did not think over a gnarled counterpoint, did not correct it, but was going ahead, and saw it from the height of the eagle's flight. Sometimes he juxtaposed the themes of the greatest inspiration and revelation with themes that are more simple, almost pale, as for example the A major theme in the Allegretto of the *Seventh Symphony*.

Remember the equalization of the imagination and reasoning.

Sing! Sing more often, hum, and sing out your thoughts...

Remember the equilibrium of contemplation and action, of passive perception, listening to what sounds inside, and active realization, manifestation of it on paper. Be not only a pot in which something is boiling by itself, but be yourself, be an active man.

Simplify everything to the maximum.

APPENDIX

Some of the proffered exercises written by Medtner for himself were recommended to his students.

Everyone who is interested in enhancing his/her piano abilities and in acquiring freedom and control over the keyboard will find useful and necessary material in these exercises. Medtner considered it necessary and very important, having in mind the highest artistic aims, to work every day on the perfection of the performing apparatus by means of which these aims are to be achieved.

Independence, flexibility, tenacity, the strength of fingers, the suppleness of the movements of hands, the diversity of the touch to the keyboard (*touché*), and the tone related to that touch – everything must be enveloped by the conscientiousness of an artist. Everything must be subject to artistic consideration..

From the notes of Nikolay Medtner it is evident, with what a vigilant eye he peered into the performing tasks set before him, with what persistent, loving attention he worked on their resolution. Under his fingers even the exercises were turned into a chain of beautiful tones.

It is not accidentally that we encounter among his sayings the following instructions: “Do not play mechanically, even exercises!” Or: “Never lose the artistic taste!”, “Everything must always sound beautiful.” The next observation of his is also a very valuable one: “Even though technique is energy, this is needed to be said over and over again to the unadvanced, inept, and sluggish students, but excessive energy makes technique heavy and awkward. Practice removing the energy,

temperament, accents, sharp movements, jolts!” It is helpful to have in mind yet another observation: “Do not spend much time on exercises and slow tempos. Play more in medium and fast ones. The maximal drawing of the fingers to the keys!!”

These exercises will undoubtedly bring help to those who work in the field of pianism. Before learning them one must thoroughly familiarize oneself with Medtner’s piano diaries where the musician wrote with the fullest clarity and exactitude the experience of his creative labor, which led him to the height of performing art.

P. Vasiliev.

MEDTNER'S EXERCISES

Trill Exercises

4

Piano

5

and so on

6

and so on

7

and so on

8

Measures 1-8: The right hand (RH) and left hand (LH) play continuous eighth-note triplets. The RH starts on a G4 and the LH on a G3, both moving in parallel motion. The key signature has two flats (Bb and Eb).

Measures 9-16: The RH continues with eighth-note triplets, with fingerings 1, 3, 3, 3, 4, 2, 3, 3, 5, 3, 3, 3, 3. The LH continues with eighth-note triplets, with fingerings 1, 3, 2, 4, 3, 5, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3.

Measures 17-24: The RH continues with eighth-note triplets, with fingerings 3, 1, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3. The LH continues with eighth-note triplets, with fingerings 1, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3. The text "and so on" appears at the end of measure 24.

Measures 25-32: The RH continues with eighth-note triplets, with fingerings 4, 2, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3. The LH continues with eighth-note triplets, with fingerings 2, 4, 3, 5, 1, 3, 2, 4, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3. The text "and so on" appears at the end of measure 32.

Measures 33-40: The RH continues with eighth-note triplets, with fingerings 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3. The LH continues with eighth-note triplets, with fingerings 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3. The text "and so on" appears at the end of measure 40.

11

3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3

3 1
4 2

3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3

3

a)

3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3

3 1
5 2

3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3

and so on

b)

5 3
4 2
1

3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3

3 1
5 2
4

3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3

A musical score for piano, consisting of two staves joined by a brace on the left. The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The top staff is in treble clef and contains a triplet of eighth notes: B-flat4, A-flat4, and G4. The bottom staff is in bass clef and contains a triplet of eighth notes: B-flat3, A-flat3, and G3. The number '3' is written below each triplet. The text 'and so on' is written to the right of the staves.

3

and so on

3

Exercises for stretch

By minor thirds³

12 R.H. 1 2 3 2 3 4 5 4 3 4 3 2 1 2 3 2 3 4 5 4 3 4 3 2 1

L.H. 5 4 3 2 1 2 3 4 5 4 3 2 1 2 3 4 5 4 3 2 1 2 3 4 5 4 3 2 1

and so on

By major thirds

and so on

By fourths

and so on

By augmented fourths

and so on

By fifths

and so on

13 R.H. 1 2 3 4 5 4 3 2 1

L.H. 5 4 3 2 1 2 3 4 5 4 3 2 1

The fingering indicated in the beginning should be maintained all the way to the end. Medtner recommended playing this exercise mainly in a slow tempo, lingering all the fingers as much as possible (*leagatissimo*) along with the entire freedom and flexibility of hand. One should not practice the exercise in wider finger positions before absolute freedom is reached in the narrow position.

14

4 5 4 5
3 3 3 3
2 1 2 1

simile

a)

4 3 2 5 1 3
3 2 5 1 3
4 4 1 1

and so on

Exercises for double notes

and so on

The musical notation for the 'and so on' section is written on a single staff. It begins with a treble clef and a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). The melody consists of a series of eighth and sixteenth notes, with some notes beamed together. The text 'and so on' is written to the right of the staff.

and so on

~~and so on~~

18

5 4 3 4 5 4 3 4

1 2 2 1 1 2 2 1

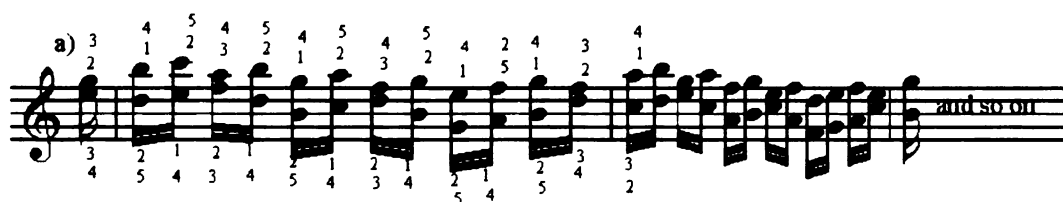
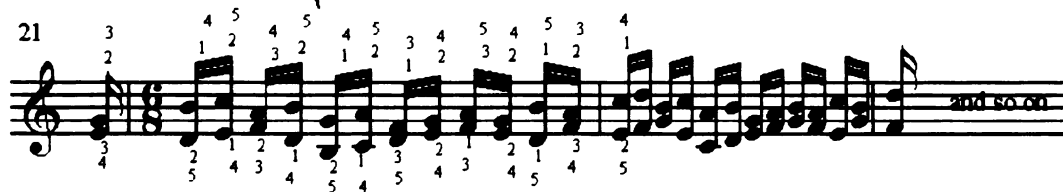
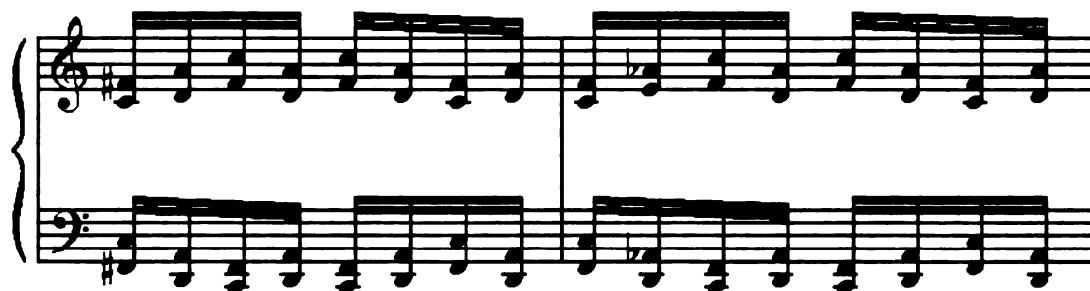
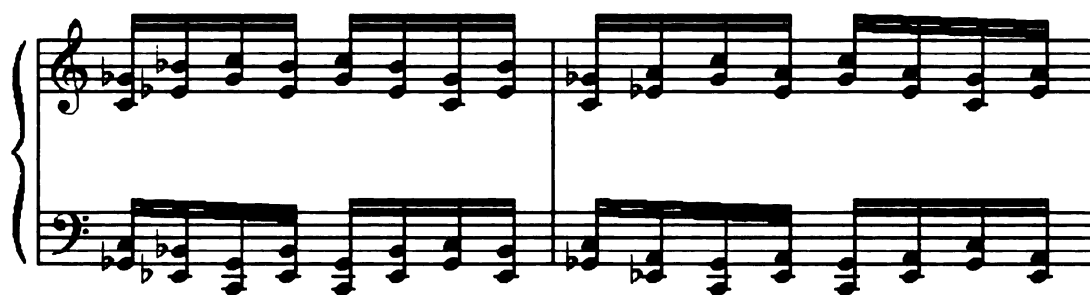
1 5 4 3 4 1 5 4 3 4

and so on and so on

19

3 4 5 4 1 2 3 2

1 2 3 2 1 3 4 5 4



Octaves and Chords

23

Piano

and so on

and so on

b)

and so on

c)

and so on

24

and so on

a)

and so on

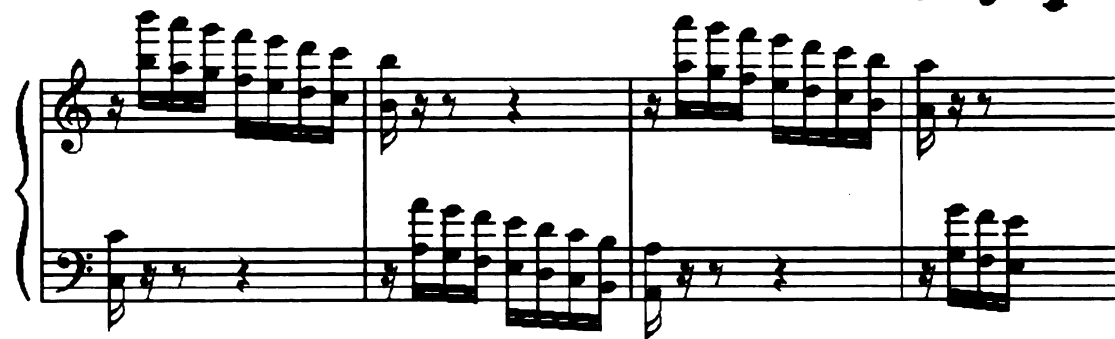
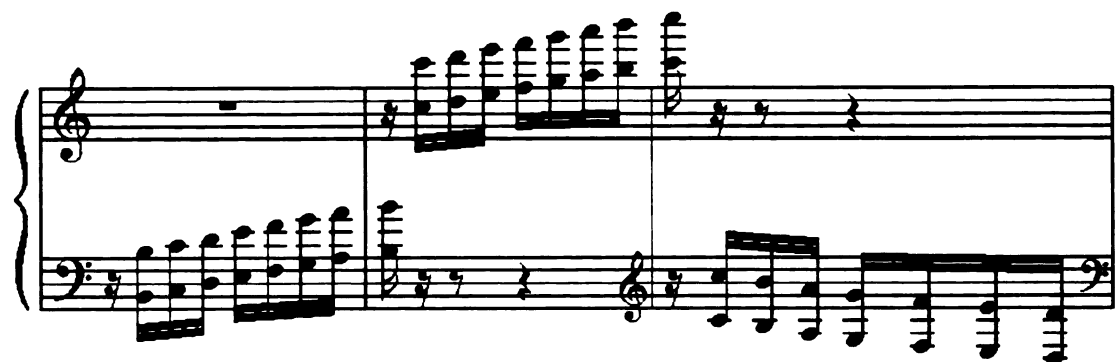
25

and so on

and so on

26

and so on
up to



By major seconds



By minor thirds



⁴ This exercise could be played on the triad and the diminished seventh chord

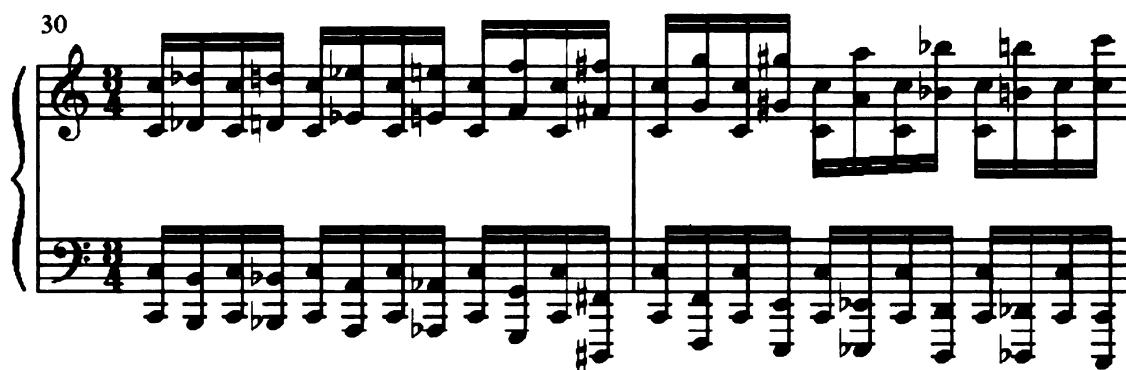
By major thirds ⁵



29



30



31



⁵ Continue to play all intervals within the limits of an octave

Exercise to the Fairytale in B-minor, op. 34

32



Exercise to the Danza Silvestra (The Forest Dance)

33



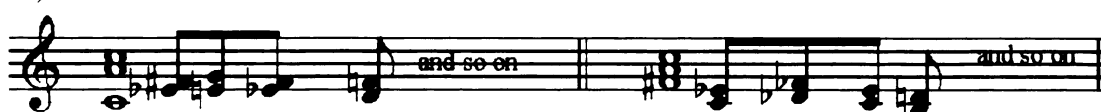
35



a)



b)



This scheme should be used for exercising each finger on the background of the four tones of the diminished seventh chord.

c)

and so on and so on and so on

Up and down the scales

36

and so on

37

and so on and so on

38

and backwards

39

a) b)

Chapter 3

Summary and Recommendation for Future Research

The purpose of the research was a) to translate Medtner's book *The Daily Work of the Pianist and Composer*; b) to improve piano instruction; and c) to obtain more information about the life, philosophy, and pedagogical principles of Medtner. The particular problem was the translation of the book itself. What is offered to the reader in the second chapter of the present thesis is the translation of the book. The difficulty of the task was mainly the stylistic work on the translation of the sentences. In the Russian language, sentences are structured in a different way than those in English. The feeling of fluency was absent because sometimes the phrases in the book (even in Russian) have a dual meaning.

The book *The Daily Work of the Pianist and Composer* has its weaknesses. As was mentioned before, the introduction to the book was written by Medtner's pupil P. Vasiliev, who was not a professional writer. The publishers, M. Gurvich and L. Lukomsky sorted out these notes and divided them into four chapters:

- I. General Maxims in Pianist's Work;
- II. Certain Elements of Musical Performance;
- III. About Exercise;
- IV. Notes on the Work of the Composer.

The section titled "About the Form" is presented, but since the original editors did not number it as a separate chapter, the researcher, committed to the literal translation of the

book, also did not label this material in a chapter number so as not to add anything that did not exist in the original.

Similarly, dates are very often encountered in the book. They are indicated by Medtner who did not bother to accurately observe their order, since he did not intend them for publication. He also labeled them in an inconsistent manner. For instance, we see examples, such as: 8/24, or 1924, or January 1936, or 31/I-1936. For others, he used Roman numerals to indicate the month but did not have any indications of the year. At other times, he used Arabic numerals to indicate the month, day, and the year. There are also some other peculiarities in the book. This is indicative of the fact that the editors preserved Medtner's notebooks in the shape that Medtner himself wrote them.

In many places in the introduction, P. Vasiliev quotes Medtner without referring to the quotations' sources. The other characteristic feature of the book itself is the use of brackets for some subtitles. These brackets do not belong to Medtner, but were added by the publishers, for reason of sorting out the notes according to their subject. These brackets were kept in the English translation in order to retain similarity to the Russian edition.

In general, the researcher's task was to translate Medtner's book *The Daily Work of the Pianist and Composer* as literally as possible with few editorial corrections. The originality of the Russian text was preserved as much as possible.

The book was issued in Russia in a very limited number of copies as a study aid for music students, teachers, and performers in order to help them to overcome the difficulties in their daily work, practice and performance.

The other problem the researcher faced was to collect and organize the wealth of materials received from Medtner's friends and relatives, whom the researcher interviewed in Moscow (Russia), London (England) and New York State. These were private letters, personal thoughts on paper, and letters of recommendation to and from Medtner. None of these materials were meant for publication, as nor were Medtner's notes *The Daily Work of the Pianist and Composer*. These newly discovered materials will be of great interest for musicians in general, and especially for pianists. Unfortunately, it is impossible to include all of them within the confines of this thesis.

Recommendations for Future Research

Medtner suggested to his pupils to keep notes by writing the thoughts that come during practice.

The influence of teacher to student is seen in the example of pianist Nikolai Stember. He was Medtner's pupil, and Medtner passed on to him the necessity of writing one's thoughts. From Stember's daughter, Olga, the researcher received the writings of her father about pianistic art. His notes "*About the styles of pianism*," "*About Bach's Well-Tempered Clavir*," "*About the New Musical School*" and others are of a great value to the pianists and teachers of piano. The researcher plans to translate these into English in the future. These notes will be very interesting to the other musicians, as well.

Also, exploration into the succession of Medtner's pianistic and pedagogical style through his pupils would be a great field for future research. Medtner taught in Moscow Conservatory from 1915 to 1921 until his emigration. Therefore, one may still find Medtner's "Grand students" at the Moscow Conservatory and throughout Russia. He lived in France for ten years during his emigration period and certainly left some students

there. England, where Medtner lived from 1935 until his death in 1951, would also be a great source for collecting further information about the composer. The British Library has unique materials housed in its archives donated by Medtner's pupil Edna Iles.

Anna Medtner wrote in an Easter greeting card to N. Stember's mother, Nadezhda Dmitrievna that "the entire archive will be in the Library of Congress." Therefore, the Library of Congress would also be a good place to research additional information about Medtner.

The other interesting field for research would be the religious aspect of Medtner's life, namely its influence on Medtner's music. The main composition of his life was the Quintet, which the composer worked on intermittently for some 45 years. The first sketches date back to 1904 and the work was completed in 1948. The work has direct connection with Medtner's religion, Russian Orthodoxy. In fact, the origin of the music for the Quintet comes from the ancient music of the Russian Orthodox Church. This work is very unique and takes a special place among Medtner's works, because he regarded it as a musical testament and as a work dedicated to God. The influence of religion is evident in all Medtner's music. After Medtner's immigration from Russia, due to the Soviet regime, the religious part of the composer's life was totally ignored. Mention of Medtner's religion could be found in books published in America and England but not in the former Soviet Union.

All of these new future findings will help musicians benefit from the philosophical and pedagogical aspects of Medtner's life, teaching, composing and performance. This research and the translation of the book *The Daily Work of the Pianist*

and Composer makes Medtner wisdom and experience accessible to English-speaking musicians, pianists and teachers of piano today.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

UCRIHS APPROVAL

MICHIGAN STATE
U N I V E R S I T Y

May 22, 2001

TO: Midori KOGA
4665 Jadestone Dr.
Williamston, MI 48895

RE: **IRB# 01-336** CATEGORY: EXPEDITED 2-F, 2-G

APPROVAL DATE: May 22, 2001

TITLE: NIKOLAI MEDTNER, EVERY DAY PRACTICE (WORK) OF A PIANIST AND COMPOSER

The University Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects' (UCRIHS) review of this project is complete and I am pleased to advise that the rights and welfare of the human subjects appear to be adequately protected and methods to obtain informed consent are appropriate. Therefore, the **UCRIHS approved this project.**

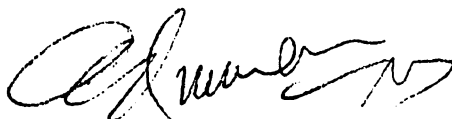
RENEWALS: UCRIHS approval is valid for one calendar year, beginning with the approval date shown above. Projects continuing beyond one year must be renewed with the green renewal form. A maximum of four such expedited renewals possible. Investigators wishing to continue a project beyond that time need to submit it again for a complete review.

REVISIONS: UCRIHS must review any changes in procedures involving human subjects, prior to initiation of the change. If this is done at the time of renewal, please use the green renewal form. To revise an approved protocol at any other time during the year, send your written request to the UCRIHS Chair, requesting revised approval and referencing the project's IRB# and title. Include in your request a description of the change and any revised instruments, consent forms or advertisements that are applicable.

PROBLEMS/CHANGES: Should either of the following arise during the course of the work, notify UCRIHS promptly: 1) problems (unexpected side effects, complaints, etc.) involving human subjects or 2) changes in the research environment or new information indicating greater risk to the human subjects than existed when the protocol was previously reviewed and approved.

If we can be of further assistance, please contact us at (517) 355-2180 or via email: UCRIHS@msu.edu. Please note that all UCRIHS forms are located on the web: <http://www.msu.edu/user/ucrihs>

Sincerely,



Ashir Kumar, M.D.
Interim Chair, UCRIHS



OFFICE OF
**RESEARCH
AND
GRADUATE
STUDIES**

University Committee on
Research Involving
Human Subjects

Michigan State University
246 Administration Building
East Lansing, Michigan
48824-1046

517/355-2180

FAX: 517/353-2976

Web: www.msu.edu/user/ucrihs

E-Mail: ucrihs@msu.edu

AK: br

cc: Liudmilo Bondar
P.O. Box 6776
East Lansing, MI 48826

APPENDIX B

UCRIHS RENEWAL

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

May 28, 2002

TO: Midori KOGA
4665 Jadestone Dr.
Williamston, MI 48895

RE: IRB # 01-336 CATEGORY: 2-F, 2-G EXPEDITED
RENEWAL APPROVAL DATE: May 21, 2002

TITLE: NIKOLAI MEDTNER, EVERY DAY PRACTICE (WORK) OF A PIANIST AND
COMPOSER

The University Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects' (UCRIHS) review of this project is complete and I am pleased to advise that the rights and welfare of the human subjects appear to be adequately protected and methods to obtain informed consent are appropriate. Therefore, the **UCRIHS APPROVED THIS PROJECT'S RENEWAL.**

This letter also approves the revised consent form.

RENEWALS: UCRIHS approval is valid for one calendar year, beginning with the approval date shown above. Projects continuing beyond one year must be renewed with the green renewal form. A maximum of four such expedited renewal are possible. Investigators wishing to continue a project beyond that time need to submit it again for complete review.

REVISIONS: UCRIHS must review any changes in procedures involving human subjects, prior to initiation of the change. If this is done at the time of renewal, please use the green renewal form. To revise an approved protocol at any other time during the year, send your written request to the UCRIHS Chair, requesting revised approval and referencing the project's IRB# and title. Include in your request a description of the change and any revised instruments, consent forms or advertisements that are applicable.



PROBLEMS/CHANGES: Should either of the following arise during the course of the work, notify UCRIHS promptly: 1) problems (unexpected side effects, complaints, etc.) involving human subjects or 2) changes in the research environment or new information indicating greater risk to the human subjects than existed when the protocol was previously reviewed and approved.

OFFICE OF
**RESEARCH
ETHICS AND
STANDARDS**

University Committee on
Research Involving
Human Subjects

Michigan State University
202 Olds Hall
East Lansing, MI
48824

517/355-2180
FAX: 517/432-4503

Web: www.msu.edu/user/ucris
E-Mail: ucris@msu.edu

If we can be of further assistance, please contact us at 517 355-2180 or via email:
UCRIHS@pilot.msu.edu.

Sincerely,

Ashir Kumar, M.D.
UCRIHS Chair

AK: bd

cc: Liudmilo Bondar
P.O. Box 6776
East Lansing, MI 48826

APPENDIX C

MAY 13 2002

Attachment #1 of 19.

Consent

You are being asked to participate in a research designed to preserve the memory of Russian pianist, composer, and teacher Nikolai Medtner. The research consists of several parts. Besides the translation of a book **The Everyday Work of a pianist and Composer**, the research will involve finding out more information about him and introducing Medtner's method and philosophy of teaching piano.

In order for the project to be implemented the contact with persons who were the composer's friends or are his relatives is needed. You will be interviewed by the researcher. The questions are about his piano method, his philosophy, his religion, his biographical data etc..

In addition to the interviews you will be video and/or audio taped, in order for the researcher to use this information in the project which may be published upon its completion. Video tape may be shown to the public and there is no promise of confidentiality for the subjects. All of the video or audio tapes are solely under my control and they will not be kept in any laboratory or library etc.. An interview may last 2-4 hours and can be stopped at your will. Your participation is completely voluntary.

Should you have any questions or concerns that may be raised by participating in study please contact the researcher : Liudmila Bondar,

P. O. Box 6776,
East Lansing, M. I.
48826
tel.: (517) 336-7048

or principle investigator: Dr. Midori Koga, phone: (517) 655-9165
and/or if you have any questions about participants' rights as human subjects of research, please contact I R B chairperson: Ashir Kumar M.D.

202 Old Hall
East Lansing, M. I. 48824-1046
phone: (517) 355-2180

Signature of Participant _____ Date _____

Signature of Researcher _____ Date _____

**UCRIHS APPROVAL FOR
THIS project EXPIRES:**

MAY 21 2003

**SUBMIT RENEWAL APPLICATION
ONE MONTH PRIOR TO
ABOVE DATE TO CONTINUE**

APPENDIX D

Согласие

Вас просят принять участие в исследовании, направленном на сохранение памяти русского композитора, пианиста и педагога Николая Метнера.

Помимо перевода книги «Повседневная работа пианиста и композитора», исследование будет включать нахождение больше информации о нем и ознакомление с Метнеровским методом и философией преподавания фортепиано. Для того, чтобы осуществить этот проект, исследователю необходимо установить контакт с людьми, близко знавшими Метнера или его родственниками. Вы будете интервьюированы исследователем. Вопросы, которые Вам будут заданы, будут касаться Метнеровского пианистического метода, его философии, его религии, а также биографических сведений.

Помимо того, интервью будут записаны на видео или аудио пленку, для того чтобы исследователь мог позже использовать полученную информацию в своем проекте, который может быть опубликован по своему завершению. Видео пленка может быть показана публике и ваши имена как участников будут сохранены без обещания конфиденциальности. Все видео или аудио пленки строго под моим контролем и не будут храниться ни в каких лабораториях, библиотеках и т.д. Интервью может длиться от 2-х до 4-х часов и может быть остановлено по Вашему желанию. Ваше участие совершенно добровольно.

Если у Вас возникнут вопросы во время Вашего участия, пожалуйста обращайтесь непосредственно к исследователю или по адресу: Liudmila Bondar (Людмила

Бондарь)
PO Box 6776
East Lansing, MI 48826
Тел. (517) 336-7048

или к главному исследователю (руководителю): Доктору Мидори Кога
(Midori Koga)
Тел. (517) 655-9165

а также, если у вас возникнут любые вопросы, относительно Ваших прав, как участников исследования, пожалуйста, контактируйте с заведующим IRB

Аширом Кумаром:
Ashir Kumar M.D.
202 Old Hall
East Lansing, MI 48824-1046
phone: (517) 355-2180

Signature of Participant _____ Date _____

Signature of Researcher _____ Date _____

UCRIHS APPROVAL FOR
THIS project EXPIRES:

MAY 21 2003

SUBMIT RENEWAL APPLICATION
ONE MONTH PRIOR TO
ABOVE DATE TO CONTINUE

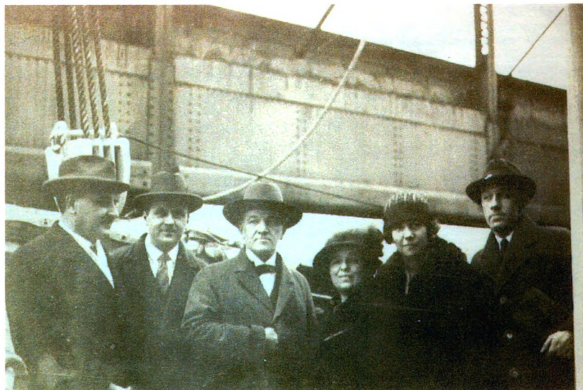
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS



Nicolas and Anna Medtner (date unknown)



Anna and Nicolas Medtner, 1925, Pine Bush, N.Y.
(in the Warrens' home: the paintings on the wall are
by V.Stember, N.Stember's father) [Natalia Warren
was N.Stember's sister]



The Medtner's departure from New York to Europe,
April 1st, 1925. (from left to right, K. Warren, an unknown
person, N.Medtner, A.Medtner, N.Warren, and N. Stember).

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

It is a pleasure to recommend Mr. Nicholas Stember as a most talented pianist and music teacher.

Mr. Stember was a student of the Petrograd Conservatory at the time when its President was Alexander Glazounoff. He studied under the direction of Prof. Anna Esipoff who considered him as one of her most gifted pupils. After the death of Prof. A. Esipoff Nicholas Stember joined my own piano class at the Moscow Conservatory, which he graduated most brilliantly with the high award of a Gold Medal.

Mr. Stember began teaching music at the age of 16 when still in the Conservatory. Immediately after his graduation he was appointed as an instructor and later on made Professor of a large class of pupils in the Music School of Borovka in Petrograd, where he had a number of advanced pupils preparing for concert appearance.

I have no hesitancy in highly recommending Mr. Nicholas Stember as a piano teacher as I know that besides his extensive experience he has a natural inclination for teaching.

Nicholas Medtner

Alexander Glazounov.

The letter of recommendation for N. Stember written by N. Medtner and A. Glazunov. (date unknown).

MANGER HOTELS - NEW YORK CITY

HOTELS
AND SUMMER
RESORTS
WALL STREET
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PERMANENT
C. HOTEL AND
GRAND
HOTEL
ELLERENTMENT
THIRD SQUARE
NEW
HOTEL
NEW YORK HOTEL
ALSO
PLAZA HOTEL
CHICAGO



GREAT NORTHERN HOTEL

Jan. 21st, 1930.

Mr. N. Stember,
67-69, St. Nicholas Ave.,
New York City.

Dear Mr. Stember,

In reply to your letter I hasten to say that I recall very well the time when I had the pleasure of being with you at the Imperial Conservatory of St. Petersburg.

I remember how much you were liked by our great teacher, Madame Annette Essipoff, and how your appearances at the Conservatory concerts were looked forward to.

I am sure that you represent the school of Madame Essipoff in a much better way than I do, and wish you all success in your career as teacher.

Most sincerely yours, S. Prokofieff

The letter of support for N. Stember written by
S. Prokofieff, New York City, New York, January 21st, 1930.



Medtner's grave in Hendon Cemetery, London, England.

Василию, Воскресе!
Троюкратно убого Вас
моя дорогая Надежда Дмитриевна
и пишу прощаясь с то
позднее приветствие - но оно
всегда живое ...
~~Скоро напишу подробно и~~
~~моях Калининских дел.~~
Весь убогий архив Судебн
во Васей отправь в
Library of Congress. Но да
заканчиваю все - еще
далеко. Мало вы да
Господь доführt до этого!
Собираю Вас и кратко
ублажу. Храни Вас Христос!
Искренне Вас А. Метнер

Text from Easter Greeting card to N. Stember written by A. Medtner
after N. Medtner's death (date unknown).
The English translation is on page 14



Nikolai Stember (1892-1982) Medtner's
pupil and nephew.



Sergei Prokofiev

This photo was presented to N. Stember during Prokofiev's visit to America in 1930. Inscription on the picture: "To Kocky Stember in memory of our plesent meeting in America. Prokofief 1930."

Prélude

(Hymne) - 1 -

N. Medtner, Op. 54, Heft IV, Nr.

Allegretto tranquillo (M. M. ♩ = 60)

Piano

sempre legatissimo

crescendo

ben carlando

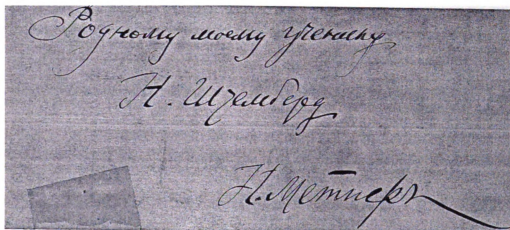
diminuendo



7. Hermann, Leipzig

Z-416.58

The opening of Medtner's Prelude op.54 with
N.Stember's pencil marks.



The inscription on the music of Medtner's
"Sonata-Ballade", written by the author to N. Stember.
"To my dear pupil N. Stember from N. Medtner."



Olga Stember (b.1927). Daughter of N.Stember,
Medtner's pupil and nephew, Whitney Point, New York, July 2001.



Ksenia Litvinova (b. 1920) N.Stember's sister's
daughter Nadezhda , Moscow, Russia, July, 2001.



Elena Tarasova (b.1929) Medtner's grandniece,
Moscow, Russia, July 2001.



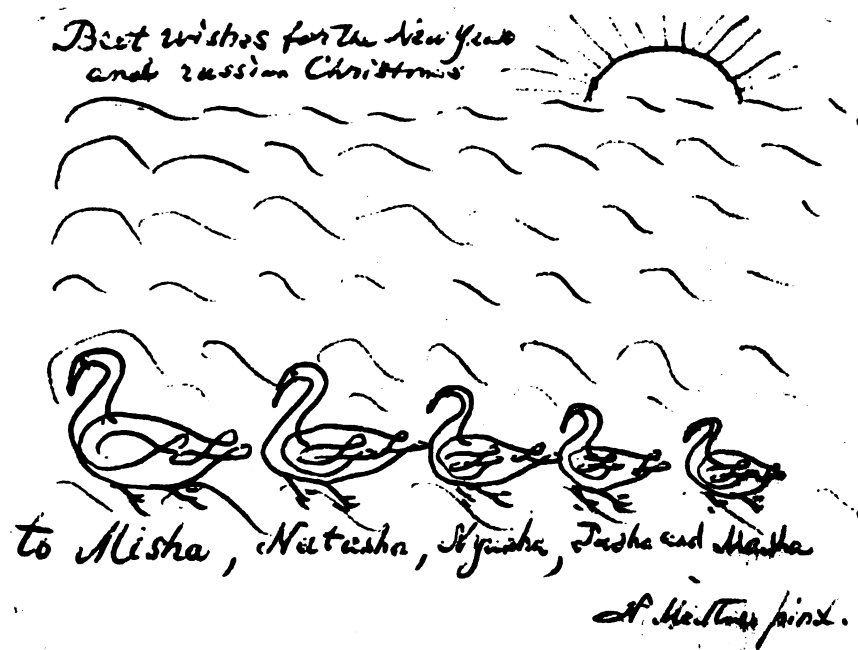
Metropolitan Anthony of Sourzh
(Bloom), (b. 1914), London, England,
August 2002



Deacon Peter Scorer, grandson of the philosopher S. Franck,
Exeter St. Davids, England, August 2002



Anna Salaman, London, England, August 2002.



Medtner's drawing on a greeting card to the Salaman family,
(date unknown)



Medtner's home on Golders Green,
London, England.

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