THE IMPORTANCE OF PIANO TECHNIQUE

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THE IMPORTANCE OF PIANO TECHNIQUE

by

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Table of Contents

Introduction

The ultimate purpose of piano technique

A great pianist has just finished the last chords of his recital. A moment of profound silence follows. Then a burst of applause breaks loose that seems to swell like a thundering sea through the hall. People who are retired and dignified in every - day-life stand up and cheer showing an unexpected enthusiasm and vitality.

What makes people act like this after a superb music performance? John Hospers, in his book Meaning and Truth in the Arts, gives this explanation:" It is characteristic of the greatest art that the attitude it communicates to us is felt by us as valid, to be the reaction to a more subtle and comprehensive contact with reality than we can normally make."[1] Geza Révész, in his book Introduction to the Psychology of Music, goes even further in his statement: ", . . the works of great masters are carriers of certain ideas, impulses and aspirations that are rooted in the collective . . . it /music/ gives expression not only to the musical ideas of the artistbut also to the subconscious motive that is co-responsible for the genesis of these ideas and their fashioning. The rhythm, the tempo of life, as well as the inclinations and aspirations of the soul that have not yet penetrated to the conscious, are revealed

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1) John Hospers, Meaning and Truth in the Arts, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1946, p.229.

in the music. . . . Art can be the herald of dawn and likewise the anunciator of darkness and the threatening storm. It is as censitive as a seismograph . . ."[2]

Here we are faced with the conveying of emotions and ideas that are, in degrees, common to most people; with glimpses into our subconscious, often, unexpressable feelings; with visions into future trends of feeling and thinking.

When we settle down to sober thinking we may ask: By what means are those ideas, glimpses, visions transferred to us? There is the piano, a stringed instrument, whose strings are struck by hammers, attached to keys, and whose sounds can be modified - piano e forte - and "colored" by pedals. This instrument is set in motion by the music performer who communicates these ideas to us through succession of tones (melodies), combination of tones (harmonies), in characteristic following (rhythm), in descriptive dynamics. He does it by striking the piano keys with his fingers; he seems to have a thousand nuances of tone quality, from delicate softness to overwhelming power; from slow singing to breathless rapidity. So, it appears that it is through the mastery of the keyboard technique that those wonders are communicated to us. Therefore it is not surprising that young students as well as parents of children who "study the piano" lay great stress on piano technique.

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2) G. Révész, Introduction to the Psychology of Music, University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, 1954, p. 245

The changing aspects of piano technique

Keyboard music, through the centuries, has developed from a rather intimate art of individual expression to a representative of complex feelings and ideas in descriptive patterns that demand intricate and compound technical abilities, often connected with an enormous display of power and speed. But despite these extraordinary demands on the skill of performance, one should not forget that technique is only a means of musical expression, it is not an end in itself. Musical expression, on the other hand, has varied, because, during the different periods, people were not interested in the same subject matter; and they presented their ideas and emotions in the light of their period and surroundings. For this reason, piano technique is not static but subordinated to musical content. It is also conditioned by the qualities and limitations of the instruments, the piano and its predecessors, the harpsichord and the clavichord.

Chapter 1:Technique of playing at the time of Couperin and Bach

If a student makes a study of the music of the time of Couperin and Bach - even an amateur student should have a knowledge and an experience of it - he should, at first, acquaint himself with the construction and the development of the instruments of that period, the harpsichord and the clavichord.

The Harpsichord: According to the Encyclopaedia Britannica, "The harpsichord, French: Clavecin, German: Clavicymbal or Dockenklavier, Italian: Clavicembalo or Gravicembalo, English: Virginal or Spinet, were names given to all small keyboard instruments irrespective of shape, having one string to a note, plucked by means of a quill or plectrum of leather. . . . the earliest name is clavicymbalum, which occurs in the Rules of the Minnesingers (1404) and also in the Wunderbuch (1440)." The harpsichord had its beginning in a shape of a sewing box,that young girls could place on a table and play, deriving from this the name "Virginal".

The tone of the harpsichord was of short duration and detached from its neighboring tones; its tone quality could be varied only in a very limited degree. François Couperin, in his treatise "L'Art de toucher le clavecin, Paris, 1717, reflects on this: "The tones of the harpsichord are settled, each one in particular, and, consequently, cannot be swelled or diminished. . ."(Les sons du clavecin étant décidé, chacun en particulier, et par consequant ne pouvant être enflés ni diminues . . .)[1]

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1)Wilfrid Mellers, François Couperin and the French Classical Tradition, Roy Publishers, New York, 1951., p. 293.

Albert Wier, in his book The Piano, says:" The impossibility of producing any gradations of tone on the harpsichord has frequently been referred to . . . this must be accepted as a just criticism."[2]

To gain variety of expression and expressiveness "pairs of virginals" were used that were tuned on different pitch. Wier quotes Mersenne and Praetorius on the subject:" There were three sizes of the spinet; one was less than three feet wide and tuned an octave higher than what was called the "church pitch" . . . the three and a half foot spinet was tuned a fifth higher, and the five foot spinet was in unison with the church pitch(Mersenne) . . . Praetorius speaks of small octave-spinets which were used with larger instruments."[3]

In later years, according to Wier," the harpsichord had two or more strings to each note . . . The outward form of the modern grand piano differs in no essential respect from that of the harpsichord. It was called in German 'Kielflügel'. . . French 'Clavecin a queue' . . . The large harpsichord assumed a position of utmost importance in the orchestra about the beginning of the seventeenth century . . . in the early attempts of opera and oratorio the latter /the harpsichord/ became indispensible . . . short incisive chords were required at frequent intervals to keep a singer in pitch and to outline the simple modulations."[4]

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2) Albert Wier, The Piano, Longmans, Green and Co., London, New York, Toronto, 1940, p. 17
3) Ibid. p. 8
4) Ibid. pp. 11 - 12

While this may give the impression that the harpsichord was mainly used as an accompanying instrument, Frederick Dorian, in his book The History of Music in Performance, throws a different light on the use of the harpsichord:" The great composers of English virginal music, such as Byrd, Giles Farnaby, John Bull, Orlando Gibbons and Philips, were associated with Elizabeth's times . . . While these representative composers and famous interpreters of virginal music are men, virginal playing was essentially a feminine pastime . . . /there were/ performances of romantic moods and nuances. Byrd's music conveys impressions of pastoral and lyric scenes; that of Gibbons and Philips elegance and decoration."[5] Later he says:" The contemporary Italian performers had contributed little, if anything, to the virginal. Significantly, they were called 'sonatori di balli' - dance players - . . . the refined type of interpretation on the virginal, demanding a softer, delicate technique, remained in England, whereas for the Italian dance accompaniment of the sonatori di balli a more robust and earthy execution was the rule."[6]

The Clavichord: Parallel with the development of the harpsichord went that of the clavichord, an instrument that had a better expressive capacity. The Encyclopaedia Britannica describes it as follows:" Clavichord or Clarichord, a mediaeval stringed keyboard instrument, a forerunner of the pianoforte, its strings being set

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5) Frederick Dorian, The History of Music in Performance, W.W. Norton and Company, Inc., New York, 1942, pp, 51 - 52.
6) Ibid., p. 54.

in vibration by a blow from a brass tangent instead of a hammer as in the modern instrument. The clavichord, derived from the dulcimer by the addition of a keyboard, has a long history, being mentioned as early as 1404 in Eberhard Cersne's Rules of the Minnesingers. There were two kinds of clavichords - the 'fretted' or 'gebunden' and the 'fret-free' or 'bund-frei'. The term 'fretted' was applied to those clavichords, which, instead of being provided with a string or set of strings in unison for each note, had one set of strings acting for three or four notes, the arms of the keys being twisted in order to bring the contact of the tangent into the acoustically correct position under the string. The first 'bund-frei' clavichord appeared about 1720 . . . was chromatically scaled . . . lead to equal temperament."

"The clavichord", as Wier tells us, "was capable of what is called 'vibrato' . . . and the 'portamento' or sharpening of the pitch by touch pressure. In these respects it was unique among the keyboard instruments."[7] Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, in his Essay on the True Art of Playing Keyboard Instruments (Versuch über die wahre Art das Clavier zu spielen), gives a good description of the execution of the portamento or portato and the vibrato: "The notes of figure 169 are played legato, but each tone is noticeably accented. The term which refers to the per-

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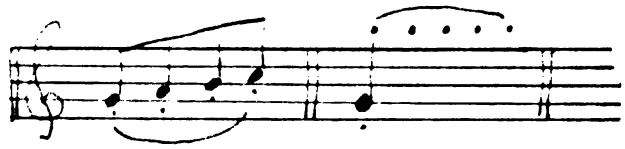
7) Albert Wier, The Piano, pp. 22 - 23

formance of notes that are both slurred and dotted is 'portato' (Das Tragen der Töne) . . . a long affettuoso tone is performed with a 'vibrato'(Die Bebung). The finger that depresses and holds the key is gently shaken. The sign of the vibrato appears in example a. The best effect is used when the finger withholds its shake until half of the value of the tone has passed."[8]

Figure 169



Footnote 17 of page 156, of the same volume gives us these descriptions:" Franz Riegler (Anleitung zum Clavier, Vienna 1779) explains the distinction by saying that the 'portato' arises, 'when the key is rather slowly rocked', and the 'vibrato', 'when the key is quite clearly rocked (herausgewieged) according to the number of dots and without repeating the finger stroke'. Daniel Gottlob Türk (Clavierschule,1789):'At the clavichord (Claviere) this so-called 'Tragen' is easy to express, for, after striking the key, an additional pressure is exerted.'" The effect of the vibrato must have been very impressive, for, in footnote 18, same page, we find:" Dr. Burney, in The Present State of Music in Germany, Vol. III, p. 268, describes Bach's vibrato (Bebung) as follows:' In the pathetic and slow movements, whenever he had a long note to express, he absolutely contrived to produce,from his instrument, a cry of sorrow and complaint,

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8) Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, Essay on the True Art of Playing Keyboard Instruments, translated and edited by William J. Mitchell, W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., New York, 1949, p. 156.

such as can only be effected upon the clavichord, and perhaps, by himself.'" The ability to change the tone quality by pressure, after the key has been struck, is lost to us and with it, apparently, a very valuable means of expression.

The clavichord is supposed to have had a soft, but very sweet, tone and, according to Wier, "remained the instrument of the artist rather than a vehicle for musical bombast. Its greater flexibility made it especially well adapted to the equal temperament for which Johann Sebastian Bach had a decided preference."[9]

The Fingering: As we find in the early spinet music, only the first, second, third and fourth fingers were used to strike the keys; later the fifth finger was added. The third finger of the right hand was set over the fourth finger in an ascending line, and over the second finger in a descending line. This action and the loosely hanging thumb must have made a high wrist necessary and an outward and inward turning of the hands. Dorian says: ". . . fingering was well marked in the scripts of the English. . . . [there were] two schools of keyboard performance - the English and the Italo-German. They had one idea in common: to use good fingers on accented notes and weak fingers for passing notes. But the two schools differed . . . as to what constitutes 'good' fingers and 'weak' fingers. . . . The English technique resorted more to the little fingers and less to the thumbs, since the thumb was considered more a handicap than an asset in achiev-

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9) Albert Wier, The Piano, pp. 25-26

ing their ideal of velocity."[10] In Thompson's International Cyclopedia of Music and Musicians, on Piano Playing, we find a lengthy description on the playing of the harpsichord. The key was released right after the finger struck it, and the finger was curled under "to avoid holding the key down any longer than necessary so that the quill claw which plucked the string . . . might be free to resume the proper position for further action."

A reflection on this information should give us an idea on the lightness and distinctiveness of touch that is necessary to re-create music of that time. Any slurring or wiping, any use of tone enforcement through arm weight would be out of place.

The"discovery of the thumb" was a phenomenon that revolutionized the keyboard technique in the time of J. S. Bach. Wier writes:" Among the technical innovations which were crystallized in Bach's teaching and playing was the use of the thumb, the possibilities of which had been entirely disregarded up to this time. By this means the scope of the hand in chord playing was practically doubled, and the facility in scale and other passage work was greatly increased."[11] In the introduction to C. P. E. Bach's Essay, the translater and editor William J. Mitchell, speaks of this development:" It is clear from the reference to fingering as 'secret art, known and practiced by very few', that the Bach family did not discover it but rather organized and elaborated its technique. . . . the older fingering . . . was

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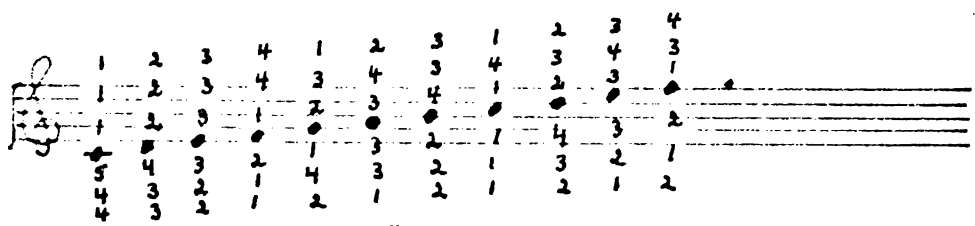
10)Frederick Dorian, The History of Music in Performance, p. 53.
11) Albert Wier, The Piano, p. 103.

characterized in general by the sparing use of the thumb and fifth finger with a consequent favoring of the middle fingers. . . . In François Couperin's L'Art de toucher le clavecin, 1717, the thumb is employed frequently in wide stretches and in running passages for the left hand, but in the right no more frequently than others had used it. Characteristic for the French school at this time is the replacement of one finger by another on an unrepeatedly held tone, along with direct repetitions of a single finger in running passages. . . . A very important innovation of the new method was the turning under of the thumb in running and arpeggiated passages. . . . Yet the turned thumb in the Bach fingering must have been known and employed by Domenico Scarlatti, for one, for the virtuoso passages in his sonatas could hardly have been delivered satisfactorily without it."[12]

As we study the fingering in P. E. Bach's Essay we see that, in general, he established the foundation of our modern fingering. For instance, he gives three fingerings for the C Major scale:



Bach says of these fingerings:" The best are those directly above and below the notes. Nevertheless, The others may be applied to good ends."[13] We still teach Bach's preferred scale fingering.

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12) Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, Essay on the True Art of Playing Keyboard Instruments, p. 13.
13) Ibid. p.48.

The real issue: Expression! All the instruction books on how to play the keyboard instruments, all the treatises and articles that appear in magazines, at that time, point clearly to one goal: Expression.

It was expression of emotions that the German school emphasized. Dorian gives us the development of the "Affectenlehre", which he calls "Doctrine of affections":" As an aesthetic discipline of musical performance, the roots of the 'Affectenlehre' were imbedded in the antique Greek 'ethos'. It occured also in medieval music and served to guide the performance in the Renaissance . . . Modern renditions of eighteenth century music, aspiring to recall the spirit of the old time, cannot ignore substantially the ramifications of the Affectenlehre."[14] In this connection, he quotes, among others; Quantz:" Putting the listener now in this, now in that affection."; J. D. Heinichen, in his treatise The Figured Bass in Composition (1728):" The purpose of music is to move the affections."[15] In the introduction to C. P. E. Bach's Essay, we read:" As the principal practitioner of the 'Empfindsamkeit' with the emphasis on the feelings, the 'affections' with the clavichord as its best-loved instrument, Bach made technical mastery of the keyboard only a contributory factor to the expressive end that he sought. Music here was far removed from the decorative art , from abstract patterns of sound; it was, above all else, a vehicle for the expression of the emotions. Music must

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14) Frederick Dorian, The History of Music in Performance, p. 138.
15) Ibid. p. 139

languish, it must startle, it must be gay, it must move boldly from one sentiment to another."[16] Interesting is also a quotation of Marpurg (Der kritische Musicus an der Spree), from the same book:" The rapidity with which the emotions change is common knowledge, for they are nothing but motion and restlessness. All musical expression has as its basis an affect or feeling . . . With the philosopher there are combustible materials which merely glow or give off a modest restrained warmth. Here, however, [with the orator, poet, musician] there is but the distilled essence of this material, the finest of it, which gives off thousands of the most beautiful flames, but always with great speed, often with violence. The musician must therefore play a thousand different roles, he must assume a thousand characters as dictated by the composer."[17] P. E. Bach, himself, gives the distinction between a mere technician and a true artist:" Keyboardists whose chief asset is mere technique are clearly at a disadvantage. A performer may have the most agile fingers, be competent at single and double trills, master the art of fingering, read skillfully at sight regardless of the key, and transpose extemporaneously without the slightest difficulty; play tenths, even twelfths, or runs, cross the hands in every conceivable manner, and excel in other related matters. and yet he may be something less than a clear, pleasing, or stirring keyboardist. More often than not, one meets technicians . . . who astound us with their prowess without ever

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16) C. P. E. Bach, Essay on the True Art of Playing Keyboard Instruments, p. 16
17) Ibid. p. 81, footnote 4

touching our sensibilities. They overwhelm our hearing without satisfying it and stun the mind without moving it."[18]

Couperin expresses himself in the same vein:" Practice has made me understand that the most dextrous and capable hands that can execute the swiftest and lightest things are not always the ones that perform the tender and sentimental pieces more successfully; and I declare in good faith that I prefer those who touch me to those who surprise me." (L'usage m'a fait connaître que les mains vigoureuses et capable d'exécuter ce qu'il y a de plus rapide et de plus léger ne sont pas toujours celles qui réussissent le mieux dans les pièces tendres et du sentiment; et j'avoueray de bonne foy que j'ayme mieux ce qui me touche que ce qui me surprend)[19]

But the French school goes beyond expression of emotion and sentiment; they want to arouse images of persons, objects and happenings in their listeners. Couperin says:" I, always, have had an object in mind when I composed these pieces; different occasions have furnished them: thus the titles correspond to ideas that I have had."(J'ai toujours eu un objet, en composant ces pièces; des occasions différentes me l'ont fourni: ainsi les titres repondent aux idees que j'ai eues.)[20] To this, Mellers makes this statement:" It has sometimes been remarked that his 'portraits',as such, are not very successful, since they mostly sound alike. . . the essence of that civilization was that it

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18) C. P. E. Bach, Essay on the True Art of Playing Keyboard Instruments, p. 147
19) Wilfrid Mellers, François Couperin and the French Classical Tradition, p. 293
20) Ibid. p. 316

permitted great subtlety and variety of emotional experience within its civilization."[21] Mellers is quoting d'Alambert on the same subject:" All music that does not paint anything is only noise." (Toute musique qui ne peint rien n'est que du bruit)[21] Rameau has a deeper insight in the aesthetics of music. He realizes that, no matter if one wants to portrait emotions or ideas, or even outside objects, it has to be done through corresponding feelings that arouse outside images in the listener's mind. He says:" The art of the musician does not consist of painting immediate objects, but to put the soul into a disposition that is similar to that which is aroused by their presence." (L'art du musicien ne consist point à peindre immediatement les objets , mais à mettre l'âme dans une disposition semblable à celle où la mettrait leur presence)[22] To quote Rameau again:" The expression of the thought, the sentiment, the emotion should be the true goal of music." (L'expression de la pensée, du sentiment, des passions, doit être le vrai but de la musique)[23]

Embellishments as means of expression: With the desire for an almost unlimited range of expression, and with instruments of very limited capability, the masters must have felt discouraged at times, and they admit these shortcomings. Couperin is the most outspoken when he says:" It appears to be impossible, up to the present time, that one can give an expression of the soul on this instrument." (. . . il a paru insoutenable jusqu'au present qu'on put donner de l'âme à cet instrument)[24] It was the embellishments that were, significantly enough, born out of the necessity of

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21) Wilfrid Mellers, Francois Couperin and the French Classical Tradition, p. 317
22) Ibid. p. 317
23) Ibid. p. 318
24) Ibid. p. 325

keeping long tones alive, that became functional in expression. Dorian considers them so important that he devotes a whole chapter to them, tracing them to their origin in nature as means of emotional expression:". . . the astonishing coloratura technique in bird songs . . . would primarily be a multiplicity of graces. . . . First attempts of primitives to express themselves musically are likewise based upon the principles of tone variation . . . Even today, they occur in the performances of the Arabs, Hindus, Persians and Turks. . . . also in the oriental church song and in the Jewish synagogue all over the world . . . the ornament creates music by spinning forth its own motifs into scrolls and graces adorning the primitive melos. . . . This excursion into primeval music has emphasized an unmistakably serviceable character of the graces. To put it paradoxically: 'ornaments are functional'. In other words, they are neither mere embellishments nor musical tapestry. What often is referred to as graces proves to be an integral part of the texture of the composition."[25]

That the embellishments are an "integral" part of the music of the Baroque age - just as they were an expression of beauty, of grace, of heightened emotion in the other branches of art - is shown by the length and thoroughness with which they are treated in Couperin's and P. E. Bach's treatises. Also Johann Christoph (the Bückeburg Bach), brother of Philipp Emanuel, wrote on ornamentation in his Musicalische Nebenstunden (Music hours of leisure).

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25) Frederick Dorian, The History of Music in Performance, pp. 88-89.

Dorian says:"Johann Sebastian, the father, made a chart . . . a very condensed but accurate index to his own ornamentation . . . Johann Sebastian's grace executions and those of Philipp Emanuel do not coincide in certain details."[26]

C. P. E. Bach writes in his chapter on embellishments:" No one disputes the need for embellishments. This is evident from the great numbers of them everywhere to be found. They are, in fact, indispensable. Consider their many uses: They connect and enliven tones and impart stress and accent; they make music pleasing and awaken our close attention. Expression is heightened by them; let a piece be sad, joyful or otherwise, and they will lend a fitting assistance. Embellishments provide opportunity for fine performance as well as much of its subject matter. . . . Without them the best melody is empty and ineffective, the clearest content clouded . . ."[27]

Expression through variation of tempo: Slight variations in tempo as expressive means were advocated in the essays of the great masters. P. E. Bach recommends them in executing embellishments in slow tempo, in the cadenza, and in the passages in a major mode that are repeated in the minor mode. Couperin also speaks of tempo changes, but reserves them for the cadence: " Measure definitely the quality and eveness of the tempi, and the cadence is the proper place where the spirit and the soul can join . . . The cadence and the good taste can, independently,

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26) Frederick Dorian, The History of Music in Performance, p. 91.
27) C. P. E. Bach, Essay on the True Art of Playing Keyboard Instruments, p. 79.

maintain, more or less, the lengthening of tempo." (Mesure definit la qualité et l'égalité des temps, et Cadence est proprement l'esprit et l'âme qu'il faut joindre . . . La Cadence et le Goût peuvent s'y conserver independamment du plus ou moins de lenteur.)[28] Here Wilfrid Mellers adds this:" The correct interpretation of these irregularities of movement is one of the most difficult of all problems involved in the early eighteenth century music."[29] Dorian proposes that the quality of expression conditioned the tempo changes:"The Affectenlehre developed a whole discipline for the purpose of achieving tempo diagnosis by external means . . . Petri and Marpurg point to . . . changes of affection."[30]

Instructions of the old masters on keyboard playing: P. E. Bach gives us some information on finger position, muscle relaxation and "singing" tone quality:" In playing the fingers should be arched and the muscles relaxed. The less these two conditions are satisfied, the more attention must be given to them. Stiffness hampers all movement, above all, the constantly required rapid extension and contraction of the hands. All stretches, the omission of certain fingers, even the indispensable crossing of fingers and turning of the thumb, which should always remain as close as possible to the hand, demand this elastic ability. . . . If he [the performer] understands the correct principles of fingering and has not acquired the habit of making unnecessary gestures, he will play the most difficult things in such a manner that the

28) Wilfrid Mellers, François Couperin and the French Classical Tradition, p. 294.
29) Ibid. p. 295.
30) Frederick Dorian, The History of Music in Performance, p. 143.

motion of his hands will be barely noticeable; moreover, everything will sound as if it presented no obstacles to him. Conversely, those who do not understand these principles will often play the easiest things with great snorting and uncommon awkwardness."[31] He advises the practice of the trill:" The trill must be practiced diligently with all fingers so that they become strong and dextrous."[32] Again, speaking of the trill, he says:" Such embellishments must be full and so performed that the listener will believe that he is hearing only the original note."[33]

With regard to the "singing" quality of playing, Bach says: "My principal aim, especially of late, has been directed towards playing and composing as vocally as possible for the keyboard, despite its defective sustaining powers . . . I believe that music must, first and foremost, stir the heart. This cannot be achieved through mere rattling, drumming, or arpeggiation, at least not by me."[34] At another place, he advises:" Far more troublesome, in fact, is a good performance of simple notes. These bring fretful moments to many who believe that keyboard instruments are easy to play. . . . lose no opportunity to hear artistic singing. In so doing, the keyboardist will learn to think in terms of song. Indeed, it is a good practice to sing instrumental melodies in order to reach an understanding of their correct performance."[35]

Couperin calls for the sensitive touch:" The suppleness of the

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31) C. P. E. Bach, Essay on the True Art of Playing Keyboard Instruments, pp. 42-43.
32) Ibid., p. 109.
33) Ibid. pp. 149-150
34) Ibid. p. 10.
35) Ibid. p. 151

nerves contributes much more to beautiful playing than force." (La soupless des nerfs contribue beaucoup plus au bien jouer, que la force) And Mellers adds to this:"'Douceur de toucher' depends on keeping the fingers as close to the keys as possible."[36]

In the Harvard Dictionary, on Piano Playing, I found this very interesting account:" . . . a description which Forkel gives of J. S. Bach's playing (Über Johann Sebastian Bach's Leben, Kunst und Kunstwerke)'According to Bach's manner . . . the five fingers are curved so that . . . each of them is placed immediately above its respective key . . . the finger should not fall down on the key or . . . be thrown, but merely should be carried through the movement with a certain feeling of security and mastery.'"

Dorian, at the beginning of his book, brings a reproduction of The Concert by Giorgione (1478 - 1510). Below it is an enlarged detail of the monk's hands on the keyboard of the clavichord, showing the characteristic finger position. The hands look so relaxed and natural that the picture could apply to any of the modern books on piano technique.

We read the statement in Tobias Matthay's An Epitome of the Laws of Pianoforte Technique (1934):" With the 'thrusting' finger the tone can neither be sympathetic, full, nor carrying in melodic passages. Nicety of tone control is also greatly stultified."[37] This is - more or less - the negative twentieth century approach to the much simpler and clearer directions of finger position by Bach.

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36) Wilfrid Mellers, Francois Couperin and the French Classical Tradition, p. 293

37) Tobias Matthay, An Epitome of the Laws of Pianoforte Technique, Oxford University Press, 1934, p. 34E.

Independence of the hands is demanded by P. E. Bach, when he says:" The most difficult but most important task is to give all notes of the same value exactly the same duration. When the execution is such that one hand seems to play against the bar and the other strictly with it, it may be said that the performer is doing everything that may be required of him."[38]

Reflections on how the old masters played: Dorian brings this important question up:" Was old music played more slowly than modern? . . . Certain interpreters today think of the fundamental tempo in preclassical times as slower, more rigid and stately . . . this idea proves to be a prejudice . . . A method of employing the human pulse for setting tempi (anticipating Quantz's system) is mentioned as early as 1596 in Lodovico Zacconi's Prattica di musica. And Marin Mersenne, in his treatise Harmonie universelle, 1636, makes the time value of a minimum equivalent to that of a heartbeat."[39] At another place, Dorian says that " the masters employed virtuoso technique in an almost modern sense, their scores presenting problems of manual independence comparable to those of Chopin."[40]

In contrast to this, Ralph Kirkpatrick, in his book Domenico Scarlatti, makes these rather sceptical statements on the performances of the pre-classical period:" The existing accounts of Scarlatti's playing are few indeed . . . confine themselves largely to remarking on the brilliancy of his execution and the richness

38) C. P. E. Bach, Essay on the True Art of Playing Keyboard Instruments, p. 162.
39) Frederick Dorian, The History of Music in Performance, p. 180
40) Ibid. p. 54

of his fantasy. . . . I doubt if Couperin, despite his peculiar command of the harpsichord in his own style, would have been able to negotiate a single sonata of Scarlatti. . . . Although Handel would probably have played the Scarlatti sonatas with great dash . . . he would have scarcely avoided a great many wrong notes. J. S. Bach would have been among the very few who could have played all of them perfectly."[41]

Despite the extensive research that has been made on J. S. Bach's music, we must resort to theories and inferences when it comes to the interpretation of his keyboard music. Dorian says: "What'authentic' German Bach interpretation really was can only be a hypothesis. . . . There are two distinctly different schools of Bach interpretation - the objective school and the subjective - . . . The objective school, of course, follows with strict allegiance the meager directions of the score of the tempo and dynamics. . . . The subjective school, in contrast, allows considerable deviation from the original Bach directions. . . . Dynamics and phrasings are added."[42]

I think one should be careful in adding dynamics and unrestricted changes of expression to the old masters, or one might turn up with a piece by Rameau that sounds like a Chopin piece. In the pre-classical period people did not put their most intimate emotions on display. On the other hand, each artist goes through a romantic period in his life. Dorian says:" Romanticism is an

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41) Ralph Kirkpatrick, Domenico Scarlatti, Princeton University Press 1953, pp, 186 - 187.
42) Frederick Dorian , The History of Music in Performance, pp,76-77.

eternal factor in the performance of music. All epochs created romantic works . . ."[43] To play an obviously romantic composition of the Bach period in an unemotional, dry manner would be just as wrong. It takes a good insight into the trends of the time as well as into the personal feelings that are expressed in a certain piece to come to the proper content of expression.

The revival of the old instruments: Curt Sachs, in his book The History of Musical Instruments, tells of the efforts of the Society of Historians and Musicians to restore the keyboard music of the pre-classical period to its original performance:" The desire to re-discover the treasures of the ancient music began as early as the middle of the nineteenth century. . . . Their /Society of Historians and Musicians/ point was to be faithful, not to 'history' but to art. They demanded harpsichords . . . a cross-stringed piano suffocated the unemotional melody of a harpsichord piece. They saw what to a painter would be self-evident, that design and color could not be separated, that an outline drawn by Raphael could not be colored with Cezanne's palette . . ."[44] But despite of this sound argument, Sachs admits: ". . . we are far away from coloristic authenticity, even with the resurrection of all these old instruments. . . . harpsichordists believe that they play 'the' authentic style. They rarely realize that such a thing does not exist. Styles differed with every country, and in every country it changed continuously."[45]

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43) Frederick Dorian, The History of Music in Performance, p. 217.
44) Curt Sachs, The History of Musical Instruments, W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., New York, 1940, p. 449.
45) Ibid.,p. 450

Having arrived at this rather frustrating conclusion, we are most happy that Arthur Schnabel, with the insight of one of the greatest performers, says, in his book Music and the Line of Most Resistance: "Musical productions of our civilization, regardless of time and place, have more common than contrasting traits. . . . Art cannot be approached like a furniture exhibition, a fancy dress ball or a political map. Costumes in the eighteenth century were daintier than in the nineteenth, but men not weaker. . . . Pleasure in old instruments, particularly of the keyboard class, is very fashionable. . . . Modern instruments can do almost all that the old ones can, can do much more than the old ones, and they are free from their defects."[46]

A specific technique of playing is necessary for the music of the pre-classical period: Reflecting on the foregoing research, we should come to a good conclusion on the technique necessary to give a performance of the old masters that is as truthful as possible.

From the construction of the instruments, the harpsichord and the clavichord, and from the use of the limited fingering, up to the time of Johann Sebastian Bach, we must resolve that we are dealing with music of a fine and intimate character that was not meant for the concert hall, though there was an element of technical display already in it. This demands an agile and even finger technique. Great tone variations were not possible, therefore an absolute evenness of touch is "a must" here. But, even with the

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46) Arthur Schnabel, Music and the Line of Most Resistance, Princeton University Press, 1942, pp. 87-88.

greatest care, avoiding all play with supporting arm weight, we shall not be able to re-create entirely the daintiness of the old instruments; for the fall of the keys of our modern pianos is deeper, and it takes more weight to bring them down. This will cause the whole performance to become somewhat heavier and clumsier.

With the exploitation of the thumb, technique was put on a much higher plane of expression and skill. P. E. Bach speaks of "single and double trills", of playing "tenths, even twelfths, or runs, cross the hands in every conceivable manner, and excel in other related matters." He recommends:" All difficulties in passage work should be mastered through repeated practice."[47] Recognizing the importance of good fingering, he made a thorough study of it and laid the foundation to our modern scale fingering.

The purpose of all great masters, at all times, is expression. We recall the Affectenlehre of the German school and the "painting of portraits" by Couperin, or, as Rameau expresses it so much better: " L'expression de la pensée, du sentiment, des passions, doit être le vrai but de la musique."

The masters found means of expression despite the limited tone quality of their instruments. They could not produce the crescendo and decrescendo of our modern piano; but, through time variations in the embellishments, the improvized cadenza etc., they could give a great variety of expressions that surpassed the simple crescendo and decrescendo.P. E. Bach says, in this connection:" Any passage

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47) C. P. E. Bach, Essay on the True Art of Playing Keyboard Instruments, p. 151.

can be so radically changed by modifying its performance that it will be scarcely recognizable."[48] These means of expression demand an absolute control over every finger and complete flexibility of the playing apparatus. The ability to mold passages, embellishments into patterns of emotional expression by unnoticeable time variations is a true art, indeed.

It is significant that all the masters stress the importance of the touch of the fingers. Finger position and stroke are discussed at length, and those instructions, as we saw, are still valid. It is here, in the touch of the instrument, where music begins. It is the same factor that we demand in speech:" It is not so much What you say, but How you say it."

Already, at that time, the importance of technique had reached a point where performers lose sight of the purpose of it and look at it as an end. We may recall the warnings of Couperin:" j'aime mieux ce qui me touche que ce qui me surprend", and P. E. Bach: " More often than not, one meets technicians, nimble keyboardists by profession who . . . astound us with their prowess without ever touching our sensibilities. They overwhelm our hearing without satisfying it and stun the mind without moving it."[49]

Today we have a better chance to "sing" on our pianos than P. E. Bach did. We even have the advantage to be able to bring out the main motive over the accompanying counterpoint. This, also, calls for great independence of the fingers which can only be gained by patient practice. Even the "singing" effect of a

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48) C. P. E. Bach, Essay on the True Art of playing Keyboard Instruments, p. 151.
49) Ibid. p. 147

single voice requires a skill that takes long practice. Too often it is being neglected for the desire to acquire speed and brilliance.

Hearing these dainty compositions performed, we, frequently, underestimate the technical reqirements, that is, technique as a tool of expression; or, as Arthur Schnabel says:" All masterworks demand the total of all imaginable technique, but only in a secondary function."[50]

If we use the compositions of that period in a concert hall we have to have a bigger tone volume. Virgil Thomson, in his book The Art of Judging Music, says:" They blow up the piano music of the past by dynamic proportions that are not always an advantage to it."[51] While some of the compositions may become more impressive, they certainly lose the original soft and delicate texture, the character of intimacy.

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50) Arthur Schnabel, Music and the Line of Most Resistance, p. 66.
51) Virgil Thomson, The Art of Judging Music, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1948, p. 247.

Chapter II: The Technique of the Classical Period

Domenico Scarlatti, the link to the piano music of the Classical Period: In the Thompson International Cyclopedia of Music and Musicians, on Piano Playing, we read:" Domenico Scarlatti (1685-1757) must always be remembered, and justly, as the true father of modern piano playing in developing a technical virtuosity at the harpsichord as epochal in its way as that of Liszt at the piano a century later. Scarlatti it was who introduced the crossing of hands, passages of double notes, the use of far-flung arpeggio passages and the rapid repetition of one note." Albert Wier sings his praise in the following words:" His toccatas, by their brilliance of content and breadth of musical expression, place their composer among the greatest musicians of all time."[1] Describing Scarlatti's Practice Pieces (Exercizii), he says:" In the selection of the figures, and in the manner of presenting them, the master often shows his consummate control of the technical resources of the keyboard, and the extreme difficulty of many of his pieces, with the repetition of characteristic figures suitable to the genius of the harpsichord, gives us a glimpse of the future possibility of the development of the étude as an art form . . . his predilection for wide skips in his figures . . . points the way toward greater freedom of movement. . . . His essays in this direction had their ultimate culmination in the great piano works of Liszt. . . . a great innovator along technical and formal lines; his work in emotional expression is secondary to his accomplishment in the realm of tonal effect."[2]

1) Albert Wier, The Piano, p. 96

2) Ibid. pp. 98-99.

Domenico Scarlatti's father, Alessandro, is credited with outstanding development of the Italian opera. Domenico also wrote several operas, but his real contribution lies in the expressive - and with it, the technical - expansion of keyboard music. The desire for dramatic presentation and descriptive effects caused him to create augmented means of technique that brought keyboard music out into the limelight and attracted the attention of the classical masters - mainly Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven.

The Piano: The desire for augmented expression called for an instrument of added expressiveness and it appeared in the pianoforte. The Encyclopaedia Britannica tells of its first appearance: " We learn that in 1709 Cristophori had completed four 'gravecembali col piano e forte' - keyed psaltries with soft and loud - three of them being of the long or usual harpsichord form. . . . There were two pianofortes by Cristophori, dated respectively 1720 and 1726, which show a much improved construction, for the whole of an essential piano movement is there." Ralph Kirkpatrick tells of the modest beginnings of the pianoforte, and, though after 1720, many ruling houses in Europe owned one or more pianofortes, there was a great preference for the harpsichord.Wier, on the other hand, says:" . . . the tendency about that time was toward the total disregard of the harpsichord and clavichord principles, and the use of entirely new methods; the strength of the strings was wholly inadequate to the pounding of the hammers, and radical

departures had to be made. . . . The man who contributed most to the development of the hammer action was Gottfried Silbermann in Germany. . . . One of them [Silbermann Pianos] is said to have been played by Bach, when the great master met Frederick the Great in 1747."[3] Later Wier also points to the disadvantages of the pianoforte:" Frederick's pianos were of the heavy, clumsy astion so vehemently condemmed by Bach; their mechanical imperfections made them most unsatisfactory for purposes of musical expression."[4] In Thompson's International Cyclopedia of Music and Musicians, on Piano Playing, we find:" With the piano established as the successor of the harpsichord the whole problem of touch and technique had to be entirely restudied . . ."

It was interesting to me that, with the adverse comments on the pianoforte and its beginnings, no one pointed out the reason for its eventual success, namely the steadily swelling crescendo and evenly diminishing decrescendo that gave a truer representation of our emotions than the step-by-step of p - mf - f of the older instruments which, besides, was very limited. Only Virgil Thomson established the reason clearly:" Like the modern orchestra, moreover, it [the piano] can produce the effect that is the specific, the differential characteristic of musical Romanticism, namely, the quick or expressive crescendo. . . . The first of Mozart's real piano sonatas - the No. 7 in A minor - . . . not only makes use (in the slow movement) of expressive crescendo and diminuendo,

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3) Albert Wier, The Piano, p. 33
4) Ibid. p. 34

but (at the end of the first) of an architectural crescendo that is the keyboard transcription of an orchestral effect."[5]

The aims of the "Viennese Group": Before we can look at the technical requirements we have to find the aim of expression of the Classical Period; for technique is conditioned by the emotional and ideal content of music.

The style of composing has undergone considerable changes also; and, though we find counterpoint parts and melodies with chordal accompaniment (Alberti bass), its foremost construction is, as Virgil Thomson says, "keyboard transcription of an orchestral effect." The technique of playing takes a development in two directions; one is the expressive crescendo and decrescendo; the other is the mastering of the intricate voice construction of the piano music that is, practically, an orchestra score. Keyboard playing which, up to this time, had been greatly a matter of improvisation, of extemporaneous playing, becomes a re-creation of carefully constructed music that was to be performed correctly to the last dot. Kirkpatrick is speaking of this development when he says:" . . . when keyboard playing became a profession in itself as apart from improvisation and composition did a genuinely universal technique such as that exemplified in the piano methods of Hummel and Czerny become standart equipment even for players of only average ability."[6]

Joseph Haydn used piano music mainly as an expression of happy, jovial moods that are set in effective contrasts, or, as Wier says: "The element of personality becomes a matter of paramount importance . . . his works have a spontaneous, lively character which highly recommended them to the public of his day."[7]

Speaking of Mozart, Wier comments:" The grace and elusive qualities

of Mozart are not easily described, his music was almost of ethereal beauty of conception and perfection of detail. . . . Mozart is said to have been a performer such as has never since been heard . . . [speaking of his sonatas] their flawless perfection demands the unerring finger work of a complete master of the keyboard. . . . he made more demands upon the left hand . . . shifting back and forth between widely separated parts of the keyboard."[8]

There is one quality in Mozart's music that neither Wier nor others mention, but which influences the technique of his works; that is the dramatic contrast in his principal and secondary subjects. Though they should not be brought out in crude, sharp contrasts of dynamics, there should be a characteristic, individual expression in each of them which demands a mastery of timbre.

Beethoven adds dynamic power and suggestion: Ludwig van Beethoven's powerful personality augmented the expressive capability of piano music, and, with it, its technique. Thompson's Cyclopedia of Music and Musicians, on Piano Playing, says:" . . . a new element of vitality and dramatic emphasis was injected into piano playing by Ludwig van Beethoven (1770 - 1827), who was a player of great dynamic energy and whose compositions of their very nature demanded a new nobility of utterance. He used, too, an

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5) Virgil Thomson, The Art of Judging Music, p. 273
6) Ralph Kirkpatrick, Domenico Scarlatti, p. 187.
7) Albert Wier, The Piano, p. 113
8) Ibid. pp. 113 - 115

English piano, with a much heavier action than that of the Viennese instruments and with greater tonal volume. The claim of great digital facility to first consideration suffered an eclipse and the inevitable reaction on the part of Beethoven's contemporaries to his personal style of playing and to his music was the cultivation of a more aggressive approach and the eventual sacrifice of tonal beauty to power." Wier adds to this:" they [Beethoven's sonatas] were made the vehicles of his ever broadening genius. . . . the sonatas provide a vivid picture of the various stages through which his soul passed on its search for the highest expression of art, revealing a consistant expansion of power. . . . Beethoven had a definite idea of the pictorial possibilities of music . . . he rejoiced in his power of suggestion in music, and was fully conscious of the enormous force of his musical ideas. . . . he . . . leaned more towards massive tonal effects and sharply defined contrasts. His scale playing was definitely more colorful in the matter of touch, but he frequently sacrificed smoothness in order to attain this diversity. . . . In the matter of digital ability, he himself performed readily all the wellknown tricks of the virtuoso of his day, including double and triple trills, as well as rapid scales in thirds, sixths and octaves."[9] This expansion of technique in tone volume and complexity must have made Beethoven, as Dorian says, "a self-taught virtuoso". Quoting Czerny on Beethoven's playing, Dorian continues:" His attitude while playing was masterly in its quietness, noble and beautiful, without the least grimace, though he bent forward as his deafness grew upon him. He attached great importance, in his teaching, to correct position of the fingers . . . Beethoven was very anxious that his pupils should acquire a perfect

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9) Albert Wier, The Piano, pp. 118-119

legato, his own legato being, as may be imagined, wonderful."[10]

These masters' works covered a great diversity of moods, moods, that were , at times, not definable; to which Beethoven added pictorial possibilities and suggestive means. And all this was written with little regard to the ability of the hands and fingers. Little runs or thirds curve up and down, demanding continuous setting over and under of fingers, or great skips in soft playing impair the free arm swing. These masters wrote the music down as they heard it in their imagination with little concern if it would be hard or easy to perform.

The beginning of teaching methods: The mounting technical difficulties caused the development of "methods of teaching" the piano. A group of "piano pedagogues" began teaching technique in a direct way instead of attaching all exercises unto the pieces. They made studies and etudes out of difficult parts as they found them in the compositions. They also created exercises for the weak fingers, for octaves, for skipping, etc. Muzio Clementi's Gradus ad Parsassum grew out of these attempts; Carl Czerny's books of exercises and etudes served the same principle. There are no records as to how these masters taught. The fact that both of them developed a number of outstanding performers proves the validity of their teaching. Wier writes:" All technical problems have been solved by the master-teachers of the early days of the piano, such as Czerny, Clementi and Moscheles . . . the fact that so little of such material is available from the pens of modern writers is testimony to the value of the standard works."[11] To the same group belong Johann Nepomuk Hummel (1778 - 1837), Francois-Joseph Fétis (1784 - 1871)

10) Frederick Dorian, The History of Music in Performance, p. 203
11) Albert Wier, The Piano, pp. 240 - 241

and Friedrich Wilhelm Kalkbrenner (1788 - 1849).

Ignaz Moscheles (1794 - 1870) takes a place of greater distinction in the teaching field. Wier praises "the charm of his cantabile playing", but he adds:" brilliant passage playing, as exemplified by Czerny, teacher of Liszt, was not neglected . . . The traditions of Italian song had been introduced into piano technique, and the best teachers laid much stress on the soulful interpretation of melody . . . While his /Moscheles'/ technique has been superseded in principle, he attained marvelous results with a level wrist and a quiet hand."[12] At another place, Wier says:". . . his/Moscheles'/ wrist was stiff which was undoubtedly a handicap . . . he did not play the works of Chopin and Liszt."[13]

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12) Albert Wier, The Piano, pp. 246 - 247
13) Ibid. p. 129

Chapter III The Romantic Period

The cantabile playing in piano music that Wier traces to the influence of the Italian song has really its source in the beginning of romanticism and the revival of the songs of the Minnesingers. Schubert and Schumann are often called "the Minnesingers of the nineteenth century".

The content of expression of the Romantic Period turns away from viewing humanity in the attempt of understanding the relationship to God and fellow-men. It turns to the exploitation of the innermost feelings and emotions of the individual, the subconscious yearnings and the display of mixed, undefinable emotions. Dorian says:" . . . the romantic performance becomes more and more an appeal to the listener's imagination, to his subconscious, which is more exciting than the plea of the baroque interpreter for conscious intellectual understanding."[1]

This movement ended in an overwhelming display of the individual's emotional life that left little room for clear thinking, for action, for striving. Curt Sachs describes it as "the excesses of the later romantic style, such as the decomposition of form, its obliteration of distinct outlines, its harmonic and coloristic superrefinement, its calculated effect on the listener, its exaggerated subjectivity."[2]

But the Romantic Period is also the time of Liszt, the developer of the virtuoso technique of description and story

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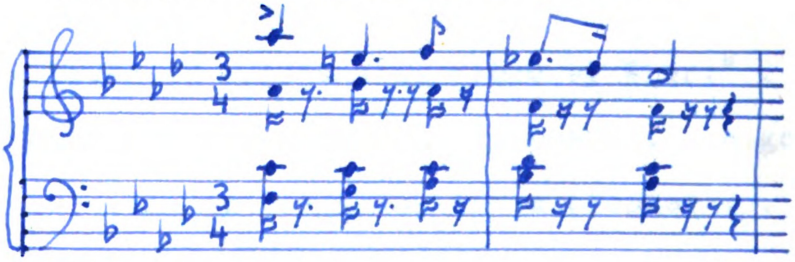
1) Frederick Dorian, The History of Music in Performance, p. 219
2) Curt Sachs, The History of Musical Instruments, p. 450

suggestion. Absolute music becomes program music - beginning with Schumann - and emotions that are connected with singular outside objects call for specific expression.

Carl Maria von Weber, the link to the Romantic Period: Weber was a successful opera composer, which means that he could produce healthy, effective contrasts. But his contrasts were not the intellectual characteristics of Mozart. He contrasts dark, supernatural mystery with lovely melodious, often folk-like, music, and this again with sweeping, joyful emotions. Some of his melodies trail, vaporlike, unreal, into the high octaves of the piano. Wier calls Weber's contrasts:" a mystical spirituality . . . unflagging vigor . . . fresh and spontaneous inspiration."[3] Weber is the first one who recognizes the "singing quality" of a single tone; of a melody, set effectively against a short, clipped accompaniment:

Conzertstück
Opus 79

con duolo e ben tenuto la melodia



The right hand, taking the strictly connected melody, has to play part of the short accompaniment, too; this takes patient practice and concentration. At times he loads his music with powerful chordal successions, even in tenths. Weber's hand is supposed to have had a large stretch - he was a brilliant performer on the piano - and the keys of his piano were a little bit smaller. Long, tiring chord successions in large stretches are

3) Albert Wier, The Piano, p. 124

one reason why his piano music is very seldom performed today. He had a definite understanding of the means of creating thundering dynamics and brilliance, but he disregarded the construction of the hand and fingers, their limits of effort, their need for rest. Later, Liszt could create the same effects with much less effort.

Felix Mendelssohn and Franz Schubert stayed well within the limits of the established technique. Schubert was a little more original in his descriptive parts, as they appear, for instance, in the Impromptu, Opus 90, No. 4. Wier says of him:" His muse was lyric . . . The Wanderer Fantasy and the Fantasia Sonata . . . strove for tremendous effects . . . show the composer's weakness in the realm of virtuoso music."[4] In the book The Music of Schubert, edited by Gerald Abraham, Kathleen Dale writes:" Schubert's piano music, while calling for high powers of interpretation, is not of great technical difficulty; moreover, it does not, on the whole, require large or powerful hands."[5]

Robert Schumann is given an outstanding place by Wier:" . . . one of the outstanding figures of the romantic era . . . a great poet of the keyboard . . . an experimenter and a pioneer . . . to explore music in the delineation of characters and events . . . to leave nothing unexplored in the matter of novel keyboard effects . . . /but/ the technique that he acquired can hardly be considered as closely adapted to the instrument as that of Chopin."[6] Schumann introduced a new help of defining his content of expression, the

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4) Albert Wier, The Piano, pp. 125 - 126.
5) Editor Gerald Abraham, The Music of Schubert, W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., New York, 1947, p. 148
6) Albert Wier, The Piano, pp. 131 - 132

descriptive title. His music became program music in the best sense of the word; that means, it is good music without the title, the title only identifies it. This outside help gives us the hint as to the often novel tone qualities and effects that are required.

In some of Schumann's music is also an expression of several emotions,at the same time, present; a true picture of reality, for we mostly do not experience one single emotion but a mixture of them, with one dominating.

Frédéric Chopin and the height of intimate expression: It was Chopin who devoted himself almost exclusively to the piano and developed its expressive capabilities mainly in the direction of the tender, delicate emotions, often mixed with a feeling of fatality. Thompson's Cyclopedia of Music and Musicians says:" Frédéric Chopin (1810 - 1849) who, as he sang his intensely personal melodies, introduced an unprecedented intimacy of content . . . filmy lace of utmost delicacy . . ."(see Piano Playing) Wier says of Chopin: " . . . his is the unassailable position of one who, more than anyone else, was able to draw musical expression from the instrument in terms of its own idiom. . . . the quality and aloofness that baffles any but the most sympathetic player; the elusive beauty of his compositions often fails to reveal itself except in the most competent hands . . . its greatness is beyond the power of most players to comprehend, and accordingly to interpret for others. . . . The delicacy and subtlety of his touch, and his mastery of pedalling were the constant wonder of his audiences; his effects were produced rather by the infinite variety of his nuances than by extreme contrasts." [7] Later, with regard to his technical con-

7) Albert Wier, The Piano, pp. 136 - 138

tributions, Wier says:" . . . he introduces countless melodic figures, constructed from vital notes of an accompanying figure . . . the difficulty of bringing out melodic notes at wide intervals . . . his recognition of the cardinal law, required by the nature of the instrument, that piano music must be ever in motion to be effective. . . . a complex web of sounds . . . in later works the accompaniments extend almost from one end of the keyboard to the other . . . Chopin had no patience with virtuoso play . . . those who play his works with this end in view are simply rehearsing the notes . . . The so-called ornaments are an integral part of the texture of any given composition."[8] Dorian comments on Chopin as follows:" . . . no romanticist is more performed than Chopin, none as widely exposed to misunderstanding and misrepresentation. . . . the style of Chopin has suffered in performance through sentimentalization by amateurs as well as through aggrandizement by virtuosi. . . . What Chopin sought was the subdued quality and tonal charm of the smaller instrument. . . . Chopin's own playing was of superlative delicacy."[9] Speaking of his "rubato" Dorian recalls that it had been used and acknowledged already by Mozart's father,Leopold, and that "Chopin regarded the rubato as by no means a departure from the metrical accuracy . . . [quoting Chopin] 'The left hand is the conductor. It must never waver or lose ground. Do with the right hand what you will and can!'"[10]

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8) Albert Wier, The Piano, pp. 141 - 143
9) Frederick Dorian, The History of Music in Performance, pp. 235-236
10) Ibid. p. 239

Nobody should disregard the warnings of Wier and Dorian when it comes to the performance of Chopin's music. It is not only lack of expression but wrong expression that should be avoided. Not only should sheer virtuoso display be shunned but "tonal aggrandizement". How much easier is it to perform passage and arpeggio work in a half loud manner, supported by arm weight, than in a soft expression with a clear outline of a melody within the figurework. It is here where technique begins to"speak" and, at the same time, to color, describe.

Franz Liszt and the height of technical accomplishment: It was reserved for Franz Liszt to develop piano technique to its peak. Thompson's Cyclopedia of Music and Musicians, on Piano Playing, says:" Franz Liszt (1811 - 1886) who, influenced by the violin wizardry of Paganini, expanded the technique of the piano beyond all previous bounds, and elaborated it to brilliant bravura proportions." The same article also states:" It remained for Chopin and Liszt to take cognizance of the inherent weakness of certain fingers and so to design their figurations as to place the hands in as advantageous position as possible."

With reference to the first remark, I believe that there were other factors involved than solely the influence of Paganini that caused Liszt to augment the technique; that was the desire for added expression and expressiveness. He was the creator of the tone-poem, developing Schumann's ideas farther. His aim was not alone to arouse emotions, ideas, in music; he wanted his music to be descriptive, to paint pictures, to tell stories - just to mention

his Années de pélérinage - and, to accomplish this, he left no stone unturned. Wier gives the following account of him:"'Franz Liszt, the virtuoso of virtuosi'. . . . his physical energy and the size of his hands made easy for him feats at the keyboard that have never been equalled. . . . His influence as a teacher was tremendous . . . Liszt resolved to develop a technical facility which should be limited only by physical possibility, and he acquired a skill hitherto undreamt of. . . . The facility of his finger technique left his audiences dumbfounded and awestricken . . . he introduced new methods which drew upon unheard-of resources of the instrument. . . . [he used] double, triple and quadruple trills . . . The use of the arm in performing the tremolo also came in for special attention . . . Liszt also antidated many modern technicians by employing the arm in a more subtle manner, that is, as an indispensable adjunct in rapid scales and arpeggios as well as in cantabile playing. His ideas along this line were not fully crystallized . . . until several decades after his death."[11]

In contrast to this, Virgil Thomson believes that Liszt, more or less, still stuck to the old-fashioned finger method:" Liszt knew at the end of his life something that we should recognize by its loudness as a modern instrument, though he still played it with high fingers and very little arm weight, the keyboard action being lighter than that in use now."[12]

Apel's Harvard Dictionary of Music, on Pianoforte Playing, comes to the understanding that "Great pianists such as Beethoven, Chopin, Liszt, Rubinstein were, of course, in full command of all the advanced methods of modern pianism." Considering the great technical

accomplishments of all those masters one can only draw the latter conclusion.

Dorian gives Liszt full credit for his technical innovations, but questions the seriousness of his artistic efforts:" [speaking of Liszt and Paganini] their performances still symbolize the triumph of the human mind over the hand, presenting unsurpassed examples of supervirtuosity . . . [Quoting Clara Wieck on Liszt's playing] 'His passion knows no limits. He often wounds one's sense of the beautiful by destroying the melody. He arouses fright and astonishment'. . . Both [Liszt and Paganini] were willing and superbly equipped to supply the musical entertainment paid for by the spoiled and superficial 'haute volée' in European capitals. . . . These audiences expected a mixture between the concert hall and the circus."[13]

Dorian is not isolated in his judgment on Liszt. At the end of the biography Franz Liszt by James Huneker, the author publishes a large collection of statements of persons who were present at Liszt's concerts; and, while the majority of them are enthusiastic about his performances, a few, definitely, describe him as a clever charlatan. Dorian's suggestion that Liszt, at times, sacrificed musical content for display of sheer technique is probably true; it may have been the overwhelming technical achievement, the novelty of producing those unheard-of spectacles that sidetracked him and made him forget the goal:artistic content.

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11) Albert Wier, The Piano, pp. 145 - 146
12) Virgil Thomson, The Art of Judging Music, p. 274
13) Frederick Dorian, The History of Music in Performance, pp. 250-251

Still the advancement that he brought to piano music is unequaled. He developed the piano into a solo instrument that could hold the attention of the audience through a whole concert. Under his hands the piano could roar like the ocean, twitter like birds, sing like a troubadour. And it was only through diversified technical augmentation that this was possible.

Claude Debussy: The next master who added to the piano technique was Claude Debussy. The Thompson Cyclopedia of Music and Musicians, on Piano Playing, says:" Debussy . . . demanded a new kind of touch and an especially adroit use of the pedals. For him the piano was not a percussive instrument in any sense, nor did he ask it to sing as it had for Chopin, or to make powerful tonal proclamations as it had for Liszt. He wooed from it the tonal effects he wanted with a 'gradual' caressing, frequently glancing touch, instead of applying a direct impact of the fingertips on the keys." Wier says of Debussy: " . . . greatest innovator in the history of piano music since Liszt . . . /has/ given a new if somewhat nebulous expression to the instrument. His technique, founded on that of Liszt, but not requiring such enormous speed and strength, is likely to be nearly as exacting as that of Chopin."[14] Dr. Max Schwarz, my piano teacher, in Berlin, always said:" When you play Debussy you must touch the keys like a velvet curtain."

The latest development of the piano and its augmented expressiveness: Anton Rubinstein was known, as Wier says,"for his love of

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14) Albert Wier, The Piano, pp. 168 - 169.

bravura playing."[15] I was told that he often broke the piano during his recitals, and that two or three pianos were kept back-stage for replacements. This made the construction of a heavier instrument necessary, and so we come to, as Virgil Thomson states: "the twentieth century piano . . . as manufactured anywhere, is darker in tone than its eighteenth and nineteenth century ancestors. Also, it can play a great deal louder, especially in the bass. . . . an instrument capable of holding its own in concertos against an orchestra of a hundred musicians. Modern piano technique is also designed to make possible, at all degrees of speed, a high degree of loudness. A wide dynamic range is now available to all properly trained pianists."[16]

The follow-up of the methods: Needless to say, the methods of Clementi, Czerny, even Moscheles, were not equipped to train students for the twentieth century piano. The master performers, from Beethoven on, had gone ahead of the old school of finger technicians. They had found their own way of drawing out of the piano what they wanted to hear, and, in the desire to hear more, they had demanded better, more expressive, instruments.

"Teaching the piano", since the middle of last century, had become a profession, not only of great performers, but, also, for mediocre players. With lack of understanding for the parts of the body involved in playing; often misunderstanding the instructions of their teachers; disregarding the ever increasing heaviness of action of the modern piano, they applied a method of touch that belonged practically to the harpsichord.Because the heavier action

15) Albert Wier, The Piano, p. 156
16) Virgil Thomson, The Art of Judging Music, p. 274

of the later pianos demanded a more forceful stroke, they began lifting the fingers high and developed a powerful finger stroke that had very little possibility for musical expression. My first instructor, at Stern's Conservatory, Fräulein Rosa Brunn, who studied during the beginning of this century, told that she had to lift her fingers as high as possible. It was so overdone that her fourth finger was thrown out of joint. When her elbows moved a little outward they were pushed back against the body. Dr. Schwarz told of his first instructions with a sense of humor. He called them "the twentieth century tortures". He had to play scales with a piece of money on the flat back of his hand, and when he dropped his knuckles too far down, his teacher would burn him with his ever-present cigar on the underside of his hand.

One of the last exponents of the school of high-finger technique was Theodore Kullak (1818-1882). He had the reputation of being an outstanding teacher. According to Baker's Biographical Dictionary of Music and Musicians:" . . . he became the teacher of the /English/ royal family. . . . In 1850, he founded, with Julius Stern and Bernhard Marx, the Berlin (later Stern's) Conservatory. . . . he received the title of 'Royal Professor' in 1861 . . . His instructive works are classics, particularly The School of Octave-Playing." Wier says of Kullak:" His technique is now almost entirely outmoded. . . . he paid much attention to the correct position of the hand . . . he believed in the old high-finger method. . . . his octave studies are well known; these were played by movement of the wrist. . . . He taught scales and passage work with great rigidity of the hand, compensating for the attendant numbness by prescribing exercises to relieve the muscles after long

exertion . . . a singing tone was produced by throwing the /low/ wrist upward and forward. Dr. Schwarz studied with KullaK for some time. He found him very uninspiring. Kullak demanded absolute obedience from his pupils with "no questions asked". He never gave any explanations, he gave only orders.

According to the Harvard Dictionary, on Pianoforte Playing,: "Ludwig Deppe (1828 - 1890) was the first to point out the importance of a deliberate use of the arm and its weight. " Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians says of him:" The special object of his system of pianoforte technique was . . . the acquirement of an absolutely even touch by the adoption of a very soft tone and a slow pace in practicing, a seat much lower than most teachers recommend and minute attention to the details of muscular movement." We see here the serious effort to break away from the mechanical clicking of the high-finger play and to find a new way to cope with the heavier key action; through the support of the arm weight. Baker's Biographical Dictionary mentions Deppe's publication Armleiden der Klavierspieler (1885)(Arm soreness of piano players). This shows the bad effect that overemphasized high-finger play had on students.Their arm, from the elbow to the wrist, where the finger muscles move, became inflamed.

It was Theodor Leschetizki who pointed the way to the modern piano methods. Harvard Dictionary, on Pianoforte Playing, says: " Theodor Leschetizki (1830 - 1915) established the methodical training in the new style of playing." Leschetizki was regarded as the world's most outstanding piano pedagogue. An article in Musical America, May 1957, moiseiwitch, quotes Moiseiwitch, a pupil of Leschetizky, on his studies with the great teacher:" No

two pupils played the same piece in exactly the same way, but all his teaching was grounded in fundamental beauty of tone and emphasis on expressive color. Individuality, not method, made him the great teacher he was." It was then the desire for freedom of expression and individuality that brought about greater freedom of action, technically. Students of the high-finger method sounded all alike. Dr. Schwarz, also, studied with Leschetizki and had only high praise for him.

Leschetizki had developed a method that lead straight to the "arm" or "weight" methods. His idea was this: If you have struck one tone you must be ready for the next. So, with lightning speed and with the shortest movement, you must place the finger over the next key, ready to strike. He insisted on "loud" practicing. By eliminating the big finger movement, and by demanding a loud tone, the arm had to come to help to produce the tone. The muscles that held the stiff hand in place and the elbow against the sides had to be relaxed. Still, I doubt that he was absolutely conscious of what he was doing, physiologically. He had thought the technical problem out from the practical side and it worked.

Chapter IV The Twentieth Century

The modern "arm" or "weight" methods: It was left to piano pedagogues of the beginning of the twentieth century to separate technique from its musical content and look at it as a series of physiological activities that are conditioned by the qualities and limitations of the instrument; men like Eugen Tetzel, Rudolf Maria Breithaupt, Thomas Matthay.

The Harvard Dictionary comments on those methods:" Rudolf Breithaupt introduced the principles of relaxation, Rollung(rolling and rotating movements of the hand) positioning and coordination of finger and arm, not without dangerous tendency of underestimating the finger training. The same statement applies to the modern Relaxation School, represented mainly by Tobias Matthay who, by this one-sided emphasis of freedom and suppleness, has to some extent discredited a good cause."

Eugen Tetzel wrote a very scholarly book Das Problem der modernen Klaviertechnik (The Problem of Modern Piano Technique), 2nd edition 1916. His demonstration of piano technique is a combined study of mechanical engineering, with regard to the physical laws of piano construction and action, and the physiological conditions of the body from the fingertips to the muscles of the shoulder blades and the back; their actions and counter actions in the movements of playing the piano. While his book is still enlightening to students along scientific lines, it gave very little actual help in gaining a good piano technique. The psychological hints on

teaching, at the end of his book, are very rudimentary. I never heard of a successful pianist who called himself a "student of Tetzel". Therefore, when, around 1920, the battle between the teachers of the "finger method" and the advocators of the "weight method" broke out, Tetzel never stood in the limelight.

It took a man like Rudolf Breithaupt, with keen observance, practical insight and a good business mind, to lead the battle with flying colors to victory.Thompson's Cyclopedia of Music and Musicians acknowledges him; Baker's Dictionary of Music and Musicians is more specific:" contributor to Redende Künste, Neue Zeitschrift fur Musik, Musik, Kunstwart, etc.; 1918 app. prof. at Stern's Conservatory, in Berlin. Works: Die natürliche Klaviertechnik, in 3 parts (P 1 1905; 4th ed. 1925; P II Die Grundlagen der Klaviertechnik, 1907, transl. into French, English and Russian; P III Praktische Studien, 1919): coll. essays as Musikalische Zeit- und Streitfragen, 1906; and Praktische Übungen (5 vols. 1916-21)". The Moser Musiklexikon adds to this:" Through his writings, since 1905, he has given the major impetus to "arm rolling", that is, to the recognition that intelligent piano playing is not possible through "finger movement" alone, but through the added use of the arm weight up into the shoulder."(Durch seine Schriften seit 1905 gab er den Hauptanstoss zum "Armrollen", d. h. zu der Erkenntnis, dass ein rationelles Klavierspiel nicht durch "Fingerspiel", sondern nur durch Gewichtsausnützung bis in die Schulter hinein möglich ist.)

In the first edition of his book, Breithaupt made the blunder of stating that the fingers had really so little to do with piano playing that one could cut them off. This was a mistake that the learned Tetzel never would have made, and, consequently, Tetzel saw fit to attack Breithaupt. After experiencing the effect of his teachings on his students, Breithaupt brought out a revised edition of his work in which he recognized the necessity of finger movement.

In 1918, he was invited to the Stern's Conservatory in Berlin to fill the position of head of the piano department which had become vacant through the death of Professor Martin Krause. Breithaupt had asked for a class at Stern's, about 15 years previously, which was refused to him, because his method, at that time, had appeared rather irrational.

I was studying at Stern's, at the time of his appointment, and I remember clearly the great anticipation with which we looked forward to hearing the first recital of the Breithaupt students. We expected to "see" something extraordinary in arm rolling and arm throwing and weight exhibition. Instead, we "heard" something extraordinary; we heard the most difficult exhibition pieces - Liszt etudes and rhapsodies etc. - played in the most fabulous manner, faster, louder, more brilliantly than we expected them ever to be performed. But we saw no exhibition in movements, whatsoever; everything was performed with the most economical amount of effort and movement. Only later did it dawn on us that Breithaupt's discovery was the relaxation of all unnecessary muscles,

saving of effort, the passing of the necessary muscle work from one set of muscles to another, so that one set should not be overworked; the use of the natural arm weight in support of the finger stroke to create a fuller tone. None of those activities are noticeable on the outside. Tobias Matthay wrote a book on those Invisible Movements.

Naturally, the effect of that Btreithaupt student recital was tremendous. Many students left their teachers and flocked to him. Many could not afford his exorbitant prices.It was pathetic to see how many older teachers who had been ardent exponents of the finger method suddenly gave their students "arm exercises", making them throw their arms wildly without any apparent purpose, trying to teach something that they, themslves, did not understand.

Technique seemed to be uppermost in everybody's mind. In the broad streets in Berlin, at the entrances of elegant houses, one could read the name of a piano teacher and under it "Kullak Methode", or "Leschetizki Methode", or even "Liszt Methode", a great nonsense, for Liszt did not teach piano "method", only expression.

Of course, the reliable teachers, who were grounded on their own experiences and convictions let the flashflood of "Breithaupt method" pass by and were still there after the flood. They may have been shaken out of their complacency and had acknowledged and accepted the valuable contributions of the Breithaupt method; but they were there to teach music, not piano method. For, as a musician, Breithaupt has proved himself to be a failure. The music of Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Chopin, Liszt sounded all alike when it was pressed into the Breithaupt method. There was no "aspiration or inclination of the soul", there were just certain sets of movements

for runs, broken chors, octaves etc. While students of his predecessor, Professor Martin Krause, - pianists of top rank like Edwin Fisher, Claudio Arrau, Lizi Fischer - still make headlines, I have not heard of one great pianist who calls himself a "Breithaupt student". There were many students who got very valuable help from his method and who knew how to use it for artistic means but who would not call themselves a "Breithaupt pupil", because they learned the important thing - the performing of music - from someone else.

Just at the time of the "Breithaupt craze", I had the good fortune to obtain a ticket to a piano concert by Edwin Fischer. I shall never forget the great impression that that evening made on me. The recital was at the Singakademie, the largest concert hall in Berlin. Not only was the house filled to the last seat, but ladies in their evening gowns sat on the steps that lead to the stage. Fischer was a young man then, tall, with a sharply cut, expressive face and long pale blond hair; and when he entered the hall he was greeted like a king. His acception of that ovation was courteous, absolutely unpretentious. He played Bach - he is a Bach authority today -,Schumann, Chopin and Liszt. There was that great sincerety and truthfulness in his playing, those eternal ideas that are "rooted in the collective"; for everybody fell under his spell in that large hall. But, being interested in the "how" he accomplished that, I could not help seeing how hard he worked to get the wanted effects. His hands seemed to be stiff at big chord successions and octaves, and one could see with how much effort he played. He was considered only a mediocre technical talent, but he knew how to make people

forget it. This was the proof that one could be a top artist, even with a somewhat limited technique. But a top technician with a limited expression is always a second-rate performer.

The challenge of acoustical findings: When we speak of a musical, an artistic performance in contrast to a mere technical exhibition of notes, we agree that the difference lies in the ability to arouse feelings. The pianist, according to Marpurg "must play a thousand different roles." With Liszt, the piano must be able to "roar", to "twitter", to "sing".

Here scientific tone studies seem to challenge this possibility, and the modern methods which have explored piano technique, separated from its musical content, cannot give any solution. The Harvard Dictionary, on Pianoforte Playing, speaks of this controversy:" The basic idea of the theory of touch is that piano playing permits not only of dynamic gradations of sound (pp, p, mf, etc.) but, within a given intensity, of additional variations of timbre, so that an mf may be either "lyrical", or "decisive", or "percussive" etc. Whether this is possible or not is a hotly contested problem among modern pianists. The affirmative group holds that the percussion noise accompanying the inception of tone attack determines its quality(timbre) and proposes that, by varying the degree of finger action, different timbres can be produced in each dynamic register. The negative group (a piano key struck by Paderewsky and the same key struck by an umbrella sound absolutely the same) holds that no such variation is possible within a single sound and that the varieties of timbre which are clearly noticeable in the playing of accomplished pianists result only from the relationship of varying intensities produced either simultaneously(as in chords) or succes-

sively (as in melodies)." In the Journal of the Acoustical Society of America, September 1934,we find a Precision Study of Piano Touch and Tone by Hart, Fuller and Lusby, that shows that any quality of tone struck by a pianist can be exactly reproduced by a mechanical striker.The article goes on to say:"The skill of the pianist depends upon the way he combines tones, making certain tones stand out by dynamic emphasis and making others stand out by agogic or timing emphasis.There is ample justification for a pianist's use of varied techniques of striking. . . . the pianist can do nothing to vary his tone except to vary the final hammer velocity; and in so doing, he inevitably varies the loudness too."

Tobias Matthay, in his Epitome of the Laws of Pianoforte Technique, tries to solve the problem of the quality of the single tone by physical and physiological means:" Once the key is down you cannot do anything further to make the sound . . . The louder you wish the sound to be, the quicker you must move the key down . . . you must never hit or jerk the key down. Instead, you must always produce the down-speed gradually - by acceleration."[1] And:"Beauty of tone and tone control directly depend on the elision of any stiffness or rigidity at the elbow-joint."[2] These statements, sadly to say, do neither help to produce, nor inspire expressive touch. How do we create the"thousand roles" that Marpurg demands?

Eugen Tetzel shows a much better observation, though it, too, is only of scientific nature. He devotes a whole chapter in his book to "The Secret of the Good Touch"(Das Geheimnis des guten Anschlages). Here, he professes:" The only medium of expression through touch are loudness of tone and length of tone, to which may be added the use of

1) Tobias Matthay, An Epitome of the Laws of Pianoforte Technique,p.5E
2) Ibid. p. 16E

the pedals. . . . How does it happen then that, every day, the touch of one performer impresses us as "soft", "full", "round", "singing", while that of another one appears "hard", "thin", "pointed", and "dry"? . . . The piano is a percussion instrument, whose tone - created through a stroke- decreases quickly. If a tone is to continue singing, it must not be overpowered by the following tones. The latter ones must not even attract the attention of the listener, so as not to detract him from the former. Subordination of the accompaniment or secondary voices is, therefore, the first condition for a good melody effect. But the contrast must not be too strong, so that the melody tone does not appear stiff and shrill. . . . The greatest error lies in the belief that one can create a real full and long sounding and, at that, soft tone through some kind of touch. The musical means for the effect of the different touches are partially dynamic, partially rhythmic. Through nearly unnoticeable accelerations, through the contrast of length and shortness of tones will the sound appear in a different light".(Als einzige Anschlagsmittel stehen dem Klavierspieler Tonstärke und Tonlänge zur Verfügung, wozu sich nur noch die Ausdrucksmittel der Pedalanwendung gesellen. . . . Wie erklärt sich nun die täglich neu zu betrachtende Tatsache, dass der Anschlag des einen Spielers trotzdem "weich", "voll", "rund" und "singend" wirkt, wenn er musiziert, der des anderen dagegen "hart", "dünn", "spitz" und "trocken"? . . . Das Klavier aber ist ein Schlaginstrument, bei welchem der durch einen Schlag erzeugte Ton ziemlich schnell abnimmt. Soll er aber dennoch "singend" wirken, so dürfen die nachher angeschlagenen Töne ihn nicht übertönen, ja sie dürfen nicht einmal die Aufmerksamkeit des Hörers auf sich und somit von jenem ablenken. Unterordnung der Begleitung oder Nebenstimmen ist also

die erste Bedingung für Melodiewirkung. Der Gegensatz darf aber auch nicht zu gross sein, da sonst der Melodieton starr und grell erscheint. . . . So besteht der schlimmste Wahn in dem Bestreben, einen recht voll und lang klingenden und dabei doch leisen Ton durch die Anschlagsart erzielen zu wollen. . . . Die musikalischen Mittel zur Erzielung der Anschlagswirkungen sind nun teils dynamischer, teils rhythmischer Art. Durch fast unmerkliche Verfrühungen oder Verspätungen, durch den Wechsel von Ruhe und Unruhe erscheinen die Töne klanglich gleichfalls in einem ganz anderen Licht."[3])

William S. Newman, in his book The Pianist's Problems, says: " . . . to produce the renowned "singing" tone of Hofmann and others mainly means hearing that each tone of a melodic line sounds over the accompaniment and right into the next tone, especially each long lasting tone."[4] Later he admits that there is more to tone quality: "In any case, as the pianist gains increasing mastery of his skills, the matter of touch and tone becomes less and less a question of technique. The qualities of gentleness or stridence, or thinness, or fullness that we come to associate with particular artists of experience represent, primarily, differences of personality and temperament."[5] Here, Newman arrives at the point where the psychological and emotional reason for the existence of the tone itself determine its "color".

All these pedagogues stay on the subject "technique" and arrive at a dead end. By separating technique from expression, the life-

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3) Eugen Tetzel, Das Problem der modernen Klaviertechnik, Breitkopf und Hartel, Leipzig, zweite umgearbeitete Ausgabe, 1916, pp. 54-58
4) William S. Newman, The Pianist's Problems, Harper and Brothers Publishers, New York, 1956, p. 67
5) Ibid. p. 69

blood has been drained from it, the reason for its existence is gone. Newman is the only one to point in the right direction. Schnabel says:" Musical performers have been intimidated by an error of instruction, first committed in the nineteenth century, and which is still being committed now. To isolate the acquisition of technique from the subject which it will later have to serve is nonsense."[6]

Attempts to omit technique: The overemphasis on technique has caused some pedagogues to swing to the other extreme; they try to omit technique. Newman discusses their methods at the end of his book The Pianist's Problems:" In a significant little book called Guided Sight-Reading the late Leonard Deutsch explained his method of developing pianists from scratch to advanced performers entirely through sight reading. . . First . . . one learns the piano to make enjoyable music . . . Second, the student experiences success at once . . . a third advantage is that all practice is supervised at first . . . Fourth, the sight reading approach permits the learner to discover meanings and relationships for himself . . . Fifth, this approach favors reading not by single pitches and note values but by contours, groups and patterns . . . The object in these first years is not perfection but broad keyboard experience in as varied and as much music as possible. . . . Technique work could be limited to simple exercises that develop a feel for the spacing of the keys and an awareness of the four playing mechanisms. . . . chromatic scale . . . Hanon Daily Exercises . . . for the wrist parallel thirds . . ."[7] Despite Mr. Deutsch's promise, at the beginning, to develop pianists through sight reading of music, he has to admit that the students need constant supervision, that there is no perfection despite of this, and, at the end, technical exercises seemed

to have crept in through the back door.

Newman tells of another group of teachers who propose "Learning by Intuition, Imagery. Luigi Bonpensiere, Abby Whitesides, Lilias Mackinnon and others argue largely for a more direct approach to the whole musical composition or "Gestalt" as the sum of more than its parts. Whether that approach is through rhythm, mental attitude, or other means the idea is to sense and work for that goal . . . these authors feel that concentration on an oral image of the piece will direct the learning subconsciously, more efficiently and musically than any conscious, piecemeal methods of building up performance level. These authors themselves have all done very successful teaching."[8] The commendable thing on this way of teaching is that the musical goal, the Gestalt, is always kept in mind. With that approach the students work on [and I quote Newman] "rhythm, mental attitude or other means." These "other means", very likely, are technical means.

Wrong approach to teaching the piano: Out of the efforts of these latter pedagogues we can see that technique cannot be ignored. It is as necessary as the human voice and all its speech training for dramatic means. Without technical skill there would be only a crude musical expression possible.

The fact that piano music has developed into a complex expression of emotions, ideas, etc. with an overwhelming amount of technique has left the amateur sadly on the side line.

Still, it would not be so hopeless, if teachers would not try to

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6) Arthur Schnabel, Music and the Line of Most Resistance, p. 75
7) William S. Newman, The Pianist's Problems, pp. 157 - 160
8) Ibid. pp. 160 - 161

make a little concert performer out of almost every pupil. Instead of teaching him pieces that he can master easily and enjoy, the pupil has to practice for months on one "recital piece" which he has to memorize and can play at the drop of a hat. This rather discouraging practice has driven many students away from the piano. Curt Sachs speaks of this deplorable state when he says: "Opposed to virtuosity and concert display this generation took refuge to preromantic music, from Bach backwards . . . the old music and its instruments . . . were particularly well suited to small musical gatherings where youths and girls played themselves instead of listening to concerts of emulating virtuosi at the piano."[9]

When we look at the works of the composers of the twentieth century, in Europe as well as in America, we find that most of them have contributed little to the piano; those who did so are followers of the Liszt - Debussy line. But those who try to express the new spirit in music have chosen other instruments than the piano, the orchestra or the human voice, apparently for their more colorful timbre. And, is it a coincidence that more and more house organs appear on the market?

There is also the criticism that piano technique, as it is taught today, is based on the harmonies and figure work of the music of the passed periods. CContemporary composers write in different intervals, have new chord formations and successions. Technical exercises have to be developed out of the difficult parts of the pieces. This is, after all, an advantage; for the technical exercise will be used immediately as a means of musical expression.

The ideal technique and its purpose: In order to keep piano music alive the teachers should choose good music, music that was originally composed for the piano, or transcriptions that can be successfully performed on the piano without loss of artistic quality. The student should be able to comprehend the emotional and ideal content of the compositions; the technical demands of the music should be in a reasonably easy reach. Technique? Of course, technique is necessary to develop enough skill to play the desired music. But technique should become an immediate means of expression. Technique and expression must grow together. The student should be concerned only about the right expression, then he will come to master the technique.

What every student really wants is self-expression. Still, his feelings, emotions, ideas are mostly unclear, in an intermingled state. By following the composer through the orderly arrangement of his emotional experiences, he will find his own emotions mirrored in it, and the composer's experience will become his. With this understanding, rhythm, tone quality, power, speed will become second nature to him as the expression of these particular emotions; very likely, he will never repeat the same technical qualities in another piece, because another piece contains another expression. Virgil Thomson says:" The best pianistic result is obtained when a different dynamic gamut and a different kind of touch is employed for each composer."[10] The personality of the composer, his period

9) Curt Sachs, The History of Musical Instruments, pp. 450 - 451
10) Virgil Thomson, The Art of Judging Music, p. 274

and surroundings, the varying expressions of his individual pieces will influence the touch, the technique. By concentrating on the former, we will eventually master the latter; and the gain of understanding, of deeper insight, the growth of feeling, in every direction, will make every effort worthwhile.

When we listen to a really great performer, as he lifts us out of every-day drudgery into undreamt-of heights, we never think of his technique. His technique is expression; they have grown together into one great unity - music; music as communication - of what? "What is the real issue?" asks Arthur Schnabel, "simply music? . . . Or is the final destination reached only when the material sounds return through the senses of one listening to his mind, and through it, back to its unknown origin - the divine reality?"[11]

11) Arthur Schnabel, Music and the Line of Most Resistance, p. 50

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