

Working on a Tone: The Challenge of the Music Education Responsibility

Alba Muçolli–Dehiri and Syzana Jakupi

University of Haxhi Zeka

Abstract

As music is expressed through tones, it is the task of every pianist to work in developing tones. Tone mastery is one of the main tasks of the piano technique, which is why it is the task of the pianist to master it since the tone is the main matter of music.

The purpose of this paper is to present main tasks to be practiced during the piano music education, the importance of the proper hand position and the music talent level as a main factor in student's tone development as well as observation on ways of receiving the tone from the piano keyboard. This purpose was achieved through analysis of important works and by the information provided by piano practitioners and pedagogues. Based on these analyses and information it results that a hand placed properly in the keyboard is a golden value for the student and for the pedagogue and the more developed the musical ear is, the easier is the learning process of tone assignments.

During the first contact with the instrument young students have a tendency to hit the key. That is why we explain the ways of receiving the tone and use pedagogical methods of simplifying this phenomenon in students. The topic treated in this paper provides a theoretical information of a good treatment and development of piano tone during our pedagogical work with students in their process of musical pianistic increase and development.

This paper consists of these parts: introduction, motif and objectives, work on a tone, talent – an important factor of the work on a tone, ways of receiving the tone and conclusion.

Key words: tone, pianistic talent, pedagogical methods.

1. Introduction

The musical pianistic art started to develop in a professional level when the Department of music art opened at University of Prishtina (UP) in 1975/76, first by hiring foreign staff members and creating this way local capacities, by developing the Kosovo pianistic school up to a satisfactory level that results nowadays with a considerable number of a considerable number of performers pianists and pianist pedagogues that present their work successfully in the local and international music scene, accompanied with active participation of new generations in local, regional and international competitions. With the development of the pianistic school, the disciplines of the piano game have also been developed, a part of which is the development of piano tone. Since music is expressed through tones, it is the task of every pianist to work in a tone. This phenomenon is often overlooked because in most cases (lower and middle school) special importance is given to the technical interpretation of the work in its narrow sense, so it is intended to achieve greater speed, whereby the work in a tone remains in the second plan. For this reason, every pedagogue's duty is to give special attention since the very first lesson to the sound and hearing it to the end.

There are no insignificant musical elements in the interpretation, in some cases hearing the smallest details can be decisive in fair and deep musical expression. If the ear does not hear the tone until the end then the finger remains passive, the phrases are divided into parts and the interpretation remains incomplete. Hearing the tone to the end is very important in achieving the naturalness and completeness of the phrase.

The opposite of what was said above is the overwhelming importance given to tone interpretation. This has to do with the interpretation of a higher level (secondary education) and is closely related to a group of performers who take pride in the tone they derive from the instrument and are emotionally conquered during the interpretation. In these cases, the interpreter is not able to clearly reflect the musical content of the work.

Tone mastery is one of the main tasks of pianist technique, a pianist really has to master it since tone is the key matter of the music. By treating and cultivating it, we raise music to a higher level.

Motivation: Motivated by the day-to-day pedagogical work and the difficulties that arise during the work in tone, I considered it very important to provide summary information on the importance of tone treatment and cultivation for young pianists. Since work on tone throughout music education is a very important segment of professional advancement, the treatment of this

topic by music professionals seems to be very necessary and necessary in order to achieve a working standard in which country-level pedagogues would base on.

Objective: The objective of the paper is to identify the tone deficiencies that arise during student's interpretation and to reflect on the importance of the pedagogue in achieving the desired goals for working with the students. In addition, I will focus on defining problems that arise in students of different ages, as a diverse reflection of the way the tone is developed, highly dependent on their imagination and inner perception of the required tone.

2. Working with students

Every child that starts to play on the piano has its own world. The pedagogical practice teaches pedagogues as us to know the way of approaching each of them considering the interest and reaction students have when they receive first information from the teacher. "The task of the pedagogue is to develop natural talents and the music intuition of the student and to develop the student further as a pianist, as an artist and a human being", (*Zlatar, 1998, p.7*).

Some of them (a small number), have a natural hand and body positioning without the constant insistence of the teacher while a considerable number of them need a maximum control exercised from their teacher. Especially when we speak for the right hand positioning, we interrelate to the problem of producing a quality tone. A child, who in the beginning of a learning process created a habit of improper hand positioning as the improper holding of the wrist or finger extension, the likelihood of reaching the right music requirements and among them achieving quality tone is almost impossible. "Muscles should not be strained to lose the elasticity, fixation has to be replaced with relaxation because on contrary muscles will be tired, tendon will extend, and the result might be inflammation of certain nerves", (*Krsiq, 1990, p.40*). So, a well-positioned hand is a golden value for both the student and the teacher. But reaching the right position of the hand is not always easy. The insistence of the pedagogue plays an important role in this work. The insistence and the constant work to achieve this important parameter in developing a new pianist is vital. We say it is an important parameter, because a "right hand" is needed not only for sound sound enjoyment but also for the technical accomplishment of the works. Therefore, we come to the conclusion that, without proper technical preparation, there is no proper tone cultivation. Pianistic technique and quality tone are closely linked to one another and they interact in order to result with a whole pianistic interpretation. So, the student's education for the work with tone starts in the first piano lessons and with its further development the pianistic tone cultivation is unlimited.

3. Talent- an important factor while working on a tone

Considering what was said above, the main place in the development of the pianistic tone belongs to the level of student's musical talent and his/her abilities to develop the musical ear during the music education. Work in a tone is considered to be one of the most difficult pianistic tasks especially for a fact that it is closely linked to the acoustic and emotional aspect of the performer. The more developed the musical ear and playing music is, the easier and more understandable becomes the work toward a better tone.

During our pedagogical work, we encounter students with different levels of musical talent. After detecting this important parameter of musical development, the careful pedagogue understands exactly how and in which way to work with each student.

In talented and intelligent students, work on tone brings a special satisfaction, from the explanation of ways receiving the tone to the creation of various colors that the piano instrument offers us. While, at students with a needed intelligence level and lack of musical talent, work is done mechanically, understanding the task but not being able to contribute to the tone beauty that the instrument offers to us.

The first task the student needs to be aware of is to listen to itself from the beginning to the end during the interpretation of the pianistic work. That means the maximum concentration during the interpretation of the pianistic work. "If the ear does not hear the tone until the end, the finger remains passive, the hand loses elasticity and any tone that is played does not come as a result of the previous tone but sounds like playing every time from the beginning with the help of new movements from the hand and arm", (*Timakin, 1984, p.49*). This is especially true for individual student exercises, since we consider that when playing in public, concentration is inevitable. Of course, all of us at least once had the chance to find ourselves at the end of the work, without thinking much about the notes or the sound result during the piano play.

Hands perform their work in a motorway from constant technical exercises and memorization of the work while the musical and artistic aspect of the work remains unrealized. This is due to the lack of proper concentration during individual student exercises. Therefore, every pedagogue's duty is to insist on increased concentration during individual exercises. The pedagogue's insistence should be continuous considering the age of the pupil (7-14 years old). When we work in details of a tone, the horizontal hearing of the musical movement to the end has a very important role, "an ambitious pianist, will in no way loose the interest about this 'Atom' of the musical interpretation", (*Neuhaus, 2000, p.99*).

As the pianistic tone, in the moment of its receipt (key) starts to diminish in a while, its active hearing makes that tone live and transfer to the audience. If the performer receives the tone from the key and does not listen it to the end, the same feeling will be transmitted to the public and the performance will be poor in the musical aspect. Work on a tone is a very important element that the pedagogue has to teach to the student. There is no doubt that a part of this work depends from the student's feeling and the level of the musical ear development. If the tone is not heard until the end, then neither the fingers do their work, the phrases are divided into pieces and in this way the work remains incomplete in the aspect of creating the musical entireness within it. Listening to the tones until their end is necessary for proper coverage of musical phrases to create greater music entireness.

When we try to create bigger musical entireness, except active tone listening, the student needs to be able to listen to horizontal musical movements. So, at the same time to listen to the current tone being played without losing the melody horizontal line. In the beginning of the learning process, students need to be given simple exercises, with a slow tempo, moving successive notes, prompting the learner to listen to the current tone and preparing for the next tone. Through these exercises which advance from year to year in the notes context and rhythm as well, the student is expected to be aware about the importance of the sustainable and quality tone and its aim is to plant the constant idea of treating the tone in piano works.

4. Ways of receiving the tone

The first and the second year of learning to play on a piano is very challenging for the student and for the pedagogue as well, because this is the time when the basic information about piano playing is provided together with ways of receiving the tone. A big number of students have a tendency to hit the key. In this case the pedagogue's task is to explain the way we receive the tone while playing on a piano. Since we deal with a new age, the best way to explain is thought to be the comparison with activities and circumstances from our everyday life. When we put the fifth finger in the key, the best accepted comparison is to say "put the finger in the bed to have some rest" or when we want to receive the pianistic tone a comparison as "take the key with you" was proven to be a very successful method, at the same time easily understandable and liked by students. So, the pedagogue's tendency should be finding the best and easiest ways to explain problems and tone tasks that a 7 year old child deals with.

Parallel to such information, the main precondition for getting the right pianistic tone is finding the freedom during the performance. So, while fingers do their part, the wrist, elbow, the arm and the whole body should be relaxed. We refer to the whole body because all these are a part of a pianistic interpretation process. Especially we have to have an impact in relaxing the pianistic

apparatus (in case we detect it at students), fingers need to keep their activity in the keyboard, while the part from the wrist to the arm has to remain relaxed. “In the beginning of piano learning process, the main task for the student is to learn the proper posture. The function of hands and fingers, technical development accuracy in rhythm, tone quality, musical expressiveness, etc., depend on the proper body posture”, *Krsiq, 1990, p.41*). Legato, non-legato and staccato, are methods of musical articulation accomplished in various ways, depending on dynamics requirements of music works.

The first explanation we do to students when Legato is learned is that the notes presented under the legato slur have to be played as one consistent and connected unit regardless of the height and the length of notes. In legato, notes are played deeply, connected and the current tone is released only when we receive the next tone. During the legato playing the hand is continuously following fingers since they move constantly till the moment the legato phrase ends. It is very important to mention the transfer of hand’s weight from one finger to the other, in which case a sound depth is provided as well as musical completeness of phrases. “Legato is a way of connected and deep piano play, in which case we receive the next tone when we release the previous one”, *Krsiq, 1990, p.48*). Non-legato is the way we play notes with a possibility to break. When we say non-legato, we need to take care and do the difference between non-legato and staccato, since students have a tendency to play notes with very short values when required to play non-legato and after that, the required articulation takes the direction of staccato. While performing non-legato, the requirement is to position the wrist in the level with the keyboard so that its performance is done more efficiently. Otherwise the pianistic apparatus might tight up and the needed tone effect will be avoided. Staccato is the shorter way of playing the tone. In order to perform staccato, the tone is received actively with the tip of the finger. Staccato can be played in many ways, depending on the dynamic requirements of the work. In cases when dynamics is required to be p or pp, staccato can be performed only through participation of fingers in order to gain a light and short tone. The finger needs to have the semi-arch form and the key is taken with a retraction. The wrist should be relaxed and elastic always keeping the tip of the finger under control. Participation of the wrist and arm is done when we deal with interpretation of chords and staccato leaping as well as realization of bigger dynamics.

When we perform a melodic line (cantilena) where the musical expressive play is required, not a superficial one, the weight of the hand is transferred from one finger to the other without separating phrases and moving directly with melody pitch movements. Hand follows fingers, by moving similar to melodic line that is being executed. By executing all these tasks mentioned, we have a possibility to create a deeper tone, with a greater expressive power and quality.

5. Conclusions

During our pedagogical work, we understand from the first hand on how complex and important work on a tone is especially in each discipline of the instrumental play. The topic treated in this paper is “Working on a tone – challenge of music education” is very concise for new pedagogues as far as we speak about provision of the theoretical information for treatment of pianistic tone while we work with students. Considering what is said above, we can conclude there are three main pillars in which the tone quality is based on:

- Importance of information transferred from the pedagogue to the student;
- Talent level and possibility to develop the musical ear of the student,
- Applied pedagogical methods in achieving tone results

As mentioned above, one of the most important factors in creating needed habits at the new performers is the one of the piano pedagogue.” In individual development, the piano professor should strive to reach a higher intellectual level, and to create an individual moral figure”, *Neuhaus, 2000, p.10*). But, in correlation to that we have the talent and individual will of especially new performers. The musical talent is the main element in accomplishing musical tasks especially when we deal with the needed tone accomplishment within works, right phrasing to the creation of the entirety of the musical work. The needed feeling for pianistic performance provides the powerful interpretation abilities of the pianistic work.

Work for a better tone starts from when we hear a single tone and continues with creation of bigger entirety as from the phrase to the entire musical work. It is a multiyear process, meaning it is not expected to gain results in the first years of learning to play on the instrument, but it is important that during this time the student creates the habit of hearing the tone from the beginning to the end. As it was said earlier, they start with easy and simple exercises and it is the task of the pedagogue to suggest exercises that are necessary for the tone advancement based on the technical and musical achievement of the student, selection of the literature remains under the responsibility of the pedagogue, so that the learning development is done in a needed level. “Music is the art of tones”, *Neuhaus, 2000, p.54*). Through tones we revive pianistic works created many decades ago, belonging to various stylistic ages, entering deep in the creative imagination of the composer trying to reflect and perform as better as possible his creative idea. This, first of all, is achieved with a needed technical preparation and with a good education of cultivating the pianistic sound.

References:

1. Timakin, E.M., 1984. *Vaspitanje pianist (English: Answering the pianist)*. Beograd
2. Neuhaus, G., 2000. *O umetnosti sviranje na klaviru (English: About the art of playing the piano.)*. 2nd ed. Zagreb
3. Zlatar, J., 1998. *Hyrje ne interpretimin pianistic (English: Introduction o of the pianistic interpretation)*. 2nd ed. Tiranë
4. Bleking, Xh., 1983. *Pojam muzikalnosti (English: The term musicality)*. Beograd: University of Washington press Seattle and London.
5. Krsiq, J., 1990. *Nastava Klavira (English: Classical Teaching)*. Beograd
6. Sonberg, H., 2001. *Veliki pijanisti (English: Great pianists)*. Beograd
7. Milankovic, M., 1952. *Osnovi pianisticke umetnosti (English: The Basics of Piano Art.)*. Beograd
8. Milankovic, M., 1952. *Sposobnosti, licnost i stvaralastvo (English: Abilities, personality and creativity)*. Beograd
9. Lagoutte, K. P., 1957. *Stil i tehnika velikih majstora klavira (English: Style and technique of the great masters of the piano)*. Beograd
10. Plavusa, D., 1961. *Moje dete i muzika (English: My child and music)*. Beograd: Narodna knjiga
11. Walter, G., 1957. *Mali prirucnik za pijaniste (English: Small handbook for pianists)*. Zagreb: Muzicka naklada

A publication of the Mahatma Gandhi Center for
Global Nonviolence at James Madison University
