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Continuing Abby Whiteside's legacy--The research of pianist Sophia Rosoff's pedagogical approach

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CONTINUING ABBY WHITESIDE'S LEGACY—THE RESEARCH OF PIANIST
SOPHIA ROSOFF'S PEDAGOGICAL APPROACH (Based on the Playing Principles
Outlined in the Book *On Piano Playing* by Abby Whiteside, with Practice and Performance
Observations by Carol Ann Barry)

Carol Ann Barry

A Research Project submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY

In

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

Of the degree of

Doctor of Musical Arts

School of Music

December 2011

DEDICATION

*This Research Project is dedicated to Pianist Sophia Rosoff.
Her patience, dedication and commitment to helping pianists
around the world play with musical and physical freedom has
been an inspiration for more than fifty-five years. I dedicate this work in honor of
her ninetieth birthday in January, 2011.*



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I offer my sincere thanks to my advisor and piano professor, Dr. Eric Ruple. His enthusiasm for this project has been a great source of encouragement. I deeply appreciate my husband, Timothy, for his editing skills and personal sacrifice. He has made the work on this document possible. I would also like to recognize my student Max Gaitán for agreeing to pose for the pictures demonstrating warm-ups at the piano.

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ABSTRACT

Since 1956, Sophia Rosoff has dedicated herself to performing and teaching principles developed by piano pedagogue Abby Whiteside. Whiteside became internationally known between 1930 and 1956 for her pioneering work in the study of the use of the body in producing beautiful sound and freedom of technique. Her research was considered revolutionary and instrumental in raising physical awareness in pianists. Committed to ongoing research, Rosoff continues to teach in her apartment in the Upper East Side of New York City.

The purpose of this document is to present Rosoff's musical background, research, teaching philosophy, and the strategies she has developed for teaching Abby Whiteside's pedagogical concepts to pianists of all ages and technical abilities. To understand the significance of Rosoff's work, an understanding of Whiteside's teaching principles must be surveyed. A chapter devoted to Whiteside, her musical background and training, and an overview of the process she used to develop her principles is presented first.

Rosoff encourages students to use many practice strategies that she has developed. Each one uses a vocabulary unique to her teaching, and is presented at the beginning of each section. The most comprehensive of these is the use of outline-based learning. Rosoff teaches pianists to learn repertoire from the broadest structure of the piece possible. This involves learning the piece using a series of outlines. Instead of attempting to play all the notes present in a phrase, the pianist is encouraged to play skeletal outlines, beginning with only first beats. Notes are systematically included in subsequent outlines. Because different textures of music require different approaches to

outlining, several examples are included that cover a broad spectrum of compositions and textures. The first outlines might include only the first beat of each measure.

Rosoff believes that outlines are essential to finding the *basic emotional rhythm* which is discussed in depth in Whiteside's book, *The Indispensables of Piano Playing*.¹ Whiteside documents her study of the different art disciplines. This document extends that study by including statements made by well-respected artists, poets, directors, and athletes. An avid reader, Rosoff often refers to a wide range of quotes that offer the pianist an in-depth look at the importance an *emotional rhythm* is to a large cross-section of physical and artistic activities.

¹ Abby Whiteside, *The Indispensables of Piano Playing*. (Portland: Amadeus Press, 1997).

Introduction

In 1716, keyboardist and pedagogue François Couperin wrote the treatise, *L'Art de toucher le clavecin*. Numerous treatises and keyboard instruction manuals have been published since then. Each one contributes new pedagogical concepts to the art of playing the piano. When Bartolomeo Cristofori designed and built the first pianoforte in 1709, he unwittingly launched more than two hundred years of design and technological improvements, culminating in the piano we have today.² The rapid development of the structure of the piano required changes in the physical approaches to practice and performance. For example, Muzio Clementi (1752-1832) wrote the *Introduction to the Art of Playing the Pianoforte* in 1803.³ Clementi focused on the production of a legato sound. He instructed pianists to hold down a note until the next was pressed. Ludwig Deppe (1828-1890), considered by many to be one of the most influential pedagogues of the nineteenth century, taught an approach to playing that included arm weight. He was also the first to develop awareness that the shoulder and arm muscles are important tools for a warm, rich sound. Franz Liszt (1811-1886) and Theodor Leschetizky (1830-1913) developed exercises, explored forearm rotation, and octave technique. They were a fundamental influence in the development of virtuosic technique. Pianist Tobias Mattay, a professor at the Royal Academy of Music in London, wrote *Pianoforte. Muscular Relaxation Studies for Students, Artists and Teachers*.⁴ Published during the 1920's, the book includes extensive discussion of rotation, hand and forearm release, and shoulder release. The work provides explanations for an exhaustive list of technical related topics. His second book, *The*

²Stewart Gordon, *A History of Keyboard Literature. Music for the Piano and Its Forerunners*. (Belmont, Ca: Schirmer, 1996), 8.

Muzio Clementi, *Introduction to the Art of Playing the Pianoforte*. (New York: Da Capo Press, 1973). The manual was originally published in 1803.

Tobias Mattay, *Pianoforte. Muscular Relaxation Studies for Students, Artists and Teachers*. (London: Bosworth and Co. LTD, 1924), vii-xi.

Visible and Invisible in Pianoforte Technique,⁵ published in 1932, is perhaps his best known scholarship on piano technique. By the twentieth century, contemporary pedagogues attempted to blend the best of the extensive treasure of books on pedagogy and add additional ideas of their own. These include *The Art of Piano Playing* by Heinrich Neuhaus⁶, and *On Piano Playing. Motion, Sound and Expression* by Gyorgy Sandor.⁷

The addition of double escapement and steel casing brought the possibility of producing a more powerful sound and greater speed previously thought impossible. Pianists pushed the limits of the instrument, and injuries became more common. For example, Robert Schumann used a device that isolated, exercised, and eventually damaged his fourth fingers. Many concert artists, and those practicing excessive amounts, such as accompanists and chamber musicians, developed hand, wrist and arm pain. Beginning in the 1940's, pedagogues researched and developed possible solutions to the increasing injuries. Dorothy Taubman's exhaustive research into arm rotation spawned many followers. Her work has been codified by many of her students and presented in various formats—notably today through pianist Edna Golandsky.⁸

The search for physical and musical freedom culminated with the work of pianist and pedagogue Abby Whiteside (1881-1956). Whiteside's principles attracted students who later were influential as teachers and performers. Eunice Nemeth, Joseph Prostakoff, Morton Gould, composer Miriam Guideon, pianist and composer Vivian Fine, and the piano duo,

⁵Tobias Matthay, *The Visible and Invisible in Pianoforte Technique*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1932).

⁶Heinrich Neuhaus, *The Art of Piano Playing*. (London: Kahn and Averill, 1993).

⁷Gyorgy Sandor, *On Piano Playing. Motion, Sound and Expression*. (Belmont, CA: Schimer, 1995).

⁸Pianist Edna Golandsky studied extensively with Dorothy Taubman. Golandsky founded the Golandsky Institute in 1991. The Institute holds numerous workshops and lectures throughout the world annually. The principles taught are based on the work of Dorothy Taubman.

Whitmore and Lowe, studied with Whiteside in New York City. Pianists such as Byron Janis, Robert Helps, and Stanley Baron, studied with former Whiteside students. Whiteside received international recognition as one of the most significant pedagogical pioneers of the twentieth century. However, like her colleagues before her, Whiteside's research into the most natural and healthful approach to the piano has both its proponents and critics. On the day of her untimely death in 1956, Whiteside asked her student and friend, Sophia Rosoff, to continue her work by developing ways to share her principles with future generations.

Knowledge of Abby Whiteside's principles is an essential foundation for understanding Rosoff's work. This paper will begin with an overview of Whiteside's background and teaching principles. Succeeding chapters will be based on Rosoff's biography, teaching, and research. The final chapter will include my observations of these principles based on private lessons and consultations with Ms. Rosoff between 2006 and 2011. Each pianist will read this document with a perspective unique to their formal training, background and beliefs. It is hoped that each reader will find helpful suggestions that increase the ease and enjoyment of practicing and performance.

I An Overview of Abby Whiteside's Pedagogical Principles

Figure 1: Abby Whiteside, circa 1950.



Source: abbywhiteside.org⁹

An understanding of Abby Whiteside's background and principles is vital to follow the development of Sophia Rosoff's teaching strategies. One of the challenges of writing on pedagogical principles is the difficulty of putting words to paper that can adequately describe motion, body movement, and fluidity. It is essential that pianists interested in understanding these concepts work privately with teachers who have studied with Rosoff or other students of Whiteside. Full comprehension of physical motion can be difficult to obtain by reading pedagogical literature alone.

Teachers and performers trained by Whiteside, Rosoff, Prostackoff, and others in the Whiteside lineage are listed on the Abby Whiteside Foundation website. Pianists such as chamber artist Vivian Hornik Weilerstein on the faculty of the New England Conservatory in Boston, concertizing classical pianists such as John Kamitsuka and Grammy Award nominee jazz pianist Fred Hersch, both of New York City, Professor Jorge Rossy, on the faculty of the Musik-Akademie in Basel, Switzerland, Professor Donna Coleman of the Melbourne

⁹ abbywhiteside.org, accessed on 7/4/2011.

Conservatorium in Australia, and Professor Albert Bauer of the Music University of Catalonia in Barcelona, Spain, are representative of the breadth of pianists worldwide taught by Whiteside. Internet access is available at abbywhitesidefoundation.org.

Whiteside's Musical Training and her Quest for Solutions to Students' Problems

Whiteside, a native of South Dakota, majored in music at the University of South Dakota, and taught several years at the University of Oregon. In 1908, she studied abroad in Germany with pianist Rudolph Ganz. Upon her return, she settled in Portland Oregon, where she taught as an independent teacher. Whiteside, restless in Oregon, and anxious to widen her knowledge, moved to New York City in 1923 and began teaching privately.

Whiteside believed that the stimulation of the New York environment, the accessibility to traveling artists, and the highly developed cultural life in the city would give her the opportunity to study the performances of the great artists who were touring the United States during the 1920's. She was hopeful that there would be clues in their performances that would help improve her teaching. Whiteside had grown disillusioned with the results of the conventional teaching she received in her collegiate training. She stated,

“ I squarely faced the unpleasant fact, more than twenty-five years ago, that the pupils in my studio played or didn't play, and that was that. The talented ones progressed, the others didn't--and I could do nothing about it.”¹⁰

Whiteside focused on the students' physical responses that prevented technical success. She strived to eliminate clenched jaws, tight upper arms and overworked fingers, and taught students to move from the center of their bodies to the periphery (fingers).¹¹

¹⁰ Abby Whiteside, *The Indispensables of Piano Playing* (Portland, Oregon: Amadeus Press, 1948), ix.

¹¹Concepts taken from www.abbywhitesidefoundation.org, accessed on July 4, 2011.

Whiteside took a hands-on approach to her teaching, gently touching the upper arms to encourage them to remain engaged.

Figure 2: Whiteside coaches pianist John Wallowitch in upper arm movement circa. 1950.



Abby Whiteside with student John Wallowitch in her studio circa 1950.

Source: Abby Whiteside, *On Piano Playing*¹²

The results of the war in Europe made travel difficult and dangerous for artists on tour. The giants of the musical world descended on the major cities in the United States. Whiteside took the opportunity to hear artists as well as anyone who possessed an outstanding skill that involved motion or pacing, such as drama or writing. She made the concert halls her research laboratory. She watched the New York ballet under the direction of George Ballanchine and Hindu dancers. She heard the famed singer Sarah Bernhard and pianist Serge Rachmaninoff. She took her research a step further by studying anatomy so that she could verify that her discoveries were based on the anatomically correct movement and coordination of the muscles and joints. As she gathered information and developed theories, she tested

Abby Whiteside, Abby Whiteside, *The Indispensables of Piano Playing* Portland, Oregon: Amadeus Press, 1948), iii.

them in her teaching studio. If any theory did not improve all of her students within their level of talent, she discarded the concept.

Whiteside came to the conclusion that the most successful artists possessed a basic emotional rhythm in their performance. That is, a performer felt the rhythm, heard it, and was able to effortlessly coordinate physical movement with the music. In her book, *On Piano Playing*, Whiteside describes emotional rhythm as a rhythm that is unending from beginning to end with no break.¹³ The rhythm can stretch, but it never ceases. Successful performances never lose rhythmic continuity, even when memory issues or a technical mishap arise.

Whiteside's research led her to conclude that musical energy starts at the pianist's seat, and all muscles of the entire body must remain connected when playing. She believed that the freedom of physical movement with physical connection is the basis for ceaseless musical flow. This uninterrupted existence begins within a phrase, and propels forward throughout successive phrases. Whiteside referred to this as a *basic rhythm*.¹⁴ Further, she concluded that it was *the basic emotional rhythm* that led to consistently beautiful performances.¹⁵ Whiteside often encouraged her students stating, "Put a rhythm in your body and keep it going."¹⁶

At the core of Whiteside's principles was the concept that it is the pulsating rhythm underneath the notes that drives the music forward.¹⁷ An emotional response is triggered by the internal connection of the body with the rhythm which translates into the flow of the

Abby Whiteside, Abby Whiteside, *The Indispensables of Piano Playing* (Portland, Oregon: Amadeus Press, 1948), ix.

Ibid, 57.

¹⁵Basic emotional rhythm is a terminology frequently used in Whiteside's book, and often referred to by Ms. Rosoff.

¹⁶www.abbywhitesidefoundation.org, accessed on July 4, 2011.

¹⁷Concept discussed on www.abbywhiteside.org website, accessed on July 4, 2011.

composition as a whole. Audiences react to the performance because they sense, see and hear that the artist has truly become a physical representation of the music.

Using these principles, Whiteside was able to achieve dramatic improvement in her students. The students, in turn, incorporated the same techniques in their teaching. They also experienced the same improvement within individual levels of talent in their students.

Whiteside's experimentation continued throughout the 1930's and 1940's. She focused on the action of the torso and the alertness of the lower body and the legs. Each muscle group is connected to the next. Total freedom and ease in performance could only be attained with the full use of the body, and no part, particularly the lower half, could be uninvolved in the playing process.

Whiteside used motions encountered in everyday life to aid pianists in finding the physical movement within their bodies that would allow for the most technical freedom. Her non-traditional method of teaching allowed students to twirl imaginary doorknobs, pretend to snap whips, and poise their bodies at the piano as if they were ready to jump up from the bench. Verbal cues such as these were instrumental tools for facilitating the awareness of the appropriate muscles needed for successful application to performance.¹⁸

Specific motions listed were included in explanations given on www.abbywhiteside.org, accessed on July 4, 2011.

The Abby Whiteside Foundation

Whiteside's research culminated in her first book, *On Piano Playing. The Indispensables of Piano Playing, and Mastering the Chopin Études*, published in 1948. Shortly after Whiteside's death, Rosoff founded the Abby Whiteside Foundation. The original goal of the foundation was to distribute several thousand copies of the book worldwide. The founding advisory board included some of the finest musicians at the time: Milton Babbitt, Vivian Fine, Miriam Gideon, Morton Gould, Robert Helps, Byron Janis, Eunice Nemeth, and Joseph Prostackoff. Sophia Rosoff and the late Joseph Prostackoff, working from Whiteside's notes on the Chopin etudes, published *Mastering the Chopin Études* using her teaching principles based on their private work with her. Following the distribution of the books, letters came to the editors from pianists and musicians across all instrumental disciplines. Many letters stated that multiple readings had led these musicians to significant improvement in their playing by solving many technical and musical challenges. Whiteside's book can be found on amazon.com. A Kindle edition is available.

The foundation developed an annual concert series featuring performers whose playing exudes Whiteside's principles. Held at Weill Hall in New York City, the concert series gives promising young artists and established pianists an opportunity to further their careers. The Foundation also provides a comprehensive listing of teachers trained by either Whiteside or her pupils. Teachers can be found internationally as well as in many regions in the United States.

Figure 3: Abby Whiteside Foundation logo



Source: www.abbywhitesidefoundation.org

II Biographical Background of Sophia Rosoff

Figure 4: Sophia Rosoff, circa 1980.



Source: Picture obtained from Ms. Rosoff's personal collection.

Sophia Greenspan was born on January 26, 1921 in Amsterdam, New York. Developing musical proclivities at a very early age, she began lessons at the age of eight with the local teacher in Amsterdam, Harriett Johnson. Sophia had only the pull-out keyboard found in the lesson book for home practice. There was no sound, there was only the motion of her hands, the dancing of her feet, and the music she imagined in her head.

Sophia credits much of her later curiosity and devotion to experimentation with those early experiences with her cardboard keyboard. As she states, “Any talented child would play correctly if they didn't learn incorrectly.”¹⁹ The Greenspans discovered the level of their young daughter's commitment to lessons when she began singing and practicing at her parents' bedroom door promptly at six o'clock each morning. She danced and sang her lessons. She

¹⁹Interview with Rosoff, June 11, 2010.

felt the music in her body. Seeing their daughter's devotion, Sophia's parents decided to get her a piano.

Sophia developed rapidly and soon became a student of the most respected teacher in Amsterdam, New York in the 1930's—Walter Haff Button. Studying with Mr. Button through her teen years, she became even more committed to the piano. Much to her parents' dismay, she set her sights on going to New York City. Initially unable to gain her parents' blessing on such an adventure, Sophia kept pleading. Her turn of luck came when she attended a performance in upper state New York by concert artist Ray Lev. Meeting Ms. Lev backstage, Sophia was introduced as the local "top talent." Lev was deeply impressed when she heard Sophia play, "You belong in New York, stated Ms. Lev."²⁰

Lev offered Greenspan's parents a plan. Sophia would live in her New York apartment and study with her as her only student. Her parents relented. Greenspan studied diligently and soon taught students that were referred by Lev. She loved Ray Lev and they spent many fruitful hours working together whenever her concert schedule permitted her to stay in New York.

Anxious to develop a playing career of her own, Sophia eventually set her sights on studying at Juilliard. She would need a degree, and she wanted to study at the most prestigious school within her reach. Ray Lev used her enviable contacts to help Sophia secure financing. Lev was friends with Lucius Littauer, a wealthy businessman who gave scholarships to students attending Harvard Law or Medical school. Ray asked him if he would be willing to sponsor a musician. Rosoff would be the only musician he ever funded.

²⁰Interview with Rosoff, June 11, 2010.

Coming late to Juilliard that fall meant Sophia had missed the opportunity to study with one of the major teachers in the piano department. She studied with Michael Field, a teaching assistant of Olga Samaroff, with the hopes that Ms. Samaroff would take her into her studio the following year. The following year, Sophia transferred from Juilliard to Hunter College, located in the upper east side of town. Her goal was to get a degree at Hunter College and continue her studies with Ray Lev privately. Greenspan obtained her baccalaureate degree in 1945. During her studies at Hunter College, Sophia met the love of her life—Noah Rosoff. Noah had received his Juris Doctor from New York University and planned a career in law, but was also a great supporter of the arts. Noah and Sophia married in 1945 and had one son, William.

Sophia Rosoff Meets Abby Whiteside

During the 1940's, Rosoff performed in an ensemble with famed clarinetist and band leader, Artie Shaw. She mentioned to Shaw that her playing felt tight and she did not feel physically good when playing. The following evening, Shaw was scheduled to have dinner with pianist Morton Gould, who was working with "a genius of a teacher." The teacher's name was Abby Whiteside. A chance conversation and a well-timed dinner with Morton Gould soon transformed Rosoff's musical life.

Abby Whiteside confirmed that Rosoff was physically very tight at the piano. She had much to offer her, but also encouraged Rosoff to do some physical work away from the piano in addition to her private lessons. Rosoff contacted Charlotte Selver, a former dancer, and the founder of the Sensory Awareness Foundation. The core of Selver's body work is well described in a statement taken from Selver's book, *Reclaiming Vitality and Presence*.

“...your own breathing can teach you how to sit. And it can teach you how to run. And it can teach you how to dance. And it can teach you how to make love. And it can teach you anything in the world. In other words, the source of information is really in you. But it's often sleeping. Sensing is to wake up to this possibility of really coming in touch with our inner informer, so to say. What we are doing (in this work) seems so physical. It isn't. It's just to wake up.”²¹

Rosoff's sessions with Selver helped her discover and focus on what her body was doing; what muscles, joints were used for movement and how they connected to work as one synchronized unit. Rosoff states, “Between Abby and Charlotte, the world opened up for me.”²²

While studying with Whiteside, Rosoff taught at the Hebrew Arts School and the Jazz School in New York City.²³ In addition, Rosoff's playing career took her to Europe, England, Italy and Germany. She performed frequently at Carnegie Hall and recorded for the BBC in London. By 1980, Rosoff's desire to share her knowledge and her love for teaching became more important to her than the concert career. She began a full-time focus on teaching, which continues to the present day. Pianists travel worldwide—from Spain, Japan, Italy, South America, and England to work with her. Throughout her teaching career, pianists with pain, tendonitis, and focal dystonia have sought her advice.

²¹ Quote taken from the Selver Foundation website: <http://www.sensoryawareness.org/>, accessed on January 20, 2011.

²² Quote taken from interview, June 6, 2010.

²³ The Jazz School was originally opened to work with soldiers returning from World War II.

III ROSOFF'S TEACHING STRATEGIES

WARM-UPS AND SET-UPS

By the time of her death, Abby Whiteside had developed core principles of playing with physical freedom and had made significant progress in her research to help pianists find the basic emotional rhythm of every piece they perform. Her parting meeting with Rosoff occurred in California the day she died. Their conversation left an indelible mark on Rosoff. Whiteside had already written *On Piano Playing*, and had started a massive undertaking in researching the technical issues with both books of Chopin's études. More importantly than Whiteside's writings, Rosoff had the benefit of many years of private study with Whiteside to guide her forward. As Rosoff reflected on her extensive teaching career, she remarked, "What I've discovered, I discovered because Abby encouraged me to learn how to teach the principles."²⁴

The challenge in becoming physically free at the piano is to successfully synchronize the movements of the entire body. The set-ups that follow were developed by Rosoff as an aid to feeling the interconnection of all muscles and joints. The order in which Rosoff presents these warm-ups vary with each pianist, depending upon individual needs. For clarity, the warm-ups are presented individually. It is important to remember, however, that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. It is the blending of these fundamental movements that develop a free-flowing technique.

²⁴ Interview with Rosoff on June 2, 2010.

The remainder of this paper will outline Rosoff's pedagogical research and philosophy. Everything is based on Whiteside's principles, but it was Rosoff who continued the development of pedagogy for teaching these concepts to pianists.

Becoming Physically Available to Play

One aspect often overlooked by pianists, particularly during their conservatory training is the need to prepare physically before playing. Pianists must play with the entire body, and neglecting to do so often results in tight playing and possible injury over time. The conventional methods of teaching center on technical studies, scales, and arpeggios, followed by repertoire work. To achieve desired results, however, one must take a few minutes to warm-up or *set-up*²⁵ for success. The terminology, *set-up*, is used by Rosoff. These are not exercises, but strategies for helping the pianist become physically ready to play.

Sessions with Rosoff begin with a few minutes of physical awareness before playing repertoire. Set-ups loosen the entire body and enhance a feeling of muscular connectedness. Rosoff rarely, if ever, teaches or hears the traditional technical routines often prescribed in formal study. Her philosophy is that if the pianist is totally aware and physically connected, the technical components (scales, arpeggios, chords) will go smoothly and fluently. Rosoff has helped many pianists sense a new freedom using many of the *set-ups* she has developed. There is no specific order to these pre-playing set-ups. Rosoff always tailors them to the specific needs of each pianist. Rosoff uses the term "becoming available to play." During sessions, she often reminds pianists to "stay available."

²⁵ The terms *warm-ups* and *set-ups* are used interchangeably by Rosoff. This document will use *set-ups* for clarity.

Focusing the Body Away from the Piano

Figure 5: Student Max Gaitán models balancing a raw egg on the floor.



Source: All pictures of Max Gaitán were taken with permission.

Rosoff often begins a session with a new student by asking them to balance a raw egg on the floor. This allows the student to experience the mental and physical focus required to accomplish the task. Upon a successful attempt, Rosoff asks the student how they felt. Students often report the sensation of the back, shoulders, upper arms, forearms, focused fingers. Working with a delicate object such as an egg on the floor helps the student find their body's center of gravity. This imitates the focus needed to play the piano with freedom. Given the opportunity, the student's body can respond to the egg challenge naturally and without conscious effort. The focus needed to balance the egg engages the body for the same body awareness necessary for physical freedom at the piano.

Discovering the Function of the Upper Arm

The following warm-up can be done standing or sitting.

Figure 6a: Starting position for the arm hang.

Figure 6b: Position of the arms after slowly lowering them to the side.

6a.

6b,



1. Place fingers on shoulders.
2. Slowly begin to lower the arms, allowing gravity to do the work.
3. Feel the pull of gravity as arms lower.
4. Turn forearms over and play a chord. Notice that the natural movement of the arms is back, toward the body.

Rosoff encourages students to do this routine several times a day, not necessarily just before practicing. The pianist should be able to feel the muscular connection through the shoulder girdle and all the way down the back to the waist.

Figure 7a: Arms open with palms up.

Figure 7b: Arms turn over to a relaxed playing position.



Feeling Physically Alert

The conventional approach to teaching hand position can be greatly enhanced without resorting to frozen positions of the hand. Students are often told to keep wrists level or slightly higher than the arms when playing. Pedagogical methods differ widely regarding the curvature of the fingers. Some espouse curved fingers and others consider the fleshy part of the finger the optimal place for contact with the keys. Pedagogues in the nineteenth century often encouraged students to develop a proper hand position from a stationary position. Czerny suggested placing a quarter on the hand and required students to keep a fixed, rigid position. Conversely, the notion of relaxed playing can be misconstrued as license to play in a flabby, unsupported position. To avoid such extremes, Rosoff promotes a healthy, natural arch of the hands and a natural curvature of the fingers with the following suggestions:

Figure 8: Hands, palms and fingers are focused as the student brings the hands together as closely as possible without allowing the fingertips to each hand to touch. This helps students feel the energy of a natural curvature without placing the hands on the keyboard in a stationary position.



1. In front of the body, bring palms together without allowing the fingers to touch.
2. Place palms inward with alert and sensitive fingers.
3. Bring fingers closer together, but not touching. The fingers will curve naturally.
4. Feel the energy inside the palms. Do palms feel ready to play and not tight?

Younger students might enjoy the following suggestion:

1. Turn forearms over in front of body. Cup hands as if holding a baby bird.
2. Gently move the now alert hands over the keys. Notice the natural arch of the hand.

Both exercises can be used multiple times in lessons and practice sessions. It is important that they not be introduced until the pianist feels the movement of the larger muscles

in the back and upper torso. This may take many sessions. The act of playing always focuses attention rightfully on the music. Repetitions of this routine over time can gradually train the hand to maintain the integrity of the arch--a vital physical component for control, warm sound production, and ease in playing. Full body work is an essential component to playing with a warm, rich tone without strain. Since the muscular system is a network of interconnections, the lower body, which includes the feet, is involved in playing. Knowing and feeling are often disconnected when becoming mentally involved in performance. Rosoff developed another way to produce physical alertness by walking to the piano as a preparation for playing. Building a sitting position from a walk, Whiteside instructed students to walk to the piano with bent knees. Rosoff discovered that the pelvis must be slightly tilted forward when sitting, and envisioned incorporating the pelvic tilt with bent knees, e.g., Groucho Marx style.

Contrary to feeling silly and self-conscious, walking with knees bent and a forward pelvic tilt makes it possible for the pianist to feel energized and connected from the feet up. Rosoff points out, that world-class tennis players frequently drop into a squat stance and lean forward slightly when waiting on the side court. Rosoff extended the connection of the center of gravity (pelvic area). She advises the pianist to stay with the walk until reaching the bench. She states,

“Music is in you before you sit down. You need to be connected before you get to the piano.”²⁶

The function of the squat re-centers the body and maintains balance. For the pianist, that balance can be found by lowering the body slowly to the bench and sitting directly on the sitting bones (also known as sitz bones). Rolling slightly forward over the sitting bones promotes a

²⁶ Interview with Rosoff in October, 2010.

feeling of being snug with the piano. Balance can also be tested by standing straight up from a sitting position on the bench. Rosoff remarks, “If I said ‘fire’, could you run?”²⁷

If this cannot be done with a direct movement to the standing position, the pianist is most likely sitting behind the bones on the seat. True balance can only be maintained through the sitting bones.

Bench Height and Distance

Figure 9: Proper distance from the keyboard and floor with arms hanging loosely by the pianist’s side and the hands placed comfortably on the keyboard.



The pianist needs to sit with the arms hanging free on the side of the body so that freedom of movement of the hands and arms is easier to maintain. The proper bench height varies for each pianist. The bench position is optimal when the legs are comfortable and the arms hang freely from the shoulder. Care must be taken to avoid holding the forearms up in the air, or raising the shoulders in an effort to support the weight of the arms. Imagine the elbows pointing straight down. Taller pianists must create a delicate balance between upper body freedom and a comfortable position for long legs. Proper positioning at the piano allows the

²⁷ Rosoff, October, 2010.

arms carry the hands with ease across the keyboard. Rosoff believes that sitting too high can interrupt the natural flow of weight and muscle movement.

Equally important to bench height is the distance of the bench from the keyboard. Rosoff suggests that the knee-caps should be almost directly underneath the front of the piano. This allows freedom for the body to move into the keyboard as arms move out and across the keys, offering the greatest fluidity in movement. *Hugging the piano* is a visual aid Rosoff uses to encourage pianists to move forward as the arms swing outward. Moving the torso forward also promotes an ease in executing leaps. This motion cuts the distance of the leap, thus making it more secure. Many concert pianists do this naturally.

Set-ups with Sound

Play a glissando! Glissando practice encourages a feeling of sweeping across the keys. It is also a natural way to refresh the pianist's concept of the ease with which the keys can be played without tension.. Every piano responds differently, and pianists who play on many pianos must use aural and physical perception to find the optimal depth necessary to make the keys sound on each instrument. Rosoff often uses the term, *staying in sound*. This is achieved by staying close to the keys, and playing across the keys with continuous movement until the last note is sounded. Pushing fingers down to the bottom of the keys and holding creates tension in the hand and can cause injuries such as carpal tunnel syndrome and tendonitis.

Other helpful techniques for experiencing ease in depressing the keys are what Rosoff teaches as *elbows in sound*, *fists in sound*, and *arms in sound*. The pianist leans into the keys and places the elbows gently on the keys. This activity reinforces the elbow's important role in guiding the arm horizontally. The sounds produced are not important; the goal is to feel the

forward motion and snugness of the body at the hip joint. Whiteside often referred to this as *being all hooked up*.

Octave Work

Whiteside used the chromatic octave with her students as a set-up to playing repertoire. Rosoff teaches a warm-up using chromatic octaves. Using short sounds and keeping the wrists firm, the pianist is encouraged to keep fingers close to the keyboard and feel the parallel movement across the keys.

Figure 10: Chromatic Octaves in contrary motion.



Rosoff advocates using the Socratic Method. Students are encouraged to discover what they feel physically as they play the octaves without verbal instruction. Self-discovery is essential for the student to feel the physical motions that promote freedom in playing. Once the octave scale is played, octaves using leaps are practiced beginning with the minor second interval. As leaps using larger intervals are played, the body naturally moves forward to stay closer to the leaps and to feel the security of a snug body. Rosoff developed Whiteside's octave work by adding the chromatic mirror octaves. These are played with the right hand beginning on F-sharp, and the left hand beginning on B-flat. First, a two-octave contrary-motion scale is played. This is followed by chromatic leaps beginning with the minor second, and progressing to full octaves in contrary motion.

Full-Arm Arpeggios

An extremely useful set-up is the full-arm arpeggio. Balance of the entire body is tested and maintained as the arms swing loosely across the keyboard in incrementally larger leaps. Movement begins from the center and moves to the periphery. The involvement of the entire body is very important, as the movement comes from the fulcrum. The pianist gently rocks back and forth using the thighs to re-balance as the arms swing from one tone to the next..

Figures 11a, 11b, and 11c



1. Clasp hands in front of body. The objective is to play a cluster of notes, using the notes of the D, E or A major arpeggio. The black key in the middle of the cluster is important as it maintains visual clarity of the clusters as the pianist swings the arms to encompass increasingly wider spans of distance. The motion of the clasped fists would also make playing single tones difficult.
2. Beginning with the lowest note, play on the knuckle area of the fifth finger of the right hand using clasped hands and a firm wrist.

3. Swinging loosely, leap back and forth from the lowest note to each successive tone of the arpeggio, creating increasing distances until the highest possible tone on the keyboard is reached. The feet remain planted comfortably on the floor.

4. At the top of the keyboard, reverse the clasp position so that the knuckle of the fifth finger in the left hand is on the bottom.

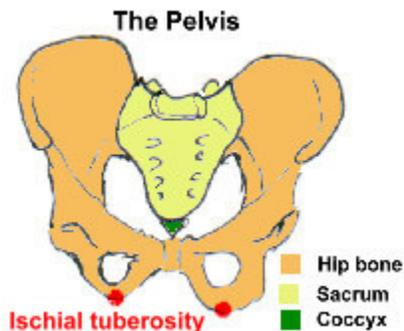
Figure 12: Arms swing to the bottom note of the cluster to end the routine.



The direction will now progress down the keyboard, always returning to both the highest and ending ultimately on the lowest note. As the distance becomes larger, the goal is to let the entire body go into the swing. The upper torso will naturally turn and the body will move forward and inward as the leaps become larger. When done correctly, the balance on the seat can be felt right on top of the sitz bones, or sitting bones (*ischial tuberosity*).²⁸ The lowest of the three bones of the pelvis, the sitz bones support the body when sitting.

²⁸<http://www.nikkiyoga.com/where-are-my-sitz-bones/>, accessed July 29, 2011.

Figure 13: Diagram of the pelvis, with ischial tuberosity noted. Sitz bones are found at the bottom of the diagram.



Source: <http://www.nik.kiyoga.com/where-are-my-sitz-bones/>

Five Finger Pentascales

Lastly, Rosoff teaches a warm-up that involves the smallest lever--the finger. Note that she places the work of the fingers last. The goal of playing pentascales is not to strengthen fingers, but to play each pattern as one movement for the five sounds. The progression of this warm-up is as follows:

1. Put down a cluster of five white keys, using a pattern such as C or G.
2. Play the cluster quickly with one motion. The fingers do not work independently.
3. Next, play the five tones ascending and slowly, so that the forearm flexes.
4. Finally, play the pattern hands together in one motion, as quickly as possible. Rip the notes open using one gesture. Note that to play quickly, the touch must be light, close to the keys, and without fingers pushing to the bottom of the key.

IV THE BASIC EMOTIONAL RHYTHM

“Music is behind the notes.”²⁹

At the heart of Whiteside’s research in the early to mid 1900’s was the concept of an underlying, unbreakable, and inevitable rhythm or pulse that enables the artist to become a unique vehicle for the expression of the music. Her quest in finding the common denominator in all great artists was enhanced by an exploration across all art forms, as well as any skill that required movement. Whiteside explored rhythmic references that included dancing, drumming, running, and swimming.³⁰ The rhythm of speech was studied through examples from writing and poetry. Rosoff, fascinated by challenges of teaching these concepts, continued to refine the art of teaching the *emotional rhythm*, using her private students as her laboratory.³¹

Basic Emotional Rhythm in the Arts

Whiteside’s original observations that the most gifted, successful artists and experts in any skill requiring movement is reinforced with countless references to rhythm as it pertains to each discipline. Many fine examples can be found in the book, *Congenial Spirits*, written by one of the most prolific writers of the early twentieth century, Virginia Woolf. The book contains her letters, many of which discuss her challenges with writing. In a letter to V. Sackville West in March, 1926, she wrote:

²⁹ Statement made by Horowitz, and quoted by Rosoff.

³⁰ Abby Whiteside, Abby Whiteside, *The Indispensables of Piano Playing* Portland, (Oregon: Amadeus Press, 1948), 24.

³¹ *ibid*, 102.

“Style is a very simple matter; it is all rhythm. Once you get that, you can’t use the wrong words. But on the other hand, here am I sitting half the morning, crammed with ideas, and vision, and so on, and can’t dislodge them for lack of the right rhythm. Now this is very profound, what rhythm is and goes far deeper than words. A sight, an emotion, creates this wave in the mind, long before it makes words to fit it; and in writing (such is my present belief) one has to recapture this, and set this working (which has nothing apparently to do with words) and then as it breaks and tumbles in the mind, it makes words to fit it.”³²

Another letter to her brother-in-law, Clive Bell, a writing colleague, in February 1909 reveals

Woolf’s frustration with finding the unbreakable continuity:

“Helen’s letter also was an experiment. When I read the thing over (one grey evening) I thought it so flat and monotonous that I did not even feel ‘the atmosphere’: Certainly there was no character in it. Next morning, I proceeded to slash and rewrite in the hope of animating it; and...destroyed the one virtue it had—a kind of continuity; for I wrote it originally in a dream like state, which was at any rate, unbroken. My intention now is to write straight on...and go over the beginning again with broad touches....Giving the feel of running water, and not much else.”³³

Rhythm is obvious in poetry. Robert Frost stated in an interview, “A sentence has a sound on which you hang the words”.³⁴ The world of theater also offers many references to the rhythm, or flow of delivery. Well-known director, Peter Brook speaks about the influence of director Georges Gurjiev, his beliefs, and his teaching style. In an interview with writer Margaret Croyden, Brook stated:

“Most important are the “movements,” or sacred dances—a set of rhythmic dances—a set of rhythmic dances or physical stances designed to liberate the energies of the body...each of which aims to elicit a certain state or awareness of one’s own body

Virginia Woolf, *Congenial Spirits. The Selected Letters of Virginia Woolf*. (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1989), 50.

³³Ibid, 50.

³⁴Quote often stated by Rosoff in lessons.

rhythms—which contribute to a subtle change of consciousness.”³⁵

The 1981 Emmy winning movie, *The Chariots of Fire*, offers another contemporary look at the use and importance of an internal rhythm. The documentary, *Wings on Their Heels: The Making of Chariots of Fire*, shows the strategy used to get the runners into the emotional rhythm of the run on the beach. Large speakers were placed on the beach, and inspirational music (not the music finally written for the scene) was played across the beach as the scene was filmed. It worked. The compelling cameos presented as bookends of the film are considered some of the greatest emotional scenes of cinema history.³⁶

Famed director of the New York Ballet during 1946-1982, George Balanchine wrote many books. Other biographies have followed that are written by dancers who studied with him during his New York years. Rosoff often quotes him during lessons to illustrate a point. Several times she stated,

Balanchine told his dancers, “Do not dance the steps—dance the music.”³⁷

In an interview with Barbara Walczak, co-author of the book *Balanchine the Teacher*, she describes Balanchine's passion to explore what the body can do with music. Balanchine redesigned how dancers moved and responded to music. Instead of moving from one still pose to another, he instructed dancers to move through one movement to another. In his early years, Balanchine instructed, “Don't listen to the music, just count.” In later years, he

³⁵Margaret Croyden, *Conversations with Peter Brook 1970-2000* (New York: Faber and Faber, 2000), 150.

³⁶Documentary, *Wings on Their Heels: The Making of Chariots of Fire*, 1981. Accessed through NetFlicks online, March 10, 2010.

³⁷Statement attributed to Balanchine by Tosoff, 2010.

said, "Don't count—listen to the music".³⁸

Walzcak explained,

“Rhythm is the common denominator—it is what makes a great musician. We all have an inner rhythm, a personal response, and the response is so charismatic that it works. There is something very personal—something intangible that we responded to; we became visible music.”³⁹

Even composers strive for a forward, unbreakable movement as evidenced by the teaching philosophies of Nadia Boulanger. Howard Pollack's biography, *Aaron Copland, the Life and Work of an Uncommon Man*, make reference to Copland's appreciation of Boulanger's sense of wholeness in the pacing and unfolding of a composition. Pollack states,

“Moreover, he praised her sensitivity to the formal rightness of a piece of music, her attention, especially, to "la grande ligne," the long line, defined as "the sense of forward motion, of flow and continuity in the musical discourse; the feeling for inevitability, for the creating of an entire piece that could be thought of as a functioning entity.”⁴⁰

The theater director, Constantin Stanislavski, often spoke of the challenge for actors of developing the ability to become their role, not just superimposing motion and emotion into the voice and body. In his book, *Stanislavski*, author Jean Benedetti states,

“The basis of his whole "System", as he (Stanislavski) came to call it, was the conviction that acting, as in everything else, nature, not the rational intellect, creates. What he had to discover was an artistic process in tune with the processes of the human organism at the level of the un-or super-conscious....Any grammar, method of system, however, was only useful as a stimulus to these organic processes.”⁴¹

³⁸ Quote taken from phone interview with Walachedk, October, 2010.

³⁹ *ibid*

⁴⁰ Howard Pollack, *Aaron Copland. The Life and Work of an Uncommon Man* (University of Illinois Press, 1999), 48, 49.

⁴¹ Jean Benedetti, *Stanislavski* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 78.

This statement is vital to Whiteside's original premise that the artist becomes the music, just as an actor becomes his character. Amittai Aviram's book, *Telling Rhythm*, sums up the concept of a basic emotional rhythm that is a part of the arts.

“In poetry, music, and dance, the physical sensation of rhythm is an insistent manifestation of the physical world....(ref). Rhythm (and more generally the *sensuous* appeal to the ear and the body) is the one thing that cannot be translated or paraphrased: it is only real when it is actually experienced.”⁴²

The Difference between Basic Rhythm and Basic Emotional Rhythm

Rosoff's goal is to help the pianist play from the heart—to express the music as they perceive it. Ideally, performances are fresh and sound almost improvisatory. When playing with a basic emotional rhythm, pianists become the music they are playing—no two performances are the same. This can only occur when interpretations are developed in accordance with each pianist's musical taste.

Rosoff believes that until physical issues are corrected, the pianist remains unable to fully express the music inside. Her willingness to honor individuality is one of the reasons she has had such success with pianists from both the jazz and classical genres. Equally unique is her ability to work with musicians from other disciplines, such as violin, guitar and percussion. The musicians come to learn her concepts of freedom and how to connect physically and emotionally to their instrument. They seek to find the physical, mental and emotion freedom that allows for a unified connection between the artist and the music.

Rosoff points out that there is a definite distinction between a *basic rhythm* and a *basic emotional rhythm*. A well-trained, talented musician can play with a *basic rhythm*—a continuous, flowing motion. In spite of the flowing rhythm, however, there can be little or no emotional connection to the music. A *basic emotional rhythm* can only occur when the essence of

⁴² Amittai Aviram, *Telling Rhythm: Body and Meaning in Poetry* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, c1994), 54.

the music is found from the beginning stages in learning a piece. The musical line triggers the rhythm to flow continuously with the musician moving physically as part of the music itself. Musicians feel that there are no boundaries. Given the use of dancing and the freedom of rhythmic movement in other cultures, an argument can be made for doing more to incorporate physical movement into music programs in the United States from early preschool through collegiate levels. When pianists succeed in achieving an emotional response to their performance, a physical response to the rhythm is triggered. This can provide a performance that feels as if it is being improvised.

Finding the Basic Emotional Rhythm

During an interview, pianist John Kamitsuka noted,

“When you study with Sophia Rosoff, leave your inhibitions at the door”.⁴³

Rosoff often reminds students that rhythm came before sound and began as a language before sound. It then grew into words and notes.⁴⁴ Kamitsuka’s comment captures the necessity of a willing, uninhibited, and open-minded spirit on the pianist’s part when working with Rosoff to experience emotional rhythm. Physical gestures and tapping with hands and feet simultaneously are essential for pianists. Dancing a phrase pattern across the studio floor is another matter. As previously discussed, dancing is not a regular part of the American culture. Consider the inhibitions many feel at dancing in front of people at their own wedding. Contrary to the musical training found in other cultures, using motion to enhance a physical presence in rhythm in America is often limited to the clapping and chanting

⁴³Interview with John Kamitsuka, June, 2010. Kamitsuka has worked with Rosoff for more than twenty years. With her guidance he has built and sustained an enviable international career. To gain other perspectives on Rosoff as a teacher, I interviewed him during the summer of 2010.

⁴⁴Rosoff interview, June , 2009.

of “tah” and “ti-ti” rhythms often used by the public school system. A survey of several pedagogical method books written in the United States shows an emphasis on clapping rhythms, but only in the early stages of training.⁴⁵

Too often, rhythm work is limited to the parameters of correct, even and steady beats with notes held in proper proportion. Rosoff believes American students focus too much on learning notes, and little on physically experiencing the rhythmic flow of their repertoire.

Tapping Rhythms at the Piano

Pianists should begin the simplest rhythm work using the entire body—the hands, feet and seat. It is important that the pianist work on the closed lid and not on the top of the lid in the open position. Doing so takes the pianist out of the proper alignment needed to play. The right hand taps the treble notes, and the left hand the bass. The goal is to feel the movement of the upper arms—they should be free and connect. The pianist first experiences the rhythm with a light touch with curved fingers, not flat handed. After tapping the rhythm of a phrase, the pianist should immediately play the phrase. Complex rhythms will require daily vigilance. It is not enough to play the rhythms correctly—the pianist must be connected with the music. The rhythms make one pattern using the whole body.

The coordination of the feet with the hands presents a more challenging movement, as I discovered when I first began my studies with Rosoff. Both hands tap the treble staff as both feet follow the bass. Each pianist must discover the easiest way to execute the rhythms physically and the most efficient manner for coordinating their limbs. After completing the rhythm, the pianist should play the phrase. An excellent example of rhythms

⁴⁵ Methods consulted were Faber and Faber, *Piano Adventures*, Helen Marlais, *Succeeding at the Piano*, and Kowalchuk and Lancaster, *Alfred's Premier Piano Course*.

between the hands and syncopated rhythms can be found in one of Debussy's earliest works, *Danse*.

Figure 14: Claude Debussy, *Danse*, measures 1-4.



The challenge is to capture the feeling of the unbreakable, unending, rhythm that takes on a life of its own when performing. Success can be enhanced with diligent daily effort for rhythmic practice away from the keyboard. Some pianists may feel self-conscious attempting such an activity in front of an artist teacher. In fact, this kind of work requires more body involvement and intricate coordination to successfully incorporate the feet dancing the two beat background as the hands tap the syncopated melody on the chest. Rosoff cites her experiences with pianists trained at the most prestigious conservatories as proof of a general lack of physical rhythmic training. Often students who can play the most difficult passages of the Prokofiev Third Concerto buckle in initial attempts to feel a four-measure phrase using both feet and hands.

Imagine a lesson on any skill level in which the teacher regularly asks the pianist to begin in the corner of the room, and dance the music! The instructions are to let the feet move to the bass rhythms, and the hands tap melodic rhythms. While dancing, sing the melody to encourage breathing with the music. Tap lightly on the chest with the hands facing inward. Everything blends as the pianist dances across the floor. My first attempt at this was playing the *Courante* movement of the *English Suite No. 2 in A Minor*, written by Bach. My feet danced the steady quarter notes as my fingers tapped the treble clef melody. I moved in the

spirit I imagined appropriate for a courante. After dancing a section, I immediately sat down and Rosoff instructed with a single word—play. The difference was clear not only in my confidence, but also in the quality of the sound and the emotional spirit of the dance. Each day I danced the courante and played them, until a performance with ease seemed natural without dancing. I practiced all movements of the suite in this manner. I believe my dancing sessions contributed significantly to the confidence and musical understanding of the courante. My freedom to dance continues to evolve. With time, I have allowed myself to dance my music in the kitchen, or another room of the house. The incorporation of rhythm into my daily life remains a work in progress. The results are worth the effort.

Dancing is a vibrant part of many cultures and is included in many well-known music programs. The flagship music training program in Venezuela, *El Sistema*, uses dance as a normal part of the musical training. The television news broadcast *60 Minutes* produced an inside look at this successful program and the training procedures used to help students acquire such vibrant performances that their top orchestras are sought from countries all over the world. The news segment shows young elementary school-aged students, who stand together and dance in a circle in front of their chairs as they play their instruments. No performance of the larger high school level orchestras would be complete without spontaneous dancing from players. One segment showed the bass players dancing with incredible, soulful rhythm and using their basses as an anchor on the floor. Considered part of the performance, dancing is expected—it is an integral part of the culture. Dr. Pedro Aponte, professor of ethnomusicology at James Madison University in Harrisonburg, Virginia received his pre-college training in *El Sistema*. He reflects on the sense of internal rhythm the methods of training instilled in him from the beginning,

“From the age of two or three, students are encouraged to break into dance spontaneously. They are free to move and feel the music and the vitality of it. This has brought the program a lot of attention. As a culture, they (Venezuelans) dance much more than we do in the United States. Dancing is an important difference in the training of musicians.”⁴⁶

Rhythm Talk

Rosoff developed *Rhythm Talk* after watching a group of Asian performers sit cross-legged on the floor and chant rhythms. She wondered how she could use this technique in her teaching. Chanting a word or syllable while playing a difficult passage can be another aid in internalizing the emotional rhythm of a specific piece. Two syllable combinations such as “dee-dah” or a word such as “little” can be spoken quickly and with minimal thought. By using Rhythm Talk, as opposed to numeral counting, one has to open the jaw more widely. Pianists often unknowingly tense their jaw when technical challenges arise. The open jaw helps maintain a relaxed upper body. Rosoff prefers the word “little”, because it can be spoken rapidly mostly with tongue movement. This encourages the jaw to remain open and loose.

In general, the words speak faster than the playing. The playing then catches up to the speech so that they are simultaneous. A repetition of the phrase of a section is spoken faster, followed by the playing. Speaking and playing are also beneficial in establishing regular breathing during performance.

⁴⁶ Interview with Dr. Pedro Aponte, assistant professor at James Madison University, September, 2010.

Figure 15a: Debussy *Danse*, measures 1-4: Syllables for the word “little” used over two measures, using one syllable per measure.

Lit tle Lit tle

Figure 15b: Syllables used over one measure, using one word per measure.

Lit tle Lit tle Lit tle Lit tle

The final step would involve chanting “little” for each eighth note.

V OUTLINING—A CRUCIAL PRACTICING TECHNIQUE

Outlining, one of the most important practice strategies for finding the basic emotional rhythm, is so fundamental that an entire chapter is devoted to the concept. In her writing, Abby Whiteside emphasizes the importance of working with musical and creative outlines as an integral part of the learning process. The basis of the outline has merit across all art forms. Artists draw the outline of shapes prior to filling in the details. The potter begins with a shapeless blob of clay—crafting only a general shape of the desired object before working in the details. Even players in the National Football League begin with a playbook that outlines the shape and direction of specific plays. Anything with motion begins with an overall, general direction. Drafts of Beethoven's symphonies and other major works offer a glimpse of the thought processes at work prior to the instrumentation, harmonic structure and melodic content of his works.

Many pianists begin the learning process by taking a section of music, slowing it down and attempting to play all the notes. Everything from fingering passages to playing intricate ornamentation is attempted at the onset of learning a piece. Whiteside's technique of outlining involved practicing the underlying music, harmonic structure, and most importantly the melody first. Whiteside's early experimentation with outlining involved the pianist adding in only notes that came easily with repetition. Her initial concept was to move forward in a phrase or section of music with a continuous rhythm. The music moves with an emotional rhythm and in a horizontal direction. The rhythm should never be broken for the sake of adding notes to an outline.

Whiteside developed her research into the benefits of outlining pieces before attempting to play all the notes. Rosoff's work has provided the pianist with many ways to outline by developing a logical process that allows the piece to unfold gradually. The process is unique to each pianist's ability and technical needs. By providing a structure that allows the pianist to work in a creative manner, the core of the music can be found in the early stages of practice.

Benefits of Outlining

The most essential benefit is the training of the ear with a physical movement that connects with the ear. Note-focused learning requires the pianist to figure out the notes and fingerings first. Too often, this approach is at the expense of the ear, which can easily focus on the many individual notes or very short patterns. The fingering that is initially set-up may have to be undone after the pianist hears where the music is going. Students with less experience can easily lose focus of the important musical lines and unwittingly practice mechanically, instead of hearing patterns of sound. Rosoff points out that this approach necessitates that the musical lines and expression, the essence of the piece, be superimposed on the notes. Rosoff often paraphrases poet Robert Frost, who once stated in an interview.

“A sentence has a sound on which you hang the words.” (Rosoff adds) “Through outlining with an emotional rhythm, one can hear the sound of a phrase into which the notes of the music fall.”⁴⁷

Awareness of skeletal structure is paramount. The pianist's initial goal is to make a musical line with just the first beats of each measure. Each outline must make a statement that is musically convincing. As layers of notes are added in subsequent outlines, the pianist can

⁴⁷Rosoff used this paraphrase at a lesson in July, 2010.

hear the details as the piece unfolds. As each additional beat is added, the pianist can hear the musical shape of each phrase in greater detail. The freedom from constant note reading focuses the pianist's ear on the musical line. The only goal is to express the musical line within the framework of the notes added in a continuous rhythm. The types of outlines played are determined by the texture, tempo and style of the piece. As Rosoff states, "The only sin in outlining is to break the rhythm or lose the musical line."⁴⁸

Perhaps the most important benefit of outlining is ear training. Learning in layers provides an underlying structure for the pianist—a life-saver in public performance. The ear tells the pianist where to go much more effectively than motor memory. Rosoff's work has helped many performing pianists use outlining as an effective tool for solidifying memory. Many pianists have found outlining to be an important element in securing memory. Although performance practices requiring repertoire to be played from memory have relaxed in recent years, the expectation of memorized performances for the majority of solo repertoire is unlikely to change in the future.

Basic Outlining Examples

The examples in this section represent different musical textures. They are representative of the work undertaken in my sessions with Ms. Rosoff between 2006 and 2010. Rosoff emphatically states that her development of Whiteside's concept is neither a method nor a set of rules that one must follow. The examples are suggestions of the countless ways a pianist can work within an outline framework.

⁴⁸ Lesson, October, 2008.

The goal of the outline is to allow the pianist an opportunity to hear what Rosoff refers to as “the slow pulsating rhythm underneath the fast.”⁴⁹ Consider that the composer began work with a melody or a basic underlying harmonic structure on which to build the composition. By beginning in the same manner, the pianist can discover the harmonic underpinning, direction of melody, and the most important melodic arrival points. In all outlining endeavors, maintaining a horizontal movement through any notes that are played is essential.⁵⁰

When playing a simple outline, leave space for the beats of the remainder of the measure. It is essential that enough repetitions are played to create a meaningful musical line, without mentally filling in the rest of the measure. It is helpful to consider the outline similar to a jazz improvisation based on a theme. Rosoff states, “Move through the outline as if it were the music.”⁵¹ Remembering that sound happens where the hammer hits the strings, it is essential that the pianist not play notes or clusters vertically, or lift the fingers or hands any higher than necessary when moving to the next chord or cluster. The economy of motion will encourage horizontal movement. Once first beats form a musical statement, secondary accented beats such as the third beat in 4/4 time may be added. The pianist will now hear the musical and harmonic line in a new, enriched way. Only after a satisfying musical statement can the pianist add the notes that fall on each beat. This chorale-style level of practice allows the ear to experience the basic harmonic structure of the piece.

⁴⁹ “Slow underneath the fast” is the terminology used by Rosoff regularly in sessions.

⁵⁰ Both Whiteside and Rosoff state that the upper arm is essential for playing the piano with ease and freedom of tension. It carries the forearm, the hand and the fingers with it. An excellent example of this is a glissando.

⁵¹ Interview in September, 2010.

Having successfully played the beats only, the pianist is ready to “open up the phrase.”⁵² This process begins from the last beat to the first beat of each measure. Thus, an outline can be played using the first three beats, followed by all notes played in the fourth beat. With each repetition, the pianist can add the third, second, and finally first beats respectively.⁵³ Pacing of the progressively fuller outlines should be geared to each pianist’s level of comfort. Particularly in thicker textures, it is often necessary to remain at the beats-only level until the desired musical result is achieved. Care should be taken that the pianist not progress too quickly from one level of outlining to another. One of the benefits of the outlining process is that an overview of an entire movement is possible in a matter of a few days. Learning large works and long sonata movements can be done more quickly when all of the pages can be covered every few days. Even texturally thick writing can be learned in a shorter amount of time when the entire piece is outlined first.

Repeating the outlining process throughout the learning process, and during the polishing phases of work refines the structural skeleton of the piece. With each outline, the direction of the melody is refreshed. The details are gradually folded into a well sculpted musical line. The example below illustrates an outline for measures one through four of the *Adagio in B Minor, KV 540*, by Mozart.

⁵² The terminology “open up the phrase” was originally Whiteside’s and used regularly by Rosoff to indicate the addition of all of the notes of a particular beat. This language will be used throughout the rest of the explanations in this chapter.

⁵³ In $\frac{3}{4}$ time, a logical progression would be the downbeats, followed by the notes on each of the two remaining beats. Since there are no secondary accents in $\frac{3}{4}$ meter, a half-note progression, the second step in $\frac{4}{4}$ meter is not possible.

Figure 16a: first beats only.

Only after successfully playing the downbeats as a musical statement, include the notes on the first and third beats.

Figure 16b: first and third beats.

Movement must be made through the music horizontally. Listen to the musical line produced with two beats. The notes on all four beats of the measure should be the next step.

Figure 16c: Four beats included.

When all beats are represented in each measure, each beat can be opened up, with all notes included, starting from the fourth beat backwards. The next repetition could sound like this

Figure 16d: Fourth beats open.

As each beat opens, melodic and harmonic direction can be sculpted in greater detail.

The example below illustrates a suitable outline for a piece in $\frac{3}{4}$ meter. The Sarabande from *English Suite No. 2 in A Minor, BWV 807*, by Bach can be extended by including the ornamentations in repetitions of the outline once all the written notes are included.

Figure 17a: Measures 1-4, downbeats only.



Figure 17b: Three beats per measure



Figure 17c: fourth beats open



Figure 17d: third and fourth beats open.



Outlining in 6/8 time requires a division of two beats per measure; therefore, only two levels of outline are necessary. The Gigue movement of the *English Suite No. 2 in A Minor* below illustrates a two-step phrase opening:

Figure 18a: Measures 1 and 2, second beats opened.



Figure 18b: Measures 1 and 2 fully opened.



The *Theme and Variations, Op. 73, No. VIII*, by Fauré, provides an excellent example that offers several outlining options. Measures 1 and 2 below may be played in clusters. All notes within easy reach of the hand are played together. This allows the pianist to hear rich harmonic blends that might otherwise be lost to the ear. The open hand is poised to play patterns of sound, rather than one note at a time. It is the whole hand that plays the pattern of sound.

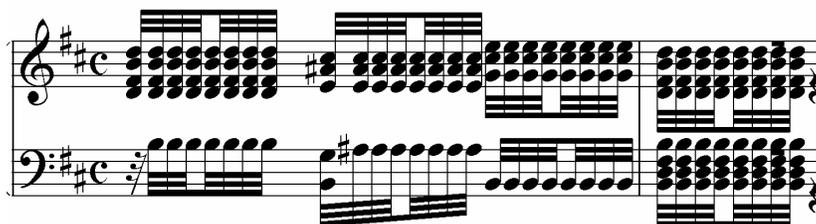
Figure 19: *Theme and Variations, Op. 73, No. VII, measures 1-2*, by Fauré



The same example can be used to show outlines of layered textures. In the above example, all three voice combinations should be played—bass and soprano, alto and soprano, and bass and alto voices. This allows for clarity of structure and voice leading. Using both hands to play different voice combinations also aids in securing memory. The more complex the texture, the more helpful this practice strategy will be.

Clusters and rhythms on clusters using all notes in a measure are another approach to outlining. In the above example, playing two clusters per bar can reveal beautiful harmonic colors not heard when played as written. Playing only the notes that fit comfortably under each hand reinforces the larger note groupings present and aids physical memory. Instead of individual note memory, groupings of notes are felt as a single unit of sound. Clusters in rhythm encourage the pianist to release the notes instantly. The speed of the rhythm played encourages playing only as deep into the key as necessary to produce the sound. The rhythm is solidified and internalized by using single notes or chords. After playing a short passage in rhythmic clusters, the passage should be played as written. Many passages benefit from rhythmic clustering. Technically difficult passages, such as the opening of the *Prelude, Chorale, and Fugue*, by Franck are greatly improved.

Figure 20: *Prelude, Chorale, and Fugue*, measures 1 and 2



The arpeggiated notes are clustered in this example by each beat. Light, rapid repetitions using thirty-second notes in small passages helps loosen the arms and avoids playing to the bottom of the key. All rhythmic practice should be followed immediately by a performance of the score as written.

The above examples provide a glimpse of the many ways outlining can be creatively used as a practice tool. The most important concepts to remember are:

1. Keep the pulse going even if a rest is placed instead of notes.
2. Play even the simplest outline musically and always in a horizontal direction.
3. Layer, cluster by the bar, cluster in rhythms, and open up phrases from the last to first beats of each measure to provide practice variety.
4. Allow freedom to explore new ways to creatively make outlines using different combinations of voices, rhythms, and chords.

VI ADDITIONAL PRACTICE SUGGESTIONS

Rosoff has developed additional practice tips for the common difficulties pianists face. Test Measures, practicing with a blind-fold, upside down practice, transposition, and slow practice are successful in bringing the pianist to a more confident performance level.

Test Measures

Test Measures provide an effective option for practicing technically difficult passages. A Test Measure is simply an outline of a single measure. By focusing on single measures of music, both polyphonic and thick chordal textures can be solidified. Beginning with a single downbeat of the problem measure to the next downbeat, additional single beats can be added. Opening from the last to first beats allows the measure to be practiced microscopically. The example bellows illustrates the process of opening a difficult passage from *Invention No. 13, BWV 784*, by Bach:

Figure 21a: Measures 12-13: complete measure

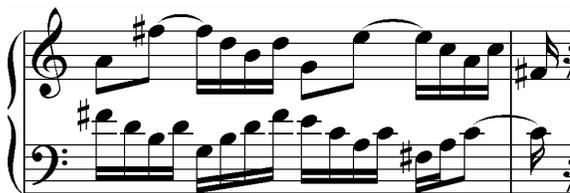


Figure 21b: Downbeats of measures 12 and 13 only. Space must be left between measures to allow notes to fill-in:



Figure 21c: Beats one and three:



Figure 21d: Four beats per measure.



Figure 21e: Following the skeletal outline, each beat is filled in from the fourth beat to the first. Shown below is the third and fourth beats realized.



Figure 22a is an example from *Preludes, Op. 64, No. 13, measure 41* written by Cui:

The skeleton below represents the half note background to which sixteenth note octaves will be later added.



Figure 22b illustrates the completed score after all beats are added.



Upside-Down Practice

Rosoff discovered the concept of practicing upside down, with the right hand playing the bass clef and the left hand the treble clef, while she was working with dyslexic students. In an attempt to help them read with less difficulty, she cut and pasted the treble and bass clefs in reverse order. The students became much more fluent. The upside down approach worked. The example below shows the left hand playing the top clef, and the right hand playing the tones of the bass clef.

Figure 23: *Prelude No. 13, Op. 64* by Cui. measures 1-3.

Left Hand

Right Hand

Curious about the benefits of this approach to non-dyslexic students, Rosoff incorporated a modified version successfully in her teaching of all students. Students may play slowly, and perfect rhythm is frequently not possible. Specific fingering is also not necessary as the hands play in reverse clefs only briefly before returning to their normal position. The hands do not cross but rather remain on the appropriate side of the body. Students were able

to hear the bass clef notes better in the upper register which aided the memory. This process stimulates the opposite side of the brain for each hand which also allows for better memory retention. Rosoff found that another benefit to this type of practice is that individual patterns of the hands become more homogenous when played as written. It is helpful to remember the following when practicing:

1. Play all notes non-legato. This avoids developing the habit of holding notes down at the key bed, which is not done when performing in tempo.
2. Play without pedal. The slower tempo can cause harmonies to die away, requiring different pedal changes than required in performance.
3. Work with short phrases, particularly those that are difficult to memorize.
4. Always put the phrase back in the correct order and play the phrase as written immediately after working upside-down.

Transposition

Developing skills in transposition is an important tool for aural training. Many well-known pianists and pedagogues have transposed as part of their regular practice routine and have taught their students to do so as well. Rosoff reminds her students that Rachmaninoff required his students to transpose and Gina Bachauer held transposition in high regard as the backbone for memory security. Rosoff remembers a concert in which Myra Hess stopped shortly after beginning a piece. To the audience's astonishment, she said,

“Excuse me, I've begun in the wrong key.”⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Rosoff, interview in June, 2010.

The importance of transposition among many of the great artists is because the ear is used as the primary source for the sound. Visual memory becomes secondary. As Rosoff states, “If you have a memory slip, the only thing that will save you is your ear.”⁵⁵ Learning to transpose piano repertoire can be a daunting task. The many styles and textures of music, from polyphonic writing of the baroque period to thick harmonic textures found in Schumann and Rachmaninoff pose significant challenges for the pianist transposing through sight-reading. Mastering the art of transposition is a slow process but it can greatly be improved with time. Not only does transposition stretch and challenge the ear, the process encourages the ear to be an important guide in performance. Moving by a stepwise interval up or down is the easiest way to develop the ability to transpose. With practice, the passage can be transposed using greater intervals such as a fourth or fifth. This allows the pianist infinite resources for challenging practice. Moving to a new key and immediately back to the written key refreshes the sound, and aids in making the home key feel more secure. A slower tempo may be necessary for successful performance in a new key. If the pianist incorporates a slow, horizontal movement during the process, an additional layer of memory security will result. For example, I found transposition very helpful in solidifying both technical and memory issues in the *Preludes, Op. 64*, by Cui. Practicing four to eight measures in a new key often clarified the original key when I repeated the passage in the intended key. I also found this very useful in all movements of Bach’s *English Suite in A Minor*.

Practicing with a Blind-fold

⁵⁵ Rosoff, interview in June, 2010.

Another effective ear-training tool is blind-fold practice. Practicing with a blind-fold after memorizing a piece helps secure the memory because the ear is forced to accommodate for the missing visual orientation. Rosoff points out, that young students frequently spend so much time learning to read, that the training of the ear is not acknowledged. Students in music schools and conservatories must realize that aural training classes are only an introduction to the skills necessary for solid performance. Practicing with eyes closed only does not produce the same effect, because light can still be a distraction, and it is far too easy to slightly open the eyes. It is essential that the pianist experience the blackout effect of the blind-fold. Pianists gain confidence when able to play accurate leaps while blind-folded.

Slow Practice

Slow practice has been a controversial issue for decades, particularly in the American university system. To prevent students from sloppy, inaccurate playing, teachers often admonish students to practice at very slow tempos until given permission to bring a piece closer to tempo. Rosoff believes this system does not allow the student to play with the gesture necessary to play in speed. She teaches students to practice in a tempo closer to the one more appropriate for the piece using outline principles. Tempo practice can be readily achieved when starting only with the first beats. As additional notes are included in the outline the pianist can experience and find the gesture necessary to play the piece successfully. Rosoff believes that slow practice is an important practice tool, but only after the musical line and essence of the piece have been thoroughly assimilated by the use of outlining. Rosoff states,

“Once you have done the work and are physically in touch with the motion and movement of a piece, slow motion can stretch out all the details in slow motion. In

order to be beneficial, slow practice must emphasize the horizontal movement of the music.”⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Rosoff lesson, August 2009.

VII TEACHING PHILOSOPHY, LESSONS AND GROUP PERFORMANCE CLASSES

Teaching Philosophy

Rosoff believes her teaching role is to "clear the pathways,"⁵⁷ thus allowing pianists to express themselves uniquely at the piano. Possessing an unshakeable belief that each pianist should have musical connections to each piece, Rosoff focuses on the entire body. She embraces each student's musical expression based on their personal emotional connection to the work, provided the interpretation is within acceptable stylistic bounds. The first goal is to produce a musically convincing performance. The second goal is to produce a warm, rich sound, which comes from playing into the key no deeper than necessary to produce the tone. She also advocates that all practicing must be related to how the music is to be performed. Practicing should never be mechanical.

Rosoff finds it difficult to limit lesson time to sixty minutes. To allow adequate time for discovery and practice of concepts, she teaches ninety-minute sessions. Time is spent almost entirely with Rosoff giving a direction for a physical motion, an outline suggestion, or ways of practicing creatively. The student experiments with the concept in the lesson until they have experienced the most successful way to play the phrase or outline. Every outline or phrase must make a musical statement. A tenacious teacher, Rosoff does not stop working on a concept until the student feels it physically and hears it musically.

⁵⁷*Clear the pathways* is Rosoff's terminology, interview October, 2008.

Group Classes

Rosoff's unconventional style permeates every aspect of her teaching, including her concept of group classes. My experience in her classes is different than anything I have experienced. Everyone is encouraged to play at every class. Since the outlining of every piece is taught at every lesson and is referred to constantly throughout the learning process, students are encouraged to play an outline of a movement or work. For example, Chopin's *Berceuse* could be performed with only basic harmonic changes in the left hand, and the melody in the right hand without any filigree passages. A texturally thick sonata such as the first movement of the *Sonata in F Minor, Op. 5* by Brahms might include only the melody and harmonic changes on beats only. Pianists performing the same work in subsequent classes fill in the outline until the piece is performed as written.

Encouraging students to perform at their current level of mastery without feeling judged by others is an important concern for Rosoff. She believes each pianist must develop the confidence that his or her personal performance critique has validity. Any comments made by Rosoff, either praise or criticism, are discussed privately in the next lesson. Rosoff believes her class strategy enhances her students' focus and connection to the music without distractions.

VIII Practice and Performance Observations

An important aspect of this project was my private work with Rosoff. It is only through private lessons with a teacher familiar with Rosoff's approach that the physicality can become experienced and internalized. Rosoff stresses the point that she is advocating an approach first introduced by Abby Whiteside. She has merely continued working with the principles first developed by Whiteside. Her more than sixty-five years of teaching have given her the time to test and explore possibilities for inclusion in her teaching. From Whiteside, she developed the love and commitment of a never-ending curiosity and a desire for continued research. My experiences with Rosoff impacted three areas of my professional life:

1. My own development as a pianist has been greatly influenced by my initial reading of Whiteside's writings, which led me to private work with Rosoff. Those changes have been profound and I will discuss those areas that brought my playing to a new level both technically and musically.

2. Rosoff's influence has changed how I teach. My private studio has been my laboratory. My high school students in particular, have been an enormous inspiration as I have tested and tried those ideas that worked so well for me. Through the process, I have become a better teacher. I am able to teach much more effectively and the results in my students have been rewarding. I will discuss the most successful work done in my studio based on these principles.

3. Further research is necessary to test out many possibilities to teach very young children these concepts from the earliest lessons. Ideas such as dancing the music, splashing sounds of clusters, and feeling the underlying, basic emotional rhythm are possibilities for improving the musical experiences of the youngest students.

4. Application of not only the teaching principles but the teaching philosophy into the collegiate studio would be challenging and rewarding. Observing Rosoff's lesson structure has provided me with ideas that I would like to initiate in private collegiate teaching.

Personal Playing Improvement:

My undergraduate and graduate work exposed me to many differing attitudes on technique and practice. Each teacher offered approaches that often contradicted what I had been previously taught. Playing on the matt of fingers versus the tips, using a high versus low wrist, straight fingers versus curved, and varying practice techniques were often confusing. My desire to find a synthesis of pedagogical theory was realized in my studies with pianist Brian Ganz.⁵⁸ For the first time, I learned that the modern piano had a mechanism called double-escapement, allowing velocity and freedom by playing only as far into the key as necessary to produce the sound. The concept of incorporating the use of the back was also introduced.

I explored the production of sound further with Dr. James Litzelman, director of the pedagogy program at the Catholic University of America.⁵⁹ He encouraged me to read Whiteside's writings, and to travel to New York to meet with Sophia Rosoff. Reading the book stimulated my sense that there must be an easier way to play. I realized that gaining all the

⁵⁸ Brian Ganz is currently on the faculties of Peabody Conservatory in Baltimore, Maryland, and St. Mary's College in St. Mary's, Maryland. Ganz enjoys an international performing career. He won second prize in the Queen Elizabeth Piano Competition in Belgium in 1991 and received first prize in the Marquerite Long Jacques Thibaud International Piano Competition held in Paris in 1989. Known as a Beethoven and Chopin scholar, Ganz is in the process of recording all of Chopin's music. Ganz promotes a healthful, organic, natural approach to playing, with an emphasis on the integration of the entire body in successful performance.

⁵⁹ Dr. James Litzelman is the director of the pedagogy program at the Catholic University of America. Suffering from dystonia, Litzelman embarked more than ten years ago on a quest to solve the problems that caused the dystonia. Reading the bulk of pedagogical literature available, he retrained himself and developed a synthesis of the most useful approaches advocating an organic, natural approach to playing that encompassed the full body.

information necessary from reading a book was not realistic. I needed private sessions tailored to my specific needs. My continued work with Rosoff has brought ease to my performance. Her insistence that I change my bench height allowed me to play at the escapement level of the hammer and increased my ease in passagework and warmth and depth of sound from the first session. Greater technical security has allowed me to focus on the musical qualities of the piece.

Outlining has given me a glimpse of playing with a basic emotional rhythm only possible once I stopped note learning and began finding the music first. Developing a creative use of outlining is a life-long pursuit. I have found that it has given my hands the freedom to cover many notes like an umbrella, and encouraged my focus on the musical line and underlying pulse. Learning to always move to the next beat has improved my playing consistency over time. As a younger student, I rarely had memory issues on stage. I realize now that my focus on the notes was so complete that my memory seemed always secure. Rarely did I experience difficulties in performances. Opening my sound and allowing myself to play without thinking about every movement requires trust—something that was not required in my note-learning days. It was very disconcerting, when early in the process of learning this approach to playing, I suffered memory slips during performances. Others assured me that this was a temporary side-effect that would be overcome once I became comfortable with many of the concepts of sound production. I found this part of the work discouraging and quite unsettling. During the course of three years, however, I have overcome many of the initial memory issues. My ear has continued to develop. Working with a blind-fold to solidify my distance memory and fine tune my ear has been enormously helpful. Using the blind-fold has given me performance confidence.

Working with creative outlines over time has allowed me to feel the essence of the basic emotional rhythm. I do not always succeed at experiencing complete connection with my

music to the level that I experience an emotional reaction every time I perform. I have had many successes under Rosoff's guidance in lessons. I believe I am able to express my personal convictions in the music in public performances more consistently with each attempt.

My ability to learn new repertoire more quickly has greatly improved. Outlining the essence of each work, particularly long movements, has allowed me to experience the music much earlier, and has allowed me the opportunity to bring repertoire to a higher level of musical understanding. I have also discovered that becoming aware of the underpinnings of an outline greatly helps me retain repertoire learned for longer periods of time before losing it. For example, I learned and played the *Prelude, Chorale and Fugue*, by Cesar Franck during the summer and fall of 2009. After performing the work for the last time in early May 2010, I put the work away. I decided to bring the work back to play for possible auditions in December—seven months after not playing the work. I decided to try playing the prelude and chorale sections without any review to see how much I could remember. I was delighted when I realized I was able to play through the first twelve pages in tempo by memory with very minimal note slips and without stopping. A seven-month hiatus in previous years would have meant much review before any level of successful performance would have been possible.

Learning to transpose difficult passages, especially those with thick textures have come slowly. Developing transposition skills that I can comfortably use as a practice technique are a work in progress. Experiencing the benefits of this type of practice has increased my commitment to working more regularly on these skills during practicing.

The most difficult practice strategy to learn has been upside-down practice. I was first introduced to this concept by pianist Brian Ganz. His suggestion, however, was to cross hands, allowing the left hand to play the right hand notes, and vice versa. Rosoff advocates keeping the hands on the correct side of the body, and visually flipping the clefs so that the left

hand is playing the treble clef below the right hand, which is playing the left hand. This is more challenging and I have had great difficulty cultivating this skill. The goal of the process is to allow the ear to clearly hear the left hand, or bass melodies and harmonies. The first step in this process is to allow both hands to play the left hand clef and subsequently the right hand clef. This is very useful and valuable in hearing each hand with more clarity. Playing each clef with both hands allows the opposite part of the brain to digest the music more securely.

In summation, my efforts to incorporate this approach to learning have greatly enhanced my ability to put the musical content first. My musical convictions develop from the beginning of learning new repertoire, and have deepened with repertoire previously played. My rate of learning has improved significantly during the past three years.

Application of Concepts in the Independent Studio:

Applying many of these concepts to my private teaching has been a continuous process since 2007. As my comfort level with specific practice ideas and physical motions became more natural, I experimented with teaching them to my students. The easiest transference has occurred with my high school students, because they are intellectually capable of understanding a reasonably well-crafted, brief explanation of new practice and playing suggestions. I am anxious to experiment with teaching these concepts to younger students by the use of games and other ways of producing the desired results without resorting to lengthy explanations that are too sophisticated.

The multiple steps explained in this document for opening up phrases gradually can be overwhelming for many teenagers. I have discovered, however, that assigning just one level of an outline for an entire week is a helpful practice strategy and slowly develops the student's sense of listening. Test measures have been very successful because they involve a short, one-

measure segment. Each level of outline must be introduced to the student first in the lesson to assure correct practice habits at home.

Teaching students about the double-escapement mechanism of the piano has been rewarding, and has produced significant improvement in both technical fluency and a warmer, richer sound. The concept must be reinforced regularly because each new piece brings different challenges in improvement in both technical fluency and musicianship. It is easy for students to become side-tracked and revert to pushing into the keys and hanging onto notes. Developing the discipline and desire to practice with more focus is very challenging for high school students. The urge to "just play" is strong. The benefits of creative practicing must be reinforced weekly, and the students must see success in the lesson before transference to home practice can occur.

My greatest future challenge lies in teaching very young students and beginners how to listen and feel the physical aspect of playing without allowing the reading portion of the skills to interfere. Much experimentation will be needed for me to develop a successful approach that offers students the freedom to explore the musical content first before becoming bogged down in note reading.

Application of Concepts in the Collegiate Studio:

I am anxious to incorporate many of these concepts into an existing college curriculum. Experimentation with twice weekly, shorter lessons is one of my first goals. I would like to try a program that encompasses three levels of learning:

1. A forty-five minute lesson that focuses on repertoire and the practice strategies necessary for flushing out musical understanding in the early weeks of study
2. A twenty-to-thirty minute lesson that focuses on the physical aspect of playing. The focus of this session would be to try different set-ups described in an earlier chapter.

Perhaps an etude could be included that would reinforce the concept taught by placing it in a musical context.

3. Frequent group studio classes that would encompass performance of repertoire at all stages of learning. Students could learn the art of outlining from each other and experience the filling in and opening up of phrases. The effect of this type of work would be analyzed and discussed. Studio classes would also provide a conduit for practicing physical motions that would then be fine-tuned in lessons. This would save lesson time by avoiding overlapping explanations. The successful performance of outlines could be heard and students would be encouraged to become active in the listening process. Students would be asked to listen for the most important aspects of a successful outline:

- Was there clarity of a musical idea?
- Did all sections of the outline form a musical statement?
- From the outline played, was there musical understanding of what the piece might be about?

These are some of the questions that could be asked to stimulate thoughtful conversation and a lively exchange of ideas. It is only when the student physically experiences the changes in sound and technical freedom in the lesson, that a trusting and committed working relationship can be fostered between teacher and student. In the end, each pianist must find his or her own way. Perhaps Rosoff gets to the heart of effective pianism when she expounds,

“You can't think the music when you perform—you've got to allow it to happen; just let it out. Don't try to make the music beautiful—it *is* beautiful; just let it out.”⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Statement taken from Abby Whiteside Foundation website: www.abbywhitesidefoundation.org.

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