International outlook of musical interpretation and pedagogical methods

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Research Context

Performing piano is one thing, but teaching is another. One can be an excellent pianist as a performer, but can be weak in his teaching. Teaching is extremely valuable as it is what shapes piano students in the ways they solve technical issues, become creative, and interpret music. The end goal is to create expressive music that comes from the heart.

Research Question and Method

What pedagogical methods do piano teachers apply?

Research method: Observation of masterclasses in InterHarmony International Music Festival in Acqui Terme, Italy

Findings

I can categorize the pedagogical methods I observed into physical and listening. Physical requires the use of the body to promote ideal relaxed posture while preventing injuries and maximizing efficiency. Listening requires active ears to pay attention to what quality of sounds I am making and how they are working together.

#1: Physical methods

Arms/wrist/hands

- **use of relaxed arms and their weight and gravity for dynamics and deeper sound, not by force**
- **wrist rotation (doorknob motion) for efficiency in moving**
- **rotate the wrist in circular motion to feel smooth continuous movement**
- **the shape of hand determines how sound is projected**

Fingers:

- **firm fingers on keys to bring out melodies**
- **gravity falls to fingers for strength and presence ("deep into the keys")**
- **to produce soft chords, stay on the keys closely before playing into keys rather than from higher above**
- **"caress" the keys with flat fingers and flexible wrist for soft vocalized melodies (Chopin)**

#2: Listening methods

- **Listening for pauses before moving on to new phrase; pause to prepare**
- **soprano and bass voices should be brought out**
- **listen for something, then fingers will follow and they will sound**
- **connect to vocal music: sing your melodic line (Schubert)**
- **Legato: connecting sounds, not fingers**
- **imitate other instruments to create color**
- **Shape with time signature to making it flowing and have direction**
- **dark and bright vs soft and loud**

Conclusion

Technique serves the music. The aim of good physical technique is to create ease and effectively produce desirable sound. Listening actively and mindfully is important so that you know how to make music expressive and create your own interpretation.