

preface: zen and the art of piano technique [by surendran reddy]

a few anecdotes and acknowledgements

my piano teachers

first of all i would like to mention with gratitude a few extremely important people in my musical life who helped form the pianist and composer i was and am (and will be); of course there are far too many to thank here individually, although i will say that i am grateful to you all, but the following four stand out as pillars in my musical education and development as a pianist.

isabel rademeyer

one of my earliest piano teachers was **isabel rademeyer**, a dear sweet lady, as gentle as a lamb who taught with an almost maternal love and care. i will never forget how she sat quietly weeping next to me while i played the sublime tones of a mozart slow movement at the age of maybe 8 or 9. this ability to emote so intensively and her lack of inhibitions to expose her feelings consolidated for me what i already guessed to be the unbelievable expressive power intrinsic in all great music and significantly inspired my life's ambition to explore the incredible and mysterious world of music, art, truth and beauty that is often for me far more real (actual?) than the so-called real one. (correct)

anthony walker

mrs rademeyer had the wisdom and foresight, *and* humility, to realise timeously when i had reached a point in my musical development where she was unable to do more for me, and sent me on to another teacher at the then rhodesian academy of music in bulawayo (in present-day zimbabwe), **anthony walker**. like all change this was at first accompanied by certain difficulties and i had to grow accustomed to mr walker's slightly stricter approach and a more disciplined method for practising, but i soon grew to love and respect my new teacher greatly, who prepared me to the point where at the age of 14 i was able to win a scholarship to the royal college of music in london - a

wonderful opportunity for me to further my music studies but also, and perhaps more importantly, an opportunity for me to escape the terrible civil war (what war is not terrible?) that waged in zimbabwe at the time, where amongst other atrocities 16 year old youths were enlisted to fight (frequently being killed doing so) so-called terrorists sometimes against their own political ideals. i myself as a confirmed pacifist would undoubtedly have landed up in jail, or worse (if death can be considered worse then locking a man up in a cage ... for any reason whatsoever, but *particularly* for simply believing in peace.)

amongst the innumerable things i learned from mr walker he introduced me to hanon's famous or infamous, much loved and much hated by pianists over decades and from all over the world: "the virtuoso pianist". and now i give you something far worse, - my exercises - ; but it is necessary for me first to introduce them to you, and that involves saying thank u to my former piano teachers.

i could write volumes about what i learned from mr walker (or anthony, as he prefers me to refer to him nowadays) but this is not the time and place here. that might come in volume 2 of the exercises! ;-) but suffice it to say that i thank him from the bottom (and the top) of my heart for everything he did for me; and that *he* is partly to blame for this new book of exercises that i am foisting upon the world now and future generations of poor unsuspecting piano victims ;-)!

bernard roberts

after i accepted the scholarship and began my studies in london i became a pupil of **bernard roberts** - in my opinion one of the greatest beethoven exponents i know. he taught me a lot, but we also had a somewhat stormy relationship at times because i did not share his opinion that beethoven - although i would be the first to acknowledge beethoven's greatness - represented the pinnacle of music history after which everything goes downhill. perhaps i misrepresent professor roberts if i seem to exaggerate a bit, but this is how it appeared to me at the time, and as i had a passion for contemporary music, which appeared to be the language of my time and

spoke to me with a directness that i failed then to perceive in earlier music - let's put it bluntly: i "took umbrage". at any rate it was often the case that after my weekly lesson the next student would wait patiently but fearfully outside the room long after his scheduled time peering apprehensively through the glass window in the door and deciding that it would be safer to stay outside once he noticed a livid, red-in-the-face professor roberts passionately arguing (while gesticulating almost to the point of attacking) with a 15-year-old boy who coolly sat on the piano stool venturing his typically ironic and sardonic, even sarcastic remarks, perhaps defending the 20th-century against beethoven, who though not god i might now even grant could be better than that ... , but nevertheless, then and now, not necessarily the be-all and end-all of all musical creation.

bernard, amongst many other things, taught me the correct - or what i consider to be the correct - finger technique in playing the piano, and i'd like to share this with you, but more of that later. thank you bernard - you showed me the way. :-)

i was going through a phase in my life at that time when i used to practise sometimes between 8 and 12 hours a day. i used to play on a semitone-flat second-hand piano in a cold enclosed verandah made of wood and glass attached to the back of the house in which i lived. in winter there would be icicles on the piano keys and after 10 minutes of playing i would have to thaw my fingers on a paraffin heater next to me until i could move them again and continue playing! sometimes i would prepare a couple of sandwiches in the morning for "lunch" so that i wouldn't have to interrupt my session and could continue practising with the right hand while i ate a sandwich using the other, and vice versa! i don't recommend this to anyone. indeed it isn't necessary to spend so much time staring at a zebra-crossing that happens to produce sound. i now know shortcuts that enable one to practise more efficiently *and* have time to enjoy life as well. because i was sometimes stupid i hope that my pupils will be more sensible. that to me is one of the reasons for teaching: not merely that the student should emulate what he thinks the teacher does or did "right", but rather learns from the "mistakes" of his teacher and finds a better way - above all: *his own*.

as douglas adams so aptly (appositely) puts it in the last volume of his trilogy in 5 parts, "mostly harmless" (pp 664 - 665) : all i can suggest is that if you take decisions that are exactly opposite to the sort of decisions that i've taken, then maybe you won't finish up at the end of your life ... ' she paused, and filled her lungs for a good shout,' ... in a smelly old cave like this! (quote full paragraph). if i have achieved this one thing then i will feel that my life has been fulfilled. bear in mind: too much practice can even be worse than too little!

once when bernard realised that i spent literally hours and hours at the keyboard he told me that i should rather play for an hour or so and then go for a walk for an hour. of course you also "practise" when u just think about music - and sometimes achieve even more this way than when u merely sit at the keyboard and move your fingers in a mindless way. he told me to read "winnie the pooh" which i had forgotten, having read it or having had it read to me as a small child, which i found quite insulting as i had started reading shakespeare at the age of about 4 (not understanding anything, of course - but perhaps more than i do today!) and while i was his pupil i was steeped in complex russian literature, modern poetry and perhaps the post-modernist novel as well - i can't remember now. why should i read a children's book? *now* i know what he meant, and i highly recommend it too (or both books rather) to u as well. :-)

yonty solomon

so, after 3 years of this stormy, intense and extremely educative time with bernard roberts i moved on to a new piano teacher: **yonty solomon** - and *that* was like a holiday!

i was recommended to go to him by my best friend, **keith burstein** - the now acclaimed contemporary composer whose opera " ..." was a success at a recent edinburgh festival. his own first experience of yonty was for him fairly gruelling as after phoning him up and expressing his desire to study with him yonty cordially invited him to his home - yonty usually taught on his own grand piano at his home in hampstead heath rather than coming in to the college, and when keith asked him what he should prepare for the first lesson

- scheduled for less than a week later - yonty (b)lithely chanted a list over the phone that included a couple of major concertos, a big sonata, some études and a few other highly virtuoso tidbits! this was pure horror for keith, who was unable to learn quickly and took sometimes more than half a year in order to learn a new piece. he had an almost teutonic methodical-ness when preparing a work and also with scheduling his time, unable to start any practising session if it wasn't exactly on the hour, or exactly on the half-hour in between. i used to delight in disturbing him at "irregular" times - such as arriving at 10:02 and leaving at, let us say, 10:33 - forcing him to wait almost half an hour before he could start working again at 11 - but then, of course i'd be back from my next-door practice-room at 10:58. this way he was hardly ever able to get anything done! i am convinced that my somewhat sadistic interruptions contributed significantly to his admittedly hard-won success as a major contemporary composer - and therefore with respect to him "je ne regrette rien". ("non, rien de rien ...").

for keith yonty's daunting list of practically the most difficult works in the piano repertory - none of which he knew already - was an almost insuperable hurdle. (yonty wouldn't have given it a second thought as he was the kind of person who could learn boulez's notorious 2nd piano sonata *from memory* within a week, or 2 at the most. in fact i believe he is known to have done just that!) i on the other hand could sight-read with a fair amount of ease, so i could hardly wait to have my first lesson.

i jumped into a tube train on the allotted day and a few minutes later, deep underground between two stations, the train stopped. i have always suffered from claustrophobia and it was terrible to wait there for half an hour while one could sense everyone else's increasing fear, but of course with typical - though delightful at times - english reserve - no one deigned to say anything. panic rose within me and i was convinced i would meet my death 600 metres - or is it feet? at any rate more than 6 feet ... underground. fortunately after the harrowing wait we moved on again but i was so shaken that i didn't use a tube train again for at least 20 years, and i got out immediately at the next station - though it wasn't my final destination.

i got to a phone booth and phoned yonty (english expression?) (coin box) (who calmed me down and was exceedingly reassuring and told me to jump into a taxi - which he offered to pay for, me being a fairly impoverished music student then, as opposed to an extremely impoverished composer now! - and i did manage to get to my lesson in the end!

it was wonderful! he delighted me with his wit, humour, immense knowledge of music and gentle didactic suggestions - never dictating anything at all or trying to change u, but simply coaxing u into giving of your best. after three such lessons he told me - though i was only about 17 or 18 at the time - that i was already a finished pianist, implying that he did not want to interfere with the interpretative abilities and performance skills i had by then developed. from that moment on i never felt i *had* to play anything for him - as in a kind of audition or test - but did so only if the moment seemed appropriate - and we spent a year or so having profound and for me highly illuminating conversations about music and art in general. he would tour extensively and come back from, let us say, scandinavia, and say - "surendran, i've organised 40 recitals for u" while i was still a student. mostly i had to decline as i might have been in the middle of exams or something and was in any case studying musicology; and by that stage i had abandoned the idea of becoming a concert pianist of which i had already had a taste, and found boring: living out of a suitcase and playing one of ten hackneyed piano concertos for the rest of your life.

yonty also used to give the most wonderful dinner parties where he would cook gourmet meals and invite the most interesting and entertaining people. by his belief in me and confirmation (encouragement) of what i had already learned he gave me the courage to embark on the path i set upon and i would never have become the musician and composer i turned out to be without his help. for this i thank him deeply.

tips for the budding pianist, piano student, and maybe even the professional pianist

practice makes perfect?

there are many different ways of playing the piano and coping with its concomitant technical problems and perhaps there are as many as there are pianists. at any rate, in this book i would like to share with you my approach to technique and also what i have learned about music and interpretation over the years, including from the teachers i have mentioned above.

in my phase where i would practise for 8 to 12 hours a day my session would begin with round about 4 hours of exercises alone, starting with the complete hanon "virtuoso pianist", an hour of octaves and other exercises of my own devising. i would not recommend this very strict, almost kafkaesque regime to anyone; but at any rate over the years i devised a set of exercises that helped me a great deal in my preparations for public recitals and concerto performances, and some of these exercises form the body of this volume.

it is necessary for me to make some comments as well however, because it is not only the exercises that count but the way that one plays them. i feel that it is also exigent to explain the *raison d'être* behind them in order that the potential student can practise them with understanding and not merely as a mindless movement of the fingers.

posture

first of all posture is of the utmost importance when one sits at the piano. i prefer an upright but relaxed position with the back supported but not tense spine rather than collapsed in on itself. (?) the height of the piano stool should be such that when the hands are placed on the keyboard the arms are parallel to the floor - not sloping downwards into it, and not groping upwards from below - as this causes unnecessary tension. a position in which the arms are parallel to the floor is the most balanced and relaxed one and affords the most strength and power.

finger, hand and arm positions

the fingers should be rounded resulting from a hand position as when holding the proverbial orange, with the fingers vertical to the keys and fully in contact with them - not hovering above them. this contact with the keys is of crucial importance and enables the minimum of movement - only what is necessary - and permits maximum velocity and dexterity.

with the parallel-to-the-floor arm position there is a line from the arm, through the wrist and to the fingers, expressing itself at right angles in the tips of the fingers that are as far as possible always in contact with the keys.

the arm should not be bent in relation to the hand, and the hand also not in relation to the arm. complete relaxation and flexibility of the wrist makes it possible for the energy to flow smoothly from the emotional centre and the point of intellectual motivation, through the arm, through the wrist and the fingers, reaching their tips, where it is communicated by direct contact with the keys, making it possible to transform feeling into physical sound which is then perceived by the listener and experienced as emotion.

your instrument

an instrument - whatever it may be - but in this case specifically the piano - is basically an extension of the human body and spirit - expanding the expressive possibilities of, say, the human voice, but at the same time requiring a certain "humanisation" lest it remain an inanimate object (which, in reality, is what it is); in the case of a piano - basically just a conglomerate of pieces of wood and metal with a bit of plastic thrown in (we won't say anything of ivory just at the moment ...)

imagine that the tips of your fingers are the mouthpiece of your musical spirit and that by pressing, stroking, coaxing, even massaging the keys u can incite the instrument to sing. if u tried to sing with your proper voice but tensed up your throat u would find that the sound - if anything other than a croak - that came out would be strained and *** painful both to u and to the ear of the listener: a grating, raspy sound. it's the same with the piano. the wrist may be compared with the throat and by keeping it relaxed and flexible

one can produce a more dulcet and clear tone on the piano, rather than a harsh, grating one, as well as much more variety of possible sound production and subtle nuances of tone, as indeed an actor or singer who keeps his throat relaxed. a good way of thinking of it is to imagine that you are breathing through your wrist and the air needs to extend to the tips of your fingers. the more relaxed your throat the louder and clearer u can project your voice - the more tense and constricted the squeakier and more constrained the sound.

legato, cantabile, transfer of weight and contact with the key surface

then there are the concepts of legato, cantabile and transfer of weight. this works best with the technique of keeping the fingers in contact with the keys. hanon advocates raising them high and striking the keys from above but this is not a good idea. keep the fingers all resting on the key surface and simply depress the relevant finger. try to press until u feel the wood at the bottom of the keyboard - the base of the frame, so to speak, over which the keys are poised. keep the pressure the whole time while retaining a completely relaxed wrist and then transfer this entire weight to the next note. there can be a slight overlap of sound or the transfer can be done quite cleanly - but if there is a gap from one note to the next then the effect of legato is broken. it is in any case a delusory legato, as everybody knows that the moment a key is played on the piano the volume of sound diminishes immediately until - if u hold the note long enough - it will eventually disappear completely. but if one thinks the legato through strongly enough - as though u are singing internally *with* the note u are playing - somehow the illusion or deception works! remember: an instrument is not just a thing - it is an extension of the human body and spirit. if u are unable to turn it into this - or transform it rather in this way - it will simply remain - and sound like - a glorified machine.

when practising my exercises work on this concept of legato and transfer of weight. try to do everything from the key surface - with which u should remain in contact. the fingers are already covering and touching the unplayed keys that are about to come in the following few notes, before one has to change the hand position in order to move on. in this way they are always

there where they are needed well in advance of their "entrance" and always in the right place at the right time. this allows for phenomenal speed when necessary and also greater security. hovering precariously above the notes has the opposite effect. feel the security that resting all the fingers on the keyboard gives u. the piano keys have enough weight to permit this, whereas in some earlier instruments such as the clavichord or some harpsichords this is not possible. there one has to "hover" - for if u tried to rest your fingers on the keys u would unintentionally depress the key and produce a sound not in the original score that may not bring back bach or telemann to haunt u but might nevertheless cause them to turn in their graves ... (may they rest in peace ...)

economy of movement and isolation of various "body parts" (sounds like a horror film!)

try to use only what is necessary when playing the exercises and indeed certain passages in pieces of real music as well. for example when practising a five-finger exercise such as numbers 1 to 20 in hanon's esteemed tome use only the fingers - in contact with the key surface as already mentioned - with a quiet hand and no other unnecessary movements. some pianists can be seen at such moments rotating the entire body as though in an advanced state of hypnotic trance - but this is entirely unnecessary, histrionic and irrelevant to the exercise or music - and has the disadvantage of consuming vast quantities of energy that will not be there when really needed - such as when the double octaves begin, in the middle of a cadenza or when in a piano concerto the entire brass section decides to wage a sonic war with u.

five-finger exercises require only the five fingers and nothing more. double octaves require a flexible wrist. some thick chordal passages will need u to move the whole arm. generous tschaikovskian dynamics such as fff - or even ffff - will require the latent power of your shoulders and indeed maybe also the whole back - and so on. but use only what is required, *especially* when practising exercises.

the zen of technique

although i am a profoundly irreligious person - though not atheistic, agnostic or jehovah's witness - my concept of technique could perhaps be likened to zen. (question: what is the sound of one hand clapping? answer 1: perhaps not unlike that of the opening cadenza of ravel's left hand piano concerto. answer 2: or is it the cadenza that ends this stupendous work? answer 3: perhaps rather the 3 unwritten bars that everybody listens to before the applause breaks loose *after* the final double bar line. answer 4: on a bad day, owing to pathetic advertising and inadequate government cultural funding, the non-applause of the one-armed war veteran who happens to be the only person in the audience of an otherwise vacant hall ...) sorry about that *cough*. i'll try to get back on track.

my idea of technique is that it should be so discreet that nobody else should notice it at all, otherwise it would get in the way of the music. do things while appearing not to do them at all. when it looks - or sounds effortless - then u know u've put enough effort into it. but don't work at this too hard - just let it happen ...

as douglas says:

anything that, in happening, causes something else to happen, causes something else to happen.

anything that, in happening, causes itself to happen again, happens again.

it doesn't necessarily do it in chronological order though.

exercising and making music

i prefer practising technique by means of exercises rather than making an exercise out of a beautiful masterpiece, especially its difficult passages. the technique should be so finely honed that one is always ready to play music, even the technically difficult and virtuosic passages. technique is always subservient to the music - it is a means to an end. when it becomes an end in itself this becomes cheap showmanship with little emotional or aesthetic depth.

an actor trains his voice with exercises so that he can project it powerfully even in a large theatre, control its nuances of expression and numerous colours, tones and inflections, practise pronunciation, enunciation and delivery, etc. all with the aim of presenting his speeches on stages with maximum expressive effect and interpretative meaning.

some pianists repeat a difficult technical passage almost to death and the danger of this is that by the time the performance takes place it has been sucked dry by excessive and meaningless repetition to the point where it ceases to have any emotional meaning and beauty. i am certain that an audience or at least members of an audience can hear this - whether or not they are amateurs of would even describe themselves as musical "ignorami".

each time a piece is played it should sound fresh and new, almost as though it is being composed in the very moment - with the same brilliance and spontaneity that an inspired improvisation could have. if the audience feels that the technical perfection of a performance has been achieved by thousands of repetitions and hours of practice, but remains nevertheless unmoved because of its lack of emotional intensity - then the main purpose of the music has been entirely lost.

although we say that "repetition is the mother of learning" one can only go so far by endlessly repeating a passage and then get stuck. practising with intelligence and an analytical attitude to the technical problems inherent within a difficult passage can achieve far more in less time.

don't practise the mis-takes; practise the - takes

a common error that musicians and students make when practising is to repeat a passage that goes wrong. perhaps everything is going smoothly and then comes a train crash, at which point the player starts from the point where things went wrong and continues a bit, then repeats this until he can play it correctly a few times. usually the next time he plays or at the concert this is the moment that could very well go wrong again. in effect all he has done is consolidated the mistake. the "mistake" occurs in the transition from the point before it took place and *that* is what has to be corrected - not the

incorrect chord or note itself. simply correcting the offending chord or note itself doesn't really solve anything.

this type of repetition and correction is what i refer to as mindless. even once one has realised that one should start a little *before* the point where the problem arose in order to practise the transition, it still makes more sense to adopt an analytical attitude to the problem and first to find out *why* it possibly could have gone wrong. in this way one practises with intelligence and understanding, having identified the problem which therefore in all probability won't happen again; whereas simply repeating without understanding is like taking pot-luck and it is entirely a matter of chance whether or not the passage will be correct in the performance or not.

creativity in practice

owing to the fact that the learning curve is usually steeper in the beginning and then tends to taper off until one reaches a point where no further progress can be made and in particularly difficult passages one seems to get stuck and the piece appears to be unplayable, one needs to implement creative thinking in the process of learning and practising a piece of music.

one of the reasons that one tends to learn faster in the beginning and slows down in almost geometrical progression with time is that the element of interest and novelty is much greater at the start of the learning process. "familiarity breeds contempt" and at a certain point after countless repetitions a kind of boredom sets in - even if only subconsciously - which seriously hinders the learning process.

a child would at this point stop the game he is playing or whatever he is doing and move on to something else. this is always a good idea. however sometimes problems *have* to be solved - such as extreme technical difficulties in a virtuosic piece of music. this is where one can engage one's creativity in practising.

one technique is to make the problem even more difficult. than when you come back to the original one it appears to be easier than it originally did.

this is in itself a good thing because that subconscious internal dialogue that makes you think the passage is impossible and you can never manage to play it effectively paralyzes you - even if you are not aware of it - and works against your achieving the results you wish to achieve. for example you could play a single line melody in octaves - when you come back to the original single line it will appear to be much easier than it originally did. try transposing it to another key; swapping the hands so that the left hand plays what the right hand should, and vice versa. turn the book upside down and try to play the piece like that. (just make sure you get it back the right way round for the concert! i once had a student who came to his lesson in a less than, let us say, entirely sober state and promptly placed his book of bach inventions on the music rack *upside down!* he hadn't noticed at all what he had done and was on the point of starting to play the piece. rather stupidly i pointed out that the book was the wrong way round and he immediately corrected this, but in retrospect i realised that i shouldn't have said anything as, owing to bach's amazing technique of invertible counterpoint the piece would have worked out just as well standing on its head, as it were! indeed after the lesson - which it was in any case necessary to abandon as a result of a certain chemically induced state of mind that made it at that moment impossible for my student to play the piece, even the *right* way round, - after my student left i couldn't resist the temptation of trying to do exactly that: playing the piece upside down. needless to say it worked - as indeed bach always works - no matter how you look at it, from any angle, in any direction, inside-out, outside-in, standing on its head, etc., etc.)

(here insert lewis carroll poem about the old man)

the process of making things more difficult in order to solve an already difficult or seemingly impossible problem frees the brain and allows it to approach the problem creatively; to consider it with the same curiosity and interest that one always has at the beginning of a project, before a certain tediousness and monotony - albeit unconscious - sets in. in this way one practically forces a new incipient learning curve, unlocks the block and progress can be made once more.

always try and see things in new ways. this keeps u on your toes, prevents boredom and broadens the interpretative range of possibilities open to you when playing a piece.

practising by thinking

we practise and play music not only by moving our fingers but also by imagining things in our heads. some people move their fingers on the keyboard which results in sounds and they respond to that. others have a mental image of the sound and then attempt to recreate this internal aural image by depressing the appropriate keys on the keyboard. we have both the outer ears and, in my opinion, the far more powerful inner one. i personally prefer to rely more on the inner ear as a composer and interpreter because it operates in a world where there are no limits; and in the outer, physical world of keys, instruments, fingers, bodies etc. there are always limits. one of the great things about art for me is that it either acknowledges no limits or tries to supercede them. the rest of our earthly lives is basically governed by limitations and limits of all kinds - and although this may sound hyperbolic, this "prison" can be of any size or as sylvia plath so eloquently expressed it, the whole world can be enclosed in a kind of bell jar. real freedom, truth, beauty and meaning can only be found, for me, in the world of art - and of course in love - but the latter is often accompanied by its own problems. a mozart sonata will *never* let u down - people unfortunately often do ...

i did some crazy things during my period of study at the royal college of music and one of the craziest was when i entered into a wager with some of my fellow students that i would learn a concerto without once touching the keyboard but would do everything entirely mentally. the first time i would play the concerto "in the flesh", as it were, would be at the first rehearsal with the orchestra, a couple of days before the final concert. it was frank martin's harpsichord concerto and i did just that: i studied the score, worked out the fingering, which when necessary i would write into the score, memorized it, practised it mentally - all in my head - without once touching a piano keyboard - and then went along to the first rehearsal and played it successfully with the orchestra. i won the bet. it did of course require a

tremendous mental effort but it *was* possible - though i wouldn't recommend learning every work in this way. i wanted to prove a point however, and it worked. what i am trying to say is that this part of our mental faculties - the imagination, the rarefied realm of pure intellectual thought, analysis, the inner ear, etc. constitutes an incredibly powerful tool in the ... of a musician. the tactile sensuality and physical corporeality of actually *playing* the music are of course wonderful assets, but they can sometimes also be a distraction to an authentic understanding of the music. practising in your head is sometimes even more beneficial and effective than doing so physically with your real fingers and your real ears.

when i compose for the piano i prefer to do so without trying things out on the actual keyboard. i prefer to enter the pure world of ideas and write down what i hear there. the necessity to develop the inner ear is essential in the training of a composer, but indeed for all musicians, in my opinion. let's face it: if u are composing a symphony u can't have the berlin philharmonic sitting patiently in an adjacent room waiting until u've finished a page and then, at your request, obligingly playing it for u just so that u can hear what u wrote! u've got to be able to hear it in your head! some conductors and composers *can* do this - others can't, though they pretend to do so. perhaps the latter have other assets such as a posterior profile so attractive that one can temporarily waive aside the paucity of musical depth in their interpretations. the ability to hear with the inner ear can be learned - of that i am quite sure - not some vague esoteric gift - it just takes a lot of work.

past, present and future

t s eliot wrote:

at the centre of the turning world there is only the dance

he also wrote:

(past, present, future)

for me when one interprets, let us say, a classical piece of music it is like an act of time-travelling. with most things when one contemplates the past one has the feeling of moving back in time; we look at old sepia photos and their very brownish colouring tastes of bygone times, things old and half-forgotten (of course they didn't have that colour at that time, when they were bright and new and "contemporary" for the subjects of the photos); period costumes that immediately give us a feeling of moving back perhaps a couple of centuries and entering into an older, less hectic and very different world from ours. when we read shakespeare the very language is different and first we have to learn what the words meant at that time, even though the concepts could be as current as though we heard them on the 8 o' clock news today.

a painting ages with time - the physical painting, i mean - though the idea might be eternal.

but with a piece of music, for example a mozart sonata, if we make the effort to reproduce it authentically - which sometimes involves a perusal of surrounding literature - if we play and hear his music, we are hearing and listening to *exactly* what he himself heard in his head - as though he were right there beside u - or even better - *in* you while u are doing this. or perhaps *u* are in *his* mind while u are doing this.

there is a difference though. we live more than 2 and a half centuries after he was born - and the world has changed quite considerably since then. however it is possible that the way human beings think, feel, live, love, are born, die, philosophise, play, work, have fun, worry about things and so on *ad infinitum* ... , might not be all that different. at any rate the act of interpreting involves for me an act of faith. one travels back in time, enters the mind and being of the composer and also has to *forget* everything that happened *after* the time when he composed his piece - because *none of that has happened yet*.

of course mozart would not necessarily only have lived in the present but would have had his own ideas of the future. (to some extent one could even say he was responsible for creating part of it). this future is part of his

present, a consequence naturally also of his past, and an integral part of his music, mind and being - and this future should indeed concern us - though it might not have anything to do with what "in reality" happened after he departed from this world - or more pertinently, after he wrote the piece which we are trying to interpret.

i never cease to wonder at the great gift the great composers of yesteryear have bequeathed to us - because their music is as alive, fresh, relevant and "contemporary" today as it was when they wrote it. the instruments might have changed of course, and the actual sound significantly so, in many cases. bach's clavichord was worlds apart from the modern steinway grand - the one almost inaudible unless u listen very carefully, the other capable of filling a hall seating 2000 people with a might sound ("that maketh a might sound"?). but this is in my opinion a detail, because the *music* is the same. and what matters is the interpretation - for the key to the music lies in how we interpret the notes on the page, how we unlock their meaning and are capable of reading between - or as i prefer to say - even *behind* the lines. when we listen to a mozart sonata and we make the effort to interpret it authentically, we are listening to the same music he himself heard 250 years ago! what could bring us closer to the man, his deepest self - for in my opinion art is a distillation of the best one can offer the rest of the world - and the past. we leap across 2 and a half centuries and are right there with him - or he does the leaping and is right there in the room with us, here and now!

i think i have made my point and i should not labour it. if i have done so i apologise for this, but i am convinced that many people don't understand this, amongst those even professional musicians.

notes for the introduction

there are many different ways but i want to share mine with u *

notes on exercise book *

the technique of legato and transfer of weight *

correct touch from key surface *

avoidance of unnecessary movement and training exclusively of fingers b4 bringing in other elements *

the zen of technique*

exercises preferable to repeating a passage till death *

technique should be finely honed so that one is always ready to play the music and concentrate only on the music rather than making an exercise out of a beautiful masterpiece *

the practising of errors and consolidating them by meaningless mindless repetition*

practice with intelligence and not just by repetition *

making things more difficult *

swapping of hands *

getting stuck and freeing the brain in order to progress *

always trying to see things in a new way *

the challenge of the new and its stimulation of our interest *

the learning curve - steep in the beginning and gradually tapering off *

getting bored and what happens to the learning process *

practising by thinking*

practising mentally - imagining things and not allowing the physical body to get in the way - the pure world of ideas *

how i compose - preferring not to try things out *

each note is your last philosophy .- extracting everything out of the moment

there is no past and no future only the present

eliot at the centre of the turning universe there is only the dance

repetition in music - things are never the same even if a passage is repeated because music takes place in time and what happened before has an impact on the present repetition

authentic interpretation as an act of time travel reindenken in a past time and shutting out the future

how closely we can get into the mind of a composer when we interpret his work - it is not yesterday - it is now

my mozart story

transposition of passages

and to the memory of my student moses molelekwa

the way children learn

improvisation and its place in classical music

ablenkung of the mind while practising - for example reading

my cembalo concerto story - learning without touching the keyboard - the power of the mind

the image - sound or picture - starts in the mind and this is what one seeks to realise physical in order that others can share it - a necessary process of translation from one medium into another in the absence of telepathy

pressing to the base of the piano keyboard - feeling the wood

legato and cantabile

dynamics - working to limits of strength and beyond in order to push improvement but without tension

how to sit and correct posture

breathing while playing - hanon - breathing in bars - my exercises as well

breathing out - strength gained from this - fast out i mean

the piano is not an instrument but an orchestra

i was always more inspired by other instruments and the voice

trying to go beyond the limitations of instruments

mozart pearly - mozart drama - getting many different tones, sounds and colours rather than one boring one - i find wind players do this a lot

the yoga exercises stretching fingers arm etc

and salute to the sun

getting to know the piano

becoming one with it

instrument as extension of the body

as indeed the voice is part of it

pianists unless u are elton john or sviatoslav richter can't usually carry their instruments around with them so it is crucial to get to know your instrument

my exercises help to serve this purpose

hanon is too quick

one needs to hone in on each note

often there are subtle differences in weight etc

very few pianos are absolutely perfect or even

chromatic scale

the relationship between performance, interpretation, and composition - and improvisation

mosehle joseph mosheshe

my teacher anthony walker

felix otterbeck

philipp

flore

no 5

check right for oktavierung when it gets too high

somewhere in the middle i went to a lower octave cos the exercise got too high

6 and 7 can be played in other keys for ex. d flat so that black notes are also practised

u could change from day to day - different keys

also modes