



# PRACTICE TECHNIQUE FOR THE INTERMEDIATE AND ADVANCED STUDENT

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## **Abstrak:**

*Tulisan ini membahas tentang hal-hal dasar apakah yang perlu dikuatkan oleh murid-murid dalam latihan piano mereka, khususnya untuk siswa intermediate dan advanced.*

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## **“Technique, the Outgrowth of Musical Thought.”**

*- Vladimir Horowitz-*

Pianists perpetually face a dilemma about pianism - specifically, how to learn or teach piano technique. We encounter a myriad of different ways of playing the piano, and recognize that even “experts” of piano technique, whether they are teachers or performers, often disagree on what are the essential principles of healthy piano playing. At times, the paradox of the naturally gifted pianist reveals itself - there are instances of technically facile performers who are not aware of important elements of piano technique, because they have never had to examine or question them. Often, the refrain from piano teachers is “Practice, Practice, and Practice”. Scales, arpeggios, and technical exercises are prescribed, without acknowledging that an improper technical or practice approach will not lead to natural facility, and may in fact; damage it.

Given the level of stress on young piano students today, from family, school and peer groups, it should come as no surprise that piano teachers find them distracted - unable to focus and dedicate themselves to music making. Unfortunately, a common by-product of modern living is tension. Many talented young pianists struggle to overcome tension at



the keyboard, and fail. They either learn to live with pain and insecurity, or, more often than not, they drop out. A piano teacher usually does a lot of rehabilitative work with their students, trying to retrain their physical instincts and gestures at the keyboard. A spiral of incomplete technical thinking, over-ambitious repertoire and little time for easeful practice leads to a high incidence of serious injuries. Piano teachers have become more aware of piano playing casualties than ever before - carpal tunnel syndrome, tendonitis, and other repetitive motion related injuries are now familiar terms for many teachers.

Structuring each practice session is a step in the right direction. The students need to set their both long and short range goals. Long range goals generally take more than a week to accomplish. It might include memorizing, refining, and polishing a certain amount of repertoire. Short range goals can be accomplished within each practice session. Defining short range goals is perhaps the most important aspect of structuring a practice session. It might include choosing fingering, theoretical analysis, and many more. Eventually students become conditioned to plan, in a detailed manner, activities for a practice session. A practice log is recommended to keep track all the plans and goals that need to be done.

The intermediate level is a crucial time for most students. A good practice habits need to be established by this level. There are many important factors that need to be addressed in practicing. Listening is the most important aspect in practicing. In practicing, all activities relate to one another. For example, technique influences rhythm, musicality, and tone quality. Each of these factors must harmonize with our total concept of composition. That concept is ultimately influenced by the way in which we listen to our practicing. Listening to our own playing is the best teacher we can get. By listening to our own playing, we can identify things that need to be fixed or polished in our playing. One needs to know what kind of sound they want to get from the music, and never give up practicing the music until they get the sound that they want to hear.

Relaxation is another essential factor in playing the piano. What kind of relaxation should one aim for at the keyboard? Obviously, an uncontrolled drop of the arm does not contribute to controlled sound. The "singing tone" which many pianists hold dear is produced, not only by pressing into the key beds, but also by lowering the keys at various rates of



speed from slow (various degrees of softness) to fast (various degrees of loudness). Relaxation at the piano is not a total surrender of control over the muscles. It involves responsiveness on the spur of the moment, to maintain musical as well as technical continuity.

Posture is crucial - sit straight, with firm shoulders pulled back and the chest forward. This creates a proper sense of balance at the piano. The term "shaping" overlaps Bernstein's concept of keyboard choreography, referring to a physical manifestation of phrasing, through undulations of the wrist or hand which follow the musical shape of the phrase. The wrist acts like a springboard, and should not be forced down in a collapsed position. Total relaxation is not the goal - neither is holding extreme body positions. Joints must not collapse, because they prohibit free motion. Tension will result, just as it can be caused by excess muscular activity. Avoid isometric dual muscular contractions which create tension. The finger tip is a locus of activity, grabbing the key to create a full sound without harshness. Grabbing must be followed by release through rotation.

All discussions of piano technique must recognize that eventually, individuals must find their own way of playing the piano comfortably. Music study and performance is not simply an avocation or a pleasurable pastime; it is a way of life. One does not have to aspire to a career in music in order to be a devoted student of music and to perform on the highest level. The finest teaching encourages a dedication to practicing that leads toward self-realization. Motivated by a love of music and a clear understanding of the reasons for practicing, music students, regardless of their age or degree of accomplishment, can establish so deep an accord between their musical selves and their personal selves that eventually music and life interact in a never-ending cycle of fulfillment. Devoted musicians serve music just as religious people serve God, namely, out of love and reverence. Devoted practitioners are prepared to do whatever music requires of them, whatever the difficulties and however long it takes. Their reward transcends even the ability to master music on an instrument. For productive practicing can harmonize the person as well as the musician and actually lead toward the integration of the personality.