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ETHICS AND ESTHETICS  
OF  
PIANO-PLAYING

CONSTANTIN VON STERNBERG

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ETHICS AND ESTHETICS  
OF  
PIANO-PLAYING



ETHICS AND ESTHETICS  
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PIANO-PLAYING

*By*  
CONSTANTIN VON STERNBERG

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To

**Josef Hofmann**

whose masterly artistry

has inspired many of its thoughts

and strengthened many into convictions,

this booklet is inscribed

in token of an old and devoted friendship.



## CONTENTS

	PAGE
MAN AND ART	1
THE INTERPRETATIVE ARTIST	8
THE LAY AUDITOR	14
THE THREE PHASES OF UNDERSTANDING	20
RULES ARE NOT LAWS	27
OLD ERRORS	33
ACCENT	50
TEMPO	71
TONE-MEASURING THROUGH THE EAR	86
CONCLUSION	98



# ETHICS AND ESTHETICS OF PIANO-PLAYING

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## Man and Art.

The reciprocal relations between life and art have in all ages attracted the attention of great thinkers. Ever since the days of Thales of Miletus—over two centuries before Plato—the speculators on this subject have formed an unbroken line reaching to our present age and their speculations are so interesting as to reward an attentive reader well for his patience. Even when succeeding ages proved the conclusion of their antecessors to be erroneous, one almost regrets to part with such errors; for they arose from systems of thought conceived in honesty and sincerity, and with astonishing ingenuity.

The purpose of this little volume requires no more than a brief summing up of the net results of these speculations. This summarizing is greatly simplified by the circumstance that in more recent times mere speculation has blossomed into practical investigation. Philosophy, from its lofty base of abstract thought, has reached out into the more material

## *Ethics and Esthetics of Piano-Playing*

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realms of physics and biology, and has thus obtained results of a nature so practical and relatively simple that they can be summed up in a very few words.

It is evident at the outset that such life as is merely organic cannot stand in any relations of mutuality to art. It may inspire art, but it is incapable of receiving, much less absorbing, its returns. Hence, the only form or type of life admitting of mutual relations with art is "conscious" life.

Now, of all manifestations of conscious life, Man has fairly good reason to regard himself as both the most complete and the most complex. What is the nature of the "consciousness," whence it comes (scientifically speaking), whither it leads, are questions which will probably never be answered. It makes very little difference whether we accept the practically identical teachings of Goethe, Huxley and Darwin or those of Agassiz, Neumeister and Chamberlain; it matters not whether Man is involuted from all lower orders of creation and inherits the aggregate of the physiological and spiritual experience from all species, or only from his own—in neither doctrine can we find the faintest glimpse of enlightenment as to the processes by which Man developed his consciousness of life and self. But we do know that he has attained to this consciousness; we

## Man and Art

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know that this consciousness is a living force; and we also know a little of the mightiness of this force. For by its exercise Man has, in large measure, subordinated the blind forces of nature to his will and has projected his intellect far beyond the range of his mere bodily existence. With this power Man encompasses the macrocosm and microcosm of the known universe and by this power he is driven to search still further for the Unknown—yes, even for the Unknowable.

Containing thus within himself the sum of all that precedent life through which he was evolved from other species or from his own; containing, consequently, the presage of some form of life still higher than his own; Man must, logically, have more to say for himself than all his evolutionary precursors, and therefore needs, more than any of them, the greatest number and variety of instruments through which to express the struggle of the human spirit. For this innate craving for individual *expression* is the chiefest attribute of conscious life.

But, we might ask, what is the aim and purpose of expression? Is it merely to portray or translate human impulses with no end beyond itself? Is it merely a mechanical reflex action of nerve stimuli and hence an effect rather than a cause? It is not so in the animal kingdom. The animal uses its

## *Ethics and Esthetics of Piano-Playing*

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cry for a purpose. It calls for food, for its mate, for relief in pain, for help in danger or as a warning of it to its kindred. Should Man alone, then, express himself without a purpose? Should Man alone not feel the need of placing himself in reciprocal relation with his environment? And should Man confine his expression to his physical needs, like an animal, and let his richer inner life remain unrepresented? There seems to be no room for such a thought when we reflect how numerous and how diversified are the forms of expression which he has already evolved and which he strives with untiring energy to extend in scope and number.

The desire for *communication* is rooted in Man. It is an instinct. Not merely to express, but to communicate himself, Man has evolved language. And, not satisfied with this, he has one by one enlisted every organ of perception to this end. Moreover, he has multiplied the services of every organ in such ways as to enable him to substitute one for the other. Thus has he made the word of his mouth—intended primarily for the ear of his fellowman—accessible to the eye through script and print. Thus has he, when words proved inadequate to his purpose, evolved other vehicles of thought and feeling, such as design, color, tone, rhythm, harmony, gesture, etc.,



and has again multiplied the employment of these in countless ways. Thus Man has finally evolved *Art*.\* And let us thoroughly understand that he evolved Art to provide for necessities not a whit less insistent than those inherent in his physical existence.

No sooner did he find his physical necessities provided for by Nature than there dawned in him the consciousness of a life within himself, not altogether independent of, yet entirely apart from, any merely creature phenomenon. When he came to a realization of this *inner life*, the Art-instinct awoke in him. However crude the manifestations of his instinct were, however primitive his script, his images and decorations, let us bear well in mind that each of them in its turn and place expressed that *which he could utter through no other medium*.

Let the prosaic or vulgar Bœotian, who disparages Art as a mere luxury, remember that "life" and "existence" are not synonyms, but almost antonyms. True, for that mere "existence" which Man—created in God's image—justly scorns, Art is quite unnecessary. Yet to his spiritual "life" Art is no more a luxury than food is to his stomach. For it is not Man's physical body alone that demands to be fed. His mind, soul, intellect, reason,

\*The term "Art" is used here in its Continental European sense, meaning an expression of purely psychic processes.

imagination, in short, all that serves to develop and fill out his inner life, requires to be supplied with such food as he *cannot obtain without the aid of Art.*

All that lifts Man above the animal, subsists more or less directly upon Art. But for Art, the past would have remained as unknown to Man as it is to the animal. Every archæologist will bear out this statement. Religion might still be struggling with the darkness of barbarism but for the services that Art has rendered it. In its cause, Art has attuned the mind, through the senses, to things spiritual and celestial. Even the concrete Sciences, becoming conscious of their imperfections, have called in the assistance of Art. In short, without Art, every distinction between the savage and modern Man falls to the ground, for in Art—and in Art alone—Man has recorded the stages of his psychic development. *In Art Man writes the history of his soul.*

The young art-student should derive strength from such reflections. When dismaying experiences turn him from belief to doubt; when he is jostled aside by heartless money-hunters; when sordid critics deprecate or ridicule his vocation; let him remember how lofty and instinct with human dignity is the cause to which he has vowed allegiance—how worthy it is of his best endeavors, of

## *Man and Art*

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his undivided aspirations, of his noblest devotion.

The student should be animated by this spirit not only in his workroom, but in the whole of life. His personal conduct as well as his work should reveal the presence of that inspiring self-respect which the ideal nature of his task seems necessarily to invoke.

## The Interpretative Artist.

Art, then, is a psychic *message*. A message from soul to soul. What is its chiefest requirement? What can be more important to a message than that it reach its destination? A message must be received and *understood*. A message sent by wireless telegraphy, finding no syntonic receiver, is, so far as we know, energy lost in space. A work of Art that is not understood is in a similar way a miscarriage and without result. Both messages presuppose the recipient's familiarity with the language in which they are expressed; but, taking this for granted, let us ask whether it is always possible for the author of a message to be also its transmitter or deliverer. Does not the word "message" denote communication through an agency? When a message is indited, only half of its purpose is attained. For the other half it needs a *messenger*. This messenger must be trustworthy, reliable, clever and, often, courageous. Such messengers are rare—very rare; but the master in Art sets his message free and lets it take its chances of finding deliverers. The test has never failed. The messenger has always appeared.

Now, if a messenger realizes the importance of his service he will at once exert his utmost ingenuity to perfect his *equipment*. He will

increase his speed, more surely provide for his safety and reliability, in short, he will use his best powers to make himself more and more worthy of his trust.

This done, he will expand his sphere of action. Messages are sometimes couched in terms too lofty, too scholarly or too ambiguous for the intelligence of the recipient; in such cases the messenger becomes an *interpreter*, translating the too scholarly wording into more colloquial terms or defining the too ambiguous words more clearly. Furthermore, when the message devolves some unwelcome task upon the recipient, the messenger resorts to personal persuasion to sweeten his message. Thus he develops step by step from a mere messenger into a representative, deputy, envoy, ambassador, minister plenipotentiary! And he obtains these promotions solely by means of his interior ingenuity and merit.

If, for the sake of analogy, we give but a moment's thought to the vast wealth invested in the organization of the mails, telegraphs, railroads, delivery systems of all kinds in our civilization, and reflect that these elaborate devices are adapted to fulfill the physical life of modern Man, we cannot wonder that the task of transmitting the intangible realities from mind to mind should tempt Man's ingenuity in at least an equal degree.

## *Ethics and Esthetics of Piano-Playing*

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Not every one, conversant with the language of sentiment and emotion, is inspired to *make* new revelations, but there are some who are fully capable of fathoming and *interpreting* them when they are made and of bringing them, through their interpretation, within the mental reach of those to whom, but for this noble service, they would have remained insoluble mysteries.

Here, then, in this vicarial office, we salute *the interpretative artist*—the actor, singer, elocutionist, virtuoso; the esthetic essayist; the literary, pictorial and—that rarest of all interpreters—the musical critic.

How much creative genius owes to interpretative genius, or on which side the obligations are greater, it would be impossible to say; for they are not different degrees, but altogether different types, of genius; yet they are connected by so close a kinship as to make an exact calculation of their mutual indebtedness impossible. Neither can accomplish anything without the other.

As a messenger is accountable to both sender and recipient of his message, so is the interpretative artist in a position of twofold trust and, therefore, of *twofold responsibility*. The sender of his message—creative genius—is behind him; before him sits an expectant and confiding audience, the sovereign addressee.

## *The Interpretative Artist*

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The interpretative artist has, therefore, first to enter into the *spirit* of his message; to penetrate its ultimate meaning; to read in, as well as between, the lines. And then he has to train and develop his faculties of delivery, of vital reproduction, to such a degree as to enable him to fix his message decisively, and with no danger of being misunderstood, in the mind of his auditor.

Yet, strange to say, the integrity of these relations is far oftener violated than respected. Very much of current music-making is gone through with in blank indifference to the composer's intentions and with utter disregard of the auditor's just claim to an *honest* interpretation. The amount of singing that is done with no higher aim than to display the voice of the singer or the singer's laryngeal dexterity may be inferred from the sad circumstance that the vast majority of opera-goers are no longer attracted by the Opera itself; but are interested in, and applaud, only the famous vocalists who figure in it. It is still worse with piano-playing. The singer who ignores the composer's ideas may still, and often does, show a compensating respect for his audience by a lavish display of the sensuous charms of his well-trained voice. Pianists fail rather often to grant their listeners even the meagre indemnity of flattering their ears with

## *Ethics and Esthetics of Piano-Playing*

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a fine touch and noble tone. Particularly is this true of amateurs and students, who are usually so fully occupied with their everlasting technic as to lose sight completely of the very aim and purpose of their playing. It usually does not satisfy them to play what they could play well. They gauge the value of a piece by its mechanical difficulty—seldom by its beauty. So, they would rather play a difficult piece badly than an easier piece enjoyably, and the auditor has “to pay the piper.” The average pianist is so deeply concerned about his “success,” too, that he is apt to forget the import of the work he is playing.

The attitude of the musically untutored auditor in such cases hinges upon his sincerity. If he is candid he will say that he “does not like the music,” without discriminating between the composition and the player. If a social diplomat, he will compliment the player upon his skill and add, with sham regret, that the composition was “a little beyond” him. In neither case will the blame be laid upon the person who alone is responsible for the failure to bring the composer and the auditor into rapport. The player fails, manifestly, in his sole duty—in his sole province and function. The auditor, however, dares not suspect that any one should have the



## *The Interpretative Artist*

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effrontery to interpret for him what the interpreter, himself, has not understood, and therefore the culprit goes unpunished, and may—and, alas, does—continue to sin with impunity.

Now, if the innocent auditor could have the faintest suspicion that (in most cases) his failure to understand a composition was due to defects in the player, the situation might assume a very different aspect. The hearer might resent inconsiderate piano-playing as an impertinence. But, misled by his humility and ignorance, he does not suspect the true conditions, and unscrupulous piano-playing has thus an open field.

## The Lay Auditor.

And yet the musically untutored visitor at Concerts, the layman, is the most legitimate auditor in the house. Incidentally, he is also the most numerous; and majorities, even though mostly in the wrong, have to be reckoned with. Besides, is it not just the untutored who is to be brought under the refining influence of good music? A concert *habitué*, conversant with the conventions of high-class music, seeks pleasure, edification, uplift in the artist's work; but the untutored in music—why, he is the very heathen whom the art-missionary seeks. Missionary and messenger, by the way, are words derived from the same root.

Let us confess that our *learned* auditor is seldom a reliable critic or a just judge. Almost invariably he has a bias of some sort; he prefers some school of composition, some style, or some musical form, to others, and any composition not reflecting his favorite type or class is apt to receive no more than lukewarm praise, no matter how much merit it may display. Richard Wagner's bitterest enemies were learned musicians, especially among those high in positions of authority. Wherever the

public were free to express or exercise their judgment, they took very quickly to his art. And his was by no means an isolated or even a very exceptional case.

The layman is, at first, very much opposed to good concerts. The brass-band and the street-organ still have a strong hold on him. He is mystified by Beethoven, but he loves "Home, Sweet Home." This proves that he loves *some* music, and, naturally, prefers the type that is within his mental horizon. Nor is his indifference to Beethoven altogether inexplicable, for he cannot possibly form an estimate of that master except by way of some interpreter.

Now, who gives him his first impressions of Beethoven? Usually it is his daughter, whose teacher, in good orthodox fashion, entrusts the "Moonlight Sonata" to the child's tender mercies. A girl of fourteen or sixteen—and a Beethoven Sonata! A girl, or, for that matter, a boy, who has no conception of anything musical beyond a correct use of the fingers on the keyboard (if that much), and of this only enough for a little modern parlor-piece; who knows nothing of construction, who is as yet without depth of feeling, without breadth of mind, whose power of thought is but little developed; such a boy or a girl brings home a Beethoven Sonata, murders it, of course, and

when Papa feels in the mood for asking for "some music," rattles it off with the air of a meat-chopper. How can any sane being derive a liking for Beethoven from such an introduction? It is inconceivable. Let this man drift into a good recital; let him listen to a strong, beautiful and, above all, *clear* interpretation of the same Sonata, and his idea of Beethoven will undergo a vast change. It may even serve to convert him to good music forever. Once converted, a man of that sort will be a very reliable critic. For he will demand that the pianist give him the musical *sense* of a composition. Feeling, sentiment, emotion, virtuosity, he will accept and appreciate, but not before he has caught the rhythms, melodies and other traits of the piece—its drift, its great outline; in short, the content instead of the empty form of what has been written. How few of the swagger virtuosos who visit America succeed in conveying this internal quality to their audiences? And as for amateurs? ——!

The formal musical content of the pieces on a concert-program, the musical *sense*, is all that can be paid for at the box-office. What the pianist gives beyond this, in the way of feeling and emotionality, is a free-will offering—a quality imparted that is not always and never entirely under his control. For this

splendid gift no money can pay, because it is not so much a part of his technical or even interpretative skill as of his own spiritual self. It can—and must ever—be called forth by the encouragement and eager sympathy of the audience, but it cannot be paid for with money. Not, at least, in advance. It must always be regarded as an addition to the sense of the pieces, not as a substitute for it. The pianist's "feeling" must never interfere with the clarity of his *phrasing*.

Now, whether a pianist does or does not bring out the musical sense of a piece; whether he presents its motives, themes, episodes, figurations—their canonic, fugal or otherwise contrapuntal treatment, their physiognomical traits, their recurrences, variations, etc., and the formal cast of the whole piece—lucidly or in undiscernable confusion (or in some manner halfway between, that can be followed only by the half-dozen experts in the house, and not with any pleasure by them), no one is as competent to decide as our friend, the lay auditor. And in many a layman's case, where musico-technical ignorance is coupled with a delicate and wide grasp upon life through other sets of psychic antennæ, the reaction of good music is spiritually far stronger than it can be upon the festive *dilettante* to whom music has nothing to tell, save of the performer's

## *Ethics and Esthetics of Piano-Playing*

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technic, or nothing to convey save, possibly, an occasional "pretty effect."

There are, of course, in some works of art, heights and depths that require for their full appreciation more than a merely unbiassed mind. \Long acquaintance with the language peculiar to great art, a general esthesis for psychic processes and a goodly degree of that indefinable quality called culture, \are undoubtedly requisite for a full and quick understanding of its creations. To an auditor thus equipped, a Beethoven Sonata will always say infinitely more than to our friend of merely unbiassed mind. But that is not the point. While the lay auditor may not perceive the whole import of the work, he must still receive *something* that is mentally tangible; he will then absorb enough to satisfy his measure of perceptive development. After he receives that—and only after it—he may rise to the suspicion that there may be more in the work than he extracted. He is then fairly certain to hear the same work again as soon as he finds an opportunity. And this stage reached, we need not worry any longer; he may be considered as being "safely in the fold."

A man does not need to paint to become a judge of pictures, but he must see many good pictures before his eye is trained to comparative criticism. Just so, he does not

## *The Lay Auditor*

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need to play the piano or to study composition in order to become an appreciator of good music; but he must hear much good music and hear it well played, very well played, before he can efficiently weigh and measure its merits.

“Art for Art’s sake” is esthetic trumpery.

“Art for sensible, normal people’s sake” is a far safer motto.

## The Three Phases of Understanding.

What is it that the auditor has to "understand" in a piece of music? One, to whom experience has never shown its sterner realities; who has never felt the tragedies of life enacted in his own heart; who has never suffered but

Some natural sorrow, loss or pain,  
That has been and may be again—

need not expect to understand the innermost meaning of any great work of Art, however clearly it may be interpreted. But Art is not exclusively esoteric; it does not confine its addresses to the initiated few; it has its exoteric side as well. For Art comprises *three* phases in which it appeals to us. It speaks to the senses, to the mind and to the soul. The highest (esoteric) phase may remain incomprehensible to many of us, but the two lower phases are well within the reach of all and—note it well—these two lower phases are the stepping-stones to the summit.

### (a) MATERIAL.

First, there is the beauty of art-material. Color *per se*, independent of any design, makes an appeal to our esthetic perception.



## *The Three Phases of Understanding*

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A plain wall-paper of a nice hue, a piece of cloth of varied colors, the blue sky, the green lawn—they flatter our eye through color alone as our ear is flattered by a beautiful tone, though a single tone is no more music than a single brick is architecture. Material beauty—tonal beauty in music—is the pathfinder, the scout sent by the artist into the mind of the beholder or the auditor. Though the auditor be sensitive to no more than this purely physical, material beauty, and though he may not become very deeply interested, he will at least realize pleasant sensations of a naïve, primitive sort.

Though the material phase is here called the lowest, the expression must not be construed as meaning that it is the least important. All three phases rank alike in significance, for each is as indispensable to the others as cleanliness is to godliness. Many an artist who really has had little or nothing to reveal to the world has nevertheless enjoyed transient fame and achieved ephemeral success through his close attention to the material beauty of his work. And many others, who may have felt deeply and thought profoundly, have failed because they neglected the material beauty of their work. Henselt, for instance, was not a musician of any great depth; neither was Thalberg; yet both achieved world-renown

## *Ethics and Esthetics of Piano-Playing*

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through the beauty of their touch. It was clearly not *what* they said, but *how* they said it, that made them famous—for a while at least. And Rubinstein! Much as the strong personality of his playing was admired—his noble, though utterly subjective imagination, his gigantic memory, and all that—no one acquainted with his playing ever failed to comment rapturously upon the wonderful beauty of his tone. Many an auditor quite unable to follow the soarings of Rubinstein's fancy, was none the less grateful for this extraordinary and unparalleled aural treat.

Therefore: respect for the beauty of tone *per se!*

### (b) DESIGN.

Secondly, there is in music the beauty of design. One of the properties of all design is recurrence. Too little of it produces restlessness, too much of it produces monotony. The right balance both denotes and produces repose. This is a fundamental principle of Art in general and of Music in particular.

After a subject has been plainly stated, its recurrences gratify the memory of the hearer. These recurrences may be complete; or they may be partial, fragmentary, and lead to new combinations and developments. In either case the traits of rhythm, grouping and

## *The Three Phases of Understanding*

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dynamics—in short, those features that constitute the musical physiognomy of the subject—must be reproduced so plainly, so distinctly, as to be easily recognizable at every recurrence. The pleasure that the auditor derives from following the lines of *thematic design* is very great. Though it may fail to reach his emotional nature, it is still certain to engage and satisfy his mind. This is a good deal. For the understanding of thematic design forms usually the first incentive for a repeated hearing of the same work, and through such repeated hearings the emotional content of a composition is very apt to reveal itself even to one lacking in musical knowledge.

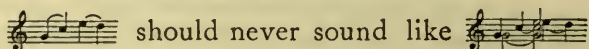
Under the above caption it will be necessary to call the attention of the piano-student to many things which the singer and the player of orchestra-parts find in the very nature of their instruments, but which the pianist has painstakingly to acquire. The vocalist or violinist when pronouncing a melody *cannot* produce more than one tone at a time; the pianist *must not*; but, unfortunately, he can and all too often does. To the pianist, therefore, this phase of design must include that clarity of execution which absolutely precludes any doubt in the hearer's mind as to *whether a melodic tone has progressed* (to another one) *or whether it is continued and some other newly*

## *Ethics and Esthetics of Piano-Playing*

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*entering tone* forms an accompaniment to it—or, as musicians say, belongs to another part. There must be no ambiguity in melody!



Nor should there ever be more than one harmony heard at a time; of which that arch-sinner, the right foot, must take care. With hand and foot the performer must *acquire* with the piano that clarity which is natural to most other instruments and without which the greatest digital dexterity is utterly worthless. It may be said here that more than half of the mystery of touch, over which gushing writers and talkers of pianistic mellifluous marvel, lies in this melodic and harmonic purity which is fundamentally necessary to musical design produced on a piano.

### (c) THOUGHT AND FEELING.

With the third and highest function of music—the thought and feeling behind the design—this volume cannot deal, for such study belongs properly to the province of abstract art-criticism, from which the benefits to be derived are rather uncertain. That breadth of sympathy, keenness of insight and depth of feeling which makes use of art as a medium of utterance and employs musical

## *The Three Phases of Understanding*

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material and design as tools to its end—as the painter uses pigments, as the poet uses meters—yields but with reluctance to doctrinaire speculation. It will always reveal itself best through itself. And it reveals itself readily enough to every one who by frequent contact with good music has become conversant with musical parlance, or, in other words, has learned to listen. In order, however, to prepare the way for an appreciation of the supreme office of music, the two phases of material and design must be plainly understood.

The element of material beauty is somewhat aside from the present discussion. It belongs to the province of mechanical technique. It is with *Design*, and its lucid demonstration on the Piano, that this volume deals. Before entering upon its details, however, it may not be amiss to give thought to one of the favorite platitudes of the prosaic *bourgeoisie*. They say that any work of art which they cannot at once understand fails of its purpose, and they strengthen their position by the slogan: "Art is for the people." This is quite true, but not more so than that everything else is for the people: Nature, religion, good manners, food—everything. But how much of it does the *bourgeois* appreciate? He has been taught to read, whether with or without

his own desire, but what does he read? He sees Nature in every mood, but does his appreciation ever rise beyond good or bad weather? Is it not the poet and painter who have to open the *bourgeois* eye to the beauties of the objective world? What other mission has Art than to open up to the average man that which he could not see and hear and feel without its aid? What other purpose than to develop and enrich his inner life? But the good *bourgeois* is accustomed to be respected according to his material possessions. Art is too hopelessly democratic for him. It scorns every worldly attribute and claims the man himself. It insists upon the *inner* man. If the inner man proves to be empty, or the talents of the *bourgeois* are misdirected, is Art to blame? The *bourgeois* who feels powerless to attack Art sometimes assails the artist. But to the artist the platitudes of philistinism are not awe-inspiring. For he knows that sparrows will never understand why eagles soar beyond the height of a cherry-tree.

## Rules Are Not Laws.

To teach or learn the perception and re-production of musical design in the manner in which the technique of the piano is taught and acquired, is impossible. The rules given here cannot make anybody phrase well. This must ever depend upon the individual power of the student to think and upon the refinement of his sensibilities—upon the amount of work he does, the devotion with which it is pursued. *For there is in Art not one rule or doctrine that admits of dogmatic rigidity and fixedness.* If there were such a principle that did not require to be elastically applied, that was mathematically settled once for all, Art would cease to be what it is, namely, an individual expression of life. Hence, the student is warned not to mistake rules for laws. What observation has established as a frequently or even usually applicable rule, has been set forth here only as a hint or suggestion to the thoughtful player, who should never lose sight of what is due from the interpreter both to the composer and to the auditor. The purpose of this book may be summarized in the claim that it aims to suggest ways and means to conceive a

musical thought intelligently and to convey it with lucidity through skillful

PHRASING.

Phrasing is that rational division and subdivision of musical sentences which serve to make them intelligible to the auditor. Its place in music—to say the least—corresponds to punctuation in elocution, though its importance is perhaps as much greater in proportion, as musical tones are less definite in meaning than words.

In order to illustrate the close kinship between literary punctuation and musical phrasing it will be necessary to anticipate for a moment the subjects of the next chapters: *Accent* and *Pause*. Asking the reader to assume for the time being that accent and pause are the chiefest means of phrasing, we will use for our illustration the following well-known puzzle sentence:

*I have ten fingers on each hand, five and twenty on hands and feet.*

The comma divides the sentence into two parts and each part contains an untrue statement. Both statements, however, are simultaneously corrected if we but shift the comma three words back, for then we read:

*I have ten fingers, on each hand five, and twenty on hands and feet.*

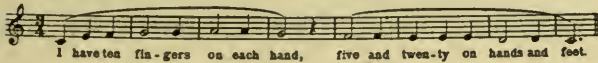


## Rules Are Not Laws

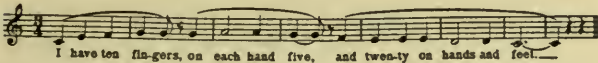
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If we add a simple melody to these words we obtain for the first (wrong) version:



which, though expressed in the same tones, may be changed in the second (correct) version into this:



The slurs invite our attention first. There were only two slurs in the first version; in the second we see three. The slurs, therefore, not only indicate that the syllables under each one should be sung connectedly (*legato*), but they also determine the extent of each part of the sentence. They indicate the breathing.

There are two other points to be noticed. First, that *pausing* was the only means by which the difference of significance between the two versions was produced. Secondly, that the placing of the pauses completely changed the character of the word "and." From a mere means of compounding two numerals—in that inverted order customary in England (and Germany), where "twenty-five" is called "five-and-twenty"—the word "and" has been transformed into a full-fledged

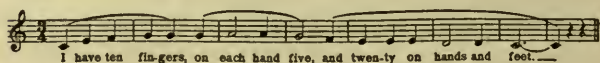
## *Ethics and Esthetics of Piano-Playing*

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conjunction uniting two entirely separate statements. Moreover, the pauses have also changed the word "five," which was part of a compound numeral, to the basic numeral "five."

To show, however, that it was not absolutely necessary to state in print the various pauses of the second version, we may now repeat it without them and we shall find that the slurs alone should have sufficed (for the trained musician), for they should have *induced* the pauses:



Under proper phrasing the "art-pauses"\* should have tallied perfectly with the stated pauses of the preceding version.

As we view the change and muse over the possibilities of "pausing," the old proverb that says "silence is golden" assumes an additional and new significance.

### THE MEANS OF PHRASING.

Of implements or tools serviceable in phrasing there are but two, *accent* and *pause*. Each of these admits of a great variety of degrees; the accent varies in force, the pause in length.

\*See page 31, end of first paragraph.

However, the accent or pause that may be found in print is not the one I mean. Far from it; for we shall find in later chapters that the sign of an accent is anything but definite in its meaning. I refer here to that accent which is inherent in the *rhythm* of a phrase and which, being tacitly understood, does not need to be (and is not) especially stated in print. It is the *natural or rhythmic accent*. And by pauses I do not mean the printed ones, but those minute interruptions in the general flow of melody which, for instance, the singer makes in breathing. As the singer may not sing on until his breath gives out and then pause to refill his lungs, but must practice that wise economy by which he is enabled to accommodate his breathing-periods to the punctuation in his texts and *then pause to breathe whether the composer did or did not prescribe a pause*; so must the pianist search for those points in his melody *where the punctuation should be placed if a text were written under it*, or, in other words, if his piece were a song. To distinguish it from the printed pause, we will call this the *Art-pause*.

In the hands of an artist the Art-pause is a wonderful tool. It can create a feeling of suspense. It can serve to distinguish a partial from a final conclusion. It can produce the thrill of tragedy and it can bring out the

*Ethics and Esthetics of Piano-Playing*

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point of humor. It can indicate feebleness and denote force. It is Protean in its moods and it is one of the two implements of musical phrasing. Mrs. Browning, said to have been a connoisseur of music, must have had this Art-pause in her mind when she wrote:\*

The growing drama.....  
.... may outgrow the painted scene,  
Boards, actors, prompters, gaslight and costume,  
And take for a worthier stage the soul itself,  
Its shifting fancies and celestial lights.  
With all its *grand orchestral silences*  
*To keep the pauses of its rhythmic sounds.*

\*"Aurora Leigh," Book V.

## Old Errors.

(WITH A BRIEF EXCURSION INTO HISTORY)

From the foregoing we have seen that the purpose of phrasing is to make the musical meaning of a piano-piece clear to the auditor; in other words, to furnish him with the means of understanding it.

We have also seen that the process of gaining the understanding of the auditor must be started through the element of rhythm. For, however far his appreciation may subsequently outreach mere rhythm, it must reach the rhythm of a piece before it can outreach it.

It is consequently true that any rule liable to interfere with rhythmical clarity must be wrong—must, once for all, be declared null and void, no matter how ancient it may be and no matter how impressive it may look apparelled in its traditional dignities. If it clashes with clarity of rhythm it must be renounced.

Now of such rules—old, widely known, only too often followed, still preached by unprogressive instructors, and yet utterly false—there are two that quite directly concern the matter of phrasing.

One of these false rules says:

The note that bears an accentuation-sign ( > ) must be the loudest of its group.

This is worse than a fallacy. It is a half-truth. It is true only in cases where the accentuation-sign is placed upon a note which stands at a naturally accented point of the measure. When this is not the case; when the sign is set over a note that stands on an *unaccented* part of the measure, the sign indicates only that the note under it ought to be less negatively treated than it would be without the sign. It does not make it "the loudest of its group" by any means, for, if it did so, the auditor would be at once misled into accepting it as a rhythmical (natural) accent.

To understand this matter better, we must divide all accents into two classes—regular (rhythmic or natural) and *irregular* (occasional or dramatic) accents. It is a musical axiom, that the composer always places the note of greatest melodic importance upon the first beat of the measure. Hence, the much-used term "primary accent." Let us compare this "note of greatest importance" with the noun in language, and see what we can discover through such comparison. In starting a serious talk, in settling or stating its subject, we are compelled to emphasize the noun. Later, when the choice of subject is understood and we are dealing with its qualities, etc., we may emphasize the adjective, but we

may do so only *because the cognizance of the subject is presupposed*. For instance, if I describe a landscape to one who never saw it, and enumerate the features of the scenery, I am bound to say "a high *mountain*" or "a beautiful *lake*"; but if I address one who is familiar with the place and I talk in a reminiscent manner, I may say "that *high mountain*" or "that *beautiful lake*." Cognizance of, or familiarity with, the subject is presupposed, and it is only this presupposition which justifies transference of emphasis.

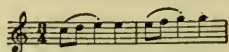
Now, this "presupposed familiarity" with the subject is a not unimportant element in music, and has been recognized or felt by all its great masters, who have frequently changed the accents in their subjects by shifting them into a different part of the measure; so that the note that bore the accent in the first statement was unaccented in a later reiteration, the accent now falling upon a note unaccented before. But in all such cases the note that was first accented *did* afterwards stand in a *different part of the measure*, and by this very token informed the reader of the intention of the composer to change the emphasis. Had the author, to induce a change of emphasis, resorted to a mere accentuation-sign, instead of shifting the subject rhythmically, the player would have been perfectly justified in regarding

## *Ethics and Esthetics of Piano-Playing*

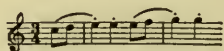
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this *accentuation-sign* as a slip of the pen or a misprint. If, for instance, a composer wished to say first:



and should later conclude to place the accent upon the note that stands on the second beat, he would have to reconstruct the motive in such a manner that the second beat should become the first. He would have to write:



The rhythmical traits inherent in either of the two forms of this motive—and which they possess without any auxiliary marking whatever—cannot be essentially changed through any accentuation-signs the composer may choose to add, no matter on which note he may place them.

This does not mean that *all* occasional accent-marks should be completely ignored (though such a procedure will be recommended later in more cases than the reader might at present suspect); but it does mean that *all* occasional accent-marks should be accepted with the utmost caution, *cum grano salis*, as it were, and that they should *never* induce



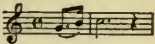
the player to *obscure the rhythmical integrity of a phrase*.

It does occur here and there that the composer purposely disarranges the rhythmical regularity of his piece to produce a dramatic effect, but this is exceptional and, what is more, it cannot be done before the idea of regularity has been well established in the mind of the auditor. For we cannot recognize the irregular as such, before we know the regular. This points again to the "presupposed cognizance" already mentioned.

We turn now to the second of the two false rules, that says:

Of two notes connected by a slur, the first note must be emphasized and the second must be played *staccato*.

Two errors in one sentence! To see that they are errors we need only remember that the violin is about three times as old as the piano, and that many of the annotations we find in piano-music are derived from violin-compositions.

A phrase of this kind 

is slurred for the violin, not for the piano. On the violin the first two notes are played with an upward moving bow, the last note with a downward stroke. The interruption in changing the bowing is too minute for

any human ear to perceive it. The bow is changed for the purpose of giving the weight of a full, new bow to the note on the primary beat. Such a change not being required on the piano, the end of the slur would indicate that arm and hand are to be lifted off the keys, and as this lifting would destroy the unity of the little phrase the slur must, in piano-music, comprise three notes, that is, it must include the concluding note. The pianist, knowingly or by instinct, would not make a break between the B and C of the above example, lest he produce something like the musical illustration of a hiccough. On the violin, however, the slurring, as stated above, is perfectly legitimate, for on the violin a slur connecting two different notes indicates that they are to be played with one motion of the bow, upwards or downwards, and that they should not be played with a separate motion for each note. This corresponds perfectly with certain elements of language which may be employed in the form of monosyllables or in combination. The slur only indicates the combination. Take, for illustration, the words "to" and "in." We may use them in succession, and yet separately, as in saying:

"He came in to say farewell."

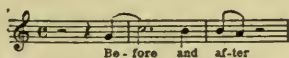
In pronouncing this little sentence we shall observe a minute break between "in" and

“to”—a break that will not occur when we compound the two words, as in saying:

“He came into a fortune.”

Now, there are of such bisyllabic words *two* kinds in all languages. Some of them put the emphasis on the ultimate, some on the penultimate syllable. In English, the words “before” and “after” will be fitting examples.

It hardly requires special assertion that musical rhythms must supply equivalents for these linguistic variations; if those two words occurred in a poem to which we wished to give a musical setting, we should be compelled to find rhythms that in the matter of emphasis exactly tallied with them. For example:



Now, if we had to accentuate the first note of the first slur, would it not sound unnatural?

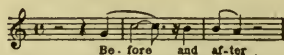
This little example, however, illustrates at the same time the falsity of the second item of the old rule: “And the second note must be played staccato.” How can we play a half-note staccato? If the second note under the slur is a prolonged one, a note which the composer meant to be dwelt upon, how can we reconcile its long duration with a staccato touch? We cannot do it. We may do *something* to intimate that the slur ends at this

## *Ethics and Esthetics of Piano-Playing*

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note. We may slightly, though very slightly, *curtail* the note and make up for it by a little pause:



Of course, if the note thus to be curtailed is but of brief duration by its denomination, this curtailment will, no doubt, make it in effect a staccato; but the staccato in such an event will be a logical result of circumstance and not a deliberate purpose dictated by a fossilized rule.

That a rule so palpably false should be formulated and widely believed is not altogether inexplicable. But the explanation will require a brief excursion into

### HISTORY.

We must remember that Music, as we understand it, is practically not more than about three centuries old. In this short time it has passed through all those stages of development for which architecture, painting, sculpture and poetry had a period more than ten times as long. It stands to reason that its first development lay solely on the creative side. Music had to be composed before music could be interpreted, and executive skill,

especially on the piano and its precursors, was at first linked with that of creation. Very gradual was the differentiation of the performer from the composer; and even long after the divorce had taken place, the skill of the executant was the prized privilege of the favored few. It remained so until music had, so to speak, established itself as an independent art not auxiliary to literature, religious service, or dancing. From Palestrina to Beethoven is a far greater distance (as far as ideas, their treatment, and the matter of style, are concerned) than from Homer to Goethe; yet Music travelled this long way past the archaic, across the antique, renaissance and rococo, to the modern (which may be said to begin with Beethoven) in 256 years. This explains the wonderful circumstance that such giants as appeared in other arts once in a century have in music followed each other without interruption. In fact, their careers have overlapped each other.

Little wonder that musicians have not bothered about *spreading* the art while there was so much to do creatively to *develop* it.

When music became—in a certain sense—complete; when it had said enough great things to entitle it to recognition *per se*, musicians naturally turned their attention to the popularization of their Art. There was

## *Ethics and Esthetics of Piano-Playing*

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now need of missionaries who would open up to the people in general the treasure-trove of beauty accumulated during two centuries; missionaries who would instruct the people to read, play or sing for themselves what has hitherto been read, played and sung to them by interpreters.

Thus came into being the musical pedagogue, who made it his business to study the principles underlying those beautiful tonal effects which the great interpreters produced intuitively, unconsciously—produced them simply by gratifying an inner impulse stirred by an education not so much pianistic as generally musical.

We must observe here that, with the exception of the specialists on rudimentary or foundational instruction, all great music-teachers have been either creative or executive artists first and have turned to teaching at an age when experience had matured their views of art and when the impulse made itself felt to propagate their views, ideas, methods and principles. Unfortunately, every current has its countercurrent, which, in this case, was represented by those who began to teach as soon as their stock of merely memorized information enabled them to begin, and who did not test their—often rather flimsy—knowledge by artistic experience. The teachers of this type have formulated a large

## Old Errors

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number of rules, regulations and wordy systems;

For just where fails the comprehension,  
A *word* steps promptly in as deputy.  
With words 'tis excellent disputing;  
Systems to words 'tis easy suiting.

Many of these rules died before their formulators, but some few of them have remained

Like an eternal sickness of the race—  
From generation unto generation fitted  
And shifted round from place to place.

The last thirty-five years have, however, brought to light a larger array of proven *principles* (not rules) in *teaching* music (especially in piano-teaching) than all preceding time put together. Modern music-teachers have studied philosophy, esthetics, anatomy, physiology and even biology in their search for means by which to increase results while at the same time reducing exertion. While musical pedagogy might well be said to be still in its infancy, it can nevertheless show substantial discoveries; enough, to say the least, to claim the confidence of those who are wont to accept the age of a "method" as a voucher for its worth.

The flexible wrist, the limp elbow, the loose shoulder; positive, negative and finger staccato;

## *Ethics and Esthetics of Piano-Playing*

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the arm in its manifold agencies; finger-stroke; pressure-touch; after-pedalling; the entire field of technique; and a multitude of other matters of a more or less physiological nature are but very recent discoveries. In the field of esthetics, too, as far as it relates to teaching, profound researches have been made. We have come to know how to handle the tone of the piano in such a way as partly to overcome its evanescence. Artistic illusions—as legitimate in music as perspective and foreshortening are in painting—are nowadays so effectively mastered as to make it possible for the piano to outdo all other single instruments. We also have recalled to our minds that such terms as *Adagio*, *Allegro*, etc., are not designations of speed but, primarily, of mood. Then, the metronome has been “found out” as an artistic impossibility, and has been relegated to its proper station as a sort of orthophonic adjunct to purely mechanical exercises. That the grouping-slur in piano-music must comprise one note more than in music for string-instruments, has already been mentioned. This list of finds and discoveries could be much prolonged here, but it is already sufficiently imposing to show that in the works of the great masters—and, indeed, through them—we have learned to read *between* the lines with a degree of penetration heretofore



out of the question, and which past generations could not even dimly have divined.

A new term has recently been added to piano nomenclature; it is "attack." It must be explained at this point because of its bearing upon the false rules to which I have referred.

We know that the use of the arm should be reserved for occasions of strictest necessity, and that we should play as much as possible with the fingers. Since, however, we cannot very well use the fingers before they are in due proximity to the keyboard, and since they ought not to be in this position until the new phrase begins, every phrase has to start with a motion of the arm. This motion is called the "attack." Now, whether the attack be positive (accented) or negative (unaccented), it has—even if very soft—to come from the arm, and as the composers of the past (and only too many of the present) have not known of the distinction between attack and accent, they have frequently put an accent-mark where they meant to indicate only the commencement of a new phrase or sub-phrase. They evidently—and perhaps justly—feared that a mere phrasing-slur or grouping-slur might be taken for a legato-sign and nothing more. They have, therefore, added an accent-mark, especially when the start of the new

phrase (or sub-phrase) was not obvious and self-evident. Teachers of no artistic antecedents have noticed these accent-marks, and, with the natural tendency of the inartistic temperament to tabulate and classify everything, they have formulated the absurd rule we are discussing.

It is true, not only of music-teachers but of the followers of every profession, that they too generally, storing up a certain amount of information, give their knowledge forth again just as they received it, without ever testing a single part of it in the forum of their own intelligence; without ever searching for the reason of a rule; without ever vitalizing a received thought by any mental activity of their own. They merely "remember," instead of doing their own thinking; they are satisfied to *jurare in verba magistri*. They will quote Schumann's well-meant mandate: "Play in time," without even suspecting that he meant "play in rhythm," and that he would undoubtedly have said so if in his day the distinction between time and rhythm had been as clearly understood as it is to-day. They will make a retard precisely where the word is printed; without furnishing either a cause for it or balancing it up subsequently; because the *ritardando* is all that is printed—as if we could never mention the hills without men-

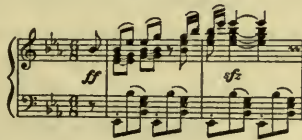
## Old Errors

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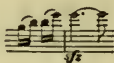
tioning also that, of course, they have a valley between them.

In closing this chapter it may be in place to make a quotation that will conclusively prove the falsity of the two (or really three) rules under discussion. It is the first motive in the Rondo of Beethoven's Concerto in E flat. We shall find that it contradicts everything that these obsolete rules teach.



What do we see? First, a sign of 6/8 time, which means *two* accents per measure, one upon the first eighth and a slightly lesser one upon the fourth eighth. Did Beethoven wish to ignore these natural accents in the very first statement of his principal subject, as we do if we must accept the old rule? Was it his intention to keep the auditor in ignorance of the very rhythm, and to make him mentally grope for it through two whole measures? Surely not. For, if such had been his intention he would not have contradicted it through the figure in the left hand—a basic figure which leaves no doubt as to its rhythmical purpose and accents. He did not wish the chord in

the second measure (marked *sfz*) to be treated as negatively as a second eighth in 6/8 time might be. He wished it to receive force enough to do its work. He even wished it to be given prominence—wished it to equal the first eighth in strength. This action, being so natural, would secure the necessary distinction. But he certainly did not wish it to be “the loudest in the group,” for if we render it thus there is nothing to prevent the hearer from understanding it as if it were written



and the eighth-rest would be decidedly *de trop!* But then, he *did* put that rest in its place; he *did* interrupt the continuity of the rising E-flat chord that forms the subject, in order to have the B flat—and *not* the E flat—fall due upon the natural accent coincidentally with the fundamental bass note. What folly it would be to disregard what he so plainly implied, in favor of the purely incidental mark *sfz!*

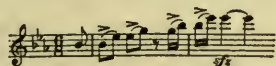
We also see in the original text four slurs, each extending over two notes. The first starts positively and ends negatively (just as the old rule says), *but the second reverses the order*. The other two slurs are put over mini-

## Old Errors

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mal subdivisions, of which, however, the note *on* the beat is naturally of greater rhythmical value than the note *between* beats. Suppose, now, that we emphasized the subject according to the old rule and obtained this:



Could anybody understand it as being in 6/8 time? Would it not be a division in 3/4?

Many other illustrations might be added to this, and they could be cited from all types and classes of composition; but this example bears sufficient authority to convince the student who has had the misfortune to be taught to believe in the aforementioned old rules, that he must cut loose from them. He must realize that if he does not do so, they will be constant obstacles to rational phrasing and will tend to confuse his mind in many other matters upon which they bear more indirectly.

## Accent.

What the hills are to the valley; what the steeple is to the village on the plain; what the arteries are to the veins; what objects are to space; what sounds are to time; what the oasis is to the desert; all this and much more is the *accent* to music. Without it we cannot carry the simplest musical thought beyond the merely physical ear of our auditor. Without it every distinction between the living musician and the mechanical self-playing machine practically vanishes. To say that, without it, the musical painting is converted into a chromo, would be unjust to the chromo; the comparison would be lame and ineffective. Without accent music becomes a succession of almost meaningless sounds tolerable only for their conventionality, rather than becoming, as music ever should, an appeal made by one living soul to another. Devoid of accent, music ceases to be that sweet mystery which has baffled the interpretative powers of the poets of all ages and lands, and of which no sage or man of science has ever been able to give more than a fragmentary definition.

Had I the flaming towers of Flammarion's visionary project of communicating with Mars at my disposal, I would flash the word "accent"

across the firmament for the benefit of all musiciandom. Life has no pulse without accent, poetry no meter; upon accent depends Rhythm, and Rhythm is the handle by which the auditor—musician or layman—grasps and takes hold of Music. To be sure, there are higher and finer qualities in good music than its rhythm, but rhythm stands at its doors, an obstinate, uncompromising guard; before we have settled our account with this guard we can behold none of the inner mysteries of the temple. Bülow's biblical paraphrase, "In the beginning was Rhythm!" should be the *Leitmotiv* of every student of music. And Rhythm exists solely through Accent.

When you read a new musical work, and its thoughts seem abstruse, increase (or, rather, exaggerate) its accents for a little while and it will quickly clear up. If anything technical seems inordinately difficult, increase the power of your accents during slow practice, and it will soon be easy. If a run refuses to roll evenly and smoothly, reverse the accents for a while, or shift them to the weaker fingers while practicing slowly, and the run will soon be equalized. If polyrhythms seem unattainable—if one hand seems incapable of playing four notes to the three of the other hand—accentuate the "dead points" a little more strongly, and all will soon be well.

## *Ethics and Esthetics of Piano-Playing*

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These latter uses of the accent, however, merely benefit the *player*, and him, again, more especially while he is learning a new work; they are helpful during preparation. When this stage is past, when the complete result is presented to the auditor—and he should now be the chief object of the player's solicitude—then the accent rises to paramount importance.

The *player* reaches an understanding for a new work with the assistance of his ears, eyes, hands and feet. His ability to impart this knowledge to his *hearer*, whose sole means of perception is his ear, is quite another and more difficult matter. The hearer has no score before him by which his eye can follow the player; nor can he have acquired any previous familiarity with a new work—and why should he? He may, furthermore, be unacquainted with the conventions of slipshod piano-playing. But, connoisseur or layman, when listening to a new composition he has no means whatever by which to form an idea of it except through the interpretation of the player; that is, not through what the pianist *means* to say, but only through that which he *does* say.

This looks like a truism. It may be classed as such. But it would bear to be graven in stone over the portals of many Concert and



Recital halls; and in every music schoolroom it invites repetition without limit.

THE PHYSIOLOGICAL EFFECT OF ACCENT.

Accent and Pause enable the player to convey the *design* of his music to his audience.

Now, what is their effect upon the audience? Gratification—sensuous, mental, and possibly also emotional.

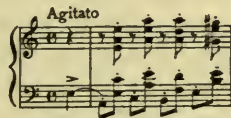
But let us see whether the hearer, while experiencing this gratification, is active or passive. This question can be answered only by his own sincerity, the presence or absence of which will show whether he merely *hears* (since hearing is a purely physical and involuntary function), or *listens* (since listening is a mental and deliberate act). We shall, however, not waste our time on fashionable pretenders, but will select for the subject of the following observations an auditor who really does desire to understand what he hears. What does he do while he is listening? *He keeps step with the music!* Yes, though he be crowded into a narrow seat, possibly holding on his lap his overcoat, hat, program, opera-glass, etc.; though he is forbidden by good breeding to mark the rhythm with his foot; though he dare not even nod his head with the positive beats for fear of exciting the ridicule of idle

observers—yet he keeps step! He unconsciously adjusts his breathing—and probably also his pulse (this point is still under debate among experimenting physiologists)—to the time-beats of the music. In the first few measures, or rather, *as soon as he has understood the rhythm*, he will begin to breathe at every beat or at every second, third, fourth beat, according to the speed and type of the rhythm. Music, therefore, in addition to affecting him sensuously, emotionally and mentally, has also a *physiological* effect upon the hearer.

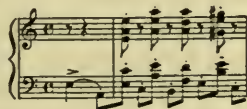
While the precise nature of this physiological effect may not be fully known, or its extent and power not precisely measured, its verity is, nevertheless, no longer doubted by physiologists. It forms the basis of Prof. Chomet's musicopathic theories and practices.

This is a matter of serious significance, and should deeply concern the player at the outset. In stating his subject, or in making the initial statement of any thought that occurs in the piece, he should strive for the greatest possible *clearness of rhythm* in order to make it as easy as he can for his auditor to effect the readjustment of his breathing and pulse. For until this is accomplished the auditor keeps mentally *groping* for a handle by which to grasp the music, and while so occupied he can do nothing else. Neither can he appreciate the music,

nor follow the stated thoughts into the mazes of their contrapuntal developments. A pianist should, therefore, write in plain characters, especially at the first exposition of his subjects; he should, above all, *make his rhythms distinct*, so as to help his auditor to "get settled." How difficult this is for the auditor, even under favorable conditions, can readily be seen whenever he has to listen to syncopation *before* having heard the regular time-beats. Then it is the accent alone that can save him from confusion or utter misunderstanding. If Chopin's *Étude*, op. 25, No. 4, is played without plainly perceptible accents on the regular time-beats



the conception that is forced upon the hearer can be no other than



Syncopation is one of the chiefest musical expressions of agitation, of unrest; it is, practi-

cally, a reversal of pulse-beats such as we experience under the stress of great anxiety, apprehension or—more especially if the melodic tones precede (anticipate) the regular beats—of joyful impatience. Is it not plain that the auditor must be enabled to perceive a syncopation *as such*, if it is not completely to fail of its intended purpose? And how can he hear that the melodic notes are not *on* the beats unless he is in some way apprized of the beats. But how can the player inform him as to the beats? Only through a healthy accentuation of the regular beats. This accentuation must not be crude; it must not trespass on the esthetic line, nor should it be needlessly persistent; but it must be perceptible and—if abandoned after a while, to avoid monotony—it must be resumed with sufficient frequency to prevent the hearer from thinking that the time-arrangement might have changed, and it must then be sufficiently clear to keep him constantly *en rapport* with the gasping character of syncopations.

Another case that craves an accent occurs whenever a theme or melody begins *after* a strong (positive) beat, as, for instance, in the third of Schumann's "Four Marches," op. 76 (called "Camp-Scene"). Its theme opens on the second beat, and there lies a peculiar whim in this opening; a virility, a vein of good

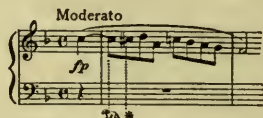
cheer and good humor that will be entirely lost on the hearer if the player leads him to accept this second beat as a first beat. In fact, the whole phrase of two measures becomes inextricably confused unless we fully understand that the starting note of the melody is the *second* beat. In order, however, to understand this beat as a *second* we must needs hear a *first* beat. Hence, the first beat, lying in the accompaniment, must have an accent of sufficient gravity and character to designate it as such.

The same holds good in cases where a melody begins *before* a strong beat and touches *no new note* at the first beat, but is tied over into the new measure. Since the melody furnishes in such cases no opportunity for indicating to the auditor how the time-beats are arranged, some other part of the whole (the bass, or, if that be missing, some middle part) must assume that function. The bass must do it, e. g., in the Sixth Variation of Schumann's Impromptus on a theme by Clara Wieck, op. 5, or in the last movement of Beethoven's Sonata, op. 28, third measure.

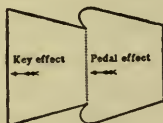
In cases where (the melody anticipating the beat and being held over) there should be no new voice or part entering upon the beat, I suggest that the accent be produced by a peculiar, sudden action of the pedal. For

## *Ethics and Esthetics of Piano-Playing*

illustration we may look at the little memorial to Mendelssohn which Schumann included in his "Album for the Young" as number 26,



or in his "Faschings-Schwank" op. 26, first movement, at the place where the signature changes for the first time to E flat. The cases are identical, for in both the melody enters *before* the first beat, while *on* the first beat there is nothing new to play. In such cases I suggest that the initial tone be struck with some force; not incompatible with the prevailing dynamic level, but loud enough to cause the strings of all higher harmonics to co-vibrate when, through a quick tread upon the pedal, they are freed from their dampers and enabled to add their tone-force to the tone struck before. This tread upon the pedal should occur *upon* the first beat, that is, some time after the key is struck. The acoustic picture presenting itself to the ear will be somewhat like this:

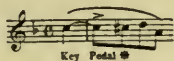


## Accent

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or thus expressed in notes:



and it will go far to bring the hearer at once *en rapport* with the rhythmic features of the musical thought. Of course, it will require some skill to measure the exact strength of the initial tone and to produce the proper and very sudden action of the pedal with the foot, but practice with close observation and keen listening will soon bring the desired results.



In Beethoven's Sonata, op. 7, first movement, the last ten measures of the first part, the case is similar. We cannot imagine these passages executed by bow-instruments or human voices without feeling that, after taking the respective notes on the negative beat, they would exert a slight pressure upon this note when the positive beat falls due. The pressure may, in some cases, be exerted unconsciously, but even then it would be due to the player's or singer's

innate desire of conveying to his hearers the rhythmic quality of the thought. Since the use of the pedal, just suggested, enables the pianist to effect very nearly the same result—namely, to produce an accent upon a note already sounding—there is no reason to reject it or regard it as illegitimate, still less as imaginary. For *paramount to all other considerations in rhythm, is the accent!* The auditor *must* know, *must* feel whether a phrase begins accented or unaccented, heavy or light, positive or negative; or, to put it still differently, whether the beat he hears first is a firmly starting or a preparatory, introductory beat. He must know it for esthetic and, as stated before, also for physiological reasons. In speaking of the physiological action of music upon the auditor reference was made chiefly to the accent, but it is not limited to it, as we shall presently see.

#### THE PRINTED PAUSE.

The player should pay most punctilious attention to the time-value of *printed* pauses. Nothing, not even a false note, causes such distress to an attentive listener as the curtailing of stated pauses. He feels as if an invisible power were jerking him abruptly into the next measure; as if he were walking with some one



who compels him at the most unexpected places to change his step. But even this does not quite fully describe his sensations. We all know how we feel on a staircase when we try, at the top or at the bottom, to take a step that is not there. How it jars every joint, every nerve, in our body! Think of going through this experience forty or fifty times in ten minutes! My analogy is not an exaggeration. It makes little difference whether our muscles and nerves or our breathing and pulse are disturbed. Such a shock is precisely what is suffered by the attentive listener when the player fails to honor the pauses which separate one phrase (or sub-phrase, or section of a melody) from another.

The Art of Music owes much gratitude to the physiologists for many valuable and far-reaching services, but for none more than for having helped the musician to discover that the discomfort arising from curtailed or disregarded pauses is not a matter of hyperculture or esthetics; but purely, aye, brutally *physical*; that it is not merely offensive to the good taste of some over-refined *arbiter elegantiarum*, but a discomfort which, like a toothache, afflicts the learned and unlearned alike, although the unlearned in music feel these sensations without recognizing their source.

THE UNPRINTED PAUSE, OR ART-PAUSE.

Whatever pedantry may say against un-prescribed pauses can have no value when its arguments are met by the statement that there are cases—frequent cases—in which a pause, though not stated in print, is demanded by *physical necessity*. When a composer fails to put down in writing a pause where its absence forms a physical obstacle to an intelligent understanding of the phrase, he has either been careless or has judged the musicianship of his interpreter by his own and—was all too trustful. It does not matter in the least whether that composer's name was Beethoven or John Doe.

To prove the physical necessity of the art-pause must, then, be our next task.

Without going unnecessarily into the physiology of the ear we can build our arguments upon the fact that a slight motion of any kind can be brought to a standstill in less time than a motion more violent. Be it a surface of water, a carriage, our own walking or the responsive vibration of the intricate and delicate apparatus for our hearing, we can *increase* the violence of motion *instantly*, but we cannot *decrease* it with equal promptitude. Now, whenever a composer prescribes a sudden change from *f* to *p*, or from *ff* to *pp*, and

we interpose no pause, the auditor has no earthly chance of hearing the notes of the *pp* until his inner ear has regained that lesser degree of vibration which could respond to a *pianissimo*.

Let me illustrate. We stand upon a rustic bridge that spans a quiet pond, into which we throw a pebble weighing (say) an ounce. As soon as the shock (impact) has spent itself, we see the rings that have formed, one encircling the other, moving towards the shore in every direction, producing a beautiful ripple. Now we throw a rock weighing fifty pounds into the water and let the little pebble follow it immediately. The result is\* that we see the violent motion caused by the rock, and that absolutely no effect whatever is visible from the pebble. We know positively that it must be there, but our eye cannot perceive it. But if we wait until the violence of the agitation caused by the fall of the rock has so far subsided that the water becomes visibly sensible to a motion of a lesser degree, and *then* throw in our pebble, we shall again see

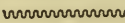
\*There is also another result, important enough for later observation and therefore reserved for discussion in its proper place; namely, that the time consumed by the shock (impact) is longer in proportion to the weight, size and the height of the fall of the rock; the "rings" or waves do not form themselves as quickly after the rock as they did after the one-ounce pebble. Mark this well, and remember it, on page 68.


*Ethics and Esthetics of Piano-Playing*

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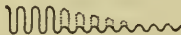
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the same rippling result as the first pebble caused. A vibration in the responsive mechanism of our ear, microscopically enlarged,

looking like this , may instantly

be changed into one like this  ;

but we cannot reverse the change with the same abruptness, because the more violent vibrations need a certain amount of time to calm down. And if we do not allow for this time, if we play *pp* immediately after a *ff*, the effect upon the hearer will be, that all the music which occurred during that time which the following illustration indicates by the dotted lines

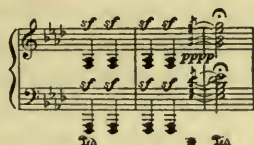


might as well not have been played, for it would go simply unheard—that is, be lost music.

Schumann, keen observer that he was, evidently speculated upon this "lost music"—upon these softer sounds produced during the time marked by the dotted line in the illustration above cited. For in his "Carnaval" he writes at the end of the "Paganini" Intermezzo:

## Accent

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He wants the *ppp* chord struck while the four *sforzati* are still having full sway. The new chord is entirely foreign to its predecessors, yet he wants it struck and struck under the same Pedal, *because it will not be heard!* It will remain inaudible until the release of the Pedal has hushed those four accumulated thunderous *sforzati*. (Nor should this release of the Pedal be too sudden, by the way.) And when the new chord finally does emerge from the preceding turmoil, a close observer may notice that it has a *crescendo* effect. Why is this? We know, alas, that the *crescendo* upon a single tone or chord is denied to the piano, and yet this *crescendo* effect is there. But it is not the piano that produces this auditory illusion; it is our own ear! Proportionately to the subsidence of the violent response that our ear makes to the preceding *fortissimo*, our hearing becomes more and more delicately appreciative of the *pianissimo*. And through this heightened susceptibility we perceive the soft chord with increasing clearness. We feel as if it were the chord that grows stronger.

This, however, is only to illustrate the fact that a sudden *pianissimo* following upon a *fortissimo* without an intervening pause *cannot be heard* until the aroused ear has calmed down sufficiently to be able to sense it. In this instance, the composer speculated rather upon the *absence* of an art-pause. The following example shows where it is absolutely necessary.

In the first Novellette of Schumann's (op. 21) we find in the second part (erroneously designated as Trio) a modulation of unusual boldness—unusual even for Schumann. It is, perhaps, not a modulation so much as an abrupt, unbridged transition from the dominant of F into a perfect tonic chord of G flat. (Counting from the beginning of the Novellette it is the step from measure 34 to 35.) If we make no art-pause before the chord of G flat with its shrill cross-relations, the juxtaposition of the two unrelated harmonies is downright cacophonous. By making a pause, however, we indicate an interruption in the flow of the melody; we announce (as through a comma) an interpolation in the sentence, and create in the hearer a feeling of suspense, the release of which converts the cacophonous shock to his ears into a delicious harmonic surprise. A pause of almost similar length is needed between measures 44 and 45, although here the harmonies are not quite so foreign to each

other, and it seems as if the degree of remoteness of the two harmonies claimed a certain proportionality in the pause to be introduced between them. However, even in this second place there still remains the harsh cross-relation between the D of the last chord in measure 44 and the opening D flat in the Bass of measure 45, which clamors for a pause of *some* length.

Similar occasions for pauses signaling unexpected harmonic turns can be found in

Schubert, Impromptu, op. 90, No. 2 (counting backward from the end, between measure 30 and measure 29). Here the abrupt change of harmony coincides with an equally sudden change from *ff* to *p*, and the pause is, therefore, doubly necessary. Eight measures later the same change recurs.

Another reason for the art-pause presents itself in

Mendelssohn's "Song without Words," No. 47. It contains what is known as a "chained period." The beginning of measure 61 forms the conclusion of the period that began three measures before; and at the same time it is the start of a new period. If the measures from 58 to 61 are played in strict time, the entire effect of the chained period is lost. But if, on approaching measure 60, we make a slight

retard and before entering the 61st measure create a feeling of suspense by a tiny pause, the significance of this measure as initiating a new period is at once understood. The A of the melody is the concluding sequel of the preceding G sharp; but the entirely unexpected chord of the subdominant upon which this A is set, characterizes it as the initial note of the new period; hence, the art-pause is imperative here.

The first two examples (Schubert's Impromptu and Schumann's Novellette) craved an art-pause for reasons of harmonic clarity, while in the last example the art-pause is induced by considerations of a constructive, formal nature. The next example illustrates a third reason for the art-pause. It is the purely aural reason. (The reader will remember the discussion of a *p* following abruptly upon an *f*, and the illustration by the quiet surface of a pond on page 63.) The Andante of Beethoven's Sonata op. 28 furnishes a fine example of such a necessity for the art-pause. The movement starts *p*, but at the end of the second measure there begins a *crescendo* which lasts through the entire third measure and which, with the slowness of the movement, must lead to a considerable degree of loudness when—suddenly—the fourth measure opens *p* again.



This *piano*, without a preparatory pause, is impossible. The reverberation of the preceding chord cannot be stopped so suddenly as to enable the hearer to perceive the *p* chord, unless it is stopped at the expense of all esthetic charm. The *p* is not a mistake, for it is repeated a number of times and recurs with heightened significance in the 12th and 14th measures (counting backwards from the end); besides, it is one of Beethoven's favorite dynamic effects, and I am satisfied that he, when playing the movement himself, made the art-pause of which I speak. He *had* to make it! But I am almost equally certain that he was not conscious of making it.

Something similar occurs in the first Allegro of the Sonata op. 31, No. 2. Counting twenty-four measures backward from the first double-bar we find a *p* entering suddenly and immediately after *ff* and carrying, moreover, a rather unexpected but beautiful change of tonality with it. So we are placed before a choice of either making a mere murmuring jumble of the bass figure that begins with the low G and keeps the auditor for a while in uncertainty as to what passes before his hearing, or interpolating an art-pause of sufficient length to prepare the auditor's ear for the ensuing dynamic and harmonic change. Beethoven's Sonatas contain such and kin-

dred abrupt changes from *f* to *p* in great numbers.

To sum up: The Art-pause may be necessary for harmonic, formal and dynamic reasons. I should have stated, as a fourth reason, that it may also be dictated by good taste or artistic esthetics, were it not for the thought that good taste in music usually receives its promptings from one or more of the reasons just mentioned. Indeed, I cannot help believing that most of the things we are wont to class as esthetic requirements repose upon a purely physical basis, though the present status of the various branches of natural science may not yet enable us to prove it in all cases. The artistic mind has often forefelt the presence of certain laws and left it to the scientific mind to find and formulate them. Art says prophetically to Science: "Somewhere 'round here there lies a rich vein of truth; now dig!" And Science digs and—after a while—verifies the prophecy; though just now it is a long way "behind its orders." A good many of the aberrations of taste into which our present hyper-modern creative artists have drifted may be accounted for by this tardiness.

## Tempo.

If the discussion of this topic were not so lengthy as it must necessarily be, it should have found its place in the chapter on "Old Errors." For in the field of music there is no error more widely spread than the belief that each and every composition has its definitely prescribed rate of motion or speed, and that, to be "correct," it must be played at this rate. "Correct!" What agonies this word has caused to artists and artistic teachers! Some American writer has introduced the term "bromides" for statements of the obvious. He should have completed his dictum by saying that to the artistic mind there is no worse bromide than "correctness." For it is indispensable, of course, but oh, so insufficient. I shall never forget my beloved master Kul-lak's comment on this word. One of my classmates (he did not stay long) was a perfect fiend for correctness; and when on a certain occasion he had finished playing, our dear master said, with an amused smile: "That was very correct! Very! And now let some one get at that piano who plays naturally."

After all, music is not a thing apart from life, existing by and for itself. It is, as we saw in the introductory chapters, a message from one

human soul to another. The demands a good composition makes upon our learnable knowledge can, therefore, go no further than to notation, terminology and mechanical dexterity. A good memory and a little persistence in technical practice will soon fulfill these requirements. But music makes other demands, and these are not so easily supplied. The trouble is that a musical work of art, before it yields its spiritual contents to any one—player or hearer—demands the man himself! The whole man! His keenest sensibility, his finest instinct, the most loving attitude of his heart and mind, in short, each and every part of that which constitutes his personality. That this is not overstating the demands which art and art-works make upon their devotees is proved by the personality of every man and woman whom the world has recognized as an artist; for

Art is, what thou *art*;  
All else is artifice.

Granting this premise, and assuming that in compliance with these inexorable demands we did invest our personality in the study of an artistic composition, how in the name of common sense can we accept a prescription of speed as more than a suggestion made on the most general lines? Shall we devote all

that is best in us to a matter that compels us afterwards to wear a straitjacket? After being applied, shall our personality keep silence? Shall it have nothing to say? Who, but a soldier—in the only unnatural occupation in the world that is socially recognized—walks with a prescribed gait? What two people, approaching a common destination from different but equidistant points and with the same urgency, would use exactly the same number of steps or precisely the same time? Do not our stature and the proportion of our body influence our gait? Are not the physiological actions of our heart and lungs important factors in determining it? And if these personal and purely physical attributes assert themselves in the commonest function of our daily life, shall this right be denied to our spiritual self when it performs one of its finest functions—that of communing with other souls?

Of course, our liberty—on the premise before us—is subject to laws, as is liberty altogether. We must not, for instance, change an *Andante* into an *Allegro*, or *vice versa*; but to a person who earnestly seeks for the spirit of a composition such admonition is not necessary, for such a person can hardly miss the right *tempo* in any piece, even if the tempo-mark should be left out—as it is in many pieces. For, as I believe, the instinct which we call the sense

of propriety is a part of the great "moral law within us" which Kant regarded as the complementary half of his philosophy, and this instinct guides us rightly if we give it only a fair share of our attention and obey its promptings.

I also believe, however, that even this delicate question of *tempo* has a physical basis and, I think, this basis contains the proof that *tempo* is an individual matter. But, to make the reader see what I believe to be this physical basis, I must invite him to follow me once more to the "rustic bridge that spans a quiet pond," of which I spoke on page 63. (See the foot-note there.) I said there: "As soon as the shock (impact)—of the rock or pebble striking the watery surface—has spent itself, we see the rings that have formed. . . ." It is to this impact or shock that we must now turn our attention.

When the impact occurs, it stirs the surface of the water, but its motion is not at once regulated. The wavy rings do not form at once. The falling rock or pebble has displaced a proportionate amount of water which, unable to escape in any other direction (because of the pressure it encounters on all sides) leaps fountain-like upwards; and *not until it falls back* do the "rings" begin to form. The time necessary for its return to the surface depends upon its bulk, which, in turn, stands

in some relation to the size and weight of the stone, as well as to the distance it traverses in falling. A small pebble, however, generates the rings in a much shorter time after striking the water than does a rock of fifty pounds in weight, because the amount of water the latter has displaced in falling is larger, and this larger body needs more time to readjust itself in its element. The reader who remembers that articulate tone is caused by regulated air-vibration begins, no doubt, to perceive that our pond and pebble and rock are not romantic illustrations but perfect analogies. For the phenomenon of the wavy rings is to the perceptive power of our eye precisely what the air-vibrations, caused by the felt-covered hammer on striking the piano-strings, are to the sensibility of our ear. The drum and the harp-like Corti organ in our ear are stirred as soon as we strike the key. We perceive "tone" at once; but we need a certain amount of time to perceive the "pitch" of that tone, and the length of this time differs with the degree of force with which we struck the key. The reader can easily convince himself of the truth of this statement by a simple experiment. He only needs to play a very rapid succession of notes somewhat loudly in one of the higher octaves of the piano and then play the same figure *with the same rapidity and same degree*

## *Ethics and Esthetics of Piano-Playing*

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of strength in the lowest octave and he will be certain to observe that in the higher octave he understood the pitch of every note practically at once, while in the lowest octave he perceived hardly more than a heavy, rhythmical rumble. If he wishes to sense the pitch of these low notes, he will find it necessary to play the figure much slower. The explanation tallies exactly with that of the waves in our pond. The low strings in the piano are stouter, heavier and longer than the high ones; hence, they consume more time to overcome the stronger impact from the heavier hammer before they can adjust themselves to regulated vibration, that is, to such vibratory motion as our ear can perceive—not merely as tone, but as pitch. The suggestion of the foregoing experiment reminds me of the passages for the double-basses in the Scherzo of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony:



Even in the best orchestras this passage never amounts to more than a rumbling noise, redeemed, however, by its rhythm, through which we recognize it as a thematic fragment; through its rhythm—and because we have heard this rhythm many times before this



passage occurs, so that through the element of presupposed familiarity (see page 35)—our memory comes to our assistance. Had Beethoven committed the blunder—unthinkable in conjunction with his name—of putting this bass figure at the beginning of the Scherzo, the effect would not have been humorous, as he intended it to be, but comical. We could never have understood the notes without looking into the score. If, however, the same figure were played in a slower movement, say *Andante*, we should have no trouble whatever in discerning the pitch of every note 'as soon as played. The difference in the effect of the tempo upon our ear is, of course, due not only to the low range of these notes, but also to the necessary ponderousness of the requisite instruments. Whether we throw our fifty-pound rock into a well, pool, pond, lake or the ocean, the amount of water thrown into the air by its impact would always be the same and would always need the same length of time to fall back and to start the wavy motion of the surface. To reduce this length of time we must take a smaller, and therefore lighter, rock. Just so it is with articulate tone.\*

\*A cannon-shot surely produces a sufficient rate of air-vibrations to create a definite pitch; yet no one could ever recognize the tone because of its all too short duration. For by the time that our ear has overcome the tremendous impact, the tone is gone.

## *Ethics and Esthetics of Piano-Playing*

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A heavy touch upon the piano produces a stronger impact than does a lighter one, no matter which region of the keyboard it strikes. An orchestra of three hundred cannot play as quickly as one of one hundred if it wishes to impress the audience with the same degree of clearness. A pianist who possesses a naturally rich, fleshy touch is bound to play slower than one whose touch is dry and bony; for if he exceeds his natural speed, if he insists upon equalling the actual instead of the relative speed of his leaner colleague—his tone will impress his hearers' ears as their eyes would be impressed by the sight of five persons trying to sit upon a sofa built for three.

It is not a mere coincidence that all rapid ornamental runs with which Chopin graces his melodies are marked *pp* (unless they consist only of a broken chord which serves an entirely different purpose), for if such a run—containing chromatic, diatonic and harmonic intervals in delightful motley mixture—were played *ff*, our ear would perhaps be able to follow it in those higher octaves, but it would, even then, be a strain rather than a pleasure for our hearing.

I repeat, that we may not change an *Andante* into an *Allegro* or *vice versa*, in order to say that, on the other hand, your *Allegro* might, but need not, be *my Allegro*. The average speed of one player differs from that of another

player as much, and in the exact proportion, as does his average "tone." This difference of speed may also be due to a difference of conception. I mention it for the sake of completeness only, for conception is a matter entirely beyond this discussion. But I feel no hesitation in saying that a player's "tone" is not altogether without influence even upon his conceptions, for when he thinks in music he thinks in his own tone, as in literary thought we think in our own vocabulary.

Some of my readers may wonder how I reconcile the foregoing with the metronome-marks frequently seen. For there, certainly, is a definite speed-prescription *in optima forma!* I pray the reader not to feel scandalized if I decline to regard the metronome with that deference which it receives at the hands of artistic and pedagogic mediocrities. (See page 42, second paragraph.) How any musician could ever play with a metronome, passes my humble understanding. It is not only an inartistic, but a downright antiartistic instrument. In order to prove this and to explain the vogue it has had in spite of it, we must regard the inventor a little closer and consider the time in which the misfortune of his invention happened. Mälzel was the son, not of a musician, but of an organ-builder. His father delighted in contriving all sorts of queer "stops"

which, of course, no organist wanted or even accepted. These queer stops accumulated in his shop until it was a regular museum of such musical eccentricities. His son inherited this trait. He "learned" music, but never played in public or composed anything. He did not even teach music, but only "gave lessons." How much his pupils could have learned from him we can infer from the fact that he spent all his leisure time upon things that go against the very grain of every one who loves music. He constructed all kinds of mechanical instruments, such as an automaton trumpeter, a mechanical orchestra, a "panharmonium," I believe also a mechanical chess-player and—the *metronome!* The priority of this latter invention was, besides, contested by a Dutch mechanist whose name does not really matter. From all this it is easily seen that the impulse leading to the invention did not come from an artistic temperament. Mälzel received, however, Beethoven's endorsement, and I do not believe, as does Dr. Thayer in his "Beethoven," that he received it because he had urged the loan of fifty gold ducats upon Beethoven when the latter was at the point of going to London and feared that his funds might possibly prove insufficient for a prolonged stay. I believe rather that the endorsement was given in all sincerity. Musical pedagogics in Beethoven's

day were in their infancy, the understanding for his works was still as good as closed to most people, including the rank and file of the contemporary piano-teachers. Hence, any device that might prevent people from taking an altogether absurd tempo in playing his works seemed welcome to Beethoven. He accepted the metronome with a feeling that, in conditions such as they were, "every little helps." We must remember, however, that the distinction between playing in "time" and playing in "rhythm" had not yet dawned upon the world. Even Schumann—though he felt it, no doubt, as keenly as did Beethoven or, for that matter, Bach—was not conscious of it. Not until the advent of Chopin began the emancipation from strict time in our consciousness. But with the moment it came to us, there began also the relegation of the metronome to its proper sphere of action, namely, to serve as an orthophonic machine for regulating the gymnastic exercises on the keyboard, which the acquisition of technic, unfortunately, requires. It may be said that the metronome is not intended to regulate the playing of a whole piece, but to give only a general idea of its average speed. Granted! But is not even this smaller use opposed to the ethics of the art divine? Let us see. A person who, after becoming familiar with the notes of a

*Ethics and Esthetics of Piano-Playing*

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composition, sees nothing more in it than the notes, feels none of its sentimental, emotional or even sensuous charm—such a person might be prevented by the metronome from taking an absurdly slow or quick *tempo*. Quite true; but what is gained thereby? What matters it whether a person who plays a piece without understanding does it in the right or wrong *tempo*? I, personally, would ten times rather listen to a wrong tempo with a conviction back of it, however erroneous it might be, than to a right tempo dictated by a machine or, for that matter, by any influence extraneous to the player's mind. A metronome should be in every teacher's studio, to be judiciously employed in the rudimentary *mechanical* work; but as soon as his pupil touches a composition—away with it! For tempo is an individual matter; it must be felt, or it will not convince.

You'll ne'er attain it, save you know the *feeling*,  
Save from the soul it rises clear,  
Serene in primal strength, compelling  
The hearts and minds of all who hear.

.....  
..... ne'er from heart to heart you'll speak  
inspiring,  
Save your own heart is eloquent!

(GOETHE'S *Faust*.)

There is in many people's minds a tendency to regard art altogether as something that can be *learned*. This conception is begotten by

the fundamental error of confounding art with the craftsmanship that underlies it. A painter can *learn* the theory of colors, perspective and foreshortened drawing, anatomy and the play of muscles in their various actions; but to put upon the canvas a human being that has character and makes a living appeal to the beholder, stirring his heart and awakening responsive feelings there that bring to the surface the noblest instincts and impulses that were slumbering in its depths—that cannot be *learned!* For it has nothing more to do with his craftsmanship than has his breathing. The power to impart to the achievement of his workmanship a living message lies in the man, himself; in the inner man. It lies in the education of his heart, an education based upon the mystery of his innate psychic disposition to extract from the experiences of his life the essence which develops the moral side of his character and spirit. Thus, when we speak of Beethoven as a great musician, we do—I hope—not mean a man who had by dint of hard work acquired exceptional skill in writing counterpoint (which, in fact, was not the strongest side of him), or who had all the regulations and rules of musical composition at his fingers' ends, but we do mean a great *soul* whose medium of utterance happened to be music.

## *Ethics and Esthetics of Piano-Playing*

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It is remarkable how few have a realization of this fact, and how difficult it is to convince the others of its being a fact. The average person who takes music-lessons sits complacently down before the piano, opens the sheet music and—instead of showing now the result of his preparatory work for the purpose of obtaining trustworthy criticism and such additional information as his work may need for its improvement—asks the teacher: How fast ought this to go? How shall I take the pedal? These, and kindred questions, are asked in a tone and manner as if one had been requested to wind a clock and asked: Do I have to turn the key to the right or to the left? The vision of the notes seems to be conveyed to the *motoric* nerve-center of the brain, and nowhere else. Is it not evident that they conceive the art of music as a mere mechanical thing, the handling of which is merely a matter of information? And yet,

..... one who never feels  
The wanton stings and notions of the sense,  
But does rebate and blunt his natural edge  
With profits of the mind,"

will never make "music," however much he may have "learned," for—to start with—he will never find the right *tempo*, that is, the *tempo* that is right for *him*.



## *Tempo*

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..... go to your bosom;  
Knock there and ask your heart what it does  
know.

That is the only way to determine the *tempo*. It is the only way by which the super-wise editors found it when they added the *tempo*-annotations to the pianists' music-bible, The Well-tempered Clavichord. If master John Sebastian could only return to earth! He would surely ask these editors why they trusted less to the common sense of humanity than he did himself. He refrained from putting down anything but the bare notes; but Czerny had to add metronome-marks. Czerny—of all men!

## Tone-Measuring Through the Ear.\*

The concluding words of the chapter on thematic "design" were: "there must be no ambiguity in melody!" What I warned against there, was the appearance of more than one tone at a time in a melody through the careless prolonging of a tone after it is supposed to have moved to another one; a prolonging which is as often effected through carelessness of the fingers as of the foot on the pedal, though in either case primarily through a careless ear. But this particular form of carelessness is by no means the only one that destroys the clarity of a melody. For it might be avoided altogether, and the melody still be unintelligible to the hearer. While there may never have been more than one tone heard at a time; while the succession of tones may have been correct in time and pitch, the melody may yet fail utterly in a musical sense "to say something," because the *dynamic* relation between the succeeding tones has remained unobserved. As our speech is not composed of solitary utterances, but of groups of words of which each one, besides having a meaning of its

\*My thanks are due to Messrs. D. Appleton & Co. for kindly permitting me to use in this chapter some expressions and designs that I employed in an article contributed to their beautiful publication, "The Music of the Modern World."

## *Tone-Measuring Through the Ear*

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own, bears upon the meaning of some other word or words in the group—so do the notes of a melody surely signify more than a mere change of pitch and length. They are not only rhythmically, but also dynamically related one to another in the same manner as are the words of a sentence, or the syllables of bi- or tri-syllabic words. And as in such words we do not pronounce all the syllables with the same force, so should the notes of a melody likewise differ from each other.

The student of a wind- or bow-instrument has in this matter a great advantage over the piano-student; for in fixing the pitch and quality of each tone that he produces, he learns from the very start to consult, and depend upon, the judgment of his ear. The piano-student, unfortunately, when hearing a tone out of pitch on his instrument, if he objects to it (which, alas, many do not), simply sends for the tuner. This lesser dependence upon his ear often induces the piano-student to neglect that attentive control over his tone which the ear alone can exercise. Since his ear is not needed for his intonation, he often does not employ it at all, and thus the dynamic element in his playing is lost sight of altogether.

And, yet, it is just the dynamic element which appeals most directly to the emotional faculties of the listener, to whom intervals

## *Ethics and Esthetics of Piano-Playing*

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and rhythms are only intellectual, not emotional, concepts. If refined harmonic successions, melodic steps, interesting rhythms, are to affect more than the intelligence of the auditor, if they are to penetrate into the sanctuary of his feelings, they must be carried thither by a nature-like variety of dynamic degrees. A melody played or sung in one monotonous-degree of force can awaken no more in us than a momentary interest in its rhythms and intervals; it can only occupy our sense of observation, if not of mere curiosity. The human voice is the most appealing of all musical instruments because, even in its natural and untrained condition, it is compelled to make dynamic changes; to increase in intensity with the rise and to decrease with the fall of the melodic intervals, besides responding dynamically also to the significance of the text-syllables of the song.

All musical instruments (including the voice), with the sole exception of the piano,\* have three forms of tone: The *crescendo*:



the *steady* tone in any degree of force:



the *diminuendo*:



Of these three forms the piano possesses only

\*The harp, on account of its utter lack of any distinguished literature, cannot be considered here.

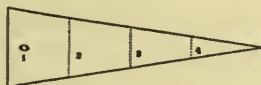
## *Tone-Measuring Through the Ear*

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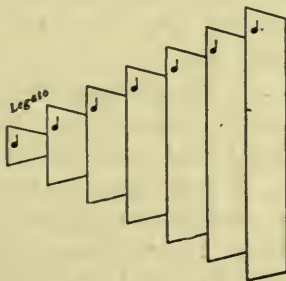
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one, the *diminuendo*. It is the natural tone-form of the piano; the other two forms must be produced through artistic deception; the pianist must be somewhat of an illusionist. Fortunately, the modern piano offers many means to produce such acoustic deceptions and many realize this; but of the one form of tone which really is the piano's own they are often totally unmindful because, while playing, they fail to employ that organ which in music-making is a *conditio sine qua non*—the ear!

Translated into a visible design, the form of tone inherent in the piano would look like this:



Hence, a *crescendo* would present this picture:



## *Ethics and Esthetics of Piano-Playing*

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While a succession of tones of equal strength would be like this:



In the modern piano the power of sustaining a tone is so well developed that, *in a rapid tempo*, such a succession of tones might practically amount to a continuous dynamic uniformity. When, however, the notes of a melody follow each other more slowly and when they vary in length, as they must in the nature of rhythm, then the matter is very different; for then the pianist has to hear, to feel, to *weigh* the relative importance of every note, as to the part it plays in the whole of the melody. If, for instance, a phrase reaches its climax upon a long tone, the next one should not be struck without considering how much of its initial force the preceding long tone has lost in the course of its duration.

This must not be grotesquely construed to mean that every piano-piece should begin *forte* and form one long, continuous *diminuendo*. By no means. If nothing else, the rhythmical accents alone should furnish ample material for the continual replenishment of force. It does mean, though, that the *diminuendo* is the

## *Tone-Measuring Through the Ear*

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tone-form natural to the piano; that it is the handiest word in its vocabulary and that the pianist should make the best possible use of it.

The beginning of Chopin's Nocturne in D flat, op. 27, No. 2, may illustrate both the necessity and the effectiveness of putting the natural *diminuendo* to its proper use.

After a measure introducing the accompaniment-figure, the first tone of the melody enters upon the primary (accented) beat. The next tone falls likewise upon an accented beat and is at once followed by two others on negative beats which, in their turn, lead to the next accented tone of four eighths in length. Upon this tone a *crescendo* is marked which can be easily produced by the left hand and by the pedal through accumulation of tone-volume, in the various stages of which the melody in the right hand is entitled to participate while it rises to D flat and to F, finally reaching the climax upon B flat. Ay, but there—on this B flat—there's the rub! In music-making I know of nothing more heartless than to strike the following A flat as if it were entirely unrelated to its predecessor. To a halfway sensitive ear it is shocking to hear this A flat struck without consideration of the loss of power the preceding B flat has experienced by the time the A flat became due.

## *Ethics and Esthetics of Piano-Playing*

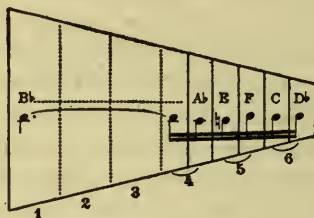
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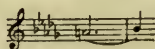
The proper presentation of this measure



translated into our adopted design, would be:



A still stronger illustration is furnished by the two following measures:



The first note lasts through the whole measure. However strong or weak it was when struck, it loses power constantly while it lasts. Therefore the next B flat ought to be nicely adjusted to that degree of force to which the A has sunk by the time when the B flat was due; for the two notes stand in precisely the same relation to each other as do the two syllables of a trochee, say "morning," "yonder."

The B flat, the second syllable, should therefore

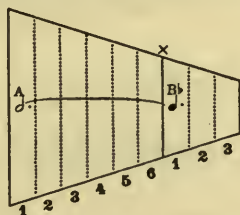


## *Tone-Measuring Through the Ear*

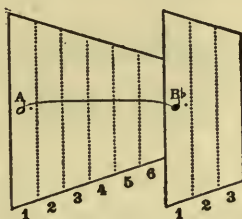
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be no louder in proportion to the A than this design indicates by an x mark:



or else this B flat would look like this:



and create the impression of starting a new phrase before the preceding suspension was resolved. It would be very confusing to the auditor because of its utter unnaturalness.

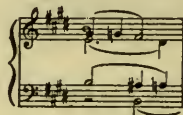
A further illustration is to be found in Beethoven's Sonata, op. 14, No. 1, measures ten and twelve. The B in the uppermost part lasts through the whole measure. It is the melodic terminus of the descending scale in the preceding measure and, introduced as it is, has considerable force. While it lasts, there

## *Ethics and Esthetics of Piano-Playing*

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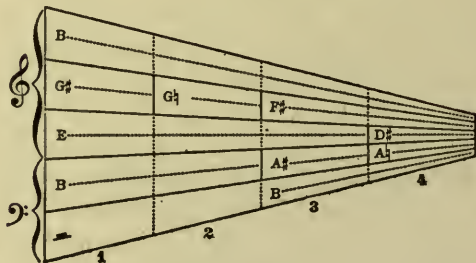
occur a number of harmonic shiftings in the lower and subordinate parts. The measure looks thus:



but who has not heard it played like this?

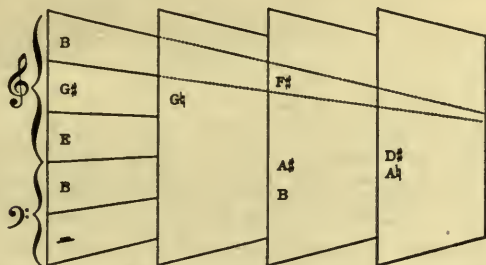


In the form of our adopted design it should, of course, present itself thus:



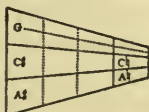
## *Tone-Measuring Through the Ear*

and not like this:



which shows that every little harmonic shifting destroyed the connection with all that preceded it, and that the poor B of the melody (see dotted line) was, as early as in the second beat, quite crushed out of tonal existence.

The Allegretto of the same Sonata shows a similar case in the transition from the third to the fourth measure. The chord in measure 3 is the climax of the first phrase. Its melodic G lasts into the next measure; but underneath it a change of harmony has taken place. This change should be made so delicately that the second of the two harmonies enters without crushing the continuing G of the melody, in order that this melody may be understood to be thus:

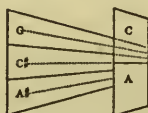


## *Ethics and Esthetics of Piano-Playing*

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and not as if it were meant thus:



These few examples may suffice to illustrate what is meant by "tone-measuring through the ear." Like all the finer problems in art, this matter of tone-measuring is very subtle and elusive. And I gladly reiterate what I have said on many other matters in piano-playing, namely, that it cannot be treated dogmatically, but only as a suggestion. Nevertheless, something like a very frequently applicable rule can be deduced from the foregoing illustrative designs by any one who is not altogether impervious to the musical inwardness and meaning of a melody. I venture to formulate it in this way:

*Whenever a long melody-tone is followed by a shorter one, the significance of the long tone as to the place it occupies in the phrase should be ascertained and, if found to be analogous to the penultimate or antepenultimate emphasis in speech, its decline of force during its continuance should govern the strength of the following, shorter tone.*

This applies with particular nicety when the second tone occurs on a weak part of the

## *Tone-Measuring Through the Ear*

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measure, as for example in the first illustration of this chapter.

Proper attention to this matter will go very far toward converting mere piano-playing into actual music-making; for it will "humanize" the melody; it will give it life, naturalness and sensuous beauty, which latter quality, as we saw on page 21, is of primary importance in art.

## Conclusion.

On page 83 it was said that the transmutation of mere craftsmanship into artistry "cannot be learned." Yet this entire little volume seems to aim at nothing else. But it only seems so, because it was taken for granted that the reader is gifted with a certain faculty which, so far, has been only veiledly hinted at. This faculty is

### THE MUSICAL WILL.

The distinction between a wish and a will is not quite clear to the minds of many people. Without needlessly going into the abstractions of thinkers like Kant and Schopenhauer—who have based their systems of thought upon the "will"—we may safely assume that the will is the highest intensification of the wish. In desire or wish the center of gravity lies on the sensuous and psychic sides of our life. In becoming "will" the point of balance has been shifted to the moral and intellectual side; for reason, percipience and judgment must have entered into its formation. The will is, therefore, the determination—coupled with the requisite physical and mental equipment—to attain by energetic, centralized action the object of our wish. (It will be hardly possible

## Conclusion

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to understand, even as an abstract philosopheme, a will that was not preceded by the wish.) Hence, the difference resolves itself into one of intensity and potency; of mere craving, yearning, longing on the one side and of well-directed and persistent action on the other.

Speaking musically, the two propositions of wish and will stand in precisely the same relations; for in music, too, the will must be called forth by the wish. The musical wish may emanate, for instance, from the joy we feel when a worthy composition unfolds its ultimate meaning to us at the piano and thus creates in us the desire to communicate this joy to our brother. But, alas, this unfolding did not come to us through our hearing alone; our eyes, the motions of our fingers and arms, the physical exertions corresponding with the dynamic changes in the piece, all these have aided us in obtaining an insight into the moods and thoughts of the composition—an insight sufficient unto ourselves. Two consecutive phrases, which ought to have been separated, but were not—our *eyes*, seeing them detached from each other, are more than likely to convey them so detached to our musical perception; an embellishing little run, which our fingers may have spoiled in its execution—our *vision*, perceiving how smoothly

it is *meant* to be played, carries it to our musical imagination in all its intended smoothness; ay, even a harshly sounding, false note disturbs us—sometimes—only until our *eye* has detected and corrected the error. Yet, in spite of such defects and blemishes, we may be perfectly able to “understand” the piece and, having done so, we feel at once like asking our brother: “Is it not beautiful?” Our brother, however, has but scant praise for it, because we invited his attention to our interpretation of the piece while we were still in the stage of the “wish.” While, in a sense, we were “perfectly willing” that he should understand and appreciate the piece, we were still very, very far from having “willed” it.

To attain to this higher stage it will be necessary that—for a while, at least—we renounce our own enjoyment of the piece and devote much, and right unpleasant, work to it. It requires close self-observation, much vexatious experimenting, keen searching, critical listening to the actual result of our efforts, and an inflexible, indomitable determination to play the piece with such technical and spiritual perfection that our brother *shall* and *must* understand it. The fortitude to impose upon ourselves these, mostly trying, experiences and to brave them for the sake of our brother; this altruism, that bears the noblest



## Conclusion

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egoism in its depths; this unshakable determination to put into living tonal reality what we have mentally extracted from the cold, printed pages with the combined assistance of our eyes, ears, hands and feet; this is the pianist's—musical *will!*

In any pianist who reaches for a book like this, the presence of this musical will must be presupposed. It was, therefore, unnecessary to dwell upon it at the beginning of the book, where it might have assumed the forbidding look of a barrier which only the chosen few could surmount. The musical will is given to all of us who have normal hands, normal ears, and strength of character in a normal degree. It is given to all of us *in nucleo*, and, as "the lofty oak from a small acorn grows," so can this nucleus, planted in the soil of our character, develop into that power which alone can change us from a self-pleased dilettante into an artist.

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Though fully aware that this little book suffers from many shortcomings, I hope that the reader who looks a little deeper, a little beyond its palpable defects in expression and wording, will allow its well-meant purpose to atone for them. For this purpose was no other than to save the reader *some* of the

vexations inseparable from serious study; to state in plain words *some* of the things he may have felt as a mere uncertain notion; and to encourage him to do what, after honest and sincere thinking, seems right to him, though this may involve the breaking with any tradition that militates against the world's modern and enlightened conception of music. He should, therefore, not accept and follow any suggestions and advice given here without testing them first with the touchstone of his individual thinking and without assuring himself that the advice selected applies to the case he may be dealing with. I said, for instance, that many of the accentuation-marks upon negative time-beats serve only to indicate the starting of a new phrase. The reader might ask how he can distinguish them from those which do imply an emphasis. Alas, I could not tell him; but I have warned him against an unthinking and unquestioning acceptance of such signs. I have asked him to reflect, to bestow thought upon something which, hitherto, he may have disregarded entirely or taken too easily for granted. In a similar manner I have suggested that he may sometimes make a pause where none is printed. How long this pause should be, and just where it should be placed, only a teacher of well-trained and refined taste can tell him.

## Conclusion

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I hope, however, to have stimulated the student's own thinking and feeling so as to make him *search* for both the length and the placing of the art-pause. If he will but persist in his search, he is bound to find what he seeks, and when he has found it by his own endeavor he will feel that his musical grasp has widened, that his own inner consciousness has begun to bear fruit; and at the same time he will have provided that rare pleasure for his teacher of discussing, and probably approving, a pupil's *idea* instead of doing—as so often he does—the pupil's *thinking*.





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