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Seeking the Meaning of Virtuosity: The Integration of Technical Mastery and Musical Artistry in Piano Training



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# Seeking the Meaning of Virtuosity:
# The Integration of Technical Mastery and Musical Artistry in Piano Training

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
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in Music

by

Xiao Chen

2017

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Seeking the Meaning of Virtuosity:

The Integration of Technical Mastery and Musical Artistry in Piano Training

by

Xiao Chen

Doctor of Musical Arts in Music

University of California, Los Angeles, 2017

Professor Inna Faliks, Chair

Virtuoso playing has ingrained itself into the fabric of classical piano performance culture. “Virtuosity” is difficult to define; if treated as an isolated goal, it can result in problems such as mechanical playing and mindless practicing by piano students. Pianists spend years to cultivate technical perfection by employing mechanical finger exercises and training methods. Without a systematic training method, an average piano student might have difficulties combining technical works with musical understanding. By examining and combining valuable pedagogical methods from the 19$^{th}$ and 20$^{th}$ centuries, I establish my own teaching method, specifically designed to help pianists find a musically aware approach to technical training. Inspired by Wieck’s *Piano and Song* and Neuhaus’ *The Art of Piano Playing*, my method, “Imagining between Notes”, will hopefully aid piano students to practice technically difficult material with imagination and meaning.

This dissertation of Xiao Chen is approved.

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2017

# Seeking the Meaning of Virtuosity:

# The Integration of Technical Mastery and Musical Artistry in Piano Training

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*Curriculum Vitae*

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# Chapter I

## Definition and Criticism of Virtuosity

The definition of virtuosity, its history, and place in the art of piano playing, is highly complex and controversial. While remaining a desirable goal for musicians, the boundary between superficial and artistic virtuosity is still the subject of much controversy. Questioned by Friedrich Wieck, Robert Schumann, and many other music critics, virtuosity remains vexing in its performance practice today and requires further investigation. As a result, certain negative "side-effects" of virtuosity have infiltrated the way piano playing is taught and practiced today. It is my goal to show in this paper, through the analysis of past pedagogical methods and my current pedagogical ideas, how one might avoid virtuosic pitfalls and highlight its artistic purpose in performance practice. Before the further discussion, it is necessary to provide the definitions to those frequently used yet perplexing musical terms, such as technical mastery, musical expression, and musical artistry: technical mastery means good execution and control in piano playing; musical expression is the communication of emotion in performance, as pertaining to musical ideas of compositions; and musical artistry is the combination of the above. The term of virtuosity, defined by Sir George Grove's encyclopedic 1889 article as "a person highly skilled in music or another artistic pursuit,"[1] is surrounded by many questions and doubts: Where does the term come from? What does virtuosity represent? Why

[1] "Virtuoso", Concise Oxford English Dictionary, 11th Edition (revised 2009), (Oxford, 2009), 1615.

has it become a goal in and of itself? How do we perceive and practice virtuosity appropriately today? In this paper, I will begin with a brief history of virtuosity and its controversial definition, and continue to an investigation of the problems existing in today's virtuosity, and later explore a solution by integrating significant pedagogues' technical training in the 19th and 20th century with my innovative pedagogical ideas.

Despite the fact that the rise of virtuosity was the Romantic period in the 19th century, virtuosity can be found much earlier, even dating back almost to the beginning of music history. Marc Pincherle and Willis Wager in their article "*Virtuosity*" claim that "[virtuosity] is almost as old as music itself, for virtuosity existed long before the words specifically designating it came into use..."[2] One can assume and define the melisma singing style in early Gregorian chants as early virtuosity. Interestingly, scholars asserted that the early existence of virtuosity in performance practice was found in church services. Without opportunities to see concerts like today, the only opportunity and place for people to hear music was the church, and virtuosity already found its place in church performance. Pincherle and Wager believed that "the church, paradoxically, was the chosen field of virtuosity, as is evidenced by the many rebukes that are to be found in parish archives, addressed to interpreters of too great brilliance. Church toccatas are one of the products of this virtuoso tendency."[3] Clearly, not limited to expressing devotion, church musicians were able to showcase virtuosity through their masterful techniques. This early

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[2] Marc Pincherle and Willis Wager, "Virtuosity," *The Musical Quarterly 35* (1949): 227.

[3] Ibid., 230.

virtuosity was exhibited by the lively speed of the performances and the velocity of the music itself. On the other hand, the style of virtuosity in church implies that church virtuosos needed to integrate showy skills with musical expression in their virtuosic performances, not allowing for technical challenges to overtake musical expression and devotional purpose. Later, virtuosity expanded to a wide range of musical styles, such as Rameau's keyboard compositions involving the showy hand crossing technique – one hand crossing over the other, Beethoven's piano sonata *Appassionata* with fast running arpeggios up and down throughout the entire keyboard, and Schubert's *Wanderer Fantansie* with challenging octaves.

The expansion of virtuosity in diverse musical styles resulted in the rise of virtuosity in the 19th century that was mainly reflected in piano performance practice in Vienna, Paris, London, and Leipzig. The virtuosity in the 19th century took center stage in the careers of performer-composers such as Paganini, Liszt, and Thalberg. The social environment of the said time period played a major part on the prevailing virtuosity. Musical performances were branching out of the private homes into the larger concert space; the increasing public concerts in the 19th century led to the growth of journalism and press releases, which significantly affected the reputation and career advancement of the performer. Musicians even went out of their way to beg journalists to write about them. The performer's self-ego and motivation constantly impelled him to improve technical skills to achieve perfection in performance. In order to gain reputation and fame, technical perfection and uncanny speed became a way for the performer to attract attention. According to Susan Bernstein, "fame is not simply added onto but is constitutive of the virtuoso; without

it, he would not be virtuoso any more than there could be a spotlight without a stage and the price of a ticket."[4] The interplay between public relations and the performer's reputation resulted in the trend of virtuosity and rising virtuosos.

Moreover, the increasing concert tours for virtuosos further forced the growth of virtuosity to satisfy the audience. Pincherle and Wager claimed, "in going from town to town [virtuosos] had to pique the public's curiosity from the very start." [5] To gain popularity, the performer might need to change repertoire and musical styles to satisfy the audience's interests and tastes, sometimes with appealing body language and technical skills. Bernstein stated that "Liszt is presented 'at this very moment' in physical contact with the worldly space of Paris to which he imparts vibrations."[6] Bernstein revealed that the composer-performer culture rapidly arose in the 19th century and accelerated the development of virtuosity. Instead of writing music for others, the composer-performer composed and performed virtuosic music to display his individuality. By composing music to feature his own personality and technique, the composer-performer advertised his music and increased his popularity. For example, Liszt's dazzling octaves, flamboyant improvisation, and personal charisma in concerts, which best displayed his technique and personality, can easily attract the audience and gain his reputation. Thus, social environments forced the rise of virtuosity and the virtuosic performing style.

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[4] Susan Bernstein, *Virtuosity of the Nineteenth Century: Performing Music and Language in Heine, Liszt, and Baudelaire* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 79.

[5] Pincherle and Wager, "Virtuosity," 233.

[6] Bernstein, *Virtuosity of the Nineteenth Century*, 66.

The development of the piano and its dominant role in the 19th century was another factor that pushed virtuosity to its peak. The rise of the virtuoso in the 19th century can be attributed to the improvement of the instrument in that century. During the industrial revolution in the early 19th century, the piano, as a commodity, were increasingly made in numbers, which led to the evolution of instrument at that time. The range and tension of the grand piano were increased to allow for different colors and sounds that were impossible before. The major piano manufacturers in the 19th century included Graf, Bosendorfer, Stein, Erard, Pleyel, Broadwood, Bechstein, Mason& Hamlin, and Steinway. Erard, one of the major piano manufacturers during the 19th century, was always compared with another famous brand, Pleyel. Chopin claimed that he could achieve more colors and personal emotional content on a Pleyel: "When I feel out of sorts, I play on an Erard piano where I easily find a ready-made tone. But when I feel in good form and strong enough to find my own individual sound, then I need a Pleyel piano."[7] Pleyel ranged 8 1/2 to 9 and possessed diverse layers of sounds. In contrast, Erard, less muffled than a modern instrument, ranged from 9 1/2 to almost 10 with a penetrating and bright tone, which was good for passionate compositions like Liszt's virtuosic works. According to a musical source, "in practical terms, the Pleyel was a drawing-room instrument, while the Erard was designed for a concert stage."[8] The rapid development of the instrument resulted in the improvement of piano technique and the popularity of piano virtuosity in the 19th century.

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[7] Larry R. Todd, *Nineteenth-century Piano Music* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 23.

[8] Ibid., 24.

The popularity of virtuosity led to the varying definitions of the term. Virtuosity has experienced serious criticism over the course of history. German writer Heine defined virtuosity as "the reversal of the 'good virtuoso' (a poet) into the 'bad virtuoso' (a prose manipulator) is enacted… from the literal to the figurative."[9] German piano pedagogue Friedrich Wieck attacked virtuosity with a mechanism by calling Liszt's and Kalkbrenner's playing "empty virtuosity."[10] His student Robert Schumann criticized the "'insipid virtuosity' [that] he associated with Herz and Czerny (and which he contrasted to the spellbinding virtuosity of Paganini)" (MacDonald, 534) and performers who lacked "true virtuosity" - "a purpose higher than entertainment", in which "the audience who did not attend to judge, but only to enjoy."[11]

To further advocate poetic and true virtuosity, Schumann established the association Davidsbündler (League of David), an imaginary society depicted in his musical articles, to criticize the empty virtuosic compositions and ornate performing style. The society, which only appeared in Schumann's articles, was formed by "real" people, including "Chiarina" (Clara Wieck), "Felix Meritis" (Felix Mendelssohn), "Florestan" and "Eusebius" (The contrasting sides of Schumann's personality). Schumann's imaginary society Davidsbündler attacked Liszt's and Thalberg's virtuosic performances as an entertainment in music salons and commercial concerts.

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[9] Bernstein, 66.

[10] Lora Dehal, "Robert Schumann's 'Album for the Young' and the Coming of Age of Nineteenth-Century Piano Pedagogy," *College Music Symposium* 41 (2001): 28.

[11] Jacob Sagrans, "Virtuosity in Clara Schumann's Piano Compositions," *Musicological Explorations* 11 (2010):53.

Schumann was concerned that this social phenomenon would destroy the musical aesthetics. By creating the musical journal *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* to spread his ideas and opposition to empty virtuosity, Schumann asserted the "subordination of technique and virtuosity to the compositional idea, and…compositional egocentricity - for music, to communicate at its deepest level, must convey a composer's personal life experience."[12] Schumann supported his ideas by defending the musical style of Bach, Beethoven, and Schubert, praising their focus on the artistry of music instead of fame. Moreover, the revolution of "Davidsbundler" inspired the nuance of Schumann's major composition *Davidsbundlertanze Op.6* and many other virtuosic works that underline the poetic components. This imaginary society, as a powerful device to stand against the anti-poetic style and mere entertainment, evoked musicians to explore the essence of virtuosity and seek an artistic interpretation.

However, the paradox arises because Robert Schumann "was devoting hours per day perfecting large works by Hummel, Chopin, and Herz, and to mastery of hundreds of exercises…Like Liszt."[13] His wife, Clara Schumann, under her father and teacher Wieck's strict technical training, became a dazzling piano virtuoso in the 19th century and frequently impressed the audience with technical perfection and accuracy. The existence of the paradox indicates the diversity of virtuosities and the blurry distinction between true and empty virtuosities. Thus, the definition of virtuosity is subjective, depending on an individual's understanding and taste. Due to

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[12] Andrew Fowler, "Robert Schumann and the "Real" Davidsbündler," *College Music Symposium* 30 (1990): 19.

[13] Claudia MacDonald, "Schumann's Piano Practice: Technical Mastery and Artistic Ideal," *The Journal of Musicology* 19 (2002): 528.

its ambiguity and ongoing debate, it is difficult to provide an absolute definition of virtuosity, and the use of the term still remains vexed. Despite all, it is undeniable that the term virtuosity is still often used today in music to emphasize technical difficulties.

On the other side, it is not accurate to conclude that 19th century was the harbinger of empty virtuosity. Many sources reveal that the major virtuosos in the 19th century went beyond perfect execution to exploit colors of the music and show personal expression in their performances. For example, Franz Liszt, a major virtuoso of the 19th century, displayed musical expression in his performance and teaching, even though the audience was overwhelmed by his flawless and ornate technique. Charles Rosen asserted that "in his [Liszt] concentration on tone color Liszt may be seen as the most radical musician of his generation."[14] Another giant of piano virtuosity during the 19th century, Frederic Chopin, displayed poetic expression in performance. Heine, when discussing Chopin claimed, "I completely forget the master of piano-playing, and sink into the sweet abysses of his music, into the painful sweetness of his equally deep and tender creations. Chopin is the great genius tone-poet."[15] The poetic sides of virtuosity shown in Chopin's performances overweigh the striking technical difficulties in his compositions. In addition, the varying sounds and singing tone quality were also reflected in Chopin's teaching. He explained a good technique to his students: "The goal is not to learn to play

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[14] Jim Samson, *Virtuosity and the Musical Work* (The Transcendental Studies of Liszt. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 89.

[15] Mark Mitchell, *Virtuosi: a defense and a (sometimes erotic) celebration of great pianists* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 61.

everything with an equal sound, [but rather,] it seems to me, a well-formed technique that can control and vary a beautiful sound quality."[16] Chopin believed that good technique embodies the control of sound and colors rather than mere dexterity of fingers. We see here both Chopin and Liszt were masters of musical expression. However, the differences of their virtuosity will be explored in the following section.

Critics and scholars often compare the differences of approach in virtuosic compositions between the two virtuosos of the 19th Century, Liszt and Chopin. Although scholars had various opinions towards their styles, I would specify and analyze Liszt's virtuosity as "explicit" and Chopin's virtuosity as "implicit." Liszt's explicit virtuosity stands out for its extraordinary technical components. In turn, Chopin's virtuosity is implicit, in which the technical component serves with the expressive component that is equally important as the former. Thus, "explicit" and "implicit" virtuosities both demands technical control and musical expression. However, explicit virtuosity draws attention to particular technical tasks at hand and its purpose is to astonish the audience; implicit virtuosity has technical difficulties solely for the purpose of musical substance. Specifically, the "explicit" and "implicit" virtuosities are reflected in Liszt's and Chopin's compositions. The extraordinary technical difficulties in Liszt's etudes draw as much attention to itself as the profound musical artistry. Some of Liszt's twelve transcendental etudes use challenging octaves and numerous fast scales and arpeggios. The ostentatious technique shown by the rapid moving intervals that have no specific pattern may overwhelm pianists

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[16] Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger, *Chopin: Pianist and Teacher as Seen by His Pupils* (Cambridge: Cambridge Press, 1986), 31.

from just looking at the score. For example, even though Liszt's fifth Transcendental etude *Feux Follet* displays a profoundly artistic image of flying fire, the technical tasks are brutal. The right hand is forced to manage the intervals while the left hand has to jump across the entire keyboard. The technical difficulties overweigh the other components in the piece for the performer. In contrast to the "explicit" virtuosity, the technical difficulties in Chopin's "implicit" virtuosity are hidden under the poetic lyricism and diverse colors. Chopin's etudes demand the performer to use a different approach to perceive and interpret the music. For example, his Etude Op.25, No.11 and No. 12, using fast scales and arpeggios, create expressive images of sea and wind. The extensive expression and poeticism of the etudes are closely connected to the technical tasks and play an important role as the technical challenges.

Furthermore, Chopin's "implicit" and poetic virtuosity was exhibited in his teaching. Pianist Alfred Cortot claimed that Chopin inspired his pupils to develop "an imaginative approach."[17] Chopin also trained his students to put "the whole of their souls" into their playing. In addition, he required students to produce smooth sound and beautiful tone while practicing exercises. Specifically, Chopin's student Mikuli recalled,

> notes that in passing the thumb under the fingers the sight movement of the hand accompanying this action must not paradoxically affect the perfect evenness of tone demanded by all these exercises, and this applies equally to the fingers and the wrist.[18]

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[17] Alfred Cortot, *In search of Chopin,* trans. Cyril and Rene Clarke (London, New York: P. Nevill, 1951), 30.

[18] Ibid., 31.

Chopin's strict finger exercise training, when concerning timbre and touch, resulted in performances that attained poetic expressions. The repertoire he gave his students were diverse, including Etudes of Cramer, *Gradus ad Parnassum* of Clementi, *Studies in Style by Moscheles*, and Field's Nocturnes or his own Nocturnes. Chopin's diverse teaching repertoire, not only finger exercises and etudes, trained students from all musical perspectives. Compared to other pedagogues who suggested many hours of finger exercises, Chopin proposes that only a maximum of three hours for finger work should be implemented. Chopin set the rule to "avoid the formation of any automatic or mechanical reflex likely to destroy the spontaneous flow of the music."[19] (Cortot, 33). The road to technical perfection, for Chopin, should not destroy the musical instincts.

Chopin's "implicit" virtuosity included a view of practice that contrasts to that of Liszt. Chopin believed that "practice should be adjusted to the demands of expressive interpretation."[20] Liszt, however, insisted that "three hours, irrespective of any other time spent on musical matters, should be devoted to the development of technique."[21] Chopin's and Liszt's dissimilar opinions in virtuosity resulted in the opposite virtuoso styles. Chopin's poetic virtuoso style revealed the significance of artistic perspectives in technical training. Chopin's concepts inspired us that the true virtuosity, not equaling to technical perfection, integrates musical expression with technical mastery in performance.

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[19] Alfred Cortot, *In search of Chopin*, 33.

[20] Ibid., 33.

[21] Ibid.

# Chapter II

# The Problems in Contemporary Piano Teaching and Playing

## The Separation of Musical Intent from Technical Perfection and Mindless Exercises

Today, many pianists train to reach the perfection of execution; this goal becomes an end in and of itself. As I previously have explained, virtuosity is a complex idea that involves more than hitting all the right notes. However, the belief that technical perfection may win a pianist international competitions makes piano students practice for years, specifically to train for perfect execution. Piano students hope to develop their careers by performing technically difficult and virtuosic music, preparing for competitions. Winning a competition might lead to recognition and publicity within the musical elite, until the next winner comes around. I believe that the sheer numbers of piano competitions, and the style of playing they cultivate result in an emergence of pianists all trying to attain one common goal in their own playing - technical precision first and foremost. Accuracy and perfection might be valued higher, at piano competitions, than a personal and thoughtful interpretation.

The problems of superficial playing were partially generated by inappropriate technical training with mechanical exercises in music history. The tradition of technical exercises dates back to the 19$^{th}$ century when numerous technical exercises were composed and pianists used them for technical perfection. Early piano technical exercises include those of Czerny, Clementi, Hummel, and Moscheles, which all

offer a variety of specific technical training. It has been controversial whether the exercises were helpful or mechanical. It is evident that these exercises embody mechanical training, thus misleading numerous pianists into using them in an insipid manner. Lora Deahl, in her article *Robert Schumann's Album for the Young and the Coming of Age of Nineteenth-Century Piano Pedagogy*, stated her perspectives on those aforementioned exercises:

> Clementi's influential manual packed all there was to learn about music reading, fingering, and performance practice into fifteen pages of dense text, followed by scale, trill, and double-note exercises…Hünten's Instructions for the Piano-Forte advocated at least three hours of daily practice with the first hour spent in drilling scales and five-finger exercises…Hummel's monumental treatise emphasized the verbal presentation of musical concepts that were then drilled in by the endless repetition of 2200 technical exercises.[22]

Through the repetitions of practicing trills, scales, octaves, and arpeggios, piano students trained finger skills with speed, clarity, and accuracy. Unfortunately, the physical training in these exercises overrode the mental and emotional involvement. Specifically, research showed that Clementi's exercises demanded superficial physical motion including firm wrist and inflexible arm. Gerig described Clementi's technical training method in his book:

> Clementi gave little but superficial physical technical direction…The hand and arm should be held in a horizontal direction…This is the kind of finger technique that allows a penny to rest undisturbed upon the wrist. The finger action will be a little more vigorous…but the arm is not actively involved.[23]

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[22] Dehal, "Robert Schumann's 'Album for the Young'," 28.

[23] Reginald R. Gerig, *Famous pianists & their technique* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2007), 60.

Clementi's mechanical training only aimed to develop fingers muscular action and did not involve the flexibility of arm.

The strict physical training was not only shown in Clementi's exercises. Gerig also found the similar training in Cramer's pedagogical books with vigorous finger exercises. Gerig described Wilhelm von Lenz's reaction to Cramer's performance of his etudes: "it was dry, wooden, harsh, with no *cantilena*…" (Gerig, 62) The mechanical elements in Cramer's playing and finger exercises revealed a separation of technical practice from musical intent. Regarding the vogue of mechanical playing, Robert Schumann disliked the fashion of this mechanical playing style in a letter to his teacher Friedrich Wieck: "They have no notion of cultivating 'touch,' and of bringing a fine tone out of the instrument; and as to regular practice, finger-exercises, and scales, they don't seem ever to have heard of anything of the kind."[24] Schumann stated pianists' mindless exercises with mechanical finger training. With the influence of the 19th century, pianists nowadays tend to perceive an effective and successful performance as playing flawlessly and with technical perfection. The lack of musical sensibility and artistry in the practice of finger exercises has resulted in the performances full of superficial touch and mechanicalness.

Furthermore, my personal experience with the aforementioned exercises has been mechanical finger training, which fostered difficulties and problems in my own playing. Thus, I then spent innumerable years trying to fully understand the musical substance of finger exercises and change my senseless and mechanical playing. Growing up in an environment where the teachers trained the dexterity of fingers

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[24] Gerig, *Famous pianists & their technique*, 202.

with strict and mechanical methods, I practiced every piece in a slow tempo to focus on the independence of the fingers. Only to train the finger skill, I lifted my fingers for every note to play clearly and loud without any musical meaning. I was made aware that my fellow students played all Chopin and Liszt Etudes flawlessly, and was forced to train my technique by practicing exercises. From the extremely slow tempo to challenging fast tempo with various rhythms and patterns, the practice process trained the independence and clarity of my fingers. I spent most of my time on practicing finger exercises, etudes, and technical passages in different pieces, in order to achieve the perfectness. However, I neglected the musical essence in exercises during the whole practice process, and later superimposed the expression to the already trained fingers.

This mechanical training method which lacks musical meaning in the beginning, forces the pianist to adopt a bad habit of separating musical intent from technical skills. When I tried to play, for instance, Chopin's lyrical passages, I could not manage my fingers to render a legato sound with the correct approach. My independent fingers tend to strike the keys firmly, and lift and strike again; any other action or approach would deem too atypical for my hands and fingers. Thus, the sound that is most often produced is not smooth and tender. My one-dimensional training has hindered my ability to demonstrate my musicianship effortlessly. This one-dimensional manner in training can also dangerously inculcate the wrong notion of what musical artistry is, engendering pianists with wrong interpretations and musical ignorance. However, the exercises I had were not wrong, and if practiced correctly - with musical meaning - the result is a flawless display of an amalgamation

of technical precision and musical essence. Although some pianists intuitively are able to not separate musical intent from technical training, there is no specific and systematic method to guide them. The problems in today's technical training reveal the significance of an appropriate training method that can prevent pianists from making mistakes and wasting time in daily practice.

## Mechanical Hand-Support in Technical Training

Mechanical hand-support was a tool used in mechanical training to physically train finger abilities. The harm of mechanical hand-support can be seen as evident in the past, which instigate hand injuries more easily and empty virtuosity. The use of mechanical aids in finger exercises was not rare. Clara Schumann's father Friedrich Wieck pointed out the harm of mechanical hand support in finger exercises. He insisted, "In piano-playing also, I require no cutting of the interdigital fold, no mechanical hand-support, no accelerator for the fingers or stretching machine; and not even the "finger-rack" invented and used, without my knowledge, by a famous pupil of mine, for the proper raising of the third and fourth fingers."[25] The "famous student" mentioned here is Robert Schumann, who injured his hand after incorrect mechanical practice. Wieck explained in his book that Schumann employed a machine for raising the weak fingers artificially. The use of this mechanical support resulted in the loss of power in his hands and destroyed his technical skills. Schumann's technical training with mechanical aids might lead to his hand injury.

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[25] Friedrich Wieck, *Piano and Song: How to Teach, How to Learn, and How to Form a Judgment of Musical Performances* (Boston: Lockwood, Brooks, and Company, 1875), 45.

Claudia Macdonald's article *Schumann's Piano Practice Technical Mastery and Artistic Ideal* described Schumann's piano learning process as a strict technical training by practicing Cramer's Etudes and Hummel's *Clavierschule.* His mechanical aid did not strengthen the weakness of his third finger. There is evidence of it when one reviews his fingerings in his pieces, where some compositions avoid the third finger entirely. It is hard to identify the reasons behind Schumann's hand injury, but his mechanical hand-supporter created problems in his piano playing.

Moreover, piano virtuoso Friedrich Kalkbrenner also used a mechanical device to train his technique. He claimed,

> After a thousand fruitless efforts, the idea came to me that all technical practice at the piano could be facilitated by the aid of a mechanical device which would give the hands their true position at the very outset. I found that by supporting my right wrist with my left hand the force concentrated entirely in my fingers was augmented by the force which formerly had only served to stiffen the arms and the hands.[26]

Kalkbrenner utilized the arm of his armchair to support his forearm, helping him solely strengthen his fingers. This method only required him to use the muscular action of his hand, and he was able to exclusively work on his finger movement without tensing his arm. Although Kalkbrenner found his method helpful and encouraging, it was not supported by his colleagues. Saint-Saens claimed that this method is excellent only at the first step of training, and later, pianists need to progressively add weight to the arm and forearm. He asserted that "it was not only strength of finger that one acquired by this method, but also the production of tone-quality by the finger only, a precious expedient that has become rare in our

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[26] Gerig, 133.

days."[27] Saint-Saens attacked the practice of using a mechanical aid by pointing out how it precipitated tone-quality ignorance in the training.

Similarly, mechanical devices have been also employed in today's technical practice. I used mechanical aids in my technical training when I was young. I was asked to put a small bag packed with sand on the back of my hands during practice to add extra weight to my hands. In this way, once I remove the bag, my hands will feel an extreme lightness and thus my fingers will fly on the keyboard without difficulties. By imposing more weight on hands, pianists can expand their technical capabilities, further their finger articulation, and increase speed. While this increased agility and strength, it detached pianists' musical intent from their finger abilities. Pianists, thus, only focused on the firmness and independence of fingers. Thus, the mechanical finger exercises and hand support prevented pianists from interpreting the music artistically.

## The Genre of Etude and Its Revolution

Etude, a short technically challenging composition, was often perceived as a necessary and significant channel to achieve technical perfection. The increasing production of etudes in the 19th century showed the rising trend that pianists improved and displayed technical skills by playing etudes. This viewpoint led to the daily mechanical practice of etudes. For example, Czerny and Clementi, the harbingers of etudes, crafted systematic and strict methods to practice their etudes.

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[27] Gerig, 136.

They wrote numerous etudes that have often been used for technical training. With diverse exercises for specific technical skills, such as thirds, octaves, and staccato, the etudes of Czerny and Clementi train the mechanism of fingers but barely involve musical elements. According to Gerig's description of Czerny's pedagogy,

> "Czerny emphasizes a quiet, restrained keyboard approach. Although he continually speaks of 'striking' the key, a high percussive finger action… The hand must… be held as tranquilly possible over the 5 keys, so that the reiterated percussion may be produced by the quiet movement of the single finger."[28]

Although Czerny's pedagogical concepts and training methods were effective and empirical, the lack of musical meaning in the practice needs to be changed. Research showed that piano virtuosos in the 19th century focused on technical execution in their practice. For instance, Gerig stated that the virtuoso style of the modern brilliant school founded by Hummel, Kalkbrenner, and Moscheles displayed "perfect mastery of all the mechanical difficulties; the utmost possible rapidity of finger; delicacy and grace in the various embellishments…"[29] The assertion revealed that technical mechanisms and accuracy were the principles for the virtuosos in the 19th century.

Following Czerny and Clementi, many virtuosos continued the tradition of composing etudes to display diverse technical challenges and claim their own technical training methods. Johann Baptist Cramer and Ignaz Moscheles, the major pedagogues of the 19th century, also composed etudes for technical training. Compared to the etudes of Czerny and Clementi, their etudes were more in the manner of concert repertoire. Cramer, Clementi's student, composed 84 etudes, all

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[28] Gerig, 112.

[29] Ibid., 118.

which have become standard teaching materials. Each etude is short in length and has various musical characters. The other piano pedagogue Moscheles showed musical artistry in his four concert etudes Op.111, in which he combined musical expressions into technical passages. These etudes displayed not only certain technical skills but also musical essence. Another significant composer and pedagogue Johann Nepomuk Hummel also created great dynamic contrasts and extensive expressions in his 24 Etudes Op.125. Thus, these etudes can be perceived and explored as concert repertoire.

Implementing new approaches, Chopin composed his etudes with lyricism and poetic expression. Chopin's great success of integrating technical skills with musical expression and poeticism enlightened the piano pedagogical aesthetics during the 19th century. Chopin's twenty-four etudes, one of his prominent virtuosic works composed during the 1930s, possess technical challenges and sophisticated musical expression. Categorized as virtuosic compositions and remained in the mainstream concert repertoire today, its unparalleled achievement exhibits the combination of poetic effects and specific technical skills. From that time on, etudes were not technical exercises anymore, but artistic challenges. Each of Chopin's etudes not only trains for particular technical skill, but also possesses its own musical character and distinctive image. Some of the etudes with specific images were named by scholars and Chopin's successors. For example, Op.10 No.12 was named as Revolutionary, and Op.25 No.9 as Butterfly. By portraying diverse images in etudes, Chopin established them as an art form.

Chopin's etudes were praised by many scholars and composers. The scholar Stefaniak in his article stated that Friedrich Wieck complimented Chopin "who seek to represent something higher than mere technical proficiency."[30] Chopin's etudes were also highly recommended by Robert Schumann. He believed that "Chopin's etude stimulated an inner, transcendental experience through the composer's own performance and the textural obscurity he scripted into his composition. Virtuosity, here, became poetic."[31] By going beyond the notes and technical skills, Chopin's etudes evoked the listener's emotions and stimulated "an image the listener longed to repossess."[32] Chopin's virtuoso style with poetic expression challenged the concept of the etude in the 19th century. People were inspired to explore the poetic perspectives and components in etudes and virtuosic compositions. However, the changing aesthetics of virtuosity and etudes did not result in a big difference in the technical training process. Despite the extensive expression in Chopin's etudes, pianists and teachers nowadays still perceive them as the paths to achieve technical proficiency and perfect mastery.

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[30] Alexander Stefaniak, *Schumann's Virtuosity: Criticism, Composition, and Performance in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2016), 60.

[31] Ibid., 58.

[32] Ibid., 57.

# Chapter III

# The 19th Century:

# Applying Singing Hand to Technical Training - The Enlightenment of Friedrich Wieck's *Piano and Song*

## Wieck's Singing Tone in *Piano and Song*

My investigation of a mindful technical training begins with piano pedagogy in the 19th century, where the trend of technical exercises and virtuosity originated. According to Lora Dehal's article *Robert Schumann's Album for the Young and the Coming of Age of Nineteenth-Century Piano Pedagogy*, "Wieck was the first person to apply Enlightenment theories about learning and methodology to piano pedagogy."[33] Wieck was the first person to challenge the mechanical finger training advocated by contemporaries such as Carl Czerny and Muzio Clementi. Instead, Wieck emphasized the individual exploration in piano teaching and developed students' musical sensibility in addition to honing the ability to self-explore. Wieck's pedagogical idea enlightened the piano society in the 19th century with his emphasis on the artistry and musical essence in technical training. In particular, Wieck concentrated on developing beautiful sound quality and musicianship during technical training. Wieck's pedagogical ideas and teaching methods, advocated two centuries ago, still inspire and benefit today's piano teaching and playing.

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[33] Dehal, 29.

Wieck's pedagogical ideas were illustrated in his significant book *Piano and Song*. He asserted that his teaching method is never "pedantic, but cautious, artistic, and psychologic[al]."[34] By pointing out the mistakes in piano and vocal teaching, Wieck stressed the significance of creating beautiful singing tone and song-like melodic line on the piano. He illustrated his teaching goal:

> I endeavored, without notes, to make the necessary exercises so interesting that the attention of the pupils always increased; and they even, after a short time, took great pleasure in a sound, tender, full, singing tone; an acquirement which, unfortunately, even many virtuosos do not possess.[35]

Wieck's concept of incorporating a singing tone into finger training was revolutionary and innovative at that time. The creation of a singing tone, which is still often absent in today's piano training, seems to form the essence of Wieck's piano pedagogy. Even though Wieck did not provide a specific definition of "singing tone", the manner of creating a singing tone in piano training was discussed in his book. In the following sections, I will review Wieck's valuable ideas of incorporating singing tone into technical practice and specifically investigate how hands can "sing" on the piano.

Before further discussions of singing tone, we will examine Wieck's innovative pedagogical ideas in his book *Piano and Song*. Wieck discussed the many mistakes in piano technical training, misleading pianists into cultivating technical perfection without musical meaning. He explained,

> It is a mistake to suppose that a correct touch, which alone can produce a good execution, will come of itself, through the practice of etudes and

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[34] Wieck, *Piano and Song*, 23.

[35] Ibid., 25.

> scales. Even with masters, it is unusual to meet with a sound, fine, unexceptionable touch, like that of Field and Moscheles, and among the more recent that of Thalberg, Chopin, Mendelssohn, and Henselt.[36]

Wieck pointed out that the mechanical practice of scales and etudes created senseless touch. He suggested pianists to practice etudes and scales with a more sensitive touch and more diverse timbre palette. Moreover, Wieck specifically stated the problems of "crude, cold and monotonous"[37] expression in piano playing. He gave an example that,

> he [a piano virtuoso] shows too pedantic a solicitude about mechanical execution and strict time; he never ventures on a pp., uses too little shading in piano, and plays the forte too heavily, and without regard to the instrument; his crescendo and diminuedi and inappropriate, often course and brought in at unsuitable places…[38]

The problems that Wieck pointed out are the common mistakes for piano virtuosos who only focused on achieving the flawless yet expressionless performance. He also disagreed with those virtuosos "who execute rapid octave passages with a stiff wrist…in the most rapid tempo, forcibly and effectively."[39] The stiff wrist and unreasonable rapid tempo, out of musical context, will result in mechanical and senseless playing. In addition, the teaching method that only aimed for speed and precision was also disparaged by Wieck. He regarded it as inappropriate teaching principles, providing an example in detail:

> they [students] possessed the peculiar advantage of playing 'in time,' when they did not stick fast in the difficult places. At such times he [the professor]

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[36] Wieck, 33.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Ibid., 66.

[39] Ibid.

> always became very cross and severe, and talked about 'precision;' in that way instilling respect. His pupils did not jingle, but they had a peculiarly short, pounding touch; and floundered about among the keys with a sort of boldness, and with resolute jerking elbows. They certainly had no tone, but the violin was therefore heard the better…[40]

Wieck insisted that the training of precision destroyed the beauty and quality of the sounds produced from the piano. He encouraged students to always consider the sound quality before aiming for fast speed and precision. In order to improve sound quality, he instructed students "not to practice much, but to practice correctly."[41] Upon reviewing his teaching principles, it is revealed that he believed that the practicing time length is irrelevant in producing the sophisticated quality of playing. In other words, the hours of technical training with dry exercises are not the correct way to cultivate true virtuosity.

Moreover, Wieck believed that supplementing technical training with musical expression can be achieved by the correct use of finger, wrist, and arm. First of all, Wieck discussed the appropriate execution and "tender touch" for the singing tone in his book:

> the tones which are produced with a loose wrist are always more tender and more attractive, have a fuller sound, and permit more delicate shading than the sharp tones, without body, which are thrown or fired off or tapped out with unendurable rigidity by the aid of the arm and fore-arm.[42]

Wieck specified the significance of involving wrist and arm in piano playing. In order to avoid harsh tone, the performer needs to be flexible in arm and wrist to

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[40] Wieck, 25.

[41] Ibid., 27.

[42] Ibid., 66.

transfer the power to the fingers. He also stressed that pianists should not lift their fingers too high and strike the keys rigidly. To produce beautiful tones while also practicing finger independence, Wieck articulated that the correct method in achieving this is by "plac[ing] the fingers gently upon the keys and avoid raising them too high, in order not to injure the nice connection of the tones, and to produce a singing tone as far as possible."[43] According to Wieck, pianists need to employ a slow attack on the keyboard with a gentle touch when producing singing tone, instead of striking the keyboard directly by fingers.

Furthermore, Wieck advocated the cultivation of sensitivity, the sensitive ears, in technical training. In order to understand the singing tone quality and avoid machine-like virtuosic piano playing, it is crucial to develop piano students' sensation in technical exercises. Even though Wieck did not specify how sensation can be embodied in finger exercises. The "beauties, shades, and delicacies" suggested by Wieck require pianists to have sensitive ears and to carefully listen to their playing in technical training. The variety of sounds produced from legato staccato, piano, forte, and tender or pounding sounds are executed by fingers yet identified by ears. Wieck underlined the significance of a "cultivated ear", which engenders pianists a better chance in creating various shades on the instrument. Wieck indicated that pianists should train their technical skills "industriously and artistically", which do not only train fingers but also improve listening and musical understanding.

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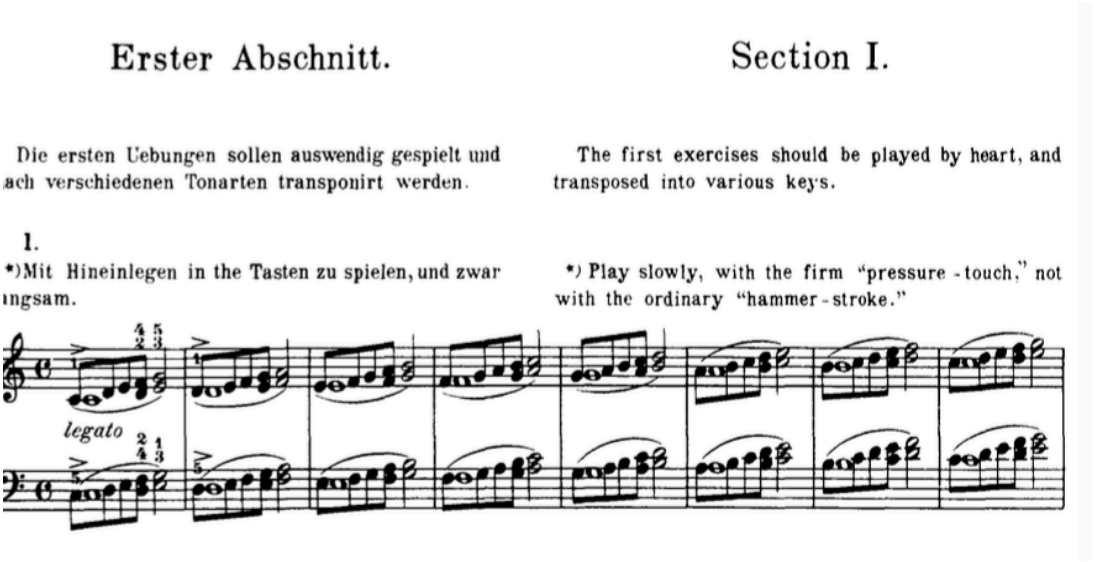
[43] Wieck, 27.

All of Wieck's pedagogical ideas are reflected in his anthology of exercises *Piano Studies*, a complete study of piano playing and musical appreciation. Through the observation of his exercises, Wieck provided detailed notations including accents, slurs, fingerings, articulations, and ideal sounds. For example, Wieck instructed students to "play by heart" on the first page of the exercises (Ex.1).



Erster Abschnitt.

Section I.

Die ersten Uebungen sollen auswendig gespielt und ach verschiedenen Tonarten transponirt werden.

The first exercises should be played by heart, and transposed into various keys.

1.

*)Mit Hineinlegen in the Tasten zu spielen, und zwar ıngsam.

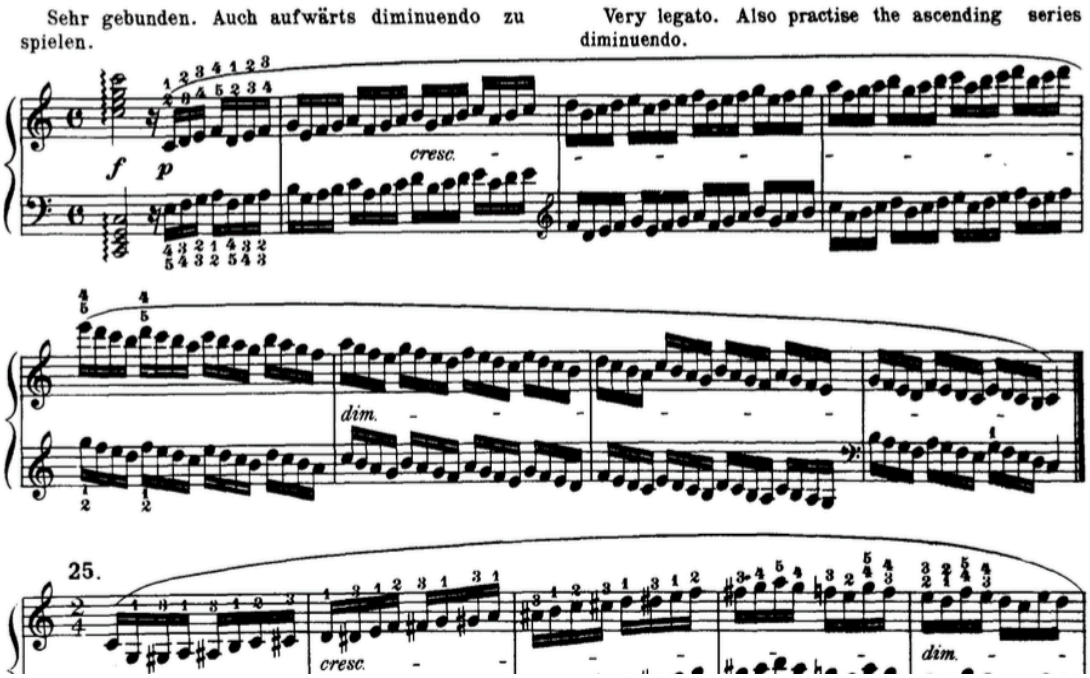
*) Play slowly, with the firm "pressure-touch," not with the ordinary "hammer-stroke."

*legato*

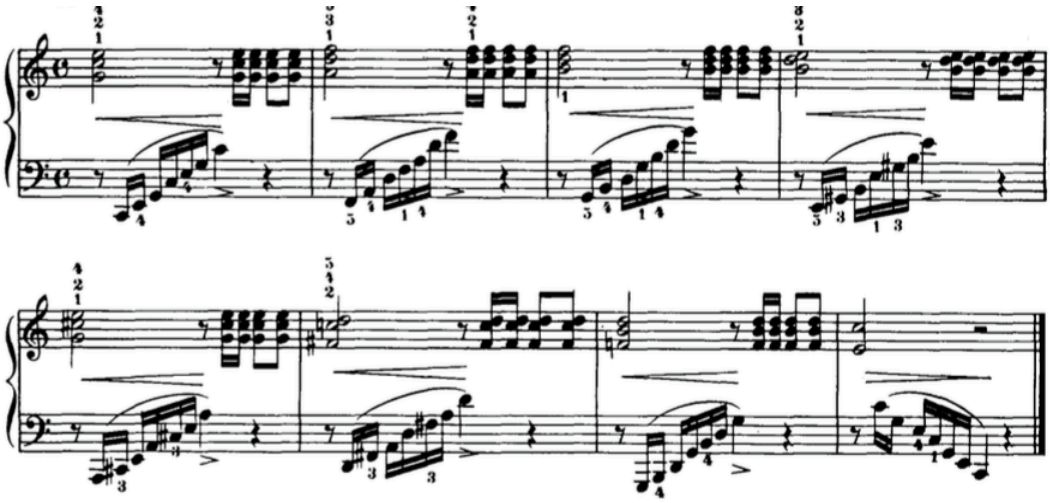
(Ex.1)

Wieck's instructions on the top of the page underlined the significance of touch and sentiment in the exercises. For example, Wieck guided learners to avoid the "hammer-stroke" articulation, a mechanical style of playing. Moreover, his exercises embody specific dynamic and phrasing notations (Ex.2 and Ex.3). The dynamic contrast and detailed articulations in the exercises help students develop musical sensors in technical training and explore the exercises as musical pieces. Wieck's specific musical instruction can be found in another example, where he required students to follow his musical interpretation - to not cut the last chord in each measure too soon (Ex.4). His instruction demands students to pay attention to the melodic line and execute the passages with musical expression. Wieck's instruction

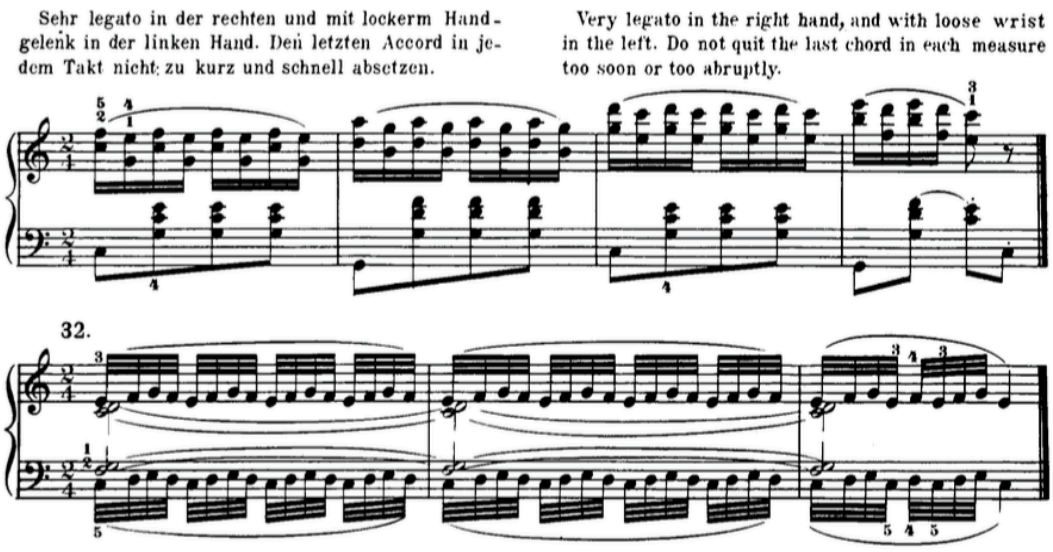
guided students to go beyond their one-dimensional playing of only exhibiting fantastic yet monotonous finger work, and explore the musical perspectives in exercises.




(Ex.2)

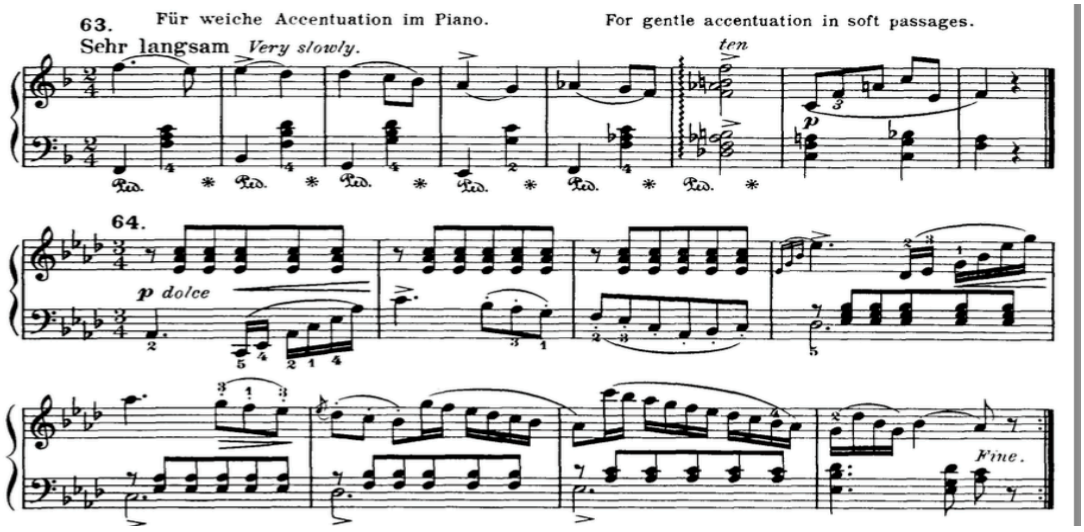


(Ex.3)




(Ex.4)

Furthermore, some exercises in Wieck's *Piano Studies* were composed as short concert pieces. For example, the exercise below (Ex.5) trains for the "gentle accentuation in soft passages." The "gentle accentuation" in the specific musical context - the "soft passages" - is challenging to students, which instructed students to fully understand the music meaning of the exercise and create dynamic contrast. Through the exploration of "gentle accentuation", students are able to seek the appropriate articulation and develop their hearing sensitivity. Wieck's pedagogical principle involves the concept of musical sensors in technical exercises and reveal that technical mastery is not precise execution, but possessing sensitive fingers.




(Ex.5)

Wieck's suggestions of the "fuller sound", "tender touch", "delicate shading", and "play[ing] musically and beautifully"[44] are all for the service of the singing tone, specifically meaning that it facilitates legato and connected sounds on the piano. Wieck believed that the singing tone effectively annuls the empty virtuosity and mechanical playing. However, even though Wieck emphasized "singing tone" in his book and inspired us with an innovative technical training, his pedagogical ideas did not thoroughly illustrate how to identify or produce the singing tone in technical training. The question of what a singing tone is and the skills for achieving singing tone needs more discussion. Specifically, Wieck's descriptions of "soft", "legato", and "tender" were not enough to clarify the methodology behind creating singing

[44] Wieck, 66.

tone. Wieck's emphasis on legato and connected playing neglected the significance of detached playing in creating the singing tone. Furthermore, the articulations of "tenderness" and "delicacy" of piano playing were not explicitly explained in his book. I will in the following section investigate singing tone at a closer perspective.

The singing tone on the piano demands various articulations and colors. Gerig claimed that "Chopin treated very thoroughly the different kinds of touch, especially the full toned *legato*."[45] Chopin's touch edified the diverse layers and colors in the piano *legato* playing. Konradi in his article *coloristic varieties of piano timbre* also claimed that "the different means of sound production on a musical instrument are expressed jointly by a single term of 'Musical Articulation'."[46] Konradi believed that musical articulation embodies diverse expressions and touches, which can be mainly divided into two manners of playing - connected playing and detached playing. In detail, connected playing, as the primary principle for singing tone, is not easy to achieve on the piano, because it is a percussive instrument. It takes years to train legato sounds and to apply it to actual music works. But does legato simply mean keeping fingers close to the keyboard? What are the necessary skills needed to successfully execute legato in piano playing?

First of all, the different types of connected playing, such as *legato expressivo*, *legato cantabile*, *legato dolce*, all require diverse musical articulations and expressions. All of these legatos require varied extents of expressions and

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[45] Gerig, 165.

[46] Tatiana Konradi, Coloristic Varieties of Piano Timbre, *American Music Teacher* 2 (1952): 8.

articulations in piano playing. *Legato expressivo* focuses on the emotion that is involved in the playing, sometimes achieved through tempo flexibility. The sound of *legato cantabile* is emotionally not as intense as *legato expressivo*, but is simpler and more like a song. *legato dolce* demands a gentler and more tender touch, to create a line that is soft and smooth and full of sweetness. Another articulation, *leggiero,* requires a light and delicate approach. For example, Chopin used *leggiero* to indicate a graceful and elegant sound in the beginning of the Etude Op.25 No.5. Therefore, all of these articulations that contribute to connected playing are distinctive. Playing legato in different registers of the piano also creates different sounds and effects, due to the various colors and timbres of different piano registers. The miscellany of sounds was absent in most technical finger exercises, which led to the conclusion that pianists do not consider musical expressions as their goals in technical training.

Moreover, singing tone can be produced not only in connected playing, but also in detached playing. Similar to connected playing, detached playing can also create beautiful tones. A contrast to legato, detached playing is also known as *non legato*. According to Konradi, detached playing includes many types, such as *portamento*, *jeu perle*, and *martalleto* or *staccato*. Detached playing also contributes to singing tone practice, because its articulation shares the same basis as legato. According to the article *"coloristic varieties"*, "The legato is based upon the same fundamental principle of portamento in the sense that the initial tone in each sequence of slurred notes should be produced by a free fall of the arm's weight."[47] Portamento, meaning detached playing, does not represent a dry and isolated sound. Even though the

[47] Konradi, 8.

articulation for “portamento” is different from legato by listening to it as individual notes, both legato and portamento in a group of notes share the same musical gesture. In other words, all the detached notes need to be “connected” together in terms of phrasing. In this case, detached playing can be also counted as “connected playing.”

Furthermore, the different types of detached sounds demand varied articulations. *Portamento*, originally from the vocal term meaning carrying, informs the player to slide from one note to another. It requires an articulation between legato and non-legato in piano playing and accentuates musical expression. *Jeu perle,* “pearl playing”, demands a soft and light touch from the fingertips to create brilliant sounds in fast passages, as seen in the opening of Debussy’s *Feux d’artifice*. By contrast, *martellato* or *staccato* indicates a very detached and energetic sound. The distinctive articulations and expressions in the “singing tone” were not fully explained in Wieck’s pedagogical ideas and not employed in his finger exercises.

Other than imitating singing tone on the piano, the discussion above inspired us to consider piano playing having the same diversity in sounds as speech. Through imitating speech, piano players can exhibit diverse expressions, emotions, colors, and drama. The speech contains a comma, period, and various tones; such qualities can be employed in piano playing and should be part of a piano student’s technical training. The different ways between reciting poems and telling stories are similar to the distinctive articulations for Chopin’s Nocturnes and Polonaises. By employing the art of speech articulation in piano playing, students will be asked to read sentences and poems, and then convey the said expressions and emotions in their playing.

## The Further Implication of Wieck's Pedagogical Ideas: The Connection between Notes

As mentioned above, the concept that Wieck advocated in his book of avoiding empty virtuosity can be concluded mainly as the "singing tone" in piano playing. However, Wieck's instruction of creating "singing tone" lacks details about the actual execution and musical articulations. To extend Wieck's pedagogy to a more concrete idea, I believe that the idea of creating the "singing tone" by using various "musical articulations"[48] in piano playing can be defined as "the connection between notes." This connection does not lie in the notes, but in the space between the notes. The connection between notes can be sound or silence, which helps pianists musically interpret the notes with expressions. Training fingers the ability to build the connection between notes further supports musicianship, which transforms the technical training from physical exercises to artistic thinking. On one hand, this idea is simple and basic because it can be applied to all music and piano technical training. On the other hand, the idea is profound because it can be applied to a variety of musical contexts. Demanding technical skills and musical understanding are necessary in the execution of "the connection between notes." I will specifically analyze this idea in piano technical training by employing different musical examples, including fundamental finger exercises and Chopin's etudes.

Before further analysis, I would like to discuss why the method "connection between notes" is one of the basic elements that avoid empty virtuosity and

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[48] Konradi, 8.

mechanical playing. “The connection between notes” helps pianists organize notes in the musical context, treating notes as a sound entity, not as single elements. The perfect execution of single notes yet neglected of note connection will result in mechanical playing that emphasizes on mechanism rather than musical expressions. Inspired by John T. Moore’s article *Some aspects of legato*, I believe that music exists in the space between notes. Moore advocated, “listening closely to the fading tones, it is relatively easy to resume the motion in a very legato manner by playing the following note at the exact dynamic level achieved by the held note at the end of its time duration.”[49] According to Moore, “listening closely to the fading tones” means paying attention to the space between notes, contributing to the practice of legato sounds. Pianists need to perceive and interpret the space between the notes, including sounds and silence, as part of the music. Therefore, the idea of “the connection between notes” is a fundamental component in piano technical training, in order to supplement the independent notes with musical meaning.

Moreover, based on Moore’s idea of “listening to the fading tone”, it is essential to analyze the connection between notes in piano technical exercises in three different situations: first, the connection between long sustained notes; second, the connection between notes with rest; third, the connection between long sustained notes with dynamic change. Specific musical examples will be used to illustrate the execution of “the connection between notes” in different situations.

The most common situation pianists encounter is the connection between long sustained notes. Pianists tend to ignore this aforementioned connection during

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[49] John T Moore, Some Aspects of Legato, *American Music Teacher* 2 (1953): 7.

technical training. When they practice finger exercises in slow tempo, they only focus on the technical execution, such as the independence of fingers, the speed, and the clarity of sounds. The connection between notes is often neglected, resulting in rigid and harsh sounds. To apply the connection between long sustained notes in technical training, I will employ Wieck's exercises *"Piano Studies."* For example, the left hand in the musical example below (Ex.6) shows the significance of the connection between notes. The long notes in the left hand need to possess direction and create a smooth line. Even though the right hand requires more challenging technical skills, the connection between the left-hand notes leads the right hands and creates direction for the passages. The significance of the left hand is often neglected during technical training. He suggested pianists to "play and practice the bass part a great deal and very often, first slowly, then quicker, during one or two weeks, before playing the right hand with it…"[50] Wieck's opinion solidified the importance of the musical expression in the left hand. To execute the left hand in this specific short exercise, pianists need to listen and respond to the growing and continuing long notes, instead of striking the notes rigidly. They can also imagine how string players use their bows to play the long notes and change bow speed to increase tension.

Furthermore, the crescendo in the right hand can support the connection of the left-hand notes. The *crescendo*, according to the score, seems to only indicate the climbing gesture of the right-hand arpeggio. However, the left hand should musically follow the *crescendo*. Pianists need to imagine the right hand's direction and gesture while playing the left hand. The synchronization of the gesture and direction for both

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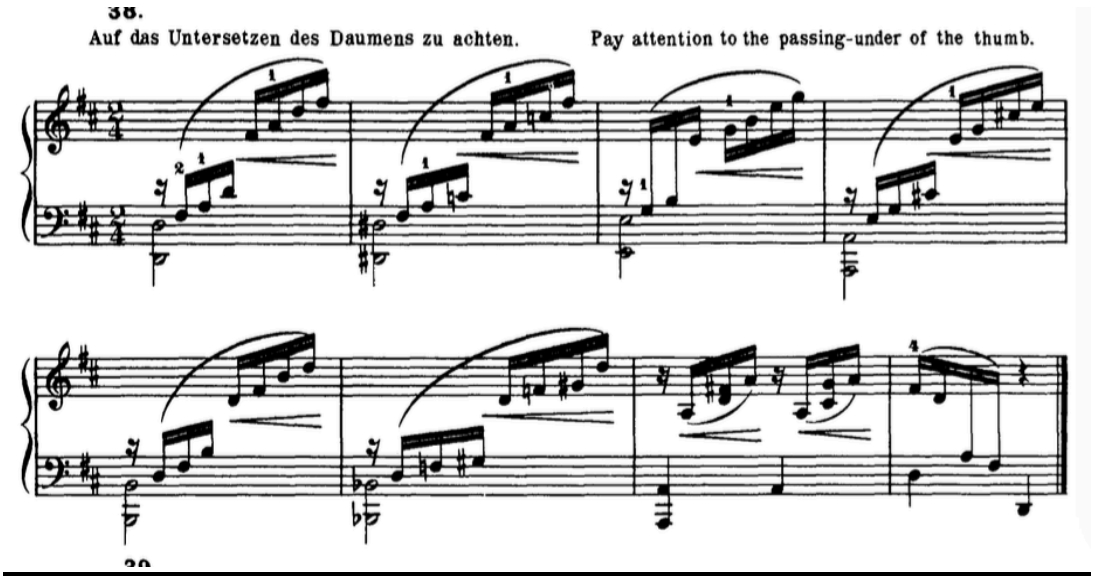
[50] Wieck, 70.

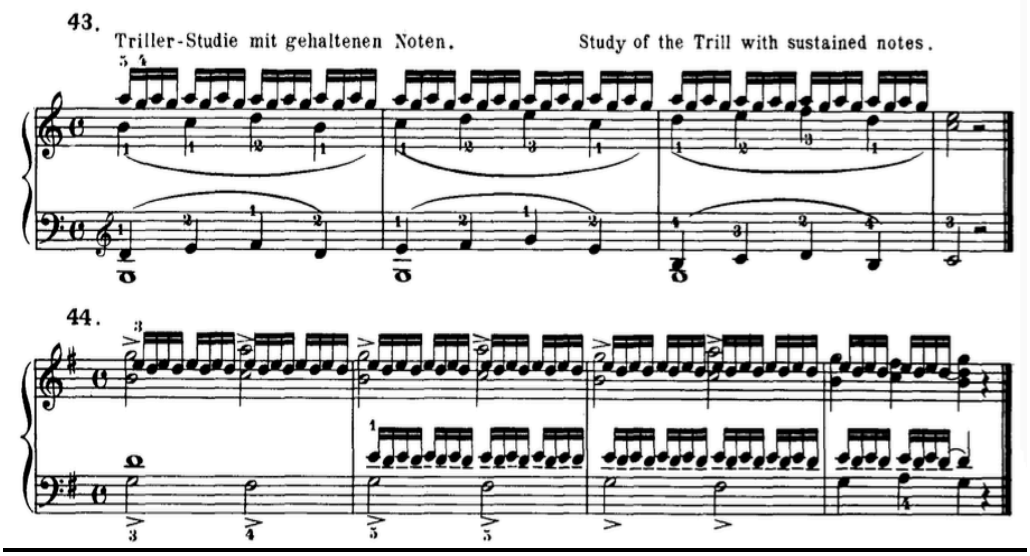
left and right hands will create a long phrase and strengthen the lyricism in this exercise. Thus, the interpretation of this short exercise embodies rich musical meaning.




(Ex.6)

Similarly, the exercise below (Ex.7) can also contribute to the training of the connection between notes. Although the purpose of this exercise is to technically train the trill with sustained notes, the four voices in this exercise require pianists to practice it with careful listening. According to the notation, the middle voices with slurs demand legato and connected sounds. However, the trills on the top make the legato lines in the middle more difficult. In order to produce the connection between the notes for the middle voices, pianists need to keep their fingers close to the keyboard and employ a gentle touch. Similar to Ex. 6, pianists need to carefully pay attention to the continuity of the middle voices (quarter notes) to create a smooth and legato melodic line. Besides, the trills in the upper voice should not interfere and destroy the connection between the notes in the middle voices. In other words, the

trills should follow the direction and shape of the middle voices. More specifically, little crescendo and decrescendo could be added to the trills to create shape and follow the direction of the middle voices. The physical movement of playing the trills should be like tires rolling and going forward. In this way, pianists will interpret the trills with expressions and shapes according to the musical context. The technical skills of the trills are trained along with musical perspectives in this exercise.

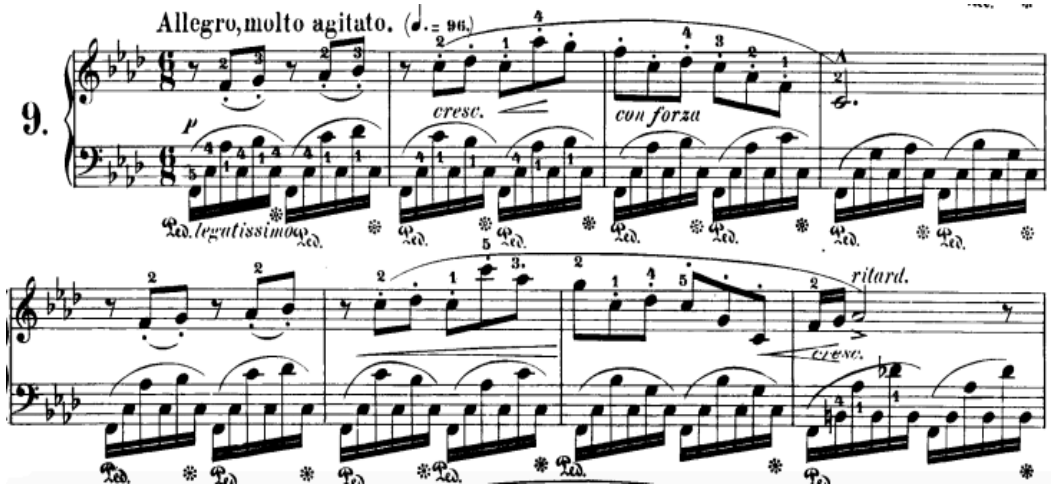



(Ex.7)

Besides, the connection between notes and rests also contributes to technical training. Even though rest represents silence in music, the performer needs to perceive it as part of the music. Rest, in some cases, is used to highlight musical characters, usually that of surprise or uncertainty. On one hand, rests strengthen dramatic moments, thus pianists need to feel the tension and musical characters conveyed by the rests. On the other hand, rest with a fermata is used to separate musical sections and moods. In those situations, pianists need to keep the rest still to produce a compelling powerful transition into the next section. The understanding

and interpretation of rests in varying musical context should be employed in technical exercises.

The rests between notes will be specifically illustrated in the musical example below (Ex.8). Chopin's Etude Op.10 No.9 is a good example in demonstrating the connection between rest. The melodic lines in the right hand are interrupted by the rests, whereas the rests should not destroy the musical essence of the melodic lines. Therefore, the rests here, as an important musical element, should be considered as silent notes. For example, the first phrase goes from the beginning to the C in the fourth measure. The rests lead and drive the phrase to go forward and increase the agitated feeling. In other words, the rests should not stop the forward motion. Besides, the left hand, by shaping a long phrase, should create waves to underline the agitation and increase the tension. The emphasis on the connection between the rests unites the independent notes as a whole and enriches the musical meaning of the etudes.

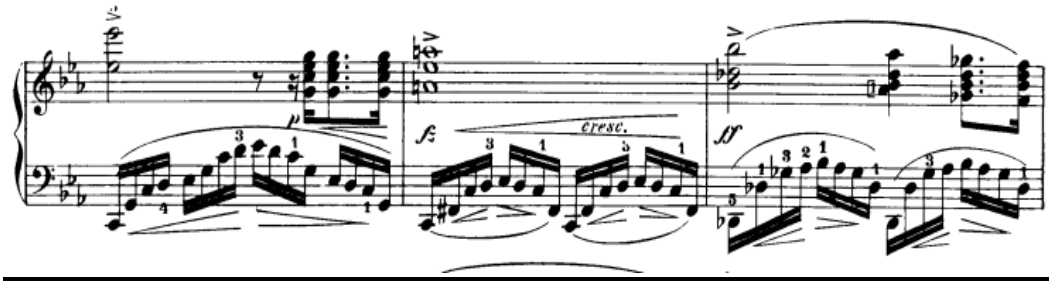



(Ex.8)

In addition, the connection between notes sometimes involves dynamic changes during long sustained notes. It is almost impossible for the piano, as a percussive instrument, to create a crescendo during the sustained note. However, crescendos for long sustained notes still often appear in the piano repertoire. These sustained notes indicate the significance of the connection between the notes. When executing crescendos during sustained notes, pianists should use not only their technical skills but also imagination. The crescendo here implies direction and emotion instead of volume. By imagining the crescendo played in strings, pianists will be able to create a connection between sustained notes with increasing intensity. Even though the crescendo during sustained notes is not often found in technical exercises, the imagination and tone quality should be trained alongside finger ability.

I will exemplify the detailed interpretation of dynamic changes during sustained notes by using Chopin's etudes. The dynamic changes during sustained notes can be often found in Chopin's Etude Op.10 No.12 (Ex.9), where Chopin provided separate dynamics to the right and left hands. The waves of the left hand are consistently shaped by the "hairpins", whereas the right hand has more varying indications to portray the fluctuation. The second measure in the Ex.9 has a big crescendo for the right-hand chord (A-Eb-A), which leads to an *"ff"* for (Bb-Db-Bb) in the next measure. According to the score, the previous dynamic is "p" in the first measure, and pianists need to produce a crescendo that proceeds to the volume of "*ff*" from "*p.*" However, it is difficult for pianists to increase volume during sustained notes. In order to create this effect, pianists need to train their imagination and understands the connection between notes. In this situation, by imagining a "crescendo" and a

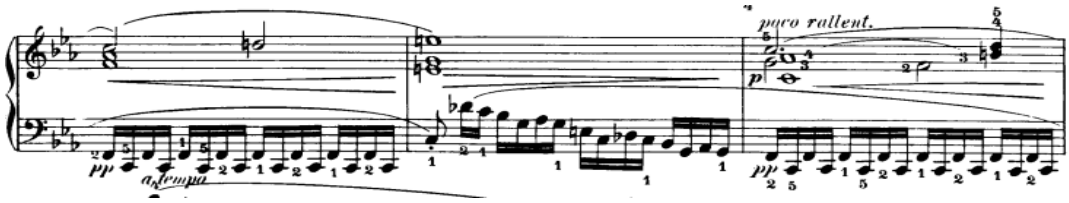
forward motion for the right hand, pianists need to pretend that they were able to push the dynamic to "*ff*." This impossible crescendo will be achieved by the imagination that is producing direction and shape for the phrase. Here, the crescendo to "*ff*" is not achieved by volume change, but by forward motion, imagination, and a good connection between the notes. Pianists need to feel the connection between notes and imagine a volume change in the continuing chord (A-bE-A). The imaginary crescendo will be delivered to the audience if the performer hears and commits it. Moreover, the left hand also contributes to the connection between these two chords in the right hand. The left hand with "hairpins" should also create a direction and intensity to help the right hand shape the phrase and achieve the small climatic "*ff*." This particular section in Chopin's etude indicates the necessity of imagination and musical substance in technical practice.




(Ex.9)

Moreover, another example in the etude (Ex.10) can demonstrate the interpretation of dynamic change during sustained notes. The first two measures in Ex.10 have a crescendo and decrescendo mainly for the right hand, while the left hand remains at "*pp.*" The crescendo for the right hand in the first measure refers to the two sustained notes. As in the previous example, pianists need to increase the direction and underline the shape to create the imaginary increasing volume. By

strengthening the direction and tension in both hands, pianists will create a false crescendo effect. The crescendo in this specific musical context does not change the volume, but increases intensity. The examples above reveal how pianists can involve artistic thinking and musical understanding into technical practice and virtuosic playing. My method “the connection between notes” guides pianists to understand the musical perspectives in diverse musical examples and to intelligently interpret virtuosic music in performance practice.




(Ex.10)

# Chapter IV

# The 20th Century:

# Applying the Visual Mind to Technical Training - The Education of Heinrich Neuhaus' *The Art of Piano Playing*

## Neuhaus' Artistic Images in *The Art of Piano Playing*

If Wieck inspired us with a general introduction to the artistry of finger training, the 20th century pedagogue Heinrich Neuhaus furthered the discussion, and provided a more specific analysis of artistic piano teaching. Neuhaus gained a wide reputation as a legendary teacher who taught students including Emil Gilels, Radu Lupu, and Sviatoslav Richter. In his piano pedagogy book *The Art of Piano Playing* (1958), Neuhaus emphasized the significance of musical artistry and explained the paths to achieving it - supplementing music with artistic images and suggesting ways of combining imagery with technical execution. Following Wieck, Neuhaus disagreed with today's mechanical training: "present-day technology is striving to turn the machine into a human being, but it is sinful and stupid to turn man into a machine."[51] He stressed the lack of sensitivity in the machine like playing cultivated by technical training. Rather than training technical skills without musical meaning, Neuhaus insisted that "musical development should come before technical development or

[51] Heinrich Neuhaus, *The Art of Piano Playing*, trans. K. A. Leibovitch (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1973), 89.

should at least go hand in hand."[52] He suggested that the musical sensations should be studied even before the technical execution, indicating the importance of musical essence in technical training. An innovator Like Wieck, Neuhaus believed in the "artistic images" in musical compositions and subsequently implemented this idea into his piano teaching. The use of metaphor and imagination were incorporated into his pedagogical concepts. By reviewing his book *The Art of Piano Playing*, I will investigate how his ideas can enlighten today's piano technical training.

First, Neuhaus suggested using images in piano training from an early stage. He explained that "work on the artistic image begins in the very first stages of studying music and learning to play an instrument."[53] The artistic images here represent the musical characters and essence of the pieces. Neuhaus claimed that culture upbringing has a significant influence on imagination training in music; this cultural upbringing is seen in our knowledge of art, poetry, literature, and theatre. In other words, the musical imagination embodies comprehensive musical knowledge learned in daily practice. In order to create artistic images in piano playing, Neuhaus provided several specific methods, from teaching perspectives that guide children to integrate musical enlightenment with physical execution at an early stage.

The first method Neuhaus claimed was the connection between the ears and eyes. He explained how teachers create familiar tunes with the signs that children just learned to help them read and play notes. According to Neuhaus,

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[52] Neuhaus, *The Art of Piano Playing*, 82.

[53] Ibid., 9.

> The best teachers in our music schools for children know full well that in teaching a child to read notes they must use the signs just learned by the pupil to make up a melody (not just a dry exercise), preferably a familiar one (this is a more convenient way of combining sight with hearing---the ear with the eye), and teach him to reproduce this melody on his instrument.[54]

The learned signs here represent the eyes, and the familiar tunes are identified by the ears. The connection between the ears and eyes along with the fingers not only reinforces their technical acquaintance of the piano but also integrates the technical execution with their musical intents. The use of familiar tunes arouses children's musical interests and avoids insipid finger exercises. Thus, Neuhaus stressed the training of finger abilities through familiar tunes, which simultaneously cultivated the children's musical intents and their technical capabilities. This training method also prevents students from practicing exercises with mechanical fingers.

Second, Neuhaus stated that the reproduction of familiar melodies helped children understand the nature of melodies, and thus they will have an easier time when involving their personal emotions in their own music making. In the process, teachers first explain and demonstrate the characters of the melodies, and then ask students to reproduce the melodies with the said musical expression. Neuhaus illustrated the functions of employing folk tunes in teaching,

> It is especially advisable to use folk tunes in which the emotional and poetic element is much more apparent than even in the best educational compositions for children…Experienced teachers of children's schools report that children of average talent are much more enthusiastic in rendering folk tunes than the educational children's literature which is concerned with purely technical or 'intellectual' problems…[55]

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[54] Neuhaus, 9.

[55] Ibid., 10.

He first pointed out problems in the educational materials and mechanical finger exercises that separate children's musical intuition from technical execution. Instead, the employment of folk tunes and musical thinking trains children to "play for the sake of music."[56] Therefore, by supplementing technical exercises with concrete musical meaning, Neuhaus suggested teachers to provide detailed instruction to piano students, including speeds, dynamics, musical characters, and ideal sounds.

Third, Neuhaus used Godowsky's teaching principles as examples when illustrating the artistry in finger exercises. He stated that Godowsky never "practiced" scales, but he "played" them with "a brilliance, evenness, speed, and beauty of tone."[57] Instead of the mundane mechanical scales practicing, Neuhaus stressed that "he [Godowsky] played the scales he encountered in musical compositions in the best possible manner."[58] Godowsky's example inspired students to cultivate beautiful tones during the practice of scales, perceiving the scales as an artwork.

Fourth, Neuhaus suggested practicing technical skills mentally. He explained that "it means making him [student] memorize music by reading the score without touching piano, in order to develop his imagination and his ear; teaching him from childhood to distinguish the form, the thematic material and the harmonic and polyphonic structure of the composition he is performing."[59] By mentally perceiving

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[56] Neuhaus, 11.

[57] Ibid., 12.

[58] Ibid.

[59] Ibid. 20.

music without touching the keyboard, students are able to analyze the structure, and characters, as well as imagine the ideal sounds of the compositions. Without the physical execution, mental practice allows students more space to entirely focus on developing their imagination. In finger exercises, the technical executions of difficult passages always overwhelm students, and as a consequence, their playing lacks musical artistry. Through the mental practice with specific musical ideas, students will be aware of their goals and will focus on the said goal in their practice.

Neuhaus' steps in training for the ultimate imagination in piano playing exemplified the creation of artistic images in his teaching. He defined the second movement of Beethoven's "Moonlight" sonata as the spirit of flowers. By pointing out the common mistake of interpreting this movement as a scherzo with dry expression and fast tempo, Neuhaus believed that this movement conveys comfort for the audience. He employed Liszt's description of this movement, "une fleur entre deux abîme" and defined it as "a smile amidst a flood of tears."[60] Thus, Neuhaus described the image of the opening bar as a flower, and the following bars as leaves "dropping on the stem."[61] The strong emotions evoked from the aforementioned image that he used as an example highlight his pedagogical concept of expressive playing. These said explicit images inspired students to correspond sounds, touches, and feelings for the music. Moreover, Neuhaus explained that this metaphor he used here did not represent the flower, but "the spiritual and visual impression given by a

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[60] Neuhaus, 26.

[61] Ibid.

flower."[62] In other words, the music here does not equal to a flower, but the spirit of a flower. By transforming the explicit image into musical spirit and emotion, Neuhaus inspired students with strong imagery and infinite imagination in his teaching. With Neuhaus' guidance, students develop their imagination and convey the profound meaning in the music.

## The Integration of Artistic Images and Tone in Piano Teaching

Neuhaus' teaching strategies went beyond the creation of artistic images in piano playing. He also discussed the connection of "artistic images" and "tone" quality in piano playing. In Neuhaus' pedagogy, he defined technique as "tone", which indicates the musical substance in technical skills. By claiming that "work on tone is work on technique and work on technique is work on tone,"[63] Neuhaus believed that well-trained technique "is adequate to the force, height and clarity of the artistic image."[64] In particular, to create visual images in technical training, Neuhaus constantly used metaphors to describe sounds, colors, and expressions. The employment of metaphors in his teaching turned the abstract words into specific images with concrete sensations. For example, he described the approach for Rachmaninov's expression as "growing into the keyboard", "as if the keyboard were

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[62] Neuhaus, 25.

[63] Ibid.,79.

[64] Ibid., 61.

resilient and one could 'sink' into it at will."[65] By following his detailed descriptions, students are able to employ their imagination to find the appropriate articulations. Compared to Rach's general description in approach - heavy touch, extremely expressive, or striking the keyboard slowly - Neuhaus' explanations are clearer, with more details about hand motions.

Second, Neuhaus used "air cushion" to indicate the distinctive sounds between melody and accompaniment. Neuhaus claimed that layers of sounds are similar to the multiplane structure with various levels. He pointed out "the dynamic 'similarity' between melody and accompaniment, the lack of an 'air cushion' between the first and second levels or between different planes, which is just as unpleasant for the eye in the case of a picture, as for the ear in the case of a musical composition."[66] Neuhaus' illustration here describes the transformation of "layers of sounds" into a concrete image, the "air cushion." In particular, the "air cushion" in technical training, meaning dynamic exaggeration and diverse articulations, helps students identify layers of sounds and discover various timbres in the piano playing.

Third, Neuhaus compared the process of creating beautiful tones to the "slow motion" in film and the "magnifying glass." "Slow motion" requires students to practice slower than expected speed, which allows students to carefully examine their melodies as using a "magnifying glass." Neuhaus explained his idea,

> This advice was born of my love for the beauty and melodic line of a passage…as one can examine a beautiful picture, in close-up or even with a magnifying glass, in order to penetrate…its mysterious concordance, its

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[65] Neuhaus, 62.

[66] Ibid., 71.

> harmony and the accuracy of the brush strokes of a great painter. The slowing down of a process in time is the exact counterpart of the enlargement of an object in space.[67]

Through practicing in a slow tempo, students are able to carefully listen to their sounds and create distinctive timbres for each note. Magnifying the music, which means closely observing the nature of the music, compels students to discover and analyze the compositions from detailed perspectives.

Last, in order to work on "tone" with "images" in piano playing, Neuhaus used the most common metaphor of comparing the piano to an orchestra. He explained the members of the "orchestra" in teaching: "the conductor (the head, heart, hearing); the players (both hands with ten fingers and both feet for the two pedals); and all the instruments (a single piano or…a hundred instruments, which is as many as there are in a symphony orchestra)."[68] According to Neuhaus, a pianist's head, heart, and hearing, working as a team, conduct the "orchestra." Hands, fingers, and feet as orchestra players will follow the "conductor", which highlights the employment of sensation in piano training. Imagining piano as an orchestra enables students to imitate the orchestral sounds and create various sonorities on the piano. In addition, he emphasized the "ego" of the piano and asked students to respect the piano's ego during practice. He explained, "the piano has its own individual beauty of tone, its own 'ego' which cannot be mistaken for anything else in the world…you have to know and love this individual, particular 'ego' of the piano in order to know and

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[67] Neuhaus, 60.

[68] Ibid., 65.

master it fully."[69] Neuhaus metaphor encouraged students to involve sensitivity into their own playing, and also, to discover the unique nature of every piano, like its sounds, colors, and timbres, during their own piano practice. Neuhaus' innovative teaching greatly guided students to seek an artistic way to train both finger abilities and musical understanding.

## The Further Implication of Neuhaus' Pedagogical Ideas: The Imagination in Piano Technical Training

Neuhaus' idea of employing artistic images emphasized musical understanding and intellectual knowledge in piano training. His combination of technical execution and artistic images enlightened piano teachers with vast possibilities to develop students' imagination. To further develop Neuhaus' pedagogical ideas, I established my own method "the imagination in piano technical training" by examining valuable pedagogical ideas, which will be discussed in the following section.

Many scholars and musicians claimed that imagination plays an important role in music making. First, I will use Bruce Adolphe's training of imagination as a reference to my method "the imagination in piano technical training." Adolphe's ideas of improving musical imagination in his book *The Mind's Ear* can be applied to technical training. He stressed the importance of imagination in piano playing, and stated that "it is important to warm up the imagination just as you would your voice

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[69] Neuhaus, 65.

before singing or your limbs before dancing…"[70] Adolphe also defined that "a good technique serves the imagination and should not be noticed for its own sake."[71] Adolphe believed that it is essential to freeing and developing the imagination during warm-up exercise before practice, which can be trained in his exercise of "hearing in silence." Adolphe explained that "hear [ing] in silence means to imagine vividly how music sounds, so vividly that it can be heard in the mind as if it were really being played."[72] Imaging and hearing the sound before playing with different colors supply musical meaning to the notes, and also, refrain from empty and mechanical playing. Rather than executing passages with the finger muscular action, this method leads pianists to use their minds to analyze the musical structure and interpret the notes with the appropriate articulations. Adolphe's idea of hearing notes in silence contributes to technical exercises by connecting pianists' emotion with the fingers, as he stated in the book that "it is also a stimulating and worthwhile exercise for anyone wishing to explore her inner life."[73]

Moreover, American Pedagogue Edna-Mae Burnam's idea of employing visual images in finger exercises helped develop my training method. His own piano exercise *A dozen a day* utilized visual images for young children to train fingers abilities. Similar to Neuhaus' artistic images, Burman paired each exercise with a specific image, such as walking, running, jumping, hopping, or ping-pong. His use of

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[70] Bruce Adolphe, *The Mind's Ear: Exercises for Improving the Musical Imagination for Performers, Composers, and Listeners* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 7.

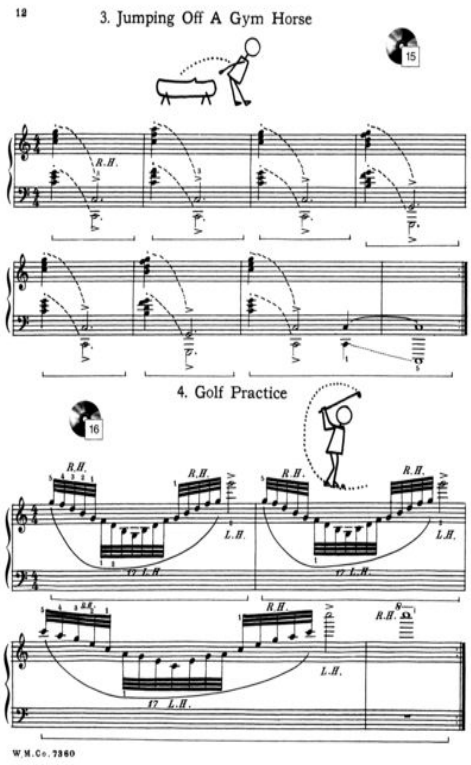
[71] Ibid., 7.

[72] Ibid., 8.

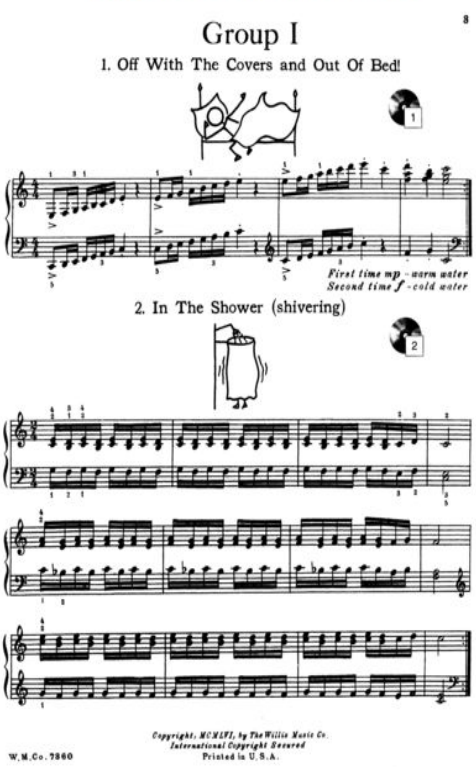
[73] Ibid., 10.

imagery of everyday life both stimulated pianists' imagination and help them comprehend the musical context in their technical training. The images, depicted by notes, support musical characters and essence, which increases children's interests in finger exercises and supplies concrete meaning to musical passages.

The specific examples can be found in Burnam's piano exercises *A dozen a day*. For example, Burman composed the exercises below (Ex.11 and Ex.12) with detailed instruction and concrete images, clearly showing the musical characters and explaining the musical context for students. The image of "Off the cover and out of bed" indicates the appropriate gestures, motions, directions, and articulations for the music. By imagining the movement conveyed by the image, pianists are able to transfer the motion into their playing. In this way, the accents and forward motion will be reflected by the sounds in the technical training. In addition, the image of "Golf Practice" in music simply means creating legato sound under the slur. By specifically indicating the phrasing in the music, the literal image helps pianists understand how to follow the slur and create a long phrase in technical execution. These images enrich training process with imagination and transform abstract music into concrete meaning. The analysis of the images guides pianists to understand the musical substance of the exercises, interpreting them with correct touches. The trained fingers, in this way, are not independent but integrated with musical expressions. Burnam's idea of using images in technical exercises can be not only applied to short finger exercises, but also to technically challenging etudes.






(Ex.11) (Ex.12)

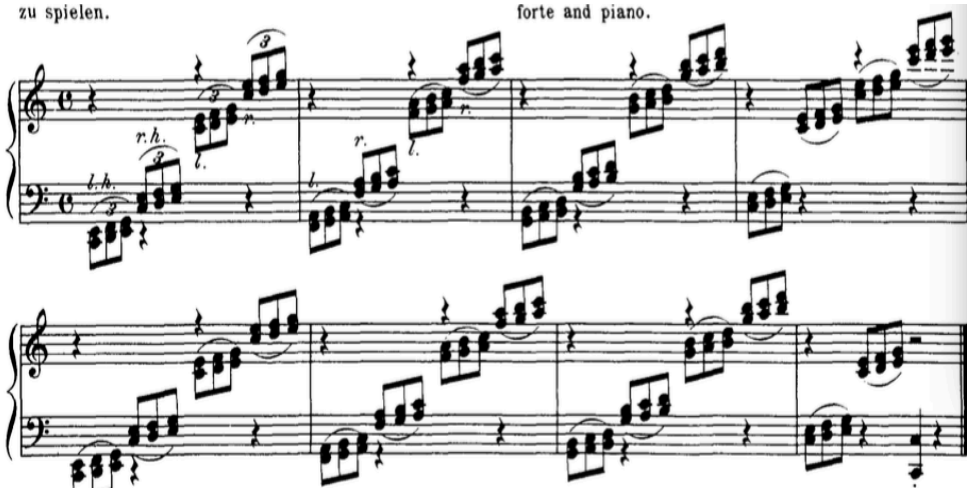
To further expand the idea of employing imagery in technical exercises, I will specifically investigate how images transform into actual sound in technical training. By combining the ideas of Neuhaus, Adolphe, Burnam, and Wieck, I conclude that my method "the imagination in technical training" has four steps reflecting visual images by sounds: first, creating images for the technical exercise or matching the exercise with hypothetical images; second, imagine an appropriate sound for the images before play; third, finding the specific touch and articulation to produce the corresponding images through sounds; and fourth, employing the idea of the connection between notes during practice. When searching correct touch, piano students need to manipulate fast and slow strikes. Fast strikes represent attacking the

keyboard by lifting the fingers to strike the keys with a fast speed. In reverse, slow striking discusses the gentler touches, in which the fingers remain closer to the keyboard. The four steps help enrich piano students' emotions and expressions by connecting sensors with fingers, allowing them to expand their imagination and explore their inner sentimentalities through finger exercises.

Next, I will use Wieck's exercises and Liszt's etudes to demonstrate and exemplify my training method. For instance, the etude below (Ex.10) evokes the image of climbing stairs. The training of the exercise is technically for double notes and hand crossing. But going beyond the notes, this exercise should produce the "one hand" effect, which means a perfecting the collaboration between the two hands. The image of "climbing stairs" gives pianists the specific idea of a going up gesture and motion, which inspires pianists to imagine their climbing action and convey it in their playing. The climbing image guides students to create a long phrase and highlight the shape by using gentle articulation and producing an ascending motion. Based on the image, students are able to closely connect the music to their life experiences and personal emotions.

Another exercise (Ex11) with long slurs can be imagined as a breeze. The image implies the appropriate articulation for the exercise - a tender and connected touch for the exercise. The image "breeze", implying a gentle feeling as spring, leads pianists to concentrate on the tenderness and lyricism of the sound. By focusing on the connection between each note and consequently shaping them in a *legato expressivo* manner, pianists will learn how to execute the exercise as a long smooth line, instead of playing with rigid fingers.

Moreover, the exercise (Ex.12) can be technically and musically practiced with the image of "blowing a balloon." The movement of blowing up a balloon, including breathing and exhaling, is specifically shown in the effect of hairpins in the exercise. The specific motion and its corresponding images inspire pianists to imagine the movement of blowing up a balloon during music making, in terms of breathing and phrasing. One can shape the crescendo as blowing up the balloon and interpret the decrescendo as releasing the breath. Therefore, the technical training with images directs pianists to involve imagination in their finger exercises, leading them to achieve the true virtuosity, in which technical skills serve for musical essence and depict varying musical context.

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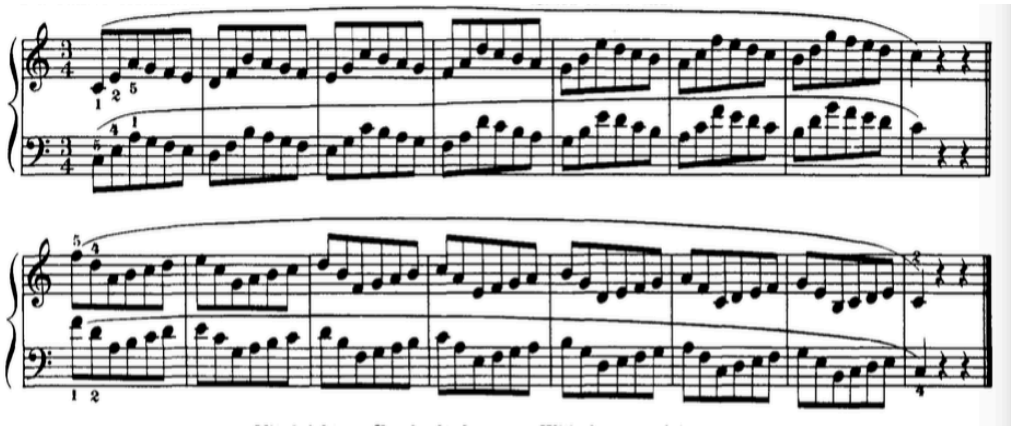
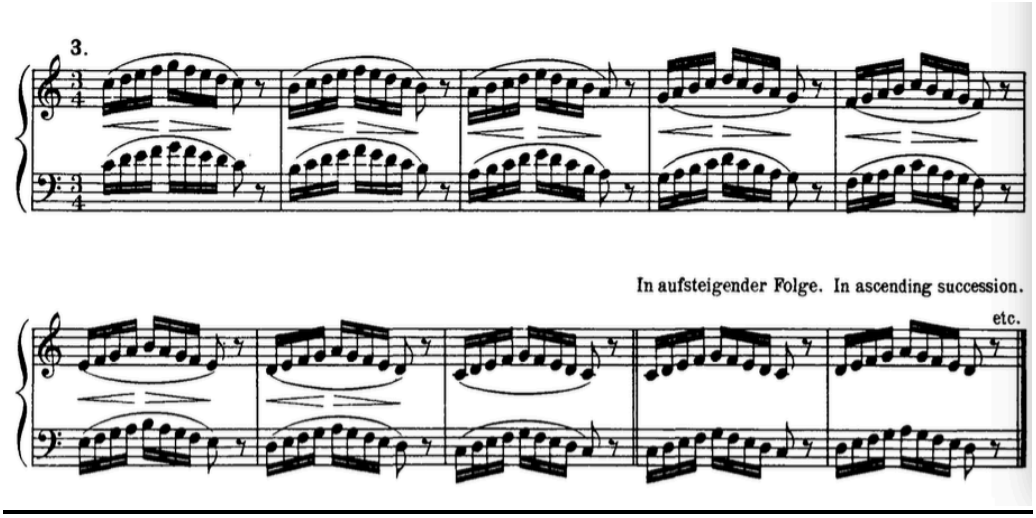


(Ex.11)

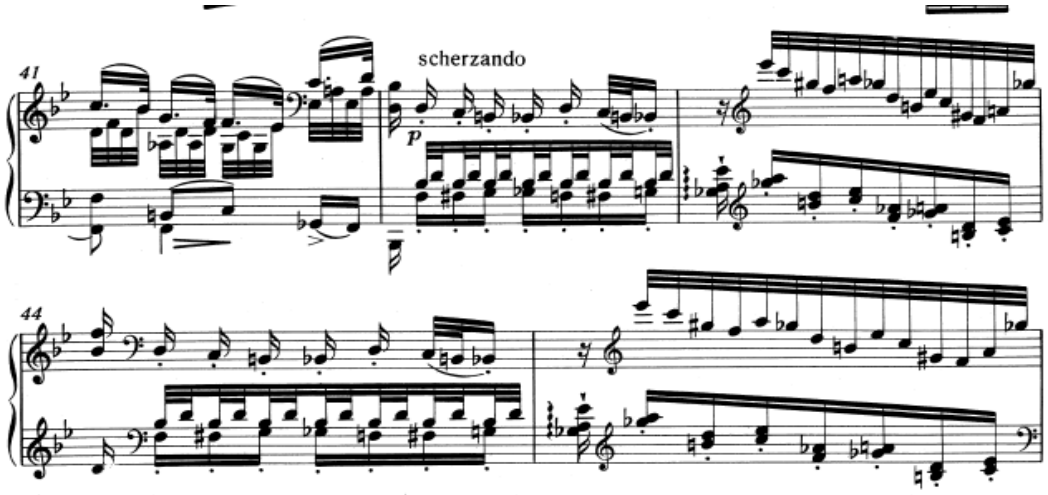



(Ex.12)

Having discussed the process of transforming images into sounds by using Wieck's exercises, I will now explore the sophisticated meaning beyond the technical difficulties in Liszt's etudes. A successful performance of an etude should not show the audience the technical difficulties of playing it without any mistakes. Instead, a successful performance, by going beyond the technical perfection, inspires the audience to ignore the technical challenges in the composition and appreciate the profound musical substance. Liszt's fifth etude, *Feux Follet*, meaning "ghostly fire",

indicates the mystery and fantasy in the music. The performer should depict an artistic image of a looming and sparkling fire throughout the music for the audience to understand the musical essence. The looming and sparkling fire indicate a brilliant sound with contrasting dynamics, created by the light and energetic touch on the keyboard.

Moreover, the legato and staccato in this piece need to be interpreted with different emotions and articulations. The legato passages are expressive and passionate. In contrast, the staccato sections are mysterious and delicate. The hairpin effect needs to be employed and emphasized in performance, which creates the visual effect of the lights brightening, dimming, and disappearing through the sound of the piano. Furthermore, the contrast between legato and staccato accentuates the "ghostly fire." For instance, the staccato in m.44 should be played with vivid and energetic sound to portray the "ghostly" character. On the contrary, the right hand should be shaped with a light, legato, and expressive sound with fluctuations to depict the moving flame. Even though the entire passage is in "*p,*" each note should be slightly different in order to create mysterious waves, highlighting the "ghostly fire" (Ex.13).




(Ex.13)

In conclusion, Neuhaus' idea of artistic images in piano playing can be applied and expanded to technical training and exercises. Adolphe's exercise of imagining during silence and Burnam's images in technical training, both demonstrate the significant role of imagination that can turn superficial playing into thoughtful interpretation. By using Wieck's exercises and Liszt's etude as examples to demonstrate my method, we analyze the music and technical passages with concrete images, extending the boundaries of virtuosic playing beyond technical perfection. By expanding imagination and improving musicianship in technical training, my teaching concept suggests a possible way to cultivate both technical mastery and musical artistry together.

# Chapter V

# The 21st Century:

# Applying the Pedagogical Ideas to Teaching Examples - The Artistic Interpretation of Schumann's *Symphonic Etudes*

## Schumann's Musical Aesthetics

Now that I have shown how to apply the methods that I developed previously, "the connection between notes" and "the imagination in technical training", in the exercises for young piano students, I will implement them to suggest how to analyze and teach a challenging mainstream work of 19th century repertoire, Robert Schumann's *Symphonic Etudes*. In this chapter, I will combine these two methods to develop one integrated method, "imagining between notes", in the investigation of *Symphonic Etudes*. The original purpose of an etude - the training for technical skills, and the mission of Schumann - the torchbearer for artistic inspiration, not technical wizardry, seemingly clash. Schumann, like Chopin, elevated the purpose of Etude in his epic work, and, going beyond Chopin, extended the form of Etude to make a larger statement that combines technical challenges and musical artistry. Thus, *Symphonic Etudes* is a good example to illustrate my teaching method. The purpose of my method is to help pianists avoid mechanical playing and further explore the artistic perspectives of virtuosic music in practice. To specifically apply my method to *Symphonic Etudes*, I will analyze the connection between notes and the images in the music. Eventually, I will go beyond the images to discover the spirit and emotion

conveyed by the images. To do this, we must first examine Schumann's revolutionary style and musical aesthetics.

Schumann created a fusion of technical and artistic perspectives in virtuosic music. He claimed the significance of emotion and feelings that "music is the ability to express emotions audibly; it is the transcendental language of emotion, which is hidden more secretly than the soul…"[74] As Schumann described, music should be a "transcendental language of emotion" for the performer, which is what my method will explore in this chapter by using his work *Symphonic Etudes* as an example. Schumann's idea of "transcendental language of emotion" advocates that virtuoso style should transcend flamboyant notes to an artistic stage where the performer conveys personal emotion. His argument against mechanical playing was assessed by Stefaniak as a "virtuosity discourse" in which "musicians and writers debated the imagined distinctions between transcendent and superficial virtuosity." [75] Schumann's critical remarks of virtuosity inspired musicians to excel technical difficulties in technically challenging music and seek a "transcendent" virtuosity.

Moreover, Schumann's virtuosic compositions exhibited profound artistry and meaningful expression in an innovative way. For instance, Schumann's virtuosic playing had an improvisational flavor, inspired by the informal music salon setting. His improvisational virtuosity went beyond the technical accuracy to a sensitive playing with expressivity and emotion. Scholar Julius Knorr specifically described

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[74] Thomas Alan Brown, *The aesthetics of Robert Schumann* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1975), 25.

[75] Stefaniak, *Schumann's Virtuosity,* 2.

Schumann's improvisation as "a soft, blurry style of playing, which died away in the ear in a way that won one's heart."[76] Schumann conveyed his emotions in a soft volume, which moved the audience through the sounds. His magical and thoughtful playing was described by Stefaniak that "the melody always stood out softly, truly as if in the light of dawn or dusk."[77]

Furthermore, Schumann's virtuoso style displayed a literary world by combining musical metaphor, ciphers, and the images from novels with music. Stefanik stated that "Schumann used a nontransparent style of virtuosity to create musical metaphors for interiority and cultivation."[78] The musical metaphors and ciphers used in Schumann's music imply his life stories and the love for his wife Clara. Schumann claimed that his *Papillons* expressed scenes from Jean Paul's novel *Flegeljahre* as if "Jean Paul's sound waves imperceptibly cross from the physical world into the mind's ear."[79] Schumann combined literature with music to depict the emotion of the stories and images through sounds. To interpret the deep meaning of Schumann's music, one needs to explore the musical meaning behind the notes to deliver an interpretation with thoughts and feeling.

In addition, Schumann's music depicts artistic images between notes; the literary influence in his virtuoso music is evident in his emphasis and concept of

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[76] Stefaniak, 92.

[77] Ibid.

[78] Ibid.

[79] Ibid., 104.

sound decaying. Schumann's ideas about decaying sounds were inspired by Jean Paul:

> a decaying tone blends into silence, it seamlessly converts physical vibrations into inner memory or imagination: it is more than an analogy to call [the Romantic] the undulating hum of a vibrating string or bell, whose sound waves fade away into ever greater distances and finally are lost in ourselves and which, although outwardly silent still sound within.[80]

Jean Paul's description suggested that decaying sound evokes imagination and visual images, which helps pianists elevate their playing to an artistic level where they are more focused on their personal emotional experience. Schumann used the decaying sound effect in many of his compositions, including *Papillons* and *Fantasie Op.17*; pianists are required to release the keys one by one to create the decaying remnant of the chords. Similarly, the decaying sound effect demands pianists to physically listen to the continuity of sounds and mentally feel the space between the notes. The idea of decaying sound shows that Schuman created sophisticated musical meaning behind the notes.

Specifically, Schumann's etudes and finger exercises exhibit profound musical substance. He composed many virtuosic compositions, which requires exceptional technical skills as well as extensive poetic expression. For instance, his piano exercise *Album for Young,* composed for children, help them cultivate musical meaning in finger exercises and avoid mechanical playing. His 1833 composition *Concert Etudes on Caprices of Paganini*, Op.10, also elevated the "etude" genre to a higher artistic stage, where technical skills combine poeticism and expressivity.

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[80] Stefaniak, 104.

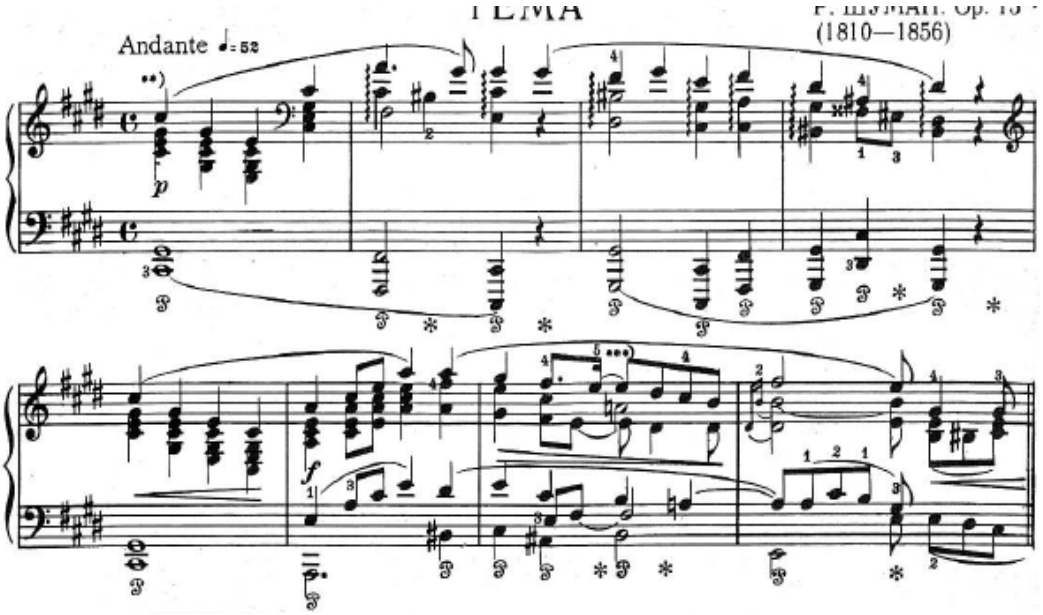
## **“Imagining between Notes” in *Symphonic Etudes*: The Integration of “Imagination” and “The Connection between Notes”**

After reviewing Schumann’s musical aesthetics and revolutionary style, we will closely observe Schumann’s major and innovative work *Symphonic Etudes*. This piece marked a milestone for piano virtuosity in music history. Following Chopin and Liszt, Schumann innovated the genre “etude” as an artwork. *Symphonic Etudes*, contains twelve etudes in variation form with diverse musical characters. Schumann conceived this concert piece as an orchestral work with various colors and timbers for the piano. The *Symphonic Etudes,* along with Chopin’s Etudes, heralded a new age for “etude”; It indicated that etude is no longer a tool or an exercise to train technical proficiency and finger abilities, but an artwork full of expressive components. The profound musical essence in the etudes demands both technical execution and musical understanding. By implementing my method of “Imagining between notes”, we will use *Symphonic Etudes* as an example to further explore the inspiration and imagination evoked from the sounds and silence between notes.

In a form of variations, the structure of Schumann’s “*Symphonic Etudes*” is revolutionary. Five extra variations, originally dismissed by Schumann, were restored by Brahms after Schumann’s death and named as “posthumous” variations. Due to the diverse editions of the work, the order of the variations remains controversial. The pianists who chose to perform them, arrange the order of the posthumous five variations based on their personal understanding of the piece or their spontaneous emotions on stage.

*Symphonic Etudes* contributes to my project by supplying technical passages with musical meanings. As we discussed, Schumann's compositions were deeply influenced by literature and program music. Therefore, this work can be perceived and understood with images. Employing my method in this piece help piano students to unlock imaginative freedom to use images, seeing as this was done by the composer himself. There are two steps involved in successfully applying my method of "imagining between notes" to *Symphonic Etudes*: The first is to explore how the connection between notes strengthens the musical characters and images; the second is to investigate how to create the connection between notes with images in terms of gesture, direction, and articulations.

In *Symphonic Etudes,* the musical characters and strong rhythms are strengthened by the spaces between notes and silence. For example, the theme of the *Symphonic Etudes* might evoke an image of the winter night with melancholy emotion through the spaces between notes. This winter scene suggests the heaviness and darkness shown in the music. The heaviness of the chords in the beginning, imitating the walk in the snow, is shown in the continuing sounds of the chords and long notes (Ex.14). The expansive countryside and gloomy winter are portrayed by the extensive long sustained chords with the intense spaces between notes. The connection between the long sustained chords coheres the phrase and enhances the melancholy emotion. The continuing sounds between the chords show the direction of the phrase and the intensity of the music. Thus, the spaces between notes in the theme are full of emotion.




(Ex.14)

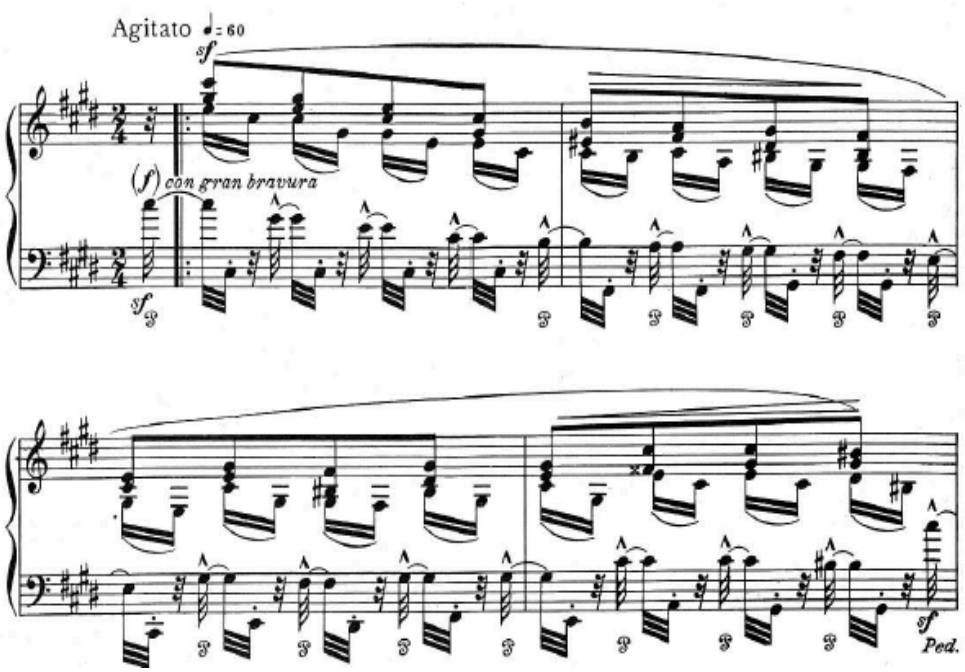
Moreover, in order to enhance the spirit of the images, the performer needs to employ appropriate gestures and articulations according to the images. For instance, to emphasize the melancholy emotion and expansive scene, pianists need to create a horizontal melodic line. Specifically, they should keep the hands close to the keyboard and employ a gentle touch with a slow attack to the keys. To underline the intensity and darkness between the chords, one can imagine the walking motion and gesture in the snow to feel the heaviness. Similarly, the dynamic changes in the theme involve one's imagination to create an imaginary crescendo during the space between the notes. For example, mm. 5, the crescendo actually lies in the space between the chords, which demands the performer's imagination to shape the crescendo gradually. Even though the crescendo there applies to the four chords in this measure, the crescendo musically happens in the space between the chords. To imagine a growing sound and a crescendo between the chords in mm.5, the

performer need to transfer the desolation and broadness of the winter scene to the intensive and expressive continuing sounds during the space between the notes. By creating the imaginary crescendo and supplying the spaces between notes with musical meaning, pianists will depict the musical essence based on their imaginations.

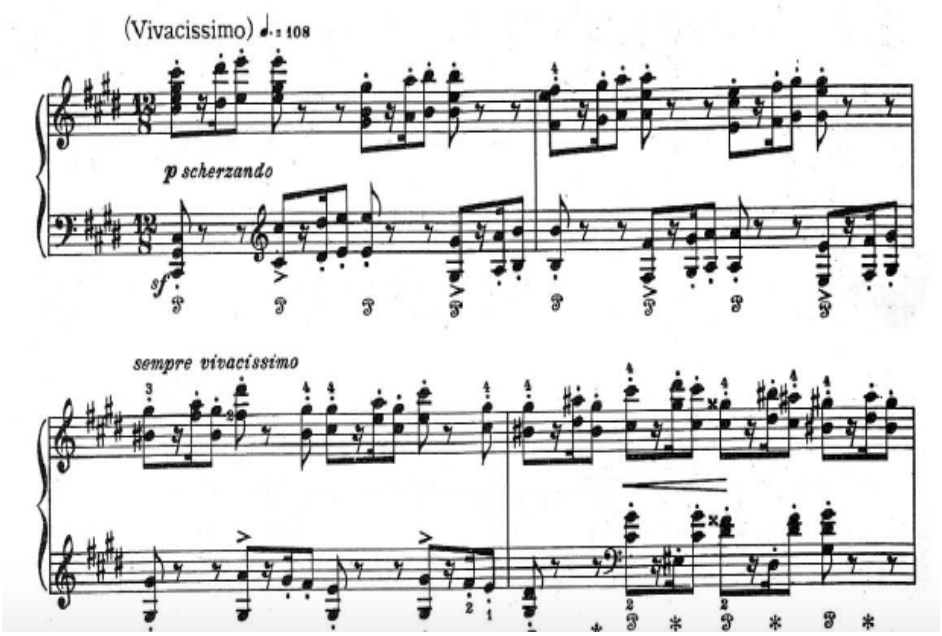
In addition to continuing sound, my method "imagining between notes" can be applied to create silence with musical meaning in *Symphonic Etudes*. The rests between notes in this work also convey emotions and expressions. For example, one can imagine a thunderstorm portrayed in Etude VI. The image of thunderstorm conveys the intensity and expression through the thirty second rests of the left hand (Ex.15). The rests in the left hand not only give the performer time to precisely execute the big jump but also underline the unexpected accents and syncopated rhythm. Here, the rests do not represent break and relaxation. Instead, the rests transfer the performer's energy to the next accents and strengthen the agitated feeling conjured by the thunderstorm imagery. Using the musical silence, pianists need to feel the continuing energy and intensity in the rests and emphasize the abrupt accents.

Similarly, Etude V was composed with short notes and rests (Ex.16). forming a conversation in an overlap cannon, the melodic lines of both hands are interrupted by rests. The rests, accumulating tension and underlining humor, present an image of comedic ballet dancing. In order to connect the melodic line and emphasize the humor and lightness, the rests need to be felt and interpreted by the same spirit as the notes. The rests here represent continuing energy and ongoing direction. Specifically,

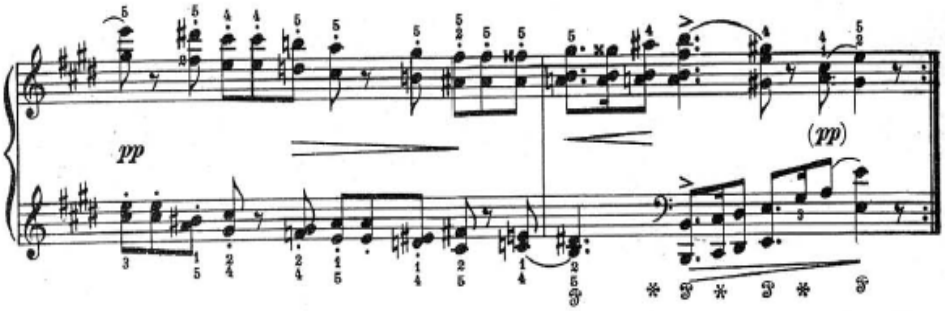
with little use of the pedal, the performer should precisely and energetically execute the rests to emphasize the rhythm. The hearing of rests in the etude sustains the energy of the music. On the other hand, the passages without sixteenth rests show how rests can change musical character. The passage in Ex.17 with eighth rests presents a contrasting musical character to Ex.15 with sixteen rests. Despite the *pp* is less energetic, it engenders spookiness, thus underlining the humor in the music.




(Ex.15)



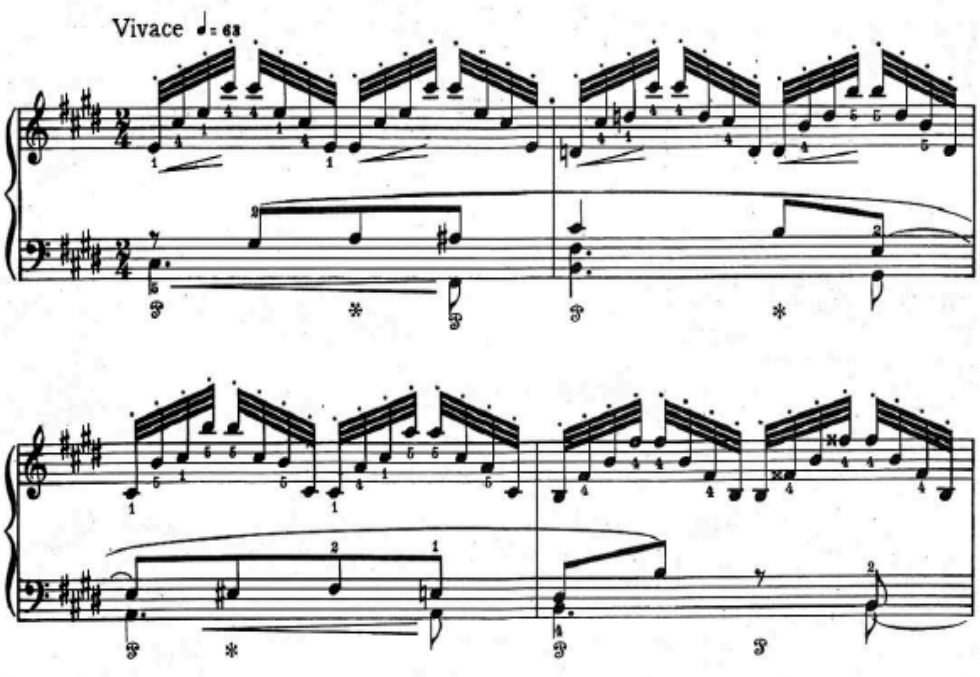

(Ex.16)




(Ex.17)

Besides the specific images, the possible images of the etudes can be artistic. In the next section, we will apply my method to investigate imagination in performance. In the book, *Schumann: A chorus of Voices*, pianist Vladimir Feltsman gave a description in regards to the references to other composers in *Symphonic Etudes*, "In these *Symphonic Etudes* we meet Mendelssohn, Paganini, Liszt, Chopin, Weber, and

so on. And throughout it, all we can see his [Schumann] face."[81] Feltsman's opinion indicates that Schumann fused diverse styles of other composers with his own spirit in this work. In some of the etudes, we can clearly see shadows and traces of Schumann's contemporaries or predecessors. For example, in the Etude VIII, the two voices fugue in polyphonic style is a remnant of Bach's abandoned manuscripts. Another example is Etude III, where it is a personification of Paganini; Schumann here has the right hand playing vivacious broken arpeggios which intimates the violin technique ricochet (Ex.18).



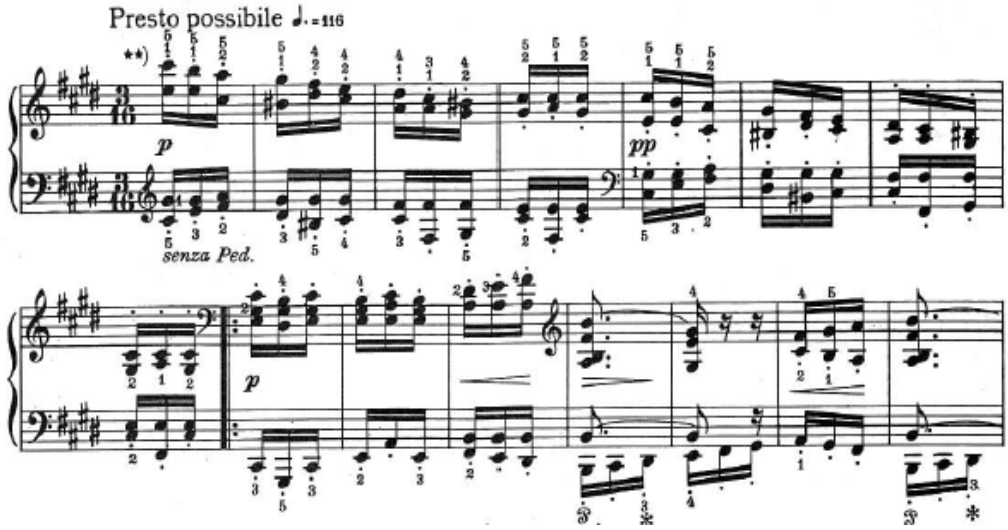

(Ex.18)

Continuing to use the etude III as an example to explore the artistic images in this work, the performer needs to understand the contrast between the left and right hand by analyzing the space between the notes. In the right hand, the energetic

[81] John C Tibbetts, *Schumann: a chorus of voices* (New York: Amadeus Press, 2010), 187.

staccato notes are emphasizing the spirit of Paganini's brilliance; in contrast, the left hand juxtaposes the right hand with sweeping expressive lines. The contrast between the two hands is also shown in the active fluctuation of the right hand, while the left hand has more smooth lines. Due to the staccato sixteenth notes in the right hand, the spaces between thirty-second notes are smaller than the ones between eighth notes in the left hand. However, the spaces between the non legato and short notes in the right hand follow the direction of the long notes in the left hand. The interpretation of the right hand follows the left hand to depict poetic expression in performance. Thus, the characters of Paganini in this etude integrate technical exhibition with lyricism and expression.

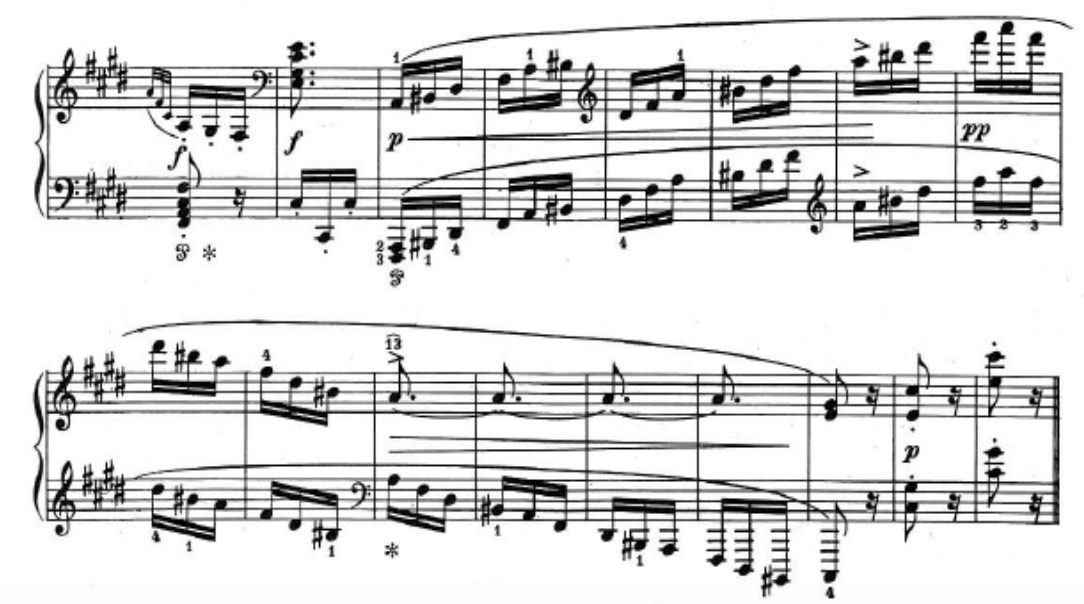
Moreover, another virtuosic and technically challenging etude in this work is Etude IX. In addition to the imitation of Paganini in the Etude III, Schumann created this etude in the musical character and style of Felix Mendelssohn, another member of his "Davidsbundler" society. Although this etude is technically challenging, the vivid and sparkling spirit of Mendelssohn shines in the virtuosic passages (Ex.19). Therefore, playing the music with clarity and speed is not satisfying. This etude is full of light, humor, and energy, a typical style of Mendelssohn, evident in his *A Midsummer Night's Dream.*




(Ex.19)

Next, we will examine how the connection between notes highlights the musical characters. In this etude, imagining forward motion between the staccato notes can be employed to execute the passages in order to strengthen the excitement and emphasize the direction. Each staccato note needs to be played energetically, but it cannot disrupt the overall long line and phrase. Instead, these staccato notes are tools in benefitting the long line, from the correct use of rests and sound. Moreover, the performer needs to execute the staccato notes with a light yet energetic touch to underline the image of the summer night. In addition, to surprise the audience, Schumann added a slur on the final passages of the etude, creating a great contrast to the previous non-legato passages, which encompassed the entire movement. The last legato passage starts with subito *p* and proceeds with a hairpin, evoking ghostly feeling and a picturesque image of a mysterious summer night (Ex. 19). By combining Mendelssohn's character with specific images, the performer is able to

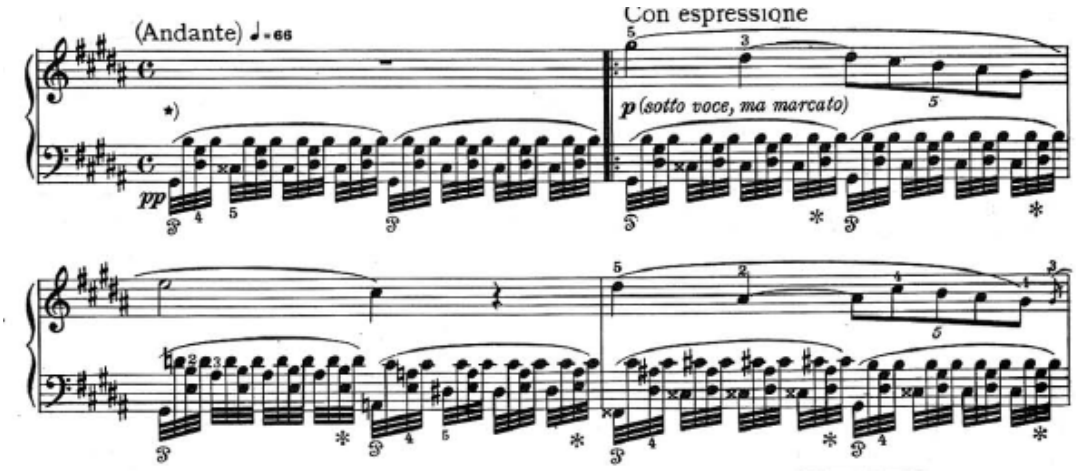
deeply understand the music and explore the connection between notes in terms of gesture, articulations, phrase, intensity, and voicing.



(Ex.19)

To continue tracing the characters of Schumann's contemporaries in *Symphonic Etudes*, we might imagine the Etude XI with Chopin's character. The extensively poetic and song-like melody in the right hand, accompanied by the restlessness and agitation of the left hand, portrays a melancholy and sensitive emotion, a quintessential character of Chopin's music (Ex.20). With the spirit of Chopin's *Nocturne*, this etude creates an image of melancholy autumn with lyricism and agitation. The right hand plays the main melody, whereas the harmonic progression and emotional fluctuations in the left hand underscore the shape and expression of the right hand. More specifically, the sixteenth notes in the left hand need to have direction to prolong the continuing sounds of the melodic right hand. As string players can use their bows to produce continuing and sustained sounds, the sixteenth

notes in this etude adopts the role of the bow, in order to smoothen the right-hand sounds and shape the direction. The agitation and intensity of the left hand strengthen the image of falling leaves and portray the depressing emotion.




(Ex.20)

By analyzing Schumann's *Symphonic Etudes* with the diverse characters as seen through the connection between notes, one can identify the diverse images depicted in the composition, such as summer night, autumn leaves, and winter countryside. Hence, one then will understand the profound musical meanings and literature in the challenging technical passages. Instead of exploring the technical skills in the etudes, pianists, from another aspect, can conquer the technical difficulties by focusing on the musical characters and images. The use of one's imagination in conjunction specific gestures, articulations, and emotions, lowers the physical difficulties in the passages. Interpreting the spaces between notes with musical characters and imagination compels the performer to avoid superficial playing.

# Conclusion

## Future Teaching - Artistic Training

The issues of mechanical finger exercises that separate technical skills from musical expression have been stressed in the previous chapters. My teaching methods discussed above indicate possible ways to solve the problems. After reviewing major pedagogues and innovative pedagogical ideas in the 19th century and 20th century, my methods are inspired by Wieck's singing tone, Neuhaus' artistic images, Adolphe's innovative imagination, and Edna-Mae Burnam's images in finger exercises. To further apply their ideas to today's teaching, we investigated the spaces between notes instead of analyzing notes. We discovered four steps that transform a mechanical playing into a mindful playing: first, we explored the musical connection between notes to produce singing tones and to avoid senseless playing; second, we employed our imagination to investigate possible artistic images and their relation to the music in finger exercises; third, we combined the previous two methods into one method as "imagining between notes" and examined Schumann's *Symphonic Etudes* as a musical example, in order to explore the images between notes; fourth, we depicted the spirit and emotions conveyed by the images in music. These four steps demonstrate the profound artistry in technical training, when combined with singing, listening, feeling, imaging, and thinking.

This technical training shows a transition from executing actual notes to portraying artistic images in piano playing. The training process helps piano students seek a meaningful interpretation that forms a connection between the performer and the audiences. My method "imagining between notes" focuses on using imagination

to cultivate sensitive fingers and analyze musical context in exercises, allowing the performer to connect himself with the music during practice. The method can be further developed to next step, artistic training, which employs personal experiences and emotions to extend musical understanding in technical exercises. Instead of attaching musical thoughts to trained technical skills, the training emphasizes musical thinking and analyzing before technical execution. Inspired by Jean Paul's idea that "a decaying tone…converts physical vibrations into inner memory or imagination"[82], the artistic training aims to help piano students relate music to their own life and memories. Through this training process, students will experience how the diverse timbres of the piano can stimulate and evoke their inner world. Hence, the training is no longer merely about practicing mechanics anymore; it is about incorporating artistry along with personal emotions into daily practice, thus engendering a training that is both personal and emotive.

Specifically applying the artistic training to technical practice, teachers can help piano students transform an exercise into a scene from their memories or imagination. Artistic training stimulates the brain to align music with certain emotions and feelings, enriching musical meaning as well as strengthens personal memories. The use of personal experiences in technical training enhances the spirit in music and generates new musical perspectives; the life stories that are depicted by music will be remembered, creating a new musical "memory" for later. The training process allows

[82] Stefaniak, 104.

piano students to indulge themselves in music, supply the music with their own stories, and develop their personal understanding of music.

Moreover, teachers can use the artistic training to inspire pianists' creativities by asking them to compose poems and stories based on the music. By writing down the words, piano students are able to explore their emotions and refresh it every time they play the music. The words help piano students illustrate their emotions, guiding them deeply understand the musical characters. They might have different emotions each time they hear and play the music, regenerating new feelings about the music. The cyclic and creative process encourages students to continually get inspired by the music they play. Eventually, the artistic technical training that integrates the performer with music as a unity becomes a way to explore the music as well as the performer himself.

Furthermore, this training method can be applied to other instruments as well. Going beyond the piano, the artistic training will also help other instrumentalists avoid superficial playing and investigate the profound meaning in virtuosic music. With the employment of artistic images and personal experiences in virtuoso styles, musicians can build up musical understanding and establish their own musical styles in technical practice. My training methods "the connection between notes", "the imagination in technical training", and "imagining images between notes" provide possibilities for musicians to discover more innovative teaching methods.

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