Shaping Sound: A Pianist's Guide to the Journey Through the Lifecycle of Notes and Musical Connection

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Abstract

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This dissertation examines the pianist's engagement with sound through a five-stage "lifecycle of a note": intention, birth, life, death, and memory. By framing each note as an evolving event—from mental conception to physical attack, audible existence, conclusion, and recollection—the dissertation sheds new light on how pianists can refine both technical facility and expressive depth.

Central to this inquiry is the primacy of the ear. While the fingers and arms are indispensable for producing sound, it is ultimately the ear that shapes artistic decision-making. Drawing on insights from pedagogues and theorists such as Boris Berman, Seymour Bernstein, György Sándor, Alfred Cortot, and Heinrich Schenker, the study argues that developing a refined

awareness of each note's "lifecycle" leads to improvements in tone production, dynamic control, and musical interpretation. Further, it explores strategies to enhance voicing in chords, manage nuanced pedal usage, and employ various touch techniques (legato, staccato, "in" touch, "out" touch) for clearer articulation.

The concept of memory, in particular, emerges as a connecting force, bridging chords, phrases, and entire sections of a piece. By conceptualizing the internal relationships between notes—whether shaped by harmonic function or contrapuntal lines—pianists can create more cohesive performances. Ultimately, Shaping Sound: A Pianist's Guide to the Journey Through the Lifecycle of Notes and Musical Connection seeks to integrate technical exercises with aural perception, ensuring that every note is approached with deliberate listening and clear intent. In doing so, it aspires to cultivate a heightened musical consciousness, where technique and interpretation serve a unified artistic vision.

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Introduction

This dissertation stems from profound dialogues with Professor Robin McCabe, wherein we examined the complex nature of music making at the piano. Our discussions highlighted that music exists before, during, and after the performance of a note, embodying a continuous journey that significantly influences musical interpretation and pedagogy. To illuminate this process, she proposed five stages through which a note progresses: intention, birth, life or duration, death, and memory. Although these stages are inherently interconnected and difficult to separate, this dissertation seeks to analyze each stage comprehensively. In doing so, I hope to offer pedagogical strategies that help students become aware of how music or notes embark on a journey that extends well beyond their initial and final sounds.

The piano, as an instrument, presents two fundamental paradoxes. The first is that it is deceptively easy to produce a sound. Unlike string instruments, where the mastery of bowing techniques and intonation issues are crucial, striking a piano key can produce an immediate sound, often leading students to a misguided belief that “pressing keys” equates to music-making. This instant gratification may cause students to confuse the mere completion of an action with the accomplishment of musical proficiency. Robertson underscores this by labeling piano playing as a relatively simple and natural activity, given the inherent conformity between the playing apparatus and the hand's normal position. As he states, "Piano technique, arising from this disposition, appears to be so 'rational' that its basic, universally applicable laws can be ignored or contravened only at the player's peril."[1]

[1] Kaestner D. Robertson, “Arm-Weight and Weight-Transference Technique: Its Systematic Use as a Technical and Artistic Vehicle in Piano Playing” (Ph.D. dissertation, Boston University, 1991), 1.

However, this ease of sound production can lead to a superficial understanding of musicality, where students might focus on the on/off mechanics of keys rather than seeking a beautiful, expressive result. Berman laments that instructors rarely provide students with advice on achieving a beautiful sound or the physical techniques necessary to make the piano sing.[2] Without this guidance, students may succumb to the instant gratification the piano offers, leading to performances devoid of musical direction and color. Thus, the seeming simplicity of the piano can mask the depth of expression and emotional nuance that true musical mastery demands, a lack of intention.

The second paradox, ironically tragic, is the piano's inability to sustain notes. Quite simply, all our sounds die. This limitation necessitates creative strategies to evoke the illusion of sustainment and connectivity among notes.[3] The pianist must be a magician, and if he executes his trick well, the audience never notices the trick but is left in awe by the magic it produces. Hofmann suggests that great finger technique, which includes precision and speed, fundamentally relies on the legato touch.[4] To overcome this challenge, students must develop practices that enable the illusion of seamless connections across the piano's various voices and registers, emulating the continuous sustainment and connection achievable by orchestras, for example.

The connection between these two tragedies lies in the art of listening. Amaize asserts that attentive listening is essential for enhancing expressivity and interpretative ability in piano

[2] Boris Berman, *Notes from the Pianist's Bench*, Second edition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), 3.
[3] While this text is focused on the piano, we could apply these principles to the organ and the harpsichord. All three instruments are easy to create sound from. However, while the piano and harpsichord does not have sustain, the organ, without the use of the expression pedals, has constant sustain that does not naturally crescendo or decrescendo creating a different yet related set of problems.
[4] Josef Hofmann, *Piano Playing, with Piano Questions Answered* (Philadelphia: Theodore Presser, 1920), 25.

playing.[5] Without this, performances risk becoming mechanically fluent but emotionally barren. Listening is the cornerstone of solving musical problems and achieving expressive interpretations. As Berman concludes, "In short, you cannot refine your touch without refining your ear."[6]

This dissertation is structured into six chapters, each dedicated to an in-depth exploration of one of the five stages, with a final chapter synthesizing these concepts through a detailed case study. Each chapter provides practical exercises, inspired by Alfred Cortot's pedagogical philosophy, to enhance students' awareness of each stage. These exercises are by no means an exhaustive list of possibilities, rather a very simple and approachable way to think about and practice the concepts of each stage in the life of a note. This format encourages both teachers and students to devise their own exercises, fostering a flexible and individualized approach to piano pedagogy.

The first chapter focuses upon the first stage, intention, which is critical as it involves the internal conceptualization of sound before making a single sound. This chapter delves into the mental and auditory preparation necessary before playing, emphasizing the guiding role of the inner ear. This stage extends from the overall vision of the piece to the minute details of each note and phrase. Manshardt & Amundrud highlight the importance of sensitive passivity, where one is most open to receiving impressions before responding.[7] Action, devoid of such receptivity, is divorced from significant reality. Therefore, intention requires careful mental and auditory preparation that informs every subsequent action a performer takes. Furthermore, the concept of intention is not limited to the localized musical event. These include note to note, or chord to

[5] Ho Pai-Hwa Amaize, "Musical Concepts for Fostering Expressivity and Interpretation in Piano Playing: A Content Analysis of Selected Written Materials (1892-1992)" (University of South Carolina, 1993), 7.
[6] Berman, *Notes from the Pianist's Bench*, 4.
[7] Thomas Manshardt and Lawrence Amundrud, *Aspects of Cortot* (Hexham, Northumberland: APR, 1994), 132.

chord progression, but to much larger musical structures as well. How phrases will interact as well as the interaction between sections within the same piece. Even the interplay between musical movements of a large piece, whether they have breaks in between them or not, is shaped by our musical intention.

The birth of a note, the topic of chapter two, is the physical act of striking the key, emphasizing touch and articulation. Ortmann posits that piano playing involves producing sounds of varying pitch, intensity, and duration,[8] especially when considering the first part of the sound once the pianist has initiated the strike on the key. This nuanced understanding of sound production is only a fraction of the note's lifecycle but sets the tone for everything that follows. Achieving a beautiful sound requires intricate coordination of hands and arms, aspects frequently overlooked in pedagogical practice.[9] The exercises here focus on the initial contact with the keys and its implications for sound production, focusing on the critical aspects of touch and articulation.

The third chapter focuses on the middle stage of the note. The life or duration of a note is perhaps the most challenging stage to define as it represents the liminal space between the note's inception and its cessation. This stage is where the note's presence is most acutely felt and its role within the overall musical phrase evaluated. Pianists must manage the temporal aspects of music, ensuring that each note serves its intended purpose while leading fluidly to the next.[10] This requires a keen awareness of each note's sustain and decay, manipulating listeners' perceptions to create a seamless musical narrative.

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[8] Otto Ortmann, *The Physical Basis of Piano Touch and Tone: An Experimental Investigation of the Effect of the Player's Touch upon the Tone of the Piano*, The International Library of Music (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co. Ltd., 1925), 171.
[9] Berman, *Notes from the Pianist's Bench*, 3.
[10] Hofmann, *Piano Playing, with Piano Questions Answered*, 27.

Chapter four introduces the concept of death. It seems counterintuitive that the penultimate stage is death, despite its sense of finality. The death of a note involves the deliberate termination of sound and preparation for the subsequent notes. Like its birth, this stage focuses on articulating the end of a note to maintain musical coherence. Matthay underscores the importance of accurately timing the culmination and cessation of energy applied to move the key.[11] This phase requires performers to blend the final resonance of one note seamlessly into the next, creating an illusion of connectedness that defies the piano's inherent limitations. Our list of exercises will focus on the retention and reflection of musical experiences, fostering connections that enhance interpretative depth.

Chapter five discusses the final stage in the life of a note, memory. Memory encompasses the retention and reflection on the note and the entire musical experience. It extends beyond individual notes to include phrases and sections, allowing musicians to build connections between past and future musical events. Amaize likens this to a painter using blended colors to evoke nuanced emotions and thoughts.[12] Effective memory enables performers to create a cohesive interpretation that resonates with listeners long after the final note has sounded. This chapter delves into how musical experiences are retained and reflected upon, making connections that deepen interpretative understanding.

The final chapter presents a case study using Schumann's "Melodie" from *Album for the Young*, illustrating the practical application of the five stages in a comprehensive performance context. Here, various sections of the piece will be disassembled and reassembled through the five stages, beginning with small sections where we focus on intention at the phrase level, then

[11] Tobias Matthay, *Act of Touch in All Its Diversity - An Analysis and Synthesis of Pianoforte Tone-Production* (S.l.: READ BOOKS, 2018), 212.
[12] Amaize, "Musical Concepts for Fostering Expressivity and Interpretation in Piano Playing," 20.

through the various smaller chordal and melodic connections. We also use aspects of Cortot's ideas using the piece itself to create exercises that foster the type of musical experience we want to get out of the musical student.

My hope is that this dissertation provides a holistic approach to piano teaching and performance by emphasizing the interconnectedness of the five stages in the life of a note. By cultivating attentive listening and refining technical skills, students can transcend the basic mechanics of piano playing to achieve expressive and meaningful musical performances. This framework not only enriches individual musicianship but also offers valuable insights for educators seeking to nurture the artistic growth of their students.

In the end, it must be realized, the final arbiter of all this is the ear itself. And so it could be said that the training of the ear and the mind, along with the proper technical tools and awareness, are what allows for musical realization and the possibility of persuasive and memorable musical performance. As Wallace Stevens express in his poem *Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird*, the essence of a memorable experience lies not merely in the individual elements but in their collective impact:

> I do not know which to prefer,
> The beauty of inflections
> Or the beauty of innuendoes
> The blackbird whistling
> Or just after.[13]

[13] Wallace Stevens, "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird," in *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989), 92.

Stevens' reflection can inspire us to consider what makes musical performance memorable—it is not just the notes themselves but the ephemeral echoes and the emotional resonance that persists in the mind and ear long after the final note has been played.

Intention

The genesis of sound occurs well before its production. We must have in our mind's ear a vivid manifestation of the sound we wish to convey. This concept is not an entirely new idea. Indeed, many famous pianists and pedagogues have echoed similar sentiments. For example, Walter Gieseking emphasizes the significance of visualization prior to practice and, by extension, prior to performance. For Gieseking, this visualization is limited to the physical: the ears and the body.[14] However, we can extend this visualization to the imagination. Indeed, many pianists use mental images as the progenitor to sounds they produce on stage. Sometimes, composers have already built them into the music itself. Pieces such as Liszt's *Les jeux d'eaux à la Villa d'Este* or Schubert's *Gretchen am Sprinnrade* demonstrate this perfectly.

This conceptualization before playing is Intention. Intention refers to the deliberate process preceding the act of playing a note, wherein all desired aspects of a particular sound are determined. It is this intention that guides our ears and our bodies to produce the sounds we wish to hear. Intention is not limited to just the beginning of notes but is concerned with the remaining stages of the life of a note. When we consider the duration of a note, how we leave a note, and how we connect notes, we are still engaging in intention. In this aspect, intention may be the most important component of music-making. And the degree to which intentionality is developed and implemented could be seen as why some performances engage us more than

[14] Karl Leimer and Walter Gieseking, *Piano Technique Consisting of the Two Complete Books The Shortest Way to Pianistic Perfection and Rhythmics, Dynamics, Pedal and Other Problems of Piano Playing* (New York: Dover Publications, 1972), 11.

others! When one senses that the performer "knows," so to speak, what they wish to do with every note, this is in itself a "magnet" for the listener.

It should be noted early that intention also contains hierarchical levels to its presence. At the smallest level of intention, we are thinking about how a single note or chord may sound at one musical event. At higher levels of awareness, intention governs our musical decisions about articulations, phrases, and cadences. Above this, we can think about how we will present and organize musical form in our interpretations. At the highest level, we may consider how our intention governs the relationships between individual movements in a multi-movement work.

But how do we practice intention? Musicians consider a range of skills and data to discern the intention of a passage. Many of these skills should not surprise the pianist, such as aural skills and the musical intentions of a composer. Other skills include those that may not seem as obvious, such as historical practices, a composer's musical techniques and notation, listening to music, and music theory and analytic skills. By employing these skills collectively, the pianist can gain an understanding of the desired auditory effect of a musical passage.

The pianist's first step should begin away from the keyboard, as mental practice is known to help resolve many technical challenges.[15] Among these, rhythmic issues are frequently tackled through such practice. Gieseking emphasized this approach, dedicating much of his teaching to studying music without the keyboard. In his book, he guides students through learning pieces away from the keyboard, illustrating the effectiveness of this method.[16] The most important

[15] Nanette Yagow, "Don't Touch Those Keys! Piano Practice Without a Piano," *American Music Teacher* 34, no. No. 1 (1984): 36.

[16]There are three pieces: Etude by Lebert and Stark, Invention No. 1 BTW 772 by J.S. Bach, and Sonata in F minor, Op. 2, No 1 by Beethoven. Gieseking provides a step-by-step approach to learning to memorize these works, along with fingering and technical challenges away from the keyboard. Further reading can be found at: Leimer and

element of practicing away from the keyboard is the preparation of technical execution through visualization.[17] However, Gieseking provides some musical suggestions as well. Often these suggestions center on voicing issues rather than phrasing and color. This practice holds importance for Gieseking in terms of memorization. Moreover, it is clear that he also emphasizes the examination of the physical technique needed to perform a passage prior to playing it.

Another area of focus for Gieseking is the aural aptitude of the student. One of the primary foundations for both Gieseking and Leimer was a strong ear:

> The chief point in which my method of teaching differs from that of others, and one of the most important bases upon which it is built, is the training of the ear. Most pianists have not the faculty of hearing themselves correctly. They are accustomed to notice the character of their scales and eventually to recognize the wrongly touched tones. But this is not at all sufficient, if one wishes to play perfectly according to our modern ideas. For the pianist the noticing of the exact tone pitch is, so to say, only secondary when compared with the noticing of the exact tone quality, tone duration and tone strength.[18]

Indeed, the ear should be our guide to developing our technical abilities, but it should also lead the pianist to developing a sense of the deserved intention of a passage. Later, we will introduce exercises to develop intention, with this critical ear playing a crucial role. But one cannot underestimate the usefulness of aural aptitude in performing piano music. Choices in voicing and tone color directly result from our aural perception and attitudes, and it is essential to develop a strong and discerning musical ear.

Score study can extend to other intellectual fields of music. The work that both musicologists and theoreticians have done in recent years in sketch studies has provided much

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Gieseking, *Piano Technique Consisting of the Two Complete Books The Shortest Way to Pianistic Perfection and Rhythmics, Dynamics, Pedal and Other Problems of Piano Playing*, 13–42.
[17] Leimer and Gieseking, 11.
[18] Leimer and Gieseking, 10.

insight into the thoughts and intentions of many composers. Our first example is the opening to Beethoven Concerto No. 4, Op. 58. The concerto is unique among piano concerti of the 18th century for beginning with the soloist alone. The standard convention during Beethoven's life was to write a concerto with a double exposition. This passage can present difficulty for the pianist for two reasons. First, the concerto does not open with the double exposition, common in the 18th century concerto. The music that ends the first exposition allows for a smooth musical transition into the pianist's entrance of the second exposition. Furthermore, the time during the orchestra's exposition allows the pianist time to prepare mentally for their entrance. Second, the opening to Concerto No. 4 is musically unbalanced. The opening contains five measures of music that ends in a half-cadence in the key of G. It feels incomplete. These two problems make it challenging to find the best way to interpret the music. However, we can use this to our advantage in finding a solution.

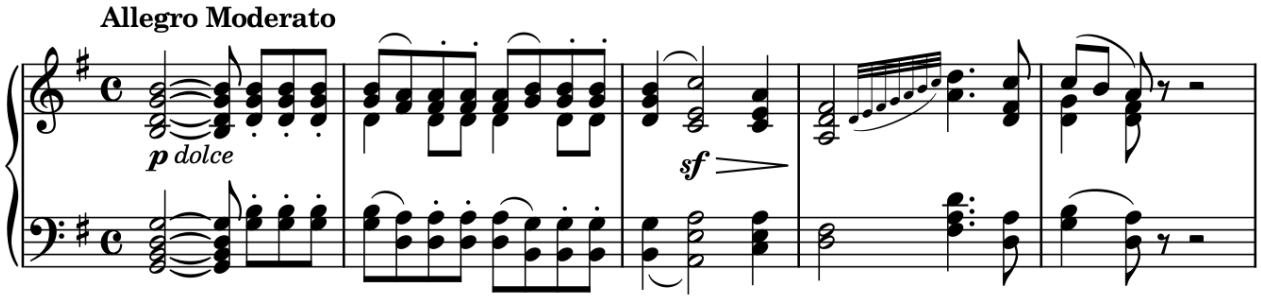

Figure 1. Opening five bars of Piano Concerto No. 4 In G major, Op. 58.

Despite these challenges, we can use these to our advantage. The sense of incompleteness indicates one of two possibilities. First, we are to think of the opening as a true introduction. A similar parallel is Beethoven's Sonata Op. 78. This sonata opens with a four-measure introduction that later expands into the first theme. The second possibility

is that the concerto begins in the middle of something. In this scenario, the pianist begins as a response to something. What that something is, is unknown. Here, we can use historical evidence to supply us with the best answer to the puzzle. Beethoven's sketches show us that the opening to the G major concerto was originally to be the second theme. Beethoven eventually decided that it would be the opening theme.

Music theory is another valuable tool for determining interpretation. While many pianists may feel a sense of intimidation about analysis, it should be stated that the pianist does not need advanced analytic skills and techniques to receive any benefits to understanding and developing one's musical intention. Even a general level of scrutiny can provide fruitful results.

Our first example in applying music theory to developing our intention is Sonata Op. 101 by Beethoven. The first movement of Beethoven's Sonata Op. 101 is another curious example where finding our intention for the phrasing can be difficult to ascertain. The music presents several musical puzzles. First, Beethoven indicates *Etwas lebhaft, und mit der innigsten Empfindug* (somewhat lively, and with the most heartfelt sentiment) with a corresponding *Allegretto ma non troppo tempo*. Most of the slurring occurs over two measures, with the first phrase lasting six measures. However, if we analyze the music, we find something interesting about the movement. Beethoven uses the key signature for A major and the first harmony that we encounter is E major, the dominant of A major. There, however, we find no A major triad in root positon in the opening phrase. Precisely, any A major triad we find is not in root position or placed on a rhythmically emphasized position and the first phrase ends in F sharp minor. We do not arrive at a cadence in A major until measure 77. What are we to make of this? We ifnd ourselves in a musical conflict. Musical phrasing moves towards a tonal goal, and yet Beethoven deprives us of this goal for 77 measures. Howe do we envision music that must sustain a sense of

continuous, tenuse journey to a harmonic goal, A major, while keeping the music both lively and sentimental? Musical analysis does provide clear insightthat allows the musician to evaluate this first movement to an interpretation that is beyond just the notes on the page.

For the student who is looking to utlize a deeper level of analysis, there is plenty of music theory scholarship that focues on analysis and its applications in performance. While music theory can intimidate, the pianist must remember that music scholarship serves to provide the performer as much information as possible to create a higher level of conception. The work of Heinrich Schenker has provided much insight into much of the work of tonal compositions from the music of the 18th and 19th centuries. Schenker also was profoundly involved in the performance editions, such as the Beethoven Piano Sonatas.[19]

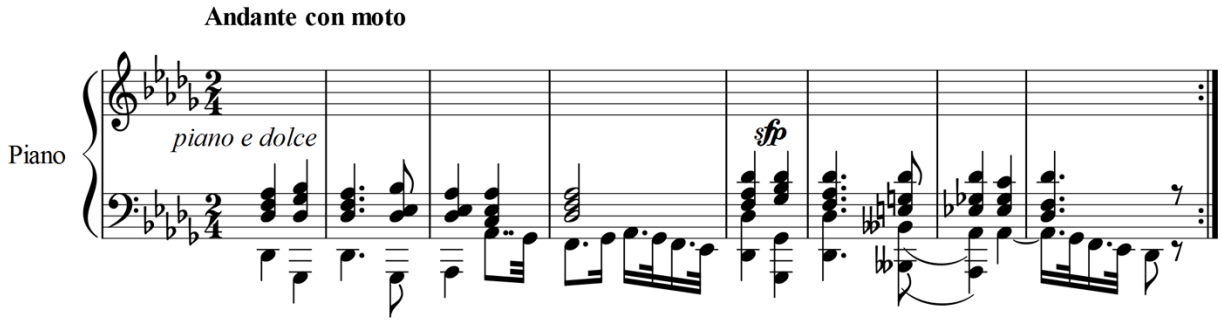

Figure 2. Opening phrase of Beethoven's Piano Sonata Op. 57.

Let us now consider Schenker's analysis of Beethoven's Sonata Op. 57, specifically the second movement. The second movement is a theme of variations and opens in the key of D-flat major and begins in the lower register of the keyboard. The theme comprises two 8 measure phrases. What is peculiar here is that the opening phrase is tonally closed. In other words, the

[19] William Rothstein, "Heinrich Schenker as an Interpreter of Beethoven's Piano Sonatas," *19th-Century Music* Vol. 8, no. 1 (Summer, 1984): 3–28.

first phrase ends with the tonic. Often in a two phrase structure, the first phrase ends in a place of tension and then second phrase returns to the tonic. Why would Beethoven write another 8 measures when the first 8 do not need another phrase to reach its harmonic goal?

Schenker's analysis in Free Composition provides insight into the theme.[20] What we see is that the theme never reaches its melodic climax until the second phrase. Here is where it reaches the high Ab, which becomes the principal tone for the fundamental line. Over the course of the two phrases, the melodic line arpeggiated along a D-flat major triad before reaching the A-flat that then descends back to D-flat. This building of the D-flat major arpeggio keeps the the phrase moving forward. Thus, requiring two 8 measure phrases rather than one. This upward arpeggio has other musical consequence for the piece. Each variation raises higher and higher, again mimicking the arpeggio across the piece. What do we make of this? As a musician, understanding these fundamental structures allows us to consider how we will approach not just this opening phrase of Op. 57, but also the overall arc of the piece. We can focus more on interpreting the arpeggio and elaborate on the momentum of the piece, which also increases with each variation and its faster rhythms.

As all the other stages of a note's life are closely linked to intention, no specific exercises are provided in this section. Each upcoming chapter will offer exercises for those stages, along with strategies to incorporate intention into them. Intention exists in the space before the note is played and can only be practiced and measured after performing some type of musical function.

[20] Heinrich Schenker, *Free Composition*, trans. Oster, New Musical Theories and Fantasies 3 (Hillsdale, NY: Pendragon Press, 2001).

There will also be further details when we discuss the relationship between intention and memory as the two stages perform a cyclic relationship.

Birth

The second stage, birth, represents the pivotal moment when sound emerges from the piano. There are two primary concerns with the birth of the note. The first is the manner in which the pianist strikes[21] the key. The second is the initial sound from the piano in response to that strike. In this way, the birth of a note is concerned with the frontal processes of a sound. While the duration and the release of a note are important parts of sound, they constitute different stages in the life of the note. We shall only concern ourselves here with the initial sounds produced.

While there are only two primary concerns with the birth stage, how we sound a note can be broken into further components. Let us discuss the four main aspects to consider when striking a note: they are the sensitivity of the fingertips, the economy of motion, the voicing, and the tactile touch. Another consideration that will be discussed is the relationship between intention and birth. Once the note is sounded, we can use this moment to confirm that the sound we produced is exactly what we intended. By combining these four elements and relying upon our senses, particularly our aural sense, we can guarantee that the sound produced from the beginning will possess a positive musical value for the pianist.

The sensitivity of the fingertips is crucial as it guides the pianist in applying the right amount of pressure on the keys, ultimately shaping the sound produced. Many pianists have emphasized the significance of developing a heightened sensitivity to the sensations in the

[21] A small remark regarding the usage of the word strike. Some pedagogues, and rightly, do not prefer this term. Often students may interpret this term to mean a forced approach to initiating sound. This is not the case, and the term strike has been chosen simply because many pianists and pedagogues use terms such as attack or strike to indicate the action one takes to produce sound at the keyboard.

fingertips. Boris Berman states that "Whether one uses flatter or more rounded fingers, the sensitivity of the fingertips is of supreme importance. The tips of the fingers have to be 'alert' and active even in the softest and most delicate passages."[22] This sensitivity or awareness of the sensations that are felt on the fingertips is important for all manners of touch. The pianist receives immediate feedback from the instrument that is not audible, but tactile. With listening, this haptic feedback system notifies pianists if their pressure, speed, and touch align with their mental image or desired sound. Seymour Bernstein recognizes the significance of being attuned to the piano keys through our sense of touch. Bernstein emphasizes the significance of the keyboard escapement for pianists, as being aware of its location enables them to better control and voice chords and accompaniment during play.[23]

Concurrently, the pianist's economy in using the body underscores the importance of minimal movement, emphasizing that only the most economical motion should evoke the desired sound. It is of no surprise that many famous pianists, both as performers and pedagogues, acknowledge the importance of optimizing our motions at the keyboard. Berman coins the term "economy principle" to describe the concept of moving the body in the most economical manner possible.[24] For Berman, the option for a smaller group of muscles or parts of the body to produce the desired sound is preferred. Leimer and Gieseking agree with Berman's assessment and state that "the aim should be the very least possible strain of muscles when playing the piano."[25]

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[22] Berman, *Notes from the Pianist's Bench*, 14–16.
[23] Seymour Bernstein, *With Your Own Two Hands: Self-Discovery through Music* (New York : London: Schirmer Books ; Collier Macmillan, 1981), 138.
[24] Berman, *Notes from the Pianist's Bench*, 39.
[25] Leimer and Gieseking, *Piano Technique Consisting of the Two Complete Books The Shortest Way to Pianistic Perfection and Rhythmics, Dynamics, Pedal and Other Problems of Piano Playing*, 12.

I want to emphasis the importance of group that both Berman states, and that Leimer and Gieseking are hinting at. Groups of muscles ensure that the musical apparatus, in this case the fingers to the arm, maximize their full potential. When we aim to do a particular musical task, the larger the group of muscles working together, the better it is. I do want to stress that when we use a group of muscles, it does not mean that their relationship in usage will be equal. In fact, it is rare that all muscle groups to perform musical task will require equal utilization. Consider just the act of dropping into the keys. The arms and the shoulders invovlment is crucial, but also rather small. It requires little energy to raise the arms and let gravity support the fall. It is the fingers and the wirsts who guide the landing and aborsb the shock. Here, we can see that a large group of muscles are activated, but not all equally.

Cortot recognizes the significance of comprehending the relationship between the fingers and the entire body, as well as how freedom in the body enables maximum expression.[26] These concepts promote efficiency and precision in piano performance, ensuring that each keystroke is deliberate and purposeful, contributing to the overall expressiveness of the music.

The voicing of chords emerges as a key consideration, as the pianist strives to achieve a balanced blend of tones within chordal structures. It is not just in playing chords where voicing must be considered, but also crucial is the balance between individual voices within the same hand or between the hands. Bernstein, in discussing being economical and having awareness about the escapement, discusses how these work together to ensure good voicing between chords and parts.[27] Heinrich Schenker states that "[t]he hand may not lie; it must conform to the

[26] Manshardt and Amundrud, *Aspects of Cortot*, 39.
[27] Bernstein, *With Your Own Two Hands: Self-Discovery through Music*, 139.

meaning of the voice-leading."[28] Schenker's comment tells us that the connection between the hand position and hand readiness is linked to voicing. We see that voicing, while born out of intention, is most present during the birth of the note and will later be observed in further detail as we discuss connecting individual sonic events in the chapter discussing memory.

Lastly, the diverse array of touch styles at the piano enriches the expressive palette available to the performer. Touch relates directly to birth because, along with voicing, touch encompasses dynamics and other nuances of shading the sound. I shall not go into further detail here, as countless pedagogues and performers have gone into exhaustive discussions about the different types of touch. One thing I should acknowledge is the tension upon how much control our touch depends. The work of Ortmann in the field of touch is worth mentioning. In his research, the only fundamental physical factor affecting tone is simply the velocity of the hammer as it hits the string.[29] For Ortmann, the velocity of strike is the most important factor, not necessarily the manner at which we touch the keys. Whether one agrees with Ortmann's findings or not, one can agree that Ortmann is still constructively and convincingly preoccupied with touch.

Exercises

The following exercises focus on the two primary components of the birth stage: manner of strike and the initial sound created. Each exercise or portions of the exercise can be repeated by the student as many times as required. Three primary components are focused on the following exercises: dynamics, articulation, and voicing. The exercises that are presented in this

[28] Heinrich Schenker, *The Art of Performance* (New York ; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 9.
[29] Ortmann, *The Physical Basis of Piano Touch and Tone: An Experimental Investigation of the Effect of the Player's Touch upon the Tone of the Piano*, 62.

section are not an exhaustive list by any measure. Students should work through these exercises meta-cognitively: students should plan, play, evaluate, and then reactively create a solution. My concept of the five stages in the life of a note already encompasses these behaviors, but at the microlevel of assessing birth, the student should continue to use these ideas. At the start of each exercise, the students should ask themselves: What sound do I wish to convey? (intention); play that sound (birth) and then evaluate or compare their sound and touch to what they had in mind. If it did not happen, the student should not immediately repeat mindlessly until the sound is correct but pause and consider ways to improve the sound until it matches their original intention (in this case the birth of the note).

Dynamics

The first set of exercises is for the student to refine their perception of touch and their aural response as it relates to dynamics. The inspiration for this exercise comes from Boris Berman, however, it has been adapted to a more focused manner. Berman believes that every pianist should have a dynamic scale, one that is consistent and reliable for them to draw upon.[30] Berman would have his students perform a phrase in *mf* and then cycle through various dynamics of the same phrase and return to *mf*. The goal is that the last *mf* should be at the same dynamic level as that of the first. The purpose of these exercises is to concentrate on individual notes and chords that are easier for the student to focus on and memorize. By doing these shorter exercises, students can easily and more quickly evaluate their own progress.

In this first set of exercises, the student should first practice each hand separately. The goal is to preserve a dynamic scale so that the student builds an aural and physical understanding of each dynamic. After each key strike, the student should stop and assess their touch and

[30] Berman, *Notes from the Pianist's Bench*, 16–18.

dynamics. Ultimately, the first and final *mf* should have the same dynamic level. Because of the ubiquitous nature of cellphones, it is also recommended that the student record themselves to verify, without bias, that the dynamics are truly different.

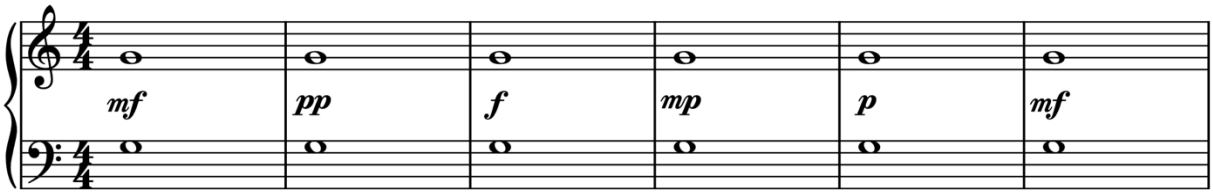

Figure 3. An adaptation of Berman's idea of a dynamic inventory. This exercise helps the student's ear and body conceptualize a dynamics inventory.

After the student is confident in their ability to play each hand separately, it is then recommended that the student plays hands together. This exercise may be extended to larger intervals and is not limited to the note G. Students are encouraged to play these in various ways. The same exercise may be extended to triads or any other combination of intervals, though the most common constructions should be used as students are most likely to encounter them. While the topic of voicing has yet to be discussed in any detail, the student may practice these in two manners. First, with all the tones being equal in sound. Second, these may be practiced with emphasis to the soprano tone in the right hand and the bass tone in the left. The same rules apply for the student: practice hands separately and then together.

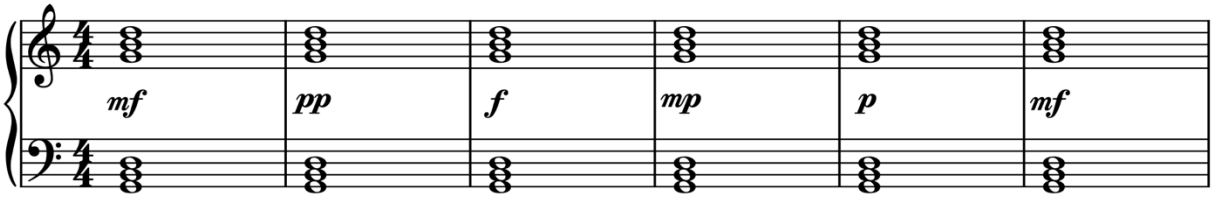

Figure 4. An extension of the previous exercise to create the dynamics inventory through chordal playing.

We can extend Berman's ideas about a scope of dynamics to a scale of various types of articulations. Here the exercise is focused on articulations of duration. The same rules of the previous exercise apply here. The goal is to create a scale in which the student may draw from and utilize at any point. The student should evaluate themselves after each striking of the key. After the student becomes confident in their abilities in playing hands separately and then together, the student may combine the first exercise with this one, randomly choosing a dynamic and an articulation.

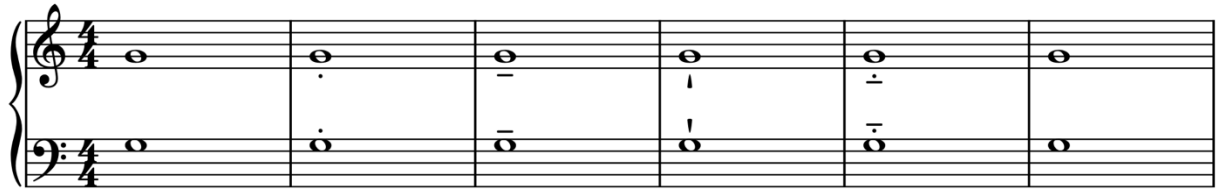

Figure 5. An exercise in creating a touch or articulation inventory. Students may vary this exercise to include various dynamic patterns.

Voicing in Chords

The technique of chord-voicing is of utmost importance for pianists to master. It is rare to find a piece in literature that does not have at least a dyad, highlighting the importance of chord voicing as a crucial skill that is frequently utilized. Although these exercises mainly emphasize chords, it is possible to derive other exercises from them to address different challenges, such as coordinating between two voices in both hands. It entails having a keen ear and excellent control over the hand and fingers. It is important to note that musical notation alone does not indicate how it should be voiced, especially Most frequently, it is the top voice that receives prominence. However, there are numerous in the literature where that is not the case, such as the Trio section from Chopin's Polonaise Op. 26 No. 2.

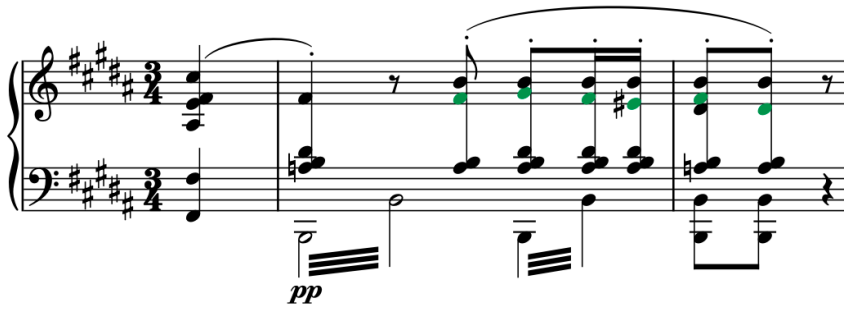

Figure 6. Mm. 97-8 from Chopin Polonaise Op. 26 No. 2. The notes highlighted in green indicate the melody, which is now in an inner voice.

The initial chord-voicing exercise is notated on one staff, and it is recommended to practice each hand separately before attempting to play with both hands together. In each measure, there is a note that retains the longest value and it is the note that should be the prominent voice of the chord. The usage of duration in this instance deviates from the concept of duration in later stages of a note's life. The duration here is intended to help the student prioritize sounds, with the longest value indicating the most important note.

In other words, if there were a melodic line here, this note would be the note receiving a stronger voicing compared to the rest. As the hands play each chord, the notes that are played staccato should be relaxed as quickly as possible and placed on the keyboard. We are trying to emphasize the accented musical note and deemphasize the remaining tones. Note that these staccato notes should not be played with an accent. It is benenfical to ask the student, upon completing the exercise, if they remember which note was the most prominent in their production of the chord. In other words, they were not successful in voicing the desired note and this queston allows for the student to begin to ask themselves after each attempt if they indeed achieved the desire sound and touch.

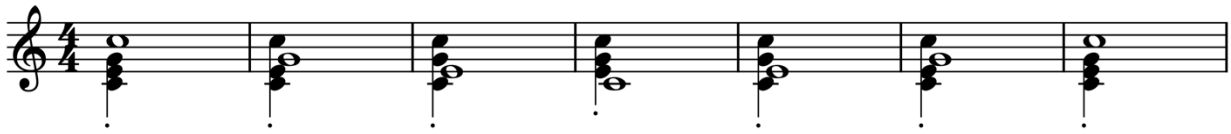

Figure 7. An exercise on voicing individual notes in a chord. Students are to relax their fingers and hand on the notes that are marked staccato while conintnuing to the voice the prominent voice (represented as a whole note).

The second set of exercises comes from Seymour Bernstein. I shall only paraphrase his steps here:

1. Cup both palms and extend all fingers taut. For the chord, use fingers 1 and 5 in both hands; keep fingers 2, 3, and 4 straight and extended.
2. Ensure your right fifth finger is straight, pointing down at a right angle. To play effectively, allow its first joint to collapse slightly, forming a bow-like shape between the tip and mid-joint in profile.
3. Focus on your forearm throughout, considering your fifth finger as a natural extension.

Now, prepare to silently practice the C major chord:

1. Quietly press the soprano C key fully down with your arm resting on it, supported by your perpendicular fifth finger.
2. Depress the other three voices to the escapement level silently.
3. Notice the sensation: your right arm's weight rests on the fifth finger; your right thumb hovers near the alto E escapement level; your left arm partially depresses the bass C and tenor G to escapement level.

Now, proceed to sound the voiced chord:

1. Depress the right pedal and maintain it throughout.
2. Before sounding the soprano C, position your taut fifth finger on the key surface. Lift your right forearm a few inches and gently lower your fifth finger onto the C key to produce a mezzo forte sound. Repeat every two seconds, resting briefly between each press while keeping the pedal down to sustain resonance.
3. Continue swinging your arm with each repetition of C, maintaining the mezzo forte sound.
4. On the next C repetition, allow your right-hand thumb to rest on the surface of the alto E without depressing it. Repeat several times, coordinating with the ringing soprano C. Eventually, allow the thumb to reach the E escapement level naturally as your arm swings.

Continue swinging your arm and appreciate the contrasting tones: the resonant soprano C and the softer, muted alto E. Complete the chord by gently lowering your left-hand thumb to the tenor G surface and then to escapement level, followed by your fifth finger on the bass C.[31]

This approach to voicing produces effective results for the student as it also forces the student to focus on their body and their contact with the keyboard. We shall adopt this method with some changes. The first is that the bowing of the first note if not necessary and not recommended for voicing. Bowing is where the joints in the finger, especially the first finger joint, collapses. It is standard pedagogy that the fingers, especially the first joint, remain stable. The second is that this method, as written, assumes that the voicing of a chord will always be the top of the chord, which we know is not the case. However, the remaining portions of the ideas do hold value and have been represented as an exercise below. Here, the notes that are placed in diamonds are the notes that we wish to only play down to the escapement.

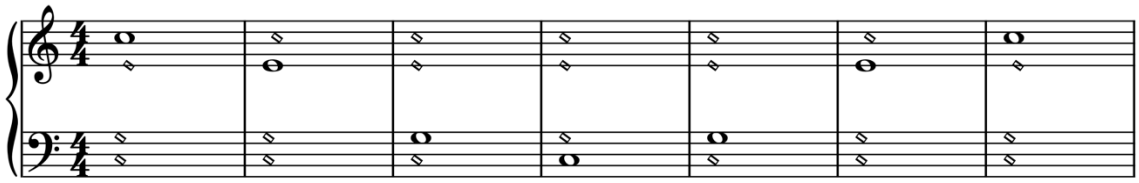

Figure 8. An adapation of Seymor's excercise on chordal voicing. Diamond shaped notes indicate notes that do not play a sound but make their way to the escapment.

Although these exercises may seem simple, the ability to effortlessly recall and use them during music making is a challenging skill that we are developing. It is also tempting to focus on other parts of the life of a note or attempt different stages simultaneously. This is not a recommended approach, but as we delve deeper into the text, opportunities to practice the connections between different stages will become apparent. Note that these exercises are just as

[31] Bernstein, *With Your Own Two Hands: Self-Discovery through Music*, 141–42.

much for the ear, if not more, than the physical body. Keep in mind that there are two elements involved in the birth of a note, as mentioned at the start of the chapter: the initial strike and the sound that immediately follows it. It is this sound that our ears must be attuned to. When we go through these exercises and evaluate our actions, we should rely upon our ears as our guides and judges. Our fingers, hands, and arms may produce the physical sound, but they should always be guided by a careful and judicious ear.

Life

The life stage of a note is where and when the ephemeral essence of music is most prominently felt. This stage encapsulates both the duration and gradation of a note, serving as the bridge between the intention behind its creation and the memory it leaves behind. Although interconnected with the other stages - intention, birth, death, and memory - the life stage uniquely focuses on the present moment. It is within this phase that the note lives out its existence, from its inception to its decay. In understanding the life stage, we delve into the nuances of musical performance, immediate execution, and on-the-fly adjustments needed to create music at the keyboard.

The life of a note is not merely about the time it occupies but also the quality and significance it possesses. This includes how it develops dynamically from the striking of the key until the sound has vanished. Pianists often grapple with this phenomenon since performance is an ever-changing landscape, especially when considering the physical and mental responses the body undergoes during performance. More so, it is during the life stage that the pianist must evaluate their artistic choices, making real-time adjustments to ensure the integrity of numerous musical parameters. These musical considerations include the melodic line, harmonic progressions, dynamics, inner voicings, and articulations. Of course, this is not limited to these examples. Such immediate feedback and willingness to adapt can significantly enhance the listener's experience and the performer's satisfaction. Of course, most magically, all this awareness must inform the performer at one and the same time.

The life stage of a note is tied to the two great so-called tragedies of the instrument. The first tragedy lies in how effortlessly the fundamental mechanics of the piano operate. In a general statement, any piano player could grab the average person off the street and have them produce

pleasant sounds in a matter of seconds. Other instruments do not offer this ease and often require several lessons before a simple song is capable for a student. To put it simply, it is too easy to produce sounds on the piano. As a result, we do not develop a 'conscience,' so to speak, for the sounds we bring into the world. For the teacher, a fascinating and sometimes frustrating goal is how to develop that sense of responsibility in the student. The instant gratification found in the piano may lead to a false sense of confidence about a student's capabilities. Leimer and Gieseking aptly describe the second tragedy: "Once the key has been struck, nothing can be done to change the quality of the tone, nor can a motion of the arm, hand or body have the slightest influence on it."[32] This unforgiving nature of the piano means pianists must perfect their touch, technique and listening before the note sounds (intention and birth), as post-production adjustments are impossible.

As observed, the second tragedy involves the rapid fading of sound following the striking of a piano key. Unlike string or wind instruments, where sustained tones can be held and shaped indefinitely with proper technique, a piano note dies the instant it is born. This transient life demands more from the pianists in terms of dynamics and articulation. According to Leimer and Gieseking, effective crescendo and decrescendo execution necessitates "incessant practice".[33] Misinterpreting dynamical development as a static condition often results in "pounding when entering upon a crescendo or rustling softly when starting a diminuendo." Life is a balance of its initial force and gradual evolution.

Seymour Bernstein further elaborates on the illusion of the crescendo on long notes.[34] Pianists must grapple with the fact that a single note cannot grow in volume once it has been

[32] Leimer and Gieseking, *Piano Technique Consisting of the Two Complete Books The Shortest Way to Pianistic Perfection and Rhythmics, Dynamics, Pedal and Other Problems of Piano Playing*, 58.
[33] Leimer and Gieseking, 105.
[34] Bernstein, *With Your Own Two Hands: Self-Discovery through Music*, 86–92.

struck. Instead, they rely on an intricate play of other notes and harmony to create the perception of a crescendo. This orchestration highlights the life of a note as not just an isolated event but part of a larger, interconnected musical narrative. During performance, the pianist must effectively manage these illusions, carefully selecting which notes to bring out to sustain the compositional intent.

The immediacy and transient quality of a note's life necessitate a breadth of technical skills and a deep understanding of musicality. Each note must be approached with precision and intentionality, as post-strike adjustments are off the table. The life stage is thus a testament to the musician's ability to live in the moment, making every note of optimal worth within the short span it exists.

Death

The fourth stage in the life of a note is Death. In the life cycle of a note, the stage of Death is often overlooked but carries immense signification. At this stage, pianists focus on ceasing the contact between their fingers and the keys after the sound of the note has faded. Although we emphasize attacking and sustaining notes, the way we conclude our interaction with the keys can have a significant impact on our overall musicality and technical proficiency. Boris Berman notes that:

> Control over the end of the sound is a powerful means of creating gradations of touch for organists and harpsichordists. As a rule, pianists are rather indifferent to these gradations, partly because of the somewhat blurred quality of the end of the piano sound, partly because the piano has so many other means of expression. Still, the ability to establish control of the cutoff moment (executed by the fingers) enriches the variety of articulation. From the slight separation of notes to what Schoenberg marks as *äusserst kurz* (exceedingly short) numerous gradations are available to the pianist. As for legato, by using "overlapping" touch, when the note is released belatedly after the next one has been activated (not simultaneously), one can create various shades of singing melody or of harmonic background (this overlapping legato serves as a very useful complement to pedal technique).[35]

Berman's quote emphasizes how pianists often overlook the endings of their notes for two reasons: the timbral quality of the piano becomes blurred at the end of a note, and the piano offers numerous other means of creating expression. The blurring timbre is paramount for highly connective touches, such as legato, but when combined with another mode of expression, such as the pedal, listening to how one ends a note is vital. Often, students are blurring notes precisely because they are not listening to the endings of their strikes, the pedal, or both. This is just one example of where a pianist's lack of awareness of the death of a note creates sloppy playing.

[35] Berman, *Notes from the Pianist's Bench*, 58.

But note that Berman also emphasizes that control of the cutoff enriches the articulation. There are two reasons. The first is that a sound wave has a beginning, middle, and end and the sound profile of an articulation or strike encompasses these three components. One cannot imagine a sound with no ending. Berman notes that control over the end of a sound adds to its sound profile and creates different sonorities.[36] Thus, the death of a note is also tied closely to musical expression. The second has to do with connectivity to the next note. Notes do not exist in a vacuum and musical connections are about relationships, including the physical location of the hand from one note to the next. Berman's example with legato highlights only one example of this connection. We will speak more about this connection later, for it is the next stage in the life of a note, Memory.

The release of a note is not merely a passive act of lifting the finger, but rather a deliberate and controlled movement that requires as much attention as the initial key strike. Indeed, Maria Levinskaya notes the foundation of a good musical technique is the simultaneous development of muscular control of the finger articulation in conjunction with the body.[37] However, Levinskaya further says that this finger control is a system of both muscular actions and releases. It is not enough to say a perfect articulation of a note is the action to contribute to it, but also how we release from said note. It is clear then that the issue becomes a question of how we get out a note once we have played it.

Our mental conception of a note is the initial point of exploration when discussing how we release a note. Camp says that regardless of the stage of advancement of a pianist, things such as style and interpretation are enhanced only after the ability to understand and hear phrase

[36] Berman, 60.
[37] Maria Levinskaya, *The Levinskaya System of Pianoforte Technique and Tone Color* (London: Dent, 1910), 66.

shapes and play them with some artistry that has been acquired. [38] It has been a running theme throughout this document that the mind and our inner ear hold the most power to our sound creation, and it is no different when we are mindful of the end of the sound. Leimer would agree with Camp, noting that a perfect execution of a note begins with having an exact impression of the note in the mind.[39] Leimer also notes that this is the first problem we should always aim to solve when we confront music playing. Thus, in trying to find the best way to end a note, to bring its death with dignity, we must first conceptualize the "perfect" ending for a said note.

Once we have our vision for the ending of a note, the next step is production. As already previously mentioned, that control of the music making apparatus (fingers, wrists, hands, arms, and body) is a must. Different performers and pedagogies have come out with various methods of ensuring an effective musical release. For Sándor, the essential figure required is the rebound. If one drops a ball from any height, what happens? Instinctively, one answers that it will bounce. This natural response to being dropped is what Sándor calls the rebound. However, it is not enough that we drop and bounce on the keys. Returning to our ball metaphor, note that when you drop a ball and it rebounds, it does not return to the initial height. A basketball player does not simply drop the ball in a dribble but creates a force that the ball responds to that forces its return back to the hands of the player. This type of controlled rebound then allows the player to traverse the court but also perform other actions, such as passing or scoring. This type of controlled rebound is paramount for Sándor. It also tells us that Sándor's ideas of release also have a strong connection to the following note (which belongs to the next stage of the note).

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[38] Max W. Camp, *Developing Piano Performance: A Teaching Philosophy* (Chapel Hill: Hinshaw Music, 1981), 32.
[39] Leimer and Gieseking, *Piano Technique Consisting of the Two Complete Books The Shortest Way to Pianistic Perfection and Rhythmics, Dynamics, Pedal and Other Problems of Piano Playing*, 90.

Sándor states that the rebound is a useful tool to help the player expel less energy while playing and allow the pianist to prepare for the next musical event.[40] He notes that the components of piano keys are elastic in nature and allow for a "considerable rebound" when played properly. Throwing the hand, which includes not only strong forte passages, allows for the hand to be pushed up, so to speak. In staccato passages, the rebound is a place for the hand to relax momentarily as it awaits its next strike.[41] A skillful release can influence the transition between notes, affect the overall legato or staccato quality of a passage, and even contribute to the prevention of tension and fatigue in the hands and arms. By consciously practicing various release techniques, pianists can enhance their control over dynamics, articulation, and phrasing, ultimately leading to a more nuanced and expressive performance.

Boris Berman identifies two types of touches in piano playing, the "in" touch and the "out" touch. According to Berman, the "in" touch consists of a slow immersion into the keys, while the "out" touch occurs when the fingers strike quickly and leave the key before the sound is heard.[42] In this binary construct, notes that are to be connected or sustained favor the "in" touch, while faster type of attacks, such as staccato, favor the out touch. However, Berman is aware that this construct serves the theoretical and not the practical, stating that "sound production 'in' and 'out' almost never appear in their pure form; rather, there are countless combinations of the two."[43] Cortot is also a fan of this combination of the two touches. Cortot refers to it as a type of buoyancy. When we fall into the keys by pressing, the music lacks

[40] György Sándor, *On Piano Playing: Motion, Sound, and Expression* (New York : London: Schirmer Books ; Collier Macmillan, 1981), 98.
[41] Sándor, 157.
[42] Berman, *Notes from the Pianist's Bench*, 5.
[43] Berman, 7.

buoyancy and vitality.[44] This pressing that Cortot is describing is dead motion. It is a strike that only moves downward and does not allow the hand to return. Cortot's remedy for this is what he calls the press-lift, in which the pianist must press and lift at the same time.[45] He goes further to say, "[t]he press-lift is the essential *spring*, the buoyancy of expressive piano tone. The noise of impact, when the fingers strike the key bed, is avoided by landing with an upward lift instead of landing with a downward thud. Even in soft playing, the tone will be much more beautiful if there are no downward thuds but instead always a press-lift connection."[46]

What all these performers experience in common is that the release of the note is vital, and it is vital for two reasons. First, the sound produced will always be substantially better and musical. Second, it allows the pianist to perform for the next note to come. The finger and the hands are reset. The stage of Death in the life of a note serves as a crucial moment for physical and mental reset. It provides an opportunity for the pianist to prepare for the next note or phrase, adjust hand position, or even take a quick breath. By giving proper attention to this often-neglected aspect of piano technique, students can develop a more holistic approach to their playing, improving not only their sound production but also their overall comfort and efficiency at the instrument. As such, incorporating the concept of release into piano pedagogy can lead to more well-rounded and technically proficient musicians.

Exercises

Our first set of exercises requires no staff notation; only the body, a chair, and the piano. Seated on the piano bench, the student should bring themselves to the keyboard at the same

[44] Manshardt and Amundrud, *Aspects of Cortot*, 52.
[45] Manshardt and Amundrud, 52.
[46] Manshardt and Amundrud, 55.

distance and height for optimal performance. Using only one finger, the student should strike any key within an octave of middle C. This strike should be of forte dynamic and the articulation close to that of a staccato that reaches all the way to the bottom of the key bed. The goal is for the force of the rebound to launch the finger and the hand upwards and slightly back. The aim is for the hand to go back to the student's lap, causing the finger, hand, and arm to relax. We are teaching the student two important things. First, is the effective launching capability of the rebound. Second, that part of releasing a note is also to relax, which will then lead to another strike.

This exercise should be practiced with both hands and the student should be listening to the ends of these notes. It cannot be stressed enough that the aim is not some dissatisfactory sound that we clip off. We want a rounded sound with a full staccato- like ending. The natural evolution is to extend this practice to triads. Our objective is the same. We strike the keys, using standard fingering to play a triad, and allow the rebound to launch the hand back to the lap of the student. Again, the student should allow the hand to relax as it releases from the keys.

The next application of this exercise is to apply it now to both short and long distances on the keyboard. In other words, using the exercise to traverse the keyboard from left to right, rather than back to the student. Starting again with a single finger, shall repeat the previous steps. However, upon being forced upward by the rebound, should guide the a distance either to the left or the right or the initial note. Here, the student should land on the chosen key but not play it. During the landing process, the student should focus on accuracy while simultaneously relaxing the hand and the finger. Beginning with short distances, the student can grow to larger distances as needed. We can also apply these same principles to triads or any hand configuration. It is

advised that students should focus on hand positions that are most likely to occur. However, extending this exercise will have benefits, for the literature is rich with passages for both hands that require chords or octaves leaps in which a rebound is most effective.

Another aspect of release is timing, specifically rhythmic timing. Often, the release of a note and its sound and color is affected by the students' inability to provide an accurate sense of timing. This may commonly occur with a rapid succession of notes, such as a run of smaller divisions or triplet figurations. Here, the problem falls into one of two categories. Either the student does not prepare notes in such a way that allows for efficient hand release and preparation for the next incoming note, or the final note in a group of notes does not convey a meaningful understanding of the rhythm. In either case, the solution is quite similar, the use of chaining practice techniques with a focus on release.

Chaining is a practice technique in which the student takes a subdivision and learns it in performance tempo, or close to it, by breaking up the problematic rhythm into smaller sections and adding to the chain. Consider the example below, the descending line to the note F. We can create a chain where we may start with the last part of the beat. Playing it in time so that we play the G in the correct position and its time span correctly before playing the F. We can work backwards until we accomplish connecting all the notes of the rhythm together seamlessly.

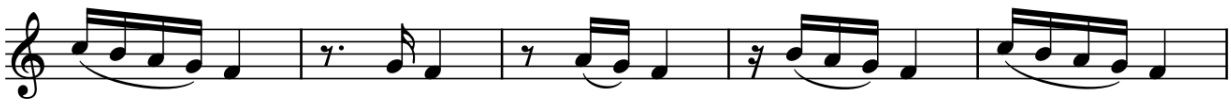

Figure 9. A demonstration on how chaining may be used as a practice technique. Here, the chaining begins at pracicing from the end and "Chaining" back to the beginning.

There is no reason why we could not have begun the chain starting with the front end of the beat. In fact, such a practice technique allows for multiple modes of practice outside what is given

here. For instance, in the above example, chaining in combination with rebound can help the student realize the work needed to individually release teach succession of notes. We can then take Berman's "in" touch to help connect this succession of notes. Each note should indeed have a strike and release which requires one type of execution on the micro level while the movement of the hand connecting them requires another type of touch at the macro level.

Playing the piano is a seamless endeavor, where every element is interconnected to form a continuous, fluid motion. Much like a string player maintains a follow-through on the bow, a pianist must ensure that every strike, attack, and release is part of a cohesive whole. This requires an approach that emphasizes lateral movement rather than isolated, vertical actions. The beauty of a performance lies in its ability to be perceived as an unbroken gesture, each note and phrase linked effortlessly to the next. By reinforcing this crucial understanding, a pianist can achieve a more expressive and unified performance.

Memory

The final stage in the life of a note is memory, which stands out as one of the most significant stages among the five. In this stage, we, as performers, relive in our minds and through our ears, the previous three stages of a note: birth, life, and death. It is within memory that the connection between two notes truly occurs. It is not merely the cessation of one note (death) but the memory of that note which creates a link to the birth of the subsequent note. This linkage allows us to adjust and correct our performance as we proceed.

Memory often operates unconsciously when transitioning from one note to another, regardless of whether the student is aware of it or not. Kaestner Robertson emphasizes this process through the metaphor of walking.[47] He explains that the transfer of weight between the fingers while playing is similar to the transfer of weight from one foot to the other during walking. This comparison is particularly useful because just as our bodies rely on muscle memory to recall the physical position and stride of a preceding step before taking the next one, our fingers and ears rely on the memory of the previous note.

If someone attempts to take uneven steps or moves in a way that causes imbalance, their body will instinctively remember and adjust the next step to maintain balance. Similarly, during a musical performance, our ears and fingers should react in a comparable manner. By drawing from the memory of the previous note, they adjust and respond to ensure a seamless and harmonious progression. Consequently, during our performance, our ears and fingers should react similarly, drawing from the memory of the previous not and reacting accordingly.

[47] Robertson, "Arm-Weight and Weight-Transference Technique," 30.

While it may seem as though memory only projects forward, this is not always true. Memory can influence musical aspects in both directions. Thus, memory affects both the chord to come, birth, but also shapes the ending of the previous chord, death. As performers, we constantly reassess our interpretations and the connections between musical events. When these revisions happen in the practice room, our relationship between the death of the previous chord or note may differ from the original intention or hearing of the music.

Camp discusses the importance of musical intelligence, or working knowledge, in the student.[48] These elements are melodic, harmonic, rhythmic, and formal qualities of music, but also include their interdependence. This interdependence between all the various musical factors is important to Camp and a core principle of memory. As Camp further states, "[w]hy do we say a note or chord is too loud, too harsh, too detached? Because of how it relates to the other sounds in that measure or context. No one can objectively make aural judgements without developing the ability to hear relationships."[49] Memory is a part of this context and helps us to interpret how we shall arrive at the next sonic event. A simple understanding of this concept is the two-note slur. These two notes exist within a relationship with each other. They also have a broader context, as does the conclusion of a musical phrase, but this will be discussed later. When we engage with a two-note slur, the first note is always louder than the second. But this is not enough. We also connect that legato so seamlessly that one could imagine the singer's breath shape the piano tone. In a slightly broader context, if we consider the chords frequently found at their location, we can understand the two-note slur better. Often the first chord is a dissonant

[48] Camp, *Developing Piano Performance*, 4.
[49] Camp, 9.

chord, and that release occurs with the second chord. It is precisely through memory that we understand how we could approach the second note, with or without an accompaniment.

Music theory also plays an important role here and its connection to intention is equally as important. Intention can be considered as the overarching musical force, while memory has a more local interaction with music theory. Camp has already hinted that understanding harmonic vocabulary is a part of musical intelligence. Recall that other pianists and pedagogues have also highlighted the importance of understand the basic principles of harmony and voice-leading tendencies. According to Schenker, a well-played bass makes the most significant impact on a beautiful performance.[50] Due to a lack of understanding of harmonic and contrapuntal relationships, pianists tend to neglect the left hand, which is where these elements are most apparent, in favor of the right hand, which typically plays the melodic parts. Schenker's viewpoint stems from his theorical views on the relationships between counterpoint (music's horizonal relationships) and harmonies (music's vertical relationships). Schenker's ideas about theory and performance lead us to understand that connections, memories, between musical events or chords are important for the pianist to consider.

Classifications such as, Tonic, Pre/Subdominant, and Dominant indicate harmonic function, but they also tell us something as performers about the relationship between immediate chord types. Dominant chords are dissonant within a key (represented through V, V^7, vii^o, and vii^{o7}) and their movement to tonic functioning chords releases that tension. As performers, being aware of this relationship, we may find ways to emphasize the dissonance of dominant types and

[50] Schenker, Heinrich. *The Art of Performance*. Edited by Heribert Esser. Translated by Irene Schreier Scott. *The Art of Performance*. New York ; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.

the resolution to tonic chords. We may connect these chords more deliberately through a stronger use of legato (even when not indicated in the score), highlighting tendency tones such as the leading tone, and dynamic shadings. Here, memory has the power to reshape the death of the previous chord by finding ways to enhance these connective tissues between chords or musical events.

It is essential to recognize that theory is important not merely for identifying the names of chords or understanding abstract concepts. Rather, the true value of music theory lies in its functionality—its ability to inform and enhance our performance. Knowing the names of chords or the theoretical underpinning of a piece is secondary to understanding how these elements function within the music. For instance, recognizing the role of a dominant chord leading to a tonic chord helps a pianist create tension and release, thereby producing more expressive and dynamic performance.

Furthermore, the functionality of music theory aids in creating a cohesive interpretation of a piece. When a pianist understands the harmonic and contrapuntal relationships, they can make informed decisions about phrasing, dynamics, and articulation. This deeper understanding allows for a performance that is not only technically accurate but also musically compelling. It should be stressed that the names of chord do not mean anything. Chords, like words, function in context, and it is this context that gives them their fuction. It is important to remember that function, the why of harmony, affects what transpires in a musical setting.

Measuring musical dissonance is also a helpful matter when considering musical connections between two chords or musical events. Consider chords of dominant function. Would we not agree, in terms of Western musical theory, that a diminished seventh chord is

more dissonant than, say, the dominant seventh? Other chord types, such as the comparison between (0123) and (0246), can also demonstrate different levels of dissonance. The first chord comprises all minor seconds, while the second chord comprises all major seconds, and yet we would perceive the first chord to be a more dissonant one. Consider the example below.

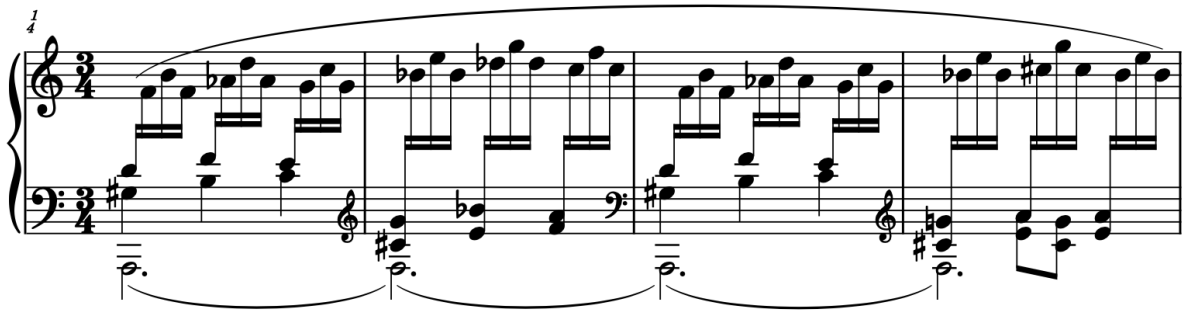

Figure 10. Claude Debussy's Pour Le Piano I. Prelude mm. 14 - 17.

Debussy's *Pour Le Piano* deviates from many of the Germanic music theory conventions established before the piece's conception. The first three measures (14-16) contain two beats of a diminished chord that moves to an expected resolution. On measure 17, however, this does not happen. This diminished seventh chord moves to a dominant seventh that ultimately ends up on an incomplete triad with a suspension (C# diminished, A7, and E). Studying these four measures, our intention for the passage would indicate it is a four-bar phrase and the point of maximum tension somewhere before the end of the phrase. Since the music does not utilize harmonic functions in a convention manner, we can still rely on our ears, on chordal memory, to shape connections between notes. The diminished seventh chord is a more dissonant chord than the dominant seventh chord that follows. And while the final chord contains a suspension and thus

tension, it is still an expected resolution of the dominant seventh chord (in terms of root motion) and thus releasing tension.[51]

Memory, like intention, can be extended to larger sections of music. In particular, memory is useful when considering the relationships between phrases. Periods in music are composed of two phrases, and the way we perform a period depends on the interaction between those phrases. Phrases, especially the second phrase of the group, utilize memory to govern their performance. Often performers may be too fixed on their local understanding of the phrase and may give excessive *accelerando* and *ritardando*, especially at the ends of phrases, but this does not produce an effective result.[52] Cortot invites us to consider that phrases, just like chords, have upbeats and downbeats and these influence our ways in considering how we should play a phrase.[53] Rather than upbeat and downbeat relationships demarcated by bar lines, phrases operate based on memory and their relationship to the previous phrase. This line of thinking also returns our attention back to rhythm theory and how phrase rhythms work. We can also extend memory into important repeated themes in larger forms, such as the rondo and sonata form. When these themes return, either identically or transformed, our memory of the previous musical ideas should shape our performance conceptions.

1. [51] The diminished seventh chord exhibits perfect symmetry as it is built from equally spaced minor third intervals, making it essentially rootless. This rootless nature means that musical context greatly influences how these chords function at any given moment. When diminished seventh chords resolve their leading tones immediately, they are often perceived to have a local root in that context. Conversely, some composers take advantage of their rootless quality in different musical spaces. Due to the importance of musical context, there are instances where a dominant seventh chord may be perceived as more dissonant in comparison, even though a diminished seventh contains two tritones and a diminished seventh interval. This allows for musical interpretation where in some cases, the dominant seventh chord is considered the primary point of tension.

[52] Manshardt and Amundrud, *Aspects of Cortot*, 122.
[53] Manshardt and Amundrud, 117.

Exercises

The memory exercises provided in this section are more challenging compared to the ones found in earlier chapters, the largest difference being that memory needs to be in a context to be effective. However, it is important to note that musical context in the other stages in a note's life is still relevant, but because memory's formation depends on relationships between musical events, a more comprehensive musical context should be given.

The first set of exercises contains two chords, with the first chord receiving different articulations while the second chord remains the same. It should be assumed that the dynamics between the two chords is relatively the same. Any slur markings here are not the conventional two-note slur, rather a notation for legato. It should be stated the focus is memory, that is what was the last sound in the performers ear and how it will connect to the next note. The student should practice these at various dynamics while keeping the dynamic shadings of each pair of chords relatively similar.

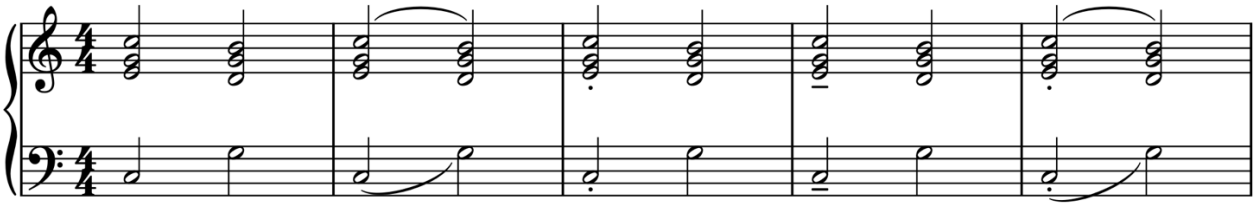

Figure 11. An exercise dedicated to various ways of connectiing chords. The emphasis is the connecton, always remembering the previous sound and articulation and linking it to the next.

We can also vary these by adding gradations in the dynamics. As shown below, the exercises are the same as above, but now focus on contour in a musical context. The student may choose any dynamic level to begin. Furthermore, the exercise presented below is only a template.

Students are encouraged to switch dynamic gradations so that there is a descending effect or the change in dynamics is excessively large.

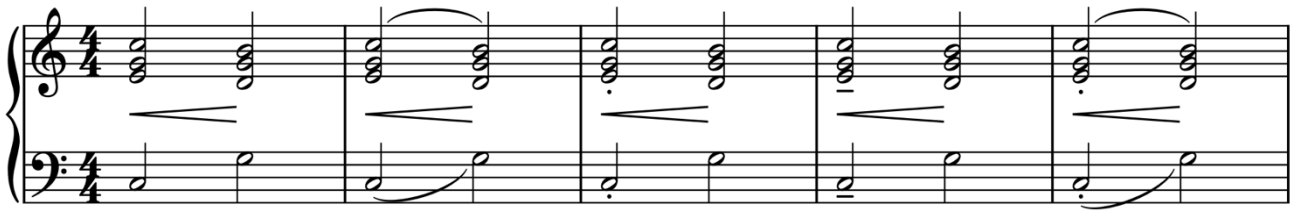

Figure 12. A memory exercise where the emphasis is growing the phrase through increased dynamics.

Students should also experiment with articulations on the second chord to varying degrees and should also explore different registers, including changes in registers as seen below. Recall from the death chapter that the rebound is an integral part of how the sound finishes as it also shapes how we prepare the next note(s). The rebound is extremely important when considering memory and connecting chords of different registers, especially if they are done in quick succession.

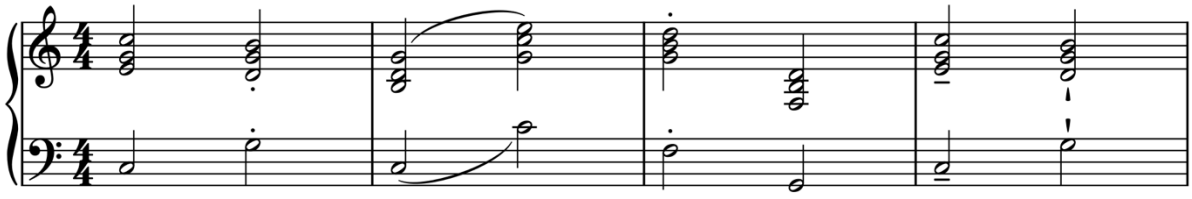

Figure 13. An exercise on chord connection where the second chord's connection is more disjuncted.

Because memory is considered with immediate relationships and connections, the two-note slur is a perfect musical device in music for fostering this idea, both in the body and in the ears. Unlike death, where we focused on the end of the two-note slur, here we are concerned with the connection between the two immediate chords. The following exercise uses the two-slur as its base and then expands the space between the two-note slur. Because every two-note slur has a strong beginning and a resolved ending, these two goalposts can be constantly filled with many smaller passing chords. The notated two-note slur does not necessarily indicate the passages

should be played legato. Figured bass is provided so that students can focus on the outer voices primarily before moving towards adding all the voices of a chord. While students are encouraged to also create their own, several music theory textbooks also contain very basic melodic and harmony passages that can be practiced in a similar manner.

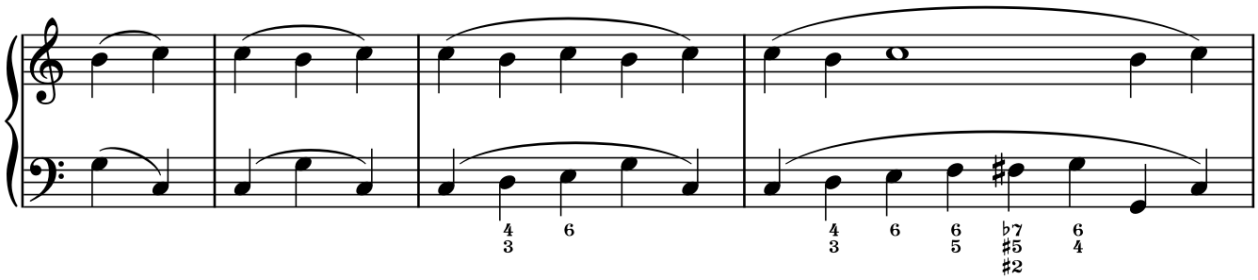

Figure 14. An example of various melodic and harmonic passages found in theory textbooks.

We can create musical exercises from real music using the same principles as the exercises previously presented. Let us consider a small portion of Mozart's Sonata K. 332 from the first movement. One important skill that a pianist should always consider is a reduction of the music, focusing on the primary notes and chords of the melody and the harmony. The following figure presents the first four complete measures of the first movement and the downbeat of the first fifth measure. The texture is that of a singing topic with an Alberti bass, with the harmony changing each measure.

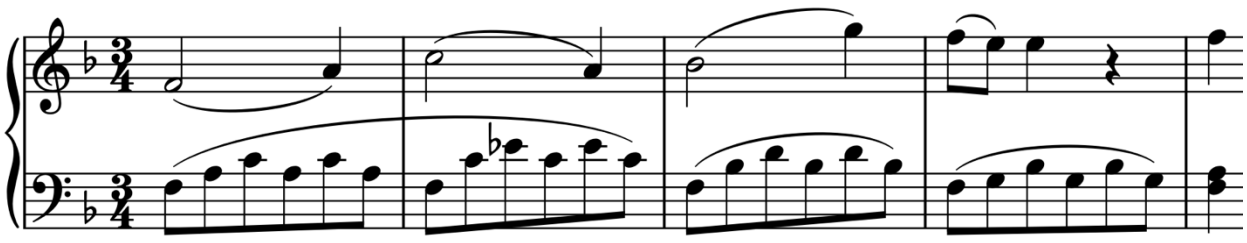

Figure 15. Mm. 1-5 of Mozart's Piano Sonata K. 332, I.

The melodic and harmonic goalposts for this passage are shown below.

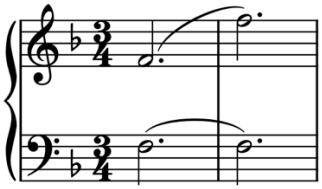

Figure 16. A reduction of the melodic and harmonic goalposts of measures 1-5 of the first movement.

While these may be the outer limits of the melodic and harmonic phrase, we must also consider the shape of the phrase itself. Measure four contains the leading tone in the melody and the dominant chord (second inversion). One conceivable way to imagine an exercise for this passage, building up to the harmonic and melodic tension from the previous chord and finally resolving it on measure five could look like something below.

Figure 17. A reduction of the mm. 1-5 that includes the dominant chord in measure 4.

Another consideration is that the highest melodic point is the G on the last beat of measure three. Because we want to help the student reduce the texture to focus on the connection between musical events, it is important to consider this G as an important musical moment. The G does not belong to the subdominant harmony that occurs in measure three but is an anticipation of the dominant seventh chord to come. Thus, another way to consider the musical texture might be seen below.

Figure 18. A reduction of mm. 1-5 including the dominant chord with the addition of the prominent notes from measure 4.

Lastly, we can combine all five measures together to form an exercise like below. Of course, this is a simplification of the many intricate levels in the music. However, it does provide a foundation for the student to begin. The harmonic rhythm changes once per bar and the singing melodic line nicely crescendos to a climax point before relaxing.

Figure 19. A full reduction of mm. 1-5 with figured bass.

The exercises above establish listening and phrasing that focuses on the outer voices. We must not overlook that the inner voices often play crucial roles in the harmonic and contrapuntal framework of music. The exercises above provide the general harmonies in the figured bass, but it is often necessary to help students understand the three, four, five, etc., part framework of a musical passage.

For example, consider the E-flat in what we might call the tenor voice of the passage. This note is significant as our first chromatic note, especially since Mozart places it on a weak beat early in the piece. We can express this in two ways. The first exercise offers a clear

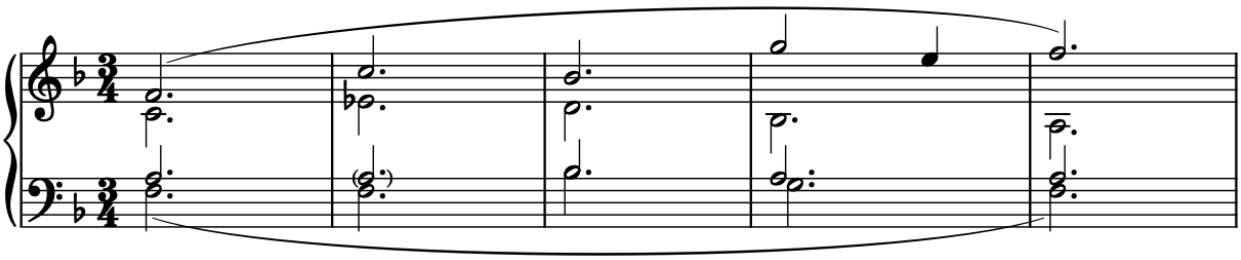

Figure 20. A reduction of mm. 1-5 that includes the inner voices.

hearing of the harmony in an abstract form. The second exercise, however, presents a more musical rendering in time, encouraging students to hear the line of the E-flat and its important journey down to D. Here, the student is confronted with the arpeggios motion from C to E-flat on the weaker beat and thinking about what type of musical emphasis as this chromatic note arises and then resolves.

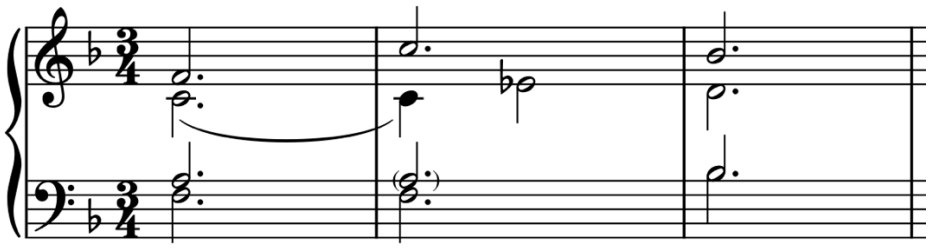

Figure 21. A reduction of mm. 1-3 highlighting Mozart's first chromatic note in the passage.

Application

This final chapter will synthesize the five stages in the life of a note through a case study, demonstrating its pedagogical applications in a piece of music. Although this chapter will not be exhaustive, it will offer various insights into how these five stages can be considered within a teaching context. The aim is to provide teachers and students with a diverse array of tools to enhance their learning and musical expressiveness. Robert Schumann's *Album für die Jungend,* Op. 68 No. 1,[54] serves as an excellent example, as it presents various musical challenges that can be effectively addressed through the framework of the five stages. This piece is short, comprising only 20 measures, and features a simple melody that is developed throughout with an active accompaniment.

The first stage is Intention, and it begins with a straightforward analysis of the work. Schumann provides many useful clues about the organization of the piece. We start and end in C major, and the repeat sign at the end of measure four suggests a two-part structure. Additionally, slur markings, which typically occur in pairs spanning two measures (except in measures 5, 6, 13, and 14), often mirror the accompaniment.

By examining the slur markings, we observe that Schumann's smallest phrasing units are groups of two measures. However, it would be incorrect to assume that these phrase lengths are only two measures long. These small phrasing units are part of a larger structure. Specifically, the piece is composed of four-measure phrases built from two-measure subunits. These two-measure pairs form antecedent and consequent pairs within the broader four-measure phrase. Schumann's presentation of the first four measures makes this clear to the student, as it features a pair of

[54] The title of this work in English is *Melodie*, but it is good to recognize that the original German title is *Trällerliedschen*. This translates more to little humming song, which provides more musical insight to the piece than simply *Melodie*.

slurred measures followed by a repeat sign, indicating the completion of a musical idea. The first two measures serve as the antecedent, which is answered by the consequent in the following two measures.

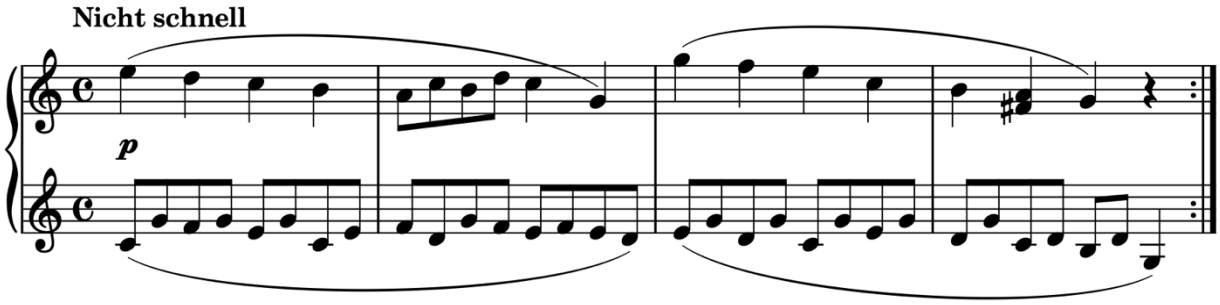

Figure 22. The first four measures of Schumann's Op. 68, No. 1.

Schumann continues this phrase structure throughout the piece. The first four measures act as a foundational pattern. Measures five and six form a two-measure segment that is then answered by measures seven and eight. This pattern persists until the piece concludes. It is important to note that even larger connections are possible. For instance, measures 5–12 can be seen as two four-measure groups. A light harmonic analysis reveals that the first four measures primarily settle on G major, with its chordal seventh, F, while measures 9–12 center around C major. Harmonically, this creates a V–I progression over the eight measures. The first half (measures 5–8) contains its own antecedent and consequent pair and creates a higher level of tension that serves as an antecedent to the resolving consequent that follows in measures 9–12.

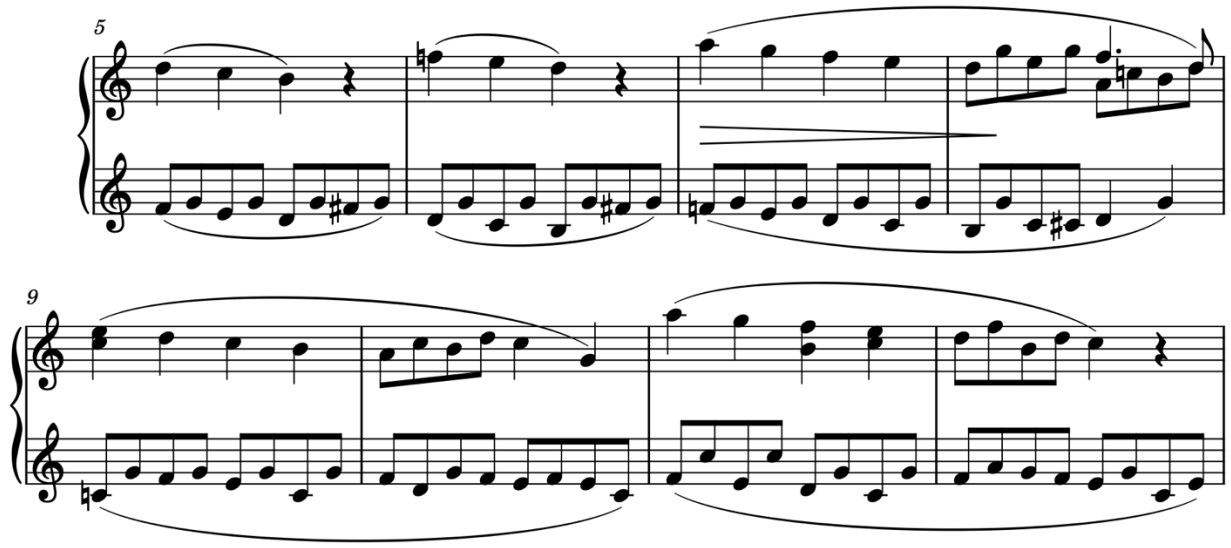

Figure 23. Mm. 5-12 of Schumann's Op 68, No. 1.

Now that we understand how phrases and phrase segments relate to each other, we can start considering how to shape these phrases even before we begin to play them. However, the specifics of our phrasing intentions may not be fully determined at this stage and might need to be worked out in the moment, as we will demonstrate later. Certain details, such as the highest notes being G and A, which always appear after a large leap, and the F-sharp and C-sharp, which are the only chromatic notes in the piece and appear solely in the accompaniment, also require attention. How should we play these notes? While we know they should be expressive and demand a certain level of detail, the exact nature of this detail will become clearer as we examine and work through the music more thoroughly.

Let us begin by examining the first four measures, which are crucial as they establish the harmonic, melodic, and phrase structure for the rest of the piece. We have already observed that these measures consist of two two-measure phrase segments. Schumann has made this clear by slurring these pairs.

The second key point, which is closely tied to the first, is that both phrase segments end with a G. However, these G's should not be given the same melodic weight. They belong to different harmonies: the tonic in measure two and the dominant in measure four. Furthermore, the two G's also serve different melodic functions within the phrase.

Notice that Schumann concludes the entire four-measure phrase on beat three with a G that is placed on an emphasized beat. In contrast, the G at the end of the antecedent phrase appears on beat four and acts as a diminution of the C found on beat three of the same measure. This G, while melodically and rhythmically weaker, maintains the momentum of the phrase and strengthens the connection to the high G in measure three, which is the highest note at that point. This nuanced treatment of the G's helps to ensure that the music flows and connects effectively.

Note two key points. First, harmonically, the antecedent ends on the tonic harmony, C major, while the consequent ends on G major. This information provides valuable insights. First, the ending of the antecedent should not convey a sense of finality, as the music must continue. Second, the phrase concludes with what we would call a half-cadence. This indicates that, while this phrase does end here, it should not be played as though the music has come to a complete stop. In essence, the music must give a sense of continuation and expectation, rather than finality.

Our next goal is to examine how the different parts work together. Let us begin by reducing the music to its most fundamental components: the primary melodic notes and the primary bass line. Notice that the texture consists of a single melodic line accompanied by an Alberti bass. Alberti bass lines often function as compound melodies, typically containing two voices. In this case, we have a tenor voice and a bass voice. Additionally, an alto note appears in the right hand on beat three of measure four. Below is a reduction of the primarily three-part

texture. Below, is a reduction of the melody and the bass line. I have presented the melody ending on beat three of measure two to highlight the symmetry in the consequent phrase.

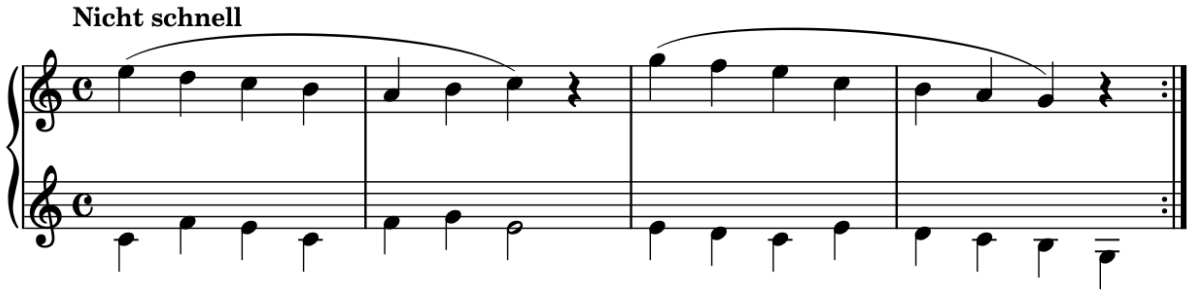

Figure 24. The outer voice counterpoint from mm. 1-4.

We can observe a few patterns in the relationship between the melody and the bass. First, they are typically in intervals of thirds or sixths, with a few exceptions. Additionally, the melodic shapes often mirror each other and sometimes they even double each other. Also, notice that in the melody of measure two, the eighth notes contain some diminutions of the main melody. Students should be careful not to over-articulate these notes. You will also notice that the G in measure two is missing in the reduction. As previously mentioned, this G is an extension of the C on beat three and serves as a diminution of the C. This does not mean that the G is unimportant; rather, its importance does not require strong emphasis, which is why it is omitted in the reduction.

In the melody, we start with an E, move down towards an A, and then return to a C. How do we initiate this phrase? Schumann indicates that the piece should begin at a piano dynamic level. However, I recommend starting slightly louder, closer to mezzo-piano (mp), and allowing the finger to sink to the bottom of the key on the E.

The birth of each subsequent note should feel similar to this E: as though we are sinking into the bottom of the key. Each note's end, or "death," will coincide with the birth of the next note. This overlap is essential for achieving legato, as we want some remnants of the previous

note's sound to exist as we play the incoming note. How do we achieve this? By transferring the weight from one finger to the next, with the wrist playing a crucial role in this weight transfer. The sensation should always mirror the action taken with the initial E that started the phrase.

Students can practice these two-note connections separately at various points in the melody to achieve smooth transitions. However, the goal is a seamless transition between each note within the phrase.

The high point of this first phrase segment is the C. From the E to the A, we should implement a slight decrescendo, and then crescendo slightly as the melody rises back to the C. However, this crescendo should not be too pronounced; it should be subtle but sufficient to sustain the melodic energy and give the sense that the phrase wants to continue. The bass line works similarly. One should always play this two-part counterpoint focusing on the melody so that the student may also learn to hear how the bass interacts with the reduced melody. The bass should complement the melody but never overtake it. This playing through allows the student to hear these interactions and adjust as necessarily when they are focusing too much on one part over the other.

We can now examine this section of music within a three-voice counterpoint framework. Notice that in the left hand, the notes representing the bass line are stemmed downwards. This reduction allows us to focus on some of the finer points in the music. This reduction allows us to focus more on the left hand, which is currently the more complex of the two. Before working on the Alberti bass figuration, the student needs to consider how to manage the voices one hand at a time. How do you play two notes simultaneously in the same hand?

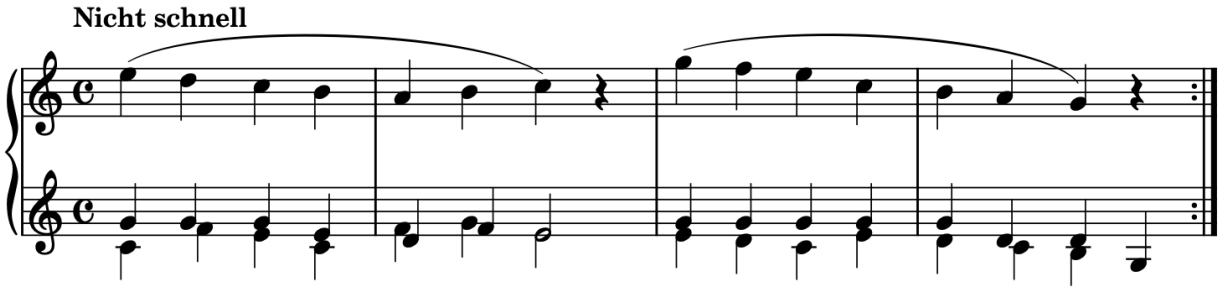

Figure 25. The outer voice counterpoint of mm. 1-4 with the inclusion of the inner voice.

First, it's essential to listen carefully, which is why the initial exercise had the student only playing the true bass line. Second, consider the positioning of the hand's weight. When playing both voices, the weight of the hand should shift slightly towards the pinky side, with a slight tilt or supination. This technique is particularly useful for the second measure, where the bass line ascends. Here, the weight of the hand should shift towards the thumb side, or pronate, to accommodate the upward movement of the bass.

The final step is to return to the original music. Practicing with the reductions helps the student focus not only on how to begin notes but also on how to let them fade in a continuous phrase. In the melody, only two primary changes occur: measure two contains eighth notes in the melody, and the G returns to end the antecedent phrase. Additionally, an F-sharp appears in the melody in the fourth measure.

A useful practice method is illustrated below. Hold the primary melodic tone (the one identified in the reduction) for its full value while bringing some of the melodic weight and tension to the right side of the hand. This approach allows the student to hear the primary voice clearly as they prepare to play the subsequent eighth note. Over time, with continued practice, they will no longer need to emphasize this.

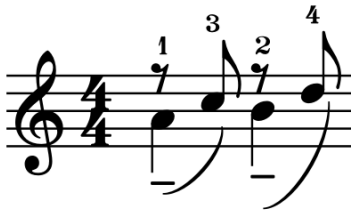

Figure 26. The right hand from measure 2, broken down into a small exercise.

A similar technique can be applied to the left hand. The Alberti bass relies heavily on this type of weight transfer. However, since the left hand is more active and alternates between voices, the wrist motion is particularly crucial. It helps maintain the weight on the bass line while ensuring a fluid and balanced performance.

Now, let us return to the G at the end of measure two, which follows the C. The student should recognize that the phrase culminates on the C; after examining the melodic shape, the C is the high point, meaning the G should not be played as strongly.

Next, consider the movement from this G to the one an octave higher. We must keep in mind the memory of the previous phrase. The initial G should not be too loud, as the higher G requires more energy. Being in a higher register and requiring a leap, it needs additional emphasis. Just as a singer needs more air to reach higher notes, the pianist must simulate this effect.

We need to think about how we let the first G decay and how we approach the higher G. Since this is an octave leap, it should fit comfortably into most students' hands. The transition to the higher octave involves forming a smaller circle with the wrist as we move up. This wrist motion helps ensure a smooth and accurate leap to the higher G.

Moving on to what we will call the B section, this part consists of 16 measures, with the first eight bars being musically repeated in the following eight bars. To clarify, while these

second eight measures are not an exact repetition, they share similar musical details. The first four measures of the B section contain a portion that may confuse the student. Throughout the piece, Schumann uses slurs to highlight and organize phrase segments. However, here there is a deviation from this pattern. What occurs in these measures is musically different from what has preceded and followed. In this context, the slurs serve more as articulation marks rather than indicators of phrase segments.

Specifically, we have a three-note slur from D down to B, followed by another three-note slur from F down to D. Additionally, the rests following each of these three-note slurs may imply that the melody stops. However, it is essential for the student to recognize that the melody rises from the D to the F and then finally to the high A. Below is a reimagining of this section to help the student better understand the musical connections. This visual aid can clarify how the melody progresses despite the seemingly disconnected slurs and rests.

Figure 27. A reimagining of mm. 5-7 to show the connections in the larger phrase.

The remaining four measures present similar challenges in the left hand as those found in the first four measures of the piece. However, to better understand and address these issues, students should consider reducing the music. This approach will help them clearly hear the harmonies, melodies, and relationships between the voices. The reduction below demonstrates that the structure is quite similar to the earlier measures. In some ways, this section is easier because the inner voice in the left hand consistently retains the G, making it simpler to distinguish and hear both the bass and tenor lines.

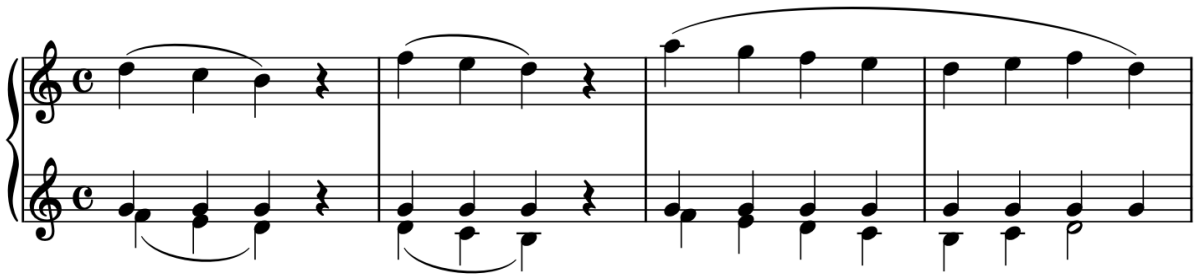

Figure 28. An outer voice counterpoint with the inner voice of mm. 5-8.

Lastly, it is important to note that in this B section, the highest note is now an A, rather than a G. We have already discussed the first occurrence, where the phrase ascends in a natural arpeggio-like succession from D to F to A, culminating in musical energy that resolves at the end of the phrase.

However, in measures 10 and 18, we encounter a different musical experience. In these instances, we find ourselves in the antecedent part of a two-measure segment that ends with a G, followed by a leap to an A. This musical connection differs from the octave leap we experienced between measures 2 and 3. The distance of a ninth is notably dissonant and must be emphasized to convey that tension.

A singer would also struggle with such a leap and would need to focus on accuracy with the interval. As pianists, we should approach it similarly. The movement of the wrists, hands, and arms must convey a sense of breath and lift, as if preparing to leap upward. Additionally, these leaps represent the highest points in the eight-measure phrase, leading to the final conclusion of the piece. It is crucial to approach these leaps with careful attention to ensure the musical tension and resolution are effectively communicated.

This final chapter has demonstrated how the five stages in the life of a note—intention, birth, life, death, and rebirth—can be effectively applied to pedagogical practice through the analysis of Robert Schumann's Album für die Jugend, Op. 68 No. 1. By dissecting the piece's

harmonic, melodic, and phrase structures, we uncover the intricate relationships between the notes and their roles within the musical narrative. Through reductions and careful examination of the piece's fundamental components, students learn to manage both melodic and harmonic elements, transfer weight efficiently between fingers, and maintain smooth transitions in legato passages. Additionally, understanding how to emphasize or de-emphasize certain notes based on their harmonic context and melodic function allows for a more expressive performance. By navigating the unique challenges presented in the B section and exploring the impact of dissonant leaps, students gain insights into how to approach complex musical passages with intention and clarity. Ultimately, integrating these five stages into music education empowers students with a more nuanced understanding of their instrument and enhances their musical expressiveness.

In conclusion, the entire exploration of this work can be understood as an advanced form of ear training. While it is true that the pianist must rigorously train their fingers, it is ultimately the ear that serves as the arbiter of true musical interpretation. Without the tools provided by a discerning and active ear, it is impossible to reach the highest levels of artistry. This is why focusing on the life stages of a note—its birth, life, death, and memory—is not merely a technical exercise but a profound practice in intentionality. By listening deeply and engaging fully with each note, the pianist cultivates a connection that transcends mechanics, transforming sound into deliberate, expressive art. This intentional focus, combined with a commitment to thoughtful listening, elevates performance from the physical realm to the heights of true musicality.

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