

Contents

Preface

The nature of technique — conscious practicing — fatigue and ailments — the mastery of motion patterns — motion and emotion

Part One

The Determining Factors in Piano Technique

Chapter 1: Music, Motions and Emotions

3

Modification of sound and human emotions — composer, performer, listener — coordination, independence, and interdependence — force of gravity and the muscles — pressure, weight, and stress — tone quality

Chapter 2: The Piano

10

The most complete instrument — forerunners of the piano — transcriptions and ornamentation — the hand's reach — sound production — volume and tone quality

Chapter 3: The Human Performing Mechanism

16

Coordination of the small and large muscles — extensors, flexors, biceps, and triceps — fingers, hand, forearm, and upper arm — the shoulder — torso, back and chest muscles, and the diaphragm — sitting positions — the feet and the bench

Part Two

Basic Technical Patterns

Chapter 4: Free Fall

37

Gravity and our muscles — the role of weight — lifting, drop, landing, and rebound — guidelines, exercises, and examples

Chapter 5: Five-Fingers, Scales, and Arpeggios

52

Anatomy of the fingers and thumb — horizontal and vertical adjusting motions — use of the thumb — the upper arm and the body — shifting in arpeggios — note groupings and legato — use of the damper — phrase endings — guidelines, exercises, and examples

Chapter 6: Rotation

79

Anatomy of the forearm — pronation and supination — axial rotation — fingers, forearm, and elbow — lateral motions — guidelines, exercises, and examples

	Chapter 7: Staccato	93
	The "wrist" staccato — roles of the fingers, hand, forearm, and upper arm — lift and rebound — white and black keys — staccato and legato octaves — guidelines, exercises, and examples	
	Chapter 8: Thrust	108
	Thrust versus free fall — when to use thrust — guidelines, exercises, and examples	
	Chapter 9: Summary of the Basic Technical Patterns	115
	Five motion patterns and the score — the slur as modifier of technique — the wrist and phrasing — variety in the application of staccato — the trill	
Part Three	Chapter 10: Identification and Application of the Basic Technical Patterns	141
Technique	Symbols for the five basic motions; wrist positions and touch forms — skill and artistry — how to play the exposition of Beethoven's "Waldstein" Sonata — a variant of a familiar basic motion	
Becomes Music	Chapter 11: Independence and Interdependence	155
	The goal: coordination, not muscle building — the principal adjusting motions — active and passive motions — finger exercises — the human warning system	
	Chapter 12: The Pedals	161
	Evolution of the pedal — pedal nomenclature — uses of the three pedals — pedal markings — partial pedals and the pedal tremolo — the pedal in Baroque and pre-Baroque music — combining pedals — the ear as master	
	Chapter 13: Singing Tone	179
	The expressive capability of the piano — the role of the equipment — cushioning or pressure — the piano as "love object" — the shoulders and the role of weight	
	Chapter 14: Practicing	183
	Mechanical versus conscious practicing — varying rhythmic patterns — slow practice — metrically uneven practice — the conscious, subconscious, and automatic centers — creativity — mental practice	
	Chapter 15: Memorization	192
	Why memorize? — when to memorize — visual, acoustic, motoric, and intellectual memory — memory slips	
	Chapter 16: Musical Diction	198
	The language of music — upbeats and downbeats — means of emphasis — flexibility — crescendos — the "negative" emphasis — ornamental passages — appoggiaturas and grace notes — ritardando and accelerando — the intangibles — tension and release — the piano as orchestra — the human voice — singing tone at any cost? — rubato — the fermata — slurs — national and regional characteristics	

Chapter 17: Public Performance 220

Performance: the ultimate issue — the performer as teacher — the expected and the unexpected at concerts — physiological and psychological factors — establishing the right tempo — the telling pause: on stage and in the recording studio — criteria for recordings versus live performances — the audiovisual film

Chapter 18: Mannerisms and Excess Energy 227

Mannerisms: manifestations of excess energy as a gauge of a well- or malfunctioning technique — spontaneous and cultivated mannerisms — “showmanship” — the value of slow, flexible movements — a mannerism sampler — “yes-yes” and “no-no” — walking on and off stage — beware of excess energy!

Index 231

Purpose of this book

Since the introduction of the modern piano (approx. 1770), innumerable books have been written on piano technique; indeed, there are also quite a few books to be found on the keyboard technique of the piano's predecessors, the clavichord and the harpsichord. The purpose of my book is not to list and describe the content of these works or to give a bibliography on the subject. Rather, its aim is to clarify concepts of piano playing, describe and organize fundamental elements of technique, and indicate how to apply these elements in performance. In a broad sense, technique is the sum total of organized motions executed by the performer. These motions produce sounds that recreate the moods of the composer in the performer's own interpretation.

Technique: examination of motions according to the characteristics of the piano

Many intangibles are obviously involved in this process. Mood, interpretation, improvisation, inspiration, and creativity are terms that are hard to define. They are subject to discussion and to varying opinions and tastes. Technique, however, is a skill—a well-coordinated system of motions conditioned by the anatomy of the human body and the nature of the piano. Even the most complex technical activities can and should be comprehended by anyone who wishes to master them. They can be reduced to their components: motions executed by the fingers, hand, wrist, arm, and body—in fact, by the entire human anatomy. The coordination of this human mechanism is based on simple common-sense principles of physiology and the force of gravity. When you dance or when you play golf, ping-pong, tennis, the violin, or the piano, you are subject to these same conditions whether you know it or not. You might as well be aware of them!

Practicing must be conscious, not mechanical

It is not that awareness of these factors is essential to an artistic and inspired performance; in fact, quite the opposite is the case—creative processes are hardly conscious. But the preparation—the innumerable hours spent practicing—must be purposeful, not automatic and mechanical, and it must be consciously controlled by the mind.