

J.S. BACH'S METHOD OF PLAYING THE CLAVIER AND ITS TRANSFORMATION INTO MODERN PIANO PEDAGOGY AND PERFORMANCE

METODA DE INTERPRETARE LA CLAVIR A LUI J.S. BACH ȘI MODIFICAREA ACESTEIA ÎN PEDAGOGIA MODERNĂ PIANISTICĂ ȘI INTERPRETATIVĂ

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Music pedagogy as a practical field of activity has a long history. Having become professional, keyboard instruments - the organ, harpsichord - have a significantly longer lifespan than the pianoforte. Piano culture inherited not only the musical material of its great predecessors but also some valuable pedagogical instructions for the practical implementation of this material.

Nowadays, these unique sources of information are sometimes regarded as archaic, relevant only to the instruments on which they were performed, but they still provide a key approach to thinking concerning musical material for its correct performance.

Such valuable sources of information for modern piano performers include the theoretical works of F. Couperin, J.S. Bach and C.F.E. Bach.

Understanding the primary sources of information concerning modern piano art regarding the achievements gained on the path of improving performance under the influence of reasonable pedagogy can significantly improve the culture of performance, which indicates the effectiveness of the teacher's work.

Keywords: music, pedagogy, methodology, exercises, students

Pedagogia muzicală, ca domeniu practic de activitate, are o istorie îndelungată. Devenind profesionale, instrumentele cu claviatura – orga și clavecinul – au o durată de viață semnificativ mai lungă decât pianul. Cultura pianului a moștenit nu numai materialul muzical al marilor săi predecesori, ci și câteva instrucțiuni pedagogice foarte valoroase pentru implementarea practică a acestui material.

În zilele noastre aceste surse unice de informare sunt uneori percepute ca arhaice, relevante doar pentru instrumentele la care au fost interpretate, dar oferă, totuși, și o abordare-cheie a gândirii în raport cu materialul muzical pentru a-i da o interpretare corectă.

Asemenea surse valoroase de informații pentru interpreții moderni de pian includ lucrările teoretice ale lui F. Couperin, J.S. Bach și C.F.E. Bach. Articolul se concentrează pe principiul producerii sunetului, asupra căruia J.S. Bach a insistat în cursurile cu discipolii săi.

Înțelegerea primare de informații în legătură cu arta modernă a pianului în lumina realizărilor obținute pe calea îmbunătățirii performanței sub influența pedagogiei rezonabile poate ajuta la îmbunătățirea calității culturii performanței, ceea ce ne vorbește despre eficacitatea muncii profesorului.

Cuvinte-cheie: muzică, pedagogie, metodologie, exerciții, studenți

Introduction

In the history of world culture, the legacy of composers of the 16th-18th centuries occupies an important place, but its path to modern perception by performers and listeners was not easy. Several factors caused the „misunderstanding”, or rejection of the music of ancient composers in the 19th

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century, in such a way were called the composers of that time, namely: a change in aesthetic views, when the Baroque style had exhausted itself, and it was replaced by others – classical ones, in the depths of which the classical and romantic styles were formed as well as a change in instrumentation that was more in line with the tastes of the new aesthetic era.

In the first half of the 19th century, a new culture emerged in the history of clavier art, which was associated with the emergence of another harpsichord instrument with percussion mechanics – *the pianoforte*, the name of which was transformed into *piano* in the middle of the 19th century.

A new instrument, the pianoforte, almost completely replaced the harpsichord from musical practice. Some harpsichords were remade into pianoforte, but at the same time, there was an intensive production of a new type of instrument that, unlike the harpsichord with constrained dynamics and sound production by plucking a string with a plectrum, had flexible dynamics of the impact action of the mechanics, the sound strength of which depended on the force of impact on the keys and on the force of the hammer hitting the string respectively. Subsequently, with the development of the design of the instrument, the pianoforte acquired a more powerful sound and, at Beethoven's suggestion, was called *piano*.

The format of performances is also changing – instead of musical gatherings in music salons of various levels (from aristocrats to ordinary music lovers), concerts are held in large halls, especially for such events [1].

The work of the composers of the 19th century was aimed at creating works that would sound best in large halls and on concert fortepianos. But the most important thing happened – a new era began, the era of piano art, built on the ideas of Classicism and Romanticism, where there was an expression of great feelings and passions born in the new times – revolutionary ideas and deep personalities.

Revival of early music

For almost a century, ancient music remained in oblivion. The concept of historicism in relation to the musical works of the past was not yet fully formed, so this problem was levelled out, however, the music of J.S. Bach continued to sound within the walls of the church. His cantatas, heard in the cathedral at a church service by R. Schumann and F. Mendelssohn, charmed them with their beauty. Their beauty impressed famous romantics greatly, so they decided to reproduce one of the greatest works of J.S. Bach „Passions by St. Matthew”. The preparation and performance of the work were extremely successful and this time – 1829 is considered to be the beginning of the revival of not only the music of J. S. Bach, but also of all ancient music, not only German, but also French, English, Italian and others, and this process continues to the present day.

Despite the efforts made about other works by J.S. Bach and other ancient composers, this music seemed alien both in the spirit of the time and in its performance on the piano. Therefore, for those who tried to play ancient music, the question arose – how to play? This caused the beginning of the creation of the original notes editions. Each musician tried to find features in ancient music that would bring it closer to contemporary romantic music, or even convey these features to it. This trend changed the style of the work, in which its originality and artistic value were lost. The desire to remain faithful to the author's style subsequently acquired the concept of authentic interpretation.

The great pianist of the 19th century, Anton Grigorievich Rubinstein, whose goal was „the desire to ideally perform works in the spirit of the author”, expressed the opinion about the programmatic revival of all ancient music, that „instruments of all times had sound colors and effects which we cannot convey on our instruments ...”. A. G. Rubinstein played his „Historical Concerts” on a contemporary instrument but was close to the performing style of the corresponding time [2 p. 187].

Performing style and pedagogy of J.S. Bach

What was the performing style of the great composer on keyboard instruments? How did they play the harpsichord, and clavichord, and in what manner? Regarding this issue, the „Bachists” proposed

various methods of sound production techniques – from solid legato to solid staccato, but the practical application of this method of playing was not successful.

The appearance in the first half of the 20th century of the research on the performance of works by J.S. Bach on the clavier by V. Landovskaya, I. Braudo, B. Yavorsky, M. Kopchevsky significantly deepened the understanding of the performance technique and its approach to reproducing the original. A significant number of studies have been devoted to the work of J.S. Bach forming a separate area of knowledge about the composer's work, but the most valuable, in the author's opinion, is the way, in which J.S. Bach educated his students by himself. He was a teacher both for his children and for other students. In this regard, his two notebooks by Anna Magdalena Bach and the Keyboard Book for Wilhelm Friedemann Bach („KLAVIERBUCHLEIN für Friedemann Bach”) can serve as material for the study of Bach as a teacher. This collection of music by J.S. Bach was first published in Germany in 1927, edited by Hermann Keller, by the publishing house Kassel and Basel Bärenreiter (Bärenreiter – Verlag Kassel und Basel). This collection is extremely important not only for the lovers and researchers of J.S. Bach (Leopold Mozart created a similar collection for his six-year-old son Wolfgang) but also because this important work can occupy a significant place in the musical pedagogy of our time. Bach arranged the keyboard book for his nine-year-old eldest and beloved son Friedemann. However, this collection is not a „Little Book”, but a truly convincing keyboard book, which contains 70 works, most of which are well known to us: small preludes, two and three-voice intentions, preludes later included in the „Well-Tempered Clavier”, as well as some lesser-known works and several works by other composers. The significance of this collection is not only in the content of the works that it includes but also to a greater extent in its purpose: even Spitta Julius August (1841-1894), a German musicologist, recognized that „... in front of us is the teaching of playing the clavier, ordered by Bach himself, Bach keyboard school; it's incomprehensible how this has remained unpublished until now!”. This is what G. Keller noted in the preface to the publication in 1927 [3].

Bach begins his collection with an explanation of notes, keys, and ornaments, which are immediately accompanied by small, interrelated exercises. From the very beginning, this lesson, in our understanding, was conducted extremely fast. For Friedemann, the lesson was accompanied by purely technical exercises; what kind of exercises these were, one could later learn from Bach's students, and pay attention to the section „On Methods.”

It is known that Bach's technical instructions were inseparable from the spiritual ones therefore we should perceive the „Klavier Book” as being created in the process of studying with Friedemann. It was not organized by a pre-thought-out plan in the same way as the book of Leopold Mozart divided into lessons, but it has the charm of something alive and therefore looks unsystematic concerning the order of the musical works.

Nevertheless, a systematic progression from easy to complex is mentioned: exercise works are followed by works for relaxation, for example, two allemandes, which can be assumed not to be the work of Bach and others. This system of arrangement of musical material can be traced further. In conclusion, surpassing in complexity all the previous works, there are three-voice intentions (called Fantasies) in the same characteristic order, because the book is over. So, this „Klavier Book,” according to its author's expectations, should have met with a friendly reception! The inscription above the first work demonstrates how Bach wanted this book to be understood and perceived: In Nomine Iesu – In the Name of Jesus; likewise, in his teaching about the general bass, he writes: „... Like all music, the general bass should have no other goal than the glory of God and the restoration of the soul; if this is not followed, then this is no longer real music, but only hellish noise and ranting”. How majestic was the figure of Bach, who, with a pedagogical purpose, wrote his deepest works and small exercises, placing them in unsurpassed forms, and for whom musical harmony became a reflection and symbol of the sublime (divine) [4].

His first researcher, Johann Nikolaus Forkel (1749-1818), wrote about the life and work of Johann Sebastian Bach in his book „The Life, Art, and Work of J.S. Bach”: „First I want to say something about

his lessons in playing the piano clavier. The first thing he explained was how to touch the keys with your fingers, he taught the art of touch". This extremely interesting process of playing the clavier by Sebastian Bach is described in this book: „According to Sebastian Bach's instructions, the hand above the keyboard should be in such a position that the five fingers bend to form a straight line on the keyboard and hit with each finger. And for pressing the key, a minimum distance was maintained, and the fingers were ready for easy movement. This hand position meant that:

- not a single finger will fall on the key (as sometimes happens), will not fall uncontrollably, but will touch it only with an accurate feeling of inner strength and with clear control of movement;
- the force of pressure on the key should be the same and precisely such that the finger does not rise directly above the keyboard, but so that by gradually moving the finger back, its tip returns to the plane of the hand, sliding off the front of the key;
- when moving from one key to another, the force and pressure with which the first sound was formed passes to the nearest finger at the fastest pace, so that both tones are neither separated from each other nor sound united”.

Forkel gives the following advantages of this hand position:

1. The bent position of the fingers contributes to the ease of each movement. In this way, you can avoid impacts, knocking, and noise during execution, which quite often happens with straight and insufficiently curved fingers.
2. The retraction of the fingertips, resulting in a rapid transfer of force from one finger to the other, forms the highest degree of expression in the sound of individual tones, so that any passage performed in this manner sounds unsurpassed, sinuous, and exquisite, as if each tone were a pearl...
3. Thanks to smooth, uniform movements of the fingertips across the keys, each string is given enough time to vibrate. In this way, the sound of the tone is not only improved, but also lengthened, and therefore we can play hummily and coherently, even on an instrument as poor in tone as the clavichord. All this together also has the advantage that we do not lose strength due to useless tension and restriction of movement. Eyewitnesses who saw Bach play say that he played so easily and smoothly with his fingers that it could hardly be noticed - only the first knuckles of the fingers move, while the hand remained rounded even in the most difficult passages of the game; the fingers are slightly raised above the keys, a little more than in trilling, and when one finger is involved in the game, the others remain in their positions [5].

In addition to careful attention to the placement of the fingers, Bach's attention was paid to the position of the torso, which should have taken even less part during the playing, like any player whose hand is not light enough. From the same information about the pedagogy of J.S. Bach, given by Forkel, it becomes known that Bach believed that in order to learn to play as previously described, students had to first train their fingers for several months on small fragments, and not on entire works, achieving expressive and pure performance. During these few months, none of the exercises could be skipped, and the transition from one exercise to another occurred in no less than 6-12 months. When it turned out that one of the students was almost losing patience, Bach kindly wrote small, melodic works that combined exercises. Thus, 6 short preludes and 15 two-voice intentions were created, which he wrote in class, caring only about the current needs of the students at that time. However, he ended up turning them into beautiful, amazing little masterpieces. In the same way, Bach did exercises to perform ornamentation. This system of training existed in Bach's time and was approved because they tried to move away from the system of playing, the goal of which was to master technique through the mind. It has long been noticed that the technique is connected not with the fingers, but with the head [4].

Bach's ideas in the transformation of virtuosos

In the 19th century, Bach's idea of the development of the performer's technique acquired a bit one-sided character in the technical exercises of Czerny, Kramer, and Clemente, in which the artistic side receded into the background, and work on the playing technique was devoid of artistic content and was of an epidemic nature. They gradually began to abandon their passion for technology alone. In this regard, at the end of the 19th century, with the advent of the etudes by Chopin, Liszt, and other romantics, who combined technical exercises with artistic content, was considered much more useful. Such useful exercises for developing technique and at the same time cultivating good taste and the general culture of a musician can be „The Well-Tempered Clavier”, works by Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, and other composers, whose works combine technique and artistry – useful and pleasant, earthly and heavenly.

In modern pedagogical practice, it is possible to some extent to use the process of working on the technique of execution from Bach's given methods, because it is impossible to force the fingers only with your mind to move with the perfection that Bach himself achieved and forced his students to do the same, moreover, he offered to play his works, which are known for their artistic fullness. Some positions according to the Bach method need to take into account the positions of the hand, because during this time, and this is more than 300 years, the use of fingers has changed – then only the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th fingers were played, and the 1st and 5th accompanied and were not involved in the playing. Now they play with all five fingers and therefore it is impossible to line them up in a straight line. The main thing in his method is the free perfect movement of the fingers, achieved by daily work, the culture of sound production, and the general culture of body posture, which now requires the attention of the teacher when working with the student.

In addition to the visible part of Bach's pedagogy, the inner essence of the lessons is extremely relevant, and these are the problems of fingering, his information about tempos, phrasing, and dynamics, notations about which he did not make in the text, but forced students to think about it, and thereby develop their thinking. Bach left the information on how to perform his music, but even now pianists edit Bach's legacy turning to the 19th-century editions created by the romantics and giving their thinking process a rest, relying on false thoughts.

Among the composers of the past who left behind „instructions” on the performance of their legacy without counting on internet and other sources – C.F.E. Bach „An Essay on the True Art of Playing Keyboard Instruments”, F. Couperin „The Art of Playing the Harpsichord”. Turning to primary sources can be useful aiming to reproduce a work in a sound that is as close as possible to the original.

Conclusions

In the pedagogical process, turning to musical material from distant times encourages the teacher to thoughtfully approach the methodology for studying such works. The remoteness of the times of their creation may take the understanding of its design and method of execution away from the original source and thereby change its artistic value. This happened in the pedagogy of the 20th century when there was not an understanding of style and truthful reproduction in the educational process. Referring to the existing sources is the professional responsibility of the teacher.

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