

The Pianist Performer, Nowadays. A Creative Practice of the instrument Recommendation

Andreea BRATU¹,

Abstract: *The Pianist Performer, it is a super-computerized humanoid with maximum analytical and psychological capacities, cold and calculated elite, able to play complex musical scores in front of an audience without any technical mistake or the artistic excitement of the individual musicality used to decipher and assimilate the subtle and profound musical context? Today, we are confronted with a strange dichotomy of what in the Golden Age of a past century pianism was a Vocation in itself. Paradoxically, tens of thousands of pianists are continuously licensed in extended and multidisciplinary programs in the 21st Century educational system, very few seem to be in touch with the musical interpretation of the studied repertoire. They are no longer the same teachers nor the same social context. From the written experience of past generations, from my own experience in this field, I propose some recommendations (far from been exhaustive) that I consider essential in the practice.*

Key-words: *creative practice; pianist composer; practice stages; extra musical elements.*

1. Introduction

We go to concerts, first to listen to some music and if we are better informed in the field, it is possible to make these choices on the quality of the production and the protagonists' professional status. However, it is possible that when these conditions are met, we do not enjoy an (in)effective experience. Before any similarity, reporting to the same written convention called score always leads to a new sensory experience. When the audience is in contact with valuable interpreters, instantly any incisive reception disappears (room flashes, boredom). This phenomenon is happening because in the audience on the sound waves route are 'traveling' more than just sounds organized in a traditional musical system. Musicality, artistic emotion, ease of expression all bring delight, relaxation and spiritual reflection in the atmosphere.

The audience feels the interpreter in front of him as a full, serene, but at the same time totally enveloped person, as if detached from the wonderful sonic universe that unexpectedly envelops the concert hall. 'It will surrender to our indifference or everyday preoccupations that interpretation in which we feel a thrill of intense human aspiration, whether it is the lover's burning longing or the infuriated search of the thinker. For the conscious interpreter of its purpose, this is the main problem' (Bălan G. 1969, 246)

And then the audience will gladly draw the final conclusion: what talented guy I listened to tonight!

'All Heaven picked up Talent' or we actually talk about or science, work, knowledge in a package basis to polish individual skills and artistic qualities carefully developed, all organized in a consistent specific working manner?

¹ Faculty of Arts of the University "Ovidius" from Constanta, andrebratu77@gmail.com

2. Issue & Objectives

The role of the performer has begun to be considered truly important with the launch of instrumental music and instruments development. A relevant aspect in the artist's affirmation is the appearance of the instrumental concert form that began during the Baroque period and evolved into the Classical one with the *virtuosity cadences*, tribute to the improvising capacities of the composer-interpreter (most of the times). At the beginning of the 19th century, besides the published opuses, the publishing works of the most noted performers appear through brilliant versions transcriptions of old music representative scores, in a *virtuoso style*.² With the romantic momentum, in some cases the interpreter becomes a collaborator in the creation process complex (in the real sense of the word) by the transcription of works for other instruments or groups of instruments than those originally intended for them.³ Moreover, the double function of *the composer-pianist* has kept its efficiency in time because, as *Serghei Rachmaninov* always said, such a musician has the ability to represent his work before composing it, possessing rich imagination and hence a sentiment with *much more developed musical colour in his approach to the instrument*. Besides, the majority of the artists until the first decades of the 20th century were their own composers.

Unfortunately, the next generations, "lacking" the compositional experience, have developed another type of approach (in most cases, poorer), which is still present today. Instead, it is extremely important to mention also that the nowadays real masters in classical performance (not the commercial ones) and those of these generations, have confirmed also without a composition training or experience because they knew how to recreate inside a system of inner revival of the studied work, in which they involved all the knowledge, working methods, artistic skills.

The need to re-create the musical work to all the emotional and mental parameters and levels to display the music to its true value underlining the authenticity of the creative act that's the *Creative Practice*.⁴

3. Material and Methods

The artist's desire to penetrate the artistic core of a musical work makes the identification with its spiritual universe possible only through an effort to understand its *inner structure* (on component sections and studying the relationships between). In the secondary plan, even if they did not compete directly with the composition of the work, the *adjacent elements from the consultation of other Art forms* are important and come to the interpreter's help, by deepening the study on the return to the eternal creative sources: cultural fundamental motifs and archetypes.

Even if he did not compete directly with the composition of a work, the artwork ambience helps the performer seeking a deep understanding of the age of the musical phenomenon he is

² Such Editions as of *Busoni- Bach* and *Scarlatti- Tausig*;

³ The *Etudes- Caprices* of *Nicolo Paganini* found a real and versatile utilization in this manner. *F. Liszt* transposed six of them with original adaptation for the piano, *R. Schumann, J. Brahms* were inspired to use thematic material for new variation forms creations.

⁴ *Here is the ultimate purpose of any interpretation: not to reproduce but to instill the score because it is lacking in a dedicated and eloquent interpreter, it remains in the conditions of sound tracking, an unmistakable dead letter.* Balan, G. 1969, 212

studying. The example of the piano and composer Franz Liszt's journey to Italy is brilliant: *"Rafael and Michelangelo made me better understand Mozart and Beethoven; John of Pisa, Fra Beato explained to me Allegri, Marcello, Palestrina; Tizian and Rossini seemed to me like two stars with similar radiation. Colisseum and Campo Santo are not as far as we think of the Heroic Symphony and Requiem"* (Balan Th. 1963 23-24) .

The preliminary stage of any instrumental work in the *Creative Practice* is:

the action to clarify the architectural plan of the musical piece, a plan on the basis of which can be build a concept of interpretation in all details.⁵

This plan must be made in order to bring to light the musical action indicated by the melodic drawing, the harmonic or polyphonic path, the rhythmic particularities, the tempo changes, the variety of possibilities offered by the dynamics of the play, thus establishing and constructing the epic-psychological dynamics of music. Eloquently, the passage in Bernard Gavoty's book of interviews with the orchestra conductor Herbert von Karajan remains a piece of advice and some questions that all respected musicians have to address:

"In order to read between the rows, you need equally the absolute respect of the text and the intuitive ability to feel the most secret movements that the single notes are not able to express. That is why the complex issue of aggression and dynamics is: what is an allegro, what is a forte and what is a piano? Do we understand the piano, for example, the half, the third or the optimum of a forte? What sound power is it, and even if it can be measured, what effects does this sound produce in two different halls? Did Beethoven tell us how many decibels did the intensity of a particular passage from the 9th Symphony?" (Gavoty 1955, 27)

Music being an art displayed in time, the plan will not gain the power of conviction, the quality it gets when it is closest to the fires of expression, giving it as a presentation of the interpretive musical creation *in the right tempo*.⁶ It can be established with the utmost accuracy only when interpreters are fully aware of the inner psychological rhythm of music that also imparts the correct pulsations. Why are there so many interpretative variants of value that differ either by small corrections of tempo, or dynamics, one for each remarkable personality with the interpretative vision of *S. Richter* or *Dinu Lipatti*, for example?

The notion of tempo is not and cannot be understood by an authentic musician as something rigid, mathematically, invariably, it is related to and guided by the interpretive process that the instrumental performer conceives, taking into account all aspects of well-defined interpretative conduct. Another enlightening example of defining the notion of tempo is the Baroque practice and sometimes also the classic not to indicate it mathematically-numerically (with metronome indications) because after the conception of the composers-interpreters of the epoch, the right tempo is the one found in the process of identifying with the spiritual and structural essence of interpreted music, is the reward of a persevering leadership of this process.⁷ In practice, the pursuit of this musical plan must vibrate like poetic symbols,

⁵ *I considered necessary before I took up the details of the interpretation to form an idea about the general structure of the work, about her inner atmosphere, the form, about the relation between the different parts and the relationships between them as a whole. and so on This method gave me the opportunity to define both the fundamental character and the various peculiarities of the interpretation that I was going to deal with.* (translated from Romanian) Walther B. 1956, p.103

⁶ *Just a little bit faster or a bit slower and everything is compromised* - Fr. W. Gluck (Rolland 1964, 205)

⁷ Franz Liszt talking about the rubato tempo. *A flashing tempo, an elastic, jaded, and at the same time lazy, creeping like a flame in the breath of the wind, like the spikes of the holdings under a warm wind like the top of the trees ... See the branches as they swing, the leaves like shivering and shaking ? The trunk and the bulls stand still: this is the rubato tempo.* Bălan Th. 1962, 302

emphasizing the colour variety and thus adding superior-human meanings to the interpretation.

Many musicians say that for programming type of pieces, these considerations can be made easier due to the coordinating intent of the composer by producing a minimal program (eg C. Debussy's *Preludes*) up to a detailed program (*The Fantastic Symphony of Berlioz*).

It is normal to believe so, but it does not exclude the possibility of plenary understanding of the music so abstracted. It is absurd to consider George Enescu's music, for example, or Beethoven's symphony,

In the first two stages of the Creative Practice

we must have the elaboration of the plan after which the piece will be learnt. It will be based on formative study principles that chronologically involve the following sections:

1. an overview of the piece
 - the structure of the composition;
 - extra music information (books, articles, visionaries);
 - audio information (reference musical recordings, live concerts);
2. conceiving a personal interpretative plan

An overview of a musical piece can form with both musical and extra musical elements. This stage is absolutely necessary for a professional approach to instrumental interpretation and, on the other hand, very effective to enter the atmosphere of the historical musical period that the work belongs to.

At this stage, for the performers with above average concentration power, the *Leimer - Giesecking method* (the rational method of the inner audition, the apparently visual study on the score) is recommended. In support of a balanced creative practice, are held both successful concert and record auditions as well as research of specialized, publications for strictly musical comments on that work or set of works, precisely because *the nature of the interpretative art is the diversity of possible variants*. When the conscious synthesis of all the traits obtained from the achievement of the stage is made, we can proceed to the elaboration, on the solid pillars of the architectural conception of the programmatic hypothesis of work.

Main stage: intensive practice with the purpose of polishing the sound intentions

Full musical materialization, this is all about it. The working methods at this stage differ according to the experience and particularities of each pianist, but it is necessary to follow mainly *the efficiency of the working time* and *the maximum utilization of the creative capacity* in the learning activity.

That's why a good organization of the work on a musical creation is followed by its division into sections (respecting the logic of the phrases, the formal scheme). The purpose of a shared practice is to invest in the eloquence of the soundtracks, both of the ones that belong to the microstructure of the piece: motifs, melodic and harmonic phrases as well as larger parts and sections. Also in the finalization of an interpretative plan is meant to achieve a certain articulation of the ideas of the whole by grouping, highlighting, diminishing, increasing and decreasing the intensities, rarities, accelerators, all carried out in respect of the plan pursued and incurable in the appropriate musical style. The practice of technically difficult passages is

recommended to be addressed both separately and in an integrative manner, closely related to the whole.

All these working principles, for a careful observation of the musical discourse to the smallest details, will be applied in a slow pace. In fact, the specific work of the efficient work is: *slow and slower tempo for a good practice*.⁸

To be careful not to fall into the obsession of the ongoing practice. After a period of sound information accumulation it is necessary to organize the material in the real tempo. The danger of stagnation at a stage dedicated to the study is even higher as the claims of expression are also very high. By imposing a qualitative standard, it is not to be left out of sight and to reach the final shape of the piece. This will be done precisely to restore the overall image of the work, temporarily unloaded into component elements - retrieving the conception unit. As a conclusion of this main stage and not the nuisance it is essential to always pursue eloquence and musical logic to the smallest joints.

4. Conclusions

In the case of great performers, the inner tension of the nature of their artistic intelligence allows the audience to reveal distinctive conceptual, dynamic, specific features to each individual, which we can see as a characteristic of their interpretative temperament. Examples: *Walther Gieseking* - color refinement; *Artur Benedetti Michelangeli* - neoclassical, sculptural clarity; *Edwin Fischer* - incendiary passion; *Alfred Cortot* - spiritualized exaltation (especially in the repertoire of Chopin); *Dinu Lipatti* - solemnity, transparency and spirituality; *George Enescu* - vitality and humanism (in the repertoire of Bach) All these personal prints of artistic mastery assume a lucid, finished expression of means of expression, depending on a prefigured artistic goal. After passing these stages, it is said that this music, not only will be learned, but will enter into the being of the musician. There is a famous interview with the legendary Cuban pianist *Jorge Bolet* (disciple of *L. Godowsky*, *M. Rosenthal* and *S. Rachmaninov*) and in which he was asked how much respect he has towards the music he is playing, sounding for the general audience so freely and with an obvious personal approach. The answer was that respect is a maximum one, although its reputation for the phenomenon seen from the common audience is not a similar one. After which he continues with a memorable statement:

‘You know, a Composer writes a piece of music and naturally it’s a moment of Creation: the greatness and the mystery of which we can never even start to comprehend. Fine. How long is a composer involved in the creation of a work? [...] Let’s think about a piano sonata. And in the process of creation he is definitely very closely involved with this work with a period of a month and a half- two- three months, maybe a year. He finishes the work and goes on to other creations. Now, comes the Performer. We take ‘that’ piece of music and we studied it, and we learn it, and we learn all the notes. And we practice it in order to can play, everything. And we perform it. And then we let it rest for a while. And we will perform it again. We take up the music again, re-learning, re- working and so on. Now, how long are we involved with that particular work of Art? A lifetime. After a lifetime of studying, of performance -which after all

⁸ *Work slow, then very slow and then even slower!*- Camille Saint-Saens advice

is the bottom line of the creation- I might be too presumptive to think that, perhaps I know that particular creation of that composer even better than he did?!”⁹

The work of the pianist never ends but only moves forward, so the tools and approach to work is never short-term and immediate. The creative practice is the main tool used to advance on their way of knowing and becoming artistic for all excellent performers. This concept frame and many recommendations that can be added anytime to it could demonstrates the extraordinary evolutions on the stage or remains testimony to the recordings of the great masters of all time.

5. References

Books:

- Bălan, George, 1969. *Sensurile muzicii*, București, Ed. Tineretului;
 Bălan, Theodor 1963 *Liszt* București, Ed. Muzicală
 Gavoty, Bernard 1961 *Herbert von Karajan* Geneve, R. Kister editor
 Rolland, Romain 1964 *Călătorie în Țara Muzicii* București, Ed. Muzicală
 Walther, Bruno 1956 *Despre muzica si interpretare* București, Ed. Rusă

***** A 1983 interview of pianist Jorge Bolet by Robin Ray

Internet links:

Youtube, Public Domain video
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6vrXvNVMoHQ&list=PL19F6AB21D0F305B1> (acc. 15.05.2018)

⁹ A 1983 interview of pianist Jorge Bolet by Robin Ray. Youtube public domain video (acc. at. 5.05.2018)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6vrXvNVMoHQ&list=PL19F6AB21D0F305B1>