

Considerations on Instrumental Fingering in the Performance Practice and Pedagogy of Concert Pianist Corneliu Gheorghiu

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Abstract: *Positioned at the intersection of technique and interpretation, instrumental fingering plays a pivotal yet often overlooked role in the artistic and pedagogical thought of Romanian concert pianist Corneliu Gheorghiu. A disciple of Florica Musicescu and contemporary and piano class camarade of Dinu Lipatti, Corneliu Gheorghiu also represents the Romanian piano school, renowned for its emphasis on clarity, expressiveness, and structural understanding. Grounded primarily in his pedagogical writings — „On Piano Performance” [Despre Pianistică], and contextualized within the aesthetic legacy of his mentor Florica Musicescu, this study approaches piano fingering in performance not merely as a technical device, but as a deliberate and expressive tool. It reveals how the pianist Corneliu Gheorghiu conceptualized piano fingering as integral to phrasing, articulation, and interpretive depth, promoting a flexible, context-sensitive approach prioritizing musical logic and expressiveness over mechanical convenience.*

Keywords: *Corneliu Gheorghiu; Dinu Lipatti; expressive piano fingering; piano pedagogy; Romanian piano school; Florica Musicescu; piano performance;*

Introduction

While often treated as a secondary or purely technical aspect of piano playing, fingering holds a far more nuanced role within the artistic process. It extends beyond mechanical fluency to shape the very expression of musical intention. In traditions where tone, phrasing, and structural awareness are prioritized, fingering becomes essential in crafting a technically secure and artistically coherent performance.

Despite its centrality in pianists' and pedagogues' lived experience, *expressive piano fingering* remains underexplored in mainstream musicological literature. While certain historical treatises and performance practice studies address aspects of fingering, particularly in Baroque or early keyboard repertoire, most modern scholars treat it marginally, often focusing on biomechanics or standardization rather than its interpretive potential.

In much of the 20th- and 21st-century pedagogical literature, fingering tends to be discussed predominantly through the lens of biomechanics and efficiency. Authors such as Otto Ortmann („*The Physiological Mechanics of Piano Technique*,” 1929)² or Thomas Carson Mark, Roberta Gary, Thom Miles („*What Every Pianist Needs to Know About the Body*,” 2003)³ focus extensively on *the anatomical and ergonomic dimensions of movement, aiming to prevent injury*

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² Otto Ortmann. 1929. *The Physiological Mechanics of Piano Technique* [CD]. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & co LTD, pp. 84-103.

³ Thomas Carson Mark & Roberta Gary & Thom Miles. 2003. *What every pianist needs to know about the body*. Chicago: Gia Publications, pp. 92-135.

and maximize muscular economy. While these contributions are undeniably valuable, they often sideline the artistic implications of fingering choices.

Similarly, method books that dominate early childhood pedagogical practice, such as „*Faber Piano Adventures*”, frequently promote standardized fingering models intended to suit the average student, rather than encourage context-specific, expressive decisions. Even in university-level technique manuals, *fingering is often presented as a question of facility and clarity, with limited space devoted to its interpretive function*. In contrast, pianists from more individualized traditions, like *András Schiff*,⁴ *Maria João Pires* often speaks of fingering in personal and expressive terms. Yet, rather than being formally theorized, their approaches are typically transmitted orally or occasionally (through live masterclasses).

This gap leaves a rich area for further exploration, particularly in articulating how fingering choices embody and transmit musical thought.

2. Issue & Objectives

The Romanian piano school, shaped decisively in the first half of the 20th century by figures such as *Florica Musicescu* (1887-1969) and her most famous student, concert-pianist *Dinu Lipatti* (1917-1950), has long been recognized for emphasizing clarity of expression, structural intelligence, and a refined touch. Less studied, however, is how these values manifest in one of its continuators: *concert pianist and pedagogue Corneliu Gheorghiu* (1924–2011), whose career spanned performance, teaching, and writing.⁵

Corneliu Gheorghiu, a meritorious student of *Florica Musicescu*, was younger than *Dinu Lipatti* and a dear piano classmate to the emergent inter-war internationally famous Romanian pianist. He inherited the same rigorous aesthetic foundation and routine of work from their pedagogue. Among the many technical elements that shape a pianist’s interpretation, fingering is often regarded as merely mechanical. Yet for Gheorghiu and his mentors, fingering was a deeply expressive tool, integral to shaping phrasing, articulation, and meaning. His pedagogical work „*On Piano Performance*” [*Despre Pianistică*] reflects this understanding, offering principles and reflections that reveal his approach to technique as a vehicle for musical thought.

This article proposes an analytical reading of concert pianist and professor *Corneliu Gheorghiu*’s views on fingering, situating them within the broader legacy of the Romanian school of piano playing. The goal is to highlight *the pedagogical and interpretive value of piano fingering as more than a means of facilitation, as a subtle but essential part of a pianist’s expressive vocabulary*.

⁴ *András Schiff* strongly advocates proper fingering technique, a topic he frequently discusses with students in his public lectures and masterclasses. His commitment to this aspect of interpretation is also reflected in his acclaimed *Henle Verlag* edition of J.S. Bach’s *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, which he carefully annotated with his fingerings.

⁵ *Corneliu Gheorghiu* (1924–2019) was a distinguished Romanian concert pianist, composer, and educator. Born in Botoșani, Romania, he exhibited exceptional musical talent from an early age, performing his compositions publicly by age six. At seven, he impressed *George Enescu*, who recommended formal studies at the *Royal Academy of Music and Dramatic Art in Bucharest*. Gheorghiu studied under renowned teachers such as *Florica Musicescu* and *Mihail Jora*, alongside peers like *Dinu Lipatti*. He graduated in 1943, earning top honors. Gheorghiu’s career encompassed international performances across Europe, South America, and Africa. In 1950, he was designated a *State Soloist* in Romania. He served as a *professor* and *head of the piano department* at the *Bucharest Conservatory* from 1963 and later taught at the *Royal Conservatory in Brussels* after relocating there in 1978. His compositions include chamber works and piano pieces, and he authored pedagogical writings.

3. Methodology & Materials

This section outlines the methodological framework and source materials employed in the present study. The analysis is based primarily on Corneliu Gheorghiu's pedagogical writings and is complemented by historical and contemporary pedagogical discourse references. The analytical and interpretive approach focuses on *how Corneliu Gheorghiu conceptualizes piano fingering as a vehicle for musical expression*, in continuity with the broader aesthetic lineage of the Romanian piano school.

3.1 Historical Foundations of Expressive Fingering

A historical examination of pianistic pedagogy reveals that the expressive role of piano fingering, while often treated as a marginal, technical matter in mainstream pedagogical literature, has been a source of concern among some of the most outstanding performers and teachers.

For instance, *Frédéric Chopin (1810-1849)* sharply rejected his time's mechanical and acrobatic methods that prioritized digital agility over expressive purpose. His views on this are preserved in his unfinished treatise, „*Projet de Méthode*” (started in 1849), where he began articulating verbally the foundations of his technical and artistic approach. He advocated for fingerings guided by natural physiology and musical logic. Frédéric Chopin emphasized the individuality of each finger in piano playing, advocating for the development of their unique characteristics rather than enforcing uniform strength.⁶

Franz Liszt (1811-1886), often celebrated for his virtuosic brilliance, similarly espoused a conception of fingering that emphasized expressive continuity over mechanical ease. In his biography of Liszt, Alan Walker notes that the composer's fingerings often seem unusual to the pianist. Still, they reflect a broader aim: to encourage the player to think of the hand as „*a single unit of ten digits*.”⁷ Capable of shaping musical ideas holistically rather than moving in isolation. Liszt's unconventional fingerings—particularly in his transcriptions—demonstrate a belief that fingering is not only about navigating technical obstacles but also about voicing, legato phrasing, and the expressive weight of each gesture. As Walker emphasizes, Liszt considered the difficulty of such fingering mental, not physical, implying that expressive intent must precede and inform digital mechanics.

Ignacy Jan Paderewski (1860–1941) emphasized piano fingering significantly to achieve clarity and legato in piano playing. He was meticulous about fingering choices, often marking entire pieces to ensure consistency and effectiveness. Paderewski believed each finger could produce a different tone quality, and he was sensitive to the nuances that different fingerings could

⁶ Fr. Chopin described the thumb as the most powerful due to its broadness and freedom, the third finger as the central pivot, and the fifth as the other hand's extremity. He acknowledged the fourth finger's inherent weakness, referring to it as the Siamese twin of the third, bound by a common ligament, making independent movement challenging. For Chopin, expressive clarity and individuality took precedence over mechanical regularity, and fingering served as a vehicle to realize that expressivity. „*For a long time, we have been acting against nature by training our fingers to be all equally powerful. As each finger is differently formed, it's better not to attempt to destroy the particular charm of each one's touch, but on the contrary, to develop it*”. (*Frédéric Chopin, in „Projet de Méthode*”), Apud. Alfred Cortot. 1952. *In Search of Chopin*. [CD]. New York: Abelard Press, p.44.

⁷ These words reflect Liszt's pedagogical emphasis on unified hand coordination, a concept central to his approach to piano technique. Alan Walker. 1983. *Franz Liszt: The Virtuoso Years* [CD], Vol. 1, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, pp. 123-128.

bring to a passage⁸. His approach was tailored to the individual's hand and the specific musical context, aiming to facilitate expressive playing rather than adhering to rigid technical formulas.

Josef Hofmann (1876–1957) advocated for a personalized approach to piano fingering, emphasizing the importance of individuality in technical development. In his book *„Piano Playing, with Piano Questions Answered,”* Hofmann discusses the necessity of adapting fingerings to the unique physical attributes of each student. He criticizes rigid, one-size-fits-all methods, advocating instead for a flexible approach that considers the individual characteristics of the pianist.⁹ Hofmann believed that such personalized instruction fosters a more natural and expressive playing style, aligning with his broader philosophy that technical mastery should serve the musical expression rather than constrain it.

Alfred Cortot (1877–1962) viewed piano fingering as a mechanical aid integral to musical expression. In his *„Rational Principles of Pianoforte Technique”,* Cortot emphasized the importance of varied fingering strategies to accommodate different musical contexts. He believed that „the action of the thumb in scales and arpeggios... should neither cause any inequality of tone... nor any diminution of speed in rapid playing.”¹⁰ In this context, Cortot emphasizes the importance of varied fingering strategies to accommodate different musical contexts, viewing fingering as a mechanical aid integral to musical expression.

Walter Gieseking (1895–1956) and his teacher Karl Leimer developed a pedagogical method emphasizing mental imagery and active listening as foundations for piano technique. In their book *„The Shortest Way to Pianistic Perfection” (1930)*, they argued that technical skill should not rely on repetitive mechanical exercises but on a deep understanding and internalization of the music. They recommended that fingering be „fixed mentally before the hand touches the keyboard,”¹¹ highlighting the importance of consciously choosing fingerings as an integral part of musical interpretation.

Likewise, *Heinrich Neuhaus (1888-1964)* insisted that technical solutions should always arise from musical necessity, rather than being chosen merely for convenience. He emphasized that fingering is not a rigid formula but a flexible tool that must adapt to the demands of each musical phrase. In his seminal work *„The Art of Piano Playing”,* Neuhaus writes: „There is no ideal fingering that works for everyone... only one that works for the idea, for the phrase, for the music”¹². This highlights his belief that fingering must serve the piece's expressive intent and structural coherence, reinforcing the inseparability of technique and interpretation.

In the 20th century, this expressive tradition continued in the Romanian school of piano performance, exemplified by *Florica Musicescu* and her disciples. *Dinu Lipatti (1917-1950)*, her most illustrious student, consistently adapted his fingerings to suit expressive aims. Although no pedagogical treatise survives from Lipatti, his annotated scores and surviving testimonies show a

⁸ „He believes in employing a fingering which most comfortable to the hand, as well as one which, in the long run, will render the passage most effective. is most sensitive to the choice of fingering the player makes”, Harriette Brower. 1915. *Piano Mastery Talks with Master Pianists and Teachers*. [CD]. New York: FA Stokes Co, The Project Gutenberg e-book, p. 6.

⁹ „By earnest thinking, every player can contrive the fingering that will prove most convenient to him. But, admitting that the great diversity of hands prohibits a universal fingering, all the varieties of fingering ought to be based upon the principle of a natural sequel”. Josef Hofmann. 1920. *Piano Playing with piano questions answered*. [CD]. Pennsylvania: Theodore Presser Company. The Project Gutenberg e-book, p. 36.

¹⁰ Alfred Cortot. 1928. *Rational Principles of Pianoforte Technique*. [CD]. Boston: Oliver Ditson Company, translated by R. Le Roy Métaux, p. 25.

¹¹ Karl Leimer & Walter Gieseking. 1933. *The shortest way to pianistic perfection*. [CD]. Mainz: Schott & Co., p. 45.

¹² Heinrich Neuhaus. 1993. *The Art of Piano Playing*. London: Kahn & Averill Publishers, p. 123.

player intensely preoccupied with tonal quality, phrase direction, and inner voice clarity. Lipatti noted the importance of careful fingering choices to facilitate smooth phrasing and to bring out the musical line. He often annotated his scores with specific fingerings, demonstrating his meticulous attention to detail. His fingering choices were not arbitrary but were made to serve the musical expression and to ensure clarity and balance in the performance. His approach is a testament to *Florica Musicescu's* pedagogy, which encouraged analytical insight and a deep connection between sound and gesture.

3.2 Fingering as Artistic Choice: Corneliu Gheorghiu's Interpretive Approach

Corneliu Gheorghiu (1924-2019), himself a student of Musicescu and a close contemporary of Lipatti, advances this lineage through his performance and his writings, especially „*On Piano Performance* “[*Despre Pianistică*]. In this volume, Gheorghiu articulates a philosophy in which fingering is understood not as a static system to be followed, but as an interpretive tool—adaptive, sensitive to context, and inherently tied to phrasing, articulation, and form. He argues that fingering is an artistic choice, not a physical prescription. He encourages pianists to develop solutions that align with the logic and expressive structure of the piece at hand.

At the core of Corneliu Gheorghiu's vision for piano technique—particularly his philosophy of fingering—lies a holistic understanding of the instrument rooted in the artistic legacy of the Romanian piano school. As a direct disciple of *Florica Musicescu* and a close contemporary of Dinu Lipatti, *Corneliu Gheorghiu inherited and continued a tradition that viewed technique as inseparable from musical expression*.¹³ In this pedagogical lineage, fingering is never treated as a neutral or mechanical choice; instead, it emerges from and serves the interpretive demands of the music. Gheorghiu articulates this view clearly in his writings: this conceptual framework places mental intention and artistic imagination at the very origin of physical movement. Consequently, any technical device—including fingering—must conform to these principles. It is not enough for a fingering to be efficient; it must support and emphasize the expressive quality of sound, the phrase's shaping, and the interpretation's overall artistic character. In Gheorghiu's view, the fingers serve the music, not vice versa. His approach reinforces a broader aesthetic imperative: that all technical decisions, from articulation to fingering, are ultimately expressive. He advocates for *an approach in which piano fingering choices emerge from:*

- a clear inner hearing of the phrase;¹⁴
- a bodily understanding of its motion, mirroring Chopin's insistence on concentration, intentionality, and natural movement.

3.2.1 The concept of inner hearing for piano fingering application

A vivid, preemptive aural imagination of the phrase shapes fingering decisions for expressive performance. Rather than approaching fingering as a matter of physical ease or inherited conventions, pianists guided by an internalized musical vision prioritize fingerings that align with

¹³ „According to our method, the concrete and artistic act of playing the piano begins with a command issued by the brain to the motor centers. This command must already be imbued with all the attributes of the sounds that will follow—expressivity, duration, nuance—whether in response to visual perception (score reading) or from musical memory.” [My English trans.] Corneliu Gheorghiu. 2015. *On Piano performance [Despre Pianistică]*. București: Editura Grafoart, p. 33.

¹⁴ „This control must be both auditory (through hearing) and muscular (a sensation of guided freedom).” [My English trans.] Corneliu Gheorghiu. 2015. *On Piano performance [Despre Pianistică]*. București: Editura Grafoart, p. 42.

the natural flow and character of the phrase. This anticipatory listening lets performers feel a line's direction, weight, and nuance before touching the keyboard. As Corneliu Gheorghiu emphasized, piano fingering should follow the expressive demands of the music, not dictate them. When a pianist hears inwardly the arc of a phrase, the rise and fall of tension, or the voicing of inner lines, they are better equipped to choose fingerings that support subtle dynamic shaping, legato articulation, or controlled voicing. This inward process echoes the pedagogical principles of figures like *Giesecking*, *Leimer*, and *Neuhaus*, who insisted that technique—fingering included—must emerge from the artistic image formed in the mind and ear before it is translated into physical action.

This perspective also explains why inner hearing becomes even more critical during sight-reading processes governed by conscious, externalized control. In such spontaneous contexts, the ear often leads to mental reasoning and physical execution, prompting the pianist to generate ad hoc fingering solutions that serve the musical flow in real time. Rather than relying on pre-learned patterns, the performer responds instinctively to the auditory shape of the phrase, prioritizing continuity and coherence. Thus, even without familiarity with the score, the pianist's inner hearing becomes a guide for the hands, enabling fingerings that support expressive clarity and structural cohesion from the first reading.

Gheorghiu's written reflections reveal a deep concern with articulating and transmitting to his students what he had consciously learned from his mentors and what he had absorbed empirically through years of experience. *His pedagogical aim was to verbalize and clarify pianistic motion's intuitive, often nonverbal aspects, what he called a bodily understanding of musical gestures.* Drawing on the legacy of *F. Musicescu* and *D. Lipatti*, Corneliu Gheorghiu sought to shape the physical logic behind expressive playing, offering his students not rigid prescriptions but multiple possible solutions grounded in clear reasoning.

3.2.2. *A bodily understanding of its motion*

One of the central principles in Corneliu Gheorghiu's pedagogical thinking—rooted in the tradition of his mentors, Florica Musicescu and Dinu Lipatti—is *the technique of arm weight transfer and its leading role in shaping sound and phrasing*.¹⁵ Far from merely a mechanical element, the controlled use of arm weight is a subtle yet powerful tool for achieving expressive legato and a resonant, harmonically rich tone. Gheorghiu emphasized that true legato is not just a matter of finger connection, but of creating the illusion of seamless continuity through weight distribution, sound layering, and the hierarchical ordering of notes. In this view, the arm acts as a unifying agent, guiding the fingers physically and musically assigning direction, tension, or release to each note or group of notes within a phrase. This approach moves beyond mere physical efficiency and enters the realm of auditory illusion and emotional logic, where the musical narrative shapes gestures.

Such understanding lies at the heart of Gheorghiu's vision of pianism: a technique guided by intention, shaped by sound, and transmitted through the body's living weight and movement.

In Corneliu Gheorghiu's pedagogical vision, the pianist's arm is a unified and responsive mechanism, extending fluidly from the shoulder to the fingertip—a single segment, mobile, free, and constantly adaptable. This integrated motion is supported by a relaxed yet firm hand, capable

¹⁵ Cornel Gheorghiu. 2015. *Despre Pianistică [On Piano performance]*. București: Editura Grafoart, pp. 43-53.

of transferring nuanced weight and articulation to the keyboard. As Gheorghiu writes, „*The palm's arch must remain strong; it must not collapse. Above all, you must not think about difficulty when you play, because that stiffens the entire pianistic apparatus.*”¹⁶

Even when playing softly, he insists that the fingers remain flexible yet firm, capable of fully transferring arm weight onto their tips. „*After the moment of attack, the surplus of weight rebounds, and it is best for the arm to be sufficiently released to rest at the bottom of the keys.*”¹⁷ In this configuration, the fingers are not passive levers but active articulators, „*firm at the tip and projecting perpendicularly onto the key, returning with elasticity and control*”¹⁸.

From this perspective, *piano fingering* cannot be reduced to formulaic convenience. Instead, the choice of fingering must support this dynamic balance of firmness and release, favoring configurations that allow weight to travel naturally through the arm and into each key with clarity and expressive depth. Thus, fingerings that preserve the curved, round shape of the hand, minimize awkward rotations, and enable weight-led phrasing are most consistent with Gheorghiu's approach, underscoring his belief in a technique shaped from within the phrase, not imposed from without.

Building on this physical conception of pianism, Gheorghiu introduces the notion of a “*ballistic center of gravity*” at the *finger tips*.¹⁹ This principle governs the weight transfer from one finger to the next with precision and expressive intent. This idea helps explain his often-daring fingering choices, which defy conventional ergonomic logic in favor of deeper musical aims.

He frequently advocates for using the thumb (1st finger) or the outer fingers (4th and 5th)—fingers typically reserved for supportive or peripheral roles—to highlight inner melodic strands or to shape expressive lines in polyphonic textures, especially in chorale-like writing of the pre-Classical and Romanticism repertoire. These choices are not accidental; they arise from an embodied understanding of phrasing, in which the weight-led motion flows seamlessly across the keyboard, even when fingerings appear counterintuitive. What may seem physically inefficient becomes musically revelatory, as the emphasis lies not on mechanical continuity, but on transferring expressive focus through carefully weighted gestures. Gheorghiu's system thus validates the expressive potential of non-traditional fingerings—provided they support the music's phrasing, structure, and emotional trajectory. It is not about ease or uniformity but about enabling the inner voice of the phrase to emerge with clarity and intention.

Gheorghiu strongly encouraged *the daily practice of foundational yet straightforward exercises*.²⁰ His teacher, Florica Musicescu, inherited many exercises to cultivate a rapid and relaxed finger attack on the keys. Among these, he often emphasized a specific drill, also favored by Alfred Cortot in his „*Rational Principles of Pianoforte Technique*,” which trains the fingers to move horizontally across the keyboard with calm efficiency and speed. A typical example, described in his writings, involves placing all five fingers on the surface of the keys, holding the second finger down on D, and then quickly striking C with the thumb (1st finger), followed immediately by moving the hand to play E.²¹ This seemingly minimal motion develops an essential dexterity for lateral finger movement, allowing fingers to pass under or cross over one another in

¹⁶ Cornel Gheorghiu, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 56

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 57

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 59.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 62.

²¹ *Ibidem*.

a natural, fluid manner. Such exercises lay the groundwork for imaginative and expressive fingering solutions, enabling the pianist to respond flexibly to musical demands. In C. Gheorghiu's approach, this horizontal agility directly expands the creative possibilities in fingering, supporting phrasing, shaping, and nuance far beyond what conventional, vertical-based fingerings might allow.

In alignment with Fr. Chopin's principles, Corneliu Gheorghiu emphasized the importance of continuous, curved motion of the hands and arms, as opposed to abrupt or angular gestures. He insisted that the pianist's movement across the keyboard should follow a fluid, organic arc, never mechanical or interrupted. As he states, „*the arm, and by extension the palm and fingers, must exit one position and enter the next without stopping.*”²² This concept reflects a vision of piano technique in which phrasing and physical motion are inseparably linked—each movement shaped by the musical gesture it serves. Rather than isolating positions or attacking keys with stiffness, Gheorghiu encourages an approach where the hand flows from note to note in a natural, unbroken trajectory, ensuring that the sound remains legato and expressive, and the fingering evolves in service of the line, not despite it. These continuous, curved hand motions expand the expressive potential of fingering by liberating the pianist from rigid dependence on fixed finger sequences. Instead of being confined to traditional fingering schemes, such as substitution or strict sequential systems, which are often dictated by the availability of specific fingers, this approach allows for greater flexibility. In Gheorghiu's view, the hand's mobility across a fluid trajectory opens a broader palette of fingering solutions, where choices are guided by phrasing and sound quality rather than mechanical convenience. Thus, fingering becomes a dynamic tool, adaptable to expressive intent and capable of reinforcing the natural line of the music, rather than interrupting it through forced technical compromises.

Gheorghiu also emphasizes the importance of finger posture and hand shape as fundamental variables in shaping sound and stylistic clarity. Depending on the repertoire, he advocates for a rounded, articulated hand position or a more elongated and relaxed curve, subtly adjusted to the demands of different musical languages. In the pre-Classical and Mozartian repertoire performance, Gheorghiu highlights the need for a precise, vertical touch and a clean, pearly articulation, which relies on immaculate finger succession and firm fingertip contact. By contrast, Romantic or Impressionist works—such as the lyrical episodes of Chopin, Liszt, or Debussy—require a more supple hand, with an extended yet slightly curved finger position to support longer lines and a more cantabile sonority. He notes that „*the shape of the hand must adapt to the repertoire's expressive content*, enabling the pianist to move fluidly between styles while maintaining technical and musical integrity²³.

In Gheorghiu's pedagogical thought, the thumb (*finger 1*) is not merely a passive transitional tool but a dynamic participant, whose function and positioning vary depending on the type of passage. He notes that when moving through an arpeggio, the wrist (*poignet*) must be slightly elevated to allow the thumb to pass underneath the palm smoothly, reaching its highest point when the third finger strikes. This gesture facilitates natural continuity and fluidity. In scale-like successions, the wrist slides horizontally, enabling the thumb to glide underneath with minimal interruption to the musical line. „*When the thumb moves through an arpeggio, the wrist is slightly raised, reaching its highest point as the third finger plays. The wrist moves gently horizontally in*

²² *Ibidem*, p. 63.

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 64.

scales passages, allowing the thumb to pass beneath."²⁴ Gheorghiu is equally consistent in applying this principle to descending motion. Furthermore, in mixed textures—such as passages combining arpeggios and scales—decisions regarding fingering and thumb usage must consider not only melodic fluency in each hand but also the broader musical texture, ensuring that accompaniment patterns and melodic lines are both served by a coherent technical strategy. This reflects his holistic view of the pianistic movement, which is responsive to structural and expressive imperatives.

Corneliu Gheorghiu's core recommendation regarding fingering is that „*the hand should remain as much as possible in a constant position.*"²⁵ This principle stems from the belief that the hand's posture stability enhances technical efficiency and expressive clarity. By minimizing unnecessary shifts or contortions of the hand, the pianist can better maintain a natural and ergonomic relationship with the keyboard. This, in turn, supports predictable finger trajectories and reduces physical strain. In terms of fingering application, this idea promotes choices that favor economy of motion, for example, selecting fingerings that allow for extended reach without twisting the wrist or over-stretching the fingers. Maintaining a consistent hand shape facilitates smoother legato connections and contributes to a more balanced tone production, as the arm weight can be more effectively transferred through the fingers. Gheorghiu's guidance here echoes the approach of his mentors, *Florica Musicescu* and *Dinu Lipatti*, who emphasized integrating physiological ease with expressive intent in all technical decisions.

Another fingering principle emphasized by Corneliu Gheorghiu is: *Use the stronger fingers where strength is needed, and the weaker fingers (4, 5) for subtlety. Use combinations like 1-2-3-4-5 for phrase endings in diminuendo, and 4-5-1-2-3 for ascending crescendos.*"²⁶ This approach demonstrates a dynamic and expressive use of finger strength, not merely a mechanical assignment. The pianist ensures expressive fidelity and technical ease by aligning finger power's natural gradation with a phrase's musical shape. Ending a phrase with the gradual release of stronger to weaker fingers supports a natural decrescendo, while beginning a crescendo with weaker fingers allows a physical buildup of strength that mirrors the musical intensity. Such patterns also help stabilize the hand, following a logical movement and weight distribution progression, thus contributing to fluid phrasing and controlled articulation. This method of tailoring fingering to expressive function rather than purely anatomical symmetry exemplifies Gheorghiu's holistic and music-first pedagogy.

Another important fingering principle Corneliu Gheorghiu highlights is: „*Divide between the hands any group of notes that exceeds the comfortable reach of one hand, as practiced by Liszt, Albéniz, and Rachmaninov*".²⁷ This pragmatic yet expressive strategy serves not only to avoid physical strain but also to maintain musical clarity and flow. By redistributing the workload between hands, the pianist preserves natural hand positions and avoids contorted stretches that could compromise articulation, tone quality, or timing. It also opens more fluid and balanced fingering solutions, especially in complex textures or wide-spanning arpeggios. Gheorghiu follows the tradition of great composer-pianists who did not hesitate to distribute technically dense

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 65.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 66.

²⁶ *Ibidem*.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 67.

passages when musical and ergonomic logic demanded. This practice enhances comfort and expressive control, key tenets of his pedagogical vision.

4. Conclusions

Corneliu Gheorghiu's pedagogical approach views fingering not as a fixed, mechanical system but as an inherently artistic choice, flexible and responsive to the musical context, phrasing, and expressive intent. He emphasized that effective fingering must emerge from a deep inner hearing of the phrase and a bodily understanding of its motion, allowing the pianist to align technical solutions with the logic and emotional structure of the piece. In doing so, his teaching mirrored *Chopin's* and *Liszt's* ideals of mental focus and *the central piano pedagogy of the XX century mentality on the topic*, natural movement, and intentionality, translating these into a vocabulary practice that encouraged autonomy, sensitivity, and expressivity in fingering and overall technique.

Central to his technique is the seamless transfer of weight through the arm, from shoulder to fingertips, supported by a relaxed yet firm hand posture; this fluid coordination enables the shaping of legato and the expressive coloring of sound beyond mere finger mechanics. Gheorghiu advocated for fingering strategies that strategically deploy stronger fingers where power is needed and the weaker fingers for subtlety, as well as the intelligent sharing of notes between hands, echoing the practices of great masters like *Franz Liszt* and *Sergey Rachmaninoff*.

In this lineage of pedagogical thought, Corneliu Gheorghiu's contributions represent a continuation and a lucid articulation of fingering as a core expressive practice. His emphasis on context-sensitive solutions, balancing structural logic with bodily intuition, and resisting formulaic approaches to technique aligns him with a tradition that views pianism as a deeply interpretive art. Reclaiming fingering as a site of artistic choice thus positions Gheorghiu within a broader rethinking of technical pedagogy, in which technical tools are judged by their expressive function rather than abstract ideals of efficiency or uniformity.

Influenced deeply by his direct mentors *Florica Musicescu* and *Dinu Lipatti*, Corneliu Gheorghiu sought to translate conscious and empirical insights into clear, flexible principles. He encouraged pianists to use fingering as a creative tool that enhances phrasing, control, and musical expression rather than as a rigid prescription.

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