



NEW ENGLAND

PIANO TEACHERS' Assoc., Inc.

January 1, 2009

Dear Colleagues:

At this time of thanksgiving and celebration, I find myself reflecting on all we have to be thankful for in NEPTA - the many members who have gone before us, caring about teaching and each other, the incredible lineup of programs we enjoy and learn from, the many opportunities for our students, and the chance for us to work together, refining our goals and direction. My thanks to all of you for your continuing contributions.

We have had three wonderful programs since our last Newsletter – **Seymour Bernstein's** knowledgeable and witty presentation on pedaling (a synopsis of Mr. Bernstein's talk by **Jean Alderman**, as well as a synopsis of **Jeanne Golan's** talk in September by **Linda Vieira**, is included with this newsletter), and a fine Teacher's Exchange devoted to studies and books on music and the brain. These occasions took place in the Wellesley Free Library, and the turnout was large in both cases. Many thanks to our Program Committee, **Shann Wood**, Chair, for securing Mr. Bernstein, to **Shelley Reeves, Barbara Jones, Shann Wood, and Nancy Schaad** for their presentations at the Exchange, and to **Adele Dreyer** for arranging it.

I am pleased to announce that **Edward Pang**, a student of **Ruth Shyu**, was the winner of the Miriam Pizer Award this year, chosen by lottery at the Teachers' Exchange.

Our December Master Class for teachers with the **Paratore Brothers, Anthony and Joseph**, was a great success. Many thanks to those who signed up to play, and also to those who joined Anthony in playing through the Brahms Waltzes, Op. 39. **Janice Paratore Zaganjori**, their sister, surprised us with a trio with her brothers, a waltz by Rachmaninoff. If you attended and were disappointed that they did not have CD's with them, you can go to their website www.paratore.de where there will be a discography, and purchase online. If you don't have a computer, contact Janice, and she will send you a list with prices. The Brothers wanted Janice to tell everyone that attended the class, that they thoroughly enjoyed meeting everyone, working with the participants, and especially enjoyed playing the Brahms with NEPTA members. Our thanks to **Emma Jean Moulton** for arranging this wonderful morning.

Betty Reed had major surgery on Tuesday, Dec. 9 at Dana Farber, and is facing many weeks of recovery. I am sorry if this information did not reach you sooner, via a separate announcement to our computer address list. A page for her and her family has been set up on www.lotsahelpinghands.com so that friends can know what activities the family will need help with, and offer assistance. Please keep Betty and her family in your thoughts, and help if you can. I am sure there is still plenty to do.

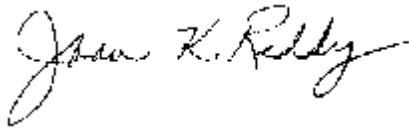
It is time to look through the applications for Recitals. A special message from the Adult Recital Chair, **Phoebe Yassa**, and her helper, **Jean Alderman**, is included in this mailing. Remember that each Recital date is in boldface type in your Program Booklet on page 9, and the postmark deadline follows in parentheses. All checks must be included with the application within the deadline to enter a student(s).

Our January meeting, Monday, Jan. 26 at First Parish, is certain to be a treat. **Virginia Eskin** is well known in Boston for her performances, lectures, and the special radio series she prepared on "First Ladies of Music" which aired on 100 stations in the U.S. and abroad. Her title is intriguing: "American Music; MacDowell and his Mentors; Schumann and Liszt."

Please remember to send any changes in your personal information to **Sue Demb** at sdemb@dembfamily.com, or by regular mail to 59 Louise Road, Belmont, MA 02478. No phone calls, please.

I look forward to seeing you on January 26th.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Joan K. Reddy". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name and title.

Joan K. Reddy
President

Announcements

Margaret Tuttle and **Yilin You** will present three concerts of music for piano four-hands: January 18 at 3pm at the Weston Public Library, February 8 at 3pm at the Park Avenue Congregational Church in Arlington (50 Paul Revere Road), and May 8 at 7:30pm at the Arlington Town Hall as part of the Menotomy Concert Series.

In a Special Concert dedicated to **Ellen Powers**, one of the founders of the Belmont Powers Music School, **Veda Kogan** will perform the world premiere of the piano solo "Contemplation" by **Dianne Rahbee**, and will also play in the Brahms' Piano Quintet in F minor, op.34. The concert will be on Sunday, Feb. 8 at the First Unitarian Church in Belmont, 404 Concord Ave., Belmont, at 3:30pm.

Erlinda Salazar McGinty will give a piano recital in the South Wing Auditorium, 1000 Southern Artery in Quincy, on Sunday, Feb 8 at 3pm. Music by Beethoven, Bartok, Ginastera, Tauriello, Rachmaninoff, and Tchaikovsky.

A Letter to NEPTA Members about Adult Recitals

From Phoebe Yassa and Jean Alderman, Adult Recitals Committee

January 2009

Hello Everyone,

First, thanks to all of you who prepared students for the Adult Recital last year. It was one of the best. And second, we hope everyone who teaches adults will seriously consider putting one or two of them (see below) in the recital this year. We want as many people to play as possible and as many teachers to be represented as possible.

This letter is an attempt to explain some of the problems of putting a good program together. In turn we hope that this will explain why we request such exact timing. We all know it's a nuisance and much easier to make an intelligent guess. But a minute or two overtime here and there, multiplied several times, can result in an unendurably long program. Running overtime also causes those teachers who have worked to keep their times under the limit to feel unfairly treated. Furthermore, Steinert's lets us use their facilities free of charge, (hoping, of course, some attendees will buy a piano). They have been extremely generous over the years. When they ask us to leave the premises by a certain time, we do our outmost to meet that request. This is a contributing factor to our being so serious about timing.

If you haven't already done so, why not try selecting the repertoire now for your performing adults?

We've set the time for one performer at 10 minutes, or 15 minutes for two performers from the same teacher. You may enter a second student only if time allows, and on a first come, first served basis. If there is room, you will be notified after the deadline for applications.

Here is one of the difficulties of programming: last year, until the deadline for receipt of applications, it was going to be a short program; then on the last possible day, FIVE new applications were received! So the sooner Phoebe receives your application(s), the easier it will be.

By the way, please do not ask your students to fill out the application, or be sure you check it if they do. They may leave out requisite information, and they may not always time themselves correctly.

If you have questions, please don't hesitate to ask.

Hoping to see you on March 22nd (time to be announced - probably early evening).

Phoebe and Jean

Seymour Bernstein's Presentation on the Pedaling of Chopin

October 27 2008

Submitted by Jean Alderman

Seymour Bernstein put us immediately at ease with his measured delivery and good sense of humor. At the outset he gave our Sandra Rosenblum great praise, saying her book on Chopin was his constant companion, and then acknowledged that they didn't always see eye to eye, thus preparing us for some discussion between the two.

He has his students learn to pedal without playing, and in Book IV of his Earth Music Series (The Pedal) he gives exercises to be done with the metronome. Because children find syncopated pedaling difficult, they should be started as early as possible. To counteract the clunk that comes when they lift the foot too high and too quickly, Mr. Bernstein wrote a piece that REQUIRES clunks. He assured us that after they learn that piece they never clunk again.

In Mozart, a curved line over a group of notes means legato; it does not tell us how to phrase. Mozart used those curves as he would bow marks for a stringed instrument. Without slurs he probably meant detached playing.

Alberti bass passages sound dry unless we use finger pedaling, i.e., holding down the low note of the LH. There is always a contrapuntal melody down there.

In Mozart, do not accent unless he writes *fp*.

Mozart used dots and wedges: a dot is a finger staccato, a wedge is an arm staccato.

At this point Mr. Bernstein gave a hilarious rendition of down-beaters and up-beaters. The first shows every down-beat with an accent; the second shies away from every first beat. He was very funny and also made an excellent point.

He uses pedal discreetly in Mozart.

Apparently Beethoven played the Moonlight Sonata I with the damper pedal pressed down throughout i.e., without changing for the chord changes. *Senza sordino* means 'without the mute', i.e., 'use the damper pedal.' In the Tempest, he follows the instruction to hold the A major chord throughout the recitative, but plays it very, very softly. (We have to remember that the piano of the time was not as resonant as ours). Mr. Bernstein played some examples of catching a forte bass octave with the damper pedal and over that, playing scales in thirds or sixths very softly. The dissonance was amazingly undisturbing. He feels the sostenuto pedal often cannot be relied upon, so never uses it.

Chopin's pedal markings are problematic; particularly the placement of the asterisks indicating the pedal's release. Different early editions, of which there are many, and not all French, confuse the issue. Mr. Bernstein's conclusion is that "the asterisks mean nothing at all." He suggested that editors may have required Chopin to put them in. Liszt's markings seldom indicate the pedal's release.

There were many interesting comments made along the way:

1. The dynamic markings are sacrosanct. Music is emotional. 'Forte' doesn't mean loud; it means forceful. 'Piano' means gentle.
2. Chopin used flutter pedal a lot.
3. The term 'open pedal' is found only in Haydn and Clementi, and then seldom.
4. "No great pianist follows Chopin's pedaling."
5. The dynamic at the beginning of a piece is a trap - it never means every note.
6. Rests and dots don't always mean silence. Often they are choreographic, telling us how to move physically.
7. Schubert's staccato in the LH of Op. 142 #3 means slightly louder than the chord.
8. Weiner Urtext - a good edition. Paderewski and Cortot - very poor.

9. Recommended: Eigeldinger's Chopin, pianist and teacher, as seen by his pupils.

Phrases and Dashes and Dots, Oh My! by Jeanne Golan

September 22, 2008

Submitted by Linda Vieira

Jeanne Golan “grew up with NEPTA” and is a previous senior competition winner of NEPTA. She lives and teaches in New York and can be found on the web at jeannegolan.com.

In her teaching and her own playing, she starts the process of interpretation in the early stages of learning a piece. It doesn't matter if the repertoire is easy or hard; it is important to get to the heart of what the composer is trying to say. If you include the expressiveness of a piece at the early stages, it becomes how a student approaches a piece and the whole body is incorporated in aiming for a sound. What we do is special: it becomes a part of a student and they will carry that with them even if they don't continue to play. She noted that with the loss of one of her mentors, Patricia Zander, came a greater realization of just how deeply a teacher's offerings can become second nature to a student over time.

In her horseback riding lessons, her instructor told her three things that were important in riding a horse: soft hands, balance and breathing. This sums up what we do at the piano.

The difference in the size of each finger can make phrasing sound and feel disconnected. Aligning the arm behind the finger that's playing gives connectivity and ultimately more command to the player, although at first one might feel less in control. In applying this idea to a piece that contains a repeated phrase or motif, it is best to use the same fingering even if it involves the thumb on a black key. A student needs to build up muscles in the fingers to play on the pads and she demonstrated an example of resting the forearm on a flat surface and raising and lowering each finger. However, other parts of the body should be relaxed and flexible.

Being at the keyboard is more than realizing the score behind the notes and rhythms. It is also a human experience. The composer has something to express and we are the vehicle for that expression. Many marks written in music, such as *ppppp* may be impossible to execute but you try to get there. It can be seen as an encouragement towards a particular quality of sound that the composer wanted.

Realizing a score starts with balance. The torso is like a tree trunk and having the feet apart allows for better balance and freedom in the arms and upper body. One feels connected to the earth instead of the action coming from the fingers only. If a pianist allows gravity to pull the arm down, the result is a plusher sound. Gravity can provide 95% of the power for a pianist and we need to use our bodies well to avoid tightness. The sound comes from the back with the elbow and wrist free with never a stopping of movement.

In her recordings, she combines standard and contemporary repertoire and she used a similar combination in demonstrating her ideas. Earlier composers had personalities even if the music does not include dynamics or other markings that showed their personalities.

She compared *Bagatelle in F major* by Beethoven to *Filter Swing* from *Ein Kinderspiel (Child's Play)* by Lachenmann. Although their styles are very different, they both use the same arm movements. Similarly, the techniques used in *Tarantella from Music for Young People Op. 65* by Prokofiev are the same for his *Sonata No.7*. The writing is the same and is just extended in the Sonata.

The next two pieces that were played did not have meters or barlines. They used words to indicate how to play the piece. In *Gnossienne* by Erik Satie, he writes “counsel yourself cautiously” or “be clairvoyant.” He was thinking about some way of being. The same is true for *The Letter to MaryAnn and Whale Watch from Jatekok (Games)* by Kurtág. At the beginning of these pieces, he states “going for a glissando like sound” and “as if you are speaking.” What is on the page is a window into what the composer was thinking about.

A pianist relates to the piano in certain ways depending on the period and what was standard at that time. Ms. Golan played part of *Arabesque No. 1* by Debussy and *Dream*, an early piece by John Cage. Although from different musical eras, both of these pieces reflect a resonance of sound. *Dream* has an allusive atmosphere and Cage wrote “...tones may be freely sustained, manually or with pedal, beyond notated duration”

The next pieces were from the Romantic period:

Papillons by Schumann

Waltz by Grieg

Prelude in D minor by Rachmanifoff

Being familiar with the notation and gestures from a period helps build a reserve to draw from for ideas on interpreting a piece.

She talked about Haydn's *Sonata in G major* and two *Sonatas* by Scarlatti (*C major and D minor*). In the Classical period, it was customary for composers to write in minimal phrasing and other markings. However, Haydn uses contrasting melodies that have character and personality; a pianist can sculpt these in any way that makes musical sense. The Scarlatti *Sonatas* were written for harpsichord but can be played effectively on the modern piano. Interpretations of these pieces can start with phrasing and how the body feels playing each phrase.

Ms. Golan concluded her talk by playing the first part of *Goldberg Variations* by Bach, followed by *Gymnopedie No. 1 (My Goldberg)* by David Del Tredici. He uses the bass line of Bach's piece and presents the theme in canon before quoting the theme at the very end of the piece. This piece by Del Tredici illustrated that new composers look for inspiration from older composers but include many more markings in their music. In summary, Ms. Golan is not an advocate of any absolute method. She feels it is the student's and teacher's responsibility to figure out what a piece means to the individual and that person's body.