

## **Teacher's Exchange; Wellesley Public Library**

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### **INTERNATIONAL TEACHING STYLES: WHAT WE CAN LEARN FROM THEM**

Irina Gelman: **Russian Piano Pedagogy School**

Lilit Karapetian-Shugarian: **Armenian Piano Pedagogy School**

Mary Bradley: **Exam Systems in England, Canada and Australia**

Elizabeth Landman and Eleanor McLaughlin: **Philosophy and Nature of Suzuki Pedagogy** (*please note: this summary will appear in the next newsletter*)

Irina Y. Gelman was the moderator and also covered the **Russian Piano School**. She showed several video clips of pianists trained in the Russian style and said that independent practice is absolutely important in training in Russia. If her students here practice one half hour a day, they would make her happy but if her students in Russia practice one half hour a day, she would be upset.

In 1856-1857, Anton Rubinstein toured Europe and made plans for the improvement of musical education in Russia with the Grand Duchess Elena Pavlovna. In 1859 they founded the Russian Musical Society and Rubenstein opened St. Petersburg Conservatory in 1862. He engaged the greatest piano professors of the time that included students of Beethoven, Clementi, Czerny, Chopin and Liszt. Rubinstein's brother Nikolai Rubinstein founded the Moscow branch of the Russian Musical Society in 1859 and the Moscow Conservatory in 1866.

The Russian School of Piano became known for its cantabile playing with a mellow rich tone and the freedom that leaves a vast space for the interpreter's personality. However, the Russian system was and is rigorous.

There were two types of music schools under the national model of music education established by the government. Good standards were always insured by the government and only licensed teachers can teach.

Children's music schools are an after school activity with a preparatory class and seven grades. There are piano lessons once a week and classes of solfeggio, music literature and choir. Technical tests are given once a year, recitals are twice a year, and an exam is given once a year.

Special music schools are public schools with deep learning of music disciplines in addition to other academic subjects. There are piano lessons of one hour to one and a half hours twice a week, additional classes in accompaniment and chamber music, solfeggio, music literature and other enriching music subjects and a rigid system of exams.

Both types of schools have a demanding curriculum and a wide range of repertoire styles from early childhood. The Russian Piano School is not a method but rather a mix of traditions from many influences coming from the great piano teachers and performers such as John Field, Liszt and Chopin. The hallmark of the Russian Piano School is the individuality of each performer. The ability to play the piano well cannot be obtained mechanically; it must be obtained in an artistic way. Phrasing, fluency in musical form and a balance of the energy in the fingers and arm weight are important components. Ms. Gelman quoted Madame Lhevine "Technique is never a goal in itself. Anyone can have technique; what is important is to be yourself. And one must listen with the heart."

Lilit Karapetian-Shugarian talked about the **Armenian Piano Pedagogy School**. While it is true that the Russian piano school had a great influence on the development of piano teaching in Armenia, it is not a mere derivative of the Russian school. In the last 70 years music education in Armenia has become an independent, self-sufficient field with its own style and methods.

Armenia, due to its geographic location between East and West, has benefited from the variety of rich European traditions. It has an impressive network of music institutions, most notably Yerevan State Conservatory and has produced world-famous musicians of Armenian descent, such as Stepan Elmas

(student of Lizst), Komitas, Khachaturian, Arno Babajanian, Charles Aznavour, Michelle Legran, Alan Hovhanness, Manoog Parikian, Kim Kashkashian and Dianne Goolkasian-Rahbee.

Before 1941, it was more appropriate to speak about individual piano teachers in Armenia with rich German, French or Russian backgrounds. WWII made it necessary to evacuate the leading professors of the Moscow and Leningrad conservatories. Professor Konstantin Igumnov came to teach at the Yerevan State Conservatory for two years. He and several other professors from Russia integrated the Russian and other European traditions with individual experiences into an academic framework that would develop into the Armenian piano school.

Within the multi-layered Russian piano school, competition amongst prominent professors and between its leading academic institution, the Moscow Conservatory and the less scholastic and more improvisational Leningrad Conservatory has always existed. However, both schools, are equally represented at the Yerevan Conservatory, where not only they peacefully co-existed but creatively complemented each other. Ms. Karapentian benefited immensely from the symbiosis of both styles: her preparatory music school teacher represented a hereditary line going back to Professor Nikolayev from Leningrad, while her 7-year graduate and post-graduate studies at the Moscow Conservatory were with Professor Lev Vlasenko, the student of Professor Flier and Mikhail Pletnev.

The Armenian contemporary classical composition school was established during the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Godfathered by Aram Khachaturian, it was subsequently nourished by the talents of Eduard Mirzoyan, Arno Babajanian and Tigran Mansourian.

Arno Babajanian was a student of Igumnov with extraordinary talent and according to many international critics and colleagues he would have been second to none, had he been able to continue his performing career. Unfortunately, it was interrupted by serious illness and he was forced to focus on composing and giving only occasional piano recitals. His style was unique, as it absorbed and embodied the most exquisite values from Russian, German and French traditions: Rachmaninov's touch and architectural thinking, Arthur Schnabel's spiritualized truthfulness, Joseph Hoffman's dazzling technique, as well as Alfred Cortot's and Walter Giseking's incessant creativity and impressionist sound. Although his teaching career was brief, he made an invaluable contribution to the future generations of Armenian pianists. "Don't play on the keyboard, play on the virtual strings," he would say to his students.

Carrying on in Babajanian's teaching methodology, his student Robert Shugarov often spoke to his students about the rests in music. Rests should not play the role of dividing or fragmenting a musical thought, but should link one musical phrase or sentence to the other. It is not only the actual sounds that should be "articulate" and "substantive" but also the connection between them. These should be spiritualized and never mechanical. Separate sounds, especially the lengthy ones, should be heard through to the end, the latter being not the formal end of the sound in question, but the beginning of the next sound or its creative transformation into a musical rest (substantive silence). Secondly, the connection between sounds, whether separated by large intervals or in a chromatic sequence, should also be heard through with a special conscious effort

While Armenian piano teaching tradition has continued to evolve from its basic principles inherited from its founding fathers, it has simultaneously searched for the new sources of inspiration. These sources were provided by some of the greatest pianists of the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Claudio Arrau, Svyatoslav Richter, Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli and Glenn Gould made a revolutionary impact on the philosophy of interpretation and the teaching methods at the Yerevan State Conservatory.

In summary: "Borrow the best from Europe and Russia, absorb it creatively, add your own and return it to the world at large".

Mary Bradley discussed the **Exams System in England, Canada and Australia**. She grew up in England and studied under the auspice of the Royal Schools of Music taking their exams from Grade 1 to Licentiate. She also studied in Australia which also has exams and taught in Canada under the Royal Conservatory system. The goals of all these systems are to provide clear and progressive programs for students and guidance for teachers. The examiner is a highly trained professional from

outside the school. Aural, sight reading and theory tests are given by the examiner who decides if the student passes. The Canadian system includes music history tests and in the British system, practical musicianship may be substituted for theory.

The well known Celebration series are the Canadian exam books. Associated Board pieces are available on line from ABRSM and from Winnie Ip at the Ip School in Chinatown. The Ip School is also an exam center. Both of these series has a wide variety of pieces from the 16<sup>th</sup> century through the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Although the systems are similar, there are distinct differences in each one. The Associated Board has 8 levels whereas The Toronto Conservatory has 10 levels; both are followed by the diploma for teachers and performers. The Australians have 3 broad levels: preliminary-4<sup>th</sup> grade, 5<sup>th</sup> grade to certificate of performance and associate and licentiate diplomas.

The biggest difference is the technique syllabus with the Australian and Canadian being more comprehensive than the British. Memorization is required for all technique but not for pieces. Repertoire lists are similar but the Contemporary pieces have the addition of national elements. There is a “Music for Leisure” designed for all ages that includes popular as well as standard classical and jazz styles that is unique in Australia.

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### Elizabeth Landman and Eleanor McLaughlin: **Philosophy and Nature of Suzuki Pedagogy**

Dr. Shinichi Suzuki (1898-1998) Although Suzuki’s father had the largest violin factory in the world, Suzuki and his brothers looked on the violin as a toy until Suzuki was seventeen. It was then that he heard a recording of Mischa Ullman playing “Ave Maria” and he was hooked! Suzuki grabbed a violin from the factory and began to imitate the recording with the record as his teacher.

At twenty-one, the Marquis Tokagawa invited Shinichi to accompany him on a world tour. Finally in Germany Suzuki found his true teacher, the violinist Klingler. He was introduced to Albert Einstein and became Einstein’s protégé. Einstein introduced Suzuki to German musical society. Returning to Japan with his wife, Waltraud, Japan soon became embroiled in World War II. Both Suzuki and Waltraud suffered greatly from the war and when it was over, Suzuki decided to devote his life to the nurturing education of young children (“Infant Education”) through the study of music.

The Suzuki approach is based on encouragement, imitation and repetition. Pieces are constantly improved and refined. Three or four year olds are taught to play an instrument in the same way that the child is taught its native language. This is called “the mother tongue” approach. The learning atmosphere is relaxed. Many teachers give the parent lessons before starting the child. Variations of Twinkle and the philosophy and basic technique of Suzuki method are covered. When the child begins lessons, the parent attends all lessons and quietly takes notes during the lesson.

The goal is not to make professional musicians but rather to make the child want to play the piano. It is the parent’s job to create the desire by showing pleasure and interest in the child’s skills. Music is for all children if given the opportunity; students are not screened. However the teacher should judge whether or not Suzuki method is a good fit for this family.

The student, parent and teacher make up the Suzuki triangle. The parent’s job is to love and encourage the child. The role of the child is to follow directions. Open communication is needed between parent and teacher. If there is a change in family dynamics, that should be told to the teacher. Because this is an equilateral triangle, the student, the parent and the teacher must all feel this is worthwhile as in “we are all in this together.”

The early years are formative. From ages two to seven, the emphasis is on absorption and aural learning. The eye is not ready to process music symbols until about age seven. As Suzuki students tend to memorize easily, early reading material must progress in small increments so the student will have enough practice reading.

Reading is not assigned from the repertoire books because they are to be learned by ear. A different track is followed for teaching reading which should begin sometime before the 2<sup>nd</sup> repertoire book. By Book 3, reading and repertoire will be on the same level.

The home environment should be modeled after the piano studio with a good piano (preferable acoustic), an adjustable bench and foot stools. Listening plays a crucial part in Suzuki method; a student should listen three times as long as he practices.

The Suzuki Piano Books consists of 7 levels. Repertoire used to be mostly Baroque and Classical with music that is accessible for small hands because in Japan, hands and legs tend to be small. A new International Piano Edition was recently introduced that includes more Romantic and Contemporary pieces. The repertoire is not in progressive order. It is designed to have mountains and plateaus, often with a difficult piece followed by an easier one.

Suzuki teachers are trained by the Suzuki Association of America and become certified. Suzuki by the Green sponsors a summer piano institute, now in its 5<sup>th</sup> year at the Suzuki School of Newton. Suzuki/MA also sponsors a Suzuki Festival for all instruments every spring. More information can be found at [www.Suzuki/Ma.org](http://www.Suzuki/Ma.org).