

## Schnabel's Interpretation of Piano Music, Ch's 11 & 12

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## Background

- Author: Konrad Wolff (1907-1989)
  - Born in Berlin
  - Doctor of Law from Berlin University
  - Diplomes d'etudes superieures from the Sorbonne in Paris
  - Moved to the United States with his wife in 1941
  - Private studies under Liszt pupil Joseph Lomba, Bruno Elsner and Artur Schnabel
  - Schnabel: "he is a remarkable pianist, an excellent theorist, a learned historian, an outstanding teacher, a brilliant thinker and writer"



## Background

- Subject: Artur Schnabel (1882-1951)
  - Born in Lipnik, Poland
  - Studied piano from the age of seven in Vienna under Theodor Leschetizky who said to him "You will never be a pianist. You are a musician."
  - Starting in 1925, he taught at the Berlin State Academy
  - Moved to America in 1939
  - Returned to Europe at the end of WWII



## Chapter 11: The Means of Regulating Sound

- **Tone Color**
  - Piano tone
    - Remains the same throughout range of instrument
    - Quality of neutrality
  - Limited number of expressive parameters available to performer
    - Soft and Sustain pedals
    - Coloring is accomplished mostly by indirect means
    - Shading of tone intensity (attack and release velocities)

## Chapter 11: The Means of Regulating Sound

- Schnabel's opinion on whether piano should imitate color of other instruments
  - Sometimes must be done (Ex 187), but should be avoided in general
  - Even with transcriptions, it is a mistake to do so
- **Acoustic conditions**
  - Pianist must be prepared for changing acoustic conditions
  - Exact pedaling must be adjusted

Example 187

## Chapter 11: The Means of Regulating Sound

- **Proportions of sound**
  - Schnabel taught rules concerning the ratios of loudness between synchronous notes
  - Four-part chord in closed position (Ex 191) is played more emphasis on the top note first, bottom second, and then the rest
    - If the notes are farther apart, the inner notes become proportionally more important
    - Pianissimo and fortissimo necessitate careful attention to loudness ratios

Example 191

## Chapter 11: The Means of Regulating Sound

- In octave duplications, the performer must distinguish between the principle and duplicating parts
  - The difference in loudness must be significant
  - The lower octave may be "simply carried along" by the upper part (Ex 192)
  - However, the lower octave may lead, particularly in slow expressive music (Ex 193)

Example 192

Example 193  
(Largo e mesto)

## Chapter 11: The Means of Regulating Sound

- For thirds and sixths, at the top, the higher part leads whereas at the bottom, the lower part leads (Ex 196)
- Trills are discussed in the following chapter
- Root notes are important when they occur in an inner part, esp as melodic connections (Ex 197)

Example 196  
(Andante con moto)

Example 197

## Chapter 11: The Means of Regulating Sound

- The left hand must be played very soft when the melody is in a high register compared to accompanying chords and the chords are in close position
- If an arpeggio is played over a wide range on the keyboard, Schnabel plays a crescendo towards the middle and a decrescendo to the end (Ex 199)
  - If the arpeggio occurs in the same register, a crescendo may be played from bottom to top
- In figurations consisting of scales as well as chords, harmony notes must be heard as such (Ex 204)

Example 199

Example 204a, 204b

## Chapter 11: The Means of Regulating Sound

- Playing both hands together
  - Schnabel "violently opposed" the technique of playing the left hand before the right
  - In cases where the hand is too small to play over a large key range, Schnabel advised to play the bass with the right hand and to play the rest of the notes as soon as possible, "softly and unobtrusively"
- Avoidance of harshness and of gaps in sound
  - In order to bridge melodic gaps, pedaling may be necessary
  - Schnabel incorporated elements of surprise by emphasizing changes in tempo and dynamics

## Chapter 12: Technique

- Schnabel considered technique a means to a musical end
- Contrary to Conservatory teachings, there is no such thing as an "illegal" trick
- He considered physical activity of performance as a gesture similar to rhetoric
- He sat relatively far away from the keyboard so he had a more "forward and out" manner of playing
- Practicing is "passing the day at the piano with patience and serenity"
- Practicing should be experimentation rather than drill
  - Opposed to slow practicing of fast passages, practicing each hand alone
  - Etudes are a waste of time for their lack of varying challenges
  - Suggested inventing patterns that pose technical problems

## Chapter 12: Technique

- Melodic articulation was the focal point of his practicing
  - Worked on slow passages as much as faster ones
- Schnabel performed trills in the manner of a vocalist
- He worked out fingerings such that the hand would remain in a “natural position”
- Neighboring notes were played with non-adjacent fingers
  - Opposed to traditional training of keeping the hand motionless
- He considered all aspects other than reducing wrong notes as priorities

## The End

- Questions?