

The Music:

"We use sounds to make music just as we use words to make a language." -- Chopin

"All the theory of the style which Chopin taught to his pupils rested on the analogy between music and language, on the necessity for separating the various phrases, on the necessity for pointing and for modifying the power of the voice and its rapidity of articulation. Here follow some principal rules for musical punctuation and elocution."

-- Chopin: pianist and teacher as seen by his pupils

(1) STUDY THE COMPOSITION CAREFULLY:

Music is the expression of our feelings and emotions. A music composition has its ideas, structures, paragraphs, phrases, words. It emphasizes and details; it has rhythm, nuances, dynamics etc. Like a poem, if you pronounce every word in a poem correctly with the same importance, it is not a poem. The same thing happens to piano playing: if you play every note correctly and in correct time, of the same dynamics, it is not music! You must know what you are going to play, not whatever you can play.

Analyze the structure of the form, study the character of work, search for its meanings and the composer's intention before actually playing are strongly encouraged.

"To read a composition intelligently: to punctuate it and phrase it properly; to give it its due eloquence; to introduce the proper nuances and dynamic shadings; to give it its intended design and form; to convey to the audience the thoughts and emotions which the composer had in mind - this is the really difficult part of piano playing."
- Quote from Vladimir Horowitz

(2) LEARNING WITH A RHYTHM:

Here we are talking about the rhythm of the form, not the rhythm of the meter. (Rhythm of the form is the phrase-by-phrase progression in the music itself. Rhythm of the meter means the mechanical division within beats, note values in a measure.)

Read the score correctly, read it away from the piano. Pay attention to the time signature and the important notes. Sing the melodies or the outlines by heart. Find the paragraphs, phrases. Act as a conductor to conduct the whole piece. Only then, you can free yourself from the technical details, you can concentrate on the music and catch the rhythm. The less important notes must be absorbed by the more important notes and conformed with the rhythm. Only when you have a correct rhythm in your head then you can play it musically not note-wisely.

(3) PHRASE IT MUSICALLY AND CONTINUALLY:

"Under his (Chopin) fingers each musical phrase sounded like song, and with such clarity that each note took the meaning of a syllable, each bar that of a word, each phrase that of a thought. It was a declamation without pathos; but both simple and noble."

- Quote from "Chopin: pianist and teacher"

Each phrase represents a sentence. It expresses an idea, a thought of the composer.

(4) DYNAMIC SHADING AND GRADATION IN NUANCES

(5) STUDY MUSIC THEORY

Here is how the techniques related to music:

- Study the composition carefully, read it away from the piano, search for its meanings so you can concentrate on catching the composer's ideas, design and form.
- Listen to the authorities' play, if available, have a clear aural image of the composition in you mind.
- Control the whole music presentation with your brain, from the very beginning to the very end.
- Control the rhythm with your torso and upper arm.
- Control the phrases with your upper arm and the wrist.
- Punctuate the emphasized notes with your upper arm.
- Control the details with your fingers.
- Control the nuances, dynamics with the combined, blended activities with your body parts.(torso, upper arm, forearm, wrist, hand and fingers).
- Always listen to your play, avoid harsh sound. Make recordings of your playing, it makes difference when you listen to yourself while you are playing and while your are not playing.

Many more to be named, you can cultivate your own techniques too! Of course, you have to practice and practice. And practice consciously, intelligently, not mechanically! Conscious, intelligent practice can save you a lot of precious time.

"I only know that in the music itself I found out what the fingers had to do"

-- Quote from Vladimir Horowitz