

Left hand, a permanent and ever present piano concern

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Abstract. Starting from the idea that a good pianist's hand is as well organized as an ideal team, we need to point out the fact that it is essential to improve and further develop the left hand technique because the performance depends in an equal measure on developing technical abilities in both hands. The appearance of the piano among the keyboard instruments helped in starting to solve this problem, having many contributions from personalities of the musical world, both in the theory and in the practice. Trends in piano pedagogy have changed from the 18th century, but great attention must still be given to the musical literature for the left hand, in which there is both challenge and beauty.

Keywords: left hand, interpretation, technique, composers, piano literature

1. Introduction

As a whole, we can point out the fact that, in the practice of piano interpretation, one can note the development of a deficient technique for the left hand. Not infrequently (both at pianists in training and at those who already perform), we see how virtuosic they play with the right hand, giving it a role of paramount importance, minimizing or even neglecting the contribution of the left hand in supporting the piano discourse.

In fact, the importance of developing and improving the left hand technique is an essential part of the conception process of interpretation, its character and quality largely depending on it.

Starting from the idea that the well-organized hand of a good pianist is an ideal team; one for all and all for one, each one an individuality, all together – a soldered team, one body [Neuhaus H.G.], it is clear that performance, skill in interpretation depend in an equal measure on equally developing technical abilities in both hands.

Precisely because of this, over time, a number of great personalities of the musical world stressed (by means of theoretical advice in specialized treaties or compositions they created) the importance and need to develop the technical and interpretative possibilities of the left hand.

2. Theoretical and instructive contributions in identifying and improving left hand technique and interpretative performance

It is obvious that, with the evolution of keyboard instruments and appearance of the piano, the development of the technique, interpretative performances and repertoire options regarding these instruments became a constant concern for keyboard lovers.

The first attempts to highlight the technical and expressive means of keyboard instruments (hence, we say, the technical elements specific for the left hand) belong to François Couperin (1668-1733) - *L'art de toucher le clavecin (The Art of touching the harpsichord)*, published in 1716-1717, noting the fact that "just as there is a long way to go from Grammar to Declaration, so too the distance from the Tablature to the art of playing well is immense." [Couperin F.].

Convinced of the importance of the left hand across the artistic execution, he emphasized that this means "to wait two or three years before learning the accompaniment...as the thoroughbasses which have a melodic progression need to be played with the left hand with just as much clearness and precision as the pieces, a knowledge of how to play them very well is necessary." [Couperin F.].

In the XVIII-th century (a century that becomes the scene of spectacular changes in the evolution of keyboard instruments with the emergence of musical resources offered by the new instrument, the piano), Carl Phillip Emanuel Bach (1714-1788) writes, between 1753 and 1762 – the two-volume work, *Versuch über die wahre Art das Klavier zu spielen (Study on the true art of playing the piano)*, which deals with problems of piano technique itself. Noting the harmful trends in the piano pedagogy of his time, the great musician remarks how little attention and importance is given to the left hand in piano playing, writing that in the beginning students are struggling with the tedious Murkis figures and other widely circulated songs; in which the left hand is used just to make noise; thus it being unable to fulfill its true role, although it could be studied in an intelligent manner. [Bach C.Ph.E.].

It is also C.Ph.E. Bach the one who, by composing a short piece entitled *Klavierstück für die rechte oder linke Hand allein, H.241 (Keyboard piece for right or left hand alone)* established himself as a pioneer (who will have a decisive influence both in that time and on his followers) in the musical literature for the left hand.

This first work of this kind (published in 1770), as well as the fact that a great musician like C.Ph.E. Bach highlights the importance to be given to the left hand, sparked the interest and compositional effervescence of a large group of composers and pianists, who approached in their compositions the solving of this problem.

From among them, with important contributions in piano pedagogy and compositions of a didactic nature, stand out Johann Nepomuk Hummel (1778-1837) with *Ausführliche theoretisch-practische Anweisung zum Piano-Forte Spiel*, published in 1827, and especially Carl Czerny (1791-1857) with *Letters to a young Lady on the Art of Playing the Pianoforte*, and with virtuosity pieces such as the 30 studies included in *Nouvelle école de la main gauche, op.861* and *24 Piano Studies for the Left Hand, op.718*.

Due to the numerous works created by composers more or less important, the repertoire for the left hand was enriched with large amounts of instructive literature, which led to the development

and improvement of a specific and more evolved technique of the left hand. Starting from this, in the next centuries reference masterpieces will also be born for the piano literature for the left hand.

3. Compositional highlights in the left hand piano literature

If for a long time, the left hand literature was composed sporadically and mainly for teaching purposes, with the development and improvement of the youngest keyboard instrument, the piano, composers understanding its possibilities and willing to enrich the piano art with new technical and aesthetic means, dedicated to the left hand literature valuable creations, of profound expression, through which the literature of that genre consolidated its identity.

The piano, this <<small Hercules>>, as it was called by Edmond Rostand, ...and which later on will become <<not an instrument, but one hundred>> under the fingers of Anton Rubinstein [Popa A.], is, however, of all instruments, the one that influences most musical composition. [Chartier E.]

Due to its exceptional characteristics, the piano is, in its way, a miniature orchestra, and it was natural that composers explore the specific possibilities of the instrument, so affordable for polyphonic, polydynamic and polyrhythmic combinations, and develop them, their creative genius making them search and find innovative methods in order to enrich and create new forms, unusual, specific for the piano. Of course, seen as a whole, piano literature for the left hand (comprising very different genres, such as studies, pieces, sonatas, variations, concerts, transcripts and even chamber works) does not enjoy the same interest as a whole.

It should be noted that a very large number of less valuable musical works alternate with works of great value that have defeated time and entered the great gate of music.

Among the masterpieces that have defeated time and conquered concert halls around the world, pieces bearing the mark of the creative genius of great composers stand out: the *Concerto for piano and orchestra in D major* by Maurice Ravel (1875-1937), concerto composed between 1930-1931 from an order from the Viennese pianist Paul Wittgenstein, who loses his right arm during the First World War;

Concerto no. 4, in B flat major, op. 53, for piano and orchestra by Sergei Prokofiev (1891-1953);

Prelude op. 9 no. 1 and *Nocturne op. 9 no. 2* by Alexandr Scriabin (1872-1915);

Study for the left hand by Béla Bartók (1881-1945), published in 1903.

But not only these masterpieces are valuable for interpretation. There are other works that draw attention to their value, several such works that were composed by a number of eminent composers-pianists, of which we will mention in what follows:

Leopold Godowsky (1870-1938), with *Prelude and Fugue* (1930), *Capriccio for the left hand* (1930-1931) and especially the very valuable transcriptions for piano op. 10 and op. 25 by F. Chopin;

Benjamin Britten (1913-1976) with *Diversions* (1940) dedicated to the pianist Paul Wittgenstein;

Paul Hindemith (1895-1963) with *Piano Music with Orchestra, op. 29* (1923);

Richard Strauss (1864-1949) with *Panathenäenzug for piano and orchestra, op. 74* (1926-1927), dedicated to Paul Wittgenstein;

Max Reger (1837-1916) with *Prelude and Fugue* (1901);

Dinu Lipatti (1917-1950) with *Sonatina* (1941);

Leos Jánacek(1854-1928) with *Capriccio for piano and wind orchestra* (1926);
 Franz Schmidt(1874-1939), with:
 -*Concertante Variations on a Theme of Beethoven for Piano with orchestral accompaniment*(1923);
 -*Quintet for piano, two violins, viola and cello in G major*(1926);
 -*Quintet for clarinet, piano, violin, viola and cello in B major*(1932);
 -*Piano Concerto in E flat major*(1934);
 -*Toccata in D minor*(1938).

Conclusions

Composers, challenged by the idea to implement creative ideals via a single hand, found special forms and new means of expression specific to the piano, their compositions sometimes displaying surprising forms, the keyboard being treated in a new, revolutionary manner.

Pianists are also attracted by the challenge of these compositions, which once resolved makes them develop great piano skills and achieve high interpretative mastery.

Finally, it should be noted that the interpretation and knowledge of the piano literature for the left hand reveals to interpreters and audiences hidden beauties, serving piano pedagogy as well as broadening the horizon and enriching the piano concert repertoire with very interesting and challenging works in terms of piano virtuosity and with a great richness of emotional content.

(English version: Gilda Cristina Marinescu)

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