THE PIANO TEACHING OF EARL WILD

AN INTRODUCTION TO HIS METHOD AND STYLE

A Document

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

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by

Debora Arder, M.D., M.M.

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Document Committee:

Rosemary Platt
David Butler
Timothy Gerber

Approved by

Rosemary Platt
Adviser
School of Music

To My Husband Tom

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I would also like to thank Mr. Wild's manager Michael Rolland Davis for providing me with reviews, articles, and other publications from his personal archives. My inexpressible gratitude goes to Mr. Wild for the patience, care and time he has devoted to me in sharing his great art.

VITA

April 28, 1961 ..... Born - Burlington, Vermont

June, 1985 ..... B.S. / M.D. - Kent State University
Northeastern Ohio Universities College of Medicine

1990 ..... M.M. - The Ohio State University

1989-1992 ..... Teaching Associate - The Ohio State University

1992-1993 ..... Lecturer - The Ohio State University

April, 1993 ..... London Recital Début, Wigmore Hall, London, England

FIELD OF STUDY

Major Field: Music

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INTRODUCTION

In his treatise Musical Interpretation, the English pedagogue Tobias Matthay wrote that many famous artists were not good teachers. Although these artists could play well, they could not explain how or why they did so.[1] This author was then doubly fortunate to study with Earl Wild, undoubtedly one of the great pianists of the twentieth century, who explained, with utmost clarity, the details of how to play the piano artistically.

Although Mr. Wild is known mainly for his concert performances and recordings, I am convinced that he is also one of this era's great teachers. In my lessons with him, Mr. Wild did not only say "play more musically," "play more legato," or "play this more brilliantly," he was able to verbalize clearly, demonstrate at the piano, and then explain, the specifics of *how* to play musically, *how* to create a legato line, *how* to play with a brilliant technique and sound. He freed my playing, and elevated my technique. Many of my fellow students were similarly enlightened by his teaching.

The purpose of this document is to provide a written record of some of the most basic concepts which Mr. Wild promoted in his teaching. He was able to take a complex problem and simplify it; some of his ideas are revolutionary in their simplicity. My intent is to describe some of his specific ideas about technique and interpretation, as well as some of his insights into the practical aspects of a pianistic career.

My Years of Study with Earl Wild

Earl Wild came to The Ohio State University as Artist-in-Residence in 1986, and held this position through the spring of 1993. I began my studies with him in the fall of 1987, and continue to receive his counsel and coaching to the present day.

Since Mr. Wild would not allow his students to bring a tape recorder into the studio, I made the practice of writing into notebooks, after my lessons, the details (measure by measure) of what he had just said. In all, the material has so far filled 752 single-spaced, 9-and-a-half by six inch pages--six notebooks-full. Appendix A includes a table of the works which are discussed in these notebooks. There are over 100 pieces listed. I studied 87 of these works privately with him. Ten others are pieces which I heard him teach in masterclass. Three of the pieces (Ravel's *Sonatine* and *Valses nobles et sentimentales*, and the Brahms Piano Concerto in D minor) are from lessons which I audited or accompanied for another doctoral student, Mei-Na Hsu. Many of the pieces which I studied privately with him were the subject of numerous lessons; for instance, I had eighteen lessons on the Chopin B minor Sonata, ten on the Grieg Concerto, and nine on the Beethoven Sonata Op. 109.

I also became immersed in Mr. Wild's art by hearing him perform often. I heard him play twice at Carnegie Hall, at Orchestra Hall in Chicago, at London's Wigmore Hall, with the Cincinnati Symphony, at The Ohio State University, and many other venues. In addition to these public performances, I was often invited to hear him perform at his home, when he would play through his recital programs for friends and colleagues. The pieces which I heard him play many times include the four Chopin Ballades, the complete Opus 25 Etudes of Chopin, the Rachmaninoff Second Sonata, Rachmaninoff's Corelli Variations,

many of his own transcriptions, Ravel's *Alborado del gracioso*, Beethoven's Sonatas Op. 10, No. 3; Op. 13; Op. 22; Op. 33, No.3; and many other major works. His interpretations of these pieces are an indelible part of my memory.

Over time, I began to assimilate Mr. Wild's musical language and technique. During the 1992-93 academic year he asked me to serve as his teaching assistant. I taught eight of his newer students regularly, helping them with their technical questions, and preparing them for their lessons with him. My job was to prepare them correctly; they would leave Mr. Wild's studio sounding like mature artists. Since I could hear the specific details of what he had done to improve their playing, I received further education in this way as well.

Earl Wild's Personal Teaching Style

Certain aspects of Mr. Wild's teaching style deserve comment, because they shed light on his effectiveness as a teacher. Briefly, I will discuss such practical aspects as the length of his lessons, his preference to give private lessons, his ability to demonstrate at the second piano, and his sense of humor.

Mr. Wild preferred to teach long lessons. He once told the story of being an interim teacher at the Eastman School of Music in 1964. At that time, students were scheduled for 45-minute private lessons. He told the head of the school that "this was barely enough time to say hello," and had lesson times extended. The official length of his lessons at Ohio State was one-and-a-half hours, but he often became so involved in teaching that many of our lessons stretched to four hours.

Besides being generous with his time, he also believed in giving each student, so long as they were well-prepared, a truly personal lesson. Many well-known teachers such as Liszt, Busoni, and Artur Schnabel preferred to give lessons with three or more pupils in attendance at one time. [2] Mr. Wild never did, choosing instead to give private lessons. With the occasional exception of one student listening to another's lesson, Mr. Wild's pupils always received his sole undivided attention. Even when his schedule was extremely tight, he would never consent to giving group lessons.

One of the most extraordinary aspects of Mr. Wild's teaching style was his ability to demonstrate every musical passage. Mr. Wild had two pianos in his studio at Ohio State, and allowed the student to use the one he felt was the better instrument. He sat at the other piano. Nearly every piece I brought to my lessons, from the Bach G-Major Toccata to Copland's Passacaglia, had been performed or studied by Mr. Wild. He has an enormous range of repertoire, and because he had first-hand knowledge of nearly every piece I played, he could show me exactly which fingering, pedaling, phrasing, and so on, had worked best for him in his performance of that piece. He would hear me play, often stopping me after a few lines, give his opinion of my interpretation, discuss what he thought was a better way and why, then show me specifically what he meant, at the second piano. The superior result was immediately obvious.

This last attribute of his teaching, his ability to demonstrate authoritatively the most difficult works in the repertoire, is by itself a rare quality. Only a handful of the greatest pianists would be able to recreate such lesson-performances. I was often inspired by the sheer beauty of his playing alone.

Next to such pianism, it might have been natural for the student to feel inept. (Even the charismatic virtuoso of the last century, Carl Tausig, felt inadequate compared to his teacher Liszt.[3]) However, one of the most endearing qualities of Mr. Wild's teaching was his humor and wit. He loved telling jokes and punning. He would often make up amusing lyrics to the phrases we were playing. He laughed often from the sheer delight of showing me something particularly inventive. He was also modest, saying that he, too, had struggled with a difficult phrase for "months, or years," or he might say "This piece is just plain old-fashioned hard." Sometimes, after a series of complex lessons on a demanding piece, he would announce, "Now forget about everything I've said, and just play." His sense of humor and modesty helped to put the student at ease.

A Note About the Writing Style of This Document

In the following pages I will put forth some of the basic concepts of Earl Wild's teaching, concepts that may be of help and interest to any piano teacher, student, or admirer of his work. For purposes of style, I will sometimes use the past tense in descriptive passages of his teaching, even though he is actively and fully engaged in teaching at the present time. Also, to avoid sounding repetitious, I will not always state "Mr. Wild often said..." It may be assumed that any instructive passage beginning with words such as "The pianist should..." refers to a concept which I heard Mr. Wild say or which he taught me.

Endnotes to Chapter One

1. Matthay, Tobias. Musical Interpretation, Boston Music Company, 1913

2. On Liszt's teaching: "These group lessons with 'the boys' marked the true beginning of Liszt's master classes, an idea which is usually associated with his work in Weimar in the 1870s and '80s, and which has been widely adopted by the teaching profession in our own century....After Bülow and Tausig left the Altenburg, in fact, Liszt never gave 'private' lessons to anyone..." (Walker, Alan. Franz Liszt, Vol. II, The Weimar Years, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993, p.189.)

On Busoni's teaching: "In Weimar, about thirty of us would gather at the Temple on Friday afternoon, and Busoni would say: 'Well, who wants to play?' ... In one afternoon, perhaps a dozen pupils would play, and at other times only two..." (Petri, Egon. "How Ferrucio Busoni Taught," The Etude, October, 1940, p. 657)

On Schnabel's teaching: "Only in rare cases were Schnabel's lessons private. Usually, some or most of his pupils would be present during he lessons, but he sincerely ignored them altogether, and never addressed his remarks to anybody but the pupil being taught at the time." (Wolff, Konrad, Schnabel's Interpretation of Piano Music. New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1972, p.180.)

3.Tausig reportedly said to Wilhelm von Lenz, "No mortal can compete with Liszt. He dwells alone on a solitary height." (Lenz, Wilhelm von. The Great Piano Virtuosos of Our Time, revised translation edited by Philip Reder, London: Regency Press, 1971, p.51)

CHAPTER II

EARLY BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION AND PEDAGOGICAL INFLUENCES

Baker's Biographical Dictionary of Musicians, 8th edition, describes Earl Wild as a "greatly talented American pianist: b. Pittsburgh, November 26, 1915," and goes on to list the many accomplishments of his long and varied career.[1] While it is beyond the scope of this document to relate his entire early biography, I would like to discuss those factors which have shaped his ideas as a musician and pedagogue. Some of the details I will include have been related personally to me by Mr. Wild during my years of study with him.

Studies of Youth

Earl Wild was born in Pittsburgh into a middle-class family. His father was of English background, and his mother's forebears were from the Alsace. He was one of four children. Although there were no professional musicians in his immediate family, his mother displayed a love of culture, and had a piano and phonograph at home. Mr. Wild describes, at the age of three, hearing the opening chords of Bellini's "Norma" on the record player, and being struck by the sound. He immediately reproduced the notes at the piano, demonstrating at that early age his gift of absolute pitch. At age four he began formal

lessons. By the age of eight, he was already playing many pieces which he would use throughout his professional career.

At age 12, Mr. Wild was accepted to the pre-professional program at Carnegie Institute of Technology (now Carnegie-Mellon University). His teacher was Selmar Jansen, who had been a student of Eugene d'Albert and Polish virtuoso Xaver Scharwenka, both students of Liszt. Mr. Wild studied with Jansen for six years. During this time he became acquainted with the musical form which would later become an integral part of his creative output--the piano transcription.

Mr. Wild credits Selmar Jansen for suggesting to him the rare Romantic repertoire which would later serve as his introduction to the recording industry.[2] In Jansen's personal library, there were many rarely played pieces and transcriptions for the piano from the nineteenth-century. Initially, Jansen suggested these pieces for their extreme technical difficulty. Later, Mr. Wild used some of these unusual transcriptions as part of his repertoire, and as a stimulus to create his own harmonically inventive transcriptions.

Under Jansen, Mr. Wild also learned the Scharwenka Concerto No. 1. Much later, in the mid- 1960's, Mr. Wild was surprised when Erich Leinsdorf asked him to perform this rarely-heard piece with the Boston Symphony. His reaction was "I've been waiting by the phone for forty years for someone to ask me to play this!" He performed it numerous times throughout the United States, recorded it for RCA, and the critical reaction was stupendous:

> The way Mr. Wild played it was actually startling. It was sheer control all the way through with a feathery touch, minimum pedal and absolutely clear articulation...Mr. Wild played it like a romantic hero of the keyboard, and he had a fine accompaniment from Mr. Leinsdorf. [3]
>
> --- Harold Schonberg, The New York Times, December 19, 1968

Other studies

As a teenager, Mr. Wild participated in his high school orchestra as cellist, tubist, and flutist, experiences which later helped him in his work as an arranger and conductor.

He learned to improvise jazz, and became so adept as a jazz pianist that at age 14 he declined a lucrative offer to play in a Florida night club. However, his skill in the jazz idiom would later lay the groundwork for his elegant transcriptions of Gershwin's works, for which he would become well-known.

In his late teens Mr. Wild also became well-acquainted with many actors and dancers of his age group. He composed music for the ballet and theater departments at Carnegie Tech, including a full-length ballet *Persephone*. His familiarity with the drama world would later translate into his understanding of projection and drama in piano performance, and also to the flexibility he would display in his work for radio, television and opera.

Hearing famous performers

Mr. Wild was influenced by the many famous artists whom he heard during his youth, such as Fritz Kreisler, Mischa Elman, Nathan Milstein, Paderewski, Josef Hofmann, Moritz Rosenthal, and his role-model Sergei Rachmaninoff. Citing these artists' personal way of playing and their flexibility, Mr. Wild stated, in an interview for Keyboard Magazine, that today's musicologically correct performances of Bach, for instance, "would

not have been acceptable in my youth. It's very mechanized now. The flexibility you used to hear is gone."[4] In writing for Musical America in 1986, Mr. Wild said about Rachmaninoff:

> I was a child when I heard my first Rachmaninoff recital. It was as though I had come upon an ancient oracle; the mysticism of his presence seemed to envelop me. I became addicted to this great genius. In the years to follow I regularly attended his many concerts, wherever it was possible for me, throughout the country. He was one of the most important musical influences in my life. The simplicity of his approach to the keyboard was a model of perfection which I have strived to emulate.[5]

The experience of hearing these artists during his youth gave Mr. Wild a certain musical language, feeling, and perspective that he has brought to his own playing, and which he has subsequently handed down in his teaching.

Early Professional Experience

At the age of 14, Mr. Wild began performing as soloist and accompanist for radio station KDKA in Pittsburgh. Two years later he was engaged by Otto Klemperer to serve as orchestral pianist for the Pittsburgh Symphony. Both positions prepared him for the next phase of his career, when he became staff pianist at NBC in New York, and orchestral pianist for the NBC Symphony under Arturo Toscanini.

The Petri and Toscanini Years

In 1934, at the age of 19, Mr. Wild won the Pittsburgh Arts Society song writing contest, which paid a large enough fee for him to go to New York to study with the renowned Dutch pianist Egon Petri. Petri had been Ferrucio Busoni's most well-known disciple and had emigrated to the U.S. in the 1930's. Petri, like Busoni, was famous for his interpretation of Liszt, and his playing was described in his Musical Times obituary as

"avoiding sentimentality" but still having "great charm." Petri also displayed "almost perfect technical control."[6]

Mr. Wild says that when he first went to Petri in 1935 he could only play lightly, high off the keys, and without much volume. Recalls Mr. Wild, "At my first lesson he gave me an imitation of my playing and it was devastating."[7] During his year of study with Petri he learned the important concept of playing close to the keys, and as a consequence how to generate a big sound. He also learned how to play counterpoint effectively, and received "advice in general ." He also recalls Petri's sense of humor and his ability to improvise in the style of any composer:

> He (Petri) could improvise like mad. I'll never forget the way he put together all the principal themes from Wagner's 'Die Götterdämmerung' with 'Roll Out the Barrel.' He asked me if I could do anything like that, so I put the 'Prayer' from 'Rienzi' together with Liszt's 'Mephisto Waltz.'[8]

Mr. Wild also wrote about Petri in Musical America:

> Petri's repertoire was enormous and his ability to retain large works in his memory was awesome. I remember one day I asked if I could continue my lesson the following day. Petri replied, 'I'm sorry, but I must save tomorrow for practice. It's been ten years since I last played the *Hammerklavier* and it's programmed on my Town Hall recital in two days.' Petri's playing had great tonal balance, ease, and beauty. His hands moved imperceptibly while playing the most difficult music. [9]

Mr. Wild settled in New York, and in 1937 was hired as staff pianist at the NBC radio network. From 1937 to 1944 he worked as orchestral pianist and celeste player in the NBC Symphony under Arturo Toscanini. Toscanini thought so highly of Mr. Wild's talent that he engaged Mr. Wild, at the age of 27, as soloist in Gershwin's Rhapsody in Blue.

Toscanini was a great inspiration to the young Wild. In an interview with the Chicago Tribune in 1986, Mr. Wild said:

> He (Toscanini) always had the score with him, he talked of nothing but music, it was his entire life, and it was dramatic and desperate. He had to fulfill his duty, and it's wonderful to work with people like that. He said, 'You have to put blood in the music,' and that's what it was ---blood...
> The rehearsals were sensational, and when he was on, and the music fit him, there were such flashes of genius, and such wonderful things that you looked at him in great awe.[10]

Mr. Wild often attributes his ideas about projection, tone color, and forward motion to Toscanini. He has said that his concept of Beethoven playing was shaped by the Toscanini model as well.

World War II

During 1942-44, Mr. Wild, along with some of the other young players in Toscanini's orchestra (including, notably, violinist Oscar Shumsky and cellist Bernhard Greenhouse), was stationed in Washington, D.C. to play in the Official U.S. Navy Band. Mr. Wild played the flute (badly, by his own admission), but also received grueling preparation for his career as a piano soloist, being engaged to play over 21 different concertos with the Navy Symphony Orchestra during this two year period. He also gave many command performances for President Franklin D. Roosevelt at the White House, and traveled with Mrs. Roosevelt, playing the National Anthem as a prelude to her speeches.[11]

Later Studies

At the end of the war, Mr. Wild was 30 years old. He returned to New York, working as accompanist, pianist, composer, and arranger for ABC-TV, a position which he officially held from 1944-1968. He made two brief sojourns to Paris in 1949 and 1950,

where he met Francis Poulenc, Wanda Landowska, Henri Sauget, and Nadia Boulanger, whose assessment of one of Mr. Wild's compositions was "Simple, but charming."

Part of Mr. Wild's duties for ABC in the 1950's included accompanying singers for the Metropolitan Opera "Met Auditions of the Air." It was a job which he initially found tedious, but from which he says in retrospect he learned a great deal. Among the hundreds of auditions he accompanied, he remembers some of the great ones, such as Grace Bumbry's. From this experience, he learned first-hand about the phrasing, flexibility, and bel canto style which the best singers demonstrated. Other singers whom Mr. Wild later accompanied included Jennie Tourel, Lily Pons, William Lewis, Robert Merrill, and Zinka Milanov.

Besides accompanying singers, Mr. Wild also became active as a chamber musician. His collaborators over the years included Mischa Elman, William Primrose, Harvey Shapiro, Leonard Rose, Mischa Mischakoff, and Oscar Shumsky. [12]

Because of his improvisational skills and imagination for humor, Mr. Wild also served as pianist and composer for Sid Caesar's NBC comedy hour from 1954-57, where he wrote the music for many of Mr. Caesar's musical parodies. He recalls his years working for Mr. Caesar with great fondness:

> He (Caesar) is a marvelous man and a great gentleman and a lover of music... When I had concert dates, Sid let me go to play... I had a room in Sid's offices where I had my piano, and when I wasn't on call, I practiced.
> In the meantime, I sat through these weekly sessions with writers like Carl Reiner, Mel Brooks, and all of them. And I think I heard every joke that has ever been heard, good or bad.[13]

In addition to his commercial and accompanying work, Mr. Wild continued to build his serious repertoire. At the start of this period, in 1944, Mr. Wild made his Town Hall

début, and gave a major New York recital at regular intervals (on average of every three years) from that time to the present day. The programs for many of these earlier recitals are given in George Kehler's The Piano in Concert, Vol. II, and reveal that some of the rarely heard pieces such as Medtner's Sonata tragica, the d'Albert Scherzo, and some of the major works of Ravel, Chopin, and Liszt, are still programmed by Mr. Wild at the current time.[14]

Throughout the 1940's and 50's , Mr. Wild studied intermittently with the French pianist Paul Doguereau, who knew Marguerite Long in Paris, and more importantly, had been a student of Maurice Ravel. Doguereau had traveled with Ravel during the composer's tour of the United States in the 1920's and had become well-acquainted with Ravel's ideas. Mr. Wild attributes his understanding of French music to Paul Doguereau, and coached with him all of Ravel's major piano pieces including *Gaspard de la nuit*, *Miroirs*, *Sonatine*, and *Jeux d'eau*. Mr. Wild also heard Doguereau's performances of major Debussy works such as *L'isle joyeuse*, and deems them definitive.

Mr. Wild considers Doguereau's influence on his playing as great as Egon Petri's. In Musical America he wrote:

> Between these two giants (Petri and Doguereau) I was able to advance rapidly...Their influence also gave me the mental strength to be calm when confronted with the difficulties surrounding a career. Doguereau ... had an equally superior technique, a big tone, and great elegance. Both of these pianists were men of the world, highly educated and intensely devoted to their art. Their ideas on music in all of its facets were very similar, and I was exceptionally lucky in knowing them as pianists, teacher, and friends.[15]

It is typical of Mr. Wild's modesty that to this day he telephones Doguereau to ask his opinion about certain pieces. Mr. Wild, who is now 79, once told me "I ask Paul Doguereau for his advice because he's older than me and has more experience."

The other teacher that Mr. Wild consulted during the 1950's was New York pianist Volya Cossack. Although Mr. Wild was already a performer of established reputation, he became dissatisfied with certain aspects of his playing, specifically in regard to the Grieg Concerto, and asked for her help. He reports that she was of great assistance in watching the proper movement of his hands, and in tone production. In reference to his studies with her, Mr. Wild told me to "never be embarrassed to ask for help from someone smart. You should always play for someone knowledgeable, no matter where you are in your career."

By the 1960's Earl Wild finally began to embark on a truly international career, which has taken him to five continents, and has produced over 350 recordings. An overview of the tremendous critical acclaim which he continues to receive, even entering his ninth decade, is given in Appendix B of this document.

Also starting in the 1960's, Mr. Wild began to teach. His appointments have included the Eastman School of Music in 1964; Pennsylvania State University from 1965-68; the Manhattan School from 1982-83; the Juilliard School from 1976-1986; The Ohio State University from 1986-1993; and, currently, Carnegie-Mellon University.

Summary

An examination of Earl Wild's early musical history reveals the multi-dimensional nature of his early career.

The variety of practical work and experience which he gained over, as orchestral pianist, composer, improviser, accompanist, arranger, and conductor, stands in stark contrast to today's conservatory model of the concert pianist, who studies in a sheltered environment, and who then enters competitions and expects to be presented as a finished

artist. The majority of contestants who cannot make a career then must teach to make a living, but again without the breadth of experience required to be a finished teacher. This unfortunate situation has made Mr. Wild disapprove of competitions in general, calling them "vaudeville circuits."[16] He discourages his students from participating, saying, "in the long run, competitions hold you back." It is better, he feels, to build a career slowly, in order to develop an original voice.

In Mr. Wild's case, his original voice also provides an important link to the past. He is only two generations removed, pedagogically speaking, from Liszt, and even closer to Busoni and Ravel. He worked with the great conductors, including Toscanini, Mitropoulos, Stokowski, Beecham, and many others. As a youth he came to know, first-hand, the playing of the legendary performers of the last era. These factors make him an authority on a style of playing which is nearly lost today, but which, carried on through his teaching and recordings, may be revived and rekindled for generations to come.

Endnotes to Chapter Two

1. Baker's Biographical Dictionary of Musicians, 8th edition. Revised Nicolas Slonimsky. New York: Schirmer Books, 1992, p. 2050

2.Elder, Dean. "Earl Wild: In the Rachmaninoff Tradition," Clavier, February 1986, p. 5.

3.Schonberg, Harold. "Scharwenka's Rare Piano Concerto No. 1 in B-flat Minor," concert review, The New York Times , December 19, 1968.

4.Kozinn, Allan, "Earl Wild," Keyboard Magazine, December 1986, pp. 53-64.

5.Wild, Earl, "If You Heard What I Heard!" Musical America, February 1986, p. 6.

6.Londonderry, A., "Egon Petri" (obituary), Musical Times, ciii, (1962), p.489.

7.Dyer, Richard, "Candid Notes from Earl Wild," The Boston Globe, August 26, 1989.

8.Ibid.

9.Wild, Earl, op. cit., p. 17.

10.Reich, Howard, "Showman Wild Delights in Confounding the Longhairs," Chicago Tribune, February 9, 1986.

11.Wu, Ching-Jen, Twelve Rachmaninoff Songs as Transcribed for Piano By Earl Wild, D.M.A. Document, The Ohio State University, 1989.

12.Kreeger, Julian H., "Earl Wild, the Complete Pianist," Clavier, March 1981, pp.18-19.

13.Reich, Howard, "Showman Wild Delights in Confronting the Longhairs," Chicago Tribune, February 9, 1986.

14.Kehler, George, compiler. The Piano in Concert, Vol. II , New Jersey and London: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1982, pp. 1393-1394.

15.Wild, Earl, op. cit., p. 16.

16.Reich, op. cit.

CHAPTER III

TECHNIQUE

The basis of any convincing interpretation is a solid technique. Mr. Wild has said "without technique you cannot fly." Technique, to be discussed in this chapter, encompasses not only the playing of runs, octaves, arpeggios and difficult passagework, but also the ability to control the tone in melody playing, to soften or bring out accompanying voices, to balance chords. In short, it is the ability of the performer to execute that which he or she wishes to convey.

Mr. Wild specifically addressed the technical aspect of all the pieces which I studied with him, but not in the conventional way. His method was to integrate the technical aspects of the performance with the interpretative ones. He would show how to execute every passage by giving detailed fingerings, and by demonstrating the exact touch, tone, phrasing, attack, and even the condition of the hands and arms for each passage.

For clarity of presentation, I have divided this section into three main groups: physical approach to the keyboard, fingering, and touch. Pedaling and certain aspects of tonal control will be discussed later, in chapter four.

Physical Approach to the Keyboard

In contrast to the theatrical motions that some pianists display at the keyboard, Mr. Wild advocates physical calm, ease, and poise. He plays with complete relaxation of the jaw, neck, and shoulders, and even in the most taxing passages displays no tightness or tension in the upper body. He avoids any extraneous motions or mannerisms such as rolling the shoulders or moving the elbows outward, or obvious facial expressions. Mr. Wild stated in the Minnesota Monthly :

> As for facial expressions, I can remember in my youth you just didn't make them. Rachmaninoff was one of our gods, and he sat expressionless at the piano...An excess of physical display while performing is usually an offspring of the Hollywood version of the great pianist.[1]

A serene bearing at the keyboard is advocated not only by Mr. Wild, but by many of the great musicians of the past as well. Beethoven, Liszt, Emil Sauer, Rachmaninoff, and Vladimir Horowitz are among the legendary figures who displayed or talked about calmness of the arms and hands, or face, while playing.[2]

Mr. Wild proved in his performances that the emotions and technical difficulties of piano playing can best be accomplished by calm and ease at the keyboard. He felt it was normal to move the body in response to the natural movement of playing, but he objected to excessive or manufactured motions. He did not like it when pianists "had their nose in the air."

He taught that both feet, not just the right one, should be at the pedals. This encourages symmetrical distribution of weight on the lower back, and also facilitates quick access to all the pedals, important in many passages.

The wrists and forearms are at the same level as the white keys, and the fingers are at rest on the keys most of the time. Mr. Wild suggested that the pupil place a mirror near the keyboard to help check the position of the wrists and hands and upper body.

In summary, Mr. Wild felt that the student should strive for a calm, natural posture at the keyboard. He felt that a lot of motion, whether in the torso, arms, wrists, or face, distracted the audience and prevented the performer from giving his or her full attention to the music. As he said in an interview with Musical America ,

> I discovered early in life that if you move too much it destroys the communication between the brain and the finger tips. You end up becoming a mime of the music. One should be able to give a recital that would be considered beautiful by a school for the blind.[3]

In addition, he wanted the student to have both feet at the pedals, and to keep the arms and wrists at the level of the white keys in a natural position.

Freeing the Hand: Fingering

One of the first problems that Mr. Wild addressed in his teaching was fingering. I recall his spending considerable time, especially when I first began studying with him, devising for me detailed fingerings for difficult passages. He often wrote these fingerings into my score himself. In doing so, he demonstrated that a judicious choice of fingering could immediately solve many problems, both technical and musical, and that fingering should be carefully considered. Chopin's assessment was also the same: "Everything is a

matter of knowing good fingering."[4] There are certain fingerings patterns which Mr. Wild used often.

5-2-1

Mr. Wild showed that the fifth finger, second finger, and thumb when used together keeps the hand in a compact configuration, and thus provides a framework of strength. To demonstrate this away from the piano, Mr. Wild had the student put together the tips of these fingers and pretend to squeeze or pinch something. When used at the keyboard, fingerings based on 5-2-1 reproduce what hand surgeons refer to as "the anatomical position of rest"; i.e., the fingers are relaxed, close together and slightly curved, rather than splayed. This will be easier to explain in the following examples. Mr. Wild taught that using the underlying structure of 5-2-1, or its correlates, 2-5 alone or 2-1 alone, is advantageous in many technical situations.

In chord playing, the underlying construction of 5-2-1 produces evenness and solidity. An example of 5-2-1 being used in this way can be found at the beginning of J.S. Bach's G Major Toccata. By using 5-2-1 on each chord, each one will have a uniformity of strength and sound.

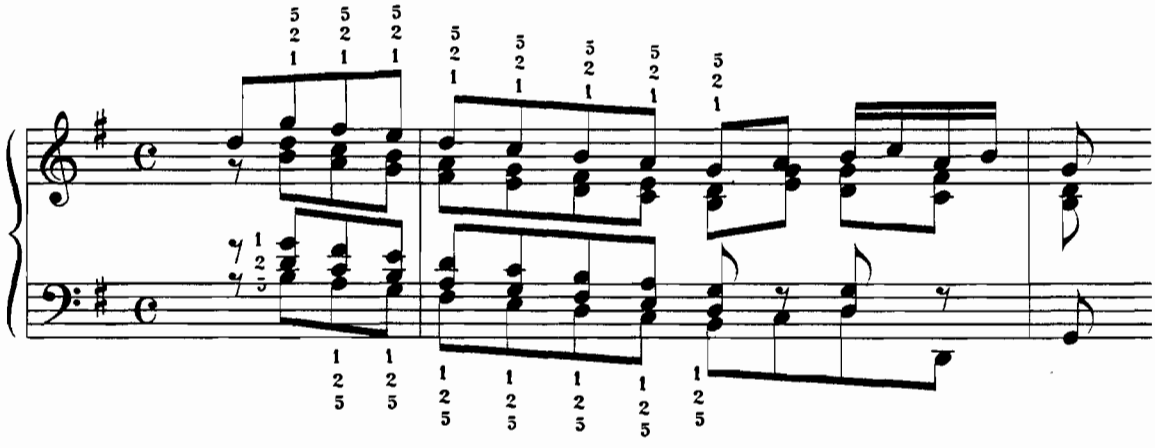

Fig. 1 . J.S. Bach -- G Major Toccata, mm. 3-4.

The pianist should always consider using 5-2-1 in chordal accompaniment figures. For instance, in measure 8 of the Chopin F-minor Ballade (where the theme first enters), the left hand is in a much more compact and relaxed position by playing the first F-minor chord with 5-2-1 rather than 4-2-1 or another fingering.

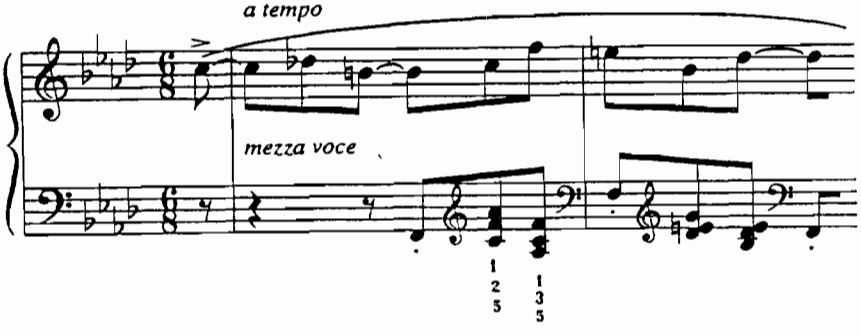

Fig. 2. Chopin -- F Minor Ballade, mm. 8-9.

In many cases, even if one has to change hand positions more often in accompaniment figures like that above, using the *fifth* finger on the bottom note of left hand chords is better than using the fourth or third fingers, because the hand stays compact and relaxed, and hence more accurate. (An exception would be for closely-spaced chords with a black note on the bottom---e.g., in the second bar of this example, in which case a 4 or 3 on the bottom note is perfectly suitable.)

Another example in which 5-2-1 is used to preserve the compact structure of the hand may be found in the trio section of the Scherzo movement of Chopin's Sonata in B Minor. Here the melody note E, in the second bar of the example, must be sustained by the pedal.

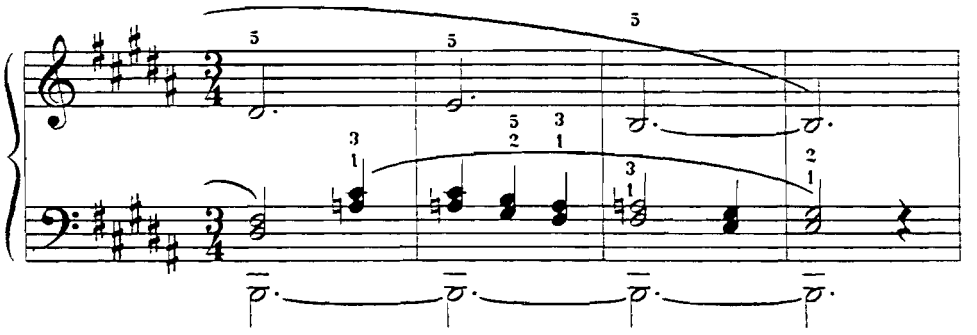

Fig.3. Chopin, Sonata in B Minor, Mvt. II, m. 77-80.

Yet another fingering which is based on the 5-2-1 configuration can be found in the piano's opening statement of the Chopin F Minor Concerto. Mr. Wild cautioned that this passage can pose dangers for the performer, because of the awkward physical spacing of

intervals and placement of the black notes. He therefore devised a fingering which renders this passage much more comfortable and secure.

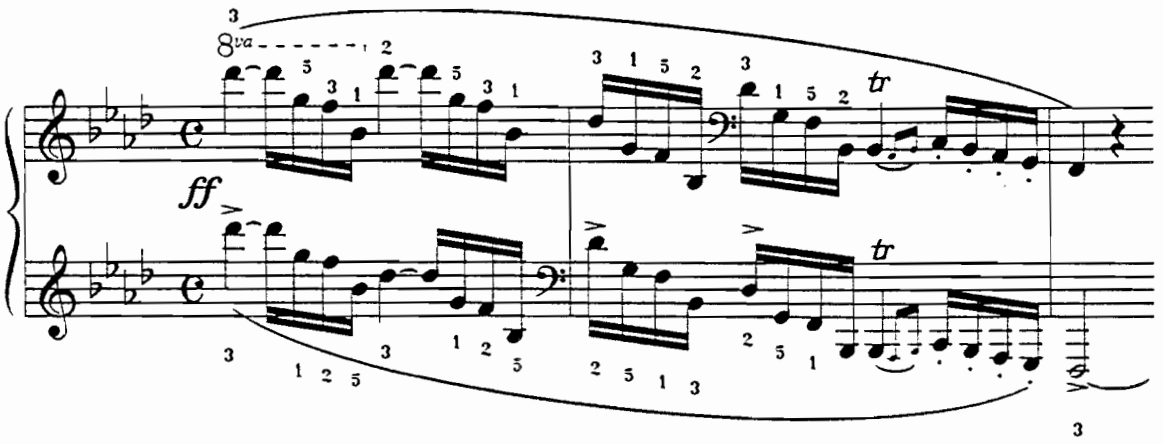

Fig. 4. Chopin, Concerto in F Minor, Mvt. 1, mm. 71-72.

The strong configuration of 5-2-1 is advantageous even when reduced to 2-1 alone or 2-5 alone. For example, in the Fugue from Beethoven's Eroica Variations, Op. 35, the left hand is given solidity, security and evenness of tone by repeated use of 2-1:

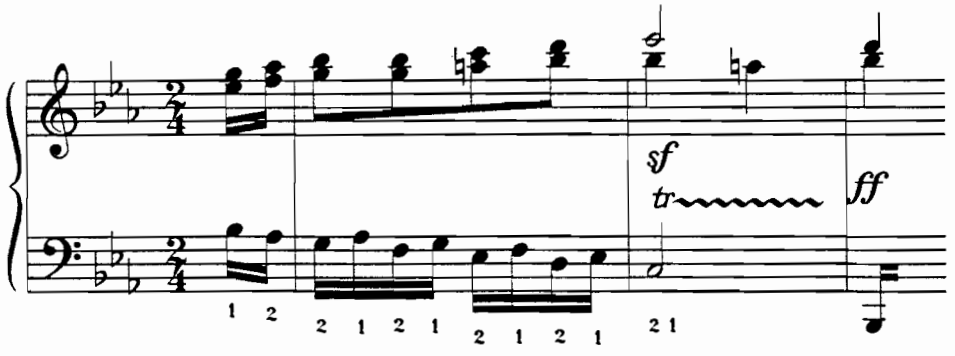

Fig. 5. Beethoven, Eroica Variations, Op. 35, Fugue, measure 109-110

2-1 by itself also helps to produce a smooth, even melodic line at the beginning of the theme in Earl Wild's transcription of Tschaikowsky's song "At the Ball." In this case, the melody, or middle voice, is played by 2-1 of the right hand, except for the last note, which is taken by the left hand thumb.

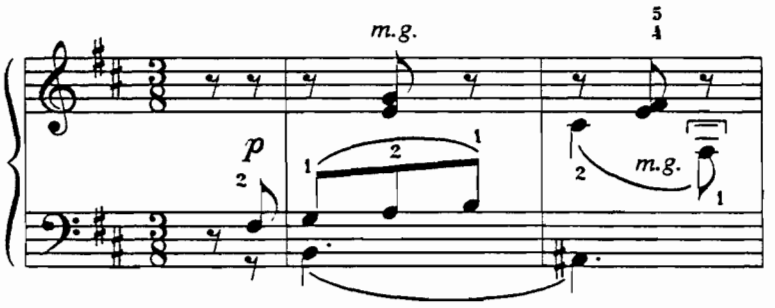

Fig. 6. Tschaikowsky-Wild, "At the Ball," m. 11.

2-5 used alone can also make an awkward passage more comfortable. An example can be found in Poulenc's Improvisation No. 8. Using 2-5 facilitates playing this line sharply and accurately, and at the appropriate fast tempo.

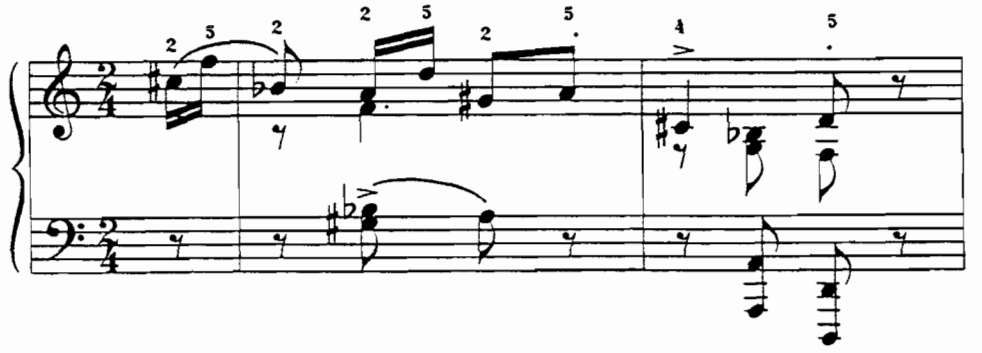

Fig. 7. Poulenc Improvisation No. 8, mm. 26-27.

An excellent example of using 2-5 symmetrically in both hands can be found in the following passage from Gershwin's Rhapsody in Blue. Mr. Wild suggested that using 2-5 would produce a strong martellato effect, while allowing the hands and arms to remain loose and relaxed, an important factor in playing this passage at a fast speed.

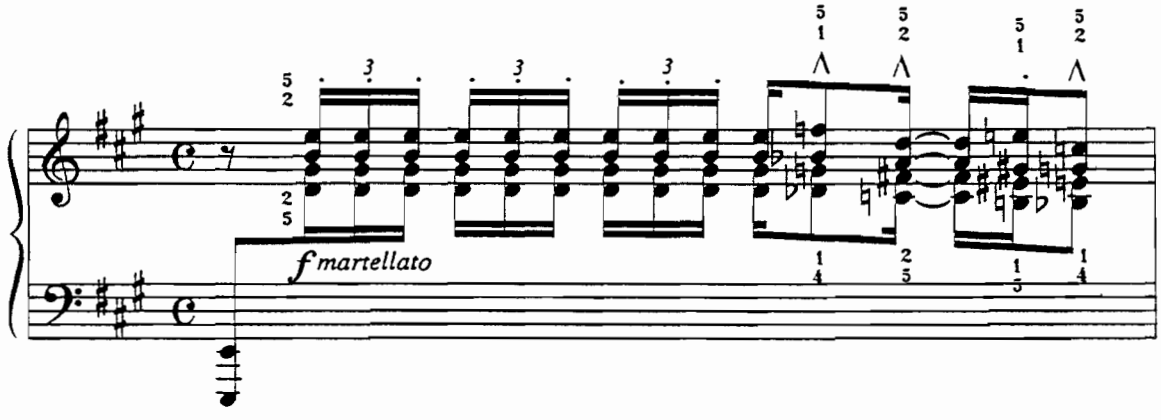

Fig. 8. Gershwin, Rhapsody in Blue, m.33.

As the above examples show, Mr. Wild formulated fingerings which kept the hand in a compact, relaxed position, rather than stretched-out. He taught that the pianist can often use the fingering structure of 5-2-1, or in its reduced form of 5-2 or 2-1, to great advantage, especially when strength, solidity, and security of technical passages is desired.

Use of consecutive 3rd or consecutive 5th finger

Another unusual principle of fingering that Mr. Wild promoted was the use of the same finger, usually the third or fifth, on consecutive notes in melody playing. Mr. Wild encouraged the student to use the third finger on consecutive notes when practicing melody

lines. The pedal is used to connect the notes. This idea goes against the grain of conventional teaching (most other teachers talk about "finger legato", or actually trying to physically connect the notes with the fingers). However, Mr. Wild asserted that legato is actually produced by matching the tones with the *ear*. By using the same finger on consecutive notes, one is more likely to get the same sound on each one. In this way a legato, even tone can be produced. Mr. Wild suggested that the student practice an entire melody line with the third finger, thereby ensuring that at least one physical variable in the production of an even tone remains constant. Later, after the tone control of the passage has been established, one can use a more convenient fingering.

It is interesting that Chopin was one of the first important teachers to promote the idea of using the 5th or 3rd finger consecutively for melody playing.[5]. Mr. Wild preferred, like Chopin, to use the third finger alone in many cantabile passages, such as in the opening of the C Minor Nocturne, Op. 48, No. 1:

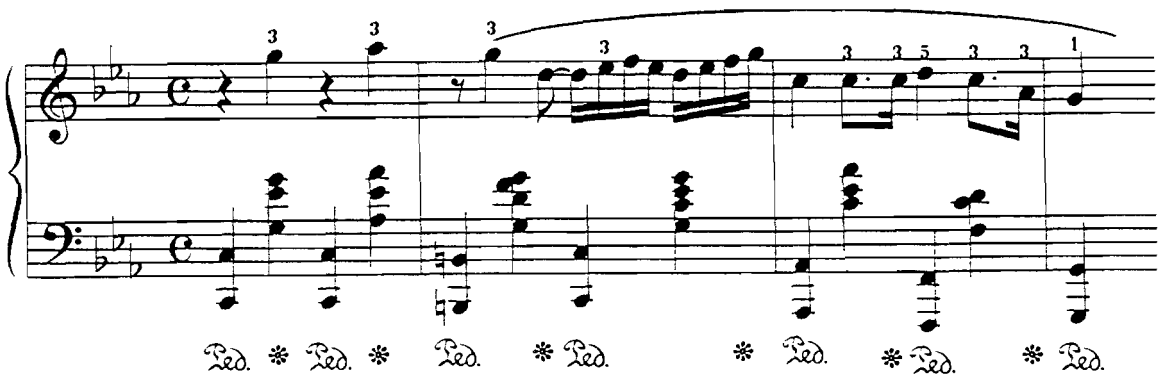

Fig. 9. Chopin, Nocturne in C Minor, Op. 48, No. 1 , mm. 1-4.

Mr. Wild also taught that consecutive use of the fifth finger can also produce superb evenness of tone. He taught that since the fifth finger is at the end of the hand, it has the advantage of readily producing a more prominent sound in chord playing, and can be used when the melody occurs in the top voice of a progression of chords. This fingering allows the pianist to control the tone in a passage where delicate changes in voicing are needed, as in the theme of the last movement of Beethoven's Sonata Op. 109:

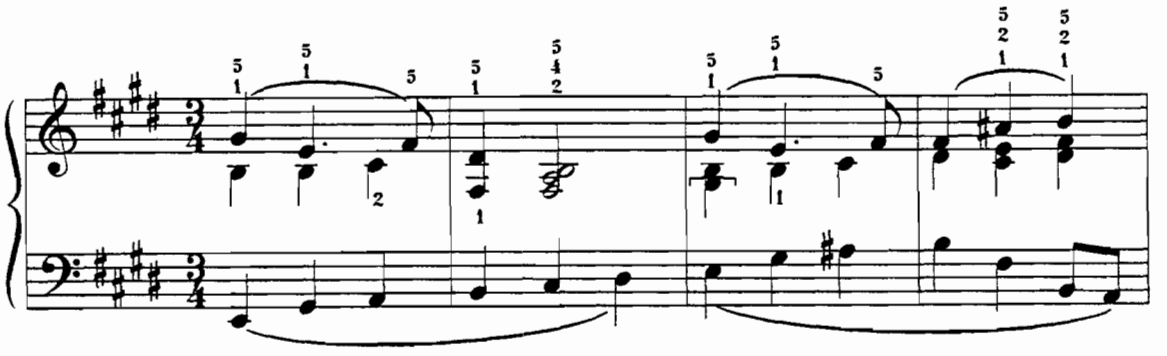

Fig. 10. Beethoven, Sonata in E Major, Op. 109, Mvt. III, Theme.

In summary, Mr. Wild suggested that the student always practice using the third or fifth finger on consecutive notes in melodic passages. He taught that legato is the result of tone control, rather than physical connection of the keys by the fingers.

Other fingering suggestions

For jumps or when crossing the hands, Mr. Wild had some practical advice. If the pianist has a large leap upward, look for the note a half-step *above* the note one is aiming for.

Do the opposite for large leaps downward. If one is jumping to a black note, playing this black key with the thumb can provide both flexibility and security, as in this passage from the end of Rachmaninoff's transcription of Tschaikowsky's "Lullaby":

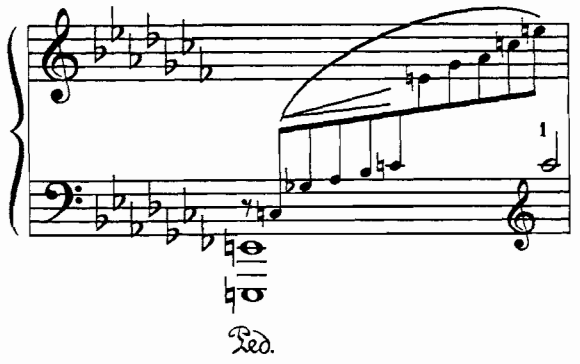

Fig. 11. Rachmaninoff-Tschaikowsky, " Lullaby," m.77.

In chromatic passages and runs, Mr. Wild advocated the use of only the first three fingers, rather than the addition of 4. He felt that in most cases, 1-2, 1-3, or 1-2-3 produced the greatest evenness and speed in chromatic passages.

In summary, Mr. Wild took great care in his teaching to give his students the best possible fingerings for technical and melodic passages. He showed that fingering must be established creatively and carefully for each individual passage. While each passage and player is unique, it is always wise to consider patterns based on 5-2-1 for technical problems, and consecutive use of the fifth or third fingers when practicing melodic passages. The best fingering is the one which produces relaxation, compactness, and freedom of the hand, and as a consequence, the greatest control and accuracy for the player.

Touch

Baker's Dictionary of Musical Terms defines touch as "The method and manner of applying the fingers to the digitals of keyboard instruments." [6] In this section I will describe some of Mr. Wild's teachings regarding touch.

Closeness

One of the hallmarks of Mr. Wild's touch was that he stayed in extremely close contact with the keys. Except for specific circumstances, he nearly always wanted his students to play with the fingers resting *on* the keys before the keys are depressed.

The first reason for a close touch is that it produces a better tone. Normally, a harsh percussive sound should be consciously avoided. Mr. Wild disliked it when pianists banged. Any sound produced by striking the keys from a distance above them is by necessity percussive, and ought to be reserved only for a martellato effect. Most of the time, the pianist must have the fingers first resting on the keys before depressing them. In other words, rather than striking the keys from a distance above them, the pianist should only depress the keys from a position directly upon them. This is what is known as "close playing" as advocated to Earl Wild by Egon Petri. Besides better tone production, this method also assures increased velocity in fast passages, and the capacity to sustain a powerful sound when fortissimo playing is required for any length of time.

Closeness in Melody Playing

When practicing melody lines, Mr. Wild suggested the pupil first feel the finger on the key, then mentally "hear" the desired tone before playing. The image he used was "to put your ear at the end of your finger." This entails great concentration, and with practice, develops a highly refined mind-ear-finger coordination. It is what many artists have called the ability to hear oneself. Chopin also taught this type of touch, when he admonished his pupils to "Caress the key, never bash it! You should mold the keyboard with a velvet hand and feel the key rather than striking it."[7]

Mr. Wild also taught that in addition to having the finger on the key, often the sound in melody playing will be enhanced by using a flat, rather than curved, finger. This flat finger approach for slow melody playing has been advocated by many other artists, including Artur Rubinstein.[8]

Velocity

Mr. Wild demonstrated in his teaching that by having the fingers directly on the keys, the student can play fast passages with greater ease. This is especially true for runs and jumps, and necessitates true preparation since the fingers must get to the proper keys before they are struck-- all of which occurs nearly instantaneously. In fast jumps, this preparation --having the fingers arrive on the keys before they are played--also results in excellent precision. In light, fast jumps, lateral movement across the keyboard, rather than vertical (up in the air), gives the pianist speed and accuracy, as can be applied to works such as Liszt's *La Campanella.*

Fortissimo Playing - Closeness and "Turning Off"

Mr. Wild taught that playing with the close touch is also advantageous in sustained, fortissimo passages (which prevail in the big Romantic concerti). In addition to playing these passages closely, Mr.Wild showed the student how to "turn off" the muscles in extremely taxing passages. This is an important concept which is essential to his extraordinary feats as a virtuoso. By staying close and learning how to turn off, the pianist can produce a big sound with little fatigue. A simple example can be found in the cadenza of the Grieg Concerto:

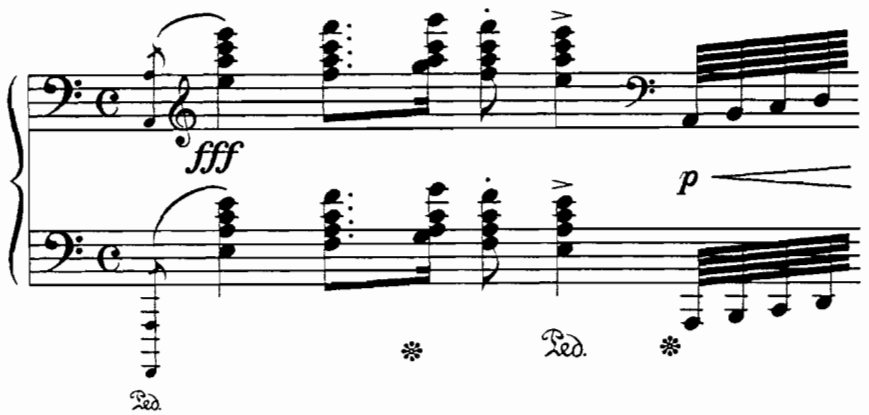

Fig. 12. Grieg - Concerto, Mvt. I, Cadenza.

Here, each of the big chords should be played with the fingers sustained on the keys, not attacked from above the keyboard. Each chord is played with a fast impulse, then the muscles of the arm are immediately relaxed. The hands move laterally to the next chord, without needing to leave the keyboard, and the action repeated. In this way, a powerful sound can be sustained for the entire passage without tiring the player, since the hands Mr.

Wild called "to turn off," and is essential in playing difficult technical work and bravura passages. Discerning when to "turn off" will make the strenuous passages possible, and will save the player's musculature and nervous system. By contrast, the performer who attempts repeated fortissimo octave or chordal passages with an attack that begins far from the keyboard, and does not allow the muscles to relax between impulses, is doomed to an ugly, brittle sound, and eventually injury.

Often these fortissimo passages must be played with such speed that the pianist cannot possibly relax the muscles of the arm between each impulse. In that case, the pianist must judiciously choose on which chords he will make the strong impulse, and play the others more lightly, with the arm relaxed, i.e., "turned off". This choice is as much interpretative as it is technical.

For instance, one possibility for the Alla marcia section of the first movement of Rachmaninoff's Second Concerto can be illustrated as follows: the accented notes are to be played with a strong, fortissimo impulse, the other notes lighter, with the arm "turned off":

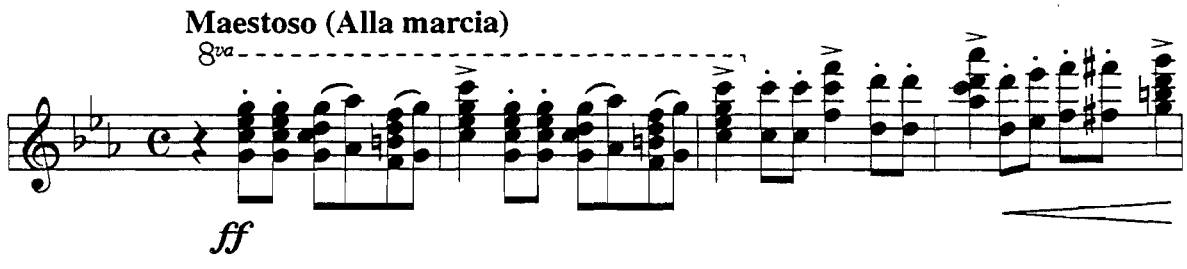

Fig. 13. Rachmaninoff, Second Concerto, Mvt. 1. *Alla marcia.*

At the fork (Mr. Wild's marking), increase strength in the arm till the last beat, which is again played with quick, forceful energy. Not only is the entire *Alla marcia* passage now effortlessly played at a brisk tempo, the performance is given a proud vitality which would not come across if the performer attempted to dig at each chord with the same volume and force. The same practice can be applied to innumerable difficult passages, such as the following measures in Rachmaninoff's G Minor Prelude.

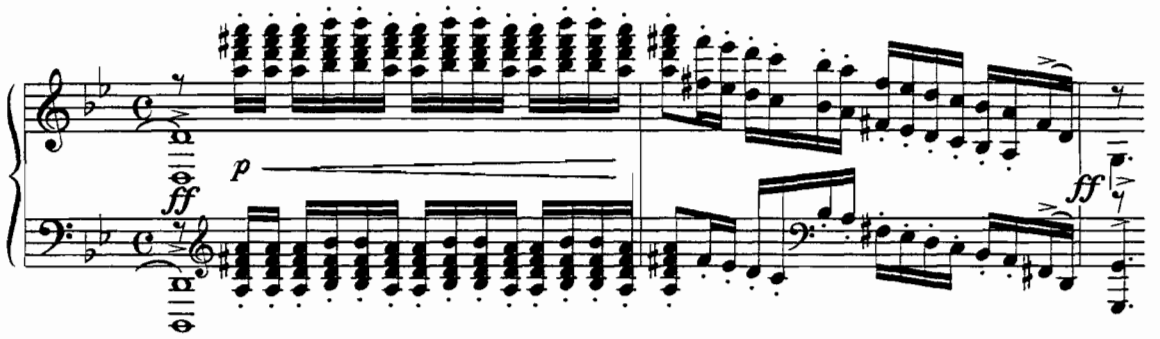

Fig. 14. Rachmaninoff, Prelude in G Minor, Op. 23 no. 5, mm. 23-24.

Here Mr. Wild demonstrated the lightning speed at which one could play this passage. Rather than work at each individual chord, he instructed the student to " turn off" the muscles and allow the passage "to fly" in one impulse.

Lifting the Hand

In general, Mr. Wild advocated that the pianist stay close to the keys, while keeping the hand loose and the arms relaxed. To enhance this type of playing even further, he showed that the pianist can also lift the hand at appropriate times. For instance, in cantabile playing, the pianist must imitate a great singer. Within the longer line, the phrase can be broken into smaller groups. It is between these groups that the hand is lifted slightly --- lifting the hand frees it and releases the physical tension which can constrain the player and choke the singing line.

This concept of lifting the hand between the smaller groups of a long line can be illustrated in the following example, the theme of the slow movement from Chopin's Sonata in B Minor.

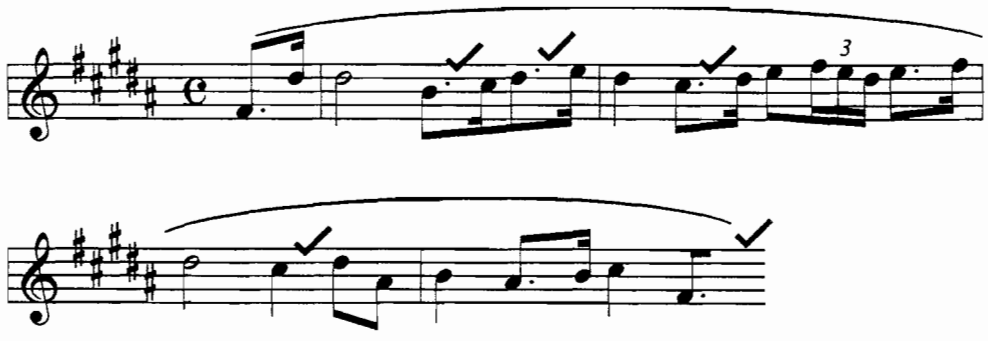

Fig. 15. Chopin, Sonata in B Minor, Op. 58, Mvt. III, mm. 5-8

Mr. Wild likened this melody to a lovely Italian aria, citing Chopin's admiration of Bellini and the famous bel canto singers of his time. The check marks in the above example indicate where the pianist may lift the hand (while sustaining the tone with the pedal), for ease of playing and freedom. So long as the finger gets back to the next key before it is played, and the pianist takes care not to drop the tone, the sound will be controlled, and beautiful. A true legato is thus produced by correct phrasing, wise use of the pedal, freedom of the hand, and a sensitive ear which directs the tones to be matched.

Tapping

Mr. Wild showed that in certain instances a close touch is to be supplanted by one in which the fingers strike the keys from a distance above the keyboard, with a crisp, definite attack. This approach is to be used in runs which need to have a pointed clarity, such as in brilliant passagework. This is what Mr. Wild referred to as "tapping" the keys, or playing with "finger action". Tapping can be used equally well for loud, brilliant passages, or softly and delicately in highly decorative musical filigree. Many Chopin runs and

ornaments sound best if played with this light, tapping approach. A good example can be found in the slow movement of Chopin's F Minor Concerto:

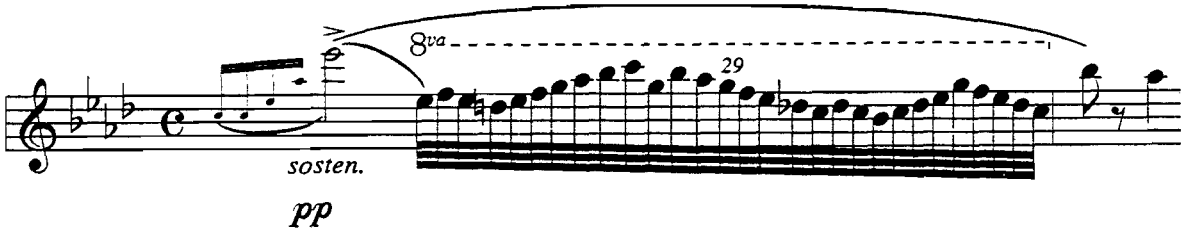

Fig. 16. Chopin, Concerto in F Minor, Mvt. II, m. 26.

Each note of the ornamental run should be tapped with a light impulse, rather than connected physically by the fingers. Played with both the damper and soft pedals, and with a delicacy of tone, this "tapping" will produce a limpid clarity which is not in the least way blurred. Mr. Wild said to think of these notes as if they were an even string of pearls.

A note about staccato playing

Mr. Wild cautioned his students against playing overly dry staccatos in music from the Classical period. While he was very observant of proper rests and phrasing in music from this era, he called the practice of playing sudden, dry staccatos "woodpeckery." He felt that such staccatos sounded silly and often ruined the line. He showed instead that the pianist can produce a staccato merely by allowing the key to come up quickly. This type of staccato is short, but also has substance and texture.

To review briefly this section on touch, Mr. Wild advocated a *close* touch for its advantages in tone production and speed. He taught that fortissimo playing is best

accomplished by keeping close to the keys and "turning off" the muscles of the arms and hands. In cantabile passages, the most effective performance comes from a loose hand which is close to the keys, and which is lifted between the smaller groups of a long line, to allow the line to breathe. For certain ornamental runs and other passages, "tapping" the keys produces a wonderful, even clarity. Staccatos should be played by simply allowing the key to raise, thus avoiding an overly dry or "woodpeckery" sound.

Summary

Earl Wild, one of the great technical masters of the twentieth century, achieves his remarkable feats by combining his natural facility with a keen understanding of the physiology of piano playing. He taught his students to maintain an unpretentious and quiet posture at the keyboard, to devise fingerings which enhance and conform to the natural shape of the hand, to develop a touch which is based on closeness to the keys, and generate power and speed by knowing how to "turn off" the muscles and remain loose, even in the most demanding moments of performance.

Endnotes to Chapter Three

1. Music this Month. "Wild is Wonderful," Minnesota Monthly, January 1986.

2. Beethoven's playing was described thus by Czerny: "His bearing while playing was masterfully quiet, noble and beautiful, without the slightest grimace (only bent forward low, as his deafness grew upon him)..."(Thayer, Alexander Wheelock, Life of Beethoven, rev.)

Liszt's bearing was described by Madame Auguste Boissier, who recorded her daughter's lessons with Liszt: " *Sa main n'est pas immobile, il la remue avec grâce selon sa fantaisie, mais il ne joue point du bras, ni des épaules. Il veut que le corps soit droit et la tête plutôt en arrière que baisée; il exige cela impérieusement.*"(Boissier, Madame Auguste, Liszt Pédagogue. Paris: Honoré Champion, 1927.p. 16.)

Emil Sauer, who studied with both Nicholas Rubinstein and Franz Liszt, advised students "to strive for naturalness. Avoid ostentatious movements in your playing. Let your playing be as quiet as possible. The wrist should be loose. The hands, to my mind, should be neither high nor low, but should be in line with the forearm. One should continually strive for quietness. Nothing should be forced. Ease in playing is always admirable..." (Cooke, James Francis, Great Pianists on Piano Playing. Philadelphia: Theodore Presser Co., 1913. p.247.)

Rachmaninoff was well-known for his reticent bearing at the keyboard. In a review of his 1935 Carnegie Hall recital, the New York Times critic Olin Downes portrayed him thus: "He seats himself at the piano and plays. He does not smile once through the whole occasion. In no way does he gesticulate or parade. All that he communicates he says with two wrists and ten fingers, without the raising of an eyebrow."(Bertensson, Sergei, and Leyda, Jay, Sergei Rachmaninoff: A Lifetime in Music. New York: New York University Press, 1956. p. 314.)

The journalist Helen Epstein wrote of Vladimir Horowitz: "His body remains immobile as he plays slow movements, his face impassive --- as if he were looking down at a display case in a department store instead of at the keyboard. When he plays fast movements, the pianist of necessity moves more, but there is rarely a flicker of recognizable emotion across his face. The emotion goes into his fingers."(Epstein, Helen, Music Talks: Conversations with Musicians. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1987. p. 13.)

3. Robinson, Harlow, "Earl Wild," Musical America, February 1986.

4.Chopin, Frederic. *Projet du methode*, as described in Eigeldinger, Jean-Jacques, Chopin: Pianist and Teacher --- as seen by his pupils, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986, p. 19.

5.His own students describe Chopin as using the same finger consecutively in cantabile passages. Carl Mikuli wrote, "With one and the same finger he often struck two neighboring keys in succession (and this not only when sliding from a black key to a white key,) without the slightest noticeable break in the continuity of the line." (From the introduction to Mikuli's edition of Chopin's Nocturnes, published by G. Schirmer.)

Madame Courty, another pupil of Chopin's said, "The third finger is a *grand chanteur.*" There are numerous examples in the original editions and editions made by Chopin's pupils, of fingerings in which the same finger appears on consecutive notes. (Eigeldinger, pp. 46-48, and p. 244.)

6.Baker, Theodore. Dictionary of Musical Terms, (New York: G. Schirmer, Inc., 1923) , p. 205.

7.Eigeldinger, p. 31.

8.Janina Fialkowska, also reported learning from Artur Rubinstein the use of a flat finger in melody playing. "That's another thing I learned from Rubinstein, the importance of colors, of using many different types of tone at the piano. When producing this beautiful singing (tone) the flatter your finger is, naturally." (Noyles, Linda. Interviews with Twelve Concert Pianists, New Jersey and London: The Scarecrow Press, 1987, p. 67.)

CHAPTER IV

INTERPRETATION

Earl Wild's teaching of interpretation was extremely detailed and thorough. In this chapter I will discuss some of his ideas regarding phrasing, connection of phrases, timing, and tone. I will also address some of his insights into achieving color through voicing, imaginative borrowing of orchestral sounds, and pedaling.

Phrasing

Phrasing is the soul of interpretation; for every performer it must be individual, unique and flexible. Yet I was encouraged to learn from Mr. Wild that there are certain ways to phrase which always sound natural, convincing, and elegant. Rachmaninoff himself asserted that there are certain "laws" of phrasing which every student must learn.[1] As Mr. Wild once said about the Chopin B-flat Minor Sonata, "There are many different ways to play it, provided you impart the rhetoric."

Length of Phrases

The first thing to consider is the length of the phrase or line. Mr. Wild taught his pupils to think always in long lines. An instructive example can be found in the slow movement of Beethoven's Sonata Op. 10 No. 1:

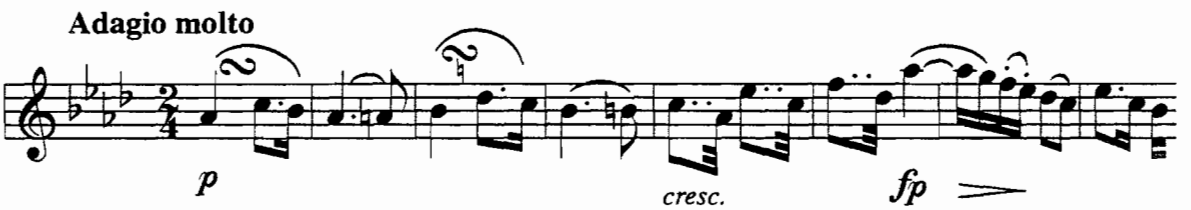

Fig. 17. Beethoven, Sonata Op. 10, No. 1, Adagio molto, mm. 1-8

The student's initial tendency might be to exaggerate the small phrases which occur every two measures, believing this to be more musical. However, Mr. Wild pointed out that while the first small phrase would be interesting, the second one would sound boring, and the third deadly. He once admonished a student to "Know your destination and don't bore your audience with starts and stops." Therefore, the more effective approach is to consider the first phrase a *long* line, which begins in the first measure and does not end until the ninth. In this way, the entire first theme is connected for eight full bars.

Mr. Wild warned, as did Rachmaninoff (see endnotes) against the visual impact of phrase and other articulation marking, including some dynamic markings. These can stifle the inclination to create longer musical lines. He asserted that the small phrase marks employed by Beethoven, Mozart and Haydn, often have more to do with articulation (as

might be used by a string player to facilitate bowing) than an indication of overall line, and corroborated Rachmaninoff's contention that, since even the "authoritative" editions often contradict one another about phrase marks, it is better in the final analysis to trust one's own judgment.

In contrast to the phrase markings of Classical period composers, Mr. Wild stated that Chopin's annotation (long phrase marks which may encompass many measures) presents the opposite problem. Although the performer should continue to think in a long line, it is wise to break a very long phrase into smaller groups, lifting the hand slightly between these groups, as has been illustrated in the previous chapter. (See Figure 15, Chopin Sonata in B Minor, Largo.) This allows the phrase to breathe, the hand to be liberated, and the tone thus renewed. Mr. Wild showed that these groupings are flexible, that the long line can be divided into smaller groups in many different ways, according to the individual taste of the performer.

Once the length of the line or phrase is established, the next questions are timing and tone. The two greatly affect each other, but will be discussed here separately.

Tone control in playing

In the title to his Two and Three-Part Inventions, J.S. Bach wrote that one of the aims of these compositions was to teach a cantabile style of playing. Indeed, the aim of every great instrumentalist has been to transmit to his or her instrument the wide range of nuance and emotion found in the voice. To do this takes enormous consideration, insight and feeling. Mr. Wild reassured his pupils that he himself had struggled with an elusive phrase for "weeks," "months" or even "years" before arriving at a way of playing which satisfied him.

Mr. Wild wanted the student first to be able to play all the notes in a melody evenly, to match the tones, not allowing physical variations to make the notes go randomly up or down in volume. He suggested that it is often helpful to practice the melody all with the third finger, as has been described in the previous chapter.

Announcing a Phrase

In many pieces with a moderate or fast tempo, certain phrases sound best if announced with a louder tone at their beginning. In the last movement of Beethoven's Sonata Op. 10, No. 1, each of the phrases shown here with a fork should begin with a louder tone, then immediately be followed by a decrease in volume:

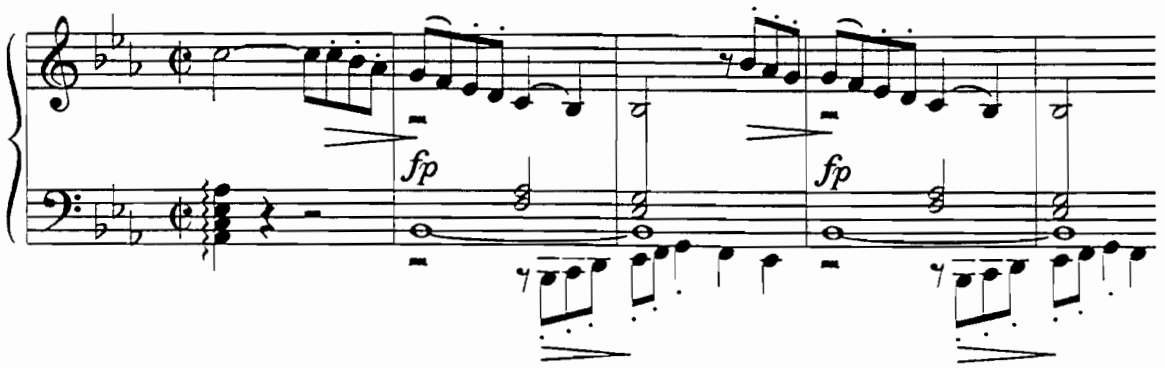

Fig. 18. Beethoven, Op. 10, No.1, Prestissimo, mm. 22-26.

Announcing each phrase in this way heightens the counterpoint, bringing a robust, conversational quality to the passage, much as might be achieved if different instruments of the orchestra were "talking" to each other.

In faster tempos, there are innumerable moments in which the very beginning of a phrase is played with a stronger tone than the notes immediately following it, giving the music a vitality which is perhaps what William Mason alluded to in Liszt's playing. "He was very fond of strong accents in order to mark off periods and phrases, and he talked so much about strong accentuation that one might have supposed that he would abuse it, but he never did... While I was playing to him for the first time, he said... 'Don't play it that way. Play it like this.' ... He sat down, and gave the same phrases with an accentuated, elastic movement, which let in a flood of light upon me."[2]

Mr. Wild showed that tapering the notes can also be applied effectively to many accompaniment-type figures. Tapering imparts grace, lightness, and a rhythmic animation to the accompaniment which heightens the melody without ever being obtrusive:

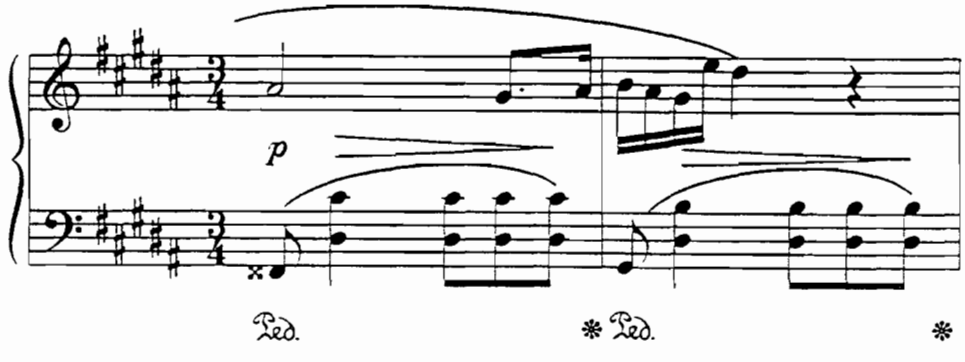

Fig. 19. Chopin, Polonaise-Fantasie, Op. 61, mm. 182-183.

Many other rhythmic motifs can benefit from a similar treatment:

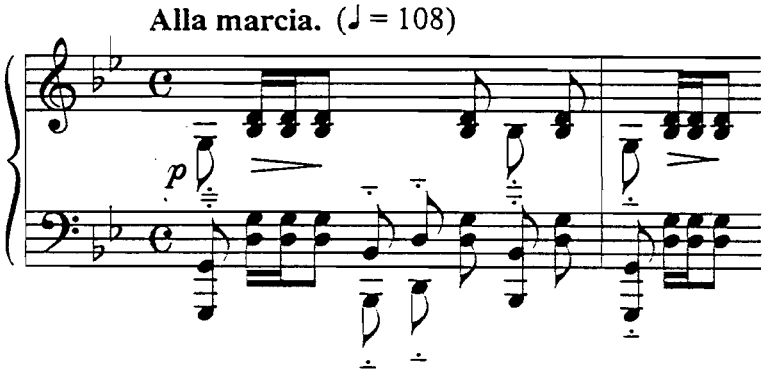

Fig. 20. Rachmaninoff, Prelude in G Minor, Op. 23 No. 5, mm. 1-2

Not Dropping the Tone

Announcing a phrase or rhythmic motif by tapering the notes does not imply that one should continue to allow the tone of the phrase to dwindle. To the contrary, dropping the tone at the end of a phrase is a habit which should be assiduously avoided. Mr. Wild likened it to a person who would cover up their mouth just as they were about to divulge something. He labeled this type of phrasing the "down-up school of piano playing." Besides sounding mannered and repetitive, dropping the phrases causes an emotional discomfort in the ear of the listener, because the music seems to start and stop continually, ruining the natural flow and impact of the long line.

Mr. Wild taught that when the performer wants to connect the "joints" of phrases (the end of one phrase with the beginning of the next), it is important not to drop the last note of the first phrase too much, nor begin the first note of the next phrase with an accent. In order to connect the two phrases, these tones must be somewhat matched in volume. The pianist should only drop the end of a phrase when he or she wants it to come to a stop.

Another place where the pianist must bolster the tone is in phrases where the pitches descend. Because of acoustic and psychological phenomena, there is a tendency for the lower pitches to seem softer. The pianist must take care in such instances to bring these notes out slightly, or play "to the bottom of the phrase."

Timing

Tempo, rhythm, and movement in musical interpretation are again highly individual and influenced by the internal clock of each player's unique nervous system. Mr. Wild's strong ideas about tempo and rhythm were shaped in part by his many years playing orchestral piano under such diverse conductors as Toscanini, Klemperer, Fritz Reiner, Stokowski, Leinsdorf, and Beecham. Although he encouraged using the metronome to clear up rhythm problems (such as rushing or bogging down), he also said that steadiness, in the literal sense, was "a mirage."

Metric Subdivisions

Mr. Wild demonstrated that the best tempo may often be achieved by thinking of a piece in larger (or smaller) metric subdivisions than the time signature may indicate. For instance, the first movement of Mozart's Sonata in A, K. 331, is written in 6/8 meter:

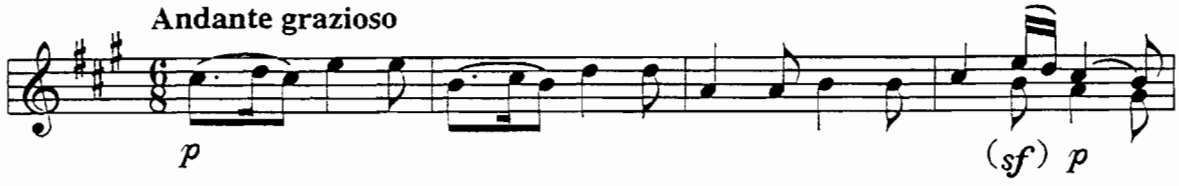

Fig. 21. Mozart, Sonata in A, K. 331, Andante grazioso, theme.

The standard response is to think of each measure as subdivided in 2, but an even better approach is to feel one long beat per measure. This sustains the line, and creates a true grazioso feeling.

On the other hand, certain pieces such as Beethoven's Third Concerto are best if played in their true time signature. Mr. Wild disliked some conductors' practice of reducing the 4/4 meter in this piece by conducting it in 2. He called this lazy conducting, and believed it robbed the piece of its strength and nobility.

Mr. Wild also showed that metric subdivisions do not remain constant within a piece, but are governed by what is occurring in the music at any given time. For example, the beginning of the Finale of Beethoven's Sonata Op. 10, No. 1, begins "in 2."

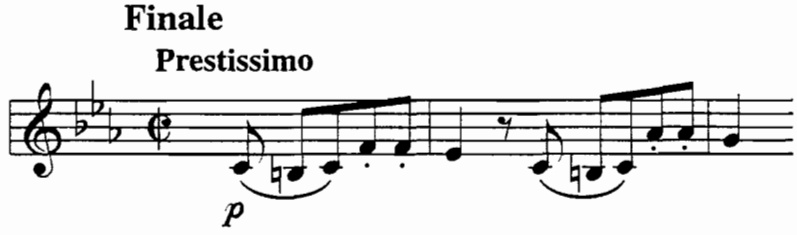

Fig. 22. Beethoven, Sonata Op. 10, No.1, Finale, mm.1-2

However, when the second theme is introduced in measure 16, the change in mood indicates that the meter should be felt "in 4."

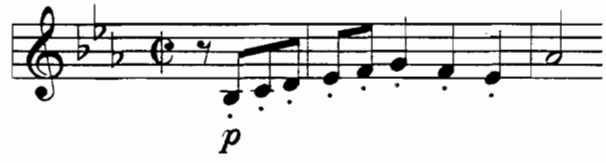

Fig. 23. Beethoven, Sonata Op. 10, No.1, Finale, measure 16.

This idea of changing metric pulse helps the pianist achieve flexibility, and a performance which is always interesting.

Rubato and Motion *within* a Phrase

Because rubato is so greatly influenced by personal feeling and taste, it is often difficult to explain. Mr. Wild, however, had devised an effective means to illustrate rubato.

In addition to conducting or singing a passage, he would often improvise an accompaniment at the second piano while the student played, stretching the tempo to indicate when and how to slow down, and gently urging the student on when the tempo needed to move. Immediately the subtle changes in movement would become very clear, and with the support of his accompaniment, the student's playing would be liberated.

In helping a student to attain the proper motion in a musical passage, Mr. Wild sometimes referred to the illusion of "playing the long notes fast and the short notes slow." For instance, in the Sarabande of Debussy's *Pour le piano*, the quarter notes and half notes should move ("don't sit on them" Mr. Wild would say) while the triplets and eighths should be more rounded, and slightly stretched.

Fig. 24. Debussy, *Pour le piano*, Sarabande.

Moving the long notes gives this Sarabande forward motion, while stretching the short ones maintains its composure. Mr. Wild had the student imagine the beginning of this piece as "giving a blessing in dance," and the movement of the middle section as "an Oriental princess riding an elephant in a royal procession."

Artur Schnabel discussed this concept of hastening and stretching when he said to "play the eighth notes slow and the quarter notes fast."[3]

Mr. Wild also applied the same concept in dealing with suspensions. A suspension is essentially a lengthened note. As such, Mr. Wild cautioned the student not to "sit" or linger on the suspension, but to move off of it quickly, as can be shown in the following example from the middle section of Liszt's *Dante* Sonata:

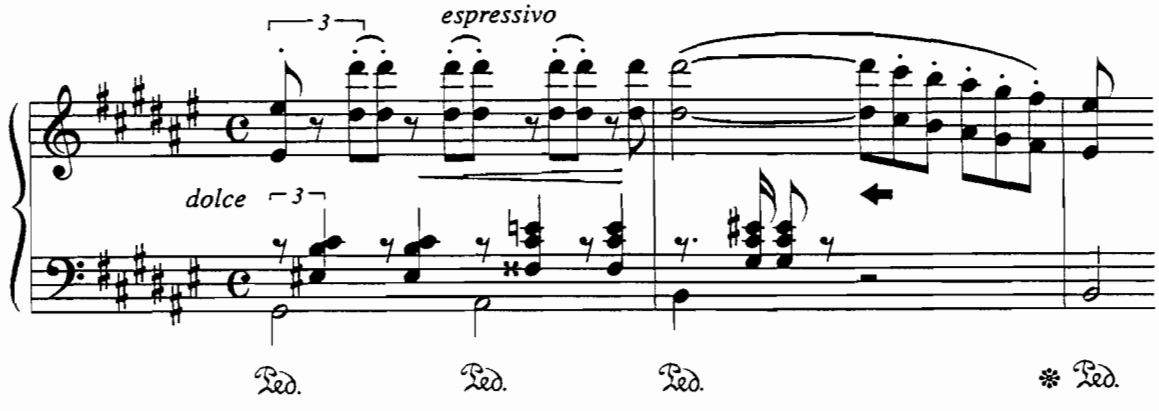

Fig. 25. Liszt, *Après une lecture du Dante --Fantasia quasi sonata*, mm. 131-132.

Rolled chords

The question of rolled chords will be discussed here, because their correct performance will help preserve the rhythm. Because of the limitation of the span of the hand, it is often necessary to roll or break a chord or interval which, if written out orchestrally, would ideally be sounded together. Sometimes the chord is intentionally rolled to produce a guitar or harp-like effect. An illustrative example can be found again in

Debussy's Sarabande from *Pour le piano*:

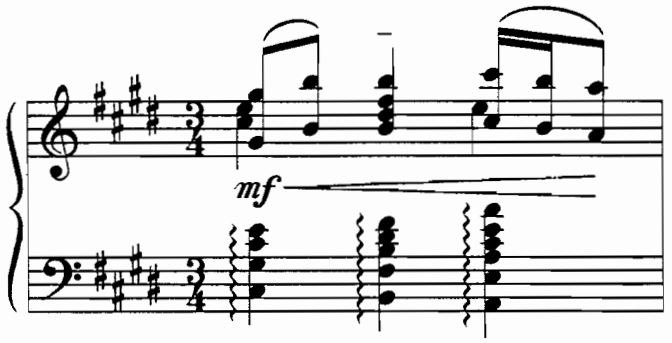

Fig.26. Debussy, *Pour le piano*, Sarabande, m. 19.

In nearly all cases, it is best to play the lower notes of the rolled chord just before the beat. To aid the student in playing the rolled chords at the right time, Mr. Wild would often write in tied grace notes, for true rhythmic precision:

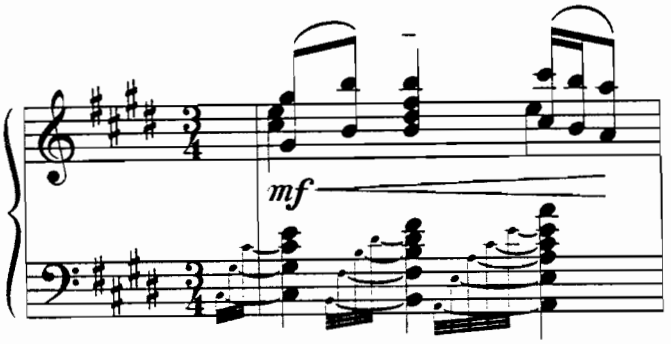

Fig. 27. Debussy, *Pour le piano,* Sarabande, m. 19.

This visual assistance also helps the student apply the pedal at the right time; i.e., with the bass note.

Motion Towards a Goal

One reason for the power of a Wild performance is that the listener is always swept toward a coherent musical goal. While maintaining a basically steady tempo, Mr. Wild plays with forward motion, and avoids the habit of bogging down. In lessons, he was fond of paraphrasing Liszt's advice to "know where you're going and don't stop till you get there."

This was remarkably demonstrated in a masterclass when a student played the last movement of Beethoven's "Moonlight" Sonata. Although this Prestissimo was performed correctly, the piece lacked excitement. To help the student, Mr. Wild stood up and conducted, urging the student to hasten to the sforzandi at the top of each arpeggiated passage, and to drive to the bottom G-sharp fermata in measure 14. Without sounding rushed, the performance suddenly had line and electricity. The interpretation was now more in keeping with Ries' description of Beethoven's own playing: "Generally Beethoven himself played his compositions very impetuously, yet for the most part stayed strictly in time, only infrequently pushing the tempo a little."[4]

Calm Playing

On the other hand, Mr. Wild felt very strongly about playing certain pieces with great calm, especially the slow movements of Beethoven's sonatas, many Chopin Nocturnes, Mazurkas, and other expressive, lyrical pieces. At these times he would exhort the pupil to play with "total repose,"or "don't be agitated" (in the Chopin B Major Nocturne), or "play this with true melancholy" (in Chopin's Mazurka in A Minor, Op. 17 No. 4).

In realizing this calm and repose, the performer must be cognizant of the speed of moving upbeats. In the following example, notice how stretching all the third beats, and

especially the moving eighth notes in the third measure, will impart an unhurried quality to this beautiful phrase:

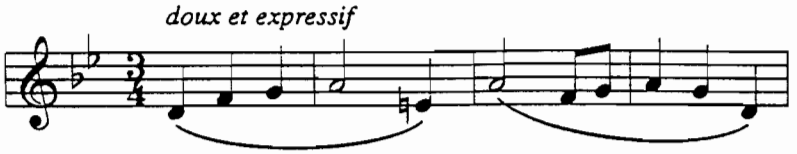

Fig. 28. Ravel, Valses nobles et sentimentales, Valse II, mm. 9-12.

It is also important in slower pieces to play any ornaments at a corresponding speed. Mr. Wild said to consider ornaments in slower tempos melodic rather than technical. All Chopin ornamental runs can be played with a feeling of ease. Chopin himself said "they should sound as though improvised"[5]. Occasionally, one ornament will succeed another; for instance, a trill will immediately precede a run. In this case, Mr. Wild suggested that the performer think of them as a single entity, that is, as one long melodic ornament.

Color

Earl Wild is a master colorist. He showed how the pianist can achieve a myriad of sounds, the variety of which can be surpassed only by a symphony orchestra. He showed that color in piano playing results from the imaginative use of dynamics, bringing out of voices, balancing chords, and resourceful pedalling.

Voicing and Balance

Because of the polyphonic nature of piano music, the performer must choose which voice to bring out at any one time. Except in certain contrapuntal works, rarely can more than one voice predominate. Mr. Wild said this was a concept he learned from Egon Petri, that, normally, the secondary voices must be played lighter.

This is especially true when managing forte passages. For instance, toward the end of Chopin's Mazurka Op. 41 No.4, playing every voice *ff* would only result in a noisy, raucous sound:

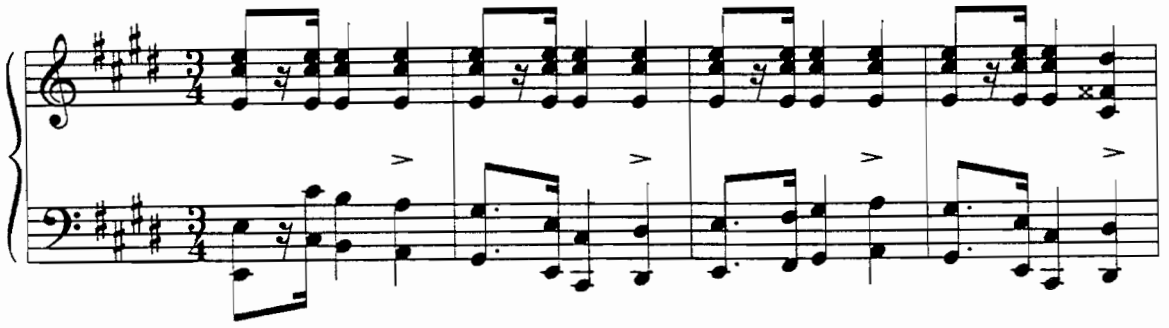

Fig. 29. Chopin, Mazurka, Op. 41 No.4, mm. 123-126.

A more plausible voicing would be to play *ff* only in the tenor (thumb) voice in the left hand, slightly lighter in the bass, and *mp* or even *p* in the right hand. The effect is still fortissimo, but good tone and clarity are preserved.

Mr. Wild also showed how voicings can change during the course of a run, depending on the range of the passage. An example can be found in the following unison section from Beethoven's Emperor Concerto:

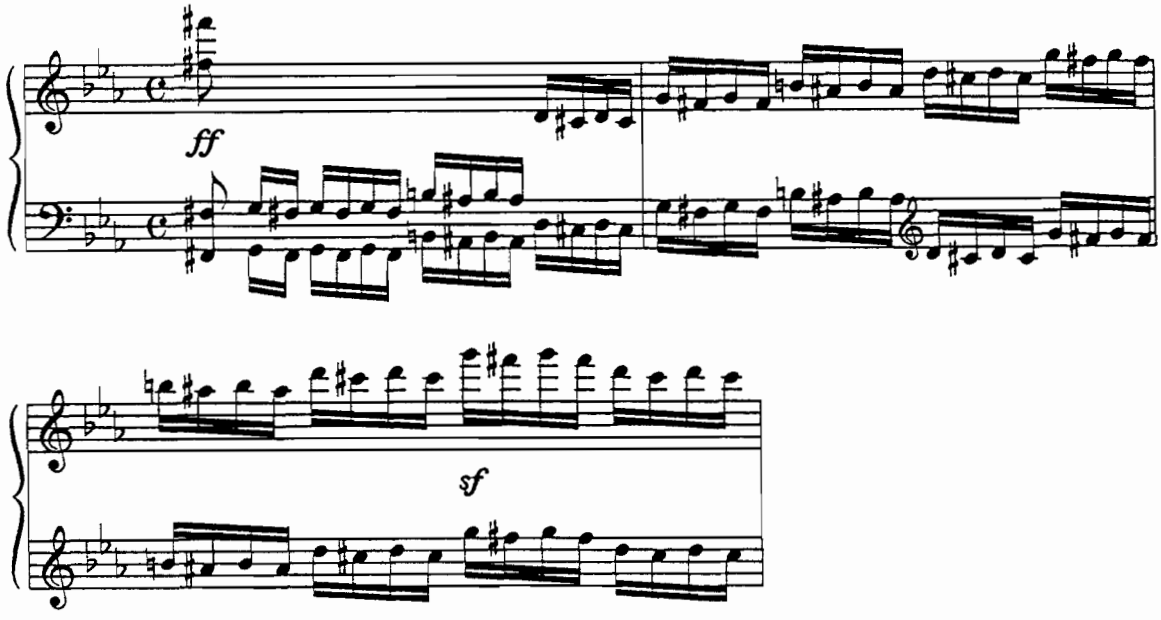

Fig. 30. Beethoven, Concerto No. 5, Mvt. I

Rather than playing both hands *ff*, it is better to begin this passage with more sound in the left hand, and less in the right. As the line ascends, gradually increase the tone in the right hand, correspondingly decreasing it in the left. In this way, even more excitement is rendered by making the beginning thunderous, and ending with brilliance at the top.

Indeed, Mr. Wild taught that a truly brilliant tone can only be achieved by intelligent voicing. In order for the tone to penetrate above the orchestra in thick concerto writing, never play all tones and both hands *ff*. This attempt will only produce a loud thud; ugly at best, injurious at worst. Instead, bring out the tones in the upper voices by lessening the left hand, as can be shown in the following example from the Grieg Concerto:

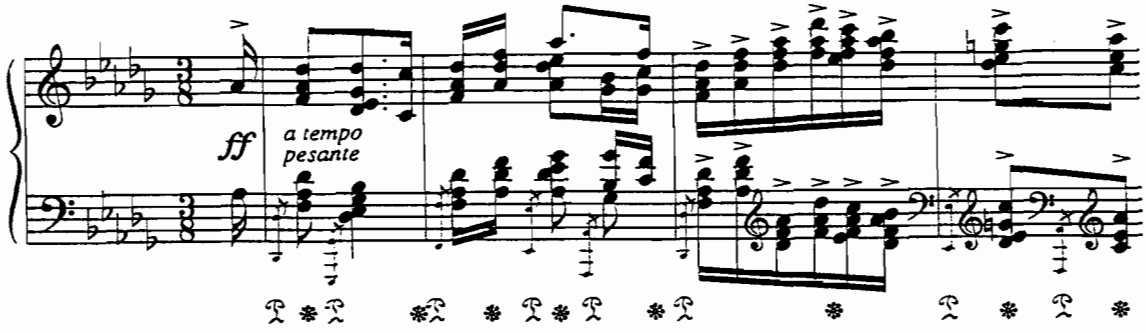

Fig. 31. Grieg, Concerto in A Minor, Mvt. II.

Here it is important to bring out the right hand only, and more specifically, the top note in the right hand, especially in the third and fourth measures. The passage will now have a ringing sound that easily soars above the orchestra.

Many well-known concerti and other pieces (the Schumann and Grieg Concertos, Schumann's *Carnaval*) begin with a solo *fortissimo* passage. Mr. Wild counseled the student in this case to "Be wise." Do not overplay at the beginning. Since the audience's ear is fresh, they will accept the performer's opening as *fortissimo*. By leaving something in reserve, the climax can then be spectacular.

Mr. Wild also cautioned the student to restrain the fortissimos in Classical era compositions. He considered the limited power of the instruments of that period and objected to a full-blown Romantic-era *fortissimo* in the playing of Haydn, Mozart, and early Beethoven. He taught that all dynamic markings from this period should be moderated somewhat.

The corollary to *forte* playing follows: if a passage is marked *piano* in the score, its softness is only relative. Mr. Wild was fond of quoting Toscanini in this instance, "There is

no such thing as a *piano* when you have something to say." That is, many cantabile passages, even if marked *p*, still must be played with a healthy enough sound to carry to the person sitting in the last row of the hall. Moments such as the beginning of Ravel's *Ondine* therefore ought not to be too wispy when the haunting melody comes in.

For greatest effect, Mr. Wild taught that the performer must save his or her softest *pianissimo* for the most exceptional moments; in this case, the sound should be so hushed that the audience must hold themselves perfectly still to hear it. This effect, if used sparingly, can be breathtaking.

Orchestral sounds in voicing

Because of his experience as a composer and orchestrator, Mr. Wild envisioned other instruments to bring full color to a piece. Most often he liked to assign the parts of bell, horns, trumpets and woodwinds to various aspects of piano music.

Bell tones occur when there is a singular bass or treble note outside of the range of the main musical passage. The low F which begins the coda of Chopin's F Minor Ballade and the low C's at the beginning of Liszt's *Funerailles* are striking examples. A beautiful high bell-tone occurs in Chopin's G Minor Ballade, as shown in the next figure.

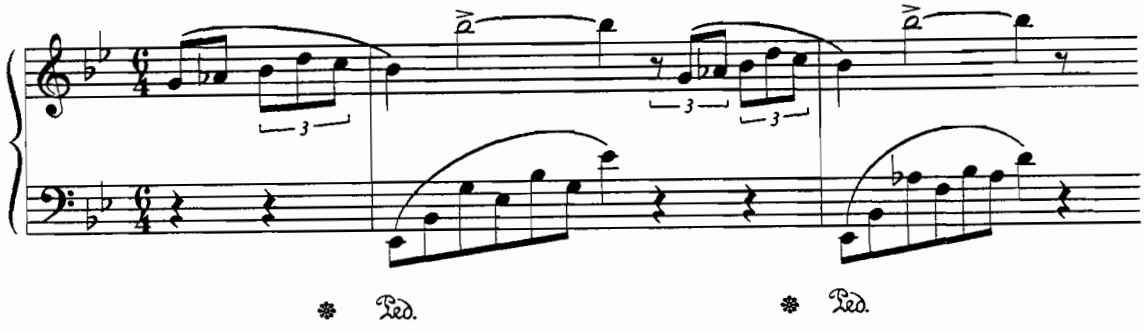

Fig. 32. Chopin, Ballade in G Minor, mm. 87-88.

Mr. Wild depicted the high B-flats as a cloister bell.

Striking these notes as bell tones means the arm must be as loose as a gong player's. This ensures the proper ease of attack and helps the performer achieve a ringing sonority, which sustains throughout the passage.

The imitation of woodwinds is used for their crispness and brevity of attack, in the first theme of Beethoven's Sonata Op. 10 No. 3:

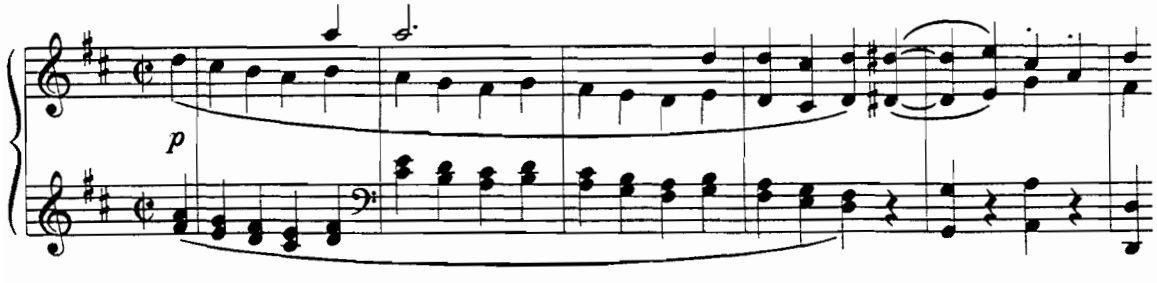

Fig. 33. Beethoven, Sonata Op. 10 No. 3, Mvt. I, mm. 5-10.

Here the top voice (beginning with high A's) can be thought of as woodwinds whose brightness punctuates the "strings" sound of the voices below.

Horn calls occur frequently throughout the piano literature. A prominent example, which Mr. Wild said reminded him of *Der fliegende Hollander*, comes from the middle bars of Chopin's G Minor Ballade:

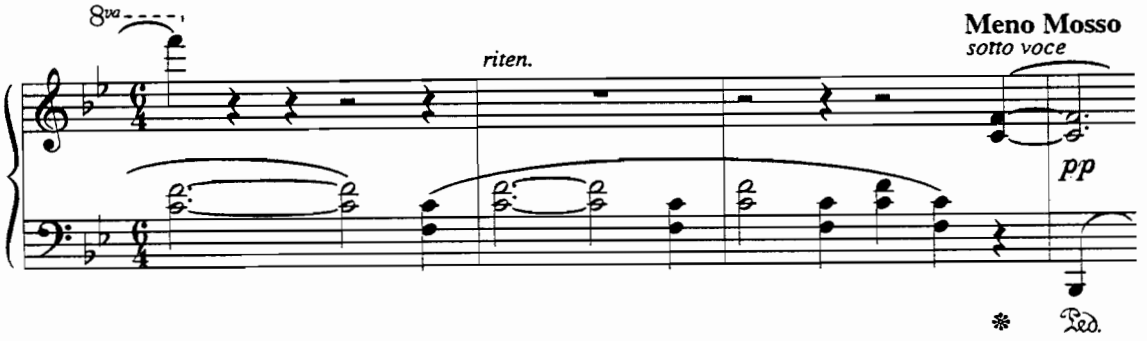

Fig. 34. Chopin, Ballade in G Minor, mm. 65-67.

It is also beneficial to think of horns when an inner voice needs to have a penetrating but not intrusive quality. In the following example from the slow movement of Beethoven's Sonata Op. 10 No. 1, the repetitive E-flats represent a horn line, which sustains the passage in a harmonious way.

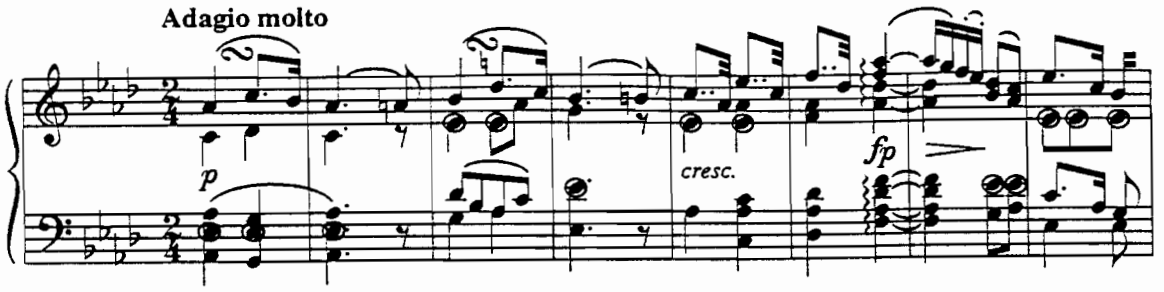

Fig. 35. Beethoven, Sonata Op. 10 No. 1 , Adagio molto, mm. 1-8.

Inner horn lines should always be looked for and brought out. Besides creating a lush sonority, they help sustain the overall musical line into a coherent whole.

Pedaling

Rachmaninoff asserted that "The pedal is the study of a lifetime. It is the most difficult branch of pianoforte study."[6] Indeed, Mr. Wild's own pedalings were intricate and carefully thought out. He instructed his pupils to always keep both feet at the pedals so that they could be accessible.

When the first note or chord of a piece is to be pedaled, the pianist should depress the damper pedal (and the una corda when called for), before he plays the first note. This way, all the sympathetic vibrations of the surrounding strings are immediately activated, and the sound does not change half-way through the first note.

Mr. Wild spent considerable time devising ingenious pedallings that would enhance the line and harmonies while maintaining the clarity of each note. He rarely followed pedallings of the conventional type; that is, ones which uniformly changed with the chord or bar line. He was more interested in sustaining the bass line with his pedaling, and abhorred the practice of lifting the pedal on rests to create a dry sound. He frequently pedaled over short rests to connect phrases (except in classical era music such as Mozart and Haydn, when he scrupulously kept the rests very clean.) An example of Mr. Wild's pedaling style may be found at the opening of Chopin's F Minor Ballade:

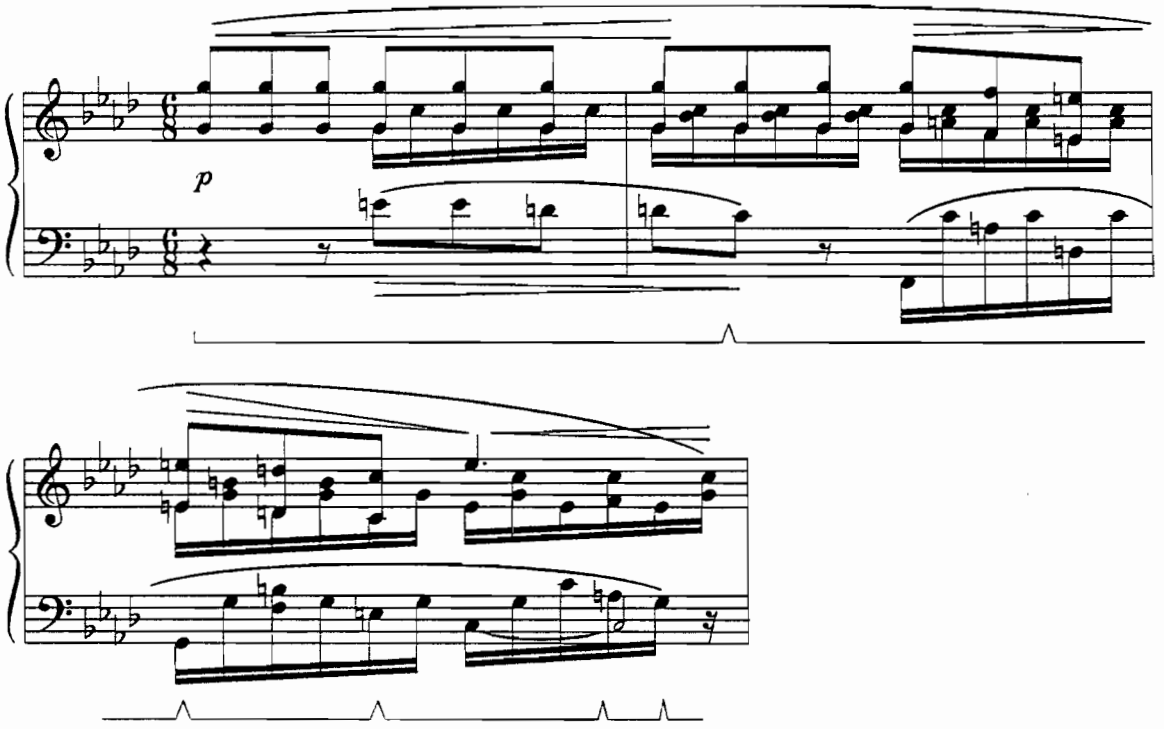

Fig. 36. Chopin, Ballade in F Minor, Op. 54, mm. 1-3.

The low F in bar 3 must be played with a big sound, and the bass-line C in bar 5 must be held over as indicated by the tie (Mr. Wild's addition), in order to carry over through the frequent pedaling changes which follow. Notice that this type of pedaling produces a

line, and erases the square, metric performance that would result from a more conventional pedalling.

Mr. Wild taught that the bigger the hall, the more pedal it could tolerate. He would remind students that their pedalling, which might sound fine in a small studio, would disappear if reproduced in a big hall. He always advised practicing with the sound of a big hall in mind, and to experiment with longer pedallings. For instance, Rachmaninoff's Prelude in G Major, Op. 32 No.5 (which he said depicted a swan --paddling), requires a pedal that is held continuously for the first five measures, to produce a liquid sound.

Mr. Wild made frequent use of the middle, or sostenuto, pedal. He claimed that one of the great advantages of having big feet was that he could pedal both the left and middle pedals at the same time with the left foot, which he did often. He used the middle pedal to sustain an underlying bass note while clearly pedalling the harmonic changes above it, and used this technique in places which were not readily obvious, such as in Chopin's E Major Scherzo:

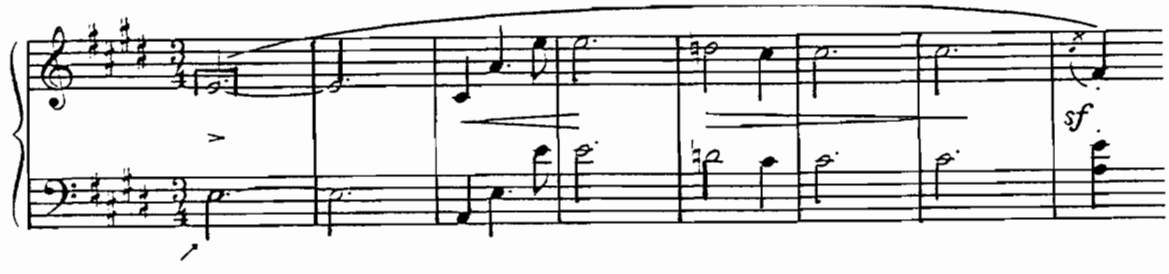

Fig. 37. Chopin, Scherzo in E Major, Op. 58, mm. 58-65.

Here, the left hand E's should be played with the distinctive timbre of muted horns, and the sostenuto pedal applied. The rest of the phrase can be cleanly pedaled with the right foot, while the E's remain sounding through.

He also advised making use of the middle pedal to lift silently the dampers of a particular note before a piece begins, when appropriate. For instance, in Liszt's *Funerailles*, the octave low C's of the funeral bell may be depressed silently and held with the middle pedal before the piece begins. The middle pedal is sustained for 17 measures, creating a pedal point in the truest sense of the word.[7]

Mr. Wild used the left pedal (una corda) in nearly all quiet, dolcissimo passages, and many other instances as well. This idea goes against certain pedantic views, such as those promoted by Clara Schumann's father, Friedrich Wieck, who was perhaps one of the first influential teachers who taught the unfortunate idea that the "soft" pedal was some sort of crutch, and ought to be avoided by any pianist who could play softly with the fingers alone.[8] Rather than thinking of the left pedal as an aid to playing softly, Mr. Wild showed the pupil that it has the capacity to completely transform the color of the instrument. Mr. Wild made it a point to have the shifter mechanism on the left pedal adjusted to its point of maximum effect. Used along with the damper pedal and the proper touch, the left pedal can help create some of the most ravishing tones on the instrument.

Summary

A literal discussion of any artist's interpretation is by nature severely limited since the best aspects of music are, of course, ineffable. Yet in teaching his concept of interpretation, Mr. Wild was exacting, detailed, and precise. He knew exactly what he

wanted. He had no patience for pedantry or academic dogma. Instead, he focused on creating long, compelling musical lines, phrasing which sounded as natural as the human voice, flexibility in timing, and the production of an extraordinary tone. He taught the student to examine the score for the best voicing and chord balance, to think imaginatively in terms of color, and to devise inventive pedallings. Above all, he gave his students a fundamental understanding of these principles, thus enabling them to sound free.

Endnotes to Chapter Four

1. Rachmaninoff stated that "An artistic interpretation is not possible if the student does not know the laws underlying the very important subject of phrasing.Unfortunately many editions of good music are found wanting in proper phrase markings. Some of the phrase signs are erroneously applied. Consequently the only safe way is for the student to make a special study of this important branch of musical art. In the olden days phrase signs were little used. Bach used them very sparingly. It was not necessary to mark them in those times, for every musician who counted himself a musician could determine the phrases as he played. But a knowledge of the means of defining phrases in a composition is by no means all-sufficient. Skill in executing the phrases is quite as important. The real musical feeling must exist in the mind of the composer or all the knowledge of correct phrasing he may possess will be worthless." (Cooke, James Francis. Great Pianists on Piano Playing, Philadelphia: Theodore Presser Co., 1913, p. 212.)

2. Mason, William. Memories of a Musical Life. New York: AMS Press, 1970, Reprint of 1901 edition, p. 99.

3. Wolff, Konrad. The Interpretation of Artur Schnabel, New York:Norton Press, 1972. p. 28.

4. Wegeler, Franz Gerhard and Ries, Ferdinand. *Biographische Notizen über Beethoven*, Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1972 as quoted in Newman, William S., Beethoven on Beethoven, New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1988. p. 112.

5. Lenz, Wilhelm von. '*Übersichtliche Beurtheilung der Pianofote-Kompositionen von Chopin*', *Neue Berliner Musikzeitung, XXVI,* as quoted in Eigeldinger, p. 52.

6. Cooke, p. 214.

7. Wild, Earl, ed. The Piano Music of Franz Liszt, Vol. II, New York: G. Schirmer, Inc., 1989, p. 9.

8. Chissell, Joan. Clara Schumann: A Dedicated Spirit, London: Hamish Hamilton, 1983, p. 5.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

In the previous two chapters I have given an overview of some of Earl Wild's basic teachings on technique and interpretation. I learned many other practical things from him as well. Besides conveying the details of his pianistic art, Mr. Wild showed, by example, how to nurture a long, flourishing career. His continuous mastery of the field can be summarized in three words: work, preparation, and flexibility.

It is apparent that any artist of great stature owes much of his achievement to the continual development of his craft. Mr. Wild works to this day with unbelievable fortitude and stamina. In describing his regime to the Sunday Star-Ledger, he said, "I practice every day four or five hours. I compose and transcribe."[1] To Asia Life he explained, "When I finish a tour, I go home and start preparing for the next. It's constant preparation. You have different music to learn and you need to play it by memory. I practice five to six hours a day. It keeps me very busy."[2]

He is also very shrewd about the practical side of the business, and leaves nothing to chance. His recital programs, usually mammoth in proportion, are often presented to friends and colleagues in an informal setting weeks before the public performances. As he has said in Asia Life:

> I still get nervous before I perform. You just have to accept it, the nerves are there. But I do prepare myself well. (Being a concert pianist) is a high-wire act. You get used to it. Before I give a concert, I do three performances at home for 10 to 15 friends. That's the hardest thing to do. They're right in front of you and they can say anything they please.[3]

Mr. Wild also makes sure that the piano itself is also well-prepared. Having developed a long-standing relationship with the Baldwin Piano Company, he receives a new Baldwin concert grand piano for his performances in the U.S., along with the service of their chief technician, who arrives at the venue several days before Mr. Wild, to prepare the piano. I once watched Mr. Wild work with a technician for hours to get the voicing of a piano perfectly even; the patience and knowledge he displayed for this task was remarkable. He also has the piano regulated with a lighter action; while capable of greater speed, this lighter action also required greater control, as many an unsuspecting student has discovered.

In other preparations, Mr. Wild always listens to recordings by other artists of the same pieces he is currently playing. He has a vast record collection, and listens with great interest to others' interpretations. He also uses the tape recorder in practice sessions, usually when a piece is nearly ready for performance. He has said that this helps him clear up any exaggerations or tempo problems.

Mr. Wild's work ethic carries over into the recording process as well, about which he is very particular. Since he feels that recordings are his legacy, he wants them to be an accurate transmission of his art. Rather than leave this to the impersonal direction of a large record company, he works with his own producer, Michael Rolland Davis, and engineer, Ed Thompson. He oversees the entire process, from the preparation of the piano to the final

editing. The results have been extraordinary, as the reviews I have listed in Appendix B show.

Not only industrious and wise, Mr. Wild is also flexible. He has a spontaneous, open manner, and a witty, irreverent sense of humor that leaves everyone disarmed. "He is controversial, a character, a maverick... He's a gift to any journalist who wants a quotable quote."[4] This attribute, of always looking at things in original ways, of frankly expressing his views, likes, and dislikes, allows him to approach the music in an open, unorthodox, way.

This flexibility is evident in the nature of his career, which has been discussed in Chapter Two. It is also responsible for the unusual material he has chosen to work with, both in his performing repertoire and in the piano transcriptions he has created. Two recent examples of the latter are his large-scale work for piano and orchestra called the "Doo-dah" Variations (based on Stephen Foster's "Camptown Races"), and a transcription based on Bach's Sarabande from the B-flat Partita which he transformed into a poignant "Hommage à Poulenc." Mr. Wild always does the unexpected.

This inspired aspect of Mr. Wild's art finds its culmination in his live performances. There is simply no substitute for experiencing his art in this way. He parallels Tausig who said "I am no drawing-room pianist, it is only in public that I can command all my resources."[5] Mr. Wild is able to fill a large hall with his huge sound. He keeps his audience spellbound with his flawless line and commanding presence. The technical feats which he accomplishes are astonishing and remain so well into his ninth decade.

Mr. Wild possesses that extra factor which he says a great performer needs to have, the technical facility and musical understanding which escape teaching and words. As he

said in a 1992 interview, "You can teach people how to play the piano, but you cannot really teach them how to make music. If they have it, you can lead them."[6] Through his detailed and inspiring lessons, his own remarkable performances and recordings, and his original example as an extraordinary human being, he does more than open the door for his students, he, like the north star in the words of the old American spiritual, "can show them the way."

Endnotes to Chapter Five

1. Michael Redmond, "Unbridled Virtuosity, Still," Sunday Star-Ledger, October 25, 1992.

2. Sheridan, Margaret, "Tuned to Perfection", Asia Life, May 1990.

3. Ibid.

4. Fagan, Keith, "Romance Man: Profile of Earl Wild," Classic CD, November 1990.

5. Lenz, Wilhelm von. The Great Piano Virtuosos of our Time, translated and edited by Philip Reder, London: Regency Press, 1971, p. 59.

6. Redmond, op. cit.

APPENDIX A

WORKS STUDIED WITH EARL WILD

**indicates works heard only in masterclass*

J.S. BACH	Toccata in G Major, BWV 916 Italian Concerto, BWV 971 *Bach-Busoni, "Wachet auf"
HAYDN, FRANZ JOSEPH	Sonata in C Major, Hob. XVI: 50
MOZART, W.A.	Variations in F Major, K.V. 416e Sonata for Two Pianos, K. 448 Sonata in F Major for 4-Hands, K.497 Sonata in B-flat Major for 4-Hands, K. 358 Concerto in A Major, K. 488
BEETHOVEN	Sonata in C Minor, Op. 10, No.1 Sonata in D Major, Op. 10, No.3 *Sonata in C-sharp Minor, Op. 27, No. 2 Sonata in E Major, Op. 109 Fifteen Variations and Fugue on an Eroica Theme, Op. 35 *Concerto No. 3 in C Minor, Op.37 Concerto No. 5 in E-flat Major, Op.73 Sonata for Violin and Piano, Op. 47, "Kreutzer"
SCHUBERT	"Wohin?" Sonata in A minor, Op. 42
CHOPIN	Sonata No. 3 in B Minor, Op.58 *Sonata No. 2 in B-flat Minor, Op. Nocturnes-Op. 9, No.3 Op. 15, No. 3 Op. 27, No. 1 Op. 48, No. 1 Op. 55, No. 1 Op. 62, No. 2

CHOPIN, cont.	Preludes- Nos. 6, 13, 17, 21. Concerto No. 2 in F Minor Etude in C-sharp Minor, Op. 10, No.4 *Waltz in A-flat, Op. 34 No. 1 *Impromptu in A-flat, Op. 29 *Polonaise in C-sharp Minor, Op. 26 No. 1 *Fantasy in F Minor, Op. 49
LISZT	La Campanella Les jeux d'eau à la Villa d'Este Scherzo and March Benediction de Dieu dans la solitude *Mephisto Waltz No.1 *Schumann-Liszt "Widmung" Tschaikowsky-Liszt "Polonaise from Eugen Onegin"
MENDELSSOHN	*Lieder ohne Worte - Spinning Song Duetto Variations sérieuses
SCHUMANN	Fantasy, Op.17 Romances, oboe and piano Kreisleriana, Op.16 Carnaval, Op.9 Concerto in A Minor
GRIEG	Concerto in A Minor *Sonata Op.7
BRAHMS	Sonata in E-flat for Clarinet and Piano, Op. 120 No. 2 *Concerto No. 1 in D Minor, Op. 15
STRAUSS, RICHARD	"Allerseelen" "Ständchen" "Befreit" "Zueignung" "Morgen"
SAINT-SAËNS	Concerto No. 2 in G Minor, Op. 22
FAURÉ, GABRIEL	Piano Quartet in C Minor, Op.15
DEBUSSY	Pour le piano

RAVEL	Gaspard de la nuit Alborado del gracioso *Sonatine *Valses nobles et sentimentales
POULENC	Improvisations - Nos. 7, 8, 9, 12, 13, 15.
TSCHAIKOWSKY	Concerto No. 3 in E-flat, Op. 75 Humoresque Chanson triste
MEDTNER, NICOLAI	Sonata reminiscenza, Op. 38, No. 1 Concerto No. 3, Op. 60
RACHMANINOFF	Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini Concerto No. 2 in C Minor, Op. 18 Symphonic Dances, Op. 45 Preludes- Op. 23, No.3 Op. 23, No.4 Op. 23, No.5 Op. 23, No. 6 Op. 23, No. 10 Tschaikowsky-Rachmaninoff, "Lullaby" "Daisies" (Transcription for solo piano) Schubert-Rachmaninoff, "Wohin" Bizet-Rachmaninoff, Menuet from "L'Arlesienne"
KREISLER, FRITZ	Liebesleid
PROKOFIEV	Visions fugitives, Op. 22 (complete)
SHOSTAKOVICH	Concerto No. 2, Op. 102 Piano Trio, Op. 67
COPLAND	Passacaglia Piano Variations
GERSHWIN	Rhapsody in Blue
WILD, EARL	Gershwin-Wild, "Fascinatin' Rhythm" Tschaikowsky-Wild, "At the Ball"

APPENDIX B

RECENT CRITICAL REVIEWS OF EARL WILD

The critical acclaim that Earl Wild, now almost 80, continues to receive for his recordings and live performances, is remarkable. Many reviewers express astonishment at his continued physical prowess. This alone is a testament to the naturalness and validity of his technical approach, as discussed in Chapter Three. His reviewers and audiences continue to be enlightened by the individuality of his interpretations as well. In the following pages I have selected excerpts from a few of the recent reviews of Earl Wild's recordings and live performances. These extraordinary reviews, all written within the last five years , express consistently high, often ecstatic, praise, covering widely divergent repertoire. This reflects the universality, the breadth and the diversity of Earl Wild's art.

"Earl Wild's recordings have always been welcome, but his most recent discs have been especially striking, capturing this still superb technician at the height of his musical acuity. His Chopin Scherzos and Ballades arguably qualified as the outstanding piano release of 1991; and his new Chesky disc of solo music by Rachmaninov is every bit as revelatory, treating the *Chopin Variations* in particular with a searching patience that illuminates the music's stature as no other recording I've heard."

---Peter Rabinowitz, Fanfare Magazine, Nov./Dec. 1992, in review of Earl Wild CD of Rachmaninov's *Variations on a Theme of Chopin, Variations on a Theme of Corelli, Songs (arr. Wild).* (Chesky CD 58)

"Anyone seeking superlative interpretations of these essential Beethoven works (Piano Sonatas 8, 14, 29 ⟨*Hammerklavier*⟩) need go no further than these ...discs. The very fluency and ease of Wild's pianism, for instance, eliminates the sense of struggle against difficulties that certain lesser artists believe is part and parcel of the Beethoven style. Thus in Wild's hands the Fugue of 29 emerges with pristine clarity and cohesion but no lack of excitement and drive."

---Donald Manildi, American Record Guide, May/June 1995 in review of Earl Wild CD of Beethoven Sonatas 8, 14, 29. (Chesky CD 120)

" 'Transcription' is an almost absurdly inadequate term for what happens here ...For anyone who knows Wild's playing a review is hardly necessary, and it need only be said that he is his usual transcendental self, drawing as beautiful a tone from the instrument as ever. ... this superlative example of the work of one of the great pianists of our time, with recorded sound up to the highest current standards, will go unheard by many. Demand it from your supplier!"

---Max Harrison, Musical Opinion (London), September 1990, in review of Earl Wild CD of Gershwin Transcriptions (Chesky CD 32)

"Earl Wild, now in his late 70s, remains one of the great piano technicians of our time. He is also a fine musician, and when the two are combined in music as demanding as the Rachmaninoff pieces played here (CD pf the Rachmaninoff sonata No. 2, Preludes Op. 23, and Op 32, 1-8), the results are dazzling. These are emotionally unbuttoned performances, with every mood and shade of feeling in the music taken to its limit; variations in tempo and dynamics are given as much dramatic value as they can bear. This is easily the most exciting version of the sonata (in its 1931 revision) that I know, exceeding even Horowitz in its powerful torrents of sound...The clarity of Wild's articulation even in the most dense and difficult pieces is simply astonishing, as is his consistent beauty of tone."

---Robert Morin, American Record Guide , October 1994

"Wild's playing is a marvel --- and I'm not just referring to technique. That, of course, is excellent, but Wild's playing is colorful, spontaneous, and ravishing in a way that is almost completely forgotten today. He and Shura Cherkassy are perhaps the last living exponents of the true romantic style of playing, both freer and more rhapsodic, yet cooler, less obvious. This recital program is a defiant refusal to surrender to the musical world in which we now find ourselves."

---Hyperion Knight , The Absolute Sound , January 1995 in review of Earl Wild's "Art of the Transcription" CD (Audiofon CD 72008-2)

"As a Chopin interpreter, Earl Wild has only one peer that I know of, and that is the late, magnificent Josef Hofmann. If I went on for another thousand words, I could not devise higher praise than that. It seems almost incredible that we could have a pianist of this stature and tradition captured in the finest recorded sound I have ever heard. The task of choosing recordings that meet the highest standards of both performance and recording is made ridiculously simple by this disc."

--- Robert Hesson, Stereophile, February 1992 in review of Earl Wild's CD of Chopin's 4 Ballades, 4 Scherzi.(Chesky CD 44)

"These are two of the most interesting concertos from the first half of this century , and they could hardly have a better spokesman than Earl Wild --- an incomparable expert in this style...Wild's keyboard becomes a fantastic voice freed of the limitations of the human range. The pianist teases us with wittily shaped phrases, melts our hearts with songful lines and whips us into a frenzy for the theatrical climaxes. This disc is an utter delight."

---Robert Croan, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, April 30, 1995, in review of "Earl Wild plays Piano Concertos by Copland and Menotti" (Vanguard Classics CD)

"As for the Tschaikowsky Concerto, it was marvelous. I haven't enjoyed this old war horse so much in years. Mr. Wild reshod it and rode off at a gallop... He correctly sees the concerto as a romp for a virtuoso, and he is just the virtuoso to perform it to the hilt. .. He doesn't look or sound his age. In fact, few pianists with a quarter of his years can match the ardor, edge, and zest of his playing."

---John Ardoin, The Dallas Morning News, May 13, 1994, in review of Dallas Symphony Concert,

"La venue du pianiste américain Earl Wild a constitué un moment d'intense émotion. Octogénaire, mais d'une étonnante jeunesse ... il reste peu connu en France...Le publie a été séduit par la fringance du *Rondo capriccioso op. 14* de Mendelssohn, la limpidité aérienne, comme décalée, de quatre valses de Chopin, la pureté de sa propre transcription du *Largo du Concerto pour piano no 2* de Chopin et la brillance de deux *Preludes* de Rachmaninov."

---Michel Le Naour, Le Monde de la Musique, (Paris), December 1994, in review of Earl Wild recital at the Festival of Angoulême, France

"By turns elegant and dramatic, Wild supplied a Chopin that was lavish in its use of rubato... In the virtuoso passages, his articulation was so clean as to be eerie. This was big-boned Chopin, not the wimpy miniaturist often heard...Liszt's Hungarian Rhapsody No. 4, gave full voice to Wild's bravura and transcendental virtuosity."

--- Derrick Henry, The Atlanta Journal, November 14, 1993, in review of Earl Wild recital at Spivey Hall, Atlanta

"Pianist Earl Wild celebrated his 75th birthday at Carnegie Hall Monday evening in as selfless a way as possible --- by showering the audience with gifts, the greatest of which is musical insight...Everything he played, he illuminated.... From the passionate discords of [Liszt's] "Funerailles" .... to the daredevil "Rhapsodie Espagnole,: Wild showed himself equal to every one of the composer's requirements, from passionate intensity to throwaway brilliance."

---Dale Harris, New York Post, November 29, 1990, in review of Earl Wild Carnegie Hall recital.

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MUSICAL EXAMPLES

The musical examples for all the figures in this document were computer-set by Craig Sylvern Computer Services, Columbus, Ohio.