

NOTED DUTCH PIANIST UNVEILS SECRETS OF TONE PRODUCTION

How Martinus Sieveking Works Out His Unusual Theories—Piano in His Paris Studio a Curious Instrument Adapted to Its Owner's Massive Bulk—A Fallacy to Insist That All Artists Use Keyboard of the Same Size—Sieveking as Player of His Own Compositions—A Past-master in the Production of Tone-Color—Eccentricities of an Artist of Remarkable Personality

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THAT giant among pianists—in more senses than one—Martinus Sieveking, lives in a quiet little flat at the very foot of Passy hill, in the most unapproachable quarter of Paris. But if only all pilgrimages ended so pleasantly! These were my thoughts when I left the musician's dwelling after some two hours in his company—two hours crammed with such interest that they seemed to pass in as many minutes.

When I rang at the door of his apartment it was Sieveking himself who opened. I had never met him, but, strange as was his attire, I had no difficulty in recognizing him from the picturesque description given me by some who had.

The massive frame before me clad in brown woolen sweater was surmounted by a head which would transport a sculptor into the seventh heaven. Features of Greek purity of contour were adorned by a fierce bristly moustache.



Martinus Sieveking, the Noted Dutch Pianist and Teacher, of Paris, Who Announces That He Has Discovered a "New Method"

But, most wonderful of all were the eyes which gazed at me full and firmly with a half irritated, half inquisitive expression. I was abashed and my words of introduction were but feebly and hesitatingly enunciated. The object of my visit having been made clear, however, Sieveking, in the best of French, bade me enter.

Two long, low rooms with the usual French doors, the first object to catch my eye being the great piano built especially for the pianist Colossus and the largest in the world. It looked very much the worse for wear. An old camera—such as is used by professional photographers—had been placed on the tail of the instrument, which occupied about one-third the length of the apart-

ment. Near the music rest was a large screwdriver and a wire string, evidence that I had disturbed my host in the gentle art of "tinkering." Valuable old curios and some priceless ancient furniture adorned the apartment, but they did not hold my attention, because, while conversing with the pianist-composer, I suddenly became aware of an insistent noisy obbligato.

A Clock Collector

This came from a curious source, as I discovered when I looked about me and saw at least a score of clocks in the apartment. Grandfathers, astronomical, Louis XVI—clocks of all epochs and denominations seemed to be represented. Sieveking later explained the mechanism of a number of his "favorites" (he discusses his clocks as if they were as simply classified as postage stamps), but as it is Sieveking the musician who is of primary interest to the readers of MUSICAL AMERICA, the highly interesting clock collection must be disregarded.

"What have you been doing to Paderewski in America?" asked Sieveking, lapsing into English. "Surely a great artist such as he should be allowed a little more scope. If he has been 'pounding' it was because the piano did not suit him. He could not perhaps draw from the instrument what he desired. Now that he is playing better he probably has a piano that responds more sympathetically. What a fallacy it is, for instance, to say that all artists should be obliged to play on a keyboard of the same size! Look at my hands!" They were massive but beautifully proportioned, the muscles standing out like knots.

"Godowsky is a small man," he continued, "but, as I am not obliged to wear Godowsky's gloves, shoes or hat, I don't see why I should be compelled to play on Godowsky's piano."

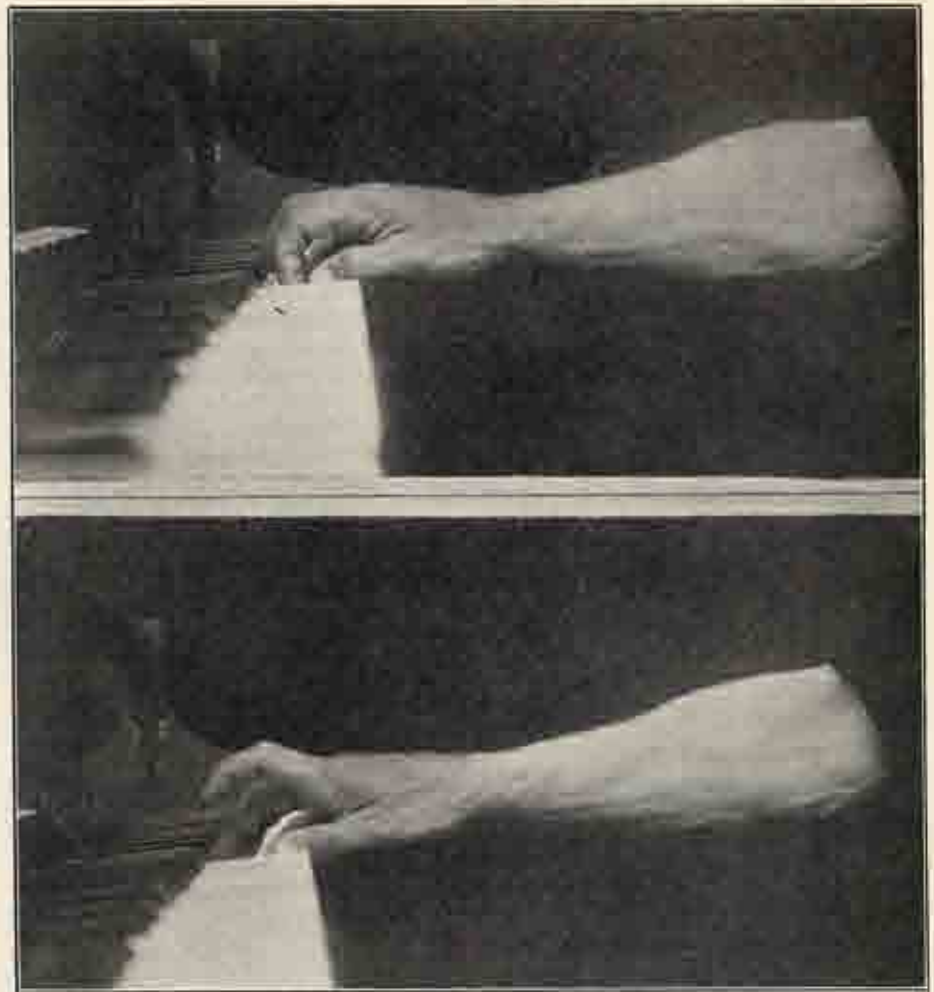
Sieveking's Piano

"Come and look at my piano," said Sieveking with a genial smile. I went over to the instrument with him and examined attentively the famous inclined keyboard slanting toward the body at a very perceptible angle. The white keys measure a little more than an inch in width, but are depressed with the same ease as any others. When Sieveking sat down at the piano he carefully changed his house slippers for a pair of well-worn dancing pumps, for he declared he never played in any others. My attention was thus drawn to his feet and I noticed that the pedals of the piano were placed not close together, but about fourteen inches apart.

"That's for balance," said the Dutch giant. "When the pianist leans to one side to execute a run his body then retains perfect poise. Isn't it extraordinary that there have been innovations and changes in the construction of every section of the piano since the days of the clavecin, with the exception of the keyboard and the position of the pedals?"

His Own Composition

"This is my latest little piece to be published. And Sieveking played 'Cornemuse' to me, a bagpipe theme, brilliantly thought out and harmonized, and which, needless to say, was superly



Illustrating the Sieveking Method of Piano Playing—Below: The Position of Hand and Wrist (Mr. Sieveking Sits Very Low at the Piano), and, Above, Bad Position of the Finger—the Finger Hooked and Thumb Bending Inward. Note the Muscular Development of Mr. Sieveking's Forearm

interpreted. The old but faithful piano had seen its best days, but Sieveking drew from it a tone of such sweet resonance that all I could do when he had finished was to stare at him in amazement.

"How do you get all those marvelous varieties of tone?" I asked.

"Ah! That is my secret!" he ejaculated. "That is what I retired from professional life six years ago to evolve and study."

"New method," he continued, in his quaint, short but emphatic English, which he has a habit of punctuating frequently with an abrupt and forceful "Ja!" "It is best explained by calling it the Deadweight method. Feel my arm."

I tried to lift his arm from the keyboard and managed to raise it a few inches with a great effort. Then I let go and his fingers struck the keys with great violence.

Secret of Tone

"That is the secret of tone," said Sieveking. "I do not press, but just allow the weight of my arms to rest on my hands. Absolutely new method! Many do it unconsciously, though. Also notice that I move my fingers from the hand joint and not from the middle joint, which latter causes the whole hand to be cramped."

Sieveking then played a composition the manuscript of which he had been copying that same day. It is a delightful trifle called "Souffrance" and extremely modern in pronunciation. After that he broke into the least known of the Beethoven sonatas, but one that he adores, which was followed by Liszt's transcription of the "Erl King." As Sieveking played and evoked that extraordinarily exquisite tone again I watched his method. I noted that, at no time, even in purely staccato passages, did he raise his hands far from the keyboard. This, he explained to me later, was on account of his inclined keys, which places the black keys on the same

level as the white, an arrangement which also guarantee a faultless legato touch. Greater leverage and general ease in executing runs are characteristics of the Sieveking keyboard, which I was able to test satisfactorily for myself on another piano of the usual size.

A Formidable Athlete

One fact must be taken into consideration, namely, that Martinus Sieveking is a man of stupendous muscular strength. Eugene Sandow, the famous expert in physical culture, has declared him to be his finest pupil. He is also a trained athlete, notably a swimmer, fencer and boxer. The width of Sieveking's biceps according to my own testimony would do credit to an ordinary man's thigh, and they are as hard as steel. Yet this man with the mass of muscular energy is completely without mannerisms. All his action comes from wrists and main finger joints. His arms are moved in playing over so little and his body not at all, except in "sweeping" the keyboard.

Sieveking has many remarkable pupils, including Henri Etlin and Paul Loyonnet, but he is to emerge from his temporary seclusion before long and intends to prove his ideas by practical demonstrations. The statement of his which will interest the student most is that, given a sound elementary musical education and by following his method, one can attain to virtuosity in two years. And the teacher is willing to furnish a written guarantee to this effect!

Diminishing Attendance for St. Paul Popular Concerts

ST. PAUL, Minn., Jan. 7.—The ninth popular concert by the St. Paul Symphony Orchestra, Walter Henry Rothwell, conductor, with Rollin M. Pease, baritone soloist, covered a program of good music played with laudable skill, but lacking in inspirational quality. The audience was pitifully small. Neither the Strauss Waltz, "On the Beautiful Blue Danube," one of the orchestra's most compelling magnets for a popular concert, nor Bizet's popular second "Carmen" Suite sufficed to bring the desired attendance. The diminishing size of the Sunday audiences is cause of general lament here, and it is felt by some to be due to the lack of a certain vitalizing spark. F. L. C. B.



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