

APPLYING RELAXATION PRINCIPLES

Pianist Must Learn Secret of Effortlessness—How the Muscles Interact—Securing a Fine Tone

By EARLE LA ROSS

DURING recent times of military drill one of the most welcome orders from our commander was "At Ease." We were told to let all of our body muscles relax, but hold our position. The need of this was apparent and gave a relief that at once brought to my mind a similar order not followed so readily by the army of pianists, that are striving to overcome strained muscles and overwrought tendon difficulties brought about by overexertion. We have lately been hearing much and reading a great deal on the subject of "weight touch and relaxation," and while, I believe there is a gradual awakening on the subject, still there is only a hazy idea held by many as to its first principles.

The great artists (in the true sense of the word) are endowed with a natural gift for piano-playing, and hence they simply relax at all times, because they simply can't help it. We are told that Bach, Mozart, Chopin and Liszt, obtained the most beautiful tones from their instruments. These men were so gifted that a harsh sound could not have been endured, and furthermore they were blessed with inherent instrumental talent. I firmly believe that they never spent much time on the study of tone-production, but that rather they were listening at all times to their own playing, and through their natural gifts could not produce an unmusical tone.

There are so few to-day who are so fortunate as to possess these gifts, that we must hunt out for ourselves the principles and steadily apply them, physically as well as mentally. So many are striving for success, and still we miss the one great asset to art, the one which proves the proverb, "The tone makes the music." Whether the instrument is mechanically perfect the tone will not be of musical proportions unless we follow the command of the great leaders: "At Ease." Unless we possess or inherit this great gift for piano-playing (in its highest sense) as does Hofmann, Novae, or Gabrilowitch, we must call ourselves in for a thorough examination at frequent intervals, and see if our enthusiasm for work along interpretative lines is preventing us from applying the principles of relaxation.

Effort Ends With Sound

The subject is a most complex one, and not so easily understood by students, whether listening in the concert room, or working in the studio. In a state of perfect relaxation, it requires muscular effort of either the finger, hand, forearm or upper-arm, to produce a tone. But when we consider that every action of a muscle must have its corresponding in-action, the principle becomes more involved, and difficulties arise. There are always corresponding muscles to take from the active ones the work at hand and relieve them from over-exertion. This is a gift of nature to us, and one which is scarcely realized. When this

idea is mastered, we shall express musical thought with a quality of inexpressible nobility, and with all possible gradations of dynamics. The muscles of the chest and shoulders, which control the muscles of the upper-arm, are to be thought of, and not simply those situated in the fore-arm. Whether it is finger work, or wrist-action, the entire playing apparatus, from the back to the finger tips, must be restrained from any stiffness. At the moment of tone-production the muscles directly responsible for the depression of the key, relax and the counter-set will relieve the once-used muscles of all action. In other words, all effort should cease at the moment of sound.

Slow practice—with keen ears and active brain, should be the by-word of all pianists. Later this effort can be transferred to an entire figure, or melodic phrase, and with the required mental attitude, results will show themselves very soon. Every set of muscles may be used separately or in conjunction with others, according to the exigencies of the case, but results will surely follow, if we keep the paramount rule constantly before us, namely, complete rest and relaxation of the unemployed muscles.

Studying Music Necessary

While the physiological study of the playing apparatus may seem unnecessary to many, still a general idea of the functions of our muscular endowments is necessary, but after all the sensations arising from the proper use of them will be the best test for self-discipline. The need of muscular relaxation is indeed felt by all, and we see many ludicrous illustrations of it. Especially is this true of accompanists who use all kinds of arm-gyration and hand-flarings, more noticeable than the direct results of their playing. They forget that a thorough mastery of the use of the muscles conceals all external demonstrations, and that it is not what they do after the tone is struck, but the condition of the arms before the sound emission, that will produce a beautiful tone, and that the tone will answer their slightest wish, if it is properly treated before percussion.

The aim of all pianists should be to express a musical thought in an artistic way, and the technique is, therefore, simply a means to this end. The acquirement of this beautiful technique can also be a most artistic accomplishment in itself, and with a more foundational study of the subject, the coming generation will be able to express themselves in a musical way that will not overtax the requirements of their instruments.

POLAH PLAYS IN DETROIT

Notable Recital by Violinist Closes Season of Notable Events

DETROIT, May 29.—The closing concert of a season of notable events was given in Temple Beth-El on May 22, the officiating artists being Andre Polah, violinist, and Margaret Mannebach, accompanist. Mr. Polah's program, chosen with impeccable taste, opened with a Mozart Concerto in D Major, which proved an admirable vehicle for displaying a robust, vibrant tone and a remarkably fluent technique. In this work Mr. Polah introduced his own cadenza which was decidedly superior to the ones generally used and was cordially received. The E Minor Concerto of Mendelssohn was imbued with fire and intensity and, as before, Mr. Polah was recalled to the stage again and again. His clean-cut bowing, accurate phrasing and fine detail work speak eloquently of his musicianship, and these, combined with a rare interpretative ability, have made him a genuinely worth while artist. His first group included a Weber-Kreisler "Larghetto"; Grasse's "Waves at Play," given with the utmost delicacy; a Saint-Saëns "Serenade"; Spiering's "Triller" Etude and the A Minor Caprice of Wieniawski. Each number served to re-

veal another side of Mr. Polah's art, and, at the close of the caprice, he was loudly acclaimed. A Vieuxtemps "Rondino," Schubert's "Ave Maria" and a stunning Spanish Dance by Fabian Redfield completed the program, together with some half dozen encores. Miss Mannebach's accompaniments are more than mere support; they act as a stimulus and an inspiration to the soloist.

On May 23 choruses from six Detroit high schools presented a program in the Central High Auditorium. The schools represented were the Joyce, Central, Western, Nordstrum, Eastern and Southeastern High School.

The annual meeting of the Detroit Symphony Society took place on Tuesday afternoon, May 27, at which time the following officers were elected: President, Jerome H. Remick; vice-presidents, Horace E. Dodge and Charles H. Hodges; secretary and treasurer, C. Hayward Murphy. M. McD.

School of Music of De Pauw University Gives Concert in Greencastle, Ind.

GREENCASTLE, IND., May 20.—The recent concert at which the cantata, "Fair Ellen," by Bruch, was presented at Meharry Hall under the auspices of the School of Music of De Pauw University was the 250th given by the school. Professor Thompson was at the organ, and Dean R. G. McCutchan conducted the university chorus. The piano accompanists were Margaret Pearson and Gladys Amerine. Artists who appeared during the course of the program were Mrs. Alice Frost Bridge soprano, replacing Leone Kruse of Chicago, indisposed, and Charles Edward Lutton, baritone, of Chicago.

Adelin Fermin, Dutch baritone, will head the vocal department of the summer session of the Peabody Conservatory of Music, Baltimore, which will be in session for six weeks beginning July 7. The dates coincide with those of the Johns Hopkins University Summer School, so that students of one school may take supplementary studies at the other. Mr. Fermin is a Hollander by birth, and came to America to join the faculty of the Peabody Conservatory of Music at the invitation of its director, Harold Randolph.

DAYTON, OHIO—The Teachers' Club gave a concert recently in the Steele High School Auditorium, under the direction of O. E. Wright.

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