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MASTERARBEIT

How to practice effectively on keyboard instruments

A bridge between modern practicing and historical sources

von

Maria van der Merwe

Betreuender Dozent: Jörg-Andreas Bötticher

Hauptfach: Cembalo

Hauptfach-Dozent: Jörg-Andreas Bötticher

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ABSTRACT

Practicing effectively is a subject that occupied musicians and music pedagogues in the past and continues to do so in our current time.

This “Masterarbeit” is an attempt to combine historical quotes of important musical figures from the Baroque until the Romantic time with practicing and teaching methods nowadays.

It is my intention to give the reader food for thought on the following main topics: practicing in the presence of a teacher (chapter 1), repetition (chapter 2) and technical exercises as a basis for playing repertoire (chapter 3).

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PREFACE

The concept of practicing effectively has occupied me since my early teenage years, when I started to play piano more seriously. As my passion grew, so did the number of pieces I wished to play as well as the musicians which inspired me. From that point onwards I was constantly looking for ways to practice more effectively with the goal of accelerating my progress. Dealing with stage fright was another motivation for me, as I discovered that practicing effectively could serve as a great support in dealing with the preparation of performances as well as the moment of performing itself.

Starting to teach myself has given me another dimension in approaching this subject, since it is any teacher's wish to help their pupils develop as much as possible. Stimulating pupils to practice effectively can be a very powerful tool to support their progress. Learning how to practice effectively encourages pupils' independence, giving them learning tools they can apply their whole lives, not only in music but also for other skills.

I was intrigued by the idea of finding out more about practicing in past eras, whether certain concepts could be applied to our practicing and teaching today or if we can find similarities with what we are doing already and perceive as modern. Hence, I came to the subtitle "A bridge between modern day practicing and historical sources". In order to make this connection, I use quotes from important figures of the baroque time such as François Couperin, until piano virtuosos of the romantic era, such as Franz Liszt. Even though my focus lies on keyboard instruments, many principles are also relevant for other instruments. When I speak about keyboard instruments, I am primarily referring to harpsichord, piano and organ.

I mainly used two books as a guideline for this "Masterarbeit", namely *Einfach Üben*¹ by Gerhard Mantel as well as *Üben mit Lis(z)t. Wiederentdeckte Geheimnisse aus der Werkstatt der Klaviervirtuosen*² by Martin Gellrich. *Üben mit Lis(z)t* helped me gain an overview of how

¹ Gerhard Mantel, *Einfach Üben*, Mainz: Schott Musik International 2001.

² Martin Gellrich, *Üben mit Lis(z)t. Wiederentdeckte Geheimnisse aus der Werkstatt der Klaviervirtuosen*, Frauenfeld: Verlag Im Waldgut 1992.

practicing and keyboard instrument pedagogy developed over time as well as where to search for some relevant historical quotes.

Concerning the subject of effective practicing in general, the courses “Vorspieltraining” and “Hirnpsychologie für Üben und Unterrichten” by Horst Hildebrandt and Judith Buchmann at the Musikakademie Basel were of great importance in gaining ideas and stimulating my own creativity on the subject. My appointment as a piano teacher at the Musikschule Region Sursee, where I have been teaching twelve piano students of different ages with different levels on a weekly basis served as a continuous learning experience on how to apply and improve my knowledge on effective practicing in the context of music pedagogy.

I would like to thank all the family, friends and teachers that contributed to this work.

INTRODUCTION

As the 18th century composer, theologian and music author Johann Friedrich Christmann wrote:

“Man hat bei der Unterweisung mehr darauf zu sehen, wie die Kinder lernen, als wie viel sie lernen.”³

Even though this quote dates to 1782, the topic of effective practicing is becoming increasingly relevant for musicians as well as music pedagogues nowadays. In the fast-paced society we currently live in, instrumental lesson times are limited, and educators are faced with the continuously noticeable influence of digital stimuli on the learning behavior of the pupils they teach.

Effective practicing is not only relevant in our current time, but it has also been in the past, although perhaps not always in an obvious way. Like anything with quality, there is a reason why something remains relevant, no matter how much time passes.

This “Masterarbeit” is meant to offer ideas, but especially stimulate fellow musicians and music pedagogues about the topic of effective practicing and how to benefit from it in their own practicing and teaching. We will discuss questions such as:

- What could teachers do during instrumental lessons to support and stimulate their students to practice effectively?
- Are there different ways to use repetition whilst practicing and what are possible advantages and disadvantages?
- How much space should we give technical exercises whilst practicing and teaching and how can we structure this?

My intention is not to provide black-and-white answers to these questions, but rather to offer the reader information I have collected along with my own insights. By doing this, I hope to stimulate a creative process in every reader’s own mind, individual to their own experiences, knowledge and opinions. As diverse as our personalities, opinions and

³ Johann Friedrich Christmann, *Elementarbuch der Tonkunst zum Unterricht beim Klavier für Lehrende und Lernende mit praktischen Beispielen. Eine musikalische Monatschrift*. Speyer: H. P. Boßler 1782, 11.

experiences are, so endlessly rich are the possibilities and approaches to learning and teaching.

1 PRACTICING IN THE PRESENCE OF A TEACHER

In 1717, François Couperin wrote:

“During the first lessons given to children, it is better not to advise them to practice in the absence of the person who is teaching them; little people are too easily distracted to keep their minds on holding their hands in the manner prescribed for them. For myself, when giving children their first lessons, as a precaution I take away the key of the instrument on which I have been giving them instruction, so that, during my absence, they cannot spoil in one instant all that I have most carefully taught them in three quarters of an hour.”⁴

Even without knowing precisely how Couperin’s harpsichord lessons differed from what we are accustomed to nowadays, this quote can help us to rethink instrumental lessons today. Even though Couperin speaks about the first lessons given to children, I would like to discuss how practicing with a teacher can be of value for beginners as well as more advanced pupils, disregarding their age. Speaking out of my own experience, there often seems to be a stigma around pupils practicing with their teacher during instrumental lessons. Little differentiation is made between being poorly prepared and involving a teacher in different stages of your learning process as a support. Fellow conservatory students might agree that it is generally expected that a piece should be “ready” once you bring it to your instrumental lesson. “Ready” meaning that you can play the piece in tempo with little or no mistakes so that you and your teacher can work solely or mainly on interpretation. This concept is most visible during public masterclasses.

What if, however, teachers would be more involved in the practicing of their pupils?

It is a known fact that practicing is essential for making progress at an instrument. Many pedagogues and pupils are also aware of the fact that the progress made during practicing greatly depends on the way in which we practice. Unfortunately, many pupils fall into the habit of playing a piece through until a satisfactory level is achieved, due to a lack of tools

⁴ François Couperin, *L’Art de toucher le Clavecin*, English translation by Mevanwy Roberts, Leipzig: VEB Breitkopf & Härtelverlag 1977 [Faksimile Paris: Chés L’Auteur, le Sieur Foucaut, 1716], 12.

and ideas when it comes to practicing. This lack is further encouraged if the topic of practicing mostly plays a secondary role during instrumental lessons.

In the book *Einfach Üben*⁵, the cellist Gerhard Mantel describes three requirements needed to make progress whilst practicing:

“Um beim Üben etwas verbessern zu können, sind drei Voraussetzungen nötig:

- Ich muss wissen, was ich will.
- Ich muss wahrnehmen, was ich mache.
- Ich muss wissen, wie ich den Unterschied zwischen »wollen« und »machen« abbaue.”⁶

What if we would discuss these three points from the perspective of a teacher being involved in the practicing process of their pupils?

“Ich muss wissen, was ich will.”⁷:

If teachers are involved in the practicing process of their pupils, they can ideally help them identify more differentiated goals than playing music through until reaching a satisfactory level. A teacher can also help pupils identify what they want to achieve through their practicing by being an example to them. In most cases, hearing and seeing their teachers play inspires pupils, helping them identify the technical and musical goals they want to achieve in the short and long term.

“Ich muss wahrnehmen, was ich mache”⁸:

Most of us have had the experience of being surprised when we hear our own voice on a recording. The inner experience we have of ourselves is in most cases different from how the outside world perceives us.

⁵ Mantel (2001).

⁶ Mantel (2001), 18.

⁷ Mantel (2001), 18.

⁸ Mantel (2001), 18.

If a teacher observes their pupils while they are practicing, they can:

1) Help pupils stimulate an awareness of what they are doing technically and musically. Most of us have had the experience of gaining a greater awareness of what we are doing when someone is observing us, especially someone whose opinion matters to us. Having a greater awareness of what they are doing technically and musically will automatically support pupils in identifying clearer practicing goals.

2) Help pupils in finding the connection between their inner experience and what is perceived on the outside.

3) Prevent pupils from forming unwished habits. As Daniel Gottlob Türk wrote:

“Alle unanständige Mienen, Verzuckungen, Grimassen, wie sie den Namen haben mögen, desgleichen das Stampfen mit den Füßen, die Abtheilung des Taktes durch eine Bewegung des ganzen Körpers, das Schütteln oder Nicken mit dem Kopfe, das Schnauben bey dem Triller oder bey einer schweren Passage, u. vgl. muß man dem Lernenden, ohne Rücksicht des Standes und Geschlechtes, gleich anfangs nicht zulassen.”⁹

In the present time, pupils have the possibility of recording themselves whilst practicing. This could serve as a good alternative when the teacher is absent or simply be used as an addition to regular practicing. This form of self-observation closely relates to a recommendation of François Couperin to practice in front of a mirror, a concept which is practiced until today:

“With regard to making grimaces, it is possible to break oneself of this habit by placing a mirror on the reading-desk of the Spinnet or Harpsichord.”¹⁰

⁹ Daniel Gottlob Türk, *Klavierschule, oder Anweisung zum Klavierspielen für Lehrer und Lernende, mit kritischen Anmerkungen*, Leipzig: Schwickert 1789/Halle: Hemmerde und Schwetschke 1789, Einleitung §38, 23.

¹⁰ Couperin (1977), 11.

“Ich muss wissen, wie ich den Unterschied zwischen »wollen« und »machen« abbaue.”¹¹:

If teachers are involved in the practicing process of their students through different stages of the learning process, they could help them figure out possible steps to reach their practicing goals and in turn encourage their motivation. This could also include working on interpretation at different stages of the learning process rather than at the very end. By working on interpretation at different stages of the learning process, pupils could align how they practice with their interpretational goals and ideas. If interpretation is worked on only at the end (as described in the public masterclass example), pupils might have to practice things all over again to match a new interpretational concept.

Looking more specifically at the concrete steps we must take to reach certain practicing goals: how do we lessen the gap between what we want and what we do, to rephrase Mantel’s words?

This is undeniably a complex topic, but in my opinion, there are two things that can help greatly, whether you are a teacher or a pupil, namely:

- 1) Having a vast repertoire of practicing tools and ideas.
- 2) Developing the judgment to know which of them to use when.

In the next chapters of this “Masterarbeit”, I will limit myself to discussing two topics related to practicing itself, namely repetition and technical exercises.

¹¹ Mantel (2001), 18.

2 REPETITION

2.1 Defining repetition

First, let us elaborate on the concept of repetition.

Does repetition mean repeating something in exactly the same manner? If we think about it more carefully, this seems to be an illusion, since a human being can never repeat something in exactly the same way, nor will the circumstances in which he or she repeats it be exactly the same. As the Greek philosopher Heraclitus said: “No man ever steps into the same river twice, for it’s not the same river and he’s not the same man”¹².

Indeed, we are already another person the second time we do something, finding ourselves in another moment in time. Besides, we will also have had the experience of having done it already, along with an array of emotions, thoughts, opinions, reflexes and associations which accompanies the experience of having done it.

Repetition plays an important role in our society, since it is in our human nature to like familiarity. Tradition and repetition are closely related. Depending on the culture, we celebrate the same festivities and perform the same rituals. Within the celebration of festivities there is a lot of repetition, such as singing the same songs for Christmas every year. One could also think of repetition on a smaller scale, such as having a personal favorite meal one likes to eat, cooked in the same way.

2.2 Repetition in music

Just as repetition plays an important role in our human existence, it is also a vital aspect in music. Repetition is not only used as a powerful tool in composition but is one of the most important components of music. A catchy melody is based on recognition, and recognition is based on repetition. Not to mention the amount of indirect repetition of compositional structures, use of intervals, harmonies and effects in musical compositions, since composers knew and studied the works of other composers.

¹² https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/heraclitus_107157 (20.11.2023).

2.3 Defining repetition in practicing

It is difficult to speak about practicing an instrument without mentioning repetition. Since a piece of music is a sequence of notes, patterns and musical structures, repetition is unavoidable in this learning process. The question is, in which way can we use repetition in practicing to reach the best results as efficiently as possible? To give possible answers to this, I would like to differentiate between three categories, namely:

- 1) Mechanical repetition: repeating the same thing in the same way, without being conscious about it or reflecting about it.
- 2) Differentiated repetition: repeating the same thing in the same way, however, being conscious about it, reflecting on it and responding to what we are aware of. This includes reflecting on how to solve problems and what to focus on whilst repeating it.
- 3) Variable repetition: repeating something with variation.

2.3.1 Mechanical repetition

Mechanical repetition is often performed with numerous goals, such as getting to know a piece, mastering a specific passage, memorizing or attaining greater security.

A noteworthy example of mechanical repetition can be found in the preface of Friedrich Kalkbrenner's *Pianoforte-Schule*¹³, where he states that he recently got used to reading whilst doing technical exercises:

“Bald beschloss ich zu versuchen, ob ich nicht zugleich lesen könnte, während ich meinen Fingern ihre tägliche Nahrung gab. Während der ersten Stunden kam mir dies schwer vor, den andern Tag hatte ich mich daran gewöhnt. Seitdem habe ich mich immer lesend geübt.”¹⁴

In our current instrumental pedagogy, the effectiveness of mechanical repetition is questioned more and more. The danger with mechanical repetition is that the analysis of the

¹³ Friedrich Kalkbrenner, *Pianoforte-Schule Op. 108/Anweisung das Pianoforte mit Hilfe des Handleiters spielen zu lernen*, Leipzig: Fr. Kistner, n.d. [1841].

¹⁴ Kalkbrenner (n.d./1841), 4.

difficulty is often overlooked, and mechanical repetition alone might not be sufficient to reach the goal.¹⁵

Additionally, there is a big chance for mechanical repetition to be built up on insecurities. This could mean repeating a passage because we were not satisfied with it, hoping that by repeating it a second, third or hundredth time, it would eventually be to our satisfaction. Or, repeating a passage endlessly to calm our anxiety about it. Unfortunately, this could easily lead us in an anxiety spiral of endlessly needing to repeat it “once more”.

Repeating in this way can lead to undesired results, as we risk encouraging negative associations such as a fear of failure. Other negative associations could include a conflicting connection with our instrument or a lack of control. Besides encouraging negative associations, we also risk reinforcing undesired habits such as tension whilst playing.

2.3.2 Differentiated repetition

The awareness involved in differentiated repetition challenges musicians to identify problems and take carefully planned steps to reach their goals. This connects well to a concept G. Mantel defines as “Prinzip des Problemlösens”¹⁶ :

“(…) Hier wird der Weg, der zwischen dem jetzigen Ausgangspunkt und dem Ziel – auch dem Zwischenziel – liegt, gesehen (…) Dieses Verfahren ist definiert durch Fragen wie:

- Was ist eigentlich konkret mein Problem?
- Was genau steht der Lösung des Problems im Weg?
- Verfüge ich über Methoden, die Hindernisse auszuräumen?
- Wenn nicht, wie komme ich an solche Methoden?”¹⁷

2.3.3 Variable repetition

Going back to Heraclitus’ words: if it is an illusion to think that we can repeat something in exactly the same way, maybe this is not what we should be striving for during our practicing?

¹⁵ Mantel (2001), 15–16.

¹⁶ Mantel (2001), 15.

¹⁷ Mantel (2001), 15.

What if we would use the insight that no repetition can be the same to our advantage? We have different ways to go about this, some of which I will discuss in the following subchapters.

2.3.3.1 Changing parameters in the musical material

The first and most obvious way to repeat something with variation, is to change various parameters in the musical material itself. Variations could include a change of rhythm, tempo, articulation, accents, phrasing, sound, dynamics, touch to only name a few.

I would like to illustrate this with the following example from the 20th century Peters edition of the famous technical exercises of Charles-Louis Hanon, which were originally published in 1873.

N^o 1

Man trenne und hebe die Finger gut, um jede Note auf's Deutlichste hören zu lassen.

M. ♩ = 60-108



Illustration 1: Extract from the first exercise in *Der Klavier-Virtuose*.¹⁸

¹⁸ Charles-Louis Hanon, *Der Klavier-Virtuose*, Edited by: Otto Weinreich, Leipzig: C.F.PETERS LTD & CO. KG 1931/renewed 1959, 3.

In this edition, the editor Otto Weinreich offers some variations for practicing each exercise, as seen in the following extract:

4 Übungs-Varianten zu N^o 1

1

2

3 In Sexten oder

4

5 abwärts abwärts rechts und links die Rhythmen tauschen. *pp*

6 *mf* Auch mit gekreuzten Händen zu üben

7 und ebenso vertauschen: rechts die Vergrößerung, links die Variante in Zweiunddreißigsteln

8 1. Fall od. portato Gegenbewegung

Illustration 2: Extract from Weinreich's variations for practicing Hanon's first exercise.¹⁹

By applying this to music pedagogy, it offers us great ways to add variation in instrumental lessons itself, stimulating our pupils' concentration as well as using the lesson time efficiently. An example of this would be to create flash cards illustrating the changed parameters, letting the pupil apply these changes whilst practicing scales, arpeggios or a difficult passage. By continuously shifting the focus point, one stimulates physical and cognitive flexibility which ultimately leads to greater security.²⁰ Besides this, creating games

¹⁹ Hanon/Weinreich (1959), 4.

²⁰ Thank you, Horst Hildebrandt and Judith Buchmann from the courses "Vorspieltraining" and "Hirnpysiologie für Üben und Unterrichten" at the Musik-Akademie Basel for inspiration and ideas on this topic.

or challenges as such simply makes practicing more enjoyable and adds structure to one's practicing, contributing to greater concentration whilst practicing.

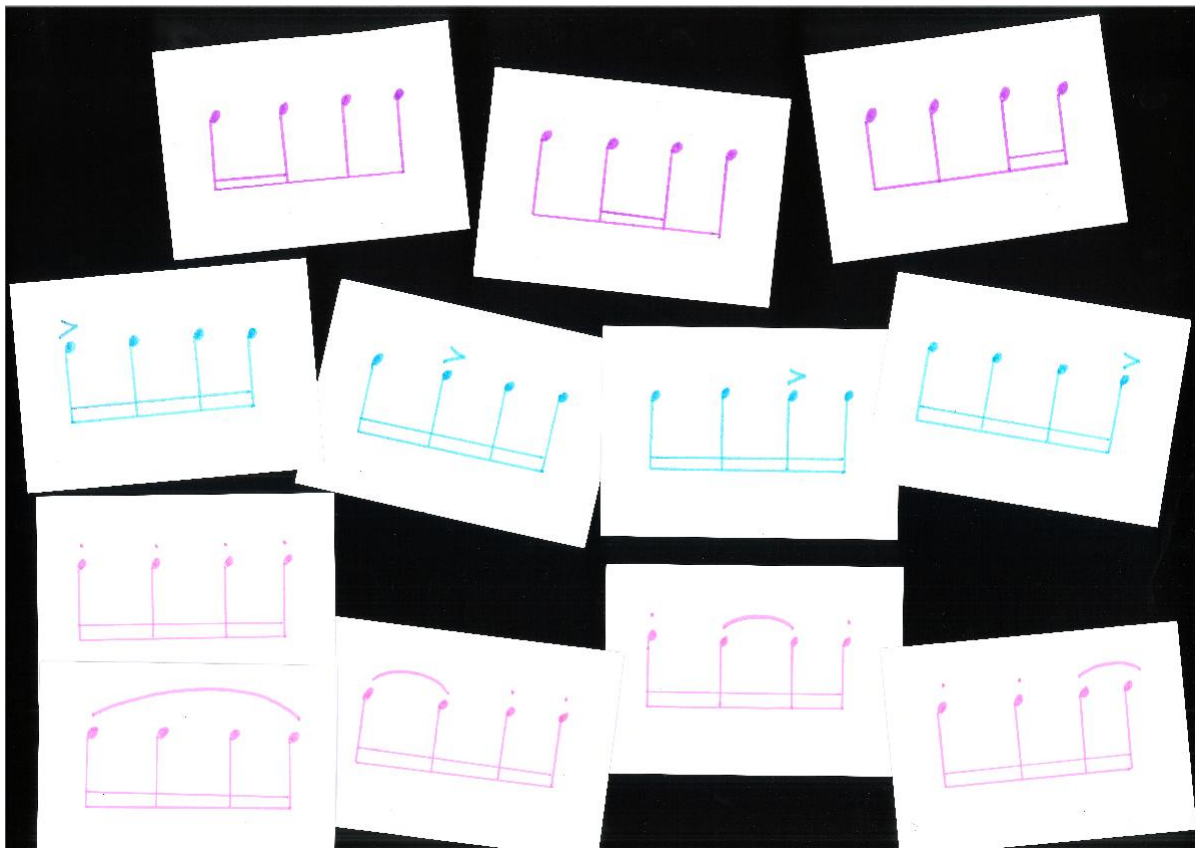


Illustration 3: Flash cards with different rhythms, accents and articulation.²¹

2.3.3.2 “Prinzip der rotierenden Aufmerksamkeit”²²

Another way to make repetition variable, is to explicitly alternate our focus on a different parameter every time we repeat something. Gerhard Mantel describes the phenomenon of alternating our focus on different parameters whilst practicing as “Prinzip der rotierenden Aufmerksamkeit”²³, which helps one to avoid being overwhelmed by information whilst practicing. I would have liked to elaborate this approach by connecting it to repetition. By alternating our focus on a different parameter every time we repeat a passage, we are stimulated in a different way, supporting us in having greater concentration whilst doing

²¹ Design: Maria van der Merwe.

²² Mantel (2001), 24–25.

²³ Mantel (2001), 24–25.

so.²⁴ In this sense, every repetition has greater learning value. Possible parameters could be musical (sound, dynamics, phrasing), physical (touch, articulation, position at the instrument, breathing) and interpretational (articulation, tempo) to name a few.

Even though this approach might at first sound like a modern concept, focusing on different parameters whilst repeating an exercise was also known to past masters such as Franz Liszt. As Auguste Boissier wrote about Liszt's instructions on practicing technical exercises such as scales in octaves, during a piano lesson given to her daughter Valérie:

“Während sie diese Übungen ausführt, solle sie die Schattierungen studieren und sich darein versenken; bald unmerklich leichte und sanfte Piani, bald wohlgeformte Crescendi, Contraste dann ein schließlich glanzvolle Fortissimi herausbringen. Er will nicht, daß man mechanisch übe, sondern daß die Seele immer nach Ausdruck suche und daß alle diese Schattierungen, die die wahre Palette des Musikers ausmachen, vollendet und gewohnheitsmäßig der Hand zu eigen seien und er in dem Augenblick keine Mühe aufwenden müsse, wo er ihrer bedarf.”²⁵

Besides focusing on dynamics and musical expression whilst practicing technical exercises, this quote moreover describes the wholehearted involvement wished for whilst practicing.

Yes, every repetition has greater learning value if we change our focus on different parameters. At the same time, how involved we are whilst practicing greatly influences the quality of our practicing, whether we are repeating something or not.

2.3.3.3 Practicing our flexibility²⁶

For the following, less obvious example, I would like to look at practicing with variation in a general sense, rather than repetition. When we look at practicing with variation, it could also mean to practice our flexibility to alternate between different passages, rather than the difficult passage itself. In this way, we will be more flexible whilst facing the difficult passage

²⁴ Thank you, Horst Hildebrandt and Judith Buchmann from the courses “Vorspieltraining” and “Hirnphysiologie für Üben und Unterrichten” at the Musik-Akademie Basel for inspiration and ideas on this topic.

²⁵ Auguste Boissier, *Franz Liszt als Lehrer*, Reprint der Originalausgabe von 1930, Düsseldorf: STACCATO-Verlag/Carsten Dürer 2016, 25.

²⁶ Thank you, Horst Hildebrandt and Judith Buchmann from the courses “Vorspieltraining” and “Hirnphysiologie für Üben und Unterrichten” at the Musik-Akademie Basel for inspiration and ideas on this topic.

and will be able to react with greater adaptability when obstacles arise. There has been an interesting study performed about a related phenomenon which I learned about in the YouTube video “Variable Practice Part I”²⁷ by Dr. Molly Gebrien²⁸. The study “specific and varied practice of motor skill”²⁹, conducted by R. Kerr and B. Booth in 1978 portrays how children who practiced throwing a ball at two different targets eventually performed better opposed to children who practiced throwing a ball at the same single target.³⁰

Translating this to music, we could use the example of playing a difficult scale-like passage as accurately as possible (target). Repeatedly practicing that specific scale-like passage with the same fingering would resemble throwing a ball at the same single target. If, however, we would not only practice that specific scale-like passage, but also practice different scales and scale-like passages in numerous tonalities with various fingerings, it would resemble throwing a ball at different targets. This could support us in having a greater flexibility once that original scale-like passage arrives, especially when things don't go as planned. Funnily enough, this flexibility probably increases the probability of playing the passage accurately, since we depend less on it that things should go as planned. This is particularly relevant for performance situations, since many things don't go as planned when one is performing under pressure. By practicing from a mindset that relies on everything to go as planned, we risk further increasing performance pressure.

²⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nvNpJwCWZR4> (30.11.2023).

²⁸ Thank you, Judith Buchmann for introducing this information at the course “Hirnphysiologie für Üben und Unterrichten” at the Musik-Akademie Basel.

²⁹ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/662537/> (30.11.2023).

³⁰ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/662537/> (30.11.2023).

3 TECHNICAL EXERCISES AS A BASIS FOR PLAYING REPERTOIRE

3.1 François Couperin³¹

When we look at Couperin's method, *L'Art de toucher le Clavecin*³², technical exercises are introduced from the very beginning. Ornaments are to be practiced separately, as well as other finger exercises which reoccur in repertoire. In this way, the player will have the necessary tools ready on any occasion, enabling him or her with more freedom when playing repertoire or improvising.

"Besides the Graces in general use, such as shakes, mordents, ports de voix, (appoggiaturas from below followed by a mordent) etc, I have always given my pupils little finger-exercises to play; either passages, or strings of shakes or tremolos of various intervals, beginning with the simplest, and on the most natural intervals, and gradually leading them to the quickest and to those most transposed. These little exercises, which cannot be too varied or too multiplied, are, at the same time, material all ready to be put in place, and may prove serviceable on many occasions."³³

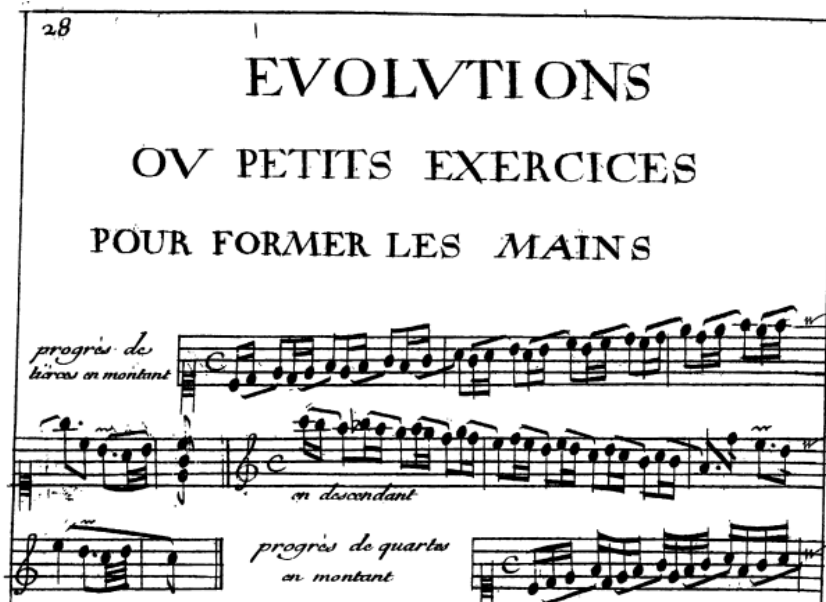


Illustration 4: Examples of "little-finger exercises", as described by Couperin.³⁴

³¹ This chapter has been inspired by: Gellrich (1992), 11–17.

³² François Couperin, *L'Art de toucher le Clavecin*, Paris: Chés L'Auteur, le Sieur Foucaut, 1716.

³³ Couperin (1977), 12.

³⁴ Couperin (1716), 28.

As Martin Gellrich summarizes about learning keyboard instruments in the eighteenth century:

“Die Lehrzeit eines Klavierspielers begann mit dem Spiel von Passagen vielfältigster Art: Tonleitern, Akkordbrechungen, Sequenzen und Verzierungen. Aus diesem Material wurden anschließend kleine Sätze gebildet. Die Sätze wurden anschließend entweder im Variationsspiel ausgeziert oder dienten als Keimzelle für die Erfindung größerer Musikstücke, den Vorläufern der späteren Etüden. Parallel dazu begann der Unterricht im Generalbaßspiel. Nachdem alle diese Fertigkeiten separat bis zu einem gewissen Grade vervollkommnet waren, sah sich der Schüler in der Lage, sie beim Improvisieren, dem Spiel von Vortragsstücken und Komponieren in vermischter Form zur Anwendung zu bringen.”³⁵

3.2 Kalkbrenner, Liszt and Czerny

Moving a bit later in time, a systematic approach to building up a solid technique can also be found in methods such as the *Pianoforte-Schule*³⁶ of Friedrich Kalkbrenner, a method much acclaimed by Franz Liszt³⁷.

After introducing the general rules of music, Kalkbrenner presents numerous exercises in ascending difficulty. In the chapter “Von den Eigenschaften, die man von einem Pianofortespieler verlangt”³⁸, Kalkbrenner lists what a pianist should be able to play to achieve equality of both hands, including all kinds of scales and trills.

³⁵ Gellrich (1992), 17.

³⁶ Kalkbrenner (n.d./1841).

³⁷ https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Friedrich_Kalkbrenner (05.01.2024).

³⁸ Kalkbrenner (n.d./1841), 24.

Von den Eigenschaften, die man von einem Pianofortespieler verlangt.

Der erste wichtige Punkt für einen Pianofortespieler ist, auch mit der linken Hand alle Stellen, die mit der rechten gespielt werden können, zu üben, so dass die vollkommenste Gleichheit zwischen beiden Händen herrscht. Um dahin zu kommen, muss er fertig spielen können:

- 1) die Übungen der fünf Noten;
- 2) alle chromatischen und diatonischen Tonleitern in den 4 Lagen;
- 3) die Terzen - Tonleitern, die chromatischen Terzen - Tonleitern, der Sechsen und Accorde;
- 4) die gebundenen, abgestossenen und springenden Octaven: **
- 5) die einfachen, doppelten, dreifachen, vierfachen Triller: die Triller mit einem Thema (s. nem 23^{te} Übungstück Op. 20.)
- 6) endlich die gebundenen und springenden Stellen mit übergeschlagenen Händen, und die Vereinigung aller dieser Schwierigkeiten, die er ohne Steifheit und Anstrengung ausführen muss. Durch gerade und Gegenbewegung.

Illustration 5: Extract from Kalkbrenner's *Pianoforte-Schule*.³⁹

Likewise, Carl Czerny also emphasizes the importance of practicing scales in his *Pianoforte-Schule*⁴⁰:

“Sollte irgendein Schüler glauben, dass auf diesen Gegenstand eine allzugrosse Wichtigkeit gelegt wird, so kann man ihm Folgendes erwidern: Seit der Entstehung des *Fortepiano*-Spiels sind die *Scalen*-Passagen ein Gemeingut aller Tonsetzer geworden. Man findet sie in Tonwerken, welche vor 100 Jahren geschrieben worden sind, eben so zahlreich, wie in den Neuesten und Modernsten; -eben so häufig in der unbedeutendsten Kleinigkeit, wie in den klassischen *Compositionen* eines *Bach*,

³⁹ Kalkbrenner (n.d./1841), 24.

⁴⁰ Carl Czerny, *Vollständige theoretisch-practische Pianoforte-Schule von dem ersten Anfange bis zur höchsten Ausbildung fortschreitend, und mit allen nöthigen, zu diesem Zwecke eigends componirten zahlreichen Beispielen. In 4 Theilen.* Wien: A. Diabelli & Comp., n.d. [1839].

Mozart, Beethoven; und auch jeder zukünftige Tonsetzer muss sich derselben noch bedienen, wie originell er auch sonst sein mag.”⁴¹

It is no surprise that virtuosos such as Franz Liszt focused greatly on practicing technique:

“Ausserdem übe ich vier bis fünf Stunden (Terzen, Sexten, Oktaven, Tremolos, Repetitionen, Kadenzen etc. etc.). Ah! Wenn ich nicht verrückt werde, wirst Du einen Künstler in mir wiederfinden! Ja, einen Künstler, nach Deinem Geschmack, wie er heute sein muss!”⁴²

Likewise, we know that Liszt instructed his pupil Valérie Boissier to practice scales in octaves for two hours every day.⁴³

3.3 Technique and our current time

In my own experience, many keyboard instrument players gradually moved away from systematically building up a solid technique since playing existing repertoire became more and more important in the classical instrumental pedagogy we know today.

If we take modern classical piano as an example, there is an enormous amount of repertoire played, dating from the late 17th century until contemporary compositions. Besides the great amount of solo music for piano, there is additionally a lot of chamber music, Lied and concertos. When we consider the demands of the classical music scene in our present time, it can be very challenging to execute performances by heart on a very high technical and musical level and at the same time continuously learn and play a big amount of repertoire. Out of my own experience, this is even more difficult if one is lacking a strong technical foundation.

In an ideal world, having a strong technical foundation gradually built up in the way described by Martin Gellrich⁴⁴ makes a lot of sense. Comparable to learning and internalizing all components of a language, once having the basis one is free to communicate freely by

⁴¹ Czerny (n.d./1839), 2er Theil, 1.

⁴² Franz Liszt to Pierre Wolff, 2.5.1832 in: La Mara, *Franz Liszt's Briefe*, Bd. 1, S.7., quoted in: Oliver Hilmes, *Franz Liszt. Biographie eines Superstars*, München: Siedler Verlag 2011, 61.

⁴³ Boissier (1930/2016), 24.

⁴⁴ See Chapter 3.1. François Couperin.

speaking, writing, reading and thinking. Translated to music, this would mean not only playing repertoire, but also improvising and composing.

However, we do not live in an ideal world. The technical foundation keyboard instrument players have depends greatly on many different factors such as where they grew up, the educational system and teachers available to them, the general structure and organization of musical education in their time as well as their family surroundings and practicing environment to mention only a few.

Personally, I have always considered myself one of the keyboard players who has some gaps in my technical development, which I had to catch up later and remains something I constantly work on. Especially when studying piano, I had to spend an enormous amount of time practicing the pieces I played. The more technical difficulties I faced in the piece, the more time it took, especially for technical difficulties I hadn't practiced separately in the past, one example being scales in octaves. Every time I faced a passage with octaves, I had to repeatedly spend a lot of time practicing these passages in a piece. However, doing it at that stage felt a bit like learning to pronounce a single word in a foreign language as convincingly as possible, without being able to speak the language properly. Unfortunately, it is a well-known phenomenon of the current time we live in to feel that we don't have enough "time" to spend on the foundational work. In the example of my octaves, at that time it seemed like a more realistic solution to practice the passage itself, since I was under time pressure of preparing a lot of repertoire in a short time.

As I believe my experience not to be entirely unique, I would like to ask the following question: What can we do in our present time to reconstruct the systematic approach there seems to have been in the past regarding technique?

3.4 Supporting technique in our current time

3.4.1 Including technique in instrumental lessons and during practicing

Naturally, the first thing we could do to support building up a solid technique is to put a bigger focus on practicing technique as a separate unit during instrumental lessons and at home. This includes instrument specific technical requirements such as different scales, arpeggios, chords, ornaments and figures in all tonalities. However, practicing technique as a separate unit doesn't necessarily mean executing technical exercises in a purely mechanical way. As Eugenie Schumann wrote about her mother, Clara Schumann:

“Wie Meereswogen brausten die Tonleitern, an- und abschwellend, gebunden und abgestoßen, in Oktaven, Terzen, Sexten, Dezimen und Doppelterzen, manchmal in einer Hand allein, während die andre begleitende Akkorde spielte, dann Arpeggien aller Art, Oktaven, Triller, alles im lebhaftesten Zeitmaße ohne die geringste Unterbrechung, in herrlichen Harmonien von einer Tonart in die andre übergehend. Das Wunderbare an diesem Üben war, daß es, obgleich ihm immer derselbe Plan zugrunde lag, doch jeden Tag neu, wie aus geheimen Quellen geschöpft, erschien (...) Eine entfernte Verwandte von uns, die zum Besuch bei uns weilte, sagte einmal, man habe ihr erzählt, Paganini habe mit einer Tonleiter die Menschen zu Tränen gerührt; sie habe das nie glauben können; jetzt aber, nachdem sie Mama üben gehört, verstehe sie es.”⁴⁵

To enhance the quality of practicing such technical exercises where repetition is involved, we could practice in a differentiated and varied way, as mentioned in chapter 2.3.2 (differentiated repetition) and chapter 2.3.3 (variable repetition). In this way, practicing the same technical exercises will always stay interesting, creative and inspiring.

3.4.2 Create technical exercises out of troublesome passages

The second thing we could do to support building up a solid technique, is to create our own technical exercises out of troublesome passages. This is particularly important if we are mainly practicing repertoire. By creating our own technical exercises out of troublesome

⁴⁵ Eugenie Schumann, *Erinnerungen*, Stuttgart: J. Engelhorn's Nachfolger 1927, 33–34.

passages, we can avoid losing time by practicing abstract segments of pieces, but instead practice the technical problem which lead us to experience that passage as difficult.

A well-known example of this phenomenon is Alfred Cortot's edition of the Chopin etudes. Although etudes are technical exercises already, Alfred Cortot published his own edition which includes technical exercises designed for each etude individually. As Cortot writes in the "note" to his Edition of the Chopin Etudes Opus 10:

"La loi essentielle de cette méthode est de travailler non pas le passage difficile, mais la difficulté contenue dans ce passage en lui restituant son caractère élémentaire."⁴⁶

By practicing the technical problem itself, we prevent repeatedly having to face similar technical problems in other pieces in the future. We also reduce the time we spend practicing the piece itself, avoiding the risk of having worked on the piece so often that our playing becomes mechanical:

"Elle peut être appliquée à l'étude de toutes les œuvres pianistiques, elle supprime le travail machinal qui déshonore l'exercice d'un Art fait de sensibilité et d'intelligence et sous un aspect lent et stationnaire, elle assure des progrès décisifs."⁴⁷

To illustrate Cortot's ideas, I used the example of Chopin's Etude Op. 10 No. 5, an etude in G-flat major known as the "Black Keys Etude".

⁴⁶ Alfred Cortot, *Éditions de Travail des Œuvres de Chopin 12 Études Op. 10*, Paris: Éditions Salabert 1915, NOTE.

⁴⁷ Cortot (1915), NOTE.

ETUDE N°5

(Op. 10)

The image shows the beginning of Chopin's Etude Op. 10 No. 5. The tempo is marked 'Vivace' with a quarter note equal to 116 beats. The key signature is three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat) and the time signature is 7/4. The score is written for piano, with a treble and bass clef. The right hand plays a series of eighth notes with various triplets and slurs, while the left hand plays chords and single notes. Performance instructions include 'f brillante' (forte, brilliant), 'p' (piano), 'legato sempre' (legato always), and 'cresc.' (crescendo). Fingering numbers (1-5) are placed above the notes. There are also some markings like 'Ped.' and asterisks below the bass line.

Illustration 6: Extract from Chopin Etude Op. 10 Nr. 5.⁴⁸

Before the score of every etude appears, Cortot shows numerous exercises he invented to prepare the player for the difficulties in the etude at hand. However, he initially introduces the collection of exercises for each etude by identifying and formulating the progress to be expected (“progrès à attendre”⁴⁹) as well as the specific difficulties (“difficultés particulières”⁵⁰) of the etude at hand.

For the etude above, he states:

“Progrès à attendre. Aisance, clarté et volubilité du jeu sur les touches noires. Legato brillant, nommé «jeu perlé»

Difficultés particulières. Déplacement souple de la main favorisant le jeu égal des droigts, dans la position disjointe. Régularité sonore, les doigts faibles succédant aux doigts forts. Passage du pouce sur les touches noires.”⁵¹

Cortot builds up the exercises systematically, starting with five-finger exercises on the black keys in different positions to ensure a basis of security for this etude.

⁴⁸ Cortot (1915), 36.

⁴⁹ Cortot (1915), 33.

⁵⁰ Cortot (1915), 33.

⁵¹ Cortot (1915), 33.

The first exercise entails the repetition of one single black key, while the other keys remain pressed down.

Assurer d'abord la parfaite possession de la succession des touches noires aux deux mains, par les exercices suivants:

N^o 1. Puis sur les positions suivantes

la main gauche une octave plus bas

Illustration 7: Extract from Alfred Cortot's exercises written for Chopin's Etude Op. 10 Nr. 5.⁵²

Cortot continues with some more exercises in a five-finger position, this time adding variations to the given exercises. This connects well with the concept of variable repetition discussed before.⁵³

N^o 2. *etc.*

Mêmes positions avec les variantes suivantes:

N^o 2 bis *etc.* (Pour la main gauche même doigté que plus haut)

N^o 3. *etc.*

N^o 3 bis Variantes sur les mêmes positions pour les deux mains. *etc.*

Illustration 8: Extract from Alfred Cortot's exercises written for Chopin's Etude Op. 10 Nr. 5.⁵⁴

⁵² Cortot (1915), 33.

⁵³ See Chapter 2.3.3.1 Changing parameters in the musical material.

⁵⁴ Cortot (1915), 33.

After the preparatory exercises, Cortot introduces exercises to work on the etude itself in general as well as on particular bars in the piece:

Pour le travail de l'Étude proprement dite, on fragmentera le trait de la main droite en passages de 4 mesures que l'on répétera avec les rythmes suivants:



puis également, alternativement legato et staccato, piano et fort. On reliera progressivement ces différents passages en fragments de plus en plus longs.

① Travail spécial des mesures 19 et 20.

The image shows three staves of musical notation. The first staff is labeled '①' and contains two measures of music, measures 19 and 20, with a fermata over the final note. The second staff is labeled '② Mesures 27 et 28' and contains two measures of music, measures 27 and 28, with a fermata over the final note. The third staff is labeled 'B.' and contains two measures of music, measures 29 and 30, with a fermata over the final note. The notation includes various rhythmic patterns and fingerings.

Illustration 9: Extract from Alfred Cortot's exercises written for Chopin's Etude Op. 10 Nr. 5.⁵⁵

As we can see in Cortot's method, identifying and formulating difficulties and goals accurately and precisely is very important for figuring out how to practice effectively. This identification and formulation process is a skill which requires continuous practice.

It would be of great benefit if teachers incorporate this process in instrumental lessons with their pupils, enabling it to become a habit for pupils whilst practicing at home. A good starting point is to ask questions, bringing us back to Mantel's "Prinzip des Problemlösens"⁵⁶, as mentioned in chapter 2.3.2:

"Dieses Verfahren ist definiert durch Fragen wie:

- Was ist eigentlich konkret mein Problem?
- Was genau steht der Lösung des Problems im Weg?
- Verfüge ich über Methoden, die Hindernisse auszuräumen?
- Wenn nicht, wie komme ich an solche Methoden?"⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Cortot (1915), 34.

⁵⁶ Mantel (2001), 15.

⁵⁷ Mantel (2001), 15.

Naturally, we could elaborate on these questions. Possible examples could include:

- Am I dealing with a technical problem or a musical problem, or both?
- Have I experienced similar difficulties in other pieces?
- Which method(s) worked best for me in solving similar difficulties in other pieces?
- Which habits of mine could possibly act as a hindrance in solving the problem?

When teaching kids, I like to introduce this process to them simply by asking which part of a piece they find most difficult. Depending on the pupil and their age, one could also ask what they find difficult about the passage. Similarly, one could ask them to identify passages they expect to have trouble with before starting to play a piece.

CONCLUSION

As Benjamin Franklin, founder of the United States said:

“Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn.”⁵⁸

Whether we are speaking about giving instrumental lessons or structuring our own practicing, on which level we involve ourselves or our pupils is crucial. The key to this is creativity, whether it concerns practicing effectively yourself or a teacher guiding their pupils in practicing effectively during instrumental lessons.

At the same time, teachers should have the skill to know how and when to be involved with the practicing of their students. This requires developing an ability to sense when which kind of exercise is appropriate for which pupil, and in which way it should be integrated in the lesson. If not integrated correctly, a teacher might run risks when being involved in the practicing of their pupils, as described in the following scenarios:

- Independent pupils might already have figured out which kind of practicing works best for them, and the involvement of a teacher might confuse them or be a loss of time, if not integrated appropriately.
- Pupils which tend to be dependent on their teachers might continuously rely on them to provide ideas on how to practice, if the teacher doesn't integrate it in a way which stimulates the pupils' independence.

For this reason, it is crucial to continuously reflect on effective practicing, whether we are applying it ourselves or supporting our pupils with it as teachers.

Reflecting on how we practice enables us to better understand what will be most effective for us or our students, such as when and how to use repetition whilst practicing. The effectiveness of our practicing can be greatly increased if we are creative with how we apply repetition whilst practicing. Besides applying this in the context of detailed practicing, one could also see the subject with a broader view. For example, being creative with the concept of repetition could also include pedagogues adding variation to repetitive elements in their

⁵⁸ https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/benjamin_franklin_383997 (23.01.2024).

instrumental lessons, like changing up the order of certain fixed blocks during the lesson. The same applies to pupils when planning the bigger structure of their own practicing time.

It can also have great benefits to reflect on how big a role we should give technical exercises in our own practicing routine and during instrumental lessons. In general, identifying and understanding the core of technical difficulties can help us find the most effective way to master it or support our students in mastering it. A creative way to do this could be to create technical exercises out of troublesome passages. Nonetheless, instrumental teachers might face the problem that parents (and pupils) expect fast progress, which usually means being able to play pieces familiar to them. This might make it difficult for a teacher to work on technical exercises thoroughly with their pupils, as initially there might be longer periods of time that pupils and their parents won't notice results in the way they expect.

While writing this "Masterarbeit", I had two expectations which I believe to be confirmed, namely:

- Effective practicing is a concept which countless musicians and pedagogues have been reflecting on and sharing information about, not only in our current time but also in the past, as seen in historical sources from the 18th and 19th century which I quoted in this "Masterarbeit".
- There is no "one-size-fits-all" to effective practicing. For this reason, it is crucial to stay creative, curious and open on this topic as a musician and a music pedagogue.

Concerning my own practicing, I have already been applying many things I have spoken about in this "Masterarbeit" during my own practicing and whilst teaching. Nonetheless, it inspired me to give technical exercises a bigger space in my own practicing routine and stay creative with how I practice.

Most of all, this "Masterarbeit" helped me gain new ideas on how to help my students practice effectively, as well as a better understanding of how to structure it in instrumental lessons. From now on, I would like to be more aware of supporting pupils individually in practicing effectively and not assume that the same exercise will be right for everyone. Furthermore, I would like to pay more attention to how I incorporate technical exercises and effective practicing in instrumental lessons. This involves a greater awareness of what would

be useful to incorporate at which moment for which pupil. Concerning lessons with kids, integrating games can be a powerful tool to add variation to their practicing and the structure of the lesson. In addition, I would like to stimulate pupils to come up with their own ideas concerning effective practicing, if appropriate.

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Illustration 1: Charles-Louis Hanon, *Der Klavier-Virtuose*, Edited by: Otto Weinreich, Leipzig: C.F.PETERS LTD & CO. KG 1931/renewed 1959, 3.

Illustration 2: Charles-Louis Hanon, *Der Klavier-Virtuose*, Edited by: Otto Weinreich, Leipzig: C.F.PETERS LTD & CO. KG 1931/renewed 1959, 4.

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Illustration 4: François Couperin, *L'Art de toucher le Clavecin*, Paris: Chés L'Auteur, le Sieur Foucaut, 1716, 28.

Illustration 5: Friedrich Kalkbrenner, *Pianoforte-Schule Op. 108/Anweisung das Pianoforte mit Hülfe des Handleiters spielen zu lernen*, Leipzig: Fr. Kistner, n.d. [1841], 24.

Illustration 6: Alfred Cortot, *Éditions de Travail des Œuvres de Chopin 12 Études Op. 10*, Paris: Éditions Salabert 1915, 36.

Illustration 7: Alfred Cortot, *Éditions de Travail des Œuvres de Chopin 12 Études Op. 10*, Paris: Éditions Salabert 1915, 33.

Illustration 8: Alfred Cortot, *Éditions de Travail des Œuvres de Chopin 12 Études Op. 10*, Paris: Éditions Salabert 1915, 33.

Illustration 9: Alfred Cortot, *Éditions de Travail des Œuvres de Chopin 12 Études Op. 10*, Paris: Éditions Salabert 1915, 34.

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Vorname Maria

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