

8. PIANO PEDAGOGY: WESTERN APPROACH IN A ORIENTAL CULTURE PEDAGOGICAL EXPERIENCE IN MAGHREB

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Abstract: *The main objective of education is to realize progress through qualitative changes driven by self-awareness. Education has a permanent effect and it entangles a long-term transformation. Pedagogy is necessary in every culture in order to facilitate and transmit cultural traits and art to future generations, being tied strongly to societal reality. Western pedagogical experience in a country of oriental background needs to find the balance between formative and informative, universal and traditional, and combine all those elements in a way that they complement each other for attaining the goal of opening doors to deeper knowledge for all the parties involved.*

Key words: *Pedagogy, western, oriental*

Art as an integral component of culture has a main role for society, because of its cognitive and educational functions. Form of the human conscience, art reflects the reality through expressive images, capable to generate and communicate specific emotions. The artist transmits subjective and objective reality facts facilitated by their sensations, intuition, affectivity and their intelligence. Art is connected to its contemporary social reality and the artists' job is to reflect it. They reflect their contemporary society through their work, using stylistically appropriate characteristics of their time. The goal of this paper is to focus on the phenomenon of the Western music implications in the artistic growth of the Tunisian students of oriental culture. In my pedagogical activity as a piano faculty at the Superior Institute of Music of Sousse and Tunis (Tunisia), the main challenge has been to train students of oriental culture with limited knowledge of Western music about the art of piano interpretation, also to comprehend the vast Western musical repertoire.

This dichotomy "Western-oriental" in the educational system represented a big trial not only for the professors for the Westernized culture, but also for the students of oriental background. How could one interpret Bach, Mozart, and Beethoven in their freshmen year of college when they don't even know where the notes belong on the staff?²⁶ Most students start playing their instrument in their freshmen year or start the program with very basic knowledge of music.

In Western culture, the artistic education is formal, starting from a very young age and building up to superior levels. Tunisian students on the other hand have a limited time spent in music colleges to accumulate such vast material. The result is that artistic education here is more informal. That deprives the students of acquiring enough knowledge and practice in order to become a good musician with good pedagogical skills.

A succinct analysis of the reality of those institutions regarding the oriental instrument interpretation led to a pertinent conclusion about the

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efficiency of the pedagogical methods that are utilized here. Therefore, the results show a big lack of:

- Development of the instrumental technique
- Poor knowledge of the piano apparatus
- Freedom of movement of all the components of the pianistic apparatus
- Control of the musical thinking
- The science of sound formation
- Problems of control and memorization in interpretation
- Lack of knowledge of the compositional styles
- Problems of self-control in recitals and exams
- Problems of concentration

Music is a universal language. The musicians should be able to understand and analyze the works they have to play before they are performing them, so that they can enter and transport their audience into a new dimension. In the Western educational system, acquiring knowledge and the learning process shouldn't be a problem, but in a strict oriental environment, with limited time, a teacher has only 4-5 years, during college years, to implement all those aspects. In this temporal space, the teacher has to surpass all or most of all the barriers in interpretation, in order for the student to be prepared enough for their final recital and be at the level required by the European standards for instrumental technique and performance.

In order to create good piano educators, our efforts were focused on the emotional development of the musician, establishing a strong connection between the teacher and the student. Only by getting to know the qualities of each student, their intelligence, motivation, work ethic, physical and psychological strength, the teacher could help the student choose long term appropriate strategies and ultimately, helping the student to reach an acceptable interpretative level in such short period of time. For the students that didn't choose to major in instrumental performance, the main objectives were geared towards improving the musical and technical qualities in the following directions:

1. Instrumental interpretation
2. Forms, analysis and Western musical styles
3. Scientific research

1. Instrumental interpretation

Western instrumental pedagogy helped and improved the quality of musical interpretation of oriental students in the following areas:

- Instrumental technique: freedom of body movement; knowledge and control of the components of the pianistic apparatus; equality among sounds through controlled movement of each finger; controlling the speed and the angle of attack of each finger; "breathing technique" for the pulsation of the attack at the beginning of the phrase; the balance between activating the tip of each finger while maintaining complete freedom in the rest of the body.

- Teaching the students how to better analyze and become independent the musical context by following the musical text with fidelity; analysis of musical phrases; the form of the entire work; decoding the characters, feelings, the artistic message of the composition.

If Western music is based on strict instrumental technique, the world of the oriental music revolves around the mysterious character of the human being. Its melismatic flows seem to have a free, uncontrolled character, though touching the deepest chords in our souls. It is because of this dichotomy "cold-warm" that allowed the teachers and the students of Western music in the Tunisian music colleges to attain unexpected high levels of instrumental interpretation.

In order to improve their technique and their score analysis skills, the teachers approach was to assist the students become independent, to think, build and be creative on their own, without being told how or what is the correct approach.

Freshman year students started with C Major scale over two octaves, Czerny Etudes op.599 and Minuets by Anna Magdalena Bach. By their senior year, students were performing scales in thirds, sixths and octaves, in parallel and contrary motion, Etudes by Chopin, Rachmaninoff, sonatas by Mozart, Beethoven, preludes and fugues by Bach, romantic and modern pieces with a high level of difficulty.

2. Form, analysis and styles of Western music

To attain a superior level of musical intelligence of the Western culture, students also had to study music theory, solfeggio and melodic and harmonic dictation, harmony, counterpoint, world music history, forms and music analysis, compositional styles. The courses that assisted the students the most to faster understand and develop the performance skills were compositional styles and analysis of Western music forms.

The necessary components in order to become a successful performer are found in the score and in the compositional style of the score. The composer can not offer the means of interpretation. Therefore, the students, who already developed a certain degree of musical intelligence based on the course work we provided, are expected to decode the composer's intentions and to send the true message to their audience by becoming directly involved in the musical act of the interpretation.

In order to teach the true meaning of the musical works, the intentions of the composer, how to decode the musical message and the technical means utilized, the pedagogical system was geared in 3 directions:

1. The analysis of the work to the smallest detail
2. Providing the intellectual training to overcome technical and interpretative difficulties
3. The function of the entire body in the pianistic apparatus

The lack of time was compensated by replacing the real movement with the imaginary movement.²⁷ This route of the information, from intention to action is

²⁷ Great teachers admit that the fastest way to overcome a technical difficulty and to memorize it is to visualize it

generally unconsciously done. The access toward the conscious movement is done through the mental stimulation that precedes the execution of the movement. Roland Barthes said: « *il y a deux musiques : celle que l'on écoute, celle qui l'on joue. Ces deux musiques sont deux arts différents, ont chacun possède sa propre histoire, sa sociologie, son esthétique, son érotique ; un même auteur peut être mineur si on l'écoute, immense si on le joue (même mal)* »²⁸

The lack of a deep understanding of the work, of the musical analysis and of technical security leads to insecurity in performance. Psychological insecurity could become a true obstacle in transmitting the artistic message. The score needs to become one with the performer. The great pianist and composer Dinu Lipatti once said that if you love the score, the score will love you back.²⁹ The clearer the mind, prepared to judge every move and to understand the score already memorized, the faster and more naturally the performer can focus on listening to their instrument, discovering new sonorities, phrasing, creating a unified artistic image. It also allows the performer to transcend into a different, dream-like dimension, but without losing contact with reality and still maintain control of the performance.

Making music means to create an animated architectural edifice, with a profound internal life, filled with sensations, thoughts, and feelings that impact the world around us. Music brings life, moves, engages the performer, the instrument and the audience. It goes beyond the simple execution of the notes and symbols notated on the score. That could be a trap that the performer needs to stay away. "*When listening to a great performer, we admire that their strong means of communication, of building the architectural structure of the work, their personality, stage presence are defined by what we could call it only a fight with matter.*"³⁰ As stated above, the professors worked to create performers of Western music with a high level of difficulty. It was not easy, but the greatest support came from the traditional culture, and from the Tunisian students' receptivity and their innate talent.

We noticed that those incredible performances had not been possible in this combination of "Western- oriental", two cultures that are completely different, if they didn't have similar levels of sensitivity. The novelty of this combination stimulated the individual development and opened unbelievable possibilities toward a complex understanding of the artistic phenomenon. This cultural exchange allowed Tunisian students to enter the world of universal

²⁸ Barthes Roland, « *Musica Pratica* », (L'Arc, février 1970), in Id. *L'obvie et l'obtus. Essais critiques III* , Paris Seuilcoll. Tel Quel, 1982, P. 231. ("There are 2 kinds of music: the one we listen to and the one we're playing. Those two are two different art forms, each one has its own history, sociology, esthetic and erotic character; the same composer could be uninteresting if we listen to them, or extraordinary if we play them (even if we play them poorly)".

²⁹Păsculescu Florian, Carmen, *Vocatie si destin Dinu Lipatti*, editura Muzicala, Bucuresti, 1986

³⁰ Pitis, Ana ; Minei, Ioana, « *Teoria comportamentului pianistic* », editura Sfantul Gheorghe-Vechi, Bucuresti, 1997, pag.133. « *Auzind un mare pianist admiram faptul ca forta lui de comunicare, de a cladi convingator arhitectonica piesei, personalitatea, prezenta sa scenica sunt degrevate de ceea ce am putea numi "lupta cu materia"* ».

music and the Western professors to grow to appreciate the oriental culture, to know it to a deeper level, and to incorporate it in their class work, by using images and specific analogies. If in the beginning stages, those accomplishments seemed unrealistic, the more we worked together, the bigger the growth in the quality of the musical interpretation.

3. Scientific Research

Today's world is geared toward science and advanced technology. Today, more than ever, we use scientific research in all areas. Every musician needs to be up to date with the latest musical research. The topics for the research for the final papers to graduate from college or to obtain master degrees were in the following areas:

- Instrumental technique
- Knowledge of the instrument
- Tunisian musical pedagogy - between reality and perspective
- Analysis of well-known and large scale universal works

Scientific research, together with the music courses taught, assisted the Tunisian students to acquire the Western performance material at a superior level, improve their technical abilities and to better understand musical styles and ideas. The ideal performance would require the artist to know their instrument, in addition to the mastery of technique and the deep understanding of the work performed. Modern pedagogy stresses the importance of collaboration between the teacher and student, while traditional pedagogy is mostly teacher directed. Today's education in Tunisian institutes of music follows the modern model, where relationship between teacher - student is based on a continuous partnership. The two musical cultures, Western and oriental, do not cancel each other, they complete each other, opening new doors for further knowledge, which will assist Tunisian musicologists with their work in the artistic world. In a country like Tunisia, whose music has a profound modal character, west and east meet, ultimately leading towards the same goal, THE LOVE FOR MUSIC.

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