Schnabel's Interpretation of Piano Music, Ch’s 11 & 12
Author: K. Wolff

Presented by Merrick Mosst
ISE 599, Spring 2006

Background

Author: Konrad Wolff (1907-1989)
- Born in Berlin
- Doctor of Law from Berlin University
- Diplomes d'études superieures from the Sorbonne in Paris
- Moved to the United States with his wife in 1941
- Private studies under Liszt pupil Joseph Lomba, Bruno Elsner and Artur Schnabel
- Schnabel: “he is a remarkable pianist, an excellent theorist, a learned historian, an outstanding teacher, a brilliant thinker and writer”

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  - Proportions of Sound
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Background

Subject: Artur Schnabel (1882-1951)
- Born in Lipnik, Poland
- Studied piano from the age of seven in Vienna under Theodor Leschetizky who said to him “You will never be a pianist. You are a musician.”
- Starting in 1925, he taught at the Berlin State Academy
- Moved to America in 1939
- Returned to Europe at the end of WWII

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Chapter 11: The Means of Regulating Sound

- Tone Color
  - Piano tone
  - Quality of neutrality
  - Limited number of expressive parameters available to performer
  - Soft and Sustain pedals
  - Coloring is accomplished mostly by indirect means
  - Shading of tone intensity (attack and release velocities)

Chapter 11: The Means of Regulating Sound

- Schnabel’s opinion on whether piano should imitate color of other instruments
  - Sometimes must be done (Ex 187), but should be avoided in general
  - Even with transcriptions, it is a mistake to do so
- Acoustic conditions
  - Pianist must be prepared for changing acoustic conditions
  - Exact pedaling must be adjusted

Chapter 11: The Means of Regulating Sound

- Proportions of sound
  - Schnabel taught rules concerning the ratios of loudness between synchronous notes
  - Four-part chord in closed position (Ex 191) is played more emphasis on the top note first, bottom second, and then the rest
  - If the notes are farther apart, the inner notes become proportionally more important
  - Pianissimo and fortissimo necessitate careful attention to loudness ratios

Chapter 11: The Means of Regulating Sound

- In octave duplications, the performer must distinguish between the principle and duplicating parts
  - The difference in loudness must be significant
  - The lower octave may be "simply carried along" by the upper part (Ex 192)
  - However, the lower octave may lead, particularly in slow expressive music (Ex 193)
Chapter 11: The Means of Regulating Sound

- For thirds and sixths, at the top, the higher part leads whereas at the bottom, the lower part leads (Ex 196)
- Trills are discussed in the following chapter
- Root notes are important when they occur in an inner part, esp as melodic connections (Ex 197)

Chapter 12: Technique

- Schnabel considered technique a means to a musical end
- Contrary to Conservatory teachings, there is no such thing as an "illegal" trick
- He considered physical activity of performance as a gesture similar to rhetoric
- He sat relatively far away from the keyboard so he had a more "forward and out" manner of playing
- Practicing is "passing the day at the piano with patience and serenity"
- Practicing should be experimentation rather than drill
  - Opposed to slow practicing of fast passages, practicing each hand alone
  - Etudes are a waste of time for their lack of varying challenges
  - Suggested inventing patterns that pose technical problems
# Chapter 12: Technique

- Melodic articulation was the focal point of his practicing
  - Worked on slow passages as much as faster ones
- Schnabel performed trills in the manner of a vocalist
- He worked out fingerings such that the hand would remain in a "natural position"
- Neighboring notes were played with non-adjacent fingers
  - Opposed to traditional training of keeping the hand motionless
- He considered all aspects other than reducing wrong notes as priorities

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# The End

- Questions?