



Inspiring Artistry Repertoire Project

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Sean Schulze presents: Fantasia in D Minor, K. 397 by W.A. Mozart

Process and Practice

Fully Present: Tips for maintaining focus and engagement over time

- Try to keep interpretive possibilities open by listening to a variety of recordings with the student. It can be counter productive to become too attached to a single performance by a great artist thereby limiting interpretive possibilities.
- Experiment with a variety of different phrasing/direction plans. For example the ascending arpeggio in m.34 might work equally well with either a crescendo or a diminuendo. There are many other instances where a variety of options would be appropriate.
- Try out different tempi where appropriate. For example, the passage starting at m. 23 could work with the same tempo as previously or equally as well with a feeling of *piu mosso* (given that this is a fantasy, some leeway is available with regard to these matters). The same would apply to the improvisatory passages that occur at m.34, m.44 and m.86

Break it Up: Useful practice segments; how to connect them and plug them back into the whole

- The LH in m.12-15 can be practiced on its own in order to hear the two distinct sound layers that are present. When the RH melody is reintroduced, the possibility for more sophisticated listening that is attentive to all the parts becomes a possibility. The same approach would apply of course to m.29-33 and 45-48.
- A sense of gesture is important with the descending passage in m.34. Each 10-note segment should be conceived in a single physical gesture. The same principle would apply at m.44. Both of these passages will generally benefit from rhythmic pattern practice.
- The ascending arpeggio at the end of m.34 can be distributed between the two hands: LH takes the first 4 notes, followed by 4 notes in the RH. The RH would end up taking the last 6 notes of this passage. This would also apply at m.53.
- The passage from m.41-43 is tricky for most pianists. Firstly, the LH needs a well thought out fingering to negotiate the double notes. The RH also needs individual attention to ensure that the variety of articulation is realized: 2-note slurs, staccatos and unmarked 1/16th notes need to be carefully differentiated. Only when these independent parts are well prepared should the two hands be combined. It can be a good idea to address

this passage before the similar passage at m. 26-27 which will feel easier once the former is mastered.

- The LH figure in m.70-83 needs some specialized attention for most of my students. There are at least a couple of fingering possibilities for the first measure: 5-1-3-1 or 5-2-4-2. The hand size of the student will be decisive with this decision. Once the fingering is decided on, a gentle rotation should be achieved by exaggerating a little at first. This will facilitate ease and the speed necessary later on.

Layers and outlines: Tips for focusing on how the parts make up the whole

- I love showing students how the contour of the D major section at m.55 is foreshadowed with the crest of the D minor arpeggio that opens the work in m.1
- Given that similar material occurs in different keys during this work, it is helpful to think of how D minor (m.12-15) will compare with A minor (m.29 onwards) or how the A minor of m.20-27 compares with the equivalent G minor passage in m. 35-42. This can help map out a large-scale sense of structure for the whole work.
- I like my students to hear how the D major theme at m.55 occurs again at m.87 and once more at m.98. On each of these occasions it is preceded by different material and this in turn will influence the approach and the prevailing mood.

Achieving flow: Ideas for finding and maintaining tempo, managing modifications artistically

- The tempo at the outset of the work should be thought of as a slow 2-beats per measure. This can facilitate a sense of harmonic flow and horizontal direction with this passage. In a similar vein, the adagio at m. 12 should be felt in 4, and not in 8 beats per measure which results in an overly vertical approach to the phrase.
- While I like to conduct when my students are playing, it can be fun to reverse roles and ask the student to conduct in order that they might physically experience the sense of gesture that is needed.
- Finding a tasteful rubato can be facilitated by drawing an analogy with the punctuation that governs written language. For example, the deceptive cadence at m.52 is clearly a question mark while the fortissimo chords that conclude the work are the musical equivalent of an exclamation point!
- There are various places in this work that require a dramatic silence, most notably at m.28. Until this is internalized, it can be helpful to have students silently count out the measure of silence or to consciously breathe deeply at these moments.

Make it mine: Tips for developing and refining a personal, internal sense of the piece.

- Mental practice can be encouraged at this point in the journey. Sitting away from the piano and hearing a beautiful performance from beginning to end with the inner ear can help develop a wider grasp of the entire structure.
- Playing other pieces by Mozart and his contemporaries can nourish one's understanding and provide a fresh perspective of this work. In the later stages of working on this I assign another work to my students such as the Mozart Sonata in G major K.283 (I) or the Haydn Sonata in e minor Hob.XVI:34

- Identifying places in the work that allow for artistic license can be helpful in establishing a scaffolding from which to play with freedom and spontaneity. I like to signpost a few places in this work where a spontaneous approach to the pacing can be implemented. For example, m.10 (take some time or not?), m.19 (slight slowing?) or m.32-33 (gentle accelerando?).
- I enjoy having my students record their own performance and then have them self-critique their playing. This is useful in terms of developing deeper and more critical listening skills which are essential tools for building a sophisticated performance.

Deep knowing: Tips for securing memory

- I always ask my students to know what key any given passage is in. Adding to this, it is important to know what arpeggio or scale various passages are constructed from.
- Dividing the work into sections and then being able to start randomly from those sections is a tried and tested procedure for securing the memory.
- My students are encouraged to be able to play the LH alone by memory before a performance. Adding to this, it is very helpful to play the LH on the piano while "ghost-playing" the RH on one's lap. This is invaluable in terms of securing memory and coordination.
- Practicing the work at a very slow tempo is helpful to truly test the security of the memory.
- It is very helpful to ask students to play similar passages that occur in different keys alongside each other in order to compare and contrast the fingering/hand shape. For example the passage from m.20-27 alongside the passage from m.35-43.

Final stages: Tips for ensuring performance readiness, maintaining freshness and spontaneity, and reinforcing an expressive personal connection

- If possible I provide opportunities for my students to play on different pianos and in different acoustical settings prior to a performance. This can dilute the surprise of having to adjust to a new instrument for the first time at a performance.
- I always ask my students to try out the shoes and outfit they will be wearing in the performance ahead of time to ensure maximum comfort and to avoid the possibility of an unexpected and uncomfortable distraction.
- Playing at exaggeratedly fast or slow tempos can be useful in preparing for a performance - if one can develop security at these extremes, then the regular tempo starts feeling easy and comfortable.
- I enjoy having my students do a performance for their classmate who has a lesson immediately before or after their lesson in order that they can try out the work for a friendly set of ears.
- Finally I always tell my students that it is a privilege to play this great repertoire and to treat a performance as an opportunity to share the miracle of Mozart with a grateful listener. Ideally the performance should not be about us but about the composer!