
Technique lets pianists avert pain

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Young pianists typically train with visions of glamorous solo careers in mind. Few get there, either for lack of opportunity, drive or talent.

Pianist Edna Golandsky's job, as she sees it, is to make sure that, among all the reasons a promising young pianist might fail, physical injury or repetitive stress injury is not one of them.

"The fact there are so many pianists experiencing injuries and limitations, and who have enormous frustration, tells you something," says Golandsky, an Israeli who came to New York to study at the Juilliard School in the late '60s. "It goes to what is the foundation of the virtuoso technique. You really want to bring to the consciousness of people that all this could be prevented."

Golandsky is a disciple of Dorothy Taubman, the well known and sometimes controversial teacher and pedagogue who spent a half century analyzing the physical process of playing piano, and how efficient use of musculature can produce more profound music. Taubman, now in her late 80s and no longer active in the piano world, has been credited with salvaging the career of many a pianist trapped by physical limitation: an aching back, chronically throbbing finger or wrist, or even the dreaded neurological condition, dystonia, which felled the early careers of Leon Fleisher and Gary Graffman.

Golandsky says the Taubman method is difficult to describe, but involves analyzing places that are too tense or relaxed in a pianist's body and retraining the technique. Clearly there is a large following. That is why Golandsky, who for 26 years helped Taubman run her institute at Williams College in Massachusetts, has branched off on her own with the Golandsky International Piano Festival and Symposium at Princeton University next week.

This is the institute's second year at Princeton, and Golandsky expects about 150 students and teachers to attend a schedule of events that includes master classes, panel sessions, lessons and performances. Those concerts, all in Princeton University's 300-seat Taplin Auditorium, are open to the public.

Russian-Israeli pianist Ilya Itin, who won the prestigious Leeds competition in 1996, will play Beethoven and Prokofiev on Monday; jazz pianist Danilo Perez, who will give the final performance on July 23, is a multiple Grammy winner who plans a program of Latin jazz favorites. Most interesting, perhaps, is a joint recital by Italian pianist Emanuele Arciuli and Richard Steinbach scheduled for July 19, an evening devoted to the music of George Crumb, who plans to attend.

"Almost everybody there has been involved with (Taubman's) work or likewise is a

disciple," Golandsky says.

Not all pianists who train at top conservatories and universities will enjoy a performer's life. Golandsky, for instance, went to Taubman as a grad student with excessive back pain and was impressed enough by the pedagogue's ability to "fix" her physical technique that she has devoted an entire career to spreading the word: Pain is not a necessary part of a pianist's lonely regime of solo practice.

"Pain anywhere from the fingertips to the hand and back is an indication something is not right," Golandsky says. "In piano playing, there should be no pain. The correct movement gets rid of the symptoms."

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