

# HANDLE WITH CARE

Dorothy Taubman's methodology – which teaches how to make music without fatigue, pain or injury – has transformed pianists' lives the world over, writes *Audrey Schneider*



Edna Golandsky was one of Dorothy Taubman's key collaborators and went on to co-found the Golandsky Institute in 2003

FOR THE PAST ELEVEN YEARS, musicians, teachers and students from all over the world have gathered annually at Princeton University in New Jersey, US, for a seven-day symposium on the Taubman Approach. The methodology appeals to a broad range of pianists – from seasoned professionals and dedicated teachers to gifted amateurs – all of whom come together to share the fascinating pedagogy and artistry of Dorothy Taubman's unique technique.

Although awareness of musicians' injuries increased during the last two decades of the 20th century, the roots of the problem are as old as the art of performing. In the late 17th century, physician Bernardino Ramazzini was the first to describe 'cumulative micro-trauma' as the main cause of 'occupational disease'. We know that some of the most revered pianists of the past suffered pain, sporadically or constantly: Clara Schumann, Paderewski, Scriabin, Schnabel, Rachmaninov and Glenn Gould all cited discomfort throughout their careers. And although the likes of Arrau, Rubinstein, Horowitz, Horowitz, Horowitz, Earl Wild and Jorge Bolet all played well into

advanced age, many younger pianists have been sidelined in their 20s and 30s, purportedly because of 'overpractising'. Taubman (1917-2013) and her colleagues quickly realised that many of these problems were due to misuse, not overuse.

CONSIDERING THE SUBTLETIES and complexities involved in playing any instrument, it is easy to understand why many physical problems have previously defied detection: most movements are minuscule and some aren't even visible. Most traditional training was based on observation of the visible, with disregard for what was operating underneath. Taubman's approach, on the other hand, was in line with Nobel Prize-winning Hungarian physiologist Albert Szent-Györgyi's assertion: 'Discovery consists of seeing what everybody has seen and thinking what nobody has thought.'

In essence, Taubman's approach explains how the fingers, hand and arm should function in order to make music without fatigue, pain or injury. This prevents problems from occurring in the first place and provides retraining pathways for those already injured. It

utilises almost invisible hand and arm motions to facilitate movements of the fingers across the keyboard, eliminating overuse or forced misuse of fingers alone for power, speed and covering distance. Taubman's combined understanding of human physiology and the mechanical possibilities of the piano yielded a system of totally economical motion.

THE TAUBMAN APPROACH HAS undergone scientific validation studies and emerged as 'the only movement retraining approach with any non-anecdotal evidence of efficacy with regard to repetitive stress injuries' (W Pereira et al, proceedings of the 13th Triennial Congress of the International Ergonomics Association, Vol 4, pp384-386, 1997).

Edna Golandsky is the person with whom Dorothy Taubman worked most closely. Taubman wrote: 'I consider her the leading authority on the Taubman Approach to instrumental playing.' Together, they established the Taubman Institute in 1976, where pianists could come together for one to two weeks to pursue intensive study. The institute was



## EDUCATION

held for many years in Massachusetts, first at Amherst College and later at Williams College.

In 2003, Golandsky, John Bloomfield, Robert Durso and Mary Moran established the Golandsky Institute, tasked with cultivating high-level training in the Taubman Approach within the international music community. Since 2004, the institute has held an intensive Summer Symposium and International Piano Festival at Princeton University every year in July.

Those attending for the first time are said to be inspired by the warmth, friendliness and generosity of faculty and participants. This is in accordance with Taubman's claim that 'we learn best when we are relaxed and happy. The best teachers never stop being students. Pain, insecurity and lack of technical control are symptoms of non-co-ordination, rather than a lack of talent, practice or imagination.' Many returning participants embark on a professional training programme, mentored by faculty, which leads to certification as instructors. All participants, performers, teachers and students alike are engaged in the process of applying Taubman principles, which often resolve technical limitations and encourage full artistic expression.

The Summer Symposium includes private lessons, supervised practice sessions for first-time participants, masterclasses, interactive technique clinics, workshops, lecture demonstrations, performance opportunities, pedagogic strategies and evening concerts. Many of these are professionally filmed and produced each year and later released to the institute's website, where users can purchase them for further at-home study. Most recently, the institute launched a digital subscription streaming service where nearly 60 of these instructional videos are available for unlimited online viewing. The institute is committed to providing easy access to training films, particularly for those who are not able to attend the Summer Symposium or workshops regularly or in person.

The Golandsky Institute operates throughout the year with workshops, masterclasses and training sessions in New York, Philadelphia, Berkeley, Montreal and other cities. ♪

*The 2015 Summer Symposium takes place on 11-19 July at Princeton University, US*

*Digital readers may click on the photographs for sample videography*

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Golandsky Institute co-founder Robert Durso is a regular lecturer at the Summer Symposium

