

## THE ART OF PRACTICING: WORKSHOP REVIEW

By Rhona-Mae Arca

The first time I heard Dmitry Nesterov perform was at the 1992 Honens Competition. Out of the many talented pianists competing, I remember him especially because Irina Ginzburg, my last teacher, was impressed with his playing - and she had incredibly high standards. He went on to become one of the laureates at that competition.

The next time I ran into Dmitry was several years later, when he accompanied my brother Jay-Arnel at the Provincial Music Festival. They performed the Arensky *Piano Concerto in f minor, Op. 2*. He didn't just accompany, he enhanced what Jay-Arnel was expressing and made it sound even better.

Dmitry also gave Jay-Arnel invaluable tips when he sprained his pinky finger two weeks before Provincials. Thanks to Dmitry's advice, Jay-Arnel's pinky recovered enough to deliver a good performance. He also gave him advice on how to practice Liszt's *La Campanella* without injuring his hand. So when I heard that Dmitry would be leading a workshop on "The Art of Practicing", I was very excited.

On February 25, 2005, 46 APTA members from Calgary and area came to Dmitry's workshop on "The Art of Practicing". Dmitry graduated from the Central Music School in Moscow, Moscow State Tchaikovsky Conservatory and the University of Calgary. He has performed with numerous orchestras throughout the former Soviet Union.

In 1994, Dmitry and his family immigrated to Canada. He has performed as a soloist with orchestras throughout Alberta and British Columbia and is a frequent guest at the Banff Arts Festival and Mozart Festival in Kelowna, B.C. He has delivered solo recitals as well as with Duo Solista - the violin/piano duo he formed with his wife, violinist Olga Kotova. He currently teaches at the Mount Royal College Conservatory.

Dmitry began the workshop by saying "All technique should have a sense of beauty. Nothing should be mechanical." He then went on to address common technical challenges that pianists face when working on repertoire:

**Challenge: Student plays the beginning of phrases well but not the latter half**

Have your student play a scale slowly, listening carefully to the sound decay. When he/she plays the next note in the scale, have him/her match the tone of the decaying note.

**Challenge: Trouble playing legato scales, musically and with good tone at a fast tempo**

Exercise 1: Have the student play two notes in a scale quickly, with good tone. Have the student add a note to the grouping one at a time. Exercise 2: Have the student play a five-note scale, ascending and descending, quickly and with good tone.

**Challenge: Playing with good lateral movement**

Let the elbow lead in the lateral motion. Keep wrist and forearm aligned. To achieve speed, count in groups of 8's. To increase speed, increase the counting groups (4's, 8's, 16's).

**Challenge: Playing chords**

Think in clusters, roll the chords, use wrist but make the notes clear. Try playing a broken chord, but stop on the third of the chord in the next inversion, or the fifth or the seventh (e.g. G-B-D-F-B, B-D-F-G-D, etc.). Play chords with a nice full sound. If playing loud chords or passages, practice it at a softer dynamic level to conserve energy. Practicing major, minor, augmented and diminished four note chords is good for stretching.

**Challenge: Playing octave scales**

Aim for maximum effect created by minimum effort. Above all, play these melodically. Don't collapse the arch of your hand otherwise, you will overextend your hand, leading to injury. Stay close to black keys. Also, try just your thumb (this is in the *Boris Berlin Daily Exercises*).

**Challenge: Teaching technical exercises to young students**

Do finger gymnastics, like making O's (in *Piano Adventures*), flicking dust, finger stands, finger circles, fist shakes, finger/arm circles, etc. Develop their musical ears early by having them listen to music at home and attend concerts. Sing often with them.

*(Continued on page 23)*

(Continued from page 21)

### Challenge: Weak pinky finger

Have the student practice a doubled third exercise (e.g., CE, DF, EG, DF, CE) and concentrate on voicing either the upper or lower note.

The practice tip that captured everyone's attention was to practice the newest, most difficult or weakest material first – when we are at our most alert. Leave the scales and other technical exercises to the end.

Dmitry also shared that he uses repertoire by Chopin and Rachmaninoff for quick studies or sight-reading. Both composers offer technically and musically challenging works. He also stressed the importance of knowing our physical and mental limits - do not over practice. The result is something that is known in economics as the law of diminishing returns (beyond a certain point, the more you put in, the less you get out).

The afternoon master class went off without a hitch this year (no ongoing construction like last year). Mallory Frayn, who studies with Denise Jamieson, performed *Sonatina in F, Anh. 5 (2<sup>nd</sup> mvt.)* by L. van Beethoven. Aneliese Fuss, who studies with Laura Chipman, performed *Suite no. 8 (Aria)* by G.F. Handel. Jessica Wood, also a student of Laura Chipman's, performed *Solfegietto* by C.P.E. Bach. Kalli Wood, another student of Laura's, performed *Little Litanies of Jesus* by Grovez. Finally, Carina Chiu, a student of Denise Jamieson's, performed *Pas de Deux* by S. Barber. Dmitry incorporated many of his points from the morning session at the master class.

Спасибо большое (thank you very much) to Dmitry for a wonderful workshop. Special thanks to Regina Thomas and Charlotte Jacobson for organizing another successful workshop. ♦



# St. John's Music

**samick**



**Sohmer & Co.**



**YAMAHA**

**Grands Uprights Digitals Keyboards**

**Great selection + Excellent service + Straight answers  
= Unbeatable Value**

**10452 Mayfield Road Edmonton**

**[www.StJohnsMusic.Com](http://www.StJohnsMusic.Com)**

**(780) 452-4810**