

Part II

Developing Artistry in Piano Playing

Artistry in piano playing is the simultaneous happening of two mental processes: HEARING and FEELING. Both processes occur in the split seconds before actual playing takes place:

- 1) Hearing involves the prediction of exact tones with their color, intensity, dynamics, nuances, shapes and rhythmic energy.
- 2) Feeling refers to the artist's ability to mentally reproduce the hands' motions, weight, posture, speed and distance of travel on an imaginary keyboard.

This ability gives the artist complete control of his playing because he can plan every tone and every gesture before actually playing. When artists practice their goal is always to find and to refine the physical motions that best bring to fruition the musical intentions in their internal ear. Every motion they make has a musical intention, whether that motion is in the entry of a tone or the exit of it.

Why is it possible for artists to predict the exact motions needed for a desired tone on the piano? Because they understand the very character of the piano and they know how the piano will behave in response to their touch. They have mastered the motions that will coax the piano's proper response. They understand how the velocity-sensitivity of the instrument works and they have the proper pianistic motions to make it work. Therefore, to teach and develop artistry in students, one must:

- 1) Have an understanding of the piano's characteristics and the relationship between the instrument's tone and pianistic motions.
- 2) Teach a large repertory of works for use as tools for developing artistry.
- 3) Devote part of weekly lesson time for the very purpose of developing artistry.

Relationship between tone and motions: There are four basic elements that determine the quality of pianistic tones: weight, speed, distance and posture. To fully comprehend the velocity sensitivity of the instrument, a simple experiment can be conducted in the following manner:

- 1) Weight used:
 - a) From a sitting position, hold the right arm up and drop it onto the lap. Now, hold the hand up and drop it (tip of fingers to wrist) onto the lap. Lastly, hold any finger up (tip of finger to knuckle) and drop it onto the lap. Compare the feeling of each drop on the lap: the arm drop is heaviest, and finger drop is the lightest.
 - b) Repeat the experiment, drop the weights on any piano key. Compare the tone of each drop on the piano keys: the arm drop is the loudest and heaviest; while the finger drop is the lightest and softest.