

#1 BLOGGING MOONLIGHT - STARTING UP!

Hello Everyone!

Starting tomorrow, Feb.1, I will begin occasional posts in weblog titled "Blogging Moonlight." The purpose of this weblog is to give you a day-to-day journal of my travels through the learning process of Beethoven's famous "Moonlight Sonata." Along the way, I'll share with you some general observations about Beethoven's music, and some ideas about learning and practicing for performance.

Although I've taught the "Moonlight Sonata" to students before, and I've sight-read the first movement as a young pianist, I haven't played the sonata in public, or studied it for performance before. So it's a "new" work for me.

If you're following along with the score as I write about the piece, it might be helpful to write in measure numbers for each of the three movements. When discussing the sonata, I'll refer to movements and measure numbers. You'll save a lot of time if you do this ahead of time.

The performance of the sonata will take place as a part of an all-Beethoven program scheduled for April 24th. So from tomorrow, when I'll begin my study of the piece, I'll have 12 weeks, or 83 days until the performance. Of course, I can't just perform one Beethoven Sonata for a solo piano recital, so I'll also be performing other pieces, namely two sets of early variations, and two additional sonatas, one written earlier than the "Moonlight" and one written much later.

In addition, I'm performing the Beethoven First Piano Concerto a few weeks prior to the all-Beethoven event.

So there's lots of Beethoven going on.

I'm off to class now, but again, welcome. I hope you find this experiment helpful to you in your own musical work, and in your own understanding of this magnificent music.

Peter Gach

I'll give you the details about this in my next blog.

posted on Monday, January 31, 2005 2:24 PM

#2 STARTING UP

Feb. 1, 2005

Well, I've started! Just finished a practice session with the Sonata. Before I did that, also worked through a French Suite of Bach (for an upcoming performance) the Dance Pieces by Mark Wessel that I'm performing with the Palomar Dance Ensemble this weekend, and the two sets of Variations of Beethoven that will be included in the program. For one of the sets, I'm dealing with a pesky memory problem - there are 5 variants of the ends of phrases in the last variation of the D major set (Op. 67). I'll explain more later about how I solved this problem. In the meantime, here's the pieces for the April 24th program - I'm listing them here in chronological order - this is *not* the order in which I'll performing them:

Eight Variations in F, Major, WoO 76 (1799)

Sonata in G Major, Op. 14 No. 2 (1799)

Sonata, Quasi una Fantasia, in C-sharp minor, Op. 27 No. 2 "Moonlight" (1802)

Six Variations in D Major, Op. 76 (1809)

Sonata in A Major, Op. 101 (1816)

Today's work on the Op. 27 (NB: Beethoven did NOT call this Sonata "Moonlight.") consisted of numbering the measures of each movement, and playing each one through to get acquainted with them, and identify any trouble spots, challenges, points of interest, etc. One question that calls for immediate attention is the choice of tempo for the first movement. Beethoven writes "Adagio sostenuto" - a sustained slow tempo - at the beginning, but then balances that by writing the movement in cut time. That is, cut time would reduce the four beats of the measure to two, so instead of

tah-da-da tah-da-da tah-da-da tah-da-da, with the underlined "tah" representing the beginning of the three-note figure that is repeated four times in the right hand, Beethoven indicates, by using the cut-time symbol

TAH-da-da tah-da-da TAH-da-da tah-da-da, so that only the first and third of the three-note figures get a pulse.

This changes the conception of the movement, and makes it more flowing and forward moving. I suspect Beethoven did this in an attempt to avoid a too-slow performance tempo. In fact, I've heard lots of performances where the Adagio tempo chosen by the performer ignores the cut-time symbol at the beginning, imparting a doleful, static quality of the movement that's not in keeping with the composer's directions.

I'll talk more about the choice of tempo in the next post. Also, I'll discuss choice of editions to learn from (I'm using three different editions of the sonata right now). But that's all for today.

posted on Tuesday, February 01, 2005 1:03 PM

#3 GETTING INTO THE FIRST MOVEMENT – WHERE'S THE MOONLIGHT?

Feb. 3

Well, today I'm in the thick of it. I went straight into the first movement, and "swam around" in the structure. This is not just a poetic metaphor, but a real experience for me. I actually made a structural analysis of the first movement (the famous one everyone plays) in order to get ready to memorize it. Once I understand the structure, I should be able to memorize this movement in less than an hour. It's actually quite interesting. There's very little melody here, very little harmony, but lots and lots of "atmosphere." This idea of getting to know the structure of a movement is like swimming around in a pool with goggles and a snorkel, and getting to know the shape of the pool under water. It's like getting a real feel for how it's put together. The texture of the plaster walls, the temperature of the water, etc.

So that's what I'm doing here, really getting to know how this deceptively simple movement is put together. It's actually a miniature sonata form, with an exposition with two themes (ms. 1-23) a development (28-31) and a retransition back to the theme (32-42) a restatement of the two themes (42-60) and a closing coda (60-69.)

What's historically important about this movement is that it is one of the first piano pieces to exploit atmosphere above everything else. As I said above, you can't hum a real melody here, and rhythms are not particularly memorable, the harmonies pretty predictable, but the atmosphere generated by the recurring three note figures on every half-beat and the strategically placed dissonances create this extraordinary atmosphere that has embedded this movement in the collective musical memory of generations of piano lovers. (As a matter of fact, I was shopping at the grocery this afternoon, and met a former student, and the moment I mentioned "Moonlight Sonata" his eyes lit up, and he said he had tried to play the first movement - and this scenario has repeated itself with variations since I committed to learning the sonata.)

Before I close, one other important observation, Beethoven did NOT name this sonata "Moonlight" - this nick-name was given to the composition by his publisher, who borrowed it from the writer Heinrich Rellstab, who said the movement

reminded him of a "boat on Lake Lucerne on a luminous night." Beethoven had never been to Lake Lucerne (much less to Switzerland, where the lake is located.) Most probably the nickname was a good marketing device. After all, it's stuck through 202 years now!

The only subtitle Beethoven gave this sonata was "quasi una fantasia" - 'like a fantasy' - a subtitle that justified the unusual opening movement. Although it's important to note that earlier composers, notably Haydn, whose music Beethoven knew well, also wrote unconventional sonata movements, and experimented considerably with the mood and character of the multi-movement sonata.

In any event, that's where I am at the moment. Tomorrow, fingering the second movement, and a few forays into the third to work on some challenges.

#4 Feb. 5, 2005

Just finished memorization of the first movement of "Moonlight." This took about 45 minutes. I used my standard memory method - I placed the score away from the keyboard, on the other side of the grand piano, where, in order to look at the music, I'd have to stand up and walk away from the keyboard. This breaking of the contact between the eyes on the page and the hands on the keys is the surest and quickest method, in my experience, of memorizing a piece of music. So I sit down to play without the music, and when I can't remember what comes next, I get up, and go over to the score look at it, and then go back, sit down and play. Not only is this good exercise, but the breaks taken by walking back and forth actually serve as little "brain rests" where the music is more quickly absorbed. Since this piece was already familiar to me, the memorization went fairly quickly. However, I did discover two "junctions" where, but for a change of chord or note, I'd end up either truncating the movement by leaving out a page or two, or circling back to where I'd already been. This is particularly characteristic of tonal music that uses the same material, but places it in different keys. It's fairly common for the point of modulation (a change from one key to another) to be a memory challenge. In this movement, these junction points are at measures 9 and again at measure 46. In measure 9, the music changes from e major to e minor: g-sharp becomes g natural. In Measure 46 the music *continues* in e major. The second pair of 'junctions' is a little more involved. This is between measures 26-27 and 49-50. In measures 26-27, a G-sharp 7th chord (in first inversion) lasts for one full measure. In the next measure the c-sharp minor chord lasts for one-half measure, and leads us, via quarter note bass notes f-sharp, f-double sharp up to another G-sharp 7th chord in measure 28. However, in the other junction the initial G-sharp 7th chord in first inversion lasts only a *half* measure, the C-sharp minor chord lasts a half measure as well. The following F-sharp octave, lasts a *half* measure, not one

beat, and leads us, by a half-measure g-sharp octave bass to a c-sharp minor chord.

These are exactly the kind of places that, if they are not carefully thought out and analyzed (and as soon as possible in the memory process) will lead to insecurity. This insecurity in turn leads to muscle tension, cramping, mental chatter, and the worrying process that destroys the musical flow.

I've gone through a verbal description of the comparison measures. The next time I sit down to practice (this probably won't be until Monday - I have two dance performances to play for, tonight and tomorrow) I'll see if my analysis 'holds' in my memory. If it doesn't, I'll make a chart by xeroxing all the similar measures, and comparing exactly where there are similarities and differences in the junctions.

But for now, I'll just let the music reverberate through my head.

posted on Saturday, February 05, 2005 4:30 PM

#5 Feb. 6, 2005

I spent about a half an hour this morning reviewing memory of the first movement of 'Moonlight.' Two interesting observations- only two measures have four chord changes in them (one per quarter note) the rest of the measures have only one, two or (much less frequently) three changes per measure. The two measures with four changes of harmony are 12 and 57. And only 57 changes melody notes along with the chord changes. Measure 12 has only two changes of melody notes. I've also begun to notice where the left hand accompaniment has three notes (an octave with a filler note) rather than just a plain octave. There are occasional single-note bass notes, these are mostly due to the fact that Beethoven's piano lacked the lower notes we have. So he either left that bottom note of the would-be octave out (ms. 13), or rewrote a passage to accommodate a missing register (24-25). His lowest note was FF (here sometimes spelled as EE#.) Our pianos go down to AAA 8 notes lower.

I'm also noticing that the transitions from one idea to another are where the most difficulty with memory lies. This is because a transition *connects* ideas that are often repeated patterns. The transition gets us from here to there, often in a very interesting way (it's where the composer has to use the most ingenuity.) It's sort of like life, isn't it? Adolescence is the transition from childhood to adulthood, and isn't it difficult. (Just ask the parent of a teenager)

The point of all this is that memory is strengthened by conscious observation. This is what allows us to truly let go in a performance. It doesn't just happen by magic, and it's not just a matter of talent.

Also spent a little time fingering the second movement, and exploring the third. Apropos fingering, the rule is *above all, comfort* - a fingering should feel easy and natural. I always write in fingerings (which is why I prefer an unfingered edition, when I can get one) and I'm not at all hesitant about changing fingerings given by others. I'm consulting a Polish edition of the sonatas, and the Schnabel edition. Once in a while they give me a good idea, but mostly I'm able to come up with my own good fingerings. I avoid twisting and stretching of the fingers, even though I have a big hand in terms of notes I can span. I also try to keep the natural relationship of one finger to another as I finger. Thus, I try to not draw in a longer finger, such as the third, as this produces a cramped feeling all over the hand. So the third stays long, and I have to adjust my arm in and out of the keyboard to accommodate that. And never, ever, any curling of the pinkie!

#6 MOONLIGHT MEMORIZATION – FURTHER THOUGHTS

I've been able to get at the piano for about an hour and a half today. Most of it was spent working on the Bach program I'm giving on Sunday at a local church. But in the little time I had to spend on the Beethoven, I went right to those places in the Sonata where my memory was the weakest. Another way of saying this is, I went to where I had a question about what comes next, but couldn't answer it. After all, memory is basically your mind saying 'what comes next?' and then your mind answering 'this note!' Or, 'I don't know!' If it's 'I don't know' that's where to go for more reinforcement. Again, I'm keeping the music away from the keyboard, looking at it while standing up some distance away, and then walking back to the keyboard to play. I've narrowed down the turning points in the road to a single note or chord in most instances. I also find that at this stage of memorization, short, frequent visits to the process are much more effective than long, 'cramming' sessions. So I'm not too worried about the fact that I'll have to concentrate on the Bach program for the next few days. I'll probably get a good session in on Thursday with the Beethoven, and that will be it until Feb. 14, when I can begin concentrating exclusively on the Beethoven program.

Don't forget, I've got a concerto to bring back to life as well.

Also, now that I've fingered the second movement, I'm letting that sit, as it will come fairly easily, and have begun exploring further the last movement. Here, because of the speed involved, finding efficient and comfortable fingerings is of the

first priority. I've begun to make some preliminary decisions here, but more on that later.

posted on Tuesday, February 08, 2005 3:23 PM

#7 BACK AT MOONLIGHT – THE THIRD MOVEMENT

Back at it today, after a day off from practicing - played a concert of Bach on Sunday, so Monday was 'practice free.' BTW, did you know that Beethoven played the Well Tempered Clavier of Bach by the time he was 13? Not only was he precocious, he had great musical taste!

Spent this morning working through some challenges in the third movement, and memorized about 2/3 of it. The particular challenge in terms of memory for the entire Sonata is its popularity. We've heard the sonata so much that we don't actually *hear* it - we hear our memory of it. So when it comes time to memorize it, our memory-hearing tends to make us play too fast, and not look at the piece afresh. We have to come to pieces like this (and all music we're learning, for that matter) with a (to use a Zen phrase) 'beginner's mind' - looking at the piece as if it were the first thing we've encountered like it, as if we've never heard it before, and this is our first meeting. With a piece like this one, this is especially challenging to do.

That's one of the reasons why I strongly discourage students from listening to recordings of piece's they're learning. Doing so can poison your imagination, creating a hearing-memory from *outside* of you rather than *inside* of you. Your performance may end up being an imperfect clone of someone else's. Just because a famous pianist plays a piece a certain way doesn't mean that it's the way you must play it. The best way for you to play a piece is the way your mind-body feels/intuits/thinks the piece. You're far better off listening to every other sonata of Beethoven, but the one you're learning.

Anyway, you can bet I'm not listening to any recordings, but I'm trying very hard to listen to myself, and what I'm playing in the moment, as I encounter this piece for the first time with my own body.

What is particularly striking is that our hearing, based on other performances (many, many other performances, in this case) is how much of the detail we leave out. Our memorization must be based on a detailed knowledge of the score, as it is right now in front of us. Little nuances in the music, changes of chord progression, chord voicing, arrangement of repetitions of ideas, these things elude us when we just listen to someone else play it, or worse - a recording over, and

over and over. I'll detail some of these areas in the third movement where I've noticed these subtle changes. But I'll save this for another time.

posted on Tuesday, February 15, 2005 7:30 AM

#8 THE THIRD MOVEMENT – TEN DAYS LATER

I've not posted since Feb. 15 - got ready for and gave the Bach concert, then got back to the Sonata. In the meantime, I took out the First Concerto of Beethoven, which I'm performing April 2/3 and began working on that. This was the first concerto I performed with orchestra, some 32 years ago, and it's remarkable how much of it stays in your memory. Two important notes here - one, I always work from the orchestral score as well as a two-piano reduction (one piano part is an arrangement of the orchestra - the other is the original solo part). Second note - it's amazing how much a poor coordination (and the accompanying feelings of discomfort) remain in the body. So there's always a period of time (usually a day or two) when my body "goes back" to its memory of the piece from three decades ago. It's not a feeling of being young again, but of the body remembering all the tightness and struggle that was embedded through practice. After all, if we do get better at our playing, then when we return to a piece, solutions for old problems will come to mind. Now those solutions have to be applied, they don't always happen automatically. We have to think through an old problem spot, and consciously apply our new-found insights. Or in this case, the insights of thirty years!

Now, back to the Sonata - I discovered that I was rushing my learning process of the last movement, mainly because I had been listening to my memory of the piece from hearing other performances, and not listening to what I was actually playing. So a certain amount of sloppiness set in as I began to reach for a fast tempo before I was ready. There is a solution at hand, however, and that is to use the metronome. Now, I'm not ordinarily a fan of the metronome. It is a mechanical device, and trying to use it to control our tempi is not always a good thing. It makes the tempo *external* when true control of tempo is *internal*. However, when we're faced with a habituation that has an external source (too many hearings of a piece we're learning for the first time) it's sometimes desirable to use the metronome as a brake. So for about three practice sessions, I went through the last movement and set the metronome at the quarter note equal to 72. This is a good "walking" tempo, and allows the music to flow without rushing. And of course, what I discovered by hearing the metronome click at 72 was how much I was rushing. It only took a time or two through to bring things back to reality, and even out the tempo. It's very important to not become addicted to metronome

use, but to only use it as a *pointing* device. It can't cure tempo problems, it can only help you diagnose them.

At this point, the third movement is memorized, and I'm ready to work on the short second movement. I'll start that tomorrow. This movement I've already played through, and fingered. So tomorrow I want to memorize it. I'm going to time how long this takes me, and also count how many times I get up from the piano to look at the score. I'll put this in the next blog.

You might re-read previous blogs about memory to understand the memory method I'm using. I've also begun a notebook with all the Beethoven pieces listed, with a few empty pages dedicated to each piece. I've begun filling those up with notes. There are times when it's better not to practice, but just look at the notebook. I'll be reproducing some of those pages in the next few blogs.

posted on Thursday, February 24, 2005 8:42 AM

#9 MEMORIZING THE SECOND MOVEMENT – A TRUE ACCOUNT

I've decided to give you an accurate picture as possible of the process of memorizing. I've chosen the short second movement of the Moonlight Sonata because it gives you a clear picture of what is going on. I used a stop watch and timed the entire process, I also noted each time I got up to look at the music. Let me refresh your memory about how I go about the memorization process. Once I'm ready to memorize, I place the music *away* from the music stand on the piano. For me, this is usually on the top of the grand piano "around the bend" so that I'm about three steps away from the piano bench. This way, there's no possibility of cheating, by craning my neck to look over at the music. I go back and forth from the music to the keyboard until the process is finished - or until I run out of steam. In longer movements, it's not always possible to complete the memorization in one sitting. I can always tell when I'm getting tired, my concentration goes, and I start thinking about something else. So I just trust that I've bitten off enough and leave it alone till the next session, usually the next day.

So, for this short movement, here was the process:

1. I spent 3' 28" playing the movement with the music, observing anything that I hadn't noticed before. (BTW, it had been about 2 weeks since I'd last played the movement) Here's the list of what I came across

- there are repeated notes in the alto on upbeats to measures 1 and 6

- the soprano is legato, the other lower voices non-legato in measures 10, 11 and 12.

- upbeats 16-17 and 18-19 are non-legato, however upbeat at 19-20 is legato

- measures 9-13 are matched by measures 25-29 (the music is the same) however,

measures 13 and 29 are the 'junction points' where the music turns in a different

direction.

2. Having done my observations with the music at the keyboard, I now placed the music away from the keyboard, and began memorizing. It took 25 minutes to memorize the movement, and I got up to look at the music 11 times, or an average of once every 2 1/2 minutes.

3. When I'm finished with this blog entry, I'll play the movement through one time with the music, and then spend a minute or two studying it without playing it. Then I'll leave it alone until tomorrow.

You'll get a follow-up then on how well the notes stayed in my head.

posted on Tuesday, March 01, 2005 6:47 AM

#10 ANYTHING BUT MOONLIGHT

Late last week my former student, Benjamin Krause, contacted me to let me know he would be home for spring break. Several years ago, he played the Moonlight Sonata as a senior in high school. I was his teacher at the time, and that was my last close encounter with the work. Now that he is away at college, we keep in touch by e mail from time to time. I had been planning to play the whole sonata for him (now that it is completely memorized) assuming that his spring break was the same as mine from Palomar - the week of March 21. However, much to my surprise, Ben emailed that he'd be home the week of March 1.

Now one of the things I've learned over the years is not to perform a work before its time. Pieces need to ripen for a while, left alone to mature on their own. And in the case of a brand new piece like this Sonata, I didn't want to 'traumatize' my handling of the piece by playing it too early. Remember I had just finished memorizing the second movement a few days before.

I've been going back over sections of the third movement, and playing the second movement daily, noticing as much as I can, and occasionally referring to the score. But this was not the same as "performance mode."

So I decided to play everything else on the recital, from the first piece through the late sonata. Here's the general order of what I'm doing (general in the sense that I'm listing the pieces here - but I'll save the detailed identifications for another blog.)

I start with some early Variations in F Major. I think his early variations are overlooked, and I've played this piece before, and have always liked its creativity and boldness. It's classical and forward looking at the same time.

Second on the program is the Sonata in G-Major, a piece in three movements, with a wonderful sense of humor and a little wacky. It's great fun to play and gives the audience a little "meat" after the appetizer of the variations.

Third on the program are a set of Variations in D Major. There are six of them, they're still relatively early Beethoven, but they were written after several of the Sonatas. So they show a little more maturity. Ben immediately said that the them was the March from the "Ruins of Athens." I believe the title refers to some incidental music Beethoven wrote for a play, using this march theme. I think Ben also called in a "Turkish" march. Now I just got some Turkish music in December as a holiday music, and I'm absolutely in love with it, but it sounds nothing like Beethoven's "Turkish" march. So this one will take a little research. At any rate, they're a lovely set - short, but beautiful, and with a raucous noisy final variation. It will make a nice ending to the first half of the program. (BTW this is a piece I discovered in December 2004, and learned in January 2005, just before starting on the Moonlight and this blog.)

Then comes "intermission."

Then the late Sonata in A major, Op. 101 - easily the most intellectually and musically challenging Sonata of the program. I like to put the real meat right after intermission in programming - the audience is into the listening mode, having been softened up in the first half of the program, and is now ready, after a brief rest at intermission, to do some serious listening. They'll do just that with this sonata - four movements. There's lots to write about this, but I'll have to save that.

Then, the full program would end with the "Moonlight," which Ben did not get to hear. But I'm glad I played the others for him, as it gave me a chance to 'pace' the rest of the program. While three sonatas and two sets of variations is not a gargantuan program, it is substantial, and I'll need to play the entire program several times for "test audiences" in order to polish the prime the whole enterprise.

So right now I'm absorbed mainly in memorizing the Beethoven Concerto which is less than a month away. Rememorizing is a more accurate description, as I've played this piece several times before. But it's been over 10 years, and I've still got to go over it using my classic memory method. I learned it this way, and re-memorizing it is certainly a lot easier when you do it right the first time.

Next blog - further thoughts about memory and reading the music apropos the second movement.

posted on Tuesday, March 08, 2005 11:25 AM

#11 WHERE I AM NOW – A PROGRESS REPORT WITH 6 WEEKS TO GO

Over the weekend, I put in two sessions on the Sonata. In the first session, I determined final tempi for each of the three movements. I put a metronome range on each of the three movements so I have a general idea of about how fast I'll be taking the movements. Please note that I rarely use the metronome all the way through a piece. In the case of the first movement, I checked two other editions of the Sonata (a Schnabel edition, and a Polish edition) both of which give metronome markings. It is interesting to note that the Schnabel metronome numbers are faster than the Polish edition, and that Schanbel changes metronome markings in the course of a piece. This has been a matter of some discussion among pianists for some time, as everyone says that a movement should be played at a uniform tempo. But if you try putting the metronome to a recording, you'll find that after a few beats, the metronome and the player rarely coincide! In fact, the metronome marking is a general guide to a "tempo band" that can vary as much as one marking up or down from the established tempo. If this is done with the musical properties of the composition in mind, the listener never notices. Quite the contrary, it will sound natural and musically logical. However, a mechanically strict tempo may sound a-musical. For further reading on the fascinating subject of tempo, I highly recommend the book Shaping Time: Music, the Brain and Performance by David Epstein. It's a lengthy book, and a hard read in places, but nevertheless revealing study of our perception of time. It goes a long way to prove what I've already felt for a number of years - that the metronome is of only limited usefulness in "curing" time problems.

Anyway, having established general metronome ranges (and I promise to give you those in an upcoming blog) I then went through each of the movements, start to finish, not stopping to correct anything. This allowed me a chance to diagnose where I was in terms of progress in learning and memorization. I used the tempi in metronome range I had chosen for each movement. Obviously, this was of most interest in the third movement, which is the fastest. Immediately after playing each

movement, I went back and worked out difficult or insecure spots. I did this on both Saturday and Sunday. By Sunday, things were flowing much better. So here is my progress so far.

1. all three movements are memorized
2. if push came to shove, I could give a 'performance' of the sonata today. It would be rough in spots, but about where it needs to be in terms of continuity.
3. the next week's practice will consist of
 - a. identifying 'rough' or 'trouble' spots
 - b. striving for musical continuity

So I'm looking for a balance between working details in the piece - concentrating on those places where things aren't going as well as I'd like, and playing the movements as a whole, looking for overall shape, listening of clarity of line, and direction of idea. I'll also start paying more strict attention to dynamics, and those pesky Beethovenesque subito pianos that dot his works like quite land-mines.

posted on Monday, March 14, 2005 11:25 AM

#12 GETTING THE THIRD MOVEMENT UP TO SPEED

I've been concentrating mostly on the First Concerto in the past few days - the first rehearsal with orchestra is on Tuesday of next week, but I have also tried to cycle through the solo program for the 24th (which includes the Moonlight.) This means that within every 3 days I've managed to play the entire program, and "hone in" on any problem areas. In the case of the Moonlight, this is the last movement, and it's here that I want to concentrate my attention for today's blog. As I mentioned in a previous blog, I've established a tempo range of half note = 80-88. This is based on tempi given in two different editions, the Schnabel (which I purchased as an undergraduate student at Indiana University in the 70's) and a Polish edition edited by Woytowicz (which I purchased in Warsaw while a student there in 1975.) The Woytowicz is the lower end of the range - Schnabel in general faster in all his metronome markings. In addition, I listened to two old LP's I have of the Sonata. One by Joseph Cooper, and the other by Walter Gieseking. Here's an aside - students of mine reading this blog will note that I've broken my own rule about not listening to performances/recordings of works I'm currently developing. The problem with doing so is two-fold. Most performances have been edited, so that a perfected version of the actual performance is heard - there is so much splicing and pasting together of versions that you're really not hearing a performance, but a

perfected facsimile of one (I know, I've done the same thing when I've recorded.) And nowadays with digital editing, the possibility of creating a 'flawless' performance are nearly endless. So hearing a recorded performance can unduly influence our expectations of how an actual performance sounds. Second, a recorded performance, with its aura of finality, validation (after all, the performer must be pretty good if company x has issued the recording, there's a picture of the performer, usually some validating notes in the liner, etc) can act as a powerful drug, overwhelming our own developing interpretation and imposing an *external* vision of the work when we are trying to develop an *internal* vision which we want to communicate to the audience. For these reasons, I've always recommended staying away from listening to recordings.

So why did I break my own rule? I'm far enough along in the process to know the works, and to have developed my own vision. And I listened one time only, with an ear toward the tempi of the last movement in the two recordings. Also, the recordings were vinyl, so the editing is not digital, and there are lots of tiny inaccuracies which give the recording a sense of life that digital editing largely takes away. It's a funny thing that if I had listened to these two recordings before my detailed study and playing of the score, I would not have heard all the little fuzziness that's in the recordings. But once I know the score well, I can begin to hear how really "human" piano playing is - with its imperfections, however small. But it's those small imperfections - a missed note here, a tone a little too loud there, a note a little out of tune - that gives the playing its character.

At any rate, I noticed that the tempo was slower in the third movement for the Cooper recording, and faster for the Giesecking. Yet both were convincing in their own way. The listenings reinforced an insight I've had before: *the impression of speed for the listener is not completely a function of the absolute tempo*. In other words, I convey the 'speed' of a movement, not just by playing at a fast metronome marking, but by the combination of factors - clarity, phrasing, shaping, color - that convey the *emotion* associated with 'speed.' You don't have to play as fast as possible to sound fast.

So the exercise in listening to the recordings (one time) was helpful, and a refreshing look back (the recordings were made in the 60's) to a time when the world was not so falsely perfect.

My second approach to the speed of this movement came from the realization that I hadn't fully practiced through the implications of the half note becoming the unit of energetic impulse. At a slower tempo, the "C" marking indicating four beats to the measure would allow us to hear the conventional 'each quarter note is a beat' metric structure, and to play with that feeling. But if we try to carry a pulse on each beat, four to the bar, through to a faster tempo, we're bound for trouble.

There's no way to sustain four beats to a bar when the tempo is at half note = 80 or faster. Then the quarter note is equal to 160 beats per minute, and this will result in cramping, both rhythmically and physically. So we both have to feel and hear the half note as the new unit of beat - remember that every beat is the beginning of a new impulse and the last notes of a beat unit get less energy than the first notes - it's a kind of decrescendo of energy (NOTA BENE: not a decrescendo of sound, we're not talking diminuendo here, but distribution of energy, periodically renewed at the appropriate beat level) So the practical result of my insight is that I'm going back and practicing at speed, but thinking in half-measures, using the half-note as my unit of beat. Now 8 16th notes are subsumed under one beat. In fact, if we look at the way Beethoven has written the movement, analyzing the harmonic movement, we see that it is relatively slow, for example, there's only one chord change every two bars at the opening. We're moving toward a sensation of hyper-measures in which there's a strong beat every two measures. I'm not sure if this is practical from a playing point of view, but it might be a way of shaping my perceptions of the overall flow of energy in the movement.

This practicing in larger beat units has proved to be very helpful in working out some difficult places - I'm placing the impulses more efficiently, and not trying to 'energize' every quarter note. It's also making the speed of the last movement more attainable as I'm hearing in larger units of time. For those of you curious about where the challenging measures are - here's a list: 9-13, 33-40, 111-115, 129 - 135 and 178-184.

posted on Friday, March 18, 2005 7:33 AM

#13 NO MOONLIGHT FOR A LITTLE WHILE

March 30, 2005

This weekend is a performance of the Beethoven First Piano Concerto, dress rehearsal is tonight, so for the past few days my creative energies have been going into preparation for that event. There will be two performances, Sat. eve and Sunday afternoon. After that, I'll take two days off from practice, and then devote my full energies to the solo Beethoven recital. So you can expect my Moonlight entries to pick up from next week until the performance itself on April 24.

It is extremely important to acquire (and this comes only with experience) the ability to know when to 'stop' preparation for a performance. The fact that I have to interrupt my preparation for one program to concentrate temporarily on another is not a tragedy, but rather an opportunity. It is always a pleasant surprise to leave

a program for a few days, and then go back to it and discover that some things have improved 'on their own.' What I think is happening is that we are unconsciously integrating the material we've acquired, and the rest time really allows our brains time to absorb all that material we've been putting into it.

I have spent a moment here and there in the past week playing 'knotty' spots in the program - places where a sense of insecurity still lurks. And on one or two occasions I've played the last movement of the Moonlight, just to see where it is. As the last movement is the freshest item on the menu for April 24, it deserves occasional visits. But even it will be ignored until next Wednesday.

I've learned over the years that there is a danger in compulsive, over-practicing. We can get so obsessed with perfection that we begin to neurotically focus on our mistakes, getting 'hung up' on tough spots, technical challenges, and ignoring the music that is to be made. If I have any pangs of conscience over the next few days, I may take the scores and read them away from the piano. But this backing off period is really a good thing. That much I've learned from experience.

So I'll be back at it next week. On the agenda when I return:

1. trying out entire movements in the 'no stopping/performance' mode
2. arranging to play the entire program for friends, and willing listeners on a variety of pianos, including my piano here at my home studio, and the homes of friends and music lovers.
3. spending an increasing amount of time away from the piano, looking at the score, and thinking through the music.

(I already notice that I can 'think through' a good deal of the program just after I wake up in the morning - my musical imagination is particularly strong then)

posted on Thursday, March 31, 2005 1:05 PM

#14 MOVING FROM 'HOW' TO 'WHAT'

Well, I'm back at it today. Tomorrow will be two weeks until the April 24th recital. Today I have played the first half of the program, and when I return to the piano later on today, I'll practice the second half of the program, which concludes with the 'Moonlight.' This next week is a time of transition, when I move from the 'how' to the 'what' of the program. The 'how' are the technical things - briefly listed:

* reading the text correctly, the right pitches and the right rhythms, based on the best text available

- * fingering the pieces, considering alternative fingerings and distributions of notes between the hands
- * working through any tension, insecurities, or 'technical knots' that have come up during practice
- * memorizing the pieces
- * working through pedaling, colorization, i.e. dynamics, accents, overall sense of phrasing and lines
- * analysis of form, theoretical considerations such as harmony, tonal centers, modulations, transitions between sections.

The 'what' :

- * The 'emotional line' of the piece - where does the tension gather, where does it release, is there movement toward a point of arrival, is there movement away from that point. Are there places where we're 'on hold' the tonal center is stopped for a while. Are there places where the harmonic language points to a rise of tension.
- * The overall rhythmic feel of each piece, each movement, each section - a constant check on whether my body is harmonizing with the rhythm of the piece. Am I clenching at a difficult spot? Is my breathing getting stopped by fear of a difficult passage? Am I playing with ease throughout? Is any possible clenching the result of a poorly or incompletely conceived sense of the rhythm? By rhythm here I mean the *metrics* of the piece - strong and weak beats, divisions of the beats into strong and weak groupings, strong and weak measures, places where there is a feeling of upbeat in comparison to places where there is a feeling of downbeat. This feeling may encompass entire groups of measures as well.
- * Cultivating a sense of the awareness of *what* I am playing. If I find myself thinking of a fingering, or technical solution to a passage, I immediately go back and rethink it in terms of what the music says, not how I'm playing it. This is critical for a successful performance, because thinking of how I'm playing something pulls the focus of my attention back onto myself. And when the focus is on myself and not the music, I'll probably start judging the past of what I've just played, the future of the tough stuff that's going to happen, and ignore the present of the music flowing through me.
- * Practicing *continuity* - the ability to get through the piece no matter what. Continuity practice is not detailed polishing - although that is also important and has to happen. Continuity practice is sitting down and beginning a piece and not stopping, regardless of how bad it is, or how many mistakes I'm making, etc. In other words, this is practice for performance. Once I've completed a continuity

practice, I'll go back polish, and make notes on what to do. But it is vital to begin doing this type of practice. So over the next week to ten days, I'll arrange for several 'test runs' of the program - first each half, and then the entire program. This builds mental stamina, and creates a 'holistic' continuity for the emotional line of the entire program.

BTW, the closer I get to the performance, the more frequently I'll begin just looking at the score, and not playing it at all...

So that's where we are in the process. I'll be practicing the 'Moonlight' later, and have some more specific thoughts on it for you then.

posted on Saturday, April 09, 2005 7:20 AM

#15 A LIST OF DETAILS

I just finished practicing the Sonata today, and I thought I'd give you a list of the things I'm noting as I practice.

First Movement:

1. still getting confused in memory on the difference between measures 26-28 and measures 49-50, so I tried another approach - I wrote out an exact scheme of the two places and how they differ. Here it is:

	a	RH	E	D#	C#]	B#	rhythm: half-note, quarter, quarter
		LH	C#	F#	Fx]	G#	
	a1	RH	E]	Dnat	B#]	C#	rhythm: half-note, half-note, half-note
		LH	C#]	F#	G#]	C#	

Please note that I couldn't do bar lines, so just used the right end of a bracket to indicate this. Also, in both cases the movement from C# to F# in the bass is *down*. I have all this sketched out on a post-it note, so I'll just stick on the music-stand on the piano, and also take it to bed with me, and read it just before sleeping, and first thing getting up. This should clear up this spot once and for all. I'll let you know in a day or two.

2. measures 32-39 order of beginning notes in ascending arpeggio figure in RH:

D#, then a measure later up a half step to E, then one measure later up next octave to C# (middle C#), then one measure later to F#, then we begin our descent down.

3. Measure 56 = Three beats of same chord B7, in inner voice - melody and bass don't move till fourth beat . This is the only measure to change harmony on the fourth beat, after repeating the harmony on each beat for three beats. Measure 26 is similar, but there the harmony lasts the *entire* measure. This is probably why measure 56 has always felt a little insecure.

Second Movement:

1. Noted that the third of the chord is in both outer voices on alternate iterations of the phrase i.e. ms.2 (upbeat to 3) then measure 6/7 then ms. 10/11 then 15/16. In between the melodic motive has the root of the chord in the soprano, and the third of the chord in the bass, rather than doubling the third as in the above measures. Again, a tiny detail that can trip the memory in the stress of a performance.

2. ms. 25/26 unsyncopated (like opening two measures) 26-28 syncopated *unlike* its equivalent at the opening.

3. The trio has accents and should be stronger than the first section. This also allows contrast with the 'pp' after the double bar.

Third Movement:

1. There are 5 sets of upward-sweeping arpeggio figures such as the one that opens the sonata. There are 6 if you count the repeat of the exposition. Here are brief observations that I'm using to help keep them straight in my mind.

Assuming 6 in all:

1: c-sharp minor triad in second inversion, arpeggiated upward, bass moves down by step eventually to G-sharp, changing once per measure in this pattern: C-sharp, B-sharp, B natural, A natural, G-sharp.

2: starts out like 1, but ends on the pitch 'e' in octaves, and proceeds to modulate to g-sharp minor. Note bass movement to a-sharp, f-double sharp, to g-sharp

3=1: return to beginning via first ending

4: starts out on c-sharp not g-sharp. So the arpeggio begins not in second inversion, but in root position, and is played twice, with downward movement in

bass, eventually travelling from g-sharp to a to e-sharp, landing on f-sharp as the initial key of the development

5=1: return of main theme after development

6: in f-sharp minor, like a transposition of 1 but after two upward sweeps changes into faster arpeggios.

2. the fast figuration in measure 33-40 and 129-135 - I should only play *piano* as indicated. Tendency to overplay because of speed and difficulty. Also, I need to know exactly where the beats lie in the figure this is crucial to developing speed and accuracy, as in going fast, a false accent throws off the whole impulse/energy pattern, resulting in tension, and an unclear sound.

3. ms. 43 and similar places - need to work on dynamics more, not completely thought out.

4. 178 and following - the series of 'forte' descending passages. Here as in the note no. 2 above, I need to know clearly where the beats are falling, and also not overplay. With the pedal down, a clear mezzo forte after a forte beginning will result in an acoustically louder sound, than in trying to play all the notes forte. Here the energy has to be evenly distributed or the passage will cramp by measure 183.

So there are some notes from today's work. Alongside this, I've arranged three run-throughs of the entire program, one on Thursday evening, one on Friday evening, and one on Sunday. The first two will be here in my home studio, the Sunday at another home on a piano I don't know. I'm also trying to arrange rehearsal in the hall, but so far, can only get it the day of the concert, which is not the most desirable.

The program itself has been submitted to the Publicity Coordinator, and I've already written program notes. These need to be proof read. I'm also beginning to send out e-mail copies of the really cool poster that has been designed for the concert. Time for lunch!

posted on Tuesday, April 12, 2005 9:54 AM

#16 REPAIRING MOONLIGHT

Yesterday I performed the entire program, which ends with 'Moonlight,' for a friend. I do want to emphasize that the process I'm going through with this Sonata that I'm blogging is also taking place simultaneously (although not on a blog, just

in my head, and in notes I make for myself) for all the other pieces in the program. FYI, here is the entire program: (all by Beethoven)

Eight Variations in F Major, WoO 76

Sonata in G Major, Op., 14 No. 2

Six Variations in D Major, Op. 76

Sonata in A Major, Op. 101

Sonata in C-sharp Minor, Op. 27 No. 2 ('Moonlight')

As you can see, the Moonlight is the last piece on the program. Yesterday evening I played the entire program for a friend, straight through from start to finish, pausing for the intermission as I would in a formal recital. The entire program's playing time (not counting intermission) is about an hour twenty minutes. As this was the first time I'd tried it all the way through, I must say that by the end of the third movement of the 'Moonlight' I was pretty fatigued. I rushed the last movement - a symptom for me of being tired. As soon as my friend had left, I went back to the music, and reviewed each piece, noting where things weren't right, and correcting it in my head. At this point I didn't practice it, as I've learned that compulsive over-practicing after playing the program all the way through is ultimately more harmful than helpful. However this morning, after a good night's sleep I corrected any place in the program that didn't go as well as I would have liked, paying special attention to the last movement of 'Moonlight.' I'll be playing it again this evening, and will go through the same process. Tomorrow morning I'll have more time to do detailed corrections. I'll also have more time to record some specific insights about what I learned from my first two 'run-throughs' at that time.

But the most important point I want to make here is that the period immediately after a performance is the most powerful time for corrections. So I try to make a space shortly after a performance for a review and correction, and will continue to do so after each try-out.

posted on Friday, April 15, 2005 9:09 AM

#17 WHERE I AM AFTER SOME TRYOUTS

As I noted in my last blog, I am now in the process of 'test driving' the program to see how it will go. I gave my initial test performance last Thursday (today's Monday) and did another one on Friday. On Saturday I gave a lecture-recital on Beethoven and played portions of the program I'm giving on April 24th. And yes, I broke my own rule and played only the *first* movement of the 'Moonlight.' This was

a lecture-recital in memory of one of my first piano students when I came to Palomar College nearly 25 years ago, and it felt right to close the concert with a performance of the quiet first movement. He had recently passed away. His Sister told me that he used to play the movement late at night, and that it brought back very tender memories for her. So, I broke my own rule and there was a rightness to doing that. Ordinarily I wouldn't play just one movement of a Sonata, nor would I end with quiet piece, but in this case, it seemed to work. Then on Sunday, I tried the program on a Fazioli concert grand in a private home. The piano was magnificent, and it was a good workout to try the program on a new instrument in a new setting, without any warmups.

Of course, having a first-class piano to work with was very inspiring - the piano I played on the previous day for the lecture-recital was a Steinway 6' grand that had been rebuilt. It was serviceable, but nothing to write home about. I own a 7'4" Falcone grand, which is a lovely instrument I've had for over 15 years. However, it's very important not to practice the program on just one instrument, and then move to another hall and instrument to perform. We can get used to the sounds of a particular instrument and its idiosyncrasies, and moving to another instrument (especially if it is inferior) can pose problems - we may hear things we've never heard, or we may lose things that a better instrument brings out.

The concert on Sunday the 24th will be on a 7 foot Steinway, about 6 years old, in a hall the seats 500. (This is the Escondido Center for the Arts) The acoustics of the hall are excellent, and the piano is very good (although I must say not as good as the Fazioli from Sunday.) Most unfortunately, however, I will be unable to rehearse in the hall until 11:00 am the day of the performance. I'll have one hour, and then the tuner will come in. This poses special logistical problems that I'll deal with in another blog. It's doable (fortunately, I've played on the piano in that hall before, so it won't be a total surprise) but I need to plan very carefully in order to bring it off.

At any rate, I'm now "off" tryouts for today and tomorrow. On Thursday I'll try it here for a friend at 2:30 in the afternoon (Nota bene: the program is at 2:00 in the afternoon, so it's always good to schedule a tryout or two at that time. The Sunday tryout was at 2:00 also.) I'll also try it on Friday morning for two students - also at home. On this occasion, the students will follow along with the score, which adds a little 'pressure.' That will probably be the last tryout - Saturday I'll just practice quietly at home.

So exactly how am I practicing these last few days? First of all, I'm not playing the program fast, or at concert tempo. I'm working in *tempo meditando* using the metronome to establish a tempo of a quarter note = 72. At this tempo, the piece moves, but does not run. I use the score, noting any deviations that may have

slipped into my memory. I note the dynamics, any expressive markings I may have overlooked. I also run continuous 'body scans' to see if there are any places where I'm tightening up. For me the indicators of tightening are:

holding my breath

tightening at the shoulder

pulling up on the sole of my left foot (don't ask me why, but it's a sure indicator of tension)

When I note one of these symptoms, it's like a yellow light indicating insecurity and tension. I may repeat that passage to make sure I'm as loose as possible.

In the case of the 'Moonlight' the *tempo meditando* applies to the last movement. It's very helpful here as I can notice how even at the slower tempo, there are places where I tend to rush. In general these are places where there is a repeated figuration, such as measure 33 and following, where the figuration winds back on itself. This is also a passage where the rhythmic/metric structure of the 16th notes is tricky. We have to be very careful that we don't inadvertently accent the first 'e' 16th note after the A Major chord - doing so will make the rhythmic structure be unbalanced. The first metric accent is on the f-sharp immediately after, and then on the 'a' which begins the fourth beat. Metric accents are not conventional accents in the sense that we play louder, there more a felt/thought sense of where the beat and its subdivisions precisely lie.

I also tend to rush in the passage that begins on measure 53 - again a pattern of repeated notes. There is a natural tendency to accelerate anytime the same information is repeated - I've seen it over and over again in my students. We have to be very vigilant not to let any accelerando happen unconsciously. I'm all for speeding up as an expressive device - but it must be applied with full awareness of what we are doing.

Apropos memory, I want to share one observation about the second movement. I've been insecure in measure 13, and just today figured out why. The last beat of ms. 12 and the entire next measure is varied in ms. 28/29. The notes are exactly the same, but the rhythm is different. Furthermore at 28/29 the same varied rhythm is repeated, whereas in measure 12/13 the rhythm appears with tied notes. By virtue of repetitions, we'll play measure 28/29 and its following repetition in 30/31 a total of six times, and measure 12/13 only three. If we're not careful, we'll want to apply the 28/29 pattern in place of the 12/13 as it is actually written. Again, making this pattern change conscious makes it less likely I'll 'mess it up' in performance.

Now apart from these kinds of specific observations, I'm spending some time each day just looking at the scores. I'm also beginning to hear the pieces in my head without the score. Yesterday while driving I went through the entire fugal development of the last movement of op. 101 several times, and also working through the last movement of 'Moonlight.' It's a good way to use up driving time!

posted on Tuesday, April 19, 2005 12:05 PM

#18 THE DAY BEFORE, AND WHERE I AM AFTER TWO DAYS OF TRYOUTS

I've completed two more tryouts - one on Thursday afternoon here at my studio, and one on Friday morning. The Thursday afternoon run-through went better than the Friday. I was well rested Thursday, and was able to spend the morning reviewing the complete program before actually playing it. And on Thursday evening, I was able to put in a few corrections. However, on Friday I had to get up a little earlier than usual to do just a brief review of notes from the Thursday evening (notes as in things to correct and remember) and then I was off to get my hair cut. As soon as I returned home, I had to sit down and play the entire program for two students of mine, who followed with the score.

So I was not as well rested, and didn't have the entire morning to undertake a leisurely review. However, there's an advantage in this as well, as I'm able to see where there are still weaknesses or insecurities that need shoring up. Over all, there's been improvement from one tryout to the next, and I'm confident that things will go well - but it's interesting that things I thought I had fixed earlier in the week turned out not to be as secure, so I had to go back and review when I was finally able to sit down at the piano (around 5pm.)

This emphasizes the importance of being well rested on the day of a performance. A little later today, I'll post a second blog detailing how tomorrow will look - from the time I get up until the performance itself. Today, after posting this blog, I'll spend an hour meditating, then I'll work through the entire program in reverse order (starting with 'Moonlight') and starting with the last movement of the Sonata. Then I'll break for lunch, and since it's sunny outside, go for a walk - during the walk, I'll mentally review the program from two points of view - one the things I want to remember to do, and then a review of the general mood and atmosphere of each piece or movement. This is practice in finding the 'character' of each piece. On stage I'm something like an actor doing a solo show in which I take all the roles - so I do have to find the keys to the 'character' of each piece or movement.

Also today, I've got to do the practical things which will make tomorrow go smoothly. These include:

- preparing my clothes for tomorrow (since I have two hours in-between my hour of rehearsal and the concert - I'll change in the dressing room there, so I'll have to organize and prepare everything today)
- preparing food for tomorrow (I'll need to eat something between 12-2 again, I'll need to be over there - not enough time to come home for lunch and go back again)
- making sure I have other essentials organized - some fruit and bottled water for intermission

This evening, I'll take a swim, and then after dinner sit down to review the scores one more time - no playing, just going through the printed page.

So that's today.

I also wanted to share some specific musical ideas for the 'Moonlight' that came out of the two tryouts.

1. Yesterday I removed the music stand from the piano when I played. It's important to do this, as the sound of the piano changes considerably when the stand is removed. It can be just the kind of 'aural shock' that can get you off balance at the beginning of a concert. My piano is on the bright side, and I experimented with playing the first movement of the 'Moonlight' using the soft pedal throughout. This worked fairly well - it provides a nice contrast in sonority with the second movement. So I'll try this in the hall during my one hour of rehearsal tomorrow, and if it feels right, I'll do it in the performance. Also, I've decided just in the past few days that at the very end of the first movement, I'll pedal more frequently. I'm referring to measures 66 to the end, which is all the c-sharp minor triad. Normally I would pedal the entire thing with one (right) pedal. But since there is a decrescendo indicated here, and since it's in the low register, changing the pedal every half-measure helps to clear the sonority and soften things. I may hold the pedal for the last two pp chords rather than changing. I'll have to see in the hall.

2. There are a couple of *subito piano* markings i.e. 48/49 and 58/59 where a cresc. mark is followed not by a logical peaking of the sound to a forte, but to a sudden piano instead. This is a dramatic device used fairly frequently by Beethoven (it will occur in last movement as well.) I find these markings pesky to pull off. The modern piano has so much sustaining power and sonority inherent in it that it takes

careful planning to be able to drop down to *piano* after the buildup of the crescendo. It takes a tiny pause to allow the previous build up of sonority to dissipate before we can actually hear the *piano* even if we're playing softly. So these kind of 'subito' markings almost always involve a tiny rubato.

3. The second movement is going well. Memory seems to be settling in, although I'll still pay attention to that similar spot I talked about in the previous blog. I need to make a correction here, as the version in measure 13/14 is only played twice (because of the structure of repeats in the movement) and not three times, as I indicated previously. So I need to be even more attentive to this in my preparation.

4. In the last movement, I've decided to add a tiny *ritardando* at the end of the chord that is arpeggiated in measure 19/20. It says *crescendo* and this implies another one of those subito piano spots, but I think the only way to achieve the transition here is with a little slowing down (not a lot, but a nice 'bend around the corner') to introduce the piano theme in measure 21.

I also need to remember that measure 33 moves from double forte to piano, and stays piano (BTW in measure 35/36 there's another one of those 'subito piano' situations) Also the chord at the downbeat of 37 is staccato and still piano - it's very tempting to play this chord forte in anticipation of the subito forte on the second beat.

In measure 55, I discovered earlier in the week a memory detail - I had inadvertently changed the upper voice in the right hand to a sixth *b to g-sharp* rather than the sixth *d-sharp to b*. This was probably because I was anticipating the former since it appears in measure 56. This is a good example of the mind trying to make everything fit a uniform pattern, a characteristic of our thinking and memorizing that's useful, but dangerous when there are these tiny differences in the music.

Measure 71 also calls for some careful playing - again we're transitioning to the theme being developed at *piano* in measure 72, and also turning a harmonic corner - moving from c-sharp minor to f-sharp minor.

In measure 88 and similar places, it's easy to rush the beats that are not articulated in the upper voice - I'm thinking of the third beat in measure 88, and the second and fourth beats in measure 97, as well as the second and third beats in 98. Again, the tendency is to accelerate through these beats - the left hand is pulsing in tremolando octaves, and will tend to push things forward. But we want the steady thrum of the dominant g-sharp pedal in the lower register. The return to the main theme in measure 103 is much more effective and dramatic if we hold onto the tempo steadily here by sensing all the beats.

In measure 148, I'd been repeating the g-sharp bass note that occurs on the downbeat, rather than moving to the f-sharp on beat three. The harmony works here with g-sharp twice, and my ear didn't pick it up until I followed the score in slow practice earlier this week. Again, it's amazing how the brain will make these changes to accommodate its innate sense of pattern making (which may not be Beethoven's!)

From measure 178 through 185, we are at a peak of music tension - a series of downward and upward sweeps through four different harmonies is followed by a rising chromatic scale. I discovered this week that it's important not to overplay these notes by trying to make them all forte. The aural sensation of forte will come about through a clean articulation of the sound, and holding the right pedal down for the two measures of each harmony. I need to take a tiny 'breath' before the beginning of each change of harmony in order to 'open up' the passages and allow them space to sound. I was pushing too hard here, and by the time I got to the diminished arpeggiation in measure 182/183 where the figure goes from triplets, to 16th notes, and then to sextuplet 16ths, I was feeling very crowded indeed. The principal is always the same *the more difficult the passage, the greater the ease with which we play it*.

I think that's about it on 'final insights.' I do want to emphasize that all of this thinking takes place before the performance, and not during. I'm not talking to myself during the performance. All of this careful thinking now is like creating the conduits through which my musical intuition can flow in the course of the performance, where my job is to experience and express the music as fully as I can in the here and now of the recital.

posted on Saturday, April 23, 2005 6:15 AM

#19 THE LAST STAGE OF PREPARATION – MY SCHEDULE FOR THE DAY OF THE CONCERT

The concert is scheduled for tomorrow, April 24th at 2:00 pm. As I've noted in a previous blog, there was a scheduling problem in getting the hall for a rehearsal of the program. As it turns out, I'll only have one hour on the piano from 11-12 before the tuner comes. Then, rather than going home, I'll stay there, and wait in the dressing room until the program time. I know there are some pianists who 'warm up' and practice till the very last minute before going out on stage, but that has always been counterproductive for me. I've ended up getting more nervous, rather than calmer.

First of all, then, let me give you a list of what I'll need to take along to the hall. Note that I'll change there, rather than wearing a suit and tie from 10:30 when I leave the house until 2:00 when I begin to play. So I'll need to take:

- suit, shirt, tie, belt, concert shoes (I keep a special pair) dress socks
- food: bottled water, protein drink, bananas, salad, toasted soybeans
- comb, brush, hand towel (they only provide paper towels there), eye drops
- Music, DAT tape (they'll make an archive recording for me) , list of timings for the pieces, and entries/exits onto stage (this is for the crew)

All of the above I'll organize tonight, so that tomorrow I'll just have to load it into the car and go. The goal is to have as little distraction as possible - no last minute drama, or trying to remember everything. Then, in case the truly unforeseen does happen (and believe me, it has happened and will again) I won't be distracted and forget something important (like my suit pants, which I once left home only to discover 15 minutes before the concert began that I only had the pair of jeans I was wearing!).

Here's my schedule for tomorrow:

7:00 am up

7-8 exercise and shower (I'll put in 20 minutes of light exercise on the elliptical trainer, just to get the blood flowing.

8-9 meditate

9-10 Breakfast, probably a couple of eggs scrambled and some green tea.

10 - load up car

10:30 leave for hall

11 - hour of rehearsal

12-2 Lunch/change/study music/meditate for 30 mins.

After I finish this blog, I'll take a swim, then have a hot bath, dinner and study the music one more time. Then I may watch a movie, but try to be in bed by 11:00.

I'll enter one last blog tomorrow after the recital with some closing thoughts.

posted on Saturday, April 23, 2005 1:34 PM

#20 ENDING MOONLIGHT – THE LAST BLOG!

April 24, 6:00 pm

The recital ended at 4:00, and after packing up and getting back home, I'm ready to enter the last blog about the performance.

It was very well received - there was a good audience, quiet, attentive, and very responsive. A standing ovation at the end of 'Moonlight' and lots of well-wishers afterwards. I personally was quite satisfied with the performance. The hall as a lovely acoustic for piano - live and resonant. The piano can really breathe, and the sonorities have room to grow in. So it's a pleasure to play there. I played a Steinway "B" which was quite good. Not as good as the Fazioli of the previous week, but certainly playable. And although it's smaller than a full concert grand (9 ft.) it has enough power for the Beethoven I played.

Here are a few general observations:

- my plan for preparation worked in general. However, I still would like to have a decent rehearsal at the piano the day before the concert. The hour I was allotted was barely enough time to get to know the instrument, and since I'm temperamentally disinclined to play everything at full bore the day of the recital, it's quite a push to get through a program of this kind. This was especially true for the late Sonata, Op. 101. There were passages in it that I was simply playing for the first time in that hall, and that wasn't ideal. But the first hallmark of a good pianist is coordination, and the second is flexibility.

- luckily, it was a cool day here, so I wore a jacket over to the hall. It turned out that the dressing room was rather chilly, and I kept the jacket on until the last minute before putting on my suit coat and going out onto the stage, where of course it's warm! So in the future, I intend to add to my checklist a note to bring along a warm sweater. With ventilation systems being what they are, the internal temperature of a building can range from freezing in one room to boiling in another. Flexibility again.

- I paid a lot of attention to my breathing throughout the recital, and this was a big help.

Now onto the 'Moonlight' itself:

- it was the correct thing to use the soft pedal in the first movement. Given the resonance of the hall, the sound was not at all muffled, and using the soft pedal gave the proper 'mystery' to the sonority of the first movement.

- here are some specific things I want to work on in the first movement:

ms. 48/50 didn't get the subito piano

ms. 58/59 another subito piano, this one I did better, but I'm not exploiting the full expressive value here

ms. 25 I need to check the triplet eighth notes, something doesn't feel right here

ms. 48 triplet eighth notes on the fourth beat, right hand - I discovered Friday that I was misreading this, but didn't have time to change it - should be c-sharp, e, g-sharp. I played c-sharp, f-sharp, g-sharp. Note that I repeated the last two eighth notes of the previous beat. Those darned patterns!

- second movement: Not too much here, I felt good about it, and have finally conquered the memory insecurity in measure 13/14. Was able to correct a misreading in 33-34, where I discovered (also on Friday) that I was prolonging the left hand chord and bringing it in with the right hand on the second beat, rather than letting the chord sound on the first beat only.

- third movement - went very well in general. In fact, certain problem passages, such as measure 9- 13 went better than ever before (boy, is it nice when that happens!) I think this was partly due to the resonance of the hall - I could actually hear the upper pedal g-sharp in the right hand.

- measures 53-57 and 148-151. In both of these passages I was hitting too many wrong notes. I think the reason is that I'm not feeling the rhythmic structure of the four measures, but instead playing each half measure as an equal to all the others. There's not enough impulse, in other words, particularly over the larger, half-measure span. I'll need to work on this.

- measure 78 - didn't play the slight change in chord voicing in the second half of the measure for the right hand. I got away with it, but I need that 'c' for the D7 chord.

- 178-185 This was better, but it still could have used more spaciousness, I need to broaden the tempo slightly here, and not play it strictly in time. It just feels to 'squeezed.' But was better, nonetheless.

Finally on 'Moonlight': frankly, I took on this Sonata after a conversation last year with our Program Coordinator, who is in charge of publicity and ticket sales, etc. She felt that we need to improve our audience attendance. And I knew that 'Moonlight' was a warhorse and would be a sure draw. What I didn't expect is that, even though I've taught it before, I would have such a wonderful time learning and playing it. I truly understand why it was such an immediate success when it was first performed, and why it has been played frequently ever since.

And now a few closing thoughts:

- recital-making is a *process* not a *product*. And what you've read here is just a little window into the process that any professional pianist must go through to present a recital. Remember that this blog covered only one Sonata - and I performed two other Sonatas and two sets of Variations. So the Blog, if it covered the entire program, would be huge. As it is, I've still got to go to the other pieces, make notes on them and put in some corrections. This is the ongoing work of the *process* of being a musician.

- I already know I'll be performing the 'Moonlight' on at least two other occasions in the next month. And, given the success I had with it, I may program it more frequently in the future.

-Finally, I hope that this blog has given you some insight into what happens on stage, and in the months leading up to it. What I can't describe here is that magic that happens when I'm totally immersed in this magnificent music, sharing its beauty with listeners. That, dear blog-reader, you'll have to discover for yourself, by making music for others.

Bye!

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