Clavier

July/August 2007

Jerome Rose

Talking with Jerome Rose

The Nash Studio

Teaching with Imagery

Photo by John Landolfi, Courtesy International Keyboard Institute and Festival

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by Patrick Meanor

"Romanticism is playing on the edge – playing as though your life depends on it," says distinguished American pianist Jerome Rose. "In a performance it is important to create moments that transcend conventional interpretations, even though they may not feel comfortable or secure. There is a certain feeling of madness – otherworldliness – that the great composers felt deeply when they wrote for artists to express."

Patrick Meanor is professor of English at the State University of New York, Oneonta, where he has taught for 33 years. He has written or edited eight books and nearly 160 essays, articles, and reviews; and his C.D. reviews are in Listener Magazine *and* Fanfare. *He has also published interviews with pianists Cécile Ousset, Idil Biret, Leslie Howard, Cyprien Katsaris, Alexis Weissenberg, Sergei Babyan, Alexander Toradze, Jean-Yves Thibaudet, and violinist Nadja Salerno-Sonnenberg.*

Rose learned about those moments early in his career. They led to a debut at the age of 15 with the San Francisco Symphony during the time he studied with Adolph Baller. Rose later coached with Leonard Shure (a pupil of Artur Schnabel) and Rudolf Serkin at the Marlboro Festival and graduated from the Mannes College of Music and The Juilliard School. He was also a Fulbright Scholar in Vienna.

While still in his 20s, Rose won first prize at the International Busoni Competition in Italy. He has performed with such orchestras as the Chicago Symphony, Berlin Philharmonic, and the Royal Philharmonic and has recorded the works of Beethoven, Schubert, Schumann, Chopin, Liszt, and Brahms.

In 1999 Rose founded the International Keyboard Institute and Festival in New York City, which this year will include 42 guest pianists and 28 concerts, July 15-29, at Mannes College. The event gives pianists from around the world the chance to meet, hear great performances, and attend masterclasses by prominent musicians. Rose is a faculty member at Mannes College, and in 2001 he was awarded an honorary doctorate degree from the State University of New York for lifetime achievement in music.

What were some important lessons you learned as a student?

My teachers gave me the ability, the musical discipline, to study and to arrive at an interpretation on my own. They encouraged me to think and study independently. I often tell students that how they practice is how they play, and how they study is how they interpret. Performance takes a thorough knowledge and understanding of how music is constructed and how it should be interpreted. The goal is to take a score and make it come alive, but many students today are hesitant to assume responsibility for an interpretation. They often expect to

be told how to play every phrase of a piece. This limits their growth in becoming mature artists.

Each of my teachers infused my ears with great playing. Leonard Shure did not move on to the next phrase unless a student absolutely mastered the first phrase. He spent an unearthly amount of time on a phrase, which forced me to hear the details in the score and create beautiful music.

What difficulties do you notice in piano students today? Are their problems musical, technical, or a combination of both?

Students and artists have the same problem, and that is how to make the music come alive and do it on a daily basis. I give students a tremendous amount of independence so they develop musically and emotionally to become great performers. Once they walk out on a stage, they face an audience alone, but they also face themselves and are responsible for the music.

The message I tell students is that audiences want pianists who will fill the hall with sound and who are exciting. Playing in a living room or a studio is not the same as performing with an orchestra in a large concert hall.

Pianists need a strong personality to play in front of an orchestra of 60-100 musicians. Many soloists seem to disappear in front of an orchestra rather than fill up the stage with personality and sound.

How did the great pianists like Gieseking and Moiseiwitsch keep up their vitality as performers? The sheer act of having to travel and play in different cities every second or third night is difficult.

Piano performance is like a Broadway show that repeats every night with a different audience. You have to hit the mark every night. At the same time, the more pianists perform, the more they learn to cope with the pressure and adjust their lives. I still remember Jorge Bolet, whose only compliment to himself was, "Well, not bad." He would never say a performances was good. It is similar to watching Tiger Woods become angry after missing a shot. He sets a certain standard and wants to meet it.

What are the qualities of great pianists?

Truly great pianists have something profound to impart about the world through music. Every artist is in some way a philosopher, a highly developed messenger whose technique helps him to communicate through the instrument in a meticulous way.

It is difficult to convey the truly great messages of composers. I believe music is a condensation of life; it is autobiographical – a statement of intellectual prowess. A musical work can encapsulate lifelong experiences into minutes, and other great arts, such as painting and films, do this as well.

Pianists need to understand that music is drama. A pianist becomes a single actor on stage who makes

Rose at the piano in a rehearsal with cellist Pablo Casals, the Marlboro Festival, about 1956.

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music come alive in dramatic ways. I'm talking about well-thought-out interpretations, with nothing exaggerated or artificial.

One of my favorite sayings is, "You play who you are." Schnabel once said to his students, "You play with as much Beethoven as you have in you." This has a lot to do with a pianist's experiences in life and his understanding of other people. Beethoven brought a lifetime of human experience to his music, with each score composed as a dramatic script interpreted through sound.

The work of an artist is to understand the message behind the music and then interpret it for audiences – that is what art is all about. The moment a pianist touches the instrument there should be something magical in the sound. It does not matter if it's one note or two.

Wiessenberg said the minute Rubinstein touched the piano, it was like being cushioned in radiance. One note would do it.

I remember that Rubinstein performed the F minor Nocturne as one beautiful legato passage with just one finger; he catapulted the sound into a hall. Rubinstein understood the need to fill every corner of the hall with sound, and he was able to blend one note into the next.

Do you specialize in playing certain repertoire?

I believe pianists should be able to play anything, even if they don't have an affinity for a piece or musical style. By learning how to perform a work with conviction, they grow as musicians. Pianists should master every style, including contemporary music.

Of course there are pieces and composers one person plays better than others, but playing only what is comfortable diminishes a pianist's education and growth. I encourage students to explore a variety of musical styles because it will only help them. I often think of the actor Sir Lawrence Olivier, who threw himself into all types of characters and different roles – even those that were perhaps foreign to his personality and training.

As a young pianist growing up, I remember not being particularly interested in the music of Franz Liszt, until I received a contract to record his music. I agreed to the contract and ended up recording all the major repertoire by Liszt. It became a great event in my life, and studying this repertoire helped me in performing other works. I learned the value of mastering each musical style and knowing what makes them distinct.

What are your early musical memories?

I am the son of what some people refer to today as a piano mother; my mother adored music and was always involved with music, so my future as a pianist was sealed before I was born. Her father was a music critic in New York, and my brother was a superb violinist.

I grew up in San Francisco and as a child heard everyone who performed there – Benno Moiseiwitsch, Arthur Rubinstein, Solomon, and Walter Gieseking, Vladimir Horowitz, and William Kapell as well as Heifetz, Oistrakh, and Rostropovich. The

Continued on page 34

Photo by John Landolfi. Courtesy International Keyboard Institute and Festival

opera house was a second home before we moved to New York. My earliest teacher was Marvin Maazel, an exceptionally fine pianist whose career was sadly interrupted during World War II.

A youthful Rose with Arthur Fiedler

Years later I discovered a book that listed Maazel as one of the brilliant young pianists of his time. I studied with him from the age of five and had my first concert when I was six; at age seven I played Bach *Inventions* for another concert. I still remember Maazel sitting in a chair, smoking cigars and teaching. He was the uncle of conductor Lorin Maazel.

At age nine I moved to Berkeley to study with Marcus Gordon, a former pupil of Rosina and Joseph Lhévinne. Later, when Gordon went on an extended concert tour, I studied with Harald Logan, who had spent many years in Berlin with Egon Petri. Logan was a great friend of William Kapell and was devastated when Kapell's plane crashed outside of San Francisco in 1953.

A critical time in my development was the four years I studied with Adolph Baller. He had accompanied and toured with violinist Yehudi Menuhin during World War II. During that time I also studied harmony, counterpoint, and music history at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, which helped my development and understanding of musical structure. These subjects are valuable because young pianists need to know how a piece is put together to play it convincingly.

Baller introduced me to Rudolf Serkin, who invited me to Marlboro in 1956. Serkin said I should go to New York to study with Leonard Shure, who was an assistant to Artur Schnabel. Shure was a great friend of Leopold Mannes and taught both private and college students, so I went to the Mannes College and finished a degree in three years.

Juilliard accepted me as a chamber music major, but I still had to pass piano examinations. I studied chamber music with the Juilliard Quartet and piano with Claus Adam, who was the cellist of the Juilliard Quartet.

One of the most memorable concerts of my life was Rubinstein's performance at Carnegie Hall, when a friend and I tried to get tickets last minute. The only seats left were on stage, so we sat just six feet away from him. I think he felt the energy and attentiveness of the audience that day, because he often looked at us.

What inspired you to start the International Keyboard Institute and Festival?

The motivation came from other festivals I created, beginning in 1981 with The Romantics in London, England. It featured music, poetry, fine arts, and theater in 45 events held in five days. The second festival in 1986 recognized the 100th anniversary of Liszt's death; in 1997 the Library of Congress invited me to create a festival with music and lectures for the 200th anniversary of the birth of Schubert and the 100th anniversary of the death of Brahms.

The International Keyboard Institute & Festival began in 1999 at the Mannes College of Music where I am a faculty member. The idea was to provide an in-depth study of the piano that had never before accomplished in a summer festival.

What was the scope of the first festival?

It had about 50 students from around the world with lessons and daily concerts. All the lessons were taught as masterclasses and open to anyone to walk in and out at any time, so students could participate in the vast piano repertoire and observe various styles of teaching.

The festival has grown and today has an enrollment of 150 students and 42 professional performers and faculty, and there are 28 concert events. There would be no festival without the help of Dorothy MacKenzie, a wonderful woman from Ohio, who supports the arts. She has helped me by offering student scholarships and personal assistance to countless families and friends. She is truly one of the finest individuals I know.

Would you please share some memorable highlights of past festivals.

The most memorable was the concert given in recognition of Rosalyn Tureck, a prominent harpsichordist and pianist and an important person in the history of the keyboard. I had engaged her to appear in the 2003 festival, but several months before the performance date she became too ill to play, so we agreed to an interview on stage. Her health continued to deteriorate so instead of the interview, friends spoke about her and several favorite students performed. David Dubal was the moderator of the event.

The recorded tape of this homage was on its way to Rosalyn Tureck when I received a notice that she died ten minutes after the tribute to her ended. It was as though she needed to stay alive to witness the event.

The next most memorable moments were the performances and interviews with Earl Wild in his 90th year, which was like seeing the history of the piano come alive on stage. We were lucky to present György Sándor in one of his last appearances and equally blessed to have Alicia de Larrocha on stage.

In 2002 Ruth Slenczynska shared her personal account of studying with Rachmaninoff, Schnabel, and Cortot in a concert and interview.

Do you ever wish you pursued a career in an area other than the piano?

Every day of my life. You need to understand that a person who does well has an increasing responsibility to keep the standard high. This is true for any profession. In the world of classical music, concert artists cannot accept slipping back to a lesser level of technique or musicianship.

The more a person knows, the greater his knowledge and responsibility. There are also greater pressures and greater expectations. □