



ONE-HANDED PIANO COMPOSITIONS AND INJURY AWARENESS

HISTORY, STUDY OF SELECTED WORKS, AND MINDFUL PRACTICE

ZHENI GEORGIEVA ATANASOVA

**One-Handed Piano
Compositions and
Injury Awareness**

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**History, Study of Selected Works,
and Mindful Practice**

Zheni Georgieva Atanasova

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I dedicate this book to my parents Romyanka and Georgi Atanasovi, and my brother Svilen Atanasov, who paved my path in life, nurtured my love for music, and constantly supported my professional journey from its very beginning, even when I embarked on a career abroad in a country so far from home. I would have never been able to accomplish so much without their love, encouragement and support.

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Preface

The book *One-Handed Piano Compositions and Injury Awareness: History, Study of Selected Works, and Mindful Practice* offers informative, helpful, and captivating content and is truly unique in its nature. It embraces four diverse but highly correlated fields: History, Wellness, Analysis in Relation to Performance of Selected Works, and Mindful and Goal-Oriented Practice. As a pianist who suffered from a professionally inflicted injury in 2011, I realized the need for a source that contains the answers to a number of questions and concerns that arise due to a trauma because I myself needed one as an injured pianist as well. The academic faculty I worked with at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas also highly recommended that I share my work with a broader audience by turning it into a book.

This book presents an overview of the history and evolution of the one-handed works throughout the centuries with an emphasis on the various reasons for their origin, importance, and application. Pieces by five distinguished composers will be closely studied in order to demonstrate a variety of music cultures, styles, and forms. One of the fundamental intentions for the existence of this book is that it features research exploring the primary causes for professionally inflicted injuries and available methods for injury prevention. I strive to bring more awareness to the importance of trauma prevention in the music field and, in particular, in the piano area. I also aspire to help injured pianists by introducing them to the realm of one-handed works and thus give them a creative outlet while they are in a process of recovery. These works are not only going to benefit the performers by helping them cultivate an excellent piano technique, but they also could save careers in circumstances such as professionally related and other commonly caused injuries and accidents.

The next essential purpose of this research is to provide an informative and interpretative analysis of selected compositions, including the expansion

of piano technique necessary to execute musical works of such category. A piece, which is masterfully performed, would not only contribute to the pianist's musical satisfaction, but it will enhance the overall understanding and perception of the oeuvre by the audience. An analysis in relation to performance is included, as the specifics of these works require an individual approach due to the variety of challenges, which could be encountered in the process of study. These pieces will bring variety to the concert stage and add artfully to the quality concert programs. They will impress the audience with their highly virtuosic character and expressive musical depth.

The final goal of this research is to inspire the readers to explore various practice techniques in order to achieve the level of greatness they are aiming for in the area of musical performance. It often occurs that musicians undertake complex and virtuosic works because their technical abilities develop quickly. However, the advanced level of playing does not always match the level of practice skills needed to support such growth. The contrast between high technical abilities and lack of in-depth understanding of important practice techniques could lead to stress, frustration, stage fright, and even professionally inflicted injuries. In this book, I aspire to share my knowledge, experience, and ideas with the reading audience in order to ignite their interest in exploring and studying various approaches to practicing and applying these new ideas to their daily practice sessions.

I became so invested in this research and all the components it involves that I did a piano concert dedicated to the topic of injury prevention and the realm of one-handed piano works. I also did the World Premiere of one of the piano compositions discussed in this book here in the United States. The performance took place on May 11, 2018, in Las Vegas, Nevada. Truly, I aspire to reach out to the broad audience, bring awareness to the issue of healthy playing, and help countless other musicians who are facing the same challenges I encountered as a result of my injury. In the process of writing, I aimed to create a comprehensive source that would acquaint the readers with the historical origin of the one-handed works, introduce them to the methods that could help them recuperate from their injuries and prevent future issues, and offer them musical works they would be able to practice and perform while they are on their path to recovery. I also realized that it is very important to include an additional chapter that focuses on healthy and efficient practice techniques. Goal-oriented work is the key to daily injury-free practice sessions and stellar career opportunities in the performing arts.

As a person who has experienced a professionally inflicted injury, I understand the suffering, frustration, confusion, fear, and panic that accompany such a trauma. Being a pianist is not just a profession but a vocation. Having that taken away due to a professionally inflicted injury for an undetermined amount of time is physically and emotionally excruciating. The proposed solution to this problem is revealed in the chapter "Injury

Awareness” where I introduce the Alexander Technique, Body Mapping, Feldenkrais Method, and Taubman Approach to the reading audience. The ideas at the core of the Alexander Technique, Body Mapping, and Feldenkrais Method could be applied by musicians and non-musicians alike. The Taubman Approach is strictly focused on pianists and the issues they encounter while playing. In exceptional circumstances, her approach has been successfully applied to instrumentalists in other areas as well. In this chapter, I also include information about the Sheila Paige’s Keyboard Wellness Seminar; Paola Savvidou’s work in the realm of music and wellness, and the yoga/piano book for children she created with Haley Meyers; the Alan Fraser Piano Institute; and the Fred Karpoff 3-D Method and Entrada Piano. New approaches to practicing, teaching, and performing inspire further research and development in the area of music studies. Original and innovative ideas are always welcome. They are interesting to explore and serve as another proof of future opportunities for expansion and progress in the realm of music education and performance.

The topic of music wellness is becoming more and more sought after, and this book offers the readers not only a comprehensive historical outlook but also information on injury prevention, ways of coping with existing or potential injuries, musical material the readers can explore and play while they are in the process of recovery, and practice techniques to assist in learning the desired repertoire. I choose to feature left-handed as well as right-handed works, so I do not limit the number of professionals who could refer to my book for help and guidance. I offer the reading audience specific musical works with provided theoretical understanding, analysis in relation to performance and efficient techniques for successful musical execution, so they can overcome the technical difficulties and physical limitations that occur while playing one-handed material. Those techniques are not limited to the compositions analyzed in this book. They are universal, so they can be applied in the process of studying of other musical works of the performer’s choice as well.

I have selected the oeuvres included in this book with a very specific intention in mind. They represent the realm of the one-handed works perfectly. I begin with the first piece in the history of music written for one hand composed by Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach and finish with a marvelous work by Sophie-Carmen Eckhardt-Gramatté. This last piece will astonish even the most experienced pianists with its unique structure featuring a movement composed for the left hand, another movement for the right hand, and a third final movement written for both hands, where the previous two movements are superimposed.

I did a Lecture Recital on the topic and it gathered a wide audience of people with various interests. Some of them were music lovers. Others were instrumentalists suffering from professionally inflicted injuries. The third group of audience members consisted of people who experienced pain

caused by non-music-related traumas. They were not specifically interested in the musical aspect of the lecture but they were looking for answers to a pain-free life. They had been suffering from pain caused by injuries for years and any new information on the topic of pain management was of interest to them. In the end of the lecture I received a wide array of questions. Many of those questions came with a short background story describing a long period of suffering that was ongoing at the time of the Lecture Recital. I strongly reaffirmed my recommendation for the use of the Alexander Technique and Feldenkrais Method as a great start to their path to pain management, relief, and recovery. That was when I found out that the audience members had never even heard of Alexander and Feldenkrais until they attended my Lecture Recital. They were actively taking notes while I was answering their questions.

The event was planned to be one-hour long. Due to the high volume of questions, I reached the maximum amount of availability of the Lecture Hall. The event continued for two hours and even then, there were more questions I answered backstage. Being able to connect with so many people and help with their concerns is an experience I cherish and appreciate because I also suffered an injury that forced me to stop playing the piano with both hands for a period of six months. That was an incredibly challenging period in my life due to the physical, emotional, and mental stress that it caused. This experience helped me understand the tremendous impact an injury could have on other people. I was able to relate to their pain and struggle because I experienced the consequences of having an injury and saw how it affected various areas of my life. From my discussions with the audience members, however, I realized that many of them experienced not temporary but chronic pain on a daily basis for years. Their search for answers brought them to my lecture which, in their words, brought hope into their lives that something more could be done to improve their condition. Educating people on different strategies that may help reduce or eliminate their pain is an incredibly rewarding and highly satisfying experience.

After this Lecture Recital, I realized that my reading audience could be very diverse. This book will benefit undergraduate and graduate students, scholars, professionals, music lovers, and the general public. It could be used in various undergraduate and graduate level Keyboard Studies classes such as Piano Pedagogy, Piano Literature courses, and Private Piano Lessons (Applied Piano) at the Graduate and Undergraduate level. The book would be a wonderful resource for classes focused on injury prevention such as The Healthy Musician and Music Wellness, which are usually electives. This research could be useful in Analysis in Relation to Performance classes due to the fact that I do discuss performance practice in one-handed compositions. The theoretical analysis will provide the readers with a comprehensive

understanding of the nature of the works, which will only enhance their performance experience.

Once I completed the chapter of the book dedicated to the theoretical and performance analysis of the aforementioned one-handed musical works, I realized that it would be truly beneficial to add a chapter discussing the Holy Grail of success and fulfillment in the area of performing arts, and that is practice. Performers often tend to focus on muscle memory by practicing countless hours. However, mere repetition of the material will not provide a sense of security during a performance and it could easily lead to professionally inflicted injuries. That is why I decided to dedicate a section of the book to the benefits of implementing various practice techniques in addition to the traditional practice routine every musician learns when they first begin their journey as music students. The ultimate goal of this book is that the information included in here will encourage the readers to seek and explore a variety of one-handed works and apply the knowledge gained from this book to their future projects.

Acknowledgments

First, I would like to thank Dr. Mykola Suk for his invaluable and inspirational guidance in the realm of performance and music interpretation, and his tremendous dedication throughout my entire professional pursuit. Once he became familiar with the topic of my research, he immediately connected with Karmella Tsepkenko, an internationally renowned composer from Ukraine, and as a result, I had the honor to premiere her work here in the United States.

I also would like to acknowledge Dr. Richard Miller, Dr. Andrew Smith, Prof. Taras Krysa, Prof. David Loeb, and Prof. Margot Mink Colbert for their continuous support and active presence during my educational journey when the idea for this book was born. Here is also the place to convey my eternal gratitude to Dr. Kenneth Hanlon for his immense contribution to my research process. He will be greatly missed as he passed away shortly before my research was completed. I also would like to thank Jeanne Hinnners for her invaluable friendship and her constant and selfless emotional support throughout my educational path.

I would like to extend my sincerest gratitude to The Eckhardt-Gramatté Foundation and the composers Karmella Tsepkenko and Emile Naoumoff as well. They generously granted me permission to conduct research on selected works from their vast compositional repertoire. I also would like to thank René Hagedorn for his permission to use the photograph he took of me for the cover of this book.

Introduction

The idea about the book *One-Handed Piano Compositions and Injury Awareness: History, Study of Selected Works, and Mindful Practice* was born in 2011. Due to a professionally inflicted injury, I was not able to use my right hand and that meant that I had to put on hold all of my music projects. It took me six months to recover completely and that time span was by far the darkest period of my life. I remember searching for information on performance-related injuries in music, health and wellness, ways to cope with the pain, and support groups founded by other musicians who may have gone through the same issues. Once I recovered, I realized that if there were books that provided the information I needed, I would have not had to spend all of this time looking for answers under such tremendous amounts of stress. After a prolonged search I realized that there is no source that offers one solution to all problems, so I took it upon myself to create one and share it. I aspired to write one book that holds all the answers that arise in a period of professional, physical, psychological, and emotional crisis that a temporary or permanent injury may cause in the life of a performing musician. Before I even start to dive deeper into this topic, however, I would like to explain the reason I felt so passionate about writing on this subject in more detail.

In August 2011, I had the honor to start a Master of Musical Arts degree at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. My excitement was immense and I practiced any chance I had during the day or night. Just a month later, I started dropping different objects involuntarily and feeling pain in my arm. Finally, I reached a point where I played a scale on the piano to warm up and my arm fell off the keyboard all by itself. I was terrified. That first unexpected moment of weakness was followed by medical tests, physical therapy, and months of doctors' visits. Since I was not able to play music, I began feeling depressed. I used to pass by practice rooms, hear fellow musicians play