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A DOCUMENT APPROVED FOR THE
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THE ACTING SYSTEM OF KONSTANTIN STANISLAVSKI AS APPLIED TO PIANO PERFORMANCE

ABSTRACT

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This document presents methods to address common performance challenges faced by college-level piano performance majors by adapting techniques from the acting System of Konstantin Stanislavski, a Russian actor, director, writer, and founder of the Moscow Art Theater (MXAT) who lived from 1863-1938. The common performance challenges addressed in this study are performance anxiety, physical tension in performance, interpretation challenges, and stage presence—the “visual rhetoric” of piano playing. The methods suggested in this study are presented as sixteen Activities that are adapted from Stanislavski’s System for stage actors. Because the impact of Stanislavski’s methods on piano pedagogy is not widely understood, this study also gives background and context for the influence of Stanislavski on a generation of Russian-born and other influential pianists and teachers who became part of the American system of piano pedagogy in the first half of the twentieth century.

Chapter 1 (Introduction) provides support and context for the four performance challenges addressed in the study from writings in the field of piano performance and pedagogy. This chapter also explores the relationship between acting (particularly the methods of Stanislavski) and piano performance through statements and writings by

pianists and pedagogues including Theodore Leschetizky, Heinrich Neuhaus, George Kochevitsky, Rosina Lhévinne, Sviatoslav Richter, and Artur Rubenstein. Chapter 2 is a review of literature which examines five intersecting topics: (i) the key writings of Konstantin Stanislavski; (ii) writings about Stanislavski and his System; (iii) key writings on piano performance, skills, and interpretation; (iv) dissertations and theses which propose a connection between the System and music performance; and (v) dissertations and theses which propose connections and applications of the System to fields outside of music.

An overview and selected biography of Stanislavski's life and work are included in Chapter 3 along with an overview of the Stanislavski's acting System, outlining what Stanislavski described as a lifelong process of learning and implementing his theory of performance. Following this, chapter 4 presents sixteen specific Activities adapted for college-level pianists which address performance challenges using concepts from the System such as relaxation, public solitude, attention, round-table analysis, imagination, subtext, emotion memory, communication, stage charm, and creating a score of physical actions. This document concludes with chapter 5 which provides a summary, reflections by the author on important aspects of the System and the Activities as well as recommendations for further study. This document also contains a bibliography and appendices including a glossary of key terms.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Overview

University piano majors typically perform only one or two solo recitals during their undergraduate years, and a great deal of emphasis is placed on the performer's stage presence, technical execution, and artistic presentation at these events. Of course, these students will also participate in weekly studio classes and perhaps give additional community performances as they prepare for junior and senior recitals. But for most, there will be nothing quite like the two solo stage performances where three or four years of studio practice and repertoire development—preceded by many formative years before college—are tested before an audience. This gives rise to a special challenge for classically-trained pianists who must convert these countless hours of practice into a single public performance that displays a high level of artistic achievement.

The paramount nature of the public performance challenge has long been recognized by piano pedagogues: “For many pianists and (even more) learners, a public performance is far from a simple matter.”¹ Pianists may encounter problems such as a lack of comfort onstage, performance anxiety, loss of focus, hyper-focus, and dramatic changes to the pieces they had played so well in a private setting. In addition, fear of performing publicly can have physical side effects due to a spike in adrenaline with

¹ Heinrich Neuhaus, *The Art of Piano Playing*, trans. Barrie & Jenkins Ltd. (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1973), 205.

symptoms including shaky hands or legs, shortness of breath, or blurred vision. The expanding field of performance pedagogy continues to seek answers that will help pianists overcome problems on the stage. This study examines well-developed methods used by actors and considers how these methods may be adapted and applied by pianists and teachers to address a wide range of piano performance challenges. Specifically, this study explores and adapts methods developed through the important work of the Russian-born actor, director, and teacher, Konstantin Sergeievich Stanislavski (né Alekseev) (1863-1938) which came to be known as the Stanislavski System for actors.²

While the Stanislavski System cannot address all the challenges faced by college-level piano performers, it can provide insights that will benefit pianists. Certain analytical tools found in the Stanislavski System will prove helpful for pianists at varying stages of development in strengthening their comprehension and understanding of the underlying emotional perspectives found in Western classical music literature. In addition the Stanislavski System may be adapted to address some of the emotional, psychological, and physical issues that interfere with a stage performance by even the most technically skilled and musically prepared performers. And these adaptations may help to fill gaps in the field of piano pedagogy, some of which have been noted. For example Lesley Sisterhen McAllister observes that “there is one area that is often lacking in degree

² The capitalized term “System” is used in this study to refer only to the methods, tools, and ideas developed by Konstantin Stanislavski for training actors. Chapter 2, Review of Literature, provides additional context and explanation for notable acting methods and systems promoted by other acting teachers who followed Stanislavski and who relied on his work and writings in some measure.

programs around the country, and that is psychological training to meet the demands of performance.”³

There are also some parallels between the tools found in Stanislavski’s System and methods that musicians and piano pedagogues employ. These parallels are likely a natural outgrowth of the connections between acting and piano performance as art forms, but they may also be attributable in some ways to the deep-seated and enduring connections between Stanislavski and his System on the one hand, and the many Russian pianists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries who admired Stanislavski and recognized the importance of his work. Solid evidence of these connections is explored in this Overview in the subsection, Connections Between Acting and Piano Performance, and further documented in chapter 2, Review of Literature. The connections are most notably seen through the writings of or about pianists Theodore Leschetizky, Josef and Rosina Lhévinne, George Kochevitsky, and Heinrich Neuhaus. In addition to the Russian pianists, connections are seen through Artur Rubenstein who spent time in Russia. With the exception of Kochevitsky and Neuhaus, these Russian pianists, and Rubenstein as well, were impacted personally by Stanislavski’s Moscow Art Theatre (MXAT) of the late 1800s and early 1900s. Leschetizky noted, among other things, that there are direct links between expressing a piano piece and “good acting.”⁴ Stanislavski’s impact on these pianists resulted in significant echoes in contemporary piano pedagogy as many

³ Lesley Sisterhen McAllister, *The Balanced Musician: Integrating Mind and Body for Peak Performance* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2013), 5.

⁴ Ethel Newcomb, *Leschetizky As I Knew Him* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1967), 173.

Russian-trained pianists left to settle in the United States and to teach at conservatories and leading music schools here.

By way of introduction, this Overview: (i) reviews some of the common stage and performance challenges for pianists by focusing from a pedagogical point of view on those which may benefit most from methods developed by Stanislavski for actors; (ii) considers the connections between the art of acting and the art of piano performance; and (iii) takes an introductory look at Konstantin Stanislavski and the evolution of his System, particularly through his published works now available. Following the Overview, this chapter separately explains the purpose of this study, the need for this study, the limitations of the study, and the organization of the material presented.

Performance Challenges Considered in this Study

Despite their many years of faithful piano lessons, college students are asked to perform in unfamiliar settings with limited support and higher stakes. Piano teachers often lament that their students play a certain way in the lesson, only to fall apart on stage, giving performances that lack inspiration, imagination, and verve. Henrich Neuhaus explains part of the challenge for teachers in this way:

One of the main mistakes in preparing for a concert (and in work in general) which I noted in some pupils and pianists, is the complete divorce between their work at home and the performance in the concert hall. For them the notion of learning is identical with that of practicing; they are prepared to play by the hour some beautiful composition, thumping out every note, to practice each hand separately, and to repeat the same passage endlessly, in short to learn music without music.⁵

⁵ Neuhaus, *Art of Piano Playing*, 211.

Performance challenges faced by college-level pianists are varied and significant. They include performance anxiety, physical tension in performance, interpretation challenges, and maintaining stage presence—the “visual rhetoric” of piano playing. These are general categories which parallel in significant ways some of the challenges faced by actors. But before discussing these parallels, it is useful first to review these performance issues from the point of view of the musician, and more specifically, the pianist.

Performance Anxiety

Pianists often report feeling apprehensive or nervous during a performance. Concert pianist Andre Watts stated that in performance “there is a certain nervousness that is almost always there.”⁶ As noted by Neuhaus, the many hours of practice in preparation for a performance often does not adequately equip pianists for the shift in conscious thought that accompanies the arrival of a physical audience on the night of the concert. Despite many years of focused energy dedicated to practicing their instrument, pianists spend fewer hours performing or practicing performing than leading elite performers in other fields. Athletes, dancers, and actors practice in groups, honing their performance skills, often with the presence of a coach or director capable of leading them through each rehearsal. Having less “stage time” or direction prior to a solo performance can add to the anxiety of pianists and eventually lead to problems on stage. Performance psychologist, Bill Moore observes:

Without a doubt, the most surprising difference between athletes and musicians is not the amount of time spent practicing, but the amount of time spent playing.

⁶ Elise Mach, *Great Contemporary Pianists Speak for Themselves*, vols. 1 and 2 (New York: Dover, 1988), 188.

Most competitive athletes have dozens of performance repetitions over the course of six months, while most musicians may have one or two. For the most part, athletes are “players” who practice while musicians are “practicers” who play . . . To play your best while it counts, you must simultaneously walk two parallel paths. One path for the development and refinement of your technical skills, and a second path for the development and refinement of your mental performance skills.⁷

Performance anxiety can be as broad as a generalized fear of being on stage or can arise from specific anxieties that relate to the psychological and emotional state of the individual pianist. In working with tennis professional and author Timothy Gallwey, classical bass player Barry Green learned that “in everything we do, there are two games being played: the outer game, where we overcome obstacles outside ourselves to reach an outer goal—winning at tennis, playing well, or succeeding at whatever we are interested in—and an inner game, in which we overcome internal obstacles such as self-doubt and fear.”⁸

Self-doubt can manifest in a variety of ways including preoccupation with “correctness” which “may actually lead to performances that sound uninspired, hesitant, and even dull,”⁹ doubting one’s own abilities, obsessing over what one’s teacher thinks of the performance, being distracted by what the audience might think, or simply being afraid of making a mistake or having a lapse in memory. These anxieties can become mental chatter during a performance which distracts from creating the emotional and

⁷ Bill Moore, *Playing Your Best When it Counts: Mental Skills for Musicians* (Norman, OK: Moore Publishing, 2010).

⁸ Barry Green and Timothy Gallwey, *The Inner Game of Music* (New York: Anchor Press, 1986), 6.

⁹ McAllister, *Balanced Musician*, 6.

musical elements necessary for an artistic performance. Performance anxiety may also interfere with the pianist's ability to listen to sound in his performance or may cause a freeze or memory lapse that reflects a loss of focus. Performance psychologist Don Green writes: "Stress is a human condition, integral to the structure and functioning of our bodies and mind."¹⁰ The perceived "threat" of a performance may activate a "fight-or-flight" response resulting in a spike of adrenaline in the bloodstream bringing on physical effects such as "sweat, hand tremors, feelings of unsteadiness," awkward gestures at the keyboard, and other physical tension manifestations that are discussed in this study.¹¹ Pianists who struggle with these performance challenges also report a feeling of self-consciousness on the stage, which "can alter the sense of sharing and turn [performing] into an act of proving oneself to meet exacting standards."¹² Self-consciousness, perfectionism, and obsessing about results are all elements of performance anxiety with the ability to produce a "snowball" effect causing pianists to "choke" in a high pressure situation.¹³

Physical Tension in Performance

Of all the side-effects of performance anxiety, physical tension is perhaps the most detrimental to optimal performance. Performance psychologist Don Greene states: "In music and sports alike, tight muscles result in poor performance ... good

¹⁰ Don Greene, *Performance Success: Performing Your Best Under Pressure* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 16.

¹¹ Greene, *Performance Success*, 18.

¹² McAllister, *Balanced Musician*, 10.

¹³ McAllister, *Balanced Musician*, 10.

performances are almost always the result of relatively relaxed muscles” and, unfortunately for musicians, “we tend to tighten up in the very muscles we need to keep most relaxed. Singers and wind players tend to tighten up in their throats and shoulders and in other areas associated with breathing. String players tend to tighten up in their wrists and hands.”¹⁴ Research findings in injury prevention for musicians state that between sixty and ninety percent of classical musicians self-report that they suffer from a musculoskeletal pain due to their playing.¹⁵ Common injuries for pianists often occur due to excess tension, overuse, and playing through pain often without seeking medical attention.

Pianists who struggle with tension may rely on the work of F.M. Alexander, Moshe Feldenkrais, and other somatic studies that help to establish a connection between mind and body. Musicians in the twenty-first century continue to search for techniques that improve physical freedom, balance, and flexibility in their work. American Alexander Technique teachers William and Barbara Conable are the innovators behind the movement theory Body Mapping. The Body Map refers to the way individuals mentally perceive their own body. William Conable discovered this theory of movement in the 1980s in his cello studio at Ohio State University School of Music where he noticed that his students move “according to how they think they are structured rather

¹⁴ Greene, *Performance Success*, 18.

¹⁵ Dianna Kenney and Bronwen Ackermann, “Performance-related musculoskeletal pain, depression and music performance anxiety in professional orchestral musicians: A population study,” *Psychology of Music*, 43 (1) (2015): 43-60.

than according to how they are actually structured.”¹⁶ Students who move in a way that is disparate to the natural and anatomically correct structures of the body will find that their movement is “inefficient and injury-producing.”¹⁷

Musicians who become aware of the anatomical structures of the body report that they move with more freedom and balance. Body Mapping is built on the Alexander Technique principle called “constructive conscious control,” which is the “process of self-observation and self-analysis wherein one becomes intimately knowledgeable about one’s own habits so that one can suspend habitual muscular tightness (sometimes called downward pull) where it exists.”¹⁸ Self-evaluation and body-awareness is encouraged through the development of the kinesthetic sense (also called kinesthetic awareness): a kind of “sixth” sense that feels the movement of the body in space. When a sense of balance is achieved through correct posture and alignment of the bony structure, pianists find that they are able to play with more freedom and facility. The studies that address these techniques are reviewed in more detail in chapter 2, Review of Literature.

Interpretation Challenges

College pianists will also be challenged to “do more” with the piano music they are assigned. This important challenge remains elusive for many students given the nature of piano playing as an art form. Neuhaus summarized the issue in *The Art of Piano Playing* as follows: “In addition to the technical demands of playing the piano, young

¹⁶ Barbara Conable, *What Every Musician Needs to Know About the Body* (Chicago: GIA Publications, 2000), 5.

¹⁷ Conable, *About the Body*, 5.

¹⁸ Conable, *About the Body*, 5.

performers are faced with the additional challenge of generating a convincing, intimate performance which is also unwaveringly faithful to the written intentions of the composer.”¹⁹ This “unwavering faithfulness to the written score” must also be accompanied by an understanding of the performer’s personality, “for out of our personality we get the predispositions that determine our tastes.”²⁰ Interpreters of music consider musical elements including all written instructions and a clear knowledge of the form as “an important means of arriving at a *concept of the whole* in performance, which is, strangely, one of the most neglected and yet one of the most vital aspects of interpretation.”²¹

In the weeks and months of practice required for learning a piece of music, it is possible for musicians to work in such a way that they grow exceedingly distant from an interpretation which is inspired and rooted in the moment-to-moment “experience” of the music (to borrow from Stanislavski’s terminology). Pianist and music theorist Alexandra Pierce believes that “one common snare is the rehearsal approach of getting the notes under control and later figuring out an interpretation.”²² The process of “translating notational signs into sounds without contacting, digesting, and bringing forth their

¹⁹ Neuhaus, *Art of Piano Playing*.

²⁰ William S. Newman, *The Pianist’s Problems*, 3rd ed. (New York: Harper Row, 1974), 139-140.

²¹ Newman, *Pianist’s Problems*, 141.

²² Alexandra Pierce, *Deepening Musical Performance through Movement* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2007), xiv.

connotations” begets “an outer shell of accuracy” without a consciously generated interpretation built on an “intimate sensory experience” with the music.²³

Elite performers in music have discussed the process of using imagery to generate an artistic performance. Opera singer Joan Wall describes her process which contains a good deal of work after the piece is completely memorized forming

an image of the whole performance ... layering it with more and more potent emotional qualities ... until it gets so rich and strong that she can almost touch it. When the image becomes “solid” enough—so developed that she can almost touch it and can easily connect with it when she is singing—then she knows she is ready to perform.²⁴

The use of imagery is also described by pianists, Jorge Bolet, Yuri Egorov, and Micha Dichter who said: “I’m constantly practicing a work as if I was performing it I consciously recreate in the room, as close as I can, the mental impulses that will be going on, that have been going on before, and that will be going on during the concert.”²⁵

Challenges of musical interpretation can also require a deeper understanding of the emotional aspects of music and the need to speak to an audience using only a keyboard. This challenge of communicating through music alone is explained by pianist Gyorgy Sandor as follows:

The language of music differs from other languages ... We cannot use it to communicate facts or convey ideas. What music can do is generate and communicate moods—the emotional responses that accompany facts and ideas. In

²³ Pierce, *Performance through Movement*, xiv.

²⁴ Robert Caldwell, *The Performer Prepares* (Dallas: Pst...Inc., 1990), 2.

²⁵ Mach, *Great Pianists Speak*.

a rather mysterious way music can represent and evoke emotions that correspond to circumstances, events, and actions that have not even taken place.”²⁶

Non-verbal communication can be expressed through phrasing, dynamics, inflection, silence, and other interpretive choices. These principles of communicative expression are similarly present in the actor’s craft. A comprehensive discussion of the similarities found between actors and musicians can be found in this chapter, at subsection Connections Between Acting and Piano Performance.

Stage Presence—the Visual Rhetoric of Piano Playing

Classical pianists have the ability to influence audience perception of their preparedness, confidence, and poise by improving their stage presence. In preparing for a public recital, college aged pianists might feel that their work is done after adequately learning and memorizing their program, which for most is no easy task. However, the visual presentation of the performance will also have a lasting impact on the audience. In a discussion of stage presence for actors, Jane Goodall describes Stanislavski’s concept communion²⁷ with the audience through pranic rays of energy.²⁸ This concept which is

²⁶ Gyorgy Sandor, *On Piano Playing: Motion, Sound and Expression*, (New York: Shirmer, 1981), 198.

²⁷ Selected, key terms from Stanislavski’s System are underlined when they appear in this study unless appearing in quoted material. In certain cases there are key terms describing the same acting principle due to the confusing nature of translations from Russian to English, as well as the constantly evolving nature of the System. In most cases the author has chosen to use terminology that is consistent with the latest translations of Stanislavski’s written works, and these System terms are also referenced in Appendix A, Glossary of Key Terms in the Stanislavski System.

²⁸ Jane Goodall, *Stage Presence: The Actor as Mesmerist* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 27.

based on Eastern meditative practices describes the kind of presence that separates a mediocre performer from a strong performer: the ability to “project” and communicate an enthusiastic, confident, poised identity in performance. In her book *Stage Presence from Head to Toe: A Manual for Musicians* Karen Hagberg discusses the important opportunity for classical musicians to “raise expectations” of their performance with their entrance onto the stage:

For an actor, establishing a distinctive walk is an important element in the development of any character; actors learn that the way people walk says a great deal about them. When you walk onto a concert stage, the walk itself gives the audience a strong message about who you are, how you feel about being there, your attitude toward the audience, your level of enthusiasm for the performance, and even *whether or not you are a good performer*. It is in your best interest to give the audience as many positive messages about yourself as possible. The moment they see you they begin to form an opinion of how you will eventually play. If you can make them think that you are about to give them a good experience, chances are that they *will* have a good experience. The opposite is true—negative expectations are usually fulfilled as well.²⁹

This is not to condone the kind of histrionic theatrics that are often accompanied by overdone, awkward movements onstage which distract the audience from the music. The key to confident stage presence for classical soloists is, according to Hagberg, maintaining a composed, relaxed, alert posture, with arms naturally at your sides, taking time to face the audience and smiling in a way that communicates “a good attitude and positive feelings.”³⁰ An excellent example of “a good attitude and positive feelings” is found in pianist Andre Watts’s interview with Elyse Mach:

Of course every performer is nervous before a concert, and one way to occupy your mind is to think of failure ... On the other hand, you can take the attitude I prefer, which is to prepare the programs, go onstage, and proffer your music to

²⁹ Karen Hagberg, *Stage Presence from Head to Toe: A Manual for Musicians* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2003), 13-14.

³⁰ Hagberg, *Stage Presence*, 13-14.

the audience ... a concert is always an incredible exposition of one's daring and insides ... Sometimes when I come on stage I find myself saying "Hello" under my breath as I bow. It may seem silly and ridiculous, but that's how I feel.³¹

Distracting physical expressions and gestures should be avoided, including "mopping your brow, wringing or flexing your hands or fingers, licking your lips, adjusting your hair, tossing your head, flailing your arms, and bobbing your head."³² Visual recognition of audible mistakes can alert the audience to a wrong note before they may have noticed. The great Russian teacher Theodore Leschetizky admonished a student of his saying "you mustn't break down before an audience under any circumstances. They will always be nervous over you afterward."³³ This is considered "losing composure" or, in acting terminology, "breaking character." A performer's goal is to suspend belief, to capture the imagination of the audience, or to transport them into another realm. Stage presence that is sloppy, distracting, disorganized, or hurried breaks the illusion for the listener and severs the connection between audience and performer.

The use of appropriate gestures in keyboard performance has a lengthy history. Following the invention of the fortepiano in the eighteenth century, keyboardists embraced the use of gesture and arm weight for the purposes of sound production but also as a means for communicating the "meaning of the music." With the introduction of "emfindsamer stil" (or sensitive style), keyboard interpretation manuals such as C.P.E. Bach's treatise *The True Art of Playing Keyboard Instruments* included discussions of

³¹ Mach, *Great Pianists Speak*, 188.

³² Hagberg, *Stage Presence*, 19.

³³ Newcomb, *Leschetizky*, 32.

proper performance practice, expression through physical gestures, facial expressions, and distinct touch styles.³⁴ In the eighteenth century, C.P.E. Bach discussed a performer's ability to communicate musical ideas through facial expressions and physical gestures this way:

Those who maintain that all of this can be accomplished without gesture will retract their words when, owing to their own insensibility, they find themselves obliged to sit like a statue before their instrument. Ugly grimaces are, of course, inappropriate and harmful; but fitting expressions help the listener to understand our meaning.³⁵

C.P.E. Bach argued that a performer's interpretation can "speak" to the audience and further offered that, "A musician cannot move others unless he too is moved...for the revealing of his own humor will stimulate a like humor in the listener."³⁶ This important observation suggests a cautionary note as well. In order to "move others" pianists should become more aware of the messages they communicate to the audience through their visual appearance and physical gestures. For expert insight into non-verbal communication on the stage through physical gestures, pianists will find that there is much to be learned from the actor.

Connections Between Acting and Piano Performance

At first blush, it may seem out of place for piano performers to borrow from the art of acting, but there are many similarities between the two. Both crafts adhere to a

³⁴ C.P.E. Bach, *The True Art of Playing Keyboard Instruments*, trans. and ed. William J. Mitchell (New York: W.W. Norton & Co. Inc., 1949).

³⁵ C.P.E. Bach, *Playing Keyboard Instruments*, 152.

³⁶ C.P.E. Bach, *Playing Keyboard Instruments*, 152.

prewritten script, placing a great deal of emphasis on the wishes of the author/composer and in following his exact specifications. Pianists often consider the written manuscript the only link to the composer, unless the composer happens to be living. The same applies to actors who must perform classic plays written in another era. In this way, both are considered re-creative art forms, and both actors and pianists share a desire for the feelings expressed in their performances to “resonate” or “strike a chord” with the feelings of audience members. William Newman makes note of the re-creative nature of music in his book *The Pianist’s Problems*, saying: “Music is one of the time arts. The classification means that, unlike the space arts—painting, sculpture, and architecture—music can and must be brought back to life by a new projection in time on every occasion that it is to be appreciated.”³⁷ Stanislavski references a similar challenge in acting in *My Life in Art*: “The difference between acting and the other [non-performing] arts is that any other kind of artist can create when he is inspired. But the stage artist must control his inspiration and arouse it at the time indicated on the posters. Therein lies the major secret of our art.”³⁸ Here he expresses a tenet inherent within all “time” arts but specifically artistic endeavors which must be carried out on the stage. For these reasons, piano performance and acting are inextricably linked and the idea of cross-pollination is hardly something new.

For evidence of the connections between piano performance and acting one must look no further than the pianists and famed teachers of the Russian piano school. These

³⁷ Newman, *Pianist’s Problems*, 139.

³⁸ Konstantin Stanislavski, *My Life in Art*, trans. Jean Benedetti, (New York: Routledge, 2008), 346.

connections were acknowledged by piano pedagogues in the early part of the twentieth century, perhaps most notably by the famed piano teacher Theodore Leschetizky.³⁹ His student, Ethel Newcomb writes in her book *Leschetizky As I Knew Him* that he believed that “all arts were related.”⁴⁰ In an effort to better instruct his students, it interested him to note the similarities and differences between playing piano and other artistic outlets, such as painting. While Leschetizky encouraged his students to study all the arts, he ascertained that the “whole art of piano playing was most akin to the art of acting,” and he compared “the movements of an actor on the stage to tempos and rhythms, expressions of faces to interpretations. Tones and shading in music should be studied as an actor studied his words, with the same endeavor to suit the acoustics.”⁴¹ Leschetizky often stated that “music was a dramatic art. He saw direct connection between the expression of a piece and good acting. ‘Certain small pieces are all acting,’ he declared.”⁴²

These connections between acting and piano playing identified by early piano pedagogues continued well into the twentieth century, and it remained common to look to the theater and Stanislavski’s theater in particular for ways to better understand and

³⁹ Theodore Leschetizky (1830-1915) was a Polish born pianist and teacher. He was invited by Anton Rubenstein to teach at the St. Petersburg Conservatory, and later taught in Vienna. His most famous students include Ignacy Paderewski, Artur Schnabel and Isabella Vengerova, although Schnabel writes that in his career Leschetizky taught over 1,100 students.

⁴⁰ Newcomb, *Leschetizky*, 173.

⁴¹ Newcomb, *Leschetizky*, 173.

⁴² Newcomb, *Leschetizky*, 162-163.

communicate musical artistry. The MXAT was a source of inspiration for Russian pianists and pedagogues Josef and Rosina Lhévinne,⁴³ George Kochevitsky,⁴⁴ and Sviatoslav Richter,⁴⁵ and also for Polish-American pianist, Artur Rubenstein,⁴⁶ who were all admirers of Stanislavski's work. Rosina Lhévinne was so moved by an MXAT performance of Anton Chekhov's play, *The Cherry Orchard*, that she recounted vivid details of the performance to her biographer six decades later. She remarked that Stanislavski's theater was "a real revelation. Before him, the plays were very traditional and quite stiff."⁴⁷ Descriptions of Stanislavski's theater also exist in Artur Rubenstein's autobiography, *My Young Years*,⁴⁸ in which he describes going to the theater every night while touring in Moscow:

My unbounded admiration, however, went to the Moscow Art Theatre of Stanislavski and Nemirovitch-Danchenko. They had created it in honor of Chekhov, who wrote for the opening *The Seagull*, [sic] which became an emblem of the theater. I saw there several plays, among them *The Cherry Orchard*, an

⁴³ Josef Lhévinne (1874-1944) was a concert pianist, and teacher at the Juilliard School. He and his wife Rosina Lhévinne (1880-1976) were fellow students at the Moscow Conservatory. Mrs. Lhévinne led an active teaching and performing career after her husband's death, becoming one of the premiere teachers at the Juilliard School.

⁴⁴ George Kochevitsky was a Russian pianist and private piano teacher in New York, and is the author of *The Art of Piano Playing: A Scientific Approach* (Van Nuys, CA: Alfred Publishing, 1967).

⁴⁵ Sviatoslav Richter (1915-1997) was a Russian pianist who enjoyed international acclaim throughout his career and was a student of Heinrich Neuhaus.

⁴⁶ Artur Rubenstein (1887-1982) was a Polish born concert pianist with an international concert career spanning nearly eight decades.

⁴⁷ Robert K. Wallace, *A Century of Music-Making: The Lives of Josef & Rosina Lhevinne* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1976), 81.

⁴⁸ Artur Rubenstein, *My Young Years* (New York: Knopf, 1973), 419.

unforgettable evening. There were no stars; every actor had to play big or small roles as befitted his or her individual personality.⁴⁹

Rubenstein recalls later trips to Moscow after Stanislavski's death in his memoir *My Many Years*: "The so-called Artistic Theater of Stanislavski and Nemirovitch-Danchenko, my beloved experience from the old days in Moscow, remained the same, and even better. Stanislavski had died, but...added operas to the repertoire of his theater, where the singers also had to be accomplished actors. We saw *Eugene Onegin* by Tchaikovsky, sung and *acted* magnificently."⁵⁰ Russian-born piano teacher and author George Kochevitsky described the realistic nature of Stanislavski's theater in Russia. He reflects upon how a meaningful appreciation for theater and other art forms, poetry in particular, influenced his development as a musician.⁵¹ Grigorii Ginzburg quotes Stanislavski in his essay "Notes on Mastery of the Piano" while discussing the way tempo choices influence correct emotional responses to the music. He goes on to say that "the performer should never for a moment forget that his art is like that of the actor, orator, or narrator, and therefore his musical 'speech' should proceed at a pace that makes the composer's ideas intelligible and accessible to listeners, conveying them with maximum clarity and expressiveness."⁵²

⁴⁹ Rubenstein, *My Young Years*, 356.

⁵⁰ Artur Rubenstein, *My Many Years* (New York: Knopf, 1980), 331.

⁵¹ George Kochevitsky and Albert Squillace, *Memoirs of a Piano Pedagogue* (New York: Primavera Books, 2010), 360-361.

⁵² Grigorii Ginzburg, "Notes on Mastery of the Piano," *The Russian Piano School: Russian Pianists & Moscow Conservatoire Professors on the Art of the Piano*, trans. and ed. Christopher Barnes (London: Kahn and Averill, 2007), 84-85.

The value of Stanislavski's writings was acknowledged by Heinrich Neuhaus when working with students whose piano playing seemed artificial—lacking the simplicity and truth of the music:

I most urgently advised such pupils, apart from becoming familiar with folklore, to come closer to Mozart, Schubert, Tchaikovsky, Tolstoy, Chekhov, Gorky, Stanislavsky. I strained (an aristocrat would say: I stooped) to show them how a simple phrase of Tchaikovsky or Chopin could be played in an “interesting,” “amusing” and “original” manner and how—giving free rein to conscience, yes, precisely to conscience—it can be played truthfully, that is with feeling, simply, sincerely, unobtrusively and well.⁵³

Neuhaus recognized that actors and pianists have similar artistic concerns. These include such things as sound projection, character projection, inflection and phrasing, tempo, rhythm and meter, memorization, and developing effective performance strategies. Of course, there are obvious differences as well. A clear distinction between the two is the lack of verbal dialogue within the repertoire of classical pianists. Pianist Alfred Brendel writes, “Music cannot ‘speak for itself’ ... [but] can only be unraveled with the help of one’s own engaged emotions, ... one’s own refined ears.”⁵⁴ Pianists are required to interpret and communicate non-verbally a musical concept through sound, touch, phrasing, inflection, movement, and timing. Of course, verbal communication can reflect unspoken, even hidden subtext using similar techniques to the pianist. The challenge for both—which is the point Neuhaus makes—is to uncover the meaning behind the words, or behind the notes. In this way, both artistic mediums share the desire to communicate the underlying idea found within the text through the use of subtle interpretive

⁵³ Neuhaus, *Art of Piano Playing*, 200-201.

⁵⁴ Alfred Brendel, *Musical Thoughts and After-Thoughts* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 25.

techniques. And in this endeavor, the work of Konstantin Stanislavski was unprecedented for actors.

The popularity and usefulness of Stanislavski's System to the performing arts are demonstrated in the reports referenced here of historically famous pianists and pedagogues who drew inspiration and insight from Stanislavski's work. In addition, recent applications of Stanislavski's System are found in performance disciplines outside of piano performance and pedagogy, including dance performance, clarinet performance, choral conducting, trumpet performance, and music theory. These applications are surveyed in chapter 2, Review of Literature. Connections between the System and fields outside of music are also surveyed in chapter 2 where it is demonstrated that psychologists, dancers, ministers, musicians, oral interpreters, athletes, and others have all benefitted from Stanislavski's insights and teachings. It is time to bring these connections and methods to bear directly on piano performance in the form of specific applications of the System which enhance the performance experience and result for the college-level pianist.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to provide a resource for college-level pianists and teachers who want to understand and apply the Stanislavski System for actors to the art of playing piano. This study presents specific adaptations of this System that are deemed useful and appropriate to address the four common piano performance challenges outlined in this chapter (performance anxiety, physical tension in performance, interpretation challenges, and stage presence—the visual rhetoric of piano playing) and to

improve the artistic results which performers may achieve. These adaptations include Activities derived from the System with specific suggestions for use by pianists. While this study is designed for undergraduate piano performers, it is possible that some of the adaptations, activities, and ideas have applications for performers at earlier levels of development and also for more experienced performers.

Need for the Study

Preparing, understanding, and performing works for the piano presents many of the same challenges faced by actors who begin with lines and directions on a page from which they hope to create rich, authentic, and memorable characters for an audience. Over a lifetime of teaching and acting, Konstantin Stanislavski developed a process that requires specific intellectual, psychological, and physical methods to help actors achieve the best possible results on stage. Stanislavski, as well as many others in the arts and music, have recognized parallels between the art of acting and the art of music. Yet a review of scholarly research reveals few attempts to comprehensively adapt these specific methods for useful application by musicians, and no specific attempt has been made to demonstrate and develop the key ideas for use by pianists and piano pedagogues. Significant and broad pedagogical research explores the intellectual, psychological and physical aspects of piano performance and demonstrates the importance of understanding and controlling these elements for piano performance. In Stanislavski's System there is a lifetime of highly-regarded artistic research that may be adapted into methods for the benefit of pianists and pedagogues. There is a need for adapting the most useful aspects

of the Stanislavski System and for developing his ideas in ways that address pedagogical challenges which may enhance or go beyond currently available research.

Limitations of the Study

The primary focus of this document is the development of specific adaptations of the Stanislavski acting System which benefit pianists and piano teachers at the college level. As a result, the information in this study about Konstantin Stanislavski and his acting System is selective and limited in order to present a working understanding of the man, the teacher, the writer, and his acting System. In addition, there is a great deal of information and writing about the Stanislavski System, including ideas and acting systems developed by others who followed Stanislavski. Some of the ideas that follow from these other actors and writers is presented selectively, but no attempt is made here to review or present these ideas in any comprehensive way. The material about acting to be discussed in this study is intended only to provide context for the adaptations of the Stanislavski System which are most useful to pianists and pedagogues.

Likewise, it must be acknowledged that there is a broad and helpful range of research and methods that benefit pianists seeking to improve and perfect their performance capabilities. This study is not intended to present a comprehensive review or analysis of this pedagogical research or these methods, nor is it intended to specifically compare these methods with aspects of the Stanislavski System. Instead, this study discusses those pedagogical ideas selectively and in context, and only to the extent that they touch directly on the parallel ideas apparent in the Stanislavski System as adapted for this study.

And finally, it must be noted that presenting a full program, solo performance on stage is a significant event for college piano majors and one that requires specialized preparation beyond the scope of this study. The acting System of Konstantin Stanislavski cannot and is not used here to address all aspects of learning to play the piano at a high level. Certain aspects of technique including note reading and comprehension, finger dexterity, and coordination, require the teaching of a skilled piano instructor and the value of such guidance cannot be overstated. Accordingly, this study does not attempt to describe all of the physically and mentally exacting tasks involved in learning complex pieces of music.

Organization of the Study

This study is presented in five chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the study with an overview as well as explanations of the purpose of the study, the need for study, the procedures followed, the limitations of the study, and the organization of the study. Chapter 2 provides a review of literature directly related to the present study, as well as sources surrounding the topic derived from books, theses and dissertations, and journal articles. Given the nature of this study, the review of literature in chapter 2 is organized by subject, with the writings of Konstantin Stanislavski reviewed first, followed by writings about the author and his System, and finishing with writings in pedagogical and related fields which connect ideas relevant to this study. Chapter 3 presents biographical, historical, and summary information about Stanislavski and his System for actors. Chapter 4 provides specific adaptations of Stanislavski's System for use by pianists and pedagogues which address the four performance challenges addressed in chapter 1,

Introduction. Chapter 5 concludes the study with a summary, some final thoughts for pianists and musicians, and suggestions for further study. A bibliography and appendices are also provided following chapter 5. The Appendices include (a) a Glossary of Key Terms in the Stanislavski System; (b) a list of the Source Material for Chapter 4 Activities; and (c) a Letter from the Institutional Review Board with Review Outcome.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter provides context for piano pedagogues and performers seeking to apply the acting System of Konstantin Stanislavski to the art of piano performance. The fact that piano performance and acting share an artistic lineage presents certain challenges for this review of literature. For example, the popularity of the Stanislavski System among actors has resulted in many writings including books, texts, teaching materials, articles, and other writings or presentations relevant to his System. This review is not intended to provide a complete list of all writings that mention or discuss Stanislavski or his System but focuses first on Stanislavski's writings and second on writings about Stanislavski or his System which are most relevant to pedagogues and performers.

Piano pedagogy has an extensive history, and there is considerable literature that demonstrates its evolution from late sixteenth-century finger technique to the musical and technical approach of the nineteenth century and finally to more varied teaching philosophies and approaches in the twentieth century and beyond.¹ It is not the purpose of

¹ Max W. Camp, *Developing Piano Performance: A Teaching Philosophy* (Chapel Hill: Hinshaw Music, Inc., 1981). Useful histories are also found in Marianne Uszler, Stewart Gordon, and Scott McBride Smith, *The Well-Tempered Keyboard Teacher* (New York: Schirmer Books, 2000); Roger Crager Boardman, "A History of Theories of Teaching Piano Technic" (PhD diss., New York University, 1954); and James Parakilas, *Piano Roles: Three Hundred Years of Life with the Piano* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999).

this review to survey all such pedagogical works, but instead to highlight those which are helpful in identifying and extending parallel or derivative ideas found in the art of acting and the art of playing the piano.

A study of this nature must also consider important works that show the extension of research and applications from other fields that have studied or benefitted music performance, especially those which derive from or overlap to some degree with the underlying elements of Stanislavski's System. The diverse and developing nature of such pedagogical research is aptly described by Gilles Comeau in his 2009 research guide for piano pedagogy as follows: "Sections of our book deal with research in cognitive sciences, psychology, neuroscience, education and health sciences, as well as engineering and technology. Their inclusion demonstrates the breadth of the field today and should encourage new ideas for expanding research."² A limited review of such works is provided, with a focus on ideas that are directly relevant to key concepts in the Stanislavski System.

Finally, while no studies have sought to develop a comprehensive method that applies the System to piano performance, there is literature that considers the System in the context of other types of music performance. These writings are directly relevant to this study and are reviewed in this chapter. Outside of music performance, the popularity of the Stanislavski System has resulted in writings that apply techniques in the System to a wide array of academic disciplines including education, dance, speech, psychology, and theological studies. While not directly applicable, these works demonstrate and reinforce

² Gilles Comeau, *Piano Pedagogy, A Research and Information Guide* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 1.

many of the benefits of the System that are parallel to benefits available for musicians, and these writings are be selectively reviewed here as well.

With these challenges and limitations in mind, this review of literature surveys relevant writings by subject in the following order: (i) the writings of Stanislavski; (ii) essential books and other materials written about Stanislavski or his acting System, including materials written by others which explore or further develop this acting System; (iii) selected writings on music performance skills and interpretation which parallel artistic ideas discussed by Stanislavski; (iv) writings that apply the Stanislavski System to music performance; and (v) writings that apply the Stanislavski System in fields outside of music.

Key Writings by Stanislavski

The author's key writings on acting that are reviewed here include *My Life in Art* (Stanislavski's autobiography), *An Actor's Work* (first published in the United States in two parts, twelve years apart, as *An Actor Prepares*, and *Building a Character*), and *An Actor's Work on a Role*. In addition, the author's key work on opera, *Stanislavski on Opera*, is discussed here given the direct connections between Stanislavski's ideas about acting and his early work in opera. These books were either originally published in English or have been translated into English from various Russian language publications or editions one or more times. While chapter three of this document discusses some of the historical underpinnings of these differences, it should be noted here that the differences in the available English translations must first be considered and assessed. Following that, a survey of the best available translations is presented in an effort to provide a more

accurate understanding of the relationship between Stanislavski's ideas and the writings of other actors and teachers who have attempted to use, alter, or adapt his ideas.

Other writings by Stanislavski including articles, speeches, notes, journals, and letters are not as important to a core understanding of his acting System which would be considered necessary for application by pianists and pedagogues, and those materials are not included in this review.³ Students and scholars interested in learning more will find a strong library of his writings and other resources at The Stanislavski Centre, maintained by the Rose Bruford College of Theatre & Performance in London.⁴ The Russian-language editions of Stanislavski's writings, together with a collection of other materials and artifacts, may also be found in the Stanislavski Archives at the MXAT Museum in Moscow.

Identifying Publication Issues and Challenges

The history of Stanislavski's publications in both English and Russian requires some explanation, before a discussion of the English translations relied on for this study, because there are "significant differences between the Russian-language editions of Stanislavski's works and the available English translations."⁵

³ For example, another published "book" by Stanislavski, *Stanislavski's Legacy*, ed. and trans. Elizabeth Hapgood (New York: Routledge, 1968), has been described as a "collection of unrelated fragments, taken out of context" and does "not help the student to understand the coherence of the 'system.'" Jean Benedetti, *Stanislavski: An Introduction* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2016), 74.

⁴ See their online resources at <http://theatrefutures.org.uk/stanislavski-centre>.

⁵ Benedetti, *Stanislavski: An Introduction*, Appendix 1, 75.

Stanislavski's autobiography, *My Life in Art*, was first published in the United States. It was translated from Stanislavski's Russian-language manuscript into English by a young translator, J.J. Robbins, and published in the United States in 1924.⁶ Stanislavski considered the edition to be a failure and immediately began revisions on it for publication in the Soviet Union in 1926.⁷ Had he been able to read the English translation, he would have found it lacking a resemblance to his conversational writing style and that it was a misrepresentation of his intentions.⁸ The revised edition published only in Russian more clearly reflects Stanislavski's ideas, however, until recently the only version available in English was the 1924 J.J. Robbins translation. In 2008 an English translation of *My Life in Art* from the author's preferred (and later) Russian-language edition was completed by Stanislavski scholar Jean Benedetti.⁹

Stanislavski's remaining books on acting were first translated by Elizabeth Hapgood, a Russian speaker whom he met on tour in the United States. She and her husband, Norman Hapgood, worked with Stanislavski on the translation and edition of what the author called *The Actor's Work on Himself*.¹⁰ Stanislavski gave Mrs. Hapgood

⁶ Konstantin Stanislavski, *My Life in Art*, trans. J.J. Robbins (Boston: Little, Brown, 1924). This book was published simultaneously in the UK (London: Geoffrey Bles).

⁷ Konstantin Stanislavski, *Moya zhizn' v iskusstve*, [My Life in Art] (Moscow, 1926).

⁸ Jean Benedetti, "A History of Stanislavski in Translation," *New Theatre Quarterly* 6, no. 23 (1990): 266-78.

⁹ Stanislavski, *My Life in Art*, trans. Jean Benedetti.

¹⁰ Benedetti, "History in Translation," 272.

power of attorney to control the publication of his written works in the United States. When Stanislavski's manuscripts were finally delivered to Mrs. Hapgood in 1936, she made considerable cuts and edits, even though she was only authorized to make cuts (and not edits).¹¹ *An Actor's Work on Himself* was released as *An Actor Prepares*¹² in November of 1936.¹³ Although Mrs. Hapgood traveled to Moscow to meet with Stanislavski in 1937 in hopes of returning with a manuscript for the second book, she returned with only a promise that it would be forthcoming as soon as it was ready.¹⁴ Stanislavski died in 1938 and, due to complications brought on by the invasion of the Soviet Union by Germany, Mrs. Hapgood was not sent the drafts of the *An Actor's Work on Himself II: Physical Characterization* until 1947.¹⁵ After arranging the material and translating, his book was published under the name *Building a Character* in 1949.¹⁶ In commenting on this divide, Jean Benedetti identifies a problem in these publications as follows: "There was thus a fourteen-year [sic] gap between *An Actor Prepares* and *Building a Character*, and it was already too late to establish in the popular and

¹¹ Benedetti, "History in Translation," 273.

¹² Konstantin Stanislavsky, *An Actor Prepares*, trans. Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood (New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1936). This book was published simultaneously in the U.K. (London: Geoffrey Bles).

¹³ Benedetti, "History in Translation," 273.

¹⁴ Benedetti, "History in Translation," 273.

¹⁵ Benedetti, "History in Translation," 273.

¹⁶ Konstantin Stanislavsky, *Building a Character*, trans. Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood (New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1949).

professional mind the notion of the unitary psycho-physiological technique.”¹⁷ The importance to Stanislavski of the connection between the ideas in these two books, and the potential for misunderstanding his ideas, is something the author worried about.

Benedetti comments on Stanislavski’s concerns raised in a letter from Stanislavski to his secretary, “Ripsi,” as follows:

Against his better judgement and that of Norman Hapgood, [Stanislavski] decided to bring out *An Actor's Work on Himself* in two parts. The reason for this decision was purely practical: the type-face of the Soviet publishing house, Academia, was very large, and if the book appeared in a single volume it would run to an unmanageable 1200 pages.

Stanislavski blew hot and cold over the decision. On 23 April he wrote to Ripsi expressing his doubts. He was afraid that the separate publication of the first part of the book as *An Actor's Work on Himself I: Experience (An Actor Prepares)*, concentrating on the psychological aspects of training, would give the appearance of an ultra-naturalistic bias if it were not properly linked to the physical aspects of acting, physical characterization ('incarnation'), which were to be dealt with in Part Two, and to work on the text, which was to be the subject of a later book.

He therefore felt it important that the first volume should be prefaced by an outline of the System as a whole—an overview which would put all the different elements in their proper context and so avoid undue emphasis on the purely psychological. Unfortunately such a preface was never written, and Stanislavski's fears were all too sadly confirmed by the subsequent history of the teaching of the System.¹⁸

The issues arising from the manner and timing of the publication of *An Actor's Work* originally in two English-language publications (*An Actor Prepares* and *Building a Character*) must be considered in the present day by both actors and pedagogues in choosing to study or adapt Stanislavski’s ideas.

A Russian-language publication of Stanislavski’s *An Actor's Work on a Role* emerged in 1957. The material for the book included “four articles on his rehearsal

¹⁷ Benedetti, “History in Translation,” 274.

¹⁸ Benedetti, “History in Translation,” 272.

method, beginning in 1916.”¹⁹ From this Russian-language edition, the final book in the English language “trilogy” was translated by Elizabeth Hapgood and published in the United States under the name *Creating a Role*.²⁰ Similar to the previous Hapgood translations, considerable cuts and liberal editorial decisions abound. In 1991, a new Russian-language edition was revised and expanded to include “all of Stanislavski’s statements on work on a role, drawing on unfurnished manuscripts in fictional form and his Notebooks.”²¹ In 2009 Jean Benedetti published a translation of *An Actor’s Work on a Role*²² relying on the newer 1991 Russian-language publication and this version provides a more comprehensive report of the material in English.

Hapgood’s translation of *Stanislavski on Opera* by Stanislavski and Pavel Ivanovich Rumiantzev remains the definitive text in the English language which describes the keen interest Stanislavski demonstrated in the musical arts.²³ Rumiantzev was a baritone opera singer in the Bolshoi Opera Theater under Stanislavski’s direction

¹⁹ Benedetti, *Stanislavski: An Introduction*, 108.

²⁰ Konstantin Stanislavski, *Creating a Role*, trans. and ed. Elizabeth Hapgood, (New York: Theater Arts Books, 1961).

²¹ Benedetti, *Stanislavski: An Introduction*, 108.

²² Konstantin Stanislavski, *An Actor’s Work on a Role*, trans. Jean Benedetti (New York: Routledge, 2009). This book was published simultaneously in the U.K. (Abingdon: Routledge).

²³ Konstantin Stanislavski and Pavel Ivanovich Rumiantsev, *Stanislavski on Opera*, trans. and ed. Elizabeth Hapgood (New York: Routledge, 1975).

beginning in 1920 and continued to work with Stanislavski into the 1930's.²⁴ *Stanislavski on Opera* was published in Russian in 1969 and Hapgood's English translation was released in the United States in 1975 and republished in 1998.²⁵

Russian-language editions of Stanislavski's writings have been published at various times beginning with the 1926 version of *My Life in Art* preferred by Stanislavski. This version has been republished multiple times, often with additional or varying illustrations added.²⁶ The Russian publication of *An Actor's Work* was also split into two books, *An Actor's Work on Himself in the Creative Process of Experiencing*,²⁷ and *An Actor's Work on Himself in the Creative Process of Performing*.²⁸ These Russian-language editions are now more commonly referred to as *An Actor's Work on Himself: Parts I and II*. Each of these works in Russian is most accessible to scholars through "collected works" editions which Russian scholars continue to supplement with

²⁴ Sharon Carnicke and David Rosen, "A Singer Prepares: Stanislavsky and Opera," in *The Routledge Companion to Stanislavsky*, ed. R. Andrew White (New York: Routledge, 2014), 120-138.

²⁵ Carnicke and Rosen, "A Singer Prepares," 122.

²⁶ See, for example: Konstantin Stanislavski, *Moya zhizn' v iskusstve* [My Life in Art], with 65 illustrations (Moscow: Academia, 1933); Konstantin Stanislavski, *Moya zhizn' v iskusstve* [My Life in Art], 516 pages with illustrations (Moscow, 1954); and Konstantin Stanislavski, *Moya zhizn' v iskusstve* [My Life in Art], 622 pages with 32 illustrations (Moscow, 1988).

²⁷ Konstantin Stanislavski, *Rabota aktyora nad soboy v tvorcheskoy protsesse perezivaniya* [An Actor's Work on Himself in the Creative Process of Experiencing] (Moscow, 1954).

²⁸ Konstantin Stanislavski, *Rabota aktyora nad soboy v tvorcheskoy protsesse voploshcheniya* [An Actor's Work on Himself in the Creative Process of Performing] (Moscow, 1955).

volumes of Stanislavski's writings other than his books. An eight-volume set of the collected written works of Stanislavski compiled between 1954 and 1961 includes the revised version of *My Life in Art, An Actor's Work on Himself: Parts I and II, An Actor's Work on a Role*, as well as journals and excerpts of Stanislavski's writings.²⁹ This collected works edition was edited by Mikhail Nikolayevich Kedrov (1893-1972) who managed the MXAT between 1946 and 1955 and was a disciple of Stanislavski. Another collected works edition, with nine volumes, was compiled between 1988 and 1999 by Oleg Yefremov who headed the MXAT for thirty years beginning in 1970.³⁰

Organization of the works in large sets simulates the unity within the System and more closely reflects Stanislavski's intentions. Beginning in 2006, in "an attempt to follow Stanislavski's original intention: to provide an accessible account of the 'System' for actors in training," Jean Benedetti translated the primary Stanislavski book (*An Actor's Work*) using Russian-language editions. Scholarly book reviewers generally approve of Benedetti's translations, with one noting that the books "will allow readers who cannot access Stanislavski in Russian to discover him at long last—not rediscover him, but actually come face to face with a practitioner whose reputation is marked by numerous misunderstandings."³¹ Many years before beginning his own translations of Stanislavski's key writings, Benedetti lamented the quality of available translations,

²⁹ Konstantin Sergeevich Stanislavski, *Sobraniye sochineniy v vos'mi tomakh* [Collected Works of K.S. Stanislavski], ed. M.N. Kedrov, 8 vols. (Moscow, 1954-1961).

³⁰ Konstantin Stanislavski, *Sobraniye sochineniy v 9 tomakh* [Collected Works of K.S. Stanislavski in 9 vol.], ed. Oleg Yefremov (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1988 – 1999).

³¹ Maria Shetsova, "My Life in Art, and: An Actor's Work," *The Drama Review*, MIT Press, Vol. 54, No. 1 (Spring 2010), 172-174.

saying: “It should, therefore, be essential that such texts are scholarly and accurate, so that pupils and teachers may not be led down false paths, and the claims of the oral tradition can be properly verified. Unfortunately, the currently available translations are often at best dubious and at worst harmfully misleading.”³² Benedetti also published translations of *My Life in Art* in 2008³³ and, as noted earlier, *An Actor’s Work on a Role* in 2009.³⁴

The author agrees that problems with the early translations of Stanislavski’s writings may lead to unnecessary misunderstandings of Stanislavski’s System. In addition, the collected works editions edited and published by Russian experts have been continuously improved offering the more accurate material available to translators. Accordingly, for this study, the author has chosen to rely primarily on the more recent Benedetti translations of the key works and believes that they more closely adhere to Stanislavski’s intentions than the Robbins or Hapgood translations of the same works.

My Life in Art

Konstantin Stanislavski’s autobiography, *My Life in Art*, was first published in April of 1924³⁵ in English and was followed by Stanislavski’s revised Russian-language edition in 1926. It is from this Russian version of the text that Jean Benedetti translated

³² Benedetti, “History in Translation,” 266-267.

³³ Konstantin Stanislavski, *My Life in Art*, trans. Jean Benedetti.

³⁴ Stanislavski, *Work on a Role*, trans. Jean Benedetti.

³⁵ Stanislavski, *My Life in Art*, trans. J.J. Robbins.

My Life in Art,³⁶ the version which is reviewed here. This autobiography provides important and primary source information on the author's first discoveries made as a young actor and director. Its relevance to this study is confirmed by Stanislavski who explains that his early introduction to opera was the basis of his later ideas on theater arts.³⁷ Opera inspired Stanislavski to apply the concepts of "the study of the voice and how to place it, nobility of sound, diction, rhythmical, musical inflexions, the physical essence of vowels, consonants, words, and sentences, soliloquies. All of them applied to the demands of the drama."³⁸ These concepts are incorporated, to the extent possible, in the applications found in chapter 4 of this study.³⁹ In the field of acting, *My Life in Art* is also considered important source material for actors and directors who seek answers to questions concerning the craft of theater performance.

An Actor's Work

In *An Actor's Work*, Stanislavski set out to describe his techniques in a form that is both conversational and true to the rehearsal process that he employed. To accomplish this, the author presents his book as "a diary kept by a young student in which he describes the acting classes given by Tortsov (Stanislavski) and his own struggle,

³⁶ Stanislavski, *My Life in Art*, trans. Benedetti.

³⁷ Stanislavski, *My Life in Art*, trans. Benedetti, 20.

³⁸ Stanislavski, *My Life in Art*, trans. Benedetti, 20.

³⁹ See Appendix B, Source Material for Chapter 4 Activities.

alongside his classmates, to master a new method.”⁴⁰ The book is presented in two parts which represent “Year One” and Year Two” of a young actor’s study.⁴¹ In the earlier translations by Elizabeth Hapgood these two years of study were separated into two books respectively as *An Actor Prepares*⁴² and *Building a Character*.⁴³ As noted earlier, the extensive gap in publication, together with unauthorized edits, led to some misunderstandings. Jean Benedetti, whose translation and edition is relied on here, combines the manuscripts in one volume in keeping with Stanislavski’s original intentions and in hopes of unifying a method that was made separate for some time.⁴⁴ For purposes of this review, some comment on the content of each of the Year One and Year Two sections of *An Actor’s Work* is helpful.

An Actor’s Work: Year One

Year One of Stanislavski’s acting System deals with his initial experiments as a director in the Moscow Art Theater. The concepts presented include emotion memory, given circumstances, magic if, imagination, concentration, and circles of attention. In this stage of Stanislavski’s System, student actors took great pains to understand the role through lengthy, “round-table” discussions of emotion memory, given circumstances and defining the supertask, and through action of the work.

⁴⁰ Stanislavski, *Actor’s Work*, xv.

⁴¹ Stanislavski, *Actor’s Work*.

⁴² Stanislavski, *An Actor Prepares*.

⁴³ Stanislavski, *Building a Character*.

⁴⁴ Jean Benedetti, *Stanislavski and the Actor* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

The student diary form of Year One presents a young acting student Kostya (a nickname of Stanislavski's) as he records rehearsals with a brilliant director Tortsov (Stanislavski). What ensues is a conversational series of vignettes which illustrate the rehearsal process in Stanislavski's legendary theater. The first year was published in the United States as *An Actor Prepares* in 1936, and in the Soviet Union in 1938 as *Year One* in a two-part series.

An Actor's Work: Year Two

This important "year" in the Stanislavski System was introduced to English and Russian-speaking actors and directors long after the effects of the first book (containing the Year One ideas) had already shaped the minds of many acting professionals.⁴⁵ Year Two provides important information about the physical and voice training that was central to Stanislavski's System. Without this second year of training, actors could imagine that the Stanislavski System was primarily concerned with the emotional and psychological nature of learning a role, whereas the total System is much more holistic, including mental, emotional, and physical modes of analysis. The method of physical actions, Stanislavski's last recorded technique, is included in Year Two and marks what some acting scholars believe is his crowning discovery in actor training. The method of physical actions is contained in both Hapgood's and Benedetti's translations. The circumstances surrounding the publication of Hapgood's translation of Year Two into English (not released until after Stanislavski's death) did not allow for the volumes to be published in close proximity to one another, resulting in misconceptions perpetuated by

⁴⁵ See Stanislavsky, *An Actor Prepares*, published in 1936; and Stanislavsky, *Building a Character*, published in 1949.

American theater practitioners. The concepts in Year One and Year Two were inextricably linked in Stanislavski's System, representing the connection between the mind, the body, and the emotions. The concepts in Year Two are a critical part of this study, particularly as they speak to the physical aspects of piano playing and performances.

An Actor's Work on a Role

Although presented as a separate book, *An Actor's Work on a Role*⁴⁶ may be viewed as Year Three of Stanislavski's training System. The book continues the student diary form used in *An Actor's Work* and was first published in the Soviet Union in 1957.⁴⁷ The book consists of fragments from Stanislavski's notes on several productions including an "unfinished article on [Alexander Griboyedov's] *Woe from Wit* drafted between 1916 and 1920, followed by the classes on [William Shakespeare's] *Othello* and [Nikolai Gogol's] *The Government Inspector*."⁴⁸ The book's relevance to this study is found in its discussions of the mechanisms of an actor's craft—after understanding both the psychological and physical aspects of acting—which allow an actor to develop a particular role in some ways as a pianist must learn how to approach a particular work.

In *An Actor's Work on a Role*, Stanislavski continues to experiment with the source of inspiration for his actors. In his earlier experimentations in the theater he

⁴⁶ Stanislavski, *Work on a Role*.

⁴⁷ Konstantin Stanislavski, *Rabota aktyora nad rolyu*, [An Actor's Work on a Role] (Moscow: 1957).

⁴⁸ Stanislavski, *Actor's Work*, vii.

emphasized reliving past experience to connect emotionally with the character. In this third book, he considers the life of the human body and the life of the human spirit in a role.⁴⁹ In this work, he discovers how emotions and physical action are inextricably linked, and that a role “exists on two levels: inner and outer. They are intertwined.”⁵⁰ He begins to outline the steps of his rehearsal process, now referred to as the method of physical action, and instructs his actors to map out the score of their physical actions onstage. This concept is explored in relation to pianists mapping the “score” of their physical actions as part of their performance preparation.

Stanislavski on Opera

Stanislavski on Opera by Konstantin Stanislavski and Pavel Ivanovich Rumiantsev was first published in 1975 with the translation provided by Elizabeth Hapgood.⁵¹ It may seem unusual in the sense that it was not written directly by Stanislavski but instead was compiled from the detailed notes taken by Pavel Ivanovich Rumiantsev, but it was normal for Stanislavski to collaborate on his writing in this way. “Left to himself, Stanislavski would never have published anything. The books which appeared in his lifetime (*My Life in Art* and *An Actor Prepares*) were only finished with the help of others. He was always dependent on someone else — a colleague, a pupil, even, if need be, someone who happened to be around and free at the time....”⁵²

⁴⁹ Stanislavski, *Work on a Role*, 57.

⁵⁰ Stanislavski, *Work on a Role*, 57.

⁵¹ Stanislavski and Rumiantsev, *Stanislavski on Opera*.

⁵² Benedetti, “History in Translation,” 267.

Stanislavski on Opera represents a definitive text that illuminates the connection between the Stanislavski System and music performance. Hapgood notes in the introduction that Stanislavski himself had received operatic vocal training as a young man and had “always felt instinctively that music could greatly enhance the effectiveness of an actor since the work of a really good composer provides such a powerful base from which dramatic expression can derive not only stimulus but also a sense of direction.”⁵³

Writings about Stanislavski and His System

Biographies

The first biography written on Stanislavski’s life, *Stanislavski, A Life*, written in 1951 by David Magarshack⁵⁴ is no longer considered to be of the highest scholarship, but rather a paraphrase of Stanislavski’s *My Life in Art*. Reviewers of Jean Benedetti’s 1988 book, *Stanislavski: A Biography*,⁵⁵ consider it to be a valuable replacement for Magarshack’s text.⁵⁶

There are several books which summarize Stanislavski’s life and System, including *Stanislavski: An Introduction* by Jean Benedetti,⁵⁷ *Konstantin Stanislavski* by

⁵³ Stanislavski and Rumiantsev, *Stanislavski on Opera*, ix.

⁵⁴ David Magarshack, *Stanislavski, A Life* (New York: Chanticleer Press, 1951).

⁵⁵ Jean Benedetti, *Stanislavski: A Biography* (New York: Routledge, 1988). This book was published simultaneously in the UK (London: Muthen).

⁵⁶ Lawrence Senelick, review of *Stanislavski: A Biography*, by Jean Benedetti, *Theatre Research International*, vol. 14(3) (Autumn, 1989): 296-298, accessed September 14, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0307883300009032>.

⁵⁷ Benedetti, *Stanislavski: An Introduction*.

Bella Merlin,⁵⁸ and *The Stanislavsky Technique: Russia. A Workbook for Actors* by Mel Gordon.⁵⁹ These works help to synthesize and organize the vast writings of Stanislavski, providing their readers with a comprehensive look at Stanislavski's life and System. Each of these resources, to some degree, discuss the rehearsal techniques used by Stanislavski in the Moscow Art Theater and provide applications of those rehearsal techniques to modern acting performance. These discussions inform and assist the applications to piano performance developed in this study.

Most beneficial to this study is the work of these authors in organizing Stanislavski's System into distinct types of analysis. The gradual evolution of his System through experimentation led Stanislavski to change his approach to rehearsals and analysis of a role over time. Acting scholars Benedetti, Merlin, and Gordon agree that the Stanislavski System can be divided into subsections or periods: The earliest period deals with script analysis or round-table analysis; the second period is concerned with inner action and emotion memory; and a final period deals with physical action primarily through improvisation.

The System in Acting Textbooks, Manuals, and Guides

The Stanislavski System provides much of the theoretical underpinning for beginning acting textbooks, including *The Actor in You: Sixteen Simple Steps to*

⁵⁸ Bella Merlin, *Konstantin Stanislavsky* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

⁵⁹ Mel Gordon, *The Stanislavsky Technique* (New York: Applause Theatre Book Publishers, 1987).

Understanding the Art of Acting by Robert Benedetti,⁶⁰ *Telling Stories: A Grand Unifying Theory of Acting Techniques*, by Mark Rafael,⁶¹ and *Beginning Acting: the Illusion of Natural Behavior* by Richard Felnagle.⁶² The writings of Stanislavski are referenced more consistently in these texts than any other acting teacher. Students wishing to understand the basics of acting will likely undergo training that is based on the Stanislavski System. The principles discussed in these texts generally include action, dual consciousness, given circumstances, economy, emotion in performance, emotion memory, inner action, outer action, public solitude, spontaneity, super-objective and through-line of action. These principles, which are consistent in acting pedagogy and originate in the writings of Stanislavski, are incorporated in various ways in the applications for performing pianists in this study.

The Stanislavski System has many facets and a long list of techniques which have been adopted by acting teachers and scholars and which are featured in books and manuals about acting. *Acting under the Circumstances* by Richard Brestoff is a manual for actors who wish to know more about the method of physical actions and “visualizing” their role in the rehearsal process.⁶³ Other acting scholars have written about the method

⁶⁰ Robert Benedetti, *The Actor in You: Sixteen Simple Steps to Understanding the Art of Acting* (California: Allyn & Bacon, 2005).

⁶¹ Mark Rafael, *Telling Stories: A Grand Unifying Theory of Acting Techniques* (Hanover, NH: Smith and Kraus, 2008).

⁶² Richard Felnagle, *Beginning Acting: The Illusion of Natural Behavior* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1987).

⁶³ Richard Brestoff, *Acting under the Circumstances* (Hanover, NH: Smith and Kraus, 1999).

of physical actions and Stanislavski's psycho-physical approach to actor training including Jean Benedetti,⁶⁴ Bella Merlin,⁶⁵ Bill Bruehl,⁶⁶ and Sonia Moore.⁶⁷

Two students of Russian theater, Igor and Irina Levin, are authors of a manual for directors, actors, and theater students describing the method of physical action, which was developed in the last years of Stanislavski's life. The method of physical action is considered by many to be the definitive technique and the culmination of the decades of experimentation that Stanislavski conducted as an actor and director of the Moscow Art Theater.⁶⁸ Levin and Levin's manual, *The Stanislavsky Secret: Not a System, Not a Method But a Way of Thinking*, is of interest to this study in part for the information on Stanislavski's method of physical actions, but also as a guideline for performing pianists wishing to use the System in their preparations for the concert stage.⁶⁹ Additional acting manuals that provide insight for this study include *Acting Stanislavski: A Practical Guide*

⁶⁴ Benedetti, *Stanislavski and the Actor*.

⁶⁵ Bella Merlin, *Beyond Stanislavsky* (Los Angeles: Quite Specific Media Group Ltd., 2007).

⁶⁶ Bill Bruehl, *The Technique of Inner Action: The Soul of a Performer's Work* (self-pub., CreateSpace, 1996).

⁶⁷ Sonia Moore, *Stanislavski Revealed: The Actor's Guide to Spontaneity on Stage* (New York: Applause Theatre Books, 1991).

⁶⁸ Irina Levin and Igor Levin, *The Stanislavsky Secret: Not a System, Not a Method But a Way of Thinking* (Colorado Springs, CO: Meriwether Publishing Ltd., 2002).

⁶⁹ Levin and Levin, *Stanislavski Secret*.

to *Stanislavski's Approach and Legacy*⁷⁰ by John Gillett and *Acting is Believing*⁷¹ by Charles McGaw, Kenneth L. Stilson, and Larry D. Clark. *At Play: Teaching Teenagers Theater*⁷² by Elizabeth Swados is written for acting instructors working with teenage students who have no previous training in theater. The activities and teaching suggestions are appropriate for discussing beginning acting techniques with college-level piano performance majors who are moving toward the end of their teenage years and into young adulthood. Her text discusses improvisation, character development, voice, movement, and imagination.

A useful manual for actors by Robert Blumenfeld draws from Stanislavski's teachings on the subject of creating believable characters through the use of thorough research in order to determine the given circumstances—the facts about the specific role the actor is portraying. *Using the Stanislavski System: A Practical Guide to Character Creation and Period Styles*⁷³ provides historical background information for actors working within a specific period style. The book summarizes the politics, fashion, art, cultural customs, dance styles and popular music of each era. Musicians also study musical style within a historical context, although with less focus on the details

⁷⁰ John Gillett, *Acting Stanislavski: A Practical Guide to Stanislavski's Approach and Legacy* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014).

⁷¹ Charles McGaw, Kenneth L. Stilson, and Larry D. Clark, *Acting is Believing* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 2006).

⁷² Elizabeth Swados, *At Play: Teaching Teenagers Theater* (New York: Faber and Faber, 2006).

⁷³ Robert Blumenfeld, *Using the Stanislavski System: A Practical Guide to Character Creation and Period Styles* (New York: Limelight Editions, 2008).

illuminated in this manual. The author finds this to be a valuable resource for musicians who wish to have a more detailed understanding of the social, political, and practical characteristics of a specific period in order to further inform their musical interpretation.

The System in Theater Arts Dissertations and Theses

There is considerable scholarship about the Stanislavski System in the field of acting and theater arts. David Tabish's dissertation⁷⁴ includes the kinesthetic engagement techniques found in Stanislavski's method of physical actions, in conjunction with body awareness techniques found in the work of F.M. Alexander and Moshe Feldenkrais, and Howard Gardner's understanding of multiple human intelligences. The Alexander and Feldenkrais techniques have been widely accepted by musicians as useful and important tools for establishing body awareness, correct posture, and flexibility. The information presented in Tabish's dissertation informs the current study by describing the connections between Stanislavski's movement theories and those found in these two highly-regarded somatic studies.

Walter Elder's thesis⁷⁵ explores the applications of Stanislavski's psycho-physical acting techniques to a play by Canadian playwright Colleen Wagner entitled *The Monument*. In his PhD dissertation, Edward Lee outlines the Stanislavski System and

⁷⁴ David Tabish, "Kinesthetic Engagement Technique: Theories and Practices for Training the Actor" (PhD diss., University of Pittsburgh, 1995).

⁷⁵ Walter Elder, "The Method and the Monument: An Application of Stanislavski's Psycho-Physical Acting Technique to a Production of Colleen Wagner's Play" (master's thesis, University of Oklahoma, 2004).

discusses applications of the System to the non-realistic theater of the expressionist era.⁷⁶ His dissertation includes an interesting discussion of establishing given circumstances within works written by absurdist playwrights such as Samuel Beckett (author of *Waiting for Godot*) and Harold Pinter (author of *The Birthday Party*).

Kevin Inouye's master's thesis discusses Movement Pedagogy in acting as a continuation of Stanislavski's System.⁷⁷ Inouye's background in stage combat training led him to create his semester long movement training course for actor-based principles in the System. Typically viewed as separate, Inouye seeks to close the divide between movement training and core acting work with specific movement exercises based on concepts from the System including the magic if, concentration and attention, and Stanislavski's interest in yoga, particularly the idea of prana, or radiation.

Richard Blum uncovers the process by which the Stanislavski System was absorbed into American motion pictures.⁷⁸ His dissertation addresses the modification of the System into the "method" as codified by Lee Strasberg at the Actor's Studio in New York City. Joyce Morgan⁷⁹ describes the evolution of Stanislavski's System through the

⁷⁶ Edward Lee, "Using the Stanislavski System to Teach Non-Realistic Acting" (PhD diss., University of North Texas, 1997), 55.

⁷⁷ Kevin Inouye, "Method in Motion: Grounding Movement Pedagogy in the Lessons of Stanislavski" (master's thesis, Virginia Commonwealth University, 2013).

⁷⁸ Richard Blum, "The Method, from Stanislavski to Hollywood: The Transition of Acting Theory in America from Stage to Screen (1900-1975)" (PhD diss., University of Southern California, 1976).

⁷⁹ Joyce Morgan, "Stanislavski's Encounter with Shakespeare: The Evolution of a Method" (PhD diss., Yale University, 1980).

lens of Stanislavski's growth as an actor in Moscow. Her dissertation tracks the genesis of Stanislavski's acting style through the production of three of Shakespeare's plays.

Patrick Carriere's PhD dissertation explores development of the System within the unique mystical, psychological, and theoretical backdrop of the Russian Silver Age (1890-1917).⁸⁰ His work clarifies the spiritual aspects of the System, particularly the soul, which is central to an understanding of Stanislavski's theories. William Jaeger's PhD dissertation explores connections between the System and the psychoanalytic techniques of Karen Horney, which deal with the evolution of character development.⁸¹ In her dissertation, Rosemary Prichard describes the common goals inherent in the acting theories of Zeami, Stanislavski, and Grotowski.⁸² Patricia Bianco combines two systems of analysis: Eric Berne's system of transactional analysis, and the Stanislavski System in her doctoral research.⁸³ The role of catharsis in process drama is discussed in Vasilios

⁸⁰ Patrick C. Carriere, "Reading for the Soul in Stanislavski's *The Actor's Work on Him/Herself*: Orthodox Mysticism, Mainstream Occultism, Psychology, and the System in the Russian Silver Age" (PhD diss. University of Kansas, 2010).

⁸¹ William Jaeger, "The Application of Karen Horney's Psychoanalytic Theories to the Stanislavski System of Acting" (PhD diss., New York University, 1964).

⁸² Rosemary Prichard, "Goals Inherent in the Acting Theories of Zeami, Stanislavski, and Grotowski" (PhD diss., University of Southern California, 1978).

⁸³ Patricia Bianco, "Analyzing Relationships Among Characters in Drama: A Combination of Precepts from Stanislavski's System of Acting and Eric Berne's System of Transactional Analysis" (PhD diss., Florida State University, 1984).

Zorbas dissertation.⁸⁴ His work compares Aristotle’s *Poetics* and the Stanislavski System for theories linking the “intellect” and the “emotions.”

Evolution of the Stanislavski System

Scholars writing about the evolution of the Stanislavski System—primarily in America—focus on the disparate paths taken by the System after the initial publication of J.J. Robbins translation of *My Life in Art* in 1924 followed by the Hapgood translation of *An Actor Prepares* in 1936. Acting teachers adding to the body of literature in the United States, including but not limited to Michael Chekhov (1891-1955),⁸⁵ Lee Strasberg (1901-1982),⁸⁶ Stella Adler (1901-1992),⁸⁷ and Sanford Meisner (1905-1997),⁸⁸ followed the Stanislavski System as they understood it, and inevitably expanded on specific elements which they believed to be important. Strasberg famously expanded the controversial idea of emotion memory, which he referred to as “affective memory,” in his actor training. His practices were rejected by acting professionals who suffered severe mental breakdowns while working in this emotionally taxing program. While this study

⁸⁴ Vasilios Zorbas, “The Catharsis of the Student-Actor of Process Drama and the Role of The Stanislavski Method” (Doctor of Ed. diss., Teachers College, Columbia University, 2005).

⁸⁵ Michael Chekhov, *The Path of the Actor*, ed. Andrei Krilliov and Bella Merlin (New York: Routledge, 2005).

⁸⁶ Lee Strasberg, *A Dream of Passion: The Development of the Method*, ed. Evangeline Morphos (New York: Penguin Books, 1987).

⁸⁷ Stella Adler, *The Art of Acting*, ed. Howard Kissel (New York: Applause Theater and Cinema Books, 2000).

⁸⁸ Sanford Meisner and Dennis Longwell, *On Acting* (New York: Random House, 1987).

focuses only on Stanislavski's System, it is important to note that acting teachers in the United States may present and adapt different aspects of the System in their written works.

The evolution of the Stanislavski System in the United States is featured in Mel Gordon's book *Stanislavski in America*.⁸⁹ His book discusses the prevalence of the System in American acting schools through the American Laboratory Theater led by two students of Stanislavski, Richard Boleslavsky⁹⁰ and Maria Ouspenskaya. The System was transmitted via their teachings to students Strasberg, Adler, and Meisner who later made their own contributions under the umbrella of the System. These resources are important for understanding the System because they clarify which elements come from Stanislavski's writings and which ideas have evolved through the influence of other acting teachers.

Exploring Musicality and Physicality in the System

Exploring the connection between Stanislavski's System and musical arts continues to be a matter of interest not only to musicians but to actors as well. Two significant items, a 2014 article by Mario Frendo and a 2014 essay by Sharon Carnicke and David Rosen, explore Stanislavski's work with the Bolshoi Opera Studio. In his article, "Stanislavsky's Musicality: Towards Physicalization," Frendo discusses the importance of musicality in the theater arts, noting that Stanislavski's "work on opera and

⁸⁹ Mel Gordon, *Stanislavski in America: An Actor's Workbook* (New York: Routledge, 2010).

⁹⁰ Richard Boleslavsky, *Acting: The First Six Lessons* (New York: Theater Arts Books, 1933).

with opera singers forms important context for investigating the musical dimension of his theater making.”⁹¹ Frendo examines the exercises conducted from 1918-1927 at the Bolshoi Opera Studio in order to illuminate a connection between what Stanislavski called tempo-rhythm, his work with musicians, and what Frendo refers to as the ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ dimensions of physical action through rhythm.⁹² His conclusions are derived in part from what Rumiantsev describes as Stanislavski’s attention to the actor/singer’s freedom from “excessive tenseness, especially in the arms, wrists, and fingers;” and the fact that Stanislavski’s exercises were always accompanied by music in order to train the students to make “every movement consonant with musical rhythms.”⁹³

Musicality is further explored as a cornerstone of the System by Sharon Carnicke and David Rosen in “A Singer Prepares: Stanislavsky and Opera.”⁹⁴ In this essay, Stanislavski’s strong affinity for music is revealed. The authors explain that in the vast majority of text written by and about Stanislavski, his interest in music, which equaled his interest in spoken theater, is neglected. Stanislavski himself “conceded that widespread interest in the Moscow Art Theatre had shaped the focus of his autobiography. Consequently and ‘unfortunately,’ he wrote: ‘In this book about ‘my life

⁹¹ Mario Frendo, “Stanislavsky’s Musicality: Towards Physicalization,” *Studies in Musical Theater*, vol. 8, no. 3 (2014): 225-237.

⁹² Frendo, “Stanislavsky’s Musicality,” 226.

⁹³ Stanislavski and Rumiantsev, *Stanislavski on Opera*, 4.

⁹⁴ Carnicke and Rosen, “A Singer Prepares,” 120-138.

in art', I can therefore concern myself with my musical endeavors only in so far as they indirectly influenced my artistic development."⁹⁵

Carnicke and Rosen trace Stanislavski's interest in music to his time at the Bolshoi Theater Opera Studio where he gave his first lectures outlining his System to the actor-musicians in the company. These lectures highlighted topics that were neglected in modern interpretations of his work, including "the importance of tempo and rhythm in the speaking of lines and in physical movements on the stage; the pragmatics of clear diction, intonation, phrasing, and vocal control; and the ways in which text encodes and prompts performance. These less-studied topics derive directly from his assumption that drama and music are kindred forms."⁹⁶

The authors, Carnicke and Rosen, further explain that Stanislavski's musicality is represented in his practice of creating a "score" of each play, much like a musical score, in which he made notes detailing "the production's sound design, the actors' vocal work, and the physical rhythms of their movements. He frequently notes the duration of pauses and other kinds of physical activities, demonstrating his keen sense of tempo."⁹⁷ This article argues persuasively that Stanislavski's conception of tempo-rhythm is inextricably linked with physical action. It would be at the end of Stanislavski's life that he would

⁹⁵ Carnicke and Rosen, "A Singer Prepares," 137. Quoted matter translated by Sharon Carnicke from *Sobranie sochinenii, vol II*: 484.

⁹⁶ Carnicke and Rosen, "A Singer Prepares," 122.

⁹⁷ Carnicke and Rosen, "A Singer Prepares," 121.

return to work once again in opera in “his last studio, the Opera-Dramatic” and develop his “most creative rehearsal technique,” now known as active analysis.⁹⁸

Lee Norvelle’s important article, “Stanislavski Revisited,” reviews Stanislavski’s writings and principles in order to distill nine essential traits of the System which, in his view, is founded on physical discipline.⁹⁹ Norvelle was a professor at Indiana University, in the Department of Theater, Drama, and Contemporary Dance, from 1925 to 1963. He claims that the ultimate goal of the System is, in the words of Stanislavski, “to create a favorable condition for the appearance of inspiration by means of the will, that condition in the presence of which inspiration was most likely to descend into the actor’s soul.”¹⁰⁰ Norvelle asserts that the importance of physical freedom is a cornerstone of the System, despite years of controversy on the subject.¹⁰¹ The relative importance of physical freedom is of special interest to pianists because playing the piano, in particular, is physically challenging work. The attention Stanislavski placed on correct physical alignment, posture, breathing, and relaxation demonstrates another important connection between Stanislavski’s performance techniques and those required of musicians.

In her classic text, *Freeing the Natural Voice*, Kristen Linklater challenges actors and orators to release inhibitions and excess tension that restricts a naturally resonate and

⁹⁸ Carnicke and Rosen, “A Singer Prepares,” 121.

⁹⁹ Lee Norvelle, “Stanislavski Revisited,” *Educational Theater Journal*, vol. 14, no. 1 (March, 1962): 29-37, accessed July 6, 2018, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3204712>.

¹⁰⁰ Norvelle, “Stanislavski Revisited,” 30.

¹⁰¹ Norvelle, “Stanislavski Revisited,” 30.

expressive voice.¹⁰² Her exercises deal with freeing the spine, understanding the mechanisms that control breathing, resonance, and centering for increased vocal power. These concepts and exercises support this study by providing detailed instructions for increased resonance. Although vocal resonance is not directly applicable to piano playing, pianists who wish to incorporate speaking to the audience members would benefit from this course of study. Understanding vocal concepts supports pianists in their quest to emulate a vocal sound at the piano.

Key Writings on Music Performance Skills and Interpretation

Konstantin Stanislavski, like other Russian artists and pianists in the early twentieth century, had a significant influence on performance art and pedagogy in the United States. This study is concerned particularly with piano performance and the field owes a great debt to Russian pianists and pedagogues who were valuable contributors to the literature. More recently, the field of piano performance has become increasingly interested in alternative strategies to enhance performance success and increase a performer's level of ease and comfort onstage. Pianists have turned to other performance-based skills such as athletics—which often relies on psychology—for insights into the science of peak performance. Most notable for this study are the pedagogical writings which share one or more elements or ideas found in Stanislavski's System or which aid in establishing connections between the art of acting and the art of piano performance. Accordingly, this section selectively reviews literature in the following areas: historical

¹⁰² Kristen Linklater, *Freeing the Natural Voice* (New York: Drama Book Specialists, 1976).

connections between Stanislavski and the art of piano performance, primarily through various Russian contemporaries; parallel or derivative works on music performance skills and interpretation; psychological performance strategies for musicians; movement strategies; improvisation to address performance anxiety; stage presence; and acting techniques in piano performance and pedagogy.

Historical Connections Between Stanislavski and the Art of Piano Performance

The strongest connections between Stanislavski (including his System) and the art of piano performance are found in the writings of several Russian pianists who were contemporaries of Stanislavski or followed closely after. Stanislavski's Moscow Art Theater influenced Russian pianists and pedagogues Josef and Rosina Lhévinne, George Kochevitsky, and Polish pianist Artur Rubenstein who were admirers of his work. Rosina Lhévinne was so moved by a Moscow Art Theater performance of Anton Chekhov's play, *The Cherry Orchard*, that she remembered specific details and described them to her biographer many decades later saying that Stanislavski's theater was "a real revelation. Before him, the plays were very traditional and quite stiff."¹⁰³ Arthur Rubenstein also mentions Stanislavski's theater in his autobiography, *My Many Years*,¹⁰⁴ in which he describes going to the theater every night while touring in Moscow. Piano teacher and author George Kochevitsky described the realistic nature of Stanislavski's theater in Russia and how an understanding of theater and other art forms, poetry in

¹⁰³ Robert K. Wallace, *A Century of Music-Making: The Lives of Josef & Rosina Lhevinne* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1976), 81.

¹⁰⁴ Arthur Rubenstein, *My Many Years* (New York: Knopf, 1980).

particular, influenced his development as a musician.¹⁰⁵ These connections were important to piano performance and pedagogy in the United States because many artists who were trained in the Moscow or St. Petersburg Conservatory system eventually relocated to America and were hired by the leading music schools.

Parallels between piano performance and acting were acknowledged by famed piano teacher Theodore Leschetizky. His student, Ethel Newcomb, notes in her book, *Leschetizky As I Knew Him*, that he believed that “all arts were related.”¹⁰⁶ In an effort to better instruct his students, Leschetizky encouraged his students to study all the arts, yet he ascertained that the “whole art of piano playing was most akin to the art of acting,” and compared “the movements of an actor on the stage to tempos and rhythms, expressions of faces to interpretations. Tones and shading in music should be studied as an actor studied his words, with the same endeavor to suit the acoustics.”¹⁰⁷ Similar recollections and teachings of Leschetizky are presented in *Theodore Leschetizky, An Intimate Study of The Man and Musician*, by Angele Potacka.¹⁰⁸

The Art of Piano Playing, by Henrich Neuhaus (1888-1964),¹⁰⁹ provides sage advice from his philosophies on teaching as demonstrated through some of his most prolific students including Sviatoslav Richter, Emil Gilels, and Yakov Zak. Neuhaus’s

¹⁰⁵ Kochevitsky, *A Scientific Approach*.

¹⁰⁶ Newcomb, *Leschetizky*, 173.

¹⁰⁷ Newcomb, *Leschetizky*, 173.

¹⁰⁸ Angele Potacka, *Theodore Leschetizky, An Intimate Study of The Man and Musician* (New York: Century Co., 1903).

¹⁰⁹ Neuhaus, *Art of Piano Playing*.

career at the Moscow Conservatory spanned over forty years and *The Art of Piano Playing* is considered a definitive text on the subject. He discusses important skills for pianists such as cultivating an artistic image of each piece and rhythmic concepts in relation to natural phenomena of “breathing, the waves of the sea, the swaying of a wheat field,”¹¹⁰ relaxation for sound production and technical fluency, and performance considerations. Neuhaus encourages his readers on two occasions in the treatise to examine the writings of Stanislavski for further study on natural rhythm freedom in phrases and determining the correct musical nuances.¹¹¹

Music Performance Skills and Interpretation

A complete review of works on music performance skills and interpretation, or piano pedagogy generally, is not necessary or appropriate for this study. Influential works in the field of piano pedagogy—for example, *The Well-Tempered Keyboard Teacher*,¹¹² or *Developing Piano Performance: A Teaching Philosophy*¹¹³—remain important, but they fall outside the scope of ideas that are parallel to or derive from Stanislavski’s System. One work that provides specific insight on interpretation and performance for pianists is *Playing Beyond the Notes: A Pianist’s Guide to Musical Interpretation*” by

¹¹⁰ Neuhaus, *Art of Piano Playing*, 30.

¹¹¹ Neuhaus, *Art of Piano Playing*, 53.

¹¹² Camp, *A Teaching Philosophy*.

¹¹³ Uszler, Gordon, and McBride Smith, *Well-Tempered Keyboard Teacher*.

Deborah Rambo Sinn.¹¹⁴ Her book discusses the many interpretive decisions that pianists make when learning specific pieces of music. These interpretive decisions must originate from the score, knowledge of the composer's intentions, and stylistic information taken from each specific musical era. Her book details suggestions for interpretive choices concerning rubato, voicing, ornamentation, phrasing, inflection, transitions, and pedaling.

There are two books on music performance that appeal to the Stanislavski System in their titles: *The Performer Prepares* by Robert Caldwell,¹¹⁵ and *A Performer Prepares: A Guide to Song Preparation for Actors, Singers and Dancers* by David Craig.¹¹⁶ Both titles draw upon *An Actor Prepares*, Elizabeth Hapgood's English translation of Stanislavski's first year of actor training. Despite the obvious adaptation of Stanislavski's title, neither book utilizes Stanislavski's System or exercises, nor do they adapt his specific techniques for music performance. While a connection between acting and music performance is acknowledged, Caldwell and Craig instead outline what are essentially their own personal methods for teaching performance confidence and musical interpretation in the private music lesson.

In *Mastering the Art of Performance: A Primer for Musicians*, Stewart Gordon provides valuable information for aspiring professional classical musicians.¹¹⁷ In addition

¹¹⁴ Deborah Rambo Sinn, *Playing Beyond the Notes: A Pianist's Guide to Musical Interpretation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

¹¹⁵ Robert Caldwell, *The Performer Prepares* (Dallas: Pst... Inc., 1990).

¹¹⁶ David Craig, *A Performer Prepares: A Guide to Song Preparation* (New York: Applause Cinema & Theatre Books, 1993).

¹¹⁷ Stewart Gordon, *Mastering the Art of Performance: A Primer for Musicians*, (New York: Oxford, 2006).

to practical information on directed practicing, developing secure memorization, and managing stage fright, Gordon also focuses on developing a successful career in music and the physical and spiritual challenges of performing life.

Psychological Performance Strategies for Musicians

The psychological aspects of many types of performing have been the focus of study and, interestingly, music has frequently drawn from sport psychology to address both the mental and physical aspects of performance. In her book, *The Balanced Musician: Integrating Mind and Body for Peak Performance*,¹¹⁸ Lesley Sisterhen McAllister intertwines important research from the field of sport psychology with music performance material, drawing connections between the two that are undeniable. Most important for this study are the strategies for dealing with performance stress or anxiety. Although the strategies explored in her study come from sport psychology research, they bear a unique resemblance to the strategies provided by the Stanislavski System. These strategies include pre-performance preparatory exercises such as centering, relaxation imagery, positive imagery, positive self-talk, concentration and attention, combining mental and physical practice, muscle relaxation techniques, and yoga. In addition to her book, McAllister's dissertation on mental practice, imagery and relaxation techniques for musicians shows the effectiveness of imagery and mental practice techniques for university-level pianists.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ McAllister, *Balanced Musician*.

¹¹⁹ Leslie Ann Sisterhen, "The Use of Imagery, Mental Practice, and Relaxation Techniques for Musical Performance Enhancement" (PhD diss., University of Oklahoma, 2005).

Rebekah Jordan-Miller's dissertation explores mental skills training for pianists.¹²⁰ Her twelve-week mental skills training program discusses concentration and focus, trust, confidence, automation, and expressiveness. Her study focuses on deliberate practice instruction and psychological skills borrowed primarily from the field of athletics. The skills and strategies discussed in this essay are aimed at developing performance confidence in lower-advanced and advanced pianists.

Age-appropriate mental skills training strategies for elementary piano students are discussed in Jyoti Hensch's DMA document.¹²¹ This study focuses on the acquisition of positive mental skills for pre-adolescent piano students and provides strategies and exercises which include creative activities that promote a positive attitude, relaxation, imagery, and concentration in young students. These exercises are accompanied by a manual for teachers outlining a sequential program for mental skills development for children.

Experts in the field of sport psychology have taken an interest in helping high level performing musicians to increase their effectiveness, ease, and success onstage. Sport psychologist Don Greene has written extensively on the subject of performance success for musicians. In addition to his work with elite athletes on the U.S. Olympic Diving Team, Greene has given extensive workshops for musicians at the Juilliard

¹²⁰ Rebekah Jordan-Miller, "Mental-Skills Training for a Lower-Advanced to Advanced Pianist" (DMA diss., University of Oklahoma, 2010), accessed September 10, 2018, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

¹²¹ Jyoti Hensch, "The Use of Age Appropriate Mental Skills Activities for Performance Enhancement in Six-to-Twelve-Year-Old Pianists" (DMA diss., University of Oklahoma, 2011), accessed September 13, 2018, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

School, the Philharmonic-Symphony Society of New York, Inc. (New York Philharmonic), the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra, and the New World Symphony. His books, *Performance Success: Performing Your Best Under Pressure*,¹²² *Audition Success*,¹²³ and *Fight Your Fear and Win: Seven Skills for Performing Your Best Under Pressure, In Sports, On Stage*,¹²⁴ apply the tenets of sport psychology to music performance with special attention to performance anxiety, attention, concentration, mental outlook, emotional responses, and resilience. These strategies have been widely accepted by classical musicians, and they have a connection to the Stanislavski System's emphasis on concentration, attention, mental preparation, and emotion memory. Additional resources applying sport psychology to music performance include *Playing Your Best When It Counts: Mental Skills for Musicians*,¹²⁵ by Bill Moore, *The Inner Game of Music*,¹²⁶ by Barry Green and Timothy Gallwey, author of *The Inner Game of Tennis*.¹²⁷

¹²² Don Greene, *Performance Success: Performing Your Best Under Pressure* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

¹²³ Don Greene, *Audition Success: An Olympic Sports Psychologist Teaches Performing Artists How to Win* (New York: Routledge, 2001).

¹²⁴ Don Greene, *Fight Your Fear and Win: Seven Skills for Performing Your Best Under Pressure, In Sports, On Stage* (New York: Broadway Books, 2001).

¹²⁵ Bill Moore, *Playing Your Best When it Counts: Mental Skills for Musicians* (Oklahoma: Moore Performance Consulting, 2010).

¹²⁶ Green and Gallwey, *Inner Game of Music*.

¹²⁷ Timothy Gallwey, *The Inner Game of Tennis: The Classic Guide to the Mental Side of Peak Performance* (New York: Random House, 1974).

Bringing Music to Life by Barry Green discusses the process of “pouring yourself, body, and soul into your music making so that the music you make truly comes alive.”¹²⁸ The techniques discussed in his book include strategies for incorporating breath (voice), pulse (rhythm), and movement (body) into the process of music making. While acting techniques are not specifically addressed, Green mentions the efficacy of drama games in helping musicians to shed their inhibitions and give themselves more freely to dramatic music performance.¹²⁹

Movement Strategies for Musicians

A number of works explore physical movements used by performance pianists and other musicians on stage. Somatic innovators Emile Jaques Dalcroze (1865-1950), F. Matthias Alexander (1869-1955), and Moshe Feldenkrais (1904-1984) discussed techniques that encourage free physical movements for performing artists. Modern practitioners of somatic studies in the twenty-first century have expanded upon the work of Dalcroze, Alexander, and Felenkrais by providing specific applications to performing musicians.

Emile Jaques Dalcroze was a Swiss music educator who taught musical concepts through movement. His theories center around providing students with a strong internal sense of rhythm which is developed through movement exercises. His seminal work, *The*

¹²⁸ Barry Green, *Bringing Music to Life* (Chicago: GIA Publications, 2009).

¹²⁹ Green, *Bringing Music to Life*, 197.

*Jaques-Dalcroze Method of Eurhythmics*¹³⁰ outlines the necessity for movement based pedagogy in music instruction promoting internalized coordination between thought and action and “the development of a rapid and easy means of communication between thought and its means of expression by movement [which] gives individual character strength and vitality to an unusual degree.”¹³¹ In his fascinating dissertation, James Lee provides proof that Jaques-Dalcroze made trips to St. Petersburg where he met and greatly influenced the work of Konstantin Stanislavski, who instituted eurhythmics movement classes for all the actors at the Moscow Art Theater in 1911.¹³² The concept of tempo-rhythm found in the System is likely influenced by the work of Jaques-Dalcroze.

F.M. Alexander (1869-1955) was an Australian actor who developed a technique outlined in his book, *The Use of the Self*,¹³³ which addresses specific harmful tendencies caused by excess tension and the gravitational pull on the structures of the body. Alexander experienced chronic loss of his voice post-performance and dedicated his life to studying the kinds of movements that caused such an injury. His method included studying his movements in a mirror, watching with a keen eye for signs of tension, which he found in excess in the region of his neck and throat. His Alexander technique has proven useful to actors and musicians as well as anyone wishing to experience a greater

¹³⁰ Emile Jaques-Dalcroze, *The Jaques-Dalcroze Method of Eurhythmics* (London: Constable & Co. Ltd., 1912).

¹³¹ Jaques-Dalcroze, *Method of Eurhythmics*, 16.

¹³² James Lee, “Dalcroze By Any Other Name: Eurhythmics in Early Modern Theater and Dance” (PhD diss., Texas Tech University, 2003), 177, accessed September 15, 2018, <http://hdl.handle.net/2346/15905>.

¹³³ F. M. Alexander, *The Use of the Self* (London: Orion, 2001).

sense of physical freedom and ease. The Alexander technique has been particularly beneficial for alleviating tension in performing musicians in the United States with Alexander technique courses offered at major conservatories including the Juilliard School, Eastman School of Music, San Francisco Conservatory, and Manhattan School of Music.

Moshe Feldenkrais was an Israeli physicist who developed the Feldenkrais Method as a means for increasing self-awareness through movement. His seminal work, *Awareness Through Movement: Health Exercises for Personal Growth*¹³⁴ discusses the components of self-awareness: sensation, feeling, thinking, and movement. Movement is a tool for examining internal feeling, such as joy, fear, or anxiety and Feldenkrais's movement exercises are designed to foster a deeper awareness of emotions. His techniques have been utilized by artists including violinist Yehudi Menuhin and stage director Peter Brook.

In her book, *Deepening Musical Performance through Movement*¹³⁵ pianist and music theorist Alexandra Pierce invites her students to explore character in music by mapping "the composition's personality" through large-motor physical exercises designed to help her students embody the character of a piece or section of a piece.¹³⁶ Julia Schnebly-Black, head of eurhythmics at the Seattle Conservatory, teaches movement to musicians to encourage physical and rhythmic engagement with the process

¹³⁴ Moshe Feldenkrais, *Awareness Through Movement: Health Exercises for Personal Growth* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972).

¹³⁵ Pierce, *Performance through Movement*.

¹³⁶ Pierce, *Performance through Movement*, 163.

of music making. In *Rhythm: One on One, Dalcroze Activities in the Private Music Lesson*, Schnebly-Black and co-author Stephen Moore offer creative ideas for teaching the connection between movement and internal rhythm in private music instruction.¹³⁷ This book implies direct connections with applications of the Stanislavski System to music given the System's use of tempo-rhythm.

Piano teacher and music coach, Eloise Ristad, in her book *A Soprano on Her Head: Right-Side-up Reflections on Life and Other Performances*, explores movement as a way to teach technique, sound production, musicality, and interpretation.¹³⁸ Performance techniques include mapping the intended sound with a physical movement in the lesson, “acting out” the negative voices of self-talk in performance, and unconventional techniques such as the practice of juggling to improve sight reading skills.

William Westney, a student of Ristad, created his signature “Un-Masterclass” by combining his belief in movement as a tool to enhance performance success and interpretation, group exercises found in Dalcroze Eurhythmics, and techniques similar to those found in acting or improvisation workshops.¹³⁹ If a traditional master class consists of a master teacher publicly critiquing a younger performer's playing for an audience, Westney's Un-Masterclass seeks to elicit audience participation and work with the

¹³⁷ Julia Schnebly-Black and Stephen Moore, *Rhythm: One on One, Dalcroze Activities in the Private Music Lesson* (Van Nuys, CA: Alfred Music, 2004).

¹³⁸ Eloise Ristad, *A Soprano on Her Head: Right-Side-up Reflections on Life and Other Performances* (Moab, UT: Real People Press, 1981).

¹³⁹ William Westney, “The Un-Master Class – What is it?,” *Piano Life* (April 1997).

performer to discover and achieve personal goals through experimentation and creative activities. His book, *The Perfect Wrong Note: Learning to Trust Your Musical Self*, explains his philosophy on music practice which encourages students to open up to musical exploration rather than submit to the debilitating fear of playing a wrong note.¹⁴⁰

Improvisation to Address Performance Anxiety

Classically trained pianists in the twenty-first century are not required to improvise and generally do not learn how, yet research suggests that such instruction can yield performance benefits for musicians. In a study conducted in 2011, music researcher Robert Allen measured the levels of performance anxiety exhibited by piano students ages twelve to sixteen while performing a free improvisation, a standard repertoire piece, or a combination of standard repertoire and free improvisation.¹⁴¹ Improvisation was taught to participants in a private piano lesson and included melody, harmony, rhythm, climax, and restatement of material. The thirty-six subjects from elementary, middle and high school who were chosen for the study completed the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory for Children (STAIC) and Musical Anxiety Report Scale (MARS) before and after their performances of either a repertory piece or free improvisation. The study found that students who played a free improvisation reported lower levels of anxiety pre-performance than those performing standard repertoire. Students who were taught how to improvise using a predetermined skill set were able to successfully explore the instrument

¹⁴⁰ William Westney, *The Perfect Wrong Note: Learning to Trust Your Musical Self* (Milwaukee: Amadeus Press, 2006).

¹⁴¹ Robert Allen, "Free Improvisation and Performance Anxiety Among Piano Students," *Psychology of Music*, vol 41, is. 1 (September 27, 2011): 75-88.

creatively and decrease the effects of performance anxiety without pharmacological or psychological interventions.

Pianists who wish to acquire keyboard improvisation skills will find that there are many method books available which offer step-by-step approaches to improvising at the keyboard. One significant improvisation series is pianist Bradley Sowash's series which combines traditional note-reading with improvisation techniques found in jazz.¹⁴² His supplementary books feature compositions with sounds from jazz, rock, and blues idioms for pianists at the elementary and intermediate levels.¹⁴³ Bert Konowitz's jazz improvisation method features musical examples that teach improvisation skills which "allow the performer to use music to express individual feelings and ideas."¹⁴⁴ Ann Collins' improvisation method book teaches pianists the skills required to enhance pre-written melodies and create engaging accompaniment chord progressions.¹⁴⁵ Tony Caramia's classic method encourages pianists to learn and understand the basics of improvising in a jazz idiom.¹⁴⁶ Techniques including diatonic extensions, altered tones, and tritone substitutions are explored in his manual. Forrest Kinney's *Pattern Play* is a

¹⁴² Bradley Sowash, *Creative Chords: Keyboard Improvisations Method* (San Diego, CA: Kjos Publishing, 2015).

¹⁴³ Bradley Sowash, *That's Jazz, Levels 1-3* (San Diego, CA: Kjos Publishing, 2016).

¹⁴⁴ Bert Konowitz, *Teach Yourself to Improvise: Everything You Need to Know to Start Improvising Now* (Van Nuys, CA: Alfred Publishing, 1996), 2.

¹⁴⁵ Ann Collins, *Lead Lines and Chord Changes: A Practical How-To Approach for Keyboardists* (Van Nuys, CA: Alfred Publishing, 1988).

¹⁴⁶ Tony Caramia, *Jazz Piano Harmonization* (San Diego, CA: Kjos Publishing, 1983).

popular series that appeals to students of all ages.¹⁴⁷ The exercises included can be used in both private and group piano study, encouraging ensemble playing. Although performance anxiety is not directly addressed by these and other authors, pianists who practice improvisation may find that they grow more comfortable with skills known to foster a greater sense of freedom and flexibility in public performance, such as the ability to spontaneously create musical material in front of an audience.

Useful improvisation exercises designed specifically for classical musicians are found in *Improvisation Games for Classical Musicians* by David Agrell.¹⁴⁸ Agrell's book suggests activities for ensemble work, performance class settings, and solo music lessons and practice. Activities that pertain to this study include improvisations that are based on a depiction, adjective, or concept, two instruments having a musical "conversation,"¹⁴⁹ creating a soundtrack to famous Shakespearian verse,¹⁵⁰ and playing a composition that has been notated in "squiggles" and shapes.¹⁵¹ Similar creative activities are examined in chapter four of this study in connection with translating Stanislavski's improvisation techniques for piano performance.

¹⁴⁷ Akiko Kinney and Forrest Kinney, *Pattern Play: Inspiring Creativity at the Piano* (Mississauga, ON: Frederick Harris Music Co., 2010).

¹⁴⁸ David Agrell, *Improvisation Games for Classical Musicians: A Collection of Musical Games with Suggestions for Use* (Chicago: Gia Publications, 2008).

¹⁴⁹ Agrell, *Improvisation Games*, 207.

¹⁵⁰ Agrell, *Improvisation Games*, 208.

¹⁵¹ Agrell, *Improvisation Games*, 58.

Stage Presence for Musicians

Success or failure in a public music performance can often turn on the somewhat intangible quality of “stage presence.” A small number of books and articles deals with stage presence for musicians, but one of the most comprehensive is Karen Hagberg’s *Stage Presence from Head to Toe: A Manual for Musicians*.¹⁵² The book covers the specifics of concert etiquette, dress, and decorum, and also offers insight into how the audience sees the performance from their vantage point.

Effects of stage presence during musical performances have been measured and reflect significant impact on audience perception. In a study conducted in 2017, George Waddell and Aaron Williamon tested the effects of several stage presence mistakes on audience perception of the performance. A single performance was edited to contain: (i) a perfect entrance and mistake-free performance, (ii) an inappropriate entrance, (iii) an aural mistake with no visual recognition of the error by the performer, and (iv) an aural mistake accompanied by visual response to the mistake by the performer.¹⁵³ Sample audience members, both musicians and non-musicians, gave lowered ratings to the performance with the inappropriate stage entrance, and a lowered rating to the performance with a mistake accompanied by facial recognition of the mistake by the

¹⁵² Karen Hagberg, *Stage Presence from Head to Toe: A Manual for Musicians* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2003).

¹⁵³ George Waddell and Aaron Williamon, “Eye of the Beholder: Stage Entrance Behavior and Facial Expression Affect Continuous Quality Ratings in Music Performance,” *Frontiers in Psychology*, vol. 8, art. 523 (April 25, 2017), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2017.00513>.

performer.¹⁵⁴ Although the performer was able to gain back favor with the audience throughout his performance, the periodic lowered rating served to diminish the perceived quality of the performance.

Acting Techniques in Piano Performance and Pedagogy

The similarities between acting and music performance have been explored in several articles and special interest pieces for music teachers and performers. An article by Sharon Osborn in *American Music Teacher* examines lessons that can be absorbed from acting to increase effective teaching.¹⁵⁵ Osborn discusses communication through body language, expressive language, speech patterns, facial expression and eye contact, changing the tempo in the lesson, and making interesting word choices.¹⁵⁶ In a similar article, Catherine Katusky discusses dramatic repertoire choices for students from the beginning level through advanced repertoire.¹⁵⁷ The repertoire selections in Katusky's article incorporate spoken text, comedic interludes, and descriptive poetry to be performed in conjunction with the music. Developing the public speaking ability of students will also affect the quality of their piano playing, encouraging better connection with the audience, and settling performance anxiety.

¹⁵⁴ Waddell and Williamon, "Eye of The Beholder," 11.

¹⁵⁵ Sharon Osborn, "Teaching: What We Can Learn from the Actor," *American Music Teacher*, vol. 46, no. 6 (June/July 1997): 26-27.

¹⁵⁶ Osborn, "Learn from the Actor," 27-29.

¹⁵⁷ Catherine Katusky, "Storytelling at the Piano," *American Music Teacher*, December/January, vol. 49, no. 3, (1999/2000): 20-23.

Violinist Simon Fischer explores the concept of belief used in acting which originates from Stanislavski's System.¹⁵⁸ Fischer discusses mechanical acting, representative acting, and belief as components of the System which can also be seen in classical music performance. Mechanical acting describes an actor with flawless technique who feels nothing in performance. A representative actor expresses emotion, which she discovers spontaneously, but later practices the same expressive techniques over and over, performing them always the same as the last performance. Fischer explains that Stanislavski's System uses the term belief to describe the sensation of a performer spontaneously reacting to and expressing the emotions they personally draw from the music in the moment.¹⁵⁹

Application of the System to Music Performance

To demonstrate a connection between Stanislavski's System of actor training and piano performance, it is important to state that while many parallels exist, there has not been a definitive text written on the subject. Two dissertations exist which draw parallels between the Stanislavski System and instrumental music performance. Jaren S. Hinckley's document discusses the connections that exist between Stanislavski's System and clarinet performance.¹⁶⁰ His study outlines the techniques found in the Stanislavski

¹⁵⁸ Simon Fischer, "Belief: Living the Music," *The Strad* (May 2007): 76-77.

¹⁵⁹ Fischer, "Living the Music," 76.

¹⁶⁰ Jaren S. Hinckley, "The Clarinetist Acts: A study of Konstantin Stanislavski's Acting Techniques as Applied to Clarinet Performance and Pedagogy" (DMA doc., Florida State University, 2002).

System and concludes that clarinetists would benefit from further study of the System. The document does not provide a list of exercises and applications for performing clarinetists to be utilized in either group or private lessons. In an article written for the *College Music Symposium*, Hinkley expands on his dissertation chapter in discussing Stanislavski's concept called public solitude and its applications for musicians struggling with performance anxiety.¹⁶¹

Choral conductor Bogdan Minut describes the connection between the Stanislavski System and choral rehearsals in his document.¹⁶² Specific techniques are discussed, however the applications to choral music primarily address textual imagery and vocal training. Music theorist Bonnie McAlvin uses Schenkerian analysis to map pitch function and emotional responses to various pitch schema in her PhD dissertation.¹⁶³ This technique is related to Stanislavski's techniques including given circumstances and creating an 'unbroken line' in working with various directions within a specific pitch set or schema. The narrative elements inherent within each schema are analyzed, and various exercises for a discussion of such narratives are provided for instrumental musicians.

¹⁶¹ Jaren S. Hinckley, "Performance Anxiety: Constantin Stanislavski's Concept of Public Solitude," *College Music Symposium*, vol. 48 (2008): 124-130, doi: 10.2307/25664813.

¹⁶² Bogdan Minut, "Applying Constantin Stanislavski's Acting 'System' to Choral Rehearsals" (DMA doc., Ball State University, 2009).

¹⁶³ Bonnie McAlvin, "Creating an Unbroken Line of Becoming in Live Music Performance" (PhD diss., The City University of New York, 2017).

In his DMA document Geoffrey Tiller discusses the role of emotion in music and vocal emulation in trumpet performance and pedagogy.¹⁶⁴ The final chapter utilizes exercises from the System including recalling emotions from past experiences (emotion memory) as a means for teaching expression in music. He describes his own process of creating a unique inner narrative for his trumpet performances based on personal experiences from his own life. Through the use of these personal narratives Tiller was able to deliver performances that showcased an increase in emotional depth and audience connection.

Russian musicologist Lev Barenboim has penned an essay that explores the connection between Stanislavski and piano performance which is contained in his book entitled *Voprosy fortepiannoï pedagogiki i ispolnitel'stva [Problems of Piano Pedagogy and Performance]*.¹⁶⁵ Unfortunately, a translation from the Russian language into English does not exist, and therefore it is not referenced in this study.

Application of the System in Fields Outside Music

Stanislavski's System has found interest in a wide array of academic disciplines, including education, dance, speech, psychology, and theological studies. In the field of Education, there have been several studies that apply Stanislavski's techniques.¹⁶⁶ Maria

¹⁶⁴ Geoffrey Tiller, "Sounding the Inner Voice: Emotion and Vocal Emulation in Trumpet Performance and Pedagogy" (DMA doc., University of Toronto, 2015).

¹⁶⁵ Lev A. Barenboim, *Voprosy fortepiannoï pedagogiki i ispolnitel'stva* [Problems of Piano Pedagogy and Performance] (Moscow, 1937).

¹⁶⁶ Maria Bakalis, "The Stanislavski System of Acting: An Adult Education Learning Methodology" (PhD diss., Northern Illinois University, 2001), 156.

Bakalis's dissertation examines the applications of several of Stanislavski's techniques to adult education, including emotion memory, imagination, given circumstances, empathy, improvisation, and subtext.¹⁶⁷ The adult learning methodologies included role-playing scenarios with adult learners at the community college level to facilitate active learning methods. Ross Figgins explored applications of the Stanislavski System to classroom education in his dissertation.¹⁶⁸ Teachers, similar to actors, communicate through a dramatic persona, facilitating learning through communication, role-playing, and the ability to adapt his or her persona to meet the individual needs of each student.

In the field of dance performance, Linda Plumblee¹⁶⁹ applies Stanislavski's acting method to dance pedagogy, rehearsal, and direction. Her applications include analyzing beats and units, attention, truth, communion and adaptation, and tempo-rhythm. Jack Neiman in his PhD dissertation relates Stanislavski's "method acting" to oral interpretation of literature.¹⁷⁰ The aim of drawing a connection between the two disciplines is to support oral interpreters "who grapple with the problem of meaning, analysis, and presentation for the end result of creativity in communication."¹⁷¹ In

¹⁶⁷ Bakalis, "Adult Education Learning Methodology."

¹⁶⁸ Ross Figgins, "Teaching as Dramatic Performance: An Inquiry into the Application of the Stanislavski Method to the Classroom" (PhD diss., University of Southern California, 1973), 124-125.

¹⁶⁹ Linda Plumblee, "Acting the dance: An application of the Stanislavski Acting Method" (master's thesis, Texas Women's University, 1989).

¹⁷⁰ Jack Neiman, "Stanislavski: His Acting Principles and Their Significance for the Field of Oral Interpretation" (PhD diss., University of California Los Angeles, 1977).

¹⁷¹ Neiman, "Acting Principles," 84.

addition to a very helpful summary of Stanislavski's System, Neiman lists practical applications of the method which are designed to use with students of oral interpretation. His insights on applications of the System are of interest to the present study because of their practical nature.

In the field of psychology, social psychologist Joseph Ehrenriech discusses the Stanislavski System as a tool for enhancing role performance in a study of 70 salesmen in his PhD dissertation.¹⁷² The System has even found its way into the field of theology where Shane Crombie's PhD dissertation in theological studies examines the Stanislavski System as a means for crafting an authentic preaching voice.¹⁷³

¹⁷² Joseph Ehrenriech, "The Value of the Stanislavski Method for Better Sociological Role Performance: An Experimental Analysis of the Effects of Professional Acting Training on Occupational Role Behavior" (PhD diss., New York University, 1963).

¹⁷³ Fr. Shane Christophe Crombie, "The Preacher's Role – Using Konstantin Stanislavski's System to Discover an Authentic Preaching Voice" (PhD diss., Aquinas Institute of Theology, 2014).

CHAPTER 3: STANISLAVSKI, A LIFE DEVOTED TO ARTISTIC DEVELOPMENT AND HIS SYSTEM

Overview

Konstantin Stanislavski (1863-1938) devoted his life to the task of elevating the art form of acting by studying it relentlessly, adapting and changing it, sharing his ideas with the actors and artists of his time, and eventually by writing and publishing written works about his System. His System was the first of its kind and is still the best-known and most prominent teaching method studied by actors, directors, and acting scholars in the United States, Western Europe, and Russia. His techniques have been expanded and adapted by influential acting teachers in the United States, most notably Lee Strasberg,¹

¹ Lee Strasberg (1901-1982) was an American actor, director, and pedagogue. After seeing the Moscow Art Theatre perform in the United States he studied acting with Stanislavski's students Maria Ouspenskaya and Richard Boleslavsky. He founded the Actor's Studio in New York which trained many famous American actors including James Dean, Marilyn Monroe, Jane Fonda, Dustin Hoffman, and Al Pacino. Strasberg is the author of *A Dream of Passion: The Development of the Method* and developed the "method" by adapting and expanding techniques found in Stanislavski's writings, especially the concept of affective memory. He is best known for his role as Hyman Roth in the movie *The Godfather: Part II*, which he played alongside his student, Al Pacino.

Sanford Meisner,² and Stella Adler.³ The methods generated through the adaptations of Stanislavski's work influenced an entire generation of actors in the "golden age" of American cinema (from the end of the silent era in 1917 to the 1960s). Stanislavski's emphasis on psychological realism permeated the silver screen and remains the standard for many acting coaches and directors today. As Lee Strasberg wrote of Stanislavski in 1987, "Probably no other name—other than Shakespeare's—is heard so often in the theater."⁴

Becoming a master at his craft was no small accomplishment given the extraordinary events and changes that Stanislavski endured. He began life as a privileged member of the Russian aristocracy and later had all his wealth and property taken from him. Despite many challenges, he never lost his lifetime focus on improving his craft and, unlike other members of the artistic elite who fled Russia after the Bolshevik Revolution, he stayed in his home country and made the best he could of his circumstances. As one scholar explains:

² Sanford Meisner (1905-1997) was an American actor and director. His method is called The Meisner Technique and was influential for many famous American actors such as Diane Keaton, Grace Kelly, Alec Baldwin, Sandra Bullock, Sydney Pollack, and Tom Cruise. His method is rooted in the teachings of Stanislavski, and rejects Strasberg's emphasis on affective memory in favor of what he called "the reality of doing."

³ American actress and teacher of acting, Stella Adler (1901-1992) also was the founder of the Stella Adler Studio of Acting in New York. She witnessed the Moscow Art Theatre's tour in America in the 1920s and studied with Maria Ouspenskaya and Richard Boleslavsky. She traveled to Moscow to meet Stanislavski and was given several insights into his System, which she incorporated into her own method. She trained actors including Marlon Brando, and Robert De Niro.

⁴ Lee Strasberg, *A Dream of Passion: The Development of the Method* (Boston: Little, Brown, & Co., 1987), 42.

Before his death in 1938, he witnessed three great revolutions: realism's overturn of nineteenth-century histrionics, modernism's rejection of realism, and Russia's political move from monarchy to communism. The first two shaped his career and made him world famous; the last turned him from a wealthy man into a poor one, from an artist who shaped modern theatre into one who was shaped by political forces.⁵

Students of acting are exposed to the System through Stanislavski's popular trilogy of books (*An Actor Prepares*, *Building a Character*, and *Creating a Role*) which serve as beginning acting textbooks, lectures, and workshop techniques. Modern theories of acting written after the publication of Stanislavski's methods draw a derivative theoretical lineage back to Stanislavski in the same way that most pianists can trace their artistic lineage back to the most prolific master-teachers from prior centuries: Beethoven, Liszt, and Leschetizky (among others). The widespread fame of Stanislavski's System throughout the United States and Europe, coupled with the longevity of his theories on acting, speak to the deeply important role that he played in the history and development of the performing arts.

Prior to writing about his life and the System, Stanislavski developed his ideas while working as an actor, director, and teacher in his "laboratories of experimentation." These laboratories included (i) his Moscow Society for Art and Literature established in 1888 with two fellow actors; (ii) the internationally acclaimed Moscow Art Theatre (MXAT) which he formed with fellow director Nemirovich-Danchenko⁶ in 1897; (iii)

⁵ Sharon Carnicke, "Stanislavsky's System: Pathways for the Actor," in *Actor Training*, ed. Alison Hodge (New York: Routledge, 2010), 14.

⁶ Vladimir Ivanovich Nemirovich-Danchenko (1858-1943) was a Russian theater critic, playwright, director, and theater administrator. He founded the Moscow Art Theater with Stanislavski in 1898 and founded the Moscow Art Theater School in 1943 after Stanislavski's death. His productions of Chekhov and Gorky introduced psychological realism to the Russian theater. Additionally, he founded the Moscow Art

Stanislavski's Opera Studio which he founded in 1918 under the auspices of the Bolshoi Opera in Moscow; and (iv) his last studio, the Opera-Dramatic, which he formed in 1934 with selected actors from the MXAT.⁷ Stanislavski's relentless approach to experimentation also led to his development of special terminology, in effect a language for actors, inspired in part by the language of music which he envied.

This chapter reviews (i) Stanislavski's early life and training, including aspects of his family and childhood, his preparatory work as an artist and actor, his opera training, and his stage and drama training including work in drama groups and at the Moscow Society of Art and Literature; (ii) the middle period of his life during which his ideas matured, and his stature grew through the MXAT; (iii) the final period of his life, including his American tour and his collaborations which resulted in the publication of his written works from which we get his System; and (iv) the most important ideas, processes, and key terminology in the System.

Musical Theater (1919) which was later called the Nemirovich-Danchenko Musical Theater (1923).

⁷ Rehearsal time in the MXAT was too valuable to be used for instruction and experimentations with the System. Teaching Studios (centers for "learning, experiment and research") were created for the actors within the theater who wanted additional training in the System. "[The Studios were] concerned with the problems of the actor's creative process (system), the educational formation of the artist, providing him with a set of practices, help through daily exercises and ... parallel performances." (Benedetti, *Stanislavski*, 206.) In total there were Four Studios at the MXAT (1912, 1916, 1920, 1921), The Opera Studio at the Bolshoi Opera Theater (1918) and The Opera Dramatic Studio (1935) which was the last group of actors that Stanislavski worked with before he died.

Early Life and Training

Konstantin Sergeyevich Alekseev was born January 18, 1863. He adopted the stage name Stanislavski at the age of eighteen when his career as an amateur actor was beginning to take shape.⁸ The young actor was destined for a life in the theater as he was raised in an aristocratic home by parents who placed a priority on merriment and diversion. His father, Sergei Bladimiorvich Alekseev was a manufacturer and industrialist who owned the country's largest factory known for making gold and silver thread.⁹ His mother, Elizaveta Vasilievna Alekseev "was the daughter of Marie Varley, a well-known Parisian actress in her time" who met and married his grandfather while on tour in St. Petersburg.¹⁰ Stanislavski was raised in an affluent environment in which "there were balls every day and young people could go to two or three houses in one evening."¹¹ The Alekseev family enjoyed the company of great artists and became well known for hosting "literary and musical soirees and concerts" in which they were regularly visited by actors, dancers, writers, and musicians from the artistic elite in Moscow.¹² In this environment Stanislavski flourished, later attributing the success of his System to the artistic exposure he enjoyed as a child.

⁸ Maria Ignatieva, "Stanislavski As Amateur," *The Routledge Companion to Stanislavski* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 14.

⁹ Christine Edwards, *The Stanislavsky Heritage: Its Contribution to the Russian and American Theatre* (New York: New York University Press, 1965), 27.

¹⁰ Stanislavsky, *My Life in Art*, 3.

¹¹ Stanislavsky, *My Life in Art*, 4.

¹² Benedetti, *Stanislavski: A Biography*, 6.

The Alekseiev family constructed a stage in their home where a three-year-old Stanislavski and his siblings would first perform for guests of their parents' estate. It was here that he received his introduction to the challenges of being a performer. He describes the feelings he experienced performing at a young age: the troublesome embarrassment that came from "meaningless inactivity onstage" as well as the pleasant rush of excitement at receiving applause from the audience. Because of these performances, he knew early in life "the living pleasure success can give, of being onstage and performing meaningful actions, and, on the other hand, the misery of failure, of just sitting in front of an audience."¹³ His early performances helped to shape the questions he would ask about the nature of creative experiencing on the stage.

In addition to the small home theater, the children in the Alekseiev home were consistently exposed to other forms of entertainment including the circus, puppet-theater, and Italian opera and attended public performances frequently.¹⁴ Stanislavski recalls with the most vivid detail the physical sensations he experienced while listening to Italian opera:

Memories of these Italian operas are not only engraved on my ear and eye but physically, i.e., I experience them not only as emotion but in my body. When I remember them I feel the same physical state that was aroused by Adelina's silvery top notes, her collaratura, her technique which made me gasp physically, her chest notes which almost made me pass out ... it was impossible to hold back a smile of satisfaction.¹⁵

¹³ Stanislavsky, *My Life in Art*, 5.

¹⁴ Stanislavski, *My Life in Art*, trans. Jean Benedetti, 9, 14, 17.

¹⁵ Stanislavski, *My Life in Art*, trans. Jean Benedetti, 20.

Aural memories of Italian opera remained present in Stanislavski's mind for the rest of his life and his recollections of opera are particularly interesting to this study because of the impact musicality had on the development of his System. Stanislavski explains in *My Life in Art* that his experiences "of sound, music rhythm, and voice... played an important role in [his] life as an artist."¹⁶ As noted in chapter 2, his experiences attending opera influenced his study of "voice and how to place it, nobility of sound, diction, rhythmical, musical inflexions, the physical essence of vowels, consonants, words and sentences, soliloquies. All of them applied to the demands of the drama," and therefore served as a catalyst for the development of his acting techniques.¹⁷

In 1877 the teenage actor's amateur debut took place on the Alekseev family estate in a new, professionally equipped theater built by his father. The first production marked the beginning of the Alekseev Circle: a family-run amateur theater company that would continue to grow throughout Stanislavski's young adulthood, solidifying his reputation in the community as a gifted actor and director. Participants were usually coerced from within the family and circle of close friends, but eventually the Alekseev Circle grew to include amateur actors and contributors from the community in and around Moscow.¹⁸ Although Stanislavski was generally unimpressed by his performances in 1877, the creation of the Alekseev circle led to his "decision to note down and analyze his performance" in his first of many detailed observation notebooks, a practice which he

¹⁶ Stanislavski, *My Life in Art*, trans. Jean Benedetti, 20.

¹⁷ Stanislavski, *My Life in Art*, trans. Jean Benedetti, 18.

¹⁸ Stanislavski, *My Life in Art*, trans. Jean Benedetti, 36.

continued “for the rest of his life, producing sixty years of notebooks.”¹⁹ His studious and dedicated observations “provided the basis for much of his published work” later in life.²⁰

Stanislavski considered his preparatory training in acting to have taken place during the years that he faithfully attended performances at the Maly Theater. The performances there influenced his learning “more than any other school” by teaching him how to “observe and see the beautiful.”²¹ He carefully prepared for each visit to the theater by studying the script ahead of time and cataloguing his observations in a scrapbook which contained “pictures and sketches of possible models for characterizations.”²² Stanislavski describes “in a few broad strokes” several actors whose performances inspired his personal and artistic growth. Two such artists were Vasili Zhivokin who “was always bright and happy”²³ and the actress Ermolova who “spent half a century onstage ... always played herself and yet each character was different from the others ... Ermolova always created her innumerable and individual characters with her own specific style.”²⁴ The qualities he observed in the masterful performances at the Maly Theater inspired Stanislavski to discover a path that led actors to perform characters which were enlivening and individualistic.

¹⁹ Benedetti, *Stanislavski*, 14.

²⁰ Benedetti, *Stanislavski*, 14.

²¹ Stanislavski, *My Life in Art*, trans. Jean Benedetti, 29.

²² Benedetti, *Stanislavski*, 17.

²³ Stanislavski *My Life in Art*, 30.

²⁴ Stanislavski, *My Life in Art*, trans. Jean Benedetti, 31.

In 1883 when he was twenty years old, Stanislavski auditioned and was accepted to the Moscow Theater School but spent only a short time enrolled as he found himself disappointed with the training and pedagogy represented.²⁵ Instead of receiving insight into the actor's inner creative mechanism, Stanislavski was asked to blindly copy the interpretation of the instructors and quickly became disillusioned with the notion of drama school. Additionally, his presence was required at the family business and he could not afford the time it took to continue his studies. Stanislavski left after just three weeks in what may be viewed as his first open rejection of the existing methods of actor training.

After leaving drama school Konstantin Sergeyeovich Alekseev gained popularity in the community of lesser-known players and amateur performers. Because of his association with the Alekseev family business he felt it necessary to take on a stage name for public performances. The stage name Stanislavski was borrowed from another amateur actor, Dr. Mako.²⁶ Benedetti remarks that "it was a safe name to adopt" because the Polish origins of the name Stanislavski would suggest humble beginnings and sufficiently mask his true identity as a member of the Russian bourgeois.²⁷

Stanislavski's association with Russia's musical elite was further in evidence in 1886 when the young actor was offered a position on the board of directors of the Russian Musical Society and Conservatoire, replacing his cousin Nikolai. The position

²⁵ Benedetti, *Stanislavski*, 21.

²⁶ Benedetti, *Stanislavski*, 24. Dr. Mako had been an admirer of the ballerina Stanislavski as a child and honored her with his stage name.

²⁷ Benedetti, *Stanislavski*, 24.

allowed him to come into contact with great musical artists such as Tchaikovsky and Taneyev. Additionally he met Vasily Safonov, the great conductor and the piano teacher of many famous Russian pianists including Alexander Scriabin, Nikolai Medtner, Josef Lhévinne, and Rosina Lhévinne.²⁸ Stanislavski also met the pianist Anton Rubenstein who “made a great impression on [him] and [was] extremely important for [his] artistic future.” With the rise of Russian National Opera Stanislavski’s love of music grew and he decided to begin training to become a professional opera singer.²⁹

From 1884 until 1887 Stanislavski worked on his vocal technique with Fyodor Komissarzhevski, a professor at the Moscow Conservatory.³⁰ His lessons with Komissarzhevski “extended beyond pure questions of vocal technique. Together they explored the problem of coordinating voice and body. Stanislavski hired a pianist to improvise while they moved, sat, stood or were simply silent in time and rhythm to the music.”³¹ His interest in rhythm and movement would later be in evidence by his introduction to Dalcroze Eurhythmics in 1911.³²

Unfortunately Stanislavski’s opera studies proved unsuccessful. The young singer’s voice lacked an operatic quality and actually produced a “croak.”³³ His struggle

²⁸ Stanislavski, *My Life in Art*, trans. Jean Benedetti, 45.

²⁹ Stanislavski, *My Life in Art*, trans. Jean Benedetti, 45.

³⁰ Benedetti, *Stanislavski*, 19.

³¹ Benedetti, *Stanislavski*, 20.

³² Lee, “Dalcroze: Eurhythmics.”

³³ Stanislavski, *My Life in Art*, trans. Jean Benedetti, 79.

with chronic laryngitis discouraged Stanislavski from pursuing his musical education further, and he commented on his failure:

...what a pity! It is such a pleasure, so easy to act in an opera, I mean *act* not sing...the composer has done everything for you, all you have to do is pass on what he has written and you are certain of success. I do not understand how anyone can fail to be carried away by what a talented composer has written. His music, his orchestration, his themes are so persuasive, clear and full of colour that you would think a corpse could play them. You must just not get in your own way but surrender to the magical power of sound.³⁴

Here Stanislavski recognized the artistic options that are inherent within a masterfully written musical score and suggested to musicians a vital key to creating imaginative performances: stay ‘out of your own way’ and surrender to the beauty of the sound created through the union of performing artist and composer.

Through his musical training, Stanislavski made discoveries that would significantly influence his theories on acting, most importantly, the idea of tempo rhythm. “I could not help noticing the way singers were able simultaneously to combine totally disparate rhythms. The orchestra and the composer maintain their own rhythm, which the singers parallel, but the chorus automatically move their hands up and down in another rhythm, and walk in another.”³⁵ The ability possessed by musicians to perform in one rhythm and move in another reminded Stanislavski of an actor’s ability to perform a certain outer action but possess a different and disparate inner action. In musicians he noticed the need for singers to recognize a physical rhythm, paying attention to the movements of their body as they correspond to the mood and actions present in the musical work.

³⁴ Stanislavski, *My Life in Art*, trans. Jean Benedetti, 80.

³⁵ Stanislavski, *My Life in Art*, trans. Jean Benedetti, 81.

After receiving a generous grant (sources are uncertain but suggest an amount of 25,000 or 35,000 rubles) Stanislavski opened the Moscow Society of Art and Literature in collaboration with actress Gilkeria Fedotova and her husband, actor and famous director Aleksander Fedotov, in 1888.³⁶ The opening was celebrated by “the whole of the intelligentsia” and Stanislavski was praised for creating an opportunity for “actors and artists, musicians and scholars to come together.”³⁷ While performing with the Moscow Society of Art and Literature Stanislavski met and fell in love with the leading lady Maria Petrovna Perevostchikova who performed under the stage name Lilina. In 1889 she became his wife.³⁸

Under the direction of Fedotov, Stanislavski received his most rigorous stage training. His every movement and motivation onstage was challenged, and he worked to the point of obsession on each role. In a production of *The Miserly Knight* Stanislavski struggled to produce the results that Fedotov required. Stanislavski researcher Bella Merlin writes that Fedotov interpreted the lead role of *Miserly Knight* not as a strong and romantic part, but as a “decrepit old man.”³⁹ At the age of 25, Stanislavski was not sure how to proceed with Fedotov’s vision of the character so he locked himself in the cellar of a castle in hopes of finding the inspiration he needed to interpret his director’s orders.⁴⁰

³⁶ Stanislavski, *My Life in Art*, trans. Jean Benedetti, 90.

³⁷ Stanislavski, *My Life in Art*, trans. Jean Benedetti, 90.

³⁸ Benedetti, *Stanislavski*, 25.

³⁹ Merlin, *Konstantin Stanislavski*, 4.

⁴⁰ Merlin, *Konstantin Stanislavski*, 4.

He describes his experiences of working to the point of complete exhaustion and never knowing what was expected of him by Fedotov. Despite the rigors of his training with Fedotov, Stanislavski reflects fondly upon the value of this relationship in the following statement from *My Life in Art*: “Learn as you take your first steps, to listen to, understand and love the harsh truth about yourselves! You must find out who can tell it to you. These are the people with whom you should talk about acting the most. Let them punish you often as they can.”⁴¹

Fedotov’s removal of many of Stanislavski’s poor acting habits (which Stanislavski referred to as “a surgical operation”)⁴² helped to refine his skills, yet questions about the “nature of the creative act or the inner life of the actor” still lingered in Stanislavski’s mind.⁴³ The technique he had developed was “purely external” governed by his keen observations of real life and the process of imitating and mirroring what he saw. The result of this technique was a performance which lacked inspiration and inner motives.⁴⁴ Stanislavski’s first attempts at directing in 1891 reflected an approach similar to the exacting training he received as “he imposed his interpretation on every role, working endlessly, and at times ruthlessly, to get every detail exact.”⁴⁵ In the first seasons that he acted as director Stanislavski admits that his directorial process was hurried and

⁴¹ Stanislavski, *My Life in Art*, trans. Jean Benedetti, 96.

⁴² Stanislavski, *My Life in Art*, trans. Jean Benedetti, 91.

⁴³ Benedetti, *Stanislavski: An Introduction*, 32.

⁴⁴ Benedetti, *Stanislavski: An Introduction*, 33.

⁴⁵ Benedetti, *Stanislavski: An Introduction*, 34.

prescriptive. It consisted of devising the production plan, determining the through-line of action and internal motives for each character, then playing through each role onstage, requiring that the actors in his company memorize his every motion. This method of instruction soon proved to be ineffective as the actors demonstrated uninspired performances with “nothing more than poor imitations of his exciting demonstrations.”⁴⁶ In the years following the establishment of the Moscow Society for Art and Literature, Stanislavski devoted a vast amount of energy to amateur performances and to refining his directing skills through keen observations of his own work combined with self-reflection and fastidious note-taking.

Generally dissatisfied with the state of Russian Theater in the 1890s Stanislavski believed that “if anyone was to save art it was himself.”⁴⁷ Professional actors in companies controlled by Imperial money allowed star-actors to dominate the stage, stopping the performance mid-scene to come to the front of the stage and greet roaring fans. The Imperial theater companies in Russia performed with big budgets but no manual for acting technique and very few acting coaches. Stanislavski wanted more for the theater and desired to provide actors with instructions that would guide them to the “creative state” in acting.⁴⁸ This quest to define the mystery of crafting an inspired performance lead Stanislavski to the development of his own theater.

⁴⁶ Merlin, *Konstantin Stanislavski*, 10.

⁴⁷ Benedetti, *Stanislavski*, 55.

⁴⁸ Benedetti, *Stanislavski*, 44.

Middle Period and the Moscow Art Theatre (MXAT)

After the death of his father Sergei Vladimirovich in 1893, Stanislavski was called upon to take a more substantial role in managing the Alekseev family business, which he did with great success and efficiency. “In the years following his father’s death, as well as negotiating [a] merger, he modernized the plant, ... [and] proved to be a model employer: at the factory he provided not only ideal working conditions – clean buildings and a large sick-bay, but a reading-room as well.”⁴⁹ In 1896 despite his accomplishments as head of the company it became clear that he only cared for his work in the theater. He began making plans to launch his second and what would become his most famous professional theatre company.⁵⁰ The success of the Moscow Society for Art and Literature resulted in national recognition of his talent, energy, and influence. It was time for his innovation to reach a wider audience. His appetite for the stage led him to create a theater wherein his theories could be tested—his laboratory—where he could continue to experiment.

Stanislavski’s “memorable meeting” with Nemirovich-Danchenko in 1897 led to the institution and development of the Moscow Art Theatre (MXAT), the crowning theatrical achievement for both directors. In a meeting in June 1897 they decided “to found an Art Theatre with seats at popular prices” and “to create an ensemble that would place artistic aims above individual vanity.”⁵¹ Additionally they agreed on their

⁴⁹ Benedetti, *Stanislavski*, 56.

⁵⁰ Benedetti, *Stanislavski*, 56.

⁵¹ Benedetti, *Stanislavski*, 61.

individual roles within the art theatre guided by their unique strengths and passionate convictions. Nemirovich-Danchenko would deal with all elements of choosing literature as he was a gifted playwright. Stanislavski would lead the actors and devise the overall artistic *mise-en-scene* (set design) for each production. Stanislavski dictated in his notes “The literary veto goes to Nemirovich-Danchenko, the artistic to Stanislavski.”⁵²

Nemirovich-Danchenko’s literary genius was displayed in the unique programming that became common in the Moscow Art Theatre repertoire. The Moscow Art Theatre’s well-received production of Tolstoy’s *Tsar Fyodor* caught the attention of Russian playwright Anton Chekhov. He agreed to give the Moscow Art Theater permission to produce his play *The Seagull* which had been a failure at the hands of another theater company two years earlier. Chekhov had fallen ill with tuberculosis and his sister warned Stanislavski on opening night that “another failure might prove fatal to [Chekhov].”⁵³ The pressure to deliver a successful performance was greatly impressed upon the actors and production team. At the end of the first act an actress fainted and Stanislavski’s own legs almost gave out but their efforts were rewarded when the audience met them with thunderous applause.

The rapid success of the MXAT’s production was experienced by pianists Josef and Rosina Lhévinne, who had the unfortunate luck to have scheduled their concert on the same night that the MXAT opened performances in Moscow. Wallace writes, “As [the Lhévinnes] played to the empty seats at the Hall of the Nobility, a small crowd at the

⁵² Stanislavski, *My Life in Art*, trans. Jean Benedetti, 160.

⁵³ Stanislavski, *My Life in Art*, trans. Jean Benedetti, 197.

Moscow Art Theater was witnessing the world premiere of Chekhov's *The Seagull*. Literally overnight, Stanislavsky and Nemierovich Danchenko, the company's directors, had become prophets of a new theatrical style."⁵⁴

The production of *The Seagull* set the theater apart not only as interpreters of Chekhov but as leaders in the new style of acting. *The Seagull* became the emblem of the MXAT and heralded great reforms. Stanislavski's tireless work and observation of "what worked" in theater became the insight which allowed him to "discover a new approach to [Chekhov's] work."⁵⁵ With the combination of Nemirovich-Danchenko's literary knowledge and Stanislavski's innovative work with the actors, talented young performers persevered in their search for the "truth in art." Actors working with Stanislavski's System were able to turn their focus away from the audience and into the character "bringing psychological depths to the surface; ensemble play was stressed and the actor was asked to subordinate his ego, taking satisfaction from the group's achievement."⁵⁶ In doing so their interpretation of *The Seagull* received national and international attention.

The artistic innovation they enjoyed was made possible in part because of the nature of Chekhov's writings. Stanislavski remarked in *My Life in Art*:

Only the Art Theater managed to convey something of what Chekhov had to offer...this is because we were fortunate enough to discover a new approach to his work. He is unique. And his uniqueness is our major contribution to the art of the theatre ... His plays are full of action, not outwardly but inwardly. The most inactive people the writer has created conceal highly complex, inner action. Chekhov more than anyone understood that stage action must be understood as

⁵⁴ Wallace, *A Century of Music Making*, 60.

⁵⁵ Paul Gray, "A Critical Chronology," *The Tulane Drama Review* Vol. 9 No. 2 (Winter, 1962), 21-60.

⁵⁶ Gray, "A Critical Chronology," 30.

psychological action and that on this alone, purged of all pseudo-theatre, that a play must be built. Just as physical action entertains and excites us superficially, psychological action slowly takes us over.⁵⁷

Stanislavski's ability to coax out the subtleties of the inner action inherent within *The Seagull* inspired Chekhov to continue writing, finishing several plays with the Moscow Art Theatre in mind. In the first seasons from 1899-1905 the MXAT premiered several of Chekhov's plays including *Uncle Vanya*, *Three Sisters*, and *The Cherry Orchard*. Acting professor Balukhaty described Stanislavski's process for actors playing one of Chekhov's characters: "Stanislavsky asserted that there could be no greater mistake than to attempt to 'act' in a Chekhov play; what the actor, according to Stanislavsky, had to do was 'to be,' that is to say, to live, to exist, by 'getting under the skin' of the Chekhov character by 'penetrating into the most secret places of his heart.'"⁵⁸

It was Stanislavski's 1904 production of Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* that captured the imagination of the young Russian pianist, Rosina Lhévinne who attended "six to eight plays a year" and afterward engaged in heated debates with friends about the performances over a glass of beer.⁵⁹ Mme. Lhévinne was an admirer of Stanislavski's work, recalling that before him "the plays were very traditional and quite stiff."⁶⁰ Her memories of *The Cherry Orchard* were recounted to her biographer 60 years after

⁵⁷ Stanislavski, *My Life in Art*, 161.

⁵⁸ Konstantin Stanislavski, *The Seagull Produced by Stanislavski: Production Score for the Moscow Art Theater*, ed. Balukhaty, trans. Magarshack (New York: Theater Books, 1952), 123.

⁵⁹ Wallace, *A Century of Music Making*, 81.

⁶⁰ Wallace, *A Century of Music Making*, 81.

viewing the play in vivid detail. Russian pianist and teacher George Kochevitsky described how performances at the MXAT influenced him as a young man in the 1920s and 1930s. He witnessed Stanislavski onstage as an actor many times and recalls for his biographer, “I remember him. I saw him in plays. He was a wonderful actor.”⁶¹ He remembered the feeling that “Stanislavski was looking for something:” the ability to be “natural” and “realistic” onstage.⁶² When asked if the Russian theater had an effect on Kochevitsky, he replied: “Influence, of course. Theater, any kind of art, and painting ... sculpture, architecture, everything, as a musician it helped me ... It cannot be explained exactly why. It enlarged my horizons.”⁶³

Despite the many breakthroughs Stanislavski experienced as a director in different theatrical genres including historical drama, psychological realism, and symbolism, he still felt like something was lacking in his abilities as an actor and in his System of actor training.⁶⁴ While on holiday in Finland 1906 he spent an afternoon “reliving [his] former creative process” and stumbled into a “great discovery, and understood a truth [he] had long known, that the actor’s state onstage when he faces an audience is contrary to nature and is the greatest hindrance to being creative in public.”⁶⁵ Stanislavski discovered that performers must demonstrate personal emotions on the stage by developing the

⁶¹ Squillace, *Memoirs of a Piano Pedagogue*, 360.

⁶² Squillace, *Memoirs of a Piano Pedagogue*, 360.

⁶³ Squillace, *Memoirs of a Piano Pedagogue*, 361.

⁶⁴ Edwards, *Stanislavski Heritage*, 86.

⁶⁵ Stanislavski, *My Life in Art*, trans. Jean Benedetti, 256.

ability to ‘tap into’ the creative state. Stanislavski noticed that in certain roles he had physically represented the signs of emotion without actually experiencing the emotion, “in other words, he had formed the habit of playing the outer characteristics without experiencing the emotions that led to them.”⁶⁶ He returned to the MXAT with a renewed obsession; something his colleagues referred to as “Stanislavski’s mania”: the formula for summoning the creative state in performance.⁶⁷

In her book *Stanislavski in Focus*, Sharon Carnicke described Stanislavski’s experimentation with “techniques aimed at answering at answering these nagging questions” about the creative state.⁶⁸ She continued: “Over the years he tested all ideas that came his way and tried every exercise from any plausible source—Yoga’s relaxation and visualization, Dalcroze’s eurhythmics, psychological theories of emotion from France and Russia.”⁶⁹ Stanislavski’s interest in yoga came from a young medical student who he met in France.⁷⁰ The young man “made a helpful suggestion. “Why invent exercises yourself, and why look for words to name which has already been named?” he asked. “I’ll give you these books. Read *Hatha Yoga* and *Raja Yoga*. They will interest

⁶⁶ Edwards, *Stanislavski Heritage*, 86.

⁶⁷ Stanislavski, *My Life in Art*, trans. Jean Benedetti, 257.

⁶⁸ Carnicke, *Stanislavski in Focus*, 32.

⁶⁹ Carnicke, *Stanislavski in Focus*. 32.

⁷⁰ Carnicke, *Stanislavski in Focus*, 170. The young man was Nikolai Vasilievich Demidov (1884-1953), a tutor for Stanislavski’s son Igor while they traveled in France.

you because many of your thoughts coincide with what's written there."⁷¹ Stanislavski's interest in yoga grew and he "became absorbed in these books by Yogi Ramacharaka."⁷²

Stanislavski's interest in Dalcroze eurhythmics is documented in a dissertation by James Lee. After Emil Jaques Dalcroze and his company made an appearance on the stage of the Moscow Art Theater in 1911, Stanislavski instituted eurhythmics classes for his actors which "took place from 10-11:30 in the mornings in the foyer of the theater."⁷³ These activities are of particular interest to this study as some of the Activities for pianists presented in chapter 4 reflect Stanislavski's interest in yoga and Dalcroze eurhythmics.

Also in 1911, the MXAT formally adopted Stanislavski's System.⁷⁴ It was clear that they needed to commit to a unified method although there were frustrations on the part of the cast due to Stanislavski's inability to plainly communicate his intentions at times.⁷⁵ He admitted as much saying "I had not found the right words which hit the target and were immediately convincing, which would open up a path to the heart and not the head ... because of these mistakes, our first appeals failed."⁷⁶ He was aware that many more experiments needed to take place before his ideas were fully formed. His

⁷¹ Carnicke, *Stanislavski in Focus*, 170.

⁷² Carnicke, *Stanislavski in Focus*, 170.

⁷³ Lee, *Dalcroze by Any Other Name*, 177.

⁷⁴ Edwards, *Stanislavski Heritage*, 91.

⁷⁵ Edwards, *Stanislavski Heritage*, 91.

⁷⁶ Stanislavski, *My Life in Art*, trans. Jean Benedetti, 297.

production of *Hamlet* in 1911 and *Mozart and Salieri* in 1914 proved to be instrumental in developing the idea of a through-line of action for each character which gives actors a sense of direction toward the end-goal of the play. Additionally, he decided that the experiments necessary for further discovery in the System could not take place in the Moscow Art Theatre “with its daily performances, its concerns over the budget and the box office, its heavy artistic commitments and the practical difficulties of a large enterprise.” The decision was made to create the First Studio, open to anyone who wanted to learn Stanislavski’s System.⁷⁷ There Stanislavski presented students with a course of study and his assistant Sulerzhitski oversaw the training process. After a monumental production of Dickens’ *The Cricket on the Hearth*, the actors of the First Studio and Stanislavski’s “new approach to art” rose to prominence and popularity in the public eye.⁷⁸

Amidst the success of the Moscow Art Theatre and the First Studio, political upheaval was brewing. A pair of revolutions in February and October of 1917 succeeded in overthrowing the tsarist autocracy and made way for the rise of the Bolshevik party in Russia. Stanislavski’s father had been a capitalist merchant of gold and silver thread and Stanislavski had continued to run the family business after his father’s death in 1893. After the fall of capitalism during the Revolution in October of 1917, land decrees were set in motion which abolished all claims to private property and ordered a redistribution of private wealth amongst the peasantry. Stanislavski’s family wealth was seized, he was

⁷⁷ Stanislavski, *My Life in Art*, trans. Jean Benedetti, 302.

⁷⁸ Stanislavski, *My Life in Art*, trans. Jean Benedetti, 304.

evicted from his home Carriage Row where he had lived since his marriage to Maria Lilina, and in 1918 he and his family were sent to live in a redistributed flat on Leontivievski Lane.⁷⁹ The flat had been previously the host to squatters who had been living communally and had destroyed much of the home. Stanislavski lived those winter months without heat, very little food, and none of the wealth that he knew as a young man. He grew ill with tuberculosis because of the cold. Regardless of this fate, Stanislavski chose to stay in Russia, unlike many of his peers. The hardship he experienced he used as fuel for one of the most productive periods in his artistic life, working tirelessly during this time of great suffering. He played many great roles including Othello (*Othello*), Astrov (*Uncle Vanya*), Vershinin (*Three Sisters*), and Gaev (*The Cherry Orchard*). Stanislavski managed the operations of the MXAT, the First Studio, the Second Studio, made guest directorial appearances at two amateur studios (the workers studio and the Habima studio for Jewish amateurs), gave private lessons to individuals and groups, and simultaneously opened and began productions with the Bolshoi Opera Studio, which took shape in the halls of his own apartment on Leontivivski Lane.⁸⁰

In the midst of his trying schedule and difficult living situation, Stanislavski's first formal lectures on the System were presented to the opera students of the Bolshoi Opera Studio in Moscow in 1921. These lectures were recorded in *Stanislavski on Opera*

⁷⁹ Stefan Aquilina "Stanislavski's Encounter with the Revolution" *Studies in Theater and Performance* Vol. 32, No. 1, doi: 10.1386/stap.32.1.79_1.

⁸⁰ Aquila, "Stanislavski's Encounter with Revolution," 83.

by Stanislavski and his student Rumiantsev which was not published until 1975.⁸¹ Stanislavski directed the Opera Studio of the Bolshoi Theatre from 1921-1928⁸² followed by a two-year hiatus due to illness and a return to directing in 1930 with a performance of *The Golden Cockerel*, Rimski-Korsakov's final opera in 1932.⁸³ The Opera Studio produced several operas including *Werther* by Massenet (1921), *Eugene Onegin* by Tchaikovsky (1922) and *La Boheme* by Puccini (1927).⁸⁴ The actor-musicians in Stanislavski's Opera Studio received thorough training in the principles of his acting techniques through a series of lectures that would later become *An Actor Prepares* and *Building a Character*.⁸⁵ In addition to knowledge of the theoretical principles of the System, actor-musicians received extensive training and completed

...daily exercises to music, sketches acted out for the purpose of giving a basis to the most varied kinds of body positions, movement in space, the freeing of muscular tenseness and finally, the principal and most interesting work the singing of arias and lyrical ballads (in the execution of which the students synthesized all the component parts of the "system").⁸⁶

Thanks to *Stanislavski on Opera* it is known that during this period (1921-1928) Stanislavski continued to express his belief in the correct tempo-rhythm which must be

⁸¹ Stanislavski and Rumiantsev, *Stanislavski on Opera*.

⁸² Stanislavski and Rumiantsev, *Stanislavski on Opera*, 3.

⁸³ Stanislavski and Rumiantsev, *Stanislavski on Opera*, 366.

⁸⁴ Stanislavski and Rumiantsev, *Stanislavski on Opera*, x.

⁸⁵ Stanislavski and Rumiantsev, *Stanislavski on Opera*, 3.

⁸⁶ Stanislavski and Rumiantsev, *Stanislavski on Opera*, 3.

discovered in every scene. He envied the detailed instructions given to musicians

indicating tempo, duration, pitch, dynamics, and phrasing in a musical score saying:

How lucky you are, you opera singers. The composer gives you everything: the rhythm for your feelings, the right intonations for each word, and the melody which is the pattern of your emotions. All you have to do is find a true basis for the notes given to you and make them your own. How much easier this is for you than for us dramatic actors, who have to create our own rhythms, compose the music of our spoken words, and provide true feelings out in the vacuum of the stage.⁸⁷

Actor-musicians in Stanislavski's Opera Studio worked with Russian opera singer and teacher N.M. Safonov (distinct from Vasily Safonov, the piano teacher and conductor) who helped with diction and vocal training. They also worked with Stanislavski's sister, Zindaïda Sokolova, who helped to identify the inner action within the operas, and brother Vladimir Alekseev, a fine musician who helped with vocal preparation and technique. While it is true that acting techniques seem directly applicable to opera, especially because of the dramatic nature of the libretto and the presence of stage direction, Stanislavski encouraged his actor-musicians to study all aspects of the instrumental score and give their full attention to the emotional material within the composition.

Final Years and Publications

The final period in Stanislavski's life is perhaps best delineated by the time when his fame spread more widely across the Atlantic Ocean, creating opportunities to demonstrate his ideas and to publish them to a wider audience of actors and theatre fans.

⁸⁷ Stanislavski and Rumiantsev, *Stanislavski on Opera*, 81-82.

The Moscow Art Theater toured the United States twice beginning in 1923, presenting several works in “New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, Boston, Washington, Pittsburgh, New Haven, Hartford, Newark, Cleveland, and Detroit.”⁸⁸ Stanislavski toured as both stage director and lead actor, leaving Nemirovich-Danchenko to continue handling the theater operations in Moscow. It was during this American tour that Stanislavski was introduced to Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood and her husband Norman. Their professional and personal relationship would later be of the utmost significance in bringing Stanislavski’s acting System to the United States.

During their first introduction Elizabeth Hapgood was asked to attend a meeting with President Coolidge acting as translator for the famous director and his traveling actors. While waiting for the meeting, Stanislavski began to perform “the elaborate eighteenth century way of greeting between a lady and a gentlemen, playing both parts.” Hapgood recalls that “Stanislavski performed these exquisite gestures with such grace and convincing intensity that we had completely forgotten where we were, when we were suddenly summoned into the President’s presence.”⁸⁹ In Stanislavski’s account of his tour in America he describes walking the streets of New York and seeing large posters with familiar faces, those of Russian pianists Sergei Rachmaninov, Alexander Siloti, and Joseph Hoffman. Beside those faces, a large crowd “humming with excitement” stood before an illuminated sign for the Moscow Art Theater.

⁸⁸ Gray, “Stanislavski in America”, p. 28.

⁸⁹ Elizabeth Hapgood, “Stanislavski in America,” *Tulane Drama Review* Vol. 9, No. 1 (Autumn 1964), pp. 19-21.

Stanislavski's autobiography (*My Life in Art*) was "commissioned by an American publisher to coincide with the MXAT's U.S. tour ... the book was, by Stanislavski's own admission, hastily put together."⁹⁰ The reason for this haste was personal in nature. Stanislavski's son Igor was ill with tuberculosis and was sent to begin treatment in Switzerland. Stanislavski, once a wealthy aristocrat, had lost his fortune in the Revolution and now relied on his own personal income in conjunction with his wife's to sustain their financial needs.⁹¹ His initial proposals to write a book on the System, and a history of the MXAT with a section on the development of the System were sent to Little, Brown, and Company and were both rejected. Stanislavski detested the idea of writing an autobiography full of "anecdotes about his life and childhood" but this was precisely what the publishers wanted. Stanislavski's financial situation persuaded him to agree to such an assignment and while on tour in the United States he wrote tirelessly with the help of several assistants including Alexander Koiranski and his secretary Olga Bokshanskaia.⁹² The book continued to grow in length and was still not finished at the end of the second tour in April of 1924. Upon threat of cancelation from the publishers Stanislavski finally finished the book at 150,000 words "two and a half times as long as originally planned."⁹³ The translation into English completed by a young J.J. Robbins was considered by Stanislavski to be a failure. He immediately began revisions upon

⁹⁰ Benedetti, *Stanislavski: An Introduction*, 104.

⁹¹ Benedetti, "Stanislavski in Translation," 267.

⁹² Benedetti, "Stanislavski in Translation," 268.

⁹³ Benedetti, "Stanislavski in Translation," 269.

returning from his tours abroad. His company set sail for Europe on May 17, 1924 and Stanislavski traveled to Switzerland to visit his son Igor, returning to the Soviet Union in August “to a much-changed world.”⁹⁴

Upon his return to Moscow, Stanislavski found that there was much to be done in his Art Theater as Nemierovich-Danchenko’s Musical Theater company was leaving for a tour of Europe and America (which lasted two years).⁹⁵ Nemierovich-Danchenko’s tour left Stanislavski to direct “nine productions, including three new Soviet plays, as well as four operas ... it was obviously impossible for him to undertake such a workload single-handed.”⁹⁶ Since the revolution Bolshevik “sovietizers” had taken up residence in the MXAT. The Central Repertoire Committee had been established to vet all productions and scripts to determine whether they adhered to Soviet ideals.⁹⁷ Soviet ideals did influence the production of *The Armored Train*, yet the play was another crowning achievement for the Moscow Art Theatre and a testament to the effectiveness of the System.

Nemerovich-Danchenko returned from his American tour in 1928 and Stanislavski, following orders to ‘slow down,’ vacationed in Germany with his wife and family. In October of 1928, he returned to the Soviet Union to participate in the Moscow Art Theatre’s thirty-year anniversary celebration gala. Stanislavski was scheduled to

⁹⁴ Benedetti, *Stanislavski*, 280.

⁹⁵ Benedetti, *Stanislavski*, 283.

⁹⁶ Benedetti, *Stanislavski*, 284.

⁹⁷ Benedetti, *Stanislavski*, 289.

perform highlights from favorite productions within the MXAT repertoire. Benedetti writes that he “approached the forthcoming celebrations with a sense of foreboding” due in part because of the political tension that had infiltrated his theater, and the “heavy round of receptions, official ceremonies, meals ... and going to bed at three in the morning” which would accompany the event.⁹⁸ In the middle of *Three Sisters* Stanislavski suffered a heart attack onstage, unknown to the audience. “Stanislavski had once said to an actor ‘You can die on the stage but you can’t miss an entrance ... His performance, according to eye-witnesses, was exceptional despite the fact that he had suffered a massive heart attack.’”⁹⁹ Stanislavski collapsed offstage after the second standing ovation and would not set foot on the stage again. After the heart attack, the 65 year old aging actor and director was immobilized for several months. Benedetti writes of his recovery in Moscow: “Stanislavski’s health became a matter of national concern. On November 18 [the local newspaper] published a bulletin giving details of his temperature, night and morning, and his pulse rate.” Because of his stature in the Soviet Union as a national treasure the decision was made to send Stanislavski away to recover at public expense.

In May of 1929, when he was finally well enough to travel he went to Badenwilder, Bavaria where Chekov had died some years before. Bedridden and weak he finally decided to commit to writing his System; or as Sharon Carnicke explains, “only in 1928, after a serious heart attack forced him to stop acting, did he focus squarely on the

⁹⁸ Benedetti, *Stanislavski*, 302.

⁹⁹ Benedetti, *Stanislavski*, 302.

project.”¹⁰⁰ Stanislavski was joined by a small party including his American friends Norman and Elizabeth Hapgood. Having decided to present his System as a fictional “diary” of an acting student he worked on a draft which he called *The Diary of a Pupil* recounting the learning of a young actor named Kostia, the diminutive of his own name, Konstantin.¹⁰¹ One night he read aloud from his draft while in Germany with the Hapgoods. Benedetti writes that “it was a momentous evening, for it was then that the Hapgoods decided, as it were, to ‘take him up.’”¹⁰² During his remaining months in Germany Ms. Hapgood would translate Stanislavski’s text, and Mr. Hapgood would edit, make cuts, and provide suggestions for improvements. They supported him financially through a fund set up for donations by their wealthy friends in the United States, as well as with their own money from time to time.¹⁰³

As a result of this relationship and his circumstances Stanislavski granted Elizabeth Hapgood power of attorney with the power to “negotiate publication of *An Actor Prepares* [the first year of an actor’s study] and other unspecified works, four in number, either in book or serial form in papers and journals. She was also authorized to negotiate motion picture rights and was empowered to recover any monies she might have spent as ‘underwriting’ and to receive royalties on behalf of Stanislavski and his

¹⁰⁰ Carnicke, *Stanislavski in Focus*, 28.

¹⁰¹ Benedetti, “Stanislavski in Translation,” 271.

¹⁰² Benedetti, “Stanislavski in Translation,” 271.

¹⁰³ Benedetti, “Stanislavski in Translation,” 272.

heirs.”¹⁰⁴ At this time Stanislavski also agreed to allow the book outlining his System to be split into two parts.

This decision—to split the System into two books—was not an easy one. Stanislavski recognized that if this was to take place it would be necessary to write a preface to the first book outlining the entirety of the System. Benedetti laments that “unfortunately such a preface was never written and Stanislavski’s fears were all too sadly confirmed by the subsequent history of the teaching of the System.”¹⁰⁵ The Russian text received some scrutiny from Soviet officials concerned that his ideas would be considered ‘idealist’ and certain words including the term ‘magic’ were not encouraged. Stanislavski quite cleverly asserted that he had not invented these terms but rather that they had arisen naturally from the process of acting and directing in the Moscow Art Theatre.¹⁰⁶ He also challenged his critics saying “if anyone else could find new terms” to describe his system “he would accept them.”¹⁰⁷ In order to placate the Soviet authorities he added a preface and reworked parts of the last two chapters. In addition he acknowledged that his theories were formulated before the rise of the Bolsheviks and therefore not a representation of Bolshevik ideals.¹⁰⁸ Stanislavski’s “diary” of the first

¹⁰⁴ Benedetti, “Stanislavski in Translation,” 272.

¹⁰⁵ Benedetti, “Stanislavski in translation,” 272.

¹⁰⁶ Benedetti, *Stanislavski*, 321.

¹⁰⁷ Benedetti, *Stanislavski*, 320-321.

¹⁰⁸ Benedetti, *Stanislavski: An Introduction*, 106.

year of an actor's training, as published in English by Hapgood, became *An Actor Prepares*.¹⁰⁹

Stanislavski experienced general unrest upon his return in 1930 to the Soviet Union. The country was disturbed by the conversion to centralization. At this time, “the first steps had been taken towards the enforced collectivization of agriculture; heavy industry was being developed with little regard to human cost.”¹¹⁰ Stanislavski returned to find the degradation of his MXAT and reported feeling completely alone.¹¹¹ The presence of governmental control on the creative output of the MXAT weighed on Stanislavski and he was forced to run the theatre on his own, still quite ill. Despite his poor health Stanislavski embarked on his last, most desperate “attempt to preserve and transmit the artistic traditions and the ethic of the Art Theatre as he knew them” in the creation of the Opera-Dramatic Studio:

From 1934-1938 Stanislavski turned his political isolation at home ... into productive work with selected actors from the Moscow Art Theatre in his last Studio, the Opera-Dramatic ... [where] he was privately examining aspects of drama unauthorized by the State. During those years, he was experimenting with a new rehearsal technique that he provisionally called “the method of physical actions.”¹¹²

This method was based on the idea that a play was like a music score which “encodes actions, and that the words, like the notes, suggest what and how the actors, like

¹⁰⁹ Benedetti, *Stanislavski: An Introduction*, 106.

¹¹⁰ Benedetti, *Stanislavski*, 319.

¹¹¹ Benedetti, *Stanislavski*, 326.

¹¹² Carnicke, *Stanislavski in Focus*, 189.

musicians, need to play.”¹¹³ It appears that Stanislavski felt also that such a score “was best discovered by the actor through an improvisatory approach to analysis, rather than through extended discussion at the table.”¹¹⁴

In 1937 Hapgood had returned to Moscow for a visit with Stanislavski while he worked with his Opera-Dramatic Studio and was promised manuscripts for the balance of the work they started in 1929. Unfortunately, Stanislavski died in 1938 and World War II began the following year. In accordance with Stanislavski’s wishes, his son Igor sent manuscripts to Elizabeth Hapgood in 1949 at which time she arranged publication in English of *Building a Character*.¹¹⁵ The manuscripts sent to Hapgood were for *Building a Character* and *Creating a Role* (viewed as the third year of an actor’s training) and were actually collections of essays and speeches organized as ‘material for a book’ rather than a finished product ready for publication. Both English language publications handled by Hapgood suffered considerable cuts and edits to the material. For the reasons set out in chapter 2 of this document, Review of Literature, the three years of an actor’s training which are relied on in this study are the translations done most recently by Benedetti as two volumes: *An Actor’s Work* (encompassing Year One and Year Two) and *An Actor’s Work on a Role* (typically viewed as Year Three in the diary format).

The desire of Stanislavski to keep working so vigorously in his later years, particularly from 1934 to 1938 with the Opera-Dramatic Studio, is another reflection of

¹¹³ Carnicke, *Stanislavski in Focus*, 190.

¹¹⁴ Carnicke, *Stanislavski in Focus*, 190.

¹¹⁵ Benedetti, *Stanislavski: An Introduction*, 106-107.

his feeling that his System was not quite finished and perhaps needed something more. His reluctance to finalize his writings together with self-doubts both had an impact on what we see as his System, but neither reduces its credibility and impact. Jean Benedetti explains it this way:

What we receive as the ‘system’ originated from [Stanislavski’s] attempt to analyse and monitor his own progress as an artist and his attempts to achieve his ideas as an actor and meet his own developing standards, and it is all the more valuable for being born of concrete activity since the solutions he found were lived and not the result of speculation or abstract theory. The ‘system’ is his practice examined, tested and verified.¹¹⁶

In addition, Stanislavski saw his System as something organic that was always evolving and improving:

This reticence to publish was due not only to a lack of confidence but also to Stanislavski’s constant awareness of the provisional nature of all his findings. Not only was it difficult for him to express his ideas coherently and clearly, but he also realized that what he had written no longer corresponded to his actual practice.”¹¹⁷

While actors and later teachers found his System revolutionary, it is this evolutionary aspect which is relevant to considering what to draw from his written works. This is especially true when considering the physical aspects of the System which Stanislavski continued to work on and to clarify until the time of this death. In the end, one can see how difficult it must have been for the Hapgoods when attempting to get his System published in any form while Stanislavski was alive. Stanislavski scholar Jean Benedetti

¹¹⁶ Benedetti, *Stanislavski: An Introduction*, 1.

¹¹⁷ Benedetti, “Stanislavski in Translation,” 267.

went so far as to conclude, “Left to himself, Stanislavski would never have published anything.”¹¹⁸

It is reasonable to conclude from reviewing Stanislavski’s life in the theater that he was deeply concerned with presenting “truthful acting” and with changing the trend in theater practices that prevailed when he was young. He was not the first to break away from this trend in Russian theater.¹¹⁹ Mikhail Shchepkin (1788-1863) before him had openly criticized the “artificial, declamatory style” of the Russian theater in the nineteenth-century. Shchepkin, a “great actor of the Maly Theater was called ‘the father of realism’ because he was the first to introduce truthful and realistic acting into the Russian theater.”¹²⁰ The acting that offended Shchepkin and later Stanislavski was the artificial style of acting found in vaudeville and melodrama which featured grandiose gestures, strict adherence to diction, elocution, and other outward forms of vocal technique.

Stanislavski called this acting “the art of representation,” which consisted of clichés, and stock and trade responses to emotional stimuli.¹²¹ The star actor in a stock and trade production was at the service of the audience and could be “called out” by audience members during a scene. While the other actors “froze, doll-like” mid-scene, the “called out” actor would “come centre stage and receive wild applause,” after which

¹¹⁸ Benedetti, “Stanislavski in Translation,” 267.

¹¹⁹ Bella Merlin, *The Complete Stanislavski Toolkit* (Hollywood: Drama Publishers), 17.

¹²⁰ Sonia Moore, *The Stanislavski System* (New York: Viking Press, 1965), 24.

¹²¹ Stanislavski, *Actor’s Work*, 24.

the scene could continue.¹²² Stanislavski concluded that the answer was to be found in “feelings” and not the use of mechanical “tricks,” saying:

This kind of acting has beauty, but no depth. It is effective, rather than deep. Form is more interesting than content ... True, acting of this kind can make a considerable impression, one which grips you while you are watching leaves you with beautiful memories, but these impressions don't warm your heart or go very deep. Its effect is acute but transitory. You marvel, but you don't believe.¹²³

While Shchepkin may have criticized this type of acting Stanislavski was the first to develop a System that would work to replace it. In contrast to “the art of representation” Stanislavski developed the art of experiencing teaching his actors to communicate the underlying idea found in the text through the use of subtle interpretive techniques that worked to strengthen the inner life of the actor in a role. In this endeavor, the work of Konstantin Stanislavski was unprecedented.

In addition to his published writings, generations of actors who worked with Stanislavski saw his System firsthand through his studios and the world witnessed the plays and operas that he directed. The Moscow Art Theatre toured and performed in major cities in Europe including Berlin, Prague, Vienna, Frankfurt, Hanover, Karlsbad, Weisbaden, and Warsaw and major cities in the United States including New York City, Chicago, Philadelphia, Boston, Washington, Pittsburgh, New Haven, Hartford, Newark, Cleveland, and Detroit.¹²⁴ Many of the actors he worked with went on to share their experience and his methods with others. Sonia Moore, a Russian actress who worked

¹²² Merlin, *Konstantin Stanislavsky*, 7.

¹²³ Stanislavski, *Actor's Work*, 26.

¹²⁴ Paul Gray, “A Critical Chronology,” *Stanislavski in America*, ed. Erika Munk (New York: Hill and Wang, 1966), 140-144.

with Stanislavski and the Moscow Art Theatre before his death, writes that “before Stanislavski, drama schools everywhere in the world taught only the physical elements of an actor’s training: ballet, fencing, voice, speech, diction ... there was no *inner acting technique*.”¹²⁵ Moore regarded his System as “the first theory of theater art” and his development of this approach required unremitting commitment over a long period of time.¹²⁶

Before his death Stanislavski continued to work, write, and direct the Opera-Dramatic Studio in a master-class format, meeting students in his home. His health (and perhaps his political views¹²⁷) during these last four years prevented him from entering the halls of the Moscow Art Theatre until his death in 1938, when his body was carried to the theater, decorated with Soviet order. Soon after his death the Opera Dramatic studio performed an unfinished staging of *Tartuffe* which they had worked on with Stanislavski for two years following the formula: “precise physical actions leading to precise emotions, precise rhythms for sections, precise expression in voice and body.”¹²⁸ The painstaking rehearsals paid off proving the viability of Stanislavski’s “new advances in acting technique. What [the audience] had seen had been truthful in terms of human behavior and viable in terms of theatre.”¹²⁹ This testament to the viability of his System

¹²⁵ Moore, *Stanislavski System*, 26.

¹²⁶ Moore, *Stanislavski System*, 26.

¹²⁷ Anatoly Smeliansky, afterword to *An Actor’s Work* by Konstantin Stanislavski, trans. Benedetti, 686.

¹²⁸ Benedetti, *Stanislavski*, 340.

¹²⁹ Benedetti, *Stanislavski*, 340.

would undoubtedly lead to its propagation throughout the Soviet Union, Europe, and the United States.

What is the System?

At this point, having acknowledged the success and impact of Konstantin Stanislavski and his System, it would be perfectly normal for those who are new to Stanislavski to ask, “what is this System?” The answer cannot be found in or understood through a chart or a series of bullet points. It must be taken for what it is, a collection of the best ideas and methods developed over a long period of investigation, trial and error, and observation. Stanislavski explains the point this way:

It is customary to call what we have been studying “the Stanislavski system.” That is a mistake. The strength of this method lies precisely in the fact that no one conceived it, no one invented it.

We are born with this creative capacity, this “system” inside us. Creativity is a natural need and you would think we would be incapable of creating other than correctly according to the “system.” But, astonishingly, we lose what nature has given us the moment we walk onstage and instead of creating we posture, counterfeit, playact and represent.¹³⁰

In developing the System, Stanislavski focused his attention on the actor, empowering the actor’s intuition and ability to analyze the emotional and psychological material in her role to give realistic and compelling performances. In other words, the System he created does not focus on what an actor should do, but on how an actor can find out what to do.¹³¹

¹³⁰ Stanislavski, *Actor’s Work*, 611.

¹³¹ Norvelle, “Stanislavski Revisited,” 37.

While it was rare for Stanislavski to write or present material about his System outside of MXAT and the actors he worked with, we do have an early view of his process for actors in a paper he wrote and delivered in 1909. In this paper Stanislavski argued that the “actor’s art consisted of six principal processes”:

The preparatory process of the will. The actor prepares himself for future creation by getting to know the author’s work and becoming enthusiastic to stimulate the desire to create;

The process of searching. The actor looks within and outside for the psychological material needed to create;

The process of experience. The actor adapts himself to an inner and outer image of his character, and to the feelings of this character as if they were his own feelings;

The process of physicalizing. The actor creates visibly, for himself.

The process of synthesis. The actor combines the process of experiencing and physicalizing so the two processes develop and help each other; and

The process of effect. The actor presents to the audience so that it has an effect on them.¹³²

His “process” for actors continued to evolve and sharpen, but rather than a neatly defined lecture, the more complete process must be deduced from the fictional diaries found in *An Actors Work* and *An Actor’s Work on a Role*. In these later written works,

¹³² Benedetti, *An Introduction*, 40-41.

Stanislavski shares his carefully developed terms and phrases which he viewed as intrinsic to his methods.

Stanislavski viewed his terminology as a “grammar” for actors.¹³³ He envied the unifying terms used by composers of music, terms such as *rubato*, *crescendo*, *allegro*, *rallentando*, and others that give performers of the composer’s work clues that point to his artistic and musical specifications. Other elements such as pitch, rhythmic duration, instrumentation, and phrasing are also indicated in the score. Before Stanislavski, actors did not have a unifying vocabulary for discussing the artistic interpretive elements of their craft and he created his to describe techniques and strategies necessary in the creation of realistic personas.

The later and more evolved System that Stanislavski shared in his books is a process that uses this acting grammar, but one which is not always a neat, chronological process. This is, in part, because Stanislavski attempted to address the emotional, psychological, and physical issues faced by actors; and the methods he used often overlapped such that they helped actors in two or three of these aspects of performance.

Nevertheless, for the purposes of this study, the System may be summarized in rough chronological form that follows five categories of preparation techniques for actors. These categories are useful in considering how to adapt acting exercises from the System in ways that best address the performance challenges faced by the college-level pianist. They are:

- (i) Analyzing the details of the play and the character;

¹³³ A Glossary of Key Terms in the Stanislavski System is provided in Appendix A.

- (ii) Understanding the inner life of the character;
- (iii) Creating emotion memory;
- (iv) Discovering the action; and
- (v) Sharing the character on stage.

Analyzing the Details of the Play and the Character

The initial part of Stanislavski's process for actors involved what came to be known as the round-table analysis. Stanislavski instituted long periods of reading and analyzing the plays put on by the Moscow Art Theater. The cast and directors were all involved in reading out-loud and analyzing the concrete details of the characters within the play (the given circumstances) and those of the play as a whole (the super-objective). This process was critical to Stanislavski because each character was placed in these circumstances by the author. The actor must understand the character's role, time-period and location, social status, gender, life circumstances, and other pieces of information about the character and the play as a whole. This vital information informs the actor's range of appropriate choices and interpretations.

Through a process of investigation the actor will discover the character's action: what a character does in order to achieve or acquire her personal goal or objective within the play. Action does not have to include physical movement and refers to both the internal and external drives of the character in every moment onstage which are present in order to draw closer to what she ultimately wants or needs: her objective. These actions are usually communicated by an internal transitive verb such as 'I summon you,'

‘I intimidate you,’ or ‘I seduce you.’¹³⁴ By determining the action in each bit or section of the play, actors will discover the through-line of action, a sequence of actions which leads the character to the super-objective, the ultimate goal of the play.

Understanding the Inner Life of the Character

Through a process of analysis, thought, experimentation, reflection, and exercises, Stanislavski wanted his actors to discover the inner life of the character, their interactions with other characters in the play, their wants, needs, desires, and drives. This process determines the subtext (circumstances communicated through “specific intonation, looks, gestures, pauses, or stillness” in light of Stanislavski’s admonition that “a person says only ten per cent of what lies in his head, ninety per cent remains unspoken”¹³⁵) and Stanislavski used techniques that strengthen the imagination which “takes the initiative in the creative process, drawing the actor along behind it.”¹³⁶

Through these techniques the System is frequently associated with something Stanislavski called the magic if which addresses the question, “What would I do if I were in this character’s same situation?” This question strengthens the actor’s imagination by creating a scenario that is connected to their own personality, beliefs, and logic. To fully answer this question actors must discover their will—their desire to solve ‘the problem’

¹³⁴ Bella Merlin, *Konstantin Stanislavski* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 157.

¹³⁵ Vladimir Toporkov, *Stanislavski in Rehearsal: The Final Years* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 181.

¹³⁶ Stanislavski, *Actor’s Work*, 63.

and move them to action.¹³⁷ And in these ways actors gradually acquire belief (“to inhabit the universe created by the stage,” and believing the truth of the character will not only affect the actor’s level of comfort and fluidity onstage but also has the ability to “produce active participation in the audience”¹³⁸). This process allows actors to engage in the illusion of the first time, in which the actor is able to recreate the same performance night after night as if it were their first time experiencing the material.

Creating Emotion Memory

Stanislavski believed that while an actor pretends to be someone else they can never actually *be* someone else. Rather, a character must be played through the lens of the actor’s own personality and lived experience. In order to communicate the character’s given circumstances and subtext convincingly the actor must connect with similar or shared experiences from their own personal history by recalling moments that generated similar emotions—emotion memory. Stanislavski suggested a number of ideas and exercises designed to get actors to use their own emotional memories triggered by sounds, speech, sight, or other sensory perceptions which would make their performance “direct, sincere, fresh and true” even when repeated.¹³⁹

Stanislavski taught that an actor must use their own mind, will, and feeling (by tapping into emotion memory) in order to engage in the creative process, explaining this as follows:

¹³⁷ Carnicke, *Stanislavski in Focus*, 227.

¹³⁸ Benedetti, *An Introduction*, 48.

¹³⁹ Stanislavski, *Actor’s Work*, 195.

When a real actor embarks on Hamlet's soliloquy "To be or not to be" does he merely deliver the author's ideas, which are not his own, as mere words, and merely carry out the moves the director has given him? No, he gives much, much more, and invests the words with something of his own, his personal representation of life, his heart, his living feelings, his will. In such moments an actor naturally evokes memories of things he has experienced in life, which are similar to the life, ideas and feelings of the role.

... It is essential that the audience should feel his inner relationship to what is being spoken, so that they desire the same thing as his creative will.¹⁴⁰

Emotion memory (sometimes also referred to as affective memory) was critical to good acting for Stanislavski because it was the connection between how an actor prepares and how they perform on stage. It is key to unlocking the art of experiencing through which the actor feels "the alien life" of the character "as if it was his own."¹⁴¹ In this "ideal kind of acting" the actor recreates the role night after night "in full view of the audience" publicly exposing the actors inner creative life.¹⁴² This requires the actor to remain "active" and "improvisatory" regardless of how well-rehearsed and well-studied they are in the role.¹⁴³

Emotion memory is a term borrowed from the research of French psychologist Theodule Ribot (1839-1916) which describes the innately human ability to "remember previously experienced emotional states by recalling the accompanying physical sensations."¹⁴⁴ Lee Strasberg placed a great deal of emphasis on affective memory in his

¹⁴⁰ Stanislavski, *Actor's Work*, 279-280.

¹⁴¹ Benedetti, *An Introduction*, 55.

¹⁴² Carnicke, *Stanislavski in Focus*, 217.

¹⁴³ Carnicke, *Stanislavski in Focus*, 217.

¹⁴⁴ Carnicke, *Stanislavski in Focus*, 213.

acting method turning it into an exercise in which actors would re-live personal memories in vivid detail. Stanislavski believed that this could act as a distraction from being present in the ‘today, here, now’ of onstage performance, which in turn could “disturb the actor’s “mental hygiene” and distract from the play.”¹⁴⁵ Instead of focusing on past experiences Stanislavski encouraged his actors to collect “a store of affective memories” by attending concerts, viewing works of art, participating in new experiences, and becoming a voracious reader of all literature, newspapers, and poetry.¹⁴⁶

Discovering the Score of Action

Stanislavski believed that an actor must do more than just discover the action which “denotes what the actor does to solve the *problem*, set before him by the *given circumstances*.”¹⁴⁷ He was always very concerned with physicalizing or physical action which he also refers to as the life of the human body in a role. This is the outward embodiment of the character and the physical movements and gestures which must be governed by the facts of the play and the laws of nature. For example, an actor looking into the distance as if searching for a ship on the horizon would do so in keeping with the natural placement of that physical gesture and would avoid looking out and up toward the ceiling of the auditorium.¹⁴⁸ This kind of physical action can be an “inner or outer action which carries with it a psychological motivation” (for example, walking across the room

¹⁴⁵ Carnicke, *Stanislavski in Focus*, 214.

¹⁴⁶ Carnicke, *Stanislavski in Focus*, 214.

¹⁴⁷ Carnicke, “Stanislavsky’s System,” 15.

¹⁴⁸ Carnicke, *Stanislavski in Focus*, 220.

is simply a physical movement, but walking across a room to embrace a loved one, or to escape from some kind of danger is a physical action because it has a psychological purpose).

In the process of discovering the action Stanislavski believed that actors need to work together to learn the score of physical action which is discovered through rehearsals that are completely improvised and performing “silent etudes” in which the score of physical action is experienced (techniques which are generally described as Stanislavski’s method of physical action). In Stanislavski’s later years he also spoke and wrote of a process he called active analysis. This is a method of rehearsal in which the actor uncovers sub-textual meaning of their part through improvisation before the script has been memorized.

Sharing the Character on Stage

An important part of what happens on stage is something that Stanislavski called communion (also called communication). This refers to the connections between groups of actors onstage and between the performers onstage and the audience. Communion is achieved through the focus of attention on the actor’s scene partner through eye contact and through an exchange of energy that is inevitably found in human interaction.¹⁴⁹ Stanislavski’s idea relates to the Yogic concept of *prana* in which humans radiate outward through “pranic rays of energy.”¹⁵⁰ This intense form of communication causes

¹⁴⁹ Merlin, *Konstantin Stanislavski*, 158.

¹⁵⁰ Carnicke, *Stanislavski in Focus*, 222.

the actors to be “in each other’s grasp” which in turn draws the audience into a state of communication with the magnetic energy they are witnessing onstage.¹⁵¹

In performance the actor is faced with the crippling effect that the “black hole” of the audience has on their comfort and feeling of ease onstage. Stanislavski asserted that the secret to feeling free onstage was simple: “*to divert your attention from the auditorium you must become engrossed in what is happening onstage.*”¹⁵² To this end the actor must develop concentration and attention, the actor’s ability to focus on what they are doing while performing without allowing themselves to become distracted by the pull of the audience. The initial steps that an actor takes to understand her role (understanding the inner life of the character, developing emotion memory, creating the score of action) allow for the success of the final performance. The more work on a role has been accomplished through analysis, emotional and physical rehearsal strategies, and improvisation techniques the greater the ability for concentration and attention in performance. However Stanislavski understood how challenging it can be to appear natural onstage despite all the best preparatory work on a role. For this reason he encouraged his actors to practice an exercise which he called circles of attention. After practicing this activity each actor would develop the ability to focus their attention only on what they could see within the pool of light cast by a spotlight on the stage. Over time the circle of light would grow increasingly larger to encompass the entire auditorium,

¹⁵¹ Merlin, *Konstantin Stanislavski*, 159.

¹⁵² Stanislavski, *Actor’s Work*, 90.

however the actors who had increased their powers of concentration were able to focus their attention on the reality they were creating onstage.

Conclusion

In *An Actor's Work*, Tortsov—Stanislavski's fictional director—admonished his students to ceaselessly “fulfill the basic goal of our art, and that consists in the creation of the *life of the human spirit of a role in a play and in giving that life physical embodiment in an aesthetic, theatrical form*. The ideal of the genuine artist is contained within these words.”¹⁵³ Tortsov's short statement captures the goal of Stanislavski's System, but in achieving this goal, the System calls on students to open their minds, bodies, and souls to constant experimentation and learning in ways that often seem removed from a stage performance. But the connections and usefulness of his methods cannot be denied in light of their success for actors.

Stanislavski's comprehensive approach to the mind, body, and soul (emotion) in his System has been described as holistic in part because the teacher, actor, and director believed that these three elements are not separate units, but instead that they exist within a “*psychophysical continuum*.”¹⁵⁴ In order to help his actors achieve an understanding of the psychophysical nature of experiencing, his System is intended to provide a series of steps by which actors can summon a creative state. The creative state is that which, in performance, allows actors to experience the creation of a role that is: (i) in the moment,

¹⁵³ Stanislavski, *Actor's Work*, 36.

¹⁵⁴ Carnicke, “Stanislavsky's System,” 7.

(ii) in communion with the audience and the other members of the cast, and (iii) fully committed to the truth of their own life within the role they are playing. Stanislavski taught that “if the preparatory work is right, the results will take care of themselves” making his formula of experiencing “today, here, now” a viable technique for constructing a convincing performance.¹⁵⁵ He believed that the essence of his System was, “On one side the technique of getting the subconscious to start working. On the other, the ability not to get in its way once it does.”¹⁵⁶

With this in mind, this study turns next to specific adaptations of Stanislavski’s ideas and techniques which may be used by college-level pianists to address common performance challenges. These challenges, like those of actors preparing for and performing a role on stage, raise issues of mind, body, and soul. While a comprehensive approach like Stanislavski’s, which is based on a three-year course of study for actors, is beyond the scope of this study, it is hoped that selected and adapted exercises can capture elements of preparing the mind, body, and soul of college-level pianists and cause them to think differently about the way they study, learn, prepare, and perform their music for an audience.

¹⁵⁵ Stanislavski, *Actor’s Work*, 212-214.

¹⁵⁶ Stanislavski, *Actor’s Work*, 612.

CHAPTER 4: APPLICATIONS OF THE SYSTEM FOR PIANO PERFORMANCE

Stanislavski believed that there was a direct connection between his System and music performance, a fact demonstrated by his devotion throughout his career to producing and directing operas. He believed that opera performers should do much more than prepare themselves musically, explaining that: “Your singing must be transformed by a musical statement into a confession made by your heart. You must take the place for me of both the poet and the composer, you must infuse into me your own creative emotions, your state of being. All the elements of your inner life must be set to work. Then you will bring to life the author’s idea, his theme.”¹ Despite the large volume of literature focused on his work in the spoken theater, Stanislavski never lost interest in music as a vital component to the development of his System. Sharon Carnicke and David Rosen report that Stanislavski “understood both performing arts as sharing a similar purpose—to communicate to audiences the ineffable and non-verbal aspects of human experience.”² The work he completed in opera included some of his most innovative and holistic ideas about performance, including the Method of Physical Actions and Active Analysis. Stanislavski developed both of these ideas and related methods in the Opera-Dramatic Studio, his final studio in Moscow, where he worked

¹ Stanislavski and Rumiantsev, *Stanislavski on Opera*, 16.

² Carnicke and Rosen, “A Singer Prepares,” 120.

until his death in 1938. Scholars agree that his work in opera inspired stimulating new discoveries that benefitted both actors and musicians.³

The purpose of this chapter is to provide undergraduate college-level pianists with a series of clearly defined Activities derived from key concepts in Stanislavski's acting System. These Activities are intended to address common problems faced in piano performance as described in chapter 1, including performance anxiety, physical tension in performance, interpretation challenges, and maintaining stage presence—the visual rhetoric of piano playing. The Activities are intended for use by piano students and teachers in private lessons, studio classes, and as recital preparation techniques. Of course, the Stanislavski System cannot address every performance issue faced by college level piano performers; however it can provide insights and offer specific tools for performance preparation that will benefit pianists.

Activities presented in this chapter have been inspired by Stanislavski's key writings as well as several acting manuals written by leading scholars of the Stanislavski System. Stanislavski lamented in the preface of *An Actor's Work*, published a few weeks after his death in 1938, that he was not able to include a handbook of exercises for actors and directors to use in rehearsals and classes.⁴ The absence of such a handbook necessitates the use of other references, primarily manuals written by modern Stanislavski scholars and acting teachers who have recorded activities which have been passed down through Stanislavski's famous students and colleagues. References to the

³ Carnicke and Rosen, "A Singer Prepares," 121.

⁴ Jean Benedetti, *Stanislavski and the Actor* (New York: Routledge, 1998), xi.

specific source material for each of the Activities in this chapter is included in Appendix B, Source Material for Activities in Chapter 4.

This chapter includes sixteen Activities that are separated into four groups identified by the performance challenges most commonly experienced by undergraduate piano performance majors. Each adapted Activity includes a stated purpose, instructions, and then concludes with suggestions for follow up Activities that allow for variation or additional applications. The Activities and instructions are directed to the student performer-user.

Performance Anxiety

Activity 1: Developing a Positive Inner Monologue

Purpose. Public performances of significant classical repertoire may trigger symptoms that disrupt your best moment-to-moment experience of the music you have prepared. The purpose of this Activity is to develop an inner monologue tailored specifically to your music that will become part of your performance experience. This Activity is designed to address the mental and physical effects of performance anxiety that may include:

EFFECTS OF PERFORMANCE ANXIETY

| <u>Mental</u> | <u>Physical</u> |
|--------------------|-------------------------------|
| Nervous thoughts | Spike in adrenaline |
| Negative self-talk | Increased heart rate |
| Loss of focus | Shaking limbs |
| Self-consciousness | Sweaty palms |
| Perfectionism | Awkward gestures at the piano |
| Mental chatter | Feelings of unsteadiness |
| Self-doubt | Physical tension |
| | Nausea |

Figure 1. Mental and physical side effects of stress.

Creating a positive inner monologue will help you to focus on the dramatic images and words which are programmed into your interpretation of the piece instead of listening to the negative, random, or anxious thoughts you might have about the performance.

Instructions.

- n Look at the score and imagine that you can hear each section being played.
- n As you listen to each section with your inner ear, visualize something (any idea or thing that you can relate to a mental picture) that represents that section of the musical score. Make a brief note about this image.
- n How does the image you have associated with the passage make you feel (lonely, expectant, angry, joyful, suspicious, or scared)? Write down the emotion you identify with this section.
- n Create an inner emotional monologue (a statement to go with each of the images and emotions you identify). This will become a string of statements that will accompany the images you have created to go with the sections of your piece. These statements should reflect your inner desires, fears, or motivations which have been triggered by the visual images. For example:

“I want to see my love again.”

“I want to go home.”
“I desire to be at peace.”
“I feel so relaxed.”
“I need to keep going and reach the finish line.”
“I am searching for the way out of this maze.”
“Everything will be alright.”

- n Now, go to the piano and play the passage. What feelings arise as you play? Are there particular sections or passages that make you feel anxious because of their difficulty?
- n Create an inner performance monologue—a string of statements, one for each section of your piece—that you will remember during performance. These statements make up your positive self-talk, and they will help you to stay focused, and to listen and react to your own emotional responses to the music. Here are some examples:

“Now go for it”
“This is your moment”
“Keep focused”
“Now listen”
“React to the music”

- n Develop a link between the mental images and inner monologue within your piece. Think of each image and add a caption that encompasses how you will perform your best. Imagine what you need to say to yourself at that moment of the piece, for example, “stay calm here,” “now move it along,” or “long lines.”

Follow-up Activities, Suggestions, and Variations.

- q Recite the inner monologue several ways out loud. Listen to each recitation and notice when it feels like the right ‘tone of voice’ for the musical character. Repeat the inner monologue silently to yourself but in the ‘tone of voice’ you just discovered.
- q Practice the piece from the beginning, working on each section in sequence. In the resting moments and transitions, stop and repeat silently to yourself the inner

monologue (verbal cues) for the upcoming material. As you become increasingly comfortable with the monologue reduce the time between sections and play the piece up to tempo, repeating the inner monologue silently to yourself in real time.

- q Repeat your inner performance monologue before you play through your piece. For example:

“I am prepared and excited to explain this music to my audience”

“I am ready to ‘go for it’ in this opening passage”

“I have carefully prepared and I look forward to sharing this experience with the listener”

- q Work through this process in the practice room several weeks before your performance.

Activity 2: Awareness of Physical Senses

Purpose. Performances can overwhelm your senses due to the presence of new stimuli and the pull of the audience on your attention and focus. To enter into what Stanislavski called the “transient now” of a live performance, you must become aware of the performance space, the physical sensations of your own body, and the emotional state which you experience on stage. The purpose of this Activity is to intentionally notice distracting sensory information in order to cultivate awareness of a multitude of different internal and external sensations that impact your focus and concentration during a public performance. In this Activity you will use your senses separately to become aware of the very stimuli which could act as a disruption during a performance. By simulating this heightened sensory state in your daily practice, you will be better able to maintain ease and focus in performance and guard against distraction.

Instructions. Begin this Activity in the hall or auditorium where you will perform. Focus on your senses⁵ one at time.

Sight

- n Stand on the stage and open your sense of sight to absorb the colors that you see, the intensity of the lights, the openness of the space, and if possible the faces watching from the auditorium.
- n Step back to the wings of the stage and observe the color of the floor, noticing how the light reflects off of its material. Look at the ceiling. Is it low or high?
- n Look at the instrument you will play. Is it an instrument you have played many times before, or is it new? At the bench, look at your hands on the keyboard. Do they reflect off of the piano? How do your hands look on the keys?
- n Look at the length of the instrument and try to absorb its size in relation to your body, as well as in relation to the recital space.
- n Go out into the auditorium and look at the stage from the perspective of an audience member. Imagine that you are watching yourself walk on stage. What do you want the audience to see when you enter the stage? What do you want the audience to feel when they see you for the first time?

Hearing

- n While on the stage, listen to sounds from a distant circle of space and work inwards to the immediate space around you.

⁵ Smell and taste are not included here because they are less relevant to performance distractions as a pianist.

- n First focus on sounds your ears pick up from a great distance, for example, the sounds of cars on the street, the sounds of other instruments playing outside your performance space, and finally the sounds within the auditorium including any noise from audience members.
- n As you absorb all of these sounds, slowly start to focus your attention inward, listening to the sounds made by your own body, the sounds of breathing, the rustle of clothing as you move.
- n Imagine that you can audibly hear your thoughts. What does your inner voice sound like?
- n Sit at the piano bench and imagine a beautiful sound coming from the instrument. Focus on the sound until it comes to life as you place your hands on the piano and recreate the exact timbre and quality as you imagined.
- n Listen now to the quality of that sound and assign an adjective to describe its qualities (for example, deep, sharp, warm, dry, soft, harsh). Continue playing and listen intently with relentless focus to each tone that you play.
- n Practice quickly labeling the quality of your sound as it happens. Imagine you are listening to the sound from the auditorium: what kind of sound resonates best in that space?

Touch

- n Notice everything that you touch: The clothes or hair on your skin, the weight of your music in your hands, the feeling of the floor beneath your feet, and the feeling of objects you might touch as you prepare for your performance.

- n While sitting at the piano, become aware of your sense of touch as you place your fingers onto the keyboard.
- n Notice the sensations of playing a note as well as the tactile sensation of creating a soft sound, a loud sound, a connected sound.
- n Become more open to your sense of touch as you experiment with different rates of velocity with which the fingers approach the keys.

Follow-up Activities, Suggestions, and Variations. Expand your range of sensory experiences by completing similar exercises during everyday activities. In this way you will develop a more vivid experience of the world through the use of all the senses at once in the following situations:

- q Attend a public performance, concert, play, reading, or exhibit and notice what you experience through sight, hearing, taste, touch, and smell.
- q Notice an object from the natural world, such as a stone or a flower. Absorb as much information as possible through the senses about the object seeing “all the elements that make up the whole.”⁶
- q Observe through the senses all of the elements of a physical space, such as a bedroom, classroom, courtyard, or restaurant.
- q Recall a physical sensation that has a soothing effect (the smell of your favorite flower, the feeling of the warm sun on your face, the sound of a comforting voice) and place your attention on this sensation backstage before you play.

⁶ Gillett, *Acting Stanislavski*, 8.

- q Recall physical sensations which are suggested in the titles or descriptions of pieces you have played, for example, Bartók, *Bagpipe Song* and *Shepherd's Flute* (mimicking the sounds of different instruments), Schumann, *Hasch-Mann* (the child's game Blindman's Bluff, or tag); Debussy, *Clair de lune* (moonlight); Bartok, *Out of Doors* (scenes from nature including sights and sounds of nighttime); and Bolcom, *Lime Jello Marshmallow Cottage Cheese Surprise* (unique combination of tastes and textures).

Activity 3: Circles of Attention

Purpose: Despite your best preparation and practice, performing for an audience can negatively impact your ability to concentrate onstage. Stanislavski designed this Activity to help his actors focus on the action on stage without their attention being shaken by the pull of the audience. Pianists also face this challenge when they finally perform their recital. The feeling of ease which you felt in the safety of your practice room dissipates with the presence of an attentive audience as your attention might be drawn away from the present moment. Not only does this encourage additional mistakes and memory lapses, but it can also strip your performance of the expressive details you had carefully practiced before the recital. The goal of this exercise is to practice focusing on the present in performance through the circles of attention. The following diagram illustrates the three circles of attention:

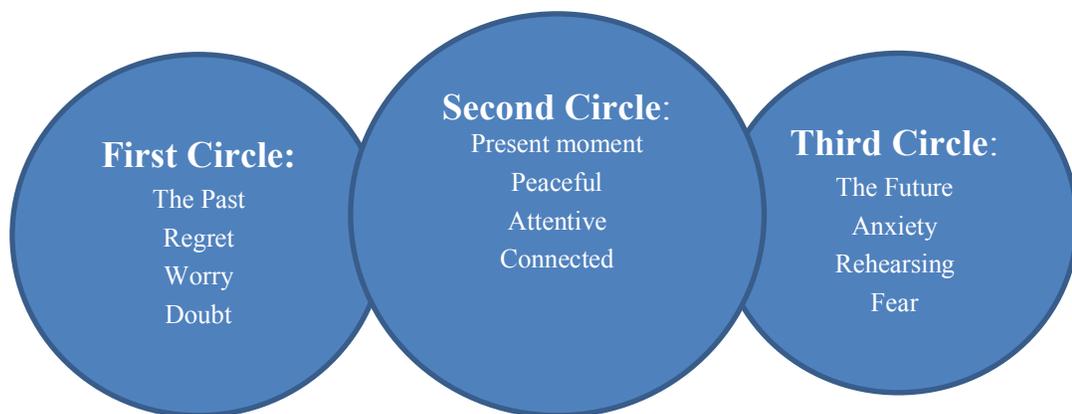


Figure 2. Circles of Attention.

The most interesting and inviting performances are created in the Second Circle when a pianist is immersed in the present moment (experience) of the creative activity. Thinking about the past during a performance (a previous section of the piece, a mistake you made three pages earlier, something your teacher said last week, etc.) can derail your performance. Too much focus on future planning in performance (thinking about an upcoming challenging passage, worrying about what the audience members might think of you, anxiety about another piece in your program) can also lead to a loss of focus.

Instructions.

- n Take two minutes before playing through your piece to focus only on your breath.
- n Notice when your mind wanders into the first circle (the past) or the third circle (the future). Bring your mind back to the second circle (the present) by re-focusing on your breath.
- n Play through your recital piece at a moderate, comfortable tempo. Practice noticing when your mind wanders to the first and third circles of attention. Bring your focus back to the second circle (the present moment) with a deep breath.

- n Bring your attention back into the Second Circle by focusing on the objects of attention—physical or emotional sensations that are happening in the moment such as the quality of the sound you are making at the piano, the feeling of relaxation in your body, a physical movement that corresponds with the passage you are playing, or your emotions in the present moment.

Follow-up Activities, Suggestions, and Variations.

- q Practice a five-minute section of your program. Make it your goal to stay in the second circle of attention the whole time. Do this by focusing on your objects of attention. If your mind wanders to a past experience or into future planning, stop immediately. Start over and try again to stay in the present for the full five minutes.

Repeat this activity, increasing the amount of music each time.

- q Repeat a five-minute section of your program focusing on a different object of attention each time. Some examples include:

- Tone
- Phrasing
- Articulation
- Inflection
- Balance
- Inner voices
- Technical clarity
- Rhythmic precision
- Dynamics and shaping

Activity 4: Public Solitude

Purpose: The purpose of this Activity is to find a comfortable feeling from your favorite practice space and transfer that feeling of solitude to your public recital hall. Stanislavski taught his students this technique as a way to feel at home in public performances. You can use this technique to pull your focus back when it is being drawn away by the pull of

the audience. Public solitude will give you more freedom to express and create in the moment.

Instructions:

- n Imagine a place where you feel the most comfortable performing. It could be your practice room at school, at home, or in your teacher's studio.
- n Recreate that space when you practice for your recital in the concert hall using only objects found on the stage (music stand, chair, bench). Use your imagination to fill in any additional details about the space which make you feel comfortable.
- n Play through your program and imagine a sphere or bubble forming around you in this imaginary space.
- n The night of the performance, before you step onto the stage, imagine that you are entering the sphere created around you in your most comfortable performance space.
- n When you feel your focus is drawn away by the audience, pull it back into the sphere.
- n Practice pulling your focus back into the sphere many times before the performance, in the practice room, in your private lessons, and in your weekly studio classes.
- n Experiment with widening your sphere to include:
 - You and the piano.
 - You, the piano, and the whole stage.
 - You, the piano, the stage, and the auditorium.
 - You, the piano, the stage, the auditorium, and the world outside.
- n Continue to practice pulling your focus back into yourself in many different performance situations.

Follow-up Activities, Suggestions, and Variations.

- q Imagine that a spotlight is shining down on you at the piano, creating a ring of light around you. Perform as if nothing else exists outside of the ring of light.
- q Imagine yourself stepping into a performance sphere of a different material: a translucent soap bubble, interwoven ivy leaves, fine gauze, or silk.
- q Invite a friend to listen to you play your piece and practice public solitude in the comfort of your home or practice room. Practice performing as if you were the only person in the room. Notice when your attention wanders and pull it back into your sphere.

Physical Tension in Performance

Activity 5: Breathing

Purpose. Stanislavski emphasized breathing exercises to teach his students the fundamentals of relaxation and to demonstrate that the connection between rhythm and breathing is the foundation of all creative work. This Activity will help you to regulate and diminish the effects of physical tension in performance by isolating upper and lower body breathing—two different breathing techniques beneficial to piano performance. These upper and lower body breathing techniques also correlate with different musical tempi in your performance (upper body breathing for an upbeat tempo, lower body breathing for a relaxed tempo).

Instructions. Wear comfortable clothing and find a place where there is room to move both arms freely. Use fluid movements while doing the required breathing.

Upper Body Breathing 1.

- n Stand with feet hip-width apart and allow the hands to hang easily by the side.
- n While inhaling allow the arms to cross in front of the body in front of the pelvis, circling up above the head, both hands pointing up toward the ceiling.
- n Feel oxygen fill the upper part of the lungs and hold briefly before exhaling and allowing the arms to float to each side.
- n Repeat 3 to 5 times.

Upper Body Breathing 2.

- n Continue standing with feet hip-width apart and arms hanging relaxed by your side.
- n Bring the arms across the chest and place the four long fingers of the hand inside the armpit with the thumb left out on either side.
- n From this position, inhale and lift the elbows toward the ceiling. As you exhale allow the elbows to release back down over the chest.
- n Repeat 3 to 5 times.

Lower Body Breathing.

- n Stand with your legs spread farther than hip-width apart for additional support and place hands on your belly with your fingertips touching.
- n Inhale and allow your hands to stroke outward towards your side while you simultaneously arch your back and puff your chest.
- n Exhale and curl your spine in the opposite direction, bringing your elbows to touch (or as close as possible) in front of your body.
- n Your head should hang heavy and your neck should be relaxed in this position. Return to neutral with hands touching your belly.

- n Repeat inhale and exhale 3 to 5 times.
- n You should begin to notice variations in your patterns of breathing during a low-pressure performance, such as your weekly studio class. Notice how your breathing changes when you are about to walk onstage.
- n Repeat these Activities if you detect that you are holding or limiting your breath in practice or performance.

Follow-up Activities, Suggestions, and Variations.

- q You will find benefit in doing these breathing Activities immediately before a recital and as desired off stage between major sections of the recital.
- q Practice Activities with varied breathing tempi, starting very slow and gradually increasing the tempo. Conversely, begin the breathing Activities with a quick breathing tempo and gradually slow the tempo, deepening the breath and the movement with each repetition.
- q While completing the breathing Activities take note of any emotions or feelings. Determine whether your current emotions correlate with the tempo of your breathing and adjust accordingly (slow, deepen, or quicken your breathing).
- q For each piece and section of a piece, determine the best kind of breath. The character of the piece will influence the quality and tempo of breathing. For example, a piece marked *grave* or *espressivo* might elicit lower body breathing (for a slow, settled effect) and a piece marked *allegro vivace* or *cappriccioso* might lend well to upper body breathing (for an energetic effect).
- q Incorporate larger movements into breathing exercises as part of a physical improvisation warm up.

- q Practice movement while listening to a recording of the piece you are performing.
Breathe rhythmically, moving with the pulse of the music.
- q Breathe as if you are a singer, with long inhales and exhales in conjunction with each phrase.

Activity 6: Experiencing the Awareness of Tension

Purpose. Many pianists are not aware of excess physical tension or how to best release it while playing the piano. The purpose of this Activity is to discover where points of tension exist in your body and how to actively use and release tension to achieve a sustained feeling of total relaxation. You can use this Activity to check and release specific points of physical tension before your performance or practice session.

Instructions.

- n Lie on the floor or sit comfortably in a chair or on the piano bench for this Activity.
- n Begin by tensing your feet as much as possible until they become hypertense, almost painful, then release the tension and totally relax the feet.
- n Repeat this process with the calves, knees, thighs, glutes, stomach, chest, shoulders, arms, hands, fingers, neck, head, and scalp tensing to the point of discomfort and following with a total release of tension.
- n Experience the difference between tension and relaxation as well as the pleasure that accompanies a release of tension.
- n Try this Activity first in a comfortable space, such as your practice room, home, or teacher's studio several weeks before your performance.
- n This Activity can also be completed with the other members of your piano studio as a group relaxation during your weekly studio class.

- n After you become comfortable with this technique, complete this Activity 30 minutes before your recital to enable a feeling of relaxation and calm.

Follow-up Activities, Suggestions, and Variations.

- q Create and focus tension specifically on the muscles used for piano playing—hands, arms, shoulders, and back. Observe how your movement is restricted in other parts of the body when focused tension is applied to each of these muscle groups. Release and try the same movement with relaxed muscles.
- q Observe any emotions that arise during these Activities when the muscles of the body are drawn in tightly. It is possible to experience an increase in anxiety, fear, nervousness, and restlessness. Be aware of any negative emotions you feel when pulling in the muscles tightly. As the body and breath release, allow these emotions to soften and fade. Recognize and describe the new emotions you feel after releasing the tension.
- q Tension can disrupt regular or free breathing and often performers report holding their breath or experiencing shallow breathing during a difficult performance. Become aware of any changes in the ability to breathe freely and naturally in the presence of tension. Immediately release the tension you feel with a long, deep inhale and exhale.
- q Try these Activities in new environments: in the practice room, off-stage while waiting to enter for a performance, onstage during your performance studio class, or right before playing the first note of the piece.

Activity 7: Recognizing Necessary Tension in Movement

Purpose. To perform any physical task requires a degree of tension in the muscles, but excess tension impedes clear thinking as well as creativity onstage. The purpose of this Activity is to identify particular muscles that are necessary for specific physical movements while keeping other muscles relaxed and free of tension. Stanislavski taught that in every motion three stages should occur: The first—excess tension, which is inevitable in every new pose and with the excitement produced by appearing in public; the second—automatic release of excess tension using the monitor; and the third—justification of the pose if it does not, of itself, produce belief; collectively, *tension*, *release*, and *justification*.

Instructions. Begin this Activity while seated at the piano; however, note that it may be done in a variety of rehearsal or performance spaces or anywhere else the pianist feels comfortable and physically relaxed.

Seated in the ready position.

- n Allow the skeletal structure to properly align, with the weight of the body resting with the sit bones and femur on the bench.
- n The lower legs and feet should be free to move without tension.
- n Both feet should be free to press the pedals by way of the ankle joint which has a hinge mechanism.
- n Excess tension in the toes while playing or pedaling is unnecessary and should be released.
- n The upper body is supported by the spine and the core-muscles which reside deep inside the body surrounding the spine.

- n Do not allow the back and shoulders to slouch. Slouching may seem like a relaxing position for the body, but slouching, in fact, produces added tension, pulling on muscles and tendons that would move more freely if properly aligned in a relaxed and ready position.

Technical Skills.

- n Play technical exercises, such as scales, arpeggios, cadences, and other warm-up activities to recognize and release tension while playing the piano.
- n Play at a slow tempo. Sense necessary tension in the fingers, hands, arms, shoulders, upper body, and spine, and then let any excess or unnecessary tension “float away.”
- n Continue releasing unnecessary tension when practicing more difficult technical passages, including large leaps from one octave to another, fast passagework, accompaniment patterns, and octaves.

Tone Production.

- n Seated at the piano, allow the arms to lift and fall completely relaxed in the lap or onto the bench.
- n After several repetitions, drop relaxed weight from your arm into the key with a strong fingertip.
- n Feel the juxtaposition of necessary tension in the first finger joint accompanied by total freedom and relaxation in the rest of the arm, neck, shoulder, and upper body as you strike the key.
- n Remember that continuing to press into a key after the sound is created may result in the use of excessive force and can lead to injury.

Follow-up Activities, Suggestions, and Variations.

- q Practice sitting in different positions at the piano and notice how tension increases or decreases with every new position.
- q Listen to a recording of your performance piece. As a phrase grows in harmonic tension, gradually allow tension to build in your hands and arms, squeezing your hands together when the phrase reaches the point of most tension. As a phrase relaxes, slowly allow your hands and arms to relax into your lap.
- q Isolate points of necessary physical tension during moments of harmonic tension in your piece. Engage your abdominal muscles, allowing your shoulders to relax. Determine the amount of muscular engagement needed to play through the high point of the musical phrase. Relax everything else with a long exhale.

Activity 8: Puppet and Rag Doll

Purpose. Movements at the piano are often involuntary and habitual. It is not uncommon for pianists to hold an incredible amount of tension in a specific part of their bodies without knowing it. Conversely, it also is common to allow specific muscle groups to grow lazy and inactive when they should be engaged for better tone production, posture, and stage presence. The purpose of this Activity is to further explore and expand your range of control of the physical apparatus in performance. Both characters represented in this Activity—the puppet and the rag doll—require a great deal of physical control: one of total rigidity, and the other of total relaxation.

Instructions.

- n Each student in a small group of students begins by choosing which character to portray—a puppet or a rag doll.

- n “Puppets” should make their bodies incredibly stiff, as if made out of wood.
- n With the consent of the participant, other members of the group should try to move the student as they continue standing or sitting in complete rigidity.
- n At the piano, the teacher or fellow students might attempt to move the “puppet’s” arms, hands, or torso.
- n Students portraying the “puppet” should note that they expend an enormous amount of energy attempting to remain in a state of total physical tension and rigidity during this Activity.
- n “Rag dolls” should work to make their entire body collapse in total relaxation, so much so that they slump to the floor while standing or to one side while sitting at the piano bench.
- n With the consent of the participant, the teacher or fellow students should manipulate the arms, hands, torso, and head of the “rag-doll” participant.
- n When portraying the “rag doll” students must exercise total control over their body to ensure that every muscle remains completely relaxed during the Activity.
- n This Activity should promote playfulness in the lesson or performance class, but for a useful purpose.

Follow-up Activities, Suggestions, and Variations.

- q Immediately following the “puppet” or “rag doll” Activity, replicate these physical experiences at the piano. Play different sound qualities produced with varying levels of physical tension and relaxation.
- q To produce a full sound at the keyboard you must be able to control a variety of touches. Often these include tension (“puppet”) followed immediately by relaxation

(“rag doll”). Use these terms as reminders or “side-coaching” directives for yourself while you practice, calling out when you need more muscular support (“puppet”) or relaxation (“rag-doll”).

- q Chose a passage in a piece which you are currently working on. In the score there are moments of harmonic tension, usually followed by harmonic resolution. Determine where each character belongs in the passage, and you may even use the imagery of the “puppet” to describe the high point of a phrase and the “rag-doll” to describe a feeling of relaxation at the end of the phrase.
- q Find the balance between the “puppet” and “rag-doll.” It is impossible to play the piano as either character—the “puppet” is too stiff, the “rag-doll” is too limp.
- q Assume a “puppet” pose and slowly relax into a posture which is upright but relaxed.
- q Assume a “rag-doll” pose and slowly add support through necessary tension until the body is upright, relaxed, and supported.
- q The balance of the two postures is optimal for piano performance.

Interpretation Challenges

Activity 9: Adherence to the Score

Purpose. What do you do when you begin learning a new piece of music? Do you sit down and immediately start plunking out the notes, phrase by phrase? When pianists default to this approach, they leave decisions about musical interpretation out of the initial learning process. In Stanislavski’s System, actors began the learning process by outlining a broad picture of the entire play before the study of their individual roles could take place. This procedure (which he called round-table analysis) gave the actors

information about the style, context, form, compositional details, and objectives within the play as a whole. Additionally, this process led to a greater ability to understand and apply what the author wrote—the given circumstances of the play. The purpose of this Activity is to facilitate adherence to the score through preliminary learning steps including (i) securing an aural representation of the piece, (ii) uncovering background information, (iii) understanding the character, and (iv) delineating the form of the piece.

Instructions.

- n Listen to five different recordings of your new piece. Make a list of different interpretive choices, including various tempi, articulation styles, use of rubato, time between movements, differences in voicing, phrase shaping, inflection, pedaling choices, etc. Keep that list close to your score.
- n Listen to recordings from different time periods, including period instruments. Take notes as you listen for different approaches to touch, time, and character in recordings from other historical periods.
- n Write a short synopsis of the composer’s life at the time of the composition you are learning. Information can be found in album liner notes (online database found at albumlinernotes.com) and other academic resources including books, peer-reviewed articles, the Harvard Dictionary of Music, and the Grove Online Encyclopedia of Music.
- n Look for information about the composer that you believe informs or enriches the character and style of the piece you are learning.
- n Listen to the composition and imagine that it portrays a specific character. This character can be a person, place, animal, thing, or emotional state.

- n Observe the musical score and make notes in the music describing what compositional techniques are used to depict the musical character you have imagined.
- n Answer six fundamental questions about the musical character of the piece: Who? When? Where? Why? For what reason? How? The first three questions (Who is the character? When is the action taking place? Where is the action taking place? Why is this action occurring? For what reason? How? These questions activate your imagination by challenging you to think of scenarios for your musical character beyond the details in the score.
- n Listen to a recording and clearly mark the major sections that you hear in the piece (A, B, C, etc.).
- n Listen a second time and imagine what objectives your musical character will face in the major sections of the piece. Write these ideas down on a separate piece of paper. Keep your notes close to the score as you practice for quick reference.
- n After completing these preliminary learning steps you will have the following information: a secure aural representation of the piece, a list of several viable interpretive decisions for performance, background information about your piece (including biographical information about the composer), your recorded first impression of the character of the piece, justification for the presence of that character through the compositional techniques, clearly marked formal structures, and your recorded first impressions of the musical character's objectives within the musical form.
- n Begin playing slowly through the sections. Make it your intention to bring out the form and character even in your earliest practice sessions.

Follow-up Activities, Suggestions, and Variations:

- q Keep a journal of favorite recordings of your piece. Search online for several video performances. Compare and contrast amateur and professional recordings of the piece, writing down your observations in your journal.
- q Search online for images from the time period when your piece was composed. Collect images of clothing style, paintings from the time period, and pictures of iconic architecture and buildings constructed in the time period.
- q Create a visual image of your musical character. Use images found online to create a collage or draw, paint, or sketch one of your own.
- q Write in your score the name of your musical character. Use colored pencils to indicate each time the musical character appears in the music.
- q Search for clues in art and literature which help you to answer the six fundamental questions about the musical character of your piece.

Activity 10: Subtext

Purpose. The purpose of this Activity is to create and instill your musical subtext—a continuous series of mental images that accompany the piece of music to be performed. Subtext is the running inner dialogue that happens in all human communication. Rather than being heard directly, it is inferred and provides the underlying motivation for action. You can think of subtext as the musical nuances which you develop as the pianist in charge of re-telling the composer’s story. Your reactions to the music will create your subtext and practicing the piece with your own associated images will strengthen memory, creativity, and focus for pianists.

Instructions.

- n Do this Activity away from the piano. Look at the score and imagine that you can hear each passage being played.
- n As you listen with your inner ear, visualize something (any idea or thing that you can relate to a mental picture) that represents the first section of the musical score. Make a brief note about this image.
- n Pay attention to the emotions that arise with each musical section to which you assign a visual image and also notice your emotional reactions to the image you create. How does the image you have associated with the passage make you feel (for example, lonely, expectant, angry, joyful, suspicious, or scared)?
- n With this first emotional reaction in mind, use your inner ear to begin playing the next contrasting section of the piece. Create a new image to represent the next section.
- n Continue going through the piece, focusing on the shift of your feelings and reactions from one section to the next.
- n In the series of mental images that you create, do you feel an increase or decrease in the same emotion or a new, contrasting emotion? The combination of mental images and emotional responses construct the subtext of the piece.
- n Incorporate specific imagery indicated by the composer. If the composer or the context tells you that the piece contains specific imagery (for example, the ocean, fairies dancing, fireworks) those images should be incorporated in a personal way.
- n If no imagery is indicated, pay close attention to images that arise from your own ideas as you review each passage. If you fail to generate any images, review the emotions you felt as your inner ear hears the section play out in your mind.

- n If you can identify a specific emotion, connect that with a moment in your life when you felt the same feeling. Images from your personal experiences will create a stronger storyboard of images that will help bring your own character into the performance of the specific piece of music.

Follow-up Activities, Suggestion, and Variations.

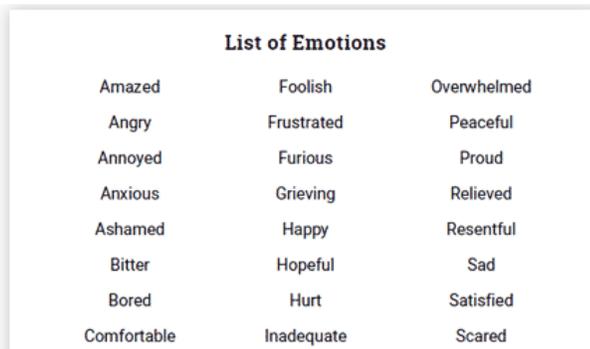
- q On a piece of paper, draw or sketch the images you have created for each section of the piece. Place them in chronological order from beginning to end and sing or hum through the entire piece using the visual images as your cues.
- q Write down your emotional reactions to each section and determine how you will play the next section based on that experience.
- q Practice visualizing each image while playing through the piece.
- q Before you start playing, allow the story-board of your entire performance to run through your mind.

Activity 11: Emotional Connection

Purpose: The purpose of this Activity is to encourage emotional connection with the music you are learning through vivid memories of your own lived experiences. The greatest source of material for actors is their emotion memory—the ability to recall memories from their own experiences in vivid detail. The images and characters you create for your piece must be enlivened by memories of your own lived experiences. For example, it is possible to act sad during a performance—pull the corners of your mouth down, grimace, and pout. However, it is a far more effective choice to remember a time in your life when you actually felt sad. Recalling that experience will allow you feel true emotions and channel them into the corresponding musical material.

Instructions:

- n Identify a passage of music or a short piece. Identify a clear emotion that you think corresponds with the music. For quick reference, print a list of common emotions and place it in your practice space. Here is an example:



| | | |
|-------------|------------|-------------|
| Amazed | Foolish | Overwhelmed |
| Angry | Frustrated | Peaceful |
| Annoyed | Furious | Proud |
| Anxious | Grieving | Relieved |
| Ashamed | Happy | Resentful |
| Bitter | Hopeful | Sad |
| Bored | Hurt | Satisfied |
| Comfortable | Inadequate | Scared |

Figure 3. List of emotions.

- n Think of a moment in your life when you remember experiencing the same or similar emotion.⁷
- n Recall the mental and physical sensations that surrounded that experience. Close your eyes and visualize yourself in the situation. Recall the sights, smells, and other physical sensations of this emotion memory.
- n Open your eyes and play the passage as you would after experiencing the emotion memory you just recalled. Imagine you are playing the passage directly after that experience. How might your interpretation change because of your emotional state?

⁷ Some memories trigger painful emotions which can disrupt your peace of mind and your focus in performance. Be careful not to force yourself to remember experiences which have been guarded by your sub-conscious for your own protection. Allow memories to come back to you easily and do not force your way into painful past experiences. This Activity is only intended to aid in building emotional connection with the music and is not intended to serve as any kind of therapy or psychoanalysis.

- n Imagine that each note is a word to describe how you felt in that moment in your life.
Play the passage again.
- n Listen intently as you play. How is your interpretation different this time? Do you feel more emotionally connected with the notes that you are playing?

Follow-up Activities, Suggestions, and Variations:

- q Within your emotional recall, identify a visual image that represents that memory.
When you are about to play the piece that recalls this emotion, think of that particular image and allow the memory to come back to you.
- q Play other pieces from your repertoire that elicit a similar emotion (joy, despair, fear, love). Instead of trying to ‘play love,’ imagine a moment when you experienced the feeling. Allow the emotion return as you think of your real-life experiences.

Activity 12: Illusion of the First Time (The Moment-to-Moment Experience)

Purpose: After studying a piece for many months, it is possible to practice your musical, interpretative choices to the point of stagnation, losing a sense of spontaneity or inspiration in performance. The purpose of this Activity is to generate the illusion of the first time at the piano in the same way that actors must create an in-the-moment reaction to the surprising or emotional moments that occur in their performances (despite having played the same scene night after night, sometimes for many years as with plays or musical shows). Pianists can use varied interpretive choices during the learning process to avoid stagnation and encourage spontaneity.

Instructions:

- n Select a piece from your recital program which you think needs extra inspiration.
Make note of a section of the piece you would like to practice.

- n Make a list of five different emotions you could portray in the section to vary your practice.
- n Make a list of five interpretive choices that could work for the section that vary your interpretation. For example:

PRACTICE VARIATIONS:

Emotions

Joyful

Content

Elated

Bittersweet

Indifferent

Interpretive Choices

Energetic articulation, shorten two-note slurs

Subdued articulation, slow key-speed

Quick tempo, light touch

Shifts in mood, use of rubato, bring out inner voices

Consistent tempo, fewer dynamic changes

- n Repeat your chosen section five times with a new practice variation each time.
- n Stay open to new interpretive possibilities while you practice by focusing on different musical elements with each repetition such as: tempo, articulation, voicing, balance between the hands, sound quality, dynamics, rhythmic drive, and melodic inflection.
- n Label surprising musical elements with a colored pencil such as: sudden changes in dynamics, changes in the musical texture, an increase in harmonic rhythm, unexpected dramatic silences (rests), etc.
- n Repeat the surprising musical element. Practice varying your reaction to the musical element by feeling a different emotion each time such as: confusion, wonder, apprehension, excitement, shock, etc.

Follow-up Activities, Suggestions, and Variations.

- q Practice savoring and enjoying each musical moment. As your piece unfolds in time, stay in the present – the Second Circle of Attention (see Activity 3: Circles of

Attention). Stop yourself from reliving past experiences of the piece (First Circle) or rehearsing future performances (Third Circle).

- q Cultivate an attitude of curiosity – imagine you are the composer thinking of this music for the very first time. Think to yourself, ‘I wonder what will happen next?’
- q Practice active listening during your practice and performances. As you listen intently, react emotionally to the music as it unfolds in real time.

Stage Presence—The Visual Rhetoric of Performance

Activity 13: Communion/Communication

Purpose: The actors in the Moscow Art Theater practiced the art of visible communication through subtle physical gestures directed at their acting partner, as well as invisible communication which was emitted, or radiated to their acting partner through pranic rays of energy transmitted through receptive eye contact. This technique caused them to be bonded in each other’s grasp, which indirectly pulled the audience into the magnetic energy of the action onstage. In order to recreate this powerful form of communication in your solo piano performances, it is vital that you have in mind something specific that you would like to communicate and to practice bonding with that character, emotion, or image with great inner focus. The purpose of this Activity is to identify a meaningful expression, image, or character within your piece upon which you can focus your communication in your performance.

Instructions:

- n Select a piece from your recital program for this Activity. Ensure your success with this Activity by first completing Activities 9 through 11 (Adherence to the Score, Subtext, and Emotional Connection) using the same piece of music.
- n Imagine the composer of the piece and think about the circumstances that led to or inspired the writing of this piece.
- n Write a dialogue between yourself and the composer as if you were conducting an interview for an article (drawing from the material you collected in Activity 9: Adherence to the Score, including paintings or photographs of the composer).
- n Begin the dialogue by asking the composer about the piece. Write down what you imagine the composer might say if he or she were sitting next to you.
- n Use your knowledge of the composer's life and culture to answer questions which explain the composition. Imagine how the events in the composer's life might lead to the creation of the piece of music you are playing. Is the piece about a person in the composer's life? Is the piece about the composer's own personal emotions and struggles?
- n Keep this dialogue that you write near your piano.
- n Now try out your acting skills. As you play through the piece, imagine that you are playing the role of the composer who you have just interviewed. Clearly focus on the emotions and objectives that you recorded in the interview, emoting these intentions with conviction.

- n As you play contrasting sections, ask “what am I (the composer) trying to communicate in this section?” Focus intently on communicating the musical intentions which you have identified.
- n Allow yourself to be bonded with the musical expression as if you were composing it yourself. Trust that the strength of your focus will draw the audience into the magnetic energy which you radiate with each musical objective.

Follow-up Activities, Suggestions, and Variations:

- q Maintain physical relaxation while communicating your musical intentions. Do not allow your body to hold onto any excess tension in an attempt to force your communication.
- q Fuse your own feelings and emotions with those observed in the composer’s life—identify a time in your life when you felt something similar (see Activity 11: Emotional Connection).
- q Focus on the creative objectives of the piece before you walk onstage. As you take your first steps onto the stage feel as though you are walking with purpose and confidence. You know what you want to say, and you are ready to communicate the intentions of the composer as you understand them.

Activity 14: Stage Charm

Purpose: The first few moments that you spend onstage can set the tone for your performance. Learning to enter the auditorium with confidence and a sense of purpose can help audience members to feel interested and excited about what you will perform. Stanislavski recognized that some performers possessed a special charisma, or stage charm that made their audiences feel immediately drawn to them. Pianists who do not

believe that they possess this quality can build confidence by practicing the manner in which they enter and exit the stage. In Activity 13: Communication, you practiced “radiating” (communicating) certain objectives and emotions in your performance in order to draw the audience into your musical interpretation. In a similar way, cultivating stage charm requires that you radiate the positive emotions that you feel about yourself and your upcoming performance through nonverbal communication. The purpose of this Activity is to experiment with techniques that enhance your body language, allowing you to control the messages you communicate non-verbally.

Instructions:

n Practice this Activity in the weeks before your performance. As you are about to walk onstage for a practice performance you will say a positive self-statement quietly to yourself such as:

“I am a creative artist”

“I am ready to experience the music”

“I am fully present and in the moment”

“This is my moment to shine”

n Identify a spot on your body. This will be your physical “center”—the point from which your movement originates.

n Practice walking onto the stage several times. First, walk as though your center is a white light in the middle of your chest. As you lead the movement with your center, imagine that the middle of your chest is pulling you onstage.

n You will change the location, and quality of this center many times throughout this Activity. Each time the location of the center changes, notice how your physical movements shift. Here are some examples:

A ray of light shooting out of your right pointer finger

A heavy gray rock in the ball of your left foot
A ball of fire in the pit of your stomach
A vibrating sensation between your eyebrows

- n Notice how the physical quality of your posture and movements change with each new center.
- n Remember that there are many different musical characters represented in a recital. Find the center of movement that works best for each piece you will perform.
- n Make a video recording of yourself entering the stage. Take stock of how your entrance onto the stage sets the mood for the piece you are about to perform.

Follow-up Activities, Suggestions, and Variations:

- q Perform this Activity in your weekly studio class. Ask your classmates to vote on which center causes you to enter the performance space with the greatest amount of stage charm.
- q Do not allow your body language to be reluctant and inward, as if you were walking alone to the practice room—dragging your feet, looking downward, slouching at the piano, etc. These physical movements appear too casual and do not translate well to an audience.
- q Do not allow your body language to be forceful, or imposed on the audience as if you were “playing to the crowd”—a puffed chest, forced smile, dramatic gestures, etc. This form of communication appears affected and may be offensive to your audience.
- q Concentrating your attention on creative objectives in the present moment (the Second Circle of Attention, from Activity 3: Circles of Attention) will produce the best performance results.

Activity 15: Characterizing Gesture

Purpose: A conversation about gesture for pianists may summon images of flailing arms, wild theatrics, and other dramatic movements onstage which can be distracting for audience members. This is not the type of gesture that Stanislavski's System condones, and in fact Stanislavski illustrated for his students how interesting it is to be totally still onstage while simultaneously occupied with intense inner creative focus. Performers must engage not only in visible, physical gestures, but inner, psychological gestures as well. This Activity will help you communicate without the use of superfluous movements at the piano and will strengthen communication with the audience by incorporating a psychological gesture—a tool by which the musical character can be conveyed onstage in a subtle manner. The psychological gesture will become hidden, almost indiscernible to the audience, but will complement the piece you are performing and bring you confidence onstage.

Instructions.

- n Sit quietly in an open, uncluttered space. Think of your piece. As you imagine it as a whole, begin to focus on the central character. It can be a person, animal, place, thing, or emotion. Hold that image in your mind with your eyes closed.
- n Ask yourself who this character is and what the character wants—his, her, or its needs and desires. For example:

A young father who wants to hold his newborn daughter

A heartbroken child who must bury her beloved pet

Passionate lovers, separated by their families who want to see one another

- n Imagine your character moving across the stage. Identify a gesture that embodies what the character needs and wants. Perform it physically several times in front of a mirror, if possible. Here are a few examples:

- Fold your arms in to your chest (an embrace)

- Extend your arms out in a large circle (a greeting)

- Outstretched arms (reaching for something)

- Covering your face with your hands (sorrow)

- Skip, hop, or dance (a rhythmic gesture)

- n Listen to an audio recording of your piece. Perform this gesture in conjunction with the music.
- n As you move pay attention to what feels most congruent with the music in the recording and the rhythmic motifs in the passage. Connect the psychological gesture with a central musical (melodic or rhythmic) motif within the piece.
- n Although these gestures can and should be exaggerated in practice, they should remain almost imperceptible in performance. The gestures you practice in rehearsal become veiled underpinnings of your public presentation of the work.
- n Before entering the stage on the night of your recital, perform the psychological gesture which embodies the piece. Allow the physical movement to remind you of the central musical character of the piece.

Follow-up Activities, Suggestions, and Variations:

- q At the piano now incorporate the characterizing gesture into your physical gestures as you play. Notice how the gesture influences your sound. Smooth gestures will produce an increasingly smooth sound, just as buoyant, bouncing gestures will help to produce a similarly characterized sound.

- q Make a video recording of your performance. Notice movements which accurately represent the character as well as movements which do not serve the character. Take an inventory of which gestures are most helpful in communicating the subtext of the piece. Record the piece again focusing on the gestures that best fit the musical character.
- q Ask a colleague or teacher to watch your video with you. Request that they provide specific feedback on the strength of your gestures and whether or not your physical movements suit the musical material.

Activity 16: Score of Physical Actions

Purpose: In Stanislavski’s final rehearsal technique, the method of physical actions, he instructed his actors to create a “score” (similar to a musical score) of the physical actions which they would accomplish throughout the play. Pianists similarly present many physical actions, movements, and gestures in a one-hour performance—too many to accurately map. However, as you prepare for your recital it is important to think about how you will construct the program as a whole, so each piece flows naturally and logically into the next. You will consider the necessary time taken between pieces and movements of pieces, whether you will stay onstage or leave after finishing certain repertoire selections, the length of your intermission, whether you will verbally address the audience or include program notes, and many other decisions. The purpose of this Activity is to determine a score of physical actions for your approaching recital that will enable a performance that is thoughtful, unified, creative, and confident. In order to do this properly, you will draw from other Activities you have completed or practiced in preparation for your performance.

Instructions:

- n Begin this Activity by looking at list of all the pieces you will be performing. Write down the central musical character and an emotion which describes each piece.
- n Consider the themes represented in your program as you decide how to best order the program. Do you prefer to begin with a high-energy repertoire choice, a serene repertoire choice, or a light-hearted repertoire choice? Allow your tastes and preferences to guide your decisions about the programming.
- n Remember that it is not required that you perform pieces in chronological order. Instead, determine the order by sequencing pieces to create a dramatic progression and tell a story.
- n Once the order of your program is set, print a copy and begin to score the physical actions of your performance from the moment you step onstage throughout the recital. Make sure you double-space your program so that there is plenty of space to write in between the repertoire selections and in the margins.
- n You might decide that you want to speak to your audience at some point during the performance. Be sure to discuss this possibility with your teacher in the months before the performance. This will require that you prepare notes, talking points, or a short script which will keep you on track. Practice what you want to say several weeks before the performance. If you plan to address the audience, step forward after your entrance and wait until the crowd stops applauding before you speak. If you decide to use a microphone, remember to practice speaking with the device several weeks before you perform. The hall manager will need to be made aware of your technology needs several weeks in advance.

- n Determine the physical movements you will use for your initial entrance and bow (Activity 13: Stage Charm) using your physical “centers.” Determine the feelings which you want to project to the audience about your performance. Do you want to exude confidence, openness, excitement, focus, determination, calm, etc.? Think of a phrase that will help you exude these qualities and write down your positive performance statements (see Activity 1: Developing a Positive Inner Monologue) at the top of your program.
- n Decide if you will walk offstage between pieces, which pieces will be grouped together, and how much time you should take between specific pieces. Write down your decisions on your printed program.
- n Pieces with several movements should be treated with special care. Determine appropriate time between movements, making note of where the composer has indicated no time between movements (*attacca*). Stay in character between movements, continuing to focus intently on the creative objectives within the piece as a whole. Determine what you will do with your hands between movements, and refrain from touching your face and fidgeting on the bench during moments of silence.
- n Determine the placement and length of the intermission. Think about the second half of your program. Decide if you need to change your onstage movements to set the tone for the pieces you are about to play. If your first half was generally light-hearted, and the second half contains a set of serious or passionate pieces consider changing the physical quality of your entrance by changing your center of movement (see Activity 14: Stage Charm and Activity 15: Characterizing Gesture).

- n Consider the nature of your finale. The dramatic quality of your final piece will help you to determine the physical movements at the end of your recital. Practice many different variations of movement so that you create the illusion of the first time in your performance (see Activity 11, Illusion of the First Time).
- n Map your final bow –should it be similar to your entrance? What emotions do you want to exude to your audience as you exit the stage? Decide whether you will return to the stage for a second bow, and if you plan on playing an encore.

Follow-up Activities, Suggestions, and Variations:

- q Turn your score of physical actions into an art project.⁸ Print out a list of your repertoire selections and cut each individual piece into a strip of paper which can be easily manipulated to determine the order of the program. Experiment with several different ways of ordering your program.
- q After you decide on the order, glue or tape the strips of paper to another piece of poster board. Incorporate inspiring words, symbols, and images to create a map of your performance. Keep your score of physical actions near your piano as you practice.
- q Make a video recording of your entrances and exits on the stage. Write down positive feedback as well as comments for improvement. Decide if your physical actions match the quality of the upcoming repertoire selection.

⁸ This works just as well with a mind map or flow chart for those who prefer a computer-based approach. But the point is to allow manipulation and embellishment of the elements of your score of physical actions.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

Konstantin Stanislavski was one of those rare artists who never stopped thinking of and working on his craft, constantly looking for ways to improve and to teach others how to find a creative truth on stage. Despite being born into aristocracy and wealth, he nevertheless chose to pursue his passions as an actor and director. When his wealth and property were lost through a political revolution, he simply continued working as an actor, director, and teacher, looking for techniques that would best advance his art. We can see the depth of this commitment through Tortsov, his fictional director, who explains to Kostya, the young actor, how to defend oneself against the dangers of amateurism on stage:

There is only one way, as I have already told you: ceaselessly to fulfil the basic goal of our art, and that consists in the creation of the *life of the human spirit of a role in a play and in giving that life physical embodiment in an aesthetic, theatrical form*. The ideal of the genuine artist is contained within these words.¹

Stanislavski's ceaseless pursuit of the best techniques and methods for actors gave us his System for stage actors, but college pianists understand just as Stanislavski did that performing on stage creates very real challenges and barriers to creative expression. Stanislavski explained the challenges of the stage this way:

We are born with the creative capacity, this 'system' inside us. Creativity is a natural need and you would think we would be incapable of creating other than correctly according to the 'system.' But astonishingly we lose what nature has

¹ Stanislavski, *Actor's Work*, 36.

given us the moment we walk onstage and instead of creating we posture, counterfeit, playact and represent.²

Early experience with acting and familiarity with Stanislavski's System frequently exposed the author to parallel concepts in acting and piano performance. In this study the author has adapted many of the System concepts into sixteen Activities for undergraduate piano performance majors. These Activities are presented in chapter 4, *Applications of the System for Piano Performance*, and are designed as solutions to four common piano performance challenges for these undergraduates: performance anxiety, physical tension in performance, interpretation challenges, and stage presence—the visual rhetoric of piano playing.

Developing and explaining the context for these Activities presented several unanticipated challenges for the author. First, despite many similarities between acting and musical performance, musicians and pianists typically know very little about Stanislavski and his System. Second, the System itself is difficult to summarize or explain, particularly given the nature of Stanislavski's writings and his constant modifications and improvements to his System over a lifetime of work. And third, many of these parallel concepts have been explored in modern piano pedagogy without any attribution for the significant and similar ideas and work of Stanislavski in the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century.

This lack of acknowledgement for Stanislavski's ideas in the field of piano pedagogy is especially surprising given the direct impact that Stanislavski had on a generation of outstanding Russian and American pianists. Certainly the uneven and

² Stanislavski, *Actor's Work*, 611-612.

confusing publication history of Stanislavski's writings contributes to this. More recently there are good quality translations of his writings by Benedetti (*My Life in Art*, 2008, *An Actor's Work*, 2009, *An Actor's Work on a Role*, 2009) and this may lead to more direct comparisons and extensions of Stanislavski's work which benefit the field of piano pedagogy.

Just as Stanislavski was focused on "how" to make his actors perform better on stage, the author's aim in this study was to develop practical applications of Stanislavski's System for college-level pianists. The material in this study was arranged to provide historical and pedagogical context and to demonstrate that Stanislavski's theoretical concepts support the use and inclusion of his System techniques as recital-preparation methods for piano students at the university level of study.

Chapter 1 of this document served as an opportunity to draw historical connections between acting and piano performance. The most compelling evidence for the significance of Stanislavski's work to pianists was found in the teaching and testimony of famed pianists and pedagogues from the Russian school of piano playing, including Theodore Leschetizky, Rosina Lhévine, Heinrich Neuhaus, George Kochevitsky, and Polish-born pianist Artur Rubenstein. The lasting impact of Stanislavski's theater and teachings on such revered pianists underscores the importance of Stanislavski's ideas to the field of piano performance in the United States, as these and many other Russian-trained pianists became established teachers at American music schools and conservatories in the first half of the twentieth century. These deep and lasting connections between the art of acting and the art of piano performance make it even more surprising that no attempt has yet been made to adapt Stanislavski's specific

techniques for use by undergraduate piano performance students and more broadly by piano pedagogues.

Chapter 2, Review of Literature, was critical to this study. To understand Konstantin Stanislavski and his work, one must understand the peculiarities of his writing and publication history. This chapter quickly revealed that Stanislavski himself bears a great deal of the responsibility for difficulties encountered by American students and pedagogues in gaining access to good translations of his writings. Stanislavski struggled to generate writings on his techniques that pleased him without immediately wishing he could add more or alter what he had written. Among the important conclusions that may be drawn from chapter 2 are (i) despite Stanislavski's writing and publication challenges, the System had a significant impact—particularly in the United States and Europe—since the initial publication of his key writings in English, (ii) there are alternative strategies employed by modern pianists to enhance their comfort and facility in public performances that seem to derive from Stanislavski's discoveries and techniques for actors, but with limited or no attribution for the work of Stanislavski, (iii) the Activities for pianists in chapter 4 are supported further by dissertations and theses which have explored connections between the System and other fields—resulting in research

applications in music,³ dance,⁴ education,⁵ oral interpretation,⁶ psychology,⁷ and theology,⁸ and (iv) there are more recent translations (from Benedetti) of Stanislavski's writings that offer more accurate and accessible material for study in English.

The selected biography of Stanislavski provided in chapter 3 revealed his influence on an entire generation of screen actors in the United States and his impact on the theater everywhere through his discoveries and publication of the “first theory of theater art.”⁹ In his early career, he pursued artistic endeavors outside of the theater, including training seriously to become an opera singer.¹⁰ His love of opera continued throughout his life as he directed many opera productions with the Bolshoi Opera Theater in Moscow from 1918-1922, and again in his final years with the Opera Dramatic Studio from 1935 until his death in 1938.¹¹ The institution of the MXAT with his partner Nemeriovich-Danchenko in 1897 eventually brought both men international recognition and remains an artistic fixture in Moscow to this day. Stanislavski’s success and wide-

³ Hinckley, “Performance Anxiety,” 124-130.

⁴ Plumblee, “Acting the dance.”

⁵ Figgins, “Teaching as Dramatic Performance,” 124-125.

⁶ Neiman, “Acting Principles.”

⁷ Ehrenrieck, “Occupational Role Behavior.”

⁸ Crombie, “The Preacher’s Role.”

⁹ Moore, *Stanislavski System*, 26.

¹⁰ Stanislavski, *My Life in Art*, trans. Jean Benedetti, 45.

¹¹ Stanislavski and Rumiantsev, *Stanislavski on Opera*, x.

reaching impact was achieved in spite of enduring many hardships, changes, and personal setbacks. His dedication to the theater, to teaching, and to performing lead him down a path of continual discovery—one which he never abandoned as he continued to make discoveries in the “laboratory” of his theater until he died in 1938.

Chapter 3 also provides an overview of the System in which the author summarizes the many aspects of performance addressed in Stanislavski’s writings and explains the key terminology. The System provides a regimen for actors allowing them to discover the essence of the character for which they have been cast and the story of which they are a part. The process includes (i) a thorough investigation and analysis of the script and the details provided by the author; (ii) discovering hidden innuendo and nuances through an understanding of the subtext—the unspoken inner life of the character; (iii) maintaining an emotional connection with the character by identifying a time in their life when the actor had felt similar emotions; (iv) creating a score of physical actions—a map of each scene which is discovered through improvisation; and finally (v) communicating the character, subtext, emotional connection, and physical actions with an audience through the art of experiencing—the ability to immerse oneself fully in the present, what Stanislavski referred to as “today, here, now.”¹²

Stanislavski’s self-proclaimed failure to compose a distinct list of exercises and activities for future assimilation of his System posed a challenge in designing the sixteen Activities for pianists outlined in chapter 4 of this document.¹³ Fortunately, a wealth of

¹² Stanislavski, *Actor’s Work*, 212-214.

¹³ Benedetti, *Stanislavski and the Actor*, xi.

research on Stanislavski’s System for actors exists and many scholars have included exercises based on their understanding of Stanislavski’s writings. The author has cited and acknowledged, in Appendix B, Source Material for Chapter 4 Activities, both Stanislavski’s key writings and the scholars whose research and writings contributed to the content developed in each of the sixteen Activities. The System concepts have been arranged by the author and Activities have been designed to support young pianists as they prepare for their degree recitals—often the culmination of their years of university piano study. The Activities address the four performance challenges outlined in chapter 1, Introduction, including performance anxiety, physical tension in performance, interpretation challenges, and stage presence. It is impossible to conclude this study without some final reflections on these Activities and the performance challenges they are intended to address.

Performance Anxiety

Pianists and piano teachers accept the fact that performance anxiety is a problem that frustrates even the most technically and musically prepared artists, and yet teachers are often unprepared to help their students directly address this issue. One common statement heard in piano lessons is “it was better in the practice room.” This sentiment is shared by Kostya, Stanislavski’s fictional young actor in *An Actor’s Work*, who lamented that despite the hours of rehearsal, study, and background work, his performance could be usurped by the “gaping black hole” of the auditorium and the presence of an audience.¹⁴

¹⁴ Stanislavski, *Actor’s Work*, 90.

The gift of Stanislavski's writings to piano performance are the activities that strengthen attention and the ability to focus on the moment-to-moment experience of the live performance. Instead of ignoring their feelings of anxiety, pianists may rehearse techniques that will give them the ability to connect to the experience of sharing the music they love with an audience.

These techniques include Activity 1: Developing a Positive Inner Monologue which gives pianists the ability to create two distinct inner monologues. The first inner monologue addresses the dramatic and musical ideas they will express in the piece, and the second inner monologue acts as the performer's positive self-talk—a string of affirmations which encourage a sense of peace and confidence in performance. In Activity 2: Awareness of Physical Senses pianists combat distraction by purposefully focusing on physical and emotional sensations which might distract them on the night of the performance. Attention and focus are addressed in Activity 3: Circles of Attention which encourages performers to stay grounded in the present moment (the Second Circle of Attention) without regressing into the past or projecting too far into the future (the First and Third Circles of Attention). As pianists learn to focus their attention they discover a concept which Stanislavski called public solitude (Activity 4: Public Solitude) in which a performer is able to feel a sense of comfort and ease while playing for an audience. Pianists are encouraged in this document to foster a sense of public solitude by continually pulling their energy into an imaginary performance sphere or bubble, a skill that is practiced in the weeks and months before their recital.

Physical Tension in Performance

One of the detrimental effects of performance anxiety is physical tension in performance which Stanislavski believed robbed his actors of their creativity. In fact, Stanislavski asserted that physical tension is the greatest enemy to creativity in performance.¹⁵ In order to master the art of physical relaxation in performance, pianists must be aware of the tensions they possess and must practice releasing that tension. The Activities presented in chapter 4 allow pianists to examine their physical technique at the piano, practice new techniques of releasing tension, breathing, and will help them to discover balance and ease at the instrument. Activity 5: Breathing encourages students to isolate their upper and lower body breathing and emphasizes the connections between rhythm and breathing. Activity 6: Experiencing the Awareness of Tension forces pianists to become aware of excess physical tension in their playing and shows them how to release it during their performances. Piano performances are physically demanding and most movements require a small amount of tension in specific locations throughout the body, but pianists can practice the techniques in Activities 7 and 8 and can learn to achieve physical balance at the piano. This balance between relaxation and necessary tension is first explored in Activity 7: Recognizing Necessary Tension in Movement which focuses very specifically on the areas of a pianist's body that need some tension and those that can relax at the same time. Activity 8: Puppet and Rag Doll explores a similar juxtaposition between complete tension in the body and complete relaxation through a pantomime exercise.

¹⁵ Stanislavski, *Actor's Work*, 120-123.

Interpretation Challenges

In addition to performing with technical fluency and accuracy, pianists must also present a personal interpretation of the written score. These interpretations cannot simply come from a teacher's experience and expertise. For college-level pianists these interpretations must also be discovered by uncovering background information about the piece, developing a personal application of nuance to the music, establishing an emotional connection to the music through personal experiences, and practicing for spontaneity and originality in the live performance. The Activities presented here encourage university pianists to accept this greater level of responsibility and to take their discoveries and personal experiences all the way through the process of sharing them with an audience in a live stage performance.

Activity 9: Adherence to the Score outlines a four-step preliminary learning process for gaining an understanding of the score before tackling the notes on the page. The steps include (i) securing an aural representation of the piece; (ii) uncovering background information; (iii) understanding the character; and (iv) delineating the form of the piece. In Activity 10: Subtext pianists determine the subtext of their musical selections which is understood to be the subtle nuances that determine a pianist's personal interpretation of the piece. In Activity 11: Emotional Connection students will recall memories from their own lived experiences and associate those memories with the music they are performing. Of course musical interpretation can become stale or ineffective after months of practicing. In Activity 12: Illusion of the First Time (The Moment-to-Moment Experience) pianists are encouraged to foster Stanislavski's illusion

of the first time by practicing varied interpretations in the weeks and months before the piano recital.

Stage Presence—The Visual Rhetoric of Piano Playing

The way pianists represent themselves onstage will have an effect on how the audience perceives the success of their musical performances.¹⁶ This is because audiences experience a live performance both visually and aurally, so pianists must examine the quality of their stage presence and appearance onstage. Stanislavski believed that the most engaging performers would draw an audience into the created world of the stage through the power of their communication and their ability to experience the active and improvisatory nature of live performance. Pianists can develop this skill by first determining what they would like to communicate—an image, affect, or character—and later practice their non-verbal communication through gesture, body language, intention, and recital programming.

In Activity 13: Communion/Communication the author explores the power of communication onstage between the pianist and their artistic objectives. The strength of a pianist’s commitment to their artistic objectives can cause the audience to be drawn into the magnetic pull of their focus. Activity 14: Stage Charm addresses different “centers” of movement which will cause the pianist to “radiate” positive messages about themselves and their performance as they enter and exit the concert hall. Activity 15: Characterizing Gesture helps students to physically embody the musical character of the

¹⁶ Waddell and Williamon, “Eye of the Beholder,” 11.

piece they are about to play. Finally, Activity 16: Score of Physical Actions encourages students to construct their recital programs in such a way that the dramatic flow and interest is carried throughout the performance. Students who use these Activities will have considered many creative possibilities within their final recital program, encouraging a performance that is both innovative, personal, and confident.

Through his writings and his influence on the theater, Konstantin Stanislavski shared a lifetime of focus on his art. Never quite satisfied with his own work and writing, his ideas seem profound today and his influence on generations of actors and musicians cannot be denied. In his words,

I feel the need to compare myself with a seeker after gold who first has to roam the desert to look for a seam and then wash many tons of sand and rock to obtain a few grains of the precious metal. And like him, it is not my search, my privations, my joys and disappointments that I bequeath to my successors but the vein of gold I have discovered. The vein of gold in the art I profess, the result of a lifelong quest, is my so-called 'system', the method of acting I have discovered that allows the actors to create characters, to reveal life of the human spirit, and embody it in an aesthetic form onstage.¹⁷

For pianists at the college level, a significant recital on stage presents many challenges. Years of study and practice, learning new music, mastering technique, moving from the practice room to the teaching studio and from the teaching studio to a performance stage are all aspects of preparing for a performance that can add stress and create trepidation for performers. Through Stanislavski's System, we get a sense of performance as an exciting "whole" made up of many carefully constructed parts including an inner focus that one may use to pull the audience into the world one creates on stage. Likewise, through the Activities in this study, the author hopes that college level pianists can create

¹⁷ Stanislavski, *My Life in Art*, 350.

a similar focus which overcomes stress, conquers physical tension, presents a unique interpretation, and communicates an inner and outer “creative state” allowing their audiences to enjoy the music they share. It is this creative pursuit in all aspects of preparing oneself for a piano performance that the author has attempted to share in this study, a pursuit that Stanislavski described for his actors in this way:

Actors must be in this [general creative] state, whatever else they do. Whether they are doing the play for the first of the hundredth time, whether they are learning or repeating the lines, whether they are working at home or in rehearsal, whether they are trying to find mental or physical material for their character, whether they are thinking about the life of the human spirit, or its outward shape, about costume and make-up, in other words every time they have the least contact with the role they must be in the inner and outer and general creative state in performance ... [this] performance mode speaks to us of genuine, living, human life, and truth.¹⁸

Recommendations for Further Study

This study has offered specific Activities for undergraduate piano performance majors that comprise solutions to four common performance issues by utilizing key concepts from the Stanislavski System of actor training. The author recognizes that the limitations of this study provide certain opportunities for further research and also that related topics and opportunities for further research and study may be discerned. These related topics include at least the following:

1. Studies that extend beyond the four common performance issues for pianists providing a more comprehensive review of the applications to piano performance found within the acting System of Konstantin Stanislavski.

¹⁸ Stanislavski, *Actor's Work*, 584.

2. Studies that consider the ideas and acting methods—as they relate to piano performance—of Stanislavski’s influential students: Vsevolod Meyerhold, Mikhail Chekhov, Yevgeny Vakhtangov, Maria Ouspenskaya, Richard Boleslavsky, and Ilya Sudakov.

3. Pianists with fewer opportunities to perform have a more difficult time feeling confident onstage. Therefore, the author suggests the creation of a semester-long performance course for undergraduate pianists, in which the Activities proposed in this document are implemented and tested, and the results are measured with a final recital, survey, and performance quality assessment.

4. Stanislavski’s Method of Physical Action uses physical improvisation as a learning tool before the script is introduced—the result is a more securely learned and memorized role. Pianists who can improvise similarly feel more confident and secure on stage. The author suggests a study that would devise an improvisation course for pianists based on Stanislavski’s Method of Physical Action and Method of Active Analysis.

5. Studies that extend beyond applications of Stanislavski’s System for undergraduate piano majors, perhaps to students at different levels of study, particularly children ages 8-18. In particular, studies that devise activities for children and teenage students with suggestions for teachers such as a teaching manual.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS IN THE STANISLAVSKI SYSTEM

Action: What a character does to achieve or acquire their personal goal or objective within the play. It is not physical action, but instead refers to the internal and external drives of the character in every moment onstage which are present in order to draw closer to what she ultimately wants or needs, her objective. Actions are usually communicated by an internal transitive verb such as “I summon you,” “I intimidate you,” or “I seduce you.”¹

Active Analysis: A method of rehearsal in which the actors uncover subtextual meaning of their parts through improvisation before the script has been memorized.

Affective Memory: (Also called Emotion memory) The ability to remember previously experienced emotional states. Lee Strasberg emphasized affective memory in his teaching, using exercises where actors re-live personal memories in vivid detail. Stanislavski believed that too much focus on such personal memories would distract from being present in the ‘today, here, now’ of onstage performance, which in turn could “disturb the actor’s ‘mental hygiene’ and distract from the play.”² Stanislavski encouraged his actors to collect “a store of affective memories” by attending concerts,

¹ Merlin, Konstantin Stanislavski, 157.

² Carnicke, Stanislavski in Focus, 214.

viewing works of art, participating in new experiences, and becoming a voracious reader of all literature, newspapers, and poetry.³

Attention: (See also Concentration, Objects of Attention) The actor's ability to focus on what they are doing on stage without allowing themselves to become distracted by the pull of the audience. Stanislavski instructed his actors in order to cultivate attention they must "*become engrossed in what is happening onstage.*"⁴ Attention was demonstrated through an exercise entitled the Circles of Attention, in which actors focus their attention on circles of light created by a spotlight on the stage.

Belief: The state of believing the truth of what transpires in performance, or as Benedetti puts it: "to inhabit the universe created by the stage."⁵ Believing in the truth of the character the actor had created in conjunction with the author not only affected the actor's level of comfort and fluidity onstage but also had the ability to "produce active participation in the audience."⁶

Bit: Also translated 'unit', Stanislavski's term bit refers to a section of the play which is driving towards a specific objective or task. Stanislavski warned his students not to try to remember all the small bits "which can be numberless" but instead focus on "the large, most important Bits, through which the creative path passes."⁷ The process of

³ Carnicke, *Stanislavski in Focus*, 214.

⁴ Stanislavski, *An Actor's Work*, 90.

⁵ Benedetti, *An Introduction*, 48.

⁶ Benedetti, *An Introduction*, 48.

⁷ Stanislavski, *An Actor's Work*, 139.

analyzing the play by its constituent parts enlivens the performance and makes it “seem easy” for the actor.⁸

Communication: (See also Communion) This refers to both the communication between actors onstage and between the performers onstage with the audience. Working first through effective communion between actors, they naturally draw the audience into a state of communication with the audience through the magnetic energy they are witnessing onstage.⁹

Communion: (See also Communication) Communion is achieved through the focus of attention on the actors scene partner through eye contact and through an exchange of energy that is inevitably found in human interaction.¹⁰ Stanislavski’s idea relates to the Yogic concept of *prana*, in which humans radiate outward through “pranic rays of energy.”¹¹ This intense form of communion causes the actors to be “in each other’s grasp” which in turn results in effective communication with the audience.

Concentration: (See also: Attention, Objects of Attention) The actor’s ability to focus on objects, objectives, and actions onstage. Actors must practice holding their concentration on a single “focal point.”¹²

⁸ Stanislavski, *An Actor’s Work*, 142.

⁹ Merlin, *Konstantin Stanislavski*, 159.

¹⁰ Merlin, *Konstantin Stanislavski*, 158.

¹¹ Carnicke, *Stanislavski in Focus*, 222.

¹² Stanislavski, *An Actor’s Work*, 93.

Creative State: Stanislavski became obsessed with determining the process of summoning the creative state in performance. In the last chapter of *An Actor's Work: Part I*, he describes formula: a psychophysical technique (the blending of body and mind), the belief in the truth of the role, and the ability to cultivate the 'new life' of the role by following the steps of textual, emotional, and physical analysis outlined in the System.¹³

Emotion Memory: (Also called Affective Memory) Borrowed from the research of French psychologist Theodule Ribot (1839-1916) and describes the innately human ability to "remember previously experienced emotional states by recalling the accompanying physical sensations."¹⁴

Experiencing: The actor's ability to feel "the alien life" of the character "as if it was his own."¹⁵ In this "ideal kind of acting" actors recreate the role night after night "in full view of the audience" publicly exposing the actors inner creative life.¹⁶ This requires the actor to remain "active" and "improvisatory" regardless of how well-rehearsed and well-studied they are in the role.¹⁷ The process represents Stanislavski's reaction to what he called the art of representation, in which actors used stock and trade (artificial) interpretations, copied the interpretation of others, and gave lifeless performances.

¹³ Stanislavski, *An Actor's Work*, 345.

¹⁴ Carnicke, *Stanislavski in Focus*, 213.

¹⁵ Benedetti, *An Introduction*, 55.

¹⁶ Carnicke, *Stanislavski in Focus*, 217.

¹⁷ Carnicke, *Stanislavski in Focus*, 217.

Given Circumstances: The concrete circumstances in which the character has been placed by the author of the play. This provides the actor with vital information about the character, informing the actor's range of appropriate choices and interpretations. This information includes the character's role within the play, time-period and place, social status, gender, life circumstances, and other facts about the character and the entire play.

Illusion of the First Time: Every time a role is performed, each moment of action should be encountered as if it were the first time it has ever occurred.

Imagination: The ability to think creatively about the unwritten details of the play, "to treat fictional circumstances as if they were real, to visualize the details of the character's life specifically and concretely, to daydream or fantasize about the events of the play."¹⁸

Inner Action: The inner psychological drives which propel the action forward, stringing moments together into what Stanislavski called the unbroken line. He continues, "Try to get into the brain, the heart, the wants of the role, to stimulate your own emotion memory, create a representation, a personal appraisal of the life of the character ... striving towards it with your own psychological inner drives."¹⁹

Life of the Human Body in a Role: (See physicalizing) This term is often used in place of physicalizing, or the outward embodiment of the character, defined separately below.

¹⁸ Carnicke, *Stanislavski in Focus*, 219.

¹⁹ Stanislavski, *An Actor's Work*, 283.

Life of the Human Spirit: (See also truth) When an actor places themselves “in the very thick of [their character’s] imagined life” in order to “go beyond” the limits of their own personality.²⁰ In order to do this, actors must have analyzed the textual, emotional, and physical elements of the role in great detail.

Magic if: The answer to the question, “What would I do if I were in this (the character’s) same situation?” This question strengthens the actor’s imagination by creating a scenario that is connected to their own personality, beliefs, and logic.

Method of Physical Action: (See also Objective, Physical Action, Score of Physical Action) The technique that fulfilled Stanislavski’s lifelong search for a rehearsal method “that would engage body, mind, and emotions simultaneously.”²¹ Stanislavski believed that each physical action embodied a psychological objective and emotional quality. Through the score of physical actions actors could achieve vivid emotional reactions to the physical actions they performed onstage.

Objective: The objective or task is the “main desire motivating a character’s behavior in a scene or within a particular *bit*, and it is directed towards the on-stage partner.”²²

Objects of Attention: In order to control attention and concentration, actors must choose a compelling object of attention: an action, physical object, or objective.

Stanislavski explained: “There is not a single moment in a man’s life that his attention is

²⁰ Merlin, *Konstantin Stanislavski*, 158.

²¹ Merlin, *Konstantin Stanislavski*, 29.

²² Merlin, *Konstantin Stanislavski*, 161.

not engaged in some object or another. And the more compelling the object, the greater its power over the actor's attention."²³

Outer Action: The physical gestures and actions an actor plays in pursuit of their inner actions.

Physical Action: (See also physicalizing) Refers to either an "inner or outer action which carries with it a psychological motivation." For example, walking across the room is not an action but a physical movement. Walking across a room to embrace a loved one, or to escape from some kind of danger is a physical action because it has a psychological purpose.

Physicalizing: (Also referred to as physical action; and see *life of the human body in a role*) Refers to the outward embodiment of the character, including the physical movements and gestures which must be governed by the facts of the play and the laws of nature.

Public Solitude: The ability to feel as relaxed while in front of an audience as you would feel if you were alone in your house. This technique was described to Stanislavski's students through an activity which he called circles of attention, in which the actors felt at ease onstage when only a single spotlight shone upon them. As the circle of light grew incrementally to encompass the entire auditorium, students trained themselves to feel as comfortable on the stage as they would in solitude.

Round-table analysis: The process developed by Stanislavski early in his career in which actors would analyze the details of the play, the given circumstances, objectives,

²³ Stanislavski, *An Actor's Work*, 91.

through-line of action, and super-objectives. These round-table analysis discussions would take place in the weeks and months before onstage rehearsals started. Stanislavski eschewed this technique later in his career in favor of the more holistic Method of Physical Action.

Score of Physical Actions: Similar to a musical score, Stanislavski would create a score of physical actions to accompany each play. This score was discovered through improvisation and rehearsed through ‘silent etudes,’ in which actors would learn their role through physicalizing.

Stock-and-Trade: An earlier system of acting which Stanislavski called the *art of representation* in which actors used artificial interpretations which they copied from the interpretation of others, and which led to contrived or lifeless performances.

Subtext: Circumstances that are not directly referenced in the text of the play but make up the inner dialogue and meaning. In determining the subtext actors must use their imagination to infer meaning where the author has not specified details. The subtext is communicated through “specific intonation, looks, gestures, pauses, or stillness” making up the non-verbal aspects of communication which are present in real life. Stanislavski said “keep in mind that a person says only ten per cent of what lies in his head, ninety per cent remains unspoken.”²⁴

Super-Objective: Every play and every character within that play has an ultimate goal, a destination to which they journey throughout the play.²⁵

²⁴ Toporkov, *Stanislavski in Rehearsal*, 181.

²⁵ Merlin, *Konstantin Stanislavski*, 162.

Task: (See also objective) This term refers to the objective or goal within a specific bit or segment of the play. Similar to action, tasks represent a specific desire or drive toward a goal.

Tempo-Rhythm: This concept, born out of Stanislavski's work with opera singers, refers to the ability for a performance to have two different speeds – the internal and the external. Merlin explains: “Tempo is the speed at which an action is performed and rhythm is the intensity with which the action is performed.”²⁶ A character's external actions might be moving at a slow pace, however their inner action could be progressing very quickly. For example, a character is sitting still but simultaneously experiencing intense emotions internally (slow external tempo with a quick internal rhythm).

Through-Line of Action: The path by which each character and thereby the play itself reaches its super-objective. The score of every action in the play determines what the Group Theater refers to as the “spine of the play” or the “spine of the character.”²⁷

Truth: (See also Experiencing) Belief in the truth of a role is facilitated by experiencing “every moment in the role.”²⁸ Experiencing their own personality within a role is the means by which actors communicate genuine inner truth.

²⁶ Merlin, *Konstantin Stanislavski*, 162.

²⁷ Carnicke, *Stanislavski in Focus*, 163.

²⁸ Stanislavski, *An Actor's Work*, 28.

Will: Represents a preparatory step in the creation of a role that deals with the actor's desire to discover and solve 'the problem' of the character they are playing, moving them toward the initiation of some kind of action.²⁹

²⁹ Carnicke, *Stanislavski in Focus*, 227.

APPENDIX B

SOURCE MATERIAL FOR CHAPTER 4 ACTIVITIES

Activity 1: Developing a Positive Inner Monologue

Stanislavski, *An Actor's Work*, 90.

Benedetti, *Stanislavski and the Actor*, 92.

Greene, *Performance Success*, 18.

Activity 2: Noticing Physical Senses

Stanislavski, *An Actor's Work*, 90-92.

Gillett, *Acting Stanislavski*, 7.

Activity 3: Circles of table

Stanislavski, *An Actor's Work*, 91-92.

Benedetti, *Stanislavski and the Actor*, 39-43.

Merlin, *The Complete Stanislavski Toolkit*, 247.

Activity 4: Public Solitude

Stanislavski and Rumiantsev, *Stanislavski on Opera*, 17.

Merlin, *Konstantin Stanislavski*, 50, 143.

Benedetti, *The Actor in You*, 25.

Hinckley, "Performance Anxiety: Constantin Stanislavski's Concept of Public Solitude," 124-8.

Greene, *Performance Success*, 18.

Activity 5: Breathing

Stanislavski, *An Actor's Work*, 120.

Merlin, *Stanislavski Toolkit*, 34-35.

Activity 6: Awareness of Tension

Stanislavski, *Stanislavski on Opera*, 5.

Stanislavski, *An Actor's Work*, 123.

Benedetti, *Stanislavski and the Actor*, 17.

Gordon, *The Stanislavski Technique: Russia*, 214.

Activity 7: Necessary Tension in Movement

Stanislavski, *An Actor's Work*, 121-122.

Benedetti, *Stanislavski and the Actor*, 18.

Gordon, *The Stanislavski Technique: Russia*, 214.

Activity 8: Puppet and Rag Doll

Stanislavski and Rumiantsev, *Stanislavski on Opera*, 5.
Benedetti, *Stanislavski and the Actor*, 19.
Gordon, *The Stanislavski Technique: Russia*, 214.

Activity 9: Adherence to the Score

Stanislavski and Rumiantsev, *Stanislavski on Opera*, 14-16.
Stanislavski, *An Actor's Work*, 52-53.
Merlin, *Stanislavski Toolkit*, 104-110
Benedetti, *The Actor in You*, 71.

Activity 10: Illusion of the First Time

Stanislavski and Rumiansev, *Stanislavski on Opera*, 52-53.
Benedetti, *The Actor in You*, 10-13.
Fenagle, *Beginning Acting*, 26.

Activity 11: Subtext

Stanislavski, *An Actor's Work*, 684.
Merlin, *Stanislavski Toolkit*, 95-96.
Fenagle, *Beginning Acting*, 124-125.

Activity 12: Emotional Connection

Stanislavski, *An Actor's Work*, 212-213.
Stanislavski and Rumiantsev, *Stanislavski on Opera*, 30-31.
Gordon, *The Stanislavski Technique: Russia*, 226.
Benedetti, *Stanislavski and the Actor*, 61-68.
Benedetti, *The Actor in You*, 22.

Activity 13: Communion

Stanislavski, *An Actor's Work*, 239.
Benedetti, *Stanislavski and the Actor*, 74-77.
Gordon, *The Stanislavski Technique: Russia*, 227.

Activity 14: Stage Charm

Stanislavski, *An Actor's Work*, 549-551.
Benedetti, *The Actor in You*, 36-38.
Hinckley, "Performance Anxiety: Constantin Stanislavski's Concept of Public Solitude,"
125-30.

Activity 15: Characterizing Gesture

Stanislavski, *An Actor's Work*, 40.
Pierce, *Deepening Musical Performance*, 156.
Merlin, *The Complete Stanislavski Toolkit*, 35.

Activity 16: Score of Physical Actions

Benedetti, *Stanislavski and the Actor*, 105-107.

Merlin, *Konstantin Stanislavski*, 132.

APPENDIX C

LETTER FROM THE INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD WITH REVIEW OUTCOME



Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects **Human Research Determination Review Outcome**

Date: July 09, 2019

Principal Investigator: Andrea V Johnson, MA

Study Title: The Acting System of Konstantin Stanislavski As Applied to Piano Performance

Review Date: July 09, 2019

I have reviewed your submission of the Human Research Determination worksheet for the above-referenced study. I have determined this research does not meet the criteria for human subject's research. The proposed activity involves using publicly available data. Therefore, IRB approval is not necessary so you may proceed with your project.

If you have questions about this notification or using iRIS, contact the HRPP office at (405) 325-8110 or irb@ou.edu. Thank you.

Cordially,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Aimee Franklin'.

Aimee Franklin, Ph.D.
Chair, Institutional Review Board