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Connecting Performance Technique with Music: A Comparative Analysis of the Teaching Methods of Hans Leygraf and His Mentor Anna Hirzel-Langenhau

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Abstract

Emotional expression is often regarded as an important element in music performance. Many prominent musicians, however, consider performance technique a requirement to gain freedom in emotional expression. This is not necessarily easy to acquire and has been a major concern for both teachers and students. Hans Leygraf (1920-2011), a renowned Swedish pianist and educator, had a unique teaching method for the piano. During the early stages of piano instruction with his students, he would deliberately emphasize on basic performance techniques. His method was inspired by the teaching of one of his mentors, Anna Hirzel-Langenhau (1874-1951), who actively sought finger skills to create tone color.

The aim of this research is to clarify how Leygraf taught music from the perspective of technical instruction. I compare Leygraf's teaching with that of Hirzel-Langenhau. In addition, I will elaborate on what they both emphasized in their technical instruction, and what Leygraf developed independently as his own teaching method.

My analysis is based on Leygraf's instruction in *Fundamental Piano Lessons* (2 DVDs, 2006) and Langenhau's teaching in *Greifen und Begreifen: Ein Weg zur Anschlagkultur* (1964, 19-). All conversations and actions between him and his students in the DVD lessons are transcribed in this study. The latter, which is a book, includes not only guidance by Hirzel-Langenhau, but also commentary and annotations by editors, disciples, and translator. All of the contents have been categorized into different sound and playing techniques through proper review and labeling.

Both Leygraf and Hirzel-Langenhau instructed their students to consciously examine these sounds and techniques by dividing them into smaller elements. Furthermore, the students learned how to merge each element. Leygraf specifically taught skills that can be applied in the musical context by teaching connected sensations with musical interpretation.

Through this research, it can be suggested that Leygraf's teaching method systematically develops a student towards gaining freedom in emotional expression. He did not regard technical practice as a mere training and preparation for performance, but positioned it as part of trial and error in interpreting music. These findings provide a pedagogical insight into teaching students how to connect performance technique with music.