

# THE IMPORTANCE OF TEACHING CANTILENA IN THE PIANO CLASSES

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**Abstract:** work on the cantilena involves improving musical capabilities and more importantly, an emotional connection to the musical instrument being played. The intonation of the melody, the tempo-rhythmic flexibility, dynamic expressiveness and subtle feeling of various ways of touching keyboard are subordinated to the artistic and sound task of mastering cantilena music.

Teacher has to demonstrate the features of the performance of cantilena and how it works and this is one of the most important aspects of teaching the piano. The sooner the student comprehends it, the better his artistic and performing skills develop.

Listening to audio recordings and watching video performances of famous and outstanding artists who contributed to a more complete understanding of the performance of cantilena music, will better equip student with learning the art of playing the piano.

**Keywords:** cantilena, music, melody, piano, teaching, sound.

## ВАЖНОСТЬ ОБУЧЕНИЯ КАНТИЛЕНЕ В КЛАССАХ ФОРТЕПИАНО

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**Аннотация:** работа на кантилене предполагает совершенствование музыкальных возможностей и, что более важно, эмоциональной связи с музыкальным инструментом. Интонация мелодии, темпоритмическая гибкость, динамическая выразительность и тонкое чувство различных способов прикосновения к клавиатуре подчинены художественно-звуковой задаче овладения кантиленной музыкой. Преподаватель должен продемонстрировать особенности исполнения кантилены и то, как она работает, а это один из важнейших аспектов обучения игре на фортепиано. Чем раньше ученик ее постигает, тем лучше развиваются его артистические и исполнительские способности. Прослушивание аудиозаписей и просмотр видеозаписей известных и выдающихся исполнителей, способствовавших более полному пониманию исполнения кантиленной музыки, лучше вооружит ученика искусством игры на фортепиано.

**Ключевые слова:** кантилена, музыка, мелодия, фортепиано, учение, звук.

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*"...singing is the main rule of musical performance, lifeblood of music"  
(K.N. Igumnov)*

### Introduction

As it is known, the word "cantilena" (Italian cantilena, from Latin cantilena - singing) is a melodic tune, both vocal and instrumental. Possession of cantilena, the art of "singing by fingers or singing a melody audibly" is one of the most important aspects of the pianist's technique. After all, sound expressiveness, the quality of sound, and above all its melodiousness, is the most important performing means for the realization of a musical and artistic design. Some of the greatest pianists – G.G. Neuhaus, K.N. Igumnov, A. Korto have spoken and written extensively about "singing by fingers or singing a melody audibly". According to the unanimous opinion of outstanding pianists and teachers, good, expressive performance should be learned from singers. "It is very useful for the correct execution of a phrase to sing it to yourself. In this way you will always learn more than from lengthy books and reasoning" (F.E. Bach). According to Thalberg, who studied singing under the supervision of a famous Italian school professor, good performance, and performance with taste, can be learned by listening to outstanding masters, especially singers. "Those artists and composers who went through a good vocal school in their youth, and their own world of feelings are much livelier, more mobile, richer and more tender - that is why their works and performance are so expressive. Those who have only a general, superficial idea of good singing are much less likely to have good expressive performance. The greatest composers of all time sang in their youth."

The education and improvement of the ability to perform cantilena musical works is one of the main tasks of a piano teacher. Working on sound production from the first lessons should be central to the process of learning to play the piano.

It takes a lot of time and effort to develop this skill. Introduction to the art of cantilena performance by developing the ability to listen attentively to musical speech, to penetrate into its meaning and structure, to work on

the sound quality has a beneficial effect on the development of the student's creative musical abilities, his performing initiative.

G.M. Kogan: "To teach to hear, to educate the ear, to develop a student's intonation and timbre subtle ear - this is the first task of a teacher-musician, the through core of his work." In addition to special techniques for performing cantilena, an emotional connection to what is being performed is necessary, since the pianist embodies his inner idea of the melody into real sounding. After all, the performer must find for each melody an individual sound and articulation corresponding to its characteristics, for "each meaningful melody has its own inner essence. Emotional connection with melody is one of the most important aspects of human musicality" (E. Lieberman).

#### **Main features of working on cantilena**

Work on cantilena, like work on all other types of technique, requires consistency and constancy.

Training is based on work on a melodic motive, a sentence, several musical phrases, the simplest elements of a musical form, dynamics, and gains experience in emotional empathy with music.

It is necessary to tell the student what is happening with this piece of work, to develop his imagination with successful metaphors, poetic images, analogies with the phenomena of nature and life. It is useful to use the subtext of the melody. Strictly speaking, the emotional connection to the melody is one of the most important aspects of the performance of any piece of music.

At this stage, vocal singing, expressive intonation and melodious performance of one-voice and two-voice songs and pieces are the basis for developing the skills of performing cantilena works. This helps the student to learn vocal breathing, the ability to "think forward", as it were, contributes to the development of perspective, "horizontal" thinking and a holistic vision of the artistic and aesthetic image in the work.

Teacher's quality display is very important. It depends on the expressiveness of the performance of the play by the teacher, to what extent the music will interest the child, give impetus to further active work. The teacher teaches to listen to the colour of the sound with varying degrees of touching the keyboard, to listen to the sound (playing non legato), and then smoothly move from one sound to another (legato) so that, the character of the performance exactly matches with the content of the melody.

It is very important to understand the gradation of sound for the student himself. By lowering the key too slowly and quietly, he will get a "zero" - this is not a sound; if, on the contrary, he puts his hand on the key too quickly and firmly - it will turn out to be a knock - this is no longer a sound. Between these limits lie all sorts of gradations of sound. "Not yet a sound" and "no longer a sound" - these are the important things to explore and experience. As the repertoire becomes more complex, so do the tasks.

Getting to work on a piece of work, we must first choose a convenient fingering. It is from the competent choice of fingering that the integrity of the performance of a musical phrase depends. Cantilena has its own fingering features, its favourite fingers. These are the 3rd, 4th, 5th, somewhat smaller than the 2nd, fingers. Such a prominent pianist as Felix Blumenfeld advised in a soft, lyrical cantilena, if possible, "to use the "unmelodious" 1st finger less often." It is often more expedient to shift the 3rd through the 4th or 5th than to put the first one. The following sequence of fingers is possible 1 3 4 3 4 5. This does not mean that the 1st finger is never used in cantilena. They have to be used, and not a little, and sometimes in melodies that require a thick, "horn" sound, it is simply irreplaceable (as in the middle part of "Sweet Dreams"):

However, in a lyrical plastic cantilena, it is better not to use the use of the first finger too often. It is especially desirable to put less of it, as this creates the danger of a push in the melodic line.

One of the main tasks of a pianist teacher should be to teach the student to listen to himself, because the ability to hear is the basis of pianistic skill. All movements of the pianist must be subject to auditory control. It is very useful to play with your eyes closed, in which case the hearing becomes sharper and the student begins to hear the real sound, and not the one that he imagines.

It is very important to convey to the student the feeling of touching the keyboard. This is done through comparisons and associations, as well as the transfer of sensations, as they say, "from hand to hand." The training is based on the experience of famous pianists. As G. Kogan explained "the melodiousness of the sound is achieved by a special way of pressing the keys. Do not push, do not hit on it, but first "feel" its surface, "stick" to it not only with your finger, but also - through the finger - with your whole hand, with your whole body, and then, without "sticking" from the key, holding it on the "cushion" of a long finger, as if stretching from the shoulder, gradually increase the pressure until the hand plunges into the keyboard "to the bottom" - with such a movement as they lean on the table, press on other people's shoulders, press the seal into the sealing wax. One of the best comparisons is G.G. Neuhaus, who sought to convey his own feelings during performance, about "... sprouting a finger into the keyboard to the bottom.

"The pianist's hands in cantilena should be strong and pointed precisely at the keyboard, but at the same time should remain soft and supple. The significance of the preparatory movements of the fingers, hand, circular movements of the elbows and forearms, the feeling of freedom from the back is also very important.

The method of Leschetizky and his students is also used, who achieved a melodious sound by combining a swing, a fall of the hand with a "wrist spring", a slight bending of the wrist. The climax of "Sweet Dreams":

The procedure for mastering the techniques of cantilena performance is the same as, for example, when working on technique: I hear - I feel - I work out - I embody. It is necessary to develop a conductor's beginning, to develop the student's inner hearing.

It is important to draw the student's attention to the internal idea of the necessary sound and dynamics of the phrase, to teach to hear and lead the melodic line performed with various strokes, to develop the desire for expressive phrasing, to form the ability to convey the nature of the melody.

The primary imagination-prehearing contributes to more accurate performance, helps to achieve the implementation of the composer's intention in real sound. The teacher can develop the ability to hear the sound not only at the moment of its extraction, but also its continuation or transition to another higher level, using figurative comparisons about overcoming musical space, about the need to mentally "reach out" to the next note, "get it" like a voice.

It is necessary to focus the student's attention on playing with prepared fingers, since only in this case he dictates to them the strength of the sound that is necessary.

For instance, if you want to extract a warm and soulful sound, as in "Sweet Dream", then it is better to touch the keyboard closer to the keys, and for a bright and open sound - "Winter Morning", you should use the full amplitude of the finger span. If the cantilena sounds in an octave or chord presentation, as in "Morning Prayer", you need to work on the sound vertical - "lightening" the upper melodic voice. The weaker 4th and 5th fingers should sound brighter, with weight, and the first finger lighter and more accurate:

In the performance of the cantilena, the main thing is to use the weight of the hand, relying on the keyboard. At the same time, one cannot understand the "weight of the hand" as something permanent, unchanging and passive. In cantilena, the weight of the hand is regulated by muscular work. Therefore, it is correct to speak about the calculated hand pressure on the keyboard.

Feelings are completely different in different dynamic shades. Cantilena forte, cantilena piano and in the physical sense is the result of a greater or lesser degree of inclusion (or inhibition) of the weight of the hand. It is important to explain that the melody (despite the piano) must be maximally and intensively intoned, sung on the instrument with your fingers.

The fingers should be kept as close together as possible, ready to play at any moment. In the fingertips, a feeling of strength, tenacity is necessary; this is important not only in forte, but also in piano.

The fingers in the cantilena can move with a larger or smaller span. However, of course, it is expedient to position them in such a way that the entire fingertip is in contact with the key, that is, the position is elongated, soft. Of course, there are cases when the finger has to be rounded due to the peculiarities of the texture, but this is an exception, which masters of piano singing resort to only when absolutely necessary.

Be sure to illustrate the method of teaching how to play the instrument with vivid and figurative statements of the great masters. Here is what K.N. Igumnov said: "When performing the cantilena, the fingers should be kept as close to the keys as possible and try, if possible, to play with the "pad", the fleshy part of the finger, that is, strive for the most complete contact, natural fusion of the fingers with the keyboard ...

You need to merge with it, "join" her..."

In order to achieve a diverse sound of melodies, they need to be played in different ways. Since we are talking about relatively small changes, the cantilena techniques described earlier are not replaced, but modified.

For the expressive performance of the cantilena, the articulation of sounds is very important, that is, the way the melodic line is pronounced.

Articulation is understood as "the art of performing music, and above all a melody, with varying degrees of dismemberment or connectedness of its tones, the art of using all the variety of legato and staccato techniques in performance," he writes in his book.

Legato, which masters use to perform melodies, is different. I.A. Braudo, in the book cited, noted the following scale of "the degree of connection and dissection":

- 1). connectivity - acoustic legato or legatissimo;
- 2). dismemberment - dry legato, deep non legato, non legato;
- 3). metric definiteness - non legato (the sounding part is equal to pauses);
- 4). brevity - soft staccato, staccato, staccatissimo (maximum achievable brevity).

However, the gradations of "connectedness", as well as "dismemberment" and "brevity" are immeasurably richer than this scale. If you offer even the greatest master to play one sound of different strength and articulation, then he will reach no more than 15-20 gradations in strength and no more than 10-15 gradations in articulation. However, in a musical context, in a work of art, the variety of sound is limitless. This is exactly what is felt when great pianists play the piano, in which each melody sounds unique.

In the Russian pianistic school, melodiousness of sound is and remains one of the most important conditions for good performance.

But the main thing in the performance of the cantilena is not the extraction of each sound separately, but the combination of sounds, phrasing. We can say that the basis of the ability to "sing" on the piano is a relaxed and correct performance, fluency in the skill of "breathing" the hand, the ability to sing sounds and smoothly lead the melody. An important point is the analysis of the structural features of a musical work.

Having found out where the culminating point of the melodic "wave" is located, one should "distribute the breath" of the hand in such a way that it "rushes" to this "point of gravity" (K.N. Igumnov), that is, there should be a logical aspiration of the melodic movement.

It is necessary to correctly calculate the motor "pattern" from its very beginning, that is, to start the phrase correctly. It is useful to practice performing the beginning of a phrase as if it were its middle, that is, as if the first sound was preceded by 2-3 more sounds.

It is even more useful to play a phrase several times, imagining, on the contrary, its middle - the beginning, in other words, not adding, but subtracting, cutting off the first sounds; then the clipped sounds are restored one by one - first the last one, then the penultimate one, and so on. In this way, the performer develops the important ability to "step" not immediately "with the whole foot, but to run up on tiptoe" (each time more and more from afar) to the climax of the phrase.

In essence, "working on sound", according to Neuhaus, is a very imprecise expression:

"It is always said about any very good pianist: what a wonderful sound he has, how he sounds ... etc. But what acts on us as a wonderful sound is in fact something much more - it is the expressiveness of the performance, i.e. e. the organization of sounds in the process of composition.

The pedal is of great importance in cantilena work. Skilfully using the pedal, the pianist finds the timbre, the color of the sound, creates the harmonic background of the melody. If we press the right pedal, we breathe life into the sound. This is the main meaning of the retarded pedal. "Catching" and "supporting" reception does not allow the sound to fade away. Therefore, it is important to first hear the sound, and then pick it up.

At the first stage of training, precise pedalling, understanding and limiting it, as well as the ability to achieve melodiousness of sound without a pedal, are necessary.

The role of the melody in the performance of the cantilena is undoubted, but pianists rarely have to play only one melody, usually it appears against the background of harmonies and accompaniment. The sound of accompaniment, the ratio of melody and accompaniment, the depth of the bass are very important.

In piano works, the accompaniment for the most part has a chordal or figurative character:

The first thing to take care of when performing accompaniment is that the latter does not drown out the melody, does not prevent it from "breathing", "flowing", "singing".

Each of its sounds should not only sound clearly, but also sound unmuffled to the end, that is, until the beginning of the next sound.

The melody should not be isolated artificially, but naturally separated from the accompaniment (remaining at the same time internally merged with it).

To this end, you can sometimes apply a slight shift of some of its sounds in time, taking them a little later or a little earlier than the accompaniment. But one should pay attention to the fact that this technique must be applied very tactfully and remember that it can be permissible and effective with the finest artistic taste, otherwise the performance will turn into a caricature. Since the accompaniment is the harmonic and rhythmic support of the melody, it should be ensured that it firmly supports its "floating", as a dancer supports his ballerina.

In this regard, the role of the bass, the harmonic vertical, is especially important. The bass sound is the basis of harmony. Therefore, it should always be taken, albeit softly, but resonantly, quite juicy and sonorous. The moderate sound predominance of the bass does not in the least burden the overall sonority. Bass plays a very large role in the overall sound, and very dangerous to leave a melody with accompaniment without the full support of the lower voice.

Each of the elements of the musical fabric - melody, harmony, bass should be listened to and worked out both independently and together. It should be noted that the degree of complexity of the musical material, its volume, forms and methods of mastering should be feasible for the students, their age and psychological characteristics, level of development and readiness for learning.

The main thing in the work on cantilena pieces is an active and interested attitude to the musical work being performed, understanding the artistic and sound specifics of music and its connection with vocal genres, identifying the intonational nature of melodic turns; understanding the interdependence of sound quality and the nature of sound production, the use of different ways of touching the keyboard, observing the patterns of form development, understanding the importance of articulation for musical expression, the subtle use of strokes and dynamic shades, and the use of pedalling as an important tool in creating a musical image.

### **Conclusion**

The above methods of working on cantilena are the main ones in pedagogical practice. The expressive intonation of the melody, the tempo-rhythmic flexibility and dynamic expressiveness, the subtle feeling of various ways of touching the keyboard are subordinated to the artistic and sound task of mastering cantilena music.

Work on the cantilena involves the maximum sharpening of creative musical abilities and an emotional connection to the musical instrument being played.

Of course, the less developed the student is, the more conversations and explanations there are, the more thorough and persistent the work. It is necessary to achieve a concrete embodiment of your statements and suggestions in sound, phrase, nuance. The practical demonstration by the teacher of the features of the performance of cantilena works is the main one when teaching students in the piano class.

The sooner the student comprehends and imagines the figurative content of the work, the ways and methods of working on mastering sound and technical difficulties, the more fruitfully his artistic and performing independence will develop.

Gradually, the ability to meaningfully perform musical works is developed through the definition of priority musical tasks and constant control over the sound quality. Listening to audio recordings and watching videos of

performances by famous and outstanding artists contribute to a more complete understanding of the performance of cantilena music.

The created artistic image in the cantilena depends on the ability of the performer to recreate the author's intention. It is important to formulate a goal for the student - in working on the cantilena, you must first work on the melody, on the sound, and be guided by the well-known statement of G.G. Neuhaus: "Mastering sound is the first and most important task among other piano technical problems that a pianist must solve, for sound is the melody of music itself: by ennobling and improving it, we raise the music itself to a higher level!"

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