

**THE SCIENCE OF PIANOFORTE
PRACTICE: AN ESSAY ON THE
PROPER UTILIZATION OF
PRATICE TIME**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649345182

The Science of Pianoforte Practice: An Essay on the Proper Utilization of Practice Time by A. R. Parsons

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A. R. PARSONS

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THE SCIENCE
-
PIANOFORTE PRACTICE.

AN ESSAY
-
THE PROPER UTILIZATION OF PRACTICE
TIME.

BY
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NEW YORK:
G. SCHIRMER,
35 UNION SQUARE.

1886.

A. S.

MIT 220
P267

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PREFACE.

THE present essay was prepared by invitation of the Music Teachers' National Association for delivery on the occasion of their meeting in Boston. It is now published by request of many esteemed members of the profession who were present at the time and in response to letters since received from various parts of the United States from others who desire to use its suggestions as an aid in systematizing and formulating their own professional experiences and observations, and at the same time to distribute it among their pupils for self-study in connection with the personal instruction received from lesson to lesson.

In revising the essay for publication, the main text has been somewhat amplified in a few places and some appendices added, with a view to making it as suggestive as possible at all points.

NEW YORK, October, 1886.



OF THE PROPER UTILIZATION OF PRACTICE-TIME.

SUMMED up in a nutshell, the proper utilization of practice-time involves three things :

1. A recognition of useful ends.
2. A knowledge of the best means.
3. A methodic expenditure of time and labor at once adequate and economical.

The scope of this subject includes everything capable of contributing to the pianist's development from its earliest beginnings to the full maturity of artistic powers. The field being too vast to be covered in a single essay, I shall restrict myself to offering a contribution to the science of practising, in the form of a presentation of certain points of practical consequence, the outcome of the experiments and experiences of some years of professional work.

The matters to be treated fall naturally under the following heads :

1. Preliminaries and adjuncts to practice.
2. Of chief ends of practice; and the selection of pieces for certain ends.
3. Aids to practice.
4. How to take up new work and perfect it.
5. General points.
6. The relation of practice to playing.

I.

PRELIMINARIES AND ADJUNCTS TO PRACTICE.

DE QUINCEY says, "The whole body of the arts and sciences is one vast machinery for the irritation and development of the human intellect."

Only a trained intellect can hope to solve with distinction the present problems of art. Obviously, then, the would-be artist should seek the highest possible culture for every faculty of mind. On an autograph leaf presented to Bülow, Wagner wrote :

"Knowledge is the means appointed to nourish the flames of inspiration in the artist's breast."

Again, it is said, that one must "strive to know everything of something and something of everything." In view of the limitations of all one-sided knowledge and the fallacies to which it exposes the mind, it is hardly an exaggeration to say, that without knowing something of everything, one is really incapable of that knowledge of everything about something without which no man is master of the situation.

To be sure, in a well-known passage, Berlioz, himself a man of quite exceptional culture and general accomplishments, cleverly satirizes the musician of the nineteenth century who, unlike his predecessors of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, reads his Homer, Virgil, Dante, Shakespeare, and Goethe all in

the original tongues; but who, quite unlike those predecessors aforesaid, is not quite clear about the right way to construct the answer to a given fugue subject. This warning against being a "Jack of all trades and good at none" receives striking expression in a proverb of the Sandwich Islands—"A dog has four legs, but he does not try to walk four ways at once."

Nevertheless, after giving these admonitions to concentration of powers and thoroughness of achievement in some particular direction all due heed, it still remains true that just as the blacksmith by the steady use of his right arm alone can never become a strong man, but only a man of unbalanced though unusual strength in one arm, so the musician who is brought up exclusively on sounds becomes usually, not an artist, but a mere specialist, with possibly ears of exceptional length to show for his pains! One of the brightest and most successful of modern English writers, the author of *The Three Fishers* and other poems which have become household words, confessed, when at the zenith of his powers, that he felt more and more strongly that he did not know enough, not of the laws of poetry, but instead, of science, to be a poet in our time. Modern poets, painters, and musicians must indeed be ever diligently employed with much besides "the thing they most do show." To the musician who is truly an artist, music is just what plumage is to the bird—namely, the most directly obvious outgrowth of the life within. But birds do not grow their plumage by feeding on feathers, and to seek to rear the young musician on music only is to starve his soul. He must "secrete" even his musi-