

The 22nd International Chopin Piano Competition in ASIA – Final Round
High School Category

I do totally understand and appreciate the idea of the Competition Organisers, who ensure that one of the main aims of the Competition is to provide pedagogical assistance to young pianists.

Of course, it is much more difficult, and sometimes even impossible, to express one's impressions or suggestions in a fully responsible manner, when one does not have the opportunity to have direct contact with the talent and artistic personality of the young pianist. That is why I decided to write these few general sentences of my thoughts, which concern practically all groups-categories that are part of the Competition Chopin in ASIA.

One of my frequent impressions when listening to Competition recordings was the impression of poorly defined or even non-existent artistic personalities of some pianists. On the other hand, a strong concentration on the exact execution of all the notes and the pedagogue's instructions is often evident. Unfortunately, we often do not hear a free, flexible, creative transmission of the pianist's interpretation. Then, we hear only an accurate but unfortunately often very mechanical realization of the text of the piece, too often subjected to the pressure of the rhythmic, metronomic tempo. Such a way of playing and music understanding guarantees limited development of the artistic personality of a young pianist and development of his musical imagination and a deep understanding of music.

What is completely different is the playing of a young pianist during everyday practice. Then an important source of information - but only information - may be the metronome. However, it is a complete misunderstanding if during a concert or a recording, instead of a narrative phrase we feel and hear... a metronome! We hear all the notes, pauses, accents etc. written in the score, but we do not hear the understanding of their role in the whole musical narration of the piece.

Such mechanical execution of the score are particularly irritating in the interpretation of deeply narrative Chopin's works.

Of course I understand perfectly well the fundamental differences in problems that the youngest pianists have, different from pianists from secondary schools and those who are already students of music universities. But in each of these groups - while maintaining obvious differences in the level of skills - the freedom of natural, creative expression and the joy of contact with music should be audible and visible! I particularly underline the term "natural transmission", and not a transmission based on artificially learned external, sometimes even theatrical gestures and movements, which are supposed to suggest understanding of the musical narrative.

Another, quite common problem is the proper understanding of what is the so-called expression in music and passion in playing. Unfortunately, very often we encounter interpretations of young pianists, whose performer understands and conveys to the audience the suggestion that expression is closely related to the fast tempo and dynamics of playing!

In my opinion, this is one of the fundamental musical errors and interpretive misunderstandings! I believe that tempo and dynamics **are not the source** of musical expression - on the contrary, the source of expression is and should be our mind, truly deep imagination and the artistic personality of the pianist, while the tempo and dynamics of interpretation **are only the result** of an extremely necessary imagination.

Finally, it is artistic imagination and the ability to communicate it to the audience - such an understanding of pianistic problems, which allows us to distinguish even good pianists from truly creative great artists.

And I wish to all our young pianists to look for and to use such an understanding of music and problems of interpretation!

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I'm impressed by the high technique of all contestants. That's a great base to build up a musical personality. I think we all need to seek the essential matter which is a good (proper) sound quality. This, of course, is strictly connected with the essence of the piece. Once we understand "the plot", the meaning and all moods of the piece, we can try to develop the appropriate sound palette.

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Dear Participants of the Final Round of the 22nd International Chopin Piano Competition in ASIA,

I would like to congratulate you on performing in the final round of the competition!

I must emphasize that I am really happy that thanks to the great effort of the whole IMC Staff, despite the very difficult pandemic situation, affecting nearly every country in the world, we could meet in some way again this year.

It was a great honour and pleasure for me to listen to your fantastic, impeccably prepared performances! My sincere congratulations on your wonderful talents and hard work, as well as on extraordinary contribution of all the teachers, whose task – especially this year – is hard to overestimate.

My message would not be complete without some thoughts concerning piano playing I would like to share with you.

First of all, when we think about participating in any competition, we should remember that it should never be the aim itself, but only the way; a possibility to meet different people and learn their opinion and view, to share our way of thinking and interpreting, sometimes to motivate ourselves or verify our skills. The real aim is always the music, the art and our development, enrichment of our feelings, emotions, experience, making our understanding deeper and deeper.

I think that also a good, adequate, and wise choice of repertoire is essential – not always preparing the most demanding pieces is the best idea.

When taking piano playing in general and especially performing Chopin pieces into consideration, it would be good to take great care of (among others):

- very natural communication, making music speak; mostly linear way of thinking and natural musical 'breathing';
- creating long phrases, shaping every motive and phrase, but also thinking about the whole construction;
- beautiful, singing (with the image of good legato and bel canto idea), very colourful, rich and noble

sound;

- awareness of musical structures, including formal aspects, harmony, gestures, etc.;
- awareness of the history of the pieces, musical stories 'hidden' in the pieces, but also our personal ideas we want to share with the audience;
- awareness of characters as well as of roots of the particular genres (which can be especially important e.g. in dances, with their folk, court, or national music basis);
- good balance (between voices, between many layers in the whole structure, between notes in a chord etc.);
- good, supporting, and varied use of pedals (always with awareness of particular instrument, acoustics and the real musical aim of using them in a particular moment);
- avoiding any unnecessary tension in body (including especially back, shoulders, arms, and forearms);
- listening to what is really happening, finding some distance and really good balance between 'input' (meaning what we want to do and what we are doing) and 'output' (what really comes out);
- ...in the end – feeling some pleasure because of the little act of creation we are always experiencing while performing a musical masterpiece!

Wishing you all the best in your future lives and careers.