



***FRIEDRICH  
WIECK***

***PIANO  
AND  
SONG***

**Friedrich Wieck**

# **Piano and Song**

**How to Teach, How to Learn, and How to Form a  
Judgment of Musical Performances**

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# CHAPTER I.

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## ON ELEMENTARY PIANO-FORTE INSTRUCTION.

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You ask, my dear friend, for some particular information about my piano method, especially with regard to my mode of elementary instruction, which differs essentially from that in common use.

I give you here the main points; and, if you place confidence in my experience of forty years, and if you will supply those details which I have omitted, your own varied experience as a thoughtful, talented, and earnest piano-teacher will enable you to understand my theory, from the following dialogue between my humble self under the title of Dominie, my friend, and the little Bessie:—

DOMINIE. My dear friend, how have you managed to make piano-playing so utterly distasteful to little Susie? and how is it that the instruction which you have given her for the last three years actually amounts to nothing?

FRIEND. Well, I will tell you how I have proceeded. First I taught her the names of the keys, that was pretty dull work for her; then I made her learn the treble notes, which was a difficult matter; after that I taught her the bass notes, which puzzled her still more; then I undertook to teach her a pretty little piece, which she hoped to perform for the delight of her parents. Of course she constantly confused the bass and treble notes, she could not keep time, she always used the

wrong fingers and could not learn it at all. Then I scolded her,—she only cried; I tried a little coaxing,—that made her cry worse; finally I put an end to the piano lessons, and she begged me never to begin them again; and there you have the whole story.

DOMINIE. You certainly might have begun more judiciously. How is it possible for a child to climb a ladder when not only the lower rounds, but a great many more, are wanting? Nature makes no leaps, least of all with children.

FRIEND. But did she not begin to climb the ladder at the bottom?

DOMINIE. By no means. She certainly never was able to reach the top. I should say, rather, that she tumbled down head foremost. To speak mildly, she began to climb in the middle; and even then you tried to chase her up, instead of allowing her, carefully and quietly, to clamber up one step at a time. Bring me your youngest daughter, Bessie, and I will show you how I give a first lesson.

DOMINIE. Bessie, can you say your letters after me? so,—*c, d, e, f.*

BESSIE. *c, d, e, f.*

DOMINIE. Go on,—*g, a, b, c.*

BESSIE. *g, a, b, c.*

DOMINIE. Once more: the first four again, then the next four. That's right: now all the eight, one after the other, *c, d, e, f, g, a, b, c.*

BESSIE. *c, d, e, f, g, a, b, c.*

DOMINIE. (*after repeating this several times*). That's good: now you see you have learned something already. That is the musical alphabet, and those are the names of the white

keys on the piano-forte. Presently you shall find them out, and learn to name them yourself. But, first, you must take notice (I strike the keys in succession with my finger, from the one-lined *c* to the highest treble) that these sounds grow higher and become sharper one after the other; and in this way (I strike the keys from one-lined *c* to the lowest bass) you hear that the sounds grow lower and heavier. The upper half, to the right, is called the treble; the lower half is the bass. You quite understand now the difference between the high sharp tones and the low deep ones? Now we will go on. What you see here, and will learn to play upon, is called the key-board, consisting of white keys and black ones. You shall presently learn to give the right names both to the white keys and the black; you see there are always two black keys and then three black keys together, all the way up and down the key-board. Now put the fore-finger of your right hand on the lower one of any of the two black keys that are together, and let it slip off on to the white key next below it; now you have found the key called *c*; what is the name of the next key above it? Say the whole musical alphabet.

BESSIE. *c, d, e, f, g, a, b, c.*

DOMINIE. Well, then, that key is called *d*.

BESSIE. Then this one must be *e*.

DOMINIE. And now comes *f*. Anywhere on the key-board you can find *f* just as easily, if you put your finger on the lowest of any three black keys that are together, and let it slip off on to the white key next below it. If you remember where these two keys, *f* and *c*, are, both in the treble and the bass, you can easily find the names of all the other keys. Now what is the next key above *f*?

BESSIE. *g*, and then *a*, *b*, *c*.

DOMINIE. Now we will say over several times the names of the keys, upwards and downwards, and learn to find them skipping about in any irregular order. At the end of the lesson we will try them over once more, and before the next lesson you will know the names of all the white keys. You must practise finding them out by yourself; you can't make a mistake, if you are careful to remember where the *c* and the *f* are.

I told you that the sounds this way (I strike the keys upward) grow higher, and this way (I strike them downwards) they grow lower. So you see no tones are just alike: one is either higher or lower than the other. Do you hear the difference? Now turn round so as not to see the keys; I will strike two keys, one after the other; now which is the highest (the sharpest), the first or the second? (I go on in this way, gradually touching keys nearer and nearer together; sometimes, in order to puzzle her and to excite close attention, I strike the lower one gently and the higher one stronger, and keep on sounding them, lower and lower towards the bass, according to the capacity of the pupil.) I suppose you find it a little tiresome to listen so closely; but a delicate, quick ear is necessary for piano-playing, and by and by it will become easier to you. But I won't tire you with it any more now, we will go on to something else. Can you count 3,—1, 2, 3?

BESSIE. Yes, indeed, and more too.

DOMINIE. We'll see; now keep counting 1, 2, 3, 1, 2, 3, as evenly and regularly as you can. (I lead her to count steadily, and strike at the same time a chord in three even



quarter-notes.) Now we'll see if you can count evenly by yourself. (I count 1 of the chord with her, and leave her to count 2 and 3 by herself; or else I count with her at 2, and let her count 1 and 3 alone; but I am careful to strike the chord promptly and with precision. Afterwards I strike the chord in eighth-notes, and let her count 1, 2, 3; in short, I give the chord in various ways, in order to teach her steadiness in counting, and to confine her attention. In the same way I teach her to count 1, 2, 1, 2; or 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6; at the same time telling her that music is sometimes counted in triple time, and sometimes in 2/4 or 4/4 time.) Now, Bessie, you have learned to count very well, and to know the difference in the tones. It is not every child that learns this in the first lesson. If you don't get tired of it, you will some time learn to be a good player. As soon as you are rested, I will tell you about something else, that you will have to listen to very carefully.

BESSIE. But I like it, and will take pains to listen just as closely as I can.

DOMINIE. When several tones are struck at the same time, if they sound well together, they make what we call a chord. But there are both major and minor chords: the major chord sounds joyous, gay; the minor, sad, dull, as you would say; the former laugh, the latter weep. Now take notice whether I am right. (I strike the chord of C major; then, after a short pause, that of C minor; and try, by a stronger or lighter touch, to make her listen first to the major and then to the minor chords. She usually distinguishes correctly; but it will not do to dwell too long upon these at first, or to try to enforce any thing by too much talk and explanation.) Now I

will tell you that the difference in the sounds of these chords is in the third, counted upwards from the lower note *c*, and depends upon whether you take it half a tone higher or lower, *e* or *e* flat. I shall explain this better to you by and by, when you come to learn about the tonic, the third, the fifth or dominant, the octave, and so on. (It is advantageous and psychologically correct to touch occasionally, in passing, upon points which will be more thoroughly taught later. It excites the interest of the pupil. Thus the customary technical terms are sometimes made use of beforehand, and a needful, cursory explanation given of them.) That is right; you can tell them pretty well already; now we will repeat once more the names of the keys, and then we will stop for to-day. Just see how many things you have learned in this lesson.

BESSIE. It was beautiful!

DOMINIE. I hope you will always find it so.

BESSIE. When may I have another lesson?

DOMINIE. Day after to-morrow; at first, you must have at least three lessons a week.

BESSIE. What shall I do in the next lesson?

DOMINIE. I shall repeat all that I have taught you to-day; but I shall teach you a great deal of it in a different way, and every time I shall teach it to you differently, so that it shall always be interesting to you. In the next lesson we will begin to play, first on the table, and at last on the piano. You will learn to move your fingers lightly and loosely, and quite independently of the arm, though at first they will be weak; and you will learn to raise them and let them fall properly. Besides that, we will contrive a few exercises to teach you

to make the wrist loose, for that must be learned in the beginning in order to acquire a fine touch on the piano; that is, to make the tones sound as beautiful as possible. I shall show you how to sit at the piano and how to hold your hands. You will learn the names of the black keys and the scale of C, with the half-step from the 3d to the 4th and also that from the 7th to the 8th, which latter is called the leading note, which leads into C. (This is quite important for my method, for in this way the different keys can be clearly explained.) You will learn to find the chord of C in the bass and the treble, and to strike them with both hands together. And then in the third or fourth lesson, after you know quite perfectly all that I have already taught you, I will teach you to play a little piece that will please you, and then you will really be a player, a pianist.

FRIEND. From whom have you learned all this? It goes like the lightning-train.

DOMINIE. A great many people can learn *what* is to be taught; but *how* it is to be taught I have only found out by devoting my whole mind, with real love and constant thought, to the musical improvement and general mental development of my pupils. The advancement will unquestionably be rapid, for it proceeds step by step, and one thing is founded upon another; the pupil learns every thing quietly, thoughtfully, and surely, without going roundabout, without any hindrances and mistakes to be unlearned. I never try to teach too much or too little; and, in teaching each thing, I try to prepare and lay the foundation for other things to be afterwards learned. I consider it very important not to try to cram the child's memory with the

teacher's wisdom (as is often done in a crude and harsh way); but I endeavor to excite the pupil's mind, to interest it, and to let it develop itself, and not to degrade it to a mere machine. I do not require the practice of a vague, dreary, time and mind killing piano-jingling, in which way, as I see, your little Susie was obliged to learn; but I observe a musical method, and in doing this always keep strictly in view the individuality and gradual development of the pupil. In more advanced instruction, I even take an interest in the general culture and disposition of the pupil, and improve every opportunity to call forth the sense of beauty, and continually to aid in the intellectual development.

FRIEND. But where are the notes all this time?

DOMINIE. Before that, we have a great deal to do that is interesting and agreeable. I keep constantly in view the formation of a good technique; but I do not make piano-playing distasteful to the pupil by urging her to a useless and senseless mechanical "practising." I may perhaps teach the treble notes after the first six months or after sixty or eighty lessons, but I teach them in my own peculiar way, so that the pupil's mind may be kept constantly active. With my own daughters I did not teach the treble notes till the end of the first year's instruction, the bass notes several months later.

FRIEND. But what did you do meanwhile?

DOMINIE. You really ought to be able to answer that question for yourself after hearing this lesson, and what I have said about it. I have cultivated a musical taste in my pupils, and almost taught them to be skilful, good players, without knowing a note. I have taught a correct, light touch

of the keys from the fingers, and of whole chords from the wrist; to this I have added the scales in all the keys; but these should not be taught at first, with both hands together. The pupil may gradually acquire the habit of practising them together later; but it is not desirable to insist on this too early, for in playing the scales with both hands together the weakness of the fourth finger is concealed, and the attention distracted from the feeble tones, and the result is an unequal and poor scale.

At the same time, I have in every way cultivated the sense of time, and taught the division of the bars. I have helped the pupils to invent little cadences with the dominant and sub-dominant and even little exercises, to their great delight and advantage; and I have, of course, at the same time insisted on the use of the correct fingering. You see that, in order to become practical, I begin with the theory. So, for instance, I teach the pupil to find the triad and the dominant chord of the seventh, with their transpositions in every key, and to practise them diligently; and to make use of these chords in all sorts of new figures and passages. But all this must be done without haste, and without tiring the pupil too much with one thing, or wearing out the interest, which is all-important.

After that, I teach them to play fifty or sixty little pieces, which I have written for this purpose. They are short, rhythmically balanced, agreeable, and striking to the ear, and aim to develop gradually an increased mechanical skill. I require them to be learned by heart, and often to be transposed into other keys; in which way the memory, which is indispensable for piano playing, is unconsciously greatly

increased. They must be learned *perfectly* and played well, often, according to the capacity of the pupil, even finely; in strict time (counting aloud is seldom necessary) and without stumbling or hesitating; first slowly, then fast, faster, slow again, *staccato*, *legato*, *piano*, *forte*, *crescendo*, *diminuendo*, &c. This mode of instruction I find always successful; but I do not put the cart before the horse, and, without previous technical instruction, begin my piano lessons with the extremely difficult acquirement of the treble and bass notes. In a word, I have striven, as a psychologist and thinker, as a man and teacher, for a many-sided culture. I have also paid great attention to the art of singing, as a necessary foundation for piano-playing. I have devoted some talent, and at least an enthusiastic, unwearied love to the subject. I have never stood still; have learned something of teaching every day, and have sought always to improve myself; I have always been something new and different, in every lesson and with every child; I have always kept up a cheerful, joyous courage, and this has usually kindled the same in my pupil, because it came from the heart. Moreover, I have never been a man of routine, have never shown myself a pedant, who is obliged to hold fast to certain ideas and views.

I have lived up to the century, and have tried to understand and to advance the age; have heard every thing great and fine in music, and have induced my pupils also to hear it. I have opposed with determination all the prejudices and false tendencies of the times, and never have allowed impatient parents to give advice about my lessons. I have insisted upon a good and well-tuned instrument for my