

## Addendum

The power of a given tradition is independent of whether or not the presence of its founder can be discerned in the public consciousness. The influence of Artur Schnabel on musical life – from training methods for pianists to repertoire selection and programme conceptions – is clearly evident, even if few know to whom this tradition can be traced. In addition, many of his pupils have passed on his ideas in anonymised form to generations of pianists.

Nevertheless, there was hardly a pianist at the beginning of the twenty-first century better acquainted with the specifics of the Schnabel tradition in every detail than Artur Schnabel's great-grandson Claude Mottier, who died tragically in a car accident in 2002. Claude was born in Zurich, Switzerland, in 1972 and grew up in the USA. He was in contact with several of his great-grandfather's pupils and received his first piano tuition from his grandfather Karl Ulrich Schnabel. He subsequently studied the piano under other teachers, whose differing perspectives enabled him to subject his own musical background to exact scrutiny. When Claude, due to progressive illness, was unable to continue his piano studies and turned to linguistics instead, the consequence, tragic as the circumstances may have been, was that he was now able to undertake a precise analysis – from the outside, as it were, after being part of this tradition himself – of his own musical origins. He did this with such lucidity and subtle wit that nobody fortunate enough to have heard his brilliantly formulated talk at the Artur Schnabel Conference is likely to ever forget his account.

Although at the conference Claude spoke about the concept of expression in Karl Ulrich Schnabel's teaching methods, it was just as possible to ask him about details of the Schnabels' playing technique. Not only because of his close relationship with his grandfather but also because of a deep understanding for the piano and music in general Claude Mottier was able to correctly interpret the relationship between the artistic heritage of Karl Ulrich Schnabel and that of the somewhat overwhelming myth of Artur Schnabel: Karl Ulrich Schnabel was in fact not only an excellent pianist but also one of the most important teachers of his time who, while owing a lot to his father, also further developed and cultivated the heritage of Artur Schnabel. Witnessing Karl Ulrich Schnabel as he taught his graduate students it was impossible not to be drawn in by the sheer force of his artistic poise: in fact it was enough for him to play a single chord in order to express his musical ideas convincingly to both his students and listeners.

Of my exchange of ideas with Claude Mottier regarding playing techniques, a small debate about the fingering of a chromatic scale, held by email just before the accident, has been preserved. The topic is obviously marginal, but his comments on it stemmed so clearly from the Schnabel tradition that his views on the subject go beyond the actual occasion to speak eloquently about the tradition itself. I had asked a question about a short sequence from Mary Lou Chayes' fascinating film about Karl Ulrich Schnabel, in which he remarks to a pupil who has just played a chromatic scale, "That's a fingering that nobody serious takes any more. The new fingering is always as many fingers as possible. [...] Learn that fingering and you'll have a great time!" Schnabel apparently did not find it necessary to explain the fingering he had proposed, which is why I asked Claude Mottier to explain it to me:

"The fingering is a classic example of Schnabellian »thinking outside the box.« Scales – whether major, minor, pentatonic, whole tone, or chromatic – repeat at the octave; thus, pianists generally devise fingerings that repeat at the octave. Hence the usual fingering for chromatic scales:



if he had one) by moving the wrist – i.e., the way chords are broken. With some additional practice to get it even (and not very much at that), the quick succession of broken chords will be a blazingly fast run.

A note of caution: practicing this way will allow virtually anyone to play far faster than they even dreamed possible – it will NOT, however, enable the same pianist to play the same passage slowly. It just doesn't work that way.

I returned again to the obviously close relationship between position technique and the fingering for the chromatic scale, but I also asked Claude whether the fifth finger was intentionally avoided in the latter, perhaps because one wished to have a universal fingering close to the traditional one for the chromatic scale. Or had there been a general mistrust regarding the fifth finger? This I could not imagine being a part of the Schnabel way of thinking, I said, as Artur Schnabel's fingers were all approximately the same length and the remarkable length of the fifth finger in particular must have provided him with no small playing advantage. Claude responded:

The 5th finger may and should be used as often as possible in the chromatic scale as anywhere else. To my knowledge, Artur as well as Karl Ulrich did not hesitate to use 5-5 or 1-1 even in legato passages at times. As I'm sure you know, Artur chose fingerings to reflect phrasing; i.e., 5-1 in a passage moving up will encourage a break. Incidentally, the long 5th finger which you speak of is a uniquely Artur characteristic which the Behr skeleton that Karl Ulrich inherited does not share. In fact, the chromatic fingering that I sent you, only lacks 5 because I planned it that way. If I had started on C, for instance, instead of A, the fingering would start 1-2-3-4-5. Because of the way the chromatic scale lies on the keyboard, there is never room for all five fingers to play consecutively except at the low end of a passage in the right hand or at the top in the left. The nod to tradition that you speak of is rather amusing in the context of the Schnabels, for while they were always very respectful of the composer's wishes, tradition as such was never very important to them."

Here it becomes very clear that tradition in the Schnabel sense does not mean an eternally fixed custom but rather something that must be redefined and developed by each generation. The goal remains the same - to adequately convey the composer's artistic ideas to the listener, while paying due attention to changes in circumstances. Artur Schnabel has been criticised for pianistic deficiencies; it is possible that his publicly demonstrated censure of technique for its own sake may have contributed to this, although reports from pupils and the Beethoven and Mozart editions, annotated in minute detail, which were then reedited and augmented by Schubert editions and a pedal book by Karl Ulrich Schnabel, speak an entirely different language. Artur and Karl Ulrich Schnabel's contributions to the further development of piano technique in the service of artistic representation were grasped in their entirety only by Claude Mottier. His death has torn a gap in our knowledge of this tradition.

W.G.

Translation: Nicola Heine

## Nachbemerkung

Die Kraft einer Tradition ist unabhängig davon, ob ihr Begründer im Bewußtsein der Öffentlichkeit noch auszumachen ist. Artur Schnabels Einfluß auf das Musikleben – von der Pianistenausbildung über die Auswahl des Repertoires bis hin zur Programmgestaltung im Musikleben – ist allenthalben nachweisbar, auch wenn vielleicht nur noch wenige wissen, auf wen diese Tradition zurückgeht. Überdies haben viele seiner Schüler seine Ideen gleichsam anonymisiert an nachfolgende Generationen von Pianisten weitergegeben. Dennoch wußte am Beginn des 21. Jahrhunderts kaum ein Pianist besser über das Spezifische der Schnabel-Tradition in allen Details Bescheid als der Urenkel Artur Schnabels, Claude Mottier, der 2002 bei einem tragischen Autounfall ums Leben kam. 1972 in Zürich geboren und in den USA aufgewachsen, hatte Claude noch ganz selbstverständlichen Kontakt zu Schülern seines Urgroßvaters und erhielt von seinem Großvater Karl Ulrich Schnabel den ersten Klavierunterricht. Später studierte er bei anderen Lehrern, die ihm, durch ihren veränderten Blickwinkel, eine genaue Reflexion seiner eigenen musikalischen Herkunft ermöglichten. Als Claude auf Grund einer schleichenden, tückischen Krankheit das Klavierspiel aufgeben mußte und sich der Linguistik zuwandte, hatte das bei aller Tragik zur Folge, daß er nunmehr präzise wie kaum jemand sonst – gleichsam von außen, nachdem er zuvor selbst Teil dieser Tradition war – auf seine musikalische Herkunft blicken konnte. Er tat das mit einer solchen Klarheit und solch subtilem Witz, daß niemand seine Ausführungen vergessen kann, der während des Artur-Schnabel-Symposiums seinen brillanten frei gehaltenen Vortrag hören durfte.

Wenngleich Claude auf dem Symposium über das Ausdrucks-konzept im Unterricht von Karl Ulrich Schnabel sprach, konnte man ihn genausogut über Details der Spieltechnik der Schnabels befragen. Nicht nur, weil er ein enges Verhältnis zu seinem Großvater hatte, sondern auch aus einem tiefen Verständnis für die Pianistik und die Musik im allgemeinen, konnte Claude Mottier das künstlerische Vermächtnis von Karl Ulrich Schnabel gegenüber dem alles überstrahlenden Mythos Artur Schnabel ins rechte Licht setzen: Tatsächlich war Karl Ulrich Schnabel nicht nur ein hervorragender Pianist, sondern auch einer der bedeutendsten Lehrer seines Jahrhunderts, der seinem Vater zwar viel zu verdanken hatte, dieses Erbe aber stets weiterdachte und weiterentwickelte. Wer Karl Ulrich Schnabel einmal beim Unterrichten von Meisterschülern erlebte, konnte sich der Kraft seiner künstlerischen Ausstrahlung nicht entziehen: Es genügte tatsächlich ein einziger Akkord, den er anschlug, um Schüler und Zuhörer von seinen musikalischen Vorstellungen zu überzeugen.



An diesen Brief schloß sich natürlich die Frage nach Karl Ulrich Schnabels »Position Technique« an. Der Zustand von Claudes rechter Hand hatte sich zu dieser Zeit verschlimmert, was ihn nicht daran hinderte, in seiner Antwort auch darüber eine humorvolle Bemerkung zu machen:

I'm sorry that it's taken me so long to get back to you. My right hand no longer seems to work quite right, and typing has been somewhat depressing. So, here is my first attempt at typing left hand solo (I've been working on Brahms's brilliant transcription of Bach's Chaconne for Violin for about a week). This way it is a fingering challenge rather than an exercise in futility. Not too bad so far!

You wanted to know about KUS's »position technique«. By now you may have received Pat Lutnes's transcript of a hand written note that she found at Como. In it he contrasts »general technique« (I think this was the word – scales arpeggios etc.) with »position technique« (that required for a particular bit of some piece). I never heard him use the term in this way, although the narrow use of »position technique« that I know is also position technique in this broader sense.

The position technique that is mentioned in the documentary, and which I mentioned in the note on chromatic scales is a way of playing, and especially practicing, fast passages. Traditionally, we practice fast passages by first learning to play them slowly, then gradually increasing the tempo (probably with the aid of a metronome) until the desired speed is achieved. Position technique is about practicing positions of the hand – or more accurately, changes in position. Fingering becomes very important for position technique; the more notes that can be played in a given position, the fewer changes in position, and since changing position takes time, the fewer changes in position, the faster we can play. The relation of this concept to the »good fingering« for the chromatic scale should be obvious.

Since position technique is not about learning the sequence of notes within a position (although doing so may still necessary), we practice the group of notes in a position as a cluster, concentrating on the change of position between the first cluster and the second, then the second and the third and so fourth, and so on. When the position changes between pairs of clusters becomes easy, practice three in a row then four... to the length of any given passage. When the sequence of positions is learned, the clusters can be »broken« (my word, I don't know if he had one) by moving the wrist – i.e., the way chords are broken. With some additional practice to get it even (and not very much at that), the quick succession of broken chords will be a blazingly fast run.

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Nochmals kam ich auf die offensichtlich enge Beziehung von »Position Technique« und Fingersatz für die chromatische Skala zurück, fragte Claude jedoch, ob bei letzterer der 5. Finger absichtlich vermieden würde, vielleicht, weil man in der chromatischen Tonleiter gerne einen universellen, dem traditionellen wiederum angenäherten Fingersatz haben wollte. Oder ob es ein generelles Mißtrauen gegen den 5. Finger gegeben habe? Ich könne mir das bei den Schnabels nicht vorstellen, meinte ich, weil Artur Schnabel doch Finger von annähernd gleicher Länge gehabt und gerade die auffallende Länge des 5. Fingers einen nicht zu unterschätzenden Vorteil bedeutet habe. Claude antwortete:

The 5th finger may and should be used as often as possible in the chromatic scale as anywhere else. To my knowledge, Artur as well as Karl Ulrich did not hesitate to use 5-5 or 1-1 even in legato passages at times. As I'm sure you know, Artur chose fingerings to reflect phrasing; i.e., 5-1 in a passage moving up will encourage a break. Incidentally, the long 5th finger which you speak of is a uniquely Artur characteristic which the Behr skeleton that Karl Ulrich inherited does not share. In fact, the chromatic fingering that I sent you, only lacks 5 because I planned it that way. If

I had started on C, for instance, instead of A, the fingering would start 1-2-3-4-5. Because of the way the chromatic scale lies on the keyboard, there is never room for all five fingers to play consecutively except at the low end of a passage in the right hand or at the top in the left. The nod to tradition that you speak of is rather amusing in the context of the Schnabels, for while they were always very respectful of the composer's wishes, tradition as such was never very important to them.

Hier wird sehr deutlich, daß Tradition im Sinne der Schnabels keinen auf immer festgelegten Brauch bedeutet, sondern von jeder Generation neu definiert und erarbeitet werden muß. Ziel bleibt stets, die künstlerischen Ideen eines Komponisten dem Hörer adäquat zu vermitteln; dabei ist den veränderten Verhältnissen Rechnung zu tragen. Mitunter wurden Artur Schnabel Defizite in pianistischer Hinsicht vorgeworfen; es mag sein, daß er diesem Mißverständnis durch die öffentlich demonstrierte Geringschätzung für Technik um ihrer selbst willen selber Vorschub geleistet hat, auch wenn Schülerberichte oder die minuziös bezeichneten Beethoven- und Mozart-Editionen, die Karl Ulrich Schnabel seinerseits revidierte und um Schubert-Editionen und ein Pedal-Buch bereicherte, eine ganz andere Sprache sprechen.

Artur und Karl Ulrich Schnabels Beitrag zur Weiterentwicklung einer Klaviertechnik, die ganz im Dienste der künstlerischen Darstellung steht, hat Claude Morttier noch in ihrer Gesamtheit überblickt. Sein Tod hat in unser Wissen um diese Tradition eine empfindliche Lücke gerissen.

W.G.