PROFILES

THE LEAVES OF A TREE

Room 412 on the fourth floor of the Juilliard School of Music, on Claremont Avenue in upper Manhattan, is about as drab as a schoolroom can be. The visitor approaches it by way of a large, creaking elevator and a corridor scarcely more inviting than one in a run-down hospital. It has dull-green walls, a fake Oriental carpet, a hatrack, an electric fan and an electric clock, a faded couch, and a number of one-armed chairs of the sort common to classrooms. It has also, however, two well-tuned Steinway grand pianos and, hanging on its walls, some very unobtrusive symbols of glamorous musical history – a huge imitation medal of gilded plaster bearing the likeness of Frédéric Chopin, a rather gloomy photograph of the late Josef Lhevinne, and a reproduction of a portrait of Anton Rubinstein, the first, and most celebrated, of the great nineteenth-century Russian pianists. In the portrait, Rubinstein has something of the glowering, Beethovenesque appearance considered fashionable among virtuosos of his period. In addition to these sparse ornaments, the room contains a green-upholstered chair, which, when classes are in session, is occupied by a tiny, voluble, gray-haired woman of eighty-two – Rosina (more formally "Madame") Lhevinne, who is the widow of the man in the photograph, and, at this particular point in history, the most widely respected piano teacher in the United States. The students who have frequented this room, singly or in groups, during the past forty years have never forgotten the experience, and today's students still glance nervously at Rubinstein, Josef Lhevinne, and Chopin before seating themselves, properly humbled, at one of the pianos. If several of them are present, a row of impassive, extremely critical, and highly competitive-looking faces contemplates the member of the group who is performing. As a rule, having withstood the scrutiny of this jury of his peers over a training period that may last as long as eight years, a student is forever afterward immune to the hazards of stagefright. Some of the students – thirty-eight of them are passing through these precincts this year – will turn out to be more or less famous virtuosos. (Van Cliburn, John Browning, and a number of other performers of unimpeachable skill and wide public reputation are alumni of Room 412.) Others will become ensemble players or pianists of more limited renown. Still others will make a career of teaching. But all of them, thanks to the suggestions, criticism, encouragement, and infrequent exasperation of the small woman in the green chair, will become artists of considerable professional polish.

Rosina Lhevinne

Sitting in the chair that she occupies some fifteen hours a week during the Juilliard semesters, Mme. Lhevinne has the authoritative look of a nineteenth-century Russian potentate, but the look is deceptive and is continually belied by definitely unregal flights of enthusiasm, ribald humor, occasional fury (which she reveals by speaking very deliberately in a very low voice), and a spirit of animation that is astonishing in a person of her years. She sits with her legs crossed, and when a student embarks on a particularly taxing piano passage, she starts swinging the free leg nervously. Soon her eyes narrow in a peculiarly

Oriental manner as she concentrates on one detail or another of the performance; she begins conducting with one arm, as if the student were an orchestra; she stops the proceedings to sing a phrase – in a cracked and piping soprano – as she thinks it ought to go; and through it all she whispers comments to an assistant, who gravely records them on a printed score, though many of them are widely rumored to concern the pupil's private life, including his approach to the opposite sex, rather than his strictly musical virtues and vices. Though Mme. Lhevinne has lived in this country for fifty years, her speech is still encrusted with the accent of the Russian expatriate; the word "examination," for instance, becomes "igsimination," and she intersperses her sentences with "you know" – as in "give respect to the composer. You can't play it, you know, just whatever way you feel" – in a manner familiar to anyone who has associated with the uprooted subjects of the late Czar Nicholas. Mme. Lhevinne is somewhat saddened by her persistent accent. "The idiom is not right even after all these years," she says. "People say it's cute. Who wants to speak cute? I want to speak like a cultured person." This makes little impression on her pupils. Instead, since music students are often natural mimics, her quaint manner of speaking has been the subject of endless impersonations behind her back, and there is scarcely an ex-Lhevinne pupil who is not an expert at it. ("When you roll a bool [ball] from the top of a mountain in winter, it becomes, you know, very large at the bottom" – a rather sage remark of her pertaining to the psychology of piano teaching – has been quoted, with gestures, by many of them.) And since budding pianists are not only mimics but, in their own little world, irrepressible pranksters, Mme. Lhevinne's classes have given rise to endless practical jokes, among them a telephone call made, in perfect Lhevinnese, to the Juilliard school paper announces that Mme. Lhevinne would be grateful if anyone wishing to contribute old clothes to a certain charity would deposit them in Room 412 at any time of the day or night – a canard that caused her considerable bewilderment when earnest philanthropists bearing castoff overcoats and shoes began barging into her classroom.

From all this, it would be seen that Mme. Lhevinne's pupils regard their tiny empress not only as an authority but as a big sisters. She herself is quite aware of the situation; in fact, she glories in it. In affairs of the world, she is an incurable romanticist. She has often been accused of choosing her female pupils for their glamorous appearance, and has even been called "the Billy Rose of piano pedagogy." The accusation is without any foundation whatever; the fact of the matter is that although she does have a canny notion that a pleasing stage presence is an asset to any artist, her best female piano pupils have just happened to be rather good-looking. She has, on the other hand, been quite rightly accused of being a tireless matchmaker, for she delights in pairing off her pupils along what she regards as harmoniously romantic lines. "I live so many romances that I feel I am eighteen again!" she recently remarked with a joyful air. Some of her matches work out – a few, indeed, have resulted in marriage. But some do not, and in such cases it takes a scene or two, and perhaps an emotional explosion, to convince her that her fondly cherished romance had best be forgotten.

Experience has taught Mme. Lhevinne's more advanced pupils to detect immediately any indications that she is about to embark on one of her forays into romantic drama, and to take steps either to forestall or to encourage her designs. Mme. Lhevinne herself considers these designs a part of her approach to the development of a pianist's total personality. As a teacher of what are commonly referred to as "master" piano pupils – that is, pupils who already have the technical equipment to play, with some adequacy, almost anything that is set before them – Mme. Lhevinne naturally stresses the aspects of a pianist's art that involve style, stage deportment, and the projection of the deeper musical values, and among these aspects the development of personality looms large. "Many people can teach the piano," she remarked recently, "but not all of them can handle the human problem." The handling of the human problems brings her into intimate contact with the family

backgrounds of her students, their often ambitious parents, their neuroses and feelings of inadequacy, and their individual artistic temperaments, which may need curbing as well as encouragement. She sends them on visits to art museums and libraries in order to broaden their cultural background. She tells them to "try to love people," which is not always easy for a piano student who has spent incalculable amounts of time pounding away in solitude and having little or nothing to do with the rest of the human race. "You play what you *are*" is a favorite maxim of hers, and it follows that one must be *some*body in order to play well. And to be somebody one must develop large reserves of self-confidence. Though Mme. Lhevinne is critical of every lapse in a pupil's expressing phrasing or in the beauty of his piano tone, she is no less ready to show approval of all his positive virtues, accentuating her enthusiasm by gleefully piping "More! More!" when he lets go in a smashingly brilliant climax, and later kissing the young performer and remarking with great simplicity, "How wonderful of you!" Privately, she confesses, "I am very impulsive. When I say, 'You are vonderful,' it doesn't mean a thing." Still, even though a pupil may be aware of this, the compliment serves its purpose; his self-esteem bounds upward for the moment, and another step has been taken toward that serene self-possession that marks the behavior of the successful virtuoso.

After classes, Mm. Lhevinne makes her way on foot to her ground-floor apartment in a modern building a block or so from the school, usually leaning on the arm of one of her students, though she is perfectly capable of walking the distance unassisted. Once there, her companion brings her, by way of refreshment, a one-ounce vial of Scotch whiskey, carefully decanted from a larger bottle, and she drinks about a tablespoon of it mixed with soda water, absent-mindedly forgetting the remainder while she discusses her reputation as a drinker. On one occasion, Mrs. Lytle Hull, having invited her for a short stay at her country place near Hyde Park, inquired of one of Mme. Lhevinne's pupil whether she drank tea or coffee. "Neither," replied the pupil. "Mme. Lhevinne drinks nothing by Scotch." Quite naturally, there was a good deal of speculation among Mrs. Hull's other guests about the inspiring effect that half a dozen hookers might have one Mme. Lhevinne's performance at the keyboard. "They expected me to stagger to the piano," Mme. Lhevinne recalls. A certain tenseness in the atmosphere was pretty thoroughly dissipated when, after sipping only a couple of teaspoonfuls from a bottle of whiskey, she waved the rest aside and proceeded to play a few severely correct selections from her repertoire.

The pupil who alerted Mrs. Hull to Mme. Lhevinne's taste in beverages – and accurately, in a sense, for she does not drink tea or coffee – was one of a succession of female pupils whom she has invited to live with her in her apartment. There is always one of them around, answering the telephone and the doorbell, cooking dinner for the Empress, washing the dishes, and basking in the intimate relationship with the great that is part of the deal. Mme. Lhevinne's pupils have learned to recognize the moment when she has reached the point of conferring the signal honor of domestic service on one of them. Her eyes narrow in their peculiarly Oriental fashion, and, with an offhandedness that she affects when contemplating a deep-laid design of any sort, she inquires of no one in particular, "Do you know a young lady who can type, take shorthand, and answer the telephone, and, preferably, has a knowledge of French, German, Italian, and Russian, and who, perhaps, can cook?" The question brings no rush of volunteers, but there is always somebody who – either out of genuine affection or out of a romanticized idea of continued intimacy with so famous a figure – snatches at the bait, although the requirements for the position are never fully met. The system provides Mme. Lhevinne with companionship; it coddles her in a lifelong unwillingness to lift a finger in household affairs; and it insures that her apartment, a fairly large one, will be kept with the utmost neatness. She is particularly solicitous about the living room, which contains the inevitable Steinway grand, another photograph of the late Josef Lhevinne (this one depicting him in a slightly wind-blown,

Byronesque pose), comfortable furniture that is neither modern nor self-consciously antique, a small bookcase filled with works on pianists and the art of piano playing, a phonograph and a collection of piano recordings, which, reportedly, are almost never played, and, on a table at one side of the room, a Steuben-glass loving cup that was presented to Mme. Lhevinne by Mayor Wagner and is inscribed with a tribute to her contributions to American culture. At the turn of a switch, the cup lights up – a phenomenon that brings to Mme. Lhevinne's face a slightly sheepish but nonetheless genuine look of delight.

Mme. Lhevinne has been described as "a prima donna whose triumphs are in what her pupils do," and, a little less fairly, as "an egotist whose pupils are mere extensions of herself." The unfairness of the latter is proved by the fact that no two of her pupils play alike, largely as a result of her fanatical dedication to the development of each student's musical individuality. This dedication has its roots in a grand tradition of which Mme. Lhevinne is the last surviving pedagogical ornament – that of the late-nineteenth-century school of Slavic pianism. Indeed, all during the latter half of the eighteen-hundreds, Russian and Polish pianists were besting the Germans, the English, the French, the Italians, and even the Hungarians at the art of spellbinding audiences with their extraordinary command of the instrument. Nowadays, the school has its detractor, who dismiss it as "romantic" and prefer to play the piano as dryly as if it were a harpsichord; in fact, there are quite a number of gifted young pianists who consider both the school and Mme. Lhevinne herself to be a bit old-fashioned. But defenders of the school point out that it is the one adhered to by most of the greatest keyboard artists of modern or recent times, including such late figures as Josef Lhevinne, Sergei Rachmaninoff, Ossip Gabrilówitsch, Josef Hofmann, Ignace Jan Paderewski, and Leopold Godowsky, as well as the very much alive Artur Rubinstein and Vladimir Horowitz. Not all of these pianists studied in Russia. The Poles, like Rubinstein and Hofmann, mostly gravitated to Germany or Austria for their instruction, but the peculiar flavor of Russian piano playing had already preceded them, and the greatest piano teacher in Vienna at the turn of the century was Theodor Leschetizky, a Pole who had spent several years teaching at the St. Petersburg Conservatory under Anton Rubinstein (and who numbered Artur Schnabel and Paderewski among his students). It is, of course, possible to overestimate the important of "school," in which secrets are supposedly passed down from teacher to pupil. Music dictionaries are full of pianistic royal lineages – the German pianist Wilhelm Backhaus, for example, was a pupil of Eugen D'Albert, who was a pupil of Franz Liszt, who was a pupil of Karl Czerny, who was a pupil of none other than Ludwig van Beethoven – but such genealogies overlook the fact that at maturity every great pianist is very much a self-taught artist. Moreover, some great pianists have arrived at the top under their own steam – or, at least, their instructors have apparently included no one capable of teaching them more than the mechanical elements of the craft. It should also be remembered that piano virtuosos form international brotherhoods, learning from and imitating one another and often acquiring their highest artistic powers by a process of osmosis. Nevertheless, there was something special about the Russian school, which Anton Rubinstein and his brother Nicholas founded, in St. Petersburg and Moscow, respectively, around 1860. It seems to have grown up almost independently of the older, European schools of piano playing. At any rate, Anton Rubinstein – and extraordinary prodigy, by all accounts – was a pupil of nobody in particular (his mother and a minor Russian pianist named Alexander Villoing were his only teachers), yet he became a formidable artist, and his particular approach to his art has influenced pianistic virtuosity ever since. The approach, according to those who remember him (and Mme. Lhevinne is among them), stressed two main points: intense projection of the mood of a composition, and full command of all the technical resources of the instrument – a command so nearly absolute that it would make he piano a veritable extension of the

artist's emotional makeup. The Russian temperament – highly emotion and at the same time fascinated by the mastery of feats involving physical prowess – was admirably suited to the Rubinstein approach, and before the century was out, Russian pianists and Russian-influenced pianists had become the rage of the international music world.

By a chain of coincidences, in which the Russian revolution of 1917 was the strongest link, a large proportion of these pianists moved to the United States and settled here permanently – Gabrilówitsch, Hofmann, Rachmaninoff, and Alexander Siloti, for example, as well as Josef and Rosina Lhevinne – and with their arrival the center of Slavic pianism shifted, in point of numbers, from Moscow and St. Petersburg to New York. Since many of the pianists were teachers as well as performers – and the migration also included a few who, for reasons of preference or ability, were simply teachers – America became the principal inheritor of the pianistic tradition that had flowered under the Czars, and has remained so despite the fairly recent reappearances of the tradition in Russia itself, where Heinrich Neuhaus, the teacher of Sviatoslav Richter, and a Russian despite his name, has shown that the parent strain is far from dead. Just as some American tenors assumed Italian names, some American pianists assumed Russian ones. Among them was Olga Samaroff – née Hickenlooper, in Texas – who could claim a Slavic inheritance only by the ubiquitous process of osmosis and by a brief marriage to Leopold Stokowski, who built up a wide and deserved reputation as a teacher of master piano classes at the Juilliard School and at the Philadelphia Conservatory of Music. Hofmann taught at the Curtis Institute, in Philadelphia, as did a later arrival, Isabelle Vengerova, and the Juilliard School almost from its inception, in 1924, had a roster of world-famous piano teachers – the Lhevinnes and Siloti, and also a distinguished group of non-Russians, including, in addition to Mme. Samaroff, the German Carl Friedberg and the German-educated Australian-American Ernest Hutcheson. Clearly, the Russian school and its adherents had taken root, and the result would be a crop of American pianists inevitably influence, if not directly nurtured, by the artistic descendants of Anton Rubinstein.

The Russian school, of course, was by no means the only important hereditary line in piano playing during the nineteenth century and the early years of the present one. Great pianists, like the late Walter Gieseking and the late Egon Petri, were entirely outside it, and there was also a whole school of Liszt disciples. (Siloti was in part a product of this school, and that thundering virtuoso of the early nineteen-hundreds, Moriz Rosenthall, was a complete exponent of it.) The English had their own school, led by the famous teacher Tobias Matthay, which produced such admirable artists as Myra Hess, Ray Lev, and Harriet Cohen, while the Paris Conservatoire was responsible for José Iturbi and Isidor Philipp. The Germans, in genera more notable as composers than as performers, nevertheless produced some masters of the piano; indeed, the difficulty in identifying them as such lies mainly in the fact that nearly all the great early German pianists (a category that much include people like Mozart, Beethoven, and Brahms) were great composers.

A skeptic might ask why so much attention is paid to schools of piano playing, and precisely what it is that is handed down, or across, from virtuoso to virtuoso – in short, why a tradition of performing music, as opposed to merely playing the notes set down on paper by the composers, is of such overwhelming importance. It is safe to say that no really important composers has ever assumed that those black-and-white diagrams could convey the whole of his message, since they are sadly inadequate to express even the precise durations and intensities required for minimally accurate reproduction. Scores are similar to rough blueprints, decipherable only by those who have been initiated into the performing tradition they represent. (At the time in history when great piano literature began – 1775 or thereabouts – scores were more or less mnemonic devices written down my men who were themselves performers.) To a large extent – though many modern composers have disputed the notion – music is a performer's art, really existing only when it is embodied in sound. The great

composers of the past took this to be an undeniable fact, and even the rare ones who were not virtuoso performers themselves wrote within the framework of a performer tradition, for they were keenly aware of the expressive potentialities of musical instruments that could be drawn out by master players. Thus, parallel to the written literature of music there has always existed a body of lore pertaining to the interpretation of its printed symbols. Just how Beethoven actually conceived of a sonata or a concerto in terms of sound is not necessarily implicit in the notes he wrote, but it has been preserved nonetheless by generations of performers, who have passed along, from one to the next, the living language of his music as it first registered on the human ear. There have, of course, been abuses of the tradition; at one time or another, irresponsible virtuosos have distorted it for their own glorification. But the theory that all a performer at his keyboard has to do is produce a literal translation of the notes on the printed page is entertained only by the pedants and musical sophomores. The notes, remarkable or stupendously impressive though they may be, are not enough; they must be given meaning in terms of sound, and this meaning is conveyed principally by reference to a collective aural memory. It is not certain – in fact, it is highly unlikely – that Beethoven or Mozart or Brahms always played a given composition the same way, or that they expected anyone else to do so. The art of interpretation has always been extremely elastic. A Beethoven performance by Backhaus will inevitably differ from a performance of the same composition by Artur Rubinstein, and both will be equally valid. In this interrelationship between the composer and the performer, music differs from all the other arts. Beethoven's Fourth Piano Concerto exists in the abstract as a titanic creation inadequately represented by the notes, rests, dynamic marks, and so on that the master put down on paper. Practically – in sound, that is – it exists as a myriad of slightly differing forms, all of them as alike as the leaves of a tree, yet, like leaves, no two precisely alike.

Just how much alike and how much unalike those leaves are is, of course, a matter of the performer's taste, intuitive insight, ingrained habit, experience, scholarship, temperament, fleeting inspiration, and conscious control, and all these factors must be considered in the training of a master pianist for, aside from such elementary mechanics as scale and arpeggio work and fingering, they are what piano playing is about. They are, consequently, the factors that concern Mme. Lhevinne as she conducts her master classes at the Juilliard School. Mme. Lhevinne, however, is anything but a theoretician when it comes to piano playing; such matters as intuition and taste are infinitely complex, and Mme. Lhevinne only occasionally allows herself to be lured into an abstract discussion of principles. Her craft is devoted to encouraging certain tendencies and curbing others; stimulating individuality, but never to the point where it passes over into affectation and mannerism; creating or channeling habits; and inducing or fostering an understanding of what is usually called "mood" and really means the communicative or representational aspect of a composition. Beyond this, she must cope with the student's personal biases, his sensitivity – or lack of it – to criticism, and his psychological approach to his work. If his approach tends toward the intellectual and the literal, she tries to develop a compensating emotional freedom, and if emotion takes precedence over intellect, she tries to develop his more rational side. (She claims that the latter state of imbalance is by far the simpler one to adjust.) "Remedial" problems – meaning problems related to defects in a pianist's physical technique – are turned over to an assistant, usually a young and very gifted pianist named Martin Canin. Mme. Lhevinne's own particular function, as she sees it, is to give a fully equipped technician the extra polish needed to convert him into an artists, and, in the tradition of Anton Rubinstein, she always starts out by getting the student to project the appropriate mood, and to do so with the beautiful piano tone as well as adequate technique. "You imagine the sound you wish to produce, and then you produce it," she tells her students over and over. This is not as simple as one might think. Mood is something that must be felt by the individual performer, but merely to feel it is

not sufficient. The mood must also be conveyed clearly to the auditor, and it is surprisingly how few fledgling pianists are able to hear themselves as others hear them. The conscious control of the varying nuances of a composition – of the ebb and flow of phrases and climaxes – to the point where the audience is made clearly aware of them is something that demands great objectivity as well as feeling. Paderewski – a rather theatrical pianist by modern standards – confessed in his autobiography that he never felt the emotions projected by a composition while he was actually performing it; on the contrary, he said, he stood coldly and calculatingly apart from his apparent self, manipulating the appearance of emotion like a puppeteer pulling strings. Along the same lines, Mme. Lhevinne recalls an evening backstage when the celebrated Russian basso Feodor Chaliapin walked back to the wings after giving a hair-raising portrayal of the death of Boris Godunov, which his fellow-singers thought must have reduced him to a state of mental and physical collapse. As they approached him solicitously, feeling that it might be appropriate to call for a straitjacket, or at least a stretcher, he rebuffed them roughly, growling, "Go to hell! You don't suppose I felt any of that, do you?" Such cases are, of course, a little extreme. Still, a young pianist mooning away over the emotions that a piece induces in *him* has a long way to go before he learns first to hear his playing from the outside and then to calculate its effect on others. And there is no better place to acquire this faculty than in Room 412, where not only Mme. Lhevinne but a crew of highly irreverent fellow-students are poised to pounce on any bit of meaningless emotional meandering.

Mme. Lhevinne, though her public performances have shown her to be a very accomplished artist, almost never seats herself at the piano to illustrate a point she is trying to make – and for a very good reason. Imitation is the last thing she wants from her pupils, for it kills the root of a pianist's individual artistry. Consequently, she firmly discourages her pupils form listening to recordings of eminent pianists; she feels, in fact, that the phonograph is a great menace to the proper development of this generation's pianists. Given the keen ear for mimicry of most music students, it is easy enough to reproduce from memory the subtlest mannerisms revealed in a recording by, say, Schnabel or Artur Rubinstein. But the result is artistically a fake. Such an exercise adds nothing to the student's understanding of the problems of virtuosity, and if the practice became general, it would ultimately make all the leaves on the tree identical and the whole art of piano playing superfluous. Ideally, no composition should ever be played twice in exactly the same fashion, yet exact repetition is all that a phonograph record is capable of. Not infrequently, a brash young beginner in Mme. Lhevinne's class rattles off an imitation of a recording performance with what he thinks is stunning effect. Mme. Lhevinne can detect the fraud immediately. "Hmm, yes," she will say, absently and without enthusiasm. "That is, you know, Horowitz – a fine pianist. Now, we will begin to study the piano."

Inevitably, a woman in Mme. Lhevinne's position attracts pupils who have already studied for years under other teachers. Inevitably, too, the cachet of calling oneself "a pupil of Rosina Lhevinne" is now, and has been for some time, a passport to success – at least as a teacher and a minor musical celebrity, if not as a famous virtuoso. These two inevitabilities have become a problem to Mme. Lhevinne, who wishes to be as fair as possible to other teachers, but who also wishes to be known as the duenna of the most utterly bang-up collection of young performers in the country. She has sought to solve the problem in different ways at different times. On occasion, leaning over backwards, she has insisted that her pupils be billed on their programs as pupils of somebody else as well as of herself. But the question of apportioning credit where credit is due is a vexing one, and as of now appears to be practically insoluble. Many of the best young pianists of the country have gravitated to her classes since the death of her most important rivals – Olga Samaroff, Alexander Siloti, and her husband, to name a few. And it certainly cannot be argued that Mme.

Lhevinne discourages this tendency. *

Pianists, as a rule, are not noted for calm normality of behavior, and one of Mme. Lhevinne's persistent problems is how to keep her students on a fairly even keel, as measured by the standards of society in general. She has tried to open the windows of social gregariousness to many of her more introverted charges. Her encouragement of romance and her habit of admonishing her charges to "try to love people" are intended to serve as a sort of psychotherapy, however rudimentary, for the single-track minds of solitary piano addicts. She is very happy that the monstrous phenomenon of the infant prodigy has recently begun to go out of fashion. (She deeply admires the wisdom of the American musical patron Alfred C. Clark, who, on hearing Josef Hofmann play with tremendous effect at the age of twelve, gave him a subsidy of fifty thousand dollars, with the strict proviso that he not appear in public again until he was eighteen. The proviso was observed to the letter, and, perhaps partly as a result, Hofmann became the most widely admired virtuoso of his time.) Even though the infant-prodigy fad has largely run its course, young pianists still have their problems, such as parents, and particularly mothers, whose immeasurable personal vanity demands that their children (and, most, damagingly, their sons) become world-famous geniuses as quickly as possible. Unfortunately, there is no question but that a putative piano virtuoso, like a ballet dancer, must start preparing for his career at a very early age, because after he is ten his muscles begin to mature, hardening his reactions and making piano playing ever afterward a conscious, effortful, and, to a certain extent, awkward thing for him. So, fad or no fad, most of those who show promise of becoming great virtuosos still start out as prodigies, and the problem is to keep them unseen and unheard by the public for as long as possible. The imperial Conservatory of Moscow, where Mme. Lhevinne herself was trained, had a pretty effective system for accomplishing this. The prodigy was admitted to the school only upon passing the stiffest sort of examination, after which, as an obscure student, he underwent five years of strenuous tutelage with one of the conservatory's instructors, and then four years with one of its professors, along with similarly obscure students of his own age. This system served to squelch any premature exploitation of the child and assured him of a normal social life, of sorts, among his colleagues. Some of the larger American schools and institutes of music have now adopted programs of instruction that are to some degree based on the Imperial Conservatory's.

But even the adult pianist in America has his occupational difficulties. The passing of the Romantic era (which coincided exactly with the era of the great virtuoso pianist) has left him a comparatively unheroic figure, except in those cases where luck and the vast machinery of mass publicity come to his rescue – and mass publicity is just as apt to promote a Liberace as a Cliburn. The old days when a great pianist was at least the equal of a statesman or a Barrymore in the eyes of the public – when, for example, Paderewski could tour America in his own private Pullman car with a retinue of servants, including a cook – are undeniably past. Today, a virtuoso is the toiling ward of one of the big concert corporations. He travels constantly, living on abominable food in poor hotels in nearly every small town in the country. If he is a stay-at-home, the chances are that he earns most of his income from teaching. He is not, as virtuosos were in the time of the Czars, a member of a special, privileged group under royal patronage, basking in the adulation of a large and dependable metropolitan audience. Only a few world-famous figure receive this sort of treatment now, and most of these are aging holdovers from the good old days. The best that a young pianist can hope for now is a busy touring schedule, a New York concert every year or so, given for the sake of prestige (and usually at his own expense), and an occasional invitation to appear as soloist with an established symphony orchestra. Under these circumstances, it is surprising how eager, dedicated, and enterprising young virtuosos of the present generation are, and how high is the quality of their performances. The situation, however, tends to turn them in upon themselves, to

lead them to practice their art for its own sake, and sometimes to make them slightly aloof toward their audiences. The Cliburns are the exception, not the rule. And even in the case of a Cliburn there are likely to be personal difficulties that need ironing out before the goal can be reached. Mme. Lhevinne is almost solely responsible for Cliburn's artistic training and for the incessant nudging that finally led him to enter the Tchaikovsky competition in Moscow, win it, and embark on a meteoric public career. But first she had to get the young man to the point where he could establish a cordial relationship with his audiences, and this took considerable doing. Very shrewdly, Mme. Lhevinne detected in Cliburn signs of the emotional isolation that is apt to overcome even the most gifted youthful American virtuosos, and her canny method of coping with it was to appeal to his generosity. Over and over, she reminded him, "There are people in every audience who have denied themselves a necktie or part of a meal in order to hear you. You have an obligation to please these people." To feel wanted is perhaps the most powerful stimulant that a young virtuoso can receive. Later on, when applause and successful box-office receipts have led him to take this feeling for granted, things are easier, but at the start there is the danger of an emotional vacuum – of a life occupied entirely by the dutiful performance of sonatas and concertos, with no spark of give-and-take between performer and audience, when any sense of being appreciated derives merely from the consciousness of a job well done or from the grudging approval of colleagues, rivals, and, rarely, critics.

Mme. Lhevinne thus stands behind her budding virtuosos as an adviser about life as well as about piano playing, and though she has in recent years appeared now and then as a concert artist herself, she considers her activities as a Svengali far more important than her own prowess as a performer. As a matter of fact, her whole life has been more or less devoted to the encouragement and criticism of other pianists, the first of them having been her husband. Mme. Lhevinne was born in Kiev, just before her parents moved to Moscow. Her father was a Dutch businessman named Jacques Bessie, who, following an education at the Sorbonne, had moved to Russia. Although, with Dutch firmness, he steadfastly regarded all Russians as Asiatics, he did not permit this prejudice to stand in the way of his marrying one of them and begetting Rosina. Largely at his insistence, the family spoke only French among themselves (along with nearly all the upper-class Russians of the period), and Rosina had to learn Russian at the knees of various nurses – a bilingual childhood that in time turned out to have its advantages. (Later on, in the course of an extremely peripatetic life, she became fluent in both German and English as well.) As a child, she was very frail; at one point, she almost died of diphtheria, and she was kept indoors for six months at a stretch every year to shield her from the Russian winters. "Nobody believe then that I would life to be eighty-two," she said not long ago, with an air of triumph. At the age of seven, she started taking piano lessons (both her parents were amateur pianists), and only two years later she had become proficient enough to pass the entrance examination at the Imperial Conservatory. At twelve, she was the youngest pupil in the piano classes of Vassily Safonov, who later became a conductor of the New York Philharmonic for several seasons. Josef Lhevinne, about five years her senior and the son of a trumpet player in Moscow's Bolshoi Theatre, was Safonov's star pupil, and once, when Safonov was away, took over his classes, teaching, among others, the young and very talented Rosina. Almost immediately after her graduation, they were married, and their marriage – those many friends prophesied that it would be wrecked by conflicting careers, and later reported some pretty stiff rows between them and the occasional separations – lasted to become one of the most celebrated musical romances that romanticists had had to moon about since the time of Robert and Clara Schumann. It ended, in fact, only with Josef's death, in 1944. One great factor in its permanence may well have been a firm resolution made by Mme. Lhevinne at the very outset – that she would not seek a separate career but would confine herself to

appearing only in two-piano performances with her husband, leaving the solo honors entirely to him. There is not doubt that he was the more brilliant pianist of the two, but there is also general agreement that she was his superior as a teacher, having far greater patience and perhaps a more acute perception of the vagaries to which young talent is subject. From 1900 to 1902, Josef Lhevinne taught at the conservatory in Tiflis, and when an agreeable life of partying, gambling, and theatergoing in the pleasant but provincial city ("Three hundred and sixty-five days a year of carnival," Mme. Lhevinne recalls) threatened to submerge him, it was his wife who decided on a return to more austere surroundings. "I am leaving," she told him. "You can do as you like." Faced with this ultimatum, Josef resigned from his conservatory job to go to Berlin, which was then the center of the world for pianists, and later on went back to Moscow.

Nowadays, to edify her pupils, Mme. Lhevinne is given to reminiscing about some of the tribulations that she and her husband encountered in those days; dogged perseverance, she implies, will win out in the end. The first tribulation occurred when Josef, all set for a triumphal tour of Western Europe, was called up for service in the Czar's Army and spent a year soldiering while his concert dates evaporated. In Berlin, however, things went along smoothly for a while, as the couple joined the artistic court of Ferruccio Busoni, then a formidable pianist and one of the outstanding intellectuals of the musical world. Their fellow-courtiers included Gabrilówsky, all of whom were to wind up their careers in America, and one or two of whom had already appeared here. Josef made his New York debut in 1906 with the Russian Symphony Orchestra (long since defunct), which was conducted on that occasion by his former teacher Safonov. It was not much of a success, but in the fall of that year Josef returned for a tour under the auspices of the Steinway piano company and was hailed all over the eastern United States as one of the finest virtuosos of the era. There followed a gypsylike period for the Lhevinnes, in which they traveled between Moscow, Berlin, Paris, and New York, taking along their first child, Constantine, who had been born somewhere along the way. In 1914, they were caught in Moscow by the war, but finagling with the authorities, they managed to get to Germany, where they had to register as enemy aliens and were compelled to report to the police three times a day. Earlier that year, they had bought an elegant house in Wannsee, a suburb in Berlin, that had been formerly occupied by the Chinese Ambassador, and they were able to live in it only because of a letter from Kaiser Wilhelm that pronounced Lhevinne an authentic genius, not to be disturbed. Still, their alien status meant that they could not play in public (second tribulation). Toward the end of the war, a second child, Marianna, was born to the Lhevinnes, and when the fighting ended, all four of them headed, via Copenhagen, for America, where the parents had determined to make their future, for they had found themselves altogether out of sympathy with the Lenin and Trotsky revolution (they never returned to Russia, even for a visit), and Mme. Lhevinne had taken a strong dislike to the German view of women as members of an inferior caste. They arrived in New York practically penniless (third tribulation), but such is the international value of a great pianist's art that within a very short time they were the proprietors of a small mansion in Kew Gardens, Long Island, which Mme. Lhevinne now looks back on as a sort of lost paradise, although most of her friends who knew her then recall it as a rather forbidding place with a perhaps characteristically Russian air of massive monumentality. It had a huge – and some say ugly – fireplace, tremendous quantities of oak paneling, vast stretches of glass-doored bookcases, two Steinway grand pianos covered with Russian shawls, a Victrola (then an indispensable ornament of the bourgeois parlor), and numerous Oriental rugs, which Josef was forever buying at auctions, usually paying, with great enthusiasm, a great deal more than they were worth.

Josef, in fact, cared for money only to the extent that it enabled him not to have to worry about it. He was a perennial investor in dubious financial ventures, and would give away

large amounts to any acquaintances who happened to be in need of funds. He was a big, stocky man, who reminded his friends of a Russian bear, and he wore a furry toupee, which, above his maskline, aquiline face, made him look somewhat like an extremely civilized and formal Eskimo. He was not, by any conventional standards, a handsome man, but his imposing face and husky body, coupled with a gliding walk and an invariable courtliness of manner, made him very much the typical American idea of an exotic Slavic virtuoso, and his conquests of American audiences were complete. His wife was a striking contrast to him – a diminutive, highly feminine, and highly temperamental woman, who appeared with him now and then in duo-piano recitals but who spent most of her time at home, supervising two maids in keeping the Kew Gardens establishment going, which he was on the road, either as a concert artist or a teacher. The couple's tastes differed enormously. Josef was an amateur astronomer, a dedicated fisherman, a crack marksman (at target shooting; he couldn't bear to kill anything above the evolutionary level of fish), and an all-around devotee of outdoor living. Having discovered the beauties of the rural Middle West while teaching in Chicago, he made repeated trips to Portage, Wisconsin, where, for something like twenty-six years, he was a regular summer guest of Mrs. Mildred Green, a Milwaukee woman who was raising her family on a farm there, and who put him up in an abandoned water tower on her place, furnishing the sanctuary with a grand piano, to which she listened reverently from outside whenever he found time to play it between expeditions to the neighboring forests and streams. It took a good deal of prodding to get Mme. Lhevinne out to the wilds of Portage, but although she visited the form only a few times, having a marked aversion to the primitive life, she and Mrs. Green, who is eight years her senior, became good friends, and still are.

A combination of fastidious tastes and mystical notions kept Mme. Lhevinne in Kew Gardens, overseeing the upbringing of Constantine and Marianna, though she did make periodic trips to Manhattan, where both she and her husband were soon busy teaching young pianists at the Juilliard School. Guided by a rich accretion of old Slavic superstitions, she would travel miles to avoid passing a graveyard, and she strictly avoided any entanglement with the number thirteen. She regulated her life to some extent by numerology, and to this day she has never taught a pupil to play Chopin's B-Minor Sonata, because it contains a funeral march. When their children were very young, the Lhevinnes considered the possibility of musical careers for them. Josef, who had started out as a prodigy – and who resented that fact as deeply as most former prodigies do – counseled holding back until Constantine and Marianna demanded musical instruction. They demand never came. The children were confronted by the problem, common among second-generation Americans, of adjusting to a new society, in which they were not exotic ornaments of an imported European culture but plain Americans, anxious to be as thoroughly American as possible; in any case, neither of their parents worries much about passing along an artistic tradition. Both children were educated in the Middle West – Constantine at the University of Michigan and Marianna at the University of Wisconsin. Both chose non-musical careers; Constantine is now an engineer in Los Angeles, and Marianna a social worker in the same city. Both are married.

In 1994, Josef Lhevinne died, universally mourned not only for his prowess as a pianist but for the gentleness, the idealism, and the gallantry of his personality. To Mme. Lhevinne, his death was, of course, a tremendous blow, but she is not the sort of woman to be permanently crushed even by so great a tragedy, and presently an attitude of self-sufficiency, which had never before been considered one of her outstanding traits, began to manifest itself. She moved out of the house in Kew Gardens and took a modest room near Riverside Drive and 125th Street, eating most of her meals at a corner restaurant, where she remembers as serving terrible food at seventy-five cents a meal. But she also remembers that the food seemed to cure her of a lifelong tendency toward nervous

indigestion, and as it did so, her lifelong superstitions began to vanish. She retained, naturally, her important mission of handing down to young pianists the grand tradition of performance that had been passed to her from Anton Rubinstein through Josef, and she felt that her responsibilities in this respect were now doubled, since she had to carry on alone. Gradually, she became a very independent woman and, in her feminine way, a very dominating one, though the dominance was never overt. But even today Mme. Lhevinne is no autocrat. She is just as capable of listening as of talking, and she believes that she can learn as much from other pianists as her pupils can learn from her. She has picked up new methods of fingering and ornamentation in the performance of Bach from such comparative youngsters as the pianist Rosalyn Tureck (a pupil of Olga Samaroff's). Like Miss Tureck, she is not greatly attracted to the present fashion of playing Bach in a severely austere "baroque" manner. She still sticks to the essentials of the Romantic school, asking her students, "What mood do you wish to express? What sound will express this mood? How are you going to produce this sound?" and seeking to analyze and bring to consciousness the capacity for producing, at will, a state of mind in which the inner emotional substance of a composition can be conveyed. "If there is no mood, music is only a crossword puzzle," she says. Her interest in the emotional psychology of pianists in general has made her a warm friend of most contemporary virtuosos, whose attitudes she nevertheless takes apart like an experienced anatomist. She will comment on the long-suffering, almost pathological perfectionism of such artists as Rudolf Serkin and Vladimir Horowitz, and on the very different temperament of the late Artur Schnabel, whose technical command of the instrument always seemed faulty to her ears, though she gave him full marks in other respects. On the other hand, she considers Wilhelm Backhaus – like Schnabel, a product of Central Europe – an impeccable master of mechanics as well as a great artist. She ranks as an important authority on such matter, and her opinions are carefully considered not only by student but by mature virtuosos with worldwide reputations. She is, in fact, the last surviving remnant of her era – and a remarkably vigorous remnant, too.

Mme. Lhevinne's present duties, apart from those on Claremont Avenue, take her to California, where she holds an annual series of classes at the university in Berkeley, and to Aspen, Colorado, where she goes each summer for a few weeks both to teach and to listen, with great interest, to lectures by various celebrated intellectual figures. A corollary activity that has blossomed on her trips to Aspen, and, more recently, in New York, has been her emergence as a concert pianist in her own right. About a decade ago, after years of repressing any pretensions to virtuosity for the sake of domestic accord, she allowed friends to persuade her to appear as a soloist, and today she carefully prepares a masterpiece for performance every year at Aspen. Audiences and critics attending her concerts in New York – she is scheduled to give three, with Leonard Bernstein and the Philharmonic, next week – have found in them all the delicacy of nuance, much of the fire, and even, surprisingly, at her age, some of the power of the rapidly disappearing school of legendary virtuosity. "My career began at seventy-five," she remarked gaily the other day, and though she doesn't take her present appearances as a virtuoso too seriously, she does take her obligation to give the music a just and expressive performance very seriously indeed. More than that, she loves to bask for a moment in the sunset trappings of the ancient rite of virtuosity, sitting backstage at a concert hall after a performance, surrounded by bouquets and receiving the homage of a stage-door line of old friends and admiring youngsters. Still and all, she continues to think of herself primarily as a teacher. "Everybody wants to be a concert pianist, and then, when they have to teach, they feel humiliated," she remarked the other day. "Why? Teaching is great profession. How would the tradition be carried on if it were not for teachers?"

– Winthrop Sargeant

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* Denotes that an excerpt from this section is not included.