

*The Legacy of Rosina Lhevinne*, directed and produced in VHS and DVD format by Salome Ramras Arkatov, is a true labor of love. One cannot help but feel immersed in the love and devotion for the master teacher Rosina Lhevinne as portrayed in this touching and exquisite tribute. I appreciate that the footage, interviews, music, and narratives tell their story, without reliance on contrived cutting edge technology found in most modern films. Because it is traditional and classic in its conception, this film harkens to the lost art of documentary filmmaking.

Teachers will find themselves inspired by the ingenuity of Lhevinne's teaching as illustrated in the interviews and footage taken from master classes and lessons. Teachers will feel encouraged when they witness Lhevinne's teaching and may even recognize aspects of her pedagogy in their own teaching. Piano instructors will grow and evolved by incorporating the timeless ideals that can be discerned from this film.

This film is at once historical, intimate, personal, musical, artistic, and profound. The viewer is guided chronologically through a sequence of events beginning with Lhevinne's student years in Russia, followed by her courtship and marriage to the renowned Josef Lhevinne, and their emigration to the United States. The remainder of the film is dedicated to Lhevinne's extensive career and far-reaching influence, primarily as a teacher, but also as a fine pianist in her own right.

The introduction to the film begins with historical footage of the third movement of Mozart's *Piano Concerto in d minor* as performed by two Lhevinne students in master class. Additional footage of this performance is integrated later in the film. The choice of this music immediately imparts the energy and musical intensity of Lhevinne's teaching. The viewer is immediately aware of her style of teaching; always involved, singing, conducting, clapping with the music. With few words, she communicated so much through gestures, her presence, and interaction with the music alone. It is appropriate that her artistry in teaching both soloist and second piano accompaniment parallels the stunning success of Lhevinne and her husband, Josef, as duo pianists in concert.

Alternating vignettes of Mozart's *Piano Concerto in d minor* are interspersed with a listing of the many musicians interviewed in this film. The music provides a vigorous foundation for these credits, and the viewer is riveted by the stature of the musicians listed: Artur Schnabel, Van Cliburn, Robert Mann, Martin Canin, James Levine, John Williams, and John Browning, to name but a few of the artists interviewed in this film.

As the film prepares to transition to more personal and intimate interviews, the emotional context is well laid with excerpts from all movements of Chopin's *Piano Concerto in e minor* as recorded by Lhevinne in 1961. The first movement evokes passion and grandeur. The second movement is at once sublime and bittersweet. The third movement exudes the optimism and buoyancy one can imagine the Lhevinnes felt as they embarked on their careers and new marriage first in Russia, then Berlin, and finally the United States. The emotional content of the music as combined with the narrative of Rosina Lhevinne describing her early years as a student through her courtship and early years of marriage to Josef Lhevinne is striking. This must be experienced on a personal level by the viewer.

Portions of the second movement of Mozart's *Piano Concerto in C Major, K 467* are used as the film tells of Josef's heart attack and death in 1944. This music beautifully carries the emotional message of her grief, then acceptance, and eventual transition to her more elevated role at the Juilliard School when she assumed the position previously held by her husband.

Interspersed in the film are brief excerpts of interviews with Artur Schnabel. The viewer will savor each of these moments, hearing this extraordinary pianist extol Lhevinne in every way. An artistically splendid choice was made to include subtitles for Schnabel's dialogue. Although his English is distinct and intelligible, the subtitles add to the poignancy of his interviews.

The film incorporates many interviews with famed students of Rosina Lhevinne at the Juilliard School, as well as interviews with less prominent students. The varied experiences and personalities of these students bring vibrancy and meaning to the story told by this film. As the film works through these interviews, there are extended portions with no music in the background. This very effectively tightens the focus on the details of these interviews and enhances the clarity of the narrative.

It appears that a strategic choice was made to use a sizable quantity of Browning's interviews with great success throughout the film. Browning speaks very eloquently and articulately. He shares insights about very personal aspects of Lhevinne's life and personality. He refers very candidly to Josef's infidelity within their marriage and the grace and humor with which Lhevinne coped with his infidelity. He mentions her bouts with breast cancer. He also discloses the depressions suffered by Lhevinne in the later years and the courage and strength of character Lhevinne demonstrated in facing these challenges. His impersonations of Lhevinne's accent are entertaining and charming. In commenting about her interactions with her students, he reveals details about the psychology of her teaching style.

Also delightful are interview excerpts of Van Cliburn in which he speaks very philosophically about Lhevinne's approach to music and how she communicated that to her students. It is equally fascinating to hear James Levine describe Lhevinne's impact on his development, particularly since his musical career took a distinctly different direction than many of Lhevinne's students. Levine credits her with recognizing his unique innate strengths, without sacrificing any of his efforts to develop as a pianist.

Lhevinne's recording of the *Piano Concerto in e minor* by Chopin that recurs through the movie is an inspired choice for this film. The fidelity is surprisingly clear for live recording from 1961. Her performance is magnificent. Most profoundly moving are the portions from the second movement. One can hear in her playing the very finest attributes enumerated by her former students in interviews throughout the film. Her exquisitely beautiful legato sound resonates with every melody note being perfectly blended. Her tone is lush; her students describe her approach to tone production as being full and rich. She never endorsed harsh or forced sounds of any kind. Her sense of timing and rubato are spontaneous yet perfectly paced. The shaping is captivating and fabulously nuanced. Her passagework absolutely sparkles with dazzling clarity, even though she was 81 years old at the time. Her ability to extract intense emotion from the colorfully harmonic chords will keep the viewer preoccupied with this recording long after the film is over.

Even the credits at the end of the film are artistically rendered. As the second movement of Chopin's *Piano Concerto in e minor* plays, silent footage of Lhevinne as an elderly woman is displayed. Rather than to describe the visual effect of this touching footage, I prefer to allow the viewer to experience this for themselves. Intermittently, an overlay of the score from the concerto is displayed. Even after viewing this film several times, I still watch the credits, wishing the film were longer. This is a film that merits viewing many times.

To obtain a copy of this film or for further information, I recommend contacting the producer and director, Salome Arkatov, at (310) 470-8401 or by email: [Salome.Arkatov@alum.juilliard.edu](mailto:Salome.Arkatov@alum.juilliard.edu)

(Jeannie DeArmond-Henselman, reviewer)