

Keywords

Healthy piano technique, prevention of pianists' playing-related injuries, piano pedagogy, Anna Schmidt-Shklovskaya, Ivan Kryzhanovsky, "finger school" approach, "natural weight" system, mind-body-instrument connections in piano playing.

Abstract

Modern scientific experiments explore the positive effects of music on various aspects of human life such as cognitive development, learning skills, and geriatric wellness to name only a few. Scientists have emphasized the connections between active music making, specifically learning to play a musical instrument, and personal development, such as improvements in children's academic achievements. In contrast to the benefits, one negative effect of playing a musical instrument -- professional injuries -- has been understudied. In the early 19th century, the mechanical development of the piano posed new technical and physical challenges for players. While pianists and pedagogues have been concerned with these challenges since then, researchers started gathering information on the subject of pianists' professional injuries only a few decades ago. Moreover, most studies have involved professional musicians, whereas the need to address a healthy body-instrument relationship exists at all levels of learning and teaching.

As one of the most popular musical instruments in Western culture, piano remains a pathway into the world of classical music for many people -- professionals and non-professionals alike. A pedagogical focus on efficient and comfortable piano technique is therefore imperative both musically and physically, and would go a long way to promoting life-long enjoyment of music making and the many benefits associated with it.

In this work, I explore a teaching approach developed by Russian pianist and pedagogue Anna Schmidt-Shklovskaya (1901-1961) and the work of Ivan Kryzhanovsky (1867-1924), a musician and medical doctor whom Schmidt-Shklovskaya credited for her own healing. I studied with Schmidt-Shklovskaya's student and follower Galina Minsker (b. 1935), who, in her turn, has brought a new perspective to the Schmidt-Shklovskaya method by exploring the theory of multi-levelled motor control, as authored by Russian scientist Nicolai Bernstein.

Although, during my many years in piano pedagogy, other pedagogues have also influenced my views, my search for the best ways of playing and teaching constantly brings me back to the principles of Schmidt-Shklovskaya and Minsker. The development and practical application of these principles have guided my current research of the Schmidt-Shklovskaya-Minsker Method, of which this particular work focuses on the historical foundations of the Method, the written works by Schmidt-Shklovskaya and Kryzhanovsky, my personal experience of studying with Minsker, and my own pedagogical insights based on all of the above. Examples of exercises are included.