

## Exercise no. 2: Change of position

Right hand:

Left hand:

### Inversion

Right hand:

Left hand:

### Purpose

The point of this exercise is to learn how to get from one place to another on the keyboard without overexerting and straining ourselves and without unnecessary movements. It is an exercise in “positioning the hand”,<sup>32</sup> that is to say an exercise in which we learn to move the hand as a whole whilst maintaining as far possible its natural form. The exercise is performed in one single unbroken movement, whereby the hand retains its natural pose the whole time where possible and is felt as being part of movement as a whole. The short notes before the leap are performed as in a baroque ornament.

### Starting<sup>33</sup>

At the beginning the arm hangs freely next to the body. An imaginary thread that is fastened to the wrist brings the otherwise completely free arm up to the keyboard in a calm and even movement. The hand and the thumb hang freely and loosely up to the last moment. The exercise figure is included into the movement without any prepa-

<sup>32</sup> Peter Feuchtwanger in conversation.

<sup>33</sup> This way of starting is the same for all subsequent exercises.

ration and without fixing the hand in advance.<sup>34</sup> This happens with a small elliptical movement whilst the hand and the arm sink downwards. One figure (one bar of the exercise) is always to be seen as **one single unified action** which comes from **one single impulse**.

### Neutral position

We take care to finish up with the hand in the “neutral position”. This means that there is tension only in the finger that sustains the note. This finger “grows into the key” so that we have the feeling that the finger is intimately connected to the key. We hang from the key with this finger. All the other fingers are at this point free. (You can check this with “quick release”.) They float on the key surface like oil on water. If we raise one of these fingers with the other hand it should follow lightly and easily. We let go inwardly and sense the energy only in the finger end joint that is lying on the sounding key. Now we can feel the forearm hanging from this finger. That means that we aren’t pressing the key down actively; rather, the wrist, elbow and arm are completely passive – they are in a state of balance. This position is a “comfortable starting position for the hand” or a “rest position”.<sup>35</sup>

The finger which plays the long note (fermata) lies in a straight line with the forearm, and at the end of the movement the thumb just hangs freely down. We can test the looseness, softness, and uncramped state of the thumb by tapping it lightly with the other hand: it should give way freely.

### Accepting/Correcting

We don’t let any wrong notes hinder us from completing the movement once it’s begun. We carry the movement through to the end, without trying to improve any particular note. After completion we can repeat the whole figure if we want. It is inevitable that we play wrong notes at first, but we just accept them. This applies both to the ornamental notes and to the long sustained note.

<sup>34</sup> Neither the fingers nor the hand should make a preparatory/anticipatory movement. It can often be observed that the hand “snaps” upwards at the last moment: this is a mistake.

<sup>35</sup> Willy Bardas, *Zur Psychologie der Klaviertechnik*, Berlin 1927 (reprinted Düsseldorf 2002), p. 35.

This is important: the finger and the hand remain lying there where they land, even if this isn’t the planned point of arrival, and we take this as the point of departure for the next movement. This is a basic rule which applies to all the following exercises.

We can compare this to the art of archery.<sup>36</sup> The archer has no influence on the arrow once it has left the bow. Once the arrow is in the air one cannot correct its flight in any way. It flies where it flies! In the same way we should let the hand fly on unhindered in its complete elliptical movement until it reaches the long note, without interrupting the flow of movement.

In order that the fingers end up lying on neighbouring keys in the neutral position, we can use the other hand if necessary to carefully correct their position after the end of the movement, just as if someone else were doing this.

### Listening

At the end of each figure we listen intently to the long note at the end, and in listening we connect this with the sound of the next figure. Peter Feuchtwanger says that “in this exercise it is almost more important to hear what happens between the notes (the intervals) than the notes themselves. When we do this exercise with the left hand, the bass notes produce overtones, the perception of which we also cultivate with this exercise.”<sup>37</sup>

### Continuation of the exercise

The impulse for the next figure comes from the end joint of the finger that is lying on the key. It comes from this finger alone (not from the arm or the wrist) and is accompanied by calm breathing. The energy comes from spine.

Once again we pay attention to the elliptical movement. “We get onto a conveyor belt, the movement of which never ends, just as the Earth always keeps turning. Some small movement is always present.”<sup>37</sup> Thus we play the figure in one single movement, the impulse for which stems from the finger end joint. The notes of the

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Herrigel 2000.

<sup>37</sup> Peter Feuchtwanger in conversation.

figure are simply included on the way. We don't begin afresh, but throw the hand back. In this way, instead of starting the second bar from C5 with a new movement, we play the whole new figure with the same single impulse which began at the end of the previous figure. In other words, we don't prepare the note by placing the thumb to the C5 and then go on to play the figure as a second step. Instead of this, we take the C5 and all the following notes with us in one movement. Going to the note and playing the note are one and the same thing. All in all this produces an elegant, smooth and rounded movement; this movement is anti-clockwise in the right hand, clockwise in the left. In this way we learn to play notes combined in groups instead of as single, separate notes.

One can describe this movement as a slinging, throwing or catapulting movement; we "throw the hand to the new position".<sup>38</sup> There is a children's game in which a child throws its arm at someone, touches him briefly, and then pulls it back so quickly that he can pretend innocence, while the other is left wondering who did it. One could compare the movement in this exercise to this. Peter Feuchtwanger says that we should behave at the piano as we do in real life – for example, we can compare the exercise with the following "real life" action: we go past a shelf in a supermarket shop and without stopping we reach out and take something from it in passing. Normally such a movement is natural, flowing, and certainly not artificial. In fact usually it is done without thinking. Ideally our movements at the piano should just like this: spontaneous, impulsive, direct and unified, as opposed to hesitating, pondering or cut up into portions. "I never prepare myself physically, only mentally."<sup>38</sup> This is basic principle that applies to all the exercises and to piano playing in general. In keeping with this, the thumb goes to the C5 free and unprepared; in fact it arrives almost

from underneath the keyboard. The arm is passive, merely following in compensatory movement and not making any evasive movements. "Everything comes from the fingers; the arm remains loose like a piece of string, and I simply reach for the keys, taking the notes with me."<sup>38</sup> The shoulders, too, hang down passively, remaining free and flexible: we take care not to raise them unconsciously.

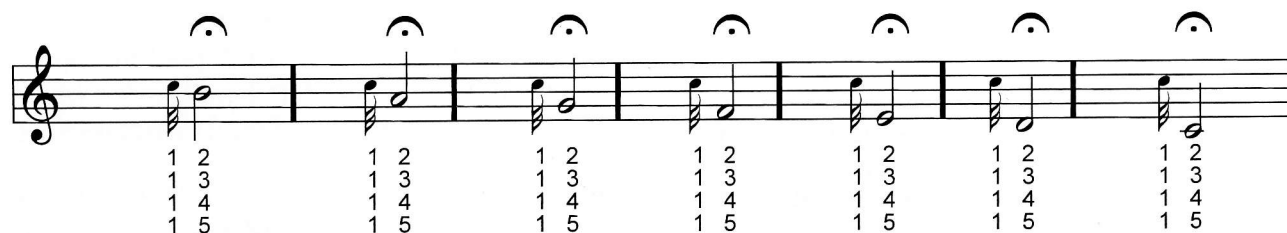
Here again it is important to listen. One shouldn't be able to hear a gap between the end of one figure and the beginning of the next one. We connect these notes by including them both in one continuous movement. "I compare this movement with the bow changes of a string player, who does this without lifting the bow from the string."<sup>38</sup>

### Variations

Apart from the diatonic version described above, we can also do this exercise chromatically (in the original form descending, or in the inverted form rising). We can also use the following alternative fingerings: (for bar 1): 1313, 1414, 1515 or 1321, 1432, 1543.

N.B. On the video this exercise is played one octave higher than it is notated here for reasons of sound quality. Likewise we can play the exercises in different octaves, depending on the kind of sound that we want. In this case we should adjust our sitting position appropriately - in the example given in the book we should sit in front of the middle of the keyboard, so that the arm extends in a straight line from the white keys.

It is recommended to simplify the exercise at first by playing just the first and last notes (what Abbey Whiteside calls "outlining"), observing of course all that has been said above. The notes in between can be added later. In the right hand the exercise would then go as follows:



<sup>38</sup> Peter Feuchtwanger in conversation.