

RULES AND MAXIMS FOR YOUNG MUSICIANS
[From *Album fur die Jugend*, op. 68, for piano]

The cultivation of the ear is of the greatest importance. Endeavor, in good time, to distinguish tones and keys. The bell, the window-shutter, the cuckoo--try to find out in what key are the sounds these produce.

You must industriously practice scales and other finger exercises. There are people, however, who think they may attain to everything in doing this. Until a ripe age they daily practice mechanical exercises for many hours. That is as reasonable as trying to pronounce "a-b-c" more and more quickly every day. Make a better use of your time.

"Dumb keyboards" have been invented. Practice on them for a while in order to see that they lead to nothing. We cannot learn to speak from dumb people.

Play in time! The playing of some virtuosos resembles the walk of a drunken man. Do not make such your models.

Learn the fundamental laws of harmony at an early age.

Do not be afraid of the words, "theory," "thorough bass," "counterpoint," etc. They will appear friendly enough to you when you are familiar with them.

Never strum! Play carefully always, and never try a piece half through.

Dragging and hurrying are equally great faults.

Try to play easy pieces well. It is better than to play difficult ones in a mediocre style.

Take care that your instrument is always in perfect tune.

It is not enough to know your pieces with your fingers. You should be able to remember them, to yourself, without a pianoforte. Sharpen your powers of fancy, so that you may be able to remember correctly, not only the melody of a composition, but its proper harmonies also.

Try to sing at sight, without the help of an instrument, even if you have but little voice. Your ear will thereby gain in fineness. But if you possess a powerful voice, do not lose a moment but cultivate it immediately, and look upon it as the best gift Heaven has bestowed upon you.

You should be able to understand a piece of music merely upon reading it.

When you play, do not trouble yourself as to whom is listening. Yet always play as though a master listened to you.

If anyone places a composition, with which you are unacquainted, before you in order that you should play it, read it over first.

If you have finished your daily musical work and feel tired, do not force yourself to further labor. It is better to rest than to practice without the pleasure of freshness.

When you are older, avoid playing what is merely fashionable. Time is precious. If we would learn to know only the good things that exist, we ought to live a hundred human lives.

No children can be brought up to healthy manhood on sweet meats and pastry. Spiritual, like bodily nourishment, must be simple and strong. The masters have sufficiently provided for this; hold to it.

Executing passages alters with the times. Flexibility is only valuable when it serves high aims.

You should not aid in the circulation of bad compositions, but, on the contrary, in their suppression and with all your powers.

You should never play bad compositions and never listen to them when not absolutely forced to do so.

Do not try to attain mere technical facility--the so-called "bravura." Try to produce the same impression with a composition as that for which the composer aimed. No one should attempt more; anything beyond it is mere caricature.

Look upon the alteration or omission of anything, or the introduction of modern ornaments in the works of good composers, as a contemptible impertinence. This is perhaps the greatest injury that can be offered to art.

Question older artists about the choice of pieces for study. You will, thus, save much time.

You must gradually learn to know all the most remarkable works by all the most remarkable masters.

Do not be led astray by the applause bestowed on great virtuosos. The applause of an artist should be dearer to you than that of the masses.

All that is fashionable again becomes unfashionable. And if you cultivate fashion until you are old, you will become an imbecile, whom no one can respect.

Playing in society is more injurious than useful. Study your audience, but never play anything of which you feel ashamed in your own heart.

Lose no opportunity of playing music, duos, trios, etc., with others. This will make your playing broader and more flowing. Accompany singers often.

If all were determined to play the first violin, we should never have a complete orchestra. Therefore, respect every musician in his proper place.

Love your instrument, but do not vainly suppose it the highest and only one. Remember that there are others equally fine. Remember also that there are singers, and that the highest expression possible to music is reached by chorus and orchestra.

As you grow older, converse more with scores than with virtuosos.

Practice industriously the fugues of good master--above all, those of J. S. Bach. The *Well-Tempered Clavier* should be your daily bread. You will then certainly become an able musician.

Seek among your comrades for those who know more than you do.

Rest from your musical studies by industriously reading the poets. Exercise often in the open air.

A great deal is to be learned from singers and songstresses, but do not believe everything they tell you.

People live on the other side of the mountain, too. Be modest! You never thought of or invented anything that others had not already thought of or invented before you. And even if you had done so, you should consider it a gift from above, which you ought to share with others.

The study of the history of music and the hearing of masterworks of different epochs will most speedily cure you of vanity and self-adoration.

Thibaut's work "On the Purity of the Tone-Art" is a fine book about music. Read it frequently when you are older.

If you pass a church while the organ is being played, go in and listen. If you long to sit on the organ bench yourself, try your little fingers and wonder at this great musical power.

Lose no opportunity to practice the organ. There is no instrument that so quickly revenges itself of anything unclear or impure in composition or playing as the organ.

Sing in choruses industriously, especially the middle voices. This will make you a good reader and intelligent as a musician.

What is it to be intelligently musical? You are not so when, with eyes painfully fastened on the notes, you laboriously play a piece through. You are not so when you stop short and find it impossible to proceed because some one has turned over two pages at once. But you are so when, in playing a new piece, you almost foresee what is coming, when you play an old one by heart. In short, when you have taken music not only into your fingers, but also into your head and heart.

How may we become musical in that sense? Dear child, the principal requisites, a fine ear and a swift power of comprehension, come, like all things, from above. But this foundation must be improved and increased. You cannot do this by shutting yourself up all day like a hermit and practicing mechanical exercise, but through a vital many-sided musical activity, and especially through familiarity with chorus and orchestra.

You should early understand the compass of the human voice in its four principal parts. Listen to these in the chorus. Try to discover in which intervals their principal strength lies and in which they best express softness and tenderness.

Listen attentively to all folk songs. These are a treasure of lovely melodies and will teach you the characteristics of different nations.

Practice, at an early age, reading in the old clefs. Else many precious relics of the past will remain unknown to you.

Observe the tone and character of the different instruments. Try to impress their peculiar tone colors on your ear. Never omit hearing a good opera.

Honor the old but bring a warm heart to what is new. Do not be prejudiced against unknown names.

Do not judge a composition on a first hearing of it. That which pleases most at first is not always the best. Masters must be studied. Many things will only become clear to you when you are old.

In judging compositions, make a distinction between them, as to whether they belong to art, or merely serve as the entertainment of amateurs. Stand up for the first! But it is not worthwhile to grow angry about the others.

"Melody" is the amateur's war cry, and certainly music without melody is not music. Therefore, you must understand what amateurs fancy the word means: anything easily, rhythmically pleasing. But there are melodies of a very different stamp, and every time you open Bach, Beethoven, Mozart, etc., they will

smile out at you in a thousand different ways. You will soon weary, if you know these, of the faded monotony of modern Italian opera melodies.

It is a pleasant sign if you can pick out pretty melodies on the keyboard. But if such comes to you unsought, and not at the pianoforte, rejoice, for it proves that the inward sense of tone pulsates within you. Fingers must do what the head wills, not the reverse.

When you begin to compose, do it all with your brain. Do not try the piece at the instrument until it is finished. If your music proceeds from your heart, it will touch the hearts of others.

If heaven has gifted you with lively imagination, you will often, in lonely hours, sit as though spellbound, at the pianoforte, seeking to express the harmony that dwells within your mind. And the more unclear the domain of harmony is yet to you, the more mysteriously you will feel yourself attracted, as if into a magic circle. These are the happiest hours of youth. But beware of giving yourself up too often to a talent that will lead you to waste strength and time on shadow pictures. You will only obtain mastery of form and the power of clear construction through the firm outlines of the pen. Write more than you improvise, therefore.

You should early learn to conduct. Observe good conductors. When alone, practice conducting occasionally. This will help you in becoming clear regarding the compositions you are studying.

Closely observe life as well as the other arts and sciences.

The laws of morality are also the laws of art.

You are certain to rise through industry and perseverance.

From a pound of iron that costs only a few pence, many thousand watch springs, the value of which runs into the hundreds of thousands, may be made. Faithfully use the pound Heaven has entrusted to you.

Without enthusiasm, you will never accomplish anything correctly in art.

Art is not a means of amassing wealth. Become a continually greater artist. The rest will happen of itself.

Your mind will only become clear when form has become clear to you.

Only genius wholly understands genius.

Someone has said that a perfect musician should be able to imagine a complicated orchestral work, which he listens to for the first time, in the written score before him. This is the most complete musicianship that can be supposed possible.

Studying is unending.

[From Robert Schumann, *Music and Musicians*, First Series, translated by F. R. Ritter (London: W. Reeves, c. 1876), pp. 409-418.]