

Exploring Natalia Pirozerskaya's piano method and teaching philosophy: an intrinsic case study

OV Tsihelashvili
20656459

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Promoter: Prof HM Potgieter
Co-Promoter: Dr L van der Merwe

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TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This is to confirm that I assisted Ms OLGA VLADIMIROVNA TSIHELASHVILI (School of Music, North-West University) with the language editing of her DMus thesis: **Exploring Natalia Pirozerskaya's piano method and teaching philosophy: an intrinsic case study**, while she was preparing the manuscript for submission. I went through the entire draft making corrections and suggestions with respect predominantly to language usage. Given the nature of the process, I did not see the final version, but made myself available for consultation as long as was necessary.

I may be contacted personally (details below) for further information or confidential confirmation of this testimonial.

Dr Edwin Hees (Associate Professor Emeritus)
Department of Drama (formerly Dept. English 1979-2004)
University of Stellenbosch
Private Bag X1
Matieland 7602
Phone 028-272-9857 (h) 076-977-7742 (cell)
eph@sun.ac.za

Photo: Natalia Pirozerskaya (private collection)



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ABSTRACT

The aim of this research was to explore the piano method and teaching philosophy practised by the Russian piano pedagogue, Natalia Pirozerskaya. Her piano method is not well known and as a former student of hers I firmly believe in its values and implications for piano pedagogy. The focus of her teaching is a holistic concept of the harmonious (organic) development of the artist-musician as expounded by Yakovlev in relation to vocal art and higher nervous activity. Pirozerskaya's piano methodology addresses the delicate relations between the inner life of the individual and the process of piano playing. She advocates a self-connected pianism characterised by the integration of all processes with the self. Pirozerskaya links the aesthetic values of Glinka's artistic tradition to piano pedagogy in relation to creative potentialities and self-expression.

The participants of this intrinsic case study were Natalia Pirozerskaya, Olga Tsihelashvili (the researcher) and five of Tsihelashvili's piano students in Johannesburg. I interviewed the five piano students and through validation strategy of crystallisation the themes emerged. Based on the interviews with the students several themes were identified: 1) They explained that they experience an interconnected unity which can be described as *oneness*; 2) There was also a sense of deep fondness in the way the pupils shared their feelings about the piano; 3) They pinpointed the existence of an inner driving force – a form of artistic energy emerging as a tangible component of their pianistic process; 4) Concerning the special piano touch advocated by Pirozerskaya, all the students unanimously agreed that it is an effortless transmission from the fingertips straight into the piano which “just happens by itself”. They willingly demonstrated this touch on the piano, thus enriching the evidence; 5) With regard to the physical interaction with the instrument, the students observed the element of the opposing spring-support and the feeling of lightness in the body, essential in Pirozerskaya's piano technique; 6) They mentioned that when they play they experience a deeper perception of the self; 7) Regarding teaching strategies, a rigid teaching approach and inexpressive mechanical piano playing, their spontaneous reactions proved that they have assimilated the fundamentals of Pirozerskaya's self-connected pianism and developed a deep insight into the pianistic process.

Keywords: Natalia Pirozerskaya; self-connected pianism; pianistic sensations; artistic impulse; piano touch; inner life; *funzione d'attacco*.

OPSOMMING

Die doel van hierdie navorsing was om die klaviermetodiek en onderrigfilosofie, wat deur die Russiese klavierpedagoog, Natalia Pirozerskaya, beoefen is, te ondersoek. Haar klaviermetodiek is nie algemeen bekend nie. As 'n eertydse leerling van haar glo ek in die waarde en betekenis wat dit vir klavieronderrig het. Die fokus van haar onderwysbenadering is 'n holistiese konsep van harmoniese (organies) ontwikkeling van die kunstenaar-musikant soos deur Yakovlev verduidelik in die verwantskap tussen vokale kuns en 'n hoër sensuiewe aktiwiteit.¹ Pirozerskaya se klaviermetodologie spreek die delikate verhouding tussen die innerlike mens van die individu en die proses van klavierspel aan. Sy is 'n voorstander van 'n geïnternaliseerde klavieruitvoering (*self-connected pianism*) wat gekarakteriseer word deur die integrasie van al die prosesse met die self. Pirozerskaya verbind die estetiese waardes van Glinka se artistieke tradisie met klavierpedagogiek asook met sy kreatiewe potensialiteite en selfuitdrukking.

Die deelnemers aan hierdie intrinsieke gevalle studie was Natalia Pirozerskaya, Olga Tsihelasvili (die navorser) en vyf van laasgenoemde se klavierleerlinge in Johannesburg. Onderhoude is met die vyf klavierstudente gevoer en deur middel van die geldigheid van die strategie van kristallisering is die volgende temas geïdentifiseer: 1) Hulle verduidelik dat hulle 'n aaneengeskakelde eenheid, wat as 'n eenwording (*oneness*) beskryf kan word, ervaar; 2) Daar was ook 'n besef van teerheid in die manier waarop leerlinge hul gevoel van die klavier uitgespreek het; 3) Hulle het ook die bestaan van 'n innerlike dryfkrag uitgelig – 'n artistieke energie wat na vore kom as 'n verweefde komponent van hul pianistiese proses; 4) Verwysende na die spesiale klaviertegniek van aanraking met die klawers wat deur Pirozerskaya bepleit word, het al die studente eenparig bevestig dat dit 'n maklike manier van oordrag van die vingerpunte direk na die klavier is wat vanself gebeur; 5) Met betrekking tot die fisiese interaksie met die instrument, het die studente die element van veerkrachtigheid en die gevoel van verligting in die menslike liggaam, wat noodsaaklik is in Pirozerskaya se klaviertegniek, geïdentifiseer; 6) Hulle dui aan dat wanneer hulle die klavier bespeel hulle 'n dieper gevoel van hulleself ervaar; 7) Met verwysing na onderrig strategieë, 'n rigiede benadering en die niksseggende meganiese klavierbespeling asook hul

¹ 'n Hoër sensuiewe aktiwiteit is 'n veld in neurologie wat verwys na die hoogste vlak van geïntegreerde breinfunksie in die serebrale konteks. Dit behels die regulering van taal, denkpatrone en gedrag deur middel van sensoriese, motoriese en kognitiewe prosesse.

spontane reaksie bewys dat hulle die fundamentele beginsels van Pirozerskaya se geïnternaliseerde pianisme assimileer en 'n insig in haar klaviermetodiek ontwikkel het.

Sleutelwoorde: Natalia Pirozerskaya; geïnternaliseerde pianisme; pianistiese sensasies; artistieke aanvoeling; klavieraanslag; innerlike ervarings; *funzione d'attacco*.

DOCTORAL PIANO PROGRAMMES²

CONCERT 1

30 NOVEMBER 2010 12:00 – CONSERVATORY HALL, POTCHEFSTROOM

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750). *Prelude and Fugue* No 18 in G-sharp minor from *Das Wohltemperierte Klavier* (Book II)

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827). *Piano sonata* Op. 111

Peter Tchaikovsky (1840-1893) – Sergei Rachmaninov (1873-1943). *Lullaby* Op. 16 No. 1

Sergei Rachmaninov. *Variations on a theme by Corelli*, Op. 42

CONCERT 2

25 NOVEMBER 2011 15:00 – CONSERVATORY HALL, POTCHEFSTROOM

1. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791) *Fantasia in c minor*, K 396

2. Robert Schumann (1810-1856) *Symphonic Etudes*, Op. 13

3. Franz Liszt (1811-1886) *Mephisto-Waltz*

4. Sergei Prokofiev (1891-1953) *Suggestions Diabolique*, Op. 4 No. 4 from *Four pieces for piano*

CONCERT 3

17 July 2013 11:00 – CONSERVATORY HALL, POTCHEFSTROOM

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827) *Fifteen Variations and Fugue* on the Theme from *Prometheus* Ballet (*Eroica*) in E flat Major, Op. 35

Maurice Ravel (1875-1937) *Scarbo* from *Gaspard de la Nuit*

Frederick Chopin (1810-1849) *The Preludes*, Op. 28

² The credits for the four piano concerts are 60 credits for each concert (total 240 credits) and the formal assignment 120 credits. According the regulations of NWU, a DMus has 360 credits.

CONCERT 4

2 DECEMBER 2013 14:00 (Piet Koornhof violin, Human Coetzee cello) – CONSERVATORY HALL,
POTCHEFSTROOM

Gayaně Chebotarian (1918-1998) *One-movement Trio* for violin, cello, and piano

Giorgy Sviridov (1915-1998). *Trio in A minor* for violin, cello, and piano

Anton Arensky (1861-1906) *Trio No. 1 in D minor*, Op. 32 for violin, cello, and piano

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 Introduction

The aim of this research is to explore the piano method and holistic teaching philosophy suggested by Natalia Pirozerskaya.³ Her unique method of integrating “the complex spiritual manifestations of personality”,⁴ the instrument and the music, which she defines as “self-connected pianism”, has its origins in the vocal art (Pirozerskaya, 2009:9-10). Pirozerskaya’s aesthetic values are rooted in the tradition of Russian artistic realism associated with the names of Glinka⁵ and Chaliapin.⁶ Her piano methodology is grounded in the vocal teachings of Yakovlev.⁷ Pirozerskaya’s method is characterised by the subtle nature of pianistic sensations and artistic occurrences. Pirozerskaya conceptualises the piano as a “vehicle of self-expression” and the pianist’s hand as a “living sensory organ” (Pirozerskaya, 2014a). Her innovative holistic concepts address the delicate relations between the inner life of the individual and the process of piano playing. “Music has the capacity to express and awaken hidden aspects of the personality” (Boyce-Tillman, 2000:94). A malleable teaching approach, sensitive to the student’s personality and state of being during learning, characterises her method. I will discuss the nature of the special teacher-student interaction as an aspect of imparting the skills of self-connected pianism. This study is a tribute to Natalia Pirozerskaya. She was my first piano teacher and the mentor of my youth. I strongly feel the need to share the special knowledge that I was fortunate to inherit from her.

Pirozerskaya’s theories and discoveries in the sphere of transferring sensations from the vocal organ to the hands of the musician-instrumentalist, as well as Yakovlev’s vocal method, were previously expounded in my MMUS dissertation (Tsihelashvili, 2008). In my previous writing the prime focus was on marrying vocal and pianistic sensations, and on enhancing artistic expression in piano performance. In this research I will focus on piano pedagogy. I will discuss the nature of the vocal mastery attributed to Glinka-Chaliapin’s artistic tradition as the origins of Pirozerskaya’s knowledge and values. I will provide

³ Natalia Isaakovna Pirozerskaya (born in 1936 in Khabarovsk, USSR) – vocal and piano pedagogue. Pirozerskaya pioneered a method of “phonemic massage” and vocal therapy (Pirozerskaya, 2014a).

⁴ All translations from Russian sources are my own.

⁵ Mikhail Ivanovich Glinka (1804-1857) – Russian composer, founder of Russian classical music.

⁶ Feodor Ivanovich Chaliapin (1873-1938) – legendary Russian bass, considered to be “the greatest representative of the Russian school of singing” (Keldish, 1973-1982 vol 6:275).

⁷ The profound vocal method of the Russian vocalist, pedagogue and scholar Alexander Vasilyevich Yakovlev (1886-1961) provided the premise for Pirozerskaya’s piano method and vocal therapy (Yakovlev, 1971).

an in-depth account of Pirozerskaya's views on piano playing and teaching, and explore their application in my teaching practice. This research hints at the capacity of piano study to foster the emotional-psychological well-being of the student.

1.2 Research problem

I will investigate the unique but unexplored contribution made by Pirozerskaya to piano pedagogy. Her piano method is not well known. I firmly believe in its values and implications for piano pedagogy and wish to contribute this knowledge to the field. I will address several issues arising from a rigid teaching approach and the teaching of the piano skills disengaged from personalised emotional expression (especially at the elementary stages). I will explain the subtle specifics of self-connected pianism and suggest a malleable approach to the student, which characterises Pirozerskaya's method.

My concern about the children and teenagers who arrive at the lessons in a fatigued, anxious, psychologically hampered, or unfocused state is another motivation for this research. Although many teachers notice difficulties of this nature, my experience in the music world reveals a general lack of due consideration of this matter from the teachers. I intend to explore several possibilities of nourishing the entire individual and enhancing state of being which are inherent in Pirozerskaya's method.

In my childhood Pirozerskaya's self-connected pianism promoted the rapid growth of my artistic potential.⁸ Nourished by Pirozerskaya, I flourished in my early concert career. However, I was to experience the rigid approach and pedagogical insensitivity throughout my adolescence. "High level of motivation and talent were basic requirements, and students were expected to be able to intuitively solve problems" (Johnston, 2010:46). These experiences made me realise the necessity of pedagogical tact and flexibility. I then deeply understood what it means to be "true to my artistic self" (Pirozerskaya's expression). Here I include a short narrative to put my experiences in context:

Around the age of 15 I began to realise the conflict between my arsenal of pianistic resources and those abundant emotions and artistic images awakened in my young imagination. This point marked the beginning of my long journey in search of piano mastery which would enable me to realise my expanded artistic ideal. The most painful part of the journey was between the ages of 16 and 22, when my old technique was already broken and the new one not yet established. Just at that time, I was first enrolled at the Music College named after Rimsky-Korsakov, and later – at the St. Petersburg State Conservatory as a piano student. During this seven-year period (1987 - 1993) I experienced an array of piano methods and teaching strategies from five consecutive lecturers. Some of those methods were in direct contradiction with one another and none truly resonated with my artistic quest. Driven from

⁸ I was taught by Pirozerskaya from the age of six (1977-1981).

one extreme request to “hang my hand” (term used by Mary Gooseva⁹) to another extreme of hammering the piano with a forced sound, I gradually lost my ability to project my natural timbres and emotional intensity in performance. I also developed severe tensions, limiting my virtuosic capacity. This was accompanied by a painful emotional-psychological crisis. A vulnerable young individual in search of my truth, I was desperately seeking sympathy and understanding from my lecturers. But none of them would hear me, each rigorously persisting in imposing their method.

During this difficult time (in 1990) I turned to Pirozerskaya for help and experienced rehabilitation through her vocal therapy over a period of three years. The effect of these vocal sessions was truly remarkable. It alleviated my emotional trauma, nourished me with energy and brought a joyful, positive feeling of being reconnected with my true artistic self. These sessions empowered me to continue my journey towards my desired piano mastery.

But Pirozerskaya’s unique contribution still remains unexplored. I have studied several books and journals and could not trace a methodology that links with that of Pirozerskaya’s (Ingle, 2005; Lin, 2002; Malkova, 2011; Mironova, 2003; Rosen, 2004; Sherman, 1997). To my knowledge, there is no literature that covers my topic in its entirety. However, there are sources which cover some of its facets. Yakovlev’s (1959, 1971) and Pirozerskaya’s (2008, 2009) own writings expound the concept of organic singing in-depth. But Pirozerskaya has produced no written work to address piano playing. Her written work, focused on singing and wellbeing, provides just the hint concerning piano playing. In my interview with her (2014b) she confirmed that there is no research being done on her piano method and findings.

Important research by world-renowned piano pedagogues and scholars such as Buzoni (1957), Cortot (1965), Feinberg (1969, 1978), Lhevinne (1972), Maartienssen (1966, 1977), Neuhaus (1983), and Schmidt-Shklovskaya (1985) provides evidence of the values and artistic outcomes attributed to piano playing similar to those expressed by Pirozerskaya. However, the specifics of Pirozerskaya’s approach, grounded in Yakovlev’s theories, are unique. Pirozerskaya makes direct reference to Maartienssen and Schmidt-Shklovskaya in relation to particular phenomena attributed to her piano technique.

My study differs from the studies mentioned above because I will explore the self-connected pianism advocated by Pirozerskaya in an intrinsic case study. The subtle nature of pianistic sensations and artistic phenomena suggested by Pirozerskaya’s method makes it challenging to verbalise her approach. I will attempt to provide an in-depth analysis of the sensations, based on my own pianistic experience as well as on my long-term teaching observations in order to make her approach tangible and useful to others. Furthermore, my young students’ perceptions and experiences will also be heard. Another challenge of

⁹ Mary Borisovna Gooseva – piano lecturer at the St. Petersburg Music College named after Rimsky-Korsakov.

this research is to translate Pirozerskaya's innovative, unusual expressions and terminology from Russian into English. I therefore, make every effort to deliver the precise meaning of her words and to capture the originality of her thinking. I am not aware of another piano method which directly incorporates the vocal aspect into the piano study. Pirozerskaya's holistic teaching philosophy is also unique. She believes that piano study "belongs in the realm of general pedagogy" concerned with personal growth and well-being (Pirozerskaya, 2014b). I will be conceptualising the pianistic process as entailing the integration of the entire self. I also hope to illuminate the concept of working with the whole person to a substantial depth. Regarding the aspect of piano study fostering well-being, I found the writings of Alexander (1918, 2001) and Boyce-Tillman (2000) of some relevance.

1.3 The target reader

The piano teachers can benefit from this research hands-on. The proposed concept of self-connected pianism emphasises self-expression, and highlights the importance of the in-depth understanding of the student as a holistic individual. To explain the method further will require a practical demonstration. The philosophy behind the method is one that is applicable to all musical instruments, and possibly to the other performing arts. Pirozerskaya speaks about a similar function of the hand in painting and sculpture, an approach specific to those art forms (Pirozerskaya, 2014a). The vocal specialists may find material of interest in Yakovlev's teachings, to which I devote a subchapter of this work. However, I note that Yakovlev's research has not been translated into English.

Speaking of the student issues related to fatigue and neurosis, Pirozerskaya explains: "The creative centres of the brain are starving. The person is tired and desperate in his need to be himself." She firmly believes in the tremendous therapeutic capacity of her deeply self-connected way of singing and piano playing to nourish the individual towards attaining the inner harmony of the whole being. This could be of interest in general pedagogy and in the sphere of well-being.

1.4 Purpose statement

The purpose of this intrinsic case study is to explore Natalia Pirozerskaya's piano method and teaching philosophy for the participants: Natalia Pirozerskaya, Olga Tsihelashvili, and five of Tsihelashvili's piano students at her teaching studio in Johannesburg. At this stage in the research, Natalia Pirozerskaya's piano method will be defined as self-connected pianism.

1.5 Research question

Main research question:

What is the nature of Natalia Pirozerskaya's piano method and teaching philosophy?

Sub questions:

- What characterises the self-connected pianism attributed to Natalia Pirozerskaya's method?
- How did the researcher apply Pirozerskaya's piano method?
- How do piano students experience the application of Pirozerskaya's piano method?
- What are the implications of this study for piano pedagogy?

1.6 Research design and methods

- Research design and methods

My study is located within the paradigm of interpretive qualitative research. According to Henning *et al.* (2005:3), qualitative research is marked by its "quest for understanding and for in-depth inquiry". Qualitative research is exploratory and descriptive and thus, fits the nature of my work. It also offers a wide range of approaches. I generally define my research approach as an "exploratory" (Rule & John, 2011:28) "intrinsic case study" (Stake, 1995:3).

- Participants

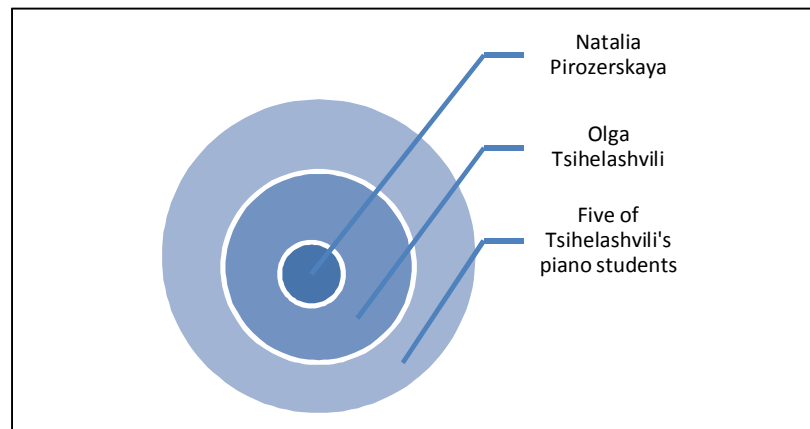


Figure 1: The circle of participants in this intrinsic case study

My circle of participants includes Natalia Pirozerskaya, myself and five of my piano students. Pirozerskaya is the binding agent in this circle. As my study is grounded in her concepts, she is the initial source. She is also my mentor, who is directly involved in this research project by giving me regular interviews via telephone or skype. She provides data and also checks my thought process. I am the link between Pirozerskaya and my students: her pupil and their teacher. The knowledge of Pirozerskaya's method attained through my first-person experience of being her pupil for seven years is filtered through my life-long application of her teachings to my piano performance and transferred to my piano students. The five selected young students show strong artistic potential. Each of them adopted the proposed approach to piano playing in their own way, unique to their personality and entire "psycho-physical make-up" (Alexander, 1918:48). The age of the students ranges between 7 and 18. Their involvement in the study will allow me to explore how self-connected pianism manifests in individual variety and specifics. I also hope to gather valuable data based on their personal perception of their experience at the piano. This is an intrinsic case study, as I am exploring Pirozerskaya's method and teaching philosophy. My circle of participants is a bound together, interconnected structure revolving around Pirozerskaya's method – a case within a case.

1.7 Data collection, analysis, validation and ethics

Case study "allows for multiple forms of data collection" (Creswell, 2013:103). My data will derive from several sources like the following:

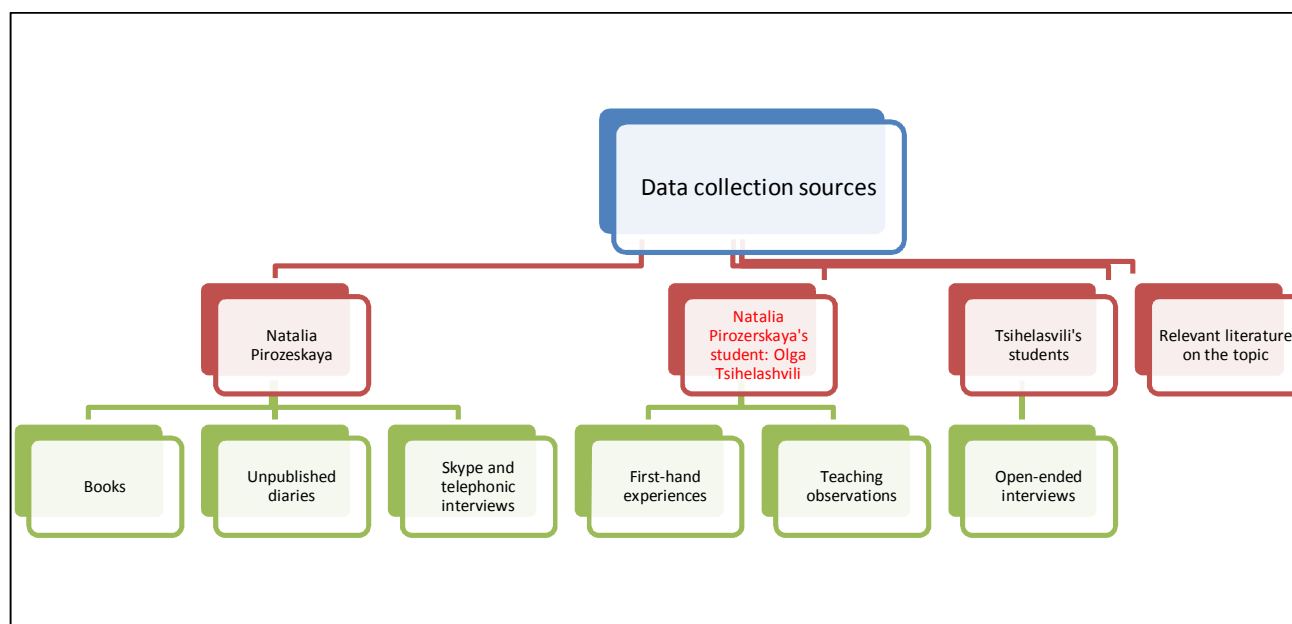


Figure 2: Data-collection sources

The interviews will be video recorded and transcribed. I designed different open-ended questions for different students to suit their age and personality. This is in line with Merriam's (2009:107) suggestion that the interviewer should ask meaningful questions "in language easily understood by the informant". The element of practical demonstration on the piano done by the children is incorporated in the interviews. In qualitative research data collection and analysis are simultaneous on-going processes. Merriam (2009:178) mentions that categories, themes, patterns, findings and answers to research questions are synonymous. McMillan and Schumacher (2001:477) discuss the process of building patterns of meaning by selecting first the topics, then the categories and lastly the patterns whilst Creswell (2013:184) mentions codes or categories and themes. I will use a manual approach to analyse the raw data.

My main validation strategies will be member checking and crystallisation. I will expose my thoughts to the evaluation of my mentor Pirozerskaya, as well as of my student-participants. The interconnected design of my case study (a case within a case) will open rich possibilities to crystallise emergent themes and findings across the data, and to provide an in-depth, thick description. To cover "the same ground from different angles" (Ellingson, 2009:15) I will explore personal perceptions and experiences of all my participants in regard to the central phenomenon of the study – Natalia Pirozerskaya's piano method and teaching philosophy.

To attend to research ethics, I will obtain parental consent for involving five young students as participants. Due to their age, they fall under the category of vulnerable populations (minors). I will ensure anonymity and confidentiality at all stages of the research, and clearly state the students' right to withdraw from the project at any point.

1.8 Researcher's role

From the perspective of my interconnected circle of participants the unusual role of the researcher in my study can be explained. I am both, a participant and an observer. According to Ellingson, in the qualitative continuum of "art" the researcher can be "the main focus, or as much the focus of research as other participants" (2009:9). The latter scenario matches my work. As for the "middle-ground" approaches, "participants are main focus, but researcher's positionality is key to forming findings" (Ellingson, 2009:9). This is certainly relevant. This determines the creative angle in the role of reflexivity in my research.

1.9 Lay-out of the formal assignment

The introduction and background of this formal assignment is discussed in Chapter 1. To be able to understand Pirozerskaya's holistic concepts and teaching philosophy (Chapter 3) the vocal origins that underpin it is described in Chapter 2. In Chapter 4 the application of Pirozerskaya's pedagogy and data analysis and findings will be explained, and the discussion in Chapter 5. Keywords about the communication with Pirozerskaya, the main source of this formal assignment, and literature, where applicable, will be linked with the findings. In Chapter 5 I also suggest opportunities for further research.

Addendum A is the letter of consent to the parents of the five pupils of the case study. This research was approved by the necessary research and ethics committees of the North-West University and the ethics number is NWU-00125-15-A7 (see Addendum B). Addendum C is a copy of the video recording on DVD and a CD of the transcribed interviews is Addendum D.

CHAPTER 2

THE VOCAL ORIGINS OF PIROZERSKAYA'S KNOWLEDGE

2.1 Introduction

The Russian composer Glinka (1804-1857) had a tremendous influence on singers in Russia. His philosophy and technique will be discussed in this chapter and their influence on several prestigious singers will be pointed out. Some of the aspects will be referenced in Russian, because those books formed the basis for my education in St. Petersburg. Yakovlev's vocal method needs special attention because Pirozerskaya is his successor. The following research question will be discussed in this chapter: **What characterises the self-connected pianism attributed to Natalia Pirozerskaya's method?**

There are also a few instances where I use secondary sources (because of the problem of accessibility with the Russian sources) to focus on the historical value of Glinka and his contemporaries.

2.2 Glinka's tradition of artistic realism in vocal art

Pirozerskaya's approach has its origins in Yakovlev's vocal pedagogy. Her principles concerning all areas of her contribution (vocal and piano pedagogy, vocal therapy) are deeply grounded in his teachings and cannot be explained in isolation. In turn, Yakovlev's ideal and aesthetics of the vocal art rest upon the principles and values of the singing tradition founded by the famous Russian composer Glinka in the middle of the 19th century. Pirozerskaya says that Yakovlev's profound vocal method is "the living link to the vocal mastery of Glinka's singers" (2009:9). Aided by his background in the medical field, Alexander Vasilyevich Yakovlev comprehended and explained the "enigmatic voice of Glinka-Chaliapin's nature" (Pirozerskaya, 2014a; Pirozerskaya, 2009:8).

These statements on Glinka are based on several sources (Asafiev, 1950; Levashova, 1987-1988; Serov, 1895; Prokhorov, 1970-1978; Keldish, 1973-1982; Songchorus). The in-depth study of Glinka's music and relevant research were also part of the syllabus in all specialised music institutions of Leningrad, where I received my music education.

In the Romantic era Mikhail Ivanovich Glinka pioneered a new trend in music art, generally defined as "artistic realism" (Levashova, 1987-1988:21). Glinka absorbed the specifics of the indigenous Russian musical heritage and founded a distinct Russian style of music. "Glinka's music is deeply identified with

the strata of the long-standing singing tradition of Russian peasants” (Levashova, 1987-1988:27). “Like Pushkin¹⁰ in poetry, Glinka originated a new era in the history of Russian music. He created a genuine, realistic art” (Prokhorov, 1970-1978; Keldish, 1973-1982 vol 1:1004). Serov¹¹ stated that Glinka believed that it is the people who create the music, while the composers only arrange it (Keldish, 1973-1982 vol 1:1002). This statement is considered to be “the cornerstone of Glinka’s aesthetics” (Levashova, 1987-1988:14).

In his music Glinka “synthesised various means of expression characteristic of Russian folk music. That includes different styles of intonation, rhythm, mode, and voice-leading” (Keldish, 1973-1982 vol 1:1005). Famous Russian musicologist Odoevsky¹² writes about Glinka: “Being initiated into all mysteries of Italian singing and German harmony, the composer deeply penetrated the nature of Russian melody” (Odoevsky, 1956:119).

Glinka implemented his new style in all major music genres. Glinka’s greatest contribution lies in opera and the vocal arts. With his operas *Ivan Susanin* (1834-1836), *Ruslan and Ludmila* (1837-1842) he initiated the art of Russian opera. Reflecting on the premier of *Ivan Susanin* (26 November 1836) Serov writes:

The similarity between the style of this music and the indigenous (folk) singing of our people was strongly evident from the first bars. I was puzzled: in its folk origins, this music was at the same time highly sophisticated in its texture (prevalence of counterpoint) ... The depths of musically-dramatic beauty were generously spelt in each item of this genius opera (cited in Prokhorov, 1970-1978,¹³ Keldish, 1973-1982, vol 1:1005).

Asafiev (1950), Levashova (1987-1988) and Serov (1895) speak of the brilliant vocal mastery of Glinka the singer. In his foreword to Glinka’s *Etudes for the improvement of the voice* Nazarenko notes that “among all Russian operatic composers, Glinka was the only one to be a concert singer of a world calibre” (Songchorus). The music critic Serov was acquainted with Glinka for 15 years. In his article *Memoires of Mikhail Ivanovich Glinka* (Воспоминания о Михаиле Ивановиче Глинке) Serov (1895) observes the nature of Glinka’s mastery as a singer:

A powerful genius as a creator of music he was as genius in his vocal performance. From the first sounds he could relocate the listener into the special atmosphere, special mood

¹⁰ Alexander Sergeyevich Pushkin (1799-1837) – the greatest Russian poet who established Russian literary language.

¹¹ Alexander Nikolayevich Serov (1820-1871) – Russian composer and leading music critic of the 19th century.

¹² Vladimir Feodorovich Odoevsky (1803-1869) – Russian writer, philosopher, pedagogue, music critic. One of the founders of Russian musicology.

¹³ Prokhorov is the editor of a series of encyclopaedias with 30 volumes therefore the publication dates differ.

of the spirit, which the poetic content of the work evokes. His power to hold the listener under his charm, from the first sounds to the last was magnetic (Serov, 1895:1319).

According to Serov, Glinka had a tenor voice that was “metallically-sharp on the high notes, and remarkably suitable for passionate dramatic artistic expression” (Serov, 1895). Amazed at Glinka’s mastery in dramatically changing expression from verse to verse of his *Romances*, Serov tells the story how once he pointed this out to the master. Glinka answered:

Sir, it is very simple. In music, especially vocal, the expressive resources are infinite. The same phrase or word could be pronounced in thousand ways by changing voice timbre, shifting accents, giving the face a smiling, serious, or strict expression. The singing teachers commonly don’t notice these factors. But genuine singers know all those expressive resources (Serov, 1895).

All the sources mentioned above point to Glinka’s keen interest in vocal pedagogy. Nazarenko writes: “Passionate about vocal art, Glinka, besides his extensive practical work with singers devoted much time and thought to the questions of voice training and singing methodology” (Songchorus). The melodiousness and deeply moving expression inherent in indigenous Russian singing inspired him to seek new ways and means of voice training, which could preserve and enhance those qualities in professional singing. Chaliapin explains that the music by all great Russian composers is charged with a “high psychological vibration” (Chaliapin, 1989:35). Levashova says that Glinka’s music is marked by his “deep perception of the specifics of vocalising a heartfelt, free-flowing melody attributed to the Russian people” (Levashova, 1987-1988 vol 1:38). Glinka’s artistic ideas coupled with his profound theoretical and practical knowledge in the vocal sphere led him to establish the methodology of the Russian school of singing.

- **“Etudes for the improvement of the voice” by Glinka**

Glinka did not provide much written advice. He mentioned to Kasperov that he does not write dissertations about music but prefers the living word (Songchorus). The only written source for his singing methodology is the “Etudes for the improvement of the voice”, which contains brief practical remarks. These Etudes were specially written for a famous bass Ossip Petrov and reveal a few interesting, unusual features about Glinka’s approach. Being intended for an extraordinary bass voice which encompassed two and a half octaves, none of the Etudes exceed the scope of an octave. According to Nazarenko, Glinka implemented a concentric vocal method of developing the voice from its centre – the “natural tones” which determine the pitch of the calmly sounding spoken voice. In his

remarks to Petrov, Glinka defines those tones as the “tones taken effortlessly” (Songchorus). Petrov’s uncommon voice could extend the natural tones for an octave. For most voices, especially at the early stages of training, the limit could be narrowed down to just a few tones. Gradually the closest surrounding tones were added, expanding the range in both directions. The absence of accompaniment is another feature of the Etudes. Nazarenko explains that Glinka believed that accompaniment to these exercises would affect the natural tone. There should be sensitivity to the vocal and auditory development. According to Kampaneisky (a student of Petrov’s), Glinka’s method “promotes even transition from one vocal register to the other, strengthens and refines the voice, cultivates a clear, radiant vocal timbre and its fresh, unfading quality” (Songchorus). Petrov treasured Glinka’s advice and used these Etudes to the end of his life.¹⁴

- **First generation of singers-successors of Glinka: Ossip Petrov**

Many prominent singers-contemporaries of Glinka adopted the fundamentals of his vocal mastery (Keldish, 1973-1982 vol 1:1002). Among those singers the sources mention the names of Petrov, Stepanova, Petrova-Vorobjova and Gullak-Artemovsky. The art of the great singers-contemporaries of Glinka is known to us only through the written words of eyewitnesses. The legendary bass of Glinka’s time, Ossip Petrov, to whom Glinka entrusted the leading roles of Susanin and Ruslan in his operas, sought Glinka’s advice throughout his singing career.

The producer of Saint Petersburg Opera, Lvov, thus describes Petrov’s phenomenal voice: “This voice resembled the low-spreading sound of a huge bell casted of silver. On the high notes it flashed like the summer lightning’s in the dense darkness of the night sky” (Orpheus). Petrov’s was a native talent. Samin states that from a young age Petrov’s singing was marked by “staggering dramatic passion, deep sincere emotion, moving unaffectedness and veracity” (Orpheus). Another profound Russian music critic of the 19th century, Stasov,¹⁵ says that it is “owing to the singers like Petrov that Russian opera successfully withstood competition with Italian opera, and claimed its high world status” (Orpheus).

- **The legendary singers of the next generation**

Glinka’s tradition reached its peak with the appearance of the great galaxy of Russian singers at the turn of the 19th century: Chaliapin, Sobinov and Nezdanova. From childhood I have listened to their singing on recordings, radio and television programmes. In my youth I admired the recording of duets by

¹⁴ Petrov’s last appearance on the opera stage was at the age of 71, 3 days prior to his passing away. According to Nazarenko, he did not part with Glinka’s Etudes for 40 years (Songchorus).

¹⁵ Vladimir Vasilyevich Stasov (1824-1906) – leading Russian art and music critic.

Nezdanova and Sobinov. The regal figure of Nezdanova and the elevated image of a deeply loving woman personified in her Marfa¹⁶ are imprinted in my memory. The Lensky¹⁷ aria sung by Sobinov is astonishing in its physiological subtlety and depth. In its every phrase Sobinov reveals the intense spiritual experience of his character through subtle vocal nuances, creating a very powerful emotional effect. The herculean power of Chaliapin's singing and his phenomenal expressive capacity are barely describable. I agree with Pirozerskaya, who considers Chaliapin as "one of the greatest artists of all arts, who ever lived" (Pirozerskaya, unpublished diaries).

Pirozerskaya thus summarises the splendid qualities of their art which, according to her, are most evident in Glinka's artistic tendency:

- the powerful energy of the innate feeling;
- tremendous virtuosic capacity;
- its distinct spontaneous quality;
- even sound quality and the fullness of sonority in all registers of the voice;
- effortless, unrestrained sound flow;
- suppleness and melodiousness of the voice;
- radiant voice timbre;
- magnetic impact on the audience (Pirozerskaya, 2014a).

The three great singers were contemporaries. They were bound by their partnership on the opera stage as well as by ties of personal friendship. I will briefly discuss Nezdanova, Sobinov and Chaliapin.

- **Antonina Nezdanova**

Antonina Vasilyevna Nezdanova (1873-1950) had a crystal clear lyric coloratura soprano of a gentle timbre. "Nezdanova's coloraturas are tinged by ardour and playfulness with the hint of a mysterious irony. Their enigmatic quality coupled with the moving sincerity of her lyrical expression marks her phenomenal art, which has become a legend" (Community). Among Nezdanova's stage partners were

¹⁶ The leading role in the opera *The Tsar's Bride* by Rimsky-Korsakov (composed in 1898).

¹⁷ A character from the opera *Eugene Onegin* by Tchaikovsky.

Caruso,¹⁸ Tito Gobbi,¹⁹ Chaliapin and Sobinov. Rachmaninov, who regularly accompanied Nezdanova at her recitals, dedicated his famous *Vocalise* to her.

- **Leonid Sobinov**

Leonid Vitalyevich Sobinov (1872-1934) had a “charming lyrical tenor of a radiant timbre, as if penetrated with light (luminous), a voice which sinks deep into the heart” (Keldish, 1973-1982 vol 5:121). Samin states: “Just as the basses realised that with Chaliapin’s arrival onto the concert stage they could no longer sing the way they have sung before, so did the lyrical tenors with the arrival of Sobinov”(Orpheus). Sobinov continually performed together with Nezdanova. Rachmaninov dedicated *Five Romances* Op. 34 to Sobinov. One of the leading soviet musicologists academician Asafiev calls Sobinov “The spring of the Russian lyricism” (Asafiev, 1952-1957 vol 3:156).

- **Feodor Chaliapin**

The legendary Feodor Ivanonich Chaliapin (1873-1938) had a “basso cantabile” of an enormous compass (Keldish, 1973-1982 vol 6:274). His voice, extraordinary in its suppleness and timbral beauty could convey an immense range of emotions – “from an entrancing tenderness to striking sarcasm and tragic pathos” (Prokhorov, 1970-1978 vol 29:277). Chaliapin the actor unravelled the nature of his characters to a staggering depth, at times revealing their heart of hearts with just a single phrase or gesture. Several contemporaries of Chaliapin also point to the remarkable effortlessness of his cantilena and long fermatas. The producer Rassokhina describes the enigmatic quality as the “sound streaming by itself without any visible effort on Chaliapin’s behalf” (Prokhorov, 1970-1978 vol 29:277). Chaliapin writes:

In one way or the other any music expresses feeling. And where there is supposed to be feeling, the mechanical rendering leaves the impression of terrible monotony. A grand aria will sound cold ... if the voice is not tinged with the shades of psychological nuances (Chaliapin 1989:66).

Chaliapin’s contribution to vocal chamber music was also profound. His repertoire included up to 400 works of this genre. Asafiev captures his live impression of Chaliapin’s performance of Schumann’s lieder: “Singing chamber music, Chaliapin was at times so intensely absorbed, so deep into the music. There was not a trace of any resemblance to the Chaliapin of the opera theatre. Once I remember *Ich hab’ im Traum geweinet*.²⁰ There was just the sound, the voice from the silence. The emotion – modest,

¹⁸ Enrico Caruso (1873-1921) – the legendary Italian operatic tenor.

¹⁹ Tito Gobbi (1913-1984) – Italian operatic baritone.

²⁰ *Ih hab’ im traum geweinet* from *Dichterliebe*, Op. 48 (1840), a song cycle by Robert Schumann (1810-1856).

kept to oneself, as if the performer is not there. There streamed the lonely voice, and all was in that voice, the entire depth and fullness of the human heart. The motionless face, the incredibly expressive eyes – the eyes of a man who endured the ocean of sorrow” (Asafiev, 1952-1957 vol 3:145).²¹

Gorki²² defined Chaliapin as a “symbolic persona who left a footprint in the world’s artistic culture” (Keldish, 1973-1982 vol 6:276).

The purity and depth of human expression are the essence of the humanism attributed to the genuinely Russian art of the native origins. The mystery of Chaliapin, the source of his convincing powers which touch all, even the most unsophisticated of men, is rooted in these origins (Prokhorov, 1970-1978 vol 29:278).

In its lofty heights the art of these three singers stands as a testimony to human expression in music performance in its highest form. Their astonishing mastery is not ostentatious in its nature. It praises in song the beauty and depth of the human soul. It awakens a deep emotional response of the listener. My great aunt, who lived through the horrors of the Blockade of Leningrad during World War II, remembers how the voices of Chaliapin and Nezdanova streamed over the streets of the blitz city from the radio broadcasts. Even from recordings, the singing of the three artists has a tremendous optimising, cleansing and uplifting effect upon the spirit. I believe this is what gives this artistic tradition its timeless value.

2.3 Yakovlev’s contribution

Russian vocal pedagogue and scholar Alexander Vasilyevich Yakovlev (1886-961) found a practical approach to the enigmatic artistry of Glinka-Chaliapin’s origins. In his quest into the depths of the vocal process Yakovlev was one of the first to turn to physiology. Yakovlev conducted a thorough investigation of the singing process in the light of Pavlov’s theory of higher nervous activity. He writes:

Pavlov’s teaching reveals new insights into the mysteries of the higher nervous activity, and opens new possibilities for the development of a comprehensive vocal method which could contribute to the organic up-bringing of the singing artist (Yakovlev, 1971:7).

Yakovlev studied singing in Russia with several well-known teachers in the early 20th century, namely Smolensky and Carelli. In 1924 he completed his studies at the St. Petersburg Conservatory under Tomars.²³ In the 1920s Yakovlev was a leading tenor of the Ekaterinoslav²⁴ Opera Theatre. He also

²¹ This refers to a different volume by Asafiev (1952-1957). There are six volumes in this publication.

²² Maksim Gorki is a pseudonym of Aleksei Maksimovich Peshkov (1868-1936) – famous Soviet writer, founder of the style of realism in Soviet literature.

²³ Joseph Tomars (1867-1934) – Russian opera singer and pedagogue.

attained a medical qualification at the Kirov Military Medical Academy.²⁵ During the blockade of Leningrad in World War II Yakovlev served as a doctor in army hospitals. He also led a concert crew performing for the wounded soldiers. Yakovlev devoted close to 40 years of his life to vocal pedagogy (which was his principal interest). He worked with singers at the Leningrad Philharmonia and Leningrad Theatre of Music Comedy, as well as at other institutions and in a private capacity. Among his students were well-known Soviet artists Sholokhov, Voronina, Souchkov. The young Galina Vishnevskaya was also his student for a short while. Yakovlev was a member of the Leningrad Union of Art-workers named after Pavlov – a research organisation of the Ministry of Culture (Yakovlev, 1971:4-6).

In the process of his discoveries Yakovlev managed to highlight the fundamental qualities attributed to the art of the great singer-representatives of Glinka's tradition. He unveiled many secrets of their mastery which appears so unattainable, at times barely perceivable. He revealed the nature of this vocal skill and placed it within the grasp of vocal pedagogy. Yakovlev laid the foundation of the school of singing which Pirozerskaya defines as "Glinka-Chaliapin's school of organic singing" (Pirozerskaya, 2008:6).

The Russian word for organic is *органичный*. It sounds very similar. However, it has a slightly different meaning. The word is commonly applied to describe a harmonious, natural manner or condition. I will apply the term organic in relation to singing and piano playing in a similar sense.

Yakovlev's exhaustive analysis of all the anatomical structures and components involved in the singing process consistently linked to musical qualities of the voice could in itself form an impressive study. This component of his research has been previously explained in my MMUS dissertation "From the Voice to the Hands: Towards the Piano Method" (2008). Yet a deeper core of Yakovlev's inquiry lies with his discoveries concerning the functioning of the vocal organ with all its interconnected systems in relation to the brain activity. In this light he conceptualises the vocal process as the "motor-musical function" (1971:22). In his only published book, *Физиологические закономерности певческой атаки* [The physiological nature of the vocal onset] he explains the functional hierarchy of the singing process as from the moment of the vocal onset.

Barsov (the editor of Yakovlev's book) notes that Yakovlev realised the possibilities of utilising some natural physiological phenomena (different kinds of inhibition, trace and chain reflexes, specifics of proprioceptive sensitivity and signalling) in vocal pedagogy (1971:5). To Yakovlev, the vocal process in its

²⁴ Ekaterinoslav is now Dnepropetrovsk.

²⁵ The Kirov Military Medical Academy (St. Petersburg) is the first tertiary medical institution of Russia (founded in 1798).

essence is “a highly complex system of functions. Their specific vital activities are entwined in the organic unity” (1971:14).

According to Yakovlev, the initial moment of sound onset is most crucial to the entire singing process. In his book he illustrates this statement in depth with reference to anatomy and physiology. Yakovlev’s spontaneous vocal onset is something very subtle in its nature. The artistic purpose of this easy, natural beginning of sound is to materialise the complex individual manifestation, defined as the inner artistic impulse, in the most unspoilt and direct way. Its deeper purpose is to set off a physiological mechanism functioning in relation to singing artistry. Yakovlev named the above mechanism *аттактная функция* – the function of touch. I found the Italian equivalent *funzione d’attacco* to be more in tune with the original Russian term. Yakovlev explains that the word *аттактная* (which I translated as *d’attacco*) stems from the Latin word *attactus*, which means touch, interaction (1971:9). However, the term *funzione d’attacco* suggests much more than just the ‘attack’ (vocal onset) or the contact of the vocal cords, or the transition from the act of breathing to the act of phonation. The phenomenon of *funzione d’attacco* encompasses the vocal onset, the “unrestrained activity of the wholesome complex of the larynx”, and the interaction of the vocal organ with the centres of the cerebrum (1971:23). I generally observed that in his writings Yakovlev uses the word “function” suggesting the relation to the higher nervous activity. Yakovlev clearly states that by *аттактная функция* (*funzione d’attacco*) he means “the physiological mechanisms of the vocal process in their active state ... the dynamic activity of the proprioceptive signalling, emerging as a result of co-adjustment between all relevant tissue formations active throughout the duration of the vocal movement” (1971:21).

Yakovlev’s vocal method is revolved around the spontaneous, natural voice onset which in its turn ensures “the optimal unrestrained reflex activity of the vocal organ” (1971:25). He writes: “It is crucial to establish a physiologically balanced voice onset free from any forcing, at the initial stages of learning. The entire process of cultivating the motor skills of the singer depends upon this quality” (1971:28). This is the essence of Yakovlev’s concept of the vocal process as a musical-motor function.

In its clearly outlined principles, Yakovlev’s organic vocal technique is deeply individual in its essence. His discovery that with an expert approach, the singing process is relatively easy to establish as a reflex activity, opens the possibilities to enhance the motor skills (technical capacity) of the singer to the point of becoming automatic (reflexive). His fundamental research into this aspect allowed Yakovlev to introduce a systematised way towards moulding an elaborate vocal apparatus, highly responsive to the singer’s artistic aims. Barsov explains: “While developing the reflex associated with both vocal intonation

and phonation, Yakovlev preserved and nurtured the specifics of the natural voice timbre, thus cultivating the individual vocal touch of each student” (1971:8).

Pirozerskaya claims that Yakovlev believed that in the brain lays a tremendous reservoir of creative forces and the nerve energy necessary to bring those forces into action in musical performance (Pirozerskaya, 2015b). I did not find a directly relevant authenticating statement by Yakovlev in the published sources available to me.

Pirozerskaya considers the phenomenon of *funzione d’attacco* with its attributed reflex activity to be Yakovlev’s most fundamental discovery. Passionate about its tremendous implications which she pronounces to be the heart of her work, she mentions this term numerous times, verbally and in her writings. She gives it several innovative definitions such as “muscular-nervous apparatus of the musical feeling” (2008:34),²⁶ “muscular-nervous tree of talent” (Pirozerskaya, 2008), “creative mechanism of the brain” (Pirozerskaya, 2007), “sensory organ of the vocal-speech talent” (2009:11), “analyser of the vocal phonation” (2009:3),²⁷ “function of brain nourishment” (Pirozerskaya, 2015a).

Knowing Pirozerskaya nearly my whole life, I easily identify with her terminology and understand what she means. However, I find her expressions, so meaningful in their original intention, to be rather eccentric for an unprepared or uninitiated reader (or listener). There appears to be a slight discrepancy between Yakovlev’s plain, highly scientific original explanations and Pirozerskaya’s elaborate descriptive terminology. I am one of the fortunate few to be initiated into Pirozerskaya’s practical work. Pirozerskaya deeply understood the practical essence of Yakovlev’s theory and this seeming discrepancy is simply a matter of words. However, it remains evident that there is a gap in the written explanations, which could potentially prevent the reader from appreciating the true value of Yakovlev’s key discovery.

Yakovlev conducted some of his research at the laboratory of the Kirov Military Medical Academy. His profound knowledge of anatomy and physiology coupled with his keen pedagogical insight and extensive experience in the sphere of vocal sensation, generated over the decades of his teaching observations, enabled him to arrive at his findings. Due to the poor quality of the technical equipment, Yakovlev could not test some of his discoveries in a scientifically experimental way: “The picture that we see in the laryngoscope is most insufficient for understanding of the vocal phonation” (1971:12). Testing the

²⁶ In Russian such compound expressions are very common. The two words are adjectives. When used in this form, the first word becomes an adverb. Those are not easy to convert into English.

²⁷ I could not find a suitable English equivalent to Yakovlev’s original term *интонационно-певческий* assigned to the reflex activity of the vocal process.

complex anatomically-physiological picture of vocal onset proposed by Yakovlev was also beyond the capacity of the laboratory equipment available in the post-World War II USSR.

In the process of his research Yakovlev realised that the spontaneous physiologically natural singing, which he conceptualised as organic, has benefits reaching beyond his original aims. In tune with his discoveries, Yakovlev's interest expands towards exploring the effect and benefits of organic singing for the developing organism of a child. All his written material on this topic remains unpublished (some of it is currently in Pirozerskaya's possession). She is familiar with this area of Yakovlev's research through her studies of his handwritten manuscripts of his conference papers. Pirozerskaya studied Yakovlev's archives at the residence of his widow Fainberg in the 1960s. Following his special interest, Yakovlev conducted children choirs in the mainstream schools for several decades. He was famous for his ability to correct the "hooters" – children who sing chronically out of tune.

Barsov also states that presenting lectures and conference papers throughout the former USSR, Yakovlev tirelessly raised the issue of the forced, screaming-like singing, so widespread in Soviet school culture (1971:5). He explained its harmful impact on general health and further – upon the delicate, complex inner world of the child.

A prominent Soviet academic Orbeli acclaimed Yakovlev's theoretical work highly. Barsov states that Orbeli was "convinced that Yakovlev's research will draw the attention of both physiologists and vocalists" (1971:4). Unfortunately Yakovlev's work did not receive a wide recognition, and the majority of his large written legacy still remains unpublished. In the 1950s Yakovlev proposed a fundamental work *Pevcheskii prozess – dvigatel'naya funkcziya* [The singing process: the motor function]. This writing was intended as his doctoral thesis. In the Soviet singing culture the tendency towards a specific bolshevist cliché of strong-willed, ringingly loud singing was then strongly prevalent. Yakovlev's research into the deeply self-connected organic singing was not received with enthusiasm in influential music circles. His article "*Voprosi pevcheskovo vospitania*" (1959) was his only published work during his lifetime. This article, devoted to child pedagogy, became well-known among school music teachers in USSR. His book *Fiziologicheskiye zakonomernosti pevcheskoy ataki* (1971) was published shortly after his death. The contents of this book were compiled by his widow Fainberg in association with professor Mozzoukin (Kirov Military Medical Academy) and musicologist Blinova. It contains excerpts from the following unpublished writings:

- *K edinomu metodu* [Towards an integrated method]

- *Pevcheskii prozess – dvigatel'naya funkczia* [The singing process: the motor function]
- *Pevcheskii prozess i vocalno-pedagogicheskaya practica v svete uchenia Pavlova* [The singing process and the vocal pedagogical practice in light of Pavlov's teachings]
- *Pedagogicheskii zournal* [Pedagogical journal].

Yakovlev's texts contain a fascinating blend of anatomical, physiological and music terminology. Despite the complexity of his scientific stance, his writings capture the reader with his pedagogical insight and passion. The thread of his great concern for the professional health and well-being of the singer is visible throughout his work. Yakovlev synthesised his immense knowledge and created a comprehensive vocal method of "organic training of the singing artist" (1959:10), based on the fundamentals of organic singing of Glinka-Chaliapin's nature. The deeper I immerse myself in Yakovlev's writings, the more I realise the stature of this scholarly figure and his tremendous input into vocal pedagogy.

2.4 Conclusion: Yakovlev's influence on Pirozerskaya

The phenomenon of *funzione d'attacco* is crucial for the understanding of Pirozerskaya's teachings. Influenced by this discovery, she transferred Yakovlev's findings into the sphere of piano playing and established a vocal therapy. Without it the nature of her approach to piano playing cannot be clearly explained. It is through mastering Yakovlev's method of organic singing that Pirozerskaya realised the possibility of teaching piano playing as the means of cultivating deeper contact with the self and thus bringing a new holistic meaning to piano study. Pirozerskaya's teaching philosophy is greatly influenced by Yakovlev's research on organic singing and child development. Following Yakovlev's findings, she explored organic singing and piano playing as the activities which promote "optimising and nourishment of the individual" (2008:64).

CHAPTER 3

THE SELF-CONNECTED PIANISM OF NATALIA PIROZERSKAYA:

FUNDAMENTALS AND HOLISTIC CONCEPTS

3.1 Introduction

Natalia Isaakovna Pirozerskaya is the only immediate successor of Yakovlev living nowadays. In this chapter I will give a background to her life and work, and refer to my personal experience of being her student. I continue in this chapter with the research question: **What characterises the self-connected pianism attributed to Natalia Pirozerskaya's method?**

3.2 Education of Pirozerskaya

Pirozerskaya was born on 21 August 1936 in Khabarovsk (Eastern Russia). In her youth Pirozerskaya's strong artistic inclinations led her to excel in ballet, piano and singing. Later, faced with a choice of artistic career, she pursued piano and vocal studies in Leningrad. During the 1950s Pirozerskaya graduated from the Leningrad Conservatory,²⁸ first as a pianist and a few years later as a singer, both under professor Levando.²⁹ Pirozerskaya remembers Levando with great fondness: "Iraida Pavlovna had a beautiful contralto. She was also a remarkable pianist whose profound technical prowess contained so much more than brilliance. Her tone poured straight from the heart" (Pirozerskaya, 2014c). Pirozerskaya considers herself first and foremost a vocalist. Her voice, rich and velvety in timbre and unusually wide in its compass, enabled her to sing both mezzo-soprano and dramatic soprano repertoires.

Pirozerskaya's interest in child pedagogy and music education led to her studies at the Leningrad College of Music Pedagogy, where she graduated as a choir conductor, singing teacher and school music teacher. Pirozerskaya motivates her passion for pedagogy thus: "I am a fourth-generation teacher" (Pirozerskaya, 2014b). Since the 1970s she devoted herself fully to the sphere of education.

Pirozerskaya met Yakovlev at the end of the 1950s. Her time as Yakovlev's singing student was very short (Yakovlev died in 1961). "Alexander Vasilyevich could do miracles with my voice. This was the mentor of my dreams" (Pirozerskaya, 2014c). After Yakovlev's death, she began her intense research into Yakovlev's vocal methodology, which became her life's work. During the following decade Pirozerskaya

²⁸ The Rimsky-Korsakov State Conservatory in St. Petersburg.

²⁹ Iraida Pavlovna Levando (1914-2004) – a prominent figure in Russian vocal and piano pedagogy. Levando taught at the Leningrad (St. Petersburg) Conservatory for over half a century.

remained closely in touch with Yakovlev's widow Fainberg, who granted her access to Yakovlev's archives, containing a wealth of his unpublished written material. Reflecting on that time, Pirozerskaya speaks of Fainberg:

Scared of plagiarism, Lubov Davidovna zealously guarded Yakovlev's manuscripts. I was then lucky, as she got to trust me immediately. For years I would spend day after day at her flat, immersing myself in Yakovlev's writings. It is thanks to his manuscripts that I learned to use the type-writer (Pirozerskaya, 2014c).

Fainberg generously shared her knowledge and memories with the young dedicated student. She also introduced Pirozerskaya to the circle of professional music educators, singers and choir conductors – followers of Yakovlev's teachings.

Pirozerskaya's deep quest into Yakovlev's knowledge expanded in three directions. Grounded in his concepts and findings, she developed a piano methodology. She also discovered therapeutic properties of organic singing and established her unique vocal therapy. Her extensive experience in the sphere of child pedagogy and music education led her to promote an innovative line of thought in school education concerning the effects of music studies on child development and well-being.³⁰

Because Pirozerskaya's outlook is holistic, it is not possible to explain it in relation to one area of her contribution only. Her piano and vocal methodologies are inseparable, and so are her unique vocal therapy and pedagogical ideas. Exploring Pirozerskaya's piano methodology with its profound holistic concepts will be the main focus of my study. I will highlight its ties with Yakovlev's principles. Some fascinating concepts deriving from Pirozerskaya's vocal therapy and general pedagogical thoughts will be briefly illustrated along with my primary discussion.

Pirozerskaya's books are not written in academic style. They are spangled with thoughts and fragments, and contain short articles, diaries and reflections. Some of her ideas are captured in poetry (2008). In my English translation I tried to preserve the meaning as well as the feel of her original descriptive expressions. Besides two published books, I am in possession of the copies of Pirozerskaya's unpublished student diaries. Pirozerskaya willingly discussed my current research on skype and in telephonic conversations. Regarding my explanations of pianistic sensations and artistic phenomena attributed to the method, I draw on my own pianistic experience as well as on the experience of my student-

³⁰ Pirozerskaya descriptively defines this line of thought as "pedagogy of the artistic mechanisms of the brain" (2008:9).

participants. Pirozerskaya has endorsed the validity of my experience in the sphere of pianistic sensation for the explanation of her piano principles.

3.3 Personal experience

Pirozerskaya initiated me into the art of piano playing when I was six. When I turned ten, my growing concert success and inclination towards following a professional pianistic path led my parents to the decision to place me in the specialised music school of Leningrad (recently named after E.A. Mravinsky).³¹ This meant parting with Pirozerskaya. For the following decade she watched over my progress from a distance, attending my concert performances and providing me with occasional advice. When I arrived at the serious pianistic and emotional-psychological crisis in my early 20s,³² I returned to Pirozerskaya on a regular basis, this time to experience rehabilitation through her vocal therapy over a period of three years. That is when I began to comprehend and analyse my entire pianistic experience with her. I realised the immense value of her teachings and in my turn continued her tradition. I apply Pirozerskaya's principles as a backbone of my teaching practice, in synthesis with my own findings and inclinations.

In this chapter I want to deliver the essence of Pirozerskaya's unique piano legacy and at the same time capture her charismatic pedagogical persona in my translations of her verbal expressions. She developed a descriptive terminology that is unique to her. Some of her expressions are strikingly innovative, even for the Russian-speaking reader. Although a little eccentric at times, Pirozerskaya's terminology is very insightful in capturing the essence of a phenomenon or issue it describes. The subtle nature of her pianistic phenomena makes it difficult to verbalise. I intend to further explain the meaning of her inspirational, innovative concepts which she so brilliantly proves to be sound in her practical work.

3.4 Initiating the self-connected pianistic process: awakening the means of contact

Pirozerskaya's piano method integrates the person, the instrument and the music. In her perception of piano playing "the complex spiritual manifestations of personality" and the nature of the physical interaction of the hands with the instrument are inseparable (2009:9). Pirozerskaya's pianism is permeated with the personal artistic substance of the pianist. This inner life animates every pianistic movement, bringing warmth and a strong sense of individuality to the sound. It transforms piano playing

³¹ Eugeny Alexandrovich Mravinsky (1903-1988) – profound Russian conductor of the 20th century. Mravinsky remained the Artistic Director of the Leningrad Philharmonic Orchestra for fifty years.

³² Described in the vignette in Chapter I.

into a deeply personal creative act. In Pirozerskaya's approach those qualities are not the attributes of an advanced skill. She initiates this self-connected pianistic process from the child's first interaction with the instrument.

The awakening of all "means of contact accessible to the child" lies at the basis of Pirozerskaya's work with beginner pianists (2008:65). With this Pirozerskaya means the complex perception of "the self" associated with the attempt to apply oneself to piano playing (Alexander, 2004:112). This involves co-ordination of inner hearing and artistic impulses with relevant bodily senses, and furthermore becoming conscious of the possibility of the personalised self-expression through piano playing. Pirozerskaya keenly observes her students in this regard. At the elementary stages of learning, if a particular area of development is lacking, she takes no shortcuts. In the cases of children who experience difficulty at the initial steps of their pianistic process, she explains that a lot could be done if the teacher takes the extra effort to "bring the child to the music" (2008:58). Pirozerskaya does not accept the idea that there is a total absence of musical ability. She believes that this ability slumbers embryonically even in those children who initially display little evidence of musical ear or feeling. She draws attention to the fact that in instrumental music pedagogy there is a general reluctance to make the effort of awakening and enhancing the musical ability:

"Often the young beginner-instrumentalist is lacking in important areas of his general musical development. Preoccupied with instrumental skill, the teacher is quick to pronounce the child to have a poor aptitude for the instrument. In the meanwhile, the purpose of all serious child pedagogy nowadays should embrace child development and alleviating its problematic issues" (2008:60).

Following Yakovlev's discoveries, Pirozerskaya delves deeper into the nature of musical feeling:

The flourishing of the musical feeling of the pianist depends upon the development of three muscular mechanisms in terms of their vital activity related to music. The most ancient and thus inherently more developed muscular complex is the large musculature of the body. This is why the majority of small children display a natural desire to move, march, dance to the music. A dancing movement is the simplest form of an embodied musical experience accessible to young children. The next muscular organ, the hand, has a considerably higher motor capacity than the large body musculature. It also has a vast agency in the upper levels of the brain. If coordinated with the musical ear, the hand with its inherent high proprioceptive sensitivity can evoke a musical feeling of a high quality. The last muscular complex – the larynx (its voice-forming area) is situated very close to the brain. Its agency spreads throughout all brain levels. The vocal organ can perform the function of a key system in accessing the reservoir of creative energy (2008:58-59).

Just as Yakovlev conceptualises the organic vocal process as a motor-musical physiological function in the light of higher nervous activity, Pirozerskaya sees the three forms of music art (dancing, singing and piano playing) as three physiological mechanisms functioning in relation to musical artistry and its embodied manifestation. She resorts to singing and dance to awaken the student's musical potential. According to her, exposing the pianist to those arts provides enhanced stimulation for his motor capacity and also deepens his perception of his own musical identity. "The central source of musical feeling is a common factor for the dance, the hand and the voice. The three classic forms of art and their adjacent pedagogies serve to uncover the wealth of potentialities inherent in the nature of man" (Pirozerskaya 2008:60).

For Pirozerskaya dancing as a component of piano study is most applicable at the elementary stages (especially with children). Depending on student needs and musical ability, the dancing can take a very basic form of movement to music, or become a spontaneous expressive improvisation. She believes that dancing is necessary to "liberate the muscular apparatus of the entire body in preparation for the well-differentiated hand movements which determine instrumental technique" (Pirozerskaya, 2009:60). She also mentions that the motor-musical co-ordination of the dance assists "the neurological process of merging the auditory and the motor signals, which forms the basis of the differentiated pianistic movement" (Pirozerskaya, 2009:60).

The reason for employing the vocal aspect is rooted in Pirozerskaya's explorations on the enhancing and therapeutic properties of organic singing. She often refers to Yakovlev's vocal exercises as the "phonemic massage", thus reminding us of Yakovlev's phenomenon of brain stimulation through organic vocal movements (Pirozerskaya, 2008:38). She explains that his exercises provide a "live link to the cerebrum" – a preliminary stimulation which is also applicable in pianistic processes (Pirozerskaya, 2008:33). Pirozerskaya's organic singing also serves to bring the student into contact with his inner artistic substance. The unrestrained singing manner natural to the individual stimulates heartfelt expression, prompting artistic will and perception to come into manifestation.

The short vocal sessions for the young pianist consist of Yakovlev's exercises, selected Vocalises by Panofka and Concone, particularly expressive Russian folk songs (some of them were in the repertoire of Chaliapin) and beautiful Italian melodies. Even though aimed at non-singers, Pirozerskaya included romances and short arias by Glinka, Dargomyzhsky, Rimsky-Korsakov and Tchaikovsky, subject to the musical maturity of the student.

The way Pirozerskaya accompanied the singing student is worthy of note. Her effortless and vibrant piano touch strongly resembled the vocal touch of organic singing, and the timbres of her free-flowing sound were in total harmony with the emotional atmosphere of the song. The artistry of her playing stimulated and prompted the student in the direction of ease and spontaneity of vocal expression. At times Pirozerskaya would sing a few phrases with the student, never overwhelming him with the sound of her voice.

After these vocal sessions, the student feels artistically stimulated and often also liberated from his emotional-psychological tension. He approaches the piano, instinctively seeking to animate the instrument, to actualise the vivid musical flow which he experienced in singing. The distinct sensation of readiness in the body intensifies and, often without realising it, the student instinctively transfers the ease and spontaneous feel of his vocal experience to piano touch.

3.5 The pianist's hand: a living sensory organ

In light of Yakovlev's physiological discoveries, Pirozerskaya approaches the pianistic apparatus as a delicate organ-transmitter of one's inner creative essence – a "living sensory organ" (Pirozerskaya, 2007) endowed with complex, subtle sensations and "motor initiative" (Pirozerskaya, 2014b). For Pirozerskaya, the movements and sensations of the playing hands are both the embodied reflection of the inner artistic impulses, and the on-going stimuli which supply and nourish the brain: "The organic development of the pianist is associated with joy deriving from the natural, harmonious activity of the living sensory organ – his hand. This motor-muscular activity of the organ nourishes the brain, and the individual begins to live through his playing, displaying feelings and artistic initiative" (Pirozerskaya, 2015c). She adds: "In my perception the pianist's hand is not a slave of the music. Often it is the artistic hand that takes charge" (Pirozerskaya, 2015a). The words of French pianist Margareta Long are in direct correspondence with this statement: "The palms and fingers of our hands are not just a muscular apparatus. They are marvellous sensory organs, endowed with special sensations – almost an artistic gift. They obey the brain but, more often than we think, take charge" (Hentova, 1966:210). Pirozerskaya adds: "In the process of training the pianist's hand (the sensory organ of musical expression) it is important to ensure that the initial moment of the motor initiative of the organ is not suppressed." (2015c).

3.6 Fundamentals of piano technique

3.6.1 The attuning apparatus: subtle bodily impulses – pre-sensations

In one of our skype conversations Pirozerskaya pointed to Maartienssen³³ as a piano authority who captured the inner process of the pianist related to artistic impulses and energies in his writings: “Maartienssen’s insight into the inner life of the artist-musician is one of the kind. He noticed the existence of the delicate strings of the attuning apparatus” (Pirozerskaya, 2014b). Maartienssen thus describes the subtle inner process of the pianist, preceding the actual contact of the hands with the instrument:

The artistic element born in its source – the soul, first manifests itself as a feeling. Then it grows to become an experience – a subtle action, stimulating inner auditory impulses and imaginative thought. Drawing the body into this process is the next phase. The certain impulses, as if pre-sensations of a genuine creative act, occur in the body just before the pianist touches the keys (Maartienssen, 1977:26).

In his book *Zur Methodik des Klavierunterrichts* (1966) Maartienssen points out that the life of the inner artistic impulse undergoes certain stages within the spiritual domain of being. Initially just a subconscious feeling, the artistic image progresses towards the conscious sphere through engaging with three inner forces: the inner hearing, the artistic imaginary (the spiritual element) and the artistic will (the impulse to further actualisation). He defines this trinity of forces which determine the evolution of the inner artistic impulse toward its physical actualisation as *schöpferischer Klangwille* (Maartienssen, 1966:28). This could be captured in English as the artistic will towards realisation through sound.³⁴ Maartienssen’s definition ingeniously combines all three factors into one notion. “The spiritual element, the ear, and the bodily pre-sensations merge into one wholesome manifestation of the artistic will. I define this interconnected trinity with the term *schöpferischer Klangwille*” (Maartienssen, 1977:26-27). Maartienssen also refers to *schöpferischer Klangwille* as “the source of inner life” which awakens the body in preparation for the act of piano playing (Maartienssen, 1977:27): “The impulse to creative actualisation penetrates the playing apparatus like an electric charge, from the fingertips all the way to the hips. Simultaneously the breathing comes into action” (Maartienssen, 1977:27).

³³ Carl Adolf Maartienssen (1881-1955) – world-renowned German piano pedagogue.

³⁴ Maartienssen’s original texts are written in German. I studied them in Russian translation. His writings have been translated into several languages; however, I am not aware of English translations.

Maartienssen observes that during this stage of the pianistic process “the delicate nerves and muscles of the vocal cords, larynx and the entire vocal apparatus – the most natural instrument of music making – automatically switch into the state of readiness” (Maartienssen, 1977:27). Maartienssen’s insightful observation brings to light the existence of the subtle preliminary bodily impulses channelled towards the hands in expectation of the act of piano playing. Maartienssen’s formula for this phenomenon is “bringing the nerves and the muscular systems into the state of readiness” (Maartienssen, 1977:27). Pirozerskaya’s approach to piano touch is aimed at enhancing the student’s awareness of those delicate preliminary impulses, which almost border on the intangible. This is not something commonly taught in piano pedagogy. Pirozerskaya calls these sensations “the delicate strings” of the playing apparatus (Pirozerskaya, 2014a).

3.6.2 Piano touch

Pirozerskaya introduces piano touch which does not suppress these delicate sensations, and appears as an effortless direct transmission of the inner impulse into the keys. Pirozerskaya calls this sensation “the touching stimulus” (Pirozerskaya, 2014a). The following quote captures the nature of this phenomenon. Pirozerskaya writes in reflecting on a performance by the pianist Teplitskaya: “Closing her eyes, she merged with the instrument. There was no hammering, just a bottomless depth” (Pirozerskaya, 2008:13). The distinct tactile sensation of the fingertips moulding the depth of the piano keys as if never sinking to the bottom is attributed to the “touching stimulus”. In connection with this, Pirozerskaya pinpoints another fascinating phenomenon which she defines as “the energy of contact” (Pirozerskaya, 2008:67). The vibrant quality of the emerging sound rests upon this energy and is unique to each individual. The subtle qualities of the described piano touch are worlds apart from a “lifeless prick or hammer-like stroke” (Pirozerskaya, 2014a). In the light of Pirozerskaya’s holistic teachings the initial interaction of the pianist’s hand with the instrument is vital. It either allows the pianist’s creative personality to manifest in playing, or leads away from the possibility of spontaneous self-expression. Just as Yakovlev postulates that the easy, spontaneous vocal touch of organic singing activates the mechanism of *funzione d’attacco*, Pirozerskaya believes that her advocated piano touch activates the creative pianistic act as a healthy physiological mechanism.

3.6.3 Delicate strings of the unsuppressed falsetto

Pirozerskaya introduces the notion “delicate strings of the unsuppressed falsetto”³⁵ which embraces both piano touch and tone quality (2008:11). In Pirozerskaya’s interpretation the term falsetto marks a subtle although fundamental feature of her teachings about sound quality (piano and vocal alike). This free-flowing sound, endowed with personal warmth and youthful energy (almost a child-like voice) allows capturing and transmitting the most heartfelt artistic expression. “Similar to the eye of a genuine artist when his sketch emerges on canvas as a result of slight movements of his finger phalanges, the *funzione d’attacco* begins its life under conditions of the unsuppressed falsetto” (Pirozerskaya, 2008:66). This notion in its entirety includes complex subtle corresponding sensations in the playing hands. It can be described as a pleasant tactile sense of gentle resistance in the fingertips and phalanges. Pirozerskaya’s term “spring-supported touch” refers to this sensation (Pirozerskaya, 2015c).

Pirozerskaya’s unsuppressed falsetto is not merely a gentle, soothing piano touch. This sound is precise and focused, but devoid of the hammer effect. It gives a sense of an embryo from where great potentialities can expand. This is Pirozerskaya’s unique means of re-connecting the pianist with his genuine inner spark, which makes the need for any unnatural exertion or forcing to fall away. This initial quality serves as the point of departure and return. According to Pirozerskaya, the delicate sensation in the fingers (mentioned above) should ideally be maintained throughout the entire range of dynamic nuances: “The cushion of the pianist’s fingers is the most sensitive area. Only genuine musicians manage to maintain its impulses unsuppressed at the dynamics of fortissimo” (Pirozerskaya, unpublished diaries).

I believe this to be the key to what Schmidt-Shklovskaya³⁶ calls “the flowing penetration of sound” – a phenomenon when a charged, unsuppressed sonority penetrates every note even in most rapid passages (Schmidt-Shklovskaya, 1985:17). Pirozerskaya claims this to be the prerequisite that enables the pianist to create a mesmerising atmosphere of pianissimo, as well as to produce a lightning-like effortless fortissimo, streaming as a powerful current of energy and never crossing the line of a noisy, forced quality.

³⁵The term falsetto refers to the highest register of the human voice. Pirozerskaya attributes a different meaning to this term. In her vocal teachings falsetto means evidence of a delicate, sunny quality in the sound of the singing voice, resembling its childhood stage.

³⁶ Anna Abraamovna Schmidt-Shklovskaya (1901-1961) – a distinguished Russian piano pedagogue, widely known for her expertise in rehabilitation of the pianist’s hand injuries. Pirozerskaya, who knew Schmidt-Shklovskaya, holds her piano method in high regard. Schmidt-Shklovskaya published a small brochure containing piano exercises with brief remarks.

3.6.4 On hand position and finger work

Encouraging the student's own creative explorations of piano touch in search of his desired sound outcome, Pirozerskaya does not insist on any predetermined shape of the hand. She is more concerned with its lively mobility and internal sensations. She does not speak of the hand position, replacing it with the notion "life of the hand" (Pirozerskaya, 2015c). Pirozerskaya's requirement of loose fingers, falling down freely, with the knuckles being nimble and relaxed, is her prerequisite for developing finger velocity. In this case the fingers interact closely with the instrument as if letting go and blending with the keys. Such interaction feels more like moulding rather than hitting the keys. The resistance from the piano keyboard provides a sensation of spring-support. A distinct feeling of "air" under the playing hands (my own expression), as if the hands are immersing into some invisible, gently resisting substance, provides a sense of balance and support. It allows a lot of room for effortless movement and flexibility.

3.6.5 The role of the arm weight

One of the fundamentals of Pirozerskaya's piano technique is the skill of "applying the weight of the arms" (Pirozerskaya, 2014a). In Pirozerskaya's sense, this notion and its role in ensuring the naturalness of the pianistic process resembles Yakovlev's "flowing breathing" of organic singing with its role as the "air-bow" in the singing process (1971:22). "In pianism, the weight of the arm, from the body to the finger phalanges, fulfils the role of the bowing-like breathing" (Pirozerskaya, 2008:67). The sensation taught by Pirozerskaya could be descriptively explained as follows: the arms of the pianist resemble two channels which allow the weight to flow like water, running from the back all the way to the fingertips and into the piano. The wider the channels the more powerful is the water flow. Resting on the playing fingers, the "weight" meets the opposing force of the distinct sensation of spring-support. This complex interaction with practice develops into a wholesome sensation of flow throughout the apparatus. At the advanced stage of pianistic development this flow within the arms feels particularly prominent. It is no longer experienced as relaxation. It is more like a strong current which fills the arms and hands with energy, creating a feeling of lightness and enhanced ability.

3.6.6 The electric-current touch

An enabling phenomenon of subtle energy penetrating the playing hand occurs as a result of Pirozerskaya's training, usually at some point during the intermediate phase of learning. It is also attributed to the growing experience of the student in the sphere of concert performance. It could be

described as a strong inner drive which charges the hands with subtle impulses, promoting an incredible ease of touch and light mobility. Pirozerskaya refers to it as “the nerve energy” (unpublished diaries). “There are few teachers who know how to support, cultivate and restore the nerve energy of the pupil. This knowledge has not been widely implemented” (unpublished diaries). She explains that this skill is within everyone’s grasp and not unique to gifted performing artists. To her, this is simply another yet more advanced form of piano touch, which occurs when the sensory mechanism of *funzione d’attacco* reaches a certain stage of development. She defines it as “the electric-current touch”, thus pointing to its physiological nature (Pirozerskaya, 2014b). In our telephonic conversation on 2 March 2015 she spoke of “the electric-current supply between the musculature of the body and the governing centres of its organics” (Pirozerskaya, 2014b). Yakovlev also speaks of “the unsuppressed electric-current processes of the larynx” (1971:33).

3.7 The harm of forced playing

Both Yakovlev and Pirozerskaya speak strongly against forced sound expulsion. Yakovlev writes: “The forced singing as a school of thought contradicts the laws of functional physiology, and ignores the delicate structural specifics of the vocal organ” (1971:18). In Pirozerskaya’s terms, forcing at the piano begins when the subtle unsuppressed impulse of touch disappears. In her colourful terms she states: “The hand of the pianist is so easy to exploit. The eyes, the mind, the teacher – all can impose on it” (Pirozerskaya, 2015c). She often associates forced playing with a rigid teaching approach when “in a diligence false to his own nature, the pupil imitates the teacher” (Pirozerskaya, 2014b). She also says that forcing occurs either under conditions of general fatigue or when, despite the progressively developing tension and discomfort in the playing arms and hands, the pianist “persists in coercing the apparatus” (Pirozerskaya, 2015a).

In Pirozerskaya’s view, forced playing is harmful. She explains: “A disorder in the functioning of the apparatus leads to cerebral fatigue. In its turn, the cerebral fatigue leads to a further hindrance of the pianist’s hand” (Pirozerskaya, 2015c). From this one can gather the extent of harm that can be caused over the long term by the unnatural exertion over the body at the piano. To please the teacher who is insisting on the overall bigger sound could be a relatively easy effort for some individuals; however, it has costly implications for the well-being of others. After parting with Pirozerskaya, I temporarily experienced this kind of rigid demand upon myself. As a result, piano playing became an uneasy effort. My apparatus lost its natural mobility and became rigid, as if leaden. A distinct feeling of being stuck in the keys had occurred. It felt as if the instrument was becoming unresponsive, heavy and difficult to

control. After a while, the unpleasant sensations in the playing arms and hands emerged, causing me painful emotional distress.

3.8 Notes on beginner's repertoire

Pirozerskaya's piano method is suitable to accommodate all stages of pianistic advancement. It has as much to offer to the beginner as it does to the advanced artist. In this work I will not undertake a general discussion of Pirozerskaya's piano syllabus, which is versatile and concentrated. However, I would like to mention a few features concerning her choice of repertoire at the elementary stage of learning.

From the first steps she introduces tiny charismatic (musically appealing) pieces in different tonalities and modes. She selects her teaching material from several piano manuals, compiled by such highly regarded Russian specialists in child piano pedagogy as Milich, Nikolayev, Liahovitskaya and others. Pirozerskaya also introduces her own elementary piano exercises and basic arrangements of those Russian folk songs familiar to most children in Russia. She incorporates black and white keys from the start, avoiding any form of rigid ideas or hand position. She avoids five-finger legato until the hand has gained enough skill to remain soft and flexible. At the early stage she first introduces staccato, entwining two or three-note legato features. In Pirozerskaya's syllabus for beginners there is no such a thing as a preparatory repertoire that does not resemble a live music flow filled with emotional expression. In her arrangements for beginners Pirozerskaya often shares a monophonic melody between two hands, or allows each hand a turn to play the whole melody while the other hand provides a basic accompaniment in the form of single notes harmonising the melody. Often the little composition ends with the melody played simultaneously by two hands an octave apart. The beginners' repertoire of Pirozerskaya's choice contains great variety of articulation, which she introduces with artistry. She sensitively endows all forms of articulation with a lively feeling which once again stems from vocal expression. In this regard she encourages spontaneity and freedom of expressive hand movements, displayed naturally by the beginner. It is artistically stimulating and enjoyable, and at the same time demanding on the student's level of awareness.

3.9 The holistic concepts

3.9.1 Energetics of personality

Pirozerskaya often speaks of the "energetics of personality" (2009:38; 2015b). This notion points to the connection between the qualities attributed to the domain of personality and the specifics of artistic

expression in piano performance. Besides the inner artistic will and energy, the notion embraces the essence of a person as a living individual. In this holistic sense, each student has a unique way of applying his energies to the musical imaginary and piano playing. Pirozerskaya draws attention to the fact that the “energy of contact” of touch and the piano tone of each student have its distinct appeal which contains a footprint of his personality. The personality manifests itself further through the specifics of the student’s artistic will and energy (the artistic temperament) which mark his playing. For example, one could imagine three students taught according to the principles of Pirozerskaya’s organic technique. The first one displays a melodious, gentle tone and a warm, sincere, soothing artistic expression. The second student’s tone would be focused and charged with lively energy. His artistic expression is then intense, with outbursts of fiery temperament. Although pleasing, the third student’s tone would somehow lack focus and be thin in its quality. His artistic expression is sluggish, restrained, lacking spark. Pirozerskaya points out that to the observant teacher, piano playing can reveal the student’s general capacity towards expressing his feelings in a positive way. Carefully observing the student from this angle, the piano teacher can get a sense of his emotional-psychological state of being: “The keen eye of a truly dedicated, expert teacher notices the child’s state of being during the activity, and sees the truth of his physical and spiritual well-being” (Pirozerskaya, 2008:58).

3.9.2 The artistic truth

Pirozerskaya’s fundamental concept of one’s own “artistic truth” deals with the delicate inner life of the self in music and its actualisation in piano playing (2008:37). In Pirozerskaya’s teachings the concept of one’s own artistic truth is like the ocean into which all rivers run. It embraces the energetics of personality, all individual specifics concerning physical sensations and aesthetic qualities attributed to piano playing,³⁷ and the pianist’s will to self-expression.³⁸ In Pirozerskaya’s notion of artistic truth all the above-mentioned qualities and forces are merged into one entity, governed by the pianist’s desire to be himself at all levels of his pianistic process. In her workshops and conference presentations³⁸ Pirozerskaya urges piano teachers to be aware of the existence of this wholesome self-perception in relation to the act of piano playing. According to her, this is a deep-seated reason why many piano students (especially teenagers and young adults) become touchy, even resistant towards the teacher. She explains that such student is “passing through the delicate stage of forming as an artistic personality” (Pirozerskaya, 2014b). Often such student would “guard” his ideal (artistic truth), while

³⁷ The individual specifics of touch and tonal qualities, the delicate connection between artistic impulses and physical sensations, the artistic temperament.

³⁸ Unpublished material. I regularly attended Pirozerskaya’s talks during 1980s – 1990s.

displaying insufficient skill to prove it to the teacher. This situation requires great expertise, sensitivity and tact on the teacher's behalf. Pirozerskaya encourages teachers to "hear the student" in his artistic aspirations instead of disheartening and traumatising the student by proving his fragile skills unsound (Pirozerskaya, 2014b). She considers the teaching approach of imposing one's own method or perception, regardless of whether it resonates with the student's artistic self or not, to be a serious offence of "coercing the person's nature" (Pirozerskaya, unpublished diaries). The situation where a piano student, who previously enjoyed the freedom of self-expression, becomes exposed to rigid demands which are alien to his artistic being can result in distorting the delicate harmony of his self-connected pianistic process. The following consequences may occur:

- The loss of ability to extract desired timbral nuances;
- Sensations of stiffening and discomfort in the apparatus;
- Emotional-psychological discomfort (feeling of restlessness and deep dissatisfaction).

The emotional-psychological well-being of the student, especially musically gifted one, may be affected at a very deep level. The strong desire towards actualising the "true artistic self" makes a gifted student more vulnerable.

3.9.3 The silence of inner contacts

"The silence of inner contacts" is Pirozerskaya's notion referring to a deeply centred state of being which occurs during performance (2008:20). In this state the pianist becomes able to access his inner space, "the seat of true self", from where the personal artistry streams (Pirozerskaya, 2014a). From here originates the poise which marks the high aesthetic values of performing art. I believe that renowned Russian piano pedagogue Neuhaus hints at the same sacred inner space when he says that piano "tone must be clothed in silence; it must be enshrined in silence like a jewel in a velvet case" (Neuhaus, 1983:81). According to Pirozerskaya, the communicative powers of the artist have their origins in the silence of this poised, centred state.

In Pirozerskaya's writings there frequently appears the notion of a "key of talent" (2008:18). The notion is often used in conjunction with two other expressions: "key system" (2008:71) and "life force" (2008:10). The expression "key system of talent" directly points at the existence of bodily mechanisms that serve to sustain and recharge the initial musical capacity (2008:64). Fascinated by this concept, I asked Pirozerskaya in our telephonic interview on 3 April 2015 what it means. She pointed to the

harmonious state of being described above, and explained that it is when the musician reaches this state that the functioning of the “key system of talent” is enabled (Pirozerskaya, 2015b). In connection with “life force” she brought up her hypothesis concerning the tremendous inherent capacities stored in the “ancient brain levels”, familiar to me since childhood.

In the process of a deeply self-connected artistic act the sensory apparatus of the musician begins to perform an advanced reflex activity. In its functioning it fulfils the role of the key system of accessing the pathways to the ancient brain levels, where the reservoir of life force and creative potentialities is stored at the genetic level (Pirozerskaya, 2008:64).

I briefly mentioned Pirozerskaya’s hypothesis of feeding “the natural musical talent and creative energy of the musician” in my previous study (2008:14). Pirozerskaya’s concept suggests possibilities of constructively enhancing general musical ability and may provide another glimpse into the mystery of musical talent: “The instrumental music pedagogy is generally not in command of the domain of artistic energies. It neither comprehends the nature of talent nor realises the means of creating it. And thus, the music pedagogy exploits the talent” (Pirozerskaya, 2009:69). “The silence of inner contacts” can occur at the height of a concert performance as well as in the solitude of a deeply personal dialogue of the pianist with his instrument. Then the physical sensation of the instrument, the flow of the music and the deep sincere expression from the self merge into oneness of an intense artistic experience. The ability to experience this phenomenon is part of a fairly advanced skill. I would describe the amazing effect that this experience has on the performer as healing. I add that the pianist who accesses this skill gains a powerful tool of self-fulfilment and for restoring his emotional balance. Pirozerskaya reflects on the Tchaikovsky recital of the singer Lina Mkrtchan:

In her artistic power, Lina showered the audience with blissful tranquillity. The poised silence evident of her highly developed inner contacts, when the air-bow³⁹ connects the depth of the subconscious with the strings of the living instrument of the soul,⁴⁰ brought the audience to experience a vibrant sense of the innate feeling (Pirozerskaya, 2008:26).

Here, in poetic terms, Pirozerskaya refers to the artist’s highly elaborate (from the physiological point of view) vocal process – the well-established *funzione d’attacco*. “The silence of inner contacts” is the ultimate achievement of self-connected pianism. Pirozerskaya points out that when the performer enters into this capacity, the atmosphere of peace and poise generated by his harmonious flow is

³⁹The stream of air in vocal breathing.

⁴⁰ The vocal organ.

strongly sensed by the audience. She concludes: “The higher artistic truth of a gifted performer is a noble, elevated force which restores healing tranquillity, poise, and beauty” (2008:40).

3.10 Summary

All of Pirozerskaya’s concepts and notions discussed in this chapter are closely related to one another. They are in a sense the different fundamental components of one unity – self-connected pianism. These fundamental concepts are deeply holistic in essence. They bring to light the subtle complexity of the inner life of the artistic individual and reveal the nature of the process of its actualisation through piano playing as suggested by Pirozerskaya’s piano method.

CHAPTER 4

FROM PIROZERSKAYA TO A NEW GENERATION OF PIANISTS

4.1 Introduction

My experience of being a piano pupil of Pirozerskaya for seven years, followed by a life-long mentorship, has been the backbone of my teaching. Although I teach in a different context, my students benefit from Pirozerskaya's pedagogy, almost as in an athletics relay: Pirozerskaya to Tsihelashvili to Emma, Ryan, Rebecca, Rosie and Tatiana.⁴¹ I will introduce my five participants in 4.3. I will sketch a vignette to portray each student and to provide a glimpse of the reality of their music lessons and our teacher-student interaction. The research question that leads this chapter is: **How did the researcher apply Pirozerskaya's piano method?**

In the first part of this chapter I will discuss how I apply Pirozerskaya's pedagogy to the teaching of my pupils at my studio in Johannesburg. I will explain the nature of the teaching approach deriving from the application of self-connected pianism to my students, and address two relevant issues in piano pedagogy. The second part of the chapter mirrors the voice of my pupils. I studied the ethical issues, completed the necessary ethics documents (see Addendum B for the approval certificate), and wrote letters to the parents for their permission to interview the pupils. From February to April 2015 I interviewed the pupils, transcribed their interviews (see Addendums C and D) and analysed the data according to MacMillan's and Schumacher's approach to qualitative data analysis. In this chapter I use mainly narrative descriptions.

4.2 My application of Pirozerskaya's pedagogy

How do I carry Pirozerskaya's tradition for the next generation? How do I teach self-connected pianism to others not by means of imitation, not by putting my own playing as the ideal for my students, but with reference to the principle?

4.2.1 My personal pedagogical journey

My teaching experience crystallised over 20 years. When I began my teaching practice in my twenties I often felt that there is a gulf between my personal artistry and my students, a gulf which cannot be

⁴¹ I use pseudonyms to protect the privacy of my pupils and name them in alphabetical order.

bridged by words. At that time everything revolved around mastering piano works and developing pianistic skills in them. My teaching then was not truly centred on the student. Tactful and friendly, I was also extremely demanding and centred on my professional values. Over the years I came across many cases of musically inclined children whose learning was severely affected by coordinative or cognitive issues. Furthermore, I encountered a number of students who appeared most capable in their pianistic capacity, but would not engage with me or absorb the knowledge I imparted. Driven by my sincere desire to understand those children in order to enable them to access their artistic potential and develop a personal bond with the instrument, I progressively realised that unless I find the key to the mystery of the whole person, I would not be able to lead these students to experience the joy of the genuine creative process.

My focus began to shift away from my professional demeanour and its values towards discovering the delicate world of the student's personality. This marked a turning point in the direction of my pedagogical thoughts and values. I saw a whole new domain of deep-seated factors causing student issues at the piano. I became keenly observant, at times almost wishing to be in my students' skin while they were experiencing difficulty in fulfilling what I always believed to be a basic pianistic task. This made me realise how multifaceted is the gemstone called concert pianist, and how much I had previously taken for granted. I soon found myself fascinated with the person at the piano as much as I have always been with the art of piano playing. Not my method or beliefs, but the person at the piano and the totality of his experience, has since become my primary concern. I understood that piano playing is a personal journey for each student. Embracing my new sphere of interest in relation to my personal artistry and expertise, I now saw the avenue to channel all my artistic energy towards the student. The thought of introducing the piano as medium through which the student can access and communicate his inner beauty and creative potentialities developed into a concrete idea. And thus I arrived at the cornerstone of Pirozerskaya's teaching philosophy on my pedagogical journey. Piano teaching has then become my true passion.

I resumed telephonic communication with Pirozerskaya since 2007, seeking her advice on my most puzzling student cases. She strongly encouraged my holistic explorations. She believes that the kind of piano pedagogy I am seeking "can become nourishment, even therapy for hindered and emotionally troubled children" (Pirozerskaya, 2015b).

4.2.2 Malleable teaching approach

My newly emerging comprehensive pedagogical task requires a high level of personal artistry and piano mastery, intuition and inventiveness. It is very involved for a piano teacher to undertake this path. Imparting the skills of Pirozerskaya's self-connected pianism with its nurturing of personality and individual artistry suggests a special bond between the teacher and the student. What is the nature of the teacher-student interaction which emerges in the context of teaching self-connected pianism? I clearly remember the comforting presence of Pirozerskaya and the inspired atmosphere of my lessons:

Pirozerskaya sat, deeply focused; close to the piano but not right on top of me. She would not disrupt the flow of my playing too abruptly or frequently. She was never imposing in the manner she gave her advice. She appeared completely centred on what I was doing and at the same time – a little distant. I remember the amazing environment of my lessons: the feeling of being deeply attuned with my teacher, the distinct atmosphere of peace and affinity with the music. I felt incredibly safe to be my true self with Pirozerskaya, to be honest – even more so than with my family.

I believe it is due to my experience with Pirozerskaya that I have learned the necessity to create a non-threatening, artistically stimulating lesson environment. I therefore define the teacher's effort to become attuned to the student as the malleable teaching approach.

In its nature the malleable approach is a sensitive, non-invasive interaction. Gathering the feel of the whole person, the teacher finds the way of conducting the lesson which is in tune with the student's personality. Approaching the delicate inner world of the student in the spontaneity of the artistic process, the teacher respects the student's space as a thinking, creative individual. In the context of such a relationship the student is very unlikely to be apprehensive in playing for the teacher, no matter how badly. How does the student then perceive the teacher's authority?

4.2.3 Piano teacher: the mentoring figure

In his growing trust the student feels that:

You are no longer someone who pronounces a verdict to his playing. The student knows that you are always there to pick him up, to attend to his every difficulty. He also knows that although firm, you are reasonable in whatever it is that you ask him to do. He knows he is safe, and you have no intention to punish or offend him. He will not take the tough episodes of your teaching strategies personally knowing you are with him at his task all the way, you are in control. You are a caring mentor. The student willingly accepts your authority as a knowledgeable, wise, compassionate figure. This authority establishes itself in the midst of the hands-on working process, and not by any means through formal subordination.

The teacher and the student begin to resonate as two artistic personalities. The live feeling associated with the music permeates the lesson, as if the teacher and the student are in the same boat, discovering and co-creating the piece together. What tone of voice or stance to adopt, so that the student opens up to you and entrusts you to steer the boat?

4.2.4 The art of teaching strategy

I define teaching strategy as tactics aimed at bringing the best out of the student. A teaching strategy needs to be a flexible measure which requires pedagogical insight and intuition. To me, mastering the art of a teaching strategy is an exciting part of being a teacher. Eager to give advice, piano teachers often stop the student each minute, thus not letting him establish his artistic flow.⁴² With the best of intentions I am at times guilty of this myself. Each student is “his own person”,⁴³ and I find this to be a fascinating aspect of my work to detect in what way and to what extent to support and stimulate the student, and at which point to allow myself to distance, let go, make the student learn to take charge. Here one needs to be insightful as to how far to stretch the student. The tone and the timing of the instruction are vital components of the teaching strategy. They can enhance the student’s responses and the artistry of his playing. Resorting to one’s own playing as a teaching strategy has many advantages. However, one needs to be careful not to overwhelm the student and not to encourage direct imitation. At times, for teaching purposes I imitate my students’ playing, adopting the specifics of their individual expression.

4.2.5 Piano study as the means of targeting greater issues

According to Pirozerskaya, the process of mastering the skills of self-connected pianism taught in such environment moulds the student’s identity both as a musician and as an independent, thinking and creative individual. In my teaching practice I generally place a high level of demand on the student. However, the demand is centred rather on specific goals unique to each student’s individual journey of simultaneous pianistic and self-development. Pirozerskaya always taught that it is only in the atmosphere of high professionalism in the piano studio will the student reveal his best qualities. Making the student accustomed to the genuine effort to achieve mastery over the self at the piano, while

⁴² Cshikszentmihalyi’s life time research was about “flow”. He has written 18 books about the subject and for the purpose of this formal assignment I refer to his 1999 article.

⁴³ An expression spoken by young Arcadi Volodos – my former class mate, who is now at the pinnacle of the world pianistic Olympus.

gradually developing his stamina and perseverance, is an integral part of the learning process. Regarding the teacher's role – apart from providing the professional expertise – pedagogical sensitivity, tact and intuition are the key components in ensuring trust and enthusiastic student responses. With experience I realised the concrete possibility of linking the process of mastering the tasks of piano playing with that of moulding character. This does not directly imply being tough and making the student persevere by throwing him in the deep end or causing him to have a negative experience. The consistent observation of learning behaviour and personality traits which keep recurring in piano lessons gradually reveals a comprehensive picture of the whole person. Among the hindering factors which lie in the sphere of behaviour and personality, one can observe the evidence of various “undesirable attitudes” and “fixed ideas” (Alexander, 2004:83), the habit of “unthinking” inattentive behaviour (Alexander, 2004:105), as well as the factor of parental conditioning.⁴⁴ My argument is that by targeting a troublesome pianistic task, the piano teacher can to an extent indirectly target a greater issue. This again involves a high level of piano expertise as well as keen pedagogical insight from the teacher. The success of this expanded pedagogical task strongly depends upon the teacher's strategy, aimed simultaneously at the two inseparable targets of developing skills and moulding character.

Each student indeed applies himself to the piano in unique ways. Finding the malleable approach to the student is itself a fascinating, unlimited field for a piano teacher to explore. Maartienssen writes: “The interconnected thought-body transmission takes as many individual forms as there are facial features. Only those piano teachers who take this factor into consideration will be able to lead their pupils to the genuine art” (1977:32).

4.3 Two issues of piano pedagogy in the light of Pirozerskaya's holistic teachings

Piano playing and its purpose can be conceptualised in different ways. In the light of the proposed piano pedagogy, deeply grounded in Pirozerskaya's teachings, I wish to briefly address two teaching approaches which to me are the central matters of concern.

⁴⁴ Alexander's terminology fits really well into this discussion. Alexander's holistic assessment of the student in his work of sensory re-education and readjustment bears some resemblance to acknowledging the student in Pirozerskaya's sense.

4.3.1 The “removed from the self” approach to piano playing⁴⁵

This approach is widespread in elementary pedagogy. Piano playing is introduced to the students as a motor-coordinative skill disengaged from personal expression. Mastering of the specific movements of the arms and hands on the piano as advocated by the teacher is the principal requirement. The aesthetic quality of the piano tone is a secondary matter and heartfelt expression often does not enter the picture. The rigid, wooden piano tone of the student-beginner, devoid of the warmth of live feeling, is commonly attributed to this approach. Not just the tone quality but the entire pianistic behaviour could develop as something alien to the person’s nature. Either rough, exaggerated manner associated with uneasiness and tension, or timid colourless and cautious playing is so often observed at the elementary, even intermediate stages. In this approach it is most likely that all students are taught alike. A diligence in following the teacher’s instructions, aimed directly at exercising the gymnastics of pianistic movements is commonly taught. On closer investigation, it implies the student adopting the teacher’s entire perception. The pattern of expectation-appraisal-punishment emerges in the process. There are indeed a significant number of children who would enjoy this approach. Those with strong inherent coordinative capacity will find satisfaction of excelling at a new skill and developing a flair for the instrument. Those naturally eager to please the teacher may find their motivation to excel in the teacher’s appraisal. However, there would be many who will try the skills of piano playing for a while and sooner or later walk away from it altogether.

This latter scenario is commonly considered to be the norm. Piano playing is then given the label of being not for everyone. How does this appear in the light of Pirozerskaya’s self-connected pianism and holistic teaching philosophy? In the perception described above, the piano playing itself does not enter the personal sphere of being. The student is not aware that his sound quality is in contradiction with sensible human expression. He often develops a perception of the instrument as an alien object which causes him to have an uncomfortable experience. In the light of Pirozerskaya’s teachings such a rigid, wooden, lifeless piano tone is a matter of concern. Removed from personal expression, it “stifles the life of the hand” (Pirozerskaya, 2015a). She explains that with the exception of some gifted students whose intense musical imaginary and desire to achieve its realisation will find its way to expression, the skill

⁴⁵ The information in the following paragraph corresponds to many articles, books and encyclopedias, like for instance Comeau’s (2009) piano pedagogy for researchers, Snell’s (2006) self-help guide to music students and Uszler *et al.*, (2000) vision for the 21st century. The interviews with Pirozerskaya (2014a,b,c; 2015a,b,c) link to the scholarly literature and were the focus of this chapter.

developed in isolation from the living feeling could in itself become an “obstacle between the person and the music” (Pirozerskaya, 2014b).

To me the child’s posture in such cases is strikingly descriptive of the fact that piano playing as a meaningful form of self-expression has not been introduced. In this case the rigid monotony of the student’s piano tone has little to do with the lack of ability. The student is simply not aware of the live connection between his spiritual sphere of being and his piano playing. As a common symptom of this approach the student becomes apprehensive of the piano. Locked in tension, looking (and perhaps feeling) really awkward, what benefit does the child derive as a living individual from his piano playing?

4.3.2 The rigid approach

The rigid approach implies the invasive rigid teaching strategy of readjusting the student to the teacher’s method. The rigid approach to piano playing is marked by little concern for individuality and its subtle manifestations in pianistic process. It does not attribute due significance to the student’s complex developing inner world of musical imaginary. This is widely observed, especially in advanced pedagogy. Its most common scenarios are associated with imposing a specific posture, hand shape or sound quality on the student regardless of his natural inclinations and artistic aspirations. In the worst cases both the artistic outcome, alien to the student and the means of its attainment are externally imposed. Often a teacher, passionate about his method, is convinced that he has found the panacea.

Pirozerskaya teaches that the rigid approach does not consider the personality factor and its complex relations with the individual pianistic process – everything that Pirozerskaya defines as the “artistic truth”. In the light of her holistic concepts, this approach is most harmful. She explains that the rigid approach will affect the entire interaction of the student with the instrument and inevitably impact on the student’s capacity for self-expression. It will affect not only the harmony of the pianistic process, but “stifle a part of the personality and distort the delicate contacts within the entire being” (Pirozerskaya, 2015b).

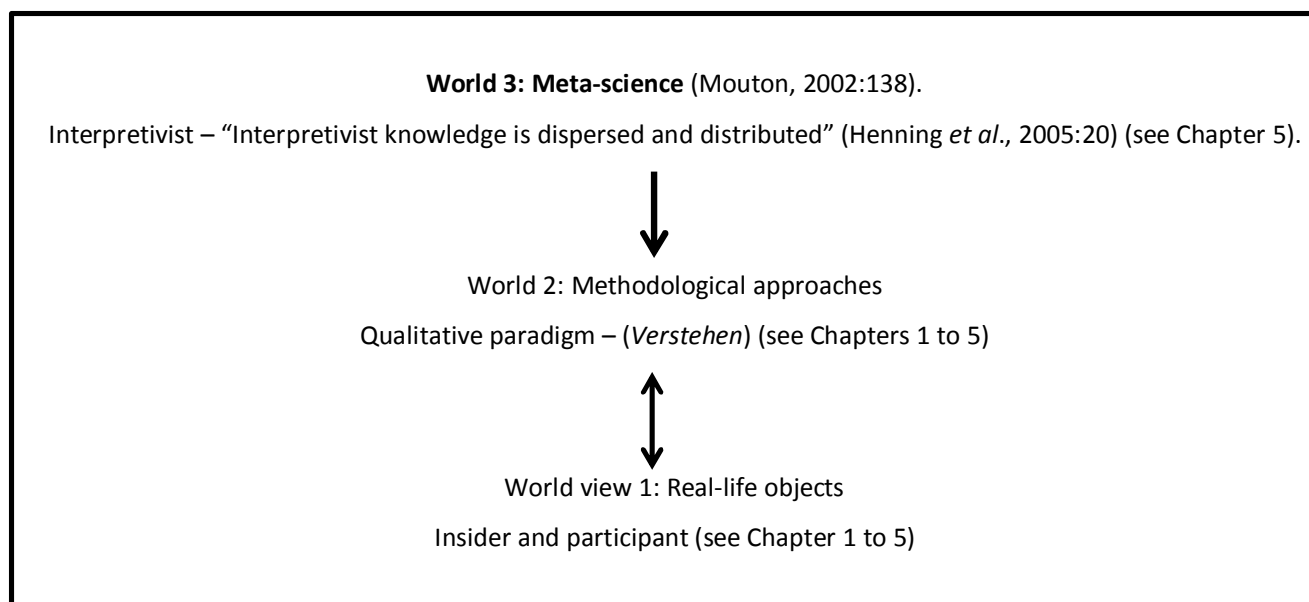
Both of the abovementioned approaches in one way or the other, contain an element of the requirement to “play as I do”. Pirozerskaya’s teaching philosophy states that “the purpose of piano pedagogy is to instil enthusiasm, associated with the joy of the enabled creative process” (Pirozerskaya, 2015a). It is not possible to truly fulfil this ideal through the two approaches discussed above.

Pirozerskaya stresses that the feeling of joy “will not emerge unless the activity becomes a fulfilling personal act, integrating thoughts, feelings, and body in one harmonious unity” (Pirozerskaya, 2015b).

4.4 Introducing the qualitative strategy of inquiry in this study

I have introduced the research design and methods in 1.6 and the data collection, analysis, validation and ethics in 1.7. Authors such as Creswell (2013), Ellingson (2009), Henning *et al.* (2005), McMillan and Schumacher (2001), Merriam (2009), Rule and John (2011) and Stake (1995) were referenced to describe the field of qualitative strategy of inquiry I applied for this study. I add to the list of researchers (Chapter 1) the names and the perspectives of Denzin and Lincoln (2013), Mouton (2002) and Yin (2014) for a more in-depth investigation. In his book *How to succeed in your masters’ & doctoral studies* Mouton (2002) discusses a framework of three worlds for planning aspects of the logic of research: “the world of everyday life and lay knowledge” (world 1); “the world of science and scientific research (world 2); the “world of meta-science (world 3)”. My everyday life consists of teaching piano pupils. This is my life style and it enables me to gain practical knowledge and share my know-how with other scholars – “lay knowledge” (Mouton, 2002:138). I select aspects of this world 1-frame to search for “truthful knowledge” (Greek *episteme*) that results in formulating the research questions in such a way that I will find “valid results” (Mouton, 2002:138). ‘Beyond’ these results (Greek *meta*) I discover a world I could reflect on as an interpretivist.

Table 1: Application of Mouton’s three worlds frame work (2002:137-142)



Denzin and Lincoln (2013:25) describe their perspective of the research process in five phases. Some of the phases overlap with Mouton's frames of world-view. I followed these phases as a checklist to ensure the full research process is covered. The highlighted sections will be discussed in more detail.

Table 2: Application of Denzin and Lincoln's five phases research process (2013:23-31)

The phases	This formal assignment
1. The researcher as a multicultural subject	The ethics of research
2. Theoretical paradigms and perspectives	Interpretivism
3. Research strategies	Case study
4. Methods of collection and analysis	Interviewing, observing and data-management methods
5. The art and practices of interpretation and evaluation	Writing an interpretation Reflecting

- **The ethics of research**

The participants that have taken part in this research project have been protected with care and sensitivity. Therefore North-West University has several documents that should be completed for approval of the project. According to Yin (2014:78) all participants should give permission that they take part on a voluntary basis; that no harm or deception will be done to them; that their privacy and confidentiality will be protected and that they may withdraw at any stage of the research (see Addendum A). My research ethics number is N W U – 00125-15-A 7.

- **Case study**

"A case study is an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system" (Merriam, 2009:40). I explore the teaching method and philosophy of Pirozerskaya with five students in my studio in Johannesburg. The unit of the analysis will be the piano pupils' experiences of my teaching of Pirozerskaya's method and philosophy. "The intrinsic case study is undertaken when the researcher is interested in the particular case itself – it is intrinsically interesting" (Merriam, 2009:48). The teaching method of Pirozerskaya is fascinating and is a stimulus for my teaching. She is a role model and therefore I will always be interested in more research about her.

- **Data management**

In accordance with Ellingson my work lies somewhere in the domain of "art" (2009:7) and "middle-ground" (2009:8) approaches. I attempt to analyse and verbalise a specific way of piano playing,

grounded in Pirozerskaya's concepts. I will draw on several other authorities in support of her views. My research will also reflect personal experiences.

Crystallisation combines multiple forms of analysis and multiple genres of representation into a coherent text or series of related texts, building a rich and openly partial account of a phenomenon that problematises its own construction ... and reveals the indeterminacy of knowledge claims even as it makes them (Ellingson, 2009:4).

Due to its nature, this work will contain elements of "mixed-genre" in my representation of the text, as well as the traces of several approaches to qualitative inquiry. With the case study method being the overall design, there will be elements of narrative and heuristic inquiry in those parts capturing personal experiences. "Heuristic inquiry is even more personalized than phenomenological inquiry in that the researcher includes an analysis of his or her experience as part of the data" (Merriam, 2009:199). The data captured through the student interviews, will form the narrative of my case studies. In the process of explaining Pirozerskaya's method I will describe some of my own sensations and experiences at the piano. Regarding transferability, my work fits into the category of applied research that Merriam describes as "research [that] is undertaken to improve the quality of practice of a particular discipline" (Merriam, 2009:4).

- **Interviews⁴⁶**

The interviews were conducted from February to April 2015. Video recordings (Addendum C) were made of the interviews and the transcription can be viewed in Addendum D. I have asked the following questions to the older pupils:

- What does the piano mean in your life? How does it relate to who you are?
- Do you see any value of this self-connected way of piano playing for your self-establishment and personal growth?
- Pirozerskaya conceptualises the piano as the instrument of contact, and the hands of the pianist – as sensory organs. What comes into contact with what? What is it that the hands sense and transfer to the piano?
- What are you feeling when your fingertips are just about to touch the keys and extract sound?

⁴⁶ See Hyry-Beihammer (2011); Merriam (2009:102-115).

- (After the children played an extract on the piano): Your fingers are so closely in touch with the keys; one can barely see what it is that you do when you extract the sound out of the piano. Can you describe the interaction of your fingertips with the keys as you conceive your sound?
- Are you pressing the keys right to the bottom or is this somehow a different sensation?
- What is it that tells you how to touch the piano to get the nuances/tone quality you desire? What is the process of finding the right touch to make those nuances materialise?
- Do you think how to move your arms, fingers in some special way or does it come spontaneously?
- How do you make your dynamics so alive? Is it only about playing louder or softer? Where does that life come from?
- How does it feel at your best moments when the piano responds to your slightest inner intentions?
- Does our piano technique exist only as a physical entity or is there another dimension to the skills of piano playing?
- I often demonstrate on the piano for you to convey all sorts of subtleties concerning artistic expression. Do you just copy my sound/hand movements or is there something else that you draw from my playing to help you? Do I impose my artistic perception on you?
- Is it always your inner artistic impulses that inspire your expression or does the physical interaction of your hands with the instrument also have something to do with it?
- How would you feel if I would start telling you to sit/move your arms and fingers/ touch the piano in a certain way which suits me, but interferes with your natural expressive flow and ability to project your timbral nuances?
- During performance, when you manage to create that special, almost magnetic atmosphere, what is the state of being that you enter? How does your body feel during those moments? How does this state compare with your usual state during your ordinary daily activities?
- The great Russian piano pedagogue Neuhaus says that the sound is born/wrapped in silence. What is this silence? Where is the silence?
- How would you describe the feeling in your arms/body when you play beautiful cantabile passages/ staccato/ fortissimo? How would you rate the level of physical effort versus the inner energy?
- What would the piano playing be without the soul?

I have slightly adapted the questions for the younger Chinese pupils:

- Where does the music live in you?
- What do the hands bring to the piano by touching it?
- What do we need to do with our hands to get the “magic sound” (the sound we want) out? How do we touch the piano so that the piano can get the feelings too? Is it easy/hard?
- Do we say we only touch the piano like so and so, or do we have many different ways of touching the piano?
- How do the music and your feelings meet inside?
- Do you think the piano is alive or dead?
- Describe the feeling in your arms while playing ... Does the piano help you?
- (About Yakovlev’s vocal exercises): Do you like them? How do they make you feel? Do you prefer to sing them before/in the middle/after the lesson?
- How do you feel about the piano? Can you talk to it? Does it answer you?

When I played an extract in a rigid inexpressive manner, I just asked:

- What do you think of this? Do we ever play like this? Why?

4.5 Introducing the pupils of this case study⁴⁷

Each of my five students selected to participate in this study adopted the subtle fundamentals of self-connected pianism in their playing. For Emma, Rebecca, Rosie, Ryan and Tatiana I was their first piano teacher and therefore had the advantage of cultivating their perception of piano skill from their first steps. Rosie, Tatiana and Ryan began piano lessons at a very early age. Emma was a late beginner (started at the age of 9). Rebecca joined my piano class at the age of 13. By then she was playing with sufficient flair and, despite a number of hindrances of varying nature, showed a strong inclination towards spontaneous self-expression in performance. As I taught those pupils according to the same principles, their playing reveals some fundamental similarities concerning the general characteristics of tonal quality and physical interaction with the piano. However, on a closer look their tonal and timbre specifics and the unique energetics of each personality become clear. This is evident on the video recordings (see Addendum C), particularly in Emma’s, Ryan’s and Tatiana’s playing. With Rosie, a beginner who was learning for approximately six months, one can see the process at its embryonic stage. All these children, in their own way, are sensitive and perceptive towards their personal interaction with the instrument. Having vastly different personalities, they all show signs of a rich inner

⁴⁷ My description of the children’s artistic personalities is not intended to suggest that their playing is issue-free and faultless.

spiritual life and artistic imaginations. Some of them encountered a number of obstacles on their pianistic journey. Awakening their “contacts” and assembling their pianistic process in order to enable their rich inner imaginary to shine in their playing was a unique experience with each of these five children.

- **Emma 14 years old**

Artistic personality: the warmth and intensity of a heartfelt feeling is distinctly prominent in Emma’s playing. In its emphasised expressiveness her playing resembles poetry. At a rapid tempo her flow carries a sense of urgency. Emma’s firm rhythm is not rigid but very expressive in its lively energy. Her timbral nuances are ever-changing according to her emotions. Within a carefully planned dynamic frame, she often spontaneously creates new shades of timbral colours in the spur of performance.

Learning behaviour: Emma is very perceptive, although impulsive and highly critical of herself. The latter quality needs to be carefully managed as Emma tends to easily drive herself into a knot. Emma works best in the atmosphere of the spontaneous creative process.

Vignette

It is late Saturday afternoon. The rays of the setting sun are penetrating my studio. Its reflections give the room an enchanting feel. Tired, I drift away in my big, cosy arm-chair. The melodious sound of the doorbell awakes me. It is time for Emma’s lesson. I am so glad she has come. Fourteen-year-old Emma has a special presence. She radiates warmth and empathy rarely seen at her age. When I am feeling down, being with Emma at the piano has a soothing, centring effect on me. Emma and I realised our special affinity with each other since she was a little girl. As a teacher-student team we work productively and intensely. Emma seems to thrive on my artistic presence, and I experience a particularly strong flow of spontaneous pedagogical inventiveness and creativity in her lessons.

Without hesitation, Emma makes her way to the piano. She is already in charge while I am lost in her unpacked music bag. Highly driven and focused, she begins her warm-up at a rapid tempo. Her flow is impulsive, I could even say over-exalted. A total perfectionist, Emma is trying to grab the bull by the horns from the first attempt. However, her body is a little reluctant to join the urgency of her artistic intention. She is just about to burst into her nasty destructive self-criticism. It is time for me to step in.

“Hold the horses” I begin. Emma stops, breathing anxiously and flashing a few strong-willed looks of anticipation at me. “Focus your energy in your fingertips; we need to shift into our special mezzo-voce mode”. Eager to start playing, Emma’s alert sensitive hands silently drift over the keys. She begins the piece in a held-back momentum. Abolishing forte in the opening bars makes no change to the intensity of her emotion. But how dramatic is the change in her expression! Emma intuitively projects her artistic will and energy onto her rhythm. In its firm rhythmic pulsation her playing resembles a strong-willed speech kept in a low tone of voice.

Her sound, subdued in volume, never faded in its expressive quality. In its new dark timbre it now appears more focused. Emma's live feeling, tamed into a moderate mezzo-voce flow, gives the piece a new highly charged feel of the held-in emotion. Emma's fiery, restless artistic temperament found another outlet to shine. She is at last feeling settled. Her pianistic movements are now levelled and precise. Her breathing calmed down.

We begin the *Nocturne in C sharp minor* by Chopin. The melancholic sounds of the opening chords emerge out of silence. Fully focused, Emma easily recreates the highly charged atmosphere of a performance from the first bars. I doubt whether she even knows what it is to play half-heartedly. The melody of the Nocturne unfolds in its beauty. Emma's warm penetrating tone is unique to her. She endows each intonation and phrase with her personal warmth. None is dull and lifeless. Emma's music is breathing with pure, elevated emotion. I feel the enchanting melancholy of the Nocturne in my body. I look into Emma's eyes. She is absorbed by the beauty of the piece. There is a moment of reverent silence. Our artistic energies begin to resonate in this amazing domain beyond words, where the musical substance reigns. I touch Emma's hands and almost whisper my first instructions. And thus continues the inspiring lesson. When Emma leaves, her sounds still linger in my ears. I am drawn to the piano. Inspired by this delightful student, I immerse myself in an intense practising session.

- **Rebecca 18 years old**

Artistic personality: keen musical perception; playing penetrated with delicate energy which manifests in instant contrasts and light agility (the flow of Rebecca's playing is not impulsive). Rebecca displays a vivid timbral imaginary. Her artistry is spontaneous and imbued with emotion. She is able to create a charged atmosphere in performance.

Learning behaviour: Rebecca is sensitive and perceptive. She can be touchy to the tone of my voice and urgency of my instruction. She is easily prone to anxiety-related tension, which at times causes stamina and perseverance issues. Despite all this, Rebecca thrives on the intense atmosphere of training in the lessons. When she connects with her artistic spark, she becomes able to meet high levels of challenge and demand.

Vignette

Anticipating the lesson, Rebecca approaches my grand piano. Her long silky hair frames her gentle face. Her intense eyes and slim, delicate figure reflect her highly impressionable artistic nature. Today there is a sense of restraint in the way Rebecca holds herself at the piano – as if she is shielding her inner world. Slightly cautious, she begins to play Schumann's *Novelette No. 8*. Her gentle tone sparkles with energy. In its every intonation Rebecca's music is alive. It resembles a voice which is trying to communicate something very personal. Today the voice of Rebecca's playing is anxious and uneasy. There is unevenness here and there in her playing and I am eager to get involved. But I watch in silence. I connect into Rebecca's flow. My creative imagination spontaneously awakens and I begin to live the music with Rebecca. Verging on full

tempo, Rebecca is struggling to emerge in a spontaneous performance; she remains cautious. In the attempt to cross the barriers she has created in her own imagination, she repeatedly stumbles over a specific spot, not a particularly challenging one. I watch the vicious circle of anxiety, waiting for the right moment. Today Rebecca's nerves are particularly fragile. She is dreading to jump into the river of her full performance momentum. As she is a natural performer, I know she will swim like a fish in the water. But first, she is to endure a short rough passage. As she approaches the nasty spot with fairly good momentum, I command in a strong-willed voice: "Next!" Not expecting my tone of voice in the least, Rebecca hops over that passage. Her playing is messy, but we are over the obstacle. Before she can gather her wits, I continue in a nonchalant tone: "It's alright! It's perfectly fine! Next!" Rebecca knows that stopping is out of the question. With tears in her eyes she surrenders to perseverance and finds herself in the thrilling momentum of performance. She soon begins to gain her usual rhythmic command over the flow of the music and enjoys her true artistic capacity. At the end of the demanding *Novelette* her eyes sparkle with excitement and her face lights up with a smile.

- **Rosie 7 years old**

Artistic personality: Rosie is sensitive and imaginative. She touches the piano with a fond feel and awareness. In their natural plasticity, Rosie's hand movements on the piano are genuine artistic gestures. Even at this elementary stage, her hands already reveal evidence of keen inner hearing and musical feeling. Rosie melts into the flow of the music. In lyrical sections of her little pieces her face expresses delightful serenity. She then often closes her eyes.

Learning behaviour: Rosie is focused and observant, even though she often appears dreamy or absorbed in something unrelated. She can remain at the task for an extended period of time. She is very co-operative, and often asks questions.

Vignette

Rosie's lesson is just about to begin. Mesmerised by my gemstones hiding among the orchid leaves, she barely notices me enter the room. I invite her to the piano. Without saying a word, Rosie approaches the instrument. She trustingly spreads her fingers on the piano, caressing the keys. Dreamy sounds appear. Lingering in the moment, Rosie immerses into creative improvisation. She gracefully drifts from register to register, creating lovely clusters of sound. She reaches for the pedal. Rosie is talking to the piano and I am not to interrupt. After a few minutes she ends off this creative greeting with pianissimo sounds in the low register. For the first time she looks at me. She is attuned and ready to be taught. My words break the dreamy silence that Rosie has created. We begin with our favourite duets. Wanting my Kawai grand piano all to herself, Rosie politely asks me to join her on the Bechstein. We are now sitting back-to-back. I begin the gentle D minor arpeggio of my introduction. Rosie enters so harmoniously as if her sounds are gliding over my chords. After a few bars I realise: I can let go completely. My little student and I are breathing together in this flow. I decide to surprise Rosie with some fresh timbral nuances. She sensitively responds. Rosie cannot stand it if in

duets I watch over her like a mother-hen. When she knows the work, she finds it most annoying if I give away clues to her entries.

Next we begin the Etude by Gurlitt. Rosie's staccatos at the end of the phrases sound particularly artistic against the backdrop of her legato arpeggios, which are flowing with ease today. At one particular place where there is a beautiful modulation from minor into major, Rosie stops, trying to adjust her hands somehow differently. It is obvious that today her ear has captured new timbral colours which she has not noticed before. Losing control over the piano, Rosie tries again and again. I think I have a hint of what she is looking for. She is trying to intensify the feel of the dominant harmony leading into minor, and do a subito piano on the dominant of the following major. My tricky Kawai is not in a hurry to respond, giving Rosie a hard time. Finally, she turns to me for help. "Imagine the first arpeggio is filled with sunlight. Your sound is bright and open. Feel plenty of air under your hand". She beautifully captures the nuance, at the same time gaining freedom of movements. She is so relieved. As we approach the major dominant there is still a sense of caution and a few notes don't come out. "What are you looking for?" I ask. "I want to close my sound" whispers Rosie. I play the challenging arpeggio subito piano, giving it a darker timbre. Rosie's face lights up. "Is this what you want?" She pushes my hands out of the way, eager to try. Her timbre is starting to show but her movements are cautious and tense. "Imagine your hands open. They are soft, with fingers – almost flat". We both move our hands in the air, looking for the right feel. Rosie's movements are so artistic as if her hand is performing a slow dance. She easily transfers the feel to the piano and at last masters the special arpeggio. She resolves this harmony into the following major tonic with such subtlety that I feel I might spoil it if I touch the piano.

We decide to end the lesson with *Little quail* – a folk song which I arranged as a little solo piece. As Rosie starts playing, my Great Dane enters the room. He stops a few meters away from the piano. Watching his every move, little Rosie is about to burst out laughing. Staring at Benedict, she maintains the calm steady flow of her playing as if nothing has happened. For me, this delightful episode was truly breath-taking. With the last note, Rosie runs to hug the dog.

- **Ryan 16 years old**

Artistic personality: Ryan has a strong musical identity. His greatest area of strength is the sphere of lyrical expression. Ryan's cantabile tone is of a splendid quality and the flow of his music penetrates the listener with his passionate, sincere emotion. The entire piano texture sings under his fingers. Ryan is capable of great subtlety of dynamics and timbral nuances. In his teens, Ryan's artistic energy sprung to embrace strong dramatic emotion. Coincidentally, he began to compose.

Learning behaviour: as a 6- or 7-year-old boy Ryan was keen and perceptive. Later in his childhood he entered a long phase of chronic fatigue. Continually exhausted and sleepy, Ryan developed a reluctance to attempt a number of pianistic tasks which involve intense focus. Joining the Drakensberg Boys Choir at the age of 14 was a complete turnaround for his well-being. Currently piano playing is at the heart of Ryan's world. In our lessons he is inspired, open and positive. He laughs a lot discovering the faults of his

own playing. Highly observant and centred, Ryan captures my advice to its essence and perceives very subtle matters of the pianistic process. He can be very defensive of his “artistic truth”.

Vignette

With a beautiful smile Ryan walks into my studio. It has been a while since we last had a lesson. These days we part for several months in the row when Ryan departs with the Drakensberg Boys. But each time he returns, we work almost every day. Towering over me, Ryan buries me in his affectionate hug. Refined in manner, passionate and a little eccentrically spoken, Ryan shares his latest exciting news. An artistically gifted individual, he is flourishing in the nurturing, inspiring environment of the Drakensberg Boys’ College. Music is now the centre of his universe and he is soaring through his school life lifted on its wings. Ryan reverently approaches my piano. A look of detachment appears in his dreamy trusting eyes. With no concern where it lands, he drops his heavy music bag on the floor and instantly immerses himself in improvisation. I look so forward to the lesson. My bond with Ryan cannot be put into words. Now, when he stands tall in the radiance of his mature musical identity, he still awards me the same touching admiration and trust as when he was a little boy. A gifted child, Ryan captured Pirozerskaya’s pianism to its innermost essence. I feel as if Ryan is an artistic extension of me.

“I must warn you: I slightly lost my touch, and I don’t know what it is” says Ryan. He requests to start with Beethoven’s *Rondo* from the Piano sonata Op. 49 No. 1. Curious to see what is to happen, I exclaim: “Let’s go”! Ryan jumps into the flow of a very fast tempo. His stroke is a little rough. I notice many subtle but ungainly hand movements. However small, they absorb his artistic energy preventing it from flowing directly into his sound. In rapid ornaments and figures of accompaniment, the light mobility of his butterfly fingers is gone. He is stuck in the keys, struggling to maintain his tempo. At the end, Ryan, unhappy with himself, remains still looking down at the keys. He slowly lifts his big guilty eyes at me: “You see what I mean”? Amused, I cannot hide a smile. Ryan sighs with relief. “Let’s go a little softer and a tiny bit slower”, I suggest. Ryan willingly responds. After a few bars he suddenly wakes up to the fact that he has lost his usual subtlety of intonation within each phrase. He stops in his tracks: “Ooh, my sound and my hands – they are like wooden”. “Do you still feel the subtle impulses in your fingertips”? “Yes, they are there”, says Ryan feeling his hands. “Let’s go again. This time, feel how the piano is pushing you out”. Ryan begins and stops again: “Oh my word, I lost this feeling. I wonder your piano feels unusually heavy today”! He smiles, and goes on exploring. His ungainly movements disappear. There is just one final touch I need to add. I sit at the piano. I begin the phrase softly with a darker, more charged sound timbre; I endow my piano touch with delicate penetrating energy. The phrase comes out vivid in its dynamics. I proceed, intending to reach the first episode of dramatic forte. Looking at Ryan, I emphasise the unrestrained outburst of dramatic energy. I try not to reveal any visible signs of effort and make the forte appear as a flash of lightning. Ryan rushes to the instrument. His body recalls the effortless interaction with the piano which he once mastered so well. His sonorous unsuppressed piano tone begins to emerge in every note. He is delighting in each little moment. Inspired by the enabled flow of his genuine artistic energy, Ryan soon effortlessly shifts back into the full tempo. His natural velocity is sparkling again and the instrument is beginning to respond to his vivid timbral imaginary.

Indulging in the fortissimo of the last chords of the Sonata for a few moments, Ryan suddenly begins to play his own composition, a particularly agile and dramatic one. The flow of his playing becomes passionate and powerful. He is embracing the instrument in the joy of his reunion, forgetting about me and all around. He keeps playing one composition after the other. I quietly walk around the room enjoying this spontaneous inspired episode. At the end, Ryan sits in silence leaning over the instrument. I approach and also lean on the piano. Suddenly, Ryan springs up: “Can we please do the Bach now”? Before I say anything in response, the *Well-Tempered Klavier* is already up on the music stand. Do I have any choice but to surrender?

- **Tatiana 7 years old**

Artistic personality: boisterous, agile and impulsive. In lyrical episodes Tatiana creates a mesmerised charged feel, which is rather different compared to the spontaneously flowing cantabile of the other four participants. Her piano tone is rich and sonorous; it has a distinct dark, focused appeal. Tatiana achieves some impressive timbral realisations within the dynamic range of pianissimo.

Learning behaviour: Tatiana is highly driven and independent. She often claims to know it all, barely giving me a gap for my suggestions. At times I have to remove her hands off the piano, as those eager hands are itching to push their way through. Attentive at the beginning of my instruction, Tatiana tends to jump to the conclusion that she knows the rest. In her desire to try it out, she stops listening. I let her bump her head until she realises that she needs my help after all. She shows incredible perseverance and stamina for her age. When Tatiana was 4-5 years old, I would not excuse her from a lesson until she completed the task at hand to my satisfaction. Currently, I cannot get her away from the piano until she fulfils it according to her own standards. She often complains when her lesson time is over. She enjoys my playing, and in this regard willingly allows me my space. However, she is urged to have her own turn immediately after.

Vignette

There rings my doorbell. A few seconds later – a little voice calling in a sing-song: “Teacher Olga-a-a”. Tatiana has arrived. As I open the gate, my Great Dane Benedict is waiting to put his wet nose against Tatiana’s cheek. “Benya, foo!” commands the little voice. The gentle giant respectfully escorts Tatiana to the door. We fondly embrace and go to the piano. On the way Tatiana skilfully explains: “Teacher Olga, you know this place. I practised, and practised but I still can’t get the G sharp fast enough. Look!” Before I blink she begins the section approaching the challenging place. I smile to myself: my little professor is indeed in charge! Tatiana’s playing is fluent and clear; however, she is rushing the flow towards the troublesome note. It gives a peculiar feel as if someone, speaking impulsively, emphasises certain words in an agitated tone of voice. It strikes me: that is exactly how Tatiana talks in Chinese to her mom when she becomes impatient trying to prove a point. “Where are you rushing to?” I casually ask. Tatiana giggles in apology. Exceptionally strong-willed and strong-minded, Tatiana

innocently applies her typical behaviour of pushing everyone around to the music. My several attempts to stabilise her flow fail. As if neither my words nor my playing enter Tatiana's perception. Insisting on her own way, she incessantly tries, becoming progressively more irritated. Directly telling her to slow down might bring upon an explosion. I move her onto the comfortable arm-chair and sit at the piano. With a delicate, focused piano touch I initiate the flow of the vocal exercise by Yakovlev, where the light staccato of the voice alternates with long sounds on one note, sung to the phoneme *oo*. Tatiana loves this exercise and willingly begins singing. Without any prompting from me, she imitates the feel of my piano touch in her voice. We move chromatically a long way up. Absorbed by the resonance of her easily flowing voice and by the rhythmic feel of the exercise, Tatiana calms down, as if now she has all the time in the world. She appears deeply focused: not on me, but on something within herself. The next minute she can hardly keep her eyes open. The sleepy spell arrives so suddenly – she can hardly keep straight on the chair. The exhaustion of the mind, over-stimulated by the long, noisy school day is now obvious. Tatiana falls asleep and wakes up a number of times as we carry on singing other Yakovlev's exercises. We pause for a five-minute tea break, after which I send Tatiana to rinse her face with cold water. She is back at the piano, breathing calmly and willing to be taught. We begin with two melodious duets and at last connect into each other's flow. Tatiana's rowdy, impulsive pianistic behaviour has vanished. She is moulding her beautiful resonant tone into lovely phrases. She asks me to repeat a few episodes where the harmony of our parts is particularly beautiful: "Oh, I love this. But I am not playing so nicely" she says. "Of course you are. There is nothing wrong with you. Just let your hands dance to the music" I reply, already playing my introduction. When after all we return to the original troublesome piece, I pre-set the tempo and dynamics of the mezzo voce flow. Tatiana follows, enjoying the ease and comfort of her balanced, natural hand movements. She begins to pronounce the rhythm of the theme with artistry. She doesn't even notice how we go past the troublesome spot. Finally connected with her body and the music, Tatiana plays the notorious G sharp with flair, spontaneously gaining the feel of a flexible *rubato*, which perfectly places the note within the context of the phrase. Puzzled, she asks me: "How did I just do that?" Step by step, I explain the trick of the process to this amazing child whose power of reasoning, perseverance and hunger for knowledge are truly admirable. "I want to be a teacher". Tatiana has been saying those words since she was four. Once I asked: "What do you want to teach?" "Everything."

4.6 My pupils' voices: the emerging themes

I did a thorough search through the interviews (data), moving up and down the material to trace the most important patterns. I have kept a record of my thinking process, observation and analysis, carefully revising it before writing this final report (Creswell, 2013:195). The various topics crystallised from the analysis of the interviews and observations. From there I moved to categories. After repeating this process several times the patterns⁴⁸ crystallised. Researchers approach this procedure differently but I identify with McMillan and Schumacher (2001:477) and prefer the manual approach.

⁴⁸ Authors such as Creswell (2013) talk about themes. Therefore I will use 'themes' and 'patterns' as synonyms.

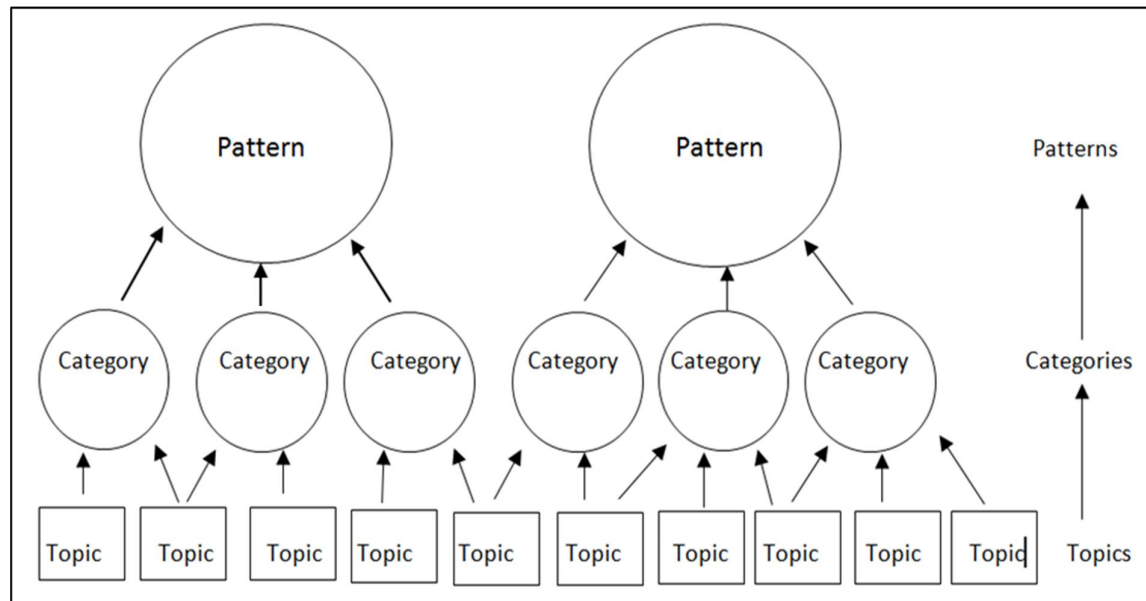


Figure 3: Building patterns of meaning (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001:477)

Seven themes emerged. A visual presentation of the patterns or themes is presented in the following figure. Each theme will be discussed below.



Figure 4: Summary of the merged themes and the relation to self-connected pianism

Theme 1



The children displayed an in-depth perception of their pianistic process. The theme of interconnectedness of the entire being, the instrument and the music strongly emerged during interviews conducted with the participants. Based on the words used by the children, I define the interconnected unity described in their answers as *oneness*.

Ryan attempts to explain that “[w]hen I play piano, I feel my, my emotions, they come through my body and then all that energy built up, coming through my fingertips. And just playing, and just coming into

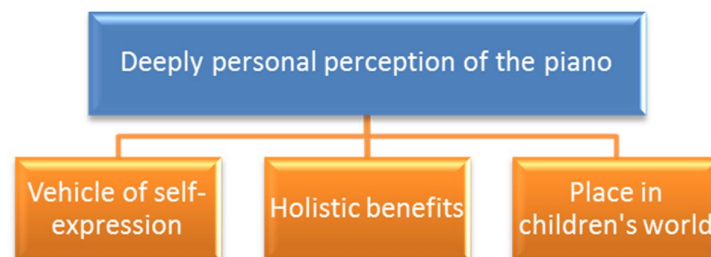
contact with the piano, I'm ... It's no longer just the piano, I ... I know ... I'm sort of one with the piano".

Rebecca agrees with Ryan when stating that

it's more about having a connection with the instrument, becoming one with the instrument and the music and creating something beautiful together ... It all works as one. I think what you're feeling inside, your whole body, becomes a part of that what you're feeling and you don't just go ... You never just go and hit the piano or whatever, you always think of what you play and think of how you're feeling at that moment and then, ja, your whole body just follows at that, for me.

Seven-year-old Rosie first explained her perception of how the pianistic process works in Chinese to her father. Her father interpreted her explanation as follows: "Okay, it's like a line – it's a line linking the feelings to the fingers. And then she said ... all the things come out from heart transport to the arms, to the finger and to the piano." Tatiana, who is the same age as Rosie, explains her understanding of the pianistic process by stating: "It lives in my hand and in my heart and somewhere, like, by my brain ...my head wakes up my hand and then my hand uses my heart with the feeling and then I just play it".

Theme 2



There was a sense of deep fondness in the way the children shared their feelings towards the piano. I truly wish I could capture their expressive faces on a video recording. Emma regards the piano as

an indescribable presence to me. I would say it's a huge integral part of me. I start off my days with a practice before I go to school and it is this practice, I think, often wakes me up, brings me to life almost as I've already accessed deep emotions, for example, before I write a test or before I even have breakfast. And without piano I think my life would be quite boring some days.

Rebecca attempts to explain her relationship with the piano by stating that it is "a relationship that you can't put into words".

Ryan, whom I have known since he was five, is now 16 years old. When asked what the piano means in his life and what he would do if the piano is taken away, Ryan replies that

it is my life [laughs] ... the piano is and has always been there for me. I mean, sometimes when I'm at boarding school now, it's late at night and I can't really go to the piano, I feel, feel quite upset because it's not, not in arm's reach. But, I mean, when I'm at home and I just feel like playing, it just helps me, it helps me gather myself. It helps me focus; it helps me calm myself and all my emotions ... If I'm having a hard time, I just go to the piano and then sometime I just compose,⁴⁹ sometimes I just play. Either way it's, it's like I can just get out all my emotions and, without even trying. It's, it's, it's like something that's always there for me. It's become a part of me ... Uhm, I, I wouldn't know what to do [if the piano is taken away].

Rebecca regards the piano as her best friend that, for thirteen years, has been there for her. She professes that she even finds it difficult to go on holiday and, upon returning home, playing the piano is the first thing she does. She explains her special love for the instrument by claiming that

the piano has definitely been there for me through everything. I've been through a few hard times and it's music, I truly believe music was one of the biggest things that helped me through it. And if I was feeling down, I'd go sit by the piano and just play and afterwards you almost feel, your heart will feel full.

She feels able to express herself when playing the piano and feels that "it's a time where I let everything go, I forget about everything and I pour everything into my music. That's how I express myself, is through my music."

Little Rosie personifies the piano. When I ask: "Do you think the piano is alive or dead?" she proclaims: "Alive." Intrigued, I wonder: who does she think bring the piano to life? First thinking for a few moments, Rosie replies: "Me". Like Rebecca, Rosie regards the piano as a friend, but "it's not like her, the classmates ... they're always fighting each other". I ask Rosie: "Are you scared of the piano, ever?"... "No" ... "Can you talk to it?" ... Yes".

To my disappointment, Tatiana to whom the instrument has been an integral part of her world since she was four gave surprisingly poor feedback on this matter. All she said was: "Because, like, I like singing and then when you play piano it got that special feeling and then it's so nice, so it made me like the piano". I admit my mistake of giving in to Tatiana's insistent request to speak English and not employing

⁴⁹ The two students, Ryan and Tatiana, have a special inclination to composition. Ryan has been recently acknowledged on Classic FM for his compositions.

a Chinese interpreter. Proud of her rapidly growing command of English, Tatiana would become very upset each time I mentioned interpreting. Unfortunately, the language factor affected the data throughout the interview. However, Tatiana's playing on the recordings is at times more explanatory than her words.

Theme 3

Inner energy: a vital component of the pianistic process

All the children, in one way or the other pinpointed the existence of the inner driving force – a form of artistic energy emerging as a tangible component of their pianistic process. In their own words, a few children even point at the phenomenon resembling Maartienssen's subtle bodily pre-sensations, occurring prior to the act of piano playing.

Ryan tries to put his perception into words when explaining that

[i]t's sort of as if my hand is, is ... has got my ... my whole body ... has got this energy and it comes through, through my arms, and just ... Even when it's playing lightly, there's still the energy of [plays piano] [laughs]. Just, it's [plays piano], you can just feel it flow. It's, it's not, it's not just ... It all comes together and, so it just becomes one and I flow through the piano...You need to, sort of just, let all your, your artistic self, like, take over and, ja [laughs]. Because you have to prepare yourself emotionally, and once you get those emotions intact, you can put that into the piano and the piano will respond. There's no need to bang or anything like that, it will just ... It, it just come out.

To the question whether within our approach the piano technique exists only on the physical dimension, Ryan answers that "It doesn't, it's ... it's all ... Not all, but I mean, a lot of it is in the mind". Rebecca agrees that we are "[d]efinitely approaching it from some higher other dimension". Emma explains in her own way that "[i]t is not merely in your arm or your fingers where this emotion is held ... it is a sense of new energy flowing into you. It's not an urgent need to use this energy, but just acknowledge that it's there to convey any message you would want to".

After his riveting crescendo towards the end of Scriabin's Prelude, Op. 11 No. 10 I ask Ryan to define the forces that he uses to generate this powerful fortissimo.

I would [laughs] define them as, just emotions and energy [laughs]. It's quite a ... I don't know, I just sort of feel it inside me and then the piano will basically feel it with me [laughs] ... Physical does, does play a part, but I mean, say, maybe if it was out of ten, six physical, four mental ... I mean, if you want fortissimo? ... A maximum six and that ... the rest is just inside you.

Rebecca sheds light on the physical actualisation of her fortissimo passages by explaining that her “inner energy definitely increases and there's a lot of momentum in those parts. My hand and my arms, I don't tense up and I don't force anything. I don't go and bang on the piano, I let it flow through and, ja, the sound comes by itself”.

She also makes an interesting observation of what happens when she is just about to touch the keys and perform a piece: “You feel like almost very fired up and ready to go. Really wanting to start ... Definitely the energy that you have inside, there is a connection to your fingertips, and ja, it's a source to let everything out”. Tatiana also attempts to describe something interesting when she declares that she “feel[s], like, the magic is, like, coming out ... [t]hey just, like, go, like, around somewhere and then, like, like they just play a little bit and then when I need them, they just come”. Wondering what the mysterious “they” are, I ask her where they come from. “From my heart” says Tatiana. Ryan also observes a distinct inner sensation and claims that “[w]hen it, when it comes through and it's just ... You can just feel your, your fingertips aching almost to just play and as soon as all of that energy is there, you just want to [plays piano] ... It's, it's just there [laughs]”. I am convinced that these children are pointing at the subtle preliminary bodily impulses described by Maartienssen (1966, 1977).

Theme 4

Piano touch ("the touching stimulus"): an effortless direct transmission

Concerning the special piano touch advocated by Pirozerskaya, all the children unanimously agree that it is an effortless transmission from the fingertips straight into the piano, which “just happens by itself”. They willingly demonstrated this touch on the piano, thus enriching the evidence. Ryan describes the sensation of the “touching stimulus” as being “sort of like a tingling sensation”. He notes that he “still feel[s] that lively impulse. In fact, if you don't feel that lively impulse, then you should probably stop and

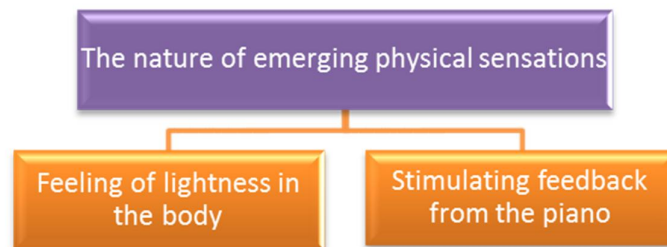
try and get it again”. Ryan’s observation is in direct correspondence with Pirozerskaya’s “delicate strings of the unsuppressed falsetto”.

Rebecca insightfully explains how to touch the piano: “For me, it’s very, uhm, gracefully. You don’t force anything, you let it flow right through you from inside through to your fingers and you don’t stop, hold it, or you just let it go.” She adds that she personally has

an image of what I would want to hear, but, and then I just start ... I think it’s new every time. You can’t say it’s going to be the same. Because each piece, the darkness ... It’s a different type of darkness you create in every single piece. So, it’s not the same, but it ... I think the concepts are the same, where you’re trying to contain your sound, but yet you still got so much energy with it?

Tatiana puts it very descriptively: “You can just touch it gently to make the sound and then the magic just came out by itself ... relax and then make the magic.” Emma confirms that one can touch the piano in many different ways: “A piano touch is for me a completely unique touch and has many different touches within it.”

Theme 5



With regard to the physical interaction with the instrument the children observe the element of the opposing spring-support, essential in Pirozerskaya’s piano technique. The oldest children, Ryan and Rebecca, speak of the “two-way connection” between the stimulating sensations of the light, comfortable playing hands and enhanced artistry. Ryan describes that

it’s a two-way connection, definitely. Like I said, when I play it’s as if I become one with the piano. I play and then as I feel the piano pushing me up, it’s as if it’s responding to me. It’s as if I’m communicating with it and I, I play and just the energy that I put into it, I hear and then it comes back through sound, and it’s a two-way connection.

Rebecca reacts as follows on my question whether the playing of the fortissimo octaves in Chopin's *Prelude No 15* is a stimulating or tiring experience. "No, very stimulating, definitely". I continue by asking if the piano sound stimulates new colours. "Yes, I definitely think so ... No, no, it does! I did begin thinking more creatively".

Emma unexpectedly adds to the question of spontaneously emerging creativity:

Well, you always have a vision of what you would like it to be and to achieve this you naturally are going to try it out first. But if you make a mistake and the hand moves on its own accord to create something beautiful, I would try to go back to it.

Tatiana explains that the piano helps you. "Because when you jump, the piano makes the sound and then it also makes the power out." She also notices that this promotes a relaxing sensation. Ryan and Rosie state the feeling of lightness in the arms and hands in relation to the cantabile flow. After performing the extract from *Chopin's Nocturne in E minor*, Ryan observes: "Uh, my hands feel very, very light when I play and the, the depth doesn't come from how hard you push it. It's from what you put into your hands and what you'll get out from it." Rosie's father communicates her perception of her bodily feelings while playing a long, beautiful monophonic cantabile melody: "Ah, she says that she was lucky, she was light, in the sky," Rosie then adds: "Relaxing." I asked another question to confirm that Rosie is talking about a bodily sensation. She repeatedly says her body feels "light."

Theme 6

A deeper perception of the self associated with the heights of pianistic experience

Emma, Rebecca and Ryan, who experienced the flow of the concert performance a number of times, describe a centred, harmonious state of being which they pronounce to be very different from the way they feel during the course of their ordinary daily activities. In their interviews we captured a few glimpses of children's heightened perception of themselves at the piano during those special experiences. Ryan provides a fascinating insight when he claims that "I, I go into sort of a trance and I'm, I'm no longer me. I'm, I'm not ... I've now got this extended version of myself and it just goes perfectly. It's, it's as if everything is just going exactly how I wanted. Everything's in tune and in sync and in harmony".

Asked to pinpoint a physical sensation associated with this state, Ryan says: “Uhm, well, I, I ... It’s sort of ... It’s a light feeling and my whole body sort of just floats up like a balloon in a sense”. Ryan captures the reflection of this comforting sensation in the spiritual sphere with the remark that “it’s sort of like an inner peace”.

Rebecca describes her state of being during pianistic heights thus:

I close off everything that’s around me. I don’t hear anything, I don’t see anything. It’s just me and the piano ... It feels like really, really rewarding and it also feels like everything is falling into place ... flows properly and freely. Like everything around you just fades away and, ja, it’s, it’s hard to find words to describe how it feels, but everything becomes one: and you, the music and the piano.

With this remark Rebecca also mentions again the importance of the theme of oneness. When I wonder what it feels like for her to experience a deeper dimension of the self, Rebecca replies: “I feel very secure.”

Emma comments: “I feel glorious! Concerning her state of being, she responds: “At those moments I concentrate fully on the piece. I would only be interrupted by something very abrupt and very obvious. Small subtle things will completely pass me by”. When I ask Emma whether this state of being is a usual part of her everyday experiences, she replies that it is not and continues:

Almost as though you feel that everything has suddenly fallen into place. Your hands are moving as you want them to and you feel so proud of yourself for accomplishing something that is not normal for you or someone else.

Both Emma and Rebecca confirm that being able to access this heightened pianistic experience empowers them as individuals, and add that they feel much more relaxed, as if “you can take on anything”. Little Rosie and Tatiana also in a way perceive that there is an inner dimension of the self where “music lives”. Rosie thinks that music lives “[i]n the heart and in the brain”. During Tatiana’s interview I requested to visit the “special place inside”. Tatiana immediately laid her hand on her heart. At that moment, thinking of her impulsive personality and tendency to be in a hurry, I ask: “[D]o you also feel in a hurry there?” “No, it feels like always relaxing”, replies Tatiana.

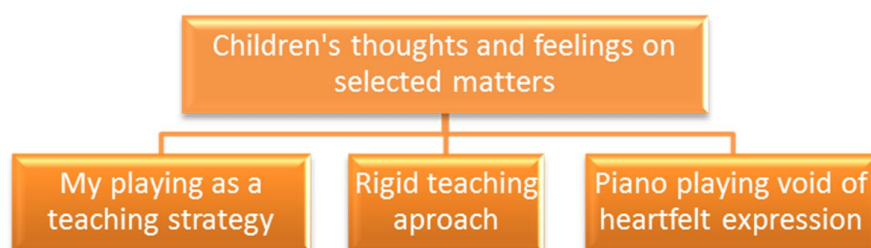
Following Pirozerskaya’s concept of “silence of inner contacts”, I attempted a question on a deeper perception of the self with the three older children. Referring to Neuhaus (1983) who wrote that the piano tone “must be clothed in silence” I investigated whether the children perceive the existence of silence in the spiritual dimension of their being as an integral part of performing artistry. Ryan responds:

The silence never really stopped, because I felt it, even when I'm playing. It's not, it's not so much on the outside, it is on the inside. There's a silence, you become at peace inside when you're playing and that conveys through ... In some ways it's intense, but in some ways it's empty. Because I feel this emptiness as if there's nothing clouding my mind, but again this intensity of just the silence that is coming through into the playing and ... Ja, I feel, I feel that sort of filling my mind in a sense.

Rebecca mentions that "... the silence is in your hands ... It's around you ... because it's inside ... it's definitely charged with intensity and I'm fired up, ready to go". Emma provides an interesting perspective that

the silence ... is for me a void that needs to be filled. A void within myself. There can be chatter or laughter in the room while I play, however to me it may mean nothing as I may only try to fill this void when I do start to play.

Theme 7



Here I combined children's feedback on the selected matters into one theme. I make it clear to all my students that my playing (and especially the shape of my hands) is not subject to direct imitation. However, I wanted to investigate whether there is an element of me imposing on my student's individuality. Gathering thoughts on rigid teaching approach and the type of playing which I described earlier in this chapter as removed from the meaningful, heartfelt expression, was mainly a matter of general interest. To investigate the latter, I played short extracts on the piano imitating the outcome which, sadly, is commonly heard in music concerts at primary schools. I asked the children to comment on this kind of playing.

To the question of my playing as a teaching strategy Ryan replies: "I pay attention to what you're giving into the piano and the intensity, uhm, of it and then I ... I don't try and copy what you've done, but I try and copy the same sort of output that you're giving". Rebecca says that for her my playing makes things clearer to her.

You sometimes bring it out way better and for me it definitely clarifies it and I don't necessarily follow your hands, I think I go for more a sound and try and hear it. I don't particularly copy it exactly, but I like to create a better image from what you've played. I try and do the same image, but I don't.

Rebecca also confirms that she “definitely” feels the inner energy of my playing.

I think whenever you play it more inspires me ... and I make it my aim to try and achieve that ... I try and make it my own personal goal, not something to try and compete with. Try and make it my own.

Emma also finds my piano playing stimulating and inspiring but adds that, as she gets to know the piece better, she has her own “special nuances and inject the feeling that I feel”. She reminds me of another way by which I impart artistic matters:

You very seldom played for me. You tried to create those emotions within me possibly through almost an anecdote or a situation that you create and when I have that emotion within myself, I can then express it.

Rosie acknowledges herself as a capable artistic individual. Her father reports of her response to my question: “She said, okay, when you play she can learn something about the music but her feeling ... After you teach her she knows how to play and she's using her own feelings to play that”. When I ask further, Rosie tells me that she has enough of her own feelings.

Ryan confronts the question of the rigid approach:

It would make me feel [laughs] actually quite angry. Uhm, I would definitely ... I, I would rebel. I would probably say I'm going to do and in a sense I'd say well, I guess I'm just not getting it the way you want me to and I'd carry on with what I can do [laughs].

Sensitive Rebecca reveals her feelings by emphasising that if she was to be confronted with a rigid demand she would feel discouraged. I did not put the question across to Emma clearly. Thinking that I myself might decide to apply a rigid strategy, she politely responded:

I would try to do what you say, as I do respect your teaching so much. However, after a period of feeling that I actually couldn't do it this way, I would probably change or try to put my arms in a new position to allow the colours to shine through.

When I suddenly played a tiny extract in a rigid way, devoid of the heartfelt expression, Tatiana was very displeased. She explained that we never play like this “because it hurts the piano and it's not music”! To my question what was missing, she replies: “Your feeling”. Emma agrees with Tatiana completely

mentioning it was “wooden, has no feelings, no life ... but technically marvellous”. Playing for Rebecca I did not capture the lifeless feel as strongly as I intended. However, she critically evaluates my playing: “I don’t think there’s any image or any colour or what you’re trying to convey. You don’t know what you’re trying ... [what] you’re aiming for”.

When I asked: “What would piano playing be without the soul?” Ryan spontaneously says that it would be useless.

Emma speaks further:

I do believe, like your teacher [Pirozerskaya], that music without expression is not music at all ... It is all about your own expression. Your own interpretation and without your own interpretation it will be dead to you and as the player, but it’s dead to you. None of your audience or your listeners will be attracted to this piece of music.

4.7 Summary

In this chapter I shared my experience of teaching self-connected pianism according to Pirozerskaya’s principles (with an emphasis on the teaching approach), introduced my student-participants, and discussed their response to my questions during the interviews. I have transcribed all the interviews and from the transcription seven themes crystallised.

In Chapter 5 I will answer my research questions. I will also reflect on the interview outcomes in summarised form and examine them in relation to Pirozerskaya’s original statements. I will make suggestions for further research and offer a conclusion on my work.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction

This final chapter is a synthesis of the analysed data presented in Chapter 4 and a discussion of the relationship between the data and the literature related to the emergent themes. The main research question and the sub-questions will be answered.

The main research question was: **What is the nature of Natalia Pirozerskaya's piano method and teaching philosophy?**

The nature of Natalia Pirozerskaya's piano method and teaching philosophy is unique. At the heart of her teachings lies the holistic concept of the harmonious (organic) development of the artist-musician expounded by Yakovlev in relation to vocal art and higher nervous activity. Being Yakovlev's successor, Pirozerskaya approaches pianist's hands as a delicate organ-transmitter functioning in relation to brain activity. She asserts that the pianistic process is a delicate, complex function which touches upon the deeper sphere of being. In this lie the roots of her great consideration for individuality in all aspects of its manifestation, related to piano playing. The care to nurture and not suppress the natural inclinations of the student is attributed to her piano method.

In its nurturing of all kinds of individual specifics Pirozerskaya's piano method is deeply holistic. Its nature opposes rigidity in any form. This concerns the actual specifics of piano playing as well as the nature of the teacher-student interaction.

The acute awareness that the healthy condition and functioning of the pianist's hand is linked to both artistry and emotional well-being is another feature of her piano methodology. The effortlessness of piano touch taught by Pirozerskaya stems from Yakovlev's principles of organic singing. The vocal origins of the method show in the specifics of piano sonority. The distinct melodiousness of flow, the warmth and the unsuppressed quality of piano tone remaining throughout all kinds of piano texture and dynamic range characterise the method. The nature of the timbral outcomes on the piano is in its essence in direct correspondence with the nature of the vocal timbral nuances in Glinka's tradition, illustrated in its

highest form by the artistry of the three great singers discussed. To Pirozerskaya, the timbres of the pianist are the reflections of his emotions and thus are ever-changing.

- **What characterises the self-connected pianism attributed to Natalia Pirozerskaya's method?**

1. Subtlety and individual diversity of pianistic sensations (apparatus attuned with the inner hearing and responsive to the impulses coming from the sphere of the inner artistic imaginary – the spiritual domain of being).
2. Spontaneity of the captured live emotion which contains the imprint of the entire personality of the individual.
3. Unlaboured, fluid, melodious (organic) flow of playing without traces of forcing and mechanical rigidity.

- **How did the researcher apply Pirozerskaya's piano method?**

1. By following its principles throughout my own path of advancement as a concert performer (over approximately 3 decades). This includes consistently applying the vocal element to myself for the purposes of
 - alleviating fatigue and pre-concert anxiety;
 - boosting artistic energy;
 - promoting effortlessness in the sphere of pianistic sensation.
2. By instilling its fundamentals into my work with my piano students (employing the vocal aspect to a greater or lesser degree with different students, mainly at the initial stages of learning).
3. By adopting a holistic, malleable approach to the student.

- **How do piano students experience the application of Pirozerskaya's piano method?**

My interview data revealed that the children display an insightful, mature perception of themselves in the context of their pianistic process. They see the instrument as the means of self-expression and assign it an essential place in their world. No one showed evidence of anxiety towards learning pianistic skills or perceived the piano as an obstacle between the self and the music. In fact, the children do not

distinguish between the music and their emotional response to it. In their perception these are merged into one personalised entity which actualises through their playing.

No one mentioned strain or difficulty concerning the physical realisation, besides a comment about taking care to manage a small hand. The sphere of physical sensation was generally described as relaxing, stimulating and effortless. The soothing experience of the vocal aspect was also captured in the interviews, even though I did not follow the question through consistently. The children are fond of my teaching approach and love the inspired atmosphere of the lessons. They speak of piano playing with confidence and great spirit.

- **What are the implications of this study for piano pedagogy?**

This study is not about a school of piano playing, as it is beyond the scope of my current work to expound multiple piano skills in depth and detail. It brings to light the subtle nature of the pianistic process in relation to the individual. This study rather reminds one of the timeless values of an artistic tradition in which the musical performance conveys the powerful energetics of sincere, elevated emotion. It reveals the nature of the skill which could enable the performer to achieve spontaneous, refined self-expression. It explores the fundamentals of Natalia Pirozerskaya's piano technique, which promotes a high quality of the artistic outcomes on the piano and enables spontaneous self-expression from the initial stages of learning.

The artistry of the great singers' mentioned earlier in the study mesmerised the audiences of their days. Now, a century later, my pupils speak of the amazing sense of oneness and harmony brought to their being through piano playing. This study hints at the wealth of possibilities for the holistic nurturing of the individual contained in piano pedagogy. Pirozerskaya calls for a student-centred piano pedagogy which is inclusive, creative and sensitive to the student's nature and needs. The voices of my pupils reveal how perceptive children are towards being taught all kinds of subtle pianistic sensations and artistic matters. The children state the value of a deeply personal contact with the instrument, which in its turn brings them to experience a greater harmony with the self.

5.2 Thematic discussion

Comeau (2009) sketches the landscape of piano pedagogy literature. The access points for research include indexes, databases and bibliographies. Sources of information for research and learning comprise of the following (Comeau, 2009:vii, viii): encyclopaedias, dictionaries, journals, magazines,

dissertations, theses,⁵⁰ tests, measurements and monographs (see reference list for sources that are of interest for the purpose of this research). Under monographs⁵¹ Comeau (2009:149-247) categorised “methodology, psychology of music, piano performance and piano study and teaching”.

Some physiological and spiritual aspects that link to my research were highlighted at North West University’s international conferences (Music and well-being, 2013; S.A.M.E., 2015). The papers of the Music and well-being conference were published in a special 2014-edition of *The journal for transdisciplinary Research in Southern Africa*. Articles of Auerbach & Delport; Boyce-Tillman; Elliott and Silverman deal with general aspects related to some of the remarks of the interviewees.

I have presented a paper at the 3rd *International Spirituality and Music Education* conference at Potchefstroom that was held from 25 to 27 March, 2015. In my paper, I discussed a heightened state of being which occasionally occurs at the peak of a concert performance (Tsihelashvili, 2015). During the course of the conference I also became aware of different models about spiritual experiences and music that link with Pirozerskaya’s perception of piano pedagogy and impressions my piano pupils voiced (Boyce-Tillman, 2006; Van der Merwe & Habron, 2014). The Dalcroze eurhythmics sessions link with the therapeutic aspect and the experience in the sphere of the physical sensation (Jaques-Dalcroze, 1930).

Table 3 displays the emergent themes and communication or literature related to the themes. In this investigation the voice of Pirozerskaya was a primary source. Few publications have appeared on her pianistic approach and therefore interviews with her (skype and telephonic) were of utmost importance for the documentation of the content of this research. Where possible I will link the interviews with Natalia Pirozerskaya in a summarised format with her perception on the related theme. I will also add piano pedagogy literature that relates to the themes (in most cases the whole publication is applicable therefore it is not possible to mention specific pages).

⁵⁰ I mention research that gives perspectives which broaden the understanding of this assignment. See Lin (2002); Cho (2013).

⁵¹ According to the electronic dictionary a “one volume work, in-depth to a specialised subject, written by a scholar, written mainly for an academic audience” (see Monograph).

Table 3: Emergent themes related to a summary of interviews and perceptions or piano pedagogy literature

THEMES AND CATEGORIES	DESCRIPTION AND INTERVIEW SUMMARY	PIROZERSKAYA'S PERCEPTION AND RELATED PIANO PEDAGOGY LITERATURE
Oneness of the self-connected pianistic process ⁵²	The children clearly perceive how the physical and the spiritual domains of their being are integrated in one harmonious unity ("all works as one") in the process of piano playing. They also note a distinct feeling of fusion with the instrument (becoming "one with the piano").	In Pirozerskaya's terms this would mean that the children's "means of contact" are well established, and their self-expression at the piano has been enabled. The direct, effortless piano touch taught by Pirozerskaya promotes the feeling of being merged with the instrument. The inner energies outlined by Pirozerskaya intensify in the conditions of a harmonious artistic state. This in its turn contributes to the effortlessness of the physical realisation.
Deeply personal perception of the piano ⁵³	The desire for self-expression is the children's first and foremost motivation to go to the piano. They develop a personal bond with the instrument, entrust their feelings to it. Some even see it as an "integral part", an "indescribable presence", a "best friend". According to the children, their special bond with the piano can serve to "gather" oneself, to "access deep emotions", to calm oneself down, to boost their day.	Among the holistic implications of introducing the piano as "a vehicle of self-expression" Pirozerskaya mentions giving the child "an anchor", "an outlet to express true feelings" (2014a). She poetically calls her advocated pianism "the way to the true self" (2015b). She also explains that the joy of the physical sensations ("the life of the hand") promotes further artistic stimulation ("the electric-current supply") (2014a; 2009:15).
The emerging inner energy: a vital component of the pianistic process ⁵⁴	The children agree that there exists a dimension to "our" piano technique, hidden from the eye – an energy which permeates all sensations of piano playing. They feel it flow through the body prior to and during the act of piano playing. They notice that this enabling energy allows them to minimise the physical effort, and promotes the "fired-up" state of readiness.	Firstly, Pirozerskaya speaks of the "energy of contact" as a subtle specific of piano touch. She also refers to "nerve energy" which emerges as a result of the well-established reflex activity associated with pianistic process. Maartienssen's phenomenon of the body's "state of readiness" is another possible source of inner energy.
Piano touch: an effortless, direct transmission ⁵⁵	The children describe that the piano touch they were taught appears to the eye as if one "does nothing" and the sound "just comes". They specifically explain that the pianist must not tense up aiming but "just start". For all of them this sensation is easily attainable.	Pirozerskaya explains that in the context of her piano technique this piano touch ("the touching stimulus") is the equivalent of Yakovlev's special vocal onset. She refers to "the magic of the individual piano touch" in direct relation to Yakovlev's <i>funzione d'attacco</i> (Pirozerskaya, 2008:64).

⁵² See Csikszentmihalyi, 1999; Jaques-Dalcroze, 1930.

⁵³ See Boyce-Tillman, 2000. Chaliapin, 1989, Elliott and Silverman, 2014.

⁵⁴ See Jaques-Dalcroze (1930).

⁵⁵ See Koornhof, 1992; Uszler *et al.* (2000).

The nature of the emerging physical sensation ⁵⁶	Firstly, the children observe that the gently resisting sensation from the piano which we describe among ourselves as “the piano helping you” is an integral part of their technique. Secondly, they report a feeling of lightness in the body associated with the rising level of their artistic stimulation.	In the light of Pirozerskaya’s teachings this shows that the children mastered the specifics of finger work and the technique of applying the arm weight sufficiently enough to experience the feedback sensation of spring-support from the instrument (discussed in Chapter 3). Regarding the second sensation, I believe that the children’s emerging ability associated with what Pirozerskaya calls “the electric-current touch” also plays a role. “The act of piano playing contains two primary sources of nourishment to the pianist. When we cultivate the pianist’s hand as a living sensory organ considering its special capacity for development, the physical act of its interaction with the piano brings a feeling of deep harmony and joy, and along with the music itself, further inspires the pianist” (2015c).
Deeper perception of the self associated with the heights of pianistic experience ⁵⁷	The children reflect on the occasions of entering an enhanced state of being as a result of feeling deeply connected and fulfilled through their piano playing. They describe it as an “extended version” of oneself, where all is perfectly attuned “in synch and harmony”. They report feeling “absolutely wonderful” and perceive a deeper dimension of the self filled with “silence”.	This directly relates to Pirozerskaya’s concept of the “silence of inner contacts”. She says: the silence of inner contacts is experienced as a blissful, harmonious feeling – an inner peace, by both the performer and the audience. In her holistic teaching the notions of the “silence of inner contacts” and of the “key of talent” verge on one another. This means that entering this state of being nourishes the pianist at a deep level.
Children’s thoughts and feelings on selected matters ⁵⁸	I proposed three brief questions. The first question, revolving around my piano playing during the lessons received a positive response. I found that my playing stimulates and inspires the children to display their own artistic initiative. The idea of the rigid teaching approach was not welcomed by my pupils. Lastly, they referred to the little music extract which I played neatly, but in a rigid and inexpressive manner, as “not music”.	Pirozerskaya speaks of the “therapeutic power conveyed by the piano touch of the teacher” (2015c). This suggests that the teacher’s playing could serve for stimulating and enhancing purposes, and not only as a demonstration. In Pirozerskaya’s view, the rigid teaching approach threatens the delicate “artistic truth” of the individual and thus, is harmful. Pirozerskaya’s perception of piano playing does not include any mechanical means removed from the live feeling and personalised expression.

5.3 Recommendation for further research

The nature of my study suggests vast possibilities for further research. To me, the further step in investigating Pirozerskaya’s work would be the call for collaboration of specialists from different spheres

⁵⁶ See Johnson (2010); Keeves (1984).

⁵⁷ See Boyce-Tillman, 2014; Cornett-Murtada, 2012; Malkova, 2011.

⁵⁸ Miner *et al.*, 2012.

of knowledge. An experimental laboratory research could perhaps shed more light on the nature of energies and other subtle phenomena attributed to the artistry of the self-connected pianistic process.

Yakovlev's research should be translated into English. This would make the knowledge he has accumulated accessible internationally. Testing his findings on the high-technology equipment available nowadays and further promoting his hypothesis could make a fascinating study. I believe, though, that undertaking this kind of research calls for an expert vocalist. I truly wish that Yakovlev's legacy will one day find its due recognition and his profound knowledge will enrich the world of vocal pedagogy.

Pirozerskaya's unique knowledge in the sphere on therapeutic effects of organic singing upon general well-being needs to be systematised and captured in an academic work. She recently expressed her concern in this regard: "I have no idea who will continue my legacy. I am now too old to gather all this knowledge on paper. The only thing that seems as a possibility is to practically train someone for this purpose. But there is currently no one I could consider" (Pirozerskaya, 2015b). Even though Pirozerskaya claims her development of this therapy to be "the application of Yakovlev's findings according to the needs of nowadays", in the quest into the nature of her thought I would recommend looking in the sphere of alternative therapy and healing, particularly in relation to voice and sound.

Pirozerskaya's piano method promotes deeper contact of the individual with his inner essence as a living personality. To me, the enabled personal artistry and self-expression at the piano, with its associated possibility of reaching a harmonious, anchoring state of being, strongly experienced by myself and some of my pupils, is a significant phenomenon. I believe in its therapeutic capacity. Pirozerskaya conceptualises the piano as a vehicle of self-expression. I take this concept further and suggest that, introduced this way, the piano can become a medium of communication between the self and the outside world. My current hypothesis suggests that this approach to piano playing may contain therapeutic implications for autistic children. I have not yet attempted any explorations in this direction.

5.5 Conclusion

Speaking of vocal therapy, Pirozerskaya says: "First, there is a therapy. But then – only the cognition of the self and its hidden potentialities" (2015b). I fully believe that her piano method initiates a similar process of self-discovery through discovering many "means of contacts" with the instrument as well as within the self. Pirozerskaya teaches her students to live through their singing and piano playing. On the path of organic pianistic development, the instrument becomes the person's life companion, his means of contact with the deeper self and its truth. Pirozerskaya postulates that this is acutely topical in the

conditions of the modern world: “Self-connected pianism can serve to restore the silence and the inner harmony of a distressed individual” (2015c).

The skills and sensations of Pirozerskaya’s organic pianism grow from the roots of Glinka’s teaching. Through Pirozerskaya the seed of the great tradition of Glinka is sprouting in another sphere of art in relation to the self and its creative potentialities. They enable the actualisation of live innate feeling and deliver the energetics of personality in performance. This benefits the art of piano playing, the pianist and the audience. Pirozerskaya’s values address the soul and individuality – the delicate strings of being. Her piano pedagogy is aimed at the holistic nourishment, strengthening and enabling of the individual through the special connection with the instrument. Pirozerskaya once said to me: “I gave you the way to yourself”. I believe the path of self-connected pianism is in its essence a concrete step towards self-actualisation. Not through the satisfaction of achievement, but through the bliss and harmony of enabled personal artistry – self-expression in its refined form which is limitless.

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NORTH-WEST UNIVERSITY
YUNIBESITHI YA BOKONE-BOPHIRIMA
NOORDWES-UNIVERSITEIT
POTCHEFSTROOMKAMPUS

Private Bag X6001, Potchefstroom
South Africa, 2520

Tel: (018) 299-1111/2222

Web: <http://www.nwu.ac.za>

School of Music

018 299 1680

0866247148 (Fax)

ADDENDUM A

Dear Parent,

As you know, I am reaching the final stage of my Doctoral study. The outcomes of my research will be presented in the form of a formal assignment. The study explores Natalia Pirozerskaya's piano method and teaching philosophy. Natalia Pirozerskaya was my teacher. Her prominent influence determined my view on piano performance and pedagogy.

My research is designed to be a case study, and involves participants. I hereby invite your child to participate. I intend to conduct open-ended interviews with five of my pupils for the purpose of gaining children's personal perspective on their experiences at the piano, particularly in my lessons. The interviews will be video recorded and then transcribed. In accordance with NWU ethics requirements, the children will be positioned with their back to the camera and the names will be kept anonymous.

Please, do not hesitate to ask me any questions concerning the study at any point. I will share the findings with you. You are also welcome to contact my study leaders Dr Liesl van der Merwe (018 299 1689) or Prof Hetta Potgieter (082 877 1866) should you have any further queries. Your child reserves the right to withdraw from the study at any point. If you agree with the nature and purpose of my study, and willing to grant your permission, please sign this consent form.

Yours sincerely,

Olga Tsihelashvili (DMUS performance)

ë ë ë ë ë ë ë ë ë ë ë ë ë ë ë ë .. (signature)

I, _____, parent of _____ hereby give permission for my child to participate in this research.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

ADDENDUM B



Private Bag X6001, Potchefstroom
South Africa 2520

Tel: (018) 299-4900
Faks: (018) 299-4910
Web: <http://www.nwu.ac.za>

Ethics Committee

Tel +27 18 299 4849
Email Ethics@nwu.ac.za

ETHICS APPROVAL OF PROJECT

The North-West University Research Ethics Regulatory Committee (NWU-RERC) hereby approves your project as indicated below. This implies that the NWU-RERC grants its permission that provided the special conditions specified below are met and pending any other authorisation that may be necessary, the project may be initiated, using the ethics number below.

Project title: Exploring Natalia Pirozerskaya's piano method and teaching philosophy: An intrinsic case study.																															
Project Leader: Prof H. Potgieter																															
Student: O Tsihelashvili																															
Ethics number:	<table border="1"><tr><td>N</td><td>W</td><td>U</td><td>-</td><td>0</td><td>0</td><td>1</td><td>2</td><td>5</td><td>-</td><td>1</td><td>5</td><td>-</td><td>A</td><td>7</td></tr><tr><td colspan="3">Institution</td><td colspan="6">Project Number</td><td colspan="2">Year</td><td colspan="4">Status</td></tr></table> Status: S = Submission; R = Re-Submission; P = Provisional Authorisation; A = Authorisation	N	W	U	-	0	0	1	2	5	-	1	5	-	A	7	Institution			Project Number						Year		Status			
N	W	U	-	0	0	1	2	5	-	1	5	-	A	7																	
Institution			Project Number						Year		Status																				
Approval date: 2015-04-09	Expiry date: 2020-04-08																														

Special conditions of the approval (if any): None

General conditions:

While this ethics approval is subject to all declarations, undertakings and agreements incorporated and signed in the application form, please note the following:

- x The project leader (principle investigator) must report in the prescribed format to the NWU-RERC:
 - annually (or as otherwise requested) on the progress of the project,
 - without any delay in case of any adverse event (or any matter that interrupts sound ethical principles) during the course of the project.
- x The approval applies strictly to the protocol as stipulated in the application form. Would any changes to the protocol be deemed necessary during the course of the project, the project leader must apply for approval of these changes at the NWU-RERC. Would there be deviated from the project protocol without the necessary approval of such changes, the ethics approval is immediately and automatically forfeited.
- x The date of approval indicates the first date that the project may be started. Would the project have to continue after the expiry date, a new application must be made to the NWU-RERC and new approval received before or on the expiry date.
- x In the interest of ethical responsibility the NWU-RERC retains the right to:
 - request access to any information or data at any time during the course or after completion of the project;
 - withdraw or postpone approval if:
 - any unethical principles or practices of the project are revealed or suspected,
 - it becomes apparent that any relevant information was withheld from the NWU-RERC or that information has been false or misrepresented,
 - the required annual report and reporting of adverse events was not done timely and accurately,
 - new institutional rules, national legislation or international conventions deem it necessary.

The Ethics Committee would like to remain at your service as scientist and researcher, and wishes you well with your project. Please do not hesitate to contact the Ethics Committee for any further enquiries or requests for assistance.

Yours sincerely

Linda du
Plessis

Prof Linda du Plessis

Digitally signed by Linda du Plessis
DN: cn=Linda du Plessis, o=NWU,
Vaal Triangle Campus, ou=Vice-
Rector: Academic,
email=linda.duplessis@nwu.ac.za,
c=US
Date: 2015.04.26 22:31:09 +02'00'

ADDENDUM C

See attached DVD. Video recording of interviews.

ADDENDUM D

See attached CD. Transcription of interviews.