

PIANNO JOURNAL

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EUROPEAN PIANO TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION

in conversation

**Niels Gade
Unsung Hero**

**Beethoven Piano
Society of Europe
Concerts in 2020**

**EPTA Guernsey and
the Fanny Davies
International Piano
Series**

**June Armstrong
Ten Years On**



NEWS & VIEWS - INTERVIEWS - REVIEWS - EPTA FORUM

EDITORIAL

Welcome to the 2019 summer-autumn edition of *Piano Journal*. Our cover artist Pascal Nemirovski gives a detailed and illuminating interview about his exceptional activities as a teacher. Nemirovski has been based at the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire for the past three years and he has recently organised an innovative new festival there, bringing outstanding young artists to the city and to an institution which has been energised not only by its new principal Julian Lloyd Webber, but also by state-of-the-art facilities in an exceptionally impressive new building. Clearly Birmingham is enjoying a new surge of musical inspiration and energy. In this sense the city complements Nemirovski's own upbeat positivity and inspiration.

Elsewhere in this issue we remember the Victorian pianist Fanny Davies as well as the much neglected piano works of Niels Gade. We look forward to an exciting series of concerts celebrating the 250th anniversary of Beethoven's birth and also take time to celebrate the beautifully vibrant educational piano pieces of Irish composer-teacher June Armstrong.

As we move forward in the digital age, we are delighted to present EPTA's flagship magazine through a more user-friendly downloadable version, which is easily accessed and obtainable via our website www.epta-europe.org. Because information is fast-flowing and subject to change, we are now presenting details about events organised by individual EPTA countries exclusively on our website. The final section of this current issue does advertise forthcoming international EPTA conferences alongside contact details for each separate association, but for specific details of events the website is now the place to go to for accurate, updated information.



Murray McLachlan, Editor



PIANO AND MORE

FACETS OF
A VERSATILE
INSTRUMENT



24TH
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27TH
OCTOBER
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EPTA AUSTRIA WILL HOST THE
41ST EUROPEAN CONFERENCE
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IN THE MDW -
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THE THEME IS PIANO AND MORE /
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Pascal:

A 21st-Century Pedagogue with Panache!

In 2019 Pascal Nemirovski is the name on everyone's lips. He is recognised as one of the most sought-after piano pedagogues in the world, with many of his students winning top international prizes (Leeds, Ettlingen, YCA New York, YCAT London, BBC New Generation Artist...). Several Nemirovski protégés are also now successful recording artists and represented by major concert artist management companies such as Harrison Parrott, Askonas Holt, Intermusica and Columbia. Among Nemirovski's former students, established artists include Lise de la Salle, Louis Schwizgebel and Daniel Lehardt.



Pascal was awarded a full scholarship (Steinway & Freudlich Fund) to study at the Juilliard School with Nadia Reisenberg and Adele Marcus. He then continued his studies in Paris with France Clidat and Alexis Weissenberg and started to give concerts and masterclasses in Europe, the United States and Asia.

In 2004, he released his first CD "Entre Ciel et Terre", devoted to Chopin, Prokofiev and Scriabin, which was unanimously acclaimed by the press.

At the age of 28, his vocation for teaching was recognised by violinist Vladimir Spivakov who invited him to teach and supervise the Masterclasses of the International Festival of Colmar. At the time he was the youngest professor at the festival, which included internationally-renowned figures Dmitri Bashkirov, Pascal Devoyon, Gary Graffman, Vladimir Krainev, Rena Shereshevskaya and Tatiana Zelikman. After Colmar Pascal continued to teach actively internationally. His furious schedule includes lectures, masterclasses and workshops all over the world.

Pascal is also very much in demand as a jury member at International Piano Competitions and was appointed Artistic Director and Chairman of the Jury of the "Concours International de Piano Antoine de Saint-Exupéry" (Saint-Priest/Lyon, France) in 2017.

For 10 years, he has taught at the Royal Academy of Music in London and was awarded Honorary Associate of the Royal Academy of Music (Hon ARAM). Having much experience in teaching, he was also responsible for the Subject Specialism "Piano Pedagogy" for LRAM (Licentiate of the Royal Academy of Music) and edited two books. During this period, he also taught at the Purcell School. In 2016, he joined the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire, where he now holds the position of "International Chair" in Piano. Pascal Nemirovski is a Steinway Artist. It was a privilege to interview Pascal as he spearheaded forward with final arrangements for his new, innovative and exciting piano festival for outstanding young artists held in June 2019 at the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire. The Faculty scheduled to give masterclasses over an intensive weekend from 15-18 June looked amazing and included Stephen Hough, Peter Frankl, Markus Groh, Boris Slutsky and Stephen Kovacevich as well as regular RBC tutors Margaret Fingerhut and John Thwaites. Peter Donohoe would act as juror for the competition.

Pascal never fails to be optimistic and upbeat. As ever his enthusiastic energy and buoyant positivity was as ebullient and infectious as ever.

Murray McLachlan (MM): Tell us about your earliest upbringing, family, home life and earliest musical experiences.

Pascal Nemirovski (PN): I was born in 1962 in Caen in Normandy, North-West France. I started playing the piano at the age of five-and-a-half with a local teacher. My father was born in Paris and played piano as a keen amateur. My Grandfather was from Odessa (Ukraine). My father used to accompany at the piano my grandfather singing some melodies. From my mother's side, the family is Basque, from the same region as Ravel. Actually, my Great-aunt, Marie-France de Montaut who knew Ravel personally, was a professional singer and sang some Ravel vocal pieces for the first time in Paris at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées in 1923.

I remember as a child hearing my father practising some difficult pieces like Prokofiev's second concerto, as well as some Brahms, Grieg, Rachmaninov... So, music was somehow in my blood. I used to practise after school every day... but really not much - and certainly not enough! I used to do some small competitions when I was young. I was successful - but nothing serious!

MM: When did you first become hooked on music and the piano?

PN: Actually, I had a big shock when I heard a recording of Martha Argerich playing Chopin's E minor Concerto with Claudio Abbado conducting the London Symphony Orchestra. I was 9 or 10 years old and then became really hooked on music and especially on piano. I was absolutely taken out by Argerich's virtuosity, natural phrasing and clarity of sound. And of course, Rachmaninov's Third Piano Concerto with Vladimir Horowitz! Those two pianists - Argerich and Horowitz - made a huge impression on me at first.

MM: Who were your teachers and what do you remember most about their teaching?

PN: I don't remember much about my first teachers when I was very young. But the first teacher who made a big impression on me was the assistant of Pierre Sancan (Professor of Michel Beroff and many other famous French pianists). I was then 13 and learned some important repertoire, Chopin Etudes, Beethoven sonatas, "Pour le Piano" Debussy etc... She started to teach me in

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detail, which was good, but she was also very difficult, and we didn't really get along. I started to have doubts about becoming a musician and was losing all interest in music by reaction. After a couple of years with her, I searched for a different approach of teaching and at that time, I heard that a young Russian pianist, Elena Varvarova, who had just left the Soviet Union, was living in Paris. She had an amazing technique and was trained at the Moscow Central Music School and Moscow Conservatory. Her professors included Lev Naoumov and Dmitri Bashkirov. She used to play Stravinsky *Petrushka*, Liszt *Feux-Follets*, Chopin *Etude Op. 10 No. 2* etc. in front of me without much problem technically and this was really inspiring! She had also a very difficult character and was extremely demanding due probably to the intense training in Moscow she used to have as a child prodigy. Actually, to give you an example, the first piece I studied then was the Prokofiev *Toccata*. I was not aware of how difficult really this piece was. It took me of course a while to learn it, but by miracle I did perform this piece and improve quickly technically. Another fundamental aspect of her teaching was to learn how to listen to yourself. This was totally new to me and I still talk about all these aspects of technique in my teaching. So, I am really very grateful for this!

Then at the age of 18 in the early 80s, I went to Juilliard where I had two professors. The first one was Nadia Reisenberg. She was a student of Joseph Hoffman and became his assistant later. Unfortunately, she died soon after my first year. She was an aristocrat in her playing and also as a human being. Then, I got into Adele Marcus' class. She was a student of Arthur Schnabel and Joseph Lhevinne and then became Lhevinne's assistant for many years. Her teaching was extremely demanding and tough. She had amazing students and the level of her class was really high. Among her students, to name a few: Byron Janis, Stephen Hough, John Kimura Parker, Norman Krieger, Jeffrey Biegel, Horacio Gutierrez, Jeffrey Swann and many others... She was a remarkable and very experienced teacher. She was very picky about sound and pedalling. Long phrases as well. A great heritage from the 19th-century Russian school. She was also quite known for technique. She used to give us some remarkable stretching exercises from Horowitz, Rachmaninov, Lhevinne etc. which I still give to students.

Later, I had the privilege to play for France Clidat and Alexis Weissenberg. Both were concert pianists more than pedagogues and learned a lot by exchanging musical ideas and hearing about their professional experiences.

MM: Tell us about your performing and teaching experience up to the present.

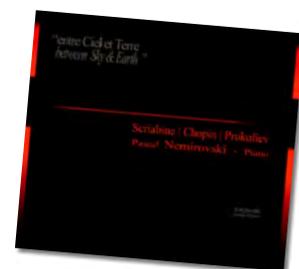
PN: Back in France, I started to give concerts and I got a position as a teacher in a very good conservatoire near Paris. For several years, I was then sharing my time between playing and teaching until I got an invitation at the age of 27 from the International Colmar Festival which literally changed my life. At the request of Vladimir Spivakov, the Artistic Director of the Festival, knowing my real interest in teaching and my dream in organising musical events, I was invited to supervise the Masterclasses and teach among 25 amazing artists including D. Bashkirov, P. Devoyon, G. Graffman, V. Krainev, R. Shereshevskaja, T. Zelikman... This unique experience which lasted five years was a true challenge and marked me profoundly. I learned so much about my work as a teacher and performer by meeting these wonderful musicians coming from the greatest international institutions such as the Paris Conservatoire, Curtis Institute of Music, Royal Academy of Music in London, Moscow Conservatory, Juilliard School... and also by listening to their teaching. This has been invaluable and influenced my life considerably.

In 1993, I got an opportunity to do some unpublished recordings of Russian music. This was actually also a great experience. The process of recording in a studio was very exciting

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in many ways. This was a totally different approach from the concerts. I was at that time also very influenced by Glenn Gould and the process of editing was very exciting. It also actually helped me in finding many concert opportunities. Then, in 1995, following a successful recital given at the Louvre Auditorium in Paris, I started to devote myself more to teaching, the study of repertoire and pedagogy. I thought my life should be more dedicated to it and I needed to share my experience with students and learn as well from exchanging ideas with them. I started to be more and more invited to give classes or Masterclasses and was really enjoying it. At that time also, I took some lessons in conducting with a student of Sergiu Celibidache which was also very useful.

In 2002, I released a CD with various works by Chopin (*Barcarolle*, *Nocturne in C minor*, *1st Scherzo*), Prokofiev (*7th Sonata*) and Scriabin (*4th Sonata*, *Etudes...*) It was important for me to still be active as a pianist and not only as a pedagogue.



Working with Lise de la Salle when she was 13 years old

MM: Tell us some more about your teaching career.

PN: In 1998, I started to teach some really gifted students, among them Lise de la Salle, privately. She was 10 years old. This was a fantastic experience. I used to give her two to three lessons per week. This was really intense for both of us and sometimes a bit stressful. I actually started to learn from this experience how to teach to a professional level. Two years later, at the age of 12, Lise won 1st Prize at the prestigious Ettlingen competition. Later on, she won representation for the Young Concert Artists in New York when she was only 16! At that time, I was invited to do some deputising at the Conservatoire Supérieur de Paris where she was also a student. I was very focused on her development and this was a very big responsibility. What was very helpful was the work she had later on with my colleagues, Pierre Reach, Bruno Rigutto and Geneviève Joy. Geneviève was Henri Dutilleux' wife. This was a great team and I felt that it was very useful for us all to work all together. I benefited enormously from this exchange of ideas.



With Louis Schwizgebel

Later, in January 2006, I got an invitation from Christopher Elton, at that time Head of Keyboard of the Royal Academy of Music in London, to give a Masterclass. A couple of months later

I was offered a position at the Academy to teach. I actually was not at all expecting this to happen and felt very honoured to work for such a prestigious institution. During my time in London I taught a number of really brilliant young pianists, amongst them Louis Schwizgebel, who won 2nd prize at the Leeds International Piano Competition, Daniel Lehardt, who has been with YCA in New York and YCAT in London and is now under management with Askonas Holt. Also, many of them have developed different qualities apart from giving concerts, Mario Mora is now Director of "Clásica FM Radio" in Spain, Lili Yang is professor at the Shanghai Conservatory, Dimitrios Marinou is Administrative Director of the Athens Conservatoire... to name a few. From 2011 to 2017, I also taught at the Purcell School. This was a great experience. I think it is very important to teach at different ages and levels. Of course, the Purcell School is one of the top specialist music schools for children in the UK along with Chetham's School of Music, Yehudi Menuhin School, Wells Cathedral School... I learned so much there; the experience gave me a much better picture overall of musical education from an early age. At Purcell I used to teach only a couple of students aged 9-10 until they got to 15. In 2016 I decided to resign from the school to concentrate more on my new responsibilities as international Chair in Piano at the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire.

MM: Tell us about your teaching books for beginners.

PN: In 2006, I felt that I was ready to write books for beginners, having many years of experience. I was always highly interested by education, especially at a very young age. The first years of the learning process are extremely important, and Music is a language as for English, French etc. So, if you don't really get the right accentuation, grammar and vocabulary at the very beginning it becomes more and more difficult as you get older. By writing this book, I wanted to make it clearer for myself and hopefully for the students and the teachers. Beatrice Quoniam, a very good friend of mine, was already publishing many books, essentially repertoire-wise classified by level for the Edition Henry Lemoine in Paris. I had a talk with her about my project and she accepted my offer to collaborate. Then the publisher, too, accepted the idea and our adventure started. Our collaboration consisted on working on the organisation of the book which I did due to my experience, and she helped me mainly with the repertoire to make sure the pieces chosen were very progressive. We also had the same

idea of choosing very musical pieces to grow the interest of the pupil, which is not easy, especially at the very beginning when you play only very few notes...



MM: What are the structure, principles and approach?

PN: The aim of these two volumes of Piano Lessons is to provide young pianists with the fundamental groundwork required for learning how to play the piano. This method proposes a learning process in a methodical

and progressive way. Its main objective is to allow the beginner to play a piece based on understanding its musical language, hoping this will contribute to a thorough approach to studying the piano, by favouring comprehension and thus the pleasure of the extremely beautiful language that is music.

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To achieve this, the essential technical elements are present in each lesson: sight-reading, rhythm exercises, technical exercises, Etudes and pieces. These exercises contain the musical specificities encountered in the pieces of the proposed repertoire. Acquisitions are therefore carried out gradually and always in line with the repertoire.

Sight reading: allows reading skills to be developed from the beginning, with the goal of avoiding the overly large discrepancy often noticed between the instrumental playing level and the actual skill of reading music.

Polyphony: intends to develop a feeling for polyphony when playing the piano, implying phrasing and listening to the various voices.

Technique: these exercises were developed in relation to the specific technical demands found in the etudes and repertoire of each lesson and will help students to identify and resolve the difficulties they encounter.

Etudes: the etudes were chosen to meet clearly-defined criteria regarding musical, technical and pedagogical interest.

Repertoire: the variety of composers selected allows students to confront different periods and different styles of piano repertoire during the first years.

MM: Have you worked directly with the approach in your books with students?

PN: No, because I haven't taught beginners for a long time, but I know that in France, these books have been very successful. The comments we generally receive are very enthusiastic, especially about the progression, the clarity and the choice of repertoire and also the drawings that the children apparently like very much. Many of my professional ex-students apparently are using it.

MM: Tell us about Birmingham and what it is like there now for you, in your Conservatoire role.

PN: I was first invited to give a Masterclass at the Birmingham Conservatoire in March 2015 by John Thwaites, the Head of keyboard. Then John kindly asked me if I would consider to be Guest Professor starting in September of the same year which I

gratefully accepted. One year later, in September 2016 I decided to resign from the Royal Academy of Music in London and was appointed the Conservatoire's International Chair in Piano. My role is intended to help promote RBC Piano department internationally, and I work closely with the Principal Julian Lloyd Webber, Lamberto Coccioni, Associate Principal responsible for our international presence, and John Thwaites. I feel the image of the Conservatoire has changed considerably in recent years. The Conservatoire became Royal and opened its fantastic brand-new building. Principal Julian Lloyd Webber and his team worked so hard to make this all happen! RBC can now really be compared with other famous institutions in the UK and the world. There is a very friendly atmosphere in the Keyboard Department between colleagues. The students sense this friendliness, and I think it helps them feel they can develop and learn without too much pressure. The Keyboard Department is already very strong, with young pianists coming from all over the world, including Belarus, Bulgaria, China, France, Germany, Georgia, Hungary, Israel, Italy, Japan, Latvia, Romania, Russia, Singapore, Spain, Taiwan and the USA.

Many students in the Keyboard Department at RBC have won recently important national and international prizes. This success is very encouraging and of course is a source of inspiration to the other students. To name a few recent successes: 2nd Prize and the Audience Prize at the Casagrande International Piano Competition (2019); Hastings International Piano Concerto Competition (2018): 1st Prize, the Audience Prize and the "Royal Philharmonic Orchestra" Prize; Winner, BBC Young Musician 2018; 1st Prize at the 15th Ettlingen International Competition for Young Pianists; Young Concert Artists auditions (YCA), New York: 1st Prize; Young Classical Artists Trust (YCAT), London: 1st Prize; Van Cliburn International Piano Competition (2017) USA: Quarter-Finalist; Sydney International Piano Competition (2016): Most Promising Pianist prize; Winner Chamber Music Prize at the International Telekom Beethoven Competition in Bonn 2017; Valencia International Piano Competition (2017), Spain: 4th Prize and winner of the "Best Interpreter of Spanish Music".

- **Andrei Ivanov: 4th Prize** overall and **winner** of Best Interpreter of Spanish Music: "International Piano Competition in Valencia 2017". **3rd Prize** "Birmingham International Piano Competition 2018". **2nd Prize** 'Silvio Bengalli' Piano Prize of the "Val Tidone International Music Competition 2019".
- **Ashok Gupta: Winner** of the Accompanists' Prize, "Kathleen Ferrier Awards". **Winner** "Emanuel Trophy, UK Festivals". **Winner** of the Chamber Music Prize at the "International Telekom Beethoven Competition in Bonn 2017".
- **Domonkos Csabay:** Piano Accompaniment **Winner** and Joint **3rd Prize** Piano Solo, "Wales International Piano Festival (William Mathias)". **1st Prize** "Brant International Piano Competition 2016".
- **Edward Leung (Piano): 1st Prize** "Thomas Harris International Piano Foundation Beethoven Concerto Prize 2018". **1st Prize** "Watford International Piano Competition 2018". **3rd Prize** at the "17th Piano Campus International Piano Competition in Cergy-Pontoise, France, 2018". **Winner** "Brighton and Hove Concerto Competition 2018". **Winner**, "Appelbe Piano Prize of the North London Festival of Music & Drama 2018".
- **Elizabeth Khoo and Chi-Hang Chang (Piano): Silver Medal**, "International Music Competition for Youth 'Dinu Lipatti', Taranto, Italy 2019".
- **Emanuil Ivanov (Piano): 2nd prize** and **Audience Prize**, "Alessandro Casagrande International Piano Competition 2019".
- **George Rowley (Piano): 2nd prize** "Brighton and Hove Concerto Competition 2018".
- **Lauren Zhang: Winner** "BBC Young Musician 2018". **1st Prize** "15th Ettlingen International Competition for Young Pianists 2016". **1st Prize** "Young Pianist of the North".

- **Luigi Carroccia : Quarter-Finalist** "Van Cliburn International Piano Competition 2017".
- **Luigi Carroccia, Domonkos Csabay and Andrei Ivanov: Semi-finalists** "Sheepdrove Inter-Collegiate Piano Competition 2018".
- **Mika Inukai (Piano): 1st Prize** "Appelbe Piano Competition 2019" and **3rd Prize** "Watford International Piano Competition 2019".
- **Roman Kosyakov: 1st Prize** and **Audience Prize** "Sheepdrove Inter-Collegiate Piano Competition 2018". **1st Prize, Audience Prize** and **Royal Philharmonic Orchestra Prize** "Hastings International Piano Concerto Competition 2018". **4th Prize** "Antoine de Saint Exupéry International Piano Competition" (CIPSP) in Saint-Priest, France 2017.

We are also very proud of our new International Piano Festival of which I am the Artistic Director. This will be June 15-18, 2019. The Faculty who will give Masterclasses includes Stephen Hough, Peter Frankl, Markus Groh, Boris Slutsky, Stephen Kovacevich, Margaret Fingerhut, John Thwaites and myself. A day-long celebration of youthful talent sees half-hour, back-to-back recitals featuring 17 superb pianists in repertoire from Scarlatti and Bach to Liszt and Messiaen. The musicians are a mix of Young Artists personally invited from all corners of the world. Adjudicated by Peter Donohoe and BBC Radio 3 producer Emma Bloxham, three will be selected to take part in the Closing Gala, competing for a grand prize and an audience Prize. [Piano Journal can now announce the winners: Emanuil Ivanov (Bulgaria) 1st Prize and the audience Prize; Natanel Grinshtein (Israel) 2nd Prize; Alice Burla (Canada) and Pascal Pascaleff (Bulgaria) Joint 3rd Prize.]



With John Thwaites, Boris Slutsky and some brilliant young pianists who participated at the 1st Royal Birmingham Conservatoire International Piano Festival 2019.

Last but not least, five of our piano students, **Domonkos Csabay, Roman Kosyakov, Andrei Ivanov, Daniel Lehardt** and **Pascal Pascaleff** will each release a CD on the world-renowned Naxos label. This is simply amazing!

MM: Finally, can you talk about the international Piano Competition Saint-Exupéry in Saint Priest-Lyon (France) in which you are the Artistic Director?

PN: Well this is also a fantastic experience but a totally new venture. For our second competition we selected 25 candidates out of the 75 participants. The level was this year particularly high, and we are proud to say that two of our laureates, Alexander Gadjiev and Arsenii Mun, were selected as two out of only 25 chosen participants for the 2019 Tchaikovsky International Competition in Moscow.

For more information see www.pascalnemirovski.com