



## Review

Joseph Banowetz, Philip Fowke, and Nancy Lee Harper. *The Performing Pianist's Guide to Fingering*. Indiana University Press, 2021.

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Joseph Banowetz (1934–2022), who served on the piano faculty at the University of North Texas for 49 years, passed away on July 3<sup>rd</sup>, and is survived by his husband, Alton Chan. (*Joseph Banowetz North Texan*, 2022) Dedicated to Alton Chan, *The Performing Pianist's Guide to Fingering* is one of his many outstanding books for interpreting and performing piano repertoire, and bears witness to a distinguished career in piano pedagogy, acclaimed performances, and recordings.

The book is divided into two parts: Part I (110 pages) begins with a Preface by Banowetz and concludes with a brief appendix by Philip Fowke. Part II (107 pages), followed by a seven-page index, is written by Nancy Lee Harper and contains her own introduction and a personal statement regarding her background in Baroque fingering and performance practice. Within Banowetz's portion of the book, there are two sections: *Fingering Keyboard Works of Selected Composers and Styles* (with 25 subsections) and *The Fingering Redistribution of Hands: Pros and Cons* (with 11 subsections).

It is as much a delight to read through Banowetz's portion of the book as it is to play through his musical selections. His personal writing style evokes the environment of a masterclass with him at the piano and he cautions that this book is not for beginners and geared towards professional pianists. With such a vast subject of fingering piano literature, his topics in his subsections prove to be insightful and practical. Musical excerpts of Beethoven (especially sonatas), Chopin, and Liszt appear most prominently, with other Romantic composers cited, including Schumann, Saint-Saëns, Brahms, as well as a smattering of Ravel, Prokofiev, and Rachmaninoff.

Almost as a mantra through his various discussions of musical examples and in his preface, Banowetz cautions that fingering must be tied to actual playing and not shackled to perceptions of rules, authoritative texts, or scores by scholars devoid of outstanding performance abilities. Not to say that historical editions with illustrious editors as performers, including Cortot, Godowsky, etc. should be ignored, Banowetz lays six general rules for pianists to follow when settling upon a performance fingering, with number four stating that a fingering should strive to convey the musical intentions of the composer. Here are a few highlights from Banowetz's thirty-seven subsections.

*Retaking Notes Silently* discusses two instances where it is desirable for the pianist to retake a note after it has been played. Banowetz indicates that in measure 152 in Prokofiev's *Piano Sonata No. 3*, retaking a note with separate hands is only part of the difficulty in this treacherous passage. A forcible, loud attack followed by retaking the note in combination with deft work in the damper pedal is also necessary. A similar instance occurs in the opening measures of Beethoven's *Pathétique* sonata.

*Chromatic Scales in Single Notes* is a true gem. From decades of teaching experience, Banowetz explains how too many pianists are ensnared by a traditional fingering where the thumb plays white notes and the third finger plays black notes. He provides many alternative chromatic-scale fingerings for both left and right hands to aid in legato passagework at faster tempi. Chopin's *Ballade No. 1* at measure 242 provides three separate fingerings in the right-hand to demonstrate these alternate chromatic-scale fingerings.

*Using the Same Finger for Portato Touch* draws upon Liszt's *Ballade No. 2* and Chopin's *Nocturne Op. 37. No. 1*. Here Banowetz directs pianists to note the importance of adhering to authority – in the latter case, none other than Chopin himself – for utilizing a fingering that would prove unusual for the non-professional pianist. In these examples, he cautions that realization of this unique fingering while still being expressive necessitates a pliable and loose wrist. Also the pedal, once again, is essential in realizing not only the expression of portatos, but a smooth legato melody.

Banowetz admits in *The Fingering Redistribution of the Hands: Pros and Cons* that we are in for a heated debate. Too many pianists, past and present, have referred to redistributing passagework as cheating, to which he responds with four common-sense queries based upon sound, technical risk, musical meaning, and stage presence. He provides the initial measures of Beethoven's *Hammerklavier* sonata with four separate incipits with insights from historical editions (including Hans von Bülow and Moritz Moszkowsky) to hammer in his viewpoints.

It is only fitting that Philip Fowke begins his appendix with discussing the perception of cheating in not only redistributing the hands, but also in rearranging and omitting notes. He believes performing pianists and pedagogues can be divided into two camps, where in one camp, a strict view against redistribution reigns while the other camp takes a more relaxed approach. Fowke unabashedly admits his alignment with the latter camp. His appendix provides insights into fingering through scores and performance indications of Moiseiwitsch through piano concerti of Beethoven, Tchaikovsky, and Rachmaninoff.

Nancy Lee Harper's part of this book contains eight sections (most with several subsections) and a concise three-page conclusion. While most of the musical examples are devoted to JS Bach, CPE Bach, and Domenico Scarlatti, there are notable inclusions of Alessandro Scarlatti and other Baroque composers.

Harper's choice of describing fingering Baroque keyboard music as a dilemma is very apt. Beginning with the strong viewpoints of Wanda Landowska as a key figure in the harpsichord revival in the early twentieth century for rigidly performing Bach in her own style, Harper provides a reassuring stance for modern pianists to consider their own paths. In addition, pianists do not need to suffer from an inferiority complex by performing on a grand piano, using pedal, and playing legato (albeit in a less grandiose, romantic manner). What is important in fingering a Baroque work is one's own personal scholarship in multiple areas for historically informed decisions. High on this list of scholarly investigations is ascertaining a lineage of early keyboard instruments leading to the appearance of the early forte pianos. Knowing their range, timbre, and acoustics inevitably influences decisions for articulation, ornamentation, tempi, among other factors. Further, there are many treatises to consult, and high on Harper's list is CPE Bach's *Essay on the True Art of Playing Keyboard Instruments*.

Harper is honest about her personal journey with performing Baroque keyboard music. Her journey can be any pianist's journey, and one doesn't need to feel the overbearing weight of not being able to publicly perform Baroque keyboard music with a genius level of historically informed confidence. Like so many pianists, Harper's journey began with the love of JS Bach's music and the desire to better understand his era. Although her early studies with various keyboard instruments, including the clavichord, harpsichord, and organ, were challenging, she describes how her perseverance eventually paid off. She would ultimately acquire, through a commission, a beautiful Flemish double harpsichord and later a Stein piano. After completing her DMA in piano performance, she taught for twenty-one years in Portugal. Her stylistic insights and fingering suggestions are grounded in decades of Baroque scholarship and publications, Baroque keyboard pedagogy, as well as recordings and performances on a variety of Baroque keyboard instruments. She is a consummate scholar, pedagogue, and performer of the highest degree.

*An Overview of General Baroque Fingering Concepts* begins with a listing of codices from the Renaissance and is tied to the historical concept of good and bad fingers. Interestingly, Harper provides early paintings from the Renaissance to further illustrate how various hand positions on early keyboard instruments evolved. As a natural segue from these paintings are three hand-drawn diagrams (by Luca Chiantore) of the early Baroque that are coupled with descriptions by Jean-Philippe Rameau on how hand positions are intricately connected with wrists and elbows in keyboard performance.

Without these diagrams as a preamble to Alessandro Scarlatti's unique symbols and fingerings for scales, it would be hard for a modern pianist to make sense of his archaic fingerings. A supple wrist and its position are important to realize a simple C-major scale, where most of the pitches are played by crossing fingers three and four consecutively, with the thumb playing the tonic in the right hand. The left hand appears more conventional until fingers 3-4-5-3-4-5 are indicative of the last six notes of a descending C-major scale.

Three toccatas of Alessandro Scarlatti are provided with his fingerings. While ascending arpeggios can be seen as similar to a modern-day approach, scalar material utilizes the unique 3-4 finger crossings. It is not out of the question to play these works on piano, especially as Harper notes in the case of one of these toccatas, scholarship has suggested they were indeed written for early fortepianos. Other composers writing for the emergent piano include Lodovico Guistini di Pistoia's *Sonata in G Minor*, and Domenico Scarlatti's etudes for piano, *Essercizi per gravicembalo*. Thus, it is clearly argued that the modern piano is a viable instrument for pianists in performing Baroque keyboard music.

After advocating Scarlatti's compositions as viable for the piano, discussion of JS Bach and CPE Bach's keyboard works ensue. Harper ascribes JS Bach as a father of technical innovations for the modern piano, while his son CPE can be considered as a father of fingering for the modern piano. JS Bach's *Aplicato* BWV 994 demonstrates archaic finger crossings, while his *Praeludium* BWV 870a exhibits a repetition of the thumb for adjacent notes. Harper notes that there are musical reasons for considering these archaic fingerings, as in the case of adjacent thumbs, a rhythmic vitality is better achieved.

As a father of the modern school of fingering for piano, CPE Bach's *Essay* is referenced again for a comparison of old and modern fingering approaches. For example, a two-octave G-major scale, both ascending and descending is provided with multiple fingerings to demonstrate several possibilities. After the scale diagrams, another example of CPE Bach's *Clavierstücke für die Rechte oder Linke Hande Allein*, is provided to show how a natural fingering approach can follow the contours of arpeggiated chords.

*Mention of Baroque Women's Contributions* is a wonderful subsection Harper provides for information about notable women composers of the Baroque. A complete prelude from Jacquet de la Guerre's first suite, *Pieces de la Clavessin*, is provided for fingering considerations. It is very inciteful to play through this prelude and follow Harper's five fingering and stylistic guidelines. Among these suggestions are finger slides, finger substitutions, and arpeggiations.

The subsection *Doctrine of Affections (Affekt)* from section four connects broad philosophies of the Baroque era to practical realizations of fingering. How a pianist can identify an *affekt* through analysis of a Baroque keyboard work is outlined in five steps. Harper suggests singing, considering string bowings, woodwind tonguing, harmony, and dance. Once an *Affekt* has been decided upon, then suitable fingerings can be worked out. She provides an example of Domenico Scarlatti's *Sonata in A Major* K. 24 for the *affekt* of joy, with multiple fingering alternatives, especially using the same fingers of both right and left hand for repeated notes. Another example is JS Bach's *C# Major Fugue* BWV 848 (measure 24-25) where the left hand shifts awkwardly. She notes that these fingerings can feel unnatural, even uncomfortable, but nonetheless present phrasing that is more articulated with rhythmic precision.

Section seven begins with the ever-contentious issue of fingering repeated notes. Harper observes that very little exists in the way of JS Bach's own fingering suggestions in his scores. Likewise, Domenico Scarlatti has very few examples—in fact only two exist amongst all his sonatas. His most famous sonata with repeated notes, *Sonata in D Minor* K. 141, is mentioned alongside the legendary recordings of Martha Argerich where Harper provides two alternate fingerings. Harper also notes that this sonata evokes a *punteado* plucking sound of the guitar. In an unusual example of Baroque keyboard playing techniques, an actual glissando is mentioned by Scarlatti in his *F Major Sonata* K. 379 where he simply indicates the glissando as to be played with one finger.

One of the highlights of this book is the last section, *Dancing with the Fingers: A Guide to Understanding Scarlatti's Iberian Sonatas When Choosing Fingering*. It is here where Harper's decades of performance experience, recordings, and scholarship truly shine in her discussion of Domenico Scarlatti's Iberian sonatas. Five tables provide essential information about manuscripts, instruments, Spanish Flamenco elements and rhythms, instrumental effects, among other insightful data. Tables 12.5a and 12.5b are devoted exclusively to the last musical example of the book, Scarlatti's *Sonata in D Major* K. 491, provided in its entirety.

Harper defines this sonata as not only a Bolero, but one that can be literally danced to. With a brief background into the origins of the Bolero and its associations with the *seguidilla*, she provides a guide to understanding its form. Table 12.5a succinctly lists each part of the Bolero with characteristic rhythmic patterns. Table 12.5b translates these sections from table 12.5a with measure numbers for the entire sonata. Beyond performance suggestions for pedaling, tempo, and

articulation, she has written into the score each named part of the Bolero such as Intro, Salida y Deplante, Bien Parado, etc. Playing through this sonata with these named parts is quite a revelation. It is only proper that Harper indicates that she cannot provide exact fingerings—it is up to pianists to look below to their feet for the correct fingerings.

A brief *Conclusion* provides words of encouragement to modern pianists tackling Baroque keyboard music at the piano. Harper believes that the aim of most modern pianists has happily gone towards performing in a way that is historically informed. It is a mistake to blindly follow maxims that can be as injurious to musical style as to physical damage to the arms and hands. Fingering Baroque keyboard works is a beautiful juggling act of one's own scholarship and dealing with the fingers and hands they have been born with. Free of any qualms, Harper states that she no longer experiences any fear for her performances that are historically informed yet might be considered disjointed from a modern audience. Her journey is but one of many successive generations of exploration stemming from as far back as CPE Bach to the present day.

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