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**German Diez, Jose Aldaz
and the
Claudio Arrau School of Piano Playing**

German Diez, Jose Aldaz and Claudio Arrau have been the greatest influences in my life as a pianist. The approach that Maestro Arrau passed on to these two great teachers is rooted in relaxation, flexibility and use of arm weight. The difficult life experience of not playing for sixteen years due to orthopedic and neurological challenges has taught me how crucial it is to play as comfortably as possible. Playing the piano should be an emotional and physical experience that is both natural and cathartic. While public performances can create anxiety, and while one may have experiences with memory slips or wrong notes, the previously mentioned can be minimized when one feels as well as possible at the keyboard. Personally, while I have performed many pieces by memory, including major concerti with orchestras, I see nothing wrong with playing with the music at times if it means that one can do a better job. Many pianists do not have the time to memorize pieces when they hold down other jobs. Using a score can also lead to new observations about the intentions of the composer. There are people who must play with chronic pain due to orthopedic and neurological problems. Sometimes using the score can add greatly to one's confidence until one has had sufficient time to memorize. I firmly believe that if one approaches the piano with relaxation, flexibility and proper use of arm weight in the manner of Maestro Arrau, German Diez and Jose Aldaz, one can exceed one's expectations and grow enormously. The following 10 pictures are intended to serve as a guide. A check list for "Playing Healthy" is included at the end of this section.

In the picture below my hands felt very relaxed and my thumbs were loose. My wrists were at a comfortable height. My fingers were firm and relaxed.



A relaxed hand position on Kaila's Ritmüller piano.

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The pictures on this and the following pages were taken as I was practicing Clair de Lune by Claude Debussy. Each of the following pictures show the importance of feeling relaxed while playing. It is also very important to sit up using the best possible posture.



A relaxed thumb position enhanced by the wonderful Ritmüller key action.

In the above picture, my hands felt very relaxed, my wrists were flexible, my elbow weight was supported by my shoulders and the arm weight was comfortably supported by my hands and shoulders. My thumbs were very relaxed and my fingers were a bit curved .

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The picture above also shows how relaxed the inside of my left hand is while my right hand is carried into position by my wrist so that there is not straining involved. The pictures on the following page also show relaxed thumbs and hands with wrists that are in a comfortable position, My arm weight is comfortably hanging from my shoulders while my elbows are very loose.

Having relaxed thumbs has a monumental effect on playing.



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Kaila uses hand flexibility while using the middle pedal to mute her piano.

Having loose elbows and a flexible wrist aid in muscle control and shading. Playing from the shoulders is truly the way to have the most control over your fingers. The following picture may clarify the concept of playing from the shoulders. Keeping the elbows loose allows the energy to flow from the shoulders and allows for the pushing of weight into the keys.



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It is very important to keep the elbows loose and free from being cramped. This allows the wrists freedom and flexibility. It allows the weight to be distributed from the shoulders in a way that allows playing into the keys for legato (connected notes) and playing off the keys for staccato (short, disconnected notes). Phrasing and slurring are literally there at your finger tips when the shoulders, elbows, wrists and fingers feel weightless and positioned naturally. The following picture shows this concept of weightlessness and relaxation. The finger joints are very relaxed. Even when playing fast runs, one can keep their hands in this position by just making slight movements of the fingers.



Kaila feels very secure using a piano because it suits her neurological and pianistic goals. She needs the resistance that the action gives her.

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Check List for Healthy Piano Playing

1. ___ keep fingers close to keys
2. ___ keep fingers firm, slightly curved and relaxed
3. ___ keep thumbs very loose and relaxed
4. ___ wrist feels weightless
5. ___ wrist can easily rotate
6. ___ elbows are loose and not cramped too close to the body
7. ___ weight is dropped from the shoulders and upper arms
8. ___ good sitting posture to the best of one's ability

