

## Organic Concept in Rolf-Dieter Arens's Piano Teaching Strategy

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### Abstract

Rolf-Dieter Arens is a distinguished and revered musical figure with a career spanning more than fifty years as a concert pianist, chamber musician, and educator. His innovative teachings have influenced professional pianists, teachers, and students worldwide. The purpose of this study is to document and explain Arens's distinct piano teaching approach. Data collection methods were participant observation, interviews with students and communication with Arens. Arens' teaching strategies involve ideas such as the establishment of goals, modelling, listening, visualisation, deconstruction of the musical structure, and subdivision support. However, a major distinction in Arens's teaching as compared to others is the notion that techniques and artistic interpretation are a holistic unit and are taught simultaneously rather than compartmentally is common. Another major aspect of Arens's teaching approach involves what is called the "organic" flow which is an understanding of how the musical structure should regulate the artistic and technical decisions for performance. This study provides a substantial guide and reference to pianists and pedagogues who wish to expand their perspectives in the process of music-making as well as improve their teaching and performance techniques.

*Keywords:* methods, pedagogy, piano, *Rolf-Dieter Arens*, teacher

### Introduction

Many piano teachers at the tertiary level desire to produce well-trained students who in turn can go forth as performers and teachers themselves. Numerous piano pedagogues and authors have exhaustively examined the components of piano playing including techniques, articulations, stylistic interpretation, memorisation, and performance techniques (Jacobson, 2015). Piano instructors frequently teach these components in a fragmented (Heavner, 2005) or intuitive fashion (as cited in Holmgren, 2020, p. 108). Among some of the problems with teaching these components separately is that the student has disconnected knowledge about these components of piano performance, and they may also struggle to apply them in actual performance.

Rolf-Dieter Arens, a prominent piano pedagogue, has an approach that addresses the concern of fragmented piano instruction. His strategy involves a synthesis of the cognitive (musicianship and stylistic interpretation), affective (expressive elements and emotion), and psychomotor (techniques, tone production, and rhythmic impulse) in a holistic manner. His pedagogical philosophies have proven widely influential as evidenced by his responsibilities as a jury in international piano competitions, masterclasses held worldwide as well as his students' outstanding success. Hence, Arens's approach to piano teaching merits scholarly attention as it has wide-ranging benefits for performers and pedagogues alike. Nonetheless, there is a dearth of materials that seeks to investigate and explain Arens's approach to piano instruction. Thus, the purpose of this study is to examine Arens's teaching strategy focusing primarily on how he synthesises different components of piano playing in a holistic manner. This study could benefit piano teachers by providing an alternative way of piano pedagogy for teachers who are helping with their students' piano performances. Furthermore, this will help students to understand the process of integrating these components into a singular idea for performance.

## Literature Review

Rolf-Dieter Arens is a pianist and pedagogue who has influenced many performers and piano teachers through his teaching at schools of music in Leipzig, Weimar, and Salaya, and numerous master classes and adjudication duties involving various music festivals and competitions such as the International FRANZ LISZT Piano Competition. Before this document, there had not been any study undertaken to illustrate Rolf-Dieter Arens's contributions to piano pedagogy. Information about his life and professional activities are available from various sources on the website such as the International FRANZ LISZT Piano Competition Weimar-Bayreuth (<https://www.hfm-weimar.de>), Liszt Utrecht (<https://www.liszt.nl>), Summer Music Academy in Hundisburg (<http://www.sma-hundisburg.de>), and discographies (<https://www.discogs.com>). However, these resources gave no information concerning his teaching techniques. The study of Arens's life, teaching, and contributions will provide invaluable information and acumen for pianists and pedagogues.

There is substantial literature devoted to examining the teaching strategy and philosophies of prominent piano pedagogues. Ernst (2012) studied the teaching approach of Marvin Blickenstaff as well as described Blickenstaff's philosophy, lesson content, and teaching techniques. A complete listing of publications and recording of his lessons, classes, interviews, and surveys were all well documented and discussed thoroughly. Research studies on other eminent pedagogues in the United States of America include Marrienne Uszler by Beres (2003), Jane Bastien by Burns (2011), James Lyke by Choi (2012) and Clarence A. Burg by Owen (1997). The studies of renowned concert pianists who dedicated their lives to teaching include Arthur Schnabel by Sossner (1986), Claudio Arrau by von Arx (2006), Olga Samaroff by van Beck (2004), Mieczyslaw Munz by Lee (2016), and Ann Schein by Gray (2021). Each of these studies has a similar focus to Ernst's (2012) with an emphasis on the pedagogue's life, contributions, philosophy, and piano techniques, but only a few of them explain teaching strategies in detail.

Surveys on the teaching elements of piano techniques from distinguished piano pedagogues and authors of methods books were evaluated by Knerr (2006). The findings of Knerr's (2006) study were organised into six technical components of piano teaching with their subdivision, which are: 1) Philosophy: techniques and teaching; 2) Basic components: posture, hand position, tone production, and playing apparatus, contraction and relaxation, mind/body relationship; 3) Exercises: gymnastic exercises and exercises; 4) Movement at the keyboard: physical and lateral movement; 5) Fundamental forms: five-finger pattern, rotation, and scales; 6) Basic musical inflection: articulation (legato and staccato), rhythm, dynamic and tonal control, tone quality, and tempo. This categorisation is used as a guide for organising this research study.

Selected studies on prominent pedagogues from South-East Asia also provide valuable perspectives. Santoso (2013) discusses the contribution of Indonesian pianist Irvati Sudiarmo with a great deal of information containing biography, professional activities, teaching content, and approach. The multifaceted concert pianist and pedagogue Reynaldo Reyes was examined by Porticos (2017). In the study, Porticos (2017) shared a fresh perspective on Reyes's concepts and techniques in performance and teaching strategy. The mechanism, position and movements of the playing apparatus (the fingers, wrist, elbow, and shoulder) are extensively discussed as well as the formation of a sound image that is based on stylistic performance practice. Similar to Arens's perspective, Reyes emphasises the importance of rhythm and pulse, which serves as the driving force for motion (Porticos, 2017).

Brown (2009) described the life and professional activities of the German-born Menahem Pressler. Brown (2009) discussed Pressler's teaching philosophy, technical approach (which includes strong fingers technique), the concept of relaxed arms (which includes exercises), and principles for achieving expressive performance through emotion, phrasing, rhythm, tone quality, and colour. Furthermore, the document includes examples of Pressler's words and technical instructions that can be used as a performance and practice guide. Pressler's teaching exhibits some resemblance to Arens's.

Von Arx (2006) elaborated comprehensive discussions on the teaching of renowned performer-teacher Claudio Arrau. The study examines Arrau's philosophy, techniques, artistry, and interpretation as well as student recollections of Arrau's teaching. One of Arrau's major teaching points is that the primary factor in achieving optimal artistic expression is for the performer's body and mind to work in unison (von Arx, 2006). Arrau's ability to produce expressive sound, round tone, and flexibility, according to von Arx (2006), is dependent on relaxation. The relaxation which liberates a performer from muscle stiffness lays the groundwork for the emotional and physical responses to work in harmony (von Arx, 2006). Relaxation does not imply weakness but rather a state of firmness without stiffness. Arrau's concept of a

unified and coordinated flow of physical mechanism, artistic intention and technique served as a critical reference point for the study.

According to Sandor (1981), the way a pianist attacks the keyboard or the way the motion is employed will determine the sound production. This implies that technique and music-making are not separate concepts. The ability to use appropriate techniques while performing great compositions is one of the primary goals of performers. Furthermore, the essential factors that transform techniques into artistry include pedalling techniques, the art of practising, memorisation, musical expression, and well-informed public performance (Sandor, 1981). Nevertheless, the most crucial aspect of piano techniques is not only the physical aspect or technical drill but also the mental aspect which includes the clarity of tonal image, musical idea, and listening to oneself while playing (Kochevitsky, 1996). The mental-physical relationship is further clarified by Li and Timmers (2021) who stated that the production of piano timbre is realised effectively only by co-constructing conceptions between the teachers and the students, which are enacted through bodily experience and embodied through performance actions. The conceptual framework of this idea serves as the foundation for this study.

Given the strong correlation between artistry and stylistic interpretation, it is critical that this research is connected to performance practice through an examination of various nationalistic piano schools. Lourenço (2010) evaluated technical and interpretative elements, repertoire preference, sonority, tempo, pedal use, and pedagogical approach in three distinct European nationalistic piano schools: Russian, German, and French. In regard to the German school, he stated that this school favoured dynamic balance, consistent tempo, respect for rhythmic structure, clarity of lines, voice leading, phrasing, and articulation (Lourenço, 2010). One of the well-known concert pianist-teachers who represents the German tradition is Arthur Schnabel. In the discussion about Schnabel's interpretative approach, Wolff (1979) systematised Schnabel's idea by relating it to technical and interpretative aspects such as melodic structure, musical direction, and articulations, which consist of melodic, harmonic, metric, and rhythmic articulations. Wolff (1979) explained and clarified some interpretative and expressive aspects of Schnabel's which are difficult and intricate to explain. Schnabel's approach to teaching which dwells upon the formal aspect of the music rather than piano techniques was examined by Sossner (1986).

With the complexity of the physical and mental processes associated with piano playing and instructional strategies, the following research questions are explored in this study:

1. What makes Rolf-Dieter Arens's approach to pedagogy unique and beneficial for performers and pedagogues?
2. What specific teaching strategies does Rolf-Dieter Arens use to implement his pedagogical approach?
3. How does he implement the teaching strategies in his piano lessons?

## Methodology

Based on the fact that this research does not begin with a hypothesis but rather seeks to explore, describe, and analyse Rolf-Dieter Arens's pedagogical content and approach, descriptive case study approach is the most appropriate research design. This research comes as a part of the thesis for a doctoral program in performance and pedagogy at Mahidol University. Rolf-Dieter Arens, four of his professional colleagues, and thirteen of his former and current students took part as participants. Interviews and observational data were gathered during the data collection period that began in June and ended in October 2019.

There are two types of interviews: one with Arens and one with his students and colleagues. The interview with Arens is categorised into five components: Arens's personal background, educational background, his career as a performer, his career as a pedagogue, and miscellaneous queries that support the study (e.g., his experience as a piano competition adjudicator). The researcher interviewed Arens at Mahidol University's College of Music, Salaya Campus, Thailand where he served as a guest professor during this period. This interview was videotaped for archival purposes. The interview with his students and colleagues was designed to elicit respondents' personal experiences with Arens including thoughts and perspectives on his significant contribution to piano pedagogy as well as a description of Arens's concepts, artistry, performance, technique, and teaching strategies. Thirteen students and four colleagues of different nationalities (Germany, Japan, Philippines, Indonesia, and Thailand) participated in the interview. A single interview session was held with each participant. The interviews took place at the College of Music, Mahidol University Salaya Campus, Thailand. Former students and colleagues who do not live in Thailand as well as students who live in Thailand but were unable to participate in the face-to-

face interview were given a written interview. The researcher collected interview responses either in written form or via audio recording. When further clarification or questions were needed, the researcher contacted participants via email, instant messaging platform or video call.

The empirical data were gathered by observing Arens's lessons with other students, master classes, chamber rehearsals, and Arens's private practice sessions. These observations were documented through written notes and video recordings. The researcher substantiated the findings by collecting commentaries, notes, and marked music scores from the researcher's three years of weekly private lessons with Arens. The score analysis was selected from the repertoire list of the researcher's private studies with Arens, namely Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's *Piano Sonata No. 10 in C major, K. 330*, Robert Schumann's *Faschingsschwank aus Wien, Op. 26*, Johannes Brahms's *Variations and Fugue on a Theme by Handel, Op. 24* as well as Franz Liszt's *Grandes Études de Paganini, S.141* and *Sonata in B minor, S. 178*.

The collected data were classified into two categories: stated and observed. All of Arens's stated and observed philosophies, concepts, techniques and teaching strategies on performance, and pedagogy were subject to evaluation. Participant observations of Arens's unstated but demonstrated practical instructions or suggestions were recorded and paraphrased using the researcher's own terminology, narration, and description.

The researcher gained information about Arens's concepts and techniques by observing him teaching, practising, and rehearsing. Six teaching strategies were identified and decided as a result of these observations. The findings were verified and clarified during the interview with Arens. This interview explained his teaching and performance philosophy, piano techniques, teaching approach, life experiences, and contributions to the piano world. The interviews with Arens's students and colleagues substantiated the data by providing details about Arens's performances, piano techniques, life experience working with Arens as well as perspectives on his teaching. Each student mentioned Arens's teaching strategies, which were collectively represented in six distinct strategies.

## Result

The research finding reveals that Arens's core philosophy of music-making is distinct and based on the concept of "organic". This concept refers to a relationship between elements that essentially allows them to coexist harmoniously and exhibits continuous and natural development as a unified entity. This notion implies that technique is a means to express human thought and feeling, and their relationship cannot be done separately from artistic interpretation. This organic concept not only applies to the context of performance (which includes interpretation, artistry, and technique) but also in teaching.

The foundation of Arens's teaching includes the coordination of the playing mechanism with mental image, emotion, listening, and rhythmic impulse. The development of a mental image of the music which also includes stylistic interpretation is associated with the cognitive domain. The translation of the mental image to one's emotion through expressive elements (dynamics, tempo, and articulation) is related to the affective domain. Lastly, physical coordination along with rhythmic impulses belong to the psychomotor domain. To synthesise and unify the different components, he employs six teaching strategies. These teaching strategies include establishing goals, modelling, listening, visualisation, deconstruction of musical structure, and subdivision support. These six techniques encapsulate the spontaneous flow that Arens advocates in his teaching.

### Establishing Goals

Establishing goals is the process of identifying and setting measurable objectives and time frames to achieve the desired outcomes. This strategy does not mean only learning and dividing the musical piece into sections or movements that the student will focus on during a lesson. For Arens, goal setting is more about the image of the sound one wants before actual playing. This happens through the analysis and assimilation of the structural elements of the music (such as melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic aspects) and the expressive elements (dynamics, time, and articulations). The assimilation process of these components should not be viewed in isolation but rather as a process that occurs in conjunction with one another.

As a prerequisite for excellent artistic performance, he reinforces this strategy in every lesson and music-making to ensure that the artistic goal will be vivid in the student's mind. Arens stated, "Know what you want, know how to do it, know what you are doing, and know how to practise it" (personal

communication, September 13, 2019). Through this notion, it is clear that the body mechanism and their movements are largely determined by the interpretation or image formed by the pianist. The formulation of this interpretation must not be an abstract form but ought to be specific and concrete with musical intent. Without this solid intention, the body would not know how to move accordingly, or it would only move intuitively rather than with clear intention. Thus, unclear goals in the pianist's mental image, as well as physical movements, may cause nervousness and insecurity during a performance.

### **Modelling**

Modelling is an instructional strategy in which the teacher demonstrates a new concept or approach to learning while students observe (Salisu & Ransom, 2014). Arens shares his musical ideas by demonstration and explanation at the same time. His instructions are always specific and clear in the context of the music. During the interview, he made his point about the importance and benefit of modelling as a strategy: "It is very important for teachers to be able to demonstrate or perform for the students, so students will learn by listening and seeing the movements" (personal communication, September 13, 2019).

The modelling strategy allows the student to learn by observing the working force of the mechanism visually and the outcome aurally as different movements of the playing mechanism affect the sound production. Thus, the student will be able to grasp the various concepts of piano playing as one holistic unit. Nevertheless, it needs to be clarified that the purpose of modelling is not to impose his own musical interpretation or to promote thoughtless imitation and repetition. Arens appreciates each student's individuality and creativity as long as the principles of natural flow are fulfilled. Thus, thoughtful modelling will synthesise and assimilate what they see and hear into their own playing.

Arens frequently imitated the way students played and asked whether this was the intended outcome. If the sound was not what the student intended, he would make an adjustment. Thus, the student can draw comparisons between the sound ideal in mind and the real outcome of the performance. It is necessary to emphasise that the modelling strategy will be successful only if the pianist has a clear understanding of the musical ideal. The role of modelling strategy assists students in hearing and visualising the desired outcome vividly as well as serving as a guide for students' inner hearing (sound ideal), physical movement, and control, all of which are evaluated through attentive listening.

Another kind of modelling strategy that Arens employs to assist his students to improve their artistry and musicality is to have them listen to recordings of great pianists or, more specifically, to have them listen carefully while Arens plays. Through listening, students will internalise an overall concept of the music.

### **Listening**

Listening is a strategy for acquiring information by paying close attention to the sound production. Arens repeatedly mentioned to his students that "One must learn how to listen for their own playing. Practise by playing the melody alone and control the musical lines. Condition the ear by listening, feeling, and finding the balance" (personal communication, September 13, 2019).

Listening to one's own playing might be very difficult. Many times, the focus of attention is diverted to what one sees rather than the actual produced sounds, especially in highly technical passages. According to Arens, intense listening to each melodic line while practising each hand separately is crucial for gaining control of all musical layers or lines (personal communication, September 13, 2019). Participant TG recalled, "he [Arens] told me to listen to all the lines, which means playing each line with a separate hand and listening until all the individual lines are clear in my mind" (personal communication, February 13, 2019). Listening to one's own playing is valuable to achieve control, the right nuances, and balance. In other words, the function of listening is to evaluate whether the actual sound produced matches the desired sound.

In the interview, Arens stated that attentive listening during a performance is not an easy task. To perform successfully while listening, a performer must have excellent body coordination, a high degree of relaxation, a vivid mental image of the sound ideal, an emotional connection, and the ability to feel the body, mind, and emotions moving in unison. Without these abilities ingrained in the student, the listening process will be disrupted (personal communication, September 13, 2019).

## Visualisation

Visualisation is an instructional approach that employs the formation of mental images or pictures in the mind to acquire clarity of musical concepts as well as accuracy in the performance. Visualisation through visual imagery has been an effective way to communicate both abstract and concrete ideas as well as increase critical thinking (Cohen, 2016). To facilitate learning, Arens uses visualisation technique, especially for students who have trouble understanding musical concepts. This strategy is invaluable in assisting students to mentally internalise the musical concept and body movement. Thus, visualisation will promote coordination between the mind and the body.

Observation reveals that Arens's strategies in employing visualisation techniques are established by focusing on three different directions. First, his focus is directed at the score in mind or photographic memory (Ford, 1996). In this strategy, he sees the score in his mind like a series of photos or a clip of film (personal communication, September 13, 2019). All the notes with the details are clearly pictured.

Secondly, Arens encourages his students to focus on the tactile and spatial aspects of piano playing by mentally visualising their hand positions and movements including the touch and stroke on the keyboard. Often, pianists rely solely on their eyes to perform accurately. As a result, their ears are closed to listen and their eyes are used exclusively to control their body movement. Accuracy can be improved by mentally visualising the target ahead. Concentrating on sight may impair the flow of piano playing particularly during extremely fast movements. Thus, pianists should avoid relying on their eyes to guide their hands and bodies but rather use their "mind's eyes". According to one of his students, "During the difficult sections particularly when there are a lot of skips, Arens told me to visualise where the hands must go and to feel the distance and position of the hands prior to the actual playing" (personal communication, November 27, 2018).

Finally, the third aspect focuses on sound production. This involves clarifying the musical intention and strategising about how to achieve the sound ideal which is critical during rehearsals. Arens repeatedly said that "one must learn how to listen to their own playing, condition the ear by listening and at the same time feeling the movement of the body and find the balance to achieve the desired sound" (personal communication, September 13, 2019). Accurate execution, as well as a smooth and powerful performance, can be achieved when the notes, sounds, and body motions are clear in the mind and the hands and body know where and how to go.

To improve tactile perception and coordination between the body, ears (listening), and imagery, Arens employs the technique of practising with his eyes closed. The researcher was permitted to observe Arens during his practice sessions particularly when he was preparing for a recital. He practised at a slow, medium or fast tempo with his eyes closed. Occasionally, it was performed with both hands or with each hand separately.

To teach the concept of "organic", Arens teaches his students to visualise the musical design as a whole as well as in detail. He emphasises expressive sounds by looking at their elements which are dynamics, tempo, and articulations. Every contour of melodies and phrases is pictured in the imagination and felt in the heart (personal communication, September 13, 2019). He would ask the student to visualise the harmonic changes to find the direction of the nuances.

To demonstrate Arens's teaching concept, the researcher created excerpts of marked music scores represented in Figures 1 to 10. Figure 1 illustrates the harmonic structure and harmonic changes that Arens wants his students to imagine. To maintain an organic flow, Arens suggested visualising the melodic line and harmonic structure in the inner hearing as illustrated in Figure 2. Figure 3 illustrates how Arens visualises the synthesis of phrase structure and dynamic gradation.

Be careful: Tendency to accent

Figure 1. Schumann, *Faschingschwank aus Wien, Op. 26, Allegro, mm. 340–347*



Figure 2. Schumann, *Faschingsschwank aus Wien*, Op. 26, Allegro, mm. 341–346

mm. 276 – 280	281 – 285	286 – 289	290 – 293	294 – 300	301 – 308	309 – 312	313 – 316	317 – 324
<i>pp</i> ( <i>cress</i> )	<i>p</i> ( <i>cress</i> )	<i>mp</i> ( <i>cress</i> )	<i>mf-f</i> ( <i>cress</i> )	<i>ff</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>p</i> ( <i>cress</i> )	<i>mp</i> ( <i>cress</i> )	<i>mf</i> ( <i>cress</i> )
Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Level 4	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4

Figure 3. Schumann, *Faschingsschwank aus Wien*, Op. 26, Allegro, mm. 276–324

The nature of articulation is always directly related to the shape of the musical structure rather than to the single element of the phrase (Wolff, 1979). The researcher noted that one of the difficulties in achieving organic flow is the disruption caused by the agogic sensation of the finger, arm or even bodyweight. To control this unnecessary accent and refine the melodic line, Arens employs the visualisation strategy. Figure 4 is an example of how he visualises the phrase outline. The encircled notes are the area in which the pianist should exercise control due to the agogic sensation of the thumb.



Figure 4. Schumann, *Faschingsschwank aus Wien*, Op. 26, Allegro, mm. 1–8

To establish the proper tempo and tone production in the opening section, he would instruct the student to visualise himself conducting an orchestra or choir and feeling the cue gesture of the entrance. He described the procedure as follows (with gestures of conducting): feel the tempo inside – preparatory cue – breath – execution. One of his students recalled his advice, “do not be a pianist, but a musician; play as if you are a conductor; listen attentively to what you play” (personal communication, May 26, 2019).

### Deconstruction of Musical Structure

Deconstruction of the musical structure is a teaching strategy that involves dissecting, analysing, and simplifying the basic construction of the piece. This strategy reduces and simplifies the task of the pianist, allowing the mind to focus on a specific task or objective. The focus of the attention may be on a single melodic line, melody-bass relationship, tempo, change of dynamic levels or gradation of intensity. This procedure assists students in internalising musical syntax in great detail, paying close attention to technical detail, and solidifying interpretation.

As part of the deconstruction strategy, Arens places the perspective into a vertical-linear relationship while examining details and connecting them to the broader view of the entire score. Participant HY mentioned,

He [Arens] aims for his students to see the big picture or big plan of the music first, then focus on little details such as wrong notes. Many teachers focus on the small details first and therefore losing the big picture. But, Arens deals with the difficulties of the meticulous detail later after the

big picture is established. (personal communication, June 10, 2019)

This strategy scrutinises the overall construction of the piece as a whole and then breaks it down into smaller components such as sections, periods, phrase units, and short motives or segments. Following an in-depth examination, the pianist is encouraged to bring back the small components to the broader context. This is the point at which the various components of music-making become unified into a single idea. This strategy serves as a gateway for the formation of a new perspective on musical performance.

The deconstruction method is a very essential strategy to achieve a higher level of artistic performance for all the details conveyed and highlighted. Arens would deconstruct the homophonic passage into different layers and articulate each layer expressively as if it were a polyphonic texture. The vertical aspect of harmonic progression—for instance, the bass part—would be perceived horizontally as an inner melody or countermelody. A similar conception featured in Schnabel's interpretation that seemingly static pedal point must be articulated well because it still has a melodic substance (Wolff, 1979). Figure 5 shows an example of how he deconstructs the homophonic passage into layers.

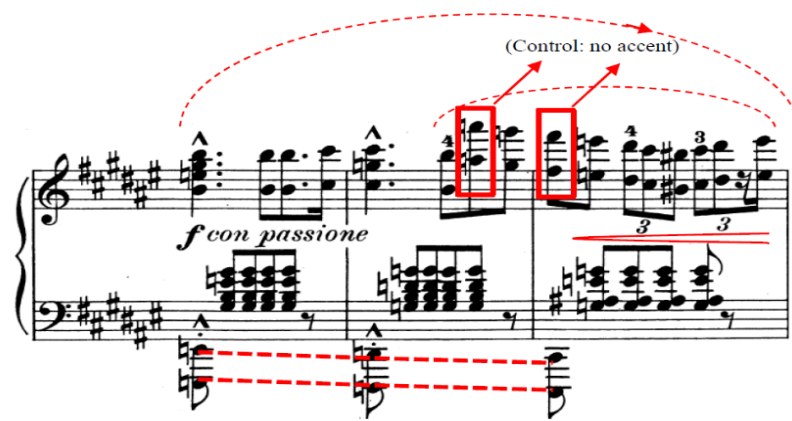


Figure 5. Liszt, *Sonata in B minor*, mm. 367–369

### Subdivision Support

Subdivision support is a strategy in which the teacher provides accompaniment in an ostinato pattern that has a smaller value than the part played by the student. This subdivision support may also be played by the student himself by maintaining the melodic line and substituting the original version of accompaniment with a new simplified ostinato in a smaller value. Arens uses subdivision support for the following purposes:

1. To assure the accuracy of rhythm or tempo.
2. To create awareness of the smooth connection between notes and the change of dynamic colour throughout the melodic line.
3. To reinforce the feeling of natural pulse in the body and mind.

This strategy is often used when students lose the natural pulse of music or when the long line is disconnected or disrupted by unnecessary accents. One of his students stated, “In music-making, Arens put importance on feeling the hidden pulse. Feeling the pulse within is helpful in solving many musical problems” (personal communication, June 10, 2019).

Apart from providing the accompaniment in an ostinato pattern on a second piano, he frequently reinforces the concept by instructing the student to play the subdivision or simplified accompaniment on the left hand and the melody on the right hand, both of which should be played in a very musical manner with all the different dynamic levels and nuance. This strategy assists in conditioning the ear to hear the smooth connections within the musical passage, remembering the natural flow of the body and reducing significantly disconnected lines or unmusical accents.

The formation of the rhythmic impulse within will not only contribute to the accuracy of tempo or rhythm and reduce the disruption of the smooth melodic line in one's performance, but also solve some technical and execution problems such as stiffness of the body and inability to play at the given speed.





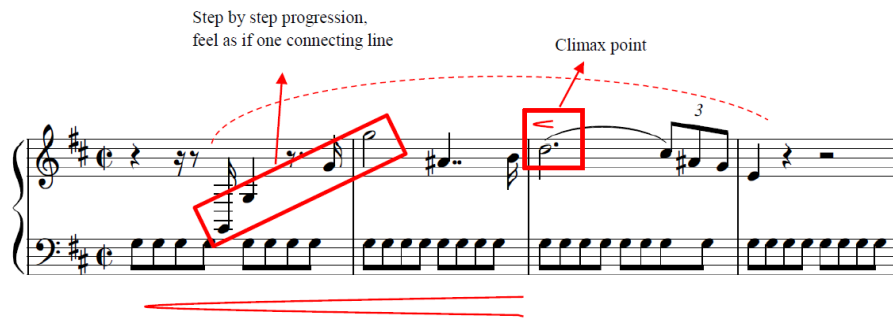


Figure 9. Liszt, *Sonata in B minor*, mm. 8–11

## Discussion

In establishing artistic goals in piano playing, Arens would make the student understand the musical concept, tone quality, and how to achieve it. In a way that is similar to what Arens does, Kochevitsky (1996) explained the importance of goal establishment:

When a pianist realises a given musical idea, the tonal image, the auditory stimulation (conditional stimulus), must always precede the motor reaction (unconditional stimulus), in performance as well as in practising. The musical incentive has to be a signal provoking the motor activity. Otherwise the latter, the technique, can easily become an end itself. (p. 28)

Further, Kochevitsky clarifies his point with a scheme: see → hear inwardly → move → hear actually → control (Kochevitsky, 1996). The second link of the process, which is hearing inwardly, is the starting point for formulating the musical idea and serves as a conditional stimulus that will stimulate body movement to produce the sound. The visualised tonal timbre in piano playing is deeply connected through in-the-moment body movement and sensation (Li & Timmers, 2021). Thus, creating the sound ideal in one's inner hearing is crucial for physical motion and control. Integrated with this listening strategy, the established sound ideal will be compared and contrasted with the actual sound production. The performance actions and gestures are adjusted and driven by auditory anticipation as an action-perception loop (Li & Timmers, 2021). The activity of matching one's mental image of sound to the real sound is what Arens understands as control. However, what distinguishes Arens from Kochevitsky is that Arens considers emotion to be one of the most important factors in formulating sound ideals. As he stated, "The sound image or musical concept must be vivid in the mind, experienced in the emotion, and felt in the body motion as a unity of synchronised process" (personal communication, September 13, 2019).

In the relationship between the notes and melodic lines, there is a striking resemblance between Pressler's teaching and Arens. Pressler commented:

Pianist must pay careful attention to the relationship of the notes, such as the decay in volume of a long note and matching the following note's attack to the decay ... Always, after a long note, start softly. Otherwise, you accent. (as cited in Brown, 2009, p. 68)

In handling the unnecessary accent on a long musical idea, Arens suggests a similar case by visualising a plan for dynamic change. Figure 10 illustrates how he lays out the dynamic plan. Through this visualisation, the vivid musical intention will generate coordination in the playing mechanism.

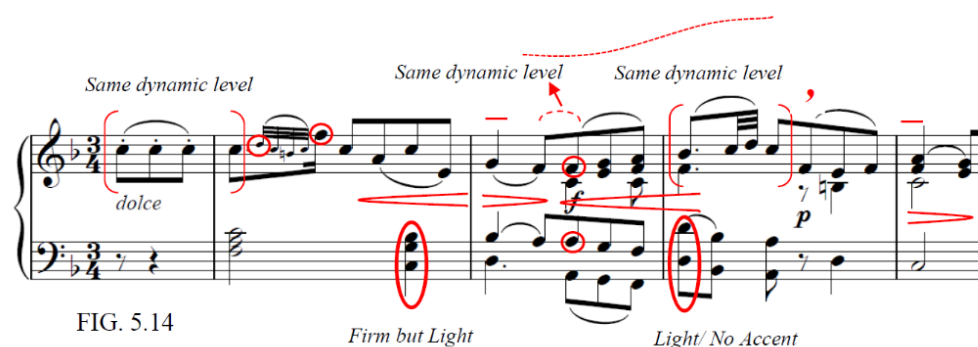


FIG. 5.14

Firm but Light

Light/ No Accent

Figure 10. Mozart, *Piano Sonata No. 10 in C major, K. 330*, 2<sup>nd</sup> movement, mm. 1–4

Arens's interpretative concept belongs to the German tradition exemplified by Edwin Fischer and Arthur Schnabel. In regard to melodic direction, Arens has a very identical approach to Schnabel's. Schnabel uses three forms of melodic direction, which are upward, downward, and stationary direction (Wolff, 1979). Although Arens did not use those technical terms, Arens was able to elaborate and clarify the concept by employing modelling and subdivision support strategies. In particular, the subdivision support is very instrumental in enforcing the rhythmic pulse and gradation of dynamic change.

To create awareness of the smooth melodic line, one should feel the natural pulse in the body and mind. The interaction between rhythmic impulses and body motion is initiated by breathing. Arens stated that "breathing is so important for performance control, tempo setting, nuance making, facilitating body movement to produce a beautiful tone and as a tool for nervousness control" (personal communication, September 13, 2019). The importance of breathing is also mentioned by Arrau in the interview with his pupil Ena Bronstein-Barton: "The tone quality comes from inside, it doesn't even come from the arms, it doesn't come from dropping in the arms; it comes from your breathing, through the arms ... So it gives ease and freedom" (as cited in von Arx, 2006, p. 87). Thus, breathing should be visualised in the mind and felt in one's body before the music is performed.

In essence, all of Arens's teaching strategies are methods for synthesising disparate elements into a unified entity that moves, grows, and flows naturally. This is what he means by the word "organic", which he repeatedly mentioned during lessons. In the interview, one of Arens's students stated:

"Organic" is the word that I always hear from him in almost every piano lesson. Organic crescendo, organic ritardando, organic ending, etc. It refers to how natural we feel and approach the music, that the music has its own direction and moves in a natural way. (personal communication, May 29, 2019)

### **Limitations and Implications**

The study of Arens's philosophy of music-making, pedagogical content and teaching strategy may inspire young pianists as well as piano teachers. In the future, it would be fascinating to conduct a deeper study of Arens's life in a full biographical document and make it available in print. Data acquisition might be a challenge due to a lack of documentation. However, it is still possible by employing a historical research method. In the area of piano pedagogy, this study can be developed further by focusing on the methodology and curriculum based on Arens's concept of techniques and artistry. A systematic approach should be laid out so that the implementation of the concepts can be applied at different levels and age groups.

Piano pedagogy research that emphasises a balanced synthesis of the various components of piano playing is presently needed to assist piano teachers in structuring their teaching and unifying fragmented instructions. Thus, the documentation of Arens's teaching, especially the way he translates abstract concepts into practical and detailed teaching strategies, becomes invaluable information that can serve as an illustration and living example to anyone who aspires to be an excellent teacher.

### **Conclusion**

Rolf-Dieter Arens's contributions and successes as a mentor and performer serve as examples for serious pianists and piano teachers who would like to apply a holistic approach to performance and piano teaching. Arens's fundamental concept of music-making is "organic" flows, which implies bringing together the relationship of different elements as a unified entity that moves, connects and develops in a natural flow. To inculcate the "organic" flows of music-making, he employs some teaching strategies that synthesise different components of piano playing into concrete instructions. These strategies are the establishment of goals, modelling, listening, visualisation, deconstruction of musical structure, and subdivision support. These six strategies are invaluable to piano teachers and performers who would like to instil mastery over their playing mechanism and body motion that move in correlation with their mental image (an artistic interpretation), emotions, listening, and rhythmic impulse of the music. The blend between artistry and technical aspect of piano playing takes place when the ideal musical image is vivid in the mind, experienced in the emotion, and felt in the body as one organic flow of a synchronised process.

The pedagogy of piano, which is based on the synthesis of the cognitive (musicianship and stylistic interpretation), affective (expressive elements and emotion), and psychomotor (techniques, tone production, and rhythmic impulse) should be incorporated into the curriculum and teaching plan by piano teachers. It is the piano teacher's responsibility to connect the dots of knowledge into one body. By so doing, the components of piano playing will be understood holistically and have direct relevancy to achieving the main goal of excellent performance.

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### **Biography**

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