**Sergei Saratovsky**

**Statement of Teaching Philosophy**

*Educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all.*

*Aristotle*

During the last twenty years I have actively practiced the craft of a concert pianist. Alongside my performing career I have continuously been tutoring, mentoring, and teaching piano to students of all stages including those at the post-secondary level. As a result, these two kinds of activities – performing and teaching – have become inseparably intertwined, significantly enriching and complementing each other. The emerging themes of my stance as a pedagogue are thus closely related to the initial matters of my growth as a performing artist and include: providing a solid approach to the instrument, inspiring and motivating, mentoring and guiding by personal example; but also, developing the whole person.

**Providing a solid approach to the instrument**

Many musicians, musicologists, performers, and pedagogues (including myself) would agree that the technical basis is clearly the secondary to interpretation. However, the only way to get students ready for musical interpretation is to provide them a solid foundation in piano technique. I always convey to my students that technique does not consist only of finger dexterity or velocity. Rather, it is the combination of all musical and extramusical elements including command of time, creative use of pedaling, hand choreography and body language, capacity to adjust to any instrument or acoustical dimension, ability to treat the piano non percussively and create any sound beyond the piano realm, and playing in such a way as to prevent injury, among others. True, many students possess sufficient knowledge of basic technique but they often don’t know how to apply this information in order to organize their own practicing more efficiently. As such, I try to use the students’ previous experience to help accelerate the learning process and further advance their technique.

**Inspiring and motivating**

Considering the fact that every student is more than a mere sum of psychological, mental, emotional, and other components, I am convinced that one of the main and initial goals for a teacher is to find a key to a unique mindset of each individual student. To achieve this purpose, I apply an effective technique of active (empathic) listening, which helps to build trust and respect, encourages students to release their emotions and express their ideas, and creates a safe and productive environment in a classroom. In addition, to inspire and motivate students I strive to make the learning process gradual, logically progressive, and consistent. It is crucial for a student to realize that the repertoire should correspond with his or her current level since either too challenging or too easy tasks might discourage the creative process and growth.

**Mentoring and guiding by personal example**

To me, education is not only about sharing knowledge and information, but also about bringing up or forming a person. The relationship between a music instructor and a student often becomes quite personal and close-knit, as we see each other not only in a classroom, but also in many different contexts: in rehearsals, on stage, as members of the audience, etc. One of the bases of my pedagogical activity is an awareness that my relationship with the students does not exist only in a classroom. I consider any type of encounter with my students as a possible learning situation. Personal example is much more efficient in the educational process than any theoretical or abstract constructions, however brilliant. This is why my experience as a concert pianist is essentially important in my teaching. This experience, on the one hand, helps me to understand all the challenges which are faced by students at each phase of their artistic development: from choosing the repertoire, memorizing, interpretation to coping with performance anxiety and behaviour on stage. On the other hand, students being aware of my active involvement in performing career accept and incorporate my practical advice more thoughtfully.

**Developing the whole person**

Learning music does not only imply refining technique, understanding the style of a particular composer and era, or even a vast immersion in various arts in general. These are all essential aspects one has to acquire and be taught in order to comprehend and interpret a musical work. Nevertheless, to let sounds become music, and then to let music become art one should draw inspiration from all other experiences of life such as: an interaction with the co-thinkers and people with the opposite views, relationships with family, friends, and loved ones, the reading of thought-provoking books, walks in forest and by the sea side, a contemplation of the summer sunsets, travelling, and a little bit of physical exercising. Since a human existence is a complex being, a human personality should be developed in various ways – physically, emotionally, intellectually, ethically, and spiritually. In view of this, music itself and learning music, are, on the one hand, the effective instruments for this comprehensive development of one’s personality. On the other hand, the more a person is well-rounded and in harmony with him- or herself, the more he or she is able to turn the music into a really high art.