

# PEDALLING DEMYSTIFIED

## Sunday 24th January 2021 – Beate Toyka

**THE SUSTAINING (right) PEDAL** On a grand the dampers are lifted and lowered horizontally above the strings. On an upright the dampers are moved backwards and forward. The results are similar, depending on the size and tone of the piano. There are slight variations on pedal depth for the foot; uprights have higher foot actions than grands. Electric pianos have an artificially created pedal action, very light on the foot.

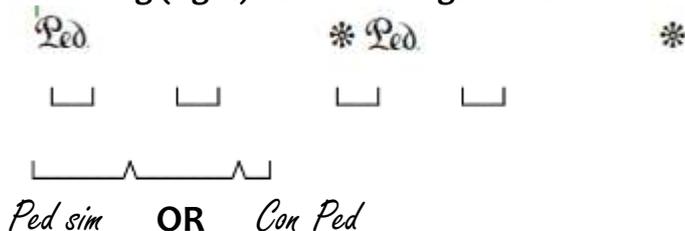
**THE UNA CORDA (left) PEDAL** Has a similar function in both upright and grand pianos. In the grand the result of 'softening' is more striking as the hammers shift horizontally by one string. In uprights the whole action moves closer towards the strings, making the hammer strike shorter. In both instruments this pedal can be used to soften a bright-sounding piano. In pieces it should only be used occasionally.

**THE MIDDLE PEDAL** Many pianos don't have one at all. It is an 'extra' and mostly found in grands. There it is a sostenuto pedal for single notes. If present in an upright it is usually a 'practise' pedal, dulling the overall sound with a strip of felt moving forward and across the strings. Neighbours like practise pedals!

### The Sustaining Pedal

- Enriches sound with harmonies and overtones
- Increases volume and duration
- Enables legato playing where legato is not possible with fingers
- Adds effects like billowing and blurring of harmonies
- Also half pedalling, partial pedalling, flutter pedalling and gradual press and release

### Sustaining (right) Pedal markings in the score



### Feet Positioning – Charlie Chaplin

**Pedalling Posture** – the lower body: pelvis, hips, knees, ankles, feet need to work together.

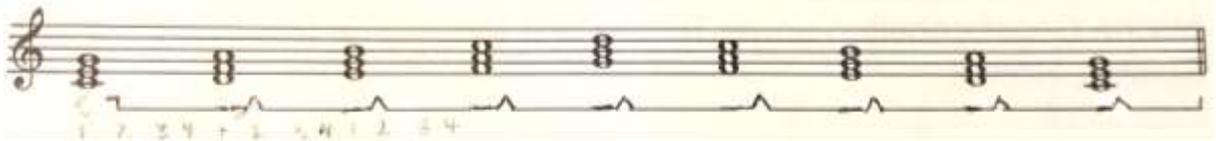
### A) Basic *direct* pedalling

Foot moves down with the hand and releases before the next chord = No sound connection/*legato*. Also practise with LH one octave lower.

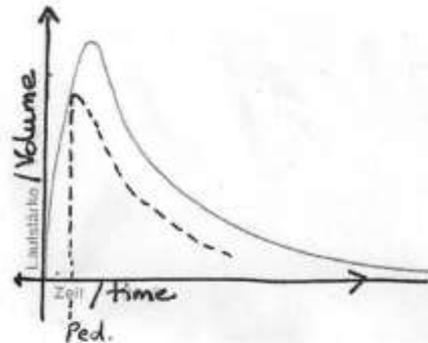


### B) Syncopated *legato* pedalling

Foot moves down AFTER chord and releases and re-takes AFTER next chord = chords are connected, *legato*. Also practise with LH one octave lower.



### More exercises – Nos. 3 and 4 with left hand alone:



You can depress the pedal just a little - a millimetre only - or more and the sound will change. Experiment with this with your own piano and in your own room. Be ready to adapt to other instruments when playing away from home.

Be inventive! Create your own pedal exercises. These don't need to be longer than a few bars, and can include a variety of patterns. Listening to a legato line is the key.

Good pedalling focuses on the bass notes and enhances the bass line. Clean, resonant bass notes and bass lines result in enriched overtones – those subtle “unplayed” tones – that greatly add to the emotional depth and moisture (vs. aridity) of the sound of a piece. This may or may not be the case in some electric pianos or keyboards.

## How do I know when to use pedal and when not?

**IMPORTANT:** It is absolutely essential to practise ALL piano music with hands separately and without pedalling to single out and listen to the sounds produced by the fingers. The sustaining pedal only augments the sound that is being produced by the hands and fingers; it cannot create its own sound or improve the polish and quality of the work of the hands and fingers.

- Decide which period your music fits in.
- The birth dates of the composer will give you a clue.
- The texture of the music will usually match with this.
- A little bit of research and preparatory listening will take you a long way.

## Baroque

### NO PEDAL as basic rule!

- Mostly contrapuntal music, individual lines with clear textures.
- Composed with the harpsichord or clavichord in mind.
- There are exceptions to this rule where you can more daring and ‘modern’, but –
- Clarity of texture should be the top rule.
- Take great care with good fingering for legato of melodic lines in either part.
- Disclaimer: A very occasional use of pedal to enhance i.e. a final chord in a cadence may be possible but not absolutely necessary. Another exception to the rule is, for example, the second movement of the Italian Concerto by Bach (connecting wide leaps) and the B-flat minor Prelude from Bach's Well Tempered Clavier Book 1 (connecting repeated chords).

**ALL** Baroque and Classical music should be practised without any pedal at all, to ensure the best possible clarity of sound is being produced by the fingers, before any pedalling decisions are made.

## Classical

**Little/partial pedal** unnoticed by listener! The hardest period to decide.

- Keep away from the pedals unless you are able to do partial and very occasional pedalling which doesn't obscure the delicate nature of the texture.
- Never pedal through rests and keep clarity at the forefront.
- Occasionally chords or broken chords can have a slight pedalled effect.
- Be ready to make quick pedal changes at all times.
- Early sostenuto and una corda pedals on the pianoforte (classical period) were operated by knee levers, so the sustaining pedal was clearly not so much intended for the sustaining of long notes as for the momentary enrichment of single notes and chords.
- Mature classical pieces like Schubert and middle to end period Beethoven need to be pedalled in the right places to fully shine. **But:**

**ALL** Baroque and Classical music should be practised initially and repeatedly without any pedal at all, to ensure the best possible clarity of sound is being produced by the fingers, before any pedalling decisions are made.

## Romantic

**YES to PEDALLING** – with many decisions still needing to be taken.

- Harmonies are more spread out, using a wider range of the keyboard.
- Understand the spread of the chord and think of your lowest note as the guiding pedal change marker.
- Clarity of harmonic progression is still the main aim.
- Keep the main melodic line at the forefront and don't allow the pedal to overpower it.

## Impressionism and 20<sup>th</sup> century

**YES to PEDALLING!** Follow the composer's guidelines (if any) or go with your instinct – but always LISTEN to the outcome. Be ready to experiment.

- Harmonies are more spread out, 'dissonance's and extended chords and an even wider range of the keyboard. Still understand the spread of the chord and think of your lowest note as the guiding pedal change marker.
- The melody, if it is there at all may be anywhere in the texture and the pedal can obscure it. Understand the texture before adding pedal.
- Impressionism/Debussy may need even wider pedalling effects than late Beethoven and Chopin. Be prepared to accept 'messy' soundscapes.
- Blurring is part of the impressionistic style.
- Overuse of pedal can dampen percussive effects (Bartok).
- Pedal markings vary widely – be imaginative and keep listening.

## Questions to ask yourself once you have worked out the style and period

- Can I or can my pupil play the piece well even without using pedal?
- Do I need to use it at all and if so, why?
- If I use the pedal will it mix up harmonies that don't belong together?
- If I use the pedal will it obscure the melodic line?
- Can I get away with notes not in the harmony included in the pedal?
- Do these notes happen close enough to the new change?
- Do I use a deep or a lighter pedal?
- Can I be sure that I don't use the pedal just to cover a 'multitude of sins'?

**IMPORTANT:** It is absolutely essential to practise ALL piano music with hands separately and without pedalling to single out and listen to the sounds produced by the fingers. The sustaining pedal only augments the sound that is being produced by the hands and fingers; it cannot create its own sound or improve the polish and quality of the work of the hands and fingers.

## The Una Corda Pedal

This pedal can be used occasionally to create a 'muffled' sound, when it is either impossible to create it with your fingers alone (for example in a very bright piano) or if you need an additional sound on the softer palette, such as an echoed phrase. Beethoven used the una corda marking extensively, and Schubert called it 'con sordino'.

## Some simple rules to bear in mind when teaching pedalling

1. Stress that listening is the key factor.
2. Explain that the foot moves contrary to the hand.
3. Demonstrate on the table or closed piano lid.
4. Demonstrate opposites, with and without pedal and encourage LISTENING.
5. Start with an occasional pedal, for a cadence, a little slur, one bar at a time.
6. Use pieces with easy finger work, ideally repeating patterns, to train the foot and ear.
7. The lower the note the slower the change can be.
8. Notes foreign to the harmony don't disturb IF they happen shortly before the change.
9. The louder the note the slower the change can be.
10. Within a crescendo and with the pedal down the new note covers up the old.
11. Don't hesitate to get on your knees and move the pupil's foot.
12. Be inventive and create your own pedalling exercises. These can be stand-alone or taken from a piece a student is learning. Expand/add to an idea you may find in a piece.

## Useful repertoire listed or mentioned in PP presentation

- Ghost in the Attic / Keynotes 1-2 / John Lenehan
- Für Elise
- Wandering Minstrel / Barbara Kirkby-Mason

## From ABRSM 21/22 syllabus:

- **Initial:** A2. Under the Acacia tree
- **G1:** B2. The Swing
- **G2:** C9. Singing Sun; C2. Angelfish
- **G3:** B3. Anastasia
- **G:** A2. Etude; B1. Moonbeams
- **G5:** B1. Arctic Night; B2. Starry Dome; B3. Douce Reverie
- **G6:** B1. Mazurka; B2. Page D'album; C3. Lavender Field
- **Alternative G6 pieces:** B5. Prayer of the Matador; B6. Gliere Prelude; B10. Khatchaturian Legend; C9. Montague Tsunami

## More pedalling pieces:

- **Initial to G1:** Seventy Keyboard Adventures with the Little Monster / Breitkopf 8722 / 8786
- **G2-3:** Hello Mr. Gillock! Hello Mr. Czerny! / Breitkopf 8627
- **G2-3:** Full Moon / Otto Joachim / Contemporary Music and the Pianist / Alfred
- **G3-4:** Piano Misterioso, Book, Barbara Arens / Breitkopf 8883
- **G3-4:** A bit like Beethoven / Laurie Holloway and Moonlight Sonata Theme / arr. Alan Small
- **G4:** In the Bay / Felix Swinstead / More Romantic Pieces Book II
- **G3-6:** Islands / Einaudi incl. I Giorni
- **G2-6:** Youth Album, with 121 (!) pieces from Beg. to G8 / Manfred Schmitz / AMA Publ. ISBN 3-932587-41-3

## Further reading:

- The Pianist's Guide to Pedalling / Joseph Banowetz / Indiana University Press
- The History of Pianoforte Pedalling / David Rowland / Cambridge University Press
- BOTH *super comprehensive, completely devoted to the pedal, with many historical facts, piano building, pianists and performance of historical pianists. Musical excerpts and discussion thereof. A good investment if you want to delve further into the topic.*
- Pedal Kurs / Uli Molsen / Sikorski Edition
- *Short, hands-on, practical book*
- The Complete Pianist / Penelope Roskell / Edition Peters
- *Pedal is one of many topics, short and well-explained, touching on many details as well as some very useful video clips on this topic all through the book. A good investment for piano teachers and pianists: 500 pages of 'Piano Bible'.*
- The Foundation of Technique / Murray McLachlan / Faber Music