

A lesson with the Maestro: an overview of Constantin Sandu's piano teaching

Lorenzo DEL CONTE¹

Abstract: *Constantin Sandu is a Romanian-born piano teacher at the Escola Superior de Música e Artes do Espectáculo in Porto, Portugal. Having had the opportunity to follow his lessons for eight months as his assistant, I decided to write this article with two main objectives: to collect and give order to my experience as an apprentice and to try to briefly recount the human and professional story of a piano teacher, with the aim of describing and sharing, albeit briefly and in a non-exhaustive manner, his pedagogical method. A recount that can be a starting point for reflection on the role of a teacher and the importance it has for young people approaching the world of classical music.*

Key-words: *music education, piano teaching, Erasmus+ traineeship, lessons, teacher.*

1. Foreword

Rita Levi-Montalcini, the Italian scientist who won the Nobel Prize for Medicine in 1986 and life senator of the Italian Parliament, wrote that “the choice [of a student] of certain fields [of study] [...] depends on the inclination of the young person, but also on the luck of encountering a real teacher” (Tripodi and Levi-Montalcini 2008, 67).

A statement that may perhaps sound banal, but which it is perhaps wise not to take too much for granted: in my years as a student, even outside the musical field, it was precisely the encounters with certain teachers that shaped me, giving a decisive turn to my training, guiding me in the choice of my studies and those of a future job.

During my first years of study at the Conservatory of Livorno (Italy), I did not really have a clear idea of what I wanted to do with my professional life: the study of the instrument was in fact becoming almost an aim in itself, grudging in prospects and poor in planning, on which I could hardly imagine that I could build a future. But thanks to these encounters, both positive and negative, over the time I

¹ Master's Degree Conservatory “P. Mascagni” of Livorno (Italy), lorenzodelconte98@gmail.com

realized that educating young musicians and teaching piano could represent a fascinating prospect for me, become a project, a goal: a job in the service of art and music for which I would have gladly spent my professional life.

It was for this reason that, after graduating with an academic diploma in piano, I decided to embark on an internship that could bring me closer to the world of teaching and begin training as a piano teacher: an opportunity that eventually materialized thanks to an Erasmus+ project that took me to Portugal.

My acquaintance with Maestro Constantin Sandu, piano teacher at the *Escola Superior de Música e Artes do Espectáculo* in Porto, soon turned out to be one of those lucky encounters that open doors and perspectives: to have the opportunity to be the assistant of a piano teacher who teaches at the highest level of musical education has in fact allowed me for the first time, after so many years as a student at the conservatoire giving private piano lessons at best, to live and measure myself with the kind of educational experience that until then I had only experienced as a student.

Clearly, each professor has his or her own teaching method, dictated both by his or her own inclinations and interpretations of the musical world, and by the encounter with the teachers who preceded and trained them. Although in my young experience, I see myself how the teachings I have received and that have most influenced me are the same ones that I have very often found myself using when I was able to test myself personally as a teacher, either to flank or sometimes replace the maestro in lessons, or on the occasion of a masterclass that the ESMAE allowed me to organize during the months of my traineeship. A sort of 'musical inheritance' where the experiences of my various teachers merged, beginning to shape my own personal teaching method.

In this direction, my meeting with Constantin Sandu was extremely fruitful: being able to observe the maestro's lessons for months, the tricks he uses with his students, and the methods with which he accompanies his students in their training, inevitably influenced not only my way of approaching the delicate work of teaching, paying attention to details and tips that I had not considered before, but also the way I continued studying piano.

In the wake of these reflections, I have therefore decided to write this article, a way not only to collect and give order to my experience as a trainee, but also to try to briefly recount Constantin Sandu's human and professional story and give a glimpse, albeit a very personal and obviously not an exhaustive one, of his pedagogical method.

To write this article, I mainly used the notes I took during the master's lessons, supplementing them with an interview I did during these months of musical cohabitation.

2. A brief biographical outline

The grandmother's old piano in Sandu's house had always been there. Constantin Sandu (Bucharest, 1 January 1964) was in fact born in a family who had always loved music: his father, an engineer who played the piano amateurishly as a young man, was a passionate meloman with a refined musical taste and a very critical ear, while his mother was a music teacher and pianist. It was thanks to her that, at the age of six, Sandu, who had been used to attending theatres and concerts with his family since childhood, took up the piano in his turn, entering the state music school as a student of Sonia Rătescu.

«I was a little bit shy with her», Sandu recalls remembering the elderly teacher, «she was very strict and a bit “old-fashioned”: I had a notebook where she not only wrote down the repertoire I had to study, but also noted down what went well with each piece and what I had to improve, putting a grade at the end of each lesson that I obviously had to show to my parents». The teacher's severity in lessons did not prevent Sandu from living a cheerful and fulfilled childhood, protected by the discreet and stimulating presence of his parents: if the father was the most critical towards his son, with his ear always alert to mistakes and things to improve, the mother never forced him to bend over the piano hours and hours a day as we might expect, but on the contrary always encouraged him to live his life to its fullest as a child, alternating the study of the instrument with the amusements and entertainments typical of his age, perhaps encouraging him to go and play football with his peers.

The first important turning point came at the age of twelve, when teacher Rătescu retired, Sandu moved to the George Enescu Music High School in Constantin Nițu's class. These were years of intense study, mainly focused on developing and deepening his piano technique:

At the time, my adolescent ardour made me yearn to study complex compositions such as those by Rachmaninov or Grieg, but both because of the study programmes in high school, which were so rigid that to tackle more difficult pieces you had to ask permission from the director, and because of my teacher's guidelines, I took on many basic studies such as those by Czerny Cramer and Clementi and classical composers such as Mozart and Beethoven to build up a solid technique. Only in the end did Nițu allow me to play Rachmaninov's “Second Piano Concerto” for my diploma.

Also in those years, after winning the first prize in the *Lira de Aur* national competition in Suceava – a town in northern Romania – 14-year-old Constantin

Sandu made his debut as a soloist playing with the high school orchestra and also gave his first recital.

After finishing high school, he entered the *Ciprian Porumbescu* Conservatory of Higher Music Education in Bucharest at the age of eighteen under the guidance of Maestro Constantin Ionescu-Vovu, where he graduated in 1986. These were difficult years for Romania, which was plagued by a very bad political and economic situation, but for Sandu, the four years at the Conservatory were nevertheless happy years, during which he also had the opportunity to participate successfully in various international competitions.²

After finishing his academic studies and a six-month period of military service, the time came for Sandu to finally live and work with music. He became pianist of the *Oltenia Philharmonic Orchestra* in Craiova, and also had the opportunity to perform as a soloist in numerous recitals. In the meantime, he also started teaching, although he limited himself to giving private piano lessons for the time being. He always remained on good terms with his Maestro Ionescu-Vovu, playing for him before each performance to receive opinions and advice.

With the end of the regime in Romania in 1989, a season of new opportunities opened up for the young pianist. Sandu began to travel, first with a concert tour in Spain and then in December 1990 going to Paris to enrol at the *École Normale de Musique de Paris*, an experience that he was forced to abandon after only two months due to the French authorities' refusal to grant him a *visa de long séjour*, perhaps as a consequence of a still confusing and evolving international situation where bans and prejudices against people from Eastern European countries persisted.

It was obviously a great disappointment. But with the premature end of this adventure the opportunity came that would radically change his life: a musician friend, who was living in Spain at the time, told him that a conservatory in Portugal³ was looking for a piano teacher and proposed that he applied for the position. And since Portugal was not even that strict about granting a residence permit, Sandu replied «why not?».

The 27-year-old Constantin had certainly not planned to stay in Portugal for long, especially because of the great distance from his native country; but as Sandu himself says with a smile on his lips, «It was destiny, I say». Indeed, he arrived in the Iberian country on 11 January 1991, started working at the conservatory in Guimarães and after the first year moved to Porto, still as a conservatory teacher.

² Among many others, we would like to mention: Senigallia - Italy 1980 (2nd prize), Viotti-Valsesia - Italy 1981 (1st), Paloma O'Shea - Santander, Spain 1984 (honourable mention), Epinal - France 1985 (2nd) and Maria Canals - Barcelona, Spain 1985 (3rd and special prize Alberto Mozatti).

³ In Portugal, conservatoires are equated with high school education.

But in the meantime, he met the woman who would later become his wife, a decisive turning point in his life that pushed him to stay in Portugal until today. Also in those early Portuguese years, he attended various master classes and lessons with famous and important musicians in Portugal, including Sequeira Costa, Dimitri Bashkirov, Helena Sà e Costa and Tânia Achot.⁴

Finally, in 2000 Constantin Sandu obtained a professorship in piano at the *Escola Superior de Música e Artes do Espectáculo* in Porto, and in 2006 he obtained a doctorate in music at the National Music University of Bucharest with a thesis on Portuguese piano music. Today, Constantin Sandu still teaches at the ESMAE and performs as a soloist, boasting a prestigious and rich concert curriculum throughout Europe and Asia.

3. Teachers

Constantin Sandu's rich and varied musical training has been essential not only for his career as a pianist but also for building the basis of his work as a teacher. Indeed, Sandu's piano method owes much of its characteristics precisely to the experiences he had with his teachers, in a constant search for an original synthesis and balance between all the lessons and influences he received, among which, it should be emphasized, the fundamentals of the Romanian piano school have a decisive weight.

In Europe, piano schools passed down their traditions and identities not only thanks to artists of great renown (think of Mozart, Clementi, Moscheles, Chopin, Liszt, Busoni, Rachmaninoff) but also to the many musicians who dedicated their lives to the activities of concert pianist or teacher. A multiform and articulated heritage that developed on a national basis between the 19th and 20th centuries, in tune with the great season of national movements that swept across Europe in that period. Thus we can speak of French, German, English, Italian, Russian, Polish traditions and schools and so on.

⁴ With Helena Sa e Costa, an important pianist in northern Portugal – herself a pupil in France with Alfred Cortot and Edwin Fisher – Sandu took several private lessons, also holding long and in-depth conversations with the Lusitanian musician about music. With Sequeira Costa and Bashkirov, on the other hand, the opportunity to meet was offered by the week-long masterclasses that the two musicians held at the Gulbenkian foundation in Lisbon, where Sandu had the opportunity to work intensively on a vast repertoire with the two masters. Tania Achot, winner of 3rd prize at the Fryderyk Chopin International Piano Competition in Warsaw in 1960, was one of Sequeira Costa's wives. When Sandu stopped giving masterclasses with Costa, she began to have more contact with Achot and to play for her.

In Romania's case, the piano school is mainly rooted in three of the great European traditions, combining the teachings of the French, German and Russian schools. Sandu's teachers were also pupils of some of the greatest Romanian pianists and teachers of the 20th century, who themselves often grew up under the guidance of the leading Parisian masters.

Sonia Rătescu, the first severe teacher of the very young Constantin, had probably 'inherited' her proverbial 'rigidity' from Florica Musicescu, known, precisely because of her rigorous and severe pedagogical principles, as the "iron lady" (Eternity 143, 2019): it is no coincidence that one of her most famous pupils, pianist Dinu Lipatti, remembered her as "a serious and skilful teacher, [...] affectionately tyrannical, from whom he liked to take advice even when he was already in the full expansion of his art" (A. Lipatti 1954, 31). Musicescu, today recognized as one of the founders of the Romanian piano school, studied with both Robert Teichmüller in Leipzig and Alfred Cortot in Paris⁵ and among the fundamental traits of her teaching method were precision and attention to every detail with the aim of "teaching the pianist to study, not to play perfectly" (Eternity 143, 2019). This was a method that Sandu found in his teacher Rătescu, who was skilled and extremely clear in her explanations not only for studying the piano but also for everything concerning the theory and analysis of music.

Constantin Nițu, on the other hand, was a pupil of Cella Delavrancea, one of the most famous Romanian pianists at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries and a pupil of Isidor Philipp and Alphonse Duvernoy at the Paris Conservatoire.⁶ As already mentioned, the years with Nițu focused above all on the development and consolidation of piano technique, also deepening the ability to carefully read and decipher a score in order to grasp every detail, including dynamics, phrasing and the exactness of the tempo and pulse of the pieces.

During his years at the Conservatoire, however, Sandu's work focused more on the malleability of sound, with the aim of achieving more colourful and refined sounds, elements from which we can once again recognize the French imprint that Ionescu-Vovu to some extent inherited from another famous Romanian pianist and teacher, Silvia Șerbescu,⁷ who had trained at the *École Normale de Musique* under Lazare Lévy and Cortot.

⁵ For more on the figure of Florica Musicescu cf. Coman, Lavinia. 2020. "Florica Musicescu, o fondatoare a școlii românești moderne de pian". *Revista MUZICA*, no. 1/2020.

⁶ For more on Cella Delavrancea, cf. Boerescu, Dan-Silviu. 2022. *Cella Delavrancea si povestile ei incredibile de amor si arta*, Bucharest: Editura Neverland.

⁷ For more on Silvia Șerbescu cf. Coman, Lavinia. 2015. "Remorare Silvia Șerbescu 50 de ani de posteritate". *Revista MUZICA*, no. 3-4/2015.

In short, a composite milieu, full of evocative elements and influences that left Constantin Sandu with a solid musical knowledge, which he would later be able to fully interiorize thanks to his Portuguese masters: «With Sequeira Costa and Bashkirov, I did not receive anything too new in terms of teachings, but they were fundamental in their ability to make me structure this prior knowledge of mine and have more confidence and control over it», Sandu continues to recount. «But the two masters had completely opposite ways of thinking and making music: Costa was the intellectual and 'cold' one, focused on reasoning and thinking about music through the lens of the intellect, while Bashkirov was the exact opposite, experiencing music with the idea of being transported by it and feeling it through the emotional sphere». Indeed, it was not uncommon for him to receive from the two masters, divided between sense and sensibility, opposing indications on a particular piece or passage: for example, on the choice of tempo, Bashkirov tended towards faster beats, while Costa slower ones in order to highlight more details. "I remember that Sequeira Costa [talking about the tempo in the last movement of Beethoven's *Waldstein* Sonata] recommended me to think in 2 (subdivision of the bar), while Dimitri Bashkirov in 1 (Alla breve); Obviously, the interpretations acquired very different valences from each other" (Sandu 2023, 247).

Over the time, Sandu has built a personal synthesis between these two seemingly irreconcilable methods: there is not necessarily a single adequate tempo for every piece, but instead it is possible to choose, changing the pulse, sometimes even in a single phrase or melody, in order to have both the possibility of taking care of and showing more details when necessary, and to give a unitary sense to the piece: «It is a procedure that often happens in the orchestra with conductors who change the movements of their hands according to the pulse necessary for a passage». Indeed, it is no coincidence that when his students are uncertain about the tempo of a particular passage, Sandu advises them to try to think of themselves as a conductor by imagining what movements they would make with their hands to make the piece clearer to the orchestra. «Maybe I'm not very revolutionary, but I try to find a balance in music as well as in life and maybe that's why my musical thinking is based on 'not exaggerating', choosing tempos that are neither too fast nor too slow».

4. Teaching piano

Following Constantin Sandu's lessons for eight consecutive months, I was able to closely observe and partly interiorize his teaching method, also learning over the

time to recognize the various influences and lessons he received from the various teachers who trained him.

Indeed, we could say that Sandu 're-uses' with his students the advice he received as a young man, but not as an aseptic lecture whose sole purpose is the transfer of notions. In fact, his pedagogical action aims not only at training good musicians but also good people:

I think it is just as important for a student to build a personal musical taste as it is to build a positive personality as a human being: you cannot separate the artist from the individual, so I think that to be a good musician you have to be a good guy first. In fact, I don't think there are awful men and women who are also good musicians at the same time. Everything is connected in the end, isn't it? So to be a good person and make good music you have to have a positive approach to life. I am not too religious, but I believe in God, in something higher than us, and consequently my relationship with mankind is first of all a relationship with the one who created this mankind. Of course it is not necessary to have this kind of spiritual connection, but I always try to educate my students to be ethically positive, to think and act in life, with themselves and with others in a positive way so that they can also be better artists.

After all, as the Italian musicologist Piero Rattalino also states, "the piano teacher is also a master of morals or, in a broader sense, of life" (1992, 5). It is no coincidence that Sandu argues that sometimes teachers also have to do a great deal of psychological work:

When students play, they can be able to do beautiful things as well as make 'huge mistakes'. Nevertheless, I try to never criticize them because I think that the psychological aspect of a person is also very important. I therefore always start by pointing out the positive aspects of a performance and then move on to advise them on how to improve certain passages, but without emphasizing the fact that it was done badly.

Sandu's positivity is in fact one of the most striking aspects of his lessons, highlighted by the continuous assent he expresses at the end of each performance. An attitude that places each lesson from a proactive point of view, where the seriousness inherited from Rătescu remains solid even if happily softened by Sandu's good-natured and sympathetic character:

Sometimes as teachers we have to do a lot of psychological work since students can be really emotionally unstable, although at their age I wasn't that different either. So I always try to see the positive things they have

(everyone has something good and everyone is different) and try to build the most appropriate path for each one based on that.

It is precisely by looking in this direction that Sandu works with his students, building with each one a personalized programme that differs from the others. In fact, although his main objective is to educate good pianists – and not necessarily and only concert pianists – short-term goals, such as adequate preparation in a given time for an exam, competition or concert, make the teaching method adjust and model itself on the needs of each student. Sandu is aware that each of his students has his or her own history and that inevitably their level of piano preparation is different from each other. Consequently, he works with each of them according to their personal possibilities and abilities.

I have to help them play to the best of their abilities at the time, so I also adjust my methods according to each one's objectives. When I teach a masterclass it's different: when you have a student you don't know for an hour or two you have to be able to give him as much information as possible about the piece he is preparing. But in regular weekly lessons the knowledge has to be imparted a little at a time, also because if you give too much information all at once the student might not remember or might not be able to do everything. It depends on each lesson and the expectation I have of it. I therefore try to improve interpretation problems but still leave the student free to create their own rules by not imposing a single studying method.

After all, each pianist's hands are different and everyone has his or her own weaknesses as well as strengths, so a technical solution to solve a passage may not be suitable for everybody. The effort must therefore be to help students find what works best for each of them.

From my teachers I learned that first of all one must still start from music and not solely from pure technique: whatever the problem one must always seek a musical result. So having a clear idea of how you want to render a particular passage you then try to realize it through your own hands: you must always start from music to get to the technique and not the other way around.

During my stay in Porto, I had the opportunity to hear Constantin Sandu in concert several times. As he told me in the interview, making the career of a teacher coexist with that of a recitalist is quite complicated, but they are two jobs that complement each other: just as Seneca stated in his *Letters On Ethics To Lucilius* “people learn while teaching” (2015, 36), in the same way Sandu argues that studying the instrument also helps to find good advice for students, and every now

and then teaching can give some good ideas for his pianist's work. «I believe that a good teacher has to be necessarily a good pianist in order to best educate his or her students, but that doesn't mean he or she necessarily has to be a soloist. The idea is to keep yourself trained with practice, possibly on a daily basis» Not surprisingly, when he began teaching his approach to study also changed in virtue just because he had to find effective tips and methods to help his students solve various technical problems. He therefore began to think more about how to approach the study of certain technical passages that in his piano life came by that time naturally to him.

Becoming a teacher is undoubtedly also a way to improve as a pianist. And I think it is also necessary: when you are young you learn quickly but later your memory and physical abilities change and you don't have the same energy as you used to. So I compensated for these shortcomings with a different way of studying. Also playing in public has become more difficult since my students are often there to hear me and as a result I care more now about errors and good performance than I did thirty years ago.

Nevertheless, Sandu is always the first to invite his students to his performances, and their response is usually positive, with high attendance: after all, as even Michael Jackson stated, “the greatest education in the world is watching the masters at work” (1988, 49). However, this does not mean that the master imposes his own way of playing on students who have a different way of making and feeling music.

In the documentary *L'amour de la vie*, directed in 1969 by Gérard Patris and François Reichenbach, the famous pianist Artur Schnabel states that one should only play what each of us truly feels deep in our hearts, when there is a true contact with music, and that one should never touch any piece of music that does not belong to us: “You must never touch any piece of music which is not ‘yours’, which doesn't talk to you. You must have a direct contact of love with the composer, with his work” (1969, at 21:49-22:30). A statement also shared to a certain extent by Sandu, who is convinced that it is important for his students to have the opportunity to measure themselves with pieces of the piano repertoire in which they reflect themselves, so that they can approach the study and technical problems with more pleasure, passion and patience. Nevertheless, he is also well aware that it is not always possible to play only the composers of the heart. So many times, especially when young, it is necessary to learn and play pieces with which we do not find complete identification but are nonetheless fundamental to the school training of every pianist. It is enough to think back to when Constantin himself as a high school student, before tackling the repertoire he loved so much at

the time, was bound by master Nițu to study many of the composers necessary to build a solid technical foundation.

With the students it is sometimes difficult to keep this balance and let them have too much freedom: every year they have a certain program to stick to anyway and consequently they have to deal with certain composers and different styles. In the master's course they have more freedom than in the bachelor's course, but regarding the repertoire I try to let them choose it, perhaps asking them to present me with a shortlist of suggestions from which they can then select the pieces best suited to their possibilities: sometimes students can make proposals that are wrong and not appropriate to their preparation, and so I try to avoid most of the time ideas that might later turn out to be problematic. I then try to adjust the repertoire based on their prior knowledge so that they can make the best progress, but I still want them to play pieces they like and feel.

However, this willingness to students in their choice of repertoires does not extend to interpretative freedoms, where Sandu believes more strictness is necessary: «I normally do not give them too much freedom, and sometimes even my colleagues during exams criticize me for this, but I think it is necessary precisely because we are in a school, and at school freedom is wise to be regulated by limits».

This clearly does not mean stopping students from expressing themselves, but emphasizing the need for careful and at the same time gentle guidance in the study of pieces, following the taste and stylistic rules of each author. In fact, it is not a matter of imposing one's own idea on the students but of offering it as the best way to achieve a specific message and musical goal, explaining if necessary the reasons and context from which they derive. Here, then, a single accent changes the way it is played depending on the context, whether it is the climax of a soft, edgeless curve of a melody in the third movement of Chopin's *First Piano Concerto* or pronouncing it distinctly, almost electrically, in one of the themes of Shostakovich's *Piano Concerto No. 2*; or the need to give an interrogative sense to a harmonically kaleidoscopic melody by Francis Poulenc. Another example concerns when it is possible to play phrases with some *rubato* and within what limits we can move: you cannot mix the value of notes, but within the limits of this clarity you can take the liberties you prefer. Sometimes pupils who have difficulty interpreting certain pieces can find help by evoking images or sounds that suggest an emotional atmosphere similar to those proposed by the author studied: thus the first movement of Shostakovich's *Concerto No. 1* is reminiscent of an old Gothic castle, and the third movement of Beethoven's Op. 109 evokes the solemnity and unity of a string quartet.

«What characterizes a music school is the need to properly learn the grammar, the basics, the syntax of music, when they graduate then they will be free to do whatever they like and explore more on their own», Sandu concludes with a laugh.

This setting of limits on interpretive freedoms inevitably comes from another of the main features of Sandu's teaching method, which is respect for the score. It is no coincidence that with both Nițu and the Portuguese masters, one of the constants of the lessons he received was the search for and attention to detail in the scores. It is no coincidence that from his very first lessons Sandu puts great emphasis on indicating which elements should be worked on most in a new piece. In this way, his students are, for example, guided in recognizing from the outset the leading themes to be marked in Rachmaninov's *Etude-Tableaux* Op. 39 No. 1, the right phrasing to adopt in *Fugue IV* of the first volume of Bach's *Das Wohltemperirte Clavier*, how to bring out the solemn and not too extroverted dynamics needed to open Beethoven's *Les Adieux* sonata, how to make the flourishes of a Haydn sonata brilliant and unburdened.

«I remember Sequeira Costa telling me that everything is written on the score, you just have to observe it», Sandu recounts, although

of course not everything is written over the parts and consequently it is necessary to filter it through one's own personality. But I think the score is all we have left of a composer and so we must respect it since I believe that we as performers are less important than the composer and it is not possible to compare ourselves to them, even the greatest pianists. We could almost call ours a "second-hand" work.

Bringing the piano repertoire to life through a personal lens is therefore necessary but, as even many of the great pianists say, we must always serve music and the composers and not the other way around, serving them for the purpose of putting on a show of self-satisfaction. Concerts and recitals are clearly shows but they are above all a mission whose goal is to go on stage and present these pieces and composers to the audience in the best way possible. It is not a mere work of pure contemplation, one must still be inside what is being played but with all the respect we can bring to the composition. In this direction Sandu educates his students by seeking with them a balance between the author's written directions and the interpretive freedoms necessary to bring music to life:

For example, the tempo should be precise and exact but not metronomic like a robot. We should not want to seek for a drastic change in tempo but a variation of the pulse, a small bending that comes out to satisfy an inner need: when the music is more intense and communicative it requires more time to express itself

and so the pulse dilates then flows back faster when the expressive material is less. But these changes must come naturally to the performer and not through decisions made at the table. So as Rubinstein said in his interview: the music that speaks to us is that with which we can communicate in turn. And that is the beauty of interpretation: there are thousands of pianists who play the same piece and each one plays it differently; you will never find two identical interpretations, because each one puts their own personality into it.

5. Conclusions

Working alongside Constantin Sandu gave me not only the opportunity to learn about a new way of approaching piano study, influencing in part my own pianism as well, but above all, it was fundamental in understanding how complex this profession is and how much dedication it requires. Teaching piano, as well as any other subject, is a job that requires a great deal of preparation and continuous training, both physical and psychological. Being able to teach any piece to a student certainly requires great knowledge as well as great dedication. In fact, a master is not just the one who instructs his or her students by giving simple directions but, using the words of writer Paulo Coelho, "someone who inspires the student to do his best to discover a knowledge he already has in his soul" (2020, 14). A laborious job, but abundantly rewarded when you see the results achieved by your students at the end of a year's work, whether it is the successful outcome of an exam, winning a competition or simply overcoming some technical difficulties that seemed insurmountable at the beginning of the year.

The teaching method followed by Constantin Sandu can be summed up in the continuous search for a musical balance. A balance that involves all the aspects of a piece, from dynamics to phrasing, with the goal of returning to the listener a work of art that is emotionally alive, refined to the smallest details and stylistically accurate. A kind of pianism that is also inevitably the result of a full understanding of the lessons received from his teachers. Indeed, Sandu believes that there is a kind of musical inheritance handed down from master to student, who will then become a master himself or herself. After all, the opportunity to study as closely with your teacher as you do in the field of music creates an intense, bilateral bond that cannot be found in other fields of university study. It is a bond that not infrequently continues even once the academic course of study is over, as experienced many times by Sandu as well, sometimes in the guise of the returning student, sometimes in that of the welcoming teacher:

one almost creates a friendly relationship even if with due respect and distance given by the age difference. When I went back to Romania as long as it was

possible I still played for my teacher Vovu. So I am very happy when the opposite happens and some of my old students keep in touch and maybe let me hear their own pupils. An amusing aspect is that sometimes I recognize some traits of my teaching method in them and even on the scores there are the same marks that I had put years ago. So there is definitely something that passes from the teacher to the student. I think there is a trace of musical heritage in all of us and you can somehow recognize the schools you come from, whether it is the mentality you share or the way you play. For example, thinking back to the Romanian school, I can say that one can easily recognize the French elegance of Cortot and his compatriots who formed my teachers. In a way you can find a line in the Romanian school that I hope will reach, along with the teachings of my Portuguese masters and Bashkirov as well, to my students.

Acknowledgements

I thank M^o Constantin Sandu for giving me the opportunity to conceive and write this article, and I thank Professor Francesca Rovai for checking and correcting the English translation of this article.

References

- Coelho, Paolo. 2020. *The Archer*. London: Penguin.
- Eternity 143. 2019. "Florica Musicescu, 'Doamna de fier' a școlii românești de pian", *Altiași*, November 19. <http://www.altiasi.ro/o-cladire/florica-musicescu-doamna-de-fier-scolii-romanesti-de-pian>.
- Jackson, Michael. 1988. *Moonwalk*. New-York: Doublebay.
- Lipatti, Anna. 1954. *La vie du pianiste Dinu Lipatti écrite par sa mère*. Paris: La Colombe.
- Rattalino, Piero. 1992. *Le grandi scuole pianistiche*. Sesto Ulteriano: Ricordi.
- Rubinstein, Artur. 1969. "L'amour de la vie - Artur Rubinstein", documentary, France, directed by Gérard Patris e François Reichenbach. Video, 1h 28 min, 41 sec. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tncAsuemCRc>.
- Sandu, Constantin. 2023. «Elements for a lesson: Beethoven „Sonata op. 53 Waldstein.» *Bulletin of the Transilvania University of Brașov*, VIII 16(65): 243-252. Brașov: Transilvania University press.
- Seneca, Lucius Anneus. 2015. *Letters On Ethics To Lucilius*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Tripodi, Giuseppina and Rita Levi-Montalcini. 2008. *La clessidra della vita di Rita Levi-Montalcini*. Milano: Baldini Castoldi Dalai editore.