

Keyboard Reflections



James Walls, Writer / Editor / Creative Director
©Copyright September 5, 2025 Art Images, LLC.
All rights reserved.

(Learning and Appreciating)

THE ART OF STEALING



My August–September issue of *The Pianist Magazine* arrived, prompting me to share thoughts and opinions. Of *KEY* commentary for this feature article comes from a quote by FRANCESCO PIEMONTESE, the brilliant Swiss-Italian pianist:

“I try to be a magpie, and steal from all my teachers. But at the same time, I’ll discard some things that don’t work for me. After all, it’s me who goes out on the stage, not them.”

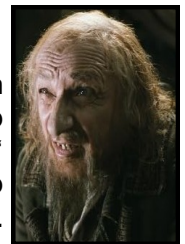
Piemontesi has been called the *ALCHEMIST OF THE PIANO*.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

The Art of Touch & Tone	2
Inspiration & Creativity	2
Iconic Italian pianists	3
Favorite pianists	3
Suggested Playlist	3
“Finger Pedaling”	4
Meet Graham Fitch	4

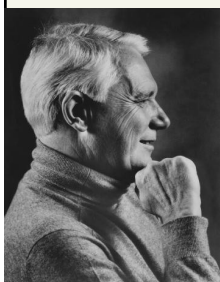
Let’s qualify words and meaning:

First off, stealing means taking something you didn’t pay for. In contrast to FAGIN in the classic motion picture, OLIVER, who taught the young Artful Dodger how to “pick a pocket or two.” When you pay for piano lessons, you are compensating the piano teacher for their time, expertise, and the service they provide. Every teacher has something you can take away as your own.



Secondly, an alchemist, in the classical sense, was an early form of chemistry with philosophic and magical associations studied in the Middle Ages. Its chief aims were to change base metals into gold and to discover the universal remedy for the elixir of life (‘elixir vitae’). In short, the miraculous change of a thing into something better. Metaphorically, critics call Piemontesi **The Alchemiemiist of the Piano** — who can turn “just notes” into pure gold!. (Read more P.2)

“STEALING” from some of my favorite teachers: *The Art of Touch and Tone.*



John Hamilton

Professor John Hamilton taught organ, piano, harpsichord, and music theory while I was his student at the University of Oregon from 1957-1959. He received his BA degree in physics from the University of California, Berkeley in 1946 and M.Mus ('56) and DMA ('66) from the University of Southern California. His early career as pianist culminated in scholarship study with the late Olga Samaroff-Stokowski in Philadelphia and New York; and iconic harpsichordist Wanda Landowska. While a professor at the University of Oregon, Hamilton divided his time between teaching at the university and his concert appearances in Europe and the United States. Piano studies using Czerny's "The School of Velocity" exercises were daily fare, boring to me as a college freshman at that time. . Now as a teacher myself, I realize the importance of scales and exercises for students in order to build finger speed, strength, and agility.



Katherine George

Katherine George, a native Oregonian, was Principal Keyboardist [piano, celesta, organ, and digital keyboard] with the Oregon Symphony Orchestra for 44 years. She was a member of the piano faculty at Lewis and Clark College for 30 years during which she taught students from the preparatory level to graduate level. She holds a master's degree from Portland State University. As a winner of the *Lillian and Paul Petri Award*, she studied piano in London with Lamar Crowson and earned an associate's degree in performance from the *Royal College of Music*. In Oregon, she has studied with Nellie Tholen and Jean Williams. Katherine has appeared extensively as a soloist, recitalist, duo-pianist, accompanist, and in chamber groups throughout the United States including Anchorage Festival Orchestra, Peter Britt Music Festival Orchestra, Chamber Music Northwest, Cascade Festival, Seattle Symphony, and the Oregon Symphony.



Paul Schmeling

Paul Schmeling, Chair Emeritus of the Piano Department at *Berklee College of Music* in Boston is a master pianist, interpreter, improviser, and arranger. In the 1990s, the *Paul Schmeling Trio* released two inventive and critically acclaimed albums, interpreting the music of Hoagy Carmichael and songs associated with Frank Sinatra. He is co-author of the *Berklee Practice Method: Keyboard* (Berklee Press 2002) and *Berklee Instant Keyboard* (Berklee Press 2002). I was privileged to study piano with Paul when he moved to head up Berklee Online. For me, this opened up a new world of learning and teaching via the worldwide Internet.



Ed Tomasi has been a professor at Berklee College of Music since 1976, teaching *jazz improvisation, performance, harmony, and history*. He graduated from Berklee summa cum laude, with a major in composition. He is also a teaching associate at Brown University. Ed is the author and instructor of a Berklee Online course titled "*Basic Improvisation*." Some of Ed's former students include: Branford Marsalis, Delfeayo Marsalis, Anat Cohen, Avishai Cohen, Mokoto Ozone, and Dana Stevens.

Regularly voted by students as one of Berklee's "***Most Outstanding Professors***, Ed Tomasi was definitely one of the most inspirational and creative teachers I ever studied with.

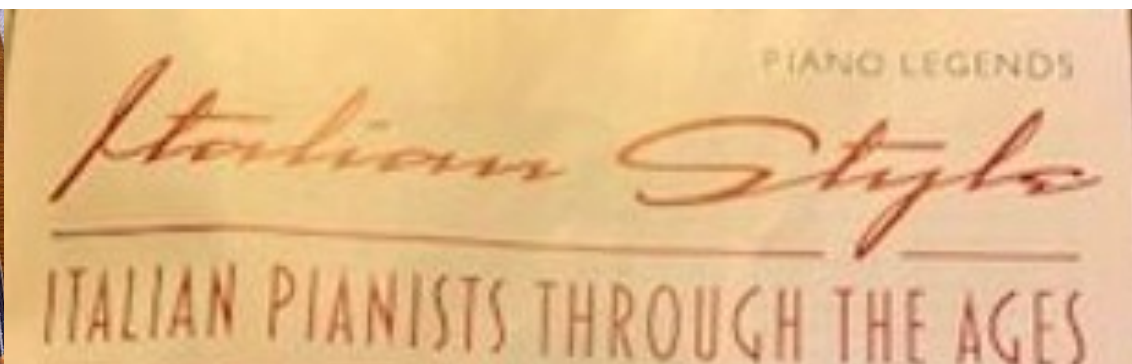


Edward Tomasi

*T*hrough my membership in Music Teachers National Association, over the years, I've been fortunate to attend lectures and master classes from world class pianists and teachers:

Byron Janis, Leon Fleisher, Menahem Pressler, Sara Davis Buechner, Eric Himy, Scott McBride Smith, Jane Smisor Bastien, Jeremy Siskind, Valentina Lisitsa, Marc-André Hamlin, Andreas Klein, Jon Nakamatsu, Shelton Berg, Hans Boepple, Seymour Bernstein, Stuart Isacoff, Dennis Alexander, Jon Kimura Parker, Frederic Chiu, Inna Faliks, Ingrid Clarfield, and *Graham Fitch.

*I attended online master classes with him for two years as part of my paid membership through THE PIANIST MAGAZINE, hence my recommendation for you to experience Graham's unique teaching style as found here on Page 4.



On pages 67-70 in this issue, iconic Italian pianists were featured as “ITALIAN PIANISTS THROUGH THE AGES.” The leading question: “Is there an Italian school of playing?” Melissa Khong, who wrote this feature article, wondered if national schools of piano really do exist. “One might be tempted to reply that there are only as many schools as there are pianists. Yet, the idea of a distinctive musical heritage, preserved through generations of pedagogues and disciples, continues to fascinate even against the backdrop of today’s cosmopolitan landscape.”

I counted 37 pianists spread over four pages of this article. It was a bit like searching one’s heritage through Ancestry.com. Through generations of links with teachers and pedagogical methods, “**The "Neapolitan School of Piano"** emerges — a historical tradition of piano playing and teaching originating in Naples, Italy, with a rich legacy from the 16th century onwards — known for its technical rigor, expressiveness, and influence on keyboard traditions.

Here one can hear a unique precision of playing, where legato and detached lines are particularly distinguished from each other. Styles and philosophies abound regarding muscle relaxation and expressive sound.

Through the “Italian connection,” influenced by Austrian, Russian, German, French, Argentine, British, Canadian, and American teachers and pianists, some of this generations greatest keyboardists delight us and make their way to our record and CD collection. While it’s impossible to name my favorite pianist, below are some of the pianists who I recommend my students listen to for specific assigned pieces. Depending on the piece, I recommend two or three recordings by pianists known for that work. I ask my students to listen with their music in front of them, making pencil markings on measures for comparison to the next recorded artist. The goal is to *listen carefully, sparking creativity for one’s own interpretation* — obviously, not adding or changing notes.



Stephen Hough



Earl Wild



Daniel Barenboim



Vladimir Ashkenazy

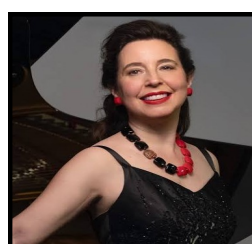
MAURIZIO POLLINI, one of my favorite Italian pianists [1942-2024] wasn’t necessarily associated with the Neapolitan school, although he was mentored briefly by Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli [1920-1995] after winning the 1960 Chopin Competition.



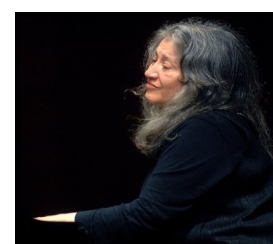
Glenn Gould



Marc-André Hamelin



Angela Hewitt



Martha Argerich

If you don’t have some of their recordings, check them out.
I’m sure you’ll want to add them to your PLAYLIST.

ART IMAGES MUSIC STUDIOS™

James Walls, Founder & Artistic Director

Mailing Address:

15727 S.E. Alder Street
Portland, Oregon 97233
Text / Cell: 503-803-1387

E-mail: artimagesm@aol.com

Web: www.aimsportland.com

Memberships & Affiliations:

Music Teachers National Association
Oregon Music Teachers Association
National Association for Music Education
International Society for Music Education

Specialist Certificate

Keyboard Skills



The Art of “Finger Pedaling”

Basically, on a piano, *Finger Pedaling* creates some of the additional resonance we seek from the foot pedal without actually using the pedal. We can sustain the bass notes of harmonies with our fingers, giving the impression that pedal is being used, but without causing any undesired confusion in other parts of the musical texture.

My younger piano students — and adult intermediate-to-advanced students also — are able to grasp Finger Pedaling concepts with simple “Seesaw” (or “Teeter-totter”) exercises whereby they play one key, holding it down while they add the next note, allowing the second note to make the first note fade away. See more below with Graham Fitch.



SEESAW

Just like a teeter-totter:

Creates A Very Smooth Effect!



Graham Fitch giving an online master class from his Steinway Studio in London.

[Pianist Magazine photo]

About Graham Fitch

Graham Fitch, based in London, maintains an international career not only as a pianist, but also as a teacher, adjudicator, and writer. His workshops and classes, which he has given all over the world, have received high praise for their creative and illuminating approach to each subject.

As First Prizewinner in the *Mieczyslaw Munz Piano Competition*, he graduated with honors from the Royal College of Music (RCM) in London as Hopkinson Gold Medalist.

His teachers at the RCM included Stephen Savage, Peter Wallfisch and Roger Vignoles. A Fulbright Scholarship then took him to the United States, where he completed his studies with Ann Schein and Nina Svetlanova, as well as participating in weekly classes with Leon Fleisher.

**A regular contributor to Pianist Magazine,
with many popular video demonstrations
on the magazine's YouTube channel,
Graham runs a thriving piano studio in London.
Here's information on how to watch:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=joy23Ad7DRI>

