Chapter V

The Mature Artist:
Repertoire, Musical and Interpretive Aesthetic, Technique

Although Cortot pursued a wide range of musical activities alongside his performance career, it was as a concert pianist and interpreter of the Romantic literature that he won fame and exerted the greatest influence. From 1907, when he began to establish himself as a soloist with orchestras and a chamber musician, to July 10, 1958 when he gave his last public performance (with Casals, at Prades), Cortot led the life of a touring virtuoso for a good part of each year, wartimes excepted. At eighty, with his performance career drawing to a close, he noted in his engagement calendar under the date January 1, 1958: "Appeared on stage 6,000 times as of this date."

I. Repertoire

Cortot's repertoire, though not as encyclopedic as some writers have implied, was fairly extensive by the standards of his day, ranging from an occasional piece by Purcell, Bach or Händel at one end of the chronological spectrum, down to the music of his contemporaries (Dukas, Ravel, Enesco, Rachmaninoff and Stravinsky). Nineteenth-century works from middle
The fact of the matter is that Cortot's deepest artistic sympathies belonged to the musical era that was waning by 1910 and was given the coup de grace by the "great war." After 1918, music began to take paths (neo-Classicism, atonality and twelve-tone technique, the individual adventures of Bartók, Prokofiev, Messiaen, Hindemith and Stravinsky, musique concrète and electronic music) that carried it further and further from his personal tastes and pianistic ideals. At the keyboard Cortot strictly avoided the more modern and avant-garde literature, though he followed all the notable developments of the first half of this century with interest. In his capacity as conductor, however, he did much to familiarize the Paris music public with little-known contemporary works during the period between the wars.

Several letters to Pierre Meylan from the aged Cortot reveal the extent of his misgivings about recent stylistic developments, which he felt were taking music dangerously far from its emotional wellsprings. Asked to comment on the evolution of contemporary music in an inquiry Meylan conducted in 1954 for the Paris journal Réforme, Cortot wrote:

[O]ne must be wary of personal judgements when it's a question of the evolution of any contemporary art. Nonetheless, I think that if the distinctive character of present-day piano writing is more influenced by the urge to create evocative sensations than by the use of the figurations and writing conventions (la technique décorative) common in the era of heroic virtuosity..., the basic elements of compositional craft have remained the same, modified only by a handling of melody that incorporates new sound aggregates into the basic "matter" of musical language.
As for the impact made on the listener by the... Classic masterworks or the moving confessions of the Romantic period, it is self-evident; it arises from the implicit evocation of human feelings of an external [i.e., extramusical] order which are at the root of our art. The methods of a sonorous dialectic without any basic emotive presence, though respectable in their own right,... are not conducive to deep inquiry into those feelings. There is ingenuity and sometimes a desire to invent coloristic effects (le souci de la recherche pittoresque) [in these modern works] which merits our admiration. But music is not an intellectual game; it's an immaterial representation of this "inexpressible" which secretly moulds the infinite of our aspirations and dreams....

Cortot was very careful not to let his personal reservations about contemporary styles prevent him from carrying out what he felt to be his special responsibilities as an educator. Asked his opinion of avant-garde music in 1960, for a survey to be published in the Swiss journal *Feuilles Musicales*, Cortot answered:

I've only just now received your communication of June 15th... regarding the question of serial or dodecaphonic music--or as it's even better termed nowadays: "experimental music," which has only remote ties with music pure and simple! Whatever my personal feelings on this subject, since I have considered it my duty as Director of a music school to expose the young generation of composers who study there to the serialists, or more exactly to their system--the use of a set of noises and strange clashes that has momentarily altered the face of our art--I hope you'll forgive me if I keep my opinion of its hypothetical future to myself and send you for your own information only this note, which should not be published in the response to your judicious inquiry.

The core of Cortot's performance repertoire was accumulated before World War I, at the outbreak of which he was thirty-seven. This is surprising, when one recalls that he concentrated more on conducting than on performing from 1899-1907, whereas most concert pianists in their twenties are
practicing intensively and assimilating new works as fast as they can. Cortot apparently made up for lost time in his early thirties. By 1914 the editor of the *Monde Musical* reported that Cortot's repertoire, "counting only works performed by memory in public, totals more than two hundred pieces, twenty-three of these with orchestra, and this does not include chamber music."7

The peak of Cortot's performance activity was the 1923-24 season during which, according to his biographer, he gave one hundred and forty public concerts and master classes.8 That season was capped by ten recitals in which Cortot performed almost the entire program of his Ecole Normale master classes in interpretation,9 devoted that year to "The Nineteenth-Century Masterpieces for Piano (Developing an Anthological Repertoire)." The program consisted of the following works (asterisks denote pieces definitely known to have been played by Cortot):

**Beethoven:**
- Sonatas Op. 27 No. 2 in c# minor *
- Op. 57 ("Apassionata") in f minor *
- Op. 81a ("Les Adieux") in Eb major *
- Op. 106 ("Hammerklavier") in Bb major*  
- Op. 110 in Ab major *  
- Op. 111 in c minor *  
- 32 Variations in c minor *

**Schubert:**
- Fantaisie Op. 15 ("Wanderer") *  
- Impromptu Op. 142 in Bb major *  
- 12 Ländler [Op. 171?] *  
- Sonata Op. 42 in a minor [D. 845]

**Weber:**
- Invitation à la Valse *  
- Sonata Op. 39 in Ab major *  
- Rondo brillant Op. 62 in Eb major
Mendelssohn: Prelude and Fugue Op. 35 in e minor
Rondo capriccioso Op. 14 in E/e
Songs without Words (choice) *
Variations sérieuses Op. 54 in d minor *

Schumann: Etudes Symphoniques Op. 13 in c# minor *
Carnaval Op. 9 *
Davidsbündlertänze Op. 6 *
Fantaisie Op. 17 *
Fantasiestücke Op. 12 *
Kinderszenen Op. 15 *
Kreisleriana Op. 16 *
Papillons Op. 2
Sonata Op. 11 in f# minor

Chopin: Ballades No. 1 (g minor),* 2(F major/a minor),* 3 (A♭ major),* 4 (f minor) *
Barcarolle Op. 69 in F# major
Berceuse Op. 57 in Db major
Etudes Op. 10 * and Op. 25 *
Fantaisie Op. 49 in f minor *
Mazurka Op. 17 No. 4 in a minor
Nocturne No. 13 in c minor
Polonaises Op. 44 in f# minor,
Op. 53 A♭ major
Préludes, Op. 28 *
Scherzi Op. 31 (#2) in b minor,
Op. 39 (#3) in c# minor
Sonata Op. 35 in b♭ minor *
Valses Op. 64 No. 2 in c# minor, *
Op. 69 No. 1 in A♭ major *

Liszt: Années de Pèlerinage: No. 4 Après une lecture de Dante
La Campanella Op. 2 *
Etudes de Concert
Harmonies poétiques et religieuses: Bénédiction de Dieu dans la solitude
Légendes: No. 1 (St. François d'Assise, Prédication aux Oiseaux),*
No. 2 (St. François de Paul marchant sur les flots)*
La Leggierezza
Mephisto Walzer *
Polonaise No. 2 in E
Rhapsodies No. 2 in c# minor,* No. 11 in a minor,* No. 12 in c# minor,* No. 13 in a minor *
Sonata in b minor *
Un Sospiro *
Variations sur un thème en fa mineur de J.S. Bach: 'Weinen, Klagen, Sorgen' *
To have played sixty of these works by memory in the space of three weeks is a feat that few of Cortot's contemporaries would have attempted. Moreover, this was not the sum of Cortot's concert repertoire for the 1923-24 season. While the programs of his solo recitals were probably recapitulated in the list above, many of his engagements were with orchestra or with his partners Thibaud and Casals in duo or trio concerts. Thus, he was also required to have in hand
that season Beethoven's Concerti Nos. 3 and 5, the Schumann Concerto, Saint-Saëns' Concerto No. 4 and Franck's Variations symphoniques, as well as Trios by Schubert (Op. 99), Mendelssohn (Op. 66), Beethoven (Op. 97), Franck (Op. 1, No. 1), Haydn (Op. 73, No. 2), Schumann (Op. 63, 80 and 110) and Ravel.

The music Cortot selected for his 1924 anthological recitals accurately reflects his tastes and strengths as an interpreter. On the surface his repertoire seems traditional, even conservative. That is partly because it has become traditional in the intervening decades. Actually, by the standards of the 1920's it was exceptional in several respects. First, Cortot played almost none of the brilliant genre pieces, salon music, operatic paraphrases and assorted transcriptions which garnished the programs of most virtuosi of that day. It was not that he was intimidated by their technical difficulty. Cortot was quite willing to tackle the big virtuoso literature—Chopin and Liszt études, Méphisto, Islamey, even Gaspard de la Nuit a few times—but only those works whose technical difficulties were incidental to their intrinsic musical interest. In matters of repertoire, he practiced what he preached to aspiring young teachers: "Never allow bad music to be played."12

More importantly, it was Cortot whose interpretations and recordings convinced the international community of pianists to incorporate quite a number of noteworthy pieces into the
standard repertoire—or at least he made them familiar to the wider music public. It was in good part through his efforts (interpretive and promotional) that Chopin's Sonata in b minor, Liszt's two Légendes and Bénéédiction de Dieu dans la solitude, Franck's Prélude, choral et fugue and Prélude, aria et finale and Schumann's Etudes Symphoniques acquired the stature they now enjoy. Schumann, more than any other composer, benefited from his patronage: "Before (Cortot) took them up, Kreisleriana, the Davidsbündlertänze [and] the Humoresque were hardly ever played," wrote Roger Boss. "Clara Schumann herself found them ungrateful and difficult."

Cortot was the first pianist to record the Schumann Concerto (a 1923 acoustic recording with Sir Landon Ronald), the first to record the complete Chopin Préludes (in 1926), the full set of Ballades (1930), the 14 Waltzes (1934) and the Fantaisie in f minor (1934), among others. That Cortot was able to significantly influence style conceptions of Chopin playing and Schumann playing was due in the first place to his prestige as an interpretive artist, but his impact was greatly enhanced by the historical priority and popularity of his recordings.

Constants and Shifts in Repertoire.

A cursory check of Cortot's programs from his earliest public concerts (1896) to ca. 1925 reveals much about his changing repertoire tastes:

1896-1907: Period of intense involvement with Wagnerism and conducting. A few solo recitals, but Cortot appeared mostly with better-known pianists; this may indicate
difficulties in getting his career launched. Composers most often performed (about three times as frequently as others): Liszt and Chopin, the first slightly predominating. In the second rank: Beethoven, Saint-Saëns, Mozart. Slightly less often: Fauré, Chabrier, Franck, Schumann, Wagner (arr.).

1908-1914: Solo career begins to take off from 1910; chamber music activities in full swing from 1907. Toward the end of this period Cortot begins to make a name for himself abroad, especially in the British Isles. Professor at the Conservatoire from 1907. Most often performed: Schumann, Chopin, Liszt and Beethoven in that order, with a significant edge to Schumann. About half as often or less: Franck, Saint-Saëns. Occasionally (in order of frequency): J.S. Bach, W.F. Bach (arr.), Brahms, Chabrier, Chausson, Fauré, d'Indy, Schubert, Weber, Albeniz, Dukas, Wagner (arr.).

1918-1924: Solo and orchestral engagements proliferate. Cortot takes a "leave of absence" from the Conservatoire, then resigns to become co-director with Auguste Mangeot of the Ecole Normale de Musique. Start of the big international career, great success in the U.S. and Britain after W.W.I, long tours of France and Europe. Numerous duo recitals with Thibaud, but Trio and lieder concerts less frequent. From this point, programs are not as easily repertoried. Most often performed: Schumann and Chopin with about equal frequency, then Debussy, Saint-Saëns. About two-thirds as often as the front rank: Franck, Liszt, Beethoven, Ravel, then (less often) Albeniz, Vivaldi (arr.), Fauré. Occasionally: Chabrier, d'Indy, Mendelssohn, Weber, Schubert, Rachmaninoff, Bach.

Since it was impossible to inventory all the programs Cortot gave during the above years, the estimations of frequency-of-performance for various composers are perforce approximate. The sampling was large enough, however, to make it unlikely that the inclusion of additional programs would substantially alter the picture. There were certain constants in Cortot's programming as well as some interesting shifts of emphasis. Chopin, in an ever-wider selection of works, occupies the place of honor from the outset. Schumann, only a
minor interest in the early years, gradually displaces Liszt and Beethoven after 1912 to become the second mainstay of Cortot's repertoire.\textsuperscript{19} Liszt retains a significant place in his programming, but the early wide representation of works (the two Légendes, the Sonata in b minor, the Rhapsodies Nos. 2, 11 and 12, the "La Leggeriezza" and "La Campanella" Etudes, \textit{Au bord d'une source}, and occasionally the Concerto in $E_b$, the Fantaisie hongroise or Liebestraume) narrows progressively so that by the 1930's only the Sonata is played with any regularity. As for Beethoven, Cortot maintained all the concerti and half a dozen of the sonatas in his active repertoire until the mid-1920's, but by the 1930's he was limiting himself mainly to the Concerti Nos. 1, 3 and 5 and the chamber music.\textsuperscript{20}

Franck's music, especially the \textit{Prélude, chorale et fugue} and the \textit{Variations symphoniques} but occasionally the \textit{Prélude, aria et finale} or the \textit{Prélude, fugue et variations} (arr.), remained a perennial favorite of Cortot's. Saint-Saëns (mainly his Concerto No. 4 and \textit{Etude en forme de valse}), d'Indy (the \textit{Symphonie cévenole}, also called the Symphony on a French Mountain Air), Fauré (notably the \textit{Ballade}) and Chabrier occupied a constant, albeit modest place on his programs into the 1930's. On the other hand, Debussy and Ravel, rarely played in the early decades, were featured after 1918 with some frequency. Cortot even added a few new works by these composers (e.g., Ravel's Concerto \textit{pour la main gauche}) to his
repertoire in the 'thirties. Other composers--Albeniz, Schubert, Mendelssohn, Rachmaninoff (the Third Concerto and the ever-popular Prelude in c# minor), Weber--were taken up after World War I, but with the exception of Weber most were gradually phased out over the 'thirties.

Considering the scope and bias (Romantic, then French) of Cortot's performance repertoire, there are some curious lacunae. One wonders why he played the Schumann Concerto incessantly, but rarely if ever performed its close cousin in spirit, the Grieg Concerto. Was this last too closely identified with Pugno? Why only the f minor, never the e minor Concerto of Chopin? Why did he play so few of Mendelssohn's Songs Without Words and Schubert's Impromptus and Moments musicaux, just the sort of Romantic character pieces in which he excelled? What motivated his choice of Debussy's Children's Corner over the Images or Estampes, Ravel's Sonatine over his marvelous Miroirs and Tombeau de Couperin (was the prospect of unfavorable comparison with the "specialists," Gieseking and Marguerite Long, a consideration?)? Lastly, one regrets that Cortot's experience with Rachmaninoff's Concerto No. 3 did not tempt him to explore some of the lyrical prélüdes and the études of that composer, which would undoubtedly have received imaginative and poetic readings from him.

Another intriguing aspect of the repertoire question is this: Cortot recorded a number of pieces which he seems to have seldom performed in public. Händel's "Harmonious Blacksmith"
Variations from the Suite No. 5, some dances by Purcell, Mendelssohn's Scherzo, Op. 16, No. 1, Schumann's Davidsbündlertänze and Kreisleriana cycles, Ravel's "Ondine" from Gaspard de la Nuit (this last not released)—all are conspicuously absent from the programs recovered for the 1906–1923 period. On the other hand, certain works which he played often and to great acclaim were never recorded or, in a few instances, were recorded but not released. Among these: Beethoven's Concerti Nos. 1, 3 and 5 and Sonatas Op. 27, No. 2 and 81a, Chabrier's Bourrée fantasque and Idylle (the latter preserved on piano roll), Fauré's Ballade, Thème et Variations and various short pieces, d'Indy's Symphonie cévenole, Liszt's Légende: St. François d'Assise (Prédication aux oiseaux), Rhapsody No. 12 and "La Campanella" Etude. A quantity of chamber music, including the Beethoven Sonatas for violin and for 'cello, Schumann's Trios No. 2 and 3, the Schmitt Quintette, and the Beethoven and Móor Triple Concerti, Fauré's second violin Sonata, Trio and Piano Quartet, and the Ravel Trio never made it onto wax. Nor did several much-admired song cycle interpretations, among which Schubert's Winterreise and Schöne Müllerin, and Schumann's Frauenliebe und Leben. Even Cortot's recorded legacy of Chopin lacks certain nocturnes, polonaises and mazurkas that were in his active concert repertoire. Henri de la Grange attributes the Chopin omissions to the fact that HMV London, for whom Cortot recorded, had contracted with Arthur Rubinstein to record
complete sets of these three genres in the period when Cortot was making his best Chopin pressings. Why the other works just mentioned were not recorded is a matter of conjecture. Commercial viability may have been a major consideration in the case of certain French works. Now-forgotten contractual agreements may have been a factor in other instances. Certain gaps in the chamber music area may be attributable to practical difficulties in reuniting the members of the Trio for recording sessions.

Cortot made multiple recordings of many staples of his concert repertoire. There exist no less than four versions of the 24 Préludes, Op. 28 (the first dating from 1925, the last from 1955), the Sonata No. 2 in B♭ minor and the Tarantella of Chopin. There are also four readings of the Schumann Concerto, Op. 54 (the first a 1923 acoustic recording with Sir Landon Ronald conducting, the last a "live" performance from 1951 under the baton of Ferenc Fricsay). Chopin's Berceuse, Schumann's Carnaval and Debussy's Children's Corner were each recorded three times. Advances in recording technology prompted much of Cortot's re-recording. In a few instances, however, there are striking differences of an interpretive order between successive recorded versions, suggesting that Cortot had evolved a novel perspective on the piece.
II. Cortot's Musical and Interpretive Aesthetic

Cortot and the French Tradition.

Cortot's extensive involvement with French music and culture during the years 1910-30 has gone relatively unremarked by commentators, who have tended to focus attention on his youthful championship of Wagner and his specialization in Chopin and Schumann in the last phase of his career. During the golden years of its resurgence, French music attracted a plethora of fine interpreters: Ricardo Viñes (1875-1943), Marguerite Long (1874-1964), Risler, Blanche Selva (1884-1942) and Robert Lortat (1885-1938), among Cortot's near contemporaries, and Robert Casadesus (1899-1972) and Lyons-born German pianist Walter Gieseking (1895-1956) from the next generation all gave French music a prominent place in their concert repertoires.

Unlike most of the aforementioned artists, Cortot did not ally himself closely with a few select composers or champion the music of a particular movement or school. Nor did he owe his celebrity primarily to his interpretation of French music. Stylistically, moreover, his playing of this literature often differed noticeably from that of the "specialists," most of whom approached it from a French neo-Classical or "mannerist" perspective. Performance, however, was only one of many ways in which Cortot promoted the music of his compatriots and contributed to the efflorescence of French musical life in the first third of this century.29
At one time or another in his life, Cortot enjoyed close professional ties with some of the most respected French composers of the day, including Fauré, d'Indy, Dukas, Florent Schmitt, Arthur Honegger and Albert Roussel. His profoundly musical style and communicative gifts made him a persuasive advocate of their music, as well as that of Franck, Saint-Saëns, Chausson, Debussy, Ravel and others he admired. With the exception of Franck, Cortot performed all these authors in limited selection. He was not one to play a work in which he did not have something personal to say. Still, his international stature after 1918 was such that any piece taken up by him was assured a measure of exposure, and perhaps acceptance, by the wider music public that it rarely won through performances by "modern music specialists."

Of the composers of the older generation--Saint-Saëns, Fauré and Franck--Cortot was closest personally to Fauré. In his youth, Cortot had moved in some of the same musical-social circles as Fauré, thanks to his deep friendship with Risler. Just two years after graduating from the Conservatoire, on April 30, 1898, he and Risler premiered Fauré's four-hand Dolly Suite at the Société Nationale de Musique. This was one of the first of many occasions in which Fauré relied on Cortot to champion a new work:

My friendship with Fauré during the last twenty years of his life brought me the honor of being responsible for introducing each new composition..., including that masterpiece of... lyrical nobility, Pénélope, which I
helped [by coaching the lead singers] to prepare for performance for his editors, with a view to eventual publication.\footnote{34}

\begin{quotation}
From our first meeting, I found Fauré delightful. Not at all snobbish, extremely charming and simple in the best sense of the word, an inveterate dreamer who would become totally immersed in his own thoughts to the point of losing the thread of a conversation. We [i.e., Fauré and I] played his \textit{Dolly} Suite for piano four-hands together \footnote{at a private performance in March, 1902.} I was amazed that such a sensitive poet as he was such a dry pianist: he had a percussive touch, an almost characterless tone, and never used pedal. Doubtless his training at the Ecole Niedermeyer had instilled in him a very rigid and even then fairly outmoded notion of performance. No matter, since it was Fauré.... From then on, Fauré befriended me and it was because of his commitment to me that I was named professor at the Conservatoire in 1907.\footnote{35}

To know Fauré well, as I did, was to know all that the most refined and discreetly manifested intellectual culture can represent. One of the most moving memories of my pianistic career is to have been chosen by him to interpret... the \textit{Ballade}... at the public tribute at the Sorbonne in 1922, organized by the French government in his honor. \footnote{[One of his last works,] the \textit{Fantaisie} for piano and orchestra,\footnote{36} is dedicated to me; unfortunately it has not received many performances to date.\footnote{37}}

Cortot was one of Fauré's favorite interpreters, despite the fact that he campaigned less aggressively than either Risler or Marguerite Long to impose Fauré's piano works on the musical public.\footnote{38} One might question whether Cortot's subjective, temperamental style was ideally suited to the music of Fauré, whose "Racinian genius" (Cortot's words) inclined toward delicate understatement, abstract purity and impersonality of language, and a classical economy and sobriety of means. Critical testimony suggests that even in the early stages of his career, Cortot was viewed by many as a French "heir apparent" to the Romantic pianistic tradition, an image
that he himself would cultivate assiduously in later years.\textsuperscript{39} Regrettably, Cortot's recorded documentation of Fauré interpretations is far too small to enable one to form a notion of how he might have played such quintessentially "French" works as the Ballade or the Thème et variations, although his remarkable performance of Fauré's Violin Sonata No. 1 with Thibaud offers a tantalizing glimpse of what might have been.\textsuperscript{40}

What can be deduced with certainty from Cortot's writings is that quite apart from his own aesthetic leanings, Cortot had a perfect intellectual grasp of the French musical tradition and the classicist ideals to which Fauré and others of the Belle Epoque still maintained allegiance. Moreover, he was able to formulate its main stylistic features in terms that were comprehensible to pianists unacquainted with French musical culture. In a master class that included many non-French participants, for instance, Cortot concluded a discussion of the styles of Couperin and Rameau with this discourse on the nature of the specifically French idiom and the reasons why the music of many of France's greatest--from Rameau to Fauré--does not "export" well:

Beware of concluding that Rameau's music has less emotional force than Couperin's, just because he is concerned with form. Rameau has suffered cruel neglect down through the ages, especially from musicians outside of France. Because he is a "theoretician," he has been... saddled with the reputation of being a magister, a scholastic. He is praised for being a logician with a clear mind, who values concision. Nothing is ever said about his other qualities.

Every French musician, for that matter, shares the fate of Rameau in the thinking of persons from abroad. The tendency of Slavic and Germanic peoples to magnify
feeling, to exalt it to... its most violent extremes of expression, has made it difficult for them to appreciate the appeal in French art of a sensibility which, though lively, restrains itself in the equally lively desire to strike a harmonious balance between the quality of the feeling, and that of the form in which it is embodied.

There is an aesthetic element in French art which values discretion, perfect equilibrium, the exact appropriateness of the means to the idea. Foreigners have to make a little effort in this direction to understand us. The qualities that make Rameau's art beautiful are the same qualities that are prized in Racine.

Emotion in French music is not extroverted. You have to come toward it. It exists--but chaste, hidden, interior, sometimes even unavowed.

Cortot saw in Fauré's best piano works--the Sixth Nocturne (Op. 63), the Fifth Barcarolle (Op. 66) and the Thème et variations (Op. 73)--all that was most admirable in the French national idiom: a genius for "striking an incomparable balance between 'imagination (fantaisie) and reason,'... which Fauré owed as much to his culture as to his instinct," an ability to accept the discipline of the classic-romantic canon of forms and materials but to invest this language with a "musical substance of the highest quality [and]... an expressive value which enables him to dispense with [the prop of] an evocative program... or the advantages of picturesque or surprise effects."

In pieces of lively tempo or playful character, there is a ravishing ingenuity of craft and diversity of pianistic means. As examples, I need only cite the Scherzo from [Fauré's] first Sonata for violin and piano, or the Impromptus..., in which the play of sounds and rhythms is worked out with such fantasy, charm and invention. But in my opinion, the real pianistic originality of Fauré appears in these works of a meditative or dreamily impassioned character, where the intimacy of the emotion is conveyed in a manner at once so intense and so
measured, via an instrumental language which seems to radiate [it] like a secret heat (chaleur).\(^{44}\)

The musical richness of [the Thème et variations], the depth of its expression, the quality of its instrumental substance... are such that this work could suffice, all by itself, to defend French music of our era against... critics who accuse it of frivolity or of superficial and dry elegance....\(^{45}\)

Cortot was very drawn to both the music and the figure of César Franck.\(^{46}\) To judge from his recordings, he had a deeper instinctive affinity for Franck's works than for Debussy's, with which he was sometimes identified in the 'thirties.\(^{47}\) The reasons why he was so fond of Franck, whom he probably never knew and whose contribution to the piano literature was meager in scope if not in quality, are not difficult to identify. On the human level, Franck, or the embellished image of Franck perpetuated by his followers, stood for many of the same principles that Cortot was (or wanted to be) associated with: high-minded idealism and a keen sense of the artist's social and educational mission, artistic/spiritual revitalization of the discipline through personal example and professional reform, a capacity and a respect for hard work, leadership that inspired disciples rather than simply forming students. On the musical level, Franck's cosmopolitan receptiveness to the best elements of every style,\(^{48}\) his blend of romantic fervor and constructive logic, his Wagnerian harmonies and fondness for dramatization and sharp contrast must have appealed to Cortot.

Noting the warm, religious feeling that pervades works such as the Prélude, choral et fugue and the Prélude, aria et
finale, Cortot emphasized that while these compositions were "as much acts of faith as works of art," one should be wary of "the pat and rather misleading legend of Franck as a mystic, a sort of Pater Seraphicus lost in a dream world, filled with this ecstatic... piety which frees one from... petty realities":

The nobility of Franck, which is inseparable from the beauty of his oeuvre, lies precisely in his having neither ignored reality nor disdained human contingencies, but in having never given in to them.... [T]he distinctive emotional character of Franck's... [mature] compositions is due as much to a specific aesthetic conception as to a desire to exalt a confession [of faith].

Franck instinctively shied away from... every descriptive effect... that might distort a line or destroy a proportion; [and] as he grew older, he moved toward a spiritual idealism that led him to want to convey only feelings distilled to their purest and most exalted expression.... Any musician anxious to interpret the piano works in the right spirit must first and foremost investigate the organ compositions in depth. They radiate glimmers of meditative, inner life... [and display] this contemplative chromaticism, imploring, turned in on itself, that one encounters again in the Prélude, choral et fugue and the Prélude, aria et finale. One might term Franck's chromaticism static, in contrast to the seething, agitated chromaticism of Liszt or Wagner.

The writing in these [organ] pieces... presages the technique by which Franck will later try to ennoble the piano timbre and make the reverberating impact of its hammers approximate the long sustaining [tone] of the voices--ardent,... supplicating,... consoling,... or thundering--that he drew from his organ.49

While granting that Franck had little flair for descriptive writing and sometimes adopted a rather cerebral approach to composition,50 Cortot took issue with Saint-Saëns' declaration that "Franck was not a poet [since] his music seems
to lack any feeling for the pictorial."51 "[C]an the notion of poetry... really be reduced to this unlikely criterion of being pictorial or not?" he asks.52

The answer, for Cortot, was obviously not. He took it for granted that in most "pure" instrumental music from Beethoven's time on, the composer was working from some type of poetic or vaguely programmatic idea. The music might be descriptive in a naturalistic sense, but it could just as well evoke a psychological state or convey a "philosophical" content (a general attitude or concept), whether acknowledged or implicit. In defending Franck's "poetic" qualities, Cortot actually gives a succinct exposition of his own interpretive aesthetic:

I will no doubt be reproached for trying to give a poetic (idéologique) exegesis of music which seems to aim only to express a sonorous design, and whose constructive logic is sufficiently beautiful in itself that it needs no extramusical program.

Franck himself answered this criticism when he declared that for him, the form was only the corporeal part of the "artwork's being" and that the idea alone was the soul of the music.

What can I say, if not that it is the interpreter's duty to rediscover the nature, the character of this generative idea; and once he has identified it,... to pursue its development and expressive transformations through the musical discourse.... Granted, [the interpreter] thus superimposes--by conjecture and without the composer's consent--a precise meaning, specific associative images onto the musical train of thought.... But if one accepts that the art of interpretation in the highest sense consists of re-creating [the composer's] thought, of giving it as natural a life, as eloquent an expression, as those which inspired the music's inflections (accents), isn't it proper for the performer to put himself in the same conditions vis à vis the musical work as the composer when he was creating it?53

.................................
A true interpreter would never confine himself... to giving what might be termed a [literal] architectural rendering of [the Prélude, choral et fugue]. Yet there is a certain danger in the notion [that Franck considered... the form only the material sheath for the idea...], namely: that it will provoke an exaggeratedly sentimental delivery from a generation of pianists who tend to filter the notes through a sensibility sharpened by a too exclusive concentration on romantic works.... [As] Blanche Selva has quite rightly observed, the rhythmic ebb and flow typical of Franck's music is the outcome of emotion, not caprice, and is thus very dissimilar from the conventional rubato [of romantic performance practice].... The lyrical outpouring of Franck, in fact, for all its expansiveness and freedom, does not have the intimate, personal tone that characterizes... [that] of Chopin or Schumann. [Franck's lyricism] is objective and, sustained by a strong classical instinct, tends to universalize the feeling that inspires it.... Even the many passages where a free, imaginative rendering is appropriate do not, therefore, lend themselves to an excessively subjective... or extremely dramatic interpretation.... A disproportionate surge of expression--and the ideal line binding the whole of the piece together is broken.... But if the performer strives to give the impression in these passages of a profound aspiration towards the eternal and the divine; if, in the four measures that twice follow the cantilena... in the Prélude, he can give the feeling of a glimmer of questioning hope...; if the silences which interrupt the initial fragments of the fugue can be imbued with an anxious and plaintive meaning without seeming... too obviously premeditated, then the rhythmic freedom desired by Franck gains its proper expressive significance and the idea again becomes truly the soul of the music, as he intended.54

Cortot's essay on Saint-Saëns is of the highest interest --not so much for the evaluation of Saint-Saëns, which is not exactly impartial, as for what it reveals about Cortot's own interpretive aesthetic and performance aims. From his depiction and criticism of the arch-classicist, one can discern as on a photographic negative the clear outlines of his own romantic idealist stance:
By instinct as much as by reason, [Saint-Saëns] prefers the well-balanced and lucid creations of talent to the lofty flights of genius. This is borne out by innumerable dogmatic assertions in his writings...: "Avoid all exaggeration"; "For me, art is first and foremost form." One could cite dozens of passages... where he inveighs against unruly inspiration and condemns deviations or extremes of musical language in the name of traditional syntax.

For Saint-Saëns, the piano is the keyboard and its idiomatic resources. He takes it at face value, with its tone of short duration and its percussive qualities. He distrusts... the deceptive illusion of the pedals, the malevolent spell of intermingled harmonies, languid touches, excessive dynamic shadings and what he terms "the mania for expressive playing and the monotony of the legato."

On the slightest provocation he would admit that he regretted the disappearance of the harpsichord, on which at least--and these were his very words--"one could not modify the intensity of the sound on every note." His pianistic writing... takes a clear, definite and very comprehensible form, reflecting for the most part his notions of [the instrument's aptness for]... fluency, effervescent lightness and brilliant elegance.

The virtuoso stock and trade of decorative scale and arpeggio figurations conveys the essential.... Rarely is there a moment of abandon, an instant where emotion comes through which could transcend, and in some sense mitigate, the mechanical aspects of piano playing. The solo works, written with amazing facility and craft, are mainly filled with an impassive and seemingly gratuitous bravura. Descriptive writing is rare, personal feeling nonexistent. It's a matter of notes, apparently, more than of music,... (a) play of sonorities... devoid of profound meaning.

From youth [Saint-Saëns] was enthralled by Liszt's creative genius,... and by the vehement style of that great visionary, Anton Rubinstein.... But when it comes to... expressing himself,... via an instrument whose every possibility he knew intimately,... here he goes, pasteurizing ideas, sanitizing rhythms and harmonies, still more concerned it seems with correct part-writing than with what is pianistically gratifying (it is known that he usually composed at a table). Bypassing the contagious revelation of romanticism, he... looks to the impersonal, ornate style... of a Steibelt or a Dussek for models, [content] to revel in displays of bantering dryness or conventional rhetoric.
There is a bias—or if you prefer, a habit—in this stance that is all the more irritating since we find [Saint-Saëns] in maturity achieving a fuller lyricism, conceptual breadth and descriptive talent in other [i.e., non-pianistic] genres.... In his piano works, on the contrary, he is happy to repeat unvarying techniques and conventions throughout his career, as if he had decided once and for all that a tone of diatonic prattling was the only one suited to the instrument.

Might not the reason lie in the very nature of his passionate love for the piano? Or more exactly, in his passion, raised to the level of a fetish, for manual keyboard drill? Legend has it that Saint-Saëns spent two hours a day on pure technique when he was too young, if not too wise, to withstand the rigors of concertizing;... [and it is said] that when death overtook him,... he was practicing scales. Even if he didn't go to these lengths in implementing the habit he acquired in Stamaty's school, one suspects that this purely physical exercise, the mechanical character of his training, his truly unreasonable overindulgence in drill exercises—exercises he practiced like one bathes, reading a newspaper fastened to the music rack—might ultimately have altered the musical significance of the instrument for him [so that] the ideas he conceived for it only transmitted the barely stylized reflection of his mechanical diversions.55

Cortot's low esteem for much of Saint-Saëns' music may have been based primarily on aesthetic considerations, but it was exacerbated by his belief that the popularity of Saint-Saëns' concerti was in part responsible for the distorted and unflattering image of the whole French school of piano playing that prevailed beyond France. Foreigners unaware of recent stylistic developments in French music tended "to equate the talents of our performers with the stylistic traits of the music they so persistently championed," and thus "to concede them only the qualities required to do justice to [Saint-Saëns'] works: elegance and clarity, a flair for brilliant and sharp rhythms, more intelligence than sensitivity, more verve
than emotion, dexterity more than technique per se."56 This stereotype fit the playing of Diémer and Saint-Saëns rather well. It already required qualifying to apply to Pugno, and it was quite unjust to artists like Risler, Cortot and Yves Nat.

How antithetical Cortot's and Saint-Saëns' performance ideals were can be gauged from Cortot's account of his youthful encounters with the venerable artist who, in his words, "was rightly considered the equal of the most famous performers of his day":

[A]t the première of Saint-Saëns' Caprice héroïque, Op. 106... in 1898, I had the fearsome privilege of assisting Louis Diémer at the second piano.... I am not exaggerating when I say 'fearsome', because during the rehearsals... Saint-Saëns made interpretive demands that were utterly disconcerting to a deferential young musician.... On that occasion,... I experienced first hand his disappointing conception of the piano.

He insisted on accents, not on nuances. Or at least not on nuanced nuances. Contrasts--forte and piano--sufficed. He detested a pianissimo, and in his mania for accents he demanded that these be emphasized aggressively, even in the most intrinsically cantabile passages. I remember, on another occasion, having spent more than an hour repeating again and again for him the theme of the Beethoven Menuet on which he based his Variations for two pianos.57 He would not be satisfied until, against my will, I hammered out in a deplorably categorical manner the expressive stresses which Beethoven had the misfortune to notate with accents.

Saint-Saëns was also very particular about pedaling, and used the pedal sparingly himself--as a last resort, so to speak. This, combined with his habit of articulating very strongly (picked up in childhood through the use of the guide-mains), lent his touch a dryness which he equated with clearness and which he was bent on imposing on all his interpreters; he credited this manner of playing with all the virtues needed to interpret any music.

I hardly need add that I do not subscribe to these precepts, nor do I advise applying them even in interpreting Saint-Saëns' music, which already tends to slight the emotional side to such a degree that the least exaggeration in the aforementioned direction can
undermine whatever appeal it may possess. The sentimental terrain in Saint-Saëns is barren, and expression does not put down very deep roots. There is no need to stress a quality which the very character of his compositions makes abundantly clear. On the contrary, I urge his performers from personal experience... never to accept this tradition of a stark and brilliantly sterile style of playing without having experimented and verified [the results] for themselves.58

It is clear from the above that Cortot considered Saint-Saëns' interpretive ideas narrow and pedantic, and dismissed his playing manner as unacceptable even for Saint-Saëns' own works. Though the two artists had very dissimilar temperaments and tastes (Saint-Saëns was virulently anti-Wagnerian, for instance), to attribute Cortot's objections to Saint-Saëns' approach to a clash of personalities would miss the main point. What does Cortot dislike about Saint-Saëns' style? His sharp, "dry point" touch, his limited range and variety of dynamics and insistence on sudden, black and white contrasts; his excessive emotional restraint; and perhaps most disturbing to Cortot, Saint-Saëns' literal-mindedness vis-à-vis the written page. But what are these traits other than the hallmarks of the classical French school, carried to manneristic extremes? We are dealing here with a confrontation between two incommensurable aesthetics: despite their common cultural heritage, Cortot and Saint-Saëns in a way lived in two different artistic worlds, and when they looked at the piano they saw quite different things.

Implicit in Cortot's criticisms of Saint-Saëns is the romantic demand for subjective, individual expression, self-
revelation, emotionalism, and the appeal to transcendental values and extra-musical ideas. It is one of the keys to Cortot's performance attitude and tastes, as well as to the specific points of break or of continuity with the established French tradition one detects in his playing style. Cortot's dissent from the late classicistic position starts right at the level of basic premises. To his way of thinking, music was first and foremost expression: expression of an inner emotional life and a higher realm of spirit and sentience that linked it to the universally human and the Infinite. Forms, he told his students, were only "the sheaths of musical ideas." Without poetic substance and passion to enliven it, the musical symbol was cold and inert—an abstract play of sonorities. Moreover, if a work's formal and acoustical qualities threatened to overshadow its expressive content, it was up to the performer to tastefully "correct" the imbalance, to discover a significance in the music that surpassed the notes. In Cortot's style the supreme objective of performance is neither clarity nor brilliance, but persuasion: he wants to be moved by the music, and in turn he uses every resource at his disposal to move the listener.

If Cortot's conception of performance was closer to that of Liszt's heirs than to that of his French predecessors, his playing nonetheless remained in many ways indebted to the French school, notably in the basic linearity of his thinking, in his sensitivity to structural logic, his rhythmic vitality,
his incisive tone and studied elegance of manner. He had no
compunction about breaking with French performance values and
practices—or more exactly, about reordering traditional
priorities—whenever these were incompatible with, or
constraining on the goal of a subjective, poetic and
emotionally forceful delivery. Note-perfect playing, extreme
fluency and speed, for instance, were relatively less important
to Cortot than to most French pianists. Cultivating great
technical prowess divorced from the demands of specific musical
and poetic contexts did not interest him in the slightest, and
he abhorred virtuosic flamboyance.

In discussing Franck's oeuvre, Cortot noted approvingly
that certain works "let us glimpse quite clearly the man behind
the artist."61 Nothing of the sort could be expected from
Debussy's music: no autobiographical confessions or effusions
of personal feeling, but rather a striving to capture by
indirect allusions the essence of sensations or impressions
experienced by a subject mysteriously absent from the picture.
Cortot seems to have had little if any close personal contact
with Debussy,62 a situation he did not regret. In fact, he
took pains to distinguish between Debussy the creator, "whose
genius I admired," and Debussy the man, "who didn't inspire the
slightest bit of sympathy in me,... or in anyone else, for
that matter."63 His sudden interest in Debussy's piano works
after the war appears to have been due in part to extra-musical
considerations.64
Around 1918-19 Cortot performed the two volumes of Préludes complete for the first time, in a memorial concert as he recalled. On November 20, 1919 he premiered Debussy's youthful Prix de Rome offering, the Fantaisie for piano and orchestra, in London. This sparked a controversy back in Paris, since there were many who felt that this piece, which Debussy himself never allowed to be published during his lifetime, did not deserve to be rescued from oblivion. With these concerts Cortot began to win recognition as a Debussy interpreter. Although his reputation rested on his readings of relatively few works (mainly the first volume of Préludes and the Children's Corner), it was solidified over the 1930s by numerous writings, lecture-recitals and master classes devoted to Debussy's music.

In his essay on the piano music, Cortot discussed two of the most significant features of Debussy's art—his concern with sonority and tone color in and of themselves (i.e., as sensuous values) and his original piano writing:

...[A]t the same time that Debussy awakened an uncanny delight in sounds by creating a subtle harmonic atmosphere in which he gave his spirit or imagination free play, he was reinvesting virtuosic piano writing with a unique poetic value and an immediate appeal (agrément) which Franckist currents seemed to have renounced... in favor of more austere procedures.

[Whatever the genre, Debussy shows] a complete grasp of the unconventional resources of the instrument.... Here it is the detail of a particular inflection which... throws some picturesque passage into relief,... there it's the use of unusual registers which by a play of shifting timbres creates the intense color effects of so many descriptive pieces; or it's the fluctuating, transparent, almost static sonority of harmonic
backgrounds from... which the musical images seem to emerge gradually, only to sink back into them once more...

[O]ne of the secrets of Debussy's genius... [was] his superb talent for capturing visual impressions—whether direct or inspired by imagination, the fine arts or literature—in musical sound.... He rarely draws his initial inspiration from human passions.... Not that he rejects or disdains emotion in music—but out of a sort of aristocratic reserve he seeks to intimate it by reverberations, rather than make us experience it directly. Rather than aiming to arouse... a personal emotional response.... [Debussy] achieves... his intended effect almost without our being aware of it, through the secret voluptuousness of two linked chords, the vibrant tension of a rhythm or the mystery of a silence.

The interpretation of Debussy's music calls for a collaboration of the imagination that is more literary and more subtly nuanced than that required for any earlier music.... Not without reason has it been said of Debussy that he was above all the musician of these mysterious correspondences by which, as Verlaine put it, "the imprecise is joined to the precise." The two sets of Images from 1905 and 1907, respectively,... exemplify Debussy's conscious... inclination to seek a musical expression as subtle as the feelings and impressions he wants to convey (these last becoming henceforth the sole catalysts of form). Pianistic figuration (la virtuosité) comprises the atmospheric element,... enveloping,... veiling or crystallizing the harmonic relationships. This innovative conception of the character and power of the instrument gives Debussy's piano writing a poetic quality that keeps it from resembling, even superficially, the intensive virtuosity of Liszt or Chopin, from which it derives.... Whereas in the music of these two the ornaments and arabesques are superimposed on the basic melodic line,... heightening the expressive and dynamic life of the work, Debussy's fluid figurations tend to blur the contours, obscure the harmonies and, almost, to prolong the silence.68

Cortot's somewhat discursive style of commentary, which aims to give a general stylistic perspective rather than to analyze specific aspects exhaustively, is a little out of favor today, yet his observations are sound and insightful. When one
reflects that he was writing in 1920, only two years after Debussy's death, one can only admire the courage with which he draws conclusions, "the acuity of his judgement, his ability to immediately grasp the essential."69

One other passage from Cortot's essay merits quoting for the light it throws on Debussy's style of piano playing. During the war, Cortot recalled, Debussy's publisher Durand asked him to collaborate on a French edition of the keyboard classics, needed to replace the German editions then in wide usage. Debussy chose Chopin, "whose music he had admired greatly since his piano studies at the Conservatoire, ... an opinion he held to even during the era when it was fashionable for ... musicians considered progressive to disdain styles ... having little in common with Wagnerism."

As a matter of fact, in Debussy's circle they liked to say that he played the piano like Chopin. And indeed, his touch was exquisite: easy, soft and veiled, ideal for refined nuances and for intimate gatherings, without any roughness or abrupt breaks (sans heurts ni cassures). He employed the pedal, and mainly the two pedals in combination, with infinite artistry; and, like Chopin, he preferred keyboard actions that were unresistant to the point of being flabby (facile jusqu'à la mollesse). But these are superficial common points, and the deeper nature of Chopin's or Debussy's playing doubtless did not reside simply in a matter of sonority.70

Cortot knew Ravel from his student days (they may have been classmates for a time in the preparatory division, though they went into different advanced classes) and greatly respected him as a musician. Personally and aesthetically, however, the two had little in common. After 1918 Cortot performed and recorded Jeux d'eau, the Sonatine and the
Concerto *pour la main gauche*,71 and with Casals and Thibaud he twice performed Ravel's Trio. In France, Cortot was not generally considered an outstanding Ravel interpreter.72 More than one of his performances reportedly met with Ravel's disapproval, a "distinction" he shared with the likes of Toscanini. His essay on Ravel's piano music is of considerable interest, however, not only for its insights into Ravel's style but also because Cortot seized the occasion to respond to Ravel's professed objections to "interpretation."

In his introductory remarks, Cortot warned against the tendency--common outside France--to lump Debussy and Ravel together in the same stylistic category, whether it be "impressionists," "nationalists," or some other catchy epithet, or to view Ravel simply as an epigone of Debussy. Despite some evident instances of cross-fertilization, their differences vastly outweighed their similarities, he argued. He offered this point-by-point comparison of their styles73 to support his contention:

In Debussy: predominance of something close to a state of suspended tonality produced by chords drawn out a long time; a fondness for the sensual resonance of seventh and ninth chords that are prepared or left without consonant resolution; frequent use of whole tone scales and chains of diminished or augmented sonorities deriving from these; in melody, constant recourse to appogiaturas and retardations; avoided resolutions, fleeting modulatory ambiguities.

In Ravel: hidden tonal stability, even when this seems threatened by... the vigor of superimposed themes, or by the frequent elision of the leading tone; fondness for the major seventh-plus-eleven chord... with the ninth omitted, or for chains of seconds, which he employs with perverse ingenuity; definite penchant for melodic lines composed primarily of seconds, fourths and fifths.
Revelation of a mysterious kinship between seemingly unrelated chords, ... by insinuating into the heart of the progression a pedal tone that traps them in a paradoxically intimate relationship. Concern ... for a discipline in melodic writing whose strictness ... imposes a sense of near-counterpoint on the voice progressions.

Debussy's concept of virtuosic [piano] writing seems suggested by the poetic or evocative resources of the instrument, much more than by a concern for form.... The arabesques embellishing certain quite simple progressions seem motivated by nothing other than the sensual pleasure of crystalline sonorities, the delights of color (timbre) per se.

No such thing in Ravel. Here the instrument is only the means of realizing an exacting will (une volonté sans négligence). It is not the piano which prompts or invites. Its role is limited to registering the decisions of a resolute mind, which calculates and controls. The moment one begins to marvel at the surprising fantasy of a detail of writing..., one notices that a secret, stringent logic dictated its use and context....

Debussy captures for eternity, and with seeming effortlessness, the fragile substance of improvisation.... Even the titles he chooses ... are often sufficiently imprecise as to seem a verbal emanation of the music's mood, intended to prolong a sensation rather than define it. Ravel, on the contrary, fully accepts the discipline of the conventional forms. Most of his piano pieces are modeled not only on dance rhythms, but on the classical development procedures intrinsic to these dances. The almost mercurial mobility of his music adapts itself well, paradoxically, to containment within the closed vessel of tradition. These [formal] constraints ... even seem to spur his imagination, posing clever problems which it enjoys solving.

In short,... where Debussy suggests, Ravel elucidates and specifies. Where [Debussy] gives the feeling of constant discovery, with all that is unforeseen and surprising, [Ravel] controls and organizes. In the one case a genius reveals itself in the realm of sensibility; in the other, in the intellectual domain. Though exploiting the innovations of the impressionistic style, Ravel, with ... his rationalistic [instincts], imbues them with the tone and moderation of classicism. 

While Cortot had to admire Ravel's genius for extracting new life and meaning from time-worn classical procedures that
would have stifled many another composer, he had difficulty accepting one of the corollaries of Ravel's anti-romantic stance: his unconcealed distaste for performers who "interpreted," i.e., who presumed to encroach on the composer's creative terrain. In his article on Ravel's piano works, originally published in the influential *Revue Musicale* (as were all the essays collected in *La Musique française de piano*), Cortot took Ravel to task for insisting on a literal-minded, impersonal reading of his music:

"I don't want people to interpret my music; it's enough if they play it," Maurice Ravel said one day to a group of young pianists who, after a presentation of his music, were hoping for some insights which might... shed light on his conception of his music.75

No remark is more indicative, despite... its somewhat sarcastic tone,... of the scrupulous attitude of deference [to the letter of the text] that is in order when performing a score where everything is predetermined (even the wrong notes, as humorists of a few years back couldn't resist insinuating).

I can't believe, however, that Ravel's legitimate expectations [of the performer], which perhaps make him wary of the initiatives of those... whom he labels "the aces of virtuosity,"... could ever lead him to declare himself satisfied with a correct but passive collaboration of the performer that would verge on anonymity.76

Did he not embrace almost as his own, twenty years ago, this little-known statement of Chopin: "Nothing is more detestable than a music without hidden motives"? Did he not demonstrate, in adapting it to choreography, that the implicit program underlying *Ma Mère l'Oye* or the *Valses nobles et sentimentales* could be made explicit without problem? Did he not, surprising as it might seem today, once confide to the author of the texts of *Histoires naturelles*: "My intention is to say with music what you say with words... I think and I feel music.... There is instinctive, emotional music--mine--and then there is intellectual music: d'Indy?" (diary of Jules Renard, January 10, 1907).

Ravel will pardon me then--at least I hope so--if,... in order to promote an understanding of how to play his works,... I employ commentary which avoids neither
personal conviction nor recourse to associative ideas and feelings. These are special privileges of our [interpretive] art, which, if exercised in conjunction with uncompromising concern for a textually accurate reading and the necessary respect for the nuances and tempi desired by the composer, do not always work against the interests of the music. It might even be that in withholding [these prerogatives] from us to too great a degree, the most meticulously predetermined compositions may lose their communicative power, vividness and significance. What we term an interpretation of genius is often only a result of a mistaken conviction conveyed with enthusiasm. But the impetus is there, giving wing to the thought.... And was it not Goethe who said that a work of art which leaves nothing to the imagination was not a true and complete work of art?77

Ravel "did not readily allow one to glimpse the man behind the artist, the emotion between the staff lines,"78 Cortot remarked. Yet read between the lines Cortot did, and he found traces of a sensibility one would not have expected from Ravel's public persona and aesthetic bias: "endearing tenderness [and] intimate warm poetry" (Cortot's words) for instance in the Sonatine, the first movement of which is tinged with a subtle melancholy in his interpretation that recalls the late-Romantic "spleen" of Grieg's Lyric Pieces and Franck's Variations symphoniques, or Ravel's own Pavane pour une infante défunte and Pavane de la Belle au bois dormante.79 In the Concerto pour la main gauche Cortot does not lean on the jazz and blues aspects but exploits instead the dramatic qualities of the work, accentuating the contrast between the vehement energy of the principal material and the poignant character of the cadenza episode. By imbuing the Concerto with all the breadth and expressive intensity that the musical substance can sustain, Cortot makes Ravel emerge as a complex musical
personality whose art sometimes reveals undercurrents of personal emotion and angst just beneath its polished surface that the composer himself was unwilling to acknowledge.\textsuperscript{80}

The aptness of Cortot's intuitions is not easily proved or disproved. His Ravel playing certainly presents a striking alternative to the more depersonalized, neo-Classical style of reading this music usually receives. Cortot's approach to Ravel does reveal some inconsistencies in his (Cortot's) own position. One can hardly fail to notice the discrepancy between Cortot's professed recognition of the necessity for "scrupulous... deference [toward the text],"\textsuperscript{81} and the substantial number of technical imperfections and minor textual changes audible in his recorded performances. Students in Cortot's master classes, moreover, sometimes found themselves chastised for indulging in romantic liberties (such as breaking of the hands or anticipating voices) that Cortot himself took rather often. This contradiction between preaching submission to the authority of the music while practicing a free, individualistic interpretation of the written page oneself was very prevalent among romantic performers, conductors and artist-teachers.\textsuperscript{82}

None of Cortot's important students seems to have been tempted to follow the example of his liberties. Listening to the recordings of Magda Tagliaferro, Yvonne Lefébure, Clara Haskil, Dinu Lipatti, Reine Gianoli, Eric Heidsieck and Thierry de Brunhoff, to name only a few of his best known disciples,
one hears a relatively high respect for the printed page, and few of the mannerisms and excesses for which Cortot is sometimes reproached today. These artists, who, with the exception of the much younger Heidsieck and de Brunhoff, all reached artistic maturity during the years between the wars, were probably less influenced in their attitude towards the score by Cortot's practices than by the neo-Classical temper of the times and the new ideas of textual respect and scholarly research that were gaining ascendancy.

Cortot and the Romantic Tradition.

Although the anti-Romantic rebellion against "the rhetorical, the overwhelming [and] the long-winded" was already in full swing in the creative sector during Cortot's youth (e.g., Debussy, Ravel, Satie), the spirit of Romanticism was still alive and flourishing. It was in fact only then beginning to exert its influence in the French performance domain. "The generation of my teachers," Cortot recalled, represented a direct link with the heyday of Romanticism. I learned what Chopin was like from Mme. Camille Dubois, [Georges] Mathias and Deombes. I heard Liszt spoken about as though he were still alive: Fauré, Saint-Saëns, Siloty, Widor, Mme. [Clauss-]Szarvady and Diémer had known him and often heard him play. A little later, I was present on many occasions when Cosima Wagner reminisced about her father. She told me much about Wagner that was invaluable; and I could also question Judith Gauthier and Mme. de Wolkenstein--both of whom had been very close to Wagner--about him. Mme. Schumann was still alive when I gave my Vienna debut recital several years after this. These now legendary figures populated my youth like familiar spirits. For me romanticism was not at all a mythical era but rather a near-contemporary one. Is it any wonder, then, that I believed in it whole-heartedly?
Of all the bygone Romantic heroes, it was surely Franz Liszt whose figure held the greatest fascination for young pianists coming of age in fin de siècle Paris. Surveying Cortot's career, particularly the hectic artistic activity of the pre-World War I decades in which he strove to establish himself simultaneously as a solo and chamber performer, accompanist, conductor, impresario, composer and teacher, one suspects that the inspiring example of Liszt and the ideal of comprehensive service to music he incarnated was never far from Cortot's mind.

Of course, it is one thing to profess and preach devotion to the loftiest artistic and humanistic ideals and quite another to live up to them in the day-to-day conduct of a life. One could cite instances in the course of Cortot's long and eventful life when the gap between noble aspirations and concrete actions was painfully wide. Yet even at the close of his career, Cortot could still speak in all seriousness—and in this author's opinion, sincerity—of performing and teaching as high-priestly "callings," the ultimate purpose of which was to "pass on the torch," i.e., to spread the uplifting "message" of music and to transmit a personal reservoir of experiences lived. He could still talk of the musical art as a secret "language of the inexpressible" with its own unique revelations, its own imperishable truths.

In the 1930's when the rallying cries of the piano world were fidelity to the page, objectivity, and scientific inquiry
into technique, Cortot was reproaching teachers for their short-sightedness, insisting that it was pointless to exact letter-perfect, "good" piano playing from students if one did not also succeed in reaching the heart and spirit, leading them to a deep understanding of the ulterior purpose of their efforts. 89 All instruction, he maintained, "should start from the premise that the student must be won over to the cause of music." 90 Cortot himself had no intention of giving piano lessons, only "lessons in the love of art." 91 His advice in 1953 to aspiring pianists was this: "You must not love music in proportion to what you might get from it,... as if it were a profession like any other--but rather [love it] in full cognizance of all that you must do to be equal to the magnificent, multiple demands of this exalted [undertaking]." 92

For Cortot, all performance questions began in, and ended with The Music, what it expressed or implied, and consequently what it asked of the interpreter. His conception of the musical art had strong mystical overtones. The performer, he constantly intimated, should be a "medium" and a seeker after an elusive absolute. While artistic beauty and verity was the immediate goal of his quest, Music, with its transfiguring powers could also become the portal to still higher realms: enlightenment, ecstasy, self-forgetting through union with the universal. Reine Gianoli characterized the attitude of Cortot and of her other mentors, Yves Nat and Edwin Fischer, thus:

What Cortot, Nat and Fischer had in common was a desire, a deep need... to surpass themselves. They were men who
had a genius for transcending their limitations,... and for making us transcend our own limitations.... There is an old, very cliché expression: hearing an artist, people used to talk of "being transported." One was really carried away, no longer there. Listening to Cortot even in recorded excerpts, one suddenly has the sensation of entering another dimension.... These great artists, who were hyper-aware, extremely intelligent, who had delved deeply into both aesthetic and purely artistic questions: they all three demanded that music be at the same time [art, and] a pathway towards something beyond, that is, something still greater than art.93

Many of Cortot's musical projects would seem to have been motivated in part at least by a strong sense of artistic and social responsibility, inspired by broadly humanitarian ideals. Underlying his whole career, there is an impulse to make music more accessible and understandable to the wider public, especially the mass of students, dilettantes and potential music lovers from the rising middle class—not through making concessions to the reigning (low) public taste but through initiating them into the "mysteries" of art, refining their sensibilities, shaping their tastes and winning their hearts. Historical concerts with the Lille orchestra,94 open rehearsals with multiple readings of unfamiliar works, musical matinées for the benefit of the war-wounded, public lecture-recitals for the Université des Annales, lyricizing appreciations of the piano literature, non-technical master classes geared less to established performers than to young pre-professionals, gifted amateurs, teachers and "auditors" from the serious music-loving public: the list of Cortot's popularizing and broadly didactic initiatives is very long indeed. The Principes rationnels de la technique pianistique
is a specialist's work--definitely not for the debutant or the faint of heart. Cortot's seventy-six study editions (éditions de travail) of the standard nineteenth-century piano literature, on the other hand, are not designed primarily for the prodigiously gifted: this group can do without poetic and psychological tips or systematic preparatory exercises to set them on the right track. Rather, they are intended for the great mainstream of the pianistic community, from the undeveloped or less-than-brilliant talents to the culturally and musically ignorant. Moreover, while Cortot's motives for assuming the artistic directorship of the Ecole Normale de Musique may not have been entirely altruistic (it might be argued that he was astute enough to see the potential for advancing his personal fame and fortune that this situation offered), the long-range consequence of its success under his administration was to give a powerful egalitarian impetus to music education in France.  

There are further ways in which Cortot's musical outlook would seem to have been colored by Romantic idealistic notions. The term "visionary" is often applied to his playing, and it is an apt choice in the double sense of that word: it alludes to the original, prophetic quality of his interpretive insights and realizations, and simultaneously to his low concern for the practical feasibility (at least for him) of implementing his ideas perfectly on the material/instrumental level. The quality of the conception and the loftiness of the musical
aspirations—how far one saw and how high one aimed—was what mattered most. If the execution was not technically precise and acoustically clear in every detail, that was regrettable—but it was not sufficient reason to lower one's sights.

Cortot always sought to transcend the material realities of written notation and instrumental mechanics: to make these as little obtrusive as possible in the listener's experience of the music. To that end he used his gifts as a charismatic and a "conjurer" to full advantage. He was a master at exploiting all the "illusions" of the interpretive art: the illusion of sustained singing tone and phrase line, fostered by vivid tonal imagination and perfectly calibrated touch; the illusion of the piano as orchestra, heightened through sharp contrasts of texture, articulation, touch, dynamic level and agogics; the illusion of poetic atmosphere and color, enhanced through ingenious proportioning of vertical sound strata and pedaling; the illusion of an unfettered, spontaneous outpouring, evoked through an extensive and often subtle use of rubato; and finally, "this fruitful illusion which leads the interpreter to believe for a moment that he is the creator of the work...."97

Cortot's thinking on music, as documented in a wide range of writings and secondary sources, displays a cluster of characteristically romantic assumptions and biases. These include:

- assumption that music is a language of great subtlety and precision, precise not in the sense of defining, or supplying objective information about the exterior world, but in its capacity to convey and arouse
specific, highly nuanced feelings, moods, impressions. ("Music obviously cannot describe precisely. Its sphere is the awakening of sensations.... Even in so-called 'pure' music, the composer's initial inspiration springs from a feeling, which it is the interpreter's task to rediscover and restore to the listener.... Though the musical language may grow more abstruse... it retains its emotional clarity for the initiated.")

- conception of the interpreter's role as an exalted one, involving great responsibilities but also great prerogatives. Among the latter, the interpreter has the right to act as the work's advocate and "co-author" in performance and (within the latitude permitted by the text) to render its essence according to his own understanding and convictions--even if these differ somewhat from the composer's.

- high value placed on the unique and the daring, on art that conveys a personal vision or feelings. Cortot tended to appreciate works and styles in inverse proportion to the measure of objective detachment a composer maintained vis-à-vis his creation (i.e., the more self-referential and emotionally-dictated the idiom, the better he liked it usually).

- in line with the above, esteem for affective intensity/ideational content over craft, for originality over the masterful handling of conventional formulas/procedures, the spontaneous and intuitively/sensually apprehended over the cerebral and rationally calculated in music. Clear preference within "programmatic" literature for writing in which the symbolic content is implied or evoked, over that in which it is explicitly fixed by descriptive/imitative effects, literary titles/programs, etc.

- in the interpretive sphere, primacy accorded to imagination--but imagination guided by a discerning musical intelligence (awareness, conceptual understanding, reflection)--and emotional/psychic receptivity: "Music presumes that if you love it enough to devote your life to it, you will not make a marriage of convenience with it for base motives. You must ceaselessly bring to it an ardent soul and all the resources of your imagination and heart.... The piano is played not only with the hands, but also--even primarily--with the sensibilities and the mind."

- tendency to regard technical difficulties as arising from incorrect/incomplete grasp of the musical thought or its import, and consequently as resolvable in the
main through clarification of the artistic intent (i.e., the inner aural image) rather than through physiological analysis (of motions, coordinations, etc.).

Cortot's View of the Art of Interpretation and the Interpreter's Role.

For Cortot, interpretation was never just a matter of reconstituting the musical score in sound according to the express indications of the composer and/or the dictates of some general aesthetic rationale or stylistic canon. The notated symbols were only a "blueprint," a point of departure containing magical potentialities. To impart the sense and significance of the living work, the performer had to get beyond the notes and beyond the personal gratification of difficulties conquered, to discover the heart of the music as it touched him in his inner life and bring its expressive implications across according to his own lights:

[Interpretation is not only determined by the qualities of the musical work...; [it] also reflects the personality, culture and secret aspirations of the interpreter. Hence, there is no rule one can invoke to establish objectively its prerogatives or limits.

[In my own mind, there is a clear difference (and I've tried to impress this point on my students) between the virtuoso and the interpreter. The [virtuoso] seeks to obtain personal success by means of a show of impeccable or sensational pianism. The [interpreter] wants only to be a persuasive translator (traducteur) of the idea or character that informs the musical work whose spirit momentarily comes back to life under the impulse of his imagination.

This does not mean... that technical skill and bravura are intrinsically unfit to serve the composer's intentions and the cause of music.... The secret dream of the interpreter, of course, is to be able to deploy these magnificent supplementary resources at will, and as
befits the character of the musical work being performed. For me this distinction [between virtuoso and interpreter] is... a way of explaining the choice which has regulated all my musical endeavours, though I don't mean to disparage... musicians whose temperament or ambitions lead them to aim for spectacular display.

[Interpreters and virtuosi] are both seeking to communicate—but the former try to do so by getting to the crux of the musical statement, while the latter are intent on calling attention to the surface embellishment. The interpreter envisages his role as comparable to that of an electric light bulb plugged into a live current: he records and transmits, reflectively, a primary power source which without his collaboration would remain in the state of an untapped element. He places his sensibility and imagination in the service of a commanding idea (pensée motrice) which shapes his persuasive... eloquence. He is simultaneously a confidant and a driving force (animateur). The virtuoso, on the other hand, is likely to assume, like Rostand's cock Chantecler, that it is he who makes the sun rise.

[As to whether one should try to play a work as the composer presumably wanted it played, or instead follow one's own instincts], I could go on at great length on the subject of 'respect for an interpretive tradition,' which... is easily confused with the question of stylistic traits when one is interpreting very familiar pieces. It is of course indispensable, when studying a musical work, to be aware of the artistic or spiritual atmosphere of the times that produced it, the tendencies of which it cannot help but reflect. But this initial concern must not work to lock the interpretation into a rigid approach of sterilizing objectivity. Music is life, constant, irrepressible life,... and it calls for performances which pulsate with the communicative power of a present-day sensibility that is its own referent.102

For Cortot, the foremost tasks of the interpreter were, simply put, two: 1) to discover the character of the "matrix idea"/design (idée génératrice)103 that inspired and regulated the composer's train of thought, and 2) to present the musical substance in the most meaningful, intensely vibrant and compelling form. The conscientious performer must be willing to discard all preconceptions and probe the music afresh, in
ever greater depth, always seeking a fuller understanding of its qualities and their manifold implications. In the end, however, he or she can only convey the music's "idea" and import convincingly if allowed to apply his/her own resources of imagination and feeling to breathing life into it in performance. "Music should live in us, with us," Cortot affirmed. "It should reflect us. It cannot help but reflect us."104

In his most important essay on the role of the performer, "Attitude de l'interprète," Cortot elaborated on the theme of responsible interpretive freedom as a precondition for a vital musical art:

The codes of musical interpretation change from one stylistic era to the next, and each generation of virtuosi has unconsciously worked to mould the expressive forms of earlier music to the particular sensibility of his time.

It is this fruitful anachronism which enables us to perceive, at the core of outdated structures, a message of eternal significance, and to imbue them with an irresistible tone of freshness and sincerity. Magnificent coexistence of past and present under the auspicious sign of the masterwork.

These sonorities which come down to us through the ages, attesting to the permanence of human emotions: they do not merely confirm that [a great composition] preserves its indestructible identity through all the artistic evolutions that have swept it up in their current. Close contact with such masterworks also leads the artist who presumes to inquire deeply into them and interpret them to come to know himself, through them.105

In the image of feelings familiar to him, he restores the radiance of a beauty which to outward appearances may seem to have been faded by time. Only thus, by opposing the vibrant reactions of his own personality to the surreptitious threat of a nonchalant admiration, can the interpreter worthy of that name protect a musical work from slow depreciation....

[This entails taking] bold liberties [with the music], granted;... and at times it may give rise to some
debatabile excesses. But it is the only way to save the
daring stylistic or formal innovations... [of bygone
eras] from irremedial devaluation.

We should be wary of regarding as improprieties—as
certain pedagogues devoid of imagination are wont to do—the liberties by which a born artist tries to save
musical works... from the ravages of the commonplace and
the conventional. We would do better to welcome as a sign
of enlivening respect (the enemy of every lettre morte
[and] attitude that has become rigid through being taken
for granted), this fruitful illusion which leads the
interpreter to believe momentarily that he is the creator
of the work which needs his collaboration, and to shape
its expression according to the mysterious secret of his
inner vision.

It matters little that a Beethoven genially dramatized
by Liszt, whose style symbolized all the stormy
aspirations of romanticism, was followed by [a Beethoven]
subjected to the philosophical exegesis of a von Bülow,
epitomizing an era which scarcely identified any longer
with... [the world view of a Chateaubriand]. Or more
recently that a Busoni, inspired by the desire for
scientific lucidity that characterizes our time, forced
himself to thrust the scalpel of rational analysis into
the open wound of an immortal torment. Or even that a
Paderewski, electrifying all music by mere contact with
his expansive personality, tried paradoxically to sound
the ardent and nostalgic voice of Poland through
[Beethoven's] impassioned outpouring....

The sublime Sonatas have responded to each of these
spiritual transfusions, these fervent and contradictory
encounters with an [interpretive] imagination, by
displaying a richer life and a more touching flexibility
(une vie plus nombreuse et une plasticité plus
émuvante). Like high mountain tops which are
alternately bathed in clouds or flooded with bright light
depending on the play of the hours and the seasons,
changing their appearance while preserving... the
outlines of their inalterable structure, the Sonatas take
up the color of every [interpretive] sensibility without
losing anything of their indelible original significance.

They become universalized, in a sense, through contact
with the divergent aims that happen to be expressed in
and through them. And the spirit of Beethoven could only
rejoice to have seen flourishing in the hearts of some of
his most distinguished interpreters, the profound meaning
of this advice he left... [us]: "Music must set the mind
afire" ("Il faut que la musique fasse jaillir du feu de
l'esprit").106
What Cortot offers here is almost an aesthetic manifesto, a carefully reflected plea for a poetic and always new approach to interpretation—"romantic" not in its specific stylistic features so much as in its spirit of boldness and exuberance, and its call for a tradition-challenging injection of "personality." Cortot is parti-pris for a re-creative style of artistry, but he has the sophistication of mind and the culture to recognize, and at times admit, the assumptions and drawbacks connected with his interest. The performer can and should take liberties, transcend the literal text, he maintains, but always for the sake of a disinterested projection of its qualities and a restoration of its original vitality.

Cortot insists on an important role for subjectivity in interpretation—but a subjectivity of the most knowing sort. His own playing and writings illustrate this approach to an exemplary degree: behind each finely wrought phrase inflection or carefully planned drive to a climax, each thoughtful literary commentary, one senses the presence of a controlling musical intelligence that organizes and shapes the particulars of a realization according to a refined mental image of the music. "Cortot represents the rare example of a man who thinks at the keyboard," wrote Alfredo Casella. "His style is continually evolving, signifying a constant desire on his part to better himself, a striving for a perfection that recedes to an ever-higher plane as he... approaches it. [He represents]
an example of high artistic conscience that most other pianists would do well to meditate." Cortot seems to subject almost everything to conscious deliberation: the score, his own responses to the music, the expressive/instrumental means fit to render each musical detail, even the exact wording of poetic images most likely to spark the imagination of the reader.

"Cortot's personality," wrote Yvonne Lefebure, "...encompasses, fused into a perfectly unified whole, a set of seemingly incompatible qualities:

the soul of a poet, the most lucid of intellects, unfailing will power, a penchant for research, a scholar's patience when studying [the music], and at the same time the capacity to respond to the work of art with endless lively enthusiasm [and] unjaded sensibilities. Whether we're talking about the virtuoso, the conductor, the writer or the teacher, these personal traits surface in each sphere.

"Cortot, the poet of the keyboard": nothing could be truer. If one were to add: the architect and colorist (le constructeur et le peintre des sons), the description would be quite accurate. This too: romantic by instinct, classic by reason (romantique par l'âme, classique par l'esprit). As far removed from a certain extravagant romanticism dictated by the impulse of the moment as from the neo-classicism so fashionable today [1939], which beneath a cold correctness of style cannot quite disguise its lack of temperament.

Love of the re-created work, primary emotion - these are always at the core of Cortot's interpretations. That is what makes them so irrepressibly alive, and that is how they are able to reach and speak to every sort of listener. But they remain consciously thought out, governed even in the heat of the action by intellect and will. This blend of inspiration and reflection - I keep coming back to that - is the very essence of his interpretive genius.
Cortot alluded to the respective places of conscious reflection and inspiration of the moment in the interpretive process in this advice to a student performing Beethoven's "Pathétique" Sonata:

Always ascertain during study - and I say this for all pieces and not merely this one - ascertain the ideational basis ('la base idéologique') of your interpretation. But establish this in such a way as to leave a great deal of room for spontaneous musical response. You must follow a general line of thought, but at the same time you must be sincere in expressing your mood and impulses of the moment. Otherwise, the performance, set once and for all time, becomes woefully hardened.111

If Cortot played in concert much the same way he played in the recording studio,112 he left less to the mood of the moment than the above remarks might lead one to believe. Actually he planned most aspects of his interpretations with meticulous care, varying mainly the details of delivery (infra-phrase rubato and dynamic inflections) from one performance to the next. The unique nuances and voicing, the main agogic fluctuations, the élan which struck listeners as spontaneous,113 were largely intrinsic to his conceptions, leading Alfred Brendel to remark that "with the great Cortot,... control appear[s] in the guise of improvisation."114

Musicologist and critic Fred Goldbeck, who observed Cortot's playing closely over more than a decade, noted that [t]his pianist, considered a romantic, certainly does not stint on lessons in perfection and balance. One knows what sort of perfection is required and achieved... [to perform] twice two hours of music without one line, one single measure that goes nowhere or is left to chance. Through an unrivalled acuity of interpretive imagination and attention, everything gains life, rhythm, form.115
No one makes you so keenly aware as Cortot does, that the reading and interpretation of a musical text is not a one-time, definitive discrimination between the letter and the spirit but a sort of continual creation, or rather a creation reiterated in ever-deepening spirals, in which the musician has for guide and mentor by turns Orpheus who imposes his law even in Hades, and Orpheus delivered over to the Bacchantes - a magnificent myth, and a very fitting symbol for the musician who possesses the magic of his art, and the musician who is possessed by it.\textsuperscript{116}

Cortot devoted more time and energy to recording than almost any pianist of his generation\textsuperscript{117}--and this in spite of the fact that he reportedly disliked making records and only reluctantly listened to his own.\textsuperscript{118} He grew up in an age that was more keenly aware than our own of the essentially dualistic nature of music: that is, of the permanence of the creative product (the text), and the relative transience of the musical process (the performance). Cortot, unlike many of his contemporaries, was quick to grasp the importance of the recording medium and the possibilities it opened up for preserving and disseminating the art of an individual interpreter. Already in the 'thirties he pointed out with characteristic far-sightedness that the new mass media technologies had in effect the potential to transform the whole aesthetics of performance:

Could we embrace and adapt to our own times Beethoven's advice [that music should fire the imagination], which so perfectly defines the aims and evocative power of interpretation? I suspect not, for reasons related to the standards of the age (cette loi d'époque), which inevitably influence the mentality of virtuosi.

The prime agents of change could well be the radio and the record player, which actively promote the tendency among young musicians to [aim] increasingly for an ideal of pure instrumental perfection. With these amazing
transmissions..., which hasten the progressive mechanization of music,... only the listener's ear is addressed. There's no direct contact with the audience whatsoever. [Under such conditions], there's no denying that material correctness must be the interpreter's first priority.

A wrong note, a rhythmic liberty, an interpretive caprice - all the human idiosyncracies of performance that can be forgiven or justified depending on whether an element of stage fright or inspiration enters in - all become literally unbearable in these media.

The happy surprise of a moment of exaltation, amplified by the listener's presence, the communicative dynamism, the vibrant personality which are part of the special eloquence called for when one performs live on stage, prove to be ineffective and even objectionable in the context of the somehow sterile format of a broadcast or a recording. In these media, music can only achieve its full effect if presented in its most objective dimension, which is that of architecture in time. It must have proportion and clarity above all, and the pleasure one expects from these qualities almost compels the performer's neutrality (anonymité), or at the very least his absolute fidelity to the letter of the score.

On this point there is a divergence of opinion that seems to split the younger generation into two opposing camps. For some - those who seem eminently capable of fulfilling the quasi-negative prerequisites just outlined - it's enough to think that music serves mainly to play the piano well. It is granted to others - faithful to a way of thinking which the future, alas, is no longer certain to sanction - to persevere in the belief that the instrument matters only in so far as it becomes the servant of a creative thought that transcends the note.

The conciliatory attitude of the public, which welcomes with equal enthusiasm and applause the virtuoso who tries to impress and the artist who seeks to convince, is not conducive to settling the controversy in favor of one or the other perspective, nor to indicating the way decisively to those who are still wavering.

I hardly need say on which side I stand, nor how much I hope that ultimately - perhaps with the help of the television medium soon to be available,... - young interpreters of our day will not be obliged to relinquish this gift of themselves, these powers of imagination which inflame and enrich music, restoring its deepest meaning.

It would be contrary to the idea of progress supposedly represented by these marvelous inventions..., if the disillusioning outcome turned out to be... that music were no longer capable of "firing the spirit" - but only of sparking fireworks from the fingers.119
III. Cortot's Technique

A great deal of ink has been spilled on the subject of Cortot's technique, not all of it in litanies of praise. If Cortot's artistry had a weak point, it was that his material execution was less than impeccable—far less, in many instances. Cortot was not born with the prodigious adaptive instincts of a Leopold Godowsky or a Josef Hofmann. Nor did he ever acquire the monumental command of the keyboard achieved by a Busoni, a Backhaus or a Lhévinne. Cortot, in this writer's judgment, possessed a very big and highly personal technique—but throughout his life he had to contend with a playing apparatus that could not be counted on to carry out his intentions with absolute reliability and control.\textsuperscript{120} By moments, moments that occasionally lasted for an entire recital, his technique allowed him to navigate the most treacherous and difficult passages with electrifying bravura and accuracy, only to lead him the next minute into mishaps—wrong or split notes, smudged or fudged figuration, memory lapses—which even a staunch admirer such as Graziosi had to concede were "of sufficient quantity and variety... to make even a pianist of modest stature blush."\textsuperscript{121} He was, as Yvonne Lefébure once quipped, "aussi inégal qu'inégalable" ("as inconsistent as he was incomparable").\textsuperscript{122}

Harold Schonberg attributes Cortot's erratic performance technique to his having attempted to juggle too many different
careers at the same time, as a result of which he was simply not able to keep his fingers in shape.\textsuperscript{123} There is some truth in this explanation. Cortot was constitutionally incapable of adopting the kind of virtuoso mentality that was content to move within the confines of a world bounded by the piano and its literature. He was a man of action--too curious, too receptive to all manner of experiences (just as long as they were "productive"), and too involved in the ways of the real world to remain cloistered in a practice studio. Deep down, he was not very interested in virtuoso problems and mechanics. When he did turn his attention to technical questions, it was with the aim of devising ways to minimize the drudgery of repetitive drill and render practicing more engrossing and efficient.

The situation is not as simple as Schonberg puts it, however. Other artists--Busoni, Rachmaninoff and Ossip Gabrilowitsch, to stay with Cortot's near contemporaries--managed to keep their techniques in fine form while pursuing multifaceted careers that surely curtailed their practice time.\textsuperscript{124} Furthermore, the Cortot students interviewed for this study insisted that the notion that Cortot never practiced much is inaccurate, except perhaps with reference to the last decades of his career, when he reportedly allowed the quality of his discipline and study habits to slacken.\textsuperscript{125}

Judging from Cortot's susceptibility to memory lapses, there was something in the process of reflex automatization
that gave him real trouble. Whether it was distaste for drill that led him to slight repetition, or a reluctance to attend consciously to the physical side of playing (which could cause an overloading of the reflex system with too many different, partially automatized movements), or paralyzing stage fright that interfered with the "automatic pilot" or some other, more arcane factor that caused his inconsistencies must remain a matter of conjecture.

Cortot's disciple and friend Magda Tagliaferro was in a position to speak knowledgeably of Cortot's practice habits, having been on very close terms with him for nearly fifty years. Cortot, she recalled,

was indefatigable and incredibly well-organized in the use of his time. That was the secret of his ability to accomplish so much in a great variety of musical spheres. He had a regular daily routine, which he adhered to like clockwork: he got up at six o'clock, ate breakfast, then attended to the mail (all his correspondents received handwritten letters). By eight-thirty he was at the piano and he practiced, with few breaks, for three or four hours. In the afternoon after lunch, depending on his commitments, he went to the Ecole Normale, or in earlier [i.e., pre-1920] days he gave his Conservatoire classes--and he was capable of teaching his class in the afternoon and playing a concert the same evening. He was a phenomenon,... with a will of iron.

Cortot believed that one should not practice more than about five hours a day--five hours of really good, intelligent and concentrated work.... He himself sometimes practiced more than that, however. I spent summers with them [i.e., with Cortot and his wife] at his villa at St. Cast, in Normandy, and during those periods Cortot... would practice all morning and then go back to work after lunch, often putting in six or seven hours a day. Concert pianists can't practice (in the best sense of the word) very much during the winter while they're touring. They run through their pieces, often hurriedly, in order to keep the music at peak performance level and maintain technical fitness (which is a kind of training in speed, agility and endurance). They cannot,
however, learn new repertoire or rework a piece from top to bottom. It was in the summer, mainly, that Cortot did the really thorough kind of practicing.

During summer vacations I often heard Cortot practice—and with such patience!—slowly, of course, ... and then afterwards gradually working the piece up to tempo. The real, basic work—this he did quite slowly, as one should.127

Yvonne Lefébure,128 one of the most important of Cortot’s Conservatoire students (the other standouts from this generation being Clara Haskil and Magda Tagliaferro) and his principal associate at the Ecole Normale until 1939, was also in close contact with Cortot during the prime decades of his career. “Cortot did have to practice a great deal to play his best,” she affirmed.

When I was very young and just starting my career, the man who tuned my pianos was Pierre Bézy, Cortot’s regular piano technician.129 [Bézy] told me that on days when Cortot had a recital he often went to the concert hall in the morning and practiced all day until seven o’clock, breaking off just long enough to grab a sandwich at lunch. Then he would come back before the concert and warm up again....

I myself saw him arrive backstage before a concert and recommence practicing his scales with his gloves on. I was so struck by the sight that I’ll never forget it. I couldn’t understand it, because back then it seemed to me that Cortot had a marvelous piano hand. He was short and slight of build but he had a large hand with fleshy pads on his fingertips, long fingers and a big stretch; and he had so much power....

In reality, he didn’t have a lot of natural agility; and except for his wrist, which was incredibly supple, he didn’t have that much natural flexibility. Cortot had to be really warmed up to play well. He was very sensitive to cold and drafts, and his muscles would get stiff and sluggish....

I knew him at a time when he said that during the vacation periods at St. Cast, he practiced eleven hours a day.... That was when he was studying the Chopin Etudes.130 I can believe it, because being “on vacation” bored him to death.... “Rest and relaxation tire me out,” he used to say.131
Cortot may have paid a high price in psychological and technical security for his youthful infatuation with conducting. His involvement with orchestras in his 'twenties, Magda Tagliaferro implied, was a double-edged sword: it helped mould and broaden his musical thinking, while at the same time it prevented him from accumulating valuable solo performance experience that might have enabled him to cope more successfully with nervousness:

It's often said that Cortot didn't have enough technique, which is simply not true. He was high-strung, and sometimes his technical control was impaired. He suffered greatly from performance anxiety; there were times when he didn't want to walk out on stage. I think that his habit of coming on stage and immediately sitting down at the piano was one of the ploys he devised for combating his terrible stage-fright.

In his younger days when he was devoting himself to conducting, Cortot played the piano, of course, but his real career as a concert pianist... began later, around the time that the Trio became famous, i.e., about 1908 or 1909. At that point, he began getting engagements everywhere. It was no coincidence; his playing when he performed with the Trio was marvelous, extraordinary!...

Cortot created his own personal technique, suited to his particular hand and physical means. He had a difficult hand--very large, with long fingers and a solid bridge, but rather stiff, rather knotty. When I met him he was almost thirty and already formed, mature. But I know that when he was young his hands were frailer, more awkward; he was always saying so. Countless times, as he watched my hand weave around the keyboard, he would exclaim: "Oh, how envious I am of your small nimble hand," and I'd answer "But as for me, how I'd love to have your big hand."

I think that quite a number of the exercises in the Principes Rationnels and in Cortot's editions were devised by him for his own use. He had to search for, and invent exercises because of his problematic hand.... I didn't hear him do exercises on a regular, daily basis, but I would hear him working on technique incidentally, so to speak, in the course of his practice. He practiced thirds, sixths, octaves, all those sort of skills that are part of a transcendental piano technique....
I had the impression that at a certain moment his technique improved markedly. Not that he changed his basic conception—but that he had more facility than in the first years I knew him, that his hand became more supple and also his wrist.... He was very high-strung by temperament, however. And as the years went by he became more so, with the result that his technique and memory were increasingly vitiated by bad nerves and stage-fright.  

Apart from the familiar breed of mistakes brought on by insecure reflexes or nervousness, one can detect another type of technical foible in Cortot's recorded performances that is not, properly speaking, an error but rather a characteristic inexactitude in the enunciation of certain rapid figurations and secondary harmonic parts. These are skinned or sketched so that the individual sounds melt into a streak of motion, a suggestion of sonorous atmosphere or a declamatory outburst as indistinct in its acoustical details as it is clear in its emotional or dramatic import. In such contexts one has the impression that Cortot's technique would have been more than adequate to the task of rendering the notes clearly had he been willing and able to curb his exuberance and temperament—in other words, if he had not been the kind of interpretive artist he was.

Instead, what we hear is the product of an artistic will so imperious, so bent on driving home the poetic/emotional gist of the musical passage as a whole, that it simply overrides the material and mechanical details of execution. Does Cortot actually play all the right-hand notes in the lyrical central section of Chopin's e minor Etude, Op. 25 No. 5, or in the
ascending runs of the g# minor Etude in thirds, Op. 25 No. 6? Does he sound all the tones in the left-hand figurations of the f minor Fantaisie (e.g., mm. 68-85) or in the chords in the closing section of the Ballade No. 3 in Ab major (mm. 212-26), or does he merely hint at some of them? Impossible to say with certainty.

The purpose of these observations is not to point out imprecisions in Cortot's performances. Nor is it to reproach him for preferring the illusionist's art to the "silversmith's" at times. Rather, it is to suggest that in Cortot's musical approach one can detect a strong tendency to split art into mental and manual aspects of decidedly unequal importance. At the risk of psychologizing, it may be conjectured that Cortot, whose extraordinary musical gifts were not matched by equally exceptional physical aptitudes, came to regard the physiological side of performance almost as a "necessary evil."
The musical idea was endowed with a quasi-absolute supremacy, while technique—or more exactly, the pianist's physical mechanism—was relegated to the status of the lowliest of tools. The piano had to be conquered so that it could be forgotten, the muscles rendered obedient to the interpreter's subtlest intent. Quite true. Yet there emanates from some of Cortot's playing and writing an attitude of condescension—mixed-with-distrust toward the playing apparatus that is reminiscent of the outlook some tyrannical conductors of yesteryear (von Bülow, Reiner) adopted toward their orchestral
players: they were insignificant, albeit indispensable cogs in the music-making process, servants that had to be subdued so that they would bend to the will of a superior musical intelligence. They had to be kept in an iron-fisted grip. If the interpreter let down his guard or stopped concentrating momentarily, they might, like the fabled sorcerer's apprentice, go awry and betray his intentions.

If Cortot's intentions happened to overextend his technique (i.e., if the players were not quite up to the demands made on them by the conductor's conception), there was no compromising: the body was simply pulled along, the fingers coerced into playing as best they could what Cortot heard in his imagination. Often the results of this "mind over matter" approach were extraordinary. Rather than looking for the pianistic (i.e., the easiest and most comfortable) way of doing things, Cortot would ask the seemingly impossible of his technique and would succeed in drawing effects of surpassing beauty and originality from the instrument. At other times, however, and with increasing frequency in his last years, the disparity between intentions and actual realization at the keyboard was painfully evident.134

Instrument, Posture, Stage Demeanor.

From the time he graduated from the Conservatoire until at least the First World War, Cortot was closely associated with the French piano firm of Pleyel.135 He continued to perform on Pleyel grands whenever circumstances permitted until
1935 or 1936, after which time he changed over to Steinways in concert appearances. To the end of his career, however, the piano he regularly practiced on at home was a rosewood Pleyel grand. His deep attachment to Pleyel pianos is perhaps of more than anecdotal significance. The Pleyel instruments had special qualities, already recognized in Chopin's day, which made them admirably suited to personal research into tone production, i.e., to exploration of the range of possibilities and means for individualizing and "coloring" one's sonority. In all basic features of construction, the fin-de siècle Pleyel was a modern instrument not unlike those manufactured today, but its touch and the character of its sound differed noticeably from those of Steinways or Erards of the same era. In particular, the Pleyel's bass register was considerably less powerful and "boomy" than the Steinway's. The tone quality had the same clear onset as the Erard's, but was a little rounder and slightly veiled (hence, less brilliant but especially well suited to cantabile playing).

The action of the Pleyel was the lightest of the three major French makes of the day (the other two being Erard and Gaveau). All the French actions were lighter than the Steinway's; that is, a few less grams of weight were required to depress their keys. The distance from key level to key bed on the Pleyel was quite possibly a tiny bit shorter as well. In the early decades of this century, Yvonne Lefébure recalled, the firm produced instruments with markedly different actions:
There were Pleyels and Pleyels, you know.... There were Pleyels with rather resistant keyboards (and there were a whole lot of pianists, myself included, who liked these better), and ones with lighter actions. Cortot preferred the easier ones.138

What the lighter Pleyel actions afforded the pianist, primarily, was greater ease and rapidity of articulation for the same physical effort. As French pianist Eric Heidsieck139 explained: "It took just a little less strength, a little less weight... to go to the bottom of the key, which made it possible to attain greater speed... [and] fluency... than on the Steinway,... whose springier but more resistant keyboard basically demanded a bit more muscular exertion."140

For the young Cortot, growing up in a finger dexterity-oriented piano school and not possessing, as his friend Risler did, an exceptionally robust and muscular physique, the Pleyel was the ideal instrument on which to pursue his search for greater fullness and variety of tone color with a minimal loss of fine-tune control and agility. Cortot wanted to develop a technique that would be capable of characterizing a musical line or "orchestrating" a complicated texture through modifications of sonority alone, if need be. The Pleyel, which was sensitive to very subtle differences of touch, enabled him to devise by experimentation his own highly individual means for achieving this.141

"Cortot and Gieseking had the two most beautiful piano sonorities I ever heard," noted Magda Tagliaferro:

The tonal ideals of the two [pianists] were quite dissimilar, however. Cortot had a very rich tonal
palette, which is to say that he could transform his sound to an extraordinary degree. He had the whole gamut of shadings (tous les coloris). Gieseking's tone was ravishing, but it was always the same gorgeous quality, very homogeneous and consistent. Cortot had much more variety, ... and he developed this coloristic skill largely on his own, through personal research, trial and error. He was guided by his ear—thinking about it is not enough, it's what the inner ear hears that matters most—and by his taste for orchestral timbres. He would have liked to have been a conductor.... In short, the piano, which is the king of instruments, was not in itself enough for him. He thought big (il voyait grand)....

Cortot "always started with the sound," in his teaching as in his own piano study, noted his pupil Guthrie Luke. "With him, it was necessary to decide on the character of the sound for every passage, to be able to put it into words. The sound—in other words, the ear—dictated for him the technique."

Cortot sat rather low at the keyboard, usually with arms sloping in a natural curve from shoulder to fingers (no sharp angles at the elbow or wrists), hand outstretched (though not to the point that the hand knuckle was sunken) and fingers only minimally curved so that the cushions made maximum contact with the key. The fifth finger was fully extended and played straight (as a unit). The fourth was sometimes held similarly, especially when it was required to sing a melody. This hand position was so unorthodox for the French school that Cortot was considered a renegade, if not an absolute original, in his own country. In reality, he was far from unique in adopting the extended finger position: several great artists of his era, including Josef Lhévinne, used and recommended it. It is particularly advantageous for legato and
cantabile playing (permitting greater control over key descent) as well as for achieving delicate gradations in the piano to ppp range without lapsing into a devitalized, insipid tone. It also facilitates the execution of extended broken figures or chords by increasing the hand and finger spread. Its major drawbacks are that finger articulation tends to be less precise, and that the pianist must expend more energy than with a curved finger to obtain the same level of tone intensity (volume), assuming that the force in both cases is applied from key level, i.e., with a prepared touch.

The intensity/energy output problem can be overcome in a variety of ways. Perhaps the most natural solution is to involve the larger playing units, the hand and arm, to a slightly greater degree so that they provide added impulse, mass (weight) or pressure, "backing up" the finger in a sense. That is exactly what Cortot did, though his utilization of less finger articulation and more hand, wrist and arm participation ran counter to some cherished precepts of French school technique. Guthrie Luke recalled overhearing Cortot practice for an extended period: "I remember that it was more or less in tempo and not with special rhythms, [b]ut there was much repetition, seemingly to perfect the various movements of fingers, wrists, or whatever. Though [Cortot] advocated practicing with high fingers, in performance he rarely played with them lifted more than a quarter of an inch above the key - depending of course on the speed and volume of the piece."149
While Cortot's fingers hovered in close proximity to the keys and executed small, economical strokes, his wrist was very mobile and supple. "Cortot utilized his wrist, which was extremely flexible, almost constantly and to wonderful advantage," noted Magda Tagliaferro. "Active and elastic, the wrist was continually tracing shapes and curvilinear movements."150

Cortot's bearing at the instrument was quiet and devoid of superfluous movements. "His overall posture was exemplary," Tagliaferro recalled:

He sat up quite straight, his torso [inclined] neither forward nor back. His movements were restrained, his bearing always dignified and sober. Some have the impression that this position was the norm in France then, but it most certainly was not. In fact, there was no norm: pianists leaned far forward, far back, sat any which way! Cortot undoubtedly exerted a positive influence on later French pianists' thinking about posture. Under the influence of Plante and Diémé many French school performers hunched over, backs curved and noses almost touching the keys, elbows bent and arms hugging their sides. The Marmontels [Antoine and his son, Antonin] and Diémé had also established the tradition, later perpetuated by Marguerite Long, of overly curved fingers that were to be raised high above the keys and projected with great force and precision onto the keyboard. Cortot detested the dry, brittle non-legato sound this approach often produced.

In general, the very greatest artists have always adopted a moderate, unconstrained posture at the piano, free of contortions or exaggeration—if only out of a sort of respect for one's instrument.151

In Cortot's performance style intense musical concentration was complemented by an extreme economy of movement, though he was technically at the opposite pole from the "static" hand position advocated by many French and foreign professors at the turn of the century.152 From the vantage of
an audience member observing Cortot in recital, Gavoty wrote, "his hands reminded one of two flexible doves, fluttering, graceful. In expressive passages... the right hand would soften and extend elastically like a cat stretching. Fingers clustered in a sheaf one minute for more concentrated energy would open like a flower, [and]... the right hand would declaim at the top of its voice... with this dipping of the wings that precedes take-off." What Gavoty's images suggest is that Cortot generally used the fingers as a supple extension of the hand unit rather than working them in isolation.

A professional pedagogue and theorist, Lucien Chevaillier, was fascinated by the efficiency of gesture and the minimal waste of energy he observed in Cortot's playing:

His body quasi-immobile, Cortot lays his hands on the keyboard and his fingers land simply, with a minimum of stretching, right where they're supposed to.... Covering the whole range of dynamic levels from pianissimo to the upper extremes of sound intensity, he does not appear to make an appreciably greater muscular effort, nor do his gestures seem to get much bigger. The way Cortot can draw from the piano sounds that are at once voluminous, powerful and "fat" (masses)... without seeming to work hard at it is one of the rarest and most thought-provoking things I have ever observed in the playing of this instrument.154

The economy of motion was real, but the appearance ofeffortlessness Cortot projected was often mere illusion. The visible stillness concealed a terrifically focussed mental energy and a fair amount of physical tension. Cortot's bearing would seem to have been at least as much the outgrowth of a philosophical attitude as it was the product of physiological insights. Students who swayed or bounced around unnecessarily,
or who indulged in superfluous gesticulations and grimaces were certain to incur his wrath—not because it was technically detrimental (or at least he never cited this reason), but because it drew attention to the performer and distracted it from the music, because it was somehow "sacrilegious."

"What would you think of a priest who skipped through his Mass in slap-dash fashion, or who served it dancing?" he would ask them.

Cortot's stage deportment was fully consistent with his conviction that the performer's task was to capture and communicate the essence of the music, not to engage in self-serving displays of showmanship. It was also consistent with his nervousness and susceptibility to audience-related distractions and reactions. Though possessing a magnetism that could hold an audience spellbound, Cortot gave no outward sign of "coming toward" his listeners, of cultivating their sympathies or interest. Utterly absorbed in his task, physically turned further away from them than was customary, he almost seemed to consciously shut them out. "Cortot seems to be very little concerned with where he is when he is officiating," wrote Chevaillier.

I suspect that he sits at the piano with the same serenity of spirit, the same intimacy of gestures, in the solitude of his studio as he does in the salon of friends, or before a hall full of four hundred or two thousand people. He is absent from his public, and doesn't seem to care particularly whether one is listening or not: it's for an interior and invisible listener, much more difficult to satisfy than all the others, that he is playing.
The impact on the listening public of Cortot's exteriorizing declamation, alternately impassioned or tender, imperious or charming, must have been all the more striking for having come from an undemonstrative, even impassive figure. Rather than playing for--or to--the public, Cortot drew them into his orbit, making them silent accomplices in his personal artistic quest, it seemed to Camille Mauclair:

The instinct of the virtuoso being to give of himself, Cortot intrigues me because of all this contradictory desire to pull back into himself that I read in his manner. Instead of projecting the music that he knows toward us, he reabsorbs it, plays it for himself in order to possess it even more fully, not to offer it to us.... We have to go to him, because he will do nothing to come to us. In the course of a long tête-à-tête with the instrument, the Liszt Sonata for instance, I sense very clearly that he has forgotten us. For a long time we've been... nothing but a rectangle of crowd, dark and mute. Nothing budges, each listener is won over to total silence. Even the white chrysanthemums on the ladies' hats are not bobbing, and no fan flutters.... Minutes pass. The dark young man, still, does not look at us. Deftly, tenderly, authoritatively, he strokes the piano keys..., and I have the weird impression of realizing suddenly that he is caressing a live body. The instrument is no longer the intermediary between the music and the virtuoso. It is really [the piano] which is crying, which is singing, dreaming, because a privileged being knows how to touch or strike it in its mysterious nerve centers. And with all this music - frenzied, soaring, elegant, fearsome - Alfred Cortot ends up creating around himself and us a kind of extraordinary harmonic silence. A silence such as this cannot be attained without the magnetism of such beautiful sonorities. Such a silence is imposed on us only by the prestige of this confrontation between an artist of superior thought and pure music. There is nothing for us to do but contemplate them both....
Technical resources: Variety of power sources, coordinations, touches.

"Cortot loved the piano--but as a means, never as an end," declared Magda Tagliaferro. In spite of an early training that laid great emphasis on pure technical work and in spite of his own imposing contribution to the technical literature (Les Principes rationnels de la technique pianistique), Cortot believed that true technical mastery was not acquired in the abstract, through exercises and drills, but rather was cultivated in response to specific musical aims and problems. The great Russian pedagogue Heinrich Neuhaus stated that "any perfecting of technique is a perfecting of art itself, and can only help bring out the hidden meaning... or essence of the music." Cortot conceived the proposition in reverse. It was the perfecting of art (musical understanding, interpretive goals) that brought about the perfecting of technique:

...(T)he only sure and rapid way of perfecting instrumental technique is to make it utterly responsive ('de l'assujettir étroitment') to the aims of poetic interpretation. That way it diversifies, grows flexible and imbues the performance with these varied shadings which alone make musical works intelligible and full of life.

"I don't know if I have a particular technique," Cortot was heard to say on occasion. In a sense he was not being evasive, if by "particular" one means an approach in which one element of the physical complex clearly predominates (active finger articulation with minimal arm participation, or minimal finger action with ample arm movement and weight, to cite two
extremes). "What distinguishes his technique," wrote Yvonne Lefébure, "is above all its incredible versatility:

His is neither a finger nor an arm technique, but - as the context demands - one of fingers and/or of arm, and especially of wrist. Percussiveness has been completely eliminated. No more of those authoritarian attacks... from above the key.... The fingers depress the keys by pressure touch from surface level and are aided by the weight of the hand, and when power is required, by arm weight. The wrist, the intermediary between [fingers and arm], is the pivot - I daresay, the "soul" - of the entire playing apparatus. The constant suppleness of wrist combined with the firmness of the fingers permits every dynamic nuance (and how judiciously calibrated!)... as well as almost limitless endurance.

That such admirable elasticity,... immense mellowness (douceur) and variety of touch are blended in one and the same technique with an intensity of sound that recalls the power of the orchestra: that is the secret, the magic of this great artist.164

In a panel discussion featuring a number of Cortot's most eminent students,165 the question arose: given that Cortot sat so low, from where (i.e., from what principal lever movement or source) did he draw all his power? "Largely from the shoulder, and even from the back," Mme. Lefébure maintained. Eric Heidsieck was not so sure: "I have the impression," he answered, "that it came simply from the wrist with the fingers outstretched,... that the finger functioned like a bell-clapper." On one point the participants were in unanimous agreement: Cortot nearly always went to the bottom of the key, in contrast to many other French pianists of his day who were partial to light- or non-weighted finger techniques (the famous jeu perlé and carezzando touches) in which the fingers gave a precise initial impulse to the key but did not follow it through to the key-bed. "His sound was never pale," remarked
Heidsieck, "never syrupy or frothy.... There was always an impact at the bottom, which was an emotive jolt (un choc emotif), but--and this was the amazing part--a jolt followed by an immense reverberation."166

Cortot, as a corollary of his overriding concern for cantabile playing, placed great importance not only on freedom of movement in the hand and arm but above all on consciously initiated motions of the wrist (in reality, the arm) that would ensure a genuine, intense legato. In his teaching, said Guthrie Luke,

\[\text{How to use the hand and wrist was more often the question than how to use the fingers. For [Cortot], melody playing was really hand playing. Even when "pure" technique was used, it was the hand that gave the impulse to the fingers.... Melodic inflection came from varying degrees of pressure of the hand brought to the fingers, with the fingers usually poised close to the keys - not "raised for attack".... Of course, for declamatory passages he could get a terrific sound by the opposite means, dropping his hand from a considerable height, as I remember in the finale of the Saint-Saëns Fourth [Concerto].}\167

Cortot's student Marthe Morhange-Motchane,168 a respected pedagogue who has authored or edited many didactic volumes, had the opportunity of working with him for seven years in private and class lessons and subsequently of playing in many of his interpretation courses. Questioned about the role of the arm and the various playing levers in Cortot's personal technique and in his advice to students, she confirmed that

\[\text{Cortot used a lot of arm participation and weight in his playing, but you wouldn't have known it to look at him. He did not make big, obvious motions with the arms and torso. In fact, his movements were often so condensed as to be barely perceptible. When he needed a lot of power,}\]
for instance in chord playing at high dynamic levels, he played from the shoulder and recommended to his students to do likewise.

Cortot rarely discussed technique per se in lessons. The fingers were to be articulated in a free and easy manner, without excessive lifting or tension. He was adamant that one should consistently go to the bottom of the key. "No surfacey sound" ("pas de sonorité superficielle") was probably his most frequent admonition. To bring the melody line out he would recommend playing from the wrist (l'attaque du poignet), but he made it very clear that it was not small wrist impulses that were called for. Instead, the forearm was always to go with the wrist [i.e., the line between hand and forearm was not to be broken by a sharp bend at the wrist]. He wanted our playing to be unconstrained, ample and projected. "Open up!" ("Ouvrez les bras!") he would often urge us.169

The testimonies of Cortot's students underscore the difficulty of drawing conclusions about muscular coordinations, touch forms or power sources from outward appearances. Their remarks do however provide several clues to his playing manner, when taken in conjunction with his writings. A moment's reflection will convince one that the wrist is neither a playing lever nor a category of technical challenge (like chords or octaves), but simply an articulation or joint, like the elbow. Therefore it is not literally correct to speak of the wrist making (i.e., actively initiating) circular or up-and-down motions, much less rotary ones. Its role is actually a complementary one: that of transmitting and completing movements--vertical, axial, curvilinear and lateral--initiated and guided by the forearm, or the forearm and upper arm working in tandem.

It is revealing that while Cortot advocated keeping the wrist somewhat lower than the bridge in his technical writings,
in practice he often played with a higher, springy wrist ("le poignet haut suspendu faisant ressort," as Gavoty says). This position allows for the forearm to give a slight impulse--gravity aiding, it need be very slight--to project finger-and-hand onto the keys with an elastic swing in melody playing.\textsuperscript{170} It is also advantageous when coordinated movements utilizing the power and/or mass of the arm are needed, as in fortissimo chord progressions.\textsuperscript{171}

The contours traced by Cortot's wrist served two primary purposes: 1) to carry the fingers and hand over the keys to be played, facilitating correct placement and smooth phrase line; and 2) to optimize energy and weight transfer by aligning the larger levers on the same axis as the finger which plays (i.e., the hand behind the finger, the arm behind the hand).

Alignment of the wrist-forearm comes naturally in the axial (rotary) movements used for tremolos and forte trills. But there are other types of forearm-generated wrist motions (e.g., the "thrown hand" employed for staccato lines or light octaves and the small vertical bounces called "pulsing") which break a hypothetical line from hand knuckle to elbow with sharp angles at the wrist. On the other hand, curvilinear or lateral wrist motion which maintains a high degree of alignment between the playing levers usually derives from movements which the upper arm initiates or participates in. This explains why Cortot frowned on the "little" wrist movements and why he often urged students to "open their arms" literally as well as
figuratively: he probably wanted more extensive use of the synthetic, interdependent gestures controlled by the upper arm and shoulder which facilitate legato playing, refined phrase shaping and long line. Needless to say, all this represented a radical departure from the old French school, so much so that in Cortot's writings the key to a sensitive technique always remained the wrist, and not the arm. 172

Rattalino is probably correct in attributing certain of Cortot's technical difficulties to his having pushed out beyond the parameters of the traditional French technique. 173

Mme. Tagliaferro, whose technique epitomizes a natural, easy approach to the instrument, made this revealing observation:

Cortot succeeded [with his technical approach] through will power and tenacity; he was convinced he was on the right track. Perhaps his way wasn't right for everyone. No way is right for everyone. There are physiological foundations which should always be adhered to--flexibility, relaxation, and so forth--but which were much less understood and practiced in his day. Only little by little have they been more widely adopted. Back then--and still today, but less--many pianists played with high physical tension (jouaient sur la contraction). Usually Cortot played from the shoulder with a free arm, but not always. At times he bent his elbows or held them close to his sides. Often I said to myself, "Oh, if only I could tell him." In fact, I dared to tell him a good many things when I was fourteen. I was just a child, and so open with him.... I even had the audacity to suggest dynamic nuances to him when he was going through the Chopin Préludes at the home of friends (what liberties one takes when one is young!) but I never made suggestions about technique to him. 174

In Cortot's concert engagement diary where he had the habit of copying his programs with comments (usually disparaging) on how the performance had gone, one finds the following remark: "I must at all cost improve in the technique
of executing large leaps."\textsuperscript{175} Jumps were Cortot's particular nemesis; no other type of technical difficulty gave rise to so many wrong or split notes in his performances.

Perhaps insufficient agility was at the root of the problem; perhaps it was a matter of his having become habituated to an inefficient approach to the difficulty ("he had trouble with leaps because he didn't go straight for the note," Mme. Tagliaferro opined).\textsuperscript{176} From a larger perspective, however, the problem would appear to be related to certain residual constraints on arm movement left over from his early French school training and to Cortot's desire to "over-control," i.e., to dictate the exact character of the sound through immediate conscious intervention rather than trusting to conditioned, quasi-automatic gestures at crucial moments—a practice which almost inevitably increases tension in the physical apparatus. Too much conscious interference in the execution of rapid jumps, whether to modify the path of the arm or the tone quality of the arrival note, engenders errors because "he who wants to brake the momentum of the leap involuntarily tenses his muscles, and whoever tenses up will tend to miss the landing note."\textsuperscript{177}

Generally speaking, the further Cortot departs from traditional French aesthetic and pianistic aims, the greater his technical difficulties. When he approaches music that calls for sparkling, fluent fingerwork and a light, non-legato sound (e.g., Saint-Saëns' \textit{Etude en forme de valse}, Albeniz'
Malagueña, or Chopin's Etudes Op. 10, No. 4 in c# minor or Op. 25, No. 2 in f minor), he plays with impressive technical finish and few wrong notes. When, instead, he aims for powerful emotional and tonal projection and complex "orchestral" textures (as in Schumann's Etudes symphoniques, Chopin's Ballade No. 2 in F major, or Liszt's Hungarian Rhapsody No. 2 or Sonata in b minor), he encounters problems with clarity and accuracy.

Cortot's style was distinguished by an extreme variety of pianistic means. He was very fond of combining two or three touch forms simultaneously to create a richly textured sound fabric. His playing shows a similar diversity of tone qualities and colors, the only piano sounds excluded a priori being sustained banging or dry thumping. Almost any other sonority or touch, including some considered "ugly" or improper in academic circles, was admissible, though Cortot might use it only rarely, to serve an exceptional expressive purpose.

Quasi-"free fall" drops of the arm,\textsuperscript{178} sharp levered-arm strokes for martellato or declamatory emphasis, quick rebounding finger and hand staccati for incisive rhythmic accentuation and accompaniment figures, rapid lateral gestures taking in many notes on the momentum of a single energetic impulse,\textsuperscript{179} scintillating finger touches (among which an energetic and a leggiero type of non-legato as well as a delicate "dusting" of the keys),\textsuperscript{180} in addition to every type of legato (pressure, weight-transfer, active and passive "swing
stroke," etc.) and legatissimo\textsuperscript{181} articulation: all these coordinations and touches were regularly utilized by Cortot. Most, if not all, can no doubt be found in the arsenal of any accomplished artist. What set Cortot above so many was his sure intuition for when and how each could be used to enhance musical character and structural clarity.
Chapter V: Notes

1A.C., p. 145. The figure seems somewhat elevated, but it is certainly within the realm of possibility if one counts Cortot's appearance as a chamber musician, vocal accompanist, conductor, master teacher and lecture recitalist along with his solo and concerto performances.

2See Schonberg, The Great Pianists, p. 383. A tentative list of Cortot's performance repertoire, reconstructed from program announcements and reviews, may be found in Appendix III.

3On the programs inventoried one finds single performances of the Concerto in Eb, K. 365 for two pianos (with Risler), the Trio, K. 542 and K. 564 (with Thibaud and Casals), and several of the violin/piano sonatas. Cortot gave at least two performances of the Sonata in D [K. 448] for two pianos, one with Plante in 1907 and another with Wanda Landowska in 1925.

4Cortot investigated all the keyboard works of Erik Satie and "Les Six" (Arthur Honegger, Darius Milhaud, Germaine Tailleferre, Francis Poulenc, Louis Durey and Georges Auric) written prior to 1938 in preparing his survey of French piano music, La Musique francaise de piano (see Vol. III, pp. 9-111 and 223-65). He recognized the considerable influence Satie exerted on the younger composers that rallied around him but considered Satie's aesthetic ideas more significant than his compositions.


6Ibid., p. 9.


8A.C., p. 146.

9The recitals were given between May 7 and May 31, 1924, at the Salle du Conservatoire. According to Laurent Ceillier, Cortot played 60 of the 70 works on his master class program. See Monde Musical, 35, No. 9-10 (May 31, 1924), p. 183.

10When Jules Gentil, Cortot's long-time associate at the Ecole Normale de Musique, first brought this program to my attention, I expressed surprise that Cortot would have undertaken a project of such scope, given his reputation for having memory lapses. Gentil said that the memory problems
grew much more serious in later years. He recalled, however, that in marathon cycles such as the one above he or another colleague would be stationed backstage and would follow the performances with score, ready to bail Cortot out should he get into real trouble.

11Early in his career Cortot did play a few transcriptions, notably Diémer's arrangement of Mozart's Magic Flute Overture, Cortot's own adaptations of Wagner's Meistersinger Overture and "Death of Isolde" scene from Tristan, and the Verdi-Liszt Rigoletto Paraphrase. Later he dropped these from his repertoire, but he would occasionally offer his transcription of Schubert's "Litanei" or Fauré's "Fileuses" from Péléeas et Melisande as an encore.


14Busoni, who with Cortot initiated the custom of playing the Chopin Préludes as a set in concert, supposedly made a piano roll around 1910 of all 24 which is said to be in the hands of a private collector. Cortot's recording of the Fantaisie is predated by two piano rolls, one by Xavier Scharwenka, the other by Mischa Levitzki.

15This survey, by no means exhaustive, drew on concert announcements and reviews in Paris music journals (mainly the Monde Musical and Mercure Musical) and programs in the Risler family archives.

16Since the Mozart pieces were almost all ensemble works, they may well reflect the tastes of Cortot's partners, Diémer, Plante and Risler. Yvonne Lefébure recalled that Cortot could not muster up much sympathy for Mozart's music. She and Cortot had many a heated discussion on the subject of the composer's merits. During one such exchange, Cortot retorted: "I'm not senile enough to like Mozart!" From Alfred Cortot, dir. Edmond Lévy, unedited ts. of a television documentary honoring the centenary of Cortot's birth (Paris: ORTF, Antenne 2, 1977).

17Many of the Liszt performances were between 1910 and 1912. October 1911, it may be recalled, was the centenary of Liszt's birth.

18Saint-Saëns, d'Indy and Fauré may have been performed more often than indicated here. Cortot played piano/orchestra works by them on his U.S. tours in 1918-1923, in alternation with the Schumann Concerto. It is not certain how often he played each, since some of the programs have not been located.
While Cortot programmed a wide variety of Chopin works from the start (early favorites were the four Ballades, the B minor Sonata, and select waltzes, polonaises and nocturnes), he played mainly a few standard Schumann works (the Concerto, Carnaval, the Etudes Symphoniques and less often, Kinderszenen) until the 1920's. Around 1912-13 he developed a fondness for playing complete sets by Chopin (e.g., all the Préludes, all the Études) in one sitting. About the same time, one finds examples of the type of program that would become almost the rule in his late years: two or three big works such as Chopin's Préludes, the Liszt Sonata in b minor, and Schumann's Carnaval or Etudes symphoniques. Cortot's offerings tended to grow less adventurous and narrower through the early 1930's. By the late '30's he was criss-crossing the globe with a trio of programs: 1) an all-Chopin recital (often the Préludes and the Études); 2) a mixed Romantic recital, usually including works of Chopin and Franck; and 3) a program of Chopin and Schumann works. He programmed other composers to the end of his career—Beethoven, Saint-Saëns, Liszt, Debussy, Ravel, Emmanuel Chabrier, Enesco, d'Indy, C. M. von Weber, Fauré, Gabriel Pierné, Gustave Samazeuilh, even Stravinsky—but infrequently.

Two notable exceptions: 1932, the Beethoven centennial year, when Cortot devoted his master classes in interpretation to the 32 Sonatas, and 1936, when he gave five lecture recitals at the Université des Annales (Paris) on Beethoven.

Oddly, Chopin's Tarantella, which Cortot recorded four times (1919 ac, 1931, 1933, 1953), does not show up on a single program located thus far. Perhaps Cortot played it as an encore. Likewise, certain of Chopin's Waltzes appear to have rarely been played in recital. Rattalino ("Un miracolo o un bluff?" p. 11) accuses Cortot of having recorded them "without really ever having studied them thoroughly."

Cortot did make piano rolls of Beethoven's Sonata Op. 109 and the Scherzo movement of Op. 106, both reissued on Klavier 110. He also recorded the Sonata Op. 27, No. 2 in 1925 but this pressing was never released. Cortot taped the complete Beethoven Sonatas twice near the end of his life, with the hope of issuing a commented set. Unfortunately, his technique had deteriorated too far by then for the project to be realized.

Cortot tried repeatedly to record Liszt's "La Campanella" Étude. In fact, he made 23 takes of the piece between 1919 and 1923, none of which ultimately satisfied him. With the older recording techniques, it may be recalled, one had to play the whole side without a hitch. Among the other pieces cut for American Victor (in the year given in parentheses) but never released: Chabrier's Scherzo-Valse (1919), Mendelssohn's "Spring Song" from the Songs Without Words (1922), Chopin-Liszt Chant Polonais No. 1 ("The Maiden's Wish") (1922), Fauré's
Romance sans paroles Op. 17 No. 3 (1923), Albeniz' "Triana" from Iberia (1922-23), Fauré's Berceuse, arr. (1925), and Manuel de Falla's "Ritual Fire Dance" from El Amor Brujo (1925). Cortot's piano rolls of Schubert's Improtu Op. 142 No. 3 in Bb major and Chabrier's Feuillet d'Album can be heard on Klavier 110.

For years rumors have circulated that EMI France has an unreleased Ravel Trio performance by Thibaud, Casals and Cortot in its vaults.

There exist taped interpretations of 49 of Chopin's mazurkas and the Polonaise-Fantaisie, all recorded in 1957. These were probably the masters that Concert Artists/Fidelio used in its 1986 release of Chopin mazurkas by Cortot on three cassettes (CE4-TC-70001/3). The performances, which have been subjected to considerable "editing" at C.A./F. to mask technical flaws, add nothing to Cortot's stature.

Grange, "Le Siècle d'Alfred Cortot...", p. 12.

Cortot had the distinction of making the first electrical disc ever issued, in 1925. In the following years he re-recorded on electrical discs a good portion of his acoustic discography, including works by Albeniz, Chopin, Debussy, Franck, Liszt, Ravel, Saint-Saëns and Schumann.

To gain a notion of how radically Cortot could change his ideas about a piece, compare his second recording of Chopin's Berceuse (1929; reissued on Discocorp RR 227) with his third (1949; included in EMI France 2 C 153-03090/6). Overall, the change is toward greater concision and simplicity. In the 1929 version, Cortot dwells on the expressive minutia, producing a somewhat segmented, albeit beautifully detailed interpretation, as though one were looking at successive passages under a microscope. In the latter performance, the delivery is much more natural and flowing, the declamation and agogics more subtle. The 1949 reading belies the common perception that Cortot's rubato was always more extreme after 1940. Here the earlier rendering is the more mannered of the two.

An incorrigible organizer, Cortot went to work for the French government during World War I and in 1917 founded the Action Artistique à l'Etranger (also known as the Association Francaise d'Action Artistique), an agency charged with promoting French cultural events abroad. Several years later, he joined Auguste Mangeot in directing the Ecole Normale de Musique, which quickly became a magnet for young musicians from the allied nations seeking advanced training in Europe after the war. His championship of French music at the S. N. M. and various other conducting posts has already been mentioned. He
also gave frequent lecture-recitals on French composers at the Université des Annales in the 'thirties.

Cortot's friendship with Fauré developed soon after his graduation from the Conservatoire. Fauré, impressed with Cortot's Wagnerian productions as well as his pianism, worked hard to have him appointed to the Conservatoire faculty. Their relations remained very amical even after Cortot left that school in 1917. Cortot's ties with d'Indy were strongest in the years 1895-1910. He played d'Indy's Symphonie sur chant montagnard into the '30s and occasionally taught his Poème des montagnes or Tableaux de voyages in master classes. Florent Schmitt he esteemed highly as a musician and friend. Cortot gave an exemplary performance of Schmitt's Quintette in 1914, but never played the Tragique Chevauchée Schmitt dedicated to him, deeming the orchestral version much superior to the solo piano one. Cortot knew Dukas since youth, and admired him highly. Later he convinced Dukas to join the Ecole Normale faculty, where Dukas taught composition from 1926-1935. Dukas' successors in this post were Nadia Boulanger and Stravinsky (in team); they in turn were followed by Honegger, then Henri Dutilleux. As a conductor, Cortot premiered three of Albert Roussel's early symphonic works: Vendanges, Résurrection and Poème de la Forêt.

How true this is even today is stressed by Bradford Gowen in "Playing, Teaching, Surviving, Dreaming" (Piano Quarterly, No. 133 [Spring 1986]), p. 48. If famous performers cultivating the standard repertoire "would regularly perform a few outstanding works from their lifetime—not just perform them,... but also talk about them to the audience [and] in interviews, and record them—their example would do more for the general acceptance of contemporary music than twenty festivals devoted to the cause."

Perhaps Cortot was just as fond of Fauré's music as of Franck's but realized that its subtlety and reserved, almost hermetic tone cut it off from mass audience appeal and made it better suited to intimate settings where connoisseurs gathered.

Both were frequent guests at the musical salons of Mmes. de Saint-Marceaux, Ménard-Dorian, Madeleine Lemaire and the Countess Greffulhe, and at the musical soirées held in the homes of upper-class amateur musicians (Marcel Gaupillat, Jean Girette, G. Humbert, Maurice Bagès, Mme. Vaudoyer and others).

Cortot/Entretiens, "Musiciens que j'ai connu."

Cortot, as quoted in A.C., p. 76.

As early as 1902, Cortot was urging Fauré to compose a second work for piano and orchestra (see the diary of Mimi
Girette, entry of Jan. 7, 1902). He finally got his wish in 1918 when Fauré wrote for him the Fantaisie, Op. 111. Cortot premiered the work on May 11 and 14, 1919, soon after returning from his tour to the U.S. He seems to have been unenthusiastic about the piece, rarely if ever playing it in later years.

37Entretiens, "Musiciens que j'ai connu."

38The Ballade was the only Fauré composition which Cortot programmed regularly, if one does not count the chamber music and songs. From time to time, however, he played the 6th Barcarolle, the 3rd Valse-caprice, the Thème et variations, which he admired immensely, and the Nocturnes Nos. 6, 7, 8 and 9 (this last dedicated to him). Once or twice he also programmed the nine Préludes.

39Cf. the recollections of the distinguished Italian pedagogue Vincenzo Vitale concerning the romantic image of Cortot promoted at the Ecole Normale master classes in the 1930's, as cited in Rattalino, Da Clementi..., p. 123.

40Fauré's Violin Sonata No. 1 (HMV DB 1080/2, 1927, reissued on EMI France Réf. 143-5331 and Discocorp RR 528) receives a reading full of élan and youthfulfreshness, with sensitive phrasing and nuances, ample basses (which Fauré is known to have loved), a vibrant and transparent sonority, and a more tempered rubato and declamation than Cortot was wont to employ in Chopin. One must be cautious about generalizing from this to solo works, however, since Cortot often played differently in duo and trio than when interpreting solo music. The only other Fauré performances by Cortot preserved on disc are the Berceuse Op. 16 (with Thibaud) and a piano roll of the Berceuse (arr.) from Dolly.

41Cours d'interprétation, pp. 73-74.

42Cortot, La Musique française de piano, I, p. 136.

43Ibid., p. 137.

44Ibid., p. 139.


46It is significant that in La musique française de piano, Cortot devotes eighty pages to Franck's personality and piano compositions (only three of which qualify as major works of his mature style) and just thirty-eight pages to the entire pianistic output of Debussy.

47Cf. Rattalino, Da Clementi..., p. 123.
48E.g., Bach-inspired contrapuntal procedures, a respect for abstract, instrumental music and for clear structures from the Austro-German classical style, Beethoven- and Liszt-inspired cyclic and thematic transformation devices, Wagnerian harmonic language, chromaticism and sequential writing.

49La Musique française..., I, pp. 64-70.

50Ibid., p. 84: "There were times," Cortot writes, "when Franck didn't know what kind of work his next composition would be, but had already established the tonal plan and modulations that would govern it."

51Ibid., p. 83.

52Loc. cit.

53Ibid., pp. 83-84.

54Ibid., pp. 126-27.

55La Musique française de piano, II, pp. 55-57, 65-68. This article was written in 1930, nine years after Saint-Saëns' death, when a general re-evaluation--lower--of his music was underway. Saint-Saëns was born in 1835, and passed his formative years amid the frivolity and ostentation of the Second Empire. Drawn to the symphonic and chamber genres by his veneration for the music of the Austro-German masters, he became France's pioneer symphonist and contributed incalculably to the national stylistic revival. In the pianistic domain, he remained more wed to the conventions internalized during his early virtuoso training.

56Ibid., p. 96.

57This coaching session on the Variations sur un thème de Beethoven (1874) may have taken place in June 1914, when Cortot and Diémer played the piece in a recital of two-piano works by Saint-Saëns.

58La Musique française..., II, pp. 103-05.

59Cours d'interprétation, p. 23.

60Cf. Cortot's advice on performing Saint-Saëns' and Ravel's music (La Musique française..., II, pp. 23-52, 71-105) and his recorded interpretations of their works.

61La Musique française..., I, pp. 88-89.

62Cortot's alliance via Wagnerism with d'Indy and his circle placed him in the enemy camp, from Debussy's perspective.
Under the nom de plume of M. Croche, Debussy portrayed Cortot's conducting with characteristic, catty wit: "Cortot is the French conductor who has learned the most from the mime show foreign directors commonly put on. He has Nikisch's forelock, and this lock is immensely appealing because it flies about passionately at the slightest nuance in the music. See how it droops... at any hint of tenderness. So much so that it prevents any communication between M. Cortot and the orchestra. Then at the vehement passages it rears up proudly again. He... wheels around towards the trombones and exhorts them with a gesture, as if to say: 'Come on, fellows, courage! Try to be more trombone than usual!' and the trombones obediently swallow their slides.... One should say in all fairness that M. Cortot is a perfect musician, and he understands Wagner down to the smallest details. He is young and he has an unbounded love of music: reason enough why we shouldn't be too hard on him for employing gestures more showy than useful." From "Parsifal et la Société des Grandes Auditions de France," Gil Blas, April 6, 1903, a full translation of which appears in Lesure, ed., Debussy on Music, tr. Richard Smith, pp. 164-67.

63 As quoted in A.C., p. 101.

64 From 1917 Cortot, as director of the Service d'Action Artistique, spent a good deal of time arranging engagements for other artists. When the Franco-American Committee invited the orchestra of the Société des Concerts du Conservatoire to make a promotional tour of the U.S. in the spring of 1918, Cortot first proposed Risler as soloist, but the project was delayed until October 1918, and Cortot himself ultimately made the tour. Naturally, French composers--Franck, Saint-Saëns, d'Indy and perhaps Fauré--were showcased. Lively curiosity in the U.S. and Britain about recent French music as well as widespread anti-German sentiment probably prompted Cortot to add Debussy and Ravel to his repertoire. Many of Cortot's first recordings for Victor U.S. were devoted to French works.

65 Although Cortot remembered playing both volumes of Préludes, I have not found mention of such a program. He did play the first book of Préludes in London on the November 1920 concert referred to. In any case, events preceding one of his early performances of the Préludes provided him with one of the most memorable "lessons" he ever received: "[Soon] after Debussy's death,... I was asked to perform the two volumes of Préludes in a commemorative program.... I had heard him play a few of them, and I had played several others from the first volume for him. Anxious not to go counter to his intentions, I requested an appointment with Mme. Debussy... to check whether my interpretations were expressively and pictorially appropriate.... I went to her home, and on Debussy's own piano--an upright Bechstein whose extremely easy action explained the murmuring fluidity of certain passages that are
almost impossible to render on more resistant keyboards....--I began to play the set.... Mme. Debussy burst into tears,... and when I had finished, took me in her arms without saying a thing.... Momentarily at a loss for the right words...., I turned to Chouchou... and asked with feigned indifference: 'Well, Chouchou, is that how your Papa played?' And I received this astounding answer from a child of eight: 'No! He listened more carefully!'" (Entretiens, "Position de l'interprète").

66 In the congenial setting of the interpretation courses Cortot discussed and performed many other pieces by Debussy. He played most of the songs in recital with Maggie Teyte, Madeleine Grey and others, gave lecture-recitals at the Université des Annales (e.g., "Debussy," Feb. 23, 1933, summary reprinted in Conferencia, No. 18 [Sept. 1933], pp. 309-15). He also wrote an article on a Debussy manuscript he owned (see Bibliography).

67 La Musique française..., I, p. 9.


69 Boss, p. 233.

70 La Musique française..., I, pp. 43-44. Cortot's description of Debussy's playing agrees with those of Vallas and Marguerite Long, cited in Gerig, Famous Pianists and Their Techniques, p. 323.

71 Cortot's 1939 recording of the Concerto pour la main gauche with Munch directing has been reissued on EMI Japan GR 2112. Cortot never took up Ravel's more famous Concerto in G, although he claimed that in its primitive form (i.e., as a "Rhapsodie Basque") it had been intended for him. The Concerto in G became a warhorse of Marguerite Long's. A performance by her with Ravel supposedly at the podium (actually Pedro de Freitas-Branco substituted for the composer at the last minute) has been reissued in 33 rpm as Seraphim IC - 6044 (Age of the Great Instrumentalists - Six Concertos).

72 So stated Cortot's students Yvonne Lefébure and Jeanne Leleu in conversations with the author (Nov. 1968 and Jan. 1977, respectively). Mile. Leleu, a Long/Cortot pupil who premiered (with Geneviève Durony) Ravel's Ma Mère l'Oye in 1910, expressed the view commonly held in French professional circles: "I can't really see Cortot performing Ravel, whereas Marguerite Long played that music very well. Ravel wanted his works played very strictly. Mme. Long was more of a rationalist by nature, and it was no trouble for her to conform to Ravel's demand that the pianist play simply, without letting his imagination run rampant or imbueing every note with special expression."
Cortot acknowledged a debt to various Ravel and Debussy scholars (Roland-Manuel, Calvocoressi, Casella) in preparing his stylistic summary.

La Musique française..., II, pp. 12-18.

This must have occurred in June of 1925, when Ravel was invited to give a master class on his piano works at the Ecole Normale interpretation courses.

Cortot was probably correct in assuming that a realization devoid of flexibility would not appeal to Ravel. Vlado Perlemuter reported that Ravel "wanted to hear... ["Oiseaux tristes"] played not in strict tempo, but with certain diminutions," and that "he wanted a tempo rubato and strong accents in the left hand" in "Noctuelles" (as cited in Stuckenschmidt, Ravel, pp. 82-83).

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La Musique française..., II, pp. 9-11.

Rattalino (Da Clementi..., p. 186) finds this elusive melancholic feeling captured to perfection in certain Grieg interpretations of Walter Gieseking.

Colette is said to have sensed, and been very moved by, the tensions and covert sorrow she heard through the often dry and ironic music of L'Enfant et les Sortilèges, the libretto of which she authored (see Stuckenschmidt, pp. 209-10).

La Musique française..., II, p. 9.

Harold Schonberg relates in The Great Pianists, p. 362, that Anton Rubinstein, who was notorious for taking liberties with the printed page, demanded that his student Josef Hofmann adhere strictly to the text. "[Hofmann] once got up enough nerve to ask Rubinstein to reconcile the paradox. Rubinstein gave the answer that teachers through the ages have given: 'When you are as old as I am now, you may do as I do.' Only Rubinstein added, 'If you can.'"

Even Magda Tagliaferro, whose ample cantabile tone and rubato betray a strong indebtedness to Cortot, adheres to modern-day standards of textual fidelity. The only instance that comes to mind where the example of Cortot's liberties may have been harmful was that of the late Samson François (1924-1970), who combined extraordinary gifts with a singular lack of discipline. There is no question but that François was heavily influenced by Cortot's style. Yet François' eccentricities, like his original creative streak, were probably
predispositions of temperament more than consequences of Cortot's teaching. François actually worked more closely with Yvonne Lefébure and Marguerite Long than with Cortot. Neither of these exacting performer-teachers managed to curb certain excesses in his playing.

84Yvonne Lefébure's assessment of Cortot's influence on her playing is instructive: "I always wanted my playing to reflect my great admiration for Cortot. Without question he exerted a considerable influence on my thinking, especially from the standpoint of sonority. But stylistically, I soon went my own way, first of all because I adored Bach and Mozart, which were after all not his great loves.... [Cortot] knew very well that Mozart's music wouldn't tolerate the kind of liberties he took... [or] his type of very elastic line..." (Alfred Cortot, dir. Lévy).

85Zuckermann, p. 121.

86A.C., pp. 37-38.

87"One day," noted Gavoty (A.C., p. 71), "after a sublime performance of [Chopin's] Études and Préludes, I asked Cortot straight out: 'Would you like to have known Chopin?' 'No,' he responded, 'I'm afraid I might not have liked him as much as I admire him.... But to have been a close companion of Liszt—that, oh yes!'" See also the reflections of the young Risler on Liszt, as quoted in Taylor, "...Edouard Risler," p. 33.

88Cortot/Entretiens, "Le Professorat."

89Cours d'interprétation, pp. 15-16.


91Cours d'interprétation, p. 19.

92Cortot/Entretiens, "Activités annexes" (closing words of his last interview).

93From Alfred Cortot, dir. Lévy.

94One of Cortot's first steps on being appointed conductor at Lille was to inaugurate a series of concerts surveying the history of the symphony through significant contributions to the genre. This was part of a larger project—a "plan d'instruction musicale des dilettantes du Nord"—he designed for local concert-goers.
Unlike the Conservatoire, the Ecole Normale accepted students of every age, nationality and level of advancement without restrictive quotas. Moreover, its programs of study were designed to provide not only budding performers but especially aspiring teachers with a well-rounded, quality education.

Often one comes across interpretive solutions in Cortot's performances—whether large-scale ideas about structure or sonority, or imaginative details of phrasing, voicing, dynamics or declamation—which are so singular as to have never occurred to earlier interpreters, yet which strike one as valid and "right." The temptation to emulate is great, and one sometimes hears an idiosyncratic inflection à la Cortot crop up undigested in the performance of an admirer, where it seldom has the same effect as in the original.

Cortot/Entretiens, "Position de l'interprète."

The three statements are from Cours d'interprétation, pp. 13 (the first) and 14 (the latter two).

Cf. Cortot, La Musique française..., I., pp. 22-23.

Cortot, Cours d'interprétation, p. 16 for the first remark; Entretiens, "Enseignement" for the second.

Cf. Cours d'interprétation, p. 15 and A.C., pp. 261-262.

Cortot/Entretiens, "Position de l'interprète."

Cortot seems to employ this term to mean both the commanding form and the central expressive significance (what Flaubert designated the "Idea"). Cf. Suzanne Langer, Feeling and Form (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, pp. 122-124.

Cours d'interprétation, p. 18.

Cortot is the only performing artist I know who makes this point in writing. It is discussed by aesthetician Langer (op. cit., p. 146), who notes that "within the range of his own emotional possibilities, ... [a performer] can even learn, purely through music, some way of feeling he never knew before.... Through art we learn the character and range of subjective experience, as through discourse we learn... the ways of the objective world."

Cortot/Entretiens, pp. 885-86.

With the exception of von Bülow, all the artists Cortot cites exemplified an essentially re-creative (as opposed to a classically oriented "presentational") style of interpretation.
Among the keyboard idols of his youth, von Bülow earned his respect and probably sparked his interest in "poetic" commentaries. But judging from his preface to Henri Opienski's I. F. Paderewski (Lausanne: Ed. Spes, 1948), Cortot found Paderewski the more inspiring model: "His Parisian debuts were quite a revelation to adolescents like myself, who discovered what heights the performer's art could attain... when an inspired poet rather than a piano player took possession of the instrument. My generation was born too late to profit from the eloquent example of Liszt. The aging Rubinstein, sublime and inconsistent, performed infrequently in Paris.... Von Bülow did not fully satisfy us, for we longed to hear music live and breathe under less dogmatic fingers. [Paderewski's] magnetic personality... reinvested music which had wilted under harsh exposure to... routine study with a touch of ardent originality;... [he] proved that the free, inventive and courageous pianistic art we dreamed of... was indeed possible,... [and] taught us that the surest and most noble way of serving music was to bring to it the absolute sincerity of one's own personality...." See also Cortot, "Paderewski pianiste," *Monde Musical*, 40, No. 1 (Jan. 31, 1929), p. 4.


109The one major exception--and for some it is a serious enough omission to have limited the efficacy of the whole enterprise--is physiological analysis.


111Cours d'interprétation, p. 98.

112Recordings can present a distorted or incomplete image of an artist. Quite a few great pianists (Yves Nat, for one) have been so inhibited by the microphone that they have not given the full measure of their qualities on disc.

113Cf. this passage from novelist-critic Camille Maucclair's "L'applaudissement au concert," impressions of a 1907 recital reprinted in *La Région de la musique* (Paris: Fischbacher, 1921), pp. 87-88: "[Cortot] knows by heart what he's going to play; but from the minute his hand... [touches] the piano, there he goes relearning all the music, marveling at its beauty.... [I] observe him, utterly turned toward himself, try to invent an unexpected way of envisaging what he wanted to impart."


From his first cutting of eight songs and arias with Félie Litvinne in 1905 to a "live" performance of Schumann's *Dichterliebe* with Souzay in 1956, Cortot recorded more than 120 works or sets (including multiple versions but not piano rolls). The actual number of records he made was of course much higher, since most of this repertoire was recorded on 78 r.p.m. acoustic or electrical discs of 3-5 minutes per side. For a tentative discography, see Appendix IV.


It has often been contended that with all Cortot's finger slips, he must have had a rather limited technique. Not so, argues Graziosi. Cortot had a superior technique, and to think otherwise is to confuse "technique" in the true sense (which is possessing the means to realize one's interpretive intentions) with "mechanism": "When an interpreter such as Cortot offers you a consistent and beautifully wrought style, gives you all the tones proportioned and connected in extremely subtle melodic and discursive relationships, conveys, in short, his own unique, always lively and authoritative expression, could this interpreter not possess a superb technique? The notion is too ridiculous to contemplate." Cortot's mistakes, some of Richter's lapses, Oistrach's rather approximate intonation: these, he maintains, are malfunctions of the mechanism.

"Mishaps of this type have not represented a technical problem in the true sense of the word to the interpreter;... they come per accidens, one time out of ten,... and are not viewed--nor does the interpreter himself perceive them--as evidence of his [technical] inadequacy... but rather as slips and stumbles that in their involuntariness resemble the catches and misses of a motor.... The physical apparatus,... the body... every so often revolts and goes its own way.... The flesh, never fully conquered, takes its sweet revenge by throwing its little spot of mud right in the middle of the most spellbinding, lofty performance" (*L'interpretazione musicale*, 5th ed. [Torino: Einaudi, 1979], pp. 197-98).

Ibid., p. 197.

From *Alfred Cortot*, dir. Lévy.
After enumerating just a portion of Cortot's activities (The Great Pianists, pp. 382-83), Schonberg asks: "How could he possibly find time to keep his fingers in shape? The answer is simple: he didn't."

This is not to imply that Busoni, Rachmaninoff or Gabrilowitsch necessarily practiced less than Cortot, merely to point out that they, too, divided their time and energy between a variety of activities and yet were able to stay in fine technical form on a restricted practice regimen.

Magda Tagliaferro (1893-1987) was born in Petropolis, Brazil of French parents. Admitted to the Conservatoire in 1906, she won her 1° Prix after only a year's study in Antonin Marmontel's class. She stayed on at the Conservatoire as an auditor in Cortot's class, then worked privately with him "for many years" (interview with the author, Nov. 1977). "I had frequent lessons with Cortot," she recalled, "and he gave me lessons that went on and on, not the kind that last just an hour." Mme. Tagliaferro had a distinguished career as a concert pianist and artist teacher and was still performing and recording in her nineties.

Yvonne Lefébure (1898-1986) was born in Ermont, France and studied with Marguerite Long at a private school (the Conservatoire Musica-Femina) and in her Conservatoire preparatory class before entering Cortot's advanced class in 1911. She won her 1° Prix in piano in 1912, and went on to earn first prizes in accompaniment, harmony, counterpoint, fugue and music history. Acclaimed for her interpretation of French music, she was also a much sought-after teacher at the Ecole Normale, where her students included Dinu Lipatti and Samson François, and then from 1952-67 at the Conservatoire.

In those days it was customary for the big piano firms like Pleyel and Erard to provide concert artists under contract with a piano of their choosing for recitals, and a company technician to care for it. The instrument cum tuner might even be sent on tour with an artist.

This would have been between ca. 1923 and 1931, the last year Cortot vacationed at St. Cast. He recorded the Etudes in 1933 (Op. 10) and 1934 (Op. 25).

From Alfred Cortot, dir. Lévy.

Mme. Tagliaferro, interview with the author.
Examples abound in Cortot's recorded performances of the Chopin Etudes (HMV DB 2027/9 and DB 2308/10, reissued in EMI France C 153 03090/6 and on EMI Japan GR 70025) and Ballades (1933, DB 2023/6 in the aforementioned EMI France set or on EMI Japan GR 70024).

Cortot's aversion to studying coordinations and movements in depth certainly did not make it any easier for him to get the physical apparatus to carry out his ideas with absolute fidelity and precision. On the other hand, Cortot liked risks; he liked overcoming challenge, obstacle, adversity. A basic oppositional stance and an argumentative streak were two of the dominant features of his personality (cf. A.C., p. 219). What did he choose for a personal motto? "Malgré" ("In spite of").

Cortot's choice of a Pleyel grand over an Erard at his graduation was the beginning of a long relationship with that firm and its director, Gustave Lyon. It was Lyon who made it possible for Cortot to make his first trip to Bayreuth and who set him up in a studio at the Pleyel headquarters, where he gave private lessons from 1896 to around the time of World War I. Cortot received a monthly stipend in return for playing Pleyel instruments. Many of his early recitals were undertaken to inaugurate new pianos installed in provincial concert halls and private residences.

Cortot's first contacts with Steinway probably date from his initial tour of the U.S. in 1918. The discs he recorded for American Victor were all made on a Steinway grand, though he didn't switch over to Steinway definitively until much later. Gavoty recalled hearing him play Bosendorfers occasionally in his late years (Alfred Cortot, dir. Levy).

The Pleyel was a slightly more intimate piano than the Erard and did not quite achieve the Erard's brilliance or carrying power in a large concert hall. Chopin, as is well known, was partial to Pleyels because their tone was more malleable and capable of subtler shadings, whereas the Erard had a "ready-made" tone that was big and resonant but less sensitive. How much the Pleyel changed from Chopin's time to Cortot's is hard to determine, but it would appear (cf. Eigeldinger, pp. 135-36) that at mid-century, the timbre of the Pleyel varied more from piano to forte (velvety at low levels, incisive and sparkling at high) and from bass to treble registers (clean and vigorous in the bass, more silvery at the top) than did the Erard's. Thus, one could "voice" the Pleyel in a more personal manner.

From Alfred Cortot, dir. Levy.

Eric Heidsieck (1936- ) was born in Reims and as a youngster studied with Cortot and his close associate Blanche
Bascouret at the Ecole Normale. After winning his 1st Prix at the Conservatoire under Marcel Ciampi, he pursued further studies with Cortot and Wilhelm Kempff. He is widely admired in France as a concert and recording artist, and presently teaches at the Conservatoire de Lyon.

140 From Alfred Cortot, dir. Lévy.

141 One wonders what motivated Cortot to switch to the heavier Steinway at a time when his strength and control were failing. Perhaps the popularity of the Steinway, especially outside France, made it increasingly difficult to find good Pleyels. It could also be that the quality of the French instrument had declined.

142 Mme. Tagliaferro, interview with the author.

143 Guthrie Luke (1932- ) was born in New York. After studies in Canada and the U. S. he participated in Cortot's Paris, Lausanne and Siena master classes from 1953. He worked privately with Cortot from 1957-1962 and has taught at the Royal College of Music (London).


145 Seat height is of course a very relative matter in which such factors as upper arm length, torso length, etc. play an important role. Cortot sat relatively low for a person of his physique, and reportedly encouraged his students to do likewise. The low seat is conducive to a somewhat greater degree of cooperation between the playing levers (finger, hand, forearm, whole arm), and hence to avoiding an excessive application of force or raising of the fingers, both of which generate tension and key noise in the tone.

146 Verbal descriptions can mislead; anyone who has seen Horowitz play will have a fairly good notion of how Cortot employed the fifth finger.

147 Yvonne Lefèbure's assertion in "Cortot, le poète du clavier" (p. 904) that "...considered strictly from the instrumental point of view, Cortot's pianism differs fundamentally from that of his predecessors and contemporaries," is rephrased by Gavoty into an even more categorical "There was piano playing before [Cortot] and after [Cortot]" (A.C., p. 248).

148 See Josef Lhévinne, Basic Principles in Piano Playing (1924; reprint ed. New York: Dover, 1972), pp. 22-32. See also Liszt's advice to play not on the tip but on the fleshy pad of the finger, as reported in Auguste Boissier, "Liszt as


150 Mme. Tagliaferro, interview with the author.

151 Ibid.


153 A.C., p. 244.

154 Chevaillier, reflections on a recital by Cortot and Jacques Thibaud, in Monde Musical, 38, No. 5 (May 31, 1927), p. 244.


156 Cf. Cours d'interprétation, p. 123.

157 Chevaillier, op. cit., p. 244.


159 Interview with the author, Nov. 1977. The same point was stressed by Yvonne Lefebure and Reine Gianoli in conversations with the author.

160 Neuhaus, L'art du piano, p. 12.

161 Cours d'interprétation, p. 15.


163 The old French school technique exemplifies the former of course, while the latter is epitomized by Breithaupt's weight technique.


165 Participants included Yvonne Lefebure, Reine Gianoli, Eric Heidsieck and Jean-Pierre Marty, all of whom studied with
Cortot, as well as Jacques Février (noted teacher and pianist who knew Cortot well) and Bernard Gavoty.

All quotations in this paragraph are taken from the unedited typescript of Alfred Cortot, dir. Lévy.


Marthe Morhange-Motchane (1897- ) had private lessons with Cortot once a month at his Pleyel studio before entering his Conservatoire class in 1915. After winning her 1st Prix in 1919 she taught for some years at the Ecole Normale, participating in Cortot's interpretation classes and in the class given by Ravel in 1925. Author of a primer to the Principes rationnels, Le Petit Clavier (Paris: Salabert, 1938) and a two-volume technique series, Small World for Young Pianists (New York: Schroeder and Gunther, 1979), she has also edited anthologies of Scarlatti and the clavecinistes for students. Most recently she has compiled a Thematic Guide to Piano Literature (New York: Schirmer, 1982-88). Mme. Motchane emigrated to the U.S. in 1941 and now resides in New Jersey.

Mme. Morhange-Motchane, interview with the author, March 1984. Except for Cortot's comments, this text is a summary of Mme. Motchane's remarks rather than an exact quotation.

Cf. Liszt's advice to "play from the wrist, using the limp hand (la main morte)," in Boissier, "Liszt as Pedagogue," p. 14.

See Gerig, p. 514.

It is not surprising that Cortot directed his attention mainly to the wrist. Even such noted exponents of analytical technical inquiry as Tony Bandmann, Marie Jaëll and Elisabeth Caland assumed around the turn of the century that the circles and curvilinear movements of the playing apparatus originated in an active motion of the wrist (cf. Kaempfer, Techniques pianistiques, p. 97).

"Cortot [and] Nat..., students of Diémé, possessed fully the great traditional French technique, refined over half a century of experimentation and practice.... [They] sought a variety and volume of sound that required a different technique, however,... and neither the one nor the other completely acquired the means perfected by Busoni and the Russians" (Da Clementi a Pollini, p. 252).

Mme. Tagliaferro, interview with this writer.

As cited in A.C., p. 147.
176Mme. Tagliaferro, interview with this writer.

177Kaemper, p. 96. See also Luigi Bonpensiere, New Pathways to Piano Technique (New York: Philosophical Library, 1952), p. 42.

178Cortot recommended these for forte octaves or detached chords in slow tempi. See Les Principes rationnels..., p. 78.

179The geste lancé, called Wurf or Schwung by the German technical theorists, is of two types. In the first, a quick impulse of the arm propels a fixed hand (i.e., fingers minimally articulated) up or down the keyboard. Cortot termed this gesture "volante." He reserves the word "lancer" for the same vigorous impulse combined with distinct finger articulation. See Cortot, ed., Liszt, Rapsodies hongroises (Paris: Salabert, 1949), notably No. 11, p. 10 and No. 12, p. 16.

180A common French expression for this is "effleurer les touches." Barely enough energy is applied to make the notes speak. The finger action is precise and tiny--sometimes only the last joint is pulled under--and there is often a fair degree of fixation. The touch is very effective for certain floriture in Chopin and Liszt and for creating sonorous atmosphere in Debussy.

181As practiced by Cortot this involved a deliberate slight overlapping of the notes by holding down the fingers, not the pedal.
Chapter VI

Cortot's Performance Style:
A Discussion of Some Major Features, with an Examination of Specific Interpretations

There is a style alla Cortot that can always be recognized: a phrasing that is more \textit{parlando} than anyone else's due to the different intensity of every note, the line contour inflected by an inimitable \textit{rubato - élan et retenue} - into an admirably elastic curve. Inimitable, too, his way of making the melody blossom, of putting in quotes a particularly expressive note, of driving home the phrase with a liberty, an unexpectedness dictated by unerring taste and controlled by a rhythm as strict as it is flexible. Everything is so full of life and animated by inner spirit (\textit{souffle intérieur}) that even the silences speak.... Virtuosity is ennobled, or rather it disappears and leaves only the music, which constitutes a superior order of virtuosity.

Yvonne Lefébure

Thus far, Cortot's art has been considered mainly from a historical perspective, with the aim of determining where he stood \textit{vis à vis} the French and late romantic traditions and by what pathways he arrived at his rather singular position. Now that the main aspects of his musical thought have been elucidated, it is time to take a closer look at his performance style. A style analysis can scarcely dispense with some amount of critical assessment, but the objective here is not to offer a final judgment of Cortot's art, much less to rate Cortot's interpretations \textit{vis à vis} those of other performers. Rather,
it is to identify within Cortot's art those procedures and understandings which may be of practical value to the contemporary performer or teacher. Cortot's recordings, examined in depth, furnish many important "lessons" in musical interpretation. His Chopin and Schumann playing in particular has influenced the thinking of countless pianists who had no personal contact with him. The performances of these "disciples in spirit" prove time and again that it is possible to recover from Cortot's recorded legacy some of the insights into sonority, rhythm and character projection which he communicated to his own pupils.

The observations that follow will be presented in an admittedly schematic form. While a number of excellent approaches to the style analysis of music literature have been formulated,² there are few if any standard procedures for analyzing a performance style. Even in those cases where an artist's playing is amply documented on recordings, most writers have tended to discuss style in broadly descriptive and anecdotal terms, either out of a desire to appeal to a general readership or perhaps a belief that there are too many imponderables--unique features of personality and talent, the circumstantial character of recordings, and so forth--involved to permit fruitful analysis of the component elements of a performer's art.³

Heinrich Neuhaus has argued that one can respect the unanalyzable considerations "that enter into the biography of a
man who has something to say to others" without falling into mystifications of the whole interpretive art:

Every great artist performer represents to the pedagogical researcher something like what the unsplit atom represents to the physicist. It takes a lot of insight, energy, intelligence, talent and knowledge to fathom this complex being. But that is precisely the goal that methodological inquiry should set for itself if it is going to get out of its diapers and stop making real musicians yawn with boredom.

The basic scheme adopted in this analysis of Cortot's style is taken from his *Principes rationnels de la technique pianistique*, in the preface to which he enumerates the elements he considers essential to any meaningful performance art. These are: 1) *imagination*; 2) *intellectual understanding*; 3) "*a gift for nuancing sonority*"; 4) *taste*, that most elusive of qualities; and 5) an accomplished *technique* capable of carrying out one's subtlest intentions. To the above may be added two factors which assume special prominence in Cortot's art: 6) *command of rhythm* and handling of the corollary issues of tempo, timing, and agogics; and 7) * declamation*, an interpreter's individual way of delivering or "speaking" musical lines, which draws on all the above and marks the performance with the unique stamp of the his personality.

The plan will be to discuss each element briefly, then examine how Cortot employed it in specific contexts, analyzing recorded performances where appropriate. Additional features of his performance style such as pedalling and multi-focal image projection will be taken up as they relate logically to
a major heading. Technique, discussed at length in Chapter V, will not be reconsidered here in detail. I have included works of Debussy and Ravel among the examples, primarily because in this literature one has the luxury of being able to compare Cortot's interpretations with performances of the same works by the composers themselves.

**Imagination.**

"All of my teaching of interpretation," Cortot reportedly said, "revolves around the concept of imagination enlightened by taste." Controlled poetic imagination—as opposed to unbridled fantasy—was likewise a hallmark of his interpretive artistry. Cortot's dictum that "[the performer] must be allowed to cherish the fruitful illusion which leads him to believe that he is the composer of the work at the moment he brings it to life, and to shape it according to his secret vision" was often misunderstood. Some of the pianists who played for him apparently inferred from the statement that Cortot placed the performer on a par with the composer. This happened often enough that Jeanne Thieffry felt obliged in 1928 to "stress the sense of certain [of Cortot's] remarks" in an explanatory preface to her account of his master classes:

> It is evident to anyone who has listened attentively to Cortot's playing that if Cortot has thrown off old shackles—conventions, habits, so-called "traditions"—he has imposed others on himself, and that his freedom entails voluntary obedience to a host of musical laws.... With the example of Cortot's playing right here before
us, let's not think that personal fantasy and the desire to "make it sound better" justify every sort of license,... or that the law of the interpreter is "whatever he feels like doing." 9

Others understood Cortot to mean that by immersing himself in the composer's personality and work, the performer could mystically "divine" the creator's thoughts and feelings at the moment of the music's writing and relive these in performance. 10

A more reasonable explanation is that Cortot hoped to emphasize by means of a striking turn of phrase that the interpreter is really acting in the composer's stead during a performance: he therefore has an obligation to bring the same discerning imagination, vitality and conviction to his interpretation that the composer did to his writing, and presumably would bring to his own performance of the work. 11

"Cortot teaches us to search relentlessly for the composer within the piece (and one has to know a great deal to succeed in this endeavor)," noted Thieffry. "He urges us to then put ourselves in [the composer's] place and to proceed in line with his way of thinking, with the freedom he himself would have exercised." 12

The most challenging literature from the standpoint of interpretive imagination, Cortot felt, is the class of so-called "free form" works: 13

There is no common pattern to these pieces from which one could draw general conclusions.... [B]y virtue of their free character, they have evolved no distinctive
musical form... [of their own]. The composer's invention and imagination alone determine the working-out of ideas, along flexible lines reflecting a variety of influences, extra-musical and otherwise.... In most instances we are dealing with a sort of program music without an explicit program that appeals powerfully to the imagination. There are few piano works where the creative participation of the interpreter is as necessary as in these. There are few, moreover, where the liberties the performer feels entitled to take in order to breathe life into the interpretation are as problematic. If the great freedom which these works invite is not tempered—or more exactly, directed—by a reasoned conception, [the performance] easily degenerates into a disorderly improvisation [and] sentiment is transformed into vulgar sentimentality. Our task, then, is to find the kind of imagination that best suits the individual work... and to determine what, within the scope of a personal conception, is liable to convey the composer's feeling vividly and at the same time reflect the interpreter's originality.14

To appreciate how Cortot's type of disciplined imagination operated in actual practice it is necessary to look at his handling of a specific piece. Chopin's Fantaisie, Op. 49, recorded by Cortot in 1933,15 will serve the purpose admirably. Cortot was especially fond of the Fantaisie and played it throughout his career. Though well within the level of virtuosity expected of concert pianists today,16 this piece is extremely demanding musically by virtue of its wealth of thematic materials, its fluctuating moods and tonal relations, and its substantial dimensions (332 measures). Even a letter-perfect rendering of the Fantaisie will not necessarily reveal its inner logic and expressive import: whether the listener perceives it as a stirring epic poem driven forward by a single narrative or dramatic impulse, or as a series of contrasting...
episodes capriciously strung together, depends very much on the quality of imagination, constructive vision and psychological insight the interpreter brings to it.

Trying to analyze the Fantaisie in conventional "textbook" fashion will not, at least in the initial phase of study, shed much light on its inner sense. Careful study will reveal that the piece is cast in a modified sonata allegro form and that, despite a lengthy introduction that asserts f/F as the initial tonality, the principal key is clearly Ab major. Upon closer inspection one discovers: that the tonic-dominant polarity (here Ab - Eb) so fundamental to the classical sonata allegro is nominally present, but has been weakened by the harmonic instability of the primary theme group and the prominence of third-related tonal regions and chromaticism to the point where it is no longer felt as the central regulative force of the musical action; that the sequence, and especially the extended sequence that generates implied tonal centers, is now the main animating impulse in the smaller structural dimensions, serving tensional as well as coloristic purposes; that the high contrast between episodes created through rhythmic, textural, harmonic and even metric changes is counterbalanced by the presence of cell motifs (the melodic perfect fourth and the chromatic or diatonic second) which generate all the main thematic materials and contribute powerfully to an overall sense of unity; that the improvisatory principal theme (m. 43) is radically transformed
in its second appearance (m. 143) and thereafter throughout the main body of the work, raising dramatic and emotional issues that are not fully resolved until the coda; and so forth.

Theoretical analysis of this sort helps the performer understand how the composer manipulates his materials. It enables him to recognize unifying devices, structural relationships and articulation points. It makes him more aware of the means by which the composer creates and fulfills (or frustrates) expectation, builds to climactic points, generates a feeling of rising/falling excitement or "directionality" in the musical discourse. These insights can and should have a bearing on the interpreter's concept of the work, but taken alone they do not suffice to bring about a meaningful and convincing projection of the music in performance, Cortot felt. Form is simply the tracings of "emotion put into motion" (Schnabel). Therefore, the only really fruitful investigation of the inner workings of a piece is that which integrates formal analysis with analysis of the expressive/poetic character and then grasps the implications of these findings for a personal response to, and an artistically appropriate realization of, the whole. On the following pages, then, is a summary of Cortot's poetico-structural observations on the Fantaisie:

Cortot's general remarks:

The *Fantaisie* is an extremely subjective work, full of fervor, excitement; great variety of emotions and rhythms. The idiomatic Polish element is less prominent in this piece than in many others. Here it is the "poetics" of the piano itself which determine the sense of the piece. It was not, as some have claimed, a sketch intended for orchestration, since the writing is inherently pianistic and would not "sound" if arranged for orchestra. The expressive content is more hinted at than defined.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>mm. 1 - 2</th>
<th>character, mood</th>
<th>rhythm, tempo</th>
<th>sonority, dynamics, color, agogics, declamation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The opening has the character of a funeral march: solemnity, nobility, stamped with a tragic feeling.</td>
<td>The rhythm has as much impassivity as that of the 'Marche funèbre' of the B♭ minor Sonata Op. 35. Original edition indicates only <em>Tempo di marcia</em>: Grave added to later eds. often causes performer to play Intro. too slowly. The virile, incisive rhythmic figure won't tolerate too hesitant or dragging a tempo.</td>
<td>A &quot;meaningful&quot; sonority is required: serious, weighed down with sadness and depression, orchestral and sustained.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2 elements: one is cold and sinister,</td>
<td></td>
<td>with a slight brightening of timbre in the more expressive replies [in middle register] to statements of basic motif [in bass]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>the other is sensitive and plaintive.</td>
<td></td>
<td>muted, solemn tone of a trumpet playing piano; use both pedals, change damper ped. on every quarter to give accomp. character of resonating pizzicati</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mm. 21 - 22</td>
<td>consoling</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Ex. 1. *Fantaisie* cont'd.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>mm. 37-38</th>
<th>enigmatic, almost fateful</th>
<th>Preserve the initial firmness of rhythm despite the lower dynamic level (mm. 37-42).</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>To bring out the character of the 7th chord, play the outside voices a little louder. The repeat of this motif (m. 39) like a hushed echo</td>
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</table>

In the spirit of an improvisation, entering into something unknown; like an intention at first hesitant but gradually taking form, then exploding (impetus of *accelerando, cresc.*) into

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>mm. 43-44</th>
<th>imperious affirmation</th>
<th>Broaden the tempo slightly to heighten the sense of a solid confirmation of the [<em>doppio movimento</em> pulse].</th>
</tr>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>mm. 51-53</th>
<th>[\text{Notes}]</th>
<th>[\text{Notes}]</th>
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\[\text{Notes}\]
Ex. 1. Fantaisie cont'd.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>mm. 54-57</th>
<th>character, mood</th>
<th>rhythm, tempo</th>
<th>sonority, dynamics, color agogics, declamation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>same as m. 43 ff; recapture the “ad libitum” feeling</td>
<td>The tempo should be less indecisive on restatement, so that the doppio movimento can be asserted in all its impassioned drive from the entrance of the bass motif (m. 60).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mm. 60-61</td>
<td>very expressive and tempestuous</td>
<td></td>
<td>Underline the dramatic impact of this allusion to the coming theme [2A₁] with a beautiful metallic (cuivre) sonority.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mm. 64-66</td>
<td>dramatic</td>
<td></td>
<td>Chopin’s marking of piano applies to the context and especially the accompaniment. The theme (r.h.), which will grow more and more impassioned with the cresc., should have a warm and vibrant timbre from the beginning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mm. 68-70</td>
<td>moving (pathétique), fervent, anguished</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Ex. 1. *Fantaisie* cont'd.

character, mood | rhythm, tempo | sonority, dynamics, color agogics, declamation
--- | --- | ---
Two characters are possible: 1) an ardent, even exalted impulse or 2) mellowed, caressing. Tradition favors the second, imbueing it with charm (séduction) rather than pathos. Avoid rendering it with an offhand *coquetterie* that distorts the expressive line. | If one accepts 2) [see left] this implies executing a *diminuendo* and slight *cedendo* in the transitional bar (m. 76). | Play the melodic voice legato *espressivo*; lighten the lower voice in the double notes. For 2) [see left], enunciate the capricious melodic figure with sensitivity and tenderness.

The inflection of the falling octaves is impassioned, desperate, so to speak. | | The tone of the thumb notes (r.h.) should blend with that of bass to reveal the harmonic progression:

The character requires a penetrating, weighty touch. | | The character requires a penetrating, weighty touch.

Beginning long drive toward climax; progressively more excited and intense. | | Calibrate cresc; save strength in order to maximize impact of climax that culminates at mm. 109 ff.
Ex. 1. Fantaisie cont'd.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character, Mood</th>
<th>Rhythm, Tempo</th>
<th>Sonority, Dynamics, Color, Agogics, Declamation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A vehement outburst; take care not to play the octaves as a mere bravura display, but render them in a bold and lively manner that makes them the logical expressive sequel to the fiery measures that preceded.</td>
<td>There is no need to play this passage and similar ones with undue speed when they are integrated into the whole.</td>
<td>Do everything possible to give the impression of a legato line.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All the éclats of this episode (mm. 93-126) should appear to have been converging towards the radiant sonority of the major key (m. 127), Eb.</td>
<td></td>
<td>To give the powerful impulse its full effect, one could stretch the initial octaves, thus:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agitated; stress the element of surprise in the abrupt modulation via the deceptive cadence.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Deliver each note of the energetic triplet emphatically.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contrary to Chopin's marking, lift the pedal before the repeated chords to underline the excited nervousness of the rhythm.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Make a slight pause on the dominant of the major key (m. 126) to give arrival greater impact.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Ex. 1. *Fantaisie* cont'd

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character, mood</th>
<th>Rhythm, tempo</th>
<th>Sonority, dynamics, color, agogics, declamation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>lofty, but restrained; with a spirit of chivalric nobility.</td>
<td>re: an appropriate tempo, Maestoso is a bit too heavy, Nobile too charged with heroic connotations. Fieramente appears suitable, as long as one heightens the character by a slight slackening of the tempo.</td>
<td>Bring out the theme clearly, with the rich timbre that French horns have in their low register; the accompaniment like a resonant (large) pizzicato. Chopin’s marking of piano can prompt too insipid a rendering of the main theme: lean toward mp.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **mm. 127-128**

- **mm. 153-155**

- **mm. 156-157**
Ex. 1. *Fantaisie* cont'd.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character, mood</th>
<th>Rhythm, tempo</th>
<th>Sonority, dynamics, color, agogics, declamation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contemplative, intensely compassionate, somehow pitying</td>
<td>Let the tempo seem to relax of its own accord, to prepare imperceptibly the poetic ambience that will imbue the new B major theme with a dream-like quality; tinge the modulation to e♭ minor that prepares the enharmonic transformation (G♭-F♯) of the theme with a slight inflection of melancholy.</td>
<td>Delicately mark the upper notes of r.h. octaves, using both pedals; be certain to hold the g♭ of the upper voice that mutates into f♯ (mm. 198-99).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(mm. 190-181) A (var.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(mm. 195-198)</td>
<td>The faint echo of this &quot;leitmotiv&quot; should sound like a memory, a disembodied reflection.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(mm. 199-201) C</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The touching tone qualities needed to shape these melodic phrases do not spring ready-made from the instrument; the interpreter must imagine them, all quivering with unutterable feeling, tender, consoling. Use both pedals to create the veiled and subtly eloquent timbre of the melodic line.
Ex. 1. *Fantaisie* cont'd.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>mm. 219-22</th>
<th>Impassioned, feverish, once more full of impulsive ardor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dive straight into the rhythmic whirlwind that rekindles the musical discourse; do not moderate the transition for the sake of a smooth performance. The effect of surprise is indispensable.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>mm. 223-25</th>
<th>Rhythm, tempo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Make an imperceptible pause with r.h. between the 3/4 and the $\frac{5}{4}$ (m. 222). Hold the bass octave (gb-f#) so it continues to vibrate, without pedal.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>mm. 232-34</th>
<th>Character, mood</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>For the fourth time this fateful figure must be dealt with; this time, envision it from the angle of a feeling of noble indignation, that will motivate the impassioned expression of the melodic idea (2A', m. 235) which prolongs the emotion, this time amplified by the addition of vibrant octaves.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sonority, dynamics, color, agogics, declamation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Let the sound die away before attacking the incisive r.h. chord that propels one abruptly back into the animated Tempo 10.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Ex. 1. *Fantaisie* cont'd.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>character, mood</th>
<th>rhythm, tempo</th>
<th>sonority, dynamics, color, agogics, declamation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The third statement of the principal theme, in contrast to the more introspective, meditative second one, can be fierce, ardent, revitalized.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There should be a more distinct expressive kinship between the passage in double notes and the exalted character of the preceding section than in the previous statements.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This march theme, which had a quality of proud restraint when first set forth, now takes on a triumphal meaning; don't be afraid to bring out the spirit of almost heroic exultation.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The indication: 'Parlando, ma non troppo dolce' could be inferred as suitable here.
Imbue the strident motif of the l.h. thumb with a tone of desperation.

This little recitativo before the coda is a whole poem unto itself; one can imagine it filled with all the shades of resignation and melancholy. One could feel the inner drama of an acceptance extracted, a "yes" pronounced after a long, indecisive wait.

Emphasize the presence of e# in this last figuration, which contrasts with such expressive intensity to the e natural of the preceding arpeggios.

A subtle use of the pedal in the recitativo is of vital importance.
In formulating his interpretive guidelines, Cortot offered no conventional theoretical analysis of the Fantaisie. "Cold dissection" (his term) of form was as distasteful to him as was analysis of the mechanics of technique independent of specific musical contexts. He aimed above all to portray the particular character or "affect" of each musical event in vivid images, and then to propose ways of embodying this associative content in sound at the instrument. Like many artist-teachers from Liszt on, Cortot was convinced that the best way to achieve artistic results was to pose musical goals, and to appeal compellingly to the pupil's imagination and subjective feelings. Cortot's commentary provides much more than a naive literary program that might serve as an emotional prop. His descriptions of the Fantaisie's character or associative meanings are grounded in a keen awareness of the actual properties of the musical material and the established connotations of musical gestures and value clusters within the stylistic language; this is what ensures their continuing aptness and pedagogical utility.

Judgments of musical character or mood are to some extent personal, of course. But they are also to some degree collective (i.e., culturally implanted) within a given socio-musical community. They can be refined through long conversance with a musical idiom and corroborated by reference to works of similar character with texts, associative titles or verbal indications of character. The appropriateness of many
of Cortot's poetic characterizations can be confirmed, moreover, by structural analysis. To cite a simple example, Cortot describes the opening of the Fantaisie as "having the character of a funeral march." Is there any evidence in the score to substantiate this notion? There is Chopin's directive 'Tempo di marcia.' There is the low register and muted dynamic level (piano) of the initial idea, plus the starkness of texture (two voices in open octaves). There is melodic contour: recurring series of descending fourths forming a step progression that itself covers a fourth downwards, alternating with phrases characterized by a static repeated-note incipit. Most significantly, there is the minor mode and the obsessively reiterated dotted-rhythm motif, both of which recall the Marche funèbre of the B♭ minor Sonata as well as the Prélude No. 2 in a minor. All of this supports the potential validity--though not the absolute rightness--of Cortot's characterization.

Whether one concurs with Cortot's specific impressions of musical character and/or meaning or not, there are a number of general interpretive principles that can be extrapolated from his commentaries. The first, and least controversial premise is that effective and compelling performance depends on the interpreter's having formulated definite ideas as to the significance of every part of a work and its relation to a coherent whole, as well as equally definite intentions for realizing those ideas at the instrument. To put it simply,
there is no such thing as general, undifferentiated "expression" or "expressive playing." Nor is there meaning "in general" in interpretation. The expression, first of all, is in the music. Or more precisely, the music is not just expressive, it expresses or embodies "something"—a state of mind or energy, a quality of feeling, an idea, a naturalistic image. Similarly with the performer: in investing the music with his own energy, he invariably conveys some thing or some qualification of feeling/meaning, whether everyone agrees on what that thing is or not. Therefore, the interpreter must have a specific vision of the music's import and of what he (or she, let it be understood) intends to say at every given moment in the performance. If he does not, something will come through nonetheless—but the overall sense may be vague, garbed or lost in a mass of surface details.

A second, related premise that is especially relevant to Romantic music can be inferred from Cortot's commentaries. One might state it thus: wherever the composer's desire for intensified personal expression and/or color pushes formal concerns into the background, the performer must shore up the edifice by underlining structural and discursive relations. He must determine the exact course—psychological, dramatic, narrative, representational—that the work as a whole follows. He must decide how to illuminate most effectively the contrasts and contours, how to give the listener a vivid sense of the
music's action or unfolding. Here a lively imagination, taking
its cues from details in the score and from a feel for what
constitutes a satisfying overall emotional progression, must be
brought into play.

To cite a specific example of how Cortot exercises his
imagination in a controlled, structurally conscious manner in
his conception of the Fantaisie, note how he envisages each
appearance of a theme as bringing different aspects of the
idea's character to the fore. Each restatement represents an
expressive evolution or metamorphosis, rather than a mere
repetition. To put it another way, the character of each
restatement has been affected by what has transpired in the
intervening measures. Thus, the principal theme, which occurs
three times in three different tonal frames, is seen in its
first appearance as "fervent, anguished," in its second as
taking on a more "sorrowful, introspective" quality and in its
final presentation as "impassioned, fierce, revived." Similarly, the descending octave figure (mm. 52, 153, 197 and 233) is successively "imperious," "faltering," "like a
disembodied reflection," and imbued with "righteous
indignation."

Like a director mounting his personal vision of a play,
Cortot draws on his insights into situation (atmosphere,
emotional tone), plot (the semblance of dynamic movement),
characterization, motivation, and poetic or rhetorical
declamation to heighten the experience of meaning and structural logic. An evolution of character or action needs to be concretely manifested in appropriate shifts of tone, dynamic and agogic nuance, color (hence the advice on "orchestrating" and voicing) and sometimes even tempo. Cortot's attention to transitions, structural turning points, harmonic details and declamatory inflections that intensify or qualify a mood, his advice on preserving momentum, rhythmic drive and emotional intensity all tend to impress on the student the need for a keen "histrionic" imagination (for want of a better term) to supplement instinct and theoretical understanding in deciding which expressive implications should be stressed to ensure maximum overall continuity and impact. Certain of Cortot's descriptions of musical character in the Fantaisie seem to find only a general, tenuous confirmation in structural elements. These probably arose out of his awareness of dramatic exigencies and his intuition that a particular sequence of qualities/moods was best suited to enhancing the emotional force and excitement of the whole. His attention to details of timing and "punctuation" reflects this same concern to sustain and reinforce the inner drama of the music.

However discerning one may find Cortot's poetic commentaries, study of his recorded performance of the Fantaisie will convince the listener that he barely discloses the tip of the iceberg in his writings. It should surprise no
one that Cortot's ideas are conveyed more fully in the playing than in the saying. The subtle expressive means he employs can often be detected by the trained ear after several hearings, but they are cumbersome to describe in words. Agogic nuances and the more refined touches of phrasing and coloring, certainly among the most significant and original features of Cortot's interpretive art, defy verbalization and can at best be notated approximately with graphic symbols.

A complete analysis of Cortot's recorded interpretation of the Fantaisie exceeds the scope of this discussion. A close look at the first two phrases of the introduction will suffice to show what valuable lessons can be learned from investigating how Cortot imaginatively manipulates the elements over which the interpreter has some discretionary control to bring across his vision. In the opening phrase Cortot establishes the dark, solemn atmosphere of the "funeral march" from the first beat. The tempo adopted (\( \frac{1}{4} = 72 \)) is both measured and flowing, as befits processional music. Cortot does not depart from it one iota until the third beat of m. 4, thus reinforcing the mood of cool, impassive grief.

Except for a slight tightening of the 16th notes he delivers every rhythm strictly. The 16th note-quarter figure (\( \text{\textquotedblright\text{\textquotedblright\text{\textquotedblright\text{\textquotedblright}}}} \)), traditional in funeral music, is incisively enunciated, piano and without accent, in the manner of woodwind or brass articulation:

To ensure that the two parts of the opening measures are heard linearly (i.e., as two voices in parallel motion rather than harmonic octaves), Cortot stratifies the texture dynamically, giving a slight prominence to the lower voice except—and this points up the refinement of his ear—on the second note of each of the first three slurred figures. His solution achieves several musical aims simultaneously. By allowing the lower voice to predominate in general, Cortot creates a tonal picture that is darker and literally more "weighed down." By tapering off the sound in the lower part on each descending perfect fourth (actually both voices are played decrescendo at these points, but the lower one drops to a barely audible level), he calls attention not to the zig-zag contour of the foreground melodic action, but to the linear step progression (also spanning a descending fourth f-e♭-d♭-c) of the quarter notes that stabilizes the long line. This has the effect of assuring forward impetus (directionality) and shifting the pulse feeling almost to a very slow $\frac{2}{2}$.  

\[ \text{Example diagram} \]
Chopin has made the preeminence of the perfect fourths obvious in the construction of the introductory theme (mm. 1-2). Cortot does not underline them, therefore, but simply preserves the listener's awareness of them through a legato touch and a decrescendo on each slur. He takes care not to clip the eighth notes too short, which would alter the character of the theme. He allows no fall in intensity over the whole phrase. One has the impression that the sound level through the linear step progression has remained constant or even risen imperceptibly toward the end. In this way Cortot avoids any hint of a softening of the relentlessly solemn mood.

In the second phrase (mm. 3-4) Cortot calls attention to the lyrical, melodic seconds of the top voice via a slightly more penetrating cantabile tone. All this highlighting is accomplished in a very subtle manner, without disturbing accents or agogic fluctuations. It is as though Cortot plays the expressive details with "intention," i.e., with a sharp sense of their "vocality" and affective/narrative significance within the whole. By imagining them so intensely as charged with import, he compels the listener to imagine them as being meaningful along with him.

Cortot reinforces perception of the long line in the second phrase (mm. 3-4) by delineating the top voice with bell-like clarity and a scrupulous hand legato, and by lightening the inside voices of the chords. This simultaneously makes the texture more transparent, and minimizes the abrupt shift at
m. 3 from thin to thick (5-6 parts) texture. He enhances continuity still further by observing Chopin's connecting pedal (m. 2, beat 3) and by insinuating the first chord of the new phrase in, very piano, as though it were an emanation of the bass C's (the C pedal point becoming a fundamental that projects its own overtone series), before effecting a crescendo to m. 4.

The arc of the second phrase has no dynamic indication from Chopin. Cortot plays it with a beautifully calibrated crescendo-diminuendo that rises to mezzo-piano at the dominant harmony of m. 4 (beat 1). He allows the harmonic tension of the V7 on the strong beat, therefore, to determine the dynamic apex of the phrase. But there is also the melodic tension of the dissonant G appoggiatura of the melody on beat 3 to attend to: Cortot underlines this agogically by broadening both the second and third beats (his first use of rubato) so that the rising leap of the melody (C-G) receives a characteristically vocal inflection. The appoggiatura is prepared and expressively "leaned on,"33 heightening the "sensitive, plaintive" quality he sees in the middle register answers (mm. 3-4, 7-8). From a tactical standpoint, Cortot's solution of placing the dynamic peak on the first beat of m. 4 and balancing it with an agogic inflection on the later expressive peak of the phrase has the advantage of giving him more time to effect a smooth decrescendo to the hushed piano level of the returning initial motive.
Intellectual Understanding.

With Cortot, as with Busoni before him, a composer of predilection became a subject of rational inquiry and critical reflection while remaining, in true romantic fashion, the object of philosophical and psychoanalytical speculation. The stronger Cortot's affinity with a composer, the harder he looked for clues to the character and significance of his music. He began his investigation with an intensive study of the score. With Chopin and Schumann in particular, he widened his search to encompass everything that might shed light on the creator's thought processes, poetics and world of sensations, the "hidden sources of his inspiration." This included reflection on possible outside influences or thematic kinships with other works of the composer, as well as inquiry into features of biography that may have left their mark on the music.

All that Cortot learned through inquiry helped him arrive at a deep intellectual empathy with the composer. It carried him inside the situation, so to speak, and gave him a grasp of the quality of the mind and personality expressed in the music. It also afforded a basis for confirming or amending the findings of his own musical instincts. With three separate vantage points—historical/philological inquiry, study of the music and intuitive insight—from which to take his bearings, Cortot was able to arrive at an interpretive perspective that was richer and more discerning than one founded solely on "feelings" or on objective analysis.
Approaching Chopin and Schumann in this manner, Cortot was able to begin disentangling their music from many of the false late-Romantic images and performance traditions "that clung to it like ivy to an oak." He looked with fresh eyes at the most hackneyed pieces (e.g., Chopin's all too frequently vulgarized waltzes). What he discovered resulted in some of the most original interpretations of his day. Cortot, wrote Beniamino Dal Fabbro, "taught that one could and should play Chopin as a classic, revealing in this way his true romanticism, which is to say not a fictive historical romanticism with all its vices and excesses but one of character, of expression: a romanticism inherent in the music, and hence absolute like its artistic value." Romantic composers more than any other group, Cortot believed, had been victimized by self-serving performers. "With your permission," he told one of his master classes, "we are going to declare war on the decorative art (l'art d'agrément), on playing that is technically perfect in every lacy detail but has no soul. We are going to combat these 'traditional' interpretive nuances whose only justification is... that they 'make a stunning impression.'"

Cortot's notion of interpretive integrity entailed fidelity to the spirit of the work but not necessarily to the letter. His liberties are not outlandish by the standards of his day. His playing does, however, display certain characteristically late-Romantic mannerisms that are no longer condoned: frequent asynchronizations (deliberate slight
arpeggiation of chords or delayed entry of a melodic voice),
minute fermatas or ritards at the peak of phrases or on the
highest note of runs, a pervasive broad rubato, octave doubling
of basses and occasional note modifications. These
mannerisms link Cortot's style to a bygone era, but they do not
really pose a serious barrier to appreciation of his
interpretive genius today.

Design.

One of the foremost challenges facing the interpreter of
Romantic literature is determining how best to elucidate the
inner logic of music that often abandons the solid armature of
a conventional form and a clear tonal center; or, like
Schumann's music, that retains formal stereotypes out of
deference to tradition while actually deriving its expressive
power from poetic ideas or feelings. Cortot recommended a
two-phase strategy. First, the interpreter must study, sing
and think about the musical ideas until he has a clear sense of
the quality of meaning they convey. If his musical competence
(literacy, inner hearing) permits,

the best way of crystallizing the piece in his creative
imagination is by trying to grasp the dominant expressive
or descriptive character of the musical ideas through
reading the music away from the piano, [so as to be] free
at first of the contingencies connected with sightreading
at the keyboard (which serves mainly to make him aware of
the technical problems to overcome).... I can only
recommend that one heed Schumann's advice: "Never play a
work before it fully sings within you." Second, and most importantly, he must deduce from the ideas a
comprehensive "expressive design" that draws all elements into
mutually fitting relations to a central poetic purpose.

Especially with sets of character pieces, Cortot noted,

we really go deeply into the imaginative domain. Sound at times tends to take the place of the spoken word. There is one overriding imperative: [the performer] must establish in his own mind a scenario of ideas that provides a frame of reference for the composition. This is no longer simply a matter of sound quality or of harmonic relationships. It entails above all capturing each feeling with absolute expressive fidelity at the very moment it arises in the music. Here the principles of contrast and variation win the upper hand over unity.

Such music expresses a state of mind more than [it displays] a technical craft. The ways of the heart (la vie sentimentale), the surge of ideas are captured alive, still quivering with the heat of the emotion which sparked them.... [The interpreter] must not only convey feelings, he must conjure up visions as well,... resort in many instances to a painter's techniques.... [This] is a fleeting, kaleidoscopic art that requires the capacity to constantly shift expressive modes, while keeping to a very clear interpretive plan.44

Since a literary exposition of an expressive plan has already been presented (see Cortot's commentaries on the Fantaisie), we can confine ourselves to examining how Cortot draws on a poetic scenario in one context (Schumann) and an expressive-syntactic plan in another (Debussy) to realize a musical design convincingly in performance. Schumann's "Fürchtenmachen" (No. 11 from Kinderszenen) presents an interpretive challenge quite frequently encountered in Romantic character pieces. This little work, whose title ("To frighten") clearly suggests that it was conceived with an associative image or emotional event in mind, was cast by Schumann in the most prosaic of forms, a simple seven-part rondo (A B A C A B A) that juxtaposes three markedly dissimilar ideas:
The problem is obvious: how to feel and create a single, cohesive pictorial or narrative vignette out of such inherently disparate materials, and how to preserve the interest and significance of (A) and (B) when they are repeated literally? Cortot's solution was to imagine a scenario that could account for the abrupt shifts of mood/character and at the same time justify an expressive transformation of (A) and (B) each time they recur. Mindful that Schumann was evoking an episode from childhood, Cortot surmised: "To frighten,... but how? Why, by telling scary stories!" With this as his point of departure, he conjures up a picture of the story-teller working his listeners (and himself) up into such a state of mind that everyone is ready to jump out of his skin at the slightest
imagined noise, until the realization gradually sets in that it is only "make-believe" after all. The tone of (A)—the "narrator"—becomes more anxious and insistent in Cortot's interpretation as he approaches the explosive outburst of the central section (C). Ominous, shadowy things scurry to and fro in the (B) sections, seeming to advance and recede from the listener (i.e., < >), coming closer in the first presentation of the idea than in its return after (C). By carefully measuring out his expressive means—dynamic levels, agogics, tempo relationships, declaration—Cortot shapes the whole piece into a cohesive arc that gradually rises in intensity and agitation to an emotional/dynamic peak in mm. 21–26, then subsides:

Figure 1. Expressive plan of Cortot's performance of "Fürchtenmachen".

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>mm.</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>11</th>
<th>21</th>
<th>29</th>
<th>37</th>
<th>41</th>
<th>48</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(A)</td>
<td>(B)</td>
<td>(A)</td>
<td>(C)</td>
<td>(A)</td>
<td>(B)</td>
<td>(A)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**tempo**

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{d} &= 86^\text{f} \\
\text{d} &= 80 \rightarrow 86, \text{then rit. from a tempo (m. 25)}
\end{align*}
\]

**dynamics**

**agogics** (rubato)
This interpretation is an object lesson in how to project a comprehensive vision of the musical design with imagination and eloquence, reinvesting a conventional form with fresh meaning.

Debussy's *Danseuses de Delphes* (*Préludes*, Book I) presents the interpreter with a different challenge, namely: how to individualize the simultaneous and successive musical events so as to display their relative musical importance and clarify the texture.

A summary of Cortot's commentaries on the piece provides insight into certain of his interpretive aims. Note that his proposed "poetic context" is grounded in observed features of the musical structure (e.g., writing imitative of harps in mm. 4-5, and of finger cymbals in mm. 8-9):

The inspiration for this piece is supposed to have been an engraving showing three women who danced, circling, the wind shaping the folds of their veils, in imitation of a famous Greek sculpture. Remembering Debussy's inquisitive mind and powerful imagination, we can envision what the title [Danseuses de Delphes] conjured up to him: fantastic apparitions in a misty atmosphere. Solemn and silent, they turn to the rhythm of harps, crotals [i.e., finger cymbals] and flutes.

In works of this sort, one has to know how to revitalize ('renouveler') one's sonority. At m. 6, for example, one can bring out the lower note of the theme in octaves more. The high resonances [chords with seconds, mm. 8-9, 16-17] recall the metallic ring of the crotals, and should be given a crystalline timbre. Do not ritard the end: a sense of dignified regularity should reign to the last.47

Cortot differentiates the superimposed lines of mm. 1-4 through expert proportioning (or "voicing" as some say) of the chord notes.48 From the opening beat, he sets the melody in relief by playing it with a firm, resonant cantabile tone, though without exceeding the specified dynamic level of piano. At the same time he employs a lighter, more vaporous sonority for the remaining chord tones. The exact dynamic relationship between the six voices is actually more complex, if my ear does not deceive me:

the melody en dehors, legato (pressure touch?), with a
certain intensity but a mellowness that suggests that
Cortot is using one of his favorite tactics: playing a
theme with a sonorous tone while keeping the *una corda*
depressed. Level: a projecting piano with "body"

2 the lower voice of the left hand octaves (i.e., the
bass) pianissimo but slightly carrying, so that one
perceives clearly the contrary motion of melody and bass

3 the parallel thirds above the melody and the octave
doubling of the top voice and bass, pppp (i.e., barely
audible) in m. 1. At the literal repetition (m. 2),
where the melodic motif is already clearly established,
Cortot brings out the highest voice (F-G-A) a bit to
suggest a counter-melody, pianissimo.

Debussy himself made piano rolls of *Danseuses de Delphes*
and four other préludes from Book I in the early years of this
century.49 Despite of the limitations of the recording medium,
these performances tell us much about his sonority and handling
of agogics, tempo relations and pedalling. Comparing Debussy's
reading of the opening of *Danseuses de Delphes* with Cortot's,
for instance, one notices that Debussy does not sharply
differentiate the superimposed lines. His composite sound is
flatter and more homogenous, his melody so little distinct from
the surrounding chord fabric that one scarcely perceives it except where it moves independently (e.g., at the 16th note of beat 2). From measure 3 he does give the theme a bit more profile, but throughout he tends to maintain relatively close volume ratios between voices. This brings the vertical (harmonic) aspect of the music to the fore in his performance, whereas in Cortot's interpretation the linear predominates.

Cortot's and Debussy's versions of measures 3-5 demonstrate strikingly how much the character of a reading depends ultimately on the way the interpreter hears the underlying musical design. Both performers adhere fairly closely to the notated text in this passage, each taking different, minor liberties with the expressive markings. Where the two really part ways is in their dissimilar conceptions of the musical syntax (phrase profile, punctuation):

Example 6. Debussy, Danseuses de Delphes, mm. 3-5.
Debussy plays the chord stream as an extension of the opening phrase (mm. 1 to 4, beat 2), creating a single musical thought that arches across five bars, coming to a resting point only at the F major chord of m. 5. In practical, interpretive terms, this means that he makes no sudden change of dynamic level, flow or color at the change of texture in m. 4, but treats the parallel chords as the logical prolongation of a dynamic curve that rises imperceptibly in intensity through m. 3 and is tapered down only slightly in m. 5. When the passage is conceived thus, the curious dynamic markings of m. 3 can be understood as serving to remind the performer to support the long line (hence no falling-off on the second note of slurs), the continuity of which is further reinforced by the D pedal point (m. 4, bass).

Debussy does not observe strictly the pianissimo preceding the chord stream. His interpretation suggests that he intended it as a "cautionary" marking, warning the performer not to exceed piano at the apogee of the phrase and hinting at the appropriate touch for the portato chords.50

Cortot plays the chord stream as an interpolation, a parenthetical aside in the musical discourse that forms a zone of contrast value between the melodic statements.51 This conception leads him to raise the tension (by stressing the ascending chromatic bass) as well as the tonal intensity incrementally through the small crescendi of m. 3 to the
dissonant peak of m. 4, beat 1. His subsequent resolution to the tonic brings a perceptible release and diminuendo. Envisioning the chord stream as a moment "in suspension" leads Cortot to take the pianissimo of m. 4 very seriously: he renders the chords with a remote (ppp) tone and a detached, leggierissimo touch bathed in pedal. More importantly, however, he transforms the character in mm. 4-5 by adopting a more flowing tempo and a more impersonal delivery (no accentuation or rubato). He underlines this change of atmosphere by discreetly arpeggiating the first four or five chords.

Debussy and Cortot play the cadence of m. 5 differently as well, each treating it in a manner consistent with his understanding of the musical syntax of the paragraph. Debussy, hearing the musical idea prolonged in one breath through the chord stream, plays the cadence as a landing point, posing the final chord rather assertively and extending its length. This furthers the impression of closure on a new F major tonic. Cortot, on the other hand, lets the sound dissipate through m. 5 and imbues the final chord with a quality of expectation and "lift." This gives the chord stream an open-ended, progressive feeling, leading the listener to hear the whole period (from m. 1) as an extended rise to the dominant F major harmony of m. 5.
Figure 2. Debussy, *Danseuses de Delphes*, mm. 1-5: comparison of the expressive/syntactical plans of Debussy and Cortot in performance.

The fascinating thing is that both interpretations could be valid, since both are derived from the given structural properties and expressive clues, both respect the logic of musical language, and both are aesthetically satisfying. Cortot's and Debussy's contrasting ways of hearing the musical design are the result of their having attached more or less importance to various implications of the text.

One final point must be addressed before leaving the subject of design. The assumption underlying this discussion has been that Cortot's interpretations were to a great extent consciously deliberated. Are there grounds for such an assumption, or are we perhaps guilty of reading premeditation into what may have been primarily the outcome of a brilliant instinct for musical architecture and characterization? The question deserves careful consideration, if only because Cortot's best interpretations of the Romantic literature give the listener such a sense of impetuous élan and emotional
involvement. Almost certainly Cortot trusted intuition to lead him to a first grasp of a composition's basic "sound-shape" and affective content, and also to dictate the surface details of declamation in performance. Between these two points, however, a great deal of reasoning and reflection went into formulating the essential features of his interpretive concept and the optimal manner of its realization in sound.

If Cortot's writings on music were not evidence enough of his inclination to calculate his manner of expression, his recordings offer further confirmation. Comparing the 1935 performance of Schumann's "Fürchtenmachen" discussed earlier with versions of the same piece recorded by Cortot in 1947 and 1954, one discovers that while no two readings are exactly alike, all proceed from the same conceptual design and display remarkably similar expressive profiles. They differ primarily in the particulars of delivery: the ear can detect countless subtle variations in the dynamic and agogic inflections employed. The sheer originality of Cortot's ideas, coupled with this richly nuanced declamation, enabled him to project the most carefully considered interpretation with an air of fervor and spontaneity.

Sonority.

Cortot, wrote Alfredo Casella, possessed "a quality of tone that was unique in timbre, in nobility, in... incisiveness, enabl[ing] him to achieve a style in which each note is dense with maturity." Less effusive but no less
admiring, Paul Badura-Skoda said simply: "[Cortot] had the most beautiful piano sound I ever heard. It had a penetrating quality, and it could be accomplished even on a poor instrument." Tone, for Cortot, was always a prime bearer of expressive significance. As such, it had to be diversified and refined to the ultimate degree. This view was not original with Cortot, of course: Chopin, Liszt, Anton Rubinstein, Leschetitzky and others had stressed the need to cultivate a beautiful and highly varied tone. In France, however, Cortot was rare among major performer-teachers in placing such a capital importance on the cultivation of an extremely varied tonal palette. The international concert world, moreover, has seen few artists who so fully exploited the expressive potentialities of tone as Cortot did in his best interpretations.

Two of Cortot's achievements in the domain of sonority may be singled out as particularly significant. Both reflect a striving for specificity and precision in expressive characterization. Sensitive pianists of all times have instinctively or consciously adapted their sound to the particular character of the work or passage they were playing. Cortot carried this practice to a higher stage of refinement: deconstructing the passage into its component voices or musical strata, he tried to discover the particular emotional character or expressive contribution of each element from its qualities
and structural function in the context, assigning to each a distinctive and appropriate tone/touch.

Cortot's second achievement reflected a desire for individualization of a different sort. If the character of a musical line dictates the tone quality with which it should be rendered, then the reverse of this proposition is also true: by modifying the sonority, an interpreter can color or "qualify" the expression within the dominant character in countless subtle ways. Pursuing this line of inquiry, Cortot developed a range and a control of tonal shadings that enabled him to enliven a melodic line with all the inflections of speech and song, to nuance the quality and/or intensity of feeling and the atmosphere almost on a note-to-note basis. In short, he perfected a sophisticated and highly individual style of declamation at the piano.

"The remarkable thing about Cortot's captivating 'beautiful sonority,'" wrote Goldbeck,
is that it is not at all some feature he adds like a manual and material embellishment (grace) to the other traits of his style. The term "touch" becomes inappropriate: it's a question of shaping the musical figure. This sonority seems to me to be the furthest extension of Cortot's incomparable feeling for the contour of musical movement (la trajectoire musicale) which he applies rhythm, phrasing and all his musical feeling to delineating. In this path traced by the line no two notes should have exactly the same tonal intensity; the values change at every point on the curve. Thus, what seems to the ear to be a supreme evenness [of line] is in fact the result of its vibrant and secret unevenness.

Inhabiting the musical gesture more than the note, the phrase more than the gesture, the whole more than the part, this sonority is the very life pulse of his
playing. If an interpretive idea happens not to come off entirely successfully, the sonority is affected. But [his tone] approaches the phantasmagorical when the interpretation is at its apogee.58

Sonority, as Cortot understood it, was "not a static sensuous phenomenon, but a dialectic concept: the best, and hence the most beautiful tone is the one which best expresses the meaning of what one is playing" (Neuhaus).59 The sense of music as a language, which despite its immensely variable connotations obeys the syntactical and prosodic laws of spoken language and aims above all to move and to be understood, is particularly intense in Cortot's playing. Even where one might be inclined to take issue with some of his interpretive ideas, Cortot usually succeeds in winning the listener over at least temporarily to his vision of the music by his sheer command of expressive resources, and by the sense he conveys of logical "rightness" and appropriateness of means to ends (i.e., his ability to say what he intends and not something different).

Cortot's sonority and mastery of tone coloring reached its highest level of artistic refinement in his cantabile playing. Memorable examples abound in the Romantic works he recorded for HMV London between ca. 1927 and 1937. His pressings from this period of Chopin's Ballades, Préludes, Sonatas or Barcarolle, Schumann's Etudes symphoniques or Concerto, Liszt's Sonata in b minor or any of Franck's works would serve admirably to illustrate the basic features of his cantabile style. All display an aristocratic phrasing, a
constant sensitivity to tone matching and part balancing such as only the sharpest ear can accomplish.

Cortot attributed his remarkable faculties of critical listening to his experience as an orchestral conductor. One can indeed detect a certain orchestral thinking in his fondness for differentiating textural strata through characteristic articulation (touch) forms as well as through "finding a distinct timbre for each...."60 His unusual sensitivity to inner voices and bass lines may also reflect his "conductor's ear." Cortot's cantabile delivery of the melodic lines themselves, however, was heavily indebted to vocal models.

Many of the hallmarks of Cortot's melodic declamation are pianistic translations of strategies borrowed from vocal technique, or expressive devices typical of bel canto. These include pointing up changes of direction; stressing appoggiaturas, slurs, or expressive dissonances by dynamic or agogic inflection; changing timbre (color) on large leaps or shifts of register; pulling back the sound or hesitating at the top of the phrase; and creating lines that "breathe" and ornamentation that "sings" with true awareness of its emotional weight. Vocal conventions of this sort, varied in the detail with boundless imagination, are employed by Cortot wherever there is a modicum of lyricism in the writing, whether it occurs in the primary melodic line or in a secondary part. They contribute largely to the mercurial character of his playing, i.e., to its pronounced rhythmic elasticity and
relatively wide and rapid fluctuations of tonal intensity within the small dimension (the gesture, phrase and period) of the music.

If there is a second source of inspiration for Cortot's linear inflections, it would appear to have been elocution, an art greatly esteemed in former times, which has fallen out of fashion and become synonymous nowadays with artificiality of manner. Listening to Cortot's performance of Chopin's Sonata in b minor or Préludes No. 2 (a minor) and 4 (e minor), one is struck by the bold, imperious tone of presentation, the sharp definition with which he projects melodies, the slightly rhetorical agogics which charge even the more tender moments with an undertone of emotional or dramatic tension. In quasi-recitativo passages such as occur in Chopin's Etude Op. 25, No. 7, in the Liszt Sonata and in the Prélude from Franck's Prélude, choral et fugue, Cortot combines this emphatic tone with a highly inflected parlando phrasing to produce an impression reminiscent of the "hyper-enunciated" delivery of a turn-of-the-century actor or orator.

Declamation aside, Cortot's sonority per se is one of the loveliest and most distinctive ever captured on record. As far as can be judged from historical discs, it is quite unlike the round, mellifluous tone favored by Paderewski, Rachmaninoff, Moritz Rosenthal, Benno Moiseiwitch and others of the late romantic era. Cortot employs a very incisive touch for cantabile notes and expressive details of momentary melodic
interest, pedalling liberally to add resonance and give the sound a bell-like ring. He differentiates the remaining parts but plays them at considerably softer levels (vis à vis principal material) than most of his contemporaries were wont to.

This dynamic tiering in which key lines are raised several notches above middle and background planes, combined with skillful modelling of "low-relief" elements (even chord tones in simple harmonic accompaniments are rarely played with the same intensity), prevents Cortot's sonority from ever becoming thick or woolly. It has a spatial quality and translucency that distinguish it immediately from the rich, consistently weighty sonority of Paderewski, or the dark, dense sound of Rachmaninoff. Cortot's chime-like cantabile tone has no counterpart. Lhevinne's touch has a similar point and ring, but his vertical proportioning of chord tones and superimposed lines is so unlike Cortot's that their overall sonorities have little in common. The uniformly steely tone of Horowitz, which makes every note distinctly audible, the solid touch and dry, transparent textures of Backhaus or Egon Petri--these are still further from Cortot's sound.

Cortot's aim is not absolute clarity, but rather selective clarification within the composite sound image. The main lyrical contours of the work and the distinctive details of rhythm and harmony are sharply profiled, while the rest is often rendered more "impressionistically" with indistinct or
delicate touch forms, the better to highlight the essential. The semblance of *timbric* as well as dynamic variety that Cortot creates through subtle shadings of touch and pedal recalls the playing of Ignaz Friedman (1882-1948), another superb colorist. The two artists have several traits in common, notably a similar manner of phrasing and nuancing melody lines, and of organizing basses. Both are capable of elucidating a polyphonic web of voices with remarkable finesse. Cortot tends to conceive of simple fabrics (e.g., melody plus accompaniment) in more emphatically linear terms. As a result, he seeks a more variegated shading of subsidiary parts.

Friedman takes as many rhythmic liberties as Cortot, but to very different effect. His musical approach is more instinctive; his agogics sound less contrived than Cortot's, though they are just as stylized and often seem more arbitrary. While Friedman is Cortot's equal as a "tone poet"—and probably his better as a technician—in small character pieces, he cannot approach Cortot in the shaping of a large-scale composition. Beyond the obvious factor of conceptual vision (i.e., of short- vs. long-range interpretive thinking), not under consideration here, one can discern in their playing a basic difference of aesthetic aims in the application of tonal resources.64

For Friedman, as for many pianists steeped in the late-Romantic tradition, a piano tone of utmost beauty and fullness
was an ideal pursued not only as an expressive means but also for its intrinsic sonic appeal. It was an entity to be cherished as such. While he did vary his sonority according to the character, Friedman appears to have been anxious to preserve its physical identity, its distinctive silky opulence, whatever the context. In performing Chopin's Ballade in A♭ major, for example, both Friedman and Cortot draw on an extensive palette of tonal shadings. Friedman, however, exploits his control of color and nuance to focus attention on the sensuous--and sensual--qualities of the musical surface. He renders certain musical events with imaginative and novel sonorous effects seemingly chosen more for their aural appeal than for their correlation to a controlling design and feeling. Cortot, on the other hand, is more intent on manipulating tone to "constructive" ends. Cortot gives the sensuous values their due, particularly in melodic declamation, but he is more thoroughgoing in employing tonal gradations architectonically, i.e., to define contrasting elements in the vertical and to actualize larger dynamic values (tension, growth, climax, etc.) in the music.

Characterization through Sonority and Rhythm.

Cortot's performance and verbal analysis of Chopin's Prélude No. 8 in f# minor illustrate well his constructive approach to the projection of musical character and form.
Example 7. Chopin, Prélude in f# minor, Op. 28, No. 8, mm. 1-2.

Despite the substantial technical difficulties present in this highly virtuosic writing, the interpreter must not forget for an instant that the ultimate challenge is to make the musical meaning intelligible to the listener. Before concentrating on accuracy, velocity, evenness, etc., he must first ascertain the dominant mood of the Prélude (Cortot sees it as "a feeling... of despair, brightened only by a glimmer of hope at the change from minor to major").\(^6\) Then he must decide how the various musical elements/events function in relationship to the central character, and what particular expressive and dynamic properties are embodied in each. According to Cortot, the distinctive contribution of each of the three elements is as follows:

1) theme: feverish, gasping, sets the tone for the entire piece by its incisive rhythm, élan and agitated, impatient phrase articulations.

2) thirty-second note figuration: heightens intensity by its seething effervescence, but should remain very secondary, contributing a shimmering (frémissement) with its wave of sound that follows the melodic rise and fall.
3) left-hand figure: supplies the harmonic framework and a pulsating rhythmic drive that reinforces the agitation of the theme if it is attacked incisively.67

Once the interpreter has identified the nature and role of each element, his problem is to find the best means of clarifying its individual features in sound, always respecting the hierarchy. Cortot's solution is to create a multi-level sound structure using three absolutely distinct species of touch-tone: 1) melody with a very penetrating tone, legato and tenuto in spirit, if not literally;68 2) the figuration of the upper part several degrees softer, rippled with a precise, slightly non-legato touch (probably a non-weighted finger-tip attack); 3) the left hand figure up to m. 19 (molto agitato e stretto) with an initial impulsive accent but falling away to a muted dynamic level, the touch for this primary harmonic element indefinite, so that with the addition of pedal each figure becomes a "gesture." This minimizes the redundant aspect of the pattern while preserving its rhythmic and affective force. Particularly in Cortot's 1933 recording of the Prélude, the various planes of the tonal image are so individualized and hierarchized that his sonority seems to acquire a "stereoscopic" depth—a remarkable feat of "auditory trompe-l'œil" in fifty year-old monophonic sound.

Turning from the vertical to the linear sound proportioning, Cortot's main objective is to scale the composite sound level so that it reinforces his vision of the Prélude as following an unbroken dramatic and emotional curve
that intensifies gradually to a high point at mm. 21-23, then declines more rapidly. To keep the tension and energy rising fairly steadily towards the culminating point, Cortot takes liberties with the written dynamics, underplaying, for instance, the forte of m. 14 and the fortissimo of m. 16 and pointing up the reprise of the initial thematic idea at m. 19 with explosive accents. These sforzandi enable him to start the final drive to the climax from a mezzo forte, without loss of momentum or emotional tension.

Cortot takes full advantage of the pedal's capacity to intensify character from the opening measures. He applies light, precise touches of pedal to enrich the harmonic support role of the left hand and bathe the upper voice figuration in a slight resonance that helps establish the atmosphere immediately. The release of the pedal at the end of each beat, meticulously indicated by Chopin in the text but ignored by many performers, is clearly audible in Cortot's performance. This lift, tastefully executed, serves a double function: it lets "light" into the thicket of notes, thus preventing the harmonies from spilling over into one another, and it checks the sound flow momentarily like a catch breath, heightening the general feeling of agitation and propulsive dynamism injected by the left hand figure. From m. 27 on he switches to very short, rhythmic pedals, creating a sound surface that is drier and more roughly textured. This enables him to bring out the inner voices more clearly and "stress the nervous, insistent
character of the bass." By establishing these new focal points of motivic and tonal interest, Cortot counters the potential risk of premature closure and a sudden sag in expressive intensity as the melodic activity, dynamic level and rate of harmonic change decline in the last quarter of the piece.

Even at the fortissimo climax of mm. 21-22, Cortot never forces his sound into the upper extremes of the piano's dynamic range, where it becomes harsh and ugly. "Power has nothing to do with banging," he told his students. It is first and foremost "a matter of rhythm and timbre, not of sheer volume." Via a conservative rendering of earlier, secondary peaks, a slight broadening of tempo at m. 22, and a sharper accentuation of the bass (contributing added harmonic and rhythmic tension), Cortot arrives at the apogee of the Prélude with intensity in reserve. There is a lesson in this that young performers today would do well to heed: in interpretive pianism "less" can be "more" when the artist is truly the master of his expressive means.

The 1933 version of the Préludes was perhaps the closest Cortot ever came on record to a perfect fusion between re-creative conception and instrumental realization. The listener is left with that rare impression: the music could not sound otherwise, given Cortot's poetic vision of the work. For Alfred Brendel, Cortot's interpretation remains as fresh and compelling as when he first heard it thirty-five years ago. H. de la Grange writes that:
[Brendel] recently confessed to me that... when he wants to demonstrate to one of his students how the very nature of the piano can be utterly transformed in the hands of a genius, he refers them to this recording. For Brendel, Cortot's performance is matchless in that he manages to evoke a whole new musical world from the first bar of each piece;... in that he knows how to raise the temperature of his interpretation in an instant, and lower it just as quickly; in the skill with which he manipulates individually all the superimposed layers of a composite texture. As models of transcendental virtuosity, Brendel always cites the Préludes No. 8 [f# minor] and No. 16 [b♭ minor].

**Multi-focal Image Projection.**

Cortot's attitude towards expressive detail, and the distinctive "multi-focal" sound picture which it engendered, have been much discussed and analyzed in recent years, especially in Italy. Music critics Graziosi, Roberto Zanetti and Rattalino are among those who have called attention to the originality and "modernity" of his composite sound image. Essentially, Cortot's procedure was this: instead of allowing secondary parts to merge into an indistinct "background" that underscored the supremacy of the primary melody, Cortot constantly set out motives and figures from the inner voices and the bass in bold relief, creating a lively counterpoint of expressive moments that thrust themselves on the listener's awareness. Significant details throughout the fabric advance and recede from a shifting foreground, imposing their particular affective or structural contribution on one's perception without ever obscuring the dominant line.
Cortot's realization of the first measures of Chopin's Ballade No. 4\textsuperscript{73} provides an especially striking example of his handling of the sound fabric. Graphic notation symbols aiding, one can indicate his main highlighting devices—here, declamatory inflections—for the opening phrase. I have retained Graziosi's symbols\textsuperscript{74} of a line (–) and an (x) to represent, respectively, a slight lengthening or shortening of single notes. The symbol (') marks a sub-phrase grouping. It should not be taken to indicate an actual break in sound, but rather a slight punctuation effected by agogic or dynamic stress. The broken-line arrows designate the note or event that is being underscored. To avoid confusion, Chopin's performance markings (dynamics, slurs, etc.) have been omitted where Cortot's interpretation is at variance with them. Parts which follow the inflections of a principal line have not been transcribed.

Example 8. Chopin, Ballade No. 4 in f minor, Op. 52, mm. 1–3, Cortot's dynamic and agogic inflections.
The result of Cortot's emphatic highlighting is a dynamic, "fractured" sound surface that is strongly spatialized, owing, in Rattalino's words, to "a constant changing of viewpoint and perspective:

To put it in modern terms,... Cortot does not work like a theatrical director, on a fixed [i.e., frontally oriented] space, but rather like a television director who positions his six or seven cameras at different angles and then chooses the image that suits his purpose to draw the spectator's attention to details. To put it in historical terms, one could say that Cortot deconstructs the sonorous object, analyzes it and then recomposes it along anti-traditional lines - a stylistic option comparable to that of the cubists. This observation was first made not by me but by Ferdinando Ballo, who spoke of Cortot's cubist sensibility. It strikes me as a fundamental critical insight, however. Moreover, it is easy to understand how Cortot, who came along after fifty years of romantic pianism, could be an innovator only through analysis and only through a new aesthetic, allied to the most avantgarde currents of French art in his day.75

There is little if any hard evidence on which to build a case for a genuine cross-disciplinary influence of cubism on Cortot's style. The intellectual affinities (anti-positivist, anti-naturalist) between Cortot and some cubists, the self-reflexive element in both styles and the tendency to "break up" the composition surface into strong lines and textural planes may reflect the influence of a common artistic milieu and "spirit of the times."76 Cortot's strong aversion to abstract art, however, makes it highly unlikely that he might have consciously derived his approach from cubist theory or praxis.

On the other hand, the pattern of deconstruction-analysis-unconventional recomposition that Rattalino identifies in Cortot's performance manner was clearly a hallmark of his
artistic thinking in general. It can be discerned not only in many of his recorded interpretations, but also in his literary exegeses and even in his emphasis in the study editions on reducing technical difficulties to their component elements. In the final analysis, Cortot is best regarded as a highly original thinker, who by largely personal paths came to forge his own style, a unique amalgam of French and Romantic performance values.

Rubato and Declamation.

Every great pianist, in fact, every pianist, has his own distinctive "rhythmic profile": his own particular manner of feeling and representing musical time (tempo, pulse, rhythmic patterns). Beyond that, every performer has his own personal notions about how much, and what kind of deviation from the notated values and a strict tempo is permissible or desirable. For a romantic interpreter like Cortot, who saw the notated score as requiring not only "sonorization" but the fulfilling re-creative participation of the interpreter, a free poetic rendering of rhythm and meter was to some degree indispensable. These liberties were his most powerful means of driving home the sense of the musical speech and the qualities of movement, tension or emotional values it embodies. Through them he could bring out exactly those implications in the music which reverberated in his own sensibility.

In Cortot's playing one can detect a pronounced tendency toward particularization of expressive content, that is,
towards controlling and nuancing meaning by underlining the smallest infra-phrase tensions, expressive "resonances" and punctuation of the musical thought with a scrupulously reflected declamation. His agogic inflections produce constant perturbations of the metric continuum. These range from slight irregularities—stretching or condensing of single note values according to their expressive function in the context—to a pronounced holding-back or hastening of the tempo (rubato). To modern ears, these declamatory liberties may sound a bit excessive, particularly when they are emphatic enough to distort the natural flow of the music.  

Cortot's agogics ruffled the rhythmic surface patterns, but rarely if ever jeopardized the fundamental stability of the deeper rhythmic structures. A powerful feeling for pulse, and for logic and equilibrium in departures from rhythmic regularity permeated all his playing. Cortot possessed that primary attribute of a fine conductor: a grasp of the music as an organic totality, and a feel for ordering and balancing stresses so that they operate to enhance the effectiveness and intelligibility of the whole. Thus, an accompaniment in a Chopin waltz that is varied agogically with a marked and ever-changing "lilt" will be counterbalanced with dynamic shading that points up the strong pulses, helps to ensure rhythmic logic and constancy of tempo at the phrase level, and clarifies phrase shape and directionality within the larger structural units. Melody lines that are inflected with pronounced, quasi-
parlando agogics will be "anchored" by Cortot with a bass that underlines the vital rhythmic points d'appui and supplies a counterpart of linear or harmonic interest. I mention these two schemes merely by way of example, to draw attention to the sensitivity with which Cortot assures a harmonious distribution of expressive values between various strata of a texture, as well as between small and large dimension considerations. The judicious balancing of liberty with strictness, of attention to detail with reinforcement of overall coherence, is one of the hallmarks of his interpretive style.

A fascinating example of Cortot's controlled declamatory freedom can be heard in his performance of the "Arioso" (Largo) from Bach's Concerto in f minor, S. 1056, transcribed by him for solo piano. Cortot delivers the cantilena in a flexible, highly vocalistic style, freely stretching or displacing note values according to their relative expressive significance and weight (as dictated mainly by length, metric placement, height, color/tension vis-à-vis the underlying harmony, position on the phrase contour, linear intervallic interest and presumed intensity of physiological vocal effort required for tone production). At the same time, he creates the impression—and much of the time, the reality—of an imperturbable, steady pulse in the underlying bass accompaniment.

The agogic liberties of Cortot's melodic delivery in this "Arioso" occur very largely between the main regulative pulses
(the first and fourth beats, marked by the bass line and
harmony changes). The wealth of subtle shading in each melodic
phrase illustrates, with much more sophistication than any
verbal description could, Cortot's manner of coordinating and
balancing dynamic and agogic inflection to produce a true
cantabile line on the piano. The artistic result seems to
approximate what modern research tells us was the old Italian
style of tempo rubato preferred by Chopin, and before him, by
Mozart.79 In this form of rubato playing, the "singing" hand
deviates from the literal rhythmic values as the expressive
demands of the melody dictate, but the basic tempo, fixed by
the bass, remains essentially constant.

To give a notion of Cortot's declamation, one can attempt
to transcribe the main agogic and dynamic inflections of
several phrases. Sensitive ears will pick up many more minute
deviations--impossible to notate--after one or two hearings of
the recording. I have retained the line (−) and the (x) to
indicate, respectively, single notes lengthened or shortened
slightly. To these symbols I have added a pair of arrows to
indicate a broadening (⟵) or a quickening (⟶) of the
tempo over several notes, and a wavy line (〰〰) to indicate
notes stirred by slight agogics that are too subtle to
represent with specific signs. Brackets indicate the beginning
and end of the more extended sections of rubato. Slight
dynamic stresses are enclosed in parentheses, stronger ones are
marked in the conventional manner. All dynamic markings reflect the performer's realization, not the composer's textual indications. Cortot plays the first phrase more or less as follows:


As the melody grows more active in later phrases of the "Arioso," Cortot resorts to more frequent and pronounced agogics. His sensitivity to the shape of musical movement extends right down to the articulation of the smallest units of the phrase. In mm. 13-15, for example, he underlines slightly the contours of the cantilena in characteristically vocal fashion:
On paper, these inflections can appear unduly complicated. In actuality, Cortot renders them with such apparent naturalness and taste that his performance takes on an improvisatory, almost rhapsodic quality. Of course, one wouldn't think of proposing Cortot's interpretation as a model for contemporary performers. Today we prefer to hear the Concerto as it was originally conceived, with orchestra, in which form it would be impossible to take such agogic liberties. The lesson to be learned from Cortot's performance is that however much he bends the melody agogically, the rhythmic core remains rock-solid.

Part of the expressive intensity of Cortot's playing stems precisely from his constant feeling for the competing demands of melodic declamation (which calls for the flexibility of speech or song) and of rhythmic continuity (which requires regularity of pulse, flow, momentum). Whether he stretches beats or whole phrases, there is no slackening of the primal
rhythmic impulse. The line remains taut. "This was one of his key precepts - the need for the player to attain rhythmic flexibility of the small metric units while maintaining the larger units quite strictly," noted Eric Heidsieck. "What he asked for, always, was a balance between sobriety and fantasy."80

Cortot's style of declamation could be described as exteriorizing and "polychromatic." Covering a broad range of expressive modes, from the tender to the exalted, "the imperative to the provocative,"81 it was ideally suited to the Romantic musical idiom and to Chopin's music in particular. The delivery is emphatic and stylized, with a whiff of the oratorical and sometimes the oracular about it. Cortot does not simply "let" the musical phrases succeed each other. He sends them forth in emotionally charged pronouncements: he declares, expounds, exalts, rages, intones, confesses, intimates. Even when evoking moods of tenderness, reverie or nostalgia, or tapping a vein of wit or charm in the music, Cortot retains a touch of the "grand manner" beloved of the Romantic concert public. "Grand" in this context does not necessarily mean heroic or pompous. In Chopin's music especially, it comes down rather to the lavishness and explicitness of Cortot's expressive devices. Melodic phrases are punctuated with minute checks and releases, interjections and parenthetical afterthoughts that are the audible reflection of his feeling for the emotive significance of every word and
syllable of the musical statement.\textsuperscript{82} Graziosi's comments on Cortot's performance of Chopin's Etude Op. 10, No. 3 in E would hold true for many of Cortot's interpretations:

At every step there is a holding back or a pressing forward, a rare balancing of slight accelerandi and ritardandi, hints of pauses and anticipations, caesuras and hesitations: a true and proper speaking with intention, having the full measure of feeling right on the tip of the tongue even more than right at his fingertips.\textsuperscript{83} A complete prosody of interpretation, not only untranslatable into words..., but not even easily transcribable....\textsuperscript{84}

To appreciate how Cortot's parlando declamation works to render specific and explicit the expressive implications of a melodic line, consider the principal theme of Chopin's Ballade No. 4. Chopin restricted his performance indications to a laconic \textit{mezza voce} and a few well-placed decrescendos that imply the essential dynamic contour of his idea:

Example 11. Chopin, \textit{Ballade} No. 4 in F minor, mm. 7-12, original notation.
From these hints, Cortot arrives at a delivery that would look something like this in transcription:

Example 12. Chopin, Ballade No. 4, mm. 7-13, Cortot's declamation.

In the annotations to his study edition of the f minor Ballade, Cortot wisely refrains from mentioning these inflective details which are, after all, elements of his personal interpretation, and not all fixed elements at that. He does, however, reveal the basic rationale for his declamation, which resides in his understanding of the logic and syntactic form of Chopin's melodic thought:
It would seem to be more in keeping with the improvisatory character of the opening measures to begin the *a tempo* only with the lift pulse of m. 8 [i.e., on the first F in the bass], and to play the legato eighths of the right hand [last of m. 7 to middle m. 8] in the spirit of a monologue that prolongs the pause (point d'orgue), a "hyphen" intended to link the introduction to the principal theme. As it happens, this way of phrasing is borne out by the configuration of the melodic idea when it is restated later....

The expressive punctuation of each statement of the theme is based quite consistently on the following principle:

Example 13. Chopin, *Ballade No. 4*, mm. 1-4, Cortot's reading of the syntax and punctuation (as given in his study edition, p. 50) and editorial comments.

The transformations of character that the melodic phrase undergoes may lead the interpreter to imbue the second [suspensive] module with a more insistent tone than the first [interrogative], but the basic sense of the motive is not changed.87

Laurent Ceillier believed that the real mark of Cortot's greatness was not his delivery of melodies, so much as his ability to unfold them in a setting, every note of which was invested with expressive meaning.88 "Granted, the melodic declamation is immensely captivating, and immediately catches the attention of the music-loving public," observed Ceillier, but the crux of the artistry of this interpretive genius is perhaps not so much his exquisite sonority... as his extremely felicitous, adroit, intelligent "setting," which colors the whole expressive ambiance, powerfully supporting the melody with a highlighting that situates and haloes it. Listening to Cortot's basses is no doubt a rather esoteric pleasure..., but an illuminating one to
the professional, who will discover why he finds [the playing] so completely enjoyable, and will savor it all the more. Consider what Cortot makes of Schumann's basses or the rhythm of the basses in simple little Schubert Ländler. All the [artistic] worth (valeur) is there [in the basses], the accent, the rhythm, the atmosphere of the sonority also.... If I've said of Busoni that he was the "artist of sonorities," one could say of Cortot that he is the "artist of accents," which comes down to somewhat the same thing, but with this distinction: that apart from the... beautiful touch by which Cortot draws such persuasive tones from his Pleyel, Cortot has a very unique feeling for the value of accentuation which is one of his least remarked, but most effective communicative means. This sense of the power of dynamic and agogic emphasis; of the profile of relative intensity, rhythm and movement blended in the most subtle nuances; of expectation, precipitation, or slowing down; the luminous clarity of all this "setting" combined with the intense musical expression which it reinforces through accentuation, imparts a power and vigor (vigueur) to Cortot's interpretations that is striking and irresistible....

Not surprisingly, declamation and especially rubato were the most variable elements of Cortot's interpretations--not only because they depended on the inspiration of the moment and the state of his nerves to some extent, but also because each rethinking of the music revealed to Cortot new implications, a different perspective on some passage, another level of meaning. Judging by his recordings and the recollections of students, Cortot's declamatory style evolved somewhat over the years of his concert career. Always individualistic, his delivery tended to be more capricious in the early years, savoring the decorative and the fanciful. From ca. 1925 to the late 'thirties, there is a move towards increasing concision and "essentialization," and following World War II a twilight stage in which creativity and experimentation decline.
The late interpretations often display a higher degree of stylization (exaggerated rubato and mannerisms) and more self-quoting.

Goldbeck implied that Cortot's constant recasting of phrasing and declamatory details was not only a spontaneous response to new insights, but also an intentional tactic adopted by him to prevent the interpretation from becoming hardened and predictable:

The "secret" of Cortot's art, perhaps,... is that he has made this shifting between tension and relaxation, abandon and discipline, the very cornerstone of his performance style. Cortot knows that a certain rubato, organic and asymmetric, controls all music..., but he also knows that it is the musician who must control the rubato.

First of all, one needs to discover within the fixed notation (which is all relative values,... conventional symbols,... structure), everything that is rhythm, line and shape. These discoveries are fixed a second time, and personalized, in the mind of the player; and as rule, that is where things stop. An artist like Cortot, however, goes much further. This second "writing" is shaken up and made flexible once again by [incorporating] later interpretive impulses and inspirations of the moment: an excessively mannered rubato, by the very fact of its stylization, has lost its essential quality - which is to be a manifestation of abandon.... One must find, then, a sort of rubato in the second degree, which consists in countering with something unexpected what is by now too predictable in the first rubato, and so on.

I confess that I derive the violent pleasure of an aficionado... from hearing in Cortot's playing this ongoing combat between spontaneity and style: a battle wherein one who tries to get inside the musical work is gripped and swept away by fascination with the musical thought, living and inexhaustible, that is embodied in it ("la musique musiquante," a scholastic would have said); and where this fascination will in its turn be conquered by a new and more subtle stylization. It is the struggle of the portraitist with the face; and like a Rembrandtesque engraving, a Cortot interpretation evolves at each stage toward a more firmly etched design and towards more arcane illuminations.93
There are advantages and drawbacks to incessantly rethinking one's interpretations. On the positive side, each new investigation of the work can rekindle emotional involvement and interest, can reveal fresh interpretive challenges. These are necessary for every performer, but never more so than for the artist who has made a long, perhaps lifelong commitment to mastering a special repertoire. If the element of conscious calculation in the retouchings is too great, however, the musical result is likely to become more and more imprinted with the interpreter's personality, more and more burdened with an arbitrary subjectivism. Too heavy a freight of personalizing inflections, self-referential innuendos and arrière-pensées detracts from the natural continuity and flow of the musical thought.

Cortot's playing does not entirely escape this pitfall, though the intentionality of his expressive devices seems to have been much less noticeable in live performances than it is in his recordings. It is probable that with his exceptional personal magnetism and intensity of artistic purpose, Cortot was able to transport his audiences out of awareness of premeditation or artifice in his playing in the atmosphere of the concert hall. "On stage Cortot had an extraordinary communicative presence," recalled Reine Gianoli. "He managed to give the impression that he was confiding in each listener personally, baring his soul. The beauty, the fervor of the playing was such that one was often moved to tears. I remember
on a number of occasions realizing with a start that I was crying. Sneaking an embarrassed glance at my neighbors, I would discover that half the audience was doing the same."^94

Composer-Performer Perspectives: Cortot and Ravel

Cortot knew very well what basic attitude and qualities Ravel expected from his performers.95 He probably had a fairly good idea of what Ravel wanted to hear in particular pieces as well: he had heard the composer teach many of his piano works in master classes where, according to musicologist Marc Pincherle, Ravel gave precise indications as to tempi, timbres, and even fingering, illustrating his points with examples at the piano.96 Cortot also had occasion to hear performances prepared under Ravel's supervision, notably at the concerts of the S.N.M. and the S.M.I.97

So how did Cortot, exponent par excellence of a re-creative approach to interpretation, conduct himself in the music of Ravel, who insisted adamantly that he did not want to be "interpreted"? The question can be answered variously, depending on whether one chooses to attach greater weight to the accounts of contemporaries or to the evidence--suggestive, but too slim to be conclusive--of the recorded interpretations. In the opinion of a good many French musicians active between the wars, Cortot had little flair for Ravel's music: his interpretations, it is said, were less idiomatic and not of the same exceptional artistic interest as his playing of Fauré or of some works of Debussy.98
It is certain that Cortot never displayed any great enthusiasm for programming Ravel's music.\textsuperscript{99} It is equally certain that Ravel, unlike his teacher Fauré, never counted Cortot among his favorite interpreters.\textsuperscript{100} Still, those who might expect Cortot to have played Ravel in a grandiloquent, hyper-subjective manner are bound to be surprised by his recordings of the \textit{Sonatine} and \textit{Jeux d'eau}.\textsuperscript{101} These interpretations suggest that the view that Cortot's style was ill-suited to Ravel's music may have been colored by the prevailing image of Cortot as a romantic pianist who did not conform to the accepted "\textit{tradition ravelienne}" (Jourdan-Morhange) of performance. Cortot never placed much faith in "authoritative" traditions. Oftentimes an interpretive convention reflects the spirit of the age and/or the composer's \textit{professed} intentions rather than the actual spirit and expressive message of the music, he felt.\textsuperscript{102}

Cortot's performance of the first movement of the \textit{Sonatine} in f\# minor (1905) can serve to illustrate his way of playing Ravel. The \textit{Sonatine} permits one to compare Cortot's reading with Ravel's interpretation of the same movement as captured on a piano roll, and also with a performance by Vlado Perlemuter,\textsuperscript{103} a much more accomplished pianist than Ravel. Perlemuter coached this piece and all the rest of Ravel's piano music with the composer.

Cortot adheres closely to Ravel's basic indication—"\textit{Modéré, doux et expressif}"—throughout. All three performers
take "modéré" to represent a lively, flowing pace. The basic
tempos of Cortot and Perlemuter, however, are more measured
than Ravel's, and their subsequent tempo modifications less
extreme:

Figure 3. Ravel, Sonatine in f#, Mvt. I: comparison of tempi
and agogic modifications in performances by Ravel,
Cortot and Perlemuter.

n.b.: → = tempo gradually picking up, ← = tempo gradually
slowing to next metronome marking indicated; measure nos.
include three bars of first ending

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sonatine, I. Modéré, 2/4</th>
<th>Ravel</th>
<th>Cortot</th>
<th>Perlemuter</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mm.1-5</td>
<td>↓ =80-82+</td>
<td>72+(mm.3-5--)</td>
<td>74±</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mm.6-8</td>
<td>→ → ← ← (little change)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m.9</td>
<td>↓ =92-96</td>
<td>70 ← ←</td>
<td>74±</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mm.10-11</td>
<td>↓ =88± ←</td>
<td>58-60 ← ←</td>
<td>72 ← ←</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m.13 (à Tempo)</td>
<td>↓ =58-60→</td>
<td>54±</td>
<td>69±</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m.20 (Un peu retenu)</td>
<td>↓ =48-50±</td>
<td>48-50</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m.30</td>
<td>↓ =68-72</td>
<td>64 → →</td>
<td>69+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mm.34 (très expressif)</td>
<td>↓ =76-88</td>
<td>79 → →</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m.43 (à Tempo)</td>
<td>↓ =61 →</td>
<td>72+</td>
<td>86±</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mm.48 accelerando</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mm.52-56 (Animé)</td>
<td>↓ =100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>120±</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mm.59 (10 Tempo) and fol.</td>
<td>↓ =75→80</td>
<td>70→72+</td>
<td>72+→74</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All three pianists deviate from their basic tempi where no
changes are indicated. Moreover, the range and "fluctuation
frequency" of tempi in each performance, from Un peu retenu,
m. 20 at the lower limit to Animé, m. 56 at the fast end, vary
considerably. Cortot and Ravel display the same overall range:
\[ \uparrow = 48 \text{ at m. 20} \text{ to } \uparrow = 100 \text{ at m. 52}. \]
Perlemuter's range is
still wider, from \[ \uparrow = 56 \text{ at m. 20} \text{ to } \uparrow = 120 \text{ in the Animé}
section. Excluding the Animé tempo momentarily from
consideration does not alter the tempo range appreciably in
Ravel's performance: it remains a surprisingly wide 48-96. Omitting the same Animé in Cortot's and Perlemuter's performances drops their ranges, respectively, to 48-79 and 56-86, almost the same differential. By and large, Perlemuter's performance is rather "straight" compared to the other two. Cortot and Ravel both make an unwritten accelerando-ritenuto in mm. 6-11 and 30-41, Ravel to a more pronounced degree. Both bend the tempo considerably within single bars.

Even granting that piano rolls are not the most trustworthy of sound documents, Ravel's performance raises some disturbing questions. What is one to make of his extreme, often rash-sounding changes of tempo? Are they deliberate, or are they the result of an incomplete mastery of the piano or an inability to control his nerves in performance? Ravel, authoritative sources agree, had some natural aptitude for the instrument but no performance ambitions. He practiced little and remained, according to pianist Henri Gil-Marchex, "only a moderately good pianist whose hands, as Weber once put it, played the despot over his musical creative process." Marc Pincherle observed Ravel demonstrating passages from his works in master classes, and found that Ravel conveyed "above all an impression of liveliness and agility:

There is nothing more intriguing than the way... in which [Ravel] juggles with the most difficult passages, tosses them off with seeming nonchalance and with [a hand] that is not that of a Casadesus or a Gil-Marchex, catches the last note with infallible aptness and the strictest metronomic precision after having achieved the exact
dynamic nuance he wanted.... Whatever the domain [i.e., composition or performance], this illusionist knows perfectly well what he is after.106

The first impression one receives from Ravel's playing of the Sonatine movement is of fast, but uncontrolled fingers. The thirty-second note accompaniment figures are skimmed (one might even say, fudged) rather than sounded clearly and precisely. The tempo seems to run away wildly at mm. 6-11 and in the analogous section of the recapitulation, as well as at mm. 37-41. Often the hands are not together in chords.

Should one disregard Ravel's tempo fluctuations then, as simply a matter of hands going their own way in the heat of the moment? Not necessarily. The particular tempo relations established between sections suggest that while Ravel may lose control of the degree of tempo change he intends to make, he is not out of control altogether. Even at the a tempo of m. 43, where both Cortot and Perlemuter maintain a certain momentum which facilitates a smooth transition to the Animé (m. 52), Ravel slows to the pace of his first a tempo at m. 13 (ca. $\frac{\dot{\scriptstyle \text{f}}}{\scriptstyle \text{f}} = 60$), suggesting that he equates that indication with a specific rate of speed.107

The score markings imply--and all three performances confirm--that a Tempo and 12 Tempo (the opening tempo) are two distinct things in this movement. The sense of the indication Rall. ...a Tempo at mm. 12-13 is ambiguous. It could imply either an unwritten accelerando in the previous measure that is
reversed by the rallentando (presumably leading back to the opening tempo), or it could signal a slowing-down to a new, more restrained tempo. The performances indicate that either interpretation is viable; in fact, the two options are not mutually exclusive. The lyrical, second theme invites a slight relaxation of the pace: a Tempo can here be read to mean tempo giusto, i.e., in a steady, appropriate tempo, not too freely. Ravel and Cortot follow this course, but also make an accelerando in mm. 6-8 (and Cortot a ritenuto in m. 8 and 10, this last anticipating the rallentando) before dropping to a slower speed at a Tempo.

The melodic construction and dynamics of the primary theme area (mm. 1-12) show a progressive intensification, in installments of irregular length, over the twelve measures. What happens to Ravel the pianist is that whenever he plays the primary material, dynamic intensity and tempo tend to interlock: the louder he plays, the faster he plays. Actually, it is more accurate to say that the louder he would like to have played (judging from the dynamic markings in the score), the faster he plays. On the piano roll transfer at least, his dynamic range is very small. Whether by intention or not, the textual marking très expressif takes on the sense in his performance of "emporté" ("with abandon") unless accompanied by the cautionary Un peu retenu, as in the transition to the closing idea (mm. 20-23, 78-81). Is this a fortuitous
correlation? Or does Ravel really feel the piece as he plays it, in which case his tempi unwittingly betray the quality of meaning the first theme had for him? One can only conjecture.

Cortot, like Ravel, is intent on pointing up the gradual rise to an expressive/structural climax in the opening section, but he does not rely as heavily on tempo modification to achieve the intensification. Instead, he builds intensity primarily through careful phrase and long-line dynamic gradation and through accentuating secondary voices. He employs agogic inflection in the opening section mainly to delineate phrase syntax, i.e., to underline the "respirations" and punctuation. In Cortot's interpretation, tempo change does not parallel the overall dynamic curve but is governed instead by the dictates of sensitive phrase declamation. In fact, as he approaches the forte of m 11 Cortot actually broadens rather than pushes the tempo. Wherever melodic activity within phrases increases or phrases are foreshortened into several smaller gestures (e.g., mm. 8–9 and 11–12, respectively), Cortot relaxes the tempo slightly to allow all the melody notes to speak with their full measure of eloquence.

The whole effectiveness of Cortot's strategy depends on artistic "pacing," or to state it another way, on his awareness and control of psychological musical time. What counts for the
listener's musical experience is not metronomic regularity of tempo but the subjective perception of the performer's tempo as 'right.' Cortot's tempo deviations, and in particular his transitions from rubato to tempo giusto passages, are accomplished so smoothly and naturally that even a trained listener tends to perceive his overall tempo variance as much slighter than the metronome shows it to be.

Examples of Cortot's mastery of timing abound in the first movement of the Sonatine. Since they are more readily appreciated by the ear than by the eye, one will suffice to illustrate his general procedure. The opening five measures of the melody line are notated as follows in the score:

and are realized something like this by Cortot:

\[
\text{A.C. } d = 72
\]

\text{Modéré doux et expressif}

\text{agogic slightly}

\text{lift delayed}

\text{mp (—) ppp subito}

\left[ \text{ poco-} \right]

\text{rubato—}

\[ d = 72 \]

Cortot plays the opening theme piano cantabile, but with \text{una corda}.\textsuperscript{110} The stress (>) marked by Ravel at the \textit{subito} pianissimo that begins the second phrase is conveyed more by agogics—by slightly delaying and stretching the melody note—than by dynamic emphasis. This allows for a genuine \textit{subito} drop in overall sound level, while imbuing the note with due warmth and poignancy.

In contrast to his usual practice of sharply differentiating the tiers of the musical fabric dynamically, Cortot sings the melodic line at a level only moderately higher than that of the rapid middle voice figuration and the octave doubling of the melody (lowest part) throughout the exposition of the first idea (mm. 1-12). Yet somehow he marks it with a special touch.\textsuperscript{111} He heightens the feeling of movement toward
a climax by underlining (dynamically) certain key elements: the initial descending fourth, F#-C#, of the first phrase, which plays a structural role in the third movement as well as in the first; its ascending fifth inversion, F#-C# (end of m. 5), which triggers the expansion of the melody in the third phrase; and the eighth-note figure of the inner voice, A#-E-A# (mm. 6, 8, l.h.), which supplies rhythmic/melodic activity where the theme is static. Finally, Cortot leads the line toward the reiterated C# peaks with ever-greater insistence as the patterns condense. So keenly does he feel the C#s as the key to the long-line momentum that he inadvertently substitutes the first half of m. 11 for the first half of m. 10,\textsuperscript{112} thus placing another C# on the important downbeat:


![Example 15. Ravel, Sonatine, Mvt. I, mm. 6-11.](image)

When the highpoint of the section is finally reached at the forte of mm. 11-12, Cortot does not force his tone at all.
Instead, he achieves a more ample, resonant sonority by broadening the tempo and giving the arpeggiated chords a generous, weighty roll.

In the second thematic area (m. 13, second idea, m. 20 bridge and the closing motif, mm. 23-26), Cortot employs a much more pronounced dynamic stratification of the texture, heightening the listener's perception of the polyphony. Consistent with Ravel's indication (en dehors) at m. 13, Cortot sings out the melody prominently. The secondary lower parts he subordinates and separates into little motivic gestures. The pedal is carefully lifted on the rests to preserve the respirations between gestures. Cortot takes certain liberties with the writing at m. 20 in trying to achieve maximum sonic individualization of the four voices:

The A of the alto (m. 20) is rhythmically dislocated—more than a sixteenth-note early in its first presentation, less in the following measure though still asynchronized—presumably to give the voice greater distinctness and help the listener to recognize it as a free augmentation of the principal theme incipit. The soprano A is "leaned on" agogically and accented, and the whole upper line is rendered at a considerably higher dynamic level than the contextual ppp marked by Ravel, while the tenor, marked tenuto by Ravel, is played so quietly by Cortot that the first note does not even sound. Everything is done to create a translucent web of lines in this section, and to contrast it (by character, texture, and especially sonorous atmosphere) with the opening idea.

Cortot introduces the second theme (m. 13) with only the slightest elasticity in the sixteenth note and the accompanying voices. At m. 20, however, his agogic inflections create a very emotionally charged phrasing: ardent and plaintive, nineteenth-century critics would have said. This imbues the passage with a quality of romantic Sehnsucht that may have been far from Ravel's conscious intentions. Ravel has marked the movement as a whole "doux et expressif." From the contrasts Cortot establishes, one would almost say that he has polarized the two aspects of the music's character. He allows the "doux" to predominate at first: hence, rapture and luminosity, but with a certain "interiority." The "expressif" (more
parlando and impassioned in tone) he brings gradually to the fore in the second theme area.

Cortot's commentary on the first movement of the Sonatine indicates that the distinct mood transformation at the second thematic area was a carefully reflected element of his interpretive design. He hints, moreover, that he had some precise poetic program in mind that inspired his choices of tone quality and declamatory means:

Imbue this music with flexibility, but without adding or omitting the slightest thing from [Ravel's] performance indications,... the meaning of which is always very precise. Hence, no excessive ritenuti or uncalled-for accents....

Performance directives as clear-cut as his help us to determine the exact poetic atmosphere appropriate to the piece. Maurice Ravel dreads the abuses perpetrated in the name of "sensitivity," and rightfully so in some instances. But although he claims not to have wanted to create anything other than pure [i.e., absolute] music here, this does not preclude the delight of watching the work unfold in a gentle, subtly legendary ambience, a bit in the "fairy-tale" mold. These are not merely notes; these notes are at times so tenderly nuanced (colorées) that one can be captivated by them and imagine that they have a hidden meaning, an indefinable descriptive or evocative power.

At the beginning, the theme seems to test its wings tentatively. It takes off, for good, at the pianissimo subito which comes on the double bar [end of m. 3], and one must mark this departure by a break (not an abrupt one, however) in the sound before recommencing: f# c#... etc.

The rocking movement of the second idea needs a steady tempo. This second passage must clearly contrast with the first. Don't connect the ritenuto [m. 19] with the triple piano, Un peu retenu... [m. 20]. Here, too, there must be a caesura, but not too sharp a break (sans qu'il y ait cassure trop "a l'angle droit"). At [m.23]..., give a special color to the exquisite ninth chord so that this delicate touch will not pass unnoticed... 116

How did Cortot acquit himself as an interpreter of Ravel?

To attempt a tentative assessment, one must begin by asking:
what is required of an accomplished interpreter regardless of what musical work he takes up? Synthesizing the answers of a performer and of a composer, one might respond: 1) to try to discover and carry out faithfully the intentions of the composer, and 2) to invest the interpretation with the utmost force and personal conviction. With respect to the second requirement, Cortot is above reproach. In this work as in so many others, he is imaginative, powerful, perceptive and compelling in his projection of the music. Is he faithful to Ravel's intentions?

Not entirely. Not, at least, to the letter of the text and to the composer's avowed intentions. Cortot's phrasing is exemplary: one could almost transcribe the phrase and slur marks of Ravel's text from his recorded performance. The internal articulations of the musical discourse, the climactic points, directional impulses, lifts and respirations—all stand out in such sharp relief that one can almost see, as well as hear, the outlines of the musical topography.

Cortot's pedalling is equally masterful, achieving maximum atmosphere and color with minimal sacrifice of clarity. The general technical level of the playing is quite high, though Ravel, who made an absolute fetish of material correctness, would no doubt have wanted a still cleaner, more precise articulation. Along related lines of textual exactitude, Cortot permits himself a modest degree of interpretive discretion with dynamic and tempo modification markings for
artistic reasons that can be readily deduced in most instances. These liberties would no doubt have met with Ravel's disapproval. The fact that Ravel in his own playing did not adhere strictly to his performance indications in the text is regrettable, but in a sense irrelevant if one attaches importance to his demand that performers not deviate from his explicit textual markings.

Seen in the larger perspective of performance practice, Cortot's infringements are relatively minor, and never unmusical or tasteless. The real issue on which any evaluation of stylistic "fidelity" must hinge in Cortot's case is the question of agogics and declamation. Cortot's rubato in the opening section of the movement, while measured and fairly moderate, inflects the pulse with a rhythmic ebb and flow that is fundamentally romantic in sound and spirit, and perhaps at odds with Ravel's own neo-Classical outlook and demand for cool objectivity in his interpreters. Cortot's adoption in the second section (mm. 12-28) of a rubato that maintains a steady tempo at the measure-unit but is flexible within bars would seem closer to the "calibrated 'rubato en place'" that Ravel reportedly condoned, but the extent of the fluctuations and their kaleidoscopic character (always "making it new") go beyond the presentational style advocated by Ravel.

In the final analysis, even when Cortot exercises restraint in his means, his declamation invariably invests the interpretation with an outwardly expressive, subjective accent.
His agogics tend to leave a personal imprint on intrinsically musical elements with their burden of extramusical vibrations. Cortot's style was "moving," in both senses of that word: it animated the musical structures with a flexible, individualistic expression and it possessed an emotive quality that drew listeners in and touched them deeply. Cortot communicated what he discerned behind the notes with boldness and poetic sensitivity. Whether he saw something other than what Ravel intended, or just disclosed more of what Ravel really said than the composer himself was prepared to acknowledge, is for the listener to decide.
Chapter VI: Notes

1 Lefébure, "Cortot le poète du clavier," p. 905.


3 Gavoty offers another common excuse for side-stepping analysis: "To analyze the miracle is tantamount to killing the goose that laid the golden eggs by dissecting it" (A.C., p. 247). For an example of a fairly objective treatment of an interpreter's art that analyzes without diminishing it, see Konrad Wolff, The Teaching of Artur Schnabel.

4 L'art du piano, p. 31.

5 Ibid., p. 19.


7 A.C., p. 120, where the source is inadvertently given as the Radio Lausanne interviews; I have not been able to identify the correct provenance.

8 Entretiens, "Position de l'interprète." The same idea is stated in different words in "Attitude de l'interprète," p. 886.


10 Bernice Lehmann, for instance, wrote in "The Legacy of Cortot" (Records and Recording, 5, No. 11 [Aug. 1962], p. 26) that "Cortot's approach... as a performer was founded on the conviction that by minute and continuous study of the music... and of the composer's life and circumstances, one could, as it were, travel backward... into the very mind of the composer. The constant striving to achieve this [in performance] was the secret of Cortot's astonishing spontaneity, and also the cause of his distressing lapses in accuracy." See also A.C., pp. 245-46 and Rattalino, Da Clementi..., pp. 122-23.

11 As Roger Sessions points out in The Musical Experience of Composer, Performer, Listener (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton U. Press, 1971), p. 85, "the composer is as unlikely as anyone else to play his work twice in the same way, and the more able the performance - the more eloquent and convincing, that is -
the truer this is likely to be. The composer, too, must be faithful to the composition; he must in fact, and presumably will, learn to be. But he, too, will present... only one of various possible aspects [of it]."


13Under this term Cortot grouped a variety of works in which interest in form was secondary to the desire to "convey a sensibility" (emotional state, poetic idea). These included: fantasies, character pieces such as caprices, ballades and intermezzi; sets like Beethoven's Bagatelles or Schumann's Papillons, tone poems, impressionistic works (e.g., Debussy's "Jardins sous la pluie") and similar genres.

14Excerpt from Cortot's prefatory remarks to his cours d'interprétation devoted to "free form" works, Monde Musical, 39, No. 8-9 (Aug.-Sept. 1928), pp. 287-88.

15The 1933 performance, originally HMV DB 2031/2, was reissued in the set EMI France 2 C 153-03090/6 (1977). A 1952 performance was released on Victor Japan JAS 273 or Victor Japan LS 2029 according to some discographies, but it is very inaccessible. By most reports it is not superior to the earlier version.

16The primary technical problems include: 1) flexibility, agility and power in extended-position figurations for both hands; 2) tonal control and variety (cantabile style, differentiating multiple superimposed textural levels or voices, chord proportioning, etc.); 3) accurate and artistic rendering of the nasty contrary octave passages in mm. 109-11 and analogous passages.

17John Ogden oversimplifies matters when he asserts, in Keyboard Music, ed. Denis Matthews (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1972), p. 228 that the Fantaisie's form is "that of a very exact sonata first movement... except for its ending in the relative major (A flat)." The future importance of Ab major is presaged as early as mm. 7-10 of the introduction and again in the opening four measures of the primary theme (mm. 43-46, poco a poco doppio movimento), where the f and Ab statements of the motif in triplets are set off from the ensuing sequences in rising 3rd transpositions (c, Eb, g Bb7) by fermatas.

18Cf. Rosen, The Classical Style, p. 454: "The lack of a central reference [tonality in many of Schumann's works] arises, like Chopin's chromaticism, from a weakening of the tonic-dominant polarity. There are phrases by Beethoven... which display a chromaticism as radical as anything outside
Gesualdo, but they all imply a firm diatonic structure as a background. With Chopin, it is the background that shifts chromatically as well."

19 Nearly all the themes of the Fantaisie are built from the perfect fourth and half/whole-step cell motives. For example:

![Musical notation](image)


21 Cortot warned against relying on traditional literary programs that were overly specific and naturalistic in formulating one's interpretation. He ridiculed the interpretation of the Fantaisie advanced by Charles Rollinat (and apparently subscribed to by Liszt and many 19th century virtuosi), in which the music was said to depict Georges Sand knocking at Chopin's door (first 2 bars), his reply 'Entrez' (next 2 bars), Sand entering with friends and begging Chopin's pardon (they had quarreled), the recalling of the argument with recriminations, entreaties and eventual reconciliation, etc. "The evocative rather than definite quality of the expression allows the sensitive interpreter to imagine a fictive plot more impressive and rich in poetic allusions than one inspired by a musical description of a domestic squabble, even magnified by genius," he wrote. "To establish the extramusical sense... one is tempted rather to refer to this excerpt of a letter contemporary with its composition: 'I dreamed once that I died in a hospital and this memory is so strongly implanted in my mind that I feel like it happened yesterday. Now I often dream with my eyes wide open - perhaps without rhyme or reason'" (Chopin, Pièces diverses, ed. Cortot [Paris: Salabert, 1936], p. 1).

22 These were summarized from Cortot's remarks on the Fantaisie in his study edition (ibid., pp. 1-20) and from Thieffry's reports of his observations to master class performers, published in the Monde Musical, 38, No. 8-9 Aug.-Sept. 1927), p. 299; and 40, No. 12 (Dec. 31, 1929), p. 396.
The Chopin scholar Edouard Ganche disagreed. Ganche heard many nationalistic allusions in the martial and processional aspects of the work.

According to Pierre Petit (interview with the author, November 1977), "Cortot never discussed musical structure per se in his master classes." Nonetheless, wrote Thieffry, he took it for granted that a musician "should be quite familiar with musical forms, and be able to easily identify their parts and name them exactly" (Cours d'interprétation, p. 20). An analysis of the musical structure indicating themes, motivic processes, keys, harmonic functions and other salient features was part of the obligatory notice (report) which participants had to prepare for each piece they wished to perform in a master class.

Interestingly, Neuhaus (L'art du piano, p. 57) envisioned the expressive/dynamic curve of this theme very much as Cortot did: "...Chopin's Fantaisie has often promoted me to remark that the three appearances of the main subject would lose their meaning if they were interpreted according to the plan A. A. A. Anyone who understands the unity of the whole work will render them in the pattern A - A₁ - A₂.... For the Fantaisie, I imagine the following graphic design:

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A → A₁ → A₂
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Of course, I'm referring here to an interpretive design, i.e., a plan for the emotional expression that is in accord with the composer's structural design."

Cortot repeatedly underscores the necessity of making each musical event appear motivated and expressively "right" in remarks such as "the octaves must be rendered in a manner that makes them the logical expressive sequel to the preceding fiery measures," "the falling off [of the phrase in octaves] in diminuendo might represent... a faltering of the will, justifying a less agitated... delivery of the returning theme," or "envision [the character of the octave figure]... from the angle of a... noble indignation that will motivate the impassioned quality of the [coming] melodic idea." In Cortot's interpretations, notes H. de la Grange (op. cit., p. 13), "[e]ach moment arises out of the preceding and foreshadows the following. Everything moves and pulls toward the final outcome."

It is difficult, for instance, to find unequivocal structural confirmation for the description of the second introductory theme as "consoling" in character (as opposed, say, to serene, contemplative, wistful, elegiac, or simply
cantabile espressivo). Yet it is logical and aesthetically satisfying within Cortot's personal poetic vision of the introduction and the overall dramatic action. A shift of mood is called for that should respect the basic tragic-pathetic mode, yet differentiate this episode in major from the more sombre opening.

28Stressing the wave form traced by all the melody notes would not only be unnecessary—as Schnabel used to observe, there is no reason to underline what the composer has already taken care of—it would lend the passage a lilt and animation that would detract from the "tragic," "impassive" character Cortot was seeking to evoke.

29Cortot's concern to suggest a pulse of two rather than four is structurally justifiable, since the improvisatory passage (mm. 43-59) that accelerates to doppio movimento in the main body of the work can make it difficult for the listener to perceive the basic continuity of rhythmic impulse between the introduction and the rest of the piece, the more so if the introduction plods along in $\frac{3}{4}$.

30On the traditional tendency of instrumentalists to aspire to the "semblance of song" (vocal utterance), see Langer, Feeling and Form, pp. 143-44.

31There are many moments in the course of the Fantaisie where Cortot underlines the expressive significance of the 2nds or 4ths in a more explicit manner. For instance:

32Cf. the legato fingering Cortot indicates in his study edition for the upper voice of m. 4 (Pièces diverses, I, p. 1).
This type of vocally inspired rubato was a characteristic feature of Cortot's declamation. Rattalino (Da Clementi..., p. 121) cites a similar instance from Cortot's recording of "Von fremden Ländern und Menschen" (No. 1 from Schumann's Kinderszenen):

In the first bar, "the melody is sung with a vocalistic feel for the interval B-G (the G is more poignant and slightly delayed, in the manner of singers who prepare and 'accentuate' ('appoggiano') an ascending interval with change of register)...."

34 Cours d'interprétation, p. 15.

Individual features of personality and experience offer particularly valuable clues to musical meaning from Beethoven through the Romantics, Cortot believed. In Beethoven's music, and still more so in Chopin's and Schumann's, "form is always determined by emotion." Beethoven, however, "pours feelings of a universal sort into... [his works], whereas Chopin, like Schumann, fills his with private feelings, [from whence their] more emphatically subjective tone...." (ibid., pp. 146-47).

The move to supplement the interpreter's intuitive powers with intellectual inquiry into the "facts" of the text and the composer's experience was typical of Cortot's time. It coincided with a tendency to specialize in a limited repertoire (e.g., Wanda Landowska in early keyboard music, Schnabel in Beethoven, Schweitzer in Bach, Gieseking in Debussy and Ravel). The scholarship of these artists was not always impeccable, but their artistic stature guaranteed that their attitude toward interpretation was influential on later generations of performers.

37 Cours d'interprétation, p. 17. Cortot did much, for instance, to explode the conventional image of Chopin as a "sickroom composer" who wrote effeminate, sentimental drawing-room music.
As quoted by Roberto Zanetti in "Cortot e Chopin," liner notes to a five-record set of Chopin performances issued by EMI Italy (La Voce del Padrone), EMI 3 C 163 - 50111/15 M, 1972.

Cours d'interprétation, p. 16.

Cortot remained fairly close to the written notes in his recorded performances of Chopin, except to displace or double bass notes at the octave or to replace variants presumably imposed by the piano's limited compass with exact transpositions. Many traditional but unauthorized note modifications and cuts are listed, however, in the footnotes of his study editions (see, for instance, the Scherzo No. 1 in b, where he condones the custom of cutting the exact restatement of the opening section in mm. 129-155). In Beethoven's concertos he doubled bass octaves, and probably adopted Liszt's and Diémer's "arrangements" of some passages (see Cours d'interprétation, pp. 182-83, and Rattalino, Da Clementi..., p. 112). In his editions of Liszt's music, especially in the Rhapsodies, he furnished numerous variants and textural revisions, incorporating some of these into the main body of the text. Most of the proposed liberties affect highly improvisatory sections.

As Brendel has pointed out (Musical Thoughts..., p. 102), chord spreading, anticipating or delaying voices and other such devices were, for the 19th century, expressive means of achieving "cantabile playing and a spatial, plastic sound quality,... [and] must have been indispensable to an age which, to a much higher degree than our own, strove towards the ideal of a beautiful, singing piano tone." Employed automatically and tastelessly, they provoked ridicule and, ultimately, strong censure. In Cortot's performances, on the other hand, one can usually discern a specific artistic purpose behind their use.

Cf. Blume, especially pp. 8-17, 132-46; and Rosen, pp. 451-60.

Cortot/Entretiens, "Enseignement."


Ibid., p. 302.

The performance discussed is from Cortot's 1935 interpretation of the Kinderszenen. Initially released on two 78 rpm discs (HMV DB 2781/2), this was the first and, in my opinion, the best of three performances he recorded (the other two dating from 1947 and 1953). It has been reissued on a
single by EMI Japan (GR 70019) and is included in two currently available sets: EMI France C 153-03490/2 and EMI Italy 3 C 153-53790/95 M, the latter containing the 1947 and 1953 versions as well.

47 Summarized from Cours d'interprétation, pp. 54-55 and La Musique française..., I, p. 34.

48 Most, if not all, of the piano rolls Debussy made have been transferred onto 33 r.p.m. records. The Classics Record Library SWV 6633 (Legendary Masters of the Piano) has La plus que lente, while Columbia ML 4291 (Great Masters of the Keyboard) contains Danseuses de Delphes, Le Vent dans la plaine, La cathédral engloutie, La Danse de Puck, Minstrels and Children's Corner. Several of these préludes can also be heard on The Keyboard Immortals, Series 2 A-005.

49 In 1919 Cortot recorded for American Victor two préludes, La Fille aux cheveux de lin and Minstrels, in both single-face (644956) and double-face (562). These have not been reissued. Cortot's two complete sets of the Préludes, Bk. I date from 1931 (HMV DA 1240/4 & DB 1593, reissued on EMI Japan GR 70020) and ca. 1951 (HMV DB 9578/82). The performance of Danseuses de Delphes analyzed in this study is from the 1951 recording.

50 Debussy actually adopts a piano level which is very close to that attained at the beginning of the measure, rather than playing a genuine pianissimo. This may have been a concession to the piano roll's limitations; extremely soft playing was not advisable.

51 This syntactical arrangement calls to mind the expression of Mallarmé in Prose pour des Esseintes: "chacune ordinairement se para d'un lucid contour, lacune" ("every one usually adorned itself with a lucid edge, lacuna"), for which Loevgren (The Genesis of Modernism, pp. 100-105) finds a parallel in the structural techniques of the painter Georges Seurat.

52 The three interpretations project the same character and show similar phrasing, voicing, tempo relations and placement of agogics and dynamic climaxes. In the later versions the opening dynamic level is higher, the rubato more pervasive and quirky. There is also a noticeable decline in technical precision in each successive version (Cortot recorded the second and third at ages 70 and 77, respectively).

53 Cortot unquestionably wanted his delivery to sound free and impulsive. By contemporary accounts it did, in the charged atmosphere of a live performance. In the several hundred reviews covering more than forty years of concerts that were surveyed for this paper, Cortot was reproached at times for Romantic excesses but never for being too cerebral or coldly
calculating—a charge that Busoni, Hofmann and even Rachmaninoff incurred. This leads me to think that the impression of premeditation or affectation one gains at times from the recordings is not a simple matter of shifting tastes, but also involves the difference between the impact of a total musical experience in concert and a recording where, as Cortot pointed out, "only the ear is addressed." Reine Gianoli (Alfred Cortot, dir. Lévy) was convinced that "Cortot never measured his rubato and dynamic nuances down to the millimeter.... They came more from the inspiration of the moment." Mme. Lefébure concurred: "In his great days, Cortot's delivery was not contrived; that was just the way he was by temperament.... Unfortunately when he was very old and no longer quite himself, he played 'à la Cortot.' At that point he didn't really feel it any more, and then it was unbearable." Alluding to Cortot's self-quoting in the last phase of his career, Joachim Kaiser writes in Great Pianists of Our Time, tr. D. Woolrich and G. Unwin (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1971), p. 35: "The older an interpreter becomes, the more wisdom, experience and tricks he stores up to... keep pace with the physical and psychological demands [of being a virtuoso], the greater is the danger of his becoming set, hardened. It was not, for instance, the aged Cortot's mistakes that disappointed--mistakes which, to adapt Brahms, 'any fool could hear'--but rather his mechanical ritardandi. One felt, sadly, that when Cortot employed a rubato he had originally conceived perhaps twenty-five years before, he was now only playing it like that because he had always done so. This, it is true, was followed often enough by unique nuances which prompted a younger pianist... to remark with justice: 'I would rather have Cortot's wrong notes than my own right ones.'"


56Cf. Neuhaus, L'Art du piano, pp. 64-65; and Eigeldinger, Chopin..., p. 31.

57Obviously, the role of tone quality in effecting changes of character or affective intensity cannot be considered in isolation from rhythmic factors, especially in communicating the larger dynamic values, i.e., in projecting a sense of energy, tension, directionality, climax, and their antitheses. The perception of intensity in soft playing, too, is mainly a matter of vertical sound proportioning ("voicing") and dynamic/agogic inflections, rather than of tone quality per se.

The ability to declaim one's ideas in a well-modulated and rather stylized manner was highly prized in nineteenth-century France, according to Zeldin (op. cit., p. 25): "For many, form counted above all; the way a man expressed himself was almost as important as what he said.... Viviani, who became Prime Minister in 1914, took elocution lessons at the Comédie Française, and rehearsed his parliamentary speeches for hours on end...."

I have tried to focus only on sonority here, deliberately disregarding obvious stylistic differences. Pianists of the 1850-70 generations including de Pachmann, Michalowski and Paderewski can be heard in Chopin selections on Desmar IPA 117 (Landmarks of Recorded Pianism, I.) On 78 rpm, Petri recorded the complete Préludes of Chopin (Columbia 71402-5D, 1943); Backhaus, the complete Etudes (HMV DV 1132-34, 1928); Moisewitsch the Scherzi Nos. 1 and 2 (HMV HQM 1153, 1949 and D 1065, 1926) and on LP a Schumann album including Kinderscenen (Decca DL 710048); Rosenthal, quite a few Chopin works on 78 rpm, including eight mazurkas (Odeon 171017, 1930; Paralphone EC 59521, 1931; Victor 1951, 1931 and HMV DB 2773, 1936) and the Nocturne in D, Op. 27, No. 2 (Victor 14297, 1936). Cortot's sound can be compared directly with that of Rubinstein, Horowitz, Gieseking, Arrau and Lipatti in Chopin works on Seraphin 60207 (Great Pianists of the Century Play Chopin).

Rattalino (Da Clementi..., p. 119) notes that Cortot, more than any pianist of his era, was able to exploit to the fullest "the tendency of the [modern grand piano] to lose the sound quality of a vibrating string and take on that of vibrating metal," tolling rather like a vibraphone or bell.

Friedman's complete recorded output (1923-1941) is currently available on a six-record set, Danacord 141-146, distributed by Qualiton. His approach can be compared directly to Cortot's in Chopin's Ballade No. 3, Berceuse, Sonata in b, minor (mvt. III, IV), Impromptu Op. 36, Préludes Nos. 15 and 19, and in many of the mazurkas.

Cortot's 1933 performance of the 24 Préludes is included in EMI - France C 153-03090/6.

This remark and the following description of textural elements in the Prelude in f# are summarized from comments in Cortot's study edition of the 24 Préludes, pp. 19-24, the Cours

Cortot does not follow his own advice (to articulate the triplets clearly) in his performance. Whether by intention or not, he consistently obscures them.

67 The unedited version of Alfred Cortot (television documentary, dir. Lévy) included a roundtable discussion of Cortot's playing of the Chopin Prélude No. 2 in e minor. One of the participants—unidentified in the typescript, but presumably Mme. Lefébure—remarked perceptively that "in melody playing, Cortot's legato was not a mere acoustical illusion [created with pedal], nor was it achieved simply by physically connecting the fingers. It was above all a mental legato. Notes seemingly distant from one another were ordered and deployed with such art and skill that the listener's mind could apprehend them as a line, just as the eye takes in distant stars... and sees them as a constellation."

Cortot used the term "coup d'éperon" ("jab of the spurs") to describe the type of pedalling needed—an apt image, in the sense that the rhythmic pulsation of sound created by the disconnected strokes of pedal does give the impression of spurring the melodic activity forward. See Monde Musical, 40, No. 10 (Oct. 31, 1929), p. 317.


72 Ibid., p. 21.

73 The 1933 performance of the f minor Ballade, to which the comments and transcriptions refer, is available on EMI France C 153-03090/6 and EMI Japan GR 70024.

74 See Graziosi, L'interpretazione musicale, pp. 191-92. The passage given in Example 8 is cited by Graziosi in a detailed essay on Cortot's declamatory art.

75 Da Clementi..., p. 122.

Almost nothing is known of Cortot's youthful tastes in painting and literature. At the salons he frequented between 1895-1910 he would have regularly encountered artists Henri Lerolle, Odilon Redon, Maurice Denis, Edgar Degas, Jacques-Emile Blanche and probably Rodin, as well as authors Marcel Proust, Camille Mauclair, Colette, Gabriele d'Annunzio and
Robert de Montesquiou. He seems not to have formed strong ties with these figures, however; he mentions none of them in his reminiscences. Through his father-in-law Michel Bréal, Cortot came in contact with some of the choice minds of the era (Berthelot, Taine, Renan, Léon Bourgeois, Jean Jaurès) but he was not very close to them. He apparently had no involvement with avant-garde literary or artistic circles. In maturity his tastes in art were probably conservative; he collected mainly portraits of musicians. Cortot read extensively in the literature on music throughout his life. In addition, he occasionally read works of personal friends—Valéry, Giraudoux, Georges Duhamel, Maurois—in later years, according to his son (interview of Nov. 1977). Gavoty remarked (Cortot, dir. Lévy) that though Cortot's own writing was often convoluted, he admired most the simple, direct style of Anatole France and Maurice Barrès. Against these conservative leanings one should place Cortot's championship of contemporary music in his conducting role, and his essentially "constructive" rather than sensual approach to sonority—a quality that disturbed some partisans of traditional romantic pianism (see for instance, André Gide, Notes sur Chopin [Paris: L'Arche, 1948], p. 82).

77 It is easy to forget that in musical as in dramatic declamation, judgments of what constitutes "excessive," as opposed to "appropriate" rhetorical emphasis shift with the times. In Cortot's youth the artistic ideal was not simplicity and the semblance of naturalness, but high stylization. From what we know of the acting styles of the great fin de siècle tragedians, it is likely that the delivery of a Mounet-Sully would strike us today as unbearably grandiloquent and stilted, that of a Sarah Bernhardt as artifical and egocentric. Tastes change.

78 Cortot made a piano roll of the "Arioso" which has been transferred to long-playing record (Klavier KS-110). This performance is the basis for my discussion. A 1937 version issued originally on 78 r.p.m. (HMV DB 3262 and DA 1898) has not to my knowledge been reissued on 33 r.p.m.


80 As quoted in Timbrell, "Alfred Cortot...," p. 28.


82 One gets the feeling sometimes that Cortot is trying to manifest every implication with an audible inflection of the melodic line, to "ex-press" the emotional import, borrowing an image of Roland Barthes', much as one would press out the juice
of a fruit. As the implications are many, and the notes and expressive means limited, this can lead to rhetorical overloading.

Graziosi probably means that Cortot brings out the emotional significance more vividly through timing and agogic inflections than through specifically pianistic means.


The trained ear can detect many differences, some extremely subtle, others noticeable on first hearing, between the agogic and dynamic inflections of the 1929 performance of the Ballade (available on Discocorp RR 317) and those of the 1933 version.

Ballades, ed. Cortot, p. 50.

Cortot's attention to even minor details of an accompaniment recalls the attitude of Henri Matisse (as quoted in Langer, p. 83): "Expression... does not consist of the passion mirrored upon a human face or betrayed by a violent gesture. The whole arrangement of my picture is expressive. The place occupied by the figures or objects, the empty spaces around them, the proportions - everything plays a part...."


According to Mmes. Morhange-Motchane and Tagliaferro, the more nervous Cortot was, the more exaggerated his rubato became.

Sadly, there are no solo recordings available from the 1907-17 period when Cortot was in his thirties, and relatively few from 1918-26 (a number of the acousticals he made for Victor U.S. have not been reissued). All conclusions here are tentative.

Cortot's 1939 performance of Chopin's *Chants Polonaises* Nos. 2 and 3 (arr. Liszt), reissued on EMI France C 153 03090/6 and EMI Japan GR 70027, illustrates this more succinct style. All that is indispensable to melodic and rhythmic characterization is carved in bold relief, while the rest is cleared away or dispatched without fuss.


Reine Gianoli, interview with the author, June 1978.
On Jeux d’eau: "Be very respectful of the composer's indications. Everything he writes down is so premeditated!... He demands from the interpreter a complete passivity, an absolute obedience to his markings, which are consciously calculated, thoroughly and carefully worked out down to the last detail." See also Cortot, La Musique française de piano, II, pp. 9-18, 33-35, 51-52 and Cours d'interprétation, pp. 169-70.

Marc Pincherle, "Ecole Normale de Musique: Les Cours d'interprétation de MM. Maurice Ravel, Paul Dukas et Jacques Thibaud," Monde Musical, 36, No. 13-14 (July 31, 1925), pp. 253-54. Ravel, observed Pincherle, "formulated his remarks in succinct and for the most part mocking terms, demonstrating an implacable lucidity" and giving the impression "of being quite definite as to what he wanted,... leaving nothing to chance."

Cortot took part in at least one such performance: on May 17, 1904, he conducted the première of Schéhérazade, with Jane Hatto of the Opéra as soloist, at a concert of the Société Nationale.

Cf. Alfred Cortot, dir. Lévy, conversation between Bernard Gavoty, Yvonne Lefébure, Reine Gianoli and Jacques Février.


Prior to 1910 Ravel's favorite interpreter was Ricardo Viñes. Gaspard de la Nuit was the last of many works Viñes premiered. Ravel's closest collaborator after the war was Marguerite Long. She premiered the Tombeau de Couperin, and Ravel dedicated his Concerto in G to her. The two toured frequently with the Concerto until Ravel's health declined. Ravel liked Perlemuter's playing very much, and coached him twice a week for six months when Perlemuter was preparing a performance of the complete piano works. Cortot was a great admirer of Ravel's Concerto for the Left Hand; it was the only later Ravel work he played with some frequency and the only one Marguerite Long could not play, because of her small hand. Even in this piece, however, Ravel is said to have preferred the interpretation of Jacques Février. Cortot supposedly incurred Ravel's wrath by making a two-hand transcription of the Concerto, which some say was published after Ravel's death; others assert that it was never published.

First released on HMV DB 1533/4 in 1931, these performances were for many years unavailable except to collectors. Eventually they were transferred to 33 r.p.m. and reissued on Seraphim GR 60143, an album that also included works by Chopin, Schumann, Albeniz and Debussy.
See Vladimir Jankélévitch, *Ravel*, tr. Margaret Crosland (1939; reprint of revised 1956 ed. New York: Grove Press, 1959). The section entitled "Appassionato," pp. 113-159 discusses Ravel's acute distaste for "confessions" and his penchant for assuming poses, disguises and evasions in his music as well as in his dealings with people. Jankélévitch points out many places in the music where moments of passionate lyricism, sensuousness or vehemence surface despite Ravel's effort to affect a posture of objectivity or indifference. With Ravel, he notes (p. 148), "anti-romanticism... was a reaction against the romantic that he might have become if his will had weakened."

Perlemuter (1904- ) was born in Poland and emigrated to France as a youngster, studying with Moritz Moszkowski in Paris before entering Cortot's Conservatoire class in 1917. Though he is nearly always identified as a Cortot student, Perlemuter had relatively few lessons at the Conservatoire with Cortot due to war disruptions and Cortot's subsequent touring. He did, however, coach with Cortot in Switzerland, and he played at several of the interpretation courses. His performance of the Sonatine is included in Vox VBX 410 (M 1225 E), a three-record set of Ravel's complete piano music.

It is common knowledge that a piano roll could be doctored: one could correct wrong notes and adjust rhythmic values, much as a technician can "sanitize" a modern tape.

Gil-Marchex, as quoted in Gerig, *Famous Pianists...*, pp. 326-27.

Pincherle, "... Les cours d'interprétation de M. Ravel...," p. 253.

Cortot, on the other hand, has one speed for the a tempo of the second and closing ideas (♩ = ca. 59 at mm. 13, 24, 71 and 82), but takes the a tempo of m. 43 as a 1° tempo, i.e., at ♩ = 72.

Ravel's interpretation of the Sonatine would seem to support Roger Nichol's contention in *Ravel* (London: Dent, 1977), esp. p. 5, that there is a basic dichotomy in Ravel's musical personality between the passionate pianist and the precise and calculating craftsman of sounds.

This is in contrast to Cortot's habitual use of agogic inflection to underline expressive intervallic tensions in the melody line in Chopin and Schumann, and also here in his delivery of the second and closing ideas of this Sonatine movement.
Cortot's use of the una corda here was confirmed by Yvonne Lefébure, with whom the author studied this work.

One can only conjecture how Cortot ensures that the melody is perceived as predominant without raising its volume level much. On held melodic notes, he brings up the inner part almost to the same level as the melody. My own theory is that he played the melodic voice legatissimo, with slightly extended fingers (going to the bottom of the keys) backed by some hand pressure, while playing the 16th-note part non-legato with a quick, shallow finger-tip touch (more "air" between the notes, less follow-through to key bed), then blended the whole together with constant flutter-pedal.

Cortot makes the same misreading in the recapitulation.

For an interesting discussion of the artistic use of asynchronization, see David Barnett, The Performance of Music, pp. 128-38.

Vlado Perlemuter maintains in Ravel d'après Ravel (Lausanne: Ed. du Cervin, 1953), p. 17 that Ravel "insisted that the sixteenth note be played exactly,... not expressively."

The qualities given in parentheses as characteristic of the two expressive markings were outlined by Alfred Brendel in Musical Thoughts..., p. 34.

cours d'interprétation, pp. 169-70.

See Brendel, Musical Thoughts..., pp. 24-25 and Sessions, p. 78.

According to Perlemuter, Ravel was uncompromising in matters of note accuracy and "demanded that even 'Scarbo' be played without a technical error." See Hélène Jourdan-Morhange, Ravel et nous, (Genève: Editions du Milieu du Monde, 1945), p. 36.

Marthe Morhange-Motchane, who played the Valses nobles et sentimentales for Ravel in the 1925 interpretation classes, remembered that he was exacting, and incredibly fussy about dynamic details. Many of his comments, she said, were of this sort: "The music says the crescendo starts here--and not one note before."

See the testimony of Ricardo Viñes in Ravel et nous, p. 215.
Chapter VII

Professor: The Conservatoire Years (ca. 1907-1918)

There is no more worthwhile way of "passing on the torch" than through a teaching that radiates contagious enthusiasm,... [a teaching] that can awaken in an individual... those powers of imagination capable of transforming him ultimately into an effective communicator of musical thought.

Alfred Cortot

Cortot's teaching activities spanned some sixty-five years, beginning prior to his graduation from the Conservatoire and extending to shortly before his death. During the years 1918-1938 the demands of concert tours that took him away from Paris for months on end, combined with administrative duties at the Ecole Normale and a host of other musical projects, made it impossible for him to teach anyone on a regular basis. In those years he condensed the brunt of his teaching into three to four weeks of master classes, held annually in May-June or June-July at the Ecole Normale. Apart from these public courses, given before a large audience of auditors, Cortot also taught students enrolled in the Licence de Concert course once a month during the early 'thirties.

A private lesson or coaching session from Cortot in the years between the wars was a rarity--a privilege usually reserved for a "finished" musician (a former student making a
career, a colleague preparing a recital, a visiting artist) or a truly exceptional talent attending the Ecole Normale (e.g., Dinu Lipatti, Ruth Slencyznska). Cortot did give some impromptu coaching during entrance hearings (he usually auditioned all pianists himself), in final examinations of Licence and Diplôme candidates and in official class reviews. Still, he had hardly any time for serious teaching and had to pass up the chance to work with more than one brilliant prospect. Both earlier and later in his career, however, pedagogy occupied a more prominent place in Cortot's professional activity.

The Conservatoire Appointment.

In 1905 Théodore Dubois retired from directorship of the Conservatoire, and Gabriel Fauré was named his successor. The selection of an artist who was one of France's most distinguished composers and not an "insider" (Fauré was educated at the Ecole Niedermeyer) raised great hopes for change, not all of which were realized. Like previous directors, Fauré often found that his hands were tied by a cumbersome bureaucracy and meddling politicians. Fauré's immediate goal was to improve the artistic quality of the study programs. He succeeded to a limited degree: he saw to it that the High Education Council (Conseil Supérieur) selected music of real artistic merit for the required competition pieces, and that the composition faculty gave serious attention to chamber
and symphonic writing rather than concentrating almost exclusively on vocal writing.

In the long term, Fauré wanted above all to "give new luster to the Conservatoire by attracting the foremost performing artists of the day" onto the faculty. His efforts to rejuvenate the teaching corps in this fashion often met with opposition, not only from the usual contingent of influential figures from music and government with vested interests but also from persons who disagreed in principle with the practice of appointing "celebrities" pursuing active careers instead of seasoned teachers or artists retired from the scene. Fauré held fast to his conviction that the nation's premier musical institution should have a stellar faculty, however. Whenever a post opened up, he immediately moved to secure the nomination of a musician he personally held in the highest esteem.

One gets a glimpse into Fauré's thinking from letters he wrote to his wife in the summer of 1907, as he worked to have Cortot appointed to the position left vacant by the death of Antonin Marmontel:

Lausanne [Switzerland], July 24, 1907

I just learned by telegram the very sad news of Marmontel's sudden death. Just the day before yesterday this unfortunate and dear friend attended the ceremony for the awarding of the prizes. He looked really well,... in good spirits, so pleased by the success of his students. I'm deeply affected by this loss which deprives me of a true friend and a professor who is irreplaceable for the passion with which he dedicated himself to teaching.
Lausanne, July 28, 1907

I'm very worried about replacing Marmontel. Everything connected with this matter is difficult, and the most difficult thing of all will be to bar the way to candidates who have no talent but who have support from those with political or other kinds of clout. Both in the government and in the High Education Council, there are too many people who place personal interests above the interest of the Conservatoire. It's very difficult to maneuver in the midst of all these obstacles, and I had a lot of trouble getting Risler through not long ago, in spite of his enormous talent and reputation!

Lausanne, July 31, 1907

At last Cortot is throwing his hat in the ring to replace Marmontel. He would be a great catch [and] a most brilliant addition to the list Chevillard, Risler, Lucien Capet. That would be just what the Conservatoire needs, and it would do me honor too. But I'll have to fight very hard for it, whereas it ought to go through uncontested, because Cortot is infinitely superior to the other eventual candidates whom I know, alas, only too well!

Lausanne, August 4, 1907

...Alfred Cortot has decided for certain to apply, which makes me extremely happy. On the pretext of conveying my regrets that I wasn't able to see him before I left [Paris], I've written a long letter to M. Dujardin-Beaumetz in which, en passant, I talked to him about Cortot's candidature, his great merit, and my strong desire to see him on the Conservatoire faculty - that way, I'll plant the idea! [le clou sera planté!]

Lausanne, August 8, 1907

...The issue of Marmontel's successor has obliged me to write a good many letters, and to exercise a good deal of diplomacy to discourage certain candidates without seeming to! I didn't get any composing done yesterday, and I'll be disturbed again today....

Fauré's attempts to dissuade certain parties from applying seem to have met with only modest success. When the
music division (section des Etudes Musicales) of the High Council met on October 23, 1907 to vote on the names to be proposed for Marmontel's replacement,\textsuperscript{11} there were fifteen candidates to consider.\textsuperscript{12} This was an even larger field than had competed with Risler to succeed Duvernoy six months earlier. As it turned out, Cortot's artistic credentials and Fauré's influence behind the scenes had generated solid support for his candidature. He received a majority of votes (15 of 25) on the first ballot.\textsuperscript{13} On November 2, 1907 he was officially named Professor (third class) of Piano, at an annual salary of 1500 Francs.\textsuperscript{14} His teaching duties began on the 11th of November.

Cortot thus joined his colleagues Isidor Philipp and Eraim-Miriam Delaborde as a member of the trio of faculty charged with instructing advanced level women pianists. As mentioned previously, there were twelve students in each class, excluding auditors.\textsuperscript{15} No more than two of the twelve could be of foreign nationality. Competition for admission to one of these three classes was ferocious: in 1907 a total of two hundred and fifty-five girls between the ages of eleven and twenty competed for only seventeen available places.\textsuperscript{16} A jury of ten respected musicians, presided over by Fauré himself, heard all candidates in the first (eliminatory) round of exams, held November 12th. They passed ninety-seven into the second round. On November 15, the same committee plus two more jurors (Moritz Moszkowski and Gabriel Pierné that year) heard pupils
who had made the cut-off in a different repertoire, and after much deliberating made their final selection. Among those admitted in 1907 was a twelve-year old Rumanian by the name of Clara Haskil, whose performance of the Chopin b minor Sonata in the final round received an affirmative vote from seven of the twelve jurors.17

Cortot had just turned thirty when he was elected to the Conservatoire faculty, making him one of the youngest artists ever to have been entrusted with an advanced piano class. While he knew a fair amount about teaching from having coached during his student days (see Chapter III, pp. 85-86) and taught private lessons at his Pleyel studio, Cortot had little prior experience in giving group lessons to a class or, more importantly, in taking full responsibility for the training of talented aspiring professionals. Jérôme Spycket may be correct in asserting that at the outset, Cortot viewed his appointment "much more as a sort of acknowledgement (consécration) than as a [pedagogical] mission:... his career has been meteoric, he is idolized, he has countless successes to his credit in every sphere."18 Although Cortot's activities were not all that far-flung yet, it is nonetheless true that prior to 1907 he had pursued teaching much less vigorously than conducting and performing. It is likely that in his first years at the Conservatoire, his students taught him as much as he taught them.
Cortot's situation in the fall of 1907 was a little unusual for a first-year professor. The success of Marmontel's class in the last concours (four of his pupils won first prizes), coupled with vacancies due to expulsion or leave of absence, had reduced the class to five returning students. That meant that Cortot was able to begin with an exceptionally clean slate: seven first-year pupils. It also meant that he was under considerable pressure to excel. There was no way to coast along on the momentum of his predecessor's work while learning the ropes. For better or worse, the results of his teaching would be clearly exposed to the juries' scrutiny.

Cortot met with his class three times a week, for two to two and three-quarters hours per session. Generally, four or five pupils played in each class session; consequently, each pupil received a lesson every five days to a week. The girls in his 1907 class ranged in age from the twelve-year old Haskil, by two years the youngest, on up to two nineteen-year olds inherited from Marmontel. Sixteen- and seventeen-year olds comprised half the class membership.

Personal Charisma and Musical Fervor.

Cortot was certainly a far cry from the type of teacher most of these youngsters had known until then: young and dashing, exuding charm, he cut a romantic figure that seldom failed to captivate. Magda Tagliaferro audited his lessons in 1907, and remembered well the atmosphere of the class:
I can see, as though it were yesterday, the door of the classroom open. The maître walks in [wearing] a long grey overcoat that nearly skims the floor, and removes his broad-brimmed hat with a flourish, revealing, beneath straight, sleek hair worn à la Oscar Wilde, an ardent and expressive face.

Immediately a dozen hearts beat wildly.... The artistic prestige of our maître is complemented by a personal charisma which we do not try to resist. Discreetly we covet a more intent look, a prolonged handshake. Perhaps Cortot shrewdly plays on these youthful and innocent passions, keeping them going. Taking advantage of his seductive eyes and deep, rich voice, he knows better than anyone how to pronounce enchanting "hellos" and memorable "goodbyes"....

Cortot was without a doubt the most fascinating personality we had ever met. There was an aura of power about him, especially in his look: his black, inscrutable eyes would fix you with a gaze of extraordinary intensity that pierced you right to the quick. He didn't set out to hypnotize us, really, but we were enthralled all the same, because of that powerful gaze.

Naturally we were shy and rather intimidated at the prospect of playing for Cortot, but he captivated us, brought us out of ourselves. We tended to forget our self-consciousness and become caught up in the experience of making music. Cortot was anxious to develop our imagination and fan whatever spark of artistic temperament was in us—and in my case, I can say that he greatly increased my desire to exercise my imagination to the fullest in interpreting a work. He strove to kindle in us a love for the music and a taste for beauty by means of images, poetic metaphors, maxims. He was very fond of discoursing: on nature, on the [artist's] loves and aspirations, on tenderness—"la tendresse avant tout" was one of his favorite sayings—on the hidden significance of a passage of music, and so forth. And inevitably, the mind of a fourteen-year old... awakens!20

The attitude towards music which Cortot projected in his teaching had a powerful liberating effect on many talented youngsters, opening their eyes to higher artistic realms and goals where before they had seen only the arduous acquisition of virtuosity. "I was nine years old when I heard Cortot for the first time," said Yvonne Lefébure.
Mme. Long took me by the hand, saying: "There's a new professor at the Conservatoire that you must meet." I'll never forget what happened then: [she] opened the door to his classroom, and instead of seeing the professor sitting staidly beside a student, I see a young man at the piano, with a lock of dark hair falling across his forehead... and flashing eyes, playing and discussing a piece (I believe it was Chopin),... and beside him, standing up, the student! And the music he drew from the instrument--it was electrifying,... it *radiated* such fervor!.... You couldn't even say it was beautiful, it wasn't beautiful--it was a flood of sound that washed over you, that carried you away! I was frozen in my tracks,... almost in a state of shock at this revelation of a musical universe which I had believed inaccessible. Until then, I had been playing the piano, struggling with the black and white of my keyboard, all the while dreaming of an entirely different sort of music--vivid, soaring, powerful. And now all of a sudden I heard, for real, the music of my imagination. That's it, I said to myself, that's how I want to play. It was beyond piano playing, it was *music*! Ever so many young artists after me have experienced this sort of musical "love-at-first-sight" (*coup de foudre*) from Cortot.21

Cortot, unlike his teacher Diémer, was never at a loss for interpretive ideas about the music his pupils were studying. From the start, he showed an "inexhaustible imagination"22 and a flair for verbalizing in inspiring terms his insights into the character of the music, its distinctive sonorous atmosphere and the emotional implications of its language. On the other hand, the practice suggestions that Cortot gave Jeanne Leleu when she auditioned for him in 1907 suggest that his ideas on study methods were still rudimentary, not to say pedantic. "I was nine when Cortot came to Rennes to play a recital," noted Mme. Leleu. "I had already won a first prize in solfège and in piano at the local conservatory, and arrangements were made for him to hear me. 
I played him a piece. He listened all the way through, then he said: "It seems to me that there were some little fingerings here and there that were not observed." He said that I should practice each piece by two-measure units: two plus two measures, and then repeat this twenty times, marking it in the notebook; then the second two plus two more, and so forth. He was very definite on this point: I was to be sure to keep tally in the notebook.  

There is nothing terribly wrong with Cortot's counsel as far as it goes, but neither is there anything even moderately forward-looking about it by turn-of-the-century standards. In its reliance on mechanical repetition and study by fragments systematized arithmetically rather than musically, i.e., by two-measure modules rather than by the motive or the musical phrase, Cortot's advice could easily have come from a conservative like Diémer or from many an early nineteenth-century teacher. It does not even hint at the practice methods expounded in his study editions and Principes rationnels, nor at the fundamental principle he devised in 1914 for his first annotated edition and placed at the head of all his subsequent editions: "Study not only the difficult passage but also the difficulty itself, reducing it to its essential elements."  

Jeanne Leleu, like Yvonne Lefébure, was admitted to Cortot's class only in 1911, after having spent several years in the preparatory class of Marguerite Long. Reflecting on her studies with Long and Cortot, Mlle. Leleu observed:  

Cortot's teaching style and musical aesthetic were at opposite poles from Mme. Long's. When I came to Cortot, what impressed me immediately was that he really liked
his students. He was very gentle and patient with us. In his comments he displayed a keen sense of humor, often tinged with irony.

In those days the girls came to class accompanied by their mothers.26 Cortot would speak to us very softly—he didn't want the mothers to hear every criticism or comment he made. Mme. Long, on the other hand, said very little directly to the pupil. She talked incessantly through the lesson with her répétitrices,27 advising them what to concentrate on in their sessions with us.

Mme. Long never played for us in lessons; you heard her in concerts, and that was it. Cortot illustrated his discussions with many examples at the keyboard. He would play ten measures, a page—but not the whole work.

Cortot made me realize what interpreting with feeling and expressive warmth was all about. Marguerite Long was very critical, very exacting in all matters of execution. With her, it was a matter of the note, the phrase: one had to play very cleanly, precisely, coldly.

Cortot wanted his pupils to put real ardor into their music-making. He would very often say: "Play that more passionately," and would demonstrate. Up to this point, passion had been absolutely out of the question! It is Cortot who really formed me as a pianist. I owe him everything.28

In his teaching as in his performing, Cortot was "very intense, vibrant and full of ardor," recalled Mme. Tagliaferro. "Usually he kept his feelings and excitement about the music in check: they were something one sensed immediately, but not because he was demonstrative in a temperamental or physically active way. There were times, however, when he got carried away as he evoked images and things like that for us."29 While Cortot's manner was not especially fearsome, he projected immense authority and self-possession. He expressed his ideas and advice with a tone of conviction and gravity that precluded indifference—on either the student's part or his—and made disagreement difficult. "I adored him, as did nearly all his pupils," remarked Blanche Bascourret de Guéraldi,30 "but to
tell the truth, one felt a sort of terror in the presence of his genius. We were so young...."31

The emotionally charged atmosphere of the class, the fact that Cortot deliberately ignored parental figures and addressed the pupil herself in a confidential, though by no means familiar tone, his emphasis on the life of ideas and subjective feelings expressed in and through the music, his appeal to higher artistic responsibilities—all this made him a great inspirational force and a "cult hero," one suspects, to his pupils. It also conferred on his teaching something of the character of an initiation rite.

Aims and Expectations.

From the testimonies of students, Cortot does not seem to have had a "method" in the strict sense of the word. In the Preface to his Principes rationnels (1928), he stated that "to develop [a pupil's] artistic qualities (qualités psychiques), which depend above all on personality and taste,... teaching has scarcely any recourse other than to enrich his general culture and develop his imaginative and analytical powers.... For that, there are no good or bad systems. There are only good or bad professors."32 At the Conservatoire, just as in his later teaching at the Ecole Normale, Cortot focussed heavily on this aesthetic side of music study: "It was never a question of learning how to play the piano more or less perfectly," wrote Yvonne Lefébure, "it was a question of getting to the very heart of the musical work."33 Always
Cortot endeavored to pose ultimate artistic and "communicative" objectives, to make pupils more aware of their inner resources and arouse in them a passion for personal inquiry into the music.

"In Cortot's class," noted Mme. Tagliaferro, "it was understood beyond any doubt that one worked to acquire technical mastery for the music, as a means and never as an end in itself." 34

His first priority was to give us a grasp of the style of a musical work, of its character, to make us aware of the expressive meaning of each passage—not merely what the text indicated we should do, but why. Naturally, he had a basic conception of the piece which he tried to get across, but he encouraged personal initiative and left a lot of room for individual expression.

The most powerful asset Cortot possessed for developing his pupils' musical gifts and personalities was not a method at all, but simply his presence—or if you will, his force of personality. We wanted to work very hard and very well for him, to understand and feel the music more deeply, to perfect the realization. We wanted him to like what we accomplished interpretively.35

Cortot's artistic temperament would have led him to give precedence to the musical over the technical aspects of performance, regardless of the instructional circumstances. Reaction against his own one-sided training at the Conservatoire, and recognition of both the inadequate musical background of his pupils and the rising antipathy of the informed musical public towards "empty and gratuitous virtuosity,"36 probably caused him to concentrate still more heavily on interpretation. "It's important to realize that a good many of the students entering the Conservatoire's advanced piano classes were just nice, hard-
working young girls with fast fingers," noted Marthe Morhange-Motchane. "They had been deprived of a general education, and as yet had little real artistic culture or intellectual curiosity. Some of them didn't know much beyond how to play the piano."37

Cortot's strategy with his pupils was twofold: explicate the music and its demands so as to give them a clear idea of where their work should take them ultimately; and challenge them in the short term to exceed their previous achievements and limitations, to approach more closely what he felt to be the music's poetic and expressive "truth." Cortot was no despot in the classroom; he almost never indulged in violent outbursts or bullying. He was a tough critic, however, unbending in his artistic standards and also rather temperamental in his attitude towards pupils. This explains the diverse and sometimes contradictory impressions of his behavior in lessons retained by former students. Depending on his mood and on the pupil in question, Cortot could be gentle and tolerant one moment, stern and cutting the next. "There were times when he was strict and rather hard to please," recalled Magda Tagliaferro, "but more often than not he was very patient, even lenient (indulgent) with his Conservatoire pupils.

Cortot would have a pupil repeat a passage quite a few times, or perform the piece again at the next class or even several more classes if necessary, until he was certain that she had grasped the essential style. He could get very angry when a student played in a tasteless or pretentious way—but not in the [Conservatoire] class,
as I remember. Everything was harmonious there. Later in his public interpretation courses he was at times harsh, even very sarcastic, saying rather awful things like "You'd do better to take up the sewing machine." As he grew old, he became irritable and choleric. In the class he was tolerant, often bestowing praise and encouragement.

In short, I would say that while Cortot was an exacting teacher, he had a good idea of the extent of each pupil's possibilities, and he did not demand more than someone could give. Personally, in my private lessons with him I always found him to be very patient and flexible. He indicated how he saw the music or how he solved a problem, but without forcing his way on me. I was left free, very free to form my own ideas and arrive at my own expression. Often I recall him saying: "Do as you wish here," or "play this as you feel it."38

"Cortot was quite kind in lessons but a little caustic,... even very ironic once in a while," noted Blanche Bascourret.

I remember an instance (this happened later, in one of his interpretation courses, hence it was a public performance before a packed hall) where a student performed Chopin's Berceuse. She played very decently, very correctly--but it was uninteresting,... cold. When she had finished, Cortot said to her: "But Mademoiselle, I asked you to play me Chopin's Berceuse." "Yes of course, Maitre," she replied, "that's what I just did." "Aaaah...non! You gave me a sleeping pill." Of course, he didn't stop there, he went on to explain.

In the Conservatoire class Cortot was usually considerate, and very correct in his behavior toward us. I can still see him, standing in the curve of the piano, listening intently to a pupil's performance (whoever was playing always received his undivided attention) or taking the pupil's place at the keyboard to illustrate his points afterwards. He brought the same concentration, the same involvement, to his work with each of us. Since he was a very young professor, he always prefaced his remarks to the pupil with "Mademoiselle [last name],". He didn't want anyone to be able to say that he played favorites. For that reason, he was always a little distant.

Cortot never directed his biting wit at me. I liked Cortot so much that if he had made a remark like the above to me, I think I would have died on the spot. On the contrary, once, when I finished playing, he said:
Professor and student, or whether Clara rested and courted,
it was simply an instance of the wrong chemistries between
ultimately providing very congenial to her temperament. Whether
performance ideals of the Vietnamese school, an aesthetic that
technical foundation and a good grasp of the classical
seem among others. Robert had armed her with an excellent
pedagogical Rhythm, Robert, teacher of Rudolf Serkin and George
to the higher aspects of the musical art by the esteemed
Clara Haskill came to parts having already been sensitized
through his hands at the conservatoire.
Clara Haskill, surely one of the most remarkable talents to pass
this sort apparently occurred in his initial contacts with
pedagogical judgment of a pupil's achievements. A clash of
always managed to keep his personal blues separate from this
uncompromising in his basic aesthetic principles and did not
quite strained in such instances, since Haskill was
magnetically. Teacher-student relations occasionally became
inescapable, there were some pupils whom Haskill failed to
paths crossed.

From students, associates and many other individuals whose
the unconditional admiration and devotion Haskill could effect
on his teaching, then because the whole gives one an idea of
length here. Less because every remark sheds additional light
more. Bascom's recollections are cited at considerable

passions of my life, must play... and human. for me, Haskill came to be one of the great musical
done is very beautiful and very moving? I was esthetic.
Mussel de quartet. Do you know that what you have just
efforts to draw her into his romantic mode of thinking, the result was immediate friction between them. And Cortot, it seems, could be difficult when someone rubbed him the wrong way. "He didn't like me," Clara Haskil wrote to Bernard Gavoty; "it was obvious that I got on his nerves. He often forgot to have me play, and when I would come up to the piano..., he would say with cool politeness: 'Ce sera pour la prochaine fois' ('We'll take this up next time.')"42

To Clara, Cortot appeared as haughty and unsympathetic that first year (1907). As she saw it, he often seemed more interested in a pupil's looks than in her talent; furthermore, he was too often away on tour to have much close contact with his pupils.43 She got along much better with Cortot's old classmate Lazare-Lévy, a fine teacher known for his esprit critique (and his dry personality, by some reports). Lévy would frequently take Cortot's class in his absence, and would always pay special attention to her.44 Clara Haskil, as her biographer points out, could be difficult and touchy herself,45 and it is not inconceivable that she mistook Cortot's general aloofness for a personal snub in some instances. Whatever Cortot's real feelings toward her may have been,46 he apparently was so disconcerted by her playing style that at first he misjudged her abilities.

Cortot's professorial reports for the end-of-trimester exams47 chronicle his changing attitude towards Haskil, from grudging recognition of her potential:
January, 1908: "Has a lot to learn - faulty technique (mécanisme défectueux) - bad early musical education. All the same, a real talent! (Du reste une nature!)

to growing interest and respect:

May, 1908: "Has made a lot of progress - lacks neither facility nor musicality. The fact of competing will no doubt motivate her greatly."

January, 1909: "Progressing very rapidly - musically and technically - over the past three months, has furnished her best work so far. Will develop, I believe, into something remarkable."

May, 1909: "Progressing musically - very gifted, though a little cold, or more exactly, childish, by nature. Good work."

to enthusiastic admiration:

January, 1910: "Excellent student - very good work this year - her personality seems to be asserting itself - remarkable pianistic means."

May, 1910: "Excellent work. Musical nature - remarkable technical gifts."

By the time Clara Haskil began her third year in the class, Cortot's esteem for her had risen to the point where he would single her out for special consideration on various matters, according to Spycket:

When he would exhort his class to practice at least seven or eight hours a day, he would add: "Except Mlle. Haskil --three or four hours are enough for her." Later he would say of her: "She had an intuitive genius for fingerings." For that matter, when a problem of this type came up in class, he often called Clara to the piano to ask her how she would deal with a given passage; and frequently her instinctive solution was adopted, when it suited other hands.48
While Cortot made a complete about-face in his attitude, Clara Haskil for her part never forgave him: for his having originally underestimated her, for having let the jury know that he thought she would benefit from a third year at the Conservatoire (or so Spycket affirms), and most of all for an occasional caustic remark that cut far more deeply than he realized. Once, aggravated by some passage in her performance he deemed too prosaic, Cortot snapped: "Do that again for me—you play like a cleaning woman!" According to Spycket, [Clara] was grievously wounded by this comment, which certainly had no particular significance for Cortot. The fear of perhaps not knowing how to play the piano, or even how to be a capable housemaid, crops up like a leitmotif in her later correspondence.... And when, forty years later, an enthusiastic Cortot approached her at the close of her first Paris concert after the war, exclaiming "Admirable!" with arms open wide, she shot back at him: "Well then! So I don't play any more like a cleaning woman?" as her other admirers looked on, dumbfounded.49

Despite this little incident, Cortot and Clara Haskil remained on fairly good terms to the end of her life. Their relations, while never reaching the point of close friendship, were marked by cordiality and deep mutual respect.50 Perhaps on the urging of conductor Igor Markévitch, himself a Cortot student, Haskil adopted Cortot's reorchestration of the Chopin Concerto in f minor for her recording of that work in 1959.51 With regard to her early studies, however, she invariably maintained that she had "learned nothing" at the Conservatoire.52
Assessed in conjunction with the testimonies of other students, Clara Haskil's impressions of Cortot tell us quite a bit about his approach to teaching. First, both the recollections of class members and Cortot's own professorial reports indicate that the mere fact of having natural talents, be they as exceptional as Clara's,\textsuperscript{53} did not necessarily win special consideration from him. Indeed, he bestowed praise much more in proportion to the amount of productive study he felt a pupil had accomplished than in relation to the "objective" level of her pianism. "What pleased Cortot most," observed Magda Tagliaferro,

was when a pupil really strove with all her might to better herself. The effort counted very much, to his way of thinking: he liked those [pupils] who took the trouble to search and discover on their own because he himself took great pains [to inquire into the very depths of the music], and also because his mediocre piano hands had obliged him to work extremely hard for what he got. Cortot respected the work of each pupil, though naturally he had a soft spot for the gifted ones. To outward appearances, however, all were equal: he gave of himself whether the pupil was talented or not, in the interest of the music. What he always looked for and commended was achievement (le résultat) by dint of hard work.\textsuperscript{54}

Cortot elaborated his views on the work of a performing artist in response to an inquiry from composer-journalist Emile Vuillermoz as to whether "the rigorous responsibilities of a concert career don't amount, at times, to being sentenced to hard labor." "Never!" Cortot wrote:

...An artist does not "work": he seeks his identity. In truth, there's no call to pity an artist who spends most of his life practicing. If he says he's working too
hard, he's not a real artist. For myself and most artists like me, life is unbearable if we're not working feverishly!

What some consider a tiresome burden is for me a source of joy. An artist is compelled to go beyond inspiration. He cannot rely on innate talent, any more than on technical facilities. His daily practice has a double objective: to keep his physical apparatus in good form, and to go more deeply into the modalities of his interpretations....

To make music is not to expend one's vital energies, but on the contrary, to accumulate new ones. Virtuosi (in the pejorative sense of the word) drill their fingers and develop velocity without taking into account the poetry of a musical composition. The real task of an interpreter is the work of hypothesizing... which permits us to become one in spirit momentarily with the personality of the composer. This involves investing imagination and feeling, but [the effort] in no way leaves one drained.55

It is clear that for Cortot, "good work" was above all
1) any mental instrumental study that deepened one's understanding of the music and ability to project that understanding in specific, sonorous terms at the instrument; and by extension, 2) the kind of total immersion in the interpretive task--living the music, reflecting on its implications, pursuing constant, imaginative experimentation at the keyboard56--that advanced one in the quest for a personal artistic vision and "voice."

Few would find these ideas objectionable in principle, i.e., in the abstract. It is the manner of their implementation in actual performance, and the interpretive values they may presuppose, over which musicians disagree sharply among themselves. It would seem that what Cortot really sought from his pupils was an impassioned, personal interpretation of the music: a free rendering, that is,
perceptibly stirred by the feelings and poetic inflections of the performer. One suspects, moreover, that he had a very limited tolerance for interpretive viewpoints that did not spring from his broadly romantic conception of music-making. On this point the testimony of Louis Goupy, who participated in many of Cortot's interpretation courses at the Ecole Normale and at Lausanne and Siena (Italy), is instructive:

Cortot revered work (il avait le culte du travail), but he did not reward work itself especially. When he said "C'est bien travaillé" ("It's well prepared"), that was somewhat disdainful. It meant that what you had done up to that point wasn't entirely unacceptable, that it was a point of departure..., but that it was necessary to go further.... It was absolutely necessary to go beyond technique and pianism. He was much more centered on the effort of deepening one's interpretation than on the technical effort. Cortot was sometimes very hard on pianists who had excellent techniques (and I mean that he criticized them from the technical standpoint as well as the interpretive). The moment that he heard someone with innate musicianship who really tried to express the music, then he was capable of the greatest indulgence.

A performer who was nervous or had mediocre fingers but who nonetheless sought to do something meaningful, who went in the direction of Cortot's thinking, was commended by him. On the other hand, Cortot could be very critical in his judgments of professionals who might play brilliantly but who couldn't manage to communicate naturally what they felt, or who hadn't given sufficient thought to the details of their interpretation. The professionals were not allowed any lapse in sensitivity, any glibness or forced expression, any banging....

Cortot's appraisals were not directly correlated to the real level of accomplishment demonstrated in a performance. This was partly because he made a clear distinction between the class of professionals and that of amateurs, and judged each by a different standard. The audience didn't quite know what was going on sometimes when he said "bravo" to someone who had played rather badly, and merely "good" to someone who had played admirably. The "bravo" was [for] the amateur who had made a genuine effort to interpret and showed artistic understanding, whereas the "bien" was [for] the professional who had disappointed him. He was much more exacting with the professional, and he was right to be
so. Some even said that he had something against the professionals *a priori*. If that was so—and I'm not sure it was—it was not out of any jealousy or because he saw them as potential rivals. He was always afraid that the professional would place technique ahead of the music.\(^{58}\)

Did Cortot draw similar distinctions in his Conservatoire classes—between pupils who leaned toward a subjective, exuberant style and those naturally inclined toward a more restrained, impersonal approach, or between those with the potential to become concert pianists and those who would never be more than teachers or gifted amateurs? And did he apply multiple standards in bestowing praise or reproach? If this was his custom, his judgments probably offended more than a few budding pianists' sense of justice over the years.

Certainly the issue of antithetical aesthetic orientations was at the very least a contributing factor in Cortot's clash with Clara Haskil. "What [Cortot] heard from her was almost diametrically opposed to his own nature," notes Spycket. "Cortot was the romantic interpreter par excellence,... whereas the playing of Clara was exactly the contrary of his in some ways 'exteriorizing' conception of music."\(^{59}\) This is amply confirmed by their recordings: where Cortot's approach was thoroughly meditated on the conceptual level, Haskil's was more instinctive and spontaneous. Where his playing was stylized, exuberant in its expressive inflections and textually free, hers was simple and unaffected, understated (though not less deeply felt) in its delivery and respectful of the notated text. If Haskil got along much
better with Lazare-Lévy than with Cortot, it was partly because their performance attitudes were very compatible. Blanche Bascourret de Guéraldi, who was Lazare-Lévy's répétitrice at the Conservatoire for some years, observed that there was a world of difference between Cortot's teaching and Lazare-Lévy's. Cortot was very romantic, whereas Lazare-Lévy was a classicist and was rather critical of certain aspects of Cortot's style. In his opinion, Cortot exaggerated.

Lazare-Lévy had a different conception of music. His philosophy was: "Leave the music alone." He said this very frequently to his pupils. "Add nothing. Read the music very observantly, do all the performance markings indicated by the composer,... but do not add!"

How remote this way of thinking was from that of Cortot, for whom the music had to be "questioned" ("interrogé") as to its hidden meaning, had to be completed and transfigured by the recreative imagination of the interpreter. Cortot listened not only for basic musicality and stylistic understanding in a pupil's performance, but also for what she brought of herself to the musical work. He was happiest when working with a pianist of expansive temperament like Tagliaferro, who could be counted on to project an original, imaginative reading of the music. He left her as much liberty in interpretive and technical matters as Lazare-Lévy was reported to have left Clara Haskil. It was all a matter of perspective and shared values.

In summary, it seems fairly certain that in order to derive the greatest benefit from Cortot's teaching, a pupil needed to have an affinity or at least a modicum of sympathy
with his romantic aesthetic. This is not to imply that Cortot
was incapable of recognizing excellence in mature artists who
embraced different approaches. "Cortot was an extremely
intelligent man," observed Louis Goupy.

While he didn't realize right away perhaps what a
first-class talent he was dealing with in Clara Haskil,
he soon came around. Even if in the final analysis she
had a conception of music that was diametrically opposed
to his own, she compelled his respect, because she was a
great artist. The same thing could be said with regard
to Dinu Lipatti, of whom Cortot was extremely fond.
Lipatti came to Cortot when he was already a fully
formed, accomplished pianist... with a playing style that
was superb but very unlike Cortot's. He had immense
admiration for Cortot, but this didn't cause him to
change his playing much at all.... And while Cortot
fully respected Lipatti's approach, he did not budge one
inch from his position. In that sense Cortot was
absolutely unbending, monolithic!63

In Cortot's Conservatoire teaching, tone quality and
touch were always major concerns, second only to establishing
the character and style of the musical work. "Cortot attached
great importance to sonority," said Mme. Tagliaferro.

Many of his discussions centered around establishing what
tone quality, what color was right for a line or a
passage, and how to achieve it. He often said to us:
"Orchestrate, orchestrate! Give me a flute here,... a
clarinet there." He would sit down at the piano and
demonstrate select passages... and it was as if we were
hearing another piece.64

.................................................................
(Cortot) opened up horizons by this emphasis on sound,
for it gave us, all at once, a taste for contrasting
touches, textures and the polyphonic style.65

Cortot concentrated on tone quality with Jeanne Leleu from the
very moment she entered his class:

The first piece that I played for Cortot in the class
was Liszt's St. Francois de Paule marchant sur les flots.
He immediately began discussing sonority. He said I
would have to learn a particular way of depressing the
keys (une certaine manière d'attaquer les notes) that would produce a rounder, warmer tone. He wanted a sonority that was very deep, very full.66

Tone and Touch: Cortot's Technical Premises

Marthe Morhan-Motchane explained in greater detail Cortot's ideas on tone production:

Cortot was most concerned that his pupils develop a free, easy and supple attack in which the fingers went right to the bottom of the keys. "No shallow (superficielle), anemic sonority!" was one of his most frequent admonitions. He was adamantly against articulating with over-curved fingers pulled back high off the keys à la [Marguerite] Long, and he generally preferred that we avoid the tiré touch forms [a reference probably to jeu perlé or leggiero-type articulations in which the fingertips tend to be drawn under towards the palm, giving the initial impetus for key descent but not following through to the key bed] and focus more on the cantabile style. Cortot wanted all melodic lines projected strongly and distinctly, including those in the inner and lower parts.

When intensity was required, he would often recommend a wrist stroke (l'attaque du poignet)—not the little impulses of the wrist (pas du petit poignet), always the forearm with the wrist, backing it up. "Insistez plus," he would urge. In cantabile playing, Cortot often emphasized that the fourth and fifth fingers were the melody fingers (le chant), and hence needed always to be very firm, though springy rather than stiff. He himself played with a straight fifth finger [i.e., with the phalanges locked together and working more or less as a unit], a position adopted by quite a few of the pupils.67

Cortot's approach to tone production arose out of his fundamentally linear, vocal conception of music.68 Its main premises were two: 1) parity, or even primacy for the legato touch (as opposed to the drier, non-legato which predominated in much French school playing); and 2) maximum individualization of parts within the texture through the use of different touch forms and varying pressure or weight (hand
and arm participation). If Cortot emphasized primarily the big, round "carrying" legato tone in his teaching while drawing on the whole gamut of touches in his own playing, it was first of all because the legato was the foundation for all cantabile playing and second because it was the touch most neglected in his pupils' previous training. "When I first went to Cortot," recalled Mme. Bascourret,

he said I would have to make some rather major changes in my technique. No one had taught me to use either my wrist or my arm.

Cortot dealt with the role of the hand, wrist and arm, with the need for freedom and flexibility, with rotational, lateral and vertical [i.e., quick rebounding or "vibrato"] propulsive movements--these last three seldom given much attention by French teachers in 1915--indirectly in his lessons. He did not, however, discuss these concepts in the abstract or formulate systematic principles of any sort. Many of his ideas were codified later, in the exercises and commentaries found in his Principes rationnels.... In the class he approached all these matters through the music, from the standpoint of the sonority one should strive for, depending on the specific musical content and character of the passage.69

Cortot's way of teaching technique was as empirical as that of the traditional French school (see Chapter II), but it was far less scholastic. As he saw it, the musical and poetic aims always dictated the sonority, and by extension, the technical means. A clear idea of the tone quality called for would induce the appropriate adaptive movements, or at least it would motivate the pupil to search until she found a way of realizing the desired musical ends that fit her personal physical means.

Cortot avoided the term "relaxation" in discussing technique, preferring instead to speak of souplesse
(flexibility) and liberté. He does mention "weight" fairly frequently in his commented editions, but usually in reference to the weight of the hand (backing up the fingers) rather than that of the arm, which was the more conventional usage outside France. The term "arm" occurs rarely in his writings. Indeed, he often says "wrist" where he quite clearly means "arm."

Cortot may have confounded the roles of the wrist and the arm; he was no great theorist of technique. More likely, however, he was unwilling to make a radical break with traditional French technical thought, which was very suspicious of the notions of "arm participation" and "weight and relaxation."

In the Principes rationnels, one finds an unequivocal acknowledgment of the important role of the arm, and of the futility of drilling the fingers in isolation:

There is a widespread misconception that velocity in playing—a dreadful ideal for piano study in any case—depends solely on the rapidity of finger movements. In reality, in every passage requiring the displacement of the hand over more than an octave (which is to say, in the performance of the whole piano literature except for the output of the clavecinistes, which adheres to other technical conventions), the role of the fingers is limited to following the impulse, the elan given by the wrist [read: "arm"]. To think that one should pull the hand over the keyboard by the finger movements is equivalent to supposing that one makes a car go by moving the wheels in order to start the motor.

From the interpretive standpoint,... the role of the wrist, in determining the tone quality produced no less than in calibrating the nuances, is inestimable.

Teaching his pupils to produce a beautiful, singing legato and to acquire fine control over the widest range of shadings was one of Cortot's foremost goals. Hence, his aversion to the percussive, high-finger articulation and the
tiré touch forms: neither of these were conducive to high control over the blending and nuancing of tone. "One often hears that Cortot advocated playing with flat fingers, which is not quite accurate," said Mme. Bascourret.

The hand position Cortot preferred was with extended fingers, which facilitated maximum contact between the finger cushions and the key surface. The finger was to articulate from its base [i.e., from the metacarpal joint]; there was no need for the last phalanx to move independently usually. The bridge was to be solid: Cortot did not like it when the bridge sagged, forming a hollow in the middle of the hand, as often happened with the old school technique when the fingers were raised excessively high.

Cortot wanted the fingers held very close to the keys. That is how it should be, if you want to work on achieving a true legato. The fingers ordinarily start from key level (or scarcely a centimeter above) and depress the keys one after the other in a very precise manner, the key descent controlled by pressure. This is known as an "indirect [prepared] attack."

Cortot advocated holding the fingers very close to the keys primarily in cantabile playing. For chord and staccato playing he had different recommendations, aimed at freeing the arm and promoting its involvement in coordinated movements of the playing apparatus. According to Mme. Morhange-Motchane, Cortot advised us to use a jeté [i.e., a throw-rebound] motion of the hand-forearm as a unit, keeping the upper arm light and flexible. He had us practice chords and double-notes in this fashion, dropping from far above the keys. Full, forceful chord passages were to be played with the whole apparatus involved up to the shoulder and back, but always with elasticity and economy of movement.

Freedom and mobility of the arm in lateral movements was especially important. The arm was to be poised and ready to carry the hands outward in figurations that extended towards the extremes of the keyboard. Some pupils opened with the upper arm leading, others opened mainly from the lower arm [i.e., keeping the upper arm close to the body rather than letting the elbow move out slightly ahead of the hand].
These reports suggest that Cortot adopted a pragmatic approach, midway between that of the high finger/fixation schools and that of the weight and arm/body participation advocates whose ideas were all the rage outside of France. It should be emphasized once again, however, that Cortot considered all these technical matters very secondary to his work on the interpretive aspects of performance. He expected his répétitrices to take care of the basics of piano playing, as well as specific technical problems that came up in the music. "Cortot was not a 'pedagogue' in the modern sense of the word," Mme. Morhange-Motchane insisted, he was an artist teacher. He concentrated in lessons on clarifying the sense and emotive content of the music and its demands on the interpreter. When it came to ways of playing the piano or basic technical principles, Cortot demonstrated but he did not explain, nor did he always insist that one do it in exactly this or that way. For instance, in my view he was not really demanding and vigilant enough in setting the pupil's hand position. Some of his répétitrices, especially Mme. Giraud-Latarse, were very exacting in this matter, while others were not. Cortot did not analyze musical structure or discuss harmony much in lessons, nor did he analyze the appropriate motions to achieve a particular musical result—all matters which a present-day pedagogue would attend to.

As an inspirational force, however, Cortot was unsurpassed. He combined great musicianship with great intellect, and his ideas were always both carefully thought out and deeply felt. Moreover, when I say that Cortot was not a modern pedagogue, I don't mean to imply that he neglected all the fundamentals and talked only about poetic content. Cortot's classes were memorable. I remember that we often fought to go first, because the first performer usually got forty-five minutes or more, whereas the remaining pupils had to be content with half an hour. Cortot would usually listen to the student's performance of the whole piece or movement without interrupting. Afterwards he always began by saying "There are many good things." Then he would more or less take the whole piece apart, explaining what could be seen
and done in each phrase or section. He talked about style and character, of course, but he also discussed--and with continual illustrations at the piano--phrasing, dynamics, sonority, declamation, rubato (where appropriate), and so forth. He discussed fingerings and pedallings where these were problematic, and wrote them in the pupil's music.

Cortot knew a tremendous amount of literature, including much that had been published quite recently. He knew Fauré's Nocturnes before they were even off the printing presses, and he assigned them to pupils as soon as they were available. He had me play Ravel's "Scarbo" from Gaspard de la Nuit on an examination when none of the jury members except Fauré and Alfredo Casella knew the work. With all this, his greatest gift as an artist teacher was still his ability to arouse fervor, to bring the pupil's passion and enthusiasm for the music to a high pitch.77

How was it that a "thinker" like Cortot, who delved so deeply into the interpretive aspects of his art, gave only perfunctory attention to technique in his teaching, willingly delegating responsibility for this domain to assistants? How was it, that is, that he failed to recognize that in many young pianists' formation, work on interpretive aims (conception) cannot be separated from work on means (physiological fundamentals)? That if ends dictate means, then by the same token means condition ends,78 and there can be no perfect rendering of musical ideas until certain muscular and nerve reflexes, certain coordinations, have been developed? When these questions were posed to Cortot's disciples, they advanced several different explanations.

According to Mme. Bascourret, the teaching situation obliged Cortot to set priorities: "In the very limited time he had to spend with each pupil, it was simply impossible to give thorough attention to both the interpretation of the pieces and
the basics of technique. Therefore Cortot concentrated on those aspects where he alone was qualified to direct the pupil's studies, and let others take care of general technical matters. This is a very reasonable explanation but hardly the whole story. Magda Tagliaferro, who in those years had private lessons with Cortot in which he was not under the same severe time restrictions, said this:

I think that deep down, Cortot just didn't find the technical side as enjoyable and intriguing to teach, and since he had répétitrices who were quite capable of taking over this part of the training—which we all know is arduous work and not always very gratifying—he tended to focus heavily on the interpretive, which appealed to him much more. Teaching, like performing, was for Cortot a kind of outlet: he needed to communicate, to pour out his feelings. And since he was—I wouldn't say introverted,...but—quite secretive, it's through music that he expressed what he felt, and he felt a lot.

Personally, I must say that Cortot paid very little attention to my technique. He used to give me fingerings, but often I couldn't use them since they were suited to his much larger hand. Not that I had flawless technique mind you—all I had back then was a lot of natural facility, and I believe Cortot was wrong not to have concentrated more on developing a solid technical foundation. One day it dawed on me that I didn't have enough technique, and I started working furiously all by myself. I developed my technique on my own. In the final analysis, I think that every pianist must to some extent devise his own personal technique, with his own hand and physique.

Among younger generations of Cortot students, there are some who suspect that Cortot did not fully appreciate the roles played by rigorous technical schooling and natural gifts in his own accomplishments at the keyboard. This may have led him in certain instances to misjudge the relative importance of various aspects of performance study, and in others to infer
causal relations that were neither as direct nor as generally valid as he imagined. To cite an example of the latter, all who heard Cortot from his student days on (see Chapter III, pp. 62-63) commented on his naturally beautiful sonority which they ascribed mainly to his very flexible wrist and his knack for using the larger playing levers efficiently. Cortot, however, was much more attuned to the mind's workings than to the body's. What impressed him was the close correlation between the acuity of his poetic vision of a work—his feeling for the meaning of every detail—and his ability to realize his interpretive intentions at the piano. He may have jumped to the conclusion that it was mainly his vivid depictions of the music's character and emotional states that enabled students to achieve the appropriate sonority, phrasing and dynamic nuances. In reality, to give the notated score a definite sounding form, a performer must know not only exactly what he or she is after (poetic-affective significance, design), but likewise know at an intuitive or conscious level how to obtain it from the instrument. In short, he must employ movements and coordinations that permit, and hopefully, facilitate in the maximum, the implementation of his artistic ideas.

With students who are technically immature or less adept, a teacher must often dwell at length on basic disciplines (the fixing of posture and hand position, the reinforcement of reflexes essential to mechanical control and fluency, as well as the analysis of motions appropriate to specific musical
contexts) prior to, and concurrent with, work on the interpretive side of performance. If the physiological component is weak, the student may easily begin resorting to any means, even the most ineffective, to realize the musical aims posed, and may end up with severe tension, stiffness and other problems that in time become chronic and perhaps incapacitating. To have the student work on technique extensively, moreover, is not enough; it is the "how" of the study that makes all the difference. Hence, it is essential that the teacher supervise the work closely, in order to verify that it is of a nature to bring the pupil closer to the ultimate goals, rather than leading him/her into new or greater problems.

Cortot's Répétitrices.

Who were the teachers who shouldered these responsibilities for Cortot, and what were their backgrounds? So much time has elapsed that information on them is rather sketchy. In the years 1907-1914 he had at least three répétitrices, each of whom worked with particular students in the class, usually for the duration of the students' Conservatoire piano studies. They were: Mme. Giraud-Latarse, Mme. Eva Duménil and Mme. Chapart. At some point they were joined by a fourth, Mme. Hélène Kastler-Galanti, and then during World War I, perhaps on an informal basis, by Juliette Meerovitch. Of the five, only Mlle. Meerovitch had
studied with Cortot, and she is not listed with the other répétitrices in Cortot's personal teaching notebook.

Mme. Chapart (1873-1955) received her premier prix in 1890; she is thought to have studied with Antonin Marmontel, who taught Marguerite Long, among others. About her person and teaching we know little other than that she was capable enough to have been appointed professor of a preparatory piano class at the Conservatoire in 1919, replacing the aged Mlle. Trouillebert (b. 1835). She had a respectable studio of private students to whom Cortot occasionally gave master classes during the war years, according to Gavoty.

Mmes. Giraud-Latarse, Duménil and Kastler likewise did extensive private teaching during the years they worked with Cortot at the Conservatoire. All three became mainstays of his Ecole Normale faculty after he left the Conservatoire.

Mme. Duménil (1880-1967), also a student of Antonin Marmontel, had received her premier prix (première nommée) in 1901. She assisted Cortot throughout his tenure at the Conservatoire, then at his invitation accepted a piano class at the Ecole Normale, where she taught from 1924 to the early 1960's, leaving only in 1938-40 to serve as Magda Tagliaferro's répétitrice at the Conservatoire. She is said to have been a fine, cultivated person and a good musician, conscientious and extremely devoted to Cortot, but perhaps not an outstandingly gifted teacher. A more dynamic personality was Mme. Kastler (ca. 1887-19?), another product of Antonin Marmontel, who won
her premier prix in 1905. It is likely that Cortot took her on sometime around the war years, probably at the request of Mme. Giraud-Latarse, who had been her répétitrice in Marmontel's class. Cortot brought her to the Ecole Normale in the 1920's to head a piano class, and she taught there until the second World War. Mme. Bascourret, who studied with her as a child, remembered her as "lively and energetic." Cortot would seem to have had a high respect for her teaching abilities: over the years quite a few of her pupils successfully completed the Diplôme or Licence.

All the teachers above have receded into the mists of history, and are hardly more than names today. As far as this author could determine, they formed no famous pianists, though they may have been very competent. Mme. Giraud-Latarse, Cortot's principal, "official" répétitrice at the Conservatoire, was by contrast a figure of considerable importance in the French piano world. Born sometime in the late 1860's (and hence, about ten years older than Cortot), she studied piano first at the Conservatoire with Mme. Leroy-Réty, then privately with Raoul Pugno. She also pursued harmony and composition studies with Théodore Dubois and Georges Pfeiffer. Apparently, she never won a prize in the advanced division and was not much of a concert pianist, but she was a born teacher. The lack of a prize kept her from ever receiving the preparatory class appointment she coveted and no doubt deserved
(the closest she came was twice being named second in line). It did not, however, prevent Conservatoire professors from exploiting her talents.

After teaching piano from 1890-1900 at the Cours Masset, a private institute for the socially privileged, Mme. Giraud became, successively, the répétitrice of Pugno (1901), Antonin Marmontel (1902-06), Cortot (1907-1919) and Lazare-Lévy (1920-3?). During those years, she was the personal répétitrice of forty-two pupils who received a premier prix, among whom Magda Tagliaferro, Clara Haskil, Yvonne Hubert, Marcella Meyer, Vlado Perlemuter, Elsa Chavelson, Lélia Gousseau and Alexander Uninsky.

Shortly after the founding of the Ecole Normale, Cortot set Mme. Giraud-Latarse up as head of an important piano class. Later he named her inspectrice-générale (supervisor) of all preparatory piano classes—a position which she was the first and only person to hold at the Ecole Normale. During the period between the wars, she kept up a veritable double life, serving as Cortot's "right arm" at the Ecole Normale and promulgating his approach in her teaching and supervisory activities, all the while working as Lazare-Lévy's répétitrice and aligning her instruction to his very different approach at the Conservatoire. She must have been a teacher of remarkable adaptive powers and energy, to say the least. The most fascinating portrait of Mme. Giraud-Latarse was drawn by Reine Gianoli:
In the first half of this century one woman succeeded in making a big name for herself in the history of French pianism, not only on the strength of her talents, but even more perhaps because she had an extremely sharp sense of business (*affaires*) and knew how to promote her interests: that, of course, was Marguerite Long. During the same period a very great teacher, Mme. Giraud-Latarse, was also active, and it saddens me to think that her achievement has gone almost completely unrecognized.

Mme. Giraud-Latarse's whole life was music and piano playing. Almost every night she attended a concert. She heard all the pianists, all the orchestras, singers, string quartets, everyone of note who played in Paris.... Rachmaninoff, Busoni, the students of Leschetitzky and Liszt--she had heard and observed them all. She was steeped in the nineteenth century. When I came to her [in 1926]... she was already past sixty.

Mme. Giraud-Latarse was not really an exponent of the French school in the narrow sense, i.e., of a nice, clear technique of the Marmontel or Diémer... type. She was already very oriented towards the Russian school, with its [emphasis on] large jumps and stretches, powerful attacks,... participation of the whole arm and even the shoulder..., in short, to the style of piano playing that arose in response to the big Romantic literature, not the *claveciniste* piano. Mme. Giraud was fascinated, as was Cortot (though in his case, I don't think... it was due to the Russian school), with the grand Romantic piano. Both had a vision of the instrument that was very broad,... universal. Romantic pianism [for them] was more than just playing fast, loud, correctly and brilliantly. It was rather a question of drawing from the instrument all its sonorous and expressive resources, of transforming the piano into a complete instrument.

Cortot's *Principes rationnels*, his commented editions --all those technical exercises were just means for serving the music. That sounds banal, but... [it was the central premise of his teaching]. Technique is a whole world in itself. There are a thousand ways of playing a note, of making it sing, of making it express what it has to say. Cortot established the basic principles of his approach in his pedagogical materials, but he left it to the teachers he had formed (his *répétitrices*, then later the former students he had moulded to his way of thinking and set up as professors at the Ecole Normale) to apply these in lessons. He himself almost never gave out technical advice--he had something else to say. Mme. Giraud-Latarse, on the other hand, explained posture, hand position, movements in detail. She was essentially a pedagogue who taught the *craft* (*métier*) of piano playing, but craft conceived on a very grand scale.
Mme. Giraud-Latarse's teaching interlocked perfectly with Cortot's. One could say that his teaching began where hers left off. She was an extremely vivacious individual, moreover, and that was "catching." Her students picked up something of her energy: they almost all played with animation and vitality. She didn't like little prissy nuances, mannerisms, clever turns, and that sort of thing. She was always intent on getting out the big long line, the main, natural nuances of the text. Essentially, she was after grand style (une grande allure) and great simplicity in interpretation.

The reason Mme. Giraud-Latarse was able to teach for artists of radically different aesthetic and stylistic outlooks is, first of all, that much of her instruction was devoted to basic, natural principles of piano playing that could serve as a foundation for any approach. A second reason, I believe, is that she did not have an inflexible method. French piano teaching in those years, both inside and beyond the Conservatoire, was rampant with parochialism. There were a great many professors who would latch onto their little piece of the whole picture and erect a "system" out of it. Mme. Giraud-Latarse, however, had no "system." Nor, for that matter, did Cortot. She knew that there were certain things that Cortot didn't like at all--overcurved fingers lifted high off the key, a sunken bridge with high, arched wrist, and so forth--and certain things he wanted in every pupil, and she worked accordingly.

Teaching Repertoire.

The études Cortot assigned his Conservatoire pupils were always works of musical as well as technical value: all the Chopin Études of course, the Liszt Transcendental Études and Paganini Études, and occasionally one of the Moszkowski Études de Virtuosité, Op. 72. Mme. Morhange recalled that Cortot, like his teacher Diémer, demanded that pupils prepare one Chopin étude for each lesson. By all reports, Cortot assigned pupils a very heavy program of pieces to study over the scholastic year. His Conservatoire students were unable to recall their specific repertoire for a given year (little
wonder, since their studies took place more than sixty years ago), but if the study programs Cortot assigned several Licence de Concert candidates at the Ecole Normale in the late 'thirties are any indication, he would have expected pupils to learn about ten to twelve substantial works a year, excluding études and other technical materials.

Though it is impossible to reconstruct Cortot's complete teaching repertoire from his Conservatoire years, one can get a good notion of his tastes in teaching literature and of the performance level of his classes from his personal professorial notebook, in which he carefully noted down all the works that his pupils were prepared to play in their June examinations.91

Here is the composite list:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Composer</th>
<th>Work Description</th>
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| Albeniz:       | Fête-Dieu à Seville (from Iberia)  
                 | Triana (from Iberia)                                                            |
| Bach, J.S.:    | Air avec 30 Variations ("Goldberg")                                              |
| Bach-Busoni:   | Chaconne                                                                         |
|                | Toccata                                                                          |
| Bach-Liszt:    | Fantaisie et fugue pour orgue en sol mineur                                      |
| Bach-Philipp:  | Passacaille                                                                      |
| Bach-Tausig:   | Toccata et fugue                                                                  |
| Bach, W.F.:    | Capriccio                                                                        |
| Balakirev:     | Islamey                                                                           |
| Beethoven:     | Choral Fantasia, Op. 80                                                          |
|                | Concerti Nos. 4 (G major) and 5 (Eb major)                                       |
|                | 15 Variations in Eb major ("Eroica"), Op. 35                                     |
|                | 32 Variations in c minor, Wo0 80                                                  |
|                | 33 Variations, Op. 120 ("Diabelli")                                              |
Brahms: Sonata in f minor, Op. 5
       Variations and fugue on a theme by Händel, Op. 24
       Variations on a theme by Paganini, Op. 35, Books I, II

Chabrier: Bourée fantasque

Chevillard: Variations

Chopin: Allegro de Concert, Op. 57
       Concerto No. 2 in f minor, Op. 21
       Ballades Nos. 1 in g minor, 3 in Ab major,
           4 in f minor
       Barcarolle, Op. 60
       Etudes, Op. 10
       Fantaisie in f minor, Op. 49
       Polonaise in f# minor
       Polonaise-Fantaisie, Op. 61
       Préludes
       Scherzi Nos. 1 in b minor (Op. 20), 3 in c# minor (Op. 39), 4 in E major (Op. 54)
       Sonatas Nos. 2 in b minor, Op. 35 and 3 in b minor, Op. 58

Couperin: Le Tic-toc-choc

Dukas: Sonate
       Variations, interlude et finale sur un thème de Rameau

Fauré: Ballade
       Impromptu No. 5 en fa dièse mineur (Op. 102)
       Nocturnes Nos. 2 en si majeur (Op. 33, No. 6), 6 en re majeur (Op. 63),
           7 en ut dièse mineur (Op. 74)
       Thème et Variations, Op. 73
       Valse-Caprices Nos. 1 en la majeur (Op. 30)
           2 (Op. 38), 3 en sol bémol majeur
           (Op. 59), 4 en la bémol majeur (Op. 62)

Franck: Les Djinns
       Prélude, aria et finale
       Prélude, choral et fugue
       Variations symphoniques

Glazunov: Variations en fa dièse mineur, Op. 72

Granados: Fandango (from Goyescas)
          Concerto

Guiraud: Allegro de Concert

Händel: Fugue in F major [from Suite No. 2]

d'Indy: Sonate

Liapunov: Lesghinka (Etudes d'exécution transcendante, Op. 11)
          Variations, Op. 49

Liszt: Au bord d'une source (Années de Pèlerinage)
       "La Campanella" Etude
       Concert solo [?]
       Concerto in E♭
       Don Juan Fantaisie
       Etude en fa mineur
       Feux follets
       Gnommenreigen
       Les Jeux d'eau à la Villa d'Este
       (Années de Pèlerinage)
       "La Leggierezza" Etude
       Mazeppa (12 Etudes d'exécution transcendante)
       Mephisto Walzer I
       Paganini Etudes
       Polonaise [No. 1?]
       Rapsodie hongroise No. 13
       Rapsodie espagnole
       Scherzo et marche
       Sonate en si mineur
       Sonate (Après une lecture de Dante)
       Totentanz
       Variations sur un thème de Bach
       Venezia et Napoli

Mendelssohn: Variations en mi bémol majeur, Op. 82

Mozart: Fantaisie en ut mineur, K. 396
        Fantaisie et fugue en ut majeur, K. 394

Paderewski: Variations et fugue en la mineur, Op. 11

Rachmaninoff: Concerto [sic]

Rimsky-Korsakov: Concerto in c# minor, Op. 30
Saint-Saëns: "Africa" [Fantasia], Op. 89
Caprice sur Alceste
Concerti Nos. 2 en sol mineur (Op. 22),
3 en mi bémol majeur (Op. 29), 4 en ut
mineur (Op. 44), 5 en fa majeur (Op. 103)
Thème varié, Op. 97

Saint-Saëns-Liszt: Danse macabre

Schubert: Sonata in a minor, D. 784 (Op. 143)

Schumann: Carnaval
Concerto in A minor, Op. 54
Concerto sans orchestra [Sonata in f minor], Op. 134
Concertstück in G major, Op. 92
Davidsbündlertänze
Etudes symphoniques
Fantaisie
Humoresque
Kreisleriana
Novelettes Nos. 2 in D major,
8 in f# minor (Op. 21)
Sonatas in f# minor (Op. 11), g minor
(Op. 22)
Toccata in C, Op. 7

Strauss: Burleske in d minor

Tchaikowsky: Concerto No. 1 in b♭ minor

Weber: Sonata in A♭ major, Op. 39

This list, encompassing nearly ten years of examination pieces, leans heavily towards the impressive, i.e., towards literature of substantial scope and technical difficulty that allowed pupils to display their accomplishments to best advantage. The full study programs did include smaller, less demanding works of Cortot's favorite composers, but fewer than one might imagine. He definitely concentrated on the "big" concert repertoire. Considering that Cortot had only twelve
pupils, the number of different pieces presented is extensive. He obviously did not like to repeat himself. Not only did no two pupils present the same work in any given year, but the vast majority of works were offered to the juries only once or twice in the nine years inventoried. Inevitably, there were some duplications. Cortot's favorites for the exams were an odd lot: the Schumann *Etudes symphoniques* were prepared seven times, Fauré's *Ballade* and *Thème et variations* and Liszt's *Sonate (Après une lecture de Dante)* six times each. The Chopin work most often repeated was the *Polonaise-Fantaisie*, assigned five times.

Cortot's teaching repertoire for the exams paralleled to a considerable extent his own performance repertoire, except that he taught more Beethoven and Russian music and much more Liszt than he regularly programmed in his concerts. Marthe Morhange-Motchane recalled that during her years in the class (1914-19), Cortot had her learn "almost all the big sonatas of Beethoven (I even studied the first movement of the 'Hammerklavier'), the 'Eroica' and c minor *Variations*, and the Concerti Nos. 2 [in B♭ major] and 3 [in c minor]. He wanted impassioned performances of Beethoven, with vivid contrasts, but he stressed that there should be no exaggerating in this music." The presence of half a dozen Bach works, albeit in Romantic transcriptions, confirms that the days when Conservatoire pianists could graduate without having read a
note of Bach were over by the time Cortot started teaching there. In fact, in the early years of this century the preparatory level professors, perhaps at Fauré's urging, had begun to assign quite a lot of Bach. Cortot and Isidor Philipp continued to teach this literature at the advanced level. According to Magda Tagliaferro, Cortot's pupils customarily played "some Bach, an étude of Chopin and then [concert] pieces, the exact number and choice of which depended on their level of advancement."

I myself worked on many pieces at the same time with Cortot (I probably covered more than the typical pupil in his class, since I had private lessons). I was always studying Chopin études or a piece of that genre like Liapunov's Leschinka, and a sonata or a piece like Schumann's Fantasia [Op. 17]--something from the big repertoire, in other words.... And then I would often play several short pieces for him. His lessons went on and on. He didn't give me the fifty-five minute type!96

Pupils had to learn fast in Cortot's class. As a rule, he expected them to prepare a newly assigned work or movement for performance in its entirety in the following class; the week after that it was to be memorized. Obviously, this would require all but the most extraordinarily gifted to work long and hard. How much did Cortot expect students to practice daily? The question has no simple answer. Mme. Tagliaferro, one may recall, said that Cortot thought that four or five hours of intelligent work a day was enough. That is what he often maintained in later years. Clara Haskil's biographer, relying no doubt on information learned from Haskil's sisters, states that Cortot urged pupils to practice seven or eight
hours a day. This is considerable for an adolescent, especially since Cortot demanded concentrated, intensely involved practicing, not mindless drill. Perhaps he did advocate seven or eight hours in his first years of Conservatoire teaching, then learned from experience to adjust his requirements to the individual student's physical capacities. In his student evaluations (rapports de professeur) for January, 1908 he notes that a certain Mlle. Duchesne had furnished "excellent work--too conscientious even, since it has resulted in a rather severe wrist strain (fatigue)." By 1912, when Jeanne Leleu entered the class, Cortot was more prudent:

Cortot was an immensely inspiring teacher, and I worked very hard to be ready for lessons. One day he turned to me and asked: "How long do you practice?" "All day, Maitre," I answered (and that was the truth). His face took on a concerned look, and after a moment's reflection he said: "Tell your maman that I said you should practice only two hours a day."

Well, I cut back a little, but two hours a day was absolutely impossible, as I'm sure he knew. One simply could not learn the music assigned and keep up with the other pupils in the class unless one practiced a great deal.

Cortot's expectations of his students, in terms of repertoire level and work load, were not out of line with those of his colleagues. If Delaborde had his pupils prepare slightly less demanding programs for the exams than Cortot, Philipp required as much or more from his pupils. It is interesting to compare the three professors' reports for a typical year, 1910. Cortot is loquacious, Philipp gives
capsule assessments without elaborating, Delaborde is dry and caustic (the pupils, it should be said, did not see these reports):

Rapports des professeurs May, 1910

Cortot

Parody (Bach-Tausig: Toccata and Fugue Chopin: Scherzo No. 4). Very good work since her return to Paris - seems to me to have improved a poor tone quality, which tended to be a little harsh.

Boucher de Vernicourt (Liszt: ['Dante'] Sonata quasi una Fantasia Fauré: Ballade). Excellent student. Very hard-working, very attentive to observations. Perhaps too attentive, in the sense that the playing is sometimes a little lacking in personality - very impressionable.

Davin (Liszt: Rhapsodie espagnole Schumann: Novelette No. 8). A great deal of progress - doesn't manage, however, to overcome an excessive nervousness that deprives her of part of her resources.

Duchesne (Liszt: Concert solo Mendelssohn: Variations in Eb). Satisfactory work this year. Her technical means put her at a disadvantage, but the improvement over this winter suggests that there's hope for a [positive] outcome.


Schulhof (Chopin: Fantaisie Schumann: Concert sans Orchestre [Sonata in f minor]). A little stationary this year. Too preoccupied with improving her technique - the musical growth has slowed down a little. Good worker, though.

Dubief (Bach-Philipp: Passacaille Liszt: Gnomorenreigen). Remarkable and intelligent work. Not quite spirited enough - but the musical sensitivity has grown very much.

Hubert (Schumann: Variations symphoniques Liszt: La Leggier-ezza). Very good student - very courageous - but a little too recherché (se cherchant un peu trop) at the expense of simplicity in the playing.
Léon, A. (Chopin: Polonaise-Fantaisie Liszt: Sonata in b minor). Remarkable nature - fire, works with ardor, musical gifts. Often wants to premeditate things a little too much (veut mettre trop d'intention dans son exécution) - that's the only criticism I can come up with.

Baillot (Chopin: Finale of the Sonata in b minor Beethoven: ['Eroica'] Variations in Bb). Good student - industrious - good work - seems to me ready to compete.

Meerovitch (Chopin: Polonaise in f# minor Schumann: Toccata Fauré: 2nd nocturne). Exceptionally gifted - great pianistic abilities (facilités), should play an excellent competition.

Philipp


Ruffin (Brahms: Variations Schumann: Novelette No. 2). Has made some progress; works well.


Gelly: not well


Ravaisse: sick


Delaborde


Prélat (Schumann: Sonata No. 3 Fauré: Thème et variations). Mediocre.

Hayot (Chopin: Scherzo No. 2). Sweet kid (Gentil baby) but a rank amateur.

Blanquer (Saint-Saëns: Toccata Schumann: Sonata No. 2 Fauré: 2nd Impromptu). Nice (gentille) - works very well - playing a little harsh.


Arnauld (Chopin: Scherzo No. 1 Fauré: 2nd Valse-Caprice). Works - will do well I think.
Cortot and Philipp assigned much the same type of repertoire but utilized it to quite different didactic ends. One cannot deduce the whole picture of a professor's teaching from reports like the above, especially if they consist, as in Delaborde's case, of only a curt judgment. Yet student evaluations can reveal something of a teacher's priorities. It is surely significant that year after year\textsuperscript{101} Cortot is the only one of the three professors whose reports call attention to pupil's stylistic and interpretive shortcomings, and to their tone quality. Philipp is attentive to signs of progress—pianistic progress, that is. "Technique," stated Bertrand, "was for [Philipp] the only element which mattered in the formation of the performer. As he saw it, the essential task of the professor is to establish a foundation that allows the pupil's artistic nature to express itself subsequently. He intentionally refrain[ed] from suggesting any particular style to his disciples, preferring to leave each personality free to develop on its own...."\textsuperscript{102}

Cortot's Editorial Debut: The First Commented Study Editions.

It would be fascinating to consult some of the scores belonging to Cortot's Conservatoire pupils to discover what, and how much, he marked on the music in the years before he made his own editions. Regrettably, not one annotated copy from that era could be located.\textsuperscript{103} A number of pupils had lost theirs in the upheaval of half a century and two wars. Others, according to Mme. Morhange-Motchane, never owned the scores
they learned from at the Conservatoire. They borrowed study copies from the lending libraries operated by music publishers and distributors (e.g., Max Eschig). When they had finished working on a piece they returned it, carefully erasing all markings. Cortot, by all reports, did not insist on a particular edition (pupils brought whatever they owned), but he had definite preferences. In general, he liked Peters best. Litolff was his second choice, despite the fact that its publications frequently contained misprints he had to correct, because Litolff editions often had comments to the student.

Comments to the student—Cortot must hold some kind of dubious record in this area, with certain pages of his later editions showing one line of musical text garnished with three-quarters of a page of commentary! Cortot completed his first study editions (éditions de travail), devoted to the Chopin *Etudes*, Op. 10 (1914) and 25 (1915), while he was still teaching at the Conservatoire. It was no coincidence that they were published during World War I. For some time French pianists had been relying heavily on German editions. French publishing firms, unwilling to undertake expensive editions for a limited clientele, had let matters slide to the point that when hostilities broke out with Germany, there wasn't a decent French edition of many of the classics left to replace the boycotted German ones. A number of major French firms jumped into the breach. Durand asked Debussy to edit Chopin's music, Dukas to edit Beethoven's; Ravel took charge of Mendelssohn's piano works. Sénart, not to be outdone, commissioned d'Indy
and Risler to do a new edition of Beethoven's piano sonatas. Chopin's music they entrusted to Cortot, an astute choice for commercial as well as artistic reasons: an indispensable work such as the *Etudes*, edited by a famous French interpreter, was a sure-fire bestseller.

Thus began Cortot's long series of annotated study editions. He started slowly. The next edition to follow the *Etudes*—that of the Chopin *Préludes*—did not appear until 1926, but by the 'thirties Cortot was steadily turning out Chopin editions. The stream became a flood in the 'forties, when Sénart was absorbed by Salabert. By 1960 Cortot had amassed seventy-six editions of the romantic piano literature: Chopin, Schumann (these two composers nearly complete), Liszt, Mendelssohn, Schubert and Weber for Sénart-Salabert; Franck and Brahms for Curci of Milan.

In Cortot's edition of the *Etudes* one finds relatively little poetic commentary, but extensive technical advice and preparatory exercises. The foundation for Cortot's study method is established right in this first edition: "La loi essentielle de cette méthode est de travailler, non pas le passage difficile, mais la difficulté contenue dans ce passage en lui restituant son caractère élémentaire." ("The essential principle of this method is to study not the difficult passage but the difficulty itself, reducing it to its basic elements.")\textsuperscript{104} This principle, Cortot asserts, "does away with mechanistic drill which demeans the practice of an Art born of sensitivity and intelligence, and—though appearing on the
surface to be slow and stationary—in fact ensures definite progress." In the same foreword, Cortot claims that his is a "rational method, based on a thoughtful (réfléchie) analysis of the technical difficulties."  

Here Cortot hoists the "rational method" flag for the first time; it will fly again in the title and foreword to the Principes rationnels de la technique pianistique, published in 1928. Let us look at some of the exercises given for the Etude Op. 25, No. 1 in A♭ major:

Example 17. Chopin, Etude Op. 25, No. 1 in A♭ major, mm. 1-2 (original, and exercises by Cortot).

Allegro sostenuto

\[ \text{Example 17. Chopin, Etude Op. 25, No. 1 in A♭ major, mm. 1-2 (original, and exercises by Cortot).} \]
Before going into the merits and drawbacks of individual exercises, it is important to note that with his commented editions of the Etudes, Cortot became the first pianist-teacher to propound in print a full-fledged method of study based on practicing the music by elements. Nineteenth-century teachers by and large gave out few concrete practice suggestions. The bright pupils found on their own some study devices that worked effectively for them. The rest tended to play the piece from beginning to end, again and again. Often this was done with metronome, gradually moving up the tempo, which at least had the advantage of injecting a little challenge into the practicing and of controlling the rate of tempo increase so that the pupil would not jump prematurely to an unmanageable speed or slow down at the difficult passages. It was a procedure that imposed a slight external discipline, but it often involved a tremendous waste of time. Moreover, it was not conducive to really perfecting one's technique and performance via critical listening. The longer the pupil plays on without stopping, the more little "problem spots" (e.g., imprecisions of articulation, dynamics or rhythmic evenness) he will have passed through. When he finally goes back to correct these, the image retained by his ear/brain of "what went wrong" at particular points will have grown fuzzy, or perhaps faded from memory entirely.

Already Liszt hinted that the solution lay in devising a more logical, methodical way of practicing with his famous
remark: "Ce n'est pas l'étude de la technique qui importe, mais la technique de l'étude" ("What really counts is not the study of technique, but the technique of studying"). Towards the end of the century Leschetizky, Busoni and other influential artist teachers evolved methods based on the in-depth study of small passages. Leschetizky emphasized the importance of a crystal-clear mental image of the task to be accomplished, and of concentrated, critical listening:

Decide exactly what it is you want to do in the first place...; then how you will do it; then play it. Stop and think if you played it in the way you meant to; then only, if sure of this, go ahead. Without concentration, ... you can do nothing. The brain must guide the fingers, not the fingers the brain.

Cortot's method of study by elements requires a thinking that is still more highly articulated and specific. Isolating the passage, he analyses it and identifies the technical problem contained therein. Almost invariably he finds the problem to be compound: he then deconstructs the problem into its component difficulties, and designs exercises for each difficulty utilizing some part of the passage (a voice or textural layer, a unit of the pattern or skeleton version that embodies a particular muscular or tone control challenge). Cortot's basic idea is brilliant and potentially of far-reaching consequence. One can construct endless variants upon it, accommodate it to almost any context. The particular manner of its implementation in the exercises for the Etude Op. 25, No. 1, however, is debatable.
Here the component elements are easy to identify: 1) the melody (in large notes), which "carries all the vocal and expressive value"; 2) the arpeggiated figure in small notes, which provides a light, "almost immaterial harmonic support"; and 3) the bass, the main harmonic pillars of which also appear in full size notes. "It is essential," Cortot maintains, "to study each element separately, in detail;... only when the particular difficulties of each have been completely mastered, should one try to combine them into a harmonious whole." Many, including this author, would take issue with the last part of Cortot's statement. It implies that until the pupil has thoroughly mastered all of Cortot's preparatory exercises, he should not play even select passages of the Etude in their original form. Perhaps Cortot stated the matter in extreme terms to impress on the pupil the importance of perfecting each component. If, instead, he expected his advice to be taken literally, one must strenuously object.

A close look at Cortot's exercises reveals that it would take a long time for most pupils to master Nos. 3, 4, 6, 9, 10 and the left hand versions of 6, 8 and 9 as applied to every measure of the piece, then practice each hand separately throughout in six rhythmic variants, then transpose the whole work to A major using the fingering of A♭ major, etc.! What happens to the pupil's musical image of the work while he is focussing on nothing but pieces of the piece? Can it hold together (assuming he reads the work often enough mentally and
can hear it in his inner ear) sufficiently to keep him mindful of where all his preliminary work ought to be leading? Cortot, throughout his writings, insists that it is the poetic idea and interpretive feeling which foster the development of the appropriate technical means. Can the pupil--not an artist like Cortot who knows the work intimately already--keep his poetic sensibilities sharp, his emotions involved, while practicing only exercises on elements? Doubtful.

Turning now to the particular exercises invented by Cortot, one notes that in most cases, he specifies what the exercise aims to achieve. This is commendable since it keeps the pupil attentive to the immediate goals. It also enables us not only to assess the validity of the aims, but to ascertain whether the exercise accomplishes what is claimed for it. No. 1 is intended to develop a firm touch and the appropriate tone quality for the fifth finger melody notes. The hand is to trace a big curve above the keyboard on the octave jumps, while the wrist remains extremely supple. Assurance and control in leaps is the objective, then. Without doubt, practicing with flexible wrist/arms and a bold, curvilinear gesture that propels the finger/hand to a decisive landing in the middle of the note will promote a generally higher level of security and control in jumps. It may even lead to greater confidence in octave jumps of the fifth finger. But will it improve the fifth finger jumps in this \textit{Etude}? There are no jumps of 5 to 5, nor are there any octave jumps involving the fifth finger
(as one of two participating fingers) in the piece. It would seem, therefore, that the benefits to be realized from the exercise are quite indirect.

Instead of practicing:

\[\text{etc.}\]

it would be more relevant to practice:

\[\text{etc.}\]

or better yet:

\[\text{etc.}\]

and:

\[\text{etc.}\]

The first retains the actual intervals (and fingerings) involving the fifth finger melody while the latter two respect the pattern frame (i.e., the overall hand span called for).
Cortot's exercise No. 2, which aims to develop highly contrasting touch/tone species for melody and arpeggio tones, is more to the point. Yet here, as elsewhere in his remarks on Op. 25, No. 1, Cortot insists on independent finger action without any hand or arm involvement: "Avoid replacing the finger articulation with a movement of the hand." Later he puts it even more categorically: "Let me repeat that the ethereal, poetic tone quality of the accompaniment depends entirely on a light articulation of the fingers in isolation (seuls). Any participation of the hand, any holding down of the keys overly long, would cause a thickening of the sound... that would spoil the impression of a glistening cascade of notes...."

An accomplished pianist will not take Cortot too literally, but will try to find the most efficient, natural means of realizing the final objectives posed—a vaporous sonority and a leggieriero touch. Cortot's advice, however, might easily lead an immature and inexperienced pupil astray. First of all, the extensions in much of Chopin's figuration are such that a normal hand must rely on arm movements to carry it to the melody notes. Is Cortot suggesting, then, that the accompaniment pattern be executed in a stationary position, followed by a quick jump at the last minute to the melody notes? Surely not. A non-integrated movement like this is extremely difficult to control tonally and to execute with rhythmic precision and vitality. Such an approach is also very
conducive to excessive muscular tension. Cortot knew very well that a "floating arm" conducting the hand in natural, continuous lateral adjusting movements is not incompatible with a minimally weighted finger touch on the accompaniment. Unfortunately, he fails to make it clear that what is detrimental to a refined, poetic rendering of the accompaniment is not movement, but undue weight of the hand or arm on the keys.\textsuperscript{113}

Cortot's exercises Nos. 3 and 4 are constructed using the melody (shaped with the original dynamic nuances, each note held down for its full value) as the upper part and a repeated-note variant on one, then two notes of the arpeggio as a lower part. These exercises are similar to advanced "held-note" (\textit{tenue}) exercises for finger independence except that Cortot injects an additional agility factor by requiring a switch of fingers in the repeated-note voice, thus:

\begin{center}
\begin{music}
\startsheet
g \hspace{0.5cm} \nolabel\newpolymark \shift -5 \polymark {\textit{tenue}}
\measure {5}
\score\upper{\hspace{0.5cm} e' e' e' e' e' d' d' c' b' g' f' f' e' d'}
\score\lower{\hspace{0.5cm} e' e' e' e' e' d' d' c' b' g' f' f' e' d'}
\score\lower{\hspace{0.5cm} e' e' e' e' e' d' d' c' b' g' f' f' e' d'}
\measure {8}
\score\upper{\hspace{0.5cm} e' e' e' e' e' d' d' c' b' g' f' f' e' d'}
\score\lower{\hspace{0.5cm} e' e' e' e' e' d' d' c' b' g' f' f' e' d'}
\score\lower{\hspace{0.5cm} e' e' e' e' e' d' d' c' b' g' f' f' e' d'}
\end{music}
\end{center}

These variants are to be applied to each measure of the piece, as are all the exercises. In both the third and fourth exercise this results in some very unrealistic stretches that must be arpeggiated:

\begin{center}
\begin{music}
\startsheet
\measure {5}
\score\upper{\hspace{0.5cm} e' e' e' e' e' d' d' c' b' g' f' f' e' d'}
\score\lower{\hspace{0.5cm} e' e' e' e' e' d' d' c' b' g' f' f' e' d'}
\score\lower{\hspace{0.5cm} e' e' e' e' e' d' d' c' b' g' f' f' e' d'}
\measure {8}
\score\upper{\hspace{0.5cm} e' e' e' e' e' d' d' c' b' g' f' f' e' d'}
\score\lower{\hspace{0.5cm} e' e' e' e' e' d' d' c' b' g' f' f' e' d'}
\score\lower{\hspace{0.5cm} e' e' e' e' e' d' d' c' b' g' f' f' e' d'}
\end{music}
\end{center}
Cortot's rationale for this complicated fingering is that "switching fingers on the third and sixth note of the sextuplet results in greater consistency and accuracy in the accompaniment pattern, in my opinion, than does using the same finger [i.e., either 3 or 4] on the same notes, and is, in any case, a skill well worth working on." However, he adds, "it may be that using a constant fingering throughout... results in greater fluency and speed."114 He also advocates changing fingers on the grounds that "it accustoms the fifth finger to being utterly independent."115 Should one practice these exercises if one is not going to switch fingers? Cortot would probably say yes, on general principles. It is reasonable to assume that if they were practiced to mastery under the supervision of a vigilant teacher who stressed flexibility as well as tonal control, the pupil would indeed see an overall gain in suppleness, facility, agility, etc. He would not necessarily play this Etude better in the short term, however. The German technical theorist F. A. Steinhausen put it succinctly: "One cannot learn movement A by practicing movement B."116

Let's assume that the performer chooses to change fingers in at least some measures of the Etude. Does the return in direct technical gains justify the investment of time and energy required to perfect the exercises? Perhaps not, for these reasons: 1) even with changing fingers, the gestures automatized in learning the exercises are not all that similar
to the gestures needed to play the Etude, meaning that direct transfer of learning takes place only to a moderate degree; 2) these two exercises are to all appearances more difficult than the original composition, raising the question of how far technical "overkill" should be pursued before it leads the pianist away from the real aim of study, which is to master the musical text of Chopin. In any event, one would be wise to use discretion, applying the exercise only to those passages which pose a real technical problem, and not to every measure in the piece, as Cortot's "etc." would have one do.

Cortot's exercise No. 7 is a little gem, excellent for promoting independence and agility of the fingers and reminiscent of those which open Chapter I of his Principes rationnels. It could be played with or without the changing fingering recommended by Cortot. Cortot suggests transposing it into all keys:

Exercise 7.

This exercise would constitute an effective sequel to Hanon and other invariable-pattern exercises which soon become
automatized. Each segment of Cortot's exercise presents a different, slightly expanded pattern. The whole, therefore, is not easily turned into a mindless drill. Each pattern, moreover, occurs often in the standard literature. Since there are no held notes to be continuously depressed, the arm and wrist are not immobilized and unduly strained. The only problem is that the exercise is not germane to the specific difficulties encountered in the Etude, Op. 25 No. 1. It really should be assigned earlier in the pupil's studies, as a general technique developer. As such it can serve equally well an approach emphasizing finger articulation or one emphasizing arm participation, depending on the manner in which it is practiced.

For some of the Etudes Cortot constructs exercises of immediate relevance to the work's difficulties. For instance, these exercises for the Etude, Op. 25, No. 3 in F major, created by factoring out the structural frame and decorative elements, are entirely pertinent to the technical challenges of the piece:

Example 18. Chopin, Etude Op. 25, No. 3 in F major, m. 1 (original, and exercises by Cortot)
Example 18. Chopin, *Etude* in F major, m. 1 (continued).

Even the following exercise, which exceeds the original in difficulty, still retains some practical value, promoting lightness and clarity of the trill parts and exact synchronization of the two hands on these:

What sets these exercises apart from the less useful ones for the *Etude* in A♭ major is above all that each preserves some of the essential motions called for in the original text.
When Cortot's exercises miss the mark, it is usually because he has succumbed to a kind of classificatory mentality that strives to cover all bases and that deconstructs passages in a thoroughly systematic, almost mathematical fashion. He concocts encyclopedic permutations on fragments that may make sense on an abstract, structural level (i.e., they may display surface formal kinship with an original component), but are neither rational nor "natural" from the physiological standpoint. Busoni, who probably had the idea of practicing by elements before Cortot but who never elaborated a system on this principle, observed in his edition of Bach's Well-Tempered Clavier that in deconstructing a musical context one must subdivide "according to its musical motives, the position of the tones on the keyboard, or the change of direction." He emphasized thereby that the configuration of the piano keys and of the "choreographic" movements necessary to play and shape a line must be considered in deciding what constitutes an "element" for practice purposes, and what kind of modifications—if any—it can undergo in exercises without becoming denatured.

"Once we reach the level of the element, it must be faced head-on," writes Kaemper.

[W]e cannot simplify any further without depriving the studying of meaning. In transposing a motive and displacing the rhythmic accents, one changes the movement which serves to play it. The lower limit of subdivision in a passage is this organic entity that theoreticians have called "element." And this musical and mental unit must be equivalent to the physiological unit: the gesture.
For this reason, some of Cortot's practice devices for the Etude, Op. 25, No. 1—such as transposing the whole to A major using the fingering of Ab major, or playing hands separately in different rhythmic variants—are from a strictly physiological standpoint of limited help in facilitating mastery of this particular piece. More effective would be Busoni's strategy of "dividing passages into modules (incises),... each of which he would go through several times very slowly, [then] proceed straightaway to play two or three times in a row at top speed, with virtuosic brilliance,... joining the fragments together afterwards." Applied to the opening measure of the Etude, Busoni's approach would give this:

Play other beats individually, then combine without repetitions, stopping on the first note of the next measure.
While this strategy might not be enough by itself to carry many pupils to a finished performance level, it does have the advantage of replicating in microcosm the ultimate physiological conditions of performance. It also allows time for reflection and conscious relaxation between "practice spurts."

Cortot's desire to avoid any kind of practice that smacked of "mechanical work" (his term) was no doubt at the root of his preoccupation with devising ingenious, at times impractical, finger challenges and variants that altered every conceivable aspect of the original text elements. His concern to minimize the aspect of mindless drill in practicing was legitimate, especially given the heavy emphasis on exercises and études in the French school. Moreover, many of the tactics he employed to combat it were not novel. Back in the eighteen-nineties, Philipp was already urging pupils to practice his technical method and finger independence exercises in all keys, with varied touches, dynamics and rhythmic patterns. Antonin Marmontel, too, had his pupils practice their music in altered (usually dotted) rhythmic patterns.\textsuperscript{121} Cortot goes still further sometimes, changing the fingerings and the interval sizes in his exercises. In doing this, he not only eliminates mechanistic drill, he complicates the essential process of conscious conditioning of the optimal movements.

Cortot tends even more to try to hit every angle in his edition of Chopin's \textit{Etudes}, Op. 10. This is the only edition
in which he spells out exactly how many times the pupil is to do each exercise, and specifies at the head of each étude the particular technical gains the pupil may expect to realize from the piece as a whole. He suggests, with regard to the Etude Op. 10, No. 1 in C major, that once the work is well known the pupil should "play it slowly, transposing it to all keys but keeping the fingering used in C major." At least the student is allowed to learn the work in the original key first, here. In the preparatory work for Op. 10, No. 9 in f minor, one is advised to practice scales and arpeggios in all keys with every permutation of two, three, four and five fingers! For example:

- two fingers: 1212 etc., 1313 etc., 1414, 1515, 2323, 2424, 2525, 3434, 3535, 4545
- three fingers: 123123 etc., 134134, 145145, 234234, 235235, 145145, 345345

What exactly this has to do with the f minor Etude is not made clear (Cortot says that the purpose is to learn to equalize the tone of different fingers). Nor are we told why we should practice arpeggios with 4545 when there is scarcely one occasion in the standard literature when such a fingering would be needed.

British performer-teacher Sidney Harrison, a great admirer of Cortot's playing, harshly criticizes Cortot's approach, though not on grounds of practicality. Rather, he suspects it to be psychologically harmful:
Every Chopin shape is rearranged in repeated notes or altered rhythms or alternative fingerings. Chords are spread out as arpeggios: arpeggios are consolidated into chords. Each exercise seems to cry out, "You're not ready yet: don't dare to begin the piece." Cortot's attitude to technical exercises was positively sadomasochistic,... as is made clear in his Rational Principles of Pianoforte Technique. This prescribes a preparatory period of six months' work.

........................................

Never is Cortot willing to suggest a few possibilities of refingering. He prints all possibilities.... In the Principles one finds a chromatic scale in thirds [for one hand] fingered in something like thirty different ways. And in the Chopin Etudes there are many exercises that are the musical equivalent of tongue-twisters, as for example holding C with the second finger of the left hand while practising a trill on two notes below it--A and B flat played with the thumb and third finger. This is supposed to help us to play the "Revolutionary" Etude. This approach to total command of technique can easily produce total anxiety.... However, as with Schmitz,125 there is something of importance to be extracted from Cortot's self-torture.126

This is a serious reproach. If it could be shown that in the long run, practicing Cortot's exercises eroded rather than bolstered students' confidence, such a finding would cast doubts on the value of his "method" as a whole. Fortunately, although mastering the exercises does not guarantee the complete technical security that Cortot may have imagined they would provide, studying them rarely if ever makes the pupil more insecure. If it were so, teachers and pupils would have discovered it in the fifty to seventy years that most Cortot editions have been in print, and Cortot's didactic writings would have slipped into oblivion along with countless others that enjoyed a passing vogue. Instead, both the study editions and the Principes rationnels are still very much in use--not only in France, but in North and South America, Japan, Russia
and many other places where pianists are nurtured.\textsuperscript{127} Most contemporary teachers who are partial to Cortot's publications use the exercises just as they were commonly used in Cortot's time by the teachers he trained: selectively, in accordance with the individual technical and musical needs of the pupil.\textsuperscript{128}

To derive the greatest advantage from Cortot's study editions one cannot treat them as gospel that must be digested from cover to cover. They are source books, from which the teacher can draw either "remedies" or special challenges as the situation requires, assigning some exercises prior to, some concomitant with, and still others after study of the piece itself. Certain of Cortot's exercises for the Chopin \textit{Etudes}, for instance, can and probably should be studied long before the pupil may be able to give a polished rendering of the pieces. They address skills which should no longer be problematic to a pianist who presumes to play the \textit{Etudes}.\textsuperscript{129}

It has always seemed to this author that the redeeming value of Cortot's study editions does not reside primarily in the immediate technical gains that accrue to the student, nor even in the particular ideas expressed in the interpretive commentary, however apt and inspiring. It lies above all in the heightened level of concentration that Cortot's exercises exact and in the capacity of the commentary and exercises together to activate the pupil's vital energies and keep him focussed on the musical objectives during the learning stages.
The pupil has not been born who will not come away from having practiced half a dozen of Cortot's exercises (to proficiency) knowing better how a piece is put together, hearing its melodic, harmonic and rhythmic details more clearly, and probably having stronger interpretive ideas about it. By virtue of their resistance to easy automatization, his exercises compel conscious attention. Attention fosters observation, analysis and insight, the prerequisites for an ever-deepening comprehension of the music.

In his edition of the Chopin *Etudes*, Cortot limited his poetic commentary mainly to describing the character of the sonority needed for individual voices and for the composite tonal image. He asserted in the foreword that he was deliberately abstaining from giving aesthetic guidelines: "Rules can be set down, if need be, for the craft (*l'exercice manuel*) of an Art. There can be no rules dictating the expression of personality and taste." In subsequent study editions he retreated from this position. Perhaps it was the subjective character of the music under discussion (the *Préludes*, *Ballades*, *Sonatas*, *Impromptus*, *Walses*, all more evocative than the *Etudes*). Perhaps it was closer contact at the Ecole Normale with the type of student likely to use his editions. Whatever the reason, Cortot began furnishing ample interpretive remarks aimed at stirring the imagination and keeping the pupil mindful of the ulterior—poetic and emotive—goals of his work.
International Recognition.

Between ca. 1910 and 1914 Cortot's performance career skyrocketed. Already something of a celebrity in France, he took only a few short years to establish himself on the European piano circuit. Gone were the days of month-long tours in trio with Thibaud and Casals\textsuperscript{132} and jaunts to the French provinces to inaugurate Pleyel pianos. Recital and orchestral engagements in the major musical centers across Europe began flowing in: Cortot was a critical and popular success in London, Geneva, Madrid, Leipzig, Frankfurt, Milan, Amsterdam, Brussels.\textsuperscript{133}

Inevitably, all this concertizing required Cortot to absent himself from Paris and his Conservatoire class more and more often. Earlier he had been able to fill most of the engagements in a single concentrated leave of absence during March or April. Now he toured intermittently throughout the second trimester--three weeks here, two there, another week here.... By the 1913-14 school year things had escalated to the point that Cortot was in Germany, Italy, Spain and France from December to February 24. Then he left again from March 5-22, this time to England, Ireland and Wales. Finally, in April there was a quick trip to Switzerland, and who knows how many concerts in French municipalities. During brief absences Cortot left Mme. Giraud-Latarse in charge of the class. When he had to be away for longer tours, he arranged for an official
suppléant (Lazare-Lévy in the first years, then Alfredo Casella from ca. 1910) to stand in for him.

No doubt Cortot's frequent absences gave ammunition to critics of Fauré who were opposed to the practice of hiring active performers, but there is no record of any official complaints.\textsuperscript{134} Cortot was in favor with Fauré and with the students: all his eligible pupils were regularly admitted to the annual public concours, and his class won more than its share of first prizes and total honors.\textsuperscript{135} He was besieged with requests for private lessons from aspiring Conservatoire entrants and always had more promising pupils to present in the fall than he had vacancies.

The outbreak of World War I in the summer of 1914 put a halt to all concert tours except military-sponsored projects for four years. At the Conservatoire it was education as usual, however, once the immediate danger of the initial Austro-German offensive was over.\textsuperscript{136} Cortot, while continuing to teach his classes,\textsuperscript{137} was recalled to active military service in February 1915. He was assigned first to staff headquarters in the office of Health Services (Service de Santé) commanded by General Gallieni.\textsuperscript{138} Then in April 1916 he was transferred to the staff of M. Dalimier, Under-Secretary of State for Beaux-Arts, who named him head secretary (Chef de Cabinet) in 1917. When Clemenceau came to power the post of Under-Secretary was eliminated and the cultural affairs office integrated into the new Ministry of Public Instruction and
Beaux-Arts. Cortot was retained as supervisor of artistic propaganda abroad. He was responsible for initiating and coordinating all manner of French cultural events (music, theater, painting, architecture) in countries friendly to France. Naturally, he gave special attention to musical matters, working openly and behind the scenes to secure concert engagements and job appointments for French musicians.139 His official title at the close of the war was Director of the Research Department and Secretary of the Advisory Committee of Action Artistique à l'Etranger.140 Significantly, his colleague and successor at Action Artistique was none other than Auguste Mangeot, with whom he would shortly join forces in a more ambitious project: directing the soon-to-be-established Ecole Normale de Musique.

Cortot's work at Action Artistique brought him valuable contacts abroad, notably with British concert societies and with Walter Damrosch and Henri Casadesus, both influential figures on the American musical scene.141 When the Comité Franco-Américain142 decided to sponsor a tour of the States by the Orchestre de la Société des Concerts du Conservatoire in 1918, Cortot handled arrangements on the French side. Although Edouard Risler was originally slated to accompany the orchestra on tour as its official soloist, this plum assignment ultimately went to Cortot.143 It proved to be a felicitous turn of events for Cortot, to say the least: the American tour
gave his career a terrific boost and led to recording sessions and five more successful tours of the United States between 1919 and 1926.
Chapter VII: Notes

1Entretiens, "Enseignement."

2Cortot gave his last series of public master classes, devoted to Beethoven's sonatas, in November of 1961; he was eighty-four. Though sick most of the winter of 1961-62, he still had plans to give one last session at the Ecole Normale in June of 1962, according to Maurice Dumesnil ("Alfred Cortot," p. 13). After tests in Paris, he was admitted in late spring to the Nestlé Clinic (Lausanne), suffering from multiple arteriosclerosis and lung cancer (see A.G., p. 195). He declined rapidly and passed away on June 15, 1962; the immediate cause of death was uremia.

3Considering the countless projects Cortot carried out in other fields, one wonders where he found the time to teach at all. His manager Charles Kiesgen told Dumesnil (ibid., p. 12): "It's very simple: he slept very little. I accompanied him on many tours of the French provinces. Invariably after his long program there was a banquet... last[ing] until two or three in the morning. At seven-thirty Cortot would knock at my door, all dressed and with his hat on.... During the ride [to the next city] he read newspapers or books. His vitality was simply amazing."

4Up to the early 1930's Cortot, Philipp, Thibaud and other chefs d'école conducted reviews (inspections) of the classes of teachers working under their supervision. From comments of Mme. Bascourret (interviews with the author, April and May 1978), it would seem that although some instruction to students was given, the main purpose of the review was to assess the quality of the teaching.

5Rudolph Firkusny journeyed all the way from Czechoslovakia in the hope of studying with Cortot but even a major talent such as he was tactfully turned down. After listening to him play, Cortot reportedly told the young pianist: "My boy you don't need a teacher, you need a public." "He offered me his friendship," recalled Firkusny, "and he offered me an engagement with him conducting. But I couldn't study with him and this greatly disturbed me. As flattered as I was with the compliment he paid me, I was still more than a little sorry." Cited in "Rudolf Firkusny" [interview with Robert Silverman], Piano Quarterly No. 139 (Fall 1987), p. 27.

6In retrospect, Fauré's administration was judged by some to have been rather ineffective. An unsigned editorial in the Monde Musical (November 24, 1924, p. 362) noted that while "he enacted several positive reforms,... he was not the man to
impose disciplines. Too good, ... too indulgent, he increased the number of prizes awarded excessively without raising the level of the classes, devaluing the title of premier prix."


8 Camille Chevillard (1859-1923), composer and conductor of the Orchestre Lamoureux, Lucien Capet (1873-1928), esteemed violinist, teacher and founder of the Quatuor Capet, and Risler were the appointments of which Fauré was most proud at this point in his tenure. Others whose appointments he later secured included Paul Dukas, Vincent d'Indy, Philippe Gaubert, Jules Boucherit and Eugène Gigout.

9 The above are all excerpts from letters published in Gabriel Fauré, Lettres intimes, presented by Philippe Fauré-Fremiet (Paris: La Colombe, 1951), pp. 137-40.

10 Marguerite Long, who would have loved to inherit the class of her mentor Marmontel, was one artist Fauré did convince not to apply. As she recalls it (Au piano avec Gabriel Fauré, p. 67), Fauré assured her that "the next class opening would be mine by right." His reneging on what she considered a "formal promise" caused a permanent rupture in their relations.

11 The procedure was as follows: representatives of the Beaux-Arts and council members appointed by the Conservatoire voted in secret, as many rounds as were necessary for one candidate to gain a majority. This person was then submitted as the first choice (en première ligne). The voting continued until a second choice gained a majority, then a third. Beaux-Arts had the final decision among these three, but rarely overrode the first choice of the committee.


13 Ibid. Voting that day were E. Dujardin-Beaumetz, Fernand Bourgeat (Secretary), Adrien Bernheim, and Jean d'Estournelles from the government ministries, plus Fauré, Bigaud-Talèrè, Rose Caron, Ernest Reyer, Jules Massenet, Charles Léneveu, Gailhard, Albert Carré, Henri Maréchal, P. Veronge de la Nux, Camille Chevillard, Paul Taffanel, Paul Vidal, Gabriel Pierné, André Messager, Paul Dukas, Pierre Lalo, Adrien Lefort, Albert Lavignac, Louis Diémer and Edouard Duvernoy.
Salaries at the Conservatoire for faculty in the performance areas were miserably low. The most reasonable explanation for this is that it was assumed that professors would augment their income with private teaching, for which they could command high fees because of their stature, and with concertizing.

Auditors were designated from among those not admitted who received the highest number of pass votes. Students receiving a first prize the year before could also audit. The number of official auditors was strictly limited, but some professors admitted additional promising prospects and pupils studying with them privately.

The number of vacancies in the combined women's classes (advanced level) varied from five to at most twenty in the years 1900-1920.


Ibid., p. 38.

Whether the class met as a whole to observe the lessons or was split into several groups so that only those pupils scheduled to perform heard each others' lessons, and whether the class lasted only the required two hours or was extended, varied from year to year. Jeanne Leleu recalled that in 1912, the class met "Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday, with the pupils split into two groups on Tuesdays and Saturdays" (interview with the author, May 1978).

The first two paragraphs are comments quoted in A.C., pp. 115-16. The second two contain observations made by Mme. Tagliaferro in an interview with the author.

The above is a composite of two accounts by Mme. Lefebure of the same incident, one in her article "Cortot, le poète du clavier" (p. 905), the other in the typescript of Alfred Cortot, dir. Levy.

Magda Tagliaferro, as cited in A.C., p. 116.

Jeanne Leleu, interview with the author, May 1978.

See Chopin, 12 Études, Op. 10, édition de travail par Alfred Cortot (1915), editor's note, p. 5.

"La loi essentielle de cette méthode est de travailler, non pas [later editions read: "non seulement"] le passage difficile, mais la difficulté contenue dans ce passage, en lui
restituant son caractère élémentaire" (loc. cit.). The same principle is reiterated by Cortot in his *Principes rationnels de la technique pianistique* (Paris: Salabert, 1928), Préface, p. 1.

26 At the turn of the century, it was still considered improper for a young girl to go out alone or to spend time in the company of a man who was not a member of her family without a chaperone present.

27 Yvonne Lefébure painted much the same picture in conversations with the author (1968-69): Mme. Long was generally surrounded by a bevy of répétitrices with whom she kept up a running conversation, even during the pupil's performance.

28 Jeanne Leleu, interview with the author.


32 *Principes rationnels...*, p. 1. "Pour développer les qualités psychiques, qui sont avant tout fonction de la personnalité et du goût, la pédagogie ne trouve guère de point d'appui que dans l'enrichissement de la culture générale, dans le développement des facultés imaginatives et analytiques.... Il n'existe pas pour cela de bons ou de mauvais systèmes. Il n'y a que de bons ou de mauvais professeurs."


34 Cf. this statement by Blanche Bascourret de Guéraldi: "I think that the most innovative aspect of Cortot's teaching at the Conservatoire was that he insisted that pupils always consider the music before the technique--the character of musical works above all" (interview with the author, April 1978).

35 Mme. Tagliaferro, interview with the author.


38 Mme. Tagliaferro, interview with the author.

39 Mme. Bascourret, interview with the author.

40 Magda Tagliaferro's testimony would have served equally well to illustrate Cortot's power to win unqualified devotion
from others. "My association with Cortot and what Cortot represented artistically were a sort of backbone (épine dorsale) in my life, from which I took my bearings and to which I always returned," she told the author. "I think I can pride myself on having embraced his aesthetic since youth and having always preserved and honored it. In my own interpretation courses, I never fail to speak of my maître vénéré."

42A.C., p. 117.

43Spycket, Clara Haskil, p. 39. From published announcements of concerts, Cortot would not seem to have been absent that often. His only extended tour was five weeks--March 20 to April 27, 1908--to Italy, Switzerland, France and Spain.

44Ibid., p. 40.


46Clara Haskil was a complex personality: artistically wise beyond her years, demanding on herself and others, possessing a deep sense of her own worth and a feel for what her kind of music-making should be, yet hypersensitive, emotionally immature and full of doubts about her ability to succeed as a concert pianist.


48Spycket, p. 43.

49Ibid., p. 43-44.

50See the letters from Cortot to Clara Haskil, quoted in Spycket, pp. 45, 48, 237, 259. These express admiration for her artistry, affection and concern for her health. Cortot also recommended her to his agent, Kiesgen, who accepted her but apparently did little to aid her career.

51The disc, which contains the Chopin Concerto No. 2 and Manuel de Falla's Noches en los Jardines de España, was issued in 1960 as Philips PHS 900-034.

52Spycket, p. 43.

53Clara's adaptive instincts and memory were such that she once picked up Peter Rybar's violin after not having touched a violin in forty years and tossed off the first movement of the Mendelssohn Concerto by memory (ibid., p. 42). She reportedly played Liszt's Feux follets for friends without ever having seen the music, after Perlemuter played it to her.
When I asked Mme. Tagliaferro what led Cortot to the very great variety of timbre and coloristic effects in his playing, she answered: "He sought them out first of all, as we all seek. It's the ear which guides— the brain is not enough—and then it's experimenting all the time to find the sonority at the instrument, and in Cortot's case, to find orchestral timbres."

Louis Goupy (1931– ) received his Licence de Concert from the Ecole Normale, where he studied with Blanche Bascourret and Cortot; in addition to performing in the various interpretation courses, he studied privately with Cortot and later with Bruno-Leonardo Gelber.


Spycket, op. cit., p. 39.

Lazare-Lévy, it may be recalled, replaced Cortot on an interim basis from 1920 and was named his successor in 1923. He taught an advanced class (mixed) from 1920-1940 and 1944-53. He kept Cortot's principal répétitrice, Mme. Giraud-Latarse, as his assistant, and Mme. Giraud probably convinced him to engage her former pupil, Mme. Bascourret, as his répétitrice as well. Both women had their own classes at the Ecole Normale also.

Mme. Bascourret, interview with the author.

See Spycket, p. 40.

Louis Goupy, interview with the author.

Magda Tagliaferro, interview with the author.


Jeanne Leleu, interview with the author.

Marthe Morhange-Motchane, interview with the author.

Cf. Yvonne Lefébure, as quoted in Timbrell, "Alfred Cortot...," p. 27: "A horizontal conception of music was always implicit with Cortot."
Mme. Bascourret, interview with author. Some pupils were not able to extrapolate the technical concepts referred to from Cortot's demonstrations. Gaby Casadesus, née L'Hôte (1903- ), played for Cortot at the age of ten, and after two years in Marguerite Long's preparatory class she audited Cortot's class during 1915-16. Cortot's popularity was such that he had no room for her in the class when she was admitted to the advanced division, so she was placed with Diémer. In 1917-18 Diémer fell ill, and his class was taken by Edouard Risler. Comparing Cortot's teaching with Risler's in an interview with Jeffery Wagner, Mme. Casadesus noted that Risler, like Cortot, was often absent on tour. "But," she said, "when [Risler] did teach, it was in a very detailed way. He showed us specifically how to practice. Cortot, on the other hand, was less detailed, but he would demonstrate quite a bit for us. I think he sometimes expected us to play as though we had his technique in our hands, but this gave us much inspiration. At this time he did not teach technique at all. I don't think everyone in his class was ready for his teaching." Quoted in Jeffery Wagner, "Gaby Casadesus," Clavier, 23, No. 9 (Nov. 1984), p. 5.


The prevailing view was expressed by Marguerite Long in Au piano avec Gabriel Fauré (p. 103): "Today the terms 'to relax' or 'to loosen up' ('décramper') are overused expressions which I condemn; they are inappropriate, because totally contrary to the action of playing the piano. If one has [good] fingers, one doesn't need to 'loosen up.' To be supple is enough; there's no reason for a special term." This statement dates from 1959.

Principes rationnels, p. 72.

Cécile de Brunhoff (1918?- ), who studied with Mme. Bascourret and with Cortot at the Ecole Normale, where she earned both the Licence de concert and the Licence d'enseignement, and who has taught for many years at that school, disagreed with this last statement. Mme. de Brunhoff, who observed Cortot teach her son in private lessons for about five years, remembered that the finger did not have to be played as a unit, that "each joint could contribute a little to the articulation in many instances" (interview with the author, May 1978).

Mme. Bascourret, interview with the author.

Mme. Morhangé-Motchane, interview with the author.
This was significant, not only because Cortot's own way of holding and using the hand was different from the conventional French practice, but also because it would have been very difficult to achieve the type of tone quality and coloristic variety he desired with independent, high fingers and a sunken bridge. This may explain why his influence, pianistically, on certain disciples was limited. Yvonne Lefébure, for instance, whose ideas on characterizing and individualizing sound were influenced by Cortot, played with high, strongly curved fingers and exuberant body motions that owed more to Marguerite Long than to Cortot.

Mme. Morhange-Motchane, interview with the author.


Mme. Bascourret, interview with the author.

Magda Tagliaferro, interview with the author.

Cortot may have had some trouble with finger control and agility, but he appears never to have had any problems with stiffness or muscle fatigue in the larger playing units (wrist to torso). He is also said to have had remarkable endurance.

Juliette Meerovitch (1896-1920) studied first with Marguerite Long, then with Cortot (1909-11), winning her 1st prix in 1911 at the age of 14. Possessing a musical personality of the first order and remarkable pianistic gifts, she was considered one of the most promising talents of her generation in France. Launched very young on what appeared to be a brilliant career, she ended her own life in Brussels at the age of 24.

Since she had no ties with the Ecole Normale, Mme. Chapart was known only to the oldest generation of Cortot students; of those I spoke to, none happened to have been her student.

It is hoped that Mme. Duménil is not being done an injustice here; what is said is admittedly second-hand reports from persons who did not actually study with her.

Mme. Bascourret, interview with the author. One of Mme. Kastler's pupils at the Ecole Normale was the young Igor Markévitch, who recalled that she "had so much energy that you would have thought that she had swallowed a tropical storm. I think that if you could have plugged into her when she was exclaiming for the fifteenth time in a lesson 'Look here, Igor,
4 on E! ' you could have fueled an electric power plant" 
(interview with Claude Rostand in Points d'Orgue [Paris: 
Julliard, 1959], p. 26).

87Each class in principle had one officially appointed 
_répétiteur_, whose duties extended beyond coaching. Mme. 
Giraud-Latarse, for instance, often substituted for Cortot when 
he was absent for short periods.

88So implied Mmes. Lefébure and Morhange in their interviews.

89Louis Goupy made the same point in an interview with the 
author.

90Reine Gianoli, interview with the author, June 1978. 
Occasionally remarks have been combined for continuity. 
Further observations on Mme. Giraud's teaching from the same 
interview can be found in Appendix I, pp. 585-86.

91Cortot's personal teaching notebook from his Conservatoire 
years has not been published; it was made available to me 
through the courtesy of Pierre Petit. The repertoire for the 
January exams and for one of the war years, 1916-17, is not 
listed. For several representative pages, see Appendix I, 
pp. 578-82.

92Though Cortot had pupils prepare Chopin's Préludes for an 
exam only two times, he actually taught them frequently. On 
the other hand, when I asked Mme. Morhange to enumerate all the 
pieces she could remember having heard Cortot teach in the 
class between 1914-19, the only ones named that were not in the 
exam repertoire were Beethoven's Sonata in C major 
("Waldstein"), Op. 53 and Concertos Nos. 2 and 3, Liszt's 
Hungarian Rhapsodies Nos. 9, 11, 12 and 14, Fauré's Barcarolles 
and d'Indy's Symphony cévenole—not for the most part 
diminutive works.

93If a piece was prepared on seven occasions, that did not 
necessarily mean it was heard seven times; the jury usually 
chose from among two or three works prepared.

94The fact that Fauré chaired the juries helps explain the 
prominent place given his works. The Schumann Etudes 
_Symphoniques_ and the Chopin Fantaisie-Polonaise were staples of 
Cortot's concert repertoire. The Liszt "Dante" Sonata he 
rarely played, but it is a work from which a student can learn 
a great deal from the standpoints of technique and declamatory 
style.

95Mme. Morhange, interview with the author.
Mme. Tagliaferro, interview with the author.

See Spycket, Clara Haskil, p. 43.

Cortot, rapports des professeurs (1908), Archives nationales AJ37 301.

Jeanne Leleu, interview with the author.

Archives Nationales, AJ37 302.

Reports of all three professors were compared for the years 1907-1913.

Bertrand, Le Monde de la musique, p. 224.

Mme. Tagliaferro apparently possessed some music studied with Cortot but did not have it close at hand when we talked. In the liner notes from an EMI-Japan reissue I have seen a photo of a page from a Chopin work (in Cortot's study edition) that a Japanese pianist studied with him at the Ecole Normale. Cortot marked mainly details of phrasing, dynamics and pedalling in that score.

Chopin, 12 Etudes, Op. 10, ed. Cortot, Préface. Cortot may well have been familiar with Blanche Selva's four-volume study, L'enseignement musical de la technique du piano (Paris: Rouart, Lerolle, 1916-22). In the first volume (1916) Selva sets forth the same basic premise that underlies Cortot's method without, however, applying it to specific contexts. On pp. 117-18 she writes: "In effect, the limitations of human thinking oblige one to divide up that which is unified, in order to become aware of that which is constant and unchanging.... We cannot grasp everything at once, still less at a glance. Our way of assimilating things makes use of elimination and of proper ordering. Knowing how to eliminate... everything required to present the element before the end result so as to show this element in simple enough form to reveal its essential quality: that's really the special gift that makes for a teaching that produces good results."

Loc. cit. The notion that it was imperative to put the teaching and study of technique on a more rational footing was slow to take hold in France, but it did gain some notable advocates in the period 1915-25. See, for instance, the article by Laurent Ceillier, "Pour une technique rationnelle" in the Monde Musical, 33, Nos. 1-2 (Jan. 31, 1922) and 3-4 (Feb. 28, 1922), the first part of which pleads for a rational approach to studying the instrument while the second reports on the pedagogical guidelines adopted toward that end by the professors' council of the Ecole Normale.
106 Kaemper, Techniques pianistiques, p. 143, where the source of the statement is given as Carl Adolf Martienssen, Die individuelle Klaviertechnik aus der Grundlage des schöpferischen Klangwillens (1930), p. 216.

107 Leschetizky, as quoted by Annette Hullah in Theodor Leschetizky, p. 50.

108 All quotes are from Chopin, 12 Etudes, Op. 25, ed. Cortot, p. 7.

109 Loc. cit.

110 Ibid., p. 9.

111 Ibid., p. 10. Marjorie Parkinson's translation of Cortot's text considerably softens his injunction against motion by saying: "[The] quality of the tone required... is entirely dependent on light playing of the fingers. Therefore, never let any movement of the hand cause heaviness to the finger-touch as this might cause an impurity of tone...." From Cortot, ed., Chopin, 12 Studies, Op. 25, trans. M. Parkinson (Paris: Salabert, ca. 1951?), p. 9.

112 Note, however, that Cortot's exercises Nos. 3, 4, 5, 6, 8 and 9 all impose a "static" hand by virtue of their held-note component.

113 How much and what kind of arm movement a pianist will employ in this Etude will no doubt vary depending on his or her previous technical schooling, individual hand conformation and level of advancement. Personally, this author allows ample arm motions and even a rotary movement with minimal finger articulation until the pupil has assimilated the synthetic coordinations of the larger levers with the hand. After this foundation is secure, then it is time to work for more efficient/condensed arm movements and a more precise, quick finger attack, always with minimal fixation and tension.


115 Ibid., p. 8.

116 Steinhausen, as quoted in Kaemper, Techniques..., p. 151.

117 Busoni, commentary on Bach's Fugue No. 10, as quoted in Kaemper, p. 150.

118 Loc. cit.
Cortot advises practicing the Etude in the following rhythms:

![Rhythms]


See Philipp, *Enseignement moderne du piano, Ecole de mécanisme pour piano, Etude technique des gammes: Essai sur la manière de les travailler, Une heure d'exercice pour le piano*, etc. and Magda Tagliaferro, as quoted in Timbrell, "Alfred Cortot...," p. 27 (on Marmontel).

See the remarks of Magda Tagliaferro in Timbrell, "Alfred Cortot...," p. 27. Charlotte Causeret, who participated in many of Cortot's interpretation courses and served as the répétitrice of Jean-Pierre Marty, one of the young students he taught privately in the '40s, remembered that Cortot was very partial to this device of transposing material while retaining the same fingering. "He wanted me to have Jean-Pierre practice all of his scales using the fingering of C major," she told the author. "I think that he got this idea from his sisters, who used it often and were firmly convinced of its value" (interview with the author, Jan. 1978). Maurice Dumesnil credits Philipp with being the first to recommend transposing scales and pieces while preserving the original fingering. See Dumesnil, "Isidore Philipp," *The Piano Teacher*, 5, No. 6 (July-Aug. 1962), p. 6.

Exercises such as this show Cortot equivocating a little between the old school technical thought, which assumed that by drilling the fingers extensively in all manner of patterns one would ultimately render them independent and equal, and the modern school, which recognized that their natural inequalities should be compensated for by greater or lesser hand/arm involvement. He is closer to the modern, however, for he warns against lifting the fingers higher for a percussive attack to obtain force, saying: "the fingers should press the keys deeply, as if to imprint themselves in the keyboard, [employing] a pressure of the hand and fingers proportional to the dynamic level desired. The hand/finger position should not be modified in forte or piano; only the degree of weight and the speed of attack should determine the dynamic intensity of the tone" (annotations to *Etude* Op. 10, No. 9 in f minor).

125E. Robert Schmitz, like Cortot, was a student of Diémer. He authored *The Piano Works of Claude Debussy* and a method, *The Capture of Inspiration*. The reference here, however, is to his edition of the Chopin *Etudes*, which could not be more different from Cortot's. Harrison (*Grand Piano*, p. 224) quotes a sample of Schmitz' explanatory text that begins: "The rhythm sequence is every three notes. For example, in the first six notes: On the first, drop forearm pronated. On the second, distribute without rotating. On the third, abduct upper arm, pivoting on the thumb.... On the sixth, supinate on fifth finger (FrmR)..."


127The main difference between present and former times is that today most teachers who use Cortot's editions do so in conjunction with a second, urtext edition that incorporates modern scholarly findings. A number of Cortot's editions contain interpretations (minor revisions, traditional readings) and/or misprints. Moreover, it is sometimes difficult to know where the composer left off and Cortot began.

128Anyone who had studied with Cortot or taught under him at the Ecole Normale knew that the last thing he wanted was for a pupil to become obsessed with the technical side of performance. Of the students and associates I interviewed who presently teach, not one assigns all of Cortot's exercises religiously. As Yvonne Lefébure remarked of the material in the *Principes rationnels*, "you must pick and choose..., for they can be too strenuous—or just plain tedious!" (Timbrell, "Alfred Cortot...", p. 27).

129In *The Performance of Music*, David Barnett discusses Cortot's didactic writings at length, citing his method as exemplary in its efforts to fuse work on the technical difficulties with work on the musical content. He rightly remarks, however (p. 40), that Cortot often "designed his exercises for the sole purpose of removing difficulty," and in doing so "fail[ed] to define clearly the status of the student who is to employ the exercises. It is as if he were asking himself, from a position of mastery, what his performance of the composition would require. Side by side, then, with poetic descriptions that only a highly advanced muscular control could apply, he places basic exercises for the passage of the thumb, or for... polyphonic playing. Such exercises are didactic rather than gauged to the type of student who could be expected to be playing the composition. They represent a reculer pour
mieux sauter, a strategic retreat, and the student is left to puzzle how extensive a retreat to make, how far back to begin the steps toward the final rendition."


131The changeover is not gradual but immediate with his next study edition, devoted to the Chopin Préludes. The commentary on each prélude opens with the heady mixture of poetic images and references to the character of formal elements that is typical of subsequent editions. The first paragraph of his annotations to the Prélude No. 1 is one long sentence: "The impassioned élan and restless ardor which drive this prélude are secured by a precise articulation of the syncopated figure which... carries the melodic line ever higher, breathless and feverish, until it reaches the exaltation of mm. 21-24, the apogee of an arc which then undergoes a short diminuendo during which the sonority drops, but not the insistence of the rhythmic motive, similar now to the palpitations of a heart overcome by emotion" (*24 Préludes*, ed. Cortot, p. 2).

132Cortot's concerts with the Trio, which had numbered around twenty-five a year in 1908-10, dropped to four, then to two a year by 1912.

133In a publicity "bio" drawn up by Cortot himself for his 1918 tour of the U.S., he noted that he had also played in Moscow and St. Petersburg; when exactly, I have not been able to determine (B.N. Dép. Mus., Cortot, lettres autographes No. 113).

134When the war was over and new appointments to the faculty were contemplated, there was heated discussion in the Conseil Supérieur over the proposed nomination of Jules Boucherit to a violin post, with some members objecting that the school was about to get another performer who would never be there. Boucherit was appointed after assurances were given that he would only be absent frequently until he had fulfilled engagements already contracted.

135Between 1907-1914, Cortot's pupils received 18 first prizes (compared to 17 for Philipp's and 14 for Delaborde's), and 59 awards in all (to Philipp's 56 and Delaborde's 49).

136The Conservatoire seems to have suspended activities briefly in the fall of 1914 as the Germans advanced on Sept. 5 to within 15 miles of Paris, but it was open again for entrance examinations in January of 1915.

137Only in 1916 did Cortot request a two-month leave of absence to work more intensively at his military assignment. During that period he was replaced by Paul Braud, a respected
pedagogue who taught at the Schola Cantorum and whose pupils included Yves Nat, Paul Baumgarten and Edgar Garès.

138 Under Gallieni, Cortot supervised all entertainment for military hospitals and founded the Oeuvre Fraternelle des Artistes, a social welfare agency for distressed musicians and actors which distributed more than half a million francs by 1918. He also helped to organize the Ateliers du Blessé, physical therapy clinics that replaced the old mécanotherapie with occupational therapy (in the course of making useful products, patients had to perform tasks that strengthened and retrained their wounded limbs). To fund these clinics Cortot organized matinées poétiques at the Sorbonne that were an enormous success.

139 See Cortot, lettres autographes Nos. 8 and 104-126 (Fonds Montpensier) in the B.N. Dép. Mus.

140 The French title was: Chef du Service d'Etudes et Secrétaire du Comité Consultatif d'Action artistique à l'étranger.

141 Walter Damrosch, conductor of the New York Symphony, was president of the American Friends of Musicians in France, a group that collected war relief donations and partially underwrote the Comité Franco-Américain. After the war, he helped found the American bandmasters' school at Chaumont (France) and the Conservatoire américain at Fontainebleau. Henri Casadesus, uncle of Robert, founded the Société des Instruments anciens. He lived for a number of years in Boston (in fact, his collection of early instruments is now housed at the Boston Public Library) and gave many concerts at the Library of Congress.

142 The Comité Franco-Américain of the Conservatoire was a philanthropic association created by Nadia and Lili Boulanger under the patronage of architect Whitney Warren. Its steering committee included Widor, Paul Vidal and Blair Fairchild.

143 How and why Cortot came to replace Risler as the designated soloist for the American tour is a bit of a mystery. Gavoty was led to believe that Cortot stepped in at the last minute when Risler was injured (see A.C., pp. 129-30) but a letter from Cortot (B.N. Dép. Mus. lettre autographe No. 102) to an unidentified friend in the U. S. establishes that at least four months before departure he had engaged impresario Arthur Judson to secure solo recitals for him between orchestral concert dates.