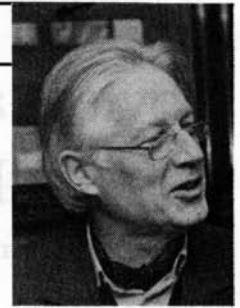


Interview: Günter Ludwig



'Music of Bach and Beethoven nourished my hungry soul'

Günter Ludwig, one of the leading German pianists, received his early musical education in Frankfurt, and went on to study piano with August Leopolder and Marguerit Long and conducting with Kurt Thomas. As a result of winning numerous prizes in international competition, he was able to perform in concert and on radio in most Western European countries, as well as in South America and Asia. He has performed piano concertos with such conductors as Günter Wand, Istvan Kertesc, Karl Münchinger, Sir Georg Solti, and Horst Stein.

His particular devotion is to chamber music. He has performed violin and cello sonatas with Janos Starker, Henryk Szering, Arthur Grumiaux, Nathan Milstein, and Max Rostal, and has recorded all the piano trios of Mozart, Brahms, and Beethoven.

In recent years, he has joined with principal violinist Norbert Brainin of the Amadeus Trio in concert performances demonstrating the superiority of musical tuning at A=432 Hz (C=256). In one such performance, on Dec. 12, 1988 in Munich, the artists featured J.S. Bach's Adagio from Sonata No. 1 in G minor at both the common A=440 and A=432 tunings. Their performance was completed at the lower tuning with Beethoven's Op. 30, No. 2 in C minor and Brahms's Op. 105 in A minor. This historic concert has been produced as a compact disc under the Ibykus-Serie label, and is available in the U.S. for \$15 from Ben Franklin Booksellers in Leesburg, Virginia, (703) 777-3661; and in Europe from Dr. Böttiger Verlags-GmbH, in Wiesbaden, Germany, (06121) 80 69 55.

Mr. Ludwig came to the nation's capital with Mr. Brainin on June 6, 1990 to demonstrate the lower tuning in concert. He was interviewed by Kathy S. Wolfe on June 7.

EIR: How do you see the role of music in education?

Ludwig: I believe that music has a central function in education, and the so-called classical music is an essential part of our tradition. This heritage comes from the experience of our ancestors. If we would have to discover and learn everything from our own experiences, we would arrive perhaps, at the end of our lives, to the spiritual level of a Neanderthal man. Tradition helps us to open the doors to the future. Due to

life's constantly changing nature, in order to live in today's world, new ideas, developed upon those of the past, are vital. When we are too involved in tradition, we do not really learn to live for today.

Music has a fundamental power and meaning in communication. The desire to make music is as strong in us, as the desire to dance, to sing, and to communicate. To activate and cultivate this power, we should integrate musical education in the realm of general education.

In the musical education of children, the emphasis should not be on winning a competition as soon as possible or to prepare a career as a virtuoso. We can do that. But that's not my view of life. I think we have no right to exploit the talent of a child solely for narrow purposes. We should help children to discover and to follow their own inner voice. Therefore, musical education is for emotional and spiritual development and to stimulate creativity.

If the musical talent is really strong and rich, one may carefully encourage the child to become a musician.

EIR: How do you train children?

Ludwig: I have little experience with children as a teacher, even with my own children.

My wife sang with our two boys, dozens of Korean and German folk songs, as her mother sang for her in Korea. They learned to sing and to speak at the same time. When the children were about 5, before they went to school, I asked one of my students to teach them music. The teacher and the children sang and danced, played melodies on the piano without introducing the names of the notes, just by ear and experiment. They learned to play a melody in every key, without knowing a key.

After some weeks the teacher started to explain the harmonic system: intervals, major and minor, the 12 keys. They played it and wrote it on the music manuscript. The teacher gradually made conscious for them, what they had previously done by imitation. Now they learned to read and to play printed music.

They played easy pieces from Bach, Schumann, Bartok, and contemporary composers. They played games with melodic and rhythmic patterns. They also played directly on the

strings of the piano—like on a harp or a guitar—so they could see where the sound actually comes from.

Soon after starting with the piano, one boy started to learn the violin, the other the violoncello. Today they are 12 and 10. They enjoy making music very much, also in concert. For them, there is no great difference between music from the 18th or the 19th century and contemporary music. They play Bach and Messaien; Beethoven, Schubert, and Bartok. They also invent some of their own compositions. When we have guests for dinner in our house, we make music together.

EIR: We used to do this in America all the time in the last century, in some cities even up to World War I. But now, unfortunately, the family comes home and just turns on the television.

Ludwig: We also have a TV at home and we use it sometimes. All you have to learn is to use the button to switch it off.

EIR: Your children are lucky, because they were born in a family of musicians. But many people say that this childhood training is only for a few children who have very special talent. Don't you think that classical music is for all children everywhere?

Ludwig: Certainly. I think, in an intelligently organized society, education—which should include musical education as well—should be free of charge for all children.

EIR: I heard you give a remarkable piano lesson to an advanced student. You mentioned, that first comes the idea and then the realization—the action of playing, the technique.

Ludwig: Of course. When you make music, you don't think what your hands are doing. You want to make come out of the instrument what you feel inside, what you have in your mind, in your imagination. If the idea is strong and clear, your playing will be strong and clear. You just follow the idea in you. The way you sing, the way you dance—you follow the music.

But this works only if you have learned how to use your hands and the keyboard. You have to build up your technique. This takes many years.

When you compare how you learned to walk: You tried to imitate others. The same with speaking: You started to learn at about one year of age. When you became conscious about it, when you learned to write and read, you had already practiced it for many years! You had already basically adapted it. It became part of your nature.

When you learn to play an instrument, the first step is to develop the inner correspondence with the instrument. You listen to how it sounds. You play and experiment. You improvise, play melodies, patterns of fast notes—you discover the instrument by playing with it.

The next step is to find out and realize how the action of the key and hammer work. You learn how to put your hand on

the keyboard. You learn to play scales, arpeggios, and so on.

After you return to the music itself, just transfer your imagination from within directly to the strings. The goal of technical training is to forget the hands and keyboard and to concentrate completely on the music.

EIR: Please tell us about your own history.

Ludwig: I grew up in a little village near Hanau, the town where the composer Paul Hindemith was born. My father was a worker in a factory. I remember when I once visited him at his machine. The smell was like hell. He spent about 40 years there.

When he was young, he wanted to become a goldsmith. He wanted to create something beautiful. But then came World War I, followed by inflation and the complete economic breakdown. Finally, he had to earn his money, in the same factory as his father. There was no escape.

A friend of his played the accordion and invited my father to let me learn the accordion too. So this man became my first music teacher. At that time, to buy an accordion was a huge expense for my parents. My father and my mother had to work very hard to afford it.

Fortunately, it turned out that I had musical talent. I made progress and two years later my parents bought an upright piano. This was a sensation in our village. Soon afterwards, when I was 10, I was sent to a boarding school.

To this school—the Music Gymnasium in Frankfurt—I owe my basic musical education. Not only did we have to play an instrument, but we also had ear training every day. Music was the garland through the whole day. We sang before each meal. In fact, our whole education centered around music.

When I was 14, we celebrated the end of World War II. The school was bombed out like most other buildings. I went back home to my village. What to do now? Stay alive, make money. . . . I played dance music and popular songs for American soldiers through many nights. During the day, after some hours' sleep, I nourished my hungry soul with Bach and Beethoven. I tried to find out what was going on around me. I discovered that not only houses were destroyed, but, worse, the spiritual life.

I contacted other young musicians. We helped each other with food, money, and ideas.

When my father came back home from prison camp, he demanded that I not proceed with music. He did not see any chance for my future—as it was with him 30 years ago. But this advice came at the very wrong moment. I insisted on becoming a musician.

Through some wild years, I struggled to find my way. I had private lessons in piano playing, in conducting. I studied one year at the Musikhochschule. I made money with concerts and private lessons. Fortunately I did not know much about a pianist's life. Otherwise, I would have given up very soon.