THE OPTIMIZING PIANISM NEWSLETTER © TOPIC: MUSICAL SKILLS
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The score suggests the ingredients – but you've got to choose the amounts

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"The secret lies mainly in contrast."

— Vladimir Horowitz

THE ASSUMPTION

Play what's written. Great. But then what? How loud should the *forte* be? How fast is your *andante*? How clear or blurred is your *legato*? And what about what is not said: about the balance between the RH and LH? or how strong is the flow towards or away from moments of tension? or the length of your silences or the textures or unmeasurable emotions of your characterizations? All these musical elements need a decision – from you – as they are the decisions that will make your playing worth listening to... or not. It's no different to being a chef.

WHERE IT GOES WRONG

Of course, look at the recipe of your piece and employ your ingredients sensibly, but don't presume this will be enough to bring the music to life. This is the trap of being a good student, or of trying to please your jury – it's a race to nowhere. Yes, the clean execution of a recipe of music is often hard enough, but the real challenge – and joy – begins when the recipe starts to get left behind and the question of 'how much of what?' gets explored. Do what's 'right' and risk serving a nice, edible, but completely forgettable dish. Do what's 'not written' and risk being 'wrong', of losing some 'aesthetic points' with your audience... but, just perhaps, of creating something memorable, amazing, and worthy of repeating.

To be or not to be? Choices. Selection. Rejection. Iteration. That's where your practice should be at. Don't keep using the same spices for all your meals. Don't play your Bach like your Chopin, or like your Prokofiev. That's habituation at work (read Issue #1), keeping you safe... and boring.

MAKE YOUR PIANISM BETTER

DON'T cook every piece with your favorite few ingredients. **DO** force yourself out of your comfort zone. This week, find different musical elements to emphasize and by different amounts. See what happens. Listen. Increase your awareness. Dare to fail. This is practicing.

I found this Insta reel this week. Right on topic. 20 seconds from the art critic David Sylvester: **Check it out ›**

I found this one too, of Martha Argerich playing an encore of Schumann. Stretching the elements and making something happen. **Watch ›**

One step forward... one step ~~backward~~ forward...

Cameron
Concert Pianist. Pianism Scientist. PhD. Physician. Author.

Next issue: the practice trap — why repetition isn't progress, and what to do instead.

How many ingredients are you actually using?

The Book **Read ›**
Ch. 8, "Be a Sound Chef," shows why every element of music is yours to mix and max. Textbox 8.2 lists them, including some surprises.

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REF: Holland, B. "Vladimir Horowitz, Titan of the Piano, Dies." *The New York Times*, 6 Nov 1989.

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