

## The Godowsky / Neuhaus Legacy

by Valerij Voskoboinikoff (Pupil of Heinrich Neuhaus)

Neuhaus always referred to Godowsky as "my dear teacher". He never referred to Blumenfeld or Barth or any of his other teachers in that way (Blumenfeld was always "my uncle"). It is therefore reasonable to suppose that Neuhaus considered Godowsky in some sense his only real teacher.

I am sure that my teacher inherited from Godowsky the highest respect for the composer and his text. Respect for the score was what set Neuhaus apart from other teachers during the Soviet period. He created a kind of culture of responsibility Neuhaus sometimes criticized Godowsky's attention to textual detail, and occasionally called it excessive. Every day, in every lesson, he taught us how to get beyond the text as such. But for Neuhaus the text was always the starting point and he always helped us to realize in practice what the score indicated. As an example, in the second movement of Beethoven's Sonata op. 109 (marked Presto con fuoco), Neuhaus wanted crescendi and accents on the syncopations, in order to create a sense of passion and breathlessness. And when we, as young students, failed to realize this "con fuoco," our beloved Master would take his pencil and add, with a flourish, some "hair pins" and some stress marks on syncopated notes, to remind us, yes, to play fast, but also to never lose the necessary accents. This one lesson has done me a lifetime of good, and I often show my scores, with my Master's annotations, to younger pianists.



*Heinrich Neuhaus*

The inscription on the verso of the photograph reads: *"To the dear Valerik [Voskoboinikoff], on the occasion of settling into my new home"*

Neuhaus also established a culture of responsibility for sound as such. He defined the famous terms "not yet sound" and "no more sound" — limits both for the pianissimo and the fortissimo.

I am especially grateful to Neuhaus for his teaching of "cantabile," which he undoubtedly learned from Godowsky. This was another lesson with rewards that have lasted a lifetime. He taught me how to build a melody (how to provide it with proper intonation, so to speak), and how to appreciate the nuances of phrases as they unwind melodically.

Neuhaus was often asked where his special brand of wisdom came from, and he often tried to explain. Primarily, he said, it came from his heart and his ear, and only in a secondary sense from the pressure of fingers on keys and the effort of playing. This explanation reminds us of what Godowsky has said about importance of hearing.

Neuhaus did not exaggerate when he said he had no love for the mechanical aspects of technique. But if one of his advanced students needed help with challenging repertoire, he would immediately provide it, beginning with intelligent fingering. This, too, reminds us of Godowsky, in particular the apropos fingerings in his scores. Familiarity with all manner of technical stratagems allowed Neuhaus to concertize effectively with serious hand injuries.

The reason why students of Neuhaus are often considered the best interpreters of Chopin can also be traced to Godowsky's teaching — to Godowsky's special relation to Chopin's music. Neuhaus put even more passion into playing and teaching than Godowsky did. He taught until his last day — always with the same honest commitment. (A lesson could last forever.) Listening to his recently issued recordings can help us better understand his artistry and his important legacy.