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PEDAGOGIC VIEWPOINTS FROM TEACHING OF THE PIANO PLAYING ON PRIMARY MUSIC EDUCATION IN RUSSIA AND IN FINLAND



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PEDAGOGIC VIEWPOINTS FROM TEACHING OF THE PIANO PLAYING IN PRIMARY MUSIC EDUCATION IN RUSSIA AND IN FINLAND

This thesis consists of two parts. The emphasis of this thesis lies on the artistic part, which was the Young Soloists Concert with Turku Philharmonic Orchestra in Sigyn-hall the 8th of May 2019. The performed music piece was Sergey Rachmaninoff – Rhapsody on the theme by Paganini op.43. A recording of the concert is available at the Turku University of Applied Sciences/Turku Conservatory library.

The weight value of the artistic part is 2/3 and the written part is 1/3 from the whole thesis.

In the written part of the thesis, the pedagogical methods of piano teaching in primary music education in Russia and Finland are speculated, based on the author's experience and an interview with a few Finnish and Russian piano pedagogues.

KEYWORDS:

music pedagogue, piano pedagogue, piano teacher, piano student

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Agakishiev Elvin

PEDAGOGISIA NÄKÖKOHTIA PIANONSOITON OPETTAMISESTA MUSIIKKIKOULUN PERUSTASOLLA VENÄJÄLLÄ JA SUOMESSA

Opinnäytetyö on kaksiosainen sisältäen taiteellisen ja kirjallisen osion. Pääpaino on taiteellisessa osuudessa, joka on Turun filharmonisen orkesterin Nuorten solisten konsertti Sigyn-salissa 08.05.2019. Esitetty teos on Sergey Rachmaninoff - Rhapsody teemasta Paganini op.43. Äänite konsertista on kuunneltavissa Turun ammattikorkeakoulun/Turun konservatorion kirjastossa.

Taiteellisen osion painoarvo on 2/3 ja kirjallisen osion 1/3 koko opinnäytetyöstä.

Opinnäytetyön kirjallisessa osiossa tarkastellaan pianonsoiton opetuksessa huomioitavia pedagogisia seikkoja kirjoittajan omien kokemusten sekä suomalaisten ja venäläisten pianopedagogien haastatteluun pohjauvien kannanottojen perusteella.

ASIASANAT:

music pedagogue, piano pedagogue, piano teacher, piano student

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Legato to play an instrument with a smooth, connected touch

without breaks between the successive tones

Staccato to play an instrument with a shortened, detached touch

Non legato to play an instrument so that a group of tones should not be

played connected with each other but there should be a pause

between each tone

Poco legato to play an instrument so that a group of tones should be

slightly connected with each other but still having a slim pause

between them

Portamento to play an instrument with a passing, gliding touch, from one

tone to another with a smooth progression

Scales a collection of the notes that because of a musical reason

have been grouped together. The benefit of knowing the scales in music is that you know how to orient yourself among the notes. Among other things, knowing of the scales will give you a foundation for improvising and composing. The notes in a particular scale always sound good played together.

Metronome is a device that produces an audible sound or an other visible

mark on a regular interval that can be set by the user, typically in beats per minute (BPM). Musicians use the metronome to

practice playing with a regular pulse.

1 INTRODUCTION

This thesis consists of two parts, artistic and written. The artistic part is a concert "Young Soloists" with Turku Philharmonic Orchestra. In my piano solo I played Sergey Rachmaninoff – Rhapsody on the theme by Paganini. The concert was held in Sigynhall the 8th of May 2019. A recording of a concert is available at the Turku University of Applied Sciences/Turku Conservatory library.

In my written part of the thesis, I speculate about the differences in the pedagogical methods of piano teaching in primary music education in Russia and Finland.

In 2012, when I came to Finland, I was interested in several questions about piano music education in this country. Unfortunately, at that time in my life I did not know anything about education in Finland. First, I entered the Turku Conservatory. (One interesting fact is, though not the most important, that in Finland, the conservatory is specialized considered as secondary education, and in Russia it is as a higher education). After living some time in this beautiful country I was struck in a good way by some aspects in the field of the musical culture and education in Finland. Nevertheless, here were also negative points. Unfortunately, it is difficult to share all my thoughts in my thesis, but I will write about what the most important things in piano teaching were on my opinion. It is worth remembering that you can not rely entirely on the opinions of other people, and only the accumulation of your personal experience will help in answering questions about the primary piano education and teaching methods. Like any student who moved to a foreign country, I asked myself some questions: "Is there any difference between Finnish and Russian piano teaching methods? What are the strengths and weaknesses in piano teaching between these two countries?"

2 PEDAGOGIC VIEWPOINTS FROM TEACHING OF THE PIANO PLAYING ON PRIMARY MUSIC EDUCATION IN RUSSIA AND IN FINLAND

I interviewed some very qualified Finnish and Russian piano teachers with long experience in teaching. They answered the following questions below. The answers which I got helped me in the arranging of my own pedagogic thoughts. All the answers of the Interview will be anonymous.

2.1 Starting age of the piano playing

Let's start with the most common question: what would be the best age to start to play the piano? According to the survey which I carried out, three Russian and three Finnish piano pedagogues gave answers of the same kind to this question. Teachers believe that six is the best age to start studying to play the piano. Like educators, I believe that it is a really good age as well. At this age a child has sufficiently formed fingers, strong enough phalanges and most importantly the human brain can focus on more challenging things at this age than before. A teacher can wait for a little bit ability to concentrate and ability understand spoken advice form a six-year old child. To speak directly to a child and to be as exacting as possible to a piano student is also possible at this age.

This is a distinct age in order to make the most basic and important function for playing the piano – to build and strengthen hands and the muscles of the fingers in order to get the right playing technic.

2.2 Factors related to the technique for playing the piano

My next question was: "Is it important for a piano player to have the right hand position?"

• "The position of the hands is very important first of all to develop the right legato skills. The "correct" position of the hands on the keyboard contributes to the proper organization of the movements of the fingers at the gates. Other touches: staccato, non legato, poco legato and portamento are also achieved thanks to the right movements and the organized positions of the hands. (answer of a teacher from Russia)

- To some extent, it matters, but as we know everyone's hands are different, and due to this, each pianist has his own hands. If the teacher sees that the "non-standard" setting of the hands affects the sound and technical quality of the game, then it makes sense to engage in a "correction". (this opinion has a teacher from Finland)
- It is of paramount importance that the right position of the hand is practiced immediately after the first hour. The fingertip stays round, the knuckles stay high, the palm of the hand and the wrist stay elastic and the hand moves from the shoulder. We'll practice a relaxed dropping of the hands on to the keys of the piano, first with the whole arm / palm of the pupil's hand and later with one finger. (another opinion of a teacher from Finland)

In my opinion, all the teachers are right. Of course, each person has her/his own physiology. First the piano teacher needs to build on the physiology of the student, everything happens individually always. Even with the most "correct" hand setting, there may arise discomfort. Nevertheless I think that the most important thing is to eliminate this discomfort, to get rid of the inconvenience, even if it is a "non-standard" method of playing the piano. This is especially important if an adult student comes to the teacher who has "the wrong" position of the hands. It is very difficult and it requires a lot of effort from both, the student and the teacher in order to remake the position of the hands especially when an adult person is in a question. As a rule, the older the student, the harder it is to change something.

"As a rule, the older the student is, the harder it is to change something".

Still it does not mean that absolutely nothing can be changed. I will give an example of one adult student, who I have been teahcing for almost two years. He came to the first piano lesson and showed his piano skills using the example of one small and not at all difficult piece. It was difficult for him to play the whole work without stopping. At first I thought that he simply did not know the notes of the music, but a little later it turned out that he could not play from the beginning to the end without stopping because of the physical reasons. His hands were very stiff and he did not know how to address the problem and how to continue to play. I thought it was the right decision of gettings starting to fix this problem. I advised him not to play his usual musical works, but instead I recommended him that he should work with each hand separately and with each finger separately. I taught him how to learn to free the hands. I told him: when you press the keys of the piano, you need to learn to dive into the keyboard. The strength and gravity of your own weight should not remain in the hands but instead of that, you should plunge

all the weight of your hands into the keyboard, as deep as possible. After a few lessons he was able to catch that feeling, and he learned to feel the "bottom" of the keys with each individual finger.

Until now, in spite of his position of the hands, I cannot say that I managed to correct absolutely everything. There are some things that seem to me very difficult when I try to correct his way of playing the piano. However, he has now began to play the piano in a more free way and for me this is already a little leap forward.

Based on the example above, the effectiveness of an earlier start of training can be seen. Six years is a suitable age for the most productive teaching of new skills to children. Then their ability to quickly absorb the information received is at the best. Having time free from school also allows a child to pay more attention to musical development.

All children are different and talented in their own way. Unfortunately, there are also "difficult" psychological moments that require additional time to solve the problems. In cases of this kind it is the teacher who advises and helps in solving this problem at the root. First you need to figure out "what is exactly the problem"?

2.3 Factors related to the motivation for playing the piano

The next question of my survey was very simple: "Whose desire was it to start playing music"?

I got the same type of answers. In most cases, children start to play music against their own will. As a rule, there is a wish that this dream of the parents which "did not come true to me, will come out from my child". Parents can also want to take their children to the world of music for a reason of common development, completely ignoring the child's desire. Often the child is "not against", but he/she can easily be led. All of these factors can affect a student's psychology. Without desire there is no result. As long as we do not overcome this kind of barrier and struggle with the motivation problems, this problem may cause many other problems in childrens life and we cannot do "qualified work" with them in the technical sense of the word. It is very important to find the right motivation for the student.

When a child reaches the age of seven children go to school both in Russia and in Finland. Accordingly they have less time for music lessons. In addition, spending half a

day at school, the child gets tired, and his brain works less efficiently, which is quite natural.

When we are talking about an adult person, he/she may have a family, work and many other external factors that interfere with the quality of music work. On the one hand, it is easier to teach adults because they really come to play music according to their own wishes. On the other hand, "adult life" is affected by people who do not always have time to "do a good job" in practice.

2.4 Factors related to musical problems for playing the piano

Let us suppose that we do not face psychological problems and we do not need to spend time on it in order to relax the student, but we may perhaps face difficulties of other kind that are much worse although they do not seem to be so. According to the survey, the piano teachers in both countries answered almost in the same way: difficulties and consequences can also appear in the late learning of music:

When adults are in question:

- It is more difficult to develop and correct the
 "playing" mechanism and the formulation of the hands.
- Coordination of a student can be reduced.
- The development of musical ear can be limited.

Based on my experience I can say that I absolutely agree with the opinions above. I want to add another important factor, a common situation: "There is a desire, but there is no time".

Next I will share another example of an adult piano student of mine. I have faced with a large number of problems with him that affect not only the technique of the playing, but also the perception of music in general. The most difficult thing seems to be how to learn to feel the music, to hear it. Music for musicians is not just a sequential order of notes that we press as the composer wanted, these are also feelings that we experience and try to convey to the audience. We all understand that there is a majore sound and a minor sound, but not everyone can hear it and let alone convey it. How can the humanities explain the theory of relativity from physics? Also in music, If a person does not understand music, he/ she can not understand what is the meaning and the

advantage of his/her education or of his/her experience? First you need to understand what you are playing, what kind of character the music have, what the composer wanted to show, then maybe you will be able to convey something of it to the audience. For a more detailed analysis of the style of a music composition/piece it is important that you know something about the composer. It has a great influence in what era he/she lived, at what time, what happened in his/her period of life. Knowledge of the history of composition is not the primary factor, but it certainly helps to realize what you should play and how to interpret the ideas of the composer. In addition, in order to improve the sensitivity of music, it would be useful to listen more often to various musical works both in audio recordings and live.

According to the Finnish and Russian piano teachers, "it is usually easy to teach a child to hear the difference between major and minor, to feel the style of music and musical phrasing". But this is often hard to teach to adults. Returning to my example, my student X, unfortunately, cannot listen to the musical factors and feel them without my help. He has been playing the piano alone for many years now, watching musical works on youTube videos where the musical performers are visible when the song is played. Still, having heard the works in "alien performance", the character of the musical work is difficult to convey for him.

All the teachers I interviewed think that acquaintance with music is the best when started to study music at a young age. For example, as in Russia and in Finland, there are specialized groups for pre-school age children. It is very good, because since from childhood children begin to develop listening, musical rhythm, memory, musical notation etc. They get also acquainted with musical instruments, such as xylophone, drums, cymbals and many others.

Nikolayev (Николаев wrote - "Studying of music should contribute to general pedagogical tasks, cultivating a sense of discipline in the student, increasing ability to work and overcoming the arising difficulties". (Николаев, 1970, 5)

3 PEDAGOGIC MATERIAL FOR PRIMARY PIANO EDUCATION

There are a lot of materials for initial piano teaching. Each pedagogue in his sense of "correctness" selects the appropriate author suitable for himself. Depending on the piano student's age, the teachers of the Finnish and Russian schools prefer several books, which in their opinion, are the best and most convenient for a novice pianist.

- Of the manuals that are most popular for beginners: A.Nikolaev: "The School of playing the piano", A. Artobolevskaya: "The first meeting with music"; "Chrestomathy of the little pianist", S. Barsukova: "Magic keys" a collection of simple pieces for piano. (opinion of a teacher from Russia)
- I explain to my piano students the benefits of the etudes of Czerny, Moszkowski, Chopin and Liszt. In my opinion it is desirable to follow just that order mentioned above. Often there are students who are playing Chopin's etudes too early, not playing a single Etude by Cherni or Moszkowski and because of this they have many technical problems. In Russia, teachers are attaches great importance to this particular order. In Finland there are also very good textbooks on the method of teaching the piano for younger and older children, for example: Pianon Avain and Suomalainen Pianokoulu. I have used more the first one. (opinion of a teacher from Finland)
- At the very beginning in my piano teaching, I use the songs, tricks and games I have invented myself. I also have taken parts of different piano schools for teaching material. (Suomalainen pianokoulu, Pianon Avain, Vi-vo). Later, the kids can buy these same booklets themselves. The speed of the child's advancement also influences the book I ask to buy. Often I use also extra material in addition from my own notes. (other opinion of finnish teacher)
- Every learner is different. I am using elementary slogans (Suomalainen pianokoulu, piano choir, Vivo primordial book, Vi spelar piano and additionally assembled mate rhythm I share with students). Young beginners discover songs and make their own custom arrangements that are played together. The Suomalainen pianokoulu 1-3 is a good base material, Vivo 1-3 contains interesting materials and free accompaniment tasks, Vi spelar piano 1-3 is

perhaps a bit old-fashioned, but partly the material is very clear and develops note reading at a peaceful pace (for those who have challenges with conceptualization). I also use separate rhythm assignments and some notes and writing exercises for sketching rhythm. Then, of course I take the etiquettes of Piano Letters 1-4 (Quarry-Nyblom), various etiquette experiments, and developing and adding material from baroque to contemporary music as the pupil's skills progress. (one more opinion of teacher from Finland)

3.1 Material for beginning piano students

Let us dive a little into the choice of Russian teachers for some textbooks and analyze why their choice fell on these book authors for initial piano teaching.

For example I will cite the author of books which, in the opinion of Russian teachers, is the most common among children's piano manuals in Russia - this is A. Nikolaev: "The School of Playing the Piano". Many of the things from this book are applicable to adult beginners with confidence as well.

Nikolaev quotes Neuhaus - "the work on the artistic way should begin simultaneously with the initial learning to play the piano and with the assimilation of musical grammar" (Николаев,1970, 5)

Nikolaev believes that - "one of the main tasks of a teacher should be to strive to preserve and develop in the student a lively direct sensation of music, an understanding of its declamatory expressiveness, phrasing, division into motives, singing. During acquaintance with a musical notation, a student plays exercises, learns to read notes and translates what he sees on the keyboard. The scheme of such a process can be expressed in a verbal formula: I see, I play, I hear. This leads to the fact that the student is accustomed to reading notes without prior auditory understanding of their sound. Hearing in this way does not fulfill the function of the main controller of the intended sound. Ideas about how it sounds, what is written in the musical text appears as a result of only the actions of the fingers pressing the keys. Therefore, the main attention should be paid to the development of hearing, meaningful and expressive singing of simple songs, their selection on the piano in various keys. The lyrics of the song will help to understand the intonation expressiveness. With simple examples, we can explain the dynamic difference between sounds." (Николаев 1970, 5)



Picture 1: «Ku-ku» (Lehtelä etc. 2003, 6)

Nikolaev recommends playing one and the same tune, but from different notes, and with the improvement of progress, gradually complicate the tune (Николаев 1970, 5).

"This will serve the development of hearing and keyboard orientation, assimilation of various intervals to the sound and representation of their location on the keys. Together with the complication of intonation and technical tasks, we must be taught to accurate and natural phrasing, to the expressiveness of melody." (Lehtelä etc. 2003, 6).



Picture 2: "Russian song" (Lehtelä etc. 2003, 6)

"A player playing this melody can use the partial breathing, i.e. After long supporting sounds, slightly raise the brush without lifting your fingers from the key and thus "breathing" to extract the following sounds. Such an almost imperceptible movement will be used to correctly phrase this example". (Lehtelä etc. 2003, 6)

Among the technical skills of the first year of study, Nikolayev recommends playing scales - "4–5 major scales in two octaves in forward and divergent movement, short arpeggios and chords, and whrist staccato. The most important condition for the development of the right playing skills are smooth, not inhibited and not sharp movements of the whole hand when lowering the keyboard, and what is equally

important when lifting it. The correctness of the playing movements is checked first of all by the sound result: the student must listen to what he is doing. Therefore, those teachers wrongly come in that during the game the student tells him: "Lift a finger! Free the brush!". (Николаев, 1970, 7)

According to the answers of Finnish teachers one of the most common collections for primary piano teaching of children is "Suomalainen pianokoulu 1".

As stated in introduction: - "The material is designed to give the student a solid basis of piano technique. The authors have chosen a repertoire of music from different periods and have included examples of modern musical notation." (Lehtelä etc. 2003, 3)

The authors of this book, Ritva Lehtelä, Anja Saari and Eeva Sarmanto-Neuvonen, after a small introduction, immediately give small pieces such as:



Picture 3: Sunset (Lehtelä etc. 2003, 10)

In this work, the second and fourth fingers of the right hand work very well, which certainly develops the motor skills of these fingers. As we move into technical skills, I would recommend changing the fingers in the right hand in order to develop a good articulation of all the fingers at the same time listening to the melody in your left hand. This is a good exercise to control absolutely opposite two actions.

In my opinion, it would be very important to indicate the pace of this work for the student in order to learn to keep the rhythm playing under the metronome.



Picture 4:The Rain has stopped (Lehtelä etc. 2003, 11)



On the fourteenth page we see the work on relaxing the hands. From the authors' given example, I can say that the step-by-step instructions for carrying out actions are very good. Thus, I worked with my first teacher myself and, in consequence, with my students, who had problems with relaxing their hands. In my opinion - this page should be the first. Always before playing the keyboard you need to make sure that your student's hand is free. As we progress along this book, the authors introduce us the theory of music explaining rhythm, signs, tempos and more.

Picture 5:Relaxing the arm (Lehtelä etc. 2003, 14)

As a professional musician and teacher, I would not recommend this collection to you as the main tool for novice pianists. In my opinion, this book can be as a side auxiliary action for technical training on the piano, however, as was written in the introduction.

3.2 Material for older piano students

Both Russian and Finnish teachers believe that the list of such authors as Czerny, Moszkowski, Chopin, Liszt would be an excellent choice for beginning adult students.

On the one hand, it may seem that such composers are too difficult for the initial mastering of playing the piano, but after a few months of playing various simple exercises such as scales, "hanons" and a learned theory, I would give several works by Czerny



Picture 6: Czerny etude op.748 №6, (Czerny 1888,12)

On the example of this etude, we can perfectly work on legato, phrases. You can also learn to better hear and listen to the colors of sounds, harmony. Work on the balance of each note, each chord, emphasizing the main theme of the melody. Distribute the

dynamics throughout the work. In my opinion, this is a great way to dilute the monotony with a beautiful slow piece.

It is difficult for every beginning student to explain and understand the importance of working at one piece, at technical places, at the sound and at various other piano skills. Therefore, after some time, any monotonous exercises get bored and all the benefits will gradually be transformed to the detriment. Because as soon as we lose the concentration in the deeds we are engaged in, we stop developing, and for often we can do ourselves more harm than good.

From 748 op. Czerny etudes you can find a lot of interesting compositions on different types of piano technique. Still, this should not stop here. After a certain number of Czerny etudes, one can proceed to the works of Chopin. Of course, the promotion of each student individually, so you need to take into account his abilities when choosing the next work.



Picture 7: Chopin etude op.10 №1 (Chopin 1986, 9)

The etude reminds one of the long arpeggio gamma exercises and this is not accidental. This is the etude really on a long arpeggio. The difference is that the student quickly gets tired of the usual monotonous activities of the arpeggio of the C-major scale and other keys, since it requires a lot of perseverance and patience to perform the same action for a long time and the etude version is much more diverse. Firstly in the left hand there is a melody, and in the aggregate with the right hand we hear very beautiful harmonic chords. Secondly, the arpeggio constantly "deviates" into other tonalities, which makes it play on the black keys and combine with the white keys. Thanks to this action, you can develop the plasticity of the hand when playing in different positions.

Of course, it's not the easiest etude for a novice pianist, but here everything depends on why you give the student such a work. Some pedagogues from my experience in life were not supporters of giving things a level higher than the student himself, but there were others. My first teacher was a woman who constantly gave me works above my level. Nobody demands genius, but very often we understand those things that are more complicated than our skills.

However, you should not dwell only on etudes. Such great composers as Chopin, Liszt, Cherni and Moszkowski have works that do not require the high skills of piano playing, so you can find something useful for your beginner student from the works of the greatest 19th century virtuoso F. Liszt or other composers.

4 CONCLUSION

In accordance with the results of the comparative analysis can be concluded that the concept of "where the better methods are," is relative. I would like to write about those broadcasts that seem to me very important for music, or another instrument that came to Finland.

For novice piano teachers, if there was such an opportunity, I would advise using Russian piano teaching techniques because in Russia they are more systematic and more extensive than in Finland. For this, it would be good to carry out joint pedagogical seminars and master classes. Of course, this does not reflect at the pedagogical level of piano teaching in Finland. Among the piano teachers here I have met a sufficient number of the worthy masters of their craft!

The most important thing is that you shouldn't judge the average pedagogic level of musicians in the academy where you study. Not always musicians are weak because of the bad teachers. All people are individual, someone more capable, someone less. Also, the goal setting of the student plays an important role. For some, music is a hobby, for some others, it is a future profession.

Of course, everyone has their own notions of the importance of different teaching methods and someone does not agree with me, but remember, all that is written here is just a view based on my personal experience and on the survey of a few piano teachers in these two countries.

In conclusion, I want to thank all my teachers both in Russia and in Finland from their participation in my interview for my thesis, for the time and professional knowledge that they shared with me during the process of my studies.

"Studies themselves do give forth directions too much at large, except they be bounded in by experience". Francis Bacon

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the Advertisement of the Thesis Concert



Recording of the Thesis Concert is situated in Turku University of Applied Sciences Library of Music Academy, Linnankatu 60

the Program of the Thesis Concert

David Claudio, kapellimestari

Atte Karhinen, lyömäsoittimet

Darius Milhaud: Konsertto lyömäsoittimille ja pienelle orkesterille op.109

Matilda Berghäll, alttoviulu

Max Bruch: Romanssi alttoviululle ja orkesterille F-duuri op. 85

Andrey Borshchev, huilu

Samuel Eriksson, klarinetti

Camille Saint-Saëns: Tarantella huilulle ja klarinetille op. 6

Çinar Yazgan, viulu

Karl Goldmark: Viulukonsertto nro 1 a-molli op. 28, Allegro moderato

Väliaika

Nargiz Mamedova, viulu

Camille Saint-Saëns: Johdanto ja Rondo capriccioso a-molli op. 28

Nathalia Hyvärinen Kanerva, sopraano

Vincenzo Bellini: Aariat oopperasta La Sonnambula

Ah! Non credea mirarti

Ah! Non giunge uman pensiero

Samuel Eriksson, piano

Sergei Prokofjev: Pianokonsertto nro 2 g-molli op. 16, Andantino

Elvin Agakishiev, piano

Sergei Rahmaninov: Rapsodia Paganinin teemasta op. 43