

A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO THE PIANO



It all began for Ukrainian virtuoso

GÊNIA when she was warned not to play Rachmaninov. Russian-trained, she longed to perform the *Rhapsody on a theme of Paganini* but was told her hands were too small. She wouldn't accept defeat, and when she won a competition whose prize included a concert she set herself the goal of playing it. 'I'm a small person, I was never very strong, and in the Russian system only the strongest survive. I knew there had to be a system of strengthening and stretching the fingers, and then I realised it was right under my nose: I needed to treat my hands like the rest of my body when I did yoga.'

She had encountered yoga after having severe back problems which involved her attending a clinic every week. Seeing this was unsustainable, she took control of her own cure. 'I found a beautiful yoga teacher, Amanda James, and she started me off. Eventually I began doing more ambitious yoga and now I have studied it professionally and have

In the wake of her successful Piano-Yoga retreats, Ukrainian pianist **GÊNIA** is returning to Kings Place for another day of holistic insight and practice for pianists of all levels, writes Helen Wallace

qualifications. The experience has taught me so much. I encourage people to learn how their hand works, how their body needs to be aligned and I give them finger-strengthening exercises away from the piano. They need to train their brains to have a relationship with each of part of each finger, to understand exactly how the digits work.'

She's keen to point out, though, that the physical aspect of yoga is only one step on a journey, and the mental and psychological aspects are just as important. 'If someone comes to me now with a technical problem I look at the whole person: it may be they are agitated psychologically, so I work on relaxation and stretching, which can be more effective than over-working a passage.'

The day retreat at Kings Place this spring will combine pure yoga with exercises in concentration, breathing and visualisation to help with performance and stage nerves; sessions on posture and piano technique from the Piano-Yoga perspective; group piano masterclasses and time spent improving the sense of rhythm. 'I'm not here to strip away the technique people come with, I'm adding a range of strategies. I base everything on the fundamentals of Russian piano technique; but while we were encouraged to practise eight hours a day we were never taught how to counteract the stresses and strains which result.'

Concert pianist Zoe Raham attended a recent retreat and was impressed by the immediate effectiveness of GÊNIA's practical advice on preparing a performance: 'With her positive, non-defeatist approach she emphasises the joy and satisfaction of playing at any level and I would encourage any pianist, amateurs and professionals alike, to attend a course.'

Prior experience of yoga is not essential. As piano teacher Karen Marshall commented following a retreat in 2011: 'For me this course provided both mental and physical strategies to play the piano to my full potential. ◊'

INTERACT HIGHLIGHTS

Piano-Yoga

21 April

Limehouse Room

10.30am – 5.30pm

Fees: £90 (£75 Piano-Yoga® members)

info@piano-yoga.com / www.kingsplace.co.uk

See Listings p57 for details



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