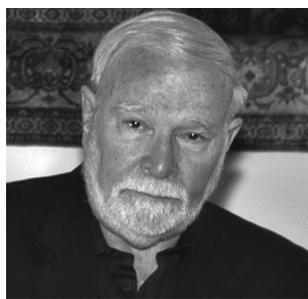


Piano Fingering and Establishing a Home Digital Recording Center

Lyn Bronson, Contributing Editor Books & Recordings



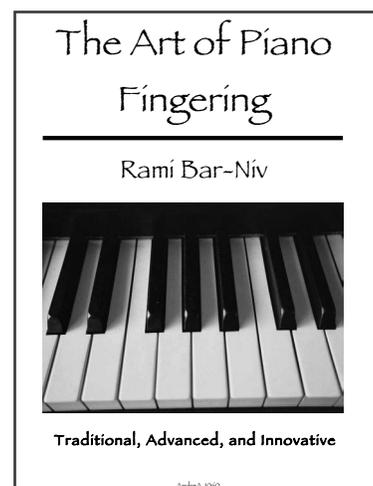
Lyn Bronson, a graduate of Yale University and the Yale University School of Music, completed his graduate studies at California State University Fullerton, where he stayed on to become a member of the piano faculty. He has been an active performer and has given over forty solo recitals during the past thirty years at Hartnell College, Monterey Peninsula College, CSU Monterey Bay, Sunset Center in Carmel and other local venues. He has also appeared as concerto soloist with the Pan-Cultural Orchestra of the Monterey Peninsula, and six times with the Monterey Peninsula College Orchestra. He was formerly a member of the faculty of Hartnell College in Salinas and CSU Monterey Bay until his retirement in June 2007. He has given piano master classes at CSU Monterey Bay, San Jose State University, and Pasadena City College. As a journalist he has been a music critic for the *Monterey Herald*, *Carmel Pine Cone*, *Coast Weekly*, and the *Salinas Californian*. He is presently the Editor of *Peninsula Reviews*, an online music journal.

The Art of Piano Fingering: Traditional, Advanced and Innovative, by Rami Bar-Niv, published in Israel (in English), 212 pages, \$30, release date February, 2012. To purchase this book, send an email to: pianofingering@yahoo.com. More information can be found on the web at pianofingering.tripod.com.

In a testimonial appearing on the back cover of this book, Dr. Walden Hughes, Professor of Piano at Northwest Nazarene University states, "The Art of Piano Fingering" by Rami Bar-Niv, fills a tremendous void in the realm of the pianistic world. Published in 2012, it is the first book of its kind in the 303-year history of the piano."

Actually, the first book exclusively devoted to this subject was "The Art of Fingering in Piano Playing" by Julien Musafia, written in 1970 and published by MCA Music in 1971. Musafia challenged widely accepted fingering principles for scales, arpeggios, and chords, and suggested new principles of his own based on the understanding of musical patterns with the intent of simplifying and reinforcing learning. One of his important principles was that although keyboard music normally utilizes the bass and treble clefs, we shouldn't limit ourselves by thinking we have a left hand and a right hand, but accept that we instead have a "ten-fingered apparatus" allowing us to re-distribute notes in passages and musical lines whenever it will help us to understand and enhance the musical meaning.

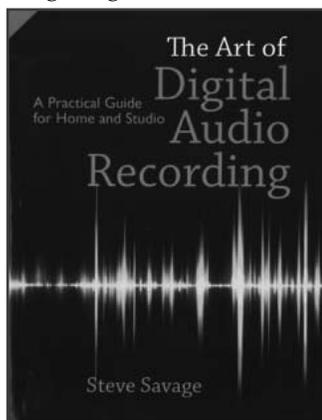
There were, however, some significant shortcomings to Musafia's book. At a meager 90 pages, the book would have benefited from the inclusion of many more musical examples. Since most of the selected examples were from the Beethoven Violin and Piano Sonatas and the Preludes and Fugues of Shostakovich, this further reduced the book's relevance to



the standard piano literature. Another serious problem with Musafia's book was its lack of an index to topics and musical examples. Therefore, anyone using his book as a reference tool had to do a certain amount of manual searching through the text, and it was time consuming.

Bar-Niv's book is superbly indexed and valuable as a reference source. In the index the reader will find next to each composer's name a listing with page numbers of every work quoted with musical examples in the text. Bar-Niv includes a generous amount of photographs and charts illustrating many of his concepts.

In his introduction, Bar-Niv acknowledges that most editions contain some degree of fingering, and he assumes that students benefit by comparing various published fingered editions as a basis for establishing their own. However, he points out that an essential element is missing: "The majority of editions do not help you understand how to create your own fingering, nor do they help to develop a sense for, and the skill of, good fingering at the piano." And herein lies one of the most helpful aspects of this book. In addition to quoting and discussing difficult passages, he also analyzes difficulties, formulates solutions (often adding his opinion why one solution is better than another), and even suggests exercises to help us master difficult solutions.



For example, in the rapidly ascending parallel B-flat melodic minor scales in the Chopin's Polonaise in A-flat, Op. 53, Bar-Niv shows us four solutions, three of which have thumbs coinciding. One of these, which he recommends highly, is initially slightly awkward, but when adopted is easily assimilated and results in a more powerfully even scale and a more effective crescendo. It turned out to be worth the trouble to adopt his fingering.

I have always had difficulty in the middle section of Chopin's Etude in E major, Op. 10, No. 3. The slurred pairs of major sixths in rapid contrary motion defied my efforts to memorize them. Bar Niv suggests an ingenious fingering solution (although not the most comfortable one, I might add) based on how the sequential patterns and groupings change during the course of the passage. Because his fingering helps a pianist recognize and mentally organize these pattern changes, the passage suddenly makes more sense and is easier to memorize.

The descending scale in fourths on the second page of the first movement of Chopin's Sonata No. 3 in B minor has always been troublesome for me, and I have tried four different fingerings during the past thirty years. Well, Bar-

Niv came up with two more I hadn't thought of. They are ingenious and they work.

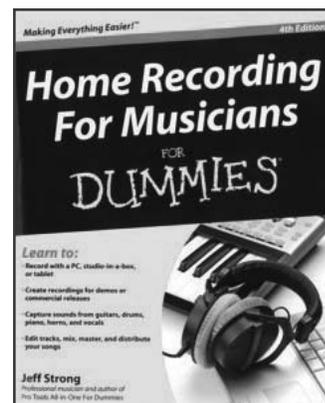
Bar-Niv discusses principles of fingering in his introductory chapters, and he freely admits that many of these principles are probably well known to serious pianists. However, it is the application of the principles and their demonstration using familiar passages from the advanced piano literature that is the true value of this book.

Bar-Niv emphasizes throughout this book that fingering problems and their solutions are basically problems in how to render musical ideas effectively and clearly. He constantly stresses that understanding the musical concept is the first step toward the solution to a fingering problem. Anyone who plays the piano with serious intentions can benefit from reading and studying this book.

The Art of Digital Audio Recording, A Practical Guide for Home and Studio, by Steve Savage, Oxford University Press, 2011, 270 pages, \$35.

Home Recordings for Musicians For Dummies, by Jeff Strong, Wiley Publishing Co., 2011, 378 pages, \$29.

Many of us can remember that not so long ago we were making recordings in our practice rooms and studios on small portable cassette recorders. Recently a sixteen-year-old student of mine asked if instead of taking her hour lesson, could she come to our studio (where we have two Steinway Ds) and use her lesson time to create a CD to send in with an application for a summer music program. At the appointed time she showed up with a small portable Olympus linear stereo digital recorder (not much larger than a cell phone) and a mike stand. After an hour of takes and retakes, she departed and came to her lesson the following week to present me with a copy of the CD she had created on her home computer. I was astonished at the near studio quality she had achieved. Her time investment was one hour to record plus one hour to transfer the digital audio files, select the best takes and burn a few CDs. Her cost was \$250 for the Olympus portable stereo recorder and only pennies for the CDs. She used no sophisticated software for mixing or editing, since all she needed to do was to select the best takes and burn them to a CD. Of course if you are recording several instruments, then you need to consider recording on separate tracks with multiple microphones, using a mixer to blend the tracks, and other sophisticated (and expensive) equipment to add reverb and acoustic presence to the finished result. There is also a variety of



software that will help you design the liner notes and artwork for the “jewel case” plus labels you can print in your computer that can be applied to the CD. This can all look very professional.

Well, here are two books that show you how it is done, either modestly or spending big bucks—the choice is yours. In either case, these two books get into the basics of helping you to understand digital audio files and how, with the proper software, your home computer can become a DAW (Digital Audio Workstation). With patience and careful home study, you too can become an audio producer. If you get really good at it, maybe you will even want to quit your day job.

Don't be put off by one of these books being “For Dummies.” We are all tyros in some areas of expertise and need clear basic information to help us along. There are, of course, two books in the “For Dummies” series I wouldn't recommend displaying on your coffee table—“Piano for Dummies” or “Piano Exercises for Dummies”(not that we don't occasionally have a student who might benefit from them).

Although years ago many of us relied on business cards and printed mailer brochures to promote our studio business, studio web pages have tended to make both somewhat redundant today. I wonder how many teachers today are availing themselves of the opportunity to purchase a portable digital recorder for less than \$300 and creating a CD they can distribute to students and parents that will be a testament to their skills and professionalism.

Recordings Briefly Noted

Russian Fantasy - Music for Two Pianos, Vladimir and Vovka Ashkenazy. Works by Rachmaninoff, Borodin, Glinka, Scriabin, and Mussorgsky, 60 minutes, Decca 478 2940, released in December 2011.



Vladimir Ashkenazy has taken a long sabbatical from the recording studio as a solo pianist. However, after enjoying a successful career as a conductor, he has been gradually returning to the piano. He released a complete recording of the Shostakovich *Preludes and Fugues* in 1999 and in 2004

another CD of Shostakovich's miscellaneous solo piano works. In 2006 there was a release of Bach's *WTC, I & II*, and in 2009 his first release of works for two pianos by Debussy and Ravel featuring his son, Vovka, as a two-piano partner.

The present recording of Russian works for two pianos suffers from some of the same problems as the earlier Debussy/Ravel CD. Anyone who knows the Argerich/Freire recording of Ravel's *La Valse* is sure to be disappointed by Ashkenazy father and son, and they will be disappointed in their performance of Rachmaninoff's *Suite No. 1* for two pianos on this new disk. There is a labored quality about father and son's playing, and we can assume that these recorded performances are studio readings rather than the end product of a series of live two-piano performances. The definitive recording of the Rachmaninoff Suites by Vronsky & Babin from 1951 was a marvel of exciting spontaneity and precise ensemble. Of course, Vronsky & Babin at that time knew the two-piano literature better than anyone else, and because they played everything from memory they achieved an extraordinary degree of polish and refinement.

Also on this disk are some works arranged and transcribed by Vovka Ashkenazy: *Polovtsian Dances* from “Prince Igor” by Borodin, *Night on Bald Mountain* by Mussorgsky and *Valse-fantasia in B minor* by Glinka. These are welcome additions to the two-piano repertoire.

Works for Piano by Enrique Granados: *Goyescas, El pele* and *Allegro de concierto*, by Garrick Ohlsson, Hyperion CDA67846

This CD turned out to be a major surprise. Ohlsson has been a frequent visitor to the recording studio during the past several years and has produced recordings of the Rachmaninoff Third Concerto and Corelli Variations, plus quite a few Liszt and Chopin recordings tied in to the celebration of their



centennials. I have never been a Garrick Ohlsson fan and sometimes felt his playing tended to turn poetry into prose. Although never questioning his technical mastery, his lyrical playing often seemed basic and lacking in magic.

Imagine my surprise in hearing his latest recording of *Goyescas*. The gorgeous piano sound will hit you like a ton of bricks. It will surround and embrace you with a lovely aura. For over fifty years, *Goyescas* has been virtually the personal property of Alicia de Larrocha, but Ohlsson shows that he can really spin the magic here. Although one work on the disk, *Allegro de concierto*, may not come up to de Larrocha's exalted heights, everything else gave me a new respect for Ohlsson. 🎵