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Dorothy Taubman, Therapist for Pianists, Dies at 95

By VIVIEN SCHWEITZER

Dorothy Taubman, who developed a method to help pianists strengthen their techniques and avoid repetitive strain injuries, died on April 3 in Brooklyn. She was 95.

The cause was pneumonia, said her son, Mark.

Musicians, often called [elite athletes of the small muscles](#), suffer repetitive strain injuries from long hours of practice and hectic performing schedules. Like athletes, they turn to physical therapy, ice packs, massage, acupuncture, surgery and cortisone injections for relief. Ms. Taubman thought that such problems could be avoided with a more ergonomic approach, and that such an approach could lead not just to pain-free playing but also to greater artistic results.

She began developing her methods, known as the Taubman Technique, in the early 1950s. She advocated forearm rotations to reduce the need to twist and stretch in awkward positions, combined with coordinate movements and proper alignment of fingers, forearm and hands.

“The body is capable of fulfilling all pianistic demands without a violation of its nature if the most efficient ways are used; pain, insecurity and lack of technical control are symptoms of incoordination rather than a lack of practice, intelligence or talent,” [Ms. Taubman once said](#).

She had “[a scientist’s brain](#),” said Edna Golandsky, a former student who runs the Golandsky Institute, which advocates Ms. Taubman’s methods. Other prominent disciples include [Yoheved Kaplinsky](#), who also studied with Ms. Taubman and is now chairman of the piano department at Juilliard.

Ms. Taubman worked with notable pianists who suffered injuries and whose careers were severely curtailed, including Leon Fleisher, who lost the use of his right hand in 1964 as a result of the neurological condition focal dystonia. After decades performing and recording the left-hand repertory, [Mr. Fleisher began to regain use of his right hand in the late 1990s](#).

Her ideas about the physiology of playing an instrument can work in tandem with the Alexander Technique and the Feldenkrais Method, two movement- and posture-based approaches that teach performers how to play without the muscular tension that can lead to discomfort and injury. But she had detractors, including piano professors who resented the implication that their teaching

methods might lead to injury or inadequate technique.

There has long been a stigma attached to injury in the musical world, and instrumentalists are often unwilling to admit problems. Some believed that associating with Ms. Taubman might jeopardize their careers. Others found her style, and especially her insistence on complete retraining, to be dogmatic.

“In the beginning, I was not a believer,” the pianist Gabriela Montero [has said](#). “I frankly was not interested. I thought the Taubman Institute was some cult, like a hippie club or something. In the end I was completely won over, not only by the intelligence but by the results.”

Ms. Taubman was born in the East New York section of Brooklyn on Aug. 16, 1917. Her parents, Benjamin and Bertha, were immigrants from Russia; her father, a businessman, committed suicide after the stock market crashed in 1929.

Ms. Taubman never graduated from college, but took courses at Juilliard and Columbia and studied with the renowned pianist Rosalyn Tureck for a year. In her 20s, her son said, she decided her calling was to be a teacher, not a concert pianist.

She directed the Dorothy Taubman School of Piano at Amherst College in Massachusetts. She also taught at the Aaron Copland School of Music of Queens College and at Temple University, where Maria del Pico Taylor and Sondra Tammam run the annual [Taubman Seminar](#), one of several institutes now dedicated to preserving her legacy.

In 1938 she married Harry Taubman, a businessman in the men’s clothing industry and the younger brother of [Howard Taubman](#), chief music and theater critic in the 1950s and 1960s for The New York Times. In addition to her son, who is dean of the school of medicine and dentistry at the University of Rochester, she is survived by a granddaughter.



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