

Read the article "Concerto for the Left Hand" before answering questions 1 through 7.

Concerto for the Left Hand

Inside a large concert hall in Paris in 1934, the audience applauds as the soloist seats himself at the piano bench and nods to the conductor. Following a brief opening passage by the orchestra, the pianist enters dramatically with a storm of chords struck up and down the keyboard. His playing is masterful, and his calm assurance on the stage holds the audience in thrall. However, there is one important difference in this pianist: his right sleeve hangs empty at his side. Those intricate trills and rapid glissandos are achieved with his left hand alone. The pianist's name is Paul Wittgenstein.

Wittgenstein was born in Vienna, Austria, in 1887. He was the seventh and next to last child of a fabulously wealthy and rather eccentric family. His father amassed a fortune in business, and passed on to his children his habit of independent thinking and his love of music. Some of Europe's greatest composers performed at the Wittgenstein Palais, a grand residence in the heart of Vienna. Paul's mother and father often played chamber music together for relaxation. All the Wittgenstein children could play multiple instruments and read music as naturally as prose.

Growing up, Paul set his heart on a career as a concert pianist. However, when World War I erupted in 1914, he enlisted and joined the fighting on the Eastern Front in what is now Poland. While on a scouting mission he was caught in an ambush by Russian troops, and a bullet shattered his right elbow. Subsequently his men managed to get him to a field hospital in a nearby town. There, doctors clumsily amputated his arm. When he awoke from the operation, Russian soldiers had stormed the town's walls and were holding the doctors and patients at gunpoint. Paul was taken prisoner and moved to a series of Russian camps, where he was held in squalid, freezing barracks with little food. To pass the time at one camp in Siberia, Paul drew a piano keyboard on a wooden crate and doggedly spent hours fingering his favorite pieces with his left hand while listening in his head to the imaginary result. A sympathetic diplomat with the Danish Red Cross noticed his dedicated routine. He succeeded in getting Paul transferred to a village hotel, where he could practice on an upright piano that was real, albeit rickety and out of tune. Finally, after months of negotiations, Paul and several other Austrians were freed in an exchange of prisoners. Paul returned to his family home and familiar keyboard.

Locking himself in his room for hours at a time, Paul set about devising new arrangements for the left hand of piano music by Bach, Chopin, and other composers. He developed tremendous strength and dexterity in his left hand, enabling him to produce a melodic line with his thumb and index finger while

his other three fingers kept a rhythmic pulse. He also invented his own technique for making his one-handed playing sound like the work of two hands. He would depress the piano's pedal for added echo and flash his fingers over the keys at lightning speed from the upper register to the lower, enabling him to fool the ears of even the most expert musicians. Ironically, the most skeptical among his early listeners were probably his own family members. His older sister Hermine, for example, disliked his playing. "When I hear him practicing upstairs," she wrote to a friend, "not a single bar accords with my way of thinking and feeling." Ludwig Wittgenstein, the baby of the family and himself a celebrated philosopher, pointedly stayed away from his brother's concert appearances.

Nevertheless, in the years after the war, Paul pursued his dream with an astonishing vigor and single-mindedness. With money he inherited after his father's death, he commissioned some of the world's greatest composers to write piano concertos for the left hand. Ravel, Prokofiev, Strauss, and Schmidt were just some of the musicians who agreed to accept the technical challenge of writing such specialized music. To ensure that the concertos would be his property alone, Paul insisted that the composers grant him exclusive rights to perform the pieces in public. The generous fees that he paid certainly helped ease these negotiations.

Occasionally spats broke out between composers and Paul. With tastes that ran to the music of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, he sometimes failed to appreciate the virtues of modern music as purveyed by his commissioned writers. In addition, he was always opinionated and outspoken — in fact, he was unable to



be less than candid when he did not understand a piece or disliked it entirely. For example, his experience with the French composer Maurice Ravel was anything but smooth. Then at the height of his fame, Ravel delivered to Paul a piano concerto that was melodic and full of drama, a virtuoso piece. Yet Paul was initially unimpressed and asked for several changes, which Ravel refused to make. When Paul premiered the concerto at a private gathering with Ravel in attendance, he changed several parts and cut out others. The composer was beside himself with rage. At first he swore that Paul would never play his concerto again in public, but at last the pair ironed out their differences. Paul agreed to perform the piece as written, and ended up playing it in concert halls the world over.

By the 1930s, Paul had become a sensation on the concert stage. Promoters throughout Europe and the United States clamored for his performances. Audiences offered thunderous applause to this strong-willed musician with his close-cropped hair, concentrated gaze, and nimble fingers. One critic described "the energy and skill of the artist who, if we close our eyes, deceives us into imagining a two-handed pianist: indeed sometimes in the power of his attack, into imagining two two-handed pianists." Paul Wittgenstein continued to play professionally for the next twenty years. The piano works that he commissioned are now considered classics. He proved that not even the loss of an arm could curtail the career of a dedicated musician and performer.

Answer questions 1 through 7. Base your answers on the article "Concerto for the Left Hand."

- 1** Read this excerpt from the article.

His father amassed a fortune in business, and passed on to his children his habit of independent thinking and his love of music. Some of Europe's greatest composers performed at the Wittgenstein Palais, a grand residence in the heart of Vienna. Paul's mother and father often played chamber music together for relaxation. All the Wittgenstein children could play multiple instruments and read music as naturally as prose.

In this excerpt, the author is discussing

- A. the satisfactions of learning to play music at an early age.
- B. the family background of Paul Wittgenstein.
- C. the importance of music in the culture of Vienna.
- D. the reasons why Europe produced so many great composers.

- 2 Read this passage from the article.

To pass the time at one camp in Siberia, Paul drew a piano keyboard on a wooden crate and doggedly spent hours fingering his favorite pieces with his left hand while listening in his head to the imaginary result. A sympathetic diplomat with the Danish Red Cross noticed his dedicated routine.

The author includes this passage mainly to show

- F. Paul's determination to develop his skill as a pianist.
 - G. Paul's unrealistic ideas about playing the piano.
 - H. the harsh conditions of prison camps in World War I.
 - I. the value of the Red Cross in improving the conditions of prisoners.
- 3 Which of the following is NOT one of the tactics Paul used to start his career as a pianist?
- A. He developed arrangements for the left hand of music by great composers.
 - B. He paid critics to attend his concerts and write favorable notices.
 - C. He paid composers to write piano music for the left hand.
 - D. He practiced a technique that enabled him to play rhythm and melody with one hand.

- 4 Read this sentence from the article.

In addition, he was always opinionated and outspoken — in fact, he was unable to be less than candid when he did not understand a piece or disliked it entirely.

In this sentence, what does the word *candid* mean?

- F. difficult
- G. dishonest
- H. honest
- I. hateful

- 5 The main reason that Paul paid composers to write music for him was that
- A. he needed very simple pieces that could be played with one hand.
 - B. he loved modern music and wanted to play music in the modern style.
 - C. he wanted to own the performing rights to the pieces that they wrote.
 - D. he knew writing music to be played with one hand was technically very challenging.
- 6 Which of the following sentences is the BEST description of the attitude of Paul's family towards his playing?
- F. Paul's family made many sacrifices for him to help him be successful as a pianist.
 - G. Paul's sister Hermine did not care for his playing, but his brother Ludwig strongly supported his career.
 - H. Paul's family was mostly jealous of his success and popularity as a musician.
 - I. Paul's family generally did not appreciate his talent as a musician and performer.
- 7 Why did the author write this article?
- A. to entertain readers with a story about feuding musicians.
 - B. to inform readers about a remarkable musician who overcame a handicap to succeed.
 - C. to convince readers that people with disabilities should be given a chance to succeed.
 - D. to persuade readers that war should be abolished because of its disastrous effects on people like Paul Wittgenstein.