

THE ART OF FOUR HAND PLAYING

BY COSMO BUONO



The repertoire for one piano four hands is varied and vast. The earliest works were written in the **Renaissance**, and music continues to be written for the genre today. It has attracted such great composers as Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Ludwig van Beethoven, Franz Schubert, Felix Mendelssohn, Johannes Brahms, Claude Debussy, Antonin Dvorak, Edvard Grieg, Franz Liszt, Maurice Ravel, and Erik Satie among many others. There are countless wonderful transcriptions as well.

One of the most useful tools in developing a successful ensemble is for the two players to talk to each other regarding **dynamics**, interpretation, **rubato**, and the overall presentation of a piece.

ACHIEVING BALANCE BETWEEN THE TWO PLAYERS

An important consideration in four hand playing is how the two players will balance with each other and how each player will balance their own two hands. Think of yourself as an ensemble of four parts, and what the role of each hand. Even when one player has the melody in both hands, one hand can be more prominent than the other. When playing **fortissimo**, if both players are too full, the sound will be loud, but it may be hard for the listener to hear what part is most significant. No matter the volume, balance should always be considered.

ENSEMBLE

This can sometimes be difficult to coordinate between the two players, as rhythms between the two parts can be problematic. The most ideal situation is when each player learns the other's part. Another helpful tool is counting out loud in order to gain a sense of the entire work. Often the problem can occur in the proximity of the hands (traffic jams!) between the **primo's** left hand and **secondo's** right hand. Carefully choreograph such spots so that you know if you need to be in or out on the keyboard to stay out of each other's way. Also be sure to consider seating. Using two concert-sized benches and angling them toward the keyboard that will help. Sometimes altering a fingering will help keep the two players' hands far enough away from each other.

PEDALING

In general, secondo does the pedaling and is responsible for both parts. This will require careful consideration, as it must work for both players. Again, learning each other's parts will help with knowing when to and when not to pedal.

FURTHER STUDY

Here is a list of piano teams that contributed to the recorded repertoire and would be good examples of how to handle issues of ensemble and technique:



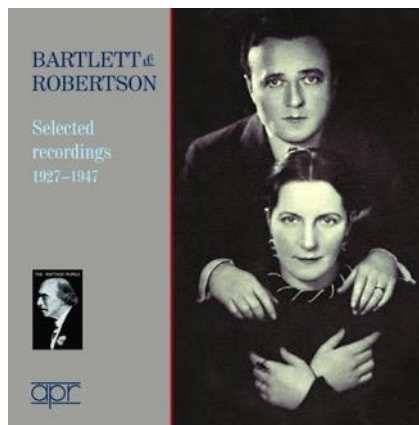
[Martha Argerich & Nelson Freire](#)



[Vitya Vronsky & Victor Babin](#)



[Vladimir Ashkenazy & Andre Previn](#)



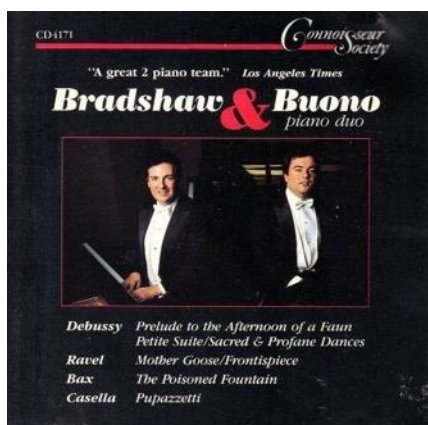
[Ethel Bartlett & Rae Robertson](#)



Harold Bauer & Ossip Gabrilowitsch



Duo Crommelynck



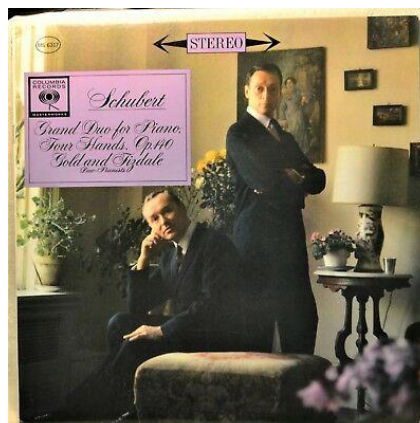
David Bradshaw & Cosmo Buono



Ferrante & Teicher



Richard & John Contiguglia



Gold & Fisdale



LUBOSHUTZ and Nemenoff, American duo pianists, 1957.

Luboshutz & Nemenoff



Stecher & Horowitz



Anthony & Joseph Paratore



Whittemore & Lowe