



**IT WORKS.  
UNTIL IT DOESN'T.**

Why playing falls apart  
— and what actually holds

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It is the day.

Lights on.  
Applause.

A demanding piece.

First phrase clean.  
Second phrase tighter.  
Third phrase — rushed.

Shoulders rise.  
Forearm hardens.  
The sound tightens.

Sweat appears.

The tempo edges forward.

We try to hold it.

**It slips.**

What felt solid in the room  
is not stable here.

The same passage.  
The same notes.

Nothing is under control.

This turns into survival.

This is not just nerves.  
This is not random.

Nothing in the notes changed.

What changed  
is how we produced them.

This is a performance  
that was working  
under specific conditions.

What looked stable  
was only stable  
under those conditions.

**When the conditions changed, it no longer held.**

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# ISOLATION IS CLEAN, BUT NOT REAL

**Working on small sections of a passage is often necessary.**

It reduces complexity, allows focused correction, and makes problems easier to identify.

Without isolation, many details remain unnoticed.

But problems begin when the isolated version becomes the only version that is trained.

**Control in isolation does not guarantee control in context.**

Isolated work simplifies the task.

Fewer variables are active.  
Attention can be directed precisely.  
Corrections can be made clearly.

This creates a strong sense of control.

But the original passage contains more than the isolated fragment.

In isolation, attention can remain fully on a single correction.

The task is narrow.  
The target is clear.

**In context, that is no longer possible.**

Before the difficult passage even arrives, attention is already distributed across:

- what came before
- phrase direction
- harmonic movement
- pedal timing
- voicing
- the other hand
- memory landmarks

By the time the passage arrives,  
the intended correction may no longer be in focus.

The passage is now performed under divided attention.

**There is also an auditory change.**

A passage may work in isolation because it can be heard clearly.

In context, it may stop working because:

- the texture changes
- the pedal alters resonance
- the voicing hierarchy shifts
- the same notes are no longer exposed

The material has not changed.  
But how it is heard has.

If this has not been trained,  
the movement loses its reference.

**Certain practice strategies rely on altering the structure itself.**

For example, changing rhythms to simplify coordination or highlight specific notes.

This can create temporary control.

But these patterns do not exist in the actual passage.

They change:

- timing relationships
- energy distribution
- movement flow

When the original form returns,  
the playing has to reorganise again.

If that reintegration is not trained,  
the clarity does not transfer.

These strategies can also shift attention away from sound.

The task becomes executing a pattern correctly  
rather than producing a specific result.

This can improve coordination in the short term.  
It can also reinforce repeatable movement.

But the auditory target becomes less precise.

Everything is organised mechanically,  
but not necessarily directed toward a clear sound.

When the original passage returns,  
the pianist must do two things at once:

- maintain coordination
- restore the intended sound

If the sound was never stabilised during practice,  
there is nothing reliable to return to.

The result often feels controlled,  
but lacks clarity, direction, or hierarchy.