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# Keyboard Basics: A Comprehensive Group Approach for Adults

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**KEYBOARD BASICS:**

**A Comprehensive Group Approach for Adults**

**BY**

**BRENDA SIEFFERMAN**

**THESIS**

**SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
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**I HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THIS THESIS BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING THIS  
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## ABSTRACT

*Keyboard Basics* is a beginning level group course for adults in a classroom setting, using electronic keyboards. The course was born of necessity, because no existing textbooks fully meet the needs of this particular group of learners. It is designed for non-music majors with little or no previous musical experience. The goals of this text are to:

1. introduce students to the world of music and its language;
2. give students several musical experiences to help develop a love and appreciation of music;
3. enable them to think and play musically and with expression;
4. teach students to read music;
5. teach students to create their own music;
6. give them the skills needed to be functional keyboardists (pianists).

This text contains a chapter for each of the areas of study necessary to accomplish these goals. These areas concern reading and repertoire, technique, sight reading, theory, harmonization, creative work, and transposition. Within each chapter there is a logical order of progression where new concepts introduced are based or built upon what has already been learned. Each chapter also contains suggested assignments for assessing the students' comprehension of the material as well as classroom activities for added variety.

## FOREWORD

### NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

This text is the tangible result of several years of teaching students to play the piano. Having studied and assimilated pedagogical teachings and principles of several well-known names in this discipline such as E. L. Lancaster, James Lyke, Elyse Mach, Frances Clark, Yvonne Enoch, and others, I set out to find the perfect text that incorporated all I had learned and wanted to pass on to my students. This proved to be a challenge. I soon learned that I was searching for something that existed only in my mind. I devised a plan for the first semester of group piano class, searched existing texts and extracted good examples from them to teach these concepts. These, combined with my own experience and knowledge of teaching, have resulted in a text concerning Keyboard Basics.

A beginning group piano class may be the only music class some students ever experience. If it is their only formal introduction to the world of music, or even if it is not, it should be a good “first impression.” This is the reason for including every area of music study—repertoire, sight reading, technique, harmonization, ear training, ensemble pieces, creative work, music theory, and transposition. In any applied music course, these areas are all closely related and students need to experience all these facets of music making, even at the beginning level. Several suggested activities and ideas for teaching these concepts are presented with this text, since the instructor’s method of presentation is just as important as the material being taught. The student is the one who benefits most from this text. It was created with him in mind.

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## JUSTIFICATION FOR THE NEED OF A NEW COMPREHENSIVE COURSE FOR BEGINNING NON-MUSIC MAJORS

There are about a dozen textbooks currently in use today for beginning group instruction in piano or keyboard. About half of these are designed solely for beginning non-music majors. The rest attempt to straddle a rather wide fence by indicating that their texts are designed for both non-music majors as well as non-piano music majors. These texts, although quite good and useful in many respects, are not designed for the special needs of the non-musician. For several reasons, these texts in the latter group are less suitable for use as a text for the first semester of class piano for non-music majors. They tend to be lacking in several areas, leaving the instructor to find supplements in order to fill in the gaps. Music majors can read music and can either sing or play an instrument. They also have a musical background in theory and have probably heard more quality music.

Most texts designed for the group college class are primarily concerned with getting the student to read notes and play pieces quickly. Harmonization, in the form of basic chords, technique, and theory are presented in this context. The main reason these texts are not suitable for beginners is that they progress too quickly into reading and playing notation covering all of the grand staff. According to studies of the motor-learning

process, in order for a skill to be acquired and retained, learning must take place in small steps and with much repetition.<sup>1</sup> Each step must be mastered before proceeding on to the next step in learning. This is true for reading and for other concepts and skills also. For this reason, students need several pieces at each level and for each skill or concept.

Students with no previous experience in music need much more time to get acquainted with the new language of music. They also need a reading approach which introduces the staff gradually and provides sufficient repertoire, rote playing, and technique to enable them to feel comfortable with some basic patterns and hand positions. *Keyboard Basics* fills this need by combining directional reading and intervallic reading with rote learning, keyboard topography, and technique.

Another downfall of existing texts is that many of them omit important areas of learning for beginning students. Some ignore ear training, musicianship, or creative work. Other texts are very weak in one or more areas which should receive more attention during the first semester of study — for instance, sight reading. Some texts follow a somewhat illogical order in presentation of new material. In texts which use a multi-key approach, such as the *Alfred Group Piano* text, students may be expected to master pentachords or even scales and pieces in all the major and minor keys (with the accompanying theoretical knowledge) very early in the course, while creative work, ensemble pieces, transposition, or ear training receive much less attention. Even beginners deserve a good foundation in all the basics of music if they hope some day to

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<sup>1</sup> Marianne Uzler, Stewart Gordon, and Elyse Mach, *The Well-Tempered Keyboard Teacher* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1991), 34.



become musicians themselves, or even if they only wish to learn to enjoy and appreciate music more as consumers.

The ideal course should offer students plenty of repertoire pieces as well as several good sight reading examples, technique exercises, harmonization/transposition examples, ensemble pieces, theory, and creative work at each level. For example, when students are reading pre-staff notation, they should have examples, drills, assignments, etc., in the above areas at that level to master as well. Students should have several exercises and pieces to practice which will help them learn new concepts well before proceeding to new ideas. These concepts must be reinforced in subsequent chapters and reviewed often so that students can build upon what they have learned as they continue to advance.

A very popular text in use today, *Alfred Group Piano* by E. L. Lancaster and Kenon Renfrow, for example, would be a good choice for college non-piano music majors. Its introduction to staff reading is very brief and it proceeds to difficult keys early. By the end of Unit 2, students are expected to recognize all major key signatures, and are expected to play examples in these keys in Unit 4. The same can be said of *Keyboard Strategies*, by Stecher, Horowitz, and Gordon. In chapter 2, students are expected to master sixteenth-notes and triplets, read notation on the grand staff, play in any major key, and accompany a melody by realizing chord symbols. Music majors already understand the theoretical concepts involved, and can read the notation, so it is only a matter of transferring their musical knowledge to the piano. The Bastien method uses more pre-reading examples and teaches students to recognize patterns easily, but once the grand staff is introduced, students are expected to play examples very soon in all the major and

minor keys. Again, this is better suited for music students. The Bastien method, while strong in technique, theory, sight-reading and harmonization, lacks sufficient solo repertoire at each level for the beginning students to master the concepts presented. None of these texts offers a gradual introduction to staff reading by using a reduced staff, where students first learn to read notes on and near one staff line, then two staff lines, before reading on the five lines and spaces.

As for the better choices—those designed for beginning non-music majors—some of them are designed to get the students playing something as soon as possible. For example, *Play Piano Now!*, by Willard Palmer, Morton Manus, and E. L. Lancaster, while not claiming to be a group text, is for adults with no previous musical experience and looks very much the same as the others. It offers rapid advancement in reading but ignores other fundamental skills.

In the Kern book, *The Adult Piano Method Play by Choice*, students progress within the span of a dozen pages from pre-reading (no staff) notation to the author's arrangement of *Fur Elise* (complete with eighth-notes, much like Beethoven!) It would be virtually impossible to teach good technique, musicianship, and other aspects of playing while moving so quickly into difficult music. The other repertoire in his book consists of arrangements of popular and classical tunes. There are no standard beginning level piano pieces here.

*Piano for the Developing Musician*, another newer text by Martha Hilley and Lynn Freeman Olson, offers no gradual staff reading. It requires almost immediate reading of all the notes on the grand staff and asks students to learn all the major key signatures in

## Unit 1.

*Alfred's Piano 101* by E. L. Lancaster and Kenon Renfrow also offers some pre-staff reading but no reduced staff reading. It does, however, move at a slower pace and requires students to play notes on the staff near middle C first, expanding the reading from there gradually. This text does not offer enough repertoire in each chapter. For example, staccato notes are introduced in Unit 6 along with several other new concepts. The student is given only two very short pieces to practice with all staccato notes, and two more very short pieces with some staccato and legato notes in Unit 7.

*Piano for Pleasure* by Martha Hilley and Lynn Freeman Olson is a much better text than those previously mentioned for beginners in every respect, but even it moves very quickly into reading notation on the entire grand staff. It does offer good pre-reading and reduced staff reading examples, and includes an accompanying CD and computer software which would be good to use in the classroom.

Most of the current methods have included an adequate amount of sight reading and harmonization appropriate for each level. *Pianolab*, by Carolyn Lindemann, although strong in technic and theory, never even mentions sight reading. *Piano for Pleasure* does not offer enough pieces in easily accessible keys for students to harmonize after the introduction of the tonic, dominant, and subdominant chords for harmonization.

Duet and other ensemble pieces are necessary and fun for college age beginners. Students enjoy making music together. This is a very important and often overlooked skill among those who only study privately with an instructor. The Bastien text, *Beginning Piano for Adults*, includes only a few very short duets in five of its chapters—not enough

to give students time to enjoy playing together—and no ensemble pieces. *Alfred's Piano 101* has only three ensemble pieces in the entire book and no all-student duets, although it does have several good teacher-student duets.

Students should have several opportunities for creative expression during their first semester. This should include improvisation, composition, and other creative activities. Neither the Bastien textbook nor *Piano 101* has any improvisation, composition, or creative work. *Piano for Pleasure*, *Piano for the Developing Musician*, and *Keyboard Musicianship* by Lyke, Hartline, and Ellison have some improvisation exercises only. *Keyboard Strategies* has a section entitled Creative Activities in each unit, but these are really only harmonization examples with occasional improvisation exercises. *Alfred's Group Piano Course* also has some good improvisation exercises but no composition. In fact, none of the newer texts includes an adequate amount of composition, improvisation, and creative work. There is also little mentioned in these texts on musicianship—playing with a sense of musicality or awareness of proper phrasing, dynamics, balance, etc. This is a weak area in all the current textbooks.

Another weak area overall is the lack of aural training and teaching students to play “by ear.” This very useful skill is virtually ignored in *Piano 101*, *Play Piano Now*, *Beginning Piano for Adults*, *Piano for Pleasure* (it does include some aural drills in the form of echo playing), *Piano for the Developing Musician*, and *Alfred's Group Piano*. It is only briefly mentioned in *Keyboard Strategies*, which lists several well-known tunes for students to play “by ear.”

All the texts for non-music majors include more than enough theory for the beginner.

As mentioned above, some go beyond the beginning level in teaching keys, complicated rhythms, and other advanced theory. Theory for beginners should include only the amount of information which will allow them to understand the music and correctly interpret and perform their pieces.

*Keyboard Basics* is designed with the student in mind. New concepts are broken down into small steps or stages so that there are no gaps in learning. Adults, who often return to a study of music later in life, as well as the typical non-music major college student will appreciate the effort to make learning these very new concepts as easy as possible. The instructor should guide the students so that they make discoveries and associations on their own whenever possible. Experience is the best teacher, and with *Keyboard Basics*, students will learn by doing—with literally a “hands on” approach to learning. All the areas of learning — repertoire, technique, sight reading, harmonization, transposition, ensemble work, theory, creative work, and ear training — are closely related and integrated in this text. Work in one area often yields improvement in other areas as well. It is assumed that students are willing to make daily practice a part of their lives. Their efforts, combined with quality teaching and excellent materials should ensure that everyone enjoys making music during this first semester of keyboard study.

## COURSE OVERVIEW

This course, a beginning level college class piano course, is for those with little or no previous musical experience. It is designed and should be taught with the student learner in mind. In this course all the basic elements of music and fundamental piano skills are clearly presented in a logical and progressive order. These elements concern music notation and reading, rhythm, musical terminology and symbols, listening skills, and keyboard topography. The course will encompass the following areas: solo and ensemble repertoire, technique, sight reading, harmonization, transposition, music theory, improvisation, composition and creative work, and musicianship.

It is important for students to leave the first class meeting with a piece they can play. This helps to give them the assurance that they can succeed and that making music is worth the effort. In this course, students will experience performing solo pieces for the group, and participating in duet and other ensemble performances and practices with other students. Students can expect to be tested often in this course. This is the only way the instructor can adequately determine if the student has really internalized the concepts presented. The instructor should test the students in performance once every two or three weeks, and give short written assignments every week or so. This process need not be a dreaded task if the instructor uses some creativity in the testing process, making it as enjoyable as possible. For example, the performance exams could be “in-class recitals” of

solo or duet repertoire, or creative projects the students have prepared. Students need to be made aware of the time and discipline necessary to learn to play the piano. Applied lessons on any instrument demand that the student be willing to practice for at least twenty minutes daily. Music is a social skill, and students will come to enjoy their performances in class and will benefit from hearing each other perform. This course is designed as an introductory course, to help students develop a love of music and give them the basic functional skills necessary to express themselves musically.

## TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

Virtually everyone enjoys music in one way or another. Making music should be an enjoyable, rewarding experience. The instructor plays a large part in this experience, and it is his responsibility to set the tone for the entire course. Many adult beginning piano students have real doubts about their ability to learn new material and to play the piano in a way they feel is acceptable. They have high expectations for themselves and can be very critical of their own playing. Others may start with a very positive attitude and with more confidence, but have no realistic concept of what will be required during the course. It is essential that the teacher put the students at ease during the first class meeting and explain what will be covered and how students will be evaluated. It is a good idea to play for the class some of the more interesting pieces they will learn. If the instructor is positive and enthusiastic from the first day, his attitude will carry over to the class. Although it requires dedication and hard work, learning to play the piano can be enjoyable, and the result is worth the effort.

A beginning level piano course should be designed in such a way that students experience success as a direct result of their efforts and attendance. It is assumed that every student has some measure of musical ability that must be either awakened, stimulated, or guided. The instructor's goal is to teach the student to make music on the piano, and make the learning experience a positive one. In a positive, encouraging atmosphere, students will not be afraid to try new things in a classroom setting. The fear



of failure will gradually diminish as students participate in ensemble pieces and other group activities where they actually have fun while helping and learning from each other. This, in turn, will build confidence as further learning takes place.

Music is really a new language to beginning students. They are expected to learn to read music and also to acquire many skills in this new language. These students need a text that progresses slowly and continually reinforces concepts. Since the nature of an applied music course is that the learning is cumulative, students should have ample opportunity to review previous material before building on or adding to the concepts and skills mastered. Each week, a portion of time should be spent reviewing previously learned skills and concepts so that students feel comfortable and secure with them. This review can take many forms. An in-class rhythm drill might be performed as an ensemble to illustrate a concept such as dotted quarter-notes. The next time, students might be assigned a short improvisation to play with a partner which uses dotted quarter-note rhythms. Then, they could learn a new piece (one that does not use a familiar melody or song) which has dotted quarter notes. When learning intervals, students might first find these in a score, then identify them in another key, aurally identify them, play them, and write them on the staff in a composition.

The ideal situation for adult learning of an applied skill is the group setting. Instead of relating only to one other adult each week in a rather isolated environment, students in a group lesson learn and interact with several other adults. This is ideal for several reasons. First, the social aspects are very important. Making music with others is fun. Students encourage each other and give positive feedback during class. Shared experiences in the

classroom help the group form some bonds. Another reason which is closely related is the idea of group dynamics which helps everyone in the class feel encouraged and supported by the others. Students who feel they are a part of the group will usually work harder to do their part. Furthermore, students in a group can also learn from each other. In an encouraging environment, students have opportunities to compare their performances with those of several others, not in a competitive sense, but in a positive way which reinforces learning. The instructor must be sure that all students are engaged in some meaningful activity during the entire class period. Everything that takes place during each class time must apply to all students in some way. For example, if one is performing, the other students should be actively listening and practicing silently on their keyboards, or preparing helpful comments for those who have played.

It is a good idea to vary the activities used in class so students do not become bored with the format. Current technology in many classrooms make the use of Power Point and overhead projectors for any lecture notes and musical examples, diagrams, or simple analysis easy. Students might use the dry-erase board for completing an in-class assignment. Students can play duets together and hold “in-class” recitals. Another possibility is to get the students together in groups of three or four to work on a creative assignment or check harmonizations. Students need in-class practice time when the instructor can check with each one individually from time to time. There is no limit to the variety of activities one can utilize in a classroom setting.

In a group setting, it is advisable to adopt the Gestalt philosophy of teaching, which is

used in school settings.<sup>2</sup> This is a broad concept of cognitive learning involving the whole person. It seeks to create a desire to go on learning. It builds upon what a student already knows, which is often referred to as “spiral learning<sup>3</sup>,” and teaches by experience, not by facts and symbols. For music, then, symbols come to represent something the student has already learned. Students must first grasp the whole by recognizing meaningful patterns, then refining the elements involved. For a music class, this can mean the student learns a well-known melody on the piano by rote first, and later learns what the different note values look like, and how to read the notation on the staff. Learn by doing first, then learn the musical symbol and terminology. The Suzuki approach is based on this philosophy. Suzuki stated that we first learn to talk by hearing speech as a young child, then we go to school and later learn to read and write the symbols of the language.<sup>4</sup> Musical language should be learned the same way. In using such an approach, the instructor will want to demonstrate entire pieces and examples often, in class. This enables students to hear the whole piece, complete with phrasing, dynamics, and proper technique. After hearing and seeing music properly performed, the student can begin to work out the music himself. It is important to learn only what is needed at the time, and not what will be needed in the future. This is why beginning students do not need to learn to recognize all the major and minor key signatures, for example. They will not be playing anything in the more difficult keys for a long time. They only learn what has direct

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<sup>2</sup>Norman Mehr, *Group Piano Teaching* (Evanston, Illinois: Summy-Birchard, 1965), 10.

<sup>3</sup>James Lyke and Yvonne Enoch, *Creative Piano Teaching* (Champaign, Illinois: Stipes, 1987), 74.

<sup>4</sup>Uszler, Gordon, and Mach, 82.

application to their repertoire and technique. This creates a “need to know” mentality, where students recognize that they must learn notation, rhythms, etc., in order to do better what they are already doing. Students internalize concepts as they learn then build upon this store of knowledge by relating new but similar ideas to previously encountered skills or concepts.<sup>5</sup> For example, students will encounter fingering problems in new pieces that are assigned. They should be able to work out a suitable fingering based on their previous knowledge of scale fingerings, hand positions, chord pattern fingerings, and other related skills.<sup>6</sup>

Every student is either a visual, aural, or kinesthetic learner. Students will learn much better and more quickly if the teacher tailors his teaching style to the student’s learning style. However, in a group setting, the best one can do is provide many varied learning experiences and activities in each of the styles so that every student has an opportunity to learn in his own style. For example, many students are visual learners. Music notation presented visually, as it is on the staff, is more readily grasped by these learners who see the notes, and play the keys. Aural learners, on the other hand, will usually try to learn to play their pieces “by ear” first, since they have a good memory for the sounds they hear. Kinesthetic learners prefer to learn by the physical feel of the keyboard and moving to each position in order to play the repertoire. A good teacher will take advantage of each of these learning styles and create ways to teach the concepts according to the various styles.

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<sup>5</sup>Uszler, Gordon, and Mach, 36.

<sup>6</sup>Uszler, Gordon, and Mach, 62.

Throughout this beginning piano course, the instructor should strive to build good musicianship in the students' playing. Even the simplest exercise can be shaped with proper phrasing and good balance between the hands. Students need not wait until they can read music to make music and play expressively. Students can be taught how to listen critically and give helpful comments about others' performances. The instructor can model this for students as they listen to classmates perform in class.

The keys to a successful beginning group piano class lie in part with the instructor and in part with the students. The instructor must set the pace and tone of the class with his positive encouragement, philosophy and style of teaching, continual reinforcement of concepts, and varied activities to maintain interest. The class members must determine for themselves that they are willing to make attendance and practice a priority in order to assimilate and build upon all the information presented. If these elements are in place, group dynamics will ensure that everyone benefits from the shared musical experiences, and real learning will take place.

## REPERTOIRE

Learning to read music is one of the most difficult challenges for many college-age and adult students who want to play the piano. It is important for students to be able to play several pieces well at each stage of learning. Teaching several familiar and unfamiliar pieces by rote during the entire course will allow students to express themselves musically, even though they are not familiar with all the musical terminology or notation. It also trains the ear to hear relationships between notes, enhances musical memory, and aids in reading notation later. Memorization of pieces, the equivalent of rote playing for the pre-reader, is another important aspect of piano (or keyboard) playing which is included later in the course. The reading approach used in *Keyboard Basics* is a gradual approach to staff reading, beginning with pre-staff notation and progressing to reduced staff notation, then to grand staff notation using pentachord patterns and known hand positions to aid in reading. Students learn to read notes by interval and by direction, combined with a thorough knowledge of keyboard geography and technique learned through rote playing of certain hand positions and note groupings. Duets and ensemble drills and pieces are included throughout the repertoire.

Since the groups of black keys are patterned and easy to locate, students can begin by playing rote pieces on the black keys, such as *Hot Cross Buns*, *Merrily We Roll Along*, and *Old MacDonald*. These can be learned quickly, since most students already know the

melody for these songs and will naturally use the correct rhythm. In fact, these can be played at any octave of the keyboard and may be taught before any discussion on notation or rhythm. *Merrily We Roll Along* can also be used as an ensemble piece when it is played as a round. The student is therefore able to “make music” very quickly and with little effort from either the instructor or himself. Most students are pleasantly surprised to find that this is an enjoyable experience, and feel very good about their first attempts at playing the piano (or keyboard). They should leave the first class period with a piece that they can play, and using the groups of black keys to teach an easy piece a good way to do this.<sup>7</sup>

At this point, some creative students will already have begun to play other tunes they know on the black keys. This should be encouraged. The instructor can even suggest other titles for those who are reluctant to “experiment” on their own, such as *Amazing Grace*, *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot*, and *The Farmer in the Dell*.

After a discussion of basic note values and finger numbers, students are ready to play a new melody by reading the unstaffed notation on the page. The pieces *Joe’s Song*, *Two by Three*, and *Who’s That?* are pre-reading, directional pieces which work well here. These are on pages 13—15. They have quarter-notes and half-notes and are played on the black keys, but the notes are positioned in relation to one another, moving up or down, so the student does not need to read from the staff. An example is shown below in figure 1.

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<sup>7</sup>Lyke and Enoch, 344.

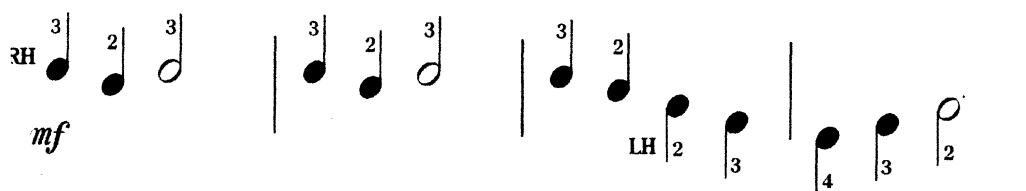


Figure 1 *Two by Three*

The student must learn and play the note values and also learn the concepts of “up and down,” both on the page and on the keyboard. This is a crucial point at which the instructor should be sure the students equate “up” on the page with “up” on the keyboard (to the right); “down” on the page means “down” on the keyboard (to the left). This directional reading is also improved with pieces like *Lightly Row*, which is useful for teaching finger numbers and, later, transposition. The first line can be seen below, in figure 2. Students are comfortable playing this familiar melody with both hands in parallel motion, and will gladly play it in any new hand position later. The chart on page 25 is designed to aid in directional reading.



LIGHTLY ROW

RH 5	3 3—	4	2 2—	1	2 3	4	5 5 5—	5	3 3—	4	2 2—	1	3	5 5	3—
LH 1	3 3—	2	4 4—	5	4	3	2	1 1 1—	1	3 3—	2	4 4—	5	3	3—
	Light-	light-	ly row,	o'er	the	glass-	y	waves we go;	smooth-	ly glide,	smooth-	ly glide,	o'er	si-	lent
	ly row,	ly row,												the	the

Figure 2 *Lightly Row*

The black keys are a useful beginning for another reason. They make learning the names of the white keys easier because they serve as guides or markers. When students are introduced to the white key pentachord patterns and are accustomed to keeping the hands in a set position, they will enjoy playing other unstaffed pieces that are familiar. A good duet, *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot*, is found on page 23. The instructor plays the first half of each phrase in chordal style and the students play the melody with their right hand (comin' for to carry me home) over the instructor's accompaniment. The students read their part here the same way they read *Lightly Row* — by looking at finger numbers and directional lines instead of notes.

Other repertoire pieces like *Take C, Summer Night, Love Me Tender, E I Know, Ode to Joy* and *Simple Elegance* can be introduced next. These are found on pages 26—31.

These directional reading pieces are notated and are played on the white keys. A diagram on the page shows students where to place their hands on the keyboard. After a discussion about meter and time signatures, the pieces *God Is So Good*, and *First Waltz* can be introduced. These pre-staff pieces have time signatures. They also make nice duets, since they have teacher accompaniment parts.

Students can be introduced to staff notation gradually, by learning how to read a reduced staff. Starting with one line, students first learn to recognize notes moving up or down. These notes can move by step or skip. Once again, the starting note (white key) is given and students play pieces like *Catfish* and *Wind Song* (page 49) reading directionally by step and skip.

Next, students can learn to read a two-line staff and play pieces like *Round Dance* and *Lullaby* (page 50). This reading approach facilitates reading by intervals when students are playing notation on the grand staff. Also, reading by step and skip is one useful way of reading new pieces when students are learning a piece in a new hand position (in a new key) on the staff.

Once students are comfortable with this reading approach and understand that each white key is a step on the staff (from line to space or from space to line), they are ready to begin reading staff notation. A good transition piece to learn first is *Stepping Along*, on page 56. This piece makes staff reading easy because the name of each note appears on each notehead. Directions are printed on the page, which point out steps and skips in the music. This piece is also in the key of C, which is the first hand position that students used in playing pentachord. They now learn to read the five notes on the staff for each

hand. *Skipping Along* and *Mexican Dances* on page 57 are very similar and provide extra practice in staff reading. *Teddy's Tune* and *Ode to Joy* are excellent beginning staff reading pieces which students also play with each hand separately.

Middle C position is another common reading position for beginners. It helps them learn a few more notes on the staff. Easy-to-read pieces in middle C position are *Camptown Races* and *You're a Grand Old Flag*, found on pages 64 and 67. These introduce rests and have finger numbers. The melody is divided between the hands and only one hand plays at a time. *You're A Grand Old Flag* begins with an incomplete measure. This concept can be explained at this time. Again, the familiarity of the song helps students understand more easily. Also, both of these pieces move by steps and skips, which students are still learning to read.

Some students have difficulty playing notes with each hand at the same time. Several pieces can be used to help improve their coordination and reading ability. *Here's A Happy Song*, on page 78 is in key of C position and requires the left hand to hold down a whole note while the right hand plays C Major triads. Students are already playing triads in their technique drills with pentachords, so this is only new because they are seeing it on the staff for the first time. This type of playing does not require much coordination, so it is a good piece to try first. Next, students can play the Gurlitt example on page 70 which requires a little more coordination and advance planning. This is shown below in figure 3.



Figure 3 Gurlitt Op. 82, No. 12

Students need to get both hands playing on beat one of each measure. This is an echo piece, so the ear helps the hands. *March Time* on page 64 is a good piece to introduce next. Here, both hands must play together in one measure, but the finger pattern is the same for both hands. This makes reading easier and helps coordination. *When the Saints Go Marching In*, on page 79, is in the key of C, with whole notes for the left-hand as accompaniment. Finally, *Jolly Old St. Nicholas* can be taught. The notation and hand position are by this time very familiar. As shown on page 72, this piece has the melody divided between the hands and, occasionally, a whole note as accompaniment in the left hand. Students will want to play this one, also. The familiarity of most of these pieces makes reading the notes and learning to coordinate the hands easier.

The next few pieces are still in key of C position to reinforce reading the notation, but they each introduce a new concept. *Echoing*, on page 96, is very similar to the Gurlitt example but it is written in eighth-notes. *Tap It Out*, on page 51—52, is an effective rhythm ensemble to perform in class. It requires reading and clapping rhythms on a four-part score with eighth-notes, quarter-notes, half-notes, and rests. It reinforces eighth-note rhythm and eliminates the need to read pitches, and also gives the group an opportunity to

“perform” together. Students can be divided into four teams and each team must read one line on each system—another new concept! A duet in C position which uses eighth-notes is *Tag Along*, on page 69. This is written in such a way that students easily see the relationship between eighth-notes, quarter-notes, and half-notes on the score. Once students understand dotted quarter-notes (like they hear in *Silent Night*, *London Bridge*, and *Alouette*) they are ready to play another duet, *Theme from the New World Symphony* on page 94. Students will enjoy other duets with the teacher called *Ear Investment No. 1*, and *Ear Investment No. 3*. These echo pieces, on pages 90—93 can be played with or without the music. They are both in C position and for the right hand only. If students use the music, they can see the dotted quarter-note rhythm and get more practice reading in a white-key hand position.

Students also need to read pieces that require the hands to be in different positions. One such piece which involves a different hand placement is *Color Wheel*, on page 63. The keyboard chart on the page shows students where to place their hands. Another piece which asks students to place each hand in a different pentachord pattern is *Sun of My Soul*. It is very easy to read (one note at a time in either hand) and the hand position for each hand is shown. *Short Run* on page 132 is another piece with a left-hand ostinato and the right-hand playing in various pentachord positions with plenty of time to move between changes in hand position.

Upper C position requires students to learn notes on the staff which are played in another octave on the keyboard. The left hand remains in key of C position while the right hand moves up one octave. Pieces which can be used here are *March No. 1* by Turk,

*Allegro* by Gurlitt, and *Study* by Bartók. *Study* by Bartók is a good one to begin with, since it moves entirely in parallel motion. *Allegro* requires students to play an occasional left-hand tonic or dominant note with the right-hand melody. These are found on page 96, 97, and 99.

Students are by now familiar with the G-pentachord pattern (and other white major pentachord patterns) and can be introduced to pieces in this hand position. One early piece they will have played in G position is *Lightly Row* from the directional copy. When they see *Lightly Row* written on the staff in G position and in parallel motion, students find that they already know these notes. *Love Somebody* on page 98 is another G-position piece in parallel motion which students can easily play. Another G-position piece is *March (Turk)* on page 99 with right-hand melody and left-hand single notes to accompany. A variation on G-position is lower G position, when the left hand is one octave lower. *Dance*, page 119, in which the left-hand plays an open fifth in low G position to accompany every measure, is a good one to use at this time. The fifth in the left-hand helps prepare students for the introduction of tonic and dominant scale degrees as accompaniment. In this piece, the right-hand plays the melody, using eighth-notes. *Texture 1* is similar, and uses dotted quarter-note rhythms. *Drone Piece* uses legato and staccato articulations. These are seen on pages 119–121.

Other white-key pentachord-patterned pieces can be introduced, which have accidentals written in as needed. *Naturally* on page 95 will seem easy to read by this time, but students can focus on the accidentals used. This gets students accustomed to seeing sharps and flats in the music. *Shall We Gather at The River* on page 130 and the duet

*German Folk Song* (right-hand only for students) on page 131 are good examples, with sharps written in as needed. *Shall We Gather at the River* has moving lines in each hand, and an optional teacher accompaniment, and the *German Folk Song* is a duet (the teacher plays the *secondo* part). *Etude*, in the key of A, has a left-hand ostinato fifth pattern with a right-hand melody. The *Forty-Finger Ensemble*, also in A, is good for a group reading exercise. Students can play any of four different parts in this two-line work. These two appear on pages 108—110.

The easier minor pentachord patterns—A, D, E, and G—should be familiar to students. They can now read pieces like No. 21 by Bartok in A Minor, on page 114, *A Little Sad* in G Minor, page 86, *Eerie Canal* on page 85, and play ensemble pieces like Beyer's duet exercise No. 42, on page 82, and *Prelude* on page 83. These are all written in a pentachord pattern and use accidentals as needed for the key. *Midnight Shadows*, on page 87, reinforces not only accidentals, but also lower G position reading, dynamics, and articulations presented thus far.

Students should be very comfortable and confident when playing and reading pieces that are confined to a major or minor pentachord pattern. Giving them many pieces in these familiar hand positions reinforces all the elements they know, such as notes and rhythm, and allows them to build confidence and experience success when playing for others. These favorites can be used to work on technique, transposition, phrasing, dynamics, and other aspects of a musical performance.

As students are introduced to intervals within the octave, pieces which use intervals in either hand can be introduced. Initially, these intervals are limited to seconds, thirds,

fourths, and fifths. Pieces which use these are *When the Saints Go Marching In*, page 137, and *Interval Study*, on page 135. Since one of the melodies is familiar, and both are in C position, it is easier for students to focus on the left hand with two notes at a time. *Will You, Won't You?* is a G-position piece which uses intervals in the left hand as accompaniment, and has two accidentals in the right-hand melody. *Miniature Waltz* on page 141 has a right-hand melody with left-hand intervals as accompaniment. *Aura Lee*, on page 136, and *Musette in F*, on page 139, are both in F position (key of F). *Aura Lee* is a familiar tune with a pleasant left-hand accompaniment which uses intervals, and *Musette in F* is fun to play, with its bouncy left-hand patterned accompaniment and intervals. *The Nightingale* also uses these intervals, and requires students to move up one octave, then another octave, on the last line. These pieces in F have melodies with repeated notes, which can sometimes present a challenge to those who have difficulty playing with a legato touch, or those who have trouble reading accurately.

Little by little, the instructor must get students to leave their “comfort zone,” for in reality, few pieces are written in the small range of the five-finger pentachord pattern. Students can learn by rote *Joshua Fought the Battle of Jericho* in D Minor with the right hand, which requires reaching down a half step to C-sharp. *Aura Lee*, mentioned above as a good piece for reading intervals, also requires the right hand to change positions once, and stretch once to a new position near the end of the melody. Two pieces which require shifts in hand position are *Waltz and March*, on page 113. Both these pieces have markings in the music which cue the student to prepare for a change in position. Both involve changes between two well-known positions—C and G. *Waltz* requires both hands



to move from C to G then back to C at the same time. *March* is a little more difficult and sophisticated, with the hands not changing at the same time to the same position. *Studies* by Kohler, seen on page 115, is a good piece for learning to change positions, because the hands alternate in this echo-type piece and each hand has time to prepare for the move to a new position. The piece *Bounce* on page 184 has only one note in the left-hand while the right-hand moves several times to known pentachord positions, both major and minor. *Vivace* has a right-hand melody in upper C position, and the left-hand accompaniment alternates between the intervals of a third and a fifth. This requires the hand playing to play an accompaniment figure moving out of a five-finger pattern. *Funny Event*, on page 86, is an echo piece with the left-hand leading. Every other measure requires moving the hands to a new position.

Another skill which is sometimes difficult for beginners is reading notation for each hand where the hands move in contrary motion or oblique motion. Several pieces can be useful for teaching this reading skill. These are more complex for students to learn, but they are also more rewarding to play. *March* on page 97 moves in oblique and contrary motion, and also moves out of the G position in both hands. *Easy Piece in D*, on page 121, is a little more difficult because it has more movement in the left hand. No. 2 by Bartok on page 187 is similar, but is written in quarter-notes so the rhythm is not complicated. *Christmas Song*, on page 185, has a busy right-hand part which plays short motives in various pentachord positions.

After students have played a few major scales and triads like C, F, and G, they can understand the pattern in a left-hand blues accompaniment progression (I, IV, I, V, IV, I).

Pieces like *Lefty Blues*, page 164, and *Texture 17*, page 165 will be fun for them to play. They will have heard pieces like this before. Both pieces use a blues progression, and have a repeated motive in the left hand with accidentals on the third degree of the scale. These pieces will seem like a reward for all the hard work so far.

Other more difficult pieces which reinforce concepts already presented may be introduced. These include *Toccatina*, on page 189–190, which moves in pentachord patterns and is fast and rhythmic, *Fifths and Starts*, on page 188, which has a drone bass and right hand which plays fifths in different octaves, and *Good King Wenceslas, Deck the Hall!*, a Christmas medley which is in F position with legato and staccato passages. It also requires changing hand positions. *Holiday Song* on page 175 is a familiar Christmas tune with a short scalar passage in the melody with the left hand. The right hand must also reach out of the pentachord pattern, but neither hand is busy when the other hand must reach.

To help students learn white key scale fingerings, teach by rote the first phrase of *Joy to the World* and *Away In A Manger*. Both these pieces begin with a descending major scale. If students are told to begin with the fifth finger they will continue to play the melody until they run out of fingers. Then, they can easily see that they need three more fingers in order to finish the phrase, so they cross over and continue with the third finger. Pieces which help reinforce the fingering for these major scales include *Morning Classic*, on page 173, and *The First Noel*, on page 174. After minor scales are introduced, the piece *A Minor Waltz* can be taught. The ascending and descending scale passages have the correct fingerings on the music.

Reading and repertoire comprise the largest area of study for musicians at any level. It is especially important at the beginning level for students to develop the ability to read by direction and interval, and to be able to recognize intervals on the page as well as aurally. Students in their first semester of study should begin with rote pieces and progress to pre-staff notation, then reduced staff notation. These steps make reading on the grand staff much easier for non-music students. Giving students many repertoire pieces to play at each level will improve their reading ability and enable them to play fluently. These pieces must, of course, be carefully selected and presented to ensure that the student understands fully all the concepts included in each piece so that he can master the pieces without too much difficulty. This will build confidence and foster a love of music. Students will enjoy playing pieces they have learned well and will be eager for the “next step.” By the end of the first semester of study, they should be reading and playing pieces in the white major keys and easiest minor keys (A, D, and E).

## TECHNIQUE

Technique is the necessary element which enables pianists to play the repertoire with facility and convincing musicality. According to well-known pedagogue Dorothy Taubman, the ultimate goal of piano technic is to enable pianists to possess essential skills so that they can move from note to note or chord to chord with a minimal amount of effort.<sup>10</sup> Good technique is necessary from the first day of learning to play the piano. Students need to understand the importance of developing good technical skills and then making them a habit, not only in performance, but in day to day practice as well. Repetitive motion injuries like carpal tunnel syndrome and tendonitis are common today among pianists and others who work with their hands and arms in a similar way. Taubman believes that proper technic and some understanding of physiology will eliminate these disorders.<sup>11</sup>

Several concepts must be addressed during the course of the first semester of study, beginning with a discussion on how to sit at the piano properly and how to use the arms, hands, and fingers. Good posture is essential. The instructor should demonstrate how to sit straight with shoulders back but relaxed, and both feet on the floor. The pianist needs

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<sup>10</sup>*The Taubman Techniques*, JJJ Films, Inc., in cooperation with the Taubman Institute, ed. Ernest Urvater (Medusa, New York, 1994) video 1.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

flexibility of movement at the waist, enabling him to lean forward, to the right or left, as the arms reach for notes. This creates a sense of balance at the piano. The instructor should show the student how to drop his arms at the sides, letting the hands hang free and relaxed, then raise the forearms and place the hands on the keyboard. The hands should now be in the proper position for playing, with the fingers curved. Wrists should be about level, not dropping below the hands or held higher than the hands. Students should be reminded that the hands, wrists, and arms are to be relaxed.

Most adult students will find that technique is the area on which they need to work the most. The muscles in their hands are already developed, but not nearly as pliable as those of a child. Adults will find that their fingers “don’t want to cooperate” with them as they attempt to play legato passages their pieces, and they struggle for fluency and speed. For this reason, it will be necessary to give these students several technique drills at each level of study, and emphasize that they must be practiced often in order for the benefits to be realized.<sup>12</sup> With some imagination, the instructor can create exercises which are pleasing to the ear and interesting to play while at the same time giving the student needed skills for playing the pieces they enjoy.

Simple technique exercises which involve hand-over-hand playing of repeated patterns in successive octaves on the keyboard are good for learning keyboard topography, use of the arms, and the feel of using arm weight when playing. Emphasis is placed on dropping the weight of the arm onto the keys with the hands in proper position for a good full tone. Finger patterns such as 2-3 on each group of two black keys is a good warm-up for

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<sup>12</sup>Gloria Hooper, *Successful Group Piano Teaching* (Prince Rupert, B.C.: Hooper, 1977) 71.

beginners when they know the finger numbers. Students can play the groups of three black keys in the same manner. The articulation can be varied, also. Students can be instructed to play the drills legato or staccato. They can use a combination of touches while playing the groups of black keys with either hand, ascending or descending on the keyboard.

Tabletop exercises, on pages 3—5 are good for learning the finger numbers and finger patterns frequently used in repertoire. Students do not have to use the keyboard to practice these. They do help with coordination and finger independence. An example is shown in figure 4.

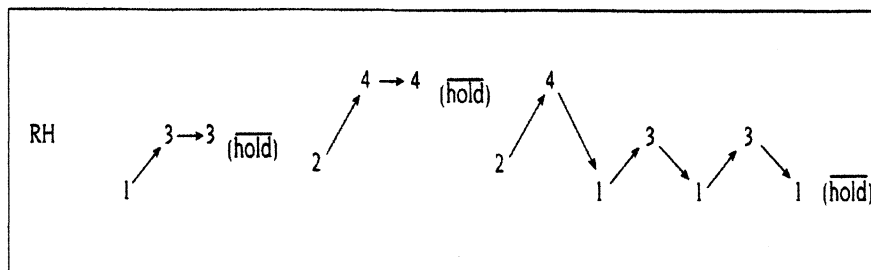


Figure 4 Tabletop Exercise

Additional warm-ups can be assigned when the student learns the names of the white keys. Various finger patterns such as C-E, F-A, or C-G, G-D going up or down on the keyboard are useful for technique as well as learning keyboard topography and note names. Exercises like those on page 54 are unstaffed, but use different note values.

The major white key pentachord patterns C, D, E, F, G, and A should be practiced and students should be careful to keep their hands, arms, and fingers in the proper position while playing. These should be practiced hands together, legato and staccato, loud and soft, and in various octaves on the keyboard. The black key major pentachords should be taught so that students are at least familiar with these hand positions. The minor key pentachords and triads would be introduced next, and these can be practiced in the same way. The students should get accustomed to playing the tonic triad at the end of the pentachord patterns. They can also play the triads hand-over-hand as they did on the finger pattern exercises. Naturally, arpeggios would follow. Students should be tested on their performance of these major and minor pentachords and arpeggios.

Students often encounter difficulty in getting their hands to play together in pieces that do not move in parallel motion like the pentachords. An example which can help overcome this is Gurlitt's Opus 82, No. 12 on page 71. Since the hands alternate and only play together on beat one, students feel that there is time to get each hand ready to play, if they will look ahead. Another piece which is similar but written with eighth notes is *Echoing*, on page 95.

Playing two notes at a time in either hand can also present a problem initially. Often these two notes are an interval which the student can recognize aurally and by sight on the staff. Practice drills are useful for getting the hands accustomed to feeling these different distances on the keyboard. Examples are included on pages 73, 75, 132, and 141. Students should be tested on their performance of pieces requiring the hands to play

together and pieces which use intervals in either hand to be sure the student has acquired the technical skills necessary to proceed to more difficult repertoire.

When major scales are introduced, students can practice these beginning with C major. The fingering should be carefully worked out in each hand, as shown on page 143. The exercise on page 144 will help students with finger crossing. Students should play both hands together in contrary motion beginning on middle C so that the students understand that going up with one hand uses the same fingering as going down in the other hand, and vice-versa. It is not advisable nor especially useful for students to play the other white key major scales in contrary motion, since they all have black keys which will prove difficult. They should practice each hand separately until they are able to play first one octave, then two or more octaves with each hand in the white major keys of C, G, D, A, and F. With the exception of the right hand in F, all these use the same fingering and can be practiced as a group.

When minor scales are introduced, students can learn the easier minor scales of A, D, and E in the natural and harmonic forms, since the fingering for these is the same as the major scales. Learning scales will help reinforce tonality and the concept of key signatures as well as promote finger dexterity. Students can work together in pairs, testing each other by playing major and minor scales in two octaves with either hand. They will be very motivated to practice these well if they know they will be tested this way.

Following a study of scales, students can begin practicing the tonic, dominant, and subdominant chords in the given keys. This functional skill will be useful to them when reading and learning music on their own. Alberti bass and other broken chord patterns are



useful, and should be taught. Examples are included on pages 165, 167, and 168. Some pieces combine a scalar melody with the primary chords, like *The First Noel*, on page 173, *Morning Classic*, on page 172, and *Holiday Song* on page 174.

Technique is essential for beginning students for two reasons. First, it enables the pianist to play the repertoire, and second, it allows the pianist to play correctly and without injury. Adults especially will need much drill in order to master their technique, but they will soon discover that it is time well spent. The reward will be greater ease and facility as they play the pieces they enjoy. Students should be instructed to practice their technique exercises daily and even apart from the keyboard with examples like the Tabletop exercises.

## SIGHT READING

Sight reading can begin as soon as students are reading music on pre-staff or reduced staff notation. Examples of music using steps and skips written on one or two lines should be given to help develop the ability to read and play at a steady pace. Students must be encouraged to keep looking ahead and keep playing in order to improve their reading ability. They must believe that each sight reading effort must be as accurate as possible on the first reading. All sight reading should be at an easier level than the student is able to play. Pre-reading examples can also be assigned as drills to practice, and students can play and name the direction and distance that the notes move. A good early example such as *E I Know* on page 30 and the one-line examples in reduced staff notation on page 47 encourage students to read by direction with each hand. An example can be seen below in figure 5.

g. Begin on F

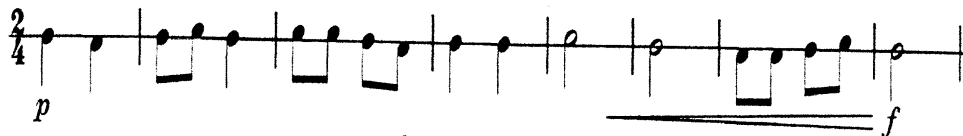


Figure 5 Reduced staff sight reading example

As students learn to read music on the grand staff in C position, they can be given short

examples to sight read in class. The notes and note values should all be familiar. At first, the examples should be for either right-hand or left-hand. Students should be encouraged to read an entire measure at a time as they play. They need to be reminded to look ahead as they play to develop the ability to read and play fluently. As students progress, the examples can include melodies moving between the hands, or notes in each hand. Several short sight reading examples for either hand, in C position, are found on page 61.

Sight reading examples can be used whenever students have learned to read in a different hand position; for example, low G position or upper C position, to reinforce reading these newer notes. Sight reading examples can be in parallel motion, but not all examples should be this easy. Students can read through easy pieces in each key with which they are familiar. Page 70 shows an example in which both hands move in parallel motion. Also on this page is an example in G position. It can be used after dotted quarter-notes are introduced.

Sight reading examples contain two-note slurs and short phrases with melodic or rhythmic patterns which often occur in the repertoire. These are especially good to use. An example is included on page 110. If the student thinks the example will present a difficulty, he should be instructed to read through the music with each hand separately at first, then play both hands together. After tied notes are introduced in the repertoire, students may sight read examples like those on page 66 in C position. As students become familiar with different hand positions and keys, they can sight read examples for either hand like those on pages 100 and 101, which incorporate several articulations and dynamic markings. Others like those shown on pages 76 and 133 are useful for planning

the hand position and reading by interval. See an example below in figure 6.



Figure 6 Sight reading by interval, hand position

When students are comfortable with 6/8 meter, they can sight read examples like number 3 and number 6 on page 103. These are for right-hand and left-hand, respectively, and require a smooth, legato touch.

When students are familiar with the primary chords used for harmonization, they can sight read examples like the one on page 153. It has a right-hand melody and left-hand chords like the harmonization exercises.

Students can check each other on sight reading drills. They will enjoy working together and listening to a partner play. This is one way to get a double benefit from the time spent, because this not only helps the one playing, it also helps the student who is watching the example and listening.

Sight reading is a very important component of piano study. Students who develop the ability to sight read well will find it much easier to read and learn new repertoire, and they will be more willing to try new pieces. Sight reading examples should be used throughout the first semester of study. The instructor should always select brief examples which are at a lower level than the student's reading ability at the time. Often, these examples serve

to reinforce a concept previously taught at the lower level.

## THEORY

While music theory is important to the study of the piano, beginning students only need enough information to enable them to understand the basic concepts which will allow them to correctly play their pieces. Since making music is one of the primary goals of beginning class piano instruction, theoretical discussions should be kept simple and students should understand how the theory applies to the individual pieces they will learn. Rhythm is the first concept necessary for a musical performance. In a discussion of theory, this refers to note values. Students should first be introduced to the basic note values of a quarter-note, half-note, dotted-half note, and the whole note. Students will have already played a few songs by rote that are familiar which use these note values. In-class exercises and drills with the metronome will quickly establish an understanding of the different duration of these notes when they see them in print. Examples are included on page 42. Drills in which class members are divided into teams with each team reading a different rhythm line are good tools not only for reinforcing the understanding of basic rhythmic patterns, but also for the ensemble aspect. Motivation is high when students in a small class must perform with their group. Examples of these are seen on pages 43, 51—52, 53, 87, and 99.

Musical symbols and terminology allow us to interpret correctly and perform a piece of music, so students must understand basic symbols like the clef signs, dynamic markings, the repeat sign, and first and second endings. Since the keyboard is divided into twelve

steps within an octave, and this pattern of notes repeats several times, the terms “octave” and half step and whole step must accompany learning the names of the white and black keys. Tied notes are common in beginning pieces, and a listening exercise like the one on page 88 will help reinforce this concept.

Once students play several familiar songs by rote and in pre-reading notation, they are ready to see music which includes a time signature. Showing them a piece such as *E I Know* with measures clearly marked helps them see the groupings of notes into four beats. The instructor might play an easy march to help students understand the feel of four beats per measure. *First Waltz* is a good beginning piece which obviously has three beats per measure. If the instructor plays an easy waltz first, students readily recognize the feel of three beats per measure.

As students play the white key pentachord patterns and learn pieces in these hand positions, they learn to name the notes on the staff that they are playing. Middle C position, key of C position, and G position are the first three hand positions that students should become familiar with. Students can build their own pentachord patterns if they understand the pattern of whole and half steps used in a pentachord pattern—W W H W. They enjoy discovering for themselves how to play a D Major, E Major, F Major, and A Major pentachord pattern. A worksheet like the one on page 38 will help them to see these patterns on the keyboard and provide a good practice guide.

After playing a few simple pieces in 3/4 and 4/4 time, students can begin to play pieces with more difficult rhythms. An understanding of subdividing the beat into eighth-notes allows them to play many more pieces. Playing a well-known piece such as *Happy*

*Birthday* illustrates the concept well. Students can quickly learn the first phrase by rote. Once they feel the rhythm, they can clap rhythm drills in class like those mentioned above for reinforcement. Playing other well-known melodies with eighth-notes on the staff would be a logical next step. The dotted quarter-note can be introduced in a similar manner. Songs which they recognize which use a dotted quarter-note eighth-note rhythm are *London Bridge*, *Alouette*, and *Silent Night*. Examples which reinforce this rhythm are the drills on pages 88 and 89, the *Ear Investment* echo pieces on pages 90—93, and the duet *Theme from the New World Symphony* on page 94. Another rhythmic pattern to introduce is the triplet. The familiar song *Row, Row, Row Your Boat* will clearly illustrate triplets. Students will learn this quickly by rote in the key of C. They can cross their left hand over to play the high C, thereby eliminating a need to change the fingering to include more notes than the C pentachord. Clapping some rhythm lines together in class like those on pages 115 and 116 will reinforce the triplet rhythm. Arpeggios can be introduced at this time, since the triplet “feel” is present.

As the repertoire gets more difficult, students will begin playing two notes at a time with either hand. Intervals of a second, third, fourth and fifth are commonly found in piano pieces, so students should be taught how to recognize these intervals at sight and by hearing. Students can learn steps and skips more quickly by quizzing each other using the music “puzzles” on page 46. Students can identify intervals in their pieces and can also be assigned worksheets for drawing the correct note to complete a harmonic or melodic interval. Ear training drills in class such as those found on page 75 will help students to identify these intervals aurally. Songs which begin with these intervals will help students



associate the sound with the interval. For example, the harmonic fourth sounds like *Here Comes the Bride*. The fact that these intervals are, in the beginning, played with the same fingers as their name (i.e., a third is played with fingers 1 and 3) helps reinforce the concept, also.

Students should be introduced to 6/8 time also. Although it is less common in beginning repertoire than 2/4, 3/4, and 4/4, it is encountered often enough that students should at least understand this different meter and be able to correctly play a few lines in 6/8 time. The instructor can play (by ear) pieces like *Greensleeves* and *For He's A Jolly Good Fellow* to help them feel the pulse.

The minor white key pentachord patterns represent a new mode which students will readily recognize aurally. Playing a well-known piece in a minor key such as *Joshua Fought the Battle of Jericho* or *Erie Canal* with chords will illustrate the concept. Students can play a C Major pentachord pattern and end with the triad. The instructor can then play a C Minor pentachord pattern and end with the triad, asking students to identify which step of the pattern is different, and to tell how it is different. They soon figure out that the third step of the pentachord pattern is a half-step lower for the minor pentachord, which makes the pattern W H W W. A worksheet such as the one on page 80 allows students to mark the notes used in the white key minor pentachords. This can be assigned, then used by the students as a reference later.

After students become familiar with several pentachord patterns, they can learn the tonic and dominant steps of the pattern which are used for harmonization. Students can be told that all the steps of a pentachord (and later, scale) have a name, which is functional

in relation to the other steps. Roman numerals are assigned to the steps of the pentachord and are frequently used to identify these steps in the music. Simple examples can be assigned for students to determine which step (tonic or dominant) is best for harmonizing a given melody. As students see pieces and examples in various pentachord patterns, they also see the key signatures for these various keys.

Since students by this time will have seen and played pieces in several keys, both major and minor, a discussion on key signatures and relative keys is in order. The Circle of Fifths offers an easy way to view all the keys in relation to the others. Students will know from their playing that C Major and A Minor are the two which have no black notes. They also know that F Major and D Minor have one flat. They can now see that this pattern is true of the other keys, both known and as yet unknown to them. Students will wonder why there are two or more sharps or flats in some of these keys which they do not need to play. This is the time to explain major scales. Even though the melody may not use all the steps of the scale, they are still in the key signature. By the end of the first semester of study, students should be able to recognize the key signatures and play scales with either hand in C, D, E, F, G, and A major and minor. Students can play these scales for each other, checking notes and fingering. Worksheets like those on pages 143—146 will help with scales, and page 178 shows the Circle of Fifths and relative minor scales.

Theory must be included in beginning music lessons because it helps explain the language of music. Students need to be familiar with terms, symbols, and concepts which will help them interpret the music correctly. Music theory should be limited, however, to only those concepts which students need to know at any given time. Students will enjoy

discovering theory applications for themselves, such as building pentachords, major, and minor scales beginning on different notes.

## HARMONIZATION

Pianists (and keyboardists) are not only soloists on their instruments, they are also frequently called upon to provide their own accompaniment or harmony. They also often serve as accompanists for others, or play along with others in an ensemble.

Harmonization is the area of study which will probably be the most useful to students who continue playing. This functional skill will enable them to provide their own accompaniment, choose an appropriate style of accompaniment, and enable them to understand chord symbols and harmonies used in the pieces they want to play.

The student's first attempt at harmonization would involve using the tonic and dominant steps of the major scale in the left-hand to accompany a melody in the right-hand. Examples are included on page 118, with pieces using this same type of left-hand accompaniment on pages 119—121. An example is shown below in figure 7.

### American Folk Melody 1



Figure 7 American Folk Melody 1

Students can improvise their own short melody in 3/4 or 4/4 time in the key of C or G, using tonic and dominant together (open fifth) in the left hand as accompaniment in each measure. The next step would be playing a familiar melody such as *Love Somebody* in the right-hand and using either the tonic or dominant to harmonize in the left hand. Trial and error on the part of the students will teach them to use their ear as they play. They should be told to watch the notes of the melody to see if they outline the tonic chord, which they should recognize. This would indicate use of the tonic note to harmonize. At this stage, other notes of the scale would probably indicate that the dominant note should be used. The guide on page 149 is helpful. Students should play several short examples in all the major white keys until it becomes easy to accompany the melody this way. Several examples of unfamiliar melodies are included on pages 124—127. Some of these include the subdominant (IV) as well, which would be introduced shortly after the tonic and dominant steps.

After students understand the concept of harmonizing with chords built on steps of the scale, they can begin to accompany melodies using the standard close-position left-hand chords. They can use their rote song *Hot Cross Buns* and accompany the melody with a

tonic chord in root position, and dominant chord in first inversion in the left- hand. This skill is difficult for some students to grasp, and should be reinforced with several familiar rote pieces like *Love Somebody*, *Lightly Row*, and *Merrily We Roll Along*, played in the key of C. Students appreciate familiar melodies that they have previously played when they must utilize a new skill such as left-hand chords. Students can play these as duets with a partner in class, taking turns playing the melody and chords with each other. Students can then transfer this pattern to the other white keys. Being able to play them fluently with a given melody will require practice, since this requires not only playing a group of notes with certain fingers, but the coordination necessary to play the chord along with the right hand melody. *Hot Cross Buns* can be transposed to all the white major keys for practice.

The tonic and dominant chords in the minor white keys A, D, and E can be presented. Students already know the tonic chord in the minor white keys from playing the pentachord patterns, and the dominant is the same chord used in the parallel major key. Short examples can be assigned for extra practice, like *Eerie Canal* and *A Little Sad*, shown on page 85 and 86. Students can play the tonic or dominant chord with either hand on both these pieces.

The subdominant chord should be introduced by showing the student the notes on the keyboard and on the staff. Students should be able to determine which inversion would be best and easiest to use along with the tonic chord position. They should practice the standard primary major chord progression (I-IV-I-V7-I) in the white major keys. Familiar songs like *When the Saints Go Marching In* can be practiced by ear, freeing the student

from reading and allowing him to concentrate on listening and the coordination needed to play the chords. There are many melodies in the *Harmonization and Transposition* book by Alice Kern that can be assigned to students for harmonization exercises. Examples are shown on pages 156 and 166. Some are familiar tunes, others are not. Again, students can play these with a partner in class, working out the harmonization together and playing the example as a duet. An example is seen below in figure 8.

Figure 8 Harmonization exercise

Students can learn the minor primary chord progression (i-iv-i-V7-i) as well in the easier keys like A, D, and E. They will become familiar with the minor scales of A, D, and E during the first semester, and can understand that, because of the steps used in building a minor scale, that the iv chord will be different in a minor key than it was in the major key.

Once students are familiar with the basic chord progression and its use in harmonizing melodies, they can begin to read pieces with broken chord accompaniment such as Alberti bass and waltz bass figuration. Students might first learn to play these patterns “by ear” in several keys before reading pieces which use these patterns, like *Ode to Joy* on page

169, and other examples on pages 164 and 166. Students may want to be tested on their playing of pieces using the primary chords by having an “in-class” recital where they can play a piece of their choice. Students can also be assigned to perform the same melody but must create their own accompaniment style using the chords. This provides the class with some interesting comparisons and is usually a fun activity.

Beginning students need a good understanding of harmony and the form it usually takes for keyboardists—playing accompaniment with chords. This basic skill is very useful especially for a pianist who often must accompany himself or a soloist. By the end of the first semester of study, students should be able to play the tonic, subdominant, and dominant chords in the white major keys and the easier minor keys. They should also be familiar with various accompaniment patterns such as Alberti bass and waltz bass and be able to accompany a melody using these patterns. They should also be able to play by ear several simple melodies, and to add the right chords to harmonize those melodies. This aspect of music training is probably the most useful one. It will truly equip the student to be a functional musician.



## CREATIVE WORK

Creative work encompasses many areas of study. In a beginning keyboard class, students should be encouraged to express themselves musically in a variety of ways. They can create their own melodies, improvisations, and harmonizations. Students should also learn to play “by ear.” Teaching pieces by rote should be a part of many lessons. This useful skill is made easier when students are taught to listen to the distance between intervals and identify the intervals they hear. This, in turn, helps them to “hear” the music they see on the page.

Improvisation should be encouraged from the very beginning of class piano. Students begin playing first on the black keys, with technique exercises and simple tunes like *Hot Cross Buns*. Even within this limited range of notes, students can improvise their own melodies over a given accompaniment pattern played by the instructor like the one on page 12. Their first experience will involve using quarter-note, half-note, and whole note rhythms. Students should be aware of the number of measures in the example so that everyone ends at the same time. Another black key improvisation for two partners is shown on page 16. Students play the given rhythm for either part one or part two. This exercise is shown below in figure 9.

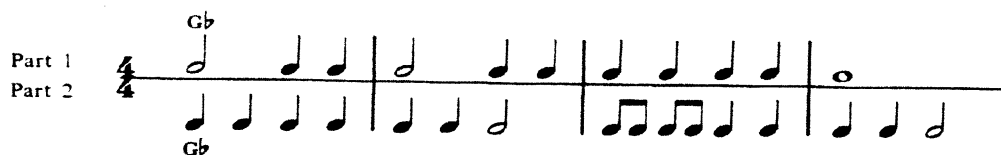


Figure 9 Black key improvisation

For students who are very reluctant to try improvisation the first time, a suggestion is in order to play only whole notes in every measure at first, then two half-notes on different pitches, then quarter-notes or a combination of half-notes and quarter-notes, etc., until the student is able to improvise his own rhythm and melody.

After the students understand eighth-notes and have played several major pentachord patterns, they can either improvise or compose their own melody to a given rhythm, which could be only eight measures long. Students should be guided to the conclusion that their melody needs to end on the tonic note. An example of such a rhythm is shown below in figure 10.

## Composing Project

Create an eight-measure melody based on a selected major five-finger pattern. Be sure to end your melody on the tonic. Use the following rhythm, and notate the melody in staff notation.

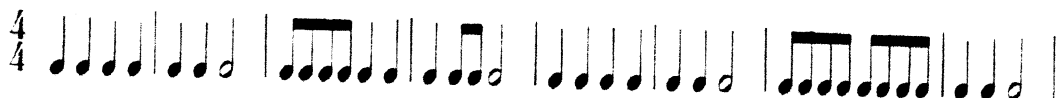


Figure 10 Composing Project

Students will enjoy playing their melody for the class. Any assignment that will be presented to the class will get extra attention, and those listening will benefit from hearing the other examples, as well. This assignment can be continued by assigning students to write out their melody on staff paper. This is a very good way to determine if the students know clef signs, time signatures, where to put bar lines, and notation. Another example to use for this assignment is on page 124.

As new pentachord patterns are learned, students can improvise these over a teacher accompaniment in the same manner as *Hot Cross Buns*. If the class seems to be very creative and relatively uninhibited, the students can play one at a time until all have played as the teacher continues the accompaniment. As a variation of this theme, the class can be assigned to create an improvisation to be played in the next class meeting which uses the same format. This becomes a composition, but both are useful in sparking creativity in the students. Examples in F and D major are included on page 106.

Any of several short melodic reading exercises using mostly quarter-notes or eighth-notes can be used in a creative assignment. Using a copy in which the first beat or last beat of each measure has been erased, for example, students can create their own melody by choosing a note to write. A good example should not be too patterned, making the missing note obvious. Or, students can be instructed to change a given piece, like the *American Folk Melody* on page 124, from 2/4 time to 3/4 time and supply the missing notes.

Once the concept of primary chords has been learned and students are comfortable harmonizing in several keys, ask them to improvise a short melody to a given chord

progression like the one below in figure 11. This might also be a blues progression or a chord progression from a well-known hymn or folk song. This could easily be a composition assignment, as well. Students can write their melody on staff paper. Examples are included on page 161, 166, and 169.

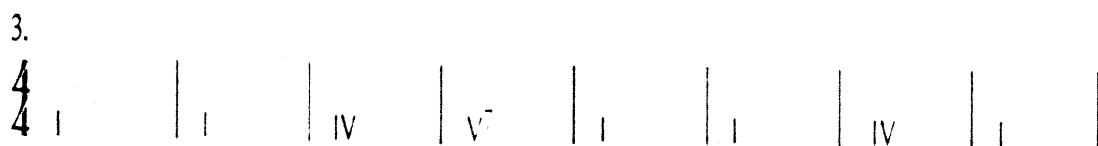


Figure 11 Improvisation exercise

Students can compose question and answer phrases also. A good example to use to illustrate this is concept is *Row, Row, Row Your Boat*, which they already can play. Copies of examples are useful, such as the ones shown on page 181 where the phrases are clearly marked. Unlike *Row, Row, Row Your Boat* and other familiar tunes which illustrate question and answer phrases, these examples are not familiar melodies. Students can play the question phrase and improvise an answer, or compose an answer phrase.

By the end of the first semester, beginning students should have had numerous opportunities to compose and improvise their own melodies and accompaniments. They should have experienced for themselves the feeling of expressing themselves creatively and musically.

## TRANSPOSITION

Transposition is a very useful skill for any pianist who will be accompanying a soloist or playing with other instrumentalists. The first rote piece learned in class, *Hot Cross Buns*, is easily transposed. Students do not need to understand music theory, rhythm, or notation in order to transfer this simple melody to the white keys. One of the purposes of transposition in the beginning lessons is to explore the keyboard.<sup>13</sup> The instructor can give a simple assignment which tests their aural skills by asking students to find out how many places, using the white keys only, they can play *Hot Cross Buns*.

The 5-finger pentachord patterns which this course uses so often is the basis for not only reading and beginning repertoire, sight reading, and technique, but is used also for transposing. *Lightly Row*, shown on page 22 in pre-staff, directional format, is useful for transposing. This easy pentachord piece moves in parallel motion. Students can easily play this in any of their familiar major pentachord patterns - C, D, E, F, G, and A. Again, this allows the student to further explore the geography of the keyboard.

*Love Somebody*, page 98, is in staff notation, in the key of G major. It is also familiar and useful for the same reasons above. Some examples are useful for technique as well as transposition. Those on page 70 and 102 are in parallel motion like *Lightly Row* and *Love Somebody*, but they are not familiar melodies. Students must rely on reading skills and not

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<sup>13</sup>Lyke and Enoch, 112.

on their ear to transpose these examples. Directional, as well as intervallic reading, beginning with steps and skips then larger intervals, strengthens students' ability to transpose.<sup>14</sup> One such example is shown below in figure 12.



Figure 12 Intervallic reading example

Harmonization examples such as those in *Alfred Group Piano for Adults* by E. L. Lancaster and Kenon Renfrow, which use the tonic and dominant in the left hand to harmonize a right-hand melody, can be good for transposing, also. This reinforces tonic and dominant in the major white keys, with which students are familiar, and gives them more experience in transferring an unfamiliar melodic line to another key. Those on pages 123—126 would be useful.

When students are ready to learn the primary chords used in harmonization (I, IV, V7), pieces such as *When the Saints Go Marching In* can be used, then transposed to other major keys. Pages 155 and 160 show some examples of unfamiliar tunes which can be harmonized and then transposed. Pieces with broken chord accompaniment like those on pages 165 and 167—68 can also be transposed.

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<sup>14</sup>Lyke and Enoch, 114.

*March* by Turk on page 98 and *March No. 1* on page 96 are good, short pieces which require students to transpose notes in each hand which are independent lines, not just harmonization or parallel motion. Students can also be assigned written transposition exercises like those on page 111. Students may enjoy testing each other in small groups on transposition examples. The group serves as the teacher while each student in turn plays an example in a different key or hand position.

Transposing pieces helps students to feel comfortable playing in many different keys. It reinforces the feel of those keys and gives students extra practice for playing in other keys.. The ability to transpose helps guard against the tendency of some beginning students to think that they cannot play notes that are not written on the page. It also reinforces reading by interval and direction, improves aural skills, and reinforces theory.

## APPENDIX

Sample Lesson Plans using *Hot Cross Buns*  
(7 ways to recycle your music)

## ACTIVITY

## CONCEPT TAUGHT / REINFORCED

Play song on black keys by ear  
(student reads from finger number chart)

Finger numbers, Aural skills

Play song on white keys by ear  
(in how many places?)

Transposition, White key names

Group Activity:  
Clap or tap rhythm of the song

Rhythm, Note values

Write song on staff paper  
(key of C, G, or F)

Staff notation, Rhythm, Meter,  
Stems on notes

Play song as written using rhythm track  
on keyboard

Tempo, Meter, Reading, Steady beat

Partner practice time: one student plays  
melody in right hand, one student  
accompanies with tonic or dominant note  
in left hand (any white key); change parts

Harmonization, Ensemble work

In-Class activity: Divide class in half; half  
play melody, half play accompaniment (I  
or V7 chords) in any white key.

Harmonization, Ensemble work, New  
keys, hand positions



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