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Creating OpporTUNEity: Engaging a Challenged Population and Bridging Racial Gaps through Music

by Melissa Martiros, Martin Methodist College

Introduction

Why I Like the Piano by Issaiah

1. Because I want a scholarship.
2. Because I can be a professional.
3. Because I get rewards for doing this.
4. Because it makes me happy.

When I first met Anya, she didn't speak. As I interviewed her for our new music outreach program, she clasped both hands behind her back and stared at her sneakers, both tattered and covered in mud. Lips sealed, her hair was dirty and it shielded her face the entire time. She never made eye contact and I was left with the overwhelming impression that she was too ashamed to interact with me. The local Boys & Girls Club staff had given me a heads up that Anya was severely withdrawn but nobody communicated why. I discovered several weeks later that she had a severe speech impediment that made her difficult to understand. She had been bullied, abused and neglected, and when her mother gave up custody, she cited Anya's speech impediment as one of the reasons why.

Months later, Anya performed in her first piano recital on the campus of Martin Methodist College. Her college student instructor wrote the following words about the experience:

> And then there was Anya. Anya told me she wanted to go up alone. She was calm and collected. Melissa looked at me with fear in her eyes, but I told her Anya had it. I was also a little worried, but the girl did it perfectly. She put her hands in the right place and played the songs beginning to end without messing up. She smiled at the crowd when she was done. I was floored. I cried. No lies. I made the mistake of looking at her [family]. They were all in tears and I know why. Anya couldn't even look people in the eye when she started this program. Today she performed and smiled at the crowd. Sometimes there are moments that change your life, and you can watch it happen. That was one of those moments for me. I have never been more proud of anyone in my entire life than I was right then. That little girl gives me a kind of hope I didn't know existed and she'll probably never know how much she has changed me. How much they all have.

The profound impact music has had on Anya is just one example of the way Martin Methodist College's OpporTUNEity music program has made positive contributions to the lives of children across south central Tennessee. By definition, OpporTUNEity is a co-curricular service-learning project that provides college undergraduate students with an opportunity to receive work-study funds while simultaneously gaining mentoring and teaching experience as they provide one-on-one music lessons to underserved youth in our local community. In context, it is so much more than that.

The Backdrop

In the fall of 2013, I accepted a teaching position at Martin Methodist College. To be blunt, this was the kind of position that nobody wanted but somebody had to fill. For starters, Martin Methodist is situated in Pulaski, Tennessee, also known as the birthplace of the Klu Klux Klan (KKK). Arts opportunities in this region are scarce as many of the public school music programs have been cut and the poverty rate is high. Since Martin Methodist predominately recruits undergraduate students from the region surrounding Pulaski, many of the music students who had been recruited for the music degree were not necessarily students who were prepared for success in a baccalaureate music program. While many of these students have inherent musical gifts, without access to the proper pre-college instruction and training, many of these gifts were either undeveloped or underdeveloped.

Needless to say, accepting a position at an All-Steinway School that had no piano program, inheriting a group of undergraduate students who had not acquired the basic skills needed to be successful professional musicians, and moving to a rural town in the south with a high poverty rate, minimal arts opportunities, and a dark history of racism was a daunting challenge for me. In an effort to create positivity out of madness, OpporTUNEity was founded in 2014 as a means of addressing three main problems:

1. How to provide an ethical and meaningful undergraduate experience to college music students who likely would not have been admitted if the institution had more appropriate admission standards.
2. How to begin inserting music back into a region deprived of art so that the students we recruit in the future are trained in a way that sets them up for success in college and, in turn, strengthens our undergraduate program.
3. How to help Pulaski's efforts to move past its past and begin addressing the history of racial tension and segregation in the community by advocating for inclusion in the arts.

The original solution was to form a partnership between the Martin Methodist College music program and the Boys & Girls Club of Pulaski, Tennessee. Through this partnership, it was determined that we would ask our undergraduate music students to provide mentoring and musical opportunities (OpporTUNEity) to underserved youth in our region. We started with two college piano students and recruited ten children from the Boys & Girls Club to participate in the first semester of this program. The initial cohort of children were screened to meet low income criteria, were held to high standards of excellence, both in their lessons and academic performance, and were required to perform in a handful of outreach, fundraising, and public recitals during the academic year. After the first formal OpporTUNEity recital, one of our college instructors, a native of Pulaski, commented on her experience:

> After the performance we chatted and took pictures and talked and talked. SO many people came up to me to thank me today. I kept wondering why. I mean, I understand, but then again I don't. Parents and grandparents of kids talked to me excitedly about how proud and happy they were. Rich people came and told me how I was an asset to the community and thanked me for doing something to help the "poor little children." People told me I played well and congratulated me. It

> struck me how diverse the people were. To be blunt, it's the only time in my life I've seen rich white Pulaski interact with poor Pulaski on an even playing field. They were all the same. They were all parents of a piano kid. And it was kind of amazing. Parents congratulated parents, and kids congratulated kids. I know it shouldn't be a big deal, but I grew up here, and unfortunately it really is. Rich Pulaski doesn't interact with poor Pulaski as equals. They just don't. But today they did. An older black woman came up to me and gave me a hug before she ever said anything. She looked me dead in the eyes and said, "You keep doing this. Not for the piano, but for the kids."

It became quickly apparent that our program was having a positive impact on the three problems listed above. That is, OpporTUNEity was bringing music education back to the region, providing meaningful experiences to our undergraduate students, and bridging racial gaps in the community by focusing on inclusion in the arts. Halfway through year two, we now provide lessons on guitar and piano to over forty children, have effectively engaged fifteen college undergraduate students, and currently partner with the Boys & Girls Club and two local elementary schools in Pulaski. Additionally, we are working on plans to bring group violin and fiddle to an additional elementary school in our community and are expanding our regional impact as we begin offering piano, guitar, and voice to a middle school approximately 40 miles north of Pulaski. And our fundraising initiatives have been equally successful.

As we rapidly expand and our program becomes more and more complex, our mission remains simple: to use college resources to bring musical opportunities to underserved youth in our community, holding them to high standards of behavioral and performance excellence, while simultaneously providing engaging and enriching teaching and learning experiences to our undergraduate students. As we do this, we strengthen our local community, bridge class and racial gaps in our region, and enhance the quality of students we recruit to our undergraduate music program. In the end, everybody wins.

Social Justice through Music: College Student Voices

I asked some of our current college instructors to reflect on what OpporTUNEity means to them. Perhaps the best words come from the youngest instructor in our program, a high school senior who is dually enrolled in our music program:

> The OpporTUNEity program at Martin Methodist presents a unique chance to positively influence kids who have had little to no exposure to the arts, to foster a mutual learning exchange between amateur piano teachers and amateur piano students, and to bridge the cultural gap that separates the ivory tower of higher education from the often grim reality of living in a low-income environment. But OpporTUNEity is much more than that. OpporTUNEity is eating pizza as a group while working through 5th grade friend drama. OpporTUNEity is teaching a frustrated 6th grader that the hardest songs he doesn't want to practice are his favorite in the end. OpporTUNEity is that moment when a kid who has been told he will never amount to anything hears a packed college recital hall thunder with applause. OpporTUNEity offers an opportunity for its students to experience life-

> changing new music, to take personal responsibility for their own development as the next generation of musicians, and, I ultimately hope, to throw off the yoke of societal expectations and claim a future for themselves brighter than the darkness of their past.

And from our current practice supervisor, a sophomore music major who spent her early years as a Roma child in a Bulgarian orphanage, adopted by her Pulaski family at age six:

> Music expresses my emotions in life and I'm giving that opportunity to kids to express how they feel. It also gives me an opportunity to interact with younger kids while I am in college. Being able to be a part of a program that helps kids grow mentally, physically and emotionally helps me heal. Not only do I help them progress in music, but they teach me to become more patient, loving, caring, forgiving, and kind towards others. I could have used this program when I was younger. At times my family could not afford music lessons for me because they were expensive. All these lessons are free to the kids who are involved in OpporTUNEity so they are very fortunate. I love the one-on-one interaction with the kids because sometimes they do not get that back home. A lot of the kids involved in OpporTUNEity come from very difficult situations and I think having music to look forward to and having the interaction is a positive influence for the kids. Some of them even say music is their favorite part of the day. OpporTUNEity is a great program to grow from. Being a part of this program has made me become a more positive person, because helping others and being there for those who need help makes me, and the kids, feel good.

Reciprocity & Collaborative Design

I believe what makes this program special and impactful is the prioritization of collaboration. At the institutional level, the college president and other executive administrators support the program through the approval of work-study requests, fund raising initiatives, marketing and promotion. At the program level, regular correspondence between myself, the Boys & Girls Club CEO, and the principals at our partnering schools is essential. We would not have a successful program if our partnerships were not effective.

Martin Methodist's president, Dr. Ted Brown, could not be more enthusiastic about the program:

> OpporTUNEity has been a breath of fresh air on this campus. Not only does it connect in the most vital ways with the college's fundamental mission, but it takes the college—students, faculty and staff—out into the community to directly engage intransigent social problems in ways that are really beginning to make a difference. This program is setting the pace for the faculty when it comes to service-learning and it has been an impetus for so many other new projects and initiatives. On a personal level, seeing the faces of those kids succeeding at something very challenging, supported by the pride of our students who are helping to make it happen; well for me that takes higher education to a whole new level!

All of our college instructors are required to provide weekly one-on-one lessons one day a week and provide supervised practice an additional day of the week. The daily supervised practice provides the support the children need to be successful without burdening our partnering organizations' staff by asking them to facilitate practice. The college instructors collaborate regularly, both with me and each other. We have weekly meetings where we discuss program challenges and address teaching issues. Our teachers and practice supervisor communicate weekly to ensure the children in the program are improving during their daily practice sessions. The children in the program have formed a very interesting little community—they support each other and collaborate in their own special way. And, finally, the support of the Pulaski community is essential to OpporTUNEity's success.

Dr. Melissa Martiros currently serves as Assistant Professor of Music at Martin Methodist College where she serves as Assistant Professor and Program Coordinator of Music. She is the founder and director of OpporTUNEity, an outreach service-learning program at Martin Methodist College that provides music lessons to underserved youth, and the CWN Community Arts Academy, where she runs a program for children with special needs. Prior to her appointment at Martin Methodist, she served on the faculties of Silver Lake College, the University of Wisconsin Fond du Lac, Bluffton University, the Lindeblad School of Music, and as a teaching assistant at Bowling Green State University and Interlochen Arts Camp.

A strong advocate for inclusion in the arts and a firm believer that all children should have access to a music education, Dr. Martiros has devoted much of her career to working with children with special needs. She has presented her work with underserved youth and children with special needs at various national and international conferences including the National Conference on Keyboard Pedagogy, the Canadian Federation of Music Educators Biennial Convention, the College Music Society National Conference, the MTNA National Conference, the Australasian Pedagogy Conference, and the Gulf South Summit on Service-Learning and Civic Engagement through Higher Education.

She earned a Doctor of Musical Arts degree (DMA) in Piano Performance and Pedagogy and a Master of Science degree (MS) in Special Education from the University of Wisconsin Madison, a Master of Music (MM) degree in Piano Performance from Bowling Green State University, and a Bachelor of Arts Degree (BA) in Piano Performance from Westfield State College, where she was the recipient of the Presidential Merit Scholarship and Excellence in Music Performance Award.

Layers or Sections? A Schenkerian Approach to Piano Instruction

by Michael Rushing and Benjamin Williams, Mississippi College

Traditionally, music teachers break assigned works up into discrete parts: students learn the A section first, or the first phrase, or an arbitrary number of measures. While the teacher might introduce the entire piece to the student at first, it will be necessary at some point to break the larger unit up into more manageable parts. The practice of breaking down a complex subject into manageable parts after its initial introduction before reassembling it into a whole can be referred to as *whole-part-whole* teaching. This works well, but teachers risk students losing sight of the whole while in the process of examining the parts.

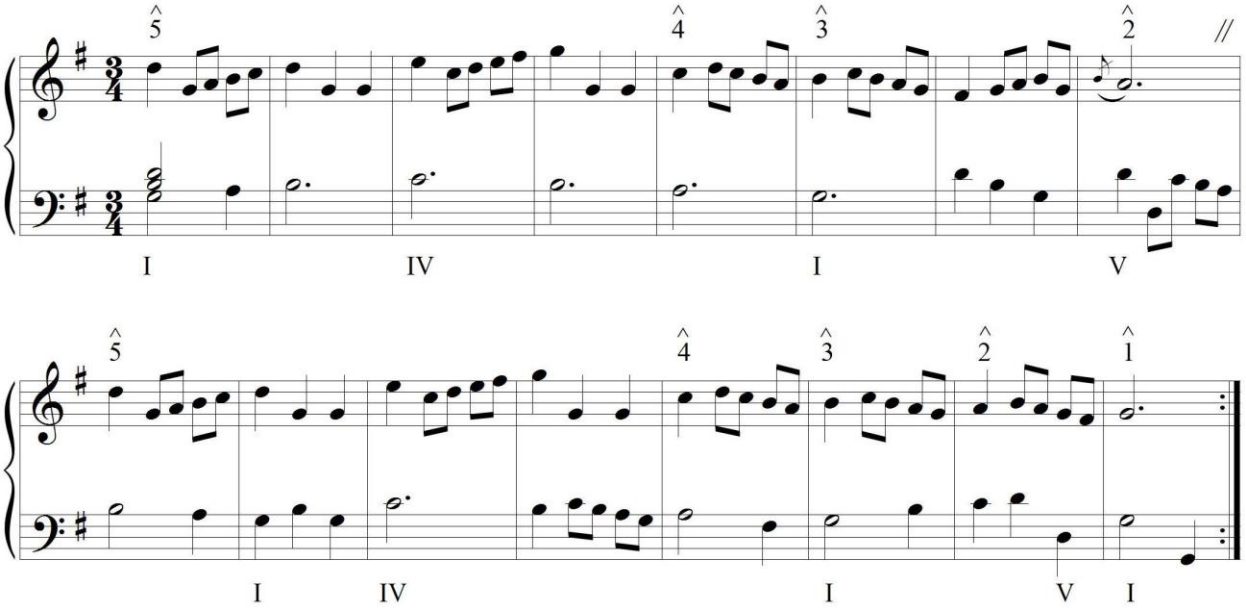
Alternatively, we might think of a larger whole as having a main or core idea that is elaborated with details that can be temporarily removed and added back later. This simplified representation would still maintain the overall structure of the whole, but with minimal distraction. Each new layer of detail could then be contextualized within a part of the already familiar framework. What would such an approach look like in music?

Whole-Part-Whole Teaching: An Alternative Paradigm

At the turn of the 20th century, German theorist Heinrich Schenker (1868–1935) developed a system of music analysis showing relationships between pitches that is now referred to as *Schenkerian analysis*. One might think of Schenker's approach as being similar to the diagramming of sentences: each sentence has a core meaning that is elaborated in various ways to make a more informative or artful statement. For example, the sentence "Students can create" can be elaborated to say "All students can create music." Even more elaboration might produce: "Given the opportunity for self-expression, students—all students, not just composers or exceptional students—can create music that displays artistry and skill." And so forth.

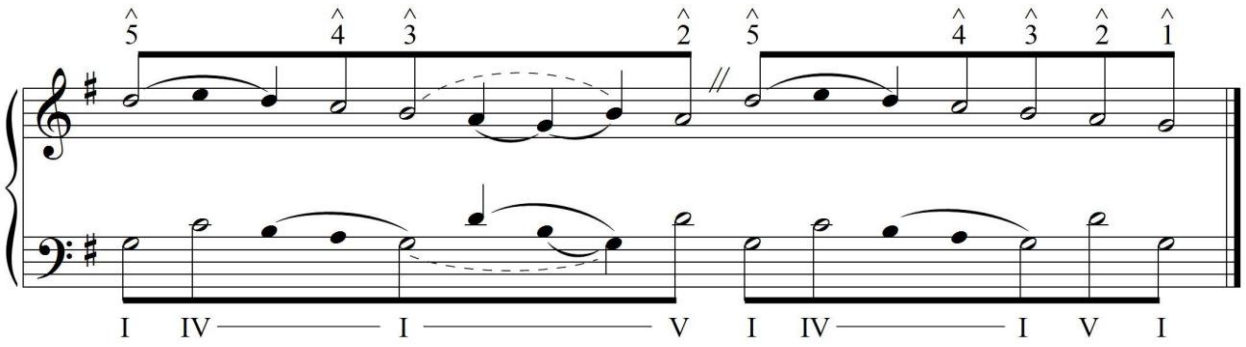
Likewise, music might be thought of in terms of core melodic and harmonic progressions that are elaborated and expanded to create more beauty. Using this approach, Schenker found that much of the music written during the common practice period exhibited a similar basic structure. Melodies, despite all of their variety, generally descend through a scale to the tonic. Harmonic progressions primarily emphasize tonic, subdominant and dominant. These features are highlighted in Example 1, the beginning of Bach's Minuet in G Major.

Example 1: Structural analysis of Bach, Minuet in G Major, BWV Anh. 114, mm. 1–16



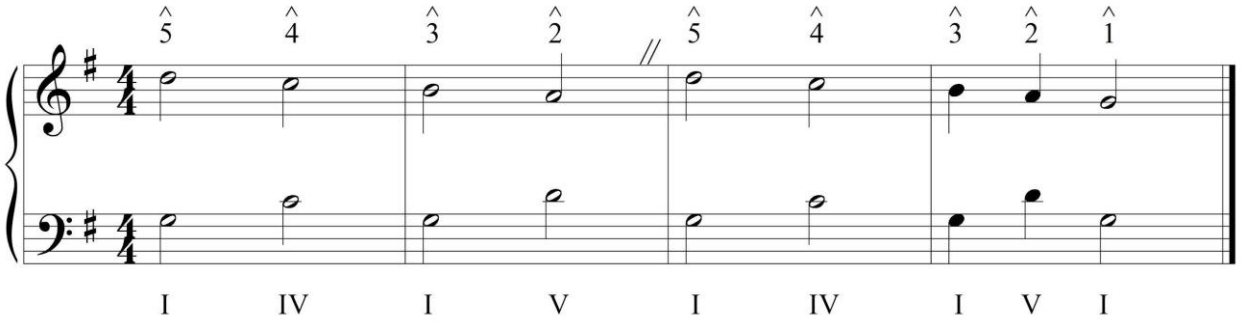
Example 2 is a more background representation of the same excerpt in Schenkerian notation: open noteheads mark the notes that reflect the common structure; closed noteheads, the elaboration. The melody is shown to be an elaborated descending scale from the dominant down to the tonic. This is accomplished in this passage in two phrases with an interruption. The bass motion likewise reflects the harmonic core in its boundary pitches.

Example 2: Schenkerian representation of Bach, Minuet in G Major, BWV Anh. 114, mm. 1–16



Example 3 shows an even more background representation of this same music, now in standard notation, where only the notes that most significantly contribute to the overarching structure are shown. For the purposes of this project, the model of Example 3 is referred to as a *skeleton* in the applied studio and taught by rote to students as a technical exercise alongside 5-finger patterns. The *skeleton* is essentially a descending 5-finger pattern in the right hand harmonized by primary chords (or their roots, depending on the physical development of the student) in the left hand.

Example 3: *Skeleton* in G Major



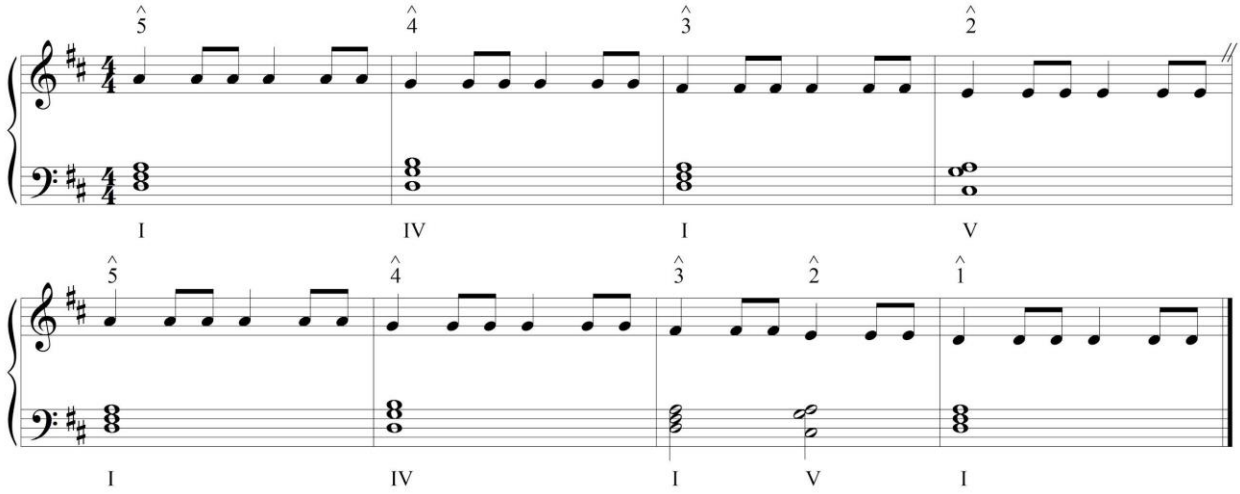
Improvising/Composing with the Skeleton

The concept of layers of elaboration or embellishment can readily be taught to beginning and intermediate piano students using the *skeleton* as a basis for composition and improvisation activities.

Addition of a Rhythmic Motive

The first step in the process toward improvisation/composition is to guide the student to choose a rhythmic motive that can be applied to the right-hand descending melody (e.g., Example 4). This rhythm pattern can either be improvised or simply borrowed from repertoire the student is studying. By using a predetermined rhythmic pattern with the *skeleton*, students are assisted in improvising within an established meter. The concept of phrase can also be reinforced by suggesting changes in the rhythm pattern at cadence points and by pointing out the quickening of the harmonic rhythm at the final cadence.

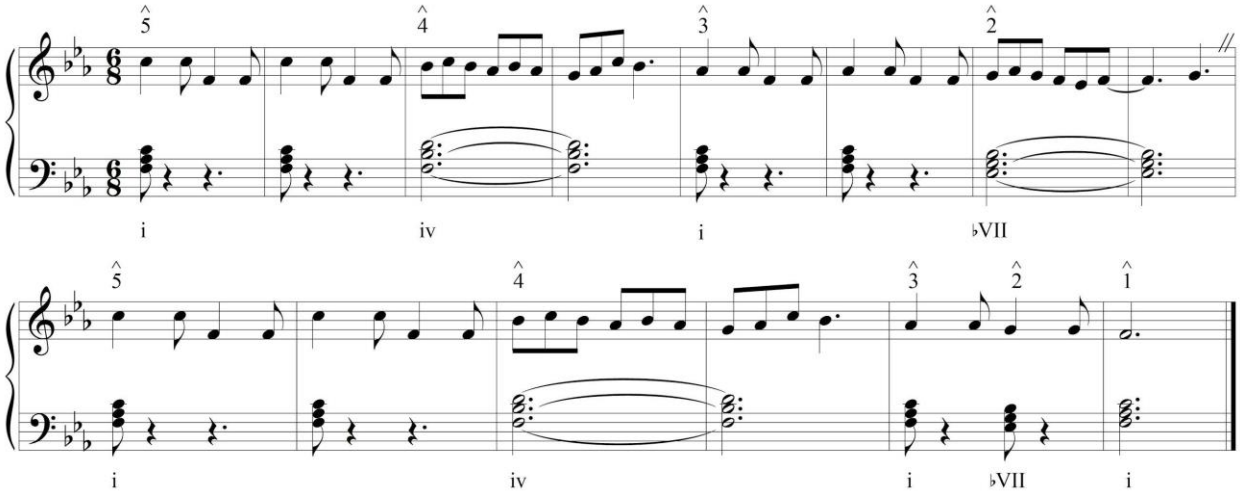
Example 4: Transcription of Cici's (age 8) improvisation: skeleton with rhythmic motive[1]



Melodic, Harmonic, and Structural Elaboration

A more explicitly creative result comes about in these improvisation/composition activities with the further application of several possible elaborations. Melodic elaborations such as neighbor tones, passing tones and chord tones can be introduced by pointing them out in the student's assigned repertoire. The student can then be guided to use them to elaborate the core melodic *skeleton* (e.g., Example 5).

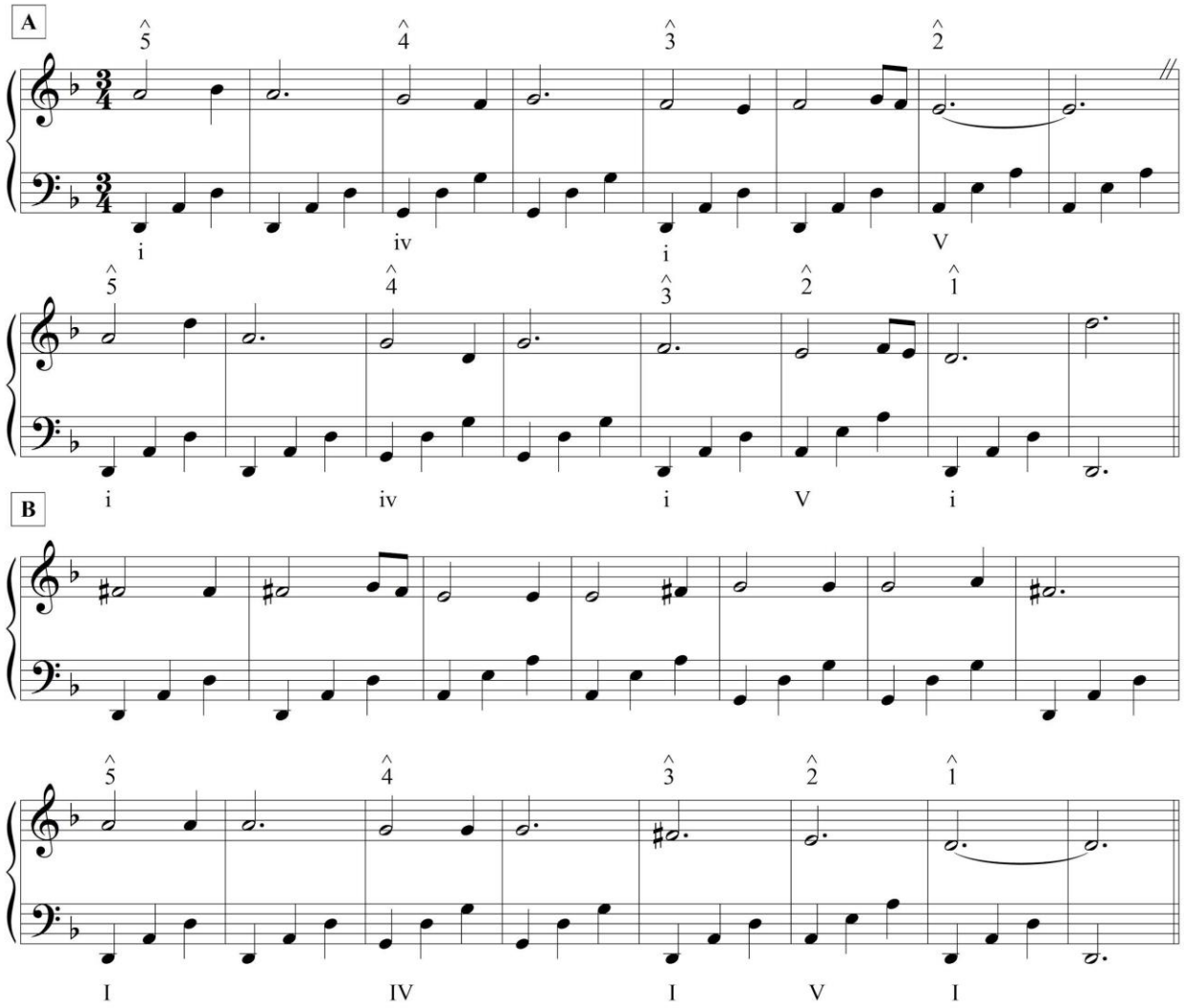
Example 5: Transcription of Landon's (age 9) improvisation: melodic elaboration in Dorian mode with rhythm borrowed from "Night of the Tarantella," Faber, *Piano Adventures*, Level 3A



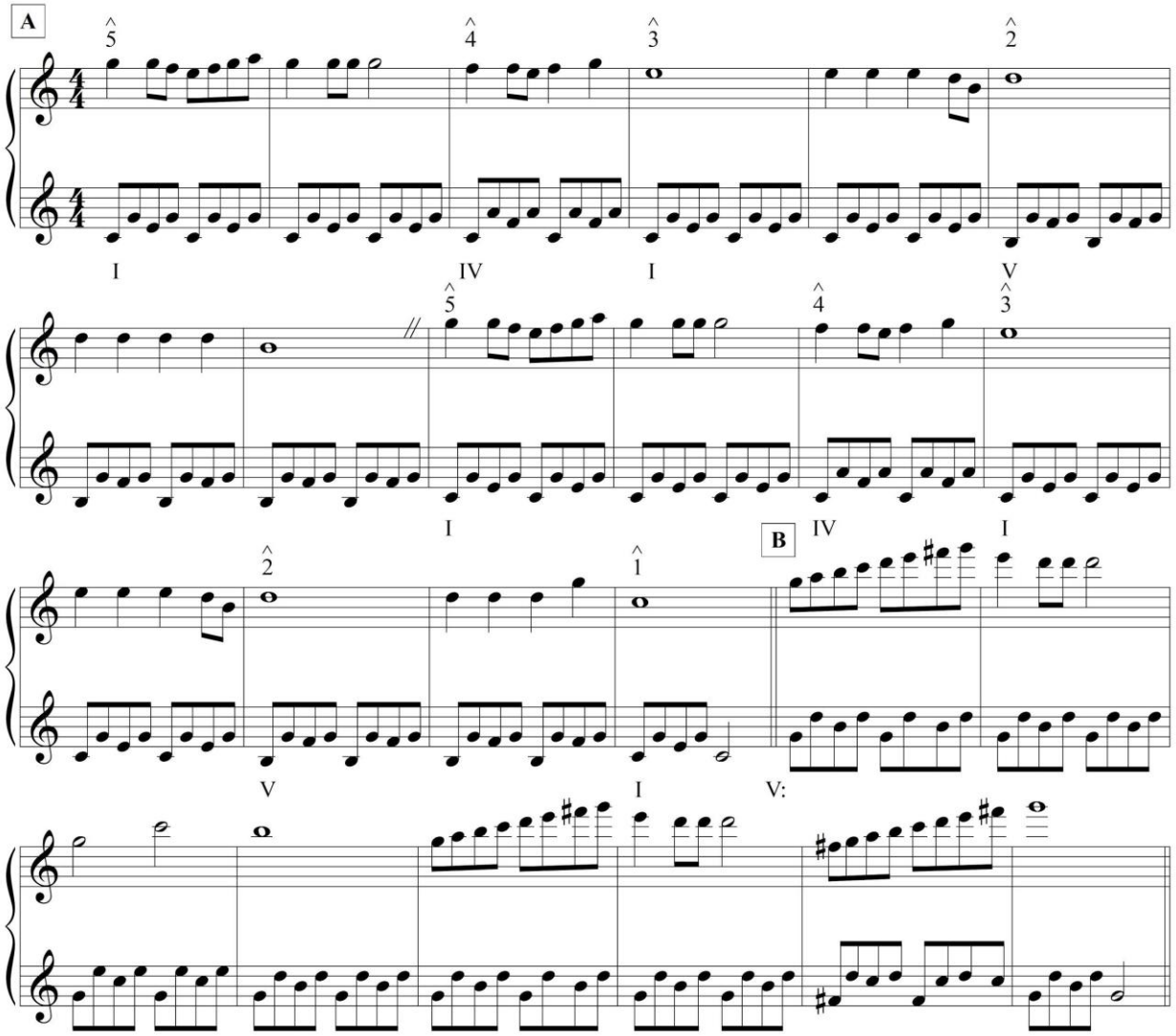
[1] For the purposes of this project, no compositions were notated. Examples were transcribed from video recordings of student performances in lessons.

Other elaborations on the *skeleton* might involve left-hand accompaniment patterns. These may be improvised from stock patterns such as Alberti bass, broken chord and waltz basses, or borrowed from repertoire the student is studying. A contrasting B section could also be added. The student might free-compose a B section or apply more guided suggestions, such as modulating to and from the dominant (Examples 6 and 7).

Example 6: Transcription of Jane's (age 12) composition, mm. 1–31: freely composed B section modulating to the parallel major



Example 7: Transcription of Allison's (age 16) composition, mm. 1–24: Alberti bass and modulation to the dominant



Further elaborations involve guiding students to improvise/compose another layer of detail on top of what they have already created. The window of time spent on each note of the skeleton can be expanded to include recursive patterns of melodic and harmonic expansions. Students can readily learn to do this by examining the details of standard teaching repertoire through the lens of the *skeleton*.

Repertoire Study with the *Skeleton*

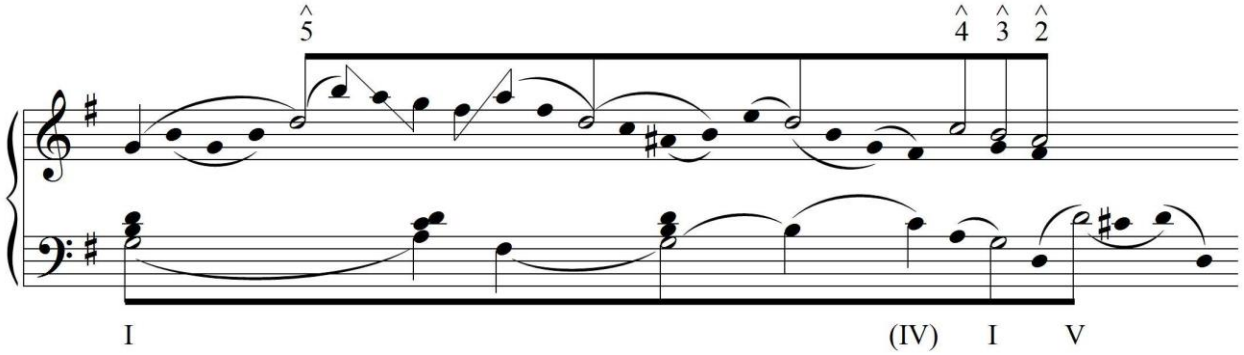
When teaching standard repertoire, the *skeleton* and several middleground levels can be used instead of discrete linear sections to gradually introduce the piece, thus maintaining awareness of the core structure throughout the learning process.

Levels of Preparatory Music from Schenkerian Analysis

Repertoire can be taught through a Schenkerian perspective by progressively introducing three or four levels of details added to a *skeleton* before the student encounters the original score. These levels are generated from analyses of repertoire that are rhythmicized to approximate the overall style of the original music. As such, the word *level* here refers to preparatory music that the student learns before going to the next level, not the abstract Schenkerian analysis itself.

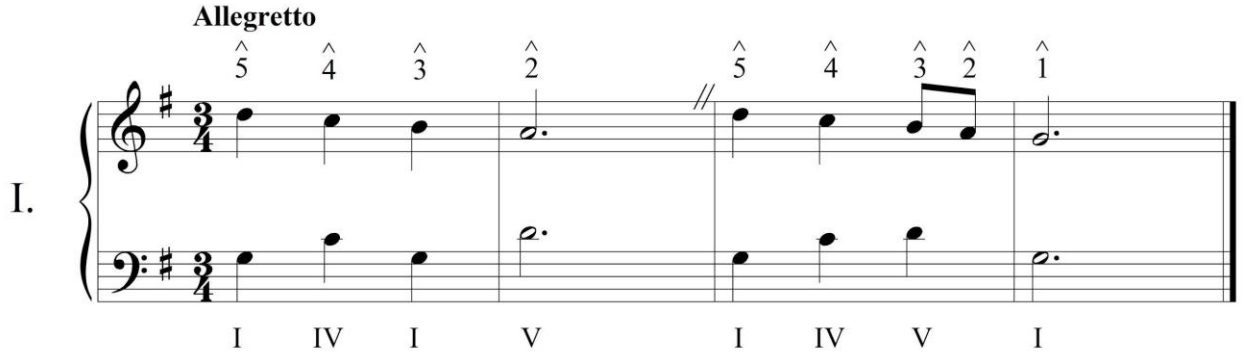
The authors began by analyzing scores to produce complete Schenkerian models of musical foregrounds. A foreground model will include every note in the piece, but will not take rhythm into consideration (e.g., Example 8). Each note is considered as being related through scales or arpeggios to notes that on a more background level are also related by scales or arpeggios. Ultimately, every note is connected to the core structure of the *skeleton*.

Example 8: Schenkerian analysis of Kuhlau, Sonatina in G Major, Op. 55, no. 2, 1, mm. 1–8



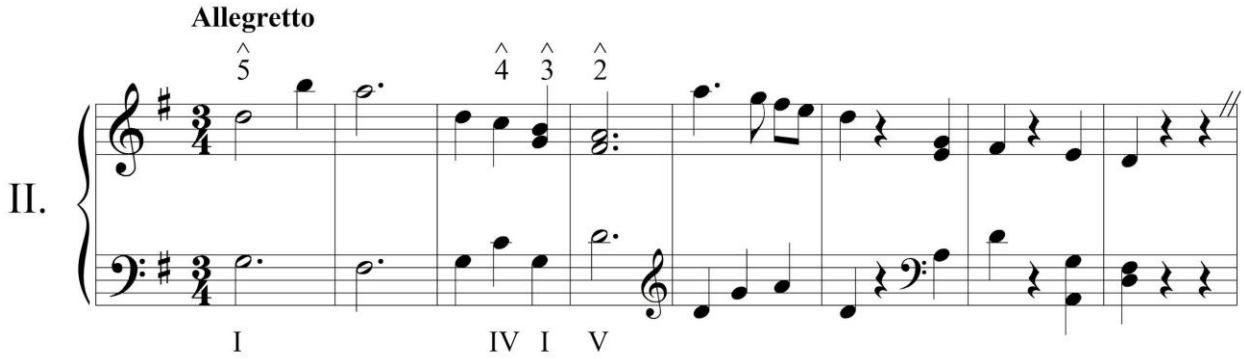
The preparatory levels are then prepared starting from the background and moving progressively toward the foreground. At each level, stylistic characteristics of the original score are maintained. Example 9 shows the first level, the *skeleton*, in preparation for a piece that is in triple meter with a tempo marking of *Allegretto*. Indications highlighting the notes of the *skeleton* are also included at each level so students will be able to keep track of the overall structure from the beginning of the learning process.

Example 9: *Skeleton* of Kuhlau, Sonatina in G Major, Op. 55, no. 2, 1



Early levels (e.g., Example 10) omit much of the surface-level content of the original score, allowing for improvisation/composition activities directly related to the student's repertoire.

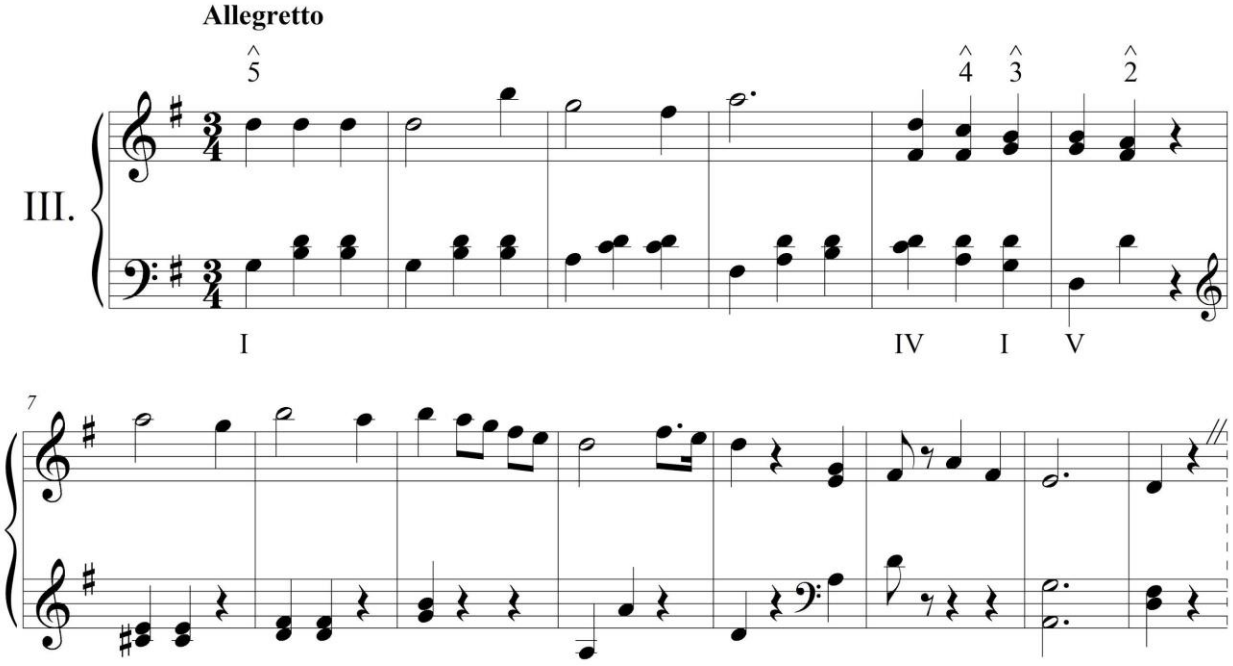
Example 10: Early level of Kuhlau, Sonatina in G Major, Op. 55, no. 2, 1, mm. 1–8[2]



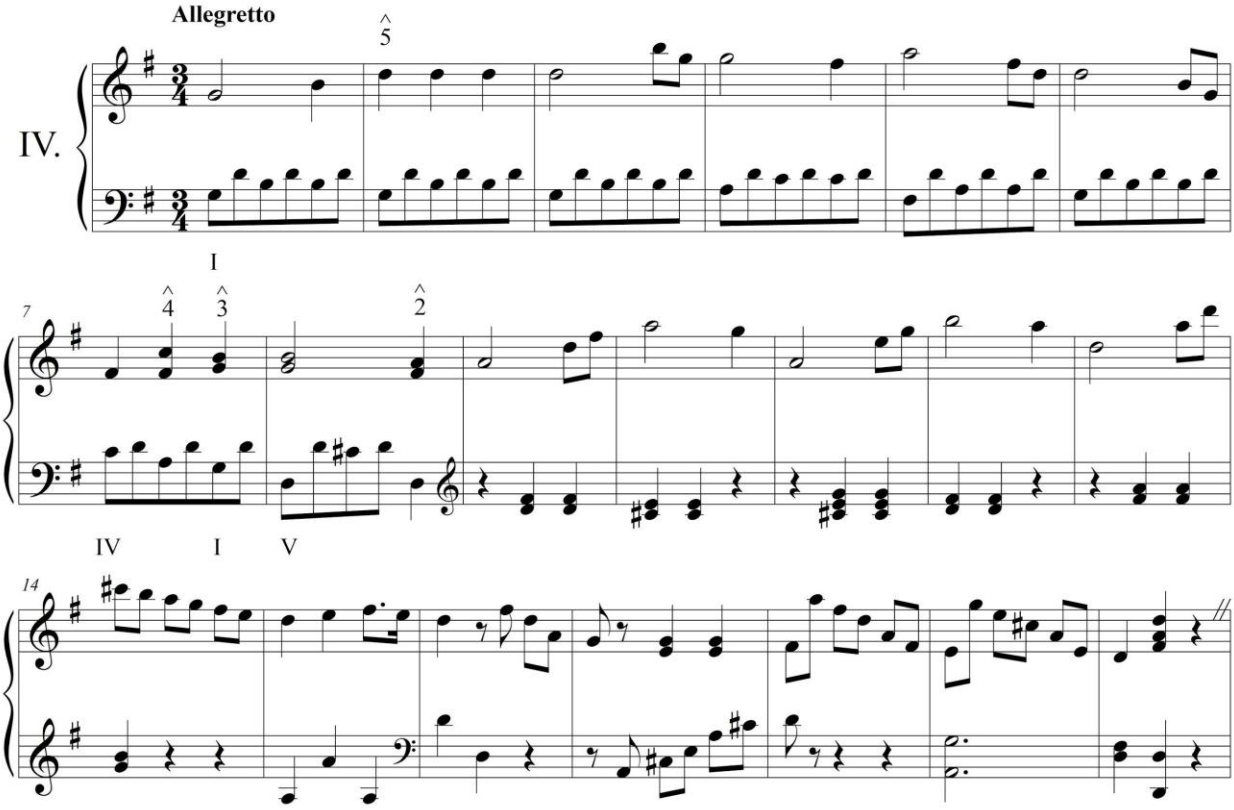
Later levels (e.g., Examples 11–12) more closely resemble the original score and include some of its technical challenges, including scales, arpeggios and other figurations. For example, Level III of Kuhlau's Sonatina includes a left hand accompaniment of the waltz pattern in blocked chords that becomes arpeggiated in Level IV before the student is required to combine that with the elaborated melody in the final score (Example 13).

[2] The examples of Kuhlau's Sonatina after this point all stop at the same structural point—after the interruption before the melodic resolution to tonic—for the sake of brevity.

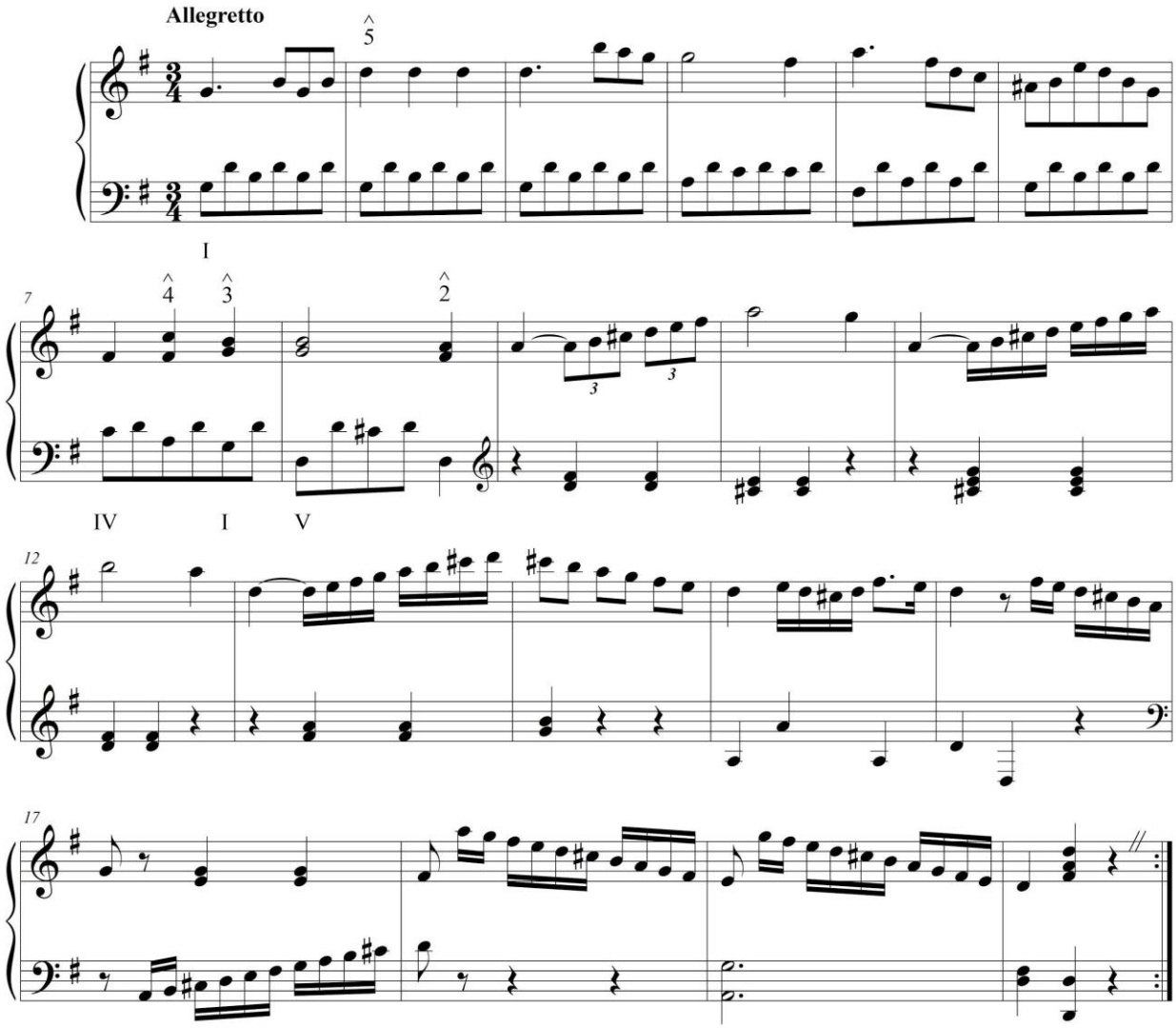
Example 11: Middle level of Kuhlau, Sonatina in G Major, Op. 55, no. 2, 1, mm. 1–14



Example 12: Late level of Kuhlau, Sonatina in G Major, Op. 55, no. 2, 1, mm. 1–20



Example 13: Kuhlau, Sonatina in G Major, Op. 55, no. 2, 1, mm. 1–20



Teaching from *Skeleton* to Score

For this project, the following pieces were analyzed from a Schenkerian perspective and assigned to students:

Kuhlau, Sonatina in G Major, Op. 55, no. 2, 1
Kuhlau, Sonatina in C Major, Op. 55, no. 3, 1
Mendelssohn, *Lieder ohne Worte*, Op. 30, no. 1
W.F. Bach, Minuet in G Major

Students were assigned one level at a time, beginning with the *skeleton*.[3] After students demonstrated fluency with a level, they were assigned the next. Students were asked to play previously learned levels at each lesson. With each assignment of a new level, structural landmarks of the *skeleton* were pointed out. The instructor also pointed out similarities and differences between each level, pointing out specific details of the composition and how they related to music learned in previous levels. Students were encouraged to improvise/compose in a similar fashion.

This approach presents small, manageable parts leading up to the whole, but in a manner in which the entire structure of the piece is always present. With each new level, details are progressively added to the *skeleton* without obscuring the overall structure. As such, students are also provided with models that can help enrich their own creative activities.

Discussion

The authors found that using a Schenkerian approach in teaching composition/improvisation and repertoire benefitted students in several ways while also presenting some unexpected challenges.

Memorization

Students who learned repertoire through preparatory levels were found to be able to memorize the final score very securely. This may be the result of learning and re-learning the piece several times, with only a few additional musical details added each time the piece is re-learned. This provides the student with a strong sense of the harmonic, melodic, and formal structures of the piece. Furthermore, students begin to recognize similar structures in new pieces as something already learned, giving them a head start on the learning process.

Musicality in Performance

After learning a piece through preparatory levels, students were generally able to perform pieces with more "musicality" and "sense of phrase" than might be expected from intermediate pianists. While these terms refer to concepts that are sometimes difficult to define, they may generally be thought of as meaningful groupings of notes in the music along with directed motion toward points of arrival. This result was probably due to the focus on the structural points of the *skeleton* and the relationship of all parts to this core. The teacher was also able to address common idiomatic challenges for pianists including balance between the hands, voicing within the hand, and articulation in the early levels of the learning process when many of the technical challenges of the final score were not yet present.

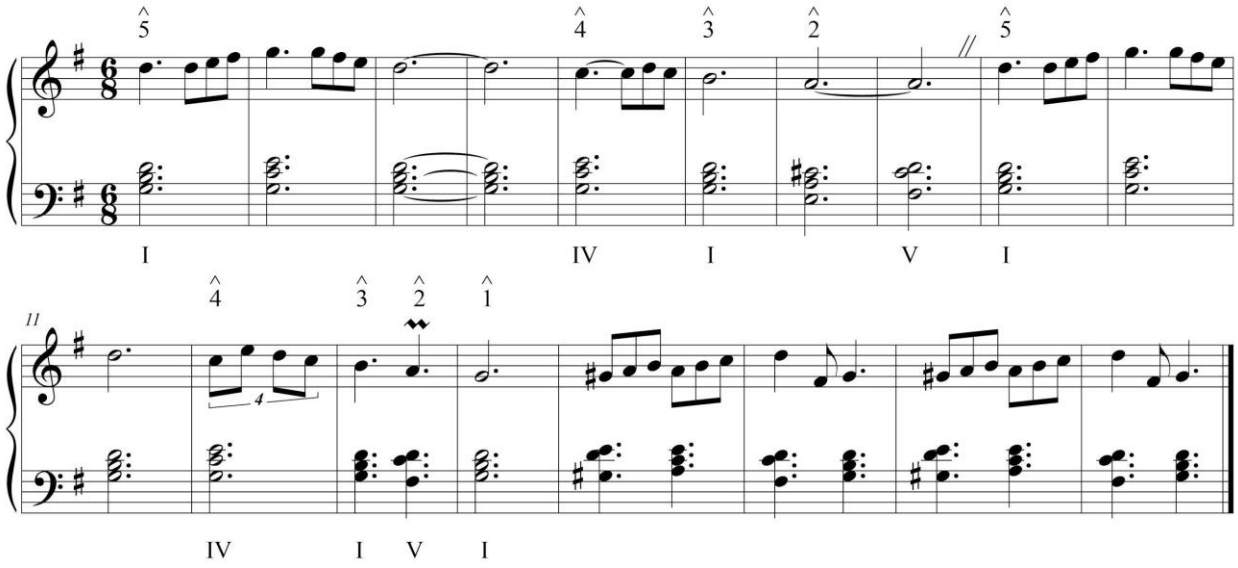
[3] The *skeletons* of beginning and intermediate repertoire pieces are often abbreviated because of their brevity. As such, they often only begin at the third scale degree and may not include an interruption.

The *Skeleton* as Pedagogical Tool

The authors found that the *skeleton* is a useful pedagogical tool through which new concepts can be introduced or reinforced. At elementary levels, basic concepts such as new rhythms, dynamics and other ideas encountered in method books can be easily applied to the *skeleton* for reinforcement of the concept being introduced. However, once learned, the *skeleton* becomes a familiar pattern in which even more advanced concepts can be introduced in a simple musical context.

The authors introduced the concept of secondary dominants to a student who was familiar with primary triads, had used the *skeleton* as a basis for improvisation/composition, and was learning a Kuhlau Sonatina through preparatory levels (Examples 9–13). The student was asked to compose a short piece (Example 14) that was structurally similar to the assigned Kuhlau Sonatina that also utilized secondary dominants. In this way, the *skeleton* provided a basis on which repertoire study and creative exercises worked together to reinforce a more advanced theoretical concept.

Example 14: Transcription of Landon's (age 10) composition: modeled after Kuhlau's Sonatina Op. 55, no. 2, 1, with secondary dominants

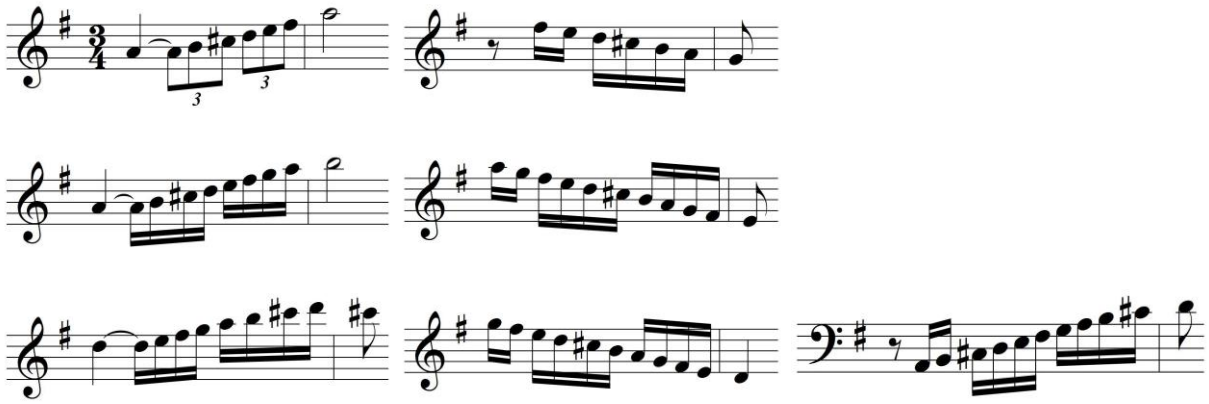


Unexpected Challenges

Despite the many successes that came about through this process, there were also some challenges. Students were initially expected to be able to learn each new preparatory level quickly, ideally one each week. However, each of the levels after Level III included enough new material and technical challenges that they required more time. As such, it took longer for the student to learn the entire score than it might have in a traditional, segmented approach. Even so, this was not considered a failure as the students had easily memorized the score by this point and had a strong sense of overall form.

Also, while musicians might spend more time practicing scales, arpeggios and other technical exercises than anything else, these same features are the last to appear in the preparatory levels as mere surface elaboration. Accordingly, if the student only begins to practice these passages at the end of the learning process, their technical facility will be far behind their understanding of the score. In order to remedy this situation, a sheet of contextualized technique exercises were designed to accompany Level I, the *skeleton*, such as those in Example 15.

Example 15: Technical exercises for Kuhlau, Sonatina in G Major, Op. 55, no. 2, 1, mm. 1–20



Finally, it should be noted that not all music will exhibit the sorts of recursive structures that can be generated in the way demonstrated here. Schenker's approach was originally intended to explain music of the common practice period and has mixed results when applied otherwise. While a Schenkerian approach may be able to suit contemporary use of the diatonic modes (e.g., Example 5), other music built around intervals, sets, or series will be best explored with other theoretical models.

Conclusions

It should be remembered that learning to play and compose by improvising over a structured framework is by no means new. Eighteenth-century teachers used *partimenti*—structured bass lines with implied harmonies—as a basis for such activities. The *skeleton* is similar, but combines a structural bass with a structural melody derived from Schenkerian analyses.

Since its introduction in the early part of the twentieth century, Schenkerian studies have moved from the work of specialists, to graduate studies and ultimately within the past decade to the undergraduate core music curriculum.[4] And yet, without ever using the terminology or complex notation of Schenker's approach, beginning and intermediate piano students can readily understand "dressing up the *skeleton*."

[4] For example, see Steven G. Laitz, *The Complete Musician: An Integrated Approach to Tonal Theory, Analysis, and Listening* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Miguel A. Roig-Francolí, *Harmony in Context* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2003); and Jane Piper Clendinning and Elizabeth West Marvin, *A Musician's Guide to Theory and Analysis* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2005).

While the exact methods used here may be only a crude first step, the authors hope that the value in thinking about music as broken up into layers of elaboration and not just discrete linear units is abundantly clear. Having a pedagogical tool that can bridge the gap between performance, analysis, improvisation, and composition allows for integrated music study in an authentic context at every stage of the learning process.

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Remediating Performance Aversion in Piano Students: From Narratives of Failure to Narratives of Progress

By John Mortensen, Cedarville University

Abstract

Students averse to performing often carry with them a "narrative of failure" (a negative personal interpretation of their performance history) by which they believe that they do not have the capacity to perform well. I propose that this narrative is learned through a series of adverse performance experiences that are themselves a result of inadequate musical preparation. Just as the narrative of failure was constructed through experience, teachers can help build a new "narrative of progress" through carefully orchestrated positive experiences on the stage. In this article I will suggest causes for narratives of failure followed by suggestions for ways teachers may counteract them with a series of activities leading to narratives of progress.

Narratives of Failure

Young pianists frequently tell me that they love music but hate performing. By this they mean that they enjoy listening to and learning music, but the experience of getting on stage is horrifying. As I question them about their musical past, I find that their disinclination to perform often results from one or more experiences which the students would characterize as failure on the stage. These experiences form students' views of themselves as inherently unsuited for performance; the prospect of playing in front of others carries the threat of humiliation. I call this belief a "narrative of failure."

Students who experience narratives of failure usually have a history of performances that went badly. Typically, "failure" involves inaccurate, uncontrolled playing and breakdown of memory, resulting in public shame as perceived by the student. Sternbach's study on music students' stress levels indicates that an ongoing narrative of failure "can be triggered by a single train wreck on stage or by an accumulation of small insults to the emerging ego that eventually prove too much for some young people to tolerate" (Sternbach, p. 47). Such events can begin very early in life; Boucher and Ryan assert that children as young as three or four may experience performance anxiety (Boucher and Ryan, p. 339).

In personal interviews with college piano majors, several confirmed the confidence-shattering power of a negative performance experience. "Tyrone" recalled: "As I moved into high school, my fantasy world of performance began to crack … Sophomore year I entered a piano competition … and the other competitors blew me out of the water. I was mortified."

"Kelsey" can trace the onset of her difficulties to a single event: "One year at Federation I knew I wasn't very well prepared and my performance proved it. I totally bombed both songs I played and had terrible memory problems. After that, I would get sickeningly nervous for any performance, especially recitals."

"Meredith" mentioned another factor that contributed to a negative view of performance: "I was also constantly compared with another player, who had incredible technical skill. This comparison of my every performance with his made performing painful many times for me."

When these students are questioned more closely about the nature of their preparation for these performances, they report little training in harmony or musical form. They were usually told to memorize the piece, but given no instruction beyond advice to keep playing repeatedly until they didn't need the score. More broadly, they received sparse training in how to practice; they simply went to the piano and tried to play the piece without applying any problem-solving strategy.

"Kelsey" recounts her own performance preparation as follows: "I have trouble remembering very much specific teaching towards performance. I know my teacher explained how to have poise on stage, walk out confidently and smile after you play. She would sometimes encourage me to have trial runs, but these were usually just with my mom or grandma, who didn't make me very nervous, or residents at a nursing home who also didn't make me nervous."

Similarly, they were rarely taught to plan and control tempos; rather, they were typically left to their own devices to practice at any tempo they wished. In the case of pre-college students, that normally meant that they practiced too fast, and consequently, haphazardly.

Likewise, they report that they received little help in making the transition from the familiar, comfortable environment of practicing at home and playing in lessons to the unfamiliar environment of playing for an audience, perhaps on a strange piano in an unknown auditorium. Mishra suggest that this unexpected transition contributes to performance problems (Mishra, 2003, p. 58).

Performance Anxiety and Performance Aversion

Given the performance difficulties these students experienced due to lack of preparation, their narratives of failure are understandable, though regrettable. It makes sense that the prospect of performing would make them anxious. However, I distinguish their situation from ordinary performance anxiety, which Salmon defines as "the experience of persisting, distressful apprehension about and/or actual impairment of, performance skills in a public context, to a degree unwarranted given the individual's musical aptitude, training, and level of preparation."

In other words, performance anxiety (as Salmon uses the term) seems inexplicable, because it affects performers who are fully prepared to play. By contrast, I use the term "performance aversion" to describe musicians who avoid performance with good reason. The reason, of course, is that many of their prior experiences have been dreadful. If that is the case, it is reasonable to expect future experiences to be dreadful as well.

Although the causes are different, the effects of performance anxiety and aversion are the same: nervousness, fear, physical tension, erratic muscle control, and great difficulty recalling memorized music. These debilitating phenomena have long plagued performers, and teachers and scholars have been searching for cures for just as long. In 1919 New England Conservatory violin professor Eugene Gruenberg reflected on the matter in *The Musical Quarterly*:

> After devoting much time and study to this problem, I have arrived at the conclusion that stage-fright is nothing else but a species of temporary insanity, impairing the correct balance of the mind to such an extent as fundamentally to annihilate the control of all the mental and physical capacities and energies for the time being (Gruenberg, p. 222).

Gruenberg recommended the following steps to overcome performance anxiety:

(1) Know your task. Do your best to prepare yourself as well and to come as near perfection as may be.
(2) Secure a perfectly correct and comfortable condition of the body by observing all rules and precautions of a sanitary order.
(3) Forget the audience, when you enter the stage.
(4) Depend on Concentration and Inspiration. Concentrate your mind upon your task, and thinking of its beauty, try to do justice to it, so you may yourself enjoy it to its full extent.
(5) Have an excellent accompanist, and be sure to arrange for as many rehearsals as necessary.
(6) Plenty of breathing exercises near an open window, before going on the stage, will marvelously enliven, strengthen and inspire you (Gruenberg, p. 229).

Gruenberg's advice is sound, if perhaps obvious; his steps may indeed help well-prepared performers overcome the "temporary insanity" of performance anxiety. However, his common-sense approach will be of little help to the musician who experiences performance aversion, who has already decided, based on experience, that the upcoming performance will be a failure. Sanitary precautions and fresh air will make no difference. Nor will Concentration or Inspiration (even if capitalized).

Constructing Narratives of Progress

Helping musicians with performance aversion requires recognition of the narrative of failure that causes the aversion in the first place, followed by arranging for positive stage experiences that eventually build a "narrative of progress."

From the student's perspective, a narrative of progress requires a series of performances that goes well enough to prove that things are actually getting better. In other words, the narrative can only be helpful if it is believable, and it is believable only to the extent that it is real. The teacher's responsibility is to plan these performances, and insofar as possible, "stack the deck" in the student's favor so that a good experience on the stage is all but assured. Below I offer some possible steps for creating a narrative of progress.

The teacher should establish and maintain regular and frequent informal performance events. One annual recital is not sufficient to build a narrative of progress. At the college level, weekly or bi-weekly studio class is appropriate. In my experience the most confident student performers in formal settings (e.g., juries, competitions, and degree recitals) are those who, from an early age, participated in frequent music-making such as accompanying the school choir, community

musical productions, and church services. The very presence and frequency of many performance events makes each one less momentous.

The events should be planned as "low-threat" experiences. The student's repertoire should not be fraught with technical peril; in fact, four-hand duets are ideal (perhaps paired with another student who is also overcoming a narrative of failure). Duets reduce anxiety by dividing responsibility for notes between two students, avoiding the need for memorization, and providing the presence and moral support of another student on stage.

Prior to the actual performance, the student should have several dress rehearsals that duplicate, as precisely as possible, the conditions of the performance. The room and piano must be the same. The teacher should provide immediate constructive feedback during the rehearsal. This is a time to figure out matters such as page turns, counting off to begin movements, and even how to walk out, bow, and situate both pianists (and perhaps page turners) in close proximity at the piano, all with grace and confidence.

I have found it helpful to assign students to speak briefly about the composer and the music before they play, as it grants them a few valuable moments of confidence-building authority and poise before beginning to perform.

During the actual studio class, the other students should write constructive remarks about the performance. The purpose is twofold: to give the performers encouragement and advice, and to allow the other students to develop their own teaching abilities. (This process of assigned written critique is often where the next generation of keyboard pedagogy professionals get their first taste of teaching.)

The next step in building a narrative of progress is to perform solo literature in a similarly informal studio class setting. I would not recommend memorization at this time because fear of forgetting is probably the single greatest contributor to performance anxiety and aversion. Rather, I prefer to build up several good experiences that contribute to a narrative of progress, and simply leave the question of memorization off to the side for a while.

However, the student should undertake musical preparation with the same thoroughness one would use if memorizing. The following checklist may help students prepare for this next level of performance.

(1) Know the key and meter of the piece, and any key or meter changes within it.
(2) Be able to sing the melody from beginning to end while playing a simplified chordal accompaniment.
(3) Be able to show where all melodies begin and end, and how the phrase shape rises and falls.
(4) Know a specific metronome speed for the piece, and memorize that tempo (i.e., be able to start at that speed without checking a metronome).
(5) If you are turning your own pages, know exactly when to do so, and even which hand to use.

The same rehearsal methods used above for the four-hand performance should be repeated for the solo. Depending on the level of the student's performance aversion, a steady program of duets and unmemorized, well-prepared solos may continue for weeks or even months. The more favorable performances that result, the better, as each one contributes to the narrative of progress.

The question of memorized performance requires special attention. Memory problems are, infuriatingly, both the cause and the result of anxiety. The fear of memory failure creates memory failure, which then creates more fear and more failure. Mishra surveyed one hundred years of articles on the subject and found that most writers have understood musical memory as having four components: kinesthetic, aural, visual, and analytical (Mishra, 2010, p. 9).

The kinesthetic is the subconscious muscle memory. It is how we tie our shoes without any conscious knowledge of what our fingers are doing. It is learned through repetition. It is completely necessary in piano playing because the mind cannot consciously give instructions for every single note. Thankfully, the body figures out a lot for itself.

Unfortunately, the kinesthetic memory can also be a trap. While it functions subconsciously, it seems to be very easily interrupted by conscious thought. It is like a delicate plant that only grows in its habitual environment, the practice room. Most students have been unpleasantly surprised that a piece that seemed ironclad in the practice room fell apart on the stage. I recall during my undergraduate studies that I brought a difficult Rachmaninoff etude-tableau to a professor who was not my regular teacher. I had worked up the piece to a furious tempo in the practice room but in the lesson it came apart at the seams in the first few measures. In desperation I explained that it had gone well in the practice room. (Unhelpfully, the professor snapped, "Some are born for the practice room and some are born for the stage; which are you?")

The trap of the kinesthetic memory is that, given enough repetition, it seems to function effortlessly and with hardly a thought. However, it only does so in the undisturbed environment of its creation. As soon as the student moves to another venue and then adds the perceived "threat" of knowledgeable listeners, the kinesthetic memory will fail. Mishra notes that many writers have agreed on a way to avoid this trap: "Practicing at a very slow tempo was commonly advocated as a way to depend less on kinesthetic memory and counteract what was seen as the dangerous automaticity of muscle movements" (Mishra, 2010, p. 11). Very slow practice disrupts kinesthetic memory because at low speeds the muscles cannot feel what should happen next, and the student must draw upon other forms of memory.

The aural memory, also called audiation, is simply the ability to imagine how the music will sound. Aural memory may be employed to "prime" the kinesthetic memory. That is, when a pianist imagines how a certain passage will sound, she can simultaneously anticipate how it will feel to play it, and what the choreographic moves across the keyboard shall be.

I have found that students vary widely in their use of visual memory. Some recall the appearance of the score in enough detail that they "read" information from it. Others visualize where their hands will go on the keyboard. Most, however, do not seem to depend on visual elements as much as the other forms.

The analytical memory is the most neglected of the four. It may be described as objective knowledge about the piece: large-scale formal structure, key areas, chord progressions, and phrase structure. Analytical memory always knows what section it's in, what tune it's playing, what chord it's on, and what key it's in.

Despite its aforementioned dangers, sheer repetition at the piano is an indispensable activity for learning music. However, other activities can strengthen analytical memory and break up the monotony of repetition:

(1) Make a jazz "fakebook" version of the piece (i.e., write out the melody on treble clef only, and fill in chord symbols above). [See Figure 1]
(2) Play the piece at very slow tempi (1/2 or even 1/4 tempo) with a metronome.
(3) Write "rehearsal letters" into the score at important moments in the piece, and be able to list from memory each letter, and what happens at that letter (key, melody, etc.), in order.

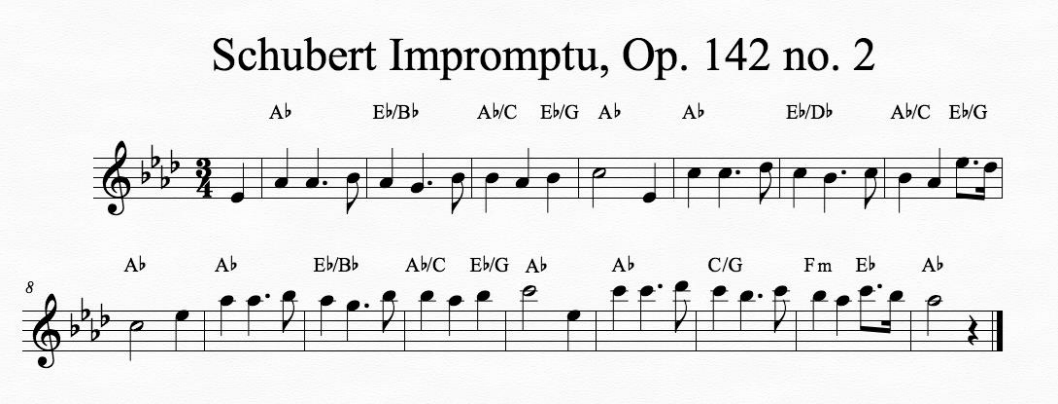

Figure 1. A "fakebook" version of a phrase from a Schubert Impromptu.

Before debuting the memorized piece in front of others, the student may further prepare by performing on video and then immediately viewing and critiquing the recording. I encourage my students to do this as if they were a teacher speaking to one of their own students; this helps them make constructive, articulate recommendations ("You need to think ahead to the key change at the page turn; what note is in the bass?") rather than self-defeating insults ("I'm an idiot for messing up that spot again").

Finally, the piece should be ready to perform from memory in front of peers. But the student should not think of this event as a final exam but rather as another step in a narrative of progress. As soon as possible after the performance, the student should receive encouraging remarks from the teacher and other students about what went well, along with suggestions for practice strategies for further improvement.

Conclusion

"Kelsey" reflected on her personal struggles with performance aversion, and the process of replacing a narrative of failure with a narrative of progress: "After giving a junior recital and completing three years at school I wish I would have known how much solid preparation reduces performance anxiety. I practice way more in college than I did in high school. Now when I perform and my mind wonders if I really know the next note, I can recall the hours and hours I've practiced and the different critiques I've received that prove I am prepared. It's also helped to play for people more in studio class or in the practice rooms."

"Meredith" relates her narrative of progress in these terms: "My performances have improved because I am more technically capable now and have better practice habits… I know I can perform without pain and without worrying about memory slips, because healthy practice safeguards me from physical injury and the consequences of weak memorization. Performing in front of others has been easier as well because I know that I can do more about my sound and technique; I am not at the mercy of weary arms and hands. This also helps soothe emotional hurt due to comparison, because if I don't like something about my playing, I know I can improve."

Students with narratives of failure (resulting in performance aversion) face significant obstacles in their musical education. Teachers may help their students replace narratives of failure with narratives of progress. This process includes attention to practice strategies, the four types of memory, frequent low-threat performance opportunities, and immediate post-performance constructive critique.

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John Mortensen enjoys an unusually broad career as a performer and teacher of classical and jazz piano. His concerts often begin with masterpieces of the classical repertoire before venturing into jazz improvisation or his original compositions. He appears frequently as concert artist and masterclass teacher at colleges and universities nationwide.

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He also performs and teaches Irish and American roots music, playing mandolin, Irish flute, Irish button accordion, Uilleann pipes, and Irish whistle. He created America's only college-level traditional Irish music session class.

Mortensen is committed to educating young musicians for the 21st century and places special emphasis on developing courses that bring improvisation back to the standard college music curriculum.

After his concert in Eisk, Russian Federation, the Russian press wrote that "... for John Mortensen Russia has always been close musically. He plays with especial passion the works of Sergei Rachmaninoff. 'I don't speak Russian, I speak Rachmaninoff,' was heard from the mouth of the pianist during the concert. And truly, during the performance of the work of the great Russian composer, in the hall peoples of different nationalities disappeared — it seemed from the stage sang and wept the Russian soul. The chords of the next Rachmaninoff prelude had not even been played, and the hall was already conquered."

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Mortensen studied with Lynne Bartholomew at the University of Michigan and Anne Koscielny and Raymond Hanson at the University of Maryland, receiving his doctorate in piano performance from the latter. He holds National Certification in Piano through the Music Teachers National Association, is endorsed as an Ohio Artist on Tour through the Ohio Arts Council, and was recently recognized as an Excellence in Education honoree by the Ohio Senate. In 2015 he was selected for the Fulbright Specialist Roster by the US Department of State. Over the next five years the Fulbright Specialist program will sponsor him to perform and teach at universities internationally.

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