

Clavier Companion

Exploring
current piano
methods



Clavier Companion

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Keyboard Pedagogy

Special Issue: A New Look at Current Methods

A Compilation of *Clavier Companion's* Method Reviews, 2009-2011

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Editor's Page

Pete Jutras, Editor-in-Chief

Guiding your students

I remember the first time my parents showed me a map. I was a young child on a long car trip, and I was so disappointed that the map didn't actually show me where the car was (this was long before GPS). My parents had to teach me to watch for road signs and other landmarks and then find them on the map to deduce my place.

You are here

Maps are wonderfully useful tools. With a little bit of effort, you can see where you are and where you need to go, and a well-marked map will illustrate the steps involved in getting from Point A to Point B. Whether I'm walking around the downtown of a strange city or traveling a long distance by car, I always like to have a map at hand to help me see where I am and where I'm going. I'll even admit that on planes I always try to find my route on that maze of lines in the back of the in-flight magazine.

Maps do have their limitations, however. I noticed these limitations during two recent trips. In each case, I was in a foreign country, and I had the opportunity to have a local resident as my personal guide. There is absolutely no substitute for having a local guide identify places of interest, narrate local history and anecdotes, and provide insight into how the residents live. Add to this local food cooked by local people, and I had an unforgettable experience that far exceeded anything I could ever achieve on my own, no matter how many maps or guidebooks I might consult.

A local host brings wisdom, pride, practical knowledge, and the ability to get to the essence of what really matters and what is really interesting about the area. The local guide knows a little about who I am, what my interests are, and what I would like to see. The local guide knows the places of interest and the stories that aren't in any of the books. The local guide can relate feelings, emotions, and opinions that increase your personal connection with the new land.

Methods and maps

With this issue, we launch what I consider to be a very important series of articles in *Clavier Companion*. We will be reviewing current piano methods in an effort to inform and educate you, the reader, about the products you might use to teach your students.

The word *method* derives from the Latin word *methodus* (defined as a way of teaching or going), which in turn goes back to the Greek roots *meta* (after, behind, among, with) and *hodos* (a way, road, or traveling). A method is in essence a map; it shows us where to begin, and it provides materials that, if used properly, will guide us to a final destination.

Like maps, some methods are more detailed than others. Like maps, some methods have a different focus than others (think of a road map, a trail map, a bus map, or a sightseeing

map). Like maps, some methods will have different appearances, and they will have varying content that may appeal to some people but not to others.

Our series of reviews will do its best to present you with as much information about these methods (maps) as it can. What content is in each map? Where do the maps begin? Where do they end? What directions (reading, rhythmic, harmonic, and otherwise) do these maps use to transport the student from beginning to end? What kinds of roads (music) do they use? What interesting sights are pointed out along the musical journey? And, most important, how do independent teachers use it everyday? What do they feel are its strengths and weaknesses?

I hope you find this information practical and enlightening. I hope it exposes you to methods you may not have considered before. I hope it stands as a resource that can direct you to the best map for each of your students—students who walk through your door with different needs, tastes, learning styles, starting points, and final destinations. Our series, written by educators who regularly teach with each reviewed method, will attempt to provide you with your own “guide”—someone who can tell you how they use the method every day and provide insights and ideas based on real experience.

You are the guide

What I hope we all remember, however, is that **a map is not a guide**. In fact, a map is a very poor substitute for a guide. By the same token, a piano method is not a piano teacher. A method alone will not lead to success, nor will it ever be the sole cause of failure. The pupil's success or failure always has and always will rest squarely on the shoulders of the *teacher*. It is the teacher who serves as the ultimate guide to a student's musical journey.

A skilled teacher can teach well with a lousy method, but a poor teacher may not be able to do much with a “great” method. A talented guide can show you interesting things on a good map, but he could also give you a great tour with a lousy map—his reservoir of knowledge, instinct, and experience will take over. A poor guide, however, is likely to get you lost with even the best of maps; at the least he would lead you on a very uninspiring trip.

A method is a tool, and it can be very useful. The method provides students with materials enabling them to learn and apply new skills, sequences, and concepts. In many cases a well-written method can add motivation and inspiration to the lessons. There are many important tasks, however, that even the best method can never do by itself—these tasks are the responsibility of the teacher.

The teacher must observe and assess each student, plotting a course for growth and improvement. The teacher must *prepare* the students for concepts presented in the method, so

they can have initial experiences of success (and not failure) when those concepts appear on the printed page. The teacher must explain, demonstrate, and illustrate those concepts in a variety of ways that speak to a variety of personality types, learning modes, and learning styles. The teacher must make up for the shortcomings and weak spots that are in any method, even the “good” ones. The teacher must always be ready to supplement the method with useful materials and activities that enhance learning and reinforce new skills. Above all, the teacher must serve as a guide, helping each student understand what is important and necessary to play accurately, confidently, and musically.

The good news is that we as teachers have the experience to do these things. We know the pianistic landscape, and we’ve made the musical journey. We have ideas about what is essential and what our students should take note of. Most importantly, we understand the final destination—we can craft a vision of the student as an accomplished musician, working in every lesson to guide the student towards the fulfillment of that vision.

All of us must remember that we are guides, and remember how much we have to offer. We cannot afford to become complacent and think that the method book will do the teaching for us—that we can just sit back and turn the page while offering corrections. We must help each student avoid taking wrong turns, losing a sense of direction, or ending up lost altogether. We must be proactive in conveying the passion, excitement, and wonder that is inherent in good music making, allowing our students to learn to love and treasure music as we do. We must see ourselves as the proud local guides, eager to share the wonders of our land with new visitors.

The methods are nice, the illustrations are pretty, and the books are often well written, but they cannot be a personal guide. Only the teacher can fulfill that role.

As you teach, never stop guiding. Your students will thank you for it, and you will help them find their way to a more fulfilling musical destination. ▲



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A new look at Current Methods

Rebecca Johnson, editor

Where were you in 1982? Perhaps you were not even born yet! I was just starting a private studio in our newly adopted city of Detroit. I subscribed to a wonderful magazine called *The Piano Quarterly*, and in this publication from 1982 to 1985 Marianne Uszler edited an outstanding series of articles which reviewed all of the newest and best piano methods on the market. I found this series to be invaluable in helping me choose which methods to use in my growing studio. In more recent years, I utilized these articles as a model for my university pedagogy students to use in learning to evaluate new methods, even though most of the methods were either no longer on the market or had been revised extensively.

On November 29, 2007, Dr. Peter Jutras, editor of *Clavier Companion*, sent me an intriguing e-mail. He wrote, "I'm sure you're familiar with the large *Piano Quarterly* project from the mid-80s that did a detailed analysis of all of the major methods. This series was a big part of my pedagogy work on beginning methods, and I still assign it to my pedagogy students...What if we attempted to undertake a similar project? Something that spanned multiple issues, but provided an updated, in-depth analysis of current methods. I think it would be a huge service to the profession." And so an idea was planted that, almost two years later, has come to fruition! This article begins our twelve-part series, *A survey of current methods*, which will appear in our *Perspectives in Pedagogy* department and review the most highly respected and popular piano methods on the market today.

The author for our "kick-off" article to the series was an easy choice. In this issue, Marianne Uszler discusses the original series and then masterfully leads us through the trends of the intervening 25 years. She puts it all in perspective and sets the tone for the reviews that will continue to appear in each issue through 2011!

Then . . . Now

by Marianne Uszler

Recently I heard an interview with a South African author. When asked how she organized her thoughts, she replied, “I just put my mind on paper.” How simple. How honest. That’s what I plan to do here.

I was asked to provide a bridge between this new *Clavier Companion* project and the series of method reviews published over nine issues in *The Piano Quarterly* from 1982 to 1985. Noting those dates made me pause. That’s a quarter of a century ago!

It seemed that the best way to sort out my thoughts was to go back to the beginning. I hadn’t read the original articles in a long time. Taking a fresh look at them triggered a variety of reactions.

My first strong reaction was a huge round of cheers and gratitude to Robert Silverman, *PQ*’s fearless and generous publisher and editor. Fearless and generous should be underlined. The whole thing was his idea.

What we are trying to do is to offer guidance to piano teachers so that they will come out after reading the series with a point of view. . . . If we make a credible stab at objectivity combined with knowledgeable ability we will provide a tool that can be used by private teachers and in college classrooms across the country.

As we worked through the series there were questions and discussions and—let’s be honest—some mumbles and grumbles. Nothing like this had ever appeared before. But the timing seemed right, and *PQ* was certainly the right place. It was a publication with a high degree of credibility, and it filled a special niche among pianists and piano teachers. Readers expected honesty, the “straight goods.”

That was then . . .

How to begin?

I have always felt that ideas and activities should be placed in context. Almost no one is completely original. The more we realize what we owe to those who preceded us, the more we keep a healthy sense of balance regarding our own efforts. And the more we learn.

The review project, therefore, examined past methods in order to put then-current reviews in context. We began with a long look back—to the mid-eighteenth century. As I pointed out:

Just as the instrument has changed over the last two hundred years, so have the methods designed to explain how to play it. The piano itself, players, teachers, and students of the instrument, cultural values, anatomical/psychological research, communication media and styles, educational sophistication—all have played a part in the formation and use of methods. Assessment of an individual method, or methods of a certain period, cannot overlook these many related factors without decreasing the validity of the examination.

With the exception of one, the methods we reviewed then are still available today, a few in revised forms or offering additional material.

These were the methods, and the order in which they were reviewed:

John Thompson Modern Course for the Piano
Oxford Piano Course
The Music Tree
Robert Pace Piano Library
David Carr Glover Piano Library
Bastien Piano Library
Alfred’s Basic Piano Library
Music Pathways
Keyboard Arts Basic Music Study
Mainstreams Piano Method
Suzuki Piano Method
Yamaha Music Education System

The reviewers were chosen because they were all teachers with a high degree of credibility. None had (then) written any methods themselves. In each case, authors and publishers of the method were sent the review prior to publication and given equal opportunity to respond in the same issue. This system provided not only fairness, but also a rather amazing amount of information that was published in one place. Once again, credit and thanks to Robert Silverman for providing that much ink.

And hats off to the reviewers who did the hard work and who put their own necks on the line to write those searching and honest critiques:

James Lyke
Anna Belle Bogner
Dolores Johnson
Marguerite Miller
Max Camp
Frances Larimer
Martha Hilley
Barbara English Maris
E.L. Lancaster

This is now . . .

Now there are 25 more years to add to that historical context. This extended perspective gives us a chance to reflect on what has happened in that quarter century. Most of the methods to be reviewed in the current survey were published since 1990. Are there trends? Fresh ideas? Has there been a synthesis? A break-through? A revolution?

After reading all the upcoming reviews, you will make your own observations. As Silverman said in 1982, “piano teachers [should] come out after reading the series with a point of view.” That should happen this time around, too.

This is my point of view. As I said earlier, I’m “putting my mind on paper.” I certainly don’t know what these reviews

will tell us because I suspect that most of them have yet to be written.

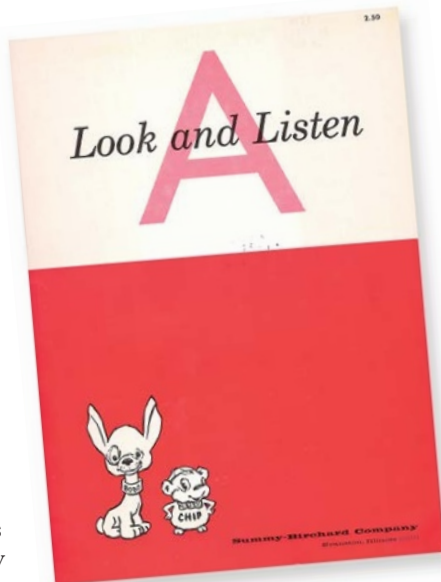
Under the influence

For me, one thing has not changed, even after 25 years. It has, in fact, become more significant as time and distance have increased. That fact is the way the ideas and materials of Frances Clark and Robert Pace galvanized the piano-teaching world back in the 1950s and 60s.

Frances Clark challenged the way that music reading is learned and taught. What we now call intervallic reading grew directly from those early *Look and Listen* and *Music Tree* books. Those books pioneered an approach to reading that prepared for, rather than began with, reading on a five-line staff. Movable starting pitches were movable clefs. You could begin on any pitch and read from there, using intervals. Middle C was not the magic key.

Not only did the eye perceive note movement best by directional reading, but the fingers also learned to “feel” intervals. Seeing seconds meant using neighbor fingers. Seeing a third meant skipping a finger. Seeing fifths and fourths created more open hand shapes. The technical approach grew “hand-in-hand” from the approach to reading.

Intervallic reading and movable guide notes, of course, did not originate with Frances Clark. That’s how the monks read from



neumes and why Guido d’Arezzo introduced us to ut, re, mi, fa, sol, la. And that’s how the best sight-readers find their way around the keyboard with speed and skill to this day. Naming a note is only the start. The rest is all about judging and feeling distances.

Robert Pace called attention to the fact that playing the piano was a means of expression beyond “playing pieces.” Knowing and using melody and finger patterns gave you the freedom to move around the keyboard without needing to read in all the flat and sharp keys. Transposition was no more a magic trick than Middle C was the magic key. The multi-key approach taught functional harmony to beginners.

Another factor influenced the way the Pace materials were organized and taught. Jerome Bruner was the leading voice in what was then called the cognitive revolution. In a “spiral curriculum” you revisited basic ideas in ever-growing complexity. Why not, then, play in all keys even if you didn’t read the notation? Why not play melodies in eight-bar groupings—inventing your own endings—even if you didn’t know these “questions and answers” were musical periods, and that periods were the basis of formal analysis in Western music?

The multi-key approach was also not an original idea. The authors of the *Oxford Piano Course* at Northwestern University, as



All these books try to provide what might best be called music education at the piano. They are not just “how to play the piano” methods.

well as Raymond Burrows and Ella Mason Ahearn, Pace’s own predecessors at Columbia University Teachers College, had advocated these ideas and teaching approaches in their own materials. But it was Pace who, with the support of the National Piano Foundation, popularized and broadcast this approach.

I go into this detail about the contributions of Frances Clark and Robert Pace because I think that the methods published after theirs had to take the Clark and Pace approaches into account. From then on references to intervallic reading, transposition, and harmonization were worked into the methods that appeared.

Old wine ... new bottles?

There were lots of questions.

Was an off-staff approach at the outset the best preparation to train the eyes and ears to read and listen? What were the plusses and minuses of intervallic reading? How did that reading approach affect the repertoire that could be played and how it needed to be sequenced? Was using whole arm/braced finger playing the best technical beginning? That was, indeed, very different from the consecutive fingering, moving from thumbs to fifth fingers, that marked every preceding Middle-C reading approach.

If five-finger patterns were the basis of early study, did students read by finger numbers rather than by direction or note names? Were they locked into playing by patterns if the emphasis was on eight-measure questions and answers? What happened to the hand position if the thumbs played on black keys in order to zip up and down the keyboard chromatically in those five-finger positions? Were small hands ready to play harmonizing triads and inversions at such early stages? What type of repertoire resulted from using this approach?

These were some of the questions that method writers had to ask themselves as they produced new materials. For a while the discussion centered on what was thought of as three separate reading approaches: intervallic, multi-key, and Middle-C. Methods were categorized by one of these labels.

This “separateness” has faded. Most recent methods try to make a synthesis of whatever they see as the strong points of each of these approaches to teaching reading, technique, and musicianship.

The first book of almost every newer method now incorporates:

- some type of preliminary off-staff reading
- exploration of the entire keyboard, usually only on black keys
- some form of a braced-finger beginning technique
- reference to Middle-C as (at least) one of the guide notes
- attention to intervals, if not at first, then rather early on

There is also a general expectation that the method will address many aspects of making music at the keyboard, and that it will provide activities to teach and support transposition, harmonization, and creativity. How this is done differs among the newer methods. Depending on the method, some skills may play a more prominent

role than others. Most often these skills are developed and supported in correlating books. What seems clear is that all these books try to provide what might best be called music education at the keyboard. They are not just “how to play the piano” methods.

Old bottles ... new wine?

And that leads to consideration of what has *changed* in the past 25 years. Earlier I mentioned factors that played a role in the development of any method, among these the instruments themselves, communication media and styles, cultural values, and educational sophistication. I would now sum it up this way: technology, the Internet, global awareness, and Facebook mentality.

Digital pianos were in use 25 years ago, but not in many places, especially not in many home studios. In addition to refinements and developments in the instruments themselves, what digital pianos began to offer by way of onboard sounds and resources grew exponentially. With the advent of MIDI, the possibilities of accompaniments to the repertoire within methods became not only a reality, but also a highly attractive feature. What student wouldn’t love to play with an instrumental backup that provided big-time sounds and rhythmic support?

MIDI disks are now included in almost every new, or newly revised, method. Many independent teachers now also have studios with instruments or equipment that make use of these disks. I would expect the upcoming method reviews to assess the quality and variety of these MIDI accompaniments.

“Chip” in

Computers play a major role in everyone’s daily life, something that certainly wasn’t as true 25 years ago.

Today’s students are completely at home with laptops, iPods, cell phones, and immediate Internet access. Many piano studios now also use computers and computer programs to teach and drill a wide variety of concepts and skills. As far as I know, such computer software, especially those with theoretical and ear-training components, are stand-alone programs, not directly connected with methods.

But I expect that Web-connected activities will begin to play a role in the design of future, or revised, methods and books used in keyboard teaching. How could they not, since every student has some handheld device offering direct, quick, and engrossing Internet connections?

Virtual worlds are only too real to many young (and older) people. A recent cartoon made a point that hit home. A young player was seated on a piano bench, with hands raised, as if playing. But there was no piano. The caption was simple: Piano Hero.

We are the world

Today the world seems bigger than 25 years ago, if only because the media spotlight our global interconnectedness daily. Western values, whether of justice, morality, or art, no longer hold the unchallenged prominence they once took for granted. This plays out even in such a microcosm as the world of piano teaching.



The current emphasis is on what is convenient for an individual and on what is interesting or meaningful to that individual.



Many of the well-known tunes that everyone likes to play are still favorites, but different countries have their own well-known tunes. Those who write and publish current and future methods are more aware than ever of international markets—right now, particularly in China, Japan, Korea, and India. Does repertoire in newer methods reflect different cultural legacies? When—if ever—will piano methods include musical references to African, Middle Eastern, and South American cultures?

Beyond the matter of well-known tunes, there is also the international popularity of styles other than those of Western classical music. Back in the 1950s and 60s there was a somewhat timid inclusion of jazz and pop music in piano methods. “Swinging” eighth notes and 12-bar blues patterns were big items. Jazz is now in a category similar to Western classical music, a specialized taste, not a daring departure from the Western canon.

Current international idols usually play “keyboards,” not pianos. Amplified digital sound is the norm. It issues from every TV, computer, iPod, and cell phone. There have been a few methods designed for digital keyboards, but these have not succeeded, at least not in any noticeable way. Will this continue to be the case? Will Western classical music, played on acoustic pianos, remain the ideal, and only, repertoire goal of piano methods?

I do it my way

Facebook is defined as “a social utility.” Odd expression. Text messaging and tweeting are how most people now communicate. Soon, I think, carpal tunnel syndrome will be eclipsed by injured, aching thumbs.

Recently I attended a play in a small theatre. Our seats were in the first row balcony. The orchestra seats on the far right and left were occupied by students. At the intermission most of the audience rose to mingle and converse. I stayed to watch, largely because one of the actors had not left the stage. Almost immediately those far right and left rows became a small sea of tiny, handheld screens. No one moved. No one spoke to those next to them. Each young person was in a world where video and electronic sounds were the sole focus. I waited to see if this would change as the intermission wore on. It didn't.

What has this to do with piano methods? I admit it's a side issue, but I think it says a great deal about where young people now look for information and entertainment. To what extent will a printed page continue to hold someone's attention unless it is linked to a cyberspace world where she or he can explore freely, in a dozen different directions? Will future method books need to figure out how to connect the student (and, presumably, the teacher) to online resources?

Let's go one step further. In 2006 *Time* magazine chose "You" as Person of the Year. "You" recognized all the anonymous people who contribute content to websites such as Facebook, YouTube, MySpace, and Wikipedia. In the words of one of the editors, "It's about the many wresting power from the few and helping one another for nothing and how that will not only change the world, but also change the way the world changes."

The current emphasis is on what is convenient for an individual and on what is interesting or meaningful to that individual. (I can put together *my* news, *my* playlist, *my* Amazon...) There already are schools where you can construct your own curriculum, presumably with a bit of guidance. Will there ever be self-designed keyboard methods? (Here is a menu of possible topics. What would you like to learn? Here is a list of pieces. Which ones appeal to you?) I don't see how this could ever make sense or be workable. But then, I never thought I'd see a time when you could tweet your questions directly to a Presidential press conference. Yes, those are the "many" who "change the way the world changes."

Editor's conclusion

Here are some answers to questions that you might have about the upcoming series:

- 1. Which methods are going to be reviewed?** The methods reviewed in the series will be: *Piano Adventures*, *Piano Discoveries*, *Alfred Premier Piano Course*, *The Music Tree*, *Hal Leonard Student Piano Library*, *Piano Town*, *Celebrate Piano!*, *American Popular Piano*, *Bastien Piano Basics*, *Music Moves for Piano*, *Succeeding at the Piano*, and *The Robert Pace Keyboard Approach*. This list consists of methods that are either new or substantially revised since the original *Piano Quarterly* series. A random drawing determined the order of appearance.
- 2. What format will the articles use?** In each article the Associate Editor will give a brief overview of the core books of the series. This overview will include basic information including the general approach to reading and rhythm, what theory is covered, how many levels are available, etc. Following this introductory information, two independent teachers who have used this particular series extensively in their studios will write about various facets of how and why they use this method, providing practical, "real-world" insights into the everyday uses of the method.
- 3. What do you mean by "core books"?** The reviews will focus on books in the categories of Lessons, Theory, Solos, and Technique. The supplementary books of many of the series are too numerous to include in this survey.
- 4. Will you be reviewing methods for young beginners and/or adults?** This series of articles will only review methods published for average-aged beginners (approximately 7 to 9 years old).
- 5. I've never taken a pedagogy course. Will you be using pedagogic terms that I might not know?** Any terms that might be used to describe reading or rhythmic approaches are discussed in this issue's companion article titled: "There's a new series in the music store—how should I evaluate it?"
- 6. New methods are coming out all the time. Do you have a recommended set of criteria that I could use to do my own evaluations?** Yes! The aforementioned companion article gives an in-depth discussion of possible criteria for making your own evaluations of current and future methods.

This article originally appeared in the September/October 2009 issue of Clavier Companion.

"Wiki" world

I said I was going to "put my mind on paper." My mind wanders these days. It is a luxury, not a distraction. I don't always have to stay on target. I now feel free to explore an assortment of topics and territories, some of which are depressing and baffling, some of which are illuminating and inspiring. I don't text message or tweet, but I use—even though I often mistrust—the "wiki" world. (I just learned that "wiki" is the Hawaiian word for "quick," hence "quick encyclopedia." And, of course, I learned this on Wikipedia.)

Like you, I'm waiting to read the upcoming reviews. I expect they will offer a healthy and thoughtful critique of what makes sense and looks good to piano teachers now. It may not be easy for the editors and reviewers to achieve, but I'm looking for scrutiny, objectivity, breadth, and honesty. I really do appreciate and understand the effort it will take on the part of so many to provide us all with such information. My thanks—in advance. ▲

This upcoming series of articles will help you survey what is available on the market today. Some may be methods that you are not familiar with, while others may be series that you have been thinking about trying. Whatever your situation, we hope that you will find these articles to be a valuable addition to your library for many years to come! ▲

Marianne Uszler was the editor of Piano & Keyboard, a former editor for American Music Teacher, coauthor of The Well-Tempered Keyboard Teacher; Sound Choices; The Pedagogy Major in the College Curriculum and the author of Play It Again, Sam; That's a Good Question; and Time Flies. Her chapter on keyboard music is included in the MENC Handbook of Research on Music Teaching and Learning. She was the recipient of the 2004 Frances Clark Pedagogy Award and the 2007 MTNA Achievement Award. She is retired from the University of Southern California School of Music where she was Professor of Keyboard Studies and Director of Undergraduate Studies and where she established the piano pedagogy program.



Perspectives in Pedagogy

“There’s a new series in the music store

While planning for the evaluations in the upcoming series of articles on method books (see this issue’s article *A new look at current methods*), I reviewed how three pedagogy textbooks approached evaluating piano methods.

In the first chapter of *The Well-Tempered Keyboard Teacher* (Schirmer Books, 2nd Edition, 2000), Marienne Uszler discusses the various approaches that method books take when introducing elementary level reading, rhythm, technique, musicianship, theory, experimentation at the keyboard, and using technology. She then completes the chapter with thumbnail reviews of eleven methods.

Martha Baker-Jordan gives suggestions on how to evaluate methods materials and then describes ten series in Chapter 13 of *Practical Piano Pedagogy: The Definitive Text for Piano Teacher and Pedagogy Students* (Warner Bros. Publications, 2003).

Chapter Three of Jeanine Jacobson’s *Professional Piano Teaching: A Comprehensive Piano Pedagogy Textbook for Teaching Elementary-Level Students* (Alfred Publishing, 2006) offers information on elementary-level introductions to reading and counting approaches and provides an extensive section on what to consider when choosing a beginning method.

After combining the information from these excellent resources with what elements I look for in a method book, I came up with a sort of “laundry list” of things to consider. By the time this series of articles is completed, it is very possible that another new method will have been published. I hope that the information provided by this article will provide you with a road map for evaluating current and future materials. It is important to note, however, that NO one series will have everything listed in this article. It is up to you to decide which of these items are important to your teaching philosophy, and use that as a guide in choosing your materials. So....let’s get started!

Reading approaches

Pre-reading:

How important are pre-reading activities? Sometimes parents are impatient with them, thinking they are a waste of time. But pre-reading materials offer a number of positive things. While beginning students are off the staff they are building their understanding of finger numbers; experiencing the sounds of up and down, high and low, and how that correlates with what order the fingers play in when going up or down; and gaining the ability to recognize types of notes and their rhythmic value. Pre-reading experiences open up the entire keyboard without using ledger lines, develop the recognition of the groups of two and three black notes, and logically lead to learning the names of the white notes. All of this is experienced without the distraction of the grand staff.

There are, however, some things to watch for in the pre-reading section of a beginner’s book. Sometimes the students are required to

cover all five black keys (D^b, E^b, G^b, A^b, and B^b) with the fingers of one hand. For a fairly young beginner this may stretch the hand too much for a healthy technique and encourage playing with very flat fingers. Even when the student is only asked to cover a group of two or three black keys, there is a tendency to play with a longer than normal section of the finger flat on the keys for a greater sense of security. Possible questions to ask about pre-reading sections of a book could include:

- Does it explore the whole keyboard?
- Does it use just the long fingers or does it have all five fingers covering the black keys?
- Does it lead to pre-reading on the white keys?
- If it uses the white keys, does it have note names in the note heads? In your opinion, is this a positive or negative addition?
- How does it transition to the staff—one or two lines at a time, one clef at a time, or the whole grand staff?

Reading Notation:

There are four basic approaches to introducing notational reading:

- Middle-C reading approach: Methods which concentrate the early reading experience on playing pieces with both thumbs on Middle-C. The lines and spaces are generally learned by their letter names. Teachers may find this attractive since it permits the student to immediately play familiar songs and tunes. Because of this, many beginning supplementary books begin with this approach. One must, however, consider the technical implications of this hand position, as it often causes students to play with their hands pronated inward from the wrist.
- Multi-key reading approach: Methods which concentrate on learning five-finger patterns (with Finger 5 in the left hand and Finger 1 in the right hand on the key note, one octave apart) and cadence chords in many keys. Teachers may find this attractive because the student is very quickly able to harmonize and transpose simple melodies, as well as use the five-finger patterns for beginning improvisation.
- Intervallic reading approach: Methods which concentrate on reading the lines and spaces primarily by interval and direction from guidepost or landmark notes rather than solely by note name. Teachers may find this attractive because it helps the student rely less on finger numbers and remembering mnemonics for the lines and spaces, as well as providing an easy way to read ledger lines. It eliminates the unnecessary step of naming the lines or spaces when sight-reading, giving the hand all the information it needs to play the next note.
- Eclectic reading approach: Methods which use some combination of all three of the above. Most current methods use some degree of an eclectic reading approach, with several of them beginning with one of the more specific approaches. Teachers

– how should I evaluate it?” by Rebecca Johnson

may find this attractive because it is intended to offer the strengths of all three approaches.

Possible questions to ask about the reading approach of a book could include:

- Which reading approach does this book seem to favor? Does it begin with one and then change to another?
 - ◆ Middle-C: Are the songs and tunes ones that the child will recognize and enjoy playing?
 - ◆ Multi-key: How quickly are new keys introduced? Are the I and V7 chords introduced as two- or three-note chords? Sometimes a young beginner with small hands may have trouble reaching a three-note chord with good hand position and healthy technique.
 - ◆ Intervallic: Are the first intervals introduced 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, etc., or are 3rds and 5ths introduced first to enable the student to initially only read line-to-line or space-to-space? Is the student encouraged to explore the entire keyboard?
 - ◆ Eclectic: Does it lean towards one approach more than the others? Are the greatest strengths of the three approaches blended in an effective way?
- Are there accompanying flashcards available? Are they important to you?
- Is there adequate repertoire following the introduction of each new note or interval? This is a matter of pacing—some books move very quickly, with just one song reinforcing a new note or interval; others move more slowly, providing several songs before the next new note or interval.
- Are finger numbers used appropriately, or might overuse lead to reading by finger numbers?
- Do the students gradually learn how to read and play *beyond* the five-finger position before they become rigidly locked into a hand position?

Rhythmic approaches

What is the first approach to feeling the beat? Large muscle movement? Clapping? Tapping? It is very difficult to teach children to feel the beat unless they have internalized the pulse in their body.

• How is counting initially taught? Take as an example the following measure:



- ◆ Metric: Counting the beats of the measure: 1 2 3-and 4. All the current methods eventually arrive at this approach. How quickly is it introduced? Too quickly? Not soon enough? This often depends on the student.

- ◆ Nominative or Chanting: Using the names of the notes to generate the rhythm of the notes: quar-ter quar-ter two-eighths quar-ter
- ◆ Unit: Naming the value of each note: one one one-na one
- ◆ Syllabic: Using a syllable or word that equals the value of the note: ta ta ti-ti ta
- Are drills provided to reinforce each new rhythmic concept?
- If you use all the levels of the series, will the students be prepared for the rhythms that will occur in early-intermediate literature?

Theory

Is the theory adequately presented in the Lesson book, or is a separate Theory book necessary for most students?

- Are key signatures first introduced with just accidentals placed in the pieces? Do the accidentals continue to appear in the pieces for a while even after the new key signature is used?
- Does the book eventually introduce the Circle of Fifths? Is it explained in a clear and logical manner?
- If you use all the levels of the series, will the student have played in every major and most minor keys? Is this important to you?
- Are all forms of the major and minor scales taught? How quickly or slowly? Are they played in the Lesson and/or Technique books, and do they occur in the repertoire, or are they only used “in theory”?
- How extensive are the chords that are taught? Primary only? Secondary? All types of seventh chords? Are they apparent in the repertoire that coincides with the Theory book? Are melodies given for harmonization to reinforce the chords that are taught?
- Are there games and puzzles in addition to written drills?

Skills

Teachers hold many different philosophies concerning the importance of teaching skills beyond repertoire in the lesson. Some teachers are very product oriented—they teach reading and counting skills primarily to support the performance repertoire. Other teachers are more process oriented and are interested in exposing the student to a variety of skills in addition to learning repertoire. Which are you? If skills are important to your philosophy of teaching, some things to look for could include:

- Ear training: Clap-back/sing-back/play-back? Major, minor, diminished, and augmented intervals? Major and minor scale types? Dictated melodies and harmonies?
- Transposition: Only in five-finger positions? Parallel or relative minors?

It is up to you to decide which of these items are important to your teaching philosophy.

- Harmonization: With classical theory and/or jazz symbols? Used beyond the early elementary level? Lead sheets with seventh chords?
- Cadences: Only taught to support the theory of chords? Used to harmonize melodies in core books? Primary chord cadences only (e.g. I-IV-I-V7-I)?
- Form: Discussion of identifying themes? Designation of large sections? Discussion of Binary? Ternary? Rondo? Sonata-Allegro?

Improvisation/Composition

Although this area is rarely emphasized, the ability to improvise and compose is vital in developing a student's feeling of connection to and expression in their music. It can lead to a greater understanding of phrasing and "personalize"—sometimes for the first time—a student's understanding of their emotional connection with a piece. Activities could include:

- Question-and-Answer phrase completions
- Improvisation over a teacher ostinato
- Improvised accompaniments to lead lines
- Formulae for short compositional assignments

Technique

- How much technique is specifically addressed in the Lesson book? Is a separate Technique book necessary for the average student?
- In the very beginning, are single notes played one at a time with a braced finger and whole arm?
- Do the beginning pieces start with only the long fingers or the whole hand?
- Are there "how-to" suggestions and exercises illustrating technical issues in the pieces?
- Does the method include etudes or etude-like pieces? Do they effectively teach a particular technical concept? Are they reasonably attractive?
- When hands begin playing together, do they initially alternate or does the student play them together from the beginning?
- When the hands begin moving out of position, are they given time to move by strategically placed rests, long notes, or fermatas?
- Do the melodies and accompaniment figures appear in both hands?
- Are the accompaniments mainly chordal or are some two-part?
- Do the pieces at each level fit the developing hand of the average-aged and average-sized student? Are octaves introduced at an appropriate developmental time?
- Are the more advanced pieces still edited for a small hand? Is that a positive or negative thing?
- Does the book discuss appropriate physical approaches to issues such as articulations?
- If the teacher uses all levels of the series, will the student be technically ready for early-intermediate literature of all genres? Does this include two-part polyphony?
- Are the technical approaches and exercises in each level generally consistent with your philosophy of a healthy playing approach?

Repertoire

In evaluating the repertoire in a series, many of the questions are objective. There are also, however, visceral and musical questions that we should ask:

- Are the pieces written with an acceptably high standard of musical quality? What tangibles do you use to define "good musical quality"?
- Over the course of several levels, do the pieces begin to have a certain sameness of harmonies, form, and melody types, or do they retain a freshness of interest?
- Will the student, after playing through this series, have been exposed to good instructions concerning phrasing and playing with artistic musicality?
- And to me, one of the most important questions: Can I enjoy teaching and listening to these pieces week after week, or will they soon become annoying, stale, and hackneyed?

Some of the more objective repertoire questions might include:

- Over the course of the series, does it stay mostly in the center of the piano or use a large range?
- Are the pieces well sequenced? Do concepts ever appear in the pieces before they are introduced in the Lesson book?
- Does it teach various types of pedaling? After a pedaling concept is taught, does the repertoire continue to reinforce that type of pedaling when appropriate? Do the pedal markings on the page truly portray the correct way to produce legato or other types of special effects pedaling?
- Are the dynamics presented consistently? Are they developmentally and realistically doable by the average student at each level?
- Is the repertoire throughout the series mostly original pieces written by the authors of the series? Is this a positive or negative thing?
- Does the series use a variety of genres? Folk songs? Jazz? Classical transcriptions? Non-Western? Atonality? Mixed meter?
- Do the early pieces generally have descriptive and appealing titles and lyrics? For boys and girls?
- Are well-sequenced strategies given for practice?
- Are suggestions given for making the piece more challenging?
- Are concepts and skills repeated and expanded at more difficult levels in a spiraling approach to learning?
- Do the pieces include all of the key signatures introduced in the Theory books?

Supporting technology

Most methods offer MIDI disks and CDs with accompaniments for each song. What are the advantages of incorporating these technologies into the lesson (and the student's practice session)? At the most basic and practical level, they require the student to play with a steady beat! Sometimes the CDs have two versions of each accompaniment—one at a practice tempo and one at a performance tempo. However, some teachers complain that the practice tempo version is more of a performance tempo for many of their students, thus restricting the usefulness of the CDs. In past years, MIDI files were unusable for teachers who did not own the special players needed to read them. Now, however, most computers will

read MIDI files. A computer or laptop near the piano makes these disks eminently useful, as it allows the teacher to set the tempo of each accompaniment for each song, for each student.

Beyond acting as a really cool metronome, prerecorded accompaniments also offer an exciting rhythmic background and a full range of supporting instrumental timbres. In this age of *American Idol*, downloadable iPods, and jazzy ringtones, our students may find the solo piano sounds of “Go Tell Aunt Rhody” somewhat less than enthralling!

Some things to look for in this area include:

- Are MIDI files and/or CDs available for separate purchase or included with each book? If they are separate, will you require your students to purchase available disks to use for home practice?
- For CDs, are accompaniments given in practice and performance tempi? Are these versions slow enough for the average student?
- Do the MIDI files have tracks that will play: Just one hand of the piano part with no accompaniment track? Accompaniment only with no piano track? Piano only with no pedal?
- Does the series offer software for use with digital pianos?
- Is supplementary theory software available?
- Are supplementary web activities and teaching tips available?

The overall series

In addition to the various aspects of the series discussed in this article, there are also some questions that apply to the series in general. These include:

- Are the pages visually appealing? Do the illustrations enhance the music or distract the child? As the series progresses, do they continue to be age-appropriate?
- Are the pages well edited? Are there adequate information and markings without undue textual clutter?
- Are teacher duets provided? Just in the beginning levels? Are the duet parts easy enough for some parents and older siblings, or are they strictly for a “practiced-up” teacher?
- Are extensive supplementary materials needed, or are the core materials generally adequate?
- Is the cost realistic for your demographic of students?

I hope this list of criteria will help you take an in-depth look at new methods, and perhaps a fresh look at the series that you are currently using! And remember to check out the *Perspectives in Pedagogy* articles in coming issues of *Clavier Companion* for valuable information about the newest and most popular methods on the market today. ▲

Rebecca Grooms Johnson, Ph.D., NCTM, is a nationally respected leader in the field of piano pedagogy. She is an independent teacher and has taught extensively at the college and university level. Rebecca is active in the Music Teachers National Association, where she has held the offices of President of the Ohio Music Teachers Association and National Chair of MTNA's Pedagogy Committee. She currently serves as National Certification Chair, and three times a year she publishes a feature in *American Music Teacher* titled What's New in Pedagogy Research.



This article originally appeared in the September/October 2009 issue of *Clavier Companion*.

A guide for the reviews

Welcome to *Clavier Companion's* first special issue, which also happens to be our first digital-only issue. In this volume, we have compiled all of the articles, reviews, and author responses that appeared in our series of method reviews. This material was originally published in individual issues of *Clavier Companion* from 2009–2011. By popular demand, we have placed it all in one issue for easy reference.

In these pages you'll be able to read the introductory articles by Marianne Uszler and Rebecca Johnson. You'll also find reviews of twelve different piano methods. Each review contains an introduction by Rebecca Johnson, the series editor, and two articles written by teachers who have direct experience teaching with the method they are reviewing. At the conclusion of each review, you'll find a response from the author(s) of the method. *Clavier Companion* invited each of these responses.

While the arrangement of the page is different, the text of the reviews has not changed been altered. Two excerpts were changed in the *Music Moves* for Piano review. Bios and copyright notices remain in their originally published form, even if some of that information has evolved over time. All ads from the published articles were removed for this special edition, so you may see some blank space at the ends of certain articles. The publishers of the methods reviewed were invited to place new advertisements, and we are grateful to them for doing so—their generous support made this issue possible.

Even an compilation of previously-published material cannot be created without considerable effort. We are grateful to Rebecca Johnson, the original series editor, for her vision and leadership; to Lauren Thompson for managing the logistics of production; and to Bob Payne for his design skills.

There is no shortage of material for today's beginning student, and these articles showcase a variety of materials and approaches. We hope that you enjoy this issue and that it serves as a useful reference for your teaching and research.

—Pete Jutras



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Jeremy Hanson teaches private and group piano at the MacPhail Center for Music in Minneapolis, MN. He is a graduate of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and the Lawrence University Conservatory of Music in Appleton, WI. He has served as the president for the Association of Professional Piano Instructors since 2007. In addition to teaching, Jeremy enjoys composing and arranging.

Issues and Ideas:

Perspectives in Pedagogy

Rebecca Grooms Johnson, PhD, NCTM

A survey of current methods: Piano Adventures

With this issue we begin *Clavier Companion's* survey of twelve piano methods.¹ Each article in the series will have several sections. The first section will be a synopsis written by the Associate Editor. This synopsis will cover the basic content, scope, and approaches of the method. The second section will contain articles by two teachers who have used the method extensively in their studios. These authors will evaluate the method and offer opinions on the strengths and weaknesses of the method. Beginning in our next issue, a third section will present a response from the authors of the method surveyed in the previous issue. We hope that you find these articles to be an interesting and helpful overview of current methods!

Piano Adventures: by Nancy and Randall Faber. Victoria McArthur is a co-author for selected Theory and Technique & Artistry books.

Publisher: The FJH Music Company Inc.

Levels: Primer, 1, 2A, 2B, 3A, 3B, 4, 5.

The core of *Piano Adventures* Levels Primer through 3B consists of Lesson, Theory, Performance, and Technique & Artistry volumes. Levels 4 and 5 do not include Technique & Artistry books, although there are plans to publish them.

Alpha

Primer-level books devote approximately half of each core book to pre-reading activities. All Primer pieces have lyrics and most have teacher duets. The books begin with pieces employing groups of two and three black keys; later pieces use white keys marked with letter names and finger numbers.

Reading

The grand staff is used throughout the presentation of notation. Landmark notes of Treble G, Bass F, and Middle C are introduced first. Additional notes are gradually introduced by name, and intervals are covered concurrently. The interval of a fifth, however, is used before it is explained intervallically. The reading approach is eclectic, with the Primer and early portions of Level 1 leaning somewhat toward a Middle-C approach (see Excerpt 1).

Rhythm

Note values are introduced with unit (1-1-1-1) and syllabic (ta-ta-ta-ta) counting. Bar lines and quarter, half, dotted half, and whole notes are presented in the pre-reading section of the Primer books. Eighth notes are introduced in Level 2A with the words "Run-ning, Run-ning." Dotted quarter-eighth note rhythms are presented in Level 2B with a metrically subdivided beat. Level 3A introduces compound time signatures and triplets, and Level 3B concludes with sixteenth notes. Pieces in Levels 4 and 5 feature increasingly challenging swing and syncopated patterns.

Lesson and Performance

The Lesson and Performance books consist of pieces written by the authors, with some arrangements of traditional melodies, classical tunes, and transcriptions. Many have teacher duets.

In the Lesson books, "Discovery" suggestions help students identify intervals, chords, scales, patterns, and other concepts that enhance sight-reading, practicing, and memorization. "Creative" suggestions provide ideas for the application of theory, improvisation, and composition.

¹ As noted in last issue's article introducing the series, the aim of this twelve-part series is to review the core materials of piano methods that are either new or substantially changed since a similar series of articles appeared in *Piano Quarterly* in the 1980s. Please see the September/October issue of *Clavier Companion* for more details on this project. For reviews of methods that are older or have not been revised recently, we invite you to revisit the original *Piano Quarterly* series.

Theory and Skills

In addition to supporting and extending the concepts taught in the Lesson books, the Theory books include sections on “Eye training” (sight-reading) and ear training, making it easier for these often slighted skills to be incorporated into lessons. Opportunities for transposition and improvisation are included throughout.

Technique & Artistry

This series’ approach to technique is one of its particular strengths. The look and feel of various techniques are illustrated in the Technique & Artistry books with easy-to-understand analogies. Each book contains “Technique Secrets,” which explain what technique an exercise is emphasizing, and “Artistry Magic” features, which present concepts related to phrasing and musical playing. Many of the pieces are supplemented by additional features: “Extra Credit” (a mixture of activities), “Optional” (different ways to practice), “Artistry Check” (listening for beautiful playing), and “Super Student Challenge” (applications of musical skills).

These books are an excellent reminder that good technique is about much more than just playing many notes very fast. If it’s not musically expressive, it’s just typing.

Teacher Guide

The *Piano Adventures Teacher Guide* is available online at www.pianoteaching.com. The Primer Lesson book is explored page-by-page on this site. The format for each page is:

- What’s New
- What’s Important
- Let’s Get Started
- Explore and Create
- Partner Pages
- Pedagogy Pointers
- See It in Action

Correlated pages from the four core books, the “See It in Action” sections include a brief video clip of Nancy Faber teaching her students activities from each page. If a video clip uses a duet part that is not published in the Lesson book, a printable PDF file of the duet part is available for download.

Randall Faber and Marianne Uszler also provide brief pedagogic introductions to sections on pre-reading, rhythm, creativity, technique, and steps and skips. Correlated pages from the four core books, the supplementary *Gold Star Performance* book, and tracks on the CD and MIDI disk are cross referenced. In addition, an index groups pieces from all five books into thematic categories including “Animals,” “Dances and Marches,” and “Learning Songs.”

Software

MIDI disks and CDs with accompaniments are available for the Lesson, Performance, and Technique & Artistry books for Levels

Excerpt 1: “A Ten-Second Song” by Nancy and Randall Faber. From *Piano Adventures® Lesson Book, Primer Level*.

Learning Treble G

On the keyboard find the G above Middle C (5 notes away). This is called **Treble G**.

Hand Shape Exercise
With R.H. fingers 1 and 5, play back and forth between Middle C and Treble G.
On the staff, Treble G is written on line 2. line 2 G →
The treble clef is also called the G clef because it circles around the G line on the staff.

A Ten-Second Song
Circle all the G's in this piece.

Lightly *mf* 1 on ? (fill in) 5 on ? (fill in)

DISCUSS With a colored pencil, trace over the G line for the first measure of this piece. (Your teacher may have you do this for many pieces in the book.)

Teacher Dust: (Student plays as written)

Primer through 3A and for the Lesson book only in Level 3B. The accompaniment ensembles are varied, and the music is attractive.

Note: The MIDI accompaniments are on floppy disks. Because my laptop, desktop, and electronic keyboard do not have floppy disk drives, I had to take the disks to the library and transfer them to a flash drive. Floppy disks are becoming obsolete; it would be helpful to have these accompaniments available for download on the website! Also, in order to use the laptop accompaniments with an acoustic piano, additional software is needed to manipulate the tracks.

Website

There is information about the authors’ catalogue at www.faber-piano.com. The site also offers a link to the *Teacher Guide*, a Piano Club Discussion Forum, and *Piano Adventures Teacher Newsletters*, which feature articles and teaching tips. Each issue of the Newsletter is dedicated to a specific level of the series.

Omega

Piano Adventures concludes with an early-intermediate mixture of original compositions, arrangements, and transcriptions by the authors, along with original pieces by classical composers. ▲

Appropriate technique contributes to artistic performance

by Katherine Fisher

During my undergraduate and graduate years I had the privilege of studying pedagogy with outstanding teachers who encouraged me to closely examine both current and historical piano methods. This extensive exploration of materials helped me solidify my teaching philosophy and select the method I felt best suited my pedagogical approach. Although many of the methods I studied have admirable qualities, *Piano Adventures* stands out to me as one of the finest. I have found the method to be based on

solid pedagogy and motivational repertoire, and I have been using it, along with other methods, since I began teaching.

The books’ illustrations are bold, colorful, and interesting without appearing overly juvenile. Note size is appropriate for the level of the piece. I do, however, have a minor concern with the pre-staff notation: when a repeated note is used, the finger number over the recurring note is not reprinted. This is not a problem in and of itself, but when successive notes move up or down, it is difficult for

a beginning reader to discern subtle note movement. If the notes were printed with a slightly greater degree of vertical distance, it would help young students follow the direction of the melody more easily.

Variety of styles

Outstanding quality of repertoire is a hallmark of the *Piano Adventures* method. The pieces are both musically pleasing and pedagogically sound. I appreciate the variety of styles in the early levels of the Lesson and Performance books (Primer-3A): there are folk songs; classical arrangements; jazz, blues, and ragtime compositions; and pieces incorporating stylistic elements from different countries. My students seem to especially enjoy these works reflective of different lands, and some of the more successful pieces include:

- “Spanish Caballero” (Lesson Book 2B)
- “Night of the Tarantella” (Lesson Book 3A)
- “Highland Jig” (Lesson Book 3B)
- “Fiesta España” (Lesson Book 3B)

In the earlier levels, most pieces are limited to major and minor five-finger positions. While I appreciate the fact that students learn to play using common patterns (and can then transpose them), I would like to see a larger number of pieces that move outside established hand positions. One composition that does so is “Storms on Saturn” from Lesson Book 2A. This evocative piece uses the whole-tone scale and requires moving across the keyboard using both black and white keys in each hand. The transition between hand positions presents the important challenge of learning to quickly move to different shapes on the keyboard.

Higher levels (3B-5) present standard classical repertoire. Included are the always-motivating Burgmüller *Arabesque*, Op. 100, No. 2, (Performance Book 4) and the Leopold Mozart *Burlesca* (Lesson Book 4). By the time students enter Lesson Book 5, they are playing pieces at the level of the last movement of the Clementi Sonatina, Op. 36, No. 1.

Gold Star Performance

I especially value the repertoire in the Faber *Gold Star Performance* books (Levels Primer—2B) and hope that more of these books will soon be available at higher levels. The *Gold Star* pieces are slightly more challenging than the material in the corresponding Lesson books, making them especially suitable for recital programming. An accompaniment CD is included for student listening and playing. The only issue I have encountered with using the CD is the tempo at which the repertoire is performed. Although the CD tempos are musically appropriate, they are performance tempos and often are quite fast. It would be nice to have a “practice track” at a slower speed so students can play along with the CD at an earlier stage in the learning process. The *Gold Star* repertoire is engaging, imaginative, and extremely motivating. I also appreciate the standard classical forms introduced in each book. For example, the Primer book includes a theme with variations, and each succeeding level includes a three-movement sonatina. In addition, there is a nice balance of pieces with and without lyrics. The lyrics that are used are interesting and well written, while the pieces without words are stimulating and help fuel the understanding that words are not always needed to communicate ideas and emotions.

Technique & Artistry

Another impressive component of this method is the training provided by the Technique & Artistry books. Each book begins with a few “Technique Secrets.” Throughout the book, students are

Excerpt 2: “Fiesta España” by Nancy Faber. From *Piano Adventures*® Lesson Book, Level 3B.

Syncopation
 Syncopation occurs when notes are accented BETWEEN the beats instead of ON the beat.
 Play this example as you count aloud.
 beats: 1 and 2 and 3 and 4 and

Fiesta España
 N. Faber
 Allegro (♩ = 160-176)
 Count: 1 and 2 and 3 and 4 and

4 8 *repeat!*
 sfz mp p

11 *cross over*
 mp p mp

14
 p mp

continually reminded which of these secrets to use when playing (see Excerpt 3). Correlating pages from the technique books are listed in the right-hand margin of the Lesson books for ease of lesson planning. Although this listing is helpful to the teacher, it would be of greater use if the secrets were listed in a more obvious way to increase student awareness during home practice.

I value the fact that the Technique & Artistry books teach students *how* to apply correct technique. The secrets are usually compared to something the student can easily understand; for example, the “Wrist Float-off” in Level 1 is compared to a balloon gently pulling the wrist upward. This important concept reoccurs in Level 2A as the “Moon Walk.” Other “Technique Secrets” include exercises dealing with the use of the fingers, use of the thumb, playing with arm weight, rotation, use of the pedal, slurs, and moving between octaves.

After students have practiced a particular secret and its corresponding exercises, the technique is incorporated into an etude-like piece. For example, the introduction of “Tropical Fish” (Level 3A) states: “Artistry at the piano means *playing with expression*. Use the ‘technique secrets’ you have learned to help you play *expressively*.” I appreciate how this method seeks to demonstrate that appropriate technique is not simply a separate entity but contributes to artistic performance of the piece. Some of the more musically effective etudes include:

- “Winter Wind” (Level 2B)
- “Chariot Race” (Level 3A)
- “Nightfall” (Level 3B)
- “Etude Energico” (Level 3B)

Learn these five "technique secrets" with your teacher.
Begin your daily practice with them before practicing your *Lesson Book* pieces.

Five Secrets for Piano Technique

1. The first secret is GOOD POSTURE.

Karate Pose

Sit straight and tall on the front part of the bench.
Your body should be centered to the **middle** of the keyboard.

Check your **distance** from the keyboard by putting your arms straight out in front of you with relaxed fists. **Your knuckles should touch the fallboard.** Adjust your bench as needed.

Now place your hands in your lap. Take a deep breath and let it out.



checking your distance



good posture

2. The second secret is ROUNDED HAND SHAPE.

Blooming Flowers

Rest your right hand lightly on the white keys in a *loose* fist.

In s-l-o-w m-o-t-i-o-n let your fingers open, like the petals of a flower, to a beautiful, curved hand position. Your wrist will rise slightly as your fingertips and thumb hold your hand in position.

Repeat with the left hand.

Now try "Blooming Flowers" hands together.



3. The third secret is FIRM FINGERTIPS.


Making O's

Gently press the tip of your R.H. 2nd finger against the tip of the thumb. Look for a round "O"

Now do the same for fingers 1 and 3, 1 and 4, and 1 and 5.

Repeat using your left hand.

Try "Making O's" hands together!



4. The fourth secret is ARM WEIGHT.


Heavy Wet Ropes

Sitting at the piano, let your arms dangle straight down from your shoulders.

Let them *feel like heavy wet ropes!*

In slow motion, bring your arms up. Your arms should continue to feel heavy. When your hands reach the height of the keyboard, let your arms drop *completely relaxed* into your lap.

Do this exercise 2 times in slow motion.



5. The fifth secret is CORRECT THUMB POSITION.

Thumb Perch


The thumb should play on the **side tip** of the fingernail.

Do a "thumb perch" by silently placing your right hand on the white keys with the thumb "**perching**" on the **side tip**.

Your other fingers should rest gently on the keys.

Then do a "thumb perch" with your left hand.

Note to Teacher: Finding the correct thumb position also eliminates a sagging wrist.



I have mentioned a few of my favorite elements of *Piano Adventures* in this brief overview, but I strongly encourage teachers to try using the method themselves. I am confident that the solid

pedagogy and high-quality repertoire will be clearly demonstrated by the success of your students and your teaching enjoyment. ▲

Fun to teach, motivating to learn

by Jeremy Hanson

I have been using *Piano Adventures* in my studio for the last five years, and I have come to appreciate it as a well-rounded, pedagogically sound, and musically satisfying method. I happily recommend this method to fellow piano teachers.

Quality of repertoire

The quality and variety of the music is superb. If a piano method is only as strong as its musical content, *Piano Adventures* is among the very best. Each level has a mixture of artistic pieces composed by Nancy and Randall Faber, classical pieces (arranged and in original form), folk songs, jazz, and blues. Most of the music through Level 2A has imaginative, clever lyrics. Because of the appealing music, this method is fun to teach. It is also very motivating for students, who are able to use the method's wide selection of music to help refine their own tastes and musical interests. I frequently have students who love the repertoire so much that they can't wait to get to the next piece!

Excellent arrangements keep the original character of the pieces, provide satisfying sound for the student, and expose the student to music from the standard repertoire at an early level. For example, the Level 2B Performance Book contains an arrangement of Beethoven's *Für Elise* (see Excerpt 4). The variety of repertoire in *Piano Adventures* helps the method appeal equally to both boys and girls.

The Technique & Artistry books include some of the most enjoyable and comprehensive technical pieces available. The "Artistry Magic" pieces at the end of each technical unit work well for recitals.

Logically sequenced learning

The method is clearly, logically, and thoughtfully sequenced. With its eclectic approach, *Piano Adventures* helps students learn to read confidently and accurately. New concepts are clearly presented

Excerpt 4: *Für Elise* by Ludwig van Beethoven (adapted). From Piano Adventures® Performance Book, Level 3B.

8 UNIT 8

Für Elise*

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827, Germany) (adapted)*

Accompaniment Hint:
Play the L.H. with a light thumb!

With motion (♩ = 92-108)



*This simplification of Beethoven's famous Für Elise is included here for musical pleasure and pianistic development. It is not intended for competitions or festivals which designate only authentic keyboard repertoire.

in the Lesson books and consistently reinforced in the supplementary volumes. The pages are clean and uncluttered, featuring tasteful color illustrations.


The Performance and Technique & Artistry books provide plenty of repertoire for reviewing and solidifying the concepts presented in the Lesson books. The “Discovery” questions in the Lesson books are especially helpful, focusing the student’s attention on a particular concept for the piece, and frequently asking them to demonstrate recall and mastery of a previously introduced concept (see Excerpt 5).

Excerpt 5: “George Washington’s Party” by Nancy and Randall Faber. From Piano Adventures® Lesson Book, Level 2A.

Review: Tonic and Dominant


In D Position (just as in C and G Positions), the lowest note or keynote is called the **tonic**.
A 5th above the tonic, is called the **dominant**.
Circle a tonic and dominant note in this piece.

D Position




George Washington’s Party

Gracefully
mf- p on repeat



5 on 7

Notice the difference in sound without the F#’s.*



13 14 15 16

Play the first 2 lines once again to finish the piece.

DISCOVERY
In which section of the piece do you think George Washington might be annoyed with a guest?

Various experiences

The Theory books contain an excellent variety of activities—including written work, ear training, and sight-reading—which strengthen the student’s understanding of the material. Many of the activities use humor, such as the cute rhyme in Level 2B: “The fourteenth-century poet George E. Dumthumb once said about scales: *Thumb be nimble, thumb be quick, thumb don’t accent like a brick!*” The activities appeal to a variety of interests (outdoors, sports, puzzles, etc.), and most students are happy to complete them.

The guided composition activities in the Theory books and the “Creative” composition activities throughout the Lesson books are excellent. These exercises encourage students to improvise, experiment, and create within a limited framework, allowing them to demonstrate their understanding of the material in an engaging, enjoyable, and personal way. In later levels, the Theory books move away from drills to analysis and its application to real music (including a clever treatment of sonatina form in Level 4, harmonic analysis in Level 5, and various compositional activities).

Because the material is carefully sequenced throughout, teachers need not worry about gaps in concepts—they can instead focus on assisting students with technical development and artistic growth.

Additional resources

The scope of the supplemental books, teacher resources, and accompaniment CDs and MIDI disks is impressive. In addition to the standard books at each level, *Gold Star Performance* books present more challenging music for ambitious students. Accompaniment CDs and MIDI disks are available for the Primer Level through Level 3B. I generally don’t ask my students to purchase the CDs, but I frequently use them during the lesson. I have the accompaniments loaded onto my iPod so they are instantly available. Students enjoy the imaginative accompaniments while solidifying their inner sense of steady pulse.

I also play games using the recorded accompaniments. For example, I have students tap the beat or the rhythm on a drum while listening to the CD. The students then drum on the rests (once they *feel* them, they rarely forget them!) or on the dots of dotted-quarter notes. As a note-reading challenge at the Primer Level, I ask students to play and name the notes on Beat 1 (or Beats 1 and 3) while listening to the CD—this activity requires them to look ahead and think quickly!

Numerous helpful resources are available for teachers on the website www.pianoteaching.com. From here, teachers can access the *Piano Adventures Teacher Newsletter*, which is filled with practical information and suggestions for using the series. Each issue contains an article by Randall Faber describing the pedagogy of *Piano Adventures*, providing helpful insights into the organization of and specific technical goals for each level.

Teachers also can access the interactive *Piano Adventures Teacher Guide*, which covers each page of the Primer Lesson book in detail, accompanied by video clips of Nancy Faber teaching. These videos are inspirational, informative, and genuinely fun to watch; they have given me ideas that can be used with any method. I enjoy seeing Nancy expand each piece into a creative adventure! A Piano Club Discussion Forum is another excellent resource available at the website.

Suggestions for improvement

In the interest of balance and objectivity, I have a few small criticisms of the series:

- The Primer and Level 1 books take a primarily intervallic reading approach, but more review of intervals may be required for some students. To address this need, teachers may wish to use the *Step Skip & Repeat* books by Stephen Covello (FJH) along with interval flashcards for larger intervals.
- The cross-references are inexplicably incomplete in the Lesson book for Level 3B.
- FJH could consider offering *Piano Adventures* as an All-in-One book at each level, since working with four or five books in the lesson can occasionally be cumbersome.

Piano Adventures is an incredible achievement. Nancy and Randall Faber have created a series that is musically satisfying, exciting, motivating, and enjoyable for students and teachers alike. ▲

This article originally appeared in the November/December 2009 issue of Clavier Companion.

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TEACHING PIANO ADVENTURES



Primer Teacher Guide

Nancy and Randall Faber
with Marianne Uszler

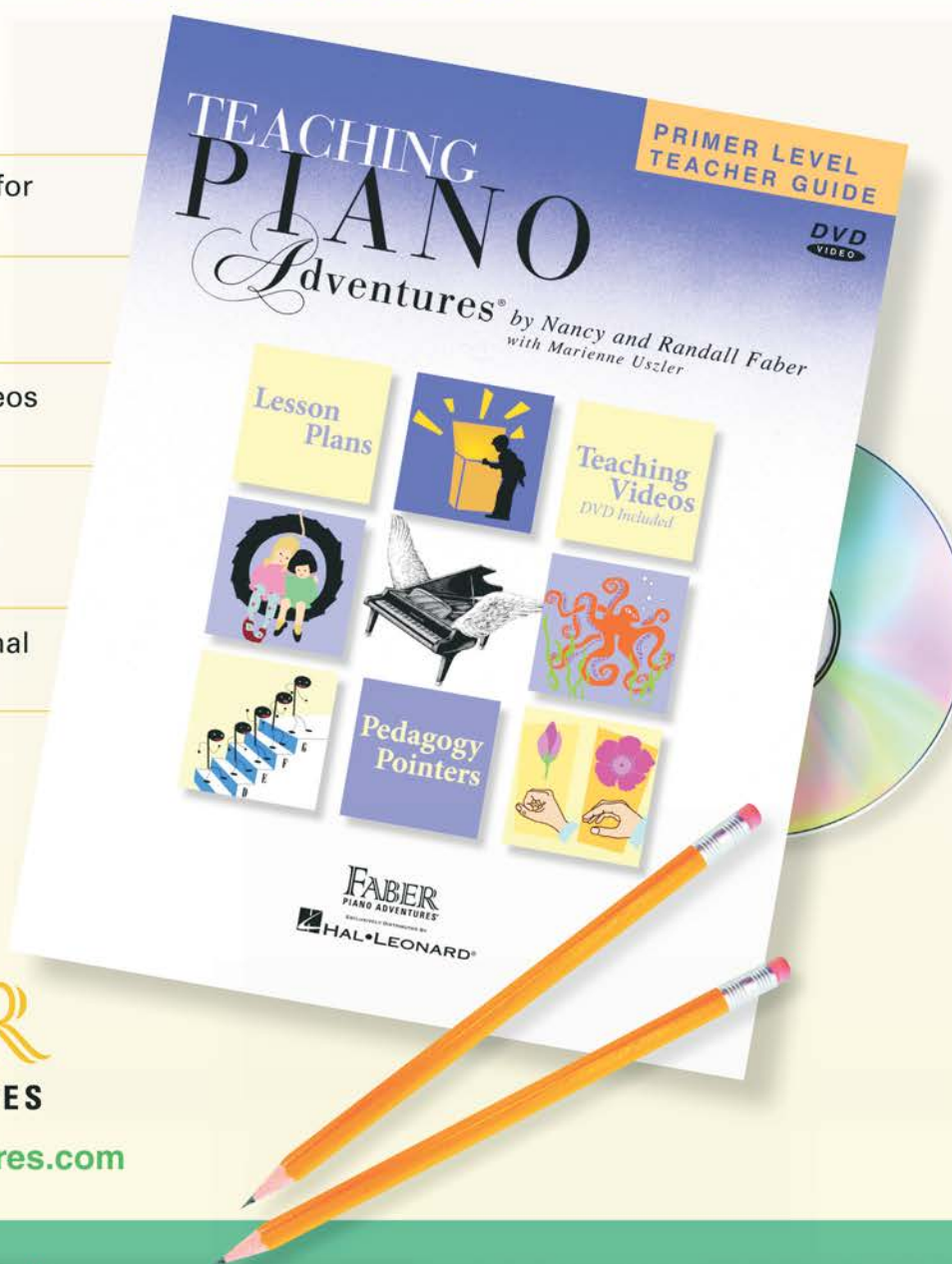
Comprehensive guide for
professional teachers

Step-by-step plans for
creative teaching

DVD with teaching videos
for every piece

Articles for Reading,
Rhythm, Sightreading,
Technique and more

Appendix with additional
teacher duets



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Author Response

Response to *Piano Adventures* review

Editor's Note: Clavier Companion will invite the authors of each method series reviewed to respond to that review in the following issue. Our first response from the authors of Piano Adventures is presented below.

First, we wish to express our thanks to the editors and contributors at *Clavier Companion* for the many positive comments in the review of *Piano Adventures*. We also extend thanks and acknowledgment to The FJH Music Co. for the many years of support and hard work.

We appreciate the thoughtful review of basic *Piano Adventures*. We would also like to highlight the scope of the method, which provides alternate entry points for different ages: *My First Piano Adventure* for ages five and six, *Accelerated Piano Adventures* for middle-school beginners, and *Adult Piano Adventures*, which is an “All-in-One” course. Each course is conceptualized according to the attributes of its specific age group. For example, *My First Piano Adventure* introduces “Friends at the Piano” (multi-cultural peers) and “Mrs. Razzle Dazzle” (join her on Facebook) who accompany the young beginner in the learning process. The pieces and activities not only accommodate the very small hand, but help form a pianistic hand. For eight-year-olds, the Primer level of basic *Piano Adventures* builds the arch with 5ths, purposefully introduced early in the course for their appealing sound and technical value. The “Accelerated” course validates the older beginner’s pride and intellect. And, with *Adult Piano Adventures*, the adult learner can enjoy the process of music study while playing familiar songs.

Over the past few years, we have worked to produce a unique set of CDs which feature vocals—children’s voices in particular! These are included in the *My First Piano Adventure* and the *Piano Adventures Gold Star Performance* series. The recordings present

musically rich soundtracks that inspire expression. Though the student may at times play along, these CDs are primarily for listening. They are up-to-tempo to inspire, motivate, and enliven the learning process. And, these “pop songs for children” bring the aural dimension of music education to the fore.

Inspired by the enthusiastic responses to our online Primer guide, “Teaching *Piano Adventures*,” we hope to expand our online videos. We appreciate the reviewer’s comments on our Technique & Artistry Books. Look for the pianistic gestures of the Technique Secrets to be illustrated by video soon.

If you are interested in more detail on the reading approach of *Piano Adventures*, please see our *Piano Adventures Teacher Newsletter* as published online (PianoTeaching.com/newsletter). For example, Issue No. 1 discusses the Primer’s use of varied fingering for new notes being introduced and how this also can be used to develop technique. Each successive level reinforces the patterns learned and adds appropriate new patterns—visual, aural, and kinesthetic. By Level 5, the student can recognize and play I, IV, and V chords in all inversions in sharp and flat keys.

Though the many pedagogical details in the method are valuable, the real driver of student interest is the music. The repertoire of *Piano Adventures* is pianistic. More importantly than supporting a sequence of pedagogical concepts, the music elicits an artistic expression that is pertinent to the child’s world. And that is the real essence of *Piano Adventures*. ▲

- Nancy and Randall Faber
Authors, *Piano Adventures*

This article originally appeared in the January/February 2010 issue of Clavier Companion.

Issues and Ideas: Perspectives in Pedagogy

Rebecca Grooms Johnson, Editor



A survey of current methods: *Piano Discoveries*

This issue continues *Clavier Companion's* survey of piano methods.¹ Each article in the series has several sections. The first section is a synopsis written by the Associate Editor. This synopsis covers the basic content, scope, and approaches of the method. The second section contains articles by two teachers who have used the method extensively in their studios. These authors will evaluate the method and offer opinions on the strengths and weaknesses of the method. The third section presents a response from the authors of the method surveyed in the previous issue. We hope that you find these articles to be an interesting and helpful overview of current methods!

Piano Discoveries: by Janet Vogt and Leon Bates (with Advisory Board members: Gail Berenson, Martha Sherrill Kelsey, Rebecca Shockley, Scott McBride Smith, and Nancy Telfer)

Publisher: Heritage Music Press (a division of The Lorenz Corporation)

Levels: Off-Staff Starter, On-Staff Starter, Levels 1A, 1B, 2A, 2B, 3, and 4

The core books throughout the series are the *Piano Discoveries Explorer* (through Level 1B); *Adventurer* (Levels 2A – 2B) and *Voyager* (Levels 3 and 4) books; and *Theory Discoveries*.

Alpha

A unique characteristic of this series is the option of beginning with an On-Staff or Off-Staff Starter book. The first two-thirds of the Off-Staff Starter book are devoted to pre-reading notation and exploring the range of the keyboard. The On-Staff Starter begins immediately with finger numbers, names of white keys, and on-staff notation. These books contain many of the same pieces. Most of the pieces have lyrics and some have teacher duets.

While I strongly recommend pre-reading experiences for *all* beginning students, the On-Staff Starter book could be useful for transfer students who have had pre-reading experiences in another book; it could also be used concurrently with the Off-Staff book. Although the Off-Staff book devotes a majority of its pages to pre-reading, both books end with the same notated pieces; this necessitates a very fast-paced introduction to Grand Staff notation in the Off-Staff book.

Reading

This series begins with a Middle-C approach to reading, with all of the pieces in the On- and Off-Staff Starter books written in Middle-C position. Level 1A briefly introduces intervals through the fifth, utilizes various hand positions, and continues a Middle-C approach with a strong emphasis on learning note names. Levels 1B through 2B take a more Multi-Key approach; many of the pieces are written in a prescribed hand position and make extensive use of primary chord accompaniments.

Rhythm

Note values are introduced with Metric (1-2-3-4) and Syllabic (Ta-Ta-Ta-Ta) approaches. Bar lines, quarter, half, dotted half, and whole notes, quarter rests, and time signatures (2/4, 3/4, and 4/4) are all presented in quick succession in the pre-reading portion of the Off-Staff book. Eighth notes, dotted quarter-eighth patterns, and syncopation are introduced with syllables and metric subdivisions (1+2+3+4+) in Level 1B. Level 2B introduces triplets and 6/8. Sixteenths and 3/8 are taught in Level 3, with Level 4 exploring thirty-second notes, dotted eighth-sixteenth patterns, and 5/4 and 6/4 time signatures.

Rebecca Grooms Johnson, Ph.D., NCTM, is a nationally respected leader in the field of piano pedagogy. She is an independent teacher and has taught extensively at the college and university level. Rebecca is active in the Music Teachers National Association, where she has held the offices of President of the Ohio Music Teachers Association and National Chair of MTNA's Pedagogy Committee. She currently serves as National Certification Chair, and three times a year she publishes a feature in *American Music Teacher* titled What's New in Pedagogy Research.

This issue's contributors:

Paula Harrison began giving piano lessons in her mother's studio while still in high school. She opened her first studio in Independence, MO, in 1975, then relocated to Houston, TX, in 1982. She is a past-president of the Huntsville MTA, the Conroe Federated Music Club, and Houston Chapter Choristers Guild. She currently serves as the treasurer of the San Jacinto Federated Music Club. She administers the Fine Arts Academy at Cedar Bayou United Methodist Church in addition to serving as the church's director of music and fine arts.

Christine Wolf, NCTM, holds a BM from St. Cloud State, (MN), and pursued Masters studies at the Hartt School of Music, CT. Her work has been published by Alfred Publishing and the FJH Music Company (under C.S. Wolf). She is a teacher, adjudicator, church worship director, clinician, and active volunteer. Chris invented *Bag O'Blocks*, the theory toy *POGO Sticks*, and practice *Post-its*. Her first CD of original compositions was released in 2008.

¹ The aim of this series is to review the core materials of piano methods that are either new or substantially changed since a similar series of articles appeared in *Piano Quarterly* in the 1980s. Please see the September/October 2009 issue of *Clavier Companion* for more details on this project. For reviews of methods that are older or have not been revised recently, we invite you to revisit the original *Piano Quarterly* series.

Janet Vogt
Slowly
Adapted from Largo
Symphony Number 5, The New World
Anton Dvorak (1841-1904)
Arr. by Janet Vogt

mp With my tel - e - scope I see a thou - sand twink - ling stars,
Do you think that brand new worlds might not be ver - y far?

Play one octave higher
play 2 times
play 2 times (5)

reflecting Rebecca Shockley's contribution to this series (see Excerpts 2A and 2B).

Technique

Beginning in Level 1A, "Building Technique" boxes appear throughout the books. These technical snippets are drawn from the pieces they support, and they provide warm-ups and practice strategies for new concepts or physically challenging sections of the pieces.

Teacher's Guide

There are no separate Teacher's Guides for this series; however, each Theory book concludes with a valuable section titled *Teacher's Corner—Optional Lesson Extras and Learning Enrichment for Your Student*. The activities in the *Teacher's Corner* are varied and imaginative, and would work well in private and group lessons.

Software and CDs

MIDI disks and CDs are available for selected pieces in each of the Lesson books. They offer attractive accompaniments in a variety of styles.

Omega

The final book in this series contains original pieces in various styles by the method authors and standard repertoire selections at the early- to mid-intermediate level. Included are: Kabalevsky's *Toccatina* Op. 27, No. 6; Chopin's *Prelude in B Minor*, Op. 28 No. 6; and Haydn's *Allegro in F Major*. ▲

A new approach to Middle C

by Paula Harrison

An intriguing workshop

In August of 2001 I attended a workshop presented by Janet Vogt. During this session, Ms. Vogt explained that when writing *Piano Discoveries* she aimed to place all the important skills into just a lesson and theory book format. She assured us that there would be plenty of review pieces so that teachers would not have to buy a performance book just to have enough pieces to review basic skills.

I found this material to be very interesting and began using it in my piano studio with great success. My students loved the graphics and the variety of the pieces. I liked the updated look of the material, the fact that it had both "boy" and "girl" pieces in each book, and the variety of musical styles from the very beginning. I also loved the "note-namer" exercises that occurred periodically in both of the Starter books and Level 1A. These were a great help in spot-checking reading skills.

Old fashioned but outside the box

Three things attracted me to this series from the very beginning. The first was the Middle-C approach to learning. As an "old fashioned, but outside the box" teacher, I had never been especially pleased with the off-staff approach to teaching. I prefer that my students begin work on reading skills from the very first lesson while learning to find notes using the black-white key relationships. I had used several of the newer off-staff methods, but I always felt that those students never developed reading skills as well as students who worked with the older *David Carr Glover Method*. *Piano Discoveries* gave me the opportunity to teach the Middle-C approach while using a new and attractive set of books.

The second thing that attracted me was the fact that this method included both On-Staff and Off-Staff Starter books. This meant that the younger beginner could start off the staff, yet still not have to learn all the notes that other off-staff methods were teaching. Both starter books end at the same place, with the student being able to read up through Treble G and down through Bass F. All students then progress to Level 1A.

The third attraction related to my "outside the box" teaching personality. I have never been a believer in teaching everything that one teaching method has to offer. I prefer that my students play music written by a variety of composers and that they not be limited to one type of writing. I compare this to a child who only reads books written by one author. We need a balanced diet, even in the early stages. I prefer to use one teaching method for the basic lesson book and integrate a different group of technical exercises, scales, and supplementary materials. I was delighted to discover that Janet Vogt shared this same belief. She used a team of composers to write the material for this series, and their pieces appear in each level. This approach fulfills my need for a variety of writing styles, while still satisfying teachers who like to use a method as a complete teaching package.

I enjoy the flexibility that this method offers. Some students might need to study every piece in every book, but I find that many students can occasionally skip pieces. Towards the end of a book, my students love having an occasional "sight-reading" lesson: any piece that can be correctly sight-read (notes, rhythms, dynamics, phrasing) receives a sight-reading sticker and we go on to new material. Students love the feeling of accomplishment that goes with this exercise.

Supplementing technique and theory

This series does not include separate books of technical exercises, so I have continued to use a different technique series. I tried the theory books and found that the layout was excellent and the content was supportive of the corresponding material in the lesson books.

Piano Discoveries is thorough in its teaching of note-reading skills, intervals and triads, analysis, and mapping. I like the way that it uses several of the pieces in each lesson book to teach these concepts. Unfortunately, as is the case with so many other theory methods, this series by itself does not adequately prepare students for the MTNA state theory exams or the Federation of Music Clubs Gold Cup theory exams. A great deal of supplementary material would need to be added to this method to successfully prepare students for these exams.

Some suggestions for improvement

My years of teaching have taught me that there are many different learning styles. One piano method is not going to be able to address all of these differences. Although I like the *Piano Discoveries* approach, I do not use it exclusively for several reasons.

This method does not lend itself to the older beginner because of the graphics found in the first several levels. These graphics begin to lessen by Level 2B and are gone by Level 3, so they are

generally appropriate for average-age beginners. I have also discovered that the pages of the first books are too “busy” for children who have problems with focusing. Additionally, the beginning books through Level 1B have brightly colored backgrounds; some children have a very difficult time reading on a colored background, and I have found that this method is not successful with that type of child.

A colleague who has also used this series had several additional observations and suggestions for improvement:

An early piece requires students to hold one hand down on the lowest (or highest) group of three black notes while playing all of the remaining groups of three black keys with the other hand. Some children have difficulty reaching that far.

There should be more emphasis placed on hand position, technique, and ear training.

The material moves too slowly, and the teacher parts that accompany some of the early pieces are too bland.

After struggling with the theory books, she discovered the “Teacher’s Corner” in the back. It would be more helpful to have these notes scattered throughout the books instead of being placed at the end.

Overall, I think that this is an excellent teaching method. The pieces are fun to play and very accessible for most students. ▲

Taking a more classical approach

by Christine Wolf

Appealing composers

I first became interested in *Piano Discoveries* when I noticed that Martha Sherrill Kelsey and Janet Vogt were two of its authors. Their music has always appealed to me—it is interesting melodically and harmonically and contains lots of musical details to introduce to students. Their pieces are quite popular with my students, who readily grasp the music’s engaging and imaginative spirit.

I first began one of my students in the middle of *Piano Discoveries* because a Festival piece was chosen from the series. I then explored the starter books with a beginner and was impressed with how quickly and effortlessly he progressed. Was it the student or the method? I continued to use *Piano Discoveries* with other new students and I have not been disappointed.

A more classical approach

My studio is based primarily on traditional classical repertoire, with an emphasis on performance, technique, and theory. In addition, I introduce students to collaborative piano, hymn playing, jazz, and composition. *Piano Discoveries* works terrifically well in my studio, encompassing many of these aspects.

The music in *Piano Discoveries* has greater depth and is more classically driven than the lighter, more pop-culture repertoire of some other series. The books include timeless pieces that serve as an introduction to the standard teaching repertoire, so the series is a good match with my studio’s teaching philosophy.

Beginning the reading process

I used both the On- and Off-Staff Starter books with a beginning kindergartener last year because some of the same songs appeared in both books. She purchased the On-Staff book and I kept the Off-Staff book at the studio. We had a “light bulb moment” when she realized that she knew how to play the music

Excerpt 4: “Make Your Own Sundae” by Janet Vogt. From *Piano Discoveries, Off-Staff Starter Book*.

on the staff, having already learned it off-staff at a lesson. She took both books home for a week, and devoured the music, excited by her realization that the patterns were the same. She returned a week later and performed all the songs she had learned to read that were published in both books. I believe that she has already become a strong reader because she could see the relationship of the notes on and off the staff. Although the repertoire in the Primer book can be somewhat challenging for small five-year-old hands, it is appropriate for seven- to nine-year-olds.

There are only so many ways composers can write in “positions” and *Piano Discoveries* does use 6ths and an occasional leap out of traditional five-finger patterns. I am a strong believer that music is

Excerpt 5: "Yankee Doodle Variation" by Janet Vogt. From Piano Discoveries, Lesson Book Level 1A.

Discovering 3rds

An interval of a 3rd is just like a skip: skip one key on the keyboard and skip one note on the staff. A 3rd is always line note to the next line note, or space note to the next space note on the staff. 3rds can move up or down.

"3rd" Warm-Up

Up a third, down a third, up a third, down a third.

Yankee Doodle Variation
Secondo*

Not too fast, steadily

mf Yan-kee Doo-dle had a po-ny, called his feath-er mac-a-ro-ni,
If you had a feath-er, would you call it mac-a-ro-ni?

*May be played as a solo or duet. When playing duet, play one octave lower.

40/1070H-21 Workbook p. 16

ever played. The artwork in *Piano Discoveries* is colorful and attractive for the average seven- to nine-year-old. Although the pages are warm and engaging, current trends in other publications are toward more vibrant, neon colors with much more "hip" characters than the elderly explorer used in this series. After about the third grade, my students have been known to raise an eyebrow at the drawings. The characters do bring out the imaginations of students, however. One student turned the page in the method book and remarked, "Let's see what Grandpa's doing this week!" Stickers are available that match the note characters. Concepts are clearly laid out; new information is located at the top of the page (see Excerpt 5), and there are additional "Discoveries" in boxes near the bottom of the page.

This series moves!

The pacing of *Piano Discoveries* is fast. A concept is presented, a piece or two is given to reinforce it, and then we are off to the next term, symbol, or idea. Some students finish their current Level 3 books in another series and then start Level 3 in the *Piano Discoveries* Series.

Reinforcing concepts

The Theory books are true workbooks that reinforce note reading, rhythm, and ear training in the early levels. They work in conjunction with the Discoveries books, and they are not fluffy or particularly game or puzzle oriented. By Level 1B, students are already using mapping techniques to solidify memory and form—a brilliant building block for their later classical studies.

Excerpt 6: From Piano Discoveries, On-Staff Starter Book.

Pages 26 - 32

1. Try this simple rhythmic dictation with your student. On a separate piece of paper, write: 3 | 1 2 3 | 1 2 3 | 1 2 3 | 1 2 3 |

Give your student this example, and as you play the following music, have your student "bounce" the tip of their pencil from beat to beat. Every time they hear a note played on a beat, have them put a slash through the corresponding beat number.

For instance, you play: They write:

See if they can write the rhythms they indicated. Make up other examples for your student.

2. Play "Name That Note" with your student. Tell them you'll begin on Middle C and you'll be playing either C or D. (Student should not watch your hands.) Pause on each note and have them say the name of each note you play.

For example, play:

Now, give them the choices of C, D or E. Again, pause on each note as they name them.

Pages 33 - 36

1. Practice more rhythmic dictation with your student. On a separate piece of paper write: 4 | 1 2 3 4 | 1 2 3 4 | 1 2 3 4 | 1 2 3 4 |

Give your student this example and as you play the following rhythmic pattern, have your student "bounce" the pencil tip from beat to beat. Every time they hear a note on a beat, have them put a slash through the corresponding beat number.

For instance, you play: They write:

See if they can then translate their slashes and write the rhythms of the quarter, half, or whole notes they heard. Make up other examples for your student.

2. Have your student turn to page 26, *Tip-Toeing*, in their *Piano Discoveries* book. Tell them you are going to play one of the measures incorrectly. Have them follow along with the music and say, "Stop" when you play the wrong notes or rhythms. Be sure to count out loud a steady 4 beats for them before you play.

For example, you play:

When they say "Stop," ask them which measure was wrong. Ask them to try to be specific and tell why it was wrong. Use the same piece and have them follow along as you play:

Again ask them what was wrong and why it was wrong.

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not in a "position," and these books reinforce that idea. Many transfer students come with the question, "Where do I put my hands?" I rephrase the question and ask, "Oh, what key is it in?" This prompts intelligent conversation about how to figure out the key of a piece.

I encourage singing along with the music in this series, for it is voice-friendly and tonal. Students are tickled when they notice that the "D" and "E" they are singing are also the notes they are playing. Because it is so close to the end of the Starter book, I surprise students with a Dairy Queen token when this piece is "Delightful" and memorized. As seen in Excerpt 4, the series regularly uses pieces in 3/4 — a meter that is not well represented in today's pop music.

Preparation for intermediate literature

I think that one of the strongest attributes of *Piano Discoveries* is its integration of good repertoire with solid pedagogy, successfully moving students towards the standard intermediate teaching literature that will serve them well as independent pianists. Level 2B, for example, includes Muzio Clementi's Arietta in C Major, as well as excellent folk song arrangements and pieces written in New Age and Blues styles.

When using other methods, I sometimes find myself writing in phrasing, dynamics, or articulations. I do not need to add to the score in *Piano Discoveries* because once these elements are taught they appear regularly in the rest of the pieces.

The art of graphics

Sometimes students and teachers judge a book based on its graphics, and they may dismiss the music before the first note is

The “Teacher’s Corner” pages in the back of each book are especially useful. They offer great extra drills and ideas to reinforce concepts and attentive listening. Although the ideas are often taught in pedagogy classes in college, these pages are a shorthand list of reminders and suggestions for growing strong musicians (see Excerpt 6).

I am a tremendous fan of the *Master Class* series, which is offered as a supplement to the core *Piano Discoveries* books and is a gem of a collection. The concept of the *Master Class* books—experts in their field sitting with you as you polish a piece—is exemplary. The practice tips and the discussion questions with these pieces reflect inspired teaching. Even when my students are using a different method book, we use the *Master Class* series rather than the companion method performance books.

Accompanying software

I purchase a method’s CDs and MIDI disks for student use in the studio and to distribute through a lending library. One advantage to using the disks is evident when students want a “do-over” or “stutter play” as they back up to correct a mistake. A CD accompaniment does not wait for them, and the art of always moving forward is reinforced. Also, students love to sound professional and impress their friends when they perform with the disks at home.

Each piece on the CD has two tracks—one at a practice tempo and one at a performance tempo. The performance tempi are sometimes very quick, so students in my studio occasionally perform using the practice tempi. The tracks were recorded using high-quality electronic sampling. One of my students noticed that the instrumentation used for “The Whistle Song,” sounded a lot like my Clavinova keyboard settings.

The CD accompaniments are recorded so that the piano part is on the right channel and the accompaniment is on the left; however most CD and MP3 players only have a volume control and cannot soften or mute just one of the channels.

A challenge fulfilled

In the 1980s, when the original reviews of methods were first published in *Piano Quarterly*, I was in college. Our class used them as an opportunity to think about what style of teacher we might become. Contemplating a personal teaching philosophy can lead to proactively choosing one method over another, rather than just following a popular trend. It was a challenging and exciting revelation to experience this so early in my career. For me, Robert Silverman’s observation that “piano teachers [should] come out after reading the series with a point of view,” was fulfilled.

Piano Discoveries has proven to be an excellent match to my philosophy. It is an exciting amalgam of traditional teaching methods and the tremendous pedagogical advances made in recent decades. It is a careful blend of folk, pop, jazz, and classical repertoire that will suit a variety of student backgrounds and develop excellent ears for style. *Piano Discoveries* masterfully juggles the many elements that produce a well-rounded pianist. I am hopeful that this series of articles in *Clavier Companion* will lead a new generation to take some important time to ponder their unique pedagogical attributes. ▲

This article originally ran in the January/February 2010 issue of Clavier Companion.

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Author Response

Response to *Piano Discoveries* review

Editor's Note: Clavier Companion will invite the authors of each method series reviewed to respond to that review in the following issue. The response from the authors of Piano Discoveries is presented below.

I'm so thrilled to be adding just a few thoughts about *Piano Discoveries* and revealing a little of the inside story of the method. It was quite a journey creating an entire course from start to finish. A little known fact about me is that prior to becoming a full-time composer and teacher, I spent fifteen years of my life as a full-time “social expression” writer—writing greeting cards and little sayings for magnets, mugs, and key rings. I was thrilled when I transitioned to the role of full-time music editor, because finally all the pieces of the puzzle of my creative pursuits were coming together—teaching, performing, composing, and writing.

When Geoff Lorenz asked me to write the method, I told him I really only had one request—that I be allowed to create two starter books—one on-staff and one off-staff to suit the different ages and abilities of young beginners. I eagerly agreed with Geoff's idea to bring full-color illustrations to the method, creating a story-book “can't-wait-to-turn-the-page-and-see-what's-next” approach. Our illustrator, Joseph Stokes, added his imagination to the process with delightful characters and a beautiful color palette.

I had many goals in mind, but my primary objectives were, first and foremost, to compose engaging music, even if it only featured three notes. It was also important to build strong note-reading skills because I'd seen so many transfer students held back by weak reading skills (hence the “note-namers”). I also wanted to have every piece in the series propel the student closer and closer to what I call “real music”—a first Bach minuet with the “real notes” Bach wrote. I wanted to write a method in which D is not “2.” How many of us have scratched out fingering on previous books so our students would not

associate a note with a finger number? Therefore, the second hand position introduced in *Piano Discoveries* is D minor—for two reasons—to add an intriguing minor sound to the student's repertoire and to assure that “D is not 2.”

Geoff Lorenz also suggested adding a co-author—concert pianist Leon Bates—and creating an Advisory Board of distinguished educators and composers. These musicians helped build a strong foundation and guided the creation of the series from the very first page to the very last song played. That incredible team—Gail Berenson, Rebecca Shockley, Martha Kelsey, Scott McBride Smith, and Nancy Telfer—met at the beginning stages and together we mapped out how we thought the course should be structured and what would be unique. Each time I completed a book, I sent it to all of them for their review and comments. There is nothing like having five editors to please! But, honestly, it kept raising the bar for each aspect of the method, and I am so grateful to all of them for their wise advice. I also want to thank Martha for her delightful contributions as a composer.

Let me say this about music theory: I love it. I pursued my masters in Music Theory at the Cincinnati Conservatory, teaching freshman and sophomore theory during the process. I saw how music theory—even for music majors—could be intimidating and downright scary, especially ear-training. My goal in *Piano Discoveries* was to make music theory very friendly, very fun, and very creative, ultimately making young pianists more self-assured because they understand the underlying music theory behind each piece. This gives students better reading skills, better performance decisions, and stronger memorization skills.

I was thrilled to see one of the reviewers refer to the companion repertoire books, *Master Class Series* (co-written by Martha Kelsey) as “gems.” I have had great success with them and I hope you explore and enjoy them as well. One reviewer men-

tioned she'd like a bit more opportunity for her students to hone their technical skills in the series. You might also want to try “Technique Tune-Ups.” These books are a nice complement to the progression of skills featured in *Piano Discoveries*.

I use *Piano Discoveries* in my studio and it's been exciting to see all that teamwork come to fruition. Each student is different and that is the true challenge of creating a method—to successfully present the building blocks that fulfill the musical talents of each child. I see teaching as planting seeds; the trick is we can't keep pulling up the plant to see if it's taking root. Time will reveal those wonderful moments to us. That is why we keep teaching; for those wonderful moments. Every day is a chance to re-invent ourselves in big ways and small ways to touch the lives of those very individual and unique students. I hope *Piano Discoveries* brings you those opportunities and also much musical joy to you and your students!

- Janet Vogt
Author, *Piano Discoveries*

This article originally appeared in the March/April 2010 issue of Clavier Companion.



Issues and Ideas:

Perspectives in Pedagogy

Rebecca Grooms Johnson, Editor

A survey of current methods: Alfred's Premier Piano Course

Rebecca Grooms Johnson, Ph.D., NCTM, is a nationally respected leader in the field of piano pedagogy. She is an independent teacher and has taught extensively at the college and university level. Rebecca is active in the Music Teachers National Association, where she has held the offices of President of the Ohio Music Teachers Association and National Chair of MTNA's Pedagogy Committee. She currently serves as National Certification Chair, and three times a year she publishes a feature in American Music Teacher titled What's New in Pedagogy Research.

This issue's contributors:

Sharon Ard, NCTM, maintains an independent piano studio in El Dorado, Arkansas, where she was named ASMTA Independent Teacher of the Year in 1998. Her students are consistently among the leaders at state and local piano events. She holds an M.M. in Piano Performance and Pedagogy from the University of Oklahoma and a B.M. in Piano Performance from Henderson State University. Sharon is currently serving as an MTNA National Certification Commissioner.

Betty Sutton, NCTM, holds a B.A. from the University of Oklahoma, Edmond and a Masters degree from the University of Arkansas. A member of MTNA with Master Teacher Certification, Betty is a member of the Federated Music Club and has judged National Piano Guild auditions for 20 years. She is a published composer for Warner Bros. (now Alfred Publishing Co.) and recently studied piano with Carolyn Hickson at the University of Arkansas. Betty is the owner of Carousel Piano Studio in Rogers, AR, where she teaches class and private piano with three other teachers.

This issue continues *Clavier Companion's* survey of piano methods.¹ Each article in this series will have three sections—an introductory synopsis by the Associate Editor, two articles written by teachers who have used the method extensively in their studios, and a response from the authors of the method surveyed in the previous issue. We hope that you find these articles to be an interesting and helpful overview of all the most popular methods currently on the market!

Alfred's Premier Piano Course: by Dennis Alexander, Gayle Kowalchyk, E.L. Lancaster, Victoria McArthur, and Martha Mier

Publisher: Alfred Publishing Co., Inc.

Levels: Levels 1A, 1B, 2A, 2B, 3, 4, 5

The core books throughout the series are: Lesson, Theory, and Performance. Technique books are available for Levels 1A and 1B. The final Level 6 Lesson, Theory, and Performance books are scheduled to be available by mid-2010. Level 2A and 2B Technique books will also be published by mid-2010, with Levels 3-6 following in 2011.

Alpha

The pre-reading pages span the first half of Level 1A and introduce quarter, half, dotted half, and whole notes; quarter and whole rests; and 3/4 and 4/4 time signatures. A strong pedagogical foundation is laid in the pre-reading section with:

Suggestions that students first play the pieces in their lap, on the fallboard, or silently touching the keys before actually sounding the keys.

Reminders for the student to play across the bar lines.

An introduction to the damper pedal with brief information about beginning

pedal technique. Early use of the pedal is limited to the “put it down and keep it down” type so beloved by children. It might, however, be difficult for a younger or smaller than average beginner to reach the pedals without a pedal extender.

An excellent beginning emphasis on steps, repeats, and recognition of notational direction.

Reading

This series uses an eclectic reading approach with a strong emphasis on landmark notes and intervallic reading. Occasional snippets for sight reading are included in the Lesson books. While the early pieces stay within five-note positions, they are not restricted to typical Middle C or other fixed hand positions, thereby avoiding the problem of students associating a particular finger with a particular note. Intervals of a sixth are introduced towards the end of Level 2A. Most of the songs in Levels 1A, 1B, and 2A have lyrics that are consonant with a child's life experiences. Because there is very little Middle-C emphasis, most of the early level songs are not singable.

Rhythm

Pre-reading pieces begin with unit counting, then quickly move to metric with the introduction of the 4/4 time signature. Sections titled “Rhythm Review” and “Rhythm Workout” occur throughout the Lesson books and always present the rhythms in groupings to be tapped or clapped. Eighth notes are presented in Level 2A with metric counting, and the dotted quarter-eighth note pattern is introduced in Level 2B. New rhythmic groupings are often presented with words that mimic the rhythm. Syncopation, 3/8, and

¹ The aim of this series is to review the core materials of piano methods that are either new or substantially changed since a similar series of articles appeared in *Piano Quarterly* in the 1980s. Please see the September/October 2009 issue of *Clavier Companion* for more details on this project. For reviews of methods that are older or have not been revised recently, we invite you to revisit the original *Piano Quarterly* series.

6/8 time signatures appear in Level 3, while triplets and sixteenths are introduced in Level 4. Level 5 continues with more complex rhythmic groupings, and Level 6 will conclude with mixed meters.

Lesson Books

In addition to boxes introducing new concepts and the aforementioned sight-reading snippets, these books have a number of activities that appear throughout the levels:

Workout activities provide short technical exercises that address specific issues in a given piece, rhythmic exercises, and blocking suggestions for efficient practice.

Premier Performer suggests additional, more challenging activities for the piece.

Imagination Station offers creative activities including playing by ear and improvisation.

Closer Look draws attention to aspects of the piece that will enhance sight-reading and analysis.

Levels 1A and 1B also have *Practice Journal* suggestions in a checklist format.

Repertoire

Along with original teaching pieces, arrangements of classical tunes begin in Level 1A of the Lesson and Performance books. These are accompanied by a short biographical introduction to each composer. Genres are varied and include Broadway show tunes, folk melodies, jazz, and in the later levels, original classical pieces.

Theory

These books support and enhance the concepts of the Lesson and Performance books and contain the following boxes:

Fun Zone: written games and puzzles.

Imagination Station: additional creative opportunities.

Learning Link: interesting extra-musical information about the subject of a piece in the Lesson books. For example, in Level 2A there is a song about using the QWERTY keyboard—something that all computer savvy children use. The correlating page in the Theory book gives a paragraph of information about the development of the QWERTY system.

Now Hear This: ear training exercises.

Now Play This: sight reading snippets.

Five-finger positions in various keys are introduced in Level 2A, cadence chords and major scales begin to appear in Level 2B, and harmonic minor scales are taught in Level 4. Concepts in Level 6 are projected to include two octave black key scales and ii-V7-I progressions.

Technique

Technique Tools covering topics including relaxed shoulders, arm weight, and strong fingertips are introduced in the pre-reading portion of Level 1A. These are followed by exercises and Artistic Etudes with titles such as “Playing Across the Bar Line” and “Playing Evenly from Hand to Hand.” Level 1B presents four more Technique Tools, three “Hands-Together Workshop” exercises (including “Contrary Motion” and “Parallel Motion”), and additional Artistic Etudes. The Technique Tools are currently only available in Levels 1A and 1B.

Teacher’s Guide

The only material currently available is a video of Gayle Kowalchik demonstrating *Nine Technique Tools from Alfred’s Premier Piano Course, Technique Book 1A* online at <http://www.premierpianocourse.com/>. Teacher’s Guides for each level will be written after the publication of all six levels of the core books.

Software and CDs

CDs and MIDI disks are available for each Lesson and Performance book in the series. The CDs provide performance and practice tempi for each piece. These disks are unusual in that the piano pieces and written duet parts are beautifully performed by Scott Price on an acoustic piano, giving the student an excellent aural model. The MIDI disks contain an attractive variety of digitally generated orchestral sounds and styles of accompaniments.

As mentioned earlier in this series, the disks that most publishers use for MIDI accompaniments are unusable for teachers who do not own an electric piano or keyboard with a floppy disk drive. Kudos to Alfred for now offering these accompaniments as a download from their website. Visit www.alfred.com/downloads and click on “Piano” on the left sidebar. The cost for each downloaded book of accompaniments is currently \$7.95.

Omega

The Level 5 Lesson and Performance books contain a wide range of appealing genres and include a generous amount of mid-intermediate classical repertoire. Level 6 will conclude with Beethoven’s *Ecossaise* in G Major and the Burgmüller *Ballade* in C Minor. ▲

Motivating to practice

by Sharon Ard

With the right combination of teacher and student, most piano methods can be successful. *Alfred’s Premier Piano Course* works best in my studio with students who are seven or eight years old. Six-year-olds move more slowly because of the quick introduction of rhythms, time signatures, and the early use of alternating hands on the same line of music. The Lesson book with CD and the Theory book form my students’ core curricula. I also use Performance book 1A with all beginners and the other Performance books as needed.

Teaching rhythm in patterns

The method begins with unit counting and then moves to metric counting. Inside the front cover of each Lesson book is a list of all the rhythm patterns covered in that particular book. The emphasis on reading rhythms in patterns is my favorite aspect of this course. This rhythmic approach enables students to develop good sight-reading and memory skills. I make flashcards of these patterns and have my students clap, tap, or play them. I always introduce a new pattern before it is used in a piece.

One of my favorite syncopated pieces to teach is “Argentine Tango” from Lesson Book 4 (see Excerpt 1). When teaching this piece, students and I listen to the CD recording of the piece and swing our arms like a clock pendulum to the beat. We then isolate the measures that might be difficult to play, for example mm. 2-4 and mm. 9-12. Using rhythm instruments, students play the straight rhythm patterns while I play the syncopation counting aloud. After a couple of repetitions, we switch parts.

To help students prepare for their first experience with the CD, we begin by tapping a steady beat while listening to the piece. Next I have students tap a steady beat while I play the accompaniment, then tap the rhythm of their part using the appropriate left or right hand with the accompaniment. Students are then ready to play the student part with the accompaniment. In subsequent pieces, the tapping of a steady beat with the CD and tapping while listening to the teacher accompaniment is omitted.

Excerpt 1: "Argentine Tango" from Lesson Book 4.

A beginning intervallic approach

Students have many opportunities in the Lesson and Performance books to explore the registers of the piano while learning pre-reading pieces. In the beginning, students use only the long fingers on black key groups. The book segues nicely from black key to white key pieces using the black keys as guides. C, D, and E are introduced together, G and A are introduced next, and F and B are presented last. This seems less confusing than introducing FGAB together, as many methods do.

Premier Piano uses an eclectic reading approach by combining elements of intervallic, multi-key, and middle C. Intervallic reading is emphasized in the beginning, and the music has a linear texture that leads to musical playing. The music is also more melodic than some of the pieces found in other intervallic based method books. Students are introduced to the bass clef before the treble clef in hopes of making the bass clef easier to comprehend.

I have found that more drill is needed with stepping up and down in the music alphabet than is provided in the book. My students choose an alphabet card and play that key and a step up and down from it. The students also play "Around the World"—I call out a letter of the alphabet; students then find the key and move up and down by step, saying what key they have ended on. This helps with note reading when transitioning to the staff, and I continue drilling while introducing landmarks C, F, and G. I would like for *Premier Piano* to introduce pieces in different keys earlier. I have, however, wished that about all methods and I just use supplementary materials to meet the need.

After introducing all the notes in the C major five-finger pattern in Level 1A, I begin teaching all five-finger patterns by rote. The method formally introduces major five-finger patterns in Level 2A after covering half steps and whole steps.

Another positive aspect of this course is that many opportunities are given for students to experience playing the same note with different fingers, and no fixed-hand positions are taught. As a result, I am noticing that my students feel freer to improvise in different registers using different dynamic levels and articulations.

Developing technique and musicianship

The Technique books Level 1A and 1B are well written with careful directions for the student and teacher and a strong correla-

tion with the Lesson books. I also like to supplement with exercises from *A Dozen a Day* by Edna Mae Burnam. This keeps students from becoming accustomed to the appearance of a certain book while offering a broader technical knowledge.

From the beginning, the method develops a good musician with a commanding technique. In early pieces, the rests between groups of keys allow students to think about a loose wrist and help them learn to prepare for the next musical idea. The use of different finger combinations in both hands helps develop the strong muscles essential for a good hand position.

The two-note V7 chord is used more extensively in this series than in some methods, and students are given many opportunities to play other two-note intervals as "chords." This helps avoid the tendency to let the hand collapse when moving to the three note V7 chord.

The workout ideas that precede each piece help isolate potential trouble spots and make students aware of the concept being taught. This can be seen in "Moonlit Snow," which has a blocking exercise (see Excerpt 2).

More than just theory

The Theory books correlate nicely with the Lesson books and have adequate activities for the average student. If the student is struggling with note reading, I supplement with note spellers. Some students are able to comprehend more than the method is covering, and with them, I substitute *Theory Time* by Heather Rathnau.

My students enjoy the Learning Link paragraphs from the Theory books and they never let me skip them. For example, in Theory 2A the Learning Link on page 12 is about boogie boards and is followed by the "Boogie Boarding" piece in Lesson 2A on page 15 (see Excerpts 3A and 3B). This can provide an interesting relaxation point in the lesson.

The ear training activities are not as predictable as in some method books. For instance, in Theory 4, the chord progressions do not always begin on a tonic chord.

Motivating repertoire

The trophy on the cover of the Performance books and the titles of the compositions motivate my students to practice. My beginning students call the Performance book the "trophy book" and are

Excerpt 2: "Moonlit Snow" from Lesson Book 4.

thrilled to play from it. The repertoire in the Lesson and Performance books incorporates a wide variety of styles including folk tunes, pop tunes, classical, and well-written original pieces that students enjoy. By level 5, students are playing Sonata Op. 36, No. 1 by Clementi and the minuets of Cristoph Petzold.

Limited time, accessible music

My students and I are happy with *Premier Piano*. In today's society practice time is limited due to all the students' activities; therefore, it is important that the assignments they practice for piano are accessible, fun, and sound good. The *Alfred's Premier Piano Course* meets those criteria. ▲

Solid preparation with outstanding results

by Betty Sutton

Four years ago I returned from an MTNA Conference feeling very excited about a new piano method I had seen—the *Premier Piano Course* by Alfred Publishing Company. I decided to begin using the new series for a number of reasons, including the fact that all of the authors and composers were highly respected in the field of piano pedagogy.

Excerpt 3A: "Learning Link" from Theory Book 2A.

12 Fun Zone

Learn about the C chord in the C 5-finger pattern by riding the Boogie Boards.

1. Play.

2. Write the other two notes of the C broken chord. Use quarter notes.

3. Name the notes.

4. Name the notes.

5. Play.

6. Write a whole note to complete the C chord.

Learning Link

A Boogie Board is a specific brand name for a body board made from soft foam rubber in the shape of a rectangle. Body boarding is the easiest form of surfing. It is usually done while lying down instead of standing. Body boards can also be ridden in a half-standing position, with one knee in contact with the board. In 1971, Tom Morey invented the soft-foam Boogie Board and named it after his favorite kind of music, boogie. Many impressive tricks were added to the sport starting in the 1990s, making body boarding an exciting spectator sport.

Excerpt 3B: "Boogie Boarding" from Lesson Book 2B.

Theory Book, page 12 15
Performance Book, pages 10-11

Play and count aloud, once each day.

Sight-Reading 1.

Boogie Boarding

CD 15/16 GM 8

Allegro

When the surf comes in, then the fun be-gins.

rid-ing my boo-gie board at the beach.

As I catch a wave, I'm feel-ing ver-y brave.

Good sequencing and pacing

The concepts are presented in a logical sequence, and the series does not move too rapidly for my students. Every new concept is introduced at the top of the page with beautiful graphics and stories about the piece. (This is especially nice when the classical pieces are introduced.) After new concepts are presented, they are followed by several pieces that reinforce them. The Theory books also reinforce the concepts and have page numbers that correlate to the Lesson book. These Theory books earn extra points for perfect pages. We must not neglect the ear training these Theory books provide!

Introduction to note reading

I appreciate the pre-reading songs in Lesson Book 1A that help beginners learn to move their hands all around the piano. This helps students avoid becoming too attached to keeping their hands in one place on the keyboard. It also works well with ear training—this year I made a game of playing black keys in different positions and having students try to match me. It was a fun way to train their listening abilities, and the students loved getting Tootsie Rolls for prizes.

I want a method that stresses intervallic reading, and this series does. In Lesson Book 1A the thumbs do not always play Middle C. The pieces continue to use different fingers on new notes, so my beginners really learn to read the notes and intervals.

Accompaniment options

Compact disks are included in each of the Performance and Lesson books, and this is one of the things that attracted me to the series. Each CD is recorded at two tempos—first the practice tempo, then the performance tempo. Some of the students have a difficult time reaching the performance tempo, but it is a goal to work for! When they are ready, I use the MIDI disk and we listen for the dynamics, ritards, and all the other expressive markings. I also have the students try to identify the different instrumental sounds that are used. The artistic creativity of the MIDI disks is amazing!

Excerpt 4: "Jazz in the Park" from Performance Book 3.

My students love playing with the MIDI disks because it sounds like they are playing with an orchestra. I let them choose their favorite pieces in the Performance and Lesson books to play at small recitals for parents. If they do not have a CD player at home, the teacher accompaniments are also delightful. If you have access to a MIDI-player or laptop computer, I highly recommend that you listen to the disks. I am sure that you will be delighted with them, too.

The image shows a page from a music book. At the top left is an illustration of a park scene with a bandstand. The title "Jazz in the Park" is written in a stylized font, with "Relaxed waltz tempo" underneath. Below the title is a piano accompaniment score in 3/4 time, marked *mp*. To the right of the score are two "Rhythm Workouts". Workout 1 is in 3/4 time and consists of a sequence of notes: quarter, eighth, eighth, quarter, quarter, quarter. Workout 2 is in 3/4 time and consists of a sequence of notes: quarter, eighth, eighth, quarter, quarter, quarter. Both workouts include a count: "1 + - 2 + 3 + 1 + 2 + 3 +".

Appealing repertoire, prepared rhythms

I am always searching for some exciting pieces with fresh appeal in the Lesson and Performance books. Our students are growing up in an ever-changing world, and we must move with the times. Repertoire includes blues, boogie, jazz, Spanish music, folk songs, and classics. The variety of music used makes this method quite appealing to middle school students. To prepare the student for the rhythms in these pieces, quarter notes and a steady beat are well developed in the early levels. Eighth notes are not introduced until Lesson Book 2A, when they are easier for the student to understand. An introduction to syncopation is given in Lesson Book 3.

A couple of rough spots

There are two places in this series that have been difficult for some of my students. First, I think there should be more pre-reading pieces in Lesson 1A on black keys before moving to the white keys. This can depend on the age of the students, but my class of seven-year-olds had problems this year during the transition from black keys to white keys. My students also struggle in Lesson Book 1B when the left hand moves lower on the staff. This happens in many methods when students begin to move the left hand lower on the staff and play two notes at the same time.

I would recommend that if your students have a little difficulty moving from Level 1A to 1B, just keep using supplementary music until they have a solid foundation in

the first book. We have all seen students struggle when they reach a plateau, and this is when many students quit piano. Don't give up because the rewards are great! It is awesome to see the bright glow of understanding on students' faces when they are successful!

In retrospect

This is my fourth year of using *Premier Piano* with students at all levels, and I think my studio has the best sight-readers ever! The music is still as delightful and exciting as the first time I heard it. If you have not yet tried the *Alfred's Premier Piano Course*, I hope you will examine it carefully and perhaps try it next year. I feel this is a method that will stand the "test of time" and be with us for many years. ▲

This article originally appeared in the March/April 2010 issue of Clavier Companion.

All musical examples in this article are from *Alfred's Premier Piano Course* by Dennis Alexander, Martha Meir, Gayle Kowalshyk, E. L. Lancaster, and Victorial McAurthur. © Alfred Music Publishing Co., Inc. All Rights Reserved. Used By Permission.

Alfred's Premier Piano Course

Dennis Alexander • Gayle Kowalchyk • E. L. Lancaster • Victoria McArthur • Martha Mier

About the Core Books

Lesson Book—introduces all new concepts.

Theory Book—promotes comprehensive musicianship.

Performance Book—contains outstanding music written in varied styles to reinforce new musical concepts.

Technique Book—introduces easy-to-understand technique tools and applies them to artistic performance.

What Teachers Like About Premier Piano Course

- The music of Dennis Alexander and Martha Mier is accessible and sounds great.
- The pacing and sound pedagogy produces strong sight-readers.
- Musical structure and concepts are presented in a fun and interactive way.
- The emphasis on performing rhythms in patterns helps with reading and memorization.
- The CDs for Lesson and Performance books, beautifully performed on acoustic piano, provide an excellent model.
- Correlating Pop and Movie Hits take the guess work out of finding popular music at the right level.

"I had no idea what to expect from Alfred's Premier Piano Course, but honestly I had expected it to be very similar to Alfred's Basic Piano, only more modern and updated. Prior to asking my pedagogy students to review the series, I myself became familiar with the sample books you sent, and I am thrilled. I particularly like how it gets students outside of "traditional" five-finger positions from a very early stage - great for reading!!! Thank you again for sending the sample books for our pedagogy library and pedagogy students. I do believe you have some new fans from the next generation of teachers. Between Alfred's Premier course, Alfred's Basic Piano, and the Music Tree series which I also love, you really do have something for just about every student. Bravo!!"

— Cynthia, AL



Alfred Music Publishing

Visit premierpianocourse.com today.

Author Response

Response to Alfred's Premier Piano Course review

Editor's Note: Clavier Companion will invite the authors of each method series reviewed to respond to that review in the following issue. The response from the authors of Alfred's Premier Piano Course is presented below.

The titles of the two articles in the review of *Alfred's Premier Piano Course* could not have been more aptly chosen. The first article by Sharon Ard, "Motivating to practice," describes the primary goal of the *Premier* writing team—to present music that students love to play. The second article, "Solid preparation with outstanding results," by Betty Sutton, accurately outlines our second goal—to create a method that is carefully paced and sequenced, thus allowing a student the chance to enjoy music for a lifetime either as a profession or as an avocation.

To achieve these goals, I asked Dennis Alexander and Martha Mier to write the music for *Alfred's Premier Piano Course*. Teachers and students at all levels have enjoyed playing their music for years, and their compositions are staples on piano recitals and contest lists throughout the world. I asked Victoria McArthur and my wife, Gayle Kowalchyk, to join the team because of their expertise in the areas of piano technique, sight reading, practice strategies, and how students learn. As a team, all five of the *Premier Piano Course* authors have extensive experience teaching pre-college students and providing teacher training.

This review of *Alfred's Premier Piano Course* supports what we hear from other teachers who are using the course. The music of Dennis and Martha is accessible and sounds great. The pacing and sound pedagogy produces strong sight-readers. The emphasis on performing rhythms in patterns helps with reading and memorization. Musical structures and concepts are presented in a fun and interactive way—consequently theory is not *boring* to students.

The CDs for Lesson and Performance books, beautifully performed by Scott Price on an acoustic piano, provide an excellent performance model and practice partner. Each selection on the CD is performed twice, first at a performance tempo and then at a *slower* practice tempo. Students come to lessons much better prepared when they work with the CDs regularly during the week. Effective practice strategies include listening to the practice tempo while tapping or clapping rhythms, singing the words, singing letter names, or playing hands separately. These CDs as well as the General MIDI disks for *Premier* are available for download at www.alfred.com/downloads.

The role of this method is to present musical concepts to students in a logical order, thus allowing them to transfer their knowledge to other musical endeavors. The role of the teacher in conjunction with *Premier* is to motivate, model, and expand beyond the page to meet the individual needs of students. To assist the teacher in that role, we have provided a selection of correlated supplementary books at each level and flash card sets for Levels 1A–2B. These sets include music cards to drill terms and symbols as well as sight-reading cards. As pages are studied in the Lesson Book, the related music cards should be introduced during the lesson and reviewed at home with the parents. The sight-reading cards should be played during the lesson and practiced at home.

The elementary levels, 1A–2B, provide the necessary foundation for a strong technical, musical, and artistic beginning. The intermediate levels, 3–6, further enhance musical playing and stylistic interpretation. Levels 5 and 6 provide a unique introduction to the

four style periods—Baroque, Classical, Romantic, and Contemporary—as well as an introduction to the development of popular music. Students develop the skills to stylistically perform the music of master composers while understanding what they are performing.

The core books of Level 6, the final level of *Alfred's Premier Piano Course*, have just been released, but the work on the method is not finished. The authors are dedicated to providing additional support materials for students and teachers. The Premier Support program, which was recently announced, offers teachers the opportunity to choose one deserving student from their studios to receive free course materials from *Premier Piano Course*. Visit premierpianocourse.com for details.

Future plans include: 1) the completion of all levels of the *Premier Technique Books* (currently available through Level 2A); 2) the release of books of popular music to reinforce each level of the course; 3) the completion of all levels of the *Premier Christmas books*; 4) the ability to interact one-on-one with *Premier Piano Course* authors through Facebook and Twitter; 5) the posting of video workshops on premierpianocourse.com; 6) support for piano pedagogy students as they complete their studies and become future professional teachers.

The authors of the course would like to thank *Clavier Companion* for including *Alfred's Premier Piano Course* in this series of reviews. In addition, thanks go to the focus group of teachers who provided valuable input into the development of the course, the students who pilot tested the course and provided suggestions for art and subject matter that would interest them and their friends, and teachers throughout the world who are using the course. ▲

—E. L. Lancaster
Senior Vice President
Alfred Music Publishing
Keyboard Editor-in-Chief

This article originally appeared in the May/June 2010 issue of Clavier Companion.

Issues and Ideas: Perspectives in Pedagogy

Rebecca Grooms Johnson, Editor



A survey of current methods: The Music Tree

This issue continues *Clavier Companion's* survey of piano methods.¹ Each article in this series will have three sections—an introductory synopsis by the Associate Editor, two articles written by teachers who have used the method extensively in their studios, and a response from the authors of the method surveyed in the previous issue. We hope that you find these articles to be an interesting and helpful overview of all the most popular methods currently on the market!

The Music Tree: by Frances Clark, Louise Goss, and Sam Holland. Additional material by Steve Betts and Craig Sale. Educational Consultants: Steve Betts, Linda Christensen, Amy Glennon, Peter Jutras, Mary Frances Reyburn, Yat Yee Chong, Ted Cooper, Monica Hochstedler, Elvina Pearce, and Craig Sale.

Publisher: Summy-Birchard Inc., exclusively distributed by Alfred Publishing Co., Inc.

Levels: *Time to Begin*, *The Music Tree* Parts 1, 2A, 2B, 3, and 4.

The core books throughout the series are the Text and Activities books. Parts 3 and 4 also include *Keyboard Literature*, *Keyboard Technique*, and *Student's Choice* books.

Alpha: First published in 1955, this revised, updated continuation of the pioneering method by Frances Clark and Louise Goss is one of the series that sparked a revolution in pedagogic thought. Nowhere is this seen more clearly than in the *Time to Begin* text and *Activities* books. The look of the series—clean and unadorned, with no extraneous or distracting graphics, reflects its pedagogic philosophy throughout. This method is built on meticulous attention to sequencing, with careful and extensive preparation for each new concept.

Reading: I hesitate to classify *Time to Begin* as a pre-reading book because of the early integration of intervallic reading concepts. Pieces featuring off-staff notational direction and movement across the entire keyboard are quickly interspersed with beginning intervals presented on only the lines and spaces needed for each interval (partial staff notation), with no clef signs. The series is the epitome of an intervallic approach to teaching reading. Clefs, landmark notes, and the grand staff are introduced in the final unit.

Rhythm: Rhythms are initially presented by feeling quarter notes as one arm swing, and half notes as two arm swings. Unit counting is introduced (1, 1-2), and students are encouraged to make sure that half notes are as long as two quarters, dotted half notes as long as three quarters, etc. Part 1 reviews quarter, half, dotted half, and whole notes; later it presents their rests. Eighth notes and dotted quarter-eighth patterns are introduced in Part 2A. Triplets and compound meters begin in part 2B, with sixteenths, “swing,” and syncopation taught in Part 3. More complex rhythmic groupings are explored in Part 4.

Textbooks: The textbooks are divided into units, and each unit is divided into two sections: “Discoveries” features pieces introducing new concepts to be taught in the lesson; “Using What You Have Discovered” presents pieces for synthesis and home practice.

Sidebars on each page of *Time to Begin* ask questions and offer suggestions for additional activities. Each unit concludes with warm-up exercises, rhythm drills, interval drills, and suggestions for creative activities. The friendly characters Chip and Bobo (a chipmunk and a dog) encourage the students to see the concepts and hear how they sound.

Rebecca Grooms Johnson, Ph.D., NCTM, is a nationally respected leader in the field of piano pedagogy. She is an independent teacher and has taught extensively at the college and university level. Rebecca is active in the Music Teachers National Association, where she has held the offices of President of the Ohio Music Teachers Association and National Chair of MTNA's Pedagogy Committee. She currently serves as National Certification Chair, and three times a year she publishes a feature in *American Music Teacher* titled What's New in Pedagogy Research.

This issue's contributors:

Sara M. Ernst, NCTM, is on the piano faculty at the University of Missouri and at the Interlochen Summer Arts Camp. She is a doctoral candidate at the University of Oklahoma, and is currently researching her dissertation on the pedagogy and philosophy of Marvin Blickenstaff. Ernst has maintained independent teaching studios in Columbia, MO, and Norman, OK. In 2005, she was the recipient of the MTNA Studio Fellowship Award.

Victoria Johnson, Ph.D., NCTM, lives in Hattiesburg, MS, where she is an independent music teacher and part-time faculty member in accompanying at the University of Southern Mississippi. She holds degrees from the University of Oklahoma, Bowling Green State University, and Luther College. She has presented at the National Conference on Keyboard Pedagogy and the National Group Piano and Piano Pedagogy Forum, and has written for *Keyboard Companion* and *Piano Pedagogy Forum*. Prior to moving to Hattiesburg, Dr. Johnson was Assistant Professor and Coordinator of Piano Pedagogy at Louisiana State University.

¹ The aim of this series is to review the core materials of piano methods that are either new or substantially changed since a similar series of articles appeared in *Piano Quarterly* in the 1980s. Please see the September/October 2009 issue of *Clavier Companion* for more details on this project. For reviews of methods that are older or have not been revised recently, we invite you to revisit the original *Piano Quarterly* series.

The textbooks throughout the series include warm-ups and various creative activities, including composition, improvisation, and harmonization. As classical repertoire is introduced, “Focus on Style” paragraphs give brief biographical and stylistic information.

Repertoire: In addition to pieces written and arranged by the authors of this series, there are a number of works by pedagogical composers such as David Kraehenbuehl, Lynn Freeman Olson, and Jon George. Many early level songs have teacher duets. Genres are varied, including folk songs, written jazz, ragtime, and soft pop. Continued revisions and the addition of popular song arrangements by Sam Holland help this series maintain a contemporary sound. *Keyboard Literature* books in Parts 3 and 4 contain standard repertoire with a short introduction to the compositional era and a brief biography of each composer. *Student’s Choice* books 3 and 4 add recital favorites at these levels.

Activities: In addition to supporting and enhancing the theory presented in the textbooks, the *Activities* books sustain an unusually consistent emphasis on sight-playing and ear-training throughout all levels. The games and drills are clever, varied, and age-appropriate.

Technique: The warm-up drills in *Time to Begin* and Parts 1, 2A, and 2B offer short, carefully sequenced technical exercises, but instructions on how to play the notes with a relaxed and well-shaped hand are generally left for the teacher to provide. Parts 3 and 4 include separate *Keyboard Technic* books containing pedagogic exercises and standard repertoire etudes. These books provide more information about *how* to prepare and play each piece.

Teacher’s Guide: Two handbooks for teachers are available in hard copy. The first covers *Time to Begin* and Part 1, and the second discusses Parts 2A and B. These Guides are strongly recommended for pedagogy students, beginning teachers, and instructors who are not familiar with an intervallic approach to reading.

Software and CDs: Although I support teaching reading with an intervallic approach, one of the drawbacks is that early pieces are not lyrical and certainly not singable. To help maintain student (and parent and grandparent) interest during this early, formative period, it is important to use the accompaniments provided on the MIDI disks and CDs. *Time to Begin* and Parts 1 – 2B have MIDI disks and CDs with accompaniments. The CDs for the Part 3 Text, Literature, and Technic books are unusual—if they are opened on a computer, they contain a free downloadable version of *Home Concert 2000 Special Edition*. With this software, the Part 3 CD accompaniments’ tempi and tracks can be manipulated like a MIDI disk.

One can only hope that, with Alfred’s recently acquired distributorship of this series, similar disks for Part 4 will soon be published. It would also be very helpful to have all of the accompaniments available for downloadable purchase on their website, as they are for *Alfred’s Premier Piano Course*.

Omega: Part 3 marks the beginning of early-intermediate literature in the Text, Literature, and Technic books. Part 4 concludes at an early to mid-intermediate level with Leopold Mozart’s “Burleske,” and “Soldier’s March” by Robert Schumann. ▲

A Growth Process

by Sara M. Ernst

The *Music Tree* is an ideal method for me, suitable for both individual and group study. It has a solid progression of skills and musical concepts, preparing students for what they will see, hear, and play in early intermediate repertoire.

Clarity and pacing

The organization of units around “discoveries” is quite effective. I can easily plan my lessons, presenting new concepts to be practiced at home this week, while preparing others for the coming weeks. My students never feel overwhelmed by this method, with its clear layout and uncluttered pages. Although my young students enjoy Chip and Bobo, the music (not graphics or pictures) is the focal point. The concise “discovery” pieces clearly highlight new

concepts through their music, lyrics, and titles. For example, the lyrics of “Eighth Note Parade” describe the note patterns and use short words on the eighths. I assign the “Using What You Have Discovered” pieces immediately or one week later. “Big Ben” is perfect for discussing the damper pedal as students hear the bell-like ring on the fifth beat (see Excerpt 1). The quantity of pieces lets me tailor the learning pace to the class or individual and allows for mastery of a concept before the next related concept is presented.

I particularly like the introduction of intervallic reading in *Time to Begin*. Students begin on a partial staff in Unit 4, playing melodies constructed of seconds and repeated notes. Unit 5 introduces thirds and repeated notes. In Unit 6, “Pumpkin Eater” is the first piece to combine seconds, thirds, and repeated notes; we always sing and play it along with the teacher duet (see Excerpt 2). With this progression of concepts my students have a solid grasp of seconds and thirds, so the fourths and fifths in the upcoming units are quick discoveries. The intervallic and landmark approach to reading develops good readers in my studio. It allows my beginners to explore the whole keyboard immediately, and they quickly learn to read the full staff. Occasionally, pieces jump ahead in difficulty, and I either omit these or use them to prime the student for a challenge.

Student generated discoveries

One of the most compelling reasons to use *The Music Tree* is its authentic presentation of musical concepts through discoveries. I feel a pang of guilt whenever I have to re-explain a concept because of an imprecise introduction, and I usually avoid this through valid and honest discoveries. For example, when introducing G major, I

Excerpt 1: “Big Ben” from *The Music Tree*, Part 2A.

2. Damper Pedal

Tones continue to sound as long as the damper pedal is down.

Circle the time signature in *Big Ben*.

Slowly 3 2 Traditional

pedal down pedal stays down pedal up

Are all the tones still sounding at the end of the piece? 5

USING WHAT YOU HAVE DISCOVERED

Before playing each piece:

1. Think what the piece is about and how you want it to sound.
2. Practice the rhythm:
Circle the time signature.
Swing and say the words or dash and say the words.
Point and count.
3. Find the position and practice any moves.

Pumpkin Eater

f Pet - er, Pet - er, pump - kin eat - er, made a pump - kin pie, they tell.

When he baked it in the o - ven, Miss - us Pet - er liked it well!

(student)

(teacher) *mf*

could tell my students to sharp all the F's because F-sharp is in the key signature; however, I would much rather explore how major scales have an intervallic pattern and why the resulting sharps or flats are shown in the key signature. I feel that this method, more than others, encourages depth of understanding.

Small rhythmic steps

Rhythmic values are presented deliberately, and students are given time to develop automatic responses to the symbols before new patterns are presented. For example, students have five units in Part 3 to master groups of 4 sixteenth notes (♬♬♬♬) before patterns with eighths and sixteenths are introduced. Students are given several units to master the next pattern, ♩♩♩, and additional patterns are introduced in similar increments. While this approach may feel slow to some teachers, I find moving in these smaller strides builds success and requires less backtracking. Because a counting system is not strongly imposed, I enjoy the flexibility of using a mix of systems among my students.

Finding a balance of literature

This method uses a linear writing style into Part 2B with creative and expressive lyrics. Once the partial staff is introduced, the melodies are tuneful and singable. Adding the teacher duets is a thrill for my students that makes the linear music come to life. My students love playing popular pieces such as "When the Saints Go Marching In" and "Batman Theme" (see Excerpt 3). *The Music Tree* has more popular music than Classical themes, and I might prefer more balance.

My students have a variety of music in their piano assignments. To provide more exposure to finger technique, note-name reading, and tuneful melodies, I often supplement *Time to Begin* with pre-staff folk songs or with books from the *Hal Leonard Piano Student Library*. Parts 1 and 2A contain only basic pedaling (as in "Big Ben"), and when my students are ready, I incorporate solo collections by various composers, choosing longer pieces with blocked sonorities and pedal changes. Since students are comfortable with the full grand staff by Part 2A, additional solos are easy to include. I continue supplementing during Part 2B, including pieces of greater length.

In the *Batman Theme*, except for the last four measures:
LH always plays _____ steps. RH always plays _____ steps.

Batman Theme

Words and Music by Neal Hefti
Arranged by Sam Holland

With great energy! (8va higher with duet)

mf

f

Building upon the warm-ups

When I began teaching this method, I found the teacher's guides helpful for understanding the warm-up patterns at the end of each unit. The warm-ups in the first two levels are presented to help a student master a new "feel" in the hand before it appears in the music. Because it features a full-arm approach that carefully introduces each finger, I have used this method successfully with four- and five-year-olds. I also include my own exercises along with those from Nancy and Randall Faber's *Piano Adventures* technique books and Edna Mae Burnam's *Dozen a Day*. Often, my average-age beginners can develop finger technique earlier and are playing five-finger patterns, some scales, and chord patterns before they encounter them in this method.

Generally worthwhile activities

The *Activities* books include a wide variety of ample materials, and the concluding puzzles are student favorites. The interval and staff reading drills are excellent, requiring students to think in multiple ways (see Excerpt 4). I use the rhythmic chants to prepare a new rhythmic concept, and the two-handed rhythms help my students develop hand independence. I do not consistently use the sight-reading exercises; I find that for some students the new concepts are added too quickly. I only assign *Time to Begin Activities* to very young students because I feel they are simplistic for seven- to eight-year-olds. This beginning *Activities* book could be improved by increasing the variety of drills and quantity of staff exercises. I think that students in the elementary levels could also benefit from the addition of ear training drills such as those found in Part 3 and 4.

I value composition and harmonization for reinforcement, variety, and creativity. The composition and improvisation activities in *The Music Tree* are great for all students and an amazing creative outlet for some. The harmonization melodies in the *Activities* books include a vast repertory of folk songs, which many students do not learn elsewhere. The method uses open fifths and sixths to harmonize melodies through the middle of Part 3. If my students are playing triads in their warm-up routines, the open fifths and sixths can sound incomplete, so they also harmonize the melodies with full triads.

The growth process

The title *The Music "Tree"* contains a profound metaphor for learning the art of musical performance. A sapling, if given sunlight and water, grows one leaf at a time: a student learns week by week in piano lessons, and, with a good foundation, matures into a strong musician. *The Music Tree* is a staple of my curriculum because it helps me provide that solid foundation, and my students are motivated through its creative discoveries of music making. ▲

Excerpt 4: Interval and reading drills from *The Music Tree* Activities, Part 1.

It suits me!

by Victoria Johnson

A year and a half ago, I married, moved to a new city, and opened an independent studio. As a result, most of my current students are six- to ten-year-olds in their first or second year of study. Since I'm a fan of variety and change, this has been a wonderful opportunity to revisit methods I used in the past, as well as try out others that are either new to the market or new to me. As a result, my fourteen beginning students are learning from five different series! I'm happy to report that all are thriving. We piano teachers are fortunate to have so many outstanding teaching series available to us. However, *The Music Tree*, which has been my go-to method for several years, remains my favorite. Why? Simply put, I teach best and my students learn best when using this series.

The Music Tree is the most effective method for me because it suits my teaching philosophy. I strive to develop happy, healthy young pianists who enjoy themselves and who are well-rounded musicians and independent learners at every stage of learning. I seek to cultivate fluent reading skills; teach attractive, high-quality repertoire; promote a fluid, well-coordinated technique; and give instruction in music theory and functional skills such as harmonization, composition, and improvisation. *The Music Tree* helps me achieve these aims.

A strong intervallic approach

For me, *The Music Tree's* greatest strength is its reading approach. My strongest wish for my students is that they will enjoy playing the piano long after lessons are over. Proficient reading ability makes this possible. *The Music Tree* uses an intervallic reading approach: students learn landmark notes and then use them to find other notes by direction and interval. This allows students to read and play comfortably all over the keyboard very early in their study. Because so many concepts are presented during the pre-reading stage, when students graduate to the grand staff, their responses to the basics of notation are automatic. I recently assigned Robert Vandall's *Blue Jeans and Boots*, in which both hands are written in the bass clef, to a second-year student. Many students would have difficulty finding this position, but this second-grader was situated and playing within seconds. This happens all the time with *Music Tree* students! I also find *The Music Tree* very effective in rehabilitating some transfer students' poor reading skills. The guide note/interval system gives them a new and logical approach to reading.

A danger for me in teaching an intervallic method is that I become focused on individual intervals rather than the big picture. Fortunately, the "yellow box" activities in *Time to Begin* and the questions preceding each piece in subsequent volumes ask students to mark the form and recognize patterns. Students love this interactive aspect.


Constant reinforcement


I believe that *Music Tree* students read so well not only because of the intervallic reading approach, but also because new concepts are clearly presented and constantly reinforced. When a new guide note, interval, note value, or other concept is presented, it is done through several short pieces. This allows students to experience the new concept repeatedly and in a variety of contexts. It is also found in the warm-ups, composition and improvisation activities, sight-reading exercises, and written work in the *Activities* books, as well as many, many pieces to come.

UNIT SEVEN

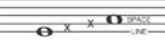
The Interval of a 4th


4ths on the keyboard






4ths on the staff






On the Keyboard

In this jumble, circle all the keyboards that have 4ths. How many did you find? _____





On the Staff

In this jumble, circle all the 4ths. How many did you find? _____




UNIT SEVEN

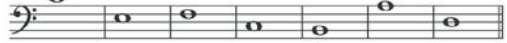
Mark all the 4ths.

Write the 4th **above** each note.



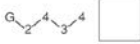
Write the 4th **below** each note.

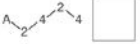


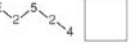
Keyboard Dictation

Play each group of intervals. Then write the name of the last note.

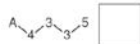
RH, begin with finger 2:

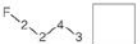







LH, begin with finger 2:







Your answers should spell a word!

THE MUSIC TREE

A PLAN FOR MUSICAL GROWTH AT THE PIANO



The Music Tree is the Culmination of Frances Clark's distinguished lifetime career as a pioneering music educator.

“My goal as a teacher is to create a climate in which my students experience continual intellectual, musical, and personal growth and to become increasingly dispensable to them in the process.”

—Frances Clark

Frances Clark's philosophy influenced the entire field of piano pedagogy in the last half of the twentieth century. The current editions, which were co-authored with Louise Goss and Sam Holland, were also influenced by the classroom experiences of prominent piano pedagogues and instructors.

The Music Tree is available from your favorite Alfred retailer. Visit alfred.com/piano and click on “Piano Methods”.



Alfred Music Publishing

Questions?
Contact us at 818.892.2452
or keyboard@alfred.com

Excerpt 5: "Take Off" from Time To Begin.

UNIT ONE DISCOVERIES

Play all pieces in this unit on groups of 2 black keys. Use your pointer fingers.

In Take Off there are:
 4 groups of notes
 4 notes in each group
 Each group begins with

All groups are alike except each group looks

LOWER HIGHER
 LOWER HIGHER

When notes LOOK higher, they SOUND higher, and you PLAY up the keyboard, to the right.

1. Learning about Higher

Take Off

high - er, high - er.
 up - we're climb - ing.
 big air - bal - on.

Go to - ward the

50

Excerpt 6: "Over the Rainbow" from The Music Tree, Part 1.

In *Over the Rainbow*, circle the tied notes.
 How many measures are there in the longest slur? ____

Over the Rainbow
 (From the Motion Picture "The Wizard of Oz")

Lyric by E.Y. Harburg
 Music by Harold Arlen
 Arranged by Sam Holland

Lyrical (svo higher with slur)

mf Some - where o - ver the rain - bow,
 Some - where o - ver the rain - bow,
 way up high,
 skien are blue,
 There's a land that I heard of
 and the dreams that you dare to

(Teacher)
 with pedal

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Good repertoire motivates practice

Another strong point of *The Music Tree* is its repertoire. Attractive literature is the best motivator of home practice, and the pieces in *The Music Tree* are musical gems. *Take Off* is perhaps the most impressive first piece in any series (see Excerpt 5). Beginners love the big sound and the feel of playing all over the keyboard. Descriptive titles (e.g. "A Secret," "Thunderstorm," "Dinosaurs," and "Skating") and sweet lyrics encourage musical playing. Terrific additions to the most recent revision include many familiar tunes such as "Batman Theme," "Morning Has Broken," "Star Wars," and "Pink Panther." These are pieces that students love to play and parents love to hear. A first-grader's performance of "Over the Rainbow" on a recent recital brought ooh's and aah's from the audience (see Excerpt 6).

Because of the intervallic reading approach, *Music Tree* pieces aren't just in major and minor five-finger positions, so students' ears are opened to a variety of sounds. Many styles are represented as well, including classical, pop, jazz, blues, rock, and folk. Parts 3 and 4 of the series have separate *Keyboard Literature* books containing pieces from the Baroque through late Twentieth Century eras, including works by contemporary composers such as Dianne Gookasian-Rahbee, Linda Niamath, and Nancy Telfer. These books take the guesswork out of correlating standard repertoire with a method book.

Achieving an easy technique

I find that *The Music Tree* is the most effective method for developing an easy, well-coordinated piano technique. The ample supply of pre-reading pieces on black keys helps beginners achieve a natural hand shape before being required to use all five fingers. I also like having warm-ups in each unit of the core book, many of which are repeated in two or three different octaves to prevent a build-up of tension. Parts 3 and 4 have separate *Keyboard Technic* books in addition to the warm-ups in the core book. These books are especially good for more serious students. Short exercises address issues such as rotation, legato thirds, and chord inversions and are followed by multiple etudes incorporating each technique.

Much accomplished in few books

The Music Tree truly helps me in my goal of training complete musicians. I am especially pleased that this is done with just two books in each level. Within the core and *Activities* books, transposition, harmonization, composition, improvisation, sight-playing,

rhythm, and written theory are addressed. Composition and improvisation—daunting areas for many teachers and students, are presented in a very accessible fashion. Sight-playing exercises are found in each unit of the *Activities* book, and I assign one a day for home practice.

A sense of pulse and fluent rhythm-reading are crucial to good sight-reading and performance, so the rhythm drills—including movement exercises such as arm-swinging, walking the rhythm, and drawing dashes under notes—are a big plus. The *Activities* books are student favorites. These books are fun (beginning students particularly love getting to use their crayons), manageable, and very effective in reinforcing concepts from the core books. They also work well in partner or group lessons.

Plusses and minuses

When I speak with teachers who don't use *The Music Tree*, they inevitably cite reasons such as, "It moves very slowly," and "There are so many black key pieces." I agree with both points. It does move slowly, especially *Time to Begin*, and for that reason I don't use *The Music Tree* with beginners older than third grade. However, for younger students, I find the pace appropriate and necessary for adequate reinforcement of concepts.

The time spent on black keys is crucial to achieving a good hand shape, a sense of pulse, and an understanding of basic concepts before dealing with the complexities of the staff. When time is taken to ask students about the mood of the piece and subsequent dynamics and tempo choices, sing the lyrics, and play the teacher accompaniments and/or CD accompaniments, the black key pieces really come to life. If anything, I believe that *The Music Tree* is more challenging than other series: it requires that I carefully pre-

pare upcoming concepts and that students really think and figure things out—there is no mindless following of finger numbers or note names in this series!

Perhaps the biggest compliment I can pay *The Music Tree* is that when I taught undergraduate and graduate piano pedagogy, it was

the one method I wanted my students to get to know in-depth. To me, *The Music Tree* is a timeless classic, now updated and fresh. ▲

This article originally appeared in the May/June 2010 issue of Clavier Companion.

Author Response

Response to *The Music Tree* review

Editor's Note: Clavier Companion will invite the authors of each method series reviewed to respond to that review in the following issue. The response from the authors of The Music Tree is presented below.

We are grateful for the careful and accurate observations that Drs. Sara Ernst and Victoria Johnson have provided in this review. It is gratifying to see that so much of what the authors intended is evident to others, particularly the young and well-educated who will lead our profession into the future.

Frances Clark was never a dogmatist. She once gave a workshop entitled, "Quit Calling Me a Method!" She was trying to say that a 'method' lives in a person and cannot be captured in print. The books we often call a 'method' are really a *plan*, an ordering of experiences that can facilitate musical growth, understanding, and appreciation (or not). Frances often said that a good teacher could use any book or no book at all.

But, if the plan is a good plan, the music will motivate and students will experience success because they are ready for what they encounter. Each new experience will be reinforced sufficiently to internalize it. Students will return and music will become an important part of their lives.

The Music Tree is not for everybody, but in the world of iPods, Twitter, and Hulu, (not to mention many other excellent piano courses), it has stood the test of time surprisingly well. It never was among the largest selling piano courses, but it is one of the longest-lasting. Why is that? We think that it is because it appeals to a certain type of teacher. That type of teacher is described in a 1994 review of *The Music Tree* in *American Music Teacher* by T. J. Lymenstull.

"If indeed it is by doing that one learns best, it is by doing worthwhile activities with loving care and intensely focused attention that one learns to create art. Arguably, it is the main work of an excellent teacher not to impart information, or even to guide in the development of skills, but rather to help students find and develop their ability to bring a profound care and attention to their work. This new version of a respected classic not only shows that kind of care in its preparation, but also embodies the authors' acute awareness of the way in which that care can be nurtured in the student."

We would like to emphasize a point that the reviewers made—that is, *The Music Tree* is built around music with broad appeal integrated into a plan for complete musical growth. *The Music Tree* is frequently regarded as a gold standard in pedagogy. If this is true, we are delighted, but we want to point out that good pedagogy is not an academic matter. If pedagogy is good, students enjoy the process and become independent; they experience success and continue to study. *The Music Tree* is usually recognized for its pedagogy of reading—the classic interval approach. *Music Tree* students learn to read because they have a *way* to read. But, the interval approach is not confined to reading. It is also the basis of a natural pedagogy

of technical development—one in which new technical experiences are equally controlled. Students who are thus physically successful from the early stages learn to play with confidence and joy. And *The Music Tree* contains a child-centered pedagogy of music theory and creativity—one that succeeds because students use every concept they learn to make music.

One of the reviewers pointed out that *The Music Tree* has a reputation for moving slowly. We would like to point out that a method series does not move at all. **Students** move at whatever pace they can sustain. Each unit contains a spectrum of pieces that prepare, present, and reinforce concepts and skills within the overall learning plan. It is not necessary for a student to play every piece in every unit—certainly not to perfect every piece. The course is constructed so that, as long as a student masters the material, a teacher can choose the pieces to perform well and the pieces to omit. Each unit contains some that are easy and essential, and others that are more challenging. This is not accidental, but is designed to accommodate students who need more or who need less as they progress. We consider this a great strength of the series.

The other reason the course may appear to move slowly is that much is happening beneath the surface. Think of the adage that 'still waters run deep.' To appreciate what happens beneath the surface in *The Music Tree* requires analysis, imagination, and attention to detail. Teaching *The Music Tree* successfully requires willingness to study, plan, prepare, and engage in a bigger picture. And that brings us back to the point that *The Music Tree* is not for everybody. The Marines are looking for a few good men. *The Music Tree* is looking for a few good teachers—teachers on a mission, teachers who truly believe that all human beings have within themselves the capacity to create art. ▲

—Sam Holland and Louise Goss
Authors, *The Music Tree*

This article originally appeared in the July/August 2010 issue of Clavier Companion.

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Issues and Ideas:

Perspectives in Pedagogy

Rebecca Grooms Johnson, Editor

A survey of current methods: *Hal Leonard Student Piano Library*

Rebecca Grooms Johnson, Ph.D., NCTM, is a nationally respected leader in the field of piano pedagogy. She is an independent teacher and has taught extensively at the college and university level. Rebecca is active in the Music Teachers National Association, where she has held the offices of President of the Ohio Music Teachers Association and National Chair of MTNA's Pedagogy Committee. She currently serves as National Certification Chair, and three times a year she publishes a feature in American Music Teacher titled What's New in Pedagogy Research.

This issue's contributors:

Meg Gray, Ph.D., is an associate professor of music at Lincoln University of Missouri, where she teaches piano and music theory and serves as the university's representative to the National Association of Schools of Music. In addition to her college teaching, she maintains a small studio of pre-college students. Dr. Gray holds degrees in piano performance and pedagogy from Seattle Pacific University and the University of Oklahoma, where she studied with E.L. Lancaster, Jane Magrath, Edward Gates, and Digby Bell.

Paula Thomas-Lee, D.M.A., NCTM, teaches piano, piano pedagogy, music history, and elementary music methods at Reinhardt University in Waleska, Georgia. She has published several articles featuring piano instruction and music for the younger child, and has presented her research at various local, state, and national conferences.

This issue continues *Clavier Companion's* survey of piano methods.¹ Each article in this series will have three sections—an introductory synopsis by the Associate Editor, two articles written by teachers who have used the method extensively in their studios, and a response from the authors of the method surveyed in the previous issue. We hope that you find these articles to be an interesting and helpful overview of all the most popular methods currently on the market!

Hal Leonard Student Piano Library: Authors: Barbara Kreader, Fred Kern, Phillip Keveren, Mona Rejino, and Karen Harrington. Consultants: Tony Caramia, Bruce Berr, and Richard Rejino.

Publisher: Hal Leonard Corporation

Levels: 1-5

The core books throughout the series are: *Piano Lessons*, *Piano Theory Workbook*, *Piano Solos*, *Piano Technique*, and *Piano Practice Games* (through Level 4).

Alpha: Pre-reading experiences are found in the first half of the Level 1 books. Single notes are initially played with a braced finger 3. Black key and then white key songs are melodic with occasional tone clusters and attractive lyrics. Teacher accompaniments are provided throughout. Improvisation and composition opportunities begin in the pre-reading sections of the *Lessons* and *Practice Games* books.

Reading: While this series is somewhat eclectic, it is strongly skewed towards an intervallic/landmark approach to teaching reading. One of the strengths of its reading approach is the avoidance of set hand positions, in both the white key pre-reading materials and the introduction of the staff. This lessens the likelihood of associating a certain finger with a particular note, while still limiting Book 1 reading to the notes surrounding middle C. Book 2 continues shifting positions around middle C while

introducing songs using the C, D, and G pentascales.

Books 2 and 3 offer many opportunities for the left hand to play single notes, either in two-part accompaniment figures or as the melody. Book 4 begins to use the left hand in more chordal accompaniment figures.

Rhythm: Unit counting introduces the quarter, half, dotted half, and whole notes in Book 1, with a quick nod to metric counting in Book 2. Eighth notes and metric counting begin in Book 3, with dotted quarters/eighths, triplets, compound meter, and syncopation appearing in Book 4. Various sixteenth note groupings are explored in Book 5.

Lesson books: The pages are clean and uncluttered. New concepts are presented in blue boxes with minimal text, and in the early levels each new concept is usually followed by two reinforcing pieces. The final pages of Book 5 include a compendium of two-octave major and minor scales and cadences, and all diatonic chords in inversions and open position in five keys.

Beginning in Book 3, several major five-finger warm-ups and hand-over-hand arpeggios are introduced. Each key includes an opportunity to improvise in that five-finger position over a written teacher ostinato accompaniment. Major and relative minor scales are introduced in Book 4; each scale has a written teacher accompaniment. As new triads are introduced in a piece, they are followed by "My Own Song" activities in which the teacher plays the student's chord-based piece while the student improvises a new melody.

Improvisation continues in Book 5, using motives and sequences with major and minor scales accompanied by teacher ostinato duets. "Extra for Experts" offer suggestions for additional challenges, particularly in the area of transposition.

Repertoire: This series is unusual in the

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¹ The aim of this series is to review the core materials of piano methods that are either new or substantially changed since a similar series of articles appeared in *Piano Quarterly* in the 1980s. Please see the September/October 2009 issue of *Clavier Companion* for more details on this project. For reviews of methods that are older or have not been revised recently, we invite you to revisit the original *Piano Quarterly* series.

solo books' repertoire. Whereas most methods have increasing amounts of traditional classic repertoire in their solo books, the Hal Leonard *Solos* books are filled with works by the authors and composers such as Bill Boyd, Tony Caramia, Carol Klose, Pete Jutras, and Christos Tsitararos. These pedagogic composers are also well represented in the *Lessons* books with original pieces, arrangements of folk songs, and other genres, giving the overall series a contemporary feel. Arrangements of classic themes and original classic literature are included in the *Lessons* books.

Theory Workbook: These books are colorful and engaging. Games and activities such as mazes, crossword puzzles, filling in note names to complete stories, and answering clever riddles will encourage students to always remember this part of their assignment.

Technique: The overall theme here is musical fitness, drawing a parallel between the physical movements that must be learned for sports and the motions needed for good technique at the piano. Each group of etudes is preceded by short warm-ups that extract their technical essence. Warm-ups are generally four measures, and they are accompanied by instructions on how to play them correctly. Analogies sometimes describe the feeling of the movements.

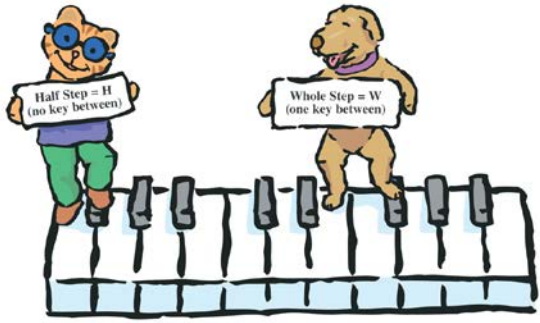
Practice Games: The Foreward states that these books "...present imaginative ways to introduce pieces in *Piano Lessons* by coordinating technique, concepts, and creativity with the actual music in the lessons book. These preparation activities help focus learning by 'playing with' each lesson piece aurally, visually, and physically." Activities include guided listening, technique, reading, improvising, and composing. These books are a good additional resource for the average learner and could be a useful addition to curricula for group lessons.

All-In-One Lessons: The five core books in this series constitute a plethora of pedagogic riches and potential frustrations. Each book contains excellent materials, but using all five requires the student and teacher to juggle many different books and assignments. The publisher has addressed this problem with the recent Level 1 *All-In-One Lessons* books A and B, which contain selected pieces and activities from across the core. One hopes that these compilations will be extended to additional levels.


Teacher's Guide: Books 1 and 2 have hard copy *Teacher's Guides* available. Each page of the *Lessons* book is reproduced at the top of the page, followed by a listing of new and review concepts and physical skills. Teaching suggestions are divided into **Prepare**—activities to use before reading the piece, **Practice**—steps to learning each piece, and **Perform**—suggestions for a finished musical performance of the piece.

Excerpt 1: Page 20 of Piano Theory Workbook, Level 3.


Half or Whole?




1. Write H (half step) or W (whole step) below each pair of notes.



2. Add a sharp or flat to the second note of each measure to create a half step.



3. Add a sharp or flat to the second note of each measure to create a whole step.



Use with Lesson Book 3, pp. 24

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Software and CDs: All of the *Lessons*, *Solos*, and *Technique* books have CD and MIDI accompaniments available. The CDs have two tracks per song—a slower practice track with the solo piano part and a performance track without the piano solo. Accompaniments are attractive and varied. The CDs include an option for downloading the MIDI version onto a USB drive for use with an electronic keyboard.

Omega: The series ends at an early-intermediate level with repertoire including a Mozart Allegro, the Bach Menuet in G Minor, and an arrangement of the Pachelbel Canon in D. ▲

Developing good technique and musicianship

by Meg Gray

The *Hal Leonard Student Piano Library* is a well-crafted and carefully planned method for teaching average-aged students to play the piano. This approach was designed by a committee of piano pedagogues and composers, and it was thoroughly tested in a number of independent piano studios. The notation is clean and clear, and the graphics are attractive. The pictures age appropriately as the books progress, so the higher-level materials do not look immature.

Pedagogic help

One of the wonderful advantages of this series is the great care that was taken in its design, and the careful explanations that are

provided for the teacher and the student. I believe this method would be very beneficial for less-experienced teachers with a strong desire to help their students develop good technique and musicianship. *Teacher's Guides* are available for levels 1 and 2 and include step-by-step activities from all the core books to prepare, practice, and perform each new concept. The Book 2 *Teacher's Guide* includes a lesson planning chart for the entire series.

The *Piano Practice Games* books are one of the best and most unique things about this series. In these books, children are prepared to learn new concepts introduced in the *Lessons* books by listening and doing rhythm activities, and by looking for and recognizing musical patterns and symbols in the music. These books also

Excerpt 2: "Water Lily" by Phillip Keveren from Piano Solos Book 1.

ful, with attractive graphics, and they contain lots of interesting, game-like activities to reinforce concepts. The instructions are clear, and they include ear-training activities as well as written work. Like the graphics in the rest of the series, the upper-level books are more mature, yet still lots of fun.

A variety of repertoire

The *Lessons* and *Solos* books contain a great variety of musical styles. Folk tunes from many cultures are included, and there are some lovely arrangements of American folk songs. Classical arrangements are introduced in Book 1 (such as the "Surprise Symphony"), and short classical pieces are introduced in *Lessons* Book 4. Ragtime, rock, blues and other popular styles are also well-represented. The teacher accompaniments are beautifully written, although I wish more were included in Levels 2 and 3. (There are CD/MIDI accompaniments for everything, but not teacher accompaniments.)

Right from the beginning

I particularly like and regularly use the first books of this series. Great care is taken to make playing the piano both feel and sound good for the student from the very beginning, and the sequencing of reading and technical concepts progresses very smoothly in the first level of the *Lessons* and *Solos* books.

contain analysis and writing activities. Reviewed concepts are reinforced by improvising and playing variations on previously learned pieces. Improvisations are carefully structured—even teachers who have not done much improvising will be able to successfully assist their students in the activities. The *Piano Practice Games* books work very well as activity books in a group class, and individual students who need more reinforcement of concepts, or who particularly enjoy doing music analysis and creative projects, will benefit from using them.

applied in the *Lessons* and *Solos* book pieces that the student is playing.

The *Theory Workbooks* are definitely worthy of mention. These books are very color-

Excerpt 3: "Mister Machine" by Bill Boyd from Piano Solos Book 1.

Musical fitness

The *Technique* books are another "best thing" about this series. They are divided into units, with each one emphasizing four to six technical aspects of playing the piano. At the beginning of each unit is a musical fitness plan consisting of a checklist of the old and new technical concepts to be used and two brief warm-ups introducing a new physical motion. Each warm-up includes a two- or three-sentence explanation relating it to a common physical activity. For example, balancing the weight of your arm behind each finger for beautiful tone is compared to balancing your body behind each foot as you walk across a rope bridge. Following the warm-ups are two pieces, each one developing the motion being learned. The physical movements are

Students are introduced to a variety of sounds from the very beginning of Book 1; the contrast between the lovely “Water Lily” (see Excerpt 2) and the lively, funny “Mister Machine” (see Excerpt 3) immediately gets students hooked into listening for wonderful musical sounds. Technically, they begin with using the stronger, middle part of the hand, and the introduction of the use of the thumb is delayed until students have become comfortable playing and reading off-staff notation. I regularly use the wonderful teacher/parent accompaniments that are provided for each lesson and solo book piece, and my students use the CD accompaniments at home.

Personal adaption

As with many good things in life, piano teaching is a very individualistic art. I believe that the best teachers can work successfully from any excellent series; however, personal preference also plays a role. There are several reasons why I sometimes move students to other piano methods

after the first level of the *Hal Leonard Student Piano Library*:

- Depending upon how a teacher uses this method and on a student’s physical coordination, this series becomes physically challenging rather quickly after Book 1. For the student with average physical coordination and reading skills, I prefer an approach that moves more gradually during the second and third year of study. When using *only* the *Lessons* and *Solos* books of Level 2 and up, the introduction of physical concepts such as hands together playing is too challenging. I prefer to use supplementary repertoire (for example, music by Lynn Freeman Olson, Melody Bober, and Robert Vandall) to challenge my students. However, I think that teachers can solve this issue if they also use the *Technique* and *Piano Practice Games* books, as this greatly slows down the pacing of new concepts and physical demands.

- From the very beginning, I like for my students to be introduced to a variety of

composers, rather than simply working from a single series.

- I sometimes move away from this series after Level 1 simply from personal musical taste. The authors chose and wrote very high-quality music, and they included a great variety of musical styles. However, I’m not a huge fan of boogie or blues, and there are lots of pieces in those genres in the later books of this series (all very excellently written, just not a sound I prefer). There are many students and teachers who love that sound, and I think they would be very attracted to this method.

The *Hal Leonard Student Piano Library* is an excellent series, carefully designed and tested to produce musically literate pianists who are comfortable playing the piano, reading music, and creating music of their own. The *Teacher’s Guides* provide wonderful resources and structure for the less-experienced teacher, and there are many supplementary materials available including CDs, MIDI disks, flashcards, note-spellers, and supplementary music. ▲

Accessible and musically stimulating

by Paula Thomas-Lee

As a pedagogy professor it has always been important for me to stay abreast of current piano methods. As a private piano teacher, my goal is to nurture, excite, and engage children in the piano studio setting, and the right piano method can help make this happen. Children naturally love music: they enjoy learning new concepts, displaying their newly acquired skills to friends and family, creating musical compositions, and participating in the “music making” process. My goal is to use a piano method that is paced appropriately for my learner, contains a variety of pieces which are both accessible and musically stimulating, and provides ample opportunity for creativity at the piano. The *Hal Leonard Student Piano Library* contains these critical elements needed to successfully introduce a student to the fundamentals of piano playing.

Concepts of reading

The pace of teaching reading is consistent and initially stresses the intervallic approach. Level 1 includes a variety of pre-staff reading activities that give the child immediate “music making” experiences. Once the student begins staff reading, color-coded lines are provided for faster note recognition. This works well for younger students who are beginning music and language readers, still acclimating to reading from left to right. In teaching music reading, we also expect young students to read up and down, and to recognize note names and rhythmic values. This is so much for the young mind to decipher, and colored staff lines greatly assist in this decoding process! Frequent hand position changes ensure stronger note/intervallic reading and prevent students from falling into the pattern of reading only finger numbers because they have spent too much time in one hand position.

This method includes a variety of intervallic reading activities, and students play in a number of different keys (similar to a multi-key approach). By Level 3, students have played pieces using pen-

Excerpt 4: “The Macaroni Cha-Cha” by Phillip Keveren from Piano Solos Book 2.

The Macaroni Cha-Cha

Phillip Keveren

With gusto

We love chees-y mac-a-ro-ni, We real-ly

LOVE that chees-y mac-a-ro-ni. (Cha-cha-cha.) Well,

Accompaniment (Student plays one octave higher than written.)

With gusto (♩ = 190)

Clear with Lesson Book 2, pp. 11

6

tascale positions in C major, G major, F major, E minor, D minor, and A minor.

Interesting supplementary pieces

The *Solos* books include a variety of supplementary pieces that may be used as reward pieces or for additional reading reinforcement opportunities. The pieces are generally challenging and quite fun for students. Repertoire falls into a variety of categories, including folk tunes, classical (original and arrangements), pedagogical compositions, and multi-cultural style pieces including Creole, Calypso, Irish, Latino, etc. The *Macaroni Cha-Cha* (see Excerpt 4) is especially creative and fun. The lyrics are funny and it has a nice “cha-cha” flair, which students really enjoy playing!

Students are also exposed to many different playing styles. For example, students play loud chord clusters at the end of *Those Creepy Crawly Things on the Cellar Floor* (see Excerpt 5) that represent the “bugs” getting squished! Early in the series, students also experiment with pedal usage, playing in extreme ranges on the piano, and a variety of articulations. Younger students often do not have the opportunity to experience these playing styles early in their piano study, making these pieces incredibly motivating!

Great music making experiences

Regardless of level, piano students enjoy the “music making” experience. This series includes a variety of opportunities for young students to experience this from the very beginning. The *Lessons* and *Solos* books include many teacher duets to play along with the student, and correlating CDs provide stimulating and fun instrumental accompaniments. All of the pieces on the CDs include practice and performance tempi. There are also MIDI disks for each level which feature fully orchestrated accompaniments that may be used with electronic pianos or other MIDI instruments equipped with a compatible disk drive.

The *Piano Technique* books include a variety of exercises and additional pieces that stress the required physiological technique/movements for accurate and efficient playing. The exercises and technical explanations correlate with needed skills in both the *Lessons* and *Solos* books.

Enhancing activities

The *Theory Workbook* and *Piano Practice Games* books enhance the concepts found in the *Lessons* books through written activities and music games. The *Theory Workbooks* reinforce note names, rhythmic values, music terminology, and ear training activities. The *Piano Practice Games* books include a variety of games, puzzles, and flash cards.

My favorite elements in these books are the improvisation and composition activities. Students and teachers alike generally shy away from the idea of improvising and composing in the lesson. The *Piano Practice Games* books limit these activities within specific parameters designed to nurture the student’s developing creativity. For example, a student may be asked to create a right-hand melody using the C pentascale position or a specified rhythm. Students are set up for success because they are given guidelines that will lead to improvisations and compositions that are fun to create and sound great!

Additional suggestions

The *Teacher’s Guides* include teaching suggestions for each piece that are divided into these categories: **Prepare** introduces the coordination, pitch reading, and rhythm of each piece; **Practice** includes ideas such as blocking, comparing phrases and intervals; and **Perform** gives suggestions on appropriate performance tempi, mood, and playing style. These guides also include a lesson plan-

Excerpt 5: “Those Creepy Crawly Things on the Cellar Floor” (page 2) by Carol Klose from *Piano Solos Book 2*.

The image shows a musical score for piano, divided into three systems. Above the first system is a blue illustration of a cellar floor with four cartoon bugs: a yellow fly, a purple beetle, a red ladybug, and a green caterpillar. The score is in G major and 2/4 time. System 1 (measures 7-9) shows a bass line with notes G2, A2, B2, C3, D3, E3, F3, G3. System 2 (measures 10-12) continues the bass line with notes G3, A3, B3, C4, D4, E4, F4, G4. System 3 (measures 13-15) features a treble line with notes G4, A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, F5, G5 and a bass line with notes G3, A3, B3, C4, D4, E4, F4, G4. Annotations include 'Very high chord cluster, slap with R.H. palm.' above measure 13, 'Eek!' above measure 14, 'f' above measure 15, 'Splat!' above measure 15, and 'Very low chord cluster, slap with L.H. palm.' below measure 15. Dynamics include *p* and *f*.

ning chart, which offers a “big picture” scheme of coordinating all the books and materials in this series.

A few concerns

The *Hal Leonard Student Piano Library* is an excellent piano method for a variety of young learners. The repertoire is well graded from level to level, includes a wide array of musical styles and genres, and exposes beginning piano students to various playing practices. Although the pacing of this method is consistent throughout the five levels, it may move too quickly for some young students. Using both the *Lessons* and *Solos* books may provide enough extra supplementary material for additional reinforcement of music concepts.

There are, however, children in my studio who would not be successful with this series, because they need a method which progresses more slowly. If I wanted to use this series with *all* my beginners, for some students it would require moving much more slowly while supplementing more repertoire than is available in just the *Lessons* and *Solos* books.

My only other concern regarding this series involves the number of books in each level and the overall cost required to purchase them. For my students to have all the core books in Level I, they have to purchase five books—*Piano Lessons*, *Piano Solos*, *Piano Practice Games*, *Piano Theory*, and *Piano Technique*. The approximate cost for all these books is \$41.00, which seems pretty expensive. If I had to eliminate one or more books for the student, I suppose I would not require the *Piano Technique* book and supplement with my own technique exercises. It would also be nice if the *Piano Practice Games* and *Piano Theory* were combined into one book for greater cost efficiency.

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STUDENT PIANO LIBRARY

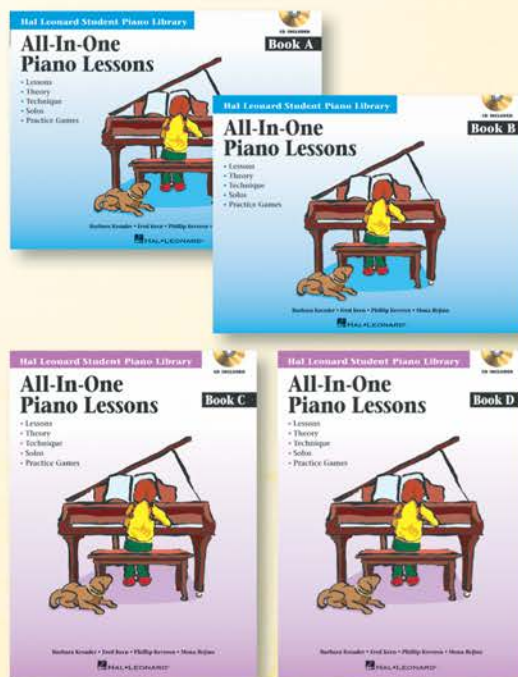
Develop Musicianship Skills that Last a Lifetime!



- ◆ **Clear and concise** presentation of concepts on an uncluttered page keeps the focus where it should be – on the music.
- ◆ **Thorough pedagogy** develops reading, rhythm, technique and theory skills with a perfectly sequenced approach that gets results.
- ◆ **Improvisation** threaded throughout all levels of the method encourage real-world musicianship by having students play and improvise in many styles.
- ◆ The **“best ever”** teacher/CD accompaniments, arranged by the world-class musician **Phillip Keveren**.

NOW AVAILABLE!

All-In-One Piano Lessons Books A, B, C and D combine selected pages from the original Piano Lessons, Technique, Solos, Theory Workbook, and Practice Games into one easy-to-manage book. A perfect choice for beginning group or private instruction, the book/CD offers students a variety of styles and moods, and includes the “best ever” teacher accompaniments. The audio CDs are playable on any CD player. For Windows and Mac computer users, the CD is enhanced so you can also access MIDI files for each song. Upon completion of All-In-One Piano Lessons Books A and B, students will be ready to continue into All-In-One Piano Lessons Book C, followed by Book D. Upon completion of Book D, students are ready for Book 3.



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Flexible, creative instruction

In general, I think the *Hal Leonard Student Piano Library* offers wonderful instruction for the beginning piano student. As a teacher, my personal goal is to locate the piano method which best fits my students' needs and learning styles. The *Hal Leonard Student Piano Library* includes many different types of music activities for all learning styles, contains a variety of pieces which are both accessible and

musically stimulating, and provides many opportunities for creative exploration at the piano. It is a wonderful all-inclusive resource that all piano teachers should survey! ▲

This article originally appeared in the July/August 2010 issue of Clavier Companion.

Author Response

Response to the *Hal Leonard Student Piano Library* review

Editor's Note: Clavier Companion will invite the authors of each method series reviewed to respond to that review in the following issue. The response from the authors of the Hal Leonard Student Piano Library is presented below.

Fred Kern, Mona Rejino, Phillip Keveren and I thank Drs. Rebecca Grooms Johnson, Meg Gray, and Paula-Thomas Lee for their thorough, honest and fair-minded review of the *Hal Leonard Student Piano Library*. In our Northwestern days Frances Larimer required all her pedagogy students (that included Fred Kern and me) to make a written, comprehensive review of all existing methods. If only we had had these first-rate examinations and evaluations of available teaching materials, how much easier our job would have been. Hats off to *Clavier Companion* for this outstanding series of reviews.

Richard Chronister once said, "Creative teaching is finding ways to help students teach themselves something they want to learn." Every student cares about the music first. As authors, we did, too. We let the teaching concepts flow naturally from the music in a way that approaches an individual student's learning style, whether it is primarily aural, visual, physical, or intuitive. The core *Lessons, Games, Theory, Notespeller, Solos*, and *Technique Books*, along with the orchestral accompaniments on CD/disk, work together to help students master music in ways that go beyond reading and playing.

Students become whole musicians when they can do it all: listen, read, play, improvise and compose. Problems develop when one sensory way of learning gets ahead of another. With the help of the *Teacher's Guide*, which includes sample step-by-step activities and lesson plans, teachers can combine all or some of the books to adjust the pace of the method to match each student's individual need for repetition and reinforcement. They can also choose those activities that tap into and strengthen each child's learning style.

For example, visual learners might not use the *Notespeller*, because they learn note names and intervals easily, but might use the orchestral accompaniments as a way to develop their listening skills and musicality. Aural learners might do just the opposite. Children with weak physical ability might rely heavily on the *Technique* books, which allow them first to practice the specific body motion they need to play the pieces in the *Lessons* books. Children with strong intuitive aptitude enjoy the *Games* books, which "play with" each lesson piece, using improvising, composing, analyzing, and writing activities. On the other hand, children without strong creative proficiency might need the *Games* to round out their musicianship.

The *All-In-One Book A* and *Book B* make it easier to coordinate all these ways of learning. Each consists of carefully selected pages from the core books. We are happy to report that the books for *All-In-One Level 2* are currently in progress.

We believe the 21st-century student needs to be proficient in all styles of music. Each *Lessons* book presents a healthy mix of folk, classical, jazz, blues, and multi-cultural music. The *Solos* books were designed to give students more music from their favorite composers in the *Hal Leonard Student Piano Library*. They were not intended as the only solos to supplement the *Lessons* books. Teachers will find every possible style of music in the supplementary *Classical, Popular, Broadway, Hymns, Patriotic, Christmas, Hanukkah*, and *Ensemble* books, which are carefully arranged to fit each level in the *Hal Leonard Student Piano Library*.

A nationwide test market of more than 1,000 students and teachers helped us author the *Hal Leonard Student Piano Library*. Many great ideas, such as the blue line that identifies the landmark notes F, C and G, came from teachers. Through the years, we have continued to listen to teachers and students and have adjusted material according to their suggestions. As the first method to include CD/disk accompaniments with each piece, we eagerly sought student and teacher response to this innovation. They suggested we slow some of the tempos of the orchestral accompaniments and add disk accompaniments to the *Solos* books. We did. Later, we made a complete revision of *Lessons* book 3 adding more repertoire for each concept and simplifying the coordination between the hands. In response to many teachers' requests for more improvisations, we recently began our "Basic Skills" series of *Scales, Patterns, and Improvs.*

No student exists who fits a page-by-page teaching of any method. We were most heartened to hear that both Meg Gray and Paula Thomas-Lee combine the *Hal Leonard Student Piano Library* with materials from other fine methods. It means they are paying attention to the needs of their students and understand what Louise Goss and Sam Holland so eloquently stated in their recent author response: ". . . a 'method' lives in a person and cannot be captured in print." To quote Artur Schnabel: "The role of the teacher is to open doors, not push students through them." We hope the *Hal Leonard Student Piano Library* gives teachers the materials they need to keep that door open for a lifetime. ▲

-Barbara Kreader

Co-author, *Hal Leonard Student Piano Library*

This article originally appeared in the September/October 2010 issue of Clavier Companion.

Issues and Ideas: Perspectives in Pedagogy

Rebecca Grooms Johnson, Editor



A survey of current methods: *Piano Town*

This issue continues *Clavier Companion's* survey of piano methods.¹ Each article in this series has three sections—an introductory synopsis by the Associate Editor, two articles written by teachers who have used the method extensively in their studios, and a response from the authors of the method surveyed in the previous issue. We hope that you find these articles to be an interesting and helpful overview of all the most popular methods currently on the market!

Piano Town: by Keith Snell and Diane Hidy

Publisher: Kjos, Neil A. Kjos Music Company - Distributor

Levels: Primer, Levels 1-4

The core books throughout all levels are: *Lessons, Theory, Technique, and Performance.*

Alpha: Although the introduction indicates that *Piano Town* is appropriate for ages six and above, the Primer *Lessons* book opens with two pages of text and a few graphics covering body position at the piano, hand position, groups of black keys, keyboard direction, and finger numbers. This is followed by four black-key and ten white-key pre-reading songs utilizing the Middle C and C major five-finger positions. On-staff reading initially reverts to Middle C position with an emphasis on guidepost notes treble G, Middle C, and bass F. The final half of the Primer level introduces intervals through a fifth, eighth notes, root-position triads, *staccato*, *legato*, sharps, and flats. Teacher duets are only present in the Primer level.

Reading: This fast-paced introduction to reading uses the Middle C and five-finger position approaches. New notes are initially presented with the name printed in the note head. Early in Level 1, the F major and G major key signatures are introduced within the context of the Middle C position. Cadence I, IV, and V⁷ chords are

introduced in Level 2 and used to incorporate a multi-key approach throughout the rest of the series. Opportunities for transposition are consistently presented.

Rhythm: Early introductions use both nominative (quarter, quarter, half-note) and unit (1, 1, 1-2) approaches. Time signatures are briefly introduced with the quarter note replacing the bottom number. The pace of introducing new rhythms slows considerably after the Primer level, with the introduction of dotted quarter/eighths in Level 1; compound meter in Level 2; triplets in Level 3; and sixteenths, dotted eighths, and syncopation in Level 4.

Lessons: One of the strengths of this series is the presence of questions with each piece. These questions encourage examining the piece before playing it, and they highlight measures or areas needing extra technical or cognitive attention. Colored boxes at the top outer corner of the page list the new concept presented in each piece. Graphics throughout the series are colorful and mature appropriately with the student; however, for my taste, the human figures are stiff and unappealing.

Repertoire: The early use of the Middle C position permits lyric songs from the beginning. This series strongly emphasizes traditional-sounding pedagogic pieces, arrangements of folk songs, and classical literature with short composer biographies. The pieces in the *Performance* and *Technic* books are correlated to the *Lessons* pieces by concept, and many also match the theme of the corresponding *Lessons* piece.

Theory: These books provide drills for the concepts presented in the *Lessons* books. All levels are printed in black and white with no graphics. There are no puzzles, games, or creative activities; however, some melodies for transposition and harmonization are included. Keys and

Rebecca Grooms Johnson, Ph.D., NCTM, is a nationally respected leader in the field of piano pedagogy. She is an independent teacher and has taught extensively at the college and university level. Rebecca is active in the Music Teachers National Association, where she has held the offices of President of the Ohio Music Teachers Association and National Chair of MTNA's Pedagogy Committee. She currently serves as National Certification Chair, and three times a year she publishes a feature in American Music Teacher titled What's New in Pedagogy Research.

This issue's contributors:

Kim Bakkum holds performance degrees from Montana State and Western Michigan, and has done extensive study in opera and art song in Graz and Vienna, Austria. She is an active independent teacher and freelance collaborative pianist in the Akron-Cleveland, Ohio area. Her most recent collaborations include traveling with the professional choir, Singers Company, to competitions in Spain, Italy, and Austria, where they have concertized for the past four years.

Sheila Vail holds a B.M. and M.M. from the Peabody Conservatory of Music. She is the owner of Indian Springs Academy of Music in West Chester, Ohio, where she serves as director for the Academy and maintains a private studio of 25 students. In addition, Sheila is a member of the Royal College of Examiners, is a member of the Steering Committee for the National Music Certificate Program, and is an active clinician for the National Music Certificate Program and the Fredrick Harris Music Company. She has published in Clavier Companion, American Music Teacher, and the OMTA News. She is the State Student Merit Certificate Program chair for the Ohio MTA.

¹ The aim of this series is to review the core materials of piano methods that are either new or substantially changed since a similar series of articles appeared in *Piano Quarterly* in the 1980s. Please see the September/October 2009 issue of *Clavier Companion* for more details on this project. For reviews of methods that are older or have not been revised recently, we invite you to revisit the original *Piano Quarterly* series.

cadences in the *Lessons* and *Performance* books reach G \flat and B major, and A, D, and G minor. The circle of fifths and all major and minor key signatures are taught in the *Theory* books.

Technique: As printed on the back cover of each book: “*Technic* provides page-by-page support for the technical skills introduced in *Lessons*. Each new exercise isolates one element of piano technic, giving the student a chance to focus on each specific skill.” Neither the *Lessons* nor the *Technic* books include suggestions for how to achieve a healthy physical approach to playing the instrument.

Teacher’s Guide: No teacher’s guides are available.

Software and CDs: CDs and MIDI disks are available for Primer

and Levels 1 and 2 *Lessons*, *Technic*, and *Performance* books. Most of the songs on the CDs have two tracks—one at a practice tempo with the piano part, and one at a performance tempo without the solo. Accompaniments are attractive and often surprisingly jazzy in light of the general omission of that genre in the student pieces.

Omega: The series ends at an early to mid-intermediate level with Burgmüller’s *Arabesque* and Beethoven’s *Sonatina in G*. Promotional literature from the publisher indicates that students will be ready to begin Level 3 of Keith Snell’s *Piano Repertoire Series* at the conclusion of this series. ▲

Life got easier!

by Kim Bakkum

Writing this article inspired me to revisit and examine my reasons for using *Piano Town*. I am embarrassed to admit that when I started teaching, I didn’t use a method. (I hope my pedagogy teacher, Dennis Alexander, forgives me!) You can imagine the frustration, disorganization, and student displeasure that occurred during those lessons. Fortunately, a dear colleague gently guided me into the world of piano methods. Both alarmed and relieved by the complete ease of teaching the correlated and sequenced concepts provided by a method, I remember feeling a bit guilty receiving a paycheck for simply following directions. Since then, my philosophy has evolved, and today I evaluate the content of methods to see which ones will match the learning styles of my students and provide a musical blueprint of concepts for their early development.

Lighthearted graphics

Students adore the colorful gem tones of *Piano Town*’s covers, and they find the interior artwork clever and lighthearted. “The Fly and The Bumblebee” reflects the humor that is often welcome in a lesson! I appreciate the visual clarity of the notation, spacing of staves, and especially the lean editing. These thoughtful details allow the score to be the focus and leave room for the teacher’s comments and, of course, the sticker.

Technical instructions

Technique is the hand and mind’s recognition of patterns, but patterns alone do not build good technique. The lack of instructions in the *Technic* books is initially a little nerve-wracking—especially for a novice teacher whose personal technical philosophies have not yet benefitted from time and experience. Seasoned teachers will find this approach liberating, as they can use their own technical language with the students.

One of my favorite *Technic* books is Level 2; I love the idea of “clumping” the scale, as depicted by the Superpower characters. This provides a fresh physical perspective and is a great opportunity to study the thumb’s position (see Excerpt 1). I also appreciate the contrary motion five-finger patterns, which encourage students’ ears to accept mild dissonances and help strengthen the outer part of the hand.

Levels 3 and 4 reinforce a multitude of keys with concise sequencing and prepare the students’ ears and hands for the repertoire. I applaud the presentation of chords and inversions throughout this method, and I often use this with students working in other methods. A variety of articulations and ranges are explored,

Excerpt 1: “Superpowers” from *Technic Level 2*.

Use with *Lessons*, page 16 and 17.

and there is significant reinforcement of melodic shape reading. I also use Lynn Freeman Olson’s *Sunbird* and *Toccata Brillante* by Dennis Alexander as supplementary pieces to reinforce chord inversions.

The folk song tradition

The pace of *Piano Town* is quick and efficient. Repertoire sails along through a unique and effective combination of folk songs and standard classical pieces. It is alarming that children today have little, if any, knowledge of the folk song tradition. I recently asked one of my third grade students if she had sung, “Skip to my Lou” in her music class at school. She replied, “No Ms. Bakkum, we don’t sing in music class—I think I heard that song on the Barney TV show!” Since piano teachers usually promote timeless composers and musical traditions, I appreciate the use of catchy melodies from the folk tradition. Good melodies are hard to forget, and students quickly delight in their familiarity.

Early eighths

Frankly, I was a bit surprised at the introduction of eighth notes in the Primer *Lessons* book. I really had to pause and think, is this sound? Can my students handle this kind of jump in rhythmic understanding so early? I found that they can. All methods’ rhythmic concepts need continual review from every possible perspective. I supplement rhythmic activities with flashcards, *Rhythm Now* by Clark and Perdue, Snell’s *Beginning Piano Technic*, and lots of

Excerpt 2: “The Waterwheel,” by Johann Caspar Fischer, from *Lessons Book 4*.

The Waterwheel

Key of ___ Major

Block the chords, then play as written.

Moderato

Sixteenth rest

mf 1 e & a 2 e & a 3 e & a

p *cresc.*

f *p*

Johann Caspar Fischer (1665-1746), a German composer, worked for the royal court in Baden.

writing exercises. The highlight of Level 4 is the section on sixteenth notes; I would love to have this kind of presentation of eighth notes in Level 1. The star selection for students is Johann Caspar Fischer’s *The Waterwheel* (see Excerpt 2).

Preparation is key

Snell and Hidy take great care sequencing the preparation for a key and its corresponding piece. Each is thoughtfully presented with a scale or five-finger pattern, chordal outlines, and miniature etude-like examples that prepare for the repertoire. Two pieces generally follow—one is written in a homophonic texture and the other is often arpeggiated or polyphonic. Teachers and students alike will appreciate the variety.

Level 3 explores the minor side of music using the same preparatory format as Level 2. Because of its succinct and methodical explanation of fingering, I often use the page presenting chromatic scales with high school students.

Piano Town explores a variety of keys and generally focuses on

Encouraging musicianship and pianism

by Sheila Vail

I first became aware of *Piano Town* when I saw Keith Snell give a presentation at an MTNA conference. I was impressed with the thought and experience he and co-author Diane Hidy put into their new creation, and I have used it very successfully with students between the ages of five and twelve. The series does an excellent job of instructing, building skills, and providing an interesting collection of teaching repertoire that includes traditional literature and pieces composed by the authors. The artwork and lyrics on each page reflect multi-cultural family activities, animals, dinosaurs (kids LOVE dinosaurs!), sports, and many fun activities that are a part of their lives. Classical literature is introduced in Level 1 and is used almost exclusively in Levels 3 and 4. A first-term learner progresses quickly to Haydn German Dances and

traditional classical repertoire. I often supplement these studies with pieces in the same key but with a more contemporary, rhythmic flair, such as Mike Springer’s *Friday Night Café*. I spend less time on pieces in four or more sharps or flats, as there are limited supplementary materials in these keys.

Tips for theory

I keep my students one theory book *ahead* of the current level they are working in to assure each concept has been presented prior to playing it, and completion of the theory book means a trip to the ever-famous prize box. Although new concepts are always introduced during the lesson, it is worth noting that students are able to forge ahead on their own in this method—a positive testament to the clarity of the authors’ instructions. I recommend supplementing note reading with the Level 1 *Notespeller*. Level 4’s “Triads of Major Scales” can be used to augment students’ physical warm-ups—students play these in a variety of keys, saying the chord qualities aloud as they play. This seems to help them understand the archaic numerical language of the Romans! I also use Keith Snell’s *Fundamentals of Piano Theory* collection, which provides greater depth in the study of theory.

Adding spice

Using MIDI disks and CDs can spice up the weekly lesson routine. Students love the challenge of playing along with the accompaniments, and it is a wonderful link to their technological world. I use the CDs to evaluate how well students visually track the music and to promote the ability to look ahead while performing the current measure.

Playing with fluency

Piano Town is a well-organized, efficient, fast-paced method that beautifully prepares students to play in a variety of keys with physical and theoretical fluency. Having used this method for several years, I find it works most effectively with a later beginner. This method invites teachers to work their technical and creative magic via the tradition of folk songs and classic repertoire. Although each facet of a method is critical to a student’s development, they cannot stand alone; as Daniel Barenboim said, “Music is an integration of all the elements.”² ▲

² Barenboim, D. (2007). *Barenboim on Beethoven: Masterclasses Vol 1*. Allan Miller, director. EMI Classics.

Excerpt 3: "The Sunset" from Lessons Primer Level.

Concepts and technical skills are integrated perfectly into the repertoire, and the emphasis on pattern awareness is excellent. There are also plenty of supplementary theory and repertoire materials from Keith Snell's *Fundamentals of Music Theory* and *Piano Repertoire Series* (Kjos).

Each concept and skill is printed next to the title of each piece in the Table of Contents. This helps me find similar repertoire for those students who need lots of "disposable" pieces to play through as well as additional pieces for students needing to strengthen a particular skill at their present level. It is also a helpful guide for filling in a transfer student's missing skills.

In the beginning

The course begins with rhythm—the underpinning of all good performance skill. The first fifteen pages teach fundamental concepts and students play in both Middle C and C Major positions. Visual presentations are simple and clean: guideposts and note labeling are good aids, and a small keyboard is placed close to the staff for easy association. In the Primer level and Level 1, students appreciate the note names printed inside the notes; I appreciate that they are only on the first few notes and only at their introduction! Judicious fingerings are given, but not included in repetitive passages.

All intervals up to the fifth are presented simultaneously so the broader concept can be understood immediately, and they are reinforced in all four books. By the end of the Primer level, students are playing in two keys at different dynamic levels, and reading eighth notes and accidentals. They are learning and using the seeds of a harmonic approach and have even been introduced to Beethoven. Often the reminders written on the page are the same things I would normally write to clarify something—it is almost eerie!

Good pacing and excellent leveling make for successful progress when all four core books are used together. Students are consistently motivated to move forward because they are developing good technical and reading skills, and the music encourages their imagination. Once students are in Level 1, they can easily play music from repertoire anthologies such as the *Celebration Series* or Keith Snell's *Piano Repertoire Series*.

Emphasizing the classics

Piano Town quickly introduces students to the classical repertoire. Etudes are included at all levels and the first Sonata is in Level 2. Throughout the series there are appropriate works by

Biehl, Gurlitt, Streabog, etc. Repertoire in Level 4 includes the Telemann *Rigaudon*, Bach Minuet in G and Musette in D, Beethoven Sonata in G, Lynes Sonata, Schumann *Wild Horseman*, and Burgmüller *Arabesque*.

Students are also exposed to a variety of styles including rhythmic, lyrical, jazzy, and simply playful. Although an occasional work may sound a bit "pedestrian" to my ears, my students are quick to remind me that, to their ears, it's great! One piece students always love is *Pogo Stick* (see Excerpt 4). Its energy and articulations are appealing and can be easily and securely memorized for a recital.

Excerpt 4: "Pogo Stick" from Performance Level 1.

An emphasis on patterns

Good playing techniques are easy to teach in this series because of good, sequential, and appropriate patterning in each level. The patterns in the *Technic* books include drills that can be used to strengthen finger 5, contrapuntal skills, chord formation and, of course, scales (including chromatic) and cadences.

Simple patterning serves as a good "chalkboard" to develop firm finger control and a sense of pulse. Plenty of finger patterns, blocked and broken chords, and blocked scales help develop a secure knowledge of keyboard figures, which makes it easier to play in multiple keys. When students clearly identify a pattern or figure, they recognize it as such in their repertoire; this makes introducing new pieces easier and enhances memory skills. The *Theory* and *Technic* books develop harmonic knowledge while the parallel work in *Lessons* and *Performance* develop contrapuntal playing skills.

My students particularly enjoy contrary motion exercises and pieces; they are good finger workouts and are fun to play. I appreciate the inclusion of exercises that repeat patterns up or down an octave—these are great preparations for Hanon Exercises. Studies include etudes by Czerny, Gurlitt, Beyer, LeCouppey, and others. Level 4 *Technic* includes some sustained finger exercises, broken chord drills, finger pattern exercises, and concludes with scales and cadences in all major and minor keys.

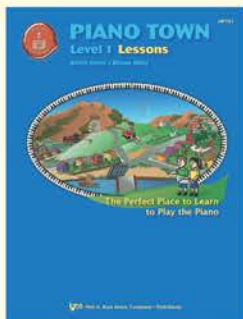
I often use additional books such as *A Dozen a Day* by Burnam or *Finger Power* by Schaum for building facility; but for some of my students in this series, these are unnecessary. Although the repertoire and skills are very well integrated, I sometimes find it effective to work through the *Theory* and *Technic* books a week or two ahead of the related pages in the *Lessons* and *Performance* books to pre-teach a concept or skill.

From Keith Snell & Diane Hidy

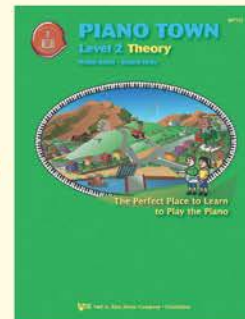
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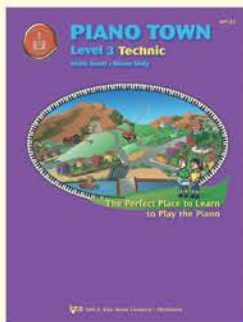
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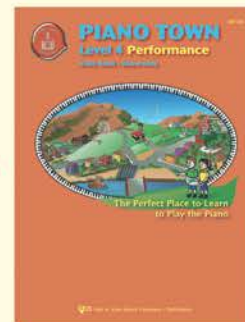
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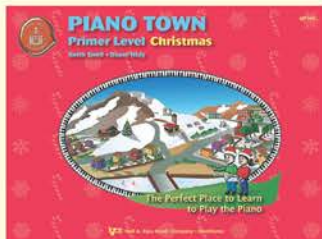
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Sixteenths made easy

One of my favorite developmental moments is the introduction of sixteenth notes—it is one of the very best introductions I have used. It begins with a simple five-finger exercise and moves to a short piece with a repeating LH fifth that plays steadily under the RH sixteenth notes in a five-finger pattern (see Excerpt 5). Supported by clear visualization and a Czerny etude in the *Performance* book, the concept is established successfully. It works every time!

Suggestions for improvement

Although my students all emerge from the series as better pianists, I have found on occasion that a younger student might become frustrated if there are too many physical skills to deal with simultaneously, such as combined articulations, octave shifting, or balance control. My “Wish List” for improving the series is all rather topical, such as presenting new information in different colors or fonts to further define the page. In the *Theory* books I would love to see more written exercises for reinforcement, although there is plenty of published material outside the series, especially Keith Snell’s *Fundamentals of Music Theory* series. His *Repertoire* anthologies are also the perfect support for added pieces throughout the series! I might also suggest a uniform use of the inside covers for quick student reference: terms, content recap, a checklist for the pieces learned, etc.

Pedagogic attention

I find this series to be pedagogically sound, pianistically strong, and created with respect for the learning perspective of the student. Segues are smooth, but at times can require a bit more “hands on” time in lessons. The authors understand what will be absorbed by simple comprehension and what will require much repetition to secure. They respect the size of the hand that will be exploring the book, what is most important for students to look at on the page, and how to challenge appropriately. Patterning and pentascales—the cornerstones of all good things at the primary level—are integral in all early stages. The authors include markings that most all of us put on the page: note names for new notes (limited to their initial appearance), circled key signatures and dynamic markings, etc. They sequence motivational and classical repertoire effectively by positioning pieces in a manner that offsets the difficulty factor.

I appreciate the attention given to reviewing concepts. For example, the Middle C position is reviewed at the beginning of Level 1, but the repetition is somewhat hidden by the addition of contrasting articulations and dynamics. The authors have also provided a good balance between left hand contrapuntal and chordal textures so stu-

Excerpt 5: “Copper” and “Silver” from Lessons Level 4.

Sixteenth Notes

Copper

Key of $\text{F}\sharp$ Major

Four sixteenth notes = \bullet

mf 1 e & a 2 e & a

Silver

Key of $\text{F}\sharp$ Major

f 1 e & 2 e &

5 1 & a 2 & a

dents do not feel overly challenged. Students really appreciate the “call outs” on the page that focus their attention on something new.

I have used Keith Snell’s *Theory* series and *Repertoire* books (levels Preparatory to grade 10) for many years. I feel like I have hit “paydirt” to have a series that facilitates quick and comprehensive development from the very beginning. My students and I have enjoyed the music, pacing, and success of building skills and knowledge within a pleasing and intelligent framework. Kudos to Keith and Diane for creating *Piano Town!* ▲

This article originally appeared in the September/October 2010 issue of Clavier Companion.

Author Response

Response to *Piano Town* review

Editor's Note: Clavier Companion will invite the authors of each method series reviewed to respond to that review in the following issue. The response from the authors of *Piano Town* is presented below.

We would like to thank the reviewers for the obvious time and energy they put into evaluating *Piano Town*. We were gratified to see that our eight-year effort writing this method was seen and appreciated in their thoughtful and insightful articles.

We feel incredibly fortunate to have enjoyed such a rich friendship as well as a long and productive musical collaboration. We began our work in the early days of Academy Records when we made our first CDs together for the *Master Composer Library*. We continue to work together on new projects whenever we can.

Piano Town was written with great joy and love. Most of all, it was written with respect for the children who would use it.

Visually, we wanted a world that was imaginative, a world where children were shown as interesting and capable people. Diane's husband, J. Tony Smith, drew the illustrations. He created a rich world in which children are shown doing things, discovering their surroundings, and being kind, responsible young people. (The children of *Piano Town* not only play the piano, but they also do their chores, help plant the garden, and make homemade presents for their families. They go horseback riding, play tennis and volleyball, and enjoy a healthy life.) We specifically excluded all references to modern technology. Our intent was to keep the focus on creativity

and the real physical world. *Piano Town* is a timeless place.

Musically, we wanted to create expressive performers with healthy hands and bodies that could make music for a lifetime. Keith carefully and thoughtfully designed *Piano Town* by scaffolding each tiny aspect of piano playing. The same systematic sequence of material that was evident in his *Piano Repertoire* books is the backbone of *Piano Town*.

Diane's skill as a teacher, accompanist, improviser, and writer of whimsical lyrics brought those perfectly sequenced pieces to life.

We have expanded the world of *Piano Town*. There are now Halloween and Christmas books at all five levels, as well as numerous sheets. These include original pieces by both of us, as well as simplified classics.

We are passionate about teaching. Our goal was to reflect our love for what we do and create useful materials.

We love using *Piano Town* and are grateful to know that others do as well. ▲

—Keith Snell and Diane Hidy
Authors, *Piano Town*

This article originally appeared in the November/December 2010 issue of Clavier Companion.



Rebecca Grooms Johnson, Ph.D., NCTM, is a nationally respected leader in the field of piano pedagogy. She is an independent teacher and has taught extensively at the college and university level. Rebecca is active in the Music Teachers National Association, where she has held the offices of President of the Ohio Music Teachers Association and National Chair of MTNA's Pedagogy Committee. She currently serves as National Certification Chair, and three times a year she publishes a feature in *American Music Teacher* titled What's New in Pedagogy Research.

This issue's contributors:

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Amy Rose Immerman, NCTM, owns the Cincinnati Music Academy, with 40 independent music teachers and 700 students. She teaches private lessons and RMM classes. Amy is on the MTNA Board of Directors, serving as East-Central Division Director. Her composition students are frequent winners in MTNA and NFMC competitions. She serves on the Steering Committee of the National Music Certificate Program, and is a member of the Royal Conservatory College of Examiners. She holds a B.A. in psychology and an M.M. in piano performance/pedagogy from Ohio University.

All excerpts from *Celebrate Piano!* by Cathy Albergo, J. Mitzi Kolar, and Mark Mrozinski © Copyright 2003 The Frederick Harris Music Co., Limited, Mississauga, Ontario, Canada. Reprinted by permission.

Issues and Ideas:

Perspectives in Pedagogy

Rebecca Grooms Johnson, Editor

A survey of current methods: Celebrate Piano!

This issue continues *Clavier Companion's* survey of piano methods.¹ Each article in this series has three sections—an introductory synopsis by the Associate Editor, two articles written by teachers who have used the method extensively in their studios, and a response from the authors of the method surveyed in the previous issue. We hope that you find these articles to be an interesting and helpful overview of all the most popular methods currently on the market!

Celebrate Piano! by Cathy Albergo, J. Mitzi Kolar, and Mark Mrozinski

Publisher: The Frederick Harris Music Co., Limited

Levels: *Lesson and Musicianship: 1A, 1B, 2A, 2B, 3, 4; Solos: 1, 2, 3-4*

Alpha: This series begins with two and three black note clusters alternating between the hands, emphasizing low, middle, and high sounds on the keyboard. Single notes are gradually introduced within the context of moving up and down. Some black-note songs are transposed by half step to white-note hand positions.

Reading: Using a purely intervallic approach to introduce reading, each staff is given without clef signs throughout Level 1A. Pieces are read solely by interval and direction on single staves and then on the grand staff, with starting positions indicated by keyboard pictures; songs range over the full extent of the grand staff using intervals of seconds and thirds. White notes are named in the second half of the book. As the student progresses into Level 2B and beyond, the series becomes more of a modified multi-key approach, with a wide variety of key signatures and increasing use of primary-chord accompaniments.

Rhythm: Syllabic counting uses *Ta, Ta, Ta-ah*, or *Short, Short, Lo-ong*. Time signatures are given with the quarter note replacing the bottom number throughout Levels 1A and 1B. Metric counting is introduced in Level 2 (along with syllabic) for eighth and dotted quarter-eighth notes. Triplets and compound time appear in Level 3 with the syllables *Do-bi-di* used for counting triplets. Sixteenths, dotted eighth-sixteenths, and syncopation are explored in Level 4.

Lesson and Musicianship books: This series is based on the educational concepts of spiral curricula and discovery learning. Many concepts are heard and physically experienced before they are visually presented and defined, giving students the opportunity to “do, hear, and then see.” Although this approach is counter-intuitive for many teachers, it is pedagogically sound and highly recommended.

In addition to teaching new concepts and pieces, each unit in the *Lesson and Musicianship* books includes technique, theory, and ear training. Not a “page-by-page” book, the teacher chooses the appropriate activities from these sections within each unit:

Finger Gym—Short technical exercises prepare for pieces in the unit. Minimal instructions are given for the physical approaches to these exercises.

Musicianship—Reading and theory activities incorporate written drills and attractive games. Harmonizing with primary chords begins in Level 3. Pentatonic scales are introduced in Level 4, followed by whole tone, chromatic, and two-octave major scales.

Rhythm—New note values are introduced and reinforced by rhythmic patterns. There is an emphasis on keeping a steady beat.

¹ The aim of this series is to review the core materials of piano methods that are either new or substantially changed since a similar series of articles appeared in *Piano Quarterly* in the 1980s. Please see the September/October 2009 issue of *Clavier Companion* for more details on this project. For reviews of methods that are older or have not been revised recently, we invite you to revisit the original *Piano Quarterly* series.

Ear Skills—An outstanding aspect of this series, activities include ear training, dictation, clap-backs, play-backs, and *Interval Safari*. Singing is incorporated throughout, as *Interval Safari* activities teach intervals and relative pitch with short songs for each interval. Solfège syllables are used in these activities.

Creativity—Guided activities are provided for improvisation and composition.

Flashcards—Separate books of tear-out flashcards support new concepts. Numbers for the appropriate flashcards are given in each unit.

Pieces usually include a *Practice Plan*, with suggestions for developing good practice routines. This includes the acronym TIPPS, which stands for:

T = Tap and *ta*

I = Say the interval direction and size

P = How many phrases and patterns are there?

PS = Play and say intervals, *tas*, or note names

“You Be the Judge!” asks students to listen for and evaluate specific aspects of their playing. Transposition activities are also often suggested.

Repertoire: Pieces in the *Lessons and Musicianship* and *Solos* books are attractive, and many are written by the co-authors and

other respected American and Canadian pedagogical composers. Arrangements of folk songs and some classical repertoire are also included.

Teacher’s Guide: An extensive *Teacher’s Guide* is available in hard copy. It includes a discussion of the series’ pedagogic philosophy, organization, and approach to lesson planning. There are unit-by-unit overviews, suggestions for integrating and sequencing the sections of each unit, “Teacher’s Notes and Tips,” and ideas for movement activities and games.

Software and CDs: Accompaniments on the MIDI disks and CDs are attractive and feature some unusual and interesting harmonies. The CDs offer both performance and practice tempi. The classical pieces do not have accompaniments and are performed as solos on an electronic keyboard; perhaps because of the limitations of this particular instrument, they do not present a level of musicianship that I would want my students to use as a model.

Omega: This series ends at an early-intermediate level. From Level 3, Unit 4 through the end of the series, the *Teacher’s Guide* includes a section titled “Enrichment Repertoire,” that suggests using various pieces from *Celebration Series*, *The Piano Odyssey*, Piano Repertoire Book 1 as supplementary literature, thus creating a smooth segue into the early-intermediate literature of that series. ▲

A well-rounded and integrated approach

by Lynn Singleton

Celebrate Piano! is a comprehensive method designed to prepare students for the curricula of the Royal Conservatory of Music (RCM) and the National Music Certificate Program (NMCP). Teachers who do not participate in these evaluation programs will also appreciate the sequencing and pacing of the method, as well as its emphasis on important elements for building a strong foundation for beginning piano study.

All-in-one

Students and teachers will welcome the combination of repertoire, musicianship, technique, theory, and creativity in the *Lesson and Musicianship* books. Not only does this save money, it also integrates and correlates all the elements into one book. This pedagogical approach leads the student to think of the elements as being interconnected, rather than separate items to be practiced in separate books. *Solo* books are available for each level as supplemental repertoire, but are not critical to the success of this method. CD/MIDI accompaniments and Flashcards are also optional.

Teacher resource

The *Teacher’s Guide* provides an introduction to the pedagogical philosophy of *Celebrate Piano!* and presents an overview of each level of the method. It offers strategies for incorporating and sequencing activities that can be very useful to teachers with less experience.

Pedagogical approach

Materials are grouped by units—repertoire is placed in the middle of each unit and surrounded by rhythm, technique, theory, ear training, and creative activities. Depending upon the age and learning pace of the student, it usually takes two or three lessons to complete each unit.

Rhythm

From the very first page of the first level, students discover the importance of rhythm and steady pulse.

Excerpt 1: Page 3 of Lesson and Musicianship Book 1A.

Note values are introduced with syllabic counting, establishing rhythmic continuity and avoiding the confusion young students often experience with metric counting. Clapping, off-the-bench, and written activities are used throughout the method to reinforce rhythmic concepts.

Aural emphasis

A crucial element and notable strength of this method is its extensive ear training program; no other method on the market puts as much emphasis on developing aural awareness through

pitch dictation, clap-backs, and play-backs. *Pattern Detective* activities develop students' abilities to discern rhythms, intervals, and patterns (see Excerpt 2).

Excerpt 2: Page 41 of Lesson and Musicianship Book 2A.

UNIT
3

Pattern Detective

Listen as your teacher plays one of the patterns in each example.

- Circle the pattern that you hear.
- Play each pattern.




Echo Game—Clapbacks!

Listen as your teacher claps a rhythmic pattern.

- Echo or clap what you hear!

Echo Game—Playbacks!

Listen as your teacher plays a melodic pattern.

- Play the melody that you hear, using the D Major 5-finger pattern.



Clapbacks: 

Playbacks: 

CELEBRATE PIANO! LEVEL 2A 41

Relative pitch is introduced in the first level with “The Middle C Song.” Once students learn to play and sing the song, they are asked to sing it every time they pass the piano and then play middle C to check their pitch. After their ears are trained to find middle C, students learn a song for each interval, establishing a physical and aural connection to each distance. By the third level, students are singing using solfège syllables and are able to identify I, IV, and V chords within chord progressions.

Teaching notation

Intervallic, landmark, and multi-key approaches are used to teach reading. Students are first introduced to notation through off-staff clusters of two and three black keys as they learn the concept of directional reading: up, down, and same (see Excerpt 3).

The presentation of the staff, line and space notes, and the interval of a second leads to reading by interval and direction. Letter clefs are used to identify the first note of the piece; students are shown where to place their hands with a picture of a keyboard and finger numbers on the appropriate keys and they continue to read using interval size and direction. The grand staff, treble and bass clefs, and landmark notes are introduced next, with hand placement based on these landmarks. Transposition activities occur throughout all levels and are used to reinforce the multi-key approach. Early level transposition involves moving the hand between black- and white-key groups. Level 2 students transpose from one five-finger pattern to another, and, once key signatures are introduced, they move between known keys.

Musically satisfying repertoire

One of my main complaints about many methods is the quality of repertoire, particularly at early levels. However, the pieces in *Celebrate Piano!* are generally less contrived and more musically satisfying than most other methods. The music is a balanced mix of contemporary, folk songs, popular styles, and classical repertoire.

Excerpt 3: “Rocket Ships” from Lesson and Musicianship Book 1A.

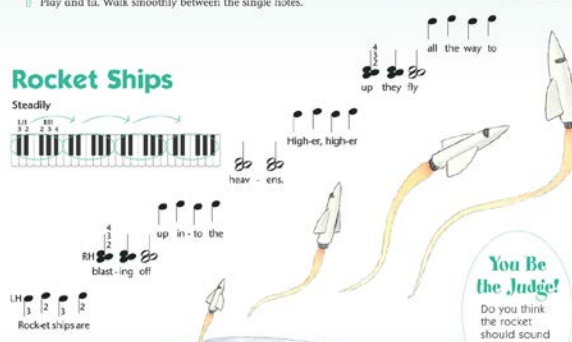
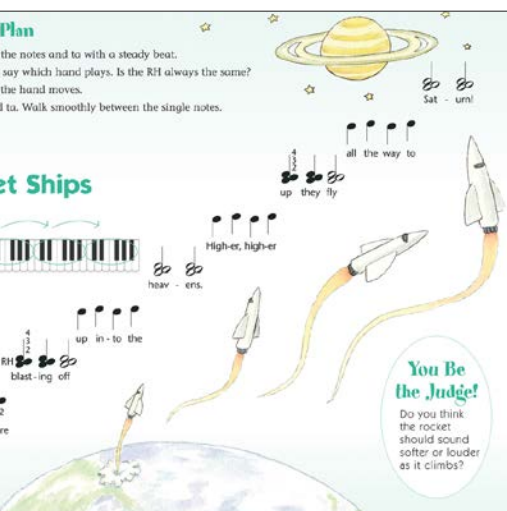
UNIT
2

Practice Plan

- Point to the notes and to with a steady beat.
- Tap and say which hand plays. Is the RH always the same?
- Practice the hand moves.
- Play and ta. Walk smoothly between the single notes.

Rocket Ships

Steadily

You Be the Judge!

Do you think the rocket should sound softer or louder as it climbs?

15-16 8


Students are gradually introduced to the challenges of elementary classical literature, and by Level 3 they are ready to begin working in the *Celebration Series Perspectives* series, also published by Frederick Harris. The upper levels of the method continue to introduce and reinforce concepts that will be encountered in the repertoire found in the first two levels of the *Perspectives* series.


Excerpt 4: Page 21 of Lesson and Musicianship Book 3.


UNIT
1

Question and Answer Phrases

- Create several parallel and contrasting Answers. Be sure to end on the Tonic.
- Write your favorite Answer.




Question: 

Answer: 

Variation on Go Tell Aunt Rhody

- Create your own variation of *Go Tell Aunt Rhody* by changing one or more notes in each phrase.
- Create another variation by moving your third finger one half step lower as you play. How has the mood changed?



The Piano Method that Prepares Students for the
Carnegie Hall Royal Conservatory
Achievement Program

Celebrate Piano!®

A comprehensive piano method by
Cathy Albergo, J. Mitzi Kolar, and Mark Mrozinski

Celebrate Piano!® offers an innovative approach to music study integrating rhythm, technique, ear skills, creativity, and musicianship into a wealth of engaging repertoire and activities at every level.

Integrated components include:

- Lesson and Musicianship Books
- Solos Books
- Accompaniment CDs and MIDIs
- Flashcards
- Teacher's Guide



Celebrate Piano!® is the first piano method designed to prepare students for the extensive range of music found in Celebration Series PERSPECTIVES® and lays the foundation for the musicianship requirements of the Carnegie Hall Royal Conservatory Achievement Program.

How to transition from Celebrate Piano!® into Celebration Series PERSPECTIVES®:													
Celebrate Piano!®	1	2	3	4									
Celebration Series PERSPECTIVES®			Preparatory	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Level 6	Level 7	Level 8	Level 9	Level 10

Visit our website at www.frederickharrismusic.com to:

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Fax: 416-408-1542



Theory and creativity

Written theory and creativity activities are included to refine new elements and concepts. Students are encouraged to compose and improvise, providing enjoyable opportunities to combine an understanding of musical elements and style with their own imaginations (see Excerpt 4).

Visual presentation

The series is visually clean and thoughtfully planned, with new elements and concepts presented in highlighted boxes. *Practice Plans* at the top of each page help students develop good practice habits—some are provided by the authors, and occasionally students write

their own plans. The animal artwork is appealing to young students, but older students find it a bit juvenile, especially by the time they reach Level 4. For this reason, I usually do not use all four levels, even though the musical materials are so well conceived.

Final thoughts

Celebrate Piano! is a method that appeals to many teachers and students, particularly teachers of young students or students who participate in the RCM and NMCP evaluation programs. The method was designed to give students a solid beginning to their musical education and build a strong foundation for their future studies. ▲

Look how far we've come!

By Amy Rose Immerman

A case study

Eight-year-old Natalie comes in for her weekly piano lesson. We just increased her lesson time to forty-five minutes. For the past year, her progress has been below average. The longer lesson time gives me more time to go over details.

Natalie is happy to be at her piano lesson. She smiles often, and it is hard for her to sit still. It's summer and she's wearing flip-flops. Her feet wiggle in and out of them, until they either fall off, or I suggest she remove them completely. I tell her I want that energy going into playing music, not into her feet dancing all over the place! She giggles. She has a delightful personality.

Natalie has to wear eye glasses; they are often halfway down her nose, and her head tilts up and down so she can see the music just right. She sits on a booster cushion, but with her wiggly nature, the cushion doesn't always stay in place.

For all of the sparkle in Natalie's personality, she lacks in some areas: she has a weak sense of rhythm and trouble keeping a steady pulse. Staying focused is tough. It's hard for her to resist looking at her hands in between each and every note. Recognizing music patterns and note direction is confusing at times. She's in the habit of constantly apologizing for every error—it drives me nuts. I tell her, we all make mistakes—that's how we learn.

We open up her *Celebrate Piano! Lesson and Musicianship Book 1B* and go to her assigned piece, *The Grand Canyon* (see Excerpt 5).

It takes too long for her to find the starting notes for each hand. It's easy to see the piece won't be a finished product—if it takes her this long to get started, something's not right in her practice at home.

The practice plan

"Did you go through the Practice Plan at the top of the page?" I ask. She giggles, while she answers, "Well, kind of?" as if it's a question back to me.

"Let's go through the practice plan together," I tell her. "What is the first step?"

This is my way of getting her eyes to the top of the page and making sure she sees the practice plan.

"Tap and ta," she says.

Celebrate Piano! uses the acronym "TIPPS" to outline the practice plan (see Excerpt 5).

Their practice plan works so well, I use it with students who are not in this series.

Excerpt 5: "The Grand Canyon" from Lesson and Musicianship Book 1B.

Tap and ta

Natalie's music comes down off the music stand and rests on top of the closed key cover. While I point *over* each note, Natalie points *under* each note and together we 'ta' our way through the piece. I want to know that Natalie is aware of every single note, and that she can chant the rhythm correctly. I want to see her eyes stay focused on the page and her finger movements keep in rhythm from one note to the next.

We've done this so many times through Level 1A, it is second nature for Natalie. The 'ta' system of counting was new for me, but not for my students; many music educators use this system in school.

Reading by intervals

Next we go to the second part in the TIPPS practice plan: "I = Say the interval direction and size," Natalie points to every note in the piece. Through this method, she has learned to say: "C, down a 3rd, down a 2nd; C, up a 3rd, up a 2nd. C, down a 3rd, down a 2nd, same, up a 2nd, down a 2nd," and so forth (see Excerpt 6). Most other methods are still using 'step' and 'skip' at this point, but *Celebrate Piano!* quickly teaches the more precise terms. Guide notes are taught early on and expand to high C & low C (two ledger lines above and below the grand staff).

I marvel at how far piano pedagogy has come since I was a child. At Natalie's age, I did not know the word *interval*. I was not taught to look for patterns. I was told nothing about phrasing.

Phrasing at an early level

Next, I ask Natalie how many phrases are in the piece. She counts the slurs and tells me there are six. I ask her if the last note of each phrase should be louder or softer. She giggles, as if this is a silly question. "Softer," she says. Then I add, "And I know you'll help me listen for a lift before each new phrase begins, right?"

We continue through the "TIPPS." Natalie improves with each run-through. I ask her if she feels like this will be easy to do at home without anybody helping her. She replies "Yes."

Constant reinforcement of the practice plan

Unlike other methods, the *Practice Plan* appears throughout the four-level series. But how do I know if the student is really "getting it"? The accompanying solo books show whether the student has grasped the concepts, because these pieces have no practice plans.

Lesson books and accompanying materials

The *Lesson and Musicianship* books include theory, technique, ear training (clap-backs, interval recognition, etc.), and more. This increases the cost of the lesson book, but it's less than purchasing separate books for each of these areas. Ear training and creative exercises appear at the end of each unit. It's best to do these a little at a time while the student is going through the unit, instead of waiting until you get to that page.

There are a handful of familiar songs as well as original pieces by the three co-authors and other well-known contemporary composers. Many pieces have attractive and engaging teacher accompaniments at the bottom of the page.

Graphics and colorful characters adorn the pages. The graphics may be too much for some people, but not for me! My students enjoy following the characters through the books.

In addition to the *Lesson and Musicianship* and *Solo* books, each level has tasteful CD and MIDI accompaniments, flashcards, and a *Teacher's Guide* for the series; these items are all purchased separately. Natalie loves playing with me and the MIDI accompaniments at the lesson. At home, she plays along with the CD.

Perfect pitch and interval recognition

Perfect pitch is taught, starting with Middle C in Level 1A, and interval songs are added gradually. Students are asked to sing the Middle C song every time they pass the piano at home. First sing, then play and sing to see if they are matching the pitch.

For each interval there is a song to sing. Sometimes I change the words to include the name of the interval. My words: Cuckoo Bird, Major Third, Can you hear the Cuckoo Bird? (see Excerpt 6).

I use these songs in my piano groups, even if the students are not in *Celebrate Piano!*

Creative activities

Transposition is taught from the beginning and reinforced regularly; pentascales in all keys are also introduced early in the series. Question-and-answer phrases, along with other compositional opportunities appear regularly. In the composition exercises, students are free to express themselves on paper in any way they choose—suggestions are given, but there is true freedom of expression (see Excerpt 7).

The magic number three

Every method on the market is worth trying—not with just one or two students, but with the magic number of three. Why three?

Excerpt 6: "Cuckoo Bird Song" from Lesson & Musicianship Book 1A.

Legato Warm-up

- Top and to the example.
- Sing the finger numbers as you play on the keyboard cover.
- Play legato with firm, rounded fingers.
- Remember to end the phrase softly.

Melodic and Harmonic 3rds

Melodic 3rd: A melodic 3rd has single notes played one at a time.

Harmonic 3rd: A harmonic 3rd has two notes played together.

Interval Safari: Cuckoo Bird Song

The Cuckoo Bird Song uses 3rds.

- Sing and play the Cuckoo Bird Song. Start on Middle C with RH finger 1.
- Sing this new song at least twice a day. Play Middle C and E (up a 3rd) to check that you are singing in tune.

combining 2rds and 3rds

The method is the same, but students are different. Are they intuitive or non-intuitive learners? Do they grasp concepts easily or do they struggle? If the lessons are not successful, is it because of the student or the method? I always try *every* method with three students. To make a fair assessment, you have to experiment with different personalities and learning styles.

Prepares students for NMCP exams

Celebrate Piano! prepares students for the entry level of the National Music Certificate Program by including essential technical, ear, and sight reading skills from the very beginning. It enhances my teaching by offering age-old concepts in a refreshing new way. Ear-training and sight-reading activities carry over into my piano group classes, and the method works well in both private and group instruction. The *Celebrate Piano!* co-authors present a well-rounded musical curriculum that leaves few, if any, stones unturned.

Thanks to *Celebrate Piano!*, my students are better readers and listeners, have a good knowledge of recognizing and singing intervals, and don't fear ledger line notes. I *love* that, and my non-intuitive Natalie comprehends and enjoys the concepts! ▲

Excerpt 7: Page 25 of Lesson & Musicianship Book 1A.

The Elephant and the Mouse

Make up a musical story about an elephant and a mouse. Play it on white or black keys.

Choose from: up, down, same
soft, loud
staccato, tenuto

Write or draw your piece using single notes, clusters, wavy lines, or anything you like.

This article originally appeared in the November/December 2010 issue of *Clavier Companion*.

Author Response

Response to *Celebrate Piano!* review

Editor's Note: Clavier Companion will invite the authors of each method series reviewed to respond to that review in the following issue. The response from the authors of Celebrate Piano! is presented below.

The co-authors thank each reviewer for the thoughtful observations and thorough comments about the breadth of musical elements and skills, the quality of the music, and the pedagogy that are key components within *Celebrate Piano!* We also thank the many teachers who are successfully using *Celebrate Piano!* The authors enjoy hearing about the wonderful learning that is occurring with the method.

Although *Celebrate Piano!* does prepare students for various exam systems such as the Royal Conservatory Music exams, the National Music Certificate Program, or others, the authors' primary goal was to develop a piano method that reflects our belief in comprehensive musicianship for all piano students through carefully sequenced music, concepts, and activities using sound pedagogical practices within one book, the *Celebrate Piano! Lesson and Musicianship* book. The sequential development of music and concepts focuses on basic elements for these young pianists and on the elimination of the gap that often exists between the completion of a method and the introduction of standard piano repertoire. Although the method has been successfully used with beginners of many ages, the method and associated graphics and artwork were designed for the average age beginner (six to seven), who would complete the four levels in approximately three to four years or nine to eleven years of age. *Celebrate Piano!* provides a comprehensive background in reading, technique, musicianship, aural skills, and creativity while preparing to progress into the standard literature. To firmly establish all these basic elements and ensure that the bridge between the method and the classical literature is successfully crossed, the authors strongly urge teachers to complete all levels of the method.

Besides music by the authors, guest composers wrote music to assist the young student in learning musical concepts. The authors are grateful that the reviewers made statements about the quality of the music and the teacher accompaniments because we requested and received many excellent pieces and made every effort to select or write the best of these. Our goal was to create a method where a young student would enjoy the music. To prepare the young student for standard piano literature, the authors also reviewed and selected easy classical pieces that coordinate with the concepts being learned. Beginning in the second level, approximately twelve standard classical pieces are learned in each *Lesson and Musicianship* book when combined with the *Solos* book. These classical pieces are not simplified, arranged, or altered and prepare the student for lessons after the method.

The authors of *Celebrate Piano!* describe the reading approach as a combination of the best elements of intervallic/landmark and multiple-key approaches. A first-year student, averaging two to three lessons per unit, would ideally complete the *Lesson and Musicianship* books 1A/1B (divided due to binding issues) in approximately thirty to thirty-six weeks. The beginner reads intervals of a second, third, fourth, and fifth; identifies note names of the intervals from landmarks on the grand staff (1B) that range from high and low C's (above and below the grand staff); and experiences multiple keys from the pieces or the transposition that begins in the second unit of 1A. The twelve five-finger positions of a multiple-key method are introduced in *Lesson and Musicianship*,

2A, Units 3 and 5. Moving beyond 2A, the student reads in multiple major and minor keys and newer tonalities by intervals with an increasing ability to name notes quickly from landmarks or intervals away from the landmarks.

As noted by the reviewers, the Finger Gyms are preparatory exercises for the songs. Frequently, students choose the Finger Gyms as their favorite "song!" Because there are differences in teachers' technical choices, the authors avoid cluttering the student's page with instructions. Suggestions for execution are provided in the *Teacher's Guide*. A unique goal of the Finger Gyms is the development of left-hand independence that is necessary when playing standard piano literature. Many of the Finger Gyms in the later levels require the left hand to play an independent line or articulation rather than move in parallel or contrary motion with the right hand.

The reviewers indicated that the ear or aural skills found in each unit of *Celebrate Piano!* are "outstanding," "crucial," and "notable" and may be transferred to any teaching environment. Thank you! By using the method's Interval Safari that develops relative pitch to sing all perfect, major, and minor intervals by the fourth book, singing solfège or numbers, or completing any of the numerous other aural activities in the lesson books, the teacher guides the development of the ear and inner hearing that reinforces the student's reading, listening, and memory.

Since a piano teacher never knows whether that young student will become the next concert artist, composer, jazz or rock musician, or recreational musician with a burning desire to write the music heard in the inner ear or heart, creativity through improvisation or compositional activities is a vital component of each unit of *Celebrate Piano!* Through these creative activities, the teacher observes whether the student has learned and synthesized the musical concepts, and the student assumes ownership of music.

The ultimate goal of the authors of *Celebrate Piano!* was to create a piano method where a young student is central to making, creating, and loving music. ▲

—Cathy Albergo, J. Mitzi Kolar,
and Mark Mrozinski
Authors, *Celebrate Piano!*

This article originally appeared in the January/February 2011 issue of Clavier Companion.

Issues and Ideas: Perspectives in Pedagogy

Rebecca Grooms Johnson, Editor



Rebecca Grooms Johnson, Ph.D., NCTM, is a nationally respected leader in the field of piano pedagogy. She is an independent teacher and has taught extensively at the college and university level. Rebecca is active in the Music Teachers National Association, where she has held the offices of President of the Ohio Music Teachers Association and National Chair of MTNA's Pedagogy Committee. She currently serves as National Certification Chair, and three times a year she publishes a feature in American Music Teacher titled What's New in Pedagogy Research.

This issue's contributors:

Stephen Reen, winner of the 2001 MTNA Group Piano Teachers Award, teaches early childhood music and movement classes and group piano to children and adults. Dr. Reen holds a Doctor of Music from Indiana University, and bachelor's and master's degrees from the State University of New York at Buffalo. His teaching has been featured in American Music Teacher and in a film produced by the National Piano Foundation. He has presented at MTNA and state conventions, NCKP, and World Piano Pedagogy Conferences.

Gary Barnett has enjoyed teaching private and group piano for over 20 years. He holds a DMA in piano performance from the University of Kansas. His teachers include Jeff Manookian, Gary Amano, Lev Vlassenko, and Jack Winerock. In 2011 Dr. Barnett will be residing in Lisbon, Portugal, conducting research on the life and works of Carlos Seixas at the National Library of Portugal under a grant from the Luso-American Development Foundation.

All excerpts in this article are from *American Popular Piano*, © Novus Via Music Group Inc. All rights reserved.

A survey of current methods: *American Popular Piano*

This issue continues *Clavier Companion's* survey of piano methods.¹ Each article in this series has three sections—an introductory synopsis by the Associate Editor, two articles written by teachers who have used the method extensively in their studios, and a response from the authors of the method surveyed in the previous issue. We hope that you find these articles to be an interesting and helpful overview of all the most popular methods currently on the market!

American Popular Piano: by Christopher Norton and Scott McBride Smith
Publisher: Novus Via Music Group
Levels: *Repertoire, Etudes, Technic*, and *Skills*: Prep through Level 2; *Repertoire* and *Etudes* only: Levels 3–8. Soon to be published: *Technic* and *Skills*: Levels 3–5. The authors plan to publish this series through Level 10.

Alpha: This series can be used as a supplementary or core method. Intended to begin about six months into lessons with a traditional series, the Prep books assume students are reading notes in several basic hand positions and already understand quarter, half, and whole notes. If the teacher decides to use *American Popular Piano (APP)* as a core series, it can be supplemented with a traditional series. The levels of *APP* generally correlate with the levels of most popular traditional series. Because of the improvisation in the *Etudes* books, teachers might wish to begin transfer students at a lower level.

Repertoire: Each level is divided into three sections; in the introduction, the authors describe these as:

Lyrical: pieces with a beautiful singing quality and rich harmonies; usually played at a slow tempo.

Rhythmic: more up-tempo pieces, with energetic, catchy rhythms; these often have a driving left-hand part.

Ensemble: works meant to be played with other musicians, or with backing tracks (or both); this type of piece requires careful listening and shared energy.

The repertoire does not become sequentially more difficult within each book, so the teacher can choose pieces that particularly address students' weaknesses, or that students like and are highly motivated to play.

The title of the series could be a bit off-putting for some. Teachers who might shy away from the idea of using songs by pop singers such as Beyoncé or Lady Gaga can rest assured that the repertoire is original and composed entirely by Christopher Norton and Scott McBride Smith. The pieces incorporate a wide range of popular styles and sounds while maintaining a high quality of musicality.

Etudes: These books are divided into four sections:

Improvisation Etudes, Prep through Level 5: Six pieces from the *Repertoire* book are presented, each with four modules. Each module gives an idea for improvising on the pitch-set, rhythm, or harmony of that particular song. The presentations are thorough, well-structured, and non-threatening. Levels 6–8 use three modules.

Improvisation Performance Etudes, Prep through Level 5: The six pieces are offered again with a written melodic improvisation in the A and B sections, and student improvised melodies in the A' and B' sections. Levels 6–8 do not include this section.

Technical Etudes—Classical, all levels: The etudes in the early levels are composed by the authors and imitate standard classical etudes; later levels include original etudes by composers such as Czerny, Heller, Kohler, etc.

¹ The aim of this series is to review the core materials of piano methods that are either new or substantially changed since a similar series of articles appeared in *Piano Quarterly* in the 1980s. Please see the September/October 2009 issue of *Clavier Companion* for more details on this project. For reviews of methods that are older or have not been revised recently, we invite you to revisit the original *Piano Quarterly* series.

Technical Etudes—Pop, all levels: Lyric and rhythmic etudes in various pop styles by the authors.

Skills: Currently available through Level 2: Unlike the *Repertoire* books, this content is sequential and not, therefore, correlated to specific pieces. Each level contains four units followed by a Midterm and a Final skills test. Each unit consists of four modules, and each module includes:

- Brainthumpers: tricky little playing and rhythmic tapping snippets
- Technic: patterns from the back of the book to be practiced in various keys with different articulations and dynamics
- Prepared Sightreading piece
- Aural Skills—Rhythmic
- Aural Skill—Pitch

Technic: Currently available through Level 2: Major and minor pentascales, major and minor triads, and beginning scale drills are given with varying rhythms, articulations, and phrasing in several keys. These books can be used from front to back, or each drill can be studied in all given keys before moving to the next drill. A handy “Technic Tracker” at the back of each book helps the teacher and student keep a record of which exercises and keys have been accomplished.

Teacher’s Guide: Although a hard copy Teacher’s Guide is not published, extensive information is available on the Novus Via Music website: nvmusicgroup.com. Podcasts with Scott McBride Smith and Christopher Norton cover a wide range of topics, are extremely helpful, and should be viewed before beginning to use this method.

Compact Discs: Packaged with the *Repertoire* books, they provide “Backing Tracks” for each of the Ensemble section pieces (practice and performance tempi) and the selections from the *Repertoire* books used in the improvisatory sections of the *Etudes* books. In the early levels, until students have mastered swing and syncopated rhythms, most of the exciting pop sounds in the Lyrical and Rhythmic sections are supplied by teacher duets. Unfortunately, these duet parts are *not* provided on the CDs, therefore the teacher may wish to record these duets for their students to use for home practice.

Omega: Level 8 is currently the final book in the series. All repertoire in Level 8 is composed by Christopher Norton, encompasses a variety of styles, and reflects mid-intermediate levels of technical and musical challenges. ▲

A core or a complementary method

by Stephen Reen

If you’re looking for a core teaching series that uses contemporary-sounding repertoire for all levels, plus sight-reading material and a step-by-step approach to improvising, the *American Popular Piano* series is a good place to start. Due to my familiarity with the authors’ earlier works, I was excited to begin using *APP* when it was first launched at the MTNA Conference in 2007.

APP is not really a traditional method. Although the *APP* series can stand alone as material for a comprehensive program, it can also serve as an excellent supplementary resource for contemporary material and improvisational etudes. It works in traditional one-to-one lessons, as well as in groups—which is a big selling point for me, because I am not a “turn-the-page” kind of teacher. I teach exclusively in groups, and begin all my students with the keyboard component of a popular early childhood music and movement curriculum. *APP* makes a perfect segue for my program. I want my students to become voracious readers, and getting them to the piano is the first step. If they are playing cool pieces that they enjoy, I hope that they will be motivated to learn more pieces each week.

Outside the box

As the title suggests, the series contains music in the style of American popular music: jazz, pop, twelve-bar blues, rock, and country. Since Bach, Mozart, Schumann, Tchaikovsky, and Kabalevsky gave us so many little gems for teaching advanced beginners and early-intermediate level students, I use an anthology of classic repertoire in addition to *APP*. Whatever your teaching experience, this series will force you to “think outside the box,” because it requires that the teacher already knows how to teach. Many methods are designed with the teacher rather than the student in mind—if you are a teacher who wants the method book to dictate exactly what you are going to teach next, then *APP* is not for you. If, however, you want a series that gives you a lot of musically rewarding material to work with and the flexibility to tailor it to your own students, then *American Popular Piano* is a great choice.

On the back covers of the books the authors write: “J.S. Bach taught his sons using the music of his time—popular dances, preludes, and exercises by living composers. It would never have occurred to him to seek out pieces in styles and rhythms one hundred years old. He expected his boys to thrive in the musical world of their time.” I find *APP* to be a good repertoire series for today’s American students. Christopher Norton is a wonderful composer who has the ability to create familiar, cool, now-sounding music. From the very earliest levels his compositions have an authentic sound with sophisticated accompaniments. The pieces are all fresh, current, and appealing to all types and ages of students (I use it with my adults.) There are no pictures, so the method doesn’t talk down to students.

Backing tracks

My students love the backing tracks on the CDs. They are playing along with real bands—rock bands, salsa bands, jazz trios, disco ensembles, etc. The sound is authentic, with acoustic and sampled sounds played in real time. There are two tracks per song, labeled “Practice” tempo and “Performance” tempo. This makes great repertoire for ensemble playing at all levels. I also use the earlier levels for sight-reading with older students.

Skills and Technic

The modular approach of the *Skills* books allows for flexibility in lesson planning, so the pace can be adjusted for each student. These books enhance student progress in the corresponding *Repertoire* and *Etudes* albums, and include small chunks of ear-training, rhythm, and sight-reading drills that can be worked into a thirty-minute lesson as well as a one-hour class (see Excerpt 1).


Pentascle drills, and “Hand-Over-Hand” arpeggio and chord drills in several keys with a variety of rhythms, articulations, and accents are presented in the early level *Technic* books.

18

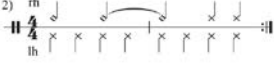
Unit Three - Module One

A. Brainthumpers
Practice daily.

1) Observe the articulation marks.



2) rh
 lh



Tap this rhythmic pattern while counting out loud.
How many notes are in the right hand? _____

B. Technic
Practice Daily.
For directions, see *How to Use This Book* on page 46.


1) Pentascales
No. ____; M.M. ____; S / T ____
key(s): d e a
Articulation: *legato staccato portato*
Dynamic: *f mf mp*

2) Triads
No. ____; M.M. ____; S / T ____
key(s): d e a
Articulation: *legato staccato portato*
Dynamic: *f mf mp*


C. Prepared Sightreading Piece
Play three times, keeping a steady beat.

For directions, see *How to Use This Book* on page 46.

— on C?
mf



— on G?
mp



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27

PIANO SOLO

Howlin'

BLUES SHUFFLE

Christopher Norton

Steadily $\text{♩} = 152$





Detection Question: How many times do you have to change your right hand position? Circle each change.

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Not a page-by-page book

The pieces in the *Repertoire* books are not in order of graduated difficulty. Students are encouraged to skip around and find pieces that appeal to them, and not all pieces have to be played before moving on to a higher level. Teachers may choose any piece, in any order, to fit a student's level. There are no boxes dictating the teaching process—each teacher is free to teach. In the first three levels, there are "Detection Questions" at the bottom of the page, to spark a conversation about the building blocks of music through a discovery process (see Excerpt 2).

Those of us who teach in groups do so for a number of reasons. One of the most compelling is to teach sight-reading and improvisational skills more effectively. When sight-reading in a group, each player must look ahead and keep going to stay with the others. Playing your own part in the ensemble along with a band on the CD and/or a jazzy teacher's accompaniment creates a rich, satisfying sound. What a contrast to sight-reading alone with a metronome!

A variety of etudes

The *Etudes* books contain traditional technical etudes in both classical and popular styles. Scott McBride Smith's "classical" studies are modeled after Czerny, Kohler, Gurlitt, and Bartók; while Christopher Norton's "popular-styled" studies are original, contemporary sounding compositions. Each study is based on musical ideas and technical challenges drawn from the repertoire.

Also included in the *Etudes* albums is a fresh new step-by-step approach to improvisation that guides students into spontaneous creativity. The Improv Etudes are presented in a user-friendly module structure that integrates smoothly into traditional lessons as well as groups. Using pieces from the *Repertoire* albums as a starting point, suggestions are made to vary the rhythm and melody.

First, students are asked to find the pitch set for the melody, and then vary the order in which they are presented, using the same rhythm of the melody. Next, they are given ideas for altering the rhythm of the left hand, then the right, and finally an entire phrase of the piece is left blank for improvisation. Improvising in a group, along with the backing tracks, supports many important skills. The backing track doesn't stop, so students are forced to keep going. Also, the CD provides the underlying rhythm and harmonic structure of the piece being varied.

When students learn to create their own music, they gain a deep understanding of the structure of all music, and of compositional styles. I suppose that's why J.S. Bach taught his sons to improvise the music of their own time. ▲

Incorporating discovery learning

by Gary Barnett

I fell in love with the *American Popular Piano* series as soon as I came across it, and since that time I have kept it as the staple of my piano studio repertoire. I initially only used this series in my private teaching, but I found that it was highly effective in the group setting as well and quickly adopted it into my college curriculum. Many things make this series rewarding and even captivating, but the genius of Christopher Norton's original compositions truly causes it to stand apart. With the prodigious variety and freshness of compositions in this landmark series, students and teachers certainly get their money's worth when purchasing *American Popular Piano*!

Experience before reading

APP is not a traditional method in its pedagogical approach. It draws on current research that indicates children should experience music first, and then it reinforces their early learning experiences through reading. From the very first *Repertoire* and *Etudes* volumes, students immediately experience the joy of playing the piano without the usual cumbersome outlay of cute pictures and wordy columns of instruction. I find that students are so caught up in the novelty of instantly playing and grooving to this cool sounding music, often with backing tracks, they forget they are learning in a “serious” piano lesson.

Despite all the fun, the core approach of this series integrates often neglected, but important, skills such as improvisation, ensemble playing, and tone production. One of the most harrowing difficulties of any piano method—the test of its longevity, success, and survival—often rests on each level’s ability to challenge while staying within the necessary boundaries of difficulty and skill. *American Popular Piano* passes this test with flying colors.

Consistency throughout

Does *APP* successfully guide the beginner from a preparatory level upwards with appropriately paced skill levels? Does *APP* effectively incorporate “discovery” learning throughout the elements of its core approach? The answer to both of these questions is a resounding “yes”!

Excerpt 3: “London Waltz” from Repertoire Preparatory Book, mm. 1 – 8.

6 London Waltz JAZZ WALTZ
 Flowing and smooth. Christopher Norton
 Gliding along ♩ = 112
 on E? *mp*
 on A?
 5 *mf* move rh down 2 *mp*
 Teacher Duet (student plays one octave higher)
 Gliding along ♩ = 112
mp
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“London Waltz,” found in the preparatory *Repertoire* and *Etudes* books, provides an excellent example (see Excerpt 3).

The *Repertoire* version goes far beyond the rudiments of rhythm, notes, and hand positions—it requires *legato cantabile* playing in the context of a smooth, flowing motion. The *Etudes* book contains four different versions of “London Waltz” that are devoted to improvisation and skill development, with the goal of being able to play the performance improvisation at the end of the book (see Excerpt 4).

In this version, two written melodic fragments are given along with bars of blank space in which students improvise on a given set of notes with a backing track. In this way, students have combined interpretive and improvisational skills through a discovery learning approach.

Sequencing rhythmic experiences

Consistent with the series’ pedagogical philosophy, “London Waltz” does not contain any explanatory paragraphs about chord progressions or the modality of the improvised melody. Students simply experience the rhythmic quality of the piece by clapping quarter notes to the backing track to achieve a solid rhythmic foundation. After maintaining a steady beat they move forward to the next step—clapping the actual rhythm of the melody. Building upon this rhythmic proficiency, students are prepared to play with confidence and accuracy the notes of the melody, first without and

Excerpt 4: Page 35 from Etudes Preparatory Book.

35 Performance Etude - London Waltz
 A Practice the *London Waltz* Performance Etude based on the notes and rhythms you have already used in the modules. Once this feels comfortable, experiment with your own rhythms. Do this several times. Improv notes:
 B Work on your improvisation without the backing track until you can play with a steady tempo. Then practice with the backing track. Choose your favorite version and play it for your teacher.
 Gliding along *mp*
 C Improvise:
 D Improvise:
 Listen closely as you play your improvisation. Does each note sound good with the backing track? Are you keeping a steady beat and staying with the backing track?
 Improv Tip: Do you think this piece sounds better played smoothly or bouncily? Try it both ways.
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The Novus Via

CN/SMS

HEY J.S., WHAT'S UP?
 OH, I'M JUST WRITING SOME NEW MUSIC FOR MY STUDIO.
 THAT'S GREAT, HOW COME?
 CARL, J.C., ANNA ... THEY ALL LOVE TO PRACTICE WHEN THEY CAN RELATE TO THE MUSIC, BUT I WANT THEM TO LEARN ALL THEIR CORE SKILLS TOO ...
 CALL ME OLD-FASHIONED, BUT MUSIC SHOULD BE **INSPIRING** AS WELL AS EDUCATIONAL!

then with the backing track. The module culminates with an improvisation using a limited number of notes for the melody along with the rhythm given in non-pitched percussion notation. In this way, students discover the possibilities of improvisation with a minimal amount of written material. With the backing track to this lyrical jazz waltz, even the most rhythmically challenged students excel because they have been amply prepared.

Solo repertoire

“*Soccer Mania*”—a delightfully rhythmic “cha-cha”—is in a syncopated Latin dance style, ending with the customary accented rhythm, *cha-cha-cha* (see Excerpt 5).

Excerpt 5: “*Soccer Mania*” from *Repertoire Book Level 2*.

16

CHA CHA **Soccer Mania** Christopher Norton

Briskly $\text{♩} = 100$

Detection Question: What beats normally have a strong accent in 4/4 time? Can you find any measures in which there is a beat with an unexpected accent? If so, circle them.

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Appearing in Level 2, this piece presents an appropriate level of difficulty: the accompaniment in the left hand is limited to the G major pentascale, and most of its right hand melodic material falls within the D major pentascale. It is a challenge, to be sure, with a metronome marking of half note = 100, syncopated accents, frequent dynamic shifts, and that infamous right hand *cha-cha-cha* cross-over at the end; but, as always, the witty style of Christopher Norton motivates students to practice it obsessively until the piece is perfectly mastered.

Ensemble pieces

Approximately two-thirds of the pieces in the *Repertoire* books are solos, and the remaining pages are ensemble pieces (see Excerpt 6 on).

“*Celtic Caper*” is a Level 3 ensemble piece that is also used in the improvisational *Etudes*. It is an Irish jig, with swung eighth notes leading to a final raucous accelerando. As is typical in the ensemble pieces, it is arranged as a duet for one or two pianos with a backing track. This feature makes these books particularly successful in group piano settings—the popular musical styles are just as appropriate for college class piano students as they are for young children in private studio lessons.

Not supplementary

The *Skills* and *Technic* books are just as integral to the series as *Repertoire* and *Etudes*. The modular approach in the *Skills* books builds upon successive foundations before moving on to more complex units. For example, in Level 1, Module One begins with a “brainthumper,” an introductory skill leading to a section on technic, followed by a sight-reading exercise, a rhythmic exercise, and finally an aural skills exercise requiring students to sing while holding specific notes. The pentascale and triad exercises used in these modules are published in the *Technic* books. There are unit skills tests, a midterm, and a final that are administered and recorded by the teacher during the lesson.

The authors’ introduction cites aural skills as perhaps the most important of all technical skills, and I particularly like these sections of the books. Beginning with the first module, audiation is a critical element that is practiced and tested. From my experience with memorized student recitals, I know just how critical these audiation skills are. It is a great boon to have this as an integral feature from the very first stages of piano instruction.

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22 RHYTHM SECTION

Celtic Caper IRISH JIG

When played on one piano, Piano Solo plays one octave higher.

Christopher Norton

Extrovertly ♩ = 132

swing 8ths

PIANO SOLO

Celtic Caper IRISH JIG

Christopher Norton

Extrovertly ♩ = 132

swing 8ths

Teacher education

I feel that I have grown as a piano teacher by using *American Popular Piano*. From cover-to-cover, its elegant simplicity—as seen in the introductions, glossaries, Technic Trackers, CD-track listings, and countless other features—demonstrates extraordinary pedagogical expertise and world-class compositional prowess. I have found myself having just as much fun with these pieces as the students, and the teacher duets help make even the longest day in the studio a pleasant time.

Until I began using this series I was always a bit squeamish about teaching improvisation to students. The preparatory level is so perfectly paced for the beginner that even a strictly-classical piano teacher like me can quickly absorb and polish these funda-

mental skills. After teaching various levels of the series, I am comfortable not only with improvisational skills, but also with popular music styles I never even knew existed. Without this series I would never have dreamed of teaching a jazz waltz, a rock-inspired composition, or a *cha cha*; yet they are so perfectly laid out from beginner to advanced, any traditional classical teacher can learn these unique pedagogical skills and have just as much fun in the lesson as the students. Most importantly, my students are responding to these styles as they never have before! ▲

This article originally appeared in the January/February 2011 issue of Clavier Companion.



Author Response

Response to *American Popular Piano* review

Editor's Note: Clavier Companion will invite the authors of each method series reviewed to respond to that review in the following issue. The response from the authors of *American Popular Piano* is presented below.

Christopher Norton and I have one word to say, to start with: THANKS!

We're thrilled that our series *American Popular Piano* has motivated Steve's and Gary's students—in every setting, from private lessons to group sessions and with age groups ranging from early-age beginners to adults. That was our first goal: that students actually enjoy the music they play in their piano lessons.

Sound obvious? We don't think so. Within the field of public school music education, there has been a fair amount of research about students' own attitudes toward music lessons, and, more to the point, why they stop studying. According to these surveys, one of the top reasons for quitting is: kids don't like the pieces they are working on. "I don't want to play music by dead people," wailed one little girl in a colleague's studio.

Christopher Norton is enjoying great good health, as the teachers and students who have taken pleasure in his many workshops and presentations can attest.¹ And the pieces he writes have that same "alive" contemporary sound that appeals to students. We think Gary and Steve nailed it when they described his music as "fresh," "witty," "now-sounding," "compelling," and "motivating."

That's the music Chris writes, because that's who he is. But there is a deeper, philosophical reason to use *American Popular Piano* as well. We are well aware that, as sales of acoustic pianos have dropped since 2000, purchases of guitars have skyrocketed. "The guitar has displaced the piano in a lot of music people listen to—and not just kids," says James Parakilas, author of the book *Piano Rolls: 300 Years of Life with the Piano*.² Chris and I are piano teachers, and we don't like this state of affairs. We set out to give teachers tools to motivate their students to continue studying piano—and to have fun playing it!

Interestingly enough, we've had very little feedback from teachers who don't want their students playing pieces in popular styles. We've had more questions from teachers—and many more from

students—asking where they can find even more music like this. Occasionally, we've been asked why we don't include pieces by Lady Gaga. But that was never our objective. We aim to provide pedagogically sound, well-sequenced pieces in contemporary popular styles that enable students to really learn to play the piano.

The pedagogical organization and content is my area of responsibility. I make endless lists of rhythmic motives, technical challenges, and articulation schemes that I ask Chris to include in the pieces. I want students using *American Popular Piano* to progress by problem solving and discovery learning, not by following over-long directions. By solving the unique challenge(s) embedded in each piece, students improve almost without knowing it, as Gary comments. The traditional building blocks of good pianism—good tone, careful balance, rhythmic acuity, note accuracy—can be learned effectively playing popular styles, as both of our reviewers attest. As long as students are actually motivated to practice!

I spent about three years studying abstract music theory journals in my work preparing the *American Popular Piano Skills* books. That is because I have become increasingly aware of the crucial importance of aural and rhythmic skills, and sight-reading ability, to students' success at the piano.³ I wanted to make sure that I was up-to-date on the best methods for teaching these skills to today's students. What I found out was this: the way I, and many in my generation, were taught ear training, and not taught sight-reading, doesn't work. Instead, small amounts of consistent practice and repetition based on tonic-dominant and triadic relationships, and familiar patterns, build expertise. It's gratifying that Steve finds this works well in thirty-minute lessons as well as in a longer class. That was one of my goals.

The backing tracks are a key part of our method. As Gary observes, working with them is an appealing way to reinforce continuity and steadiness, as well as creating an authentic overall sound. But we don't believe it works in every situation. In my own teaching, I have found that over-reliance on backing tracks and recordings creates its own problems. Learning the piano is partly about listening to others and borrowing cool ideas to use in one's own playing. But it's mainly about developing a personal love and imagination. We want our students to react to the sounds they



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hear, but also to internalize and create their own musical ideas. This doesn't happen if they are always playing to a backing track or copying recordings.

Scott McBride Smith and improvisation? None who know me or my articles over the years in *Clavier Companion* would expect to find those words in the same sentence. I well remember my terror as I took the final in our Improv class with Dr. Bert Konowitz at Teachers College, Columbia University. Doesn't matter; I did it, because I know how creativity builds critical musicianship, including audiation and a deeper level of musical understanding. We're thrilled that both Steve's and Gary's students have been able to dive into Improv using our Etudes books, without fear! And that Gary is starting to feel completely comfortable teaching it, too. As Steve says in his closing, maybe that's why J.S. Bach taught his sons to improvise in the popular styles of the day.

It would take an encyclopedia-sized book to tell you how much I have learned working on this Series, playing the musically rewarding music of Christopher Norton, and interacting with piano teachers all over the world. Chris and I owe you all a lot—and look forward to more time together. ▲

—Scott McBride Smith
Co-Author, *American Popular Piano*

¹ Word from Chris: "Hello everyone! I am indeed alive and well and hope to see you soon."

² This quote, and the depressing statistics, can be found in an article from *The Los Angeles Times* by reporter Mary MacVean, May 16, 2009, entitled "The Decline of the Piano."

³ For an impassioned plea to this effect from the guitar world (I don't dislike the guitar, really!!), see http://www.guitarplayerworld.com/Ear_Training.html.

This article originally appeared in the March/April 2011 issue of Clavier Companion.

Perspectives in Pedagogy

Rebecca Grooms Johnson, Editor



A survey of current methods: *Bastien Piano Basics*

This issue continues *Clavier Companion's* survey of piano methods. Each article in this series has three sections—an introductory synopsis by the Associate Editor, two articles written by teachers who have used the method extensively in their studios, and a response from the authors of the method surveyed in the previous issue. We hope that you find these articles to be an interesting and helpful overview of all the most popular methods currently on the market!

Bastien Piano Basics: by James and Jane Smisor Bastien

Publisher: Neil A. Kjos Music Company

Levels: *Piano, Theory, Performance, Technic*—Primer through Level 4; *A Line a Day Sight Reading*—Levels 1 - 4.

Alpha: Originally published in 1985, this series begins with pre-staff reading black-and white-key pieces. The black key songs are carefully fingered for the small hand size of most beginners. All of the white key off-staff pieces have note names inside each note head with minimal finger numbers. All of the Primer level songs have words and some have teacher accompaniments. One of the first series in the 1980s to use large, extremely colorful graphics; the pages tend to be, to my taste, visually busy.

Piano: The lesson books present a strong multi-key approach. Intervals are introduced and five-finger hand positions are emphasized from the beginning. Moving at a lively pace, the Primer introduces the three-note tonic chord, eighth notes, sharps, flats, *legato*, and *staccato*. Rhythm is presented with nominative counting.

Level 2 introduces dominant sevenths and the full I-IV-I-V7-I chord progression. By the end of the series, pieces are written in key signatures of up to six flats and five sharps. Throughout the books the

left hand plays a variety of chordal accompaniment styles; however, there are very few two-part contrapuntal textures. Many of the original pieces and folk song arrangements have a pop/rock/jazzy sound, and simplified transcriptions of classical themes are also presented. Due to the multi-key emphasis throughout, students are given many opportunities to transpose the songs.

The multi-key approach has many strengths—a thorough knowledge of the theory and technique of primary chord progressions and seventh chords, the ability to transpose and harmonize with ease, and a strong physical connection with the keyboard topography of the five-finger positions. Teachers should, however, be careful to supplement this approach with pieces that extend beyond five-finger positions at a fairly early level and literature that offers two-part writing and non-chordal accompaniment styles to prepare their students for the reading and technical requirements of intermediate music, particularly in the left hand.

Although the pictures become smaller in the upper level books, the graphics do not become concurrently age-appropriate.

Repertoire: Written by Jane Smisor Bastien, the *Performance* books are filled with original pieces and arrangements of folk songs in a variety of styles; they provide additional pieces to support each new concept in the *Piano* books. No teacher duets are included in any levels.

Theory: Correlated with the *Piano* books, a variety of drills and games support and reiterate the concepts presented. Upper levels offer various melodies for harmonization with theory and jazz chord symbols, and some compositional activities; there are, however, very few activities for improvisation.

Technic: Consisting of etude-like pieces that explore and expand the technical chal-

Rebecca Grooms Johnson, Ph.D., NCTM, is a nationally respected leader in the field of piano pedagogy. She is an independent teacher and has taught extensively at the college and university level. Rebecca is active in the Music Teachers National Association, where she has held the offices of President of the Ohio Music Teachers Association and National Chair of MTNA's Pedagogy Committee. She currently serves as National Certification Chair, and three times a year she publishes a feature in *American Music Teacher* titled What's New in Pedagogy Research.

This issue's contributors:

Elaina Denney Burns, NCTM, is an adjunct faculty member at Clarke University. She is currently completing a doctorate in piano performance and pedagogy at the University of Oklahoma and holds degrees from the University of Colorado and the University of Delaware. Mrs. Burns has established private piano studios in Delaware, Colorado, Oklahoma, Nebraska, and Iowa, and she has remained active as a chamber musician. She lives in Dubuque with her husband and frequent collaborator, conductor Brian Burns, and their son, Daniel.

Kristi Helfen holds a B.S. in music education/piano from Asbury University and an M.M. in piano pedagogy from Georgia State University. She has taught group piano classes of all levels at GSU, currently works as piano instructor at Oxford College of Emory University, and maintains a private studio of thirty students. Ms. Helfen accompanies for community choruses, school musical productions, recitals, and various events. She also enjoys performing as a member of Redeemer Piano Ensemble, a group of eight pianists at four pianos.

¹ The aim of this series is to review the core materials of piano methods that are either new or substantially changed since a similar series of articles appeared in *Piano Quarterly* in the 1980s. Please see the September/October 2009 issue of *Clavier Companion* for more details on this project. For reviews of methods that are older or have not been revised recently, we invite you to revisit the original *Piano Quarterly* series.

lenges of the pieces in the *Piano* books, the upper level books include exercises and etudes by Schmitt, Hanon, Schytte, and Gurlitt. No information or analogies are given at any level concerning the correct physical approach to playing these pieces.

A Line A Day: Beginning with Level 1, each page offers a *Daily Note Search* and three four-measure phrases for practice. Each phrase has boxes for recording the day it was practiced and number of times played. The first page of each book gives helpful preparatory and evaluative suggestions for the student. A grid on the back cover provides the opportunity for progress reports with specific criteria.

Teacher's Guide: No teachers' guides are available in hard copy or online.

Compact Discs: Each level has a two-disc set of attractive, well-

written orchestral accompaniments by Paul Sheffel for the *Piano*, *Performance*, and *Technic* books. Each piece begins with a two-measure orchestral introduction, and the piano part is played by different non-piano instruments. The accompaniments are synthesized instrumental samples and (unfortunately) given at only one tempo. They would make even scales and Hanon fun to play!

Omega: It is somewhat difficult to give a level to the final books in this series. Although the key signatures are advanced, the repertoire varies between late beginner and early intermediate.

This series, with its strong multi-key approach, probably works best with students particularly interested in keyboard skills and perhaps playing in a jazz or rock band, rather than students (or teachers) who are more repertoire-based in their interests and goals. ▲

Developing facility and musicianship at the keyboard

by Elaina Denney Burns

When I first began teaching piano, I accepted students of all ages and levels and tried to familiarize myself with as many methods as possible. I kept transfer students in their original materials and started young beginners in *Bastien Piano Basics*, *The Music Tree*, *Alfred's Basic Piano Library*, or *Piano Adventures*. That first year of teaching served as my own "methods evaluation assignment" before I pursued graduate studies. Now, nearly a decade (and five states!) later, I can look at the successes and challenges presented by each method from a new perspective.

I currently teach using a large variety of educational materials, and I continually ask myself these questions when I accept a new student: What method would work well for this student? What method best suits my teaching style? What method would work best for both of us as we strive to make music together? The right combination of student, teacher, and materials generally yields the best results, and therefore it makes sense to have knowledge of as many different approaches as possible.

I find that *Bastien Piano Basics* works well for 7- to 8-year-old beginners. I have had less success using the method with older students (such as 11- to 13-year-old transfer students who are still at a beginning level), since many of the illustrations are clearly designed to be enjoyed by younger children. With my older students, I tend to use a series designed for the older beginner in order to refresh and review concepts in a way that is appropriate for both the age and level of the student. The *Bastien Piano Basics* method, however, is a wonderful choice for the average-age beginner, since concepts are clearly introduced and thoroughly reinforced throughout the series in a way that is meaningful to children. Over the course of the series, students begin to develop a natural way of playing due to the emphasis on musicality and phrasing.

Advantages of the multi-key approach

Bastien Piano Basics is a gradual multi-key method in which students are introduced to all twelve keys over the course of the series.

LEVEL	KEYS INTRODUCED
Primer Level	C, Middle C, and G Positions
Level 1	Group 1: C, G, F
Level 2	Group 2: D, A, E
Level 3	Group 3: D-flat, A-flat, E-flat
Level 4	Group 4: G-flat, B-flat, B

For teachers who prefer to give students a faster paced introduction to all twelve keys, Bastien's single-volume *Pre-Reading Experiences* can be used as a supplement or replacement. I find that the successful completion of a method using the multi-key approach offers students access to a great variety of works by standard classical and educational composers because the students are considerably less fearful of key signatures littered with sharps or flats.

This familiarity with all twelve keys makes transposition, which is experienced at various points throughout the series, much easier for students to grasp. Although the multi-key approach is sometimes criticized for confining students' hands in strict positions, the implications for early transposition provide a distinct advantage that outweighs possible limitations of the consistent use of five-finger patterns. *Piano Basics* introduces transposition in Level 1, and by Levels 3 and 4 students are transposing two or three pieces in each key up or down by a half-step.

Since some pieces in the beginning of the Primer Level require students to use all five fingers on the black keys, the teacher should watch closely for proper hand position and encourage parents to monitor their child's positioning at home. In my own teaching, I use a great deal of supplementary pre-staff reading material and I enjoy pieces from Alfred's *My First...* series as well as solo sheets by Mary Leaf. Practicing this material alongside *Piano Basics* offers students a variety of composers while still exposing them to the multi-key method.

A strong technical foundation

The front cover of *Bastien Piano Basics* is easily recognizable, with its three brightly colored building blocks for pianistic success. A strategically placed metronome on the *Technic* books reminds students to practice their technical exercises with a strict, steady beat at multiple practice tempi. Jane Bastien is a strong promoter of slow practice, and this valuable strategy helps students develop proper technique from the very beginning of their studies.

Clean layouts in the *Technic* books allow the teacher to introduce technical approaches that best suit the teacher's style and philosophy. A lack of superfluous instructions offers a much less cluttered look than can be found in some other early technical approaches. Teachers must interpret the music and determine the best way to convey the concepts to individual students. I find this approach, which lacks highly specific instructions, to be more conducive to creative teaching.

The *Technic* books are especially valuable because they expose students to more challenging passages at early levels. Multi-key methods are often considered overly position-oriented, but exercises such as “Hear the Wind Blow!,” “Dragon’s Den,” and “Dolphins at Play” help students to move out of standard five-finger patterns (see Excerpts 1-3).

Excerpt 1: “Hear the Wind Blow!” from *Technic Primer*.

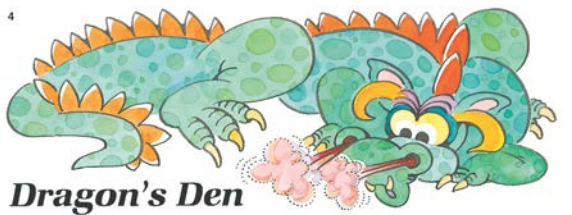


Hear the Wind Blow!




WP215 Use with pages 48-49 of *Piano, Primer Level*.

Excerpt 2: “Dragon’s Den” from *Technic Level 1*.



Dragon’s Den



Excerpt 3: “Dolphins at Play” from *Technic Level 1*.

Dolphins at Play



Introducing chords

Chords are introduced in the *Primer Level*, and I find this to be a distinct advantage of the method. Students enjoy the rich sound of chords as they accompany traditional folk melodies such as *Row, Row, Row Your Boat*. I must admit that I had a difficult time teaching chords to beginning students during my first years as a teacher, but, over time, I have had more success with helping students to accomplish this task. I find that if students are sitting at the proper height at the keyboard, and the hand is formed with a high bridge and gently rounded fingers, students can usually master chord playing fairly quickly. Teacher accompaniments are included with about half of the pieces in the *Primer Level* and with very few pieces in subsequent levels; perhaps because students learn to provide a thicker texture by adding chords so early in this method. Teachers who enjoy the rhythmic and motivational benefits of accompanying students should improvise an accompaniment or supplement with additional materials.

The Bastien philosophy

Since I am currently conducting my doctoral research on Jane Bastien’s teaching and methodology, it is difficult to give a synopsis of her materials without appearing somewhat biased. I can, however, offer a unique perspective on her philosophy and on the *Bastien Piano Basics* method in particular, because I have observed her teaching and interviewed numerous students from various stages of her career. Bastien writes pieces that she enjoys using in her own studio, but she does not exclusively use her own materials, nor does she expect others to do so.

When using any method, it is helpful to seek out opportunities to observe the teacher or teachers who created it. Many well-known teachers and authors have created DVDs or online tutorials explaining key aspects of their methodologies. In addition, exhibitor showcases at MTNA events often feature authors demonstrating their techniques, and these can provide valuable insights into each unique pedagogical approach and the numerous ways in which to teach the given materials. ▲

Comprehensive musicianship with fun, motivating activities

by Kristi Helfen

Bastien *Piano Basics* became a part of my piano studio in the mid-1980s. Since then I have completed graduate studies in piano pedagogy, analyzed many other methods, and used various materials brought in by transfer students, and I still choose *Bastien Piano Basics* for my elementary-aged beginners.

A timeless classic

Even though *Piano Basics* was published twenty-five years ago, students still enjoy the colorful, entertaining illustrations and fun-to-play repertoire. Headings are in large, bold print, so they can quickly see when new musical terms and symbols are being introduced. Explanations are clear and to the point. The pages are uncluttered and exhibit a good balance of music, explanations, and illustrations. New concepts are well-paced and follow a logical sequence.

A solid beginning

The Primer level starts with several black-key pieces using quarter, half, and whole notes. When students are introduced to the music alphabet and learn how each white key relates to a black key group, I find it helpful to call these the “CDE” and “FGAB” groups.

The C position is introduced with letter names written inside each note; finger numbers are also indicated. Soon afterward, finger numbers are removed and time signatures 2/4, 3/4, and 4/4 are presented. Staff reading begins before the halfway point of the book, and intervals are introduced shortly thereafter. Except for the beginning note for each hand, finger numbers disappear once students are on the staff (although some are added later when sharps and flats are taught). This early removal of finger numbers and the introduction to intervals of 2nds through 5ths helps ensure a strong foundation in music reading.

Playing chords

An entire page in the Primer is devoted to beginning chord playing—utilizing both broken and blocked forms. For the elementary-aged learner this is not too early, although blocked chords require a great deal of attention. I have my students play hands alone in half notes with just the third finger, watching carefully for a curved shape. Then the fifth finger joins the well-positioned third finger, with the student making sure the fifth finger doesn’t collapse on its side. Once these fingers are stable, the thumb is added. They practice this each week until the fingers gain strength and correct hand position for blocked chord playing becomes natural.

Off and running!

Soon after stepping into Level 1, students see chords labeled with I and V7 (with the 3rd and 5th omitted from the V7) and a discussion of the balance between melody and accompaniment. Reminders are given to continue good hand balance as students move to other keys. Level 1 contains folk songs, spirituals, classical tunes, and many innovative, upbeat compositions by the Bastiens. Student favorites include *Pop! Goes the Weasel*, *Cops and Robbers*, and *Ode to Joy*. A highlight of the book comes when students learn about the damper pedal and use it with pedal markings throughout *Morning Prelude* (see Excerpt 4).

Key groups

Major key groups are introduced at each level. Each group is classified by the look and feel of the I chords in that group (all white, black in the middle, etc.). Group 4 is insightfully labeled the “Unusual Group” since the I chords of its keys differ greatly from one another. Upon completion of Level 4, the student can play in major and minor keys up to five sharps and six flats. This sequence of learning key groups, along with several pieces in each key, gives students much needed confidence when tackling new repertoire in these tougher key signatures.

One of my favorite teaching pages is in Level 1 when Group 1 is introduced. Keyboard pictures show how C, G, and F chords are all on white keys. Changing hand positions within a piece is presented for the first time in *Chord Hop* with blue arrows pointing the way as each change occurs. Chord symbols are explained and written above the staff and there is a clever illustration of a rabbit, frog, and kangaroo jumping rope; yet the page remains uncluttered (see Excerpt 5).

“What’s at the end of the book?”

When they get a new piano book, many students like to look ahead to see where it is going to take them. They are especially

Excerpt 4: “Morning Prelude” from Piano Level 1.

Excerpt 5: “Chord Hop” from Piano Level 1.

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(Primer)



(Level 2)



(Level 1)



(Level 3)



(Level 4)



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delighted to find arrangements of *The Entertainer* at the end of Level 2 and *Für Elise* closing Level 3. I appreciate the variety of styles that the *Piano* and *Performance* books include throughout all levels of this series. Students are exposed to classical types of compositions such as the march, waltz, minuet, prelude, etude, tarantella, rhapsody, barcarolle, and sonatina. They are introduced to the music of Mozart, Beethoven, Brahms, Dvořák, Offenbach, Sousa, and others. Styles also include blues, boogie-woogie, rock 'n' roll, hymns, Spanish and Middle Eastern music, and pieces with dissonant harmonies often depicting outer space.


Learning the language

All of my students are required to study theory as part of their piano training. If they express a desire to create their own music, we have a responsibility to equip them to read, play, *and* write the language. Early in *Primer Theory*, students are asked to improvise a melody. In Level 1 *Theory* they learn the meaning of transposition, then play and write out the transposition of a melody with chords. Instructions to transpose a piece appear often throughout *Piano* Levels 2-4. In *Theory* Levels 2-3, students write answers to question phrases. Forms such as AABA, binary, and ternary are highlighted in many of the pieces. All of these music theory components construct a framework on which the beginning composition student can build (see Excerpt 6).


Excerpt 6: Page 9 of Theory Level 3.

Question and Answer Phrases

15. Make up (improvise) two-measure answer phrases to complete these lines. Write your best answers on the staves.



16. Write a melody and the harmony indicated by the chord symbols to complete these lines.



Use with page 15 of Piano, Level 3. WP208

Technic and accompaniment CDs

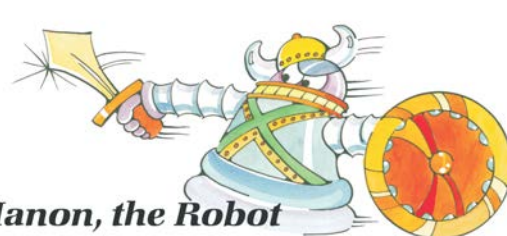
Reinforcing concepts presented in the *Piano* books, the *Technic* books often follow a theme such as the jungle, sea, or circus. The CDs have accompaniments for everything in the *Piano*, *Performance*, and *Technic* books. What a fun way to learn technic! The orchestrations are always clever and the tempos are reasonable. When students are ready to play with an accompaniment CD, I ask them to guess what kinds of sounds they might hear to fit the piece they are working on.

Meeting the challenge

Bastien Piano Basics, with its curriculum of *Piano*, *Theory*, *Performance*, *Technic*, and *A Line A Day*, encourages complete musicianship. I do, however, have a couple of suggestions: It would be helpful if the Primer and Level 1 cover colors were more contrasting; and I would love to see companion classical repertoire books correlating with each level of the series.


I am grateful to have encountered *Bastien Piano Basics* in my early years of teaching. In using their method, I have gained greater insight as an instructor, while my students have been given a solid base for musical growth. As I reviewed materials for this article, I happened upon an exercise in Level 2 *Technic* titled *Hanon, the Robot* and couldn't help but notice a strong resemblance to *Conan, the Barbarian* (see Excerpt 7). Learning to play the piano is not for the weak or fainthearted, that's for sure. May we encourage students each and every lesson to rise up and meet the challenge. Thank you, Bastiens, for your expertise and guidance in this process. ▲

Excerpt 7: "Hanon the Robot" from Technic Level 2.



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Hanon, the Robot



All excerpts in this article are from *BASTIEN PIANO BASICS* by JAMES BASTIEN and JANE BASTIEN. © Neil A. Kjos Music Company. All rights reserved. Used by permission 2011.

This article originally appeared in the March/April 2011 issue of Clavier Companion.

Author Response

Response to Bastien Piano Basics review

Editor's Note: Clavier Companion will invite the authors of each method series reviewed to respond to that review in the following issue. The response from the authors of Bastien Piano Basics is presented below.

As many of you know, my husband, James, passed away in 2005, and I know he would have been honored as I was to be included in your 2011 survey of current methods. I wish to express my thanks to *Clavier Companion* and especially Rebecca Grooms Johnson, editor of "Perspectives in Pedagogy," for including our books in the March/April issue. I would also like to thank Elaina and Kristi for taking the time and energy to survey the books and write the reviews. I am so pleased that they have enjoyed teaching with *Bastien Piano Basics*.

During the 2007-2009 time frame, and after an especially sizable number of high school seniors graduated from my studio, I acquired many new four- to six-year-old beginners. Because of their age, I started each of them in our series designed for young children, *Bastien's Invitation to Music*. As they progressed through the four-level course, they also learned music from several supplementary books and sheet music solos. As this school year comes to a close, all have finished Level 1 of the *Bastien Basics* series and some have reached the midway point in Level 2 and will also have played out of *Piano Literature, Vol. 1*, featuring original piano literature by master composers.

These young students all started out playing in five-finger positions. I like teaching this way because students can make music from the very beginning while learning the keyboard geography. While at the same time they are playing little pieces in positions, they are learning the relationship of individual notes on the staff to the keyboard. The relationship of written notes on the staff to the keyboard is critical, and I use these indispensable tools: *Note Flashcards* and *Interval Flashcards!* These flashcards aid in reinforcing individual note reading and interval recognition, and students learn *all* notes on the staff, not just the notes they play in their music. As students progress and begin moving out of position, they know where to move. They are ready. Again, the flashcards are essential tools in my studio. I often make up games when using the flashcards—my students have fun and retain what they have been drilled on! Students have their own flashcards at home as well and look forward to next week's drills and games.

Before moving on to more difficult literature, I want my students to learn a wide variety of music and to understand all types of note values and rhythm patterns. Students enjoy playing from the Bastien supplementary collections, which include graded books celebrating holidays such as Halloween, Thanksgiving, Christmas, Hanukkah, and Valentine's Day. We also have collections showcasing arrangements of music by master composers (Primer Level-Level 4), and we have a variety of themed books featuring folk songs and sacred music. I also enjoy providing music from many different composers, many of whom are actively publishing new music today. Students also balance their playing time with their study of music theory and ear training. Another important goal is to teach students musical understanding so they can teach themselves the kind of music they want to play even as adults. From the beginning, it's my priority to show students how to use their hands in order to produce good phrasing, balance, and voicing of melodies.

I do love to teach at many levels and discover how students actually learn. James and I were extremely fortunate that the late Neil A. Kjos, Jr. made it possible for us to create method books in the exact style we wanted to teach. What a privilege it was, and still is, to have a way to share the joys of piano education with colleagues and students worldwide. My daughters, Lisa and Lori, have brought new ideas and creativity into more recent publications, and we are thankful for the ongoing support of Mark and Tim Kjos.

To close, I simply want to remind you what a fun and rewarding job we have as piano teachers. I encourage you to teach each student as though he or she is your very best. You can't predict what that student will do with music in the future, so give him or her your absolute best. Have a great time! ▲

—Jane Smisor Bastien
Co-Author Bastien Piano Basics

This article originally appeared in the May/June 2011 issue of Clavier Companion.



Rebecca Grooms Johnson, Ph.D., NCTM, is a nationally respected leader in the field of piano pedagogy. She is an independent teacher and has taught extensively at the college and university levels. Rebecca is active in the Music Teachers National Association, where she has served as President of the Ohio Music Teachers Association, National Chair of MTNA's Pedagogy Committee, and National Certification Chair. She is currently Vice-President of the MTNA Board of Directors, and three times a year she publishes a feature in American Music Teacher titled What's New in Pedagogy Research.

This issue's contributors:

Kristine Parker, NCTM, holds a D.M.A. from Michigan State University in Flute Performance. She has pursued special training in Early Childhood Music and Elementary General Music Education using the Music Learning Theory (MLT) developed by Edwin Gordon. She is the owner and director of Allegro Music Academy and teaches flute, piano, violin, voice, early childhood music, and children's choir. Kristine is also the director of music at the Muslim Educational Trust School in Tigard, Oregon. She served as a member of both the Orchestra on Temple Square and the Mormon Tabernacle Choir.

Barbara Hendricks is a registered Music Together® teacher. She holds a B.A. in Elementary and Music Education from Calvin College along with a Master's in Music Education (with early childhood specialization) from Michigan State University. She also holds certifications from Gordon's Institute for Music Learning and the Early Childhood Music & Movement Association.

Barbara currently teaches both early childhood music and movement classes, and piano lessons in her independent music studio in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Issues and Ideas:

Perspectives in Pedagogy

Rebecca Grooms Johnson, Editor

A survey of current methods: Music Moves for Piano

This issue continues *Clavier Companion's* survey of piano methods.¹ Each article in this series has three sections—an introductory synopsis by the Associate Editor, two articles written by teachers who have used the method extensively in their studios, and a response from the authors of the method surveyed in the previous issue. We hope that you find these articles to be an interesting and helpful overview of all the most popular methods currently on the market!

Music Moves for Piano: by Marilyn Lowe in cooperation with Edwin E. Gordon

Publisher: Music Moves LLC, distributed by GIA Publications, Inc.

Books: *Keyboard Games for Beginners* Books A and B with Teacher's Guide

Books 1 - 5 with Teacher's Lesson Plans (Teacher's Lesson Plans for Levels 4 and 5 are currently in production.)

Rhythm and Tonal Patterns from the Pattern CD (with accompanying CD)

Reading and Writing Music Notation Books 1 - 3

Keyalities & Tonalities: The Complete Book of Arpeggios, Cadences & Scales

The Well-Tempered Reader Books A - C

Alpha: A staggering amount of thought and work has gone into the creation of this non-traditional series. Elements of Orff, Dalcroze, Suzuki, Kodály, and Taubman are combined with Edwin Gordon's learning theories on audiation. Strongly espousing the "mother tongue" philosophy, students "hear" and "do" for at least two years before they begin to see and read the written language of music.

Students in small groups learn through movement (whole body and shoulder/arm/hand/finger), rhythmic chanting, tonal pattern singing, improvisation, and rote piano pieces. Beginning notational

reading and writing is gradually introduced through the *Reading and Writing Music Notation* books during the third book of the core series (when students are approximately eleven years old). Early repertoire emphasizes whole arm movement over the entire keyboard by each hand.

Keyboard Games for Beginners with Teacher's Guide: Designed for children ages four and five, with introductory activities in audiation and keyboard skills.

Books 1 - 5: Books are organized by unit; each unit contains:

- **Lesson Time Objectives**—a printed list of what was covered at the lesson, including Activities to Teach Audiation Skills, Keyboard Geography and Technique, Exploration/Creativity/Improvisation, and Book/Listening Assignments.

- **Song to Sing**—students sing and move to songs, some of which they will later learn to play by rote.

- **Exploration/Creativity/Improvisation**—suggested creative activities for the keyboard with a strong emphasis on improvisation.

- **Performance Piece**—usually a folk song taught by rote, this section can also include scales, cadences, or arpeggios. Songs are presented in a "rote notation" that pictures the fingers and keys used, and cover a wide variety of keys and meters. This page includes a standard form listing possible lesson concepts and activities, a blank for the teacher to check-off what was covered in the lesson, and a blank for the student or parent to indicate that it was practiced at home.

Book 1: Rhythm is introduced with an emphasis on feeling the macro and micro beats and chanting short rhythms—first on a neutral word and then with DU-DE for duple and DU-DA-DI for triple patterns. Portato and legato are introduced and practiced by rote in the second unit. Unit

¹ The aim of this series is to review the core materials of piano methods that are either new or substantially changed since a similar series of articles appeared in *Piano Quarterly* in the 1980s. Please see the September/October 2009 issue of *Clavier Companion* for more details on this project. For reviews of methods that are older or have not been revised recently, we invite you to revisit the original *Piano Quarterly* series.

Three introduces singing tonal patterns by rote with solfège syllables. Beginning in the tenth unit, students learn to sing and play simple versions of the tonic-dominant-tonic cadence in G, F, C, and F# major, and play the C major scale.

Book 2: Arpeggiated tonic and dominant chords are taught by rote and played in a variety of major and minor keys along with several scales. Dotted eighth/sixteenth note rhythms and compound meter are introduced by rote. Students begin playing single note tonic and dominant harmonies in the left hand with right hand melodies. Supplementary songs are also taught by rote.

Book 3: Five-finger folk songs continue to grow more complex. The tonic/subdominant cadence is introduced and students play in D major, B minor, A major, and F# minor. Students transpose, improvise, change tonality and meters, and create accompaniments. Because students begin working in the *Reading and Writing Music Notation* books at this level, fewer rote songs are provided. Suggestions for supplementary rote pieces are listed in the introduction and three volumes of *The Well-Tempered Reader* (currently in production) provide additional notated pieces for analysis and playing.

Book 4: Contains a beginning exploration of Dorian and Mixolydian modes. Cadences are expanded to minors and modes, and include the major subtonic. Rote songs expand beyond five-finger positions, and creating melodic and rhythmic variations is emphasized. Meters include five and seven beats per measure.

Book 5: Currently in production, it will complete the exploration of modes and introduce 7th, 9th, and 11th chords for improvisational activities.

Rhythm and Tonal Patterns from the Pattern CD with accompanying CD: A single volume, it contains all of the rhythm and singing patterns for each unit of the entire series. The CD presents each rhythm pattern first on a neutral word (BAH) and then with eurhythmic syllables. Each tonal pattern is initially sung on a neutral syllable and then with solfège syllables.

Reading and Writing Music Notation Books 1 - 3: Beginning with a detailed explanation of all aspects of notation, these books progressively introduce advancing theory concepts. Short musical excerpts for playing are accompanied by various analysis activities.

Keyalities & Tonalities: The Complete Book of Arpeggios, Cadences & Scales: A reference book composed entirely of rote notational symbols.

Teacher's Lesson Plans: Pages of introductory text explain the philosophy of audiation and the correct approach for presenting these materials; however, one might also wish to attend training workshops presented by the author and her colleagues, and explore the resources offered on the website www.musicmovesforpiano.com. Additional information and opportunities for a deeper understanding of the tenets of audiation can be found on the website of The Gordon Institute for Music Learning (www.GIML.org).

Instructions for presenting every aspect of each unit are given in extensive detail in the teacher's guides. Beginning teachers, as well as seasoned instructors, who are exploring this approach for the first time may find these to be either helpful or overwhelming. Each unit's "Lesson Time Objectives" and "Lesson Plans" generally encompass five to seven pages of detailed suggestions and instructions, with recommended lesson time allocations for each section of the unit. Good analogies and word usage suggestions are given for technical approaches to correct hand and arm positions, the use of weight, and rebound from the key—reflecting some of the philosophies of Dorothy Taubman.

The appendix of each *Teacher's Lesson Plans* book gives detailed instructions on:

- Teaching Rhythm Patterns and Tonal Patterns
- Teaching Movement
- Teaching Songs
- Teaching a Rote Piano Solo
- Teaching Exploration, Creativity, and Improvisation
- Teaching Reading and Writing
- Teaching Tips
- Coordinated Rhythm Movement Activities

Teacher's Lesson Plans for Books 4 and 5 are currently in production.

Compact Discs: Each student book contains a CD that presents all rote performance pieces. Early level single line melodies are played on the piano followed by the accompanying piano duet. All pieces are presented at performance tempi.

Omega: Repertoire in all three books of *The Well-Tempered Reader* is at the same late-elementary to early-intermediate level. Consisting entirely of Baroque and Classical pieces, they present a total of five pieces in every major and minor key with some opportunities for improvisation and composition. ▲

Understanding the context

by Kristine Parker

As a child I participated in the California Music Teachers Association Certificate of Merit program and completed Level 10 as a senior in high school. I performed repertoire and technique well, understood music theory, and had basic sight reading and ear training skills. However, if you asked me to play and harmonize "Happy Birthday" or any other simple folk song in any key, I could not do it. Fortunately, my students will not have the same experience; by using *Music Moves for Piano (MMP)* they learn to play, harmonize, and transpose simple melodies by the end of the first book.

Three years ago I began using *Music Moves for Piano* (including *Keyboard Games*) with my students. After a year of teaching this

method, I attended workshops and was certified by the Gordon Institute of Music Learning. Because I have only been using the method for a relatively short time, my most advanced students are in the latter part of the second book. I have not, therefore, used *Books 3 or 4*, or the *Reading and Writing Music Notation* books.

I use the *MMP* approach almost exclusively in my studio. The only exception I make is when I teach adult beginners who strongly prefer to use a "traditional approach" by learning to "read" music immediately. I find that students who begin their piano experience reading notation generally do not understand the context of what they are reading or playing. It is as if they are reading a sentence letter by letter rather than words that form a complete idea. It is an

in-the-moment experience where every note is a discrete event until, after much practice, phrases start to take shape and music is created.

Developing musicianship

Music Moves for Piano appeals to me because it fosters a foundation of good musicianship. Students who participate in this form of music instruction will be life-long musicians whether or not they continue to play the piano. Several elements of the method contribute to this:

- Most students are able to harmonize and transpose melodies by the end of the first book.

- The rhythmic and tonal pattern instruction, along with the “Song to Sing” in each unit, teaches listening and singing skills.

- By presenting rhythmic and tonal patterns, the “Song to Sing,” and the piano pieces by rote, students learn to listen to and identify context. They recognize major and minor. They hear the difference between duple and triple meters.

- Those who start piano lessons unable to sing in tune learn to sing more accurately.

- Rarely do students rush or slow the tempo, and they play their pieces with rhythmic accuracy almost every time.

- Movement activities help students play with more expression and better phrasing (see Excerpt 1).

Extensive review

Materials are reviewed in three different ways. First, in the “Lesson Time Objectives” column for each unit, students are given a list of songs and activities to practice and review for the week. Each piece has a “Music Information” box that allows space for parents or students to check off whether the piece was reviewed at home. In the early units, this list often includes pieces from more than one unit. The second part of the review process occurs when students reach the tenth unit, where the “Lesson Time Objectives” include a systematic review starting from the first unit of the book (see Excerpt 2). Students learn the duet parts and finally echo, perform, and create with the rhythmic and tonal patterns found in each piece. When they finish these steps, they “pass it off” and put stickers on each page and on a chart the teacher creates inside the front cover of the book. The third, and possibly most effective means of review, occurs because this method is designed to teach small groups of three or four students of differing skill levels. In this setting students come for an hour and their time overlaps with other students who are either more or less expe-

Excerpt 1: Lesson plans from Music Moves for Piano, Teacher's Book.

MUSIC MOVES FOR PIANO • LESSON PLANS

LESSON PLAN

ACTIVITY TIME (10-15 minutes)

Duple Meter

1. Have S stand and engage in the Duple meter “Watch Please” game. Continue movement.
2. T and S sing “Duple Meter.”
3. Have S chant macrobeats using DU.
4. Have S chant Duple meter microbeats using DU DE.

Duple Meter Rhythm Pattern Instruction

1. Rhythm 3A1, Part 1—Aural/Oral, Division patterns.
2. Use enrichment patterns.

Duple Meter Performance Piece

T plays “Sneaking” two times (p. 33, student book):

- S move their bodies in a circular way.
- S roll their arms.

Minor Tonality

T establishes Minor tonality. Have S sing the resting tone LA. Then T sings “Russian Folk Song Two” two times:

- S do a dance for two hands. Freeze and sing LA when T stops singing.
- S do a swaying dance.

Major Tonality

T sings “Hot Cross Buns:”

- S do a dance for two thumbs.

Song To Sing: “Major Song” (M/D)

1. T sings the song with words:
 - S move shoulders in a continuous fluid manner.
2. Have S echo the words (without singing).
3. Teach S to sing the song.

Major Tonality Pattern Instruction

1. Tonal 2A1—Verbal Association, Label tonic and dominant pattern function.
2. Tonal 2B1—Verbal Association, S sing the first pitch of the pattern.

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3. Tonal 2B2—Verbal Association, S sing the resting tone DO.
4. Tonal 2B3—Verbal Association, Students sing tonic and dominant patterns using syllables.
5. Use enrichment patterns.

Triple Meter

1. Have S stand and engage in the Triple meter “Watch Please” game. Continue movement.
2. T and S sing “Triple Meter.”
3. Have S chant macrobeats using BAH.
4. Have S chant Triple meter microbeats using BAH.
5. If more than one S is present, have some S chant macrobeats while others chant Triple microbeats.
6. T sings “Big Ben:”
 - S do a dance for hips.
7. T establishes Major tonality and S sing the resting tone DO:
 - T sings “Big Ben” while S move lightly then freeze and sing DO when T stops singing.
8. T sings “English Folk Song” while S and T move to macrobeats and microbeats.

KEYBOARD GEOGRAPHY AND TECHNIQUE (10-15 minutes)

Activities Away from the Keyboard

1. Have S stand and swing both arms.
2. Have S feel the arms hang easily from the shoulders.
3. Have S raise their shoulders as high as they can. Hold the shoulders up, then drop them.
4. Keep the head-neck-back in a straight, comfortable position.

Keyboard Activities

Articulation

1. Play two-note slurs:
 - Have S practice letting go of the second key of a two-note group (a slur).
 - Have S listen for a lighter sound on the second note.
2. Have S play three notes separated. Have S play three notes connected.

rienced. What is new to one student may be review to another.

The group lesson approach is challenging for me, as I am not confident in my ability to meet the needs of all the students simultaneously. Presently, I generally teach either private or partner lessons with two students in the same unit of a lesson book. I do have one lesson with two brothers—one is older and been taking lessons for one year, and the other is just beginning. It has been helpful for both of them to go through the early units with each other. Music patterns are solidified for the older student, and he in turn helps his younger

brother. They enjoy playing the duets and doing the movement activities together.

Optimal ages

Most of my students are between four and ten years old, and this approach works well for them. It works best for me to have beginning four- and five-year-old students participate in thirty-minute *Keyboard Games* classes. I have tried three students for forty-five minutes, but some of the less mature children have a hard time in a longer class. In *Keyboard Games*, most all of the activities are movement based. Each lesson plan suggests an art project that I

Unit 7

Music Information

Duple Meter

Mixolydian Tonality

SO is E^b

Melody starts on RE

Mixolydian Honeybee

Accompaniment
Root Chord Changes

Melody

Check List

Lesson	Home
_____ Melody	_____
_____ Melody	_____
_____ New Keyality	_____
_____ New Keyality	_____
_____ Accompaniment	_____
_____ Hands Together	_____
_____ New Tonality	_____
_____ New Meter	_____
_____ Melodic Variation	_____
_____ Rhythmic Variation	_____
_____ Create with RP	_____
_____ Create with TP	_____

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develop audiation and keyboard skills.

After graduation, I began by experimenting with the *Music Moves for Piano* books and eventually started using them exclusively in my own studio. It is even clearer to me now that Lowe's books not only address key components of Gordon's Music Learning Theory, but also incorporate the best teaching practices.

A unique path to music literacy

Helping children learn music in the same way that one learns language provides the foundation for this approach. Throughout the series students are given opportunity to hear and perform music in a variety of tonalities and meters, to develop skills with tonal and rhythmic patterns in a way that helps them think and create with the patterns, and eventually to recognize these patterns on the staff. It is important to understand that the use of functional patterns to teach music literacy is unique to this sound-to-sight approach. The use of Gordon's rhythm system along with a moveable *do/la*-based tonal system offers a logical and easy way for students to organize the functional patterns they are learning.

While experiencing activities that develop audiation and keyboard skills, students also move to hone their rhythmic sense, and sing to foster tonal audiation. More importantly, they are asked to focus on only one of these at a time. This body-to-mind progression helps solidify what students are learning.

Although the initial use of rote instruction is intended to help students develop

audiation, it is surprising to discover many other benefits. Removing the distractions of the page helps students focus on developing technical and keyboard geography skills that are an important part of playing the piano, and students have the freedom to play solo pieces that are more interesting than what they might otherwise be able to play. Early concerns about the transition from sound to sight have been alleviated with the addition of two new *Reading and Writing* books.

Excerpt 5: "When DO is F#" from Music Moves for Piano, Book 1.

When DO is F[#]
For the Student

Learn to Find F[#]

1. F[#] is a black piano key.
2. Find F[#] in the set of three black piano keys.
3. Practice finding F[#] in different places.

Sing the Tonic-Dominant-Tonic Cadence

1. Sing the syllables for the tonic Major triad.
2. Sing the syllables for the two arrangements of the dominant Major tonal pattern.
3. Sing the ending tonic pattern.

Play the Tonic-Dominant-Tonic Cadence

1. Play the cadence with one finger. Keep all the fingers together. Do not isolate one finger.
2. Play the cadence with a separated touch. Use the fingers shown in the pictures.
3. Play and sing the cadence.

Teacher Reference

Major Tonality - When DO is F[#]
Student Activities

Find F[#] on the Keyboard

F[#] Major Tonic-Dominant-Tonic Melodic Cadence

First, play with one finger.

Second, play with these fingers. Follow the arrow movement, and play as sung in class.

Tonic Major (I) Dominant Major (V) Tonic Major (I)

Technical skills

It is exciting to see how Lowe clearly addresses, develops, and incorporates technical skills throughout this series. Using short, interesting pieces, students progress through soft fist, tall finger, three fingers to five fingers, extensions, and cross-overs. Students play a variety of pieces with emphasis on separated or connected articulation, alternating hands, crossing hands, imitations, or hands that play one after the other. Playing hands together is supported with optional simple accompaniments of an open fifth or single-tone root harmonic chord changes (see Excerpt 4).

However, the use of harmonic accompaniment can be individualized. Teachers may choose to assign one of several harmonic suggestions or choose another option better suited to the student.

Cadences, arpeggios, and scales begin in the first book; however, these are nicely managed, with the emphasis placed on helping students aurally understand the harmony while simultaneously becoming familiar with the visual look and kinesthetic feel of each key. Many opportunities to review these keys continue throughout the first three books and beyond (see Excerpt 5).

No turning back

In many ways, it has been a refreshing experience to use *Music Moves for Piano*, focusing on teaching musical sounds and musical understanding instead of coaching pieces and helping students decode notation. Teaching with purposeful activities

MUSIC MOVES FOR PIANO

The piano series that builds on Orff, Kodaly, Suzuki, and Dalcroze.
Based on the audiation theories of Edwin E. Gordon!



IMAGINE...

- Music learned as an aural art – SOUND to SIGHT
- A proven curriculum that is challenging and fun
- Solo and ensemble repertoire performed with ease
- Playing by ear, arranging, composing and improvising
- Students who remain in lessons for many years and become independent, literate musicians
- Internalized learning, resulting in a deep, lasting understanding and love of music
- Students who audiate

FEATURES...

- Improvisation as a fundamental component for learning
- Music taught through singing, chanting, moving, and improvising
- Notation understood by applying familiar patterns in context
- Keyboard and audiation skills provide a strong background for success in university music theory classes
- Piano instruction for all ages and music levels

Available Materials

Music Moves for Piano Student Books:
Keyboard Games Books A and B;
Books 1, 2, 3, and 4

Teacher's Guides-Lesson Plans:
Keyboard Games A and B;
Books 1, 2, and 3

Boogies and Blues

Music Moves for Two, Books 1 and 2

Christmas Music, Books 1 and 2

Keyalities and Tonalities: The Complete Book
of Arpeggios, Cadences and Scales

Pattern CD

Rhythm and Tonal Patterns from the Pattern CD

Reading and Writing Music Notation: Books 1, 2, and 3

The Well-Tempered Reader Books: Red, Blue, and Green

Books in Progress

Music Moves for Piano Book 5

Teacher's Lesson Plans: Books 4 and 5

Tone Colors for Piano: Books 1 and 2

By Marilyn Lowe in Cooperation with Edwin E. Gordon

"Marilyn Lowe has brilliantly applied the profound Music Learning Theory of Edwin E. Gordon to create a new approach to piano study that ensures **joyfulness, musicality, and an authentic connection to music making**. The series of books represents a monumental and inspired contribution to piano pedagogy."

SEYMOUR FINK, Author of *Mastering Piano Technique*



Watch videos of Music Moves
for Piano students on
Facebook!

More Information at
info@musicmovesforpiano.com
www.musicmovesforpiano.com
www.giamusic.com

Think. Listen. Move. Sing. Play.

that are enjoyable for students and are educationally sound makes my work more satisfying. What one might not realize on first glance is that the structure of *MMP* offers teachers an opportunity to individualize instruction. The checklist at the beginning of each unit is helpful to keep track of completed activities. Cyclical learning is encouraged, and review is easy to accomplish without students feeling as if they are not progressing. To have the flexibility to set individual goals with each student and work with them within this structure makes my job easier.

When I compare my students now to those I taught before my leave of absence, I see positive changes. My current students play more fluently, with a better sense of tonal and rhythm accuracy, and develop a better understanding of tonality and meter. They reap the benefits of engaging in higher level thinking skills (creativity, improvisation, and generalization), develop a large repertoire of pieces they can play without music, and read notation with better understanding. Recitals are much more relaxing and enjoyable experiences than they used to be. Students no longer memorize notes and fingers, but rather seem to connect with and own the music they perform.

Challenges, not necessarily weaknesses

Having said all this, I must admit it has also been a challenge to teach *MMP*. Understanding this approach and applying it during lessons takes time and practice. My experience with the series has been more positive than negative, largely because of the coursework and other Music Learning Theory teaching experiences I had before venturing into this non-traditional piano series. If it had been necessary for me to rely on the teacher guidebooks only, I am not sure that I would have been willing to take the leap. Anyone considering this approach would be wise to take advantage of the certification process through Gordon's Institute for Music Learning (GIML) or any of the workshops that Lowe presents.

As one might guess, this approach also requires more teacher lesson preparation time. In addition to understanding the lesson objectives, teachers need to explore additional solo repertoire. The repertoire books included in the series (*Boogies and Blues*, *Music Moves for Two* and *Christmas Music*) include wonderful teaching pieces that are easy to use; however, students do need solo literature. Becoming familiar with pieces that work well with this new approach, building

a music library, and making solo repertoire decisions adds to the burden of preparation. Lowe does, however, offer many suggestions on her website, and the recent addition of *The Well-Tempered Reader* books will ease the burden as students move into *Book 3* and beyond.

Other challenges include adjusting to the reality that providing a more comprehensive musical education at the keyboard requires teachers to explore creative ways to add more instruction time. Many of my students share an hour lesson, and some are willing to come to a monthly Saturday Musicianship Class.

One of the most significant challenges for me has been helping my community accept this approach and have faith in the process. Finding the right teacher-parent and teacher-student match becomes a bit more complicated when one stands out in the community as a non-traditional teacher. Parents who are brave enough to take the leap sometimes begin to worry about when their child will learn to read, and may be more confused about how to best support their child at home. I find it helpful to present an annual parent education workshop, regularly schedule parent-teacher conferences, and showcase student performances throughout the year.

A new benchmark?

The longer I work with *MMP*, the more convinced I am that this approach offers the best way to provide a musical education at the keyboard—one that nurtures student potential, promotes music literacy, and helps students develop an understanding of music that will serve them well even after the lessons stop. If you are a teacher who can imagine teaching music through singing and moving and improvising; who values helping students acquire a deep, lasting understanding and love of music; and who has the strength and tenacity to consider making significant changes in your approach, I encourage you to consider this challenging, yet rewarding, curriculum. ▲

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Editor's note: For further information, please visit www.musicmovesforpiano.com

This article originally appeared in the May/June 2011 issue of Clavier Companion.

Author Response

Response to *Music Moves for Piano* review

Editor's Note: Clavier Companion will invite the authors of each method series reviewed to respond to that review in the following issue. The response from the authors of *Music Moves for Piano* is presented below.

A huge thanks to *Clavier Companion* and to associate editor Rebecca Grooms Johnson for this series of piano method reviews. I also sincerely appreciate Barbara and Kristine's excellent personal reviews of *Music Moves for Piano*. This piano series supports Dr. Edwin E. Gordon's lifelong, research-based Music Learning Theory, or theories of audiation. Briefly, audiation means listening to, performing, and thinking music with understanding. A core belief is that the aural art of music is a powerful human resource and a birthright that can and should be made accessible to and individualized for all. Individualizing instruction is a top priority: every student needs to be challenged appropriately, and this is possible in audiation-based piano lessons.

A prototype for a sequential-learning, audiation-based piano instruction method did not exist when this series was imagined. Therefore, from the beginning of development (in 1992), my students and their parents served as an experimental laboratory for constructing curriculum guidelines and for putting this aural approach on paper. Enthusiasm was surprising. There was an intuitive sense that music *really* is a listening (aural) and performing (oral) art, and that developing audiation skill, while developing musicianship and performing skills, provides intrinsic rewards. Robert Schumann's maxim: "The most important thing is to cultivate the sense of hearing..." became a reality.

Music patterns—their content always in context—build the foundation for comprehending music. Therefore, understanding pattern instruction and the pattern learning sequences, along with how to teach without notation, is necessary for teaching this piano series. Students adapt easily because they are involved in a personal and natural way of learning. However, all of us—teachers and parents—learned music differently. Consequently, a change in thinking and the development of new teaching techniques are needed. *MMP* workshops are very helpful. We expect changes in technology and medicine, but changing the way music is learned and taught is difficult. However, the rewards are long-lasting.

Tonal and rhythm patterns are created specifically for learning how to audiate. Two- or three-tone tonal patterns are without rhythm and are based on harmonic function: tonic, dominant, and so forth. Tonal patterns are always learned in context, for example, major or minor. Students sing tonal patterns: singing develops tonal audiation. Two- or four-pulse rhythm patterns are without pitch and are based on different categories, such as rest, tie, and upbeat. Rhythm patterns are always learned in the context of a meter. Students use coordinated body movement (moving to pulse-beats in the heels and meter-beats using hand touches) while chanting rhythm patterns: body movement is essential for rhythm understanding. Separating rhythm patterns from tonal patterns follows Lowell Mason's educational principle, 'Learn one new thing at a time.'

Through sequenced tonal and rhythm pattern instruction and pattern activities, students acquire a personal music vocabulary that they use to learn, remember, create, listen to, talk about, and perform music. Labels, or technical names, learned during pattern instruction further music understanding and communication.

Patterns are also used by students to create short "throw-away" improvisations created with the voice or at the keyboard. Like language, students are expected to use what they know: improvisation is similar to conversation.

The curriculum for *Music Moves for Piano* provides activities for teaching to the individual student within a group setting in order to challenge students appropriately. *Feeling* successful is important for student achievement. Rote solos for technical and musical development are essential for the success of this series. *MMP* students learn to perform with technical ease, avoiding many pitfalls. Students and teachers may select from the many wonderful piano pieces in contemporary methods and in the general literature. Fellowship, student interaction, and common activities enable long-term retention of music concepts that are learned when students engage in contrasting activities of "same/different" sounds. Continual performances for each other provide experiences that relieve or reduce performance anxiety.

Nineteen years of creating and teaching an audiation-based curriculum has shown some amazing results in my studio. This piano series has been used successfully for all ages, including adults. It may be used one-on-one, but I have found that students like being at lessons with other students: they learn from each other. Activities for learning to audiate are enjoyed by students of all levels and ages and demonstrate proof of research stating that most children and many adults learn best through body movement: body movement cements learning. Most importantly, I discovered that the internal music learning process is a slow one that requires time for absorption and experimentation. It cannot be hurried.

Lesson time activities and home assignments develop a broad music literacy. And, to top it off, students become excellent readers and writers of music notation. They are able to apply personal audiation and performing skills to the understanding of music notation when they are ready to think abstractly, around age eleven. At this age, students begin to "see with their ears" what is on the page and read/hear patterns and sound shapes in context. It is all a matter of learning style and sequencing: similar to language, students first read and write what they know.

Hats off to Edwin E. Gordon for his dedicated longitudinal research about how we learn music. He synthesized well the contributions of many music educators to create theories of audiation that are fundamental for developing musicianship, performance skills, and love for music. I am excited about the musical growth observed in students who have studied using this sound-to-notation approach. Current students and "graduates" compose, create movies, play in bands, teach, make CDs, listen to music, attend music performances, accompany, sing in musicals, participate in church and community music programs, and perform for others as well as for their own enjoyment. Creativity and audiation are at work as these students, who are the future of music in our world, continue to make music and incorporate it into their life experiences. ▲

—Marilyn Lowe
Author *Music Moves for Piano*

This article originally appeared in the July/August 2011 issue of Clavier Companion.



Rebecca Grooms Johnson, Ph.D., NCTM, is a nationally respected leader in the field of piano pedagogy. She is an independent teacher and has taught extensively at the college and university levels. Rebecca is active in the Music Teachers National Association, where she has served as President of the Ohio Music Teachers Association, National Chair of MTNA's Pedagogy Committee, and National Certification Chair. She is currently Vice-President of the MTNA Board of Directors, and three times a year she publishes a feature in American Music Teacher titled What's New in Pedagogy Research.

This issue's contributors:

Gail Lew is a nationally respected leader in the field of piano pedagogy, an independent studio teacher in the San Francisco Bay Area, an international adjudicator, and serves as Editor for the California Music Teacher magazine. She is also Chairman of the National Conference on Keyboard Pedagogy Committee on Independent Music Teachers. Gail received her bachelor's degree in piano performance, a master's degree in music history, and a Lifetime California State Teaching Credential with specialization in music education.

Dr. Sylvia Coats, NCTM, has been professor of piano pedagogy and class piano at Wichita State University for the past twenty-five years. She authored *Thinking as You Play: Teaching Piano in Individual and Group Lessons*, published by Indiana University Press. Her credits include presentations at conferences throughout the United States and internationally in Italy, Malaysia, and China. She has held many offices in MTNA, including National Certification Chair, and has served as a member of the Board of Directors. The Kansas Music Teachers Association honored her as 2007 Teacher of the Year.

Issues and Ideas:

Perspectives in Pedagogy

Rebecca Grooms Johnson, Editor

A survey of current methods: *Succeeding at the Piano*

This issue continues Clavier Companion's survey of piano methods.¹ Each article in this series has three sections—an introductory synopsis by the Associate Editor, two articles written by teachers who have used the method extensively in their studios, and a response from the authors of the method surveyed in the previous issue. We hope that you find these articles to be an interesting and helpful overview of all the most popular methods currently on the market!

Succeeding at the Piano: by Helen Marlais

Publisher: The FJH Music Company Inc.

Levels: *Lesson and Technique Book* (with and without accompanying CD), *Theory and Activity Book*, *Recital Book* (with CD)—Preparatory through Grade 2A.

Proposed schedule for future releases: Grade 2B—May, 2011; Grade 3A—October, 2011; Grade 3B—April, 2012; Grade 4—October, 2012.

Alpha: This series espouses what the author terms “familiarity training,” in which new concepts are introduced in the order of listen, play, see, learn, and reinforce. The first half of the Preparatory books utilizes off-staff notation, with partial staff introductions to 2nds and 3rds. An eclectic approach to reading includes intervals, guidepost notes, middle C, and modified C positions. Rhythmic pulse is equated to heartbeats and initially uses unit counting.

Teachers may consider one of the strengths of this method to be its early inclusion of arrangements of melodies from the classical repertoire. Short paragraphs introduce the composers, and lyrics have been added to most of the themes. A majority of the pieces in the Preparatory books have teacher duet parts. Although

the covers of all the books show a group of students in a lesson situation, there is no indication that this series is particularly directed to teaching in groups.

Lessons and Technique: In addition to the author's contributions, repertoire in the *Lesson and Technique* and *Recital* books includes compositions by Timothy Brown, Kevin Costley, Mary Leaf, Edwin McLean, and Kevin Olson. Pieces are sometimes preceded by a “Before playing” list of preparatory activities, and occasionally followed by “After playing, ask yourself” questions such as “Did I count all the quarter rests?” Most of the pieces in the Preparatory, Level 1, and Level 2A *Lesson and Technique* books have lyrics, and continue to include arrangements of themes from the classical repertoire. The graphics are tasteful and age appropriate.

Various composers are referenced on the technique pages (e.g. “Technique with Beethoven—Major five-finger patterns and triads”), but without any overt reason other than, perhaps, to continue the method's emphasis on classical composers. Extensive suggestions are given for the correct technical approaches to the exercises. By combining the lesson materials with technical instruction, a more seamless integration between the two is ensured.

Theory and Activities: Six activities are presented throughout these books: Writing (drills and games), Time to Compose, Rhythm (with an emphasis on steady beat), Ear Training, Follow the Leader (rhythmic clap backs), and Parrot Play (melodic play backs). Pages are correlated with the *Lesson and Technique* books and are visually attractive.

Recital books: Correlated with, and continuing much of the format of the *Lesson and Technique* books, some pieces are preceded by “Before playing” suggested activities and occasionally followed by “After playing ask yourself” evaluative questions.

¹ The aim of this series is to review the core materials of piano methods that are either new or substantially changed since a similar series of articles appeared in *Piano Quarterly* in the 1980s. Please see the September/October 2009 issue of *Clavier Companion* for more details on this project. For reviews of methods that are older or have not been revised recently, we invite you to revisit the original *Piano Quarterly* series.

A majority of the compositions have lyrics and some have teacher duets.

Compact Discs: The *Lesson and Technique* books can be purchased with or without accompanying CDs; however, all *Recital* books contain the accompaniment discs. These recordings are unique in several ways. In the early pages of the preparatory books a voice counts off each piece (e.g. “one-two-ready-play”). Throughout the currently available levels of this series, this voice gives the title and page number of each piece, and interjects praise, pedagogic reminders, or evaluative questions at the end of the practice tempo rendition. All solo pieces are played unaccompanied on an acoustic piano at both practice and performance tempi. Pieces with teacher duets have the practice tempo duets on acoustic piano, and occasionally the performance tempo duets are played by an acoustic string quartet—a refreshing sound after many years of hearing

sampled electronic accompaniments.

Teacher’s Guide: Currently available for Preparatory and Grade 1, this guide contains information about the author’s “familiarity training” philosophy and other pedagogic aspects of the series. Ensuing pages provide an overview of the *Lesson and Technique* books and discuss new concepts, reinforced concepts, teaching suggestions, practice steps, and technique tips for each page.

Omega: Although the latter half of the series is currently in production, Dr. Marlais indicates that the concepts and repertoire in the concluding Grade 4 books will equip students for the repertoire in *Succeeding with the Masters* Volume 1, *The Festival Collection* Book 4, and *In Recital* series, Books 4 and 5. A concept chart of the remaining levels is available on the FJH website: <http://www.fjh-music.com/piano/satp.htm>. ▲

Artistic performance from day one

by Gail Lew

My first introduction to *Succeeding at the Piano* (SATP) was in Los Angeles at the 2010 Music Teachers Association of California convention. There was super-charged excitement in that standing-room only session. I was immediately drawn to the clever cover art featuring an artistic drawing of Helen Marlais teaching a group class seated around the grand piano, and I was anxious to try the new method in my own studio.

Comprehensive approach

This series presents new, innovative ideas, combined with tried and true piano pedagogy. *SATP* uses an integrated pedagogical approach: reading is a combined Middle C, intervallic, and multi-key approach; rhythm is internalized by the student and learned like a language; technique is incorporated into the *Lesson and Technique* books, ensuring that correct technique is learned from the beginning; repertoire includes terrific motivational music; and the CDs are both innovative and educational. The mixture of classical themes by master composers such as Beethoven, Haydn, Mozart, and Brahms with FJH composer originals is excellent. Students get to know “Papa Haydn” from day one. What fun! It’s all part of a comprehensive music curriculum that not only develops good posture, hand position, and practice habits, but also includes reading, rhythm, technique, theory, ear training, playing by ear, music history, and composition. For a complete approach, students need the *Lesson and Technique Book*, the *Recital Book*, and the *Theory and Activity Book*.

Logical learning sequence

Spanning the first half of the Preparatory book, there are plenty of off-staff reading pieces that introduce quarter, half, dotted half, and whole notes, with 3/4 and 4/4 time signatures. A strong pedagogical foundation is laid in this section with technical work on “Perfect Piano Hands” and warm-ups that address arm weight, strong fingers, and flexible wrists (see Excerpt 1). Emphasis is given to steps, repeats, recognizing notational direction, and intervallic reading. New concepts appear in orange boxes, and green “After playing” boxes offer ideas to develop musicality. From my perspective, the Preparatory Level seems best suited for the five- to seven-year-old beginner, and for students requiring exhaustive reinforcement; it may, however, be too slow for the precocious, quick learner. With many instructions for the teacher included on the page, it seems to be rather text-heavy.

Excerpt 1: “Technique with Papa Haydn” from Helen Marlais’ Succeeding at the Piano Lesson and Technique Book, Preparatory Level.

Technique with Papa Haydn
Learning a natural hand position

1. Hand position is very important. It is the first step in making a beautiful sound.

- People play the piano all over the world! Look at Papa Haydn and the piano student as they place their hands over the globes.

2. Imagine that your hand is covering the top of the little globe. Now form your own rounded, natural hand position for playing.

- Look at your hands—do you notice your curved fingers?
- Do you notice the space between your fingers?
- Do you notice how your knuckles look?

PLACE A ✓ UNDER THE DAYS YOU DID THIS PAGE.

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY

FJH20151

Lesson and technique together

It is great to see a method that *combines* lesson material and technique rather than putting them in separate books. From the very beginning phrasing and artistry are emphasized in every lesson. Students are introduced to the idea of playing beautiful phrases by creating a rainbow in the air. The “Before playing” and “After playing” points develop musicianship, good practice habits, and excellent listening skills. Using a highly effective spiral approach to learning, numerous topics are introduced at once with a later return to each concept.

Eclectic reading approach

“Guide Notes” and intervallic reading are utilized in a combined reading approach (see Excerpt 2). Students learn on-staff Guide Notes Bass F, Middle C, and Treble G, which are then color coded in red. Early-level pieces remain in stationary positions, but are not restricted to a typical Middle C position. Thankfully, thumbs do not always play Middle C! This integrated approach to music reading avoids problems with students becoming locked into any one position.

Excerpt 2: “Learning Guide Notes” from Helen Marlais’ *Succeeding at the Piano Theory and Activity Book*, Preparatory Level.

Lesson Book p. 49

Learning Guide Notes

Write the name of the guide notes below each dancer. The 1st one is done for you.

FH2053 39

Grade 1 emphasizes multi-key work and thoroughly reinforces all of the concepts introduced in the Preparatory Level. The traditional F-A-C-E is presented for treble staff spaces and adjacent spaces are related as the interval of a third; however, the names of the treble staff lines are not included, nor is there any mention that thirds can also be line-to-line.

Natural rhythm

Off-staff reading begins with unit counting, and then moves to metric counting when the student is introduced to the 4/4 time signature. Quarter notes are initially related to the natural rhythm of walking and to the beating of the heart. No confusing rhythms are introduced since eighth notes and dotted quarter notes are not presented until Grade 2A.

More than just theory

Can theory be “fun”? The answer is YES! Correlated with the lesson books, the theory books include writing and note-spelling activities, rhythm experiences, ear training exercises, sight reading examples, “Time to Compose” opportunities, and other diverse, creative, and fun activities. I especially love the early introduction to master composers (see Excerpt 3). In “Follow the Leader” sections, students listen to and clap back rhythms. “Parrot Play” activities give students an opportunity to play back short melodic patterns of well-known songs. These activities are perfect for my group theory classes.

Motivating repertoire







Succeeding at the Piano contains interesting and creative original music with fresh appeal, captivating titles, and a variety of styles and genres. The development of hand independence is also a big plus of this method. Melodies are either divided between the hands, or harmonized with intervals or single notes. Genres are varied and include folk, blues, country, traditional, classical, and contemporary (see Excerpt 4). Pedagogically sound arrangements of classical themes encourage students to gain an appreciation for the classics. Katherine, for example, was anxious to play all the pieces by Mozart, Beethoven, and Chopin, and she has quickly moved to pieces from Kabalevsky, Op. 39; the *Anna Magdalena Bach Notebook*; and a collection of early Mozart pieces. Student favorites include *The Merry Farmer* (Grade 1), *Japanese Pagoda at Night* (Grade 1), *Hungarian Dance No. 5* (Grade 1), *Angelfish* (Grade 2A) and *Festival in Seville* (Grade 2A).

Excerpt 3: “Hall of Fame—Which Composer Is It?” from Helen Marlais’ *Succeeding at the Piano Theory and Activity Book*, Grade 1.

Lesson Book p. 77

Hall of Fame—Which Composer Is It?

- You have learned about famous composers in your *Lesson and Technique Book* and *Recital Book*.
- Draw a line from the composer to the fact that matches below.

		
Haydn	Mozart	Beethoven
		
Chopin	Brahms	Schumann

<p>This composer wrote <i>Ode to Joy</i>. (page 46 Lesson)</p>	<p>This composer wrote symphonies for the people of London, England. (page 22 Lesson)</p>	<p>This composer grew up in Poland but spent most of his life in Paris, France. (page 28 Lesson)</p>
<p>This composer from Germany wrote <i>Hungarian Dance No. 5</i>. (page 49 Lesson)</p>	<p>This composer was married to a pianist named Clara. (page 73 Recital)</p>	<p>This composer was born in Austria and played for kings and queens in Europe. (page 62 Lesson)</p>

FH2058 55

Adding interest

The accompaniment CDs help students to achieve musical, artistic, and educational goals; and best of all, the students love playing along with the recordings. Using the CDs helps students

Excerpt 4: “Festival in Seville” by Timothy Brown, from Helen Marlais’ *Succeeding at the Piano Recital Book*, Grade 2A.

Lesson Book p. 53

Festival in Seville
by Timothy Brown



Key signature: All F's and C's in the piece are sharp.
With energy

30 FH2062

learn, reinforces correct practice habits, and provides students with an opportunity to play many of the pieces with a string quartet accompaniment. Most of the songs have lyrics that young students can easily relate to and fall within an average vocal range. Each piece has a single track in three parts. In Part 1, the students hear their part with the teacher duet at a “practice speed.” In Part 2, after the student plays the piece with the accompaniment, Dr. Marlais gives a short verbal instruction or affirmation that is ideal for home practice (for example, “Did you remember to use your Perfect Piano Hands?” or “Playing steadily while counting aloud will help you play even better.”). Then, in Part 3, students play the piece at performance tempo with the accompaniment.

Meeting my goals

The goal of my studio is to instill a life-long love of music, and I choose methods that will help me attain that goal. *SATP* achieves this on several levels: the colorful graphics really appeal to students; the generous use of classical themes makes them feel that they are playing “important music”; the short pieces are easily mastered with 100 percent accuracy within one week; students develop smart practice habits; and above all, students develop a love for music. ▲

Matching the curriculum

by Sylvia Coats

I tell my university pedagogy class to develop their own curriculum for each student based on what they think the student should know and be able to do, and it really helps when a beginning method matches that curriculum. *Succeeding at the Piano* is a welcome addition because of its sound pedagogical basis and delightful music. Dr. Marlais is an excellent musician and pedagogue, and she brings her extensive background and creativity to this recently published method. It is written for five- to nine-year-olds and should take six to nine months for each level. I had my pedagogy class use *SATP* Grade 1 with a group of ten-year-olds who had prior piano background, and one of my colleagues uses the method with a quickly advancing six-year-old.

Sound before symbols

In learning to read music, I want my students to be able to hear and sing melodic movement up and down in steps and skips—to audiate what they see on the page. *SATP* lets students first experience concepts through sound and feel, and then learn to associate the sounds with musical symbols. *SATP* combines conventional note reading (Middle C), intervallic reading, and multi-key reading approaches. Some students might find this hybrid approach to reading rather confusing, so the teacher may need to stress consistent reading habits for each new song. For instance, always find the first note from the closest landmark, then say direction, interval, and note name.

Students learn to read by grouping notes into patterns, hearing the sound, and associating them with the feeling of the pattern in the hand. Concepts are experienced before learning their names. For example, in the Preparatory book students see space and line notes in the introduction of 2nds before the staff is introduced; they clap back eighth-note rhythms by ear before they are introduced in Grade 2A; and they see four beats in a measure with bar lines before the time signature is added. Thus, students will have an “aha” moment when they put a name to the concept that they have already discovered. The music will make sense to them.

My students who begin lessons in September learn about melody and rhythm first by ear and later with off-staff notation. Then, when given Christmas music during the holiday season, they are very motivated to learn to read these on-staff pieces. *SATP* enables students to read successfully by using seasonal music to motivate them.

Feeling the pulse

Succeeding at the Piano teaches rhythm through movement activities such as walking, marching, clapping, or tapping while counting

aloud. In learning rhythm, I want my students to use their whole bodies to move to the pulse, while clapping the rhythm. Once they develop a sense of beat, rhythms are easily related to a steady pulse. In the early stages of the method, I recommend choosing one movement from the suggested list of activities to develop a consistent approach to learning the rhythm in each new song. For example, always step to the beat while clapping the rhythm. Lyrics are also spoken and sung in rhythm. The steady quarter pulse is compared to the feeling of a steady pulse of a heartbeat, and clever illustrations picture hearts in quarter noteheads (see Excerpt 5).

Excerpt 5: “The Steady Beat” from Helen Marlais’ Succeeding at the Piano Lesson and Technique Book, Preparatory Level.

The Steady Beat

Rhythm marks time in music.  1 HEART BEAT =  (QUARTER NOTE)

With your teacher,

1. Stand in place and clap this beat: 
2. Stand and lightly tap your head with your hands to every beat.
3. Walk around the room and swing your arms back and forth with every beat.
4. Sit on the piano bench and sway to the beat.



Which picture shows you a steady beat? Circle it!




6 EHR2051

Integrating lessons and technique

One of the major strengths of this method is the combining of healthy technique with the lesson book repertoire. This integration brings attention to technique so that it is a “must” for student and teacher, rather than only a supplement. “Technique with Papa Haydn” makes the exercises enjoyable, while students learn how their bodies feel when playing the piano in a healthy, tension-free way. Six basic techniques are taught in the *Preparatory* and *Grade 1* books: posture and finger, hand, and arm position; arm weight; flexible wrist; two-note slurs; weight transfer; and rotation. In *Grade 2A* the basic techniques are reinforced and become more complex.

Varied genres

A buffet of folk, classical, jazz, and original music appeals to students and teachers, and the longer pieces in the *Recital Book* are appropriate for class lessons and recital performances. Many classical themes are included in each book, with music adapted from Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Offenbach, Chopin, and Brahms. The theme from Chopin's *Fantasia Impromptu* in *Grade 1* is a lovely arrangement with a teacher duet. Added lyrics and composer histories help students make classical music a part of their daily lives.

Various styles, articulations, and scale forms, including major, minor, modal, and pentatonic, keep the songs fresh and musically inviting. Pieces are harmonically varied to engage the ear and make colorful sounds. Teacher accompaniments complement the student parts—they are interesting, yet simple enough not to distract. I predict “Maracas” will be a hit with any student (see Excerpt 6).

Thoughtful practice

SATP encourages students to think during their practice. “Before playing” points are excellent and help students develop good practice habits, while “After playing” assessments encourage students to listen carefully as they play. The illustrations are lovely, often humorous, and support the musical concepts. Text in colored boxes draws attention to helpful tips, and occasional red text in the score gives gentle reminders. If your students are distracted by the amount of text on the page, you can choose from the many good suggestions and highlight what to focus on in their home practice.

Musicianship skills

Learning to listen is vital in developing a sensitive musician. The theory books maintain this focus rather than presenting the mindless drill of some theory books. Students are asked to listen and clap back rhythm patterns and to sing and play folk songs by ear. By listening and singing intervals and melodies, students associate what they hear with what they see. Composition, improvisation, transposition, and ear training are integrated consistently throughout the method. These musicianship skills reinforce the reading approach with the sound coming before the symbol so that students develop “inner hearing.”

My home state of Kansas holds an event once a year called Music Progressions, during which examinations are given in repertoire, theory, history, and listening. *Grades 1* and *2A* of *SATP* fulfill the Level 1 and 2 requirements by introducing major and minor pentascales, white note triads, and tonic and dominant notes.

Excerpt 6: “Maracas” by Kevin Olson from Helen Marlais’ *Succeeding at the Piano Lesson and Technique Book, Grade 1*.

Staccato

To play with a short, separated sound means to play *staccato*.

To play *staccato*, once you play the key, lift your wrist and forearm quickly to leave the key.

A note with a dot under or above it tells you to play *staccato*!

Play and listen to the difference in sound. *Staccato* and *legato* are opposites!

Before playing:

- Prepare the harmonic intervals.
- Tap hands together and count aloud.

Maracas
by Kevin Olson

Lively

mf See the ma - ra - cas play - ing the cha - cha.
They play a sam - ba, on to the a - rum - ba.

They click and slack and keep a stead - y beat.
Oh, these ma - ra - cas make me move my feet!

L.H. over

After playing, ask yourself:

- Did I play *staccato*?
- Did I play with “Perfect Piano Hands”?

DUET PART: Kevin Olson (student plays 1 octave higher)

FJH2056 19

Guiding the teacher

A Teacher’s Guide is available for the *Preparatory* and *Grade 1* books. The introduction explains Dr Marlais’ pedagogic philosophy and clearly outlines her approach to reading, theory, technique, musicianship, and repertoire. I plan to use it as a reading assignment in my pedagogy class, and I think that intern teachers as well as experienced teachers will appreciate the lesson plans for each unit. The well-constructed curriculum of *SATP* encourages conceptual instruction rather than merely teaching the pieces.

I always urge my pedagogy students to prepare students for success with challenges that are attainable. Helen Marlais writes, “The method is designed to create excellent musicians with a passion for music.” *SATP* succeeds in making music learning engaging and enjoyable. ▲

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This article originally appeared in the July/August 2011 issue of *Clavier Companion*.

SUCCESSING AT THE PIANO®

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Author Response

Response to *Succeeding at the Piano* review

Editor's Note: Clavier Companion will invite the authors of each method series reviewed to respond to that review in the following issue. The response from the author of *Succeeding at the Piano* is presented below.

I would like to thank Rebecca Grooms Johnson, editor of "Perspectives in Pedagogy," for including the *Succeeding at the Piano* method in the July/August issue, as well as both Gail Lew and Sylvia Coats, for their detailed assessment of the method. The reviewers did a fine job of identifying the core pedagogical issues of SATP. They deserve our appreciation for their expertise, and our thanks for the time they have devoted to this important, informative series. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank Frank J. Hackinson, President and CEO of The FJH Music Company Inc. His unwavering commitment to pedagogical quality, as well as to aesthetic detail, has served as a cornerstone to our field of piano pedagogy.

Here is a quick review of some of the defining characteristics of SATP:

a) The reading approach in *Succeeding at the Piano* combines conventional note reading with reading by intervals. This means that from the first lessons students learn to read patterns naturally and easily. By the end of the 2B level, students know both staves completely as well as ledger lines above and below the staves. The system works the best when the *Theory and Activity Book* is used along with the *Lesson and Technique Book*. For students who need a little extra help, the *Flash Card Friend* as well as the *Succeeding with a Notespeller* books provide further reinforcement. The *Recital Book* is also another way to review the reading skills learned in the *Lesson and Technique Book*.

b) Correct information for healthy technique is included in the Lesson books. Students learn that technique is an essential part of their everyday routine.

c) Students are introduced to the elements of musicality as early as the Preparatory level book. Recurring activities that promote excellent musicianship fill the pages of the Preparatory Book. I am sure that when you use these activities and observe the great results, you'll see why I included them.

d) Interesting repertoire: With music by six leading pedagogical composers and historical pieces, students are engaged in a wide variety of musical styles with roots firmly grounded in the classics.

e) *Succeeding at the Piano* recognizes that learning is non-linear and uses a pacing system that accommodates natural learning cycles. Within each carefully leveled grade, SATP's natural learning cycles move students through units that fluctuate slightly in difficulty. Athletes have long known that this is a more effective way to train, and we see that students are happier and psychologically healthier when they learn this way.

f) Familiarity training is another important pedagogical approach used in *Succeeding at the Piano*. As Rebecca Grooms Johnson aptly stated in the initial review, my goal with familiarity training is to introduce concepts "in the order of: listen, play, see, learn, and reinforce concepts." Familiarity training works, and it helps to ensure healthy, motivated, successful students.

With students playing musically, learning excellent technique, and developing strong reading skills, they progress quickly and confidently. I wrote *Succeeding at the Piano* to serve students and teachers and encourage a love for piano playing that will last.

Succeeding at the Piano is designed as a core piano method, with typical starting ages of five to nine years old. ▲

—Helen Marlais
Author, *Succeeding at the Piano*

This article originally appeared in the September/October 2011 issue of Clavier Companion.

Issues and Ideas: Perspectives in Pedagogy

Rebecca Grooms Johnson, Editor



A survey of current methods: *The Robert Pace Keyboard Approach*

This issue concludes *Clavier Companion's* survey of piano methods.¹ Looking back over the past two years, I have come to realize that we are blessed with a tremendous variety of excellent, pedagogically sound materials. Several of my core beliefs have been confirmed: no one series is right for every teacher, or for all of any one teacher's students; when used by the right teacher with the right student, all of the reviewed teaching approaches can produce happy, enthusiastic, well-prepared students; and we must never stop examining and testing new methods as they are published.

Each article in this twelve-part series has had three sections—an introductory synopsis by the Associate Editor, two articles written by teachers who have used the method extensively in their studios, and a response from the authors of the method surveyed in the previous issue. We hope that you found these articles to be an interesting and helpful overview of the most popular methods currently on the market. My deepest thanks go to all the teachers who wrote about their experiences with each series, and to Pete Jutras and Steve Betts for their editing expertise and always patient help. It has been a pleasure.

The Robert Pace Keyboard Approach: by Robert Pace

Publisher: Lee Roberts Music Publications, Inc; distributed by Hal Leonard Corp.

Levels: Books 1—4 (Revised) *Music for Piano, Theory Papers, Finger Builders, Creative Music*

Book 5—*Music for Keyboard, Skills and Drills*

Book 6—*Music for Piano*

Initially influenced by the *Oxford Piano Course* and the Burrows-Ahearn materials,

Robert Pace was an early leader in the multi-key pedagogic movement. He wrote:

In my own mind, I had no doubts that key diversity should be an essential aspect of every piano student's learning from the very beginning, although that was contrary to the practice of the most widely used and popular piano methods on the market at that time. It was in this context that I decided that any method books I created would be "Multi-key" with no key restriction.²

The original method was first published in 1961, and revisions were made from 2006 to 2009.

Alpha: Moving at a breathtaking pace, **Book 1** begins with six pages of off-staff pieces introducing note direction and steps/skips in the C and D major five-finger positions. The Grand Staff is presented with emphasis on the four As, and rhythmic counting is nominative. Sharps, flats, and key signatures are introduced on page eleven, and pieces are immediately transposed into various keys. Occasional "variations" of pieces are given—students are encouraged to find the differences and then change a note or two to make their own new piece. Chords in all twelve major keys are introduced on two pages in the middle of Book 1, followed by I and V⁷ melodic harmonization in each hand. Relative and parallel minor tonic and dominant chords appear in the final pages of the first book along with a piece introducing Alberti bass accompaniment style. Nominative counting continues throughout the presentation of eighth notes and compound meter. There are no graphics or color in any of the core books in this series.

Rebecca Grooms Johnson, Ph.D., NCTM, is a nationally respected leader in the field of piano pedagogy. She is an independent teacher and has taught extensively at the university level. Active in the Music Teachers National Association, she has served as President of the OhioMTA, National Chair of MTNA's Pedagogy Committee, and National Certification Chair. She is currently Vice-President of the MTNA Board of Directors, and three times a year she publishes a feature article in American Music Teacher titled "What's New in Pedagogy Research."

This issue's contributors:

An author of two encyclopedia articles and a book, Kathy Van Arsdale is former president of her suburban Denver MTNA affiliate. She holds a BME from the University of Colorado, Boulder, and an MA from the University of Denver. She has presented at conferences and conventions for Music Teachers National Association, Colorado State Music Teachers Association, American Choral Directors Association, and the National Society for Gifted and Talented. A consultant for the International Piano Teaching Foundation and an adjudicator and chairman for National Guild of Piano Teachers, she has maintained her home teaching studio for thirty years.

A specialist in group teaching for thirty years, Julie Lovison studied piano in Chicago with Mollie Margolies, received a Bachelor of Music degree from Millikin University in Decatur, Illinois, and has done graduate work at Teachers College, Columbia University and the National College of Education. Prior to founding The Lake Shore Music Studio in Chicago, she taught in the preparatory department of Millikin University and Young Peoples Arts Program of Alverno College in Milwaukee. As consultant to the International Piano Teaching Foundation she is a frequent speaker and teacher trainer.

¹ The aim of this series is to review the core materials of piano methods that are either new or substantially changed since a similar series of articles appeared in *Piano Quarterly* in the 1980s. Please see the September/October 2009 issue of *Clavier Companion* for more details on this project. For reviews of methods that are older or have not been revised recently, we invite you to revisit the original *Piano Quarterly* series.

Music for Piano: Repertoire in the lesson books begins with an emphasis on folk songs and pieces by Robert Pace, then quickly moves to original works by classical composers. Opportunities are provided for transposition and improvisation.

Book 2 introduces waltz bass, the damper pedal, Dorian mode, twelve-tone row, sub-dominant chords, diminished triads, diatonic triads of the major scale, blues scales, and Phrygian mode. The final piece is *Soldier's March* by Robert Schumann.

Book 3 teaches the I-IV-ii-V⁷-I cadence and melodic harmonization; augmented triads; whole-tone scale; twelve-tone row with retrograde; twelve-bar blues; canon at the octave, the second, and the fourth; bitonality; quartal harmony; secondary dominants; all seven modes; mixed meter; and non-chord tones. It concludes with a *Ländler* by Franz Schubert.

Book 4 is essentially an early- to mid-intermediate book of repertoire in sequential order of difficulty with brief performance suggestions at the top of some of the pages. *Bagatelle*, Op. 119, No. 1, by Beethoven, is the last piece in this book.

Books 5 and 6 continue the format of Book 4, concluding with the Chopin *Nocturne* in E Minor, Op. 72, No. 1 (posthumous).

Theory Papers: Offering extensive opportunities for drill and reinforcement, these books provide necessary support for the extensive array of theory concepts presented in *Music for Piano* Books 1-4. There are no games or graphics.

Creative Music: In describing these books Pace writes:

Creative Music I Revised contains materials both for sight reading, transposition, and for improvisation which are closely related to those presented in *Music for Piano I Revised*. Here the learners reapply in slightly altered fashion the basic musical ideas just encountered. The goal is for students to be able to read and understand music at the level of their current technical advancement and to be able to apply the appropriate concepts to each new example. (From the Foreword of Book I, *Creative Music I Revised*.)

Books 2-4 feature examples for sight-reading on even numbered pages and creative activities such as improvisation on the facing odd numbered pages.

Finger Builders: Short technical exercises are given in Book 1 with various suggestions for hand position, wrist movement, and an emphasis on musical playing. One-octave major and parallel minor scales appear in Book 2, interspersed with longer technical

exercises. Books 3 and 4 provide work on two- and four-octave major and minor scales, arpeggios, more advanced technical exercises, and Hanon (with instructions for transposition).

Skills and Drills: Listed as a companion for Book 5, this volume provides extensive work on chord progressions, harmonizing melody lines, seventh chords, modulation, and improvisation. Short pieces and technical etudes comprise a section on sight-reading and transposing, with a concluding section listing major and minor scales and arpeggios, and more advanced technical exercises.

Compact Discs: Neither compact discs nor MIDI files are available for this series.

Teacher's Guide: No Teacher's Guides for these books are currently available, although workshops are offered. Dates and locations for the training workshops are posted on the Lee Roberts website: leerobertsmusic.com.

Omega: If one ends the series with Book 4, students will be at an early intermediate level. The sequenced repertoire in Books 5 and 6 extend to early-advanced literature.

Reflections: It has been interesting to review this series, not only because it was one of the revolutionary pedagogical influences in the recent history of piano methods; but also because of the direction James and Jane Bastien took some of its concepts in their own piano series.³ The most obvious adaptations were a slower pace, less emphasis on traditional classical repertoire with more pop and rock style pieces, reduced levels of theory concepts and, of course, the use of color and graphics. (For more information on this adaptation, see Jane Bastien's discussion at www.namm.org/library/oral-history/jane-bastien). New publications such as *Succeeding at the Piano* continue to use the multi-key philosophy as a major portion of their eclectic pedagogical approach.⁴ I wonder if, when Robert Pace first wrote these books, he ever imagined they would have such a far-reaching and lasting influence on how thousands of students learn to play the piano. ▲

³Pace, Robert (2010). *Why Multi-Key?* Retrieved from <http://www.leerobertsmusic.com/dynamic-learning-robert-pace/why-multi-key-robert-pace.pdf>

⁴Please see the *Clavier Companion* March/April 2011 issue for the *Bastien Piano Basics* review.

⁵Please see the *Clavier Companion* September/October 2011 issue for the *Succeeding at the Piano* review.

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A revolutionary change

by Kathy Van Arsdale

A former student of Rosina Lhévinne holding a performance degree from Julliard, Dr. Robert Pace made the remarkable decision to revolutionize the art of piano teaching in America. Deeply rooted in a philosophy of music education he called "Comprehensive Musicianship," his dynamic approach was well ahead of its time.

Dr. Pace often pointed out that only approximately one hundred pianists earn a full-time living as concert artists. Establishing the vital role of music making in the lives of **all** learners became his mission. Not only are technical performance skills and repertoire taught in *Comprehensive Musicianship*, but learning PROCESS—original thinking and imagination—are emphasized. Among

the first to stress the importance of early childhood music education at the piano, Dr. Pace developed an inventive program for pre-school students. Offering an early, consistent incorporation of music theory, history, analysis, performance practice, composition, and aural skills, this original multi-key approach develops higher level thinking skills from the very beginning. Peer learning and teaching begin immediately.

By incorporating the ideas of important learning theorists and psychologists such as Jerome Bruner, Jean Piaget, Howard Gardner, and Abraham Maslow—as well as various contemporary researchers and neurologists, a breakthrough in educational methodology was achieved. Teaching music conceptually through

spiral learning became the basis of the Pace pedagogical approach.

Multi-key, multi-level, multi-purpose materials provide a masterful basis for instruction and offer limitless potential in the hands of imaginative teachers. Inventive supplementary materials for all levels (including advanced students) continue supportive options beyond the scope of most series. Even at the elementary level, materials include unusual offerings such as modal, bi-tonal, twelve-tone row compositions, and circle-of-fifths pieces. Duets are found in every level of the *Music for Piano* books. Many flashcards are available, including off-staff materials.

Supporting each piece

Core materials are structured into four books:

- *Finger Builders* takes students from five-finger positions in all keys through scales, technical exercises, arpeggios, and cadences in all keys.

- *Music for Piano* provides music literature that, in intermediate and advanced books, includes outstanding short examples in their original form organized into repeated cycles of music history. A huge variety of musical sound is presented.

- *Creative Music* offers sight reading, transposition, harmonization, and improvisation related to the music literature.

- *Theory Papers* supports literacy through written activities for each level—from note, interval, and chord identification through formal analysis.

Each piece is supported by appropriate technical skill builders in every key, theory related to the piece of the week, improvisatory and compositional exercises in the style of that piece, sight-reading, and aural skill examples. Integrating the whole musical picture into a comprehensive, easy-to-teach unit is a tremendous strength of the series. All four books are interconnected to concepts related to the masterwork-centered music literature. Earl Ricker's *Escape to Sherwood* is an intermediate-level student favorite due to its big, exciting contemporary sound (see Excerpt 1). It incorporates a number of concepts including triads, extreme dynamics, bi-chordal composition style, program music, crossing hands technique, and changing meter.

Researched, tested, and ready to teach with carefully designed progressions of musical concepts, the series requires no hunting for the next sequential piece, technique, or theoretical concept. Although all materials are organized and correlated in a complete package of musicianship, teacher and student creativity is encouraged. Spiraling conceptual learning ensures review of each concept: review pieces are woven into the books, and often developed through activities in *Creative Music* or *Theory Papers*. One of the activities I like to use is the Question and Answer game. This dialogue begins with a four-measure question from *Creative Music* such as this one from Book 4, performed by the teacher or all the students (see Excerpt 2). Individual responses are performed until all have supplied an answer or two.

Appropriate for all students

Students of diverse learning styles, backgrounds, and personalities comprehend and enjoy the music, finding at least one way in which they can shine. For younger students, learning through play is emphasized by using musical games and songs. Gifted learners skip ahead at their own rate, and delight in perceiving the *big picture* presented in the materials. Pace materials are particularly strong in the areas of standard piano literature, the integration of music theory from the start, and an emphasis on improvisation and composition for every student.

With the exception of a few books, this is a non-graphic method. Dr. Pace opposed selling books via color pictures, and chose to let the beautiful music speak for itself. Piano class

Excerpt 1: "Escape to Sherwood" by Earl Ricker, from *Music for Piano*, Book 3, mm. 1 – 37.

Excerpt 2: Question and Answer activity from *Creative Music*, Book 4.

becomes the place for visuals and weekly “hands-on” activities. Flashcards, chalkboard games, finger puppets, fine art reproductions, flannel board, board games, and student art projects reinforce concepts. Student imagination is piqued by aural and visual design.

What about classes?

The stereotype that this is a “group method” scares many away. Although the method can be implemented in a wide variety of ways, it may be best used in a combination of partner and group lessons (about forty minutes each). This requires studio reorganization, with long- and short-term teacher design and planning. Who has time to teach all this? Consider using weekly groups to teach concepts, gain an instant ensemble, and use peer learning and teaching; then add repertoire lessons (partner or private) for indi-

visualized attention. What can you do in weekly piano group?

- Fun activities—many can be found in *Creative Music and Theory Papers*
- Games from Gloria Burnett Scott's wonderful book, *Musical Games and Activities* (Hal Leonard, HL00372363, \$14.95)
- Aural skills, performance and critique, flashcards, dictation
- Ensemble work using Pace's many supplementary duet books demonstrating various compositional techniques
- Board games and other materials from a variety of publishers.

Group learning reduces quirks and inappropriate behavior, develops discerning listening skills, models expressive performance, increases fun, and provides encouragement and social support—keeping students engaged longer to develop studio loyalty. The traditional “big me, little you” teaching dynamic is erased.

Teacher training

The Pace method can be daunting without proper training, which is available at locations throughout the nation. It is a relatively unknown method with little name recognition, and thus, little music store display space. Materials can be difficult to find (online is best).

Building layers of musical understanding

by Julie Lovison

Teach the Robert Pace approach because I can't imagine not giving my students the benefit of having a broad understanding of music that makes studying more fun, more practical, and a more thoroughly rich experience. The beauty is in how students build their understanding one layer and one concept at a time. There is simply no other approach that so totally integrates comprehensive music study and builds layers of musical understanding—from the first basic concept that melodies go up, down, or stay the same, to the intricacies of I-vi-IV-ii-V-I progressions, secondary dominants, modulations, and diminished-seventh arpeggios found in Levels 4 and 5.

This method is not about flashy graphics and student-friendly songs. It is up to the teacher to romance the material and involve students. This is hard work, but the method itself is exciting, prepares the student for all the music they will ever play, and is, therefore, well worth the effort.

Building a foundation

Whenever possible, I prefer to start students in the *Moppets* (four- to five-year-olds) or *Kinder-Keyboard* (six- to seven-year-olds) programs, where we can have a few years to get comfortable and develop familiarity with basic, but powerful music concepts. What we love about the *Moppets* course is that it includes creative movement, singing, playing and acting out songs, rhythm instruments, xylophones, improvisation, listening games (for ear development), and even drawing and coloring—all natural parts of a child's world. Students experience a wide spectrum of songs that use major, minor, pentatonic, Dorian, and whole-tone scales in 4/4 and 6/8 meter. Students learn to recognize melodic patterns that repeat, sequence, and invert; steps, skips, and larger intervals; and discover the relative position of the ABCs to the twin or triplet black keys, all while encouraging each student's creative ideas. It is truly a musical playground, where the toys are musical concepts they can use the rest of their lives.

Songs are highly patterned in *Kinder-Keyboard*. I put the patterns of the songs on flash cards and color code repeated patterns (see Excerpt 3). Students enjoy a game of unscrambling the pat-

Pace program certification provides training in topics such as educational theory, business practices, psychology, early childhood education, teaching methodology for lifetime retention, and the comprehensive approach to music learning. Ideas can be infinitely interrelated, reshaped, and revisited. Teacher support and continuing education is possible in local groups of teachers of the Pace method, or online.

Innovative Pace materials are applicable in a wide variety of ways, stimulating students AND teachers. Teachers find the series comprehensive, engaging, and challenging. An invitation to inventive teaching, the series provides a tested and trustworthy template for instruction. Because it is intellectually appealing, teachers avoid burnout. This method speaks to teachers through its strong philosophy, the possibility of implementing individual teaching strengths in working with groups, conceptual thinking, and perceiving the big picture. As a Guild adjudicator, I have seen all the methods performed. My transfer students bring in their old methods. Having implemented this method in my home studio for thirty years, it's clear I'm a true believer. Never stagnant, every teaching day with Pace is greeted as a joyful opportunity. ▲

Excerpt 3: “April Showers” from *Kinder-Keyboard*.

APRIL SHOWERS
Can you make up a song about thunder, raindrops, clouds, and the sun?

Ap - ril show - ers bring May flow - ers. Drip, drop, drip, drop,
Wish - y wash - y, squish - y squash - y, drip, drop, drop.

terns as each child plays one pattern of the song, then we switch. Separating the cards helps them see and learn the individual patterns. In another game, we pick a new five-finger pattern for transposition. One student will play a steady beat as a duet—with notes one and five of whatever key we are in, or F# and C# if it's a pentatonic song. Then we may take turns improvising a new melody with the same rhythm, incorporating ear training as students try to duplicate what each student improvised. Another day we'll play a fishing game with the melodic patterns and use additional cards with various combinations of steps and skips patterns. Six year olds appreciate being able to move around in class, rather than sitting at the piano for the entire lesson.

Transitioning to the core books

Students who have completed *Moppets* and *Kinder-Keyboard* can comfortably jump into Book 1 at page 12, poised to move quickly from there. If students begin with Book 1 materials, they will need time and lots of reinforcement with the basic concepts, often

Comparing Teaching Approaches

Learning Style: Many piano methods introduce new material to students in the form of separate, isolated elements—for example, “the key signature for G major has one sharp on F,” and later, “the key signature for D major has a sharp on F and C.” Pace Students learn via generalizable concepts: “To name a sharp key signature, look at the last sharp and count up one letter.” This helps students learn new specifics on their own.

Presentation: In providing instructions to students, many methods adopt narrowly scripted language: “For a different effect, change the final C to G.” By contrast, the Pace curriculum regularly uses open-ended directions: “Improvise new musical question and answers each day.” This encourages student-directed learning.

Mastery: Many approaches base mastery of material upon multiple direct repetitions. Creative activities are intermittent, and not a primary means for reinforcing learning. In the Pace Approach, creativity is a cornerstone of the curriculum. By regularly varying and transposing new material many ways, students practice recall while also creating something new. This promotes student-directed learning and higher-level thought processes.

Skill Development: The Pace Approach strives to evenly develop achievement in repertoire, technique, theory, reading, and creativity.

Basic Levels: To simplify material for basic levels, many approaches restrict tonal ranges to a few closely related tonalities. Because aural acuity is a central goal of the Pace approach, it favors a richer soundscape for formative levels. Simplification is instead accomplished through careful structuring of a conceptual learning sequence. Permitting all major and minor keys—plus pentatonic, whole tone, 12-tone, chromatic, bitonal, blues, and modal tonalities—fosters students’ individualized exploration of soundscapes, without dependency on outside accompaniments for enrichment.

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through playing musical games. Although the series can be used successfully with individual students, it only takes a brief encounter to see how much better these books can be experienced through group activities.

Although each level's four core books give plenty of reading, writing, and creative improvisation practice, a teacher who wishes to supplement with repertoire from other series can easily relate concepts such as intervallic reading, transposition, question and answer phrasing, repeats, sequence and inversion, and the application of I and V chords to these supplementary pieces. I have successfully used *Alfred's Basic Piano Library Prep Course* books to ease the transition from *Kinder-Keyboard* to Book 1 and solidify reading skills, but any contemporary series could be used.

Combining activities

Technique and theory can be effectively combined. For example, the Hanon exercises presented in Level 2 *Finger Builders* (see Excerpt 4) can be played in the right hand while the left hand (or a second student) can play the I-ii-iii-IV-V-vi-vii^o chords that have been taught in *Music for Piano* and reinforced in *Theory Papers*. These chords can first be played in block form, then Alberti bass. Just as the melody would be in a piece, the right hand should be louder and perhaps crescendo as the notes ascend. For added fun try the left hand in calypso style rhythm (eighth, quarter, eighth, quarter, quarter). Try reversing the hands—or my student's idea, play a crossed-hands version.

Students learn that ascending or descending diatonic chords can be an accompaniment device, and experiment with applying this bass to "Merrily We Roll Along" and other folk songs (see Excerpt 5). Later, the right hand can play a two-octave scale while the left hand plays a I-IV-V-I chord progression in Alberti bass pattern. Studying upper and lower neighbors, passing tones, and parallel and contrary sixths and tenths in Book 2 is so helpful in preparing to play Bach Inventions, Schumann character pieces, and Mozart sonatas, as well as jazz studies.

Applying skills and knowledge

I always explain to students that the eight-measure pieces in the *Music for Piano* Books 1 and 2 are there to teach something important about music that they can apply to other music. We establish a routine for quickly evaluating the melody, rhythm, and harmonic patterns before playing; then we discover the new concepts and immediately transfer them to other musical situations. Students

Excerpt 4: "Legato Study" from Finger Builders, Book 2.

enjoy being able to easily transpose, improvise, play by ear, and find appropriate and interesting harmonies based on chord formulas and their knowledge of musical scales and styles.

They are truly engaged in their practice because they know how to study music independently. Songs are learned quickly since all the notes are meaningful to them. They understand the phrase structures, chords, and melodic components, and develop a comfortable technical facility to perform with stylistic accuracy. Because most have learned with partners or in a group from an early age, they have developed a healthy collaborative approach to music and a confident, realistic attitude about their strengths and areas to improve.

Recommended teacher training

The teacher's manuals for *Music for Moppets* and *Kinder-Keyboard* are essential to understanding how to teach these books. Currently in revision and projected to be published in early 2012, the Book 1 Teacher's Guide provides detailed page-by-page directions. Additional training with seasoned teachers who studied with Dr. Pace is invaluable for practical structuring advice. Pace teachers typically continue their training by regularly meeting together to practice teaching and share creative ideas. If a Pace group is not available, getting together with other instructors who teach in groups is also helpful.

The delight in completing the Pace series comes from being able to boil advanced literature down to simple concepts, thus making Mozart, Beethoven, and Persichetti as easy to play as *Hot Cross Buns*. Having the technique in place, along with the requisite theory knowledge, enables students to learn pieces quickly and interpret them sensitively and musically. We all desire this intensely rewarding musical experience for our students. My excitement in using the Robert Pace approach is that even students who end formal lessons after Book 1 or 2 have a more profound understanding and a set of practical skills to enable them to continue a satisfying life-long involvement, with a healthy enthusiasm for playing and sharing music with others. ▲

Excerpt 5: "Merrily We Roll Along" from Music for Piano, Book 2.

This article originally appeared in the September/October 2011 issue of *Clavier Companion*.

Author Response

Response to *The Robert Pace Keyboard Approach*

Editor's Note: Clavier Companion has invited the authors or representatives of each method series reviewed to respond to that review in the following issue. The response to last issue's review of The Robert Pace Keyboard Approach is presented below.

Robert Pace, who passed away in September 2010, would have been honored to have his work featured in "Perspectives in Pedagogy." Many thanks to Editor Rebecca Grooms Johnson and Clavier Companion for including an overview of the Robert Pace Piano Series in the September/October 2011 issue. I would also like to thank teachers Kathy Van Arsdale and Julie Lovison for their excellent, informative review of the Robert Pace Approach.

Kathy Van Arsdale and Julie Lovison speak of the "big picture," and "layers of understanding" that characterize the Pace Approach. These elements relate to the frequently asked question, "How can beginners learn so much—all major/minor chords, key signatures, I-V7s, transposing, improvising—within so few pages?" The teaching of key signatures illustrates the answer. On page 11 of *Music for Piano Level 1*, students learn: "Look at the last sharp and count up one letter." A "big picture" concept, this empowers students immediately. They now can figure out every major sharp key signature name, and its "key-note" on which to "tune up." Similarly for flat keys: "find the next to last flat." During the weeks that follow, students will begin "layering in" new understandings. They will progress from deliberately "figuring out" key signatures, to "instant recognition," through games, flashcards, and *Theory Papers* exercises; and, especially, through identifying the key signature of each new piece they learn. Over months and years, they will "layer in" minor key signatures, corresponding scales, and so on. While some students can instantly recognize key signatures sooner than others, the "big picture" puts virtually all students on the same page, in having the means to identify any key signature, and use it to play in any given key.

Robert Pace wrote about big-picture teaching, when he discussed presenting the concept of minor: "Do not bog down on details—rather, present the idea of minor along with its sound, then give students time to grow with it. They will be getting many examples of minor in the next few weeks, so keep moving!" (Robert Pace, *Teacher's Guide*: p. 40a).

In Pace's approach, concepts are anchored to one another through similarities and differences. These interrelationships allow students to move smoothly, concept to concept. New concepts differ from preceding ones by a small degree. For example, beginners first transpose from a C major "tune-up" to G, on the opening page of *Music for Piano Level 1*. The similarity between playing in G and C—same melodic contour, fingering, and all-white five-key set, assures students' success. Only the tonality differs, implementing interesting variety. In the next step, transposing "Up and Down" to D and A major, in *Creative Music*, the difference is incremental. A black-key middle tone is added. Other similar/different connections: a skipping melody (1-3-5) "is" a stepping melody minus tones 2 and 4; minor chords "are" major chords with the middle note lowered a half step; V7s are built from I chords by raising the middle and lowering the bottom tones.

Not only do students develop an effective learning strategy through identifying differences and similarities, but they also gain a basis for creating new, "different" music from a given piece of

music, and they acquire a feel for nuance that contributes to sensitive musical performance.

Creativity and variety are cornerstones of the series. Transposition, inversion, melodic, rhythmic, and harmonic variation, repetition and sequence, parallel and contrasting question and answers, and various forms all provide tools with which students both learn and create music. From preschool to adult levels, the core books provide essential concepts for students to apply to limitless repertoire and creative experiences, according to individual abilities and tastes.

In the four-book series, books *Music for Piano*, *Creative Music*, *Theory Papers*, and *Finger Builders* work together. Concepts thus receive four pages of collective attention, from the standpoints of repertoire, creativity, fundamentals and technique. Detailed directions appear on each page of these books, so that a manual is unnecessary. However, a revised edition of the *Teacher's Guide* will become available in early 2012, for those interested in more background on lesson sequences and philosophy. *Options for Teacher Training*, an invaluable resource, may also be found through Lee Roberts Publications.

To successfully teach the Pace piano series, it is helpful to remember that Robert Pace meant his approach to be taught in an "on-the-job-learning" style, through real world application rather than theoretical explanation. He expected teachers to "plant" concepts for continuous future use. "Don't get stuck on a page," he wrote. "Your students will learn more about flats, sharps and key signatures by using them in daily practice than by getting a theoretical discussion of them now" (*Teacher's Guide*, 11a). The "big picture," in conjunction with "layers of understanding," allows students to stride rather than struggle through material rich with concepts, leading the way to independent learning and lifelong musical enjoyment.

For information, contacts, or a first lesson "Test Drive," please visit www.lee-robertsmusic.com. ▲

—Cynthia Pace
President, Lee Roberts
Music Publications

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