

# THE PIANO Adventures® TEACHER

FJH PEDAGOGY NEWSLETTER

Winter 2004/2005 No. 6

## Know Yourself Help Yourself

Picking Up Speed

Software for Beginners

Motives and Melodies

Tip-Top Tips

Planning an  
Integrated Lesson



# THE F·J·H MUSIC COMPANY INC.

## THE PIANO ADVENTURES® TEACHER

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## From the Editor

BY MARIENNE USZLER

For teachers there are two New Years—the one that begins in late August or early September, and the January celebration. At each of these times, I suspect that we all make resolutions. It's good to know we can begin again, with a burst of renewed energy to do things differently, better, or more creatively. We like looking forward, anticipating a future, rather than mulling over the past. The past is reality, not always as shining as we'd hoped. The future holds promise. It can be stimulating *not* to know exactly what lies ahead, trusting that we do have the power to make or respond to change.

The August/September "new year" revolves around studio and professional concerns—making a schedule, auditioning students, choosing materials, or perhaps trying out new teaching techniques or equipment. The January "new year" resolutions are apt to be more personal—redoubling efforts to stay organized, revising eating habits, or being serious about the budget. We often do not re-examine our professional behaviors and attitudes as we sing Auld Lang Syne. The teaching plans for the year are already underway, and it's harder to assess something in motion, whether it's working well or not.

Yet it might be interesting to consider some possibilities.

- Check if you need to go on a "teacher talk" diet—talk less, play more.
- Budget time as well as money. Re-assess how you use lesson time.
- Make sure that the practice advice you give really helps students organize what they should do at home.

• Whatever happened to those good intentions to include ear training or sight reading? There's still plenty of time to cycle in these activities before the teaching year ends

- Set aside some—even just a small—time each week to practice. Remind yourself what it feels like to *play* the piano.

There are multiple ways in which you can help yourself, either to solve problems that have arisen, or to ratchet up the quality of your teaching. In my article on Alice and the Cheshire Cat, I offer some heads-up, practical suggestions. Perhaps one of these might "hit home" for you.

### Smiles from the Studio

This happened several years ago when I was new to teaching. I was having a dress rehearsal for our recital at a Steinway Hall location. Rachel, one of my students, was playing a duet with me as part of the recital.

As we were rehearsing, she slid completely off the bench and landed "boom" on the floor. I stopped, stunned, and asked if she was OK. She stood up, brushed herself off, looked right at the audience and said, "I'm sorry. I can't work under these conditions." She proceeded to sit back down at the piano and say, "from measure 20, please" with a very straight and deadpan face. The entire room just rolled with laughter. To this day we still laugh together over this incident.

Rachel went on to play in an honors band and as part of a jazz ensemble at her school.

Courtesy of Kelly Penn  
Via E-Mail

As we pop the champagne corks, the old refrain is "Where did the last year go?" So much seems to have whizzed past. Although at times we love the sensation of speed (getting through traffic, reaching someone on the phone right away, finding an answer or solution, or cleaning up a physical mess), we often wish we could linger (over coffee, a beautiful sunset, a photo album, in a museum, or on a walk with a loved one). The balance always seems to be tipped in favor of rush-and-hurry.

As Randall Faber notes in his discussion of the pedagogy underlying the *Piano Adventures®* Level 3B books, speed is an attractive component of virtuosity. That is the message of the cover photograph. The blur captures the excitement of flying fingers. Learning to "play fast" is what every student wants to do. But, as Randall points out, there are dangers involved if adequate care is not taken to prepare muscles and neurons to make natural, healthy gestures. His excellent discussion casts light on the importance of balancing quick specific moves with parallel moments of relaxation.

Is there a life lesson in all this? I think so. Life "gestures" can sometimes be as impetuous and ill prepared as a flurry of notes played with locked wrists and tight forearms. We push through the daily agenda, dashing here and there to accomplish duties and errands without ever taking even a tiny time-out to check our psychic temperature. The analogy to the extension-contraction movement needed in speed playing is pertinent. It's equivalent to ensuring a moment of inner relaxation that keeps the next "spring into action" from becoming tension building or frustrating.

Let's all resolve to become "life virtuosos", then, aware that reserving at least small moments of personal focus can countercheck our hurry-scurry activities. Come to think of it, it's rather like "playing" life *tempo rubato*. Happy New Year!

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# The Cheshire Cat

BY MARIENNE USZLER

When Alice was searching the byways of Wonderland, she asked the Cheshire Cat a question reflecting equal parts of frustration and curiosity. "Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?" The clever cat gave a cryptic answer. "That depends a good deal on where you want to get to." No quick "Turn here" or "Straight ahead." Alice first had to state a goal. Only then could specific directions make sense.

But Alice persisted. "I don't much care where." To which the Cat again replied pointedly, "Then it doesn't matter which way you go." Alice quickly interrupted with a lame "So long as I get *somewhere*." The Cat was not about to let Alice get away with such a vague choice. He stated the obvious. "Oh, you're sure to do that if you only walk long enough."

Piano teachers sometimes feel like Alice. They'd like a quick clue (How can I get students to practice?), feel trapped in a rabbit hole (Is there life beyond teaching beginners?), or discover themselves teaching without enthusiasm (I wish there was a teaching vitamin.). They, too, would like to ask, "Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?"



What often happens at such times is that teachers look around for a Cheshire Cat. There must be some expert, authority, colleague, or master teacher who can point the way or offer solutions. That may well be the case. A spirited workshop, an inspiring lesson, an eloquent book, or a friendly chat room conversation may stir up the teaching juices or stimulate new ideas. We all need to reach out to the larger teaching community at times.

But Cheshire Cats willing to point in this or that direction are not always around when you need them. Consider the words from Alice's Cat. There's a great deal to learn from that inscrutable feline. The Cat's comments all prodded Alice to refine her own thoughts. To set a goal. To be specific. The desire to go "somewhere" was not enough. Why shuffle along an unmarked path to an unknown destination?

## Help Yourself

The thread underlying all this is—help yourself by knowing yourself. One of the easiest ways to learn about yourself as a teacher is to make audio- or videotapes of your teaching. Then listen and/or watch yourself. It's not easy to be objective, but the effort to do so is already the first step forward.

Do exactly what you would do with a student. Focus on only one aspect. Make it your goal as you watch or listen to the tape. (Watching or listening without a specific focus is like Alice saying she'd like to get "somewhere.") Here are a few help-yourself ideas.

### Goal: I could make better use of teaching time.

- Make a timeline. Note exactly how much time you spend on each type of activity: technique, presentation of new material, review, giving practice advice, polishing pieces, sight reading, rhythm drills, chatting ...

You might be surprised to learn that you over-emphasize one aspect of the lesson (working on technique, for instance), or that you find yourself always getting caught up in details. If you can pinpoint a particular behavior, you can take steps to change it.

- Listen to what you say. Do you talk too much? Could your comments be more on-target, shorter, or more varied? Are you encouraging, or mostly picky? Are you the only one who speaks during most lessons?

Just knowing that you spend too much time explaining or commenting on everything alerts you to catch yourself in the act during actual teaching time. Negatives can be turned inside out easily. "That's not the right rhythm" could be "Let's look carefully at that rhythm." A single word—bravo, better, oops, hmmm, impressive—sometimes carries more weight than a two-minute critique.

### Goal: I need to recharge my teaching batteries. I'm in a rut.

- Do you follow the same routine in each lesson—review, technique, new material, polishing pieces and so on?

Begin the lesson with something off-the-wall: ear-training games, rhythm games, sight reading, playing a duet, improvising. These needn't take much time—maybe only two or three minutes—if you have planned the activities beforehand.

• Do you ask questions? Which types of questions do you ask—questions that require specific answers, or questions that challenge the student to choose or solve a problem?

Questions with specific answers (How many sharps are in this piece?) are useful, but limiting. Try questions or suggestions like “What if ...” “Could you imagine ...” “Suppose you ...” or “Why do you think that ...” Stimulating students to get involved in the learning process energizes both of you.

**Goal: I need to revamp how I give practice advice.**

• How much lesson time do you use to give practice advice? Do you feel the time is wasted if you use it in this way? Do you give *specific* practice advice? Do you have the student demonstrate that she understands the point of the advice and knows what must be improved before assigning practice?

The student needs to make a *connection* with whatever is studied. This may mean inserting some fun pieces to wake up the student (and you). Play pieces for your students. If they never hear exciting performances of the music they play, how can they acquire aural models on which to base their own performances? If CDs or MIDI disks are available for the pieces, use them as motivational tools. Find three pieces that feature primary blocked chords as accompaniments (or whichever teaching point you’re trying to make). Play these pieces for the student and let him choose which to work on.

#### Do-It-Yourself Group

A further word about Cheshire Cats. If you belong to a local teacher’s group, consider a new type of agenda. A group of Winston-Salem teachers decided that they would be their own

## Help Yourself to Practical Teaching Hints

Books by Marianne Uszler

**Play It Again, Sam ... What, Why, and When to Repeat**

“This is a gem of a book.”

Louis Nagel, *American Music Teacher*

**That’s a Good Question ... How to Teach by Asking Questions**

“It packs a powerful punch pedagogically speaking.”

Patricia Powell, *American Music Teacher*

**Time Flies ... How to Make the Best Use of Teaching Time**

Published by the FJH Music Company

- A smooth introduction for those just beginning to teach
- A shot-in-the-arm for those who might feel burned-out
- A reminder to the experienced teacher of further challenges

Focus on giving *specific* practice advice. Outline a practice plan, for instance. “Practice your pentascales ten times each day. The first two times see how quickly you can find the patterns. On the next three tries, check for good hand position. Spend the next three times looking and listening for “sticky fingers.” Round off your practice by playing each pentascale first loud, then soft.” Such a plan beats “That needs more work” or just “Practice your pentascales ten times each day.” A thoughtful plan shows students *how* to practice.

**Goal: I need to find some way to motivate students. The lessons seem listless.**

• Does the student enjoy playing this material? Do you ever give students a choice among several pieces, any of which might accomplish the same purpose? Does the student ever hear his piece performed beautifully?

“experts” instead of inviting speakers to each meeting. They agreed to read specific short books, then discuss their own opinions and ideas on the subject. They also drew up a list of topics they felt were of general interest to the group and agreed to give these topics the same personal-input treatment. In that way, each teacher comes to a meeting prepared to give as well as take. Personal involvement replaces passive listening.

#### Your Own Way “Out”

Despite your misgivings, you already know the answers to many of your questions. How do you find them? Take time to sift through the flurry of thoughts swirling in your head, narrow the focus, pinpoint a behavior, attitude, or skill, and decide to improve just one aspect of your teaching. The Cheshire Cat will purr as you step along the path *you* have chosen. ■■■



## The Pedagogy of Piano Adventures

### Level 3B: Playing Fast

BY RANDALL FABER

This is what the student has been waiting for—a chance to play fast. “Now I can really show off!” Then we tell the student, “The first lesson in playing fast is ... slow practice.” We’ve just taken the wind out of his sails. Well ... almost. There are *secrets* to playing fast. And if we let students in on these secrets, they are usually more than willing to go through the necessary paces to achieve fast playing.

We designed Level 3B with two purposes in mind.

- ◆ To elongate the bridge to the intermediate level. Thus we accommodate the quasi-motivated student, the youngster who does not practice an hour a day but who yet wishes to continue piano study.
- ◆ To develop the skill to play fast—to build speed. We’re not looking for virtuosity yet, as that will come in stages. We are looking to guide the student into the mechanics of fast playing and to offer the experience—indeed the thrill—of rapid tempo and flying fingers.

#### Building a Bridge

Much of what is taught in *Piano Adventures*® Level 3B is reiterated in Level 4. As discussed in the previous newsletter issue, review is essential. How often are you surprised by a student’s inability to name the relative minor? Or failure to recognize the dominant in a familiar key? We can’t send the student back, but neither should we push blindly ahead. Certain concepts are fundamental to intelligent piano playing. These need to be mastered before moving into the intermediate repertoire. We would be mistaken to blame the student for not retaining a concept on first hearing. Instead, we recognize the importance of review and the instructional need for follow-up presentations. For this reason, relative major and minor key relationships and chord inversions are presented as new concepts in Level 3B, then are fully revisited in Level 4.

#### Building Speed


It is tempting to push for virtuoso playing when we see potential, but it almost always backfires if we fail to ramp up through pre-requisite stages. In fingerwork, for example, the student must develop coordination that allows *instantaneous* contraction followed by relaxation, and *precise* contraction that does not affect the relaxation of neighboring muscles. This takes time to develop and requires specific practice routines. Virtuosity cannot be forced; virtuosity unfolds naturally with knowledge and correct practice.

#### Pulsing

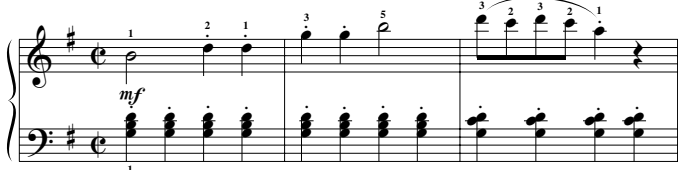
The Level 3B Lesson Book opens with Beethoven’s *Rage Over a Lost Penny*, providing a review of cut time. Why does cut time so effectively increase speed? Because it invites pulsing every two beats instead of pulsing every beat. Consider a set of four eighth notes. If we provide a metric pulse on both quarter-note beats, the passage bogs down with heaviness, as if running with

### Check out the supporting VIDEO CLIPS!

Go to Nancy and Randall Faber’s  
[www.PianoTeaching.com](http://www.PianoTeaching.com)  
 Check under “Newsletter”


boots in the sand. If we pulse only on the first of the four eighth notes, we get fluency and musicality.  **Video 1**

Allegro (♩ = 80-100)



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Measure 3 invites a drop of arm weight into the first of the four eighth notes (beat 1) and a wrist float-off at the end of the slur (beat 3). Match this “down-up” motion in the left hand: The four quarter-note chords are played as “DOWN-and-UP-and.” The down-up motions match that of the right hand and the “ands” are played with a light ripple. Notice how the half-note pulsing of this down-up gesture matches the feel of cut time. It propels the beat, not only through half-note pulses, but from measure to measure.


In the Leopold Mozart Minuet in F on page 7, we find similar pulsing, but in 3/4 time. Both hands synchronize to a “DOWN-up-up” pattern that matches the triple meter. As a general rule, the hands should make the down or up motion together, as if playing both hands in a large, ten-fingered glove (analogy by Dorothy Taubman).  **Video 2**


Andante (♩ = 96-108)



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#### Rotation

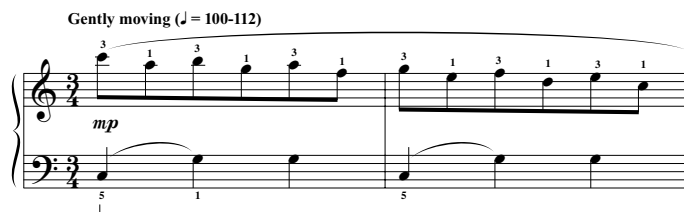
Page 6, Interval Review, provides a review of rotation, which we address in *Piano Adventures*® Level 3A Technique & Artistry. Rotation refers to the back-and-forth turning of the forearm, as if turning a doorknob or a key in a lock. The efficacy of forearm rotation is that it plays two notes with the effort of one. In Interval Review the tenuto notes are played with the forearm rotating toward the thumb and the recurring Cs are played effortlessly on the rebound. The many notes of the passage are thus reduced to a simple descending major scale. Efficiency is gained by employing the natural fall of a turned hand and its rebound.  **Video 3**

R.H. 

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A more subtle application of forearm rotation occurs in *Snowfall* on p. 10. Again, the rotation allows the student to concentrate on the three descending scale tones of each measure

instead of all six notes. Here the rotation is toward the finger, with the thumb playing on the rebound. Notice also how the turning back of the hand toward the thumb (finger 3 in the air) shortens the preceding third (fingers 3-1) to set up the contracted second (also fingers 3-1). The rotation actually facilitates the contracted second without a physical hand contraction. This is much more efficient and more comfortable than crab-like hand contractions along the surface of the keys.  **Video 4**



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## Gesture



**Video 5**

Much of what enables speed at the keyboard is the playing of several notes in a single gesture. In *Phantom of the Keys* (3B Lesson Book, p. 13), we find two excellent examples that illustrate this. The RH eighth-note gesture at measure 5 must be initiated by a single drop of arm weight that carries through the entire measure. This drop takes the wrist rather low as it transcribes the lower half of a “wrist circle” (see *Technique & Artistry Level 3A*, p. 34), not coming up until the following measure. In contrast, imagine the feel and the sound if beat 2 (thumb on A) were to be accented. All sense of lilt and dance would vanish. Beat 2 in the LH accompaniment must be similarly light. As noted earlier, the gesture of both hands should match, so play both hands with a drop, then a rising wrist. (For more on “accompaniments that dance,” see the Level 2B Pedagogy of *Piano Adventures*® article in Issue 4. Also, the Level 3A *Technique & Artistry* Book, pp. 14, 15.)



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The brisk three-note slurs at measures 7 and 8 are almost ornamental, much like the grace notes being taught with this piece. The single gesture not only gives speed, it allows the performer to concentrate on the descending scale played by finger 3, in parallel 10ths with the left hand.

What do pulsing, rotation, and slur gesture have in common?

All of these techniques carry many notes on a single impulse. This gives efficiency and motion, technical fluency, and musical artistry.

## Slow Practice

So, how do you practice slowly, yet execute the gesture? The simplest way is to use slow practice to *exaggerate* the gesture. Slow practice just for finger work has limited workability because the gesture required for speed and expression may be absent. Bringing the gesture into the slow practice makes slow practice exponentially more valuable. Sometimes you need to “sprint” with a passage to find the gesture, then execute it in slow motion.

With a facile technique, this can all be done in very little time. But students need yet to develop a facile technique. Developmental steps need to be taken to build fundamental finger coordination. Note, however, that we’re not going for building muscles or “finger power.” We’re looking for instantaneous, precision “firing” of very specific muscles, with simultaneous relaxation of the surrounding muscles. Thus, coordination is key; strength is not. (Arm weight, rotation, and forearm thrust provide sources of impact that are much more effective than finger strength.)

For students at the early stage, the firing of a finger generates many contractions in a generalized area. Specificity is weak; generalized tension is high. Slow practice can provide a relaxation immediately after the note is played, thus allowing the inappropriate contractions to relax. Over time, generalized tension diminishes and finger contractions become very specific with concurrent relaxation of proximate muscles. This is how slow practice, done correctly and over time, can build the neurological basis for speed. Adding the correct gesture provides the formula for expressive virtuosity.

## Play-Relax



**Video 6**

In *Piano Adventures*®, we accelerate the development of this sophisticated neurology through specially developed exercises. Flying Fingers and Team Players in *Technique & Artistry Level 2A* build “fast fingers” by incorporating the process of “play-relax” with slow practice and repetition. A simple pattern is played four times *slowly/forte*, then four times *quickly/piano*. For the slow executions, have the student relax immediately after each finger plays, but not collapse the arch. In fact, each finger strike can carry the hand slightly forward (toward the fallboard), increasing the hand arch and tall bridge. The immediate relaxation will lead to more specific fine-tuning of the muscle groups needed to play each finger. For the quick executions, the pattern is played lightly—all notes played in a single gesture. Notice how the exercise first develops the muscle specificity of the finger attack, then adds the gesture. Both are essential for fast playing.

## 3. The third secret is FAST FINGERS.

### Flying Fingers (on the closed keyboard lid)

A pianist must be able to play **finger patterns** quickly.

Practice this **finger pattern** with your R.H.

||: 1 - 3 - 2 - 4 :|| “Play” 4 times SLOWLY, *forte*.  
“Play” 4 times QUICKLY, *piano*.

Now repeat with your L.H.

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## Alignment



**Video 7**

We open the Level 3B *Technique & Artistry* Book with a secret called “Closed, Cupped Hand for Scale Passages.” Here we contract

the hand, bringing the fingers close together with visibly tall knuckles. This contracted position allows the arm and bridge of the hand to align with the finger that plays. We avoid any angle between the playing finger and arm, preferring straight alignment. In this way the weight of the arm can transfer finger-to-finger for efficiency and evenness of touch. The contracted, closed, cupped hand invites continuous alignment through stepwise passages. A slight adjustment is made by the wrist and forearm for each finger being played. You can easily check the alignment at any time by touching the thumb to the tip of the playing finger, then releasing. This brings the hand (with its tall knuckle) and the forearm into balance over the fingertip. This is an advanced application of the Primer Level technique-secret “Making Os,” which builds a firm fingertip. At Level 3B, the “closed, cupped” hand-shape essentially brings the “O” to the keyboard for effective passagework.

## Level 3B Technique Secrets

### 1. CLOSED, CUPPED HAND FOR SCALE PASSAGES\*

**Hand Shape Warm-up:** Open your R.H. with the palm facing up. Bring your fingertips and thumb together. Notice your **cupped** hand. Turn your hand over and look for **tall knuckles**. Repeat with the L.H.

Play each scale passage below. Look for a “tall knuckle” for **finger 3**. Let your thumb play lightly on the *side tip*.



#### Finger Fireworks

**Allegro** Repeat 8<sup>th</sup> HIGHER

R.H.

L.H.

Repeat 8<sup>th</sup> LOWER

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With Finger Fireworks, ensure proper alignment for each finger as it plays. Use a light thumb (see Technique and Artistry Levels 2A and 2B) and a one-measure gesture with cut-time pulsing to build speed.

The second secret at Level 3B opens the hand for extensions. The “Hand Toss” exercise practices the rapid opening and closing of the hand (which constitutes much of piano playing). Extensions should be momentary, almost always falling back to a comfortably closed hand.

### Up-touch



Lastly, efficient playing utilizes what Nancy and I label the “up-touch.” Here the hand springs from the surface of the key, with active fingers and a thrust of the forearm. The spring of the up-touch sends the hand and fingers to upcoming notes, in precise preparation for the next chord or passage. The touch is effective for either loud or soft chords, and makes a wonderful counterpart to the “drop-touch” of arm weight.

In summary, we work slowly with smart practice to build speed. Yes, fast playing probably is the root of most technical problems. But students want to play fast, and they’re going to play fast. Let’s give them the tools to do it correctly. Let’s harness our students’ motivation for speed to elicit hours of practice. Then students can indeed show off—with flying fingers and the groundwork for virtuosity. ■■■

# PIANO

## Adventures®

by Nancy and Randall Faber

### Level 3B Piano Adventures®



#### Lesson Book FF1180

The Level 3B Lesson Book introduces chord inversions and minor scales, while offering significant opportunities for fast, bravura playing.



#### Theory Book FF1181

Along with essential writing activities, the Theory Book presents sight-reading and ear-training instruction for each unit.



#### Performance Book FF1182

This engaging and expressive collection of pieces offers a varied repertoire while reinforcing the Lesson Book concepts.



#### Technique & Artistry FF1289

The “Technique Secrets” lay a foundation of physical gesture with an ear toward expressive playing. Each unit culminates in an “Artistry Magic” page with tips for artistic performance.



#### Christmas Book FF1201

“Sightreading Stocking Stuffers” follow each Christmas selection. These melodic variations build on the aural familiarity of the tune to promote recognition of musical patterns, and thus reading skill.



#### Popular Repertoire FF1290

Appealing popular standards are arranged to reinforce the concepts of the level. Each selection is paired with an Activity Page that addresses harmony, rhythm, ear-training, or other important musical skill.

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SETTING THE STANDARD FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

# How To

## "Motive"-ate

BY MARIENNE USZLER

### Get a Sense of the Piece

- ◆ The student listens, *without* watching the music, while you perform Mm. 1-16. Then ask questions like the following:  
How would you describe what the right hand does?  
Is it a long, smooth line? Does it leap? Does it creep?  
Does it go up, down, or both?  
Did you ever get a sense that you knew what was coming next? Why?  
Describe the right-hand pattern.  
Is it a sigh? A jerk? A bump? A twist?

However the student answers these questions, lead the listening and responses to an understanding that the right hand moves up by step to a high point, then relaxes by falling back upon itself quickly.

[The questions offer choices to help the student find descriptive words, yet subtly hint at the idea of motive, sequence, and mood.]

- ◆ Have the student read the right hand, noticing how the fingering aids the physical gesture to gently emphasize each quarter note.  
In Mm. 7, 8 and 15, 16 the fingering is especially important. It helps to shape the phrases and to articulate the repeated note.

As the student plays the right hand, accompany with the left-hand part. That way there will be a model aural image.

### Prepare the Left-hand Moves

The left hand must be ready to expand (for the octaves) and contract (for the thirds and seconds). Prepare the left-hand so that it, too, imitates the "sighing" right-hand motives.

Have the student play the left hand to develop the idea and the feel that it mimics, or answers, the right-hand "sighs."

Many students will now be able to try both hands together, at least enough to go home with a physical and musical sense of how to play these 16 measures.

### Motive and Sequence

**motive**—a short musical pattern.

**sequence**—a musical pattern repeated on another pitch. A sequence may be higher or lower than the pattern.

*Andante* uses a 2-note motive that is sequenced up the keyboard.



## Andante

Key of \_\_\_\_\_ major/minor (circle)

Johann Christian Bach\*  
(1735-1782, Germany)  
original form

**Andante** (♩ = 88-100)

The score is divided into four systems of four measures each. Measure numbers 1, 4, 8, and 12 are indicated at the start of each system. The right hand (treble clef) plays a series of quarter notes, while the left hand (bass clef) provides a simple accompaniment. The score includes fingering numbers and dynamic markings like *mf*, *cresc.*, and *f*. Brackets labeled 'motive' and 'sequence' highlight the 2-note pattern and its repetitions.

\*J.C. Bach was one of the 23 children of the great composer Johann Sebastian Bach.

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If not, suggest a simple exercise like



so that the student can develop the correct physical feel and sound before playing the exact left-hand notes.

### Get an Image of the Entire Piece

This time the student listens, *without* watching the music, while you play the entire piece. Once again, ask questions.

Are there clear sections to the piece? How would you describe these?

The middle section is completely different. In which ways? Does the middle section move up or down?



17

21

26

31

36



In your practice this week, make up a **motive** followed by 2 **sequences** each day.

Which part of the middle section is most active? Why?  
 What is the impression at the end of the middle section?  
 Is there a motive in this section?

Have the student prepare and play the left-hand in Mm. 17-24. The quicker-moving thirds in Mm. 21-24 may be a little "gummy." Ask the student to think of going from the eighth-note thirds to the thirds over the barline. Going from 1-3 to 2-4 is easier than going from 2-4 to 1-3.

Have the student prepare and play the right-hand in Mm. 17-24. It might be easier to begin with the third finger in M. 18 and Mm. 20-24.

Have the student play Mm. 21-24 hands together. Perhaps you will need to give special attention to the gesture from the last

### "Motive"-ate Yourself!

Create a variation on Bach's Andante. Have the right-hand motive move up by steps, rather than down.



Create an original, but similar, Andante motive. Perhaps



OR



### The Composer

Johann Christian Bach was the youngest of the "Bach boys." His family nickname was "Christel." After his father died, he lived with his older brother, Carl Philipp Emanuel, in Berlin. He then traveled to Italy, became a Catholic, and began writing operas. When he moved to London, he gave keyboard concerts, and one of these was the first performance of a solo work on the new "pianoforte." Mozart loved his music, and the two composers became friends.

From *Piano Adventures Lesson Book*  
 Level 3B, pp. 16, 17

eighth notes to the notes over the barline. Suggest that the student feels the hands going in contrary motion.

### Words to Discuss

#### ♦ Motive What does "motive" mean?

An inner drive. Something that causes action. Something that "drives" someone to do something.

Make analogies to how musical motives "drive" the musical action.

#### • Sequence What does "sequence" mean?

A continuous, related series. An orderly arrangement. A series. A chain. A musical sequence means a pattern repeated on other pitches. That's what makes it "orderly" and "predictable."

#### • Andante It comes from the Italian word "andare" (ahn-Dah-ray) which means to walk. Think of it as easy-going. Moving evenly. Without rush or bumps. III

# How To

## Focus on the Melody

BY SUZANNE W. GUY

### About the Composer

Who was Stephen Heller? His circle of friends included Schumann, Liszt, and Chopin, yet today this Hungarian composer is often overlooked. He preferred the smaller lyric forms and is best known for his tone poems, even if they are titled Prelude or Etude.

### About the Piece

Tolling Bell is one of the best tone poem examples from a collection of 24 Studies. Its 31 measures can be played at a walking pace in less than one minute. Yet even a short subject can be made shorter if you divide a whole into little pieces.

The bells are played by the left hand and are marked with tenuto signs. Ring every one of them! The lingering resonance comes from playing the "bells" with a paintbrush stroke. Drop firmly into the key, stroke gently and release, leading up with the wrist. This kind of progressive key contact makes the sound last longer. Be sure to play the melodic syncopation in measures 5-4 (and all similar places) with dynamic inflection. Look for the double stems to guide you toward the important notes.

## Tolling Bell

Op. 125, No. 8

STEPHEN HELLER  
(1813-1888)

Andante (♩ = 100-120)

The musical score for 'Tolling Bell' is presented in a standard piano format. It begins with a treble and bass clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 3/4 time signature. The tempo is marked 'Andante' with a quarter note equal to 100-120 beats per minute. The score is divided into four systems. The first system (measures 1-4) starts with a mezzo-forte (mf) dynamic. The second system (measures 5-8) continues the melody. The third system (measures 9-12) introduces a piano (p) dynamic. The fourth system (measures 13-16) concludes with a 'poco rall.' (slightly slowing down) marking. The score includes various musical notations such as beams, slurs, and tenuto marks to guide the performer.

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### Overview

What is the form? Look for similarity and difference—a clue to the organization of any piece.

- ◆ Measures 1-8 (LH melody)
- ◆ Measures 9-16 (RH melody)
- ◆ Measures 17-24 (LH melody)
- ◆ Measures 25-31 (LH winds down, RH has the final say)
- ◆ The standard musical shorthand is ABA' Coda

Notice that every measure has mostly eighth notes, some of which are better and brighter than others under the same beam. (There is no democracy in music.)

How do you spot the most important notes?

- ◆ Look for stems going in both directions (double-stemmed notes).
- ◆ Give them a boost of tone quality—caress the key.
- ◆ The tenuto (—) mark above or below the note head requires a special sound. Pretend the keyboard is a cork board. Press (don't punch) the marked notes.

### What You Need for Bell Sounds

- ◆ Left hand is the bell ringer for all the F# single notes. Make a rainbow shape to cross over the right hand in a gentle arc.

The musical score is for a short piece in B minor, 4/4 time. It consists of 28 measures. The score is divided into four systems, each with a measure number in a box at the beginning: 16, 20, 24, and 28. The first system (measures 16-19) starts with a treble clef and a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). It features a melody in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. Dynamics include *fp* (fortissimo piano) and *p* (piano). The second system (measures 20-23) continues the melody and bass line. The third system (measures 24-27) shows the melody and bass line with various dynamics. The fourth system (measures 28-28) ends with a final chord. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, ties, and fingerings.

### “All’s Well That Ends Well”

There are two endings in this short piece!

At the midpoint is a beautiful half cadence at measure 16.

A half cadence sounds unfinished, because it pauses on the dominant.

Think of it as a musical question mark.

The key is B Minor (tonic) and the pause is on an F# Major harmony.

There are more dynamic instructions in the last seven measures than anywhere else in the piece.

The *f* upbeat eighth notes in measure 28 lead to a surprise *p* that must still have enough punch before closing even softer in the final measure.

The final chord is “perfect” because of the tonic B in both the highest and lowest voice. Notice how restful the ending feels.

From *Focus on Melody*, Volume 1, pp. 44, 45

Selected and Edited by Suzanne Guy and Victoria McArthur

- ◆ Right hand “rings” all the F# octaves. Let the fifth finger “shine” more than the thumb as you play and release into the rest to follow.
- ◆ Pedal by harmonic color, blending all the notes of the chord together. Notice the pedal marking holds for an entire measure.
- ◆ Listen to the shower of sounds with your ears open and eyes closed.

#### Focus on the Melody

Regardless of the dynamic marking, a melody rarely speaks below *mezzo forte*. If the accompaniment is soft enough, the melody will stand out and sing.

Practice balance like this:

1. PLAY the melody tone.
2. SHADOW the accompaniment note or chord.  
Shadow means to touch the unimportant tones, moving the fingers on the keys, but without sound.
3. Combine PLAYING and SHADOWING.
4. SHADOW enough to MOVE the key(s) until sound emerges.
5. Adjust the balance until melody and accompaniment are three dynamic levels apart. III

## TEACHING PIANO PEDAGOGY

# Plan to Involve the Student

BY SYLVIA COATS

A lesson is not only about getting a student to learn a piece, but especially about getting the student to develop a *learning process*. Planning a lesson, then, is a consideration of possible ways to involve students in decision-making. Instead of listing what is played when, the lesson plan should reflect possible problems that may occur in the music and outline musical concepts that may assist the student to solve these problems. By anticipating what issues may arise, the teacher plans music, activities, and interaction that will guide the student to *think* about the music.

Consider the following lesson plan. It is written for a student who has progressed to Level 1 of *Piano Adventures*®, but still has some trouble reading.

**Objective:** Recognize pitch and rhythm patterns

**Materials:** *Piano Adventures*® Level 1

Au Clair de la Lune, Lesson Book, p. 47

I've Got Music, Performance Book, p. 24

It's Up to You!, Theory Book, p. 34

**Concepts** that may contribute to possible solutions:

Pitch, rhythm, tempo, coordination, phrase

**Concrete experiences** to encourage insight and help solve problems

- ◆ Work with hands separately, short phrases [limit conditions]
- ◆ Sightread, transpose, memorize, and harmonize  
Improvise two-measure question and two-measure answer phrases using the rhythm pattern of Au Clair de la Lune [Transfer concept to other skills]
- ◆ Sing melodies while clapping rhythms of Au Clair de la Lune, I've Got Music, and It's Up to You! [Eurhythmics, singing, imagery]

**Teacher/Student Interaction:** Use a balance of praise, questions, lecture, and directions to provide concrete experiences emphasizing patterns.

### An Integrated Lesson

In an integrated lesson, the teacher directs the student to apply a concept learned in one piece to other pieces and technique exercises. In a nonintegrated lesson, the teacher follows an order of materials and tasks to be accomplished, but may feel frustrated because of lack of time to complete the agenda. With a conceptual approach, however, the teacher motivates the student to apply the concept to music practiced at home. A concept used in similar yet different contexts enables the student to think independently in his practice. Therefore, there may not be time to hear all the music and do all the tasks that were planned, but the instructor should trust that the student could apply the concept to his practice with music not played in the lesson.

The plan suggested is designed to create opportunities to develop student insight. The lesson focus—recognizing pitch and rhythm patterns—is emphasized in the concrete experiences. The teacher will ask questions about similarities and differences in pitch and rhythm patterns in each piece and summarize what is learned in each activity.

### Stimulate Insights and Connections

Encourage the student to make intuitive connections. (Refer to the lesson plan.)

- ◆ Choosing to work with one phrase of the music, or perhaps with one hand, enables the student to be successful by *limiting the conditions*.
- ◆ Sight reading, transposing, improvising, and harmonizing are all ways to reinforce the concept—in this case, pitch and rhythm patterns. These *symmetrical activities* support and stimulate the student's comprehension.
- ◆ Moving to the rhythm by clapping, directing, or dancing, singing the melody or scale, and using imagery or stories to describe the music help the student make connections between the concept and other experiences. These *analogies* promote opportunities for student insight and analytical thinking.

### Student-Centered Interactions

Rather than a session for correcting mistakes, plan the lesson so that the student takes an active role in analyzing music and correcting his own mistakes. In a student-centered lesson, the communication between the student and teacher is characterized by questions about the student's perception of the music. After the student sings and claps Au Clair de la Lune, the teacher may ask, "Are there repeated sections in this piece?" The question assesses if the student is listening and evaluating visual and aural information. The teacher accepts the answer and builds on it by further justification from the music or asks questions to guide the student to a more thoughtful answer. This collaborative discussion nurtures the student's belief that he can make informed decisions about the music.

I encourage pedagogy students and experienced teachers to plan activities that integrate the learned concept into all the music played. The reward for your time and effort? The student will likely say, "I get it!" ■■■

Sylvia Coats teaches piano pedagogy and class piano at Wichita State University. Her book, *Teaching Minds As Well As Fingers in Piano Lessons*, will soon be published by Indiana University Press. She recently presented her popular workshop on Baroque and Romantic dances in Beijing, Tianjin, and Hong Kong. Dr. Coats is a member of the Sotto Voce Trio which has performed contemporary music from coast to coast. She holds degrees from Texas Tech University and a DMA in performance and pedagogy from the University of Colorado where Guy Duckworth was her teacher.



## TALKING TECH

## Software for the Primer Level

BY SANDRA BOWEN

I pride myself on having an exhaustive library of music education software, yet every time I start a new student, I stop to think. When it comes to creating an appropriate lab assignment for a beginner, I am reminded that only a teacher can demonstrate hand position and get the little tyke correctly situated at the piano. I'm not suggesting that software can in any way replace the teacher, just that it can reinforce some concepts better than others. Computers become our assistants, not our competitors.

So what can software do to help beginning students?

## Starting Your Library

While a number of programs drill notes and teach note values, very few address the early concepts of finger numbers, high/low, up/down, and the pattern of black and white keys. **MiDisaurus** ([www.town4kids.com/us\\_ecom/](http://www.town4kids.com/us_ecom/)) does. This charming program is engaging, thorough, and gives lots of reinforcement. After you and the Fabers have shown the student proper piano posture and hand position, MiDisaurus will help drill those first concepts. To follow Piano Adventures® Primer Level exactly, you'll have to skip around a little, but generally it follows the progress of the books quite well, gradually introducing such elements as note and rest values, beginning hand positions, and dynamics.

**Pianomouse** ([www.pianomouse.com](http://www.pianomouse.com)) is available in two age groups: **Pianomouse Goes to Preschool** (ages 3-5) and **Pianomouse Theory FUNDamentals Preparatory Level** (ages 6-12). Both programs are cleverly animated and constructed around a story featuring two mice (Pianomouse and Clara the concert violinist) and an opera-singing cat named Puccini. The first four chapters of FUNDamentals drill high and low, key names, steps and skips, and the grand staff.

**Music Ace** ([www.harmonicvision.com](http://www.harmonicvision.com)) and **Alfred's Essentials of Music Theory** ([www.alfred.com](http://www.alfred.com)) do not integrate with the Piano Adventures® Primer Level as well as the previous programs. While they both introduce the staff, keyboard, and pitch, they are generally aimed at a slightly older crowd and introduce some concepts earlier than does Piano Adventures® Primer Level. I wait and introduce these programs with Level 1 as a review and move quickly to the material of that level.

One program drills a small but critical area of the Primer Level better than any other. **Early Music Skills** ([www.ecsmedia.com](http://www.ecsmedia.com)) addresses line and space notes, notes moving up, down, and repeating on the staff, and notes stepping and skipping up and down on the staff. It has an unusually clean look, and students using it will indeed master the concepts. My only hesitation is that the program is a poor buy given how little material it covers.

When the student in the Primer Level reaches note reading on the staff, I enthusiastically recommend **Piano Is Fun** ([www.pianoisfun.com](http://www.pianoisfun.com)). While it addresses only this one con-

cept, it does it well both from the standpoint of the teacher (completely programmable—you assign the notes to be drilled) and the student (lots of kudos for completion of each level and printable certificates).

Maestro Music has a pedagogically sound program addressing the pre-reader. **Fortune Cookie** ([www.wrldcon.com/maestro](http://www.wrldcon.com/maestro)), while not visually appealing, provides vocalized instruction.

## Edutainment Programs

Largely because of the dearth of programs specifically addressing Primer issues, I use a number of more commercial (as opposed to educational) programs to accompany the first few lessons. **Menlo the Frog—A Musical Fairy Tale** tells an interactive story in which the student's curiosity leads to various musical discoveries. **Jumpstart Music** introduces the student to rhythm and beat. In **Sesame Street Music Maker** the student accompanies Bert and Ernie to various musical venues. My youngest students are addicted to **Lamb Chop Loves Music** where they learn about different musical styles and instruments. One of my oldest programs, **Lenny's Music Toons**, features a seriously competitive note identification game. Each of these titles, though they don't quiz finger numbers, ignites the child's interest in music. While not generally still in production, these programs can be readily located through a quick "Google."

## Creative Gems

Composer Morton Subotnick has written a trio of programs for young children. Each one sparks the composer in the child and gives him or her appropriate tools to create. Subotnick believes that waiting to teach composition to a child is like depriving him of crayons until s/he has proper art instruction. **Making Music, Making More Music**, and his new ear-training program **Hearing Music** ([www.creatingmusic.com](http://www.creatingmusic.com)) would all be worthwhile additions to your Piano Adventures® Primer library.

*I presented this topic to my colleagues on the Piano Pedagogy List on the Internet and want to thank the following for their suggestions: Misti Akins, Sarah Crandall, Anna Fagan, Priscilla Hefffield, Mona Houser, Linda Kennedy, Becky Lewis, Kathy Miller, Lisa Pevey, Marci Pittman, and Marcia Vahl. ■■■*

In her private piano studio in Lafayette, California **Sandra Bowen** has employed—and enjoyed—an extensive MIDI lab for almost 20 years. She shares her experiences in *Electrify Your Studio!* which is published by The FJH Music Company. Her articles on integrating technology into the traditional studio have appeared in *Clavier*, *Piano & Keyboard*, and *Keyboard Companion*. Sandra holds B.A. and M.A. degrees in Music History and Literature from Mills College and has done postgraduate work in music education at Stanford University.

## HELP YOURSELF!

# Note, Interval, and Rhythm Games

BY OUR READERS

In response to Marianne Uszler's editorial in the August 2004 issue, readers are sending in their favorite teaching tips. We're happy to share these, knowing that a great idea from someone else might work for you or get you thinking in another direction.

Send us your own best tips. What have you discovered that works especially well? Have you invented some games or follow-up activities that students love? Do you have a sure-fire way of presenting a particular skill? Maybe your idea is a special twist relating to recital planning, motivational strategies, lesson scheduling, or bookkeeping shortcuts. We're eager to hear them all!

Here are a few to tuck in your teaching-tip kit.

For both of these ideas I use a full flashcard deck of treble and bass clef notes so that there is one treble clef note matched to the same note in the bass. The backs of the cards are not marked with note name answers.

Both games work well through Piano Adventures® Level 2. This is a way to review note names and theory concepts using flashcards, but without the same old routine of name the note and flip the card. My students love it!

### MEMORY GAME

Shuffle the deck and place the cards face down on a flat surface. My students and I usually sit on the floor for this, but a table is also fine. The student picks a card, then names the note (for example, treble clef A). She then needs to pick a second card to match (bass clef A). Correct matches are kept, and the student goes again. Incorrect matches go back into play, face down. Play until the deck is matched up.

### INTERVAL GAME

For this you need the flashcard deck (as in the Memory Game), but also a die.

Shuffle the cards and put them face down on a flat surface. The student chooses a card and names the note. Then he rolls the die and must find a note on another card corresponding to that interval from the note picked. (In this case, clefs may or may not match.) If he picks a C and rolls a 4, for example, he needs to match it to an F (up a fourth) or G (down a fourth).

Variation: The teacher could call for notes up or down from the interval.

Variation: All even numbers will be up, odd numbers down. Then switch the next time the game is played.

Kelly Penn

Mason, Michigan

This is a tip for teaching proper hand position to beginners.

"Turn your hands palms up and pretend that you are catching a raindrop. Keeping that hand position, turn your hands over, palms down, and place them on the keyboard."

They always have a beautifully shaped hand. If they "slip", all I have to say is, "Catch a raindrop." Works every time.

Joanne Tadych

Mentor, Ohio

## Share your favorite tips

for

Teaching • Planning

Recitals • Scheduling

Record-Keeping

Send your tip(s) to Marianne Uszler

Muszler@pianoteaching.com

When any of my younger students doesn't "connect" with a piece of music from the method book, I work with them to "re-compose" the words that accompany the music. This process gives them the authority and ability to approach a piece of music in their own creative way.

One of my seven-year-old students, for example, didn't particularly like one of his pieces. But after choosing some words that reflected his love and fascination with dinosaurs, his eyes quickly brightened with interest and excitement. In this process, he had to investigate the rhythm of the piece so that his words would fit each phrase. This activity consequently strengthened his rhythmic perception. In place of some notes we also added dinosaur "stomps" that he performed admirably with his feet. This allowed him an opportunity to connect with his music kinesthetically. Through these new and original connections, a significant turning point began for this young and newly inspired musician.

Nicholas Elderkin

Lubbock, Texas

I use this in connection with teaching the syncopated rhythm in *Jumping Jazz Cat*, Piano Adventures®, Lesson Book 2B, pp. 16, 17.

Have the student first clap measure 2 without the tie. While clapping, the student could chant "run-ning, run-ning, run-ning, walk". Then add the tie. Or chant "run-ning, run, HO-OLD-ing walk." Make sure you say "hold" loudly to correspond to the accent mark.

I use this in connection with teaching motive recognition in *Coconut Shuffle*, Piano Adventures®, Performance Book 2A, pp. 18, 19.

The student identifies Mm. 1, 2 as the driving motive of the entire piece. The student color-codes motives according to their starting points on D, E, or F. The teacher then plays the MIDI disk or CD and tells the student that when she hears the D Motive, she should put her hands on her head. When she hears the E Motive, the hands go on the waist. For the F Motive, hands go on the knees. If you have a MIDI player, try doing it several times and speed up the tempo. My students absolutely love doing this!

Jee Wong

Seattle, Washington

## FAMILY TREE

## “Knicks” on Technic

BY MARIENNE USZLER

Pianists and teachers have always written books about technique. Since this is difficult to do—use words to describe how to play the piano—it's remarkable that so many authors have filled so many pages on this subject. Technical explanations, advice, and exercises constitute the bulk of the written literature on piano playing throughout the nearly three centuries of the piano's existence.

Authors who wrote about technique generally did so in language that was complicated, if not arcane. Many claimed to be writing for beginners, but such beginners had to be serious, indeed. Technique books written expressly for children, using language, examples, and pacing a child could understand did not appear until the early 20th century, a time when child-centered education—as exemplified in the methods of Maria Montessori, for example—was emerging.

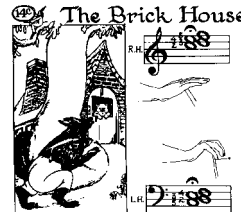
A groundbreaking example of the attempt to translate technical piano-playing habits into child-friendly language was the work done by a Chicago teacher, Louise Robyn. Her most notable achievement—the books known as *Technic Tales*—presented basic technical gestures combined with story-telling and supportive graphics. Book One was published in 1927, Book Two in 1930.

The fingers played the keys from the fingertips, not from the finger pads. The initial touch involved the third finger approaching the keyboard straight down, from above. The wrist was then flexed, producing an arch, after which the wrist floated straight back up, lifting the hand off the keyboard (The Aeroplane).



keyboard in the same way as The Aeroplane. Snow on the Mountain was “proved” when you could see “the white spot which appears on the third knuckle joint when the fifth finger makes the proper key attack.” When the thumb played, the other fingers were lifted slightly off the keys, in arched position, sitting in The Balcony.

There is great stress on forming an arch. It's built from the *weak* side of the hand, first with 4 and 5 (Straw House), then 3, 4, and 5 (Wooden House), and finally 2, 3, 4, and 5 (Brick House). The thumb (Peter) "guards Wendy's House" (the arched fingers on the keys) against the wolf who tries to blow it down.

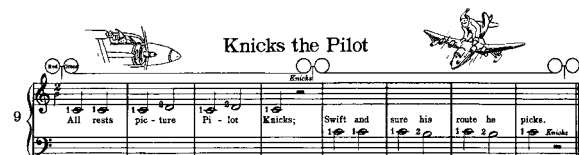


Book Two focuses primarily on thumb crossings. Each finger (star pitcher) learns to rotate over the anchored thumb in a “winding” motion. Staccato was produced by plucking the key in a “quick back action” (Tick Tock) while one finger remains anchored on the key.



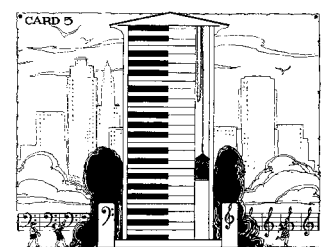
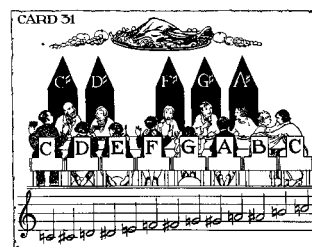
Robyn, who joined the faculty of the American Conservatory of Music in 1901, directed the Children's Department, taught the teacher-training classes, and eventually became the Associate Director. She also taught advanced students. (Ruth Crawford Seeger studied with Robyn in 1920.)

In addition to *Technic Tales*, she produced a beginner's book, *Keyboard Town*. Beginning with a Middle C approach, the book ended with 5-C reading. An original touch was the Stop/Go lights. Red indicated where the player could look down at the keyboard. When the green light was on, the eyes were to remain on the music. The student colored the lights for each piece.



Throughout half the book, rests were called “knicks.” Students went through the book three times: first playing everything in C Major, then with all sharps, and finally, with all flats! Students who worked in this book also used *Technic Tales* and were enrolled in Dalcroze eurhythmics classes.

Robyn was a strong advocate of preschool music lessons. For these classes she created “Rote Cards” contained in *Teaching Musical Notation with Picture Symbols* (1932). The ideas and graphics are instructive, as well as clever.



I know the *Technic Tales* material very well. I was raised on it. Although I no longer agree with this technical approach, I can produce an excellent Snow on the Mountain on request. And the wolf still can't blow my arch down! |||

# PIANO

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