

Exploring, Growing, Changing

Experimenting, Forgetting, Reapplying, Crystallizing

Trying, Composing, Improvising, Singing, Phrasing, Voicing, Articulating

## **Leerplan**

**Helping the Student Develop a Relationship**

**with Music and the Piano**

**at the Beginning, Intermediate and Advanced Levels**

Learning, Feeling, Questioning, Touching, Doubting, Describing, Breathing, Moving

Grounding, Testing, Listening, Communicating, Giving, Taking, Wondering

Asking, Working, Playing, Timing, Remembering, Reading,

Memorizing, Analyzing, Imagining

**by Sharon Stewart**

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**Coached by Willy Muller and Guido Topper**



## Foreword

Just as each note in a music composition has a relationship with every other note in that composition (and perhaps with other musical compositions as well), I find it useful to say that people also have and develop a relationship with music just as they have and develop a relationship with their instrument and their musical teachers. This relationship is based upon practical experience, factual knowledge as well as a dose of imagination. In this 'leerplan' I will present my ideas as they now stand as to how I, as a teacher, can help the piano student in the development of a personal relationship with music, a relationship which will hopefully develop strong enough roots to produce a lifetime of musical fruits. Central to this is how to teach the young or older pianist to practice and practice well; how to come into a state of absorption, or as Seymour Bernstein calls it, 'spontaneous concentration' in the making of music or working out of exercises on the piano. As Bernstein states, and I believe, 'the practice and performance of music can promote self-integration' (Bernstein, p. 4) Good practice can promote this integration of the heart, mind and emotions, both while studying or performing music as well as in every aspect of our lives.

The paper is written in outline form with learning aims, approach, educational resources and learning contents as points behind each topic. Following these points is a paragraph with ideas or anecdotes. One paradox which made categorization difficult is the inseparability between technique and musicality. Take 'finger independence,' for example, applied in the beginning as a purely technical exercise of raising and lowering each finger independently from the others. As control develops, the applications to music in order to reach musical aims are endless: voicing, playing phrases, articulation, polyphony, etc.. Technical and musical development are endlessly intertwined. If a student has technical problems solved, he or she will often have more 'room' left to think of and manipulate 'musical' details. On the other side, the more musically concrete an idea is, the easier it is to work out technically. Thus technical ease aids musicality and musicality aids technical ease.

I divide the topics into three levels: beginning, intermediate and advanced. However, within this rough organization, the topics are not 'chronological,' and each topic has its roots in the previous stage and/or continues into the following stage. For example, I choose to treat '*Listening to yourself*' in the advanced stage. However it is equally important in earlier stages. With topics such as '*Consciously developing the ear*' in the beginning stage and '*Developing independent finger control through physical training and ear training*' in the intermediate stage, I hope to lay a foundation as well as provide other facets of '*Listening to yourself*.' In the beginning level, children approach the piano with their thus-far developed motor skills and do what they feel is the most 'natural.' At some point every student makes the step from doing what comes naturally to challenging him or herself with theoretical problems or more analyzed 'concepts' of playing as introduced by the teacher or picked up purely through observation. (For adults, this sometimes works backwards - beginning with the unnatural and coming back to the natural...) At this point I feel that the pianist has moved to an intermediate level. The advanced level is reached when the pianist is ready to invest much time and energy into practicing and has already amassed a large amount of experience through the study of diverse repertoire and technical exercises with a purposefulness based on

a solid knowledge of harmony and form. I should also state here that I am extremely indebted to my teachers as well as the books I have read for the majority of my ideas. It becomes impossible to imagine that any of the ideas presented here are originally mine, as insight feeds on insight. The book *With Your Own Two Hands, Self-Discovery Through Music* by Seymour Bernstein was an especially inspiring find, and I am still enjoying the benefits of his ideas.

How do children experience music? With their whole bodies! Music is a strong bond that gives children the feeling that they are connecting, communicating something. When I telephone my two-year-old niece who lives nine time zones away, the conversation on her side usually stops after 'Hi, Aunt Sharie.' However, if I introduce a song that we are both familiar with, she joyfully joins in and squeals commands to go further if I try to stop. Keeping this childlike, enthusiastic response towards music while obtaining more and more 'head-knowledge' about music is a challenge for anyone (maybe especially conservatory students). I hope to remain practicing in a disciplined, yet joyful way and hope that this paper serves as an initial and important step in my quest to bring other individuals into a fulfilling relationship with the piano and music.

# Table of Contents

## Elementary

Exploring the (whole) piano.....	1
Making sounds (noise?) on the piano.....	2
Discovering dynamic, tempo and pitch variables on the piano.....	2
Playing songs on the piano.....	3
Developing a comfortable body and hand position with beginning finger training .....	3
Some simple exercises .....	4
Developing a sense of rhythm.....	5
Playing accompaniment .....	6
Playing with other students .....	7
Playing songs in different tonalities and modal music .....	7
Consciously developing the ear .....	8
Shaping a musical phrase .....	8
A first look at written notation .....	9
Music reading in the first stages.....	10
Exploring with the pedals .....	11
What is a scale?.....	11
How can beginners practice? .....	12

## Intermediate

Playing scales, broken chords and arpeggios .....	13
Major and minor tonalities and the wonder of intervals.....	14
Music reading and sight-reading in later stages .....	15
Musical timing and rhythmic difficulties .....	16
Practical and theoretical approach to harmony .....	17
Developing independent finger control through physical training and ear training .....	17
Examining different kinds of movements and arm weight .....	18
Developing different sorts of touch and articulation on the piano .....	20
What good is fingering?.....	21
Working with the pedals .....	22
Practicing well .....	23
Improvisation .....	24
Playing with other pianists, instrumentalists or vocalists.....	24

## **Advanced**

Controlling breathing and the body .....	25
Inspecting and choreographing movements .....	26
Some more difficult exercises .....	27
Tempo and rhythmical difficulties in more advanced stages .....	27
Developing theoretical insight and mental study .....	28
How to listen to yourself .....	28
Knowing the piano .....	30
Importance of knowing the historical timeframe of a work .....	30
Encouraging composition.....	31

## **Miscellaneous**

Specific problems for adults.....	31
Ideas for rewarding performance experiences.....	32
Enriching a student's musical heritage.....	32

## **Appendix I - Literature and Piano Works not included in the Leergang**

## **Appendix II – Some Songs in Graduated Difficulty**

## **Appendix III – Student Reports, Learning Materials and Cassette Contents**

## **Appendix IV – Technical Exercises**

## Elementary

For this level, I speak primarily of children beginning relatively early with piano playing. If we consider the model of cognitive development suggested by Jean Piaget, children from 3-7 have just come out of the sensorimotor stage in which intelligence takes the form of motor actions and are in the preoperational period in which intelligence is intuitive in nature. Thus, work on the piano should bypass long descriptions and get right down to the doing. Activity moves into description of activity at later phases. I will also use here plural pronouns, as I believe beginning piano lessons are the most rewarding in groups. Problems of the adult beginner are discussed under 'Miscellaneous.'

### ***Exploring the (whole) piano***

**learning aims:** the child feels comfortable touching and working with the piano

**approach:** hands-on, looking, touching, exploring, listening

**educational resources:** teacher's experience and Runze (trap 1)

**learning contents:** trying out different things with the parts of the piano

Especially with young children, their introduction to the piano can be a fun and exciting experience. Most children have already been exposed to the piano at an early age, but the moment when they have their first lesson and realize that they are going to learn to 'play the piano' is something different, special. My first piece began with a repeated middle C. It was a nice piece about a steamboat, but it is not material I find extremely useful in introducing students to the piano.

What can a child do to explore the piano? On the keyboard: let the children feel the black keys. Ask questions to get them to verbally describe what they see. Big movements are important: for example walking up and down the black keys (also walking along and not sitting in front of the piano) using the flattened hand. The groups of two's and three's are always a revelation. If someone doesn't see the groups, you can use long, thin strips of paper between the two white keys (without a black in-between) to 'mark off' the groups of black keys.

Open the lid to the grand piano or take off the board behind the music stand on the piano. Let the children see the workings of the hammers against the strings. Most children find this wonderful! You can even go so far as to let them hit the strings themselves with something like a cotton-covered spoon. (You will need to depress the right pedal to get it to sound really good.) Talk about the sound board, and let them tap the side of the inside of the grand piano to see how the sound resonates within the grand piano.

Let them see what happens when the right or left pedal is pushed in. Even if they don't understand what is happening, they will hear the difference in the sound and they will know what is happening with the hammers and the dampers.

### ***Making sounds (noise?) on the piano***

**learning aims:** student develops bigger motor skills on the piano and starts noticing sound variables and may try to produce certain results

**approach:** experimental, copying animal characteristics and using different parts of the hands and body

**educational resources:** teacher, Runze and Emonts (trap 1)

**learning contents:** use hands and body on different parts of the piano

In the previous topic, I mentioned ‘walking’ over the keyboard. There are many variations on this exercise that are useful for presenting different musical ideas as well as helping children feel comfortable making sound on the piano. One idea presented in Runze is to waddle like a duck over the groups of two’s and three’s. The student places the flat of his hand on one group of notes and then places the other (if moving up, left over right - if moving down, right over left) on the next group, thus waddling like a duck. This helps the student orient himself on the keyboard as well as play in a steady rhythm, much easier with big movements.

Ask the children to think of other animals and act them out on the keys. Move up and down. Children can connect well with animal sounds, as they have also been communicating not so long ago without words. Use different parts of the hand and body for fun. Ask them to perform for each other. Another idea moving into melody is to use the names of the children in the lesson to make small melodies or rhythms on the black keys or groups of black keys. Play and sing the children’s names up and down the piano.

### ***Discovering dynamic, tempo and pitch variables on the piano***

**learning aims:** child discovers that certain actions and locations on the piano have an effect on the sound

**approach:** ask for different results, let child direct him or herself to different results

**educational resources:** previously made noises or experimental exercises, later songs or exercises

**learning contents:** musical material in combination with dynamic and pitch variation

Children can learn basic variables of piano sound right from the beginning by experimenting and listening. Begin to ask questions (beginning with the ideas mentioned above) about hard and soft, fast and slow, high and low. As to the latter, children often do not come up with the words ‘high and low.’ ‘Light and heavy’ are more often chosen by children. See what they say and use that, if it fits. Ask one child to play and others to describe what happened. Try also speeding up and slowing down, playing louder and softer, higher and lower. If children feel comfortable manipulating these variables at an early age, they will be more likely to be sensitive to the differences and apply them later.



### ***Playing songs on the piano***

**learning aims:** student builds a relationship with their own musical world and experience and expresses it on the piano

**approach:** use known songs or introduce a new song to play through singing, clapping, moving

**educational resources:** Nooitgedagt and Emont (trap 1) and other traditional songs

**learning contents:** playing known or newly learned songs on the piano

There is almost nothing better when first learning to play piano than playing a well-known song. As teacher, it is good to choose first songs with three notes which can be played on the black keys, gradually broadening out to five-finger songs and further.

Steps for variety in playing songs can go something like:

- playing a song on the three black keys of the piano
- playing the song with two hands in contrary motion (mirrored)
- playing the song with two hands parallel
- playing the song on the white keys in different places
- playing four and five-note songs with the previous steps
- playing the song with a one note (a third or fifth is also handy) steady beat in the l.h.

Children should be encouraged to sing while they play and to play in different places on the piano.

### ***Developing a comfortable body and hand position with beginning finger training***

**learning aims:** child sits or stands comfortably behind the piano and can hold and use arm and hand in such a way that finger movements necessary for piano playing are as natural and comfortable as possible

**approach:** demonstrations, gentle corrections and reminders, use of hands to guide good posture

**educational resources:** Zebra from Runze Hervé and Pouillard (Trap 1)

**learning contents:** guiding good sitting and hand position at the piano

How a child sits behind the piano is extremely important. The stool should be high enough so that the elbow is level with the tops of the keys (the forearm is thus parallel with the floor). It is best if the child has a support for dangling legs. I use wooden planks and thus have five different levels. *Ma première année de piano* (trap 1) has nice pictures of children sitting at the piano (although they recommend crossed legs for a student whose feet don't touch the ground). A stable, adjustable chair should be used instead of a turning stool. Books to prop the child up are not ideal, but are better than a too low stool. Young children can also play splendidly standing.

The hand position must always be kept as natural as possible. When people ask me what is the best hand position, I ask them to rest their lower arm flat on a table, palm down and to let their hand curve naturally. This, except for rare cases, is the best hand position. Of course, the problem is that the fingers must learn to

move individually and be capable of coping with the resistance of the key. With children, therefore, especially with those with smaller or weak hands, it is important that they not play harder than their fingers allow (thus 'breaking through' the joints). Also with soft playing, they can better test the weight of each key against their muscle mass, and soft playing encourages listening.

Let children feel how a loose arm feels by walking around a bit. Help them keep their fingers firm to press the keys down while keeping the arm relaxed. A child with tense shoulders can be allowed to walk around a bit or swing their arms to free the shoulder joints.

### ***Some simple exercises***

**learning aims:** student learns to control fingers better

**approach:** small exercises at and away from piano - geared toward motor development

**educational resources:** Runze, Hervé and Pouillard and Emonts (Trap 1), Evertse (Trap 2), Burnam (Trap 3), Hanon no. 1 (trap 10!), Joan Last (Appendix I), personal experience

**learning contents:** using fingers with small exercises

I think that exercises are just as much about discovering the whole keyboard as about strengthening or coordinating the hand. While becoming comfortable with a particular hand movement, a beginning student can move over the whole keyboard with that movement.

As mentioned earlier, the book by Runze, *Two Hands-Twelve Notes*, introduces this kind of exploration from the start. With one finger exercise, the children place the three middle fingers on the group of three black keys as well as the thumb and fifth fingers on the black key above and below. They then move up and down the keys, using all five fingers in a pattern that can be played on any group of three black keys. In another exercise, the child learns to move from note to note, keeping the finger touching the keyboard (chromatic scale) as if he were on a slide in the playground. Later the child develops this into finding octaves, minor thirds and fifths on this same slide all over the piano.

Joan Last in her book, *The Young Pianist*, introduces the 'run and jump' exercise in which groups of three fingers play a pattern which is then transferred step-wise up or down the piano. With slightly older children, the first Hanon exercise is a way to transfer their five finger skill over the whole keyboard. One of my young students loved it so much that she practiced more than ever the week that I gave her the exercise. Her mother mentioned to me that her daughter was playing much more freely (she had been playing more than a year already). Earlier she was scared to place a finger wrongly for fear of losing the musical idea. The feeling that she could play over the whole piano increased her confidence.

Another exercise from *The Young Pianist* is called 'chairs,' and is a very good exercise in sixths where children sink into the sixth with thumb and fifth finger while keeping the wrist loose. For further (short but more difficult) exercises, a nice book is *A Dozen a Day* by Edna-Mae Burnam.

An exercise away from the piano that can help children become more aware of their hands and finger movements is to have them hold their hands in front of their face, palms together, thumbs toward their face. Then make a sort of ball, keeping finger tips, thumb tops (side of top) and base of palm together. Have them separate their first fingers, pulling them away from each other and then pressing the tips of the fingers together again. Repeat this 10 times while trying to keep the other fingers relaxed and passive. Repeat the exercise with all the other fingers and the thumb. This will develop their understanding of how fingers can be lifted, as lifting is just as important as pushing the key down.

### ***Developing a sense of rhythm***

**learning aims:** student feels steady beat from within and can control tempo between rough estimations as well as gradual changes in tempo

**approach:** moving, dancing, clapping, identifying examples

**educational resources:** all mental and printed music as well as purely rhythmic exercises

**learning contents:** rhythm and music

A good rhythmic basis is such an important groundwork that it deserves much time and attention in each lesson. For me, a solid feeling of rhythm is the canvas upon which the music can be drawn. The 'easiest' children are children who enjoy clapping or moving to music as they have already internalized from their environment the way rhythm permeates your system. More difficult are the children who are embarrassed or want to 'skip the clapping part' and jump straight into playing. Their playing is often not rhythmic because they have failed to internalize this musical element.

Thus, in my experience, the best thing to do before teaching a song is to sing it with clapping, moving, dancing, etc. Marching works well with 2/4 and 4/4, rocking with 3/4 (some children will say 'this is a marching song' or 'this is a rocking song' long before they have an idea of time signature. The song is thus internalized. Even with pieces in grade 3, it is quite possible to hum the melody several times through with the student while rocking or silently tapping to help them have first a 'musical' sound in their heads rather than working as a typist.

The moment when a child goes from a more approximate to a more exact relationship with rhythm is different with every child. Some children can sing a melody quite easily with '1-2-3-4' while others find this quite difficult. Reading music helps in structuring rhythm, but it is equally important to work with non-written material so that the intangible rhythm begins to take on some kind of tangible structure in the children's mental maps .

Leimer in his book recommends a very exact counting with each beat. I find foot tapping useful as this is a rather 'cool' way of outing their inner rhythms. Attention must continually be brought to unrhythmic playing and the teacher must 'study' or play with the student to unravel any rhythmic problems.

## ***Playing accompaniment***

**learning aims:** child learns to control a line other than the melody line and to hear accompaniment as joined with the rhythm, structure and tonality of the song

**approach:** gradual progress from separate hand coordination to chord changes as part of the form of a song

**educational resources:** Nooitgedagt, Emonts (Trap 1), other songs

**learning contents:** accompaniment with songs

Playing accompaniment with a certain song can be more of a challenge for young children (6 years and younger) than older children. Each child is different, however. Some pick the idea up and reproduce it almost without explanation (after seeing your example a few times), while others need more steps in order to master the coordination.

Accompaniment with short songs is combined with rhythm. As each accompaniment chord is often played on the beat or on each strong beat, a feeling of where the beat or the strong beat falls is essential.

Here are a series of stages that I have found useful in teaching accompaniment to less instinctive learners:

- Clap with the beat (all time signatures) or on the first and third beat (with 4/4 time) while singing the song. Make sure each child feels where the beat is. Sometimes marching and clapping (for 4/4 time) helps.
- Play a certain accompaniment (one note or a third or a fifth is easiest) on this steady beat or the first and third beat (with 4/4 time) while singing the song. Repeat.
- Let one student play the accompaniment while the other plays the song.
- Try playing the song with one hand while the other plays the steady beat (one note or third or fifth) or claps against the thigh. What might happen is that the left hand starts tapping or playing with the rhythm (divisions of words and note values) within the song rather than remaining on the steady beat. If this happens, return to the previous steps.
- Once the students can do the above steps, they are ready to play harmonic shifts (from tonic to dominant for example) on single notes or with chords. A good exercise is to see if the students can themselves find the best harmonic shifts within the accompaniment - what sounds best?
- Later exercises then can include three part blocked or broken chords.

Playing with two hands is extremely rewarding and can be introduced with small songs very early on.

### ***Playing with other students***

**learning aims:** student can listen to and play with another student or teacher and adjust his or her playing accordingly

**approach:** coach children as they learn to work and play together

**educational resources:** all books used by the student as well as songs and accompaniment

**learning contents:** more than one student playing together

A very good exercise and unavoidable in group lessons is to have children play together. Synchronizing rhythmically through rhythmic playing (and counting before starting) becomes a must. But also important is that students copy other innovations from each other such as hard, soft or perhaps tone color. You can ask one student to be the leader and the others to follow their example with the way they play and not only the what. This opens children's ears and gives them other ideas of playing, as each child plays differently.

Children can also learn from each other's strong and weak points. Some children can learn a song by ear easily while others have a strong feeling for rhythm. Others improvise creatively. Also there are many more accompaniment options that may be beyond the individual skills of the students when students play together. Playing with the teacher is also very good training, as explanation is avoided and just 'doing' stimulates coordination.

### ***Playing songs in different tonalities and modal music***

**learning aims:** student is aware that the same song can be played in another place on the piano while losing or retaining its same properties

**approach:** discovering with guided questions and ideas

**educational resources:** songs the student is playing, Appendix II – Songs in Graduated Difficulty

**learning contents:** songs in different tonalities, *Mikrokosmos 1*, Bartok (Trap 2)

Songs and exercises played 'by heart' are good material to learn about different tonalities. Ask children to play a song in another place on the piano. They will usually find the 'strange note' quickly and be able with a few hints to find the 'correct' black note to take its place. A good song to use (covering a whole scale) is 'Poesje Mauw,' as it contains a complete descending scale at the end. A very quick piano student of mine was working in the tonality of G. When we came to the F, she quickly discovered that it should be the F-sharp. 'Do you know the name of this new note?' I asked in Dutch. She didn't. 'It's fis,' I said. (Vies, pronounced the same, means 'dirty' in Dutch.) 'Oh, she said, I think the other note [the F] is vies!' We both had a good laugh. Minor scales can also be introduced in this way. Why we use only two modes is a cultural tradition, however, Bartok's modes are quite refreshing to break out of the major/minor molds and often seem quite natural to children.

### ***Consciously developing the ear***

**learning aims:** student can hear whether one tone is higher than another as well as general motions in melodies

**approach:** sing or play a song or exercise to be copied with movement or on the piano

**educational resources:** songs or self-made materials

**learning contents:** finding songs on the piano or moving in relation to pitch 'direction'

Much ear training will happen naturally through the playing of songs 'by ear,' however the teacher can always run little checks or play games in order to reinforce this natural process. One exercise or game that I like to do is to move the hands in the air for each pitch. Thus, the hand goes up when the pitch goes up and vice versa. Another variation is to choose different body parts, like head, shoulders and hips for a three-note song and then touch the head for the highest note, the shoulders for the middle note, etc., while singing.

Other games are to let the children try to find a note played on one piano on the other piano (two pianos necessary) or to sing or play a group of pitches and have the students find the combination on the piano. The teacher or a student can also sing two pitches and the others guess if it went up or down. Combinations are endless.

### ***Shaping a musical phrase***

**learning aims:** student can analyze a musical phrase to find climax, tension and resolution and can reproduce this on the piano

**approach:** repetition with feedback from teacher as well as student

**educational resources:** all pieces the student plays as well as sings (Trap 1, 2 & 3)

**learning contents:** phrases and playing motion

If the students can sing and play songs by ear, they are already a long way toward being able to shape a phrase. Although this should happen naturally, there are some exercises that can help the student understand how to shape a phrase. Most important in developing dynamic shape is that the student can hear where the climax of the phrase is. This can be practiced by singing a phrase with the student and asking where it becomes the loudest, the strongest, the most exciting, etc. The voice is the natural measuring stick. The hand should be flexible with firm fingers. If the student cannot make a controlled crescendo and decrescendo, one simple exercise may help:

- Play 1 -2 -1 with crescendo to 2 and decrescendo back to 1
- Play 1 -2 -3 -2 -1 with crescendo to 3 and decrescendo back to 1
- Play 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 3 - 2 - 1 with crescendo to 4 and decrescendo back to 1  
continue with 5
- Play 5 - 4 - 5 with crescendo to 4 and decrescendo back to 5
- Play 5 - 4 - 3 - 4 - 5 with crescendo to 3 and decrescendo back to 5  
continue until 1

The student should listen carefully to the sound and try to make as controlled, gradual, crescendo and decrescendo as possible. One help may be a slight push on the shoulders or back from the teacher (causing the student to play more firmly) with a crescendo and a release with a decrescendo.

One comment about piano sound should be made here. The realization of an actual crescendo (gradual increase in sound) between two different notes is impossible on the piano. This is because each note struck, thus each sound produced, begins strong (percussive element of the piano - remember, we are dealing with hammers, even if they are nice and padded!) and has an almost immediate downward curve. Thus an actual crescendo is impossible and an actual decrescendo (gradual decrease in sound) would happen so fast as to make adding a third note almost disappear. The idea of a crescendo is made through making the second sound somewhat louder than the begin sound of the previous note and vice versa with a decrescendo. Although this concept need not be explained until a child is somewhat more advanced, it is indeed very important to realize that when asking a child to make a gradual crescendo, we are actually asking the impossible.

### ***A first look at written notation***

**learning aims:** student can write musical ideas in own visual language, student is aware of basics of standard musical notation

**approach:** from drawing own musical material to learning the grand staff and writing and reading notes

**educational resources:** self-made materials, paper and colored pencils

**learning contents:** drawing, writing and reading

A nice preparation for note reading is to let children who can not yet write 'draw' music or exercises in his or her own symbolic language. For example, a circle means a cluster of black notes, little dots are staccato notes, a bell means the song 'ding-dong,' etc. Let them 'draw' a piece of music that includes songs and movements for themselves to play. This stimulates creativity as well as preparing them for musical notation.

Fortunately, note reading material is very easy to 'adjust to size' for each student. A help is to have a supply of musical paper with big enough staves on hand at all times. Depending on the book, you may have to do more or less work to help the children absorb the musical symbols they are presented with. In combination with the stages mentioned in the following topic 'Music reading in the first stages,' it may be necessary to do reinforcing work - letting the child draw all the clefs as well as new notes learned. It is quite important that musical symbols, the written 'language' of music become active and not only passive. I think I had been playing piano for years before I drew my first clef and key signatures, with the result that I was not always properly aware of them in the music. Actively writing musical notation should help to avoid this trap.

### ***Music reading in the first stages***

**learning aims:** student can read music while maintaining the idea that music notation represents sound and not a key on the keyboard

**approach:** gradual while maintaining relationships with sound through singing

**educational resources:** Alfred, Emonts, Thompson, Hervé and Pouillard (Trap 1), all other books and pieces mentioned in Trap 2 & 3

**learning contents:** reading music

Some books present note reading materials better than others. *Europäische Klavierschule* by Emonts, for example, is very creative with beginning material, but the gradation is too fast for the average student. Thompson's *Meest Eenvoudige Piano Leergang* offers gradual note learning with opportunities for the student to reinforce this learning with written exercises. As said in the paragraphs above, no matter what method you use, you can always fill in note reading with note writing.

Perhaps ideally music reading would follow, as in language, music speaking (thus music playing). In an ideal situation, the sight of a note on the page would conjure up in the student an inner idea of sound. However, this rarely happens. In the worst case, piano students type out music without listening to it at all!! One device I use in order to try to make this step with piano students is to use the few notes they know to make notated patterns on blank music paper that they later (with me) sing, not play. If the student knows the middle C and the few notes around it, this is perfect material to make written patterns with the C D E or A B C and try to sing them. Use of the voice connected with note symbols is an important way to make a connection between pitch and symbol.

The positive aspects of learning to read music well are many - being able to quickly absorb new material, even songs you have never heard. Being able to play longer musical forms is also an advantage. However, the disadvantage comes when note reading is taught at the expense of developing a musical memory. Being able to remember groups of notes or longer phrases is quite helpful in later stages. Thus, playing by ear should remain an important part of the music lesson.

Much has already been said about experimenting with sound, which is actually improvisation. Here I would like to add one more tip about improvisation: use written works as sources of inspiration for improvisation. A song like 'Ol' MacDonald Had a Farm' in Thompson (Trap 1) can be used perfectly to ask students to come up with other animal noises on the piano.



### ***Exploring with the pedals***

**learning aims:** student knows what the different pedals ‘do’ and how this affects sound

**approach:** experimental, looking, feeling, listening, comparing

**educational resources:** piano, student’s ideas and personal experience

**learning contents:** playing piano with the pedals

Although controlled use of the pedal is not necessary before the student has a better control of the hands, the pedals and their functions can be introduced at an early point. I do not believe that they should be ‘forbidden territory’ on the piano. The left pedal and its function in making the sound softer (and changing the color in the grand piano) can be demonstrated. The effects of the right pedal can also be demonstrated. Children will notice for themselves that the sound gets ‘bigger.’ If the children’s feet cannot reach the pedals, there is not much of a danger that they will want to push the pedal down during the duration of the piece. However, if that happens, the moment is good to let them hear the difference between a clean change of tones between struck keys with no pedal and a ‘blurred’ change of tones between struck keys with the pedal down.

### ***What is a scale?***

**learning aims:** student can recognize some major scales, sing a scale and name some of its properties

**approach:** visual materials in combination with keyboard and sound

**educational resources:** self-made materials - drawing of a ladder or stairs

**learning contents:** scales with audio and visual material

The scale is a really neat item of musical material, and many children find it quite ‘grown-up’ to be able to play a scale. They have already done much work with songs in different tonalities (up to 3 sharps and one flat are most often used in the beginning stages). The students have played chromatic scales as a part of their exercises. With a little effort, one can explain the difference between whole and half steps.

Now is time to ‘draw’ the idea of a scale. You can use the idea of stairs, a ladder, anything to show the whole step (big step), half step (little step) idea of scales. If a child is already quite far with notation, you can notate this on a piece of music paper and ask them to go further with other scales, notating the scale and marking the whole and half steps. I had such a wonderful feeling when I for the first time saw the matching relationship between the first four tones and the last four tones of a scale, like little sisters.

Important technically is the movement of the thumb during a scale so that it will be brought into position to play without an extreme raising of the elbow (chicken flapping!) Many children do not realize the flexibility of the thumb, which can be brought all the way over to touch the base of the fifth finger. This flexibility is just what is required to bring the thumb into position. Another difficulty is that the thumb should be moving almost from the moment it stops playing to arrive on time for its next note, especially with fast scales. It takes many children a while to do the two things at once - begin the movement of the thumb under (the mouse creeping into his hole) while the other fingers are carrying on with the scale. The book Alfred’s Basic Adult

Finger Aerobics, has a very good exercise. The thumb plays, followed by the 2nd and 3rd fingers together while the thumb goes under and plays again. This can be used to get the feel of a whole scale, sometimes playing the 2nd, 3rd and 4th fingers together, really giving your thumb a big stretch! Scales will be carried on in the following level, so there is no need to rush a child who does not really like them. However, I do think they are extremely important for technical and musical reasons.

### ***How can beginners practice?***

**learning aims:** beginning piano students can direct their practice time both with goals set by the teacher as well as self-made goals

**approach:** talk about practicing, ask questions about practicing, give clear activities and goals

**educational resources:** music paper, musical diary or folder to be kept by student and teacher, practice cassette (see cassette content in Appendix III)

**learning contents:** organization of study time and materials

Young children are still developing their ability to develop goals and become self-directed. It is unreasonable to expect that they can organize their learning for more than a few minutes at a time. Even if they know what to play, they may not know how to play, thus meaning that running through a song with bad rhythm and wrong notes is 'practicing' to them. I have also heard from more than one parent that their child often follows a 'fly-by' approach to the piano - stopping to play for a couple of moments while walking by the piano or between play moments.

Because of this, Hofmann recommends that children receive two thirty-minute lessons per week rather than one hour lesson. Bernstein also advises that the child only practice under supervision (by a parent, adult or teenager appointed by the parent!) until he learns to concentrate on his own, because, 'As we have seen, the secret of productive practicing is to listen to yourself objectively; to compare the sounds of your instrument with your own musical concept. Being too young or inexperienced to do this alone, a student must then rely upon another person who will listen for him until he is able to listen to himself' (Bernstein, p. 115).

Unfortunately, these are ideal situations that do not often match reality. So what can a teacher do in order to make the practice time of young students as beneficial as possible? Make songs and exercises as clear as possible in the lesson and have the student write them in a practice notebook (or you can write them if the student is unable to write). The material should be understood in the lesson, before the child leaves, thus it helps to have a small 'run-through' before the student goes out the door. Write down any ideas on variations (such as a different kind of accompaniment or dynamic contrasts) that the student can practice at home. If the student's ears are opened during the lesson to the different elements of sound that can be produced on the piano, he will have an advantage in this area.

A tape cassette or CD can be an enormous stimulation to practice. I have made a cassette (for an adult, actually) as a way to keep a student practicing when lessons were not possible, during a vacation. CD's fill out the sound for beginners as well as reinforce good rhythm (see cassette content in Appendix III).

## Intermediate

In this section harmonic understanding on theoretical and practical levels as well as an understanding of musical forms become more important. If we consider the model of cognitive development suggested by Piaget, students from the age of 8 - 11 years are entering the 'concrete operational stage' in which the cognitive structure is logical but depends upon concrete referents. From 12-15 years they move to the 'formal operations stage' in which thinking involves abstractions. Thus, these are prime years in which to develop the logical and abstract side of music understanding. Of course, one cannot close out the emotional side of music, but it is the rare 13 year old who can play with the emotional maturity of a 30 year old. That is not to say that music cannot be a prime tool to develop emotionally as well as mentally. I now switch to using the singular pronoun 'he' for male and female students, as I believe individual lessons or duo lessons work better at this stage.

### ***Playing scales, broken chords and arpeggios***

**learning aims:** student becomes aware of the building blocks of much music

**approach:** gradually introduce new scales, broken chords and arpeggios in new and old exercises

**educational resources:** self-devised exercises, *Know Your Scales!*, Harris (Appendix I), Hanon (Trap 10)

**learning contents:** scales, broken chords and arpeggios in all tonalities

I have already discussed the technical aspect of turning the thumb under for scale playing. As I see it, other than developing a sort of mental map of each tonality, scales are good purely for developing an even finger touch. Ideas that I use to develop this are letting the weight of your arm come evenly on each finger (weight technique is discussed in *Examining different kinds of movements and arm weight*) and imagining that your elbow and shoulder joints are filled with warm oil, as a fixation on the finger movements can cause stiffness in the arms. Now is a good time to develop a standard fingering for scales (see Hanon). Care should be made that the thumb does not sound too loudly, or as Leimer says, the fingers playing before and after the thumb do not sound too loudly. In any case, passing of the arm weight on equally firm fingers is enough material to work on for a lifetime.

Arpeggios can be practiced legato, with a more far reaching thumb-under technique or with the hand jumping from one position to the other without placement of the thumb under. I prefer a combination of the two in which the thumb is placed under, but the connection between the last finger to play and the thumb is not legato - an almost imperceptible jump. However, every technique most likely has some application in music.

From the first chord learned, broken chords played up and down the piano with the crossing over of the hands (already learned in the earliest black key exercises) gives an arpeggio effect, reinforces the feel of the chord and gives a student orientation over the whole keyboard. Broken chords played in different inversions ascending in the following pattern: C - E - G - C, E - G - C - E, G - C - E - G and so forth (descending reverse) are quite handy in developing a circular movement of the wrist and forearm and are a good way to develop

the standard fingering for all the inversions as well as to develop a sense of how all the inversions feel. This material can be added quite easily with each lesson.

### ***Major and minor tonalities and the wonder of intervals***

**learning aims:** student knows the difference between major and minor scales and how they are related and understands how intervals are based on the steps in the scale

**approach:** slowly building on learned material, playing and describing

**educational resources:** self-made materials, maybe Hanon for a synthesis, *Lire la musique par la connaissance des intervals*, Arbaretaz (Appendix)

**learning contents:** major and minor scales in different pieces and exercises

The student should already hear the difference between major and minor scales. The story of how the minor relates to the major was to me very interesting. Half steps can be explained in the way done with major scales. An explanation of natural, melodic and harmonic minors is also good, and the student should be introduced to all three, although harmonic minors are the only that really add a new type of interval. Harmony is, as the name indicates, also based on the harmonic minor.

A very important part of developing melodic memory is to be able to hear important intervals such as the dominant and the tonic. A student who can trace a melody as it jumps and weaves through the steps of a scale will have a much easier time 'placing' the melody on the piano (maybe even singing). I find the France system 'do, re, mi, fa, sol, la, ti...' of relative note names quite useful. Once a student 'hears' the difference between the major and minor third or sixth, it will help him to have a closer relationship to the music. Hearing a leading tone or how the minor sixth falls to the fifth or how chromatic alterations add color groups of notes should give a student a closer connection with the mind of the composer - this note 'leads to' that note, etc..

With twelve-tone music, this intervallic relationship takes on an especially important role. Scriabin developed a new system of harmonic relationships in which the fourth plays a more important function than the third. This kind of knowledge and the ability to hear basic intervals and gradually all intervals will help a student greatly in their relationship with music in all styles. I mention the book, *Lire la musique par la connaissance des intervals* by Arbaretaz almost as a joke, as it is for the non-French-taught student nearly impossible. However, it gives a good look at what is possible as far as understanding intervals is concerned.

### ***Music reading and sight-reading in later stages***

**learning aims:** student can read music over the complete grand staff plus additional registers with more ease through better understanding of musical patterns and groupings.

**approach:** practice, practice, practice with helps

**educational resources:** all new material, helps such as *Improve Your Sight-reading!* by Harris (Appendix I)

**learning contents:** new music to read

Reading music well is a great joy. Hopefully as a student learns more about the relationships of the notes within the diatonic scales as well as the function of chromatic alterations, he will naturally become better at note reading. Making sure that the student works with writing scales and the key signatures will aid recognition of tonalities as well as making ‘forgetting all the f-sharps’ less likely to happen.

Bernstein spent much time analyzing his ‘good’ and ‘worse’ sight-readers. Of himself he says

‘the instant I began to read, my mind framed a running commentary coincidental with the automatic movements of my hands. The absorption into my mind and retention of successive musical facts were triggering the appropriate responses of my hands. By drawing on a great store of information, gathered from years of experience, I was able to analyze complex musical situations at a glance and reduce them progressively to their simplest elements. Above all, I found myself able to anticipate what was to come, as, for example, repetitions of motifs, rhythms, and harmonic progressions. This ability to predict musical events being the major skill for sight-reading, is rooted, as I realized from observing myself, in the power of retention. Thus, to know what is to come, one has to remember what has just transpired’ (Bernstein, p. 41-42)

Thus:

- understanding (major and minor) key signatures and the relation to tonality
- seeing patterns in music
- learning to recognize intervals (an aural as well as motor response)
- recognizing and feeling rhythmical patterns
- recognizing and feeling tonalities
- practice playing in different positions

are essential for developing sight-reading abilities. Helps like *Improve Your Sight-reading!* by Harris can also prove handy for students (or teachers) who appreciate a break-down of steps as well as successes in small drills.

### ***Musical timing and rhythmic difficulties***

**learning aims:** student begins to feel and present music in a more tangible timeframe

**approach:** clapping, moving, voicing, comparing

**educational resources:** recording mechanism in combination with musical material, Ferguson, Hofmann, Neuhaus, Leimer and Bernstein (Appendix I)

**learning contents:** performances and practice in time

Music occurs in time, thus feeling for time is essential. Yet time can be so extremely subjective for the performer whose heart is racing or for the tired student. Even with the Italian tempo indications, the manner in which a song was played was at first more important than the speed. For example, *allegro* means gay, not fast. It is a good idea to familiarize the student with these meanings. However, objectivity as regards tempo can be helped by applying a metronome now or then to dubious passages or making a recording of yourself.

For the sake of conciseness, I make a list of some considerations that students and teachers should consider concerning time and tempo. One can endlessly deepen oneself in this subject.

- stealing and giving back in time - with rubato, one must 'give back' time stolen, however this works differently between music of different origins (i.e., French and German)
- choosing a tempo: students own capabilities as well the requirements of the piece are important. A student should not play faster than he can musically play. However, some students need a push to bring a piece to the next level of performance speed. Slow practice should be alternated with practice at a 'concert' tempo.
- the metronome, in my opinion, is a lot of fun in challenging yourself rhythmically, but it is true that overuse can cause you to become lazy in developing your inner pulse or can cause you to play nervously or without the normal 'breathing' in music
- maintaining one tempo: test different parts of the piece (especially with the sonata form) against each other to make sure you are playing the quarter note passage at the same tempo as the sixteenth note passage.
- not speeding on crescendos or slowing on decrescendos - test yourself with the metronome
- not sacrificing any beat in the measure: the last beat often needs special attention so that it is not regularly cheated.
- agogic pauses use the voice or violin as example for jumps in the melody
- consult a Baroque expert for help in Baroque timing and articulation
- two against three, three against four, five against seven, etc.: practice a bar or two with one hand after another to develop an automated 'hand independence,' then throw the hands together. Use the metronome or practice tapping the rhythm out with your hands on your legs if necessary.

### ***Practical and theoretical approach to harmony***

**learning aims:** student can analyze a tonal work based on concepts of tension and release through the (culturally reinforced) dissonance and resolution in tonal harmony and student can hear and reproduce various harmonic progressions

**approach:** study transitions harmonically, play cadences in pieces and listen to the results, try to reproduce harmonies from a CD

**educational resources:** self-made materials, CD's and student's pieces

**learning contents:** tonal harmonic analysis

Scales, chords and arpeggios have already been discussed to some extent. Chords and arpeggios can be extended to dominant and diminished and half-diminished sevenths, nice because all four fingers can be put into use. Important harmonic concepts are dominant and diminished sevenths, augmented and Neapolitan sixths; full, half and deceptive cadences; mixing of modes; added sixths, ninths and suspensions, however it is not my goal to explain harmony here.

The student who is interested in jazz or pop chords can pick up a CD and try to match the harmonies heard. In classical works there are also a wealth of cadences to dissect. Being able to trace the harmonic line in a work is very important in understanding the form as well as memorizing a piece.

### ***Developing independent finger control through physical training and ear training***

**learning aims:** student can move each finger independently from the others and can apply this to achieve polyphonic, voicing and tone-coloring aims

**approach:** repetition with feedback from student and teacher

**educational resources:** Nieland (Trap 3), Schumann, Bach, Chopin, Grieg, Liszt, etc.

**learning contents:** finger control in combination with musical aims

There have been innumerable exercises written to develop independence between the fingers. Some ask the pianist to hold four keys down while the remaining finger plays a repeated note, moving very exactly up and down (beginning exercises by Liszt not mentioned in the leergang or Appendix). More difficult is to let the fingers rest on top of the keys quietly while the one finger plays. These kind of gymnastics do serve a purpose, I believe. Although the fourth finger, for instance, will never become independent from the third and we will all remain wrestling with weaknesses and dependencies, I think it is good for the pianist to learn what the individual weaknesses and strengths of each finger are. Thus any highly concentrated yet relaxed, thoughtful finger movements should serve some purpose, even if it is merely to see what the possibilities are.

The fun part is to apply these trained fingers to music. Once a student has learned to play a beautiful melody with one hand, the trick becomes adding a melody with the other hand and then one or two more melodies divided between the hands. Although I at the moment have no system to teach this, I do know that slow

playing while exaggerating the dynamic levels between voices can wake the student up to the sound of two voices in music.

Playing chords as a collection of different voices and not only a flat group of notes is another skill. Bernstein devotes much time to describing the process of voicing a chord (Bernstein pp. 139-143). Although I do not want to repeat everything he says here, an important point is learning to play one note to the bottom 'key bed' while the other notes are sounded at escapement level. The whole process, as he proves, can be divided into accomplishable steps.

This brings me to the question of tone color in polyphonic voicing. Different colors can be produced by different voices, even two voices played in the same hand. Take the example mentioned above, for instance. A group of notes played on the keybeds will have a different color than a group of notes played at escapement level.

A piece that I love which combines three voices with rotation in both hands is *Trällerliedchen* in Schumann's *Album für die Jugend*, op. 68.

### **Examining different kinds of movements and arm weight**

**learning aims:** student can reflect on and describe different body movements used during piano playing

**approach:** questioning, examining, feeling, describing

**educational resources:** Leimer and Bernstein

**learning contents:** movements at the piano and discussion

This is one of the most interesting as well as complicated subjects regarding piano playing. One interesting concept is of the 'musical' or 'controlled' free fall as a way to release arm weight onto the keys. In Leimer's book he mentions that the idea was introduced by Deppe, whose work I have not studied. In any case, the idea is that the arm should hang naturally from the shoulder joint and be able to be raised through the efforts of the different muscles and dropped on the keyboard with a complete relaxation of those same muscles. (Of course it is not a real free fall, because the arm is still attached!) Leimer then goes on to explain a free fall from the elbow, wrist or fingers. Bernstein mentions the free fall as being greatly misrepresented and quotes Matthay, a firm proponent of relaxation, as eventually issuing the following statement in opposition to misunderstanding: 'The arm is never dropped onto the keyboard except by fools!' (Bernstein, 129)

In any case, I believe that training to feel the contraction and release of the arm is essential for students. The piano keys should not, in general, be poked down from an arm held above the keyboard. However many students are not aware that they are

supporting their arm above the keyboard through the contraction of muscles. When asked to relax, their arm remains swaying gently in the air, and they are unable to let the weight of the arm sink into the keyboard.



To produce a clear tone with relaxed arm weight behind the finger requires finger muscles that are firm enough to support the weight of the arm muscle!! This cannot be emphasized enough. In playing with a weight touch, the fingers should support a freely hanging arm, and the weight is transferred from finger to finger. Theoretically speaking, with a freely hanging arm supported by the fingers, only *legato* playing is possible. Every lift of the hand from the keyboard requires a contraction of the arm muscles. Another distinction deserves to be made: a freely hanging arm supported by the fingers is different from an arm being 'pushed' onto the fingers through a contraction of muscles or the 'leaning' of the body weight of the player through his stiffened arms. This pushing through or straining to push the keys down despite contracted muscles produces a quite different sound (perhaps useful in a *sforzando*) than one that comes purely through the relaxed weight of the arm itself. Bernstein suggests trying wrist arm weights of a few pounds and to use them (five minutes a day at first) to simulate the feeling of controlled arm weight. He guarantees that you will be amazed at the depth and quality of the sound you produce.

Leimer speaks also of the throw produced by muscular strength (sometimes called the thrust), producing a powerful burst which can be combined with the free fall (releasing the muscles); stroke, which he calls a more expressive 'touch;' the swing as a form of the stroke, forming round, wavy movements; the roll which he says can only come from the shoulder joint; and pressure which comes from a finger already in contact with or resting on the keys. I am not sure that I find his descriptions very useful. He does not mention rotation which occurs when the two forearm bones roll over each other such as in the motion one makes when turning a doorknob. He also fails to mention the 'roll' coming from the flexible wrist joint. The throw or thrust I would describe as a powerful motion (often said by pianists to come from the pit of their stomach) toward the piano. The best results are when the fingers are in touch with the keys and make a firm, accelerating movement to push the keys to the keybeds. During the process, the arm muscles (sometimes with body weight) are released into the keys. This touch performed slowly or quickly is useful for powerful chords. Matthay would emphasize that after every movement, the ability to quickly relax or redirect the muscles is extremely important.

Bernstein takes much time to discuss the movements of the upper arm toward and away from the piano with many examples as to how this can be applied to music (Bernstein, pp. 175-180) He also uses the term 'curves of energy' and the three spheres: the fingers; the palms, wrists, and arms; and the torso. According to him the fingers must bear the major share of responsibility in piano playing, moving faster than any other part of your body. The palms, wrists, and arms (in choreographing) gather the more 'rapid and particularized movements' of the fingers together and provide a solid platform for these movements. The torso can be used as an overseer to 'reflect large musical ideas' (Bernstein pp. 192-5). I found this as well as his example from a Mozart sonata interesting and look forward to applying the idea in my own playing and teaching.

Jumps provide their own problems. For fast jumps, a close flying over the keyboard with a well-trained spread of the fingers for chords aids in security. A succession of chords or other repeated movements requiring

endurance can be made much easier if the movement is changed from time to time. With long trills, for example, a more active finger approach can be alternated with a rotation of the forearm.

Every teacher should be able to write exercises for the particular problems of her students. Students should take many breaks while practicing technically heavy music or exercises. Fatigue should be avoided. As Leimer says, 'Where fatigue begins, technique ends' (Leimer, 107).

### ***Developing different sorts of touch and articulation on the piano***

**learning aims:** student is aware of how the way in which he strikes or presses the key influences sound and student can choreograph articulation in a way that enhances the music

**approach:** listening, practicing, reflecting, using motifs and short passages

**educational resources:** various styles of music, Ferguson, Leimer, Hofmann and Neuhaus (Appendix I)

**learning contents:** touch and articulation on the piano and in musical scores

Touch and articulation involve all the movements and uncountable combinations of movements possible. One useful exercise, suggested especially by Matthay, is feeling exactly how much weight is actually required to move a key from its resting position to its fully depressed position (the keybed). This can be done with merely the weight of the hand behind the finger. In slowly dropping the weight of the arm on a fixed forearm and finger, an extremely soft sound can be made, the softest sound possible on the piano. Understanding this dynamic relationship between the weight of the key and the energy required by finger and body to move it should improve once the pianist realizes the minimum energy necessary to depress a key.

Tone color changes with every other factor of sound that changes when depressing a key. Theoretically it should be impossible to repeat exactly the same tone color two times, as one hit of the hammer on the string changes the nature of the hammer as well as the string. An important exercise for the pianist in controlling the color of a tone is to know where the escapement level is on the piano (grand piano). By playing to this point or through this point, great variations of color can be made. The pianist should also realize that once the key is depressed past this point, nothing he does will alter the sound, as the mechanism has, past this point lost contact with the hammer.

'Drop-lift' is an important combination of movements for articulation. Take playing three notes under a slur with a staccato marking on the last note, for example. In bringing the arm down while playing the first note, letting the weight of the arm come fully on the second note and bringing the weight of the arm out of the keys on the third note (releasing the key before the full value of the note), a well-shaped musical motif is made to fit the articulation markings. Thus the ideas of applying and lifting weight on and from the keyboard are directly applicable in articulation.

The pads and curvature of the fingers are important in touch. Playing with flatter fingers where a large surface of the finger pad touches the key helps to create a *cantabile*, expressive sound while playing with more

strongly curved fingers where the tip of the finger only touches the key is better for a more percussive sound and faster playing.

*Staccato* means separation and has many different applications as well as symbols in the history of music.

*Legato* means a joining of the sounds which can even be overlapping as in *legatissimo*. *Tenuto* implies that a note is held for its full value, but can also imply a firmer sound with a tiny gap between sounds as if you were trying to impress on someone the importance of what you are saying (playing). One help on this subject is *Keyboard Interpretation* by Ferguson (Appendix I).

Another interesting concept is how the intent of the pianist can actually work wonders in changing the color of the sound. If the pianist does not understand the word *cantabile*, but is told that he should play the melody as if he is singing it to his dearly beloved in the middle of a silent park on a summer midnight, then *voilà!* a beautiful *cantabile* sound should come out! The best results come when emotional content is felt and allowed to affect touch. On the other hand, certain practiced movements can also inspire a certain emotional response.

### ***What good is fingering?***

**learning aims:** student can finger a passage based on the musical contents, tempo and needs of student's own hands

**approach:** use new material, trial and error, check editor's or composer's own fingering

**educational resources:** accepted fingering for scales, chords and inversions and inventive fingering, Leimer, Neuhaus, Bernstein, *Melodie in F* by Rubenstein (Trap 6)

**learning contents:** fingering in music

A well-placed finger is a serious aid in both assimilating as well as automizing a piece. Once the student is aware of the strengths and weakness of each finger, he can work on developing his understanding of fingering. For example, in fingering a slow up and down passage, the fifth finger might be chosen as it has the swing to play more expressively. However, this same passage at a faster tempo might be safer with the first three fingers only a passing of the thumb. An ideal to seek in fingering is comfort, aided by the arm, but the student should learn not to habitually avoid weaker fingers (for example, using the third instead of the fourth on a chord in first inversion). I believe students should finger a piece they are seriously working on. Trial and error, listening to your fingers, logic and experience are important components in finding a good fingering. I mention the *Melodie in F* by Rubenstein above because it is a piece in which the melody is to be played by the thumbs in both hands. Pieces like this are good tools to develop certain fingers or fingering ideas.

### ***Working with the pedals***

**learning aims:** student can use left and right pedal to enhance playing beauty and comfort

**approach:** inspect physical steps (break-down of movements), apply steps in different ways to different passages

**educational resources:** pieces with pedal markings, Ferguson, Hofmann, Leimer, Neuhaus and Bernstein (Appendix I)

**learning contents:** pedal use in music

The heel of the foot should be placed firmly on the floor in front of the pedal to be used as the feet are an important grounding point for the pianist. In working with the pedal, the pianist must feel how much pressure it takes to depress the pedal as well as to release the pedal in a controlled way (because of a powerful spring, pressure has to be used to slow the speed of a released pedal). Each pedal response is unique.

An important exercise for good use of the right, or damper, pedal is to see how quickly and soundlessly one can release the pedal and push it back down again. The pedal can be depressed before a note, on a note or just after a note. Depressing the pedal before a note will raise the dampers so that all the strings vibrate freely when the note is played (also, there will be less resistance from the key, as the damper is already lifted). This is basically only useful with the beginning of a piece, section or with a note or chord coming after a rest. In applying pedal to a series of notes, releasing the pedal before the release of each key and playing the pedal exactly with the depression of the following key provides one color (Leimer calls this 'time-tread' and recommends this for Beethoven and Chopin, p. 124). Changing or clearing (quickly releasing and depressing) the pedal slightly after the beginning of each note is called syncopated pedal use and is used to enhance legato playing.

Also the distance a pedal needs to be depressed in order to raise the dampers from the strings should be checked as each piano is different. An easy way to check is to keep striking one note while pushing the right pedal slowly down. The gray area where the dampers are just coming off the strings and where they are completely off may be just a millimeter of motion with your foot. This spot is useful for half pedaling, where the performer wishes the edges of the notes to be blurred but does not want a complete blending of sound. The spot where the dampers come back in contact with the strings, found when playing a repeated note and allowing the pedal to slowly come up from a depressed position is useful for half changes. A half change might be used when the player wishes to prevent the blurring of middle register notes but would like a bass note to sound through.

*Vibrato* pedal comes from the quick up and down movement of the foot on the pedal and is useful for longer scales played in a piece or virtuoso passages where a certain clarity yet connection between the notes as a whole is desired.

The middle ‘*sostenuto*’ pedal (some people will use the word ‘sostenuto pedal’ for the right pedal) is not found on many pianos. It sustains single or groups of notes and is useful for pedal points, for example. This pedal comes in handy especially when playing Debussy.

Bernstein recommends that advanced students not be ashamed to use the left pedal, the soft pedal (Italian, *una corda*; French, *sourdine*; German, *Verschiebung*) even on longer passages. The sound produced should be the most important determining factor. If the sound is still round enough and beautiful and delicately soft, he says to follow the example of many performers and use the soft pedal in passages where this sound is desired.

Hofmann suggests that the balls of both feet be kept on the left and right pedals at all times, so that unnecessary shuffling is avoided.

Students should have developed a good legato touch before they use the pedal. For students who tend to use too much pedal (like me!), a passage should be played carefully without pedal until another idea of sound is developed. Then the pedal can be added again. Once the student has the mechanical capabilities of working with the pedals, I see no reason that they should not start adding pedal (conscientiously) from their first work with a piece.

### ***Practicing well***

**learning aims:** student can apply knowledge in a productive and efficient way during practice

**approach:** listening and awareness

**educational resources:** practicing materials

**learning contents:** practicing away from the teacher

Now that a student is more advanced and is building up a larger body of knowledge about the piano and practicing, he should be able to be much more self-directed. In this stage, however, the teacher may still need to take on more than a purely motivational role. The teacher must always be prepared to ‘practice with’ the student, guiding the student through the listening process and making necessary suggestions and giving ideas for ways to improve. Ask the student to imagine that a master he much admires is in the room with him while he is practicing. If the student has direct goals and has learned to listen to himself (see topic *Listening to yourself*), he will be able to better and better direct his own time behind the piano. Schedule regular group lessons for your intermediate students so that they can listen to each other and give constructive support and criticism. At this stage students will need more performance opportunities to keep practicing motivation high.

### ***Improvisation***

**learning aims:** student feels free to improvise at the piano with and without an improvising framework

**approach:** encouraging freedom of expression in combination with applicable techniques or materials

**educational resources:** bass lines of classical or baroque works, self-made materials, harmonic schemes, rhythmic patterns, scales and broken chords

**learning contents:** improvisation at the piano

Improvisation should be encouraged by the teacher. However, most students will probably feel uncomfortable launching into an improvisation with their teacher sitting in the room, looking over their shoulder. A solution might be to work with improvisation using some guides or written materials as a start. If the student has already been working on developing accompaniment for songs and melodies, then material might be a melody line for which the student improvises accompaniment in different styles. Another idea is to have written-out chords (with notation or letters, such as A7, D) within bars, letting the student develop these to an accompaniment and melody. Another idea is to come up with a rhythmical motif and let a student play whatever comes to mind and hand as long as he remains true to the rhythmical motif. The possibilities are endless. Encourage the student to play free improvisations in a 'safe' environment. These skills will always come to use at some point, even if it is by making a group he is with on vacation extremely happy with a sing-along with him behind an old piano at the lodge.

### ***Playing with other pianists, instrumentalists or vocalists***

**learning aims:** student can play with another instrument or vocalist in a way that supports the other musician musically and artistically

**approach:** playing with other instrumentalists

**educational resources:** duets, trios, quartets, etc.

**learning contents:** performing music with another instrumentalist or vocalist

I list the benefits of playing with other instrumentalists or vocalists below:

- student develops a broader ear for and appreciation for musical color
- student develops an appreciation for the difficulties of other instruments
- student can imagine other tone colors better
- student refines conception of rhythm in order to make music together
- student has a broader vision of the available repertoire

Playing four-hands or piano duo with other pianists is also extremely useful as the student will be confronted with his or her ideas over piano playing and will learn to adapt or explain these ideas. Numerous problems such as unrhythmic or unlogical playing will come to light when playing with another pianist. Plus, a student will gain a great deal of inspiration from the insights and skills of his partner

## Advanced

This is perhaps the most difficult stage to describe in words, as it involves a deeper working of all the skills mentioned thus far. The relationship of the student with the piano has now been developed for so long, that the student may be more and more motivated purely from love of the beauty of music and the piano. On the other hand, he may be less likely to have an unbiased perspective of his own playing and old habits might become more difficult to confront.

### ***Controlling breathing and the body***

**learning aims:** student is more aware of and can better control breathing at the piano and student can better balance tensions in the body

**approach:** breathing, balancing, sitting, standing exercises with careful observation

**educational resources:** Bernstein, *Licht op Adem* by Weller (Appendix I), and Alexander Technique principles

**learning contents:** breathing, sitting and moving while playing piano

The piano offers several temptations in order to pull the performer or practicer ‘out of his own body.’ The desire to listen carefully as well as to control the sound can bring the pianist so much out of balance or out of touch with his own body that he may lean, bend or curl to the extent that he causes serious back and/or neck problems. One way to avoid this is to become ‘grounded’ behind the piano. The ‘sit-bones’ on the piano stool and the heels on the floor are important places where contact with a solid surface are made and tensions or energy can be released. If one feels these sit-bones and heels on the floor and directs the body upward through thinking (not a straining or ‘doing’), the body will react better by using the support offered and organizing the ‘posture muscles’ rather than the ‘movement muscles’ appropriately. However, it is almost impossible to describe this process in words.

Another problem, perhaps the counter-effect, related to being pulled toward the piano comes when a student pulls himself away through an overarching (over-contraction) of the spine, especially in the lower back. This gives the illusion that the student is sitting quite straight behind the piano, but in reality their lower back muscles are being shortened considerably. By asking a student to soften these muscles and allow the energy to stream upward from the solidity of the ground and stool, this problem can be to some extent alleviated and all the energy that was being pulled away from the piano in order to achieve this ‘straightness’ will be freed to be used on the keys.

Young children in their freshness often exaggerate these tendencies, which is good because it then becomes obvious to the teacher. If you have ever asked a tired child to sit straight, he will often pull himself up with an extended chest and raised shoulders, generating so much effort, that you realize he will collapse in a couple of minutes. A better idea is perhaps asking the child to sit toward the front of the stool, place his feet firmly on the ground and take a long, even breath while thinking he has a string tied to the top of his head which will

gently pull him up. (Children may find this so funny that they begin bouncing around as if their head is being jerked upward with a rope. This may not be so useful, but at least they will not be slumping tiredly any more!)

Another aspect of being 'grounded' is brought out by Bernstein as coming from the music itself. A long bass line, where the left hand rests on a note or chord can be felt as a sort of grounding on the left hand, leaving the right hand freer to produce its virtuoso passages.

Our breathing is strongly effected by our emotions and our concentration. When performing or concentrating very hard, we may hold our breath, right at the moment when breathing slowly and regularly would bring the calmness (not to mention the regular blood flow!) we need. Bernstein includes a slow breathing exercise designed to develop control in the breathing as well as bring the body to rest before responding to a new piece in an open and receptive way. He also mentions breathing in ways that go with the motion of the music, like holding your breath on the final note of a phrase or inhaling before a difficult passage and exhaling during the passage (Bernstein, pp.65-67, 73). Other ideas and exercises for healthier, controlled breathing are found in *Licht op Adem* by Stella Weller.

Bernstein believes that much cramp in the forearm comes from fingers that are not held taut enough, thus creating contractions in the forearm which is trying, but is not able, to take over the work of the fingers. He offers an exercise for developing elastically taut fingers (pp. 137-138). Stiffness comes from the uncontrolled contraction of muscles, sometimes caused by the fear that you will not be able to perform a required task. It is the goal of the advanced pianist to be so intuitively aware of tensions and release of the muscle that any task can be analyzed according to necessary and unnecessary tension. One tension in particular is the squeezing of the arms to the body (squeezing in the armpits) which restricts the free motion of the arms. However, in fast playing, good stabilization of the body and joints does become necessary to support the member that is moving rapidly.

### ***Inspecting and choreographing movements***

**learning aims:** student can couple movements with musical passages for optimal comfort and performance

**approach:** coupling all movements with technical needs and musical lines in a study or piece

**educational resources:** teacher and student

**learning contents:** choreographing different musical passages

As mentioned above, the advanced performer learns to match the effort exactly with the result required. All unnecessary movements of arms and shoulders will only serve to tire the performer. In all the books that I have read, the author and pianist recommends that the arm hang loosely from the shoulder and states that any lifting of the shoulders while playing is most likely unnecessary. However, the student must also become aware of contractions that limit the freedom of the arm and body to move in a natural and fitting way with the music.



As the notes of the music move from one place to another, the pianist should try all possibilities to make circles of connections between the two notes. A downward movement almost always comes back to an upward movement after which the performer is ready for another downward movement. A good metaphor to use is circles of energy, and tension should be balanced by release.

### ***Some more difficult exercises***

**learning aims:** student learns to master exercises as a means to broaden his or her grasp of technical possibilities and making it automatic

**approach:** studying and performing etudes

**educational resources:** Czerny Op. 299 (Trap 5 & 6), Cramer-Bülow (Trap 8), Hanon (Trap 10), Liszt, Brahms (Appendix I), self-made exercises (Appendix IV)

**learning contents:** technical difficulties approached

Additions to what has already been specifically mentioned in technique (scales, arpeggios and chords) are passages in octaves, thirds and sixths; chromatic scales, thirds and sixths; trills, repeated notes, rotation and stretching exercises.

Brahms 51 exercises are great for developing stretch. With stretch, a student must be careful not to go beyond his own capacities and damage the hand. Czerny op. 299 offers some wonderful rotation exercises (i.e. nos. 10, 13, 14, 20, 23, 34) as well as scales, finger work, broken chords, etc.. Nos. 14-15 in Cramer-Bülow's *60 selected etudes* and No. 46 in Hanon's *Virtuoso Pianist* will train trills in both hands. Exercises 48-59 in Hanon contain thirds, sixths and octaves (and combinations with trills). The fingering of chromatic scales has a variety of origins, and it is good that the student be familiar with different fingerings.

### ***Tempo and rhythmical difficulties in more advanced stages***

**learning aims:** student experiences freedom of expression within tempo and rhythmical structures

**approach:** recording and listening, imitation by teacher

**educational resources:** Leimer, Hofmann and Bernstein

**learning contents:** tempo and rhythm in music

All the difficulties mentioned in the section *Musical timing and rhythmic difficulties* for intermediate students should be further worked out in longer, more complex pieces. One good exercise to train tempo retention and stability is to choose a certain tempo for a piece and to sit down at the piano at random moments and try to imagine the tempo and begin the piece at the proper tempo. Check other beginnings of sections or problem points in the piece and check yourself with the metronome. Understood and directed emotional intent and the ability to remain with the musical flow are essential to creating a rhythmically coherent piece.

Smaller divisions and rhythmical motifs such as dotted eighth notes can often become uneven without the student realizing it, or long notes become too long or too short. A small articulated sound (Bernstein recommends Kuh - Kuh - Kuh - Kuh, pp. 90-92) in the throat can help correct these small deviations.

### ***Developing theoretical insight and mental study***

**learning aims:** student can analyze the form of complex pieces melodically, texturally and harmonically and find musical insight and meaning

**approach:** looking at the music away from the piano

**educational resources:** each piece practiced, works on theory and harmony, Leimer and Hofmann (Appendix I)

**learning contents:** theoretical and historical analysis

Again, here the student progresses deeper into the musical meaning behind certain textures, forms or intervals and how that relates to the composers intent in his historical setting. *Affects* and dance forms in Baroque music; sonata form in Classical music; textures, free forms (fantasy, impromptu, rhapsody, preludes, etc.) and harmonic variations in Romantic music; and dynamics and isolated intervals in modern music all serve to be studied in combination with music-making.

As music becomes more and more a part of the student, the student should become able to absorb musical material away from the piano. Especially for memorization of pieces, the work required for organizing a piece mentally away from the piano (thus avoiding the tendency to rely on automated, unexamined physical reflexes) will imprint the music more firmly in the student's mind. See chapter 'The Student Begins Work' by Leimer in which he describes the practice of 'reflection,' as well as Hofmann's ideas (pp. 23-24).

### ***How to listen to yourself***

**learning aims:** student can synthesize preparation, action and reflection for optimal control, peace and beauty of expression

**approach:** psychological questions and introspection, starting small

**educational resources:** time and patience

**learning contents:** listening

I think that how the student listens to himself is based very much on how his teacher listens (or how his teachers have listened) to him. From personal experience, I know how demotivating it is to have a teacher who doesn't listen to you, but only gives out prefabricated advice based on what they think your problems are. Good listening often goes with good analysis, because the 'obvious' problem may be hiding the real problem.

Open listening can only come after the student has overcome all technical and psychological barriers. After all, actually listening to yourself rather than what you want to hear is a scary and exposing task. Begin with one note, then, balancing your projection of a certain sound with the sound that is actually produced.

Bernstein offers the following experiment which will lead you to a predictable performance of a single tone:

1. Sit at the piano with your hands resting in your lap. Breathe deeply.
2. Imagine the sound of the first phrase.

3. Listen inwardly to the first note of this phrase in terms of its exact dynamic and quality of sound.
4. As you conceptualize it, be aware of your feeling.
5. Your feeling expresses itself in a muscular sensation.
6. Your finger, wrist, arm, and entire body should be imbued with the feeling of the note you are about to play.
7. Your muscles must be in a condition of natural tension in order to express this note.
8. As your arm rises, your finger becomes imbued with the sound you have imagined. In this sense, *the sound has already been assimilated by your finger*.
9. Take a deep breath; then, while exhaling, sound the note.
10. Listen to the sound and enjoy the realization of your musical concept.

If, by chance, the sound did not match your image, you may have overlooked one or more of the following requirements:

1. You must have a clear image of the dynamic *before* you play the note.
2. You must consciously feel the dynamic.
3. You must balance your mental image with your feeling by being neither too analytical nor too emotional.
4. Allow your feeling to express itself in natural body movements and sensations. Don't inhibit them.
5. Your physical co-ordination must be sufficiently developed to adapt to your feeling and perception. Only adequate and consistent practicing can make this possible. (Bernstein, pp. 118-119)

As a teacher, some work can be done by 'imitating' a student and having them listen more objectively to their own playing through you, so to speak. Another idea mentioned early is to have the student record and listen to themselves.

Listening to yourself takes on new dimensions when performing. One must remain totally in the flow of the music, anticipating and preparing each note while not jumping ahead with negative anticipation 'oh no, here comes that difficult passage!' or thinking back to mistakes. In this way performing and practicing are completely opposite. In practicing, one stops when a mistake is made and works until the problem of technique, memory or concentration is solved. In performing, one must learn to leave mistakes behind as irrevocable and thus irrelevant. This can be practiced in run-throughs with or without an audience. The moment you make a mistake, train yourself to keep on going. Do not stop. The key is to remain in the moment without fear or regret. This can be practiced in day-to-day situations as well, as it is really an attitude as well as a skill.

### ***Knowing the piano***

**learning aims:** student has a realistic perception of the characteristics, capabilities and limitations of the piano

**approach:** explanation and experimentation

**educational resources:** pictures of the mechanism, body and parts of the piano such as found in Schimmel Pianos promotional material or Lelie (Appendix I)

**learning contents:** the piano

The grand piano is such a majestic instrument and deserves to be known completely by the student. Promotional books by piano producers or a visit to a manufacturing site for pianos can be very enlightening. Students should know how the hammer mechanism works, how the damping system works, how sound is conveyed to the soundboard as well as what tuning entails. The student might be surprised to learn that the strings at the very top register need no dampers or that the intonation (or sound character) of the hammers is made by pricking the stiff felt of the hammers a certain number of times in certain places with a needle. The student may also not realize that the fifth on the piano is slightly smaller than a pure fifth or that the dynamic of sound on the piano has to do with the speed of the hammer moving to the string and not how hard the student 'presses' on the key.

Accepting the qualities of the piano and using them to their full extent is another job of the advanced student. Playing a tone in all the dynamic degrees a student can is a good exercise. Begin with an inaudible sound and push through to the point where the top of the dynamic range is reached. Sometimes a harder hit will actually produce a softer, more percussive sound. Also playing a sound and listening quietly until it dies away will do much to make a student aware of the volume curve of the sound.

Also useful is to know that the main determinant for a beautiful sound out of a piano or grand piano is the quality of the soundboard, because the amplified sound we hear comes from the soundboard, the resonance of the piano.

### ***Importance of knowing the historical timeframe of a work***

**learning aims:** student knows enough about the background of keyboard music and keyboard instruments themselves in order to interpret historical works to the best advantage

**approach:** reading biographies and historical works

**educational resources:** *Van Piano tot Forte* by Lelie, *Keyboard Interpretation* by Ferguson, *A History of Western Music*, by Grout and Palisca (Appendix I)

**learning contents:** historical and biographical works on the piano, composers and pianists

First of all, the piano is not a harpsichord, clavichord or organ, and it might surprise students to learn that Bach wrote exclusively for one of those instruments. Thus, performing those works on a modern piano is perhaps a bit like a Shakespeare play in modern English (although that would be an even greater distortion, I

think). It might be helpful for the student to be introduced to the characteristics of those instruments as well as the difficulties of the instruments in order to understand Baroque music better. However, it is not necessary (or possible) to produce the sounds of an harpsichord or organ on the piano, thus knowledge will aid interpretation only to a certain extent. There is much room for disagreement on points such as: should the instrumentalist play a Bach prelude with crescendos and decrescendos or only 'blocked dynamics' (going directly from *mp* to *mf*, for instance), to imitate what happens when registers are coupled or uncoupled on the harpsichord. Every pianist must make a decision with each work and is responsible for the consequences. Does the choice bring out the most beauty possible in the work?

Other difficulties in interpreting piano works come from the development of the piano as modern instrument, especially concerning the different quality of sounds produced by pianos in these different stages as well as the number of and functions of the pedals. For example, Mozart never wrote pedal indications, yet there were pedals in pianoforte's of his day. Chopin's pedal markings may seem to make musical mush of his works because the sound of the piano of his day died away sooner than with our pianos. Also the *una corda* of early works becomes a *duo corda* on modern grand pianos.

### ***Encouraging composition***

**learning aims:** student finds pleasure in composing own works

**approach:** trying

**educational resources:** musical experience of the student

**learning contents:** composing music

Ideas on this subject fall in line with what was written about improvisation on the intermediate level. Teachers should give their students a small composition assignment and see what happens. As the student to write a melody to a text or to create a melody to match a certain emotion or experience. Once this is accomplished, accompaniment material should be much easier to work out. Chords can also be used as a basis to see how many different textures the student can produce.

## **Miscellaneous**

### ***Specific problems for adults***

**learning aims:** adult students enjoy piano as an important outlet and skill

**approach:** coaching, encouraging

**educational resources:** books for adult piano students such as *Alfred's Basic Adult Finger Aerobics, Level 1* by Willard A. Palmer

Adults who start later or who have stopped for a long time have their own set of problems. The number one being that they are so much more responsible for other aspects of life that they do not have as much time to practice or are not able to concentrate properly. Adults are much more 'in their heads' than children. They

analyze material before they try it. A good idea is to try to push them to not analyze sometimes. Say ‘just try it,’ or ‘see what happens.’ Although they may get frustrated, this type of training will achieve more natural results. The stiffness that offers opposite problems to the flexibility and pliability of small hands can also be a frustration. Exercises such as in *Alfred’s Basic Adult Finger Aerobics* by Willard A. Palmer can help to overcome this. Hanon is also a useful tool.

Adults are also much more perfectionistic than children and more likely to be nervous playing for their teacher. The teacher should play often with the student, teach breathing exercises and above all offer lots of encouragement. Playing more slowly than normal should also help a nervous student during a lesson.

Adults who are overly dependent on musical notation or who cannot read well may not have the energy to retrain themselves. A teacher should be able to be flexible, work with the strengths of an adult student as well as slowly work on the weaknesses. Most students will themselves admit after a while that they would like to be better at what they now lack.

### ***Ideas for rewarding performance experiences***

Ideas that I have for performance experiences come from personal experience or plans for the future. Concerts in the home with family and friends present work well with young students. One or two students who play for a longer time with tea and coffee afterward offers a different atmosphere than a whole row of students who play each for three minutes (although this also has its advantages). Other ideas are:

- concerts around a theme (such as an animal, a country or a composer)
- concerts with a story told by someone sitting beside the piano
- piano duet concerts
- piano music with dance or theater
- a musical
- folkmusic from other countries
- ensemble concerts

### ***Enriching a student’s musical heritage***

**learning aims:** student becomes more aware of contemporary artists and opportunities as well as music that has contributed to their and their culture’s ideas over music

**approach:** concert-going and discussing, in-house musician performances

**educational resources:** concerts, readings, lectures, books, internet

**learning contents:** musical opportunities of all sorts

The Netherlands offers an environment with a rich assortment of performance opportunities that students can take advantage of. Hearing more than just the piano works of each composer will be an endless source of inspiration and deepening understanding. The teacher can help the pupil learn how to discover information on

topics in the library, through lectures or on the internet. The teacher can also use her personal network of friends to create in-house performances for students by or with other professional musicians.

As conclusion, I would like to repeat my statement in the beginning that this paper is only a start for me. An ideal in teaching may be summed up in the following quote by the great Russian teacher, Neuhaus:

I already said that a teacher of any instrument (let us consider the human voice also as an instrument) must first and foremost be a teacher of music, in other words an expounder and interpreter of music... In such a case it is absolutely essential to use the comprehensive method, i.e. the teacher must make the pupil grasp not only the so-called "content" of a composition, he must not only instil into him its poetic image, but also give him an extremely detailed analysis of the form, the structure -- as a whole and in its every detail -- harmony, melody, polyphony, pianistic texture; in short he must be at one and the same time a historian and theoretician of music, a teacher of theory, harmony, counterpoint and pianoforte playing (Neuhaus, pp. 173-174)

This is already quite a package, but to this I would like to add that a love of music and teaching and a realization that the lessons learned in music are applicable to many other relationships in life, should make all the effort worthwhile.





## Appendix I - Literature and Piano Works not included in the Leergang

### **Literature**

Bernstein, Seymour, *With Your Own Two Hands, Self-Discovery Through Music*, c. 1981, G. Schirmer Co., New York, N.Y.

Bjørkvold, Jon-Roar, *De Muzische Mens*, c. 1992, Uitgeversmaatschappij Ad. Donker bv voor de Nederlandse vertaling, Rotterdam

Ferguson, Howard, *Keyboard Interpretation from the 14th to the 19th Century*, c. 1975, Oxford University Press Inc., New York

Giesecking, Walter and Karl Leimer, *Piano Technique*, c. 1972, Dover Publications, Inc., New York

Grout, Donald Jay and Claude V. Palisca, *A History of Western Music*, c. 1996, W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., New York

Hofmann, Josef, *Piano Playing with Piano Questions Answered*, c. 1976, Dover Publications, Inc., New York

Kloppenburger, W. Chr. M., *Pianomethoden van de 20<sup>ste</sup> eeuw*, c. 1992, Broekmans & Van Poppel B. V., Amsterdam

Last, Joan, *The Young Pianist, An approach for teacher and students*, c. 1972, Oxford University Press Inc., New York

Lelie, Christo, *van Piano tot Forte, Geschiedenis en ontwikkeling van de vroege piano*, c. 1995, Uitgeverij Kok Lyra, Kampen

Neuhaus, Heinrich, *The Art of Piano Playing*, c. 1993, Kahn & Averill, London

Schimmel, Nikolaus, *Pianobouw - een kunstzinnig ambacht*, c. without date, Wilhelm Schimmel Pianofortefabrik GmbH

Weller, Stella, *Licht op Adem*, c. 2000, Kosmos-Z&K Uitgevers B. V., Utrecht

## **Piano Works**

### **Improvisation:**

*Beginning Keyboard Jazz, Further Experiences with the Elements of Jazz* (for the early and intermediate levels) by Lee Evans, Edward B. Marks Music Company

*The Jazz Tetrachord Approach to Keyboard Jazz Improvisation* (Upper Intermediate Level) by Lee Evans, Edward B. Marks Music Company

### **Sight-reading, ear and visual training:**

*Improve Your Sight-reading, A workbook for examinations*, Piano grade 1-8 by Paul Harris, Faber Music Ltd.

*Lire la Musique par la Connaissance des Intervalles*, Volume I, II & III by Marie Claude Arbaretaz, Chappell S.A.

### **Scales, Technique and Adult Technique:**

*Know Your Scales!, The essential learning method for scales and arpeggios*, Piano grade 1-8 by Paul Harris, Faber Music Ltd.

*Alfred's Basic Adult Finger Aerobics, Level 1* by Willard A. Palmer, Morton Manus and Amanda Vick Lethco, Alfred Publishing Co., Inc.

*Fifty-One Exercises for the Piano* by Johannes Brahms, G. Schirmer, Inc.

### **Playing Pieces for Beginners:**

*London River, sixteen simple piano pieces and two duets* by Leslie Fly, Forsyth Bros. Ltd.

*The Four Country Dances* by Walter Carroll, Forsyth Bros. Ltd.

*Variation Time, six sets of variations for young pianists* by Joan Last, Novello & Company Limited

### **Historical Perspectives:**

*L'art de toucher le Clavecin* by François Couperin, Edition Breitkopf

## **Appendix II – Some Songs in Graduated Difficulty**

## Appendix III – Student Reports, Learning Materials and Cassette Contents

Report over Beginning Student Inge de Bruijn

By Sharon Stewart

November 30, 2000

Inge began taking lessons with me early in Nov. 1999. She was working out of the Folk Dean Book I. She had learned the note names and had written them beside the notes and had a very 'reading-based' approach to music. I decided it would be good to encourage her to play more 'by ear,' and thus chose Fritz Emonts, *Europäische Klavierschule*, since this book encourages both note reading as well as playing by ear through learning songs and folk melodies.

In our first attempts at 'naspelen' with 3 and 5 notes, it became obvious that Inge would need to work to develop her ear. If she repeated what I played on the piano, she could usually manage to reproduce what I played. However, if we sang a song and she tried to play it afterward, it was more difficult for her to hear if the pitch went up or down or to remember the melodic patterns.

In the beginning I wanted to give her (too much??) theoretical information - to have her learn all the scales and the I, IV and V chords and how they function. However, I realized later that it was more practical (she has little time to study) to stick with the playing of songs with a simple I, V accompaniment.

Together we have played several songs in the tonalities of C, G, F and D major. She has improved in her ability to play 'by ear,' however, I am afraid that her music-reading has not improved much. She is less than a third through the book and has difficulty remaining in the rhythmical flow of the music while reading notes. She enjoys playing, however, and will most likely continue with piano.

Technical exercises which she has done include:

- drop-lift with groups of 2 and 3 notes
- scales (briefly)
- 'Chairs' or sixths exercises (following Joan Last)
- wrist rotation
- parallel harmonic thirds
- Hanon 'voortschuivende' exercise No. 1
- broken chords

Examples can be seen in the attached papers 'Exercises for Inge.'

I also made a cassette for her to use during the summer months. Contents can be seen in the attached papers. She progressed about halfway through the cassette. I have also included other worksheets given to her over the past year (including less successful ones).

## Report over intermediate student Mignon Primus

Teacher: Sharon Stewart

4 December 2000

Mignon is in her second year of vooropleiding zang met H. Diemer. She began piano lessons with me early in November 1999. For the first lessons she played for me some of Walter Carroll's *Tunes from Nature* and Caesar Franck's *Les plaintes d'une poupée*. While she had a clear feeling for music and could analyze simple pieces, her ability to remain concentrated and play through a piece despite mistakes was limited.

I have kept her involved with a steady stream of technical activities, beginning with rotating voortsschuivende sixths and the three finger (1-2-3, 2-3-4, or 3-4-5) *run and jump* exercise introduced by Joan Last. She has also played many scales and arpeggios, a trill exercise, two parallel thirds exercises, a rotation exercise, chord inversion exercises, crescendo/decrescendo exercise and pedal exercises. At the moment she is working on voortsschuivende broken chords, the first Hanon exercise, an exercise in agility that I wrote for her and the first two of Czerny's 160 Eight-Measure Exercises, op. 821. (Examples can be found in the attached materials.)

Repertoire includes:

Work(s)	Composer	Purpose
<i>Elementaire Polyphone Studies</i> Canon and Air	H. Nieland	development of polyphonic 'ear' - to hear more than one simple voice
<i>Book for Anna Magdalena Bach</i> Minuet in G major	probably Petzold	articulation work - development of bass line
Minuet in c minor	J. S. Bach	more work on articulation and voicing
<i>Intervallen</i> op. 41 Twaalf etudes voor piano - Kleine secunde - Grote tert - Kwint	J. ter Veldhuis	for developing her sense of intervals as well as a taste of contemporary compositions - r.h. finger dexterity, timing and dynamics - graceful melodic line, pedal jumps - wide spacing, pedal, singing melodic line
Kleine prelude voor elke dag	E. Satie	reading, drop-lift
- Musette (C major) - Tarentelle (a minor)	T. Lack	- Alberti bass with poetic melodic line - r.h. dexterity, climax development
<i>Variation Time</i> Four Variations on a Sad Song	J. Last	becoming familiar with the variation idea, learning markings such as <i>espressivo</i> , <i>sempre legato</i> , <i>cantabile</i> , <i>doloroso</i> , <i>rubato espressivo</i> as well as how to musically change tempo within a 'piece' --from Andante to a Scherzando and back to original tempo with multiple rit.
Choral	B. Bartók	to learn a 'choral style' voicing, including how to bring out the melodic line and how to create a legato effect by connecting at least one note in a series of chords

<b>Work(s)</b>	<b>Composer</b>	<b>Purpose</b>
<i>Album für die Jugend</i> , op 68 - Trällerliedchen - Ein Choral - Stückchen	R. Schumann	- development of balance through the appearance (and the need to bring out) of the melodie or bass line in combination with an alternating harmonic note - same as for Bartok Choral - same as for Trällerliedchen
op. 65 no. 3 Historiette	S. Prokofieff	a glimpse at the idioms of Prokofieff -- angular melodies, less emphasis on legato, more emphasis on contrasts and atmospheric style
Sonatina op. 36, no. 1	M. Clementi	become familiar with the 'pre-classic' sonatina, French style
Sonatina op. 151 no. 1	A. Diabelli	further development of alberti bass, hand crossing, finger dexterity, lightness and evenness of touch, drama and story-telling and an ear for standard harmonic modulations
<i>Melodious Exercises</i> op. 149 for Piano Duet, various numbers	A. Diabelli	piano duet and sight-reading
Vertroosting	Burgmüller	same as for Trällerliedchen, with increased drama and romanticism
<i>Lyrische Stücke</i> , op. 38 no. 7 Waltz	E. Grieg	to become familiar with the fairytales, romanticism and expressive playing of this Nordic composer
op. 98 no. 5 Ya Banat Skandariyya	T. Succar	a look at Lebanese folk music, arranged by a contemporary artist -- includes polyphonic-style articulation and lively rhythmic playing

Mignon is enthusiastic over music and the piano and has covered a wide range of repertoire, as can be seen above. We still have problems 'polishing' the pieces to a performing level. However, she is much better at remaining concentrated through an entire work. While she has received an introduction to a wide range of technical skills, much time will need to be spent toward deepening her level of 'comfortableness' with the piano. Her touch remains somewhat superficial, and I could perhaps become more insistent on a fuller tone, which she can produce with some concentration. We have also discussed aspects of 'key weighing' as presented by Matthay as well as the ability to let the weight of your entire upper body (or at least parts of it) sink into the keys, supported by the fingers.

**Verslag Groepslessen aan Dewy en Nina**  
**door Sharon Stewart and Mijntje Keijzer**

Wij zijn half oktober 2000 begonnen en eind januari 2001 geëindigd. In een serie van 10 lessen hebben wij het volgende materiaal doorgenomen:

Lesmateriaal:

- Europese Klavierschule, Volume 1, door Fritz Emont
- Werkbladen voor notenlezen en tegenbeweging
- Liedjes

Beginsituatie van de leerlingen:

Nina woont in een omgeving waar haar moeder piano speelt, en een piano aanwezig is. Dewy heeft geen piano, maar is dusdanig enthousiast dat ze wel naar Nina toe wil gaan om daar piano te spelen.

Na een les introductie (piano bekijken, hoog en laag, hard en zacht behandelen, zwarte toetsen groepen vinden, theorie, etc.), begonnen wij grotendeels met het auditief aanleren van liedjes om op de piano te spelen. Wij hebben de volgende liedjes auditief aangeleerd:

- 'Tjoek, tjoek, tjoek'
- 'Gijsje heeft een vis gevangen'
- 'Liesje had een lammetje'
- 'Lang zal ze leven'
- 'Sinterklaas kapoentje'
- 'Slaaplied' (van Europese Klavierschule, blz 16)
- 'De grote mug'

Deze liedjes hebben wij vaak gecombineerd met een begeleiding in de vorm van een bourdon, cluster, of losse noten of werden begeleid door de docenten. Ons doel met deze liedjes was om het gehoor te ontwikkelen en met twee handen te leren spelen zonder afgeleid te worden door notenbeeld. Zij konden ook meezingen waardoor hun spel een meer natuurlijke frasering zou kunnen krijgen. Nina was sneller in het opzoeken en onthouden van de muziek terwijl Dewy vaak dichter bij een goede klankvoorstelling kwam.

De improvisatie combineerden wij vaak met beweging en ritme. Wij gebruikten de zwarte toetsen in groepen en maakten daar een ritmisch patroon mee. Hierbij maakten wij gebruik van het voorstellingsvermogen door dieren of geluiden (zoals klokken) na te bootsen. Dewy was hier experimenteler in dan Nina die een beperkter beeld had van wat wel en niet 'mocht.' Wij hebben ze ook gevraagd om een eigen tekst bij een liedje te verzinnen.

De theorie hebben ze geoefend met de werkbladen en vaak ook in de les op het bord (sleutels tekenen, namen bij noten zetten, noten met verschillende waarden tekenen, toonladder tekenen met vingerzetting, tegenbeweging spelen en schrijven).

Het ritme bleek meer aandacht nodig te hebben. In de lessen is er veel ritme geklapt, geteld, en ook nog gesprongen. Maar dit verdient in de komende lessen nog veel aandacht aangezien dit nog niet genoeg van binnenuit komt en is te horen in hun (vooral bij Dewy) onritmische spel. Om ze de maatsoort te laten voelen, hebben wij een paar keer op de muziek bewogen.

Het boek Europäische Klavierschule is vrij zwak in het geleidelijk aanleren van noten. Hierdoor hebben we dit d.m.v. werkbladen en opnoemen van de noten in de liedjes toch geprobeerd aan te leren. Aangezien de melodieën in het boek niet makkelijk in het gehoor lagen, hebben wij er soms tekst op verzonnen.

Ons doel in deze korte periode was om de leerlingen een brede muzikale basis te geven in combinatie met pianospelen.

Onze conclusie:

In de loop van de tijd, hebben wij gemerkt dat familie-invloeden de motivatie van de leerlingen verminderde. Hierdoor wordt hun leerproces vertraagd. Ook hebben wij gemerkt dat er een groot verschil tussen Nina en Dewy is, zowel persoonlijk als in het leerproces. Hierdoor lag er een te grote druk op Dewy, terwijl Nina (die meer ervaring met de piano had) vaak te lang moest wachten. Wij hadden waarschijnlijk beter en eerder op de signalen moeten reageren en op een duidelijkere manier hun opdrachten voor thuis over moeten brengen. Desondanks hebben wij als docenten goed kunnen samenwerken en hebben wij problemen op een positieve manier op leren lossen.



## **Appendix IV – Technical Exercises**