



Music Makers: at the Keyboard, Year 1 – Weeks 13 through 15

Dear Teachers,

I hope you have given yourself a well-deserved break for the holidays. My schedule leaves two or three keyboard classes for January, because 15 weeks just don't quite fit in my studio schedule from September to December. But there are other reasons I schedule my classes this way. It has to do with re-enrollment. Teachers, this is your next push. Retaining families is very important for the health of your developing group keyboard program. Hopefully your parents have attended your parent education sessions and are clear that the fruits of their children's study will show in two or three years. I want my families to be sure about what is next long before they enroll. Just before the break I show Book 2 and hand out my registration form with a description of the next class. My registration form includes all the classes I teach in my studio so they can consider other classes for younger siblings. I also send an email registration form and a reminder that we have a short break for the holidays and we resume with three more classes in January.

So what do we want our parents to know?

Here are some of the skills I think the children are beginning to develop (and you can easily send off a newsletter before the start of class with these points):

1. They are starting to comfortably find C, D, and G positions in the right and left hands.
2. They are starting to play a warm-up in D major position and d minor position. They may even be able to play the warm-up in C and G.
3. They can play *Listen for Bells*, *Mouse*, *Mousie*, *Who's That?* and *Hot Cross Buns*, and some can play these songs in C, D, and G.
4. They are beginning to aurally identify Do Mi Sol and Sol Mi Do as well as Sol Do and Do Do Do.
5. They can compose with the duple and triple rhythm cards and are beginning to distinguish between the duple and triple language.
6. They can visually identify the melodic patterns in *Mouse*, *Mousie*.
7. They can follow the 5-step process to learn a song by ear.

Some of the children can also...

1. Add tonic and dominant-seventh chords, usually as two-note chords.
2. Sing in tune most of the time.
3. Keep a steady beat with their drums.
4. Follow me as I change from macro beat to micro beat.
5. Aurally find the resting tone for major or minor.
6. Move in a circle in time with the music.



I remind the parents that their children have been introduced to these important concepts, but it will take time for any mastery. Some children, like flowers, bloom later than others. I will continue to encourage my families to participate in as many of the home activities as possible and to enjoy the daily music-making their children are assigned.

Week 13

Down Comes Johnny should not take long to learn. Limit the time at the keyboards. You do not need to stay there until they all get it. That is not the point of learning a piece in class. I give them a sampling of the patterns and expect them to work on it at home.

Drums come quickly for *Kwaheri*, and my blue card set is all ready for the next activity. I have collected their blue cards as they enter so we save time. I may extend the blue cards by having them play the cards on their pianos. This is a wonderful mini-sight reading exercise. I also have collected their books when they arrived so we can segue directly to the homework. I want more time for keyboard sharing because I am going to encourage chords for new and old pieces, and I may review the chord warm-up for each child before s/he plays. Sometimes I will play the chords as a duet with the children. You can even collect the form cards so you can quickly move into *Old French Song*. No part of the lesson plan needs to be left out if you plan ahead.

Week 14

For this week I will pick mostly minor song cards for my top basket. I will bring out my resonator bars and review the patterns in minor. We will find the minor patterns in the songs after we sing them, and I will play an aural recognition pattern with those one or two patterns. When the children finally come to the piano I want the minor patterns to be ringing in their ears. I will help them find e minor by first playing E major and comparing the parallel major sound to the minor sound. I will demo how only one notes changes the sound. We warm up and go into patterns. It's fun when children figure out the IV chord by themselves. I prepare the IV chord by singing it often in Singing Circle.

The mystery song (*Hot Cross Buns*) is fun to discover. Even the most reticent players can proudly strut their stuff at the piano--and yes, often are playing by ear. This is a great time to practice reading the music. I will cover their hands and ask them to feel the notes they plan to use. I point to the notes and they sing the *solfege* as they feel their way. They like to peek but I say, "Do you need to look at your feet as you climb stairs?" They giggle and go back to "reading" the notes.

At Keyboard Sharing I bring out the keyboard game with all the cards laid out and the C, D, G, and E cards ready to play. Each gets to play one song they know well in a new key. I may also encourage playing *Wild Horses* in e minor.



Week 15

I make sure parents are present for the entire class. This is my chance to show the children's progress (and collect checks from all the parents that haven't decided to continue yet). I have the children write down what they play on a post it, and I set up the order on one piano. I include favorite dances and a few of their favorites games from the singing circle. I also include the Sea Shell ensemble and make sure the parents get a part also.

Finally, I record their shares, and this year I published their efforts on YouTube. I hand out completion certificates and show off Book 2, which I hand out to each child. This is usually all it takes for the reluctant family to continue to the next book. There is so much excitement and joy in this class because the children are now a group of musicians and the seeds are sprouting. Don't let these precious seeds wander to other activities. Music is their food and we want to them to keep returning to the plate.

At this point I would like to hear your questions and concerns. This would be your gift to me. What parts of the program are going well? What parts seem to be lagging? Are you still huffing and puffing through the lesson plans wondering how you will get everything done? Or are you covering everything, and is it starting to make sense?

May this holiday season be a time of music, joy, and rejuvenation and the New Year bring all Musikgarten teachers the daily satisfaction that teaching this program affords us.

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