



Music Makers: at the Keyboard, Year 1 – Weeks 9 through 12

Dear Teachers,

During the coming holiday season, you may notice that the children in your classes are stretched in many directions. How wonderful that music remains a constant in their lives. We have been sharing this wonderful gift of music since September, and now the children are coming to class with wonderful songs they can play in multiple keys and perhaps with a chord or two.

At this point, I would like to hear your questions and concerns. 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 it is starting to make sense? I hope these monthly enews are giving you some insights and making the lesson suggestions easier to realize..

Following are some notes and tips for Weeks 9 - 12. I hope you can apply some of these tips in the lessons you are teaching in the coming weeks.

Week 9

The new element of this lesson is the Mystery Song. This is such fun when children discover they can figure out the song by hearing what they are seeing. It is especially fun when they link the patterns in a fluid way. When I review the blue cards I like to show the children how I am placing the patterns on to a larger board so that everyone can see the pattern. I have a white board with the grand staff and clefs. I add the appropriate key signature and always locate the resting tone. I name the letter name of that note and describe its position on the staff. I want them to be able to describe a note by its location, and we may quickly play a game of identifying space and line notes. It is fun and light.

I then begin with the easiest pattern, "Do, Do, Do". I have each child sing and identify the pattern. Then I move the magnets around to "Sol, Mi, Do". I pause and let them figure out the pattern. They sing the pattern, and I remove the 'Mi'. They sing the pattern and I remove the 'Sol'. They sing the remaining note ('Do') and I remove the 'Do'. I always get a pregnant pause and then some guffaws when they realize we have no sound left. I continue to play the game until I get a sense that they are actually looking and singing the patterns that they see. Then I open their books and mark the resting tone on the top left corner with a red pencil (my resting tone pencil). I write "'Do' is D" and then I circle the first 'Do' in the piece. I give them a pencil and off they go circling the resting tone. I immediately take back the pencils when they are finished (it is too tempting to start to color the child in the corner of the page), and we start singing the piece using a *bam*, not necessarily in tune (I don't want to give away the piece too early) but singing the 'Dos'. Then we add the 'Sol - Mi - Do' pattern in purple. I model how I want the pattern circled, and I may even circle the first pattern in each of their books. Off they go, and I collect the pencils. We now sing the purple patterns and the resting tones. Some children already start reading the other notes, but I just mumble through them and let them sing the circled patterns.



Next, we do the 'Sol - Do' pattern, and at this point, they are bursting to tell me the name of the piece. When we finish singing they all shout the name (and yes, at least one shouts out the wrong name) and then we take the piece to the piano. (Warning: there may be a child who has already figured out what the piece is. State the rule early: No one calls out the name until you ask for it. Also, you may need to check their books to make sure no one has written the answer down!) I always choose one child to be the player, one to be a pointer, and the rest are singers. I usually pick the best player for the first time, and sometimes I will direct the hand of the pointer, but my goal is to walk away from the piano and let the class take over. By the third repeat, they are quite independent. Some of the children will put up the music and not look at the music as they play, but I find when another child is pointing to the notes, it seems to remind the child playing to look as he/she plays. There is the added benefit of discovering whether the pointing child can actually follow the music or whether she has no idea where she is in the score. I will continue to encourage looking at the score as they play every time we have a reading piece.

Ode to Joy is a highlight in my studio. Students will pick this piece for recitals. It is a wonderful holiday piece. Amy, a Musikgarten teacher writes on the loop:

I am happy to share another version of *Ode to Joy*. It is my closing song for the current session; it is used at all levels of Musikgarten. Families love it. Here is the story behind it. (Those of you who teach the keyboard class will surely smile.) The mother of a child in keyboard class told me, "Cassie was having trouble learning to play *Ode to Joy*." For her, it was the first piano piece that did not have words. "Mom, if I can't sing *Ode to Joy*, how can I possibly learn to play it on the piano?" They searched the Internet together.

Here is their joyful discovery:

*Come and sing a joyful chorus,
Lift your voices to the sky.
Helping hands now join in friendship,
Keeping hearts and spirits high.
Sister, brother care for each other,
Care for the world and keep it free.
All together, sing together,
As a peaceful family.*

In joy,

Amy Abbott Pappageorge
Musikgarten of Oak Park



Week 10

Make sure the warm-up in d minor for *I Hear the Mill Wheel* is played by both hands. The second pattern is played by the thumbs of each hand; they need to find the hand position so they can locate the 'Mi' in the left hand.

When the new mystery song moves up to G, I review the blue melody cards, and I show NEW melody cards that I have either constructed on index cards or with magnet staff boards. I compare each blue melody pattern card to the newly transposed melody pattern card. We sing a blue melody cards in D and then the transposed cards in G. I want them to discover that although the *solfeggio* names remain the same, the pitch is higher on the new cards. I also would like them to discover G is "higher" on the staff than D. I identify the note names of the resting tone on the staff and ask them to describe their positions on the staff (this "D" is below the staff; this "G" is on the second line on the staff). However, when we sing the pattern, we sing in pitch with *solfeggio*. I hold off having children name the letter name of staff notes, although I will identify the name of the resting tone as I continue to share reading pieces. I am aware that some children may want to proudly tell me the letter names of notes. I acknowledge their information and move on. I know this grammatical reference is taught in my local public schools. However, I will not introduce naming notes on a staff in my classroom until the second year of this program.

Week 11

By now the Singing Circle is becoming slightly un-manageable because there are so many songs to review. When I prepare for class, I choose two or three pieces that will help to develop a concept (like choosing all the minor pieces and follow with minor patterns to familiarize the children with these patterns in preparation for a minor by-ear piece, or selecting pieces in triple knowing the cards we will use to compose with that day are in triple meter). I also choose cards by looking back three lessons and forward three lessons and choosing cards that relate to those lessons. Occasionally I let the children add a card from the assortment of cards I did not add to the basket. (I tend to give some cards a "vacation" when they are picked too often.) I make sure every child gets at least one turn picking a card from the basket. I also limit the singing circle time to 10 - 15 minutes. Singing Circle can always come back later in the class and can be used during sharing time with the keyboard game. Another option is to not use the singing circle game and simple choose three songs you wish to emphasize in that class and sing those. Follow them with patterns and if song has already been taught perhaps invite a child to play the song. You can add songs throughout the class when you see fit. It is a perfect way to balance movement with sitting at the keyboards.

See the Pony is the new "by ear" piece of the day, so I am sure to place this card in the basket. I play aural recognition games for both the rhythm and the tonal patterns. I also enjoy asking the children to find a pattern in the song. How many times do you hear that pattern in the song? Can you substitute the solfege or the rhythm language when the pattern appears? They giggle when we sing, "See the pony du da di du da di down the country lane." Yesterday we found a different movement for each rhythm



pattern they found in the song. We galloped for *du di du di* and circled our arms for *du da di*. And yes, we kicked high in the air for *du du*. I was exhausted after one verse! Then we found tonal patterns. Following the establishment of the resting tone, I do the song process for the piece during Singing Circle on the floor away from the pianos. We talk ahead of time how we link the patterns into the song. I will ask them, "Where do you find this pattern in the song? How many times?" This helps greatly when it is time to put the song together.

At the pianos, I generally follow this order:

1. I ask them to locate all the Es and then put their hands on their laps. (For younger children I will ask them to find all Ds first and then ask them to tell me where the E is. I teach them the answer, "It is after the two black keys." I want them to use the black keys to find their notes on the piano rather than to find A and then go through the alphabet to find the note E.
2. I quickly put out any fires (the child playing C, the child playing another piece, the child pressing the demo and all the piano buttons), and we establish quiet.
3. I sing the warm-up and play it on my arm and ask them to find the warm-up in E position-- quietly so they can only hear themselves. This may not make sense, but it actually works.
4. When they think they have the sound, they put a thumb up, and I have them come to my piano. They play and I sing back what they played and ask them if they think it matches. This goes on for a while until someone gets it. Then I have that child go and work with the other children. Eventually, all the children are helping each other and we all sound E-ish.
5. We then play the warm-up all together, maybe 4 or 5 times, but that's OK. In fact, I make sure they play all patterns three for four times before moving on.
6. We sing "*See the Pony*" at their pianos and go into the song process. This process goes quickly because of all the preparation.
7. As soon as a few have linked the patterns, I have them play I and V7 chords.
8. We sing the song again while accompanying ourselves with chords.
9. Then I demonstrate playing the piece with chords, and we move away from the pianos and dance to *Cathrineta*. If we did not finish the process of learning "*See the Pony*" I may go back and complete the process. It depends on the children. If I get them moving and singing, I usually can return and finish any remaining patterns.

Red Cards – Before bringing out the read cards, I make sure we sing a song in major and we play an aural recognition game with a few of the major patterns, particularly tonic and dominant patterns. This sets up their ear for the introduction of the red cards. Once the cards are placed on the floor (and you can save time by making sure you hand out the cards in order) I sing each pattern and ask the children to listen as they point to their own set of cards. Then I have them echo as they point. I have insisted on this process of pointing and listening and then pointing and singing or chanting since the yellow cards, so they know what to do. This ritual is on the Practice CD as well. If you have not started this ritual, it is not too late. After we play a recognition game with the cards, I collect them as I remind them they will need them for homework for next week and hand them out when we go over the homework. This saves a lot of transition time.



We next look at Week 10 homework. Often I will collect their books at the start of class so that I can move quickly from one activity to the next. I will also do this for any cards we plan to use in class. If I pace this lesson right I should have 5 – 10 minutes for sharing, and I will make a “post-it” note on my share card saying exactly what I want from each child. Another option is to open their homework page and write notes as to what they shared and what I would like them to work on for next week. This saves time later when I go over the homework assignment with the children. This week I will ask for *I Hear the Mill Wheel* and a piece they are most proud of playing. I will work with *Mill Wheel* in all levels, from just patterns to the entire piece, adding the appropriate next step for each child. The other children are expected to sit quietly and focus on the child performing. There is no exception to this rule. After this piece, I ask the child share his/her best piece, and then I always ask for it in a different key. To save time I sometimes seat the children at their pianos so they can go next with little lost time. If I am running out of time, I will quietly invite parents to come in and listen. I then have the parents listen as the children play what they know of the new piece. I can then listen in and see who has it and who needs more time, and I can then plan what to suggest to each parent during assignment time.

We dance to *Musette*. I often put the dance first before cards because it saves time in that we do not have to move books out of the way and then have to get them again. When reviewing the cards I often don't let the children pull out cards because it takes too much time. I can demo the homework assignment with mine and a child and parent. My home assignments are done with parents marking the assignment in the book. Each keyboard assignment is individualized, and I always review the song for all parents to see and hear, and I will put on the practice CD to help parents understand that the CD is their best friend at home and to encourage its repeated use.

Week 12

John Kanaka is a favorite dance, and sometimes if parents are lingering (but are not staying for the class) I pull them in to teach the dance before song circle. If not, I like to repeat it when parents enter at the end.

Sea Shell is taught as a gentle song, and I talk about creating a gentle sound at the piano. I create the shape of the shell with my hand, and this is also our hand position at the keyboard. I talk about making the final resting tone quieter than the other notes in the piece and model this when I play the piece at the piano. Even though we don't speak about dynamics doesn't mean we can't introduce expressive sound when we play the piano. When I do the *Sea Shell* ensemble I work up parts one at a time. I try to end up with three stations. If you are lucky to have metallophones they can play the dotted quarter part. Resonator bars play the moving line do-sol-do-sol-fa-sol-do line, and I teach this to the children in the Singing Circle. I use finger cymbals to play at the end of each line. Before I hand out instruments, however, we sing the parts individually and do the action on the floor with mallets and bells. Then I bring in each part. I make sure we repeat often enough so that every child plays each part at least once. To make things quicker I make sure they understand that they move quickly to each station and instruments and mallets stay at the stations. This saves a lot of time. I also make sure I have a place to put the instruments away that the children can reach easily.



The Mystery Song follows a ritual I use for all mystery songs. I use a magnet staff board on the wall to review patterns, and I make sure I have the key signature on the staff. I review the resting tone, finding it on the staff and review the patterns we are finding in the song. I ask them to tell me what line or space different notes reside in on the staff. I am beginning to introduce vocabulary to help them describe the position of notes on the staff. Each child has a turn identifying the pattern by singing in *solfege*. Then I always use red pencils to mark the resting tone on their copy, and I show the pattern we are looking for, we name the pattern, describe where it is found on the staff (what line and space), and I give children turns picking the color we will use to circle the pattern. I work quickly and efficiently, checking work and sitting next to the children that are losing focus. We sing the patterns again, and then we sing the entire song in *solfege*. I start out singing with them and then fade away. Depending on the time I will let one or two children try out the piece at the piano. We also identify the chords, although I don't expect the children to play them with the melody. One child can play the chords while we sing the melody in *solfege*. Keyboard Sharing can follow after each child tries his/her play of the mystery song. I hope you are beginning to see that I do as much as possible to flow activities into each other, and I use movement or song to transition when I need to do a quick set up or break down of an activity. The children always have something to do.

Happy Teaching,
Ellen Johansen