



Music Makers: at the Keyboard, Year 2, Book 4 – Week 49 through 52

Dear Teachers,

Week 49

Improvisations 3 – 5 - When introducing a new improvisation exercise, I have the children listen to the new improvisation track together. The instructions are very important so I will have them listen to the instructions, stop the CD and ask the children what they heard. “Huh?” Yes, they will not have any idea what was said were most likely playing with their sleeve or picking their latest scab. Sigh! I lead them to discover what to listen for. I ask, “What key the exercise is in?” and replay the CD. Then, “Are we going to be in Duple or Triple?” and replay the CD. Then, “What chords will we be using?”, and replay the CD. Finally, “Which hand will be improvising the melody? And replay the CD. What? Replay it that many times??? Yes. After doing this a few times, my classes are clearly waiting to answer these questions the first time around. And the bonus of this exercise is that you are preparing them for when they create their own Improvisation plan in Book 5. In Book 5 they will be creating a plan where they will improvise without any recorded help and these words are used to describe what they will plan.

This week we are adding the IV chord and I am careful to make sure they can move comfortably from a I to a IV chord with correct fingering in each hand. Some children are still confusing the movement from I to IV with I to V7 and end up with quite an interesting mess. I make sure I use the term, “chord tones” often and we spend time identifying the chord tones in each chord.

You can easily turn this into a game. Then I will announce that our improvisation is in “question/answer form”. They should be familiar with this form if because of earlier rhythmic and tonic improvisation games. I like to set up a particular rhythmical pattern, such as “Du -Day Du, Du- Day Du and ask them to create an answer with this rhythm as practice before we start the game. This can be practiced on the floor away from the pianos. Then we try it at the pianos a few times. Then I ask for individual answers. Some will answer with the same rhythm pattern I set up and some will answer with their own rhythm pattern.

Before using the CD, I often play the question on my own piano and give them more time for them to answer. This method is often easier than using the CD because I can give make corrections and give them another chance. Otherwise, play the CD/recording and have them try out an answer all at the same time. Then do it again and call their names so they can give a solo answer. Be ready to stop and start the CD if necessary Repeat this process during parent time, and use the CD only, so the parent knows how it should sound at home.

Singing Circle – I no longer use a basket with cards. Rather I choose three pieces I wish to review and support the lesson with. This week I choose *John Kanaka*, *Summ Summ Summ*, and *Billa Boo*. I am sure as you grow more comfortable with the program you will work this to match your group.



John's Idea – After singing *John Kanaka* I review the tonal and rhythmic patterns. Then I add an aural recognition game for a tonal pattern in *John Kanaka* and write it down on a board. Then I ask them to find this pattern in *John's Idea*. I also review the Dotted rhythm pattern and I observe how the dot is to the left of the note, not above or below. They have a good enough experience of the rhythm from singing and dancing to the piece so I rarely am questioned about this rhythm. When we sing the song with rhythm language I first let them figure out the rhythm themselves. Then I will repeat the rhythm of the dotted quarter note and have them echo. After a repeat or two, I let them continue on their own. Make sure you do an F major warm up before you begin. Then we all go to the piano and practice the chords in F. We play them together as we sing the solfeggio.

G Major Patterns, Step 3 -

To play the dictation game, I first take my cards to my piano and ask different students to play the cards. We sing them together, and the student plays while we sing again. This quick review will ease the group into the four-card dictation game. They set their cards up on the floor and off we go.

If you prepared the homework on page 11 (New Positions in C and D) in class last week, you should see some successful copying on their pages. If you don't see what you expected, it's not too late to re-introduce the concept of transposing a melody in a new key. You can always make this a quick dictation exercise on the board, working together to see the patterns in a new key. I usually let them copy the beginning of the answers and ask them to finish the idea in class or at home.

Week 50 – Mini-Musical

I have learned over the years to give plenty of notice to the parents if I want them to attend the entire class for a mini-musical. I will place a large notice on the door the week before and the week of the class. I have them write it in their books by their assignments. I hand out a postcard so that each student can write down what pieces they plan to play for the musical. I send email reminders. Parents look forward to this event and so do the children. I make sure I add lots of dances in the singing circle basket, including *John Kanaka*.

Billa Boo is the by ear song of the day. It is fun to play the game. We enjoy creating clapping patterns while singing the song. I like to remind the parents after a successful and efficient 5 part song process how it may have sounded as little as a year ago when the children could barely hold a hand position and now they finish the patterns before I begin. Their ears are engaged and quite skilled. It only gets better and better.

Besides dances, I choose two or three songs that contain IV chords: *All the Little Ducklings*, *Bim Bam*, *When the Train Comes along*, *Willum*, and *Billy Billy* are just some examples. I like to have them go to the pianos and play the harmony progression along with the song as we sing. *Billy Billy* is especially fun for this. We do a warm up first that moves from a I chord to a IV chord and back to the I chord. Their improvisation exercises at home last week have given them practice and they have completed a written



assignment writing the IV chord. I will mention this to the parents that we have sung IV chords, harmonized with them, written IV chords in our homework and improvised with them.

On this day we are seeing the *duple Dotted rhythms* that showed themselves in *John's Idea* and have located the rhythm in Mozart's *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik*. These are parent education opportunities; let your parents know that each activity in your program is an appropriate musical experience upon which we can expand their musical literacy. The process is constantly moving forward in your music program.

Week 51

Discovering Root Position Chords

Root position chords are fun to teach! I enjoy watching my class have an “aha” moment when they realize the root is the name of the chord. I ask them to play a C Major chord in the root position and name the root of the chord. Then I ask them to play a G Major chord in the root position and name the root of the chord; then the D Major Chord and the E Major chord and the A Major chord. It is like asking, “Who is buried in Grant’s tomb?” When I ask for a IV chord in its root position, that idea was a bit more cumbersome, but it leads to finding out what a IV chord really is. We have touched upon root chords and inversions in previous lessons, and our foundation of playing with chords by adding them to melodies and improvising is beginning to pay off. This is a concept that will spiral around again and again as we sing the harmonic patterns, play them in reading and “by ear” pieces, and write them in exercises and in compositions.

Singing Circle – Some fresh ideas.

I look ahead three lessons and back three lessons and a few songs that relate to the lesson. This includes looking through the content of lessons for ideas of what songs would relate best to a lesson. In Week 51 for instance, there are three songs where the children identify skips, steps, and repeated notes. Then they read the music and guess what songs they are. Adding these songs this week to singing circle would be a subtle preparation for this latter part of the lesson. I will also sometimes ask the children to request a song and activity. Sometimes I am surprised what pieces are their favorites. No matter what, I always follow the song with the resting tone and with patterns. I keep a mixture of Major and Minor Songs, as well as songs in duple and triple. I also like to add aural recognition games after patterns and a tonal or rhythmic question and answer aural improvisation. I will look for ways to incorporate the concept in the lesson with related patterns. For example, in Week 51, I will include the solfege names of the root chords, singing:

Do- Mi - Sol, Do (One Chord, root position)

Fa – La – Do Fa (Four Chord, root position)

Sol – Ti – Re, Sol (Five Chord, root position)

Do – Mi – Sol, Do (One Chord, root position)

It sounds like this could all take a longer time than I have, but I limit this time to about 15 minutes, knowing I need to move on to other musical activities in the lesson.



Preparing for Steps, Skips and Repeated Notes

This concept can be prepared aurally. I will sing, "Mi – Re-Do", have them echo and then sing "Mi- Do" and I will actually leave an "aural hole" (is there such a thing?). Then I ask the children what pitch did I skip over? I also do this game when introducing skips in dictation. I will draw the above patterns and do the same game. Before going to their books I will also use my magnet staff or my chalkboard staff and practice identifying different patterns. Are they skipping? Stepping? Staying the same? Going up? Going down? Going up in skips/steps? Going down in skips/steps?

Happy Teaching,

Ellen Johansen