



Music Makers: at the Keyboard, Year 2 – Week 42 through 45

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. I hope my classes will continue through book 6, but I can assume my parents are automatically planning to continue to enroll their child in my program. There are more and more exciting afterschool distractions being offered that often conflict with my class time.

Hopefully your parents have attended your parent education sessions and are clear that the fruits of their children's study will begin to show up in the next year or so. I want my families to be sure about what is next long before they enroll. Just before the break I show Book 4 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.

At this point it may be a good idea to send out a newsletter that brings parents up to date on their student's progress. Let's take a moment and observe how far our students may have progressed since last December.

Most of them had only a handful of songs that they could play in three different keys, and some could add a two-note chord here and there. They just got their first reading piece. *Mouse, Mousie* was still in the song basket (I do hope you have weaned them of this game as a weekly card by now.). Now they have a large repertoire of "by ear" pieces, many accompanied by chords. They have touched upon many reading pieces that have been fun to teach as well as to listen to during the past year. What other musical skills have they developed?

1. They are playing warm-ups in C, D, E, F, G, A Major and Minor.
2. They are playing scales, hand separately, in various keys.
3. They are improvising melodies in both hands in different keys.
4. They are composing pieces with chords in various keys.
5. They can write down melodies that are dictated to them.
6. They are continuing to enjoy the drumming and dancing that are part of each class.
7. They are becoming acquainted with chord progressions and are beginning to identify these progressions in music.
8. They are being exposed to music of various composers.



Let your parents know about this progress and tell them about all the excellent musical activities in Book 4. During the next few classes bring out your copy of book 4 and show the children the new pieces throughout the book. Sometimes this is all it takes for a child to want to continue.

Week 42

Scales, Step 4 - monitor your group. They need to have a firm grasp of the I IV I V7 I chord progression before going directly from IV to V7. My favorite chord is the IVV7 combination chord--especially by those with small hands!

F minor Patterns – make sure you have placed lots of minor cards in singing circle. Also play an aural recognition game for the patterns before introducing the patterns in class. Minor patterns are not as familiar, so I want to be sure I do not get any Major pattern answers.

Hi-Lan' dey – This is a favorite! Be aware that a few students will always prefer to play drums and not want to move from chord to chord at the piano. This exercise is a perfect example of an activity that can meet the needs of all your students.

Week 43

Chord Song – I like to keep this piece in their repertoire long after the assignment ends. It can be transposed into all keys. The E Major key makes the IV chord harder for small hands. I will adjust the piece, removing the Do from the IV chord when it is blocked and reminding the student to “slide towards the black keys” so they can more easily reach the 6th. When they are arpeggiating the chord I have them remember to let go of the note they are no longer playing and take the finger with them. This way they can reach all the notes without stretching and without tension.

Dictation: Debka Hora – By now we are moving quickly through dictation. I make sure they are learning to write notes carefully but quickly, keeping up with the group. Each student needs to verbally describe where the notes go on the staff before drawing the note even if the student that has no idea. When I have a student that seems lost I make sure another student verbally describes the placement, and then I have that student repeat the words. Keeping all students in the process is important, as it keeps all of the students responsible for knowing the material. No one gets to sit out of the exercise because they don't know or don't understand. If a student cannot draw the pattern on the paper, I suggest they first place magnet notes on a magnetic staff board or pennies on a paper staff. Then they can copy their answer in their book.

Week 44

Listen For Bells, Sea Shore – The arrangements of these pieces are challenging for some children and perhaps impossible for some of the children. *Listen for Bells* is the easier of the two. For the children that are ready to play these pieces, I will suggest they start the Left hand broken chords AHEAD of time,



repeating the chord until it feels automatic. Then add the melody, which is like jumping on to a moving train. I enjoy watching them fall off and giggling about it. When it works they are amazed!

Improvisation with Melody Both Hands Opposite Chords – don't tell them during the exercise to change chords. Have them discover for themselves when it is time to play a different chordal melody. This will keep the ear-training in the exercise.

Chord Analysis: Chopin Nocturne – I use this exercise more as a wash. I don't expect them to identify the chords. I do expect them to enjoy the novelty of the vi chord, and I will introduce the new chords excitedly and mention how the ear will bend to hear the sounds. If you can play the piece and slow down the analysis, that helps; otherwise you can listen and follow along with the recording.

A lot of fun music-making has happened in the last few weeks. Make sure they choose 2 – 5 pieces to play for the Mini-Musicale. Parents, friends, and students alike will enjoy the music making in Week 45.

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.

Ellen Johansen