



Music Makers: at the Keyboard, Year 3, Book 6 – Week 79 through 81

Dear Teachers,

Week 79

Mini-Study No. 2 by Hanon (adapted). Some of your students can play the first study with hands separately, and some can play both hands together. Once they figure out how to link the repeating pattern, off they go! This is the same for all of Hanon's exercises in part I of his book *The Virtuoso Pianist*. In the original, the exercise spans two octaves and immediately descends with no break. Many pianists will play the entire first part with no break, and Hanon suggests transposing each exercise into every key. The adaptation only rises for one octave and takes a break before descending again.

Sometimes my students keep going higher and higher and higher. I am not too concerned if they start and end it as the music dictates. However, I do insist on the correct fingering, and we discuss the best technique for playing in control. I encourage rounded fingers with a supple wrist and the use of rotation when changing directions. I observe their body position, and we talk as a group about how to adjust our bodies so that our sound can be more graceful. You can begin to bring in more discussion about how the body plays a role in the production of sound at the piano. Remember, the children you are working with have had ample experience in graceful movements during dancing and drumming, so they will be open to your suggestions as well as the suggestions of their classmates.

When we sing and move to **Kalump** I find myself laughing with the children as I ask them to walk as graceful elephants, swinging their trunks from side to side. Yes, I get sprayed with water - well, imaginary water anyway. This piece is just fun to sing and move to together. Have some nine-year-olds in the group? Well, they will swing with the rest of them, although they need more room!

When teaching **Jericho or any by-ear piece** at this point in the curriculum, I am always swept away by the ease and speed that they find the patterns and link the patterns. Usually, I start with the first pattern and off they go with me running after them. I often have them sing the melody and add the chords. Play track 2 on the practice CD in class so they can figure out the arrangement. I ask the students to analyze the chords they hear being played with the melody. Then I ask which hand is playing the melody in the second section (both). I prefer to have them listen rather than play the arrangement themselves. This gives them a chance to describe what they hear aurally rather than what they see visually. I also like to play the Listening CD arrangement and talk about the tempo of the piece. It is fun to play this piece fast and quick with staccato touch.

Waltz in A-flat Major (Brahms, L6, No. 6) - After handing out the scarves, asking each politely what 2 colors they would like, I first have them gracefully hold the scarf at the level of their belly button. Then I have them sweep up (beat 3), then down in front of the belly button (beat 1) and out (beat 2). When they sweep back up at beat 3 they arc their scarves towards the center of their body and up to the top



of their head. The total action should trace a triangular pattern. It is easier if they have two scarves so they can move the scarves symmetrically. As we move we say all together, "And....down....out....up....down....out....up...etc. It is hard to catch the downbeat on the CD so often I have them catch the beat by the downbeat of the second measure.

Hey, Mister! This piece presents a new layer this week. The student is supposed to have created a new ostinato in their homework. Well, I am going to share an embarrassing truth. I always forget about this homework until Week 79 and do not prepare this in Week 78, so I get lots of puzzled looks. You can write a big note in Week 78, suggesting to yourself to demonstrate creating an ostinato and then writing down your idea on a copy of the homework sheet. Then during parent time, you can have them complete one of the lines with you and then one without your help and leave the final two for homework. THEN, when you get to this part in this lesson your students will actually have some interesting ideas. (Now if I can just get that suggestion into my own book before the week blows by....)

Keyboard Share this week should include some pieces the students would like to play for the Mini-Musicale. Every piece is welcome including Hanon and *Scales*. I make *Jericho* a piece that everyone will play because this time **I AM** looking ahead and noticing that the homework and parent time includes playing with the 2 special accompaniments, and this is so much fun to do.

During Homework review I have everyone turn to pages 18 and 19 and we select a few random patterns to work on together. This seems to get the ball rolling. I also remind the parents of Mini-Musicale and ask them to mark their calendars and plan to attend the entire class.

Week 80

Twelve Bar Blues, Steps 1 and 2. Keep this introduction simple and fun. I simply turn on the practice CD track 6, and we work through the activity together. I will point out after track 1 is over that the improvisation Howard Baer plays uses chord tones only, and he is moving from root position chord to root position chord. I will demonstrate this and have the children go to the piano, and we play the chord progression with the right hand in root position. I have them practice this at home. Then we all listen to and follow track 7. I then go to the piano and suggest using the following notes when they improvise - first the chord tones, C, E, and G and then the lower neighbors (B flat and D Sharp) and the upper neighbor (A) as nice additions to their home improvisation assignment. Then I demonstrate creating an improvisation to the first phrase using these new colors, and then we turn to page 34 and I write out my improvisation. I keep my improvisation to quarter notes and eighth notes, and I show how I may swing the melody but write it out straight. I then have them go to their headphones and try out some ideas. Once they have had some time to play I will then work on a measure or two with them to get started. This process could take time, but it is well worth the effort.

I share *Jericho* and *Kalump* with the whole class and their attending family members. We spend more time on singing the patterns from the 4 groups and doing some aural recognition patterns. I include the Brahms waltz as a choice in the basket; the Dictation Activity which will be finished at home.



Mini-Musicale is always an informal affair. I ask the children to tell me what they plan to play and they are expected to play at least one piece that is recent and one piece from their repertoire. I make sure everyone can play *Jericho* so we can move right into adding the accompaniment tracks on the practice CD. I like to demonstrate these in class using the students if possible.

Quickly I look at the Major Patterns on pp. 18 - 19, giving the appropriate “teacher glare” when they are incomplete and hand out the homework sheet for next week, making a note in my book to check the unfinished pages from those stalwart few that seem to have majored in “my dog ate my homework” or “I left my book home” excuse course 101.

Week 81

There is a lot in this lesson so I want to be sure I do not linger on any one activity. Keep it going and keep it light.

Minor scales are introduced this week. We stay in natural minor only. Sing, sing and play, and remind them to use the same fingering as the C major scale.

The Quadrille is fun to teach and is a successful piece for many of the students. The biggest challenge is to keep the chords from sounding like they are chopping vegetables. I encourage the children to think of the chords moving forward with a graceful and light touch. We discover the odd V7 chord with the re instead of the ti. The children get used to me calling this the “V7 with a re”. I have them circle this variation of the chord with a red pencil so that it stands out. We all play the chords together and then they play the chords all together as I play the melody. We always add the repeats. We then find the resting tone and discover the melody has notes below the resting tone so we will need a different fingering to be able to reach the notes without any unusual gymnastic moves. I ask them to locate the lowest note and the highest note and then place their hand in a way so they can reach all the notes comfortably. I ask them to look at the suggested fingering. Someone may notice this fingering is similar to playing the IV chord in G. In the last line, however, the right hand will need to move gracefully from one place on the keyboard to another place so we identify where we need to go and we practice this movement.

Country Dance is a fun dance and can be done with just two, but is even more fun with a crowd. If you have an uneven number in your room you may want to ask the parent to stay so you can join in the dance. Take some time to quietly sit with the recording and imagine the dance in your head before you rehearse the moves. Then try out the dance yourself and make sure you can follow without a cheat sheet. You may only have time in this class to teach half of the dance. That is fine.

I make a point of doing pages 20 and 21 together in class, but I limit the amount of time spent and make sure I have all the material organized before we begin. We then look at last week’s dictation quickly, and we continue our work with Phrase 1 on page 34 for five minutes.. I make a point of listening to their ideas and think of at least one positive thing to say about their melodies.



Is there time to share? Often I find myself barely fitting in this aspect but I know I need to hear something from each student. This is why I will add time limits to each activity and make a point of stopping an activity so we have time for this important part of the class. Five minutes is a bare minimum for keyboard share. Often when I am planning the pace of my lessons I will give keyboard share 10 minutes and re-evaluate each activity in that light. As I teach I will note when I am over the time allotted and then attempt to end the activity so we can move on.

During parent time try to touch on all the activities in the lesson plan. This is your chance to connect with parents and keep them involved in a program that their children enjoy.

I hope these tips will help you enjoy teaching your classes this month,

Yours in teaching,

Ellen Johansen