



Music Makers: at the Keyboard, Year 3, Book 6 – Week 82 through 84

Dear Teachers,

The material in Weeks 82 - 84 continue with Twelve Bar Blues Improvisation, repertoire development, military dancing, key signatures, time signatures, and minor scales. Twelve Bar Blues improvisation is so much fun, and finally the students are coming up with some interesting patterns. *March Militaire* can fill your room with lots of laughter. The rest of the concepts—key signatures, time signatures, and minor scales are nothing new. What is new about these subjects is the labeling we are placing over the concepts. This is what you see in early primer and first year method books. Over the last three years we have introduced and developed these concepts aurally; the students have been immersed in the language. Now we are adding labels and definitions.

Week 82

This week we develop the second phrase of the Twelve Bar Blues improvisation.

Take a moment and listen to Howard Baer improvising in “Blue Shoes” and you may notice that he moves his right hand for the notes of the IV chord in root position. I suggest to the students to move as well. We have played with root chord position in book 4, and I review that exercise. I also review the hand over hand arpeggios in root position. Then we look for the blue notes in the IV chord root position – flat 3, flat 5 and flat 7. This gives the students more colors in their improvisation.

Key Signatures have been around for a long time. Every reading piece since book 1 has a key signature, and although my students love to point out the convenient “E Do” or the resting tone placement on the reading pieces, I remind them that this tool doesn’t exist in music books. Rather there is a more sneaky way, a secret society initiation way to discover the key signature of a piece. I then pull a book from my music library and show how all music has a key signature (it is fun to show the unique key signatures in Bartok’s *Mikrokosmos* series). But first I make them promise that they will say the official Musician initiation Key signature Oath, “I promise to faithfully LOOK at the key signature before I begin to play a piece of music.” At this point you are welcome to use any games you have read about or have created to begin the process of identifying a key signature without the helpful tool Musikgarten has provided on all their reading pieces. In my studio the first question before we look at a piece is, “What key is this piece in?” Then “How can you tell?” We look for three signs:

- 1) The actual key signature (I often have them copy it)
- 2) The final Bass note of the piece (Good review of bass clef notes)
- 3) The sound of the piece (Major or Minor) – the third discovery can be done by singing the solfeggio, then sight-reading, and listening to a recording. When a student says a piece is in minor when it is major or visa versa, I enjoy playing the piece in major and minor and asking them which sound seems closer to the composer’s intention. This is especially fun with pieces like “Fur Elise” or the *Minuet in G* (part of Anna Magdalena Bach’s Notebook. Just try playing *The Entertainer* in minor.



Week 83

The Twelve Bar Blues continues with Phrase 3, and I make sure I continue the process as in previous weeks. Some of the children are having such fun with this process, and some are merely going through the motions. That's fine. This is a challenge for all and can be approached again and again in later study. Certainly they will have a level of comfort when asked to join the Jazz band.

Schytte's *Melody for the Left Hand* teaches lyrical playing for the left hand, balance, and repeated chords for the right hand. Here is a chance to go beyond the notes and discuss sound quality. How do we keep the chords in the right hand quieter while playing the legato melody of the left hand? How does the left hand move in a legato fashion while moving out of position? What are the elements of a beautiful phrase? Make sure you demonstrate these qualities as they follow along with the score.

Time Signatures – when I work with the chart, I first work with my chart and we altogether find different combinations. Then I have the students work in groups and I go around to check the different rhythmical combinations. They need to be able to clap the rhythm they create.

This game can be a logistical nightmare so after a few messy classes I have come up with these solutions:

I start with my board on a bulletin board. I place the pieces on a board with push pins (scotch tape didn't work too well). How about making the pieces magnetic? Hmmm, a future project....

I give each student their note value cards in their own zip-lock bags. If they are working in groups of two I give out one zip-lock bag to each group so they don't mix their pieces together.

Week 84

Natural Minor Scales in e and g are still discovered aurally. I have included aural prep of this sound in past singing circle. I introduce the sound in a minor and then have them go to their keyboards and find the same sound in e and g. I use headphones at this point. Once they find the sound and play with the fingering I demonstrate we move to the singing circle. I make sure many of the songs are in minor so I can continue to model the natural minor scale.

This week we discuss next week's Mini-Musical. Included will be the Blues improvisation, *Melody for the Left Hand*, and *Quadrille*. Each student also has chosen a supplementary piece of their own to learn, and they include this piece on their list. I make sure I have heard these pieces each week, even if it is just a share. Scales can also be included in the musical. I also add in the *March Militaire* dance with parents, and it is such fun. This is their last Mini-Musical because our final musical is a major celebration, and I keep a record of the pieces they are doing next week in preparation for this final class.

Hope these ideas help,
Happy teaching,

Ellen Johansen