



Music Makers: at the Keyboard, Year 3 – Week 64 through 66

Dear Teachers,

There are some new concepts introduced in the next few weeks that I don't want you to obsess over the way I did when I first taught them. The best way I have found to approach these concepts is to ask myself, "What can the student derive from this activity today?" Don't worry if you can't complete every step of the activity. Do what is appropriate for your class at that time.

Let's dig in...

Week 64

Non-Harmonic Tones - Adding non-harmonic tones is introduced in Week 64. They will need a lot of practice using this concept so I suggest starting the process by improvising long before this day. When your students feel comfort improvising with chord tone patterns in the singing circle or at the piano, begin to model patterns with non-harmonic tones. I improvise keeping the chord tones on the beat and demonstrate how I add non-harmonic tones between the beats to smooth out the melody. When I show the pages in their books about chord tones and non-harmonic tones I want to make sure they have enough aural understanding first. Don't despair though. There will be lots of time this year to expand this topic.

Rhythmic Improvisation Step 2

Before you teach the class, sit and really listen two or three times to this track. Find the macro-beat and follow along with your drum. At first, you may not be able to hear the triple rhythm but as the track progresses it becomes clearer. Before I turn on the track in class I make sure the students are echoing triple rhythms with a steady macro beat on the drums. Then we will explore different triple patterns. I will ask one student to create a triple pattern on the drum and then we will all repeat that pattern a few times. Each student gets a turn to be the leader. Then during the improvisation, I give each student a chance to lead us in the improve sections.

Dictation, Activity 1 – Make sure you include a card for *Ah! Vous dirai-je, Maman* in the singing circle and follow it with the patterns in the song. You may want to make it an aural recognition game as well. In my last class, I asked them to sing the entire song in solfeggio. When it was time for dictation they basically wrote it out themselves. Alternatively, I write my dictation on a chalkboard that already has the staff on it and I draw and verbally label the clefs, the brace, the key signature and the time signature. I dictate one or two measures at a time first on a neutral syllable and then ask the children give me the name for that pattern in solfeggio. Then I ask them to identify verbally where I will place the notes ("Where does the 'do' go?"). Inevitably, though, the children are ahead of me and if so I let them write



out the dictation at their own pace and challenge them to compare their dictation to mine AFTER they finish. Then we add the rhythm (although in this dictation I make a point to say the notes are either quarter notes or half notes). I go to the piano and the children help me discover what chords work best, we add the symbols to their dictations and I get them started writing one or two chords and leave the rest for homework. (However, yesterday I asked them to figure out the chords based on the whether the note they are accompanying is a chord tone. This connected very nicely with the earlier discussion about non-harmonic tones. Then I asked them to test their chord decisions at the piano.)

Week 65

The Mini-Musicale is always a work in process. I ask each child to prepare two pieces, and I try my best have each child play a piece that no one else is playing. We have chosen our musical selections in Week 63 so that they have time to prepare their pieces to play in Week 64 in a dress rehearsal. However this year my students are totally not ready to “perform” their pieces in week 65 so I will change the tone of that musicale and make it more of a master class with the parents included. This will give the children a chance to show their works in progress. No, my Grandfather’s Clock ensemble is not finished and I plan to continue to develop this through the next few weeks. Some classes will be able to play all three parts in the full ensemble and some class will only be able to sing and keep one ostinato going (yes, I often change the ensemble parts to a repeating ostinato based on the patterns in the different ensemble parts.) Whatever stage my class is at, I have them write what they will play on index cards so they can bring these cards up to the piano with them. The *Grandfather Clock Ensemble* often completes our musicale, but again it depends on the progress of the children in your program.

Week 66

Learning arpeggios is part of today’s lesson. I like to break the process down this way into smaller steps. First, we block the chords and practice crossing the left hand over to reach treble C (Do) and then block the chords as we return to Bass C (Do). I then remind them what an arpeggio is and we sing the ascending arpeggio together. (Of course, don’t try to sing the pitches on the written registers unless you have a vocal range of Joan Sutherland.) Then we sing and play the ascending arpeggio. Does this process sound familiar? When the crossover is comfortable, I repeat the same process for the descent. This may prove to be harder for some. Sing, echo, sing and play, echo. (For an illustration of this I have created a video that you can access by going to my “youtube” channel.)

Bow to Your Partner is a favorite reading piece and a popular choice for mini-musicales. There are three chord accompaniments: blocked, broken, and Alberti Bass. I have them circle all the members of the chord in one measure and then we identify the chord. Then we continue with the directions in the Teacher’s Guide. When preparing the children to play this piece I like to compare measures 3 and 4 to measures 7 and 8. Measure 4 has the notes played in unison. We practice this measure all together after we clap the rhythm and sing the solfege. Then we compare measure six to measure three and I ask, “What notes are the same in each measure? What notes are left out in measure six?” Then I ask



them to sing the L.H. part in measure six and seven. I have them play the left-hand part to measures 3 and 4 and then measures 7 and 8 at the piano and when they are comfortable I will add the melody over what they are playing. I point out the final measure and ask what chords they see. I will use the term cadence and discuss what this is. We play it together at the piano. We sing the melody in solfege. We then play the melody line together as we sing the solfege. I hope they discover that the melody moves to the left hand in the 2nd measure. Once they are comfortable playing the melody, I add the chordal accompaniments. This step will happen over the next few weeks or even months. For some children playing hands separately will be all they can do and I will work on an ensemble with some children playing the melody and other children playing the accompaniments.

3/4 Triple Song Rhythms – By now you have introduced this new concept and hopefully the parents are at least acting like they understand as well as the children. The homework has been checked on page 18, which we do mostly together in class with the parents in Week 65. I work with the children on page 19 in class, preferably with parents in attendance. I copy the page and have the students work with me as we complete the copy together. Then I allow the children to begin their own page as I go around and check their progress. The homework is more successful when we do part of it in class.

Remember to pace your classes and do not worry if you do not cover the entire activity. I like to consider what they need to understand so that they can complete their home activities. There is always next week to review and expand.

Happy teaching,

Ellen Johansen