



Music Makers: at the Keyboard, Year 3 – Week 67 through 70

Dear Teachers,

Week 67

Solo Improvisation is a big part of the next few weeks, and this can be a wonderful, creative portion of each child's time at the piano. Before you teach, make sure you can create some improvisations on your own, following the decision making process mentioned in the Teacher's Guide. If you are feeling unsure of your spontaneous improvisational ability, I would suggest you plan your piece ahead and talk about how you made the decisions you did. What Key? Style? Meter? Keep your improvisations simple, no need to show off here. During Keyboard Share in Week 68 I like to continue to develop this concept and ask for different solo improvisations they may have worked on at home. This will give them more ideas for home play. On Week 69 they will write a choice on page 22. Some of the students immediately thrive with this process, and some seem to be frightened by the idea of creating this way. The plan helps the reluctant create his or her own improvisation. You may be quite surprised at the mini-musicale!

Week 68

Scales, Step 4: Parallel Motion

I have introduced scales in so many different ways but no matter how much time I put into the subject, ultimately it will be the student that will be ready or not to put hands together and work out our odd Victorian fingering. I love to WOW the children by playing the scales on a grand tour of the keyboard as fast as I can go. This has brought me to realize how long it takes to learn muscle memory. In the meantime I lately have been following these steps to introduce hands together. **Oh, by the way, I use the E Major scale to introduce hands together. I find it easier for the children to remember when to move the thumb because of the placement of the black keys in the scale.**

1. Start the scale and freeze at fingers 3.
2. Who needs to shift? (the right hand) Why? (so that we can benefit from placing our thumb under and gaining more fingers to play)
3. Stop when the LH reaches the thumb. Now what? (pass the third finger over)
4. Finish up!
5. Reverse. Freeze on the threes
6. What's next? Who needs to Shift (the Left hand) Why? (so that we can benefit from placing our thumb under and gaining more fingers to play)
7. Stop when the RH reaches the thumb. Now what? (pass the third finger over)
8. Finish up



I am sure you have other innovative ways to introduce the scale fingering.

Lavender's Blue is another reading piece the children enjoy learning. The biggest confusion occurs when they need to follow the repeat and skip to the second ending. I like to use a larger copy so we can read the music and follow together.

Week 69

Solo Improvisation, Step 1

I spend a lot of time modeling how I improvise over a chord progression. In Week 67 and Week 68 I have the children choose a chord progression that begins and ends with a I chord. I make the chord progression have 8 chords. First I play the chords and have them sing the bass line. For example, if the chord progression we create is: I- V7- IV-V7-I_IV-V7-I They sing I on Do, V7 on Sol, IV on Fa, etc. Then I ask them to choose a meter. Sometimes I will ask this way, "Shall I improvise in Duple or Triple Meter?" I pause and if I don't get a response I change it to "Shall I improvise in Du Day or Du Da Dee?" Then I ask for some samples of the meter. One or two will suffice. Then I play the chord progression and have them sing the samples. For example, they may choose Du, Du, Du da dee du. I have them repeat this meter as I play the chord progression. Next, I play the chord progression and create a melody with chord tones. After I ask if they liked it. Then I say I am going to add non-harmonic passing tones and repeat the improvisation. After I ask them if they liked it more? Then I say I am going to add non-harmonic upper neighbors and lower neighbors. After this demonstration, I ask a student to play the chord progression while I improvise and then we switch places. By this time the students have a good idea what I am aiming for in their improvisation.

Singing Circle: Jericho

This new song is fun to sing with an off-beat clap. When the refrain ends with "and the walls came tumbling down" I add a "shimmer" hand motion. During the verse, I point at the children keeping the beat with my pointing finger. After this, I add drums and have them play on the offbeat. I often add the recording and we make up different motions and sounds on the drums to accompany.

Generally, in the singing circle, I choose perhaps three songs to sing and add a lot of patterns that are chordal and then add non-harmonic tones to the pattern. I also include the aural recognition game for more complex patterns. The children are getting pretty good at this game because we have played it since year one.

Country Gardens

At this point in the curriculum, I simply tell the students to go figure out the song at the keyboard. There is not much I need to do. If they are stuck I may sing the pattern and ask them to figure out its solfeggio name. Then I play the melody and ask them to harmonize.



The *Lavender's Blue ensemble* is fun. If I have a few playing the piece I will have the most secure play it on the piano and have other students play the chord progression on the bars. They like taking turns with the bars and playing the piano. I may even let them find interesting sounds on the keyboard instead of piano.

Major Chord Progressions, Step 1

I hand out the cards and ask them to go to their pianos. They put up cards 1 through 5 and wait. We do an F major warm up with the left hand. I ask them to review the I, V7 and IV chords. I remind them to "paste" their second finger on the B flat. Then I play a card, ask them to identify and then they all play the card. After we do all the cards I exchange these five cards with cards 6 – 8 and repeat the process.

Bruil

I always take a moment to rehearse this drumming song before class. During class, I like to repeat the pattern as solo and then have the children join me for the third and fourth repeat. It is tricky to end with the recording!

In the upcoming mini-musical, I have the children choose four pieces and a solo improvisation to prepare. Each week I have been assigning supplementary pieces from Book 4 and Book 5. Feel free to also supplement with pieces from your teaching library.

Week 70

The mini-musical is with parents in the room and we start with Vocal/Keyboard Improvisation. I have turned this into a game at the keyboards. I begin by showing the pattern on the board: du-de-ta du. After they have echoed the pattern a few times I then create a pattern using this rhythm. I base the pattern on a I chord either staying with chordal tones or adding non-harmonic tones. I have them echo what I played. Then they name the pattern. After they get the hang of it I ask for a student to take my place. They create a new pattern. Depending on their ability it can include non-harmonic tones. The children echo the pattern and guess the name. The winner creates a new pattern. After we play a few rounds I start again with a pattern based on the V7 chord. By this time everyone should have arrived and we move to singing Circle.

Briu

First I rehearse the patterns. Then we follow the recording. After that, I ask them to open to page 24 and we select patterns from different student's work. I usually copy the patterns on a whiteboard and then we rehearse the new patterns. Then we try it out with recording.

Dictation for Country Gardens



Before we begin the dictation we sing the song and I have the children play it on the piano. Then I start the dictation. I get them started by working out the rhythm above the measures. Then have them write out the melody on their own. I stand back and assist as needed. Then I ask them to write out the harmony adding the symbols first. I may write out the first chord so they can see which way to play the stem.

After we explore Beethoven, I look at the clock and decide if we need to add more activities. I know the children will enjoy repeating the grandfather clock ensemble or the Lavender's blue ensemble. The Clock Symphony and the Country Gardens are also favorites.

Twinkle, Twinkle

After we sing this piece we go to the score and examine the piece, noting its key signature, its time signature and the form of the piece. We sing the melody in solfeggio. I ask a student to sightread one line. This is a good time to talk about playing music every day. I have a collection of music books the children can check out. I also refer the parents to a website like Makingmusicfun.net for fun pieces to download and learn on their own.

My parents stay for the entire musicale so at this point I go through the homework sheet, look over page 27 (Ode to Joy) mark their sheets with any supplementary pieces I wish to assign each child individually and dismiss them for the day.

Happy Teaching,
Ellen Johansen