

Comparison of the Noona Courses

By Kevin M Coan

Summary of the Courses

Because the Noona's have written six piano courses, teachers often become confused as to which is which with the various methods. This article was written to help teachers to sort out those details. Currently, only three of the original six courses are actively in print, so I will limit my comments to those three.

I will begin by listing the six courses with a brief description:

Noona Basic Piano – this is a 12-volume method that includes method, theory, technic, and repertoire all in the same book. Every three books represent one level. The 12-books take about four years to complete. A single book takes only 3 months to complete. There are two starting points: Starter Book for ages 6-7, and Book One for ages 8-11. If a student starts in the Starter, he must still do Book One, but can skip the first two units.

Noona Digital Piano Method – this is a four-volume version of Noona Basic Piano, but without pictures. It is page for page identical to NBP. As with NBP, there is only one component per level. It is appropriate for any age, but is especially useful for older students who can profit from a gradual pace. All of my comments regarding NBP are also applicable to this course. This course has gone out of print, although there are still copies available in some music stores.

Noona Comprehensive Piano Library – this is a traditional course similar to the Faber Piano Adventures series. There are two starting points: Music Magic, for ages 4-7, which has two levels: PrePrimer and Primer; and Starter Level, for ages 7-11, which has only one level. Either starting point flows into Level One, then Level One Plus (1+), then Levels Two, Three and Four. There are three components at most levels: Lessons, Playing with Sound (theory and ear training), and Complete Performer (technic AND repertoire). Levels 1+, 3, and 4 also have a Comprehensive Skills book that presents scales, cadences, and arpeggios in all keys.

Mainstreams Piano Method – this is a course emphasizing musicianship skills for students 9 and up. There are four components: Pianist, Pencil and Paper, Projects, and Performer. There are four “phases” or levels. The pictures in this book are in black and white. They are not juvenile in appearance, making this course an ideal choice for teens and adults.

The Young Pianist – this is a course for 6-9 year olds emphasizing musicianship skills. There are three components to each level: Piano Book, Theory Pages, and Solo Book. The course is being sunsetted, although the primer level and levels 1 and 2 still available.

Noona Clavier Method – this is an intensive course that focuses solely on classical masterworks, using a contrapuntal, linear approach. It is being sunsetted as well, although all of the method books are still in print. The course has only two books per level: Method and Repertoire. Lessons, technic, and theory are all contained in the method book.

The following sections discuss how various topics are treated in the various series.

Philosophy

NBP – Noona Basic Piano was designed to provide an all-in-one course for students who need considerable help with motivation and focus. The single book approach helps the student to focus, and the practice of completing each book in only three months provides motivation and positive reinforcement. The course limits the amount of written work required, letting the student focus on the technic and pieces. There is more emphasis on learning to play classical pieces than other types, but the course provides a balanced curriculum of all the genres. The concluding “reward” piece is Fur Elise.

NCPL – Noona Comprehensive Piano Library was designed to provide a thorough, balanced curriculum that thoroughly prepares students for masterwork literature. The philosophy of the Performer books is to present technical skills that are immediately applied to the repertoire that follows. This helps the student to see the purpose for the technical drills he or she is practicing. The course “teaches” like the Faber’s Piano Adventures method.

Mainstreams – Mainstreams Piano Method was designed to expose students to a very wide range of styles and musicianship skills. It teaches the same skills as the Robert Pace materials, including an intensive multikey approach, but it features interesting repertoire in the process. The pieces in the Pianist books focus on the pedagogical skills, while those in the Performer books focus on interesting repertoire and musicality. The pacing of the course is accelerated, which limits its use to late elementary, middle school, high school, and adult students. The course focuses more on musicianship skills than on classical repertoire.

Pacing

NBP – This course features gradual pacing. The entire course can be covered in approximately four to six years. The Starter Book moves at about the same pace as the Faber Piano Adventures Primer. Book One moves about 50% more rapidly through the same material. The course concludes with Fur Elise

NCPL – This course features standard pacing. It takes about five years to complete. Music Magic moves about the same pace as the Faber’s My First Piano Adventures. The Starter Level moves about 30% faster than Faber’s Piano Adventures Primer. The philosophy of the Starter Level is to

move rapidly through the pre-reading stage and then to provide only a few pieces in each of the presented positions. The course concludes with the Burgmuller Ballade

Mainstreams – This course features an accelerated pace. The entire course takes about four years to complete. There is no primer. Phase One covers about the same ground as Faber’s Accelerated Piano Adventures Level One. Phase Four includes the Burgmuller Arabesque.

Pictures

NBP – There are color pictures that are fairly juvenile in appearance. Only one color is used throughout each book.

Noona Digital – There are no pictures at all. Single colored boxes feature instructions for using the digital piano features.

NCPL – There are full-color pictures throughout that feature children who are enjoying music in various aspects of their lives. The children include all ethnic groups.

Mainstreams – There are black and white illustrations that are not as juvenile as most programs. Adults and teens do not find the pictures insulting.

Reading Approach

NBP – The course progresses from finger number melodies to letter name melodies to staff reading. Staff reading begins with a presentation of the C, F, and G guideposts. In the Starter Level, reading continues with a Lesson in the C major pattern, then one in the middle C pattern. The pieces alternate between the two patterns, forcing the student to read notes and not just positions. In Book One, the sequence flows from C major to G major, and then to middle C. Accidentals occur at the end of Book One. In Book Two, there is extensive drill on the guideposts of bass C, bass F, middle C, treble G, and treble C. The student is taught to measure from a guidepost to an unknown note by interval. All other reading is done by interval. All of the guideposts are presented by the end of Book 3.

NCPL – This course uses the same pre-reading approach as NBP. Both beginning programs emphasize intervals rather than note memorization. For the younger students using Music Magic, the PrePrimer level is devoted entirely to off-staff reading. On-staff reading begins in the Primer Level, using middle C as the first guidepost. Only the middle C and C major positions are used. For the average age students using the Starter Level, the pre-reading and reading is all included in one book. Staff reading uses the guidepost approach as well, but with only eight pieces in middle C position and five pieces in the C major position. Measuring from guideposts is taught in Level One, and the remaining guideposts are taught in Level One Plus and Level Two.

Mainstreams – This course has only a page or two of pre-reading. Reading then begins with middle C as the first guidepost, using an intervallic reading strategy. By the end of phase one,

the guideposts of bass C, bass F, middle C, treble G, and treble C have been taught. Phase Two completes the development of guideposts.

Multikey Development

NBP – This course features a gradual approach to multikey work. The keys of C, F, and G are taught in Book Two (mid level one). Beginning in Book Five (mid level 2), each book devotes an entire unit to the study of a major key. In Book Eight (mid level 3), an additional unit is devoted to a minor key. By Book Twelve (ending level 4), all of the major keys, plus all of the minor keys with white home tones, have been studied in depth.

NCPL – This course is partially multikey in the method itself, with the remaining keys covered only in the Comprehensive Skills book. C, G, and F are taught in Level One. D and A appear in Level Two. E, Bb, and Eb appear in Level Three. Detailed work with the minor keys is a feature of Level Four. Transposition into all keys is encouraged in the the Lessons and Playing with Sound books. It is intended that transposition will be used to cover the keys not specifically featured in the course books.

Mainstreams – This course covers the keys of C, G, and F in Phase One. Phase Two is an intensive study of all of the major keys, focusing on five-finger positions but with octave moves. Phase Three covers all major keys again using the the full scale. Phase Four covers the minor keys.

Musicianship Skills

NBP – This course is lighter on the theory aspects than the other courses. There still IS work in transposing, lead line harmonization, and simple composition. There is just is not as much written work in these areas in this course.

NCPL – This course includes all of the musicianship skills, including composing, arranging, transposing, improvising, and harmonizing. There is ample work in the Playing with Sound component that develops each of these areas.

Mainstreams – This course focuses on the musicianship skills quite heavily. The Pencil and Paper series develops the concepts from a theory perspective. The Projects books include a section focusing on harmony, sight-reading, and transposing, plus a second section on composing and improvising. There are quite a number of assignments that require the student to harmonize a melody using various accompaniment patterns, and then to transpose the arrangement to other keys. This is an ideal course for those wanting to learn to improvise popular music.

Composing

All three courses require the student to create several compositions of their own. NBP has the least number of these, and Mainstreams has the most.

Ear Training

NBP – This course does not include formal ear training.

NCPL – This course includes a number of ear training exercises in the Playing with Sound Component.

Mainstreams – This course requires the student to play quite a number of piece by ear and then to transpose the pieces and provide various accompaniments. Improvisation is a key feature of the course.

Approach to Technic

NBP – The NBP books are organized into units called “lessons.” Each lesson includes method, theory, technic, and repertoire for a 2-3 week period. Short exercises and studies appear in each lesson that drill the skills required for the repertoire. Scales, cadences, and arpeggios appear in some of the upper levels at the end of each book.

NCPL – The NCPL course has the strongest technical strand. The Complete Performer component integrates technic with repertoire. Each skill is taught through a thorough explanation. It is then practiced in exercises and studies. Finally, each new skill is featured in a solo or recital piece. The student then sees the reason for learning each skill. A separate component entitled Comprehensive Skills is available for levels 1+, 3, and 4. (The 1+ book is used for level 2 also). These books provide scale work, chord inversions, arpeggios, and cadences in all major and minor keys, to be used at the teacher’s discretion.

Mainstreams – The last third of each Projects book offers several exercises that focus on finger dexterity, phrasing, and scales, chords, and arpeggios. Some teachers may wish to supplement this work with Hanon, Schmitt, or Czerny assignments.

Three-Note Chords

NBP – Three note triads and V7 chords appear in Book 3 (level one).

NCPL – Three note triads appear in Level 1+, and three-note V7 chords appear in Level 2.

Mainstreams – Three note triads and V7 chords appear in Phase 2.

Tetrachord Scales and Standard Scales

NBP – Tetrachord scales appear in Book 5. Standard scales appear in Book 6.

NCPL – Tetrachord scales are taught in Level 2, and standard scales in Level 3.

Mainstreams – Tetrachord scales are not specifically taught. Standard scales are taught in Phase 3.

Classical Masterworks

NBP – This course introduces the first masterworks in Book 5. Books 7-9 include about 25% masterworks. Books 10-12 include about 50%.

NCPL – This course introduces masterworks in Level 2. Levels 3 and 4 focus heavily on master composers: about 75% of the pieces are masterworks. This is the best of the Noona courses for students wanting to focus on classical composers.

Mainstreams – Masterworks are first introduced in Phase 3, but they comprise less than 20% of the material in the course itself. Mainstreams includes quite a few pieces of other genres, including popular styles, hymns, patriotic numbers, and jazz. At one time, the program featured additional supplements for jazz and classical interests. The “Jazz Pianist” series has been replaced by “All That Jazz and Pizzazz.” The “Classical Pianist” books have been replaced by a single volume collection entitled “Easy Piano Classics,” which covers levels 3-5. The same pieces appeared in both the Classical Pianist books and in Easy Piano Classics. By using Easy Piano Classics, students receive ample experience with the most frequently taught compositions.

For the most part, the same set of standard masterwork pieces appear in all three courses: several selections from the AM Bach Notebook, several Kabalevsky pieces, the Clementi C Major Sonatina, Burgmuller’s Ballade, a couple of Chopin Preludes, Spinning Song, Fur Elise, etc. All of the classical pieces appear in their original form, with very conservative editing. There are no added staccatos, phrases, etc., in the baroque works. The student is taught the proper performance of ornaments and the performance styles of each of the historical periods.

Conclusion – All three of the Noona courses provide students with a complete and balanced curriculum of lessons, theory, technic, and performance repertoire, with full coverage of multikey work. While each of the courses has its own “personality,” the same ladder of concepts is taught in each. Students using any of these methods will enjoy a well-rounded learning experience.

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