

Recommended Materials and Reviews – for Teens and Adults

By Kevin M. Coan

Fully Recommended

George—*Artistry at the Piano*

Artistry at the Piano provides systematic preparation for the performance of the masterworks for students who are serious in their practice and study habits. The books do not write down to the student and are quite sophisticated in their format. The progress in these books is fairly rapid, with only level 1 devoted to the elementary stage.

The course begins with a 12-hour primer entitled *Introduction to Music*. This book provides away-from-the-piano activities that develop rhythm, pitch (aka note reading), and technic to the point where music reading becomes a tool for learning rather than the object of study once pieces have begun. While many of the exercises are done at the piano, there are no performing pieces during this introductory phase. The best use of the Intro book is in a piano camp setting, where it can be completed in a short but concentrated period of time. I have used the book, however, in traditional lesson settings over a longer period of time with success.

The main part of the course is built around 16 master Lessons, with four master Lessons making up each of the four Levels. There are four components for each of the Levels that have to be used in rotation Lesson by Lesson: Workbook, Musicianship, Repertoire, and Ensemble. One uses Lesson 1 of the Workbook for about three weeks. For the next three weeks, the Musicianship Lesson serves as the source of instruction. The Repertoire pieces are then studied for the next three weeks, and finally the Ensemble pieces are studied for another three weeks. It is advisable to begin the next Workbook lesson while completing the Ensemble portion. Used in this manner, each set of activities in one book prepares the student for the activities in the next book of the rotation. Thus, a complete Artistry “Lesson” will take about twelve weeks to complete.

It is important to understand that the Artistry course cannot be used in a partial way. The books do not supplement each other. Rather, the instruction flows from book to book as each one is used in the rotation. The Workbook, rather than being merely a “theory supplement,” is the primary place where all new topics are first taught. If one were to try to omit that component, one would lose all of the instructional material of the course! If one were to try to omit the Repertoire component, there would be significant holes in the progression of the pieces. It is possible, of course, to use the Repertoire books to supplement another course as long as you realize that there are significant “jumps” as you start each Repertoire Lesson. The jumps would be filled in by the Ensemble, Workbook, and Musicianship work when the course is used as intended.

A key feature of Artistry is that every piece has recital merit in and of itself. The pieces invite the student to perform them with genuine artistry, and they reward the student's effort to do so. Each piece has stylistic merit as well, thereby exposing the student to the writing styles of the various composers. The musical quality of the pieces in this course is perhaps its most outstanding feature.

Beginning with Level 2, the teacher should select a Literature program to compliment the student's work. I use the Alfred Masterworks, the Frances Clark Library, or the Bastien Literature series with Artistry, although any of the better collections is appropriate.

My favorite use of Artistry is for transfer students who need to "start over." I can present Level 1 to such a student with the comment that they will be working in "college" type material. To date, not a single student has objected. Students who have had a lot more training can sometimes start in Level 2, but I would never start a student higher than that. It was not until I began to teach Artistry that I realized all of the intermediate skills that were being neglected in my teaching.

Artistry depends, to a great degree, on transposition for the multikey work. The pieces do not go beyond three sharps or flats in the key signature. I have habitually used either the Bastien "Reading" series (from "Music Through the Piano") or the Gillock "Accent" series ("Accent on Majors," "Accent on Majors and Minors," and "Accent on the Black Keys") to provide actual sight reading drill in the various keys. Since the Bastien "Music through the Piano" course leads directly into the Bastien Literature series, use of the "Reading" books and then the Literature series offers a complete set of supplements for the Artistry books from level one through the advanced level.

Noona—Mainstreams Piano Method

"Mainstreams" is the Noona's original piano course. It is an older method that has one major drawback: there are too many finger numbers in the pieces. If you use the course, you will need to white them out. Nevertheless, the course is so outstanding that it is worth this added effort.

There are four books at each level:

- *"The Pianist" is the method book. Its focus is on the reading and multikey skills.*
- *"The Performer" is a repertoire book. Its focus is on musicality.*
- *"Projects" is a three-in-one book that focuses on multikey skills, creative work, and technic.*
- *"Pencil and Paper" provides both written and keyboard theory work.*

"Mainstreams" blends the guidepost/interval reading approach with an intensive multikey approach to musicianship. It is designed for older students, aged 8 or older. I would consider 9 to be the minimum age for the course. It is actually ideal for teens and adults. The course is fairly accelerated, however, and some older students will find the course too rapid for them. If that is the case, consider the "Noona Digital Piano Method" for them instead.

Some teachers consider this course to be a middle C approach, since the middle C position is used at the start. However, middle C is simply the first guidepost presented. The approach to reading in a true middle C course requires the student to memorize the notes one at a time. In "Mainstreams," the student does not do this. He memorizes only the guidepost notes; he then reads the rest of the melody by intervals. If a phrase does not begin on a guidepost, he is taught to measure the interval to the nearest guidepost, and

then use that information to “spot place” the starting note. That is consistent with the guidepost/interval approach.

Phase 1 focuses on the guideposts and intervals. Accidentals occur in many of the pieces, and the keys of C, G, and F are presented at this level. Rhythms are limited to whole, half, dotted half, and quarter notes in simple time. Hand position shifts occur in many of the pieces. Syncopation begins in this level.

Phase 2 focuses on five finger position pieces in each of the major and minor keys. Tonic and dominant seventh chords are presented for each key. The pieces are much more interesting than most other five-finger-position pieces. Out-of-position pieces are featured in the “Performer” book; those pieces emphasize pure musicality. The rhythms now include eighth notes and dotted quarter notes. Quite a few of the pieces employ syncopated rhythms. The “Pianist” book includes specific assignments to play several pieces by ear. Other creative work is developed in the “Project” books.

Phase 3 expands the work to the full scale, and adds the sub dominant chord. Chord inversions are also developed. Position shifts occur almost continually at this level. The rhythms add triplets, both in simple and compound time, and dotted quarter notes. Classical masterworks appear for the first time at this level. Multikey work expands to all 15 major keys, with the pieces utilizing all eight notes of the scale.

Phase 4 focuses on minor keys, including all three forms of the minor scale. The four periods of musical style are taught, and there are lessons that develop ornamentation. The final lessons of this level develop skills with arpeggios. Rhythms emphasize sixteenth notes, including the various combinations.

The course used to offer a component entitled “The Classical Pianist” for phases 3 and 4. Those books are out of print. Instead, use the Noona’s “Easy Piano Classics” for those levels, which have essentially the same pieces as the older “Classical Pianist” books.

Since teens and adults often want to focus on popular music, this course is a perfect choice for them. The course emphasizes improvisation, arranging, harmonization of lead lines, and playing by ear, all skills important for the correct performance of popular music. There are classical selections as well, making this method a very well rounded curriculum.

Noona—New Horizons: Piano Course for Busy Adults

New Horizons takes the material of “Noona Basic Piano” Books 1 – 10 and condenses it into two 96-page volumes. To this basic material, “New Horizons” adds a rather thorough improvising thread. The premise of the course is that it minimizes the time demands on busy adults by focusing only on activities that promote rapid progress.

The entire course is complete in two levels. Level 1 covers the same ground as levels 1 and 2 of a standard course; level 2 covers the equivalent of levels 3 through 5. Some of the final pieces in level 2 include “Spinning Song,” Burgmuller’s “Ballade,” the AMB “Minuet in G,” “Für Elise,” and Chopin’s “Mazurka in F.”

The first unit of the course uses pre-reading notation with letter names to introduce the C major pattern, basic intervals on the keyboard, and triads. Notation begins in the second unit using the bass C, bass clef F, middle C, and treble G guideposts and the C major finger pattern. Reading examples include single note melodies, unison and parallel melody lines, and I and V7 chords in close position. Eighth notes, accidentals and key signatures are introduced in unit 3 followed by the G major pattern. Guideposts receive focus in

unit 4, after which the melodies move out of fixed five-finger patterns. Sixths and IV chords appear at this time. Unit 5 completes the guideposts with bass G and treble F. Dotted quarter notes come into play in this unit as well.

Unit 6 begins the arranging and improvising strand of the course, plus the key of F major. Unit 7 emphasizes intervals larger than a fifth. Several major arranging projects make up the rest of that unit. In unit 8 the student sees 6/8 time and learns to read the leger line notes. The key of D major is featured as well. In unit 9, the student studies the key of A major plus tetrachord scales divided between the hands. This leads into scales with traditional fingering. The final unit of volume 1 features the key of E major plus some recreational repertoire

Volume 2 begins with a review of volume 1, including the scales and chords learned so far. New material includes varying accompaniment patterns and playing from lead lines. Unit 2 begins the minor keys with a focus on A minor. Unit 3 develops the key of D minor plus chord inversions in all of the keys learned so far. Unit 4 teaches the student to create variations while he studies the key of Em. Triplets and the keys of Bb major and G minor make up the topics of unit 5.

Unit 6 starts intermediate work with sixteenth notes in various combinations. The key of Eb major is also introduced. Unit 7 continues the intermediate work with the keys of C minor and Ab major. There is also a discussion of syncopation. In unit 8, the student plays in F minor and learns augmented and diminished triads. Unit 9 features the chromatic scale, chromatic triads, and seventh chords. A beautiful contemporary improvising project enables the student to put this knowledge to use in a fun way. The final unit of volume 2 takes a four-piece tour through the periods of music history.

It is obvious that the course covers quite a bit of ground fairly rapidly. About half of adults will be just fine with this pacing and the other half will be overwhelmed. It is wise to use this course selectively with students who learn quickly and who use their practice time efficiently. This course lends itself to easy transfers out of the method, however, since the student will have covered more ground than what is required in other adult courses.

Olson—Music Pathways

MP provides similar material to Albergo's "Celebrate Piano," but in a format more suitable to older students. The books of MP are mostly in black and white, with a bit of red highlighting. Like CP, the course features a blend of landmark/interval reading and intensive multikey work.

Each pair of books constitutes a single level – Books A and B make up level 1, and Books C and D make up level 2. This is followed by the intermediate levels of 3a, 3b, 4a, 4b, 5a, and 5b.

Like Celebrate Piano, "Music Pathways" develops intervallic reading prior to presenting the names of the keys or notes. MP makes use of partial staves at first, which CP does not. After intervallic reading is underway, key names are introduced. Finally, landmarks are introduced, using the five C's. This course is different from almost all other courses in that ledger line C's form the first landmarks. This is followed by middle C and finally by the space C's on the staff. Book A develops intervals of seconds through fifths. This develops the full range of 37 notes by the end of the book.

Book B introduces pentascales around the entire circle of fifths, using the four basic key groups. Accidentals are used at this level rather than key signatures. Unlike many multikey courses, the pieces do not remain in fixed five-finger positions. The course includes pieces in non-pentascale positions as well as pieces in pentascale positions that move from octave to octave.

Key signatures are discovered in Book C, with all the notes of the key being utilized in the pieces. Compound time is developed in this book as well. Triads are introduced towards the end of Book C.

I and V7 chords come into play in Book D through pieces that are more interesting than the typical fare of “Lightly Row” with blocked chords. Sixteenth notes are another major topic in this book. The student completes this level ready for the original masterwork material of the intermediate books.

One of the strengths of MP lies in its intermediate levels, 3, 4, and 5. A Musicianship component presents the rhythm, harmony, style, and other elements needed to perform the Repertoire selections intelligently. The Technique books provide exercises and etudes that are specifically keyed to the pieces that use those skills. The Repertoire books provide six collections of gradually progressing, interesting music organized by historical period. Used together, the program offers a thorough program of quality instruction and skill development.

The Musicianship program is unique in that it is organized around several broad topics, including rhythm, style, harmony, and form, rather than being specifically coordinated piece by piece to the repertoire component. When a topic is studied, the material compares several of the repertoire pieces from that standpoint. Those same pieces may then recur in a different setting in a different topic. The student may or may not have learned each piece by the time it appears in one of the Musicianship settings.

The elementary levels of Music Pathways series were designed to provide the essential common work that all students need, leaving ample time for the teacher to select additional repertoire to match the interests and needs of the individual students. This differs from other courses, which typically provide all performing repertoire within the course itself. Therefore, additional performing repertoire is needed beyond what is provided in the Discovery and Solo books. Certainly all of the recommended sheet music pieces could be used. In addition, I recommend using “Near the Beginning” at level B, “Further Along” at level C, and “Audience Pleasers,” book 1 with levels B and C and book 2 with level D.

I personally supplement this course with the “Belwin Piano Method.” The latter provides more traditionally sounding pieces to round out the very modern sounds of the Olson compositions. The Belwin course blends nicely in that it, too, features black and white formatting, almost no finger numbers, and a skill progression that does not introduce topics before they are developed in MP.

Teachers who are used to using Robert Pace will find that MP includes all of the musicianship skills that Pace includes, but in a more relaxed fashion that gives the student time to master each skill. Most importantly, MP provides for a systematic method to learn reading on the staff using the five C’s as landmarks. I consider this to be an advantage over Pace’s practice of simply presenting the entire staff at once and leaving it to the teacher to drill the notes over an extended period of time.

Gillock—Piano All the Way

PATW is an all black and white multikey course, with a pacing and format that is ideal for teens and adults. The course features some of the best compositions of any of the methods. The books are valuable in that regard even if the course is not used as a core method. One of my most successful adult students went from being musically illiterate and essentially tone deaf to becoming an excellent intermediate pianist using this course.

Level 1A uses a “Frances Clark” approach, developing only the concepts of high and low, rhythm, and step and skip on the staff. The theory and technic books are overkill at that level. I do not personally use them.

Level 1B develops reading from landmarks of C’s and G’s, and position shifts occur in some of the pieces. Although the pieces start with middle C at first, the use of frequent shifts and alternative fingerings avoids any possibility of middle C fixation. “Theory All the Way” should be used beginning at this level. Optionally, “Technic All the Way” can be added as well, although I am not personally fond of the latter series. Ironically, neither series actually goes “all the way”! I sometimes use the “Magic Finger Technique” books from Bastien’s “Music through the Piano” instead of “Technic All the Way.”

Level 2 reviews middle C, and then develops I and V7 chords and pentascales in all major keys. The pieces do not remain in five-finger position, however. Accidentals are used throughout to help the student develop a key sense without having to remember key signatures. The supplemental materials, especially “Accent on Solos” 2, however, use some key signatures. The teacher will need to teach that concept apart from the method if those supplements are used.

Level 3 develops all major and minor key signatures through the use of exceptionally interesting pieces. “Accent on Majors” should be used along side this book. Since PATW includes only Gillock compositions, a literature series should be started at this level. The Alfred Masterworks series is one possibility.

Level 4 develops chord inversions, musical style, and compound meter, again applied to quality music. “Accent on Majors and Minors” should be used at this level. “Accent on Rhythm and Style” is another great supplemental book, helping the student gain an understanding of the four historical periods.

Upon completion of Level 4, “Accent on the Black Keys” and “Accent on Analytical Sonatinas” should be studied. The first book focuses on the major and minor keys that have black key tonics. The second book provides good preparation for the Clementi and Kuhlau sonatinas that most teachers use during the intermediate years.

David Carr Glover – Adult Piano Student

David Carr Glover wrote the “Adult Piano Student” method with the intention of combating what he perceived to be the most common problem of other adult courses: they progress too rapidly and do not offer the student enough practice at each stage. The result is a very usable piano course that takes a student from the primer level to level four in three books. The course progresses quite comfortably, and there are never stumbling blocks of music that is too difficult too soon.

The course is designed to be used with the “Chords and Keys” series, which makes the method fully multikey. Technic is featured in the method book. There are supporting theory and repertoire components as well. I consider the theory essential, but this is one series in which the repertoire books can safely be considered optional

A nice feature of this course is the use of original classical literature in the method books. The compositional style is a bit less structured than in other Glover methods, making for more interesting compositions. Level 3 of this course is going out of print, although there are quite a few copies still available at several music stores. Level 3 of the “Adult Piano Student” series covers the exact same ground as level 4 of the “David Carr Glover Piano Library,” however; a student completing level 2 of the Adult course can easily follow that with level 4 of the Library.

Cynthia Pace—Piano Plain and Simple

This course for adult piano students offers a highly teachable multikey course for beginners. The beginning fundamentals are spread out and fully developed, much in contrast to the fast-track approach used in the Robert Pace adult books. The usual emphasis on sight reading, multikey development, and creative improvising is still present. Quality selections encourage the adult student to master the presented repertoire. A mixture of folk and popular choices is included.

I often follow up this book with Alfred’s “Play Piano Now” Level 2, followed by the Alfred “All in One Adult Piano Course” Level 2. There is some duplication in that sequence, nothing of which presents any real problem. PPN picks up with traditional scale fingerings in the easier keys, which is a natural follow up to the tetrachord scales presented in PPAS.

An alternate follow-up might be the Noona “Adult Pianist” series level 2. In my opinion, level 1 of the Noona Adult series moves much too rapidly to be useful with total beginners. Levels 2 and 3, however, are very reasonable in their rates of progression. Using “Piano Plain and Simple” followed by Noona “Adult Pianist” makes use of the best of both programs.

Robert Pace—Music for Piano

The “Pace Keyboard Approach” provides an intensive multikey development of beginning piano. From the very beginning, students play in all major and minor keys, frequently transposing pieces to several other keys. Skill development in reading and improvising forms the basis of the course.

Teachers intending to teach this course are going to need to understand the Gestalt/spiral approach to learning. Each new concept is presented with a “big picture” view, without the expectation of mastery at the time of presentation. The teacher is expected to provide weekly reinforcement over an extended period of time to produce mastery. For example, page 8 presents all the notes of the staff, with the instructions to “learn each note.” It is up to the teacher to provide weekly drills through flash cards, games, and other activities. Page 11 presents accidentals, key signatures, and key signature rules in an all-at-once approach. Key signatures are reviewed in the theory lessons on a spiraling basis, however, resulting in their eventual mastery.

The explanations in this series are purposely not complete; explanations that are more thorough need to be presented by the teacher. In fact, the series is designed with the intent that comprehensive teaching will be done by the teacher BEFORE the material in the book is presented.

The pieces in “Music for Piano” are quite short and are primarily designed to develop reading skills. Performance material is purposely NOT included in the course itself until level 3. The teacher is instructed to include selections from the Pace Recital Series. Most Pace teachers use a wide variety of repertoire resources rather than relying solely on the Recital Series pieces. I personally supplement this course either

with Weybright's "Belwin Piano Method" or Denis Agay's "Joy of First Year Piano," both of which provide good collections of performance material in a format suitable for adults.

While some students will take well to the constant improvising and creative music requirements of this course, I am of the opinion that many of them would probably profit from using "Music Pathways" instead. With the right student, however, this course offers perhaps the most thorough skill development of any course on the market.

Conditional Recommendations:

Noona Comprehensive Piano Library

"Noona Comprehensive Piano Library" covers the same ground as the "Noona Digital Piano Method," except that a multiple-book approach is used in this series. I list it as conditional due to the juvenile format of the books. Some teens and adults will be comfortable with the books and will be able to ignore the pictures; others will find the pictures and format insulting. If the latter is true, the teacher should turn to a different choice: either the "Noona Digital Piano Method" or the "Mainstreams Piano Method" makes a great alternative.

"Lessons" is the method book, "Playing with Sound" is a theory and ear-training book, and "Complete Performer" is a combination technic and repertoire book. (Note that the "performer" book is NOT merely a repertoire supplement, but rather a very necessary technic component.) At levels 1+, 3, and 4, there is also a Comprehensive Skills book that presents scales, cadences, and arpeggios in all keys. The Skills books should also be considered part of the "core" (required) set.

One novelty to the program lies in the Performer books. Each new technical idea is developed and practiced through exercises and etudes, then applied to solos and recital pieces. Thus, the student sees the reasons for learning the technical skill.

If this course is used with teens and adults, the Starter Level serves as the point of entry. This is followed by Level One. There is also a Level One-Plus that comes between levels One and Two. It is NOT an optional level, but rather is an essential book in the progression. It is more like the 1B level of other courses.

The reading approach of NCPL blends positional reading with guideposts and intervals. The course is gradually and partially multikey, going as far as four sharps and three flats by the end of level 3. "Comprehensive Skills" includes scale, chord, and arpeggio work in all major and minor keys. I highly recommend using some form of a supplement that completes the circle of fifths with pieces in the missing keys. Piano Town level 4, by Keith Snell, does this appropriately.

This course, like its Basic twin, blends quality music with solid skill development. Additional repertoire can also be found in the "Time to Play" series, although the latter is only loosely tied to the course itself. The pieces in "Time to Play" are more challenging than anything in the core course books. Slower students may find the pieces to be more challenging than they can handle. Most students really enjoy learning the recital pieces in both the "Performer" and "Time to Play" books, as they have a high level of musical quality. Alternate choices for repertoire include "Four-Hand Duets" and "All That Jazz and Pizzazz." Walter Noona

directs the Virginia Beach Pops Orchestra, and his first hand involvement in jazz is reflected in this fun, contemporary series.

Glover Method for Piano

This course is recommended for those students who have trouble with spatial reasoning. The course blends a memorize-notes approach with intervallic reading and a partially multikey approach. The teacher can utilize Glover's "Chords and Keys" to complete the multikey cycle. I list this course as conditional for teens and adults, as there may be an issue with their response to the pictures and format of the books. I have used the course successfully with quite a few adults, and most of them had no objections to the pictures at all. However, I have also encountered students who shook their heads the moment I showed them the books. If that is the case, the Glover "Adult Piano Student" might make a suitable alternative.

The Glover Method features five books at each level: Lessons, Performance, Theory, Technic, and Sight Reading and Ear Training. I recommend using all five together, although the Sight Reading and Ear Training book could be considered optional. A supplemental course would not be at all necessary. Teens and Adults can begin directly in the Primer Level of the course, omitting the Pre-Reading Level.

The pieces in the Glover method are highly structured (on purpose) to develop pattern reading. The resulting music is a bit on the contrived side, with the pieces becoming highly predictable and somewhat boring to us teachers. The students seem to take to the pieces well enough, however, in that the students are almost always successful in learning them.

The books follow the standard grading of modern methods. The primer level presents reading in the middle C, C major, and G major positions. A couple of pieces also use the position where the left thumb is on C and the right thumb is on D. Sharps and flats as accidentals occur in some of the pieces.

Level one introduces key signatures for the keys of G and F. Eighth notes occur about half way through the book. Harmonic intervals provide the primary accompaniment structure at this level.

Level two features scales in tetrachord position followed by scales with traditional fingering in the keys of C, F, G, and D major. I IV and V7 chords are presented in these same keys. The book concludes with the keys of Am, Dm, Gm, and Em. I highly recommend the use of "Chords and Keys" level one with this level, which extends this work to all major keys.

Level three focuses on minor keys and scales. Compound time is introduced for the first time. I recommend continuing Chords and Keys with level two while studying MfP level three. Chord inversions form another important topic at this level. The structured pieces of the earlier level give way to more interesting music in levels three and four.

Level four covers sixteenth notes, augmented and diminished triads, and the keys of A major, Bb major, Eb major, and C minor. I sometimes use Bastien's "Major Scales and Pieces" to provide additional multikey work with this level.

I personally follow up level 4 of this method with level 4 of the "David Carr Glover Piano Library." I continue the latter series through level 6. Alternatively, this series could lead into level 5 of the "Alfred Basic" course.

Bastien—Music through the Piano

MTPP offers an alternative to the Pace approach with similar skill development and music that is more interesting, at least in my opinion. It is perhaps one of the better under-utilized courses on the market.

“Pre-Reading Experiences” offers a 14-unit course that systematically develops finger-number reading in the major keys through the use of the key groups. I and V7 chords are developed in all keys in the process, making the books useable only for students whose hands are strong enough to handle the three-note versions. Staff reading is presented without much of a system for learning the notes. Considerable flash card drill is necessary to assist the student in that regard.

“First Reading Experiences” provides a 3-week bridge into staff reading. This book transitions into “Reading” and “Writing” Book 1.

At levels 1-3, the “method” portion of the course is titled “Reading 1,” “Reading 2,” and “Reading 3.” Beginning in level 4, the Bastien “Literature” book provides the basis for study material.

The theory/musicianship component is titled “Writing 1,” “Writing 2,” etc. through level 6. The books are not limited to writing work alone, however. The lessons include sight reading drill, ear training, theory material, and a complete course in composition.

“Magic Finger Technique” covers levels 1-3. “Major Scales and Pieces” is appropriate for level 4, “Minor Scales and Pieces” for level 5, and “Czerny and Hanon” for level 6.

Reading 3 is to be followed by “Literature Vol. 1,” along with “Major Scales and Pieces” and “Writing 4.” “Literature Vol. 2” is level 5, and “Literature Vol. 3” is level 6. The Literature series now includes five volumes.

I typically use the “Bastien Favorites” series when I use MttP. I also like the “Playtime at the Piano” books, which go with levels 2 and 3 of the course. Since the pieces are somewhat pedagogical in nature in the course books, these two series provide repertoire that is musically richer, providing the opportunity to develop artistry in the young student.

Because the writing style of this series is highly chordal, it is important to supplement this course with material that develops contrapuntal playing. Selections from an “old school” course, such as Schaum’s Making Music Method, or selections from one of the classical methods, such as Beyer, Koehler, Gurlitt, or Bartok, should be included in the student’s assignments.

Bastien Older Beginner Piano Course

The “Older Beginner Piano Course” is an adult version of the “Bastien Piano Library.” Many of the same pieces are used in both courses. Level One of the Older Beginner course covers the primer level, level one, and level two of the Library. Level two of the Older Beginner course covers the same ground as levels three and four of the Library.

Like the two Bastien courses for children, this method begins with positional reading in C, G, and F major. Primary Chords are introduced right away and used for accompaniments in the pieces. Unlike the children’s courses, however, this method introduces position shifts quite early; this avoids the position mindset that often occurs with the children’s method.

There are only two required books at each level: the method book itself, and a companion “Musicianship for the Older Beginner” series, providing theory, technic, and sight reading. I would also encourage teachers to use the optional repertoire collection, “Favorite Melodies the World Over,” which provides performing repertoire classified by style. My only concern with the latter is that many of the pieces become quite a bit more advanced than the level of the corresponding method. Teachers may well need to delay the repertoire collection until later than recommended by the footnotes.

Level one of this course focuses on the keys of F, C, G, D, A, and E. Level two of the method completes the cycle with Db, Ab, Eb, B, B, and Gb.

One drawback to the Bastien books is the excessively chordal style of writing. Teachers will need to pay close attention to the balance of melody and accompaniment, to avoid the Bastien syndrome of banging out the chords in the left hand. Some supplemental work with contrapuntal styles should be included to prepare the students for intermediate literature.

This course leads into Bastien’s “Intermediate Piano Course” upon completion. The latter is a very thorough development of intermediate literature, theory, technic, and repertoire. It represents some of the Bastien’s best material.

Faber—Accelerated Piano Adventures

“Accelerated Piano Adventures” is a slightly faster version of the Faber “Piano Adventures” series. It features a nice blend of landmark/interval reading with a partially multikey approach. It is with good reason that this course has become the method of choice among many piano teachers. The quality of music is extremely high, and the sequence of topics is comfortable for all but the slowest of students.

I list it as conditionally recommended, the condition being that the course be used through level five to take advantage of the multikey work in levels four and five. I personally believe that the greatest mistake teachers make is to use a quality course like PA and switch to a literature-only program after level 3. Such a decision focuses on product (literature) rather than process (learning of new skills). In addition, the student should make use of the supplemental sheets that present the remainder of the cycle of fifths in scales and arpeggios. With such supplements, the course offers a thorough skill development in a quality fashion.

The other condition I would place on this course would be the use of some form of supplement for multikey development sooner than what is developed in the series. In my opinion, delaying key signatures to late level 2 is a serious mistake, resulting in students developing a habit of ignoring key signatures altogether. I have personally met numerous students trained with this method who have serious difficulties with handling pieces in keys of more than one or two sharps or flats. One possible supplement would be the David Carr Glover “Chords and Keys” series, which could be started with level 2. Users of C&K would encounter all 12 keys upon completion of the level 1 book. Those who used level 2 as well would have mastery of all the notes of the scale and would have mastered the I, IV, and V7 chords in all keys.

The course includes a Lesson Book, Theory Book, Performance Book, and a Technique and Artistry book for each of the two levels. The teacher can choose to omit either the Technique and Artistry component or the Performance component with a faster student. Students who need additional reinforcement can utilize all four books at each stage. Upon completion of level two of this course, the student is ready for level 3A of

“Piano Adventures.” Level 3B of PA is considered to be an optional level. A student who progressed rapidly through “Accelerated Piano Adventures” levels one and two may well be a candidate for skipping level 3B.

Alfred Adult Play Piano Now

“Play Piano Now” is one of the better adult courses currently available. It was written by a combination of the authors of the Alfred Basic and the Alfred Premier methods, and it shows the influence of both philosophies. PPN was created in response to the feedback from teachers on the “All-in-One Adult Course” that complained that not enough reinforcement material was given in the latter at each step of level one. As a result, students often had to spend several weeks on each piece before moving on. In PPN, the material of the All in One course is spread out over two levels. Additional sight reading, theory, and repertoire reinforcement has been added to each topic, making the overall progression much smoother for most students. In addition, this method begins with a pre-reading phase, where the All in One course starts out on day one with staff reading.

One other advantage of this method is that it presents a much clearer reference to the same landmarks used in the Alfred Premier method. Although position playing is used at first, the student is taught to reference the landmarks in finding the positions.

Upon completion of this two-level series, the student progresses to level TWO of the “Alfred Basic All in One Adult Course,” or the regular “Alfred Basic Adult Course.” For some reason, there is a slight overlap of material between the two; when starting one of the Adult level two books, the student can skip several units at the beginning of the book, since the material and pieces are duplications of those in PPN level two. The student will still need to complete about 80% of the rest of level two of the Adult Course, however.

I list the course as conditionally acceptable due to its delay in working with key signatures. The teacher should consider books like the Glover “Chords and Keys” or the Olson “Keys to Success” to remedy this situation.

Supplement Recommendations

Aaron—Michael Aaron Piano Course

One of the primary uses of a supplemental piano course is simply to obtain additional practice repertoire. The Michael Aaron Piano Course is ideal for this purpose, since the course contains numerous high quality, melodious teaching pieces that focus on musicality rather than just pedagogical reinforcement. The original course consisted solely of the current Lesson books; the other components of this curriculum were added a few years ago by other authors years after Michael Aaron was no longer on the scene. I recommend that only the Lesson book, or possibly the Lesson and Performance books, be used for a supplemental situation.

The Aaron course is organized by “grade” rather than by “level.” The older concept of a “grade” is that it represented TWO teaching years of study, in contrast with our current system of “level,” which tends to represent a one-year time frame (or even shorter in some curricula). Thus, Grade One would cover the same ground as levels one and two of a modern course. Grade Two would cover levels three and four, etc.

The Aaron course was written to compete with the John Thompson books. Many of the same standard classics appear in both courses at about the same level: Spinning Song, Burgmuller's Ballade, Beethoven's Minuet in G, etc. The Aaron course tends to include more teaching pieces by Aaron himself, where the Thompson books tended to focus on original masterworks. Since the masterworks are apt to be included in literature books, there is value to having a series with teaching pieces as well.

A major difference between Aaron and Thompson is that the Aaron books contain a comprehensive development of keyboard harmony. In Grade One, for example, the keys of C, G, F, D, and A are developed, with pieces containing primary chord harmonizations. That is totally missing in the Thompson books. The Aaron books also contain charts of scales and arpeggios appropriate for the grade level. The fingerings are accurate and easy to read, making the charts useful for practice purposes.

The best feature of the Aaron course is its pieces. Many of them were composed with the express purpose of "sounding difficult," even though the pieces are usually easier than they sound. About half of the pieces in any given book can be used for recital purposes. Few piano methods feature such a high percentage of truly performable compositions.

The Grade One book of this course can also be used as a "beginning" book for older students; the first nine pieces provide a crash tour of the middle C position. The progression then migrates to the C major position, and the pieces begin to resemble the first pieces in a typical "Thompsonish" grade one book.

With teens and adults, the Michael Aaron Piano Course could be used in its entirety as a student's basal curriculum. With the addition of the theory, technic, and performance components, the full course now provides adequate material for a student's complete foundation. Intervals, chords, cadences, scales, and other elements of theory are adequately developed in this course, in stark contrast to other traditional courses that neglected these elements. The only major drawback I have found to the series is that the discussion of ornamentation is outdated and stylistically incorrect. The editing of some of the baroque and classical pieces reflects this same error, where appoggiaturas are incorrectly shown as "grace notes." Those issues, however, should not stand in the way of being able to use the benefits of the series as a basic method for older students.

Weybright—Belwin Piano Method

The "Belwin Piano Method" provides the following benefits: black and white illustrations that are appropriate for all ages; very few finger numbers; directional reading from middle C; and the use of FACE in the treble clef and GECA in the bass clef as landmarks for reading. The BPM is not a complete piano method; there is little theoretical development in the course, which focuses solely on learning the mechanics of playing.

The writing style of the pieces is very traditional, making the course a very useful supplement to courses like Pace and Music Pathways that feature modernistic compositions. BPM serves as an almost perfect complement to MP in that regard.

The Belwin Piano Method has a couple of features that make it especially useful as a supplemental course. First, Book 1 of the course includes quite a bit of material that is helpful in learning note names. The first half of the book is in the middle C position, but different fingers are used on C rather than just the thumbs. The music was written to emphasize intervallic reading. The second half features two sections: one that

focuses on learning the treble staff notes, and one that focuses on learning the bass staff notes. Students graduate from Book 1 knowing the names of the lines and spaces.

Second, quite often, finger numbers are not given, but “finger boxes” are drawn next to the note for the student to fill in. The student has to examine the phrase and determine which finger will accommodate the entire range of notes included in the phrase. This develops an awareness of why certain fingers are used, and it lets students plan fingerings that suit the individual student’s hands.

Third, Book 4 develops the more difficult key signatures containing five, six, and seven sharps or flats. Students are taught to remember which notes are NOT sharped or flatted. The author believes that the best approach to key signatures is to teach the keys of C, G, D, F, and Bb first, and then to teach C#, Cb, F#, Gb, Db, and B next by having them remember the “not sharps” or the “not flats.” Ms. Weybright believes that the keys of A, E, Ab, and Eb are the most difficult, since they require the memorization of three sharps, flats, “not sharps,” or “not flats.”

Book 5 includes a nice introduction to the various periods of music history. The pieces in the book begin with pre-Baroque music and end with 20th century music. Although the course claims to reach grade 4 (using the older “Thompson” grading system), grade 3 is a more realistic estimate of the level reached. One could follow this method with grade 4 of the Aaron course above, for example.

I consider the Belwin Piano Method one of the underutilized courses of our time for supplemental purposes. It makes a nice balance to many of the modern theory-oriented methods in use today.

Wesley Schaum—Piano for Adults

Piano for Adults is the first course put out by Schaum Publications after the death of John W. Schaum. The course is the only one created entirely by John’s son, Wesley Schaum, and it reflects some differences in philosophy from his father, especially in regards to its approach to note reading. The course begins with middle C, but the instruction places a heavy emphasis on intervallic reading. The supporting Theory Workbook component is also intervallically oriented. Position shifts occur very early in the course, and several pieces quite near the beginning move away from a fixed middle C position for the entire piece. This is not a method that presents any risk whatsoever of a student becoming fixated upon middle C.

What does still represent the typical Schaum philosophy is the fact that this course consists almost entirely of arranged music. The author was careful to avoid any simplification of piano pieces. Instead, the compositions are arrangements of symphonies, concertos, operas, ballets, and other forms of orchestral works. There are also some folk songs and patriotic selections. There are very few “teaching pieces” that represent original Schaum compositions.

There are five levels to this course: Beginner and Levels One through Four. The progression is not much faster than a traditional children’s course, which makes this course accessible to almost any adult. Upon completion of level four, the student is referred to level five of the “Making Music Method.”

The arrangements feature a mixture of contrapuntal writing and broken chord accompaniments. There are specific lessons devoted to teaching the theory of chords and other topics common to most other modern methods. However, the series does not refer to chords by their I IV and V7 names. Instead, the key names are consistently used: C, F, and G7. Schaum feels that that approach makes the transfer to lead-line

reading easier. The books recommend that the teacher present the student with music that has chord symbols written in, and that the student learn to improvise his or her own accompaniment based on the chord symbols.

Music appreciation is a primary feature of the course. Each selection includes a mini biography of the composer. For students who are open to developing a knowledge of the classical composers, this book makes an excellent resource in that regard.

I do not recommend using this course as a primary method. Its total lack of original masterworks makes it a poor choice in that regard. Nevertheless, the method does make a great supplement to a quality core course by providing an introduction to masterworks the student otherwise might never encounter. It also provides practice in contrapuntal playing, a topic that is often minimized in many of the modern methods.

After completing level four of Piano for Adults, the student progresses to levels five through seven of the Making Music Method. The selections in these levels make nice recital choices that provide a refreshing change from many of the standard masterworks one usually hears. The pieces usually cannot be used for contest or festival purposes, however, since they are not in their original form.

One of the main advantages of this sequence lies in the fact that it includes eight levels: primer through level seven. This gives the student both a goal and a sense of progress. I have had more than one student tell me that they were planning to continue lessons until they finished the last piece in level seven of the Making Music Method. I often wonder if they would have continued that long if they did not have the course to set as a goal.

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