

# Recommended Materials and Reviews

By Kevin M. Coan

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## Fully Recommended

### Noona Basic Piano

*This is a twelve-volume course with an optional thirteenth starter level for 5-7 year olds. The course provides an all-in-one course in the fundamentals of piano. Reading is approached intervallically from given guideposts. The course includes complete multikey treatment spread out over the four levels of the course. If a teacher wants a single course that can be used with all piano students, this is the one to choose.*

*Note that the books of this course are used one at a time, with Books 1, 2, and 3 making up level 1, books 4, 5, and 6, level 2, etc. Each book lasts about three months.*

*The strength of this course lies in its blend of solid skill development with quality performance music. Because everything is organized in complete units, there are no books to coordinate. All that the teacher needs to do is to turn the page and teach. Theory and technic work is blended into each lesson and then applied in exciting solo and recital pieces. The Noonas have purposely written the compositions in this series for their musical value first and their pedagogical value second. There is an ample supply of good recital choices in this series.*

*In addition, this course is almost universally successful with almost all students. The pacing is gradual enough that most students are able master each topic in succession, and the music is exciting enough to motivate the students to want to continue. Add to that the fact that students complete entire books several times a year, and the environment is ripe for students to continue their lessons to the advanced level.*

*Although the books are used singly, it is important to consider the course to be the equivalent of three separate books when considering supplementing the course. It is easy to over-supplement this course, causing progress to get bogged down. Normally, four to six pages from the course book makes an appropriate assignment length.*

*The following summarizes the goals of each book:*

*Starter – Starting book for 5-7 year olds. The progression moves from finger number melodies to letter name melodies, and finally to reading from the guideposts of bass C, bass F, middle C, and treble G. Pieces in C major position are followed by ones in middle C position.*

*Book 1 (level 1A) – Starting book for ages 8 and up. Finger number melodies and letter name melodies are followed by pieces requiring reading in C major with 2nds, then C major with 2nds and 3rds. Use of*

*phrasing begins immediately, with drop-lift drills. This is followed by reading in G major with 4ths and 5ths, then reading in middle C position with eighth notes. The last unit introduces sharps, flats, and naturals. "Moochie Poochie Blues" is a favorite recital piece using flat notes extensively.*

*Book 2 (level 1B) – The book begins with review and drill on reading and accidentals. This is followed by an extensive development of spot-placing (measuring) from guideposts in non-position pieces. The remaining staff guideposts are introduced. Key signatures occur for the first time in keys of F and G major. Quite a number of pieces include two and three note phrases, as well as phrases of longer duration. Syncopated rhythms occur in a couple of the pieces.*

*Book 3 (level 1C) – Triads are presented (for the first time), and I and V7 progressions occur in many of the pieces. A presentation of sixths enables the student to experience three-note versions of these chords. Transposing is carefully taught. At this level, there is a systematic progression of studies and pieces to develop position shifts. The concepts of contrary and parallel motion are developed and featured in pieces.*

*Book 4 (level 2A) – This level includes extensive development of ledger line reading and ledger C guideposts, polymetric music and contemporary sounds. Numerous pieces focus on phrasing and articulation. This level is a consolidation level to develop reading skills, with outstanding recital selections in the process.*

*Book 5 (level 2B) – Topics include sevenths, half and whole steps, tetrachord scales, the IV chord, compound time, finger crossings, preparation for traditional scale fingerings, key of D major.*

*Book 6 (level 2C) – Order of sharps and sharp key signatures are presented. Traditional scales are developed in this level, with each unit focusing on a key with pieces to apply the scale and chord work to. Keys of C, F, G, D, and A are included. This book is extremely valuable for students using other methods for its extensive scale work.*

*Book 7 (level 3A) – Chord inversions receive special emphasis at this level. Other topics include the key of E major, syncopation, chromatic scales, and scales in parallel and contrary motion.*

*Book 8 (level 3B) – Minor keys of Am, Em, and Dm are introduced, along with flat key signatures, the key of Bb major, and triplets. This level includes various accompaniment patterns. Numerous classical pieces begin to appear at this level.*

*Book 9 (level 3C) – Sixteenth notes are featured in a number of pieces. The keys of Eb major, B minor, and G minor are featured. Counterpoint is formally presented. The G major "Prelude" by Bach is included. "Caramba!" is an exciting recital piece in Spanish style.*

*Book 10 (level 4A) – Keys of Ab major, C minor, and F minor are presented. Other topics include the various combinations of sixteenth notes, including dotted eighths, pentatonic and whole-tone scales, and style. The Burgmuller "Ballade" and Ellmenreich's "Spinning Song" are featured pieces along with some of Schumann's favorites. A very playable version of the Star Spangled Banner in Ab makes a good recital piece.*

*Book 11 (level 4B) – The four periods of musical style are thoroughly developed, including ornamentation. The keys of B and Db major each have a unit to themselves. Augmented and diminished triads are*

*featured. Sonatina form is studied and applied to the Clementi C major Sonatina. The Gm Minuet from the A.M Bach Notebook is another teaching favorite included in this level.*

*Book 12 (level 4C) – Keys of F# and Gb major are presented, including an incredibly exciting blues number in F# major with double sharps. Double flats occur in one Gb piece. Variations of seventh chords are studied, and arpeggios are practiced in all keys. More work with style and form complete the course. Fur Elise is the concluding reward piece. This book is out of print, although numerous copies still exist in stores. One can also obtain this material by using Level 4 of the Noona Digital Piano Method, described below.*

### **Noona Comprehensive Piano Library**

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*Noona Comprehensive Piano Library covers the same ground as Noona Basic Piano, except that a multiple-book approach is used in this series. “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.*

*NCPL has two points of entry. “Music Magic” is a two-level program that features off-staff reading in the Pre-Primer and on-staff reading in the Primer. It is appropriate for students in the 4-7 age range. It may take a younger student a full two years to complete the two levels. Students 8 and up use the Starter level, which often can be completed in about 6 months. Either program flows into Level One of the main course.*

*Like Noona Basic Piano, NCPL is a course that the majority of students can be successful with. For some students in the 8 and up age range, however, the Starter Level may move a bit too quickly. For these students, I often recommend that the Primer Level of the Faber Piano Adventures series be used instead of the Starter Level of NCPL. The student can then progress directly into Level One of NCPL.*

*Note that 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.

### **Noona—Mainstreams Piano Method**

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*“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.*

### **Albergo—Celebrate Piano**

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*If one could design the “perfect” piano course, this might be it. CP is designed for students in the 6-7 age range, but the course can be used successfully with students up to about age 9. CP is the one piano course that most thoroughly applies all known piano learning principles and research to a useable method. The course is also a perfect blend of landmark interval reading and intensive multikey work.*

*CP takes some getting used to in that it is not a page-by-page course. Each unit includes three sections, and teachers will need to select activities from each of the three sections for each weekly lesson. A Teacher’s Guide helps in doing this, but many teachers find that the recommended lesson plans jump around too much (as do I). Eventually teachers will find ways of creating balanced weekly assignments that flow a bit smoother than the recommended plans.*

*CP is complete with the Method book and the Solo book. Many teachers will want to use additional pieces from other sources for additional performing material. I have found the Hal Leonard Solo series to be suitable in that regard. The CP course is designed to lead into the Celebration Odyssey series (RCM). The Introductory level coordinates with CP level 3 and Odyssey level 1 coordinates with CP level 4.*

*The CD or MIDI component of CP is pretty much a necessary ingredient, especially in the earlier levels where the melodies are in the accompaniment rather than in the student part. Often the student parts sound “weird” unless used with the CD’s. The flash cards are a worthwhile investment as well.*

*CP is a challenging course that does not skimp on skill development. Students with weaknesses in spatial reasoning will not take well to the course, but average and above-average students will be able to handle the method in succession. In my opinion, CP raises the bar for piano course writing. Few courses provide the unique blend of quality skill development and interesting repertoire that CP does.*

*Level 1A begins with a careful development of rhythm and pulse along with concepts of high and low. Reading begins with the concept of intervals. In the first pieces, the student finds the starting key from a keyboard picture, and then reads the entire piece solely by interval. No reference is made to key names, which at that point, have not been developed. Later, key names are presented, with the student still reading pieces totally by interval from a given starting key name.*

*Level 1B introduces landmarks for the first time. Independent reading is finally possible once the landmarks are taught. Bass C, Middle C, and Treble C are the first landmarks. Later, Bass F and Treble G are included. Rests and accidentals make up the other major topics at this level.*

*Level 2A introduces leger C above the treble staff and below the bass staff. Eighth notes occur for the first time in this book. Pentascales form a core topic in this level, primarily through the use of accidentals. The last unit introduces sharp key signatures, and the rules for finding the key from the key signature are taught. A unique feature of the course is that the true nature of key signatures is presented right away; the first piece with a key signature is in the key of E major. Thus, the student gains firsthand experience in working with various key signatures.*

*Level 2B works with more keys, including the keys that start on black keys. Extensions to sevenths come into play at this level. Several of the pieces are classical masterworks.*

*Level 3 introduces I and V7 harmonies for the first time. Several lessons develop compound time. The Celebration series literature program can be introduced with this level, using the Introductory level of the latter program*

*Level 4 includes sixteenth notes in many of the pieces. Scales are taught at this level, focusing primarily on the keys that start on white keys. Level One of the Celebration series coordinates with this level of CP.*

### **George—Artistry at the Piano**

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*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.*

### **Olson—Music Pathways**

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*MP provides similar material to Celebrate Piano, but in a format more suitable to older students. The books 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. More recently, Carl Fischer has published the Lynn Freeman Olsen Signature Collection, which contains most of Olsen's best pieces. This new series would be ideal for repertoire resources as well.*

*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**

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PATW is an all black-and-white multikey course, perhaps best reserved for students 8 and older. 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.

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 alongside 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.

### **Glover Method for Piano**

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This course is recommended for those students who have trouble with spatial reasoning. It is also a great resource for students with other learning challenges. It is "success oriented" in the sense that the course seeks to enable even the weakest students to be successful.

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.

The Glover Method features five books at each level: "Lessons," "Performance," "Theory," "Technic," and "Sight Reading and Ear Training." I recommend using the first four books with all students. The teacher

can then decide whether the added “Sight Reading and Ear Training” component is desirable. A supplemental course would not be at all necessary when using this curriculum. I do recommend using the PreReading level prior to the Primer level, to provide the necessary pre-reading phase.

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 they are almost always successful in learning them. The advantage of the patterning is that the student experiences rapid mastery of each new piece, which is especially motivating for students who might experience difficulty with more challenging methods.

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.

### **David Carr Glover Piano Library**

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The “David Carr Glover Piano Library” provides similar material to the Glover “Method for Piano,” utilizing a memorize-notes approach to staff reading. Like the newer Method, the course progresses gradually without the snags of difficult music too soon. The ear-training component is not included in this older course, but good note spellers are. When used with the “Chords and Keys” books, the course is fully multikey.

A nice feature of this course, in contrast with the Method for Piano, is the use of original classical literature in the Repertoire component. The compositional style is a bit less structured than in the Method as well, making for more interesting compositions. The levels in this course are not directly comparable to the levels in the Method for Piano: more is covered in each level in this course than in the Method, to the

degree that Level 4 of this course could well follow Level 4 of Method for Piano. This course is complete in six levels.

### **Snell—Piano Town**

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*“Piano Town” offers a blend of landmark/interval reading and a gradual multikey progression. The course is similar to the approach used in the “Bastien Piano Basics” series, but the landmark approach provides the student with an effective means of learning the notes on the staff. It would be helpful if additional landmarks besides the clefs and middle C were introduced; the course relies somewhat on positional reading once outside of the range covered by the landmarks.*

*The music used in PT consists mainly of folk songs with “Piano Town” words, alongside classical originals and arrangements. There are also a number of teaching pieces composed by the authors. The pieces in the Lesson books are primarily pedagogically oriented. The real music in this course is in the Performance books, which should be considered an essential part of the core course, NOT a supplement.*

*Level four of PT is especially useful for filling in the key gap left by other courses such as Faber and Noona. It presents the keys of Eb, Ab, Db, Gb, and B major. Adding the lesson book at that level to the other courses covers an often-needed element.*

*Level 2 of Piano Town coordinates with the introductory level of the Snell Repertoire series. It would be a serious mistake, however to abandon Piano Town at that level and move over to the literature series alone. Such a move would fail to take advantage of the excellent multikey work featured in Piano Town. A better approach would be to use the literature as a supplement while continuing with Piano Town as the primary course. After PT level 4 is complete, follow that up with Repertoire level 3.*

### **Cynthia Pace—Piano Plain and Simple**

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*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**

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*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.*

*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:**

#### **Bastien—Music through the Piano**

*MTTP 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 Piano Library**

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*The BPL represents the first course to utilize a gradual multikey approach to key development. I would recommend only the modern primer and not the traditional one. Reading is developed in the keys of G and C major, followed by work in the middle C position. The student is expected to use flash cards to master the notes in each position. Some students do so successfully, but many students will benefit from the use of a book like Olson's "Right from the Start" to incorporate a landmark system.*

*Five books form the core of each level: Lessons, Solos, Technic, Theory, and Sight Reading. The Sight Reading books can definitely be considered optional. I enjoy adding the Piano Recital Solos to the core set, as the pieces in that series provide a higher level of musicality than the Solos in the core books. In general, any Bastien supplements that are chosen should be used upon completion of a level in the core books. For example, the student should complete the level one core books before attempting to use level one of "Piano Recital Solos," "Hymn Favorites," or "Christmas Favorites." The level one supplements can be used while the student continues into level two in the core books.*

*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 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.*

### **Bastien Piano Basics**

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*While I find the gaudy format of this course distasteful, the course itself offers a quality development of skills in a gradual multikey course. It offers an alternative to the "Bastien Piano Library," with the same strengths and shortcomings.*

*There are almost no classical pieces in this course, something I consider a drawback. The writing style is a bit less chordal than BPL, however, which makes the writing style a bit more interesting. Teachers tend to either love this course or hate it.*

### **Bastien Intermediate Piano Course**

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*To be used upon completion of the “Bastien Piano Library” or “Bastien Piano Basics,” this course offers some of the best intermediate piano development available. I highly recommend using the four basic books together for comprehensive skill development at the intermediate level.*

### **Faber—Piano Adventures**

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*“Piano Adventures” 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 level 2B 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 2A. 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.*

*A great idea for a comprehensive core curriculum is to use Piano Adventures Primer Level followed by Level 1 of the Noona Comprehensive Piano series. This takes advantage of the position shifts that the PA primer features, and resolves the dilemma of whether to use the two-year Primer or the six-month Starter level of Noona. The Piano Adventures Primer provides a nice “happy medium.” I prefer levels 1 – 4 of Noona Comprehensive to levels 1 – 5 of Piano Adventures, however. Levels 1 – 4 of Noona Comprehensive require five levels (there is a 1 and a 1+) compared to the Piano Adventures use of eight levels to cover exactly the same ground. (Both courses use the Burgmuller Ballade as their final selection.) Nevertheless, for slower students, the Piano Adventures method might work better.*

### **Alfred Premier Piano Course**

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*The Alfred Premier Piano Course is one of the newest publications of Alfred Publications. It is quite similar to the Piano Adventures series. It appears that students would be able to transfer between this series and*

*Piano Adventures with little difficulty. The strengths and weaknesses of the Piano Adventures course would also apply to this method.*

*There are two features of Alfred Premier that differentiate it from other programs, however. First, rhythms are taught in this series by means of patterns rather than by a focus on individual note values. There is a considerable body of research that supports such an approach. Teachers who are using this course (correctly, anyway) are reporting success with this feature as far as getting students to internalize rhythms well.*

*The other feature lies in the way reading is taught. Where most of the modern courses, including the older Alfred Basic course, use some form of positional teaching, Alfred Premier relies heavily on landmark and interval reading. The word “position” is never used in the series. Notes are NOT taught in a step-by-step progression outward from middle C either. In this course, the C, G, and F landmarks are taught first. Every other note is then taught by its distance from the landmarks. Thus, in the bass clef, G and E are taught early because they are each a 2nd from landmark F. When the course was first introduced, many teachers felt that the introduction of notes was “out of order.” Most teachers now understand the reason for the order in this course, and most understand the principle of teaching notes by their distance from landmarks (i.e., spot placing).*

*Like the music in Piano Adventures, the music in this course is interesting and rewarding for students. Many teachers purposely look for music by Dennis Alexander. Dennis is the primary composer for Alfred Premier.*

*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.*

### **Frances Clark—The Music Tree**

*“The Music Tree” method is perhaps the best example of a quality landmark/interval course on the market. My recommendation assumes that the student will begin in “Time to Begin,” which develops freedom of movement on the keyboard, rhythmic skills, and intervallic reading on the staff. Landmarks of bass clef F, treble clef G, and middle C enable the student to read most of the notes of the staff. Level 2A adds the top space G and bottom space F, which develops the rest of the staff.*

*The newest edition of MT extends to level 4, by which time the keys of C, G, D, A, E, F, Bb, and Eb are developed. Literature levels 3-6 follow level 4, during which time the remaining keys are explored in Keyboard Theory and in levels 3 and 4 of Musical Fingers.*

*Students using this course will receive a quality music education. I rate it as a conditional recommendation only due to the limitations of key development.*

### **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 Primer level of the Aaron course is devoted to reading the white keys in numerous positions: middle C, C major, G major, and some hybrid positions. No accidentals are taught. The Grade One book 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**

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*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 20<sup>th</sup> 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.*

### **Schaum—Making Music Method**

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*This course represents my most frequently used supplement. It has strengths where most of the modern methods are weak, and it is weak in the areas that most modern methods are strong.*

*One of the benefits of this course is the use of simplified arrangements of classical masterworks. I personally have no objections to the use of simplifications as long as the student’s overall curriculum provides sufficient exposure to original masterworks from another source, which my choices always would. Students completing this method receive a wonderful music appreciation course and exposure to*

*numerous pieces in simplified form that they will want to learn to play in the original form in the near future.*

*A second benefit of the course is its approach to note reading. Both individual note memorization and intervallic reading are taught. The course specifically teaches the student to recognize intervals that cross from one staff to the other, a skill that other courses neglect. The progression of skills in this course follow the typical middle C sequence.*

*The writing style of the pieces features a mixture of note against note, contrapuntal styles, and chordal type harmonies. This provides a nice balance to most modern methods that are typically quite chordal.*

*Key signatures are presented earlier in this method than is typical for many modern courses. The keys of C, G, and F major are taught in the primer level. Level one adds the keys of D and Bb major. In level two, the keys of Eb and A major appear. In level three, Ab and E major are featured. Minor keys are taught in level four. In level 6, the keys of Db, B, and Gb major are featured, completing the cycle of major keys.*

*Teachers should be aware that ornaments are not always correctly taught in this series. This is especially true when presenting the “inverted mordent.” While inverted mordents do exist in the Romantic and Modern periods, the Making Music series presents them in conjunction with a Scarlatti Sonata, where the symbol should represent a trill beginning on the upper auxiliary. The turn, on the other hand, is consistently presented correctly as a four-note ornament, rather than the quintuplet that many other old-style courses incorrectly teach.*

*A nice feature of the Making Music series is its choice of less than familiar repertoire in levels 5 through 7. The selections 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 course 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 this course. 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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