

Preface

Musical Fingers Book 4 is the last in a series of four books, designed to develop the physical skills essential to reaching the advanced level of piano technique. These books are called *musical fingers* because each exercise has musical as well as technical goals.

Piano technic involves developing skills in three important areas:

- the ability to create in imagination the desired sound;
- an awareness of how the hands and body *feel* to produce that sound;
- an awareness of how the hands and body *look* to produce that sound.

Physical Readiness to Play

To be ready to play, the body must be in an active and balanced condition, free to move quickly and gracefully to any position on the keyboard.

The following checkpoints help insure physical readiness:

1. Be sure the *bench is the correct height* so that the upper arms hang loosely from the shoulders and the forearms and wrists are level with the floor.
2. Be sure that the *bench is the correct distance from the keyboard*, so that the elbows are free and at a comfortable distance from the body.
3. *Sit on the front part of the bench*, with the back comfortably erect, the shoulders dropped and relaxed, the body leaning slightly toward the keyboard.
4. *Divide the weight between the “seat and feet”*—part of the weight on the bench, part in the left foot. This balance helps create a feeling of readiness and comfort and makes it possible to move with freedom over the entire keyboard.

Hand Position

While no two students' hands are exactly alike, hands that can play the piano efficiently and musically have many things in common. To prepare a good hand position, allow the hand to hang comfortably from the shoulder in a loose condition; then take that natural position to the keyboard. Look for these checkpoints:

1. the knuckles of the four fingers are visible and clearly defined
2. the thumb is loose and curves slightly toward the second finger
3. the arch is high and level, not sloping toward the fifth finger
4. the 5th finger is standing tall

Definitions

Keyboard Topography

Keyboard topography is a term we use in discussing the way the hands and fingers fit the keys in any configuration of white and black keys. Since the keyboard is fixed, the hand must learn to accommodate to it. When a position includes black keys, our basic premise is to prepare the black keys first, then allow the hand to settle comfortably onto the white keys. This avoids the excess motion and tension caused by “reaching” for the black keys, those last-minute jabs that result in *unmusical fingers*!

Special consideration should be given to preparing the black keys *first* in three musical situations:

- when first placing the hands on the keys;
- on moving to a different position;
- in scale and arpeggio crossings.

The goal of all keyboard topography is to create a hand that is supple, and that readily and easily adjusts to any configuration of white and black keys.

Impulses

An impulse is a group of notes played as a single musical gesture. It begins with a motion of the arm and is then carried out by the fingers during a smooth, unbroken motion of the arm. An impulse can be as short as two notes, as in a two-note slur, or it can include many notes, as in a long slur. An impulse must always begin with enough energy to “carry through” the entire gesture without interruption.

For a discussion of impulse practice, see the paragraph on Rhythm, Tempo and Metronome.

How to Use This Book

Abbreviations

Throughout this book, RH means right hand, LH means left hand and HT means hands together.

Memorizing

The exercises in this book are patterns that are easy to remember. We recommend memorizing them at once, so that the eyes can focus on the hands and full concentration can be given to how the hands look and feel to make the desired sound.

Repetition

Practice of real value begins only *after* a pattern has been mastered. Up to that point, the learning process involves discovering and/or working out the technical problem. Once the pattern is mastered, it should be practiced many times—by direct repetition, by playing in different octaves, by playing on each consecutive key within an octave, or by transposing to many different keys.

Transposing

Transposing serves not only as a means of repetition, but also gaining experience in different keyboard topographies. Where keys have been selected, they are chosen to provide a balance of topographical experiences. When keys are not specified, we recommend three possible plans for transposing:

1. transpose to keys having the *same* keyboard topography;
2. transpose to keys through the circle of 5ths (e.g., C-G-D-A, etc.) which means that the topography changes gradually from key to key;
3. transpose chromatically (e.g., C-C \sharp -D-E \flat , etc.) which means that the topography changes radically from key to key.

Rhythm, Tempo and Metronome

A strong rhythmic pulse and flow is essential to all technical practice. Before beginning to practice any pattern, set and feel the pulse so strongly that it maintains itself to the end of the exercise.

At first, most patterns should be played slowly and analytically, concentrating on the desired sound, look and feel. When a pattern is secure at a slow tempo, the tempo should be increased, either gradually or in impulses, but never faster than it can be played with complete rhythmic and tonal control.

In impulse practice, short segments are isolated and immediately taken up to tempo. Step by step these short segments are recombined until the entire pattern is reassembled up to tempo (e.g., p. 14).

Metronome marks are given for some of the patterns, but we do *not* recommend practicing with the metronome. Rather, the metronome marks are used to define what we mean by a slow or fast tempo and to set tempo goals for any given pattern.

Dynamics and Articulation

Signs for loud and soft are given only when an exercise calls for two contrasting dynamic levels simultaneously. Elsewhere it is essential to decide the dynamic levels appropriate for any given lesson and to vary them during the course of study.

Unless otherwise specified, all exercises are to be practiced legato. However, once a beautiful legato has been mastered, it is valuable to practice given exercises staccato, with varying degrees of non-legato, or in special combinations of legato and staccato.

Daily Practice

In developing any physical skill, practice must be regular, and piano practice is no exception. But regular practice does not mean mechanical practice. Every time an exercise is played, try to perform with greater facility, control and tonal beauty. Active, critical listening is the most essential ingredient for all technical practice.

We believe the piano student who masters these exercises, whether in high school or college, will be thoroughly prepared to approach the standard repertoire with confidence and ease, equipped with the technical skills that make artistic performance possible. This is the ultimate goal of *Musical Fingers*.

Frances Clark, Louise Goss and Sam Holland

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1 Five-Finger Positions

A. Major 5-Finger Positions Progressing Chromatically

Pattern 1 consists of a major 5-finger pattern, beginning on every note of the chromatic scale. Play it at a *slow* tempo (♩ = 60 – 72):

RH alone

LH alone (1 or 2 octaves lower)

HT (1 or 2 octaves apart)

1

To increase tempo, follow the practice suggestions in Patterns 1a and 1b.

Pattern 1a allows time on the fourth beat of each measure to prepare your hand for the next position. Play it at a *fast* tempo (goal: ♩ = 112):

RH alone

LH alone (1 or 2 octaves lower)

HT (1 or 2 octaves apart)

1a

3 Arpeggios

Introduction

Arpeggios involve facility and control in extended positions and arpeggio crossings require the thumb to travel greater distances than scale crossings. The basic skills for arpeggio playing were introduced in *Musical Fingers Book 3*, and you may want to refer to the photographs of the hand in arpeggio crossings on page 22 of that book.

The exercises in this book present steps for studying and practicing *any* arpeggio. Practice all of the patterns given below in every major and minor key. For a fingering chart, see the *Appendix*.

Musical Considerations for Arpeggio Playing:

1. Before beginning to play, set clear and specific goals for tempo, dynamics and articulation.
2. Throughout the arpeggio, listen for legato, for a full, even tone and for steady rhythm.

Physical Considerations for Arpeggio Playing:

1. In crossing *over*, be sure your thumb rolls loosely so that your fingers cross over it freely, on the surface of the keys, not in the air.
2. In sliding the thumb *under*, be sure your thumb slides loosely on the surface of the keys, travelling behind each finger as it plays.
3. Allow your wrist to travel freely in a lateral direction and avoid excess motion of the elbow.

Play the A Major arpeggio (Pattern 12) up and down 4 octaves in flowing sixteenth notes:

RH alone
LH alone
HT

12

8va -----

1 2 3 1

5 3 2 1 3

5