

INTRODUCTION

This *Teacher's Handbook* is designed to be used in conjunction with the student's book, *Musical Fingers, Book 1*. It should be studied along with the student book because the musical patterns, pictures, instructions and questions for the student are not duplicated here. Instead, this is an explanation for you, the teacher, of what we are trying to accomplish in the student book and how you can use it most effectively at the lesson.

Even though no book by itself can teach technic, a book can offer technical exercises conducive to developing good technical habits and laying the foundation for a fine physical approach to playing the piano.

Musical Fingers was designed to provide such exercises, but in addition it goes one important step further. Instead of being merely a well-organized collection of exercises, it also serves as a textbook for students on technic. There are instructions, explanations and questions addressed to the student. And there are graphics for the student to study—pictures of the whole body at the piano, pictures of the hand in a variety of positions on the keys, and keyboard illustrations in which dots represent where each fingertip should be. In addition, we have tried to help the student develop mental attitudes and physical conditions which encourage relaxation and freedom as much as care and precision.

Despite these aids, *Musical Fingers* is in no sense a tutor-text, to be used by the student alone. Its success is wholly dependent on you, the teacher. Throughout its pages you are the student's model and guide. The text and the illustrations serve as reminders during the days of practice between lessons.

The section called *To the Student* (pages 2-4) is a very important preface. We hope the student will read it before beginning the book, and refer to it frequently throughout its pages.

But the material in it is too important to be left to the student alone. All of it needs discussion with you, some parts more than others. The opening paragraphs on what technic is, and on developing skills in the three areas of *sound*, *look* and *feel* are of particular importance. They may not be clear to the student at first but, with your help, will become so as the book progresses.

POINTS TO CONSIDER THROUGHOUT THE BOOK

1. Position at the Piano

In our notes *To the Student* (pages 3-4), there is a picture of Greg with four check-points for what we call the feeling of physical “readiness to play.” Following it there are three pictures of Elaine’s right hand in a G major five-finger position (from above, from the thumb’s side, and from the 5th finger’s side) with check points on a good hand position from each viewpoint. In addition, there is a keyboard on which dots show where each fingertip should be to form a rounded shape, each finger centered on its key.

These pictures and check-points need to be discussed and studied with the student at the lesson, adapting everything, of course, to the body and hands of each individual. At the lesson, with you as a guide, the student doesn’t really need either the pictures or the check-points. But if you emphasize their importance at the lesson, they are much more apt to be used during practice at home. Most important, if you always check on physical readiness to play and on hand position before students play any pattern, such checking will become part of their habit in home practice.

2. Teaching the Patterns by Rote

Because the patterns are short and repetitive, they are easy to teach by rote, and this is the ideal way to present them. Students need to hear the pattern, to watch as you play it, and to see how your hand looks and feels to produce the sound before beginning to play it themselves.

Some students will need to play a pattern several times with your help before arriving at the desired sound, look and feel. In most cases, explanations are of real value only *after* the students have had the experience.

3. Practicing the Patterns from Memory

Practicing the patterns from memory frees the student to concentrate on the sound and on how the hands look and feel. As soon as a pattern is memorized, the student is ready to begin practicing it at home. At that point, the music serves merely as a reminder of the pattern itself.

4. Instructions and Questions

The instructions before the patterns and the questions after them are a guide to the student, a kind of substitute teacher between lessons. They should be discussed at the lesson, and the student should be encouraged to refer to them repeatedly as the patterns are practiced at home.

We don't presume that we have included enough instructions and questions, or even necessarily the right instructions and questions for all students. You will want to amplify them in your own way, adapting for each individual student.

5. Emphasis on Transposing

The emphasis on transposing throughout the book could be misleading. This is *not* a theory book! Its role is to create experience in different keyboard shapes, not to teach theory. In the chapter on 5-finger positions, for example, the keys in which the patterns are written and those to which they are to be transposed, were carefully chosen to give the student experience in how the hand looks and feels in the topography of the 12 keys presented in this book (six major and six minor).

We want students to become aware that their hands have the flexibility to accommodate comfortably to any combination of white and black keys, adjusting as needed for white keys or for the black keys that are higher, shorter and farther forward.

In this book, once students have made the necessary adjustment to a 5-finger position that includes a black key, they are asked to go back to preceding patterns and transpose them to the new key(s).

As the chapter proceeds, they will transpose:

- from a key to another that has the same look, feel and sound (for example, C Major to G Major, or D Major to A Major)
- from a key to another key that has the same look and feel but a different sound (for example, C Major to A Minor)
- from a key that has a different look and feel but the same sound (for example, D Major to E Major or F Major)

The keys to which each pattern is transposed represent a

balance of these experiences. Most of the patterns are transposed to several keys to combine experiences.

6. Ways to Lengthen the Patterns

Almost all of the patterns are longer than they appear. Though most are written in a few brief measures, there are a variety of ways in which they are to be lengthed:

- 1) many of the patterns have repeat signs. This means that to have practiced the pattern as intended, the student will have played it twice non-stop.
- 2) many are to be played in three different octaves, RH going up, LH going down.
- 3) some have a measure to be played 3 times before playing the final measure.
- 4) often we suggest only the beginning of a pattern, but ask that it be played on every key within an octave. In these cases, the sign ↗ or ↘ etc. means to continue the pattern to the top or bottom of the octave.

Once the pattern is learned, all these types of repetition should be played non-stop. This provides length, rhythmic momentum and helps build endurance.

7. Play the Patterns in Rhythm

As teachers we understand that all good technical practice must be done with a strong rhythmic pulse, but some of our students may not understand this. However, once they have been carried along on a strong rhythmic flow, once they have experienced the way in which their technical practice improves if it is done rhythmically, they will understand your insistence on setting a strong rhythmic pulse before beginning any pattern, and maintaining it through to the end.

Establishing such a pulse before beginning to practice is something that must be done at every lesson.

8. Dynamics and Tempo Indications

You may need to explain to the student why dynamic marks and tempo indications are not included in the music, but will be assigned each week by you.

This gives you the option of assigning exactly the tempo or dynamic level appropriate to each student, and of changing them from lesson to lesson depending on individual needs.

9. Freedom at the Piano

Freedom at the piano is a most important part of developing good technical habits, and is encouraged on every page of this book. *Musical Fingers* addresses the issue of physical freedom in two basic ways:

- 1) encouraging the student to be in a condition of physical “readiness to play” (see *To the Student*, page 3)
- 2) the patterns themselves, which provide motion up and down the keyboard

As early as patterns 4-5, the student is asked to play the patterns in 3 different octaves, hands separately, moving in one direction (we suggest RH move *up* 3 octaves, LH *down*).

This motion over the keyboard continues throughout the book and climaxes in the last chapter. Here the student plays two-octave leaps in both directions, crossing one hand over the other. This occurs first in single notes (patterns 53a-b) and finally in triads (patterns 64a-b and 65).

Such motion is an indispensable part of developing freedom. However, it is possible only if students are in a condition of “readiness to play”—readiness that includes the weight divided between the bench and the ball of the left foot, and distance from the keyboard that allows room for the arm to support the hand in any octave.

Throughout the book we have tried to develop not only physical freedom, but mental freedom as well. Mental freedom occurs in several ways:

- 1) when students know they are in a good physical condition, when they feel comfortable and balanced (both in the hand and in the whole body), they are much more likely to feel mentally free as well.
- 2) when students experience physical satisfaction with each successive pattern, and see themselves developing control and facility, they are much more likely to feel mentally free as well.
- 3) when students feel successful in their mastery of the patterns, they begin to develop real self-confidence—an eagerness to try what they have learned in a new key, or at a faster tempo, or with

more refined tonal control. This eagerness to move forward is the greatest evidence of mental freedom, and the greatest proof of technical success.

CONTENTS

A study of the table of contents (page 5) will show you the plan of the book:

Chapter 1 (patterns 1-22) is devoted to 5-finger positions

Chapter 2 (patterns 23-31b) presents extensions of a 6th and patterns in which the hand moves from 5-finger positions to extensions. In this book the hand never extends more than a 6th, and the extension occurs only between fingers 1-2

Chapter 3 (patterns 32a-34b) is devoted to contractions (chromatic crossings) as preparation for scale crossings

Chapter 4 (patterns 35-52b) consists of diatonic crossing exercises and scale patterns

Chapter 5 includes a series of special subjects:

moving freely over the keyboard (patterns 53a-b, 63, 64a-b and 65)

two simultaneous voices

melody and accompaniment between hands (patterns 54a-b)

melody and accompaniment in one hand (patterns 55a-b and 56a-b)

canon (pattern 57)

two legato voices in one hand

2nds moving to 4ths (patterns 58a-b)

3rds moving to 5ths (pattern 59)

legato 3rds (patterns 60a-b)

chord progressions (patterns 61a-b and 62a-b)

Now on to a discussion of the patterns themselves.

1 FIVE-FINGER POSITIONS

A. Building the Whole Position

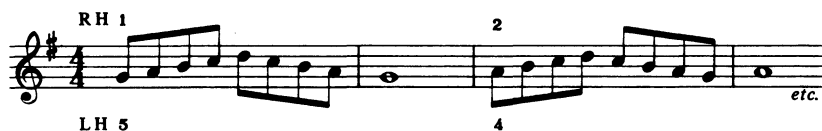
1. Beginning on Each Finger

Patterns 1-2, page 6

This chapter begins with building the whole position, starting on each finger in turn, and playing the pattern diatonically. This gives the student a feeling for the “whole” before we begin to work on specific fingers in later patterns.

It is in connection with these patterns that we first call the students’ attention to the picture of Greg’s position at the keyboard (page 3) and to the pictures of Elaine’s hands (page 4) and help them use these pictures as models for their own position and hands. Of course *you* are the primary model during a lesson, but the pictures can serve as important reminders when the student is practicing alone at home.

Before beginning patterns 1 and 2, some students may need a preparatory exercise, such as this:



Patterns 3a-3b, page 6

In playing patterns 1 and 2 hands together (HT), we use contrary rather than parallel motion because we want the students to think and feel the same *fingers* in each hand rather than the same *notes*.

You will notice that we assume a basic knowledge of transposing, and make use of transposing throughout the book. This is done for *technical*, not theoretical reasons. Here we want to highlight the fact that when students can play patterns, 1, 2, 3a-b in G Major, they can also play them in C Major and in D and A Minor. Because each of the positions uses white keys only, each has the same keyboard shape, so the hands look and feel the same. Only the *sound* is different.

2 FIVE-FINGER POSITIONS EXTENDED TO SIXTHS

In this book, the hand never extends more than a sixth, and the skipped key is always between fingers 1 and 2.

Call the student's attention to the picture, noting especially that fingers 2-3-4-5 are lying on consecutive white keys, that the thumb is curved slightly toward the second finger, and that even though the hand is extended over six keys the arch is still high and the 5th finger stands tall.

A. Blocked Sixths

Pattern 23, page 16

Before assigning this pattern, help the student find the hand shape and balance in which both notes of the 6th sound and release exactly together.

The asterisk reminds the student on which beat the hand should be in position, ready to play the next 6th.

B. Blocked and Broken Sixths

Patterns 24-25, page 16

The two-note slurs in these patterns provide follow-through for the patterns on page 9. Again, encourage the student to listen for two qualities of tone in each slur: a rich, full tone on the first note and a softer, lighter tone on the second. The student should also listen carefully to be sure the two notes of each blocked 6th sound and release exactly together.

Again, the asterisk shows on which beat the hand should be in position, ready to play the next 6th.

C. Sixths: Broken and Filled In

Patterns 26-27, page 17

These patterns consist of 6ths in two-note slurs, going both directions, followed immediately by a figure in which the 6th is filled in with eighth notes. It is here that we begin to work seriously on the lateral motion of the hand, following and supporting each finger as it plays.