

Mexico 07

Play these eight bars several times in strict time and commit them to memory.

This brings us to the fifth phrase in bar **B1** (Example Mexico 08). It begins with the third phrase (Example Mexico 06) that is transposed up a fourth, E - F - G, and harmonized in sixths. The crescendo is more forceful, leading to *mf*, and the G is held into the 3rd beat of bar **B2**. Play this phrase a few times.



Mexico 08

At this point (Example Mexico 09), a new rhythmic idea occurs. The G is tied into a quarter note triplet figure that completes bar **B2**, descending through F and E (harmonized in sixths). Play this figure a few times.



Mexico 09

In bar **B3** (Example Mexico 10), the *appoggiatura* figure from bar **A7** (Example Mexico 07, bar 2) is rhythmically embellished and transposed up a step: a dissonant dotted quarter, E (harmonized with G against $\mathbf{B}_{b\Delta}$), followed by two neighboring sixteenths, F – E, resolves into D on the 3rd beat (harmonized with F) and is held for four beats until the middle of bar **B4**. Play this several times with a loose hand and wrist.



Mexico 10

In **B4-6** (Example Mexico 11), a repetition of the previous two phrases occurs, transposed down a fourth. The (modified) descending quartet note triplet figure, (D omitted) – C – Bb, and the embellished *appoggiatura*, Bb – (C – Bb) – A, are again harmonized in sixths. Play this phrase a few times.



Kjellaug 09

To assure legato fingering of the notes that follow in bar **5**, B-A[#], use your 5th and 4th fingers. Your thumb may play the bottom notes by sliding D[#]-E. Use convenient fingers for the middle notes, perhaps the 3rd and 2nd fingers, respectively.

Your left hand simply plays a pedal tone on G# (Example Kjellaug 10), the new key center.



Kjellaug 10

Once again, master each hand's part as before. Then, join your hands, and refine the phrase to form a seamless whole.

The next phrase in the right hand (Example Kjellaug 11) is a near retrograde of the previous one. The harmony is G#-. Apply motivic dynamics and articulations as before. Legato fingerings of E-A# (harmonized with F*) may be done using the thumb-4th finger (with the 2nd finger on F*) and A#-B in bar 6 using the 3rd-4th finger. The bottom notes (F*-G#) can be played with thumb-2nd finger.



Kjellaug 11

The left hand part (Example Kjellaug 12) sets down another G[#] pedal tone on the downbeat with your 5th finger, as it completes the appoggiatura chords with descending voice leading of the minor second, E-D[#] (thumb-2nd finger), in a contrary direction to the melody.



Kjellaug 12

Once again, master each hand's part as before. Then, join your hands, and refine the phrase to form a seamless whole.

When you can play the fifth and sixth phrases individually with hands combined, from memory, with all expressive details and in tempo, join the phrases to form another two-bar phrase.

In the last two bars, a return to the key of B Major concludes the exposition of the theme.

In the first phrase of these two bars (Example Kjellaug 13), the harmony is a tritone substitution, $C\Delta^7/F_{\#}^{\sharp}$. It is articulated through the motivic repetition, B-A-A-G, fingered with thumb-5th-5th-4th (the last three notes harmonized in thirds, F#-F#-E, using 3rd-3rd-2nd). The B is repeated and held on the downbeat with your thumb.

KJELLAUG

When I first visited Norway, with its majestic snow-capped mountains plunging into the sea, I met a girl and fell in love. This song is for her.









Armen Donelian, A Reverie (Sunnyside Records SSC-1019), Solo Piano

Exercise 17 – Chord Drop

Practice the following **Chord Drop** to develop your ability to accurately read, see, feel, play and hear chords in time. It uses a simple series of diatonic and transposed seventh chords, but you may use any kind or combination of chords, in one or two hands.

The focus is primarily on *how* you play the chords, as well as on which chords you play. Reading, rhythm and tone production are also exercised here. Do this in strict time, with a metronome if necessary.

Once your eye learns to quickly spot chords on the keyboard and your hand learns to grab them by feel, your chord fluency will develop.

Beat	Action in Time	Skill Improved
Beats 1–4	 <i>Read</i> the chord from the page <i>See</i> the chord on the keyboard with your eye <i>Feel</i> the chord on the keyboard with your hand and fingers, but don't play it yet 	 Sight reading, Comprehension Visual siting Sensory positioning
Beats 5–7	 <i>Arpeggiate</i> the chord by playing it up and down in duplets, or triplets <i>Listen</i> to its sound 	 Hand placement, Rhythmic melodicization of harmonic content Aural verification
Beat 8	• <i>Lift</i> your hand off the keyboard, <i>drop</i> it precisely onto the chord from above	• Hand memory, Tone production through gravity, Rhythmic execution
etc.	• <i>Move on</i> to the next chord	• Building chord vocabulary and speed











Chord Drop

Some Suggestions For Building Chord Vocabulary

• Chord Drop with Major Diatonic first inversion chords. For example:



Chord Drop with Major Diatonic First Inversion Chords

Continue ascending in this pattern for the remaining first inversion chords of C Major.

Then, practice the second and third inversion chords of C Major in the same way.

Continue with all one-handed 4-note root position and inverted chords (arpeggiated in both hands in triplet groups) derived from the C Minor Scales (Natural, Harmonic and Melodic), the Diatonic and Melodic Minor Modes all starting on C, the C Altered, C Diminished and C Whole Tone Scales.

Now, combine the two voices and play the entire phrase (Example Devotion 07).



Devotion 07³

Now combine these two phrases, play and memorize them (Example Devotion 08).



Devotion 08

Then, combine the first four bars, play and memorize them (Example Devotion 09).



Devotion 09

The remaining four bars of the left hand part may be learned in three phrases. The first of these phrases passes from the middle of bar $\mathbf{5}$ through the 3^{rd} beat of bar $\mathbf{6}$ (see lead sheet).

The leaping fifths in quarter notes in the tenor voice suggest a motivic connection with the eighth note leaps in the right hand melody above. Notice how some of the tenor notes are played by your right hand, as indicated by the dotted bracket facing up (- - - -), or by your left, as indicated with a downward bracket (- - - -).

In Example Devotion 10, only the notes to be played by your left hand are shown. Ascending chromatic movement is clearly outlined in the bass notes Eb-E-F that are all played with your 5th finger. The tenor notes Eb-C-C fill out the chords. Using the correct fingering, play and memorize this phrase.



Devotion 10

The second phrase (Example Devotion 11) begins on the 4th beat of bar **6** and passes to the 3rd beat of bar **7**. It supports a brief transposition of the melodic motive to the key of Db. The bass notes Eb-Db are played by your 4th and 5th fingers (the last of which is held). A legato countermelody in the tenor Gb-F-Cb-Bb is played with the 2nd-3rd-thumb-2nd finger sequence.

Tip: Lift these fingers before striking to project this beautiful tenor line.

3 See **Fingering**, for an alternate fingering of this passage.





Devotion 33

You're really sounding good!

Now, let's study the third phrase. Begin by reviewing Examples Devotion 10 and 26. Then, look at Example Devotion 34. Practice and memorize this phrase, as before. Stop, analyze and loop any challenging passages. Be thorough and methodical. Notice how sharing the tenor part between your hands makes it easy to play.



Devotion 34

We're almost done.

Now, let's put the last phrase together. Since it resembles the first phrase, it seems like it should be pretty easy, right? Not unless you have really mastered the left hand part! Unlike its counterpart in the first phrase, this part is complex and multifaceted.

Review the left hand (Examples Devotion 11-16) and the right hand (Example Devotion 29). Then, look at Example Devotion 35. Be thorough and methodical. Stop, analyze and loop any challenging passages. Practice and memorize this phrase, as before.



Devotion 35

Now, let's combine the last two phrases (Example Devotion 36). Fine-tune any challenging passages. Practice and memorize.





Devotion 36

That's great!

Now play Devotion from start to finish, in time, without stumbling, from memory, with a beautiful legato and projecting a singing tone with a full range of expression. Go ahead, you can do it!

Exercise 22 – Wrist Roll

In this exercise (Example Wrist Roll), you will immediately *feel* any tension in your wrist upon striking a note, and *release* it through a gentle *rolling* motion.





Wrist Roll

- 1. Place your right hand on the keys C-D-E-F-G, with your wrist in the default position (Photo 22.1a and 22.1b).
- 2. Play the C Major scale with the usual fingering (1-2-3-1-2-3-4-5), one octave ascending, extremely slowly yet in tempo (= 40), one note at a time in a legato style, by bending each finger from the knuckle and raising the fingertip a minimum of *one inch* (two centimeters) above the key before striking ("Strike"). Picture the feet of Clydesdale horses lifting with each step.
- 3. Hold down each note for four counts, making small, gentle *clockwise* circles with your wrist ("Roll") on beats 2, 3, and 4 in time to the count, one per beat. This movement lubricates the wrist joint by producing synovial fluid and relieves tension in your wrist, hand and fingers. Be totally loose in this area.
- 4. After each note, return your wrist to the default position, release the note and strike the next note, in time, and repeat the clockwise rolling circles.
- 5. Repeat the scale descending, rolling the wrist *counterclockwise*.
- 6. Repeat with your left hand, ascending and descending, in a similar manner.
- 7. Apply this method to other scales, modes and arpeggios in other keys and to melodic passages that you're studying, when you discover wrist tension.
- 8. Adapt this method to tension in other parts of your body (shoulders, neck, etc.) anytime you're playing or not.

Exercise 24 – Thumb Crossing Study

To promote thumb crossing, practice this Thumb Crossing Study slowly using the Pencil Balance. Create similar studies of your own.



Thumb Crossing Study

Once you can cross your thumb under and over smoothly, play **Exercise 23** again, increasing the speed slightly. Maintain balance and ease as you increase speed.

2

3

1 4

4

LEADING OUTWARD WITH THE WRIST

4

4

As mentioned earlier, your thumb is an asymmetrical attachment to your hand, a symmetrical object with four fingers. This arrangement has several features worth noting:

- The thumb is your strongest finger
- The 2nd and 3rd fingers are in the center of your hand, and are longer and stronger than the others
- \bullet The 4^{th} and 5^{th} fingers are opposite your thumb, and are shorter and weaker than the others
- Most of your playing is done with your thumb, 2nd and 3rd fingers. The shorter, weaker 4th and 5th fingers are used less often.

To use the weaker fingers efficiently, it helps to keep your hand, wrist and elbow angled outward slightly away from your torso (see Photos 22.3a and b).

Tip: Imagine a rubber band attached to the outside of each wrist, gently pulling your right wrist towards the higher keys and your left wrist towards the lower ones.

- After playing it for several minutes, or over several days or even weeks, consciously adjust the fingering in any way that enables you to play it most easily
- Learn and memorize it with the practice methods studied earlier.

After assigning fingering in one key, transpose the solo to paper in several different keys. Then,

- Reassign the fingering in the new key(s)
- Relearn and rememorize the solo in the new key(s).

Each key's new hand position provides an opportunity for assigning new fingering. In addition, sightreading skills are exercised across the keys while aural skills are strengthened through repetition. *Assigning new fingering* to *your own composed musical phrases*, or *transcriptions of your own solos*, is also an excellent study method. Truly own this process for yourself. In this way, you may create technical challenges for yourself that are prompted by musical choices that hold your interest.

SMOKE

My song **Smoke** is a contrafact melody over the harmonic progression of **When Smoke Gets In Your Eyes** (by Jerome Kern and Otto Harbach). I composed it during my 2002 Fulbright Residency in Armenia where I was shocked to discover that smoking was accepted in conservatory classrooms. **Smoke** uses chord alterations and melodic intervals that highlight augmented triads. I was looking for an irritating quality, and I found the unsettled augmented sound apt for this thematic purpose. It is followed by a transcription of my piano solo. Fingering is provided throughout. (See **Appendix** for transpositions of the melody and transcribed solo of **Smoke** to the remaining 11 keys with fingerings.)



SMOKE

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Piano Solo by Armen Donelian, with fingerings.





















Armen Donelian, *Leapfrog* (Sunnyside Records SSC-4010) with Marc Mommaas, Mike Moreno, Dean Johnson and Tyshawn Sorey

"Eyeglasses" Scale Practice Format

You may use the *Eyeglasses*² scale practice format as a template for scale practice (see Eyeglasses Scale Practice Format in C Δ). It provides a thorough workout in both *parallel* and *contrary* motion.







Eyeglasses Scale Practice Format in C Δ

This format may be practiced in octaves, thirds and sixths:

- First, as shown, with your hands two octaves apart
- Then, in *thirds*, with your right hand on the 3^{rd} of the scale (or E, in C Δ), and played with the 3^{rd} finger as normal
- Finally, in *sixths*, with your left hand on the 3rd of the scale played with the 3rd finger as normal.

2 For easy recall, picture the reduced image of this format resembling a pair of old-style eyeglasses:





This example consists of three smaller phrases (indicated with slurs). Each has intricate rhythmic, melodic and harmonic content associated with the others and forming a larger musical statement. Note any additional features that come to light during this examination process. Then, *sing* and *play* the example *several times*.

Tip: By examining musical content, you may develop a clearer understanding of phrase structure that fundamentally contributes to your execution of expressive content.

This brings up the second question.

QUESTION 2: WHAT IS PHRASING?

Phrasing is the grouping together of sounds into phrases, either through *rhythm* or *pitch*, or both.⁴ Phrasing also refers to the performance of phrases (*interpretation*). How notes are grouped, and how these groupings affect expression, are what phrasing is all about.

Since you've briefly familiarized yourself with the Example of a Composite Phrase through singing and playing, let's examine its phrase structure more closely and grasp its effect on interpretation and expression.

EXAMINING RHYTHMIC DETAILS OF PHRASING FOR EXPRESSION

We'll start by removing the example's pitches in order to clearly expose and examine its rhythmic content. Scat it a few times, slowly.



An Example of a Composite Phrase (Rhythmic Content)

Phrasing can also refer to the chord progressions (*harmonic phrasing*) and rhythmic divisions (*metrical phrasing*) within a piece of music. These are important, indeed, monumental topics more closely related to musical composition rather than expression, and so they are not discussed here.

MORNING FLOWER (EXCERPT)

Let's examine the melody of another example from my piece, **Morning Flower** (**Chapter 4**), for its phrasing and expression.

Play this melody a few times, slowly and evenly.



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Morning Flower Excerpt (no expression)

The rhythmic content of the excerpt is fairly regular, being comprised mainly of whole notes and quarter-note triplets. Therefore, we need to look further, into the pitch content, for additional clues concerning the excerpt's possible interpretation.

The inflective contour of this melody provides a clear guide to dynamics. However, two notes related to harmonic function conflict with the dynamics suggested by the melodic contour:

- The Et in bar 2 that suggests E⁰⁷
- The D_{a} in bar 4 that anticipates the arrival of $B_{b}7$.

In both cases, strong harmonic content is introduced at low points in the line's contour. For this reason, these places deserve expressive highlighting.

Therefore, in the next example, E_{a} and D_{b} may be emphasized with an expressive articulation (marked tenuto, or —) as well as the inflection-related dynamics.

Also, all notes are connected throughout by means of legato except for two rests on the downbeats of bars 2 and 4.



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Morning Flower Excerpt (add expression)

Furthermore, in addition to their strong harmonic content, the Eh and Dh introduce three-note *ascending* scale motives (E-F-G and D-Eb-F), which mirror or are mirrored by *descending* motives (Db-C-Bb and Cb-Bb-Ab) immediately preceding or following. Taken together, these motives outline E^{07} (E-F-G-Db-C-Bb) and Bb7 (Cb-Bb -Ab-D-Eb-F), respectively.



Sequence of Group One Articulations with Diatonic Root Position Four-Note 7th Chords in 12 Keys

Practice it first in your right hand, then in your left hand, then with both hands together. Continue cycling through the sequence of Group One Articulations (a, b, c) in the remaining keys.

Compose your own examples, in combination with any chord voicings and qualitative expressions (dynamics, tempos, scale types or key cycles).

- Sequence of Group One Articulations with Diatonic Four-Note I^6 (C⁶) Chord Inversions using
 - (a) Staccato (•) on the first chord
 - (b) Tenuto (—) on the second chord
 - (a) Staccato (•) on the third chord, etc.

Continue cycling in 12 keys in this binary pattern (a–b).



Sequence of Group One Articulations with Diatonic Four-Note I⁶ Chord Inversions

- Sequence of Group One Articulations with Diatonic Four-Note ii–⁶ (**D**–⁶) Chord Inversions using
 - (b) Tenuto (—) on the first chord
 - (c) An accent (>) on the second chord
 - (b) Tenuto () on the third chord, etc.

Continue cycling in 12 keys in this pattern (b–c).



Sequence of Group One Articulations with Diatonic Four-Note ii-⁶ Chord Inversions

- Sequence of Group One Articulations with Diatonic Four-Note iii–b6 (E–b6) Chord Inversions using
 - (c) An accent (>) on the first chord
 - (a) Staccato (•) on the second chord

(c) An accent (>) on the third chord, etc. Continue cycling in 12 keys in this pattern (c-a).

Sequence of Group One Articulations with Diatonic Four-Note iii $-\frac{1}{6}$ Chord Inversions



Play these Group Two Chord Articulations with your left hand, too, by working out your own fingering. Compose and practice your own examples using these as models. Use two- and three-note chords as well.

Arpeggio

Arpeggio (broken chord) is a precisely timed roll whose notes are metrically aligned and rhythmically notated. As with rolls, you may play arpeggios dry or held with either the fingers or the damper pedal.



Arpeggio (dry)



Arpeggio (held)



Arpeggio (pedaled)

TREMOLO

Tremolo is a rapid alternation between or among two or more notes. Tremolo is indicated with either slash marks between two notes of the same rhythmic value (for dyads), or above or below a chord of three or more notes.



Tremolo

CHAPTER 4

STRENGTHENING EXERCISES

 \bullet Exercises for the $4^{\rm th}$ and $5^{\rm th}$ Fingers. Practice in 12 keys.







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• Closed Positions – Broken Thirds. Practice in 12 keys.









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