

Around The World At The Piano

Becoming Multicultural In Today's Piano Studio



By Deborah Brener

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The buzz word in education today is *multiculturalism*. Public schools throughout North America are increasingly involving students in the study of other societies and cultures. In practically every discipline multiculturalism has made an appearance; and now there is even a growing movement to teach math in a multiethnic fashion, by taking into consideration the way other cultures approach math.

What Has Changed

According to the U.S. Census Bureau's 1997 Population Profile of the United States, by the year 2050, the non-Hispanic White population is expected to drop from 72 percent of the nation's population to less than 53 percent. The balance of the nation's population will be 15 percent African American, more than 24 percent Hispanic descent and nearly 9 percent Asian and Pacific Islander. Given the fact that public schools in cities throughout North America have numerous ethnic groups represented in their student bodies, it is important for children to recognize that many of their peers have cultural differences and that each one of



us has a unique background and heritage. To study music of other cultures is just an extension of our general music studies and should be approached in this fashion as opposed to being something “out of the norm.”

Teaching ethnic music in the piano lesson is only the natural extension of what has been the standard in music education. Orff and Kodály programs have become a mainstay in many regions, introducing music fundamentals by means of folk songs to elementary school students.

The real issue for the pianist is the lack of original world music written for piano, as well as the notion that western European music is more suitable for the instrument. While that may be true at large, there is a growing repertoire of well-arranged folk music and original compositions that are well written for piano students of all levels.

What Does Multicultural Mean?

According to views expressed on the website www.edchange.org,

- Multicultural education calls for a critical examination of all aspects of schooling.
- All subjects must be told from diverse perspectives—this is related to accuracy and completeness.
- “Inclusive curriculum” also means including the voices of the students in the classroom.
- Concepts such as “the canon” and “classic literature” must be reconceptualized, again with the idea of accuracy and completeness, to debunk the perception that the only great literature came from the United States and England.
- Curricula should reflect the diversity of learning styles in every classroom.
- Educational materials should be inclusive of diverse voices and perspectives.

To be true to the above statements, piano teachers must first recognize that most of the music we teach is representative of western European sounds and traditions; however, the possibilities for adding multicultural elements within the piano lesson are unlimited. As piano teachers, we may simultaneously teach a prelude and fugue by Bach, a jazz piece by a composer/jazz musician from New Zealand and a composition based upon an African melody, by a Canadian composer.

Furthermore, much of today’s music represents a “fusion” of different musical ideas and practices, both western and non-western. By teaching our students about music from different cultures, we make it easier for them to understand traditional composers, such as Debussy being impacted by Indonesian music and Gamelan Orchestras and Dvořák with his fondness for American melodies.

Getting Started

At the beginning of the new teaching year, I plan a course of action. I set a world music theme recital for a particular

date that allows students enough time to have at least three workshops prior to the recital, so they may participate in activities that are world-music related. I then begin the task of assigning a country piece to each student. I have discovered a number of pedagogically suitable teaching pieces with world music themes and arrangements of folk tunes that are good performance pieces.

Once a country piece is assigned, it is up to each student to do a representative country project. My experience has shown that students are excited to share their ideas with me almost from the beginning and many own artifacts such as native costumes and instruments from travels abroad. In this world of international travel, parents or friends often have traveled and brought back a trinket or two, which is then shared with other students.

Pentatonic Scales

World music theory is important to refer to so that students understand the difference between western and non-Western music concepts. Since pentatonic scales appear in many types of music, including Chinese, Japanese, Indonesian, African and European folk songs, I spend a small amount of time in lessons describing the major and minor pentatonic, as well as a variation of the pentatonic, known as the blues scale.

The major pentatonic scale is a good place to start with students as it forms the basis to many of the tunes they were introduced to as children. “Mary Had a Little Lamb” and “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot” are two popular nursery rhymes.

Mary Had A Little Lamb

Swing Low, Sweet Chariot



The major pentatonic can be easily created by playing all five black keys on the keyboard in a row. Often, preparatory lesson books start students on two and three black keys, (the pentatonic scale) to teach keyboard geography quickly, as well as providing a way for beginning students to create recognizable melodies by rote.

Fortune Cookies

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The example below illustrates a pentatonic scale that begins on F-sharp. The five notes are all played on the 2 and 3 black keys of the keyboard.

Interval Key For All Figures

H = half step m3 = minor third
W = whole step M3 = Major third

Interval arrangement in a pentatonic scale

The major pentatonic scale can be explained simply as the removal of the 4th and 7th degrees of the major scale and the minor pentatonic as the removal of the 2nd and 6th degrees of the minor scale.

Example of C Major Pentatonic

Example of A Minor Pentatonic Scale

**An example of a minor Pentatonic piece is
Land of the Silver Birch**

The pentatonic scale may be built upon any note by following the pattern of W W m3 W m3

W W m3 W m3

In Asian music, the pentatonic dates back as early as 2000 B.C. (long before the origin of western music scales). The Japanese Hirajoshi scale is composed of five different notes, each with its own symbolic role as one of the five Japanese basic elements: earth wood, fire, metal and water. The pattern for the Hirajoshi is slightly different than the basic pentatonic scale given its W H Major 3 H M3 pattern. The Hirajoshi scale is the basis for many Japanese folk tunes, including Sakura.

Sakura



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Once students are familiar with the construction of the pentatonic scale, I demonstrate its use by western composers in traditional composition. One beautiful example is found in Debussy's *Pagodes from Estampes*, where the composer imitates the gong effect of Javanese Gamelan orchestras through the use of the pentatonic.

Pagodes

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A modified version of the pentatonic is found in the Jewish Scale. This evolved in Spain during the 15th century before Sephardi Jews had to hide their culture out of fear of torture and expulsion during the Spanish Inquisition. The unique quality of the scale are the small and large intervals between consecutive scale degrees, rather than generally even intervals as we have seen. One example is "Hava Nagila," based upon the notes, C D-flat, E, F, G, E-flat, B-flat, C.

Hava Nagila

In more recent times the pentatonic has been found in the blues scale, which is closely related to the pentatonic. The relationship to world music dates back to African work songs, which altered the European pentatonic with the lowered 3rd and 5th notes of the scale. African slaves later sang these as work songs and hollers of the deep south. The sound of these work songs became part of the African American culture and along with other factors helped to give birth to the blues.

Simply rearrange the pentatonic scale above so that it begins on the C and add an F-sharp between the F and G, and you have a commonly used version of the blues scale.

Transposed "Black Key" Pentatonic Scale

Same Scale (not transposed) From C to C Instead of E^b to E^b

Add an F#. A Commonly Used Blues Scale

Instruments

During lessons I pull together the rattles and drums I purchased through teacher supply catalogues. These are used for rhythmic exercises and to embellish the various world music pieces that students are learning. I also offer lab time on my digital piano for students to try out instrumental sounds. Although not acoustic, digitized sounds offer a quick alternative for students to hear differences between instruments at the touch of a button.

In my final workshop, students get hands-on experience with ethnic instruments I have collected. This is an opportunity to try the panpipes I bought from Native American Indians in New Mexico and the two-stringed fiddle covered with snake skin from the hill tribe region of Thailand. Rattles



and drums from West Africa are by far the most popular instruments with students and even the most resistant to counting out loud will find it irresistible to feel the beat when tapping on a *djembe* from Ghana. To categorize instruments, I employ the modern classification system (Hornbostel and Sachs), which classifies all instruments into four main categories according to the way in which sound is produced: aerophones, idiophones, membranophones and chordophones.



Students wear authentic Ethiopian clothing during a multicultural recital. The child on the right is playing the African Djembe.

Make It Fun And Interesting!

A good way to introduce instruments is through videos and DVDs. I have found that the *Music Around the World* videos, available through music teacher catalogues, are perfect for students of all ages. While somewhat dated, this collection of six videos may be purchased individually or together. They are colorful and interesting, emphasizing native instruments and performance methods and live performances of the music. Each video is 21 minutes, making them ideal for workshops.

The *JVC/Smithsonian Video Anthology*, available through public libraries, are as authentic an experience as one will find. The 30 or so DVDs or videos that belong to this series offer authentic performances of ethnic instruments from the representative countries. Recorded by ethnomusicologists in the “field,” they offer true representation of the instruments within a cultural context.

Musical Instruments of the World—An Illustrated Encyclopedia published by Sterling Publishing, offers wonderful pictures and description of all the instruments in the world as they exist within the Hornbostel and Sachs classifications.

I use *World Instrument Bingo*, a game with CD, by Cheryl Lavender. This makes learning the instruments fun, with its five different games in one. It is available at www.keystoimagination.com. This game will help students identify tone colors, explore sound production, and compare cultural influences on music. The kit comes complete

with 30 Bingo Play Cards, an instruction booklet with game directions and World Instrument Fun Facts, a CD with sound samples of 24 world instruments recorded on six separate sound sequences, a World Instrument poster, and a page of 24 cut-out caller cards.

Lynn Freemans Olson’s *A Folk Gathering*, a collection of 15 play-along songs, arranged for the elementary pianist with lots of helpers, is a simple way of bringing world music activities into the piano studio. “Helpers” are rhythm instruments such as triangle, tambourine, drum, finger cymbals, wood-block, bell, sandblocks or homemade equivalents. While out of print, many copies are available via the Internet.

Activity Books

Music of Many Cultures by Carol Fisher Mathieson, is a fine arts activity book with sections on Southeast Asia, Latin America, India, Iran and Sub-Saharan Africa. The pages in the book are reproducible for classroom use. Simple projects, such as building a Gamelan orchestra using kitchen items or creating an African “jongo” (music and dance for happy occasions) with a recorder, whistle, small drum and simple rhythms are examples of the book’s instructions. Instruments are clearly described along with simple terminology to describe the application of melody, rhythm and harmony in the music of each particular country.

Multicultural Music by Connie Walters, offers dozens of activities plus recipes for each of the countries that are in the book. The songs in the book are accompanied by puppet cutouts and book suggestions for reading. This teacher’s guide, designed for use with elementary-age students, contains units of study about eight countries, their inhabitants, customs and nationally celebrated events with special emphasis on music and food traditions. Countries represented by the units in this guide include Australia, Canada, France, Japan, Kenya, Mexico, the Netherlands and Poland. Each unit provides (1) Map and Country Information; (2) Word List/Translations-Definitions; (3) Original Songs; (4) Authentic Songs; (5) Recipes; and (6) Classroom Curriculum Activities. Several units also provide lists of books to read and step by step instructions for art activities, including patterns for teacher use and reproducible student sheets.

Aerophones

Aerophones are instruments in which the sound is produced by air being blown through it, like flutes, whistles, panpipes and bagpipes. Idiophones are instruments that are stamped, shaken or hit, for example rattles, struck bells, gongs, cymbals and castanets, jaw’s harp. Membranophones are instruments in which the sound is made by the vibration of a stretched membrane or skin, such as barrel and waisted drums, kettledrums, band drums. Finally, the chordophones are instruments in which the sound is made by the vibration of strings, as in folk harp, zithers, violins, pianos.



The Music of Australia

I recently did some research on Australian Piano Music. I came up with some interesting finds:

1. Grainger, Percy Australia Australian Up-Country Song (Easy-Int) In The Young Pianist's Grainger. Some of the pieces in the collection are by Grainger, others are settings by Grainger of folk songs and pieces by Bach and Cowling.
2. Haun-Hayward Koala on the Keys (ALFRED) Easy-Int. Nine solos. Inspired by the animals and people of Australia. (Botany Bay, Click Go the Sears, Creepy, the Crocodile, G'day to Everyone, In the Dreamtime, Kangaroo Hop, Koala Kapers, The Black Swan and Waltzing Matilda.)
3. Niamath, Linda Kangaroos Easy-Int. In Celebration Series Studies Album, Grade Two
4. Christopher Norton Connections for piano: Repertoire 1-8, by Christopher Norton. Edited by Andrew Hisey. For Piano. Solo Piano. Christopher Norton Connections for Piano. Jazz, Rock, Blues, Latin, Swing, Country, Funk, Reggae. SMP Level 1 (Elementary). Book. 40 pages. Published by The Frederick Harris Music Company (FH.CNR01)

World Music At The Piano

The following is a suggested list of world music in solo and duet format for elementary through advanced students. Combining these pieces with assignments from above can enliven the learning process of international music.

Early to Late Elementary Level

1. *A Folk Holiday* by Dorothy Bishop. Piano duets on folk songs and dances not in print; older copies may be found online. [Carl Fischer]
2. *Arabian Dance* by Carolyn Miller. Numerous half steps and staccatos give it an Arabian sound. [Willis Music]
3. *Around the World on 88 Keys* Bks. 1 and 2 by Ted Cooper. A global music tour with seven original piano solos. Includes Sightseeing Facts, Musical Maps and Practice Suggestions. [Alfred] *CM Level 3*
4. *A World of Folk Songs* arr. By Victor Galindo. Folksongs from many parts of the world, including China, Ukania, Switzerland, Japan, Nigeria and South America. For very beginning students who know middle C position. No eighth notes or accidentals. Opt. teacher duets. [FJH]
5. *East Meets West* (Ed. Weekley & Arganbright). Four-hand duets include Korean Folk Song (Arirang); Sakura [Kjos]
6. *Keys to the Cities* by Sharon Aaronson. A musical journey to six cities: "Bonjour Paris," "Cairo Caravan," "Calgary Cowboy," "Castanets in Seville," "First Stop! Ellis Island," "Kyoto Blossoms." [Alfred]
7. *Sounds of Childhood Suite* (Sonidos de la ninez) by Marin Cuellar. Latin American folk tunes with teacher accompaniments. [Kjos]
8. *Supplementary Solos Levels 3-4*: Selected and edited by

Frances Clark and Louise Goss. "Twilight in Mexico," "Pakistan Caper," "Aborigine Dance," "Rio Rhumba." [Alfred]

9. *World At Your Fingertips, Vols. 1 and 2*, by Deborah Brener, Tom Gerou and Nancy Lau. Offers 12 chapter units with historical and cultural information on each country represented along with games and quizzes. A map of the country is shown at the beginning of each unit. Each piece is written to capture the style and sound of the ethnic instruments studied in the chapter. [Alfred]

Intermediate Level

1. *Aborigine*, piano solo by Dennis Alexander. [Alfred]
2. *Arabian Tale*, piano solo by Martha Mier. [Alfred] Embraces Middle Eastern tonalities and culture.
3. *Bridge Over Nishigama*, piano solo by D. Alexander. [Alfred]
4. *Calliope Rag*, piano solo by Melody Bober. [Alfred]
5. *Chinese Doll*, piano solo by Vladimir Rebikov.
6. *Chinese Dragon Festival*, piano solo by D. Alexander. [Alfred]
7. *Chinese Dragons*, by Nancy Faber, Four-hand piece with beautiful lyrical melodies. Asian characteristics. [FJH]
8. *Chinese Piano Music For Children*, by N. Liao. Seventeen pieces designed to introduce the Western intermediate student to Eastern music. [Schott]
9. *Folk Fantasies* folk melody arrangements by Melody Bober [Alfred]
10. *Il Zapateado*, piano solo by D. Alexander. [Alfred]
11. *Pentatonic Tune* Piano Solo by Bela Bartók.
12. *Piano Music of Africa and the African Diaspora* compiled and Edited by William H. Chapman Nyaho. Volumes 1 and 2 are compilations of pieces written by both Africans living and working in Africa, as well as those of African descent throughout the world. [Oxford University Press]
13. *Streets of Hong Kong*, piano solo by Melody Bober. [Alfred]
14. *Shoukei*, by Naoko Ikeda. This two-volume collection of 12 piano solos is modeled after the style of William Gillock while reflecting upon the composer's Japanese heritage.
15. *The Merry Mariachi*, piano solo by Melody Bober. [Alfred]

Planning a theme recital around world music can be fun and entertaining. My students enjoy creating costumes that go along with the country they are assigned. The recital is an opportunity for everyone to share what they have learned about his or her respective country. Each student comes up to the front and pins a flag on an oversized map. After the performance, desserts from the represented countries are served. The variety of treats is overwhelming and both students and parents are delighted in the trip they have taken around the world.