

JUNIOR VIRTUOSOS:



TECHNIQUE *and*
MOVEMENT *for*
BEGINNERS

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I. Introduction

"If a picture is worth a thousand words, an experience is worth ten thousand pictures."

II. Posture

a. What is posture?

"Good hand alignment begins with the feet."

b. Awareness: the head and neck (atlanto-occipital joint)

Tools: pencils above the ears

c. Awareness: the hips (ball and socket joint)

Movement exercise: "The Clock"

III. Seating

a. Level forearm

Tool: book under the arm

b. Bench height

Tools: seating pads and risers

c. Distance

Movement: touching the fallboard

d. Foot support

Tools: pedal extender/foot stool, stickers

Images: king or queen on their throne
riding a horse

e. Where to sit

f. Standing while playing

g. Sitting too low

h. Sitting too high

IV. Hand Shape

a. What is the ideal hand shape?

"We all carry a model of perfect alignment around with us at all times: The shape of the forearm and hand when it hangs to the side."

-Teresa Dybvig

Images: weeping willow, spaceship with slimy aliens, monster vs. princess hands

b. Flipping over the hand

Images: holding a book/cup of ice cream

c. What is not an ideal hand shape?

- curled fingers, holding an egg or ball

d. Common pitfalls:

- neat and tidy- five finger positions
- neat and tidy- straightening at the wrist

Images: pointer and pinky are friends

tulip shape

ghost with a flashlight

Songs: "Alien Song"

"The Pointer and Pinky are Friends"

- fingers in a straight line

V. Important Concepts

a. Tension and relaxation

"to·nic·i·ty
(tō-nis'i-tē)

1. A state of normal tension of the tissues by virtue of which the parts are kept in shape, alert, and ready to function in response to a suitable stimulus. In the case of muscle, it refers to a state of continuous activity or tension beyond that related to the physical properties. "
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Image: leaping cat

"Movement is life; without movement life is unthinkable." - Moshe Feldenkrais

b. "Sensation of no sensation" - T. D. Movement: sloppy drop vs. toned drop

"In good action, the sensation of effort is absent." -Moshe Feldenkrais

c. Body levers:

- finger
- finger-hand
- finger-hand-forearm

d. Distal to proximal gradient: smaller moments at the center of the body (proximal) than those farther away from the center of the body (distal)

Image: handle of the whip vs. the tip

Tool: pencil held between the thumb and forefinger

e. Anatomy lesson 1- Finger flexion and extension

Muscle:	Function:
Flexor digitorum profundus/superficialis	flexion of PIP, MCP, DIP
Interossei	adduction and abduction
Lumbricals	flexion of MCP joints extension of DIP and PIP
Extensor digitorum	extension of the MCP joint
Extensor indicis	extends finger 2
Extensor digiti minimi	extends finger 5

f. Anatomy lesson 2- Extensor tendons

Extensor digitorum:

- first strand ties to the 2nd finger
- second strand ties to the 3rd finger
- which connects to the 4th finger
- The 5th finger gets its own extensor tendon (extensor digiti minimi) but is connected to finger 4

g. Comparatives

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"Difference that is not perceived does not exist"- Anat Baniel
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h. Attention and awareness

Movement: "Goldilocks" comparatives

Range of motion- the motion allowed by the joint's shape and surrounding tissue to allow a specific movement between bones

Mid-range- the hand in its natural alignment

Fingers:

- curl
- straighten
- spread
- squeeze

Wrist:

- swivel towards the thumb
- swivel towards the pinky
- drop
- raise

Shoulder:

- raise
- lower

Elbow:

- towards and away from the body

VI. Sequencing

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"Gross motor skills come before fine. Arm before fingers."
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a. Fists

Image: holding a bird's egg

Pieces: "The Woodpecker" - Marilyn Lowe

"Hommage a Tchaikovsky"- G. Kurtag

"L.H. and R.H. Rainbows" - Faber

b. Pencils

Seymour Bernstein exercises:

- pianissimo black and white keys (kitty meows)
- silently playing to the escapement (the kitty bed)
- playing to the escapement pianissimo (whispers from outer space)
- playing forte to the bottom of the key (earth tones)

c. Finger 2 or 3

Piece: "The Apple and the Worm" - Marilyn Lowe

Movement: touching the face or opposite forearm

d. Balance

Images: skydiver with parachute

piece of paper between the fingers and the keys

flat sidewalk, tabletop balance

Contacting: "as if standing on the floor"- Taubman

Tool: finger paint/silly putty

e. The Two Drops: Hand

Movements: hi-five and pat-a-cake

Image: drawbridge and moat

- f. The Two drops: Fingers
 - Image: wave “bye-bye”
 - Tools: stickers on the joints
 - pencil roll using the MCP joint
 - Movement: finger tapping/drumming
- g. Keybedding (use of excessive force):
 - Exercise: playing with the keys depressed
 - Tool: kitchen scale
- h. Legato
 - Exercise: playing the teacher’s fingers
 - ‘walking’ with the fingers
 - Pieces: “My Family/Favorite Animals” - Irina Mints
 - “Cinderella/Brave Prince Out Hunting” I.M.
- i. Rotation
 - Images: royal wave
 - tilting airplane wings
 - Tools: velcro toy
- j. Preparatory Motion
 - Image: kicking a ball
- K. Fifth Finger and Thumb
 - Image: no teepees
 - walls and roof of the house
- L. Fifth Finger
 - Image: one bone
 - karate chop
- M. Thumb
 - Image: magic thumb spot
- N. In and Out
 - Image: opening and closing the drawer
 - car in and out of the garage
 - walking into the forest
 - changing fingerprints

- O. Staccato
 - Image: dribbling a basketball
 - bouncing on a trampoline
 - riding the elevator
 - Tools: rubber ball
 - Piece: “Zechariah Zebra”- Piano Safari
 - Exercise: magic alignment exercise
- P: Elliptical shapes (wrist circles)
 - Pieces: “Tree Frog” and “Soaring Bird” P. S.
 - Images: smile and rainbow

VI. Body Movement and Flow

Resources and Materials

Websites:

www.BenjaminSteinhardt.com
www.WellBalancedPianist.com
www.TheMusiciansBrain.com

Methods:

Music Moves by Marilyn Lowe
 Piano Safari by Knerr and Fisher
 Musi-Physi-Calilty by S. Bernstein
 Hello, Piano! by Irina Mints
 Jatekok- G. Kurtag

Taubman Approach:

The Well-Balanced Pianist
 The Golandsky Institute
 Keyboard Wellness Seminar
 Dorothy Taubman Seminar

Somatic Education:

Feldenkrais
 Alexander Technique
 Aston Patterning
 Iyengar Yoga
 Anat Baniel Method
 Dalcroze Method

Music Learning Theory:

Music Moves
 Gordon Institute for Music
 Learning

Books:

What Every Pianist Should Know
 About the Body - T. Mark

Adaptive Strategies for Small
 Handed Pianists- Wristen
 and Deahl

Physiological Mechanics of Piano
 Technique - O. Ortmann

The Child’s First Steps in Piano
 Playing - T. Matthay

Kids Beyond Limits - Anat Baniel

The Hand: How its use shapes the
 brain, language, and human
 culture - Frank R. Wilson