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You should sing using the animal names. If you have difficulty in sight-singing a piece, first listen to the CD in order to familiarize yourself with it, and then play the melody on the keyboard whilst singing it. Children might be reluctant to sing at first. However if you persevere with this, especially if you always sing as well each time a new melody is introduced, they should become quite confident within a few lessons and happily sing on their own. Your child should always begin each piece by counting in one bar as is done on the CD.

Usually young children find it difficult to sing the G or F below middle C (see section 5 for an explanation of the musical notation). If this is the case then you might ask the child to sing the melody an octave higher than written. Listen to “Aquarium” (track 40 of the CD) for an example.

Sung Finger Exercises

These additional exercises are important in that they:

- prepare the child for playing the pieces;
- provide good ear-training;
- improve the child’s singing ability;
- strengthen the fingers;
- introduce the geography of the piano;
- prepare for improvisation or composition.

Since these exercises are not printed in Book 1 you should write them out in the manuscript book, in order to keep track of where you are. If the child cannot yet read or write you may need to draw animal symbols to symbolize the notes. As well as using the exercises in these notes, you can also make up your own. The small animal tiles and coloured staves can be used for composing simple finger exercises, as described later.

Make sure that the child can play through each exercise before attempting to play the piece that follows in a particular step. Children should play from the shoulders – moving their whole arm as a unit. In order to see how this should be done ask them to draw a series of

arches (like a viaduct) on top of the keyboard, hands separately. Their arms should be free, without any tension. Children have a tendency to raise their shoulders and keep their elbows close in to their waists. Therefore please ensure that they keep their elbows away from the body, with their shoulders down. For fun you can mention that they should play as if they have hedgehogs under their armpits which mustn't be harmed. Also make certain that they do not just play from their elbow or wrist – the movement should start from the shoulder. Each note should be detached and not played legato (smoothly). Their wrists should not be dropped (in order to allow space for a mouse to run under their hands).

Children should always sing the animal names out loud whilst playing. Throughout these notes upward facing stems on minims and crotchets are used to signify notes to be played with the right hand and downward facing stems signify notes to be played with the left hand. These exercises should be played at each octave on the keyboard, with the children always singing at the octave which is most comfortable for them (probably around middle C). If the keyboard has many octaves then they should play these exercises in a standing position and walk along the piano in order to reach the required notes. Sing with the children in order to encourage them.

It is good practice to ask the students to try playing the finger exercises with their eyes closed. This will allow them to feel the spacing of the notes on the keyboard and help them ultimately to look at the music, rather than relying on looking at their hands whilst playing.

The Echo Game

The echo game involves playing notes at random on the keyboard and asking the child to identify which is which, singing them back using the animal names. If you have a set of small animal tiles or wooden animals (see below) you should always use them as you play the echo game (as described later). An example of the echo game is shown in step 2. There you are asked to play Dogs and Birds randomly. You should play the notes in a number of different octaves in order to train

the children's ear, although they should always sing the pitch that is comfortable for them. Gradually in the steps that follow more notes are added. Relatively quickly you should find that the children are able to distinguish between the different notes. Really occasionally children find this challenging, especially once the number of notes increases. If this is the case you might wish to start with them simply singing or humming the notes back before identifying them by name.

If the child has problems with this game at the beginning then try another way to train the ear. Play two "Dogs" of different pitches and ask the child to identify which note is high and which is low. You can do similar exercises as you add more notes. Always make sure that the child can hear whether notes are moving up or down before you start to introduce difficult sequences.

Small Animal Tiles/Wooden Animals

As well as the small animal tiles, a set of wooden animals is available for use with this method, as is a large set of staves. Each set contains one of each of the seven animals. The animals can be placed on either the keyboard or the large staves. For the exercises in the seventeen steps you can use either small animal tiles or wooden animals. You should ask the child to place the animals in the correct place on the keyboard or the staves. You can call each stave a shelf, staircase, or a block of flats, for example, or you can tell the child that  symbolizes a house in the mountains and  a house in the valley. Another way is to liken the top stave to five red benches and the bottom to five blue benches in a school. Some children need to sit on red benches, others on blue. And some need to stand between the benches.

It is particularly important that you do the exercises with the animals and staves since if children are using the animal notes edition it is possible for them to play the music by looking at the animals without actually realizing on what line or space a particular animal sits. You can also use animals and staves as you play the echo game. This is very

good both for ear training and visualization of the notes, and it helps to make learning more interesting.

You can watch examples of animals and staves in use in the Musical Exercises and Games section of the Video Demos at www.dogsandbirds.co.uk, and also on the Dogs and Birds Piano Method YouTube channel at www.youtube.com/user/elzalusher.

When you have introduced all of the notes you can play a game with a dice. Place an animal on the staff then roll the dice and based on the result get the child to add the appropriate animal in its correct position. It is good to ask the child to sing the animal name at the correct pitch then check it by playing the note on the piano. A throw of 1 corresponds to the same animal, 2 to the next animal note etc.

Combining the Echo Game with the Animals and Staves

We take as an example the exercises in step 2, where the children are introduced to the Dog and the Bird. You should sit at the piano and get the child to sit in front of the open staves. Play and sing “Dog Bird Dog” and ask the child to echo this by singing it back. Then play either Dog or Bird and ask the child to identify it. The child should recognize which note you have played and sing it back with its appropriate name and pitch, at the same time putting the correct animal in its proper place on the staves. Now again play either Dog or Bird. The child should sing the appropriate animal name and pitch and either place the correct animal on the staves or remove it if it is there already. If you are using the tiles then just place another animal on the staves. Continue the game by playing randomly either Dog or Bird. This is extremely good for ear training and also for teaching the child the correct positioning of the notes on the staves.

If the child has difficulty with this game initially you can try a simpler version of this exercise. First place the Dog and Bird in their correct positions on the staves. Then play Dog and Bird randomly and ask the child to point at the appropriate animal (either with a stick or a pencil)

as they sing its name. Once the child can do this then you can progress to the harder version of the game.

If you find that the children can do this exercise easily then you can try playing Dog or Bird one octave higher or lower. Always ask them to sing back at the pitch most comfortable for them (probably that closest to middle C).

You can also build up sequences of Dog and Bird. For example play “Dog Dog Bird Bird Dog Dog Bird” and ask the children to sing the phrase back with the appropriate names, pointing to the correct animal as they sing. The level of difficulty of the sequences you can use will depend on the child. Try to challenge him or her somewhat, but not too much. Make sure that the child can master the challenge and feel successful.

Continue with the game in a similar manner as you add more notes. Finally the child will be able to remember and sing back 4 to 6 note melodies and point to the notes while singing.

Stories

Each piece in the book has a title and is illustrated. A story runs through the book. Please feel free to elaborate on this and discuss it with the child, using the illustrations as a guide. This helps to stimulate further the interest and imagination of the child and makes the lessons more fun and enjoyable. It is very advantageous to talk about the illustrations since it brings the child closer to the pieces and the music.

Improvisation

For some time during each lesson children should be allowed to express themselves on the keyboard, by “playing” a story. This is the time when they can bang on the keyboard freely, or stroke it softly depending on the story they make up. It is also an excellent time for children to have a break and stand up from the piano stool and stretch their bodies. The story could perhaps describe their favourite fairy tale, a game with their pet or friends – practically any aspect of their life. In

the first few steps some ideas are given. You should help by suggesting themes, but make sure this activity is kept under control. Keep a strict time limit. Make sure your child uses a great variety of sounds and touch – for example soft or loud, long or short, single notes or groups of notes, hands together or separately, smooth or detached, etc.

Composition

In addition to these exercises and games the child will sometimes be asked to compose a short piece under your guidance. Try to compose music similar to that which the child has already learnt, or use the sung finger exercises as a basis for the composition. This is an excellent use for the small animal tiles and coloured staves. Children can write out their compositions using the animals and staves and then place the staves on the piano to play them.

Balancing the Elements

All the elements discussed in this section are important for children in order to become rounded musicians. In general children will be better at some elements than others. If, for example, tapping the rhythm exercises is weak, playing the musical pieces hands together is difficult, or carrying out the listening games is hard do not worry. Practise, watch the child, and use the ideas outlined in this book to make the particular element more interesting.

If something is complicated or hard for the children try to solve it from a different angle. Please do not force anything! For example, if they are reluctant to sing initially then you should sing continuously and ask them to copy you or just sing along with you. If they have difficulty with rhythm then try many different ways to achieve your goal – use pieces of paper or names of vehicles (see later) to describe lengths of notes, try marching, clapping or barking, or other techniques, as outlined in these notes. If their hand positions are weak then you should first determine if they are ready for a proper hand position, or whether it is just better to play with index fingers (possibly with an open hand) or thumbs. Possibly the best way for very young children with weak hands to play notes is for them to play with the side of the thumb,

supported by the index finger. To produce this hand position, ask them to form owl's eyes with their hands. The thumb and index fingers will form circles (which the child can look through like spectacles), with the third fourth and fifth fingers held higher up forming eyelashes or feathers. They can then play notes with the sides of the thumbs keeping the same hand position. They should play all notes in the musical pieces this way, using the left (blue) hand for the bass notes and the right (red) hand for the treble notes. Maybe start to do preparatory work away from the piano to achieve the correct hand position – ask them to hold their heads with curved fingers or to hold their hands like a tiger's claws. Also you can concentrate more on the correct hand position and correct fingering when carrying out the sung finger exercises.

The most important thing is to motivate the children. And each child is different so you will need to find out what works in each particular case. For some children making the lessons fun is the most important thing. In other cases you can fire their imaginations by telling stories. You might use finger puppets to help with your descriptions. For others at this young age, filling the lessons with kindness, love and care is the key to opening the children. You should always make sure that the children will be successful so give them exercises that will be challenging but possible, and make the lessons varied. Work together with the children to produce happy, stimulating and successful lessons.

Section 3 – The Seventeen Steps

STEP 1

Improvisation – Before you open Dogs and Birds you should explain to the child that music is wonderful for expressing feelings and moods, and it can describe many different pictures and stories. In order to demonstrate this you should do the following improvisation exercises on the piano and get the child to repeat them.

First play LOW, LOUD, LONG notes – these represent the *elephant*. Do this with your hands, playing many notes simultaneously – first one hand and then the other, as if you are walking side to side on the bass notes.

Now walk all the way up the keyboard softly. These SOFT, LONG notes increasing in pitch represent a *cat* walking. At the very end hit your hand hard on LOW BASS notes to illustrate the cat jumping down from the fence it has been creeping along. You can then do a similar thing on the black keys as well, representing a *black cat*.

You can describe happy *birdsong* by playing HIGH, LOUD, SHORT notes. Do this by turning your hands with a rotary motion from the wrists. Play with the backs of your hands – both hands simultaneously, using a rocking movement.

Listen to track 1 of the CD for examples of these first three improvisation exercises.

Finding the First Note – When the student is ready, turn to page 1 of the book and ask him or her to find all the Dogs on the keyboard. Put a Dog tile (or pencil) on top of each of these Dogs – you need one tile/pencil for each of the Ds on the keyboard. If you are using the toy wooden animals then place the wooden Dog on each of the Ds in turn. Get the child to play the notes with the thumbs, and sing “Dog”. Make sure that all the fingers are above the keyboard, and curved if the child is ready for that. If the child is under 4 years old, then it may be easier

to use the index fingers rather than the thumbs, or to hold the index fingers and thumbs together like spectacles, bicycle wheels, or owl's eyes (as described on page 15 of these notes) whilst playing with the thumbs.

Sung Finger Exercise – Ask the child to play:



Use the right hand thumb or index finger to play the Dog and the left hand thumb or index finger to play the Bird. Once again it may help to hold the index fingers and thumbs together like spectacles whilst playing with the thumbs. Remember that the children should play from their shoulders, moving their whole arm – they should not just play from the elbow or wrist. It is important that they sing “Dog Bird Dog” whilst playing the notes. You should perform this exercise at each octave on the keyboard, but always sing around middle C i.e. the pitch that is most comfortable for the child. There is an example of this on track 1 of the CD.

Musical Pieces (Page 3) – First sing “Playground” together with the child, using the animal names i.e. Dog Dog Bird Bird Dog Dog Bird etc. If necessary listen to the CD first and then play the melody on the keyboard whilst singing it. Parents without previous musical experience should see “Important Notes for Parents” (section 5 of these notes) for advice and instruction. If the child is very young and has no experience of reading from left to right then hold a pencil together and point out the notes as you sing. This will teach the child to read and helps with concentration.

After singing the line then get the child to play and sing. Repeat the same procedure with “By the Lake”. Children should possibly use their thumbs to play these notes – the right-hand thumb for the Dog and the left-hand thumb for the Bird. They should play from the shoulders –

moving the whole arm. Advice on a proper hand position is given in section 5.

Rhythm Exercises (Page 2) – These are the first rhythm exercises. Rhythm exercises are dispersed throughout the book and they are very important for the child in order to develop a strong sense of the beat. The child and teacher/parent should march, clap and count the rhythms. Marching helps the student to feel an even beat. Most of the rhythm exercises have four beats in a bar, so the child and teacher/parent should count “1 2 3 4 | 1 2 3 4 | 1 2 3 4 | ...”. As you clap try to emphasis the first beat of each bar.

Using Cars to Explain the Lengths of Notes – If children have difficulty understanding the lengths of the notes then use the chart on the back cover of Book 1 in order to aid understanding. A car takes up less space in a car park than a bus. The black notes (crotchets/quarter notes) have a length of one beat, the white notes with stems (minims/half notes) last for two beats, and the white notes without stems (semibreves/whole notes) last for four beats. The same applies to notes when they are written on a musical staff. If children are unable to count then ask them to clap or tap the rhythm on the back of the book, whilst saying aloud the words:

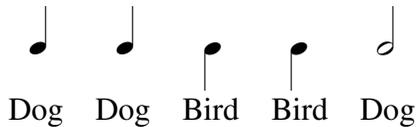
“Car Car Car Car | Big-Car Big-Car | Car Car Big-Car | Very-Very-Big-Bus”.

You should use these words with the children in the rhythm exercises (especially with extremely young children), until they are ready to count using numbers. Further suggestions for teaching very young children are given in section 4.

STEP 2

Rhythm Exercises (Page 4) – In these and the remaining rhythm exercises the child should “tap” the rhythms and count the beat using numbers (or cars if necessary). This should be done by striking the keys with open palms as described before, in section 2. Hand symbols indicate which hand should be used. When a note is written directly above another note then the notes should be played (or tapped) at the same time. If the beat is not yet even the child and teacher/parent should march as in step 1 until the beat becomes strong. It is a good idea to listen to a clock ticking and ask the child to count to the ticks.

Sung Finger Exercise – Sing and play:



Play this at each octave on the keyboard as described earlier, always singing (at a comfortable pitch). If possible once children have played this ask them to play it again with their eyes closed.

Stories – Never miss an opportunity to make up stories about the illustrations. For example in “In the Bush” and “Cotton Flower” (page 6) you can talk about the nest, which is being prepared for the next new note (the Egg). Please go through the story with your child. A story always enables the child to find links that help the learning process.

Musical Pieces (Pages 5 and 6) – Play and sing “Sparklers”, “Wait until it is Dark”, “In the Bush” and “Cotton Flower”. Do this in a similar manner to earlier, that is singing first and then playing and singing.

The Echo Game – Now play the echo game. This involves playing Dogs and Birds at random on the keyboard and asking the child to identify which is which and sing them back using the animal names. Remember to play these notes in a number of different octaves.

Small Animal Tiles/Wooden Animals – Get the child to put the animals in their correct places on the keyboard and then place them on the appropriate places on the staves. It is often easier for the child if you call the stave a ladder or stairs. The Dog lives on the top (or red) ladder and the Bird lives on the bottom (or blue) ladder – or the Dog lives in a mountain home and the Bird lives in a house in the valley.

The animals and staves can be linked with the echo game to provide an excellent opportunity for ear training. Get the child to place the Dog and the Bird on the staves. Play and sing “Dog”, then play and sing “Bird”. After that play just one of them and ask the child to identify it by removing the appropriate note from the staves. Then play a note again. Ask the child to identify it, either by removing a note from the staves or putting it back on the staves in its appropriate place. With practice the child will soon be able to distinguish notes with ease. This game can be extended to more notes later.

Improvisation – Here you should ask the children whether they can think of a story to describe by playing on the keyboard. If not suggest a theme for them to improvise. You could try to express different moods, for example being happy, sad, sleepy, angry, lively etc. It is important to discuss the different moods with the children. Ask them to tell you which situations make them happy, and which make them sad, for example.

Composition – If you have the animal tiles and coloured staves make up a simple melody using the notes you already know and then sing it as you play it on the piano.

STEP 3

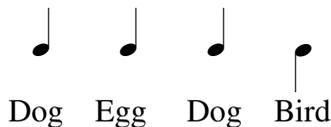
Improvisation – Make up a new story and play it on the keyboard. This time the student should use both hands whilst playing or should play together with the parent or teacher. Play LOUD and SOFT notes, and LONG and SHORT notes. Together with the child think of situations when you need to be LOUD or QUIET and describe them using the piano.

Musical Pieces (Page 7) – Sing and play “Promise to Behave”.

Stories – Look at the picture on pages 8 and 9, and discuss it with the child. Explain that the Eggs must all be on the bottom line of the staves. Where is the Dog sitting?

Small Animal Tiles/Wooden Animals – Use the animals Dog, Bird and Egg to teach the child their positions on the keyboard and the staves. Maybe link this with the echo game as described in the previous step, or with the sung finger exercise below.

Sung Finger Exercise – Sing and play:



Rhythm Exercises (Page 8) – Tap these rhythms with alternate hands counting aloud as you do so. Please do not forget to march if it is still necessary.

Musical Pieces – In “Tightrope” (page 9) you can ask the child to count “1 2 3 4 | 1 2 3 4 | 1 2 3 4 | ...” rather than singing the animal names whilst playing this piece. Sing and play page 10. If the child is ready then use the second (index) finger for Egg, otherwise use the same finger as for Dog. Make sure that the index finger is curved if possible. Please do not force this below the age of 5 or 6. Only use the right hand for “Far-off Hills” and “Egg Rock”. Do not play anything smoothly (legato) – play separated notes using the whole arm.

STEP 4

Stories – Talk about the picture on pages 10 and 11 with the child. The Dog and Bird are looking for the Egg Rock in the secret garden, when there is a full moon. Can you see the swan constellation in the sky? In this and in all cases make the pieces more interesting by talking about the stories in the pictures.

Musical Pieces – Sing and play “When the Moon is Full” and “The Secret Garden” (page 11), and “Golden Rings” (page 13).

The Echo Game – Play the echo game with Dog and Egg. Maybe also introduce Bird occasionally. As before play the note and ask the child to identify it and sing it.

Small Animal Tiles/Wooden Animals – Use the animals once more, placing them in turn on the keyboard and the staves. Again link this exercise with the echo game. Place the Dog, the Egg and the Bird on the staves initially. Play and sing these three notes in turn. Now play a single note and ask the child to identify the note as explained in step 2. Repeat with other notes. Try to challenge the child gradually.

Rhythm Exercises (Page 12). Tap exercises 4a, 4b and 4c.

Improvisation – Make up another story. A possible story is about a snake climbing up a tree to catch a bird at the top. The bird in the tree is the same as in the first lesson. Is the bird caught by the snake or does it escape? Move your wrist and elbow from side to side like a snake slithering, pressing down as you slide up the keyboard. What happens next will depend on your answer. Then get the child to repeat this story.

Sung Finger Exercise – Sing and play:



Now try to repeat it with your eyes closed.