

A GUIDE TO PIANO IMPROVISATION

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FOREWORD

I considered an alternate title: *Piano Improvisation for the Slightly Fearful*. If that description fits you, welcome.

The primary audiences for this book are 1) music teachers seeking resources for learning to play for movement and eurhythmics, and 2) studio piano teachers wishing to incorporate improvisation in lessons.

The motivation for this book comes from my experience presenting Dalcroze eurhythmics workshops around the country. (Dalcroze eurhythmics is a movement-based approach to teaching music and musicianship.) The music for eurhythmics is frequently improvised at the piano by the teacher. While many music teachers would like to incorporate more eurhythmics in their teaching, the daunting task of improvising at the piano stops them from doing so. There are scant resources with clear, sequential steps to help interested teachers acquire the necessary improvisation skills to play effectively for movement. When I demonstrate a few strategies for improvisation in workshops, teachers are surprised to discover they can, in fairly short order, improvise effectively for a march or a ball passing game. I am frequently asked, “Where can I get more ideas for improv?” This ebook is my answer.

Piano teachers will find exercises here they can do themselves and incorporate into lessons. I am a piano teacher who discovered Dalcroze in mid-career. I find the strategies needed to play effectively for movement surprisingly compatible with teaching both private and class piano students. Becoming comfortable improvising oneself can lead to helping students discover they, too, can improvise. Short improvisation activities in lessons can teach students valuable aspects of musicianship that cannot be learned by adhering exclusively to the printed page. Given the opportunity in a natural, low-stakes environment, many students discover they love to improvise.

I hope readers will enjoy experimenting with the activities in the following chapters, and that new doors may be opened for teachers and students alike.

INTRODUCTION

This ebook offers a series of accessible entry points into the world of improvisation at the piano, designed for musicians trained primarily to read from a score. The activities are intended to supplement, not replace, in-person eurhythmics and piano training. There are three types of material presented: 1) Written suggestions, 2) **Sample scores**, and 3) **Videos**. The sample scores, linked as PDFs for easy printing, serve as jumping off points for creative improvisations. The videos are teaching tools showing actual improvisation; they are not performances of the

sample scores. There are no movers in the videos. The focus is on how to create music at the piano, and feel comfortable doing so. The highly interactive nature of playing for movers requires intense focus and concentration, which can best be accomplished once the improvised music is reasonably well in hand. Helping readers get that music reasonably well in hand is the goal of this ebook.

The mere fact of improvising at the piano can be daunting. Many well-trained musicians are fearful of improvising, or at least lack experience in playing spontaneously. Accomplished pianists are often especially fearful of creating their own music. Pianists know the existing literature and can jump to the conclusion they have nothing worthwhile to add. Improvisation is not about adding to the repertoire, but about discovering one's own internal musicianship. The process of discovery can be affirming and joyful, if one can get over the natural internal resistance many musicians have acquired through extensive training.

As educated musicians we have been taught to be discerning about what we hear and about the quality of performances. It is helpful for improvisers, especially in the early stages, to suspend such harsh judgment. Readers are encouraged to explore sounds, initially without any judgment at all. Musical tones are not right or wrong, but every tone has an effect. Listening to the effect of tones is the point of exploration. Refinement, shape, and judgment can come later.

A PERSONAL NOTE

I was a traditionally trained piano teacher when I first encountered Dalcroze eurhythmics. I was a music reader. Period. My first Dalcroze teacher, Anne Farber, made music at the piano that was out of this world. She could play seemingly anything, including well-known pieces and tunes created out of thin air, in any key, in any style, with rich harmonies. She almost never looked at her hands because she was watching us move around the room while she played. When I discovered she was improvising I was flabbergasted. I quickly arrived at a truism: I would never improvise like Anne. The gulf between her improvisation skills and mine is vast. I concluded I lived on the other side of a great divide that could never be bridged. Some people could improvise and some of us could not. Twenty years later I concluded something different. I have learned to improvise, not like Anne or anyone else, but like me. I can make music spontaneously at the piano, and I can play effectively for eurhythmics, even though I do not consider myself a natural improviser.

The Dalcroze work, as introduced to me by Anne Farber and also by the superb musician and Dalcroze teacher, Lisa Parker, intrigued me enough that I began pursuing the training. There was no avoiding the fact that I would have to improvise, somehow, to live through the Dalcroze classes. I was terrified. Where does a person start? I felt utterly incompetent and foolish, not to mention frozen when I sat at the piano. Show me the score! I'll read anything. My Dalcroze teachers' collective replies: "Aha, there is no score. You have to make it up as you go along. Just keep it simple. Listen and think, but do more of the former and less of the latter. And make sure to keep your eyes on the class because you have to change how you play in response to

what you see them doing. And why didn't you use a V⁷/ii there?" My wild-eyed response to all of this was, "You have got to be kidding." To make a long story short, I learned new musical skills through improvisation. Eventually I became a Dalcroze teacher, and the approach informs all of my teaching today.

Through a combination of my own Dalcroze training, on-the-job learning, and teaching others to improvise, I have accumulated improvisation strategies that I believe work for those of us who were trained primarily to read. They also work well with music teachers who feel they barely survived class piano in college. These strategies usually include a combination of fixed, stable elements, and one or two elements that are flexible and easily adapted to the task at hand. When I was learning to improvise I felt like a juggler with too many flaming hoops. I had to reduce the number of hoops so that I could function. The strategies in this ebook are how I accomplished that.

THANK YOU

Many people helped me on my improvisation journey. I thank them for enriching my musical life and teaching me aspects of musicianship that my traditional training never addressed. I thank first and foremost my principal and excellent Dalcroze teachers, Anne Farber and Lisa Parker, for their guidance and friendship. This ebook is infused with their ideas and influence. Many other Dalcroze teachers and colleagues offered support, encouragement, and training, including Annabelle Joseph, the late Marta Sanchez, Cynthia Lilley, Ruth Alpers, David Frego, Karin Greenhead, Todd Anderson, and the late Claire McCoy. Three early readers of this text, Jane Frazee, Jayne Wenner, and Karen Lien, provided much appreciated feedback. Thanks also to the summer Dalcroze students at the University of St. Thomas for continuing to ask questions and seek strategies for developing their own improvisations.

HOW TO USE THIS EBOOK

I imagine readers sitting with their laptops at the piano, scrolling through this material and trying out ideas that interest them. Each exercise is self-contained, so no particular order of chapters or exercises needs to be followed. For easy navigation, links to all exercises and back to the [Table of Contents](#) are provided throughout the text. Sample **Scores** are in **green**, and they can be printed from the PDFs. **Video** links are **pink**. If you're a paper person, feel free to print as much of this material as you'd like.

Each **EXERCISE** begins with suggestions to **EXPLORE**, without judgment. Simply listen, play and experiment. Next, **SHAPE** the material, giving it form and a rhythmic context. Finally, **APPLY** what you have learned, **RED** for **movement/eurhythmics activities** and **YELLOW** for **piano lessons or classes**. The applications do not always fit neatly into one category. Teachers are encouraged to use and modify any idea to fit their circumstances. The applications for piano teachers may be played by student and teacher, or two students, depending on skill level.

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CHAPTER 1 GETTING STARTED

CONCERTO ON G

EXPLORE without judgment. Listen.

ONE PITCH - G

- Play G in all octaves - How many Gs are on your piano?
- Play G in different registers - Hands Separately (HS) and Hands Together (HT)
- Repeat the exact same pitch (not in different octave) - use one finger or 3-2-1 in either hand - with and without pedal
- Using only G, explore dynamics, meter, tempo, register, articulation, etc.

SHAPE**CONCERTO ON G**

- Invent a 3-movement Concerto, fast-slow-fast, using only Gs in any octave, that lasts 1-2 minutes
- Can be metered or unmetered; can change meters within and/or between movements
- Explore dynamics, register, articulation, quality of sound, tempo, duration, rest, and nuance
- Changes can be gradual or abrupt
- Use pedal or not, as the Concerto begins to take shape
- Invent rhythmic motives, patterns, repeat and vary them
- Invent an ostinato and play a melody over it
- Think phrase: end on a long note, breathe, then move on

Video:

[Concerto on G](#)

APPLY**MOVEMENT TO CONCERTO ON G**

- Invite your group of learners to move to Concerto on G. Watch them, respond to them.
- See if they will respond in movement to changes in your music, especially tempo and dynamic changes
- Practice classroom management through movement
 - Sound = Move
 - Silence = Freeze

STUDENT PERFORMER AND CONDUCTOR FOR CONCERTO ON G

- Teacher models by improvising Concerto on G
- Student improvises a Concerto on G
- Student “conducts” Concerto on G while a pianist (teacher or another student) responds at the piano; reverse roles.

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BE MY ECHO

EXPLORE without judgment. Listen.

8 SOUNDS

- Play 8 sounds on black keys in a steady tempo using single notes. Explore dynamics, register, articulation, pedal. Think raindrops, or French Impressionism
- Play 8 sounds on white keys using single notes in a slow tempo, use lots of pedal.
- Try harmonic 2nds. Use one hand, or both, or alternate, with and without pedal.
- On white keys, play a harmonic 6th with one or both hands. Move up and down the keyboard in 8 slow beats. Change pedal each time.
- Try a 5th. Notice how your ear responds if you happen upon the tritone B-F.
- Find a chord shape in either or both hands (i.e. RH: CEGA) and practice “planing,” moving by step or skips of varying sizes across the white keys, keeping the same chord shape.
- Explore dynamics, registers, contrasting articulations as you listen and play.

SHAPE

BE MY ECHO

- Play 8 sounds in a steady tempo using single notes.
- Rest for the same 8 in silence, feeling the beats internally.
- Without pause, play 8 more sounds in the same or a different tempo. Continue to explore dynamics, register, articulation, etc.
- Rest/silence for those 8 while you feel them internally.
- Repeat this sequence. For an extra challenge, change tempos between sets, but keep the tempo steady within a given set.
- Pitch material can be single notes, or can expand to harmonic 2nds, or two voices, clusters, or chords. A non-tonal scheme allows you to focus on musical features without worrying about playing “right notes.”

Score:

[Be My Echo](#)

Video:

[Be My Echo](#)

APPLY

BE MY ECHO IN MOVEMENT

- Ask movers to listen for 8 sounds in stillness, then move the 8 sounds they just heard.
 - Watch them! As they approach the end of their 8 beats, get ready to play 8 more sounds

- This exercise is designed to be continuous, my turn/your turn, without pause between sets. This will take practice.
- Change a musical aspect of your playing - articulation, dynamics, register, weight - to see if you can elicit corresponding changes in movement
- Once students can play the game successfully in a steady tempo, challenge them incrementally by doing any of the following:
 - Change tempo for new sets of 8
 - Call out a new number (i.e. 5) and play/move to that number of sounds for several rounds, then call out another new number.
 - Make it a movement canon with two groups. Group A: Moves 8 and freezes. Group B: Moves 8 and freezes. Accompany/lead this from the piano.
 - If your learners are ready, (and you can play for it!) make this a disappearing and reappearing beat game. Start with 8 and each round subtract a beat down to 1. Establish with your movers that you'll repeat 1, then add a beat until you're back to 8. (8-7-6-5-4-3-2-1-1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8)
- The more musical variety you offer them in dynamics, articulation, style, and tempo, the more opportunity they have to expand their expressive movement vocabulary.

BE MY ECHO AS A PIANO DUET

- Trade sets of 8 sounds between two pianists, varying tempo, dynamics, articulations, etc.
- Play the disappearing/reappearing beat game as a piano duet, one pianist leading and the other following; reverse roles.
 - Start with 8 and each round subtract a beat down to 1. Establish that you'll repeat 1, then add a beat until you're back to 8. (8-7-6-5-4-3-2-1-1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8)

Videos:

[Be My Echo Duet with Student](#)

[Be My Echo Duet with Student - Changing Tempo](#)

[Disappearing-Reappearing Beat Game with Student](#)

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TONAL MELODIES

EXPLORE without judgment. Listen.

TONAL MELODIES

- Single voice, one hand only. 5-finger major or minor pentascale, or full scale if comfortable.
- No penalty for playing in C major or A minor. Try a few other keys when ready.

- Sing aloud with your hand as you explore melodic contours, as this will remind you to use mostly stepwise motion and a few skips. Go above and below tonic. Listen to what defines a key melodically (Hint: It's not the whole steps). Use the half-steps to solidify the key, otherwise tonic is ambiguous.
- Finish on tonic (home); hear and feel the effect.
- Finish on not-tonic (away), such as scale degree 2,4,5,or 7; hear and feel the effect. Listen for tendency tones inherent in the scale. Some tones are stable (1-3-5), others are less stable (especially 2 and 7) and tend to pull toward more stable tones.

SHAPE

PHRASES AND CADENCES IN TONAL MELODIES

- Using one hand in C major, invent a 4-bar single line melodic phrase in 2/4 using a variety of rhythmic values. Begin and end on C, with the final bar being a half note (C).
- Invent other melodic phrases in C major that end on D (scale degree 2), on G (scale degree 5), on other scale degrees. Tonic is the most stable, and scale degree 3 also feels like "home" (full cadence). Scale degrees 2,4,5 and 7 imply V and feel "away" (half cadence). How does scale degree 6 feel?
- Improvise a 16-bar piece with four equal length phrases. First and fourth cadences full, second and third cadences half. Each cadence should end with a long note.
- Repeat the above plan but in a different meter. Make sure to end each phrase with a long note, or long note and rest. Play LH melodies too.
- Instead of equal length phrases, play short-short-long (SSL): 2 bars + 2 bars + 4 bars.
- Invent an ABA piece with the A sections in C major and the B section in A minor, or play the B section in a lower register with your LH.
- Listen for melodic contour, phrase shape, tendency tones, and get comfortable cadencing away from home. Being away makes coming home more satisfying.

Score:

[Tonal Melodies](#)

Video:

[Tonal Melodies](#)

APPLY

MOVE TO THE MELODIES

- Movers: "Step the beat, stop when the music stops." There is almost infinite variety in this simple plan. You'll get to practice playing phrases, your movers will learn steady beat, stop/start, phrase, cadence, melodic contour. Make sure to cadence away from home, and have a complete rest/silence to cue the stop. At first this will be a long pause while everyone gets the message to stop. Once they've all stopped, you may give a single whole note anacrusis on scale degree 5 (and also a verbal cue) to signal movers to resume walking.

Video:

[Move to the Melodies - Stop and Start](#)

- Once start/stop is established and “phrase” has been experienced, ask them to change direction for each new phrase. Make your phrase endings clear with a long note or rest.
- Variations can include high/low register, legato/staccato, soft/loud, etc. Encourage different qualities of movement to match different qualities of sound.
- Mix piano improvisation with vocal improvisation, i.e. When I sing, stand in place and clap the beat; when I play, step the beat around the room.
- SSL is fun with three groups, or trios of movers. Group/Person A: moves with first short phrase, B: moves with second short phrase, C: moves twice as long.

Video:

[Short-Short-Long](#)

PLAYING MELODIES, PHRASES, CADENCES

- Select a key, meter, and tempo for teacher/student duet using Question/Answer. T: Plays 4-bar phrase ending with half cadence. S: Plays 4-bar phrase ending with full cadence; reverse roles.
- Expand:
 - Four phrases with cadences - half, full, half, full
 - Change key, mode, meter, tempo, articulation, dynamics, phrase scheme, etc.
 - Student solo: Alternate hands, playing one phrase with LH, next phrase with RH
 - Duet with two pianos, or with eyes closed: Player A invents a phrase, Player B starts a new phrase on the final pitch of the previous phrase.
 - Invent Question and Answer phrases which are nearly identical except for the cadence. Requires careful listening and musical memory.

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FINAL SCALE DEGREE GAME

FINAL SCALE DEGREE GAME: SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

I am grateful to Anne Farber for teaching me this game.

Need: Paper cups representing scale degrees - 3 cups for beginners, 5 cups for intermediates, 7 cups for advanced. Number the cups 1, 2...7 Small prize (a dime, M&M, token) to hide under a cup.

Procedure:

- Arrange the cups left to right in scale degree order.

- Teacher leads the first round. Decide on which scale degree you will end, then secretly place the prize under that number cup.
- Improvise two equal-length phrases, the first phrase ending on tonic to establish the key, the second phrase ending on the predetermined final scale degree (where the prize is hidden).
- A student listens and guesses the number of the final scale degree by picking up that numbered cup. Correct guesses will be rewarded with a prize.
- The student who guesses correctly comes to the piano (if appropriate) and becomes the next improviser.

Score:

[Final Scale Degree Game](#)

Video:

[Final Scale Degree Game Two Students](#)

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CHAPTER 2

MODES

The following modal examples offer ways to learn and apply improvisation skills using musical material that fits the hand easily, and does not need functional harmony.

MELODIES AND SIMPLE ACCOMPANIMENTS

EXPLORE without judgment. Listen.

MODAL MELODIES

- Invent single voice melodies using only white keys. Listen to each mode's unique sound. Modes have unique characteristics of their own, but here's a short-cut to thinking of modes in terms of major and minor:
 - C - Ionian - Major

- D - Dorian - Minor with raised 6th
- E - Phrygian - Minor with lowered 2nd
- F - Lydian - Major with raised 4th
- G - Mixolydian - Major with lowered 7th
- A - Aeolian - Natural minor
- B - Locrian - Used most often in jazz

SHAPE

SIMPLE LH ACCOMPANIMENTS

- LH harmonic open 5th in any mode is useful. In D Dorian select a meter, play the LH D/A on each downbeat. Invent RH melodies in phrases, making sure to cadence on a long note other than D, then for the final phrase cadence on D.
- Move this LH 5th around, down to C/G, back to D/A, up to E/B, back to D/A. Keep the melody in D Dorian to hear that sound, or change the melody to match the mode of your LH. (Recommended: avoid LH tritone of B/F, both for the ear's sake, and because it implies functional harmony.)
- Change the LH harmonic 5th to a melodic 5th; invent RH melodies.
- Try a rocking bass spanning an octave, D-A-D-A-D, etc. using fingers 5-2-1-2-5.
- Harmonic 5th, add a grace note 1/2 step below the upper note, i.e. D/A, add G# almost simultaneously with the A. This is a fun sound when playing for galloping.
- Simple ostinato accompaniments are very effective, i.e. in D Dorian, D-A-B fingered 5-2-1. The tones A and B can be played as a harmonic or melodic 2nd. Any ostinato that is easy to play and avoids 1-3-5 can be used. Moving the ostinato up or down a step gives a welcome new sound, especially when you come back home to the original.

Score:

[Modal Melodies and Accompaniments](#)

Videos:

[Lydian in 4/4](#)

[Ionian and Dorian in 6/8](#)

[Phrygian Waltz](#)

APPLY

MOVE TO THE MELODIES

Modal melodies provide raw material for many eurhythmics activities, a few of which are suggested below. Once the movers are successful with the original task, remember to change the tempo, dynamics, or articulation to engage the students in active listening, and to prevent them from going on autopilot.

- Create some music for movement: In F Lydian play an open 5th with LH (F/C) in whole notes in 4/4. Invent F Lydian melodies in the RH, cadencing away from F and on F. Move

the LH down to E/B, but keep the RH in F Lydian. Hear this bi-modal sound, then return the LH to F/C for closure. (Going up with LH to G/D does not work equally well because you will imply V7 with the tritone B/F.) Possible movement activities:

- Step the beat and clap on every downbeat
- Step only on beat 1.
- Make it a Quick Reaction game by calling out new numbers: Step only on beat 3; only on beats 1 and 4, etc.
- Step on 1, clap on 3; step on 1 and 4, clap on 2 and 3, etc.
- My turn/Your turn: Improvise a 4-beat rhythm pattern using F Lydian that students repeat by clapping, then stepping. Or play one 4-beat rhythm continuously until everyone can clap or step it, then announce “New Pattern” and repeat the process.
- Create some music: In C Ionian, play LH C-G-C-G covering an octave. This LH rocking back and forth works well in 6/8, but could also be adapted to other meters. Movement activities:
 - Skate to this music (feeling ternary beats, aka compound meter)
 - Ball pass around the circle on the beat
 - Pretend you have a long rope to ring a big bell, down and up
 - Push an imaginary swing, forth and back
- Create some music: In E Phrygian, play a LH ostinato waltz accompaniment. Movement activities:
 - Step on 1, clap on 2 and 3 (or play small hand drum on 2 and 3)
 - Bounce a ball on each downbeat
 - Ask students to invent partner game in 3/4 using combination of clapping/patsching

USING MODES TO INTERNALIZE METERS AND SOLVE PROBLEMS

- Establish a meter, select a mode, and improvise melodies in phrases. More challenging: stipulate the number of measures in each phrase.
- Add LH accompaniment as able
- Trade modal phrases as a duet.
- Use modal improvisation to help solve problems in the repertoire
 - If a student struggles with a particular meter, improvise in that meter.
 - If a particular rhythmic figure is frequently misread (i.e. dotted 8th-16th, or dotted quarter-8th), improvise on that rhythmic figure.
 - In addition to clapping rhythmic sight-reading exercises, ask students to improvise modal melodies in written rhythms

Score:

[Rhythms for Improvising](#)

Video of piano students:

[Improvising in Lydian in 2/4 to a given rhythm](#)

[Improvising in Dorian in 3/4 to a given rhythm](#)

[Improvising freely in 6/8 in Mixolydian](#)

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CHAPTER 3

LOCOMOTOR ACTIVITIES

This chapter offers practical ways to create simple but effective piano music for locomotor activities. Eurhythmics teachers need to play for locomotor activities, but all musicians can benefit from learning the piano skills addressed in this chapter, including independence of hands, coordination, and rhythmic control.

MARCH

EXPLORE without judgment. Listen.

- March around your living room or wherever you are to get a sense of the meter, tempo, and style of music you will eventually improvise.

OPEN 5TH IN LH

- Play LH open 5th on C using fingers 5 on C and 1 on G, harmonic and melodic
- Move this around to various white keys, noticing the distinctive sound of the tritone (B/F)
- Find and listen to tonic/dominant relationships, such as C/G and G/D, or D/A and A/E
- Find tonic/dominant and relative major/minor relationships, such as C/G and A/E, or G/D and E/B.
- Find the white key/black key relationship, such as C/G and C#/G#, or F/C and F#/C#.
- Invert the 5th (becomes a 4th), putting LH thumb on tonic and 4th finger on the dominant below, such as C down to G, etc.
- Move that 4th around, finding tonic/dominant, and relative major/minor relationships

PENTASCALE IN RH

- RH thumb on any white key, find the major 5-finger scales, i.e. CDEFG, DEF#GA, etc.
- RH thumb on any black key, find major 5-finger scales, i.e. C#D#E#F#G#, etc.
- Invent melodies in various 5-finger major scales

- Find minor pentascales and invent minor melodies

SHAPE

HANDS TOGETHER MARCH IN 2/4

- LH 5 on C, thumb on G: Think 2/4, playing harmonic 5th every beat, lightly and detached.
- Add RH melody in C 5-finger, in 2/4, using quarters, 8ths, half notes, dotted quarters/8ths.
- Play a 4-bar phrase ending on D as a half note, then play a 4-bar phrase ending on C as half note. You've just created a half cadence and a full cadence.
- Move LH to 5 on G, thumb on D. Move RH to G major 5-finger scale. Invent phrases.
- Return to C/G and C major 5-finger scale, invent phrases with half and full cadences.
- Move LH to 5 to A, thumb on E. Move RH to A minor 5-finger scale. Invent melodies with full and half cadences.
- Bi-tonal pieces, i.e. LH harmonic 5th C/G, RH in D major 5-finger scale
- Black and White pieces: LH harmonic 5th on C#/G#, RH in C major 5-finger, then both in C#, then LH back to C/G with RH in C#. Finally both return to C major.
- More advanced: Use the entire scale. Occasionally use a chromatic tone.
- Alternate Bassline: LH thumb on C, 4 on G, play alternating quarters C-G-C-G. Walk the bass up from G: G-A-B-C.
- Invent phrases with a half cadence (melody ending on scale degrees 2 or 5) and full cadence (melody ending on scale degree 1) Remember that "home" (tonic) is more satisfying if you've ended away from home several times (scale degree 2 or 5 in melody)
- Plan your phrase structure, i.e. equal 4-bar phrases, or Short-Short-Long (SSL) 2+2+4-bars, LSS, or some other combination.

Score:

[Marching Samples](#)

Videos:

[March at slow tempo](#)

[March at tempo for kids](#)

APPLY

PLAYING INTRODUCTIONS FOR LOCOMOTOR ACTIVITIES

Introductions set the tempo and style. If used consistently, carefully constructed introductions can help with classroom management, and movers will learn to start together.

- Use single pitches followed by one final chord.
- Use the dominant if improvisation is tonal, otherwise select an appropriate pitch and final chord
- Final chord should be longer in duration than other notes in the introduction.
- Lift hands off the final chord to create silence/space, cueing movers to prepare.

- Tell movers, “Listen for the chord before you move.”

PLAYING FOR MARCHING

- Select several of the above plans for playing Marches, creating a 32-48 bar piece
- Practice playing introductions. A dotted rhythm ending with a chord, then rest, is effective
- Teach movers to listen for an Introduction, to lift one foot during the rest, and to step on the downbeat. Many skills are involved in starting movement accurately, and it is well worth spending time teaching these “getting ready to move” skills.
- Play an introduction and set your movers in motion
- Teach them to stop by executing a ritard before a cadence, giving a verbal cue, and completely stopping the sound. Stopping and starting are skills that need to be taught and learned.
- After a full stop, give an introduction again to reinforce starting skills
- Movement challenges include:
 - Stop/start
 - Set new tempo after a stop
 - Change in dynamics
 - Change direction for each new phrase
 - Clap at the beginning of each new phrase or the beginning of each measure.

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JUMP

EXPLORE

- Away from the piano do several jumps. Notice what happens when you jump.
 - Knees bend
 - Spring up off the floor
 - Land
- Now sing/vocalize “Up/Down” while you jump. The landing feels like a down beat, and the “up” is the anacrusis. The music needs to start with the anacrusis in order for the jump to occur.
- Experiment with equal length anacrusis (up) and crasis (down) in 2/4, i.e. both quarter notes on beats 2/1-2/1...Up/Down - Up/Down
- Maintain the same tempo but shorten the anacrusis to an 8th note, i.e. &/1-2&/1-2&/1. Notice you have less time to prepare the jump.
- Change to 3/4 time and you’ll have a beat of rest between jumps. 3/1-2-3/1...Up/Down - Rest - Up/Down - Rest.

SHAPE

JUMPING MUSIC

- Start in 2/4. With the fall board closed, say “Up/Down” while tapping RH/LH.
- Open the fall board. Splash any white key chord cluster with RH on beat 2, play LH single bass note C on every downbeat.
- Move the RH cluster around the piano, move the LH to the dominant (G), alternate RH chords with LH repeated Gs a few times, then back to LH on C.
- Move the RH up an octave or two while keeping the LH on C3. A higher register may inspire movers to jump higher.
- Same tempo, 2/4, shorten the RH anacrusis to an 8th note
- Change to 3/4, same length anacrusis/crusis, but now with a rest on beat 2.

Score:

[Jumping Samples](#)

Videos:

[Jumping 2/4 equal anacrusis/crusis](#)

[Jumping 2/4 shorter anacrusis](#)

[Jumping 3/4 equal anacrusis/crusis](#)

[Jumping 3/4 shorter anacrusis](#)

APPLY

PLAYING FOR JUMPING

- Decide on a meter (2/4 or 3/4) and the length of the anacrusis (quarter or 8th)
- Practice playing introductions to feel the jumps yourself, and to set the tempo for the movers.
- “Listen for the long sound before you jump.”
- Watching the movers is essential in all movement activities. Make sure your musical timing makes jumping physically possible for your movers.
- An alternative to playing an introduction is to ask one student to jump. Watch carefully, play that student, then invite another (or everyone) to join.
- Movement challenges:
 - Change tempo
 - Change dynamics
 - Change registers: move everything up, or everything down, or RH up and LH down
 - Change meters from duple to triple to see if movers will wait an extra beat

TIP TOE JUMP - INCORPORATING JUMPS INTO A PIECE

(*Gavotte* by F.J. Gossec serves as the model for this activity, as suggested in Virginia Hoge Mead’s book, *Eurhythmics in Today’s Music Classroom*, p. 64)

- Improvise on a simple harmonic scheme (I and V)
- Movers tip toe until they hear the signal to jump.
- Repeated playings of the original plan will be needed until the movers can successfully anticipate and time their jumps.
- Once the original game is mastered, play one of the variations. Again, repeated playings of a variation will be needed for mastery.
- When challenging movers, change only one thing at a time. Allow them to master each new challenge, then change one more thing.
- Simple tonal material allows you to focus on watching the movers and tailoring the game to their needs.

Score:

[Tip Toe Jump](#)

Video:

[Tip Toe Jump original](#)

[Tip Toe Jump extended game](#)

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WALK

EXPLORE without judgment.

- Walk and sing a melody in time with your steps, or, watch someone walk and sing a melody in time to that person's steps. Children walk on average between 130 and 150 steps per minute; teens and adults usually walk slower.
- Invent single voice melodies at the piano, mostly stepwise with occasional larger intervals, beginning with quarter notes. Think one quarter note per foot fall. After about eight quarter notes/steps, add occasional 8th notes. A few bars later add dotted quarter-8th, half notes, etc. to vary the rhythm. Pitch material can be tonal or not.
- Walking meter is usually 4/4, but it is fun to experiment with other meters (3/4, 5/4). Playing without a meter, just meandering, is actually very difficult to do. Try it.
- Play *molto legato*, *portato*, *marcato*, *staccato*. Vary the weight from very heavy to very light.
- Vary the dynamics and the tempo
- Listen for phrases

SHAPE

WALKING MUSIC

One Hand

- In 4/4 invent a RH melody in a major or minor key, or a mode, with 4-bar phrases. Cadence on tonic with a long note for the first phrase, then cadence away (scale degree 2 or 5), away again, and finally home (tonic).
- Effective walking music can be created using only one hand. Beautifully shaped and phrased single line melodies are a joy to walk to, and allow for nearly all the pianist's focus to be on watching the movers.

Two Hands

- Play a LH walking bass. (See examples in score.) When the improvised music contains two voices, movers tend to step the bass.
- Invent RH melodies to go with the walking bass
- Think phrase, cadence, long note.

Score:

[Walking Samples](#)

Video:

[Walking - LH scale degrees 1565](#)

[Walking - Key changes \(Slower tempo for demo\)](#)

APPLY

PLAYING FOR WALKING

- Play a clear introduction. Tempo should match the natural walking tempo of the movers. If you don't know their tempo, ask one of them to walk and take that tempo to the piano.
- After the intro, begin with a 1:1 correspondence between notes and steps, that is, quarters in both hands. Once the movers are with the music, add pairs of 8th notes and other rhythmic variety in the melody, but not too much.
- As always, watch the movers and adjust your playing to fit them.
- If too much is happening at once, find just one mover who is doing more or less what you intend, and keep your eyes focused on him/her.
- Think phrase, cadence, long note.
- Movement challenges:
 - Stop/start
 - Change tempo
 - Change quality of sound - articulation, register, weight, dynamics

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JOG

EXPLORE

- Away from the piano, jog a few steps. (Jogging can also be called tip toeing, but avoid using “run” or this will get out of hand quickly.) Alternate walking with jogging. Is there (or could there be) a rhythmic relationship?
- Notice how jogging/tip toeing compares to walking in terms of:
 - Size of steps
 - Weight
 - Speed
 - Ease of stopping
 - Distance that can be travelled comfortably
- Jog and sing a melody with your steps
- Jog over to the piano and play a melody similar to the one you were just singing.
- What register did you select for your melody?
- What meter? What durations were you playing?
- What articulation fits jogging?

SHAPE

JOGGING MUSIC

- Jogging is usually in 2/4 or 4/4, with foot steps equal to 8th notes.
- Internalize your own jogging tempo, select a pentascale, and invent RH 4-bar phrases with primarily 8th notes that cadence with a longer note at home and away.
- Jogging register is usually from about middle C up, but it is possible to play in a lower register too. (A tip toeing bear, perhaps? Tempo will have to be adjusted for a large animal, but kids might enjoy moving like a tip toeing bear.)
- Articulation is staccato, except for longer note at cadence
- Play LH accompaniment alternating tonic and dominant, also with light, staccato touch, along with your RH melody
- Leave the tonal realm. Try a LH ostinato: light, staccato, non-triad cluster, i.e. DGA. This can be moved around by step, and back to original for a home-away-home sound.
- With LH ostinato, invent RH melody. Pentascale (major, minor, modal) works well, or try a tonal center with some “wrong notes,” that is, notes outside the expected key signature. Think Bartok.
- A third way to play for jogging is to use 3rds. Use fingers 1 and 3 in one or both hands, and finger 2 for the note in between. Play low to high, high to low, with and without the fill-in note. Using only white keys will yield some major and some minor 3rds. Occasionally use a black key to make a minor 3rd major. Move the 3rds around by step without regard to a tonal center. Cadence by landing on a longer single note or 3rd.
- Voice exchange between hands is helpful, that is, play the same 3rd in both hands but low/high in one hand and high/low in the other.

- Think phrase, cadence, long note.

Score:

[Jogging Samples](#)

Video:

[Jogging - LH scale degrees 1 and 5](#)

[Jogging - LH ostinato](#)

[Jogging - Alternating 3rds](#)

APPLY

PLAYING FOR JOGGING

- Three suggestions were given above
 - Tonal melody with tonic/dominant LH
 - Ostinato LH
 - Alternating 3rds
- Select one of the above and invent a 16 or 32-bar jogging piece which cadences away and home. Call this A.
- Create a B section using one of the other jogging suggestions, or make the B section walking music. If B is walking music, strive for the same tempo as jogging, resulting in walking steps that are twice as slow as jogging steps. Cadence away and home in the B section.
- Return to A by repeating the original plan, although every note will not be identical to the first time.

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WALTZ (OR STEP-CLAP-CLAP)

EXPLORE

- Imagine in your mind's ear the music for a waltz, then move to it, three steps per bar. Also try step-clap-clap.
- There are two levels of rhythm (at least): the longer line represented by the phrase, and the individual measure of strong/weak/weak or down/up/up.
- At the piano, close the fall board and with LH play a waltz bass with just fingers 5 and 1. 5-1-1/5-1-1.
- Still on the closed fall board play a RH melody in 3/4, remembering to think phrase, cadence, long note.

- Still on the closed fall board, play a 2-bar LH introduction 5-1-1/5-1-1, followed by a HT waltz of several phrases.

SHAPE

WALTZING MUSIC

- Select a mode. D Dorian will be used in the first example, but any mode works. (See Ch. 2 sample score of a Phrygian waltz with ostinato.)
- Accompaniment can be simple, an open 5th on D (LH 5-1-1) with a small change for contrast, i.e. dropping LH a whole step to C-G.
- Invent a melody to go with the LH, beginning with just a 5-finger pattern. Remember phrase, cadence, long note.
- LH can be moved around to various open 5ths. To avoid the tritone B-F, use Bb-F instead.
- Melody can be a modal-tonal mix. Think of the 5-finger white key pattern of the first bass note in the measure.

Score:

[Waltzing Samples](#)

Video:

[Waltz - Dorian](#)

[Waltz - Modal Tonal Mix](#)

APPLY

GAMES IN 3/4

In addition to simply stepping three beats of a waltz, many eurhythmics activities can be done to waltzing music. Remember that once the movers have mastered an activity, change one element at a time: the dynamics, tempo, articulation, phrase structure, etc., to challenge them. Here are several eurhythmics activities in waltz-time:

- Step-Clap-Clap. Step on the downbeat, clap or play a small hand drum on beats 2 and 3.
 - A fun but potentially chaotic variation: Students work in pairs. One student holds a hand drum, steps on beat 1 and places the drum somewhere accessible for his/her partner to tap. The other student taps the drum on beats 2 and 3.
- Step only on beat 1; or step only on beat 3; or step only on beats 1 and 3, etc.
- Step all the beats, clapping only on each downbeat; step on 1 and 3, clap on 2; step on 1 and 2, clap on 3; etc.
- Half the class steps only on beats 1 and 3, half steps on beat 2, etc.
- Divide the class into two groups. Group A steps 12 beats (4 bars) with the music while Group B stands in place and claps those 12 beats. Then B steps 12 while A stands in place and claps, etc. Change to 6 beats per group, or 9 beats.

- Bounce a ball on the downbeat, catch on beat 2, transfer to other hand on beat 3. Solo or partner bounce.
- Ask students to invent ways to bounce a ball in 3/4

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SKATE OR GLIDE

EXPLORE

- Skate or glide around the room and imagine music to go along with your movement. Absent actual skates, a decision needs to be made regarding footwear and how much forward sliding motion per step is realistic and safe.
- Some teachers use paper plates under the feet to simulate the feeling of skating.
- Whether or not your feet actually slide, feel the transfer of weight from left foot to right foot while swinging your arms
- Imagine and sing music in compound duple meter. 6/8 is a natural meter for gliding due to the side to side swing (2 beats per bar), and the slightly longer time spent on each foot (three subdivisions per beat) than is the case with marching or walking.

SHAPE

SKATING OR GLIDING MUSIC

- Think in 6/8. Two possible bass patterns for skating are shown in the score.
- Play each of these LH patterns, with slow harmonic rhythm (at least 4 bars per harmony)
- Add a melody, remembering phrase, long note, cadence.

Score:

[Skating or Gliding Samples](#)

Video:

[Skating with easier bass](#)

[Skating with rocking bass](#)

APPLY

SKATING, GLIDING MUSIC IN 6/8

- As with any locomotor activity, to find an appropriate tempo ask a student to skate; or model skating, then ask a student to join you.
- Take that tempo to the piano. Play an introduction and set a few more students in motion.
- Students skate/glide around the room, feeling how the side-to-side motion fits the music.

- When/if appropriate, students can discover there are three microbeats for each macrobeat in skating music.
- The grand right and left, as used in some folk dances, gives the feeling of both micro and macrobeats when done in compound meter. The feet step 8ths, the hand grasp occurs on dotted quarters. Improvised skating music is ideal for teaching a grand right and left, principally because you can adjust the tempo to the movers.

A note about Simple Triple Meter (3/4) vs. Compound Duple Meter (6/8)

Absent notation, it is sometimes impossible to tell whether music is in 3/4 or 6/8. When improvising for movement, the nature of the left hand is a good way to cue what you want the movers to do. Notice the difference between the left hand in the scores of *Waltzing Samples* and *Skating/Gliding Samples*. The left hand parts are specifically designed to elicit different kinds of movement.

Tempo is also important in cueing the difference between 3/4 and 6/8 to the movers. Waltzing music played quickly will almost certainly feel like 6/8. If the objective is to feel 3/4, then keep the tempo on the slow side and emphasize a strong downbeat with lighter beats on 2 and 3. If the objective is to feel 6/8, then emphasize the feeling of two beats per measure, with a weight shift left-to-right, keeping the triple subdivisions very light.

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GALLOP AND SKIP

EXPLORE

- Gallop, then skip, and notice the differences between them.
- Galloping is one sided, whereas skipping requires alternating left-right motion.
- Galloping tends to keep the mover slightly lower to the ground; skipping lifts the mover off the floor.
- Notice your knees. In galloping the knees can be nearly stiff but in skipping, the knees have to bend to provide the upward motion.

SHAPE

GALLOPING AND SKIPPING MUSIC

- Meter for galloping could be 3/8 due to the one-sided nature of the motion, but 6/8 is most often used for both galloping and skipping. Compound duple meter (6/8) provides a feeling of two to reflect the left-right nature of skipping, and ternary subdivisions provide support for the long-short/long-short nature of the steps.

- Bass for galloping can be open 5th, with or without an added grace note. Rhythm of the bass can be primarily dotted quarters.
- Try a modal sound on white keys with LH 5th on D/A (optional grace note G or G#), RH melody in D Dorian.
- For a new phrase, move the LH to E/B and F/C, then back down eventually to D/A.
- An effective motif in the RH melody is a descending 3rd. This supports the galloping motion.
- The weight of galloping music is slightly heavier than the weight of skipping music.
- Bass for skipping needs to reflect the left/right nature of the motion. At minimum the bass needs to alternate pitches, i.e. C/G as dotted quarters.
- Try a tonal scheme with LH C/G as dotted quarters for a phrase, then G/D for a phrase or two, and back to C/G. Traveling to the relative minor and back is also effective.
- RH melody can be a mixture of 6/8 rhythms. Remember to think phrase, cadence, long note.
- Skipping music should lift the movers off the floor. This lift can be achieved through tempo, weight, register, but especially through articulation. Play and record a few bars of skipping music using an alternating bass as above, then skip to the recording. (This is an excellent strategy for all improvisation for movement.) You'll know immediately if the music fits the skipping.
- A better bass for skipping, but harder to coordinate for the improvising pianist, is long-short/long-short. This bass more fully supports the movement as it coincides with the feet.
- Practice cadencing. Once this bass gets going, it's challenging to stop it without fumbling.

Score:

[Galloping Samples](#)

[Skipping Samples](#)

APPLY

GALLOPING AND SKIPPING

The activities of galloping and skipping are usually their own rewards. Humans are meant to move, and skipping, especially for children, is one of the most pleasurable ways to move. Children usually gallop before they are able to skip.

Skipping is most enjoyable when there is plenty of open space. This is a great time to collaborate with the physical education teacher, who probably shares the music teacher's goal of having children learn to skip. Improvised music that inspires skipping will likely facilitate the learning process.

The quintessential skipping piece for children is *Pop Goes the Weasel*. The POP (jump) built into the song makes this a fun movement activity. A simple arrangement of *Pop* is included here.

Score:

[Pop Goes the Weasel](#)

Video:

[Gallop](#)

[Skipping easier bass](#)

[Skipping harder bass slow tempo](#)

[Skipping harder bass closer to tempo](#)

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CHAPTER 4

SONGS - KNOWN AND INVENTED - USING I, IV, V7

Learning to play and harmonize melodies by ear is a skill that can be learned and practiced. With a little experience harmonizing known melodies, it's fairly easy to harmonize improvised melodies. The traditional melodies included here are selected because they are ideal for learning basic tonal harmony.

KNOWN MELODIES

EXPLORE

- Sing one of these tunes: Yankee Doodle, You Are My Sunshine, Twinkle Twinkle Little Star, Hickory Dickory Dock, or Happy Birthday.
- After singing the melody, play it on the piano with RH, in any key.
- Sing and play one of the other melodies listed above. Try singing and playing the melody simultaneously, to strengthen the connection between ear and hand.
- Select one of the songs above. What meter is it in? (Could there be more than one answer?) Does the song begin with a complete or an incomplete measure?
- Using just two voices, soprano and bass (no chords), play RH melody and single notes in the bass with LH. Play only one bass note for several notes in the melody. In other words, do not harmonize every melody note.
- It doesn't matter if the bass is "right," just experiment and listen. If you play a bass note your ear doesn't like, find a different bass note.

SHAPE

KNOWN MELODY - YOU ARE MY SUNSHINE

The details below apply to *You Are My Sunshine*, but the process can be used with any melody.

- Play *You Are My Sunshine* and determine on which scale degree it ends. Compare the final note to the starting note. Are they the same?
- Play *You Are My Sunshine* in F major (Hint: do not start on F) and know the scale degree of every melody tone. It doesn't matter if you use Moveable-Do or numbers for function. If you need to refer to a score it is included here.

Score:

[You Are My Sunshine - Melody only](#)

- Determine tonic, dominant, and subdominant pitches in F major. (F, C, Bb)
- Prepare to harmonize the melody with just two voices. LH thumb on F below middle C, 5th finger on Bb, 4th finger on C.
- Don't harmonize the pick-up notes
- Play the melody with the RH, and play one bass note every other beat, either F, C, or Bb, according to what your ear tells you. Remember: no chords, just single bass notes. You are looking for chord roots only.
- The result may sound something like this. Your result could be different, and that's fine too.

Score:

[You Are My Sunshine - Basic Harmony](#)

APPLY

YOU ARE MY SUNSHINE - MOVING BASSLINE

create a MOVING BASSLINE TO ACCOMPANY STUDENT SINGING

- Instead of playing only roots of chords, try a more stepwise bassline. For example, let the bass move stepwise between tonic and dominant
- Play the third of the chord in the bass instead of the root
- Try to avoid too many unisons between melody and bass. The score offers two possible basslines.
- Students sing *You Are My Sunshine* accompanied by the bassline on the piano.

Score:

[You Are My Sunshine - Two different basslines](#)

YOU ARE MY SUNSHINE - ALBERTI BASS

- Play duets by ear: Primo is the melody of *You Are My Sunshine* (F major), Secondo is one of the bass lines above or, better yet, improvise a bassline.

- Turn it into a solo: Student plays You Are My Sunshine HT, melody and bass
- Teach the block-chord progression in F Major in the LH: I - IV - V7 - I (F - Bb/F - C7/E - F)
- Practice an Alberti bass as follows with each chord: bottom-top-middle-top
- Play duets by ear: Primo is You Are My Sunshine melody, Secondo is Alberti Bass
- Turn it into a solo: Student plays You Are My Sunshine HT using Alberti Bass

Score:

[You Are My Sunshine - Alberti Bass](#)

ORIGINAL VARIATIONS ON TWINKLE

There are famous variations on Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star. Why not create your own? This could be a project shared by a student and teacher, two students, or a solo project. It could begin with improvisation and lead to a written (or loosely sketched out) composition. The accompanying score illustrates these possibilities:

- Preserve the melody and move the bassline around. (Var. 1)
- Preserve the melody and improvise with LH arpeggiated triads by ear, without regard for functional harmony. (Var. 2)
- Keep chord roots in the bass and decorate the melody (Var. 3)

Score:

[Twinkle Twinkle - Basic harmony and three variations](#)

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HARMONIZING IMPROVISED MELODIES WITH PRIMARY CHORDS

EXPLORE

- Select a singable key. Find tonic, subdominant, dominant tones with your LH. (Easiest fingering is thumb on tonic, 5 on subdominant, 4 on dominant.) Play bass notes slowly, as whole notes, while singing improvised melodies to go with the bass. Let your ear guide you.
- The need to breathe will create natural cadences.

SHAPE

HARMONIZING IMPROVISED MELODIES WITH PRIMARY CHORDS

- Select a major key.

- LH plays tonic, subdominant, dominant tones only. (fingers 1, 5, 4 as above)
- Play four LH whole notes in common time in this order: tonic, subdominant, dominant, tonic.
- Play those same four LH notes and add a melody, singing, playing, or both at the same time. End with a long note in the melody (whole or half note) on scale degree 1 or 3. You've created a 4-bar phrase with a full cadence.
- Play LH notes in a new order: tonic, subdominant, tonic, dominant, while playing a melody to go with the bass, ending with a long melody note (whole or half note) on scale degree 2. You've created a 4-bar phrase with a half cadence.
- Extend the above plan to create a 4-phrase piece (16 bars), with the following cadences: full, half, half, full. Play only chord roots with the LH.

The sample score contains some deliberate dissonances to illustrate their effect. Guided by the harmonic rhythm in the bass, a melody can survive dissonances quite easily if you let your ear lead and you don't panic when you play a "wrong" note.

Score:

[Harmonizing Improvised Melodies - I IV V7](#)

APPLY

HEARING TONIC AND DOMINANT HARMONIES

Using whatever labels make sense for the learners (Home/Away, Do/Sol, Tonic/Dominant), let them experience and identify tonic and dominant bass notes. Formation for this exercise can be a standing circle.

- Play an improvised melody of four bars with only the tonic in the bass. Emphasize the bass and repeat it twice per bar for clarity. Decide how you want students to indicate tonic, i.e. standing in place, or hands on knees, marching in place, etc.
- Then improvise two to four measures with only dominant in bass. Establish that this sounds different from tonic. Whatever you wish to call it, decide how they will indicate this change, i.e. put one foot behind the other, or arms and legs extended making an X, etc.
- Continue improvising melodies with slow harmonic rhythm (two or four bars of one harmony), playing only roots of tonic or dominant chords. Students hear and show in movement the difference between tonic and dominant in the bass.
- Extensions include:
 - Adding full triads
 - Adding the 7th for V
 - Adding IV, but only when I and V are solidly learned
- If chaos can be avoided, it's fun to walk in a circle for the tonic/dominant game. Walk forward for tonic, walk backward for dominant. First make the changes entirely predictable (i.e. every 4 bars), but once the movers are successful, introduce one unexpected change, then another. The only way to execute this kind of eurhythmics

game is through improvisation. Improvisation is the means to achieving one principal goal of eurhythmics: Movers *have to listen* to the music in order to play the game.

Videos:

[Improvised melodies over chord roots](#)

[Harmony March](#)

- Vary the above by trying:
 - New key - relative minor, or another major key
 - New meter - try compound meter (6/8) if you've been in simple meter (4/4)

HEARING HARMONIES

Here's a plan for a duet with a pre-planned bass (Secondo) and improvised melody (Primo):

- Select a chord progression for secondo, playing only chord roots to begin, for example I-IV-I-V/I-I-IV-V-I.
- Primo improvises melodies, remembering to play a long note at the cadences.
- Select a different chord progression, or take a chord progression from the repertoire that uses only primary chords.
- As able, ask student to play both hands

Videos:

[Student Duet Number 1 on Pre-planned bass](#)

[Student Duet Number 2 on Pre-planned bass](#)

Sometimes your students will be inspired, take a bassline from their repertoire, and improvise without being prompted.

[Student solo on bass from the repertoire](#)

GUIDELINES FOR HARMONIZING TONAL MELODIES WITH PRIMARY CHORDS

First-hand experience should precede learning a set of rules. After you have experimented with harmonizing melodies, the following guidelines may be helpful. The first guideline, playing with just two voices, is the most important.

- Use only two voices, soprano and bass. Two voices telegraph nearly all the harmony you will ever need, and it's easier to hear the harmonies with only two voices.
- Do not harmonize every melody note, unless purposefully trying a Bach chorale-style melody.
- Do not harmonize pick-ups
- Scale degrees 1-3-5 take I, 1-4-6 take IV, 2-4-5-7 take V7. Notice some scale degrees can go two ways (1, 4, 5) and some are unique (2, 3, 6, 7). If in doubt try both possibilities and let your ear decide.

- Some melody tones are harmonic and some are non-harmonic. If you're having trouble finding the right bass note, it's possible you are trying to harmonize a non-harmonic tone. Try thinking of the following (or preceding) note as the harmonic tone. (Happy Birthday, for example, is loaded with non-harmonic tones.)
- Harmonic rhythm is an important consideration. In 2/4 and 3/4 generally play one bass note per bar; in 4/4 and 6/8 play two bass notes per bar. Within a given measure in 4/4 or 6/8 the bass notes may represent one chord or two different chords, depending on the melody. Harmonic rhythm is often, not always, the same throughout a melody, but then quickens at the cadence.
- Establish the basic harmony by playing only the roots of the I, IV, and V7 chords initially.
- Once you can hear the chord roots, then make the bassline more stepwise and flowing by adding passing tones between chord roots, or by playing the 3rd of a triad in the bass rather than the root.
- Try to avoid V going to IV unless the melody gives you no choice.

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CHAPTER 5

BEYOND I, IV, V: HARMONIES YOU CAN HEAR

Major and chromatic scales, and the circle of fifths are ideal starting points for harmonic improvisation.

HARMONIZING THE MAJOR SCALE

EXPLORE

- Play a major scale ascending and descending in whole notes with LH, repeating the high tonic for the trip down. As always, there is no penalty for playing in C Major.
- To the LH whole note scale, add a RH melody. The RH can wander in terms of register, but play only tones that are in the key signature. Play a strict ratio of 4:1, that is, four quarter notes in the RH for each whole note in the LH. When you arrive at the tonic, both high and low, play a whole note in the RH along with the whole note in the LH. This is how to create a cadence.
- The above plan automatically provides phrasing, an 8 bar phrase in each direction.

- Play slowly and listen. Don't worry about analyzing. Do you hear tension and relaxation?
- Enjoy all the tones you play, even the ones your ear perceives as "wrong." No matter how dissonant a tone sounds, stay with it and listen. You can get relief on the next note. A given tone is never more than a half or whole step away from consonance with the bass.
- When the above plan is comfortable, add a cadence in both directions at the halfway point. Create a cadence by playing a whole note in the RH along with the whole note in the LH. Ascending, the cadences will occur on the subdominant and tonic; descending cadences will arrive on dominant and tonic. Now there will be two, 4-bar phrases in each direction.
- Play slowly. Listen for tension and relaxation. Postpone analysis and judgment.

Score:

[Harmonizing a major scale with scales tones in bass](#)

Video:

[Major Scale 4:1 with two cadences](#)

[Major Scale 4:1 with four cadences](#)

SHAPE

HARMONIZING THE MAJOR SCALE

- Play exactly as above, but try it in two adjacent keys on the circle, i.e. C Major and F Major, or G Major and C Major. Whole note scale in LH, ascending and descending, repeating high tonic. RH 4:1 except 1:1 at the four cadence points, subdominant, tonic on the ascent, dominant, tonic on the descent.
- Now make one change in the above plan. LH stays the same, cadence points stay the same, but make the RH into more of a melody by varying the rhythm, adding a few passing tones as 8th notes, etc. There will no longer be a strict 4:1, but keep the four cadence points as whole notes in both hands.
- Careful listening will guide your hand. At times the melody will seem to reveal itself and you'll be able to hear what notes to play next. What you're hearing is the miracle of tonal music. The tonal system is dynamic, and the major scale naturally pulls toward certain harmonies. Whether or not you label the harmonies, your ear can hear these underlying forces present within the major scale.

Video:

[Major Scale with freer melody](#)

APPLY

ECHO-STEPPING RHYTHMIC PATTERNS USING HARMONIZED MAJOR SCALE

- Directions to movers: Listen to 4-beat rhythmic patterns and demonstrate them in movement. These are listed in increasing order of difficulty for the movers, from Level 1 - 5.
 - Stand in place and listen to a 4-beat pattern, then echo-clap the pattern. (Level 1)
 - Stand in place and listen to a 4-beat pattern, then echo-step the pattern. (Level 2)
 - Step beats while listening to a 4-beat pattern, then echo-step the pattern. (Level 3)
 - Step and clap beats while listening to a 4-beat pattern, then continue stepping beats while echo-clapping the pattern. (Level 4)
 - Step and clap beats while listening to a 4-beat pattern, then continue clapping beats while echo-stepping the pattern. (Level 5)
- How to play for this. The music for this activity is a harmonized scale, LH plays the scale tones as whole notes, RH plays 4-beat patterns for each bass note.
 - LH is two whole notes on the same pitch.
 - RH plays pattern on LH tonic, then RH rests for the next four beats, allowing students to respond. Hold/tie the bass note or repeat it during 4-beat student response time. Then play supertonic in bass along with a RH 4-beat pattern, then RH rests while students respond, etc.
 - RH patterns can be as simple or as complicated as movers are able to echo.
 - RH patterns can be repeated over multiple bass notes if movers are having difficulty echoing them, or RH patterns can change for each bass note, or every two bass notes, etc.
 - If students are able, they can also echo-sing a 4-beat pattern as well as move it.

Video:

[Echo Pattern Game with Major Scale](#)

PLAYING HARMONIZED SCALES

- Duet with C Major scale and melody
 - Secondo: C Major scale ascending and descending in whole notes, repeating high tonic for the trip down. Scale can be done with one hand, or divided into tetrachords and played with both hands.
 - Primo: All white keys. Play 4 quarters for each bass note. Once the plan can be executed, then begin to shape it: Whole note on both tonics to create two cadences; whole note at halfway points as well as both tonics; vary the rhythm.
 - If/when able, turn this into a solo activity
- Keep the same duet plan and try other keys. Students will supplement their knowledge of theory by learning scales and key signatures by ear.
- More advanced: play in several keys by moving counterclockwise around the circle, i.e. begin in A major. After going up and down the A major scale, play an A7chord, then execute the plan in D major, then D7 and G major, etc.

Video:

[Student Duet #1 on Major Scale](#)

[Student Duet #2 on Major Scale](#)

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HARMONIZING A DESCENDING CHROMATIC SCALE

EXPLORE

This plan is similar to harmonizing the major scale in terms of whole notes in the bass, four quarters in the RH, and midpoint cadences. Just as with a major scale, the strict 4:1 eventually turns into a RH melody with varied rhythms.

PLAN A

- Play a descending chromatic scale in whole notes with LH beginning on middle C, descending to F# (half-step below the dominant), then go up a half-step to cadence on G (dominant).
- Go back up to C and descend chromatically again until you arrive on G. This time, repeat G an octave lower and then cadence on C. This bassline contains 16 whole notes.
- There are two cadences in this plan initially, the first on G (dominant) and the second on C (tonic).
- Now add a RH melody to the LH whole note chromatic scale. The RH can wander in terms of register, but play only tones that are in the key signature. (In C, all white keys.) Play a strict ratio of 4:1, that is, four quarter notes in the RH for each whole note in the LH. When you arrive at the cadences (G, then C) play a whole note in the RH along with the whole note in the LH.
- Play slowly and listen. Don't worry about analyzing. Enjoy all the tones you play, even the ones your ear perceives as "wrong." Because the LH is now chromatic, there are potentially many more "wong" notes available to your RH. No matter how dissonant a tone sounds, stay with it and listen. You can get relief on the next note. A given tone is never more than a half or whole step away from consonance with the bass.
- When the above plan is comfortable, create a cadence every four bars. Now the cadences will be on these bass pitches: A, G, A, C.
- Play slowly and listen. Postpone analysis and judgment. Play a strict 4:1 except whole notes at cadences.

PLAN B

- Play a descending chromatic scale in whole notes with LH beginning on middle C, descending to F# (half-step below the dominant), then go up a half-step to cadence on G (dominant).

- Repeat that same G and proceed chromatically down to C.
- There are two cadences: G (dominant) and C (tonic), where RH will also play a whole note.
- When adding a RH melody 4:1 for the first half of the trip down to the dominant, the RH can get by playing only white keys. For the second half of the trip from G chromatically down to C, it gets a little tricky. The RH will need a black key in the penultimate bar. Hint: Try an Ab.
- Once the two cadences are solid, add two more so there is a cadence every four bars. Now the four cadences for Plan B will be on A, G, E, C.
- Play slowly and listen. Postpone analysis and judgment. Play a strict 4:1 except whole notes at cadences.

Score:

[Harmonizing a Descending Chromatic Scale](#)

SHAPE

HARMONIZING A DESCENDING CHROMATIC SCALE

- Play either Plan A or B above. Do it again adding just a few more RH notes, remembering to create a cadence every four bars with a long tone (whole or half).
- Little by little work toward playing a flowing melody in the RH, remembering to cadence.
- Change the meter to 6/8 and play dotted half notes or two dotted quarters on the same pitch in the bass. Melody in RH.
- Change to other meters, but keep the harmonic rhythm at one chord per bar.
- Analyze the harmonies, or not, as you wish. Your ear is your best guide.
- In Plan B, the penultimate harmony is probably the hardest to hear. It is a Neapolitan (flat supertonic), or some call it a tritone substitution for the dominant. It's helpful to figure out this chord before playing Plan B. In C major, this chord is Db major.
- Plans A and B provide clear, predictable 16-bar periods with 4-bar phrases.

Video:

[Descending Chromatic Scale Harmonized Plan A 4:1](#)

[Descending Chromatic Scale Harmonized Plan A Freer Melody](#)

[Descending Chromatic Scale Harmonized Plan B 4:1](#)

[Descending Chromatic Scale Harmonized Plan B Freer Melody](#)

APPLY

BALL PASSING GAME

- Goals: Keep a steady beat by passing a ball; respond to tempo changes and signals to change direction. Game set-up:
 - Standing circle. Goal is to pass a soccer-size ball around the circle to the beat.
 - No music at first. Teacher stands inside circle, facing students. Teacher places ball in each student's outstretched hands and says, "AND pass AND pass," while

moving ball around circle clockwise from student to student. Verbal cues provide clear anacrusis/crusis to time the ball passing.

- When students can maintain this passing to verbal cues without the teacher's help, the music can begin.
- Choose Plan A or B above, whichever is more comfortable.
- Instead of LH whole notes, play four repeated half notes (over 2-bars) on each pitch with slightly detached articulation. Thinking "AND pass AND pass," each LH note coincides with "pass."
- RH needs to cue the ball passing just as the verbal cue "AND pass AND pass" did. RH plays 2-note slurs, first note coincides with "AND," second note coincides with "pass."
- Once students are passing successfully, begin changing one element at a time
 - Change tempo. Students will likely need reminders that more time (slower tempo) takes more space on the pass, and less time (faster tempo) requires them to use less space and possibly tighten the circle.
 - Give signal to change direction of passing. This could be verbal ("change") or musical (RH splash in a high register). The score with sample music has several * above bars where the RH melody is a half note at a cadence. These are suggested places for signals, but signals can be given anywhere once the game is going well.
 - Change quality of sound to inspire different kinds of passing. Instead of light and detached, try molto legato with lots of pedal, or very heavy (achieve this by playing octaves in LH instead of single pitches). Encourage passing to reflect musical qualities.
 - Add a new signal (bass note) which indicates the student with the ball should roll it across the circle to someone else. This action requires not only a signal but a fermata in the music while the ball is rolled and picked up. Once a new student has the ball, verbal cues help get started. "Get Ready To Pass, AND Pass"

Score:

[Ball Passing Game to Descending Chromatic Scale](#)

Video:

[Ball Pass with Signals to descending chromatic scale](#)

PLAYING HARMONIZED DESCENDING CHROMATIC SCALES

The same procedure can be used with a chromatic scale as with a harmonized major scale. The bass is given, the melody is improvised. The exercise can be a duet or solo. As with most improvisation, starting with narrow parameters, i.e. 4:1 melody:bass. Narrow parameters promote listening and creativity because there are relatively few variables to manage in musical time. Improvisers can focus more on the sound, less on the details of the plan. Once a pianist can operate within strict parameters comfortably, then the parameters may be loosened to allow more freedom while still executing the original plan. In many cases the loosening happens naturally, and musically.

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CIRCLE OF 5THS PROGRESSION

EXPLORE

- In C Major with LH, start on C and play up a 4th, down a 5th. Bass will be: C-F-B-E-A-D-G-C
- Repeat using 5th finger on each bass note, and add every other white key above the bass to form a 7th chord: C-E-G-B, F-A-C-E, B-D-F-A, E-G-B-D, etc. Fingering can be 5-4-2-1 or 5-3-2-1. Arpeggiate the chord one note at a time, or play the bass then the triad above, or play the whole chord blocked.
 - Easier version. Use both hands, LH plays single bass note, RH plays top three notes. This version will require a duet partner for the melody, or you can play the chords with two hands and sing an improvised melody.
- Play slowly, use pedal, listen to each harmony and to the chord root relationships. Hear your way around the circle. The 7th chords will be different qualities, with the penultimate chord a dominant 7th leading home to C.

Score:

[Circle of 5ths Progression](#)

SHAPE

CIRCLE OF 5THS PROGRESSION

- Select a meter. Play the chord progression with a harmonic rhythm of one chord per bar.
- Add a RH melody, or if playing as a duet, get a partner to play a melody. Any white key will do.
- Because this is a circle, it is theoretically endless. Create melodic phrases and cadences with long notes so the music has shape, or it will sound like a never-ending run-on sentence.
- Once comfortable with the plan, try different styles, tempos, meters, articulations, i.e. languid, peppy, jazzy, lyrical, etc.
- The faster the tempo, the slower the harmonic rhythm can be. A jazzy, syncopated melody is much easier to navigate if each chord lasts two full bars. Play the bass note for a full bar, then the rest of the chord for the second bar.

APPLY

BALL PASSING GAME TO DEMONSTRATE ANACRUSIS/CRUSIS

- Demonstrate anacrusis/crusis by passing a ball. The principal goal here is to feel and show a long anacrusis by moving the ball in a large arc. The relationships among time, space, and energy are especially important to understand in this activity. Game set-up:
 - Standing circle. Soccer-size ball. Movers will stand in place and pass the ball to their neighbor around the circle.
 - Feel and show the full length of the anacrusis while passing the ball around the circle. Ball should land in the new person's hands on the crusic (downbeat).
- When the anacrusis is shorter, the ball is passed more quickly with a smaller arc.
- The improviser can change from a longer to shorter anacrusis as movers are able to respond. Scales given in the score are merely suggestions, as virtually any scale passage will work.

Video:

[Extended Anacrusis Ball Pass to Circle of 5ths](#)

THE CIRCLE OF 5THS

- The circle progression makes it easy to improvise in the style of Satie's *Gymnopédies*.
- Whether as a duet or solo, being able to play any white key in the melody frees the player to listen and truly play "by ear."
- Play in a leisurely 6/8 with a harmonic rhythm of one bar per chord. Try other meters, simple and compound. Improvising is a great way to teach the feeling of various meters.
- Play the progression in any major key and ask your student to improvise a melody using the seven tones of that scale. Improvisation is a great way to teach key signatures.

Video:

[Circle Progression in different styles](#)

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SECONDARY DOMINANTS

EXPLORE

- In 4/4 play the following bass line in whole notes: C-B-C-C#-D-E-F-G-C. The tones move mostly stepwise: the first move is downward, then up, and continue up until the final leap from G back down to C.
- Now add a RH melody in a strict 4:1, quarters in RH against whole notes in LH. Play slowly and listen. Use only two voices. Listen for the harmonic "pull" of certain tones toward other tones. Avoiding unisons with the bass will give your ear more harmonic information for the journey. On the final C in the bass, play a whole note C in the RH.

- Remember to love every note you play. They're all good; some are just more juicy than others.
- Once the "tune" starts to emerge with the strict 4:1 and you are beginning to hear the harmonies, feel free to make the RH more melodic with passing tones and different rhythms. What's the worst that could happen? You're never more than a half or whole step away from consonance.
- New bass line, same procedure as above, same general stepwise motion: C-B-C-C#-D-E-F-F#-G-C. Remember: use only two voices, bass and soprano.
- Play both bass lines several times, trying out different melodies until you can hear what's happening in each sequence. Do not worry about analysis. This is between your hands and your ears. Your analytical brain will be invited later.
- Congratulations. In all likelihood you have just discovered by ear how secondary dominants work.

Score:

[Secondary Dominants bass line only](#)

Video:

[Secondary Dominants simple bass line](#)

SHAPE

SECONDARY DOMINANTS

- Secondary dominants are represented by notes outside the key signature.
- Expand the second bassline above by just one note: C-B-C-G-C-C#-D-E-F-F#-G-C
- Play 4:1, except cadence (long note) every 4 bars on bass notes G, E, C.
- Identify the harmonies.
- V/ii and V/V are frequently used secondary dominants. They follow a simple principle: wherever you're going, you can precede that destination chord with its dominant. (Call it V/X)
- Play a 4-bar phrase with these harmonies: I-ii-V-I. Bassline of C-D-G-C.
- Extend I-ii-V-I to two 4-bar phrases by adding secondary dominants. First phrase: I-I-V⁶⁵/ii-ii (C-C-A⁷/C#-Dm). Second phrase ii-I⁶-V⁶⁵/V-V (Dm-C/E-D⁷/F#-G). Secondary dominants enrich the harmony and can extend a simple progression, providing additional music for the ear and for movement purposes.
- Keeping those same harmonies for two 4-bar phrases, add a few moving bass notes.
- Once you can hear the harmonies offered by secondary dominants, you can create longer, more varied pieces out of not much more than a few extensions of primary triads.

Score:

[Secondary Dominants Bass and Melody](#)

APPLY

THE OPPOSITE GAME

- The movers are to demonstrate quarters while hearing half notes, then demonstrate half notes while hearing quarters. (Be My Opposite). Game set-up:
 - Establish two durations (quarter and half) by clapping
 - Establish the concept of “opposite” (half notes are the opposite of quarters and vice versa)
 - Ensure that students can clap with the music, and clap opposite the music.
 - Transfer this to the feet. Step with the music, then step opposite the music.
 - Add some stop/start and play examples of the same music two or three times consecutively so that students don’t automatically switch from one duration to the other every time. Make sure they have to listen to the music to play the game.
 - Change tempo if students are ready
- To create music for “Be My Opposite,” I create modules that can be combined as needed. This gives me a good opportunity to use secondary dominants.

Score:

[The Opposite Game](#)

Video:

[Opposite Game using Secondary Dominants](#)

DUETS USING SECONDARY DOMINANTS

Secondary dominants are represented by notes outside the key signature. Sometimes non-key signature notes are merely surface decoration (i.e. chromatic grace notes), but in many cases non-key signature notes are harbingers of a coming modulation. Through carefully constructed improvisations students can experience the effect of secondary dominants. As students return to their repertoire, the tones outside the key signature can be searched for, and their effects heard. When students are ready to learn about modulation, their experimentation with secondary dominants will have paved the way.

The next several pieces in this chapter can be played as solos or duets. The *secondo* is to be played as written. The *primo* contains pitches without rhythmic value. A suggested progression for the *primo* part is:

- Play the printed pitches in any rhythm that fits the meter and tempo.
- Once you are comfortable with the printed pitches, begin filling the space between them with chord tones or passing tones.
- Finally, invent melodies to please your ear, with the printed pitches serving merely as guidelines.
- Always listen and play to your ear.

Score:

[Duet or Solo with Secondary Dominants](#)

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DECEPTIVE CADENCES

EXPLORE

- Play this bassline slowly in whole notes: C-B-C-G-C-F-G-C (Bassline 1)
- Add a RH melody that your ear tells you matches the harmonies in the bass. Create two cadences, half cadence in bar 4, full cadence in bar 8.
- Change the final tone to A and play the bassline again: C-B-C-G-C-F-G-A (Bassline 2)
- Add a RH melody that your ear tells you matches the harmonies in the bass. Again, create two cadences, half cadence in bar 4 and a cadence in bar 8 - but what kind of cadence is it in bar 8?

SHAPE

DECEPTIVE CADENCE

- We expect that V or V⁷ will go to I, that is, G or G⁷ will go to C. That's called a full cadence. In a deceptive cadence the destination after V or V⁷ is vi, that is, G or G⁷ goes to Am instead of C. The expected resolution of G⁷, CEG, is 2/3 the same as the deceptive resolution, ACE. That single tone, A instead of G, makes all the difference. You can hear the effect even with just two voices.
- Play a 4-bar phrase ending with a half cadence, that is, on the dominant. If in C major, the bass will be G and the easiest to hear melody tone is D (2nd scale degree).
- In the same key play a 4-bar phrase ending with a full cadence. (V-I)
- In the same key play a 4-bar phrase ending with a deceptive cadence. (V-vi). If in C major, the bass will be A and the easiest to hear melody tone is C.
- Once you can hear your way through a 4-bar phrase to each type of cadence, then improvise four, 4-bar phrases with the following cadences:
 - Full
 - Half
 - Deceptive
 - Full
- Change keys and play four, 4-bar phrases with the same cadences as above.
- Make it a waltz. Use LH accompaniment with chords split between lowest note on downbeat, other two notes on beats 2-3.

Score:

[Deceptive Cadence](#)

APPLY

DECEPTIVE CADENCE

Once you understand how deceptive cadences can be used, they can be woven into improvisations to enrich the harmonic vocabulary. Alternatively, deceptive cadences can be the point of an exercise. If your learners are ready to distinguish tonic from dominant, and further, to distinguish “other” which is neither tonic nor dominant, deceptive cadences can be fun for both improviser and movers. The following exercise is another example of how the music teaches itself in a Dalcroze class. This is for older, more advanced students.

THE DECEPTIVE CADENCE GAME

- Goal: Students will demonstrate in movement I, V (or V⁷), and vi
 - Two concentric circles (inner and outer). Pairs of students standing side-by-side walk forward in a circle when hearing tonic (I).
 - Upon hearing a change to V, students take a step or two away from their partners, continuing to walk in a circle, but now farther apart.
 - When the music changes back to I, students move back toward their partners and continue walking closely side-by-side in a circle.
 - After five or six rounds where the music toggles between I and V, a deceptive cadence is introduced. Instead of V - I, the music goes from V - vi. Presumably, students will be confused. There will be a little chaos and the game will have to pause.
 - The new instruction: When you hear that V has not gone back to I as expected, outer circle move forward one person, and you'll have a new partner. The game continues as before, with new partners.
- The improvised music begins with a series of phrases with slow harmonic rhythm, alternating between I and V.
- One element to consider is chord inversions. Root position I and V (or V⁷) are much easier to hear than inversions. Use root position triads until learners have thoroughly mastered the game. With experience students can learn to hear both root position and first inversion triads as the same harmony. Avoid second inversion triads however, as they function quite differently from root position and first inversion chords.
- After students are successful hearing and showing I and V, the first deceptive cadence is introduced. Students will need time to hear and respond. Slow the tempo while continuing to play vi. The game will have to pause, and new instructions to change partners will need to be given verbally.
- Once students have new partners, the game begins again.
- Improviser can decide what happens each time: full cadence on I, half cadence on V, or deceptive cadence on vi.
- Tempo, length of phrases, and rate of changes all must be customized to fit the learners.
- Discussion and written notation follow experience.

Video:

[Deceptive Cadence Game](#)

DECEPTIVE CADENCES

When students are beginning to encounter deceptive cadences in their repertoire it is useful to have them experience how these cadences work through improvisation. The point of recognizing deceptive cadences is to understand their effect on the ear, and therefore to play them with musical understanding. Music is a combination of expected (i.e. V-I) and unexpected (i.e. V-vi) elements. Students, especially after practicing a piece many times, will play V-I and V-vi exactly the same way, as if there were no difference in musical meaning. In many cases repeated practice can dull the ear. Students forget that to a careful listener, V-vi is a startling turn of events. Calling attention to the distinctly different meanings of full and deceptive cadences through improvisation can result in recognizing different types of cadences in the repertoire. This, in turn, can result in more expressive playing.

As with the previous duet employing secondary dominants, this duet has a *secondo* to be played as written, and a *primo* with pitches intended as guidelines. Progression for playing *primo*:

- Play the printed pitches in any rhythm that fits the meter and tempo.
- Once you are comfortable with the printed pitches, begin filling the space between them with chord tones or passing tones.
- Finally, invent melodies to please your ear, with the printed pitches serving merely as guidelines.
- Always listen, and play to your ear.

Score:

[Duet or Solo with Deceptive Cadence](#)

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NONHARMONIC TONES

EXPLORE

- Select a key. Using two voices improvise several phrases, but use only chord tones in the melody. Use a slow harmonic rhythm, i.e. whole notes in the bass. Simple harmonies. I, IV, V are sufficient, or add other chords if you wish. Listen to the effect of all consonances.
- Using roughly the same bass line, repeat the process adding various nonharmonic tones in the melody, such as passing tones, upper and lower neighbors, etc. Naming them isn't important. Let your ear guide you to create a smooth and flowing melody.

SHAPE

NONHARMONIC TONES

- In 6/8 in C Major, alternate phrases of: a) all harmonic tones, and b) mixture of harmonic and nonharmonic tones. Listen to the effect.
- Use a dominant pedal with various melody tones. Listen to the effect. Eventually resolve.

Score:

[Harmonic and Nonharmonic tones](#)

Video:

[Harmonic and Non-Harmonic Tones, Pedal Point](#)

APPLY

ANY LOCOMOTOR MUSIC

Use a mixture of harmonic and nonharmonic tones as you invent music for locomotor activities. It's fun to try using nothing but harmonic tones for a few phrases, then switch gears and allow nonharmonic tones as well. Listen to the effect of both plans.

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CHAPTER 6

MORE THAN TWO VOICES

While two voices provide nearly all the harmony one would ever need, there are times when more than two voices are advantageous. Harmonizing each tone of a major scale, with the scale tones in the soprano, is a good starting point.

SCALE HARMONIZATION IN TWO, THEN THREE VOICES

EXPLORE

- Play the C Major scale ascending and descending in whole notes with your RH, repeating high C.
- Now harmonize each scale tone with a single tone in the bass.
- There are many solutions to this, one of which is:

Score:

Scale Harmonization Two Voices

- Using the above 2-voice harmonization, add a third voice. Given the bass and soprano, there aren't that many choices to be made.
- Once you've played your own 3-voice harmonization, see how it compares to this, which will be called Plan A:

Score:

Scale Harmonization 3 Voices Plan A

- Learn this 3-voice harmonization, or one of your own, by ear. The goal is to play one harmonization easily in C major.
- Transpose it to several keys until the harmonization feels easy in those keys as well.

SHAPE

SCALE HARMONIZATION IN TWO, THEN THREE VOICES

There are any number of harmonizations that could be used to harmonize the major scale. The following sequence will start with Plan A, then extend and enrich the chords to create multiple harmonizations where chords can be interchanged at the improviser's discretion.

- Play Plan A and identify the chords in your ear, hands, and theoretically.
- Features to note:
 - All chords are in the key
 - Both root position and 1st inversion triads are used to create a relatively smooth bass line.
 - There is one second inversion triad at the final cadence.
 - Primary triads (I, IV, V) harmonize every scale degree except in three places.
 - Scale degree 7 ascending takes a 1st inversion diminished vii triad; descending scale degree 7 takes a root position minor iii.
 - Scale degree 4 descending takes a minor ii, to set up the final cadence.
- Re-imagine triads that could be replaced with other triads or 7th chords. For example:

- Scale degree 3 ascending (E) is a member of the C major triad but also of the A minor triad. Replace C major with A minor here.
- Re-voice the IV chord on scale degree 4 ascending to make the bass line move.
- Scale degree 6 could be harmonized with F major, D minor, or A minor. Try D minor ascending.
- Scale degree 7 is a chord tone of B dim but also of the G⁷ chord. Try G⁷ ascending.
- The tonic (C) is a member of C major and A minor. Change from major to minor at the top of the scale.

Score:

Scale Harmonization 3 Voices Plan B

- Add a secondary dominant.
 - Scale degree 4 ascending is harmonized with IV. Using the principle of “V/X” precede it with V⁷/IV. The bass line works nicely as a chromatically descending line if the V⁷/IV (C-E-G-Bb) is in 3rd inversion.
 - Re-voice the IV chord.
- Add another secondary dominant.
 - Scale degree 4 descending is harmonized with ii. Again, using the principle of “V/X,” precede the ii with its V⁷. The bass line works well if the V⁷/ii (A-C#-E-G) is in first inversion.

Score:

Scale Harmonization in 3 Voices Plan C

- Add another secondary chord, but a diminished 7th instead of a secondary dominant. The principle of “V/X” can also be “vii dim⁷/X”.
 - Descending scale degree 2 is harmonized with V, so precede V with its leading tone diminished 7th. Scale degree 3 (E) can be harmonized with vii dim⁷/V (F#-A-C-E). You can omit the A in this case.
 - Several other substitutions are made in this plan, on descending scale degrees 7 and 6, to make the bass line move stepwise and in contrary motion to the soprano.

Score:

Scale Harmonization 3 Voices Plan D

Scale Harmonization 3 Voices Plans A, B, C, D

APPLY

STEP-CLAP

- Create a eurhythmics game where movers demonstrate the downbeat as distinct from other beats:
 - Step on the strong beat
 - Clap on the weak(er) beats (or play a hand drum or other rhythm instrument)
- Music for this game is the major scale.
 - Improvise/compose a piece with the soprano line being more or less the tones of a major scale. Decorate the scale with various other tones, but keep track of the scale in your ear.
 - Start in 3/4. Use Plan A as you ascend and descend the major scale.
 - The second time use Plan B or C, or mix and match any of the plans to create variety.
 - Change register, tempo, articulation to inspire different qualities of movement.
 - Once the movers can successfully perform the step-clap-clap in 3/4, change to 4/4. Wait until movers are with you, change back to 3/4

Video:

[Scale Harmonization for Step-Clap-Clap](#)

SCALE DUET

Secondo: Teacher or another student plays the harmonies of one of the Plans (A, B, C, D) by ear or using the score. An accompaniment can be invented, or the secondo can be the harmonies in whole notes.

Primo: The improvising student knows the melody is more or less a major scale ascending and descending. The improvised melody can center around the scale but it can be freer and not locked into the scale in a strict way. To get started, suggest that the scale tone arrive on every downbeat, and the decorations come between downbeats.

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DOMINANT 7TH CHORDS AND THE TRITONE WHEEL

EXPLORE

- Using RH, play any tritone (two tones, three whole-steps apart. i.e. C-F#, Eb-A)
- Listen, then resolve the tritone inward by half-step, that is, lower note goes up a half-step, upper note goes down a half-step.
- Play the same tritone but this time resolve it outward by half-step: lower note goes down a half-step, upper note goes up a half-step.

- Play the same tritone. Add one LH note that is a whole step above the lower note of the tritone. (i.e. if RH plays E-Bb, LH plays F#). Listen.
- While listening, but before moving anything, hear the bass as scale degree 5. Hear the bass in your inner ear resolving from dominant to tonic (scale degree 5 to scale degree 1, by going down a P5). Which way will the tritone resolve, inward or outward?
- Resolve the bass (go down P5), and the tritone outward.
- Play the same tritone in the RH again (i.e. E-Bb) and in the LH play a bass note one whole-step higher than the upper note of the tritone (C). Play the bass at least an octave below the treble.
- Listen. Hear the bass as the dominant, which is going to resolve up a P4 to tonic as the tritone resolves inward.

SHAPE

TRITONE WHEEL

The following could be learned by rote, but the idea is to strengthen the connection between hands and ear. Listen and strive to play by ear, even though the pattern is repetitive. You will be playing a three-note chord, a V^7 absent the 5th of the chord, and resolving it two ways, just as in the above Explore exercise. The goal here is to listen and resolve by ear.

- Separate your hands so RH is starting on middle C and going up, LH starts an octave below RH.
- Start with RH tritone C-F#, and LH on D (whole step above lower note of tritone). Hear D as the dominant (5th scale degree).
- Resolve D up P4 to G, while tritone resolves outward.
- Play RH tritone C-F# again, LH thumb on G# (whole step above upper note of tritone). Hear G# as the dominant.
- Resolve G# down P5, while tritone resolves inward.
- Your RH is now on Db-F, LH is on Db.
- Make a new RH tritone up from Db: Db-G.
- LH on Eb. Hear Eb as dominant.
- Resolve Eb up P4 to Ab, while tritone resolves outward.
- Play the Db-G tritone again, LH thumb now on A. Hear A as the dominant.
- Resolve A down P5, while tritone resolves inward.
- Make a new RH tritone up from D: D-G#, etc.
- It's a wheel that just keeps going.

N.B. The resolutions are in major in the accompanying score, however minor resolutions are just as likely as major resolutions.

Score:

[Tritone Wheel](#)

The Tritone Wheel isn't of particular use in and of itself, but having the patterns in your fingers and ears provides useful material when improvising. Extending the idea of the Tritone Wheel leads to a fun game taught to me by Anne Farber.

APPLY

SEARCHING THE WILDERNESS FOR V⁷ AND RESOLVING

The following is an ear training game to connect hand and ear, extending what you have just done in the previous exercises.

- Close your eyes (or do not look at the keyboard) for the entire game.
- Play any two random pitches with your RH, and any random single pitch with your LH. Listen to these three tones.
- Play them four times slowly with lots of pedal. Listen.
- In this game you will continue to play the three pitches under your fingers four times slowly with lots of pedal. You will change only one pitch at a time, then repeat the new set of pitches four times, change one more pitch, repeat that new set four times, etc.
- The strict rule for changing pitches is that only one voice may be moved at a time, and only a half or whole step up or down.
- Listen and luxuriate in the new sound each time you move one voice. Change the pedal each time one voice of the chord changes.
- The goal is to arrive at a tritone in the RH, and a bass pitch which is a whole step above one of the pitches of the tritone (just as you did in the previous exercises).
- Once you hear you have "arrived," play the pitches repeatedly until you can *hear* the resolution, then resolve.

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ONE NOTE

EXPLORE

- Select any tone, i.e. G
- Play any voicing of a G minor triad, with G in the soprano.
- Eliminate the chord and play just G
- Play any voicing of a G major triad, with G in the soprano.
- Reimagine G as the 3rd of a minor triad, then play an E minor triad with G in the soprano
- Reimagine G as the 3rd of a major triad, play an Eb major triad with G in the soprano
- Reimagine G as the 5th of a minor triad, play a C minor triad with G in the soprano
- Reimagine G as the 5th of a major triad, play a C major triad with G in the soprano
- Play G again as the root of a major and minor triad.
- Any tone can be the root, 3rd, or 5th of a major or minor triad (or dim or aug)
- Select another tone and hear all its major and minor triad possibilities

N.B. The obvious extension of the above is that any tone can assume any function in any key. This principle is what I call the “trap door” of improvising for eurhythmics. When improvising tonally, it’s possible to wander into an uncomfortable key (i.e. G# minor). The “trap door” or “one note” principle is extremely useful. Reimagine a tone as something else, find a V⁷, and get into a more comfortable key. For example, if you should wander into G# minor (a key I find uncomfortable), reimagine G# as a leading tone in A minor. Play a single G#, fill that in with an E⁷, and you’ll be in A minor where things are likely to be much more comfortable.

SHAPE

SCALE DEGREE 1 BECOMES SCALE DEGREE 3

For the purposes here, one example will be used to illustrate the general principle of how one tone can change function when surrounded by a different set of tones.

- Improvise several phrases in G major, ending on a tonic triad with G in the soprano.
- Eliminate the chord and play only a G.
- Reimagine G as the 3rd of a new major triad
- Surround the tone G with an Eb major triad
- Improvise several phrases in Eb major, ending on a tonic triad with Eb in the soprano.
- Eliminate the chord and play only an Eb.
- Reimagine Eb as the 3rd of a new major triad
- Surround the tone Eb with a B major triad (Eb became D# in the process)
- Improvise several phrases in B major, ending on a tonic triad with B in the soprano.
- Eliminate the chord and play only a B.
- Reimagine B as the 3rd of a new major triad.
- Guess what? You’re back where you started, in G major.
- This game links the three keys of any augmented triad, i.e. G/Eb/B, Bb/Gb/D. It provides the ear with delightful, unexpected changes in tonality without the improviser having to think through secondary chords.

Video:

[Scale Degree 1 Becomes Scale Degree 3](#)

APPLY

ANY EURHYTHMICS ACTIVITY

As with most of the improvisation strategies in this book, the idea in which scale degree 1 becomes scale degree 3 in a new key could be used for many different eurhythmics games. This change in a note’s function in and of itself is not unusual, but the resulting key change delights and surprises the ear. It’s “instant modulation” without a lot of thinking. The improviser gets to a new key without having to do much more than play I, IV, V in three different keys.

If you have adult musicians as movers, the key changes could serve as one goal of an exercise. For example:

- Movers step the beat. “When the music stops on a chord, stop moving.”

- Improvise in G major, cadencing on a tonic chord with G in the soprano. Hold that chord until movers have stopped.
- Ask the movers to sing “do” or “tonic” or “1,” depending on the language you use.
- After everyone is singing G, Improviser does the pivot, making G become the 3rd of the Eb chord. Improvise in Eb to get the room moving again.
- Play phrases in Eb, movers step the beat. Cadence on Eb. Music stops on an Eb triad with Eb in the soprano.
- Movers stop.
- Ask movers to sing “do.”
- After everyone is singing Eb, improviser does the next pivot to B major, movers step beat. Start, stop, sing “do” this time in B major.
- Discuss what happened to that “One Note.”

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CHAPTER 7

SIMPLE MODULATIONS AND KEY CHANGES

With practice, it becomes easy to move from key to key. The exercises here are not the more extensive modulations found in, for example, the exposition of a classical sonatina. These “modulations” are shortcuts the ear can learn to hear, and the hands can learn to find quickly.

When improvising for eurhythmics, new keys allow the player to extend a limited amount of music. The I IV and V chords can go a long way if you know how to play them in several keys. New keys can delight the ear of both the movers and the improviser. Improvising in the piano lesson is also enhanced when the player is able to move to new keys easily. Improvising in several keys helps the player hear the meaning of a key signature and its relationship to closely related keys. One tone makes all the difference. A fundamental aspect of tonal music, stressed in Dalcroze solfège and applicable here, is that tonal hierarchy begins with hearing half- and whole-steps.

For this and the remaining chapters, the three steps to Explore, Shape, and Apply will not consistently appear in the text. Ideas will be offered with sequential practice steps and a few suggested applications. Readers can use and extend the ideas to fit their circumstances.

RELATIVE MAJOR AND MINOR

- Practice finding the two V^7 chords needed to cue relative keys, i.e. for C major it is G^7 and for A minor it is E^7 ; for F major and D minor the necessary chords are C^7 and A^7 .
- Remember that in many cases, improvising with just two voices is highly advantageous. Two voices are easier for the player to hear, and they telegraph almost all the harmonic information that is required. Dominant 7th chords are different because generally they need three tones, namely, root, 3rd, and 7th. You may want to enrich the V^7 with additional voices, or not, depending on your context and comfort level.
- Start by playing a G^7 , listen to it, then improvise in C major. Come to a full cadence on C major with C in both treble and bass.
- Play an E^7 and listen, then improvise in A minor harmonic minor.
- Come to a full cadence in A minor with A in both treble and bass, then play a G^7 and listen. You're back in C where you started.
- You'll soon discover common tones that will make this even easier. If in C major, cadence on tonic, but end the melody on E (scale degree 3). That E is the root of the pivot chord (E^7) to get into A minor.

APPLY

EURHYTHMICS

Use this major/minor plan for any activity that requires a different response when the music changes, i.e. Walk when in major, jog when the music changes to minor; or walk alone when the music is in major and walk with a partner when the music is in minor, etc.

PIANO DUETS

The teacher can supply a simple harmonic accompaniment (i iv V^7 is sufficient), and the student can improvise melodies in either major or minor, changing modes when cued by the V^7 at a cadence. The melody can be as simple as a pentachord, or the whole scale may be used.

Score:

[Changing from major to relative minor and back](#)

Video:

[Changing from major to relative minor and back](#)

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MOVING COUNTERCLOCKWISE AROUND THE CIRCLE OF FIFTHS

By turning a tonic triad into a secondary dominant, it's easy to travel around the circle of fifths counterclockwise. The tonic triad of any key, with the addition of one tone - a minor 7th above the root - becomes V^7/IV . It's obviously easier to stay near the top of the circle than to venture toward the bottom, but it's good discipline to travel among keys at the bottom of the circle when you're ready. This entire exercise can be accomplished with two voices. The V^7 is implied with just root and 7th.

- Start in D major. Improvise phrases, cadence on tonic.
- Turn D major (D F# A) into a V^7/IV by adding a C natural (D F# A C)
- D^7 opens the door to G major
- Improvise phrases in G major, cadence on tonic
- Turn G major (G B D) into G^7 (G B D F), which is V^7/IV , and you've opened the door to C major
- Etc.

Score:

[Moving Around the Circle CCW](#)

Video:

[Moving Around the Circle CCW](#)

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MOVING CLOCKWISE AROUND THE CIRCLE OF FIFTHS

Clockwise is much more challenging than moving counterclockwise, but it gets easier with practice. Moving clockwise, as with counterclockwise, requires just one new tone. A clockwise move requires the raised 4th scale degree. Using the raised 4th is not quite as smooth as using the lowered 7th when moving around the circle counterclockwise, but it is enough to accomplish the move to the new key. Once in the new key, confirm the new key with its dominant. Do not use the subdominant of the new key right away or your ear will be confused. To learn this move, it's easier for the hands, ear, and mind to use more than two voices.

If you like exploring by ear, play in Bb major, then try getting from Bb major to F major. Once there, convince your ear of F major. Keep going around the circle clockwise to C major, G major, etc.

The details:

- The goal is to get from Bb major to F major. The difference is Eb/E natural, the raised 4th scale degree in Bb major. (The raised 4th becomes the leading tone in the new key.)
- Start in Bb major. Play several phrases and cadence on Bb

- Play I (Bb) then IV in second inversion (Eb/Bb).
- Change Eb to E natural, change Bb to C, keep the G. You have a C triad, and if you add Bb you have a 7th chord: C⁷
- C⁷ opens the door to F major.
- Once in F major, do not play a IV chord (Bb) for a while, or your ear won't believe F is the new tonic. Instead, alternate F and C⁷ chords to convince the ear you are actually in F major.
- Once firmly in F major, try making the move to C major (one more position clockwise on the circle)
- The destination is now C major, and the difference between F major and C major is the tone Bb/B natural, the raised 4th scale degree in F major (and the leading tone in C major)
- The V⁷ of the new destination (C major) is G⁷, therefore your first task is to get to G⁷
- Play phrases in F major, cadence on F
- Play I (F) then IV in second inversion (Bb/F)
- Change Bb to B natural, change F to G, keep the D. You have a G triad, and if you add F you have a 7th chord:G⁷
- G⁷ opens the door to C major.
- Etc.

Score:

[Moving Around the Circle CW](#)

Video:

[Moving Around the Circle CW](#)

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AUGMENTED 6TH CHORDS

The following explanations of Augmented 6th chords will not earn me an “A” in a traditional music theory class, but they will help you get these chords in your ears and hands so that you can use them to enrich your improvisations. The chords will be spelled in the most straightforward way possible. (aka Incorrectly)

The augmented 6th chords illustrated here (German 6ths) are chords that sound like dominant 7th chords. The trick, and therefore the joy for the ear, is that you leave them in unexpected ways. These chords do not resolve the “normal” way for a V⁷, which was discussed in the [Tritone Wheel](#) exercise.

AUGMENTED 6TH CHORDS TO STAY IN A KEY

- Play phrases in C major, arrive at a full cadence on C.
- Start a new phrase and travel to the subdominant (F chord)
- Put that IV chord in first inversion (F/A)
- Make it minor (Fm/Ab)
- The tone Ab is about to change its function. Ab starts as the 3rd of an F minor chord (F-Ab-C). But now play Ab⁷ and the tone Ab morphs into the root of Ab⁷. An easy voicing is a P5 in the LH (Ab and Eb), and Tritone in the RH (C and Gb)
- Follow the Ab⁷ with a second inversion tonic triad (C/G): LH tones move outward by half-step (Ab goes down to G, Eb goes up to E); RH only has to move one tone, the upper note (Gb) goes up a half-step to G. The lower RH note (C) is common to both chords.
- Now you're on a second inversion C (C/G), which can go to V⁷ (G⁷) and I (C).
- For the record, the correct spelling of this German 6th chord from bass up would be Ab-C-Eb-F#.

AUGMENTED 6TH CHORDS TO MODULATE UP A MAJOR 3RD

The V⁷/IV opens the door to the key up a major 3rd from your starting key. Doing this several times results in playing in three keys that form an augmented triad. (Keys of C, E, and Ab)

- Play phrases in C major, arrive at a full cadence.
- Turn the C (I) chord into C⁷ (V⁷/IV) by adding a Bb. (C-E-G-B^b)
- The expected resolution of C⁷ is F major or F minor, or if a deceptive cadence, D minor. You're going to none of those keys. You are going to E major, up a Major 3rd from where you are.
- From C⁷ go to E/B (a second inversion tonic triad in the destination key of E major)
- Cadence in E major with V⁷ - I (B⁷ - E)
- Play phrases in E major, arrive at a full cadence
- Turn the E (I) chord into E⁷ (V⁷/IV) by adding a D (E-G#-B-D)
- The expected resolution of E⁷ is A major or A minor, or if a deceptive cadence, F# minor. You're going to none of those keys. You are going to Ab major. (Temporarily spelled G#)
- From E⁷ go to Ab/Eb
- Cadence in Ab major with V⁷ - I (Eb - Ab)
- Play phrases in Ab, arrive at a full cadence
- Turn the Ab (I) chord into Ab⁷ (V⁷/IV) by adding a Gb (Ab-C-Eb-Gb)
- You are going back to C major.
- From the Ab⁷ chord go to C/G
- Cadence in C major with V⁷ - I and you're back where you started

Score:

[Using Augmented 6th Chords](#)

Video:

[Augmented 6th chords to stay in a key](#)

[Augmented 6th chords to modulate up a Major 3rd](#)

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CHAPTER 8

TEMPO AND DYNAMIC FOLLOWS

A tempo and dynamic follow (T&D follow) could be used equally well in a eurhythmics class or piano lesson. There are two roles, the improviser and the mover(s). Both roles will be described, and readers may adapt the ideas to fit their circumstances. Each role develops musicianship skills and is challenging in its own way. The role of the improviser is more difficult, and will be discussed first.

Improviser's Role

The basic principle is to start by playing a rhythmic pattern, with rhythmic unison between the hands. The pattern the improviser chooses can be relatively simple, even for advanced movers. Patterns including some longer notes, such as half, dotted half, or whole notes, work best.

Select a one-bar pattern for younger, less experienced movers. A one-bar pattern could be, for example, quarter, two-8ths, half. Older or more advanced students will enjoy a two-bar pattern, such as quarter, two-8ths, half/two-8ths, dotted half. The mover(s) can, and should, be asked to notate the pattern at the end of the exercise.

The improviser decides on a pattern and plays it in a moderate tempo, making sure the hands play in rhythmic unison. The improviser needs to repeat the pattern exactly until the mover(s) can demonstrate the pattern accurately. There is no way to predict how many repetitions this will take, but the game cannot continue until this first stage is solidified.

Once the mover(s) can demonstrate the pattern accurately, the improviser begins to change the music gradually. At first, the improviser may support the pattern without playing it exactly. For example, if the pattern is quarter, two-8ths, half, the improviser might play quarter, two-8ths, quarter, quarter. If all goes well, the improviser may add more subdivisions, or other rhythms. The improviser has to watch the mover(s) to make sure they keep the original pattern, despite no longer hearing it exactly from the piano. If the mover(s) lose the pattern, the improviser has to go back to playing it "verbatim" until the movers are once again executing the pattern accurately and comfortably.

This is an interactive process with incremental changes. The improviser challenges the mover(s) while checking to see that the challenge is appropriate. When the music changes, the mover(s) should be able to reflect the changes fairly quickly after hearing them. The sequence for the improviser in terms of rhythmic changes is to: 1) play the pattern, 2) support the pattern, 3) challenge the pattern. In addition to rhythmic changes, the improviser varies the tempo and dynamics of the music.

Never underestimate the power of rhythmic silence. When the mover(s) have to execute the pattern in silence, they are responsible for holding the pattern together themselves. It's fun when the music re-enters, and movement and music coincide once again.

Mover(s)' Role

Upon hearing a pattern from the piano, the movers execute that pattern. In a eurhythmics class they will step the pattern, moving around the room. In a piano lesson where floor space may be limited, musical clapping may be used. In both cases the movers should strive for flowing, continuous movement that reflects the music.

The movers are to execute the original rhythm pattern throughout the exercise, no matter what the piano does. The movers should follow the piano in terms of tempo and dynamic changes, but they are responsible for keeping the original rhythmic pattern throughout. Herein lies the principal challenge for the movers. Once the movers can execute the pattern easily and accurately, the improviser will begin to challenge them by playing other rhythms, or by playing nothing at all. Holding onto the pattern becomes more difficult as the improviser challenges the pattern with more cross rhythms, rests, etc.

At the conclusion of the exercise the movers should be able to notate the rhythm pattern.

Video:

[T&D Follow: quarter-two-8ths-quarter-quarter/half-half](#)

A similar follow with slightly different directions could be: When the music is in major, step the beat. When the music is in minor, find a partner and pat the pattern you hear (or move the pattern by yourself, or clap the pattern)

Video:

[Major/minor T&D Follow: quarter-quarter-dotted quarter-8th/two-8ths-dotted half](#)

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CHAPTER 9

PIANO DUETS FOR IMPROVISING

With a little preparation and forethought, it's easy to introduce improvisation into piano lessons. Doing so, even for a few minutes a month, may open doors for students who are completely tied to the page. Many students find improvisation liberating and fun, once they overcome their initial fears.

What About Fingering?

Does improvising encourage bad fingering? Temporarily, yes. In the heat of the moment, notes have to be grabbed almost any way the player can get them. The body is an amazing machine. Where there's a will, or an ear, the body will find a way to get the desired sound. These videos show my student using his right hand 5th finger repeatedly to ascend, fingering I would not accept or encourage under other circumstances. I do not mention this to him however, because the goals here are to let the ear lead, and to coordinate the ear and hand. In other contexts we talk about fingering.

My pedagogical philosophy is that improvisation is well worth the cost of some haphazard fingering. Sometimes when improvising, efficient scale fingering emerges, and the ear and hand are perfectly coordinated. My student experienced this fortunate event at the end of our Chickens and Hens improv.

The idea for a duet on Chickens and Hens comes from my Dalcroze teacher, Anne Farber, and I have adapted it over the years to fit my students' needs.

WHO STOLE MY CHICKENS AND MY HENS

Complementary rhythm is the “negative space” in music. *Chickens and Hens* has empty space every two measures that could be filled with one or more notes. The first, second and fourth phrases have three full beats of rest, but the third phrase has only one beat of rest.

Teacher (T): *Primo* - Plays melody

Student (S): *Secondo* - Plays complementary rhythm in the bass

After hearing the melody a few times (and reading the score if you choose), ask your student to fill in the rests with notes. The fill-ins could be sparse, just one note after each phrase, or more dense, with several notes. The harmonies are straightforward, using just primary triads. No matter what your student plays, this is an opportunity to talk about harmony, and the implied harmonies of melodies.

Score:

[Chickens and Hens](#)

Video:

[Chickens and Hens - Complementary Rhythm](#)

Switch places on the bench.

T: *Secondo* - Creates harmonic accompaniment, which can be in any meter, tempo, style, major or minor

S: *Primo* - Plays melody, at first as written, then begins to improvise without being tied to the page.

Video:

[Chickens and Hens - Freestyle](#)

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BLACK KEY "COWBOY" DUET

Again, I have Anne Farber to thank for introducing this black key duet to me years ago. I've simplified the accompaniment a bit. My own children called this the cowboy duet, hence the title.

T: *Secondo* - Plays score as written

S: *Primo* - Improvises melodies on the black keys

Score:

[Black Key Cowboy Duet](#)

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WHITE KEY CIRCLE OF 5THS DUET

Here's a white key duet, subtitled, "Any white key will do." It's the circle of 5ths progression - up a 4th, down a 5th, first in C major, then in A minor, then back to C major.

T: *Secondo* - Plays score as written, then turns it into a waltz, polka, something in 5/8, something syncopated, etc.

S: *Primo* - Improvises melodies on white keys

Score:

[White Key Circle of 5ths Duet](#)

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TAKE ME OUT TO THE BALL GAME

The chord chart is laid out for the secondo (teacher) to play with one or two hands. The primo (student) part is intended to be improvised over the chord chart. To assist students, the chord tones are printed without rhythmic values. Initially they may play exactly what's written in straight quarter notes, then start to vary the rhythms. Once they are more comfortable, they can add passing or other non-harmonic tones - or play the actual tune by ear.

Score:

[Take me out to the Ball Game](#)

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For information about Dalcroze Eurhythmics: www.americaneurhythmics.org
