

Toward Advanced Playing

1) Technique

A. Months 1 and 2. Worked on simultaneously:

1. Learn scales in the 24 keys (with harmonic minor form, for now) – 25' / day
 - a. Order: G, e, D, b, A, f#, E, c#, B, g#, F#, d#, Db, bb, Ab, f, Eb, c, Bb, g, F, d, C, a
 - b. Four octaves up & down – scale sequence order and fingerings memorized – to 100.
2. Learn Hanon exercise #1 – 5' / day
 - a. All notes always staccato – metronome click always on first 16th note of every beat.
 - b. With accents – begin about 50 on the metronome
 1. Start by accenting the 3rd note of each group of four. Increase speed to 80.
 2. Then back to 50, with the 4th note of each group accented. Speed up to 80.

B. Months 3 and 4. Worked on simultaneously:

1. Scales, detached, with 4th note accents – 15' / day
 - a. Apply the 4th note accents (learned in Hanon #1 above) to the 24 scales, in order.
 - b. Speed up from 60 to 100.
2. Scales, legato, with no accents – 15' / day
 - a. Learn D major in the “in fifths” pattern (reverse side of sheet) from 60 to 84.
 - b. Proceed to learn the other 23 scales “in fifths” in sequence order.

C. Month 5 through 12 – 30' / day

1. Combine all 24 scales (“in fifths”) with staccato 4th note accents.
2. Practice 4 keys / day – (G, e, D, b) (A, f#, E, c#) etc. – covering all 24 keys every 6 days.
Each day, practice each of the four keys in two ways:
 - a. Staccato, with 4th note accents – starting at 84. Eventual goal: 132.
 - b. Legato, with no accents – starting at 108. Eventual goal: 176.
 - c. Speed up one tempo or the other (84 or 108) by a single notch every week or two.

2) Making Musicianship principles into “baked in” habits:

- A) Doing what the score says to do: notes, rhythms, dynamics, etc.
- B) Making the melody prominent: melody notes are always louder than the other notes.
- C) Shaping the melody: the next note must be louder or quieter than the note just played.
- D) Controlling the rhythmic dimension through counting: #1 musicianship skill.

3) Developing an artistic voice: what does the music feel like? what is being communicated?

Deciding how a piece of music feels, from small details to entire works, and then learning to convey those feelings accurately.

4) Awareness of performance practice: great performing artists have much to teach us about playing and interpreting a piece of music.

5) Learning to perform: a separate skill

Opportunities to perform . . . often.

What about nervousness? Some reasons:

- 1) Being under-prepared.
- 2) Self-sabotaging vanity that must be recognized and managed.
- 3) Wrong thinking: the assumption that we're supposed to be nervous.
- 4) Simple lack of experience doing it.

This is an exercise that I made up and use with every student (no matter the age.) I call it "scales in 5ths" because each section extends the scale 4 more notes (the interval of a 5th.) Right hand fingerings are above; left hand below. The hands are played an octave apart, and each segment is repeated except the two full-4-octave scales. The example is in D Major, but all 24 keys are done (minors in harmonic form only.)

Students practice this in two ways. The first way is as written, with the beats slightly emphasized. The other way is trickier, called "4th note accents." It is played staccato; the 1st note of each group of four sounds with the metronome while the 4th note of each group is sharply accented.

As for tempos, both ways can be started as slowly as necessary, even in the 50s (per quarter.) But full tempos are 176 for the "straight" way and 132 for "4th note accents."

The 7 structural notes (D, A, E, B, F# . . .) are the 7 different notes of the scale. Learning scales in this form, the student "over-learns" the scale by stopping at each of the 7 pitches from both directions (while keeping the basic scale fingering at all times.)

The musical score is written for piano in D Major (one sharp) and 4/4 time. It consists of 10 systems of piano accompaniment. Each system contains a right-hand melody and a left-hand accompaniment. The right-hand part features ascending and descending scales with various fingering patterns (1-2-3-4, 1-3-2-3-1, 1-3-1-3-4, 1-4, 1-2-1, 4-1-2-1-4, 1-3-1, 1-3-3, 4-3-4-1, 1-2-3-2-1-4, 4-3-2, 1-2-3-1-3-2-1, 4-3-2, 1-2-3-1-3-2-1). The left-hand part provides a steady accompaniment. The exercise is in D Major (one sharp) and 4/4 time. The first system starts with a 5-measure rest in the bass clef. The final system ends with a 5-measure rest in the bass clef.