First Title Page:

# PIANIMALS TEACHERS MANUAL



28 Feldenkrais Hand Lessons for the Beginning Pianist

Library of Congress publication data



Our Principle Pianimal, Lucky the Cat, likes to hang out with his buddies like Sarah Swan. She reminds him that his thumb is not really an "ugly duckling," but a swan like her, capable of far more movement than his ducky siblings. It can <u>oppose</u>.

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### The pianist's hand – a developmental approach

*Pianimals* examines the basic hand movements of piano playing developmentally. These derive from human body movements – the hand is seen as a mini-body, a little person that lies down, stands up, walks, runs and jumps on key. Each part of the hand has its equivalent in whole body structure, such that the:

- nail joint is the **ankle**
- middle joint is the **knee**
- top knuckle is the hip joint
- hand is the **pelvis**
- wrist is L5-S1
- forearm is a **torso** that breathes, and the
- elbow is the **head**.<sup>1</sup>

Thus we can develop the hand's movements on key just as a baby develops its movements in life. Babies have a pre-standing apprenticeship: they need a whole year to acquire the complex actions of standing and walking before they actually do it – but amazingly we force these things on a pianist's hand the first day. What if the hand could learn like a baby, acquiring preliminary pianistic movements – flexion, extension, rotation, and a host of other skills – gradually, before it had to stand on key? This is the aim of *Pianimals*: to bring the movement components of pianistic standing, walking and running to the hand while it is still just learning to play. This makes learning stress-free – simple, easy, and joyful.

### Exercises plus compositions

Each lesson presents an exercise exploring one of these components, then one or more pieces incorporating the movement into a musical setting. The pupils' book has almost no written text. It is up to you, the teacher, to take the pupil through the exercise and suggest how to implement it into the music. Perhaps write the key elements of the exercise into the pupil's score as a reminder – or have the pupil do it themself for improved learning and memory retention.

Discovering the structure and function of the hand's skeleton step by step prepares the fingers to 'walk' effortlessly and confidently, free from trauma. Breaking an action down into its constituent parts and learning each part stress-free helps the brain assemble these components holographically into a new skill. The process is intention-driven but non-linear. The pianist doesn't so much learn to play the piano as *acquire* a physical language<sup>2</sup> of piano playing: a repertoire of movements that make it easy to play – a "pianistic grammar of spontaneity." <sup>3</sup>

Even those who already play can benefit from a refresher course of ergonomically efficient exercises informing the movements of piano playing. Many of these *align the skeleton*, helping the bones to take over the work of the muscles which leads to less strain, greater agility, freer playing, and better music-making. One might wonder what some *Pianimals* exercises have to do with piano playing at all – but that's the ingenious part. Like Feldenkrais *Awareness Through Movement* lessons, they hone an action's underlying components to achieve a general improvement.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> See diagram, p. 58

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Steven Krashen, *Explorations in Language Acquisition and Use*, Heinemann: London, 2003)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Ruthy Alon, Feldenkrais trainer, created a series of *Awareness Through Movement* lessons called *The Grammar of Spontaneity*.

### Make it fun

My late teacher Phil Cohen's epitaph: "There is always another way." He used to fool around at the piano, knocking the keys in all sorts of peculiar ways to get unusual, percussive sonorities out of the instrument. He was like a kid, exploring in a carefree way, dreaming up never-before seen ways of using his hand. Doing these exercises should be the same kind of fun.

The "lying down" pieces are a case in point. The constraint of glueing the heel of the hand to the white keys could be seen as a limitation, but the sense of security it evokes improves ease of learning in the neuromotor system. Turning this into a game helps the pupil discover new ways of using the hand, new ways of making piano sounds.

Don't force the pupil to learn the actual piece if that would be a chore. Improvise a musical game imparting the essence of the exercise, and then give the pupil full marks – not for learning the piece, but for *learning*. The child grows more in ability while having fun than while learning under duress. The whole thrust of *Pianimals* is to eliminate the drudgery in piano playing.

### Acquisition" vs. learning

The learning is fun but not superficial. Reading even the simplest of motives (a three-note rising scale for instance) can be difficult for a beginning pupil – but turn it into an exploration of the keyboard from end to end by repeating the motive one step higher each time, and they suddenly discover "I can." They are *playing*, not just trying to play. They are freed from the slavery of the page, becoming creators and developing a proactive relationship to the keyboard. They are *making music;* it is flowing out of them. Returning to read that three-note motive, they now recognize it as something they can *do* – they have made it their own.

The accompaniments have been composed with this in mind. Some of them challenge the teacher as well as the pupil – meeting that challenge can spark a heightened creative moment for both players. The sometimes dissonant harmonies can spark creativity as well, returning the pupil to that spontaneous state when they first mashed indiscriminate notes as a baby, long before learning became a job and harmony became a sterile, diatonic affair.

### The practical benefits: "carrying the weight" well

The exercises redress an unintended effect of the arm weight school – a plodding touch that inadvertently limits ability and musicality, caused by the hand relaxing but not *standing*. Claudio Arrau has noted the importance of the hand's standing up in weight technique,<sup>4</sup> and Heinrich Neuhaus also stresses it.<sup>5</sup> The hand produces the sound easily when it stands well, freeing the arm to do its own job – to *join* notes, to shape the phrase.<sup>6</sup> Over-involving the arm in tone production, or over-relaxing it, robs the hand of its full potential – the hand goes to sleep when it thinks the arm is doing all the work. The hand comes fully into its own when it fully neutralizes the arm's weight, countering the "down" kinetic forces with an inner "up" action, standing well, harmonizing with the field of gravity instead of succumbing to it – just as the legs "float" the torso as we stand, walk and run in life. All strain in the arm results from the hand's failure to do this.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Dean Elder, *Pianists at Play,* (Kahn & Averill: London, 1986), 38

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Heinrich Neuhaus, *The Art of Piano Playing* (Kahn & Averill: London, 1998), 124-5

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> A key element in the teaching of Alfred Cortot (my pianistic great-grandfather).

#### The thumb

The thumb deserves special attention because of rampant underuse. Functionally, the thumb is 50% of the hand. Pianistic walking often happens between one "leg" – the thumb – and the other "leg" – any one of the fingers – but if the thumb metacarpal bone hardly moves at all, hand potency is drastically diminished. The thumb's movement is much more complex than the fingers'. Failing to master those complexities makes the thumb seem like an ugly duckling. *Pianimals* restores the thumb to its swan nature, helping it find its place *under* the hand to eliminate limping and improve melodies, scales, arpeggios and chords.

### How to teach the exercises

Take pupils through the preparatory exercise before they learn the composition, and don't introduce the accompaniment until the pupil has mastered the piece physically and musically. At that point a pedantic exercise can transform into a real musical experience, establishing an instant bond between physical organization and musical expression.

### Do them yourself

Experience each exercise in detail yourself before showing it to your pupils. The movements pique the curiosity and enhance kinetic awareness: sense them as richly as possible. Many of the exercises reduce the arm pumping motions we see so often – but if those movements were a part of your own learning, you may not notice when your pupils fall into the habit. Prepare yourself to hone their reflexes by cleansing your own. If you have trouble visualizing how an exercise should be done, please refer to the video demonstrations found at www.alanfraserinstitute.com/pianimals.php.

### Think less about external form, more about internal function.

Sense internally the idea behind each exercise – which muscles are stimulated to new action, what new bone alignments arise. Instead of correcting a hand position, try to develop a new *action* that improves it naturally. The improvement stems not from increased strength (though the hand may feel stronger), but from new aptitude: the hand learns to use its skeletal structure to stand tall instead of relaxing into limpness; the arm learns to shape phrases with organic, lateral movements instead of 'producing tone' with vertical movements; the thumb learns to be an 'arm thumb' with far more structural power than its finger neighbours; the wrist finds the neutral point and rests there, calm and empowering.

Experiencing these developments in your own hand gives you the best chance of guiding your pupils effectively. It never hurts to review, even when it's familiar territory – as Moshe Feldenkrais put it, "there is no limit to improvement." The exercises are not included in the pupil's method book, so it is up to you, the teacher to impart them. Create easier (or more complex) versions according to needs of your pupils – and write reminders into their score. Teach the pieces by rote if the pupil reads poorly. Do whatever it takes to make the learning fun and easy.

#### Is this a method?

Feldenkrais also said, "My principle is that there are no principles." Phil Cohen stressed that he had no method, but worked in a unique way with each student. I too tend to work differently with each pianist I meet, because each has different needs – but there are certain background principles which can be codified. Exercises that access skeletal force vectors, balance the down and the up forces, and activate the hand's capacity to grasp on key will benefit virtually all pianists. The road to improvement is clear.

### **Pianimals** Pointers

Not all pupils will need all the exercises. Many have already acquired certain skills, or may have possessed them naturally, so a certain streamlining process may be possible. Do the exercises with your pupils; evaluate which ones are essential, which ones are only needed in certain cases, and which ones can be safely skipped much of the time.

Each of our editors has tailored the *Pianimals* exercises to their own teaching needs, distilling them down to a few essentials, a core group that suffices to get their beginners playing with a healthy technique within six months – but they didn't pick the same exercises. Their regimes may be found in Appendix 1, and the twelve most useful exercises have been distilled into *Pianimals Pointers* – a slim, easy-to-use companion volume to this more comprehensive teachers' manual.

### Glossary

Pianimals deals with these basic actions:

- Lying down... lowers effort throughout the whole self. The support of the floor allows the body to let go, making sensations richer and more precise, and making it easier to learn new movements. Sinking into the key has a similar effect on the hand.
- Standing up: The first straightening of the legs to stand is an important moment in the development of a child's confidence, their very sense of self. Standing the hand on potent, straight fingers gives the pianist similar physical confidence.
- Walking... is immensely more complex than standing. One balances on one foot, then transfers the weight to the other, the pelvis gliding along several planes simultaneously to make it smooth. In pianistic walking, the hand's 'hip joint' rides high while the wrist and arm glide to facilitate smoothness.
- Running... is simpler than walking. Robots have been built that spring from leg to leg to run surprisingly well, but as we go to press, the walking robots are still falling down pathetically. Running is relatively straightforward because between each step, the runner has time to recalibrate equilibrium 'mid-flight.' Fast passages at the piano are also relatively simple, *if* adequate structural-functional preparations have been made.
- Rolling: The motion of the pelvis in human walking follows a flattened out, 3-dimensional figure-8 trajectory. Rolling on the keys as one plays, the wrist experiences a fluid *rotation* that smooths out the corollary arm movement (when not overdone).
- Hopping or leaping on key, the hand tends to relax and let the arm carry it. But in human jumping, the legs power the leap. When the fingers power the leap on key, they become more accurate and ironically, more relaxed. Heightened activity in the finger lowers strain in the arm the effort has been localized where it is most effective.

### Abbreviations

Here's a list of special 'articulations' you'll find in the music:

Н	Lie on the hand's <b>H</b> eel: mash it into the keys loosely, heavily, gently. We call it "smooshing" the hand.
SF	Make a <b>S</b> eal <b>F</b> lipper by bunching the fingers together in a flat band.
тн	Lie on the <b>T</b> humb <b>H</b> eel alone – let the keys massage the thenar muscles.
TS	Thumb Stand: point the thumb straight down and stand on it. Keep the fairly compact fist directly above it.
ТР	Thumb Poke: use that standing thumb to poke the key.
к	Play with the <b>K</b> nuckles; actually put the top knuckles, the metacarpal-phalangeal joints (MCP joints) on the keys.
BB	Play with a <b>B</b> ird <b>B</b> eak – all the fingers and thumb bunched tightly together.
Р	The <b>P</b> ad is the flat, fleshy part near the tip of the finger or thumb.
KE	Hold the <b>K</b> ey <b>E</b> dge.

### Which hand, which finger, which direction?

- When an exercise is given for one hand only, apply it to the other hand immediately or later *ad libitum*.
- When no fingering is marked, choose one appropriate to the size and shape of the pupil's hand.
- In scales, "to the outside" refers to right hand ascending, left hand descending, and "to the inside" refers to the left hand ascending, right hand descending.

#### Acknowledgements

Grateful thanks to the numerous colleagues who helped me pare down these exercises from the more extensive *Handy Harry* series, especially Hanno Beckers, Audrey Dumont, Alison Lund, Rene Maurer and Christine Olson. Especially warm thanks to Dragan Jascur, whose captivating illustrations do so much to make the book.

I would also like to thank my mentors: the late Phil Cohen, whose vision of the role of the biologicalphysical in piano playing provided inspiration for many of these exercises; Kemal Gekić, whose brilliant technique provided me with hands-on experience of what works and what doesn't; the late Moshe Feldenkrais, whose method illuminates the learning strategies and skeletal mechanics underlying all these exercises, and Tai Chi master Sam Slutsky, whose acid-tinged encouragement often keeps me on the straight and narrow path of skeletality when, left to my own devices, I might wander further afield.

### 0. Introduction: All of You Plays the Piano



### An Octopus's Garden

Imagine your arm moving underwater – like an Oscar the Octopus playing the piano! Lucky the cat wants you to make the most beautiful sound in the world.

The arm joins the hand to the body – effortlessly, fluidly. When the finger touches down on key to stand, but doesn't <u>try</u> to stand, it's easy to feel that flowing connection of fingertip to whole self.

### 1 The Most Beautiful Sound in the World

Imagine a simple arm action, a Buddhist 'not-doing' movement that makes a sound. Let it develop on its own. There's no trying, no wrist undulation. The finger stays limp, but contacts the key and mysteriously moves it with a unique kind of dangling-standing. The sound is unique as well.<sup>7</sup>

Play a note. Was it ugly? Banged? Weak? Beautiful? Rich? Could it be more beautiful, more magical? How could we make it the most beautiful note in the world?

### A floating arm

**Step 1: Raise your arm high in the air.** Let the hand and fingers hang down, relaxed as a skeleton. **Lower the arm slowly...** slowly... until your hand hangs by your side. The hand didn't stiffen. It didn't prepare to touch anything – there was nothing to touch. It remained free. Remember that in the following:

**Step 2:** Sit at a table. Raise your arm high in the air. Let the hand and fingers hang down. Imagine that the table top is a soft, furry animal. Lower the arm very slowly until the vertical fingers meet the table top somewhere near the edge. **Continue lowering the arm, passively folding the fingers as they stroke the animal's fur...** and then unfolding them again as they slide off the table to land limp in your lap. Rest there a moment or two, then raise the arm again, brushing the back of the hand against the side of the table on the way up. Feel the sensations in the fingers... the hand... the wrist... the forearm... the elbow... the upper arm... the shoulder... the torso...

**Step 3:** Hold the arm high above the keys. Dangle the hand totally limp, the fingers like hanging poles. **Lower the arm gently until one of the hanging poles plays a note** with a clear, gentle, knocking sound. Stop before the finger stiffens – keep it straight *and* loose. Take the

### Purpose:

cultivate easy, light,
floating arm movements.
connect finger to key
palpably, skeletally, but not
weighted.

### **Potential errors:**

falling instead of gently wafting down.
flattening the hand prematurely, missing the skeletal contact point.
clamping the key and solidifying the skeletal contact.

 over-activating the fingers.
 stiffening the fingers at the moment of impact instead of letting their loose, bony structure move the key.

finger away by lifting ever so slightly. Gently drop to re-establish contact on the next note, like a tightrope walker. Don't sink down too much; you'll fall off the rope. Don't dangle too high; you'll lose contact with the rope. Keep the entire hand limp as the arm lowers the hand's bony structure to tap different keys gently (*The Tightrope Walker*).

If the bones don't line up, the finger/hand skeleton has no power; the bones miss the key. If they line up but get stuck together, it's no better; the bones poke the key. The connection should be bony, but not fixed. Make finger into a sort of "bone rope." Feel this bone rope by lowering the arm while the finger is dangling vertically, touching fingertip to key and producing a sound while the finger crumples and un-crumples again. Never hang on to the key. Pretend that you have three sticks attached with string and you somehow get them to sound a note. This gives the note a distinctive sonority. Then try again, reducing the "crumpling" to a minimum. That's the *Tightrope Walker* touch.

Let's clarify this by exploring some other ways of doing this:

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Hanno Beckers writes, "My student who had a brain stroke two years ago loved this exercise because she could easily let go the fingers, lowering their tension by moving the hand from the arm. The idea of 'breathing' helped a lot. She was almost hypnotized by the movement."

**Step 4: Waft down "too far,"** so the fingers get flat and play by lying down in the key horizontally. The sonority is different because the finger's skeleton is involved differently (*Lazy Lion*).

**Step 5:** Waft down and **stiffen the vertically standing finger** on purpose. The sonority is stronger but uglier. You sure felt the finger's skeleton - but maybe it's a little *too* stiff (*The Pogo Stick*).

**Step 6: Waft down while curling the fingers** into the classic "hold the apple" shape as well as solidifying them. This change in sonority is caused by another sort of over-stiffening.

**Step 7:** Waft down, curl the playing finger, and **press on the key to** *push* **the wrist up** in the air. Now the hand is active and the arm limp. This again makes a different sound.

**Step 8:** Play again with "rope-fingers," and after the note sounds, continue wafting the arm down, **crumpling the finger and sliding it off the key** to rest in your lap *(Elegant Alionus, beginner version)*.

**Step 9:** As you descend, **vibrate the wrist lightly as the fingertip knocks the key** loosely, repeating the note. "Ricochet" the key, sounding the note twice... or three times... or four times, or even five times if possible... It's like a ball bouncing. Keep the arm's movement continuous, the hand and finger shape neutral. Just dangle, don't stiffen. It's as if an octopus's tentacle were playing the note, and it bounces lightly as he lays it down. Add pedal for a ghostly sound (*Elegant Alionus, advanced version*).

**Step 10: Make 'disembodied' ricochet notes in a continuous movement,** counting a slow 4. Descend to "vibrate" some notes counting 1-2. When the hand touches down, reverse the direction immediately to rise again counting 3-4. Make the change from out-breath to in-breath indiscernible. Add pedal for an even more ghostly sound (*Elegant Alionus, advanced version*).

# Lazy Lion



These lazy lions have found some nice piano keys to curl up in. Shhhhh, don't disturb them... even the elephants are walking on tiptoe...

#### Sink the arm down from a high position until the finger lies down on the key and plays it horizontally.



Improvisation & Variation

- Play the piece with another finger.
- Vary the melodic line, playing with the same floating-lying touch. For instance, in measure
   5 play E flat instead of F.
- Play with a different rhythm.
- Do all that with the left hand.

Whatever notes and rhythms you come up with, always keep the arm movement very large, very slow, very gentle, and very continuous.

# **Elegant** Alionus



Alionus's elegant tie and his elegant arm movements fascinate Gracie Goosy – but not Lucky the cat...

Begin with your arm very high, then follow the curving line.



### Improvisation & Variation

- Play the piece with another finger.
- Vary the melodic line. For instance, play the first four bars as written, then descend A-G-F-E to create a Phrygian scale version of *Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star*.
  - Do all that with the left hand.
- Whatever notes and rhythms you come up with, always keep the arm movement very large, very slow, very gentle, and very continuous.



Eddie Elephant and Lucky have had too much fruit punch. All they want to do is loll around... Can your hand and arm be as lazy as these pianimals?

### I. Lying Down

Let's first get to know the keyboard as an infant first experiences the ground – by lying down. Nobody learned to walk by walking. A fully relaxed hand joins its skeleton to the key, allowing it to sense new ways of activating and differentiating. Freed from the stress of standing or walking, the hand moves with more vitality and precision, making a distinctive, 'skeletal' sound. Lying down it can:

- "Swat" the keys with banded fingers like a seal flipper (Sassy Seal)
- Bunch the fingers tightly into a sharp bird beak (Wonky Woodpecker)
- Use free fingers with medium-high tonus somewhere in between the seal flipper and the bird beak (*Chinese Chickadee*)
- Trill with free fingers (Wonky Warbler)
- "Pluck" the keys with a sharp curling motion (Chinese Chicken)
- Roll the hand skeleton this way and that like a hibernating bear or an elephant (Sleepy Bear, Jumbo's Lullaby)
- Rest the hand on the heel of the thumb only (Run, Rover, Run)

When you mash the hand into the keys be heavy, but don't press in with muscular effort. Sink into the keys like a fat cat lying down. We call this "smooshing" instead of mashing. For small hands, sinking the heel into the key bed may leave the fingers too far from their keys. Slip the other hand in underneath the heel of the playing hand to bring those fingers close to the black keys.

If this is too weird for your pupils, play these pieces without smooshing. Just rest the heel lightly on the keys, or float the wrist just above the keys. In any case, keep the wrist as low as possible. The security afforded by the hand lying down integrates the action into the neuromotor system much better than the same action done standing. Can you devise a game to make "key smooshing" more attractive?

### <sup>3</sup> Flop Heel, Fingers Make a Bird Beak

*This exercise enhances the differentiation between a totally relaxed wrist & forearm and highly tonused fingers & hand.* 

**Step 1:** Flop the forearm on a table; turn the hand palm up. **Bunch the straight fingers & thumb together into a bird beak,** as firm as you can. A woodpecker's beak pecking holes in a wooden tree must be really hard! Explore three variants:

- a. Thumb touching all four fingers
- b. Thumb touching only 2 & 5
- c. Thumb touching only 2 & 3

**Step 2:** Flop the forearm on the table, palm down. With the elbow on the table **lift the forearm and peck with the bird beak.** Which of the three beaks makes the most convincing knocking noise? Which one sounds most like a woodpecker?

**Step 3:** With the heel on the table **lift just the hand and peck.** How does this change the sound?

**Step 4:** Resting the heel securely in some white keys, **use the bird beak to peck one black key,** and then another, imitating the sound of a woodpecker. Which bird beak works best? (*Wonky Woodpecker*)

**Step 5:** Still flopped, keep the fingers as firm as a bird beak but separate them. **Touch a key with one finger, another key with another finger.** Tap very sharply, and leave long silences between notes. Play *staccato… legato…* or something in between... *(Chinese Chickadee)*  tonus & activity in the muscles that move the fingers. **Potential errors:** - Pressing the heel too much. - Mistaking tension for tonus.

Purpose: Develop

 curling the fingers too much.
 failing to feel the difference while simultaneously relaxing one part and activating another.

**Step 6:** Play more quickly and lightly, **fluttering the fingers** while the heel still rests securely, and keeping the *feeling* of the bird beak in the fingers. Go through all possible combinations:

d. 2-3-2-3-2-3-2
e. 2-4-2-4-2-4-2
f. 2-5-2-5-2-5-2
g. 3-4-3-4-3-4-3
h. 3-5-3-5-3-5-3
i. 4-5-4-5-4-5-4

Keep the finger shape not too flat and not too curled – whatever is natural. (Wonky Warbler)

**Step 7:** Make a bird beak again; place the heel on some other white keys; peck some fresh, new black keys. **Lay your hand at a different angle to peck a different kind of hole** in the key. Or make a warbling sound instead of a pecking sound.

**Step 8:** Fluttering the beak-y fingers again, flop the heel higher or lower on the keys to **change the sound of the black key warbling.** Explore different hand angles to find the lightest, easiest black key warbling.

# Wonky Woodpecker



Wanda Woodpecker can't peck the message because she is busy feeding her kids – so Alionus is doing it for her with his 'bird beak' finger. He's listening in on his headphones – but is his sweetie getting the valentine message?

Bunch the fingers as tightly as possible to make a good, strong bird beak (**BB**). Use the thumb and heel (**H**), or maybe the wrist, flopped on the keys like a woodpecker's feet as a base to peck a black key rat-a-tat-a-tat! At measure 7, separate the fingers but keep them as solid as a bird beak to make the same sound.



Improvisation & Variation

- Hop all over the keyboard with the heel of your hand, so you can peck whatever black keys you want.
- Play *Wonky Woodpecker* with the left hand.
- Make up some left hand variations.
- Make up two-hand variations with Mommy and Daddy Woodpecker both pecking away, finding wood weevils for their kids. Peck *staccato* or *legato*, *forte* or *piano* – all the different touches and articulations you can dream up.

### 5 Lay the Hand Down & Roll

The hand is always rotating as we play piano, <sup>9</sup> but just as we don't notice the rotation of the pelvis in walking, it generally remains outside our awareness. It's complicated and subtle, easy to overdo. Rolling the hand in the keys introduces rotation naturally, spontaneously – unplanned. For now, don't even worry about how little or how much you do.

Try these steps first on a table.

### A hibernating bear doesn't want to wake up

**Step 1: Smoosh the white keys with the heel** while the fingers lie gently amongst the black keys. Rest in the keys, feeling the arm and shoulder let go.

**Step 2: Rock the hand sideways, this way and that**, as Mama Bear's big behind (that's your hand's heel) rolls around finding a better position to go back to sleep... Roll slowly and stop often. Feel how you adjust to each new position...

**Step 3: Pronate**<sup>10</sup> **to lay the hand more on the thumb.** Then pronate even farther to lay the inside edge of the hand (the 2<sup>nd</sup> finger) on the keys – Mama Bear on her side, still fast asleep (*Sleepy Bear*).

**Step 4: Slowly roll back again** to smoosh the heel into its keys – Mama Bear on her tummy, still slumbering somnolently. Feel the arm and shoulder relax anew.

### Step 5: Keep rolling farther to the outside... just as lazily, just as heavily...

roll the hand over the mashed 5th finger... fold it slightly – Mama Bear on her back, still asleep – then roll her back onto her stomach... (Jumbo's Lullaby)

**Step 6: Roll the hand onto its back and lay it on the MCP joints...** Then roll it more along the wrist... What difference can you feel? How does the trajectory change? These two types of rotation are both good.

### A hibernating bear... a dreaming doggie... a dreamy dragon...

**Step 7: Lay the right hand on its inner edge,** the 2<sup>nd</sup> finger lying farther to the inside than the thumb. Lay the inside of the thumb on E, or E-F. Lay the inside of the 2<sup>nd</sup> on D, or C for a larger hand, or even C-B. Lay the hand down like a doggie lying in front of the fireplace, legs stretched out, dreaming about chasing a cat and twitching his legs: wiggle fingers 3, 4 & 5, lightly brushing any keys that might be nearby. Even wiggle the 2<sup>nd</sup> finger (*Run, Rover, Run*).

**Step 8:** Roll left and right on the heel again, pronating and supinating to **drag the fingers this way and that on the black keys** until some random notes start to sound, as if Mama Bear really is finally starting to wake up (*Sleepy Bear*).

**Step 9:** Use the heel-rolling motion to **help the fingers play specific black keys.** As you roll one way, it's as if the impetus of the roll is enough to put the finger into its black key to sound the note. Rolling the other way puts another finger into a different black key (*Dreamy Dragon*).

**Step 10:** Smoosh the heel in some white keys and **slide it in a slow, silent glissando** along the keyboard. Listen to the *thuk thuk* of each successive key coming up. When you arrive at a new place, rest and play some new black keys with the fingers.

### Purpose:

introduce rotation in a stress-free way: by lying down in the keys.
learn it by sensing it skeletally.

### Potential errors:

mashing the keys too forcefully.
not really <u>sensing</u> the hand's let-go internally as you roll.
Rolling too much or too little.
being too stiff.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Tobias Matthay, British pianist and pedagogue, author of *The Visible and Invisible in Pianoforte Technique*.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> To pronate, roll to the inside. To supinate, roll to the outside. The hand lying on its back is supine, lying on its palm is prone – but rolling even farther to the inside is also pronation.

# Sleepy Bear



It's winter. Father Bear hibernates – with his paw still mashed on the keys. Mommy and Baby Bear seem happy slumbering below, but look at Lucky, he has the warmest place.

"TH" means "Thumb Heel." Lay the entire thumb down, mashing all three thumb phalanges into the white keys E-F. Play the black keys by turning the fingers into a bear paw. Glue them loosely together. Mash the undersides of the fingers into the keys, more or less flat, but loose – curving the fingers everso-slightly makes it easier... the undersides still brush the key surface.

At the end of the advanced version, roll the hand over so far that it lies on its inside edge, the 2<sup>nd</sup> finger to the left of D flat, thumb to the right of E flat. Let them just lie there, relaxed, or see if they can gently squeeze the black keys between them.



### Improvisation & Variation

Lay the thumb on any pair of white keys you like, and band the fingers to play any group of black keys you like. Play the black keys *staccato* or *legato*, *forte* or *piano*, to change the sonority and make Sleepy Bear feel happy or sad, bright or grey, calm or excited... Can you lay the thumb down on B-C, the 2<sup>nd</sup> on E-F, surrounding a group of *three* black keys?

## Run, Rover, Run!



Dougie Dachshund, Danny the Dane, and even Graham the Greyhound can't keep up with Lucky, try as they might. See how they play the piano as they run! We know Rover is dreaming all this, because his legs are twitching.

Mash all three thumb phalanges into E-F. Leave the fingers loosely independent, so they can now play the black keys one at a time, just like Rover's twitching legs. Curl the fingers just a *tiny* bit more than in *Sleepy Bear*...



Improvisation & Variation

- Lay the entire thumb on any white key or keys, and run with the fingers on some black keys. Make the fingers sort of lie down and run at the same time. Play *staccato* or *legato*, *forte* or *piano* – whatever touch and articulation you like.
- Make up stories about different kinds of doggies big ones, little ones, sad ones, happy ones, yappy ones but don't ever let them catch Lucky!
- Find the full version of *Run, Rover, Run* in Appendix Two.



Jumbo is playing a lullaby – with his back – while Eliza Elephant changes his diaper. Lucky patiently waits his turn...

Mash the heel heavily into the white keys as if it were an elephant – not forcefully but bulkily... Roll that bulk gently right and left – can you roll your hand right over onto its back like Jumbo? Remember the rolling feeling when you play the piece – rolling just a tiny bit makes it easier for the elephant's legs to play the notes.



### Improvisation & Variation

Roll around in some other white keys; play some other black notes, creating new melodic shapes, finger patterns and rhythms. Always use the rolling motion.

### Dreamy Dragon



He may look like a big, bad dragon, but Puff is a gentle soul with a heart of gold. He's heard this piece a thousand times – but he'll still give Lucky a good lesson.

This piece integrates and develops the strange feeling of planting the heel in the white keys while the fingers move. Make sure both you and your pupil can tap the rhythms correctly before playing the notes.

Play the cluster silently, and slide along the keys to the next one in a silent glissando. Make the cluster fit the size of your hand – it doesn't need to be five notes. Vary the fingering to suit your hand as well. Keep the fingers totally flat, or curve them very slightly, or curve them more. How does the sound change? How does the feeling change?



Improvisation & Variation

- Try playing the clusters out loud doesn't that sound horrible? Try to find combinations of white key heel mashing and black key melody notes that don't sound so awful. Do they exist?
- Create new melodies that skip around more than this one... or less...
- Create left hand versions as well.

### **II. The Thumb**



A giant hand floats under water. The ducklings like the fingers, but the baby swans like the thumb more. They are not like the other ducklings, just as the thumb is not like the other fingers. It sticks out to the side. It moves differently. It's weird and gangly. Is it an ugly duckling, or could it actually be a swan, more beautiful and more capable than its finger brothers?

Clamp the straight thumb against the straight fingers. Oppose them. Grasp. This is the thumb's principle job. Face the palm down; move the fingers as they do to play piano – now if it grasps, the thumb goes up! How can it grasp <u>and</u> play?

This section helps figure it out, first by developing the thumb's strength and independence. The thumb does many things here it may never do while playing the piano – but afterwards the whole hand will play better.

### 10 Alligator Jaws – Clamp Thumb & 2<sup>nd</sup> as a Triangle

The thumb can also "un-oppose." Moving the thumb down & away from the rising fingers is "reverse opposition." The hand is more like an alligator than a crocodile – this jaw is not so long and thin, but more bulky and three-dimensional. Keep the alligator's eyes on top for this entire exercise by keeping the wrist low.

**Step 1: Thumb tip & fingertip together on the table:** Lay the entire straight thumb on the table, all three phalanges in contact. Lay the  $2^{nd}$  finger on top of the thumb in complete contact, with the  $2^{nd}$  fingertip farther forward than the thumb tip. Touch the table top with both tips. Squish thumb & finger. **Step 2: Make the triangle more taut:** Draw the hand back to slide the  $2^{nd}$  fingertip onto the thumb as it lies on the table, keeping the finger straight. Make a triangle whose base is the thumb, the two sides the  $2^{nd}$  finger and hand. The  $2^{nd}$  fingertip *almost* leaves the table top to clamp to the thumb tip – but the  $2^{nd}$  doesn't curl.

**Step 3: Give the alligator an overbite:** Slide the 2<sup>nd</sup> tip forward again, flattening the triangle until the fingertip is far forward on the table top, as far as possible farther from the thumb tip. Repeat many times.

**Step 4: Give the alligator an overbite a different way:** Slide the *thumb* along the table *towards* yourself to distance thumb tip from fingertip. Then slide it forward in and under the stationary 2<sup>nd</sup> fingertip to touch it, creating the same triangle. What feels different in the upper arm and shoulder?

**Step 5: Alligator jaw plays some notes:** Use the triangle to play some notes. Lay the entire thumb down on C; separate thumb and  $2^{nd}$  to play D flat with the flat  $2^{nd}$  finger. Slide the  $2^{nd}$  finger pad on D flat *backwards,* making a

higher triangle – making the "jaws" more like an alligator's. Keep the hand strictly in this triangle shape while playing the D flat many times. Close the jaws firmly; feel how powerful they are.

**Step 6: Alligator yawn:** In the same triangle position, slowly raise the 2<sup>nd</sup> fingertip: open the alligator's jaw in a giant yawn. Still lie down on the thumb – keep the lazy alligator's lower jaw on the ground. How much can the jaw open with the thumb lying down?

**Step 7: A wider yawn:** Gradually stand on the thumb to raise the 2<sup>nd</sup> fingertip farther – yawn even wider. Stand the thumb right up on its tip, so the alligator could swallow a house!

**Step 8: A 'safe place' in the mouth cavity:** In the middle of that yawn, a little birdie flies into the alligator's mouth. Don't hurt the birdie. Close the jaws slowly and carefully, against inner resistance. Keep birdie safe inside the jaws. Lower the thumb to lie on key again; fingertip clamped to thumb tip with a really big space inside.

**Step 9: No more safe place:** Alligator gets hungry. Raise the 2<sup>nd</sup> slowly, as high as possible, stand up on the thumb, and then quickly clamp the middle of the 2<sup>nd</sup> to the thumb, squishing the triangle flat. *Snap* down quickly to gobble the birdie up.

**Step 10: 'Roly-poly' between thumb tip & 2<sup>nd</sup> fingertip:** Maintaining the squished triangle position, let the heel of the hand rise, balancing the 2<sup>nd</sup> fingertip, then lower it again to balance on the thumb.

**Step 11: Open the bird's cage.** Yawn, balancing on the thumb tip: heel somewhat in the air, separating 2<sup>nd</sup> fingertip from thumb tip. Make the space a little bit bigger and smaller by balancing on the thumb tip in a wavy, springy manner.

**Step 12: 'Roly-poly' on key:** Walk on the keys like a Sumo wrestler by bringing the 2<sup>nd</sup> fingertip down onto D flat and get the thumb tip off C to balance on the 2<sup>nd</sup> fingertip. Then bring thumb down into C and raise the 2<sup>nd</sup> fingertip again to yawn. Repeat.

**Step 13: Thumb and the other fingers:** Repeat all steps with thumb & 3<sup>rd</sup>, thumb & 4<sup>th</sup>, thumb & 5<sup>th</sup>.

### Purpose:

### - develop strength and coordination in thumb opposition.

- individuate thumb from hand.
- discover thumb's standing power.

### Potential errors:

### - lack of vigour.

- failure to open the joint enough.
- clamping too lazily.
- loss of structure in the snap.

- isolating the effort: it should radiate through the entire arm and body.

# Yawning Alligator



Sleepy Alvin Alligator is yawning... Kindly Alphonse Alligator is guarding the birdies... Hungry Alexa Alligator can't eat Gary the Gander because she's vegetarian!

To "yawn," slowly raise the 2<sup>nd</sup> high. To "keep birdie safe," lower the 2<sup>nd</sup> slowly against resistance making a triangle shape. To "eat lunch," snap shut as quickly as possible, squashing the triangle.



#### Improvisation & Variation

Combine the thumb with each of the other fingers in turn. Then stand on the thumb, raise the 2<sup>nd</sup> finger making it more like an antenna than an alligator's upper jaw. Search all over the place. Play more distant notes. Do that with each other finger in turn. Always use the finger's vital upward movement to stimulate springing, standing power in the thumb.

Integrate the thumb/finger/hand triangle feeling with the Five Finger Exercises, Appendix Two.

### 17 Manipulate the Key

### The key does not go down

The perception of what we're doing has a great influence on how we do it. If we think we are pressing the key down, inevitably something in us drops as well, compressing the key. The MCP joint can fall, or the wrist, or the forearm, or somewhere in the torso – the neck or upper back. Now one must recover from the resulting compression. Hence all the "relaxation moves" we see, hence the stilted, note-by-note melodies we hear. Why not just change the perception? Does the key really go down? What if it were seen as a lever to be manipulated?

### Maintaining equilibrium

In piano playing, the fingertip goes down with the key, but almost everything else in the body goes up. "For every action, there's an equal and opposite reaction." The equal and opposite reaction balances the down and up forces; maintaining equilibrium, eliminating the need for relaxation moves. If you never fall, there is no need to catch yourself. There is no tension from which you must now free yourself. The relaxation move attempts to regain an equilibrium that never should have been lost in the first place. It usually just pulls you further off-balance.

### The key is a lever

This exercise changes the way we move the key by changing the way we see it. The weight of a lever to be manipulated doesn't pull it down: its mass can be moved up or down with equal ease. In this new sensorial world we can actually hold the key and wiggle it any way we want to. Gravity becomes irrelevant. We are forced to equalize the down and up forces by virtue of the very nature of the action. It's the first step in freeing ourselves from the disease of "down."

Step 1: Grab the key: Make a bird beak with thumb and 2<sup>nd</sup>; use it to grab the edge of the key. Pinch it where the little edge of its flat surface sticks out.
Step 2: Wiggle the key up and down, so gently that no note even sounds.
Sense the hammer jiggling inside.

**Step 3: Wiggle it enough to sound a note lightly** – just a little more vigorously. Imagine that you are holding the hammer itself. Jiggle the key to throw the hammer lightly onto the string.

**Step 4: Sense the hammer's weight:** Jiggle more gently again, making no sound. Sense how heavy the hammer is. Feel its weight. Is it 10 grams, 20 grams, or 50 grams? Bounce the hammer lightly on the inner end of the key – feel hammer and key losing and regaining contact.

Giving oneself to gravity completely – allowing oneself to fall – actually divorces one from gravity. There is no control, no relationship. Here we <u>manipulate</u> the key instead of pressing it down, eliminating the <u>sense</u> of 'down' altogether. Moving the key directly instead of falling into it begins that process of establishing relationship to the field of gravity, in which we'll eventually stand.

#### Purpose:

<u>experience the key as a</u> <u>lever</u>: sense the difference between pressing a key down and manipulating it.
Replace the sense of falling into it with the sense of manipulating it.

#### Potential errors:

over-clamping the key,
falling into it or compressing
it, instead of moving it up
and down equally: wiggle it
failing to keep the 'up' just
as important as the 'down.'

# **Termite Temerity**



These termites have the temerity to <u>eat</u> the piano! They are lining up like soldier ants, planning what to devour next. At least they left a place for Lucky to snooze... Can your fingers tunnel through the keys the way the termites tunnel through the piano's wood?

Grab the Key Edges (**KE**); feel the keys with the fingers like termites trying to get inside them. Play the stems up notes with the right hand, stems down with the left. Play *forte* the first time, *pianissimo* the second.



Improvisation & Variation

- Create other melodies and rhythms with the right hand, left hand, or both hands, always grabbing the key edges.
- Play staccato, or play almost legato can you make the piano sing even though you're repeating the notes?
- Replace the "key edge" technique with bird beaks or more normal fingers, creating the same "pinched" sound.
- Play the extended version in appendix two.

### 21 Stand on 2<sup>nd</sup>, Lean 'Arm Thumb' to Inside

Thumb and  $2^{nd}$  can stand and walk pretty well now, but arpeggios are the ultimate test – there's a bigger stretch between thumb & fingers. Keep the  $2^{nd}$  MCP joint standing well no matter how far the thumb stretches to the inside.

**Step 1: Stand on a thumb-2<sup>nd</sup> bird beak:** Stand the right 2<sup>nd</sup> finger on a table top. Clamp thumb underneath 2<sup>nd</sup>. Curl the other fingers into the palm.

**Step 2: Teeter on the bird beak – thumb prevents 2<sup>nd</sup> MCP from collapsing:** Sway this standing structure side to side as far as you can. Almost touch the outside of the hand down to the right, the inside of the hand down to the left. Even sway your whole body to make it more fun. Notice the strength of the 2<sup>nd</sup> finger's "hip joint," the MCP joint, how the thumb's support helps keep it standing well, no matter how far you sway.

**Step 3: Thumb "abandons" 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> still stands well:** Sway to the inside, stand well on the 2<sup>nd</sup> while moving the thumb away from it to touch down somewhere on the table. Keep the 2<sup>nd</sup> finger "hip joint" potent and sturdy. Touch the thumb down a little farther away each time you sway. How far away from the finger can it reach, without making the 2<sup>nd</sup> MCP joint collapse at all?

#### Purpose:

- Keep 2<sup>nd</sup> MCP pumped in thumb extension.
- Recalibrate the thumb/arm relationship.
- move arm to inside to improve thumb standing.
- eliminate thumb reaching, arch collapse and finger flapping in arpeggios.

### Potential errors:

- MCP joint collapses as thumb stretches out.

- not putting arm far enough to the inside: the right arm should be to the <u>left</u> of the thumb in thumb standing.

- lack of differentiation of effort: arm stiffens due to influence of high hand tonus in arpeggio, or hand collapses due to influence of free arm moving it to the new position in arpeggio.

Step 4: Giant thumb-2<sup>nd</sup> steps on key: Do all of this on key.

**Step 5: Apply to the repertoire:** Think of places in the repertoire where the hand tends to collapse because the thumb is stretching to the inside. Imagine how you could improve those places by using this exercise.

# **Stretching Spider**



Sapphire Spider's friends are helping her do the splits... Maybe don't stretch your hand <u>quite</u> that much...

No matter how far your thumb stretches, don't collapse the hand arch. Play a mirror image of this piece with the left hand, standing the left 2<sup>nd</sup> finger on C in the small hand version, A in the larger hand version – always keeping the arch healthy.



### Improvisation & Variation

- Stand the 2<sup>nd</sup> finger on any white or black key and wiggle some other keys with your thumb, without shifting the weight.
- Gradually shift more and more weight onto the thumb without collapsing the arch until the potent arch between thumb and 2<sup>nd</sup> is absolutely secure.
- Finally lift the 2<sup>nd</sup> out of its key to stand the thumb on its key still not collapsing the arch.
- Do this with the right hand... the left hand... and finally create new compositions where both hands spider-stretch and spider-walk all over the keyboard simultaneously...



Samantha & Simon Snake stood up on their rattles to fight... but then they fell in love! Their tails, their tongues, even their souls are intertwined so roundly that they could go for a roll on the keys. Can your fingers fall in love with the keys like this?

### V. Rotating & Running

Running takes more energy than walking, but it's simpler. In walking, always at least one, and often two feet (fingertips) are on the ground (key). The pelvis (hand) must flexibly adapt to the shifting configuration of the legs (fingers). By contrast, in running the legs (fingers) launch you in the air and touch down springily to launch you again. Never are there two feet on the ground, and often not even one. The pelvis's job is much simpler.

Running requires more energy, less intelligence

Someone launched in the air is free between each point of contact – but not relaxed! A dynamic and vital leg (finger) action launches the body (hand) to the next point of balance. There's no chance for relaxation between each stride. That would rob the leg (finger) of energy, evoking the same hidden collapse that we saw in poor walking.

The neuromotor images of standing and walking inform running

Usain Bolt's muscles work very differently when he sprints than when he walks, but if he had never learned to stand and walk, he could not run. The less demanding actions are embedded in the higher energy movement – their structural-functional wisdom enables efficient and potent motion at high speed.

### 22 Whip the Arm to Smear a Scale

This ultra-quick arm movement surreptitiously combines finger running with forearm rotation, establishing the running reflex effortlessly.

**Step 1: Bored in school – drum your fingers** on a table top as you did on the desk in school, fingering 5-4-3-2-1. If they don't rat-a-tat totally smoothly, move the wrist more to the inside, and rotate the forearm more, until they sound *brrrrrrrrt*. The elbow pushes the hand and forearm quickly across the body in front.

**Step 2: Whip the arm up & across more quickly and energetically:** Give this movement more energy and speed – with a judicious pause between each smear. Whip your arm as fast as you can across the body to the other side, thrumming the fingers and flinging them up into the air.

**Step 3: Arm-smear a 5-note pattern:** Do the same at the piano, smearing a super-quick 5-note pattern (beginners may try a 3-note pattern – which fingering is smoothest?). After whipping the arm up in the air across the body, let it waft slowly down till the hand rests comfortably in your lap.

#### Purpose:

- Give the CNS a first impression of very fast playing. - use the arm to guide the fingers through their notes.

#### Potential errors:

- falling arm.
- collapsing finger joints.
- stiff wrist.
- floppy wrist.

This dissipates any residual effort in the hand and arm. Begin the next smear from this deeper state of let-go.

**Step 4: Cultivate evenness by sensing – both physically and aurally:** Watch out for unevenness stemming from a weighted touch or from a collapsing finger or thumb. Make sure that the five notes, no matter how quickly or slowly they are played, are absolutely even. Don't induce any weight. Don't allow any collapse. Use the ear to fine tune the evenness until even a computer could not detect any discrepancies.

**Step 5: Make a magic flute:** When the left hand plays that 5-note group the melody ascends: does it remind you of a famous musical motto? Play the left hand rising several octaves higher to really sound like Papageno's magic flute.

If the pupil has trouble playing this little motive really quickly, take some time to figure out why. Is she or he doing any of the following?

- Lifting the thumb too high
- Keeping the thumb too tense
- Collapsing the hand arch
- Failing to add a dollop of rotation
- Not moving the arm through a wide enough range of motion
- Not moving the arm quickly enough

# **Barmy Bunnies**



*These crazy rabbits are leaping everywhere, searching frantically for the elusive Papageno. Whip your arm the same way they leap.* 

Whip the arms up and across so vigorously that the notes seem to play themselves. Whip the left forearm up & to the right (notes stems down), the right forearm up & to the left (notes stems up). Whip them so quickly that the fingers seem to go *through* the keys. Play two octaves higher to sound even more like Papageno's magic flute.



### Improvisation & Variation

- Use this "smear" technique anywhere you want on the keyboard, in any rhythm that pleases you. Create different dynamic shades.
- Smear the two hands simultaneously, always 3-2-1, or 4-3-2-1, or 5-4-3-2-1. Do the hands bump into each other? Avoid this by angling one hand a little higher, the other a little lower, crossing the arms in front of you.
- Create smears fingered 1-2-3, or 1-2-3-4, or 1-2-3-4-5.

### 26 Forte is "Up"

**Forte** is one of a pianist's biggest challenges. Many can sing beautifully when playing **piano**, but the instant the dynamic increases, the perceived need to involve the arm weight often ruins the sound. In a healthy **forte**, the key's faster "down" energy is compensated by a greater "up" impulse in the fingers, hand and arm – making for <u>less</u> weight, not more!

Strengthen your **forte** by making the "up" more evident: make it super quick. A speedy "stand up" creates a resonant, ringing, beautiful **forte** without even trying to play loud. <u>Trying</u> to play loud is generally what ruins the whole thing.

**Step 1: Pianistic** *circuits* **&** *bumps*:<sup>22</sup> With the hand relaxed in a gentle curved shape, move the arm towards a table top. As the hand approaches, lightly slap/tap the table with one or more fingers and continue straight forward and up, curling the fingers loosely under but leaving the wrist flat. The fingertip touches the table for the shortest possible time. As you leave the table surface, explore different arm trajectories:

- up and back towards the shoulder
- straight up towards the ceiling
- diagonally forward
- straight forward

**Step 2: Fast** *circuits* **&** *bumps***:** Do the same movement as quickly as possible. Which arm trajectory feels best now?

Purpose:

- increase the speed of the standing action to create a freely resonating **forte.** 

Potential errors:

- imposing weight on the key even though you are standing up, not falling in.

**Step 3: Pianistic** *stop* **&** *go:* Do the same super-quick arm-gliding/finger-tapping movement, and when the finger makes contact, keep it glued to the table top as you continue to move 'up' as much as possible. *Think* that you are going to launch the arm into the air, just don't *do* it. Trick the mind. Don't let the wrist fly up! Leave it horizontal: stop the "up" movement when you are balanced in a nice arch position.

**Step 4: Higher energy: stronger** *bump* **needs more** *up***:** Review these three steps, gradually increasing the energy the fingertip imparts to the table top. Make a louder and louder *thok* sound, with less and less weight. The louder you *thok*, the more vigorously you need to balance the "down" kinetic energy with a "forward and up."

**Step 5:** *Circuits & bumps* on key: Review all these steps on key, noticing the change in sound each time you change the attack. Omit launching the hand straight forward; this would smash it into the fallboard.

All these up movements are done by the forearm alone; the upper arm hangs loosely. The shoulder remains relaxed, and the elbow feels heavy. The elbow is the fulcrum. Simply let it hang low and allow it to bend.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> *Circuits & bumps*, otherwise known as *touch & go*: when an airline pilot lands the plane and takes off again without coming to a full stop, allowing her to do many practice landings in a short amount of time. In *stop & go*, the aircraft comes to a full stop.

# Forte Flying Fox



Yikes! It's a lion! What big claws he has!!! Oh, it's just Lucky... Can you give your own hand an electric jolt like the one Lucky gave Felicity Fox?

In violin music, ^ is the sign for an 'up' bow. Think "up" as you play the ^ notes. Exaggerate the "up" feeling by practicing the notes *staccatissimo:* whip the forearm straight up and back from the keyboard towards your ear.

The louder you play, the more you need to think "up" everywhere. *Stand* up on the notes marked ^ ; and *leap* up on the notes marked > . The hand should feel as firm as a bird beak, and the wrist should remain horizontal – keep a flat line between forearm and hand.



Basic

#### Improvisation & Variation

- Create a C major key version of this piece, or G major, or E minor!
- How about a simpler version, or more complicated?
- Explore many variations, all of which use a vigorous 'up' motion in the finger, hand and arm to create a wonderfully ringing, clear, healthy, robust *forte*.

# Mozart Monkey Business



Manny, Mickey and Milan think they're Mozart, but they're not even interested in the piano – they just want to trick Lucky... Are you more a Mozart or a monkey?

*Mozart Monkey Business* uses many of the techniques we've learned so far. How many of them can you find?

### Easy version

Play stems up right hand, stems down left hand. Use the various touches we have learned to give each articulation a unique sound.



### Intermediate version

Play this version with more of a gentle, lyrical feel. Later on, if you like, spice it up with more crisp articulations. Teacher may take the left hand part if so desired.



#### Advanced version

This more challenging version requires an ebullient 'up' in your touch at all times if it is to sound as Mozartian as it was written. Teacher may take the left hand part if so desired.



Improvisation & Variation

- Easy version: Retain the same melody but fool around with which hand plays which notes.
- Intermediate and advanced versions:
  - Change the rhythm of the accompaniment to quarter notes or even eighth notes.
  - Play the melody with the left hand and make up a new accompaniment figure for the right hand. Did the right hand copy the original left hand part, or did it try something different?



The Pianimals



Concert

### 30 Appendix Two: Paring Down to the Essentials

Not all of your pupils will need all the *Pianimals* exercises. Divining which pupils need which exercises is a part of getting to know them. You may even develop a core group of exercises that quickly and dependably put a beginner's technique on solid grounding. *Pianimals Pointers* is one such grouping, but you may have a different one. Editors Hanno Beckers and Audrey Dumont have each come up with a personalized core curriculum. Hanno began by using principally these four:

- Lay a flat finger on the key, allow the arm to sink lightly, slightly, until the finger plays the key. Make a sound with a sort of "rope finger." (*The Most Beautiful Sound:* Exercise #1, Step 4, page 15)
- With that flat finger rooted in the key, hook the nail joint ever so slightly. The hooking movement should be as gentle and small as possible, barely visible more felt internally than seen. (*Creeping & Cliffhanging:* Ex. #28 St. 1-3, p. 105)
- Form the fingers into a tight, solid bird beak, and "peck" the keys with it. The beak can be made of five fingers, or the thumb and 2<sup>nd</sup> alone, or any combination of fingers and thumb. (Standing Bird Beak: Ex. #7, St. 1-8, p. 39)
- Lay the half-curled finger on key so that the fingertip points straight down. Raise the finger in the air, keeping the tip pointed down. Play the note, tip still pointed down. This is the "hammer" stroke. (*Creeping & Cliffhanging:* Ex. 28, St. 12, p. 105)
  - ... but ended up principally using only one:
- Slide the flat finger forward on the key. As it slides, stand it up. In the end, stand it up by drawing the hand back, laying the heel on key and creating a flat-fingered hand arch. (*Flop Heel, Finger-Flippers Swat Keys:* Ex. 2 St. 2, p. 23; *Sliding Bird Beak:* Ex. 8, St. 7, p. 41)

These four exercises alone helped Hanno's beginning pupils play well within a few months. The sliding bird beak gave them a healthy, potent touch almost immediately. Hanno uses other exercises to resolve specific technical problems, but these four work well for him as a basic diet. I like to save curling the distal joint for later, when the MCP joint's healthy activity has been firmly established – but Hanno successfully introduces it much sooner, without detriment to the MCP.

Audrey Dumont uses a different core group to quickly resolve developing hand problems:

- Glue the finger to the key; keep it in constant contact as it manipulates (wiggles) the key. Feel the finger *in* the key, not *on* it. (*Sliding Bird Beak,* Ex. 8, St. 1, p. 41)
- Form a triangle by clamping thumb pad to finger pad, and imagine that the top knuckle (the 2<sup>nd</sup> MCP joint) is the eye of an alligator or crocodile. Slide this triangle in the keys, keeping only the eye above water a convenient way of keeping the wrist nice and low. (*Clamp thumb & 2<sup>nd</sup> Crocodile Jaws;* Ex. 8, St. 2-4, p. 45)
- Slide on the key to immediately discover the best finger tonus: too loose and the finger crumples, too tight and it can't slide. (*Sliding Bird Beak:* Ex. 8, intro, p. 41)
- Keep the fingers straight like sticks: if they buckle, it means there is too much "knee," and not enough "ankle" and "hip joint." (*Lie Down Floating:* Ex. 15, St. 9-12, p. 65)

Another teacher focuses solely on the bird beak exercises. At first, her new pupils play all melodies with one finger only, using either a literal bird beak or something close to it. After two months, when she finally introduces "walking," the pupil's sense of hand structure is so well developed that more complicated patterns are easily acquired.

Explore the entire series with your pupils, and come up with your own "core curriculum." Please visit our site to share your "core curriculum" and to find out how other teachers are getting the most out of the *Pianimals* method. We want to collate data from the widest possible group of piano teachers.

#### www.alanfraserinstitute.com/pianimals/selection

### 31 Appendix Three: Thematic Sources

Arnold Schoenberg wrote that "good composers borrow, great composers steal." Here are some of the sources from which I "borrowed" as I was trying to be a good composer...

Schumann	Album for the Young: Melodie, Op. 68 #1
Gregorian Chant	Dies Irae
Children's Song	Mary Had a Little Lamb
Mussorgsky	Pictures at an Exhibition: Tuileries
Debussy	Jimbo's Lullaby
Lambert & Potter	One Tin Soldier
Prokofiev	Visions Fugitives, Op. 22 #1
Johann Strauss Jr.	Roses from the South, Op. 388
Bach	Fugue in C sharp minor, WTC Book I
Liszt	Technical Exercises, Book I, #1
Gregorian Chant	Dies Irae
Anonymous	French Canadian Folk Music
Mozart	The Magic Flute
Bill Withers	Lean On Me
Anonymous	French Canadian Folk Music
Mozart	Sonata in B flat major, K.333, 3 <sup>rd</sup> mvt.
Chopin	Prelude in C minor, Op. 28 #20
Schumann	Kinderscenen, Op. 15: Knight of the Hobby Horse
	Schumann Gregorian Chant Children's Song Mussorgsky Debussy Lambert & Potter Prokofiev Johann Strauss Jr. Bach Liszt Gregorian Chant Anonymous Mozart Bill Withers Anonymous Mozart Chopin Schumann

... and here are the names of the people who made *Pianimals*:

![](_page_42_Picture_2.jpeg)

Canadian pianist **Alan Fraser** has written several books applying the Feldenkrais Method to piano technique. As a concert pianist he has performed in Canada, the USA, Great Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Hungary, Yugoslavia/Serbia and China. In 2020 he retired from teaching piano at the University of Novi Sad, Serbia. He still directs the *Alan Fraser Institute of Piano Somatics*, enriching piano artistry by linking its physical and musical dimensions.

![](_page_42_Picture_4.jpeg)

Serbian visual artist **Dragan Jascur** works in oils, pastels, charcoal and pencil. He has exhibited in the USA and numerous European countries, and lives with his cat Lucky at his country estate near Sremski Karlovci, Serbia. You can find much of his artwork at

www.jascur64.wordpress.com

- Sign up for the Alan Fraser Piano Somatics Institute newsletter
- Attend a piano institute near you
- Become an accredited *Pianimals* teacher
- Watch the *Pianimals* video tutorials
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