

JOURNAL

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Who's Who of Great Pianists

Paul Badura-Skoda talks to Malcolm Miller

Farewell to Robert:

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Music Reviews

CD and DVD Reviews - EPTA News

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MUSIC REVIEWS

ISBN: 1-57999-343-5),
Book 2 (Book & CD, 17.95 USD; ISBN:
1-57999-345-1).
Boogie and Blues (7.95 USD;
ISBN: 1-57999-349-4).
Music Moves for Two
(Book & CD for Duo Books 1 & 2).

Confirming that young piano beginners should be taught music literacy instead of just notes, Marilyn Lowe's new method is a "Piano Series based on the Music Learning Theory of Edwin E. Gordon Designed to Develop Audiation and Keyboard Performance Skills." In other words, this method is comprehensive in that it emphasises both the aural and oral arts while developing a music vocabulary. It supports Gordon's premise that music ability develops in a child by the age of nine.

In this piano method, movement, singing, chanting and listening activities, while acquiring recognition of tonal and rhythmical patterns, combine to enable students to read, improvise, compose and perform. This approach might be seen as radical in Europe, where the long pianistic tradition that focused on technique and interpretation is still the mainstay of the piano teacher, rather than the broader approach evidenced in America, where the piano teacher must also teach the foundation of music theory and history while instilling keyboard competencies, such as sight-reading, ensemble playing, technique and hopefully improvisation and composition. How to do all that in 60 minutes a week or less?

Marilyn Lowe has the answer. Her method has been tested for over 10 years and is not too far removed from such pre-school programmes as *KinderMusik™* and *MusikGarten™* (both curricula created by Lorna Heyge, also in consultation with Gordon), of which the latter has recently developed a beginning piano method. Inspiration from Jaques-Dalcroze *Eurhythmics* as well as the opposite end of the spectrum – that of Sinichi Suzuki and Dorothy Taubman – is apparent in Lowe's method, as well as sparks from the pedagogical currents of Zoltán Kodály and Carl Orff. It cannot go unnoticed that there exist some repertoire similarities with other beginning piano methods, such as *Pathways* and *Music Tree*.

Starting with the black keys, which naturally lend themselves to the pentatonic mode, the *Preparatory Book* encourages keyboard exploration and musical expression through a variety of songs – some familiar, some didactic –

MUSIC MOVES FOR PIANO
distributed by GIA Publications,
7404 S. MASON AVE., CHICAGO, ILL.
60638. www.giamusic.com or
www.musicmovesforpiano.com

Piano Method by Marilyn Lowe in co-
operation with Edwin E. Gordon
Books - Teacher's Lesson Plans 1;
Student books:
Preparatory (Book & CD, 14.95 USD;
ISBN: 1-57999-341-9).
Book 1 (Book & CD, 17.95 USD;

while leaving room for invention of the child's own story in photocopiable fashion. Pedagogical profiles for each piece are given at the end of the book. The accompanying CD is played on an acoustic piano and presents the teacher's accompaniment, as well as the student's part. For beginning piano students of five to six years of age, this book will whet the appetite of the budding young pianist. *A Teacher's Guide* is also available for all current levels.

Book 1 in 20 Units (for Creativity, Keyboard Skills, Ensemble Playing, Movement and Improvisation) juxtaposes on the same page teacher's instructions with those of the student's lesson and homework assignments. Duple metre, then triple metre, etc., is taught through the various activities at and away from the piano, including singing with moveable *Dó* ("bah", "bum") in various modes (including new "keyalities") and rhythm patterns ("do", "da", "de", "di", "du"). Students learn the concepts of micro- (metre) beats – and macro-beats (pulse or tempo) to assist in their musical comprehension and expression. Folksongs from America, Russia, Wales, Latvia and France enrich the literature coupled with original pieces. Listening instructions for the CD are given to the student, while parent instructions accompany the practice component of the book. The student is given ample room to succeed, since the focus is shifted from mere pianistic skills to overall musical skills: singing on pitch, moving with grace, audiating intelligently and musically, listening and reacting to the physicality of music-making, all done before learning to read. The learning approach is comprehensive and thoroughly teaches a concept before advancing to a new one. The multi-tasking that is naturally built-in to this method allows the student to stay in the book for longer periods of time without buying so many companion books as is found in some other methods.

Boogies and Blues will spice up the folksongs learned in *Book 1*. This valuable companion has simple pieces with teacher accompaniment, such as "Silver Canyon Blues", "Doggone Blues", "Grandfather's Boogie", "Dolphin Game", etc., as well as space for an original composition. All are learned without knowing musical notation. The CD that goes with this volume may be found in the companion book *Music Moves for Two (Book 1)*.

Music Moves for Two (Book 1) not only is a duet-book, but has space for Improvisation in various modes using "Leader/Follower" concepts. For group lessons, those not playing at the piano can move or perform on rhythm instruments. Student *ostinato* inventions may give rise to new compositions.

Book 2 continues along the lines of *Book 1*. Lesson Time Objectives for

Teachers are now substituted with Music Information boxes for Students. Scales and arpeggios are not only played at the piano, but are also visually understood through graphic notation. Aural harmonic concepts are also developed painlessly and simply at the piano, while melodic patterns naturally unfold. German, English, American, Mexican, French, Latvian and Dutch folksongs joyously brighten the content of this volume.

Other materials currently available are *Teacher's Guides for the Preparatory and Level Two books*, as well as *Christmas Books*, *Pattern CD*, and *Music Moves for Two, Book 2*. Books in progress include *Music Moves for Piano, Books 3-5* as well as their accompanying *Teacher's Guides*. In addition, *Tone Colours for Piano (Books 1 & 2)*, *Repertoire for Piano (Books 1-3)*, and *Reading and Writing Music Notation* are also under construction.

Lowe's method is perfect for small groups of young children or for overlapping individual lessons, allowing the teacher some personal time with the student and the student some time with a peer. Ideal lesson lengths are from 45 to 60 minutes per week. Practice instructions are for two daily 15-minute sessions, instead of one longer period.

Does the piano teacher need extra training in order to implement the Lowe-Gordon method? To answer that question is not easy because it depends on the teacher. The *Teacher's Guides* give very ample advice and instruction, but if one is not confident in musicianship skills, then a preparatory course (see the website: www.musicmovesforpiano.com) may be the answer. For teachers who are blindly opposed to any kind of rote teaching, then they must open their eyes to the more comprehensive nature of this method. The benefits of general musicianship, learned at the keyboard, are so great that the merits of this method should override any reluctance on the part of the teacher. We need only to remember the example of the functional Baroque keyboardist before the lamentable bifurcation between pianist and composer in the 19th century.

The brisk tempi on the CDs, while perhaps difficult for some beginning children, help to maintain a musical phrase so necessary for a singing line and to keep the student focused. Each track has several activities on it within the unit to be studied. The outlay of the books is attractive and easy to read and does not go in for costly colour images, yet conveys a wealth of information on each page and is just "fun" in its adventurous approach.

Already introduced into Germany, Scotland, and the USA, this method teaches the "how" of music-making and piano playing, rather than the "what". From that, is understood the "why",

which is every teacher's (and student's) objective. Marilyn Lowe is to be congratulated on her forward-looking method, expertly conceived, whose far-reaching and long-lasting consequences should revolutionise current piano teaching and make musicians, rather than just more fleet-fingered pianists.

NLH