

### 3 ANALYSIS OF BEGINNER COURSES

#### 3.1 Introduction

A study was done on the generally accepted, and most regularly used, beginner courses. They were measured against the recommendations of well-known authors in the field of piano technique, on what the basic movements are that a pianist should be able to execute.

Only the first lesson books in the different courses were used for the study. These are the books from which the pupil is taught the very first and basic movements in piano playing, and where the first habits are formed. Although most courses provide teacher's guides, technique and performance books as well, no new information was found in these books and the concepts stated in the lesson books were only repeated.

It is the author of a beginner book's responsibility to explore the field of beginner piano tuition thoroughly in order to structure the information regarding all the aspects of music in such a way that the beginner is given a solid theoretical, musical and technical basis to build on. All music teachers are not necessarily specialists in the field of beginner tuition. Authors of beginner books should be the specialists in their field and should illustrate to the teachers the difficulties to be overcome by the pupil. The teacher's responsibility is then to interpret the information presented in the beginner books and to see to it that the pupil understands the theory and performs the exercises correctly. This fact is supported by Kisell et al:

All the exercises in Part 1 of **The Russian School of Piano Playing** are intended to illustrate to the teacher the difficulties to be overcome by the pupil... If during the lessons, the teacher supervises the execution of these different types of exercises, he will systematically develop the different aspects of the pupil's technique... and generally train the pupil to work conscientiously towards a sound piano technique (Kisell et al 1978:3).

To ensure a structural development of all aspects of piano tuition, the author of a beginner book should plan the sequence, structure and explanation of all information meticulously. No aspect of music should be neglected. The researcher is especially

concerned about the forming of correct habits of movement during play. Habits are formed within the first few months of taking music lessons and the basic movements in piano playing should be systematically presented, clearly explained and illustrated.

The recommendations of well-known authors are:

- a proper sitting position (position of the lower body and torso)
- use of the whole arm in a 'free fall' and a 'float off' movement
- use of the forearm in a rotation movement
- use of the hand as a unit in a staccato movement
- finger movement from the phalanx joining the hand and fingers, supported by the bigger levers
- use of the thumb alongside and underneath the hand.

Different beginner courses were measured against these recommendations.

The study was done on the following beginner courses:

- Thompson (1956) - *John Thompson's Easiest Piano Course - Part 1.*
- Burnam (1959) - *Step by Step piano course - Book one.*
- Pace (1961) - *Music for Piano - Book 1.*
- Clark and Goss (1973) - *The Music Tree - A plan for musical growth.*
- Bastien (1985) - *Bastien Piano Basics - Piano - Primer Level.*
- Waterman and Harewood (1988) - *Me and my piano - very first lessons for the young pianist - part 1.*
- Schaum (1996) - *John W Schaum Piano Course - Level pre A - The green book.*
- Palmer, Morton and Lethco (1999) - *Alfred's basic piano library. Lesson book Level 1a.*

These are courses named by Uszler et al (1991:122).



## 3.2 Thompson (1956) - *John Thompson's Easiest Piano Course - Part 1*

### 3.2.1 Analysis

Thompson starts his book with a letter to the parents and teachers explaining that this course was designed to present the easiest possible approach to piano playing. Part one was specifically designed to develop a fluency in note reading:

...the number one enemy with most young students (Thompson 1956:1).

Firstly the keyboard (1956:4-7) is introduced. Names of the white keys are given and how the black keys are structured is explained. On a picture of part of the keyboard, the location of C is explained. The music staff, treble and bass clefs are introduced. Bar lines, time signatures and the numbering of fingers are dealt with. Middle C, using different note values, is played with the thumb of the right and left hand respectively (1956:8-12).

- Researcher: No guidelines are given on how the thumb should be used. The tendency is to use the thumb in conjunction with the forearm, resulting in uneven playing.

The notes D - G (ascending) and their locations and the notes B - F (descending) and their locations are introduced to the right and left hands respectively during this course (1956:13-39). The note values and rests dealt with during this course include that of the semibreve (whole note), minim (half note), crotchet (quarter note) and dotted minim (dotted half note) (1956:13-39). The rhythmical aspect of emphasizing the first beat of each measure is stressed. Worksheets concentrating on revision of the previous work on note values, names and location of notes and time signatures are regularly given (1956:13-39).

- Researcher: The suggestion to put emphasis on the first beat of each bar is an important rhythmical aspect for the pupil to take note of.

### 3.2.2 Conclusion

Thompson's *John Thompson's Easiest Piano Course - Part 1*, was measured against the basic requirements recommended by the authors in the field of piano technique.

The researcher came to the following conclusions:

- The sitting position  
No mention is made of the sitting position.
- The lower body  
No mention is made of the position of the lower body.
- The upper body (torso)  
No mention is made of the position of the upper body.
- The whole arm  
Nothing is said about the use of the whole arm.
- The forearm  
Nothing is said about the use of the forearm.
- The hand as a unit  
Neither the staccato nor any other touch using the hand as a unit is introduced.
- The fingers  
Although all the fingers are used in *John Thompson's Easiest Piano Course - Part 1*, no explanation is given of how they should be moved. The pupil is not informed about the position of the arm or of the fact that the arm is at all involved in playing at this stage.

### 3.3 Burnam (1959) - *Step by Step piano course - Book one*

#### 3.3.1 Analysis

Burnam's book starts with the numbers of the fingers. This is followed by the structure of the keyboard and the location of middle C. The pupil is encouraged to play middle C with the thumb or first finger.

- Researcher: No indication of how the thumb should be moved is given.

The treble and bass clefs are introduced. It is explained that the notes to the top or the right hand side of middle C are written in the treble clef and the notes to the bottom or the left-hand side of middle C are written in the bass clef on a grand music staff. When the stems of the crotchets go down, the left hand plays and when the stems of the crotchets go up, the right hand plays (1959:6-11). The bar line, double bar line and bars are introduced. Pieces using only middle C's are given (1959:12-14).

- Researcher: Although the pupil has been playing only C's with both thumbs for 9 pages now, no guidelines are given on how to move the thumb or any other finger.

The tie is introduced (1959:24-31). The notes D-G (ascending) in the right hand and B-F (descending) in the left and their locations are introduced in this course. The note values and rests dealt with during this course include the crotchet (quarter note), minim (half note) and dotted minim (dotted half note). The time signatures 2/4, 3/4 and 4/4 are explained during this course (1959:12-31).

Pieces using all the previously learnt notes and note values are given, as well as games testing the theoretical information dealt with earlier in the course (1959:15-31).

### 3.3.2 Conclusion

Burnam's *Step by Step piano course - Book one*, was measured against the basic requirements recommended by the authors in the field of piano technique. The researcher came to the following conclusions:

- The sitting position  
No mention is made of the sitting position.
- The lower body  
No mention is made of the position of the lower body.



- The upper body (torso)  
No mention is made of the position of the upper body.
- The whole arm  
Nothing is said about the use of the whole arm.
- The forearm  
Nothing is said about the use of the forearm.
- The hand as a unit  
Nothing is said about the use of the hand as a unit.
- The fingers  
Although all the fingers are used, no explanation is given of how they should be moved. No information about the position of the arm or of the fact that the arm is in any way involved in playing at this stage is given.

### 3.4 Pace (1961) - *Music for Piano - Book 1*

#### 3.4.1 Analysis

Pace (1961:2) starts with the hand position and numbering of the fingers. On a picture of a part of the keyboard the hands (fingers 1-5) are shown in a position to play melodic patterns going up and down in the key of C. The pattern of the melody going up and down is indicated in order by the numbers of the relevant fingers. The concept of keys are not explained; only a picture of the hand position in that key is given. The same melodic pattern is repeated in the key of G. The same concept is practised on the black keys in G flat with fingers 1,3 and 5 (Pace 1961:2-6).

The grand music staff with spaces and lines on it and the treble and bass clefs are explained. Note values (from the crotchet (quarter note) to the semibreve (whole note)), time signatures and some key signatures are dealt with. Short melodies based on the first five notes of the first two sharp and flat keys are played by the pupil to practise the different keys (Pace 1961:7-15).

The pupil is encouraged to play the different melodies in the explained keys and if possible to improvise on them. All the major keys and their key signatures are explained (Pace 1961:18).

- Researcher: Although the pupil has been playing with all his /her fingers for the past 15 pages no mention was made or explanation given of how the movements should be executed. The young beginner usually has no way of strengthening his/her fingers before starting lessons. The tendency is to involve the arm in some or other way in the playing as the fingers are still too weak to play on their own.

Exercises are given in six different keys to practise legato playing. The pupil is advised to do the following:

Although each of your fingers will be touching a key, allow only one note to sound at a time. Let the weight of your arm shift from one finger to the next while you keep a good hand position and a flexible wrist (Pace 1961:21).

- Researcher: A proper hand position has not been explained. How to use the 'weight of the arm' and keep the 'wrist flexible' has not previously been dealt with. To understand these concepts and to be able to execute them is a process of development. To expect a beginner pupil to be able to do this immediately is not realistic.

The phrase, crescendo and decrescendo are introduced (Pace 1961: 22,23).

- Researcher: How to move, in order to phrase and make dynamic differences is not clear.

The pupil is encouraged to play in as many different keys as possible. The teacher and pupil play improvised questions and answers respectively in order to become acquainted with the different keys (Pace 1961:24,25).

The staccato action is introduced. The following guidelines are given:

Move your hand but not your arm, and say “down-up” as you play each note. This will help you develop a good staccato touch (Pace 1961:26).

- Researcher: A flabby movement of the wrist is also a ‘down-up’ movement but does not describe the exact staccato movement. The movement should be described very clearly and should be performed with precision in order to provide the technical basis needed to build an advanced technique on.

The tonic and dominant 7th chords are explained and chord studies are given in the different keys. The tie and slur are dealt with (Pace 1961:27-34).

- Researcher: No mention is made of the movement or sound needed to perform the slur.

A simple melody line in F is given with the instruction to harmonize it using the chords I and V7 and then to transpose it to E and G. More ideas on simple accompaniment figures are given, for example broken chords and half broken chords (Pace 1961:35-38). The minor chord is introduced and the relation between the minor key and its relative major is explained. The pupil is encouraged to write his/her own melody and use the proper clefs, key signatures, bar lines and note values (Pace 1961:39-43).

- Researcher: Although accompaniment figures like broken chords and half broken chords are used no mention is made of the movement involved.

The rest of the pieces in the book are revisions of previous theoretical and practical work done (Pace 1961:44-48).



### 3.4.2 Conclusion

Pace's *Music for Piano - Book 1* was measured against the basic requirements recommended by the authors in the field of piano technique. The researcher came to the following conclusions:

- The sitting position  
No mention is made of the sitting position.
- The lower body  
No mention is made of the position of the lower body.
- The upper body (torso)  
No mention is made of the position of the upper body.
- The whole arm  
Although the weight of the whole arm and a flexible wrist are mentioned once, it is not clearly explained.
- The forearm  
Nothing is said about the use of the forearm.
- The hand as a unit  
The use of the hand as a unit is mentioned during the introduction of the staccato touch. The touch is not properly explained.
- The fingers  
The fact that the arm weight should be shifted to the next finger when playing with the different fingers is mentioned, but not clearly explained.

## 3.5 Clark and Goss (1973) - *The Music Tree - A plan for musical growth*

### 3.5.1 Analysis

Clark and Goss start in unit one with the concept of high and low. The group of two black notes is shown on a picture of part of the keyboard. High and low are illustrated by asking the pupil to play these notes respectively in different octaves up and down the keyboard. The note values are crotchets (quarter notes) and minims (half notes).

When the stem is down the key is pressed down by the third finger of the left hand and when the stem is up the key is pressed down by the third finger of the right hand. An accompaniment is provided for the teacher.

A strong, rhythmical pulse is emphasized and a simple physical exercise of one full arm swing for a crotchet (quarter note) and two full arm swings for a minim (half note) is suggested. Revision of the previously learnt work is done. The numbering of the fingers is explained and finally the pupil is encouraged to create some pieces using these two notes on his/her own (Clark and Goss 1973:3-11).

- Researcher: The information given to the pupil is clearly explained. However, a perfect opportunity to teach the pupil the 'free fall' movement, falling on the third finger, is passed by. None of the movements executed by the pupil are illustrated or explained.

Unit two focuses on dynamic differences. Whilst practising the concept of high and low, piano and forte signs are explained and added. The notes played are now extended to all the black keys. The keyboard is explained through the structure of the black keys, grouped in two's or three's. On a picture of part of the keyboard all the white keys are named and played by the pupil with the third finger of each hand respectively. Even, rhythmical playing is emphasized. Revision of the previous work is done and the pupil is encouraged to write his/her own piece using the new information and notes (Clark and Goss 1973:12-19).

- Researcher: No explanation is given on how dynamic differences are obtained through specific movements. The use of the third finger on the white keys provides the opportunity to teach the 'free fall' movement.

Unit three explains the slur and legato playing. Playing on the black keys, using fingers three and two in the left hand and three in the right hand, a three-note phrase is performed. It is suggested that the notes be played as smoothly as possible. The *8va*

sign is explained and is used with indicated dynamic differences in the pieces that follow. Rhythmical, even playing is emphasized and revision of all the previous work is done.

As a warm-up exercise a two-note sigh motive, using the second and third finger of each hand respectively, is used (Clark and Goss 1973:21-26).

- Researcher: Although the sigh motive is used, no mention is made of the 'free fall' or 'float off' movements or how these movements should be executed. Legato playing is only described by 'playing as smoothly as possible'.

In unit four the note value of a dotted minim (dotted half note) is explained, as well as the interval of a second. These concepts, as well as all the previous ones, are practised in the next four pieces. At first the pupil practises the interval of a second by playing two adjacent white keys with the second finger of each hand. Then the interval is practised by playing with the second and third fingers of both hands respectively on two adjacent white keys. An exercise on two adjacent notes going up and down, using the fingers two, three and two in both hands respectively, is suggested. Revision of all the previous work is done (Clark and Goss 1973:27-33).

- Researcher: The position or movements of the fingers, hand or arm are not mentioned in unit four.

In unit five the interval of a third is explained. The two notes of the interval are at first played respectively and then together with the second fingers of both hands on two white keys F and A. The keys are indicated on a picture of part of the keyboard. Evenness of rhythm is emphasized and revision of the previous work is done (Clark and Goss 1973:34-39).

- Researcher: The movements of the fingers are not explained. The involvement of any other lever in the playing is also not mentioned.



Unit six focuses on time signatures using the crotchet (quarter note) as a unit. All the previous concepts are revised and practised in the pieces of this unit (Clark and Goss 1973:40-45).

Unit seven introduces the interval of a fourth. The two notes of the interval are again at first played respectively and then together with the third fingers of both hands on two white keys E and A. The keys are indicated on a picture of part of the keyboard.

The method of revision of all the previous concepts is followed. Exercises on three adjacent keys going up, using the fingers two, three and four in the right hand are suggested. The left hand plays the same exercise using a mirror pattern (Clark and Goss 1973:46-51).

- Researcher: In the previous two units the opportunity to explain adjacent finger movement with the levers involved presents itself in the exercises given, but is not used.

In unit eight the semibreve (whole note) and the interval of a fifth is presented. The two notes of the interval are again at first played respectively and then together with the third fingers of both hands on two white keys F and C. The keys are indicated on a picture of part of the keyboard. Again all the concepts learnt so far are revised and even, rhythmical playing is emphasized (Clark and Goss 1973:52-57).

The bass and treble clefs, as well as the grand staff and ledger lines are explained in unit nine. A final revision on all the previously learnt information is done (Clark and Goss 1973:58-64).

- Researcher: The emphasis on even rhythmical playing throughout the course is an important aspect for the pupil to take note of.

### 3.5.2 Conclusion

Clark and Goss's *The Music Tree - A plan for musical growth* was measured against the basic requirements recommended by the leading authors in the field of piano technique. The researcher came to the following conclusions:

- The sitting position  
No mention is made of the sitting position.
- The lower body  
No mention is made of the position of the lower body.
- The upper body (torso)  
No mention is made of the position of the upper body.
- The whole arm  
No mention is made of the use of the whole arm.
- The forearm  
Nothing is said about the use of the forearm.
- The hand as a unit  
Nothing is said about the hand as a unit.
- The fingers  
How the fingers should be moved and what their position should be is not explained.

## 3.6 Bastien (1985) - *Bastien Piano Basics - Piano - Primer Level*

### 3.6.1 Analysis

Bastien starts with the sitting position. The guidelines on sitting and hand positions are as follows:

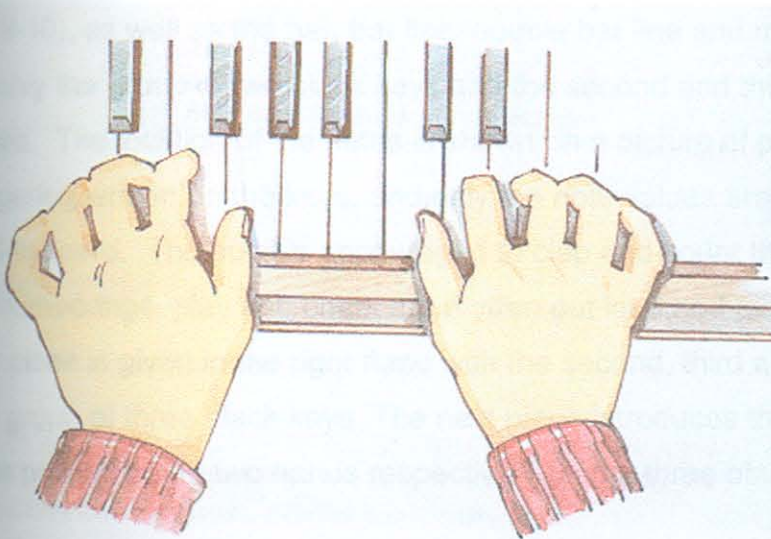
Sit up straight facing the centre of the piano. Place your feet flat on the floor. If your feet do not reach the floor, it is helpful to have a footstool or books under them when you practice.

Sit high enough to reach the keys easily. Do you have a piano stool or chair at home, which moves up and down? If not, cushions or books may be used to help you sit at the correct height when you practise.

Hold your fingers in a nice curved shape. Imagine you are holding a ball in each hand. That is the way the fingers should be curved when playing the piano. Your wrists should be level with your arms (Bastien 1985:4,5).

A good sketch of a relaxed but curved hand position is given.

**Picture no 1** (Bastien 1985:4)



On outlines of the hands, the fingers are numbered. To help the pupil remember the numbering of the different fingers, it is suggested that the numbers are called, and for the pupil to wiggle the specific finger.

The keyboard is explained (1985:6,7) through the structure of the black keys, grouped in two's or three's. On a picture of part of the keyboard the groups of two and three black keys are shown. The pupil is encouraged to play the groups of black keys with the right and left hands respectively. Fingering used includes 2 and 3 or 2, 3 and 4 up and down the keyboard. Up and down and high and low are explained. By playing these same



notes the pupil is encouraged to say the words 'play up' or 'play down' for the group of two black keys. For the group of three black keys the words 'playing up and playing down' are used.

- Researcher: This is the first touch the beginner has of the piano, and it would be the ideal time to introduce the 'free fall' movement but no mention is made of the use of the arm.

The note values of the crotchet (quarter note) and minim (half note) are explained (1985:8-10), as well as the bar, bar line, double bar line and measures or beats. A piece, using only the group of two black keys and the second and third fingers of the left hand is played. The location of the notes is shown on a picture of part of the keyboard, with the fingering written on the keys, and only the note values are notated below the picture of the keyboard. The pupil is encouraged to clap and count the rhythm out loud, sing the finger numberings, play and count the rhythm out loud and play and sing the words. A similar piece is given in the right hand with the second, third and fourth fingers playing on the group of three black keys. The next piece introduces the semibreve (whole note) and the playing of the two hands respectively on the three black keys.

- Researcher: The emphasis is placed on theoretical information, rhythm and fingering. Teaching of the appropriate movement of the fingers is omitted.

The repeat sign is introduced (1985:11-13). The thumb is used for the first time on the black keys. The location of the notes or position of the hands is still being shown on a picture of part of the keyboard. The fingering is written on the keys in the picture.

The music alphabet is explained on a picture of part of the keyboard (1985:14, 15). Up (or going to the right side of the keyboard) and down (or going to the left side of the keyboard) are explained. The pupil is encouraged to play and memorize the music alphabet up and down the keyboard, saying the letter names and using the second finger of each hand to play the notes.

- Researcher: A perfect opportunity to practise the use of the 'free fall' movement as described in Chapter 2.5.2 by Bastien. No description of the movement is given.

The next pieces are given in the key of C major or 'C position' (1985:16-19). Legato playing is introduced and the following guidelines are given:

Legato means to play smoothly, connecting the tones. To play legato, one finger lifts when another finger plays the next note (Bastien 1985:19).

The time signatures  $2/4$ ,  $3/4$  and  $4/4$  are explained and used in the next pieces (1985:20-23).

- Researcher: No reading of notes is done up to now. Only note values are learnt and a basic rhythm and keyboard sense are developed. The opportunity to develop the correct habits of movement, while the pupil still has little abstract information to absorb, is not used.

Revision of the previous work is done (1985:24). The music staff with lines and spaces, and the treble and bass clefs are introduced (1985:25-29). For the first time notes are written in notation on a music staff. The location of the notes is still being shown on a picture of part of the keyboard. The different intervals of a second, third and fourth are dealt with. The grand music staff is explained (1985:30-38). Dynamic signs *f* and *p*, as well as the slur, are introduced. The slur is described as follows:

A slur is a curved line under or over two or more notes that are to be played legato (smooth, connected). The slur is used to show a musical thought called a phrase (Bastien 1985:37).

The only guideline given here is:

Lift your hand gently at the end of a phrase (Bastien 1985:38).

The following guideline is given in the Technique book where the slur or phrase occurs:

Lift your hand at the end of each slur with an 'up wrist' motion (Bastien - Technique - Primer Level 1985:10).

When two notes are slurred the following guideline is then given:



Begin with a low wrist, and end with a high wrist for each slurred group (Bastien - Technique - Primer Level 1985:28).

The tie is explained. The interval of a fifth is introduced.

- Researcher: Although no mention is made of the use of the arm during the performance of the slur, the wrist's movement (wrist is the initiator of the movement) is emphasized and the arm movement, therefore, implied.

The difference between a harmonic and melodic interval is explained (1985:39). A piece is given where the left hand plays a repeated harmonic fifth interval.

- Researcher: No guidelines are given on either the hand position or movement when playing the fifth in the left hand, or the movement of any of the other levers.

The rests of all the note values learnt so far are introduced (1985:40-45). Chords played in both the right and left hand, as well as broken chords, are explained. Emphasis is placed on the balance between a clear and defined right hand melody and a softer bass (chordal) accompaniment. The left-hand position is changed with the thumb on C (F position), not the fifth finger on C, as in the C position.

A few pieces incorporating the new information are given as exercises. A new hand position's location (G position) is explained. Chords are used in the new position (key). Accidentals 'F#' and 'C#' are introduced (1985:46-55).

The staccato touch is dealt with giving the following guidelines:

Staccato means to play short, separating the tones. A dot over or under a note means staccato. To play staccato, let the key go immediately after playing (Bastien 1985:56,57).

- Researcher: No practical guidelines are given on how the staccato should be performed and what the movement involves.



The flat sign is introduced, B flat, and three pieces are given in the key of F major (1985:58-62). At the end revision on all the theoretical information in the book is done (1985:63,64).

The *Bastien Piano Basics - Technique and Performance books - Primer Level*, support everything that is done in the 'Lesson' book - Primer Level.

From the technique book, the different technical aspects that were dealt with are extracted and incorporated in the analysis of the *Bastien Piano Basics - Primer Level*.

- The first technical aspect dealt with, is the use of all the fingers. The following guidelines are given:  
 Play evenly with curved fingers. Play legato connecting the notes smoothly. Play slowly at first; play faster when you are ready. Play loud or soft (Bastien - Technique - Primer level 1985:2).
- The next technical aspect that is explained, is the movement during the performance of the slur or phrase. The following guideline is given:  
 Lift your hand at the end of each slur with an 'up wrist' motion (Bastien - Technique - Primer level 1985:10).
- When two notes are slurred the following guideline is given:  
 Begin with a low wrist, and end with a high wrist for each slurred group (Bastien - Technique - Primer level 1985:28).

### 3.6.2 Conclusion

Bastien's *Bastien Piano Basics - Piano - Primer Level*, was measured against the basic requirements recommended by the leading authors in the field of piano technique. The researcher came to the following conclusions:

- The sitting position  
 A good description of the sitting position is given. How high the pupil should sit is explained by suggesting that the pupil should sit high enough to reach the keys easily, and even more important, that the hand and forearm should be level. If the

pupil does not have an adjustable chair, books or even cushions may be used to get to the correct height.

- The lower body

It is stated that the feet should be flat on the floor or, if the feet do not reach the floor, a footstool should be used.

- The upper body (torso)

How far the pupil should sit from the piano is not dealt with and nothing else is mentioned in connection with the upper body.

- The whole arm

The arm is not mentioned anywhere in the primer level books. The 'up' and 'down wrist motion' during the performance of the phrase are dealt with in the Technique book Primer level. This implies the movement of the whole arm.

- The forearm

The forearm and rotation movement of the forearm are not mentioned in any of the primer level Bastien Piano Basics course.

- The hand as a unit

The staccato touch is dealt with in the primer level, but how the movement should be performed is not clear.

- The fingers

Although all the fingers are used in Bastien Piano Basics course, no clear explanation is given of how they should be moved. The pupil is not informed about the position of the arm or of the fact that the arm is in any way involved in the use of the fingers at this stage.

### 3.7 Waterman and Harewood (1988) - *Me and my piano - very first lessons for the young pianist - part 1.*

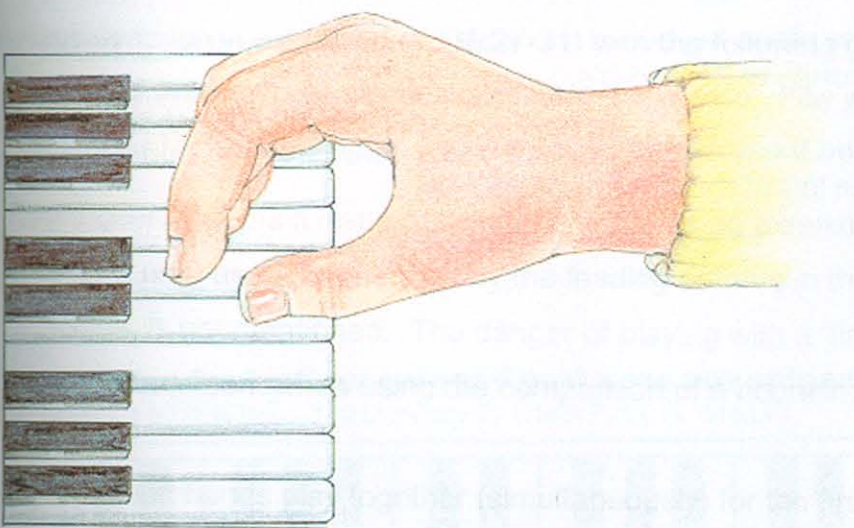
#### 3.7.1 Analysis

Waterman and Harewood (1988:1-3) start with the sitting position. The following guidelines are given:



Play with clean hands and short fingernails. Check that the chair or piano stool is in the middle of the keyboard and at the right height. Make sure you are sitting correctly. Play with curved fingers, like this:

Picture no 2 (Waterman and Harewood 1988:3)



- Researcher: The terms 'right height' and 'sitting correctly' are not explained. The sketch is a good example of a relaxed hand with firmly curved first phalanx.

The keyboard (1988:4, 5) is introduced. The structure of the white and black keys is covered. High and low, up and down and middle C's position are explained. The note names are introduced with colours. The note values of a semibreve (whole note), minim (half note) and crotchet (quarter note) are explained, as well as the 4/4 and 2/4 time signatures (1988:6-9). The music staff, with the treble clef and lines and spaces, is explained. The right hand's fingers are numbered and the pupil starts to play crotchets and minims on middle C with the right hand. The notes D, E, F and G are introduced. Only the right hand is playing at this stage. Exercises/monkey puzzles are given to test the previously learnt note values, note names and locations. Then the left hand is introduced to the notes C, B, A, G and F. Fingers are numbered and pieces are played with the left hand only (1988:10-26).



- Researcher: No explanation is given on how the fingers should be used. A hand position in which the thumb is immediately used promotes the active use of the forearm. On the first lesson the pupil's fingers will not be strong enough to play independently, and the habit of actively playing with the forearm when the thumb is used, is formed very quickly.

The staccato touch is explained (1988:27-31) with the following guidelines:

A dot placed over or under a note makes it short and crisp. Play with a loose wrist like a bouncing ball (Waterman and Harewood 1988:31).

- Researcher: The main issue of using the finger as an extension of the hand (the hand as a unit) as recommended by the leading authors in the field of piano technique, is not mentioned. The danger of playing with a 'flabby' wrist away from the key is imminent when using the comparison of a bouncing ball.

The right and left hands play together (simultaneously) for the first time (1988:32).

Dynamic signs *mp* and *mf*, as well as *crescendo* and *decrescendo* are explained and used in pieces.

- Researcher: No guidelines to explain the touch or movement when making dynamic changes are given.

The tie is introduced (1988:34) and another monkey-puzzle and musical crossword is given to revise the information previously given to the pupil. Rests are introduced and in the following pieces all knowledge previously acquired is practised.

### 3.7.2 Conclusion

Waterman and Harewood's *Me and my piano - very first lessons for the young pianist - part 1*, was measured against the basic requirements recommended by the leading authors in the field of piano technique. The researcher came to the following conclusions:

- The sitting position  
The guideline 'make sure you are sitting correctly' is given, but no further explanation of the correct sitting position is given. It is mentioned that the pupil should sit at the right height, but no explanation of the 'right height' is given. That the chair should be adjustable is not mentioned. See chapter 2.2.8 for clear guidelines given by the leading authors in the field of piano technique.
- The lower body  
Well known authors in the field of piano playing stress the fact that most of the body weight rests on the chair and that approximately one third of the body weight is supported by the feet. No mention of a footstool for pupils, whose feet do not reach the floor yet, is made. How the lower body is supported, is not explained.
- The upper body (torso)  
No mention is made of the position of the upper body.
- The whole arm  
The use of the arm as a unit in piano playing is not dealt with.
- The forearm  
No mention is made of the use of the forearm.
- The hand as a unit  
When the staccato touch is introduced, the guideline 'play with a loose wrist like a bouncing ball' is not explained clearly. If the movement of a loose wrist is compared to that of a bouncing ball, the wrist will rather move away from the instrument, resulting in the 'flabby wrist movement' Last refers to in the previous chapter in section 2.7.3
- The fingers  
All the fingers are used, but it is not explained what their positions are, how they should move or how the big levers always support the fingers when playing. According to the leading authors in the field of piano technique, the position of the first joint is very important and should be strengthened.



### 3.8 Schaum (1996) - *John W Schaum Piano Course - Level pre A - The green book*

#### 3.8.1 Analysis

Schaum (1996:2) starts with a word to the teachers and parents. The teachers are encouraged: 1) to teach piano in the most natural and enjoyable way, 2) to present technical information accurately and progressively, 3) not to define the scope of the grades, 4) not to confine the intellectual range of the pupil, 5) to offer a gradual progressive pedagogic continuity through a series of books named Pre A, A, B, C, D etc. and 6) to lead with assistance to eventual mastery of the instrument.

The parents are asked to: 1) set definite practice times each day, 2) listen to their child's playing, 3) see that the child practises as soon as possible after each lesson and 4) be interested and help the child develop a happy attitude towards piano study.

In the first lesson the hands are traced (1996:4, 5) and the fingers are numbered. The notes, on a picture of part of the keyboard, are also numbered from 1-5 on the ascending notes from middle C to G for the right hand, and from 1-5 on the descending notes from middle C to F for the left hand. A melody is used to explain up and down. By following the numbers on the notes in the picture, which indicates the finger that the pupil should play with, the pupil is encouraged to play the melody using the fingers 1-5 in both hands respectively. The rhythm is not indicated in note values, but as one note per beat unless a dash is used. Then the note directly before the dash must be kept for another beat. It is suggested that the rhythm is clapped or tapped before an attempt is made to play the melody. The pupil is encouraged to sing the words of the melody and say the numbers of the fingers while playing. The regularity of the beat is stressed. Bar lines and beats/measures are explained.

- Researcher: No explanation is given of a good hand position, or of how the fingers should be used during play.



The structure of the keyboard (1996:6-9) is explained through the groups of black keys. The note names and positions of the white keys C, D and E are linked to the group of two black keys. Similarly the note names and positions of the white keys F, G, A and B are linked to the group of three black keys. The music alphabet is now written on a picture of part of the keyboard and tests are given to practise these note names on the pictures.

The melody appears twice more (1996:9-11). The second time the melody is used, the letter names of the notes are written on the keys with the fingering below. This time the pupil is encouraged to repeat the letter names of the notes while playing. The grand staff and how music is written on it, is explained. Bar lines and measures, and the time signature are dealt with.

The third time this melody is used, it is written in music notation on a grand staff. The rhythm stays exactly the same throughout. The pupil is encouraged to look at the music and not his/her hands when playing.

- Researcher: All the fingers have been used in the previous piece, which was repeated three times, each time with different emphasis. The emphasis though, is never on any technical aspect of playing, be it the position of the body, arm, hand or fingers.

The next piece (1996:12-15) introduces a hand position called a 'bunched hand position'. The teacher is asked to show the pupil the 'bunched hand position', as the next piece, according to Schaum, is entirely built on that. This piece uses the notes C, D and E in the right hand. The same is asked of the next piece played with the left hand and using the notes C, B and A. The following two pieces concentrate on these notes, the different hands playing respectively. The following sight-reading hint is given:

Find the notes visually then manually...Keep the hands quiet until the note has been found visually (1996:15).

The natural accent on the first beats of each bar is stressed.

- Researcher: 'Bunched hand position' is not a well-known or widely used technical term. The author does not explain the meaning of the term or what the position involves.

The slur is introduced for the first time and is described as follows:

Music is a language and has punctuation signs that divide it into phrases or sentences. These phrases are marked with curved lines called slurs (Schaum 1996:21).

- Researcher: No indications or guidelines on how the slur should be performed either technically or musically are given.

Pieces in which the hands cross one another are introduced. The first new key, G major, is explained, and a new fingering is introduced (1996:27-31). The tie is dealt with. The hands play together for the first time (1996:32-39). Accidentals are used and a new key, F major, with new fingerings, is explained.

The staccato touch is introduced with the following guideline:

When dots are written above or below notes, you touch the keys as if you were touching a hot iron (Schaum 1996:41).

- Researcher: Different pupils would react differently when touching a hot iron. This does not explain the staccato touch.

The last two pieces in the book include the *8va* sign and the accent. A piano quiz is held at the end to do revision on all the theoretical work.

### 3.8.2 Conclusion

Schaum's *John W Schaum piano course - Level pre A - The green book* was measured against the basic requirements recommended by the authors in the field of piano technique. The researcher came to the following conclusions:

- The sitting position  
No mention is made of the sitting position.
- The lower body  
No mention is made of the position of the lower body.
- The upper body (torso)  
No mention is made of the position of the upper body.
- The whole arm  
Nothing is said about the use of the whole arm.
- The forearm  
Nothing is said about the use of the forearm.
- The hand as a unit  
Staccato is introduced, but the touch is not explained.
- The fingers  
Although all the fingers are used in *John W Schaum piano course - Level pre A - The green book*, no explanation is given of how they should be moved. The pupil is not informed about the position of the arm or of the fact that the arm is in any way involved in playing at this stage.

### 3.9 Palmer et al (1999) - *Alfred's basic piano library. Lesson book Level 1a*

#### 3.9.1 Analysis

Palmer et al start with the sitting position and the following guidelines are given:

Lean slightly forward. Let the arms hang loosely from the shoulders. Bench must face the piano squarely. Knees slightly under the keyboard. Feet flat on the floor – right foot may be slightly forward. A book or stool may be placed under the feet if they do not reach the floor (Palmer et al 1999:3).

- Researcher: Measured against the recommendations of the leading authors the guidelines about how far and how high the pupil should sit are left out. This information is crucial to the correct use of the whole arm, forearm, hand and fingers.



Palmer et al then deal with the numbering of the fingers. The production of sound is described:

When you drop into the key with a little weight, you make a soft tone. When you use more weight, you make a louder tone (Palmer et al 1999:5).

Play any white key with the third finger of either hand softly. See how many times you can repeat the same key, making the tone a little louder each time you play (Palmer et al 1999:5).

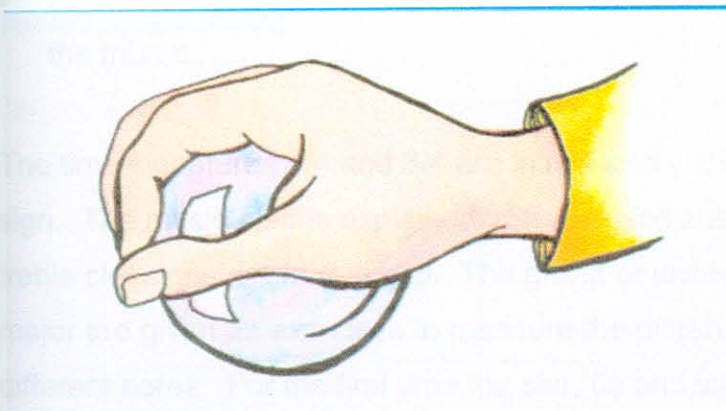
- Researcher: The term 'drop' has not been described and the word 'weight' has little meaning to the pupil if the bigger levers have not been dealt with. As soft playing is a 'controlled touch' and the pupil does not know the prerequisites of a basic touch yet, this is an impossible instruction for a pupil to carry out during his/her first few lessons.

The hand position is dealt with very briefly. The following guidelines are given:

Curve your fingers when you play. Pretend you have a bubble in your hand. Hold the bubble gently so it doesn't break (Palmer et al 1999:5).

- Researcher: A sketch is given in which the thumb is clearly not curved. To imagine holding a bubble in the hand can create tension in the hand, especially for a young child.

**Picture no 3** (Palmer et al 1999:5)



The keyboard is explained (1999:6-9), the black keys in groups of two and three. Down and up, and high and low are explained. The pupil is encouraged to play the group of

two black keys with the second and third fingers and the group of three black keys with the second, third and fourth fingers of the right hand. The left hand then plays the same in a mirror pattern. The note values from a crotchet (quarter note) to a semibreve (whole note) are explained. Pieces using these note values are played on the black keys, with the second, third and fourth fingers.

- Researcher: The use of the second, third and fourth fingers on the black keys promotes the use of a balanced arm behind the fingers, as recommended by the authors in the field, but the use of the arm is never mentioned. Several similar pieces are given as exercises and because the pupil is at this stage not reading notes yet, this would have been an ideal opportunity to introduce the movement of the bigger levers. The authors in the field of piano technique make it clear that the fingers are supported by bigger levers with every movement they make. See section 2.8.8 - Conclusion. No explanation is given on how the fingers should move or should be supported.

The notenames (1999:18 - 20) of the white keys, A, B, C, D, E, F and G are introduced, with their specific locations on the piano. The first pieces in which the thumb, second and third fingers are used, are in C major. More pieces are given for the use of all the fingers.

- Researcher: No guidelines are given on how the fingers should be used, especially the thumb.

The time signatures 4/4 and 3/4 are introduced (1999:21-26), as well as the *mf* dynamic sign. The music staff is explained. Spaces and lines are dealt with and the bass and treble clef signs are introduced. The grand or joined staff is explained. Pieces in C major are given as exercises to measure the distance between notes and to locate the different notes. For the first time the slur, tie and sigh motive (1999:35-37) are used. The legato aspect of the slur is explained. The only explanation on how legato playing

should be performed is through the comparison of the fingers with the moving ends of a seesaw.

- Researcher: The perfect opportunity to introduce the use of the arm as big lever is created with the sigh motive. No mention of the involvement of the bigger levers (arm or wrist) is made. The concern at this stage of the lesson book is note names and locations, note values and distances between intervals.

In the pieces that follow, different intervals (second, third, fourth and fifth) are dealt with (1999:38-56), as well as the G major playing position. The first accidentals are introduced. A new piece (1999:57) is introduced in which the left hand repeatedly plays a harmonic interval of a fifth.

- Researcher: The use of the hand as a unit is not mentioned and no explanation is given on how this should be performed.

Staccato playing (1999:58), as well as *crescendo* and *diminuendo* are explained.

- Researcher: The word, sound and image of staccato are explained, but no mention is made of how it should be performed.

### 3.9.2 Conclusion

Palmer et al's *Alfred's basic piano library. Lesson book Level 1a* was measured against the basic requirements recommended by the leading authors in the field of piano technique. The researcher came to the following conclusions:

- The sitting position  
The fact that the chair should be adjustable, level and hard, as well as the height and distance from the piano, is not mentioned. See chapter 2.2 for clear guidelines on the sitting position, given by the authors in the field of piano technique.



- The lower body position  
The suggestion that the knees should be slightly under the keyboard confuses and it is not clear if the guideline is given in connection with the distance from the piano, or the height of the chair. It is suggested that the feet should be flat on the floor or supported by books or a footstool if the pupil is too short.
- The upper body (torso)  
Palmer et al suggest that the upper body leans slightly forward and that the arms hang loosely from the shoulders.
- The whole arm  
Although the words 'drop' and 'weight' are used very early in the first few lessons, no mention is made of the use of the arm or wrist.
- The forearm  
No mention is made of the use of the forearm.
- The hand as a unit  
No mention is made of the hand as a unit.
- The fingers  
All the fingers are used, but it is not explained how they should move or how the big levers always support the fingers when playing. According to the leading authors in the field of piano technique, the position of the first joint is very important and the joint should be strengthened in order to keep the position.  
  
Although it is stated that the fingers should be curved when playing, the sketch of a curved hand has a straight thumb and a high and tense knuckle position.

### 3.10 Chapter conclusion

When the process of evaluation on the generally accepted and most regularly used beginner courses was completed, the researcher came to the following conclusions:

The basic requirements for a beginner pianist, recommended by the leading authors in the field of piano technique, are:

- a proper sitting position
- use of the whole arm in a 'free fall' and a 'float off' movement
- use of the forearm in a rotation movement
- use of the hand as a unit in a staccato movement
- finger movement from the first phalanx (never without support from the bigger levers).

In the beginner books studied, the researcher found that:

- the sequence, structure and explanations of how (and with which lever), the different movements should be executed, do not measure up to the recommendations by the leading authors
- in most instances as shown throughout the chapter, the use of the bigger levers is not addressed at all. It is the researcher's belief, based on the literature study in chapter one, that all the levers and their specific movements should be addressed from the very first lesson. It is only a logical motoric and educational process to concentrate on the bigger levers (giving the support), which perform slower and easier movements and then move on to the smaller levers, which perform the faster and more complicated movements. A background study on motor development in children supports this approach and no objection against the teaching of all the movements involving the big levers is found (Gallahue 1982, Thomas 1984, Wade and Whiting 1986, Singer 1989, Savelsbergh 1993, Du Plessis 1994 and Wicks-Nelson and Israel 1997).
- the majority of information in these beginner books can be taught in a theory class preceding the individual lesson. When the pupil then arrives at the individual piano lesson he/she can concentrate on learning the motoric and aural aspects of the instrument.

The emphasis in the majority of piano books for the young beginner is on note names and locations, note values, rests and dynamic signs. This is important information for the beginner pianist, but as the movements that the beginner makes in the first lessons become habits for life, they are much more important at this stage than the theoretical

information. Authors in the field of piano technique emphasize the fact that the movements the beginner is taught during the first lessons provide the technical foundation for the rest of his/her life.

Another suggestion is to form correct habits of movement from the very beginning. All these movements are easy enough for the beginner to learn during the first few months of piano lessons.

The theoretical information in the beginner books studied is properly explained and presented in a very structured manner. The researcher is, however, concerned about the fact that there is not enough structure in the sequence of learning the basic technical movements in the beginner piano courses using the adjacent five finger method. Not enough emphasis is put on the development of basic movements and the connection between sound and movement is not made.

In the next chapter, to address the lack of structure and discrepancy in the sequence of learning the basic movements, the researcher compiles/composes exercises for the beginner. These exercises concentrate on the specific movements and results in sound recommended by the leading authors in the field of piano technique.



## TEACHING AND STRUCTURING THE BASIC MOVEMENTS

## Introduction

## Sitting position

The starting point for beginners recommended by leading experts in the field of riding technique is the sitting position. The sitting position, as well as the position and support of the 'lower body' and 'lower', is clearly explained in Chapter 2.2.5, 2.3.3 and 2.4.3 respectively. For these descriptions and illustrations, when mentioning the body's position in terms of the individual:

## Exercises

Specific exercises are recommended for the rider to do by way of preparing and improving most of the required segments of the rider's body, particularly the lower body, in order to be able to perform the basic movements of the individual's body. It should be noted that the rider should be able to sit in the saddle and move on to the specific events. The majority of the exercises are in the

The most important aspect of beginning lessons is to form correct habits (Bastien 1977:165).

reported by the pupil since under the supervision of the teacher, a habit that is secure and correct. Only then can the rider be considered a professional rider.

## Rider's posture requirements

Although a rider's posture should be maintained as long as possible, it is not recommended that the rider should be sitting in the saddle for long periods. The basic movements should be considered as 'short bursts' of activity, rather than long periods, within a limited time (regular burst). Thus the rider should be able to move on to the establishment of a regular habit that the rider should be able to perform in the movements and the frequency of the burst should become more regular as the rider progresses to the riding stage. What rider can read now, the rider should be able to be placed on the required keys for the rider's body. The rider should be able to 'landmarks' should be given to enable the rider to be able to perform the movements in the instrument when walking. For example, if the rider is able to perform the movements in the off of the two hind legs of the Donkey in the rider's