

Summary of Two Dissertation Recitals and Pedagogy Workshop

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Musical Arts
(Music: Performance)
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ABSTRACT

Two dissertation recitals and a pedagogy workshop were given in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Musical Arts (Music: Performance) at the University of Michigan. The repertoire performed spanned over two centuries of solo piano works, covering a variety of periods and styles. The workshop, accompanied by a paper, surveyed the integration of musicianship skills in three different piano curricula.

The first recital was given in Britton Recital Hall on December 3, 2018. The program consisted of J. S. Bach's *Chromatic Fantasia and Fugue in D minor*, BWV 903; Franz Schubert's *Four Impromptus*, D. 899/Op. 90; and Franz Liszt's *Totentanz: Paraphrase on Dies irae*, S. 525.

The second recital, given in Stamps Auditorium on March 31, 2018, was a lecture recital entitled "Doorways: Half-Remembered Music," which focused on connections between compositions written by composers of different eras. The program consisted of four pairings of miniature pieces: Johannes Brahms's Intermezzo in E minor from *Fantasien*, Op. 116 paired with the first movement of Anton Webern's *Variationen*, Op. 27; No. 5 from Béla Bartók's *Six Dances in Bulgarian Rhythm* paired with Dave Brubeck's "Blue Rondo à la Turk"; Claude Debussy's "Golliwog's Cakewalk" from *Children's Corner*, L. 113, paired with George Crumb's "Golliwog Revisited" from *Eine Kleine Mitternachtmusik*; and Frédéric Chopin's Mazurka in A minor, Op. 17, No. 4 paired with William Albright's "Fantasy-Mazurka" from *Five Chromatic Dances*.

The pedagogy workshop, held in Watkins Lecture Hall on April 20, 2018, was entitled “A Comparative Study on the Integration of Musicianship Skills in Three Piano Curricula.” Often musicianship skills are neglected during piano lessons, and students’ performance skills can surpass their theory and musicianship skills. The three chosen piano curricula are widely used throughout the United States. The research surveys how each curriculum introduces and teaches musicianship skills to ensure that students develop into well-rounded musicians.

RECITAL 1 PROGRAM



FIRST DISSERTATION RECITAL

SUSAN YANG, PIANO

*Sunday, December 3, 2017
Moore Building, Britton Recital Hall
4:30 PM*

Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue in D Minor, BWV 903 Johann Sebastian Bach
(1685–1750)

Four Impromptus, op. 90, D. 899 Franz Schubert
(1797–1828)
No. 1 in C Minor: Allegro molto moderato
No. 2 in E-flat Major: Allegro
No. 3 in G-flat Major: Andante
No. 4 in A-flat Major: Allegretto

Pause

Totentanz: Paraphrase on Dies irae, S. 525 Franz Liszt
(1811–1886)



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RECITAL 2 PROGRAM



SECOND DISSERTATION LECTURE RECITAL

SUSAN YANG, PIANO

Saturday, March 31, 2018
Walgreen Drama Center, Stamps Auditorium
12:30 PM

DOORWAYS: HALF-REMEMBERED MUSIC

Fantasien, op. 116 No. 5 Intermezzo in E Minor	Johannes Brahms (1833–1897)
Variationen, op. 27 I. Sehr mäßig	Anton Webern (1883–1945)
Six Dances in Bulgarian Rhythm No. 5 Allgero molto	Béla Bartók (1881–1945)
Blue Rondo à la Turk	Dave Brubeck (1920–2012)
Children's Corner, L. 113 No. 6 Golliwog's Cakewalk	Claude Debussy (1862–1918)
Eine Kleine Mitternachtmusik No. 6 Golliwog Revisited	George Crumb (b. 1929)
Mazurkas, op. 17 No. 4 Lento ma non troppo	Frédéric Chopin (1810–1849)
Five Chromatic Dances III. Fantasy-Mazurka	William Albright (1944–1998)

PEDAGOGY WORKSHOP PROGRAM



THIRD DISSERTATION RECITAL

SUSAN YANG, PIANO

Friday, April 20, 2018
Moore Building, Watkins Lecture Hall
12:30 PM

**A COMPARATIVE STUDY ON THE INTEGRATION OF
MUSICIANSHIP SKILLS IN THREE PIANO CURRICULA**

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
Doctor of Musical Arts
Horace A. Rackham School of Graduate Studies

DISSERTATION COMMITTEE
Associate Professor John Ellis, *co-chair*
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A Comparative Study on the Integration of Musicianship Skills in Three Piano Curricula

Introduction

Musicianship skills are an essential part of every musician's technical and artistic development. They cover a wide range of visual, aural, tactile, and analytical abilities, combined with a practical knowledge of music theory. These abilities are necessary in order to cultivate a well-rounded musician. As Robert Schumann said, "You must get to the point that you can hear music from the page," and "A perfect musician should be able to picture a piece, at first hearing...as though he had the score in front him."¹ When processing music, through listening or playing, no skill is used individually. Rather, multiple skills are acquired to achieve proficiency. In other words, musicianship skills are dependent on each other, and together, they demonstrate the ability to think in music.

There are many different approaches to teaching musicianship skills. This paper will survey three piano curricula that are widely used throughout the United States: the Faber *Piano Adventures*, the Royal Conservatory of Music (RCM) Certificate Program, and the Suzuki Method. These three curricula differ greatly from one another, from the structure of the curricula, to the repertoire chosen for each level. While musicianship skills are taught differently, the end goal of each method is the same—to prepare students to play and think in music with fluency.

¹ Robert Schuman, *Im eigenen Wort*, ed. Willi Reich (Zurich: Manesse Verlag, 1967), 400–14.

The paper will first introduce each curriculum and provide a basic overview of its structure, followed by a comprehensive review of how musicianship skills are taught and integrated into the curricula. These skills are broken down into four categories: sight reading, aural skills, harmonization and transposition, and creative activities.

Chapter I

Introduction of the Curricula

The Faber *Piano Adventures*

The Faber *Piano Adventures* was first published in 1994 by Nancy and Randall Faber. Since then, the husband-wife duo has released hundreds of publications in addition to establishing the Faber Piano Institute based in Ann Arbor, MI. The *Piano Adventures* series now consists of four different courses based on age groups: *My First Piano Adventures* for the younger beginner, the basic edition of *Piano Adventures*, *Accelerated Piano Adventures* for the older beginner, and *Adult Piano Adventures*. This paper will survey the basic edition of *Piano Adventures* in order to make equitable comparisons to the other two curricula, the RCM Certificate Program and the Suzuki Method.

The basic edition of *Piano Adventures* is geared toward students from six to eleven years old. It is currently in its second edition and offers eight different levels, from Primer to Level 5, with Levels 2 and 3 further divided into A and B. Each level includes four core books—Lesson, Theory, Performance, and Technique and Artistry. In 2011, the Fabers introduced a sight reading course, a book that accompanies each level and contains exercises based on the melodic and rhythmic patterns of the Lesson Book pieces. The Sightreading Book will be further discussed in Chapter II.

Considering the typical lesson length for this particular age range, which is thirty to forty-five minutes, the instructor may need to choose between the Performance and Technique and Artistry books, in addition to using the Lesson and Theory books.² The number of units vary in each level, from five to ten, and the amount of the time it takes to complete each level is highly dependent on the student's practice habits and parental involvement. In addition to the core books, numerous supplemental materials are available and correlate to the concepts covered in the Lesson Book. Once the students begin reading notes on the staff, the authors recommend adding the *PreTime* and *BigTime* series, another Faber publication that offers repertoire in an array of genres including Popular, Classical, Jazz & Blues, Rock 'n Roll, Ragtime & Marches, Hymns, Christmas, Kid's Song, and Jewish Favorites.³

The Faber method is unique in that most of its pieces, especially in the earlier levels, are the authors' original compositions. Some folk songs and popular Classical tunes are incorporated in the earlier levels, but they only appear in arranged versions that suit the overall lesson plan and concept. For example, J. S. Bach's G major Minuet, BWV Anh. 114, from *Notebook for Anna Magdalena Bach* appears in Level 2A in an arranged version, where the eighth notes are split between the hands, and the left hand harmonies are omitted. The majority of the original compositions are songs with descriptive titles and contain lyrics that allow the student to sing along. Many pieces also provide teacher duets to encourage ensemble playing. As the levels progress, the method introduces more standard piano repertoire in their original versions, such as J.S. Bach's Prelude in C major, BWV 846, from *Well-Tempered Clavier Book I* in Level 4, and

² "How to use Piano Adventures," Faber Piano Adventures, accessed March 14, 2018, <https://pianoadventures.com/resources/for-teachers/how-to-use-piano-adventures/>.

³ "PreTime to BigTime," Faber Piano Adventures, accessed March 14, 2018, <https://pianoadventures.com/browse/libraries/pretime-to-bigtime/>.

Cornelius Gurlitt's "Whirlwind," Op. 141, No. 14 in Level 5. Incorporating more standard pieces in the upper levels help students transition out of the method and prepare them to work on repertoire independently of the Faber curriculum.

Another distinctive quality of the Faber method is the thematic content and coordination of concepts across the core books. Most pieces in the Lesson, Performance, and Technique and Artistry books are written, or arranged, specifically to correlate with each other, forming an integrated and comprehensive approach. Often the song titles, characters, and even images that are presented in the Lesson Book will reappear in the other core books to aid memory and familiarity. The Theory Book also contains activities that correspond to pieces from the Lesson book, using similar titles and illustrations. For example, in Unit 3 of the Primer Level, the song "Men from Mars" introduces the measure and bar line while reinforcing the C five-finger scale. On the corresponding page of the Theory Book, there is a song called "Who's Your Favorite Martian?" accompanied by the same illustrations from the Lesson Book. The activity asks the student to divide the music into measures by drawing bar lines and to play the song using the C five-finger scale. Occasionally, characters from previous songs will also reappear in other units, like in "Come See the Parade" in Primer Level Unit 6. To evoke a festive parade, an elaborate illustration spans both pages of the song and include characters from previous units as well as future units.

The illustrations, along with the lyrics, also play a strategic role in the method. In addition to their visual appeal, some illustrations help reinforce the concepts. An example is "Frogs on Logs" in Primer Level Unit 5. This song introduces the "hopping hand position," which is a hand shift that requires the student to begin right hand finger 2 on middle C and hop the same finger to D, then E, and so forth. The image that accompanies the song is a group of

frogs hopping off the log into the water, with lyrics that say “One by one they jumped into the little water fall!” The corresponding song in the Performance Book is titled “The Inchworm,” which also focuses on the same shifting position. Here, the image of a worm inching along evokes the same idea as the hand shift.

Lastly, the Faber method uses a composite approach to note reading. Students begin with playing on the black keys and familiarizing themselves with fingerings and directions on the keyboard. Next, three guide notes are introduced—Middle C, Treble G, and Bass F. These notes are reinforced through different fingerings, so the student does not rely and associate certain notes with certain fingers. Most pieces in the earlier levels begin by asking the student to name the starting notes, requesting the student to answer questions like “2 on ___?” By filling in the blank, the student eventually becomes self-sufficient in finding the starting position. Gradually, all the notes of the Middle C position are introduced, still utilizing varied fingerings. Concurrent with the guide notes and Middle C position is intervallic reading. The Faber method introduces the concept of steps and skips as early as the Primer Level, promoting pattern recognition and fluency in reading melodic contours. By the middle of Level 1, students become familiar with intervals up to the fifth, in addition to the octave.

The *Piano Adventures* is a comprehensive method with all content carefully chosen to enhance the student’s enjoyment and understanding of music and piano playing. The original compositions, integrated themes, and multi-faceted approach to reading all contribute to the method’s uniqueness and achievement in student success. However, the Faber method is not the only approach to piano teaching, as the next two curricula will demonstrate other approaches in achieving competence in piano performance.

The Royal Conservatory of Music Certificate Program

The Royal Conservatory, founded in 1886 in Toronto, is one of the largest and most well-respected music institutions in the world. Currently, the Conservatory oversees a number of arts education programs, among which is the Certificate Program. The Certificate Program is a comprehensive and sequenced program of music study with yearly assessments, beginning with the Preparatory levels, followed by levels 1 to 10, and concluding with the Associate Diploma (ARCT). Similar to the Faber method, the Certificate Program uses a set of core books called the *Celebration Series*, which was first published in 1987 and is currently on its fifth edition. In addition to the *Celebration Series*, which include the Repertoire and Etude books, *Four Star Sight Reading and Ear Tests* is used to prepare the student for the musicianship skills portion of the exam. The *Four Star* books will be examined in details later in Chapter II. As of 2016, *Celebrate Theory* also became a part of the larger curriculum, further integrating theory and well-rounded musicianship skills as part of the student's music study.

While the RCM Certificate Program and the Faber method share some similarities in that they are both sequenced curricula that use a variety of books to foster an integrated approach to learning, they are also vastly different from one another in many ways. Unlike *Piano Adventures*, *Celebration Series* does not contain themes, illustrations, or authors' original compositions. It does not include songs with lyrics or teacher duets; rather, it is a collection of repertoire that is organized into List A, B, C, D, and E according to the repertoire style and period and curriculum level (see Table I.1). The benefit of this organization is that students are exposed to a variety of styles and periods early on, and having the knowledge of different musical periods and styles is extremely helpful in their performance and understanding of the repertoire. In addition to featuring standard pieces from the four major eras, the Repertoire book also includes a wealth of

living composers, jazz pieces, as well as pieces with extended techniques. The Piano Etude book is also organized by technical challenges, where students can choose from a diverse collection of pieces that will strengthen their individual technical needs.

Table I.1. RCM Piano Repertoire List

Piano Repertoire

The pieces in each *Piano Repertoire* book (except Preparatory) are divided into several lists, according to stylistic period.

Level	List A	List B	List C	List D	List E
Levels 1–2	Baroque and Classical Repertoire	20th- and 21st- century Repertoire	Inventions		
Levels 3–5	Baroque Repertoire	Classical and Classical-style Repertoire	Romantic, 20th-, and 21st-century Repertoire		
Level 6	Baroque Repertoire	Classical and Classical-style Repertoire	Romantic and 20th-century Repertoire		
Level 7	Baroque Repertoire	Classical Repertoire	Romantic and 20th-century Repertoire		
Level 8	Baroque Repertoire	Classical Repertoire	Romantic Repertoire	Post-Romantic and 20th-century Repertoire	
Level 9	Baroque Repertoire	Classical Repertoire	Romantic Repertoire	Post-Romantic, 20th-, and 21st-century Repertoire	
Level 10	Works of J.S. Bach	Classical Sonatas	Romantic Repertoire	Post-Romantic and Early 20th Century Repertoire	20th-century Repertoire

Another difference between the two curricula is that *Celebration Series* does not offer a specific approach to note reading, as it is only a collection of repertoire. The aim of the early books of the *Celebration Series* is to transition students out of a method, so even starting with Preparatory A (hereafter Prep A), the student is expected to possess basic knowledge of music theory and be able to read from a grand staff. The question as to how to transition a student into Prep A is at the teacher’s discretion, as the *Handbook for Teachers* states: “Teachers must bridge the gap between their students’ method books and the standard piano repertoire in *Celebration*

Series.⁴ However, the authors of the Handbook suggest using *Celebrate Piano*,⁵ a beginner method book that was designed to prepare students for the Certificate Program. Until 2016, *Celebrate Piano* was published by Frederick Harris Music Co., RCM's exclusive publisher; however, the two have since taken separate paths.⁶

A major component of the Certificate Program that distinguishes it from the Faber method is the syllabus system that dictates all requirements for the yearly assessments. For each level's assessment, beginning with Prep A, the syllabus lists specific requirements that are broken down into three sections: Repertoire, Technical, and Musicianship. For the Repertoire requirements, the student is expected to play one piece from each of the List A, B, and C etc. in the *Celebration Series*. All levels have fairly flexible repertoire choices. Since students in the Preparatory levels are in a transitional phase, pieces from the *Celebration Series* as well as other method books are permitted. In fact, select pieces from both the Faber and Suzuki methods are included in the Preparatory exams, despite some leveling differences (see Table I.2). Students in Levels 1 to 10 also have the choice of substituting up to two pieces for the exam, which can include repertoire not listed in the syllabus.

⁴ Cathy Albergo, Reid Alexander, and Marvin Blickenstaff, *Handbook for Teachers: Celebration Series Perspectives* (Mississauga: The Frederick Harris Music Co., Limited, 2008), 7.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Cathy Albergo, J. Mitzi Kolar, and Mark Mrozinski, *Celebrate Piano: A Comprehensive Piano Method* (Champaign, IL: Stipes Publishing L.L.C., 2016).

Table I.2. Overlapping Pieces Among the Curricula

RCM Prep A	RCM Prep B
<p>“The Haunted Mouse” (Faber Level 1)</p> <p>“Jazz Blast” (Faber Level 2A)</p>	<p>“Au Clair de la lune” (Suzuki 1)</p> <p>“Cuckoo” (Suzuki 1)</p> <p>“French Children’s Song” (Suzuki 1)</p> <p>“Lightly Row” (Suzuki 1)</p>

The Technical requirement includes various versions of scales, chords, and arpeggios, listing specific keys and numbers of octaves. All requirements must be played according to the designated metronome markings. After the Preparatory Levels, etudes must also be performed as part of the exam requirements. The Musicianship portion is divided into Ear Tests and Sight Reading. The Ear Tests consist of clapbacks, where the student reproduces the rhythm that the examiner plays; interval identification, where the student can choose to either sing or identify the intervals; chord identification; and playbacks, which is like clapbacks but reproducing a melody. The Sight Reading consists of tapping and clapping a given rhythm and playing a short excerpt. In 2016, a separate theory syllabus was also developed to correlate with the performance syllabus. Concepts listed on the theory syllabus coincide with the expected skills listed on the performance syllabus.

The fact that everything the student does is based on a syllabus and not a cumulative method book generates the biggest difference between the Certificate Program and the Faber method. *Celebration Series* does not introduce concepts one by one like *Piano Adventures*; instead, the syllabus presents all required skills for each level, and by using a combination of *Celebration Series*, *Four Star Sight Reading and Ear Test*, and *Celebrate Theory*, the student

works toward the end goal—acquiring the expected skills for the exam. The Repertoire and Etude books offer numerous pieces that allow the student to choose from, as opposed to *Piano Adventures*, in which the student must go through every piece in the presented order to gain a cumulative understanding of the concepts and make steady progress. Therefore, *Celebration Series*, *Four Star*, and *Celebrate Theory* do not form a method, but rather they serve as tools in helping the student to succeed in the Certificate Program.

The Suzuki Method

The Suzuki method is a music curriculum and teaching philosophy developed by Japanese violinist and pedagogue, Shinichi Suzuki, in the mid-twentieth century. Initially, the method was created for teaching violin, but due to its success and popularity, the method was later applied to the pedagogy of many other instruments, including the piano. The Suzuki method is based on the “mother-tongue approach,”⁷ as Dr. Suzuki observed that all children learn their native languages impeccably, even with accents and dialects particular to their region. If the same concept of language acquisition is applied to music learning, then all children should be able acquire fluency in music as well.

The Suzuki method seeks to create a musical environment as close as possible to one that fosters language learning, resulting in several peculiar approaches that distinguish it from the both Faber method and RCM Certificate Program. The first step, even before playing an instrument, is the importance of listening, because when learning a language, a child first hears the spoken language before he or she speaks. In order for the child to then learn and remember,

⁷ “About the Suzuki Method,” Suzuki Association of the Americas, accessed March 20, 2018, <https://suzukiassociation.org/about/suzuki-method/>.

repetition is a key factor in both language and music learning.⁸ Suzuki believed that only through repetitive exposure to great music is a child able to reproduce it. Therefore, emphasis on tone quality and phrasing is reinforced from the very beginning of lesson instruction.⁹

Another important aspect of the Suzuki method is the emphasis on communal effort. To create a nurturing environment, the teacher and student should not be the only individuals involved. In addition to listening to recordings and going to concerts, parental guidance, group classes, and recitals are also crucial. Haruko Kataoka, one of the leading authorities on the Suzuki Piano School, argues that just as children cannot survive on their own and need adult assistance, parental monitoring during practice is essential.¹⁰ Kataoka claims that learning a new piece is a job the parent and child should complete together. She suggests that parents observe the lessons, so that they can be coached on how to help the children at home. Learning from other students, Kataoka states, is also important, which concurs with Suzuki's emphasis on group classes.¹¹ Through observing others, children can learn a great deal about themselves. The group classes and recitals are also meant to foster friendships, where children can influence each other and grow together as musicians.¹²

One well-known feature of the Suzuki method is teaching by rote without the introduction of note reading.¹³ This idea correlates with the belief that listening and developing

⁸ Haruko Kataoka, *Thoughts on the Suzuki Piano School* (Princeton, NJ: Birch Tree Group Ltd., 1985), 29.

⁹ Shinichi Suzuki, *How to Teach Suzuki Piano* (Miami, FL: Warner Bros. Publications Inc., 1993), 5.

¹⁰ Kataoka, *Thoughts on the Suzuki Piano School*, 30–31.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Suzuki, *How to Teach Suzuki Piano*, 11–12.

good playing skills are more important introductory steps than note reading, which Suzuki believed can hinder a child's musicality.¹⁴ Along with delayed note reading is the exclusion of music theory, which is regarded as the “grammar” of music.¹⁵ Kataoka argues that grammar is spontaneously picked up during language acquisition, and as one can speak fluently without knowing the details of grammar, music theory is seen as unnecessary in the beginning stages.

The *Suzuki Piano School* books are the sole materials students use for their lessons, and there are seven volumes in total. Similar to *Celebration Series*, *Suzuki Piano School* is a collection of repertoire. However, the diversity of repertoire in *Suzuki Piano School* is not as broad as *Celebration Series*, given the latest composers it covers are Bartók and Villa-Lobos. The two curricula do share some overlapping pieces, especially more standard pieces by earlier composers such as J. S. Bach and Beethoven (see Table I.3). The leveling of pieces differ substantially due to the differences in teaching approach, especially with Suzuki's emphasis on rote learning. Without the necessity of reading notes, students are able to learn much more difficult music by rote. For example, the very first piece that any Suzuki student learns is a series of variations based on “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star.” These variations contain quarter, eighth, and sixteenth notes, in addition to syncopation and a hand position outside of the C five-finger scale. By Faber or RCM standards, a student would not be exposed to these concepts at least for several levels.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Kataoka, 28–29.

Table I.3. Leveling Differences

	RCM Syllabus	Suzuki
J. S. Bach, Minuet in G Major, BWV Anh. 116	Level 4	Level 2
L. v. Beethoven, Sonata in G Major, Op. 49, No. 2	Level 8	Level 4
J. S. Bach, Invention in C Major, BWV 772	Level 7	Level 5
J. Haydn, Sonata in C Major, Hob. XVI: 35	Level 10	Level 5

Although *Suzuki Piano School* is like *Celebration Series* in that it is a collection of repertoire, it is more like *Piano Adventures* in that every piece must be completed before moving on to the next one. Once the student has perfected a piece, he or she must continue practicing it even after advancing to the next piece, because “repeated practice of former pieces is the basis for progress.”¹⁶ Again, Suzuki is drawing parallels between language and music learning. Since we always use the words we have learned before, through this repetitive usage, we gain the ability to speak fluently without making mistakes. Each book is also accompanied by a CD that contains a recording of every piece in the book. The student is supposed to listen repetitively to each piece during practice until the piece is polished. By the end of each level, the student is to give a graduation recital, where he or she performs the entire book by memory.

The core philosophies and the curriculum itself are so intertwined that it is impossible to teach Suzuki Piano without a thorough knowledge of the philosophy. Hence all Suzuki teachers

¹⁶ Kataoka, 29.

must go through extensive training and be certified to teach. The Suzuki Associations throughout the world have exclusive memberships, in which teachers may apply and audition to become a member. In addition to a pre-requisite course, teachers must be certified to teach every individual level. This means that piano teachers must take seven separate courses in order to teach the complete sequence of *Suzuki Piano School*.¹⁷

Compared to Faber and RCM, the Suzuki method has some unique approaches to music learning, mainly due to its imitation of language acquisition and links to the child's development. Although there are no supplemental materials that incorporate theory or technique, like the other two curricula, the Suzuki method excels in other areas, such as creating a nurturing environment and emphasizing the importance of listening and repetition. All three curricula possess distinctive approaches to teaching piano and ensuring the students' progress, which are equally valid. Their approaches to teaching musicianship skills also vary greatly, as the next four chapters will demonstrate.

¹⁷ "Teacher Training," Suzuki Association of the Americas, accessed March 21, 2018, <https://suzukiassociation.org/teachers/training/>.

Chapter II

Sight Reading

This chapter will examine how sight reading is introduced and taught in the three curricula, which will be addressed in separate subsections. Sight reading is generally understood as the ability to play a piece of music at sight without prior practicing, and it is one of the most important skills to acquire as a pianist. Basic sight reading requires a combination of skills, including visual recognition of notes, rhythm, and intervallic patterns, keeping a steady tempo, and hand-eye coordination. A proficient sight reader should be able to accomplish all of the basic skills as well as developing sensitivity to dynamics, articulations, and phrasing

Faber Piano Adventures

Prior to 2011, the Sightreading Book did not exist as a separate part of the Faber method, but elements of sight reading can be found throughout the Theory Books, labeled as “Eye Trainings.” The Eye Trainings serve two main purposes: the first is, of course, strengthening the student’s sight reading skills, and the second is to reinforce specific concepts of the concurrent unit, even though the Eye Trainings occasionally use different musical material than what is presented in the Lesson Book. The style of exercise varies based on the unit, from identifying notes, rhythms, and intervals, to matching and playing, but similar concepts are reinforced through these different styles to ensure a thorough understanding.

The Primer Level covers from pre-staff reading to C five-finger position in both hands on the grand staff. The Eye Training begins by introducing directional reading, as early as Unit 1. It introduces different series of notes on the staff and asks the student to identify whether they are going up, down, or both (see Example II.1). Although the student has not yet learned to read on the staff, the intention is to pre-teach and familiarize the students with the appearance of the staff. As soon as the student learns the basic note values and dynamics, the Eye Training exercises incorporate these concepts with a mixture of ear training. For example, in Unit 2, the exercise presents two rhythmic patterns followed by *forte* and *piano*. It asks the student to identify two things: the rhythm that was played and the dynamic level. The book first introduces the term “sightreading” in Unit 4 with three guidelines, which are called the “3 C’s”: 1) “correct hand placement” to help find the right starting note; 2) “count-off” as a reminder to maintain a steady beat; and 3) “concentrate” to focus your eyes on the music. The first sight reading exercise that requires playing is one measure long, and it incorporates two of the guide notes, Middle C and Treble G, on quarter and half notes with various dynamics. Following the introduction of time signatures, 4/4 and 3/4, the corresponding Eye Trainings present short melodies that ask the student to identify measures with too many or too few beats, further reinforcing rhythm recognition and counting. As the units progress, the Eye Trainings become more complex. In Unit 6, the student is presented with four letter names and asked to find the corresponding measure with the same notes, from four different choices. After identifying the measure, the student is asked to sight read all four measures in a row. By the end of the book, the student is asked to play a series of musical questions and answers, and upon playing, he or she must identify if the answer is parallel or contrasting.

Example II.1. Primer Level Directional Reading

You will soon be reading music with notes that look like these.
Look closely at the round noteheads. Is the music going UP or DOWN?

Inspect the Notes!
Directional Reading

Ex. going UP
going DOWN

going UP
going DOWN

going UP
going DOWN

The concepts in Level 1 cover basic articulations, intervals, accidentals, and rudiments of scale degree names and roman numerals. The Eye Training resumes with a mixture of old and new concepts, from differentiating between a slur and a tie, to identifying steps and skips. Often the exercises will also ask the student to name the notes as an additional step to establish strong note recognition skills. The level of identification gradually becomes more intricate and requires more detailed attention from the student. The first full sight reading piece, “Forest Dance,” is in Unit 2. This is both the longest and the first complete piece that the student has to sight read. It spans twelve measures with various dynamics and articulations, but the hands do not play together, and the five-finger position does not shift from the initial position. The directions for this sight reading are similar to the 3 C’s, but instead of finding the correct starting note, which should be automatic for the student by now, the book suggests to look through and check for the steps and skips. Shorter sight reading excerpts are presented in the following units with similar directions and level of difficulty. The first time that the hands play together in an Eye Training is in Unit 7, when the student has learned tonic and dominant notes. “Bicycle Tune” consists of 16 measures with a mixture of melodic and rhythmic patterns in the right hand C five-finger position, while the left hand alternates between bass C and G, the tonic and dominant. The last concept in Level 1 is the upbeat. In the corresponding Eye Training, there are three excerpts to

be played hands separately that feature different number of upbeats. The five-finger position still remains, but the articulations have extended to legato, staccato, and accent marks.

The next two levels, 2A and 2B, introduce the first few keys on the circle of fifths away from C, as well as primary chords and full scales in those keys. The Eye Trainings follow the previous pattern of alternating between short excerpts and complete pieces for sight reading. Gradually, these exercises incorporate more playing as they decrease the amount of simpler visual recognition, because only through playing, can students develop their hand-eye coordination. “A Jazzy Song for Mr. Bach” in Level 2A Unit 1 is a sight reading exercise closely based on the Lesson Book piece, an arranged version of J. S. Bach’s Minuet in G Major from the *Notebook for Anna Magdalena*. The idea of creating a sight reading piece based on the Lesson repertoire foreshadows the future Sightreading Book, which will be discussed in the next section. “A Jazzy Song for Mr. Bach” keeps all the same notes from the Minuet but adds one extra beat to each measure, extending the first melodic note of every measure (see Example II.2). The level of difficulty is harder than previous sight reading pieces, but it was designed this way as the student should already know the notes and hand positions. By the end of Book 2A, the student’s sight reading abilities should include reading note values up to an eighth note, 3/4 and 4/4 time signatures with upbeats, accidentals, harmonic and melodic intervals up to the fifth, and chords and five-finger positions in the major and minor keys of C, G, D, and A. The next two obstacles that the Eye Trainings present are playing hands together and shifting out of the five-finger positions, which are both introduced in Level 2B.

Example II.2. “A Song for Mr. Bach”

A Jazzy Song for Mr. Bach

Cheerfully from the Notebook for Anna Magdalena Bach
arranged by Nancy Faber

Write: 1 2 3 4

Due to the cumulative nature of the method, new material tends to be based on previously learned concepts. The Eye Trainings are structured in this way as well. To transition the student into playing hands together, the 2B exercises return to the five-finger scale and broken-chord waltz patterns in the left hand to create a sense of familiarity for the student. Following the introduction of playing hands together, the Eye Training exercises prepare the student for hand shifts. It begins with the interval of a sixth, which requires the hand to stretch further than a five-finger position. It is reinforced again through introducing the IV and V7 chords, in which the student plays simplified first inversions of each chord. The rest of the Eye Trainings in the book continue to alternate between playing hands together and hands separate, but always incorporating familiar skills, such as five-finger pattern and chords.

Level 3A covers the major keys of C, G, and F in more detail, while Level 3B presents their relative minors, A, E, and D. Other concepts include more intervals, 2/2, 3/8 and 6/8 time signatures, and triplet and sixteenth-note rhythms. These two levels mainly serve as review and builds upon concepts introduced in previous levels. Students benefit from the varied repetitive

drills, as it supplements any deficiencies while building a solid technical and theoretical foundation. Having learned the interval of a seventh in addition to full scales and primary chords, students can move further away from the five-finger position. By the middle of Level 3A, sight readings commonly incorporate key signatures other than C major, and the right hand moves freely in various rhythms within an octave range. The left hand mainly stays within the primary chords, with most of the hands-together sight reading examples in the style of melody with simple accompaniment. Up to this point, the majority of the sight reading examples are still in 4/4 or 3/4, with very few in 6/8.

As the main focus in Level 3B are the minor keys, many of the Eye Training exercises are in minor keys. Throughout the book, the Eye Trainings ask leading questions that prepare the student for different types of reading skills and recognition. For example, the Eye Training in Unit 3 asks the student to label the different motives and sequences, while Unit 4 asks to name the key and alerts the student about difficult intervals, and Unit 6 directs the student's attention to root position and first inversion chords. One guideline that is consistent throughout the sight reading exercises is the reminder to count off before playing and keep a steady tempo.

Level 4 further integrates and builds on the concepts from 3A and 3B. The units combine the major keys and the harmonic form of their relative minors and present them as a pair, strengthening the student's theoretical connections. In this level, the only new concepts that the student is exposed to are the full dominant seventh chords and dotted eighth-note with sixteenth-note rhythm. Besides incorporating these concepts, the Eye Trainings in Level 4 are similar to the ones found in Levels 3A and 3B.

The last book, Level 5, introduces quite a few new reading skills. Unit 1 Eye Training begins with three accompaniment patterns in the left hand: broken octaves, waltz bass, and

arpeggios. They appear simultaneously with pedal markings and three new time signatures: 2/4, 3/8, and 12/8. Unit 3 contains an exercise that requires the left hand to play a series of I-IV chords in a circle of fifth progression. The next unit covers rolled chords as well as two-octave arpeggios in the right hand. A newly composed list of sight reading guidelines is also available in Unit 2, which is a compilation of instructions from previous levels. Recalling the Eye Trainings in Level 3B, each unit gives different instructions as to which specific aspects to focus on during the different sight reading exercises. In Level 5, the list is comprehensive, with four steps that apply to all sight reading exercises. First, notice the key and time signatures; next, scan the music for rhythmic, harmonic, and melodic patterns; set a slow tempo and count an empty measure before starting; lastly, keep moving ahead and do not stop to correct mistakes.

In 2011, the Faber method added a Sightreading Book that accompanies all the levels except Level 5. Like the other core books, the construction of the Sightreading Book is closely based on the pieces and concepts presented in the Lesson Book. Each Sightreading Book is prefaced with a list of skills to be covered in that level. It is organized into sets of five exercises, with the exception of the Primer Level, which has six exercises per set. The number of sets vary by level, and it depends on how many pieces there are from the Lesson Book. The student is instructed to play one exercise a day and complete one set per week, to ensure at least five or six days of practicing.

All of the Sightreading pieces are variations based on the Lesson Book pieces and bear identical titles. These variations are shorter than the Lesson Book pieces, and each exercise from the set is usually based on one idea or motive from the corresponding piece. The way that the exercises are structured is as if the Lesson Book piece was divided into five sections, and each section was varied and presented as an exercise in the original order of the piece. Every exercise

comes with a stamp that says “Don’t practice this!” to remind the student that sight reading is not meant to be played repetitively, and it adds an element of fun for the activity.¹⁸ In the Sightreading exercises, almost all of the notes from the Lesson Book repertoire remain the same, but the melodic and rhythmic patterns are varied. The idea behind the variations is, again, to create a sense of familiarity. Students would already know the corresponding Lesson Book pieces, therefore, by presenting a shorter variation of the piece, the expectation is that the student would have an easier time reading the notes, but also be challenged at an appropriate level and avoid frequent stumbles.

The variation idea works very well for the earlier levels, since there are fewer melodic and rhythmic patterns to recognize, and the student only knows a limited set of notes. For example, the song “Dance Band” from Primer Level Unit 5 contains the notes of a C five-finger scale in the right hand, with only one note in the left hand, the bass F. The song spans eight measures with three appearances of the same two measures. Due to the heavy amount of repetition, the options for the variations are limited. Day 1 of the Sightreading takes the first four measures of the song and expands the melody twice as long by doubling the note values. Two quarter-note F’s become four quarter-note F’s, and two quarter notes followed by a half note become two half notes followed by a whole note. Day 2 is based on the last four measures of the song, and it has the same length. Three out of the four measures in the Sightreading remain identical to the original song. The only change is in the third measure, where the quarter notes become half notes, essentially the opposite strategy of Day 1 (see Example II.3).

¹⁸ Nancy and Randall Faber, *Piano Adventures Sightreading Book* (Ann Arbor, MI: Dovetree Productions, Inc., 2015).

Example II.3. “The Dance Band” Sightreading

DAY 1: The Dance Band
Notice the L.H. starting finger.

DAY 2: The Dance Band

DAY 1: Peo - ple danc - ing to the stead - y big band sound.
Clap - ping to the beat, they're mov - ing all a - round.

DAY 2: Dance band plays to-night. Let's go see the show!

Another example is “Russian Sailor Dance” from Level 1. The Day 1 of the Sightreading has eight measures, which are based on measures 9 – 12 in the Lesson Book piece. The melody is expanded in the Sightreading by doubling some of the note values. Day 2 consists of sixteen measures, which are based on the first eight measures of the piece. Again, the expansion is created out of augmentation. In the actual piece, the melody alternates between repetition and changing notes at the quarter-note rhythm. In the Sightreading, every melody note is repeated for an entire measure, elongating the phrase.

Every level of the Sightreading follows the variations principle, but as the levels progress, this idea creates two potential problems. One is that the repetition creates expectation for the students. Upon completing just a few exercises, the structure and pattern is easily detectable. The anticipation of something familiar defeats the true nature of sight reading, as the *The Oxford Companion to Music* defines sight reading as “The performance of music from notation that the singer or instrumentalist has not previously seen.”¹⁹ The other issue is that as the repertoire levels increase in difficulty, the Sightreading exercises become almost as difficult

¹⁹ Piers Spencer, “sight-reading,” *Oxford Companion to Music* (Oxford University Press, 2011).

as the Lesson Book pieces. The authors do make adjustments in the Sightreading Book to make certain aspects easier. If the Lesson Book piece requires the hands to play together or shift position, the Sightreading piece usually eliminates those challenges by implementing stable positions or hands separate playing. However, that is not always the case. An example of this is J. S. Bach’s Prelude in C major from Level 4. In the Sightreading, both Day 1 and 5 make slight rhythmic alterations to the continuous sixteenth-note figure, but they keep the same melodic content and harmonic progressions. Day 5 is the most difficult of all. In addition to its length of two pages, it incorporates both the sixteenth note rhythm and a new chordal eighth note rhythm. Compared to the original piece, it is not necessarily easier to play. The original Prelude has the continuous sixteenth notes all throughout with no changes, but the Sightreading has two different rhythms in addition to reading new chords that shift to different positions. In this regard, the Sightreading is essentially at the same difficulty level if not harder than the actual piece (see Example II.4).

Example II.4. “Prelude in C” Sightreading Example

DAY 5: Prelude in C

Take a moment to scan the music.
Notice the entire piece is based on the rhythm pattern of measure 1.

**DON'T
PRACTICE
THIS!**

The image shows two systems of musical notation for a piano piece. Each system consists of a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The first system includes a count: "Count: 1 e + a 2 e + a 3 + 4 +". The notation features sixteenth-note runs in the treble clef and chordal accompaniment in the bass clef. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 above or below notes. A box with the number "3" is placed above the first measure of the second system. A stylized graphic with the text "DON'T PRACTICE THIS!" is positioned to the right of the first system.

Four Star Sight Reading and Ear Tests

The *Four Star* books are intended to be used in conjunction with the *Celebration Series* to prepare students for the RCM Certificate Program yearly exams. Similar to *Piano Adventures*, *Four Star* is available in every level, from Prep A to Level 10, and its organization and structure are the same throughout all the levels. Unlike Faber, the RCM Certificate Program is not a method. Instead of presenting concepts one by one, the RCM syllabus clearly lays out all of the requirements, which serve as a reference, and are available to both the students and teachers as they begin each level. While the Faber Sightreading Book is closely related to the Lesson Book, the content of *Four Star* is not related to that of *Celebration Series*. As opposed to having a set of books that correlate with another, like Faber, each book of the RCM Certificate Program correlates directly to the syllabus, including *Four Star*. The sight reading requirements of the syllabus are organized into two categories: rhythmic and playing. The syllabus lists all possible time signatures, note values, and key signatures to be tested for both categories. Exercises for all of these requirements can be found in the corresponding level of *Four Star*.

The *Four Star* books are prefaced with suggestions on how to practice sight reading according to the syllabus requirements. These suggestions are the same and apply to all of the levels. For the rhythm reading, the book suggests that the student should first study the example, noticing the time signature and any distinctive rhythmic patterns. Next, count and tap the basic beat for an empty measure before proceeding with the example. While counting the example, the student should continue to tap and speak the rhythm as well as maintaining a steady beat. These instructions are fairly similar to the ones found in the Eye Trainings of the Faber Theory Books.

For the Sight Playing, there are four specific steps, some of which are not found in the Faber books. The first step, also the most intricate, is to preview the music. The student is

advised to first determine the tonality by observing the key signature, opening and closing notes, and scale or chord patterns. If the key is unfamiliar, the student should practice the corresponding scale and tonic triads to review notes and fingerings. Then the student must study the structure of the music, noticing phrases and shorter melodic and rhythmic patterns. Lastly, the student is advised to pay close attention to fingerings, dynamics, articulations, expressive markings, as well as tempo indication, if any. The second step is to rehearse the rhythm, by tapping or singing it, so the student knows “how it goes” before playing. The third step is to play the example silently, practicing the notes and fingerings on the keyboard without making a sound. Finally, the last step is to play the sight reading out loud and never stop to correct mistakes, choosing a tempo that allows the student to play without hesitating. The book also advises the student to focus on groups of notes that form recognizable patterns rather than individual notes. Generally, the sight reading practicing guidelines from *Four Star* are much more unified and detailed than the ones found in both the *Eye Trainings* and *Sightreading Books* of the Faber method.

Each *Four Star* book contains twelve weekly sets, two introductory and ten regular. Once the student has completed each set, corresponding tests in the back of the book are to be given by the teacher at the weekly lesson. The tests are structured exactly according to the syllabus requirements, which include both the sight reading and ear tests. Each weekly set, from Preparatory to Level 4, comprises five daily exercises that are divided into four categories: pitch and fingering patterns, rhythm reading, sight playing, and musicianship activity (see Example II.5). The pitch and fingering activity trains the student to recognize and feel common musical patterns and shapes. This activity usually incorporates short examples of intervals, melodic fragments, triads, chord progressions, and cadences. The rhythm reading includes one short

Similar to Faber’s Eye Trainings and Sightreading Books, the exercises in *Four Star* begin in five-finger positions. Accidentals and keys other than C major are introduced in Prep B. Hand shifts appear in early Level 2, and by late Level 2, a few exercises incorporate simple hands-together arrangements, where the left hand only plays one note. In Level 3, almost all of the exercises are played hands together, and the student is exposed to chordal and Alberti bass accompaniments for the first time. Common time signatures like 2/4, 3/4, and 4/4, are used consistently throughout the books until Level 5, where 6/8 becomes a requirement. Exercises beyond this point are extracted from pre-composed repertoire, and the requirements of the more advanced levels consist of similar skills from the previous levels, but with an increase in difficulty and length.

Another common feature between the Faber Sightreading Book and *Four Star* is the idea of playing variations based on familiar pieces. Unlike the Faber, *Four Star* only incorporates one variation per set, still allowing some variety in the exercises. The variations are always implemented at the end of the set in Day 5. Prep A presents nine different variations, one per set, on “Hot Cross Buns,” and Prep B does the same with “Mary Had a Little Lamb.” The structure of Levels 1 to 10 is a bit different. Day 5 of the first set presents a traditional or popular tune as a “Mystery Piece,” and in the following set, the mystery is revealed as a variation. The rest of the sets follow this pattern, resulting in five different tunes with variations in each book. The mystery element is beneficial in that it requires the student to listen and analyze what is being played, as opposed to simply playing the notes without thinking.

The Suzuki Method

As previously mentioned, the Suzuki method uses no other material besides the *Suzuki Piano School*. In addition, students are taught to play by rote in the beginning, so reading music

is not even a part of the curriculum for some time. Shinichi Suzuki does not suggest a specific age or level to begin music reading; he only says to wait “until an appropriate age and time.”²⁰ Haruko Kataoka, however, has a different suggestion. Her method is to introduce reading once the student can play Book 1 skillfully and is ready to advance to Book 2, and that it does not matter what the student’s age is.²¹ She says that any book is fine to use, but it should be easier than the Suzuki texts, because Level 2 is already quite difficult.

Thanks to John Kendall, a renowned string pedagogue, the Suzuki method was introduced to the United States in the early 1960s.²² Since its introduction, some adaptations have been made to better fit the American classroom. Regarding music reading, teachers have the flexibility to use any material they prefer.²³ There is still no standard as to what level or age the student should be taught to read music. The “when,” “what,” and “how” are all at the teacher’s discretion. Based on a collection of interviews, Suzuki teachers across the country use a wide range of supplemental materials, from note flashcards to theory workbooks and other method books, such as *Hal Leonard Student Piano Library* and *Bastien Piano Basics*.²⁴

Carole Bigler and Valery Lloyd Watts, two well-respected Suzuki teachers, co-authored a book called *Studying Suzuki Piano: More than Music*.²⁵ In their opinion, Suzuki principles can

²⁰ Suzuki, *How to Teach Suzuki Piano*, 12.

²¹ Kataoka, *Thoughts on the Suzuki Piano School*, 44–45.

²² “Suzuki Community Mourns the Loss of Leader and Mentor, John Kendall,” Suzuki Association of the Americas, accessed April 7, <https://suzukiassociation.org/news/suzuki-community-mourns-loss-leader-mentor-2/>.

²³ Renee Robbins, Interview by author, February 22, 2018.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Carole Bigler and Valery Lloyd Watts, *Studying Suzuki Piano: More than Music* (Los Angeles: Alfred Publishing Co. Inc., 1998).

be applied to note-reading, and it can be taught side by side with Suzuki repertoire, as early as the “Twinkle” variations. They stress that the process of note-reading should not be rushed, and each concept needs to be explained, understood, and played during the lesson. Whichever method is used, students must perfect each song like they do with Suzuki repertoire. Through repetition and thoroughness, Bigler and Lloyd Watts believe that students will develop acute awareness and confidence, which will make them great sight readers. In the *Studying Suzuki Piano* book, they suggest using the Music Tree for teaching note reading,²⁶ but in one of their later publications, which is a teacher’s manual called *Mastering the Piano*, they suggest using any of the Alfred books.²⁷ It does not matter what method the teacher uses, because according to Bigler and Lloyd Watts, it is always the teaching procedures, and not the materials, that determine the results.

²⁶ Ibid., 65.

²⁷ Carole Bigler and Valery Lloyd Watts, “Teaching Strategies,” in *Mastering the Piano Manual*, (Los Angeles: Alfred Publishing Co., 2004), 33, accessed April 1, 2018, <http://valerylloydwatts.com/books/mastering-the-piano-manual/>.

Chapter III

Aural Skills

As Chapter II delved into sight reading and visual recognition, this chapter will mainly cover the aural aspects of musicianship skills. The ability to identify or play back music upon hearing is equally as important as sight reading. Aural perception of any sort is generally known as ear training,²⁸ and it is a necessary tool in order to advance as a well-rounded musician. The necessity of having excellent aural skills is the reason that ear training courses have long been a traditional part of the music curricula at many conservatories and universities.²⁹ However, post-secondary education should not be a music student's first exposure to ear training, as it is crucial to incorporate it in early music education.³⁰ This chapter will assess how aural skills are integrated in each of the three curricula by addressing them in three categories: melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic recognition.

Faber *Piano Adventures*

Along with the Eye Trainings in the Theory Book are the Ear Trainings, which also help reinforce concepts in the corresponding unit. The Ear Trainings cover a broad range of skills that include the three categories of aural recognition as well as improvising and other creative

²⁸ Christopher Fry and Piers Spencer, "ear-training," in *The Oxford Companion to Music* (Oxford University Press, 2011).

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Boris Berlin and Andrew Markow, *Four Star Sight Reading and Ear Tests*, rev. Laura Beauchamp-Williamson (Mississauga: Frederick Harris Music Co., 2015).

activities. They are not organized by any specific type of skills or have a strict structure, unlike *Four Star*. Often, one Ear Training exercise will combine multiple skills, and sometimes it is also to be used jointly with the Eye Training. Evaluating the sequence of the Ear Trainings alone will not make sense unless one considers the sequence of concepts that are presented in the Lesson Book.

Similar to the Eye Training, the Ear Training begins with direction of notes and rhythm recognition, but the progression moves quite fast. In the Primer Level alone, the student is expected to distinguish between 3/4 and 4/4 rhythms, be able to recognize parallel and contrasting answers, which can span up to eight measures, and play back C five-finger melodies up to four measures long that can also include tied notes. The level of difficulty is inconsistent and changes based on the concepts of the Lesson Book. The beginning of Level 1 returns to the simpler exercises, such as recognizing steps and skips, *forte* and *piano*, and legato and staccato. As the student learns intervals beyond the third, the Ear Trainings reinforce and combine all of the intervals together. In the Level 1 Unit 4 activity, four different intervals are mixed together for identification. In Unit 6, the introduction of the sharp and flat allows the students to learn half steps, which prepare their ears for more chromatic melodies encountered in Levels 2A and 2B.

Once students learn transposition in 2A, they must compare two melodies in different keys and identify if they are the same or different. Being able to hear the correct transposition requires keen intervallic identification, which the Ear Trainings in the following units and levels continue to review and reinforce. Level 2B introduces the interval of a sixth, which is added into the interval identification exercise. The majority of the melodic examples up to this point still adhere to the five-finger position, with the occasional leaps of a sixth or octave. The range of melodic examples are expanded considerably in Level 3A, as the new concepts include the

seventh, chromatic scale, arpeggios, as well as the review of full scales in several major keys. The mixture of intervallic identification has now become a comparison of longer melodic excerpts that contain multiple intervals, and the student must choose the correct melody that the teacher plays. This activity requires the student to not only identify one interval at a time but several in one listening.

The Ear Trainings in later levels follow more or less the same format as before, except the examples become more intricate and require finer listening skills. As far as melodic and intervallic recognition is concerned, by Level 4, the student should be comfortable with naming all scale degrees, as many of the exercises ask to identify a certain scale degree given the tonic or request the student to play back a melody that starts on the tonic. As each new level builds on the previous one, Level 5 is the culmination of all ear training skills acquired throughout the entire method. All intervals within the octave are presented along with their basic qualities at this level, with the exception of the diminished fifth and augmented fourth. In practicing these intervals, the guidelines provide a description or famous tune to help the student to remember each interval and quality. For example, the major second sounds like the opening of “Happy Birthday,” and a minor sixth sounds like a “sad” sixth. Students should also be able to differentiate between major and minor, as well as the three forms of minor scales. The rest of the Ear Trainings are geared more toward harmonic identification.

Harmonic identification is first introduced in Level 1 Unit 8, as the student learns about the I and V7 chords in C major. The V7 is a simplified two-note chord with the root and the seventh of the chord forming the interval of a second. As the student becomes more comfortable with I and V7 chords, especially after learning them in multiple keys, all four notes of the V7 chords are gradually introduced, reaching the full chord in Level 4. Before learning to identify

the chords, the Ear Trainings first acquaint the ear by incorporating them into rhythmic exercises. The main objective is identifying rhythms, but the student is indirectly exposed to the sounds of full chords (see Example III.1). The next step toward chord identification is naming the tonic and dominant scale degrees. The student must know whether a note is the tonic or dominant upon hearing a short melody that begins on the tonic. From midway of Level 2B onward, full chords become a typical component of the Ear Trainings.

Example III.1. *Piano Adventures* Ear Training Example

The primary chords, I, IV, and V7, in both major and minor keys, are continuously reinforced throughout Levels 3A to 5. As the levels progress, the only additional element in the identification is the first and second inversions of triads. Level 5 combines all previous harmonic knowledge into a new and final concept—the circle of fifth progression. Students learn to play the progression with the appropriate inversions as well as identifying it by ear. In the Ear Training activities, the teacher must play each example starting in the key of C major and stop on different chords in the progression, then the student has to name the last chord that was heard.

The rhythmic exercises are found throughout the Theory Books, and they always correspond to the new concepts that are introduced in the Lesson Book, in addition to providing ample review material. Although some exercises focus purely on the rhythmic elements, such as

counting and clapping, or identifying measures with the incorrect number of beats, often that is not the case. The Ear Trainings tend to combine multiple skills into one exercise, and rhythm is frequently embedded in the melodic and harmonic identifications. Sometimes the student is asked to play back a melody including the correct rhythm, and other times the student has to compare and identify melodies and harmonies that carry different rhythms.

RCM Certificate Program

As the title presents, *Four Star Sight Reading and Ear Tests* not only reinforces sight reading, but also ear training. Given the syllabus system and its meticulous requirements, the design of *Four Star* clearly reflects the parameters of the syllabus, which makes it more systematic than the Eye Trainings and Ear Trainings of the Faber Theory Books. For the aural skills portion of the exam, which is referred to as Ear Tests by RCM, there are four sections: Clapbacks, Playbacks, Intervals, and Chords. The interval identification only applies to Level 1 through 10, and beginning in Level 5, the clapback and playback are combined into one example, while the chord identification incorporates common progressions in addition to naming single chords.

Along with the weekly sight reading test that is to be given by the teacher, there is also an ear test that covers all of the above four categories, with the exception of the Preparatory levels. The student should not see the music during any portion of the ear test. Prior to Level 5, the clapbacks use a different melody than the playbacks to ensure that students develop keen rhythmic and melodic senses independently. Based on the skill requirements of the earlier levels, it would also be difficult for the student to track intervals and rhythms simultaneously. The melodies used for clapbacks are much more complex than the ones used for playbacks, since the student is only responsible to repeat the rhythm.

For the clapback, the teacher must identify the time signature and count one measure before playing the melody twice. The student will then have the options to clap, tap, or sing the rhythm back. Similarly, the playback requires the teacher to identify the key, play the tonic triad once, and play the melody twice before the student has to reproduce it on the piano. Once the two categories merge in Level 5, the teacher must combine the introductory procedures, such as identifying both the key and time signatures, play the tonic triad, and count one measure before playing. The student is asked to clap back the rhythm upon hearing the melody twice, and play back after hearing the same melody for the third time.

As expected, each new level integrates more requirements, and the progression of difficulty is measured by three criteria. One is the beginning note, as in tonic or dominant etc. as the starting note of the melody; the second is the key of the melody, as in how many sharps and flats are included in the key signature; the third is the approximate length, which ranges from four notes to four measures. Beginning in Level 9, the clapback and playback melodies become two-voice phrases, where the student repeats the rhythm and melody of the upper parts. In Level 10, the student is expected to play back the upper part in addition to harmonizing it with basic progressions in the left hand.

For the interval identifications, the teacher should select various intervals and their qualities from the appropriate syllabus level, and the student may choose from two options on how to identify. The first option is to name the interval and quality after hearing it played once in melodic form, ascending or descending, and once in the harmonic form. The second option is for the student to sing or hum the interval, ascending or descending, once the teacher provides the first note. For the chord identifications in Levels 1 and 2, the student must name the quality of the triad upon hearing it once in blocked form. In Levels 3 and 4, the identification consists of

two parts. The first part is the same as the earlier levels, and the second part is to identify one note as the root, third, or fifth, after hearing it once in broken form. For Levels 5 and beyond, various seventh chords as well as chord progressions are included in the identification. Instead of naming single notes, the student now has to name functional chords in roman numerals.

The Suzuki Method

With no other material except their main repertoire book, Suzuki students do not have a concrete system to train their aural skills. However, this does not mean that they receive no practice at all. Since most of the lesson structure and content are at the teacher's discretion, the student will most likely inherit many skills informally from the teacher. In addition, the fact that teachers have the freedom to use other books gives students the opportunity to acquire ear training skills with material outside of the *Suzuki Piano School*.

Since listening and repetition are heavily emphasized in the Suzuki method, as each volume of *Suzuki Piano School* includes a CD recording of all of its pieces, the student must listen regularly until he or she can reproduce not only the notes but musical sensitivity as well. Given the variety of the repertoire, even if the student is not taught the theory initially, through repetitive listening and imitating, he or she will likely be able to develop astute aural senses. Once theory is incorporated, the student would have an easier time analyzing the music he or she hears. Furthermore, the delay of music reading is very advantageous in the case of building aural skills, because the student is relieved from the burden of hand-eye coordination. Instead of dividing the attention between reading and listening, the student is able to focus entirely on the listening.

Chapter IV

Harmonization and Transposition

Harmony is essentially a combination of notes that produce chords, and successively, chord progressions. When it accompanies the melody to create various colors and shapes in the music, it is known as harmonization. In order to harmonize, one needs to possess basic knowledge of tonality and functional chords and their properties. Transposition is playing a piece of music in a key other than the original, maintaining the same intervallic relationships but varying the pitches. The ability to transpose also requires a level of comfort with keys and an agile perception of intervals. Harmonization and transposition can be combined into one exercise or taught separately, and this chapter will explore the three curricula's different approaches in introducing and reinforcing these concepts.

Faber Piano Adventures

The earliest form of harmonization is introduced in Level 1 Unit 7, once the student learns the tonic and dominant scale degrees. In the corresponding Eye Training of the Theory Book, the activity provides a melody in the right hand and asks the student to write a tonic or dominant note in each measure for the left hand observing the following rules: if the melody is mostly scale steps 1-3-5, use the tonic, and if the melody is mostly scale step 2-4-5, use the dominant. After completion, the book then informs the student that he or she has just harmonized a melody. The next two units introduce the I and V7 chords, which are immediately followed by another set of harmonization exercises.

Level 2A introduces transposition, using only the C and G five-finger scales, as the student does not know other keys or positions at this point. As an example, the Theory Book presents the opening of “Jingle Bells” in both C and G, so the student can hear the change in keys using a familiar tune. Before the student is asked to play any transposition, the Theory Book provides ample practice for intervallic recognition in both written form and aural recognition. As the student becomes more fluent with reading intervals, the Eye Training guides the student in playing a transposition of a short sight reading example.

After the course on transposition, Level 2A returns to harmonization, now integrating lead sheet symbols instead of roman numerals. In the corresponding Theory activity, the student must fill in the chords above the melody and check for a correct chord choice when he or she plays the final product. Once the student learns the I and V7 chords in G major, the Theory Book reviews the harmonization rules by making the student play a five-finger pattern, where each note is harmonized by either the I or V7 chord. This activity is followed by longer harmonization exercises that require the student to write in the appropriate harmonies as well as playing them. The same procedure is applied when learning the IV chord. By the end of Level 2A, the student should be able to harmonize with the three primary chords in the keys of C, G, and F major. This is also the first time that harmonization and transposition are combined into one activity. Upon completing and playing the harmonization in the original key, the student is then asked to transpose the same excerpt to the other two keys.

When Level 3B introduces the relative minors of C, G, and F, the student is also exposed to a new set of primary chords in the keys of A, E, and D minor. Similar harmonization exercises as seen in the previous units are also used for these new keys. To further build on the student’s existing knowledge of primary chords, the end of Level 3B introduces the 12-bar blues, which is

the longest progression in the method so far. The 12-bar blues is comprised of the three major-key primary chords. All the student has to do is memorize the structure and pattern.

Level 4, as previously mentioned, continues to strengthen the concepts introduced in 3A and 3B. An activity in Unit 1 combines both transposition and a review of triadic inversions. An eight-measure excerpt is presented in A minor with tonic chord inversions in the right hand. First, the student has to identify the position of each chord as the root, first inversion, or second inversion. After playing it once in A minor, the student is then asked to transpose the excerpt to C major as well as D minor. A few more harmonization activities are found throughout this level, using a similar exercise structure. The only modification in the more advanced exercises is the use of keys other than C major.

As the levels advance, the Theory Book activities gravitate heavily toward harmonic studies. Beginning in Level 2A, and continuing in the later two levels, almost all of the repertoire include some sort of harmony and progressions. The majority of the theoretical knowledge accumulated from previous levels, such as intervallic identification, scales, and transposition, is meant to ultimately prepare the student for further harmonic studies. By the end of Level 5, the student should be able to demonstrate a solid understanding of functional harmony and be able to perform basic harmonic analysis. Learning to harmonize a melody is a great way to achieve these skills, because by doing, the student is able to better retain the knowledge than merely studying the rules.

RCM Certificate Program

While harmonization is not specifically included in the syllabus, with the exception being Level 10's playback requiring a harmonization of the upper melody, many other skills

concerning harmonies are required. From Level 5 and onward, students are expected to play various cadential progressions in multiple keys as part of their technical requirements. The Ear Tests, as previously mentioned, also require a plethora of harmonic identifications. However, the study of harmony is mostly covered in the newly written *Celebrate Theory*, and students are tested in written exams. Similarly, transposition is also not a tested skill in the performance exams, but rather is integrated into the *Four Star* books as well as *Celebrate Theory*.

The Theory syllabus is quite thorough with its requirements of harmonic knowledge. Preparatory through Level 4 are considered the Elementary Theory Levels, where students are introduced to the basic elements of harmony, such as the study of intervals, triads, and functional chord symbols. Levels 5 through 8 are the Intermediate Levels, which require cumulative knowledge from the earlier levels, and the first time students are exposed to harmonic analysis and composition. Levels 9, 10, and ARTC comprise the Advanced Levels, which integrate not only harmony and analysis, but counterpoint and keyboard harmony as well. Keyboard harmony is the demonstration of theoretical knowledge in playing form. The study of counterpoint prepares the student to master contrapuntal forms, music that is among the most harmonically advanced, and keyboard harmony further reinforces part-writing, analysis, and harmonization. The Theory syllabus strongly encourages students and teachers to ensure that the level of theory study is concurrent with the performance level. Using the appropriate levels and materials will prevent students from deficiencies, as the nature of music study is a cumulative process. Additionally, requirements such as harmonizing a playback melody incorporate a number of different skills, and can only be achieved if the student progresses equally in all areas of musicianship skills.

Transposition exercises appear both in the Musicianship Activity sections of *Four Star* and in various units throughout *Celebrate Theory*. Students begin playing transpositions as early as the Prep Levels, but the instructions do not necessarily inform them that the activity is called transposition. For one of the “Hot Cross Buns” variations in Prep A, the student plays the tune on a set of three white keys. The Musicianship Activity that follows asks the student to “create another flavor” by playing it on a group of three black keys. Similar instructions can be found in Prep B through Level 2, where the student is asked to play a melody up or down one octave, or play in a different key with the starting notes already provided.

In *Celebrate Theory*, the student learns about writing transpositions starting in Level 3, and it becomes an ordinary part of the exam in the succeeding levels. One aspect of transposition that RCM enforces but Faber does not is the transposition of orchestral instruments. Students are expected to know both the B-flat and F instruments for the exam. A possible reason that Faber does not include this skill is that the method only goes to Level 5, which places the student at an intermediate level. The levels of RCM progress much further, and thus the corresponding concepts are also more advanced.

Suzuki Method

Due to the nature of rote learning, the level of repertoire in the Suzuki method tends to be higher than the other two curricula, which means the incorporation of harmony occurs earlier in the student’s study. In Volume 1 of *Suzuki Piano School*, Variations on “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star” is the only piece that is to be played hands separately. The next two pieces require the student to play hands together in unison. From the fourth piece onward, simple harmonies are incorporated in the left hand. They are mostly I and V7 chords in three different accompaniment figures: blocked, broken, and Alberti bass. The general level of difficulty progresses much faster,

since reading notes is not yet a concern. As expected, the harmonies in the repertoire become more challenging as the levels progress. However, since music theory is regarded as unnecessary in the beginning levels, students would not necessarily know what exactly they are playing, even if they are technically capable. Regarding transposition, the student has no exposure to this concept, unless it is incorporated in the piece and the teacher makes a note of it, or if the teacher uses supplemental materials.

Chapter V

Creative Activities

This chapter focuses on the creative aspects of musicianship skills, which can be more challenging to accomplish than other musicianship skills. Creative activities include composition, improvisation, and arranging. They all require strong theoretical knowledge and demand a further conceptual step than the other skills, as the student has to produce an original work based on what he or she knows. Improvisation, a performance according to the inventive whim of the moment,³¹ can be even harder, as it is essentially composition in real time. All of these activities stimulate and foster a creative mind as well as cultivating expressivity.

Faber Piano Adventures

Creative activities are included in both the Lesson and Theory books. The longer exercises that require writing are usually found in the Theory Book, and playing activities are found in both books. The activities appear throughout the units, and there is no discernible structure as to how many there are per level. The composition exercises always include parameters to help guide the student, which are usually based on multiple concepts that have been previously introduced in the Lesson Book. For example, in Level 2A Unit 3, the student is invited to co-write a song called “If You Meet an Alligator.” The song provides notes at the beginning and end of phrases, and it asks the student to complete the phrases by choosing notes

³¹ Michael Kennedy and Joyce Bourne Kennedy, “improvisation,” in the *Oxford Dictionary of Music* (Oxford University Press, 2012).

from the C five-finger scale, using the rhythm given above each measure. To complete the song, the student has to insert phrase and dynamic markings (see Example V.1)

Example V.1. “If You Meet an Alligator”

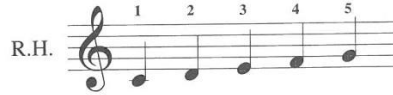


You Can Compose!

C 5-Finger Scale



C 5-Finger Scale



- Complete this piece by choosing notes from the C 5-finger scale. Use the rhythm given above each measure.
- Then draw phrase marks and dynamic markings (*p*, *mp*, *mf*, *f*). Play your composition!



If You Meet an Alligator

Words by Crystal Bowman

rhythm:

R.H.

dynamic marking If you meet an al - li - ga - tor, bet - ter run and let him be!

L.H.

Do not greet or try to calm him with a moon-light mel - o - dy.

The improvisations also contain guidelines as to what should be played and offer creative suggestions for the students, and they usually include a teacher’s accompaniment for the student to play along with. An example can be seen in Level 2B Unit 10. To reinforce the F major scale, the theory activity asks the student to improvise using any notes from the F major scale, after listening to the teacher’s accompaniment. The activity offers three ideas on how to improvise: 1) play some F major and D minor blocked and broken chords, 2) play repeated notes on the tonic,

dominant, and leading tone, and 3) make up short musical patterns and repeat them higher or lower.

Some improvisation activities are also based on the Lesson Book pieces, where students have a chance to change certain elements of the pieces they are learning. For example, “I Am the King” in Level 2A Unit 3 is in the G five-finger scale, and it asks the student to make up a new left hand melody for measures 1 – 2, while keeping the same rhythm but choose any notes from the G five-finger scale. This short activity not only reinforces the G position, it also offers an opportunity to be creative without the burden of having to come up with everything on the student’s part.

Besides composition and improvisation, *Piano Adventures* includes a few arranging exercises as well. The main focus of “Hey, Ho, Nobody Home” in Level 2B is to practice reading lead sheet symbols. The student must play the melody while accompanying with blocked chords in the left hand. Once the student can play it fluently, the activity asks the student to create an alternate ending. Again, the book offers some ideas to help the student get started: 1) play an extended D minor cross-hand arpeggio up the keys, or 2) repeat the last measure several times with the right hand playing the octave higher for each repeat.

RCM Certificate Program

Composition is mostly covered in *Celebrate Theory*, as it requires more writing and reinforces theoretical concepts. It becomes a portion of the exam as early as Level 1. Similar to *Piano Adventures*, *Celebrate Theory* also provides parameters as to what should be included in the composition activity for each level, such as the keys and intervals to be used. As the levels advance, the guidelines become more specific and constricted, including concepts such as

creating certain phrase structures, using indicated harmonies, and incorporating various forms. Compared to *Piano Adventures*, the composition exercises in *Celebrate Theory* are much more rigid. While they still foster creativity, the priority of these exercises leans more toward the demonstration of theoretical understanding.

All other creative activities can be found in the Musicianship Activity category of the *Four Star*, which continues up to Level 4. A variety of exercises are available, and many are similar to those from the Faber Theory and Lesson books. As previously mentioned, the Musicianship Activity is always based on another category from the same day's sight reading practice. Some examples of Musicianship Activity include playing the piece again but changing at least three things, such as tempo, dynamics, and articulations; making up words to accompany the sight reading; applying the rhythmic activity from the day's practice to a certain scale to create a new melody; and making a new version of the rhythm reading by changing the order of the measures (see Example V.2)

Example V.2. *Four Star Musicianship Activity*

Mystery Piece No. 4

arr. Forrest Kinney

★ Play this piece again, changing at least three things. For example, you could play slower, softer, and with a *staccato* touch. Have fun with it!

The Suzuki Method

Unless the teacher uses supplemental materials during the lesson, the student has no exposure to any curricular creative activities.

Conclusion

While the Faber *Piano Adventures*, RCM Certificate Program, and the Suzuki method share superficial similarities, such as having series of books that correlate or same choice of repertoire, the three curricula are vastly different in their underlying structures and approaches to teaching. The Faber method is governed by a specific sequence of concepts with supporting materials that all correlate to the same concept, while the RCM Certificate Program is organized by a syllabus and testing system that requires standardized skills across all levels, and the Suzuki Method takes a holistic approach in not just teaching music, but also creating a desirable environment in which the student is constantly nurtured and exposed to various musical activities. The Faber method stresses that the Lesson and Theory books should be the basis of the curriculum while choosing from other supplemental materials as additional reinforcement. In the RCM Certificate Program, using the *Celebration Series* in addition to *Four Star* and *Celebrate Theory* is a requisite if the student expects to take the corresponding exams, because the contents of the books are specifically designed to correlate with the listed requirements on the syllabus. The *Suzuki Piano School* is central to the Suzuki method and is the only standardized text for the curriculum. Many teachers supplement with other books,³² often creating a synthesis of different approaches. How the students learn and what they learn are also highly dependent on the teacher and the extra materials.

³² Renee Robbins, 2018.

The structure of each curriculum directly influences how musicianship skills are integrated. The types and amount of skills covered in each curriculum also vary. As Faber and RCM both include individual sight reading and theory books, they aim to teach all areas of musicianship skills equally, which is not to say that the Suzuki method does not. Due to Suzuki's peculiar beliefs and philosophies, skills such as note reading and theory take different priorities in the curriculum, and the order of concepts presented is rearranged compared to the other two curricula. However, skills acquired through any of the curricula should eventually reach a comparable state. Through examining the three curricula, similarities, differences, advantages, and disadvantages in their approaches to musicianship skills can all be observed. While no approach is better than the other, the end goal is the same across all three curricula—to develop sensible musicians with keen listening, reading, and creative skills.

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