

## **ACADEMY PIANO BOOK 3 – Grades 2-3**

### **Overview**

Book 3 focusses on the intermediate repertoire of Grades 2 and 3. The important development here is balance between the hands and the understanding of keys and chords. Once a student can see a chord in the music and identify it quickly then reading music becomes easier: in some senses it becomes educated guess work especially at cadence points.

More than in books 1 and 2 I have collected examples of graded repertoire so that while the student is learning about a particular key or technique they are testing themselves against pieces regularly set at the graded level. For the teacher this gives accurate representation of progress and a clear indication of when and with what repertoire the student can successfully complete a graded exam.

The objective to develop a foundation of technical flexibility that creates a platform upon which other musical experiences can be safely built continues throughout the book. Notwithstanding the virtues of a sound technique, musical students without effective control can often miss out on the higher marks and become disillusioned with the process. As a teacher my prime objective is to create a pianist whose love of playing sustains them throughout their lives and is passed on to their children.

I have tried where possible to ensure the pieces selected highlight the concept being taught using repertoire from recognised composers all masters of their craft. I think it important a student knows something of the background to a piece especially the composer. This occasionally proved challenging as composers don't always make choices based on theory choosing instead to break new ground. Where no pieces were available I took the liberty of composing my own.

The book ends with two pieces that are really Grade 4 level. I like to move my students forward a little ahead of their standard before the exam as this makes the performance technically comfortable rather than challenging which means they can focus on the musical aspects of the piece and score higher marks.

## **TERM 1 – ABOUT CHORDS AND KEYS**

### **LESSON 1 – F MAJOR TRIADS AND INVERSIONS**

**Pg Nos. 6-7**

The importance of understanding chords and their inversions cannot be overstated. As the student advances reading music note-by-note becomes impossible because there are simply too many of them. By recognising and identifying chord shapes and patterns we give the student the ability to read in 'chunks' and, moreover, they begin to identify the colours of each chord and its structural and emotional importance within a piece.

The first test concerns concept understanding which is followed by an example. Thereafter we concentrate on turning chords into rhythmic patterns and finally use the descending scale to test their knowledge – a good student might be able to complete this at the piano.

The German Dance that follows is an opportunity for students to recognise these chords within a piece. There are, after all, just two in this instance. I would recommend the student writes the chords either above the staff or in the centre – then it will be interesting how quickly they learn the piece armed with this knowledge.

**AUDIO:**        **TK1. F MAJOR ASCENDING BLOCK CHORDS**  
                  **TK2. F MAJOR ASCENDING ALBERTI BASS**  
                  **TK3. BEETHOVEN – GERMAN DANCE**

### **LESSON 2 – DUSSEK GAVOTTE IN F**

**Pg Nos. 8**

Dussek's Gavotte is a challenging piece at this level, but it is full of patterns and familiar chords. The descending scale RH bar 13 should always match F Major Scale fingering, equally the descending scale LH at bar 23. The fast harmonic rate makes this a challenge so short sectional practise is the key.

**AUDIO:**        **TK4. DUSSEK GAVOTTE IN F**

### **LESSON 3 – D MINOR TRIADS AND INVERSIONS**

**Pg Nos. 9-11**

Maintaining consistency we apply the same approach to D Minor as we do F. The student understand the primacy of the Tonic, Dominant and Subdominant chords.

The Gurlitt is an especially lovely teaching piece as it is full of imagery and from a didactic point of view moves between D minor and F major – we hope the student will identify the change and apply the appropriate affectation. Keep the RH light throughout and ask the student to imagine the LH as a Cello line – deep and sonorous.

La Pernette is a delightfully short piece that has a Lydian feel. LH flows until bar 12, when it suddenly punctuates the harmony with block chords. Make sure the slight melody LH in bar 5 sings.

**AUDIO:**        **TK5. D MINOR ASCENDING BLOCK CHORDS**  
                  **TK6. D MINOR ASCENDING ALBERTI BASS**  
                  **TK7. GURLITT NIGHT JOURNEY**  
                  **TK8. D'INDY LA PERNETTE**

## **LESSON 4 – E MINOR**

**Pg Nos. 12-13**

E Minor is a new key. As with all minor keys it is taught in relation to its major counterpart. So many pieces change mood by modulating between relative major/minor, it is really important a student knows when and where.

Bartok's dance song is a favourite of the Grade 1 syllabus, but it is rather more difficult than that in my opinion. The balance between the hands; the large chords in the LH, the anacrusis rhythm are all challenges. My approach is to teach the LH alone to start and then when they realise that the RH is simply repeated x 3 at a lower dynamic they believe that the main challenges of the piece have been overcome. Usefully is also has a passage in G major amplifying the connection between the two keys.

**AUDIO:**        **TK9. BARTOK DANCE SONG**

## **LESSON 5 – DOTTED SEMIQUAVER**

**Pg Nos. 14-16**

This tricky rhythm was taught to me with the word Am – ster – dam. I have never forgotten it so felt it worthy of inclusion here.

This folk song has a delightful melody and requires careful fingering throughout. The second half of the chorus made more challenging by the added 'harmony' notes in the RH. Keeping this under control while the melody sings is a challenge. It might be helpful for the student to hear Kathleen Ferrier's haunting solo rendition of this to capture the mood faithfully.

The Allegretto brings the dotted semi-quaver into the more common time signature of 4/4. This is a more challenging piece, but focussing in learning in four bar sections will repay the effort relatively quickly. Careful of the different conclusions to the two A minor sections.

**AUDIO:**        **TK9. BLOW THE WIND SOUTHERLY**  
                  **TK10. ALLEGRETTO**

## **LESSON 6 – MAJOR KEYS AND CHORDS**

**Pg Nos. 17-18**

Much of this section is reinforcing the importance of the primary chords as a way to emphasize the difference between major and minor triads. We explore the other available chords with a key and discover there are three major and three minor chords in each major key. Essential here is to test the student on their aural recognition of a major and minor chord.

## **LESSON 7 – MINOR TRIADS AND CHORDS**

**Pg No. 19**

Continuing on from Lesson 6 we identify the structure of a minor triad. It is hoped the student will identify that the third is the key component in the difference between the major and minor sound. I don't mention it here, but perhaps this lesson might include a discussion of the perfect intervals of four, five and octave.

## **LESSON 8 – THE TRIAD HIERARCHY**

**Pg No. 20-21**

Establishing a 'hierarchy' of chords in a key is precisely what the Circle of fifths is primarily concerned with so to illuminate this in a single key prepares the way for uncovering the secrets at a later stage. It also begins the process of freeing the student up from the notation. With some practise they should be able to play with the chords within the hierarchy quite freely and again this familiarity will pay dividends with their note reading as well as their inherent musicality.

Take advantage of Attwood's Allegro to have the student identify all the chords in the piece. This useful exercise will help the student realise that when reading music identifying chords is so much quicker than each individual note, and, familiarity with chord patterns adds fluency to this reading. Additionally Attwood's melodic material is replete with scales and again I urge sticking to the fingering appropriate.

**AUDIO: TK.11 ATTWOOD ALLEGRO**

## **LESSON 9 – SCHUMANN HUMMINGSONG**

**Pg No. 22**

I use this piece to develop rotation but also control of the thumb. It is enough for the thumb to merely grace the key to create the requisite sound. It should never become part of the melody so I recommend practising with and without so the outer parts sing together leaving the inner part to supplying a gently audible rhythm.

**AUDIO: TK.12 SCHUMANN HUMMINGSONG.**

## **LESSON 10 – TWO OCTAVE SCALES: SIGHT-READING: THEORY Pg Nos. 23-25**

We close Term 1 with an overview of the journey so far: All the keys and scales learnt so far in two-octaves; a series of sight-reading pieces; and a comprehensive review of their Theory.

## **TERM 2 – NEW KEYS, SCALES AND ARPEGGIOS**

### **LESSON 11 – THE CHROMATIC SCALE**

**Pg Nos. 26-27**

In my experience students tend to find the chromatic scale a relatively comfortable learn. Once they grasp the concept of three on ALL black notes they can quickly run up and down the keyboard effortlessly. To take advantage of this I try to teach the chromatic in both hands simultaneously and using D as the starting point means each hand mirrors the other so it is a comfortable and satisfying achievement for student.

Approaching the learning of this piece, I start with the learning ALL the chromatic passages. They are miniature finger exercises and need personal attention. Don't rush the piece as it is a 'Majestic' rather than a military march.

**AUDIO: TK.13 CHROMATIC MARCH**

### **LESSON 12 – D MAJOR**

**Pg Nos. 28-30**

A new key and again we use the same strategy only this time we move straight to the two-octave scale.

Bach's Musette is a piece found regularly on the grade 2 syllabus. Its staccato octaves are useful for opening the hand and it has an attractive rhythm although I find the B section less persuasive musically and probably accounts the unconvincing attribution to Bach.

Bertini's Study like D'Indy's La Pernette has a flowing LH rhythm that metamorphoses into waltz time and then an Alberti bass – challenging but rewarding as a teaching piece.

**AUDIO: TK14. BACH MUSETTE IN D  
TK15. BERTINI STUDY IN D**

## **LESSON 13 – B MINOR**

**Pg Nos. 31-32**

Taught in direct relation to D Major to establish the connection, and again we introduce two- octave scales from the outset.

B minor is actually an awkward key to play – unlike B major which falls neatly under the fingers, B minor seems to feel awkward and, as I discovered, there are few pieces written at this level in the key so I am compelled to compose them. Flute song is relatively simply to play, but demonstrates the key neatly. In teaching this I start with the LH and try to create as much of the pedal effect with the fingers first before using the sustain pedal.

**AUDIO: TK16. HIGGINS FLUTE SONG**

## **LESSON 14 – TRIPLETS**

**Pg Nos. 33-34**

Triplets are best taught with drumsticks first (or hands on a lap). Once the student understand the quaver two semiquaver quaver rhythm between the two hands it can cognitively grasp the concept sufficiently to play it successfully – then use fifths in either hand then go to individual notes in short phrases.

Meditation needs a solid LH to be established before applying the RH melody. Take this bar-by-bar if necessary aiming for the first note of the next bar before stopping to repeat so we plan the flow to the next bar. The semiquaver B section is a diversion to free the hands a little before taking on the polyrhythms one more time before the end.

Folk Song continues the focus on Triplets but also offer an alternative if the student struggles with Meditation. In this case simply switch the pieces round and teach this first. The main difficult here are the octaves especially bar 5 so omit if necessary. Notice it is in D Major (relative of B minor).

**AUDIO: TK17. HIGGINS MEDITATION  
TK18. HIGGINS FOLK SONG**

## **LESSON 15 – CHORD PROGRESSIONS: THEORY: TWO-OCTAVE ARPEGGIOS: SIGHT-READING**

**Pg No. 35-38**

I never cease to marvel at the ingenuity of composers and song-writers using familiar chord progressions and yet extracting original ideas and sounds. Yet this familiarity is so frequent it is well worth identifying and teaching – nearly all popular songs can be sung to an accompaniment of some variation of these four chords. Again a student able to identify then is equipped to accompany at the drop of a hat.

**AUDIO: TK19. DOO-WOP CHORDS  
TK20. DOO-WOP ADDED RHYTHM**

## **TK21. DOO-WOP BROKEN CHORD PATTERN**

### **LESSON 16 – B FLAT MAJOR**

**Pg Nos. 39-41**

Now we move into the territory of the flat keys. Starting a scale on a finger other than 1 is a new experience. Sometimes I play the RH notes of Bb but start from the note C – what you uncover is that the correct fingers fall out of the hand naturally. This helps the student remember them.

Now we are moving into Grade 3 territory this Schubert Dance is a challenge for both hands. The 'stride' waltz pattern really needs to be carefully established so it becomes natural before adding the RH which in itself no picnic. Voicing these chords so the melody is clear means careful positioning of the hand so the energy focusses on the upper fingers. Try this first with basic triads until the student 'feels' it in their hands, then apply to the actual RH melody.

This Sonatina is a real test of articulation. Two-note slurs abound and both hands needs careful sectional work before putting it all together. As with all counterpoint it relies of evenness of hands and the ability to play with different techniques at the same time. The scale practise of legato and staccato in together in alternating hands recommended in books 1 and 2 begins to pay off here. Practise the 5-note melodic fragments that are thrown between the hands until the articulation is correct and then the piece should come together.

**AUDIO:           TK21. SCHUBERT GERMAN DANCE IN Bb**  
**TK22. HANDEL SONATINA**

### **LESSON 17 – G MINOR**

**Pg Nos. 42-44**

Continuing the format of teaching the relative minor immediately after the Major we have G Minor. Same format to uphold continuity.

Bartok appears regularly in teaching books mainly because his historic collection of teaching pieces Microcosmos is so effective. This particular piece focuses on independence of fingers.

Bach's Minuet in G minor is a development of the Bartok asking as it does for parts to move in and out of the foreground – identifying and executing the melodic material is at the heart of teaching this piece.

**AUDIO:           TK23. BARTOK SWINEHERD'S DANCE**  
**TK24. BACH MINUET IN G MINOR**

## **LESSON 18 – THEORY REVIEW III (INTERVALS)**

**Pg Nos. 45**

This lesson focuses exclusively on identifying intervals. Students learnt as early as book 1 about 2nds, 3rds, 4ths etc.... but are yet to identify them as major, minor or perfect. Now we are well and truly on our journey through the major and minor keys these local distinctions become critical to training the ear and eye to hear and see in advance the varying qualities of every interval.

## **LESSON 19 – MINOR KEY TRIAD HIERARCHY AND CHORDS**

**Pg No. 46**

Exactly as we provided the student with a useful Hierarchy of chords in major keys we will do the same for minor keys. What should soon become apparent is that in both cases there are three each of minor and major, and one diminished chord. However unlike in the major keys where we tend to favour the dominant seventh rather than chord vii so it is rarely used, in the minor keys chord ii is the diminished triad and it works especially well with chord V7 when this is made major by the raised 7<sup>th</sup> note. This 'colour' adds a special drama to the minor key.

## **LESSON 20 – BURGMULLER ARABESQUE/TELEMANN RIGAUDON Pg Nos. 47-48**

Arabesque is a grade 2 piece that requires agile fingers in both hands. It also demonstrates neatly how minor and major intersect. For the rapid semiquavers, try to take each one in a single gesture using the natural rise and fall of the wrist to generate sufficient energy.

Telemann's Rigaudon is typically contrapuntal with overlapping phrases. Understanding where the left hand combines melodically and then accompanies is the key to this piece. This also expresses the minor/major relationship clearly.

**AUDIO:**        **TK25. BURGMULLER ARABESQUE**  
                     **TK26. TELEMANN RIGAUDON**

## **TERM 3 - LESSON BY LESSON**

### **LESSON 21 – A MAJOR**

**Pg Nos. 49-51**

Now we move into the keys of three accidentals starting with A. The fingering is comfortable as it is already understood so attention can focus on the accidentals.

Scarlatti's pieces always teach so much. Rachmaninov often used them to warm up the fingers. As with the Handel Lesson 16, articulation is crucial. There are also some unusual twists and turns harmonically in this piece; the bars 25-28 descend chromatically with some awkwardness with the additional 'echo' effect dynamic thrown in. Quite a challenge for the grade 3 student.



For Smaa Og Store is from a collection of teaching pieces by Nielsen. This is tricky rather than difficult, but I add the additional challenge of encouraging the student to avoid looking at their hands. It remains in a fixed 'position' throughout, but through skilful use of accidentals subtly changes character – sort out the accidentals and this piece is delightful.

**AUDIO:           TK27. SCARLATTI MINUETTO**  
**TK28. NIELSEN FOR SMAA OG STORE**

## **LESSON 22 – F# MINOR**

**Pg Nos. 52-53**

In keeping with the flow of this book we now address the relative minor key of A, F# minor. The fingering is challenging, but if you start with A major RH fingering and adjust the E to E# it rolls out with the same fingers. LH is more challenging and then hands together a further challenge. Learn one octave at a time.

Rather like B minor repertoire for pieces at this level is scarce so this short Nocturne will have to suffice. The LH Alberti bass effect should be familiar by now, but don't hesitate to 'block' the chords if necessary. The melody is a series of short phrases: add pedal where necessary.

**AUDIO:           TK29. HIGGINS NOCTURNE**

## **LESSON 23 – TRIAD HIERARCHY G MAJOR**

**Pg Nos. 54-56**

For this lesson we concentrate on adding to the student's harmonic awareness. I find that once a student recognises that all they keys are effectively governed by the same principles of construction, and that relative major and minor keys use the same chords it opens a door to a wider understanding of harmony. I leave the hierarchy unfinished so the student can fill in the gaps.

Bach's Minuet is a favourite teaching piece of mine. Students like its attractive harmonic rhythm and the flow between the hands. The change to the relative minor will helpfully set up the next lesson (E minor Triad Hierarchy).

The additional sight-reading has lots of little 'pit-falls' – the quirky rhythm, left-hand melody; delicate staccato chords; DC al Fine.

**AUDIO:           TK30. BACH MINUET IN G**

## **LESSON 24 – TRIAD HIERARCHY E MINOR**

**Pg No. 57-59**

Students will now be familiar with the Hierarchy format and should be able to complete this comfortably. I always think of guitarists who can strum chords or 'finger-pick' through a chord progression and encourage my students to think similarly.

Dance Orientale needs to maintain a sense of rhythm otherwise the bars 35-38 can sound hesitant rather than thoughtful. The 'Russian' harmonies in bar 31 for example should be clearly voiced.

**AUDIO: TK31. REBIKOV DANCE ORIENTALE**

## **LESSON 25 – THEORY REVIEW III**

**Pg Nos. 60**

My preference is to teach theory from the body of the pieces they are playing, but if exams are to be passed then 'abstracting' the theory is necessary. Here are some typical exam questions you might find on a theory paper at about grade 3.

## **LESSON 26 – E< MAJOR**

**Pg Nos. 61-63**

Now we move to the flat side and introduce two more keys with three accidentals. Firstly Eb. When I teach the RH fingering I simply use C major, apply the accidentals, and the fingers fall naturally and neatly on the correct notes. Then simply start from Eb and hopefully the student will relish the short cut!

The Mozart Andantino falls neatly under the hands but is not without its challenges. Bar 14-15 has the octave leap – I recommend separate practise for this. The double thirds are within the hand but will take some practice. I typically prepare these separately with mini exercises.

**AUDIO: TK32. MOZART ANDANTINO**

## **LESSON 27 – C MINOR**

**Pg Nos. 64-66**

C minor is comfortable partly because of the way the student learnt Eb major (from C). It falls neatly under the hand and my students generally don't have any problems with this key.

The Burgmuller is a favourite of the graded exam. Usually at Grade 4, but LH semiquavers apart I think it is manageable as a transition piece linking grades 3-4. The sudden accents are usefully explained in the context of a 'ghost' story with the wind rattling at the windows and sudden movements in the dark. Many of my students tend to play the staccato arpeggio bars 24-26 too fast so metronome work might be useful here. The C major interlude is unexpected so worth spending some time dramatizing this too – I hear it as an aria with the leaps and sustained phrasing.

Menuetto has Scarlatti's fingerprints all over it. Terrace dynamics, sequenced melodic material, delicate articulation, part writing; a stern test of accurate finger-work. The rather unusual modulation to the subdominant (F minor) at the start of the B section might be worth pointing out.

**AUDIO: TK33. BURGMULLER BALLADE**  
**TK34. SCARLATTI MENUETTO**

## **LESSON 28 – SIGHT-READING**

**Pg Nos. 67**

Typically sight-reading exam papers tend to be awkward to play and somewhat tuneless. They rarely reflect 'real' music which is often easier to sight-read. I have tried throughout to be a bit of both with the sight-reading tests. This exercise definitely falls into the 'piece' category. Once the student has grasped the LH ostinato then the RH falls within a simple chordal melody.

## **LESSON 29 – THEORY REVIEW IV**

**Pg Nos. 68**

A final page of typical exam questions for this book. My recommendation after this is to use old papers to focus the student's knowledge before taking the plunge.

## **LESSON 30 – SCHUMANN FIRST LOSS/BEETHOVEN BAGATELLE IN F**

**Pg Nos. 69-72**

The closing pieces of the book are pointed in the direction of Grade 4. Schumann's first loss is in some ways a continuation of the Mozart Andantino. Certainly the texture with its overlapping between the hands melodic material and occasional leaps makes them partners in crime. I would start the learning process with bars 17-24 and then the final bars 29-32. Once these are comfortable the rest is a breeze.

The final piece, Beethoven's Bagatelle in F, is a challenging piece at this level. Typically the music seems like a collection of arpeggios and can sound like that if little care is given to the sudden shifts in dynamic and abrupt changes in key. This is the first use of 'the other pedal' and in some cases just lifting the pedal does half the work – bar 38 = pp una corde; bar 42 = p tre corde for example is almost achieved just by raising the una corde under the crescendo at bar 41.

**AUDIO: TK35. SCHUMANN FIRST LOSS**  
**TK36. BEETHOVEN BAGATELLE IN F**