

THE
BARBARA SOLÍS
METHOD OF TEACHING



Stimulating instruction of piano and other instruments

for pupils at all levels and of all ages

- introducing a new Rhythm Language

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FOREWORD

Throughout my years as a teacher I have become increasingly aware of the need to bring forth a concept in teaching that would assist pupils of all levels to help themselves when there was no recourse of study available to them.

As I worked within the smaller communities of Alberta, I could not help but notice the plight of pupils who wanted to take music lessons. The scenario was always the same. Someone new comes to the community who is blessed with a few years of musical training and is quickly descended upon by youngsters who want to play the piano. The person becomes "The Teacher" and after a time, leaves the community, for whatever reason. The children are left without any further instruction. After an interval, someone else with a similar background comes into the community and the whole process is repeated.

The children can and do go through as many as two and three teachers in the space of a year, each with individual ideas of teaching. Because the method differs between teachers, the pupils are often required to start all over. This tends to leave the children feeling frustrated, with no sense of anything having been accomplished, and the community wary of strangers who profess to teach music.

Often I have put the question to communities, "Where are all the qualified teachers?" I received the same answers: "They don't want to come" and "They came for a short time and then they left".

When I took up permanent residence in one small community, I determined that even though I knew that one day down the road, it would be necessary for my own growth to leave, I would not leave my beloved pupils without something. And so the idea of a musical legacy was born.

With this in mind, I have written this book in the hopes that all who follow *The Barbara Solis Method of Teaching* might be filled with a kind of learning so that for a time, at least, they would not need a teacher.



INTRODUCTION

My method of teaching is based very simply on experience. During my many years as a professional teacher, certain problems would arise in connection with the discipline I was teaching, for which there was no immediate answer. While I was most appreciative of the vast sources of material on the market for teaching purposes, presentation, etc., and while I attended the various workshops which were and are still being offered in an effort to assist the teacher, these did not always solve the basic problems either. And so I began to look at the world of music and its problems through myself and through the eyes of the children whom I taught.

Although I was considered to be a very gifted child, it was not always easy for me to work with specific problems at the piano, such as a new piece which contained a complex rhythm, or how to best remember a passage from Bach or Schumann. Since it was taken for granted that I knew how to handle the basic elements in music, who was I to speak up and tell my teacher that I really did not know how to work through a particular problem? Such assumptions in place of proper preparatory work eventually became a larger problem and over the long term showed up particularly in my own personal approach to the element of Rhythm.

Memory is another example. As a child, I had an excellent memory. Most of the time I did not even know how I remembered. But the time came, again over a long period of time, when my style of memorization just would not hold up. Then it became very necessary to seek a much more secure approach to remembering one's work.

As the years progressed, it became apparent that I was not a perfect pianist. Alas, how often and how painful it was to be reminded of my inadequacies in areas which were considered to be quite basic. In coming to terms with this reality, I started analyzing every area of my playing to see how I could improve it.

My attention then focussed upon my pupils. Was it possible that they were encountering the same difficulties which I had and that my assumptions would create similar problems for them in future years? I began to wonder if it were possible to develop some kind of

method of teaching to provide a firm foundation to pupils of all ages who came to study with me. At the same time, the method should leave something to help them to open the musical doors for themselves and to be of lasting value to them.

The Barbara Solis Method of Teaching is intended only as an aid to musical studies, as I am totally aware that every teacher has his or her own way of doing things. It is intended to present a way of teaching which may help to stimulate the pupils' interest and give them opportunity to progress at a much more rapid rate, without the boredom that certain types of repetitious study tend to produce.

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CHAPTER 1



READING THE NOTES

During my years as a teacher, it has been my experience that most pupils at some point have difficulty with the reading of the notes.

The material they have absorbed has either been learned through constant repetition, which tends to lead to a laid back approach to this important factor and often to boredom; or the material has been marvellously memorized by the more astute pupils, which can and does hoodwink the unsuspecting teacher into assuming that the pupil knows far more than he or she actually does.

Personally, I depend upon the tried and true way of teaching note reading through the method of “Lines and Spaces”. The pupils have delighted in making up sentences to help them remember their notes of the staff in an entertaining way. It is important not just to include them, but to include them in such a way as to involve them in the actual teaching of note reading.

However, “Lines and Spaces” can also become repetitive. Often they are overlooked simply because there is so much one wishes to cover in a lesson and there is never enough time to do it. In spite of rigorous training in the arena of “Lines and Spaces”, the truth of the matter is that there are very few pupils who can read their bass clef as fluently as their treble clef.

I wrestled with this problem for several months until striking on the idea of how to combine the learning of notes, lines and spaces with what was on the agenda for the lesson. What I was looking for was a way to put fluency, accuracy, and understanding into what was being learned. Also, I wanted something that would give the students the ability to put what was being learned towards new work, so that they would not feel held back when they wanted to progress on their own.

My method of presenting “Note Reading” is covered in the next chapter.

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CHAPTER 2



NOTE READING WITH THE PENCIL

Step One

Have the pupil, no matter what the age, number the bars of the piece to be learned. This gives the little ones an opportunity to practice their numbers. It teaches the older pupils to know where they are at any given point of a lesson and also assists them to learn to play from any area of the composition under study, rather than continually going back to the beginning. The numbering of the bars makes it much easier for the teacher to assess exactly and quickly where the difficulties lie and is helpful in setting out the lesson.

Step Two

Using a keyboard guide, either cardboard or one that appears at the top of the piece for little ones and/or a Staff for older pupils, have the pupil take a pencil (their own is good incentive) and point carefully to the note, calling out its letter name. (See example). Do this three times.

Step Three

For the Little People, when the keyboard guide is familiar at the top of the page or wherever it appears, have the child or pupil take the pencil and call out the letters for the notes in each bar. I recommend this procedure be done first bar by bar, followed by two bars at a time, then four bars at a time and finally the entire selection.

From the example, one might wish to set out the lesson as follows:

| | |
|-------|--------------|
| Bar 1 | three times, |
| Bar 2 | three times, |

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| | |
|--------------|--------------|
| Bars 1 and 2 | three times, |
| Bar 3 | three times, |
| Bar 4 | three times, |
| Bars 1 to 4 | one time, |
| and etc. | |

I would encourage the pupil to go through this exercise three to six times, following the bar numbered outline. The number of times will depend upon the age and ability of the pupil.

In the matter of time values, I suggest to my pupils at the very outset of the exercise to say the letter name followed by a number. The number is representative of a time value which would be greater than 1. For example, one would say for the half note value: "C-2"; or for the dotted half note value when the pupil comes to it, one could say: "E-2, 3"; and for the whole note value which is generally included in beginning studies, one could say: "G-2, 3, 4". Please refer to the examples for clarification of this point.

Whatever the time value of the note, the pupil keeps the pencil pointed at the note or under it until the appropriate numbers have been said to give the note its proper duration. It is very important that the pupil point the pencil at the note or under it, and not have the pencil wandering all over the page.

To ensure that the exercise has been well absorbed and not merely memorized, the teacher could challenge the pupil in a little game of note reading. Pointing at random notes throughout the song, the teacher awards the score to the pupil for each correct note. For each incorrect note, the teacher is awarded the score. Given unexpectedly, this little challenge does help keep the children on their toes, for they do so want to excel.

Another method I use to double check that note reading has not just been committed to memory is to have the pupil read the exercise from back to front. This also provides a bit of a challenge and some fun throughout the lesson.

If the child is very gifted, I employ these challenges in the first class. Otherwise they are best left until the pupil has had a little time to work with the notes.

CHAPTER 3



NOTE READING WITH THE RHYTHM AND THE BEAT

Pupils need a break from sitting, no matter how short or how long the lesson may be. A break gives the little ones a chance to stand up and stretch their muscles. It keeps the older ones from falling asleep at the keyboard, as they are wont to do after a long day at school or a late night before their class.

For this section of Note Reading, you may wish to provide your pupils with a music stand.

Step One

Have the pupil stand up either behind the piano bench (this is dependent upon his/her eyesight), in front of the bench, or in front of a music stand quite apart from the piano. As the pupil now calls out the letter names, have him or her clap his or her hands as the notes are called out.

At the time values, for those that are longer than the quarter note or representative of the 1 value, the pupil holds the hands together and says the letter name, once again followed by 2; 2, 3; or 2, 3, 4 - as these numbers pertain to the value of the note being held.

The main thing to remember is that whatever format you followed by using the pencil, you are now having the pupil substitute the hands for the pencil. So do keep consistency in mind.

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Step Two

Now explain the time signature in your own way. Emphasize to the pupil that according to the top figure of the two numbers that appear at the beginning of the piece, the corresponding number of beats shall be needed for each bar.

Having the pupil use a foot, ask him or her to stamp out the beats for each bar as the letters are now called out. This should be done two or three times, or until the pupil feels comfortable stamping out the beats and calling out the letter names.

Step Three

Finally, have the pupil combine the rhythmic element (notes written on the page) by clapping the hands, and the beat element by stamping the foot, while simultaneously calling out the letter names.

I have found it a good idea to start with the longer notes of duration and have the pupil practice these several times with me and then to incorporate them with the surrounding bars. An exercise set out in a two bar or four bar format is helpful, but always be sure to include the entire number of measures at the conclusion.

I would like to recommend that, as part of the fun, the teacher also stand and participate in this exercise with the pupil. It is infinitely more fun for the pupil when there is participation from the teacher.

Teachers, please note that there will be times when this exercise is not as easy as it might appear. I would advise a short run through ahead of the lesson, so as to be sure that what you are attempting to teach can be demonstrated without fault.

When the pupils are thoroughly adept at this exercise, a game can be played whereby the teacher is the rhythm, while the pupil is the beat. Then the roles are reversed. The letter names can be called out by one or the other, as well.

As aforementioned, this segment of note reading provides a necessary physical break and a little mental stimulation, which is of utmost importance if one wishes to keep the full attention of the pupil for the span of the required lesson. It further reinforces what has been done with the pencil. However you may wish to present this part of the note reading, be sure there is continuity between the exercises.

CHAPTER 4



RHYTHM AND BEAT - STANDING

Perhaps one of the most difficult areas for the majority of pupils in the study of music is that of truly understanding the rhythmic content of a piece. Sooner or later, the simpler rhythms can be comprehended through the method of counting. With the addition of dots, rests and sixteenth notes, the student actually sets up a mental block and is totally incapable of unravelling the rhythmic challenge. Even when their comprehension of rhythm is excellent, I have yet to find pupils (apart from the genius level) who can read with accuracy, fluency and understanding everything as it appears on the musical page.

In order to tackle this problem, I utilize a “Rhythm Language”. Each note is given a rhythm name; dots are referred to as “dots”; and rests are also called by their proper appellation. For those teachers who would like guidance with respect to this “Rhythm Language”, I have included a guide at the end of this chapter.

Whatever form of rhythm you will be employing, it is important to remember that it should carry on where the assignments for note reading left off. It should interrelate with what has gone before and whatever will follow, to give continuity to the lesson. It is therefore of utmost importance that the assignment from the previous lesson be reviewed, following each segment to its completion.

If the lesson has been written up carefully and has been adhered to closely in practice, the pupil should have very little hesitancy with the Note Reading assignments and should be able to read at least four bars without interruption. Of course, this will depend upon the ability and the age of the pupil. Ultimately, the goal is to enable the pupil to read fluently and at sight a given passage of music, first saying the letter names and then with correct rhythm and beat.

If inconsistencies, incorrect notes or hesitation occur, these should be noted (I usually circle these in red) and they should be reviewed for an additional week. I suggest that the particular circled error be reviewed at a minimum of ten times. If there are more than two errors I usually call for a review of the whole passage at least three times, as well as the specific errors.

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Having to review circled errors ten times acts as an excellent deterrent to future note reading mistakes. I have found this to be especially effective with my seniors. Therefore, taking the time to hear the correction of the error should not be overlooked. The pupil tends to realize the teacher is serious about this particular error being corrected.

The main point then is to be sure that before the rhythm and beat exercises are assigned, the note reading assignments are understood and not merely glossed over by the teacher or guessed at by the pupil.

Step One

Set up a rhythm language suitable for the piece of music under study. Note the chart in the lesson book or at the top of the page. Be sure that the pupil can readily see this chart, so that it can be intelligently utilized.

Step Two

Have the pupil stand either behind the piano bench or in front of a music stand and review the chart several times, while clapping hands for the rhythm.

Step Three

If the rhythm presents no problem, discuss the beat. Have the pupil go through the entire piece of music, stamping out the beat with the feet.

Step Four

Now look at the rhythm for the treble clef. Have the pupil, using the chart when necessary, clap out the rhythm for the entire Treble clef. This may be done in small sections or larger ones, again dependent upon the ability of the pupil. Follow the same format for the Bass clef. In the case of more advanced work, have the pupil go through each voice where double voicing appears.

Step Five

Have the pupil now add the beat. Be certain before the lesson that, as the teacher, you are totally capable of doing what you are requesting from your pupil. Each clef and each voice should be practiced until fluent. You can add a little theory at this time to demonstrate to the pupil how the

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rhythm of each bar and each clef adds up to the time signature. At this juncture, you can also point out rhythmic patterns and offer small challenges within the lesson to see if the pupil can distinguish one pattern from another.

I generally do this two ways: (1) review the rhythms and then clap one and ask pupil to identify it as (a), (b) or (c); and (2) clap one of the rhythms and have pupil clap it back. The children love these games and you should give some form of reward for perfect scores.

If this is begun at an early level, the pupils will have less of a problem with ear training as they approach more advanced levels. It does make the job of ear training and sight reading infinitely easier for the senior teacher when the pupil is ready for this stage of study.

As with the Note Reading assignments, observe very carefully all weaknesses or hesitations in reading the rhythm and keeping the beat. It is suggested that these problem areas be reviewed with the pupil in the class and assigned for home study until they are overcome.

CHAPTER 5



THE RHYTHM LANGUAGE CHARTS

Chart for 4/4 Time

| <u>Kind of Note</u> | <u>Rhythm Name</u> | <u>Value</u> |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------|--------------|
| Quarter | <i>dum</i> | one |
| Half | <i>dum dee</i> | two |
| Dotted Half | <i>dum dee dot</i> | three |
| Whole | <i>dum dee dah day</i> | four |
| Eighth (single) | <i>did</i> | half of one |
| Double Eighth | <i>did dle</i> | equal to one |
| Sixteenth | <i>da</i> | 1/4 of one |
| Dotted Quarter followed by Eighth | <i>Dum dot a</i> | one and 1/2 |

How to Use

For the Quarter note the pupil claps the hands together one time and beats with the foot one stamp.

For the Half note, the pupil claps and holds the hands together, while saying, “*dum dee*”, and stamps the foot two times to indicate that there are two quarter notes or *dum* notes for every half or *dum dee* note.

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For the Dotted Half note, the pupil claps the hands and holds them together, while saying, “*dum dee dot*”. The foot is stamped three times.

For the Whole note, the pupil claps and holds the hands together, while saying, “*dum dee dah day*”. The foot is stamped four times to indicate four *dum* notes to each whole note.

The eighth notes are best taught in pairs until the pupil understands the function of the single eighth note. This would apply to younger pupils only. Have the pupil clap the pairs of eighth notes and stamp but one time. For some pupils this takes some time to master and should be approached with a lot of fun.

The sixteenth notes are best approached in groups of four, with the pupil clapping quickly four times, while stamping the foot one time.

For the dotted quarter followed by an eighth, have the pupil clap the *dum*, holding the hands together for the *dot* and clapping again on the eighth. The foot will be stamped on the *dum* and the *dot*. Teachers who approach this with a tremendous sense of rhythm will find that their pupils will enjoy the bounce and the feel of it. Once learned, pupils will not have any fear of such passages.

In more advanced work where there is an eighth note followed by a dot and a sixteenth, I recommend saying, “*did dot a*”, and having the pupil stamp the foot on the *did*, if the above chart would be applicable.

Chart for 6/8 Time

| <u>Kind of Note</u> | <u>Rhythm Name</u> | <u>Value</u> |
|------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------|
| Eighth | <i>dum</i> | one |
| Quarter | <i>dum dee</i> | two |
| Dotted Quarter | <i>dum dee dot</i> | three |
| Half | <i>dum dee dah day</i> | four |
| Half with a dot | <i>dum dee dot, 4, 5, 6</i> | six |
| Two sixteenths | <i>did dle</i> | equal to one |
| Single sixteenth | <i>did</i> | 1/2 of one |
| thirty second (single) | <i>da</i> | 1/4 of one |
| Dotted Eighth | <i>dum dot</i> | one and 1/2 |

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How To Use

Use this chart exactly as you would for 4/4 time, except be sure to point out that, as it is for compound time, the bars will only require two beats of the foot, to each.

Note

Where there are groups of three eighth notes, I like to say ,“*Butterfly*”, with the stamp of the foot coming on the syllable “*But*”. This seems to give more of a swing to the piece and lends definite rhythmic interest for the pupil.

Other Compound Times

In 3/8, 9/8, or 12/8 the same chart is used as for 6/8 time. However, it will be explained to the pupil that the beat is derived by dividing the top number by 3. This number of beats will then be stamped out by the foot.

This chart is also useful for compound times, such as 3/16, 6/16 and 9/16 and 12/16.

In compound times such as 9/4 and 12/4, the quarter note chart would best be followed.

When pupils are trying to determine a rhythm for a given exercise (whether it is for the piano or for a theoretical exercise) and when it is of extreme difficulty, they should look for the smallest duration. Then they should base which chart to use on this note.

If a piece is difficult to work out for the 4/4 chart even though it is in a simple time, I very often ask the pupil to think of the exercise in terms of the 6/8 chart (that is making the eighth note the *dum*). The proper place for the beat must be determined. Teach the student to stamp the foot at that point and not where we would expect it to come in the normal 6/8 time chart.

CHAPTER 6



CHARTS FOR RESTS

Chart for 4/4 Time

| <u>Kind of Rest</u> | <u>Rhythm Name</u> | <u>Value</u> |
|--|--------------------|--------------|
| Quarter Rest | Rest | one |
| Half Rest | Rest, 2 | two |
| Dotted Half Rest | Rest, 2, 3 | three |
| Whole Rest | Rest, 2, 3, 4 | four |
| Eighth rest followed by eighth note | Rest, <i>dle</i> | equal to one |
| Sixteenth rest - followed by note | Rest, <i>da</i> | 1/4 each |

Whenever a rest appears in a piece of music, I encourage my pupils to call it by its proper name - that of rest - while opening their hands and putting their palms upward. This little added exercise helps their flexibility with wrists and arms. I have seen some pupils become quite artistic in their movements, too. Even though there are rests throughout the composition, the beat with the feet continues just as it would if the notes were in place of the rests.

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Chart for Compound Times

| <u>Kind of Rest</u> | <u>Rhythm Name</u> | <u>Value</u> |
|--|------------------------|----------------------------|
| Eighth rest | Rest | one |
| Quarter rest | Rest, 2 | two |
| Dotted quarter rest | Rest, 2, 3 | three |
| Dotted Half rest | Rest, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 | six |
| Sixteenth rest followed by sixteenth note | Rest, <i>da</i> , etc. | 1/4 each 4 equal to one |

CHAPTER 7



MUSICAL SIGNS

As pupils become more familiar with the notes, the rhythm and the beat, we must be certain that they are able to understand the other musical signs which will invariably be found throughout the piece of music they are studying. Most teachers will have some way for the student to indicate that particular sign. If you do not, then here are a few suggestions.

The Tie

When the piece calls for a tie, it should be called exactly that. If the pupil is at the note reading stage, he/she might say, “C2 tie 2”, or whatever.

If the pupils are in the Rhythm and Beat exercises, the hands are best held together when the tie comes up. If the tie falls where a beat would come, again be certain that the pupil stamps the foot at the appropriate place.

The Pause

The pause also cannot be overlooked and should be called by its proper name. Be sure to remind the pupil that there is no further beat required on the pause. The note name should be followed by the word “Pause”, as should the rhythm name, with the beat falling on the appropriate place.

The Sharps and Flats

In note reading exercises, it is best to have the pupil remember to call out the note which appears in the key signature as a sharp or a flat by that name. Too often when a pupil encounters a key other than C Major, he/she forgets the altered note. Once learned that way, it is difficult to

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correct. So, for example, in the Key of G Major, wherever an “F” note makes its appearance, it should be called “F Sharp”, not merely “F”.

In coordinating the beat with this note name, I have the pupil set the foot down simultaneously with the letter. The word “sharp” or “flat” is then said at a rate which will fit before the next beat falls.

The rhythm and the beat tend to become confused in the pupil's mind if the beat goes down with the accidental, rather than the letter. You may have your own way of presenting this and as long as it works, then use it.

Accidentals

All accidentals should be read as they appear by their correct names. If the accidental affects the same note more than once in the bar, be consistent and have the pupil read it out again.

In more advanced work, be sure that the pupil studies every voice for the details as discussed and is able to follow each line of music through, just as if it were the melody.

Sharps and flats, naturals and accidentals are read as part of the Note Reading exercises and are not referred to in the Rhythm and Beat exercises. However, the pause and the tie are referred to as suggested in the foregoing notes.

CHAPTER 8



RHYTHM AND BEAT AT THE PIANO

Once the Rhythm and Beat have been understood the exercises are transferred to the piano.

I recommend that the pupil learn to keep the beat with the feet, while playing and saying the Rhythm Language. This assists greatly in working towards a more perfect sense of timing, especially for those pupils who find time a challenge.

For the younger pupils, I try to keep the exercises for the Rhythm and Beat assignments similar to what was set down for the Note Reading assignments - that is with reference to the number of bars and which bars, etc. which you would wish them to study.

For the more advanced work, again have the different lines of voicing studied, such as soprano, alto, tenor and bass. Then put them together, first in the treble clef and later in the bass.

I prefer the pupils to study their exercises hands separately and then hands together, as this gives them a more thorough knowledge of what is on the page of music.

If the younger pupils are ready for simple duet playing, having them say their rhythm while keeping the beat is an entertaining way of hearing two rhythms at the same time. Where it is technically possible, exchange the parts so that the pupils have a total knowledge of what is being played, rather than just the one part.

With the more advanced work, the pupils play the treble and then the bass, while calling out the Rhythm Language and keeping the beat with the teacher. The latter does one or the other, without calling out the Rhythm Language but keeping the beat. This is so helpful in preparing pupils who may be interested in ensemble work, as it is very necessary for them to be able to listen to the other participants.

When the pupils are preparing for a formal recital, the beat is discouraged and I try to get them to feel the beat with their body. Generally, if they have understood the foundation, this is not a problem. Most pupils have kept almost perfect time during a performance. By this I mean that

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they may be off just a fraction. However, I no longer encounter the situation where the time is a disaster, as I did so many years ago.

The main thing is to be very exact and let nothing go. It is easier to spend a few moments making sure the difficulty is thoroughly mastered in the class. There will be infinitely less frustration on the part of the pupil when that particular Rhythm and Beat is met with again along the path of instruction.

To reiterate, when the musical signs of Pause, Tie and Rest are encountered, it is important to include them as the Rhythm Language is being called out and the Beat is being kept accordingly.

Obviously, accidentals or key signature signs do not work in this category.

CHAPTER 9



THE SOL FAH METHOD OF MEMORIZATION

The Sol Fah approach to memorization and sight singing is the outcome of my personal studies in Spain. This is the method by which pupils in Spain are encouraged to sight sing and memorize. I had never really been taught in a specific way before to memorize, for I seemed to have an infallible memory. Finding it a new concept, I struggled tremendously to try to switch my mind over to the idea. Only at the insistence of my professor did I persevere.

It was some years before I saw the benefits of using the sol fah as an important tool in aiding memory work, sight singing, harmony (written) and transposition, to name but a few areas. I also realized that if the Sol Fah were introduced as a part of the early learning process, it possibly could help students whose strong point is not memory. As well, it could benefit those pupils who memorize easily. I have been delighted with the results thus far.

Before attempting the sol fah, I usually start the pupils with the simple scale of C Major. I have them sing this in sol fah language as follows:

| | |
|---|----------|
| C | Doh |
| D | Re |
| E | mi |
| F | Fah |
| G | Soh |
| A | Lah |
| B | Si or ti |
| C | Doh |

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The pupils accompany themselves with the proper fingering for the C Major scale. Or if they are able to reach the pedals, I ask them to combine the sol fah scale with a pedal exercise using one finger only. The pupils learn to sing the scale with the piano and without the piano. Later, triads and intervals are introduced, as these points come up in their theoretical training.

I found that it was best to keep C, no matter what key, sharped or flatted, as the “Doh”, which I call the “Immovable Doh”. I have concluded that if children can refer to C as “Doh”, no matter what key they are playing in, they avoid a lot of confusion. If you use the “Movable Doh” and are having problems, you might wish to try the “Immovable Idea”, as it really is much simpler.

CHAPTER 10



SOL FAH WITH THE PENCIL

Sol fah with the pencil is approached in the same way that pencil work is introduced in the beginning for note reading. This overlapping tends to interrelate the subject matter and further cement itself into the child's mind.

As with note reading, I am inclined to use a bar by bar method, increasing this to two bars, then to four and so on. Finally, the pupil is asked to read the entire selection with the pencil .

In checking the assignment the following week, be sure to look for any inconsistencies or weaknesses. These should be singled out and reviewed at the class. Depending on how many faults have occurred, they should be reassigned as review or repeat exercises. If a firm foundation is established at the outset, there will be far fewer problems once the pupil has grasped the sol fah idea.

In order to detect memorization by rote, a random sol fah check can be made by selecting various notes out of their order and asking the pupil to identify them by their sol fah names.

CHAPTER 11



SOL FAH STANDING AT THE PIANO

Before sol fah standing at the piano can be full mastered, it is important for the pupil to have a thorough grasp of the Rhythm and Beat aspects of the assigned work. When this is secure, the pupil is asked to stand, as the break from sitting increases attention span. While clapping the rhythm which is written on the page and keeping the beat (refer to the time signature) with the feet, the pupil calls out the sol fah names.

In the case of extended note values, such as half notes, whole notes, or dotted notes, follow up with whatever you used in the initial note reading assignments. For example, the half note can be read as “doh 2”; the dotted half note can be read as “doh 2, 3” or “doh, 2, dot”, etc. Rests are read as “rest 2”, “rest 2, 3”, or whatever. Be consistent. By consistent interrelating, the material is firmly impressed upon the pupil's mind.

When the pupil is standing for sol fah, it is a good idea to encourage him or her to sing as the sol fah is called out. I find that this develops the ability to follow the musical line, while setting the melody in the mind. It is a great aid to ear training, particularly where melody playbacks are concerned. Be on the lookout for any weak areas and encourage the pupil to review or repeat if these are in evidence.

Where there are two or more notes in double note or chord form, as with the pencil, it is a good idea to decide how you want these to be read - from top to bottom or bottom to top. I favour the latter. In this challenge, the sol fah names are to be properly fitted to the beat, which means the names will either be speeded up slightly or slowed.

This policy applies as well to the use of sharps or flats. Very often, the speed of naming the double notes, chords or accidentals (or the accidentals which are part of the key signature) determines how simply and accurately the pupil will complete the exercise.

The proper application of this point will lend a certain rhythm or flow to the spoken part. Pupils quite often find this helpful in getting the swing of the melody. Since most youngsters like an

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upbeat, it appeals to them. Consequently, they are more likely to remember the passage than if they are just standing and reciting the sol fah names.

CHAPTER 12



SOL FAH AT THE PIANO

When the assignments of sol fah with the pencil and sol fah standing have been completed, the pupil is then ready to transfer this preparatory work to the keyboard or other instrument, as may be the case. This part of the assignment is carried out hands separately and in parts where two or three voiced fugues are being taught. I encourage the pupils to keep the beat with their feet and to sing along with the sol fah as much as they can. This depends upon the voice range and development of voice placement.

Any expression which may have been discussed or other detailed work is now also included with the sol fah at the piano. In other words, expressive crescendos and diminuendos are combined with the actual sol fah. Other details, such as staccato marks, accents, etc., are also not overlooked.

When each hand can be expressed faultlessly, the pupil is then asked to do the assignment hands together (where applicable). The pupil has the choice of either singing the sol fah to the treble clef, if this is where the majority of the melody line lies, or using the rhythm and the beat. There are few pupils who can actually play an assignment hands together, while singing the sol fah to one clef or the other. Personally, I have had a few pupils who could do this and enjoy it.

To be able to sing the sol fah to either clef while both hands are playing is a feat itself. It develops the memory to such a refined level that it is without doubt one of the most beneficial aids to memorization.

Personally, I utilize this format for memorizing particularly difficult passages. I feel that if I can retain the concentration that is so necessary to do this, I really know that passage. Senior pupils who eventually reach this level find it most stimulating and rewarding, as it assists them with other areas of study for which a great deal of memory may be required.

CHAPTER 13



MEMORY WORK

Unless there is a very specific reason why the pupil cannot or need not, I require my students to memorize assignments for all my classes. I remember only too vividly the many times I was called upon as a young student to play something while in the company of visitors or friends. Just as clearly, I recall painful embarrassment having to say that I was sorry I could not, because I did not have anything ready.

As a young matron, I had the very good fortune to study with Mr. Lloyd Powell. One of the most important things he taught me was to always have a composition or two at the ready. Not only was it good practice to play by memory, but it gave an opportunity to test a piece for the sensitive areas still needing to be strengthened before actual concert performance.

Playing a new piece by memory is a little like wearing a new pair of shoes or a new garment, as we don't quite know what to expect from it. Often there are certain adjustments to be made so that the shoes or garments or selections to be performed are comfortable. As with shoes and garments, pieces become comfortable with time. They become, as it were, old friends.

Performing for one's friends also gives a measure of confidence that may be difficult to determine if one does not afford oneself this opportunity. While performing from memory can be very difficult for some pupils and easy for others, there is still always a measure of excitement that goes along with this aspect of musical study.

I have found that if the basics have been closely studied and thoroughly understood, with the sol fah mastered to the best of the pupil's ability, there are far fewer errors and breakdowns in memory. Although the pupil through nervousness or excitement may execute a wrong note or momentarily forget something within a passage, either in one hand or the other, there is not a total breakdown. Generally the pupil is able to carry on until the balance is restored.

In a study which I carried out in my classes, I found that, when something did not go quite as planned, those pupils who worked with the note reading, rhythm and beat and sol fah assignments had more confidence than the pupils who just did their own thing. Usually when this latter occurs,

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the pupil will then see the validity of what I have been trying to teach and will resort to a more secure method of memorization as opposed to their own ideas.

CHAPTER 14



MEMORY WORK WITH THE SOL FAH

Once the sol fah has been read and the standing exercises and keyboard exercises mastered, the pupil then proceeds with the memory assignment using the sol fah. For pupils who are totally unfamiliar with the memorization concepts of the sol fah, I usually find that small assignments in the beginning are better than large ones. I suggest that the assignment be from one to four bars. Further, each clef with the bars from one to four should be studied not less than ten times for the first week.

The music should be set up in front of the pupil, but should be referred to as little as possible as the week progresses. As soon as possible, the pupil should attempt to do the sol fah exercises without the benefit of the written music and become familiar with where the music is on the keyboard or other instrument.

As with the previous exercises, rhythm and beat are employed. The pupil is encouraged to sing the sol fah to the most prominent melodic line. He or she should attempt to do this for the secondary line, which is usually the bass clef or inner voices in fugal work, or another two or three voiced works.

When each hand has been practiced separately, the hands are played together and the pupil has the choice of either sol fah to the melodic line or rhythm language. As pupils progress, it is a good idea to get them to sing the sol fah to one hand or another as the hands are played together. This is not only challenging but develops their memory to a high degree in music and other educational subjects.

The benefits from sol fah are far reaching, as the aural senses begin to develop. Pupils seem to be able to work much more easily with ear training concepts, such as intervals and the play back melodies required in examination work. The sol fah seems to assist the development of voice placement amongst the younger pupils. Often I am able to determine whether a pupil would be more interested in the area of voice than, for example, studying an instrument. Most children like to sing and, when they know that their voices are going where they should, they have a measure of confidence that would not otherwise be there.

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I have encouraged those pupils who are required to play choruses at Sunday School or "Happy Birthday" to those celebrating their special days in school to write out the particular song using the sol fah. Then I have taught them to put a rudimentary keyboard harmony to the piece. Utilizing the rhythm language, they are able to produce a satisfactory work that they can call their own. Pupils tend to remember something they have had to work out much better than if it were set down for them by the teacher. The sol fah is therefore useful for teaching pupils to play by ear, while employing correct concepts in the areas of rhythm and beat and harmony.

I have also found the sol fah a tremendous aid in the teaching of Transposition and Keyboard Harmony. My pupils begin transposition at an early grade at the keyboard through the Sol Fah. For those who wish to pursue it on a more senior level, it has proven invaluable, especially when they are asked to sight sing in the original key and then in the transposed key.

In the study of harmony the sol fah has again proven itself, as has the rhythm and beat part of the course. Few pupils can readily hum out loud or to themselves a given written exercise. Through the discipline of the sol fah, this chore is considerably eased in their study of harmony.

While my pupils do not always receive the sol fah graciously in the beginning, once they perceive its vitality, generally their method of memorization breaks down and they become staunch adherents of sol fah. It is to be hoped that your pupils will come to realize the value of sol fah in the same way that mine have.

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CHAPTER 15



CONCLUSION

This concludes *The Barbara Solis Method of Teaching*. I have set up several examples along with each chapter or area of the course with as clear and detailed an explanation as possible.

Please remember that the method has been designed to apply to any particular course of study or music your pupils may wish to undertake and will also work with pupils studying various instruments, including the voice.

