

TALKING TECH

Get More for Your Money!

BY MARIENNE USZLER

Using technology in your studio doesn't always mean fussing with cables or experimenting with new programs. It need not even mean buying equipment or software. You already have things on hand that you could use to better advantage. For instance ... the MIDI disks or CDs that you have purchased as part of your *Piano Adventures*® library.

Yes, they are designed as accompaniments to the pieces in all the Lesson, Performance, and Technique & Artistry books. You may be using them as the “dessert” after a piece or an exercise has been worked on, or to enhance recital performances. It's possible that you may also be using them to stimulate interest in a particular piece. But, wait—as the infomercials always claim—there's more!

These exciting accompaniments can be used for rhythm and listening experiences, too. Some of them may work better in a group setting, but all of them may be used with individual students. Several suggest ways to use rhythm instruments you might already possess, or perhaps these ideas may motivate you to add a few rhythm instruments to your studio.


Remember—these are done with the MIDI disk or the CD accompaniments!

LEVEL 1

Lesson Book: Forest Drums, page 26 (Mm. 1-8; Mm. 17-28)

Use a tambourine.

1) Student taps on beat 1 of each measure.

2) Then student taps using 

Performance Book: A Merry March, page 12

Have the student march energetically around the room.

(I know this sounds ordinary, but it promotes full-body movement, an experience too often lacking in a piano lesson.)

Performance Book: The Crazy Clown, page 16

How many of the sounds can the student identify?

(There are many different sounds, all of them quite short. This promotes careful listening. It's not important if you can't name them all. It's the listening and trying that are important.)

LEVEL 2

Lesson Book: I Am the King, page 18

Use (a) drum(s)

1) Student drums the rhythm “I Am the King” each time it occurs.

2) Student drums on beats 1 and 3 in measures with the left-hand melody, then drums the “I Am the King” rhythm in measures where it occurs.

3) Create the rhythm you want to drum for the last four measures.

Technique & Artistry Book: Hound Dog Boogie, page 26

Student does “Flying Fingers” on the fallboard.

Move left hand up or down as required in the piece.

Listen to audio files for these examples!

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LEVEL 3A

Lesson Book: 7th Street Blues, page 14

1) Student claps on beats 2 and 4 (like a jazzier would, with body “feel”)

2) Student then claps on beats 2 and 4 in most measures; in measures 3 and 7 student claps on beats 2, 3, 4

(This gets the student to differentiate between on-beat and off-beat pulses. Feeling strong off-beats is typical of jazz.)

Lesson Book: Land of the Silver Birch, page 15

1) Student taps/claps the rhythm heard in the accompaniment. (Have student discover that it's the right-hand rhythm in the last line.)

2) Student plays the right-hand rhythm and notes from M. 13, two octaves higher, throughout the piece

3) Student plays the right-hand rhythm from M. 13, two octaves higher, but creates an original motive using the notes of the D Minor chord.

(This is a listen-to-something-else-while-you-play experience, like being part of an ensemble.)

Lesson Book: Cool Walkin' Bass, page 34

Student steps/stamps and sways body on beats 1 and 3, and clicks fingers on beats 2 and 4

(Here's another chance to engage in full-body movements. Encourage strong, jazzy body language.)

Performance Book: Carnival of Venice, page 4

Student blocks the chords as they change, but with eyes closed!



(This teaches the student to anticipate the harmonic changes.)

Performance Book: The Great Wall of China, page 22

1) Student discovers the pentatonic scale used in the right-hand melody, probably in this position:



2) Using this scale an octave higher than the right hand, improvise a descant melody in Mm. 1-8, Mm. 17-23, and Mm. 28-31 using this rhythm



Do another improvisation in this way, but with eyes closed! (This is a more complex listen-while-you-play experience.)

All of these activities are ways to use the MIDI disks or CDs in addition to having the student play the piano with the accompaniment. When students have varied experiences with a piece—especially those that intensify the rhythmic feel—you can be sure that will translate into a more rhythmic piano-playing performance, too. As you noticed, the activities grew more complex and challenging as the level increased. You can create similar—or even more ingenious—activities as you work with your own students.

Remember—the accompaniments can have multiple uses. And it's a way for you to capitalize on your investment! ■■■