



Practical Solutions for Approaching the Classics

Most children would tire of a steady diet of master composer melodies, no matter how easy or varied. It's a good idea to include a variety of musical styles in a student's musical fare. Schaum's series Making Music Method and Piano for Adults include many simplified classics in all levels along with a tasteful variety of other musical styles.

Books with Variety

Collections of piano music that include classics can fill this need while acquainting students with master composers. Students enjoy playing familiar melodies - and many classical pieces are already familiar to them through cell phone ring tones, commercials, and in TV shows such as "Little Einsteins." Schaum has a series that mixes classics with folk songs, jazz and patriotic pieces, providing both variety and familiarity:

Gold Star Favorites

(Primer to Level 4)

In this series, simplified classical excerpts are themes from symphonies, operas, ballets, concertos, oratorios, chamber music, vocal and choral literature.

And to appeal to the 'electronic' generation, orchestrated CD accompaniments are included for each piece. Clever arrangements with flashes of humor, these accompaniments make the piano solo into showy

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Introducing Master Composers

By Wesley Schaum

Every teacher has aspirations of grooming students to a level of proficiency at which they can play music by great composers in its original form. This goal of playing original masterworks is unquestionably worthy. There are, unfortunately, several obstacles to overcome on the road to this goal.

Music in the Early Levels

One problem is that there is almost no original piano music by master composers written for students in Primer Level, Level 1 and Level 2. As students advance further through Level 3, Level 4, etc. they find increasingly more original music by the great composers. In Level 7 and beyond, original masterworks are plentiful. The question is how to select music, especially at the early levels, that will prepare pupils for the great composers.



The Old School

Eighty years ago, beginning students commonly spent most of their time on scales and exercises. This dull routine continued until they had developed adequate proficiency to begin original classics. Although there is tremendous value in practicing technique, it is now generally agreed that this approach is outdated and that some way must be found to let students of any age play real music from the very start.

One solution is to provide simple arrangements of folk tunes and nursery rhymes. Such arrangements can hardly be criticized, since this music was not written for the keyboard in the first place, but more probably created for the unaccompanied human voice. This music may be all right for a very young child, but is unsuitable for older students. An older child or an adult man or woman will want to start with music of mature appeal.

Appeal of Classics Must be Nurtured

Another problem, especially with a child, is that original classics often have little appeal unless the student's musical taste has

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Solutions (cont.)

performances that students can enjoy playing for friends and family.

Specialized Albums of Classics

The Schaum Classic Melodies books are planned as a perfect introduction to many master composers focusing on ballet, opera and symphonic literature. All books in the series range from Primer Level to early Level 1 and are suitable for students of all ages.

Great Ballets • Great Composers **Great Operas • Great Symphonies**

Each book contains short, one-page themes with optional duet accompaniments. There are short stories and humorous anecdotes about the composers and their music. Some simplified piano music is also included.

Classical Composer Collections

For those who want more emphasis on the classics, Schaum has a series that helps students develop an appreciation for the world's greatest music.

Easy Master Themes (Primer to Level 4)

This series features respectful arrangements of famous themes from orchestral, opera, oratorio, vocal, chamber music and piano literature.

Focus on Single Composers

Each album in this series has famous themes every student should know, in a wide range of styles including symphonies, chamber music, vocal literature and opera, as well as piano. Tasteful arrangements retain the character, style and mood of the original.

Best of Bach • Best of Beethoven **Best of Chopin • Best of Schubert** **Best of Tchaikowsky** (Level 4 - 5)



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Web site: www.schaumpiano.net
E-Mail: info@schaumpiano.net
Toll-Free: 1-800-786-5023
Fax: (262) 241-1063

Introducing Master Composers (cont.)

been carefully developed. In these days of cable TV, video games, computers, iPods, the internet, heavily publicized professional sports and movies, young students are looking for music they can more immediately relate to. They also enjoy playing familiar music that can be shared with their friends.

Developing Musical Taste

The music we choose for our pupils will, in the long run, help mold their musical taste - something of lifelong significance. One of the important aims of keyboard teaching is to expose our students to a wide range of musical styles - especially the classics.

Start Early and Allow Time

Student acquaintance with master composers should begin quite early. Fortunately, classical music is now widely used on television commercials, some children's programs, and even on cell phone ring tones. Encourage parents to take their children to performances of local children's or community choirs, youth and professional symphony orchestras, and free orchestra, band and choir performances at their high school. You could also post notices of upcoming performances in your studio.

In selecting repertoire for your students to learn, a dilemma is created by the scarcity of master keyboard literature in original form for the early levels. There are two alternatives, you can use original music by educational composers or use simplified arrangements. Most progressive teachers use a thoughtful mixture of both.

A Musical Compromise

Simplified melodies of the master composers are a logical solution and serve three very sound educational purposes. First, they enable students to experience and sample music of the classics at a much earlier level than possible with the originals. Second, they help to foster a love and appreciation of good music, which prepares them for more serious music study later. Third, they make master themes available to many students who may never progress to the point where they can play the original. It is far better to have played a simplified melody by Mozart than to have played nothing by Mozart. This is a musical compromise for pedagogical purposes that is sometimes misunderstood.

Simple Psychology

An important consideration in introducing the classics is student motivation. There is a simple psychology here. Titles of pieces, illustrations, lyrics and attractive cover designs, especially on sheet music, are very important to children and help motivate their progress. Original titles such as *Bouree*, *Air*, *Melody* or *Sonatina* have very little appeal, particularly to younger pupils. This is the reason that classic melodies are often retitled when simplified, although the original title is frequently shown as a subtitle.

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