

## Group III – Louis Lumbrical Helps Handy Harry Stand Up

### *Lesson III-1 – Fingers Beckon “Come Here”, Wave “Bye Bye”*

Here we review the work of Louis Lumbrical by isolating it from other movements. We confirm the pupil’s familiarity with the unique action of flexing the finger as a whole. Many pupils when asked to flex the whole finger will curl it instead – hence our current emphasis on a flat finger flexion. Later on curling and flexing will be integrated (see lesson III-13, *Handy Harry Revs His Legs*), but first they must be clearly differentiated.

- Lay your hand on its back on the table and try Handy Harry’s ‘sitting up’ movement again. Make sure it’s the Louis Lumbrical movement and not Freddie Flexor. The fingers don’t curl at all, they stay straight and simply ‘bend from the waist.’ The entire group of fingers stays almost flat and beckon “come here,” not just the tips. [illustration 21 - already done before]
- Now bring your arm up in the air and keep beckoning...
- Turn your hand over and do the same movement – now Louis Lumbrical is waving “bye bye” instead of saying “come here.” [illustration21A done before]

Also note that it’s not the whole hand waving “bye bye,” just the whole fingers. The wrist stays fairly bent, only the lumbricals bend and unbend.

### *Lesson III-2 – Louis Lumbrical Saves Handy Harry from Falling Off a Cliff*

- Lay your fingers down flat on the table, and mash all your fingers and your palm into the table top. Really mash the underpads of your four fingers into the surface. Your whole hand should be flat as a pancake.
- Now begin to slide your hand towards you until the heel of your hand begins to slip off the edge of the table. Handy Harry slides like a snake out to the edge of the cliff and takes a peek over. [illustration 22B or C – his head is the heel of the hand or the arm, his legs the fingers]
- Now keep on sliding slowly until your whole palm hangs from the table edge, but your fingers and half your thumb are still mashed on the table. Handy Harry wants to get a closer look at something on the floor and so he keeps sliding more and more of himself off the cliff until most of his torso and even his pelvis is hanging over the edge, only his legs are left on it! [illustration 22D or E]
- Whoah! Don't fall! To help Handy Harry stay on the table, grip a little bit more firmly with your fingers and thumb – but don't curl them: grip leaving them flat. Handy Harry stiffens his legs to keep himself from falling right off!
- Relax the gripping effort and increase it many times. There is virtually no visible movement but the inside of your hand galvanizes itself to keep Handy Harry from falling off the table.
- Can you even feel other muscles further up your arm and in your shoulder and back contracting as well when your fingers grip?

Tune into the strong feeling that it's Louis Lumbrical on lifesaving duty here. He's doing all the work to keep Handy Harry "hanging by a thread" – to keep your hand 'hanging' by your fingers.

### *Lesson III-3 – Handy Harry Comes Up Onto All Fours*

#### **Handy Harry Practices Sticking His Bottom Up Into the Air Some More**

- Get your whole hand back on the table, mash it again, and repeat the gripping motion you just learned, this time keeping the heel of your hand glued to the table top. This forces your fingertips to slide towards your heel making the top ridge of knuckles rise up in the air. Once again, Handy Harry has succeeded in sticking his bottom up in the air. [illustration 23 – but we already had this one (with arrows showing the different direction of finger movement)]

Remember to make Louis Lumbrical work more than his cohort Freddie: use *effort mainly in your hand arch*. Don't pull with too much your fingertips – this would over-curl them, actually emptying out the hand's arch, lowering it and disempowering it.

- Try doing what you should *not* be doing a few times to understand the difference: mash your hand and just curl your fingertips using the efforts of Freddie Flexor. Now Handy Harry's bottom

stays on the floor, his body is uncomfortably squished down onto the table instead of gloriously rising up into the air [illustration 23B we already had this one as well].

- Now stick Handy Harry's bottom up in the air again. When you do the movement the right way, your hand feel great, really powerful, whereas the other way makes it feel yucky. Remember that your heel doesn't slide forward – it stays glued to the table and it's your fingers that slide towards your heel.

It's so much a 'flat finger pull' that the nail joints can even splay – that's OK – let Freddie have a holiday! The whole idea is to activate Louis Lumbrical and develop him. It can actually be a good thing to "sacrifice" the work of the smaller fingertip joint at first, localizing all the sense of effort in that larger, normally inactive top knuckle joint, making it vital and energetic.

#### Another Way for Handy Harry to Go 'Bottoms Up'

- Place your whole hand on the table again, mash it again, and repeat the whole-finger gripping motion once more – make Harry go bottoms up. But now keep your fingertips glued to the spot so it's the heel of your hand that is pulled sliding towards the tips. [illustration 23 again (with arrows showing the different direction of heel movement)] This one is a little tricky: try it slowly and gently at first so that if things go wonky you can carefully 'un-wonk' them.

#### 'Bottoms Up' On Ice

- This time, your fingertips *and* the heel of your hand slide towards each other as your fingers pull. It's as if Handy Harry has found his way onto a skating rink! [illustration 23 again but with new face (with arrows pointing in all the directions of movement, different expression on Handy Harry's face)]

If the table top is not slippery enough to do this easily, put an 18<sup>th</sup> century North German damask tablecloth on the table or, if you don't happen to have one of those handy, try placing a Kleenex under your hand.

### *Lesson III-4 – Handy Harry on All Fours on the Keys*

This is the same as the previous lesson but now done on the piano keyboard.

#### **Handy Harry Almost Falls Off the Piano Cliff**

- Lay your fingers down flat on the keys, and mash all your fingers and your palm into the keyboard. Really mash the underpads of your four fingers into the keys. Your whole hand should be flat as a pancake.
- Now begin to slide your hand towards you until the heel of your hand begins to slip off the edge of the keyboard. Keep sliding slowly until your whole palm and half your thumb hang from the keyboard, but your fingers and distal thumb phalange are still mashed in their keys. Whoah! Don't fall! [illustrations 27]
- Actually, there's a safety net down there under the keyboard: it's your leg. So try sliding slowly *all the way* off the keys, till your hand flops down onto your leg. Feel each tiny part of the underside of your hand sliding off the edge of the keyboard, so all of your hand and your fingers get a massage from that edge. And feel how nice it is to just let go, to not have to worry about falling but just let it happen, and how good it feels to flop onto your nice, secure thigh... [illustration 28]
- Now try stopping yourself from falling again. Begin to slide your hands gradually off the keys towards yourself, but once the heel of your hand is off the keys, grip with your fingers a bit to stop yourself from falling. Feel how this ensures your secure resting on the keyboard. Remember, don't curl your fingers – this wouldn't make them feel so secure. It's when they lie flat that they really feel most comfy: make Louis do the gripping, leaving each of your whole fingers flat. Repeat this gripping motion many times – there's not much external movement but the inside of your hand working like a son-of-a-gun to keep you from falling off the keyboard. Can you again feel that it's Louis Lumbrical (plus those muscles in your upper arm, shoulder and back) who is on lifesaving duty here? He's doing all the work to keep Handy Harry safe and to keep your fingers mashed into their keys. Remember, at this point we are still giving Freddie Flexor a real rest, because many times he has been overworked, and needs some time off. Louis Lumbrical needs to learn how to shoulder the load in this movement.

#### **Handy Harry on the Keys Sticks His Bottom Up In the Air**

- Get your whole hand back on the keyboard, mash it again, and repeat the gripping motion you just learned, but without sliding towards yourself. Your whole hand is on the keyboard now, not just your fingers, and so this gripping motion makes your hand "stand up:" your fingertips slide towards your heel and the top ridge of knuckles rises up in the air. [illustration 23A again but now on a keyboard i.e. 29A]

Again it's Louis Lumbrical who makes this happen: it's a strong effort that's isolated to the hand arch alone. *Use effort in your hand arch only.* Don't pull with your fingertips – this would curl them and actually empty out the hand's arch, lowering it and disempowering it. Don't push your wrist forward either.

And again it's so much a 'flat finger pull' that the nail joints can even collapse – sacrilege! But that's OK because the whole idea is to activate Louis Lumbrical and develop him. Release any effort in the other joints, localize it all in the metacarpal-phalangeals. In this first version the heel of the hand is glued to the keyboard and the fingertips slide towards the heel.

#### **'Bottoms Up' On the Keys Sliding Your Heel Instead of Your Fingertips**

- The same as the previous but now the fingertips stay glued to the spot and the heel of the hand is pulled sliding along the keys away from you towards your fingertips. [illustration 23A again but now on a keyboard, new arrows of direction]

#### **'Bottoms Up' On Keyboard Ice**

- Now your fingertips *and* the heel of your hand slide towards each other as your fingers pull. You won't be able to fit an 18<sup>th</sup> century North German damask tablecloth on the keyboard, so even if you *do* have one, don't use it here – just go with the Kleenex. [illustration 23A again but now on a keyboard, new arrows of direction]

#### **Handy Harry Uses an Arm As Well As His Legs To Go 'Bottoms Up'**

- Go back to the first way Handy Harry stuck his bottom in the air, but now have your thumb play a key as well. Note that your thumb does not go along with your other fingers with this movement but allies itself with your wrist. [illustration 29B (with arrows pointing in the direction of thumb, wrist, finger, heel movement)] It's more like Handy Harry's arm than another leg. This gives you an exceptionally clear feeling of how different the thumb is from the other fingers in its function: *they* are attached to the hand; *it* is attached to the wrist.

### *Lesson III-5 – Handy Harry on the Trampoline*

- Let your hand fall onto the table once again – let it flop on the table top so it's mashed like a pancake.
- It's time for Louis Lumbrical to get some exercise again – pull with your whole fingers (remember, don't curl them), but this time let the heel of your hand leave the table. Your wrist comes up so your hand and your forearm form an even line. [Illustration 30]
- Now make the movement more vigorous and quick, if you increase the speed and the effort enough, your hand will leave the table altogether! When your fingertips begin to slide, make them so strong they launch your hand up into the air like a trampoline – your fingertips stay flat and slap the heel of your hand. Remember, it's not the tip of the finger that slaps your heel but the flat pad of the nail joint. [illustration 30C, D, E, F]
- Then unfold your hand again, flop back down on the table top, and repeat.

Don't let your wrist pop up higher than your hand. The top knuckles should be highest, as if they wanted to rap someone behind you. [illustration 30G]

Also remember that it's not your arm pulling your hand up into the air but the power of your fingers themselves that shoots your arm up, just as your ankles and knees power you up when you jump on a real trampoline. Here, your hand arch is like Handy Harry's ankles and knees. When you're on a trampoline, a big rope on a crane doesn't come down and lift you up – you use the power of your legs to jump!

- Try some more trampoline jumping, varying the height your hand reaches. Pretend your hand is in an elevator and you are going to the second floor... the fourth floor... the tenth floor... the *twentieth* floor!

### *Lesson III-6 – Handy Harry on the Keyboard Trampoline*

Let's try this same trampoline movement on the keyboard.

- Flop your hand down on the keys and pull on them with your fingers to *launch* your hand and arm up into the air like a trampoline would. Feel that effort in your hand itself, a healthy, robust contraction of the hand. Do you remember how happy you felt the last time you were on a real trampoline? Make your hand and arm feel that happy now, and really *use* the power of your fingers as you would your ankles and knees to really exult in that soaring – your hand almost flies!
- Don't cushion your fall when you land on the keys. Crash down as loosely and heavily as you like. What a sound!
- Try jumping to different spots on the trampoline for a higher or lower sounding crash: can you even compose a piece for 'trampoline piano?'

### Lesson III-7 – Handy Harry is a Roly-Poly

- Keeping your fingers and thumb relatively straight, press their tips firmly together: as firm as a bird beak. [Illustration 31] What sort of things could you peck with your bird beak? The table? Your leg? Your forehead? A piano key? What sort of a sound does the piano make when your bird beak pecks it? How is it different from a normal piano sound?
- Now place your bird beak on a key keeping your wrist very low. [Illustration 31B] From this position use your bird beak to press into the key: *dig* into it so firmly it pulls your arm forward. The more your bird beak pulls your arm forward, the more it rolls onto the 3<sup>rd</sup> finger. Your hand is like a roly-poly man, and as it rolls forward he stands up. But your arm is like the roly-poly man's long tail: *it doesn't stand up, it just rises slightly off the table.*

There are three ways to do this which all look identical but *feel* very different:

- 1) *Active hand/passive arm*: Pull your passive arm forward with the strength of your active hand.
- 2) *Passive hand/ active arm*: Push/roll your passive hand forward with your active arm. Here your hand still makes an effort to keep its tight bird beak shape, but your arm is the sole activator of the movement forward.
- 3) *Active hand/active arm*: Make both your hand and arm active so they work easily together. It's not even clear which part makes what effort, everything just goes smoothly along. You don't even know which is active and which is passive any more.

### Lesson III-8 – Handy Harry Stands Up!

- Lay your hand on its back on the table and once again review Louis Lumbrical's 'sitting up' movement. Remember, don't curl your fingers at all, just flex them – beckon 'come here' to yourself. Or think of it as Handy Harry doing a leg lift lying on his back. [illustration we've already had this one]
- Turn your hand over and do the same movement so Louis now waves goodbye...
- Lay your hand on the table and wave goodbye but this time, don't make the heel of your hand stay on the table. Instead, let the waving action pull gently on your wrist so it rises from the table. Do this so gently that you 'discover the movement from within.' Sense how it feels. Sense which muscles work together to coordinate the movement. [illustration 39]
- Slowly begin to expand the range of this movement and finally its vigor as well, until Louis Lumbrical gives such a good, healthy pull that your wrist and arm rise as high as they can – Handy Harry stands up!
- Now instead of using all four fingers bunched together to stand up, exercise each of Handy Harry's 'legs' in turn. Use your forefinger alone to do a 'leg lift' lying on your hand's 'back,' then a 'stand up' lying on the palm of your hand (its 'stomach'). Then try the same with your middle finger... your ring finger... your pinkie... Which finger is best at this? Was it the one you normally think of as strongest, or one of the others? [illustration 40]
- Finally try combinations of two or three fingers...

### Lesson III-9 – Freddie Flexor Saves Handy Harry from Falling off the Cliff

This lesson aims to *stimulate*, not strain the flexor muscles – it is *very* important that you go gently and don't overdo it. Start out with an extremely light movement entirely lacking in strain. To get a stronger stimulation, increase the effort by small degrees but always monitor exactly where the effort originates. Be on a constant lookout for any sense of strain that exceeds the boundaries of good sense. Some of you need not try anything other than a gentle movement; others may feel limber and strong enough to increase the intensity – but never make so strenuous an effort as to cause stress. Try to gauge how much effort is right for you.

- Lay your hand on the table and then slide backwards until your hand falls off the table edge but your fingers are still hanging on, like in lesson #2 earlier this section.
- Now keep going – slide a little more so that only the last two finger joints are on the table. You have to try even harder not to fall off completely! [illustration 42]
- Now slide even *further*, till only your nail joints are hanging on to the table edge. It's like hanging from a cliff! [illustration 42A]



- In this precarious position, curl your nail joints a little more to pull yourself upwards very slightly. You can't pull yourself right back on to the top of the precipice, but at least you can work to reduce the danger of your falling right off! Do this several times to clearly sense how you're exercising that *other* finger muscle – not Louis Lumbrical but Freddie Flexor. [illustration 42B]
- Try this last movement with different combinations of fingers: 2, 3, 4 and 5 each alone, then 2 & 3, 3 & 4, 4 & 5, 2 & 4, 3 & 5, 2 & 5, 2, 3 & 4, 2, 3 & 5, 2, 4 & 5, and finally 3, 4 & 5. [illustration 42C]

Which individual fingers work best? Go gently with the ones that seem not to take to the movement so well. Give them a chance to discover how by not forcing the movement upon them. Go so gently, and try so many different combinations, that your hand feels glowing and different afterwards when you hang your two hands by your sides. Your fingers really learned to do something new!

### *Lesson III-10 – Freddie Flexor and Louis Lumbrical Work Together to Pull Handy Harry Up*

This exercise starts where the last one left off: in the “cliffhanging” position, but now hang only by your 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> fingers bunched together. Freddie Flexor and Louis Lumbrical each know how to pull Handy Harry back up on their own, but they haven’t yet learnt how to work in tandem. They need to cooperate if Handy Harry’s going to climb back on the table most easily and effectively.

- First let Freddie Flexor start pulling... He can pull Handy Harry up a little bit, but soon his effort has no more effect: Handy Harry gets stuck part way... [illustration III-10.1]
- Now Freddie asks Louis Lumbrical for some help! When Louis lends a hand and the two of them pull together, Handy Harry comes right up onto the table to rest there on his chest (the heel of your hand). [illustration III-10.2]

Notice that now your top knuckles are really high: those little hillocks are very pronounced.

These high knuckles indicate just how large a role Louis plays in helping your hand be strong and capable.

- If you want to feel with even greater clarity Louis’ strength and good work, have teacher press gently down on those knuckles. You have to resist teacher’s weight or that wonderful arch will fall – and so Louis becomes even stronger and more potent.
- Next do the same exercise with your 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> & 5<sup>th</sup> fingers bunched together.
- And now with your 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> & 5<sup>th</sup> all bunched together...
- What other combinations of fingers can you try?
- Notice that if you imagined all your fingers are one of Handy Harry’s legs, and your thumb as his other leg, when Harry pulls himself all the way up onto the table with one “leg,” his other “leg” can rest on the table too. The pulling motion brings your passive thumb up to the table, where it rests, totally relaxed.

### *Lesson III-11 – Handy Harry Scratches His Leg with His ‘Fifth Finger Foot’*

- Play a high C with your right 5<sup>th</sup> finger.
- Play the B next to it with your 4<sup>th</sup> finger, but *don't let go of C*. Feel how your 4<sup>th</sup> & 5<sup>th</sup> stand tall together, and notice how your upper arm relaxes when they discover how to do this. [4<sup>th</sup> & 5<sup>th</sup> standing/Handy Harry standing illustration – Handy Harry neizvodljivo: the fingers are vertical but the hand is horizontal – how to make Handy Harry stand tall when his torso must be horizontal???) They may be your smallest fingers, but nevertheless they are strong in their own right!
- Move your 5<sup>th</sup> fingertip sideways across its key until it slides onto B and snuggles even closer to your 4<sup>th</sup>. It's like Handy Harry sticking his two feet together.
- Now Handy Harry's left leg feels itchy. Bend your 5<sup>th</sup> finger but keep it pressed onto your 4<sup>th</sup> finger so it scratches the side of your 4<sup>th</sup> finger nail phalange. [illustration III-11.1] How much of your 4<sup>th</sup> finger can you scratch with your 5<sup>th</sup>? You may not feel able to do very much, but every little bit counts. Don't strain, but do keep exploring and see if you can discover new little parts of your 4<sup>th</sup> finger you didn't know you could scratch. By gently trying to go a little bit further than you can at first, you may discover new ways of moving your 5<sup>th</sup> finger!
- Go slowly... only later, when you get used to this strange movement, try going a little faster. Ahhh, doesn't that itch feel better!
- Stand on your 3<sup>rd</sup> finger and go through the same slow, exploratory scratching procedure scratching your 3<sup>rd</sup> with your 4<sup>th</sup>...
- Similarly, stand on your 2<sup>nd</sup>, scratch with your 3<sup>rd</sup>...
- Can you try some other combinations?

Of all the exercises, this one perhaps best illustrates their didactic nature. One thing for sure, you'll never do *this* movement while actually playing! But it brings a new feeling to your finger, hand and arm, a feeling that makes more possible the development of a new pianistic ability.

### *Lesson III-12 – Handy Harry Slaps the Ground with His Foot*

- Sit on a chair, lift your leg up, and then drop it so your foot flops on the ground. Then do the same with your other leg. Go back and forth between your two legs a few times – it’s a funny kind of ‘sit-in-the-chair-walking.’
- This time instead of just flopping your foot, really slap the ground with it. How loud a slapping sound can you make – but *without* making your foot too heavy? It’s a slap, not a stamp.
- How would Handy Harry do that on the table? [“Handy Harry chair sitting/hand finger stomping” illustration III-12.1] Extend your arm out above the table top, make Louis Lumbrical wave goodbye a few times, and then just as you let your arm flop down on the table, make Louis *slap* the table top. Your fingertips slap the table which instantly pulls your hand up to stand on your tips. If Handy Harry slaps the table and stands up nicely, your upper arm will feel relaxed because all the effort is right where it should be – in Louis Lumbrical. Make sure you don’t thrust your wrist forward – if it moves forward, it does so passively, pulled along by the galvanizing force of Louis standing up.
- Now try this with each finger individually – and why not for fun start with the ‘weakest’ finger, your 5<sup>th</sup>!
- When you do this on the piano, can you make a composition up just by slapping different notes with your fifth finger? How about some other finger?

### *Lesson III-13 – Handy Harry Launches Himself Forward*

- Place your hand on the table, begin to curl your fingers, but make sure your top knuckles stay potent so they rise up. Notice that your top knuckles also move forward. Amplify this forward movement. Repeat this many times, allowing the forward movement to develop in range and finally also in speed. Make it more and more vigorous, until finally Handy Harry’s legs are launching him forward. Your arm is pulled forward until your fingers flop over onto their nails – but not any further. [Illustration III-13.1 – could you draw Handy Harry doing a forward roll as in Aikido? Handy Harry in full Aikido kimono doing ]
- Try the same thing but with only your second finger. Handy Harry sort of stands up on the finger: although it stays quite curled, it is still very springy. Make the movement more and more vigorous, giving your 2<sup>nd</sup> finger a real experience of just how vigorously it could move when playing piano.
- Try this with each finger in turn. Which one most easily adapts to this vital, élan-filled movement?
- *Add active/passive variations*

### *Lesson III-14 – Handy Harry Revs His Legs*

In this exercise we combine the efforts of Louis Lumbrical and Freddie Flexor in a quick movement instead of the slow pulling we did in cliffhanging. We're going to transform that slow, pulling movement into something quick and effortless.

- Pretend your hand is a prehistoric Handy Harry's car and your fingers are like the driver's legs. [illustration III-14.1: this should be a basic copy of Fred Flintstone's car, with Handy Harry in the driver's seat] Scoot your fingertips quickly underneath you so all your 'legs' together try to make the car go. Louis Lumbrical and Fred Flexor are working together now. Your fingertips curl so quickly that they smack the underside of your hand near the heel. You already drew one kind of like this, Handy Harry running – but you did it without the car.
- Your 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>d</sup> fingers are Handy Harry's two legs. Your hand is a Flintstone car! Dangle your hand so Handy Harry's legs lightly press the ground and quickly flick your finger under you to make the car go forward. First one 'leg,' then the other! How fast can you make the car go? Try quickly flick-curling your fingers while staying in one place, like you're just revving your engine before you take off. How fast can you do that?
- Try this with each pair of fingers: 2-3, 3-4, 4-5, 2-4, 3-5, 2-5. Which ones go easiest?