

# PART II

## Group V – Handy Harry Takes His First Steps

### *Lesson V-1 – Handy Harry Walks with His Legs Tied Together*

- Play C & D with your 2<sup>nd</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> fingers together.



- Start teetering from one to the other like you're on a pogo stick, trying to balance and just about succeeding.
- Keeping these two fingers squeezed together, can you teeter so far to the left, onto your 2<sup>nd</sup> finger, that your 3<sup>rd</sup> finger lets the key D rise? Then when you teeter to the right, your 3d plays D again. Keep teetering further to the right until the key C rises, then teeter back to the left to play it again – all the while your fingers are glued together. It's like walking with your legs tied together! [illustration]
- Do the same thing on D & E with your 3<sup>rd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup>.
- Then on E & F with your 4<sup>th</sup> & 5<sup>th</sup>.
- Finally play B & C with 1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup>, in the same way. Notice how it's a little more difficult when the thumb is involved: you have to twist your hand into an unusual shape and position to do it. Help the student, by guiding her physically, to make thumb and 2<sup>nd</sup> teeter just as well as the other pairs.
- Slide thumb down 2<sup>nd</sup> finger to equalize



## *Lesson V-2 – Handy Harry Paddles His Feet in the Water*

- **Dangle your hand so that fingertips 2 & 3 barely reach the keys. ‘Paddle the water’ with them, first so gently that the notes don’t even sound – the keys don’t go down. [illustration] It’s a light slap with your ‘finger ropes’ that makes little ripples on the water.**
- **Lower your hand just a tiny bit so that now the keys begin to descend, but just a little bit – not enough to make a note sound. Now Handy Harry’s feet are making slightly bigger waves.**
- **Increase the speed of your fingers, or lower your hand just a little more, just enough so the notes begin to sound.**
- **To play louder, don’t press more, just increase the speed of your fingers so they still just brush the key, go ‘through’ the key and ‘out the back door.’**
- **To make an even bigger splash, *lift* your fingers before you paddle the water with them. This makes your sound even louder but keeps it totally free.**
- **Keeping this totally free finger movement, try going faster and faster. What a *splish splash kersplosh* Handy Harry’s making now!! [illustration]**

*Note to teacher: lifting and slapping the fingers is a great way to help a very young child play legato passages. The hand may be too small and undeveloped to withstand the stress of standing firmly up into its arch structure, but this movement stands the hand up automatically, without any intention to stand it up. The intention might create strain, but this vigorous movement more or less launches the hand into a standing position without the child ever thinking about standing. Let the fingers remain as wobbly as they like, make no attempt to correct any collapsed nail joints – it’s too soon for that, just help them to ‘walk’ in this strange way, and observe how the hand assumes whatever version of verticality it is comfortable with at this point.*

### *Lesson V-3 – Handy Harry Walks like Daddy Long Legs<sup>1</sup>*

- Play any 5-finger pattern, *lifting* each finger as absolutely high as possible immediately before it drops into its note. The finger should drop lightly, as if it's a rope, instead of digging into the key. This means the hand must be held high enough so that once the finger has played, it *looks* like it's standing firmly but really it's more 'dangling lightly' in the key. Standing too firmly *inhibits* you really lifting with vim and vigor. The feeling is one of robust freedom.
- Finger lifts after as well.
- Thumb can lift because its not going into inversion. HB

*This exercise is another one especially valuable for the very young pupil whose hand skeleton isn't developed enough to bear the stresses of overholding and standing firmly. She can acquire a sense of mobility and agility without trying to express a structural power she does not yet possess.*

### *Lesson V-4 – Handy Harry Tests the Waters<sup>2</sup>*

#### **A – Tai Chi walking**

- Stand up, and bend your knees very slightly a few times. Bob up and down a little bit.
- When you bob 'down,' stick your right leg a little out in front of you. It's as if you were going to take a step, but don't actually take it. Instead, just let your foot touch the ground... don't shift your weight onto that leg! Pretend you want to feel the water with that foot, but the water's so cold you don't really want to put your foot right in. Tap the ground with your right foot, like a blind man tapping the ground with his cane. Even bend your left knee a little more or a little less to help your right foot tap the ground *without* putting any weight on it.
- Finally, leave your right foot on the ground in front of you and begin to *slowly* shift your weight forward until your right leg is bent and your left leg has straightened out. Now your right foot is bearing all your weight, while your left foot remains on the floor behind you but almost lifted off. Move back and forth between your two legs – shift your weight from one to the other without ever lifting either foot off the ground. Which foot bears your weight better? Where do you feel more comfortable, forward or back?
- Finally with your weight on your front, right foot, lift your back left foot off the ground and bring *that* leg out in front of you, again using it like an antenna-sensor to feel the ground without bearing any weight. You begin to take a step but don't complete the motion – it's only complete when the weight shifts. Explore the entire area your left foot can reach comfortably while all your weight remains on your right foot. Inhibit your strong desire to place your weight on that left foot.
- Now begin finally to shift your weight slowly, sensing every millimetre of the way, onto your left foot. And explore the sensation of shifting your weight backwards and forwards, from the front

---

<sup>1</sup> Based on Robyn II #11B

<sup>2</sup> My version of Robyn's Grandfather's Clock (II #12)

left foot to the back right foot, all the while never lifting either foot from the ground. On this side, where do you feel more comfortable, forward or back? Are you always more comfortable on the right foot or left, or is it rather the forward or back foot that always best bears your weight?

- Take several of these strange steps, pausing each time to first sense the ground with your totally unweighted foot out front before gradually shifting your weight forward onto that foot.
- Now try the whole procedure but walking backwards!

## B – Walking on the Keyboard

- Put your 2<sup>nd</sup> finger on the note C and try to stand up on the note the same way you stood in Tai Chi walking – that is, don't straighten your finger completely; instead, feel a springiness in your finger that comes from having both Louis Lumbrical and Freddie Flexor take part in the effort. [illustration: Handy Harry as a Chinese practitioner of Tai Chi with the pants etc] Breathe your wrist a little left and right, forward and back to make sure you are standing really well – both securely and moveably.
- Now use your 3<sup>rd</sup> finger to feel the note D – what happened to your 2<sup>nd</sup> finger? Did it continue to stand well, nice and springy, or did it abandon its secure, springy standing and empty out even ever so slightly? Don't actually play the note D, instead, just use your 3<sup>rd</sup> finger to play around *with* the key. Make it go down just a tiny bit and then see how it bounces back up by itself. Try to use the key as a lever to feel the weight of its hammer way inside the piano. Depress the key a bit further to feel the weight of that hammer even better, but don't go all the way to the keybed. When you waggle-wiggle the key with your 3<sup>rd</sup> finger, you get a better chance to feel how heavy the hammer is, because you aren't just pressing the key all the way down automatically. All this time, ensure that you continue to stand well and sinuously on your 2<sup>nd</sup> finger, just as you stood well on one leg while the other explored the ground.
- After you've felt the weight of the hammer for some time, finally play the note D and hold the key down. *Still* make sure your 2<sup>nd</sup> finger doesn't lose *any* of its standing security. The top 2<sup>nd</sup> knuckle will often fall an ever-so-tiny amount, but that is enough to weaken the whole structure – don't let it happen! Instead, when you play the note D, a moment arrives when both your 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> fingers are standing really well – both knuckles soar high and your arch is really seen in both fingers without being rigid.
- Continue to stand on your 3<sup>rd</sup> finger's note D, and pick up your 2<sup>nd</sup> finger to wiggle *its* key C, jogging it many times to feel the weight of *that* hammer. Is it the same or heavier or lighter?
- Walk very slowly back and forth between your 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> fingers, pausing at each step to feel the key just as you paused in real walking to sense the ground with your 'leg antennae.'

*Repeat this keyboard walking exercise with each pair of fingers in turn.*

## *Lesson V-5 – Handy Harry Skips Slowly*

- Press your 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> fingers together and keeping them like that, play the note C with your 2<sup>nd</sup>. Then move your hand like a roly-poly to the right so that, with your fingers still banded together, your 3<sup>rd</sup> finger plays D. [Illustration – Handy Harry like a roly-poly] It's a funny way of playing a 2-note slur where you do it more with your wrist than with your fingers. It's Handy Harry walking with his ankles tied together again as in lesson 1, but this time he does a 'step-hop:' after playing the two notes in succession, let your wrist fly away from the keys.
- Use this 'step-hop, step-hop' to play C-D, D-E, E-F, F-G, etc.
- Do the same thing going down, that is C-B, B-A, A-G etc. with the fingering 3-2, 3-2, 3-2...

This exercise aims to make it kinesthetically clear just how much the wrist participates in phrase shaping. Later on, when the fingers individuate to play their notes, the wrist should continue to play its crucial role – without the wrist movement, the phrase doesn't happen. But here we isolate the wrist to make it totally obvious and easily felt.

- Now try the first 2-note slur again, but this time use the Tai Chi walking motion you learned in lesson 4. Remember that with your fingers individuated, your wrist still helps keep the movement fluid and lithe. The music of these slurs will dance when your fingers, hand and arm do so!
- Play a series of 2-note slurs with 2 & 3. C-D, D-E, E-F, F-G, etc. going up the keyboard.
- The same going down the keyboard...
- Repeat each of these 6 steps with each other pair of adjacent fingers. Save your thumb and 2<sup>nd</sup> finger for last, because the thumb is the trickiest.

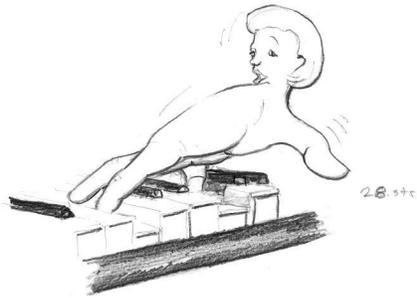
### *Lesson V-6 – Three-Legged Handy Harry Skips*

- Bunch *three* fingers together, let's say 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup>. Keeping them glued to each other, do a 'roly-poly' movement to play C-D-E, then E-D-C. Your wrist rotates right and left and flies away from the keyboard at the end of each 3-note group.
- Now using the Tai Chi walking movement with those same fingers, play a series of 3-note slurs going up the keyboard – C-D-E, D-E-F, E-F-G, F-G-A, etc.
- Then a series of 3-note slurs going down the keyboard.
- Do this same exercise, first 'roly-poly' style and then 'Tai Chi Walking,' with 3-4-5.
- Finally do the same with 1,2 & 3.

### *Lesson V-7 – Slow Skipping on FOUR Notes*

The same as the previous lesson but with 2, 3, 4 & 5, then later with 1, 2, 3 & 4.

Higher wrist HB



### *Lesson V-8 – All FIVE Notes –Whoops, Don't Fall Over!*

- Play all five notes 1-2-3-4-5 in 'roly-poly' style with your fingers all bunched together, and when you get to your 5<sup>th</sup> finger, let your hand fall on its side to the outside. Then do a 'roly-poly' 5-4-3-2-1 and fall to the inside!
- The same but with the Tai Chi Walking movement of your fingers.

### *Lesson V-9 – Staccato I: Let's Go Hopping*

Use the 'Fred Flintstone Car' motion of your fingers to play a series of staccato notes. First with one finger, then with all your fingers in a row. [illustration: Handy Harry like RoadRunner] These are called elliptical staccatos because of the elliptical path your fingertip follows. I also call them "Out the Back Door" – here done relatively loosely. Your fingertip doesn't need to finish tucked snugly against your palm but just somewhere near it.

### *Lesson V-10 – Staccato II: Let's go Pecking*

- Play the same notes but this time don't individuate your fingers from your hand – make your hand into a bird beak and let your entire forearm make the staccato movement, straight up and back from the key. [illustration: Handy Harry with your fingers his head this time – a bird beak head. i.e. Handy Harry as a sort of Cone Head]
- The same movement, but this time let your wrist be a little flexible – see how the sound and feeling changes.

*Lesson V-11 – The Bellows*

**Stand on thumb, raise finger and forearm at exactly the same rate and lower them so finger plays. Like breathing or operating a bellows. It's a thumb push-up, here used to play a series of notes or a little tune. [Handy Harry doing leg lifts]**

*Lesson V-12 – Watch Out for that Alligator – Snap!*

- Stand on your thumb and make your second finger an alligator's upper jaw. Pretend your head is in his jaws and you *don't* want him to close them... but they inexorably get closer and closer until... crush, your 2<sup>nd</sup> finger play a note. [Andy Alligator with Handy Harry's head in his jaws]
- Now raise that upper jaw as high as you can and then let it *snap* shut as quickly as possible! Your 2<sup>nd</sup> finger plays again, with a structure supported snap!
- Finally pretend you have a head made of such bouncy rubber that when he snaps his jaw shut it bounces open again – your 2<sup>nd</sup> finger plays a structure supported snap staccato.