

Group VI – Handy Harry Finds Friends to Play With – Chords & “Octaves”

New Lesson 1 – Thumb Pushup Morphs Into “Bridge Walking” M d l V

Lesson VI-2 – Can Your Bridge Tip Without Collapsing?

- Play ‘C and G’ with your thumb and 5th finger. Holding onto those two keys, move your arm forward slowly so that your thumb-5th stands up into its arch structure. It makes your hand into a bridge with two pylons. How high does this movement make the center of the bridge’s arch? If you played a smaller interval, could you make it even higher? Move your arm gently, slowly forward and back to test the strength and security of this bridge. Can it, like a willow tree in the wind, ‘bend without breaking?’ Don’t let the pylons collapse but let the whole structure move this way and that while maintaining its integrity.
- Make your hand into the same bridge, and this time while standing on your thumb, keeping your hand’s arch very firm, lift your 5th finger to play one note closer to your thumb. Don’t let the arch get wobbly, it keeps its exact shape. Make especially sure your thumb keeps its erect shape. The whole arch tips up a bit so it balances on your thumb while the other leg of the arch, your 5th finger, first rises into the air and then roots itself in the key one note closer than the first. Then ‘walk’ your 5th finger one more note closer, making the interval again smaller, using this strange, firm arch tipping technique. How close can you make your 5th finger ‘walk’ towards your thumb? Could it even reach the adjacent key so thumb and 5th play the interval of a 2nd?
- Tip your arch onto your thumb to raise your 5th in the air again, but now each time you 5th descends, have it play one note further *away* from your thumb. How far away from your thumb can your 5th walk? How big an interval can you stretch between thumb and 5th *comfortably*? Don’t stretch so far that you strain. The point is to keep feeling your arch’s potency which derives from both firmness *and* moveability.
- Do the same ‘tipping’ exercise, but this time raise your *thumb*, by tipping your hand arch onto your 5th finger. Again, first have your thumb play one note closer to your 5th each time, then begin to play one note further away each time. How does this feel compared to the first part of the exercise? Even more bizarre? Easier? Different?
- This time don’t tip either pylon up but move your wrist left and right leaving both pylons rooted in their keys. They have to bend to let this happen – can you detect exactly which of your thumb and 5th joints flex, and how much? This adds a further dimension of stability *combined* with flexibility to your hand’s self-image...
- Review the first movement you did: move your arm forward and back with your pylons rooted in their keys. Remember, here your fingers don’t need to be as flexible as in the sideways movement – they can remain standing straight, whereas when you move sideways their joints must bend.
- Combine steps 1 & 2 etc etc AF
- Combine the forward-back-left-right movements to move your hand in a circle... clockwise...

then counterclockwise... How's *that* for moveable stability!

Lesson VI-3 – Use Your Bridge to “Go Fishing”

Create your bridge again using your thumb and 5th fingers, on any two notes that are comfortable for you – not too big a stretch but not too cramped either.

- While standing really tall in your hand arch, drop your 2nd finger into a black note somewhere in between your thumb and 5th. The first few times don't even make it play its note – just drop your finger lightly on to the key surface, as if the fisherman dropped his hook but there was a thin sheet of ice on the water.
- The same, but now let your 2nd finger actually play its note – your fingertip breaks through the ice. First do this without really involving your arm – let it stay inert while your finger raises and drops lightly.
- Now raise your arm as you raise your finger, then drop them both simultaneously. Make sure that involving your arm in the movement doesn't weaken your arch. Your arm breathes to help your finger move smoothly, and your arch learns to remain stable while this is happening.
- Finally, raise your arm and lower it slowly while you drop your finger in several times for each single movement of your arm. This effects a third differentiation – the arm breathes while the arch remains stable, and the finger moves independently of both.
- Do all these steps with your 3rd finger.
- Both 2nd and 3rd

Lesson VI-4 – Jumping and Rolling in the Ice and Snow

Do you remember taking a running jump to slide on a clear patch of ice in wintertime? Dangle your hand loosely, envisioning a C major chord but not tensing your hand into that shape just yet. It's important that your hand stay loose and then automatically, lightly form itself to the chord shape in the instant your fingers touch the keys. But we're going to play that chord in some unusual ways.

- First imitate that running-jumping-sliding movement. Move your arm forward until your fingers fall into the keys. They reach bottom, the chord sounds, and you *keep sliding forward* until your fingertips hit the fallboard. Do this many times. Skidding on the keys this way forces your arch to stand up into the chord's shape whether it wants to or not!
- The same, but when you slide in and hit the backboard, don't leave the keys. Keep holding on to them and slide back out until you almost fall off the keyboard. Then slide in again. Repeat many times.
- Play your chord the same way, but now your foot hits a patch of bare pavement under the ice and catches. Your fingertips try to slide but they catch on the keys and stick to them, forcing your wrist to roll forward over your hand. Feel this movement simultaneously strengthen your arch and relax your arm.

Lesson VI-5 – Shake the Piano

Handy Harry has been at the gym working out, and his muscles are getting amazingly strong. He thinks he can lift a whole piano up!

- Play a comfortable interval with thumb and 5th, and then begin to press those two keys more and more firmly. Play *piano* but press *fortissimo*. What does your hand do? Most likely it stands up into its arch shape.
- Keep grabbing the piano like this, as strong as you can, and begin to try and shake it. Pretend you are so strong that you could actually lift the piano up over your head with your hand, and *grab* it and shake it as if you were preparing to do just that.

Don't overdo this exercise. The effort must be as strong as possible, because that is what develops the musculature to deal with the articulations and control of the key so necessary to colorful piano playing. But at the same time as you are making a maximal effort, try to avoid strain. Or rather, take your effort to the point of strain but don't leave it there for any length of time. Be wise! Build up your strength gradually, by degrees, sensing yourself the whole time and monitoring the level of strain so you don't overdo it and actually hurt something!