

## Group VIII – Handy Harry Drinks Too Much “Raspberry Cordial” – Rotation

### *Lesson VIII-1 – Handy Harry Does Some Warm-up Leg Stretches*

First try some leg stretches with your real legs, not your ‘piano legs.’

- Stand up, put one heel on a chair, and straighten that leg. Bend forward and feel a gentle stretch along the back of your leg. Where do you feel it the most: in your calf, behind your knee, or in your thigh – your hamstrings? Lean further forward to increase the stretch, but go gently – don’t force anything.
- Try stretching the other leg now. Do you feel the stretch in exactly the same place in this leg, or is it somewhere else? Which leg stretches further?

Now it’s Handy Harry’s turn,

- Mash your 2<sup>nd</sup> finger nail joint into the edge of the key – play the note with as splayed a finger as possible **[illustration]**. Let your arm relax completely, but don’t make *any* effort at all in your finger to curl or even curve it. Keep your wrist high but let your top knuckle be the lowest.
- Now begin to slide your finger forward on the key. Keep pressing to give Handy Harry’s leg the same kind of good stretch you just gave yourself. Slide all the way forward until your entire finger is mashed into the key. Rest there for a minute, letting your arm be totally heavy.
- Slide back out until only your fingertip is on key, and then repeat this in-out movement.
- Try this with each finger in turn.
- Try it with groups of two, three and finally four fingers. Which groups are most interesting for you?

## Lesson VIII-2 – Handy Harry Needs to Lie Down

- Slide your whole thumb into a white key – Handy Harry is feeling so tired after all his workouts (or so lazy) that he just needs to lie down... Let all three bones of your thumb lie down in the white key, with your hand lying down beside in the keys as well – whatever keys are comfortable. Again feel the entire underside of your hand, both your palm and your ‘under-fingers’ – to mash the keys.
- Now Harry feels like he wants to roll over: leaving your thumb where it is, begin to roll your hand to the inside so it lazily folds over your thumb and eventually flops onto the keys on the other side of your thumb. Your hand is now to the inside of your thumb instead of outside, and lying on its inner edge. The entire edge of both your thumb and your 2<sup>nd</sup> finger now lie on the keys. **[illustration: Harry lying with his face in the gutter, a ridiculous smile plastered across his face]**
- Return to normal lying down.
- Harry seems to be both incredibly lazy and really restless – now he wants to roll the *other* way! Rotate your forearm so your hand begins to roll onto its outside edge. The entire edge of your 5<sup>th</sup> finger – all three bones – and the outside of your hand press into the keys. Keep rolling slowly... little by little... until finally your hand flops over onto its back, to the outside of your 5<sup>th</sup> finger.
- Return to lying prone on the keyboard.
- Harry wants to roll to the outside again, but in his sleep he stuck his leg out to the side so it stops him from rolling. **[illustration: 5<sup>th</sup> finger to the outside, other fingers to the inside – Harry lying on the beach on his back with one leg curled under the other – left leg curled under the right]** Roll your hand to the outside again, but as you begin to roll, stick your 5<sup>th</sup> finger more out to the side while angling all your other fingers to the *inside*. With your fingers like this, when your forearm rotates, it makes the other fingers separate out from the 5<sup>th</sup> finger. They go to the inside, while he gets squashed more to the outside. You can still turn your hand 90 degrees but not much more.
- Roll to the outside in this same weird fashion so that this time you stand up on your 5<sup>th</sup> finger while still using the rotation to separate out your other fingers from your 5<sup>th</sup> – they go ‘in’ while it stays ‘out.’

### Lesson VIII-3 – Drunken Jumping

- Put your thumb on middle C. Take a look at the note C *three* octaves higher up the keyboard. Handy Harry actually thinks he can *jump* that far! But because he's had a little too much 'raspberry cordial,' his coordination is a little off, and when he uses his '5<sup>th</sup> leg' to land on high C, your 5<sup>th</sup> finger stands up but your arm rotates to bring the other fingers to the inside – he can't stand up straight but goes all wonky. Your *thumb* ends up going to the outside, the same as your 5<sup>th</sup>, while your middle three fingers go to the inside.
- Jump up to a high note letting your right thumb fly further to the outside than the other fingers. Then jump to a low note, play it with your thumb while your 5<sup>th</sup> flies up into the air – your hand has rotated the other way. Keep jumping a very wide interval rotating your hand one way when you land on the high note, the other way when you land on the low note...

### Lesson VIII-4 – Harry Gently Tests Some Very Thin Ice

Descend a piano key slowly, ever so gently, until, somewhere near the bottom but not quite, it seems to catch on something. If you go too quickly or strongly, you'll go past this point without noticing it. Keep going slower, more gently, until you can detect this point  $\frac{2}{3}$  to  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the way down where the key seems to get stuck on some obstruction.

This obstruction is the escapement. A little stick in the piano mechanism pushes up and rests against the hammer's *knuckle* before it slides off the knuckle and launches the hammer onto the string. **[illustration: piano mechanism]** When you play a note normally, this takes place so quickly that there's virtually no friction – if any, it's imperceptible. But if you reach this point where the stick pushes on the knuckle very slowly, and just rest there, you can feel resistance – the stick tip gets stuck on the leather of the knuckle (it's actually deerskin), and doesn't want to slide past. So you press just a little more and it slides off. This last little part of the key's path to the keybed takes place rather suddenly. You feel like you are crunching the key down to the keybed to get it past the resistance of the escapement – but you have to *feel* the escapement first before you can then crunch past it.

This process of descending the key to the escapement, feeling its momentary resistance, then crunching through it is the closest we pianists can approximate how a harpsichordist plays. Harpsichordists rest their finger on the key and exert such a slight pressure that the note does not sound but the key descends imperceptibly, just enough to bring the plectrum into contact with the string.

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*Lesson VIII-5 – Looks Like the Ice is Just Thick Enough – But Not Totally Firm*

Descend the key silently then lift it up only half way. Play the note.

## Appendices

*Appendix 1 – What to do besides teaching kids to play a piece by reading the notes and playing them on the keyboard...*

Singing

Tapping

Sing while tapping

Playing by ear

Sing and play together

Name the notes without reading

Articulations, dynamics without reading – by ear

**THEN** read the notes!