

## Preface

“The First Book of Piano Music” is intended to help beginner piano players achieve their goals in a smooth and comprehensive way. The pieces and exercises included in this book cover the repertoire from preliminary level up to Grade 3.

This book is intended for studying with a teacher. Although it may seem like a code of musical laws with many musical illustrations and practical tasks, the decision of what is appropriate at any particular moment – what should be focused on, what pieces and exercises to choose and how to work on them – is the prerogative of the teacher. Like a master in the Middle Ages, the teacher shares knowledge and skills that allow the apprentice to understand and use the musical “code” effectively. Suggestions are made to help facilitate a student’s immersion into the world of piano music. A substantial collection of musical pieces sure to inspire students to practice is brought together with ordered information about musical rudiments. Studies and exercises as well as scales support these pieces.

The idea that any key, black or white, can be played by any finger depending on its musical surroundings is the foundation for this book. This does not contradict the method of placing hands in positions – although it could be said that raising the *C* position to the rank of center of the piano universe and using it as the basic method for studying piano seems to be unconsidered, overestimated and may actually be the cause of many learning challenges. When picking up by ear any simple melody on the keyboard starting on the different keys, it will be found that using black keys is unavoidable and students should be prepared for this from the very beginning of their instruction. Of course, there are pieces in *C* position in this book but equally pieces in other keys and “positions”. You will even find many pieces where black keys prevail.

Most students coming for their very first lesson have listened to or sung children songs, folk songs or Christmas carols and may be thrilled to learn them on the piano, enjoying their new found ability to pick up familiar melodies on the keyboard. Assuming this, well-known songs have been chosen to build up the “short list” of repertoire for the young musician. Besides arrangements of traditional songs from many countries, there are pieces and arrangements of music of classical composers in different styles. Some of the pieces have been composed by the author of this book.

The book’s contents are as follows:

- I. Introduction to the piano, a brief overview of the instrument, short instructions regarding posture and preparatory finger exercises;
- II. A chapter about music theory, where valuable information about musical rudiments can be found;
- III. Rhythmical exercises;
- IV. Simple melodies written without the staff;
- V. Exercises for memorizing notes in the bass and treble clefs on the staves;
- VI. Simple pieces to play hands separately;
- VII. Pieces in order of increasing difficulty to play hands together;
- VIII. Songs and Christmas carols to play and sing;
- IX. Studies and exercises;
- X. Vocabulary of terms and musical expressions found in musical pieces of this book;
- XI. Scales and arpeggios;
- XII. Selected exercises by Hanon;
- XIII. Flash-cards.

*Chapters I and II* are sections for a teacher to read to a student, with practical tasks for them to do in collaboration. In these chapters, I suggest an order in which to explain the basics. You may accept my way, or use your own referring to these chapters as a guideline for essential information, or you might choose to ignore it and skip to the music collection. I believe however that it is important that the student know the vocabulary used when working on music from the very beginning of their instruction.

*Chapter II* is about music theory and uses language that can be understood by a child. It may happen that a first-time young student will not be able to comprehend everything in this section. Keep in mind that this book is intended for a relatively long period of use, and students can return to this chapter again and again to refresh their theoretical knowledge and apply it to solving practical tasks on the keyboard.

Rudimentary rhythms and rhythmical exercises can be found in *Chapter III*. We might say that rhythm came before melody, so rhythmical exercises preceded musical pieces in this book. Practising these exercises, a student will experience pulsation and the difference between strong and weak pulses, soon dividing them into elementary patterns and reading simple rhythmic progressions. Before studying this chapter, a student should be familiar with the terms of beat, bar, rhythm and duration discussed in the chapter two.

Simple melodies written without a musical staff can be found in *Chapter IV*. The letter of the appropriate key to play on the keyboard is written below each note. Because there is no reference to particular octaves in such notation, these melodies can be played with either hand in the most comfortable octave. Playing these songs in detached style using one finger is suggested.

Translating music letters into notes and writing them down in the treble and bass clefs help a student to practice note recognition in both clefs. These exercises make up *Chapter V*.

The pieces in *Chapter VI* are intended to be played hands separately using different fingers. Pieces to play with the right hand are placed on the right page and left hand pieces can be found on the page opposite. Every succeeding piece uses a larger range of notes so a student can explore more and more keys on the keyboard.

The longest, *Chapter VII* is a collection of short pieces in different styles and textures of gradually increasing difficulty. Among them you can find arrangements of traditional songs, music by Baroque and Classic composers, Romantic pieces and several pieces in the modern style. The short format of pieces has been chosen because young students find it challenging to remain focused on long and seemingly insurmountable tasks. So, it is often more effective to conquer several short pieces than

struggle with very demanding ones. Often a beginning student only has one half hour lesson a week. In that limited time a teacher has to demonstrate some music or technique, check the student's homework, explain a new subject, give instruction, answer questions and so on. Small size pieces work best in this situation. It should be noted that some pieces are provided with questions related to musical aspects of the piece such as the key, basic chords or harmonies, musical expressions and more. Sidebars are used for this purpose; also this space can be used for writing the teacher's instructions directly beside the piece being studied.

In *Chapter VIII*, there are fifteen arrangements of popular songs and Christmas carols. Singing at the same time as playing the piano is another musical challenge that can inspire a student. Music from this section could be used for the student's first Christmas recital.

Studies are collected in the *Chapter IX*. For the same reasons as mentioned above (*Chapter VII*), these are in short form and most are bundled in pairs to facilitate working on the same technique with each hand.

In *Chapter X*, there is an *Italian-English dictionary* of the musical terms and expressions used in this book

*Chapter XI* deals with scales and chords in all 24 keys. A different style of notation is used: in order to make reading and finding a note easier, the white keys are represented by white note-head notes and the black keys are marked by black note-heads. The scales that are comfortable to read are not always the easiest to play and vice versa. According to F. Chopin, the *B Major* scale is one of the most comfortable with regard to the finger position on the keyboard but the five sharps in the key signature are more challenging to read. On the other hand, the *C Major* scale is easy to read but requires adjusting all the fingers. The modified notation used in this book should help in playing scales with large numbers of accidentals. The *C Major* scale is not the first in the list of scales in this book. It is suggested starting from *B Major* (as was recommended by Chopin) or *D Flat Major* scales because they provide the most comfortable and natural setting for fingers on the keyboard, allowing short fingers to rest on the white keys while long fingers are settled on the black. The pages with scales are preceded by a list of possible exercises.

At the end, selected five-finger position formulas by Hanon are featured in *Chapter XII*, followed by *flash-cards* to help to memorize and identify notes in clefs.

To conclude, I would like to add several sentences about studying a musical instrument. A very complex activity, it involves aural, visual, tactual and kinesthetic sensations as well as imagination, logic and emotion. In the best of possible worlds, all of these qualities participate in the performing of a musical piece and need to be developed and balanced. On the way to bringing up young musicians and setting them on the road to the wonderful musical world, there are many challenges for a teacher: recognizing the abilities of the individual student; finding ways to improve challenging areas while keeping secure ones intact; and determining what is immediately required over what can wait for a while – to name only a few. Above all a teacher's task is to be a supportive guide, whose help and coaching are valuable and effective. It is my hope that "The First Book of Piano Music" be an effective tool for teacher as well as student, mapping roads and paths to avoid obstacles along their journey through the magic realm of music.

Sincerely, *Denis Khvatov*