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## An Innovative Piano Study for Non-Piano Major

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### Abstract

This article outlines of “An Innovative Piano Study for Non-Piano Major”. A set of piano study is specially designed for non-piano major who has competent musical foundation and basic piano skill. A Collection of short piano studies comprises of 36 technical exercises with varied difficulties and styles arranged in order of difficulty. Most are only about 2 pages in length based on tone center and unfamiliar scales. This uniqueness will prove to cultivate better reading, aural, and technical skills. Such development on piano technique helps facilitate studies of piano pieces and polyphonic music for students and provides good foundation for advance piano playing. However, this set of studies can also be used for piano students in general as they have unconventional harmony and styles in comparison to the usual exercises regularly used today. It provides an interesting alternative to the practice of piano technique.

**Keywords:** Piano Technique, Piano Study, Piano Exercise, Etude, Non-Piano Major

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## Introduction

Pianos are unique in themselves in that they possess and are able to create complete musical elements, especially in terms of harmony, which is restricted in other solo instruments. By developing a musician's pianistic ability, one also promotes the betterment of musicianship. As such, the capability of playing a piano is considered beneficial for musicians in general. This is especially true for piano minor students (in other words, students who major in instruments other than piano) and singers who wish to improve their pianistic skills. The emphasis of this research is placed upon undergraduate students in colleges and universities whose instrumental skills are proficient enough. Such students should also possess a solid background in Music Theory and History, and should have played the piano for a certain period. In addition, it is worth emphasizing that piano classes for non-piano students are compulsory to the prescribed undergraduates in their freshmen year; this is done globally in universities because piano is beneficial for studying keyboard harmony, and it will help students achieve the understanding in Music Theory and also develop the knowledge in harmony and aural abilities considerably.

Although there are enough materials, pieces, and exercises for general piano students nowadays, there has not been an adequate syllabus for piano minor students whose cognitive abilities are different from others; the target group may realize and understand the elements in a piece in a very short time, but they also lack the essential techniques to convey such understanding effectively. Therefore, a set of the study specifically designed for these students is required to help them achieve the goal in progress their musical talents. Moreover, this will help them with sight-reading, ear-training, realization of techniques and timbre involved, as well as develops the ability to perform pieces that are not monophony, which will provide a solid foundation for advanced piano studies in their futures.

### **An Innovative Piano Study for Non-Piano Major**

“An Innovative Piano Study for Non-Piano Major” comprises 36 studies varying in difficulty and musical styles. The objective is to promote the complete musical efficiency in piano minor students through playing piano. All the pieces from No.1 through No.36 provide emphasis on controlling the fingers on the keyboard with continuity and equilibrium. This covers playing in legato, non-legato, and articulating the fingers in order to obtain the desired dynamics by individual hands. More demanding techniques such as playing in thirds, fifths,

and octaves in each hand, stressing the fingers in arpeggios, and keeping the drone in one of the fingers whilst others continue the melody (as if to create a polyphonic effect by one hand) are gradually added as the study progresses. Additionally, the structure in most of the pieces is based on tonal center and unfamiliar scales in order to stimulate the acquaintance with modern sounds that are an important element in contemporary music. This study is unique in that it adapts the unfamiliar scales used in contemporary music (such as church modes, octatonic scale, whole-tone scale, and chromatic scale) in order to generate the pieces unique in both melody and harmony. Since such scales can cause various types of accidentals once adapted in a piece, the students will benefit, through constant practice, the sight-reading skills and aural skills. The unacquainted intervals and chords will force the students to listen carefully in order to analyze and separate the sound correctly. As for techniques, the students will progress their technical abilities by practicing the fingerings that are different from the normal conventions. Hence, they will have the opportunity to be familiar with sounds caused by non-traditional tonal system.

### The Structure of Piano Study

In regards to the structure, the unfamiliar scales, the essential piano techniques, and the development of aural and sight-reading skills have to be taken into account;

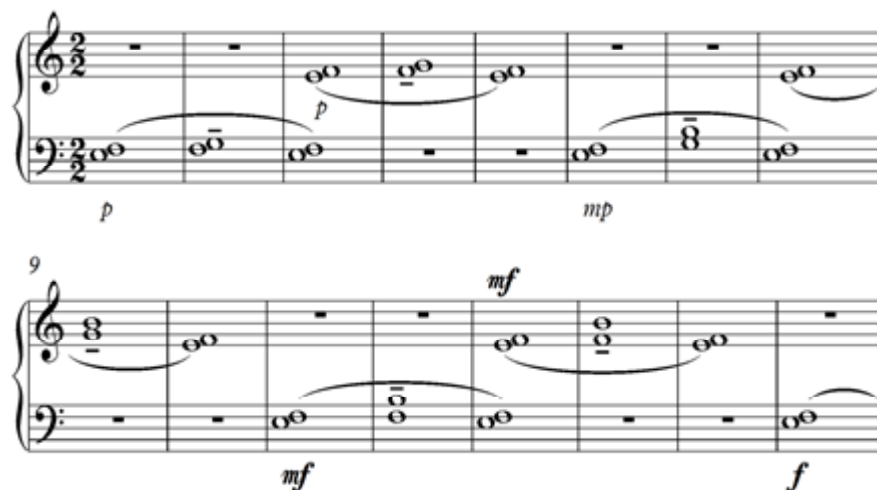
1. The pieces in this study use the tone-center system, albeit not necessarily the major-minor system. In other words, most pieces begin and end with the same tone center in order to help with the ability to sight-read the non-traditional tonal music. Example from No.28 provides the different accidentals posed on the same pitch in different intervals.

#### *Example 1*



2. Importance is given to phrases composed from melodic and harmonic intervals in order to promote the students' sight-reading and aural imagination skills. This is achieved by relating the intervals, dynamics, pitch values, and fingering movements together, as in No.23.

### Example 2



3. The main idea may be derived from chords, which are presented as accompaniment to the melody, in order to develop the ability to listen harmonically and play more than one pitch simultaneously, as found in No.27.

### Example 3



4. The mixture of multi-linear melodies causes a polyphonic effect that enhances the sight-reading ability, as well as the coordination of hands and aural skills, as in No.7.

*Example 4*



5. Contrary motions are used to exercise similar fingerings and help with aural abilities, as in No.2.

*Example 5*



6. Parallel motions are used to improve sight-reading skills for passages that go in a similar direction but with different fingering. It also helps the students to listen to consecutive parallels, as in No.3.

*Example 6*



7. Melody and chordal accompaniment with combination of techniques to create distinctive timbres in different hands helps improve the coordination of hands. An example, taken from No.10, shows that while the melodic legato is achieved in one hand, the chordal staccato is achieved in the other.

*Example 7*



8. Consecutive broken seventh chords help the students to play arpeggios, as well as sight-read and listen for intervals of thirds, as in No.17.

*Example 8*



9. Block chords and broken chords are combined in order to create a vertical block chords and a horizontal arpeggios simultaneously. They also help realizing the heterophonic effect through different functions in each hand, as in No.18.

*Example 9*



10. Intervallic inversions through polytonality help with the sight-reading and aural skills. Also, in No.20, the contrast between white keys and black keys is given especial importance by the right hand wholly devoted to white keys and the left hand to the black keys.

*Example 10*



11. Abrupt change of key, along with dotted rhythms, develops not only the technical rhythmic skills but also aural and sight-reading abilities in realizing the change of key, as in No.26.

*Example 11*



12. Chromatic scales are imposed to exercise appropriate fingerings when playing consecutive semitones and realizing different accidentals. This includes listening the minor seconds, as shown in No.30.

*Example 12*



13. Different rhythmic juxtaposition by using triplets and duplets can train the students' control of rhythm and help them differentiate various rhythm, as in No.31.

*Example 13*



14. Tritones are adapted in polyphonic pieces in order to facilitate the students' simultaneous coordination of fingers and aural training, as in No.34.

*Example 14*



### **Evident Piano Techniques Found in the Study**

The word 'Technique' means skillfulness in the command of fundamentals deriving from practice and familiarity; "practice greatly improves proficiency". Musical technique is the ability of instrumental and vocal musicians to exert optimal control of their instruments or vocal cords in order to produce the precise musical effects they desire. Improving one's technique generally entails practicing exercises that improve one's muscular sensitivity and agility. Technique is independent of musicality. Works known as 'études' (meaning 'study') are also frequently used for the improvement of technique. For piano students, this could imply the ability to control the fingers with clarity, continuity, and balance sound shading on the keyboard.



The basic techniques required for piano minor students comprise;

**1. The position of the five-fingers on the keyboard.**

The position of the hands and the continuity of the five-finger position on the keyboard, including the alteration of hands and fingers are essential fundamentals to keyboard playing. Importance is given to the progress of all the fingers to coordinate and work together in balance by placing the hands appropriately and changing the positions with consideration, as in No.1.

**2. Legato touch**

Being able to play a legato is the core of playing piano. Usually, this is notated by a curve either above or below two or more pitches. In order to accomplish the effect, one must press a finger on the keyboard, keep the finger, and release the key, together with transferring the momentum to the adjacent pitch. A student may begin practicing this by playing two consecutive pitches in legato while alternating the fingers; for example, using the thumb with the index finger and with the middle finger until all fingers in both hands have been exercised. Later, more pitches may be added from two, three, and eventually five in the hand position. Once this is achieved, the student may begin practicing these consecutive pitches, ascending and descending in a moderately slow tempo at first, and then accelerating the tempo later, as in No.5.

**3. Staccato touch**

Staccato are notated by the dots above or below the pitches, thus causing the effect of detached sounds, which is achieved by releasing a finger from the key before striking the following pitch. In theory, staccatos would devalue the rhythm of certain pitches by half, hence a rather swift sound is achieved and will not be connected to the preceding pitch, as in No.14.

**4. Controlling dynamics**

In music, 'dynamic' means the level of sound or pitch measured by density. This is written by using basic symbols such as 'f' implies loud and 'p' implies soft. Other symbols are ppp, pp, mp, mf, ff, etc. The density of sound is measured relatively instead of rigidly and is therefore relative to the context of a specific piece. Being able to control and weigh one's physical force on the keyboard in order to cause different dynamics is considered an art of applying and varying power and balance. Dynamics in music are composed of loudness, soft-

ness, and accents. Playing in such contrasting dynamics will contribute to the development of aural skills because one must listen and learn how to control the instrument effectively in order to achieve the desired quality of sound, as in No.23.

### **5. Achieving balance sound shading**

Achieving balance sound shading in each hand means playing different dynamics between the two hands; for instance, while the right hand plays loudly, the left hand might play softly simultaneously. This requires a good coordination between the hands, as seen in No.26.

## **Preparation Before Practice**

1. The ability to sight-read quickly can be practiced by learning to realize the pitches from the staves; for instance, the distance from a note notated on one line to the one on the next line is always a third, as well as the ones notated between the lines to another of similar type. Some examples to this are the relationships between C-E and D-F.

2. It is essential to correctly define the melodic intervals and harmonic intervals when using intervals as a tool to realize the pitches while sight-reading. This is emphasized so that the rational relationship between the pitches and the fingers is constructed.

3. Being able to categorize the types of sound, melody, rhythm, and note-grouping will facilitate the sight-reading ability.

4. Prior to start practicing, the essential details should be observed. These include meter, tempo, style, key, hand positions, accidentals, and dynamics. Then, try analyzing the structure, phrasing, texture, and characteristic melodic progressions; all of these will be helpful to the basic understanding of the pieces before actually playing.

5. Although choosing the appropriate fingering is important and necessary for piano playing, there is no specified fingering given in this study. This is because the objective of the study is to allow the students to choose the most appropriate fingering at liberty, suitable to their techniques, in order to progress the working of each finger variously. Nevertheless, once choosing an suitable type of fingering for each piece. It is expected that the same set of fingering is practiced until the student is convenient with it. Then, should one so desire, alternative types of fingering may be devised and put into practice; however, this also requires repetitive practice, and the students may consult about fingering with their teachers or professionals.

## **Practicing the Piano Study**

1. Begin by practicing in separate hands; this will help with the functionality of each finger in each hand to operate as balance as possible. One should bear in mind that the order of the fingers in each hand is dissimilar; e.g. the left hand begins with the little finger to the thumb from left to right, whilst the right begins with the thumb to the little finger from left to right, but when playing the same pitch by using both hands at the same time, different fingers with different ability and strength must be used. Naturally and anatomically, the thumb is the strongest of the fingers, followed by the index, middle, little, and ring fingers, respectively. As such, if a student begins by carefully practicing each hand, he/she will be able to play with both hands more easily afterward. In the meantime, learning to control the balance in each finger requires delicate listening prior to gradually adjusting the weight and speed in each finger with care. Hence, this could be regarded as a way to listen intently.

2. The students should begin by practicing in a slow tempo first in order to take time to consider and control the weight so that the desired effect is achieved. They should also listen to check the quality of the output in earlier to make amendments afterwards. Later, once they have fully gained control in their performance, they may accelerate the tempo, little by little, whilst maintaining the desired quality of sound.

3. Metronomes may be used to help with maintaining the speed; students sometimes lose control of tempo without them. As a result, it is advisable to begin with a slow tempo and with caution, particularly in regard to symbols and fingering, along with trying to control the weight and balance as indicated.

4. Repeat the pieces over and over, adhering to the objective of each piece, until one develops own techniques, listening and sight-reading skills to a mature level. Since techniques may be developed by gaining acquaintance with the pitches, the movements of hands, fingers, wrists, and arms in various patterns (i.e. up-down, left-right), provided that the muscles are acknowledged about the natural movement, the brain will automatically memorize the patterns and function with the relevant muscles. Whilst correctly repeating a pattern would facilitate the techniques, incorrectly repeating a pattern would likely cause the catastrophic techniques. However, the students may practice repetitively in the same rhythm until the objective in performing and listening is achieved in each piece.

5. Special attention must be given whilst sight-reading and listening in order that the students can gain most benefit in technical practice.

6. The students are not required to practice in consecutive order from No.1 to the last, they may opt to choose the pieces that fulfill their technical and listening objectives.

However, the accomplishment that each student will gain depends on their devotion to practice, and this study is but a fulfillment of the pianistic ability of piano minor students. Therefore, students may also use those standard studies by Czerny, Hummel, and Bulow to improve similar techniques.

## Conclusion

The difference between those who have fundamental musical knowledge with certain musical skills on other instruments and those who have no musical knowledge whatsoever is distinctively evident in that musicians will already have known all the musical elements but only lack the opportunity to grasp the overall picture of a piece whilst practicing alone. As a result, despite having a solid musical background, these musicians still encounter difficulty in successfully playing the piano. In other words, they probably lack the sight-reading and sight-playing skills on the grand staff, which requires them to read two clefs simultaneously along with to carefully control both hands in order to coordinate effectively. Having a study that helps develop the techniques in a short period of time as well as contribute to the understanding of musical elements will help the students to play the piano or adapt the method to music notated in multiple staves. In order to progress the pianistic ability, this study aims to present short pieces with non-complex structure that focuses on piano techniques. The musical elements and aural development are also given importance since such skills will be beneficial in defining the musical details. By listening intently, one understands the roles of the pitches and sounds in the pieces, as well as develops one's own techniques, especially in terms of balance control that is directly derived from intensive listening.

This set of piano study brings together aural skills, sight-reading skills, and piano performance skills. These skills are woven and categorized into a set of connecting piano study whose main emphasis is to develop a good musicianship in the students. However, one must take into account that 'Practice makes perfect only if practice is perfect'.



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