



Piano Adventure

Student Guidebook



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Introduction

People love to make music together! Keyboard instruments have allowed people to do this for over 600 years. There was the small, soft sound of the clavichord in the 1500s. In the 1700s the music of Bach was played on the harpsichord, which had strings that were plucked by a quill.



Pianoforte

A new type of instrument was invented in the 1700s. It was called "pianoforte" because the Italian word for soft is "piano" and the word for loud is "forte". This innovative instrument had the ability to play both loud and soft sounds at the touch of a finger and allowed composers to create beautiful, expressive music.

It was common to have a piano in the home, and proper young ladies were expected to learn to play it! It was socially acceptable for a man and women to spend time alone if they were playing a piano duet together! By the 19th century, the piano was the most popular instrument in Europe.

The 20th century brought new inventions and ways to listen to and share music, including the electronic keyboard and synthesizer. There are many versions of keyboard instruments, but the **acoustic** piano remains a popular and welcome fixture in homes, schools, and concert halls.

Program

Hungarian Rhapsody #2	Franz Liszt
Variations on Ah, vous dirai-je Maman	Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
Scenes from Childhood (From Foreign Lands and People, Catch Me, An Important Event, Dreaming)	Robert Schumann
Reflections in the Water	Claude Debussy
Mystery Music	
Pirates of the Caribbean	Movie theme by Klaus Badelt

About the Composers



Franz Liszt (1811 – 1886)

- ◆ born in Doborján, Hungary
- ◆ composer, conductor and teacher
- ◆ wrote more than 700 pieces of music

Franz Liszt was a rock star. He played music that was fast and furious, brushing wild hair off his brow and making sure everyone could see his fingers

dashing across the keys. The ladies would sometimes faint and throw their bling onto the stage, and even grown men would swoon and cry! When the concert was over, people rushed the stage and fought to get souvenirs. He was the musical superstar of the 19th century!

In spite of this rock star image, Liszt was an incredibly devoted musician. He sometimes travelled 4,000 miles a year by train, which was very difficult and unusual in his time. He often donated the money he earned from his concerts to charity.



The Mozart Family

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756 – 1791)

- ◆ born in Salzburg, Austria
- ◆ performed concerts for Kings and Queens as a young child
- ◆ composed music for piano, opera, orchestra and chorus

Mozart was a child **prodigy** with a comical sense of humor. He wrote his first songs at the age of five, and at age six, he toured Europe with his father and his sister, Nannerl, who was also a talented musician.

He was well known as a performer. Competitions were as popular in 18th century Europe as they are today. While we have *America's Got Talent*, in 1781 Emperor Joseph II arranged a piano competition between Mozart and Roberto Clementi, who happened to be a competitor of Mozart.

Pianists would often **improvise** music at concerts, much like Jazz musicians in the 20th century. The history books give different accounts of who won the competition, although there are stories that the Emperor bet the Grand Duchess that Mozart would win, and that he won his bet.

Robert Schumann (1810 – 1856)

- ◆ born in Zwickaw, Germany
- ◆ studied to be a lawyer before becoming a composer
- ◆ wife Clara Schumann was famous pianist



Robert Schumann

As a young man, Schumann showed great musical talent, but his family encouraged him to study law. He did for one year, but then went back to music. He wrote beautiful and expressive piano music. He also was a music critic, which means he wrote about music for a magazine.

Robert Schumann got musical ideas from books, stories, and sometimes even the letters from his own name. *Scenes from Childhood* is a tribute to games and events from childhood. This is called **program music**, a style of music that became popular in the 1800s during the **Romantic Period**.



Claude Debussy (1862 – 1918)

- ◆ born in Saint-Germain-en-Laye, France
- ◆ he is considered a founder of 20th century music

During Debussy's lifetime there were many new ideas in the arts in France and Europe. The artist Claude Monet created a new style of painting that emphasized color and light. In 1872 his painting *Impression – Sunrise* gave a name to this new

movement: **Impressionism**.

Debussy's music also didn't follow tradition. He focused on **timbre** (tone color) and layers of sound created by the use of the pedals, **glissandos**, **tremolos** and **arpeggios**. His melodies did not have a clear beginning and end, and his rhythms didn't always follow a rigid pattern.

Reflets dans l'eau ("Reflections in the Water") is inspired by the motion of water and light reflecting off the water. The beauty of water in nature was a theme for many of Debussy's pieces.

Klaus Badelt (b. 1967)

- ◆ born in Frankfurt, West Germany
- ◆ best known for composing film scores



Klaus Badelt

Klaus Badelt started his musical career composing for movies and commercials in his homeland. In 1998, Oscar-winning film composer Hans Zimmer invited him to work at Media Ventures in Santa Monica, California. On his own and in collaboration with other composers, Badelt has written over fifty film scores. One of his more famous scores was for the 2003 film *Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl*.

Resources and References

Books

The Piano and Other Keyboard Instruments. Rita Storey. Smart Apple Media, 2010.

Should I Play the Piano? Nicola Barber. Heinemann Library, 2007.

Music (Eyewitness Books). Neil Ardley. Dorling Kindersley, 1989. (pp. 44 – 48)

Introducing Mozart. Roland Vernon. Silver Burdett Press, 1996.

Mozart. Catherine Brighton. Reed Business Information, Inc., 1990.

Online Resources

How does the piano work?

http://www.ducksters.com/musicforkids/how_the_piano_works.php

<http://www.explainthatstuff.com/piano.html>

What is a simple machine?

<http://www.enchantedlearning.com/physics/machines/Levers.shtml>

What happens when you press a piano key?

<http://www.rennerusa.com/piano-action-guide/grand-piano-virtual-action-model/>

Why should I play piano?

<http://www.healthfitnessrevolution.com/top-10-health-benefits-playing-piano/>

What does it look like when they build a Steinway piano?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HttInAXsvtw>

Where can I learn more about composers?

<http://www.classicsforkids.com>

Can I play a virtual piano online?

<http://virtualpiano.net>

Isn't it Grand?

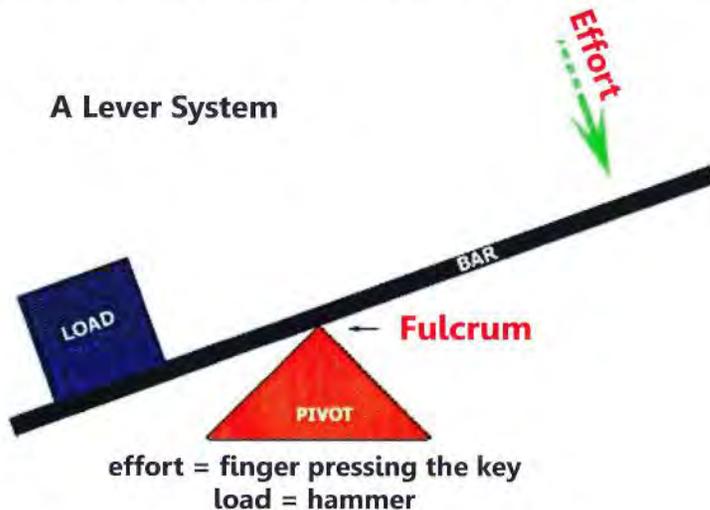
Ready, set, action! Inside the piano is a very important group of parts that is called the "action". The action is made of wood and does not require electricity to work. The thousands of pieces in the action work together to make sound. The pianist can dampen (stop) the sound and control the sound in ways that make beautiful music.

A piano key is a lever that sits on top of a fulcrum (pivot). At the other end of the lever is the action mechanism. When a piano key is pressed down, the piano action makes the hammer strike the strings and the strings **vibrate**. The vibration is transferred to the soundboard through the bridge, much like the guitar or violin. The vibration is amplified by the soundboard so it can be heard. There is a damper on top of the strings that is lifted to allow the strings to vibrate.



The lid on the grand piano also helps direct the sound so the audience can hear it.

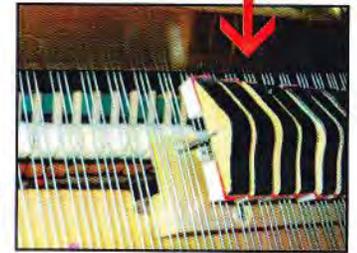
A piano has over 200 strings. The strings are stretched very tightly. The wooden sound board would collapse from the tension if it didn't have support. There is a heavy cast iron plate that supports the system. This metal piece has holes called rosettes, which allow the sound to come through.



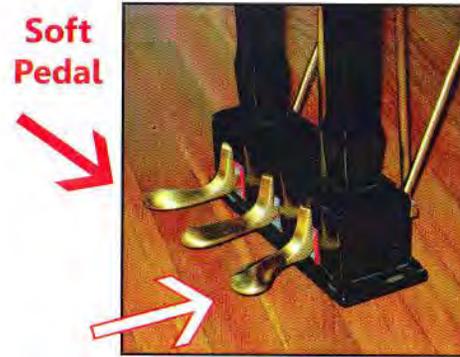
The grand piano gets its shape from the length of the strings. The low strings are much longer than the high strings, which is why the left side is long and the right side curves in.

The brass things near the floor are called pedals. Pianos can have two or three pedals. The one that is used most often is the one on the right, called the damper pedal. When a pianist presses the damper pedal it lifts the small felt squares off the strings (called dampers) which allows the strings to continue to vibrate even after the pianist lifts their finger off the key. This can make it sound like a pianist has more than ten fingers. When the pedal is depressed, each time the pianist plays a new key, it adds a new layer of sound that will continue to ring until the pedal is released.

Dampers



Soft Pedal



Damper Pedal

The pedal on the left is called the soft pedal. When you look inside a grand piano you will see the strings grouped together in twos or threes. This is because each note has two or three strings that work together to make the sound. The exception to this is the low notes, which have one, thick string. When the soft pedal is depressed the piano action shifts, so the hammer is only hitting one string, thus making the sound softer. The official name for the soft pedal is "una corda" or one string.

High Note Strings

Soundboard

Low Note Strings





Upright Piano



Grand Piano

Glossary

acoustic - played without electricity

arpeggio - playing the notes of a chord one at a time

chord - two or more notes played at the same time

genre - a category or style of music

glissandos - gliding the finger across the keys

improvise - make up music on the spot

Impressionism - a style of painting that emphasized color and light

prodigy - a child with exceptional talent

Program Music - music that tells a story without words

Romantic Period - name given to the musical period in 1800s Europe

timbre - the characteristic of a sound; tone color

tremolos - rolling the notes of a chord quickly

vibrate - move back and forth very quickly



Would you like to take a piano lesson?

Steinway Society is offering a free piano class and evaluation to students. If you are interested in finding out more about taking piano lessons, contact Sylvia Ferguson to schedule your free class!

sylviaferguson00@yahoo.com