

The Pedagogy of Piano Adventures

Level 5: The I-IV-V Tapestry

BY RANDALL FABER

Considered entitling this article The I-IV-V Harmonic Grid. Such a title aptly conveys the concept—a grid of primary chords in all inversions branded across the keyboard and strongly embedded in the student’s visual cortex. Though I appreciate the solidness and certainty invoked by this industrial image, we might instead consider the softer word “tapestry.” As we read and create music, we weave through the I-IV-V tapestry of primary chords. At Level 5, we ensure that the student can see and feel this structural tapestry for each tonal piece.

Scales

“Why learn scales?” students ask. Our answer? A scale reduces 88 keys to seven. Five keys are eliminated in each octave (12 chromatic tones minus five leaves seven diatonic scale steps), and each of these seven tones retains its own meaning regardless of octave. So when playing the Pachelbel Canon in D, for instance, we can ignore one third of the keys on the keyboard and visualize a simple thread of the D major scale weaving through seven tones per octave, across the entire keyboard. Whether reading or improvising, attention is delimited to this D major thread for security, predictability, and confidence.

Consider When the Sun Rises ... from the Level 5 Lesson Book (p. 36). The piece is essentially an “improvisation” in B-flat major, excepting a brief color detour with the A-flat in measures 6-9. By delimiting the keyboard to the notes of the B-flat major scale, and imagining this “scale thread” of two black keys interspersed with five white keys, the piece becomes easy to read and easy to play. Furthermore, there is little chance of a bad note sounding because the scale tones all relate to the tonality.

Sound Check:

Is your L.H. playing softly while your R.H. “sings” the melody?

When the Sun Rises...

N. Faber

The last three measures of this piece offer opportunity for improvisation. Taking the short rhythmic motive given, explore any tones from the B-flat major “thread.” It is surprising to see—and to hear—how easy this can be.

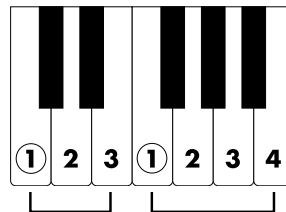


Write I, IV, or V to show the harmony in measures 10-15.

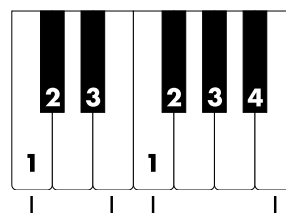
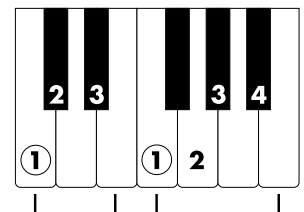
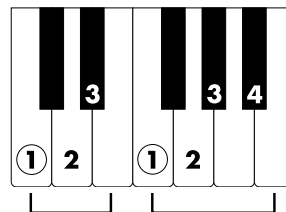
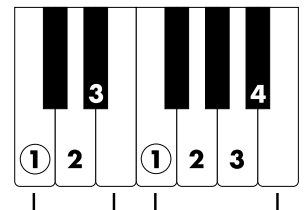
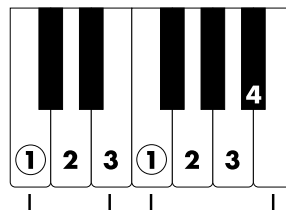
Well, yes, there is that issue of fumbled fingering. Fortunately, the flat-key scales give special opportunity to simplify fingering, which is why we devote Level 5 to the flat key signatures. Here’s the rule:

For RH flat-key scales, the thumb plays on C and F

So we always have RH fingers 1-2-3 on C-D-E, and fingers 1-2-3-4 on F, G, A, B.



Without shifting this image, let’s flat the B under finger 4. Now also flat the E in the 3-finger pattern up from C. Now add A-flat to the 4-finger pattern. Back to the 3-finger pattern for D-flat, etc. And so we go around the flat side of the circle of 5ths: C-F-Bb-Eb-Ab-Db-Gb.



In every case, the RH fingering is consistent: three fingers built up from C, and four fingers built up from F. Work this over in blocked fashion—three fingers, four fingers—without beginning on the actual

keynote. Then block it out in this same fashion, but going up several octaves. Now play the actual scale. (It's not really important which finger plays the black key opening tonic.)

With this fingering in mind, let's revisit When the Sun Rises and improvise on measure 6, where we find an A-flat chord over the B-flat pedal point. Place RH fingers over C-D-Eb and/or F-G-Ab-Bb and improvise over the LH ostinato. One might return to B-flat major accompanied by the opening ostinato. Also consider exploring alternative scale passages modeled after those in measures 13 and 14. We composed these scale passages to begin with thumb on F (measure 13) and thumb on C (measure 14) to reinforce the flat-key fingering rule. In improvising, one might use the prescribed hand placements, but begin on any note.

Carillon Fantasia (p. 42) orients to the key of E-flat with thumb placement on F. The piece alternates between motivic thirds and motivic seconds, acquainting the student with the look and feel of E-flat major.

Carillon Fantasia

Fast, joyous (♩ = 84-92) R. Faber

L.H. over

Chord Etudes

Scales are invaluable, but it is the combining of scale tones in thirds that gives tonal music its harmonic structure. Recalling our metaphor, we use the scale "thread" to weave the chord tapestry. First and foremost, we weave the tapestry of I, IV, and V chords—in all inversions.

As Level 5 begins to progress through various keys, each piece is preceded by a short etude, disguised by a title. Coral Reef Etude, for example, opens the book as a primary-chord study in C, featuring all inversions of I, IV, and V.

To maximize the effectiveness of this and similar etudes:

- Play by memory. Encourage students to look at their hands for these etudes so that the keyboard patterns are visually imprinted.
- Play with eyes closed. Highlight the feel of the keys and the feel of the thirds and fourths.
- Transpose. Use Coral Reef Etude as a generic warm-up for every piece, in any key, whether major or minor.

Coral Reef Etude is the harmonic grid, the primary-chord tapestry. It is essential for the student to grasp these chord pat-

A triad is a 3-note chord built in 3rds. All major and minor chords and their inversions are triads. Play these I, IV, and V triads, naming them aloud: tonic, subdominant, and dominant.

Coral Reef Etude

Flowing (♩ = 76-88) (Inversion Study in C)

DISCOVERY Transpose *Coral Reef Etude* to the Key of G major. In the Key of G: the tonic is ____, the subdominant is ____, the dominant is ____.

terns that combine the student's understanding of primary chords with understanding of chord inversions. This is the bridge to the intermediate repertoire.

Notice that Blue Etude (p. 11) is a primary-chord etude in F, preparing for Tumbleweed Blues (p. 12). Similarly, Rolling River Etude (p. 14) drills the primary chords in A major using the LH pattern of Shenandoah (p. 15). As the student progresses to new keys, come back to Blue Etude, transposing, for example, to B-flat (especially for those pre-jazzers who will be playing in B-flat with brass players). Revisit Rolling River Etude as preparation for the pieces in C minor and G minor when these are encountered later in the book.

Popular Repertoire

A look at *Piano Adventures*® Popular Repertoire Level 5 gives insight into the importance of chord comprehension. Consider Elton John's Candle in the Wind. The entire verse (Mm. 5-20) simply alternates between I and IV chords (G and C in the key of G major). Yet, how many students fail to recognize this simple chord pattern and struggle to decode 150 notes instead of two chords? So we pair the arrangement with an "Accompanying Activity" that drills I-IV chords in a pop accompaniment style. The arrangement then reduces to simplicity.

In a different context, we again explore the repetition of I



ACCOMPANYING ACTIVITY

Chords in the Wind

These are the primary chords (I, IV, V) in the Key of G:

Each can be played in any inversion.

The most common chord change in popular music is the shift between I and IV chords.

Below is a two-hand accompaniment that alternates between I and IV chords. Practice and memorize it using all three R.H. inversions, as shown.

Transpose the above to the Keys of C, D, E, F, and A.

1323

11

and IV in Wind Beneath My Wings. The corresponding activity, titled “The Bass Beneath My Wings,” explores aural recognition of the bass line and various accompaniments for the I-IV chord progression.

The Power of Primary Chords

In the Level 2B article (*The Piano Adventures® Teacher*, March, 2004, No. 4, pp. 5-7), we discussed “The Power of Primary Chords.” Indeed, one can’t overestimate the value of recognizing fundamental harmonies—for reading, for memorization, and for musical creativity. We recapitulate this concept here at Level 5 by weaving an elementary understanding of primary chords into a patterned “I-IV-V Tapestry” by including chord inversions.

The warm-up etudes in *Piano Adventures®* Level 5 provide some very effective tools. But learning the etudes once, in the key written, will not make a real musician. We need to roll up our sleeves and help students transpose these etudes to many, if not all, keys. Do so in conjunction with learning each new scale and each new piece. With this higher expectation, we can indeed develop a Harmonic Grid that is “industrial-strength.” Or, if you prefer the softer metaphor, a “I-IV-V Tapestry” that won’t fade by next week’s lesson. ■■■

PIANO

Adventures®

by Nancy and Randall Faber

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Lesson Book FF1093

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