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The Piano Adventures® Teacher
is published three times a year by
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From the Editor

BY MARIENNE USZLER

*K*inesthesia. What a descriptive (and musical-sounding!) word. Thank you, Greeks. Translated traditionally, it would be *cinesthesia*. There are two parts to the word. *Cineo* means “put in motion.” *Aesthesia* means “sensation.” So, kinesthesia is the awareness we have of motion, especially the motion, balance, position, and weight of our own bodies. We *feel* that we move and, if we pay attention, we can also monitor *how* we move.

Take a good look at our cover. Everyone’s in motion. That bell ringer is using a full arm to sound imaginary chimes. The whirling dervishes are spinning with energy and abandon. And those arms and hands are stretching to make the big drum “boom.” What does all this have to do with teaching someone to play the piano? It is activities like these that free and stimulate the body to feel and enjoy rhythm, that most internal and primal of all musical sensations.

In “An Invitation to the Dance,” a short essay in a program book for a play about dancers, Megan Monaghan comments on how closely connected we are to movement. “Our earliest experience *in utero* is the rhythmic sounds of a heartbeat, and we continue to respond to rhythm in joyful, physical ways throughout our lives—from public occasions such as wedding receptions to the spontaneous solo boogie in the kitchen or living room when a favorite song comes on the radio.”

Often when we play the piano—and when we teach someone to play—we concentrate too narrowly on motions made by the fingers, wrists, and arms. Sometimes, we even forget about the arms! But the whole body must be in involved—feet, seat, spine, lungs, shoulders, eyes, ears, mind, and heart. Only when you play as a whole person do you absorb the music, play it with ease and skill, and communicate what it means to others. If you don’t use your entire body, or if you ignore its feedback, you’re in trouble.

In this issue, Janet Palmberg reminds us of the importance of recognizing sensory modality preference. Each of us has a strong propensity to certain ways of relating to the external world, whether seeing, hearing, moving, touching, or feeling. Although we are drawn more to some, or one, of these modes, it is equally true that the more we respond to, or are stimulated by, multiple sensations the richer and deeper is the total experience.

Each student is an individual with certain learning preferences. Some students need to see

and be shown. Others are particularly sensitive to moods and feelings. Many students, especially young students, come alive chiefly through physical contact with whatever is out there. In our efforts to form rounded hand shapes, teach accurate reading, and instill careful counting habits, we sometimes overlook the most direct and natural ways to experience music, particularly rhythm. Big gestures and full-body activities awaken visceral responses to making, hearing, and enjoying music. And they’re fun!

As Randall Faber points out, the Level 5 *Piano Adventures*® books are designed to “strongly embed” the primary chords in the “student’s visual cortex.” Seeing chord and scale patterns and translating these to tactile experiences is what makes reading easy and playing more secure. Some students, however, “see” too much, or “look” only at details. Reducing the information load to essentials is not only comforting, it’s also the key to internalizing the information.

Seeing what’s important and translating that into hand shapes like chords and intervals connects sight and touch. Playing by “touch” is a useful skill, not only for those who are eager to get their hands on the keys and *do* something, but especially for those learners who tend to rely too heavily on visual information. Slipping and sliding with an assortment of seventh shapes and sounds is both “cool” and “handy” for pianists, as I suggest when teaching or learning *Jazz Reflection*. It’s a good thing to be a “touchy-feely” pianist!

Take another look at our action-oriented cover. The images of those high-spirited dancers and drummers bring us back to moving, seeing, feeling, and touching—to kinesthesia, in fact. Perhaps we should reflect on how much our own teaching puts students in contact with what it means to “feel” and make music. Is it possible that our teaching reflects *anaesthesia*, a lack of sensation? That would be numbing, indeed—both for us and for our students. So, off those piano benches. Swing, bend, sway, dance, drum—move!

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Back From Down Under

Nancy and Randall Faber just returned from Australia and New Zealand. Randall opened the six-city tour with a recital for parents, students, and teachers in the new Scots College performance hall in Melbourne. The Fabers closed the tour with an all-day workshop for teachers in the exquisitely renovated Sydney Conservatory. The tour celebrated the release of the International Edition of *Piano Adventures*® and the launch of the *Piano Adventures*® Gold Star Performance Books. The Gold Star series features listening CDs with vocals that highlight musical expression and aural skills. Visit www.PianoTeaching.com for audio samples.