

Favourite Children's Songs for Piano – Teaching Notes

P5) **Mary Had A Little Lamb:** Uses just three notes – C, D and E – just the first three fingers of the right hand. Introduces the crotchet, minim and semibreve, and can conceivably be taught in the very first lesson.

P5) **Ode To Joy:** All five fingers of the right hand are used. Notes move only in steps; can students follow them accurately? Can they identify the descending run?

P6) **Jingle Bells:** Again, just uses the five notes of the right hand with no movement required. Longer at 16 bars, though repetitive. Introduces quavers and different intervals (not just steps). Mention that line-to-line intervals (or space-to-space intervals) – 3rds – require a skipped note.

P6) **Pop Goes The Weasel:** Just five fingers of the right hand. Introduces 3/4 time. The fingers 5-3-1 on G-E-C make up the C major chord. Can the pupil play the three notes together? Can they get the piece to the correct tempo?

P7) **Oranges And Lemons:** A piece for just the left hand. Uses the bass clef, and just five notes. Left thumb starts on D (can the pupil work that out?). This piece will help strengthen fingers 4 and 5. There's a prominent G major broken chord. Compare it to the C major chord in the last piece.

P7) **London Bridge Is Falling Down:** Just the right hand. New hand position – thumb on D. Can the pupil work out the starting note (a G)? Can they follow the steps in the four “falling down” phrases? This piece includes the first stretch – the thumb has to stretch down from D to middle C for the last note.

P8) **Incy Wincy Spider:** This is the last song of Part 1. Five notes played with the right hand, and longer at 16 bars (though repetitive). This arrangement is in simple time rather than compound time for simplicity – though perhaps the pupil can swing the rhythm when they know it really well!

P10) **Hot Cross Buns:** First song of Part 2 requires both thumbs on middle C. Left hand plays just one note (G, with finger 4), three times. Can pupil count down to that note on the score? Introduces the octave.

P10) **Westminster Chimes:** The tune played by Big Ben. Use a bell tone on the keyboard if available! It's also used as a football chant. Make sure pupil counts correctly, especially the dotted minims.

P11) **The Wheels On The Bus:** Introduces two more left hand notes. This might be a good time to introduce “All Cows Eat Grass” or “Apes Can Eat Grapes” or your own favourite equivalent! Can pupil identify the C major broken chord in the right hand?

P11) **Alouette:** This pretty little French piece is just four bars and has only one solitary left hand note (a G)! Introduces the dotted crotchet and a dotted rhythm (doesn't it sound like a galloping horse?)

P12) **Twinkle Twinkle Little Star:** Left hand here has more notes than the right hand. After it's learnt, ask the pupil to play an octave higher to make it sound extra twinkly!

P13) **God Save The Queen:** The UK's national anthem. Can pupil work out where their thumbs go? (On D, not C). Play slowly, and careful of the dotted rhythms! Both hands are of equal importance.

P14) **Row, Row, Row Your Boat:** First piece in 6/8 compound time. Discuss how each beat is divisible by 3, not 2. Try it slowly first and then increase the tempo with practise.

P14) **Happy Birthday:** This piece starts on an upbeat (anacrusis). Can pupil identify the octave? Careful when swapping hands. Maybe a good one to sing along to!

P15) **Three Blind Mice:** Introduces the tie. This piece is in compound time again – can the pupil remember what that means? The hand position is very different to previous pieces; can the pupil work out where thumbs go?

P16) **Yankee Doodle:** A good revision piece. Pupil should be able to follow the steps (and 3rds) with little assistance. Test note names and values.

P16) **The Fair:** My own simple composition to be used as a step-reading exercise. Can pupil identify the C major broken chord? Maybe add a rit. at the end of the piece.

P17) **Old MacDonald:** Tentatively introduces playing two notes at the same time – bar 12 involves playing repeated Cs with the right hand as the left hand plays a G-A-B stepwise run. Practise this *slowly* and *deliberately*.

P18) **B-I-N-G-O:** Make sure pupil holds down the minims, especially from bar 5 onwards.

P19) **Swing Low, Sweet Chariot:** Again, test to see if pupil can work out starting position, and then ask them what the ties are for. The rhythm can be quite tricky here.

P20) **The Bonny Banks Of Loch Lomond:** Talking about tricky rhythms! Dotted rhythms galore. Clap the rhythm a few times. Introduces the semiquaver and the dotted quaver rest. Notice the reverse-dotted rhythms in bars 6 and 7. It's worth asking the pupil to listen to the piece a few times. Remember all pieces can be heard on my website!

P22) **London's Burning:** Part 3 involves playing both hands together. This piece is a simple introduction to that. Left hand begins, and then when the right hand takes over the melody the left hand plays accompanying chords. Make

sure to hold the left hand chords for their full length. Practise playing hands separately until pupil can play both left hand notes together with confidence.

P22) **Playing Chords:** This is a short exercise I wrote to assist with chord playing. Left hand repeats two alternating chords under a simple right hand melody. Practise left hand separately, slowly and carefully until confident. This exercise also introduces our first dynamic – *mezzo piano*.

P23) **Frere Jacques:** New hand position for the left hand. Again, practise the chord separately. At bar 5 the right hand has to move up so finger 4 is on the G... but keep thumb on middle C, maintaining a gap between fingers 2 and 1. Also introduces a new dynamic: *forte*. Teacher could start the piece two bars after the pupil, in a round – but this would require perfect confidence from the pupil.

P23) **Drunken Sailor:** Strictly speaking, key signatures are not used for prep test level pieces, but there's no harm in mentioning their existence at this stage! Introduces the # (sharp). Perhaps play the G major scale (if C major scale has been introduced in previous lessons). The right hand rhythm requires a bit of repetition – try clapping it. A minor and G major chords are formed from the first notes of bars 1 and 3. Compare major and minor chords. Happy vs sad or a sunny day vs a rainy day etc. Remember the F# in bar 6!

P24) **Mary Had A Little Lamb & Ode To Joy (2 Hands):** Right hand is exactly the same as previous. Single left hand notes add some accompaniment.

P25) **Chords On An A Minor Theme:** Perhaps begin by playing the A natural minor scale. Notice how minor scales sound Egyptian. *The Streets Of Cairo* is a famous tune, introducing *staccato*. *Medieval Music* is an exercise I composed, introducing the need to put the thumb under the third finger, and then the third back over the thumb (as in a scale). If you haven't introduced 8-note scales yet, this is the perfect time. *Spooky Theme* is a very famous motif, employing *tremolo* and introducing a *b* (flat).

P26) **Two Hands Jingle Bells:** Ask the pupil if they can work out the left hand notes themselves.

P27) **Oh, When the Saints Go Marching In:** Left hand is a little more complicated than previous pieces, with a few passing notes introduced. Also includes accidentals and a *crescendo*.

P28) **She'll Be Coming Round The Mountain:** Simple left hand accompaniment. The trickiness lies in the right hand, whose starting position should be thumb on E, second finger on G with a gap in between. Can the pupil work that out themselves? In bar 4, right hand has to move up a large interval. Can the pupil work out where?

P29) **Beethoven's 5th (Theme)**: Introduces the *fermata*, *accents* and *fortissimo*. This piece should be played slowly and loudly before increasing the tempo and considering dynamics. The ending is difficult, but notice that hands play together in unison in bar 8, and be sure to practise the last two chords separately. Observe the rests!

Prep Test Standard Pieces

At this stage, pupils should be tested on clefs, time signatures, dynamics, note names, rests, note values and their position on the staff. Ask them to clap the rhythm of a chosen bar, play it, then sing it back with them.

P31) **Scarborough Fair**: Dynamics play a big role in this piece. Make the most of them! Try and establish a real dynamic contrast. Practise the jump in the right hand during bar 5, and make the finger-over-thumb motion in bars 11 and 15 nice and smooth.

P32) **Cockles And Mussels**: The right hand is relatively simple as it doesn't move during this piece, but there are some tricky chords in the left hand – especially on the second page! Can pupil remember what a tie is?

P34) **I Love The Flowers**: Left hand is repetitive, but right hand has some tricky jumps and lots of low notes. Make the most of the dotted rhythm. Introduces the *triplet*.

P35) **Away In A Manger**: This brings together everything the pupil has learnt throughout the book, and makes a good transition piece to Grade 1, perhaps after the prep test has taken place. The right finger two stretches in bar 2, then the thumb closes to it in order to play the D in bar 4. Be careful also of right finger 5 moving down in bar 6. And watch all those accidentals in the left hand! At least this piece is quite repetitive!

I really hope you have enjoyed *Favourite Children's Songs For Piano*. If you have, please consider leaving a review on Amazon. And please look out for my other piano works, coming soon!