

Casio Piano Teacher's Workshop 27/09/2015

As a composer and teacher I firmly believe that music 'theory' can be taught in a wholly practical way which brings engagement, enjoyment and a deeper understanding of music.

Today I will focus on teaching harmony using examples from my book, 'Fun, Games and Party Pieces for Beginner Piano'.

Harmony is the building blocks of music. The piano gives us immediate access to understanding how harmony works in the music we play, and thus making playing music really enjoyable.

Steps which will allow students to understand and play around with harmony right from the start

- Show them the concept of major and minor.
Play lots of different tunes; make it a game where they have to correctly identify each one.
Play the same tune in both modalities.
- Show them the shape of a root position triad.
- Let them try this shape out starting on different notes. Ask them to listen to it, decide whether it is major and minor, and adjust the middle note accordingly.

Now they have a whole library of chords at their fingertips.

- Show them how to play 'um cha' by alternating the bass root note in the left hand, and the chord in the right.
Now they can accompany themselves singing, and accompany you playing.
- Introduce 'um cha cha'.
They are now experiencing the concept of two-time and three-time, and it's fun.
- Get them to play either of these rhythms going from one chord to another to accompany a simple tune.
(good examples: Ode to Joy, He's Got the Whole World in His Hands, many of the tunes in Fun, Games and Party Pieces for Beginner Piano).

From here you can increase the complexity at the speed you feel is appropriate for the student.
The world is your oyster.

Learning to accompany with chords in this way will allow them to understand the harmony and timing of the pieces they play in a deep and physical way.

'Fun, Games and Party Pieces for Beginner Piano' includes these elements - transposition, variation form, major/minor, modes, the two pentatonic scales and the 12 bar blues structure.

All are introduced through the practical experience of playing the pieces.