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Pattern Play, Chord Play, Create First, and Forrest Kinney...

After working on creating four new books and 100+ new videos, Forrest Kinney graciously took the time to [answer a few interview questions](#) that we had started working on a few months ago.

I discovered his *Pattern Play* and *Chord Play* series in my studio almost a year ago. It is an excellent supplement to the (mainly) Classical education that is given in our studio. *Pattern Play* is a six-book series that de-mystifies improvisation and makes it accessible to anyone, regardless of age or skill.

Chord Play takes students through learning to play melodies by ear, and learning how to find harmonies and accompaniments that will help them make their own arrangements of loved songs.

In the interview, Forrest talks about his newest series, based on the *Pattern Play* method, called *Create First!* I just love this new series. And so do my students!

Important dates to remember:

- March 7, 2017 - deadline for registering for the Spring 2017 Royal Conservatory of Music examinations in May (theory) and June (practical).
- March 18 - 22 MTNA National Conference in Baltimore, Maryland.



What is in YOUR music bag?

As I student I remember keeping all my music together in a school bag that I brought back and forth to my lessons. It also contained my theory book, my metronome, some pencils, an eraser, and a lesson book for writing down the teacher's assignments.

As I got into higher levels, I remember having a teacher complain that I had too much 'junk' in my bag...probably because I had everything **except** the book he happened to be looking for... (Yes, I am a *little* compulsive)

As a teacher that works in a studio apart from my home, my music bag has

changed a little! Some things are left at the studio (standard lesson and theory books, metronome, facial tissue, hand sanitizer, etc.) but here's what I **do** bring back and forth to my lessons.

I have a little kit that I use for the little kids that zips up handily in a re-purposed toiletry bag. It contains

- a stress ball for little fingers to squeeze and strengthen their hands and teach wrist rotation
- a set of Flash Cards to drill notes
- a set of Lego minifigures that fit perfectly on the keys to use in games and to use with the flash cards
- multicoloured paper clips to mark pages for assignments (I use these instead of Post-it notes)
- a set of dice for playing games
- a ruler with a keyboard painted on it (useful for theory applications)
- a set of Music Blocks
- two sets of magnets numbered from 1-5 to drill finger numbers
- a set of dry erase markers for writing on my laminated dry erase grand staff

I also bring my Android tablet and charging cable. I find that it is useful for looking up YouTube videos, has a huge sheet music library loaded on to it, the RCM piano and theory syllabus for reference, the mobile metronome app, and a sketch pad that I use as a mini-black board. I will sometimes use it's note-taking feature to take electronic notes (that are e-mailed afterwards) if the student has forgotten their assignment book.

I also have a project book that has paper protector sleeves in it. I have my easy-intervals chart, a marking scheme for RCM examinations, the technical requirements for every grade, blank note paper, blank manuscript paper, 6 pages of sticker choices, and a copy of my schedule.

Everything I need to get me through the week!

Getting kids to practise -- the magic of checking boxes

Lately, I've had a few parents that shared with me their frustration in trying to get their children to practice, They've tried enticing, rewards, cajoling, reverse psychology, nagging, threatening, and forcing. But how do you get kids to actually do it on their own... and like it?

Before I share with you 'the magic of checking boxes', I have a few tricks up my sleeve when it comes to getting kids to practice. Some of these include:

1. Finding music they really want to learn

2. Sharing with them the music menu idea (appetizer: small technical exercise; main entree: pieces; dessert: a fun piece or reviewing an old song)
3. Making it a daily routine
4. Making practicing a fun thing to do!
5. Making it easy -- put the piano in an accessible place, have your books out, have an appreciative audience
6. Planning their week of practice *together* as teacher and student.

For teenagers and adults, if they are struggling with practice, I often will have them schedule practice time into their agenda and start off with smaller increments of daily practice. Another way that works is to schedule it with something that happens daily (after or before dinner, work, or school). As they realize how much fun lessons are when they come prepared, the daily practice time grows without them even noticing!

But I still had (mostly younger kids) who really struggled to practice. So here's the scoop on the magic of checking boxes. First I write out the days of the week and then depending on their schedule that week, I will offer them one or two days off from practising that **they** get to choose.

Next, we'll take up the week's assignment and divide it up into manageable sections. I ask them how many times they promise to play and repeat that section. You get to choose the minimum/maximum number of repetitions, but usually I give them a choice between two numbers: Can you do this 4 times or 5 times?

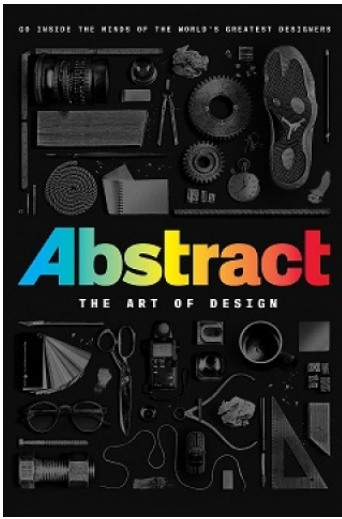
Then we draw in boxes for them to colour or check off. This practice agreement gets clipped to the front of their music book or right next to the song they are working on.

Some days will be only be a new section. Other days will be a review of an old one + a new one. Then towards the end of the week, they will be playing sections together to put all the learning together.

Parents love this approach! They don't have to nag...the student came up with the practice routine on their own. It is really clear what exactly is expected each week so they come to their lessons prepared! And what a relief it is to **everyone** involved...

Seeking inspiration in other disciplines

If you know me, you know that I often seek inspiration for music from many other different disciplines. I recently got into the Netflix series *Abstract: The Art of Design*. Season One has



documentaries about various aspects of design, including: an illustrator, a set designer, a shoe designer for Nike, and an architect, among others.

I have only watched 4 or 5 of these episodes but I was very interested to see that (for the first five of these anyway) all of the designers that were featured also have music as a hobby to varying degrees. (Several play piano or keyboards when stuck creatively, one is a violinist, etc.)

I think one of the most important ways of preventing burnout is to have other creative outlets and a way to de-stress. Isn't it great that for many of these highly creative minds, music is one of those outlets?!



Until next time!

Elena Fortin

elena@the-piano-studio.com February 2017

the-piano-studio

P.O. Box 320, Plantagenet, ON K0B 1L0

1.613.686.2197

www.the-piano-studio.com

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