



The Joy Of Playing Piano By Ear

by David Longo

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When it comes to "playing by ear" there is a belief that prevails among many individuals, and it goes something like this:

"The ability to play by ear is a rare gift enjoyed only by a select few."

It's almost as if the concept is looked upon by some as almost a "magical" one that is unreachable.

I'm here to tell you that nothing could be further from the truth. It's a belief that you simply have to be willing to toss in the trash can - forever. Now be willing to accept the truth, which is this: You really do have what it takes to play piano by ear. You really do. Have you ever listened to a song on the radio (or other) and

started singing, whistling, or humming what you're hearing? The very act of doing this confirms that you have an ability to reproduce something you've heard.

By the way, it's not important that what you reproduce through your singing, etc., is perfect.. what you can do at any level can always be refined...

Even if you're more reserved and don't actually sing or hum out loud, you do recognize that song, don't you? Well, that's your brain's natural ability to make sound distinctions - and that is exactly what playing music by ear involves.

You can certainly learn to become more and more proficient at making these distinctions. And, do you know the one factor responsible for your realizing your potential or not when it comes to playing by ear (or almost anything for that matter)?

Your attitude toward yourself and what you are capable of.

It's true - your beliefs about yourself and your ability are either helping you or preventing you from enjoying your potential.

"It's hard work!" is what you may be thinking. "It's difficult to achieve this goal of playing by ear the way I would like to - it could take forever!"

Ahhhh... THAT is the attitude that needs to be disposed of. Let me make one thing crystal clear right now:

Combining the two ideas of "hard work" and "training your musical" ear is like mixing oil with water. It simply doesn't work. You see, it's necessary to take a playful attitude toward the whole idea of training those musical ears of yours. You have to be nice to your ears... in return, they will be nice to you.

Ear training is not an activity to be forced. That's why we call it "ear training" and not "ear straining." If you were to take a walk through a peaceful garden on a beautiful day, how would you experience it? Would you force yourself to take in the beauty of the lush greenery and the fragrant flowers... or would you simply allow the magic of it all to come to you through casual observation? You'd smell the smells and listen to the sounds in a very relaxed fashion, not even questioning your ability to "soak it all up." You wouldn't judge yourself for "not doing it perfectly" ... you would just

experience it. Now you have an idea of what the process of ear training should be like for you.

"How do I get started playing by ear?" is a pretty common question. The truth of the matter is you're always using your ears... you've been doing it right along. So, it's not a matter of beginning the process... rather, it's a matter of being aware of it.

There are certain actions you can take to bring about this awareness. And, by the way, the amount of experience you have playing music has no impact on your ability to do this. As a matter of fact, I kept this truth first and foremost in my mind as I created [*How To Play Piano By Ear In All 12 Keys Without Knowing How To Read A Note Of Music*](#). I wanted to provide a vehicle that would be effective for a wide range of individuals - from the person who never even touched a piano keyboard before to the person who has experience but never gave himself or herself permission to break away from the "slavery" of reading from sheet music.

In that manuscript is a very simple method that, when followed (not just read), will break any preconceived barriers that one might have when it comes to his or

her ability to play music by ear. You see, it's the doing that makes the difference. Just get yourself involved... and maintain a personal commitment that, each and every single time you sit at that piano or keyboard of yours, you're going to have fun. Yes, always keep it fun.

The music you listen to on a daily basis consists of elements that repeat themselves. And when you become aware of these repetitions, you begin to see (more accurately, you begin to hear) these "patterns" as pieces of a puzzle that you are in greater control of putting together... you really do start to approach your music from a different perspective - a much more satisfying one.

The great thing about all this is that you can enjoy results instantly... and you realize more and more that this understanding comes in many levels. What's more, you recognize that you've embarked on a journey that is one to be appreciated one step at a time - a joy ride that you are in no hurry to complete. To put this in perspective, you never really do "complete" it. Whatever level you are at, no matter how advanced you become in your skill of listening, there's always

another level you can look forward to. So you might as well adopt this attitude of appreciating where you are at each and every step of the way right now.

Whenever you sit down to play... whatever it is you're playing... whether it's a few notes of a melody you like, a new chord you learned, etc., simply listen. Allow your ears to be receptive to what is happening without judging anything. Each time you play something and do this, you see, you are providing yourself with a reference. In other words, if you merely play a "C" to a "G" with that right hand of yours, listen to what that sounds like - be aware of it. You've discovered a sound that you can duplicate whenever you want it. And don't say to yourself, "well that's not much." Just accept it for what it is and appreciate it. When you allow yourself to do this, your ear is being trained in a very positive way.

Again, progress comes in many levels. Let's say that you have been playing piano for a while and are familiar with your 7th chords. For example, you know that you can play a Cmaj7 chord as C E G B. Well, when you play that chord in that position (which is Root position), you produce a particular sound - a certain "texture," if you will. As you proceed with taking that

chord to other levels you realize that you can get even more textures by approaching that chord in different ways (such as we do in [ProProach](#))... your ears develop more... and so does your appreciation!

Go ahead and take that chord in its Root position... play it:

C E G B

Now, play just the C and G with your left hand. At the same time, play the E and B with your right hand one octave higher:

Right hand: C G Left hand: E B

and listen! Same chord... but different texture! You've produced a sound that you now can duplicate anytime you want to. What's more is that, once you've exposed yourself to this sound by playing it enough, when you hear this sound produced by another musician, chances are you will recognize it - that's a very satisfying musical experience!

(By the way, Lesson #1 of ProProach takes the above chord and introduces you to another texture quite

pleasing to the ears - that lesson is free when you sign up for it)

It's important to point out here that learning to play by ear involves a basic understanding that you are always at some point of proficiency with it. Appreciate where you're at - and build upon that! Simply remain open to the idea of improving all the time.

There are programs available that can help you accelerate the process by getting you to place your attention on certain aspects of listening. One you just might want to seriously consider is [here](#).

By listening to everything you play, listening to the musical performances of others, and exposing yourself to additional ear training suggestions and advice of others who are at levels higher than your current one, you have the capacity to enjoy amazing results!

Remember, it's your attitude that makes the difference.

I have a suggestion for you:

- 1) Think of the melody to a song that you like - one that you never attempted to play before but you have a

genuine appreciation for.

2) Start singing a small segment of that melody now (hum or whistle if you prefer)

3) Now immediately sit down at that piano or keyboard of yours and allow your fingers to search for the melody notes you are singing

4) Observe your thoughts and feelings as you engage yourself in this process

5) Turn any negative thought into a positive one...

Examples:

"This is frustrating" ... change that to "This is a challenge that I am thankful for because it certainly has the potential to take me to a higher level."

"I can't do this" ... change that to "I am doing this... whatever results I am getting, I accept them for what they are - results. I am always making progress."

"This is a hard song to play" ... change that to "All songs can be broken down to elements that I can be in

control of."

"I'm playing all kinds of wrong notes here" ... change that to "It's interesting how the notes that I'm playing differ from the actual melody to the song. Maybe I've got a new song in the making here!"

6) Keep going with the process, giving yourself credit for your positive attitude.

7) Smile the whole time - and learn to laugh!

Make a habit of doing this... do it for a few minutes each day... just make a game of it. You're going to absolutely amaze yourself... your eyes are going to open... your ears are going to open... your self-appreciation is going to increase... your appreciation for music is going to be enhanced!

Remember, keep it fun... and...

Always...

ALWAYS...

PLAY WITH PASSION!

Musically,

A handwritten signature in a cursive script, appearing to read "Dad".