



CAROL'S KEYS

PRINT AND PLAY

Arranging 101

(ISSUE 1)

First Things First!

Created by

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ARRANGER NOTES — While many church pianists stick to the written page, I have met others who are also interested in creating their own arrangements; however, they do not know where to begin! So I have designed a series of lessons featuring the musical steps involved in taking some of your musical ideas to the next level... writing something well-crafted and musically satisfying. In *FIRST THINGS FIRST* I talk about the importance of choosing the key signature that works best for your arrangement—fingerings and skill levels being important considerations. *READY - SET - WRITE* then presents you with an opportunity to put what you have learned into practice.

PREVIEW - Do Not Print

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ARRANGING 101

(ISSUE 1)

by Carol Tornquist

FIRST THINGS FIRST!

Can you imagine yourself being created in the image of God—Creator of the universe?? Yet that is exactly what His Word says. As Christians, we know that each of us is, by nature, *creative* ... and as musicians, our creativity is often on display for all to see and hear! That creativity takes different forms for all of us—writing melodies and/or lyrics, communicating through either singing or playing other instruments, and creating our own arrangements of already existing songs. (*That would be me!*) And if you are reading this, you must either be an arranger or at least an aspiring one. So as well as offering new keyboard arrangements, I have decided to also share some things I have learned along the way about the ‘craft’ of arranging.

People often ask me where I get my musical ideas, and truthfully, they really do just ‘come to me’. However, that was not always true. *Inspiration usually involves a certain amount of perspiration!* Without a doubt, whenever I face a blank template on my computer screen, I instinctively draw upon years of studying piano, having my musical eyes and ears opened during two solid years of music theory classes in college, teaching both piano and vocal music, and simply making music in a variety of life experiences. (Yes, I definitely have paid some dues!)

So here goes ... I am going to attempt to provide you with some rhyme and reason for the thought process involved in creating a well-crafted piano arrangement. I am assuming that most of you rely for the most part on the written page. However, you also have a desire to explore some of your own musical ideas, but are just not sure where to begin. How about starting with first things first??

CHOOSING THE KEY SIGNATURE

Deciding which key signature to start with is the first step in the creative process of arranging.

1) FINGERING

How the notes ‘lay in the hand’ makes all the difference in whether or not a solo piano arrangement is user-friendly. Let’s use the familiar Advent/Christmas carol: *JOY TO THE WORLD* as an example.

‘Think’ the melody of the first phrase: “*Joy to the world! the Lord is come!*”

(A simple descending major scale moving down by STEPS.)

With your R H play that first phrase in the key of C Major.



Now play it in the keys of G, D, A, E and yes, even B Major (five sharps)!!

(Same fingering as in C Major: 5 4 3 2 1 3 2 1)

Notice that I left out the key of F Major! (Fingering: 4 3 2 1 4 3 2 1)

Try playing the descending scale and you should immediately understand why this key may not be the best choice! (Just for fun, try R H descending scales in the keys of B \flat , E \flat , A \flat and D \flat Major as well.)

A few melodies may be easily played in any major key. Beethoven's classic hymn: *JOYFUL, JOYFUL, WE ADORE THEE* is a good example. It is a basic five-finger melody that changes hand position only once—at the end of the third phrase.

Play the melody below in the key of **F MAJOR** beginning with your 3rd finger on A.



Now in the following keys:

B♭ MAJOR:



D MAJOR:



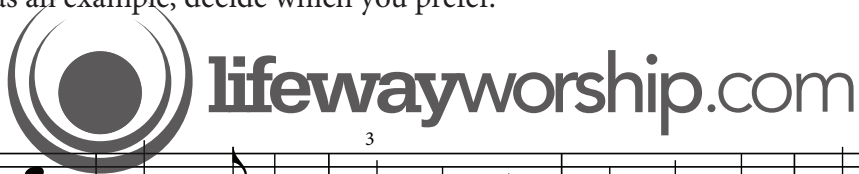
TEACHER'S NOTE: Since this tune moves mostly by STEPS, it works well for beginning piano students to transpose by ear to other major keys.

EAR TRAINING NOTE: If playing by ear is intimidating to you, try playing this entire melody without reading the music. Once you can play it easily, try it in several major keys.

2) RANGE

Another factor in establishing the beginning key signature for your arrangement is the range of the melody—that is, what the highest and lowest notes are. Using the first phrase of the majestic hymn: *PRAISE TO THE LORD, THE ALMIGHTY* as an example, decide which you prefer.

F MAJOR:



A MAJOR:



You probably chose the 'hymnal key' of F MAJOR since adding harmony under the melody in the A Major version would require more ledger line notes, resulting in a very 'muddy' sound. However, if you like the sound and feel of A Major, you can always write it an octave higher. (Happily, since you are not writing for singers, vocal ranges are never an issue in arranging for keyboard!)

