

## PIANO STUDIO with CYNTHIA MARIE: 29 Songs to Play by Heart

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*In this new Piano Primer, we wanted to address several issues students & teachers had with other books, and create pages that were both fun and practical to enhance the first piano lessons for beginners ages 5+.*

*Below are the issues that needed attention, and our Primer's solution:*

### **Students were learning to type notes, rather than hear songs.**

In Piano Studio with Cynthia Marie, students start out playing-by-ear, echoing their teaching and singing/playing folk tunes with basic solfege. This helps them hear and feel the shape of notes moving up or down, skipping around, etc. I've found my students always catch on quick to Do-Re-Mi!

### **They couldn't remember any songs after going through a whole book, or two.**

With regular check-ins, students review and commit favorite tunes to memory, and write them into the Songs by Heart section at the beginning of the book. This helps them feel confident and master their repertoire from early on. They are more than ready come recital time.

### **No experience or encouragement to play freely and/or improvise at the piano.**

One of the first activities in this book is just to feel out the sounds of the piano, playing up and down the black keys and then jamming with the play-along or teacher.

### **Teacher dictates out of book, and student is unattached to material.**

This book is for writing and coloring in. It is for students' ideas and making it their own. Through play-alongs, coloring, tracing, playing games, writing notes, composing songs, and choosing their favorite songs to perform for family and friends - this book can be as unique as each student.

### **Too many books.**

This book is ALL-IN-ONE, listening, reading, writing — it all gets done in one easy to carry book.

### **No real songs. (My students would get very excited and ask "Is this a real song?" when a familiar Folk tune would appear :)**

29 Songs to Play by Heart puts songs first - you can learn notes & any musical concept you want from a lovely tune. In addition to these folk songs, students are asked what other songs they might like to learn - say a pop tune from the radio?

### **Too many concepts taught at once - fingering, dynamics, articulations - before mastering notes.**

This book teaches playing by ear first, so students get comfortable feeling the keys under their fingers, hearing sounds move up and down, skipping and stepping - they get the contour of music. When it is time to read, they begin with Treble Clef and master CDEFG, before moving into bass clef. Simple dynamics and articulations are added when relevant to a certain song.

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### **No at-home listening assignments.**

Youtube play-alongs are fun and easy. Students can review their song with the recording, and also listen to original recordings of different songs.

### **Cluttered pages - too much information to take in at once. For both the teacher and student.**

Piano teachers are knowledgeable about basic piano, and I know they don't need someone to talk them through every single tiny thing. I made this book to be a useful tool for teachers, clean, simple, full of songs and activities, with basic prompts, so they are free to expand upon concepts as they wish.

### **Boring rhythms. Not enough eighth notes or swing eighths for interest.**

Some students swing naturally on their own. I did not want to withhold these rhythms from them. This is done by rote easily. Especially with great tunes like Chatter with the Angels and Shortenin' Bread.

### **Boring flashcards.**

Musical Go-Fish is a fun game I created where students read phrases of 3 notes instead of just a one note flashcard. They get to know different starting notes and recognize the shapes of moving up/down or skipping/stepping.

### **Not enough enjoyment & interaction with teacher and/or other students.**

This book is meant to spark conversation about songs, rhythms, musical ideas and engage both teacher and student. DIY projects, studio ideas, and games on my website are all available to bring more enjoyment to the piano studio.

### **Too many notes to read at once in both Treble and Bass Clef.**

We start by mastering Treble Clef, and then only introduce bass clef as one hand playing separately, or as minimal harmonic accompaniment.

### **No introduction to Solfege, a useful musical system.**

I personally did not learn Solfege until college, and that is really when I began to play by ear. Picking out tunes was 100% easier, and I wanted to give my students this head start. With moveable Do, students learn to hear the relationship of notes to each other, no matter what key they are in.

### **Only C position.**

We start out with black keys songs, then move to C position, and include songs in G Major, A minor, D minor, F Major, and C minor.

### **No singing.**

There are lots of songs to sing in solfege, and with lyrics in this book. Sing out and remember your songs for a long time!

### **Theory is separate. How does it tie into the song?**

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All-in-one means everything ties into the songs. Practice writing what you are reading.

### **What about students' opinions & ideas? They have a lot to bring to the table.**

My students are SO creative, and I know yours are too! When they have more freedom to share their ideas and song interests, lessons are more fun, and they are more engaged.

### **How can we hear Left Hand harmony supporting the melody?**

Left Hand harmony is often overlooked as just another hand pressing down random notes. I like to help students begin to understand what the other hand is for by first introducing melody strongly, and then adding a little color in the Left Hand.

### **Students play "letters" at random on the piano, with no concept of low to high on Grand Staff.**

The Grand Staff is introduced with an illustration placing Treble Clef notes higher in the sky and Bass Clef lower underwater. Writing exercises are clearly marked in Treble or Bass clef.

### **Not enough interactive note-reading & writing practice.**

With activities like Felt Board note-reading (DIY project available on my website) & Musical Go-Fish - students master reading in a fun and easy way. Writing exercises side-by-side the songs re-enforce their understanding.

### **What about one or two fun duets?**

You are my Sunshine (teacher-student), and Oh When the Saints (student-student) get kids listening to their duet partner right away.

### **Some fun songs are level appropriate to play, but hard to read.**

Why not teach by rote? All the Pretty Horses, Skin 'n Bones, and Happy Birthday are great ones to share.

### **Takes so long for student to advance, master notes, or even learn a song. When can I learn the fun stuff?**

Right now. Let's play a song right away.