

## Practicing, part one

### Warming up

I'm a big fan of a twenty-thirty minute warm-up. First of all, it relaxes me, focuses my attention on the tasks ahead, and loosens up my fingers, hands and arms. I don't focus on the individual fingers too much; rather, I like to make sure my arm rotation is happening... from left (as I play the thumb on my RH) to right (as I play the 5<sup>th</sup> finger), and vice-versa on the left hand. Allow the hand and arm to play the notes, unless the tempo is REALLY fast. Then, engage the fingers, but don't play too loud. Use full arm and shoulder weight for really loud passages.

More on this later. Today, we'll give you a great warm-up routine.

I got this from my teacher at Duke, Loren Withers, a student of Ernest Hutcheson former director of the Juilliard School. First of all, acquire, if you don't have it already, the classic Hanon Studies book. (Schirmer). On pages 50 through 64, he has very good fingerings for the 12 major and minor scales. Incidentally, his alternate fingering for the chromatic scale, on the bottom of page 64, I like very much.

Pick a metronome marking of, perhaps quarter note=60. Then practice your scales the following way.

Play scales in quarter note = 60, one octave. Start mp, get gradually louder, don't stop on top, just get there, maybe at a forte dynamic and come back, getting softer to the original mp.

Think about sound... make each note RIGHT with the metronome. No bumps in the sound, make the crescendo and diminuendo even and musical.

Now play them in 8<sup>th</sup> notes, two octaves. Same approach.

Then, triplet 8ths, three octaves

Finally, sixteenth notes, four octaves. If this isn't possible, either slow down the tempo or leave out the 16<sup>th</sup> notes for now. It's really important to have even tone, consistent crescendo/diminuendo, and perfect rhythm. I have done this every day for thirty five years (except for my occasional days off!!!).

Then I do my chromatic scale. If I'm feeling good, I might omit the quarter notes here and go right to the 8<sup>th</sup> notes. Same approach.

Next, I would tackle dominant 7<sup>th</sup> chords (Hanon, p 70-71)

Quarter notes one octave, 8<sup>th</sup> notes two octaves, triplet 8ths three octaves, sixteenth notes four octaves. Don't skip any steps. Think rhythmically, and think about great tone. That's what I love about the piano, even if you're a beginner, you can get a great sound right away.

Next, use the same approach for major and minor triads. (Hanon p 65 – 68).

I'm not a huge fan of pounding through the Hanon uncritically, but there are some exercises in it that are of value:

On a particular day, I might pick one from pp. 22 to 42 and run it through a mode I was trying to learn.. in all keys, of course. I also think the trill exercise on pp 76-77 to be of value. Keep the hand relaxed, and let the arm rotation help you execute the trill. Don't do it with just the fingers. I also love doing it with just the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> fingers on each hand.

Many of the Hanon exercises concern themselves with technical problems in mid 19<sup>th</sup> century piano music, and are not as useful to the modern jazz player. I'd rather a student practice Bach two-part inventions, easier Mozart and Beethoven, and Chopin preludes and etudes. I think you can get technically all you need to be a fine jazz pianist from these composers.; throwing in a little Debussy and Ravel for tone color and balance.