

Let's Pretend

by Susan Griesdale

from the composer.....

This is a fun collection to work on together and it really does help the young student express their 'Pretend character' and perform successfully.

So often young pianists simply play the notes and it can be a challenge to get them to add even simple dynamics and expressive articulation. Just learning the notes accurately seems to be their main goal.

So I wrote this collection with the sole purpose to encourage young students to really get into the story and play the 'meaning of the notes'.

When I introduce the music, I talk about being an actor/actress and how they, as performers, have to make the story believable and draw the audience into the action.

The music collection covers a wide variety of acting roles.

All the pieces have words which have a dual purpose:

1. Help with the rhythm. (Words are not for singing melody).
2. Provide the narrative of the plot. It's fun to read the words together with the student!

To help 'Tell the Story!'

I Can Fly! – Wouldn't it wonderful to fly through the air! It plays visually the way it feels with the LH flying over the RH and back. The challenge for the LH is to fly to the correct notes right on time! The pedal will help create the smooth legato sound and the piece ends with a slow glissando rising all the way up to the top of the keyboard as our little flyer takes off.

Pretty Ballerina – Aim for grace and charm in your performance. Open with a light 'tippy toes' soft staccato in the right hand while the left hand plays a smooth legato to accompany the 'dancing toes'. Starting in bar 8 there are big leaps. The use of the pedal and a slight slowing down 'in the air' will help you get to the notes in a timely manner. I also like to tell my students to 'linger' on the RH tenuto at the end of the first two phrases. This could be seen as first attempts at rubato and helps to create a graceful shape to the melody. At the end, be ready to cross the RH over the LH for that final graceful, soft note.

Astronaut - A quick piece, playing notes 'up and down and all around' the keyboard. Play all notes legato, making sure they sound clearly without holding them longer than the note value. It is important to make switching between the right hand and left hand notes sound seamless without the use of pedal. Maintain one tempo for the whole piece while making good use of the fermata to mark the turning point of the piece. A slight slowdown at the end helps to emphasize the 'realization of our astronaut's dream!'

Scary Monster – The music uses sudden dynamic extremes to create suspense. First play really quietly, slowly and evenly to get a feeling of 'sneaking up'. Also don't be afraid to play loud for the extreme dissonances in bars 5 and 6 to sound as scary as possible. Accelerate at the end to escape the scary monster chasing after you!

I'm an Alien – This is in a 'musical declamatory style' where each note should be well defined while maintaining a legato. I refer to this as an 'active legato' with lots of energy into each finger. No pedal is needed. Play phrase by phrase as you 'speak' the Alien's words. The piece starts and ends with a quiet, 'wash' of sound using a typical 'space motif' to help create the atmosphere.

I'm Invisible - This piece is really only 8 bars long. These 8 bars are then repeated but notes start to disappear as they are left out. Therefore counting becomes the main challenge for the second half. Keep the LH staccatos light but make the accented 'boo's' loud, bright and sudden. Don't forget to press the una corde pedal at the very end so it's best to get your foot read at the beginning before you start.

I am the King! – This is a fanfare. Imagine the sound of trumpets as you play broadly with full tone and snappy dotted rhythms. The words will help students play the dotted rhythms. All chords are open 5ths and the challenge is jumping both hands into position right on time, particularly bars 9 and 10 where the two hands jump in contrary motion. Make it sound bold and celebratory!

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I'm a Robot – Play Robot very evenly with a sharp, crisp staccato. The LH accents help bring out the unusual time signature of 5/8, divided here into 2 plus 3. The middle section changes time signature and the notes are staccato without accents. Add a gradual crescendo to mimic the energy involved in scrubbing everything to a 'shine!' The last section resumes the robot's 2 plus 3 character and ends with a loud assertive declaration of just how great he is! For this piece it's great fun to speak the words together and sound 'robotic'!

Fireman - For students who love to play fast, here is a fast piece using the three strongest fingers of the RH. The main challenge is to maintain the tempo and momentum throughout and the clarity of the notes.. From the start, practice the 'hands together' scale in bar 21 so that by the time all the notes are learned this bar will be up to tempo. The other challenge is to control the dynamics so it builds excitement and rises to ff 'oh so gradually' and then decrescendos to the end. Read the words out loud for a fun time keeping the momentum all the way through!

Cowboy - Always a popular 'pretend to be' role, the cowboy music ambles along at a relaxed pace. Do make a big difference for the staccato/accents to bring out the rough and tough character of our cowboy. And add dynamic contrast to tell the story especially the gentle 'riding into the sunset' with a diminuendo at the end.

The Great Wizard – A magical piece taking you on a journey to an enchanted land. Shaping the phrases dynamically is very important to add suspense and create mystery. Keep the tempo somewhat slow and keep an even 'swaying' feel to the rhythm throughout. Become the Wizard and the story will be awesome!

Soldier's March - Play with lots of energy, keeping a very steady march rhythm. The accent on the downbeat of each bar helps to create the feeling of military precision. The LH staccato is pointed and lively, with an 'up, up' feel. This piece introduces the skill of changing fingering on fast repeated eighth notes to achieve a clean articulated sound. Dynamic color is provided by big crescendos as our soldier boy marches along bravely.

Beautiful Princess – This piece should sound 'sweet and pretty' with a soft but singing legato. Make the right hand staccato quarter notes in the second half of bar 2, 4 and 6 'ring out' by playing a staccato touch while depressing the pedal. The left hand dotted quarter notes for bars 8 and 10 should be soft and very quiet. The middle section uses only three notes but notice the different phrase lengths. The words will help to hear these phrases. Finally, for fun (!) do the princess wave (flat open hand rotating at the wrist) at the end to "acknowledge all your subjects sitting in the audience!".

Rock Star - For the extroverts out there – a Rap Song! Keep a steady beat and play very quietly so your spoken voice can be heard. The difficulty is to maintain the spoken voice without singing pitch, especially at the end of this piece. Learn the piano accompaniment and the words separately, and then you are ready to put it together. Give it lots of energy. Have fun!