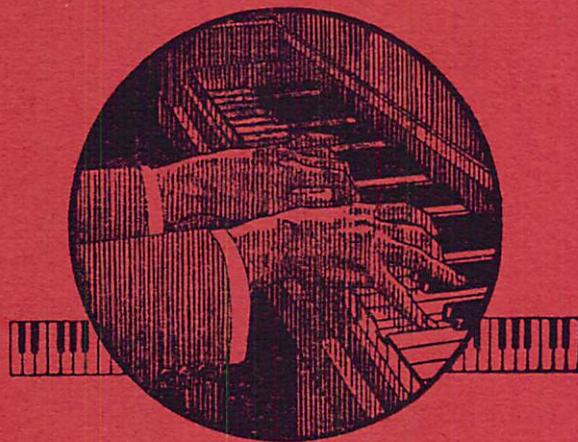


THE BILLY MAYERL SCHOOL
OF
MODERN SYNCOPATION
FOR THE PIANO

ADVANCED COURSE
IN THE MODERN
RHYTHM

STYLE OF PIANOFORTE PLAYING

LESSON II



ADVANCED LEFT-HAND TREATMENT

You will already be familiar with the fundamental principles of the work of the left hand, especially those who have studied them in the first course on Syncopated Playing. Let us repeat, all these principles still hold good in the same way that they always will hold good. They are the basic essential facts of rhythmic left hand work; and we warn you, unless you know them and can put them into practice in your ordinary playing, the whole structure of your syncopation will fall to the ground. Remember, "Unless you can play to the rule, you cannot play to the exception."

Very well, then; what we are going to do here is to take you deeper into the subject of this left hand work: but the work is still based on the same rules. Up to now, generally speaking, all your syncopated effects proper have been carried out by the right hand only. Your left hand has been employed merely to mark the steady tempo which shows up this right-hand syncopation, to play the counter-melody, and generally to cover a certain portion of the keyboard. Now, we are going to introduce the syncopation itself into the left hand as well; but we are not going to dispense with any of the above-mentioned left-hand functions on that account. In other words, we have got to add something to the left hand without subtracting anything from it. You may well wonder how this is to be done! But you will find that it is neither so impossible nor so difficult as it sounds.

Now, to do this, we must still take four beats as the basis of our left hand work generally. But we have got to adjust our idea of just where these four beats come, in relation to the remainder of what is played with them. In future you must regard them not as being confined within the limits imposed between two bar lines. You understand, of course, that these beats still remain four crotchets in value, and as such are equal to one common-time bar. But, as we say, they do not come actually *inside* one bar (as understood by the dividing bar lines on the score); they come between the bar itself and part of the bar previous. In other words, we start on the last half-beat of the bar *previous*, and finish on beat $3\frac{1}{2}$ of our bar proper. That is to say, we retard the whole of the left-hand work by half a beat, or one quaver.

This may at first sound odd, or even silly, to you; but such is by no means the case. Don't you see that, by doing this, we have already introduced our first rhythmic effect into our left hand—and this without any extra "notes," or other complications. The next question is, how are we going to put this syncopated rhythmic effect to the best possible use? The answer is: by treating this "ante-half-beat" in a different manner from the first beat proper (i.e., the beat within the confines of our two bar lines). Now please follow this very carefully, because it is *most* important.

First of all, then, we will give you two bars of the ordinary accompaniment for the bass, which you learnt in Lesson II of the main course:—



Fig. 29

Now to demonstrate clearly the time-value of the new metre, we will divide each bar into eight parts, or quavers, thus :—



Fig. 30

This is the first step in the process. In order that our counter-melody may be brought out with the thumb, in just the same way that you have previously been instructed, our “borrowed” beat must be part of the counter-melody. In other words, we must start off with the thumb. This is because the counter-melody is always played with the thumb, owing to its position on the keyboard.

This means that we must drop *downwards* from the thumb to the first beat of the bar proper, which latter will be played with the fifth (or little) finger. Let us now illustrate our bars “bit by bit.” Here is your first “bit” :—



Fig. 31

So much for the “ borrowed ” section, together with the first beat of the bar “ proper.” The second beat, or after-beat, is just as usual. Thus :—



Fig. 32

Before you play the third beat, or “ single-note beat ” it is once more necessary to borrow half-a-beat from beat 2. You do this so as to keep up the character of this particular metre, and in order to keep it steady and balanced. Remember that beat three is a single note ; and in order to reach it and to play it correctly here, we must do two things. We must not only borrow our half *beat* from beat two (as explained) but we must also borrow one of the actual *notes* of beat two. In other words, we borrow from beat two, not only half-a-beat, but also one of the after-beat “ notes ” to play this half-beat on. This should be quite clear, put in this way ; and all that now remains is for us to decide which of the after-beat notes we are actually going to use. Here is a general working rule which should hold good in 99 cases out of 100 :—

“ For your borrowed half-note of the third beat, take the lowest note of the after-beat—that is, the one just played with the fifth finger—and play it with the thumb, as before on beat one. **ONLY PLAY IT ONE OCTAVE LOWER.** ”

This will avoid an awkward jump, at the same time giving the correct harmonic effect. Here is the example :

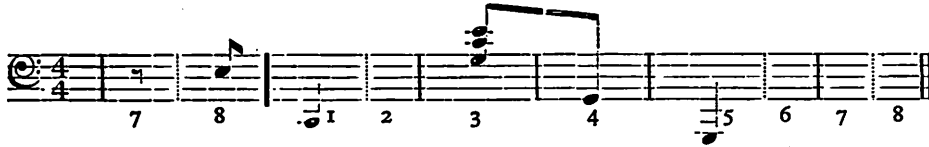


Fig. 33

Now we come to the fourth beat, which is, of course, an after-beat again. This is not held on for the complete value of one crotchet, because its last half must be used for the bar which is to follow, in order to continue the "borrowing process." Here is your example :

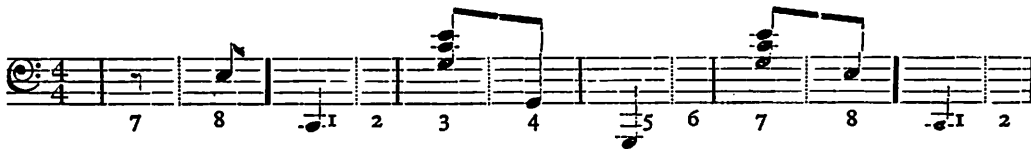


Fig. 34

Following this, we will give you these two bars with our special division-marks removed, so that you may see how they would appear in an ordinary piece of printed music. Please play them through a few times, not only to get the metre well into your head, but also to conquer the knack of the jump on beat three :—



Fig. 35

SUSTAINING THE COUNTER-MELODY

If the above instructions have been studied, understood and mastered, your left hand should already be sounding rhythmic to a marked degree. But this is not all. The above does not, in itself alone, give the full effect which is desired. But it is better to take it for the moment stage by stage, as we are doing. Let us proceed to the next step.

Now that the thumb is anticipating the beat and at the same time is responsible for the counter-melody, it is extremely important that you should "announce" that same counter-melody in no uncertain manner. This is done by SUSTAINING THE THUMB NOTE SO AS TO MAKE IT RING RIGHT OUT. If this were printed, it would appear thus :—



Fig. 36

Now please refer to Exercise F, and practise its contents in all the keys given.

THE "OBVIOUS CHANGE" AGAIN

The *theory* of the obvious change is in no way altered by our new-style rhythm bass. But in practical *application*, you borrow on every beat of the bar. Thus :—



Fig. 37

As the obvious change is nothing more or less than a counter-melody, the sustaining of the thumb is even more important here, were such a thing possible. So remember to produce a strong *sostenuto*. Otherwise the whole effect will be entirely spoiled. And exactly the same thing applies to the fifth-finger note—the entire effect is lost unless the whole passage is made to “swing.”

Will you please study Exercise G for examples of the obvious change in the new rhythm style treatment.

HOW TO DECIDE THE CORRECT LEFT-HAND HARMONY FOR THE NEW RHYTHM BASS

Harmony in dance numbers does one of two things only. Either it remains the same for any given number of bars, or else it changes. If the latter, then it can only change on the first and third beat of a bar ; or on the first or the third beat of a bar.

Beat one is already clear to you, because being beat one, you work to the harmony which actually appears on that beat. So now let us deal with the change on beat three. As you know, nobody can foretell the vagaries of composers ; so any harmony may follow any previous harmony. Therefore, when the harmony changes on the third beat, we can no longer borrow from beat two both half a beat and a note to “play it upon.” We *must* use the harmony of beat three for our borrowed note, because this harmony is “taken over,” as it were, into the new harmonic “scheme” which begins on the borrowed half beat. It may be as well to remind you here about the fixed rule concerning a change of harmony :—

“ ALWAYS BEGIN NEW HARMONY ON A TENTH ”

The harmony for your borrowed note is to be found in this tenth. As a matter of fact, it is the thumb note of this tenth ; so there is no difficulty there, is there ? Before we go any further, let us remind you once again of the correct left-hand rule—the “golden rule”—for bass formation. This applies equally to the

style with which you are already familiar, or to the new rhythmic style now under study. Here is your rule once more :—

- A tenth on the first beat of the bar;
- An after-beat on the second beat of the bar ;
- A single note on the third ; and
- An after-beat again on the fourth beat of the bar.

UNLESS

the harmony changes,

WHEN

You MUST start this change with a tenth.

We make no apology for repeating this rule here, because it is of vital importance.

Now, below is a four-bar example embodying a change of harmony, and written in the way you have already learnt :—



Fig. 38

This passage would be played thus in the new rhythm-style manner :—



Fig. 39

Before you proceed any further, please study this well. Remember, it does not matter what tunes have been written, or what tunes will be written—this process will apply. Will you now refer to Exercise H for examples of phrases where the harmony changes on the third beat of the bar. This is arranged as a study with the corresponding right-hand harmony. Practise it well and imagine that a melody is “being accompanied.” Familiar strains of current numbers will suggest themselves to you.

EXECUTION OF THE FOREGOING

To master this new style firmly and to play it with confidence, you must start slowly in your practice and work up speed gradually. Concentrate on accuracy and *dead steady tempo*—speed will come later. Bear in mind, that the quicker you play in this new style, the harder it is for the thumb. And remember, your speed is governed by the amount of technique at your disposal. Remember again, that if your thumb work is not exactly as directed, the whole work will sound dreadful.

The borrowed half-beats must be of absolutely correct time-value. If not, the entire passage will be ruined.

We are not going to pretend that the mastery of this new rhythm-style is easy. It is not. But when once you have mastered it, it is more than worth while. Moreover, if you will follow the above carefully and practise as directed, you definitely can master it, and in less time than you would at first believe.

PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF THE NEW RHYTHM STYLE TO THE RIGHT HAND

Now that you are beginning to get the rhythmic syncopated effect into your left hand, you will soon discover what a great help this can be to your right-hand work. It has not, as we have already told you, taken over any of the right-hand work—the right hand is “quite happy, thank you”! But it leaves the right hand more free to do other things.

Have you noticed that some time or other in every season, the popular trend is for “melody” numbers? This means that to produce all your syncopation in the right hand in numbers of this type is to chop up your melody; and there is a great risk of ruining it if you are not more careful than the average pianist is wont to be in this matter. If therefore you are able to take part of the rhythmic treatment into your left hand, your right hand is the better able to bring out the melody—still, we repeat, without any loss of rhythm: but also, mark you, without any loss of melody.

Remember, we have always maintained that your audience must have, and *will* have, its generous share of the *melody*. We have heard a great deal about this so-called “hot” playing, and how it puts other styles out of date. Yes! And what is “hot” playing, after all? It is merely a bad attempt to put into practice the very effects we are now teaching, before the would-be performer even understands the very rules underlying his attempt. The result is generally pitiful! “Hot” playing is only another name for extremely *rhythmic* playing. Where the “heat” comes in is by a total disregard of the rules of melody, harmony, and even of playing in tune, in a brave attempt to produce rhythm. If rhythm is so important that all else is sacrificed upon its altar, how much better will it sound when coupled with correct harmony, melody, and a thorough knowledge of your instrument. Remember that Paul Whiteman, still the greatest modern-style band leader, has made—and *kept* his reputation on rhythm (yes, plenty of rhythm!), but correctly coupled with all the other ingredients of *real* musicianship. You cannot play music and ignore the rules. You can fool some of the people some of the time, but not all of the people all of the time.

Very well, then! We have decided to give our melody a fighting chance of existence. How are we going to deal with it? We can't very well play the melody with one finger only; nor do we desire to play it in full-chord harmony all the time. Nor yet again do we wish to leave it as it is in the printed copy. What then *are* we to do? Well, once again it is the same old tale of using our discretion as to the best treatment to fit the situation. Different numbers, different interpretation. All the “raw material” already given you in our original course will supply a satisfactory solution, provided, of course, that it is suitably applied in its various forms or in adaptations of them. But we do not want you to use this material as “standard,” exactly as it appears therein. We are not out to produce thousands of Billy Mayerls all over the place! Use it exactly as we say—as *raw* material. Employ it as the scaffolding upon which to build your *own* structure. Think it out for yourself—be original. It is not so difficult. After all, it can't be, because thousands of people

are! There are dozens of ways of saying a thing; there are dozens of ways of playing a thing, too—each as good as the rest. It is said that there is nothing new under the sun; what is new is the manner of presentation. If two artists go into the country to paint the same scene, they will observe the same rules of composition, balance and perspective. They will, in fact, paint the same scene, but there will be a difference. It will be the difference of personal interpretation—the character of each artist showing through his work. As in painting, so it is in music. They all embody the same root ideas. Here, then, is your material. Go and build your own house. And build boldly. See to it that it is a fine house, one that people will talk about; and above all, one that expresses your own individuality. Be proud of it!

Remember, every time you copy the work of another, you make it harder for yourself to be original. So, in studying the right hand which is now to follow, use it only as a basis. Do not worry yourself too much at present with the actual construction of the right hand—that will be dealt with later. What we are giving you here is only to make the work of the new *left* hand clearer.

Very well, then. Below you will find eight bars of a fox-trot, which has been specially composed by Billy Mayerl. This is exactly as it would appear in the published version. It is of what we call the “melody type.” Before playing it, glance right through the portion given, and observe where the harmony changes. Then before attempting any transcription embodying the new rhythm-style left hand, play it through exactly as it is printed: become thoroughly acquainted with it. Here it is:—

Fig. 40

Now try and transcribe it, by adding the new-style left hand. Bear in mind that it is a *melody* fox-trot, but that there must be no long waits. So make good use of fourths, and of everything else you have learnt which can be employed to advantage here. Go after this “good and strong,” and make a fine job of it. Do not proceed further to anything connected with this tuition until you are satisfied that you have really produced *your best rendering of this*.

Then—but not before—turn to Exercise I and compare your solution with the one given by Billy Mayerl. On no account are you to regard the Mayerl solution as being the *only* correct one. Remember that it is only one of ten which *he* might have written, to say nothing of the hundred other possibilities which would have

occurred to *other* pianists. What you may do *afterwards* is to analyse his and to compare it with your own, bar by bar. If you like yours better, don't hesitate for one moment to say so in your report at the end of this lesson. We shall be pleased : it proves that you are keen on your work and that you have the courage of your convictions. Send it along to us if you like ; Billy Mayerl will go through it *personally*, and be glad to do so.

GENERAL REMARKS

Once again we repeat, we are making no alteration in principles here : *nobody* can do that. All that we taught you in Lesson II of the main course still holds good and is the *only* basis of *all correct* syncopated playing. All Harmonic Progressions studied in that course should be adapted to this new style. At the conclusion of this lesson, please turn to Exercise J. You will find that it is composed of bars and phrases with which you are already familiar, but they have been treated in the new manner. Study them carefully and practise them.

We shall return to the left hand later. But in your next lesson, we are going to give more instruction in the work of the right hand, so as to bring it still further into line with what you have already done in the left. When you feel that you are thoroughly ready, will you therefore please send in your report sheet.

Billy Mayerl.