

With so many methods for beginners already available, what drove you to write 'Piano Junior'?

The international publishing house *Schott Music* in London commissioned me to develop an innovative children's piano method designed to set a new standard worldwide. I feel that teachers should be able to choose from a range of material to suit the individual needs of their students in lessons, and should have additional online support from a dedicated Homepage. This also brings the method to life for today's tech savvy kids.

After nearly 30 years as an author, I was excited to write an international piano method that students around the world are thrilled to use because of the great design and learning material.

In addition to well-known melodies in 'Piano Junior', I also used my own compositions, which support the techniques and content taught in each book.

Your method is called 'creative and interactive': what does this mean?

There are so many aspects to the experience of learning to play the piano. This innovative course stimulates and encourages creativity by featuring frequent 'Corners' that highlight *Composing, Improvising, Action, Playing, Technique, Ear Training, Memory, Sight-Reading* and *Music Quizzes*. These provide a foundation of musical knowledge and develop technical skills. Online access is available too. Teachers, parents and students can visit www.piano-junior.com for audio recordings, video demonstrations and a range of additional free resources to download that go with this course (*Rhythm Checks, Workouts, Sight-Reading*).

Interactive resources, e. g. piano games, quizzes, and flash cards are in preparation.

At what age can children start using this method?

It will suit children from the age of 6 who want to play the piano and learn about music. This method presents material in small, manageable steps, encouraging quick and measurable progress.

The method starts in the 'C position' with hands an octave apart instead of starting with 'Middle C'. Why did you choose this approach?

This physically comfortable position avoids twisting and ulnar deviation of the wrist.

How else is 'Piano Junior' different from other methods?

Supplementary online material and range of repertoire are a special feature, of course. All the pieces in this method are written simply to introduce notes and musical concepts in a very enjoyable manner.

What kind of tunes and repertoire do you use?

'Piano Junior' includes exciting and attractive compositions from the classical period to the present day, as well as arrangements of folk tunes, children's songs, classical masterpieces, jazz and pop melodies.

Can you tell us about the various books and levels in 'Piano Junior'?

'Piano Junior' progresses through 4 levels with 4 books at each level. In addition to the 'Lesson Book' (which includes *Daily Finger Fitness* exercises), each level has a 'Theory Book', where valuable information from the method is worked through and consolidated in a playful, imaginative way. There is also a 'Duet Book' at each level to provide motivation for playing the piano with others and a 'Performance Book' with great repertoire that is fun to play.

With four titles at each level, what do you suggest is the best way using the books in combination?

In each Lesson Book (levels 1-4) there are coloured icons with page references to the other books. This is the key to using the books: follow the icons to find exactly the right supplementary material for each teaching point.

'Theory Books' suggests boring theoretical explanations! What approach do you use for children? Is it easy to learn with this method and do you include practical exercises?

All aspects of this method are presented and developed in a playful, imaginative way. Interactive exercises, quizzes and games help children to learn transposing, improvisation, composition and using traditional musical notation, along with aural training, sight-reading and rhythmic exercises. These activities will appeal even to very young beginners. Children can be given guidance and ideas to encourage playful improvisation and composing from the very beginning. This is the first step to exploring creativity on a journey of discovering musical sounds and notes.

At each level you have 'Duet Books' with pieces for four hands. Why is this?

'Piano Junior' is designed as a complete teaching method that presents a range of progressive repertoire at each level. These 'Duet Books' increase motivation by encouraging two pianists to play together, producing lovely sounds at every stage.

There is a lot of video and audio material to supplement the 'Piano Junior' series. Why did you feel it so important to include this in a new beginners method?

Video and audio material is available for online access. This enables students to become familiar with the sound of the pieces on an acoustic piano and make visual sense of teaching points such as hand and fingering positions and general posture.

Where can these videos be found?

For each level you will find videos on 'PJ's Homepage' www.piano-junior.com illustrating the main points covered.

Your books make rich use of colours and illustrations. Can you tell us something about your approach to using colours?

Clear, visual presentation of teaching material is an important element in children's learning processes. Colour has an incredibly powerful impact on teaching and can be used to stimulate concentration, energy and attention. Children react very sensitively to the style of visual aids used in teaching material, with their capacity for retaining information greatly reinforced by images. The illustrations used in this method are by the well-known children's book illustrator Leopé.

The Lesson Books include colourful 'Flash Cards'. What are these for?

The 'Flash Cards' stapled at the centre of each Lesson Book include 'Notes' and 'Musical symbols/Terms' to identify and 'Rhythmic' patterns to clap. By collecting the cards from each volume students will acquire a wealth of reference material.

On the cover we see a funny little robot called 'PJ': who is he?

Piano Junior, 'PJ' for short, is a robot who loves the piano. He accompanies and motivates children throughout this piano course, together with his cheeky friend 'Mozart' the dog.

Answered by Hans-Günter Heumann

Can you give us a pedagogical overview of 'Piano Junior'?

On PJ's homepage you can download a 16-page detailed 'Pedagogical Overview' about the method 'Piano Junior'.

Why should children learn to play piano today?

The good old piano continues to be on the wish list of parents and children - and with good reason! Everything can be represented on this instrument: the rhythm, the harmony and the melody. On the other hand, you can sing while playing the piano and, of course, accompany other instruments with the piano. The sound of the piano has fascinated people for more than three centuries. Learning an instrument from piano to violin has many advantages for children: it promotes concentration and perception through listening carefully, communicating with other instruments, coordinating fine motor skills, and training memory.

You can express emotions with music that you have no words for (*Jean Sibelius: Music begins where the possibilities of language end*).

First and foremost, playing the piano should be fun for the child and therefore it is important that the child shows interest in the instrument and would like to learn it.