

A note from Paulette Theriault:

It's been my greatest honor to have worked side by side with Dr. Faina Bryanskaya for over 24 years. Just imagine how I felt when, in the very beginning, she asked me to help put her thoughts into words for her unique teacher's manual, Teaching Fundamentals of Music Making, A Holistic Integrated Approach.

We met in the summer of 1994 when I attended her Summer Piano Pedagogy Institute at Longy Conservatory and School of Music. I was trying to 'disappear' in the back row, but Faina wouldn't let me! Much to my chagrin, she kept calling me up to the piano and did her best to keep me engaged. It didn't take me long to understand how fortunate I was to be there — it was obvious every time her fingers touched the keys. The sound was magical! I was mesmerized, trying to figure out just how she could produce such a gorgeous sound, even on the smallest of pieces.

Lucky for me, Faina agreed to accept me as a student, but only after I auditioned with Chopin's Ballade No. 1. She realized it would be a daunting task! Nevertheless, she began the process of teaching me how to become the best teacher and pianist I could be, for which I will be forever grateful!

Soon we realized we were a good match because I could help her with most of her writings — syllabi and hand-outs for classes, repertoire lists, announcements, letters, and plans. We met most Thursdays. As soon as the lesson and lunch (only vegetarian!) were over, we sat beside each other in her office as I listened intently to her ideas and did my best to put them into proper English. We decided to take on the challenge of writing the pedagogy book she longed to see in print.

What follows here are excerpts from this book. Faina's assistant Yelena Prizant (with whom I worked to create this website) and I feel it's the best way to promote her lifetime work. This will enable you to have a keener sense of our beloved mentor's intellect, personality, knowledge of the subject, language, and of course, her high quality communication skills. It is well known that Faina was one of the best presenters of Russian piano methodology to this day. Please be advised that it is protected under Copyright Law.

Quoting from Faina's above-mentioned book, including a statement from her teacher, Nathan Perelman:

"Piano teachers! Begin not with positioning the fingers but with positioning the soul: it is well known that it lives in the tiny tips of pianists' fingers."
Nathan Perelman"

"Introduction. Did you ever marvel that from birth, children have an innate affinity for music and an inherent bodily response to its pulse and rhythm? Why, then, when it's time for music lessons, is it such a struggle for many of them? Why battle with counting and puzzle over clefs?

Children come to us with their own rich and colorful world, having a natural ear, a perfect sense of pulse and rhythm, wonderful mobility and flexibility, and possess fairly complex reflexes. The newborn musician is like a healthy embryo, maturing fruitfully from the life force within. If only we could benefit from all of this!

It's amazing how quickly and easily kids learn new things. From birth, they are in a constant process of discovery, exploring the world by touching things, and learning by listening and doing. Youngsters

understand music or speech in terms of the unit of meaning. They generally do not hear letters, and it is difficult for them to slow down enough to hear the individual letters of a word. They learn words, not letters. It's similar in music. Children can sing like birds or repeat a little tune to you, but if you ask them how many notes it has or how many times the same note is repeated, they are lost. They hear the entire pattern as one element.

There are so many pedagogical books and methods for teaching music in the U.S. and around the globe. Some of them are excellent, especially in later levels. In spite of this bevy of choices, teachers often have trouble with the same problems they encounter while teaching. Over and over again, throughout three decades of teaching teachers in different parts of the world, I have found that instructors come to me with the same issues: students become tense, and after only a few lessons lose their natural sense of rhythm. They often suffer attempting to read music, especially in the bass clef, or when they improvise or play by ear, and become easily bored with the repertoire. Given the wealth of resources, doesn't this sound strange?

Another quandary is that it's seemingly impossible to cram so much into the space of one lesson: playing by ear and improvising, learning theory and developing technique, acquiring sight-reading and memorization skills. Even if one could magically cover them all, these aspects are still taught as separate entities that sometimes work against each other (e.g., memorization and sight-reading).

These concerns haunted me. I became preoccupied with finding another approach, searching for the "whole picture" from a global perspective.

In my view music is a living force that exists innately within us. My close observations of nature and living creatures, as well as of children, have revealed an endless source of images and impressions. The basic tenet of my approach is that the elements of music have meaning, character and emotional energy. The ear comes first and everything else is an extension from it. The eye-ear-finger circle should then become an organic and constant coalition for music-making. Experience comes naturally in the process of music-making: singing, clapping, playing by ear, improvising, writing down and transposing familiar songs, and then modeling rhythmic and melodic patterns. These patterns are generalized by comparing familiar songs, thereby acquiring a basic vocabulary of patterns by focusing on one element – like rhythm or pitch – at a time.

For years, piano teachers and students have been successfully using my Key to Music Making (in three volumes). Teachers I have worked with in my Piano Pedagogy classes, workshops, and international conferences and conventions have asked me to explain and elaborate the concepts underlying those books. I couldn't do that in a rushed Question and Answer period. So here, at last, is a teacher's manual for them.....for you.

This book stands on its own, but it is best (in my opinion) to use it in conjunction with The Key to Music Making — until I come up with something else even better!"

"About this book. What you are about to read is not just another addition to the huge library of pedagogical and reference books. Rather, it is a guide, a workbook, for teaching music from the very beginning through the piano.

My holistic and integrated approach is the culmination of a lifetime of my teaching and performing, research and study in the field of Piano Pedagogy. It integrates the best features of the European,

Russian, and American piano schools, and it really fits with other methods that reinforce my ideas. I have drawn from the ideas of Zoltan Kodaly, Carl Orff, Emile Dalcroze, Alexander Technique, and others that help to develop fine musicians.

Most importantly, I have devised a pathway that establishes an immediate connection between the ear and the keyboard through the ten “voice boxes” in our fingertips, thereby establishing a second human speech organ.

I believe and recommend that all elements of music making must be taught as one skill from the very beginning. Even the most complex ideas may be presented simply through game-playing and vivid imagery, in a way that is easy for students of all ages to grasp and remember.

MY GOALS are:

- To plant and nourish love and understanding for music language
- To cultivate a “musical ear” in the finger pads
- To develop a sense of overall musical space on the keyboard and in notation, and
- To have the pleasure to move around freely within its entire space

Curiosity leads to discovery. When the excitement of exploration comes while learning the world of music, then there is no limit to imagination!”