

Exercise no. 1: Quick release

Right hand:

The exercise consists of four staves of musical notation for the right hand. Each staff has a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp. The notes are represented by black dots on a five-line staff. Below each note is a small symbol indicating finger placement: a diamond for the thumb, a star for the index finger, a club for the middle finger, a spade for the ring finger, and a circle for the pinky. The staves are separated by vertical bar lines.

- ◊ Rest the finger on the key. Depress the key with the second finger of the other hand and let go. The resting finger follows the movement of the key passively.
- ★ As above, but this time touch the passive finger itself with the index finger of the other hand, and then depress it, thus moving the passive finger and the key down together.
- ♣ Now the finger resting on the key becomes active itself and copies the feeling of the movement that it experienced and learnt in the first two stages.

Left hand:

The exercise consists of four staves of musical notation for the left hand. Each staff has a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp. The notes are represented by black dots on a five-line staff. Below each note is a small symbol indicating finger placement: a diamond for the thumb, a star for the index finger, a club for the middle finger, a spade for the ring finger, and a circle for the pinky. The staves are separated by vertical bar lines.

Purpose of the exercise

"Quick release" means a fast letting go (both inwardly and outwardly) of the finger that is lying flat on the key. The point of the exercise is to exclude all preparatory tension or advance positioning of the fingers and to learn that the key can work for us by bringing the finger back up from the key bed. We experience the movement of the key and become aware of its upward pressure³⁰, becoming more sensitive to it and using its energy. Thus the finger does not have to make any unnecessary lifting action, since we experience the unity of finger and key and learn to shut out all superfluous movements. In this way we learn from the key's own movement, trust in it and tune in to it. This requires enormous concentration.

Through this exercise the contact of the finger with the key can be significantly improved. It promotes the ability to play **from and in** the key, rather than on and over it.

This exercise also helps develop good articulation, since the fingers learn lightness and mobility, comparable to a good flautist's mobility with the tip of the tongue. Articulation depends on the speed of your inner letting-go, so that the fingers can be brought back up by the keys rather than by being actively lifted. Apart from this, if we raise our finger and "hit" the key, we produce an extra tapping sound as the finger strikes the key surface.

Introductory comment

A little experiment may aid in clarifying the purpose of the exercise. We place a pencil on the key and then depress the key so that the pencil goes down with it. We then release the key and observe that the key brings the pencil back up. This is exactly what the key can do with our finger when we inwardly release it, (this cannot be seen from outside), or to put it another way, when we "let it happen".

Starting

To begin with we set the passive finger-key unit in motion with the other hand and concentrate

on how this feels. In the ensuing action we then try to re-create this feeling – how this movement feels. The hand is placed on the keys in such a way that the keys don't go down. The arm feels as if it were lightly floating on water. This position differs from the neutral position for Exercises 2 and 3 in that we don't hang from the keys. Nor does the wrist hang down, but is lightly held up. We play solely from the key surface and not from above the key, as when using the fingers like so-called "little hammers". Our movements are dependent on the keys. We play with the key and project ourselves into it. We regard it as an extension of our finger and direct our attention to this finger-key unity. The key then brings the finger back up and the finger follows the movement of the key when, for example, it is depressed by another person or with the other hand.

Teaching Hints 1

To begin with one should find a position on the keyboard such that the forearm forms a straight extension of the keys. Thus the width of your shoulders and the build of your body determines on which note we should begin the exercise. The second to fifth fingers should lie on the keys in the most comfortable state possible. We avoid all superfluous tension. The thumb, too, is free: it feels soft and hangs loosely down from the hand. When we move the other fingers the thumb should make no movement of its own, not even tensing or twitching. By concentrating we can learn to avoid extraneous movements. This can definitely not be achieved by stiffly holding the thumb still. In performing the exercise we should take care not to force and not to push or hit. Each finger should move in isolation, without the other fingers moving in sympathy. This requires a high degree of concentration and attention. For example, it sometimes happens that one or other of the fingers of the other hand twitches unconsciously, even when they have nothing to do. There should be no such extra unconscious movements. At the beginning we should be satisfied with a very small sound, or even no sound at all - it is sufficient that the key moves a bit, whether a sound is produced or not. We breathe regularly, calmly and deeply. At the beginning of each exercise we breathe in (using our diaphragm) and with the first active movement we breathe out.

³⁰ The technical term is „uplift weight“.