

MINI ESSAY 8: PHILOSOPHY OF RHYTHM

By Dr. Julie Knerr

Syllabic Counting

We find it most helpful to use a syllabic system of counting (**Ta, Ta-ti**) for the whole of **Piano Safari® Repertoire Book 1** before introducing metric counting in **Piano Safari® Repertoire Book 2**. This is for several reasons:

- There are many numbers involved in the beginning of piano study: finger numbers, measure numbers, page numbers, and interval numbers. Adding rhythmic numbers prematurely is unnecessary and may result in the student feeling overwhelmed by all the numbers.
- Syllabic counting allows for musically inflected chanting of the rhythm. Young children who are taught to count metrically before establishing a sense of pulse sometimes count mechanically in an unmusical manner, because they are concentrating on saying the correct numbers rather than on feeling the rhythmic swing of the music.
- Because young children have not yet learned fractions in school, explaining the subdivision of the beat and introducing eighth notes is often delayed in beginning method books. However, students who learn eighth notes from the beginning through chanting in a syllabic system of counting (without the mathematical explanation, which occurs later) have no trouble internalizing eighth notes. In fact, I would argue they have less trouble than students who have delayed the subdivision of the beat. Also, children prefer fast rhythms to slow rhythms.
- Students have no trouble converting to metric counting after they have been using a syllabic counting system, because they have internalized the rhythms aurally and kinesthetically rather than just counting the rhythms mathematically.

Technical Considerations


Besides the complexity of the math, another reason that method book authors often delay the introduction of eighth notes and faster rhythms at the beginning of study is because children do not yet have the technique to play faster rhythms. This is absolutely true of consecutive scalar fast passages. The coordination necessary to play even a five-finger passage with appropriate technique at a fast tempo does take quite a bit of time to develop. This is why in **Piano Safari®**, students tap faster rhythmic patterns long before they play them. The only time they are playing fast rhythms is with repeated notes (such as in Zechariah Zebra and Kangaroo Technique Exercises), which is an appropriate place for beginners to play at a fast tempo. All other fast passage playing is delayed until future books.


The Piano Safari® Syllabic Counting System


The syllabic system we use in the **Piano Safari® Method** is a modification of the Kodaly and Gordon systems. Ta is always on the beat ("Ta-ti" instead of "Ti-ti"). I have found that students who use a different system in their school music classes have no trouble using the Ta-ti system in piano.


 = Ta


 = Ta-ti


 = Ta-2

 = Ta-2-3

 = Ta-2-3-4

 = Ta-ka-ti-ka

 = Rest




 = Rest-2

 = Rest-2-3-4

Rhythm Patterns


In addition to introducing each rhythmic value to students, we also teach students several **Rhythm Patterns** that are related to their **Technique Exercises**. We draw the student's attention to these patterns in the **Rhythm Tapping Exercises** in the **Piano Safari® Sightreading Flashcards for Book 1**, in pieces, and anytime we are creating rhythm patterns.

The **Rhythmic Patterns** we teach are:

- **Zechariah Zebra**  Ta-ti Ta-ti Ta Ta
- **Kangaroo**  Ta-ti Ta
- **Tall Giraffe**  Ta Ta Ta-2 (essentially just a slow **Kangaroo** rhythm)

Rhythm Patterns help students see rhythms in groups rather than as isolated notes, and they relate kinesthetically to their **Technique Exercises**.

When creating rhythm patterns with my rhythm cards, the students are often curious about

what the  card is, even though they will not play sixteenth notes in their pieces for quite a while.



In our system, these sixteenth notes are chanted as "Ta-ka-ti-ka." The children get so excited about this rhythm that even if they are not playing sixteenth notes in their pieces, I let them use sixteenths when working with rhythm cards.