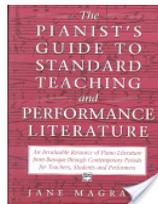


MINI ESSAY 21: LEVELS OF REPERTOIRE

By Dr. Julie Knerr

It was not until a few years ago that I actually sat down and thought to myself, "What level of repertoire should the normal student who began piano around the age of 5-7 be playing at any given point in his piano study." As I pondered this question, I developed with the **School Grade to Piano Level Comparison Table** (show later in this essay) that correlates a student's school grade with his piano level. This makes it easy to tell at a glance if the child is ahead or behind in piano.

The levels I use are based on the levels provided in Jane Magrath's *Pianist's Guide to Standard Teaching and Performance Literature* (Alfred).



Here is a selection of some of my favorite books at each Magrath Level, some of which are listed on p. xi of Dr. Magrath's book. I have added Level 0 to Dr. Magrath's system for the easiest pieces.

Level 0

Book	Type
Fisher & Knerr. Piano Safari® Level 1	Method
Most Primer Method Books (Faber, Alfred, etc.)	Method

Level 1

Book	Type
Fisher & Knerr. Piano Safari® Level 1	Method
Most Level 1 Method Books	Method
Alexander. Finger Paintings Book 2	Educational
Bober. Pentascale Pro Book 1	Educational
Faber. Gold Star Performance Primer	Educational
Magrath. Masterwork Classics Level 1-2	Anthology

Level 2

Book	Type
Fisher & Knerr. Piano Safari® Level 2	Method
Most Level 2-3 Method Books	Method
Faber. Gold Star Performance Levels 1 and 2A	Educational
Goldston. Fantastic Fingers Book 2	Educational
Mier. Just Imagine Books 1 and 2	Educational
Vandall. Celebrated Virtuoso Solos Book 1	Educational
Reinagle. Easiest piece from 24 Short and Easy Pieces	Classical
Kabalevsky. Easiest pieces from Op. 39	Modern
Celebration Series Perspectives Repertoire, Preparatory Level	Anthology
Magrath. Masterwork Classics Level 1-2	Anthology

Level 3

Book	Type
Most Level 4-5 Method Books	Method
Alexander. Simply Sonatinas Book 1	Educational
Norton. Connections Book 1	Educational
Alfred. Contest Winners Book 2	Educational Anthology
Myklas. Contest Winners Book 2	Educational Anthology
Gurlitt. I Remember Gurlitt Books 1 and 2	Romantic
Crosby. In My Dreams	Modern
Kabalevsky. Op. 39	Modern
Celebration Series Perspectives Repertoire, Levels 1-2	Anthology
Magrath. Masterwork Classics Level 3	Anthology

Level 4

Book	Type
Gillock. Accent on Analytical Sonatinas	Educational
Mier. Romantic Impressions 1	Educational
Norton. Connections Book 2 and 3	Educational
Vandall. Celebrated Piano Solos 3 and 4	Educational
Bach. Easiest minuets from Anna Magdalena Notebook	Baroque
Clementi. Easiest movements from Sonatinas, Op. 36	Classical
Czerny. Op. 599	Classical
Gretchaninoff. Op. 119 and 123	Romantic
Gurlitt. Op. 101 and 130	Romantic
Lynes. Op. 39. Analytical Sonatinas	Romantic
Reinhold. Miniatures, Op. 39	Romantic
Bartok. Easiest pieces from For Children	Modern
Nakada. Japanese Festival	Modern
Tansman. Pour les Enfants Volumes 1 and 2	Modern
Waxman. New Recital Pageants 1	Modern
Celebration Series Perspectives Repertoire, Levels 2 and 3	Anthology
Magrath. Masterwork Classics Level 4	Anthology

Level 5

Book	Type
Norton. Connections Book 5	Educational
Bach. Anna Magdalena Bach Notebook	Baroque
Clementi Sonatinas. Op. 36	Classical
Czerny. Op. 139	Classical
Loeschhorn. Op. 65	Romantic
Bartok. Mikrokosmos 3	Modern
Gillock. Lyric Preludes in Romantic Style	Modern
Kabalevsky. Op. 27 and 60	Modern
Khatchaturian. Adventures of Ivan	Modern
Maykapar. Pedal Preludes	Modern
Waxman. New Recital Pageants 2	Modern
Tansman. Pour les Enfants 2	Modern
Celebration Series Perspectives Repertoire, Levels 4 and 5	Anthology
Magrath. Masterwork Classics Level 5	Anthology

Level 6

Book	Type
Norton. Connections Book 6	Educational
Vandall. Celebrated Piano Solos 5	Educational
Beethoven. Shorter Pieces	Classical
Clementi. Sonatinas. Op. 36	Classical
Czerny. Op. 453	Classical
Kuhlau. Op. 88	Classical
Burgmuller. Op. 100	Romantic
Gretchaninoff. Op. 3	Romantic
Gurlitt. Op. 107	Romantic
Heller. Op. 47	Romantic
Schwarenka. Op. 62	Romantic
Tchaikovsky. Op. 39	Romantic
Waxman. New Recital Pageants 3	Modern
Celebration Series Perspectives Repertoire, Levels 6 and 7	Anthology
Magrath. Masterwork Classics Level 6	Anthology

Level 7

Book	Type
Norton. Connections Book 7	Educational
Bach. 18 Little Preludes	Baroque
Benda. 34 Sonatinas	Classical
Beethoven. Shorter Pieces	Classical
Clementi. Sonatinas. Op. 36	Classical
Haydn. Easier Sonata Movements	Classical
Kuhlau. Sonatinas Op. 20 and 55	Classical
Grieg. Easiest Lyric Pieces	Romantic
Bartok. Mikrokosmos 4	Modern
Waxman. New Recital Pageants 4	Modern
Celebration Series Perspectives Repertoire, Levels 6 and 7	Anthology
Magrath. Masterwork Classics Level 7	Anthology

Level 8

Book	Type
Bach. Inventions	Baroque
Haydn. Sonatas	Classical
Burgmuller. Op. 109	Romantic
Heller. Op. 46	Romantic
Bartok. Mikrokosmos 5	Modern
Waxman. Etudes 1	Modern
Tcherepnin. Op. 5	Modern
Celebration Series Perspectives Repertoire, Levels 8	Anthology
Magrath. Masterwork Classics Level 8	Anthology

Level 9

Book	Type
Bach. Sinfonias	Baroque
Beethoven. Easiest Sonatas	Classical
Haydn. Sonatas	Classical
Berens. Op. 88	Romantic
Mendelssohn. Songs Without Words	Romantic
Moszkowski. Op. 12 and 91	Romantic
Bartok. Mikrokosmos 5	Modern
Celebration Series Perspectives Repertoire, Level 9	Anthology
Magrath. Masterwork Classics Level 9	Anthology

Level 10

Book	Type
Bach. Sinfonias	Baroque
Scarlatti. Sonatas	Baroque
Beethoven. Easiest Sonatas	Classical
Mozart. Easiest Sonatas	Classical
Burgmüller. Op. 105	Romantic
Chopin. Easiest Nocturnes	Romantic
Heller. Op. 45	Romantic
Loeschhorn. Op. 66 and 67	Romantic
Mendelssohn. Songs Without Words	Romantic
Tchaikovsky. Op. 37a	Romantic
Celebration Series Perspectives Repertoire, Levels 9 and 10	Anthology
Magrath. Masterwork Classics Level 10	Anthology

In the **School Grade to Piano Level Comparison Table**, minimum Magrath Levels are provided to correspond to each grade in school (U.S. system). Of course we teachers would always be happy if the student is playing at a higher level than is listed.

Disclaimer: I realize that there are always exceptions, depending on when the student began to study piano, their aptitude, learning challenges, how much they practice, etc. The **School Grade to Piano Level Comparison Table** is designed to help teachers have general benchmarks to use in pacing a student's progress.

When I have shown this chart to some teachers, they often say is, "But I have this one student who... So this wouldn't apply to him." I realize that there are exceptions, but if we do not have an ideal goal in our minds, it is much harder to keep perspective on pacing for piano students.

School Grade to Piano Level Comparison Table

SCHOOL GRADE	IDEAL MAGRATH PIANO LEVEL	SATISFACTORY PIANO LEVEL RANGE
Kindergarten	Level 0	Level 0
1st Grade	Level 1	Level 0-1
2nd Grade	Level 2	Level 0-2
3rd Grade	Level 3	Level 1-3
4th Grade	Level 4	Level 2-4
5th Grade	Level 5	Level 3-5
6th Grade	Level 6	Level 4-6
7th Grade	Level 7	Level 5-7
8th Grade	Level 8	Level 6-8
9th Grade	Level 9	Level 7-9
10th Grade	Level 10	Level 8-10
11th Grade	Level 10	Level 9-10
12th Grade	Level 10	Level 10
Entering College	Level 10	Level 10

You may notice that there are 11 piano levels (0 - 10) and 13 school grades (Kindergarten - 12th Grade). Because of this, there are two levels worth of "wobble room" that allow the student flexibility in case he has a hard year at school or needs more time to work through a specific level of repertoire.

This means that a 7th grader playing Level 5 pieces is still on track, since there are two levels of wobble room.

A 12th grader playing Level 10 pieces is in a good position to major in piano in college or to get a piano scholarship at college and major in something else.

This also means that a child who does not start piano until 2nd grade is not behind, because not only is he a Level 0 student at this point (only two levels behind, which is fine because of the two levels of wobble room), but he will probably catch up rapidly and be a Level 3 student by 3rd grade anyway. But even if he does not catch up rapidly, he will still not be behind. In fact, I firmly believe it is better to move slowly and carefully to lay a good technical foundation in Levels 0 - 1 and then watch the growth spurt that happens around Level 2 - 3. Rushing through Level 0 - 1 will often backfire in terms of technical development.

Students Who are Behind

After developing this **School Grade to Piano Level Comparison Table**, I noticed a disturbing trend when judging at various venues. There seem to be an inordinate number of 6th and 7th graders who are playing Level 2 - 3 pieces. They should be playing Level 4 - 7 pieces, which means that they are two to four years behind where they should be in their piano study.

I have also seen plenty of 12th graders who can only play Level 5 pieces, which will not have them prepared for any type of college piano experience. These students are at least five years behind where they should be.

How do students get so far behind?

- The pacing in level of difficulty in piano methods has become slower and slower over the years. The newest methods of today progress at a very slow rate, so much so that the pieces at the end of a book are not a great deal more difficult than the pieces at the beginning of a book. In some cases, a first book in a method series starts at Level 0 and ends only at Level 0+. This means that a student who studies in a current piano method series will progress more slowly than he might have in the past when method books moved more quickly. I am not advocating a return to the methods of old, as they may have progressed so quickly that students became frustrated. However, it seems that in the name of "fun" and "easy," some method series move so slowly that a student who puts in hardly any practice time or effort can still move through the book. This results in the student and his parents (and teacher) developing the idea that since he is moving through the book, he is making satisfactory progress in piano, when in reality, he is moving much too slowly to reach a reasonable level of pianistic ability by the end of high school.

- Some parents in the United States expect too little of their children in terms of practicing. Ten or fifteen minutes of practice per day is not a sufficient amount of time for a child to learn to play the piano well. We as teachers need to educate parents about what will be required in piano study and the work (and ensuing joy) that is involved. Also, parents need to be involved in the child's practice in terms of scheduling, organizing, and prioritizing the practice time. The parent should help the child practice and encourage and praise his efforts. It would be ridiculous if a school teacher only scheduled a math lesson once a week for 30 minutes and expected the child to practice at home for only 10 minutes a day with no parental help or accountability. And parents would never say, "I don't want to stress my child out by making him do math 10 minutes a day." Or, "Sorry, we were so busy with soccer and birthday parties that we only did our math one day this week." Or, "It's fine if my child is in 6th grade and still has not learned his multiplication tables. It's just math." This just would not happen. And yet this is exactly what happens too often with piano study, since piano is often seen as an extracurricular activity that is not as demanding or important as school subjects. This means that students in 6th grade end up playing Level 2-3 pieces, which means they are two to four years behind. In my research with twelve respected pre-college teachers, the main factor in whether these teachers decide to take a certain child as their student is the parent's attitude and commitment to the child's piano study. Parents cannot be expected to know what the commitment level will be unless we teachers educate them about what we expect.
- The whole weekly piano lesson system is not set up with the best interests of the child's piano study in mind. Ideally, daily interaction between the child and teacher and guided practice would be best. At the present, piano lessons are set up once a week because of economics, not because of best practices in learning or teaching. This puts most of the burden of progress on home practice. If parents are not committed to helping the child practice, the child is not going to progress sufficiently.
- Teachers are too often not aware of where a student should be in terms of level at a given time. Because of the individualized lesson planning inherent in piano lessons, it is too easy to go with the flow and let students progress entirely at their own pace, which may be very slowly (depending on the factors above). Before the teacher realizes it, the student is in 10th grade playing Level 4 pieces, which means the student is at least four years behind.

Solutions to Progressing at an Adequate Pace

Here are some solutions to helping students progress at an adequate pace:

- We should be aware of the pacing of method books, and move at a faster pace through books that advance very slowly (while of course being aware of the student's technical and reading needs).
- We can educate parents about practicing and change the way music study is sometimes viewed as "extracurricular" and "not as important as school subjects."

- We need to be aware of a leveling system and keep track of whether each student is ahead, behind, or on track.
- We should assign as many pieces in a week as the student can handle. The more pieces assigned, the longer the student will spend at the piano, and the more fluency he will develop.

Pacing in Piano Safari®

Piano Safari® aims to be a method that progresses slowly where needed (Reading Pieces) and more quickly in areas students are likely to excel in, like musicality and memorization through Rote Pieces. The pieces in Piano Safari® Repertoire Book 1 and accompanying Piano Safari® Sightreading Flashcards for Book 1 are Level 0 - 2 pieces (depending on the type of piece). In this way, reinforcement is combined with challenge to help students make adequate progress.