## Practice Right Hand Improvisation with Left Hand Ostinati to Develop Coordination

Through the normal effort that one makes at the piano in learning music by reading notation, a certain amount of right hand/left hand coordination and independence will result. When a student learns a piece of written music, however, the interactions between the right and left hand are usually learned by rote through repetition. This can become a mindless activity, and a joyless sense of order is often the result.

Once the hands are practiced together, the relationship, sound, and timing of the hands as they play together remains unchanged. While this is a good thing—in that it makes the piece more manageable and easier to play, such practice does not promote true independence of the hands.

It's not unlike the relationship between the skill one develops in reciting a memorized passage, verses being able carry on an interactive conversation in response to another speaker, or to speak freely off the top of one's head. The two skills are quite different. The ability one develops as a result of practicing both approaches makes the speaker more proficient in their speaking ability. Speaking freely, without preparation as in a conversation, however, requires that the speaker remain conscious and vigilant throughout the entire process. This forces concentration and alleviates the boredom that often results through the repetition of fixed patterns.

Accordingly, an alternative approach to developing coordination and independence of the hands is to practice improvised rhythmic figures in the right hand, while maintaining a steady, repeated rhythmic figure in the left. This can be done, for example, by using a left hand figure such as the one below to provide the ostinato:



Given that the ostinato is oriented in the key of b minor, the right hand could use one of the b minor scales (natural, melodic, harmonic, or Dorian) or a part of any of these scales for its melodic material. For example, the right hand could position itself over the first five notes of the b minor scale.



This makes the technical challenge of improvisation easier while allowing the player to concentrate on various rhythms using only these five notes.

The improvised melody, while it is based on particular fragments of the scale and specific rhythmic ideas, is approached freely and somewhat randomly. The played doesn't really know what he or she will play. As a result, the player will find the challenges of maintaining the left hand figure more formidable. Nevertheless, the skill developed as a result will prove more valuable.

Moreover, the process is a creative activity. Since the player must remain focused throughout, and actively participates in the musical result, the practicing becomes more enjoyable. As a result, the practice becomes more rewarding both *musically* and *technically*.