



# A QUICK GUIDE FOR A STUDENT PIANIST

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## Abstrak :

*Karya tulis ini akan membahas tentang hal-hal apa saja yang menjadi dasar untuk membangun diri sebagai musisi yang utuh. Sebagai seorang pengajar, penulis banyak mendapatkan pengalaman-pengalaman tentang bagaimana membuat seorang musisi menjadi utuh baik dalam segi permainan maupun dalam segi penjiwaan. Banyak siswa piano menilai bahwa mereka dapat bermain dengan baik jika mereka selalu berlatih, dan berlatih tanpa mengetahui makna dan hal-hal lain yang sebenarnya akan sangat mendukung untuk men-support permainan mereka. Untuk itu, karya tulis ini akan mencoba untuk memberi pengertian dasar tentang apa saja yang dibutuhkan para siswa musik, khususnya adalah piano.*

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## PREFACE

After my experience of teaching my students in Indonesia, I came up with the idea of writing this quick guide on what our students need to become a succesful in playing piano, and what would help them develop themselves as a piano student.

We live in the modern world, where all things can be done with such high technology in an instant, a very fast world that we live in right now. Even most of the music are recorded with such high technology in studio recordings. But what about the music itself? Is it getting better in quality of the music? Or is it getting worse? To tell you the truth, if we're talking about the pop, R&B, hip-hop, alternatives, techno, and every single type of music that we listen to, those music came from the classical music.

For lots of people, listening to classical music are boring, but, I think it's the opposite. For those people who think it's boring, they're never realize that the melody, the harmony, the form in classical music are one hundred times more complex than the modern music that we listen to the most right now.



Most of our students didn't realize that they are under influence of modern music, and the result is they don't want to trace back on what happened in history. They will just have to learn the notes and play the piece like it's written. That's why I wrote these guide for the students so they could see that they're many important elements to know and to learn that will help them grow as a high-quality musician, in this case, a pianist.

## **MAIN TOPIC**

There are many things that we need to become a pianist. The more advance we're playing the piano music, the more we need all other things related to the music to develop our skills and our knowledge to the music. Let me start with some of the main things that we have to have.

### **The Love For Piano Music**

All human beings can play piano, even a person who have only one arm and one hand can play piano (there are many compositions for one hand, ex: Ravel Left Hand piano concerto, Scriabin prelude, Godowsky's transcription of Chopin Etudes, etc). From the love for music and off course the dedication to the music, we can develop our skills to play by learning how to read and how to play the notes, and that will be our starting point. And, there is no such thing called "too late" to learn music. Some people are gifted with talents, and some people are not talented. But the most important things is how hard you want to work in the practice room, otherwise, people who are talented in music but don't have enough time spent in the practice room will have a hard time developing their skills. From that point, we all know that learning classical music can not be done in an instant, but it will take lots of your time and your energy until you can play that music by heart. For example, from my experience in teaching, many of the advance students refused to play Mozart, because it looks easy to read and to play. They think that they can finish the sonata for example, in one week. It is true that you can finish reading it in one week, but it will take years to get the perfect touch in Mozart. Most of the professional pianists all over the world think that playing Mozart is the hardest one compare to any other composers. Why? It because to get the perfect lightness and delicate touch in Mozart is one of hardest technique in playing piano.

One of the main the main thing that we have to have as a pianist is the piano to practice on. I'm not suggesting a digital piano for the advance students, but it's ok to have a digital piano for beginners, but soon they're developing their skills, they have to change it to an upright or a grand piano. It also depending on where they want to go, is it going to be classical, jazz, or pop? For classical, I recommend to have an acoustic piano rather than a keyboard or digital pianos. Although it is true that the digital pianos have the ability to produce different sounds, but for our ears, the acoustic are still can not be imitate by the most modern technology. For example the digital piano sound can not imitate the overtones of the acoustic piano, or the strings sounds is too electric in comparison with the real strings section in the orchestra because each of the violin or other strings intruments produce. For instance the tuning note a = 440, but the other player produce a = 440,2 or 439,9. These combination of the 40-60 string players makes a very complicated sound to imitate.

## **Teacher**

Teachers have an important role in music. A good teacher is the one who have a dedication to the music, and understands of their students problem. But, if the students don't have enough time in the practice, the teacher become useless. Some teachers know how to solve technical problem, but for some teachers, they don't know how to solve technical problems, it because they never experienced those problems during their studies, they just found it naturally. In this way, it's going to be hard for the students who experience some problems because the teacher never experience the same problem, a good pianist can not be guaranteed as a good teacher.

A teacher also have another important role in relation to the students, and that is trust and honesty. As a teacher, we have to be honest to our student, and as a student, we have to put our trust that our teacher will be our friend in music.



## Technique

The basic technique to play any music instrument is scale. There are 2 main categories for scale, and there're Major scales, and Minor scales, which also can be divided into harmonic and melodic scales. As we know that those 2 main scale characters came up in the baroque era after the developing ideas by the modals like dorian, locrian, phrygian, etc. Most student pianists don't have the understanding on how important to play scale, but the fact is, that is the very basic technique on every instruments. From there, you will have the ability to play the notes with the correct fingering automatically, including the arpeggios and the cadence chords. We can develop our technique by playing the Etudes, and I will suggest that playing lots of Czerny etudes will increase your technique. One of the most famous composer named Franz Liszt, wrote down many of unthinkable technique in his pieces, but if we analyze his pieces, almost 90% of his fingers technique came from his teacher Carl Czerny, in conclusion, if you want to learn Liszt, Carl Czerny etudes is the starting point for you. There are also other composers who composed Etudes, such as Chopin, Liszt, Moszkowsky, Debussy, Goddard, Mendelssohn, etc. And those etudes are very important to develop your technique. But, remember to know all the 24 scales and arpeggios (including the variety of arpeggios you can play on the piano, and also the inversions)

## Recordings

There are many fine recordings you can buy in a CD stores, although in Jakarta it happened to be hard to find them. Most of the classical CDs that I have are bought from outside Indonesia. I think that is one difference between our country and other countries in this world. I've made a research during my studies in New York about CD stores, and the fact was a bit astonishing. In one of the big CD store in New York, the classical section always in the big 3 in income of the store, and always the largest in the area, leading over the pop, rock, jazz sections, and other types of music sections, but that is just another addition information.

As a pianist, we need to learn from the professional artists, such as Vladimir Horowitz, Arthur Rubinstein, Sviatoslav Richter, Glenn Gould, and many others. Those artists have made outstanding recordings through out their life, and it's our benefits to just buy those CDs and listen to their playing, although many of the



legendary pianists are already passed away. One of the best way to study the music beside practicing in the practice room, is to listen to CDs, and compare them if they have similar pieces. You will find that one artist have different interpretation to the piece, different touch, different approach, different tempo, or even different story. But of course, many of the teachers always give their students some advice that they can not imitate everything from the CDs, especially when their technique is still weak. For example, nobody could play an octaves passages as fast as Martha Argerich (a very famous Argentinian Pianist), but all the student pianists want to play as fast as her playing, and the result is devastating for the students. Argerich has the all the technique equipment as a pianist, and we have to remember, she's a legend in playing piano.

## **Theory and other subjects**

Another important element in music is theory, which includes theory, dictation, singing ability, and history. These subjects support what we study on the piano, without those subjects, our piano playing will become empty. The theory will help us as a pianist in many things, such as understanding the harmony, the form, and even it helps us to read the notes quicker if we really understand about the style of writing of each composer. For example, if we read many of Franz Liszt compositions, it will be totally different than if we read Rachmaninov's composition. Of course, both of them are from different eras, but even if we look closely to the style of writing of Brahms and Chopin, they're both in the same eras, but their technique of writing are totally different.

Not only the theory that we have to learn, but also we have to know the history of each composer, the development of the whole classical music. The easiest example would be the style of playing Bach, Mozart, Schumann, Debussy, and Bartok. I took those 5 different composers from the different eras, and even if we put them in one program of our recital, we have to be able to show the difference of style, from Baroque, to Classical, to Romantic, to Impressionism, and to Modern. By learning the history, we would know the difference on how to play them.



## Concerts

As a student pianist, we have to be able to perform in front of the audience, or judges. The more we perform, the more we get experiences and becoming mature in playing. But not only performing in front of people, seeing somebody else's concert or recital will help us grow as a student pianist. By watching a pianist play on stage, we could learned on what we could do next time on stage, and what we wouldn't do. We might think that it's better to watch a performance of a world class pianist rather than a regular recital by some unknown pianist, well, it's not true. By watching a world class pianist perform, we could learn a valuable lesson, but watching some unknown pianist perform, we will also get a valuable lesson on how to criticize ourself and how to build ourselves up in playing.

