# Keyboard / Piano INPROVISATION One Note At a Time! Learn to Improvise from Scratch!



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1st Edition: 2015 2nd Edition: 2022 ISBN: 978-1-4717-2680-4 Enquiries: <u>https://learn-keyboard.co.uk</u>

# **Acknowledgements**

To all the fantastic musicians who I've had the privilege of working with back in the 1960s / 70s including: Pip Williams (guitarist / record producer); Tex Marsh (drums); Roger Flavell (bassist / singer / songwriter); Kevan Fogarty (guitarist); Tommy Hunt (singer); Other members of '*Aquila*' - Ralph Denyer (singer / songwriter); Phil Childs (bassist); Jim Smith (drums); George Lee (saxophonist); Ron Thomas (bassist); Martin Johnstone (bassist / vocals); Geno Washington (singer); UK No. 1 singer / songwriter Emile Ford; U.K. top 10 artists: '*The Fantastics*' - John Cheatdom, Jerome Ramos, Donald Haywoode and Richard Pitts.

To my early mentors: Alan Simonds (guitarist / vocalist); big bruv Steve (guitarist) and Mr. Henley (my inspirational music teacher at Warlingham School 1960 - 65).

And to Myriad Software: <u>http://www.myriad-online.com</u> for the Harmony Assistant music notation software which was used to produce this book. - Thanks!



Aquila album cover design by Keith Besford - Thanks Keith, I still Love it!



Note that the links may not work if you are viewing this in a Google or Amazon preview. Please go to <u>https://learn-keyboard.co.uk/keyboard\_improvisation.html</u> for a more complete free *working* pdf preview.

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You may or not know that I've written several keyboard tuition books, but actually the first edition of this book was the first one that I wrote as improvisation was / is my passion dating back to my days as an international touring musician in the 60's / 70's - *soul, funk, and prog rock.* 

This second *special* edition which has been many years coming is short and sweet but packed with everything you need without any unnecessary garbage. It's been written both for the complete novice and the more experienced alike.

I'm not going to include anything but the essentials in order to keep the number of pages to a minimum and therefore also the price of the paperback version, BUT I will include appropriate links to some of my other books which you can access without further charge - *in with the price of this book!* 

Below is the list of the digital books that you will receive *with* this book all of which are in pdf format. This will enable me to concentrate on the *'nitty gritty'* but at the same time ensuring that you have all the resources that you need to get the best out of it. The links for these can be found under the <u>'Download Links'</u> heading at the end of the book.



# All the above are FREE to download with this book!

If you are reading the digital version, you can click on the previous graphics for further information of each item. If you were to buy all these items separately, they would cost considerably more than the digital version of this book and more than double the price of the paperback version, so actually this book is a *pretty good deal*!

Note that all these items are available as free downloads (with this book) *only* while I'm still alive. If my website at <u>http://gonkmusic.com</u> or <u>https://learn-keyboard.co.uk</u> is still working, you can be sure I'm still here and the downloads will be available. At the time of writing this (2022) I am / was 73 and plan on living forever and so far, I have to say that it's not going too badly! But nevertheless, I realise that every day is a bonus! *If I'm dead and you can't get the downloads, please feel free to sue me!* 

Now to begin with I'm going to assume that you can read music notation at least to a very basic level - but don't worry if you can't, as one of the links listed previously will provide you with all the information you need. Even if you are a complete novice, all the information is provided in the links.

To make things as uncomplicated as I can, in the main I shall be using *keyboard* views for scales / chords etc. wherever possible, but in some cases using music notation is essential, although this will be kept to the absolute minimum.

So, if you can't read music notation, please go to the download links page at the end of the book and download my '*Learn How to Read Music*' book *now*. You will find this is also short and to the point and will give you all the information you need to proceed quickly and easily with the information herein.

Improvisation is easy and great fun if you have the right 'tools' for the job all of which will be covered. And these must be dealt with first.

These include:

- Basic fingering information and exercises
- Intervals
- Scales: major, minor (natural, harmonic, melodic) and chromatic
- Pentatonic and blues scales
- Scale modes
- Chord construction inc. 6/9 and m7sus4
- Diatonic chords
- Arpeggios (major, minor including 7ths)
- Then the fun begins!

## **Audio Links**

This book has been written to be read as a paperback and / or a digital eBook. If you have the paperback version - great, - without doubt this is the best version for flipping backwards and forwards to where you want to be. However, if you wish to hear the many audio examples included, you may find it convenient to also have the digital version in pdf format which can be read on any PC, laptop, or tablet.

The audio links throughout the book can be accessed two ways:

- by using the free external links at: <u>https://learn-keyboard.co.uk/impro\_new\_links.html</u> which gives access to all the links in the order in which they appear in each chapter; or
- by using the links throughout the book as they appear in the digital pdf version (internet connection required)

If you have purchased the paperback version, the digital version is *freely* available to you (for your own use only). This can be found under the <u>download links</u> heading at the end of the book along with the other book downloads. Be sure to copy the links exactly as written including the hyphen and the underscore between the words.

# Using the *in-Book* Links

Quite probably you may only need to listen to some of the audio links, but several are included for your convenience.

To access the links easily, if you are viewing this on a laptop or PC first of all go to your browser and click the restore down button to reduce the view size to something like the image below to the right (by dragging the bottom and sides).



Then click on the link which should then appear in front of the document enabling you to move it out of the way of anything that you may wish to see at the same time.

If you are viewing this on an Android tablet as soon as you click on the link you will lose the book view until you push the '*Back*' button (shown next).



If you want to you can have a trial run now by clicking on the following graphic which actually is '*Pop Goes the Weasel*'!



Note also that each link will open a new page in your browser, so you will eventually need to cancel them (or just close the browser).

In addition to the external links, there are also internal links to help you navigate to certain reference points in the book and return including the arrows either side of the chapter headings. Clicking the right-hand one will take you instantly to the next chapter and the left-hand arrow to the beginning of the last chapter. If you want to navigate to another chapter quickly, simply click on the ' $\leq$ ' icon which is in the footer of every page (including this one). This will take you instantly to the '*Contents*' page where you can then click and go to any section you wish - *so you can basically whizz through the document at lightning speed*!

Also, throughout the book I have included a few of my favourite keyboards. These are not 'adverts' per se, they are basically just to fill space. Links for all the major manufacturers as well as my 'keyboard review' section can be found on my website so that you can get all the up-to-date relevant information in order to make up your own mind as to what suits your needs either now or in the future!



I'm assuming that you can now read music notation at least a very little.

If you are more experienced, you may well not need this first section in which case please just move on to the next section.

## **Correct Hand and Seating Positioning**

Firstly, it's a good idea to make sure that your hands are clean and warm. You can achieve this by soaking them in warm water for a while, but then dry them thoroughly. Alternatively, sit on them to warm them up; but if you happen to be sitting on a cold marble slab or an iceberg, nestle your right hand under your left armpit and your left hand under your right armpit for a while which is a method that I used regularly whilst gigging around Europe during the cold winters of the 60's.

The next thing is to be sure that you adopt a correct seating position so that you can achieve the correct hand position. If your seating is incorrect (too low or too high) then your hand positioning will never be correct. I recommend using a height adjustable piano stool so that you can experiment in order to get comfortable. Or of course you may have an adjustable keyboard stand.

Do also take into account the fact that you may need to use the pedals, or at least the sustain pedal. So, both feet should be comfortably flat on the floor to begin with.

And of course, your stool should be positioned so that you are seated more or less in the centre of the keyboard - belly button opposite **middle** C!

The next pictures illustrate the correct and incorrect hand positions.





# Fingering

As far as keyboard / piano music is concerned what most people will call their '*first*' finger is their '*second*' finger as in piano music the '*first*' finger is always your '*thumb*' (on both hands).



# Your First Exercises

The first exercises that I am going to show you are simple and require no music reading skills. But don't be misled into thinking that you can learn these and then forget about them - they are superb ongoing exercises.

They are great for the following reasons:

- They will create strength and flexibility in your fingers
- They are a prelude to the more extensive *'Hanon'* exercises for which you have a free link
- They are an essential prelude to learning scales which will be dealt with later
- They're easy and fun!

To perform these exercises, we'll be using a series of patterns to make it easier for the novices.

Begin by resting the fingers of your right hand lightly on the five notes shown in the first diagram (**C major**) in a relaxed claw like position; then when you are ready begin depressing the keys in the order shown in *Pattern 1* in a piston type motion using the tips of your fingers and the side of your thumb. Make sure that you release each note before playing the next except for the last note which can be sustained a little longer. And try to play each note with equal pressure, which I know is not easy at first if you are a beginner.

Hopefully to make this perfectly clear - your first finger (thumb) starts on middle C in the first segment and in *pattern 1* each note (from C to G) is played in order up and down until the last five notes where the 1 - 3 - 5 - 3 - 1 pattern kicks in which is the major triad in the first segment and the relative minor triad in the second (right-hand diagram below).

Most importantly keep to a strict rhythm which can be as slow as you like, ideally use a metronome set to a comfortable speed. Each exercise should be repeated several times and speed can be increased only as you gain experience.

Initially, practice with each hand separately and later both hands together when you are ready.



C Major Right Hand



A Minor Right Hand



C Major Left Hand



A Minor Left Hand

For all the patterns, the fingers of each hand should be placed as on the above graphics.

In all cases the left hand should be played an octave lower - *I've only included the notation for the right hand, but the left hand is identical, but an octave lower.* 

All the exercises can be heard by clicking on the music notation graphic for each exercise or by connecting to the website.

Each pattern also has a *mirror version*. In this case, as you should see it's the same pattern the other way around, which starts with your 5th finger on G (right hand).

Using the mirror pattern ensures that each finger benefits equally in each pattern.

Before progressing to *pattern 2*, do the same again with your left hand starting an octave below **middle** C and then practice with both hands together. When you feel ready, progress through the remaining four patterns using the same technique.

Ideally these should be practiced in three ways:

- Legato which is smooth and connected
- Staccato where each note is detached; and
- Swing in swing feel

Examples of these can be heard by clicking the links below.



If you can't access the links direct (by clicking on the graphics), the web page link for this chapter is:

https://learn-keyboard.co.uk/audio-links/lets\_begin\_impro\_new.html



The Legendary Hammond B3

*I had the very great pleasure of owning one of these beasts. A great machine, but no fun humping them into basement or attic venues!* 

# Korg SV2s Stage Piano (88 keys)



This must be the coolest looking keyboard on the planet and sounds good too! Available with or without internal speakers - I love it!











# 🗧 Creating Your Own Patterns 🏓

What I want you to do now is an extension of these previous exercises but using the right hand only.

Previously, I've given you the set patterns, fingering and timing. But now I want you to create some of your own using the same **C major** and **A minor** '5 note part scales' as shown below.



C Major Right Hand



A Minor Right Hand

For this, you can use exactly the same fingering as before (shown above) but now you can:

- choose which notes to hit in what order
- choose the time length of each note
- repeat any notes as required
- use only some or all the notes
- start and finish anywhere you choose

Due to the possible timing variations alone, there are only about 500 billion possible combinations even with just with these five notes, so there's a fair bit to go at!

To begin with I recommend that you start and finish on the root note (C or A respectively).

#### Why?

Because if using these notes as suggested, you will be in the key of **C major** or **A minor** and doing so will simply make it work better. As you gain a bit of experience, you can perhaps start on another note, but still end on the root. But having said this - *do what the hell you like*!

The following link buttons will give you a few audio examples.

Notice that each example has too phrases; the first sort asks a question and the second answers it - or *resolves* it! This technique is common in all sorts of music.

In all the examples I've added the metronome as example 3 in particular starts off the beat!

Example 1	Exan	ple 2	Example 3
Exam	ple 4	Exan	nple 5

Notice also the difference between doing this in the minor key as against the major key - examples 4 and 5 are in **A minor**. You may also find that you can figure out how to play some simple tunes that you know just with these five notes.

As we progress you will see the major and minor scales in full as well as the pentatonic and blues scales and arpeggios. Then this exercise can be repeated using a combination of all of them enabling you to improvise easily as well as compose if you want to. But in the meantime please download the *'Hanon Exercises'* which will help improve your finger technique as well as perhaps giving you some ideas which you can use later.

The link for this chapter is <u>http://www.learn-keyboard.co.uk/own\_patterns.html</u> .



Korg D1 Portable Piano (88 keys)

## If you are on a budget and want a great piano keyboard feel, this could be for you. This has the same RH3 keybed as the mighty Kronos and the Korg SV2. This could also make a great lower tier board with maybe a synth or organ on top!



The smallest interval in Western music is the 'semi-tone' and this is the interval from C - C sharp (the first black note up from C) and going the other way from C - **B** (as there is no black note between **C** and **B**, but the *interval* is just the same). Playing a progression of semitones for one octave or more, starting on any note and returning to the same note is known as the 'chromatic' scale which you'll see later.

Two or more *'semi-tones'* create larger intervals. The interval between **C** and **D** is a *'tone'* two semitones) as there is a black note in-between. The interval between **F sharp** and **G sharp** is also a tone, as there is a white note in-between. And the interval between **E** and **F sharp** is again a tone as there is once more a white note in-between.

Minor 2nd	Major 2nd	Minor 3rd	Major 3rd
Perfect 4th	Diminished 5th	Perfect 5th	Minor 6th
Major 6th	Minor 7th	Major 7th	Octave

# Intervals from C

Then as more gaps are left in-between the *intervals* become greater and are named as shown above. All the intervals up to an octave are shown here starting on **C**. Continuing beyond the octave the 2nd plus an octave is known as a 9th, the 4th an

11th and the 6th a 13th. Interestingly every interval can be found more than once in every major and minor scale.

Note that the Minor 6th is also sometimes called an augmented 5th, and a diminished 5th could also be called an augmented 4th.

			In	t	er	Va	al	С	ha	r	t						
Minor 2nd	С	-	C#	-	D	-	Еb	-	E	-	F	-	-	1 Semitone			
	F#	-	G	-	Ab	-	A	-	Bb	-	В	-	С				
Major 2nd	С	-	D	-	E	-	•	-	Ab	-	Bb	-	С	2 Semitones			
J	C#	-	Еb	-	F	-	G	-	A	-	В	-	C#				
	С	-	Еb	-	F#	-	A	-	С	4							
Minor 3rd	C#	-	Е	-	G	-	Bb	-	C#	1	3 Semitones						
	D	-	F	-	Ab	-	В	-	D								
	С	-	Е	-	Ab	-	С										
Major 3rd	C#	-	F	-	A	-	С#				4	Se	emiton	105			
major or a	D	-	F#	-	Bb	-	D							162			
	ЕЬ	-	G	-	В	-	EЬ							1			
Perfect 4th	С	-	F	-	Bb	-	ЕЬ	-	Ab	-	C#	-	F#	5 Semitones			
	F#	-	В	-	Ε	-	A	-	D	-	G	-	С	5 Senircones			
	С	-	F#		С												
	C#	-	G		C#	-											
Diminished 5th	D	-	Ab	-	D	-			6	Sen	niton	es	(Trito	ne)			
	Eb	-	A	-	Eb	-						,					
	E	-	Bb	-	E	_											
	F	-	В	-	F									1			
Perfect 5th	С	-	G	-	D	-	A	-	E	-	В	-	F#	7 Semitones			
	F#	-	C#	-	Ab	-		-	ВЬ	-	F	-	С				
	С	-	Ab	-	Е	-	С	-									
Minor 6th	C#	-	A		F	-					8	Se	emiton	es			
	D	-	Bb	-	F#	-	D										
	ЕЬ	-	В	-	G	-	ЕЬ										
	С	-	A	-	F#	-	Еb	-	С								
Major 6th	C#	-	Bb	-	G	-	Е	-	C#				9 Sen	nitones			
	D	-	В	-	Ab	-	F	-	D								
Minor 7th	С	-	Bb	-	Ab	-	F#	-	Ε	-	D	D - C 10 50	10 Semitones				
	C#	-	В	-	A	-	G	-	F	-	Еb	-	C#	10 Semitones			
Majon 7th	С	-	В	-	Bb	-	A	-	Ab	-	G	-	F#	11 Semitones			
Major 7th	F#	-	F	-	Е	-	Еb	-	D	_	C#	-	С	11 Senitones			

You are advised to learn how these intervals sound played one note at a time from high to low and vice versa and also how they sound played together. There is an audio link on the first of the two graphics, but you should also play these yourself and really get to know them.

Notice how the same notes occur in the minor 3rd and the major 6th; the major 3rd and the minor 6th; the perfect 4th and perfect 5th; the minor 2nd and the major 7th etc.

#### So why are intervals so important?

Because different intervals form different scales, and different chords etc., and understanding them is certainly useful for improvisation and composition as well as good theoretical understanding.

The previous chart shows every interval within an octave, in all cases from the lowest note upwards. You may find it useful to print out both charts from this section.

For convenience I've used C sharp instead of D flat etc.

The link for this chapter is: <u>http://learn-keyboard.co.uk/intervals.html</u> .

# Clavia Nord Stage 3 Synth / Piano / Organ (88 keys)



This is certainly one of the very best professional boards available for stage and recording use, and incorporates some the best piano, organ and synth sounds available. - I love it!

## Clavia Nord Piano 5 Stage Piano (88 keys)



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