

# The Progressive Succession of John Thompson's Modern Course for the Piano

*"Something New Every Lesson"*

## PREPARATORY GRADE

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412076	Teaching Little Fingers to Play	A book for the earliest beginner, combining rote and note approach.
412228	Teaching Little Fingers to Play – Ensemble	With these accompaniments, teacher, parent, or advanced student may play each piece as a duet. The second piano part is invaluable for two-piano, four-hand playing in class or recital.
406137	Teaching Little Fingers to Play More	The follow-up book to <i>Teaching Little Fingers to Play</i> . Helps to ease the transition into the <i>Modern Course – First Grade Book</i> . By Leigh Kaplan.

## GRADE ONE

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412081	Modern Course – First Grade Book	A correct foundation for teaching the student to think and feel musically.
412225	Hanon Studies, Book 1	Hanon exercises, simplified and edited by John Thompson. See pages 2-23.

## GRADE TWO

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412234	Modern Course – Second Grade Book	Carries on the principles of the course: "Make haste slowly but learn thoroughly."
412225	Hanon Studies, Book 1	Hanon exercises, simplified and edited by John Thompson. See pages 24-43.

## GRADE THREE

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412301	Modern Course – Third Grade Book	Progresses uninterruptedly and logically.
412300	Third Grade Velocity Studies	50 etudes by the masters, ed. Thompson.
415694	Hanon Studies, Book 2	Hanon exercises, ed. Thompson.
411640	Keyboard Attacks	28 teaching examples from the masters, ed. Thompson.

## GRADE FOUR

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412454	Modern Course – Fourth Grade Book	Progresses uninterruptedly and logically.
412426	Fourth Grade Etudes	24 progressive studies, ed. Thompson.

## GRADE FIVE

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412638	Modern Course – Fifth Grade Book	Progresses uninterruptedly and logically.
412725	Fifth Grade Technique	94 technical fragments from standard piano literature, ed. Thompson.

# CONTENTS

*“Something New Every Lesson”*

PREFACE.....	2
Hand Position (C Major) / The Phrase <b>“Music Land”</b> .....	4
Musical Form / Melody Pattern / $\frac{4}{4}$ Time Signature <b>“Patterns”</b> .....	5
Rhythm and Accents / Tie / $\frac{3}{4}$ Time Signature / Dotted Half <b>“Runaway River”</b> .....	6
Tempo / $\frac{2}{4}$ Time Signature <b>“The Traffic Cop”</b> .....	7
Tonal Shading / Expression Marks <b>“Swans on the Lake”</b> .....	8
Half-Steps / Sharps, Flats, Natural.....	10
Whole Steps / Writing Lesson.....	11
Accidentals / New Left Hand Position in C Major <b>“The Scissors Grinder”</b> .....	12
New Key and Hand Position (G Major) <b>“A Song of Penny Candy”</b> .....	13
Two Melody Patterns / Transposition <b>“The Man in the Moon”</b> .....	14
Folk Tunes / Melody Beginning on Various Beats <b>“The Party”</b> .....	15
The Phrasing Attack / Two-note Phrases (“Drop, Roll”).....	16
Combining Hand Positions <b>“The Robin”</b> .....	17
Finger and Harmony Patterns <b>“The Merry Clown”</b> .....	18
<b>“The Cuckoo”</b> .....	19
<b>EXAMINATION No. 1</b> .....	20
Scales.....	21
Building the C Major and G Major Scales.....	22
Ascending Scale in C Major <b>“Scaling the Wall”</b> .....	23
Descending Scale in C Major / The Pedal <b>“The Chimes”</b> .....	24
New Left Hand Position in C <b>“Stepping Stones”</b> .....	25
Chord Building / Intervals and Triads.....	26
Chord Inversions / Triads in C and F Major.....	27
Broken Chords as Melody <b>“Mountain Climbing”</b> .....	28
New Key and Hand Position (F Major) <b>“A Chord Frolic”</b> .....	29
First Recital Piece <b>“The Fairies’ Harp”</b> .....	30
Introduction to Eighth Notes / Two Left Hand Positions in C <b>“The Wishing Star”</b> .....	32
New Key and Hand Position (D Major) <b>“Lightly Row”</b> .....	33
New Key and Hand Position (A Major) <b>“Little Spring Song”</b> .....	34
Staccato and Legato <b>“Falling Leaves”</b> .....	36
Dance Forms <b>“Dutch Dance”</b> .....	37
A Descriptive Recital Piece / Wrist Staccato <b>“The Fairy Court”</b> .....	38
<b>EXAMINATION No. 2</b> .....	39

Recital Piece with Wrist Staccato <b>“The Tiresome Woodpecker”</b> .....	40
Eighth Note Grouping <b>“The Knight and the Lady”</b> .....	42
Dotted Quarter Notes / New Left Hand Position in A <b>“Air” from Mozart</b> .....	43
New Rhythm Pattern <b>“A Little Waltz”</b> .....	44
New Key and Hand Position (B $\flat$ Major) / Nocturne <b>“The Owl’s Question”</b> .....	45
$\frac{6}{8}$ Time Signature <b>“Cheer for the Blue”</b> (C Major).....	46
<b>“The Cuckoo Clock”</b> (F Major).....	47
<b>“The Singing Mouse”</b> (G Major).....	48
New Left Hand Position in F / D.S. al Fine <b>“The Birthday Cake”</b> .....	49
Two Hand Positions (for Both Hands) / D.C. al Fine / Accents <b>“The Popcorn Man”</b> .....	50
<b>“The Merry-Go-Round”</b> .....	51
Syncopation / Recital Pieces <b>“A Spanish Fiesta”</b> .....	52
<b>“The Fox Hunt”</b> .....	54
Two Right Hand Positions in D <b>“To Celia”</b> .....	56
<b>EXAMINATION No. 3</b> .....	57
Cross-Hand Position <b>“The Frog Chorus”</b> .....	58
Wrist Staccato <b>“The Sleigh”</b> .....	59
New Key and Hand Position (E $\flat$ Major) <b>“Little Bo-Peep”</b> .....	60
The Forearm Attack <b>“Evening Bells”</b> .....	62
New Key and Hand Position (E Major) <b>“Peasant Dance”</b> .....	64
Broken Chord Accompaniment / Two Right Hand Positions in D <b>“Long, Long Ago”</b> .....	65
Three Right Hand Positions <b>“Silent Night”</b> .....	66
Scale Patterns and Chords / Three Hand Positions (for Both Hands) <b>“A Keyboard Recreation”</b> .....	67
Interpreting Descriptive Music <b>“The Streamliner”</b> .....	68
New Key and Hand Position (A $\flat$ Major) / Repeat Sign and Endings <b>“To a Skyscraper”</b> .....	70
Two Hand Positions (for Both Hands) <b>“Dublin Town”</b> .....	72
Sixteenth Notes <b>“John Peel”</b> .....	74
<b>EXAMINATION No. 4</b> .....	75
Technical Drills.....	76–78
Certificate of Merit.....	79
Biography of John Thompson.....	82

# CONTENTS

*“Something New Every Lesson”*

PREFACE.....	2
Hand Position (C Major) / The Phrase <b>“Music Land”</b> .....	4
Musical Form / Melody Pattern / $\frac{4}{4}$ Time Signature <b>“Patterns”</b> .....	5
Rhythm and Accents / Tie / $\frac{3}{4}$ Time Signature / Dotted Half <b>“Runaway River”</b> .....	6
Tempo / $\frac{2}{4}$ Time Signature <b>“The Traffic Cop”</b> .....	7
Tonal Shading / Expression Marks <b>“Swans on the Lake”</b> .....	8
Half-Steps / Sharps, Flats, Natural.....	10
Whole Steps / Writing Lesson.....	11
Accidentals / New Left Hand Position in C Major <b>“The Scissors Grinder”</b> .....	12
New Key and Hand Position (G Major) <b>“A Song of Penny Candy”</b> .....	13
Two Melody Patterns / Transposition <b>“The Man in the Moon”</b> .....	14
Folk Tunes / Melody Beginning on Various Beats <b>“The Party”</b> .....	15
The Phrasing Attack / Two-note Phrases (“Drop, Roll”).....	16
Combining Hand Positions <b>“The Robin”</b> .....	17
Finger and Harmony Patterns <b>“The Merry Clown”</b> .....	18
<b>“The Cuckoo”</b> .....	19
<b>EXAMINATION No. 1</b> .....	20
Scales.....	21
Building the C Major and G Major Scales.....	22
Ascending Scale in C Major <b>“Scaling the Wall”</b> .....	23
Descending Scale in C Major / The Pedal <b>“The Chimes”</b> .....	24
New Left Hand Position in C <b>“Stepping Stones”</b> .....	25
Chord Building / Intervals and Triads.....	26
Chord Inversions / Triads in C and F Major.....	27
Broken Chords as Melody <b>“Mountain Climbing”</b> .....	28
New Key and Hand Position (F Major) <b>“A Chord Frolic”</b> .....	29
First Recital Piece <b>“The Fairies’ Harp”</b> .....	30
Introduction to Eighth Notes / Two Left Hand Positions in C <b>“The Wishing Star”</b> .....	32
New Key and Hand Position (D Major) <b>“Lightly Row”</b> .....	33
New Key and Hand Position (A Major) <b>“Little Spring Song”</b> .....	34
Staccato and Legato <b>“Falling Leaves”</b> .....	36
Dance Forms <b>“Dutch Dance”</b> .....	37
A Descriptive Recital Piece / Wrist Staccato <b>“The Fairy Court”</b> .....	38
<b>EXAMINATION No. 2</b> .....	39

Recital Piece with Wrist Staccato <b>“The Tiresome Woodpecker”</b> .....	40
Eighth Note Grouping <b>“The Knight and the Lady”</b> .....	42
Dotted Quarter Notes / New Left Hand Position in A <b>“Air” from Mozart</b> .....	43
New Rhythm Pattern <b>“A Little Waltz”</b> .....	44
New Key and Hand Position (B $\flat$ Major) / Nocturne <b>“The Owl’s Question”</b> .....	45
$\frac{6}{8}$ Time Signature <b>“Cheer for the Blue”</b> (C Major).....	46
<b>“The Cuckoo Clock”</b> (F Major).....	47
<b>“The Singing Mouse”</b> (G Major).....	48
New Left Hand Position in F / D.S. al Fine <b>“The Birthday Cake”</b> .....	49
Two Hand Positions (for Both Hands) / D.C. al Fine / Accents <b>“The Popcorn Man”</b> .....	50
<b>“The Merry-Go-Round”</b> .....	51
Syncopation / Recital Pieces <b>“A Spanish Fiesta”</b> .....	52
<b>“The Fox Hunt”</b> .....	54
Two Right Hand Positions in D <b>“To Celia”</b> .....	56
<b>EXAMINATION No. 3</b> .....	57
Cross-Hand Position <b>“The Frog Chorus”</b> .....	58
Wrist Staccato <b>“The Sleigh”</b> .....	59
New Key and Hand Position (E $\flat$ Major) <b>“Little Bo-Peep”</b> .....	60
The Forearm Attack <b>“Evening Bells”</b> .....	62
New Key and Hand Position (E Major) <b>“Peasant Dance”</b> .....	64
Broken Chord Accompaniment / Two Right Hand Positions in D <b>“Long, Long Ago”</b> .....	65
Three Right Hand Positions <b>“Silent Night”</b> .....	66
Scale Patterns and Chords / Three Hand Positions (for Both Hands) <b>“A Keyboard Recreation”</b> .....	67
Interpreting Descriptive Music <b>“The Streamliner”</b> .....	68
New Key and Hand Position (A $\flat$ Major) / Repeat Sign and Endings <b>“To a Skyscraper”</b> .....	70
Two Hand Positions (for Both Hands) <b>“Dublin Town”</b> .....	72
Sixteenth Notes <b>“John Peel”</b> .....	74
<b>EXAMINATION No. 4</b> .....	75
Technical Drills.....	76–78
Certificate of Merit.....	79
Biography of John Thompson.....	82

## FIVE-FINGER POSITIONS

Practically all the examples in this book remain in the five-finger position. For this reason, transposition is quite easy by means of *finger patterns*, and the student is given opportunity through actual experience to develop a real finger sense in five-finger groups before venturing into more complicated fingering. The five-finger group is the basis for scale and arpeggio fingering which follow later. Of course, scales and arpeggios are the foundation of all piano technique; therefore, five-finger drills should not be passed over in a superficial manner.

## VARIATIONS ON FIVE-FINGER POSITIONS

As students become familiar with several five-finger positions (C Major, F Major, G Major, etc.), they are gradually introduced to examples combining more than one five-finger group. In other words, they learn that it is no more difficult to change from one five-finger position to another in the same piece than it is to do so in two pieces—each one of which requires a different position.

Students will be taught to recognize five-finger groups with extensions; that is, with one note added on either side of the group. For example:



These simple extensions can be played without shifting the hands out of position. Such extensions also make it possible to enrich both the melodic and harmonic content of the little musical examples which can grow monotonous if kept strictly within the five-note limit for the entire content of a book.

## KEYBOARD ATTACKS

Since the piano is, after all, a mechanical instrument made up of keys, strings, hammers, and other mundane materials, our thoughts and emotions must be produced by the mechanical action of these mediums in direct communication with our fingers. The proper *touch* must be acquired or, regardless of the emotions of the performer, the piano will not respond. Therefore, **the same keyboard attacks used by the great artists should be taught in miniature to the beginner.**

Resolve that your students are to have the benefit of such training now. You will find that the following touches are stressed in this book: *finger legato*, *phrasing attack*, *wrist staccato*, and *forearm legato and staccato*. If properly and carefully applied, they will enable beginners to play these pieces with precision, expression, and musical understanding. When they have finished the book, students will be ready and eager for their next step up the musical ladder into Grade 2. They will have learned to play the piano as a musical instrument and not as a typewriter.

*John Thompson*



## Welcome to Music Land!

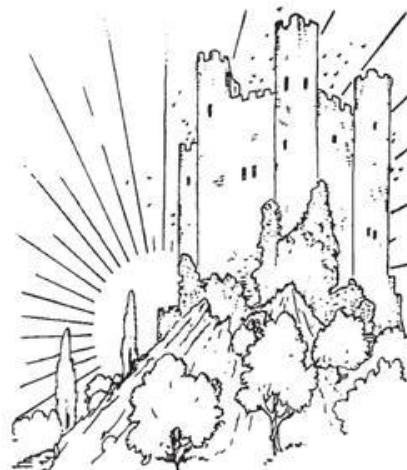
**Hand Position: C Major**

Key: C Major

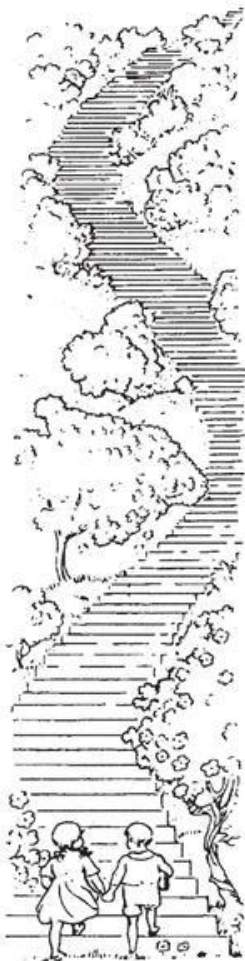
Right hand  
1 2 3 4 5

Left hand  
5 4 3 2 1

Middle C



Before beginning to play this piece, place both hands in the position shown above. Play each hand separately a few times to get the feel of the five-finger position in the key of C Major.



### MUSIC LAND

#### 1st phrase

$\text{♩} = 60-120$

3 4 5 1 2 4

Off I go to mu - sic land!

5 3 1

#### 2nd phrase

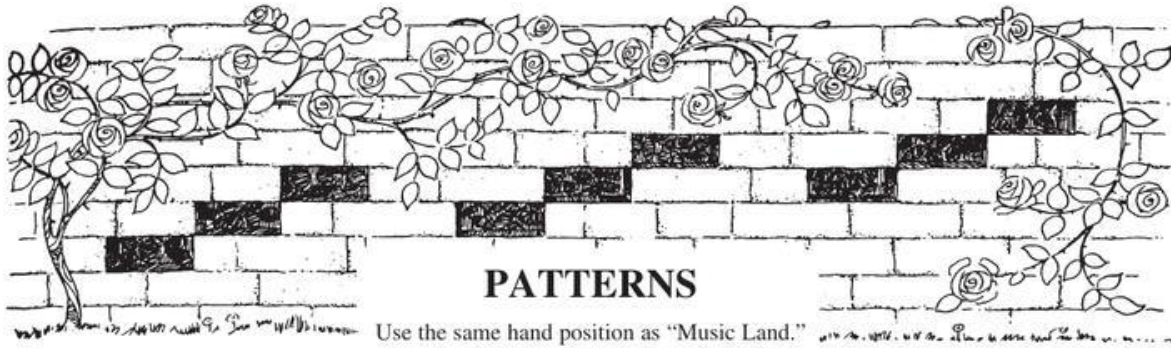
3 1 2

Train - ing ear and eye and hand.

5 2

### THE PHRASE

**Music is a language.** It can express thoughts and tell stories—musical stories. When we hear a story, we listen sentence by sentence, not letter by letter. So it is with music. Single notes by themselves mean nothing. Only when the notes are arranged into musical sentences do they take on a definite meaning. Musical sentences are called *phrases*. Learn to think of your music phrase by phrase. Note how the musical story above is told in two phrases.



Use the same hand position as "Music Land."

♩ = 60-120

1st phrase

Build - ers make their hous - es from a pat - tern that is neat.

2nd phrase

Mu - sic has its pat - terns, too, with place for *phrase* and *beat*.

## MUSICAL FORM

Because it is built of many well-ordered patterns, music has often been compared to architecture. In music there are *melody* patterns, *rhythmical* patterns, *harmony* patterns, and in piano music we also have *finger* patterns. The ability to recognize patterns is VERY important. It makes for easier sight-reading, quicker memorizing, and more intelligent interpretation.

### The Melody Pattern



Fix in your mind this melody pattern in the right hand. Note that the tones move *three steps* upward, then *one skip* downward.



Same pattern,  
one white key higher.



Same pattern,  
another white key higher.

This design is repeated over and over in the piece above.  
Each design starts one tone higher than the preceding pattern.

**4**  
**4**

### Time Signature

"Music Land" and "Patterns" are written in 4/4 time. This means that each quarter note is one count, and there are four counts in every measure.

“I think I first knew I was going to be interested in music when I learned my first piece in the John Thompson book. Everybody who’s ever taken piano lessons has to take a John Thompson course.”

— Billy Joel, American pianist and singer-songwriter,  
in a 1980 interview with Tom Hoving on ABC’s “20/20”

“I grew up learning John Thompson’s pieces. I loved them then, and I love them still – I could not have asked for a better beginning! Basic concepts were soundly introduced, but in the most charming way so that I was always eager for more. The wonderful thing about Thompson’s pieces is that they teach the crucial pianistic skills, so progress is assured.”

— Dr. Peter Mack, professor of piano at Cornish College  
January 2013



**John Thompson** (1889-1963) was born in Williamstown, Pennsylvania, the eldest of four children of James and Emma Thompson. He began music study at the age of five, and his parents encouraged his prodigious talent by sending him to study piano with Maurits Leefson at the Leefson-Hille Conservatory in Philadelphia, graduating in 1909. At the same time, he studied composition with Dr. Hugh Clark at the University of Pennsylvania. In his early twenties Thompson toured the United States and Europe as a concert pianist, receiving respectable reviews and performing with several European orchestras. He was in London when the start of World War I abruptly ended his concert career. After his return to the United States, he began a distinguished career as a pedagogue, heading music conservatories in Indianapolis, Philadelphia, as well as the Kansas City Conservatory of Music (now University of Missouri at Kansas City). It was during these tenures that he developed his distinctive ideas about teaching young children and adults and began his prolific composing and publishing career.

His best-selling method books *Teaching Little Fingers to Play* and *Modern Course for the Piano* were first published by the Willis Music Company in the mid-1930s and soon grew to include the *Easiest Piano Course* and other notable educational publications. These publications have had a profound influence on millions of musicians today, and continue to have an impact on the teaching of piano in America and throughout the world.

**John Thompson publications mentioned in this book:**

Page 28: “Forest Dawn” – HL00111968, *Classic Piano Repertoire*

Page 61: “Cobbler, Cobbler” – HL00412094

Page 73: “Humoresque” – HL00111968, *Classic Piano Repertoire*