

About the *Exploring Piano Classics* Series

Exploring Piano Classics: A Masterworks Method for Developing Pianists pairs performance repertoire with related technical studies. Each level contains two books:

- *Exploring Piano Classics—Repertoire* includes pieces from the major style periods. The repertoire was selected and graded by studying festival, competition, and examination lists from the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom. Background information on each style period, its instruments, composers, and the music itself is included. The CD performances of the repertoire are an indispensable tool for motivation and for modeling stylistic interpretations.
- *Exploring Piano Classics—Technique* includes **basic keyboard patterns**—five-finger patterns, scales, chords, cadences, and arpeggios in the major and minor keys of the literature in the *Repertoire* book of the same level. These patterns can be developed into a daily warm-up routine for practice to increase the student's technical skills. **Exercises and etudes**, an important feature of the *Technique* book, were chosen and written to develop basic keyboard touches and other technical skills necessary for mastering each piece. Suggestions for efficient practice are also included.

These companion books are cross-referenced, enabling quick access to the correlating repertoire or technical study. This allows the teacher to assign pages in the *Technique* book that directly apply to the pieces students are learning in the *Repertoire* book.

About the *Technique* Books

Technique is a skill that can be developed by both athletes and pianists. To succeed in either field, it is necessary to practice desired skills until they are automatic and can be used successfully in performances.

As an **athlete at the piano**, it is necessary for students to develop many technical skills to play the piano. A well-functioning piano technique is effortless, comfortable, and pain-free. *Exploring Piano Classics* suggests physical motions and sensations to encourage students to experiment with different muscle groups until discovering how to play in a way that feels natural and easy.

Three building blocks for developing a reliable piano technique are introduced in the Preparatory Level on page 4 that should be reviewed daily at all levels of piano playing:

- Position of the Body at the Piano
- Focused Fingertips Balanced on the Keyboard
- Coordinated Motions of the Hands and Arms

This foundation will enable students to progress to higher levels. Working through the *Technique* books will give students a structured program of technical development, enabling them to play skillfully and musically throughout their lives.

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Balancing Focused Fingertips on the Keyboard

Notice the **natural curve** of your hand by letting it hang at your side. Then find this hand position **on three black keys**:

- Place RH fingers 2-3-4 and LH fingers 4-3-2 **flat** on the three black keys (Ex. 1).
- **Pull nail joints back** toward the palm with a firm, scratching motion until fingers 2-3-4 lift each hand into a naturally curved hand position about **level with the wrist**.
- Place fingers 1 and 5 on E and B, connecting them to help balance hands. Thumb angle is about 45° (Ex. 2).
- Relax arms, wrists, and knuckles, **directing energy forward** to the firm nail joints.



Ex. 1



Ex. 2 Pull fingertips back into naturally curved hand shape.

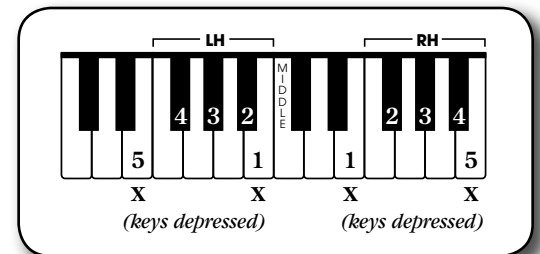
Keeping that balanced hand position, **change tone quality and volume** in *Black Key Exercise* as follows:

- Keys stay **down** (by gravity) on all notes not being played.
- Play on different parts of each fingertip, **listening** to different sound qualities.
- Increase and decrease sound by **tossing** fingers with more or less energy. Arms and wrists remain quiet and relaxed.

REMEMBER: Volume comes from the **speed** of the hammer striking the string.

Black Key Exercise




Balance the fingers by keeping the same amount of weight on each held note.



Warm-Up Patterns in B \flat

■ Play *Exercise No. 1 in C Major* by Hanon (p. 5) in B \flat major. Begin on B \flat and lower all B's and E's a half step.

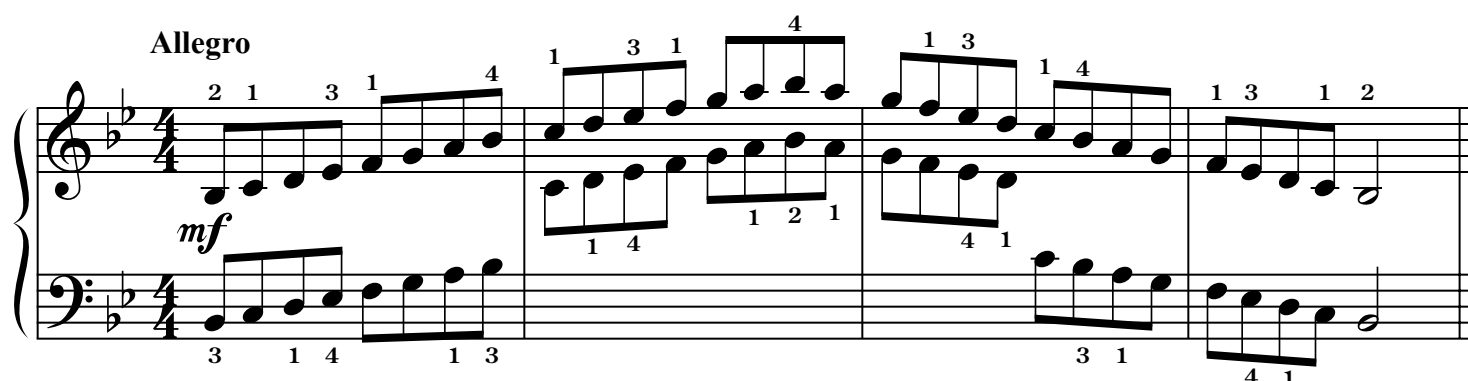
■ Practice scales in progressive rhythms:

First  one octave, then  two octaves, then  two octaves'

(Play the 16th notes hands separately, if necessary.)

B \flat Scales in Progressive Rhythms (Parallel Motion)

Allegro

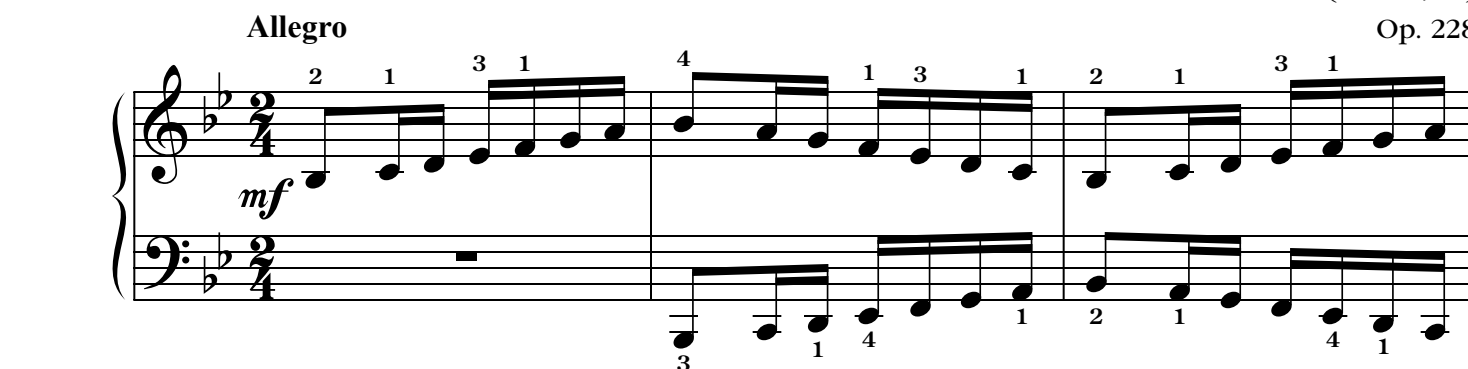


Contrary Motion Scale Pattern in B \flat

Cornelius Gurliitt (1820-1901)

Op. 228

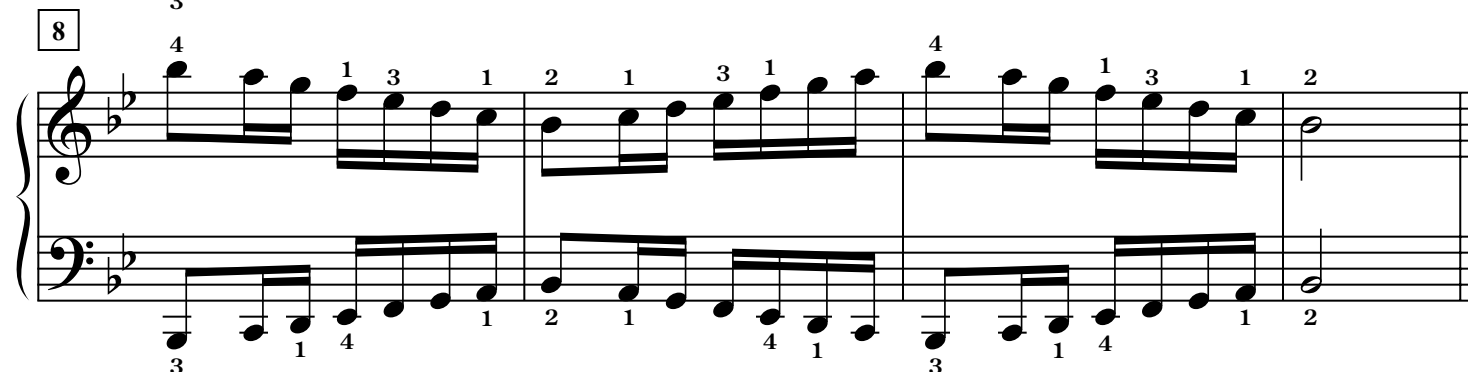
Allegro



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■ Play both exercises in B \flat harmonic minor by lowering all D's and G's a half step.

■ Also play them with different touches and vary the dynamics.