

The Stream of Inspiration

by Akiko and Forrest Kinney

In our previous column, we quoted Franz Liszt and suggested that music, to be an art, must flow from inspiration—not mechanism. How can teachers invite inspiration and creativity into their lessons?

We encourage our students' natural desire to create and be expressive by giving them simple, imaginative musical patterns from which they can spontaneously create melodies. Soon, melodies begin flowing from their hands like sentences from their mouths.

Most of us learned to make music by reading notes, so the idea that melodies can flow like sentences may sound rather far-fetched. But given the opportunity and a reliable approach, many of our students quickly develop speech-like fluidity in their playing. It is natural to make music via feeling and exploring, so students who have not yet learned otherwise will often do so with surprising ease.

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Here is a pattern we use often with our students. We call this "Reflecting" in our *Pattern Play* book.



Press the damper pedal and play this softly. The repeat signs mean to repeat each measure as many times as you like. Move back and forth between these two measures many times. Say to your student, "Feel the mood, then create sounds using only black keys." (We avoid saying "create melodies" because this can be intimidating.) Ask your student to close her eyes, listen, feel and explore. Vary the way you play your part in response to what she plays.

Next, ask your student to play the pattern as you create sounds and melodies. If the student is a beginner, she can play just the first two notes in each measure (a fifth).

Finally, ask your student to play both parts as a solo. Use imagery ("make waves of tone") to engage your student's imagination and awaken her sensitivity to touch, tone, phrasing, rhythm, mood and feeling.

Remind your student to keep it simple and not to stop. To invite a stream of inspiration, there is nothing more important than to keep the music going and flowing.

When the student is ready, give her another pattern to play, one that provides a break from the main pattern. We usually call this second pattern a "vacation."



Ask your student to return to the original pattern when she feels like it, then move back and forth between the pattern and vacation. In this way, the student can create long improvisations with a two-part form that is open-ended.

Though the resulting music doesn't compare with Chopin, the student is actually creating music *in the manner of* Chopin. The sounds and the performer's accuracy are not what are important here. We are helping our students discover and dive into the endlessly refreshing stream of inspiration.



This is a pattern we call "You're a Winner!" As you play this, ask your student to create melodies with thirds or sixths on white keys and play as if she is walking into her own long-awaited birthday party. Repeat each measure many times. Then switch places and create. Finally, ask the student to play both parts.

Once students learn to create music from inspirations and feelings, they will instinctively do this with literature. They will naturally and artfully "inflect" the notes as they read them.

Many students take delight in creating. The composer Frederic Delius once wrote, "The only joy is to create." Creating starts with simple, imaginative patterns that allow the stream of inspiration to begin to flow.