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A Pedagogical and Educational Examination of The First Month At The Piano by Mana-Zucca

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UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI

A PEDAGOGICAL AND EDUCATIONAL EXAMINATION OF THE FIRST MONTH AT THE PIANO BY MANA-ZUCCA

By

Laura Helene Keith

A DOCTORAL ESSAY

Submitted to the Faculty of the University of Miami in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Musical Arts

Coral Gables, Florida

December 2009
A PEDAGOGICAL AND EDUCATIONAL EXAMINATION OF THE FIRST MONTH AT THE PIANO BY MANA-ZUCCA

Laura Helene Keith

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Abstract of a doctoral essay at the University of Miami.

Doctoral essay supervised by Professor Rosalina G. Sackstein.
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The First Month at the Piano by Mana-Zucca, published in 1935, is a pioneering
piano method to be taught by rote, supporting sound before sight learning theories, to the
pre-school student. It differs from the Suzuki method in that The First Month at the Piano
uses short, repetitive patterns, intrinsic to the Edwin Gordon Music Learning Theory. The
First Month at the Piano has been compared to educational theories and has been found
to follow Lev Vygotsky’s theory of scaffolding and Jerome Bruner’s principles of
structure, readiness for learning, and motivation.

The First Month at the Piano has been shown to provide a wide variety of sensory
experiences for the pupil and establish a comfort and familiarity with the instrument.
After completing the method, the pupil will have a solid aural foundation at the piano and
will be fully prepared for primer level notation. It is a highly adaptable method and
modified versions were made from the originals which would be of interest to today’s
teachers of pre-school piano students. Incorporation of interactive MIDI with electronic
keyboards would enhance the students’ learning experiences and be a direction to follow
for future use of this method.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I wish to thank Dr. Rosalina G. Sackstein for introducing me to the pedagogical materials of Mana-Zucca. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Dr. Joyce Jordan for her invaluable assistance, guidance, and encouragement. I would like to thank Dr. Dennis Kam for his expert insight and generous gift of his time as well as to Dr. Robert Gower for kindly stepping in during Dr. Kam’s sabbatical. Thank you to Mr. Tian Ying, Dean Edward P. Asmus, Ms. Nancy Zavac, and University of Miami Music Library staff. I also wish to thank Chad Harris, Vicki Silvera, and the staff of Florida International University Green Library - Special Collections. Thank you to the director, Dr. Megan Walsh, and students of the Piano Preparatory Program of the UM Frost School of Music. Thanks also goes to Ms. Tracy Ellyn for her assistance with compiling Mana-Zucca’s scrapbook for presentation. A special note of thanks goes to Mr. Bradley Cassel, Mana-Zucca’s grandson, the Cassel family, Dr. Ruth Greenfield, Mana-Zucca’s former piano student, the Scott family, and Dr. Dennis Janzer.

I would like to dedicate this essay to the memory of my beloved teacher, Sylvia Rabinof, of the Juilliard School Pre-College Division.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Mana-Zucca, born Gussie Zuckermann (1885-1981), was a child prodigy, pianist, extraordinarily prolific composer, member of the American Society of Composers, Authors, and Performers (A.S.C.A.P.), publisher, writer, actress, singer, author, wife, mother, grandmother, humanitarian, and entrepreneur.\(^1\) Due to the differing dates of her birth from reputable sources, a facsimile of her birth certificate was provided by her grandson, Bradley Cassel. It is on page 79 in Appendix A. This birth certificate or “return,” as it was known at the time of her birth, is proof that she was born on December 25, 1885.

As a composer, her output was prodigious and included the following: numerous pedagogical works for the piano, two operas, one ballet, 172 songs, a violin concerto, a piano concerto, three choral works, and over twenty chamber pieces.\(^2\) She studied piano with Alexander Lambert, Ferruccio Busoni, and

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\(^1\) Bradley W. Cassel, interview by author, Miami, FL, July 15, 2008.

Leopold Godowsky, and composition with Max Vogrich.⁵ Former Miami Herald music critic, James Roos, described the salient features of Mana-Zucca’s compositions as having “melodic lines, . . . superior craftsmanship, . . . flecked with tart harmonies, . . . .”⁶ She imbued her teaching pieces with these fresh and unique qualities which rarely exist in the current elementary and intermediate level repertoire.⁷

In his July 29, 1974 address to the Speaker of the House, Florida Congressman Claude Pepper recognized Mana-Zucca as “a child prodigy, now the holder of an honorary doctor’s degree in music from the University of Miami, the composer of 1,100 published songs, . . . [and] . . . for seven decades or more a world renowned composer and concert pianist.”⁸ In his address to President Ford, Senator Jacob Javits announced the occasion of the 50th anniversary of her membership in A.S.C.A.P., for which she was awarded a scroll by the same, as an opportunity to make our nation aware of “her distinguished service to music.”⁹

Mana-Zucca’s importance to the musical development in Miami during the 1920s through 1950s cannot be overstated.¹⁰ She brought many great artists

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⁵ John Tasker Howard, Our American Music: Three Hundred Years of It (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company Publishers, 1931), 541.


⁷ Dr. Rosalina G. Sackstein, interview by the author, Miami, FL, June 26, 2008.


¹⁰ Roos.
to this city, including Misha Elman, Josef Hoffmann, Jose Iturbi, Fritz Kreisler, Alma Gluck, and Efrem Zimbalist to perform in Mazica Hall, her home. Her living room was used as a concert hall, seated approximately 300 people. It is illustrated on page 80 in Appendix A. Mana-Zucca made this statement to Roos during their 1979 interview for the Miami Herald: “You know many of today’s greats gave their first concerts in my home, . . .” More than 500 subscription concerts were given at Mazica Hall, the “Carnegie Hall of the South,” a designation used by journalist Helga H. Eason in her Miami Herald article. The illustration on page 81 in Appendix A shows an exterior view of Mazica Hall. Anya Laurence, noted author and expert on women composers, claimed that during the years Mana-Zucca resided in Miami, she reigned as the “grande dame of music in Miami.” Roos claimed: “in a way, meeting Mana-Zucca is practically like meeting Miami music in person.”

Mana-Zucca’s teaching pieces for the piano encompass levels pre-one through four, as are shown in the tables reproduced from the Congress Music

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11 Roos.

12 Ibid.


15 Roos.
A comparison of her published works with her manuscripts indicates she supplied the grade (or level) of each piece and was meticulous about providing exact fingering, tempi, and dynamics. She was very careful regarding the programmatic names she gave to each piece. Her manuscripts show that often they had three or four titles scratched out before she finally decided on the best title to convey the meaning of the piece to the student. Her grading was highly specific and often each level was divided into A and B, or 1-1/2 and 2-1/2, to further assist the teacher. Teaching piano to children was an extremely important part of her life, and the rapport she enjoyed with her students is evident in the picture, seen on page 82 of Appendix A.

Her large scale compositions were widely performed in the United States during the first half of the twentieth century by major orchestras including the Cincinnati Symphony, the New York Philharmonic, and the Los Angeles Symphony. At the time of the performances of her works with the Los Angeles Symphony, its conductor was Arnold Volpe, whom Mana-Zucca would later recruit to become the first conductor for the University of Miami’s Symphony. Despite her achievements with music for concert performances, she became most famous for composing the popular song, *I Love Life* (lyrics by her husband, Irwin

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16 Florida International University, Greene Library, Special Collections.

17 Ibid.

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid.

Cassel). This sensational hit was recorded by Nelson Eddy and Paul Anka, in addition to other artists.\(^2\) Its success afforded her the financial means and name recognition enabling her to produce other compositions of a more serious, classical nature.\(^2\) Among these was her Piano Sonata No. 3, which Mana-Zucca believed to have been one of her greatest compositions. She claimed: “it will probably take 20 years before it gets known. So much will be produced after I’m gone.”\(^2\)

**Need for the Study**

This paper will demonstrate that Mana-Zucca was a pioneer in the field of piano pedagogy. In 1935 Mana-Zucca wrote with Preston Ware Orem The First Month at the Piano, a pre-school method book to be taught by rote. She and Mr. Orem saw the necessity for rote education as they witnessed their own children being repelled by conventional approaches to piano study. They found very young children to be overwhelmed by musical notation as too abstract and ill-suited to their need for sensory stimulation. She published a method book for rote learning

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\(^2\) Ibid.

at the piano long before Shinichi Suzuki adapted his rote violin method to the piano, first published in 1978 by Summy-Birchard, Inc.\textsuperscript{24}

Author Anya Laurence described the careers of women composers born before 1900 as an inevitable journey from “Great promise, brilliant beginnings, bursts of creative output, and then oblivion.”\textsuperscript{25} One needs to look at the lives of Clara Schumann, Amy Beach, and Fannie Mendelssohn to see that their careers were clearly eclipsed by those of their husbands and brother, respectively. During a 1976 interview, Ms. Laurence questioned the ninety-five year old Gena Brandscombe, another great woman composer born before 1900, if she had encountered similar attitudes of chauvinism and animosity that had befallen so many of her colleagues.\textsuperscript{26} Paradoxically, this was her response: “No, I don’t believe I ever felt that way about it. I’m sure it was all around me, but there were things I wanted to do—goals I wished to attain—so I really didn’t have time to worry about it. I was too busy following my light.”\textsuperscript{27} This paper is designed to show that Mana-Zucca “followed her light” as well. She was certainly driven by a force stronger than herself when considering her vast and varied output as a composer.


\textsuperscript{26} Ibid, 2.

\textsuperscript{27} Ibid.
Purpose of the Study

This essay is to create a renewed interest in the pedagogical piano works of Mana-Zucca, which have been undeservedly neglected since her death. This paper will present the innovative ideas and sound pedagogical principles that are reflected in *The First Month at the Piano*. Proposed by Friedrich Wieck (the noted piano pedagogue and teacher of daughter Clara Wieck and son-in-law of Robert Schumann) in the 1800s, rote education was subsequently practiced by other music pedagogues Annie Jessie Curwen, Angela Diller, and Shinichi Suzuki. It is further validated by educational learning psychologists Jerome Bruner, Lev Vygotsky, and music educator/psychologist Edwin E. Gordon.

Decades after Clayton F. Summy Co. published Mana-Zucca’s rote method book, Edwin Gordon defined and developed foundational musical theories in his “Music Learning Theory.” In his book about Gordon’s theories, Eric Bluestine describes that children learn the small patterns or elements in a rote song so that eventually they will recognize those same elements in musical notation and eventually in more complex musical compositions. Each piece Mana-Zucca created in her rote method is a short, repetitive, musical pattern rather than a more lengthy melody or nursery song (as was utilized by Suzuki). As such, Mana-Zucca’s patterns will be examined for their musical content and theoretical implications related to Gordon’s learning sequence.

In today’s piano method marketplace, there are no books for pre-readers that are comparable to *The First Month at the Piano*. Every top selling primer level method book emphasizes visual over aural learning. As music is auditory, to

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begin its study by ear rather than eye is most logical. Mana-Zucca must have been keenly aware of this, as her 1935 method is a testament to rote education. *The First Month at the Piano* is one-of-a-kind, not seen before or since.

**Research Questions**

The following questions will be answered in this essay:

1. What is documented historically in the piano pedagogical literature concerning rote instruction?
2. What are the pedagogical principles and musical content of each piece in *The First Month at the Piano*?
3. How does *The First Month at the Piano* synthesize educational theories supporting rote instruction?
4. How was Mana-Zucca a pioneer in the field of piano pedagogy?
5. How can *The First Month at the Piano* be modified for today’s marketplace?
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The general learning-theory of teaching sound before sight was documented in the pedagogical theories of Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi in the early 1800s and was endorsed by Lowell Mason in 1838 when he established the music curriculum guidelines for Boston’s Public School System.\(^1\) The Mana-Zucca preschool method book is an example of this theory. Each of the pieces in their method is taught to the student first by allowing him/her to hear each piece and mimic its character through gestures, body movement and vocalization prior to playing it on the piano. In her written instruction before each piece, she encourages the teacher not to explain to the student what he is playing in terms of the musical content, but simply to play it and enjoy the experience.

*The First Month at the Piano* was originally published by Clayton F. Summy Co. in 1935. Ultimately, Mana-Zucca recouped the copyrights to all of her music and the impressions were reissued by Congress Music Publishers that she founded with her husband, Irwin Cassel.\(^2\) *The First Month at the Piano* was

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re-published in 1957 by Congress Music. None of the content was altered in its second publication. All of the same illustrations in the 1935 Clayton publication were used in the 1957 Congress publication. The layout differed in that each piece was assigned to its own page with larger font and was printed landscape oriented in the Clayton edition. The Congress edition was printed portrait oriented and in smaller print allowing for more pieces per page.

*Piano and Song*

When one thinks of teaching by rote, one of the first pedagogues that comes to mind is Suzuki. Although Suzuki did much to promote rote instruction world-wide, teaching methods of this style had previously been in existence for some time. The famous piano pedagogue and father of Clara Wieck Schumann, Friedrich Wieck (1785-1873), did not teach notation to his students for the first full year of their piano studies.\(^4\) Perhaps Wieck’s most important reason for doing so was for the student to fully devote his attention to the quality of sound he was producing from the piano, in keeping with the *bel canto* style of vocal production.\(^5\)

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\(^5\) Ibid.
Wieck wrote at length about the ways in which students learn in his book *Piano and Song* first published in 1853 in Leipzig, Germany. Comparing Wieck’s writings to his contemporaries: Hummel, Czerny, and Kullak; Wieck was the only celebrated nineteenth century piano pedagogue to place methodology on par with content. He expressed the outcome of his methodology in the following statements:

I have cultivated a musical taste in my pupils, and almost taught them to be skilful [U.K. spelling], good players, without knowing a note.8

... In a word, I have striven, as a psychologist and thinker, as a man and teacher, for a many-sided culture.9

... I endeavored, without notes, to make the necessary exercise so interesting that the attention of the pupils always increased; and that they even, after a short time, took great pleasure in a sound, tender, full, singing tone; an acquirement which, unfortunately, even many *virtuosos* do not possess. In this way, we made an opening at the beginning, not in the middle: we harnessed the horse *before* the wagon.10 The pupil had now obtained a firm footing, and had something to enjoy, without being tormented at every lesson with dry matters to be learned, the advantage of which was not obvious to him, and the final aim of which he did not perceive.11
Wieck was greatly influenced by educator/philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) whose celebrated treatise on education, *Émile*, (1761) described a method for teaching music, and was written nearly a century before Wieck’s *Piano and Song*. Rousseau endorsed what later would be called the sound before sight learning theory for Émile’s music study in the following prescription: “at first sight, the knowledge of notes for singing seems no more necessary than the knowledge of letters for speaking . . . and a song is better learnt by ear than by eye.”

With his own three year old son, Pestalozzi (mentioned at the beginning of this chapter) further developed Rousseau’s theories. Pestalozzi was the first educator to apply these theories in a school system in Prussia. Johann Friedrich Herbart (1776–1841), educational philosopher and professor at the Universities of Gottingen and Konigsberg, additionally refined Pestalozzi’s theories in his “Pedagogical Seminar.” Wieck’s theories about sound before symbol are also echoed by the noted twentieth century music psychologist, Dr. James L. Mursell (1893-1963), stated in the following:

12 Powelson-Gritton, 63.


14 Powelson-Gritton, 64.

15 Ibid, 68.

Long before a child begins to study these symbols, his musical responsiveness should have gone through a considerable development. The melodic and rhythmic components of music and its distinctive mood values should have come to mean something to him. Then as he begins to be able to see what he hears and what he responds to, the symbols themselves are learned in terms of meanings that are actualities in his experience, and the learning of them further refines and clarifies musical responsiveness.17

**Psychology Applied to Music Teaching**

Mrs. Annie Jessie Curwen (1845-1932) was an Irish piano teacher and author who deeply believed in the application of child psychology and the teaching-principle of sound before sight to piano instruction. In her book, *Psychology Applied to Music Teaching*, she stated: “every music fact for which there is a notational sign shall be presented to the pupil first through hearing, compared with other sounds, known and recognized and named, before the notational symbol is shown him.”18 She went on to say, “Perception cannot occur without sensation, for we must be aware of an object before it can have a meaning for us. … Music, from start to finish, is a thing of hearing.”19 Mrs. Curwen encouraged rote playing so long as the pieces to be played were musical, simple yet imaginative, and mostly  

19 Ibid, 67.
fit within the five-finger hand position so as not to create bad fingering habits which would carry over into notational reading.\textsuperscript{20}

\textit{Rote Teaching: What It Is—And How To Do It}

The noted pedagogue of the Diller-Quaile School of Music and Piano Method Series, Angela Diller (1877-1968), authored in 1953 \textit{Rote Teaching: What It Is – And How To Do It}. In it she states, “The natural order of learning music is first through hearing it, then singing and playing it, and lastly reading it.”\textsuperscript{21} In this book are nine pieces for piano which will give the student a tremendous sense of accomplishment having learned them by rote, as they would be much too difficult to learn from the notation. This is the primary aim of rote instruction in Ms. Diller’s mind, in other words: “to give the child the pleasure of learning quickly and easily, and playing well, pieces that at the moment he cannot read.”\textsuperscript{22}

\textit{Suzuki Method}

The teaching of music by rote as it relates to language development was written about extensively in the philosophy of Shinichi Suzuki (1898-1998). He refers to rote learning as the “mother tongue”

\begin{flushright}

\textsuperscript{21} Angela Diller, \textit{Rote Teaching: What It Is And How To Do It} (New York: G. Schirmer, Inc. 1953), 3.

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid.
\end{flushright}
method.\textsuperscript{23} Just as all children learn to speak through listening and imitating, Suzuki believes students have the ability to be musical if they are consistently exposed to good music from a very early age. He states, “In acquiring a skill, ability grows through daily habit. In learning his mother tongue, the child begins to read only after he is able to speak. The same approach should be followed in music.”\textsuperscript{24} Suzuki created the term “tonalization” which he used to describe teaching violin whereby the goal was to produce a beautiful singing-tone (\textit{bel canto}) and meaningful musical expression. This is the same quality of sound to which Friedrich Wieck referred, applied to the piano, more than a century before.\textsuperscript{25}

\textit{Music Learning Theory}

The principles of “Music Learning Theory,” developed by Edwin Gordon (b.1927), are evident in \textit{The First Month at the Piano}.\textsuperscript{26} Similarly to Gordon, Mana-Zucca instructed the teacher to have the student experience the patterns of each miniature piece by listening, singing, dancing, and moving to it before attempting to play it on the piano.\textsuperscript{27} Almost exclusively, each piece in this method


\textsuperscript{24} Suzuki, 6.

\textsuperscript{25} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{26} Bluestine, 4.

\textsuperscript{27} Mana-Zucca, 1.
consists of one melodic and rhythmic pattern repeated several times. It is meaningless to inform children that they are playing—for example—a descending major third, four times in a row. The student will find awareness through repeated performance of the pattern—not the label, “interval”—including its direction and placement on the keyboard. Imitation is a preliminary step towards “audiation,” a term used by Gordon to indicate the ability to give meaning to music patterns at various levels of understanding. In the following statement, Richard Grunow describes how audiation differs from imitation: “Audition [sic] requires comprehension, and it occurs when an individual gives tonal and rhythmic meaning to music through reading, writing, creating, improvising, listening, and performing.” Each of the pieces in The First Month at the Piano utilizes a simple pattern of sound, an idea later codified in Gordon’s learning theory.

The Psychology of Art

Lev Semenovich Vygotsky (1896-1934) created an innovative area of Soviet psychology “based on the socio-historical nature of man’s consciousness” and compiled the data for his book, The Psychology of Art, between the years of 1915 to 1922. Vygotsky developed the concepts of “Consciousness,” the “Zone


29 Ibid.

of Proximal Development,” and “Self-Regulation.”“31 “Consciousness” is described as “a state of awareness that enables children to control their movements and construct their own identity, even at very early phases of development. Later, children learn to represent the materials and operations symbolically through gestures, signs, and symbols.”32 In this context, playing by rote is a primary example of an early state of musical awareness that leads to playing by using the symbols of musical notation.

Vygotsky defines the “Zone of Proximal Development” as “the distance between a student’s potential and actual development.”33 The child’s learning potential refers to what s/he is capable of doing with the assistance of his/her teacher. Vygotsky describes “Self-Regulation” as the state in which the student is able to internalize that what s/he has been instructed to perform and then apply it on his/her own to new materials.34

The teacher’s accompaniment in Mana-Zucca’s *First Month at the Piano* supports the pupil’s part. Vygotsky labels this support “scaffolding.”35 There are several possibilities for scaffolding, one of which may be accomplished by playing the duet first for the child to give him/her an idea of its character, or its


32 Ibid, 42.

33 Ibid, 43.

34 Ibid, 46.

35 Ibid.
mental picture. The teacher may further scaffold by playing skeletal portions of
the duet to harmonize the child’s part without creating rhythmic confusion. The
duet adds dimension melodically, rhythmically, and harmonically to the simple
pattern the child plays, making it more meaningful.

**The Process of Education**

Harvard University Professor Emeritus Jerome Bruner (b. 1915), has
applied his educational theories to numerous fields, including mathematics, art,
music, science, literature and law in his numerous publications. *The Process of
Education* is one of his books which focuses on how teachers may best help their
students learn with understanding and meaning. One of the tenets of his
philosophy is “structure.” His belief is that knowledge presented as an arbitrary
string of facts is of little value. The student must understand the basic structure
of the subject he is learning in order to properly develop specific skills within the
subject.

One of Bruner’s most recognized theories is “readiness for learning.” He
states: “the foundations of any subject may be taught to anybody at any age in
some form.” Learning by rote is a primary example of “readiness for learning”

36 Jan Jones-Forrester, “Robert Pace: His Life and Contributions to Piano Pedagogy and


38Jones-Forrester, 40.
at the beginning level. In addition, Bruner believes it is important to encourage students to trust their hunches and develop their intuitive thinking.\textsuperscript{39}

Finally, Bruner theorizes that the best way to motivate the student is to create interest in the material s/he is learning. Playing by rote has an immediate reward. The student produces the sound s/he has just heard his teacher demonstrate, and has no confusion with regard to deciphering notation. The teacher must make the playing of the music interesting to the student; this is the essence of motivation.

The key to effective teaching is to discern between motivating the child’s interest in musical development, and yet not to confuse by going beyond the student’s capabilities.\textsuperscript{40} According to Van der Straeten, “The development of the musical education of a child is a very delicate matter. It resembles the care we should bestow on a young plant. The least injurious influence spoils all. Just as a very small success stimulates, so the least failure discourages from study.”\textsuperscript{41} Producing sound at the piano by imitation is a gentle and delightful means of introducing music to young students. They are unencumbered by notation which often frustrates them to the point where they abandon all interest in musical study. When children learn by rote they are in an environment of discovery. According

\textsuperscript{39} Bruner, 56.

\textsuperscript{40} Jones-Forrester, 45.

\textsuperscript{41} Aloys Hennes, \textit{A New Method for the Piano After the Klavier-Unterrichts-Briefe (Letters on Piano Instruction)}, Introduction, trans. Prof. H. Mannheimer, (1875: Fragmented Manuscript in British Library, London England, No Publisher or page number given).
to Herbert Spencer: “Children should be led to make their own inferences. They
should be told as little as possible, and induced [italicized in original source] to
discover as much as possible.”\footnote{Edgar Robbins, \textit{American Method for the Piano Forte: Daily Requirements of the Pianist} (London: Stevens and Brown, 1909), from Introduction, unnumbered page.}

John Dewey’s book, \textit{Art as Experience}, was published in 1934, one year
before the Mana-Zucca/Orem method was published.\footnote{Jones-Forrester, 45.} Dewey stated: “When old
and familiar things are made new in experience, there is imagination.”\footnote{Ibid.} \textit{The First
Month at the Piano} portrays musically things that are familiar to a small child:
animals, insects, nature, etc. By creating these familiar objects at the piano, a
child’s imagination is stimulated, which in turn develops understanding of the
world. As so beautifully expressed by the educational psychologist Vernon
Howard: “music education is education of an understanding that ranges from
physical dexterity, to emotive discovery, to perceptual insight, to pattern
recognition, to associative hunches, to logical argument—in no particular order
and in every combination.”\footnote{V.A. Howard, \textit{Learning By All Means: Lessons from the Arts} (New York: Peter Lang, 1992), p.21.}
CHAPTER 3

METHOD

The First Month at the Piano
By Mana-Zucca and Preston Ware Orem

The First Month at the Piano is a highly unique pre-reading method to be taught by rote to very young piano students. Its miniature pieces are written to be performed in various registers on the keyboard utilizing pianistic patterns and diverse articulations. These elements strengthen different sensory experiences in the child. This also proves to be very beneficial to the student when s/he encounters similar techniques in notated music. Piano method books of Mana-Zucca’s day were typically centered around middle-C. Today’s methods still utilize the middle-C approach. This confines the student to an extremely limited number of hand positions, keys, and major modes. The middle-C approach encourages reading by finger numbers, promoting a bad habit which is extremely difficult to break.

Mana-Zucca was a pioneer in piano pedagogy. The First Month at the Piano was is the only method book of its kind in terms of promoting instruction by rote and utilizing theories of learning which had yet to be documented. It is important to note that this method was published in 1935, almost thirty years
The First Month at the Piano is a child-centered approach to the piano consisting of familiar patterns of melodic and rhythmic sound. These include the sounds of the cuckoo, rooster, cow, bird, rain, clock, lion, and bear. Transferring these familiar sounds to the piano develops good techniques of touch and tone production. In analyzing her method it is obvious that Mana-Zucca anticipated the learning theories that Gordon would later label.

One of the outstanding features of Mana-Zucca’s method is the teacher’s part composed at a high level of artistry and complexity. The teacher’s duet part is vital to this method. It supports the pupil’s part in terms of keeping a steady beat and creating exciting music. Vygotsky refers to this technique of support as scaffolding. The teacher uses the accompaniment in several ways, first by playing it in its entirety—including the pupil’s part—to introduce the piece to the student. Next, smaller elements of the piece are taught to the student, such as only the pupil’s part without teacher accompaniment. Fragments of the teacher’s part are added to the pupil’s part to help maintain a steady rhythm. Finally the entire teacher’s part is played along with the pupil’s part. This is an example of Gordon’s whole-part-whole learning theory.

Bruner’s theory of structure is intrinsic to Mana Zucca’s method. The pieces are presented sequentially in order of difficulty and each builds upon the
previous. Playing melodic intervals are taught before playing harmonic intervals. Smaller intervals are taught before larger intervals and then progress to the octave. Five-finger patterns are brought in prior to tetrachords. Tetrachords are presented in ascending and descending fragments before the full scale is introduced. Open fifths are played before single hand broken triads, which in turn lead to using two hands playing multiple octave arpeggios. Pieces that review material previously presented are built into the method, an example of Bruner’s spiraling curriculum. All material is imparted with excitement and imagination, an example of Bruner’s motivation theory of learning.

After completing this method, the student will be able to perform melodic and harmonic intervals, triads, chords, scales, arpeggios, grace notes and two-note slurs. The pupil will be able to play with legato and staccato touches, and different dynamics. Note names are learned. The importance of ensemble playing is stressed from the beginning as duets are played in all lessons. This differs from most teaching methods in that duet and ensemble playing are neglected during early training.

Mana-Zucca advises the following in her instruction to the teacher before the first piece: “The pupil should be encouraged to imitate in speech or song: to tap or to beat the rhythm: finally, to imitate the teacher’s playing of his own part, the teacher adjusting his hand to the keys. When this is all firmly fixed, the teacher supplies the accompaniment.”

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For the purposes of this essay, I have recreated through Sibelius software each of the thirty pieces in *The First Month at the Piano*, Congress Publication. Customary rules regarding stem direction are not always consistent in the published version. In the original, no key signature is used in the notation of the pupil’s parts; whereas, specific key signatures were notated in the teacher’s parts. The musical examples in this paper are copied exactly as the original is notated, unless otherwise specified. *1. The Cuckoo* was published in two-four time and barred in four-four time. The time signature was changed in the musical example to correctly reflect the four-four bar lines of the original, in Example 3.1.

Example 3.1. Mana Zucca, *The First Month at the Piano, 1. The Cuckoo.*

1. **The Cuckoo**

The student learns from playing *1. The Cuckoo*: the interval of a third from a visual (on the keyboard) and tactile (within the fingers/hand) standpoint. In the pre-school student, the interval is more easily understood as a skipping pattern rather than an interval of a third, and should be presented as such. S/he also develops an ability to imitate and internalize a short-long rhythmic figure (eighth
note-quarter note: cuc-koo). Mana-Zucca’s first piece in her method begins with the strong fingers of the right hand, 1 and 3.

In 1. *The Cuckoo* a repetition of the tonic is found in the student’s part and also in the teacher’s part—a constant reinforcement of the home tone, i.e., key/mode. Certainly, the short-long rhythmic pattern and descending melodic third pattern inherent to the cuckoo-call are ideal examples of melodic and rhythmic patterns with which the pupil is familiar and are easily remembered in a musical context. Example 3.2 demonstrates:


2. **The Birdie’s Peep**

This is the first presentation of a grace note, or crush note as Mana-Zucca describes it, as well as the first use of black keys. This grace note pattern is moved to different pitches requiring a shift of hand position. The focus in this piece is the strong beat and feeling of four-four time. 2. *The Birdie’s Peep* is entirely different from 1. *The Cuckoo*, not only in an aural but a tactile sense as well. This element of contrast makes both pieces more memorable and meaningful to the pupil.
In 2. *The Birdie’s Peep*, the second finger of the right hand is introduced for the first time. This is also a strong finger and it is pedagogically sound that it should be introduced after the first and third fingers. The teacher may present the piece by instructing the student to first tap the beat on his lap using his whole hand and saying 1-2-3-4, and then using the correct fingering on a table top or keyboard lid, still counting the beat. Next the pitch can be introduced either by singing for each quarter note “peep” or in solfege, using the “movable do”, “ti–ti–ti–ti, do–do–do–do.” Singing and tapping the fingering should then be combined and once mastered transferred to the piano keyboard.

Hearing the teacher’s part and singing the familiar tune *Three Blind Mice*, makes learning the next piece, 3. *The Tic-Toc Clock*, Example 3.3, more enjoyable. The student discovers the interval of a fourth similar to the way the third was presented in 1. *The Cuckoo*. Instead, 3. *The Tic-Toc Clock* skips two fingers or keys in a row. By having prepared the use of the stronger fingers (1, 2, and 3), Mana-Zucca introduces the weaker fourth finger. It is helpful to have the student first tap this on the piano keyboard lid using correct fingers prior to playing it on the keyboard. In addition it is important to keep a steady, metronomic beat against the teacher’s part containing a triplet and dotted subdivision of the beat. As a final touch, Mana-Zucca suggests that the student and teacher sing *Three Blind Mice* while playing the piece.
Example 3.3. Mana-Zucca, *The First Month at the Piano. 3. The Tic-Toc Clock.*

3. The Tic-Toc Clock

The inherent imagery in 4. *Cock-a-Doodle-Doo,* Example 3.4, facilitates the student in learning new concepts. Mana-Zucca recommends this piece be presented through imitative movement and singing before the student attempts to play it at the keyboard. In this way, the child internalizes the dotted quarter note – eighth note rhythm. The half-note pulse is emphasized by the teacher’s part with accents. By playing it so, the teacher’s part assists the child in keeping better time and performing the eighth notes more accurately.

5. *The Cow’s “Moo”* is more difficult than any of the prior pieces, as there are several new things the child must perform simultaneously, including alternating hands and playing the two-note slurs *legato*. The child plays a minor sixth four times in a row alternating hands on the same notes. Mana-Zucca encourages the teacher to introduce this piece with a vocal *glissando* imitation of the “moo” sound. This helps the student to tactilely connect the first to the second notes of each upward slur, a new concept (connect and release) thus far in the method. The child should be taught to lift his wrist with each second note of the slur to create the *staccato* release that is indicated. Example 3.5 is *The Cow’s “Moo.”*


5. *The Cow’s "Moo"*

The next piece in Mana-Zucca’s method is 6. *Chimes*, Example 3.6, which consists of a group of descending harmonic sixths each played twice and ending by repeating the first sixth. This piece helps the child expand or stretch his/her hand position. The two notes should be played as if making one sound. Care must be taken to play half notes in the pupil’s part with quarter notes in the teacher’s
part. Mana-Zucca advises the pupil to drop the lower note of the sixth if the child’s hand is too small, still paying close attention to the rhythm.


7. *The Donkey,* Example 3.7, is similar to 5. *The Cow’s “Moo”* in that it utilizes the same articulations. This time, however, the interval is a fourth. The smaller interval is better for smaller hands and the hands alternate only once rather than with each repetition as in 5. *The Cow’s “Moo.”* The hold and release aspect of articulation is reinforced in this piece. 7. *The Donkey* is a review piece of all the concepts introduced in 5. *The Cow’s “Moo.”* The tempo should be taken fast enough to give the impression of the donkey kicking.

The following piece: Example 3.8, 8. *Raindrops*; is a study in staccato and steady rhythm. Here, the child plays with only the third finger of the right hand four repeated notes in a descending pattern. In the four measures, the pupil’s second and fourth beats are played independently of the teacher’s part. This challenges the student to keep the beat unaided by the accompaniment. The piece concludes on the tonic, a whole note treble C tied over four measures as the teacher’s part continues the quarter note pattern introduced in the student’s part. This allows the student to experience the “conversational” aspects of ensemble playing at a basic level, enhancing listening skills and reinforcing counting ability. It is important that the tied note is released with the last note of the accompaniment.

9. *Indian Tom-Tom*, Example 3.9 places the pupil in the *severo* position. The child’s part consists of a harmonic fifth in the bass played by the left hand.

To prepare, Mana-Zucca recommends: “Crouching, with hand upraised, as though carrying a tomahawk; moving around in a circle (in time), taking stealthy strides.”\(^2\) The technique taught is independence of the left hand, strength and unity of sound, and repetition of the open fifth, the foundation for a root position chord.

\(^2\)Mana-Zucca and Preston Ware Orem, 4.

9. **Indian Tom-Tom**

The pupil moves back to the original *primo* position for 10. *The Babbling Brook*, Example 3.10. This piece consists of the repeated figure, A-B-C♯, stepping up and down three times. The sixteenth note passages in the teacher accompaniment imitate the shimmer and flow of water, reminiscent of Schubert’s *lieder* accompaniments. Mana-Zucca recommends playing this “tastefully and delicately.”³ Adding a *legato* touch enhances the musical interpretation of this song-like melody. The student feels a sense of having created good music when the parts are combined.

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³ Mana-Zucca and Preston Ware Orem, 5.

10. **The Babbling Brook**

Playing the following piece, *11. The Lion's Roar*, Example 3.11, is great fun for the child. The teacher’s part provides a wonderful contrast to the sharply dotted accompaniment derived from the song, *A hunting we will go!* A cluster chord played with all fingers of the right hand simultaneously mimics the roar of a lion. When *The First Month at the Piano* was published in 1935, it would have been rare to hear this level of dissonance in a primer level method book. Another unusual aspect of this piece is the right hand playing in a lower register, creating a stronger roaring sound for the right-handed student. This could free the child of fixed ideas (e.g., the right hand should only play on or above middle-C, and the left below) regarding register positions when starting to read music.
Example 3.11. Mana-Zucca, The First Month at the Piano, 11. The Lion’s Roar.

11. The Lion’s Roar

In the following piece, 12. Four Tall Trees, the pupil experiences an open-hand position, shown in Example 3.12. The student plays a broken G chord with the added octave at the top (the fourth tall tree). This piece helps the student develop a full, rich, bel canto sound in imitation of the teacher’s stately part. Quarter rests are provided on beats two and four so that the student is able to place his finger over the next key in time to play it on the beat. The teacher’s part provides strong support with its march-like rhythm and intensity. Mana-Zucca advises the teacher to “have no hesitancy whatever in explaining to the pupil that the four stately tones of his part form a Chord, if played all together. The teacher should illustrate.”

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4 Mana-Zucca and Preston Ware Orem, 7.

12. **Four Tall Trees**

![Musical notation image]

13. *The Grasshopper,* shown in Example 3.13, is a playful preview of the tetrachord presented later in Mana-Zucca’s method. The musical content of this piece consists of broken fifths that ascend over four diatonic steps, repeated three times. The grace note appears again, this time producing the “hopping” sound.

The left hand of the teacher’s part maintains the quarter note pulse reinforcing the steady rhythm of the child’s part. The familiar element and mental picture of the grasshopper jumping and landing will help the child arrive on the beat, transferring the jump to the grace note and the arrival to the main note.

13. The Grasshopper


14. The Swing, Example 3.14 utilizes a broken C triad, ascending and descending for the left hand. Mana-Zucca recommends the teacher make the student aware of the concept of a triad. This broken execution of the triad matches pedagogically the capability of the student’s hand, transferring the weight from bottom to top, creating a swing effect.

The descending arpeggiated C triad for right hand in 15. *The Whippoorwill*, Example 3.15, should be played gracefully. The teacher’s part features a triplet on each first beat, followed by a dotted eighth and sixteenth notes on each second beat. This allows the student to hear triplet and sixteenth subdivisions of each quarter note, keeping time with the subdivisions as well as diligently observing the rest on the fourth beat. The quarter rest affords the opportunity to listen and wait while the teacher concludes each phrase. They re-enter together on the first beats of each measure.


**15. The Whippoorwill**

Example 3.16, which follows, is 16. *The Chinese Song*. The pupil’s part is a rhythmic variation on the descending four-note pattern seen previously in 8. *Raindrops*. In 16. *The Chinese Song*, the hands alternate and play in different octaves. This expands on the use of alternating hands first presented in 7. *The Donkey*, adding a higher degree of complexity to this technique. The rhythm and *staccato* touch of the accompaniment imparts a Chinese flavor.

16. The Chinese Song

![Sheet music image]

It is time for some ragtime fun with the three adjacent black keys on the piano in Example 3.17. Although the title, *17. Three Little Dark Men in a Hammock,* is politically incorrect now, its use in 1935 referred to the ragtime or minstrel style. The student’s part is played by the right hand on the three adjacent black keys. A steady quarter note rhythm must be maintained against a very active and syncopated accompaniment. Another challenge is to hold the whole note for its full value in measure eight. The pupil is encouraged to listen for embedded sounds in the teacher’s accompaniment as cues. This adds to the student’s aural sensitivity and concentration.

17. *Three Little Dark Men in a Hammock*

18. *The Cafe,* Example 3.18, is so named as it spells the word cafe on the piano. The pupil plays C-A-F-E four times in a row. Mana-Zucca’s nod to *soggetto cavato* has its roots in Guido d’Arezzo’s method, “Micrologus.” In chapter seventeen, d’Arezzo explains “How anything spoken can be turned into music.” The student who may know how to read will enjoy “creating a word” on the piano. However, Mana-Zucca cautions the teacher not to teach the letters if the child is too young. The child plays half notes throughout which should be held while the teacher is playing a jazzy ragtime accompaniment mostly in

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6 Ibid.

7 Mana-Zucca and Preston Ware Orem, 19.
*staccato* notes. There is a great contrast between the pupil’s part and the teacher’s accompaniment.


18. The Cafe

Example 3.19, 19. *The Same Three Little Men in a Cellar* is a *sempre* experience for the pupil. This is a repetition of the same musical material presented in 17. *Three Little Dark Men in a Hammock*, but with the left hand in the bass clef—hence the cellar and not the hammock. A new element added by Mana-Zucca is the tenor line in the teacher’s part assisting the pupil rhythmically, while simultaneously harmonizing with its melodic pattern.

19. *The Same Three Little Men in a Cellar*

Decidedly more complicated than the preceding pieces, 20. *The Cabbage*, Example 3.20, requires a shift of hand position. As in 18. *Cafe*, Mana-Zucca uses the letter names of the keys to spell a word with a melodic line, making the key names more memorable. The shift of hand position takes place after the first B which is played with the fourth finger; then, the second B is played with the fifth finger, both of the right hand. Mana-Zucca cautions the teacher not to allow the rhythmically busy left hand accompaniment confuse the child’s steady beat.

20. The Cabbage

![Music notation for 20. The Cabbage]

The next piece, 21. *A Cab*, Example 3.21, reinforces the keys previously learned in 20. *The Cabbage*. More fun with key letter spelling, however, this time it is more manageable for the younger child in terms of the number of different keys that are to be played. The teacher’s part, reminiscent of the old time automobile horns in the first part of the 20th century, creates an intriguing and interesting dissonance. The pupil’s part in 21. *A Cab* consists of intervals of seconds and thirds played using the stronger fingers, 1, 2, and 3. These are the first intervals learned in most primer level methods in today’s market, further placing Mana-Zucca on the forefront of piano pedagogy.


21. A Cab

![Music notation for 21. A Cab]
In 22. *Pitter Patter*, Example 3.22, the pupil’s part calls for alternating hands for the first time since 7. *The Donkey*. In this piece, the child plays the octave As with alternating hands, while the teacher imitates the sound of the raindrops playing staccato sixteenth notes. The active teacher’s part subdivides the quarter note and facilitates playing with rhythmic accuracy.


In 23. *The Circus Band*, Example 3.23, the broken octave is played with one hand. The pupil plays a B♭ in octaves using the left hand. Although no attempt should be made at connecting the octave, this piece gives the opportunity for the pupil to aim at notes, developing directional aspects and placement using the entire arm. This prepares the student for octaves and leaps encountered in more difficult future repertoire. The duet part is a rhythmic march reinforcing the strong beat.
Example 3.23. Mana-Zucca, *The First Month at the Piano, 23. The Circus Band*

### 23. The Circus Band

The next piece, 24. *Lullaby*, Example 3.24, should be played musically according to Mana-Zucca’s instruction. The *legato* touch first seen in *10. Babbling Brook* is reinforced in 24. *Lullaby*. The new element added is the use of the fifth finger. The pupil’s part in 24. *Lullaby* is a variation of the triad for the right hand, once again in the key of G. In addition, a more complex rhythm of an eighth note microbeat is introduced for the first time in the method. The lyrics will prove to be most helpful in performing this new rhythm: “Ah” for both descending thirds in eighth notes, giving the impression of a sigh.

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8 Mana-Zucca and Preston Ware Orem, 13.

**24. Lullaby**

25. *The Harp*, Example 3.25 introduces the *arpeggio* in alternating hands. The right hand is the stabilizing factor, keeping its position while the left hand crosses over. The rest allows for the return of the left hand to its original position. The pupil’s part is in triplet eighth notes against *staccato* quarter notes in the teacher’s part. As in 24. *The Lullaby*, the child has the microbeat, or subdivision, this time with the added complexity of triplet subdivision. On the third measure, the teacher switches to eighth notes, creating a two against three rhythm with the pupil’s part, an advanced concept in ensemble playing.

**25. The Harp**

The accompaniment played against the pupil’s arpeggiated broken G triad in 26. *Rock-A-Bye*, Example 3.26, are reminiscent of 15. *The Whippoorwill*. The similarities are both aural and technical. A dominant to tonic cadence, G to C, is created by this descending *arpeggio* in *Rock-A-Bye*. This piece requires a small change of hand position to the C, an added layer of complexity for the pupil.


**26. Rock-a-Bye**
27. *Hear the Bear Say “Woof,”* Example 3.27, is a programmatic delight for the pupil. The words of the title perfectly fit the notes of the child’s part: four soft quarter note Cs in the right hand (Hear – The – Bear – Say) followed by a left hand *fortissimo* C (Woof!). This piece is the first in the method to have dynamic markings indicated in the pupil’s part. The teacher’s part makes use of the decidedly modern sounding whole tone scale with an augmented fifth on each “Woof” of the student’s part, adding to its frightening affect.

Example 3.27. Mana-Zucca, *The First Month at the Piano*, 27. *Hear the Bear Say “Woof.”*

![27. Hear the Bear Say "Woof"

28. *Going Up and Down the Steps,* Example 3.28. shows the pupil playing a two octave scale in conjunct tetrachords. These are divided between the hands, first ascending starting with the left then the right completing the first octave. The descending octave begins with the left hand crossing over the right an octave above. The right hand then shifts up a fourth and completes the descending scale. The teacher’s part is in contrary motion to the child’s.

28. *Going Up and Down the Steps*

The pupil’s part in 29. *Galloping Horses*, Example 3.29, is a descending scale pattern written in a double dotted rhythm using fingers two and three only of the right hand. The child will enjoy galloping around the room in a preparatory exercise to internalize the rhythm. The teacher’s part in triplet eighth notes enhances the forward motion inherent in this piece. Mana-Zucca advises to “teach this rhythm by rote. Show the pupil how to snap the third and second fingers appropriately.”

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9 Mana-Zucca and Preston Ware Orem, 15.

### 29. Galloping Horses

The plagal cadence in 30. *Amen*, Example 3.30, is a fitting end to this method book. This miniature hymn features the teacher at the piano and the child as the singing soloist. The pupil joins the teacher at the piano on the final cadence, which is played divided between the hands. This is the third time after 6. *Chimes* and 9. *Indian Tom-Tom* in the method that the student plays intervals harmonically. The use of two different types of harmonic intervals within the same piece adds another layer of complexity.
CHAPTER 4

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

For a piano method to have value, it must produce results. This chapter answers the final research question posed in Chapter 1: How can *The First Month at the Piano* be modified for today’s marketplace? This practical application of Mana-Zucca’s *First Month at the Piano* is the result of my successful teaching experience to a pre-school student, who turned 3 in January 2009. The student, as she will be referred to, has a very good ear and sings well on pitch. She also has a natural sense of rhythm and can count the beat and remember how many times in a row to play a repeated note. Her father is musical and helps her at home during the week with her practice.

The pieces in this method were modified to fit the student’s very small hands. In making the decision to arrange the pieces for her age and size, I took Mana-Zucca’s recommendation from the introduction to the teacher for 6.*Chimes.* In it she states: “If the pupil’s hand is too small to stretch the interval of a sixth, omit the lower notes for a time.”¹ Modifications to the originals would sometimes include playing with a closed fist, rather than with the finger-tips.

¹ Mana-Zucca and Preston Ware Orem, 4.

In teaching very young children, I incorporate techniques from other method books which have proven successful over the years. These methods include: *My First Piano Adventure* and *Piano Adventures Primer Level*, composed by Nancy and Randall Faber, F. J. H. Publishers; *Music for Little Mozarts*, composed by Gayle Kowalchyk, et al., Alfred Publishing Co.; *Bastien Piano Basics - Piano For The Young Beginner*, composed by Jane Smisor Bastien, Publisher: Neil A. Kjos Music Company; and *The Music Tree, Time To Begin*, composed by Frances Clark, et al., Summy-Birchard, Inc. All of these books are available in today’s market. For the student, it was necessary to change the order of pieces in Mana-Zucca’s method and to begin with larger groups of notes for better motor control and understanding of keyboard geography. Therefore, the first piece with which we started was 11. *The Lion’s Roar*. The
pupil’s part was adapted to be played with a faced-down fist, better accommodating the student’s small hands. Examples 4.1 and 4.2 show the comparison.


![Example 4.1](image1)

Example 4.2 Modified Version, *The Lion’s Roar*.

![Example 4.2](image2)

The ensemble in this piece was very simple for the student to follow as she played identical notes always on the first beats of each measure with the strongly
accented notes of the teacher’s part. The preparation for playing included the student roaring like a lion for four full beats while I counted to four. Next I played the teacher’s part while she roared for four beats. Then we transferred the roar to the hands at the piano. Being right handed, the student played using her right hand first. We then switched to the left hand, and lastly played with both hands in octaves. As she was seated in the *secondo* position, we stayed there and went on to the next piece, also in the lower register of the keyboard for the pupil’s part.

19. *The Same Three Little Men in a Cellar* was renamed to the more politically correct, *Three Little Blackbirds in the Valley*. It was also necessary to arrange the pupil’s part so that the closed fist was used on the three black keys and their rhythm was altered from four individual quarter notes and combined to a whole note chord cluster. Examples 4.3 and 4.4 show the comparison between the original and modified versions.


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Example 4.4 Modified Version, *Three Little Blackbirds in a Valley*.

![Three Little Blackbirds in a Valley](image)

Preparation for this piece included discovering the groups of three black keys all over the keyboard. The student identified which groups sounded high versus low. She understands the concepts of left and right and can associate them to low sounds are on the left side of the piano and high sounds on the right. The ideas of high and low were transferred to the modified title. The student understood that when she was playing a group in the low part of the piano, her blackbirds were in the valley. With the syncopations in the teacher’s part, it was easier for her to understand the directions play and hold rather than counting/holding to four beats. She was eventually able to do this without any verbal prompting.

Attention was then focused on the right hand where the student understood, after a brief description of the birds flying from the valley (bass area) up to the hill (treble area), that her blackbirds would play high on a hill. I took this opportunity to reinforce high and low sounds and their position related to the
keyboard. When the student moved to the right side of the keyboard, it was necessary to reorient her to the groups of three black keys, as she had a tendency to play the group of two: C♯, D♯, and add the F♯. Upon closer examination, she could see the patterns of the two and three black keys and easily found the correct group. The previous modifications used in performing *Three Little Blackbirds in the Valley* were applied to *Three Little Blackbirds on a Hill*. The original and modified versions of the piece are Examples 4.5 and 4.6. Transposing the piece to C♯ allowed the student to experience playing on the two black key groups. These are the pieces shown in Examples 4.7 and 4.8.


![Example 4.5](image)

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2 Mana Zucca and Preston Ware Orem, 17.
Example 4.6 Modified Version, *Three Little Blackbirds on a Hill*.

*Three Little Blackbirds on a Hill*

Example 4.7 Modified Version, Transposed, *Two Little Blackbirds in a Valley - in C# Major*.

*Two Little Blackbirds in a Valley - in C# Major*
Example 4.8 Modified Version, Transposed, *Two Little Blackbirds on a Hill – in C# Major*.

Now that the student had played using both fists separately and together in three different pieces, attention was directed to finer motor skills by using the fingers, and 23. *The Circus Band* was ideal for this purpose. Due to the size and lack of strength in her hands, the pupil’s part was changed from left hand only to alternating left and right hands. The fingering utilized was that of the Fabers: 3/1 combination in the left hand and 1/3 combination in the right hand. The Fabers refer to these as the “donut” positions.³ This fingering enabled her to make a fuller sound with better attack. Combining the first and third fingers also allowed the student to play using a more relaxed hand position with arched knuckles rather

---
than stiffly pointed individual fingers. Preparation for this piece involved whole body swaying from left to right (comparable to a circus elephant), followed by alternating left and right arm movements, and then playing on the keyboard lid using the first and third fingering combinations of the left and right hands.

After moving to the second piano, I played the teacher’s part, verbally coaching the student with “left, right” while she continued her preparation on the keyboard lid. Finally, we opened the lid and looked for the three black key groups on either side of middle-C. The student was oriented to the F♯s indicated in the transposed version of 23. The Circus Band as to their relationships to the three black keys. She played them with the awareness that the keys were the left-most, or lowest black key (F♯s) of the three black key groups. She then played all the three black key groups again, followed by all the left-most black keys (F♯s). Once the student was able to visually identify the keys, the oscillating movement was applied to the keyboard, and she was able to play the correct keys on the beat. Finally, the teacher’s part was added to her part. Example 4.9 and 4.10 are the modified and transposed versions of 23. The Circus Band used to teach the student.
Example 4.9 Modified Version, Transposed, *The Circus Band in F# Major*.

![The Circus Band in F# Major]

Example 4.10 Modified Version, Transposed, *The Circus Band in C# Major*.

![The Circus Band in C# Major]

Logically, the next piece in the original method which should be presented based upon this modified format is 22. *Pitter Patter*, as its concepts are virtually identical to those of 23. *The Circus Band* with the addition of the note C (A in the original method). A new element in this piece is the minor mode. To introduce the piece we discussed with her the mood of a rainy day and the sound that rain makes on the window-pane. The student closed her eyes and visualized it while I
played the teacher’s part on the piano. Next we walked to the window and using left and right hands in the “donut” position fingering, we gently tapped the rhythm on the window-pane while saying aloud, “Pit-ter, pat-ter.”

As this piece is actually a reinforcement of the one taught immediately prior, all that was necessary was to identify the C’s at the keyboard. These were made evident by their relationship to the C♯, and the C was referred to as C♯’s “downstairs neighbor.” We went back to playing all the C♯s at the piano which we had done before in preparation for 23. The Circus Band and immediately followed them by sliding down to their adjacent Cs. Next we played only the Cs all over the keyboard. The student had no difficulty understanding this and played her part with ease. Our next step in the process was to add the teacher’s part.

The student marched around the room rhythmically while I played her part. Switching to the teacher accompaniment, the eighth notes were gradually introduced as the student continued marching to the beat of the quarter notes. While keeping a strong quarter note pulse in the bass to support her marching, the right hand accompaniment was doubled to the sixteenth notes written in the original. Finally, the teacher’s part was added as written, to which the student marched correctly following the quarter note beats. After going through this preparation, the rhythm was so strongly ingrained that she had no difficulty in keeping a steady quarter-note pulse at the keyboard. The same process was performed in F minor. In Examples 4.11 and 4.12 are the modified versions of 22. Pitter Patter.
The student was now able to play alternating Cs and Fs in both hands. One of the great American pedagogues, Frances Clark, referred to these keys as “landmarks” in her method books.\(^4\) Not only are they important visually on the keyboard, but once the pupil is prepared to begin to read notation, these prove to

be vital. The keys were referred to by their letter names, and the student could locate them on the keyboard. Note name identification was reinforced at every subsequent lesson and she had become quite thrilled in locating the Cs and Fs throughout the different registers. It was time to add a new element to what we had learned thus far: dynamic contrasts. 27. *Hear the Bear Say “Woof”* was chosen to accomplish this goal, much to the student’s delight. She really enjoyed playing this piece and creating the soft and loud sounds with her hands. Examples 4.13 and 4.14 are the modified versions. The second was transposed to F to reinforce the key associated with the note name.

Example 4.13 Modified Version, *Hear the Bear Say “Woof.”*
Example 4.14 Modified Version, Transposed, *Hear the Bear Say “Woof” in F.*

The student was now ready to play both pitches, C and F, within the same piece. 3. *The Tic-Toc Clock* was ideal for this purpose. The original score was changed to use alternating hands and the above mentioned “donut” position fingering. Additionally, the G was changed in the score to F to reinforce the familiar pitch in a new context. This created only a mild dissonance which did not affect the student’s ear, presumably because it is the 7th of the G dominant chord; and we had just played 27. *Hear the Bear Say “Woof”* with its augmented 5ths—decidedly more dissonant than a seventh chord. The G will later be added as related to F. The modified version is Example 4.15.
The counterpart to 3. Tic-Toc Clock is 7. The Donkey in that the descending interval is changed from a fifth to a fourth on the same notes—C and F. Accent, slur, and staccato articulations are introduced in 7. The Donkey. The proper performance is facilitated by the impetus of the rolling triplet subdivision of the 6/8 meter. In the introduction Mana-Zucca recommends to imitate the sound of the donkey’s bray, vocally mimicked as “hee-haw.” This begins with an accented attack on “hee,” then is continued and drawn down (slurred) to an abrupt stop (staccato) on the second syllable: “haw.” After we were able to perform our “hee-haw” calls with a steady beat and consistent vocal articulation, we transferred the sound to the keyboard. The fingering was adapted to the “donut” position fingering and the F and C were alternated between the left and right hands as notated in Example 4.16.
A new technical skill for the student was that of playing both hands simultaneously using the “donut” position fingering. The transposed version of 9. *Indian Tom-Tom* utilized the two pitches F and C for this purpose. Concentrating on the F and C landmarks, this piece, originally written in D minor, was transposed to F minor. The continual reinforcement of these landmarks was preparing the student for upcoming pieces containing the pitches between C and F. This is the step-by-step sequencing needed to introduce the tetrachord and eventually the full scale in C major. 9. *Indian Tom-Tom*, Example 4.17, is the modified form of the method. 9. *Indian Tom Tom* was transposed to C minor (the
lowered third affecting only the teacher’s part) and introduced the student to the new note G. This is shown in Example 4.18:

Example 4.17 Modified Version, *Indian Tom-Tom for Two Hands.*

![Example 4.17 Modified Version](image)

Example 4.18 Modified Version, Transposed, *Indian Tom-Tom in C Minor.*

![Example 4.18 Modified Version, Transposed](image)

After playing this piece, we concentrated on the next landmark of Frances Clark’s, the Gs, and their visual/physical relationship to the Fs, the “next door neighbor.” This simplified term was used for adjacent white keys; whereas, “downstairs neighbor” described the relationship of C to C♯ and F to F♯. To reinforce this, we played all of the Fs again at the piano and immediately followed
with the adjacent Gs. The student was now ready for the five-note pattern, G down to C. Utilizing the “donut” position fingering, we practiced the five note patterns in single, long held notes for accuracy before attempting them as faster, repeated notes. Example 4.19, is the adaptation of Mana-Zucca’s 8. *Raindrops.* The five-note pattern was transferred to the left hand, this time in an ascending direction, C up to G, in Example 4.20. The third modified version of 8. *Raindrops* allows both hands to be used within the same piece, in Example 4.21.


![Raindrops for the Right Hand]
Example 4.20 Modified Version, *Raindrops for the Left Hand*.

The student was now able to play the C major scale: the left hand playing four notes, C up to F, and the right hand playing four notes, G up to C. This divided the scale into two tetrachords distributed between the left and right hands.

Example 4.21 Modified Version, *Raindrops for Both Hands*.
28. *Going Up and Down the Steps* was used with a few alterations to simplify it for her. Examples 4.22 and 4.23 show the comparison:


Example 4.23 Modified Version, *Going Up and Down the Steps with 1/3 Fingerings*.

Given the limitations of her manual dexterity, the student was now able to perform a number of skills at the keyboard, the most advanced of which was the C
major scale with “donut” position fingerings. The final piece in the modified version is the same piece Mana-Zucca used to end her method. Transposing 30. Amen from G to C allowed the use of pitches familiar to the student: C with F, and C with E. The new adjacent white key, E was easily found as F’s next door neighbor. The lyrics and title were altered. Examples 4.24 and 4.25 show the changes.


Various alterations of the pupil and teacher parts may be made depending upon the needs of each student for pedagogical reasons. *The First Month at the Piano* could be used in private piano lessons, or small group piano classes. The creation of MIDI accompaniments for the teacher’s parts would facilitate group learning, as they would free the instructor to move about the room assisting each child as needed. Additionally, MIDI accompaniments of the teacher’s parts with added percussion tracks would create varied instrumental color and interesting synthesized sounds, promoting student enjoyment. *The First Month at the Piano* is effective in application when incorporating the teaching techniques found in today’s primer level piano method books.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Mana-Zucca’s *The First Month at the Piano* has been examined for its pedagogical value in terms of current day educational theories and application. Mana-Zucca was a pedagogue ahead of her time, anticipating educational theories later defined by Bruner, Gordon, and Vygotsky. Mana-Zucca was a natural-born teacher. She identified techniques that trained youngsters to play the piano from pre-school to advanced-levels. Her tremendous pedagogical output for the piano and its success in the market of its time is certainly a testament of its value.

Mana-Zucca wrote numerous pedagogical works for the piano levels one through four, including the method to be taught by rote for the pre-reader: *The First Month at the Piano*. These works are unique in that their compositional focus is on a beautiful melodic line and chromatic harmonies, rarely seen in today’s teaching pieces. She established music clubs and concerts for music teachers and their students in the Miami area and opened her own home, Mazica Hall, for these events. Her subscription concert series gave the opportunity for families in her community to experience art music.
Philosophies endorsing rote instruction stem from Rousseau’s *Émile*, (1761) which revolutionized future educational practices. The line follows through Pestalozzi and Herbart to Friedrich Wieck. Wieck’s *Piano and Song* (1853) is evidence of rote instruction creating the necessary foundation leading to virtuoso pianism. Annie Jessie Curwin’s *Psychology Applied to Music Teaching* (1920) supports sound before sight learning theories which would be later be documented by Edwin Gordon. Suzuki was a worldwide educator of the rote, or mother tongue, teaching philosophy applied to the violin and published his method in 1945. It was later adapted to other instruments including the piano. Mana-Zucca preceded Suzuki’s initial publication with *The First Month at the Piano* in 1935.

*The First Month at the Piano* is a pioneering method and no others have been found by the author to compare prior to, post to, or contemporaneous with its publication. It differs from the Suzuki method in that Mana-Zucca used short, repetitive patterns, intrinsic to Gordon’s Music Learning Theory, rather than nursery songs in her method. Another difference is the addition of a teacher’s accompaniment for each piece providing the scaffolding for the pupil’s part recommended by Vygotsky. *The First Month at the Piano* has been compared to Bruner’s learning theories and was found to follow the principles of structure, readiness for learning, and motivation.

The modified versions that were made from the originals would be of interest to today’s teachers of pre-school piano students. Technological advances not available to Mana-Zucca, including interactive MIDI with electronic
keyboards, will enhance the student’s learning experience. Use of notational software can allow the teacher to easily transpose the pieces reinforcing the visual and aural awareness of different keys for the student. The teacher may alter the accompaniment part as necessary for the individual student’s needs through notational software.

_The First Month at the Piano_ has been shown to provide a wide variety of sensory experiences for the pupil. These include playing at different tempos and meters, creating loud and soft sounds, and experiencing different articulations. Additionally, the child will have established a comfort and familiarity with the instrument which will prove to be an excellent starting point. After completing the method, the student will have a solid aural foundation at the piano and will be fully prepared for primer level notation.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


APPENDIX A

ILLUSTRATIONS

Illustration 2. Mazica Hall, Music Room and Concert Stage.
APPENDIX B

LIST OF TEACHING PIECES FOR THE PIANO BY MANA-ZUCCA

Table 1. Sheet Music, Level One

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<th>Title</th>
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<th>Publisher/Year</th>
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<td><em>Farmyard, The</em></td>
<td>Op. 76, No. 2</td>
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<td>Op. 41, No. 1</td>
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<td>Op. 134, No. 1</td>
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<td><em>Honeysuckle, The</em></td>
<td>Op. 76, No. 3</td>
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<td><em>In My Garden</em></td>
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<td><em>Landscape</em></td>
<td>Op. 108</td>
<td>Presser, 1931</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Polka Comique</em></td>
<td>Op. 275</td>
<td>Congress Music, 1971</td>
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