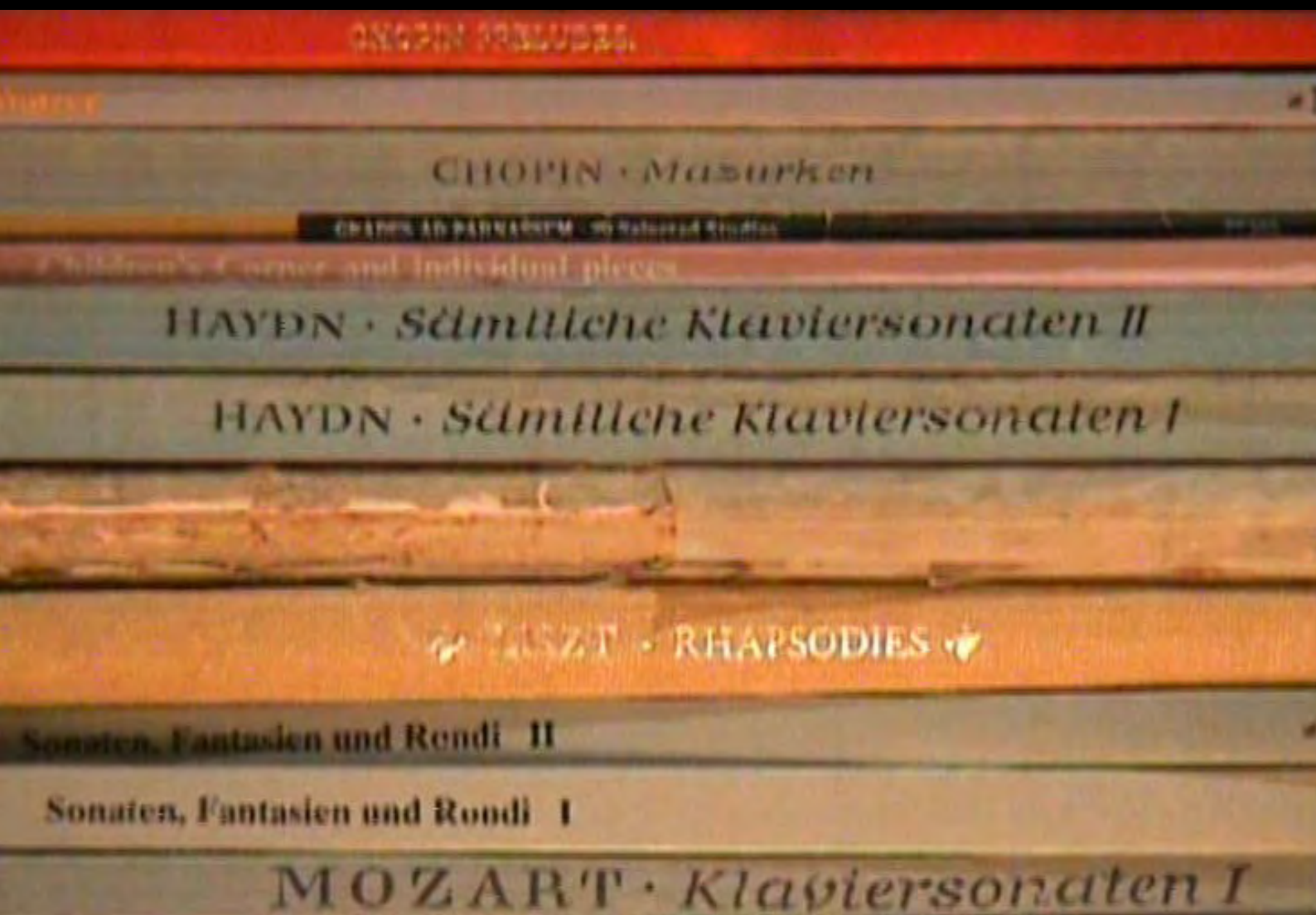


Sight Reading Skills

A Guide for Sight Reading Piano
Music Accurately and Expressively

Revised Edition



Faith Maydwell

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Some General Questions

What is sight reading?

Sight reading is the ability to perform music at the first reading of a score. It might include music read in the past. However, unless a work is studied assiduously and over a long period, it is difficult to retain much of the detail.

Why another book on sight reading?

This book is not yet another set of sequential sight-reading pieces which all too often turn into dry and uninspiring exercises. It is a book to help in gaining skills in order to be able to explore good music meaningfully. When teaching this subject at university, there was not a great deal of literature available to aid the student. In less than one year students struggling with sight reading needed to be strong enough readers, able to tackle Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier*. This book is the accumulation of all the approaches and experiments that over the years reaped good results. I also use these ideas when teaching students of different ages and stages within my private studio.

Can sight reading keep on improving?

All musicians wish to sight read well. Whenever students tell me they feel a big improvement has been made I ask them what have they been doing differently. Invariably the answer is that they have been working consistently on a daily basis. It cannot be stressed enough that to try to improve reading by sporadically using the skill does not reap good results. However, consistency is not the only answer to sight reading well. I have known many students who have tried to sight read over a long period of time and frustratingly have not moved forward. Unfortunately, it is a too common attitude by teachers and musicians that sight reading is developed only by practising it. Add to daily practice specific guidance and help in understanding how to sight read, then progress will be dramatic. With knowledge, discipline and focus, a musician can match technical ability with reading ability. In other words, whatever recital piece is being polished, many more scores of the same difficulty can be read through satisfactorily if somewhat slower than the suggested tempo. This book aims to help those who want to approach music reading in a methodical and focused way so that results can be measured.

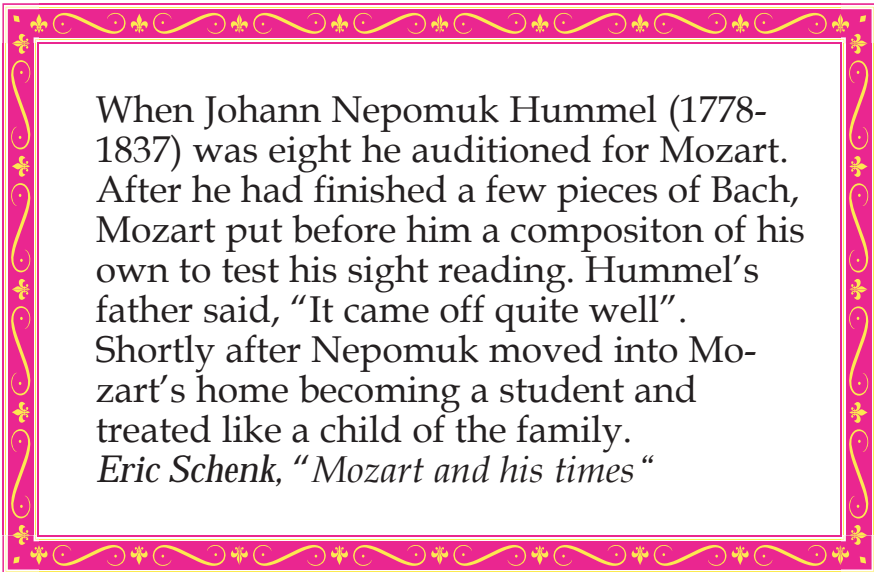
Who is this book directed to?

The possibility that sight reading can improve dramatically provides a great deal of hope for:

- The adult who says, “I used to play as a child but can no longer, as I don’t remember how to read.”
- The secondary or tertiary level student who has progressed through the grades with a handful of polished pieces but who is unable to explore chamber, vocal and orchestral scores, or even the most elementary of piano material in a satisfactory manner.
- The teachers who are locked into a pattern of studying half a dozen pieces with their students each year, leaving sight reading to the last minute before the examination. This usually results in the incoherent playing of an academic example labelled “Sight Reading Test”.

How do you feel about sight reading?

For most music students, reading music is an area fraught with negative feeling. In the initial class at the start of each year, when students are encouraged to briefly describe their thoughts and feelings associated with sight reading, words such as “fear”, “stress” and “panic” are often used. These reactions are understandable as experts agree that sight reading is one of the most complex of tasks, where material is presented in one form and needs to be instantly realised in another. Negative attitudes arise when the approach to it has been rather haphazard. However, with some help, sight reading can become an exciting musical experience.



When Johann Nepomuk Hummel (1778-1837) was eight he auditioned for Mozart. After he had finished a few pieces of Bach, Mozart put before him a composition of his own to test his sight reading. Hummel’s father said, “It came off quite well”. Shortly after Nepomuk moved into Mozart’s home becoming a student and treated like a child of the family.
Eric Schenk, “Mozart and his times”

A Graded Sight Reading List

Bartók, Béla, *Mikrokosmos* (1940) Volumes 1-4.

Children's pieces by Bartók, Kabalevsky, Khatchaturian, Prokofiev and Shostakovich.

Bach, Johann Sebastian, *Clavierbüchlein* for Anna Magdalena Bach
Sonatinas by Beethoven, Clementi, Diabelli, Dussek, Gurlitt and Kuhlau.

Schubert, Franz, *Dances: Waltzes, Ländler, Ecossaises and German Dances.*

Bach, Johann Sebastian, *Two-part Inventions, Twelve Little Preludes, Six Little Preludes.*

Schumann, Robert, *Album for the Young*, Op.68.

Studies by Bertini, Cramer, Czerny and Clementi's *Gradus ad Parnassum.*

Haydn, Franz Joseph, *Sonatas: Hob.XVI/1-19, 44-46.*

Scarlatti, Domenico, *Sonatas.*

Bach, Johann Sebastian, Two-voiced movements from the *French Suites, English Suites and Partitas.*

Mozart, Wolfgang Amadeus, *Sonatas, Rondos, and Fantasias.*

Haydn, Franz Joseph, *Sonatas: Hob.XVI/20 and upwards.*

Chopin, Fryderyk, *Mazurkas.*

Beethoven, Ludwig van, *Sonatas, Op.2-28, 49.*

Bach, Johann Sebastian, *Three-part Inventions, three-voiced movements from English Suites, French Suites and Partitas.*

Mendelssohn, Felix, *Songs Without Words.*

Beethoven, Ludwig van, *Bagatelles and Sonatas Op.31-90.*

Schubert, Franz, *Sonatas.*

Bach, Johann Sebastian, *Well-Tempered Clavier, Books 1 & 2.*

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Sight Reading Skills...

With specific knowledge, significant progress is achievable by students of all levels and sight reading can be an integral and positive part of music-making.

*“Sight reading used to scare me. These past two years have changed that negative attitude.
I see it now as a really useful tool.
I now have a more practical approach to sight reading.
I now have an understanding of how to achieve a better standard.
I pay attention to the detail now.
I am more confident and no longer afraid of the music.
I place more value on sight reading.
I use it in most of my piano lessons.
I have a love for sight reading now. In fact one of my favourite things is to go to the library and take out a whole stack of new material.
It's an extremely valuable tool.
I think more before I commence and I think more musically.
I take sight reading more seriously with my own students.
It is now a priority in my own practice time.”*

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