

Is It Possible To Create Cool "New Age" Sounds On The Piano Without Knowing A Thing About Music?

I'll admit that for many years as a piano teacher I didn't think so.

But in the last couple years I made a discovery about creating pleasant sounds on the piano that I never would have believed during my earlier piano teaching career.

I recall a physician friend asking me if I had any kind of course he could take that didn't involve learning to read music or music theory or any of the traditional materials.

He had purchased a beautiful Yamaha grand for his daughter to take lessons on when she was growing up, but now she was married and moved away, so he had this grand piano in his living room with no one to play it. He was much too busy in his career to take traditional piano lessons; he just wanted to "doodle" after work in the evening and relax after a stress-filled day at the hospital.

Unfortunately, I told him "no, I don't have anything like that available, sorry!" and that was the end of that story.

But a few months later another student had heard a "new age" pianist somewhere, and loved the sounds he produced so much that they wanted to do the same, and asked me how in the world he got those sounds. They weren't really songs but more like the sounds of nature and running water and nature in bloom.

I have taught piano for 30 years and I'm a firm believer in learning to read music, understand music, and really master the keyboard. I'm no fan of mindless "shortcuts" because I know in the long run they just don't work because you've got to have understanding.

But I also know now that there are many people like my doctor friend that would love to be able to make their own "pleasant sounds" on the piano just for their own satisfaction, relaxation, and amusement. They know full well that they will never be full-blown piano players, but still, they would like to sit down now and then and just make some sounds on the keyboard that sound good, feel good, and give satisfaction to them and/or their family.

I should have understood that earlier, because as I think back to my own youth, I recall my Dad sitting down at our old upright piano for a half-hour on a Saturday night and playing some kind of chording pattern that absolutely delighted my Mom and my big brother and I. I guess you know that if I could call him back from Heaven and have him play that again for me, I wouldn't trade the entire London Symphony for that half-hour.

There is a style of music that is quite popular these days known as "new age" music. It tries to capture the sounds of nature such as water flowing, birds, wind, and that kind of thing. It is very descriptive music, and very relaxing. It's fun to play, too, because there are really no "wrong answers"; anything that sounds nice and pleasant is "right".

After trying for several months to create some of these sounds on the piano, I was delighted to discover that there are some very simple finger patterns that can create some wonderful impressionistic sounds using patterns that can be repeated in various places on the keyboard and in various ways.

And so for those people who just want to make some nice sounds on the piano (or keyboard or synthesizer, it doesn't matter what kind of keyboard) I discovered some 15 different sound patterns that anyone can duplicate. I named some of them:

Cascading waterfalls

Wind in the forest

Rainbow after storm

Oriental gardens

Stroll in a meadow

Peaceful morning

Playful kittens

Gentle waves

and 7 others.

After I discovered each sound pattern, I then linked those sound patterns together in various ways so that anyone can create their own song, their

own creative improvisation that expresses the feelings they want to express.

I guess an old doctor friend who just wanted to make some pleasant sounds on his grand piano can teach and old dog piano teachers like me a few tricks after all!

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