

A Beginner's Guide  
to Keyboard  
Instruments and  
their Composers

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**For the teachers: The purpose of this document is to teach students some basics about well-known classical music composers and keyboard instruments. The first slide serves to teach the students about the musical alphabet (a,b,c,d,e,f,g). This slide is not essential for the student's understanding of the document as a whole, but I have included it in case there is interest.**

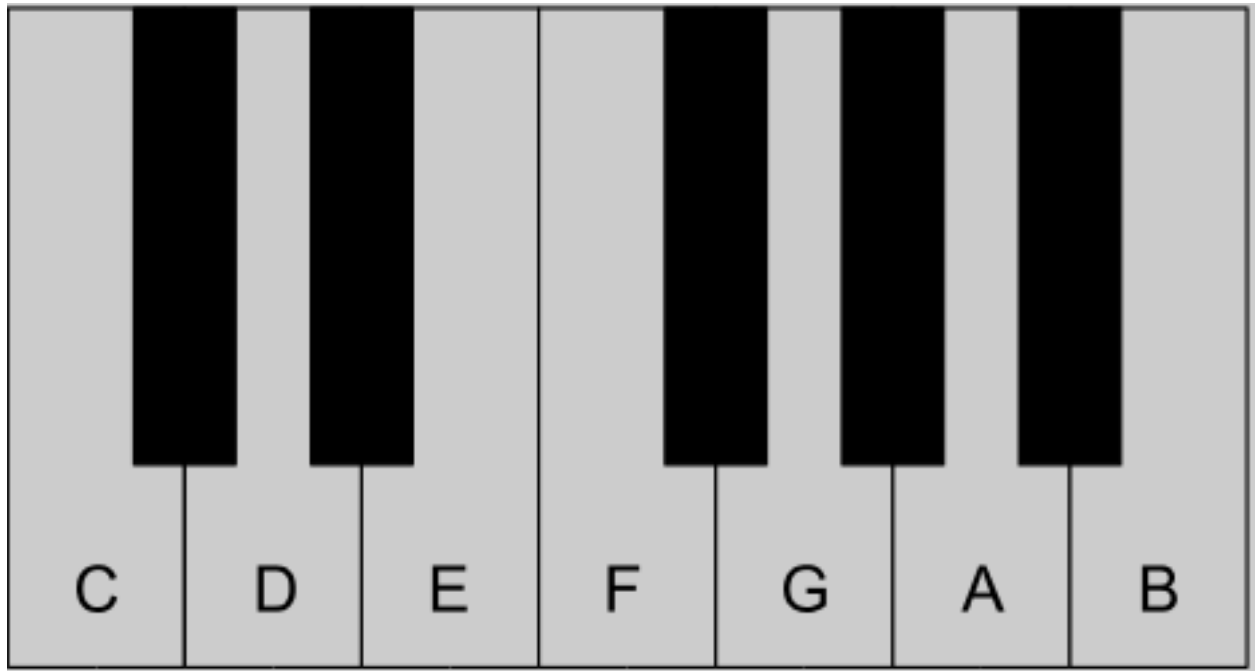
**The next few slides each give a brief background about an individual composer. Before explaining the information on each slide, the instructor should play an excerpt of a piece by the composer on that slide. Recordings of pieces by these composers can be easily found on [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com). Here are my suggestions for pieces to play:**

- 1). Beethoven: *Fur Elise***
- 2). Johann Pachebel: *Canon in D (Pachebel's Canon)***
- 3). Scott Joplin: *The Entertainer***
- 4). John Williams: *Star Wars (Main Theme)***

**The last few slides show a picture of and give a brief background on different keyboard instruments. Again, the instructor should show the students what each instrument sounds like before explaining the details provided on the slides. Again, I have provided some suggestions for recording to play, all of which can be found on YouTube. In each case, only an excerpt needs to be played, as some of the recordings are quite long.**

- 1). Piano: *Sonata no. 8* (by Beethoven)**
  - 2). Harpsichord: *Chaconne for Harpsichord Solo* (by J.S. Bach)**
  - 3). Clavichord: *Pavana Italiana* (by Antonio De Cabazon).**
- FOLLOW THIS LINK:**  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Utkqp3OMb9Q>
- 4). Pipe Organ: *Toccata and Fugue in D minor* (by J.S. Bach)**

**PIANO KEYBOARD WITH NOTE NAMES**



FAMOUS COMPOSERS WHO HAVE WRITEN MUSIC FOR PIANO

1) LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN



- Born on December 16, 1770 in Germany.
- The Beethoven House is now a museum.
- Starting learning music when he was 4 years old.
- He met Mozart when he was 16 and took some lessons from him.
- He became deaf around age 30.
- Died in 1827.
- Some of his more popular pieces are: Fur Elise, Moonlight Sonata, Ode to Joy (from his 9<sup>th</sup> Symphony), and his 5<sup>th</sup> Symphony.

## 2) JOHANN PACHEBEL



- Lived from 1653 to 1706.
- He played the organ and was a teacher. He taught many composers.
- Most famous for his Canon in D (also called Pachelbel's Canon)
- Other famous works include Chaconne in F minor, and Tocatta for Organ.

### **3) SCOTT JOPLIN**



- African-American composer and pianist.**
- Born in 1867 and died in 1917.**
- Was famous for his ragtime music.**
- People called him “The King of Ragtime”**
- Born in Texas, where he took music lessons.**
- He also lived in Missouri and New York City.**
- He wrote 44 ragtime pieces, a ragtime ballet, and an opera.**
- Some of his famous pieces are: The Entertainer, and Maple Leaf Rag.**

## 4) JOHN WILLIAMS



- Born in 1932 (he is 81 years old in 2013).**
- Writes music for movies. He is also a conductor and piano player.**
- Wrote music for Star Wars, Indiana Jones, Harry Potter, Jurassic Park, Superman, and many others.**
- Wrote music for every movie that George Lucas (creator of Star Wars) has directed.**
- Wrote music for every movie that Steven Spielberg has directed (except for “The Color Purple.”)**



## KEYBOARD INSTRUMENTS

### 1) PIANO



- The word “Piano” is short for “gravicembalo col piano e forte” which means “harpsichord with powerful and light sound” The piano is a keyboard instrument that is capable of playing both very soft and very loud.
- Invented around the early 1700s by an Italian, Bartolomeo Cristofori.
- It used to be much smaller and not have as many keys.
- Modern pianos have 88 keys. Pianos in the 1700s had much fewer keys.



## 2) HARPSICHORD



- Probably invented around the year 1500.
- It was widely used during the 1500s and 1600s. It wasn't used as much during the 1700 and 1800s because the piano became more popular.
- In the 1900s, the harpsichord became popular again.
- Composers who have used the harpsichord in modern music include: Phillip Glass, and Dimitri Shostakovich.
- It has also been used a lot in movie music.

### 3) CLAVICHORD



- Was invented around the year 1500.
- It was popular from the late medieval period until the late 1700s or so.
- Widely used as a practice instrument. It wasn't used much for big concerts, as it is a very soft instrument.
- An electric clavichord is called a clavinet. Clavinets have been used by Stevie Wonder, and other modern musicians.
- The Beatles used a Clavichord on one song, "For No One."

## 4) ORGAN



- There are different kinds of organs: pipe organ, electronic organ, and mechanical organ. The above picture shows a small pipe organ.
- The pipe organ is the biggest musical instrument.
- Some of the bigger pipe organs have around 20,000 pipes.
- Mozart called it “The King of Instruments.”
- Widely used in churches and cathedrals. But is has also been used in concert halls and theatres.