

**Music Education Network - for The Visually Impaired -
*An International Coalition of Parents, Educators, and Students***

- MENVI Headquarters -

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MENVI

- Important Announcements – Teaching Piano Formats to Blind Students -

MEMBER SERVICES TO UNDERGO CHANGES

Everyone has had to make difficult decisions and adjustments in order to survive today's uncertain economy. No doubt you have noticed that there have been no mailed or online & web news journals since Winter 2008 - Issue 28. The membership roster is a yearly project, and will continue to be available for online subscribers, and in electronic format by request. A new, and more accessible, Word® format with hyperlinks directly to email addresses should make networking for members more convenient. MENVI headquarters at SCCM has undergone substantial changes, and its *Braille Music Division* exists now in a reduced capacity with limited services and outreach programs.

Print mailings will resume for those who prefer not to use Internet. Braille mailing will undergo some changes, in that mailings will not include the optional print copy. There are well over 200 online subscribers in the network of now over 500 members. If you currently receive conventional mail and would prefer online mailings, use our website application to request an online subscription. You can also use web versions, but they may appear later than mailings and online subscriptions. Braille files are offered for file downloads, and a raw translation of the roster in braille is available in electronic format, although it does consist of hundreds of braille pages.

CONCERT FOR MENVI – A GREAT SUCCESS!

On behalf of all members of our network, we wish to express our deepest gratitude to concert pianist and MENVI member, Ayaka Isono, for sponsoring the beautiful fundraiser concert near San Francisco last October! World-class performers were invited to perform in several capacities, and donated their

precious time to raise at least five hundred dollars specifically for the maintenance of your network.

Supporting Members:

Supporting Members are always welcome to donate a yearly fee, and will be listed as such in publications. Often we forget that MENVI is perhaps one of the only organizations of its kind that does not charge membership dues. We must rely on sponsorship from the stressed non-profit SCCM, and the generosity of donors and foundation grants, which are few at best.

**COLLEGE SURVIVAL GUIDE STILL
AVAILABLE FOR FREE DOWNLOAD**

The newly revised edition of “*A Blind Music Student's College Survival Guide*” is now available as a special free service on the MENVI website at www.menvi.org. A braille edition is available by special request at www.atpc.net. If you are planning to enter college as a blind music major, consider doing a little early homework to avoid an inevitable struggle. By knowing your own special needs, and by letting your chosen school know that “you know” what your needs will be, you can make your own difference in success or failure.

A special section is dedicated to college professors seeking help in making good choices for blind music majors under their tutelage. As a student who is planning to enter college, consider making some print copies of the book to give to administrators and teachers when you apply. They will clearly respect your self-direction, and the fact that you have researched the special needs information required to take command of your future.

TEACHING EARLY PIANO FORMATS TO A BLIND STUDENT

The MENVI network consists of students, educators, and musicians. Future issues of our journal will include a series on music education as applies to blind students. Some of these articles will be based upon earlier issues of the CTEBVI journal, from the column, “*Music in Education.*” You can view all of these articles on the CTEBVI website by going to the specialists’ link at: www.ctebvi.org. CTEBVI stands for *California Transcribers and Educators of the Blind and Visually Impaired*. It is open for membership to all who are interested in the educational welfare of blind individuals.

Article reprinted from CTEBVI Journal (formerly CTEVH), Spring 2009 – with permission

The study of bar-over-bar piano music can present some very unique problems to a music braille reader and his or her music teacher.

First of all, let’s define *bar-over-bar*. This is the format that shows a right hand part directly over a left hand part in much the same way as is done in print music. The notes for each hand part are aligned at the beginning of each measure, and each and every measure in the piece must show a new octave mark. In standard single-line music, the octave mark is not required on each measure, unless some other sign interrupts the music code. Instead of clefs, hand signs are used in braille:

Right hand:  Left hand: 

As said many times, the best way to teach beginning music reading, whether print or braille, is to NOT approach it at the same time as teaching the fundamentals of the instrument itself. Consider why European and Asian countries traditionally use the solfege system of sight singing to teach music notation as a language before applying the skill to any musical instrument. To teach a student music notation while teaching the first basics of an instrument is not unlike teaching a child to use a spoon to eat while expecting him or her to walk for the first time – at the same time!

Once basic music reading has been experienced *away from the piano*, and *hands-on* the instrument has begun separately, some ideas for the first exposure to bar-over-bar piano music notation might be presented in this way:

Preliminary thoughts:

1. Have your student be responsible for a right hand part, and you for singing or playing the left hand part. Go slowly, and require the student to call out any finger number (assuming that you have introduced them).
2. Now reverse the part assignments.
3. Take the duet activity further by having the student sing every other measure, alternating with you. This way, he or she must keep very good track of where you both are in the music.
4. Now follow the same procedure, but use the keyboard to play the music as opposed to singing.
5. Use the above procedure for all bar-over-bar exercises, at least until you feel that your student comprehends the format and is able to follow the music – hand-to-hand - on his or her own. There is no need to be concerned with hands together at this point.

In *Graded Studies* Book 1, Section II of “*Introduction to Piano for the Blind Student**,” the need to read hand-to-hand becomes more complex, as now two- measure segments occur before the parts switch hands. Try the guidelines that follow the examples below when teaching music in this format.

**Publisher: Dancing Dots – www.dancingdots.com*

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{Finger numbers are highlighted in braille.}

1. Sit on the student's right hand side, carefully observing and tracking his or her braille reading fingers.
2. The student should first read with left hand, and play with right hand. When arriving at measure 3, he or she will encounter the whole rest. This must become a clear signal when to switch hands.
 - a. The right hand moves down to locate the place on the braille that the left hand is holding.
 - b. The right hand remains on the music, while the left hand locates the third octave five-finger position, and the note C with fifth finger.
3. When arriving at the point of hand switching, be prepared to physically take the students reading finger yourself, and hold it on the whole rest while assisting him or her in the adjustment. You may very well be holding a reading finger, and simultaneously moving the other hand to the keyboard location of the hand part.
4. While holding this position, quiz the student as to what he or she will play next, and with which hand.

UH OH! HANDS TOGETHER

If you would like to have some fun with your student, and you feel that he or she has a good sense of humor, this approach is nearly always successful. It can truly break the ice, so to speak, when taking on the daunting job of explaining how a blind person can read and play with two hands.

Be aware that blind students are very familiar with how a sighted person responds to them when that sighted person has had little experience with VI students. In many cases, they find it entertaining to watch us stumble about trying to avoid words like *see*, *watch*, and most words having to do with sight, as we know it. We must learn to understand that sight has very little to do with the eyes. *Sight* is what the brain perceives through an outside stimulus, which may originate from other senses, not only via the eye sense.

Children will giggle and laugh, truly think you are "cool" when you respond to their question of "how do I play with two hands and read at the same time?" On one occasion, I held my playful smile, and said, "well that's easy; you just take off your shoes and sox; put the music on the floor, and practice reading with your toes." Needless to say, this brings fun and laughter, but the teacher needs to be comfortable in such humor. Think about the following quote from taken from a very serious lecture on the case for music literacy for blind musicians:

"Blindness is part of WHO we are! We know that we are unique and special – and not only in spite of the fact that we are blind, but in many situations – BECAUSE of it!"

The successful advocate knows this. Let us share this wonderful outlook from a blind adult guitarist who had been recently blinded by an accident:

"We just do it differently now!"

In the next issue I will continue with a discussion and some examples of teaching the reading of two hands together - with shoes and sox on!