

So You Always Wanted to Play the Piano

By Muriel Brooks

THE MCCLINTOCK PIANO COURSE, *A New Experience in Learning*, by Lorene McClintock, McClintock Enterprises, 853 Seventh Avenue, New York, NY 10019. (800) 428-0018, \$388.00, including sales tax (except for NY) and shipping.

AT MOST SOCIAL gatherings, if there is a pianist around, one is likely to hear that old refrain from the adults present, "Oh, I always wanted to learn to play the piano."

These days more of them are doing just that, causing them to become the fastest-growing segment of the music student population. To accommodate these avid students, adult methods have been appearing in large numbers in the music stores. In 1992, Lorene McClintock added her unusual course to the available material.

The McClintock Piano Course, subtitled *A New Experience in Learning*, was developed over a 30-year period of testing. It consists of 201 lessons in three volumes of music and eight volumes of text, plus a patented set of Interval Key Blocks, a Keyboard Concealer, and a music manuscript book, all packaged in two attractive boxed sets. The course is sold in this complete format only; one cannot buy individual volumes.

An accompanying brochure states that one of the purposes of the course is "to enable an individual with no previous knowledge of music or the keyboard to learn to read music and play the piano and to receive a complete music education—with or without a teacher." Other purposes are "to develop musical literacy and a musical consciousness" enabling one to become "a more active and appreciative listener" and "to provide a discipline that is both enjoyable and stimulating." Those are broad aims but this course fulfills them better than any in my experience.

Piano

& KEYBOARD

Muriel Brooks is a pianist, harpsichordist, teacher, and music critic. She has served as president of the Associated Music Teachers League of New York and as president of the Piano Teachers Congress of New York. She has held many positions of responsibility with the Music Teachers National Association, is a member of the Music Critics Association, and maintains a private teaching studio.

Method

Kelly Campbell



INVISIBLE TEACHER: Lorene McClintock's course is designed so students feel she is looking over their shoulders.

The author's first concern is to develop a sense of touch and measurement through exercises coordinating eye and hand. This is achieved through the use of the patented Interval Key Blocks and the Keyboard Concealer and, like a number of other exercises in the course, is not done at the piano. The cardboard Key Blocks are McClintock's clever invention. The Keyboard Concealer, also of cardboard, is the best of several types to be found in other beginners' methods to prevent the pianist from watching his or her fingers. Without the constant looking from music rack to hands, a secure keyboard sense is established. If one can't watch the hands, the eye can watch the music. This produces a more fluent sight reader—the goal of every teacher and the means to more enjoyment for the amateur pianist.

McClintock places great stress on developing tone quality, legato playing, the shaping of phrases, and rubato—musical considerations that are rarely touched upon in most methods. She gives clear and truly innovative directions on how to achieve these important aspects of musical performance beginning with the very first lessons. Theory is thoroughly taught, also from the beginning, and doesn't just deal with the basic I, IV, and V chords. By the time one reaches the last volume of text, one has very thoroughly explored diminished and secondary 7ths, 9th, 11th, and 13th chords, the Neapolitan, French, German, and Italian 6ths, plus diatonic and altered chords in major and minor keys. Additionally, the student has been instructed in modulation, improvisation, ear training, analysis, and composition. Once again, this range and depth of information cannot be found in any other adult method, especially those designed for self-instruction.

One may doubt the success of such a home study course, but this particular one can definitely be used with or without a teacher. The detailed directions ensure understanding and correctness of execution, all reinforced with repeated questions the students are urged to ask themselves as to what they are seeing, doing, feeling, and hearing. This is the result of 30 years of constant testing and rewriting.

Lorene McClintock first taught the concepts herself and produced the three volumes of music. There followed a period in which she trained a group of teachers in Texas, her home state, allowing them to buy the music and use it in classroom situations as well as for private instruction. That experiment was a 20-year success story. Realizing that if she produced a thorough text, the method could circulate more widely and be used

for self-instruction, she set about writing the voluminous instructions. The next step was to allow individuals to work with the books on their own. Revisions or additions were made to clarify the text as needed. Finally, after 30 years, satisfied that she had done all that was possible to produce a course that would "provide a simple and direct approach that will dispel the fears of those who have always wanted to play the piano but who have felt that it was too complicated and difficult to learn," she published *The McClintock Piano Course: A New Experience in Learning*. It is designed for adults and teenagers but could be of benefit to teachers through the application of the many excellent ideas and principles innovatively explained.

The brochure, in describing the advantages of the McClintock Piano Course, states that it may be used as "learning therapy" for the physically handicapped, to develop coordination and confidence, and for mentally and emotionally distressed and drug-dependent individuals, to enable them to focus their attention, learn a new skill, and gain self-esteem." As extravagant as that may sound, Lorene McClintock can document many quite unusual benefits of a mental and physical nature that have occurred with adults of all ages—some in their 60s, 70s, and even 80s—working their way through her course. One can see how, as she rightfully claims, it is "remarkably effective as a method of stress release and relaxation." The constant cautioning to avoid tension, to use the arms and body in relaxed ways,

and the physical exercises to learn meter and rhythm (away from the keyboard) can result in a desirable lack of stress. In these days when many musicians are experiencing increased tension and physical damage, it's refreshing to come across a course that is a model of prevention of those ills and even manages to free people from muscular problems.

The majority of music included in *The McClintock Piano Course* consists of folk tunes, traditional songs, and music by the author illustrating various principles. The number of classic works is very small: an exhaustive analysis of the complete Bach C-major Prelude from the *Well-Tempered Clavier*, a similarly detailed Chopin C-minor Prelude in the concluding pages, and a number of excerpts or arrangements of other well-known composers. One misses repertoire from the elementary to the advanced stages to supplement the student's advancement; McClintock might have included recommendations for additional material. Here the help of a teacher would be valuable. However, this is the only caveat for an otherwise exceptional and innovative method of learning to read and play the piano intelligently, musically, and pleasurably. It is certainly superior to anything available on the market today for the budding adult pianist.

20 HOW DO YOU LOCATE THE B'S AND THE D'S? L. McClintock

21 DO YOU KNOW THE C'S, B'S, AND D'S? SPEED TEST #1 L. McClintock

22 HOW CAN YOU HAVE A FINGER FOR EVERY KEY? L. McClintock

IN BLACK AND WHITE: The musical illustrations accompanying the McClintock Piano Course visually coordinate key and hand positions with note positions on the staves.