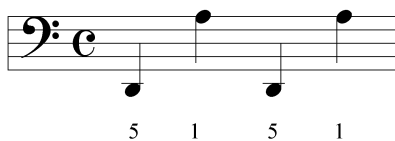


Using Small Intervals to Manage Large Leaps

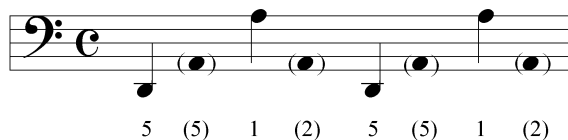
by Bob Hinz

For most pianists, it takes many years of practicing and playing before large intervals and leaps—usually in the left hand—can be negotiated comfortably. It is possible, nevertheless, to develop the ability to play large intervals accurately, even without looking at the keyboard. One approach is to use keys that are in between the notes forming the large interval. For example, a skip from D2 to A3, and back down:



Example 1

This can be managed by using an intermediate key that forms a comfortable interval with the note that the hand is moving to:



Example 2

In this instance, A2 can be used as a tactile reference point between the outer notes. With the ascending leap, the perfect fifth above the lower note can set up the fifth finger in its octave relationship with the upper note. With the descending leap, the second finger can be used to set up the movement back to the lower D. This technique works as a practice technique at any tempo (both with and without looking at the keyboard), but tends to work best at slow and moderate tempos.

This technique is useful, for example, at the end of Chopin's Etude in Eb Major, Op. 10. no.11. In the last two chords, the right hand moves an octave higher from the highest note in each of its grace note chords, while the left hand moves an octave lower from the lowest note in each of its grace note chords:

8va

Red. * Red. *

Example 3

Here, the thumbs can set up the octave from the highest note in each of the right hand chords (and the lowest note in each of the left hand chords) to play the following single notes with the fifth finger of each hand.

When the left hand plays a large leap, one or more additional notes (that are not played) can serve to guide the hand to the note that is played. In the example below, different intervals—each using another keyboard reference point—help make the leap more secure:

10th: 12th: 13th: 2 octaves:

5 1 5 1 5 1 5 1 5 1

(2) (3) (3) (2) (4) (5)

Example 4

Practice that includes a conscious awareness of these keyboard relationships promotes a tactile and kinesthetic knowledge of the keyboard.

A note that is played can also serve as a pivot point that enables the hand to change position. In the example below, after A2 (the second quarter note) is played, the position of the fifth finger may be used to set up the second finger:

1 5 5 2

(2)

Example 5

D2 can then be found by feeling the perfect fifth between the second and fifth fingers.

The exercises below can be used to practice the technique with upward leaps in the right hand, and downward leaps in the left hand. In both cases, the thumb is placed over a key closer to the first note, and the note that is leaped to is felt in its octave relationship to the thumb. There is no need to see the note that is played by the fifth finger. Skips to the thumb are not as difficult, given the movement is toward the center of the keyboard and the thumb is within a comfortable visual range. Moreover, a repeated skip can be understood as being in either direction. Nevertheless, the exercises can be varied to include a descending skip in the right hand, and an ascending skip in the left. In the right hand, use 5 to set up the thumb an octave below the fifth finger after it skips the smaller interval from its first note. In the left, use 5 to set up the thumb an octave above the fifth finger after the skip:

1 5 1 5

(1) (1) (1) (1)

Example 6 is a short piece in C major, 4/4 time, written for treble clef. It consists of three staves. The first staff contains a melody starting on C4, with a fingering of 1, 5, 1, 5. The second and third staves show a bass line with chords and single notes. The piece ends with a double bar line.

Example 6

1 (1) 1 (1)

5 5

Example 7 is a short piece in C major, 4/4 time, written for bass clef. It consists of three staves. The first staff contains a melody starting on C3, with a fingering of 1, (1), 1, (1). The second and third staves show a bass line with chords and single notes. The piece ends with a double bar line.

Example 7