

Use Target Tones When Changing Hand Position

By Bob Hinz

After the initial stages of studying the piano, students begin to move around the keyboard. Ease of movement is often facilitated through the use of hand positions: a group of keys on which the five fingers of the hand are placed. These hand positions, furthermore, use reference points: usually one particular key that defines the position, such as “C position” (which uses a “C” key), or “G position.” This principle—using reference points, or *target tones*—can go a long way in dealing with the many movements that are required in most piano pieces.

Target tones are the notes that a player aims for when the hand leaps from one position to another. They are often the first note that is played in a new hand position, but not always. Although target tones are usually black keys, they can be white keys as well, with the black key arrangement of the keyboard facilitating the movement to a particular white key. Target tones can be quite useful when the distance covered is quite large.

A good example of the technique can be found in a piece that most students encounter early in their piano study: Bach’s *Musette* in D Major, from the *Little Notebook of Anna Magdalena Bach*:

Allegro con brio

The image displays two systems of musical notation for the piece 'Allegro con brio' in D major, 2/4 time. Each system consists of a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The first system shows the first two measures. In the first measure, the right hand plays a quarter note D4, followed by eighth notes E4, F#4, G4, and A4. The left hand plays a quarter note D3, followed by eighth notes E3, F#3, and G3. The second measure continues this pattern. The second system shows the next two measures. In the third measure, both hands move inward. The right hand plays a quarter note D5, followed by eighth notes E5, F#5, G5, and A5. The left hand plays a quarter note D4, followed by eighth notes E4, F#4, and G4. The fourth measure continues this pattern. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 2/4.

In the third measure, both hands move inward, toward each other. Although the movement is an octave down in the right hand, and more than an octave up in the left, the movement is made easier by the awareness of a few details. First, both hands are moving to the D major position, the first five keys of the D major scale. Second, the target tone, *F sharp*, can be used as a visual reference point that enables *both* hands to get into position for the notes in the next two measures. The fact that the F sharps are black keys and the first notes played in the new hand position of both hands make this a particularly appropriate point of reference for the movement.

In the movement back to the original hand position in measure five, moreover, the player can take advantage of the same keyboard features as references. Since the right hand is moving up to the same five keys one octave higher, the F#, which stands out in the hand position, can be used to gain position on the A, which is the first note played in the fifth measure. Additionally, the left hand is also moving back to its original hand position. This lower hand position (in which the left hand plays the D octave) can also be thought of as a D major position with an extension of the thumb to the D an octave above the pinky. Accordingly, the F# can be used in the left hand as a target to gain position on the D below it.

In summary, when moving in large leaps at the keyboard, use visual (as well as tactile) reference points, or target tones, to set up the new hand position. This promotes accuracy, ease of movement, fluidity, comfort, and memorization.