



simply music

a brief history

simplymusic.com



a brief history

An edited transcript of a conversation with Neil Moore, recounting the story behind the creation and development of the Simply Music Program...

The Simply Music story begins with an 8 year old blind boy. I had been teaching students and training teachers for many years, presenting a program that I was involved in developing. It was based on an alternative approach to reading music, and it achieved comparatively good results. Nonetheless, it was a traditional program in that it introduced music reading as the means of learning how to play.

One day I received a phone call from a government agency and was asked if I would be willing to teach an 8-year old boy who was blind. I had absolutely no doubt that I could teach him, although at that point in time, I wasn't sure exactly how. Certainly however, reading music would be out of the question.

As a child, my own background in music was an initial 8 years of piano lessons, starting at age 7. I had been blessed with a deep affinity for music that, according to my mother, was very evident even during infancy. With an already developed ear for music, when I began piano lessons I merely needed to watch and listen to my teacher as he played the songs I would be learning. I had the ability to aurally remember them in detail and then 'figure them out' during the week. I also had an idiosyncrasy whereby whenever I listened to music, I would visualize two and three-dimensional 'shapes'. In short, I heard music, but saw 'sentences', 'sequences' and 'patterns'. Even though describing this can sound quite obscure, at the time it was all completely easy and perfectly natural to me.

At my lesson on Saturdays I would sit at the piano to play, and pretend to be reading the music. Actually I couldn't read a single note on the page, and what I played was entirely based on what I had aurally memorized and turned into shapes and patterns etc. Fortunately, both my teacher and my mother had the foresight and a faith in my natural affinity with music, to know that they should leave me to continue to progress as quickly as I was.

By 15 years of age I was playing a comparatively advanced repertoire, composing my own pieces and developing my own arrangements. Even then I still couldn't read a note of music, and it wasn't until I was in my 30's that I actually learned how. How bizarre that all these years later, I found myself teaching a method that was based on reading music as the entry point into learning how to play!

So when given the chance to teach Wade, the young blind boy, I remember making a clear choice. I decided that I would recreate for him my own experience of learning, and use my own childhood model as a template to build his.

At first, I began to compose pieces and 'distill' them into patterns that would translate directly into his hands and onto the keyboard. When Wade came to lessons I would simply teach him those patterns, and within a few months he was playing a range of blues, popular and classical pieces.

Then one day, I asked his father if he was happy with his son's progress. His father said this, "...not only are we happy with his progress, but he's started to teach his 4 year old sister how to play, and she's blind too."

This simple statement became a turning point in my life. I found myself compelled to explore what would happen if I were to introduce all young children to a similar approach – no music reading, no theory – just playing and learning by doing. And so I began to develop more material, creating an approach 'from the ground up' so to speak. I began introducing the concepts to young children and found that they were producing superior results to older, more 'advanced' students. What struck me as remarkable was that from the very beginning these new students were playing with both hands, simultaneously, easily and musically, and with so much confidence.

Parents began reporting that their children were wanting to play all the time. And students themselves began saying that practice didn't feel like practice, it was fun and it felt like playing the piano.

I became more and more engrossed with the process and subsequently assembled a pilot group of over 120 students of all ages and musical backgrounds. I decided to push what I was doing as far as I could. My commitment was to get a clear picture of how successfully students could progress with this 'playing-based' approach. The results were stunning and immediate, and consistently so. From their first lessons, students were playing great-sounding music, and within a few months had already built a repertoire of contemporary, classical, blues and accompaniment pieces. Their experience of the process was that it was more refreshing, more inspiring, and far more motivating. I was overwhelmed with the realization that I was dealing with an approach that was far more powerful than anything I had ever witnessed or ever heard of before.

Over time, the achievements of the program became clearer to me. It was clearly accessible to the majority of people – children, teenagers, adults and seniors alike. It could be learned more quickly than anything else that I was aware of. It was fun and informal. It was quickly and easily 'digestible' for people, and they could immediately have the experience of playing great-sounding music. And above all else, every student who followed the program learned how to play. This in itself was a breakthrough!

The extraordinary nature of the program didn't stop there. In addition to what it accomplished with students, it completely redefined who was capable of teaching music. Over time I discovered that students who started as total beginners with Simply Music, could themselves become highly accomplished teachers of the program. And the more that I thought about the ramifications of this, the more I came to see that the opportunities that it represented were as vast as one could comprehend.



Developing the teacher program became a priority, and over time I continued to expand the body of distinctions, processes and concepts. An integral part of this process was composing and arranging a structured and progressive collection of great sounding blues, popular and classical pieces. I wanted the music of this program to sound rich and mature, and be a significant 'cut above' the music that is usually associated with entry level piano lessons.

As time went on, it became appropriate to share aspects of the approach with other piano teachers, asking them to introduce the concepts and report on the outcome. They began achieving the same kind of consistent, rapid results with their students as I had with mine. It was very exciting to see how simply and easily others could duplicate the successes of this program.

Naturally, this resulted in more and more stories surfacing about beginning students who had begun teaching others. Children were coming to lessons and then going home and teaching their parents to play. Parents were having lessons and going home to teach their children. Homeschool families were bringing one of their children to lessons, and then going home and having the child teach the other siblings how to play. Parents started telling their children's teachers about how in the past they had struggled with their children to get them to practice, but now were struggling to get their children away from the piano! And overall, people's experience of both the learning process, as well as their feelings about themselves, was entirely different with this approach compared to anything they had experienced in the past.

And so it came to be. The experience of teaching an 8-year old blind boy gave me a completely new context for, and perspective of all the years of my own childhood music-learning experiences. The culmination of this ultimately evolved into tens of thousands of hours of program development, and this gave birth to a new methodology – the compositions and arrangements, the curriculum itself, the training program and its associated components, the array of support materials and systems, and most importantly, the context and philosophy behind each and every step. It's the entirety of it all that constitutes what we now call, Simply Music.

simply music



Simply Music is a remarkable Australian-developed piano and keyboard method that offers a breakthrough in music education. This unique program has children, teens adults and seniors playing great-sounding blues, contemporary, classical and accompaniment pieces – immediately – from their very first lessons.

Neil Moore, the creator of the Simply Music program, was born in 1957 in Melbourne, Australia, and began studying piano at the age of 7. He moved to the United States in 1994 and currently lives in Sacramento with his wife and three children. He has spent most of his life actively involved in ‘playing-based’ music education. He composes and arranges much of the music used throughout the Simply Music program, and his experience includes teaching in schools, leading seminars and workshops, as well as owning and operating a network of music teaching studios. He regularly conducts training programs in both Australia and the United States. Neil’s most extensive field of focus has been the training and coaching of music teachers.

USA & CANADA
1 800 SIMPLY 7

(1 800 746 7597)

email: info@simplymusic.com

AUSTRALIA &
NEW ZEALAND

phone 03 9571 3986 (Australia)

simplymusic.com