

On Sight-reading, extract from Bachelor of Music thesis (July 2008)

By Anne Ku

Since I enjoy sight-reading piano duets and playing chamber music with others, I have an implicit goal to find more sight-readers like myself to collaborate with. I began asking this of my own students by introducing duets at a very early age. I even composed multi-hands on one piano “duets” for them. I am curious why some students become better sight-readers while others struggle.

I learned from giving my workshop in North Cyprus in May 2003 and subsequent conversations with Marian Bolt of Utrecht Conservatory in the Netherlands that it’s a very important topic for all musicians, not just pianists. And it’s also of interest to researchers in computer science, psychology, education, and even neurology. The findings from my interviews with seven piano teachers from the Netherlands, UK, and the USA converged with conclusions from published literature. Some of these are:

- The more you sight-read, the better you get
- Vertical reading is critical in sight-reading, as well as looking ahead and other aspects of eye-movement
- Good technique helps you recognize patterns and respond more quickly
- Sight-reading requires good concentration and anticipation
- A big part of sight-reading is getting the rhythm right
- Knowledge of music theory and analysis helps greatly
- Good sight-readers are bred not born

Finally, as a composer, I learned that readability of the score is an important ingredient in a player’s acceptance and willingness to play the music. Thus editors and publishers also have a responsibility in choosing the appropriate font size, spacing, and notation.

On sight-reading: summary and conclusions

- Definition
- Importance
- Problems and challenges
- Pre-requisites: what makes a good sight-reader
- Teaching methods and approaches
- Relationship with memorization, improvisation, playing by ear
- Overconfidence bias

Sight-reading, or sight reading, or sightreading, or prima vista playing is that ability to play from the first reading of a music score, without prior practice. It may be better termed “sight playing” or “playing at sight.”

For the rest of the report, please contact the author via http://www.anneku.com/contact.htm
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