

2 Pianos 4 Hands

by Ted Dykstra & Richard Greenblatt

Directed by Tom Frey

September 12 - 27, 2025

SPOTLIGHT STUDY GUIDE For Teachers and Students



Pioneer Theatre Company's Student Matinee Program is made possible through the support of Salt Lake County's Zoo, Arts, and Parks Program, The Simmons Family Foundation, and The Meldrum Foundation Endowment Fund.





SYNOPSIS: *2 Pianos 4 Hands* is the tale of two boys sharing the same goal: concert pianist stardom. They work hard towards their dream amidst pushy parents, eccentric teachers, hours of repetitive practice, stage fright, the agony of competitions and the dream of greatness.

Two actors, two pianos and many characters grace the stage as 15 years of learning the art of piano playing unfolds.

In the beginning each actor plays a younger version of himself while the other becomes the teacher, the adjudicator, the parent. No costume changes – just posture, voice and mannerisms to indicate a new character has entered the scene.

As the boys mature, so does their piano playing. They also become more aware of the gap between the very good and the great – and come to the humbling realization that greatness may be out of reach. Through Ted and Richard, *2 Pianos 4 Hands* captures the humor that comes with learning to play the piano and the difficulty of deciding when, or if, to let go of a dream.

CHARACTERS



TED: A very talented piano player- Richard's friend and rival.

RICHARD: A very talented piano player- Ted's friend and rival.



Meet the Playwrights



**TED
DYKSTRA**

(co-writer)
started playing
piano at age
six and peaked
at age 12,
when he had a
particularly

memorable string of firsts competing in the Edmonton Kiwanis Music Festival. His acting career began at a young age in St. Albert, Alberta, playing the 2nd Bird in *Once Upon A Clothesline*, but his breakout role was Bilbo Baggins in his school's Grade 8 production of *The Hobbit*. Since then he has gone on to play leading roles on every major stage in Canada, often combining his musical skills. He has appeared in dozens of films and TV shows. He has also voiced dozens of cartoon characters.

In 2000 he turned his attention to directing and since has directed many award-winning shows across the country. He has also directed *2 Pianos 4 Hands* across America and in Australia and Hong Kong.

For him, all of the above pales compared to being the proud father of Theo and Rosie and their hamster, Buttercup.

"I enjoyed taking a huge part of my life and sharing it with thousands of strangers. I enjoy playing the piano at a fairly serious level which I've never really done in public since I was 16 in the festival. I enjoy playing the Bach at the end. It's very challenging still. Every time we do the show, we know we have to play an eight-minute Bach piano concerto at the end and that keeps us very much alive..."

The play's also about being really good but not good enough ...Almost all of us have a dream that at some point we realized that it's not going to happen." — **Ted Dykstra**

"I think it's not about failed dreams. It's about understanding the certain endeavors that you were involved in as a young person and that you had dreams of. You know, so few people make it to the NHL. It's one in tens of thousands of all the people who play, but that doesn't mean you don't play hockey. There are all kinds of reasons to continue playing hockey, of course, even as an adult. We're not two of the best piano players in the world but there is a celebration in just being able to play. The music is bigger than any player of it, so even though the greats are great and you can look upon them with awe and with admiration, it doesn't mean that you can't play it and enjoy it yourself." —

Richard Greenblatt

"People see themselves in this show. It's not just about the production; it's about the pursuit of excellence. It's about childhood dreams and confronting our limit. There is lots of commonality in this show." — **Ted Dykstra**

**RICHARD
GREENBLATT**

(co-writer) is
an actor,
director, writer
and musician,
who has been
a professional
theatre artist
for the last 37
years. He was



born in Montreal and studied piano for 10 years with the late Professor Dorothy Morton of the McGill Conservatory of Music.

He received his acting training at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in London, England. Upon graduating, he worked at Leeds Playhouse for a season, returning to Canada in 1975. Since then, he has performed in theatres in Toronto, across Canada, and abroad.

He has directed well over 100 productions for theatres across the country, the vast majority being original and/or Canadian works. He has also directed the premieres of many groundbreaking and award-winning plays for young audiences.

As a writer, he wrote or co-wrote *2 Pianos 4 Hands*, *Sibs*, *The Theory Of Relatives*, *i.d.*, *Letters From Lehrer*, *Care and Soft Pedalling*.

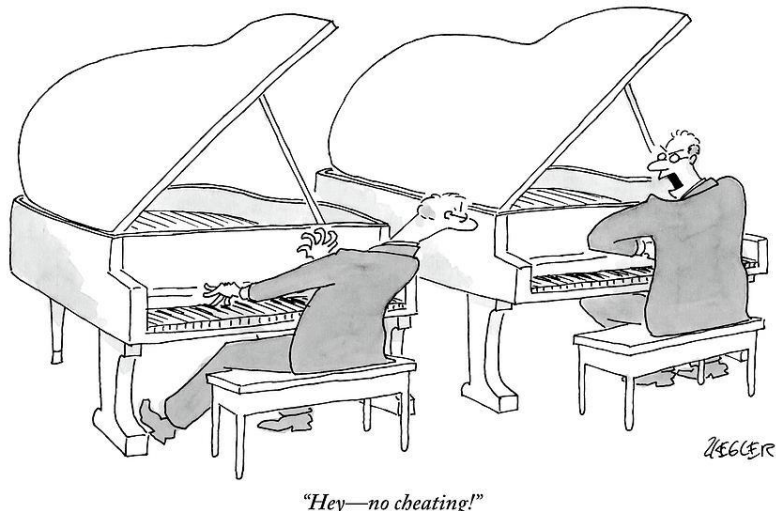
He lives in Toronto with partner Tanya Greve and their daughter, Amelia, and is the proud father of Natasha and Will.

Production History

While performing in a children's play called *So You Think You're Mozart*, playwrights Ted Dykstra and Richard Greenblatt began comparing stories of their piano lesson days. They both trained as classical pianists until age 17 and both eventually quit. Once Tarragon Theatre Associate Artistic Director, Andy McKim, suggested that "maybe there's a show there," they started putting pen to paper and developed *2 Pianos, 4 Hands*.

2 Pianos 4 Hands premiered in April 1996 in Toronto to rave reviews. Immediately following the close of the premiere run in Toronto, Ted and Richard embarked on a national tour. They travelled from coast to coast with the show, stopping back in Toronto for a second run in the fall of 1996 and concluding in September of 1997 at the Vancouver Playhouse.

In October of 1997, *2 Pianos 4 Hands* opened Off Broadway at The Promenade Theatre. The production was widely acclaimed and ran for six months before transferring to the Kennedy Center in Washington in the spring of 1998.



Dykstra (left), Greenblatt (right) in *2 Pianos 4 Hands* (2003). Photo: Robert Bodrog.

Ted and Richard returned to Toronto later that summer and again played to sold-out houses. The show had its European premiere at the Birmingham Rep in the spring of 1999, a production that transferred later that fall to the West End of London. Since then, Ted and Richard have twice reunited to perform in Toronto, twice toured to Japan, and in 2011/12 embarked on a Farewell Tour that included visits to Toronto, Ottawa, Vancouver and Edmonton.

There have been many other productions with other actors, both male and female, with performances in Canada, the US, the UK, Japan, Australia, Hong Kong, South Africa, Austria, Finland and beyond.

ACTIVITY: How do you think music improves our experience at the theatre?

A Few Questions with Ted & Richard

Why do you think this particular play remains so popular with audiences all over the world?

Ted Dykstra: I think it's because people, when they see it, end up wanting very much to talk about themselves—not only “piano” people, people from all walks of life. The story is universally understood, something writers always like to believe is true of their work, but seldom achieve: It's lightning in a bottle...

Richard Greenblatt: Several reasons: For me, it's a reiteration of a long-held belief I try to practice rigorously, which is that specificity is the only way to communicate widely to an audience. Ted and I tried to tell a very specific story based on our experiences growing up as piano nerds, and as soon as we started performing it, people would come up to us and tell us *their* stories, whether it was about music, or a sport, or whatever dream they had in their youth. Most everybody has similar desires, and they plug their experience into our tale, which I think is the definition of successful storytelling. And we were willing and able to combine it with our absurd senses of humour, the pathos in our journeys, as well as playing challenging, beautiful music. So, it's a pretty full evening. The lasting image of celebrating two of the best in the neighbourhood is an inclusive concept, I think. It's both thought-provoking and life-affirming at the same time.

Can each of you tell us about a moment from the *2P4H* experience that stands out in your mind?

RG: It's hard to pick just one moment from a 26-year journey. There were many moments from Japan which were memorable, such as when we first performed there and were totally convinced that they were perplexed and bored, but they were in fact loving it, just giggling into their hands and being totally silent in order not to miss anything. Openings in new countries, like New York or London were always pretty amazing – in many different ways. For me, it was mostly when someone would tell us that they had had a traumatic break from the piano as teenagers, which we were told quite often. They told us they had not touched the instrument for many years, but after seeing the show and laughing at so much, as well as experiencing the cathartic emotions of our story, they were anxious to start playing again. That

was always extremely gratifying to me.

TD: There really are too many. I was very moved this time around on opening when we entered at the top to bow and people cheered for us so loud that it overwhelmed me. That was so nice. I mean we're so lucky to have had this happen to us, and to still have an audience.

Was there a favorite city for you? A favorite run of the play?

RG: I'd have to say there was something about Regina that was just so cool. We were doing the show in the round [at the Globe Theatre] and it seemed impossible to even imagine the idea of having the audience all around you. Yet, the show [was] so successful there. I think we added a couple of minutes per act because people would just keep on laughing and laughing.

Would you say you play more or less piano at home, and what percentage of it is classical music?

TD: I'd say that I play classical music very rarely even since the show. No matter how hard I practice, some pieces I'll never be able to play. I want immediate satisfaction. I don't want to have to work at a beautiful piece of music in order to play it. So I will only play something I know or studied as a kid so it's a lot of the same material. [They laugh.] I still write music for the theatre and I like all of the samplers that I have and



Ted Dykstra (left), Richard Greenblatt (right) in 2 Pianos 4 Hands

A Few Questions with Ted & Richard (cont.)

the drum machine. Thank God my kids are playing now. Because [my daughter] plays violin — Paganini, Clementi— I'm accompanying her and I'm playing duets with my son.

Do you think you're any better as piano players?

RG: Totally. We're still not two of the best in the world but we play better than we ever have. After this amount of time, there's a relaxation to it. Acting is so much about experience and about trusting how little you really have to do on stage, doing your homework and then just being there. I think the same thing is true of any art form, including music.

Do you think doing the show has changed your approach to acting?

TD: I think it keeps confirming what I've learned which is about keeping it fresh and that it's just not an option to phone in a performance. I feel it especially in this piece, I don't know why ...

RG: Maybe because we wrote it.

TD: I think we care more about it than if it were someone else's words. The great thing about being an artist of any kind is you really do improve the longer that you're at it. ...Our glory days are still 10, 20 years ahead of us, almost seems like always.



GREAT CROWD-SURF MISJUDGMENTS

2 Pianos 4 Hands is the story of two young students who dream of making it big as concert pianists. Ted and Richard both deal with teachers, mentors, parents and friends who influence them along their journey.

What exactly is a Mentor?

A mentor is someone who provides guidance, support, and advice to a less experienced individual, known as a mentee. Mentors are typically more knowledgeable or experienced in a particular area and are willing to share their expertise to help the mentee grow and develop. A mentor can be a valuable resource for personal and professional development, offering insight, encouragement, and constructive feedback. Whether in a formal or informal setting, a mentor plays a crucial role in helping others reach their full potential.

ACTIVITY:

- What does being a mentor mean to you?
- Do you currently have a mentor? If so, who are they and how did they fill this role? If you do not have a mentor, write who could fill this role and why they are someone you wish to be a mentor.
- Are you a mentor for anyone else?

<https://mentorloop.com/blog/what-a-mentor-is-and-isnt/>

The History of the Piano

Many other stringed and keyboard instruments preceded the piano and led to the development of the instrument as we know it today.

Our knowledge that a taut, vibrating string can produce sound goes back to prehistoric times. In the ancient world, strings were attached and stretched over bows, gourds, and boxes to amplify the sound; they were fastened by ties, pegs and pins; and they were plucked, bowed or struck to produce sounds.

Eventually, a family of stringed instruments with a keyboard evolved in Europe in the 14th century. The earliest of these was a dulcimer, a closed, shallow box over which stretched wires were struck with two wooden hammers. The dulcimer led to the development of the clavichord, which also appeared in the 14th century. These were followed by the spinet, virginal, clavecin, gravicembalo, and finally, the harpsichord in the 15th century.

The harpsichord, however, was limited to one, unvarying volume. Its softness and loudness could not be varied while playing. Therefore, performing artists could not convey the same degree of musical expression as that of most other instruments. The artistic desire for more controlled expression led directly to the invention of the piano, on which the artist could alter the loudness and tone with the force of one's fingers.



*This example is an 18th century French harpsichord.
(Photo courtesy Michael Meacock)*

The harpsichord was a particularly important development leading to the invention of the piano. Its ability to project sound more loudly than earlier variations and refinements in its response to touch or “action” inspired many more musicians to compose for the keyboard and to perform those keyboard works.

The story of the piano begins in Padua, Italy, in 1709, in the shop of a harpsichord maker named Bartolomeo di Francesco Cristofori (1655-1731). Cristofori's new instrument was named *gravicembalo col piano e forte* (roughly “soft and loud keyboard instrument”). Eventually, it was shortened to *fortepiano* or *pianoforte* and, finally, just *piano*. His earliest surviving instrument dates from 1720 and is on display at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City.



Cristofori's gravicembalo col piano e forte

Despite many improvements during the past 300 years, it is truly astonishing to observe how similar Cristofori's instruments are to the modern piano of today.

The Piano

An acoustic piano usually has a protective wooden case, surrounding the soundboard and metal strings, and a row of 88 black and white keys (52 white, 36 black). The instrument's strings are sounded when the keys are pressed and silenced when the keys are released. The note can be sustained, even when the keys are released, by the use of pedals.

Behind the Keys

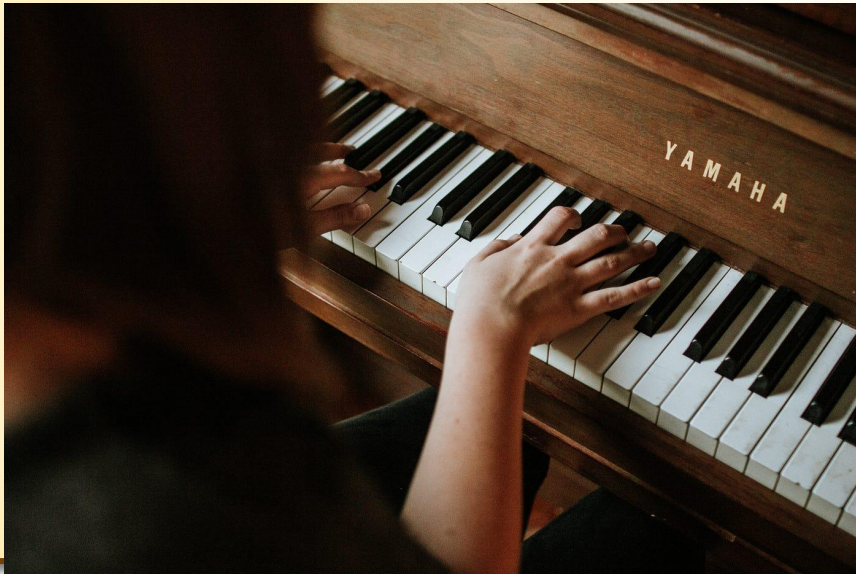
Pressing a key on the piano's keyboard causes a felt padded hammer to strike strings. The hammer rebounds, and the strings continue to vibrate at their resonant frequency. These vibrations are transmitted through a bridge to a soundboard that helps amplify the sound. When the key is released, a damper stops the strings' vibration, ending the sound. Although an acoustic piano has strings, it is usually classified as a percussion instrument because the strings are struck rather than

plucked (as with a harpsichord). With technological advances, electric, electronic, and digital pianos have also been developed.

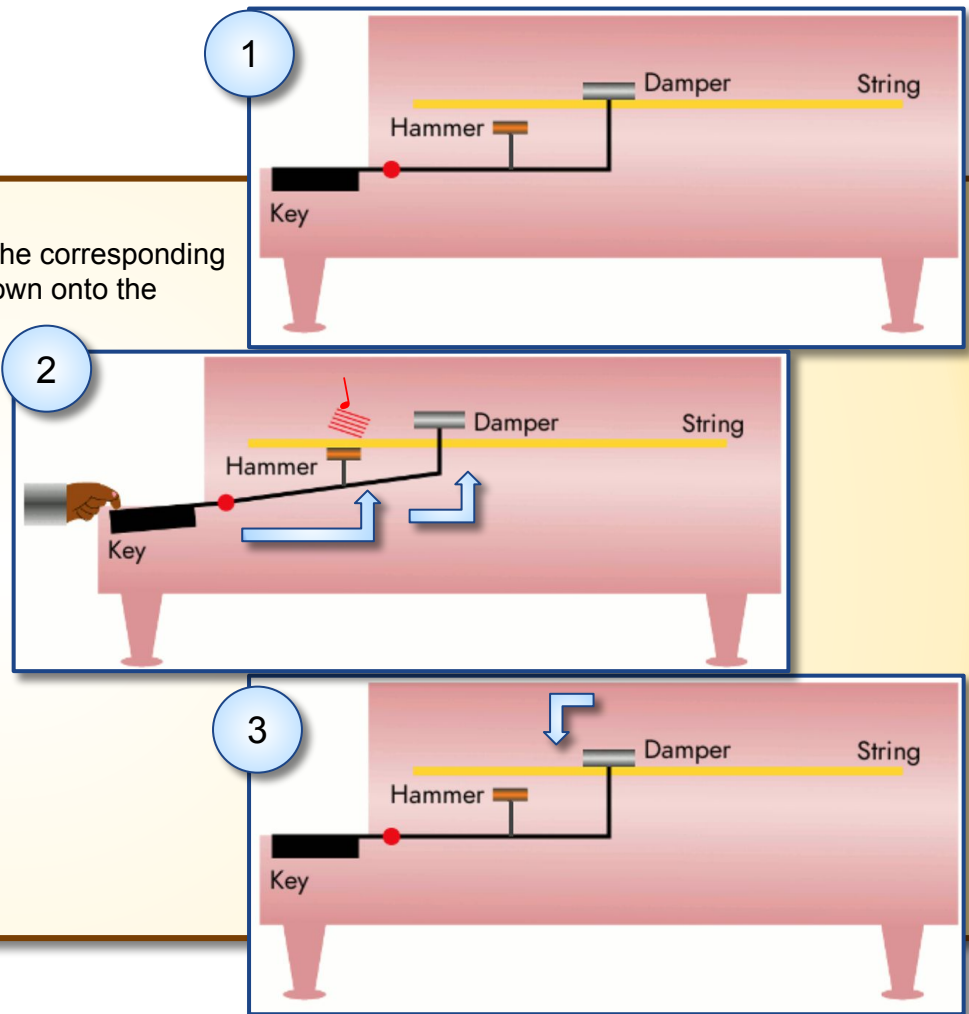
The word piano is a shortened form of pianoforte, the Italian word for the instrument- which came from the previous terms *gravicembalo col piano e forte* and *fortepiano*. The Italian musical terms *piano* and *forte* indicate "soft" and "strong" respectively, referring to the variations in volume the instrument based on a pianist's touch on the keys: the greater the velocity of a key press, the greater the force of the hammer hitting the strings and the louder the sound of the note produced.

How A Piano Works

Press down on a key and you make a small hammer shoot up and strike the corresponding strings from beneath. Release the key and the damper at the back falls down onto the strings, stopping the note.



<https://www.explainthatstuff.com/piano.html>
https://www.wctlive.ca/docs/2p4h_study_guide.pdf



Where Could Music Take You?

Studying music helps develop essential job skills like critical thinking, collaboration, presentation, and responsibility. But there are also actual jobs connected to music? Here are just a few:

Performing

- Orchestra Musician
- Freelance Musician
- Live Band
- Theatrical Ensemble
- Opera
- Musical Theatre Actor
- Singer/Songwriter
- DJ
- Accompanist
- Background Singer
- Conductor
- Cruise Ship Musician

Composing

- Film Composer
- Arranger/Orchestrator
- Sound Designer
- Songwriter
- Game Music Composer
- Jingle Writer
- Lyricist

Education

- Private Instructor / Tutor
- University Instructor/ Professor
- School Teacher
- Instrument Instructor
- Voice Teacher
- Choir Director
- Recruitment

Entrepreneurship

- Record Label Owner
- Promoter
- Project Manager
- Business Owner
- Manufacturer
- Agent / Manager
- Concert Venue Manager
- Music Producer

Publishing & Media

- Radio Producer
- Talent Scout
- TV & Film Music Producer
- Music Licensing
- Digital Distributor
- Creative Director
- Music Journalist
- Music Critic
- Editor
- Engraver / Copyist

Music Therapy

- Speech and Language
- Private Practitioner
- Wellbeing Lead

Marketing

- Content Creator
- Project Manager
- Researcher
- Analyst
- Social Media Manager

Engineering

- Instrument Builder / Repair
- Piano Tuner / Technician
- Acoustic Designer
- Live Sound Engineer
- Mastering Engineer
- Recording Engineer
- Sound Operator
- Mixing Engineer
- Product Designer

CAREERS IN MUSIC

Does Practice Really Make Perfect?

What creates the difference between expert and amateur performance? Can anyone become an elite athlete or professional musician with enough practice, or is genetic talent the deciding factor?

Actually, the answer to this question has been the subject of considerable research. A landmark 1993 study suggested that practice accounted for about 80% of the difference between elite performance and amateur performance.

These findings led to the popular notion of the "10,000-hour rule," or the idea that it takes 10,000 hours of practice to become an expert. But another major study challenged the idea that anyone can become an expert with enough practice.

How Much Does Practice Matter?

In that study, which appeared in *Psychological Science* in 2014, researchers analyzed the results of 88 different studies of practice and performance in numerous areas including music, sports, education, professions, and games. All of these studies looked at people who were learning a new skill.

The researchers looked at factors including how much the people practiced and how good they eventually became at the new skill. Just how big of a role did practice really play?

Unsurprisingly, practicing a new skill *does* have an important role in the learning process. However, the researchers found that practice alone only accounted for an average of 12% of individual differences in performance across various skills.

Yes, practice accounted for 26% of the difference in games, 21% in music, and 18% for sports. But when it came to education and professions, practice made far less of a difference, with just 4% of the difference given to practice in the domain of education and less than 1% for professions.

Other Contributing Factors

So if practice is only one piece of the puzzle, what other factors contribute to learning and skill development? A few of the things that

might be important include your overall intelligence, how early you start learning a new skill, your memory capacity, and natural born talent.

While the age-old saying suggests practice makes perfect, researchers have found practice alone doesn't necessarily lead to success. Instead, experts suggest the *right kind* of practice is what really matters when trying to optimize learning and increase skills.

Although hands-on experience is often said to be the only way to learn a new skill, it leaves out another very important type of rehearsal—mental practice.

Mental practice involves imagining the procedures you must go through to perform a task. For example, a pianist might mentally practice a piece of music while an actor might mentally go over their lines in a play.

One 2008 study found that medical students who combined mental practice with hands-on experience did better when performing real surgery than those who had only relied on physical practice and textbook reading.

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"How expensive would it be to just skip practice and get right to perfect?"

Does Practice Really Make Perfect? (cont.)

Best Way to Practice

Researchers have also found that the way a person practices influences how well a skill is learned. In a 2013 study, a team of researchers analyzed data collected from more than 850,000 participants as the players learned new skills playing an online game called "Axon."

In the game, players guide a neuron from one connection to the next by clicking on possible targets. The purpose is to test how well participants take in information and make decisions as well as how quickly they act.

What the researchers were interested in when looking at the game, however, was what kind of effect practice had on game performance. And they noticed some players, who practiced the same amount as others, displayed much higher scores than the rest.

By analyzing the data, the researchers were able to see that these high-scoring players had spaced out their playing sessions more, suggesting that they spent more time investigating how the game worked than the lower-scoring players. These spaced-out explorations early on paid off in better performance as the players became more skilled.

How to Make the Most of Practice

So how can you practice in a way that will effectively foster skill development? Here are some tips for making your practice count.

- Spend time early on becoming familiar with the process and tools you need to perform the skill.
- Vary your practice sessions early on to help maintain interest and enjoyment.
- Be courageous and don't be afraid to make mistakes; research has shown that optimal learning often requires making errors.
- Remember that exploration is an important part of learning any new skill.

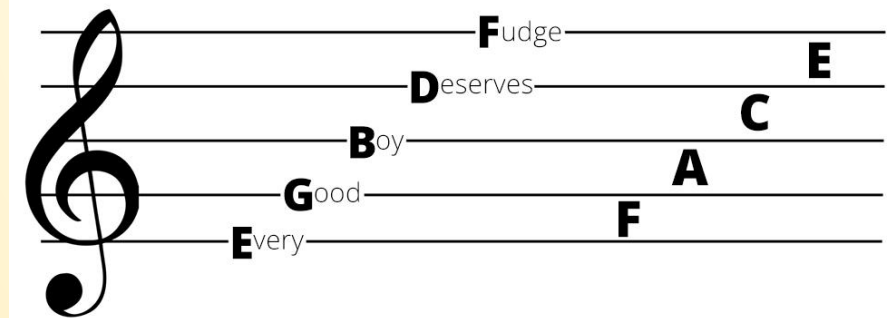
While practice might not necessarily make your skills perfect, it certainly is still an important piece of the learning puzzle. By balancing methods that include mental rehearsal, hands-on practice, exploration, and other forms of learning, you can optimize skill development and become a more efficient learner. Becoming an elite expert in any area takes years, but practice is really just one piece of the puzzle.

Reading Music

Music is written on a staff (or stave) which is a set of five straight lines. This is read and then sung or played by an instrumentalist. Notes can sit right on a line or in the spaces between the lines.

Musical notes are placed on the five lines and four spaces of the staff. Each line and space represents a different musical pitch. The lowest notes are at the bottom of the staff, and the highest notes are at the top. This helps musicians quickly see how high or low a note should sound. Each line and space has an assigned note shown in the picture below. A note placed on the bottom line would be considered an E note.

Simple tricks can be used to help people remember the order of notes on the staff. Looking at the lines and going from the bottom to the top, you might remember the order of **EGBDF** by using the phrase **Every Good Boy Deserves Fudge**. You can simply use the word **FACE** to remember the order of the space notes.

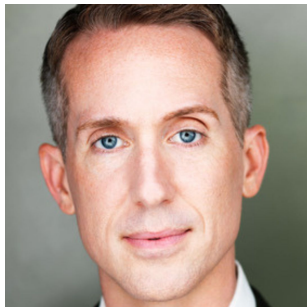


The higher a note is placed on the staff, the higher its pitch (how high or low it sounds). For example, if you look at the white keys on a piano, each note (like A, B, C, D) goes higher up the staff. It moves from a line to a space, then to the next line, and so on.

Meet the Cast

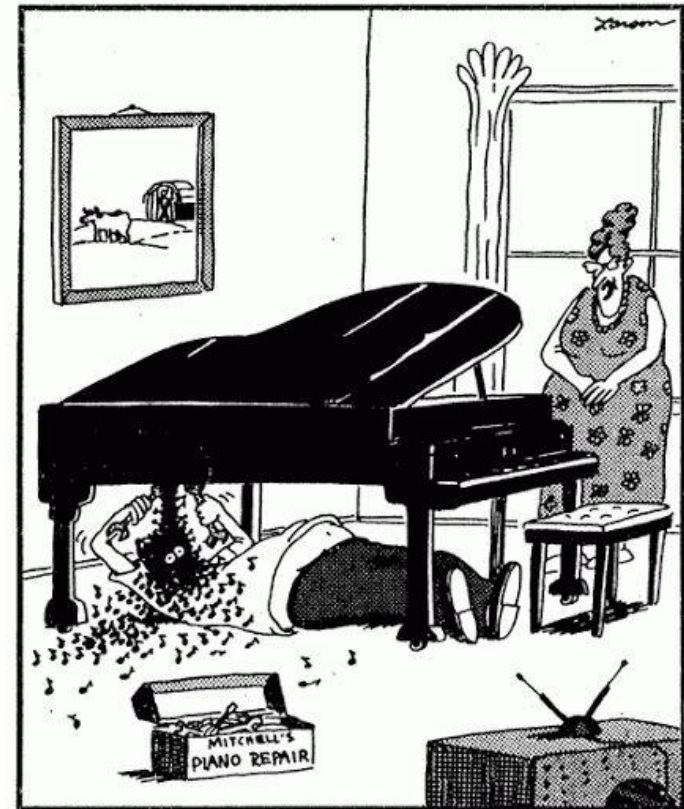


RICHARD TODD ADAMS* (Ted) has had a long history with 2 *Pianos 4 Hands*, having first appeared as Ted in 2001. He's thrilled to make his Pioneer Theatre Company debut after performing the show throughout the United States and Canada. He was last seen on Broadway in the 2016 revival of *Cats*, where he was the standby for Old Deuteronomy and Gus/Bustopher Jones. Richard is one of a handful of actors around the world to have portrayed both the Phantom and Raoul in *The Phantom of the Opera*, and Jean Valjean and Javert in *Les Misérables*. He made his Broadway debut in Andrew Lloyd Webber's *The Woman in White* and a year later appeared in Boubli and Schoenberg's *The Pirate Queen*. He won the Jeff Award for his portrayal of Javert in Chicago's Marriott Lincolnshire Theatre production of *Les Misérables*. Regionally, he has starred in *Jekyll & Hyde*, *The Scarlet Pimpernel*, *Ragtime*, *Showboat*, *1776*, *Man of La Mancha*, and *Billy Bishop Goes to War*. Richard received his Bachelors of Music from Trinity University in San Antonio, TX, and his Masters in Music from The Juilliard School. He has sung with symphonies in Cleveland, Naples, Indianapolis, Pittsburgh, Ottawa, Edmonton, Vancouver, and Raleigh. For more, please visit www.RichardToddAdams.com.



MATTHEW MCGLOIN* (Richard) believes in the power of live theatre to connect and heal, and he's honored to reunite with Tom Frey and Richard Todd Adams for this show. He has previously been seen here at PTC in *Agatha Christie's Murder on the Orient Express* and *Prayer for the French Republic*. TV: *Law & Order*, Investigation Discovery, History Channel. NY/OFF BROADWAY: Prospect Theater Company/59E59, The Cell, HERE Arts, Ars Nova, Tectonic Theater Project, Abingdon Theatre Company, Dixon Place, The Brick, BMI, The Lark. REGIONAL: Alabama Shakespeare Festival, Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park, Northlight Theatre, Mayfield Theatre, Laguna Playhouse, North Coast Repertory Theatre, American Stage/Jannus Live, Peterborough Players, Repertory Theatre St. Louis, Wellfleet Harbor Actors Theater, Triad Stage, Signature Theatre, Olney Theatre Center, Folger Theatre, The Kennedy Center, Virginia Shakespeare Festival. BFA Acting, UMBC. www.matthewmcgloin.com // @jackie_of_all_traits *For Helen, always...

ACTIVITY: Can you determine the name of each of the notes that are shown here in the beginning of the song, "Ring Around the Rosie?"



"Oh, this is so exciting! You know, no one's played this thing for years!"