

Musiskill 102 Magic Hand

It's useful to have done Musithink 103 before you tackle this. That introduces you to the idea of arranging notes onto a ladder in pitch order.

You'll learn to relate the first 5 notes of a scale to your fingers and sing them confidently and accurately in any order

Understanding the idea will only take a moment: mastering the skill is a different matter. Practise for a couple of minutes every day. It's another apparently childlike activity – but absolutely invaluable. Once you can sing the first 5 notes of the scale fluently in any order you are well on the way to reading pitch with confidence. It's fun if you have a young child to play it with.

1. It's usually most comfortable to use the hand you write with for playing your fingers. Your other hand will be the “magic” one, the one with fingers that make notes.

Arrange your magic hand so the thumb is upmost and your fingers are a little bit spread. Sing the first bit of “Frère Jacques”. As you sing the first note, touch your little finger – that's the lowest as long as you have your thumb on top. As you sing the second note, touch the next finger and as you sing the third, touch your middle finger. Remember, the tune goes back to the little finger for the fourth note.

2. If this is to be as useful as it can be, you need to really relate each of those fingers to their notes. Imagine that touching the finger is linked to your vocal cords, so it makes you produce the right pitch. Or even that each finger can sing.

Work with just those three fingers, which give you the first 3 notes of the scale. Establish the 3 pitches again with the “*Frère Jac*” pattern.

Now point at the middle finger first, and move down by step to the little finger. You've just sung down the first 3 notes of the scale. They are the first 3 notes of a nursery rhyme – you should spot it if you do them twice over. Remember to point and think – don't relapse into just singing.

3. Practise moving up and down the 3 notes. Sometimes touch one finger several times so you stay on the same note. Try jumping between your little finger and your middle finger. When you feel ready, touch the 3 fingers in a random order, singing the notes. (If you have a child you can persuade to join in, they touch your fingers to make them play)

4. Now life gets more interesting. You're going to bring in your index finger and thumb. That'll give you 5 notes. A lot more scope – and a lot more challenge.

Check out the pitches by singing the first two bits of “Frère Jacques”, or just sing up and down the first 5 notes of a scale.

Your aim is to be able to sing from any finger to any other finger accurately. Steps are easier than jumps. Make up patterns. If you get lost with the pitch, go back to singing up the 5 notes of the scale. You'll probably need to spend quite a bit of time over several days doing this.

5. Work out the the finger sequence for these tunes:

“Jingle Bells” – you can do the whole of the chorus. Start on your middle finger.

“Merrily We Roll Along”. This one also starts on the middle finger.

“Half a Pound of Tuppenny Rice”. Start on little finger. You can do everything except the pop!

“Doe a Deer” Start on the little finger. You can get as far as “*far a*” before you run out of fingers.