

Music Education Network - for The Visually Impaired -

An International Coalition of Parents, Educators, and Students

- MENVI Headquarters -

Southern California Conservatory of Music – PO Box 408, Burbank, CA 91503

Phone: (818) 704-3819; E-mail: <richardtaesch@menvi.org>

Website: www.menvi.org

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MENVI

- More on Hieroglyphic Braille; Piano Teaching & Music Braille; Online News; More ...

MORE ON “HIEROGLYPHIC” BRAILLE

The question sometimes arises as to why some transcribers prefer to braille their files with direct six-key entry, while others use automatic translation followed with manual formatting and proofreading. Personal preference seems to prevail in most cases; some may choose direct entry if it is more efficient for them, others may use automation where vigilant code awareness is distracting, or may prove troublesome for them.

As to proofreading, there is no escape no matter which method you use – errors are errors, and can occur in everyone’s work. The article on proofing one’s braille with the computer ASCII text verses actual reading of the on-screen braille brought this wonderful article by Richard Dortch, President of *Valley Braille Service*. (www.valleybraille.com).

PRESS RELEASE:

“In reading the article in the last MENVI News Journal concerning reading ASCII, we at Valley Braille Service train our transcribers to read braille in ASCII, as well as with dots.

“This system seems to be faster for proofreading, and once ASCII is learned it is definitely more efficient and saves a great deal of time. Most of our Nemeth [mathematics code] transcribers read their work in ASCII and find it quicker to proof their work. Some of our literary/textbook transcribers can even type in ASCII without using the six-key method. When I do braille music, I six-key, but it’s all done in ASCII. I use MegaDots™ braille [transcription / translation] program for this purpose, and have modified a style sheet for music.

“At the beginning of learning ASCII, it may seem difficult, but once it is mastered, you will save time; and time is money!”

Richard Dortch, Chairman of the Board,
Valley Braille Service, Inc.

[Editorial Commentary:]

Thank you, Richard, for this very enlightening and interesting information! I would like to add the following to perhaps broaden this great discussion (Members, send us your thoughts too):

As has been said before, the overshadowing accent in our field has been on the issue of transcribing, and less on the educating of readers to understand what we transcribe. More music transcribers have been certified by The Library of Congress in recent years than ever before in the history of the NLS program. Such a welcome turnaround is due largely to two significant factors: (1) Our highly efficient transcriber training program headed by Karen Gearreald; (2) The dramatic and unprecedented upswing in a demand for music braille literacy in most schools and colleges in the United States and abroad. This upswing is clearly augmented by technology for increased braille production (direct or automated), and the contributions in assistive software such as the *Goodfeel™* translation program, aiding those who may not be braillists.

Unfortunately, the training of music braille educators has not kept pace with transcriber training and increased production. There is certification for braillists, textbook specialists, Nemeth specialists, and all braille codes – but no certification of any kind exists to help train those who teach the special language of music braille.

As a lifelong educator, my personal preference for direct entry transcription is simply that of placing myself continuously in the braille environment by viewing the same medium as the braille reader. In this way, I can improve communication and develop curriculum more effectively. My eyes see what the reader’s fingers see.

Diversification is essential to upgrading and improving state of the art in all fields. Thank you Richard, Andy, Karen, and to all of our specialists laboring daily to make this a better world for our braille readers!

- R. Taesch [Ed.]

TRIVIA FORUM:

True or False: The name *braille* / *Braille* must always be used with a capital “B.” [Headquarters vote: False!]

This one brings some heated discussions.

However, unless the word *braille* is used as Louie’s proper name, at the beginning of a sentence, or as part of a formal entity or product, to use the cap with respect to braille in general, would seem as grammatically incorrect as to use a capital “P” whenever the word “print” appears. Example: “*Music braille is similar to Print music.*” (Opinions?)

True or False: The term “News Journal” is an attempt to create a sophisticated image for what is really just another (yawn) newsletter.

Webster’s definition indicates that a *periodical* is simply published at regular intervals. A *journal* is defined as “*any newspaper or periodical dealing with scientific or professional matters.*” Since our MENVI news contains actual technical articles by authors and not only news, it is well defined as a “*News Journal.*”

EXCITING NEW PRODUCTS

Following is an article contributed by our MENVI specialist, Mr. Bill McCann:

High-tech Help for Low Vision Musicians
The Lime Lighter from Dancing Dots
By Bill McCann

As I myself am a blind musician, it is no surprise that my company, Dancing Dots, has focused first on developing and adapting music technology to benefit musicians who use braille and speech as their primary communication methods. Using braille, verbal and/or musical cues, our customers can read and write music and independently produce audio recordings.

But over the years, many people have asked us about developing solutions for low vision musicians: people whose primary reading medium is large print. At last, we have something to offer low vision players. We have spent the past three years developing a solution that should help many low vision people to read print music more easily. See announcement enclosed for details and links to our webpage and YouTube demo.

People with low vision have used different approaches to get access to the information in the music they want to perform or study. Using a hand-held magnifier, CCTV, enlarged photocopies---all of these methods are still certainly viable options. It turns out that low vision performers, like totally blind players like me, tend to

memorize their music, as it is often impossible to read while playing. With The Lime Lighter, we have actually enabled some low vision performers to sight-read their music; that is, read while playing the music thus removing the necessity to memorize. Of course, using The Lime Lighter is also an excellent approach to practice and study.

The magnified notation appears on the 20-inch diagonal screen. Choose your zoom level up to 10 times the original size. Press the right side of the pedal to advance one measure at a time or the left control to move back by measure. Press center control to move to beginning of piece or, if the current measure is within a repeated section, move to start of repeat. Mark your score with the special stylus provided. Your markings can be saved for future use.

You have the option to use Lime Lighter with third-party text magnification software such as ZoomText and MAGic or the built-in magnification features of Windows. Advanced musicians can even use Lime Lighter to write and revise music notation. A copy of the SharpEye Music Reader music OCR software is also included so that you can scan in [the] pieces you want to play or study.

Dancing Dots thanks our friends at the Lighthouse Music School in Manhattan, who served as a test site for The Lime lighter. This new device is already helping low vision musicians to “know the score.” One customer was overcome with emotion when he saw the music notation clearly, something he had not experienced for many years since losing his vision. As a technology developer, just one moment like that makes it all worthwhile!

Bill McCann, President and Founder of
Dancing Dots – www.dancingdots.com

FREE STUFF FOR LEARNING!

Remember that the guidebook for blind college students is available for free on our website at: www.menvi.org. *A Blind Music Student’s College Survival Guide* is available as a free download, and is in a Word doc format. Those considering college, or simply looking for information to pass on to professors and administrators, may find this little book useful as an informative handout. It can also be used to “educate your educators” on the special considerations required for a successful college experience. It is intended for both students and their teachers, and inspired by real life situations. Contributions include those of administrators and teachers from colleges and universities.

TEACHING EARLY PIANO FORMATS TO A BLIND STUDENT ... *Continued*

Article adapted from *CTEBVI Journal (formerly CTEVH)*, Fall 2009 – with permission

CTEBVI stands for *California Transcribers and Educators of the Blind and Visually Impaired*. It is open for membership to all who are interested in the educational welfare of blind individuals. www.ctebvi.org

A wonderful intermediary step in the process of developing braille piano skills is that of duets, canons, and piano ensemble groups. They can be quite fun, and encourage social participation among students. Those who may not be comfortable performing in solo recital programs may find duets and trios to be quite possible, and for some, this activity can provide a gentle first experience for performing in front of an audience. Let's look at some ideas on how we might go about some group projects, while encouraging progress in the perplexing skill of learning and playing music with two hands.

A suggestion is to first learn a simple braille part well enough to play at a slow steady tempo without hesitating or breaking pace. It is also helpful to memorize short – one and two-measure – sections before attempting to perform the piece with an additional part. But first, use simple exercises such as found in “*Introduction to the Piano for the Blind Student*,” Graded Studies Book 1 (www.dancingdots.com). Assign the right hand part to your student, while you create a duet by playing the left hand part. In this way, the student must learn to accurately count the rests and measures for one part at a time. The student will read and play through an entire right hand part while you both *rehearse* as an ensemble.

If the student seems impatient with the process, try making comparisons to pop bands that must rehearse a performance many times before a successful public appearance. Children and adults often find identity by relating their work to popular music interests; don't use the word “practice,” for duet and group work; try using the term “*rehearsal*” instead.

Let's take the process to a demonstration in two simple steps:

Step One:

Here is the first of a two-part canon. We'll create a duet from Part I, and then progress to teach both hands. Later when the student is comfortable with hands together, we'll then add the teacher's Part II.

Hand Position: C five-finger

Canon Part I

13 a

Student right hand part:

Teacher left hand:

Take careful note of the finger numbers highlighted in the braille music facsimile. These were introduced in our Spring 2009 article. Remember to have your student read ahead, and to perhaps recite the notation in simple solfege before trying to play it; a sample oral recitative for measures one and two follows:

Do, 1 (*finger*) – sol – fa – sol flat mi – fa – sol, hold (*quarter note*), etc.

A fingering review for the piano:

- Thumb (1) = ♩
- Index (2) = ♩
- Middle (3) = ♩
- Ring (4) = ♩ (dot 2)
- Pinky (5) = ♩

Step Two:

Now we assemble both hands by memorizing only the first four measures of Part I; play the same part along with your student until it is error-free. If the student stumbles during the memory process, encourage him or her to read while playing, and to gain skill in switching from hand to hand. Remember that once the second four measures are approached, two hands will be required at measures 7 & 8.

Once the student can perform the first four measures correctly with both hands, accompany him or her by playing your Part II while you both *rehearse ONLY* the first four measures of both parts.

Canon Part II

Once four measures have been successfully rehearsed and are ready for the recording studio, complete the remaining four measures in the same way.

LOOK WHAT'S NEW FOR BRAILLE MUSIC READERS!

Christina Davidson and Karen Gearreald are pleased to announce a new resource for braille music literacy: ***HAPPY FINGERS: Easy Songs for Braille Music Readers, Book 1***. Dedicated to Louis Braille and Bettye Krolick, this new book presents the words and melody for ten public-domain songs. Permission for use is granted to all who promote braille music literacy. Sales in any format are strictly prohibited. These files are available as free downloads from www.ctdcreations.com

Is your membership roster information up to date?

Be sure to fill out an updated application online, or ask Jared to fax one to you

NEWS JUST FOR ONLINE MEMBERS

Online news for News Journal 32

By Jared Rimer

Well, it's another online edition from Jared Rimer. Some news of importance for this issue includes phone notification, and website updates. Lets get started:

The first item is phone call notifications. In our last issue, I indicated that we would call a member only once, and then it was up to you. Since Roster 14 was released, management feels that it is no longer possible for the web services to be calling anyone. We have had some bounces coming back since the mailing of roster 14. The roster now includes reminders for members to keep their information updated. If you bounce, contact information must be removed from the pertinent database and list, and networking consequently becomes unavailable to you.

My second concern is regarding website issues. On October 21, 2010, the website and our associated services moved to a different server. We're not sure why, but I can happily report that there was no data loss. The Downloads section does need the new roster files added, and yours truly will see to that shortly. We are considering the possibility of discontinuing this service, as it is not all that popular. It will, however, remain in service until a decision can be made. For those who have accounts on the private download section, try checking back after November 8th for copies of roster 14.

In other news, I would like to start a *Twitter* account specific to this network. Folks can communicate with us through Twitter, and we can post website updates. This would eventually replace the *What's New* page, as updates can become available in *real-time*. Should the site be "down," subscribers of Twitter may obtain real-time updates on its status from our MENVI Staff.

That's all for now; please contact me through our website if you have questions or concerns. www.menvi.org

Jared Rimer - MENVI Webmaster

Need to reach us directly?

Call toll-free at: **866-824-7876**

MENVI Specialists Committee

Band Music/Director - Rick Coates,
Band & Music Technology - The Governor
Morehead School - coatesncr@earthlink.net
rick.coates@ncmail.net

Braille Piano Music Library Resources - Stephanie Pieck,
Concert Pianist; Braille Music Instructor for New
York Commission for the Blind and Visually
Handicapped themusicsuite@verizon.net

Braille Music Textbooks and Formats - Ed Godfrey,
Braille Program Assistant, Washington Talking
Book
and Braille Library, Seattle - ed@wtbbl.org

College/University Disabled Student Services -
1. Jeff Senge, Cal State University, Fullerton
jsenge@exchange.fullerton.edu
2. Mary Ann Cummins-Prager, Cal State University,
Northridge - CSUN
mary.ann.cummins-prager@csun.edu

Electronic Music and VI Computer Music Arts - David
Pinto,
VI Computer Composition - pinto@tvimusic.org

International Braille Music Code - Mrs. Bettye Krolick -
Compiler, *New International Manual of Braille
Music Notation* - Retired

Large Print - Joan Hudson-Miller, Consultant - *Library
Reproduction Service (LRS)* - lrsjhm@aol.com

Music Transcriber Training and Certification - Karen
Gearreald, Braille Music Advisor/Instructor for The
Library of Congress, Washington DC -
karen118@cox.net

National Braille Association - Lawrence Smith, former
Chairman - NBA Music Committee -
musicbrl@earthlink.net

Postsecondary Braille Music Literacy & Advocacy -
Valerie Gaer-Sandler M.M., Postsecondary
Education Specialist vgaer@msn.com

Professional Transcriber Software and Technology -
Robert Stepp, President of Computer Application
Specialties Company (*ED-IT PC; Braille 2000*)

Student Certification (Practical/Theory Examinations) -
Grant Horrocks, L.A. Chair - Los Angeles
Examination Center (formerly RCM); SCCM Piano
& Braille Music Division siloti@sbcglobal.net

VI Computer Assisted Technology
1. Sam Flores, President of Opus Technologies
samf@opustec.com
2. William McCann, President of Dancing Dots
Technology bill@dancingdots.com

MENVI ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Karen Gearreald

Bill McCann

Jared Rimer (MENVI Webmaster)

Stephanie Pieck

Jacob Sexton (MENVI Assistant Webmaster)

Robert Smith

Maureen Carole Young