



CyberConservatory

Using SuperScore to Develop Fluent Reading Skills

Ach, du Lieber Augustin

German
arranged by Paul Sheffel

Schnell

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Page 1 of 1

Play Mode: Normal Tempo: 100% (160 bpm)



Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Paul's Protocol	4
Introduction to SuperScore	5
Paul's Protocol with SuperScore	6
Recommended Reading Materials	7

Introduction

The experienced musician has many cognitive resources that enable the fluent reading of music, such as the understanding of basic structures, scales, intervals, chords, and the like. The experienced musician also has deep familiarity with rhythmic combinations. Needless to say, the experienced musician has no problem with note recognition.

This knowledge is brought into play as the musician reads a score, processes the visual information, and plays the music with relative ease in real time. (Of course there are notable differences among experienced players, some having more technical facility than others.)

The novice reader, however, is only beginning to acquire this musical vocabulary. Therefore, before attempting to sight read—or as some say, sight play—a certain amount of pre-reading investigation is to be encouraged.

Much as I exhort my students to adhere to a step-by-step approach, I often find that they proceed in a more slapdash fashion that often leads to both a faulty and jerky performance as well as considerable frustration.

I have therefore constructed a sort of protocol—a detailed road map to help engender a smoother and more efficient effort.

This protocol includes initial steps that can be applied to both paper and digital scores. The protocol additionally takes advantage of modern technologies, utilizing various features of the SuperScore app on the iPad.

Obviously one size does not fit all; some players may not need to follow all of these steps. Some may be omitted, and some may need to be amplified. When used as a road map, I have found this protocol to be significantly effective in promoting efficient reading skills.

Paul Sheftel with George F. Litterst

January 2022

Paul's Protocol

Pre-Reading (pre-SuperScore)

Be sure to linger on each step as needed.

1. **Understand the Key of the Piece**

Scan the piece to determine the key. Be sure to play the scale.

2. **Determine the Pitch Range**

Look over the piece and determine the high and low notes and whether the piece can be broken down into regions that involve different pitch ranges.

3. **Focus on the Pitch Factor**

Play slowly without rhythm, hands alone at first, as necessary.

If you have a MIDI-capable piano that is connected to SuperScore on the iPad, use SuperScore's Learn Mode to verify that you are playing the correct notes. More on SuperScore later in this document.

4. **Focus on the Rhythm Factor**

Tap the rhythms with each hand alone. Be sure to establish the beat before tapping the rhythm.

Tip: It is often helpful to imagine, vocalize, or otherwise feel the rhythm before trying to tap it.

5. **Combine the Rhythms of Both Hands**

Tap rhythms with both hands in order to understand and master coordination issues.

6. **Play Hands Alone**

Play slowly each hand alone, combining pitches and rhythm.

At this point, you may be ready to introduce SuperScore features that are discussed more fully below.

7. **Play Hands Together**

Play slowly hands together, combining pitch and rhythm. Start with short sections or phrases as necessary.

Introduction to SuperScore

SuperScore has numerous features that can assist with reading, providing the student with opportunity for structured practice. Features include:

- **Resizable Score**

Early level readers typically benefit from larger print; more advanced readers benefit from being able to see more of the music at one time.

- **Recorded Performances**

Every score from CyberConservatory comes with a MIDI recording. This provides an opportunity to become acquainted with the sound of a piece.

- **Metronome and Backing Tracks**

The metronome is a traditional tool for keeping a student in time and moving forward through a piece. SuperScore offers a metronome. In addition, most CyberConservatory pieces also provide MIDI backing tracks. These backing tracks serve a metronome function but in a musical manner.

- **Moving Cursor**

Regardless as to whether MIDI tracks have been set to be audible or muted, SuperScore provides a playback experience with a moving cursor. The moving cursor motivates students to keep moving ahead as these play.

- **Tempo Control**

The foregoing features can be implemented at any tempo. Judicious use of the SuperScore tempo slider can slow a student down to a realistic tempo or encourage the student to move ahead more quickly.

- **Additional Features with a MIDI-Capable Piano**

Although SuperScore can be used effectively with a traditional acoustic piano, a MIDI connection between piano and iPad provides a deeper level of interactivity in SuperScore.

As mentioned in the previous section, there is a Learn mode function in which the moving cursor will not move forward unless the student plays the correct note. This capability can be used to train accurate pitch recognition.

Paul's Protocol with SuperScore

The following SuperScore features can be strategically integrated with Paul's protocol that is described more fully above.

1. **Mute Backing Tracks**

This enable the student to focus on the pitch factor.

2. **Add the Metronome**

When the student is ready to add the rhythm factor, it is usually best to set the metronome to a slow tempo.

3. **Tap the Rhythm along with SuperScore Playback**

SuperScore playback provides an opportunity to make sure that the student is tapping correctly and without hesitations.

4. **Engage the Loop Function**

The loop function encourages the practice of brief sections at a steady (and typically slow) tempo. Use this function as needed.

5. **Mute the Playback of Either Hand**

This feature enables the student to play just one hand while SuperScore plays the other, thus enabling the student to hear the entire piece while playing just one hand.

6. **Gradually Increase the Playback Tempo**

Strategic control of the playback tempo helps the student to play within reasonable temporal boundaries while also promoting a sensible increase in tempo as the student's skills warrant it.

7. **Add Backing Tracks When Appropriate**

The backing tracks provide a metronome-like function in a musical context. They can help to clarify rhythms while keeping the student playing in a steady fashion. They also train aural awareness in a larger context.

In some situations, it may be helpful to include the metronome along with the backing tracks.

Recommended Reading Materials

The following materials are available in the SuperScore in-app Store from either Carl Fischer or CyberConservatory. The following albums are especially useful for the purpose of teaching fluent reading.

Music Pathways Method

Levels A through D are available from Carl Fischer. The method was designed by Louise Bianchi, Lynn Freeman Olson, and Marvin Blickenstaff. The SuperScore edition features MIDI backing tracks by Paul Sheftel. The method offers a well organized, conceptual approach to reading.

Folk Songs from Planet Earth

This 9-level series from CyberConservatory supports any method from the beginning into the early intermediate level. The material is beautifully tuneful and includes engaging MIDI backing tracks.

Foundations

Foundations from CyberConservatory offers a novel, interactive approach to the study and practice of theory fundamentals: major and minor scales, intervals, chord constructions and progressions, and rhythm and note drills. Fun MIDI backing tracks are provided for each reading challenge.

Modules

Winner of the 2017 MTNA Frances Clark Award for Keyboard Pedagogy, this CyberConservatory album provides 36 original, intermediate level piano compositions that cover all intervals as well as major scales and triads in all inversions in all 12 major keys. It offers an inspiring and practical way to learn music fundamentals at the keyboard! MIDI backing tracks are included.

Creative Musicianship Levels 1-3

This CyberConservatory publication is a fun and unique resource for developing musicianship and improvisation skills. This series promotes the development of aural awareness, rhythmic security, and technical freedom at the keyboard. Reading challenges are included, and every activity offers MIDI backing tracks.