

## Want Your Piano Playing to Sound Super? Turn Your Keyboard into a Cast of Characters

By Ed Mascari

Do you wish your piano playing had more life to it?  
Are you struggling to get past the notes and on to a more expressive keyboard style?

A few years ago, I was watching the TV show *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire*.  
The contestant was asked the following question:  
“On the piano, which direction causes the pitch to get higher, going to the left or to the right?”

The contestant did not know the answer.  
Do you?

**One of the many reasons that the piano is considered such an important instrument is that you can play every note used in the musical universe: from the lowest to the highest pitch.**  
Not only that, you can also **see** what you are playing.

In order for a symphony orchestra to play every note that is on the piano, it needs many different instruments. This is because each of the instruments has a smaller range (number of notes) that it can play.

Have you wondered why the piano has a very special note called **Middle C**?  
**Middle C divides the piano into treble and bass clef**—but you already know that.  
Do you know why?

Not only does your right hand play music written in the treble clef, but this part of the keyboard represents the instruments of the orchestra, such as the violin, flute, oboe and trumpet, that sound from the middle to the highest range of all of the notes.

The same holds true for the bass clef (the music your left hand usually plays).  
Instruments including the bassoon, bass fiddle, trombone and cello all have ranges found on the middle to lower part of the keyboard.

What I'm leading up to is this:  
It's not just that it takes all of these different instruments to play the notes that are found on the piano.  
**It's the fact that you can make your piano playing sound so much more colorful when you capture the distinct character of each non-keyboard instrument.**

**Here are 5 tips for turning your keyboard into a colorful cast of characters.**

1. When you came across a lyrical melody in the bass clef, e.g. the middle section of Gershwin's *Prelude No. 2*, think of Yo-Yo Ma playing the **cello**.
2. If your selection is a slow sorrowful song, listen to a recording of Dvorak's *Largo* from *The New World Symphony*. Focus on the color and expression of the **English Horn** as it plays the melody.
3. To create a walking bass line that really swings, learn from the master of the jazz **bass fiddle**: Ray Brown. Many recordings of his work with Oscar Peterson are readily available.

4. Suppose you come across a piece with many staccato notes. In addition to the plucked the strings of the cello (pizzicato), the **bassoon** can serve as a terrific model. One great example is Grieg's *In the Hall of the Mountain King*.

5. Whether you encounter a mid-range ceremonial melody (perhaps by Handel) or need some inspiration for your improvisation, Wynton Marsalis can help you. His fine **trumpet** playing is a reliable resource in either context. You find his recordings on CD as well as on many internet music sites.

### Action Exercises

Here are three things you can do immediately to put these ideas into action.

First, look at one of your favorite pieces and find an important spot that needs to be played with more expression than you are now giving it. Identify which non-keyboard instrument could play this musical line with the unique characteristic that brings out its style.

Second, find and listen to some recorded examples of the instrument you identified. Focus your attention on hearing the color, character and articulation (how the notes are played) that this instrument has.

Third, go back to your selection and act as if you are playing this part of your piece with the appropriate instrument. By using the technique of pantomime to make believe you are actually playing the instrument, you will treat this passage with more feeling than you ever have before. Once you do this, go back to the piano and listen to the difference!

Follow this process on a regular basis and [make it a habit](#).

The more you do this, the faster your piano playing will sound super.

**Turn your keyboard into a cast of characters**, and you'll be amazed at how quickly your piano playing will sound super!

© 2007 by Ed Mascari All Rights Reserved. [ed@edmascari.com](mailto:ed@edmascari.com)

### About the Author

Ed Mascari has been teaching piano privately to children and adults for three decades. He combines his extensive experience to guide students in a variety of styles as he helps them achieve their unique potential.

To find out all about piano lessons, visit: <http://www.edmascariplanostudio.com/>

Ed also teaches group classes for piano students in the tele-class format. All of the programs at <http://www.mykeyboardsuccess.com/> focus on specific topics that are designed to give participants the tools and techniques that will help them to play piano better and better.

Ed Mascari is a seasoned performer (pianist/ jazz organist) of show tunes, jazz and popular music as well as a published classical composer and church musician. For more info, go to: <http://www.myspace.com/edmascari>.

To receive special subscriber bonuses: free sheet music and audio files for "Six Simple Songs to Make You Smile", the helpful article "The Key Is to Get to the Keys: How to Set Up and Maintain a Successful Practice Routine", a free lesson "How to Arrange a Song in 12 Easy Steps" and a subscription to our ezine "Conversations at the Piano", sign up today at: [http://www.edmascariplanostudio.com/p/free\\_stuff.php](http://www.edmascariplanostudio.com/p/free_stuff.php)