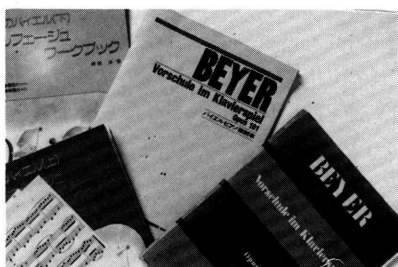


## How Timely is Beyer Today: The Pros & Cons. A study of beginner's Piano Lesson in Japan

by

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### 1

The name of the composer pianist Ferdinand Beyer is not as well known as his contemporary, Beethoven. Both were born in Germany.<sup>1</sup>

The name “Beyer,” however, is very popular in Japan, even a 5-year-old boy who does not know Beethoven at all recognizes Beyer easily. There may not be another country in the world where Maestro Beyer is as famous as in Japan.

The name of the medical company “Bayer” is internationally famous but in Japan, this name is famous for the piano method and the textbook, “Beyer, Vorschule Im Klavierspiel, opus 101.” I have seen some of Beyer’s compositions, easy piano pieces are included in many beginner textbooks in the world.

However, I have never seen this particular text “Beyer” abroad.

Beyer is widely used for beginner piano lessons in Japan. Beyer is not only popular among Japanese music lovers but is a very important textbook in music education, especially at teacher training institutes. At many teachers’ colleges, Beyer is used to introduce piano technique and it is also the choice for designated pieces of

the government examination for nursery school teachers almost all over Japan.

Maestro Beyer was something of a popular pianist at that time. He was a guest at many salons in high society. He might play famous pieces by Haydn and Mozart as well as his own compositions which were created for the salon’s particular atmosphere. I have his piano pieces which I bought at an antique bookstore in Vienna. These are gay pieces in a light style, typical European salon music in which I found melodies from famous operas and pop tunes of the era. I suppose these pieces were written to entertain salon guests.

Beyer’s work for piano — I haven’t seen anything other than piano pieces — are the type of music that is easy to play. Even an amateur pianist will enjoy playing them. Beyer was a pianist and, as is quite often the case, a good piano teacher, which is how he wrote this type of composition. Maestro Beyer was a professor, too.

### 2

Why is Beyer so popular in Japan?

It is because the majority of Japanese children take piano lessons; also, there is some kind of keyboard instrument in almost all Japanese homes now. This phenomena started after the Second World War. In 1945, when the war ended, culturally thirsty Japanese wanted to drink deeply of the cultural wine which had been lacking during the war years.

One of the most appreciated wines was Western music. Before the war, even during the war, intellectual Japanese were fond of listening to Western music. It didn’t matter whether it was classical or popular.

The piano was accepted as a symbol both of Western music and culture for many years in Japan.

Immediately after the war, symphony concerts became more popular than before and the subscription tickets to the concerts were swiftly sold out.

In 1955, when The Symphony of The Air (the former NBC Symphony) came to hold concerts in Tokyo, the first symphony orchestra from abroad after the war, the line of people wishing to buy tickets was a whole kilometer long.

About the time of the Korean War, Japan's economy had improved, as had the living standard of the Japanese. It was at this time that Japanese parents began to involve their children in music lessons at an early age.

The Japanese concept of the enjoyment of music through listening evolved to become the enjoyment of music by playing music. One good example is that the Suzuki method for violin had prevailed in Japan.

It is generally accepted that Jew and Japanese are two of the most educationally minded people. Next to food is education; next to reading, writing and arithmetic, music will be fine—this might be their national way of thinking.

While living rather humble, Japanese parents were likely to buy a piano, which is very expensive, for their children to play. I think it is a special scene; a piano standing next to a refrigerator in the small living room of a modest home. But it happened in Japan at that time. We called that the "music lesson boom," or the "piano lesson boom." The main educational backbone of the boom was Beyer, which, even before the war, had been the Bible of piano lessons for piano teachers in Japan.

It was a beautiful sight to see, a mother accompanying her little daughter, who held a large Beyer tucked under her tiny arm.

Beyer seemed to be a symbol of peaceful Japan.

3

Now let me tell you when and how Beyer was introduced to Japan. In a sense, one might say that Western music was introduced to Japan before the Meiji Restoration.<sup>2</sup>

It is said that the Reverend Francisco Xavier, the first Catholic missionary who landed in Japan, brought some holy music. If so, the Japanese had heard pre-baroque music two hundred years before the Meiji Restoration.

I believe that it was at the time of the Meiji Restoration that Western music as we presently appreciate it was introduced. The Japanese government adopted many habits of Western civilization, from the use of the telegraph to the hair style of the people. The educational system, where music education belongs, was included in this cultural expansion. When you study Japanese culture, the basic concept of the Meiji government is interesting and of value.<sup>3</sup>

The Meiji government ordered that traditional Japanese education be restored by adopting the Western system and they established a trinity of education:

1, intellectual training; 2, moral training; 3, physical training. It is essential to keep the balance of the trinity and apparently No. 2 includes music.

The mentality of those Japanese who purchase a piano and a refrigerator at the same time, as I have mentioned, can be seen even here.

The governmental decree of the new educational system which contained music as an elementary school subject was published in 1872 but actually put into operation in 1879 at The Government Institute of Music (Ongakutorishirabe-gakari) after 7 years preparation.

This is the official start of the Western music teachers and musicians training in Japan.



Professor Shuji Isawa

The Director, who later became Dean, at the Institute was Professor Shuji Isawa, who graduated from Bridge-water Normal School (the first normal school financed by the state in the United States and built in 1846 at Bridgewater, Massachusetts) in 1877, continued his studies at Harvard University.

Professor Isawa was certainly the first Japanese who mastered Western music and music education. When he was appointed director of the institute, he recommend

ed to the government that Mr. Luther Whiting Mason (who had been Isawa's private music teacher when he was studying at Bridgewater) be invited to be a professor at the institute.

Mr. Mason was one of the important figures in the early days of American Music Education. He was quite active in promoting music education and also was an influential educator in America at that time. He came to Japan in 1880 and taught at the Institute for about 2 years.

Mr. Mason is the person who brought 20 copies of Beyer to Japan, together with 10 upright pianos made in America. He also brought other piano texts such as Czerny, Clementi and Kuhlau but they were for more advanced courses.

Apparently, Mr. Mason had the idea that Beyer is the best piano text for beginners.

Why did Mr. Mason choose Beyer?

Here is a study about this written by Ms. Setsuko Mori.<sup>4</sup>

"When L. W. Mason visited European countries in 1872 looking for good educational material, he happened to meet Beyer (B. Schott edition, Germany). He thought it enjoyable and convenient for piano beginners.

Luckily, the English version (by different title, Elementary Instruction Book for Piano, C. Prüfer edition, Boston) was available in America. Mr. Mason used it in his piano class and the material was widely accepted because of his influence.

It is possible that the light style of Beyer's music was favored by Mason because it avoided boring practice. Mason probably thought that Beyer would be good material for the rapid training of elementary music teachers in Japan."

Let me continue with some valuable points about Beyer in the beginner training. These are:

1. Effective method for fundamental finger training.
2. Shows good examples of functional harmonizations, which are the most important factors of Western music. These are well arranged from simple ones to advanced steps.
3. Beyer is a good entrance to the history of classical music literature.
4. Beyer has a collection of solid musical examples of

the classics.

The Government Institute of Music has been the Tokyo University of the Fine Arts for about a hundred years now. In accordance with the change in the music life of Japanese certainly there is much enjoyment for Doh-Ray-Me-Fah music.

The piano has been given a very important place in Japanese music education, in teacher training and as a tool for teaching. So, Beyer has enjoyed a leading position for quite a long time.

The piano lesson boom after the war, which I mentioned, might be thought of as a reflection of the early days of the introduction of Doh-Ray-Me-Fah to Japan.

About a hundred years ago, we imported Western music as one of the symbols of an advanced Western culture. Nearly the same situation occurred in music education with the use of Beyer.

It is an interesting phenomena that the Japanese musical trend has been so strongly influenced by America, from the use of Beyer to rock'n' roll music.

#### 4

Well, at the present time, how is the textbook Beyer used in Japan?

Is Beyer in the mainstream of piano lessons in Japan now? Roughly speaking, yes, it is. the publishers for Beyer are enjoying sales of over 30,000 annually in Japan. However, we must understand that few piano teachers start beginner students with only that text. They also use other materials such as the French <Methods Rose>, and the American <Thompason> as well as Japanese texts together with Beyer.

I agree that many Japanese piano teachers are still taking Beyer as the convenient, conventional fundamentals of beginner's piano lesson. In other words, they use Beyer as the main text and the rest as enrichment.

This is the influence of remarkable change in musical circumstances in Japan, especially after World War II. Japanese teachers were stimulated by the many music educational materials, including textbooks and methods, that were introduced in the postwar years. At that time, the Japanese teachers were receiving a wide perspective of piano lesson material and recognizing that restricting lessons to Beyer only would make a student music experience narrow.

I would like to explain some of the weak points in Beyer.

1. There is a lack of pieces containing counterpoint study, one of the most important musical techniques;
2. The musical expression is restricted in the so-called style of Beethoven's day of salon music.
3. Tonality is quite limited (flat key are only in F, B<sup>b</sup>, minor keys are few - 90% in C).
4. It is difficult to find adequate arrangements for small hands, by which I mean children.
5. Few of Beyer's pieces will be of interest to children's taste today.

Because of these weak points, I have to explain the important aspect in the use of Beyer, and that is the change of the time, the tremendous change in musical life from the time when Beyer was introduced to Japan.

Piano lessons are more than merely learning "how to play the piano." Piano lessons are a great introduction to all music.

Just consider the difference in musical circumstances even between the 1940s, immediately after the war, and the 1990s. We did not have devices such as televisions, CDs, videos and so on, all of which we are now commonplace.

The musical opportunities that children and adults now have available are highly sophisticated. Just imagine, the Metropolitan Opera and Michael Jackson coming to Japan. Children can enjoy such shows routinely, and they can even enjoy such shows at home on TV.

I think it is rather difficult now to teach piano to Japanese children with only the Beyer, early 19th century product, despite its tremendous contribution to the first introduction of Doh-ray-me-fah music to Japan.

Japanese piano teachers today are making efforts to give children quality piano lessons that are enriched by various kinds of musical simulation.

Japanese piano teachers are quite eager to study new material and trends in music. In this sense, composers are good coordinators for piano lessons. I believe that few countries enjoy as many children's piano pieces that are composed by contemporary composers as in Japan. At least 300 series of such textbooks by Japanese composers are available in Japan.

Music teachers and piano tutors in Japan are musicians whose ideas are generally fairly advanced. They advise composers about the writing of piano pieces for children. However, I have to mention one important fact.

— One remaining situation, the government exam for nursery school teachers (which is different from the exam for kinderfarten teachers). — —

This exam requires candidates to finish all the Beyer numbers.

You should know that many of the teacher training colleges in Japan require piano beginner courses mainly based on Beyer. Therefore, all such students need to pass the curriculum for the licence anyway.

I understand this is one of the historical legacies of Beyer from the very beginning of Japanese music education. When we consider the musical circumstances of today's Japanese children, the importance or the utility of the college practice of Beyer is minor.

The songs which are taught at nursery school or in grade school may be too hard for those who have finished only the Beyer pieces.

Today, children's songs contain many musical factors; jazzy rhythms, harmonies, modern idioms. — In other words, they are neither the music of Beyer's time nor the time that was introduced to Japan. Beyer is behind the musical taste of today's children.

I'd like to say something about the use of Beyer as a textbook for piano lessons which include teacher training.

I agree with the idea that Beyer is one of the good piano methods. But it should be taken only as fundamental for the study of classical piano techniques of its era. It is, of course, evident that good piano teachers in Japan are using other contemporary material besides that of Beyer in their classes. Beyer is often used in supplemental to other methods.

5

A hundred years ago, it was fine material to introduce Doh-Ray-me-fah music to Japan, at a time when Western music was quite foreign. In this sense, Mr. Mason was correct, for it might be pretty hard to find a better method and text than Beyer at that time, in the Boston area where he worked.

As time passes, the position of Beyer in the musical world has changed. Many well planned and convenient

methods for beginners have been developed.

We need some that are appropriate for our time.

Today, although Beyer needs to be taken as a classic piano fundamental, it is material that has a limited use.

I have mentioned that Beyer is still required for the Japanese government exam. This creates problems among teachers who pass the exam. They eventually realize they cannot even play the nursery songs in the classroom. This is a side effect of the Beyer technique. There are so many good methods and textbooks for every grade now.

We can find excellent textbooks for any purpose. Indeed, many fine piano teachers have even compiled their own texts by themselves.

Maestro Ferdinand Beyer, and the textbook Beyer, have almost completed their task in Japan.

It is my recommendation to government personnel in charge of setting nursery school teacher exams that the use of Beyer be changed.

## Notes

1. Ferdinand Beyer, 1803-1863 (born in Halle Germany)  
Ludwig van Beethoven, 1770-1827 (born in Bonn Germany)
2. Meiji Restoration, about 1867 (Meiji Ishin in Japanese)  
a series of governmental changes from the feudal system to the modern system which reflected to modern Japanese life great deal.  
It was an entrance to the modern Japan.
3. Japanese government of Meiji era hired many experts of the field from abroad, ....medical doctors, lawyers, scientists and even painters. They were very helpful to Japanese development. And, it is true they enjoyed tremendous high salary as much as the one to cabinet minister.
4. Setsuko Mori, Researcher at Documentation Center of Modern Japanese Music, Tokyo.

## バイエルの時代的適合性 その光と陰

服 部 公 一

(平成5年10月7日受理)

バイエルの時代的適合性：その光と陰

ピアノ教則本＜バイエル＞は現在も日本のピアノ初心者教育の大きな柱のひとつとなっている。これは明治12年音楽取調掛、お雇い教師メイソンが日本に導入して以来のことである。

以後百年余、バイエルはピアノ初学者殆どの必修書として日本の西洋音楽発展に寄与して来た。

しかし“明治百年”の今日、日本人の音楽環境は著しく変化し発展した——特に戦後のマスコミ発達の影響に負うところが大きい。このような状況の中でバイエルは充分に機能しているのだろうか。又初等教育者養成のカリキュラムに於いてこれはいかなるものであろうか。

——バイエルの日本との関りとこれからの展望について小論は述べている。