Demystifying Hip-Hop

By Dr. Jennifer Cruz and Prof. Brian Jump

Introduction

Today, we're going to demonstrate how a modern hip-hop song, properly transcribed and arranged, can be useful in a class-piano context.

Once students have attained some facility with reading and playing the piano, it is sometimes difficult to find interesting, engaging, and sufficiently challenging repertoire. Often, the method-book handouts, whether classical or jazz, simply fail to connect with students. We aren't arguing that classical and jazz aren't important styles to teach—they are, of course. But occasionally, during class time, teachers should provide their students with an interesting diversion.

One way to provide your students with an interesting diversion is to deploy some do-it-yourself repertoire culled from modern hip hop (or from any other commercial style). This is an old solution of course. Music teachers know now, and have known for centuries, that successfully motivating a student is dependent upon connecting with their interests.

The book, *<u>How Learning Works</u>*, puts the concept like this: "Students' motivation determines, directs, and sustains what they do to learn (Ambrose et.al. 2010).

Our innovation, then, is simply to map this concept onto group piano through the vehicle of modern hip-hop. It is our belief that within this genre is an untapped wealth of repertoire and pedagogical value ust waiting to direct and sustain your class-piano students.

The rest of this presentation will focus on a piano lesson we devised from the 2021 hip-hop song called "<u>Industry Baby</u>" by Lil' Nas X.

Learning Objectives

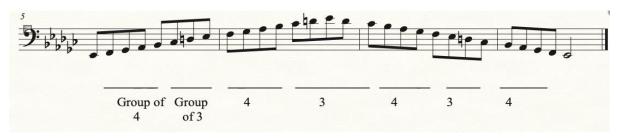
Upon completion of this learning activity, students will be able to

- Play two octaves of E_b minor, including both harmonic and natural minor
- Identify and perform the i, iv, and V chords from E_b minor
- Summarize the concept of a borrowed division
- Perform musical figures from "Industry Baby," a song by Lil Nas X in the hip-hop style
- Improvise melodies in E_b minor

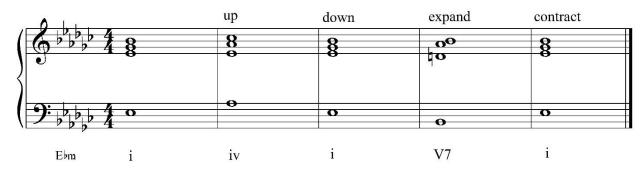
E_b Natural Minor



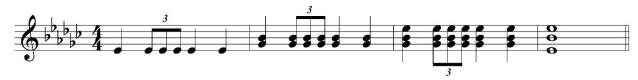
E Harmonic Minor



Cadence



Intro



Bass Line



Counter Melody



Counter Melody in Dyads



Vocal Melody



Methods

To prepare this material, we used the following tools: <u>Finale</u>, <u>full-range loudspeakers</u>, the <u>Amazing Slow Downer</u>, and <u>Chordify</u>.

- Finale was used to make all musical examples.
- **Full-range loudspeakers** were used to allow accurate interpretation of the song's frequency content—including the bass range (20 320 Hz).
- **The Amazing Slow Downer** was used to alter the tempo and key of the music; thereby, facilitating ease and accuracy of the transcription.
- The harmonic interpretation was checked using **Chordify**, an online resource for chord progressions.

Assessment

Directions: Measure you level of agreement with each statement using the following scale:

- 1. Strongly disagree
- 2. Disagree
- 3. Undecided
- 4. Agree
- 5. Strongly agree

Overall, this lesson was more engaging and enjoyable than most music lessons.

- 12345
- Average: 4.8

This lesson helped me solidify my understanding of E-flat minor.

- 12345
- Average: 3

Hip-hop is one of my favorite musical styles.

- 12345
- Average: 3.7

I could explain the concept of a borrowed division to a non-musician.

- 12345
- Average: 3.7

Learning scales is unimportant.

- 12345
- Average: 1

Piano classes are often dull and boring.

- 12345
- Average: 3.3