

Demystifying Hip-Hop

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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, [How Learning Works](#), 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 just 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 "[Industry Baby](#)" 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 \flat Natural Minor

3 1 1 1 1 3 2 4 3 4 3

Group of 4 Group of 3 4 3 4 3 4

E \flat Harmonic Minor

5

Group of 4 Group of 3 4 3 4 3 4

Cadence

up down expand contract

E \flat m i iv i V7

Intro

3 3 3

3

Bass Line

Bass line musical notation in 4/4 time, key of F major. The notation is written in bass clef. It consists of four staves of music. The first staff contains measures 1-8, the second staff measures 9-16, the third staff measures 17-24, and the fourth staff measures 25-28. The music features a steady bass line with various rhythmic patterns, including quarter notes, eighth notes, and sixteenth notes, often with rests. The key signature has one flat (F major), and the time signature is 4/4.

Counter Melody

Counter melody musical notation in 4/4 time, key of F major. The notation is written in treble clef. It consists of two staves of music. The first staff contains measures 1-4, and the second staff contains measures 5-8. The melody is composed of quarter notes and eighth notes, with some rests. The key signature has one flat (F major), and the time signature is 4/4.

Counter Melody in Dyads

Counter melody in dyads musical notation in 4/4 time, key of F major. The notation is written in treble clef. It consists of two staves of music. The first staff contains measures 9-12, and the second staff contains measures 13-16. The melody is composed of dyads (pairs of notes) and rests. The key signature has one flat (F major), and the time signature is 4/4.

Vocal Melody

A musical score for a vocal melody in 4/4 time, featuring a key signature of three flats (B-flat major or D-flat minor). The score consists of eight staves of music, each with a line of lyrics underneath. Chord symbols (A^bm, B^b7, E^bm) are placed above the staff lines. The lyrics are: "Ba-by back, ayy. Cou-ple tracks, ayy. Cou-ple gram-mies on him, cou-ple plaques, ayy. That's a fact, ayy. Throw it back, ayy. Throw it back, ayy. And this one is for the champ-ions. I ain't lost since I be - gan, yeah. Fu - ny how you said it was the end, yeah. Then I went did it a - gain, yeah. I told you long a - go on the road I got what they wait-in for. Don't run from no-thing dog get your sold - iers tell em I ain't lay-ing low. You was ne-ver real-ly root-ing for me an-y way. When I'm back up at the top I want to hear you say "don't run from no-thing dog get your sold - iers tell em that the break is o - ver."

A^bm B^b7 E^bm

Ba-by back, ayy. Cou-ple tracks, ayy. Cou-ple gram-mies on him, cou-ple plaques, ayy.

5 A^bm B^b7 E^bm

That's a fact, ayy. Throw it back, ayy. Throw it back, ayy. And this one is for the

9 A^bm B^b7 E^bm

champ-ions. I ain't lost since I be - gan, yeah. Fu - ny how you said it was the

13 A^bm B^b7 E^bm

end, yeah. Then I went did it a - gain, yeah. I told you

17 A^bm B^b7 E^bm

long a - go on the road I got what they wait-in for. Don't run from

21 A^bm B^b7 E^bm

no-thing dog get your sold - iers tell em I ain't lay-ing low. You was ne-ver real-ly

25 A^bm B^b7 E^bm

root-ing for me an-y way. When I'm back up at the top I want to hear you say "don't run from

29 A^bm B^b7 E^bm

no-thing dog get your sold - iers tell em that the break is o - ver."

Methods

To prepare this material, we used the following tools: [Finale](#), [full-range loudspeakers](#), the [Amazing Slow Downer](#), and [Chordify](#).

- **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 your 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.

- 1 2 3 4 5
- Average: 4.8

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

- 1 2 3 4 5
- Average: 3

Hip-hop is one of my favorite musical styles.

- 1 2 3 4 5
- Average: 3.7

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

- 1 2 3 4 5
- Average: 3.7

Learning scales is unimportant.

- 1 2 3 4 5
- Average: 1

Piano classes are often dull and boring.

- 1 2 3 4 5
- Average: 3.3