



Anime Piano Tales

Imaginative Storytelling Through Music



Background

- Anime has become a central part of contemporary youth culture (Clements et al. 2015).
- To date, only two known individuals have done research specifically on Anime Piano Music (Zhai 2024, 2025; Gillis 2021, 2022).
- One of the most famous anime studios is Studio Ghibli, known for its work on classic children's anime films (Bauer 2019).

Research Question

- How do elementary piano students engage with storytelling through their performance of piano arrangements from Studio Ghibli films?

Participants

- 6 students from the University of Toronto Piano Pedagogy Program.
- Age 10-12.
- Most of them have spent several years in the piano pedagogy program.

Methodology

- Each student chose a piano arrangement from a Studio Ghibli film.
- Students were tasked to tell a story through their performance.
- Creative activities were done each week to help foster their storytelling abilities.
- Results were based on:
 - Personal observations/notes.
 - Video recording of the final recital.
 - A mini group discussion/reflection.
 - Their scripts.
 - Interviews with their piano teachers.

General vs Specific Storytelling

- Students either think about a specific scene in which their song appears in the film or a general theme.
- Students were able to represent certain aspects or elements from the film through musical gestures.
- Students were able to incorporate storytelling into their performance.
- Interestingly, some students felt that they weren't able to tell a story through their performance despite the evidence saying otherwise.

*This song is bouncy like Totoro's Belly
- UTPPP Student*

A Deeper Look Into Storytelling

- Teachers reported that students were able to utilize their imagination and creativity more.
- Students were able to better understand the music because there were visual elements and an actual story to follow.
- Their conversations and understanding of the music were much deeper and unique when compared to the other pieces they have worked with.
- It also helped them think about mood, atmosphere, and, with some gentle pushing, details as well, rather than which notes are the right ones.

Engagement

- Students were very engaged and motivated to learn their assigned arrangements.
- Several student are continuing to work on their arrangement even further after the project.
- Students prefer their arrangement over their other pieces.

Piano Development

- Learning a Studio Ghibli arrangement was beneficial to a student's piano education.
- Students learned about thematic development, were pushed to play more complex accompaniment patterns, and consolidated different articulation types.

Discussion

- What is storytelling? Does your performance have to be a complete story?
- Visuals and story can influence a student's performance.
- Teacher vs Student's criteria for evaluating.

Conclusion

- Elementary-level piano students can engage with storytelling.
- This activity is very engaging and beneficial to the students' education.

Next Steps

- I hope to continue my research on this topic at the doctoral level.
- Continue to promote the performance and pedagogy of Anime Piano Music.

Acknowledgement

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Select Sources

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Image Credit:
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