

Early access piano music

Fiona Lau, our resident reviewer of beginner piano music, took the time to engage with the Dogs and Birds method of teaching piano to young students. This is what she found

Dogs and Birds Beginners' Set Bundle
Elza and Chris Lusher
Alfred
£45

The Dogs and Birds is a method of teaching very young children the piano. It uses animals to help them read music, and is very much rooted in the Kodály approach; emphasising singing as a vital part of learning any instrument.

Elza Lusher is the creator of the Dogs and Birds method. She is Hungarian and her music education was based on Kodály principles from the start. She trained as a piano teacher at the Liszt Academy in Hungary, however, as she began to teach the piano in both Hungary and England, Lusher realised that singing and basic musicianship had to be built into piano lessons. She has been teaching the piano for over 30 years and the Dogs and Birds Method has evolved during that time, and is now published by Alfred. It has been used by Lusher with children as young as two, and the word has spread via a number of platforms, including the Dogs and Birds website, annual workshops, a teachers' register and by presentations at conferences.

I have been aware of Dogs and Birds for a while now but never really explored it thoroughly – fear of the unknown and sheer laziness were probably part of that – so I was delighted to receive the Basic Beginner Bundle from Elza and Chris and to have a chance to explore the method thoroughly. The Beginner Bundle comprises:

Dogs and Birds Book 1 Notes and Lessons Plans for Parents and Teachers (including a CD) This is such a good idea. One of the factors that often puts teachers off trying out new

'methods' is the fear of something new, and not understanding how it works. It is also logical to address material to parents as they will (hopefully!) be the ones supervising the daily practice. This fabulous little guide removes the fear and makes the whole method user-friendly.

Dogs and Birds Book 1 (there is an Animal Notes Edition with animal pictures in the note heads, and a

Blank Notes Edition) The blank notes edition can either be used on its own, or in parallel with the animal notes edition. Both books start with the Golden Rules:

- » Always sing the melody as they play.
- » Count aloud during the rhythm exercises.
- » Never tap or play faster than one beat a second.

Book 1 then begins with rhythm exercises using crotchets, minims and semibreves, and Dog- D, and Bird- B, tunes. By the end of the book a range of one octave is used and hands are playing together. There is also a very useful explanation, at the back of the book, of »

Elza and Chris Lusher





The Dogs and Birds Beginners' Set

the basic elements of the Dogs and Birds approach.

Dogs and Birds Music Manuscript Book (4 staves per page: 32 pages) It is suggested that this is used to keep a record of lessons, the material covered, the rhythm, and finger exercises used, as well as the games that the child should practise during the following week or days.

Small Animal Tiles These can be placed on the keyboard or on the Dogs and Birds Coloured Staves. There are 56 of them, all different, with one for every white key on a full-sized piano. There are many imaginative ways to use them listed on the packet, in the Notes to Book One, and on YouTube.

Dogs and Birds Coloured Staves These are printed on durable thick glossy card and on one side there is a grand

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stave, while the other side (can be folded in half) has separate treble and bass clef staves with a keyboard underneath illustrated with the relevant animal. It is so lovely, the kind of thing I have only seen in music shops in the US, or online. These staves can be used to show pupils where the notes are on the staff and the keyboard, to compose their own exercises and pieces, and to play games with.

All the materials are incredibly attractive and well-presented: glossy covers, beautiful illustrations by award-winning illustrator Mark Chambers,

simple pages, and lovely tactile small animal tiles to fit on the keyboard. More importantly the method itself is, pedagogically, extremely sound, imaginative, creative and effective. Small children love animals, they enjoy singing and playing games, and they want to make music. This method enables them to do all that and have fun from a very young age. Elza and Chris are to be applauded for creating and persevering with such an accessible and delightful creation. **MT**

Further information about Dogs and Birds can be found on its website dogsandbirds.co.uk

Videos showing the method in use can be watched on Elza's YouTube channel youtube.com/user/elzalusher