

# The Taubman Approach to Playing the Piano

by Julia Bady, Pianist and Teacher

What is the Taubman Approach? This is the question I asked myself in 1992 when a friend told me I must watch the video "Choreography of the Hands." As a piano teacher and concert pianist, I had been suffering from pain in my elbows, and felt limited in my technique. Starting with this video, the Taubman Approach changed my life.

The Taubman Approach is a natural, ergonomically correct way to play the piano and other instruments. While the Taubman Approach is not a "relaxation" technique, it minimizes muscle tension and uses the most efficient, healthy motions possible in the correct combinations. The approach also has applications for typing, using computers, and many other daily activities. Many pianists, other instrumentalists, and computer users are injured, limited, or fatigued by repetitive incorrect motions. Although the approach can be useful in resolving problems in a variety of settings, this article will focus primarily on piano playing.

The Taubman Approach enables and enhances artistic and effortless piano playing. It does this by providing a "toolbox" of largely invisible movements and skills to meet any and all technical demands and challenges we face at the piano. This knowledge also makes it possible to prevent and heal injuries related to piano playing. In addition, the Taubman Approach has much to offer regarding the art of rhythmic expression, dynamics, and tone production in piano playing. I have been studying this approach since 1992, first through the Taubman Institute (founded in 1976 by Dorothy Taubman and Edna Golandsky), and now with the Golandsky Institute (established in 2003 by Edna Golandsky, John Bloomfield, Robert Durso, and Mary Moran). I believe that I would not be playing the piano today had I not found this technique. It has truly saved my musical life! I am honored to be able to teach others this

technique and help them to overcome technical and musical limitations, fatigue, and injuries at

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The Taubman Approach, first developed decades ago by Dorothy Taubman, is a complex set of coordinated movements that are best taught one-on-one, by a well-trained teacher. Mrs. Taubman believed that if one person could play the piano effortlessly and beautifully, anyone could. She studied the physical aspects of piano playing and developed a comprehensive, logical technique.

The ideas begin with basic seating position and postural alignment. It is critical to sit at the correct height and distance from the keyboard. The proper height for sitting at the piano is determined by making sure that the pointy bone of the elbow is at or just above the surface of the white keys. You'll need a friend to squat down and check your seating height, as you face front, towards the piano. You may need to add books, carpet samples or hard foam gymnastics mats to your seat, as many piano benches are too low. In addition, don't sit too close or too far away from the keyboard. A guideline for the correct distance from the keyboard is to sit with your knees just under the edge of the piano. The torso needs to be balanced slightly forward, but without the fingers pushing down or holding up. One can think of this as "resting lightly" on the keys, ready for action, but without tension.

Another basic postural element is to keep your upper arms hanging loosely from your torso. Even the slightest amount of habitual holding the upper arms out or up can cause fatigue and limitation. If you sit at the incorrect height or distance, hold up or push down with any part of your upper body, it can put strain on various parts of your body (fingers, wrists, arms, back, neck), impeding your ability to have complete freedom and ease at the keyboard. Other important alignments include keeping the wrists flat (not too low or too high) and the hand lined up with the arm (not twisted away from the arm in either direction). You can find your natural arm/hand position by letting your arms hang down freely by your sides, without tightening or spreading your fingers.

The Taubman Approach involves numerous other elements which I will simply name here: forearm rotation (to avoid the tightness and limitations that come from playing only with the fingers); in and out motions of the arm; shaping; grouping; walking hand and arm motions (up and down, or sideways motions of the hand and forearm); how to drop freely on the piano keys; ways to conquer leaps (including two leaps at a time); staccato technique; interdependence of the hands... the list goes on and on. Notice that many of these elements include the word "forearm." In using the forearm, we assist the smaller finger muscles to do their job. It is teamwork at its best. Clearly, there is too much to explain in a short article, but I am hoping at least to ignite your curiosity! When one learns these movements and how they work together, one can realize one's potential as an expressive, agile, pain-free and confident pianist. I know that taking in all of this information can be overwhelming, so I'd like to reassure you that even learning some of the basic physical positions and balance can be extremely useful.

The Taubman Approach has been successfully taught to children, from the

beginning of their piano studies, with fabulous results. Mary Moran, a senior faculty member of the Golandsky Institute, has written a book called "Basic Alignment and Rotation, Level I," with both student and teacher editions available. This book is wonderful for teaching adults, as well as children. The books, general information, how to find a qualified Taubman teacher, plus many informational DVD's are available at the website <http://www.golandskyinstitute.org>. In addition, you can read testimonials from pianists and from medical doctors at this website.

The Taubman Approach is the only piano technique I have encountered in many decades of piano study that clearly explains and demonstrates what lies underneath a virtuoso technique. The Taubman Approach synthesizes knowledge in a wholesome and highly teachable way, freeing pianists and other instrumentalists (of all ages and levels) to reach their highest potential. It gives us not only concrete tools and methods to musically express ourselves, but it offers us hope and inspiration in our musical lives.

## Learn More About the Taubman Technique:

Video: "Choreography of the Hands: The Work of Dorothy Taubman"  
JTJ Films, Inc., 21 Kettle Hill Road, Amherst, MA 01002-9522

Book: "Basic Alignment and Rotation" Beginning Piano Lessons in the Taubman Approach

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Musical Compositions by Paula Dreyer & Kendall Feeney  
Photography by Mary Moran  
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Online: The Golandsky Institute  
[www.golandskyinstitute.org](http://www.golandskyinstitute.org)

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