

CONCENTRATED CHOPS

by Ben Stivers

One of the biggest challenges I face when on tour is keeping my head and hands limber enough so that when I come home, I'm ready to jump back into the creative cauldron that is New York City. Here are a few examples I've found useful not only for keeping my chops up, but for maintaining my overall musical

"head" as well. Add these exercises to your practice regimen, and you'll be in shape for whatever the road hands you, and for the projects waiting when you get back home. **K**

Hear audio of this lesson at keyboardmag.com/lessons.



Ben Stivers has toured and recorded with the Bee Gees, Matchbox Twenty, and Ricky Martin, to name a few. Most recently, he's been co-producing Swiss singer Beat Kaestli and leading his funk organ trio project Triple Crown. Visit him at myspace.com/benstiverskeys. Jon Regen

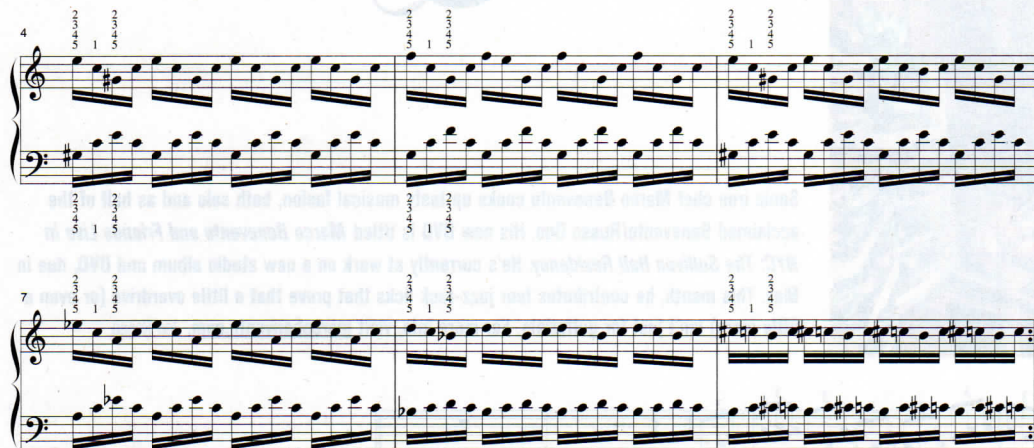
Ex. 1. This one is a real "chops burner" that Dr. J.B. Floyd showed me when I studied classical music at the University of Miami. It requires a pretty good stretch. Play it slowly and carefully, and continue the pattern for as long as you can, taking breaks when you need to.



Ex. 2. My friend Ruben Andreu from Madrid showed me this exercise. Rumor has it that Herbie Hancock was the original source. These kinds of "crossing-over" motions really get your hands in shape. Play the first pass through this nine-bar exercise using finger 2 to cross over, finger 3 for the second pass, finger 4 the third pass, and so on. By the time you're finished, you'll feel like you can play just about anything!

Strong and fast
Repeat four times





Ex. 3. I devised this simple pentatonic exercise myself, involving the head as well as the hands. There are an almost infinite number of ways to vary it. You can also alter it by changing any degree of the scale. For example, in the key of *C*, if you change all the *E* notes to *E_b*, you get a different set of technical challenges. Try playing it in all keys, around the circle of fifths, with a metronome clicking every two notes, then every three notes, etc. This one really works all five fingers, and the exotic sounds generated by the altered pentatonic scales make an interesting vocabulary for improvising.

Fast and clean

Ex. 4. This is a *C* melodic minor scale played in block diatonic fourths. One of the obstacles I face on the road is having to play the same show every night. So on a long tour, playing all those tunes in the same keys night after night, there's a danger of losing the "feel" of different keys. Piano is a tactile instrument, and every key has its own "shape." Playing through this in all keys (again, around the circle of fifths) helps me remember what those shapes are, along with colorful voicings that I might not get to use in every show.

Slowly, in all 12 keys