


FINGER INDEPENDENCE

by Kiki Ebsen

In my touring career with artists like Colin Hay of Men at Work, Wilson Phillips, and my own band, it has always been challenging to find time to practice. That's why I've come up with my own exercises that can be played in minimal time, and that focus on a balance of stretching, stamina, speed, relaxation, and finger independence. The following exercises are the basic template that I use. I must credit my early piano instructor, the late Harry Fields, for influencing my technical routines. They've stayed with me all of these years! 

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

Ex. 1. Parallel sixths. This is great for opening up your hands. Do one hand at a time, and modulate up a half-step each time until you've played through all 12 keys. Holding your middle finger down while you play puts the focus on finger independence. If you feel tension, stop and go to your other hand. Remember, you're not going for speed here, but learning to use your fingers *deliberately*.



Ex. 2. Trills on fingers 1 and 2. Just like the previous exercise, holding your fingers down requires slower, more deliberate playing, which develops finger independence. Here, you're playing trills with fingers 1 and 2 (thumb and index fingers) of each hand while holding sustained notes with fingers 3 and 4 (middle and ring fingers). Practice each hand's part separately, then put them together.



Aside from performing with artists such as Christopher Cross, Tracy Chapman, and Colin Hay, Kiki Ebsen has also maintained an active and acclaimed career as a leader in her own right. She appears on the A-Train compilation *Nu-Jazz*, and will soon release her first cover CD, *Cool Songs Vol. 1*. Ebsen's original album, *The Beauty Inside*, is due in May. Visit her at kikiebsen.com. Jon Regen

Ex. 3. Trills on fingers 3 and 4. This flips the pattern from Exercise 2 on its head. Now it's the thumb and index finger holding the notes while the ring and middle fingers trill away. You can also work up to this by omitting the sustained notes and just doing the trills.



Ex. 4. Octave shake. Using both hands, play this as fast as you can without feeling tension in your wrists or hands. This is a great exercise to insert between the more concentrated finger-independence ones.



Ex. 5. Five-finger trill combo. Play this with both hands, as fast as you can while maintaining even tone and tempo. On each repeat, move both hands up the scale of C in whole steps, then down the same way. This exercise combines all the aspects of finger independence, strength, speed, and relaxation, and takes a bit of stamina to build up to.



5 Repeat exercise sustaining each finger using finger positions below

