

## FAMILY TREE

## Releasing the Splendor

BY MARIENNE USZLER

It's sometimes difficult to appreciate the originality of an idea or the foresight it may have taken to put a plan into action if the idea is now regarded as obvious or if the plan is a taken-for-granted design. Those teachers, composers, and authors who wrote piano methods that broke new ground in their own day are not always given the credit they deserve for discovering and smoothing the paths we now walk with confidence and ease. Redressing that wrong, of course, is the purpose of "Family Tree."

Angela Diller (1877-1968) and Elizabeth Quaile (1874-1951) are no longer pedagogy "household names" even though the school they founded in 1920 is still a thriving New York City music institution. The Diller-Quaile school evolved from their belief that teaching music to children ought to be child-centered rather than piano-centered—a novel idea at the time.

In the early 1900s, they were fellow faculty members at the Third Street Settlement School where Diller headed the Theory Department and Quaile the Piano Department. Well aware of how pianists were trained and of the books and methods used to do so, both women were determined to change that process. They also realized they would have to write their own material.

Diller and Quaile believed in an approach that was rooted in singing before playing—beginning with something a child could do with ease, then moving to how the song, with interpretation based on the words and phrasing, could be performed at the piano. "Musical" and "natural" would be good words to describe their educational philosophy. Other educators were promoting similar beliefs at nearly the same time, though not with particular reference to music.

Diller and Quaile's *First Solo Book* was published in 1918, two years after they had left the Third Street Settlement School to help found, with David Mannes, the school now known as the Mannes College of Music, and two years before they established their own school. One of the principal innovations of the Diller-Quaile School was that students were jointly enrolled in piano and theory instruction. Activities included singing, rhythmic experiences, and aural training. From the outset, and as stated in the preface to this first book, students were taught to transpose. The choice of music and its presentation demonstrate that Diller and Quaile were concerned with musicianship.

The first six pieces have words, and the brackets indicate the shape of the musical idea. Most basic rhythms, with the exception of the whole note, appear immediately. Eighth notes appear in Example 6, and are "natural" to the word rhythm.

From Example 7 to the end of the book, there are no words, but most of the examples are folk music drawn from many different countries and cultures. Major, minor, and modal melodies are intermixed freely. Key signatures of one and two sharps and one flat are used early and freely throughout the book.

Hand positions begin to change as early as Example 9, although they remain close to the middle of the keyboard until Example 38. In the pieces that follow, the left hand begins to move toward C below Middle C.

**Fun, Fun**

**Sing, Sing**

**Baa, baa Black Sheep**

The notation of dotted-quarter notes is unique. The dot is placed where the equivalent note would be. Examples in compound time use two time signatures.

**My Country, 'tis of Thee**

Andante

**Rhythmic Study**

Allegretto

The difficulty of the music advances rapidly. Playing hands together (with one small exception) begins in Example 38 and is used thereafter in every piece.

**Jig**

Allegretto

**French Folk-Tune**

(To be followed by Treble Part No. 24, First Duet Book)

There were four Solo Books, the first three each matched by a duet book. The *First Solo Book* was very popular, selling over two million copies. Thirteen of the books are still in print.

Toward the end of her very long life, Diller wrote a lovely book, *The Splendor of Music* (1957) in which she artfully extolled two splendors, each needing to be discovered and released: the music behind the symbols and the music within each person. As she put it, "The fusing of these two splendors is one of the important aims of music education." ■■■