

(Excerpt from Chapter 9, Section 1, "Music Therapy: The Science of Frequency," of the book *Aging Gracefully: Three Lessons for Wealth, Happiness, and Companionship in Old Age*, published on Amazon.com in the United States in 2025.)

1.3 Rebirth on the Piano Keys: A Music Therapy Journey for a Patient with Myasthenia Gravis

In a quiet community in North America lives a Chinese-American man in his late sixties. He has been my neighbor for many years and is a "student" who only began learning the piano in his later years. The content of this section is adapted from his real-life piano practice journey. This neighbor is a man in his seventies named Andrew. He was once a professional with a background in science and engineering, harboring a vague yet unfulfilled passion for music. Due to family financial constraints and the limitations of his time, he never had the opportunity to formally study piano. Instead, he taught himself melodies on a harmonica and occasionally accompanied friends. However, the piano his family had purchased for his daughter remained a symbol of regret and a cherished dream in his eyes.

Andrew has lived in the United States for over three decades and is a retired Chinese-American engineer. After retiring, he reignited his passion for music and joined an online piano course taught by a Taiwanese instructor. The course is conducted in Chinese with simplified sheet music, perfectly aligning with his preferred language and learning style. "The traditional staff notation is too dense; looking at it makes me dizzy. I can read

1-2-3-4-5-6-7 much faster," he joked.

This HEINTZMAN piano, which has been idle for eighteen years, was a German-made upright piano purchased for his daughter. Though time has left a thin layer of dust on the



keys, faint fragments of the melodies she once played still echo faintly. Occasionally, when his daughter returns home, she sits down to play a piece, and Andrew always listens quietly, lost in the music. He often says, "She worked so hard when she was young, and she can still play like this now. Music is truly beautiful." His wife smiles and encourages him, "Why don't you learn too? You can teach me when you do."

This casual conversation quietly planted a seed of renewal. Ten years ago, Andrew suffered from severe myasthenia gravis and underwent treatment in various parts of North America. Although he recovered, he was left with numbness in his fingers and occasional

tremors. Over the years, he had grown accustomed to this inconvenience and believed he would never play the piano again. But one day, he stumbled upon an online piano course designed for middle-aged and elderly people. The course emphasized "no need for sheet music, starting with simplified notation, and suitable for beginners with no prior experience," and could be taken using a piano, electronic keyboard, or any keyboard instrument. He was intrigued.

The course is led by a team of three instructors: a lead instructor responsible for core explanations, two collaborating instructors who take turns teaching, three sessions per week, and a patient and attentive tutor who regularly reviews assignments and answers questions for each student. After enrolling, Andrew was deeply moved by this "senior-friendly" course structure. He attended classes on time every week and submitted his assignments promptly. Although he made mistakes in every recording, he persisted in using mobile editing software to trim the stuttering sections before uploading them. Each assignment was reviewed and corrected by the teacher, and the entire class could watch each other's practice videos, which provided him with immense encouragement.

The first class of each week was always led by Xiao Han—a young, vibrant instructor with exceptional piano skills. She would begin with a demonstration piece featuring a lively rhythm and crystal-clear tone, instantly filling the classroom with rhythm and energy. Her touch control is extremely delicate, allowing her to effortlessly transition between staccato and glissando, with notes seeming to leap from her fingertips, light yet full of power. Andrew particularly admires her mastery of pedaling and tonal layers during performances, showcasing the professionalism of a seasoned performer.

Mr. Du, on the other hand, is a graceful, long-haired male teacher who not only has a striking appearance but is also highly creative in his teaching. When explaining the division of labor and coordination between the left and right hands, he cleverly used a concept similar to Zhou Botong's "Empty and Clear Fist" technique, guiding students to experience the rhythm and weight transfer of independent hand movements. His explanations are clear and well-structured, with a crisp "Go!" as a rhythmic cue, enabling many students to grasp the concepts immediately and retain them effectively.

Lu Lu, the class tutor, also performed exceptionally well. Not only does she have a solid foundation in playing, but she also patiently answers students' questions and provides detailed guidance. She excels at breaking down technical details into simple, easy-to-understand language, such as the five-finger basics, harmonic progressions, and rhythmic subdivision. For many older students, her assistance feels like a warm, supportive presence, bringing a sense of reassurance.

This cross-generational teaching model is precisely one of the practical examples emphasized in this chapter's section "1.2 Intergenerational Learning Symbiosis Model"—the professionalism and vitality of the younger generation are transformed into a driving force for the older generation to relearn and build confidence through systematic and empathetic teaching design.

"I was at the bottom of the class at first. My left hand couldn't keep up with my right, and I often played everything out of sync," he once told his daughter. "But you had it harder when you were little—you're left-handed and had to play melodies with your right hand. I have no right to complain now." This remark made the whole family laugh, and it also

encouraged his daughter to support him further on this healing journey.

He practices for about half an hour each day, but never misses a day. He started with right-hand scales, then moved on to left-hand scales, and eventually practiced both hands together, using a metronome and sheet music. He gradually noticed that his fingers were becoming more flexible, and the numbness and trembling he once felt were slowly diminishing, even disappearing.

Two months of progress: from stuttering to fluency, fingers and confidence awaken together

Within two months of starting piano lessons, Andrew's progress exceeded his family's expectations. In the first few weeks, he practiced at home for about half an hour each day, repeatedly learning simple scales for the right and left hands on the screen. However, his fingers were stiff, his movements slow, and his left hand struggled to keep up with the rhythm, often resulting in stuttering or wrong notes. He often frustratedly told his wife, "My left hand is really too weak; it's always half a beat behind." "This must have been very difficult for our daughter back then; she's left-handed, but piano is right-handed... She managed to stick with it, so I'll give it a try too."

However, what kept Andrew going wasn't just the course design itself, but the positive pressure from the learning community—he had to submit homework every week. These assignments weren't just for the sake of completing them; they required him to record a video of his performance, which would then be reviewed by an instructor. Andrew often re-recorded his piano practice assignments multiple times to avoid issues like stuttering or

instability. He even secretly taught himself how to use a mobile video editing app to cut out any unnecessary silences or obvious mistakes before submitting his work. Though he knew this wasn't entirely in line with the assignment's spirit, he still submitted it with a touch of pride, saying, "If I don't edit it, the teacher will think I zoned out for two minutes." Deep down, he knows this is somewhat "cheating," but he still submits it anyway. After handing in the assignment, he practices even more diligently, fearing he might fall behind the rhythm in subsequent sections.



It was in this state of "trying to be clever but not daring to slack off" that his playing gradually evolved from its initial awkwardness and instability into something with rhythm and muscle memory.

What's particularly worth mentioning is that all the students in this course could see each other's homework, allowing Andrew to directly gauge the skill levels of his peers and adjust his own goals accordingly. He once whispered to his wife, "I'm probably at the bottom of the class right now, but that's okay. As long as I can play it steadily, I'll be satisfied."

The metronome exercises became one of his favorite parts of the course. The system provided accompaniment tracks at various speeds to help students maintain rhythm, which not only strengthened his musical sense but also significantly improved his long-standing issue with numb fingers. By the end of the second month, he could play several single-hand melodies smoothly and had begun to attempt simple two-hand pieces, with the right-hand melody and left-hand harmony gradually becoming more coordinated.

Every afternoon, Andrew sat at the brown piano, with his surroundings arranged like a simple recording studio. He mounted his phone on a tripod to record videos of his practice sessions, which he uploaded to the class group chat every week as homework. After recording, he would review the video frame by frame, marking sections where the tempo was too slow or the dynamics were lacking. "As a student, you have to show some effort," he said.

A light yellow metronome sits beside the piano, emitting a steady ticking sound, like an unwavering practice partner. Andrew plays along with the beat, nodding rhythmically, even ensuring that the height at which his fingers lift remains consistent.

He had specially prepared two hand trainers for his left and right hands, matching in color and shaped like five claws. These were his "extra practice" after finishing his daily piano practice. Even after dinner, he would slowly press them while watching TV. "This thing is more effective than seeing a doctor," he said with a smile. When he gripped the trainer, his palm naturally arched, and his fingers spread apart, resembling the position of fingers about to strike the keys. This movement wasn't just about building strength; it also helped him remember the fundamental principle of "keeping the fingertips upright."

"My left hand is the numbest, but you know what?" he said to his wife while pressing the device. "When I practice this, by the third round, I suddenly feel a place open up. It's not that magical—it's just that if you dare to move, it slowly opens up."

The left hand found its own voice: a symphony of familiarity and challenge

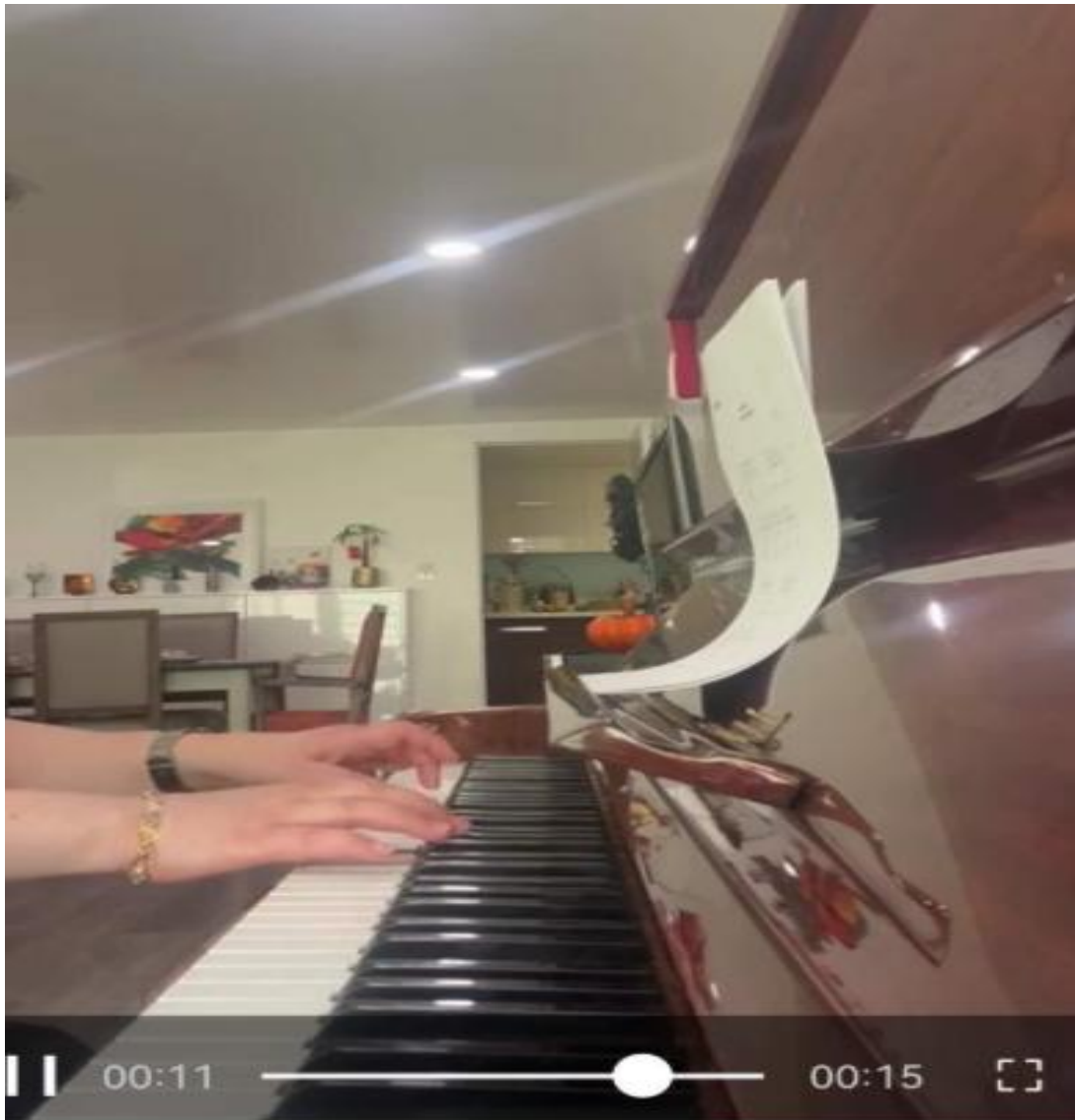
About half a year later, on a certain afternoon, Andrew's practice began to undergo a qualitative transformation. He was no longer just imitating the instructional videos but had truly "understood" the relationship between melody and accompaniment. He started to focus more on his left hand. From initially only being able to play simple bass notes, he gradually mastered the secondary accompaniment and "sliding chords." He said, "The left hand is finally not just moving along—it's starting to speak."

This was the first time he felt he could "play a complete piece," not just with the melody in his right hand, but with a dialogue between both hands. When practicing "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star Variations," he constantly adjusted the rhythm of the left-hand chords to blend naturally with the right-hand melody. He even began to express his own interpretations of the rhythm markings in the sheet music, using a pen to sketch his designs for the changes in the musical phrases in his practice book.

Notes

"Twinkle Twinkle Little Star Variations" is a piano variation piece based on the melody of the classic children's song "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star." The original melody originates from the French folk song "Ah! vous dirai-je, Maman" and is widely known around the world. The renowned composer Mozart composed twelve variations (K.265/300e) based on this melody, endowing the simple children's song with rich and diverse musical expressions.

This piece is not only a classic practice piece for piano beginners but is also widely used in music education and therapeutic training due to its familiar melody and varied techniques.



圖：影片播放到第11秒，安德魯按下暫停鍵，看著同學的手型發了一會兒呆——那是他下決心不落後的時刻。

Watching his classmates' homework videos has become his daily "observation time." He would comment while watching: "This person's left hand is steady, but the melody in the right hand isn't very clear," or "I'll try to learn that rhythm from that person." Occasionally, he would exclaim, "This person plays so well; I still have a long way to go." However, more often than not, he would smile and say, "I'm so much better than I was two months ago."

Weekly assignments still required video submissions, and he always took them seriously. If he didn't play well, he would record it again, sometimes multiple times, and even use a mobile editing app to cut out the beginning and any mistakes before uploading the final version. On a few occasions, after watching the recording, he shook his head and sighed, "It's still not smooth enough. Let's try again." This diligent attitude led the teachers grading the assignments to specifically mention in their feedback: "Continuing to make progress; details are gradually improving."

Occasionally, his family members would hear him practicing and notice that it was no longer mechanical finger movements but a gradually smooth rhythm. His wife smiled and said, "You've learned well; teach me too. Don't keep it to yourself." Andrew also began actively sharing his practice insights in the student community and encouraged others: "Record it a few more times, and it will flow better. No one plays well the first time."

During this period, Andrew's body also began to respond positively. His right thumb and index finger, which had been numb for years, began to actively exert force on their own during practice, and the trembling sensation gradually decreased. The phenomenon of frequently mistyping while typing also significantly improved. He was deeply surprised—"It turns out that medication or exercise couldn't solve this. Playing the piano is truly different; it starts with training the brain's commands."

Although he occasionally still feels frustrated due to unstable rhythm, every time he completes a slightly more complex new piece, the sense of accomplishment always outweighs the temporary setbacks. He said, "Music makes me feel like I can still improve, still create—it's not just about growing older day by day."

"Silver-Haired Red Pine": From Online Classrooms to the World's Melodies

Behind the "Silver Pine" course lies the hard work and dedication of countless teachers and students. Originally an online piano teaching platform for seniors in Taiwan, "Silver Pine" combines the experience of the Red Pine Long-Term Care Organization and digital music education to use music as a companion, helping the elderly rediscover rhythm and dignity in their later years. These young teachers, who excel in teaching, not only bring artistic and spiritual nourishment to students from around the world but also gain opportunities for international exchange and travel.

This time, their destination was the United States. During their ten-day cultural tour, the three teachers set aside an entire day to visit Andrew's home for a face-to-face visit and guidance.

This day holds special significance for Andrew. He had been eagerly anticipating the meeting with these teachers from Taiwan. When the three teachers entered his living room and gathered around the familiar brown-yellow Hertzwan piano, Andrew's eyes sparkled with pride and emotion.



"This is the piece I've been practicing recently. Could you give me some feedback, teachers?" Andrew smiled, his eyes filled with anticipation.

Xiaohan smiled gently, her fingertips lightly touching the keys as she demonstrated a light, bouncy passage. The notes shimmered like stars. Her delicacy and mastery left Andrew even more impressed, and he immediately asked her to guide him on how to integrate his finger movements with the changing notes.

At the same time, Teacher Xiao Du began explaining the techniques for dividing the left and right hands, emphasizing their independence and coordination. Every word he spoke felt like a guide to the piano notes, instantly helping Andrew understand the layers of tone. Teacher Lulu, meanwhile, provided specific rhythm exercises and patiently guided Andrew on how to find smoother expressions in his playing, ensuring that every note carried emotion.

At that moment, Andrew felt a sense of fulfillment that came from the heart—he was no longer looking up at these former teachers from afar, but was now in his own home, standing side by side with them as a student and friend.

Rebuilding Through Music: From Healing Hands to the Spotlight

A year had passed, and Andrew's piano technique and musical understanding had made significant progress. He not only mastered the independent use of his left hand for accompaniment but could also play several classic pieces smoothly with coordinated hands. Pieces like "Für Elise," the Asian classic "The Butterfly Lovers," and his two favorite Western melodies, "Wedding March" and "Canon in D," have become part of his daily practice and performance repertoire.

He often practices in his living room, and neighbors sometimes stop by to listen, with some even knocking on the door to express their admiration. He has also participated in music salons organized by senior citizen clubs, confidently performing on a simply decorated stage. His performances have not only earned him enthusiastic applause but also inspired many of his peers to express their desire to "re-learn some things they missed out on when they were younger."

Today, Andrew's finger dexterity surpasses that of most people his age. He can move effortlessly between the black and white keys and adjust the rhythm and intensity of his playing according to his emotions. He has even begun to study harmony theory on his own, experimenting with rearranging familiar melodies to create his own "versions." Music is no longer just a tool to heal his stiff hands; it has become a way for him to connect with the

world and communicate with himself.

For his family, Andrew's transformation has far exceeded their original expectations. His wife often jokes at family gatherings, "This piano has finally found a second life, and it's even more 精彩 than the first."

His daughter often secretly filmed him playing with focus and shared the videos on social media, receiving a string of encouraging comments and likes. One person even wrote, "This is the most moving music I've ever heard, coming from a soul that refuses to give up."

"I never thought I could still improve at seventy," Andrew said. "The older I get, the more I realize that some things are never too late to start."

In him, we see not just the miracle of recovery after illness, not just the improvement in piano skills, but a call from the depths of the notes—a reminder that no matter where we are in life, we still have the ability to learn, express ourselves, and be moved.

Music is the language of frequency; scent is the key to memory.

If the piano keys awaken the rhythm deep within our hearts, then in the next chapter, we will enter the world of scent—exploring how aromas quietly redefine the paths of the body and emotions.