The MAYRON COLE PIANO METHOD

Contemporary Era

Fireworks March

Mayron Ellis Cole
1940 –



Since Level 9 is the last book in my piano curriculum, it has been called to my attention that I should write my own biography, and what a challenge this assignment has become. But I shall try to be succinct, as best I can, regarding my never-ending search for musical knowledge during my stay on Planet Earth.

My life began in my tiny hometown in the center of Texas. Actually, it began on a farm located outside of that small town. I am the middle of three daughters, and I have always enjoyed that birth-order position of "middle child." For you see, middle children are usually left alone to do their own things, and I am very creative which requires being alone. I would wander the fields of my farm looking for clay in the gullies washed out by rain, and with that clay I would sculpt the most wondrous things for hours and hours. All I needed was a large hat, a kitchen spoon, and a canteen of water. The large hat was needed because I am a very fair-skinned redhead.

One day, my outdoor wanderings came to an end when an old upright piano appeared in our living room. It was like a miracle! I did not need to go out into the Texas sun to find entertainment. My entertainment was that piano! I never questioned where the old clunker came from, but I did discover that the piano was there for my older sister to begin piano lessons. Although my older sister did not particularly enjoy taking piano lessons because her teacher was a shrew, I was mesmerized by the sounds that came from that piano. Using Sister's piano books, I taught myself to read staff notes. Soon, I was reading my way through church hymnals and any old music I found in the piano bench. My mom realized that she was purchasing piano lessons for the wrong child.

Two weeks later, Mom announced the greatest news: She had persuaded Mrs. Lois Morris to be my piano teacher. Mrs. Morris was the best teacher our small town had. I was so excited I couldn't sleep that night. I was told that Mrs. Morris only taught older and advanced students, and my mother had to *beg* Mrs. Morris to take me on since I was only seven. I am emphasizing the word "beg" because it comes back into this essay at the end. Mom further informed me that Mrs. Morris did not like teaching

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really young students and that I must practice every day to keep from being dismissed from the lady's piano studio. And Mom further announced that she would be fatally embarrassed if I were dismissed from piano for lack of practicing. Our family's honor was at stake.

Finally, the day of my first piano lesson arrived. The first thing Mrs. Morris did that day was change my name. Up until that piano lesson, everyone in my family and small town called me Mayron Ann. (My mother's name was May and my father's name was Ron. I never knew who Ann was.) Mrs. Morris announced that henceforth I would be known only as Mayron. No more double-name would be used. And so through the years that followed, I have gone by just Mayron. Little Mrs. Morris was a force to be reckoned with!

Mrs. Morris knew that I had learned on my own to read staff notes, so at that first lesson she gave me a primer book of music which I promptly sight read my way through. She smiled and then dug around in her music cabinet and pulled out Beethoven's *Moonlight Sonata* in C-Sharp minor. She showed me which keys would be sharped and how to play triplets. But that was all she would show me. Mrs. Morris had a unique manner of teaching that worked well with my personality: She would assign a page or two of music, then I was to go home and figure everything out for myself. When I returned for the next lesson, she would answer any questions that I had. I liked that way of learning. It made me think, reason, and focus on what I was doing. It was like being a detective! And when I discovered the double sharp found in *Moonlight Sonata*, I figured out what it meant by myself, and remember this was decades before the internet existed. I will forever be indebted to Mrs. Morris. Her manner of teaching would not be good for other students, but it worked for my needs.



I was practicing diligently every day because my family honor was at stake but most of all because I loved playing the piano. I was quickly becoming an advanced pianist (pictured here at age 8), but it all almost came tumbling down the day Mrs. Morris decided to drill me on the names of staff notes. When she asked me a note's name, I remember saying, "Notes have names? Like Bob or Susan?" She almost fell out of her chair laughing, but I was not kidding. I also did not know the keys on the piano also had letter names. I knew which key to depress when I was reading music but the fact that notes and keys have names was foreign to me. So after learning *Moonlight Sonata* in just two weeks at the age of seven, I had to take home flash-cards and learn the letter names of notes. I was chagrinned! But I learned them because I wanted to become really great at the piano. I moved into Bach's Two-Part Inventions when I was eight and then into all the other great composers' music as my sight-reading skills climbed higher and higher. But I was hiding another secret from Mrs. Morris and the world: I did not know how to count rhythms correctly. I was afraid to admit this problem to Mrs. Morris because I was afraid that would be the reason she finally let me go as a piano student. But I have to confess that Mrs. Morris did try to teach me to count rhythms.

I will remember one day in particular: *The Day Mrs. Morris Tried to Explain Time Signatures*. The dear lady had me place my new piano book on the music rack. Then she said, "Point to the time signature of this composition, please." I stared at her blankly. She said, "It's those numbers at the beginning of the

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piece of music. Do you see the top number?" Of course I saw it. "The top number tells you how many beats are in one measure. So how many beats will be in each measure, Mayron?" Now that really confused me! How many beets will be in a measure? Beets? Those red vegetables that we grew on my farm? I had no idea! She waited a long moment, and then answered for me. "There will be four beats in each measure." I nodded my head in a knowing-manner. "The bottom number tells you what type of note will receive one beat. The bottom number is a 4. So what type of note will receive one beat?" Please remember that I was only eight years old, so I had never been introduced to fractions and did not know that the 4 stood for the ¼ note. But you must also realize that Mrs. Morris had never taught a young student before. And neither of us was going to give up! Finally, she said, "The 4 stands for the quarter note." I did not know which note was a quarter note, but I was afraid to announce that fact. And besides, "Quarter" sounded like it started with a "Kw" sound, so why was there a 4 symbolizing the quarter note? But I kept quiet. I knew my family's honor was a stake, and I was starting to panic. She continued, "So in this music, there will be four beats per measure and the quarter note will receive one beat. Do you understand?" Heck no! I did not understand! I asked, "Why does the quarter note want a beet?" Now Mrs. Morris was quiet, then said, "Uh, it does not *want* a beat; we simply give it a beat." I asked, "We give it a beet even though it does not want one?" "Uh, yes! We give it a beat! Now look at the first measure. How many beats do you see in that measure?" I saw no beets! None. "Mayron, play the first line of music. Then tell me if you feel the beats." I played; I felt nothing. I put my hand on the music to see if, somehow, I could feel the beets in the music, but there were no beets to feel. I'm sure I had tears in my eyes when Mrs. Morris finally called a halt to that day's lesson regarding time signatures.

When I was working in the classics that Mrs. Morris assigned I was always unsure about playing the rhythms correctly. I could read all the notes easily, but no one could explain that invisible force in music that drives it and is called rhythm. How did a pianist know how long to depress a key… and when to play the next key? My mother said that a pianist could feel the rhythm, but I felt nothing. The solution? I borrowed classical records of the music from our local radio station and mimicked the rhythms that I heard. No one suspected, and I won many piano contests with that devious little ploy. But my knowledge of reading and playing rhythms was decidedly lacking, and I knew it.

Tragically, my life changed forever on a spring afternoon when I was twelve. My father suddenly and unexpectedly died. He was the person in my life who had convinced me that I could do anything that I set my mind to doing. He was very dear to me, and I fell deeply into mourning. To comfort myself in that horrific period of grief, I began to play every hymn in our church's hymnal. I sat for hours each day and just played the piano; playing the piano was great therapy for my grief. By summer's end I was able to do some impressive improvisations with those hymns, and I was ready to jump back into life. That fall I became our church's pianist, a job I held until I went to college. Through the many years of my life, I have been a church pianist in every town and city in which I have lived. I believe God took my sorrow and turned it into a blessing.

One day, after viewing a hometown parade, I decided that I should be the drum major of our town's high school band. But one needed to play a band instrument in order to hold that position, I was told. So for a few months I took trombone lessons from a local teacher and then joined the high school band at the end of the summer. At that first rehearsal, that award-winning band was practicing some great marches to play for the fall football season. I had never played with a large ensemble such as a band,

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and I loved the sound of all those wonderful instruments. I was mesmerized with ensemble playing. But I quickly realized that I could not fake rhythms as I had been doing previously. I will never forget the moment that the band director told us to turn to a march written in 12/8 and announced, "Take it in four!" Everyone knew what that meant… except for me. I could not begin to play that march! I knew all the notes, but it was the rhythm that stopped me. The band director glanced over at me as I sat with my trombone on my knee, and calmly said to me, "Stay after band tonight, and I will teach you to read rhythms." Help finally arrived; I could have jumped up and kissed him at that moment! That afternoon, we studied simple rhythms, compound rhythms, irregular rhythms and cut time; plus, he explained to me how to take a waltz tempo "in one." I absorbed that rhythm-counting knowledge like a water-starved sponge. I took three rhythm-counting lessons with him, and am grateful for each of those lessons. So now you know why I stress rhythm counting in my piano curriculum, and why I encourage you to play in ensembles. And yes, I did become the drum major of that band as well as student conductor. And I was also the high school choir pianist (pictured here at age 16). I loved sight reading those beautiful accompaniments; sight reading has always been tremendous fun for me.



I was offered scholarships to many universities, and decided to attend Baylor University. A friend of mine had somehow scheduled a piano audition for me with the dean of the music school, so I traveled to Waco about two weeks before I was to start my freshman year to meet with him. Surprisingly, the dean only wanted to hear me sight read, and as I have confessed earlier in this essay, I love to sight read. He said that sight reading was the only true means of testing a pianist's knowledge. After my audition, the dean placed me as a senior in piano. I took "double piano" which meant six hours of piano lessons that first semester. By the end of my first semester, I had completed all the hours needed for a major in piano. But I liked taking piano lessons, so I took six extra hours of piano during the spring semester. The music dean heard me play again for my piano final exam that spring and gave me the highest marks of all of my piano professor's students, my piano professor informed me. I have also been told that I set a record for finishing a piano major. Both the dean and my piano professor talked to me about going further with piano and becoming a college piano professor, but my lifelong goal has always been to teach children how to correctly play the piano.



I met my future husband, Bill Cole, in the university band. He played the drums, and I played the trombone and was a majorette. We have been married ever since (pictured here at age 27) and have two beautiful daughters, Ellisa and Colleen, who are now grown. Bill is a retired orthopedic surgeon and helps Colleen and me run our publishing company. As you have progressed through my piano method, you have probably seen that several of my compositions have been dedicated to Bill: *William's Waltz* in Level 7 and *Summer Love* in Level 7. For Ellisa, I wrote *My Daughter Ellisa* in Level 1 and *Ellisa's Journey* in Level 7. For Colleen, I wrote *Colleen's Waltz* in Level 1 and *Colleen* in Level 8..

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So why have I spent years writing piano compositions and theory pages all the way up to the college level of knowledge? Truthfully, it was out of necessity. I began writing my own piano method when I found that the other piano methods were too weak in rhythm counting and relied too heavily on hand position. Along the way, I purchased a duplex apartment building close to my home in Houston, hired teachers and opened The Mayron Cole Music Conservatory, Inc. Now years later, Bill and I have moved back to my small hometown in central Texas where we run my music publishing company. I continue to compose every day, and to date have written almost six-hundred compositions and drawn more than two thousand illustrations for my many books. I have been asked numerous times what impetus made me dedicate my life to teaching piano. And here's what did it: One day when I was about ten, Mrs. Morris said to me, "Mayron, you know a great deal about music and playing the piano. But when you die, you are going to take all of that knowledge with you…unless you teach it to others." That one brief statement changed my entire life. So thank you, Mrs. Morris, for inspiring me to give my knowledge of music to others. I owe it all to you.

And remember my mother telling me she had to "beg" Mrs. Morris to take me as a young student? Well, many years after my mother died, I received a letter from Mrs. Morris. She told me how proud she was of me, which made me smile. Then she wrote, "Mayron, I had to *beg* your mother to allow me to teach you. She knew I only taught older students so was hesitant to let you take piano lessons from me. But I assured her that I would enjoy teaching a young student like you, that I would learn how to explain musical concepts to a young child, and that you and I would have a great time as you progressed through piano. I am so grateful your mother allowed me to teach you." What?! My mother fibbed about "begging" Mrs. Morris to teach me?! I am still in shock! But I have to confess that I probably would not have practiced as much if I had known the truth, so in the end I'm glad my mom created the story!



(left to right): Colleen, Mayron, Bill, Ellisa in 2015

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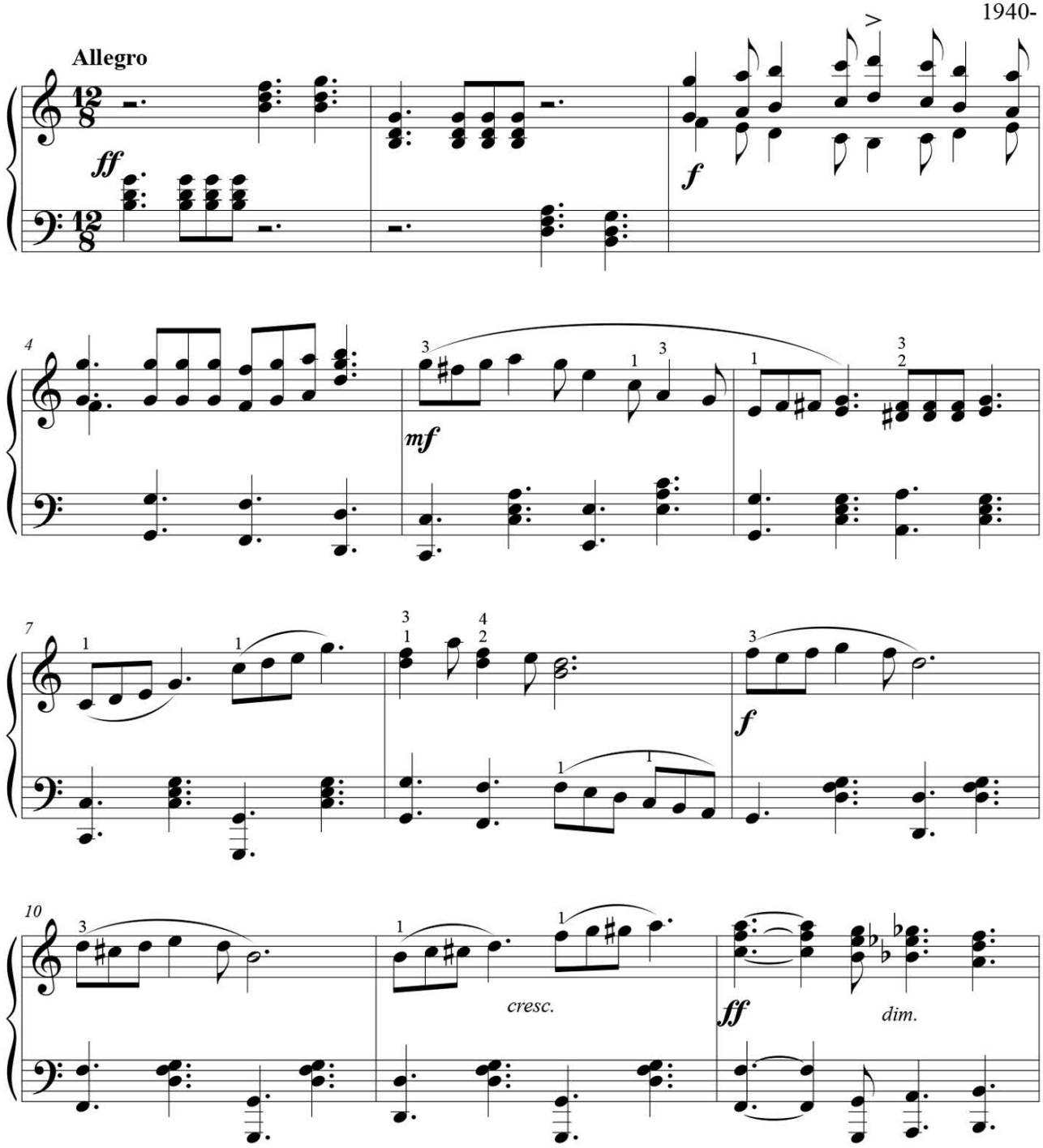
Fireworks March

(The Mayron Cole Piano Method Grand Finale!)

(orchestrated accompaniment has a 2 measure count-in)

Mayron Cole
1940-



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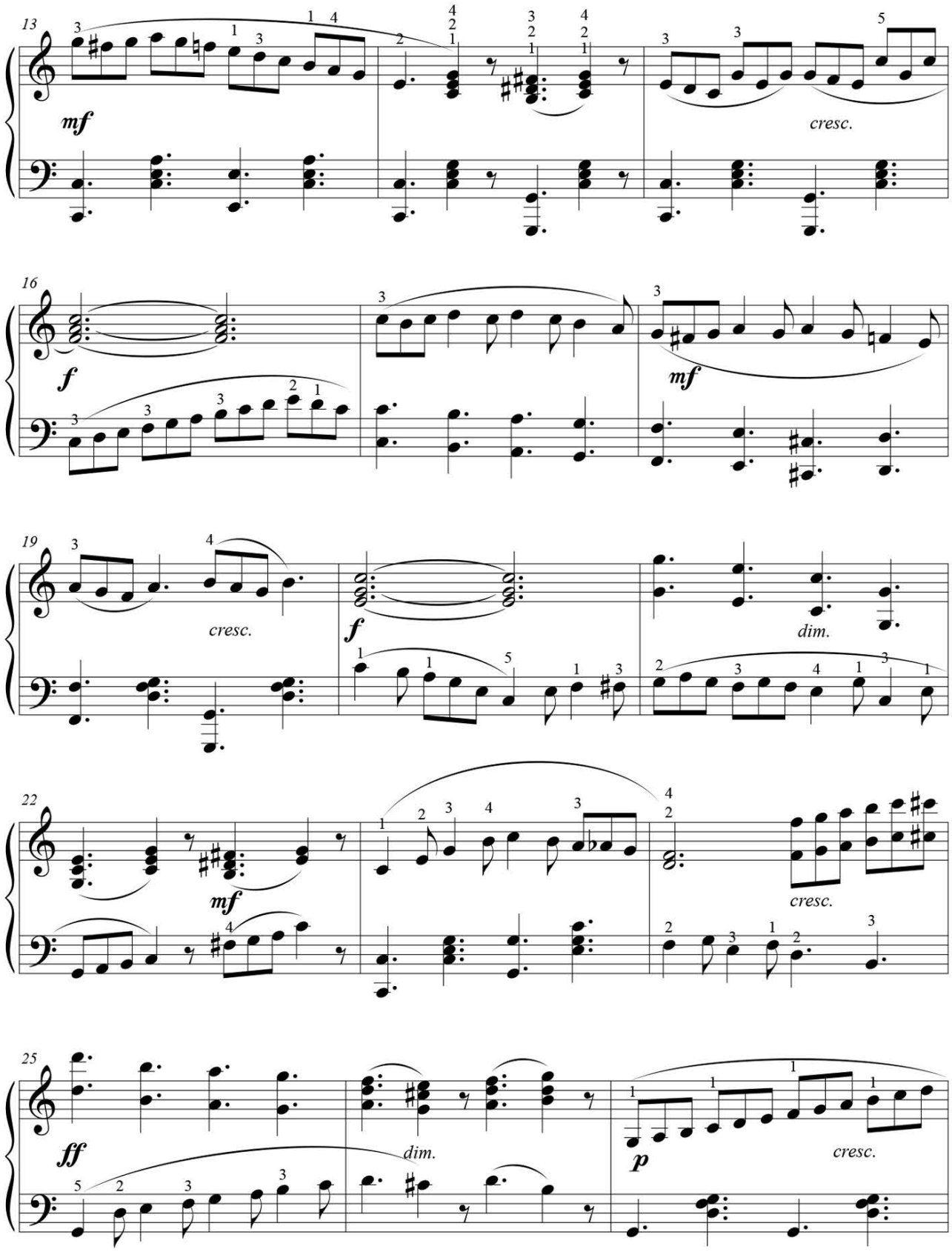

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28

f *ff* *mf*

31

cresc. *f* *dim.* *ff* *dim.*

34

ff *dim.* *p* *cresc.* *f*

37

cresc. *rit.*

39

ff



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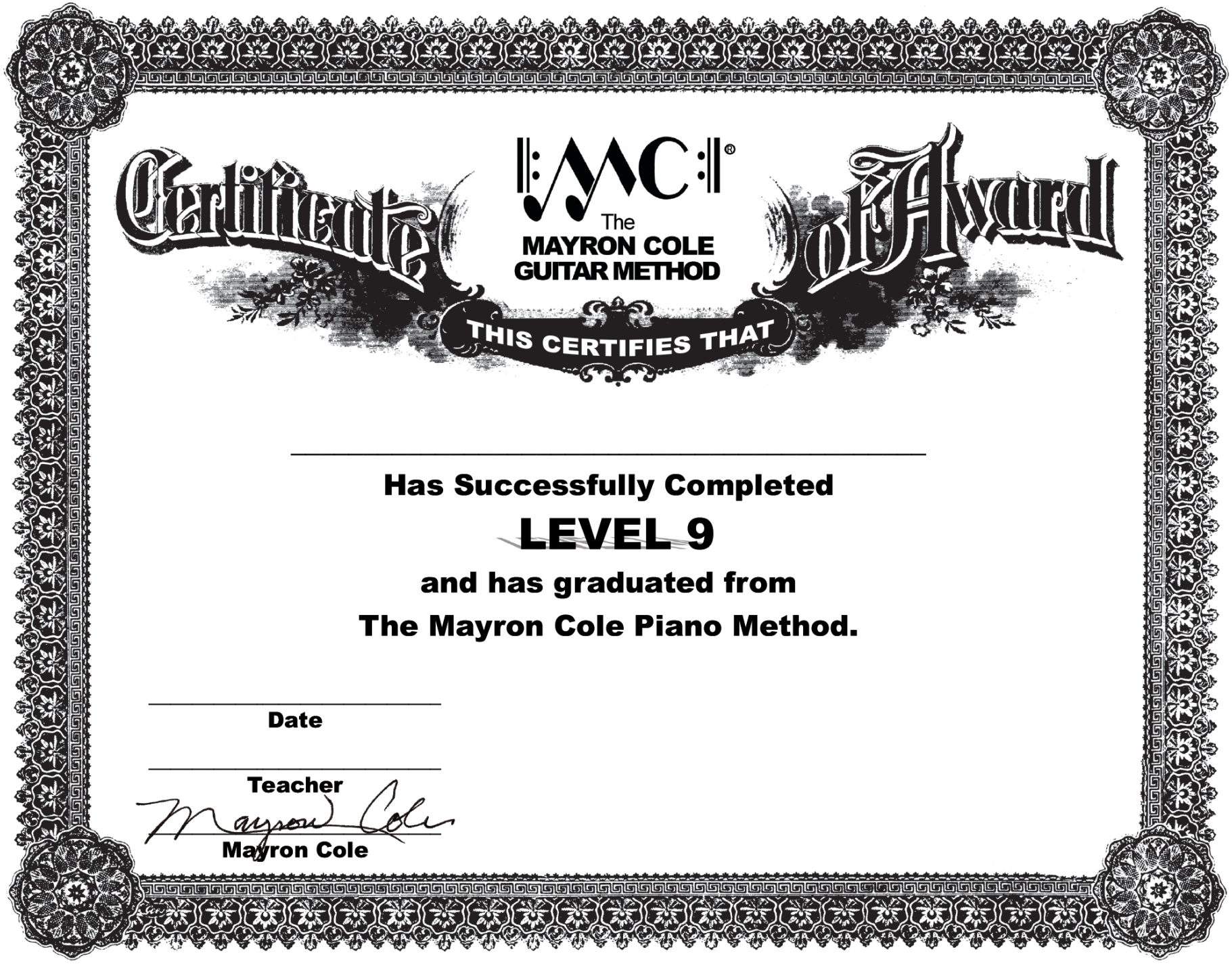

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Has Successfully Completed

LEVEL 9

and has graduated from

The Mayron Cole Piano Method.

_____

Date

_____

Teacher

Mayron Cole