

Piano Learning Software

[Pete Matthews Jr](https://3nt.xyz) – <https://3nt.xyz> – © December 24, 2021

This article compares six methods of learning to play piano that can be used on an Android tablet. All run on other platforms as well. Programs that are either not recommended or do not run on Android are discussed briefly at the end.

How to Play Piano, from The Great Courses, is an updated traditional course. *Jeremy See's* course gets you playing quickly, using the special features of an arranger piano. *Pianoforall* gets you playing quickly with chords.

Flowkey, *Simply Piano* and *Yousician* all have apps that work similarly: they have lessons (courses); they all include music (songs) you select to practice and play along with. None allow you to install music (such as a MIDI file) or to print out sheet music. To take a song out that you learn in one of these apps, you either memorize it, or take your device along – you hope to outgrow these methods. *Synthesia* has no courses, but can play any MIDI file.

	The Great Courses	Flowkey	Simply Piano	Yousician for Piano	Synthesia	Jeremy See (Arranger)	Pianoforall
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● functionality full ○ partial - none 							
Runs on Android	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Product Type	Web	Practice/Play App				Web	ebook
Game & progress...	-	-	-	●	●	-	-
Short route to fun	-	●	●	●	●	●	●
Play-along mode	○	●	●	●	●		-
Either hand or both	○	●	-	●	●		-
Wait for note mode	-	●	-	-	●		-
Play/repeat section	-	●	-	●	-		-
Metronome	-	-	-	●	-		-
Slow, fast or on beat	-	-	-	●	-		-
Slow (speeds/range)	-	3	3	range	5+		-
Shows sheet music	○	●	○	●	●		-
Workbook	●	-	-	-	-		●
Arranger Features	-	-	-	-	-	●	-
Audience	adult	adult	child+	any	any	any	adult
Fee for 3/12 mo., or {one time fee}	{35-385}	\$13/120	72/130	60/90	{40}	{198}	{39}

The Great Courses

Professor Pamela D. Pike, PhD

Pamela D. Pike is ... Professor of Piano Pedagogy at Louisiana State University (LSU), where she coordinates the group piano and piano pedagogy programs.

This course comes as 36 half-hour lessons. I run it on a 10-inch Samsung (Android) tablet on the music rest and dedicated to the piano on the music rest, in the Firefox browser. The tablet sends sound via Bluetooth to the Yamaha DGX-670 piano. I can play along, and all the sound comes out clearly through the piano speakers or headphones. However, while the interface permits backing up (or going forward) 15 seconds at a time, this function is not smooth.

Furthermore, if I blank the screen and turn off the piano, when I come back, the interface will be messed up. To beat this problem, I try to remember to back out of the course and shut down the browser when I am done. (I don't know if performance under Chrome would be better.)

The course workbook is available as a PDF; and when I first got the course, I printed the pages for each lesson. Then I received the DVDs and spiral-bound workbook, which must be ordered at the time the course is purchased. I did use a DVD on a laptop, perched on the top of a digital upright piano, when I visited my daughter. That was OK, but that old laptop would not send sound to the piano.

The workbook is very good – and essential - but there are discrepancies. After a while, I started noting them in my book:

- The book should recommend a cadence for every piece. I practiced hard on Woodland Jaunt (p. 28) at the typical 132 cadence used for the simpler version (p. 24), only to have her ask me to play it with her at a quarter note = 176. Or maybe that problem was for Chord Etude (p. 44), which she played at 160. Some cadences are announced in the Practice Assignments, some only in the video, and some not at all. One of the last was Skip to My Lou (p. 53), on which I timed Dr. Pike at 120. The first cadence I found at the beginning of a piece was for Minor Romp (p. 62) in Lesson 15. However, I have paused, perhaps permanently, after Lesson 14.
- Dr. Pike played the first measure of the 12-Bar Blues (p. 36) incorrectly; she played it correctly in the full run-through. Also, on the video, Dr. Pike suggested the option of playing half notes, on the first and third beats, with the left hand – but that suggestion came after I had practiced the piece, in the next lesson – and the idea is not in the book.
- The first fourteen lessons use only 5-finger scales; octave scales are introduced in Lesson 15. This seems a good idea, in general, but some items in minor keys are confusing in the book.

- Sometimes crucial theory appears only on the video, and those bits can be difficult to seek out. [Please don't tell me we have to buy the complete transcript to get this info.]
 - Skip to My Lou (p. 53) is presented with a new-to-us chord scheme that is not explained in the book, only on the video.
 - You can figure out any chord progression given the steps. The key steps for a minor chord progression are explained in Lesson 14 (Legato and Staccato, of all places) but are not in the book. I wrote this in myself.
 - There are other such bits that I don't have.

"I think you'll enjoy exploring musical concepts while making music at the piano."

That quote pretty much says it all – where is the excitement, the enthusiasm?

This course updates the standard style that I attempted to learn with, for over six years, as a child. Practitioners of these methods act as if students arrive fully committed to success, with the will to tackle anything. Then they teach with old music, partly because it is free. As a child, I was there because my Mom signed me up, and then because that's what I did. If I practiced, it was mostly because of coercion or to not be in trouble when I went to my lesson. It was not until years after I finally quit that it sank in that playing piano could actually be fun – although I had had some fun with a book of folk songs.

Dr. Pike teaches this rigorous style as well as anyone could. She probably teaches college students who are required to take her course to get their music degree. They need to gain this proficiency, and are committed by both their long-term goals and fear of failure – they arrive motivated. Presumably many do love music so much that they attack the work with gusto. For me, the fun came from the rare feelings of competence playing music that, on its own, I often found not worthy of the effort.

After my failure, my parents diverted my sister, Andrea, 8 ½ years younger than me, to playing flute (which she hated) in school. She wanted piano lessons, and was finally allowed to take them in her last two years of high school. Same teacher, and – surprise! – same result. After a career as an opera singer, and as a voice and Alexander Technique instructor, she still does not play Mom's piano.

My work on the first 14 lessons has been valuable, and I may return later. However, I looked ahead at the remaining 22 lessons, and decided I don't want to go there now. Each lesson requires harder practice than the last and is no more rewarding. I'm looking for a good course that will be fun to take – *I'm retired!*

Flowkey

<https://www.toptenreviews.com/flowkey-review>

OUR VERDICT ★★★★★

Flowkey is a great option for beginners and young kids who want to get stuck into playing piano. With limited theory options though, you might outgrow it sooner than you'd like.

FOR	AGAINST
Start taking piano lessons instantly	Not ideal for advanced players
Affordable, with a 30-day free trial	Limited theory and sight-reading lessons
Partnered with Yamaha, a great brand	


<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VNIRRZG-lwI> [Charles Cleyn] – vs. Simply Piano


<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NisclVdQZig> [Charles Cleyn] – vs. Yousician

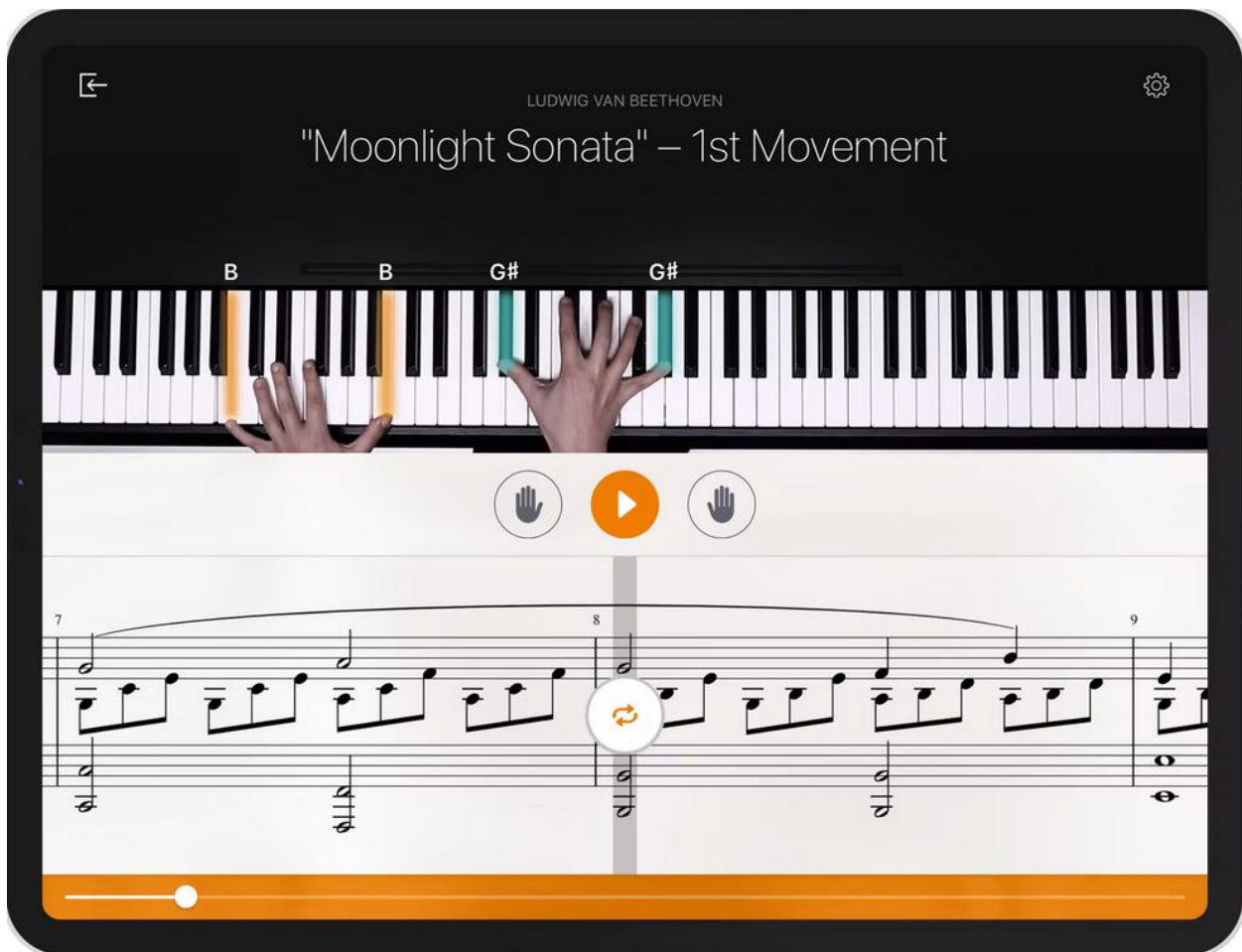
Flowkey is a free app, but eventually you will have to pay to get more or advanced songs. As with Simply Piano, there are **courses** and **songs**. The courses in Flowkey are less linear, more choose your own adventure, without any prerequisites noted. 50%, 75% and 100% tempos are available. Flowkey teaches posture and hand position. As with Simply Piano, the keyboard is on top of the display and the sheet music on the bottom. Flowkey has a more standard, professional, adult appearance than Simply Piano; the sheet music actually looks like sheet music.







<https://www.flowkey.com/en/yamaha> - Here, I claimed 3 months of Flowkey Premium for free, because I bought a Yamaha piano the previous summer.


While I did try a few lessons, what I really wanted was to practice and learn an interesting song. At the beginner level, I found about a dozen songs I like, and I selected Simon & Garfunkel's "The Sound of Silence." I am truly a beginner, so I started working on it in chunks, at 50% speed. I found no documentation on how to do this, except for the figure on the next page, which I cut from the Flowkey web site.

As shown, when you touch the  play button, the complete backing track plays, and the sheet music rolls off screen to the left, at full speed. It will stop, if you touch just about anywhere on the screen. Above the music, you see the keyboard being played by an expert.

Touching either (or both) of the  hand icons turns it orange, selects that part of the backing track to be played, and displays a menu above from which you select wait mode, 50%, or 75% speed.



-  **Discover Songs**
Over 1,500 songs from every genre and skill level
-  **Wait Mode**
Listens to you play and waits for you to hit the right notes
-  **Video & Sheet Music**
Watch an expert pianist play and follow sheet music on the same screen
-  **Slow Motion**
Play at reduced speed to get comfortable with a piece
-  **Loop Function**
Replay a specific section until you perfect it
-  **Select a Hand**
Practice right and left hands separately

The  loop function is crucial: when you touch that icon, you can then highlight a chunk of the song to practice. Then when you touch play, it will play that chunk repeatedly. I like this approach as a beginner. When looping, after stopping, the play button starts the chunk from the beginning.

<https://www.flowkey.com/en/piano-guide> provides useful information, such as how long to practice:

20 minutes is a great place to start. In general, limit your sessions to 40 minutes as this is the limit of productive human attention span.

Flowkey is a worthy product, especially if you just bought a Yamaha piano. However, I found these defects, using my configuration:

- The “Wait” function does not work when I use headphones, which is much of the time. I don’t use it. If I configured my tablet to use USB-MIDI instead of one-way Bluetooth, to talk to my piano, perhaps it would work. It should work without headphones, as the feature is designed to work on an acoustic piano. (USB-MIDI was problematic with The Great Courses, and I’m using the lone port on the tablet for permanent charging.) There are articles on this at <https://help.flowkey.com/en/collections/34718-piano-midi-setup>.
- When playing at either 50% or 75% speed, after a few bars (measures) into the block, the sound of the backing track deteriorates some, and static interference comes in.
- If I take a break, the app’s backing track may stop playing. It comes back if I exit the practice session, and click “learn song” to start it back up again.
- There is no restart button. However, when looping, if you stop and then touch play, the loop starts over at the beginning.
- I feel that the progression of the music is uneven when practicing. The note sounds seem to lag at the start, and then catch up. Or maybe this is in my head. The thing is, I have to rely on the speed to try to hit the keys at the right time – there is no metronome. I did not even try to guess-sync the ‘nome from my piano.

Flowkey provides a different learning experience from a traditional course, but the fundamentals of learning a song are basically the same: break it up in chunks, learn the chunks, and glue them together. Once successful at 50% speed, bump it to 75% and have a good chase! Practice, practice, practice! The key to supporting that is to have fun practicing, and playing an interesting song helps. I plan to continue with Flowkey, but I plan to try another method at the same time.

Simply Piano

<https://www.toptenreviews.com/simply-piano-review>

OUR VERDICT ★★★★★+

Simply Piano is a simply brilliant modern tuition app that gets great results in a short space of time. Perfect for beginners.

FOR	AGAINST
Great sense of fun	No desktop version at present
Beginner lessons are superb for fast progress	Can’t always distinguish all notes via microphone
High quality backing tracks	

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VNIRRZG-lwI> [*Charles Cleyn*] – vs. Flowkey

Simply Piano is available only on phones and tablets, not the desktop. After installing the app and answering a few questions about goals and such, you can

select courses or songs – and soon choose between a Soloist or Chords track – a more linear approach than Flowkey. Songs specify courses as prerequisites. There is a Community with well over 100,000 members.

Simply piano offers Premium plans with prices noted above. They also have a lifetime plan, a 6-month plan, family plans and a 7-day free trial of the Premium plan – be sure to cancel before it ends, or you pay for a year.

The interface is simple, without advanced features. 60%, 80% and 100% tempos are available. You cannot focus and loop on a chunk of the piece. There is no metronome. There is a backing track, but you cannot turn it off. You cannot turn off bass or treble, to play with one hand. The interface seems more child-like.

This is clearly too simple for me.

Yousician

<https://www.toptenreviews.com/yousician-for-piano-review>

OUR VERDICT ★★★★★+

Yousician’s bespoke notation system will get you playing quickly, but learning to play sheet music will essentially mean starting again.

FOR	AGAINST
Teaches you piano like you’re playing a videogame	Potential audio latency issues depending on your setup
Great selection of songs with more added frequently	Learning with the bars won’t necessarily help with real notation
Premium Plus membership includes guitar, voice and more	

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NisclVdQZig> [**Charles Cleyn**] – vs. Flowkey
<https://www.pianodreamers.com/yousician-piano-review/>

More gamified than Flowkey: much more built as if you are playing a video game and less like you are on the computer. You have leaderboards, you have points, you have badges, you can track your progress much more productively in Yousician than you can in Flowkey. Tempos may be set anywhere from 25% to 125%. Sound does not distort when playing at a different tempo.

When you start a song, you must start with the first part; the other parts are locked. However, you can either practice that part or play the whole piece. There is no wait mode. There is a restart button, to go back to the start, which Flowkey does not have (but only needs when playing the whole piece).

Yousician sheet music uses colored notes, coordinated with colors highlighted on an image of the keyboard. The notes can be either tabs (filled areas) or musical

notes; the latter can also be black. When playing one hand, Yousician raises the volume for that hand, and lowers the volume for the other. You can mute the backing track. Yousician listens with the tablet's microphone and provides feedback (e.g. slow, fast, on time). The friendly and efficient Yousician Help Center confirmed to me that all levels of their product can neither print sheet music for their songs nor import MIDI files for new songs.

Premium costs \$120/year (or \$20/month), providing one instrument and unlimited session time. Premium+ costs \$15/month; it unlocks all five instruments (piano, guitar, ukulele, bass & voice) and all songs. Both are available for a 7-day free trial. There is also a Family plan (four Premium+ accounts) for \$210/year. The company claims 20 million monthly active users.

Synthesisia

"A fun way to learn how to play the piano." The great advantage of Synthesia is that it can play any MIDI (computer music) file. The program comes with 150 music files, you can buy more from their store for up to \$3 each, and they are available from lots of other places on the web. However, there do not seem to be any lessons, so Synthesia would not be a complete learning solution.

While you can slow the program down, there does not seem to be a way to loop on a chunk of the piece. It will wait for you to play the correct note. You can play from sheet music or from the competitive falling notes game.

You can try Synthesia for free, with more than 20 songs, and purchase an unlock key when ready. As I write, it is on sale for \$29.

My DGX-670 will play back a standard MIDI file, and it has a metronome built in, but its screen is tiny. There is a whole page of Synthesia alternatives:

<https://alternativeto.net/software/synthesia/>

Jeremy See (Arranger)

This is the only course I know of that teaches playing with the special features of an arranger piano, one with substantial one-man-band capabilities.

Unfortunately, the only information I have about the course is from Jeremy See's own materials:

At the end of my proven **step-by-step beginner course** comprising more than **90 videos, 50 exercises, course notes and quizzes**, you will learn everything you need to know to *sit down at your keyboard, open a music book and start playing your favorite tunes with lush accompaniment rhythms* with minimal effort!

Learn to Play the Keyboard with Easy Auto-Accompaniment is for you if:

- You are a ***beginner*** who wants a complete step-by-step method to learn how to play your keyboard with **arranger accompaniments**.
- You're motivated and willing to put in the work needed to see results.
- You **have one of the following** keyboards / pianos with **arranger** feature:
 - Yamaha
 - **PSR series / DGX series**
 - **EZ series / YPT series**
 - Casio
 - **CT-X series / CTK series**
 - **CT-S series LK series (*excludes CT-S1*)**
 - **LK-S series / WK series**
 - **CDP-S350 / PX-S3000**
 - Korg
 - **EK series / PA series / XE20**

You get to keep and own this course **forever**. All future updates included!
Risk-free. No questions asked. 14-day money back guarantee.

This course is tempting, as I do want to know how to use the arranger features of my DGX-670. While the capabilities are explained in the manual, it is not clear how you should take advantage of them. See provides free guides to features his course requires, including [Yamaha DGX-670 Essential Operations Guide](#).

Pianoforall

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XekVmYIVF5c> [Best Music Courses]:

This affordable, 2 ½ year course of nine ebooks is best for complete beginners, hobby pianists, adults, learning to play popular songs by chords, people who prefer pop & blues before classical, and learning to accompany a singer. The course is *not* for children, intermediate & advanced pianists, people who prefer classical, people who want a traditional learning experience or emphasis on sight reading and sheet music. It's good for people who want to play from sheet music with chords and lyrics.

Pianoforall does not have video functions such as slow motion and looping; and there is no interaction with the material or the instructor. There is no library or repertoire. The lessons do include audio files and lyrics. The Speed Learning E-book comes last, but should precede book 5 or 6; it contains key theory, scales, and more.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P2ZO661MXqc> [ZW Music]:

It's a very serious course by a very serious teacher and pianist [Robin Hall] ... very accessible. Yes, of course, there are limitations to this course; but overall, it's a great way for music enthusiasts, amateurs, teenagers, even students, and even very experienced classical musicians like me. I bought this course because I am interested in brushing up on my jazz – I love jazz, blues and ballads.

<https://www.pianodreamers.com/pianoforall-review/>

<https://www.bellevuereporter.com/marketplace/pianoforall-review-worth-the-excitement-or-just-another-lame-learn-to-play/>

The whole course is by ebook. Each lesson starts with a video, right there on the first page. Turn the page, and the lesson material is there as well, along with the exercises. You can print it out from the supplied PDFs, which I have not needed to do yet.

This is my third piano course selection. I have begun to pursue Pianoforall in parallel with learning songs on Flowkey. It's fun!

Not Available for Android

Skoove

<https://www.toptenreviews.com/learn-piano-online-skoove-review>

OUR VERDICT ★★☆☆☆

Skoove gets you reading music for both hands very quickly, but lacks the precision and firm approach of other apps.

FOR	AGAINST
Beginner lessons introduce many concepts without pressure	Interface sometimes leaves you playing blind
Stepped method to lessons works well	Doesn't recognize note durations
High quality backing tracks make you sound great	Play anything you want with the band - it's not marked

Skoove has a new Android app. I quit almost immediately after installing the app, and did not get it to work, probably my fault – three stars and the lack of note duration support shut me down.

Skoove is free for 3 beginner lessons. The Premium version has 400+ lessons, monthly updated lessons and songs, one-on-one support from the Skoove music instructors, and special courses. Cost: \$42/120. Premium is free for a 7-day trial.

<https://www.pianodreamers.com/skoove-review/>

Playground Sessions

<https://www.toptenreviews.com/playground-sessions-review>

OUR VERDICT ★★★★★

A great all-rounder, Playground Sessions aims to help you learn through actually playing the piano, and has a great range of activities and songs to keep you engaged.

FOR	AGAINST
Learn through playing	Not optimized for children
Material to keep people of all abilities occupied	
Customizable features help tailor lessons to your preferences	

Requires MIDI keyboard. Cost: \$54/120.

<https://www.pianodreamers.com/playground-sessions-review/>

Piano Marvel

<https://www.toptenreviews.com/piano-marvel-review>

OUR VERDICT ★★★★★☆

A great-value way to learn piano at your own pace, with digestible chunks and a rewards system to keep you motivated.

FOR	AGAINST
Over 1,200 exercises for beginners to experienced pianists	No live support
A trophy cabinet to keep you motivated	Limited song options for modern music
Instant feedback with a MIDI keyboard	Reward system geared toward younger learners

Related Resources

Musescore

<https://musescore.org/en> - Free

“Create, play and print beautiful sheet music – the world’s most popular notation software.”

Musescore will convert a MIDI file to music notation, but because MIDI has imperfections, you will need to touch up the sheet music before printing it.

For more information on converting MIDI to sheet music, see <https://www.musicianwave.com/midi-to-sheet-music/>.

IMSLP – Petrucci Music Library

https://imslp.org/wiki/Main_Page - Free

The International Music Score Library Project – “Sharing the world’s public domain music.”

Unsafe to Use

Zebra Keys

Zebra Keys is free, although if you use it, you should use its Donate button to support it. So, morally, it’s not free.

Zebra Keys has a cobbled-together look. I did not get very far with it, because:

Zebra Keys is not safe to use!

It requires installing a Flash plugin on your web browser. “Adobe no longer supports Adobe Flash Player as of December 31, 2020. We recommend that you uninstall it. ... Because Flash Player is a relatively old plug-in, it has become increasingly **vulnerable** to online threats like viruses and hackers. Most web browsers have even started disabling Flash Player content by default for security reasons.” (<https://edu.gcfglobal.org/en/internetsafety/should-i-still-use-adobe-flash-player/1/>)

I’m a bridge player, and I use Bridge Base Online (BBO). Originally developed with Flash, the site has been converted to HTML5 – BBO is now safe, and better, too!

Zebra Keys should be converted to HTML5 or some alternative. That might be a major project, but it should either be done, or the site should be discontinued. In the meanwhile, it’s a particularly bad idea to use Zebra Keys.