

2002 and Musical Palindromes

Creative Keyboard, January 2002

by Gail Smith

2002 is a palindrome year. The next palindrome year will be 2112. I don't think anyone reading this will be around then! This will be an exciting year. Let's take a look at some palindromes. The words DAD, BOB, RADAR, MOM, and LEVEL are just a few. Backwards and forwards they are the same. Here are a few sentences that are palindromes:

A man, a plan, a canal, Panama.
Sit on a potato pan Otis.
Madam I'm Adam.
Able was I ere I saw Elba.
Do Geese see God

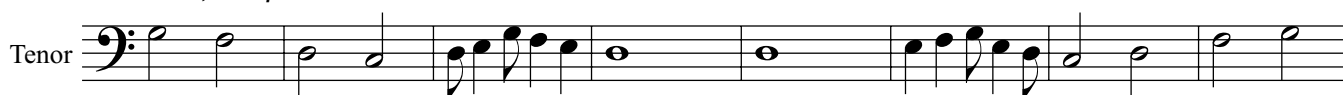
There are benefits to reading something backwards. It is a positive brain exercise to increase your intelligence. It stimulates the brain cells. For a pianist it helps make you a better sight reader when you play music that is a palindrome.

It must be amazing to come up with a new sentence that is a palindrome. I've never created one, but I have composed over a dozen musical palindromes.

One of the first composers to write a palindrome was Guillaume de Machaut (1304-77). Machaut was the leading composer of the ars nova in France. His works are preserved in manuscript form. Machaut was born in northern France in the province of Champagne. He was educated for the clergy and took holy orders. At the age of twenty, Machaut became secretary to King John of Bohemia. Machaut was famous not only as a musician but as a poet. He introduced lists of instruments into his poems that proved valuable to scholars interested in the instruments of that time. Machaut's description of a concert listed 31 different instruments as part of the orchestra.

Machaut composed 23 motets which were based on the traditional form of the day: an instrumental tenor and different texts in the two upper voices. In one of these tenor lines Machaut demonstrated sophisticated musical ingenuity. Against the text "Ma fin est mon commencement et mon commencement ma fin" ("My end is my beginning and my beginning my end") a portion of the melody for the tenor voice is first played forwards then backwards, making a palindrome.

Machaut, *Ma fin est ma commencement*



meas. 17

The image shows a musical staff for a tenor voice. The staff is labeled 'Tenor' on the left. The music is written in a single line with a bass clef. The melody consists of a sequence of notes that is first played forwards and then backwards, creating a palindromic effect. The notes are: G2, A2, B2, C3, D3, E3, F3, G3, A3, B3, C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, F5, G5, A5, B5, C6, D6, E6, F6, G6, A6, B6, C7, D7, E7, F7, G7, A7, B7, C8, D8, E8, F8, G8, A8, B8, C9, D9, E9, F9, G9, A9, B9, C10, D10, E10, F10, G10, A10, B10, C11, D11, E11, F11, G11, A11, B11, C12, D12, E12, F12, G12, A12, B12, C13, D13, E13, F13, G13, A13, B13, C14, D14, E14, F14, G14, A14, B14, C15, D15, E15, F15, G15, A15, B15, C16, D16, E16, F16, G16, A16, B16, C17, D17, E17, F17, G17, A17, B17, C18, D18, E18, F18, G18, A18, B18, C19, D19, E19, F19, G19, A19, B19, C20, D20, E20, F20, G20, A20, B20, C21, D21, E21, F21, G21, A21, B21, C22, D22, E22, F22, G22, A22, B22, C23, D23, E23, F23, G23, A23, B23, C24, D24, E24, F24, G24, A24, B24, C25, D25, E25, F25, G25, A25, B25, C26, D26, E26, F26, G26, A26, B26, C27, D27, E27, F27, G27, A27, B27, C28, D28, E28, F28, G28, A28, B28, C29, D29, E29, F29, G29, A29, B29, C30, D30, E30, F30, G30, A30, B30, C31, D31, E31, F31, G31, A31, B31, C32, 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The following palindrome is from Book Three of the *Celebrate the Piano Series*. Enjoy playing it backwards as well as forwards. (The extra accidentals are there to make it correct when reading backwards.)

Happy New Year!

Palindrome Party

Gail Smith

Rubato - Jazzy

mf

The musical score for "Palindrome Party" is written in 4/4 time. It features a melody in the treble clef and accompaniment in the bass clef. The piece is marked "Rubato - Jazzy" and "mf". The melody is a palindrome, meaning it reads the same forwards and backwards. The bass clef accompaniment consists of chords and moving lines. The piece ends with a double bar line and a final "mf" dynamic marking.