

## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1 Background of the Study**

Music has existed since pre-historic times as the essential symbol of expressing sentimental touch, such as sadness, happiness, or sorrow. Songs with slow tempos in minor keys usually reflect sadness or depressing feelings. On the other hand, songs with quick tempos in major keys generally create a cheerful feeling. Since music can be used to express emotions or imaginative feelings, it has been incorporated into film, drama, and theatre. Producers have used music in attracting audience's attention in films, advertisings, and other entertainment medias as music can help in creating feelings of excitement and emotion.

A website written by Mark Maxwell, a British saxophonist, artist and creative consultant, describes music as a universal language. It is one of the powerful mediums which help communication that goes beyond words and enables meanings to be shared (Francis, 2008). This medium not only can decrease a gap between cultures that colloquialism cannot but also brings people together as well as creates universal community (Maxwell).

Music has powerful therapeutic effects that can be attained via listening or actively making music (Francis, 2008). Moreover, according to Francis (2008) "Music can be effective in conjunction with other interventions in promoting

relaxation, alleviating anxiety and pain in medicine and dentistry, and promoting well-being through the production of particular endorphins”.

Additionally, music represents national identities, religions, cultures, customs, as well as the uniqueness of organizations. Each country has its own national anthem, while Western musical style is also different than Eastern aspect. Furthermore, not only do schools and universities have their own theme songs, but also some institutions and organizations as well. Therefore, music is a part of everybody daily life of the people all around the world.

In Thailand, Western music has played an important role in Thai society for nearly two decades. Moreover, music from other cultures also influences Thai people. Music from different nationalities such as Korean, Japanese, and Chinese have inspired among Thai societies for a century.

In education, a number of music institutes have been established in Thailand such as Yamaha Music School, Chintakarn Music School, KPN Music Academy, SUFA Music School and many more. Furthermore, many private and government universities offer music degree programs. As a result, a lot of scholarships and fundings are offered by government, foundations, universities, and organizations.

Being a good musician requires several skills such as ear training or aural skill and improvisation. Knowledge of music history and theory also facilitates musicians to analyze and understand musical eras and forms. Sight reading has been considered to be one of the essential skills for musicians. According to Harvard Dictionary of Music, “sight reading is the ability to read and perform music at first sight, i.e., without preparatory study of the piece” (Apel, 1969: 775). In the eleventh century,

virtually all performances were done by sight reading. Soloist, ensemble performers, and orchestra performers were used to performing new pieces at first sight because composers were frightened of plagiarism. By the time that numerous compositions would have a rare repeated performance, they might possibly be performed without rehearsal. Therefore, compositions at that time were usually performed by sight reading. The tradition of performing by memorization was started only in the nineteenth century by several composer-performers such as Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy and Clara Schumann (Lehmann & McArthur, 2002: 136).

Performing at first sight or sight reading is a skill which each musician does not equally have. It is possible that some talented musicians may have poor sight reading skill. In contrast, some fair musicians may be very skillful at it. A number of musicians share an opinion that musicians who are good in sight reading normally do not read note-by-note but instead they read patterns of notes. Moreover, being a good sight reader, a musician should be a good observer too. He should observe key, tempo, and meter before playing. In addition, knowledge of musical forms, styles, and characters of each period are also important factors that help musicians recognize pieces and increase their reading abilities. For example, a style of music in Baroque period typically is in one key for the entire piece. Besides, there are scale patterns as well as ornamental melodic patterns that keep repeating in many different places (Wolf, 1976: 147).

## **1.2 Statement of Problem**

Sight reading skill is an important skill for every musician. Nevertheless, many musicians have poor sight reading ability. Sight reading is one of many requirements in music college and university auditions and grade examinations. However, most students get low scores in sight reading sections. From this researcher's experience, sight reading is one of the key factors for students whether they are going to pass or fail the grade examination. This study will compose pieces to improve sight reading of pianists by using the strong musical characteristics of the classical styles.

## **1.3 Statement of Purpose**

Having a skill in sight reading will facilitate musicians in music learning and performing. Not only can it increase musicians' abilities in learning unseen or inexperienced pieces, but it can also increase musicians' confidence in playing music in public. The purpose of this study is to compose sight reading pieces to enhance pianists' skill. These pieces will include characteristically strong structures presented in selected western musical periods and styles. These compositions should be more familiar and interesting to students and enable them to learn pieces more quickly.

## **1.4 Research Objective**

To compose sight reading pieces to improve sight reading skill of students.

### **1.5 Scope of the Study**

This proposed study is meant to develop sight reading ability of higher education students majoring in piano performance. The styles of music that are used in this research are only tonal music. Moreover, students are expected to play unseen intermediate piano repertoires by sight playing in a fair and acceptable level when considered for rhythmic accuracy, note reading accuracy, and tonality awareness.

### **1.6 Methodology**

This study is a creative music composition. Music history, music theory and music structure were studied in order to compose the sight reading pieces. Furthermore, thirty sight reading pieces, two introduction pieces, and three conclusion pieces approximately 24 measures were designed in different unique key signatures by using the strong musical characteristics of the classical styles. Each piece was transposed into three different suitable key signatures. Besides, musical concept and analysis as well as instruction for practicing each piece were provided. These pieces were adjusted based on comments by experts in piano performance and composition.

### **1.7 Benefits of Expected Outcomes**

1. Thirty sight reading pieces, introduction pieces, and conclusion pieces which comprise the characteristically strong structures of selected periods and styles were composed.
2. The pieces improve sight reading skill of pianists.

## 1.8 Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following terms have been defined:

**Sight reading** – “the ability to read and perform music at first sight, i.e., without preparatory study of the piece” (Apel, 1969: 775).

**Ear training** – “training intended to improve musical perception, including the ability to recognize by ear alone and reproduce in musical notation melodies, intervals, harmonies, rhythms, and meters and the ability to sing at sight” (Randel, 1986: 204).

**Improvisation** – the ability to perform music naturally without any manuscript, sketches, or memory (Apel, 1969: 404).

**Composer-performer** – musician who does both composes music and performs music.

**Talented musician** – a highly accomplished musical performer whose technical accomplishments dazzle the public (Weiss and Taruskin, 1984: 430).

**Fair musician** – musical performer whose technical accomplishments is in a proper level neither excellent nor poor.

**Tonal music** – music which uses the system of major and minor keys widespread in Western music since the Baroque era throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries (Apel, 1969: 855).

**Intermediate piano repertoires** – piano pieces which the difficulty is equivalent to Grade 8 of Trinity Guildhall Music Examination or the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM).

## **1.9 Organization of Research Chapters**

This research, “A Composition to Enhance Sight Reading Skill for Pianists” will be divided to five chapters as followed;

Chapter one describes the introduction to the study. This chapter consists of background of the study, statement of problem, statement of purpose, research objectives, scope of the study, methodology, benefits of expected outcomes, and definition of terms.

Chapter two presents literature reviews with a number of related articles. The literature reviews cover the qualifications of capable sight readers, problems in sight reading, problem solving and sight reading drill, and review of current sight reading books for piano.

Chapter three explains the research procedures and methodology which includes research design, compositions, and instruction of practicing the composed sight reading pieces.

Chapter four describes the thirty sight reading pieces, introduction pieces and conclusion pieces’ musical concept and analysis.

Chapter five concludes the study. Additionally, the recommendations and possible future study topics related to this research are provided.