

Getting Started on Harpsichord

A short guide for pianists and true beginners alike

The harpsichord rewards a completely different kind of touch than the piano — and that's part of what makes it so satisfying to learn. Whether you're coming from piano or starting fresh, these five points will get your first week off to a strong start.

Five Things to Try This Week

1. Forget about dynamics from pressure.

A harpsichord's strings are plucked, not hammered, so pressing harder doesn't make a note louder the way it does on piano. Expression comes from timing, articulation, and which notes you slightly separate or connect — not from force.

2. Practice a light, even touch on repeated notes.

Play the same note five times in a row, aiming for each pluck to sound identical. This single exercise retrains the reflex most pianists bring with them: pressing harder for emphasis.

3. Keep your wrist level, not dropped.

Because there's no need to dig into the keys, your wrist can stay relaxed and roughly level with the keyboard. A dropped wrist is a piano habit that adds tension you don't need here.

4. Learn where your instrument's registers are.

Most harpsichords (and digital/hybrid models) offer more than one register or coupler. Spend a few minutes simply listening to how each one changes the color of the same phrase before you start interpreting a piece.

5. Start with Baroque ornaments in isolation.

Trills and mordents are core to the harpsichord repertoire. Practice a single trill slowly on one note, away from any piece, until it feels even — then bring it into your music.

Coming from piano is a real advantage, not a hurdle to unlearn — we'll build on what you already have. If you'd like to feel the touch difference in person, a trial lesson is the easiest way to find out.

Warm regards,

Mirco Lieber, MMag.

Harpsichord & organ studies (MDW Vienna) · ~30 years teaching experience

Ready to try it with guidance?

Book a free trial lesson with Mirco — live, 1:1, over Zoom.

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