

PIANO MAGAZINE

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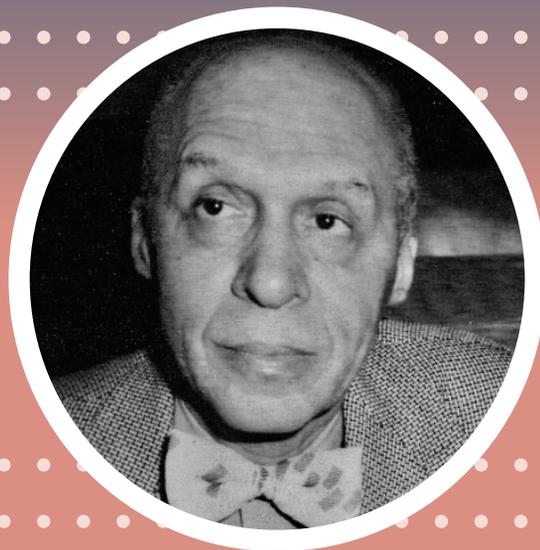
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Impact.

BY
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PAMELA D. PIKE

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IMPROVISING *in the Piano Studio*

PAMELA D. PIKE *Editor-in-Chief and Chief Content Director*



At the end of my first semester of undergraduate piano study, my teacher asked me to “practice improvising” during my winter break. I suspect that her intention was to help me recognize the possibilities of each key (beyond simple scales, arpeggios, and chord progressions that I had dutifully learned), thus enabling me to be freer following memory slips. However, the assignment stymied me. Firstly, I had no experience improvising at the keyboard; while some might view the assignment as a license to be creative, I was paralyzed. I knew how to learn music that was printed on the page. I was relatively adept at identifying problems, then isolating these and finding creative solutions. I knew how to memorize music using different strategies to solidify my memory and could easily test the results of my work. But I didn’t even know where to begin with improvising.

Since those dark winter days as an undergraduate student, I’ve explored ways to include simple improvisation activities into the curricula of my beginning and intermediate students, especially those who are not naturally inclined to noodling and experimenting at the piano during their at-home practice time. Improvising allows students to explore and understand keys, melodic and harmonic progression, dissonance and consonance, and exercise their creative voice. My goal for students who are not motivated by creating their own music is to set them up for success so they won’t fear improvisation. Our interests change as we move through life. If one day, as adults, my former students wish to take up improvising more seriously, I want them to have the basic knowledge upon which they can build the skill.

Over the course of time, my students learn scales and chord progressions in all major and minor keys. At the earliest levels, they learn five-finger patterns and the tonic and dominant roots of chords. Eventually the chord roots expand to two-note fifths and sixths, and ultimately, they learn primary chord progressions with inversions. Many of the standard method books that our students use follow this sequenced pattern of building theory and technical concepts. Even if the method book doesn’t overtly introduce the five-finger scales and primary chord terms, I do. Introduced at the appropriate time, even my youngest students can understand these essential musical concepts and play them. To reinforce the technique and theory, I create simple harmonization exercises that allow students to hear, see, and feel the most appropriate chord choices for melodies. Once students are comfortable with harmonizing simple melodies, improvising is simply the

“flip side” of that harmonization exercise. Now, students get to create their own melodies to enhance the chord progressions that I provide.

Initially, I choose a key that fits well under a small hand, and I encourage students to choose mostly chord tones for their melodies. Once non-chord tones are introduced to enhance or embellish the melodic line, deep exploration of meter, pulse, and consonance and dissonance can be experienced as they hear and discover the difference that accented and unaccented passing tones make to a melody, for example. See figure 1 for a sample set of multi-week beginning improvisation activities. Typically, we don’t name these non-chord tones until we have experienced them (we try to follow Clark’s “sound before sight” adage). The time spent in harmonization and simple improvisation exercises always reinforces theoretical and technical concepts and provides students with space to explore these more deeply. While these are only the first steps toward full-fledged improvisation activities, they are appropriate for the beginning student and they set the student up for success, which will empower them to experiment with and expand their improvisational skills alongside their technical, theoretical, and musical development.

This issue of the *Piano Magazine* features composer, Thomas H. Kerr Jr., who was a master of contemporary musical styles of his time. In the article, Susannah Garcia provides information about Kerr and his style, then introduces us to concert and pedagogical repertoire that we may wish to explore. Articles about teaching sight reading and using social media will provide teachers with ideas to investigate throughout the spring semester. Our regular contributors provide insight into effective teaching repertoire, new music, and recordings of note. Finally, since The Piano Conference: NCKP 2025 provides professional development opportunities, an overview of keynotes, PEDx speakers, artists, and innovative programming are highlighted in this issue.

As you peruse the spring issue of the *Piano Magazine* and dig into articles of interest, we know that you will find ideas to enrich your teaching, music that your students will love, and repertoire that you will want to practice and perform. We thank you for subscribing and send a special thank you to our supporting patrons who make all of the Frances Clark Center work possible. 📖

EDITOR'S LETTER

FIGURE 1

Examples of improvisation instructions and realizations with beginning piano students.

WEEK 1:

Create a melody. Use D, F#, & As when LH plays D. Use E, G, & As when LH plays A. Begin and end on D. Use the rhythm provided in the RH. (*D Major fits well under the hand. The teacher can play tonic and dominant chords with the student and the student may go home with an accompaniment track to improvise above.*)

The student might arrive at the following melody. The teacher helps them feel the pulse (2 beats per measure) as they play.

WEEK 2:

For the melody, fill in some of the thirds with notes from the scale. You may keep the rhythm the same or play faster notes, while keeping the D, F#, or A on the big beats (beats 1 & 3) in measures 1, 2, & 4 and E, G, or A on the big beats in measure 3. Experiment until you find a tune that you like with these LH notes. (*Although not notated, student might play melodies similar to the following examples.*)

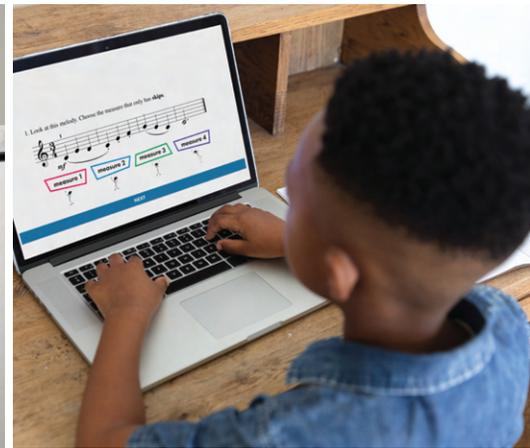
SUBSEQUENT WEEKS:

To fill out left hand harmonies, the following two-note and three-note chords may be played as the student's technique allows. New melodies can be improvised. Old melodies can be transposed to different keys. Students can be encouraged to give their improvisations suitable titles.



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THE DISTINCTIVE VOICE



OF THOMAS H. KERR JR.

By Susanna Garcia

Thomas Henderson Kerr Jr. (January 3, 1915–August 26, 1988) was an American classical pianist, organist, teacher, and composer. His works were performed by some of the leading African American artists of his era and his spiritual arrangements were performed and recorded by Kathleen Battle and Jessye Norman.

Yet, the extent of his influence is seldom acknowledged. Despite composing over 120 works for piano, organ, voice, chorus, and other ensembles, none were published during his lifetime. His manuscripts, preserved at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture,¹ reflect a largely forgotten legacy. Fortunately, recent publications and recordings have renewed interest in his music.

In 2022, I explored Kerr's archives at the Schomburg Center, uncovering manuscripts, correspondence, recital programs, and a master catalog of works. This article highlights Kerr's life and contributions to piano literature.

Biographical Information²

Thomas H. Kerr Jr. was born in Baltimore, Maryland. He began his musical journey early, learning piano and teaching himself the organ. By fourteen, he was playing at Metropolitan United Methodist Church³ and local nightclubs, developing strong improvisational skills.

At Frederick Douglass High School, he studied with W. Llewellyn Wilson, who also taught musicians like Eubie Blake and Cab Calloway. Denied admission to the Peabody Institute due to racial barriers, Kerr attended Howard University for a year before transferring to the Eastman School of Music, earning three degrees and graduating *summa cum laude*. At Eastman, he studied piano with Cécile Genhart (1898–1983).

In 1943, Kerr became professor and chair of the piano department at Howard University, retiring in 1976. He performed at venues like the Phillips Collection and as soloist with the National Symphony Orchestra.

Notably, he was the first African American to give a recital at the National Gallery of Art.⁴ He also served as organist at Plymouth Congregational United Church of Christ for over thirty-five years.

Kerr raised two children, Judith Elaine Kerr and Thomas Henderson Kerr III, with his first wife, Norma McAllister Kerr (1922–1991). His second wife, Hortense Reid Kerr (1926–2002), was a piano professor at Howard University and actively promoted his music and legacy.⁵

Kerr died on August 26, 1988, following an automobile accident and is buried near Howard University in Washington, D.C.

Compositional Style and Output

To me music first and foremost and forever, is a language to speak directly to the hearts of the listeners.

– Thomas Henderson Kerr Jr.⁶

Kerr was a master of contemporary musical styles, crafting a distinctive voice that integrated twentieth-century modernist techniques with the rich traditions of African American spirituals, blues, and jazz. Kerr describes his own musical style as “conservative,” rejecting serialism and atonality.⁷

Jane Fitz-Fitzharris, writing about his organ and piano works states:

The musical language of Thomas Kerr, Jr. uniquely reflected the African-American experience. His forms and styles were classically European but at the same time he incorporated elements of African music as well as spirituals and American jazz. . . . Kerr's output shows pluralistic influences. For example, his use of the ostinato technique reflects the rhythmic richness/complexity of African music; his use of formal structures such as theme and variations reflect European style; and his inclusion of the spiritual was African-American.⁸

Kerr's catalogue lists nine solo piano works, five for two pianos, three for piano four-hands, various hymn settings, and simplified arrangements composed between 1937 and 1973. These are listed at the end of this article.

Kerr composed for himself and for prominent pianists in his community, reflecting the high regard in which he was held by his peers. These compositions are marked by artistic sophistication and technical complexity, tailored to the performers' high caliber.

- **William Duncan Allen** (1906–1999), renowned collaborative pianist for artists like Paul Robeson and Todd Duncan, was the dedicatee of *Caprice Carillon* and performed *Joy (Prelude in E-flat)* in concert. Allen admired *Joy* so much that he shared it with André Watts and considered sending it to Vladimir Horowitz.⁹
- **Natalie Hinderas** (1927–1987), concert pianist and professor, was the dedicatee of *Caprice on Two Dance Themes (Toccatina)* (1960) and *Scherzino: Easter Monday Swagger* (1970). Hinderas, a pioneering figure for Black pianists in classical music, included *Scherzino* on her 1971 recording *Natalie Hinderas Pianist Plays Music by Black Composers*.
- **Sylvia Olden Lee** (1917–2004) opera coach and Kerr's duo-piano partner, was the dedicatee of *Temporait I (Toccatina)* and two duo-piano arrangements. In 1954, she became the first African American vocal coach at the Metropolitan Opera.
- **Delphin and Romain Piano Duo:** Wilfred Delphin (b. 1949) and Edwin Romain (1950–1995), an internationally renowned piano duo, were the first African American piano team on the professional circuit. They championed *Concert Scherzo: Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel?* during the 1980s, performing it at prestigious venues like the Kennedy Center and Carnegie Hall.

Kerr also maintained a private studio, composing works tailored to his students' needs and reflecting his attentiveness to their unique skills. His most ambitious pedagogical work was *Dancétudes: 7 Vignettes of Dolls and Pets*, written for his daughter, Judith (Judy) Kerr.

Until 2024, none of his piano compositions had been published. This discussion focuses on the three piano works that are now accessible due to their recent publication.

“To me music first and foremost and forever, is a language to speak directly to the hearts of the listeners.”

– Thomas Henderson Kerr Jr.⁶



I. Concert Scherzo: Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel? for Two Pianos

Concert Scherzo: Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel? (1940) was one of Kerr's earliest works, created for duo performances with Sylvia Olden Lee on the "Black College Circuit" during the 1940s and 1950s. This circuit included historically Black colleges and universities, as well as African American churches, schools, and community centers.

Kerr explains:

So [I] decided to write an extended work for their recitals, a work based on an Afro American folk melody, keeping the tune well in the foreground a la Percy Grainger. The challenge lay in producing a work that was idiomatic for the instrument, virtuosic in its demands and projecting a number of different moods.¹⁰

Kerr selected the spiritual "Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel?" as the theme for a set of six variations with a coda. The spiritual recalls the biblical story of Daniel, along with other tales of deliverance from the Old Testament.

Kerr's sophisticated harmonic language blends classical, jazz, and gospel styles, and each variation offers a distinct emotional tone. There are sections of intensity (*Allegro Barbaro*) and contrasting slower, more expressive moments (*Andante Sognando*), as well as playful variations (*Scherzando*) and a grand finale (*Grandioso*). Kerr's performance indications serve as guides to conveying the different moods.

Allegro scherzando ♩ = 120

Piano I

Piano II

mp ben ritmato sfz sfz sfz

mf non legato e giocoso

senza ped.

4 (8va)

EXAMPLE 1: Theme (mm. 1–8) *Allegro Scherzando*

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VARIATION II
Allegro barbaro

Throughout this section, the right hand part on both pianos must be played somewhat restrained in volume.

31

loco 3

f sempre non legato

il basso sempre ed energico

sfz

sfz

35

mf

molto marcato f

meno forte

simile

sfz

sfz

EXAMPLE 2:
Variation II
(mm. 31–38):
Allegro Barbaro

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VARIATION III
Andante sognando

79

p

1 2

mf
molto cantabile

simile

EXAMPLE 3:
Variation III
(mm. 79–82):
Andante Sognando

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VARIATION IV
Tempo I

105

p scherzando

2 4

mf

8va

LH

mf scherzando

2 4

LH 2 4

EXAMPLE 4:
Variation IV
(mm. 105–108):
Scherzando

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VARIATION V

28

115

pp
gracioso

5

loco

8va

e misterioso quasi pizz.

sfz

2

sfz

8va

loco

8va

loco

EXAMPLE 5:
Variation V
(mm. 115–117):
Misterioso

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VARIATION VI
Tempo grandioso
(8^{va})

123

ff

pesante

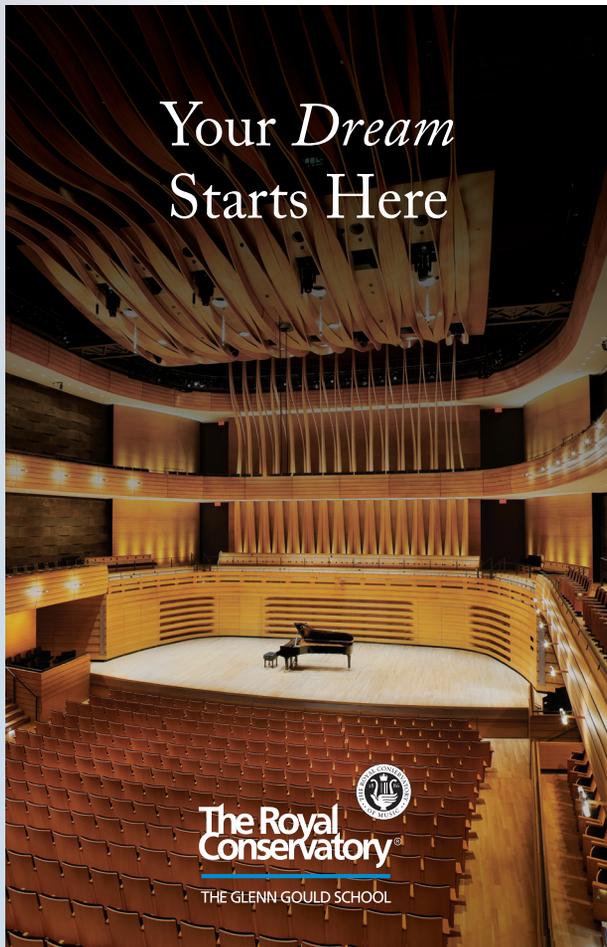
simile

EXAMPLE 6:
Variation VI
(mm. 123–125)

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During the 1980s, the internationally renowned duo-piano team Delphin and Romain performed *Concert Scherzo* on their tours and in several high-profile concerts including the Kennedy Center (1980), the White House (1980), and Carnegie Hall (1982).¹¹

At six minutes long, *Concert Scherzo* is a compelling showpiece that demands skill and sensitivity. Both pianists share equal duties in melody and accompaniment. The technical intricacies combined with the expressive emotional range make it a rewarding piece for both performer and audience.



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II. Scherzino, Easter Monday Swagger for Piano Solo

Scherzino, Easter Monday Swagger is an imaginative work based on the spiritual *Walk Together, Children*, blending playful energy with reflective depth. Subtitled *A Fantasy “Romp” on Walk Together, Children*, it evokes the spirit of Washington, D.C.’s African American Easter Monday celebrations.¹²

Kerr uses techniques of imitation, call-and-response, and improvisation, reflecting the performance traditions of the spiritual. By weaving these elements into the “fantasy” genre—known for expressive freedom, improvisatory character, harmonic experimentation, and virtuosity—he creates a distinctive synthesis of African American and European classical elements.¹³

Scherzino is remarkable for its creative freedom and resistance to formal constraints. Though sectional, its structure defies standard classification, unfolding as a series of continuous developments.

The piece opens with an unaccompanied presentation of the spiritual, including chorus and verse.

EXAMPLE 7:
Spiritual:
“Walk Together,
Chillen”

In the first section (mm. 1–26), the melody (marked in grey) is playfully exchanged between voices, each picking up the phrase where the previous one leaves off—starting with the tenor, followed by the bass, and concluding with the soprano and alto in unison. Mild dissonances punctuate the quasi-contrapuntal texture, while the interplay of voices evokes the communal spirit of the spiritual tradition.

EXAMPLE 8:
Scherzino,
Opening Section
(mm. 1–6)

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At m. 26, a new section marked “Fantasie (with great freedom)” initiates a dramatic shift in mood and texture. Kerr’s writing—characterized by irregular phrase lengths and frequent shifts in character, tempo, and harmonic style—feels spontaneously improvised as fresh colors and ideas emerge every few measures. His tonal palette includes polychords, jazz-inflected harmonies, and impressionistic pedal techniques.

Example 9 illustrates Kerr’s blending of harmonies, textures, and motivic techniques. A unison F Dorian scale sets the stage for brassy polychords that introduce the verse in augmentation. Fragments of the verse and chorus are then interwoven in call-and-response fashion.

Fantasie (with great freedom)
always broadly and with much fantasy

EXAMPLE 9:
Scherzino,
“Fantasie”
(mm. 26–32)

Scherzino, Easter Monday Swagger by Thomas H. Kerr.
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The work builds to a dramatic climax, leading into a cadenza-like passage (mm. 51–60) filled with ornamental figuration, brillante arpeggiated flourishes, dramatic pauses, and canonic exchanges.

“His tonal palette includes polychords, jazz-inflected harmonies, and impressionistic pedal techniques.”



Harmonically, he employs a palette rich in major-seventh chords, which underpin a Lydian melody. This piece exemplifies Kerr's skill in blending technical elements with storytelling, making it both an engaging teaching tool and a charming performance work.

Moderate Waltz Tempo (♩ = 126–144)

“Me - ow”! “Me - ow”! Old

“Mad Dance,” marked “*barbaro*,” is a powerful and frenetic composition rooted in early modernism. Its rough character is enhanced by driving rhythms, polytonality, and jagged accents. A persistent *ostinato* creates a mechanical pulse, against which dissonant notes and misplaced accents occur. A maniacal effect is achieved through carefully paced phrasing, syncopation, overlapping articulations, hemiola, and rapid, almost dizzying, melodic sequencing. *Stringendo* and controlled dynamic shifts propel the music toward a central, climactic moment, making “Mad Dance” an intense and thrilling exploration of rhythmic complexity and emotional tension.

Moderato barbaro - Not Fast (♩ = 96–120)

f e ritmicissimo

non legato

ped. simile

EXAMPLE 13:
Scherzino,
 climax and cadenza
 (mm. 49–52)

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No. 4 “Glad Dance” (Chinese Tarantella)

- **Dedication:** For a Wooden Puppet Doll
- **Purpose:** Whole-Tone Passagework
- **Magrath Level:** 10

“Glad Dance” is a spirited perpetual motion in 6/8 time—an exuberant tarantella that builds to a feverish climax. The work relies on the repetition of material in a breathless succession of rapid, unprepared key changes, with unpredictable octave shifts and foreshortened phrases creating a dizzying effect.

Kerr considered it the most challenging of the *Dancétudes*, with technical demands including extensive whole-tone passagework, intricate finger combinations, and frequent accidentals, clef changes, and register shifts.¹⁵

“Glad Dance” requires speed, dexterity, and precision. Kerr’s subtitle, “Chinese Tarantella,” may refer to the use of left-hand parallel fifths—a common musical trope often used to evoke Western perceptions of Chinese sounding music.

à la Tarantella
Presto comodo (♩. = 132–152)

EXAMPLE 14: “Glad Dance” (mm. 1–4)

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Dolls and Pets* by Thomas H.
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No. 5 “Quack! Quack! Quadrille”

- **Dedication:** For Judy Kerr and “Cuddles,” Her Duck
- **Purpose:** Playing Pentatonic Largely on Black Keys
- **Magrath Level:** 6

“Quack! Quack! Quadrille” is a playful and humorous piece filled with programmatic elements. The *staccato* touch mimics the comic movements of ducks while bitonal dissonance (black key/white key opposition) evokes quacking sounds. The piece ends with a “*furioso*” duck fight, animated by imitative counterpoint, *stringendo*, *martellato*, note clusters, and coloristic pedaling.

The quadrille, a paired dance in 6/8, also serves a programmatic function, with the partners represented by a pentatonic melody in canon. Kerr’s wit shines through in both the music and the manuscript, with the dedication “for Judy and her (late) pet Cuddles” and playful instructions like “NOT FAST” and “spit it out like a bassoon.”

Rollicking but not fast (♩ = 69–84)
 (In two) Quack! Quack! Quack! Quack!

mp
 4 3 2 1-3 1 2 2
 ben marcato e molto scherzando

EXAMPLE 15:
 “Quack! Quack!
 Quadrille”
 (mm. 1–4)

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No. 6 “Parakeet Parade (Paype! Paype!)”

- **Dedication:** For Judy Kerr and “Cecil,” Her Parakeet
- **Purpose:** No technical purpose stated
- **Magrath Level:** 7

“Parakeet Parade” is a lively march with playful programmatic elements. The A section mimics parakeet calls, marked “Paype,” while the B section features a walking bass line that propels the parade forward. Kerr blends mild dissonance with chromaticism and unexpected modulations within a predominantly tonal framework.

Though Kerr didn’t specify the technical purpose of this piece, components include two- and three-note slur gestures and fifth-finger extensions. True to march style, dotted rhythms frequently appear within the 4/4 meter.

In Moderate March Tempo (♩ = 88–108)
 Paype! Paype! Paype! Paype! Paype!

mf
 5 1 3 2 5 1 5 4

EXAMPLE 16:
 “Parakeet
 Parade”
 (mm. 1–3)

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No. 7 “Sad Dance (Lullabye-Dance)”

- **Dedication:** For a Broken Doll, Beloved, but Soon to be Discarded
- **Purpose:** No technical purpose stated
- **Magrath Level:** 8

“Sad Dance” blends the soothing qualities of a lullaby with the rhythmic grace of a jazz waltz. Its lullaby character is emphasized by the performance marking *andante sostenuto e molto tranquillo* and the continuous use of the *una corda* pedal.

Kerr incorporates jazz elements, including a modal framework and a rich palette of extended harmonies, including sevenths, ninths, and chromatic dissonances. In keeping with the jazz-waltz style, rhythmic emphasis is placed on beats 1 (bass note) and 2 (chord), softening the traditional oom-pah-pah feel of a waltz.¹⁶

Andante sostenuto e molto tranquillo (♩ = 88–96)
molto cantabile

una corda throughout pedal simile

EXAMPLE 17:
“Sad Dance”
(mm. 1–4)

Dancétudes: 7 Vignettes of Dolls and Pets by Thomas H. Kerr. Copyright © 2025, Piano Education Press. Used with permission.

Dancétudes provides a welcome bridge to advanced impressionist and modernist works, and to works in the jazz idiom. Kerr’s thoughtful fusion of artistry and pedagogy not only enriches the performer’s skillset but also establishes *Dancétudes* as a significant and distinctive addition to the piano repertoire.

Final Thoughts

Thomas H. Kerr Jr. was an innovative composer who wove the richness of African American musical traditions into the fabric of classical music. His ability to bridge the spiritual, jazz, and modernist idioms with technical sophistication and emotional depth created works that are both distinctive and enduring. Despite the lack of recognition during his lifetime, Kerr’s compositions reflect an extraordinary legacy that speaks to his artistry, ingenuity, and commitment to education.

Recent efforts to publish and perform his works have begun to restore Kerr’s rightful place in the canon of American classical music. Through these initiatives, a new generation of musicians and audiences can experience the richness of his artistic vision.

List of Piano Compositions

Piano Solo

- *Burlesque Toccata* (Adventure with an Emancipated Puppet) (1937)
- *Caprice Carillon* (After Poe’s Poem, The Bells) Dedication: William Duncan Allen (1940)
- *Retreat of the Lame Tin Soldier* (Gestapo Goose Step) (1941)
- *Joy* (Prelude in E-flat major) (1942)
- *Temporait I* (Toccata) Dedication: Sylvia Olden Lee (1943)
- *Temporait II* (Dedication) Dedication: G.L.K. (Geneva Kerr) (1943)
- *Dancétudes: 7 Vignettes of Dolls and Pets*. Dedication: Judy Kerr, Age 9 (1959–1963, Pub. 2025)¹⁷
- *Caprice on Two Dance Themes* (Toccatina) Dedication: Natalie Hinderas (1960)
- *Scherzino: Easter Monday Swagger*. Dedication: Natalie Hinderas (1970, Pub. 2025)¹⁸

Two Pianos, Four Hands

- *Satirical Gavotte* (1938)
- *Passacaglia and Concert Fugue in the Old Style* (1939)
- *Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel? Concert Scherzo for Two Pianos* (1940, Pub. 2024)¹⁹
- *Es ist vollbracht* (arr.) J.S. Bach. Dedication: Sylvia Olden Lee (1941)
- *Begin the Beguine* (arr.) Cole Porter. Dedication: Sylvia Olden Lee (1941) (pages missing)
- *Wer nur den lieben Gott lässt walten* (arr.) J.S. Bach (1943) (pages missing)
- *Romantic Fantasy in the Form of a Passacaglia and Fugue* (1959)
- Cadenza for Mozart's *Concerto for Two Pianos*, K365. Dedication: for Earl and Earnest Hargrove by their teacher" (1970)

Piano Four-Hands (Pedagogical)

- *Old MacDonald (Chicken Reel)*. Dedication: "for Pat and Michael Thornton" (1973)
- *Mother "Bs" Bach*. Dedication: "For the Hargrove twins" (1973)

Recordings

Scherzino: Easter Monday Swagger

- Natalie Hinderas, *Piano Music by African American Composers* (New World Records NWCR629, 2007, Recorded 1971). Reissue of Desto 7102/3 Records, *Natalie Hinderas Pianist Plays Music by Black Composers*.

Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel? Concert Scherzo for Two Pianos

- Wilfred Delphin and Edwin Romain. Interview by Bruce Posner and Joe Patrych. *Concert Grande*, WFUV Radio, March 15, 1982. archive.org/details/delphin-romain-3-15-1982. Archived radio interview and performance.
- Nyaho/Garcia Piano Duo (William Chapman Nyaho and Susanna Garcia). *Five By Four*. (MSR Classics MS1753, April 2022). 🎧

NOTES:

¹ Thomas Henderson Kerr Jr. Papers (Sc MG 763). Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division of the New York Public Library. archives.nypl.org/scm/23943#overview

² *A Catalogue of the Compositions and Arrangements of Thomas Henderson Kerr, Jr. (1915–1988)*, compiled by Constance Tibbs Hobson and Cynthia A. Reid, 2005. Kerr Papers, Box 5, Folder 1.

³ "Thomas H. Kerr Jr Dies, Howard Music Professor" *The Baltimore Sun*. August 30, 1988.

⁴ "At 90, Kerr has 'been somebody' a long time" *The Baltimore Sun*. May 20, 1978.

⁵ Hortense Reid Kerr's papers are located at the Kerr Papers, Box 14.

⁶ Thomas H. Kerr Jr., interview by Sharon Barron, April 24, 1980, transcript, 4–5. Kerr Papers, Box 1, Folder 1

⁷ Kerr, Interview by Barron, 4.

⁸ Kane Fitz-Fitzharris. "Compositional Techniques in Thomas Kerr, Jr.'s 'Anguished American Easter, 1968' and Their Application to the Theme of African-American Theology." (DMA diss., Louisiana State University, 2006.) 6.

⁹ William Duncan Allen letter to Thomas H. Kerr Jr., February 8, 1982. Kerr Papers, Box 1, Folder 4.

¹⁰ Thomas H. Kerr Jr., program notes, *National Black Music Colloquium and Competition*. Kerr Papers, Box 2, Folder 6.

¹¹ Performances of *Concert Scherzo* included the *National Black Music Colloquium and Competition*, January 1980, held at the Kennedy Center; the White House state dinner during the visit of the Kenyan President Daniel T. arap Moi on February 20, 1980; and Carnegie Hall in March 1982. Programs and press clippings for these can be located in Kerr Papers, Box 2, Folder 5. See also "Menus for State Dinners during the Carter Administration," The Jimmy Carter Presidential Library and Museum, jimmycarterlibrary.gov/assets/documents/state_dinner_menus.pdf

¹² "Easter Monday at the National Zoo." siarchives.si.edu/collections/siris_sic_9155

¹³ Notable piano fantasies include J.S. Bach: *Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue in D Minor*, BWV 903; W.A. Mozart: *Fantasy in D Minor*, K. 397; Ludwig van Beethoven: *Piano Sonata No. 14 in C-sharp Minor*, "Sonata quasi una fantasia" Op. 27, No. 2; Franz Schubert – *Wanderer Fantasy in C Major*, D. 760; Franz Liszt: *Fantasia on Themes from Mozart's Figaro and Don Giovanni*; Frederic Rzewski – *Fantasia on 'The People United Will Never Be Defeated!'*

¹⁴ Kerr, Interview by Barron, 3.

¹⁵ In the margin of a manuscript prepared for Sylvia Olden Lee he writes, "They are not necessarily in order of progressive difficulty, but Chinese Tarantella should be last." Sylvia Olden Lee Papers (RG 30/369), Oberlin College Archives.

¹⁶ Other jazz waltzes sharing these features are *Waltz for Debbie* by Bill Evans, *The Gentle Waltz* by Oscar Peterson, and *Waltz for Miles* by Valerie Capers.

¹⁷ Thomas H. Kerr Jr, *Dancétudes: 7 Vignettes of Dolls and Pets*, eds. Susanna Garcia and William Chapman Nyaho (Kingston, NJ: The Frances Clark Center Piano Education Press, 2025).

¹⁸ Thomas H. Kerr Jr, *Scherzino: Easter Monday Swagger*, eds. Susanna Garcia and William Chapman Nyaho (Kingston, NJ: The Frances Clark Center Piano Education Press, 2025).

¹⁹ Thomas H. Kerr Jr, *Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel? Concert Scherzo for Two Pianos*, eds. Susanna Garcia and William Chapman Nyaho (Kingston, NJ: The Frances Clark Center Piano Education Press, 2024).



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IMPROVING SIGHT READING AT THE PIANO

—

and the Potential of Technology in the Future

BY LE BINH ANH NGUYEN

Research over the last decade suggests that sight-reading skill levels are not fixed but can be improved by building various musical, technical, and cognitive skills.¹

However, differing viewpoints among educators can present difficulties in establishing a universal framework for teaching sight reading.

First, there is a distinction between skills that are typically learned through repetition and skills that need to be taught, and teachers do not always agree on this basic aspect of sight reading. Some believe individuals either have the skill or they don't, while others compare it to reading books, arguing that proficiency comes with more practice.² Still others believe that the skill can be taught but hold different opinions on how best to teach

sight reading.³ Some educators advocate for quick recognition of common chord progressions or pianistic idioms, while others prioritize maintaining a consistent tempo under all circumstances.

The reality may be a healthy mix of perspectives. There are situations where students simply read too little music to realize their abilities, but there are also times when it feels like their sight-reading skills hit a ceiling, resisting improvement no matter how much they practice. Some students might benefit from a thorough analysis before sight reading, while others find success by thinking less and continuing to “keep going.” There may not exist one answer to fit all situations, which underscores a broader pedagogical point—different students require different approaches.

Strategies for Assessment

Sight-reading skills are often assessed by evaluating students playing a wide range of different repertoire at sight, similar to a vocabulary test when learning a new

language. Since the piano repertoire is vast and diverse, it is practically impossible to be familiar with every piece of music. Therefore, multiple approaches exist to assess sight-reading fluency.

One common approach involves identifying recurring patterns among pieces frequently encountered in sight-reading scenarios.⁴ These identified characteristics can then be integrated into exercises presented to students. This approach is often utilized in supplementary sight-reading studies found in popular piano methods such as *Alfred's Basic Piano Library*, *Faber Piano Adventures*, *The Royal Conservatory*, and more.⁵ It is also often found in curricula of functional keyboard skill classes, where sight-reading expectations vary based on students' majors, such as music education or instrumental performance.

Another approach involves using software to assess sight reading by providing a substantial quantity of reading excerpts with filtering options based on difficulty level, key signature, time signature, and rhythm. The aim is to read as many as possible from a semi-random selection of repertoire.⁶ This approach is frequently used in sight-reading software applications such as *Piano Marvel* and *Sight Reading Factory*, allowing users to practice independently with a low likelihood of encountering the same piece twice.

Both discussed approaches offer viable solutions, but they are not without their shortcomings. The first approach, which often predetermines what should be taught, may inadvertently reduce the novelty and variety discovered in sight reading. On the other hand, the second approach, while resembling real-life scenarios more closely, filters excerpts based on generic features, potentially oversimplifying the challenges of sight reading.

Is there, then, an alternative approach that effectively addresses the balance between breadth and depth in practicing sight reading?

Learning By Doing

When questioning how professional pianists learn to sight read in their youth, many may not recall undergoing formal training. Many expert pianists would agree they developed the skill intuitively, typically through instances where they needed to learn new repertoire quickly. Collaborative pianists, in particular, are no strangers to preparing pieces on short notice, perhaps explaining why they are often regarded as sight-reading experts. Much like practicing improvisation, possessing the necessary theory and jazz licks is insufficient; meaningful improvement comes from trial and error.⁷

Creating a learning-by-doing environment poses many logistical challenges. First, in-lesson sight reading can be time consuming when lesson time is already limited. Second, even for reading that takes place outside of lesson time and without guided instruction, teachers must select and sequence exercises to create an optimal learning zone. The sight-reading materials suitable for a vocalist, for instance, may differ significantly from those beneficial for a choir conductor. Hence, tailoring reading suggestions to accommodate individual student interests, weaknesses, and progress becomes essential but requires additional time.

Intersections with Technology

Looking beyond traditional sight-reading methods, a subfield of computer science known as Recommendation Systems may eventually provide new applications to the issues at hand. Widely used in e-commerce and streaming services, these systems provide personalized

“Since the piano repertoire is vast and diverse, it is practically impossible to be familiar with every piece of music. Therefore, multiple approaches exist to assess sight-reading fluency.”



content suggestions by leveraging data like user profiles, purchase history, and browsing behavior.⁸ For example, if a user buys an iPhone on Amazon, the system might recommend complementary items such as smartphone cases. Subsequently, if the user purchases one of the suggested cases, details like the chosen color will enhance Amazon's ability to predict what to show to the next customer.

Drawing parallels to sight reading in lessons, when a student struggles with complex technical passages, teachers may supplement their practice with readings that contain scales or arpeggios. Generally, sight-reading recommendations from teachers are effective and intuitive for individual students. Nevertheless, these suggestions might not be universally applicable to all students. The introduction of a recommendation system for sight-reading examples could potentially create a scalable framework to address this challenge.

Successful Recommendation Systems

We can learn from current systems when looking to future applications for sight reading and music education. For example, Spotify is a prime example of how to leverage recommendation systems. With hundreds of millions of subscribers and a daily influx of thousands of new tracks, the platform has a robust recommendation algorithm to suggest songs that match the diverse musical taste of users.⁹ Each song undergoes analysis using unique metrics that capture its sonic characteristics and lyric content. These insights are then employed to curate personalized features like the Daily Mix or Weekly Discover.

With language learning apps, Duolingo leads the way in optimizing content for learning. The app's habit-forming quality is no accident, as it adjusts the difficulty level and number of exercises based on specific metrics that track learners' progress.¹⁰ Duolingo's lesson sequences are designed to strike a balance—they are easy enough to avoid discouraging learners yet challenging enough to maintain user retention. The results are successful; an independent study in 2012 reported that an average of thirty-four hours of Duolingo are equivalent to a full university semester of language education.¹¹

Collaborative Filtering and the Future of Sight Reading

In the context of sight reading, Collaborative Filtering is the most relevant method to implement among various possible recommendation techniques.¹² This method played a pivotal role in Netflix's early success, where the movie streaming platform attempted to predict user ratings for new movies based on their viewing history and rating data.¹³ These predictions also relied on movie attributes like release date, genre, directors, actors, and movie synopsis.

Such a system for sight reading, though not in existence yet, would involve predicting the success rate of reading a new piece based on how other students have performed on it. Additional relevant information may include genre, composers, piano method series, levels, and pedagogical aspects—most of which have been documented and digitized by many piano method books. Ultimately, the goal is to recommend pieces that exhibit characteristics where students are most likely to face challenges. Differing from the discussed methodology of mainstream piano methods, recommendation algorithms can eliminate the need for the teacher to predetermine the relevance of specific teaching concepts and pieces. Instead, they employ mathematical and probability techniques to discern the connections from a large dataset, such as the characteristics of sight-reading excerpts or the performance data of students.

“Collaborative Filtering offers clear advantages due to its relevance and precision.”

Collaborative Filtering offers clear advantages due to its relevance and precision. Current software applications, such as *Piano Marvel* and *Sight Reading Factory*, utilize a more straightforward filtering system called Rule-Based Filtering, which operates on the principle of “if this, then that.”¹⁴ To illustrate, in *Piano Marvel's* “Standard Assessment for Sight Reading” (SASR), if a student plays a song at level 3D with less than 80% accuracy in terms of note and rhythm, the next recommended song will be two levels lower, which is 3B. While Rule-Based Filtering is simpler to implement, Collaborative Filtering could lead to more nuanced recommendations and may be a helpful solution to explore in the future.

Making Connections

Sight reading is an essential skill for pianists, and teachers can continue to explore best practices for improvement. Ideas might include beginning each lesson with brief, targeted exercises that gradually increase in complexity, or encouraging students to spot recognizable patterns, harmonies, and rhythms before they play. The use of a metronome may foster a steady tempo and push students forward with minor hesitations. Exposing them to a wide range of unfamiliar repertoire broadens their musical vocabulary, and leveraging technology—such as online sight-reading platforms and interactive notation tools—can provide personalized feedback and additional practice outside the lesson.

Technological advancements in music software continue to improve and provide additional opportunities for sight-reading growth. In recent years, advancements in microphone and MIDI assessment technologies have enabled software applications to accurately assess

musical notes and rhythm. While these two aspects may not encompass other musical nuances such as articulations or dynamics, they are one example of an objective criteria for evaluating sight-reading skills. Many popular piano learning apps have capitalized on this assessment technology to encourage an independent learning style. At this unique time where technology is advancing exponentially, we may even find a shift towards the integration of a recommendation system capable of personalizing sight-reading practice through the analysis of students' reading performance. However, one thing is clear—sight reading is an important skill, and teachers must encourage students to work towards greater proficiency, no matter the method. ■

NOTES:

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²Richard Chronister and Edward Darling, "Sightplaying," *A Piano Teacher's Legacy: Selected Writings by Richard Chronister* (Kingston, NJ: The Frances Clark Center for Keyboard Pedagogy, 2015), 240.

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³Jeanine M. Jacobson, E. L. Lancaster, and Albert Mendoza, "Teaching Rhythm and Reading," *Professional Piano Teaching: A Comprehensive Piano Pedagogy Textbook* (Los Angeles: Alfred Music, 2015), 86–96; Richard Chronister and Edward Darling, "Sightplaying," *A Piano Teacher's Legacy: Selected Writings by Richard Chronister* (Kingston, NJ: The Frances Clark Center for Keyboard Pedagogy, 2015), 237–249; Beth Gigante Klingenstein, "Sight-Playing," *The Independent Piano Teacher's Studio Handbook: Everything You Need to Know for a Successful Teaching Studio* (Milwaukee, WI: Hal Leonard, 2009), 217–223.

⁴Jeanine M. Jacobson, E. L. Lancaster, and Albert Mendoza, "Teaching Rhythm and Reading," *Professional Piano Teaching: A Comprehensive Piano Pedagogy Textbook* (Los Angeles: Alfred Music, 2015), 129.

⁵Examples of sight-reading method books include: Gayle Kowalchuk and E. L. Lancaster, *Alfred's Basic Piano Library: Sight Reading Book 1A* (Van Nuys, CA: Alfred Music, 1994); Nancy Faber and Randall Faber, *Piano Adventures: Level 1 Sightreading Book* (Ann Arbor, MI: Dovetree Productions, 2011); Laura Beauchamp-Williamson, ed., *Four Star Sight Reading and Ear Tests: Book 1* (Toronto, ON: Frederick Harris Music Co., 2015).

⁶The software is semi-random in that it is coded to provide the users with fresh pieces at each test, but a human being must curate the list of pieces available for each level.

⁷Bertrand Denzler and Jean-Luc Guionnet, *The Practice of Musical Improvisation: Dialogues with Contemporary Musical Improvisers* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021), 5–15.

⁸Larry Hardesty, "The History of Amazon's Recommendation Algorithm," *Amazon Science*, December 1, 2022, amazon.science/the-history-of-amazons-recommendation-algorithm.

⁹The Wall Street Journal, "How Spotify's AI-Driven Recommendations Work: WSJ Tech Behind," YouTube Video, 7:04, April 15, 2023, youtu.be/pGntmcy_HX8?si=K4hGCTLNBiCOzvIF.

¹⁰Duolingo, "Personalized Learning with the Latest AI—Duolingo's Approach to AI," YouTube Video, 6:37, October 11, 2023, youtu.be/-CckdFDptt4?si=nYC2sFDCmFpOFMeI.

¹¹Roumen Vesselinov and John Grego, "Duolingo Effectiveness Study," *City University of New York, USA* 28, no. 1–25 (2012).

¹²"What Is a Recommendation System?," *NVIDIA Data Science Glossary*, accessed November 12, 2023, nvidia.com/en-us/glossary/data-science/recommendation-system/.

¹³Gibson Biddle, "A Brief History of Netflix Personalization," *Medium*, May 14, 2022, gibsonbiddle.medium.com/a-brief-history-of-netflix-personalization-1f2deb010a1.

¹⁴"Standard Assessment of Sight Reading," *Piano Marvel*, accessed November 12, 2023, pianomarvel.com/feature/sasr.



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NCKP 2025

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BY
SARA ERNST

The Piano Conference: NCKP 2025 will convene for the thirteenth time this summer, in-person on July 23–26, 2025, in Lombard, Illinois, just outside of Chicago, and online on June 7–8, 2025. As part of the Frances Clark Center, the conference has been recognized for its innovation and big ideas, as an event for a community of dedicated pianists, and for its inspiring program that is international in scope.

The first day of the in-person conference is devoted to an interactive summit—an exciting, collaborative event. The additional three days of the in-person conference and the two days of the online event have a schedule of invigorating concerts, presentations, and experiences, all of which feature leaders and highlight cutting edge ideas.

Keynotes & Artists

The Piano Conference presents three inspiring keynote speakers on topics of great impact for today: current research in teaching, music and health, and equity in education.

Gilles Comeau, director and principal researcher of the Piano Pedagogy Research Laboratory at the University of Ottawa, will present on the latest research in music education and piano pedagogy. His keynote provides specific teaching strategies that are supported in the research literature. As Associate Dean for Innovation in the Arts and Health at the Peabody Institute, Sarah Hoover is responsible for advancing initiatives that link the performing arts and health. In her keynote, she positions musicians as health workers, suggesting ways in which musicians must prepare for this crucial opportunity to transform communities. Lastly, Stanford Thompson is executive director of Equity Arc, and served as founding board chair of El Sistema USA. He provides strategies for embracing equity in music education by creating places of belonging and dignity for all students.

New to the conference in 2025 is programming devoted to the creativity and pedagogy of jazz. We are thrilled to welcome an amazing roster of jazz pianists—Jeremy Ajani Jordan, Edward Simon, Jeremy Siskind, and Miki Yamanaka. These artists, led by Siskind, will highlight the history of jazz piano in a compelling evening concert. They will also improvise in a late-night collaborative jam and share impactful ideas in the pedagogy of creative music making in a PEDx panel.

PEDx is a distinctive aspect of The Piano Conference; these TED-style, piano-focused presentations by today's innovators challenge us to embrace new ideas and visions for the future. In his philosophical discussion of piano study in a world of artificial intelligence, William Westney examines the importance of the “human element” found in music making. Rochelle Sennet explores her creative juxtaposition of the music of Bach with Black composers, and Patricio Molina shares his investigation into piano music from the Dominican Republic. By expanding the concept of social prescription, Tracy Cowden discusses using music to promote health and wellbeing. Karen Walwyn proclaims Florence Price as “an American hero,” and Roberta Rust celebrates indigenous composer Louis W. Ballard (Quapaw/Cherokee). These amazing six presentations, along with the jazz education panel, will round out PEDx for 2025.

Additional evening concerts will feature multiple artists, with repertoire that include traditional favorites, music of today, and lesser-known gems from around the world.

Pianists include:

Connor Chee

Susanna Garcia and William Chapman Nyaho duo

Derek Hartman

Jennifer Hayghe

Catherine Kautsky

April Kim

Carol Leone

Artina McCain

Spencer Myer

Roberta Rust

Rochelle Sennet

Alexa Stier

Nicholas Susi

Todd Van Kekerix

Karen Walwyn

Jerry Wong

Interactive & Immersive Programming

The Piano Conference features varied session formats, which include interactive learning experiences and lecture recitals. The conference sessions include workshops in topics like educational games for the piano studio and learning through movement with Dalcroze eurythmics. A multi-station keyboard lab—equipped with the latest Yamaha technology—is installed at the conference to provide attendees with hands-on opportunities through guided activities in composition, ensembles, and popular music, to name a few. The conference exhibit hall and showcases will provide a wonderful opportunity to experience the newest products, publications, and services available for today's piano professionals. A series of lecture recitals provides inspiring learning and listening opportunities that, at the 2025 conference, provide attendees with repertoire ideas from around the world—Canada, France, Guatemala, Indonesia, Peru, Vietnam, and the list goes on!

Other presentation formats provide varied viewpoints, and there are many opportunities for networking. Lightning talks—numerous short presentations in the space of an hour—give perspectives on topics as wide-ranging as ideas on practice, new teaching repertoire, hypermobility, and recruiting. Panels, on the other hand, provide multiple perspectives on a topic, such as using artificial intelligence as pianists and pedagogues and in best practices in group teaching. Committees like Independent Music Teaching, Research, Technology, and Young Musicians provide open forums for learning about specific topics and networking. Poster sessions are an opportunity to dialogue directly with researchers and pedagogues on their interactive e-poster displays. For the third time, The Piano Conference will utilize Kubify, an innovative, e-poster platform to highlight the unique projects of presenters.

An International Community Online

Among the lessons learned from the global pandemic is that the world is more connected than ever, and that online education provides access to many. The Frances Clark Center has an unwavering commitment to building an international community and to broadening access to its offerings. Thus, for the third time in its history, The Piano Conference will include an online event, in the month leading up to the in-person event. The online event will also be archived for

the entirety of the summer, allowing an on-demand experience that escapes the usual time barriers of in-person conferences.

We are excited that the NCKP 2025 online event includes an expanded international track. The program features presentations in Portuguese, Spanish, Mandarin, and Korean, in addition to international topics in English. All non-English sessions will feature English subtitles to allow for broad participation in this global content.

Join Us in 2025

The schedule is crafted by our subject matter committees, the national committee, and the executive committee, resulting in a program that covers a wide array of topics by an impressive roster of presenters. Many themes emerged in the review of conference proposals, highlighting areas of interest for pianists of today. These include duets and ensembles, performance anxiety in the studio, mental health for teachers, the uses and implications of artificial intelligence, expanded use of group instruction, and improvisation and creativity in the piano studio. Throughout the spring, we will continue to announce programming from the committee chairs in each committee track. Thank you to all the committee members for their tireless work in building this exceptional program!

Join us! The Piano Conference in 2025 will expand and challenge us, leaving us invigorated and ready to continue our transformative work as artists, educators, and scholars. Register today at nckp2025.com. 📍



SARA ERNST, PhD, has served as Program Director for The Piano Conference: NCKP in 2025, 2023, and 2021. She is Associate Professor and Director of Piano Pedagogy at the University of Oklahoma in Norman.

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ASK YOURSELF THIS QUESTION:

Why do you love to play the piano?

For me, it is about expressing myself—sharing my voice and passion for music with an audience, hoping they can connect with the story I tell through sound. Now, ask yourself this question: Why do you love posting on social media? My answer is much the same. It's an opportunity to express myself and share aspects of my life and passions, hoping to inspire others to pursue their own. For those in the arts, leveraging social media can be viewed as an extension of their creative practice.

Social media has revolutionized the way businesses, including music educators, connect with their audiences. Like a piano teacher exploring solo performing or accompanying gigs for supplementary income and creative fulfillment, social media offers musicians a platform to extend their reach and even generate additional revenue.

Much like learning the piano, mastering social media requires building foundational techniques and refining them through consistent practice. In the early stages of piano study, students develop essential skills such as scales, chords, and arpeggios. These basics serve as

stepping stones to mastering beginner, intermediate, and advanced repertoire. Similarly, social media success starts with mastering fundamental skills—crafting compelling captions, taking high-quality photos, and capturing the best camera angles for videos. These foundational skills evolve into polished outputs: beginner posts might be simple text updates, intermediate posts could feature photos or graphics, and advanced posts might include well-edited video reels and interactive content. Achieving excellence in either realm—social media or piano performance—requires the same principle: deliberate and consistent practice.

Just as pianists improve their artistry and reduce performance anxiety through frequent performances, a regular social media posting schedule hones social media skills, expands audience reach, and amplifies content impact.

Before diving into practical tips for building and sustaining your social media presence, it's important to understand the significant benefits it can offer to your studio and career.

TECHNOLOGY

Key Questions to Consider:

1. What do you want to achieve from social media?
2. What type of content are you interested in creating?
3. How much time can you dedicate to maintaining your social media presence?

Benefits of Using Social Media

Social media offers music educators a powerful tool to enhance their teaching practice, strengthen connections within their community, and grow their studio.

For studio teachers, social media creates opportunities to celebrate student accomplishments, milestones, and performances. By sharing these moments, parents can engage with their child's progress and the broader studio community. This visibility fosters a sense of belonging and encourages families to share your posts, broadening your reach and serving as an informal referral system.

For music schools with multiple teachers, social media bridges the gap, allowing students and parents to feel more connected to the other community members they may only see at recitals or special events. Additionally, parents who share your posts about their children often extend your reach to potential new students, creating a natural and enjoyable referral system. Parents are more likely to trust and recommend an educator who actively demonstrates their commitment to student growth. This well-maintained online presence extends your reach to potential students and families, enabling your studio to attract a broader and more diverse audience.

If you do not teach at a community music school, teaching piano can sometimes feel like an isolating profession, especially for independent instructors. Social media provides an avenue to connect with other teachers, share accomplishments, and exchange ideas, inviting both camaraderie and collaboration. For example, a teacher might share struggles with a specific pedagogical approach, sparking valuable advice from peers. These interactions foster relationships that extend beyond online platforms, enriching in-person encounters at association meetings or conferences.

Moreover, an active social media presence keeps you top-of-mind for colleagues, increasing the likelihood of student referrals from other teachers who might get a student inquiry from your teaching area.

On top of all these benefits, social media isn't just about promoting your studio—it's also a platform to enhance professional credibility and visibility. By sharing insights, achievements, and teaching strategies, educators can position themselves as thought leaders within the music education community. Participation in discussions and online groups not only builds credibility but also fosters relationships with colleagues and industry leaders, opening doors to new opportunities.

Choosing the Right Platform

Social media platforms are as varied as the audiences they attract, each offering unique functionalities tailored to different goals and content types. Among the most prominent platforms are Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, X (formerly Twitter), LinkedIn, and YouTube. Regional differences also play a role in platform popularity; for example, Telegram and WhatsApp are widely used outside the United States.

Think of social media platforms as performance venues and your posts as musical selections. Just as the audience at Carnegie Hall might appreciate Liszt's *Sonata in B Minor*, a local middle school audience might respond more enthusiastically to Mozart's *12 Variations on "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star."* Neither piece is inherently better; success depends on selecting the right content for your audience.

- Facebook excels in fostering local connections through community groups and discussion pages.
- Instagram and TikTok are ideal for short-form video content, offering opportunities for global engagement and viral reach.
- LinkedIn, with its professional focus, is particularly effective for networking and career development.

By aligning platform choice with your goals and audience, you can maximize your social media impact.

Choosing the Form of Content

Bach's "Chaconne in D Minor" from *Partita No. 2* has been transcribed for piano by numerous composers—Busoni, Brahms, Raff, and others. Each transcription reflects the unique style and interpretation of the composer. Similarly, on social media, the form of your content should reflect your strengths and creative vision.

Depending on your skill set, you might excel at speaking in front of a camera and producing engaging videos on various topics. If public speaking feels daunting, you could focus on writing insightful blog posts or creating visually appealing graphics and worksheets. Starting with a medium that aligns with your skills enables you to build confidence and consistency. Once you have established a rhythm, you can experiment with other content formats to diversify your social media presence and appeal to a broader audience.

Time as a Deciding Factor

As musicians, we are often driven by a pursuit of perfection and a commitment to delivering the highest quality in our work. While emphasizing quality in social media posts is important, consistency is arguably even more critical. Regular posting not only increases the likelihood of your content being recognized by social media algorithms and reaching a broader audience but also enhances your skills and confidence in content creation. Just as a pianist learns valuable lessons by studying multiple sonatas at a high level rather than perfecting a single piece, consistent practice with social media posting fosters growth and adaptability.

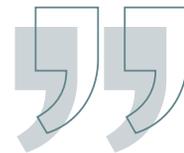
Time is a crucial consideration when establishing a social media presence. Reflect on the amount of time you can consistently dedicate to your channel each week. This commitment will determine the frequency and type of posts you can realistically manage. A good starting schedule might include posting at least once a week. Even as you get advanced, avoid exceeding one post per day. For platforms requiring more time-intensive content, such as long-form, highly edited videos on YouTube, posting every two weeks or even monthly can still yield meaningful results.

It is also important to periodically reassess the time you can allocate to social media. As your skills develop and your efficiency improves, you may find opportunities to adjust your posting frequency or experiment with more complex content formats. Balancing quality and

consistency, while adapting to your evolving expertise and schedule, is key to sustaining a successful and impactful social media presence.

Social media offers music educators a dynamic platform to expand their reach, enhance their teaching practice, and build meaningful connections. By understanding the benefits of social media, choosing the right platform, aligning content with personal strengths, and maintaining consistency, educators can create a vibrant online presence. Much like mastering a piece of music, success in social media requires dedication, practice, and a willingness to evolve. By embracing these strategies, you can amplify your voice and inspire others in the world of music education. 🎹

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ANTHONY TY currently teaches piano from his home studio and works as the digital and social media manager for the Frances Clark Center. He has a passion for online teaching and technology.

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• WELLNESS • & • BELONGING •

by Quodesia D. Johnson

Music has a fascinating role as a connector and communicator across cultures, experiences, and spaces. **Where there is life, there is music.**

Like many young musicians, I did not honor the learning process of music-making at the beginning of my studies. I rushed passages, eager to get to my favorite part or shortened rests to “get to the music.” Such inconveniences and challenges did not belong within my limited ability and perspective. I practiced, but I did not practice well. Deeper understanding created a shift in my values. Everything has its purpose. Every note is necessary to express the intentions of the composer. Every passage is just as important as the other—the silence, as important as the notes.

Learning my craft was one part of this understanding. Navigating the social context and inherited challenges of classical music was another. With eyes closed, I could easily be transported at the tuning of the symphony, the commanding presence of the human voice, or the comforting, familiar ringing of the piano. However, my experiences were much less inviting when studying classical music history and attending performances.

The palpable rejection and dismissal I felt forced constant interrogation of my place in all of it. People who look and live like me—and some who do not—seemed rarely included in the annals of classical music.

This demand for people to prove their worthiness beyond skill and artistic integrity still rings true throughout the field. Various institutions are engaging in wellness programs to support healthy interactions and learning

experiences in an effort to correct this challenge. If we are to create confident, well-rounded musicians and music lovers, we must value spaces of belonging as an integral part of wellness.

As an equity specialist and healing practitioner, I collaborate with arts and education institutions in the United States and Canada seeking to make meaningful impact in their communities and respective fields. What remains consistent is the undeniable need for music to be an accessible, valued part of our daily lives. Organizations are shifting to ensure that more and different perspectives shape every part of the creative process and presentation. This sense of deep inclusion, of being a necessary component of the whole, is belonging.

How one experiences art matters. How one experiences making and teaching art also matters. I center healing and dialogue circles in my practice because we all deserve authentic connection. These intentionally designed spaces support compassionate and courageous conversations and act as invitations for participants to imagine, process, and connect. Everyone is impacted by the challenges of systemic practices and limited resources. The healing circles allow everyone to seek collective solutions in a healthy manner, reinforcing the power of our creativity. People are at first skeptical and unsure at the beginning of our engagement—not unlike being in artistic spaces. They are ultimately questioning whether or not they will feel seen and heard—whether their participation will be rooted in dignity and respect. I meet this need for belonging with joy and sincere invitation, and it is often deeply reciprocated.

Though it can certainly be challenging work, I believe we have the creativity and skill-gaining capacity to demonstrate that everyone has a place in classical music—that in some way, everyone can belong.

Wellness requires a sense of belonging.

To do so, we can all consider the following:

Meaningful representation matters and benefits everyone.

Share the narratives and works of more cultures and music-making traditions. Consider and include the student body, colleagues, audiences, and communities in decision-making while working to reflect everyone respectfully in repertoire, educational resources, and engagement practices.

Music creates opportunity.

Different identities and perspectives can help shape a more textured and nuanced experience for everyone. Celebrate the differences and similarities in a manner that supports the confidence necessary for collaboration and artistic integrity.

Planning with belonging in mind goes a long way.

Develop practices that make belonging and wellness a part of decision-making and engagement for everyone involved, ensuring it is valued in creative spaces and resource allocation.

There are various ways to support wellness.

Create meaningful opportunities to experience belonging for artists and communities, such as healing and dialogue circles or collective music-making activities that center creative agency and support.

We get to do something amazing in making, teaching, and administering music. We have an obligation to do so while honoring wellness and belonging. Let us not rush through the uncomfortable parts or devalue the people around us, but rather, let us value all the passages, stories, notes, and rests we all bring to music—because they belong. 📌



QUODESIA D. JOHNSON (she/her) is an equity specialist, racial equity coach, healing practitioner, speaker, and community facilitator recognized nationally for her unique approach to shaping spaces of collaboration and creativity in the nonprofit arts, culture, education, and social justice sectors. Combining her experience in the arts, business, organizational culture, and trauma-informed healing practices, Quo's original frameworks are designed to cultivate a transformational, human-centered approach to dismantling systems of oppression and championing connection.

More information can be found on quojohnson.com.



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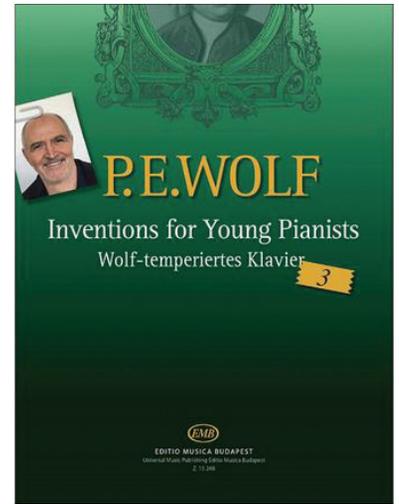
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PUPIL SAVER

Create a Musical Story!

by Ivan Hurd

When a student seems to be losing interest in playing piano, often the best solution is to find a piece that is energetic, imaginative, fun, and perhaps easier to play than other pieces they may be studying. Péter Wolf's "Sparring Hands" from his collection *Inventions for Young Pianists* is fast, fits in the hands well, and features repetitive patterns that are easy to read. A student and their teacher could create a story about two boxers sparring while training at the gym. What student could resist?



The A section is built upon ascending and descending arpeggios using primary chords in A minor. The composer creates a unique technical feature by dividing the arpeggios between the hands and including hand crossing, which is fun to play. The right hand crosses over the left hand in measures 1–4, followed by the left hand crossing over the right hand in measures 5–8, and then again the right hand over the left hand in measures 9–12. The arpeggios travel up and down the keyboard which brings to mind the athletes ducking in all directions to avoid their opponent.

EXCERPT 1

Péter Wolf, "Sparring Hands," mm. 1–4

Allegro
sempre staccato

R.H. R.H.
mp L.H. simile

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“Sparring Hands”

from *Inventions for Young Pianists—Wolf-temperiertes Klavier 3*
by Péter Wolf

The A section concludes by alternating right- and left-hand arpeggios in faster succession. It is fun to imagine a coach calling out to the boxer which direction to punch or move next: “right, now left, right again, c’mon, you’ve got it, right, left, right, left!” Just as a boxer needs to remain loose, piano students will need to keep their upper arm relaxed to execute the fast hand crossings. To maintain the continual *staccato*, students need to keep their fingers light on the keys like a boxer is light on their feet.

EXCERPT 2

Péter Wolf, “Sparring Hands,” mm. 13–16

13 *seconda volta rall.*

Fine

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The hands move around a larger range of the piano in the B section which could emulate the two boxers moving further away from each other in the ring. The drama of this mental picture is a great way to help students pace the dynamic changes and longer phrases in measures 17–24.

EXCERPT 3

Péter Wolf, “Sparring Hands,” mm. 21–24

21 *mf*

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“A student and their teacher could create a story about two boxers sparring while training at the gym. What student could resist?”



“Sparrring Hands” is one among many of the twenty-three wonderful pieces found in the collection. Students who go on to explore other pieces such as “Puss Hunting Mice” or “Rhino in the Puddle” will expand their interpretive skills while further developing their technique and musicality. Teachers can pull any pieces from the collection the next time they need to reinvigorate a student’s interest! 🎹



IVAN HURD is Assistant Professor of Piano Pedagogy at the University of Texas at San Antonio where he teaches piano, pedagogy, and class piano. He holds a DMA in Piano Performance and Pedagogy from the University of Oklahoma.

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Five-finger patterns & simple rhythms

1

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2

INTERMEDIATE:

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3

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Technical & rhythmic sophistication, Bach Inventions, Bartók Romanian Folk Dances

4

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For competent pianists, Mozart sonatas, Brahms Rhapsody, Op. 79, No. 2

5

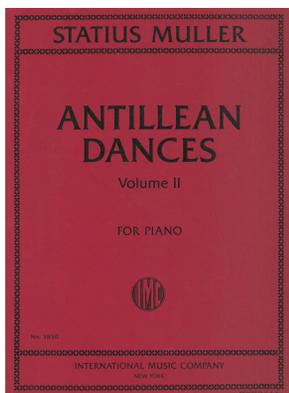
VERY DIFFICULT:

For advanced pianists, Chopin etudes, Beethoven Sonata, Op. 57

6

ANTILLEAN DANCES, VOLUME II

by Statius Muller



“Best of all, the pieces sound harder than they are. This new collection will delight those who wish to explore a new avenue of Antillean music!”

Charming, elegant, romantic, and rhythmically innovative are all adjectives that perfectly describe Wim Statius Muller’s *Antillean Dances*. Muller was a Curaçaoan composer and pianist who has often been described as “Curaçao’s Chopin.” The term “Antillean” refers to the six Caribbean islands of which Curaçao is the capital. This delightful set of stylized dances are salon pieces that are intended to be listened to rather than danced to.

Wim Statius Muller was born in Curaçao in 1930. He graduated from Juilliard in 1954, and began teaching at Ohio State University the next year. Surprisingly, he gave up his position in 1960 to become a civil servant and collaborate in the creation of a security service. He eventually moved to the Netherlands where he worked at the Domestic Security Service (“BVD”) in The Hague and then at NATO headquarters in Brussels. After his retirement in 1995, he returned to Curaçao where his love of performing and composing were rekindled. He was awarded the Silver Carnation by Queen Beatrix and was honored as a Knight of the Order of Orange-Nassau. By the time of his death in 2019, he had composed over 200 piano works, some of which have not been published.

This second volume of *Antillean Dances* contains twenty-one delightful pieces which were only recently discovered after Muller’s death. These additional pieces are from Opus 2 through Opus 9 and consist of many waltzes as well as mazurkas, *danzas*, *tumbas*, and a polka. Each dance employs a tuneful melody along with triads and simple progressions. Muller’s originality lies in his unique use of Caribbean rhythms—syncopations and dotted notes are used extensively. Many pieces are reminiscent of Chopin’s style, perhaps due to the many waltzes and Chopin mazurkas Muller heard in Curaçao during his

youth. While European waltzes typically employ three even quarter notes in the accompaniment, Muller’s pieces tend to employ a dotted quarter note followed by an eighth and quarter.

The dances in this collection are short, ranging from one to four pages. The key centers are simple and rarely venture beyond three sharps or flats. The diatonic melodies are generally parallel periods of 8+8 construction. Each dance has sections that are very clearly demarked by cadences or modulations to closely related keys.

Three pieces that characterize the various aspects of the collection are “Tumba Calypso,” “Polka,” and “Bertha.” “Tumba Calypso” is a one-page piece that has the unusual syncopation pattern of a dotted eighth note followed by another dotted eighth and an eighth. This occurs in every measure and makes this piece as unique as a Scott Joplin rag. The “Polka,” on the other hand, is another one-page piece that has no syncopation whatsoever and could easily be mistaken for a Czerny exercise. “Bertha” displays the unmistakable influence of Chopin. It is a melancholy piece in A minor with straight-forward quarter notes and no syncopations. This is one of the easiest pieces in the collection and is recommended for anyone attempting this volume for the first time.

Pianists will enjoy working on these highly approachable new Caribbean gems. Each piece has an enticing melody and catchy rhythm. The music passages lie well under the fingers and do not require any large stretches or leaps. Best of all, the pieces sound harder than they are. This collection will delight those who wish to explore a new avenue of Antillean music! (International Music Company, \$54.95) — *Ernest Kramer*

RELAXING PIANO BALLADS: 16 Soulful Arrangements

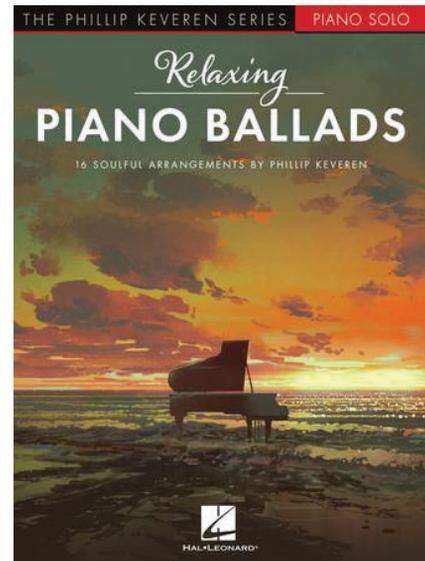
arranged by Phillip Keveren

Students are often more driven to practice pieces they know and love, especially popular music they encounter in their daily lives. With a constant flow of new media around us, it can feel like a chore to source effective piano arrangements for our students that allow them to learn new pop music at the piano while helping them achieve their artistic and musical goals. This new collection provides fresh, new arrangements that today's students likely already know and love.

This anthology of soulful ballads contains a mix of condensed film score and pop song arrangements that are friendly to the developing pianist and satisfying to play. Drawing themes from award-winning films such as *Interstellar*, *The Greatest Showman*, and *La La Land*, and arranging songs from artists including Miley Cyrus, Adele, and Lauren Daigle, Keveren has produced a collection of arrangements that will appeal to a wide variety of pianists.

One of the more advanced arrangements is “Evermore,” the moving baritone solo from Disney’s *Beauty and the Beast*. This arrangement features diverse textures with brief flashes of virtuosity, making it one of the most performable works in this collection. Another gem is “Cornfield Chase,” from the film *Interstellar*, which contains the most recognizable theme from Hans Zimmer’s award-winning score. Zimmer’s expansive score for “Cornfield Chase” is condensed into a two-page work suitable for an intermediate student, while maintaining the integrity of the musical themes. Several of my own students have requested arrangements of “Cornfield Chase,” and I struggled to find an accessible and satisfying arrangement until I encountered this one. Likewise, the arrangement of “How Far I’ll Go,” the inspiring ballad from Disney’s *Moana*, offers new harmonies and textures to a beloved Disney hit. This powerful ballad transforms into a flowing, tranquil work that sounds as lovely as it is to play.

Teachers will find several “pupil savers” in these accessible and gratifying arrangements, especially for teenage and adult students who are familiar with the artists and films. With an average length of three pages per piece, this anthology would make a great companion book to complement a student’s piano study or a fun summer project for the studio. (Hal Leonard, \$16.99, other formats available) — *Hayden Coie*



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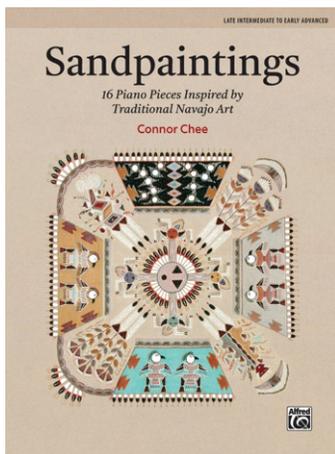
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S4-5

SANDPAINTINGS: 16 Piano Pieces Inspired by Traditional Navajo Art

by Connor Chee



“His collection was influenced by Diné sandpaintings, a type of visual art often used for ceremonial purposes and created using colorful sand. Customary elements of sandpaintings such as clouds, lightning, sacred stones, and sacred mountains inspire the pieces.”

Connor Chee is a Diné (Navajo) composer with a unique talent for blending traditional Navajo elements with the classical style. His collection was influenced by Diné sandpaintings, a type of visual art often used for ceremonial purposes and created using colorful sand. Customary elements of sandpaintings such as clouds, lightning, sacred stones, and sacred mountains inspire the pieces. Chee masterfully weaves these and other elements into sixteen thoughtfully crafted piano pieces honoring his Diné heritage in a rare and exciting new compilation.

The composer explains in the foreword that the number four is a sacred number corresponding to the four directions. Therefore, many sandpaintings present an idea four times—one time in every direction. An example of this kind of sandpainting can be found on the cover of the edition. In the same way, each piece of this musical set has a theme that moves through four different versions, with the final or northern version representing the original form. Also, if all sixteen pieces were placed in a circle, the “opposite” pieces include melodies that are retrograde inversions of each other.

While the symbolism and design of the set is intriguing, it is the music itself that makes this collection so enticing to perform. The melodies and harmonies are captivating, with many surprising moments and effective peaks. The

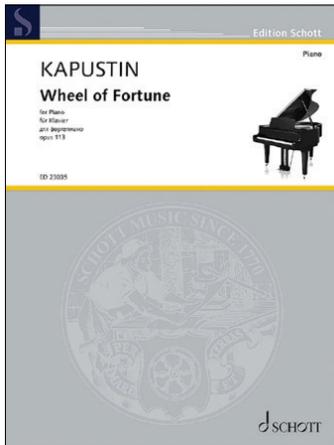
pieces include distinctive features like whole-tone scales, quartal harmonies, cluster chords, and *tremolos* to create unique soundscapes. Each piece also provides ample opportunity to work on technical elements such as fast passagework, complex left-hand arpeggios, thick textures, and cross rhythms.

The set is ideally suited for late-intermediate or early-advanced level players and contains a mix of lengths and levels of difficulty. While the sixteen pieces are related in content, it is not necessary to perform the entire collection at once; pianists can choose a few pieces to play as a set, or each piece works well as a standalone selection. Although the entire set is compelling, some favorites include “White Shell,” “Southern Clouds,” “Abalone,” and “Northern Lightning.”

The selections rely on many classical piano techniques while seamlessly incorporating Diné melodies and symbolic elements. Students and teachers who have not had the opportunity to explore traditional Navajo music will find a wide range of styles from which to choose, and these pieces provide no shortage of imagination and creativity. For those who wish to program music from underrepresented cultures, *Sandpaintings* is noteworthy, but the high quality of the music is incentive enough for all to explore the collection. (Alfred, \$14.99) — *Olivia Ellis*

WHEEL OF FORTUNE FOR PIANO, OPUS 113

by Nikolai Kapustin



“This is a gratifying piece for pianists where they can demonstrate the technical and musical difficulties, while enjoying the pleasure of jazz. It is a great addition to the repertoire for both performing professionals and students of advanced levels.”

Wheel of Fortune, Op. 113 is a spectacular single-movement piece that showcases the composer's unique combination of classical and jazz influences.

Kapustin (1937–2020) was born in Ukraine and studied classical piano at Moscow Conservatory. He was always captivated by jazz, and was an active pianist, arranger, and composer for well-known jazz ensembles in the Soviet Union. As a prolific composer, Kapustin wrote works in classical forms and styles, as seen in his twenty piano sonatas, twenty-four preludes and fugues, and six piano concerti. But what attracts today's musicians and audiences worldwide is his jazz harmony, complex rhythm, and the energy of the virtuosic writing.

The piece begins with a two-measure bass riff. The bass line is more like a jazz riff, an introduction to a jazz tune, rather than an *ostinato* because of its immediate key change. The introductory riff is in F minor, but the piece is without a key signature, and travels through various keys with its accidentals.

The meter alternates between 7/8 and 4/4. The 7/8 measures are mostly divided into the rhythmic pattern of 2-2-3. This rhythmic pattern is often used in the bass line with the left hand accompanying the fast sixteenth notes in the right hand.

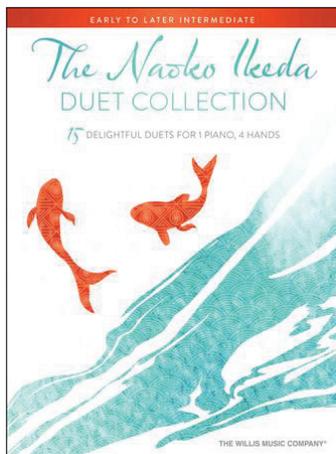
Several technical challenges are present in the middle section and notably lacking strong downbeats. Irregular syncopations, irregular accents, and polyrhythms abound. Intricate passages, where the right-hand's virtuosic sixteenth-note line leaps through wide intervals outlining extended chords while the left hand ignores the 7/8 meter and plays eighth-note pairs in the bass across the bar lines, demand exceptional technical skills and rhythmic precision. This middle section sounds like a small jazz ensemble in which the bass plays a line with syncopated rhythm and accents while a high register instrument, such as a trumpet, plays a showy solo.

While the solo is dominated by jazz elements such as complex harmony, scales, and rhythm, Kapustin sneaks in a little flavor of classical-style writing. In the chordal unison of the 2-2-3 pattern, Kapustin uses charming impressionistic harmony, creating a contrasting mood to the busy jazz section.

This is a gratifying piece for pianists where they can demonstrate the technical and musical difficulties, while enjoying the pleasure of jazz. It is a great addition to the repertoire for both performing professionals and students of advanced level. (Edition Schott/Hal Leonard \$16.99)
— Keiko Asakawa-Golden

THE NAOKO IKEDA DUET COLLECTION

by Naoko Ikeda



“The set represents an explorative and creative compositional voice and Ikeda’s thoughtful pedagogical writing.”

This duet collection is a full house, comprised of eight standalone character pieces and a seven-piece set of character pieces about playing cards, previously published as independent pieces now together in a single collection. The set represents an explorative and creative compositional voice and Ikeda’s thoughtful pedagogical writing.

The duet collection is divided into two parts; the first half is comprised of independent, narrative pieces evoking scenes of nature and city life such as “Powder Snow” and “Weekend in Paris;” the second half is a seven-movement collection titled “The Royal Seven” and includes playing-cards-themed pieces such as “Jack of Spades,” “Queen of Diamonds,” and “King of Clubs.”

This collection is appropriate for intermediate-level piano students due to the use of syncopation, arpeggiated melodic figures, hand-position shifts, and the overall independence of the hands that is required. “Central Park Promenade” is a particular standout; the piano *secondo* plays a fun, syncopated pop-like groove over the “Royal Road Progression” (a harmonic progression of IV-V-iii-vi) while the piano *primo* plays a cheerful, chromatically embellished melody. Where many composers would opt for the *primo* pianist to play the melody in octaves, parallel sixths are chosen here to yield a richer harmony and a satisfying technique.

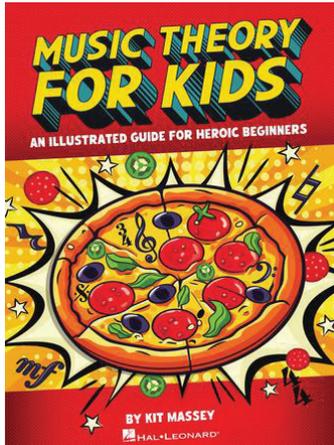
Though C major is the most commonly represented key signature, a range of key signatures is explored throughout these works including two short and manageable forays into B major in “Joker.” The genius of this movement begins in the transition from B minor to B major. The opening B minor *scherzando* section includes a fast-paced, whimsical, but approachable melody and accompaniment. To fully contrast the B minor section, the B major is a slower, *rubato* melody with simple chromatic embellishments (including two instances of a double-sharp, occurring on C and F). The use of musical contrast and the limited duration of the B major section make it a stellar introduction into a generally more difficult key signature.

Jazz influences evident throughout the collection are best demonstrated in “Jam Session,” in which jazz harmony culminates in an optional improvisation section where players are asked to trade eight-measure phrases, a common practice in jazz improvisation.

The *Naoko Ikeda Duet Collection* is a great resource for teachers with intermediate-level students looking for a range of styles and meters. (Willis Music Company, \$16.99) — *Matt A. Mason*

MUSIC THEORY FOR KIDS: An Illustrated Guide for Heroic Beginners

by Kit Massey



“Colorful, comic book-style illustrations and humor make music theory feel approachable and fun for students of all instrumental backgrounds.”

Transforming music theory into a thrilling adventure, this is the ultimate workbook for young musicians. Perfect for private or group instruction, the workbook introduces the basics of music theory in a uniquely engaging way.

Colorful, comic book-style illustrations and humor make music theory feel approachable and fun for students of all instrumental backgrounds. This non-intimidating approach ensures that young musicians can build a strong foundation in music theory without feeling overwhelmed.

The workbook’s eight chapters cover a comprehensive range of music fundamentals. Students will progress from basic rhythm concepts, including note values, rests, and simple time signatures, to more complex topics like sixteenth notes and dotted notes. The workbook also delves into reading and notation on the grand staff, including accidentals, basic intervals, major scales, and tonic triads in the keys of C, G, D, and F major. Additionally, students develop a vocabulary of expressive signs and terms, further enriching their musical understanding.

Each chapter concludes with engaging review sections that reinforce learning and encourage creativity. The “How Do I Feel?” mood chart helps students reflect on

their understanding, with tailored follow-up tips to address any challenges. To further supplement their learning, students can access downloadable PDF worksheets on the publisher’s website using the unique access code found inside the workbook’s cover. Key vocabulary words are reviewed in “My Theory Scrapbook” sections, while “You Be The Composer!” challenges students to apply their new knowledge by creating personalized music compositions.

Throughout the workbook, a cast of colorful characters guides students on their musical journey. The stern Bandmaster, forgetful flutist Cecil, and the enigmatic Masked Composer offer helpful tips and corrections, creating a narrative thread that flows seamlessly from one chapter to the next. Along the way, students will discover fascinating musical fun facts, interesting historical tidbits, and humorous “Dad Joke Corner” moments. These engaging elements transform the workbook into an immersive adventure that makes learning music theory a delight. (Hal Leonard with online supplements, \$19.99)

— Lisa Mioduszewski

THIS ISSUE'S CONTRIBUTORS:



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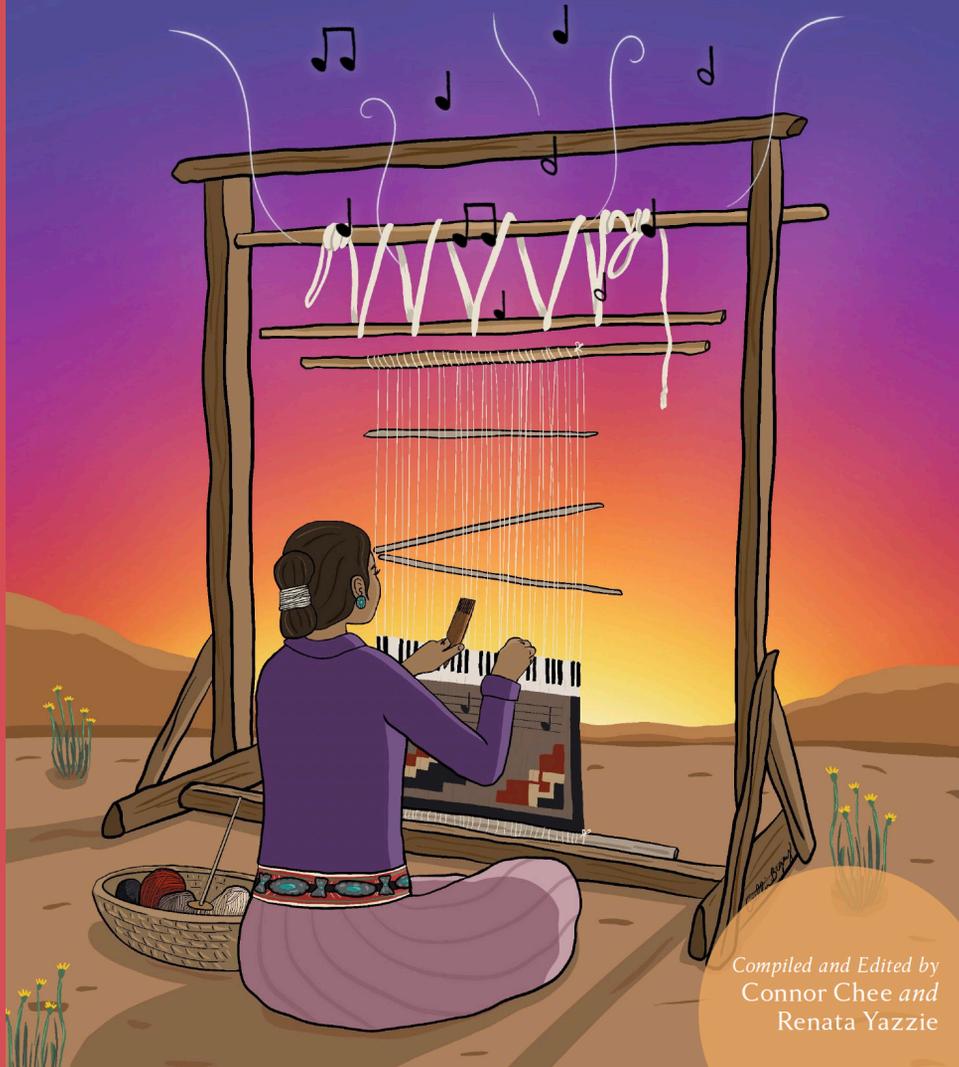
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GOODBYE RUSSIA: Rachmaninoff in Exile

by Fiona Maddocks

review by Veda Zuponicic



Fiona Maddocks' biography of Rachmaninoff's American years is a fast-paced ride—filled with details of Rachmaninoff's life from 1918 to his death in 1943 which, incidentally, includes many references to his love of fast cars! Pianists are aware that Vladimir Horowitz traveled with his own souped-up Steinway but probably don't know that Rachmaninoff's late-model Lincoln luxury car traveled with him on his trans-Atlantic trips.

The book, constructed in large chronological sections with short, titled chapters, relates Rachmaninoff's high moral stature, his sense of responsibility to his family, and his generosity of spirit and money. Vignettes and anecdotes provide the reader with intimate details of his relationships with a cast of characters, including Sergei Prokofiev, Igor Stravinsky, Nikolai Medtner, and many others of prominence in the world of music after 1918. One such example relates Rachmaninoff's first meeting with Vladimir Horowitz, performing the Third Concerto in the basement of Steinway Hall, with Rachmaninoff playing the orchestral accompaniment. "He swallowed it whole,"¹ Rachmaninoff remarked. *Goodbye, Russia* is filled with such delicious stories, a pianist's *Vanity Fair*.

Setting the scene is the post-Bolshevik Revolution Russian émigré community in New York that fascinated the American public: Rachmaninoff is fully in the mix, helping to fund Russian Orthodox churches and serving as honored guest at high society Russian-themed balls. Russian to his core, he also suffered from the knowledge that there was no going back; the nostalgia for his estate at Ivanovka and Russia would be his lot for the rest of his life.

Rachmaninoff's life intersected with Prokofiev, having arrived in the United States via Scandinavia, on November 10, 1918, on the eve of the World War I Armistice; and on the heels of Prokofiev, who traveled through Siberia to reach the United States a few months

earlier. The book illuminates their tense relationship as well as equally fraught intersections with critics and other composers; we already know that Rachmaninoff's relationship with his own *Prelude in C-sharp Minor* was one of his greatest irritations! (A hilarious short chapter features a story of Harpo Marx trying to practice in a bungalow in California, being "disturbed" by Rachmaninoff's practice in an adjacent bungalow features that very prelude.) Audiences were universal in their admiration for Rachmaninoff's compositions and performances, and Rachmaninoff's great success in the United States was a result of his romantic Russian sensibilities and his extraordinary pianistic integrity. By 1920, his pianistic career guaranteed high fees, an agreement with Steinway Pianos, and the beginnings of a highly lucrative recording career with RCA.

On the other hand, critics and colleagues who were writing in a clear twentieth-century musical language disparaged him both publicly and privately. Prokofiev, Stravinsky, and the critic Paul Rosenfeld rarely had anything good to say about his compositions. In one short chapter is a fascinating section about Rachmaninoff's long-standing relationship with his piano technician, William Hupfer, who relates Rachmaninoff's habits surrounding a piano recital; "His wife's constant presence, his need to warm his hands on an electric muff, and his taste for sipping a cherry malted milk float after a concert." "High Seas, Floating Palaces" describes the frequent trans-Atlantic crossings Rachmaninoff made to continue his European career. The description of one such palatial first-class passage mentions violinists Mischa Elman and Jascha Brodsky; and pianists Alexander Brailovsky and Mischa Levitsky, plus Sergei Prokofiev. Prokofiev had recently attended one of Rachmaninoff's recitals. "[Prokofiev] was going to go backstage... but after [Rachmaninoff] played ... some appalling piece of vulgarity by Kreisler [Liebesfreud]" he did not. Prokofiev was an inveterate diarist and provides many sniping comments about Rachmaninoff over the years. Also included is Igor Stravinsky's legendary description of

BOOK REVIEW

Rachmaninoff: “Rachmaninoff’s immortalizing totality was his scowl. He was a six-and-a-half-foot tall scowl.”

The book documents that Rachmaninoff was an extremely philanthropic person, as there were constant appeals from friends in distress during both wars, including from Nikolai Medtner, a very dear friend. Loans were made, sometimes in very large amounts, and Rachmaninoff never pressed for repayment. He was in constant turmoil during World War II, concerned with the heavy losses of life and fund-raised for many agencies that supported causes in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

Musicians sometimes muse, “What a pity that George Gershwin, (or Mozart or Mendelssohn) died so young: How might they have developed had they lived longer?” A review from the *Philadelphia Inquirer* upon his arrival in 1918 quotes, “Rachmaninoff comes back to America in the prime of his years, in the full maturity and exercise of his powers, and at the height of his reputation.” In fact, his need to earn money meant that he definitively gave up his conducting career, and put composing on a slow

burner, devoting his energies to performing. What might he have written had he not arrived in the United States as an almost penniless refugee? Ultimately, there are only six compositions between 1917 and his death in 1943. For those who remember Rachmaninoff the pianist, we must thank Fiona Maddocks for this painstakingly researched book that broadens our understanding of this great composer and musician. (Pegasus Books, 2024, 360 pages, hardcover \$29.95; other formats available) 



Pianist VEDA ZUPONCIC has been Professor of Music at Rowan University for more than fifty years and was a Guest Professor at the Moscow State Conservatory for a semester. She has performed on four continents, including more than fifty performances in the former Soviet Union.

NOTES:

¹All quotations in this review are from Fiona Maddocks, *Goodbye Russia: Rachmaninoff in Exile* (New York: Pegasus Books, 2024).

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Jorge Federico Osorio, *piano*

Orquesta Sinfónica de Minería conducted by Carlos Miguel Prieto

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[Total Time 74:31]

cedillerecords.org



“Both concerti are refreshing alternatives to overplayed repertoire. Several short solo works of each composer round out the offerings and Ponce’s exquisite Intermezzo provides a wistful conclusion to the recording.”



Cedille Records has released an excellent recording of Romantic music masterly performed by pianist Jorge Federico Osorio, conductor Carlos Miguel Prieto, and the Orquesta Sinfónica de Minería with ample program notes by José-María Álvarez. Featured on the album are two concerti by Mexican pianist-composers Ricardo Castro and Manuel Ponce. The brilliant technique and tender lyricism of Osorio are showcased throughout. The oldest composition featured, Castro’s *Concerto in A Minor*, Op. 22 (dating circa 1885–1887), opens with mysterious broodings of the orchestra, followed quickly by the piano asserting its heroic nature through several interspersed cadenzas, Lisztian flourishes, and abundant octaves. The first movement leads directly into a beautiful second movement which incorporates material from the first and reaches dramatic climaxes. The Polonaise finale (without the most recognizable polonaise rhythm)

transforms the *cantabile* theme of the first movement and brings the concerto to a rousing conclusion. Ponce’s *Concerto No. 1 in F# Minor* (1911–12), often called “*Concierto romántico*,” features movements that each lead into the next. Both concerti are refreshing alternatives to overplayed repertoire. Several short solo works of each composer round out the offerings and Ponce’s exquisite Intermezzo provides a wistful conclusion to the recording.
—Elizabeth Moak



Pianist and recording artist ELIZABETH MOAK performs as soloist throughout North and South America, Asia, and Europe. Associate Professor at the University of Southern Mississippi, Moak studied at Peabody Conservatory with Fleisher, Martin, and Schein.

REVIEWS

CPE BACH: SONATAS & RONDOS

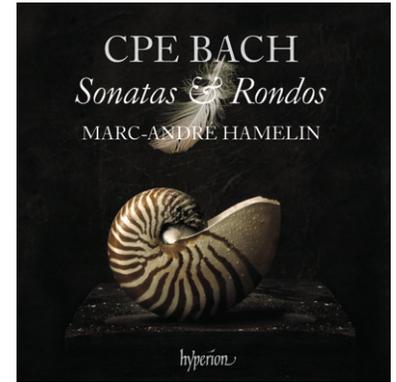
Marc-André Hamelin, *piano*

Hyperion CDA68381/2

2 CD Set

Total Time [140:34]

hyperion-records.co.uk/



“The conjoining of multiple movements by pauses and fermatas, and the composer’s bold chromaticism may often lead modern listeners to sense that [he] foresaw the future...”



Arguably, the keyboard works of CPE Bach are still far too little known by the majority of pianists, so we owe a debt of gratitude to the extraordinary Marc-André Hamelin for expanding his extensive discography with this remarkable 2-CD set. In January of 2021 (during the COVID lockdowns), Hyperion enlisted the Grammy-award-winning Judith Sherman to engineer this extraordinary collection at Mechanics Hall in Worcester, Massachusetts, where she managed to capture the artist’s every tonal nuance, making this title a more than worthy enhancement to the label’s high standard of audio excellence.

The conjoining of multiple movements by pauses and fermatas, and the composer’s bold chromaticism may often lead modern listeners to sense that Emmanuel Bach foresaw the future, and his keyboard style, as the English diarist Charles Burney once observed, owed much to his

uncanny skill at improvisation. For additional confirmation, listen to Hamelin’s treatment of the composer’s *Freie Fantasie fürs Clavier* in F-sharp minor, H300, a twelve-minute masterwork which continually basks in a feverish Liszt-like intensity alongside a sublimity reminiscent of Schubert. This collection is also graced with numerous, exquisitely wrought miniatures, including a one-minute fiery, yet sensitively subtle account of the composer’s famous *Solfeggio* in C minor, H220.—*Stephen Siek*



STEPHEN SIEK is the author of *England’s Piano Sage: The Life and Teachings of Tobias Matthay*, and *A Dictionary for the Modern Pianist*. He has annotated numerous historic reissues for APR, Decca, Deutsche Grammophon, and Hyperion, and currently serves as Director of the Academy for Continued Learning at Arizona State University.

CHOPIN: PIANO WORKS

Samson François, *piano*

Erato 9029586920 - 10 CDs

Total Time [11:17:00]

warnerclassics.com/



“This is the sort of vital, thought-provoking playing that revitalizes these well-trodden musical paths and will trigger an urge to look at the scores to see where François finds his inspiration.”



2024 was the centenary of the birth of pianist Samson François (1924–1970). François was a troubled soul whose considerable gifts could not help him to turn away from the drugs and alcohol that ultimately hastened his untimely end. This budget collection of the Frenchman’s commercial Chopin recordings is the perfect introduction to his art, capturing François’s unique blend of masculine *élan* and delicate poetry. Every note seems to be improvised on the spot; there are myriad unexpected articulations and sudden dynamic shifts, and above all, the music is spun out with a fearless sense of flexible timing that disdains our modern mania for strict tempi. Listen to the shockingly slow (yet somehow logical!) opening of the *Concerto in E Minor*, or to the swift yet intimate sway of the *Barcarolle* with its clearly

delineated voicing and kaleidoscopic timbral variety. This is the sort of vital, thought-provoking playing that revitalizes these well-trodden musical paths and will trigger an urge to look at the scores to see where François finds his inspiration. —*Richard Masters*



RICHARD MASTERS is a soloist, opera coach, and conductor based in Blacksburg, VA, where he is an associate professor of piano and collaborative piano on the music faculty at Virginia Tech’s School of Performing Arts.



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“There is no power for change greater than a community discovering what it cares about.”

– MARGARET J. WHEATLEY



by JENNIFER SNOW

This summer, we will be hosting The Piano Conference: NCKP 2025.¹ As shared in this issue of *Piano Magazine*, the online and in-person programs are robust, reflecting the extraordinary work of our dedicated and inspired community. In addition to our scheduled programs, we have added for the first time a summit on the future of our field. The Inaugural NCKP 2025 Innovation Summit: Designing the Future of Piano Education² is open to everyone, and we encourage all to attend. We have been working on the design of this day for over a year, creating an opportunity for our community to gather and brainstorm, workshop, dialogue, and dream big about the future. The Summit is an opportunity for all attendees' voices to be heard. It will amplify the value and work of piano educators and the essential role musicians play in the future sustainability of communities.

As we face current challenges and disruptions, music-learning experiences have never been more needed. By coming together with professional, trained facilitators, The Summit will allow us to explore our big, bold ideas for the future. NCKP Innovation Summit Director, Dr. Andrea McAlister, and the NCKP team have been working in collaboration with NCKP committees, innovation experts, leaders in the field and in higher education, new professionals, and practitioners to design a meaningful day. We will explore how piano educators impact community. We will collectively delve into ideas on how to adapt to ever-changing technologies, economic challenges, and new learning modalities, and we will share visionary ideas for advocacy and access. Through a purposefully designed program, together, all participants will chart the course for our field over the next decade.

At The Frances Clark Center, we are constantly evaluating how we can most effectively continue to support and serve our community. At the Innovation Summit, we will capture and record all aspects of the designed activities and distill the results into a strategic vision document for the field. The Piano Conference: NCKP 2025 will also launch programming for the next two years that fully reflects and supports the needs of our piano teaching community. We remain deeply committed to those in the broad community who are dedicated to ensuring access to meaningful music experiences for all learners.

Our piano education community provides cultural infrastructure for music sustainability in communities around the country and the world. We look forward with hope and optimism that the community gatherings of The Piano Conference: NCKP 2025 and the interactive Innovation Summit will invigorate, motivate, and inspire us to deepen and expand our powerful work through music. We look forward to welcoming our passionate network of piano educators as together, we imagine, dream, and amplify our community's profound and enduring impact. 🎹

NOTES

¹ pianoinspires.com/nckp-the-piano-conference/

² pianoinspires.com/nckp-the-piano-conference/nckp-2025-innovation-summit/

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The Royal Conservatory of Music	Back Cover

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**QUESTION:**

I've been asked to judge at a local event and have never judged before. What advice do you have, and how can I best prepare?

ANSWER: I applaud you for taking this “assignment” so seriously. Fair and constructive judging is key to making a student’s participation in any event a success.

A good adjudicator will do more than criticize and assign a score to a student’s performance. The adjudicator needs to present, in a constructive manner, the issues present in the performance that led to the score received. When I judge an event, I phrase my comments as I would in a lesson. I begin with a genuine compliment and then proceed to discuss the elements that would make the greatest improvement in the performance. If time and space allow, I will suggest practice techniques that would help.

An essential consideration for the adjudicator is to make the assessment fit the setting and the performer. If the event is highly competitive, the adjudicator must listen not just for details in the score but for all aspects of artistry. They can listen with high expectations and can evaluate and discuss the performances accordingly. In a *non-competitive* festival designed to be a supportive performance opportunity, an average student will not benefit from comments better suited to a highly competitive event. The feedback here should be encouraging and constructive. In all situations, the adjudicator will be listening for communicative playing as well as accuracy.

It is the job of the adjudicator to present in a constructive manner the issues present in the performance that led to the score received. If a student does not rank in the top tier, there should be suggestions for what the student needs to do differently in order to receive a higher ranking. It is extremely confusing to the student to receive a less-than-top score accompanied with only comments of vague praise—“Great job,” “Thanks for playing,” “Nice work.” It is also hard for a teacher to discuss such a critique sheet with a student after the event.

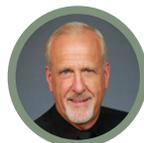
My adjudication mantra is “what one thing will most improve this performance?” Rather than try to list every little detail that could use improvement in the piece, the adjudication comments will have greater effect if focused in one direction. For example, it might be something as simple as dynamic contrasts. In such a case, I would suggest that the piece will have greater effect with more dynamic contrasts, and then proceed to cite the various instances where stronger contrasts would deliver the greatest impact.

Sometimes the most necessary improvement is something which needs practice suggestions. This is often the case when the performance needs improvement in balance. I try to keep in mind, depending on the age and experience of the performer, that they might not know what “balance” is. In these cases, I will briefly explain that the hand playing the melody needs to be louder and the accompanying hand softer (and name it as “balance”) and give practice suggestions on how to achieve it. Other areas which often warrant practice suggestions from the adjudicator include tempo control, technical clarity, and memorization techniques.

To prepare yourself for judging an event, it is wise to find out all you can about the event’s mission and goals. Many events have required repertoire, and some events will let you know what pieces will be performed. In these cases, familiarize yourself with that repertoire. If possible, get a copy in advance of the judging form. You will see if the form encourages comments or if it asks for evaluation or scoring on different aspects of the performance. Score-based forms can facilitate staying on time. However, brief comments will help the student understand the scores.

I suggest that you listen to some student performances on YouTube and complete the sample judging form to get comfortable with writing and listening, while the student is playing. Then, review your comments and think of how the student and student’s teacher might respond to them. Will they understand your perspective? Will they feel affirmed and encouraged, or criticized and discouraged? Will your comments have meaning for their practice going forward? If you do not have the judging form in advance, you can still practice writing comments based on the recorded performance.

Most important of all is to smile and welcome the student, and smile immediately after the performance before you resume writing. That smile will help put the performer at ease and will be remembered! 🎹



CRAIG SALE is Senior Editor for *Piano Magazine* and Director of Online Courses for the Frances Clark Center. He directed the preparatory piano department at Concordia University Chicago for thirty years.

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