

# THOMAS H. KERR JR.

## DANCÉTUDES

7 Vignettes of Dolls and Pets

*For Piano*

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*Edited by* Susanna Garcia and William Chapman Nyaho

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## *DANCÉTUDES*

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## ■ ABOUT THOMAS HENDERSON KERR JR.

Thomas Henderson Kerr Jr. (1915–88) was born in Baltimore, Maryland. He began playing and studying piano at an early age. He taught himself the organ and, as early as fourteen, played for church services, as well as in Baltimore’s nightclubs. As a young man, Kerr wanted to attend Peabody Institute, but, at that time, African Americans were not admitted. He instead attended Howard University for one year, then transferred to the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, New York, where he earned three degrees: a bachelor of music in piano, a bachelor of music in theory, and a master of music in theory. At Eastman he studied piano with Cécile Genhart (1898–1983). He graduated summa cum laude. In 1943, Kerr returned to Howard University as Professor of Piano and served as chair of the piano department until his retirement in 1976.

During his tenure at Howard, his career flourished. He composed and arranged music for significant events that directly and indirectly affected the University, such as the Howard University Centennial and the installation services for James Nabrit Jr., president of the university. He also composed for events of national significance, such as the US Bicentennial, the deaths of presidents Franklin D. Roosevelt and John F. Kennedy, and the death of the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr.

For over thirty-five years, Kerr served as the organist at Plymouth Congregational Church in Washington, DC, where he composed organ, choral, vocal, and ensemble works for services. His organ compositions have been performed at the National Cathedral, the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, the Mormon Tabernacle, and in more than twenty cathedrals and churches in Europe. As a pianist, he performed both on the Howard campus and at venues including the National Gallery of Art and the Phillips Collection. He appeared twice as a concert soloist with the National Symphony Orchestra in Washington, DC.<sup>1</sup>

Thomas Kerr Jr. raised two children, Judith Elaine Kerr and Thomas Henderson Kerr III, with his first wife, Norma McAllister Kerr (1922–91).<sup>2</sup> His second wife, Hortense Reid Kerr (1926–2002) was Professor of Piano at Howard University. She performed, catalogued, and lectured on his music and career.<sup>3</sup> Thomas H. Kerr Jr. died on August 26, 1988, as a result of an automobile accident. He is buried in Washington, DC, near Howard University.



Thomas H. Kerr Jr.  
Photo courtesy of Stuart and Cynthia Reid

1. Thomas Henderson Kerr Jr. Papers.
2. Fitz-Fitzharris, “Compositional Techniques,” 6.
3. Hortense Reid Kerr’s papers are found in the Kerr Collection at the Schomburg Center.

The *Dancétudes* are summarized in the following table, including Kerr’s stated purpose for each étude.<sup>20</sup> Editorial metronome markings that expand the ranges supplied by Kerr are provided. (See the section “About This Edition: Metronome Markings” for a comparison with Kerr’s original markings.) To indicate the difficulty level of each piece, the editors have used piano literature expert Jane Magrath’s ten-level grading system.<sup>21</sup>

<i>Dancétudes Summary</i>						
No.	Title	Dedication	Dance Type	Purpose of Étude	Metronome	Level
1	“Meow” Waltz	<i>For “Yellow Eyes,” Judy’s cat, member of the AristoCATstry</i>	waltz*	gentle dissonances	♩ = 126–144	6
2	Wistful Dance	<i>For a China doll—old-fashioned and lovely</i>	habanera	parallel thirds and triads in asymmetrical rhythm	♩ = 132–184	8
3	Mad Dance	<i>For a Brazilian rag doll</i>	march	violent dissonance in hard-driving rhythm	♩ = 96–120	9
4	Glad Dance (Chinese Tarantella)	<i>For a wooden puppet doll</i>	tarantella*	whole-tone passagework	♩. = 132–152	10
5	Quack! Quack! Quadrille	<i>For Judy Kerr and “Cuddles,” her duck</i>	quadrille*	pentatonic: largely on the black keys	♩ = 69–84	6
6	Parakeet Parade (Paype! Paype!)	<i>For Judy Kerr and “Cecil,” her parakeet</i>	march*	none given	♩ = 88–108	7
7	Sad Dance (Lullabye-Dance)	<i>For a broken doll, beloved but soon to be discarded</i>	lullabye-dance* (jazz waltz)	none given	♩ = 88–96	8

20. Kerr identifies the dance type on most of the études. These are marked with an asterisk (\*). The editors have identified the others.

21. Magrath, *Piano Literature for Teaching and Performance*, xiv–xv.

## PEDAGOGICAL OVERVIEW

### No. 1

### “Meow Waltz”

**Dedication:** For “Yellow Eyes,” Judy’s cat, member of the AristoCATstry

**Purpose:** gentle dissonances with added notes

**Date and Location Composed:** November 1959, The Virgin Islands

**Intended Use:** Judy Kerr, 1960 auditions

“Meow Waltz” was written about a cat, Yellow Eyes, that followed Judy home from kindergarten. It is a character piece accompanied by a prose narrative within the score. To clarify that the words are not to be treated as lyrics, Kerr specifies in the manuscript *This is not a song but a piano piece, the words are a lure*. In his characteristic good-humored way, Kerr refers to his text about the cat as “doggerel.”

Kerr’s words animate the relationship between his music and narrative. Repeated two-note-slur gestures imitate the sound of meowing. Increasing levels of dissonance, tempo fluctuations, and sudden changes of dynamics are used to suggest different aspects of the text.

Kerr’s design is prose-like, and his use of uneven phrase lengths parallels and is illuminated by his text. No key signature is given, but successive phrases, like the wandering cat, meander through different keys. These qualities give the piece a through-composed feel, with clear phrases and motives.

Kerr’s harmonic palette primarily consists of major-seventh chords supporting a Lydian melody. When suggested by the text narrative, he uses more-dissonant chord qualities. Notice the shift to minor and diminished chord qualities to accompany the text “Or hungry or limping or freezing, His cry is ever the same!” (m. 20, beat 3 to m. 28, beat 2).

### Pedagogical Elements

<b>Technique</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Two-note slur gesture</li><li>• Legato connections between chords</li></ul>
<b>Rhythm, Tonality, and Harmony</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Waltz time, but two-note slurs initiated on beat 3 of each measure de-emphasize the downbeat and lend a distinctive and graceful rhythmic feel.</li><li>• Lydian mode</li><li>• Major-seventh chords and other chords with extended harmonies</li></ul>
<b>Pedaling and Fingering</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Pedaling is used impressionistically to blend sounds.</li><li>• Editorial fingerings can facilitate a smoother legato.</li></ul>
<b>Grading</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Level 6</li></ul>
<b>Similar Repertoire (impressionistic harmonies)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Edward MacDowell: “To a Wild Rose,” Op. 51, No. 1</li><li>• Jacques Ibert: “La meneuse de tortues d’or” (The Leader of the Golden Tortoises) (<i>Histoires</i>, No. 1)</li></ul>

For Judy Kerr

# DANCÉTUDES

## 7 Vignettes of Dolls and Pets

For "Yellow Eyes," Judy's cat, member of the AristoCATstry

### No. 1 "Meow" Waltz

Thomas H. Kerr Jr.  
(1915–88)

Moderate waltz tempo (♩ = 126–144)

"Me - ow"!

"Me - ow"!

Old

*mp* (In the "Meows" the LH should be much softer than the RH)

RH over 5 3 1 4 2

1 2 (1 4) 1 3 2 5

"Yel - low Eyes" says, "Me - ow"!

"Me -

5 3 4 2 1

1 2 1 3

ow"!

"Me - ow"!

Just

9 4 2 1 4 2 1

2 4 4 5

noth - ing else but "Me - ow"!

When -

13 3 1 5

*mf*

1

For a wooden puppet doll  
**No. 4 Glad Dance**  
 Chinese Tarantella

à la Tarantella

Presto comodo (♩ = 132–152)

The musical score is written for piano in 6/8 time. It consists of four systems of music, each with a treble and bass staff joined by a brace. The key signature has one flat (B-flat).

- System 1 (Measures 1-4):**
  - Measure 1: Treble staff has a half note G4 with a fingering of 2. Bass staff has a half note F4.
  - Measure 2: Treble staff has a half note A4 with a fingering of 1. Bass staff has a half note G4.
  - Measure 3: Treble staff has a half note B4 with a fingering of 3. Bass staff has a half note A4.
  - Measure 4: Treble staff has a half note C5 with a fingering of 4. Bass staff has a half note B4.
- System 2 (Measures 5-8):**
  - Measure 5: Treble staff has a half note D5 with a fingering of 5. Bass staff has a half note C5.
  - Measure 6: Treble staff has a half note E5 with a fingering of 1. Bass staff has a half note D5.
  - Measure 7: Treble staff has a half note F5 with a fingering of 2. Bass staff has a half note E5.
  - Measure 8: Treble staff has a half note G5 with a fingering of 3. Bass staff has a half note F5.
- System 3 (Measures 9-12):**
  - Measure 9: Treble staff has a half note A5 with a fingering of 4. Bass staff has a half note G5.
  - Measure 10: Treble staff has a half note B5 with a fingering of 5. Bass staff has a half note A5.
  - Measure 11: Treble staff has a half note C6 with a fingering of 1. Bass staff has a half note B5.
  - Measure 12: Treble staff has a half note D6 with a fingering of 2. Bass staff has a half note C6.
- System 4 (Measures 13-16):**
  - Measure 13: Treble staff has a half note E6 with a fingering of 3. Bass staff has a half note D6.
  - Measure 14: Treble staff has a half note F6 with a fingering of 4. Bass staff has a half note E6.
  - Measure 15: Treble staff has a half note G6 with a fingering of 5. Bass staff has a half note F6.
  - Measure 16: Treble staff has a half note A6 with a fingering of 1. Bass staff has a half note G6.

Dynamics and markings include *f* (forte) at the beginning, *sfz* (sforzando) at measures 2 and 5, and *energico* (energetic) at measure 3. Fingering numbers are provided for many notes. Articulation marks (accents) are present on notes in measures 1, 2, 5, 9, 10, 13, and 14.