

Welcome back to our discussion on Repertoire. This column features the subject of **Etudes**. I must confess to being a great fan and long-time teacher of etudes. As we know, these pieces are packed with the foundations of technique and serve as building blocks for playing with more physical ease. Rarely have I found so much value in so few measures!

From the Harvard Dictionary of Music, an etude is defined as “a piece designed to aid the student of an instrument in the development of his mechanical and technical ability. An etude is usually devoted entirely to one of the special problems of instrumental technique, such as scales, arpeggios, octaves, double stops, trills, etc.”

Assigning etude practice also offers these additional opportunities and benefits:

1. There is a quicker turn-over of repertoire since the etude is usually short in length.
2. Since the focus is on one or two technical issues, teaching time can feature practicing tips and problem-solving ideas.
3. Teachers can use them for Music Progression preparation -- review key signature identification and look for relative or parallel changes of key; define terminology; discuss meter; name distinguishing features.
4. You could choose to practice etudes for a time period as a substitute for the usual scale routine. (heartily endorsed by all of my students!)
5. Many selections are appropriate for performance use.
6. Etude collections may be useful sight-reading material for more advanced students.

Over the years, I have returned again and again to these favorite etude books. I hope that the following annotated listing of Elementary through Early Advanced level etudes will remind you of forgotten gems or introduce you to some new repertoire to teach. Each book is currently in print and has qualities of cover appeal, clean printing and layout, along with superb music.

Elementary

Beautiful Etudes, Book One, selected & edited by Victoria McArthur
Alfred Publishing Company

An early level collection with practice and creative suggestions for each piece, a practice record, glossary and composer facts. The technical focus is listed with each selection in the Table of Contents.

Celebration Series, The Piano Odyssey, Etudes, Book One
Frederick Harris Music

More difficult than the previous book listed. The pieces are more sophisticated, offering diverse meters, some cluster experience along with standard repertoire. Nice cover art, imaginative titles - this collection is super for the older or more adventurous student.

Celebration Series, The Piano Odyssey, Etudes, Book Two
Frederick Harris Music

Continuing in the same path as Book I in this series, Book 2 has a mix of traditional and contemporary pieces. Who could resist a “Kangaroo” piece made entirely of minor 2nds (a real reading challenge!) or “Moon Through the Window” with quiet glissandos?

Piano Repertoire, Etudes, Book Three, selected & edited by Keith Snell
Neil A. Kjos Music Company

This series is available in levels one through ten. It is an outstanding value with excellent repertoire choices throughout. The volume contains works by Czerny, Loschorn, Gurlitt, Duvernoy, Streabbog and Kabalevsky.

Streabbog, 12 Melodious Pieces, Op. 63, Book 1
Alfred Publishing Company

A collection with pieces that address developing a fluid line, shaping ascending scales, balance between hands, grace-notes, phrasing, pedal, cross-hand notes, transfer of notes between two hands and much more.

Expressive Etudes, Book Three, compiled & edited by Suzanne W. Guy
FJH Music Company

Ms. Guy labels this volume as Early Intermediate and I'm including it as a late Elementary because it contains 3 pieces from the Streabbog Op. 63. After each title, the technical focus is noted. There is a brief composer biography and a page of practice suggestions.

Intermediate

Burgmuller, Czerny & Hanon, Book I and II, selected by Ingrid Jacobson Clarfield
Alfred Publishing Company

An appealing mixed format that offers a variety of technical material, including etudes. Helpful practice suggestions are written at the top of each page.

Burgmuller, 25 Progressive Pieces, Op. 100
Alfred Publishing Company

I have a particular fondness for this album. Students love these pieces! This edition is a favorite also because of the beautiful cover art.....it just looks important and special. Many of these selections work well for performance.

Beautiful Etudes, Books Three and Four, selected & edited by Victoria McArthur
Alfred Publishing Company

As written in Book One, each piece is given detailed ideas for preparation and practice. Ms. McArthur has chosen an excellent variety of material. I especially like her transposition and creative suggestions. Be sure and see the "Russian Dance" by Hugo Reinhold in Book Four. It is a student favorite.

Heller, 24 Studies for the Young, Op. 125
Universal Edition

Students are challenged both rhythmically and by a variety of key signatures. You will encounter syncopation, two against three and dotted plus double dotted rhythms.

Intermediate

Expressive Etudes, Books Four and Five, compiled & edited by Suzanne M. Guy
FJH Music Company

The music is by J.S. Bach, MacDowell, Streabbog, Heller, Hummel, Burgmuller, Gurlitt, Czerny and Bartok. Ms. Guy arranges the pieces in approximate order of difficulty in all volumes. The selection of material is varied and while most is familiar, there are a few unexpected surprises, such as the "Berceuse" by Saint-Saens, written at age 7, from Book Five.

Celebration Series, The Piano Odyssey, Etudes, Book Four
Frederick Harris Music

Half of the offerings are traditional including Heller's "The Avalance," the rest is enticing, newer music with titles such as "Blues no. 1" by Christopher Norton and "You're Joking!" by Clifford Crawley. One piece, "Sailing Along" by David Karp explores the whole-tone scale. There are no teaching tips in this series.

Technique Teasers by Jeanine Yeager
Neil A. Kjos Music Company

This collection is original music has always been fun to use with teen-agers. She really likes to move around the keyboard -- see "Crosswinds" with many seventh chords and "Dynamic Designs" with an octave rock-style bass. "Ethnic Accent" is multi-metric and "Rushing River" (continuous triplets) has a new-age quality to it.

Early Advanced

Piano Repertoire – Etudes, Levels Six through Eight, selected & edited by Keith Snell

Neil A. Kjos Music Company

Composers represented in these volumes are Czerny, Concone, Burgmuller, Gurlitt, Heller, Kabalevsky, Khachaturian, MacDowell, Liszt and others. Many of these pieces can be used for performance, such as “The Storm” from level six or “Warrior’s Song” in level eight.

Burgmuller, 18 Characteristic Studies, Op. 109

Alfred Publishing Company

This opus also has a beautiful cover for instant appeal. My favorites (& my students’ favorites) are “The Pearls” (very rapid scales), “The Gypsies” (minor key with lots of drama), “Agitato” (quick 16th notes between hands), “Morning Bell” (descriptive with hand-crossing) and “The Storm” (blocked and broken octaves, tells a story).

Stephen Heller, Twenty-Five Studies, Op. 45

Universal Edition

This collection has “Avalanche” as the 2nd piece, “Warrior’s Song” is no. 15. The final four page work is an exciting Allegro con brio with full chords and octave passages. The B section is a brief recap of the 1st Etude with quiet RH broken chords. It concludes with brilliant bravura-style arpeggios, changing registers, octaves and even a bass tremolo. Here is a challenging and different piece to use for festival or recital.