

# Piano Professional Reviews

*pentatonic scale is an ideal improvising tool as nothing can sound wrong; any note you play will work, which is quite a relief.'*

Not only is every possible popular style described, from 12-bar blues and its variations to funk and rock, but also a comprehensive range of bass patterns is offered, along with many tips for idiomatic performance. The emotional 'colour' of intervals is mentioned, such as the '9ths from the country', and the 'open' suspended 4th chords, which work so well on the organ. If you have ever wondered how to achieve a brass 'gliss', or octaves with one note, read about how to use the 'pitch bender', and the 'de-tuner'; how to add vibrato to guitar notes, or achieve sci-fi distortion. These effects were developed to 'colour' the inexpressive white noise produced on a synthesizer. Just as baroque players added ornamentation as a way of creating sustain, keyboard players often add grace notes and tremolos.

The difference between 'synth lead' and 'synth pad' is explained; early synth voices were monophonic, something often mirrored even on modern portable keyboards, whereas the pads aim to provide a 'wash' of harmony. We are told of ideal combinations of instruments when splitting the keyboard into two, and given the ranges for acoustic instruments so that solos can sound realistic. There is useful advice on how to provide percussive 'rhythm piano' in a band context, and even 'piano fills'. 'Comping' means accompanying the other players, and the chapter showing ballad-style comping for a singer is particularly helpful. There follow descriptions and examples of the type of playing for which keyboardists and their chosen instruments became famous.

In the accompanying book 'Keyboard Facts' there is further in-depth information. Performer/composers from Fats Waller to Keith Jarrett or Amy Winehouse are described and set within the developments of their era. Many, such as Rick Wakeman, were classically trained, which is evident from their technique and some of the figurations they use in their keyboard playing. Rick is photographed working with eight keyboards at once.

A fascinating chapter, beautifully illustrated, is devoted to The Piano Story, tracing the history through zither (11th century), dulcimer, hurdy-gurdy, organ, clavichord (15th century), and harpsichord, to piano (turn of the 18th century.) It includes mechanized pianos and pianolas along the way.

The following chapter charts the development of electric keyboards, mentioning the Theremin of 1917, the Ondes Martenot of 1928 (employed by Messaien in some of his pieces), the Hammond organ of 1935, the Wurlitzer electric piano of 1954, and the Clavinet and Fender Rhodes of the mid 60s. All these instruments are demonstrated on the DVD. The huge Moog synthesizer opened the door to many of today's sounds (it was used by the Beatles in their Abbey Road album of 1969) but the real breakthrough came with the portable Minimoog synthesizer of the 1970s. From then on electronic music making did not have to be confined to the

specialists. We are brought right up to date with a description of Korg, Roland and Yamaha synthesizers, computer-based sequencing software, and preparations for live performance. MIDI is exhaustively explained and a glossary rounds off the book.

It is made clear that hard work cannot be avoided; 'Put aside time each day to work on scales and arpeggios, gradually working through all the keys.' And sure advice is given in one of the PRO TIPS: 'The best way to get into any style is to listen to as many recordings as possible.' I like the quote from Wilson Mizner; 'Copy from one, it's plagiarism; copy from two, it's research!'

■ Nancy Litten

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## Sheet music reviews

**Mike Cornick**

### **Clever Cat goes on Safari**

Easy to middle-grade solo piano pieces

Universal Edition ISBN 978-3-7024-6811-8 £8.95

The music in the *Clever Cat* series continues in its delightful, characterful way. The pieces are widely different, exploring a range of styles including samba, waltz, march, ragtime, tango and swing. As ever with Mike Cornick, the titles say it all – Safari Samba, The Waltz of the Elephants, March of the Meerkats, Ostrich Outing. The book is well printed and attractively laid out with amusing line drawings.

However, I question the psychology of writing "I'm a Clever Cat. I can play the piano" on every page. According to Daniel Coyle in *The Talent Code* (Random House, 2010), if you tell children they are clever, they will work at difficulties less long and less successfully than if you tell them they are working hard. Conversely, if people believe achievement is the result of hard work, they work better and persevere longer than when they believe achievement is the result of talent.

It's good to see the introduction written in three languages – English, German and French.

**Nicolai Podgornov**

### **Graded pieces for piano**

Vol 2 Intermediate

Universal Edition ISBN 978-3-7024-6779-1 £11.95

I am so pleased to have been asked to review this new book of piano music by Nicolai Podgornov (born 1950). I reviewed his *Piano Album* very positively for PP in Autumn 2008 ("quite a find – a book of studies disguised as pieces") and have used the book successfully with many pupils. I have already used *Graded Pieces for Piano vol 2* with pupils. Like *Piano Album*, *Graded Pieces* addresses technical and musical issues in a logical and accessible way. As Podgornov writes in his preface (again, in three languages), learning should be enjoyable, and the pedagogic intentions should not be evident as pupils are "carried along by interesting musical themes, the images in your mind, your feelings and the joy of movement". Challenges are practised and mastered without being noticed – not because pupils want to perfect their technique, but because they want to make music.

Podgornov's stated compositional objective is to write something of substance and to create memorable melodies even when composing the simplest of pieces. I think these pieces will inspire and stimulate pupils to practise well. They are fun and imaginative, and will broaden pupils' musical and technical experience. Highly recommended.

## **Johann Wilhelm Wilms** **Sechs Sonatinen Op16**

Edition Dohr 25226  
ISMN M-2020-1226-0 £12.95

Has anyone ever heard of Wilms? I must confess I had not. His dates are 1772-1847. These *Six Sonatinas* (around grades 3 to 6 standard) are quite pleasant, though not exceptional. It is interesting to study in these pieces Wilms' musical development of the use of keys, rhythms, textures, harmonies and forms. The book is printed clearly, though simply and unimaginatively. But the price (£12.95 for 25 pages of music) does seem excessive! There is a detailed introduction by Christoph Dohr – but given only in German.

## **Friedrich Kiel** **Werke für Klavier Heft 1**

Edition Dohr 96355  
ISMN M-2020-0355-8 £14.95

Again, Kiel is a new name to me – dates 1821-1885. The music seems attractive enough, and this book might be a useful source of unusual romantic pieces for pupils between grades 4 and 7. In addition to *Bilder aus der Jugendwelt* (in effect an Album of six pieces for the Young), there is a Bolero, 3 Romances and a Waltz-Caprice. We get 37 pages of music, but at a cost of £14.95. Again, there is much description (of the 3 Romances) – but only in German.

## **Mark Tanner** **Eye-Tunes Book 7**

Spartan Press  
ISMN 979-0-57999-927-0 £14.99 including CD

The first six books of *Eye-Tunes* were very highly recommended in the last issue of PP. I loved the atmosphere of the first piece in book 7, Fibreoptic Horizon. The second, Incognito, "to be played with plenty of charisma and rhythmic bite", didn't appeal to me but I imagine would be favoured by those who love a jazzy feel. The third, Ring-tone Rhapsody, was too corny for words (who wants to hear someone repeatedly practising a piece based on five mobile phone ring-tones?!) – but would doubtless have its followers amongst teenagers. Acid Rain is ingenious, and Spider Sleeps, Spider Wakes is highly descriptive. All in a Day's Work has a wonderful left hand bass line throughout the piece.

Overall, there is plenty of variety in this music – good, solid pieces for students of grade 7 to 8 standard. Much to be recommended.

■ **Jenny Macmillan**

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## **Louis Lortie plays Chopin** **volume 1: 4 Nocturnes; 4 Scherzi; Piano Sonata No.2** **Op.35.** Notes by Jeffrey Kallberg and Louis Lortie. CHANDOS 10588

Here is a Chopin CD with a difference. Although like many Chopin CDs, this disc collects together several major piano compositions by genre (specifically the *Scherzi* together with the *2nd Piano Sonata* as conclusion) there is also an important difference. Each *Scherzo* is introduced by a shorter piece, which both introduces and separates these longer works, and is also suggestive of a recital. Louis Lortie states that his approach is in part to compensate for the lost

art of an introductory improvisation. Instead each *Scherzo* is therefore preceded by a *Nocturne*, in the same key or a related one, which is a good plan, as is the fact that his pairings are chosen exclusively for musical compatibility rather than for date order. This is not to suggest that the *nocturnes* merely serve as vignettes. On the contrary, in Lortie's hands these works become narratives, even miniature 'epics'.

The disc opens with the precise yet airy sounding *Nocturne* Op.72 no.1 in E minor: one encounters elegantly phrased and shaped melodies, played with great beauty of tone. The *Scherzo* Op. 20 in B minor which follows opens at an incredible pace, almost too fast, but Lortie delivers in spades. After the lovely middle section, the latent drama of the pre-recap moments is palpable. The *risoluto* ending is simply superb, almost sounding as though the 'audience' has goaded the performer into playing faster than is wise, but again he delivers...even though I knew this was a studio recording I still expected to hear a roar of approval.

Other than in its uplifting opening statement (and subsequent reprises) the *Nocturne* Op.55 No.2 in Eb major has – despite its major key – numerous tragic passages, and is therefore a thoughtful pairing for the well-known *Scherzo* Op. 31 in Bb minor. Again, the playing is superbly controlled. The piano, by Fazioli, is a delight, particularly in the upper registers, where the sound is not merely bright but has a real kernel to the tone of each note. There is also a beautiful warmth of sound in the quiet middle section. And if this remains the most often played of the *Scherzi*, it nevertheless amply fulfils one's expectations of a major Chopin work.

In *Nocturne* Op.62 No.2 in E major, it is as if we are eavesdropping on a private performance which, for much of the time, contains a delightfully rolling, cascading left hand. The *Scherzo* Op. 39 in C# minor follows. This is not only shorter but very different in character from the previous *Scherzo*. Although the speed seems less frenetic and more open-handed than 1st *Scherzo*, Lortie again delivers a blistering pace in the coda.

*Nocturne* Op. 62 No.1 in B major has a surprisingly 'modern' sounding opening. The long trills and arabesques are more than merely attractive; all are given shape and purpose. If that sounds a rather obvious observation that one takes for granted from a seasoned performer, then consider that it's easy to say but difficult to do, particularly in the studio. Firstly, the performer is bereft of the interaction of the audience. Secondly, matters such as, say, major fluctuations of rhythm or tempo, which might be considered acceptable even essential in the "aristocratic delight of the moment" of a live performance, would be considered excessive in a studio performance and must be made subservient to the necessity of the disc to withstand repeated listening. Lortie is to be commended for finding a balance between taste and restraint, and also in finding this balance so deftly in works, such as the *Nocturnes*. In the opening of *Scherzo* Op. 54 in E major which follows, Lortie's playing is full of a delightfully rhythmic, almost balletic, energy. One notes the subdued cantabile in the middle section, and the control in the return (quasi *trillo*) to opening material. The finesse of the *trillo* section (in both single notes and thirds) prior to the final coda section is even more noteworthy, as is the power and bravura of the final flourish.

There's no reason to suppose that the *Sonatas* (being longer, and in several movements) are superior to other