

Sheet music review: Piano

reviewed by **Jenny Macmillan**

Music for Little Mozarts

Favourites from Tchaikovsky's Nutcracker Suite
Christine H Barden, Gayle Kowalchuk and EL Lancaster
Alfred, 28272, £5.50



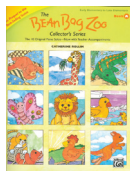
This imaginative book is well produced for young children from the age of about four. The music is printed large and clear. Attractive line drawings can be coloured in by the pupil.

Mozart Mouse, *Beethoven Bear* and the *Nutcracker* tells the story of the ballet as the animal friends perform it. The eight well-known pieces are given in very easy arrangements for the young pupil, in five-finger positions with accidentals, mostly one hand at a time, with simple, appropriate articulation and dynamics. Each piece has a chordal accompaniment for teacher, parent or older student.

Playing duets helps pupils play more rhythmically, and creates richer, more satisfying sounds. Young pupils will have fun learning and playing these pieces with their teachers, parents, older siblings, or older pupils of their teachers.

The Bean Bag Zoo Book A

Catherine Rollin
Alfred, 25401, £5.50



The ten pieces in *Bean Bag Zoo Book A* were first published as ten separate sheet music solos. The popularity of these led to the publication of two collections, *Bean Bag Zoo Collector's Series Books 1 and 2*. Now the original ten solos have been issued in one book with optional teacher duet parts added.

Some of the pieces are very convincing. The creative use of C minor and of crescendos, diminuendos and sforzandi in *Creepy Crocodile* will encourage development of musicianship. *King Lion* and *My Ducks Love to Quack* have very effective duet parts. Performance directions such as 'Sneakily' for the crocodile, 'Stretching high and humorously' for the giraffe and 'Dangerously' for the shark will develop pupils' imagination.

Adding words to the pieces clutters the page, but some children like the words and learn the music more easily when they can first sing the piece. The print is nice and big, though there are too many phrase marks for total clarity. These are fun pieces to motivate young pupils.

It's never too late... to play piano

Pam Wedgwood
Faber Music, ISBN10: 0-571 52984-4,
£7.95

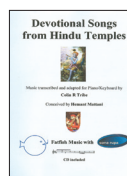


This is new jazzy music suitable for adults who have been playing for about a year. The

pieces are gently progressive, gradually extending players' technique. Most of the solos are short (one page) so not too daunting, a few are two pages, and there is one duet at the end. The keys are simple – no more than two sharps or flats. A variety of time signatures are used, and it is good to see *Climate Change* in 5/4 but changing to 6/4 and 3/4 and including some imitation between the hands. I love the tempo markings in *Bureaucratic Blues*: 'Bureaucratic speed! (quite slow)', then later 'a little more hopeful'!

Devotional Songs from Hindu Temples

Music transcribed and adapted for piano/keyboard
arr Colin R Tribe
Fatfish Music with Sona Rupa, £10,
colin@fatfishmusic.com



The introduction states that these arrangements are for pianists and keyboard players 'to share in the timeless and spiritual qualities' of devotional music sung in Hindu temples. As the music is from an aural tradition rather than a written one, it is difficult to realise on the piano the melodic subtleties of Indian music, including scales which frequently use quarter tones. These short pieces provide an outline of the music – a starting point. There are no suggestions for dynamics, no phrase marks, and no fingerings. The player's own interpretation is considered a vital part of the performance. Students can listen to the CD (included) and hear an accurate but very bland account of the notes played on Sibelius, therefore with no variety of dynamic, balance between hands or speed (eg slowing down at ends of pieces). Some of the songs are rhythmically interesting, including one in 7/4 time; and some have intriguing major/minor shifts, which are typical of Indian music.

The notation is clear (though with no bar numbers), with added chords for guitar or other accompanying instrument. All the pieces in the book are set for various grades and medals awarded by the Victoria College of Music.

The Bollywood Piano Collection

12 melodies from Hindi films
arr Colin R Tribe
Fatfish Music, £10, colin@fatfishmusic.com



These 12 melodies from Hindi films display melodic richness and rhythmic subtleties. Most of the comments for *Devotional Songs from Hindu Temples* (above) apply to the *Bollywood Piano Collection*. Some of the pieces are rhythmically interesting, including *Piyu Bole* which is partly, in effect,

6/8 in one hand and 3/4 in the other; and several in which the pulse is 3 + 3 + 2.

Again, the CD was made from the Sibelius software used to print the book. It is a useful guide to the rhythms, but it would be helpful to hear the original versions in the films in order to understand how to capture the mood of each song.

A Night at the Symphony

Bernadine Johnson & Carol Matz
Alfred, 25609, £6.95



A Night at the Symphony explores seven great orchestral works (such as the 1812 Overture) by including for each work a simple arrangement of its main theme, background information on the composer and the composition, and a fun activity page. At first sight this book is completely naff, its best use being as sight-reading material for pupils, or for fond grandparents to give to their darling grandchildren. Having said that, if you want to introduce children to orchestral music on the piano, giving them some information along the way about the history of the orchestra and orchestral music, this is quite well presented. Listening to recordings of the symphonic works is undoubtedly a better way of getting to know the music, though picking out the tunes on the piano may encourage children to wish to listen to the real orchestral music. I'm certainly not convinced that singing lyrics such as 'Beethoven did! Beethoven did! He did something nobody else had ever tried' to the opening theme of his 5th Symphony is necessary or inspirational in any way.

The Essential Collection Elgar Gold

Elgar ed Derek Jones
Chester Music, CH72281, £8.95



This is a collection of piano arrangements of 25 well-known pieces by Elgar, with an informative one-page introduction. The arrangements are not difficult and lie well under the hands; yet they are effective, and capture the spirit of Elgar. He wrote little for piano, and what he did write is difficult. These arrangements offer an opportunity for less advanced pianists to enjoy wallowing in Elgar's broad melodies and wonderful rich harmonies. The pieces are carefully graded through the book.

Jenny Macmillan teaches the piano in Cambridge. She gives lecture/demonstrations throughout the UK on ideas for piano teaching and on group lessons. She has an MA in Psychology for Musicians. Her articles on various aspects of music teaching appear on her website: www.jennymacmillan.co.uk