

audience. Leygraf is unafraid to take his time, to have the same movements practised many times, to concentrate on the smallest details. He emphasises physical freedom, preparation of the keys, above all a conscious understanding of the mechanics of piano playing, but also of how works are shaped structurally. You may want to go elsewhere for musical inspiration, but there is no doubt that this delivers exactly what it says in the title.

Boogie and Blues Piano

Louis Vause & Seamus Beaghen
Eye Eye Ltd, 5-050693-187408

This is billed as a beginner's guide and will take you through the nuts and bolts of blues and boogie in an extraordinarily enjoyable way. Louis Vause is the main presenter, often sporting shades and a hat (echoes of Blues

Bros methinks), with Seamus Beaghen as his follically-challenged and equally quirky partner. Whilst they explain riffs, shuffle rhythms and Chico's flump, at the bottom of the screen there is an aerial view of the keyboard, making it easy to follow their moves. The sections in the studio are intercut with live gigs, conversations in a local café and other location shots.

Alongside this decidedly 'cool' approach is a great deal of good sense. Vause talks about practising slowly, left / right brains, the Brain's Permanent Secretary (that's when it carries on working whilst you have a break) and developing finger strength. They aim to give you the ingredients, but want you to 'make your own recipe', not just read from a score, and they also emphasise listening to the greats. If you fancy getting in the groove, this zany duo will fire your enthusiasm.

Piano Professional Reviews

By Jenny Macmillan

Paul Harris

Improve your practice!

Grades 1 to 5
Faber Music

As teachers, we know how important it is that pupils practise regularly. We also know how important it is to practise in a thoughtful, efficient way. Just playing once through as much as they can of each of their pieces five times a week is not going to elicit much progress. Worse than that, children soon get bored and decide music is not for them.

Thinking around the music is essential for keeping pupils interested. Few people know better than Paul Harris how to encourage youngsters to explore different aspects of their music. Each of the *Improve your practice!* books grades 1 to 5 includes double page spreads asking pupils to fill in details about the pieces they are learning. Not only do they write in key and time signatures, they are asked to discuss title, mood, marks of expression, and also to identify tricky rhythms and other challenges in the piece.

Having examined a piece, pupils then pick one of two dozen 'playing cards' which suggest ways of practising for that day. For example, for grade 1:

- play the piece ignoring all dynamic markings, then play it again exaggerating all dynamics;
- play one or two bars an octave higher than written, then an octave lower, then sing those bars at a comfortable pitch;
- having identified the time signature of the piece, make up a simple rhythm on one note using this time signature, then write it down.

With the guidance given in these books, pupils will start to take a real interest in their music and in how they are practising. From there follows progress. Terrific! I plan to give a copy to each of my pupils for Christmas.

Mike Cornick

Clever Cat

Universal Edition UE 21 407

What a lovely idea! These are duets 'for the earliest stages of learning' in which the pupil copies short phrases played first by the teacher – with jazzy accompaniments. On the accompanying CD each piece is played twice – once with both parts plus rhythmic percussion, the second time just the teacher's part. The pieces have captivating titles such as Cat Nap, The Cat's Pyjamas, Purr-fect Boogie, Alley Cat and Cat's Cradle.

The pupil's part is based on scales (major, minor, chromatic, blues), broken and solid chords, and double thirds – in syncopated jazz rhythms. The first four pieces, essentially 5-finger exercises, give pupils an opportunity to master the copycat idea and the complex rhythms. Real beginners would probably play almost entirely by ear, copying the teacher's phrases, while more advanced ones could be encouraged to read the notes alongside copying aurally.

Many teachers and pupils will have fun with this book and CD. Meanwhile it develops pupils' knowledge of the notes and fingerings of scales and broken chords, furthers their ability to copy aurally and to play in ensemble, and could also assist in sight-reading elaborate rhythms. My one reservation is that the teacher's part doesn't lie particularly well under the hands. However I would recommend it when in need of something exciting to motivate pupils through a difficult period.

Nicolai Podgornov

Piano Album

Universal Edition UE 33 649E

Well, this is quite a find – a book of studies disguised as pieces! The 31 'easy to middle-grade pieces' are beautifully produced – clear and uncluttered, with only essential fingerings and other markings added. Its composer, Nicolai Podgornov, was born in Russia in 1950, and this Piano Album was published in 2007.

Each of the pieces has an imaginative title both to attract the pupil and to encourage musical playing, and most of the pieces do, indeed, have musical value. But further, each piece addresses a particular technical issue. *The Drummer* plays fast repeated notes between the hands; *The Little Mouse* is for fast 5-finger exercise practice – in the left hand as well as the right hand; *Raindrops* is for staccato (of course); *The Race* includes crossing of hands as well as fast 5-finger exercises; *Lullaby* alternates a singing left hand tune with a soft right hand accompaniment and vice versa; *The Little Frog* is for the right hand alone – an exercise in staccato double thirds, followed by *The Tiger Cub* for the left hand only – arpeggios, accidentals and part playing. I could go on – studies for fast repeated notes fingered 4-3-2-1, grace notes, um-cha-cha bass, chords, pedalling, and many others. There is also a delightful set of *Variations on a Nursery Rhyme* and, to end, an exciting jazzy piece.

Most pieces require a staccato touch. Many are in C major, though keys up to E major and G minor are also used. I would recommend this book very highly.

Martha Mier

Romantic Sketches books 1 and 2

Alfred

These short musical sketches in the romantic style are designed to help students play with musical expression – with nuance and sensitivity. The pieces in book 1 are grade 2 standard and those in book 2 are grade 3-4. It can be difficult to find attractive romantic pieces for the early stages. These sketches seem very derivative to me, and rather inconsequential. I would use them for sight reading practice or for light relief between studying other more substantial pieces.

I have one niggle – accidentals are not cancelled from one bar to the next. Although technically a natural sign is not required, it is generally considered good practice, and certainly easier to read, if the natural is added. Otherwise these books are very nicely produced.

Christopher Norton

Country Preludes Collection

Boosey & Hawkes

This collection of 16 original pieces for solo piano from intermediate to advanced level is based on Country styles including country rock, ballads and bluegrass. It includes a playalong CD performed by the composer himself. Christopher Norton always does this sort of thing so well. To those who like it, I'm sure this book will appeal. Personally I find the constant crash of the backing track tiresome though, of course, it's optional.

Piano Professional Reviews

By Beate Toyka

A super collection from an American publisher has found its way across the Atlantic – much of it so attractive and user-friendly that on looking through it and listening to the excellent CDs I have found myself thinking that I have waited too long for these books, for many reasons...

The FJH Pianist's Curriculum, by Helen Marlais IN RECITAL with Jazz, Blues, & Rags

The FJH Music Company Inc.

Books 1-3: \$ 6,95, Books 4-6 \$7,95 (10 – 12 pieces in each volume)

Check prices with your music shop in UK – seems to be too good to be true as a CD is included. With under £7 for each book excellent value.

It seems there is now no turning back from providing a CD along with new material. It makes super sense – music is sound and what better way to learning a piece than hearing it first? As a Suzuki as well as traditional teacher I have come to appreciate this fact and have found that all children learn better when they can listen as well as see!

These books provide Jazz, Blues and Rag numbers in

very well arranged pieces. For classically trained teachers who want to see "a bit of discipline" applied to a fun idiom these present the ideal mix. Plenty of technical material is covered and clearly explained, stepwise, roughly a grade per book, in each volume. In the lower books solos have optional duet parts, some with equal parts, some with teacher parts; the higher volumes include more solos but offer duets as well.

All volumes have a one page **index** featuring the piece category, the composer AND arranger. Bearing in mind that some tunes are show tunes or vocal material the arranger's job is of utmost importance. He has to make sure that technical difficulties are challenging but not insurmountable. He has to have the pupil in mind, shape his taste and hone his skill. In the back of each volume we are given photos and biographies of the arrangers, as well as write-ups of the pieces themselves, so well done in the 'Spectrum' series and others.

A big plus is the **large print** for Volumes 1 to 4, medium size for 5 and 6.

The page is uncluttered; the fingering good and good