

# CONNECT



# JOURNAL



# CAPMT CONNECT

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# Message from the President

[Mona DeCesare](#), NCTM •  
[monawudecesare@gmail.com](mailto:monawudecesare@gmail.com)  
CAPMT President

Dear CAPMT Colleagues,

It is hard to believe my amazing journey as CAPMT State President is coming to an end. There are no words that can describe my gratitude for the privilege to serve such a wonderful group of music teachers.

During the past two years, I had an exceptional board filled with generous, talented, and brilliant colleagues who were an honor, not only to work with but to get to know and make friends as well. They got things done in the most professional manner and went above and beyond what was expected in achieving perfection at every event. Each one of them has inspired me in their unique ways, but more importantly, they always managed to put smiles on their faces when providing services to our members. In the past two years, I had the pleasure of working with Dr. Michael Krikorian in organizing the 2021 and 2022 CAPMT State Conferences. We had amazing guest artists: Ran Dank, Soyeon Kate Less, Catherine Karoly, and Nahre Sol. For me, the huge success of the Conferences was the highlight of my presidency.



We are proud of our existing events such as the Piano and Ensemble Festivals, Northern and Southern Festival Celebrations, MTNA State Performance Competition, MTNA State Composition Competition, Concerto Competition, Contemporary Competition, Honors Competitions, and the CAPMT State Finals. Many of the competitions were run through the challenges of coping with the Pandemic, so it has been exciting recently, and we have been elated to once again hear the students performing live.

Before I conclude, I would like to express my special gratitude to Past President and Southwest Division Director, Noreen Wenjen (2017-2019), who has been a great mentor to me since I took over the office in 2021. Her encouragement and guidance has been crucial in helping me fulfill my role as CAPMT President. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank our outgoing board members and officers: Treasurer Kary Kramer (2021-2023), Vice President Membership Noreen Wenjen (2021-2023), Immediate Past President Wendi Kirby (2021-2023), and District 9 Director Dr. Stephen Pierce (2021-2023). Each of you has contributed so much to the association, and your legacy will have a lasting impact.

Now it's almost time to "pass the gavel" to our President-Elect, Dr. Mitzi Kolar. I have no doubt that Mitzi, together with the new board and officers, will lead CAPMT into another glorious chapter as we look forward to 2023-2025.

Sincerely,  
Mona Wu DeCesare, NCTM  
Outgoing President (2021-2023)

# Editorial

[Dr. Sonya Schumann](#), NCTM • [sschumann@sdsu.edu](mailto:sschumann@sdsu.edu)  
CAPMT Connect, Editor



Dear friends and colleagues of CAPMT,

Every Spring, change and congratulations are in the air – graduations, end-of-school recitals, and the beginning of “wedding season”, not to mention the various holidays and events that celebrate maternal and paternal figures. From the beginning of our spring semester resolutions in January through our final ceremonies and concerts in June, Spring is when we redefine ourselves and our

perspectives. It’s also a wonderful time to take stock and reflect on our work. I echo our outgoing CAPMT President in feeling gratitude to serve such an incredible group of educators. For me, this Spring volume of *CAPMT Connect* hold special significance, as it is my very first as editor, although I have served on the editorial committee for some years now. This spring also held significance for all who attended the national MTNA conference in March as we took the journey to Reno in person! These last three virtual years have been full of challenge and growth, and while change is still ongoing, I believe a huge congratulations are in order to us all for making it through thus far.

As we reflect on the past year (or the past three), I find myself contemplating the nature of stress and anxiety. Upon “returning”, there are those who find relief to gain what they had lost, but others find a sense of pressure from compounding expectations and concerns. Our appreciation for the return of in-person activities comes with a host of responsibilities, new and old. How do we balance our time, or what is our obligation to ourselves versus others? I’m thrilled to share Dr. Jackie Petitto’s wellness column on “Mental Health and Emotional Wellness for Musicians”. This is an absolute necessity to read, on the heels of the busiest and mentally taxing year! I would welcome all to write in to us to share your own wellness practices. Thank you, Jackie, for continuing to educate and support our CAPMT members mentally and emotionally.

In this volume of *CAPMT Connect*, I am excited for us to continue to learn from Yvonne Reddy’s column for the Independent Music Teachers Forum (IMTF). Her article on “Starting and Sustaining a Pedagogy and Play Program” is based in the



successes found at the CAPMT Santa Clara Valley Chapter. The Pedagogy and Play concept originated with our very own CAPMT Young Professional Leadership Network (YPLN), but the Santa Clara Valley Chapter's program proves that these groups keep our pedagogical practices full of youthful exuberance. Thank you for sharing your experiences and wisdom, Yvonne!

I am inspired by the work of Dr. Nadia Shpachenko, whose new album *Invasion: Music and Art for Ukraine* connects the listener to the experience of the Ukrainian people. She further ties the album to her home city of Kharkiv through artwork by Ukrainian artists and children, featured in the album booklet, gallery, and music videos. I am so pleased to share an extensive and insightful interview with Dr. Shpachenko conducted by Zachary McConnell in this volume! In addition, Gail Lew shares new publication recommendations in her column "Contemporary Masterpieces: MTNA Conference Highlights". What a pleasure it was to roam the booths with you at MTNA this year, Gail! Finally, our Coda column in this issue will bring us new methods to motivate the anxious, unmotivated, or overworked student. Thank you to our Communication and Advertising chair, Joshua Tan, for curating this season's column, and thank you to the contributors for their wonderful ideas.

As we look forward to the summer, I hope you have plans to take some time for yourself, rest and rejuvenate. Until then, I wish you a season of learning and beautiful music!

Sonya Schumann  
Editor, *CAPMT Connect*



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# Independent Music Teachers Forum (IMTF)

## 10 Tips for Starting and Sustaining a Successful Pedagogy and Play Program

Yvonne Reddy

*Direct from the CAPMT website, "Pedagogy and Play is an informal gathering where music teachers get a chance to chat about pedagogy, meet other teachers, and make music together." While the concept of Pedagogy and Play originated with the Young Professional Leadership Network (YPLN), it's not just for teachers early in their careers.*

The CAPMT Santa Clara Valley Chapter has sustained a successful Pedagogy and Play program for several years now. All members were invited to participate, not just those who were in YPLN. The discussion was free flowing and there was no requirement to perform, although many participants did.

Originally, Pedagogy and Play was held at the home of whoever had time and space each month to host the group. Enthusiasm for the program was high, with many teachers expressing how beneficial the Pedagogy and Play program was to their own teaching. Over time, attendance began to drop due to the transitory nature of the event. To ensure the program continued, I committed to hosting it regularly. We now meet on the first Friday of most months. Attendance now remains fairly consistent and teachers can confidently schedule P&P in their calendars.

To establish a Pedagogy and Play program for your own Chapter, I invite you to consider some of the following suggestions:

1. **Set a location, date, and time and commit to it.**

We started in my home. During the pandemic, we pivoted to ZOOM and have remained there. This allows people to attend no matter where they live.

2. **Select a topic.**

Attendees know that the discussion will be relevant or of interest to them. They are prepared to provide insight and join in the discussion. Strive for topics that are not piano-centric. Offer people who can't attend the option of submitting written comments on the monthly topic. These comments can provide a great starting point for the day's discussion.

Past topics have included:

- Favorite Games to Supplement Learning
- Selecting or Creating the Perfect Etude

- Adapting Your Teaching to Meet the Needs of Individual Students
- When To Move on From Method Books
- Simile and Metaphor – Using Imagery in Teaching

3. **Ask people to RSVP.**

Not only does this give you an idea of how many will attend, but it means people are more likely to show up having made the commitment. I use a separate email specifically for Pedagogy and Play so that I don't miss any responses.

4. **Structure the time and adhere to time limits.**

Our sessions begin with a virtual Meet and Greet from 9:30-10 am, followed by a topic discussion from 10-11 am, and finish with performances for those who wish to play beginning at 11 am. As you structure your time, confirm who wants to play prior to starting the discussion. If there are no performers we often continue our discussion into the performance time block!

5. **Establish ground rules.**

Ground rules might include the maximum amount of time each person may speak, how to indicate a desire to speak, the best ways to respect each other's opinions or teaching methods even if in disagreement, and other such community agreements. Open and active discussion is welcome but hurtful comments are not permitted. Go over the ground rules for the first few meetings so that members are aware of participation expectations.

6. **Act as a moderator.**

Keep the discussion on-topic, but at the same time allow for participants to discuss what's relevant to them. Follow the ground rules you have established. The success of Pedagogy and Play lies in everyone feeling valued and involved. If this is not something you're comfortable doing, enlist the help of a regular attendee to take on this role.

7. **Invite sharing of favorite resources.**

Your fellow teachers are a wealth of information and ideas. In our virtual group, frequently a teacher will disappear off-camera to grab a book, game, or teaching aid that they find useful in their studio. Encourage your community to share, bring materials with them, or even make connections by sharing phone numbers to follow up after the session is over.

8. **Engage all attendees in the discussion.**

Everyone has an interest in the topic but some people are naturally hesitant to speak up. Actively encouraging their participation involves them in the discussion and emboldens them to speak up at future sessions. Ask those

who are most confident in sharing to assist you in welcoming those who have not spoken.

**9. Send an event invitation with RSVP details a week beforehand.**

You may want to send a reminder a day or two before your Pedagogy and Play session to help build interest and to solicit attendance as you grow your program. If you're organizing an online session, set up an RSVP response system to send the ZOOM link for that session.

It may take a few months to build a core group of attendees but the few extra minutes it takes to send a reminder is well worth it.

**10. Be sure to emphasize that performance is optional.**

Not everyone enjoys performing and may be reluctant to attend if they think they must perform. Over ZOOM, the number of performances has dwindled but the opportunity to perform is always there.

The key to establishing a successful Pedagogy and Play program is consistency. You might want to offer a couple of day/time options to see where the most availability is, then choose a time to get your program up and running. You can also collaborate with another chapter if yours is a small group.

Good luck establishing your new Pedagogy and Play program!



*In addition to being an RCM Certified Piano Specialist, [Yvonne Reddy](#) holds a master's degree in Music Education and a BA in Cultural Geography. She teaches a full piano studio in San José, California, and is an active member of the CAPMT Santa Clara Valley Chapter. Passionate about the benefits of introducing music to very young children, Yvonne created the PRISMS Preschool Music curriculum and teaches preschool music in Family Child care centers in the South Bay area. When not teaching, attending music workshops and seminars, or mentoring other teachers, Yvonne enjoys traveling to new destinations around the world.*



# ***INVASION:*** **An Interview with Dr. Nadia Shpachenko**

Zachary McConnell



*Earlier this month, I had the opportunity to speak with Dr. Nadia Shpachenko, a GRAMMY® Award-winning Steinway artist and professor of music at California State Polytechnic University in Pomona, about her latest project: [INVASION](#). She shared her perspectives and personal stakes in creating this album and how her work on projects like these has shaped her career and methodology as an educator and artist.*

ZMC: As Russia began to invade Ukraine early last year, much of the world was left to simply watch as one tragedy after another unfolded. There is certainly an air of helplessness across everyone hearing the news, but the grief and shock felt by those with family or personal ties to Ukraine must be nearly inexpressible. Understanding your personal stake in this devastating and untimely war, how did the *INVASION* project begin?

NS: The horrific and brutal invasion of Ukraine by Russia started on my birthday, on Feb. 24, 2022. One of the first places hit was my home city of Kharkiv, and it is still being bombed nonstop, more than a year later. I was in touch with my family and friends in Kharkiv immediately, hearing first-hand accounts of what was/is happening almost daily since then. That same day I spoke to my dear friend and collaborator,



Pulitzer Prize-winning composer Lewis Spratlan, and we decided to make an album together and to dedicate it to Ukraine, using music as an opportunity to raise awareness about this tragedy and to raise funds for Ukraine humanitarian aid. Lew and I collaborated frequently over the past eight years. He passed away last month, on February 9, 2023. We worked very closely together on our *INVASION* project, since the first day the war started and until just a few days before Lew passed away.

*Invasion: Music and Art for Ukraine* is a very personal album. I was already planning to collaborate with Spratlan on an album at some point, but when the war started, we decided to make it happen immediately. I am so grateful that I got the chance to work with Lew so closely on every detail of this album. Spratlan wrote the solo piano pieces *Six Rags*, *Two Sonatas* and *Piano Suite No. 1* for me during and before the pandemic, and on February 24 he immediately started writing the title piece *Invasion*, a sextet for piano, saxophone, horn, trombone, percussion, and mandolin, as his response to the brutality of this war. This album had to be made in record time because of the urgency of this war and my desire to start helping people in Ukraine as soon as possible. After the war started, I immediately began to perform fundraising concerts for Ukraine, but I wanted to also create something more timeless for this purpose. I had to learn all the solo pieces within a period of a few months, find collaborators for the *Invasion* piece (the wonderful musicians Anthony Parnter, Pat Posey, Aija Mattson-Jovel, Phil Keen, Yuri Inoo, and Joti Rockwell), line up a recording venue (Silent Zoo Studios in Glendale), and juggle everyone's very busy schedules to make the recording happen. I was very fortunate to find these great musicians for the sextet who got on board immediately, learning the piece with me for the premiere on April 2, and then the recording on May 29, 2022. Working on the *Invasion* piece with these artists and the composer, being able to express my anger and outrage through music helped me cope with the hopelessness of this situation, so working on this piece was definitely a key moment.

ZMC: You've discussed the vast history that you have with composer Lewis Spratlan; during *INVASION*'s creation, were you working closely with Spratlan to come up with some of the conceptual ideas behind the various works in the album? Did you get to see drafts and/or early sketches that helped shape your performances or the course of the album?

NS: Lew was a prolific composer who wrote major pieces unusually quickly. He surprised me each time by sending me a completed piece soon after we discussed the ideas that would be behind the music. Lew spent all his time composing. In fact, he completed a wind quintet just two weeks before passing away and a major 30-minute symphony two months before passing away. He never paused, this was his calling, his greatest passion. Once I got the music, I worked with Lew on Zoom on each piece, discussing the ideas and concepts behind each composition and my personal responses to the music. The sextet *Invasion* was written specifically about this war and there were gruesome details we discussed about certain sections of the piece, which, while responding to the war, is also hopeful, wistful, and reflective of Ukraine's beauty, in the middle section in particular. While the solo pieces were written before the war, my interpretation of them, in every part, was influenced by what was happening. For example, there are two dance-like pieces on the program, *Pastorale* from *Piano Suite No. 1* and *Gentle* from the *Two Piano Sonatas*. While playing this music I had a vivid

image of high school seniors dancing a waltz in front of ruins of their school, to celebrate their graduation despite the destruction. This was a viral video filmed in Kharkiv, and it was on my mind a lot as I was learning and interpreting the music.

ZMC: Given that this album was created with profuse Ukrainian collaboration in mind, what were some of the difficulties you encountered while gathering the elements that led to the completed album?

NS: I commissioned Ukrainian artists to make paintings about each musical piece. I wanted to make sure every detail of the music was connected to Ukraine, and I wanted to show the world the work of Ukrainian artists currently living there amid the invasion, to showcase the talent and resilience of people in Ukraine. As the war started, I was discovering that many artists in Ukraine were responding to the war through their work. I found numerous stunning paintings, drawings, and artworks created as a response to the war and spent a few months researching art and artists there, to narrow down the ones I would end up collaborating with on this project. I wanted to showcase the diversity of styles and experiences these artists brought through their creations. The greatest difficulty was for these artists to keep creating amid the war. Some of them needed to move to safer places, barely escaping from the bombs and the constant shelling, but never stopping their work. And of course, shipping original work from Ukraine to the US was not easy. It's quite miraculous how the art was able to arrive in the US safely, after taking many detours on the way. The courage, resilience, and dedication of the Ukrainian artists I worked with is extraordinary. They always found creative ways to overcome difficulties, and everything worked out better than expected because of that.

ZMC: Contrast and natural imagery appear as major themes throughout the album, notably in *Invasion*, the *Six Rags*, and *Wonderer*. Were these themes part of the vision for the album? Did you encounter any challenges while expressing some of the pastoral elements or creating sudden contrasts within the solo piano works especially?

NS: I have worked with Lew for a long time, and this is one of my favorite elements of his music. So this was always part of the vision for the album, and something I have a lot of experience with in the solo piano works. Of course, there are added dimensions to both the contrasts and the pastoral imagery in the sextet, along with the additional extremity of trying to capture the huge emotional range of a beautiful land being basically destroyed by war. All of the musicians worked hard on crafting the nuance to capture this nostalgia and devastation. Being so... emotionally distressed and involved in the situation myself probably contributed to the musical feeling.

In the *Six Rags*, Lew was reminiscing about his time spent exploring the vast New England landscape, particularly the Mahoosuc mountains and parts of Western Massachusetts. He was an avid hiker and spent a lot of time in the places that he has referenced in the rags. When the artists Yurii Nagulko and Kati Prusenko in Ukraine were responding to this music, they envisioned their own favorite places of nature in Ukraine. They told me that this music helped them step back from the horror of their current situation, even if just momentarily, and brought them to their happy places in Ukraine and their significance, reliving the memories and the beauty of the land.

In *Wonderer*, which is the earliest work on the album, I imagined a hero who was displaced, much like many Ukrainians are now, wandering around unknown places, trying to find themselves and their new purpose in life, and wondering about what future would bring. This is another work that has a waltz-like section that reminded me of the high school seniors dancing in front of the ruins of their school. And this original waltz, interestingly is also referenced (in a very different form) in the piece *Invasion*. There it is transformed into music reminiscent of cheerful and proud marching pieces I used to hear during victory celebration parades during Soviet times. In *Wonderer*, there are also many references to earlier music that inspired both Lew and me, and the visual artists. I first discovered classical music when I was growing up in Ukraine. The references to Schubert and Beethoven in *Wonderer*, for example, had direct impact on me and brought back memories of first discovering these composers in Kharkiv. *Wonderer*, while not directly quoting the music of Beethoven's 4<sup>th</sup> Piano Concerto, references it in its character. The contrasts of the slow second movement of the concerto evoke the legend of Orpheus calming the raging beasts through song, much like now the musicians and artists in Ukraine respond to their horrific invaders through their music and art. There is also a section where I play low menacing notes while holding chords silently in the right hand, resulting in 'ghost' sounds that remind me of the souls of people who perished in this war while cooking and doing normal things. There were many paintings done in Ukraine depicting these souls. There are deeply felt reflective parts in both this and *Invasion*, suggesting beloved places in Ukraine, now erased.

ZMC: Can you discuss some of the art included in the album's booklet?

NS: I prerecorded all the pieces specifically for the artists to respond to, even before the actual recording sessions. The artists were given recordings of the pieces from the album, and asked to create works that specifically evoked the feelings and thoughts they had while listening to these pieces during the war. Each artwork in the booklet was specifically created for the piece it illustrates. The music on this album reflects the full range of human emotions, it is so diverse and inventive. And so is the art, reflecting the full range of human experience, especially that of resilience and triumph of spirit.

And, speaking of contrasts from earlier, they are very prominent in the *Capriccio* movement of Piano Suite No. 1. Kati Prusenko created a digital artwork for this piece that depicts two characters drawn with contrasting colors, having opposite facial expressions, while still complementing each other. Artist Lesia Babliak has been creating art in response to this war since day one. She created a series of stunning paintings, a set titled "Yellow-Blue Album," which uses real photographs from the war as inspiration for her art. The cover image of *Invasion* album features Lesia's painting titled "My beloved Ukraine." It depicts a little girl standing on an abandoned Russian tank with a Z on it, having the most expressive, heartbreaking, defiant expression on her face. This image is so striking, and it is one of the original paintings that I have here and display on stage every time I perform this program live and talk about the project.

Another big part of this project is paintings by children in my home city of Kharkiv. These children are students in the art studio called Aza Nizi Maza. They created art in response to the war, while sheltering from bombs in the subway station. These artworks are moving and ingenious, in my opinion. These young artists are so immensely talented and brave. I highly recommend to look at all the art in the booklet for this album and to read about these artists and their experience. The booklet can be downloaded for free; it also includes extensive program notes for all the pieces on the album: <https://referencerecordings.com/recording/invasion-music-and-art-for-ukraine/>

ZMC: Contemporary music is an extraordinary medium for the interpretation and expression of current events, especially because close work with the composer is possible. What are some of the ways you bring these virtues into your teaching space at CPP?

NS: There are so many things I do at Cal Poly Pomona University that are directly connected to my work with living composers, through my commissioning, performing, and recording projects. I bring composers here to teach. I have students play new works, often for the composers. Many of these works are written for my projects and many are written specifically for my students at CPP, the Cal Poly Pomona Piano Ensemble. We discuss the composers' motivations, inspirations, and experience. Composers whom I bring here comment on my performing students' interpretations of their works and often give feedback to student composers at CPP, discussing their compositions. This is not just for contemporary music though; we go into depth as much as possible about what factors influenced baroque, classical, romantic, and 20<sup>th</sup> century composers... but of course there's something special about talking to living composers about current events we are all witnessing or living.

Another thing I do is to always try to work with repertoire from a diverse range of composers, which is great way to understand how the composers' situation influences their music. This range also connects to our diverse students at Cal Poly Pomona, celebrating diversity and wide range of human and musical experiences, a community connected by humanity and perseverance of human spirit and its reflection through art.

ZMC: Do you have goals in reaching particular demographics within CPP and beyond with both *INVASION* and similar projects?

NS: Our main goal is to reach as large an audience as possible so as to raise as much as we can to aide Ukraine. I have performed the program, or parts of it, in many places on the West and East coast; the album has been reviewed in many magazines and has been featured on hundreds of radio and television broadcasts across the US and in Ukraine.

At Cal Poly Pomona, I played this program in a few public recitals, as well as in workshops. Throughout the project I have discussed the process of my work with students and workshopped the pieces with them. Spratlan also worked with my students in the past and it was a very memorable and inspiring experience for the students. I met many students and faculty at Cal Poly Pomona just because they came

to concerts because of the Ukraine connection and spent a lot of time discussing the situation in Ukraine with them after the concerts.

ZMC: CPP is often characterized by its “Learn-by-Doing” methodology. How do you find that your work on projects like *INVASION* and emphasis on contemporary music complement this mindset?

NS: My whole teaching philosophy is centered on learn by doing; contemporary music is great for this because you often have the freedom (and responsibility) of first interpretation, and the ability to interact with the composers. Every ensemble piece and many of the solo pieces I commissioned for my recording projects I then taught to my students, performing the works with them in California and out of state.

This is cutting-edge work in classical music that my students actively participate in. In recent years I commissioned many new works for my Cal Poly Pomona Piano Ensemble and have put together a number of unique 60-80 minute programs of contemporary works with multiple pianos, toy pianos, and other instruments, performed by me and my students together. The CPP Piano Ensemble was immensely fortunate this year to have five pieces written specifically for them by composers William Alves, Samara Rice, Madelyn Byrne, Michael Roth, and Jack van Zandt. We premiered some of those piece pieces in Fall 2022 and will premiere the rest of them this Spring and in Fall 2023. We were invited to tour with these pieces in Las Vegas, Santa Barbara, San Diego, San Francisco, Boston, and various venues around Los Angeles. Within the last few years my students and I performed many more World and US premieres of ensemble pieces written for our ensemble. We performed six premieres in the 2021/2022 academic year, by composers Armando Bayolo, Samara Rice, inti figgis-vizueta, Christopher Jessup, Todd Tarantino, and John Proulx. During the pandemic my students collaborated remotely with Yale professor and renowned composer Martin Bresnick, and Pulitzer Prize finalist composer Alex Weiser, recording their works for violin and piano with professional New York based violinist and conductor Jacob Ashworth, while also performing remotely recent works by Samara Rice, Isaac Schankler, and Dai Fujikura. Right before the pandemic they visited and performed at top level music institutions, which included the Juilliard School of Music, Mannes College of Music, and Rutgers University on the East Coast, and on the West Coast at Chapman University, Los Angeles City College, East Los Angeles College, and Palomar College in San Diego, among others. My students collaborated extensively with all the composers that wrote music for them through master classes and workshops and collaborated with students in other institutions through their performances and presentations, and even through performing works by student composers at those other institutions. These experiences are all great examples of how my students take advantage of Cal Poly Pomona’s learn-by-doing philosophy through their work with living composers and through their collaboration with students and audiences in a wide range of places.

ZMC: Countless events across our history and within our present parallel the Russian invasion of Ukraine, leaving many with feelings of hopelessness or powerlessness. Have you found that *INVASION* has granted a voice to some of those suffering from this war?



NS: *Invasion* has given us as musicians, here in the US, at least a sense of doing SOMETHING, and saying SOMETHING. I, along with my wonderful colleagues, have raised almost \$60,000 through concerts and through this CD project, targeted to various Ukraine humanitarian aid organizations. Purchasers of the CD, and people inspired by the project at performances to donate, are also able to feel a sense of involvement, of doing SOMETHING when they were not sure how to help otherwise.

As to those in Ukraine, in the midst of war, we have tried to provide a channel for voices to be heard through the extensive artwork in the booklet, and have tried to involve Ukrainians-in-Ukraine in every aspect we can, up to publicity for the album which is being developed by a web-design team in Kyiv.

This project has kept me in closer contact with a larger group of people in Ukraine than I ever have been before. Just speaking to these people on a daily basis has helped ease my feelings of helplessness, and in fact I have found great hope and inspiration in the spirit, resourcefulness, and strength of all these people. And they have in turn, I think, been fortified by the knowledge that there are so many people here working on ways to support them.

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**Zachary McConnell** is an undergraduate senior at California State Polytechnic University in Pomona, where he is studying music pedagogy.



A "gifted and versatile pianist" (*San Francisco Chronicle*) and GRAMMY® Award winner **Dr. Nadia Shpachenko** enjoys bringing into the world things that are outside the box – powerful pieces that often possess unusual sonic qualities or instrumentation. Dr. Shpachenko's concert highlights include recitals at Concertgebouw, Carnegie Hall, Disney Hall, on the Piano Spheres and Los Angeles Philharmonic's Green Umbrella and Chamber Music Series, and with numerous orchestras in

Europe and the Americas. An enthusiastic promoter of contemporary music, she premiered more than 100 works by major American composers. Shpachenko's album *The Poetry of Places*, featuring world premieres of architecture-inspired works, won Best Classical Compendium GRAMMY® Award. Described as "powerful... impressive... haunting" (*Gramophone*), Nadia Shpachenko's album *Invasion: Music and Art for Ukraine* features premiere recordings of music by Pulitzer Prize-winning composer Lewis Spratlan and art by numerous Ukrainian artists, with 100% of proceeds donated to Ukraine humanitarian aid. Shpachenko is a Steinway Artist and professor of music at Cal Poly Pomona University.



# Musicians' Wellness

## Mental Health and Emotional Wellness for Musicians

Dr. Jacqueline Petitto

Recent research studies have shown an increase in the number of music students suffering from depression, anxiety, and stress as well as music teachers experiencing burnout. Mental health affects how we think, feel, and act. It influences how we learn and relate to the world around us. Support, discuss, and advocate for your own mental health the same way you do for your physical health. It is imperative that we promote awareness and provide information on the prevalence of mental health concerns to those in the music profession. Music educators can help their students and themselves to develop coping strategies such as self-care, know that depression and anxiety are common and treatable conditions, and encourage seeking professional help as soon as necessary.

### Total Health

Consider this equation: mental health plus physical health equals total health. That makes sense, right? Mental health is part of total health because the brain and body are intrinsically connected. Therefore, caring for our mental health supports our total health.

Here are some ways to keep your mental health in check:

1. Take care of your physical health: eat well, sleep well, and exercise regularly
2. Make time for yourself: pursue interests and find ways to decompress
3. Talk about how you feel: connect with family, friends, and professionals
4. Practice ways to manage stress - see below for places to start
5. Get help when you need it

The harmful effects of negative stress can impact all systems of the human body. Symptoms of negative stress include tension headaches, muscle tension/pain, shortness of breath or rapid breathing, heart problems, gastrointestinal issues, chronic fatigue, depression, and more. Over time, these symptoms may take a toll on your body and keep you from being your best self. If you feel that stress may be negatively affecting your daily life, try incorporating some stress management techniques into your daily routine. These include regular movement or physical exercise, an adequate amount of sleep, a nutritious diet, relaxation techniques (meditation/mindfulness, tai chi, yoga), and a healthy social support system.

### Pause. Breathe. Resume.

Next time you feel the signs of stress during a busy day or find yourself getting pulled into an unproductive conflict, try this simple exercise: *Pause. Breathe. Resume.* This may prove to be an easy and effective way to draw yourself out of an unwanted situation, calm yourself and find clarity, then choose how to move forward. Make a regular practice of pausing/breathing/resuming and use the technique whenever:

- You feel tension from stress building in your body

- Your thinking narrows or freezes in response to anxiety or fear
- A conversation becomes confrontational, overly emotional, or otherwise unproductive

Pausing, breathing, and resuming may help you choose more thoughtful and effective responses to challenging situations. With time and practice, you will discover that you become more productive, collaborative, and creative.

While pausing/breathing/resuming is a very effective technique, it is best used for smaller stresses. Struggles with mental health of a larger magnitude may require a more nuanced and experienced approach. These struggles are common, and most are treatable. Please know that you are not alone. Even if it becomes difficult to know how and where to search for support, you will find a better path.

## **Larger Stressors**

There is no single cause of any mental health condition. Usually, it is a combination of genetics, brain chemistry, family history, and social/ environmental dynamics. Physical health factors including disease, nutrition, and sleep can also play a role.

The following common experiences can sometimes trigger mental health struggles or make current ones worse. However, just because you experience these stressors does not mean you have a mental condition. Stressors could include:

- Grief and loss
- Trauma, abuse, and violence
- Bullying
- Academic or workplace pressures
- Questions about sexual orientation or gender identity
- Issues with body image or self-esteem
- Social media and peer pressure
- Family issues like divorce, relationship hardships, etc.
- Loneliness and isolation
- Racism and discrimination
- Political and civil unrest
- Gun violence
- Global crises like climate change, conflict, and the COVID-19 pandemic

Depression, anxiety, and other mental health conditions are common, and while they cannot be cured they can be treated. Being aware of the symptoms of depression, anxiety, and other mental health conditions can aid in early detection before they escalate into more severe conditions. Some commonly observed symptoms include:

- Persistent sadness and hopelessness that lasts two weeks or more
- Feeling overly fearful, anxious, trapped (no way out) or worried
- Purposelessness and/or helplessness
- Withdrawing from or avoiding social interactions
- Ideation to self-harm, harm others, or suicidality
- Extreme anger, rage, or irritability
- Drastic fluctuations in mood and erratic/reckless behavior
- Major changes in eating or sleeping habits
- Frequent headaches or stomach aches
- Difficulty concentrating or focusing

- Falling behind in school or at work

There is a difference between ordinary sadness and worry and the medical conditions of depression and anxiety disorders. Ordinary sadness can help us seek connection and draw closer to others. Those with depression, however, may exhibit the opposite, appearing to self-isolate. If someone you know is struggling with anxiety or depression, one of the best things to do is to talk with and listen to that person. It can be tempting to try to cheer up someone with depression or to point out the good things in their lives, but that is often ineffective. If you are struggling with anxiety or depression, reach out to your loved ones.

## Ask for Help

Talking about suicide with family members or friends you are concerned about does not increase its likelihood. Listen patiently, compassionately, and without judgment. Show empathy and support. You can play an important role in helping someone in a crisis, and when ready, seek assistance from outside resources. There are programs and services that are here to help, with a history of successful recovery.

Seek professional assistance if negative feelings or behaviors cause severe distress for longer than a few weeks. Here are some resources for immediate help:

- The 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline (formerly known as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline) offers 24/7/365 call, text, and chat access to trained crisis counselors who can help people experiencing suicidality, substance use, mental health crisis, and/or any other kind of emotional distress. Dial 988 for a free, confidential conversation with a trained counselor. These counselors can support you and offer helpful advice.
- Crisis Text Line: Text "Home" to 741741.
- The Trevor Project: Call 1-866-488-7386 or text "Start" to 678-678. A crisis and suicide prevention service for LGBTQ+ youth.

Mental health matters. Prioritizing your mental well-being will impact your life in a positive way. Talking openly about mental health and emotional wellness with others can make a big difference. It will not only help you, but those around you as well. Recognize when someone needs expert help or get help for yourself immediately.

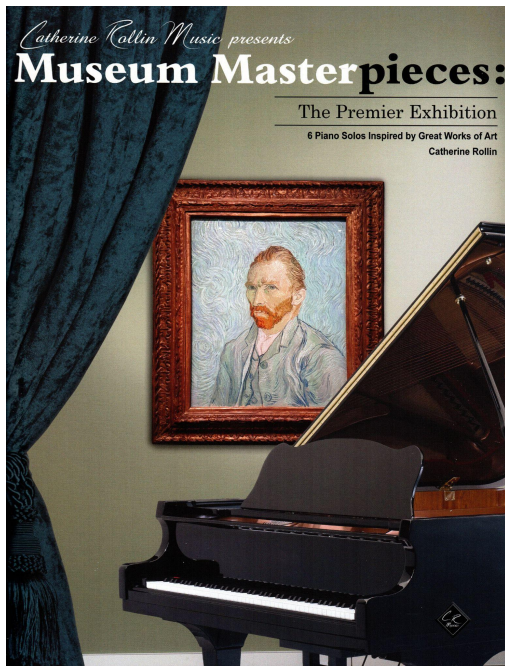


*Pianist Jacqueline Petitto is an active soloist and chamber musician who has performed domestically and abroad. She has taught at the University of Southern California, University of La Verne, Pasadena City College, Los Angeles City College, University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong Baptist University, Colburn Conservatory of Music (where she created a Musician Wellness course), and was Assistant Professor and Director of Keyboard Studies at Long Beach City College. Dr. Petitto's strong commitment to wellness resulted in her appointment as CAPMT Wellness Chair. She has presented at universities, conferences, and for music teacher organizations, and translated a musician wellness book from Spanish into English.*

## New Publication Recommendations

# Contemporary Masterpieces: MTNA Conference Highlights

Gail Lew



### MUSEUM MASTERPIECES

By Catherine Rollin

Catherine Rollin Music ©2022

[www.catherinerollinmusic.com](http://www.catherinerollinmusic.com)

ISBN 9798987355206 - 28 pp., \$14.99

Level 7

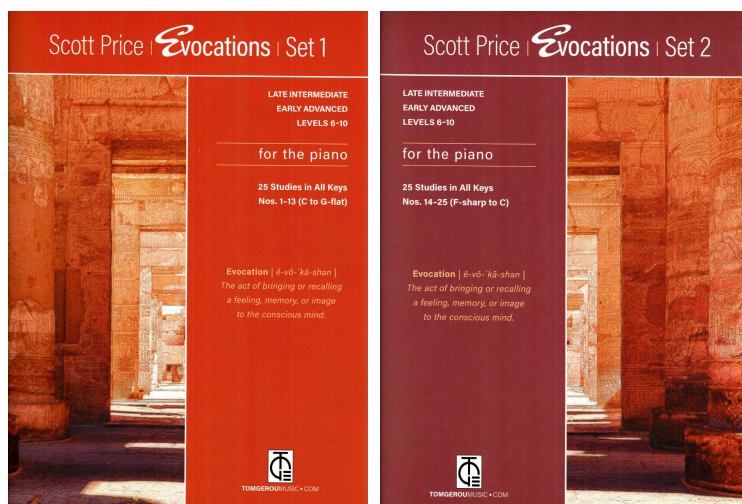
What better way to bring art and music together than with a blending of the two mediums into a collection with piano solos inspired by great works of art and photos of the evocative paintings that inspired the pieces? This fusion allows students to be fueled by the imagery of these classic works of art. Historical notes and information about the artists accompany six extraordinary paintings which are artistically displayed in full color at the center of the book. Composer Catherine Rollin clearly states her purpose for this collection, her use of imagery, and how teachers might inspire students: "In my role as a teacher, I am always

using imagery from art to try to inspire a student, in terms of their playing. If I want someone to use their arms in a way that is flowing, I might show them a painting by Monet and how the brushstrokes flow for the water. As a person who loves art, I thought it would be really wonderful to have the artworks inspire me to write music."<sup>1</sup>

Expanding on the brilliant vignettes in her **Museum Masterpieces** Books A, B, and 1-4, this collection artfully captures the essence of each painting and fulfills Rollin's dream of melding art and music. Paintings like Vincent Van Gogh's "Self Portrait" and Pierre-August Renoir's "The Skiff" come to life. The sunlight glimmers on the water through the high treble rolled chords. The continuously moving eighth notes glide leisurely along interspersed with some delicate, sparkling sixteenth-note passages distributed between the hands. Scored in the key of A minor, the mood is more somber in "October" (James Tissot). The Autumn leaves are swirling in continuously moving triplet groups tossed back and forth between the right and left hand. Like Monet, Rollin captures the sea and fog punctuated by seagulls flying above the River Thames in "Houses of Parliament, Seagulls." The flowing waves are depicted using right-hand eighth notes performed fluidly and ever so lightly. The seagull calls are then accented against the waves. An undercurrent of dread is aptly portrayed in "The Scream" (Edvard Munch) using minor seconds and tone clusters.

<sup>1</sup> Kevin Elliott. "Catherine Rollin." *Downtown News Magazine*. Birmingham/Bloomfield, October 23, 2018.

The sixteenth-note figuration rises and falls like the sea in “Girl Seated by the Sea.” This collection features some of Rollin’s most expressive and ravishing writing.



## EVOCATIONS SETS 1 AND 2

By Scott Price

TOM GEROU MUSIC ©2023

[www.tomgeroumusic.com](http://www.tomgeroumusic.com)

Set 1 TGM00048 – 32 pp., \$10.99

Set 2 TGM00049 – 32 pp., \$9.99

Levels 6-10

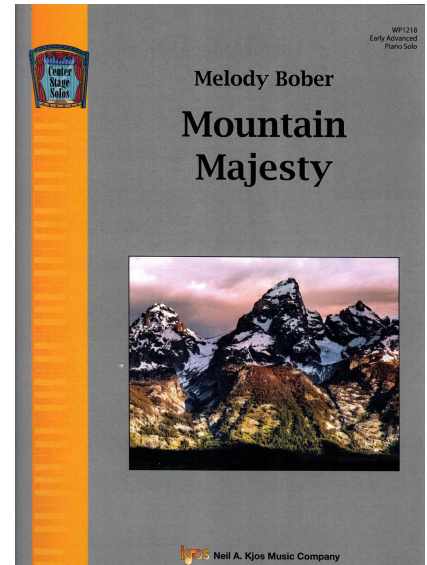
Evocation is defined as the act of bringing or recalling a feeling, memory, or image to the conscious mind. Written in major, minor, modal, and tonally ambiguous keys, these twenty-five improvisational studies

provide students with evocative opportunities. Presented chromatically, Set 1 features miniatures, mostly two and three pages in length, spanning C Major to G-flat Major. Set 2 features vignettes from F-sharp minor to C (modal). Each piece presents a specific challenge for the student. For example, in Set 1, the notes in “Evocation No. 2” do not have stems on the notes in the first 19 measures. This gives students a great deal of freedom. The student is allowed to make musical and expressive decisions on where the notes should be placed and how they should be placed. The middle section is a chant. There are no stems on the accompaniment notes so students can better breathe the chant, learn how to phrase the chant, and also how to place the left-hand notes to create a sense of beginning, ending, and arrival. This piece is evocative of an ancient Egyptian temple. Students can create a musical picture of incense wafting in the air accompanying the chanting and singing. Written in the style of a Baroque Opera, the challenge in “Evocation No. 5” is in the accompaniment pattern. The student needs to achieve a rich, natural, and slightly accented bass note and then suspend the hand enough to be able to voice the chord that follows. “Evocation No. 6” is a modal study in tremolos and scales. “Evocation No. 7,” in a popular idiom, features a gorgeous lyrical melody, smooth legato, and rich harmonic colors. Pedagogical features in Set 2 include intervals of a ninth, dynamic shading, notes without stems, trills as accompaniment, voicing intervals of a second, splitting a melody between the hands, and quarter, half, and flutter pedaling. Because these pieces developed primarily from improvisations, the performer can feel free to exercise a great deal of expressive freedom in their performance interpretations. Scott Price has offered students so many interpretive possibilities to imagine and create. The improvisational qualities are often mystical. The harmonic excursions are sometimes experimental. The moods are often atmospheric. These appealing studies will challenge students to explore their own interpretive ideas and possibly create their own improvisations. Audio samples of Set 1 may be accessed at [Evocations, Set 1 \(Nos. 1-13\) | TomGerouMusic.com](http://Evocations, Set 1 (Nos. 1-13) | TomGerouMusic.com). Audio samples of Set 2 may be accessed at [Evocations, Set 2 \(Nos. 14-25\) | TomGerouMusic.com](http://Evocations, Set 2 (Nos. 14-25) | TomGerouMusic.com).

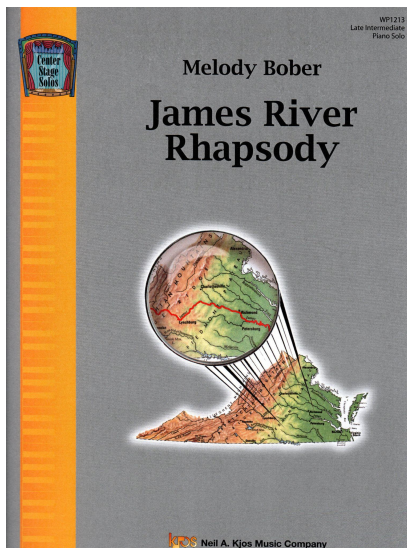


**MOUNTAIN MAJESTY**

By Melody Bober  
 KJOS Music Company ©2023  
[www.kjos.com](http://www.kjos.com)  
 WP1218 Sheet Music \$4.99  
 Level 7-8



This majestic recital piece features calm, stately introductory chords that open into a gorgeous, lyrical theme. This faster, expressive section with its undulating left-hand arpeggiated accompaniment is scored in quadruple meter. Dramatic chords in both hands gradually rise leading to a melodic line voiced in octaves. Pedagogical features include sixteenth-note scale passages, melody in octaves, hand-over-hand descending passages, tempo and meter changes, two against three, voicing the top note of a chord, balance between the hands, and dynamic nuances. A poignant middle section scored in 6/8 time offers a brief respite of tranquility before the brilliant, flashy glissando brings this solo to a vibrant conclusion.

**JAMES RIVER RHAPSODY**

By Melody Bober  
 KJOS Music Company ©2023  
[www.kjos.com](http://www.kjos.com)  
 WP1213 Sheet Music \$4.99  
 Level 7

This piano solo is a valuable library addition for teachers looking for a show-stopping contemporary recital piece. Melody Bober does a fantastic job of offering extraordinary and challenging pieces that allow students to show off their technical prowess. Technical elements include virtuosic octave passages, pedaling that creates color and mood, hand-over-hand arpeggios, a left-hand arpeggiated accompaniment, and wide dynamic contrasts. Featuring an effective combination of bold, rapid presto tempos along with

a slower, pensive middle section, the triumphant opening chords return followed by powerful ascending octaves and a crashing descending black-key glissando. What a dramatic conclusion for a recital program!

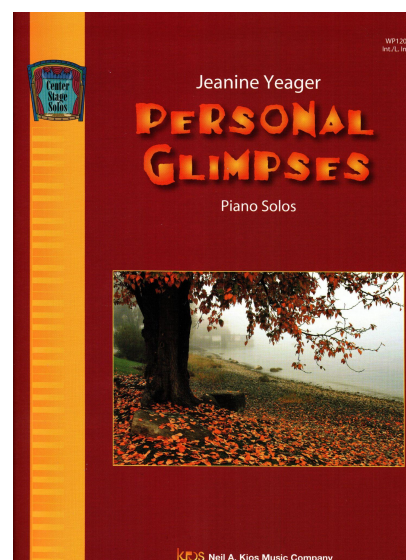


**PERSONAL GLIMPSES**

By Jeanine Yeager  
KJOS Music Company ©2023

[www.kjos.com](http://www.kjos.com)

WP1203 - 32pp., \$7.95  
Levels 5-6



One of America's finest women composers has once again created a collection with improvisational and expressive qualities. Each composition presents students with an opportunity to offer their own interpretation and insert their own personality into the music. "Of Things Not Spoken" is reminiscent of a haunting Satie miniature. "Lighten Up!" requires careful voicing to bring out the melodic line hidden in the undulating triplet figures. Students will love the high energy and dynamic contrasts ranging from *piano* to the concluding *fortissimo* glissando; a real showstopper. "Running Wild" utilizes tone clusters, various seventh chords, and full octave chords at breakneck speed to create frenzy and excitement. The Coda slows down as the subito *piano* moves to *pp* and then to *ppp*. (The exhausted runner is tired!) The nostalgic "Remember Me" features a lyrical solo melodic line along with right-hand chords that will require careful voicing. The powerful "Intense Journey" alternates between formidable *fortissimo* chords and *pianissimo* sixteenth-note passagework.

Gorgeous harmonies, powerful chords, introspective moments, arpeggiated left-hand accompaniments, haunting melodies, rapid sixteenth-note passagework, and incredible pianistic flair make this collection a welcome addition to the contemporary repertoire.

**A Day at the Beach**

by Amy Stephens

Five Jazz and Latin-jazz Pieces for Solo Piano



Intermediate to Early-Advanced Levels

**A DAY AT THE BEACH**

By Amy Stephens

Amy Stephens Music ©2022

[www.amystephens.com](http://www.amystephens.com)

ISBN 9790800246012 - 22 pp., \$10.00

Just about every California student can relate to a super-fun day at the beach. Each of the five titles in this collection will spark imaginative interpretations. "Skipping Rocks" has an upbeat, syncopated melodic line punctuated by accents, staccatos, and rests. The melody is accompanied mostly by tenths in parallel motion. "The Hang Gliders" is filled with chromatic passages that leap and soar as the hang gliders take a running jump from the high cliff. "Tide Pools" uses major and minor ninth chords providing a sense of color and

mystery, especially when the pedal is held across two measures creating an underwater effect. Use of the Lydian scale in the second theme provides an uplifting sound as the tide goes out. The A theme returns as the tide comes in and the tide pools are covered by water once again. A bluesy, medium swing and a boogie-woogie style left-hand

accompaniment depict the rhythm of the waves in "Riding the Waves." The melodic line follows the rhythmic rise and fall of the water's surface by juxtaposing swing eighths with chromatically altered ascending and descending triplets. The humorous antics of dolphins are portrayed by using the whole tone scale and augmented contrary motion broken triads in "Swimming with Dolphins." The mood is playful in this perpetual motion solo.

Each piece in this collection has an accompanying song construction activity page to help students understand the compositional devices behind the music and gives students the tools to compose their own pieces and expand on their own ideas. What a fun-filled jazzy collection.



## PROGRESSIVE PIANO REPERTOIRE VOLUMES THREE AND FOUR

Selected and Edited by Keith Snell  
KJOS Music Company ©2023

[www.kjos.com](http://www.kjos.com)

GP484 - 64 pp., \$9.99 Levels 3-5

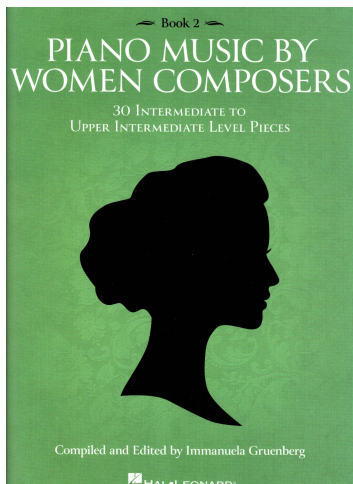
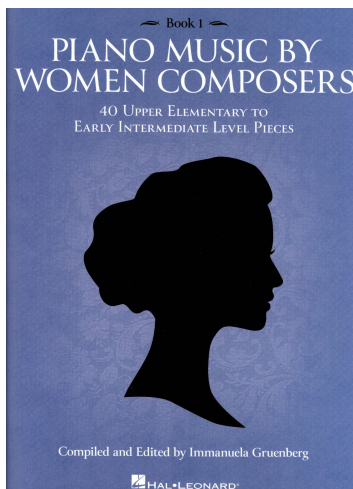
GP485 - 88 pp., \$11.99 Levels 6-7

Volume Three features carefully selected pedagogical works by well-known composers along with intermediate gems by Duvernoy, Streabbog, Maykapar, Rebikov, and Pescetti. The pieces are arranged in order of difficulty.

The first piece in the collection is the ever-popular "Ballade" Op. 100, No. 15 by Friedrich Burgmüller. The collection concludes with "Sailor's Song" by Edvard Grieg.

Volume Four is effectively grouped into five programs with four pieces in each program representing all compositional periods: Baroque, Classical, Romantic, and Twentieth Century. Each program becomes progressively more challenging. Program one includes "Prelude in C minor," BWV999 by J.S. Bach, "Six Variations on a Swiss Song" by Ludwig van Beethoven, "The Storm," Op. 109, No. 13 by Friedrich Burgmüller, and "Aurora" by Bela Bartók. By the time students reach program five, they are performing "Sonata in D minor," L58 by Domenico Scarlatti, "Sonata in C major," K. 545 by Wolfgang Mozart, "Waltz in A minor," Op. 77, No. 9 by Franz Schubert, and "The Little White Donkey" by Jacques Ibert.

Keith Snell's collections make an important contribution to intermediate and late-intermediate pedagogical literature.



## PIANO MUSIC BY WOMEN COMPOSERS BOOKS 1 & 2

Compiled and Edited by Immanuela Gruenberg

Hal Leonard ©2023

[www.halleonard.com](http://www.halleonard.com)

Book 1: HL00370900 \$19.99 Levels 3-4

Book 2: HL00370901 \$19.99 Levels 5-7

The lack of women composers throughout history is a subject that has interested many music historians. There are reasons behind this issue and many hypotheses about why there is such an uneven male-to-female ratio among composers. Throughout history, many women composers have written musically exciting gems that deserve to be better known. Immanuela Gruenberg carefully researched and selected beautiful, interesting compositions that students will love, audiences will appreciate, and teachers will enjoy teaching. These two volumes recognize the talent and creativity of many fine women composers. Book 1 features composers Amy Beach, Mélanie Bonis, Cécile Chaminade, Fredrikke Egeberg, Louise Farrenc, Emma Hartmann, Marie Jaëll, Clara Schumann, and Anna Stubenberg. Book 2 features more advanced music by the same composers along with music by Cecile Hartog, Natalia Janotha, Josephine Lang, Kate Loder, Marianna Martines, Emilie Mayer, Fanny Mendelssohn, Adele Aus Der Ohe, Fanny Scholfield Petrie, Delphine Von Schauroth, Marie Szymanowska, and Stephanie Vrabely.

Short biographical information on each composer is interesting and insightful. Programming music by women composers will help our students better understand the role of women in music history. Immanuela Gruenberg is filling a void in piano repertoire and we are fortunate to be the beneficiaries of her countless hours of research. These collections deserve a permanent place in every teacher's library.

## SAINT-SAËNS SIX ÉTUDES POUR LA MAIN GAUCHE SEULE OP. 135

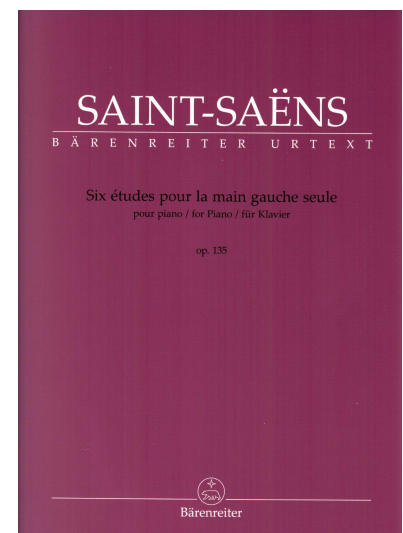
Urtext Edition

Bärenreiter ©2022

[www.baerenreiter.com](http://www.baerenreiter.com)

BA 11856 – 28 pp., \$28.95

This is a perfect edition for the student with a sprained finger, broken arm, or other sports injury. The left-hand Op. 135 Études are distinctive, much different, and easier as compared to the Op. 52 and Op. 111 Études. In Opus 135, Saint-Saens recreates old dance forms inspired by his lifelong interest in





the works of Couperin and Rameau. Rather than études, one might consider them as character pieces. Despite the technical limitations of one-hand performance, the composer freely exploits the pianistic registers of the keyboard as widely as possible. Each of the six pieces focuses on a different style of writing rather than different technical difficulties. The “Prélude,” written in G major, gently contrasts arpeggiated chords and sustained melodic fragments. The “Alla fuga” continues in the same key. The subject is only taken up by one other voice, but the two attain a stretto on the final page and achieve a great deal of contrast. The “Moto perpetuo” explores different keys and registers, reaching a forte climax before vanishing. The lively *Bourrée* features a middle section with a forty-eight-measure G pedal point! The “Élégie” is gushing with lush harmonies and thirty-second note passages, and will require ample pedal support. This is the only movement that is non-Baroque in style. The “Gigue” provides a predictably *presto* conclusion with a sparkling *prestissimo* descent.

The Critical Commentary documents the exhaustive research that went into the preparation of this definitive edition. The engraving is clear and clean and devoid of unnecessary editorial markings. This authoritative Bärenreiter edition of the Op. 135 Études should definitely be the “go-to” edition for students and teachers.



**Gail Lew** is an editor, arranger, piano teacher, clinician, and nationally-respected leader in the field of piano pedagogy. She is an independent studio teacher in the San Francisco Bay Area, a member of CAPMT District 2, a 2023 MTNA Foundation Fellow, and a judge for state, national, and international piano events. Gail holds degrees and credentials in piano performance, music history, and music education. Highlights of her 30-year career in music include her tenure as senior piano editor for Kjos Music, director of keyboard publications for Warner Bros. Music, editor of the *California Music Teacher* magazine, and contributing editor for the *American Music Teacher* magazine. Gail maintains close ties with major publishing companies in the United States, Canada, and Europe and presents workshops nationwide on contemporary music focusing on living composers.

## Coda

# “How do you motivate your students when they are stressed or have a lack of investment in their musical studies?”

As the definition of what it means to be a “working musician” changes with advances in society and technology, it’s critical that as educators we train our students for this new reality. A huge part of our work as teachers is not only teaching them music, but also how to balance their lives and career! Stress and a lack of motivation aren’t flaws or things to avoid—it’s a sign that you’re human, and that your mind and body are telling you that you need something. I highly recommend Celeste Headlee’s book [Do Nothing: How to Break Away from Overworking, Overdoing, and Underliving](#) - reading this helped to shed some light on how our minds and society over-glorify endless work and stress, and demonize rest. A few strategies I recommend to my students:

1. **Support.** Finding a support network of friends, family and advisors is critical to managing stress and staying motivated. You’re not alone in what you’re going through! Making time for personal connections will help you stay grounded and remind you that you’re more than just a musician, or a student: you’re a person.
2. **Rest.** As our society is slowly starting to learn: good, true rest is just as important as hard work. [Your brain literally cannot work at its full potential without real rest.](#) Making sure one is [caught up on sleep](#) is step 1. Then, taking time fully dedicated to letting your mind rest is the next step: when you take a break, really try to not do anything!
3. **Inspiration.** Finding something to be inspired by can really help with motivation. Seeking out new music, and taking in other forms of art are critical to fostering the creative process. My students are lucky to be no more than a few miles away from [LA’s many excellent museums](#). I am also a big believer in what I call “reverse inspiration” - letting yourself become bored so that your brain starts to come up with ideas to keep itself occupied. Try this: listen to no music, and avoid art and creativity for a full day. Often, by the end of the day, you’ll be craving music or be brimming with ideas. If not, at least your mind will be rested and ready to take in new information the next day!
4. **Plan.** Most stress comes from the unknown. We’ve evolved to be afraid of what we don’t know - so the easiest way to reduce stress is to figure out how to accomplish your task. It may seem counterintuitive, but grabbing the bull by horns and working

out a plan of how to finish learning your piece, get through finals and juries, or prepare your performance will greatly reduce your anxiety. The critical part of this is to make sure you're breaking down your goal into *manageable tasks*. Instead of writing down "master the music before the performance", or "finish my album by the end of the semester", instead think of how exactly you will accomplish these goals. "Practice daily, even for a short amount of time" or "work on my music every time I'm in the production studio" are clear, attainable goals that are much easier to execute. If you're a student reading, don't hesitate to ask your teacher for help on this! It takes time to learn how to create plans effectively - any teacher would be thrilled to know you're trying to make a plan and will gladly dive in and help you develop this skill.

*Dr. [Alexander Zhu](#) is a Los Angeles based composer, producer and keyboardist whose work has been showcased in film festivals across the US and Europe, and can be heard on Disney+, Netflix and TF1. As a concert artist, he has performed solo recitals, concerti and chamber, orchestral, pop, fusion and film music coast to coast in the United States, and across Europe and China. He holds a Doctor of Musical Arts degree from the University of Southern California working with Stewart Gordon, and earned a Bachelor of Music degree from New England Conservatory. He serves as Assistant Professor of Musicianship and Concert Management at Occidental College.*

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I often think back on the initial reasons why I decided to pursue music. Most of these memories are attributed to a particular teacher and event that inspired me, whether it was pushing me to enter competitions or encouraging my exploration of music composition. It's not to say that everything was smooth sailing—sometimes I lost the desire to do something simply because it did not engage me creatively or provide me with the freedom of choice.

In my own teaching, I've experimented with extrinsically motivated tools: sticker charts, recital awards, and practice contests. While many of those things can be used to encourage healthy musical learning, I've been on the hunt for games that lead back to music-making itself. For example, one of my middle school students stayed fully online with Zoom after the pandemic. It was difficult to keep him accountable with practicing and lessons quickly became stale. One day, I stumbled upon some custom scratch-off stickers that reveal text underneath when scrubbed with a coin. Instead of points or prizes, I hid activities underneath, such as guided listening, a repertoire hunt, or a technique builder. My student suddenly couldn't wait to discover what activities were buried within the scratch cards. This encouraged him to engage with the lesson material to earn the scratches. Alternatives to "prizes" at the end of the semester included special sheet music that would be enjoyed and encourage reading outside of lessons. Video game themes arranged for easy piano have been a favorite this semester.



I have also found that it is important to balance my own curriculum requirements with what the student might be interested in at the moment. A few weeks ago, one of my young students—clearly exhausted—kept getting sidetracked by the grand piano hammer mechanism and did not care for any of the traditional note reading that I had planned. Rather than force his focus, I decided to help him rechannel that energy—we had tutorial on all the pedal functions and improvised chord patterns by ear instead. He was clearly inspired by this because the following week he had returned with music that he had composed on blank staff paper, all without prompting.

Coming from a choral music education background, I am not afraid to pull out the play scarves and dance in a lesson with my younger students or ask my older students to sing silly words along with their pieces. Some of us come from a conservatory-style approach that stresses tradition, a defined approach to lessons, and sitting for long periods. As teachers, we must remind ourselves that this doesn't resonate with every student. It's true that our students must learn how to focus intensely and embrace the discipline of learning in a specific method. Yet, we are all only human—we need to express our creativity and maintain the license to discover things on our own terms. Perhaps that is one key to jumpstarting the motivation that we desire!

*Dr. [Joshua Tan](#), NCTM is an award-winning pianist, baritone, and composer. He holds degrees in piano performance from the University of Southern California, University of Arizona, and University of Houston. Additionally, he earned a degree in music education with a K-12 teaching credential. Joshua's musical mentors include Nancy Weems, Dr. John Milbauer, and Bernadene Blaha. He currently teaches at Fullerton College and the Pasadena Conservatory of Music.*

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I teach instrumental music in a public Title 1 middle school (grades 7-8), and feel very fortunate that my school offers both piano and guitar in addition to band. Piano class is a beginning level class; students come to me with little to no music background. My students are very grateful for the opportunity to learn how to play piano. Spending a class period playing piano each day is, in itself, a way to relieve stress.

I like to incorporate 'show off time' at least once a month. This is very informal, and can take as little or as much class time as needed. I like my students to play for each other right away, in part to ease anxiety over playing for others before it even has a chance to settle in, but also to build community (piano can be such a solitary pursuit!). Students can play anything they'd like - or nothing at all! - for their peers. It might be a portion of a piece they're working on (even a few measures), it might be something they've figured out on their own entirely separate from what we do in class, and it might even be their own composition. Each time we do this, more students volunteer to participate. We cheer them on as a class, and it's fun for me to hear what they like to work on or experiment with beyond the class assignments. Being celebrated by their peers is highly motivating, and eventually, students request the 'show off time' on a regular basis.

Another great motivator is to invite a guest (for us, any adult on campus) into our class for a 'mini concert.' Students know ahead of time that this will happen, and they have the option to play - or not - for the guest. They also get to choose what music they will perform. The reluctant students often change their minds and volunteer to perform midway through the event, as they see the praise heaped on their peers.

These are a few strategies I use to help my students when they get stuck in a slump or have a hard time pushing through the inevitable challenges of learning to play piano. Music is a gift. It's a gift to learn to play an instrument, but it's also a gift to share your music with others through performance.

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