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MUSIC OF OUR TIME

MUSIC OF OUR TIME (Parnassus Revisited) is a new collection of graded piano books designed to introduce pianists to the musical vocabulary of the 20th century. In our era of new musical sounds and effects, the composers of MUSIC OF OUR TIME (Parnassus Revisited) have consciously attempted to introduce 20th-century idioms early in any student's playing career. However, while some of the sounds produced may seem new or unusual, the forms on which they are based are, for the most part, developed from the classic writers of earlier expressions of musical pedagogy. The entire series of books is graded and within each volume pieces have been placed in approximate order of difficulty. Fingering and pedalling suggestions have also been included by the composers, but these indications are suggestions rather than firm dicta on technical matters.

The overall intention of the MUSIC OF OUR TIME (Parnassus Revisited) series of piano pieces is to reveal the natural growth of contemporary music from the styles and ideas of earlier musical forms. MUSIC OF OUR TIME (Parnassus Revisited) is, in effect, a celebration of contemporary idioms for contemporary pianists.

INTRODUCTION

To help the teacher guide students through MUSIC OF OUR TIME (Parnassus Revisited), we have prepared a teaching manual to accompany the series. The term "teaching manual" may not be the very best definition of this supplementary volume — it is more in the nature of a resource book, including suggestions for performance techniques, information about the history of various 20th-century idioms, suggested materials for further listening and reading, and short analytical discussions of all the MUSIC OF OUR TIME (Parnassus Revisited) repertoire.

Often younger students have a certain difficulty "relating" 20th-century music to other styles of musical compositions; we believe that an integrated approach to 20th-century repertoire which explains not only the style of new music but also its roots and structure is the best method of understanding 20th-century compositions.

In the series itself, short notes for the student explain the basics of any given piece and establish a beginning vocabulary of concepts and terms. The teaching manual expands these concepts for the teacher in more technical language and greater depth. As well, the manual suggests various teaching approaches which will facilitate a greater degree of student comprehension of musical structure, syntax, and vocabulary.

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MUSIC OF OUR TIME
(Parnassus Revisited)

BOOK ONE

In BOOK ONE, Jean Coulthard's pieces form a short suite titled BIRTHDAY PIECES FOR A GRANDDAUGHTER; it contains six short pieces dedicated to the composer's new granddaughter, Alexa. Almost all of the pieces are programmatic in some way, and the teacher is encouraged to point out the programmatic style of the works to children. Especially with younger students, the story of any given piece will be helpful in interpretation and in explaining some of the effects - - ritards, cadence styles, etc. As well, the younger student can relate to the story.

ALEXA'S MUSIC BOX

ANALYSIS: This piece is in simple ternary form, with the first section extending from bar 1 through the A major seventh chord cadence in bar 6, the second section from bar 7 to 12, and the return of the first material from bar 13 to the conclusion. Harmonically, major seconds are used throughout the piece. While the tonal centre is C, notice the cadence in bars 6 and 7 using a seventh chord on A, the sixth degree of the scale. There is a brief contrapuntal interlude at bar 7, where the theme alternates from right to left hands.

IDIOMS: The use of seconds and sevenths in this piece reflects a style originally associated with CLAUDE DEBUSSY in the early part of our century; a particularly good example of this idiom can be found in "Jimbo's Lullaby" from CHILDREN'S CORNER (see recording, Phillipe Entremont, Columbia MS-6567).

TECHNIQUE: Play quite softly throughout. In bars 6 and 7 pause quite a long time for the music box to "run down", then pick up the tempo and tone at beat 3, bar 7. The rhythm is fairly steady at moderate speed until the music box begins to "run down". The pick-up beats 3 and 4 at the beginning and elsewhere should not be a sharp staccato but rather a "portamento"- - slightly detached notes.

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A FIRST CHORALE

ANALYSIS: Binary form (first section, bars 1 - 4; two-bar link passage; second section, bars 7 to the final IV-I cadence). This piece has a reasonably simple, traditional harmonization in a D tonality. The primary importance of counterpoint serves to introduce the young student to a contrapuntal style. Note the use of the interval of the 4th, beat 1, bar 2, to ensure exact imitation of the choral tune in the left hand and the use of fragments of the chorale tune in the link section, bars 5 and 6.

IDIOMS: Traditional 18th-century contrapuntal style is in keeping with the historical nature of the German chorale tradition, but note the more 20th-century treatment of the 4th and 7th in bars 2 and 8, beats 1 and 2 respectively.

TECHNIQUE: Fingering and phrasing are of the utmost importance in this setting in order to bring out the chorale melody clearly. Younger students must be encouraged to feel the majesty and grandeur of this fine, traditional tune. The IV-I **plagal cadence** should be played softly. The rhythm should be straightforward except for the cadence, which is slower with each pause observed. Separate hands practice will be advisable.

FIRST LITTLE DANCE

ANALYSIS: Simple ternary form, first or A section, bars 1-8, second or B section, bars 9-12, and A section return, bars 13-20, with a brief coda in bars 21 and 22. Tonally centred on F, this piece uses simple chords on the tonic and subdominant in second inversion. The final cadence uses the augmented 4th or tritone, B natural, rather than the expected B flat. There is no "key signature" in order to familiarize the beginner with the common 20th-century practice of writing in all accidentals.

IDIOMS: Almost all 20th-century composers have used the tritone both melodically and harmonically. In very early music the tritone was scrupulously avoided by composers as the "diabolus in musica" or "the devil in music". The use of the tritone is particularly associated with the earlier years of the 20th century, especially with IGOR STRAVINSKY in his ballet FIREBIRD (see recording, Columbia M-31841).

TECHNIQUE: In bar 7 the teacher may choose to vary the printed fingering of the two-note phrases to suit the hand of the student. This piece should be played happily and not too fast in a waltz rhythm. Do note the ritards in bars 12 and 20. Separate practice for the right hand will help to master the feel of the folk song's rhythm. The words of the original folk song are "Lavender's blue, Dilly, Dilly, Lavender's green. / When I am king, Dilly, Dilly, / You'll be my queen."

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