WHERE DO I BEGIN?

EXPLORING TWENTIETH-CENTURY NOTATION AND TECHNIQUES THROUGH LARRY SITSKY'S CENTURY

HANNAH TH'NG MCDOWELL

THURSDAY | 11 JULY 2024

Australian Piano Pedagogy Conference 2024
Monash University
Sir Zelman Cowen School of Music and Performance
Performance Theatre
4:35 PM - 5:15 PM

This interactive workshop aims to demystify selected twentieth-century notation and techniques which are often found in advanced repertoire and perceived as intimidating and inaccessible. In response to a scarcity of beginner piano pieces containing twentieth-century notation and techniques, Australian composer, pianist, and pedagogue Larry Sitsky (b. 1934) composed a three-volume set of 155 graded pieces for pianists entitled Century.

These short, characterful, and engaging pieces are designed to introduce the young pianist into the world of twentieth-century sounds and colours. This workshop seeks to provide teachers with an overview of the work as well as the tools necessary to teach pieces in Century—some of which are included in the current AMEB and ANZCA syllabuses—by identifying potential challenges in selected pieces and through live demonstrations at the piano.

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"Decades after the conception of *Century* in the early 1980s, we finally see it as it was first conceived. The order of pieces was there not just for progression of difficulty, but for variety, challenge, and inspiration. At one stage, I did sit down with one or more teachers and we arrived at a purely subjective grading for each piece. This will always be contentious, but at least indicates roughly the intent behind the order of the collection."

— Larry Sitsky

A brief description for each piece has been added by the editor with the intent that these will be an aid to teachers and pianists. It is by no means exhaustive. These descriptions have been approved by Sitsky.

Century – Volume I

No.	Title	Brief Description	Grade
1	Sam the Semitone	Thumbs and semitones only	Pre-P
2	Leapfrog	Alternating hands with fist clusters	Pre-P
3	Slipping and Sliding	Sliding/swiping motion with palm clusters	P
4	Window Wipers	Broken chords with two key signatures	P
5	Walking	Two fingers walking along the keys of the piano	1
6	Hiccups	Exploring p and sfz	P
7	Delirium	Duet: improvising in response to graphic notation	1
8	Circles	3-note finger clusters clockwise and anticlockwise	1
9	Strawberry Ice-cream	Introducing triplets and septuplets using words	1
10	Changes (Etude)	Repeated patterns with slight changes in harmony	2
11	Mr Clementi	A staccato etude referring jokingly to Clementi	P
12	Minus	Diminution of phrase and changing time signature	Pre-P
13	Superball	Leaping finger clusters imitating a ball game	P

14	Metrognome	Alternating $\frac{2}{4}$ + $\frac{3}{4}$ and playing with a set beat	1
15	Submarine	Duet: improvisation using given notes	P
16	Spooks	Duet: atmospheric improvisation with clusters	2
17	With Eyes Closed	Game where student has to find the pitch	Pre-P
18	Right/Left	Fixed hand position with alternating hands	P
19	Here Come the Accidentals	Simple tune chromaticized with added accidentals on each repeat	2
20	Trampoline	Leaping from single notes to palm clusters	P
21	Creepy Crawly Chromatic Caterpillars	Five-finger chromatic positions with rotation	P
22	With the Beat in Our Feet	Piece with foot tapping to imitate a percussive instrument	1
23	Didgeridoo	Irregular rhythmic groupings using $\frac{7}{8}$, $\frac{5}{8}$, $\frac{4}{8}$ etc	P
24	Wind Chimes	Pedalled piece with pauses based on two chords	P
25	Geriatric Normal Sumo Dinosaurs	Chromatic hand clusters and improvisation	P
26	Contraction-Expansion	Piece constructed using an interval pattern	1
27	Chinese Teasing Song	Folk song using only black notes	P
28	Sadly	Phrasing and *decrescendo*	1
29	Korean Song	Exploring intervals of a fifth in accompaniment	P
30	Lasers	Exploring *glissandi*	2
31	Chinese Folk Tune	Bitonal staccato piece and reading *8va* and *15ma*	P

32	Percussion Study	Rhythmic study played with lid shut over the keys	P
33	Rounds – Russian Folk Song	Single melody given followed by a written-out round	1
34	Hybrid	Bitonal piece with major and minor	1
35	Frère Jacques	Bitonal canon and setting of a folk tune	P
36	Forcefield	All phrases end in G and B to create a 'barrier'	1
37	Drone – Rumanian Dance	Folk song with rhythmically-varied LH ostinato	P
38	Background	Foreground/background effect using *pp* and *sffz*	1
39	Alternate Hands – Apache Indian Dance Song	Setting of a traditional Mojave-Apache Dance Song using alternating hands	P
40	Echo Song – Russian	Folk tune with an echo at the end of each line	1
41	Ad Infinitum	Soft pedalled chords held till they almost fade	1
42	Israeli Acceleration Dance	Controlled *accelerando*	1
43	Red Indian Hand Game Song	Unisons and octaves with parallel and alternate hands	1
44	Embellishment – Turkish Melody	Adding ornaments as embellishments on the repeat	P
45	Korean Mirror Song	Hands and fingers moving in mirror motion	P
46	Hassidic Dance Tune	Traditional dance tune with monophonic texture	P
47	Prism	Phrases always ending with the same chord	1

Century – Volume II

No.	Title	Brief Description	Grade
48	March of the Robots	Staccato and legato	2-3
49	Ukrainian Folksong	Traditional folksong with unexpected harmonies	2
50	Jewish Dance Melody	Traditional dance melody	2
51	Duet	Polyphonic piece	1-2
52	Armenian Melody	Canonic piece	1
53	Piece for Piano and Metronome	Phrasing, changing from $\frac{4}{4}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$, playing with a set beat	3
54	Vilna Ghetto Song	Traditional song, *cantabile*	2
55	Heatwave	Soft chords with free durations between chords	3
56	With Foot Stamping: Dakota Indians Ghost Dancing Song	Setting of a Dakota Indian song with notated foot stamping	1-2
57	Shrink	Each phrase a diminution of the previous phrase	2-3
58	Tag: Russian Folk Tune	Fixed five-finger position with broken chord accompaniment	1-2
59	Subtraction	Chords with a note subtracted on each repetition	1-2
60	Red Indian Hand-Game Song	RH melody whilst LH plays on the wood of the piano using palms and/or knuckles	1
61	Lion	Rolled chromatic palm clusters in the left hand	2
62	Russian Comic Song	To be played with the left hand only	2-3
63	Decrescendo and Ritenuto: Russian Folksong	To be played with the right hand only	2

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64	Outer Space	Playing unisons an octave or more apart	4
65	Nursery Rhyme with Bongos and Bass Drum	Three Blind Mice with three-note finger clusters	4
66	For One Hand: Russian Folksong	To be played with the right hand only	3-4
67	Moon Walk	Mobile composition with feathered notation	4
68	Contrapuntal: Hassidic Dance	Contrapuntal piece with left hand softer than right	3
69	Woodpecker	Fast alternating hands and repeated notes	2
70	Morse	Decipher the message using Morse Code	2
71	Barrier	Phrases end in C# and G to create a 'barrier'	3
72	Firecrackers	Piece with only black-note and white-note fist clusters	3-4
73	Roulette	Indeterminate score using a wheel and semicircle	4
74	Addition	Phrase repeated each time with additional notes	3
75	Maestoso	Chordal piece	4
76	Solo and Chorus: Russian Folksong	Traditional folksong with LH ostinato in a different key	3
77	High Up	Both hands in treble clef and *fioritura*	3
78	Hungarian Song	Traditional song with unexpected harmonies	3
79	Drums	Piece using black-note and white-note fist clusters	4-5
80	Hungarian Melody	Both hands in treble clef	2-3
81	Extremes	Playing unisons an octave or more apart	2-3

82	Wait: An Etude in Counting	Changing time signatures	3
83	Rumanian Folk Tune	Playing in an expressive and declamatory manner	2
84	Jewish Part-Song	Voicing right-hand part and left-hand part	3
85	Building Blocks	Notes progressively added to form a chord	4
86	Russian Folksong	Setting of a traditional folksong	3-4
87	Monsters	Both hands in bass clef	4
88	Cues	Polyphonic piece with musical "interruptions"	3
89	Winnebago Red Indian Warrior-Song	Traditional song with changing time signatures	2
90	Crescendo	Piece with fist, palm, and elbow clusters	3-4
91	Nigun: Hassidic Dance	Traditional melody with left hand octaves	4
92	Mountain	Climbing phrases	3
93	Accelerando and Crescendo: Russian Folksong	For exploring *accelerando* and *crescendo*	2
94	Thunderbolt	Rolled chromatic palm clusters	3
95	Mirage	Silently depressed keys and sympathetic vibrations	4
96	Cheyenne Hand-Game Song	RH melody with LH rapping on wood of the piano	2
97	Game of Cards	Indeterminate piece with eight score cards	3
98	Whisper	Fast and soft	4
99	Polyphony: Jewish Part-Song	Two-part irregular polyphony	3
100	Mirror Dance	Mirrored four-finger white-note clusters	5

Century – Volume III

No.	Title	Brief Description	Grade
101	Israeli Song	Setting of a traditional song, mainly in G minor	4
102	Ping-Pong	Free and quick staccato piece with leaps, improvisation, and no time signature	5
103	Mongolian Folksong	Bitonal setting of a folk song with quasi-drums in the left hand	5
104	Collisions	Phrases end in a "musical collision", usually a semitone or tritone	4
105	Parlando: Hungarian Song	For exploring *parlando*: playing in an expressive and declamatory manner, as though speaking	3
106	Swing Band Blues	Slow blues with finger-cluster accompaniment	5
107	Jewish Folk Song: Festivo	A festive setting of a folksong with tempo changes	4
108	Only One Note	Expressive articulation study built on one note	4
109	Interjections	*Quasi chorale* with *Allegro* interjections	4-5
110	Phonetics	Piece with phonetic vocalisation whilst playing	5
111	Stereophony-Antiphony	Contrasts between low and high registers, loud and soft dynamics	5
112	Jewish Folk Song	Traditional folk song centred around A minor	3
113	Homophonic	Single musical line split between both hands	4
114	On Four Staves	New notation on four staves; a white note-head indicates a natural and a black note-head indicates a sharp	3
115	Knock on Wood: Trumpet and Drums	RH melodic line imitates a trumpet and LH taps or knocks on wood of piano to imitate a drum	4

116	Major-Minor Mixed: Hungarian Song	Hungarian song with phrases alternating between major and minor	3
117	Jungles	Slow and atmospheric piece with leaps, wide spaces between the hands, and pedal held down throughout	5-6
118	Jewish Folksong: Dance	Longer folk song with unexpected harmonies	5
119	Magic Chant	Flexible chant-like melody with both hands in bass clef	3
120	Caves and Echoes	Melody with rolled palm clusters, edge of hand clusters, and silently depressed cluster	5
121	Wolf-Song: Dakota Red Indian Song	Traditional plaintive melody with harmonically complex accompaniment	3
122	Reverberations	Imitating electronic reverberation through time signature changes and *decrescendos* in every bar	5
123	Piece with Stopwatch	Pitches aligned to time scale in seconds	4
124	Tug of War	Dissonances to create a musical "tug of war"	4
125	Flute and Guitar	RH melody (flute) with free LH (guitar); placement of LH indicated by arrows	5
126	Descent	Piece using only palm and elbow clusters	4
127	Aurora Australis	Piece with pedal and *tremolo*; both hands in treble	5
128	Elbows	Rhythmic study using elbow clusters	4-5
129	Configurations: Piece for Analysis	For exploring and analysing how compositional patterns can be altered	5
130	Mist	*Ad libitum,* lengths of notes are visually estimated	4
131	Pulsations	Melody with pulsating chordal accompaniment	5

CENTURY PIECES IN THE AMEB & ANZCA SYLLABI

The following pieces are taken from the Australian Music Examinations Board (AMEB) Manual of Syllabus 2024 and the Australian and New Zealand Cultural Arts Limited (ANZCA) Music Examinations Examination Syllabus 2022-24.

Whilst the following details are correct at time of writing, it is always the responsibility of the teacher or pianist to consult with the current AMEB Manual of Syllabus and ANZCA Examination Syllabus.

Australian Music Examinations Board (AMEB)

Vol.	No.	Title	AMEB Grade	List
1	23	Didgeridoo	P Plate Piano Book 2	–
1	43	Red Indian Hand Game Song	Preliminary	C
3	112	Jewish Folk Song	Preliminary	C
3	108 + 109	Only One Note *and* Interjections *(to be played as a pair)*	5	D
3	118	Jewish Folk Song: Dance	5	D
3	152 + 153	Zig-Zag *and* Zig-Zag Mirror *(to be played as a pair)*	7	D
3	154	Nocturne Canonique	8	D
3	155	Petra	Certificate of Performance	D

Australian and New Zealand Cultural Arts Limited (ANZCA)

Vol.	No.	Title	ANZCA Grade	List
1	1	Sam the Semitone	Preliminary	C
1	12	Minus	Preliminary	C
1	23	Didgeridoo	Preliminary	C
1	24	Wind Chimes	1	C
1	27	Chinese Teasing Song	1	C
1	29	Korean Song	1	C
1	35	Frére Jacques	1	C
1	37	Drone: Rumanian Dance	1	C
1	40	Echo Song	1	C
1	45	Korean Mirror-Song	1	C
1	33	Rounds: Russian Folk Song	2	C
1	42	Israeli Acceleration Dance	2	C
1	43	Red Indian Hand Game Song	2	C
1	46	Hassidic Dance-Tune	2	C
2	69	Woodpecker	2	C
2	50	Jewish Dance Melody	3	C
2	78	Hungarian Song	3	C
2	83	Rumanian Folk Tune	3	C
2	84	Jewish Part-Song	3	C

CENTURY

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