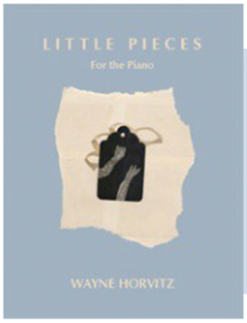
New Music Reviews



(S1-3) Little Pieces (For the Piano), by Wayne Horvitz.

One only has to glance at the staggering breadth of Wayne Horvitz's output to see that he makes himself at home in multiple styles, from avant-garde piano improvisations, to jazz standards, to ambient "sonic experiments," to gospel-country folk music, and beyond. His collection of *Little Pieces for Piano* pays tribute to Bartók's *Mikrokosmos*, while celebrating Horwitz's own creative energy.

The pages of *Little Pieces* fairly leap with inventiveness and ingenuity. Each miniature—all but a handful are a single page in length—has a distinct character and an irresistible rhythmic vitality. Some of the pieces are named after musical concepts ("Between the Hands," "16th Notes," and "Fourths and Fifths"), while others are named for emotions and extramusical concepts ("Forgiveness," "The First Last Thing I Remember About You"). The latter category is interesting for its emotional complexity. For example, "Laughter" isn't a predictable *scherzo*, but, instead, a twisty-turny *adagio* adventure through a bittersweet sepia lens. And, despite its title, "Love, Love, Love" is full of unexpected dissonances and incongruous choices. Horvitz's pieces consistently resist cliché in every regard.

Like Bartók, Horvitz pulls no punches in terms of harmonic complexity, nontraditional intervals, or rhythmic ingenuity. The book's fourth piece, "Snake Man, Snake Man," features a black-key melody over a white-key vamp, and "Opposites" combines a straightforward diatonic folklike melody with mismatched bass notes.

Nor, as Horvitz points out in his introduction, is this a method book. Although the pieces are ordered by increasing difficulty, many musical elements are introduced in rapid bursts. Key signatures shift abruptly, from no sharps or flats in the first nine pieces, to three sharps in the tenth piece, and six flats in the eleventh. Similarly, the first few pieces use only quarter notes, and then, suddenly, the piece "On the Black Keys" has not only eighth notes, but sixteenth notes as well.

This book certainly isn't for everyone; teachers or students who crinkle their noses at overt dissonance should look elsewhere. For a contemporary-minded teacher with a sense of adventure, however, *Little Pieces for the Piano* would make a rewarding supplement to a traditional method book. (Available at waynehorvitz.net, $10) J.S.

(S3-5) Suite de danzas criollas and **Rondó sobre temas infantiles argentines,** by Alberto Ginastera. Edited and recorded by Michael Mizrahi.

This new edition is a welcome and impressive contribution to the piano repertoire. Ginastera's audience-pleasing set of native Latin American dances is paired here with a brilliant and underplayed rondo based on Argentine children's songs. Both pieces in this collection feature the composer's characteristic driving rhythms and asymmetrical meters, alternating with lyrical melodies and widely spaced guitar-like sonorities.

Piano students and their teachers will find great value in the sixteen pages of performance notes about Ginastera and his keyboard music, including general guidelines for fingering, pedaling, articulation, phrasing, dynamics, and tempo. Editor Michael Mizrahi provides examples of the dances' harmonic and rhythmic folk elements. He also discusses the melodies and lyrics of the four folk tunes quoted in the *Rondó.* Notes on performance practice are extensive, but not so detailed as to be prescriptive.

This edition is much easier to read than the original, and Mizrahi's fingerings are welcome additions. Most of the fingerings, particularly in

Grade Levels

1 Beginning: five-finger patterns and simple rhythms

2 Easy: scales and simple syncopation

3 Intermediate: beginning counterpoint and complex rhythms (Bach notebooks, Bartók *Mikrokosmos* I-II)

4 Late intermediate: technical and rhythmic sophistication (Bach inventions, Bartók *Romanian Folk Dances*)

5 Difficult: for competent pianists (Mozart sonatas, Brahms Rhapsody, Op. 79, No. 2)

6 Very difficult: for advanced pianists (Chopin etudes, Beethoven Sonata, Op. 57)

Categories

S - Solo
E - Ensemble

Quality rating

Thumbs up: repertoire that is highly recommended