

**TEACHING TECHNIQUE AND ARTISTRY IN CHINESE CHARACTER PIECES
FOR MID- TO LATE-INTERMEDIATE LEVEL STUDENTS**

by
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A PROJECT

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Chapter I: Overview of Intermediate level

1. Overview

During the process of learning the piano, the intermediate level is a very important phase. After finishing a basic elementary series and demonstrating an understanding of and ability with the instrument's fundamental ideas and techniques, students are typically considered to have reached the intermediate level of study. The students will eventually reach the standard repertoire study stage once they have completed the process of learning from the method book. At this point, they will have a solid comprehension of the various musical periods and styles.

Students can build a solid foundation of skills in reading, musicianship, and technique during their elementary studies. This paves the way for an easy transition to the intermediate level. However, after finishing the method books, teachers face the possibility of getting lost in the process because there is not enough of a guideline to help them discover the way to the next level or something in between. Therefore, it is crucial for piano teachers to have a firm understanding of what defines the intermediate level, and what should be covered during this stage of learning.

Based on the second volume of *Professional Piano Teaching*, an intermediate student will have mastered a fundamental elementary method. At this point, students should have the ability to play with a pleasant tone, identifiable articulation, and dynamic contrast. Regarding the ability to read scores, the author notes that intermediate-level students can define simple rhythms well and read simple pieces with confidence.

2.Goal

Training the young musician to become more independent and mature is the key point of music education. The instructor needs to help students to pave the road towards the next level during the intermediate-level study process. After finishing the learning process by playing various pieces of intermediate repertoire, students should already have the basic ability to read the score and learn the note pitches and rhythm patterns by themselves. Also, under the instructor's guidance, the student should have the ability to illustrate the shaping of the phrase with appropriate dynamics to interpret the meaningful moments in the music. There is no doubt that music interpretation is always closely connected with harmonic analysis. Thus, students can understand the effect of tension and release in different harmonic progressions. From this point, basic theory knowledge and application of this to music interpretation requires more guidance from the instructor.

Also, according to the book *The Well -Tempered Keyboard Teacher*, Chapter 8, students must master the skill of listening to the sound of their own playing and develop an awareness of the expressive features of music as a language of communication if they are to become independent. This procedure seeks to educate students on what it means to be musical beings.¹

3. Challenge

Intermediate-level study requires a long length of process. The students need to build up solid fundamental concepts from notation, rhythm, technique, and artistry during this study process. After finishing the elementary piano method books, the student will step into a new

¹ Uszler, Marianne., Stewart Gordon, and Elyse Mach. *The Well-Tempered Keyboard Teacher*. New York: Schirmer Books, 1991.

world and leave their comfort zone. In intermediate repertoire they will encounter more complex finger pattern sequences within the large form pieces which contain more sections. Based on the article *Extended Techniques: in the Repertoire of the Intermediate Learner*, the author asserts that beginning level students gravitate towards contemporary music because of their experience with modern method books. However, there are many earlier composers, such as J.S. Bach and W.A. Mozart, that students might find challenging to comprehend. Thus, along with pieces from the Baroque, Classical, Romantic, and Impressionistic eras, the piano repertoire from the 20th century should be an essential part of the intermediate repertoire. The author also mentions that most students encounter contemporary pieces during college. It would be ideal to introduce contemporary music at an earlier stage, making it easier for students to connect with the next level smoothly through the transformation period of the intermediate level.²

Also, most of the students are teenagers through the intermediate level studying period, and the physical development during this age boosts their ability to adapt and respond to new experiences and skills. Since their brain already has an amazing ability to embrace creative activities and new challenges, it will bring a lot of benefit into their piano learning process. However, lack of patience is another factor that might happen during the teenage years. The lack of patience is a common behavior during this age. “Impatience is always in a hurry for something to start or stop. Impatience reduces tolerance for the time something takes, creating urgency for what is desired or against what is not.”³ Hence, the instructor who is teaching intermediate-level study needs to pay more attention to the mental-physical development

² Tindall-Gibson, Annie Rose. “Extended Techniques: In the Repertoire of the Intermediate Learner.” *The American music teacher* 72, no. 1 (2022): 21–23.

³ Pickhardt, Carl. 2014. “Adolescence and Impatience.” *Psychology Today*. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/surviving-your-childs-adolescence/201408/adolescence-and-impatience>.

features. Selecting repertoire with a shorter length is ideal because it can shorten the learning process and increase the passion in music for young students.

Many great composers wrote character pieces for different levels of performers. Some of the pieces are etude collections with colorful harmonies and playful melodic lines. These collections include *25 Études faciles et progressives*, Op. 100 by Friedrich Burgmüller. Also, many of the Romantic composers such as Schumann and Mendelssohn wrote numerous character pieces aimed for piano pedagogy such as Schumann's "Album for the Young". These pieces are ideally used as preparatory repertoire assigned to the students before they move on to more challenging pieces which have thicker textures. Since the intermediate level has a more extended length of study period and the students face new challenges during the learning process, the repertoire selection requires more attention and variety. To maintain the enthusiasm of intermediate-level students, it is essential to provide more repertoire options such as music from different periods, composers, countries, and cultural influence. This also requires more research and attention from instructors.

Since globalization and immigration happens all over the world, many instructors will teach students with different cultural backgrounds. It is important to teach music works from different countries to maintain diversity and creativity in the studio. There are many underrepresented music works that can be selected as piano pedagogy pieces for students to inspire their musical learning.

In my studio, many of my students are originally from mainland China, and born in America. It is very common for their parents to request that I introduce some Chinese folk music or Chinese style music as repertoire for their children. Parents are worried that their child will

lose the connection from their hometown as a second-generation immigrant. They believe that music always plays an important role in rebuilding that connection. Learning music is not limited to note playing; the deeper meaning behind the music is the most attractive topic during the learning process.

There are two categories of piano transcription work in China: transcriptions based on traditional Chinese instrument music or transcriptions based on folk music and nationalistic ideas. Since the mid 1980s to the present, which can be regarded as the new piano music era in China, increasingly more musicians have gotten the chance to study abroad to receive Western classical music training, and the cultural impact from both sides have increased the range of discovery for the new generation of musicians.⁴ Also, the Western piano technique and composition style have greatly influenced the native Chinese composer in many ways. There will be two Chinese composers and their pieces selected to be introduced in this project.

Chapter II: Introduction of harmonic style and selected Chinese Composers

1. Traditional Chinese harmony system: Pentatonic scale

Most Chinese music uses the Pentatonic scale, which is a typical scale that has similar intervallic relationships as the major scale, but it only contains five notes. The notes of this scale are called *gōng* 宫, *shāng* 商, *jué* 角, *zhǐ* 徵 and *yǔ* 羽. The earliest historical mention of the pentatonic scale comes from the books 吕氏春秋 (Master Lü's Spring and Autumn Annals)

⁴ Chiu, Kan. "Voices from the East: Culture and Expression in Contemporary Chinese Piano Music." Order No. 3394862, University of California, Los Angeles, 2009.

written by scholars 吕不韦 (Lü Buwei) in 241 B.C. and 管子 (Guanzi) and 管子 (Guan Zi) in the fourth century B.C. Guan Zi mentioned the method of adding and subtracting a third (三分损益法) and applied it to the number 81. The number 81 means superior luck, which is an auspicious number in the Chinese tradition.

Based on his research and calculation, Guan Zi was able to generate four other numbers. Together with the number 81, the five numbers correspond to the fixed do solfège names do-sol-re-la-mi in today's music system. These five notes comprise the pentatonic scale system.⁵ Each pitch of the note has their independent name, and each pitch can be regarded as a tonic along with a combination of the other notes to create different pentatonic scale systems. For example, the C Gong mood is C D E G A, and the D Gong mood is D E F-sharp A B. The main difference between the pentatonic scale compared to major and minor scales is the lack of minor second intervals. The pentatonic scale has more consonant sound effects due to thirds and sixths that are built into the scale, as opposed to the western scale system, which has dissonances associated with the minor second interval particularly with the use of the leading tone.

2. Composer background information

Zhang Zhao, a well-known Chinese composer, lecturer, and postgraduate teacher at MinZu University of China College of Music, was born in the Yunnan province in 1964. Since

⁵ Han, Norah. 2022. "A Brief History: the Study of Pitch in Ancient China." Digital Commons at Oberlin. <https://digitalcommons.oberlin.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1029&context=ost>.

Zhang Zhao has spent the past 14 years residing in the Ailao Mountains in southern Yunnan, he has had a natural setting in which to embrace the numerous genres of Chinese folk music. He was born in a musical family. At the age of 5, his mother began teaching him how to play the Yang Qin, a traditional Chinese musical instrument. He then began learning the violin at age six, the piano at age seven, and composition with his father at age eleven. At the Yunnan Literature and Art School, he studied as a piano major for five years beginning at the age of 14. He wrote a lot of works for piano and violin, art songs, and chamber ensemble at this time.

He earned a double degree in composition and piano from the MinZu University of China's Conservatory of Music in 1987. In 1998, he earned an honors degree from the Central Conservatory of Music's graduate composition department class. Zhang is a member of the Beijing Musician's Association, the Musicians Association of North America, and he was the first Chinese composer to be chosen for the Associated Board of the Royal School of Music. With scores and CDs released in Germany, Britain, and Switzerland, Zhang's works have received widespread appreciation in Europe, North America, and Southeast Asian countries. Zhang attempted to incorporate contemporary composition techniques with traditional folk tune music while including a variety of national styles and musical ideas into his composition works, which he then updated and modified as piano character pieces. These pieces not only represent several cultural characteristics but also have deep artistic importance.

Huang Huwei (1932-2019) is one of the most famous contemporary composers from China. Through his composition work, his approach of exploring Chinese-style music reflects a strong connection between Eastern and Western music. He advocated that Chinese musicians should invoke folk music with new composition techniques, since a strong national style is essential to the vitality of the Chinese culture and folk music features. In addition, Mr. Huang

studied western composition techniques and explores various approaches to create a fusion of pianism and nationalization, including the use of national folk character in his melodies, varieties of colorful harmonizing, and the well-organized structure in his work. His compositions have substantial and universal appeal to musicians.

Chapter III: Chinese culture and dialect

1. Chinese folk music region

The origins of Chinese folk songs can be traced back to the Yellow Emperor's reign.⁶ (The Yellow Emperor, formally Xuanyuan Huangdi, was the third of ancient mythological emperors, a culture hero and patron saint of Daoism.⁷) After a long history of cultural development, there are various types of Chinese folk song which reflect contrasted or similar musical features. The type of Chinese folk song can be divided by a geographical, historical, and cultural perspective. Because of the complex factors, such as population migration and the changes of the environment, it is hard to provide a specific number of genres for Chinese folk songs. Also, many Chinese folk music scholars have different opinions of how many types of Chinese folk song exist. However, most of the scholars believe that types of Chinese folk song can be divided by geography. Since the landmarks of mainland China vary from the East to the West, and the South to the North, people divide mainland China into seven cultural areas, and all of them contain different folk music characteristics.

⁶ Jianzhong Qiao. Chinese Music. Beijing: Culture and Art Publishing House, 1999. 1-61.

2. *Xiao Diao* from the Canal Towns in South of the Yangtze River

Southern China often refers to the subtropical regions of the Yangtze River, encompassing the southern Jiangsu Province and the northern Zhejiang Province. The Yangtze River provides an excellent foundation for agriculture. Numerous products are nourished by the gentle and humid atmosphere. Following the fifth century A.D., the canals, manual rivers, and channels were created, which aided in the development of water traffic and led to the formation of numerous wealthy water towns. Every home was next to an area of water that had boats traveling through it for hundreds of years, creating the distinctive sights and features of "small bridge, flowing water, and home."⁸ *Xiao Diao* can be translated as "Little folk song"; this type of music represents the attitude and temperament of people from these canal towns. *Xiao Diao* is usually performed for practical needs during daily life, such as childhood songs, lullabies, selling tunes, and singing tunes in rituals and ceremonies. The lyrics of folk tunes are typically descriptive, and the sound of the singing is delicate and tuneful, with a simple elegance. The gentle and lyrical style represents the personality of the residents from these towns in southern China. For example, the most famous *Xiao Diao* is *Jasmine Flower*.

⁸ Ruan, Yisan, and Jiancheng Dong. *Water Towns of the Yangtze River in China: Jiangnan Shui Xiang Gu Zhen / Ruan Yisan Zhu; Dong Jiancheng She*. Di 1 ban. Shanghai: Shanghai People's Fine Arts Publishing House, 2009.

Excerpt 1: Traditional Chinese Folk song *Jasmine Flower*

Mo Li Hua 茉莉花 (Jasmine Flower)

Trad. Chinese

hǎo yī duǒ měi lì de mò lì huā hǎo yī duǒ měi lì de mò lì huā
好 一 朵 美 丽 的 茉 莉 花 好 一 朵 美 丽 的 茉 莉 花

5
fēn fāng měi lì mǎn zhī yā, yòu xiāng yòu bái rén rén kuā. ràng wǒ lái jiāng
芬 芳 美 丽 满 枝 桠 又 香 又 白 人 人 夸 让 我 来 将

3. The Northern *Hao Zi* from the Chinese Northern Plain

Most of the important historical events occurred in the northern mountains and rivers, where the northern plain, the birthplace of Chinese civilization, is located. Here, there are a lot of grasslands and woodlands. The cold climate and poor living conditions have a huge influence on their culture. Due to difficulties of this natural world, people who live in the north plains have developed an independent, brave, and thrifty attitude. The folk songs of the northern plains area have a consistent, resilient, passionate, and sorrowful manner that is reflected in the lyrics. Meanwhile, the songs also have a pioneering and optimistic attitude. For example, *Hao Zi* is a traditional folk song that is sung by Yellow River boat workers.

Figure 1: Yellow River boat workers

Photo credit unknown



These workers must use all their strength to hold the tool. The folk tune that they sing during their work is helpful for them to keep up a good performance and coordinate as a team. Usually, they yell loudly with simple descriptive lyrics, and when workers join forces to move the boat, they must release the air out of their lungs. The short "Hei!" and "Ha!" accents burst out of the music alternately, and the rhythm and pulse has a straightforward energy.

4. The Northwest *Xintianyou* and the Wild character

In Northwest China, the semi-arid and semi-humid Loess Plateau is deep in the countryside, with many mountains and very few people. The landscape of the North Plateau is stunning, and its rough parts fit the style of folk songs, which are high-pitched and steady, rough and strong, and have a wide range.

Table of *Xintianyou* characteristics

Pitch	High/wide vocal range
Rhythm	Steady, often contains repetitive rhythmic patterns
Dynamic	Contrast
Lyric	Onomatopoeic words at end of phrases

Xintianyou is a popular genre of Chinese folk music, which has a contrasting style compared to Xiao Diao from the Canal Towns in South of the Yangtze. For example, “Lan Huahua” is the most famous Northwest folk music. The high range of the pitch with extended shape of the phrase makes this piece stunning. Chinese composer Lisan Wang adapted this folk tune into a contemporary piano piece.

Excerpt 2: Lisan Wang: "Lan Huahua" (1953) mm.1-11

Lento (♩=48)
Tempo rubato espressivo *pp* 汪立三 编曲

Andantino ♩=72 *p*

poco accel.

5. *Shan Ge* and Dance Music of Southwest Plateau Style

The Southwest Plateau area includes *the Yunan, SiChuan, and GuiZhou Province*. The beautiful views of the mountains and the colorful culture of national minority communities attracts visitors from all over the world.

Figure 2: Mountains and Hills view of Yunan Province



Shan Ge often refers to a form of folk music that allows working people to openly express their emotions. Traditional *Shan Ge* contains themes of love and suffering. *Shan Ge* is

frequently performed outside. The lyrics are primarily improvised, the music is loud and high-pitched, and the rhythm is free and extended. Folk song lyrics exhibit the qualities of straightforward passion, audacious imagination, and clever imagery, which are colorful and moving. For example, the most famous *Shan Ge* of YunNan Province is "Flowing Stream". The parallel phrases have alternating dynamics and pitch which create an echo effect, illustrating the vivid sound features of the mountain area.

Dance music also establishes the distinctive music features of the Southwest plateau region, especially in the Xizang community people residence area (formerly called Tibetan region). One example is the XianZi Dance. The XianZi dance is very popular in Xizang communities of Southwest China, including Sichuan, Yunnan, and other regions. XianZi is the name of string instrument, and XianZi dancers are accompanied with the XianZi playing and voices singing together. People congregate and dance in a circle at parties, weddings, and other events. XianZi is a Xizang stringed instrument, usually played by a male musician, who accompanies the lead dancer while she is singing and dancing. The posture and motions of the dance include shaking the long sleeves of her traditional costume openly and gracefully with both hands.⁹

⁹ Chinese National Intangible Culture Heritage. "XianZi Dance (KangMang XianZi Dance)." December 14, 2018.<https://www.ihchina.cn/Article/Index/detail?id=12930>.

Figure 3: Xianzi Dancer and Costume of traditional Xizang community people



The Xizang community people's clothing provides another example of their distinct artistic sensibilities. Since there is a significant temperature variation between day and night, the Tibetan people's traditional attire is suitable for their everyday needs. Women typically dress in floor-length pleated skirts, broad and long silk blouses, large waistcoats, and many colorful silk belts around the waist. Men typically dress in blouses with high necks and long sleeves similar to the female costume. They can stay warm by wearing tall fox fur hats or top hats with wide brims. When they dance, they will remove the long sleeves from the bulky coat and move to the beat of the music while wearing the long sleeves of the blouse. Additionally, as they dance with strong movements, their multicolored belts will spin.

In Xizang community culture, bowing is the appropriate gesture for expressing gratitude. As part of the Xizang people's dance, bowing usually happens as the final dance gesture with instrumental accompaniment. As a result, most Xizang folk music has a peaceful and calming conclusion. When contrasting between the authentic cadence of the western harmony system and Chinese folk music culture, here the ending chord serves a different purpose. In some of the

Xizang folk music, a strong ending is typically avoided by the performer, who instead chooses to bring the melody to a graceful, exquisite conclusion, which is matched with the dance gesture.

Here is the example of XianZi dance music, which is transcribed as piano repertoire for early intermediate-level students. This piece was collected into “Basic Piano Method Book Album 1”.

Excerpt 3: Zhao Xiaoping: XianZi Dance

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弦子舞

西藏民歌
李晓平编曲

Moderato

6. *Urtiin duu* and the NorthSteppe Landmark

Urtiin duu is one of the most significant types of the folk song in the Inner Mongolia area, which belongs to the Northern part of China as a landmark on the Steppe Route. *Urtiin duu* is a sacred form of expression that is connected to significant events and holidays, and it has a

special place in Mongolian society. “The *Urtiin duu* is a lyrical chant, which is characterized by an abundance of ornamentation, falsetto, an extremely wide vocal range and a free compositional form.”¹⁰ *Urtiin duu* has a rising melody, which is slow and steady. The performer usually wears the traditional costume and sings with *Morin Quur* accompaniment. *Morin Quur* is a traditional instrument that is also called horse-head lute.

Figure 4: Morin Quur performer.



Figure 5: Morin Quur



It is made of carved wood with a carved horse head, plaque and inscription.¹¹ The extended melodic line of *Urtiin duu* is often composed with a spirited rhythm. Also, *urtiin duu* has rich ornamentation through the melodic line, which requires the performer to sing with expressive legato. The way that people compose or perform *Urtiin duu* are tightly connected to the pastoral way of life. The lyrics of the *Urtiin duu* normally describe the view of the grasslands, the natural creatures, or a blessing to the freedom of life. For example, one of the

¹⁰ Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, *Urtiin Duu*, traditional folk long song, 2008, <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/urtiin-duu-traditional-folk-long-song-00115>

¹¹ Royal collection trust, *Morin Khuur* (horse head fiddle), 2004, <https://www.rct.uk/collection/95705/morin-khuur-horse-head-fiddle>

famous folk tunes of Inner Mongolian folk music is “γada meyiren.” This music was adapted as piano repertoire for intermediate students, and it was collected into *Basic Piano Method Book Album 1*.

Excerpt 4 “γada meyiren.” from *Basic Piano Method Book Album 1*.

嘎 达 梅 林

悲壮 内蒙民歌

The image shows a piano score for the piece '嘎达梅林' (Gada Meyiren). It is in 4/4 time and G major. The score consists of two systems of music. The first system starts with a forte (f) dynamic. The melody is primarily in the right hand, with some accompaniment in the left hand. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-5. The second system continues the piece, ending with a double bar line. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, ties, and dynamic markings.

7.Exotic and colorful style of Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region

XinJiang Uygur region has many nationalities that live in compact communities, where many cultures coexist and blend together. Due to its central location in Eurasia and the numerous "Silk Roads" that travel through it, Xinjiang has become the focal point of the fusion of Chinese and Western cultures and economics. ¹²The unique geography of the XinJiang area made it closely connected with Russia, Mongolia, Kazakhstan, India and eight other countries. The

¹² Ma, Shuhao. “The Relationship Between Traditional Music in Xinjiang and the Geographical Environment of the Gobi Desert.” *Journal of environmental and public health* 2022 (2022): 1–9.

overall pattern of Xinjiang can be summarized as “three mountains and two basins”: The Altai Mountains run through the northern part of the territory, the Kunlun Mountains run through the southern part, and the Tianshan Mountains run through the middle, forming the geomorphological pattern of Xinjiang along with the northern Junggar Basin and the southern Tarim Basin.¹³ All of these features inspired XinJiang folk music to depict colorful and distinct characters.

The folk music of the Xinjiang area contains various tonal and musical elements, and it is mainly influenced by three major systems: the Mongolian, Iranian and European music systems. The *Twelve Mukams* is a product of the Uyghur people, who over a long historical period gradually amalgamated and developed from inheriting the music of the Xinjiang province and absorbing outside art.¹⁴

Figure 6: Painting work of *Twelve Mukams* large ensemble
from Uyghur Musical Instruments



¹³ Ma, Shuhao. “The Relationship Between Traditional Music in Xinjiang and the Geographical Environment of the Gobi Desert.” *Journal of environmental and public health* 2022 (2022): 1–9.

¹⁴ Mackerras, Colin. “Traditional Uyghur Performing Arts.” *Asian music* 16, no. 1 (1985): 29–58.

Figure 7: Dancers from *Twelve Mukams*

Photographer Liang Li



Twelve Mukams is a large-scale form of Uyghur traditional classical music that mixes songs, poems, music, dance, singing, and playing. It uses various art forms such as music, literature, dance, and drama to express the colorful life and emotional character of the Uyghur people. The XinJiang folk music reflects the cultural diversity, combined with symmetrical structure and rhythmic patterns, and the melody contains various characters including lyrical and energetic styles. And the dance music is lively and spontaneous, which reflects the positive outlook of the native people from the region.

Furthermore, the Tajik and Kazakh folk song has many diverse harmonic styles. In addition to the pentatonic scale, major and minor diatonic modes are also present in their folk music. For example, the most famous folk music from the Kazakh people of the XinJiang area is *Mayila*. There are multiple arrangements of this folk tune, and some Chinese composers have transcribed it for art song, solo piano, and as theme and variations. I will provide a deep analysis of the transcription from Chinese composer Zhang Zhao in Chapter IV. His arrangement is quite suitable for intermediate-level piano students.

Chapter IV: Analysis of selected Chinese character pieces

I. Melodies of China Arrangement by ZhangZhao

1. Melodies of China No.6 Mayeela

Mayeela is a typical Kazakh folk song, which is one of the most popular folk tunes in XinJiang Uygur region. The pastoral way of life that Kazakhs lead is reflected in their positive attitude in their folk music. Mayeela is the name of a Kazakh girl, and she was reputed to have a beautiful voice. The lyric of this folk song is like an introduction of herself and it reflects her optimistic and energetic personality.

The opening section is marked *Vivace*, the fire-like tempo indicates the excited mood throughout the whole piece. The introduction contains eight measures of alternate double-notes, which requires a non-legato of touch technique. The melody starts at measure 9 in the top voice. The melodic line is hidden within the thicker texture here, but the sound from the high register can be easily heard by the performer and the audience. The balance between top voice and the chordal accompaniment requires well-controlled fingers with a close position approach and a flexible wrist.

The melody of this piano piece comes from the art song *Mayeela*, and the composer transcribes this art song as a piano work. The composer keeps the original melody as the top voice, and the dynamic marks through the phrase represents an excited atmosphere especially at the opening section. Even though the melody is made up of double notes, the performer needs to use a flexible wrist and steady fingertips to emphasize the top note's legato tone. This is an essential technique for an intermediate-level students since it can help them get ready for certain

large-scale pieces such as Chopin, Schumann, or Brahms compositions where the melody is constantly hidden by the chordal phrase or multiple voices are intertwined throughout the piece.

Except 5: Zhang Zhao: *Melodies of China* No.6 "Mayeela" mm.1-11

The musical score for Except 5 is in 3/4 time. It consists of two systems. The first system is in bass clef and starts with a forte (*f*) dynamic. The second system is in treble clef and starts with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The music features a mix of chords and melodic lines, with a dissonant harmonic color in the accompaniment.

The contrast of dynamic from the opening section represents a lovely and lyrical character, which requires a sensitive control of the sound for all performers. The hairpin dynamic through this phrase indicates the agogic accent, and the dissonant harmonic color of the accompaniment creates an exotic mood here.

Except 6: Zhang Zhao: *Melodies of China* No.6 "Mayeela" mm.32-38

The musical score for Except 6 is in 3/4 time. It consists of two systems. The first system is in treble clef and starts with a mezzo-piano (*mp*) dynamic. The second system is in bass clef and starts with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic. The music features a mix of chords and melodic lines, with a dissonant harmonic color in the accompaniment.

Using Mayeela as a transitional piece can assist students to prepare for Villa Lobos *Baby's Family* Book 1, No. 7 "O polichinelo." The opening of both pieces is made up of staccato chords that are repeated in a fast tempo.

Except 7: *Baby's Family* Book 1 No.7 "O polichinelo" mm.1-5

Presto No. 7 of The Baby's Family (Vol. 1, 1918)

The musical score consists of two systems of two staves each. The first system contains measures 1-4, and the second system contains measures 5-8. The right hand (treble clef) plays chords with fingerings 1-4 and accents (>). The left hand (bass clef) plays chords with dynamic markings (p) and staccato articulation. Asterisks (*) are placed below the first and third measures of each system.

The Villa Lobos edition necessitates a refined finger technique with appropriate accented notes in the high register. The students should spend more time practicing slowly to get better with the finger technique, such as changing the position of the hands with good coordination between the two hands.

2. *Melodies of China* No.7 “Flowing Stream”, Arrangement by Zhang Zhao

“Flowing Stream” is a typical *Shan Ge* from Yunnan Province, which exemplifies the southwest plateau style. This folk song is originally from Midu city in Yunnan.¹⁵ This song is about love, and the lyrics depict a girl's unending love to her beloved who is far away. The rhythm is extended and free, and the melody is very lyrical with sensitive emotional expression. As one of the most well-known Chinese folk songs, it has been arranged multiple times as instrumental pieces, music ensemble pieces, and art songs with different styles. It is more acceptable to compare this love song to large works from the romantic period that have a related theme and poetic style, such as Liszt *Sonetto 123 del Petrarca* or Schubert *Licht und liebe*. I highly suggest that the performer listens to the vocal version of this piece before learning the instrumental version. It would be helpful for them to represent the lyrical sound with sensitive emotional changes within the phrase.

This piece can be divided into two sections. The same melodic line is repeated in the higher octave in the second section, with a new accompaniment pattern bringing out different layers and musical style. The most remarkable feature of this arrangement is the harmony. The composer includes several dissonant harmonies, which adds mystery and exoticism to the music.

¹⁵ Shi, Jiazi, "East Meets West: A Musical Analysis of Chinese Sights and Sounds, by Yuankai Bao" (2016). LSU Doctoral Dissertations. 1762.
https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_dissertations/1762

Except 8: *Melodies of China* No.6 “Flowing Stream” mm.1-6

The musical score for Except 8 is written for piano. It begins in 4/4 time with a tempo marking of 'Andante'. The right hand plays a melodic line with a 'mp' (mezzo-piano) dynamic and 'espress.' (espressivo) articulation. The left hand provides a harmonic accompaniment with chords and moving lines. The score is divided into two systems, with the first system containing measures 1-3 and the second system containing measures 4-6. The key signature has one sharp (F#).

For technical training, the composer places several pedal notes for the harmonic progression (example, mm.15-17). This accompanying pattern incorporates the simple texture of the melody, which requires a good control of sound balance with independent fingers and flexible wrist.

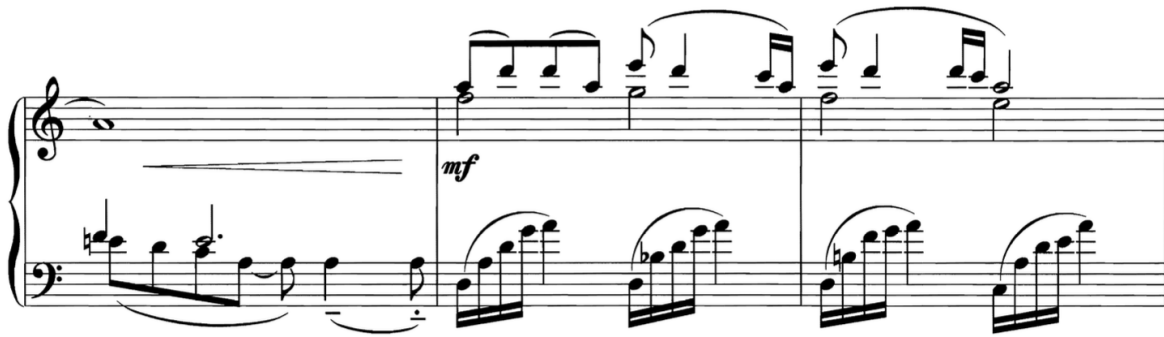
Except 9: *Melodies of China* No.6 “Flowing Stream” mm. 14-16

The musical score for Except 9 shows measures 14-16. The right hand features a melodic line with arpeggiated patterns, while the left hand provides a harmonic accompaniment. The time signature is 4/4. The key signature has one sharp (F#).

The opening section has been revised with groups of arpeggio patterns as accompaniment at the ending of the second section to depict the sound of a flowing stream. This requires a natural wrist

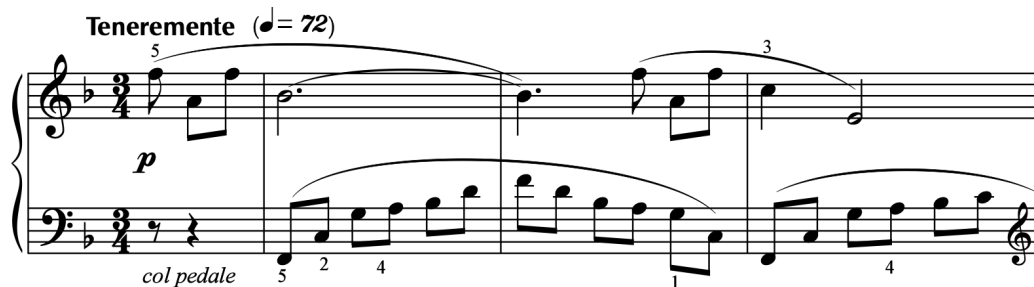
movement with finger crossing technique. In order to create a connected sound, the instructor must help students discover an effective fingering and add the sustain pedal appropriately.

Except 10: *Melodies of China* No.6 “Flowing Stream” mm. 17-19



Another approach to make the learning process easier for intermediate-level students is to assign the appropriate repertoire that fits their learning style with a mild challenge. Intermediate-level etudes are an acceptable option since most of them are designed as teaching material. Examples include *Etude for the Intermediate Pianist* No.2 by Jeff Manookian and the *Etude Op. 849* No.15 by Czerny. Both etudes feature an accompaniment section with a similar arpeggio pattern. For intermediate-level students, these two pieces are perfect for improving their finger technique before applying it to more difficult pieces.

Except 11: *Etude for the Intermediate Pianist* No.2 by Jeff Manookian mm.1-3



Except 12: *Etude Op. 849* No. 15 by Carl Czerny (second section)



II. Piano suite: *Paintings of Sichuan* by HuWei Huang (1958)

Paintings of Sichuan is one of the most popular piano suites in the Chinese contemporary repertoire. The composer draws inspiration from the breathtaking scenery in Sichuan, his hometown. Each section highlights important regional cultural characteristics. The Han and Tibetan populations are the most numerous in Sichuan Province. Huang Huwei's inspiration for this suite came from the folk music of these two ethnic groups.

The suite contains six movements, all of which are based on Sichuan folk tunes. The six folk songs in the suite were all renamed with new titles to describe the landscapes of Sichuan and the people's lifestyles more adequately. Some of these pieces were collected into the repertoire list of the China Musicians Association piano examination and China Central Music Conservatory's music examination. Recently, G. Henle Verlag, one of the most renowned music score publishers, released a collection of Chinese contemporary works from the 20th century. This collection includes the piano suite, categorized at a level 4 of difficulty. It is obvious to find out that the composer combines the various characteristics of folk song and dance pieces with pianistic compositional ideas. These pieces serve as excellent examples for

players to explore the approach of using imagination to connect sound and visual arts. This approach contributes to a better interpretation of the performance throughout these pieces¹⁶ In the following section, I will give further information about the selected movement from the piano suite, and analysis through it from a piano teaching and pedagogy perspective.

No.1 Morning Song

'Morning song' is the first movement of this piano suite; the melody is adapted from the folk tune *Mowing song*. This folk tune originally comes from *Tong Jiang* city of Sichuan.

Excerpt 13: Mowing song, Sichuan folk tune

割 草 歌

1 = C $\frac{2}{4}$ 四川通江

i 6	i 6 6	5 6	i 6i 2 i
清 早	起 来(嘛)	八 个)	去 割 草(哟)
6 i	2 2 i	2 6 i i 2	6 6 i i
露 水	汪 汪(嘛)	三 八 二 十 四)	割 不 到(哟)
			六 八 四 十 八)。

注：这首割草歌的衬词，用数字组成，唱起来很有风趣，又可以使儿童加强“数”的观念，因此，它又是很好的识数歌。

Huang added ornamentation notes at the higher register to describe the grass covered with beads of dew. This short piece can be simply divided as two sections. After the opening section depicts the main melody from mm.1-4, the phrase repeats the opening section an octave higher from mm.5-9.

¹⁶ Cheng, H. and He, S.F. (2021) Review of the National Style Research of Chinese Piano Solo Music in the 1980s. *Open Access Library Journal*, 8, 1-7. doi: 10.4236/oalib.1108211.

Excerpt 14: Piano suite: Paintings of Sichuan, No.1 Morning song

组曲——巴蜀之画
PIANO SUITE : PAINTINGS OF SICHUAN
晨 歌
Morning Song

黄虎威曲
Huang Huwei
(1958)

Adagio, frescamente (♩ = 54)

mp

ppp

mp

ppp

mp poco rit.

ppp

Huang's compositional approach represents a significant Chinese art philosophy, *ShanShui* (山水). The notion of *ShanShui*, is often seen translated as “Landscape” in English. The term *ShanShui* consists of two characters, *shan* as mountain and *shui* as water.¹⁷ This concept hugely influenced many writers, artists, painters and musicians, and can be recognized as one of the core values of Chinese aesthetic ideology. In the area of painting, the function of *ShanShui* is to “free the spirit”.¹⁸ *ShanShui* paintings are less about illustrating a landscape

¹⁷ Wang, Jing. “Shanshui-Thought in Experimental Music Practices: China and Beyond.” *Organised sound : an international journal of music technology* 25, no. 3 (2020): 292–301.

¹⁸ Ibid.

accurately and more about conveying the artist's feelings or inner experiences. A similar idea can be translated to the musical world, indicated by freedom of rhythm and expression of emotion throughout the melody.

Figure 8: Chinese Landscape Painting by Jiujiang Wang



Throughout this piece, the composer aimed to incorporate *ShanShui* concepts with the folk tune. The dynamic marking indicates the agogic accent at mm. 3-4 and mm.7-8. The shifting rhythmic pattern with extended shape of the phrase also represents the expressive musical character.

This movement has a short length, but it contains various musical materials and elements. It can be considered as the introduction piece to assign to the student before learning Debussy's "The Little Shepherd" from *Children's Corner*. The introduction section shares a similar rhythmic pattern with Morning song. The switching of the rhythmic material from the duple and triplet eighth note requires a less driven forward motion.

Excerpt 15: Debussy *Children's Corner*, "The Little Shepherd," mm.1-4

Très modéré

p *mf* *p*

Excerpt 16: Debussy *Children's Corner*, "The Little Shepherd," mm.5-11

Plus mouvementé

p *p* *pp* *ppp*

Cédez - - //

Additionally, the similarity of modal harmonic style and pentatonic scale correlates the relationship between these two pieces of music. The frequent switch from eighth note to triplet and the ornamentation in both pieces require a good understanding of subdivision and delicate touch to maintain the singing quality. The Morning Song is shorter with no key signature, which provides an ideal exercise for the student to get familiar with the complicated rhythm pattern with melodic singing quality.

No.2 Echoes in Deep Valley

The melody for Echoes in Deep Valley was inspired by the Xizang folk song, *Snow on the Mountain, Like a Flower*. The repetition of the phrase is marked by contrasted dynamic markings, which indicate the echo effect of the deep valley. The parallel fourth and fifth harmonic progression is employed repeatedly in the accompanying part throughout the entire song. In Chinese folk music, a notable feature is the use of pure and consonant tones. Most Chinese folk compositions adhere to a single mode, characterized by a sweet and melodious sound. Unlike the typical harmonic structures found in Western music, Chinese folk pieces often feature a subdominant harmony. This absence of tonic-dominant tension contributes to a relaxed atmosphere within musical phrases. Furthermore, it requires a sensitive control from active fingers and flexible wrist. Besides the finger technique, following the pedal instruction with careful control of the sound is essential for the student to make the learning progression successful. This composition is a great approach to introduce the student to *una corda*. The instructor can easily guide the student in understanding the function of the *una corda*, as well as connecting the idea to this piece's content.

Excerpt 17: Piano suite: Paintings of Sichuan, No.2 Echoes in Deep Valley mm.1-12

空谷回声
Echoes in Deep Valley

Moderato cantabile (♩=80)

mf *ppp* *mf*

una corda *tre corde*

7

ppp *mf*

una corda *tre corde*

This piece is a great introduction for students in preparation for sonatas by Domenico Scarlatti. Since the parallel phrase with echo sound effect is a significant characteristic of Scarlatti sonatas, the clear contrast of dynamics and sounds requires a delicate control of the keyboard. Slow practice with careful listening is key to approaching the contrasts in sound. The instructor needs to provide more demonstration on this certain section during the lesson, or the instructor should also consider distributing the different voice parts and collaborating with students to identify the differences in the dynamics of certain phrases. For example, the opening section of sonata K.380 in E major fits well with this contrast sound approach. The first four measures are composed by two parts of a juxtaposed section with a similar melody. Even though Scarlatti did not indicate the dynamic marking on the score, the repeating phrase needs to be interpreted with contrasted sound.

Excerpt 18: D. Scarlatti Keyboard Sonata K.380, mm.1-4



No.4 Dance with Three- Sfring lute

Dance with Three Sfring lute was inspired by Tibetan traditional dance. The name of this dance is called ' ye' in Tibetan language. It was usually performed when people would gather and celebrate the ending of the work day . There is a mural in the Mogul caves named "Zhang Yichao's Patrol," which captures a realistic image of the Ye dancer and their movements.

Figure 9: *Mogul caves paintings Zhang Yichao's Patrol*



Long-sleeved dancers in colorful costumes wave their arms with expression. This demonstrates the long history of cultural connections between Xizang community people and the Han people. This traditional dance has only one instrument as accompaniment which is the Three-Sfring lute, which is like the Erhu. The dance motions are graceful and free, the male dancer represents a powerful and masculine style. In contrast, the movements of female dancers are beautiful, with expressiveness and joy. There is a definite difference in the range of motion between male and female dancers, even though they perform many of the same steps in the dance.

The composer cleverly captures the characters of *Ye* dance and transcribes the contrasting styles of the male and female dancers into piano pieces. The first six measures represent the lively male dancers, with *mf* as the dynamic marking. In the following four measures, the dynamic marks switches to piano with a *dolce* character, which expresses the female dancer's motion with a more free and delicate style. For the pianist, this section requires a delicate control of sounds. Also, the contrasted articulation of two voices through this section requires attention from the piano student. Slow practice with separate hands is a wonderful strategy for all the pieces that have multiple technical difficulties such as this.

Except 19: Piano suite: Paintings of Sichuan, No.4 Dance with Three sfring lute

The image shows a musical score for a piano piece. It is titled 'Moderato (♩ = 80)'. The score is in 3/4 time and consists of two systems of music. The first system has four measures, and the second system has four measures, starting with a measure number '5'. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The first system is marked with *mf*. The second system is marked with *p* and *dolce*. The score features a mix of eighth and sixteenth notes, with some measures containing chords. The bass line is more rhythmic, while the treble line is more melodic and expressive.

Since this piece contains imitative melodic lines between the bass and the top voice, it would be ideal to extend future piano study by learning the two voice counterpoint pieces by J. S. Bach or any other Baroque composers. However, the instructor needs to help the student analyze the score before playing. Discovering and deciphering the melodic line is a good way to understand the form and the texture.

The articulation notation in this movement includes a variety of expressions, including staccato chords, slurs with sustained pedal notes, and legato phrases. All these notations represent the piece's changing moods and colors, and the staccato notes need to be performed with energy and colorful characteristics. For the goal of reinforcing staccato technique for students, the instructor can introduce Dmitri Kabalevsky's *Clowns*. Students will find it straightforward to incorporate the same concepts into this piece.

Except 20: Dmitri Kabalevsky *Clowns*

Clowns

from Twenty- Four Easy Pieces

Dmitri Kabalevsky

Allegro

mf

f *p*

5 1 5 1

No.6 Night Gathering at Aba

Night gathering at Aba is a dance piece, which is adapted from Sichuan Tibetan people who live in the Aba area. The name of their dance is *Zhuo*. The main movement in this type of

dancing involve waving the hands in front of the body, twisting the hips, crouching, and turning around. The basic rhythm usually follows a 2/4 meter. The dance posture is powerful and unrestricted, and the move of this dance indicates a vigorous and passionate characteristic. The composer captures the features of the *Zhuo* dance and transcribes it into a delicate piano piece, including the rhythm and movements of the dancers.

The accompaniment pattern in the left hand in "Aba Night Party" symbolizes the rhythm of the drum beat as the residents of the Aba area engage in dancing and singing, promoting a joyful and welcoming atmosphere. Furthermore, the dynamic range was extended from *f* to *pp*, indicating a passionate and wild dance style. Since there is a series of accent notes marked *Sfz* on the weak beat, the piece captures the audience's attention with this unusual rhythmic pattern. For the performer, it is a challenge to bring out the different layers of sound with various dynamic markings. I highly suggest the student and teacher to watch the dance video to absorb the unique style of this type of dance.

Like the *Dance with Three- Sfring lute* (which was discussed in the previous section, both of these two dance pieces require a well-prepared technique of finger staccato. Before learning *Night Gathering at Aba*, the instructor can consider the Tchaikovsky *Album for the Young No.13 Kamarinskaia* as the introduction piece to prepare for the staccato technique. In *Kamarinskaia*, the staccato melody of the top voice with dotted slur comprises the main motif of the first section. The chordal accompaniment of the left hand requires a flexible wrist with non-legato sound. Overall, the length of this piece is shorter compared to the *Night Gathering at Aba*, and both pieces share a similar dancing character with fast tempo.

Figure 21: Tchaikovsky *Album for the Young No.13 Kamarinskaia*



Chapter V: Bridge from Eastern to Western piano music

Pentatonic scales do not only exist in Chinese folk music. We can find that the pentatonic scale has been used by numerous composers, particularly in folk traditions, including Celtic, gospel, ancient Greek, Afro-Caribbean, Chinese, and jazz. The pentatonic scale is used in the tuning of the Javanese Gamelan.¹⁹ Impressionist composer Debussy first heard the gamelan in the 1889 International Exposition in Paris, and this experience triggered his inspiration and involvement with Eastern and Asian musical languages. He composed the piano suite *Estampes* in 1903, and the first piece “Pagodes” is based on the pentatonic scale. Although “Pagodes” is firmly structured in a Western form both structurally and harmonically, it is written in clear mimicry of gamelan music. To enhance the “Oriental flavor,” the work incorporates many pentatonic scale structures and is resonant and percussive like a gamelan.

¹⁹ Interlude, and Interlude. “The Hungarians and Chinese Are Related — The Pentatonic Scale.” *Interlude HK Limited*, January 6, 2022. <https://interlude.hk/the-hungarians-and-chinese-are-related-the-pentatonic-scale/>.

There are many similarities between this piece and Chinese folk music, especially the improvisational features of the *ShanGe* style. The melody of both pieces contains an attractive melodic line with colorful harmonic progressions, and the emotional characters with imagination symbols within the phrases, create ample space for performers to express themselves. All of these pieces require a delicate sound control with appropriate balance between melody and accompaniment. Debussy treated individual harmony with specific color, and the switching of the rhythmic material indicates the improvisational features. These characters were also mentioned in the *Shan Ge* and *Xintianyou* style from Chapter III.

The historical folk music of the Hungarians is also significant. Hungarian composer Zoltán Kodály and Béla Bartók traveled to the country's outlying regions, collecting, classifying, and recording Hungarian folk music. Since most of them have only been passed down orally, the collating and transcribing took a great deal of effort. One of the most distinctive types of Hungarian folk music is Romani dance music. The Romani music from Hungary is distinctly different, and it has a romantic, exotic flavor. The so-called Hungarian minor scale, which is used in Romani folk music, has seven notes, but there are different spaces between them.

The third piece from Romanian Folk Dances, Sz.56 is a typical Romani dance piece, which is called Stamping Dance (Pe Loc / Topogó) - Andante. The B minor key center reflects the atmosphere of this piece, and the phrase structure can be simply divided into four measures as one group. The ornamentation on the downbeat creates an uncertain mood here. Coincidentally, a similar folk tune exists in Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region in China. One of the most famous Tajik folk songs, called *Why are the flowers so red*, represents a similar style compared to the *Stamping Dance*. They both have the same key signature, four measure phrase structure, high

ornamentation, repetitive pedal note and exotic and sorrowful melody. Even though the distance between these two regions exceeds 15,000 kilometers, the music ties them in an invisible way.

Except 22: Bela Bartok: "Romanian Folk Dances", Sz.56

3. Der Stampfer. – Topogó. – Pe loc.**)
 Andante. (♩ = 112.)

Except 23: Zhang Zhao: "Why are the flower so red", mm.1-11

8. 花儿为什么这样红
 Why Are the Flowers So Red

塔吉克族民歌
 雷振邦编曲
 张朝改编

Andante

Conclusion

Exploring new ideas in piano pedagogy involves combining traditional methods with innovative approaches to enhance learning, making it more engaging, effective, and adaptable to the individual needs. Learning more contemporary works is helpful to expand the repertoire across various genres and expose students to a wide range of musical styles. Also, it will broaden their musical horizons and helps them embrace diverse features and finger techniques.

Incorporating more contemporary pieces aligns well with this approach, especially given their complex, irregular, or syncopated rhythms that demand precise finger control and timing. The intricate textures and patterns in contemporary pieces make them excellent for technical training, particularly for developing a high degree of finger independence. Practicing these works can strengthen weaker fingers and improve overall control.

Young kids, often rebellious and naughty, find 'ugly' things more interesting compared to what is typical. These 'ugly' things can have a unique appeal or humorous aspect for children. Most adults appreciate humor that involves exaggeration or comic portraiture. However, children view life from a completely different perspective. To them, 'nothing is quite so funny as seeing what a thing "should be" while observing how far it has gone astray.'²⁰ Based on my teaching experience, most young kids show significant interest in contemporary pieces with dissonant sounds, especially when the instructor encourages them to 'make some ugly sounds on the piano' or 'play this accent note more aggressively.' These ritualistic and barbaric characteristics, typical in many contemporary works, are easily identifiable by students during creative lesson activities.

²⁰ Merchant, Louisa P. "A Child's Sense of Humor." *The Elementary English Review* 17, no. 1 (1940): 15–27. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41381659>.

Beyond the folk character pieces discussed throughout this document, a wealth of fantastic Chinese contemporary repertoire is currently being explored and researched. These pieces reflect a balance between musical concepts and finger technique, making them exceptionally suitable for students of all levels to learn and master. Furthermore, their diverse styles and elements, including influences from dance, art, and cultural features, enrich these compositions. This variety allows for an integrated approach to music education, linking it with other disciplines to offer a more comprehensive learning experience.

The methodology presented in this document commences with an exploration of the cultural background, followed by an in-depth analysis of the structure, rhythm, and harmonies, as well as a thorough score excerpts of technical aspects. This is succeeded by a detailed discussion of specific difficulties encountered in the repertoire and recommendations for both students and instructors as preparation and interpretation. This approach ensures a comprehensive understanding and an insightful analysis of the musical works under consideration. Additionally, this methodology can be applied to many contemporary piano works from other countries and composers.

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