

AN INSTRUCTIONAL APPROACH TO INTRODUCING TWENTIETH-CENTURY PIANO
MUSIC TO PIANO STUDENTS FROM BEGINNING TO ADVANCED LEVELS: A
GRADED REPERTOIRE FOR MASTERING THE CHALLENGES
POSED BY LOGAN SKELTON'S *CIVIL WAR VARIATIONS*

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Beginning and intermediate piano students typically study the repertoire of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This pedagogical approach leaves them underprepared to approach compositions written since the latter part of the twentieth-century which are significantly different in terms of harmony, rhythm, meter, and compositional procedure. Therefore, a step-by-step method is necessary to prepare a student for the challenges of learning twentieth and twenty-first century piano music.

Civil War Variations (1988), by Logan Skelton, is an excellent example of a piece that presents a number of challenges characteristically found in late twentieth-century piano music. The twenty-five variations that comprise the work incorporate a series of twentieth-century musical techniques, namely complex rhythms, extreme dissonance, frequent metric changes, dissonant counterpoint, the inclusion of blues scales and rhythms, and new notations. The purpose of this study is to identify the technical, musical, structural and notational challenges posed by a work such as Logan Skelton's *Civil War Variations*; examination of this piece will lead to suggestions regarding repertoire that a teacher may assign to beginning, intermediate, and advanced students in order to prepare them logically and in a step-by-step fashion to cope with and meet the challenges posed by this and other compositions having similar characteristics.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Beginning and intermediate piano students typically study the repertoire of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This pedagogical approach leaves them underprepared to approach compositions written since the latter part of the twentieth-century which are significantly different in terms of harmony, rhythm, meter, and compositional procedure. Therefore, a step-by-step method is necessary to prepare a student for the challenges of learning twentieth and twenty-first century piano music. Teachers and pedagogues acknowledge the need for a pedagogical method that addresses the performance of late twentieth-century music. Alice Canaday states that changes in musical language should result in the broadening and re-definition of teaching systems to include the multiplicity and diversity of late twentieth-century music.¹ Ellen Thompson also notes “reading contemporary music will be either a discouraging or disastrous experience if it is not accompanied or preceded by an academic knowledge of its theoretical content and rigorous drills for the hand.”²

As a teacher, it is necessary to approach twentieth and twenty-first century piano music at the beginning level in order that a child becomes accustomed to the vocabulary of contemporary piano music. Children easily absorb everything they learn. They are more open to learning twentieth-century piano music techniques such as polychords, non-tertian chords, and meter changes because they have not yet become entrenched in the traditional musical and technical vocabulary of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Civil War Variations (1988), by Logan Skelton, is an excellent example of a piece that presents a number of challenges characteristically found in late twentieth-century piano

¹ Alice Canaday, *Contemporary Music and the Pianist: A Guidebook of Resources and Materials* (Port Washington, NY: Alfred Music, 1974), 4.

² Ellen Thompson, *Teaching and Understanding Contemporary Piano Music* (San Diego, California: Kjos West, 1976), 16.

music. The twenty-five variations that comprise the work incorporate a series of twentieth-century musical techniques, namely complex rhythms, extreme dissonance, frequent metric changes, dissonant counterpoint, the inclusion of blues scales and rhythms, and new notations. The purpose of this study is to identify the technical, musical, structural and notational challenges posed by a work such as Logan Skelton's *Civil War Variations*; examination of this piece will lead to suggestions regarding repertoire that a teacher may assign to beginning, intermediate, and advanced students in order to prepare them logically and in a step-by-step fashion to cope with and meet the challenges posed by this and other compositions having similar characteristics.

CHAPTER 2

THE CHALLENGES POSED BY LOGAN SKELTON'S *CIVIL WAR VARIATIONS*

Civil War Variations presents numerous challenges to the pianist in terms of harmony, rhythm, meter, dissonance counterpoint, elements of blues, and notation.

2.1 Technical and Musical Challenges

2.1.1 Harmony

One of the challenges faced by the pianist while first learning *Civil War Variations* is Skelton's continuous use of non-tertian chords such as tertian chords with added notes, secundal or quartal harmony, percussive use of harmony, and polychords.³ Those non-tertian chords are challenges to beginning students because the sound is quite dissonant. In addition, they do not fit into the traditional harmonic structure which is taught to younger piano students. This makes learning and memorizing more difficult than it would be, for example, to learn a Clementi sonatina. From a teacher's standpoint, the difficulty lies with the awkward hand positions. It is a teacher's task to help the beginning students identify the pitch materials in non-tertian chords in such a way that memorization is easier. Tertian chords with added notes may be found in variation 5, variation 6, and variation 15. The chords in variation 5 are tertian chords with added 4th. The chords in variation 6 and 15 are tertian chords with added 2nd and 4th (see Examples 2-1, 2-2, and 2-3).

³ In the twentieth century, composers used the piano as a percussion instrument. Non-functional harmonies along with the use of a percussive approach to the instrument were the devices used to achieve this effect.

Example 2-1. Tertian chords with added 4th in Var. 5 from *Civil War Variations*

Var. 5
Martial

ff pesante *simile* *simile* *ffz*

A-flat minor+4th(D-flat) G-flat minor+4th(C-flat) A-flat minor+4th(D-fla)
E-flat major+4th(A-flat) D-flat minor+4th(G-flat) F-flat minor+4th(A)

Example 2-2. Tertian chords with added 2nd and 4th in Var. 6 from *Civil War Variations*

Var. 6

A-flat minor 7+4th(D-flat)
sub. mp ped.

D-flat minor 7+2nd+4th(E-flat,G-flat) E-flat major+2nd+4th(F,E-flat)
ped. simile

A-flat minor+4th(D-flat)

Example 2-3. Tertian chords with added 2nd and 4th in Var. 15 from *Civil War Variations*

Var. 15
Exhausted but concentrated (♩ = ca. 112)

mp *mp* *simile*

A-flat minor+2nd_4th(B-flat, D-flat) A-flat min7+2nd+4th (B-flat, D-flat)
A-flat minor+2nd_4th(B-flat, D-flat) E-flat min&+4th(A-flat)

Harmonic intervals of seconds, fourths, and fifths are considered to be stable and complete in twentieth-century music.⁴ For example, secundal, or quartal harmonies appear without resolution in variation 14 and variation 22 (see Examples 2-4 and 2-5).

Example 2-4. Secundal and quartal harmony in Var. 22 from *Civil War Variations*

The image shows a musical score for Variation 22 from *Civil War Variations*. The score is in 3/4 time and consists of two systems of staves. The first system starts at measure 268 and includes markings for *molto meno mosso*, *accel.*, and *Molto allegro* (♩ = ca. 168). The second system starts at measure 271. Red circles highlight specific intervals in the upper staff of both systems, labeled as "Secundal harmony". Blue ovals highlight specific intervals in the lower staff of both systems, labeled as "Quartal harmony". The word *simile* appears in both systems, and a dynamic marking of *f* is present in the second system.

Example 2-5. Quartal harmony in Var. 14 from *Civil War Variations*

The image shows a musical score for Variation 14 from *Civil War Variations*. The score is in 4/4 time and consists of two systems of staves. The first system starts at measure 167 and includes markings for *Grandioso* (♩ = ca. 116) and *sfz*. The second system starts at measure 169 and includes the marking *f strong and clear*. A red circle highlights a specific interval in the lower staff of the first system, labeled as "Interval of 4th" and "Quartal harmony".

With regard to pianistic sonority, the twentieth-century saw a redefinition of the piano as a percussive instrument, leading composers to demand a more aggressive touch from pianists. Percussive use of harmonies may be found in variation 12, combined with a demand for brutal sounds and complicated rhythms, and changes of register.

⁴ Thompson, 84.

Example 2-6. Percussive use of harmony in Var. 12 from *Civil War Variations*

Var. 12
With energy and precision ($\text{♩} = \text{ca. } 84$)

141 15th complicated rhythms

143 15th changing register

144 15th

Skelton also uses polychords. In variation 24, for example, each hand plays a different chord. The right hand plays a C major chord, and D-flat and F, and simultaneously, the left hand plays A half-diminished 7th chord, and D and F-sharp.

Example 2-7. Polychords in Var. 24 from *Civil War Variations*

228 C major

230 D-flat, F

A half diminished 7th

D, F-sharp

(8^{va})

2.1.2 Rhythm

Challenging rhythmic features of *Civil War Variations* include unpredictable rhythmic patterns and shifted accents. The unpredictable and complex rhythmic patterns make it difficult initially to find the strong beats and weak beats, as well as to identify phrase lengths. Once a phrase length can be determined, it is immediately easier to negotiate the complicated rhythms. Teachers may introduce irregular rhythmic patterns to beginning

students, using such a piece, Adler’s *Gradus* I, no.9. Clapping rhythms first before they play will be helpful to understand complicated rhythms.

In variation 9 from *Civil War Variations*, the rhythms in the left hand are unpredictable and sometimes feature accents. Irregular rhythmic patterns also appear in variation 12 (see Examples 2-8 and 2-9).

Example 2-8. Irregular rhythmic patterns in the left hand in Var. 9 from *Civil War Variations*

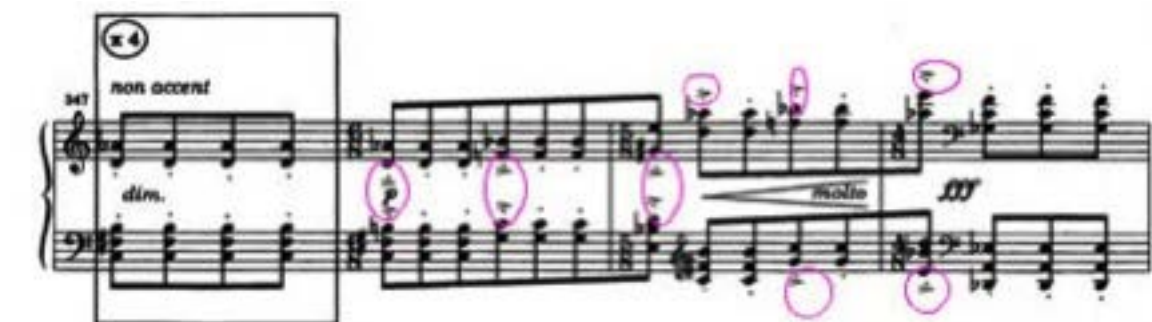


Example 2-9. Irregular rhythmic patterns in Var. 12 from *Civil War Variations*



The displacement of accents is known as ‘shifted accents’. Unlike syncopations, shifted accents create rhythmic patterns that are different from the metric division.⁵ For example, from mm. 348 to mm. 350 in variation 24, it sounds like 6/8 and 3/4 because of the shifted accents, although the meters are 6/8 and 5/8.

Example 2-10. Displacement of rhythm by means of shifted accent and meter change in variation 24 from *Civil War Variations*



⁵ Thompson, 53.

2.1.3 Meter

Asymmetric meters, unusual meters, and meter changes appear in *Civil War Variations*. Students who are not accustomed to meter changes are frequently confused when it comes to counting beats, keeping a steady pulse, and finding the phrase lengths. Learning the beats by clapping and counting out loud are good ways to start.

In variations 17 to 21, for example, Logan Skelton uses asymmetric meters such as 7/8 and 5/8 and the unusual meter, 6+2/8. Meter changes occur in every measure (see Examples 2-11, 2-12).

Example 2-11. Asymmetric meters and meter change in variation 17 from *Civil War Variations*

The image shows a musical score for "Var. 17 Mirror" from "Civil War Variations". The score is in 2/8 time and is marked "With energy and precision" with a tempo of quarter note = ca. 126. The piece is in a minor key and features a complex, asymmetric meter. The score is divided into two systems. The first system contains four measures, and the second system contains four measures. Blue circles are drawn around the time signatures in each measure, highlighting the changes: 7/8, 5/8, 7/8, 5/8, 7/8, 5/8, 7/8, 5/8. The score includes a piano (p) dynamic marking and a "lunga" marking. The notation includes eighth and sixteenth notes, rests, and a fermata.

Example 2-12. Unusual meters in variation 17 from *Civil War Variations*

The image shows a musical score for "Var. 17 Mirror" from "Civil War Variations". The score is in 2/8 time and is marked "ten. a tempo" and "molto". The piece is in a minor key and features a complex, asymmetric meter. The score is divided into two systems. The first system contains four measures, and the second system contains four measures. Red circles are drawn around the time signatures in the first two measures of the first system, highlighting the unusual meters: 6+2/8 and 6+2/8. The score includes a piano (p) dynamic marking and a "molto" marking. The notation includes eighth and sixteenth notes, rests, and a fermata.

2.2 Structural Challenges

2.2.1 Dissonant Counterpoint

Ellen Thompson states “modern polyphony has been stripped of such controls as consonant intervals permissible only on strong beats and allows for any intervals to be

prominent.”⁶ In Variation 10 and Variations 17-19 of *Civil War Variations*, Skelton makes use of such techniques as round, mirror, inverted mirror, and alternating mirror.⁷ Although these are traditional techniques and used typically, the pitch material and meter changes makes them sound non-traditional. It is more difficult to follow the counterpoint than it might be in a traditional fugue because of the dissonance and meter changes. Variation 10 is a round form in 4 voices.⁸ The melody itself sounds consonant. However, in this round variation, the melody stretches out past the counterpoint, with the result being that the variation is harmonically quite dissonant.

Example 2-13. Dissonant counterpoint – Round form in 4 voices in variation 10 from *Civil War Variations*

The image displays a musical score for 'Var. 10 Round' in G major, marked 'Andante, echoing' with a tempo of ca. 48. The score is in 4/4 time and consists of three systems of two staves each. The first system (measures 94-103) features a piano introduction with a 'rit.' and 'molto' section, followed by the main theme. The four voices are numbered 1 through 4. The second system (measures 104-113) and the third system (measures 114-123) show the continuation of the four voices. Red circles highlight specific intervals between voices that are dissonant, with the word 'dissonances' written in red below the second system. Performance instructions include 'with much pedal' and 'lunga'.

⁶ Thompson, 135.

⁷ Logan Skelton uses the terms ‘mirror’, ‘inverted mirror’, and ‘alternating mirror’ in the score of *Civil War Variation*. ‘Mirror’ is a type of canon, which inverts the interval of the main subject in contrary motion. ‘Inverted mirror’ is an inversion of the ‘mirror’ canon. In ‘alternating mirror’, the subject appears alternately in different voices.

⁸ Round is a type of canon, in which each voice starts at the same time intervals.

Variation 17 in *Civil War Variations* is a 'mirror' variation (see Example 2-14). The left hand starts a whole step down from the right hand's melody, so that the resulting counterpoint is quite dissonant.

Example 2-14. Mirror writing in variation 17 from *Civil War Variations*

Var. 17 Mirror
With energy and precision (♩ = ca. 126) *lento*

Variation 18, 'inverted mirror,' is an inversion of the previous variation. The right hand plays the same melody which the left hand played in variation 17, and the left hand plays the right hand part from variation 17.

Example 2-15. Inverted mirror in variation 18 from *Civil War Variations*

Var. 18 Inverted Mirror

Variation 19 is an alternating mirror. The subject appears alternately in different hands every two measures. The right hand plays the original melody, and then the left hand plays the 'mirror' of the original melody (see Examples 2-16 and 2-17).

Example 2-16. The original melody in the right hand and mirror of the original melody in the left hand

The image shows two systems of musical notation. The first system consists of two staves: a treble clef staff (right hand) and a bass clef staff (left hand). The right hand contains a melody of eighth and sixteenth notes. The left hand contains the exact same melody mirrored. Red boxes highlight the original melody in the right hand and its mirror in the left hand. The second system also consists of two staves. The right hand continues the melody with some grace notes and rests. The left hand continues the mirrored melody. Red boxes highlight the original melody in the right hand and its mirror in the left hand. The piece concludes with a whole note chord in the right hand.

Example 2-17. Alternating mirror in variation 19 from *Civil War Variations*

Var. 19 Alternating Mirror

The image shows two systems of musical notation for Variation 19. The first system consists of two staves. The right hand has a melody with dynamics *mp* and *mf*. The left hand has a bass line. A red box highlights a section of the right hand melody labeled *f marcato*. The second system also consists of two staves. The right hand has a melody with dynamics *ff molto marcato* and *whimsically*. The left hand has a bass line with dynamics *marcato* and *ff molto marcato*. Red boxes highlight sections in both hands: the *ff molto marcato* section in the right hand, the *marcato* section in the left hand, and the *whimsically* section in the right hand.

Var. 20
With delicate expression

The image shows one system of musical notation for Variation 20. It consists of two staves. The right hand has a melody with dynamics *p* and *mf*. The left hand has a bass line with dynamics *p* and *mf*. A red box highlights the beginning of the right hand melody.

2.2.2 Blues

Elements of blues such as an A-flat blues scale (A-flat, C-flat, D-flat, D, E-flat, and G-flat), off-beat accents, simple harmonic progressions (I, IV, V), and improvisatory figures appear in *Civil War Variations*. The sound of blues scale and blues music is unfamiliar to piano students who come from outside the United States, particularly to those who come from Asia. To play variation 11, students need to become familiar with the twelve bar phrase structure, the chord progressions using the blues scales, and blues rhythms including syncopations and off-beat accents. As in the use of non-tertian chords, understanding the different harmonic structure of the blues will help a student to memorize these passages without resorting to mindless repetition.

Example 2-18. Blues variation in variation 11 from *Civil War Variations*

Var. 11 Blues (♩ = ca. 76)
Cool and cruel

The musical score for "Var. 11 Blues" is presented in four systems. The first system (measures 104-106) shows a simple harmonic progression in the bass and a melodic line in the treble. The second system (measures 107-110) features off-beat accents in the treble and a simple harmonic progression in the bass. The third system (measures 111-113) continues the melodic and harmonic development. The fourth system (measures 114-116) highlights the blues scale in the treble and a simple harmonic progression in the bass. Annotations include "Simple harmony progression" in blue, "Off-beat accents" in pink, and "Blues scale" in blue.

2.3 Notational Challenges

The twentieth century also saw the development of new or alternate notation for various instruments, including the piano. Henry Cowell, for example, first used cluster chords in *The Tides of Manaunaun* for piano (1912).⁹ Additionally, many of his piano pieces require the pianist to play the strings inside the piano. Another composer who explored alternate notation was George Crumb, who used an unusual layout of staff and new notations in his *Makrokosmos*. Understanding these new and possibly unfamiliar symbols is important for precise reading. For example, Skelton incorporates improvisatory figures and the notation of snapping fingers in *Civil War Variations*. These improvisatory figures are at times influenced by jazz, and they require the performer to play freely while still playing specific notes on given beats.

Example 2-19. Improvisatory figures in variation 11 from *Civil War Variations*

The image shows two systems of musical notation for piano. The first system, starting at measure 120, features a treble and bass staff with various rhythmic patterns and dynamic markings like *mf* and *pp*. The second system, starting at measure 123, continues the piece. A pink box highlights a specific section in measures 124 and 125, which is annotated with the performance directions "freely", "accel.", and "deliberately".

In twentieth-century piano music, rhythmic notation for tapping the piano or snapping the fingers, which is influenced by jazz, appears. This notation also appears in Skelton's *Civil War Variations*.

⁹ Stanley Sadie, ed., *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd ed., vol. 6 (New York: Grove's Dictionaries Inc., 2001); s. v. "Cluster," p. 65.

Example 2-20. Notation for snapping fingers in variation 11 from *Civil War Variations*

The image displays two systems of musical notation for a piano piece. The first system, starting at measure 120, features a treble clef staff with a *loco* marking and a bass clef staff. A circled asterisk (*) in the treble staff indicates a specific rhythmic pattern. Below the first system, a blue annotation reads: "This rhythm is to be performed by 'snapping' the finger". The second system, starting at measure 121, includes a *molto* marking and a *rit.* (ritardando) marking. The treble staff contains a circled rhythmic pattern, and the bass staff contains a circled rhythmic pattern. The second system concludes with an *a tempo* marking and a final *rit.* marking.

CHAPTER 3

A GRADED REPERTOIRE FOR MASTERING THE CHALLENGES POSED BY LOGAN SKELTON'S *CIVIL WAR VARIATIONS*

Technical and musical challenges posed by a work such as *Civil War Variations* need to be prepared from the ground up. There is repertoire suitable for younger students that begin to build the foundation needed for more advanced study.

3.1 Beginners

For beginning students, teachers need to introduce all the concepts referred to in Chapter I in a gradual and unthreatening way. The pieces discussed below offer examples of the material that is available to a teacher.

3.1.1 Technical and Musical Challenges

Album for the Young by David Diamond,
Gradius by Samuel Adler,
Mikrokosmos I, and II by Béla Bartók

3.1.1.1 Harmony

To play Logan Skelton's *Civil War Variations*, students need to become accustomed to non-tertian chords, including secundal or quartal harmony, tertian chords with added notes, polychords, and percussive use of harmony (see Examples 2-1 to 2-7). Non-tertian chords are difficult for the beginning student because of their sonority and the hand positions they involve. Beginning students who are not accustomed to non-tertian chords will feel uneasy about the way they sound. A piece such as *Christmastide*, from David Diamond's *Album for the Young*, places a non-tertian chord at the end of each phrase; this is done in such a way as to gently introduce the concept of non-tertian chords to a beginning student.

Example 3-1. *Christmastide* from *Album for the Young* by David Diamond

Mikrokosmos, Vol II, no.42 by Béla Bartók is also a good piece for beginners to study tertian chords with added notes. The accompaniment part plays the broken chord including tertian chords with added 2nd and 4th. By learning this piece, students can become accustomed to the sound of non-tertian chords and to wide hand positions.

Example 3-2. *Mikrokosmos*, Vol II, no. 42 by Béla Bartók

As a starter-piece for introducing polychords, a student is encouraged to learn *Gradius I*, no.15 by Samuel Adler. Each hand plays a different chord in broken chord style, and then holds the chord in the next measure. Holding down the polychords enables a student to hear and therefore comprehend the concept.

Example 3-3. *Gradus I*, no.15 by Samuel Adler

Very slowly and sustained 15

D major + D minor

C major + E major

D major + C major

C major + E-flat major

pp

3.1.1.2 Rhythm

Irregular rhythmic patterns and shifted accents are shown in *Civil War Variations* (see Examples 2-8, 2-9, and 2-10). The piece *Gradus I* no. 9, by Samuel Adler, is of great help in terms of introducing irregular rhythmic patterns at a beginner's level. Not only does each phrase contain seven beats divided within two measures, but the numerous meter changes add to the rhythmic complexity of the work.

Example 3-4. *Gradus I*, no. 9 by Samuel Adler

Happily, and quite fast

ff

Gradus I, no. 17 also deals with the irregular rhythmic patterns so common in twentieth-century piano music. Three-measure phrases can be divided into 4 groups (3-2-2-8 beats).

Example 3-5. *Gradius I*, no. 17 by Samuel Adler

Spirited 17

3.1.1.3 Meter

Frequent meter changes appear in *Civil War Variations*, including unusual meters (see Examples 2-11 and 2-12). Adler's *Gradius I*, no. 8 can help beginning students to become familiar and comfortable with meter change in regular meters.

Example 3-6. *Gradius I*, no. 8 by Samuel Adler

Waltz-like

After learning meter change in regular meters, a student is encouraged to study irregular meters, such as 5/4 and 7/4.

Example 3-7. *Gradius* I, no. 4 by Samuel Adler

Moving quietly

The musical score for Example 3-7, *Gradius* I, no. 4 by Samuel Adler, is presented in two systems. The first system is marked "Moving quietly" and features a piano (*p*) dynamic. The second system is marked *f* (forte). The music is written for piano with treble and bass staves. A blue box highlights the first measure of the first system in both staves, showing a first finger fingering (1) on the treble staff and a first finger fingering (1) on the bass staff.

Example 3-8. *Gradius* I, no. 11 by Samuel Adler

Heavy

The musical score for Example 3-8, *Gradius* I, no. 11 by Samuel Adler, is presented in two systems. The first system is marked "Heavy" and features a forte (*f*) dynamic. The second system is marked *f* (forte). The music is written for piano with treble and bass staves. A blue box highlights the first measure of the first system in both staves, showing a fifth finger fingering (5) on the treble staff and a sixth finger fingering (6) on the bass staff.

Lastly, *Gradius* I, no. 18 is a good example of meter changes between regular meter and irregular meter.

Example 3-9. *Gradius* I, no. 18 by Samuel Adler

Bouncing along

The musical score for Example 3-9, *Gradius* I, no. 18 by Samuel Adler, is presented in two systems. The first system is marked "Bouncing along" and features a piano (*p*) dynamic. The second system is marked *f* (forte) and ends with "Fine". The music is written for piano with treble and bass staves. Pink ovals highlight the first measure of each system in both staves, showing a first finger fingering (1) on the treble staff and a first finger fingering (1) on the bass staff.

3.1.2 Structural Challenges

Mikrokosmos I by Béla Bartók,
32 Piano Games by Ross Lee Finney,
Jazz and Blues Vol.1 by David Kraehenbuehl

3.1.2.1 Dissonant Counterpoint

Variation 10 and Variations 17-19 of *Civil War Variations* make use of dissonant counterpoint (see Example 2-13, 2-14, 2-15, and 2-17). Bartók's *Mikrokosmos* Vol. I, no. 31 is useful for the beginning student with regard to introducing dissonant counterpoint. This two-voice canon includes accents at the beginning of each phrase, making it easy for students to follow the two voices.

Example 3-10. *Mikrokosmos* Vol. I, no. 31 by Béla Bartók



To play the mirror variation in *Civil War Variations*, students need to understand the concept of mirror writing. From mm. 1 to mm. 5 in *32 Piano Games*, no. 13, the right hand plays first, and then the left hand plays the right hand's melody in contrary motion. This piece is an example of an easy introduction to the concept of mirror writing.

Example 3-11. *Mirror mimic* from *32 Piano Games* by Ross Lee Finney



3.1.2.2 Elements of Blues

In order to play variation no.11 in *Civil War Variations*, students need to know the blues scale and rhythm.¹⁰ (see Example 2-18) *Black Eye Blues* from *Jazz and Blues*, book 1 by David Kraehenbuehl is an excellent piece to introduce beginning students to the blues scale. Each measure includes the blues major scale, and this frequent repetition will get students accustomed to its sonority.

Example 3-12. *Black Eye Blues* from *Jazz and Blues*, book 1 by David Kraehenbuehl



¹⁰ There are two scales in blues. The major blues scale is composed of a major pentatonic scale plus a flat-third. The minor blues scale is a minor pentatonic scale plus a flat-fifth. As such, a C major blues scale is spelled: C, D, E-flat, E, G, and A; a C minor blues scale is spelled: C, E-flat, F, F-sharp, G, B-flat.

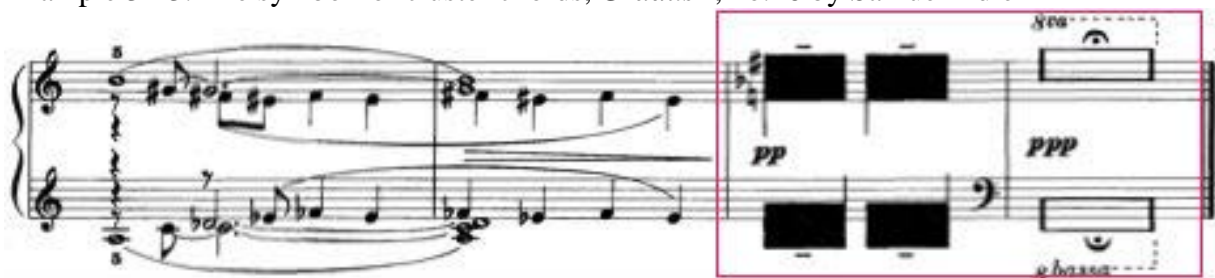
3.1.3 Notational Challenges

Gradius by Samuel Adler,
32 Piano Games by Ross Lee Finney

3.1.3.1 Notation

In terms of exploring other extended techniques, *Gradius I*, no.16 by Adler and *32 piano games*, no. 3 by Finney acquaints the student with the concept of the cluster chord and the way it is notated.

Example 3-13. The symbol for cluster chords, *Gradius I*, no.16 by Samuel Adler



Example 3-14. The symbol for white-note cluster chords, *32 Piano Games* by Ross Lee Finney



3.2 Intermediate

After being introduced to some of the compositional building blocks of twentieth-century piano music, intermediate students are encouraged to begin combining two

techniques simultaneously such as, for example, non-tertian chords with melody, meter changes with syncopations, and blues scale with the chord progression in blues. Students in this level need to learn more intricate notations such as free repetition of given notes in any order and alternate notations from traditional one.

3.2.1 Technical and Musical Challenges

Mikrokosmos IV, and V by Béla Bartók,
Fourteen Bagatelles, Op.6 by Béla Bartók

3.2.1.1 Harmony

Once the student has become acquainted with the sound of non-tertian chords, a piece such as Béla Bartók's *Fourteen Bagatelles, Op.6, no.5*, which includes non-tertian chords in the accompaniment is an excellent next step for an intermediate student. Measures 21-27 of this *Bagatelle* involve a change of hand position that can be rather uncomfortable. Practicing the bottom three notes in each of the chords in the passage will allow a student to become familiar with the hand positions that involve non-tertian chords. Studying secundal harmony with unpredictable rhythms in *Fourteen Bagatelles, Op.6, no.2* allows the student to understand the sound of non-tertian chords with complex rhythms in *Civil War Variations* that one finds in variation 9 and 12 (see Example 2-8, 2-9, 3-15, and 3-16).

Example 3-15. *Fourteen Bagatelles, Op. 6, no.5, mm. 12-23* by Béla Bartók

The image displays two systems of musical notation for piano accompaniment. The first system contains measures 12 through 17, and the second system contains measures 18 through 23. The notation is in treble and bass clefs. A blue rectangular box highlights measures 21, 22, and 23 in the second system, where the right hand plays a sequence of chords with a descending bass line, while the left hand has a sustained bass note.

Example 3-16. *Fourteen Bagatelles*, Op. 6, no.2 by Béla Bartók

Allegro giocoso $\frac{2}{34}$

p

secundal harmony

unpredictable rhythms

molto rit. smorzando

3.2.1.2 Rhythm

Bartók's *Mikrokosmos* Vol. IV, no. 108 is a piece intended for intermediate students. In Vol. IV, no. 108, notes marked *sforzando* result in a displacement of the rhythm, causing each phrase to start on a weak beat (see Example 3-17). Vol. V, no.122, which combine two techniques-polychords and unpredictable rhythms, can also be used for this level of study (see Example 3-18).

Example 3-17. *Mikrokosmos* Vol. IV, no. 108. mm. 12-15 by Béla Bartók

Example 3-18. *Mikrokosmos* Vol. V, no. 122 by Béla Bartók

Molto vivace, ♩ = 160

122

f, *strepitoso*

Polychords

meno f

3.2.1.3 Meter

Bartók's *Mikrokosmos* Vol. V, no. 133 can be thought of as a transition piece between beginning and intermediate level. It combines syncopation with changes from regular to irregular meters.

Example 3-19. *Mikrokosmos* Vol. V, no. 133 by Béla Bartók

Allegro, ♩ = 152

133

mf, *pesante*

sf

After studying meter changes with regular meters and irregular meters, intermediate students are encouraged to study Bartók's *Mikrokosmos* Vol. V, no. 126. From the beginning of the piece, A quarter note gets one beat, but, from mm. 3 to 4, an eighth note gets one beat. By studying this piece, students will figure out how to count beats in meter changes from 2/4 or 3/4 to 3/8 or 5/8.

Example 3-20. *Mikrokosmos* Vol. V, no. 126 by Béla Bartók



3.2.2 Structural Challenges

Mikrokosmos III, IV by Béla Bartók,
Jazz and Blues Vol. V by David Kraehenbuehl

3.2.2.1 Dissonant Counterpoint

Bartók's *Mikrokosmos* Vol. III, no. 91 involves a higher level of chromaticism than found in earlier *Mikrokosmos* pieces and thus begins to train a student's ear in terms of following two contrapuntal voices simultaneously. In addition, the work employs a considerable number of accidentals, forcing students to do away with their sense of traditional tonality.

Example 3-21. Chromatic inversion, from *Mikrokosmos* Vol. III, no. 91 by Béla Bartók



Having studied the concept of mirror writing at the beginning level, a student can develop this technique further with Bartók's *Mikrokosmos* Vol. IV, no. 105. This piece places mirror

writing with two different keys in each hand from mm.10. Studying this mirror writing in two different keys can help with the dissonant counterpoint in *Civil War Variations* such as that found in variation 17, and 18 (see Examples 2-14, 2-15 and 3-22).

Example 3-22. Mirror writing in *Mikrokosmos* Vol. IV, no. 105 Béla Bartók

3.2.2.2 Elements of Blues

Blues Largo from *Jazz and Blues*, book 5 by David Kraehenbuehl is a piece that can be attempted by intermediate students. After becoming acquainted with the blues scale, students are encouraged to learn the chord progression in blues (I-IV-V) with C major blues scale and minor blues scale in the right hand.

Example 3-23. *Blues Largo* from *Jazz and Blues*, book 5 by David Kraehenbuehl

3.2.3 Notational Challenges

32 Piano Games by Ross Lee Finney

3.2.3.1 Notation

Mobile from *32 Piano Games* by Finney is a piece suggested for students at the intermediate level. This piece has no meter marking, and the left hand is asked to play freely using the given notes, while the right hand plays as written.¹¹ *Mountains* from *32 Piano Games* also has no meter marking and different notations from traditional one for trill and accelerando (see Example 3-24 and 3-25).

Example 3-24. *Mobile* from *32 Piano Games* by Ross Lee Finney

The musical score for Example 3-24, 'Mobile', shows a right-hand melody and a left-hand accompaniment. The left hand is marked 'mf' and 'no ped.'. The right hand has a dynamic marking of 'mf'. The tempo is marked '♩ = ca. 132'.

Example 3-25. *Mountains* from *32 Piano Games* Ross Lee Finney

The musical score for Example 3-25, 'Mountains', shows a right-hand melody and a left-hand accompaniment. The left hand is marked 'p' and 'ff'. The right hand has dynamic markings of 'ff', 'pp', 'p', and 'pp'. The score includes a trill and an accelerando section.

A trill starting fast and slowing gradually

Accelerando

¹¹ According to Ross Lee Finney, the left hand part in Example 25 means 'a free repetition in any order of the notes indicated lasting the length of the box.'

3.3 Advanced

Advanced students should now be ready to master a more complex technical and musical vocabulary, including notation for playing the strings inside the piano and slapping the piano.

3.3.1 Technical and Musical Challenges

12 American Preludes by Alberto Ginastera,
Six Preludes, Op. 38 by Paul Creston

3.3.1.1 Harmony

Creole Dance from *12 American Preludes* by Alberto Ginastera is a work that illustrates more complicated harmonic concept for advanced students. Throughout the work, Ginastera uses a significant number of non-tertian chords in addition to complicated rhythms. As such, the student is required to combine two learned skills- reaching and executing the non-tertian chords while also performing a complicated rhythmic pattern.

Example 3-26. *Creole Dance* from *12 American Dance* by Alberto Ginastera (mm. 18-29)

The image displays two systems of musical notation for the piece 'Creole Dance'. The first system shows measures 18-23, featuring a complex harmonic structure with non-tertian chords in the right hand and a rhythmic pattern in the left hand. The second system shows measures 24-29, continuing the harmonic and rhythmic complexity. The notation includes dynamic markings such as *sempre f* and *dim. molto*, and various articulation marks like accents and slurs.

3.3.1.2 Rhythm

Ginastera's *Accents* from *12 American Preludes* benefits advanced students through the practice of shifted accents. The study and successful performance of a piece like this will

subsequently allow students to play the complicated shifted accents with meter changes found in *Civil War Variations* (see Example 2-10).

Example 3-27. Accents from *12 American Preludes* by Alberto Ginastera



Six Preludes, Op. 38 by Paul Creston is also useful for advanced students. These six preludes show five rhythmic patterns: regular sub-division, irregular sub-division, overlapping, regular sub-division overlapping, and irregular sub-division overlapping.¹² The rhythmic patterns in *Six Preludes*, Op.38 are different from the metric division, which is also shown is variation 24 from *Civil War Variations* (see Example 2-10, 3-28, and 3-29).

Example 3-28. Regular sub-division in *Six Preludes*, Op. 38, no.2 by Paul Creston



Example 3-29. Irregular sub-division overlapping in *Six Preludes*, Op. 38, no.6 by Paul Creston



¹² Paul Creston explained these five rhythmic patterns in the score.

3.3.1.3 Meter

In the First Pentatonic Major Mode from Ginastera's *12 American Preludes* is a fitting work to help advanced students explore the concept of irregular meter. This piece is more complex from a visual standpoint due to Ginastera's use of multiple staves; it is also technically demanding because the hands are required to move quickly within the extremes of the keyboard's range.

Example 3-30. *In the First Pentatonic Major Mode* from *12 American Preludes* by Alberto Ginastera (mm. 16-18)

The image shows a musical score for piano, measures 16-18 of 'In the First Pentatonic Major Mode' by Alberto Ginastera. The score is written on multiple staves. Annotations include: 'multiple staves' in red text with a red box around the first two staves; 'meter changes' in blue text with a blue box around the first two staves; 'the extended range' in green text with a green box around the bottom staff; and two green ovals highlighting specific musical passages in the upper and lower staves. The page number '23' is visible in the top right corner.

3.3.2 Structural Challenges

Ludus Tonalis by Paul Hindemith,
Preludes for Piano by George Gershwin

3.3.2.1 Dissonant Counterpoint

Ludus Tonalis by Paul Hindemith can be advantageous to more advanced students as they carry forward the technique of playing and hearing three voices contrapuntally. The twelve fugues in *Ludus Tonalis* are three-part fugues. The fugue in C has three voices in irregular meter.

Example 3-31. Fugue in C from *Ludus Tonalis* by Paul Hindemith



3.3.2.2 Elements of Blues

For advanced students exploring this same subject, *Blue Lullaby* from *Preludes for Piano* by George Gershwin is an example of a piece that provides more intricate challenges, as it includes a number of ornaments, complicated rhythms and octave passages.

Example 3-32. *Blue Lullaby* from *Preludes for Piano* by George Gershwin (mm. 5-8)



3.3.3 Notational Challenges

The Banshee by Henry Cowell,
The Serpent's Kiss by William Bolcom

3.3.3.1 Notation

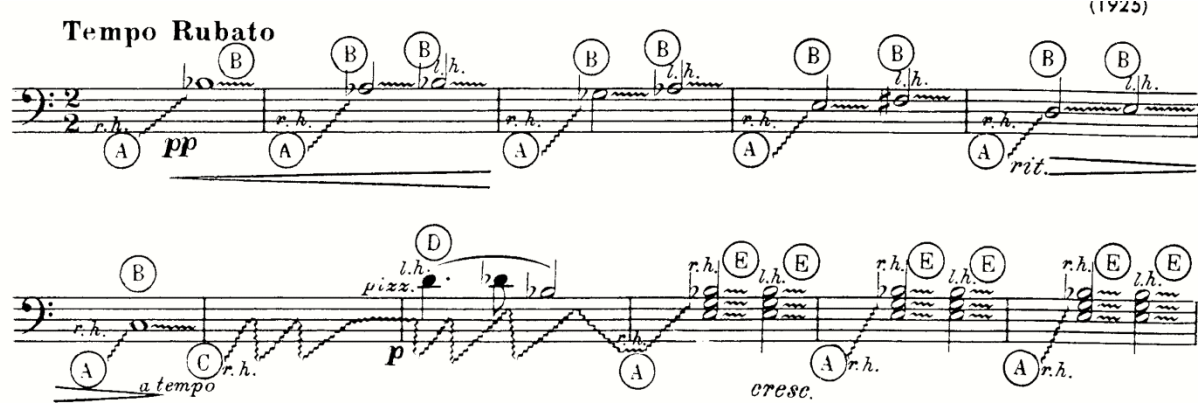
Advanced students are encouraged to attempt a piece like *The Serpent's Kiss*, by William Bolcom. In this work, students are presented with other extended techniques, such as slapping the piano, which connects to Variation 11 from *Civil War Variations* (see Example 2-

20 and 3-33). Also, advanced students are encouraged to study *The Banshee* by Henry Cowell to learn new notations for playing the strings inside the piano (see Example 3-34).

Example 3-33. Slapping piano, mm. 108-111 from *The Serpent's Kiss* by William Bolcom



Example 3-34. *The Banshee* by Henry Cowell



CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, many students who have not been introduced pedagogically to twentieth-century piano music face a difficult time dealing with both the new harmonic and rhythmic structures, as well as with the new kinds of notations found in more advanced literature of the late twentieth century. This guide is intended first of all to help a teacher prepare students at different levels for the particular challenges of Logan Skelton's many-faceted *Civil War Variations*. It is this author's hope, however, that the principles outlined in this guide could serve also as a template to introduce younger students to the incredible variety of great music that has been written for the piano post-Debussy, Ravel, Prokofiev and Rachmaninoff.

It is critically important that exposure to the technical and musical vocabulary specific to contemporary music occur at the earliest possible stage of study. Children are not predisposed to dislike dissonance, irregular meters, or new notations. They are at their most open when they are young. Composers like Ross Lee Finney have pieces that can excite and challenge a beginning student, and they can be learning techniques such as polychords, secundal and quartal harmonies, and dissonance counterpoint without even realizing that they are doing so. Continuing on into more intermediate and finally advanced repertoire of the twentieth and twenty-first century positions a professional performer and teacher to be a responsible musical citizen of his or her time. Just as one cannot imagine living in 1913 and not knowing or playing any of the repertoire written for piano since 1813, so today it is impossible to achieve success as either a performer or a teacher without the ability to perform and teach music written since 1913.

The gradual progression of repertoire illustrated in this dissertation is chosen specifically so that a difficulty is introduced gradually, one small component part at a time.

By the time a student has progressed through the early teaching pieces to the intermediate level and finally the advanced repertoire, they should not only be equipped with the knowledge and the technique to cope with works such as Logan Skelton's *Civil War Variations*, but they should be comfortable with these techniques.

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