

Milan DVOŘÁK

COMPLETE JAZZ PIANO ETUDES

Milan Franěk

FIRST RECORDING

MILAN DVOŘÁK AND HIS JAZZ PIANO ETUDES

by Milan Franěk

Milan Dvořák¹ began playing piano at the age of seven in Prostějov, Czechoslovakia, where, on 6 December 1934, he was born into the family of a violinist and a music-teacher. Later, while studying at the Faculty of Electrical Engineering in Prague, he pursued music as an amateur in a student jazz quintet. Upon graduation in 1958, the communist regime ordered him to take a position as an engineer in a metallurgy combine in the industrial town of Ostrava, probably to convince him to forget about jazz and draw him closer to the working class. Dvořák disregarded this instruction and joined a famous Prague big band as pianist. Over time the threats from the state apparatus came to a stop, and he was free to develop his musical activities.

As a pianist he played, for example, in the prestigious music-theatre Semafor. In the years 1965–90 he led the band accompanying the first lady of Czech *chanson*, Hana Hegerová, and from 1980 to 1990 he was the head of the group TV Septet of Czechoslovak television. For many years he also worked as a professor of composition at the Jaroslav Ježek Conservatoire in Prague.

Along with playing the piano, Dvořák has also been active as a composer. In addition to many songs and orchestral pieces, he has written the music to over a dozen films, directed by Petr Schulhoff, František Vlácil, Dušan Klein and others.

Currently he is a member of the Swing Quintet Prague, plays with the pop and jazz singer Eva Pilarová, and with the *chansonnière* Eva Kriz, who became his life-partner after the death of his wife. He works in continuing close co-operation with the Czech Radio Musical Publishing House, for which he has written a number of piano albums.

The history of Milan Dvořák's jazz pieces for piano begins in the 1960s. At that time he was recording some contemporary popular Czech songs for Czech Radio in his own arrangements and with his own trio (piano, double-bass and drums). The unusual, slightly jazzy, arrangement of songs by local composers aroused the interest of an editor at the State Musical Publishing

¹ Western readers may wonder whether Milan Dvořák is any relation of the better-known Antonín (he isn't). In fact, Dvořák is the fourth-commonest surname in the Czech lands. There's even another Milan Dvořák prominent in the Czech Republic: a former professional footballer born only seventeen days earlier, on 19 November 1934.

House who, by coincidence, was also the composer of some of the songs being recorded. Dvořák was asked to transcribe them for solo piano, bringing about a first publication of *Piano Transcriptions* in 1963. The idea of writing jazz piano etudes followed later in the late 1960s and, after the success of the first series in 1971, a second series was born fourteen years later, in 1985. In the preface to that second volume, Dvořák explains that he retained the title *Jazz Piano Etudes* to maintain continuity with the first, although the later one offers a much broader variety of styles and genres, extending also to rock and pop.

In the creation of these etudes, Dvořák defined several criteria that he tried to observe: they should be composed so that they are playable even by pianists who play jazz music only occasionally; further, they should draw the interest of interpreters with their melody, harmonic structure and rhythmic elements. Probably thanks to these principles, the etudes have been published in many issues and reprints, but this is the first time that they have been recorded.

Volume One (1971)

The opening piece of the cycle, Etude No. 1 in C major [1], practises scales in both right and left hands, the chords in the right hand in the second half containing the same simple accompanying melody of the left hand from the very beginning.

The classic twelve-bar blues was the inspiration for the following Etude No. 2 in G major [2], although the tempo is much faster. The short middle section is based on a repetition of a simple motive in the right hand together with an interesting chromatically sinking counterpoint in the left hand using the circle of fifths harmonically.

The tempo indication of the Etude No. 3 in B flat major [3] is again *Allegro*, applying imitation technique using a short motive presented alternatively in both hands; the middle part, in G minor, features two simple lines responding to each other.

Etude No. 4 [4], again derived from the harmonic structure of the blues, focuses on facilitating the practice of bass figuration in the left hand, starting in E major first and modulating into F major in the second part.

C major is also the key of Etude No. 5 [5], which introduces different articulations of the theme, starting *legato* in both hands but applying sharp accents and rests with repetition.

Etude No. 6 [6] is an example of a technique known as ‘playing in blocks’: this slower piece in

medium tempo and in B flat major features rich chords on almost every note in the right hand which recalls the sound of a saxophone section in a big band.

Etude No. 7 [7] presents a twelve-bar theme enriched with another twelve-bar middle section in a faster tempo, *Allegro* and in C minor. The main pattern for practise here is the boogie figuration in the left hand – and accurate accents also have to be maintained throughout the piece.

The following fast Etude No. 8, in D major and marked *Vivo* [8], is again derived from the blues, although those origins are slightly obscured by the spreading of the blues harmonic structure – which normally occupies twelve bars – over 24.

Etude No. 9, again very fast [9], first introduces a theme in the right hand, whose role is swapped with the left hand in the second part. The key, A flat major, helps to create a special atmosphere and sound-colour.

Etude No. 10, *Moderato* and in A major [10], is a typical representative of the ‘walking bass’ technique, using both chromatic and diatonic steps in the accompanying line, which in this instance happens alternatively in both hands. The second half of the piece is a variation of the material contained in the opening section.

Another example of boogie comes in the G major Etude No. 11 [11], with one of the most characteristic bass figures in the left hand; it is even reinforced by the tremolos and triplets in the right hand in the middle section.

Etude No. 12 is one of a number of bitonal pieces in this collection. It starts in C major – with a Czech tempo indication of *Živě* (‘Lively’) – and then the theme is transposed a semitone higher, into D flat major, in the second part using broken chords *unisono* in both hands.

The structure of Etude No. 13 in F major [13] is that of a common dance-song, that is, the first theme is immediately repeated, then there is a middle part and then the first theme returns with a concluding section. As the *Cha cha moderato tempo* already indicates, this etude helps to achieve the rhythmic independence of both hands that is typical of Latin-American rhythms.

Etude No. 14 in G major [14] is largely constructed from two lines which apply consecutive fourths and fifths – something that used to be frowned upon in classical music but is very common in jazz and dance music.

A fast tempo and passages in octaves characterise the outer sections of Etude No. 15 in A minor [15]; the middle section, in C major, contains a walking bass in the left hand and strongly syncopated rhythm with accents in the right hand.

Etude No. 16 in E flat major, marked *Allegretto* [16], features triplets and rhythmic independence in both hands.

The octaves of Etude No. 17 in F major [17] require unity of the hands, especially when it comes to appoggiaturas, triplets and syncopation. After an eight-bar introduction the common scheme of jazz and dance music follows: that is, part A (repeated), part B and another repetition of part A. In this instance there is an introduction of eight bars, followed by the main theme A (another eight bars), again the main theme A (again eight bars), then the middle section B – also eight bars with full chords enriched with added ninths and elevenths; the main theme A is then repeated (eight bars once again) and then there is an extended concluding section (eight bars plus three bars marked *Meno*) which contains bars with chords harmonically sinking from B, B flat, A – each chord taking one bar – and then A flat, D flat, G, C and finally F major. The three bars marked *Meno* are then repeated, ending again on F major enriched with an augmented ninth.

Etude No. 18, in C major and a 5/4 metre [18], features examples of various cadences played mainly in the right hand, which occur in rubato and rhythmic passages that suggest jazz improvisation.

Etude No. 19 is another bitonal piece in which triplets play the main role [19]. The opening section – ‘Slowly’, in B major – is transposed into C major in the second half, with the additional moving triplets in the bass giving the impression of a faster tempo.

A theme from an earlier work of Dvořák’s, *Twelve Apostles*, a jazz piece for three voices and orchestra published in 1966 by the State Musical Publishing House,² serves here as Etude No. 20, in F major and marked ‘Fast’ [20]. Several means of expression are employed here, from single notes through various hints of contrary motion to full chords, suggesting orchestral *tuttis*.

In jazz-rock or music influenced by it, to which Etude No. 21 [21] is probably closest, different principles are applicable than in music derived from jazz, as can be seen most clearly in the quavers in the left hand articulated regularly and steadily, as in classical music, as compared with the ‘swinging’ quavers of purely jazz pieces.

The character of Etude No. 22, in G major [22] is based again on the blues, featuring rubato breaks repeated every other bar, transposed a fourth higher in the fifth bar, and with articulated triplets in both hands throughout the entire piece.

A beat-like figuration occurs four times in Etude No. 23 [23], transposed a fourth higher or a fifth

² It also exists in various arrangements, for big band, small jazz combo, etc.

lower. The piece starts in E minor but then a circle of fifth is applied and the concluding section ends up on chords consecutively on A major, B major and C sharp major.

Etude No. 24 in D flat major [24] is permeated by two rhythms: an initial 4/4 metre with 3/8 figurations. In jazz the origins of this polyrhythmic formation go back to the era of ragtime (there are, of course, many more examples in classical music³) and it is now a compositional practice frequently encountered in jazz music (such as *In the Mood*, the Joe Garland tune that Glenn Miller made famous). The middle section, in B flat minor and a regular 4/4 metre, changes the mood slightly but then returns to the polyrhythmic pattern in the coda.

The last etude of the first volume is No. 25 in B flat major [25]. It features a sixteen-bar theme and written-out improvisation on the given harmony, with a hint of walking bass in the left hand. The music reaches its climax when it returns to the initial theme, now in full chords. At the end, the theme reappears in its original form, to which Dvořák adds a short concluding section.

Volume Two (1985)

The second volume of Milan Dvořák's *Jazz Piano Etudes* opens with a B flat major etude marked 'Medium tempo' [26]. Full chords and a hint of stride-piano technique accompany a simple melody in the right hand; they are followed by a written-out improvisation on the harmony of the theme in the form of triplets in the right hand and full chords as accompaniment, and the original theme then returns, followed by a concluding section.

A very fast tempo *Presto* determines the character of Etude No. 2 in C major [27], with many accents and much syncopation; the middle part again features a polyrhythmic pattern of 4/4 and 3/8.

Etude No. 3 in F major [28] is one of the slower and more melodious ones (it is marked *Moderato*) and brings a marked contrast with the previous piece in mood, tempo and musical expression. The middle section uses imitation technique, highlighting a melody alternately in both hands.

Etude No. 4 in G major, marked *Con moto* [29], is rhythmically very precise. The middle section is based on upbeats which are in fact written-out improvisations and the whole piece ends up with even an faster coda, *Più mosso*.

Etude No. 5 in E major, marked *Sostenuto* [30], is again one of the more melodious examples; Dvořák himself describes it as 'Chopin-like'. The worlds of contemporary jazz and popular music are

³ For instance, it is found in the 24th of the 36 Fugues, Op. 36 (published in 1803), of an earlier Czech composer, Antonín Rejcha (Anton/Antoine Reicha; 1770–1836).

less prominent here and surface only occasionally – for instance, in the return of the theme after the middle section.

Etude No. 6 in B minor, in ‘Medium bossanova’ tempo [31], is another example of Latin-American inspiration. It is based on an eight-bar theme, its accumulating variations finishing with the return of the theme.

Etude No. 7 in G major, marked *Allegro*, is mainly an exercise for the left hand [32]. After part of the theme is introduced and many accents and syncopations are applied, full chords in the right hand appear in the middle section, together with a rhythmically pregnant accompaniment in the left hand.

Etude No. 8 in B flat major [33] introduces the theme and slight variations in the left hand in the first part, after which comes a strongly syncopated middle section, followed by the return of the theme in a thicker texture, recalling the sound of a saxophone section in a big band.

Etude No. 9 in B minor [34] brings further contrasts in mood and style. This is the only etude in the whole cycle which has no tempo indication at all. It is a peaceful and calm composition which allows the performer to use the damper pedal more frequently and for a longer time than usual – something rather rare in jazz interpretation.

A substantial part of Etude No. 10 [35] – in a dark D flat major and marked *Allegro* – lies in broken chords. Once again, the middle section features a polyrhythmic pattern of 4/4 with 3/8 formations, but the accentuation in the left hand falls on every fourth quaver regardless of the metre.

Etude No. 11, in F major and a very fast and swinging *Vivo* tempo [36] – is one of the purely jazz numbers in the second volume. The main theme is given three times, followed by a written-out improvisation based on the same harmonic structure.

Etude No. 12 in A flat major [37] is another example of a beautiful and calm piece with fewer jazz elements; instead, it is closer to jazz-rock, as the tempo indication, ‘Slowly with Beat’, suggests. Before a return to the opening material, the last four bars of the middle section are filled only with consecutive full-chord syncopes which give the impression of a suddenly faster tempo.

Etude No. 13 in A major, *Allegro* [38], returns to the world of jazz improvisation. The middle section features another polyrhythmic structure, this time supported by changes in the harmony, which climbs up a semitone, starting on D, until it reaches G and finally finishing the phrase on the E dominant-seventh chord before returning to the very beginning of the etude.

Etude No. 14 in F major [39] derives from the classic twelve-bar blues and is written in 12/8 time, divided into triplets. Several parts of the texture feature full chords containing a hidden melody

which forms a counterpoint with the left hand.

Etude No. 15 in A major [40] recalls a typical 1960s song, with a stereotypical harmonic scheme and accompaniment in a lively *Con moto* tempo.

Like No. 12, Etude No. 16, in D major and marked 'Medium tempo' [41], doesn't especially require jazz articulation or expression; instead, Dvořák comments in the score that performer is free to approach the piece in whatever style he or she prefers. The beautiful colours of its chords, enriched with ninths and elevenths, are supported by frequent pedalling throughout.

Etude No. 17, in E flat major and marked *Allegro* [42], is only the second one in 5/4 in the entire cycle, but in comparison with No. 18 in the first volume, the metre is much more clearly felt here. Rhythmically inspired by Dave Brubeck's famous *Take Five*, this piece shows what a strong and convincing impression an irregular metre can make.

Etude No. 18, in C major and in 'Medium tempo' [43], brings a compilation of styles, and it falls to the performer whether and where to use jazz articulation or not – there is enough space to use a jazz approach (with a boogie-like part after the introduction) or a jazz-rock style interpretation (for instance), as the rest of the piece could take.

The F major, 'Swingy' Etude No. 19 [44], by contrast, leaves no doubts about its jazz credentials. A very light and rhythmically pregnant piece featuring a good deal of syncopation and many appoggiaturas, strong accents and accentuated upbeats (so-called 'prebeats' or 'anticipating beats'), it features a good deal of syncopation, many accents and other means of jazz articulation throughout.

For the theme of the very last piece of the whole cycle, Etude No. 20 in C major [45], Dvořák turned to an earlier composition of his, *Ragtime Reminiscence* (composed in 1981). The melody in the right hand is often accompanied by the stride-piano technique typical of ragtime, although the last four bars of the coda finish with consecutive triplets alternatively in both hands.

The Czech pianist **Milan Franěk** studied at the Conservatoire in Pilsen and the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague, at the University of Music and Performing Arts in Vienna and in Graz and at the Charles University in Prague. He also participated in several international piano master-classes with renowned pianists (Eva Solar-Kindermann, Williard Schultz, Pierre Jasmin in Canada, Peter Roggenkamp in Germany, Avo Kouyoumdian in Austria, and Eugen Indjic and Livia Rév in France). In 1984 his piano trio won third prize at the International Radio Competition ‘Concertino Praga’ and in the year 1988, as a trombonist, he won third prize at the national wind-instrument competition of music conservatoires in Brno.



Milan has taught at various music institutions and music universities both in the Czech Republic (the České Budějovice Conservatoire, University of Hradec Králové and, in Prague, the International School of Performing Arts in Prague, the Jaroslav Ježek Conservatoire and College and Charles University) and abroad (the Universiti Teknologi MARA, Shah Alam, Malaysia, and the Vienna Music Academy). He has made several recordings of classical music for Czech Radio and has given concerts in Austria, China, the Czech Republic, France, Great Britain, Japan, Lithuania, Malaysia, the Netherlands, Norway and Serbia. Since 2012 he has conducted piano master-classes at prestigious institutions in many countries in Asia (China, Hong Kong, Japan, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam), and in January 2015 he conducted a master-class with students from various music institutions in South Korea at the Vienna Music Academy. Later in 2015 he featured the complete *Piano Jazz Etudes* of Milan Dvořák in several recitals at the International Music Festival ‘Smetana Days’ in Pilsen and, for the Petrof Piano Prep. Co., in Tokyo. He has been the President of the European Piano Teachers Association (EPTA) for the Czech Republic (www.epta-cz.com) since 2010.



Recorded on 19 and 25 April 2015 in the recording studio of the Pardubice Conservatoire, Czech Republic
Piano: Concert Grand Ant. Petrof Model AP 275

Musical Direction: Jitka Fowler Fraňková

Sound Engineering and Mastering: Antonín Dvořák

Cover design: David M. Baker (david@notneverknow.com)

Design and layout: Paul Brooks (paulmbrooks@virginmedia.com)

Acknowledgements

Milan Franěk would like to express his sincere appreciations to the Pardubice Conservatoire for making this recording possible in its recording studio and to the Petrof piano factory who provided the latest model of the concert grand Ant. Petrof Model AP275 for the recording sessions.

Executive producer: Martin Anderson

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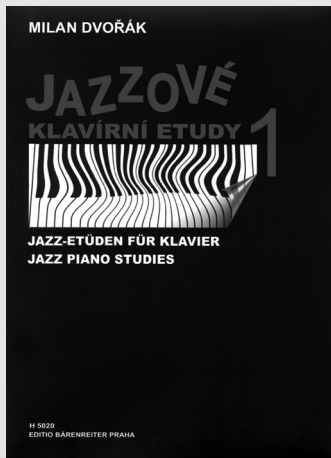


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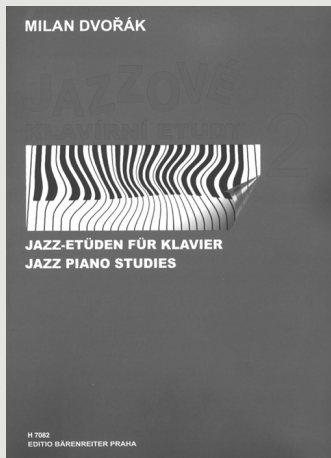


Vol. 1

Edition No. H5020

ISMN 9790260102286

€11.00



Vol. 2

Edition No. H 7082

ISMN 9790260103399

€12.00

Available from
Bärenreiter-Verlag
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