

DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND *INCLUSION*

These Are A Few Of My Favorite...

Diverse Piano Collections

By Leah Claiborne

Like many teachers, I have my “go-to” collections I use every year that represent music at the very beginning stages of piano studies to early-advanced repertoire.

Below are three of my absolute favorite collections of pieces that I use each year. These collections are not only my favorites because of their pedagogical value, but my students (and their parents) constantly request more items from these sets because they enjoy learning and performing the music. The three collections below represent more than 50 pieces for piano ranging from level two to advanced. Teachers will certainly find a handful of pieces at a minimum they can add to their library for each student in their studio. Enjoy!

The Zoo In the Sky, by Karen Tanaka

Karen Tanaka is a Japanese-born composer who has written more than a dozen pieces for solo piano. This particular set is especially useful in my studio because it is specifically written for children with small hands. The pieces in this collection are suitable for students playing at levels two through seven. With such a wide range in skill level, the student can certainly continue to come back to this set time and time again as their reading and technique grows. My students especially love how incredibly imaginative these pieces are and the opportunity this



gives them to bring the music to life. There are 20 pieces in the collection, and each piece portrays a character from the constellations. The composer writes: “In composing, I wanted children to fully develop their dreams for space and stars, their affection for animals, and also express their originality and imagination.” This collection will certainly become a beloved set that you will come back to each year.

Faces of Jazz, by Hale Smith

Another collection I have fallen in love with is *Faces of Jazz: A Set of Pieces for the Intermediate Pianist*. What I love right off the bat is that this music is truly for the early-intermediate pianist. Often times, we use the term intermediate in a broad sense, but students playing at levels three through six can utilize this wonderful set. What I love the most about this collection is that every time a student plays a piece, it sounds different! (In the best ways possible.) Hale Smith invites the young pianist to explore jazz harmonies and rhythms in a pedagogical and accessible way that brings confidence out of the pianist. A fan favorite in my studio is the sixth piece, “Blooz.” The composer writes: “The repeated notes in the right hand are to be played as a quietly blurred background which surrounds the melody as fog surrounds a landscape.” Your students will dive into the

invitation to explore various sounds from the piano to create this atmosphere.

100 Years of Chinese Piano Music: Works in the Traditional Style

I believe the most rewarding experience as a teacher is when you find that one piece for a student that pushes them beyond what you had hoped for them to achieve. For me, I had a student who simply bloomed musically when they learned “Selling Sundry Goods,” by Chen Peixun. I began to research other works by him and other Chinese composers. In my research, I came across this wonderful collection, which is suitable for advanced pianists. The editors give wonderful information about Chinese folk tunes, which will be beneficial when learning these pieces. It is particularly important to understand that the traditional folk melodies were never performed on the piano because the piano was considered a “foreign” instrument.

The textures and sounds the pianist gets to explore in this collection are written to imitate traditional Chinese instruments. One piece in particular that I love in this collection is, “Autumn Moon Over the Serene Lake,” by Chen Peixun. This piece has proven to be the perfect predecessor to Chopin’s “Black Key Etude.”

What are some of your favorite collections by diverse composers? Please let me know your favorite collections and how you choose to utilize them in your studios.

Leah Claiborne is associate professor of music at the University of the District of Columbia. She holds a BA degree from the Manhattan School of Music and MM and DMA degrees from the University of Michigan.



JOIN US IN SUMMER 2023

41 grand pianos | 23 forest studios | 13 world-class teachers

MASTERCLASSES

JUNE 19-23 | JOHN O’CONOR

JUNE 27-JULY 1 | CHRISTOPHER ELTON

JULY 4-8 | ANGELA CHENG & ALVIN CHOW

3-WEEK TRADITIONAL SESSION

JULY 16-AUGUST 4

ELAINE GREENFIELD, ROBERT HENRY, FRANKLIN LAREY, DEIRDRE O’DONOHUE

ROBERTA RUST ARTIST-IN-RESIDENCE: REBECCA PENNEYS

SOLO PIANO & PIANO/VIOLIN DUO MASTERCLASS

AUGUST 8-12 | JEFFREY COHEN & LUCIE ROBERT

for application, scholarships and tuition information visit

ADAMANT.ORG



Matthew Manwarren, Artistic/Executive Director