

The Book of Easy Piano Magic: Elementary to Intermediate Piano Solos

By Peter Rudzik

Published by Red Leaf Pianoworks

Reviewed by Lisa Ng

Fairies, pixies, elf, unicorn, hippogriff.... No, it's not Disney, nor is it Harry Potter! It's Peter Rudzik's new album of piano solos, *The Book of Easy Piano Magic*.

This book is attractive from its outset (which caught my young student's attention as soon as she walked into the studio, and got her talking nonstop about fantasy stories during the lesson). The cover of the book with a pixie playing the piano in an eerie forest surrounded by other pixies, dwarfs, and imps cannot be more descriptive of its contents.

The 12 pieces in the album ranging from elementary to early intermediate (approximately Grade 2–4 RCM-equivalent level) consist of interesting harmonies, challenging rhythmic patterns and a variety of articulations and moods.

The tone and ambience of the album are established from the opening piece, "The Mischievous Imp," which achieves its prankish effect through well-balanced teasing, playful staccato and velvety, delicate legato. The crossed-finger thematic pattern gives a sense of naughty and fun character of the legendary creature.

The mythical atmosphere continues in the second piece, "Blue Elf," where the tempo marking "In an elfish manner" challenges students' imagination. The elf's capricious nature is depicted through the contrasting A section (bouncy and full of augmented intervals) and B section (expressive and lyrical).

The album presents ample opportunities for the study of articulations. The theme of "March of the Dwarfs," for example, combines staccato and slurs alternating between the right and left hand. A mixture of quarter notes, eighth notes and triplets requires attention to rhythmic control.

The contrasting moods expressed in different pieces—*alla marcia*, playful, energetic and humorous ("Preschool for Centaurs" and "A Little Dragon Hatchling"); silky lyricism ("Tears of a Unicorn" and "The Siren Song"); and dark, foul yet tender tone ("Demntor's Kiss" and "Frolicking Faun Friends")—open the gate to the fantasy world, like a storybook to an imaginary space.

As in Rudzik's other collections of works such as *Wild Rose Suite* and *Truly Astounding Animals*, *The Book of Easy Magic Piano* is characterized by modern idioms, which the composer once described as "bent tonality." His use of modern harmonies, chromaticism ("Humorous Hippogriff"), blues, whole-tone scales and augmented intervals ("Little Pixies") not only enhances mythical feeling, but engages teachers and students in the discussion of these theoretical concepts.

With contemporary fantasy such a big hit in the book and film markets these days, Rudzik's pieces are solid hook for students to enlarge their imaginary sphere and to foster their reception of new sounds.

And if this book is not enough to entertain your students' imagination, check out Peter Rudzik's *The Book of Piano Magic Intermediate Piano Solos* where the mythical journey continues onto the next level.

To listen to Peter Rudzik's album, visit <http://www.redleafpianoworks.com/index.php?sort=c22>

Lisa Ng holds a PhD in French Literature, and a LRSM from the Associated Board of Music. She is the editor of Tempo and Impromptu, and she edits for international scholarly journals. She is an ARMTA Calgary member.

Mix and Match

By Stephen Chatman and Tara Wohlberg
Published by Galaxy Music Corporation, a division of ECS Publishing.

Reviewed by Beth Olver

Stephen Chatman who is recognized for his beautiful choral works, and stimulating piano works that are sometimes exquisite, has collaborated with Tara Wohlberg (author of song texts) to create *Mix and Match: Primer and Level 1*, supplementary works for piano. The works include a mixture of original pieces, arrangements of traditional nursery rhyme tunes, Christmas carols, and classical themes.

Mix and Match: Primer Level begins with nine pieces in off-the-staff notation before moving to 21 five-finger-C scale, and middle-C-position pieces. Several include opportunities for percussive sounds (snap, tap, stomp, spoken words). "Sour Grapes" uses D \flat and F \sharp and a great tone cluster for a sour ending! "I Love Halloween!" uses D-minor pentatonic scale and 3/4 meter to create a joyful soundscape for Halloween.