

1994

William Bolcom's "Twelve New Etudes for Piano".

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WILLIAM BOLCOM'S
TWELVE NEW ETUDES FOR PIANO

A Monograph

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Musical Arts

in

The School of Music

by
Henry S. Jones
B.A., Yale University, 1978
December 1994

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ABSTRACT

This study examines William Bolcom's *Twelve New Etudes for Piano* as a contribution to the evolution of the concert etude for piano solo, describing them mainly from the point of view of technical requirements. Chapter One charts the course of the etude for piano solo in the twentieth century. Chapter Two looks at Bolcom's Etudes in detail, addressing the following: style and format, passage-work, leaps, chords, trills and tremolos, counterpoint, cross-rhythms, stretches, dynamics and tone, pedaling, and new techniques. In the course of the description, several areas are pointed out in which Bolcom has done something new or unusual within the genre, namely: the use of pop styles (especially those other than ragtime), programmatic titles, leaps as the technical focus of an etude, "split" chords, counterpoint combined with cross-rhythms, two completely new techniques (the lateral tremolo and the forearm glissando), and perhaps most importantly, emphasis on dynamics, timbre, and pedaling. It is these last emphases, together with the Etudes' humor and accessibility, that set these pieces apart and make them an important contribution to the modern piano repertoire. Chapter Three is a brief summary of the study, concluding that Bolcom's *Twelve New Etudes* are innovative in many ways, representing, along with his earlier set (*Twelve Etudes for Piano*, 1966), a significant contribution to the genre.

WILLIAM BOLCOM'S *TWELVE NEW ETUDES FOR PIANO*

Chapter I. Introduction

The concert etude for solo piano is a genre to which many twentieth-century composers have contributed, including Scriabin, Ives, Stravinsky, Prokofiev, Rachmaninoff, Debussy, Bartók, and over one hundred others. The purpose of this paper is to describe William Bolcom's contribution to the evolution of the etude. Although there are several reviews of the *Twelve New Etudes*, there is as yet no published study of them. The external evidence for their significance includes frequent performances, favorable reviews, and the 1988 Pulitzer Prize. This paper describes the internal evidence. Specifically, it examines the *Twelve New Etudes*, mainly from the point of view of technical requirements, and compares them with other concert etudes (mostly from the twentieth century) where appropriate.¹ While influences from the etudes of other composers can be found, the *Twelve New Etudes* are innovative in many ways. They represent, along with Bolcom's earlier set of etudes (*Twelve Etudes for Piano*, 1966), a significant contribution to the genre.

Many of the etudes from the first decade of this century, such as those by Moszkowski, Arensky, Respighi, and Liapounow, offer little in the way of innovation; they contain no technical demands, harmonic devices, or other musical elements that are not found in the etudes of Chopin and Liszt. Szymanowski's *Four Studies*, Op. 4 (1902) are late Romantic in style, with

¹See appendix for list of etudes examined.

"soaring" melodic phrases and highly chromatic tonal harmony. Reger's *Vier Spezialstudien* (1901), written for the left hand alone (cf. Godowsky's *Chopin Studies Arranged for the Left Hand*, 1899), are very conservative in harmony and form. The same decade saw the appearance of two other "early" works: Stravinsky's *Four Etudes*, Op. 7 (1908) and Prokofiev's *Four Etudes*, Op. 2 (1909). Change, however, was already under way. Scriabin's late etudes, Op. 42, Op. 49, no. 1, and Op. 56, no. 4 (1903-08), show the development of his particular type of tonal ambiguity, which can also be traced in his sonatas. In addition, Ives began his series of over twenty *Studies for Piano* before 1910, although it took decades for his music to become known.²

In the history of piano etudes, the 1910s are particularly notable for the appearance of Rachmaninoff's *Etudes-tableaux*, Opp. 33 and 39 (1911 and 1917), Debussy's *Douze Etudes* (1915), and Bartók's *Studies*, Op. 18 (1918). Rachmaninoff expanded the resources of the genre by increasing the use of counterpoint in the Romantic style, using typical Russian melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic structures, and sometimes emphasizing sonority over other technical requirements. Debussy's etudes have several features that are new to the genre. They are among the first to be individually titled according to their technical focus. His "Pour les cinq doigts--d'après M. Czerny" may be the first intentionally humorous piano etude. Bartók's three *Studies*, like the etudes of Prokofiev and Stravinsky, are relatively early works. They are harmonically and technically adventurous, extremely difficult, and not frequently performed. Other harmonically and technically

²The dating of Ives's works has recently been brought into question. See Maynard Solomon, "Charles Ives: Some Questions of Veracity," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 40 (1987): 443-70.

progressive etudes were written in the 1910s by Ives, Scriabin, and Szymanowski, as well as some relatively conservative examples by Dohnányi.

From the 1920s through the 1960s, composers sought new elements of technique on which to base their etudes. Cross-rhythms appear frequently, along with more innovative techniques, such as mirror-symmetry on the keyboard, which appears in etudes by Toch and Chávez. Etudes that emphasize sonority as much as technical agility, like many of Rachmaninoff's and Debussy's, become rare, although there are a few such etudes in this period, most notably Messiaen's *Quatre études de rythme* (1950). Atonality and serialism appear mostly in the late 1940s and early 1950s in the etudes of Messiaen, Leeuw, and Chávez. Neoclassicism is rarely represented in the genre, although there are plenty of etudes in conservative styles, and there are references to earlier works, especially to Chopin (in etudes by Blanchet, Lutosławski, and Casella--cf. Godowsky's *Chopin Studies* and Brahms's *Etüde nach Friedrich Chopin*, as well as the end of Etude 7 in Bolcom's earlier set of etudes, discussed below.)

Since the 1970s, a great variety of styles and techniques have been used in concert piano etudes, including atonality, serialism, chance procedures, proportional notation, complex rhythms, references to earlier works and styles, and new technical requirements.

William Bolcom (b. 1938) studied piano and composition at the University of Washington. From 1958 to 1961 he studied composition with Milhaud at the Paris Conservatoire and attended lectures by Boulez. He received a D.M.A. degree in composition from Stanford University in 1964. Bolcom has won many awards, including several Rockefeller grants and two

Guggenheim Fellowships. He is currently Professor of Composition at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, and tours with his wife, mezzo-soprano Joan Morris, performing American popular songs of the mid-nineteenth to mid-twentieth centuries.

Bolcom's early works showed the influences of Milhaud and Boulez. Later, he became interested in theater, ragtime, and American song. These influences are apparent in his more recent compositions, which include ragtime piano pieces and cabaret songs. There are also hints of various popular styles in his works in the more "serious" genres, such as sonatas and symphonies. He often juxtaposes styles; for instance, he uses a typical blues piano accompaniment against an atonal obbligato line in the first movement of his *Second Sonata* for piano and violin. Bolcom's published piano solo works include fifteen rags, *Three Dance Portraits*, *Twelve Etudes for Piano*, and the *Twelve New Etudes for Piano*. He has also published a set of piano duets, a piano concerto, and several chamber works with piano.

The *Twelve Etudes for Piano* (the first set) were composed between 1959 and 1966, and premiered and recorded by the composer. This set comprises three "Books" of four etudes each. While the etudes are numbered rather than individually titled (except for etudes 10, "Gestures," and 12, "Apotheosis / In memoriam Béla Bartók"), each has a sentence or two printed at the top of the first page, explaining the technical idea of the etude, and in some cases explaining some details of the notation. Most of the etudes are about three pages long, and the whole set takes about thirty minutes to perform. They are very difficult, with a wide variety of technical requirements, including extremes of control in dynamics, touch, and pedaling, as well as such non-traditional techniques as forearm glissandos.

Chapter II. The *Twelve New Etudes*

The *Twelve New Etudes for Piano* were composed between 1977 and 1986. They are dedicated to the pianist Paul Jacobs, whom Bolcom met during his years in Paris. Jacobs specifically requested an etude like number 4, with a rigorous left hand against "irrational" right hand rhythms.³ (Bolcom uses the term "irrational" to mean subdivisions not in 2: triplets, quintuplets, and so on.)⁴ According to Professor Mark Wait of the University of Colorado, Bolcom tried to finish the set quickly in the summer of 1983, but was unable to complete it before Jacobs died in September. The first nine etudes were for Jacobs, and the last three for Marc-André Hamelin, the pianist who eventually premiered and recorded the set.⁵ The *Twelve New Etudes* were awarded a Pulitzer Prize in 1988. In an interview in the *Piano Quarterly*, the composer spoke of the two sets of etudes: "The first ones were really very much in the Boulez tradition. . . . I think the first group were much more difficult technically. They were written when I was a mad monster pianist."⁶ While the *Twelve New Etudes* may be a little less technically difficult than the early set, they are by no means easy. Stylistic differences between the two sets are much more apparent. In the second set, non-traditional techniques appear much less frequently, and clear tonal centers much more frequently, than in the first. Some of the *Twelve New Etudes* seem intended to be humorous (especially Etude 8, "Rag Infernal"), and some have various pop styles worked into the texture (Etudes 2, 6, 8,

³William Bolcom, telephone interview by author, 4 May 1993.

⁴William Bolcom, letter to author, 16 October 1994.

⁵Mark Wait, telephone interview by author, June 1993.

⁶Mark Wait, "Meet the Composer-Pianist: William Bolcom," *Piano Quarterly* 36 (1988): 33.

and 12). The overall effect is of greater accessibility, as if Bolcom had a general audience in mind rather than one made up of composers and modern music specialists. These differences reflect Bolcom's new interest in the vernacular tradition, as well as his conviction that the future of American music requires an increasing interaction between the vernacular and "cultivated" traditions.⁷ In his unpublished preface to the *Twelve New Etudes*, Bolcom explains: "My music had become since 1966 more tonal and even consciously American (if not always in a political sense) in an effort to avoid the earnest imitations of European style then common to my composer compatriots, myself included. Much of my music became addressed to the special spiritual needs we have right here."⁸ He goes on to explain that the mixing of tonal and non-tonal techniques produces a musical tension that he finds "enormously fecund and exciting."

A. Style and Format

The use of pop styles outside of pop music is far from new in other genres (Stravinsky's *Piano Rag Music*, for instance), but rare in piano solo etudes. Before Bolcom's etudes, and apart from Ives's *Studies for Piano*, which use bits of ragtime, the only examples I have found are Martinů's "Prélude en forme d'étude" and his *Etudes and Polkas*. The former uses ragtime rhythms, and is part of a set of eight preludes in the forms of "blues," "foxtrot," and so on. Based on the title, it should perhaps be placed in the genre of preludes or character pieces, rather than that of etudes. It is akin to Debussy's "Doctor Gradus ad Parnassum" or the "Pianists" movement

⁷William Bolcom, "Trouble in the Music World," *Michigan Quarterly Review* 27 (1988): 541-57.

⁸William Bolcom, unpublished preface to *Twelve New Etudes* (enclosed in letter to author, 16 October 1994.)

of Saint-Saëns's *Carnival of the Animals*--pieces that are meant to sound like, or evoke the idea of, etudes or exercises. In Martinů's *Etudes and Polkas*, the pop elements are found only in the polkas. Bolcom is therefore among the first to use pop styles in piano solo etudes, and possibly the first to use pop styles other than ragtime. (Etude 8, "Rag infernal," is discussed below under the heading "Leaps.") The cadences at the beginning and end of Etude 2, "Récitatif," using ninth chords with chromatic appoggiaturas to various parts of the chords, have a "Gershwin-esque," Tin Pan Alley sound (fig. 1). (The arrow pointing left means "ritardando.")

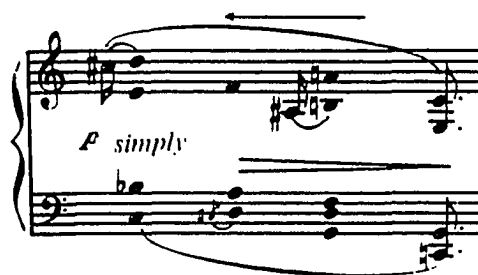


Fig. 1. Etude 2, "Récitatif," p. 8.

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The accompaniment of Etude 6, "Nocturne," sounds as if it came from a 1950s or 1960s pop tune (fig. 2).

Very controlled, strict rhythm ♩ = c. 72

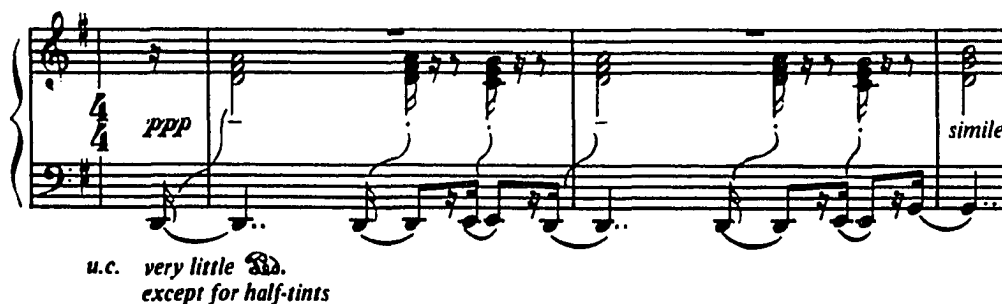


Fig. 2. Etude 6, "Nocturne," p. 25.

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The big chords at the middle and end of Etude 12, "Hymne à l'amour," are enriched modern jazz chords--tonal progressions with extra notes added (fig. 3).



Fig. 3. Etude 12, "Hymne à l'amour," p. 54.

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Referring to the pop elements in the *Twelve New Etudes*, I asked Dr. Bolcom whether he used any direct quotations. He replied that he never does, but is often asked if he does.⁹ Presumably this is because he writes convincingly in pop styles. This is not surprising, considering his excellent playing in the concerts of American popular songs mentioned earlier. (I have had the good fortune to hear two of those performances.)

In Etude 3, "Mirrors," Bolcom uses symmetry around an axis between e-flat' and e' (fig. 4).¹⁰ This sort of symmetry has been used by other twentieth-century composers, including Webern, whose style this etude resembles. (Bolcom, however, said he was thinking of "Boulez, if anyone.")¹¹

⁹William Bolcom, telephone interview by author, 4 May 1993.

¹⁰The naming of pitches follows the method used in the *New Harvard Dictionary of Music*: C₁, C, c, c', c'', and so on, with c' = middle C.

¹¹William Bolcom, letter to author, 16 October 1994.

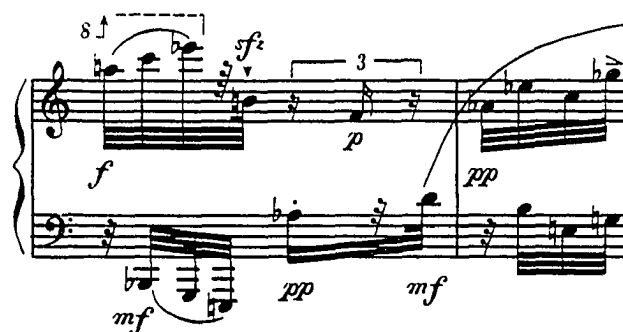


Fig. 4. Etude 3, "Mirrors," p. 11.

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In twentieth-century piano etudes, symmetry usually appears in a special form, in which the axis must be a D or G-sharp/A-flat, so that there is a physical symmetry on the black and white keys--a technical, rather than a purely compositional matter. This technique appears in etudes by Toch, Chávez, and Persichetti.

Few twentieth-century piano etudes use serial techniques.¹² Bolcom uses a special form of serialism in Etude 9, "Invention" (fig. 5).

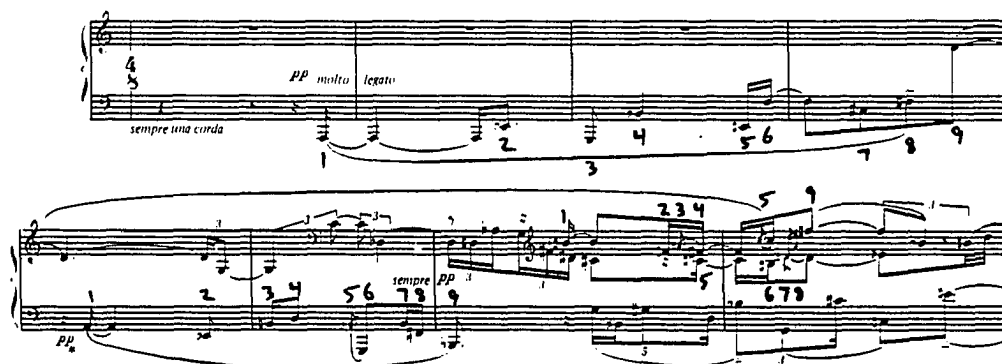


Fig. 5. Etude 9, "Invention," p. 39.

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¹²Messiaen's "Modes de valeurs et d'intensités," though historically related to serialism, is not actually a serial piece. Outside of Bolcom, the only examples I found were in Charpentier's *Soixante-douze études karnatiques*.

The intervals between the first nine notes of the three voices, in number of half-steps (reducing compound intervals by one octave), are:

Voice 1: 6 8 3 6 1 4 5 8

Voice 2: 6 8 3 6 1 4 5 8

Voice 3: 6 4* 3 6 1 4 6 8 (The 4 is an octave inversion of 8.)

In the second and third entrances, each note has a slightly shorter duration than the corresponding note in the previous entrance. The durations of the first nine notes, in sixteenths, are:

Voice 1: 6 3 2 4 1 3 2 2 8+

Voice 2: 5 2 1 3 0 2 1 1 3

Voice 3: 3 1 0 2 0* 1 0 0 1+ (*The fifth note begins during the previous note, and could be considered as having a "negative" duration.)

Standard twelve-tone technique is used, "tongue in cheek," in Etude 11, "Hi-jinks." Most of the few appearances of the row are marked "*mechanically*, bêtement" (translation: "stupidly"), and are composed in a single-line texture, which contrasts with the lively, scherzando character of most of the piece. At the end, the row-forms P0, I0, R0, and RI0 are used in succession, followed by a few short notes that sound like a snicker (fig. 6).

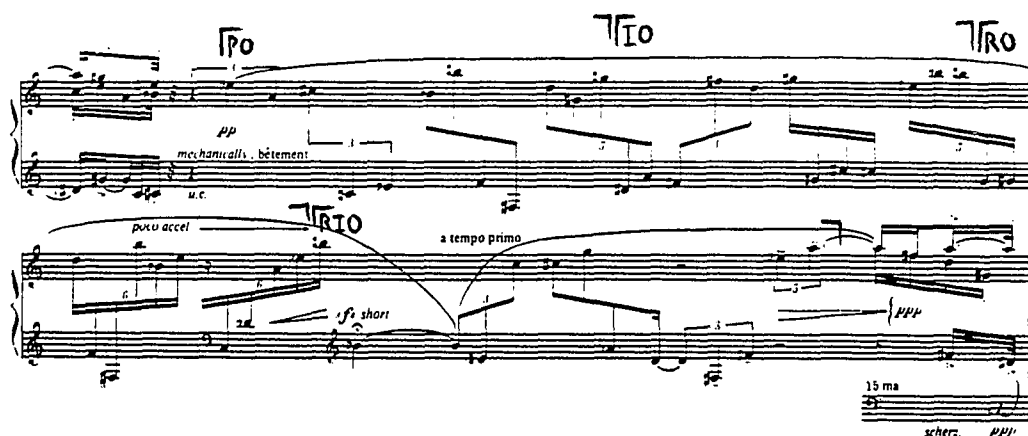


Fig. 6, Etude 11, "Hi-jinks," p. 50.

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Ostinatos appear frequently in etudes, especially those that focus on rhythm, such as Leeuw's *Drie Afrikaanse etudes* and Ligeti's *Etudes pour piano*. Bolcom uses ostinatos in Etudes 4, "Scène d'opéra," (fig. 7a) and 12, "Hymne à l'amour" (fig. 7b). The latter, according to Professor Wait, is "stylistically connected to Messiaen."¹³ It has a timeless, hypnotic quality, like Messiaen's *Vingt Regards sur l'Enfant-Jésus*.



Fig. 7a. Etude 4, "Scène d'opéra," p. 16.

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¹³Mark Wait, telephone interview by author, June 1993. Confirmed by William Bolcom, letter to author, 16 October 1994.

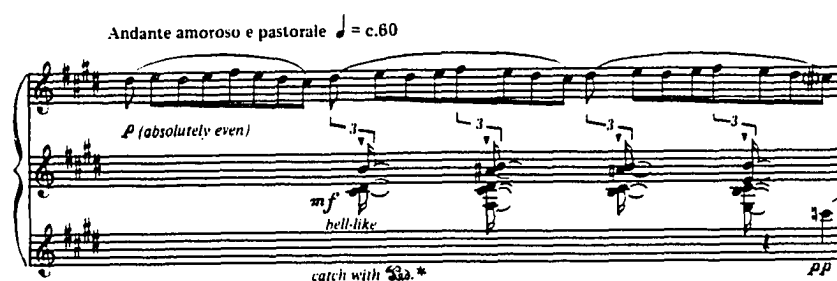


Fig. 7b. Etude 12, "Hymne à l'amour," p. 51.

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In Etude 12 (fig. 7b), it is difficult to fit the chords rhythmically between the notes of the ostinato, especially without accenting the following note. Hamelin, in his recording of the etudes, occasionally leaves a little extra time for the chords. The result is convincing--the phrases of the ostinato do not seem to be interrupted.

In format, the *Twelve New Etudes* are similar to the earlier set, but with a few differences. Bolcom grouped the *New Etudes* into four "Books" of three each, instead of three books of four each. When asked to explain, he said only that they seemed to "fit well" when grouped that way.¹⁴ The only other twentieth-century etudes I could find in which a set is divided into smaller groups is Cage's *Etudes australes* (four "books" of eight etudes each). Some other sets of etudes are printed in several volumes, but it is not clear whether this is for practical or musical reasons. Of course, the tradition of composing pieces in sets of twelve or multiples of twelve goes back much further than the twentieth century. In twentieth-century etudes alone, there are sets of twelve by Arensky, Liapounow, Debussy, and Szymanowski.

¹⁴William Bolcom, telephone interview by author, 4 May 1993.

The *Twelve New Etudes* have individual programmatic titles, as well as subtitles similar to the technical descriptions used in the first set. They are listed below.

TITLE	SUBTITLE
1. Fast, furious	Sweeping gestures of hands, forearms, the body. Freedom of movement.
2. Récitatif	Recitative style, rubato; finger-changes for smoothness' sake; smooth passage of line between hands.
3. Mirrors	Leaps. Distorted mirrors. Lateral stretches between fingers.
4. Scène d'opéra	A steady, rhythmic ostinato vs. varied irrational rhythms.
5. Butterflies, hummingbirds	The lateral tremolo. Mercurial changes in color, attack and rhythm.
6. Nocturne	Absolute contrast in dynamics and tone.
7. Premonitions	"Free-falls" into piano keys; size of tone, without banging. (Inside-piano plucking).
8. Rag infernal (Syncopes apocalyptiques)	Lateral hand-jumps and stretches. Use of practically no pedal.
9. Invention	Controlled legato lines with minimal pedal. Clear delineation of voices.
10. Vers le silence	Use of the pedals. Wide leaps and dynamic contrasts. Trills.
11. Hi-jinks	Dynamic contrast (in the piano-section least naturally apt).
12. Hymne à l'amour	Contrast of timbres, mostly by means of pedal. "Orchestral" sonorities.

In addition, there are two quotations placed at the ends of etudes: number 7 is marked "[. . . tuba mirum spargens sonum]," and the end of number 10, "[. . . rex tremendae majestatis]." These quotations from the requiem mass refer to Paul Jacobs' death,¹⁵ as do the titles of Etudes 7 and 10, "Premonitions" and "Vers le silence."¹⁶ Finally, there is a Satie-like use of a quotation in the middle of Etude 2: "('C'est mon coeur qui se balance ainsi.' . . . Satie)."¹⁷ This appears at the beginning of a delicate passage with a seesawing rhythm. Bolcom explained that his use of alternate English and French titles relates to his time in Paris, and that it is coincidental that Marc-André Hamelin, the pianist who recorded the set, is French-Canadian.¹⁸

In etudes one rarely sees truly programmatic titles, such as "Hymne à l'amour." Titles that merely describe the technical requirements (cf. Debussy's "Pour les tierces"), or name another genre that the etude is intended to evoke ("Scherzo," "Nocturne"), are more common. Among the etudes I have examined, programmatic titles are found in Liapounow, Toch, Cherepnin, Jelobinsky, Messiaen ("Ile de feu"), Thomson, and Ligeti. Titles that describe technical requirements (only possible for those etudes that have a recognizable technical focus, as Bolcom's etudes do) are used by Debussy, Pfitzner, Casella, Leeuw, Chávez, Thomson, Corigliano, and Ligeti.

¹⁵Their similarity in appearance to the titles of the Debussy Preludes may also refer to Jacobs, who was known as an interpreter of twentieth-century music, including Debussy. He recorded the complete Debussy Etudes and Preludes.

¹⁶William Bolcom, letter to author, 16 October 1994.

¹⁷"It is my heart that swings this way."

¹⁸William Bolcom, telephone interview by author, 4 May 1993.

The *Twelve New Etudes* are not musically linked in any obvious way. They are, in fact, published with a preface that includes this statement: "As with the first collection, these Etudes can be played singly, in selections, in books, as well as in toto." However, there are other indications. At the end of Etude 6, there is a notation, "End of Book II / Pause before Book III," at the end of number 7, "A very short pause before No. 8," and at the end of number 8, "Pause before No. 9." Perhaps Book III was originally conceived as a unit. In any case, freedom of choice for the performer seems to be typical of twentieth-century sets of etudes. Major exceptions include Szymanowski's *Twelve Studies*, Op. 33, in which the end of each etude is marked "attacca," and Corigliano's *Etude Fantasy*, in which the five etudes are musically continuous.

As in Bolcom's first set of etudes, the notation used in the *Twelve New Etudes* is straightforward, using new markings only for new techniques, such as the lateral tremolo (to be discussed below). The pieces are also of similar length, the whole set taking about thirty-eight minutes to perform.

B. Passage-work

Passage-work (rapid successions of single notes, usually all of the same duration) has been a very common element in concert etudes for piano solo since the earliest examples: Chopin, Schumann, Mendelssohn, and Liszt. This is no less true in the twentieth century. All along, however, there have also been slow etudes, in which the technical focus is on sonority, balance, phrasing, dynamics, and so on. Chopin's Op. 10, no. 6 and Op. 25, no. 7 are good examples, as is "Paysage" from Liszt's *Etudes d'exécution transcendante*.

In Bolcom's *Twelve New Etudes*, occasional fast passage-work occurs in almost half the pieces, but only number 1, "Fast, furious," uses it throughout. Here, the passage-work consists of thirty-second notes, at eighth note = c. 132, arranged, as the explanatory note indicates, in "sweeping gestures" of varied length (fig. 8).

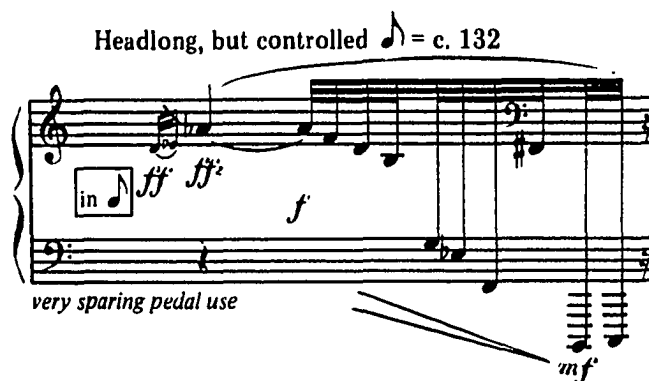


Fig. 8. Etude 1, "Fast, furious," p. 5.
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The thirty-second notes are beamed in groups of four, so that the rhythm can be read in eighths, although there is no emphasis on the first notes of groups, no meter, and no bar lines. The phrases, often divided between the hands, cover wide ranges, occasionally reaching the ends of the keyboard. For the most part, neither hand plays melodic intervals larger than a seventh. The writing is neither tonal nor twelve-tone. There are cells of three or four notes that recur, some always at the same pitch level (fig. 9a), others transposed to various levels (fig. 9b). There are extended-arpeggio figurations, built mostly of fifths, in sixty-fourth notes (fig. 9a). The resulting texture is very dramatic, impressive, and idiomatic,

though far from easy.¹⁹



Fig. 9a. Etude 1, "Fast, furious," p. 6.
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Fig. 9b. Etude 1, "Fast, furious," p. 6.
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Of the twentieth-century etudes I have examined, those in which the passage-work most resembles that of "Fast, furious" are Ruth Crawford's *In Mixed Accents* and Szymanowski's *Twelve Etudes*, Op. 33, no. 1.

C. Leaps

Two of the *Twelve New Etudes* concentrate on leaps: number 3, "Mirrors," and number 8, "Rag Infernal." Large leaps occur only infrequently in the other etudes. In "Mirrors" the leaps extend up to two octaves plus a sixth. The largest ones are to be accomplished in one

¹⁹This is true of the whole set of etudes. Bolcom's experience as a concert pianist is evident throughout. Even the most difficult spots will be recognized by pianists as idiomatic. For example, in passage-work the pianist only rarely has to turn the thumb under, or the fingers over the thumb. The notes fall into "positions," which the hands reach by shifting, stretching, and contracting.

half-second (one beat in 2/8 time at quarter note = 60). A major part of the difficulty is controlling the dynamics and tone at the end of a leap (fig. 10).

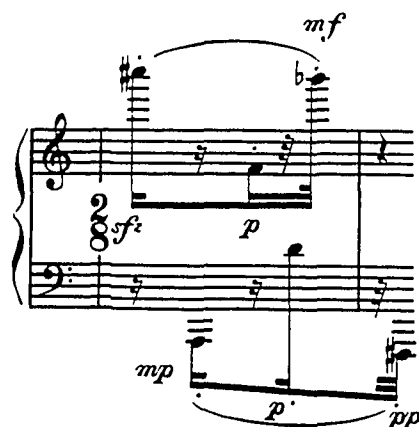


Fig. 10. Etude 3, "Mirrors," p. 11.

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In "Rag Infernal," the left hand plays a typical ragtime accompaniment, alternating bass notes with three-note chords, but at a very fast tempo: quarter notes at half note = 126-160. (The lower tempo is Bolcom's performance tempo; the higher one is Hamelin's).²⁰ The interval from the bass note to the bottom note of the following chord varies from a whole step to an octave plus a seventh; the interval from the bass note to the top note of the chord ranges from a sixth to two octaves plus a sixth (fig. 11).

²⁰William Bolcom, letter to author, 16 October 1994.



Fig. 11. Etude 8, "Rag infernal (Syncopes apocalyptiques)," p. 33.
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At the slowest recommended tempo, each leap must be taken in just under a fourth of a second (quarter notes at half note = c. 126-160). Many, but by no means all, of the chords are recognizable tonal structures, sometimes in jazz style (augmented ninths, thirteenth, and so on). The greatest difficulty appears where both hands have to make simultaneous leaps (fig. 12).

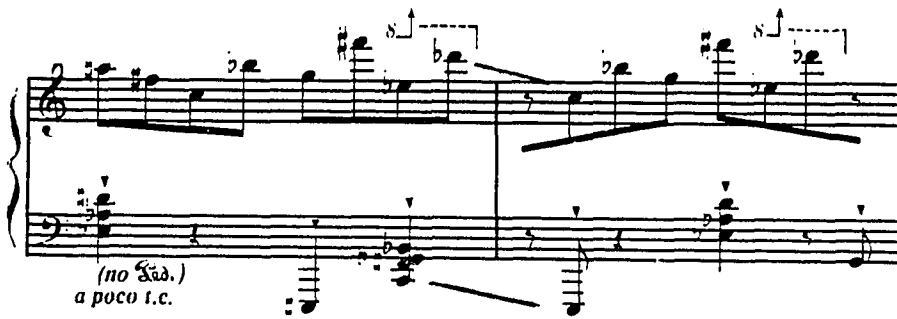


Fig. 12. Etude 8, "Rag infernal (Syncopes apocalyptiques)," p. 36.
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Leaps are not uncommon in etudes, or in technically advanced music in general, but there are not many etudes that concentrate on them. The left hand accompaniment of Chopin's Op. 25, no. 4 makes technical demands

similar to those of "Rag Infernal." Even the tempo is similar, judging by Mikuli's marking in the Schirmer edition (fig. 13), as well as Paderewski's in the PWM edition.

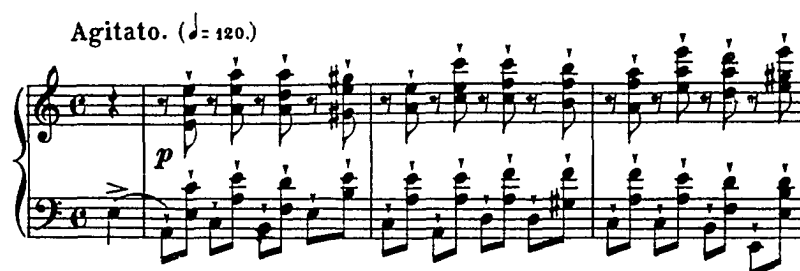


Fig. 13. Chopin, Etude Op. 25, no. 4.
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Debussy's Etude XII, "Pour les accords," has long sections of upward leaps of an octave in the right hand, simultaneous with downward leaps of about a twelfth in the left hand. Each leap moves from a four-note chord to an octave, in about a third of a second (at my estimated tempo of dotted quarter = 60). The only other etude I could find that focuses on leaps was the first of Chávez's *Four New Etudes*.

D. Chords

In Bolcom's Etude 12, "Hymne à l'amour," there are several chord progressions in which each chord covers such a wide range that it has to be played as if the bottom note (in some cases two notes) were a grace note (see fig. 3, p. 8). This is not specifically mentioned in the description at the beginning of the movement, but the phrase "'orchestral' sonorities" probably refers to big chords in general. As a precursor, Chopin's Op. 10, no. 11 comes to mind, although the chords in that piece are rolled, not "split." The same is true of "Guitar and Mandoline," number 9 of Virgil Thomson's *Nine Etudes*. Only "Vânaspati," number 4 of Charpentier's *Soixante-douze études karnatiques*, actually uses "split" chords as a major technical focus.

E. Trills and Tremolos

While trills and tremolos appear occasionally in the *Twelve New Etudes*, they figure prominently only in Etude 5, "Butterflies, hummingbirds," and Etude 10, "Vers le silence." In the former, Bolcom uses the lateral tremolo, a technical innovation to be discussed below. In number 10, there is a whole page of trills and tremolos. They are placed on each note of two simultaneous melodies, with the secondary pitch of each trill or tremolo (anywhere from a half-step to a major seventh above or below the principal note) being indicated by a small note-head in parentheses (fig. 14).

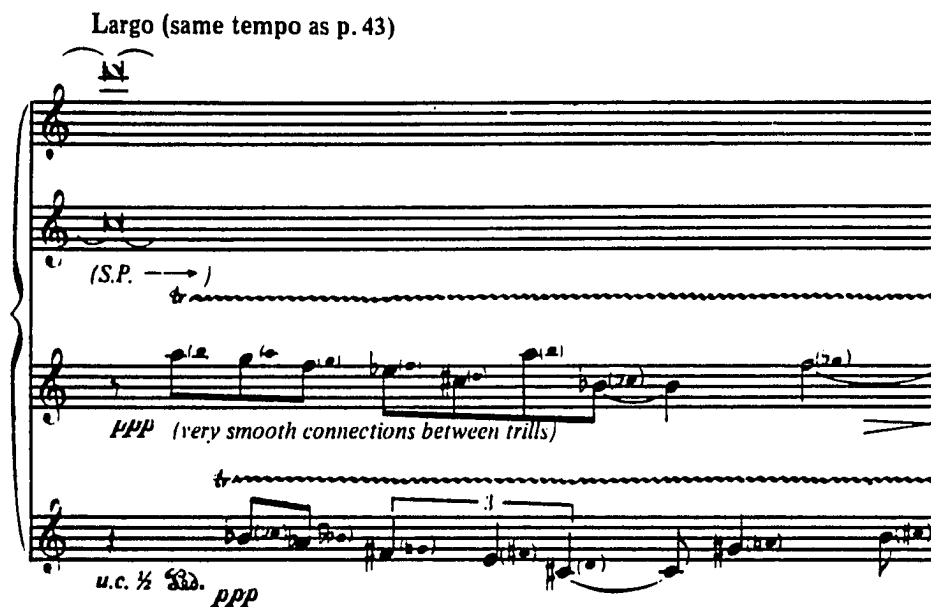


Fig. 14. Etude 10, "Vers le silence," p. 45.
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The texture is reminiscent of Scriabin's similarly titled "Vers la flamme," Op. 72. Bolcom's parenthetical direction "(very smooth connections between trills)" can be hard to execute, especially across large intervals, but with half-pedal and *ppp* (as marked), the illusion of smooth

connections can be made by means of a slight fade at the end of one trill and a very soft start on the next one. This works even with a gap of two or three notes at a fast trilling speed.

Liszt's "Chasse-Neige," number 12 of the *Etudes d'exécution transcendante*, is an early example of an etude that focuses on tremolos. In the twentieth century, there are Pfitzner's "Trillerstudie," Etude 6 of his *Sechs Studien für das Pianoforte*, Op. 51 (1942); Corigliano's "Ornaments," Etude 4 of his *Etude Fantasy* (1976); Liapounow's "Harpes éoliennes," number 9 of his *Douze études d'exécution transcendante*, Op. 11 (1905); and Chávez's Estudio II, from *Cuatro estudios* (1921). In the latter, the right hand part consists almost entirely of groups of four sixteenth-notes, each group alternating between two notes--in effect, a series of short tremolos when taken at the recommended tempo of quarter note = 160 (fig. 15).



Fig. 15. Chávez, "Estudio II," from *Cuatro estudios*, p. 9.
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F. Counterpoint

In this study, counterpoint is considered a technical element in the sense that it presents the coordination problem of sustaining notes while moving or releasing other notes played by the same hand. Two of the *Twelve New Etudes* concentrate on counterpoint: number 4, "Scène d'opéra,"

and number 9, "Invention." In the former, Bolcom uses a four-measure ostinato in the left hand, and counterpoint of up to three voices in the right hand (see fig. 7a, p. 11). "Invention" is in three-voice counterpoint throughout, with wide melodic intervals in each voice (see fig. 5, p. 9).

Only seven other etudes among those examined for this study use counterpoint of three or more voices extensively: "Präludium und Fuge," from Reger's *Vier Spezialstudien für die linke Hand allein*,²¹ Messiaen's *Mode de valeurs et d'intensités*, Charpentier's *Soixante-douze études karnatiques* (numbers 1 and 3), Persichetti's *Mirror Etudes* (number 5), Ives's *Study Number 5*, and Baiocchi's *Two Piano Etudes* (number 2).²²

G. Cross-rhythms

Etudes 4 and 9, mentioned in the previous section for their use of counterpoint, also make extensive use of cross-rhythms. While they are used throughout the right hand part of Etude 4, "Scène d'opéra" (see fig. 7a, p. 11), the cross-rhythms in Etude 9, "Invention," are more complex. At one point, they involve playing 5 against 4 against 3 (fig. 16).

²¹Reger's "Präludium und Fuge" is surely unique in the genre; it is a three-voice fugue for left hand alone. Even in Brahms's *Chaconne von J. S. Bach* (the left hand arrangement), only one four-measure segment has counterpoint of three independent voices.

²²Etudes that focus on counterpoint of three or more voices are rarer than this list makes them seem, since four of the etudes on the list have only a partial right to be included. In Messiaen's *Mode de valeurs et d'intensités* and Charpentier's *Soixante-douze études karnatiques*, numbers 1 and 3, the counterpoint is very different from what we usually think of as counterpoint, in that the voices are not melodic in the usual sense. In *Etude karnatique* number 1, for instance, each voice consists of three-note chords, while in *Mode de valeurs et d'intensités*, each note has a different attack and volume, which tends to disconnect it from the preceding and following notes. Persichetti's *Mirror Etude 5* has real four-voice counterpoint, but two of the voices are simultaneous mirror-images of two others, which reduces the independence of the voices.

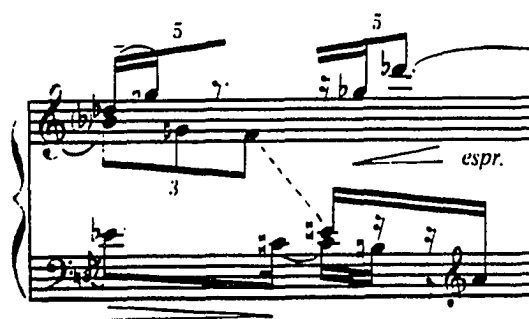


Fig. 16. Etude 9, "Invention," p. 41.

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There are many other piano etudes that use cross-rhythms, but unlike Bolcom's cross-rhythms, they are usually in a constant ratio: 4 against 3, 3 against 2, and so on. Many of Scriabin's and Szymanowski's etudes show this characteristic. Of the seven etudes listed above under "Counterpoint," only the last two (those by Ives and Baiocchi) combine an emphasis on counterpoint with one on cross-rhythms, as Bolcom does in Etudes 4 and 9.

H. Stretches

Part of the technical description of Bolcom's Etude 3 reads: "lateral stretches between fingers." For the most part, this is achieved by the use of arpeggio-like passages in which the notes are placed in ascending and descending groups, many of which cover a range wider than the hand could play as a chord. Similar extended arpeggios can be seen in Etude 1, where the left-hand groups of thirty-second notes cover ninths, tenths, and elevenths, while the right-hand groups of sixty-fourth notes cover ninths (fig. 17).

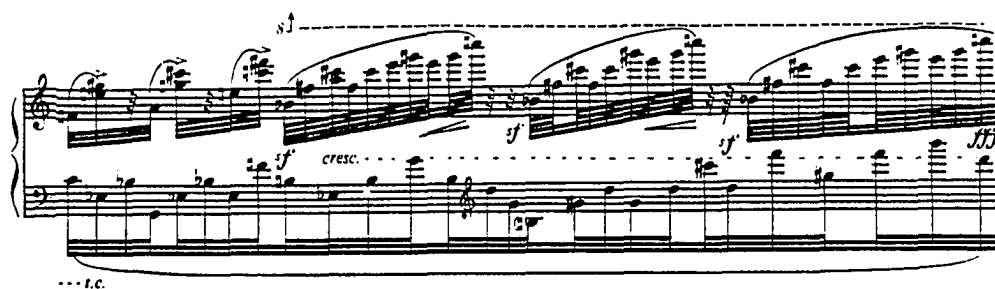


Fig. 17. Etude 1, "Fast, furious," p. 6.

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Lateral stretches also occur in Etude 9, where the melodic intervals include legato ninths, tenths, and occasional elevenths, some of which require touches of pedal to achieve the smoothness required.

Chopin's Op. 10, no. 1 may well be the prototype of the extended-arpeggio etude. (Lutosławski paraphrased it in the first of his *Two Studies for Piano*, and Bolcom alludes to it at the end of Etude 7 of his earlier set.) It is noteworthy that the first of Bolcom's *Twelve New Etudes* is, like Chopin's first etude, concerned with "sweeping gestures," as is the first of Liszt's *Etudes d'exécution transcendante*.

Single stretches, like those in "Invention," appear in the first of Chávez's *Four New Etudes*. Wide chords appear in many etudes, and there are two based on double notes in ninths: number 3 of Persichetti's *Mirror Etudes*, and Scriabin's Etude, Op. 65, no. 1.

I. Dynamics and Tone

Bolcom uses many dynamic markings, as do most twentieth-century composers. Chaitkin provides an extreme example: his *Etudes for Piano Solo* have an average of about two dynamic markings per measure. Moszkowski is a major exception, using about one dynamic marking per five

measures. The striking feature of Bolcom's use of dynamics and sonority is his selection of them as a technical focus: seven of the twelve technical descriptions (Etudes 5-7, 9-12) mention either dynamics or timbre, which are also specified in such markings within the pieces as "Play entire passage intensely, deep into the keys" (footnote to Etude 4).

Sonority is important in Scriabin, Liszt, and Rachmaninoff, perhaps even more so in Debussy (despite the titles referring to intervals and other technical elements), and of course in Chopin, especially in the slower etudes and Op. 25, no. 1. In fact, sonority is an important element in many, perhaps most, slow etudes. Nonetheless, with few exceptions, Bolcom is the only composer since the 1910s to write etudes in which control of dynamics and tone is the main technical requirement. Chaitkin, mentioned above, is a possible exception, and sonority figures prominently in Corigliano's *Etude Fantasy*, especially Etudes 1 and 4. Also, Virgil Thomson, in his *Nine Etudes*, probably had certain timbres in mind when he used these titles: "With trumpet and horn," "The Harp," "The Wind," "Guitar and Mandoline." Perhaps the most significant example between the 1910s and the *Twelve New Etudes* is Messiaen's *Quatre études de rythme*. In each of these, dynamic contrasts are central to the piece, and in "Mode de valeurs et d'intensités," types of attack (legato, staccato, accented, tenuto, and so on) are equally important.

Part of the subtitle of Bolcom's Etude 9, "Invention," reads: "clear delineation of voices." Since the voices are not differentiated by volume, rhythm, articulation, intervals, or range (they occasionally cross), the only recourse is to heed the composer's footnote: "All three voices usually *pp*, but distinguished by color and style" (see fig. 5, p. 9). Delineation of voices

is made particularly difficult by the wide melodic intervals in each voice. In Etude 6, "Nocturne," the accompaniment ranges in volume from *pppp* to *pp*, the melody from *mf* to *fffz*, except for a fade to *ppp* at the end. Etude 7, "Premonitions," aims at "size of tone, without banging," and has many chords marked "*fffz*." "Vers le silence" (Etude 10), as the title implies, ends with the most extreme diminuendo possible: one measure repeated five times, marked "*pp-ppp-pppp-ppppp-pppppp* (each time softer)," followed by a measure that repeats the last few notes of the previous measure, marked "*ppppppp*," "*Ped. l.v.*" (*laissez vibrer*), and "till silent" (fig. 18).

The image shows a musical score for a piano piece. It features a grand staff with five staves. The first staff has a melodic line with various dynamics and a 'Repeat 5 times' instruction. The second staff has a series of chords marked 'pp-ppp-pppp-ppppp-pppppp (each time softer)'. The third staff has a series of chords marked 'mp-p-p-p-ppp-pppp (each time softer)'. The fourth staff has a series of chords marked 'ppppppp' and 'till silent'. The fifth staff has a series of chords marked 'ppppppp' and 'till silent'. Below the staves, there are performance instructions: 'non dim.' with a slur, 'Ped. l.v.' with a slur, and '[... rex tremendae majestatis]'. At the bottom, there is a small note: 'poco a poco una corda'.

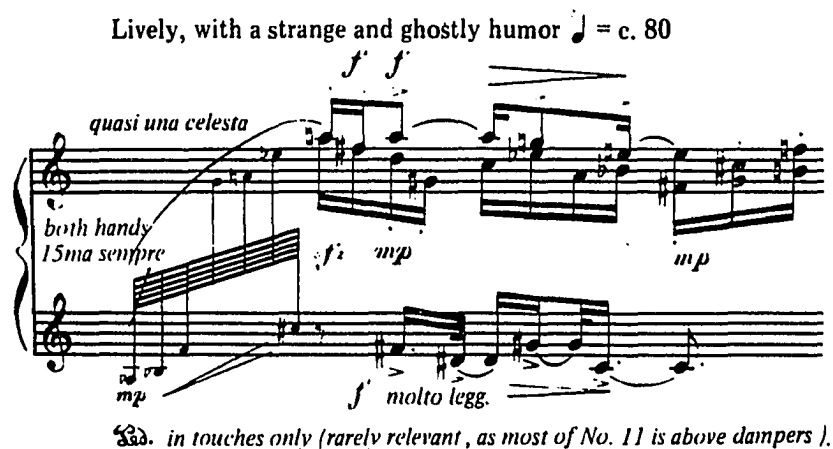
Fig. 18. Etude 10, "Vers le silence," p. 46.

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In Etude 12, the emphasis on timbre is evident from markings such as "absolutely even," "bell-like," "like brass," "rich tone; outer notes strong," and "like Horns." Etude 11, "Hi-jinks," is concentrated entirely in the top three octaves (mostly in the top two octaves) of the keyboard. The subtitle is "Dynamic contrast (in the piano-section least naturally apt)," and the beginning of the first score is marked "quasi una celesta" (fig. 19). (Note that in the direction "both hands 15ma sempre," Bolcom has taken the

trouble to properly abbreviate the Italian for "fifteenth," "quindicesima," rather than using the "15va" we sometimes see.)

Lively, with a strange and ghostly humor ♩ = c. 80



quasi una celesta

both hands 15ma sempre

f *mp* *mp*

f *molto legg.*

33d. in touches only (rarely relevant, as most of No. 11 is above dampers).

Fig. 19. Etude 11, "Hi-jinks," p. 47.
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J. Pedaling

Even more unusual than Bolcom's emphasis on timbre is his use of the related area of pedaling as a technical focus. Although most composers of etudes mark pedaling, some more thoroughly than others, few of them indicate the use of the *sostenuto* or the *una corda* pedal. In the twentieth-century works examined for this study, Scriabin, Stravinsky, Crawford, Philipp, Martinů, and Martinček use no pedal markings at all, while Bartók, Toch, Pfitzner, Casella, and surprisingly, Debussy, use very few.

Several of the *Twelve New Etudes* are marked "Practically no pedal," "very little pedal," and so on. This in itself, together with the wide variety of pedal markings Bolcom provides, demonstrates his attention to pedaling. Four of the twelve subtitles mention pedaling (Etudes 8-10, 12). The

damper and una corda pedals are each at one time or another depressed or released gradually, while in Etude 8 there is a pedal-release marked with an accent, and a footnote that reads "Let Pedal up with a jerk (for an 'accent')." Bolcom also uses half-pedal, half-release, quarter-pedal, quarter-release, flutter pedal, and a "bell-like" timbre indicated (Etude 12) with this footnote: "Play notes *molto staccato* and depress *Ped.* just before damper hits strings" (see fig. 7b, p. 12). This effect is difficult to execute consistently. His use of all these effects in his earlier set of etudes predates any unusual pedal markings I have found in the etudes of other composers.

Near the end of Etude 10, all three pedals are called for simultaneously (see fig. 14, p. 21). This is not accidental; Bolcom explained that one foot has to press two pedals simultaneously.²³

K. Non-traditional Techniques

Five new, or relatively new, techniques appear in the *Twelve New Etudes*: the lateral tremolo, the forearm glissando, pizzicato, clusters, and silently depressed keys. All of them, except the lateral tremolo, occur in Bolcom's earlier set of etudes (1966).

Inside-the-piano techniques have been familiar since the publication of Cowell's "The Banshee" (1930). In the etudes (other than Bolcom's) examined for this study, they occur only twice: once in Thomson's "Guitar and Mandoline," number 9 of *Nine Etudes* (1954),²⁴ and once in Etude 3 of Perle's *Six Etudes* (1976).²⁵ While Bolcom uses a variety of inside-the-piano

²³William Bolcom, letter to author, 16 October 1994.

²⁴The player is to "reach into piano and strike strings with flat of hand, pedal down."

²⁵In the last measure, "R.H. stops these [two] strings near the bridge."

techniques in his earlier set of etudes, the *Twelve New Etudes* only use pizzicato on single notes, four times each in Etudes 2 and 7.

Chromatic clusters are another familiar twentieth-century piano technique that appears only rarely in etudes. They can be seen in Ives's *Study Number 5* (1907), Messiaen's *Ile de feu I* (1949), and Etude 4 of Corigliano's *Etude Fantasy* (1976). In the *Twelve New Etudes* (aside from the lateral tremolo, which is actually an alternation between a black-key cluster and a white-key cluster) they are used in Etudes 1, 8, and 11. In Etude 1, each cluster is notated as a harmonic interval with a vertical bracket on the left (fig. 20).



Fig. 20. Etude 1, "Fast, furious," p. 7.
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Figure 21 illustrates the clusters in Etude 8. They are notated as two simultaneous chords, one with a large sharp sign (black keys) and one with a large natural sign (white keys).

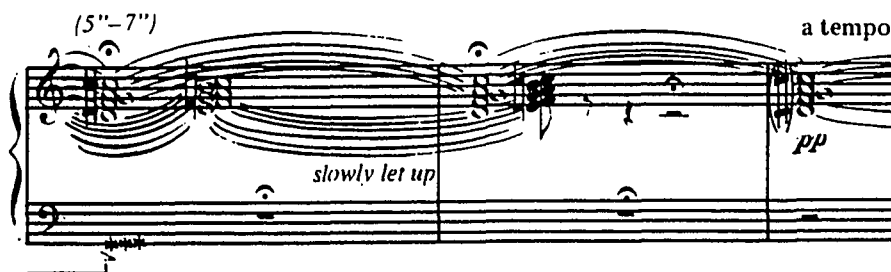


Fig. 21. Etude 8, "Rag infernal (Syncopes apocalyptiques)," p. 37.
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The cluster in Etude 11 is written in normal notation, since it consists of only five notes. The chords in Etude 7 are not chromatic clusters, but they are very dense and hard to read. Some of them, if one ignores the top right-hand and bottom left-hand notes (which are constant), can be more easily read as jazz chords, although the piece is definitely not in jazz style (fig. 22).

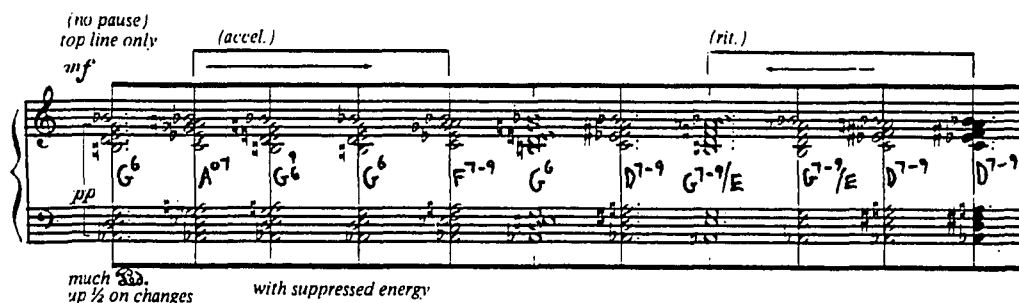


Fig. 22. Etude 7, "Premonitions," p. 28.
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Bolcom uses silently depressed keys to prepare sostenuto pedal effects in Etudes 7 and 10. They are used more extensively in etudes by Ligeti (1985)²⁶ and Zender (1989).²⁷

²⁶In "Touches bloquées," Etude 3 of Ligeti's *Etudes pour piano*, some notes are "played" silently while the keys are held down by the other hand.

The forearm glissando appears in Etudes 1 (fig. 23) and 8.

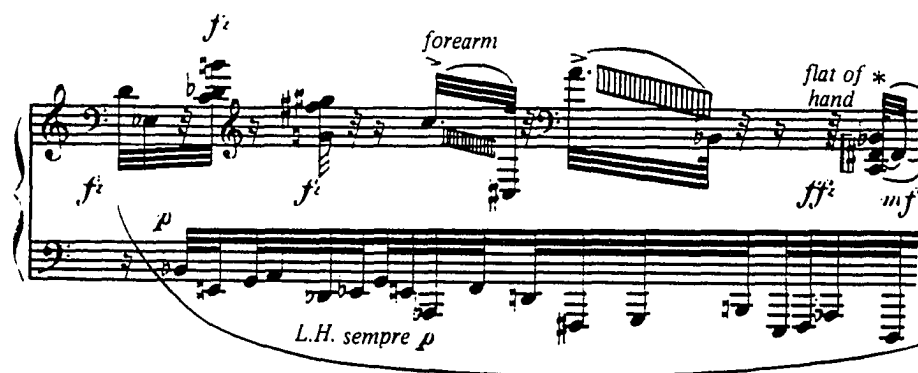


Fig. 23. Etude 1, "Fast, furious," p. 6.

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The forearm glissando is actually not a sliding, but a rolling movement, from elbow to hand. A player with long arms may need to angle the elbow away from the keys, so as to cover the required interval. The forearm glissando is, as far as I know, unique to Bolcom.²⁸

The lateral tremolo is used in Etude 5 (fig. 24).

²⁷Hans Zender's *Memorial* (1989) consists of three etudes that focus on silently depressed keys. I found it practically impossible to change keys silently at the required tempi.

²⁸The rolled clusters in Cowell's "The Tides of Manaunaun" differ from Bolcom's forearm glissandi, in that the former, as the word "clusters" indicates, end with all the notes sounding, while the "glissandi" ideally sound one note at a time, and end on a single note.

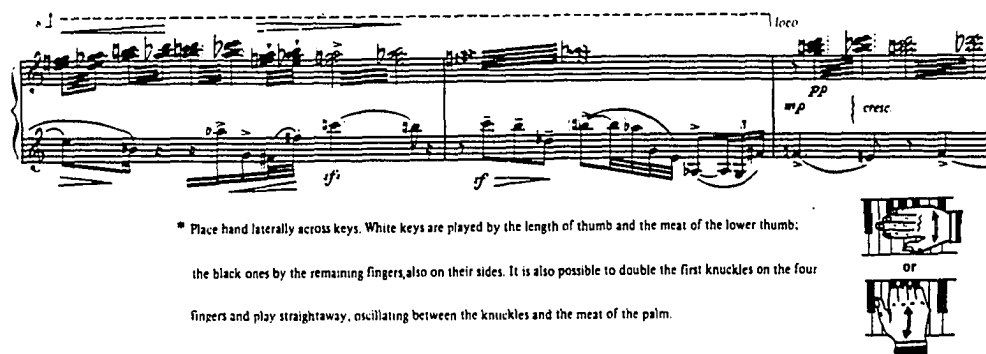


Fig. 24. Etude 5, "Butterflies, hummingbirds," p. 21.
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In the lateral tremolos, the black-note and white-note clusters each consist of three, four, or five notes. I have found it easiest to control the tremolos, not in the way Bolcom has recommended, but by playing the white cluster with the thumb and the meat of the lower thumb (or thumb alone if the white cluster has only three notes), and the black cluster "normally," that is, with the fingertips. This makes a comfortable rotary axis between the thumb and second finger. When the black cluster has five notes, the thumb can play one of them, and the white cluster can be played with the entire heel of the hand. Care must be taken to play the lateral tremolos lightly, as most of them are marked *pp*, and they can easily become too loud. When asked if the lateral tremolo was unique to his works, Bolcom, true to his eclectic interests, replied "I showed it to Eubie Blake and he thought maybe [jazz pianist] Luckey Roberts may have used it too."²⁹

There are several technical elements that rarely figure in Bolcom's work, though they appear frequently in other twentieth-century etudes: concentration on particular intervals (cf. Debussy's "Pour les tierces"),

²⁹William Bolcom, letter to author, 16 October 1994.

concentration on one hand, and rapidly repeated notes and chords. The same is true of double notes, although there are some passages alternating double with single notes in Etudes 1 and 5 (fig. 25). This is not a common technique in etudes, but examples of it can be found in the etudes of Toch.

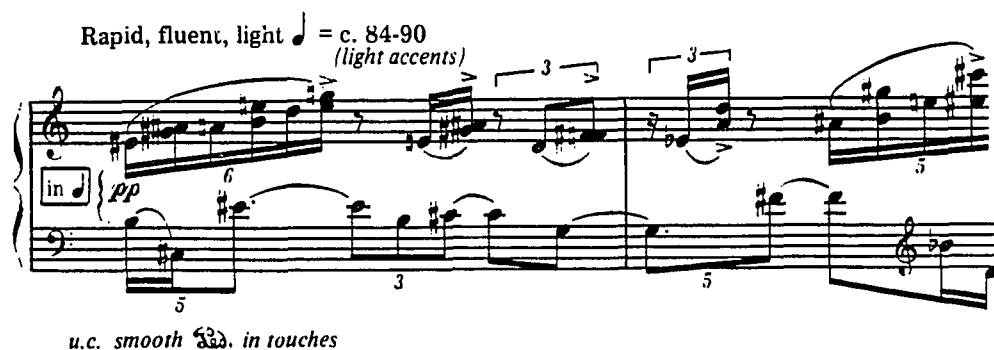


Fig. 25. Etude 5, "Butterflies, hummingbirds," p. 20.
Twelve New Etudes by William Bolcom (c) 1988 Edward B. Marks Music Co.
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The *Twelve New Etudes* demand of the pianist a combination of skills: speed and agility in passage-work, accuracy in leaps, and the ability to work out complex cross-rhythms. The willingness to try new techniques is only required in a few of the etudes. Good trills are necessary in Etude 10, and refined pedal-technique is needed in several of the etudes. Most important is precise control of dynamics, especially at the soft end of the spectrum. Large hands are not necessary, nor is the ability to play octave passages, other double-note passages, or rapidly repeated notes and chords. Surprisingly, familiarity with pop styles is not a requirement, since the passages in those styles are notated so precisely for expression that the pianist who can follow all the markings cannot miss the style.

Chapter III. Summary

I have pointed out seven areas in which Bolcom, in the *Twelve New Etudes*, has done something new or unusual within the genre, namely: the use of pop styles (especially those other than ragtime),³⁰ programmatic titles,³¹ leaps as a technical focus,³² split (as opposed to rolled) chords,³³ counterpoint combined with cross-rhythms,³⁴ two completely new techniques (the lateral tremolo and the forearm glissando),³⁵ and perhaps most importantly, emphasis on dynamics, timbre, and pedaling.³⁶

While it is much easier to say what is new than what is good about a piece of music, it seems necessary to address the latter question as well. Reviewers of the *Twelve New Etudes* seem to focus on different aspects of them. Teachout mentions their wittiness.³⁷ Bennett emphasizes contrasts of mood and style.³⁸ Svard praises Bolcom's idiomatic writing for the piano.³⁹ Carl lists tunefulness, sincerity, and mastery of pop styles as important

³⁰Etudes 2, 6, 8, and 12.

³¹Etudes 2 through 12.

³²Etude 8.

³³Etude 12.

³⁴Etudes 4 and 9.

³⁵The lateral tremolo in Etude 5, and the forearm glissando in Etudes 1 and 8.

³⁶Dynamics and timbre in Etudes 5-7 and 9-12, pedaling in Etudes 8, 9, 10, and 12.

³⁷Terry Teachout, "Classical Reviews: Bolcom: *Twelve New Etudes*," *High Fidelity* 39/2 (February 1989): 59.

³⁸Joshua Berrett, Review of *Twelve New Etudes*, by William Bolcom, *American Music* 7 (1989): 234-35.

³⁹Lois Svard, "*Twelve New Etudes for Piano*," *Notes: Quarterly Journal of the Music Library Association* 46/2 (December 1989): 509.

elements of Bolcom's work.⁴⁰ In my opinion, the outstanding features of the *Twelve New Etudes* are their humor, technical showiness, and dramatic effectiveness. The latter is especially impressive, involving clear emotional expression and a sense of timing that arranges gradual and sudden mood changes, contrasting active and calm areas, and pauses, in a "logical," natural-sounding way that consistently makes the listener want to know what is coming next. In short, the *Twelve New Etudes* are enjoyable to listen to. It is the combination of innovation with accessibility that sets these pieces apart and makes them an important contribution to the modern piano repertoire.

⁴⁰Robert Carl, "Six Case Studies in New American Music: A Postmodern Portrait Gallery," *College Music Symposium* 30/1 (Spring 1990): 45-63.

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APPENDIX I: CHRONOLOGICAL LIST OF SCORES EXAMINED

In this list, "c" denotes date of composition,
"p" date of publication, and "~" an approximate date.

- Liszt, Franz. *Etude en douze exercices*. c 1826 p 1826.
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- Schumann, Robert. *Sechs Studien nach Capricen von Paganini*, Op. 3.
c 1832 p 1832.
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Op. 10. c 1833 p 1835.
- Liszt, Franz. *Grande fantaisie de bravoure sur "La Clochette" de Paganini*.
c 1834.
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- Mendelssohn, Felix. *Three Etudes*, Op. 104b. c 1834-38.
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- Liszt, Franz. *Etudes d'exécution transcendante d'après Paganini*. c 1838
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- Liszt, Franz. *Mazeppa*. c 1840 p 1847.
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- Scriabin, Alexander. *Eight Etudes*, Op. 42. c 1903.
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- Scriabin, Alexander. *Etude*, Op. 49, no. 1. c 1905.
- Arensky, Anton. *Twelve Etudes for Piano*, Op. 74. c 1905.
- Moszkowski, Moritz. *Etude* ("L'Agilità"), Op. 75, no. 2. p 1906.
- Ives, Charles. *Study Number 5, for Piano*. c~1907 p 1978.
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- Ives, Charles. *Study Number 9, for Piano: The Anti-Abolitionist Riots in the 1830's and 1840's*. c 1908-9 p 1949.
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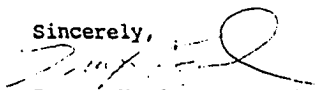
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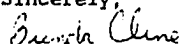
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VITA

After graduating cum laude from Yale University in 1978, Henry Jones worked for ten years as a free-lance accompanist and vocal coach in New York City. During those years, his activities included piano solo recitals; theatrical work on Broadway and Off-Broadway shows; accompanying vocal recitals in Lincoln Center; and performing as orchestral pianist and choral accompanist in Carnegie Hall and Lincoln Center.

In 1989, Mr. Jones began his work toward the D.M.A. degree in piano performance at Louisiana State University with Alumni Professor Jack Guerry as his major professor. He was awarded an LSU Alumni Fellowship, and was a winner of the LSU Symphony Concerto Competition in 1990. While working on the doctorate, he accompanied several faculty and guest-artist recitals and coached graduate voice majors. Mr. Jones anticipates teaching applied piano and related courses at the university level after receiving his degree in 1994.

Henry Jones and his wife Stacey Davis Jones, a singer who was nominated several times for Manhattan Association of Cabaret Awards, have a five-year-old daughter, and are expecting a second child in January, 1995.

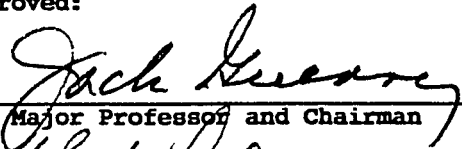
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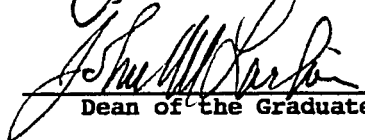
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Major Field: Music

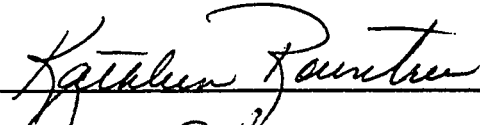
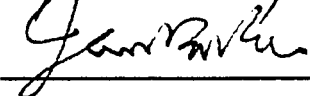

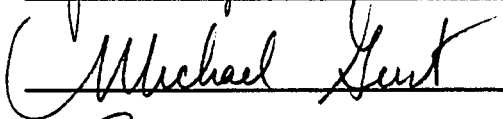
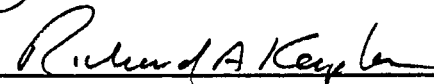
Title of Dissertation: William Bolcom's Twelve New Etudes for Piano

Approved:


Major Professor and Chairman


Dean of the Graduate School

EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

Date of Examination:

October 17, 1994