

Alexina Louie:
Works for Young Pianists
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ABSTRACT

Alexina Louie (b. 1949) is a highly respected Canadian composer who has received numerous prestigious awards. The present study focuses on her pedagogical works for young pianists: *Music for Piano* (1982), *Star Light, Star Bright* (1995), and *Small Beautiful Things* (2016). All three sets, written in different periods of her compositional career, reveal Louie's highly artistic musical style adapted to her strong interest in piano pedagogy.

Music for Piano, intended for intermediate-level pianists, has four individual pieces, taking two to three minutes each, representing Louie's early compositional style. *Star Light, Star Bright*, for intermediate-level pianists at a slightly lower level than intended for *Music for Piano*, consists of nine short character pieces inspired by the stars and planets and other phenomena of the solar system. *Small Beautiful Things* is technically less challenging than the other works. It consists of eleven-character pieces with titles from everyday life that are designed to appeal to young musicians.

The first chapter is an account of Louie's educational background and how mentors influenced her development as a pianist, composer, and teacher. The chapter also documents Louie's strong interest in teaching, which led her to compose piano music with pedagogical intent. The second chapter describes the compositional elements of *Music for Piano*, examining Louie's uses of various Asian elements, minimalism, notational innovations resulting in rhythmic freedom, and Impressionistic timbres and sonorities. The third chapter assesses *Star Light, Star Bright*, showing the overall palindromic structure of the set while discussing the content and pedagogical value of the

individual pieces. The fourth chapter focuses on how the pieces of *Small Beautiful Things* help young pianists to develop basic techniques and musicianship.

Overall, the discussion reveals not only the musical and expressive qualities of Louie's works for young pianists, but also their value for cultivating both technique and musicality.

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CHAPTER 1

ALEXINA LOUIE AND HER PEDAGOGICAL WORKS

Alexina Louie (b. 1949) is a highly respected Canadian composer who also excels in piano pedagogy. As a pianist who dreamed of a performance career during her youth, her devotion to and knowledge of piano repertoire helped her to transition into a successful career as a composer.

Louie as a Pianist

For Louie, a Vancouver-born Chinese Canadian, playing the piano was a part of her life since the age of seven. She began to take piano lessons seriously after she met Jean Lyons, the teacher she considers to be her lifelong friend. Under Jean Lyons's guidance, Louie at the age of seventeen received an Associate Diploma in Piano Performance from the Royal Conservatory of Music -- the highest diploma and academic standing award from that institution.¹ At the age of sixteen, Louie was offered a teaching position in Lyons's studio due to her talent and potential.²

Louie states that “music has always been a way of expressing myself, from a small child playing the piano.”³ During childhood, Louie was not interested in becoming a composer, but rather a concert pianist. She professed her love of performing, saying, “I learned to express myself by playing such composers as Brahms and Chopin. Something

¹ “Diploma Requirements,” The Royal Conservatory, accessed January 20, 2022, <https://www.rcmusic.com/learning/examinations/recognizing-achievement/arct-lrcm>

² Yoomi Kim, “The Evolution of Alexina Louie’s Piano Music: Reflections of a Soul Searching Journey” (DMA diss., University of Cincinnati, 2009), 109.

³ The Journal of Music, “A Different Point of View: An Interview with Alexina Louie,” March 7, 2019, <https://journalofmusic.com/news/different-point-view-interview-alexina-louie>.

happens inside me when I hear great music performed well.”⁴ After becoming inspired by Courtland Hultberg (1931-2002), her theory professor during her undergraduate study in music history at the University of British Columbia, she discovered her interest in composition. Her initial motivation to study composition was “to learn why great music moves us deeply.”⁵

Even after she moved to California to study composition, her love of playing the piano continued. She recounted the joy of practicing: “Piano playing was that for me. It was a world that you create for yourself. Once I was there playing and practicing, it was to the exclusion of everything else... Although I was writing music, it was still playing the piano that utilized most of my time.”⁶ Her proficiency at the instrument supported her as a collaborative pianist during those years at the University of California San Diego. She also worked as a piano teacher and a cocktail pianist to finance her education. Her studies as a composition major did not limit her involvement as an active performer and pedagogue, giving Louie opportunities to collaborate with various performers and artists.

Louie practiced piano five hours daily.⁷ This intensive practice sometimes caused pain in her right hand. Louie said, “When my hand started getting stiff and hurt, it was

⁴ William Littler, “Alexina Louie Gets a Rare Honour for a Canadian Composer: Glory While She’s Alive,” *The Star*, October 4, 2019, <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/57dc396a03596e8da9fe6b73/t/5e5da24aa347fb44ae3286b9/1583194699284/2019-10-04+Alexina+Louie+gets+a+rare+honour+for+a+Canadian+composer%3A+glory+while+she%E2%80%99s+alive+%7C+The+Star.pdf>

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Mira Kruja, “Piano Inside Out: The Expansion of the Expressive, Technical, and Sonorous Spectrum in Selected Twentieth-Century Art-Music Repertoire for the Modern Acoustic Piano” (DMA diss., University of Kentucky, 2004), 137.

⁷ Diane Bégay, “Contemporary Music in Canada: Alexina Louie” (M.M thesis, University of Ottawa, 1994), 12.

just because I thought I had to practice more, which was not the case at all, I was getting tendonitis.”⁸ This injury affected her performance and forced her to rely on composing for musical communication. Louie explains, “It was at that point that composition became a necessity for me, for self-expression.”⁹

The piano became the main source of Louie’s writing. She would begin the composition process by improvising at the piano and translating those musical ideas into other instrumentation: “I physically have to hear it and make my adjustment by listening to what it sounds like, and imagining what the orchestra, what the instruments, would sound like. I am always searching for what I want to say. I am writing for myself first.”¹⁰ In addition, her extensive knowledge and experience as a pianist enabled her to compose pedagogical works that fit the mechanics of young pianists’ hands while still cultivating skills such as dexterity, finger independence, and musicality. This understanding of musical execution extended to her virtuosic works. For example, when she wrote *Fastforward*, commissioned for the Montreal International Competition in 2008, she implied that her inspiration was to make performance comfortable for pianists who have limited preparation time.¹¹ Louie said of *Fastforward*, “Everything fits. There are a couple of little awkward things about it, but there is nothing that a fine pianist can’t play. I wrote this with all these things in mind.”¹² In contrast, when she writes pedagogical

⁸ Kruja, 138.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ “A Different Point of View.”

¹¹ The Montreal International Competition allows only one month of preparation for pianists in the final round. Newly-composed music is assigned for the performers to show the wide spectrum of their musical understanding and technical ability.

¹² Kim, 125.

pieces for young beginners, she takes into account their physical limitations and utilizes vertical sonorities and melodic patterns to build foundational pianistic skills.

Influence of her Mentors

Louie expresses much gratitude toward her teachers in various interviews, never forgetting their influence. She emphasizes the importance of finding the right teacher for the development of each student, because everyone has different personalities, learning styles, and preferences in their approach to music.¹³ Of her teachers, she honors two above all: her early piano teacher Jean Lyons, and her composition teacher, Courtland Hultberg. She attributes her success and musical understanding to their dedication, saying, “If I had never met Jean Lyons, I wouldn’t be the person that I am today. If I didn’t meet Courtland Hultberg, I would certainly not be a composer.”¹⁴

Louie grew up in a non-musical family where her access to music was limited. Her early piano education was with local teachers who lacked any specific specialties. The lessons with Jean Lyons beginning at twelve or thirteen years of age marked a shift in her education.¹⁵ Louie acknowledges that Lyons truly supported her as a musician, cultivating her first experience of serious study. Louie frequently mentions how Lyons’s teaching method and personality shaped many students, including herself: “She was demanding but very kind. She had a real sense of humor, but she was also very, very organized.”¹⁶ As someone who had a nurturing and humorous personality, Lyons

¹³ Kruja, 134.

¹⁴ Kim, 109.

¹⁵ Kruja, 132.

¹⁶ Ibid.

encouraged her students to engage in playing and discussion as a group to learn how to communicate about music.¹⁷ Lyons also introduced various kinds of music to young Louie by taking her to concerts. Louie especially remembers the “humbling experience” of attending two of Arthur Rubinstein’s concerts.¹⁸ Lyons also taught Louie appreciation for the deeper meaning in music and the importance of expressive playing. Louie mentions, “She taught me how to play everything expressively, from technique to pieces.”¹⁹

Louie’s other significant teacher, Courtland Hultberg, who inspired her interest in composition, was her theory teacher at the University of British Columbia and a composer who actually wrote little music.²⁰ His class on Medieval and Renaissance music captured her attention. She was originally not interested in this era of music, but his inspired teaching appealed to her. Louie recalls: “I think I was really fortunate, because I know that there are many teachers who teach the same thing year in and year out, without changing their program of delivery... but he was remarkable. We learned really through osmosis rather than instruction...”²¹ His enthusiasm and love for music led her to take his composition class, sparking her interest in composition. Louie mentions that the initial reason she took his composition class was because she liked spending time with him.²²

¹⁷ Ibid., 133.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Kruja, 135.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

Louie recognizes her time as Hultberg's student as a turning point in her compositional career. Through her study with him, Louie realized for the first time the desire to express herself and to understand the mechanics of music.²³ Hultberg also encouraged her to take further studies in composition even after graduation. Louie decided to study composition more seriously and left the University of British Columbia to go to the University of California San Diego. Louie believes that her training at UBC was her destiny: "All these things happened, I don't know how they happened, because there was some direction that happened. Had I gone to any of the other schools, I am sure I would not be a composer today. I am absolutely sure."²⁴ Louie's experiences show the impact one teacher can have on the life of a young musician, in this case, changing the trajectory of her career.

If her experience at UBC prepared her to love writing music, then it was her experience at UCSD that allowed her to find her own compositional voice. At the time, the faculty and performances at UCSD were focused on contemporary music.²⁵ Under the guidance of avant-garde composers Pauline Oliveros (1932-2016) and Robert Erickson (1917-1997), Louie was exposed to new sounds and such unconventional techniques as woofing, grunting, and crawling around on the floor.²⁶ Louie thus began to explore the provocative and unusual musical developments from the early 1970s.²⁷ Her experiences with new music were valuable to her artistic growth, but came with the challenge of

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., 137.

²⁵ Dirk Sutro, "Departmental History," *University of California San Diego*, accessed January 10, 2022, <https://music-cms.ucsd.edu/about/index.html>

²⁶ Esther Yu-Hui Chu, "On the Musical Silk Route: Piano Music of Alexina Louie" (DMA. thesis, University of Alberta, 1997), 2.

²⁷ Kim, 157.

managing the unique personalities of influential composers, students, and teachers. Despite the challenge, she believed these traits implied greatness in their craft.²⁸ The composition environment at UCSD was very experimental, developing new computer and electronic sounds, alternative singing, multiphonics, Tibetan chanting, and many other avant-garde techniques that were unavailable at UBC.²⁹ Finding her own voice in this environment was not easy, but she eventually did so through exploring these strange and incredible methods. Inspired by the timbral experiments directed by Robert Erickson, Louie developed her sensitivity to tonal colors into artistic uses of space and timbre. She explains, “I used my ears in a different way than I had before.”³⁰ Through her experience at UCSD, Louie understood how teachers and the musical environment could shape students’ personalities and artistry. Perhaps as a result, her pedagogical works help young pianists to understand and find enjoyment in contemporary musical idioms.

Louie’s Pedagogical Philosophy

Guided by Jean Lyons, Louie became a patient and effective teacher of young students: “From [teaching young students], I knew I could communicate, and people enjoyed studying with me.”³¹ During her internship with Jean Lyons, Louie taught a blind student with the goal that he would learn how to play independently. Louie worked with him “a half hour every day, seven days a week, for four years,”³³ witnessing how successful performance was possible for those with physical disabilities. Ultimately, her teaching of technique, theory, and performance during her ARCT training resulted in her

²⁸ Kruja, 139.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.,134.

³¹ Kim, 111.

popularity as a piano teacher in California during her graduate study, although she taught only privately.³²

Louie's teaching was not limited to private piano lessons. As a composition major, she taught music theory at various colleges, including Los Angeles City College, Pasadena City College, and the Royal Conservatory of Music in Canada.³³ After moving back to Canada, she taught a large, first-year, evening theory class at York University. Louie learned to play ukulele and relearned recorder to demonstrate the difference between chords and melodies to beginners,³⁶ showing her creativity in finding ways to deliver ideas to her students, especially to help them understand fundamental musical elements.

In addition, Louie believed that music could be fun even for those who are uninterested, and so she worked to make her lessons entertaining and engaging. She recalls her efforts to motivate the theory students as “humbling,” “humorous,” and “endearing.”³⁴ In fact, humor is a big element in Louie's life and teaching. Humor permeates her pedagogical works, helping performers and audiences to interact with and enjoy her compositions. She states, “I think we need humor in this time that we are living in. It's a troubling and dangerous time. I think that humor is necessary. But it's difficult in art music. I've been able to do it and I enjoy it.”³⁵

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid., 113.

³⁵ Ibid., 150.

Finally, Louie gave several master classes to those who were performing her pieces, including for the National Centre Orchestra in Ottawa and Vancouver.³⁶ Working with these musicians on her compositions helped Louie to recognize the needs of different performers. Her ability to consider the performers' learning is one factor that sets her pedagogical compositions for piano apart from those of other composers.

Louie believes that everyone is born with unique gifts and personalities and that self-discovery is important for them to find satisfaction in their lives.³⁷ She regards music as a means of self-expression that helps people achieve that satisfaction: "By playing a piece of music well, you can really feel something that you don't ordinarily feel. And as you 'mine' that feeling, it's very positive."³⁸ Therefore, she writes her compositions to move performers and listeners in a deeply human way.³⁹ Her performers must seek the truth of human life as Louie did herself. She asks those who approach her music not only to master the mechanical aspects of the work, but to find its intrinsic value.⁴⁰

This connection to self-discovery starts as early as childhood. Louie believes children are better able to handle emotions when given a creative outlet that can reflect their inner world.⁴¹ For example, some children have trouble expressing their emotions, leading them to hold negative feelings such as anger, frustration, and aggression. To help them channel negative emotions into something positive, Louie, believing in the

³⁶ Sarah Petrescu, "Planting Classical Seeds," *Times Colonist*, October 30, 2008, <https://www.timescolonist.com/life/planting-classical-seeds-4562763>

³⁷ Kim, 115.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid., 143.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid., 115.

beneficial impact of music on emotional health and personal identity, wrote her pedagogical works. She says, “Maybe if more people got to develop their artistic natures or be exposed to art there might be fewer frustrated people around. Might be less road rage incidents, or less violence.”⁴²

Louie decided to write pieces for young musicians because the standard repertoire she normally taught often lacked the creativity and potential for personal expression. She believed that traditional pieces for this group often underestimate their potential for creative imagination. By learning some contemporary music, young students would develop more room and opportunity later to become familiar with and love the new music of today.⁴³ As she expressed in an interview, “I feel fantastic when [young pianists] love to play [my pedagogical] pieces. I feel fantastic that it’s a positive experience for pianists. I know it is for young kids. I have taught my own children some [of] the pieces from the early books.... It’s very rewarding.”⁴⁴

Louie used the work of great masters with her students to engage in discussion about the meaning, emotion, and intrinsic value behind the art. This discussion helped students notice their own feelings, how they changed with the phrasing and different compositional techniques, and how composers mature over time.⁴⁵ Louie tells her students, “Great art changes you if you’re responsive to it.”⁴⁶

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 130.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 151.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 115

Louie especially encourages young composers to listen to various types of music to expose and challenge themselves through the musical ideas and instrumentation used by different composers.⁴⁷ She expresses, “I try to get [young composers] to understand the general and overall view of music. I then make them elaborate on basic concepts. Starting with one note, we discuss what the note could do in terms of rhythm and placement within orchestral effect, how the note would sound at a certain point. I never write a piece for them but just allow them to make different choices.”⁴⁸ Jeffery Ryan, one of Canada’s acclaimed composers, commented about his experience of studying with Louie. He remembers that she would bring scores and recordings to lessons, which helped him to be more critical, to express his thoughts, and to distinguish what makes good music good.⁴⁹ He continues that Louie does not ignore the emotional and expressive side of music but knows exactly how to articulate it in the clearest and the most effective way. It was during this time that his own voice really began to emerge.⁵⁰

In taking her duty as a composer so earnestly, Louie maintained high expectations for her work. One result is that she would accept only commissions that would stretch and challenge her creative capacity.⁵¹ She states, “I want to create music at the highest level that I am capable of. It should be of the highest musical level as well as the highest technical level.”⁵² Her high standards pertained also to her pedagogical works: “I don’t

⁴⁷ Ibid., 151.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 115.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 162.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid., 151.

⁵² Ibid., 143.

want to write formulaic music. My works should continue to be fresh and alive. I don't want to rewrite the same piece. Each one should have its own uniqueness."⁵³

However, this desire for novelty created challenges in writing works for piano. Louie admits, "I knew that it would be hard for me to write another unique piece. You would think that you could write a little piano piece in a week, but it doesn't take a week—it takes months. It's real labour!"⁵⁴ This difficulty became acute with Louie's pedagogical work, *Star Light, Star Bright* (1995). She once believed this was to be her last work for piano, as the nine pieces in the set created difficulty in writing subsequent works without repeating her compositional style.⁵⁵ However, Louie's motivation and dedication to the development of young pianists resulted in one more pedagogical work, *Small Beautiful Things* (2016).

Louie's piano compositions attract a wide spectrum of pianists and teachers. In her catalogue of compositions, there are eleven works for solo piano for all levels of pianists, ranging from *Small Beautiful Things* (2016) for young beginners to *Touch* (1996), a test piece for the Esther Honens International Competition, for the most advanced performer. *A Scene from a Jade Terrace* (1988), commissioned by Jon Kimura Parker, and *I Leap Through the Sky with Stars* (1991), commissioned by the Canadian Music Competitions, are popular and frequently performed. Her earliest chamber work is *Afterimages* (1981), for two pianos. She also wrote several chamber works that rely heavily on the piano. Some are intimate works, such as *Beyond Time* for violin and piano

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 128.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 151.

(2014), and some are for large ensembles, such as the two piano quintets *Music from Night's Edge* (1988) and *Falling through Time* (2016).

Louie's three pedagogical works, *Music for Piano* (1982), *Star Light, Star Bright* (1995), and *Small Beautiful Things* (2016), are products of her dedication to helping students understand musical elements, and they reveal not only her ingenuity as a composer, but also the depth of her musical philosophy. They reflect her sensitivity as a teacher and pianist who seeks to connect students and performers to their identity while introducing them to the human values found in music.

CHAPTER 2

MUSIC FOR PIANO (1982)

Music for Piano is a set of pieces commissioned by the Alliance for Canadian New Music Projects and is one of the works representing Alexina Louie's early compositional style. It is dedicated to Jean Lyons, her former piano teacher, whom Louie acknowledges with gratitude in the performance notes: "My dear friend and former piano teacher, whose encouragement and refined musical instruction nurtured my love of music."⁵⁶ Although these are pedagogical pieces intended for intermediate-level pianists who are still forming their musicality, Louie's highly artistic musical style and her professional pianistic knowledge, expressed in an Impressionistic language, are evident throughout. Many of the characteristics of her early period, displayed here, are also found in pieces written much later.

Music for Piano is the first solo piano work in Louie's official catalogue.⁵⁷ The Pytheas Center for Contemporary Music possesses the full collection of Louie's works, including unpublished early works that were composed during her studies in California, such as *Dragon Bells* (1978), for prepared piano and recorded tape.⁵⁸ However, *Music for Piano* is placed as her first solo piano work in her current official catalogue.

Louie's concern for young musicians is evident in that this first work in her catalogue is pedagogical, with contemporary idioms and notational practices introduced

⁵⁶ Alexina Louie, "Performance Notes," *Music for Piano* (Toronto, Canada: Gordon V. Thompson Music, 1993).

⁵⁷ Alexina Louie, Official Web site, "Catalogue," accessed August 20, 2020, <http://www.alexinalouie.ca/catalogue>.

⁵⁸ Pytheas Center for Contemporary Music, "Alexina Louie (1949-)," accessed January 15, 2020, <http://www.pytheasmusic.org/louie.html>.

for their education. In an interview, Louie emphasized the pedagogical components: “I wrote these intermediate piano pieces to teach younger pianists how to deal with the sonorities of contemporary music. It’s also a steppingstone for kids who might better understand another contemporary piece.”⁵⁹ After her studies in California, she returned to Canada where there were many agencies that could provide commissions. Louie started her career almost from the beginning by writing commissioned works. Although the pedagogical intent of *Music for Piano* and its use of some contemporary notations were requirements of the Alliance for Canadian New Music, Louie mentions that she never tried just to make a living and was truly motivated to create art on her own terms. As she explains, “I always do only music that I choose that I want to do at a certain point. I have turned down many commissions.”⁶⁰ It is significant that Louie began her career with music written for young pianists rather than for established professional artists who could easily meet different artistic goals.

Music for Piano was published in 1982, around the time Louie started her career after settling in Toronto. The work contains four short pieces and has a duration of approximately ten minutes. The four pieces are not necessarily intended to be played together, so many young pianists perform them individually, each taking about two to three minutes. The descriptive titles “The Enchanted Bells,” “Changes,” “Distant Memories,” and “Once Upon a Time” evoke images and moods, as do many titles from Impressionist composers, especially Debussy. The titles of the individual pieces and their coloristic

⁵⁹ Kim, 130.

⁶⁰ Kruja, 141.

elements fit with Louie's description of them as "rather mystical in nature."⁶¹ Furthermore, each piece demonstrates different characteristics of Louie's early style.

The first piece, "The Enchanted Bells," takes approximately three minutes to perform and is an example of Louie's treatment of Asian idioms. The compositional techniques of her early period are influenced by such Asian instruments as the *gamelan* ensemble and the *ch'in*, China's most revered instrument. "The Enchanted Bells" is divided into three clear sections: slow opening, fast middle section, and slow closing. The outer sections are notated on three staves and have a variety of rhythms and figures over a slow-moving bass line, resembling *gamelan* ensemble music. In the sections with three staves (mm.1-14, mm.29-36), the top staff is designated for the right hand, while the lower two staves are for the left hand, an outward indication of the rich bass sonorities. Louie specifically mentions in her performance notes for this piece that "this technique was chosen to facilitate the reading of the score, eliminating the need to constantly change clefs."⁶² By using the three staves Louie helps young musicians to read and to bring out the layering of registers more easily.

The middle section consists of rapid arpeggios in both hands that evoke the *ch'in*, all in the high register without the third staff, notated only in treble clef in both hands. The piece is not exactly in traditional *aba* form, since there is no direct return of material between the opening and closing sections. The third section gives the impression of return to the first section only in atmosphere and by sharing of similar materials. When

⁶¹ Louie, "Performance Notes," *Music for Piano*.

⁶² *Ibid.*

the three staves with bass return in the third section, the music changes back to the slow, mysterious, and meditative gestures of the opening.

In addition to Asian idioms, Louie also introduces contemporary polytonality by juxtaposing white and black keys. This separation of white and black keys between the hands helps young pianists to develop secure hand positions on the keyboard. The extensive arpeggiated passages in the middle section are not only useful for developing technical skills but also musical flexibility, such as the pulling and releasing of tensions.

The second piece, “Changes,” generates rhythmic excitement through minimalistic language. Marked *Allegro*, it takes less than two minutes at the brisk tempo marking of quarter note=88-96 bpm. Louie in the performance notes describes “Changes” as built on the “repetition of a small amount of musical material which undergoes constant minute transformation.”⁶³ This material consists of two voices in nearly constant sixteenth-note rhythm with pulse-and-pattern groupings created by accents and changes of dynamic. Short and simple melodies pop out of the texture. The piece pauses with a *fermata* approximately halfway through, then the sixteenths resume with a new pattern that is developed until a closing section that slows the momentum with long notes inserted among the sixteenths. In the end, the consistent doubling in fifths or sixths creates a bell-like sound as the rhythm slows. The piece might seem monolithic due to its constant rhythm and voicing, but the incremental variations in accents, dynamics, and figuration create subtle changes, as befits the title.

Performing “Changes” requires a strong sense of rhythm to maintain steady sixteenths while bringing out the small differences in each measure. Christopher Hann

⁶³ Ibid.

classifies the piece as advanced, informed by his study of Canadian pedagogical piano repertoire since 1970. He describes its difficulties in this way:

While repetition is a major feature of the piece, neither ostinato nor rhythmic phase is used exclusively. Instead, the lulling constancy of sixteenth notes in four-note groups provides the basic texture for subtle changes of pitch, of rhythmic placement and of direction of patterns.⁶⁴

This piece is a wonderful resource for the pedagogical approach to developing not only rhythmic accuracy, but also a musical and technical approach to the sound of the piano. Louie provides detailed pedal markings, both for *sostenuto* and *una corda/tre corde*. Her changes of *sostenuto* pedal are one to two measures apart, creating blurry effects and a dreamy atmosphere when the dynamic is in *piano* range. Louie's love of blending the sound to create resonance of colors and timbre is evident in her detailed performance markings. Her concern for the overall sonority and how it should be produced is expressed also by her suggestion in the performance notes that "each four-note grouping should sound legato and 'round' in tone, and thus it is suggested that the wrists be rather loose and used in a rotary motion."⁶⁵ In this way, Louie applies her professional knowledge as a pianist to instruct the young musician.

The third piece, "Distant Memories," takes about three minutes to play. Whereas "Changes" is monomotivic and minimalistic, "Distant Memories" embraces stark musical contrasts. "Distant Memories" displays Louie's artistic freedom and imagination in an original musical style. The piece begins and ends with recitative-like passages marked *senza misura*, which means 'without a regular beat,' or 'freely,' 'without strict regard for

⁶⁴ Christopher Hann, "Canadian Pedagogical Piano Repertoire Since 1970: A Survey of Contemporary Compositional Styles and Techniques" (DMA diss., The University of Oklahoma, 2005), 187.

⁶⁵ Louie, "Performance Notes," *Music for Piano*.

the meter.⁶⁶ Without bar lines, Louie indicates only the approximate durations of notes, leaving much interpretation to the pianist. To suggest tempo, she indicates in seconds how long each system should take. However, as she states in the performance notes, “The approximate duration of each system is indicated in seconds, and by no means implies strict adherence.”⁶⁷ While she gives freedom to performers, Louie also offers clear boundaries through detailed dynamic and tempo markings that show the intended direction of the phrases. It is important for performers to understand the flow of musical phrases within the freedom given. She also introduces some modern techniques of rhythmic notation, such as widening beams to indicate acceleration. The musical result consists of rapid flourishes that pause on freely repeated notes, very meditative and improvisational. This use of *senza misura* in the opening and closing sections of “Distant Memories” offers performers the opportunity to be creative. According to Louie, this type of notation “liberates performers from the bar lines and consequently challenges players to unite her music with their ‘imagination and sensitivity’ when shaping the passages.”⁶⁸

These free-recitative outer passages frame a conventionally notated middle portion marked *Quasi berceuse (with a gently rocking motion)*. In an aba form, within the larger ternary design, the middle section creates gentle rhythms and hypnotically repeated figures that transform the repeated notes from the *senza misura* opening. A quiet

⁶⁶Grove Music Online, “Misura,” January 20, 2001, <https://www-oxfordmusiconline-com.ezproxy1.lib.asu.edu/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000018791?rskey=hvJjKS>.

⁶⁷ Louie, “Performance Notes,” *Music for Piano*.

⁶⁸ Alexina Louie, “Program Notes,” *Bringing the Tiger Down from the Mountain* (Toronto, Canada: Canadian Music Competition, 1991).

character is created by the gentle, rocking eighths of the berceuse, contrasting with the sporadic rhythms of the recitative outer portions.

As one can easily understand from its title, Louie captures the longing and recalls the feeling of “distant memories” in this piece. She indicates that it “should be performed with a sense of nostalgia, and hence there should be a slight lingering on notes that end phrases.”⁶⁹ The contrasts between the outer and inner sections might suggest two types of memories. The “lullaby” could recall memories from infancy while the recitative outer sections suggest meditation or even recollection of spoken words or conversations. The vague and abstract atmosphere of “Distant Memories” helps the young performer to convey the mental process of introspection, which begins with meditative reflection that yields to a soothing memory and then retreats again. Louie mentions in one of her interviews that “I strive to have my compositions represent me in a true way—for me the act of creation is the search for musical and human truth.”⁷⁰ Her goal, to express her personal emotions and who she is, is evident in this reflective and touching piece.

The last piece, “Once Upon a Time,” takes approximately two minutes. As the title implies, Louie recalls the past by bringing back material from the first three pieces, combining them into one storytelling. The first half, marked “Rather freely and somewhat wistfully,” recalls the alternation of rapid figures with pauses on sustained notes from “Distant Memories.” It also briefly brings back the pulse-and-pattern sixteenths of “Changes.” The first half of “Once Upon a Time” sounds like an improvisation that mixes bursts of sixteenth-note arpeggios from “Changes” with slower rhythms. “The

⁶⁹ Louie, “Performance Notes,” *Music for Piano*

⁷⁰ Kim, 143.

Enchanted Bells” is also recalled by the notation on three staves in the second half, where “Once Upon a Time” expands into three layers, from low to middle to high registers. In the ending section a gong-like ostinato also resembles the *gamelan* effects in “The Enchanted Bells.”

The reminiscences of sixteenth-note figures and sporadic rhythm abruptly end halfway through “Once Upon a Time.” The second half, marked *Maestoso e allargando*, is a grand finale for all four pieces. It changes character completely, opening into a giant chorale of block chords over a slow-moving bass line, all in slow rhythm. With this chordal section, Louie introduces young pianists to the technique of singing in chords. Louie clearly indicates the flow of phrases with detailed dynamic markings and specific phrase slurs. Young performers must pay attention to these directions so that the chords will not only be played vertically but connected to each other with good sound production to create a grand and jubilant *allargando* ending.

Asian Elements

Because Alexina Louie composed *Music for Piano* while she was searching for her ethnic identity, there are many Asian idioms in the work combined with Impressionistic and progressive techniques from Western music. Such a combination of elements is characteristic of her other early compositions as well.⁷¹ Olivia Adams observes that Louie’s originality as a composer is very much grounded in her personal Chinese Canadian identity, acquired during her childhood in Vancouver, British Columbia. Adams describes: “Through reaching for her Asian heritage she created her

⁷¹ Alan Horgan, “Alexina Louie,” *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, June 17, 2010, modified February 25, 2022, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/alexina-louie>.

own unique voice in fusion of east and west. There is no one who composes music in the style Louie created.”⁷²

After she was introduced to Japanese *gagaku* by Peter Salemi, her friend and colleague during her studies at the University of California San Diego (UCSD), Louie was immediately attracted to Asian music and sought experience in Asian philosophy also. She intensely studied the *gamelan* as well as Korean *p’ansori* and Chinese ensemble music, through which she was introduced to the *ch’in*, a traditional Chinese stringed instrument. Louie explains, “For a period of about six years, I studied: Asian, Chinese and Japanese instruments and Korean and Indonesian, to really understand Asian music—all of these, and of course Chinese instruments and philosophy.”⁷³ Louie was especially captivated by the “mysterious sound” and “meditative quality of Asian music.”⁷⁴

Yin and Yang

Alexina Louie incorporates in her music one of the most important concepts in Chinese philosophy: that of Yin and Yang. As an article in the *Ancient History Encyclopedia* describes it, “The principle of Yin and Yang is that all things exist as inseparable and contradictory opposites. The two opposites of Yin and Yang attract and complement each other, and as their symbol (☯) illustrates, each side has at its core an element of the other.”⁷⁵ Louie hinted at how she applies this concept in her music: “Yin-

⁷² Sean Brickerton, “A Celebration of the Life & Music of Alexina Louie,” *Canadian Music Center*, British Columbia, June 5, 2019, <https://musiccentrebc.ca/2019/a-celebration-of-the-life-music-of-alexina-louie/>.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Kim, 19.

⁷⁵ Mark Cartwright, “Yin and Yang,” *Ancient History Encyclopedia*, May 16, 2019. https://www.ancient.eu/Yin_and_Yang/.

Yang is a question of balance, and also conflict and contrast. It inspired me in a way because there are bristling parts in my pieces that are just so loud and there are things that are so intimate.”⁷⁶ Speaking about her music in general, Louie in an interview advises performers to play with “An extremity in spirit, like Yin versus Yang”⁷⁷ to bring out contrasts: “When I mean forte, I really mean forte and explosive; and when I put pianissimo, I really want the performer to play very intimate and internalized.”⁷⁸

In *Music for Piano*, this concept of balancing Yin and Yang is found in the contrasts of musical character, register, dynamics, and other musical elements. From a large perspective, Louie creates Yin and Yang balance between entire pieces in *Music for Piano*. Generally speaking, the overall contrast between “Changes” and “Distant Memories” could be seen as a Yin/Yang pairing in which the two pieces are interconnected and complement each other despite their extreme musical contrasts. The active and fast character of the second piece, “Changes,” could be aligned with Yang, while the intimate and quiet character of the third piece, “Distant Memories,” is that of Yin. The juxtaposition of these two opposing characters in the central portion of the suite shows that these musical opposites belong together. They attract and complete each other as though a Yin and Yang pairing.

The idea of Yin and Yang is also found in the formal organization within the individual pieces of *Music for Piano*. For example, in “Once Upon a Time,” the cheerful and flowing melodies in the opening section represent the feminine and lyrical characteristics of Yin. They are in extreme contrast with its majestic and grand chordal

⁷⁶ Kim, 136.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 156.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

ending that represents the more masculine and powerful characteristics of Yang. The registral difference adds to the contrast. The first section, from m. 1 to m. 22, is in mid-to-high register until m. 18, when a gong-like bass ostinato transitions to the richer chordal texture of the second half. The dynamic contrast between the two sections is also a factor. For the opening section, which can be interpreted as the more introverted and soothing character of Yin, Louie limits the dynamic range from *pianissimo* to *mezzo forte*, while the chordal ending stays mostly in the range of *forte* to emphasize the extroverted and energetic character of Yang. In addition to the dynamic and registral contrasts associated with Yin and Yang, “Once Upon A Time” is divided at almost exactly the midpoint in terms of number of measures, with the first section from the beginning to m. 22 and the second from m. 23 to m. 43. This equal division of the piece represents a balance approaching that of Yin and Yang. When the overall contrasts of dynamic, register, and character are heard one after another in equal length, the opposing musical tensions appear to be extreme. Although the two sections contrast with each other, Louie unites them by creating such shared elements as the sporadic, long bass notes in the first part, which anticipate the bass ostinato in the second part. The connection created by the mutual bass ostinato ensures that these two contrasting parts can be heard as one unified piece representing Yin and Yang. This technique recalls the description of Yin and Yang cited above, in which “each side has as its core an element of the other.”

Impression of the *Ch'in*

In her early piano works, Louie uses the high register almost exclusively. She mentions that “I was drawn by the upper part of the piano, because it rings in a specific

way that no other instrument can produce.”⁷⁹ Even in *Music for Piano*, both “Changes” and “Distant Memories” are notated only in treble clef. The first part of “Once Upon a Time” and the middle section of “The Enchanted Bells” are also prevaillingly in the high register.

One explanation for Louie’s attraction to high notes on the piano is that they evoke the sound of the *ch’in* (or *qin* or *gugin*), a Chinese stringed instrument that resembles a zither. The *ch’in* has seven parallel strings, and by moving the hand back and forth, performers can create many different coloristic effects. In performance, the *ch’in* symbolizes the union of heaven, earth, and humankind, and these characteristics are due to the three different types of sound that are produced: open sound, harmonics, and stopped sound.⁸⁰ During her studies of Asian music in California, Louie was especially drawn to the “depth evoked by the subtle, refined, and quiet sound of the *ch’in*,”⁸¹ one of the most aristocratic Chinese instruments. Esther Chu points out that running arpeggios in upper registers in soft dynamic markings are one of the ways Louie imitates the instrument on the piano.⁸²

Through the arpeggiated passages in high registers in the middle section of “The Enchanted Bells,” Louie conveys the soft, tranquil, and reserved atmosphere of the open sound of the *ch’in*. The portion from m. 15 to m. 28 consists of arpeggios in both hands, exclusively in treble clef. Their high register contrasts with the wide range of the outside

⁷⁹ Esther Yu-Hui Chu, “On the Music Silk Route: Piano Music of Alexina Louie” (DMA Diss., University of Alberta, 1997), 12.

⁸⁰ Encyclopedia Britannica, “Qin: Musical Instrument,” accessed December 10, 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/art/qin-musical-instrument>.

⁸¹ Chu., 11.

⁸² Ibid., 12.

portions of the piece. The gong-like ostinato of the opening section is no longer heard so that the listener can concentrate on the delicate, high arpeggios.

Roger Vetter also explains that “In Confucian thought the *ch'in* is associated with morality, elegance, learning, and life, and is used to enrich the individual and the state to bring peace to the realm.”⁸³ Because of these religious and spiritual aspects, playing this instrument requires deep concentration with a meditative mindset and attitude and can result in an “unexpected, irregular, and improvisatory style.”⁸⁴

This meditative and improvisatory quality of the *ch'in* is well expressed in the *senza misura* sections of “Distant Memories.” Here a single melody in the high register is decorated with rapid thirty-second notes, repeated notes, *acciaccaturas* (grace notes with slashes) that are “to be executed as quickly as possible,”⁸⁵ and trills. Louie reveals that the trills in her early works are imitative of the techniques of *ch'in* on the piano, although she uses them for different purposes in later works, that is, for continuous sound and the resonance of the harmony.⁸⁶

Asian Scales

In *Music for Piano*, Louie uses various scales to evoke the exotic atmosphere of much Asian music. In her many pandiatonic passages, modal scales and pentatonicism sometimes become apparent. For example, in the middle section (mm. 15-28) of “The Enchanted Bells,” a diatonic modal scale emerges. The melody that appears in this passage consists of the treble pitches struck on the downbeats, as circled in Example 2.1:

⁸³ Roger Vetter and Toby Austin, “Qin,” *Grinnell College Music Instrument Collection*, accessed January 20, 2021, <https://omeka-s.grinnell.edu/s/MusicalInstruments/item/649>.

⁸⁴ Chu, 16.

⁸⁵ Louie, *Music for Piano*, 9.

⁸⁶ Kim, 138.

G-F-A-G-B-C-E-F-G-F. These pitches include six of the seven possible in a diatonic collection. The missing pitch, D, is supplied on every downbeat by the left hand. This pedal point and the D-minor triad persistently outlined in the lower staff tend to stabilize the pitch D. As a result, the diatonic pitch collection should be ordered as D-E-F-G-A-B-C-D, which is Dorian mode.

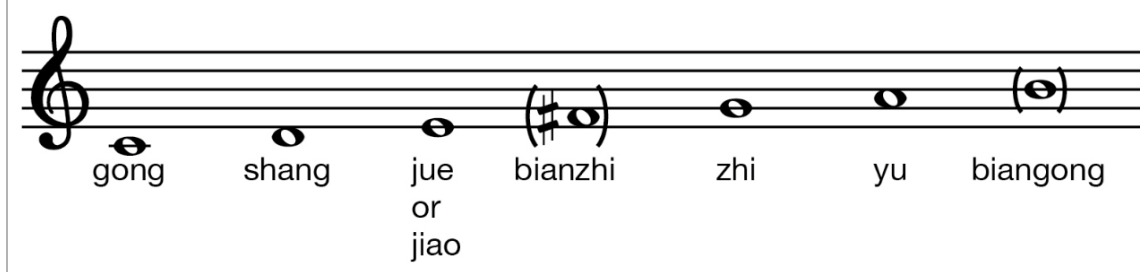
Example 2.1: Middle Section from “The Enchanted Bells” (mm. 14 – 28), with Melodic Notes Circled

The musical score consists of three systems of piano accompaniment for the middle section of "The Enchanted Bells" (measures 14-28). The tempo is marked as quarter note = 56-60. The score is in 3/4 time and features a constant D pedal point in the left hand. The right hand melody consists of sixteenth-note chords, with the melodic notes circled in blue. Dynamics range from *p* to *mp*. Performance instructions include *poco a poco crescendo* and *tre corde*. The score is divided into three systems: measures 14-16, 17-19, and 20-28.

Although the D Dorian scale in this passage would seem to be a Western device, it is in fact related to Asian scales. The musicologist William P. Malm describes a similarity between the Western modal system and the Chinese tuning system. He explains that the Chinese system uses a seven-tone scale just like the Western system, but “with a five-tone core (*wu sheng*) plus two changing (*bian*) tones to accommodate transpositions of a single mode to different pitch levels as well as modulations from one mode to another,”⁸⁷ as shown in Example 2.2. This structure based on the five core tones makes Asian scales more centered on pentatonicism than Western modes. However, in both Western and Chinese music, seven-tone scales and modes can be defined by their pitch centers and be freely shifted or transposed as well.

⁸⁷ William P. Malm, “Chinese Music,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, modified November 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/art/Chinese-music>.

Example 2.2: Seven-tone Chinese Scale (Starting for Ease of Comparison from Western C), Showing the Five-Tone Core with Changing Tones in Parentheses. Pitch Names are Indicated Beneath each Note. ⁸⁸



Seven-tone scales centering on certain pitches existed in Chinese music since the Qin dynasty (221-207 BCE).⁸⁹ Louie’s use of Dorian mode in this passage from “The Enchanted Bells,” as well as pentatonic and other pandiatonic passages throughout *Music for Piano*, can be seen as expressions of her Asian voice in her early period. In particular, Louie has said that the pentatonicism in her early works was her attempt to use Asian influences in her own way.⁹⁰

Such passages in *Music for Piano* are usually short-lived; a mode or scale comes briefly into focus, then is left behind. Louie uses diatonicism and pentatonicism for pleasant, colorful, local effects, not for long-term tonal organization. She explains:

That’s where my ear is going... Beethoven has certain patterns, and his music, you just know where he is headed because he knows... Sometimes I don’t have an answer. That’s why anyone who is trying to do a theoretical study of my music, I would make them crazy. I don’t start in a mode, stay in the mode, and then transpose the mode. It’s logical but it’s also feeling my way through the logic, too.⁹¹

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Joshua J. Mark, “Qin Dynasty,” *World History Encyclopedia*, published on July 1, 2020, accessed October 15, 2021, https://www.worldhistory.org/Qin_Dynasty/.

⁹⁰ Kim, 145.

⁹¹ Kim, 132.

Similarly, Louie’s passages of pentatonicism in *Music for Piano* are few and fleeting. For example, a pure pentatonic scale A-B-C#-E-F# is sounded in the opening four measures of “Once Upon A Time” (Example 2.3). The harp-like figurations in the left hand and the pauses on *fermatas* suggest the start of a story, “Once upon a time...” The pentatonic scale together with the high, delicate sound again evoke the sound of the *ch’in*.

Example 2.3: Pentatonicism in the Opening Measures of “Once Upon A Time” (mm. 1-3)

Once Upon A Time

Alexina Louie

Rather freely and somewhat wistfully

RH

LH

The pure pentatonicism of this opening begins to change, first with the addition of G# in mm. 5-6, and then the full diatonic scale is completed with the introduction of D in m. 7. The first half of the piece continues with the full diatonic pitch complement, but Louie returns to the pentatonic scale in the few measures before the second half. This return rounds off the first half and also connects to the second half, as the chord in m. 23, which abruptly halts the flowing rhythms and initiates the block chords of the second half, consists of the pitches A-B-C#-E-F#, as in the opening. This example illustrates how Louie integrates brief pentatonicism into a pandiatonic section.

“Distant Memories” offers another example of Louie’s treatment of pentatonicism. Its middle section has the performance direction *Quasi berceuse*, and is in

aba form. In the b section, mm. 10-17 (Example 2.4), the main pitches, G#, A#, and C#, are a subset of the black-key pentatonic scale. The only pitch outside of the black-key scale is the long E introduced in the melody in m. 12 and again in m. 16. The tritone relationship of this E to the A# below makes it sound like a “blue note” that stands out, enriching the pentatonic language. The passages before and after this middle portion (mm. 2-9, mm. 18-35) also reiterate the pitches G#, A#, C#, and the blue note E, but with semitonal, pinprick dissonances of A/A#, A#/B, and B#/C# that make it difficult for the listener to recognize the underlying pentatonicism. These dissonances add a bittersweet quality and make the tonality ambiguous. When they disappear at m. 10, the pure pentatonicism stands out even more.

Example 2.4: Pentatonicism from “Distant Memories” (mm. 10-17)

The image displays a musical score for Example 2.4, consisting of two systems of piano and treble clef staves. The first system covers measures 10 through 13, and the second system covers measures 14 through 17. The tempo is marked 'piu mosso' with a quarter note equal to 80 (♩ = 80). The key signature is one sharp (F#). The piano part is marked with dynamics *p* and *mf*. The treble clef part is marked with *mf*. Annotations include red circles around the notes G#, A#, and C# in measure 10, with the text 'Black Key Pentatonicism' written below. A blue circle highlights the note E in measure 12, with a blue line pointing to it from the text '"Blue Note" E' below the second system. The score shows a melodic line in the treble clef and a piano accompaniment in the bass clef.

Pentatonicism and *Gamelan*

Louie also uses pentatonicism when she evokes the tunings and modes of *gamelan* music. She was highly inspired by the soothing quality and repetitive patterns of Balinese *gamelan* music during her extensive studies of Asian music.⁹² In *gamelan* scales, a seven-tone tuning system, called *Pelog*, is significant.⁹³ David Harnish says, “Most *gamelans* are tuned in either an anhemitonic pentatonic system or a hemitonic heptatonic system, and most compositions use pentatonic modes. A wide variety of new tunings—diatonic, just intonation, multi-tonic—have been found both within and outside of Indonesia.”⁹⁴ There are seven tones in the full *Pelog* scales, similar to the Phrygian scale in the Western modal system, but in *gamelan* music, only five of the seven tones are typically used. As shown in Example 2.5, four of the five scales in the table are five-tone subsets of the seven-tone *Pelog* scale across the top.

⁹² Alexina Louie, “Paul Wells Interviews Alexina Louie,” *National Arts Centre*, January 15, 2013. <https://nac-cna.ca/en/podcasts/episode/paul-wells-interviews-alexina-louie>.

⁹³ *Pelog* scale is the most common and essential scale of *gamelan* music along with *Slendro* for Bali, Sundanese and Java, in Indonesia. *Slendro* is a “five-tone scale that very roughly approaches into the equal size intervals” while *Pelog* is a “seven-tone scale, whose underlying tuning concept is less obvious.” Martin Braun, “The Gamelan *Pelog* Scale of Central Java as an Example of a Non-Harmonic Music Scale,” *NeuroScience of Music*, Sweden, August 2002, http://www.neuroscience-of-music.se/pelog_main.htm.

⁹⁴ David Harnish, “Gamelan,” *Grove Music Online*, July 25, 2013, <https://www-oxfordmusiconline-com.ezproxy1.lib.asu.edu/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-1002241217?rkey=DmYNum>.

Example 2.5: Different Scales of *Pelog*⁹⁵

Mode	Pitches													
7-tone pelog scale (UNSW gamelan)	e	f	g	a	b	c	d	e	f	g	a	b	c	d
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
selisir	1	2	3		5	6		1	2	3		5	6	
	ding	dong	deng		dung	dang		ding	dong	deng		dung	dang	
tembung	1	2		4	5	6		1	2		4	5	6	
	dung	dang		ding	dong	deng		dung	dang		ding	dong	deng	
sunaren		2	3		5	6	7		2	3		5	6	7
		dung	dang		ding	dong	deng		dung	dang		ding	dong	deng
baro		2	3	4		6	7		2	3	4		6	7
		dung	dang	ding		dong	deng		dung	dang	ding		dong	deng
lebeng	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	ding	dong	deng	deung	dung	dang	daing	ding	dong	deng	deung	dung	dang	daing

Instances of pentatonicism have been discussed in “Distant Memories” and “Once Upon A Time.” In the opening of “The Enchanted Bells,” Louie creates effects that evoke the *gamelan*, in combination with a five-tone scale. In mm. 1-4, the upper line is doubled in perfect fourths and fifths (Example 2.6). This doubling extends in m. 5 to octaves against a repeated G in the inner voice of the right hand. The addition of grace notes here creates an effect that imitates the overtones of bells or of two bells played simultaneously.⁹⁶ The main pitches appearing in mm. 1-7, ordered from the repeating G, are G, Ab, C, D, and Eb (there is only one B sounding in this passage, in m. 5). This scale is a transposition of the *tembung* scale in Example 2.5, above, a gapped, five-tone scale. With the combination of this scale, the bell sounds, and the registral layering, Louie imitates *gamelan* music.

⁹⁵Ludy Dinh, Adrian So, and Myles Oakey, “Interactive Gamelan: Modes and Instruments,” *University of New South Wales*, February 28, 2017, accessed July 2020, <https://interactivegamelan.arts.unsw.edu.au/cultural-practice-context>.

⁹⁶ Especially, the gongs of *gamelan* are tuned to produce doublings: “Trompong [high registered gong] is generally featured as a solo instrument and plays melodic lines of the higher register. The ability to play more than one gong at one time allows the Trompong to produce chord like sounds.” *Musical Element*, “Balinese Gamelan,” accessed October 2020, <https://gamelanbalinese.weebly.com/musical-elements.html>.

Example 2.6: Opening Phrase of “The Enchanted Bells” (mm. 1-7)

The image shows the musical score for the opening phrase of "The Enchanted Bells" by Alexina Louie, measures 1-7. The score is written for piano and is in 3/4 time. The tempo is marked "Misterioso" with a quarter note equal to 76 beats per minute. The dynamics are marked "mf" (mezzo-forte). The score consists of three staves: the top staff is the Right Hand (RH), the middle staff is the Left Hand (LH), and the bottom staff is also labeled LH. The music features a complex texture with multiple layers of melody and accompaniment. The first staff (RH) has a melodic line with a "mf" dynamic. The second staff (LH) has a bass line with a "mf" dynamic. The third staff (LH) has a bass line with a "mf" dynamic. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, ties, and dynamic markings. The title "The Enchanted Bells" is centered at the top, and the composer's name "Alexina Louie" is on the right. The tempo marking "Misterioso" and the quarter note = 76 are on the left. The dynamic marking "mf" is on the first staff. The score is divided into two systems by a repeat sign.

Beginning in m. 10, low, gong-like bass notes create the melody A#-G#-F#-D#-C#. The scale of this melody is a transposition of the five-tone *baro* scale shown in Example 2.5 and is equivalent to a black-key pentatonic scale. Louie adds many layered melodies above this pentatonic bass line to imitate *gamelan* even more creatively in this passage. For example, she duplicates the bass line in the bottom voice in the middle staff, circled in red in Example 2.7. Simultaneously, the top line, G-F-D-C-A in half notes, circled in green in the example, tracks the bass line with a white-key pentatonic version. In addition, Louie slightly differentiates *gamelan* modes in different voices, by raising or

lowering pitches of the pentatonic scale. For example, the middle line of the middle staff (E, D, B, A#, G#) resembles the gapped scales, circled in purple, notably the *tembung*, while the top line of the middle staff, circled in light blue (G, F, D#, C#), is a whole tone scale (Example 2.7).

Example 2.7: Different Gamelan Scales in mm. 10-13 of “The Enchanted Bells,” Circled in Different Colors: Dark Blue Circles for the Black-Key Pentatonic Melody in the Bass Line; Red Circles for its Doubling Two Octaves Above; Green Circles for the White-Key Pentatonic Melody in the Treble; Purple Circles for the Gapped *Tembung* Scale in the Middle Staff; Light Blue Circles for Whole Tone Scale.

The image displays a musical score for piano, consisting of four staves. The first two staves are grouped together, with a tempo marking of ♩ = 69 and a dynamic marking of *loco*. The third and fourth staves are grouped together, with a tempo marking of *meno mosso* ♩ = 60 and a dynamic marking of *p*. The score includes various annotations such as *loco*, *una corda*, and *p*. The notes are circled in different colors: dark blue circles in the bass line, red circles for doubling two octaves above, green circles for the white-key pentatonic melody in the treble, purple circles for the gapped *tembung* scale in the middle staff, and light blue circles for the whole tone scale. The score is divided into measures, with measure numbers 8, 11, and 12 indicated.

This heterophonic treatment of the melody creates dissonances that mimic the aural effect of *gamelan* tunings. Sylvia Parker points out another significant aspect of *gamelan* tuning, namely that instruments are not exactly tuned in unisons with each other

as in Western music.⁹⁷ In this heterophony, Louie's combination of melodic variants in different registers is such that every vertical sonority contains at least one semitonal or major-seventh dissonance among its various intervals, which contributes to the imitation of the sound of the *gamelan*.

Gamelan Instrumentation and Influence

The heterophony of the *gamelan* ensemble creates its rich and colorful sound, and the music, as Catherine Schmidt-Jones describes it, "often sounds as if it includes harmony rather than just a single melodic line."⁹⁸ When the multiple layers of melody are built together, it can create a thick texture, often with the more embellished parts playing different pitches at the same time.⁹⁹ Depending on the composition, the instruments, such as xylophones, metallophones, or bamboos, are divided into five tones in different registers and are played in octave doubling or in unison.¹⁰⁰

To express this rich and colorful sound of *gamelan* orchestration, Louie uses layers in all the registers of the piano. When these multiple registers sound simultaneously, the contrasts blend to create a distinctive unity of timbre that evokes the effect of the *gamelan* ensemble. For the *gamelan*-like sections in "The Enchanted Bells"

⁹⁷ Parker adds, "The fundamental pitch of the *gamelan* is set not to a universal standard but chosen by its maker. In practice, 'unison' instruments may be intentionally made slightly out of tune with each other, to produce a shimmering timbre when they are played together." Sylvia Parker, "Claude Debussy's *Gamelan*," *College Music Symposium*, August 27, 2012, <https://symposium.music.org/index.php/52/item/22-claude-debussys-gamelan>.

⁹⁸ Catherine Schmidt-Jones, "Listening to Balinese *Gamelan*: A Beginners' Guide," *Musical Travels for Children*, *Openstax CNS*, accessed January 2021, <https://cnx.org/contents/Q1VXjVm0@11.10:AaDWaahk@6/Listening-to-Balinese-Gamelan-A-Beginners-Guide>.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ Andrew McGraw explains, "[In the *gamelan genggong*], the instruments appear in three different registers and are played in parallel octaves with a mallet in each hand." Andrew C. McGraw, "Balinese *gamelan*," *Grove Music Online*, December 8, 2014, <https://www-oxfordmusiconline-com.ezproxy1.lib.asu.edu/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-4002268105?rskkey=Dutkbc>.

and in the second half of “Once Upon A Time,” Louie notates on three staves to make extreme registers more readable for the pianist. For example, the three staves in “The Enchanted Bells” help separate the low bass, resembling a gong, from the upper register’s mysterious bell sounds, which fit well with the piece’s title. Louie specifically explains her attraction to the high register of the piano because of the “bell-like sonorities that can be produced there.”¹⁰¹

Louie uses rhythm and meter as well as register to imitate the *gamelan* gong in the bass ostinatos in *Music for Piano*. According to the research team of the Balinese Gamelan of the Musical Element, “Most Balinese compositions are written in simple meter where the strong beats fall on the second and fourth beats of each bar, rather than on the first and third beats of each bar like in most Western music.”¹⁰²

This rhythmic effect is well illustrated by the chordal section of “Once Upon A Time,” from m. 27 to the end, in which the two pitches of the gong-like bass melody fall on relatively weak beats, as shown in Example 2.8. This metric placement pertains more to the low B, circled in the example, whose irregular rhythm befits its tonal function as the fifth scale degree in this pandiatonic passage; the E, the first scale degree, is more stable and falls on the notated downbeats for cadential effect. For both pitches, the gong strokes occur only where the melody is sustaining or resting: Because the gong fills in empty spaces in the heterophony, it sounds as though its changes are only in metrically weak positions.

¹⁰¹ Kruja, 146.

¹⁰² Musical Element, “Balinese Gamelan,” accessed October 15, 2020, <https://gamelanbalinese.weebly.com/musical-elements.html>.

Example 2.8: Gong-Like Ostinato in the Ending of “Once Upon A Time,” with Gong Strokes in Metrically Weak Positions Circled (mm. 26-43)

The musical score consists of four systems of piano music. The first system (measures 26-29) is marked *poco rit.* and *mf*, with *a tempo* starting at measure 30. The second system (measures 30-33) continues the piece. The third system (measures 34-38) is marked *Maestoso e allargando* with a tempo of 72-76 and *poco rit.*. The fourth system (measures 39-43) ends with *rit.*. Red circles highlight specific bass notes in measures 27, 28, 29, 32, 33, 35, 36, 37, 38, 41, 42, and 43. A dashed line labeled "8th bas" is shown below the first system, and "8th bas (->)" is shown below the second, third, and fourth systems.

Similarly, at the beginning of “The Enchanted Bells” (Example 2.6 above), Louie places the deep, gong-like bass notes at mm. 2 and 4, while the treble is sustaining.

Earlier in “The Enchanted Bells,” Louie introduces another rhythm that evokes the *gamelan*, which is “often highly syncopated.”¹⁰³ In mm. 10-14, shown in Example 2.7 above, the low bass notes are struck a sixteenth-note ahead of the chords in the two upper staves, which fall on the notated downbeats. As a result, the bass and the treble chords are asynchronous, and Louie thus conveys the *gamelan* trait of gong strokes whose rhythm interlocks with that of the main melody. This passage can also be useful for training young pianists to secure quickly their chord positions on the keyboard, because quick shifts in the left hand are needed between the bass notes and the chords in the middle staff.

Imitation of the Balinese *gamelan* appears also in the second piece, “Changes,” which is in Louie’s individual minimalistic language. The “fast, steady, syncopated rhythm” and its shifting groups of three and four notes evoke the Balinese *gamelan*.¹⁰⁴ The piece undergoes constant minute transformations through repetitions of four-or three-note grouping patterns. In the first section, mm. 1-19 consist of the pitches F, B \flat , C, and E \flat , to which D \flat (m. 11) and G (m. 15) are added later. The anhemitonic collection of the first ten measures (F, B \flat , C, E \flat), conveys the effect of a pentatonic scale. The second half, from m. 22 to the end, is based on a different six-tone diatonic collection, namely E \flat , F, G, A \flat , B \flat , and D. This limited diatonic pitch material evokes the *gamelan*, and Louie explains that the repetitive patterns of “Changes” are influenced by her studies of

¹⁰³ Schmidt-Jones, “Balinese Gamelan.”

¹⁰⁴ Philip Yampolsky, “Indonesia (Bahasa Indon. Republik Indonesia),” *Grove Music Online*, July 1, 2014, <https://www-oxfordmusiconline-com.ezproxy1.lib.asu.edu/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000042890?rskey=0ryMhD>.

gamelan music.¹⁰⁵ Louie also captures the attention of listeners by adding syncopated accents on some of the top notes in the right hand, creating the impressions of *gamelan* bells (Example 2.9).

Example 2.9: Opening of “Changes” (mm. 1-6)

Changes

Alexina Louie

The musical score for the opening of "Changes" by Alexina Louie, measures 1-6, is presented in a grand staff format. The right hand (RH) and left hand (LH) both play complex, syncopated eighth-note patterns. The RH part is marked "legato" and "pp", while the LH part is marked "pp". A "una corda" instruction is placed below the LH staff. The tempo is indicated as 88-96. The score includes a 4-measure rest at the beginning of the first system and a 4-measure rest at the beginning of the second system. The music is in 4/4 time and B-flat major.

The Minimalism of “Changes”

Another important influence on Louie’s music is minimalism. The idea of minimalism in music arose in the late 1960s as a reaction to the “complexity, structure, and perception of twelve-tone serialism.”¹⁰⁶ The core idea of minimalism, which is “simplicity,” or the “less is better” philosophy, has become more popular in Western

¹⁰⁵ Kruja, 159.

¹⁰⁶ Elliot Jones, “20th Century: Aleatoric, Electronic, and Minimalist Music,” *Lumen Mus 101*, Santa Ana College, accessed February 3, 2021, <https://courses.lumenlearning.com/music/chapter/minimalist-music/>.

society over the past several decades and has influenced various aspects of Western culture, including design, fashion, food, and lifestyle as well as music.¹⁰⁷

During her studies at UCSD, Louie was exposed to the music of significant avant-garde composers such as Robert Ashley, Nicolai Castiglioni, and Terry Riley, leading figures in minimalist or “pulse and pattern” music. Louie remembers Terry Riley as a “very strange guy” in addition to his performance with an Indian singer during his short visit to UCSD. She acknowledges in an interview that the rare exposures to these new kinds of music did encourage her to open her ears and eyes to new and different approaches to sound.¹⁰⁸

Arts correspondent Akshita Nanda surveyed a mega-exhibition at the National Gallery and the ArtScience Museum in Singapore about the Asian roots of minimalism.¹⁰⁹ She explains its influence during the 1960s, saying, “Many pioneering [minimalist] artists were influenced by Asian philosophies such as Zen Buddhism and the ideas of ‘endlessness’ and ‘nothingness’ found in Hindu scriptures.”¹¹⁰ In many traditional Asian arts, such as ink paintings, the lines or colors are reduced to a minimum, sometimes to a single brush stroke, leaving the beauty of emptiness in space for an aesthetic purpose.¹¹¹ Musical minimalism reflects the introverted spirit of Eastern philosophy in contrast to the complexity of traditional Western music. This interaction

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Kruja, 139.

¹⁰⁹ Akshita Nanda, “Asian Roots of Minimalism Explored in Exhibition at National Gallery and ArtScience Museum,” *The Straits Times*, November 19, 2018, <https://www.straitstimes.com/lifestyle/arts/asian-roots-of-minimalism-explored-in-exhibition-at-national-gallery-and-artscience>.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Chu, 19.

seems to have captured Louie's interests as well when she was searching for her Asian heritage in music.

Although the aesthetic of minimalism can mean various things to different composers, the composers in this style are shunning complex formal and tonal structures. As Elliot Jones observes, "in a musical context that means that the music is not progressing toward a clear conclusion. In even simpler terms it means the music can seem to wander around without a clear sense of direction."¹¹² However, in Alexina Louie's musical vocabulary, her minimalism is different from that of Philip Glass, John Adams, and Steve Reich, whose language is more focused on repetitiveness, static harmonies, silence, and immobility. Louie uses repetition and incremental changes to create forward momentum, and she displays this technique as well as tonal devices in "Changes." According to Louie, it is a "minimalism-training piece" because of its many repetitive patterns, but it is not in the typical minimalistic language that "puts people to sleep" but rather it has contour, direction, and form.¹¹³

These elements of contour, direction, and form are evident in the first section of "Changes," mm. 1-21. The piece begins immediately with constant sixteenth notes in four-note arpeggios (Example 2.10). Louie describes this portion as having "an inner propulsion to it in the harmony. It gets you to certain spots, and you have to move toward those spots... I find the piece quite moving in a way."¹¹⁴ An important source of contour and directionality is the bass line. The bass remains on F through mm. 1-8 and, in m. 9, begins a slow step descent through F E \flat D \flat C B B \flat , reached in m. 21 (circled in red in

¹¹² Jones, "20th Century."

¹¹³ Kruja, 160.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

Example 2.10). The arpeggios change with each new bass note, and each new chord is at the *forte* peak of a *crescendo*. These dynamic swells make the changes of harmony stand out. With the arrival of B-natural in m. 19, however, there is a steady *diminuendo* through m. 21. This *diminuendo* helps to create a sectional division between m. 21 and m. 22. The bass note B \flat in m. 21 is harmonized with a B \flat ⁷ chord, and a *fermata* at the end creates a pause at the bottom of the *diminuendo* before the B \flat ⁷ “resolves” to a chord with E \flat bass in m. 22, where the motion resumes. Thus, the forward momentum created by the bass descent in the first section is briefly halted by a moment of V⁷-I tonal focus.

Example 2.10: The First Section of “Changes” (mm. 1-21)

The musical score for the first section of "Changes" (mm. 1-21) is presented in a grand staff format. The right hand (RH) and left hand (LH) are both playing continuous eighth-note patterns. The tempo is marked as $\text{♩} = 88 - 96$ and the articulation is *legato*. The key signature consists of two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The score is divided into five systems, each containing two staves (RH and LH). The first system (mm. 1-3) is marked *pp* and includes the instruction *una corda*. The second system (mm. 4-6) continues the *pp* dynamic. The third system (mm. 7-9) is marked *f* and includes the instruction *tre corde*. The fourth system (mm. 10-11) is marked *mf*. The fifth system (mm. 12-14) is marked *f*, *mp*, and *mf*. Red circles highlight specific notes: F in the LH at measure 1, Eb in the LH at measure 7, and Db in the LH at measure 12.

Louie creates excitement and forward movement in a different way in the second section. From m. 22 to the end, the bass is almost entirely on Eb, with brief changes to G during mm. 38-43. Despite the static bass in this section, vigorous rhythmic changes accomplished through various note groupings and shifting accent patterns become the source of variety. Changes of grouping are indicated outwardly by the changes of meter, from 4/4 (mm. 22-23) to 3/4 (mm. 24-37) to 2/4 (mm. 38-43). Then, as the excitement and momentum begin to slow for the ending of the piece, the meter changes become irregular. Although the changes of time signature create large groupings, at least visually, the sixteenth notes within each measure are also actively shifting their accents in ways that disguise the changes of meter and create variety at the sixteenth-note level.

The pitch patterns are grouped into four sixteenths and three sixteenths, occasionally two. Written-in accents sometimes contradict these groupings and sometimes coincide with them. For example, at m. 24, the four-note pitch grouping changes into three-note grouping, although the written-in accents are every four sixteenths. At m. 26, the accents change to reinforce the three-note groups, as shown in Example 2.11. The changing combinations of pitch groupings with accent marks create excitement. Adding complexity, at m. 29 the right hand continues three-note grouping with accents on the beats while the left hand goes into four-note grouping. A brief relaxation occurs in mm. 31-32, when the three-note grouping is isolated momentarily.

Example 2.11: Specific Groupings and Accents in the Second Half of “Changes” (mm. 22-29): Red Circles for Four-Note Grouping, Blue Circles for Three-Note Grouping, Light Green Circles for Accents in Four-Note Grouping, Purple Circles for Accents in Three-Note Grouping.

The musical score for Example 2.11 is presented in three systems, corresponding to measures 21-23, 24-26, and 27-29. The key signature is B-flat major (two flats), and the time signature is 3/4. The score is for piano, with dynamics ranging from *p* (piano) to *mf* (mezzo-forte). The notation includes various rhythmic values, primarily sixteenth and thirty-second notes, and rests. The score is annotated with colored circles: red circles for four-note groupings, blue circles for three-note groupings, light green circles for accents in four-note groupings, and purple circles for accents in three-note groupings. The tempo markings are *poco rit.* (ritardando) and *a tempo* (return to original tempo). The dynamics are *p*, *mp*, and *mf*.

The grouping of the sixteenth notes changes yet again in mm. 38-43, to 3+3+2 in each 2/4 measure (Example 2.12). This shortening of the groups not only accelerates the motion and driving force, but also adds a jazz-like rhythm into this piece. Its greater complexity sets up the simplification in the nine measures at the end during which the two voices match in rhythm and melodic contour. The repetitiveness of these closing measures slows the momentum. Also contributing to the closure of the piece are the narrowing of the figures in mm. 50-51 and the long *diminuendo* through the end.

Example 2.12: Three-Three-Two Groupings Circled in Red and the Ending Section of “Changes” (mm. 37-52)

The image displays a musical score for the ending section of "Changes" (mm. 37-52). The score is written for piano and consists of five systems of two staves each. The key signature is B-flat major (two flats), and the time signature is 4/4. The first system (mm. 37-38) shows the beginning of the section. The second system (mm. 39-41) features three-three-two groupings circled in red in the right hand. The third system (mm. 42-43) continues the piece. The fourth system (mm. 44-46) includes a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic marking. The fifth system (mm. 47-52) concludes the section with dynamics of mezzo-piano (*mp*), piano (*p*), and *perdendosi* (fading away).

Overall, the various lengths of the groupings created by pitch contours and accents in both hands and their interactions are the source of the vitality of “Changes.” Although Louie builds the rhythmic energy in this second half, it lacks the dynamic contours and the cohesive bass line of the first section. Overall, the two-part structure of

“Changes” is comparable to that of various preludes of Bach, notably the C-Major Prelude from Book I of the *Well-Tempered Clavier*.

J.S. Bach is one of the composers Louie listened to and played often during her formative years. Louie recalls, “I would start with [my own] piece, but then I would end up playing Bach.”¹¹⁵ In the C-Major Prelude, the constant sixteenth-note figuration groups the eight sixteenth notes in each half-measure as 2+3+3, a more distinctive subdivision than the normal 4+4. In addition to the perpetual-motion sixteenths, “Changes” and the C-Major Prelude share a two-part structure with a bass line that makes a long step descent followed by a pedal point underpinning the second section. In the Bach Prelude, the bass begins on c¹ and ends its descent an octave lower. From there, a dominant pedal is reached that lasts for seven measures, followed by four measures of tonic pedal. In “Changes,” there is the step bass in the first part until the affirmation at m. 22 of an Eb tonal center, then from there to the end, the second part is static, effectively prolonging Eb while the rhythmic interaction creates motion.

To perform “Changes” effectively, it is crucial to understand the structure and arrival points, as Louie’s music has a natural flow and contour despite the minimalistic language. The pianist’s building and releasing of momentum and tension within the general plan, which is perhaps borrowed from Bach, can help to set “Changes” apart from other minimalistic music that has “endless” or “immobile” qualities.

Freedom in *Senza Misura*

Both “Changes” and the C-Major Prelude have an improvisatory quality, and Louie’s music often conveys this effect in a different way by granting freedoms to the

¹¹⁵ Kruja, 161.

performer. Canadian pianist John Kimura Parker says, “Her music has to be played with freedom and passion. These are musical concepts that can’t be notated.”¹¹⁶

Senza misura is one of the ways Louie achieves freedom in music. Louie explains that *senza misura* notation frees performers from rhythmic boundaries and encourages them to interpret her music with more creativity and consideration for shaping the passages.¹¹⁷ She also states, “I do want the performers to have freedom, with elastic feelings. I often notate long passages with seconds, and it is because I want the players to take freedom in the passage. This is one of my musical languages.”¹¹⁸ Later, extensive use of *senza misura* becomes a core idea of *Bringing the Tiger Down From the Mountain II* (1991), one of Louie’s works for cello and piano. Because she feels her music should be flexible in its feel rather than rigid in its measure, she usually composes with relative durations only, going back to add bar lines once the musical line and harmony flow naturally.¹¹⁹

The free-flowing and soothing melodies in Louie’s music stem from Eastern concepts of rhythm. In the Eastern musical philosophy, the activity of breathing in and out is the source of unity with the rhythms of the heavens and earth.¹²⁰ Louie mentions that the natural flow in her music is based on “natural breathing,” which cannot be

¹¹⁶ Kim., 169.

¹¹⁷ Louie, “Program Notes,” *Bringing the Tiger Down from the Mountain*.

¹¹⁸ Kim, 156.

¹¹⁹ Kruja, 147.

¹²⁰ Shelley Drake Hawkes, “An Environmental Ethic in Chinese Landscape Painting,” *Asian Visual and Performing Arts, Part II*, Vol 18, No.1 (Spring 2013): 17, <https://www.asianstudies.org/publications/ea/archives/an-environmental-ethic-in-chinese-landscape-painting/>.

measured in exact time.¹²¹ The rhythm of Asian music seeks smoothness and continuity, in keeping with Confucianism. Annie Wu comments,

Unlike Western or African music, there is no emphasis on rhythm or beat. Traditional Chinese music isn't meant to be danced or moved to. That would tend to orient people toward bodily sensual and sexual drives. As Confucius taught, beautiful and appropriate music is meant to promote social tranquility. In accord with Confucius' idea of music being "smoothly continuous," traditional music generally doesn't have sharp breaks in tempo.¹²²

The improvisational quality of Louie's music and its freedom are also influenced by her experience with jazz in her early career, along with her work as a cocktail pianist (1970-1973) during her studies in California, as well as in Vancouver.¹²³ She acknowledges that many experiences and the music she listened to growing up have influenced her in developing her own unique voice: "from playing cocktail music... to teaching students, [and] following Chinese Lion Dance with drums and gongs and firecrackers up and down Pender Street every Chinese New Year with [my] family."¹²⁴

Although her music offers freedoms to the performer, she does not want it to "wallow into emotional mush."¹²⁵ As a result, she sets limitations by using specific indications requiring the performer's personal involvement and communication. Even in *senza misura* sections with no bar lines, she sets parameters: "I always control how long that *senza misura* will go on...I will actually put points at which certain things have to

¹²¹ Kruja, 148.

¹²² Annie Wu, "Traditional Chinese Music," *China Highlights*, modified August 30, 2021. <https://www.chinahighlights.com/travelguide/culture/traditional-music.htm>.

¹²³ Kruja., 119.

¹²⁴ Alexina Louie, "Alexina Louie Wins Molson Prize In The Arts," *Esprit Orchestra*, Sept 18, 2019, <https://www.espritorchestra.com/blog/alexina-louie-wins-molson-prize-in-the-arts/>.

¹²⁵ Kruja, 148.

happen, so I control the *senza misura* but I give the performer a certain amount of freedom.”¹²⁶

Through this improvisatory quality and freedom granted to performers, Louie achieves her artistic goal as a composer by making her music feel alive and fresh. She explains, “My art music should communicate with performers and listeners and it should move them in a deeply human way.”¹²⁷ It is important for performers to understand that Louie wants a feeling of elasticity and natural flow in her music. Canadian composer Jeffery Ryan says that the danger of misinterpreting Louie’s music comes when one becomes too rigid in what is written in the score. He explains that her music must be “breathed by the performers,” adding that “her tempi are all approximate, and no two beats should be the same.”¹²⁸

Louie’s philosophy of freedom in music is well illustrated in “Distant Memories,” in which she uses *senza misura* extensively. The opening and ending sections of this piece contain no bar lines but instead have approximate time suggestions. There is a single melody in recitative style in these *senza misura* sections that is decorated with some proportional notations. Louie indicates that the opening thirty-second notes are not to be played with specific rhythmic values, but rather “From slow to as fast as possible.”¹²⁹ The use of proportional notations and the suggestions for the number of repeated notes leading into trills “[imply] a desired looseness of duration.”¹³⁰ In addition,

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Kim, 143.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 165.

¹²⁹ Louie, *Music for Piano*, 9.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

detailed tempo markings such as *fermatas*, *rallentando*, *poco ritardando*, and *a tempo*, as shown in Example 2.13, convey rhythmic flexibility.

Example 2.13: Opening *Senza Misura* of “Distant Memories”: Specific Performance Indications are Circled in Red and Tempo Markings Circled in Blue.

Distant Memories

Alexina Louie

0" *senza misura*

RH *p* (*from slow to as fast as possible*) *mp* *mp* 10"

LH

10" (1.) *p* *mf* *rall.* *a tempo* 18"

(1.) The number of repeated notes is left to the discretion of the performer. May be divided between the hands.

18" *mp* *poco rit.* *p* 30" *Quasi berceuse* ♩ = 58 - 60 (*with a gently rocking motion*)

The recitative single melody shown in the example above conveys the meditative and enchanting atmosphere reminiscent of music for the *ch'in*, but it also has an element of Western jazz: Its pitches belong to the major blues scale (A, B, C, C#(D_b), E, F#) with added sevenths (G, G#). This passage is an example of how Louie created her profoundly

evocative and unique voice, in a fusion of East and West. Sean Bickerson observes her compositional identity as “grounded very much in her understanding of her own personal identity.”¹³¹ Elements of her Asian ethnicity and her growing up in Western society are evident throughout *Music for Piano*.

Sonority

Louie talks about the importance of focusing on the sonorities when it comes to performing her music: “I think performers should sink into the sound since sonority is really important for me. The instrument should resonate.”¹³² The statement reveals Louie’s desire for Impressionistic, colorful sounds in her works. She acknowledges her indebtedness to other composers for her blending of sonorities: “I was also influenced by the sound of the Impressionists, particularly Ravel. I like that music very much. Most of my music has a resonance to it that is different. It’s not dry music.”¹³³ Louie displayed her expertise in Ravel’s sonorities by orchestrating some of his music for the Documentary Arts Film titled *Ravel’s Brain* (2001), directed by Larry Weinstein.¹³⁴

Her love of a resonating sound and sonority as inspired by Ravel is evident in the performance indications throughout *Music For Piano*. Louie helps young performers achieve rich and blurry sonorities by offering detailed pedal markings and technical guidance throughout the work. In “Changes,” for example, Louie’s performance notes convey specifically how the sound is to be produced. This entire piece, written in

¹³¹ Bickerton, “A Celebration of the Life & Music of Alexina Louie.”

¹³² Kim, 156.

¹³³ Ibid., 150.

¹³⁴ Robin Roger, “Toronto Ravel Unravels The Illness That Took Down A Musical Giant,” *Ludwig Van Toronto*, December 23, 2019, <https://www.ludwig-van.com/toronto/2019/12/23/feature-toronto-ravel-unravels-illness-took-musical-giant/>.

consistent sixteenth notes in a minimalistic manner, can easily sound dry and mechanical without a careful approach to the sound quality. Louie emphasizes in her own words that the whole piece should be “legato and round in tone,” proposing that “the wrists be rather loose and used in a rotary motion.”¹³⁵ She also blends the entire piece with extensive use of pedal to add reverberance to the sonority. The overall coloristic sound of the piece is well expressed through her instructions.

To create the specific timbre she wants, she also uses a combination of different registers. For her, timbre is a “crucial part of the music and it does not happen accidentally.”¹³⁶ She explains, “I have to combine the sound of the notes with the timbre I want to create. Throughout [“Memories in an Ancient Garden,” one of her major piano works, written in 1987], I think the major aspect is timbre. There is a huge difference between the lowest and the highest register.”¹³⁷

The use of registers to achieve timbral effects is especially evident in the ending section of “The Enchanted Bells.” In the score, above m. 33, Louie explains how the two rapid figures of 10 notes against 12 (mm. 31 and 33) are to sound. As shown in Example 2.14, she writes, “Exact subdivision of 10 and 12 are unimportant; rather, it is a flurry of sound that is desired.”¹³⁸ Louie thus gives rhythmic freedom to the performer to achieve the sound effect of a “flurry” of notes.

¹³⁵ Louie, “Performance Notes,” *Music for Piano*.

¹³⁶ Kim, 157.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Louie, *Music for Piano*, 4.

Example 2.14: The Specific Performance Indication about Sonority at the Ending of “The Enchanted Bells” (mm. 32-37)

The image shows a musical score for the ending of "The Enchanted Bells" (mm. 32-37). The score is written for piano and includes three systems of music. The first system (mm. 32-33) features a treble clef staff with a melodic line and a bass clef staff with a low, sustained D note. A red oval highlights a performance instruction: "(3.) Exact subdivisions of 10 and 12 are unimportant; rather, it is a flurry of sound that is desired." The second system (mm. 34-35) continues the melodic line in the treble and the low D in the bass. The third system (mm. 36-37) shows the final measures, with the bass clef staff marked "una corda" and "ppp". Performance markings include "P rit.", "poco cresc.", and "8va" with a dashed line. A note "(2.)" is placed above the bass staff in the second system, and "(2.)" is also present in the first system. A note "(2.) Hold with right hand through pedal change." is located at the bottom right of the first system.

In this ending section of “The Enchanted Bells,” the difference in register between the repeated D in the bass and the active figures in the upper staves creates a unique coloristic effect. The return a few measures earlier of the slow-moving bass, after a middle section of flowing arpeggios, is significant. The bass’s low D is a continuation of the repeated D’s in the arpeggios passage, but it is transferred from middle to low register for the ending of the piece. The wide range between the hands through this ending creates a timbre that evokes a sense of vast space separating the bass from the rapid figures above.

When Yoomi Kim asked Louie about her tendency to use D pedal points in her music, she replied surprisingly that she does not do this intentionally but instead follows her inner intuitions. She explained, “Yes, it’s my ear that carries me. I don’t usually write in D, so I don’t know how that really happened. But, when I find the solution, it’s just like a light goes on and you just know it’s the right choice.”¹³⁹ Thus, the repeated D at the ending of “The Enchanted Bells” was selected primarily for its resonant timbral effect, that of a ringing bell, and was not necessarily intended to satisfy any specific demand of pitch organization.

Canadian writer Emily-Jane Hills Orford has described Louie’s works as having an “ethereal quality that transcends both time and place and leaves the audience as well as the performers with a distinct feeling of being in a trance, a dream.”¹⁴⁰ When Louie writes the music, she aims for something “captivating, magical, touching, inspiring,” whether “the work is meant for young piano students or the audience of National Ballet of Canada.”¹⁴¹ Even in “The Enchanted Bells,” Louie finishes the piece in such a way that the audience has the sense of being in a transcendent realm as the sound fades away to *pianississimo*.

The performer of Louie’s music should think about these aspects of timbre and sonority and even prioritize them over technical or mechanical approaches. Louie thus offers young performers opportunities to use their imagination and sensitivity through

¹³⁹ Kim, 132.

¹⁴⁰ David Jaeger, “Signaling a Musical Sea Change/ Composer Alexina Louie and Cellist Rachel Mercer,” *The Whole Note*, November 1, 2019, <https://www.thewholenote.com/index.php/newsroom/feature-stories/29608-signalling-a-musical-sea-change-composer-alexina-louie-and-cellist-rachel-merc>.

¹⁴¹ Louie, “Louie Wins Molson Prize.”

focusing on blended sonority and timbral effects, rather than concentrating on an exact execution.

CHAPTER 3

STAR LIGHT, STAR BRIGHT (1995)

Alexina Louie's works in the 1990s began to show her compositional style straying from Asian idioms, which were common in her earlier works.¹⁴² Partly as a result of Asian influences, her early music extensively incorporated the upper register of the piano, which she used in contrast to the muddier sounds of the lower register.¹⁴³ She began to expand and broaden her use of contrasting registers, not only to represent Yin and Yang, but also to represent her understanding of the heavenly realms. Several of her later works have themes related to heaven, earth, the universe, the brightness of the stars in the night sky, and eternity. Examples include the orchestral works *Music for Heaven and Earth* (1990), commissioned by the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, *The Ringing Earth* (1986), and *The Eternal Earth* (1986), as well as the piano works *Star-Filled Night* (1987), *I Leap Through The Sky With Stars* (1991), *Starstruck* (1996), and the choral work *Love Song for a Small Planet* (1989) and its arrangement for orchestra (1994).

Louie explains that her connection to nature and the heavenly realms is inspired by her interest in the opposites found both in the universe and within humans:

I have written a lot of music about nature or about the heavens. I'm not exactly sure why, except that the sounds that I choose, my musical language, evokes this kind of crystalline sound that reminds me of the heavens and stars. The inspiration might be the darkness of the night and then its exact opposite which is brightly shining heavenly bodies. It has to do with the expression of that which is inside human beings, which is darkness and light; it is love and violence. Again, music really is an expression of being.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² Kim, 155.

¹⁴³ Kim, 129.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 118.

Star Light, Star Bright was composed in 1995. It is similar to *Music for Piano* (1982) in that both were written for intermediate-level pianists. However, Louie has mentioned that *Star Light, Star Bright* was written especially for pianists at a slightly lower level than those she intended for *Music for Piano*.¹⁴⁵ Louie's success was propelled forward by her first Juno award in 1988 for Best Classical Composition. She began writing actively for famous artists as well as many highly regarded international competitions, including the Esther Honens International Piano Competition (1996), the Eckhardt-Gramatte Competition (1996), and the Canadian Music Competition (1991). Despite expectation and demand for her to compose for those with higher artistic capacity, she prioritized and enjoyed writing for students. Louie dedicated *Star Light, Star Bright* to “my young daughters, Jasmine and Jade.”¹⁴⁶ She recalled, with a smiling face, the excitement of her children when hearing different chords from the piece during its composition.¹⁴⁷

Star Light, Star Bright consists of nine small character pieces, which take approximately two to three minutes each. As Louie mentions in her program notes for this set, the nine pieces are meant to introduce intermediate-level pianists to contemporary music. Louie believes the pieces ought to be performed individually, because each has an individual character.¹⁴⁸ When these nine pieces are performed together, they create an arch-like structure in which one half of the set mirrors the other due to similar characteristics between pieces. The first and ninth, “Distant Star” and “Into

¹⁴⁵ Alexina Louie, “Composer’s Notes with Special Guest Alexina Louie,” *Langely Community Music School*, Online Masterclass, Vancouver, November 29, 2021, <https://languagemusic.com/alexina-louie/>.

¹⁴⁶ Alexina Louie, “Program Note,” *Star Light, Star Bright* (The Frederick Harris Music Co., 1995).

¹⁴⁷ Louie, “Composer’s Notes.”

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 127.

Forever,” are slow movements that evoke a feeling of transcendence and reveal Louie’s haunting and lyrical melodic lines. The second and eighth pieces, titled “Blue Sky I” and “Blue Sky II,” are also similar, with humorous, light, tonal melodies. The third and seventh pieces, “Star-Gazing” and “Shooting Stars,” reflect their titles by mimicking the shimmering effect of stars. In contrast, the fourth and sixth pieces, “Rings of Saturn” and “O Moon,” are about planets and convey Louie’s impression of the vastness of the planetary universe. Finally, the fifth piece, “Moonlight Toccata,” acts as the center of the arch and is the most vigorous and traditionally written.

Louie wants her music to be played with an "extremity in spirit,"¹⁴⁹ and she emphasizes in her performance notes that "In all cases, the pieces should be approached musically and not performed dryly in an automaton-like manner."¹⁵⁰ She explains that the pieces within *Star Light, Star Bright* “range in style from dreamy ones, in which timbre is the most important element, to active ones where, in minimalist fashion, repeated phrases of similar material take a prominent role.”¹⁵¹ Louie has been more concerned with the teaching of sonorities and timbre to young pianists, than with the development of technique for playing fast passages. For Louie, the colors and timbres of the piano are most important, and she always emphasizes that her pieces should be played with a flexible musicality.

While not necessarily stretching the boundaries of musical styles that may be familiar to pianists at an intermediate level, these pieces feature such contemporary

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 156.

¹⁵⁰ Louie, “Program Notes,” *Star Light, Star Bright*.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

elements as proportional notations without bar lines, rapidly repeating passages, shimmering timbral effects, chord clusters, and groups of grace notes that are intended to be played as quickly as possible.¹⁵² Louie explains that her music is “not old and not aggressively new... and yet it is new. It sounds different. At least that’s the response that I’ve had. People say, ‘You know I don’t like contemporary music but I really like your piece.’”¹⁵³ *Star Light, Star Bright* is a gateway that introduces contemporary musical idioms at a level suitable for the next generation of pianists.

Quartet for the End of Time & Star Light, Star Bright

Many critics have connected Louie with Olivier Messiaen (1908-1992) for their compositional approach that brings together Asian elements, Impressionistic colors and sonorities, and inspiration from jazz. A review in the *American Record Guide* comments that the last section of *Music for Heaven and Earth* exhibits an awareness of Messiaen’s *Turangalila Symphony*.¹⁵⁴ In addition, both composers often wrote sets of pieces that have multiple movements to be played individually or together in tandem. Recognizing their similar musical language, the renowned Gryphon Trio commissioned Louie’s *Echoes of Time* (2011) as a prelude for their performance of Messiaen’s *Quartet for the End of Time*.¹⁵⁵

Both composers were highly interested in spirituality and wrote several works on mystical and religious themes, such as eternity, heaven and earth, supernatural power,

¹⁵² Louie, “Program Notes,” *Star Light, Star Bright*.

¹⁵³ Kim, 121.

¹⁵⁴ De Jong, “Collections,” *American Record Guide*, 59. No.3 (May 1996): 227.

¹⁵⁵ Bill Rankin, “Echoes of the Quartet for the End of Time,” *Gramophone*. May 16, 2012, <https://www.gramophone.co.uk/blogs/article/echoes-of-the-quartet-for-the-end-of-time>.

and fairy tales.¹⁵⁶ Messiaen's *Quartet for the End of Time* (1941) includes eight movements inspired by text from the Book of Revelation that describes an angel coming down from heaven.¹⁵⁷ Similarly, Louie's *Star Light, Star Bright* consists of nine movements inspired by objects in the heavenly realm. These sets are comparable in the way that the first pieces, "Distant Star" from Louie and "Crystal Liturgy" from Messiaen, showcase flowing and haunting melodic lines. In addition, the final pieces of the sets, "Into Forever" from Louie and "Praise to the Eternity of Jesus" from Messiaen, explore the theme of eternity, leaving a feeling of hope and inspiration about everlasting life.

In particular, Louie's final piece, "Into Forever," resembles Messiaen's final piece, "Praise to the Eternity of Jesus," which is a duo between piano and violin, reducing the quartet to two instruments. Noticeably, Louie wrote "Into Forever" on four staves instead of the traditional two staves for piano solo, resembling a quartet-like texture, as shown in Example 3.1. Louie's evocation of quartet writing in a work for the piano is the counterpart of Messiaen's offering a duet for the finale of a work for a quartet.

¹⁵⁶ Kim, 43.

¹⁵⁷ Betsy Schwarm, "Quartet for the End of Time," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, November 24, 2016, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Quartet-for-the-End-of-Time>.

Example 3.1: Opening Section of “Into Forever” (mm. 1-4)

Into Forever

Alexina Louie

The musical score for "Into Forever" is presented in a standard piano-vocal format. It begins with a tempo marking of $\text{♩} = \text{ca } 58$. The piano accompaniment is marked *una corda* and features a low-register ostinato with chords marked with a downward-pointing triangle and *pp*. The vocal line is marked *p* and features a melodic line with slurs and fingerings (2, 3, 4, 2, 1). The score is in 4/4 time and spans measures 1-4.

Furthermore, both pieces feature contrast between beautiful, moving, soulful melodies in the upper register and peaceful, motionless, calm accompaniment. In “Praise to the Eternity of Jesus,” the immobile repetitions in the piano offer the timeless, transcendental, steady feeling of an ostinato. The low-register tone clusters of "Into Forever" emulate this effect. Conveying the feeling of eternity, both pieces are primarily in the dynamic range of *pianissimo* to *mezzo piano* with the exception of moments of climax, conjuring the vague, vast, endless quality of the universe or time.

Distant Star & Into Forever

The first piece and the last piece of *Star Light, Star Bright*, “Distant Star” and “Into Forever,” display Louie’s detailed and clear expressive directions and her lyricism conveyed through Impressionistic language. The similarities between “Distant Star” and “Into Forever” hinge on their vague and mysterious feelings of intimacy. As the beginning and ending of the set, both pieces are slow, at quarter note = 56-58 bpm, and

are only at soft dynamic levels, implying the haunting and peaceful atmosphere of the universe.

“Distant Star” is composed largely of vertical fifths and fourths that either double the melody or create chord structures. The majority of these intervals are diatonic, consisting of pitches from the A-Major scale. The open intervals and limited pitch content create hollow sonorities, adding to the feeling of space and distance.

Despite frequent meter changes, "Distant Star" is largely homorhythmic, the melody consistently moving together with its doubling or supporting chords, as shown in Example 3.2. Louie adds *tenuto* marks to bring out a slower-moving melodic layer that emerges from this active background. For example, the *tenuto* marks draw the pianist's attention to certain notes that form an independent melody, marked in red in Example 3.2. While this melody descends from F# to B (mm. 7-9), Louie shortens its rhythm and adds a *poco accel.* to add forward movement. When the melodic line rises up from B to C# (m. 10), she creates a phrase ending by increasing the rhythmic values and indicating a *ritardando*.

Example 3.2: "Distant Star," Showing the Melody Brought out by *Tenutos* (Circled in Red), Plus Tempo Markings in Blue (mm. 7-10)

In “Into Forever,” the intensity is also built up and released through rhythmic acceleration and expansion. The melody starts in duple eighths at the beginning and pauses on certain notes (Example 3.1, above). This pattern repeats until m. 17, each time shortening the rhythmic value of the held note. Additionally, the duplets change into triplets at m. 15, ultimately becoming sixteenth notes at m. 17. When these rhythmic values are shortened, an *accelerando* at m. 16 increases the forward movement. Conversely, when the rhythm returns to duplets, a *ritardando* at m. 32 helps ease the piece back to its original pace.

“Into Forever” additionally shows the space of the universe by the registral distance between a very high, active melody and a quiet, slow-moving bass with tone clusters. Although in one passage the doubled melody blossoms into two voices in contrary motion, the piece maintains the serenity of an ambling, tinkling melody over rich sonorities from the low bass.

In “Distant Star,” Louie does not include any specific contemporary techniques, but in “Into Forever” she introduces tone clusters in the accompaniment. The specific indication is to play with both palms open, with fingers pointing left, each hand playing black or white keys. By introducing these techniques to a younger audience, Louie communicates music's ability to be conceptual, spacious, and atmospheric, qualities expressed in “Into Forever.”

Blue Sky I & II

The second and the eighth pieces of *Star Light, Star Bright* share similar titles, “Blue Sky I” and “Blue Sky II.” Their tonality, harmonic language, and compositional style are simple, creating a pleasant atmosphere evocative of bright blue skies. Both are notated almost entirely in treble clef,¹⁵⁸ with eighth-note figurations consisting of pitches from the A-Major scale. The rhythm is frequently varied in both pieces by changing meters or by phrase marks. Irregular grouping of the eighths, syncopations, and unevenly-spaced *tenuto* marks in both pieces keep listeners engaged.

“Blue Sky I” is in two parts, the main first section (mm. 1-25) and a smaller second section (mm. 26-35) that acts as a closing. The main part produces a jazz-like flavor with its boogie-woogie bass that groups eighth notes in twos and threes (circled in red in Example 3.3) against a right-hand melody involving many syncopations.

The bass line descends pentatonically through C#, B, A, F#, E (circled in blue in Example 3.3). There is a change of figuration with each new note of this scale. In mm. 1-

¹⁵⁸ Especially “Blue Sky I,” which is notated entirely in treble clef.

4 a syncopated, repetitive melody is sounded over the C#. With the B in mm. 5-10, meter changes and *tenuto* marks add rhythmic complexity, although the melody repeats only three different pitches. The change to A in the bass brings more-complicated dynamic markings (circled in purple in Example 3.3) and a voice added under the melody from m. 13 to m. 17. With the arrival of F#, in mm. 18-21, three-note clusters are introduced and become more active when the bass reaches E in m. 22. Swelling dynamics (Example 3.3) return here, making this last figuration the most complex. Above this pentatonic underpinning, the tonal language is pandiatonic with a key signature of three sharps and indications of an A tonal center, such as the bass's arrival on E, the dominant tone, at the end of the section.

Example 3.3: "Blue Sky I," mm. 1-24

♩ = ca 120-126
legato possible
Alexina Louie

The score consists of six systems of two staves each. The first system (measures 1-3) is marked *p* and *mp*. A blue circle highlights a C# note in the bass line, labeled 'C#'. Red circles highlight other notes in the bass line. The second system (measures 4-9) is marked *p*. A blue circle highlights a B note in the bass line, labeled 'B'. Red circles highlight other notes. The third system (measures 10-13) is marked *mp* and *p*. A blue circle highlights an A note in the bass line, labeled 'A'. The fourth system (measures 14-17) is marked *mf* and *mp*. A pink oval highlights a passage in the bass line. The fifth system (measures 18-21) is marked *mf* and *mp*. A blue circle highlights an F# note in the bass line, labeled 'F#'. The sixth system (measures 22-24) is marked *p* and includes a *rit.* marking. A pink oval highlights a passage in the bass line. A blue circle highlights an E note in the bass line, labeled 'E'.

In contrast to the variety of the boogie-woogie first section, the closing passage (mm. 26-35) is consistently in sixteenth notes divided between the hands. The "crystalline sound"¹⁵⁹ of the restless sixteenths recalls Louie's inspiration from the heavens and stars. The implication is that the blue skies of the first part move from day into dusk and the appearance of shimmering stars.

This second section additionally has an *ossia*, a second version that is easier to play. For young musicians, the more contained bass line of the *ossia* allows them to more easily dedicate their full physical capacity to playing the alternating sixteenth-note figurations with the correct rhythm and vigor. In both versions, Louie's concern for the timbre, sonority, and resonance is evident in her adding *una corda* to her pedaling marks.

"Blue Sky II" is the eighth piece of *Star Light, Star Bright*. It has similarities to "Blue Sky I," contributing to the palindromic structure of the nine pieces in the collection. Both are predominantly in two layers, with a moving bass and variable treble figurations as in jazz and boogie woogie styles. The two also share constant eighth-note motion, frequent meter changes, shifting accents, irregular note groupings, high tessitura, and an A tonal center.

Structurally, "Blue Sky I" has a long first section and shortened second section, whereas "Blue Sky II" has a short first section and extended second section. In "Blue Sky II," there are 8 measures of introduction (mm. 1-8) before the first section starts. The first section occupies 12 measures and ends with a transition (mm. 21-24) to the second

¹⁵⁹ Kim, 118.

section, which occupies 42 measures (mm. 25-66). The introduction is in syncopated block chords, without the flowing eighths of the two main sections. Its most obvious difference is its chromaticism with strong (semitonal) dissonances in mm. 1-6, which gives way to the diatonicism of mm. 7-8 as preparation for the first main section. These eight measures of chordal opening mirror the short ending section of "Blue Sky I."

While "Blue Sky I" moves from day to night, "Blue Sky II" can be interpreted as moving from dawn to the full daylight of the first section.

Unlike "Blue Sky I," in which musical ideas are distinctly separated, the figures in "Blue Sky II" overlap and evolve organically. After the introduction, Louie continues with constant eighth notes in both hands, at first in three- and two-note groupings as in Blue Sky I (circled in red in Example 3.4). However, this choppy rhythm with leaps is interrupted and begins to alternate with measures of flowing eighths, largely stepwise (circled in blue in Example 3.4).

Example 3.4: “Blue Sky II,” mm. 9-14

At the closing of the first section, mm. 21-24, the flowing figure blossoms into a scale that descends two octaves, doubled at first in clusters, then in thirds, then in full chords, connecting in m. 25 to a return of the opening (m. 9), now down an octave. This return, along with an *a tempo* after a *molto ritardando* during the scale, marks the beginning of the second section. Although the second section begins as did the first, it quickly digresses, dipping briefly into bass clef before a long, rising scale in eighth notes (mm. 30-31, shown in Example 3.5) restores the high register. This scale continues in the left hand of mm. 33-36 (Example 3.5), now downward, making a two-octave fall before both hands return to treble clef for the remainder of the piece (marked in blue in Example 3.5).

From here, the left hand expands into longer rhythmic values with large shifts in pitch (marked in red in Example 3.5), adding brightness and openness. The expanded

rhythm is the opposite of Louie's crystalline sixteenth notes of the night sky at the end of "Blue Sky I." Overall, the second section of "Blue Sky II" is longer, higher, and more diverse in its material than is the first, thus fitting the image of dawn's expansion into midday.

Example 3.5: "Blue Sky II," mm. 31-41

The image shows a musical score for "Blue Sky II" from measures 31 to 41. The score is written for piano in treble and bass clefs with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). It includes dynamic markings 'mf' and 'mp', fingering numbers (1-5), and various annotations: a large blue oval around the bass line in measures 31-32, red circles around specific notes in measures 35 and 38, and an '8va' marking with a dashed line in measure 38.

Louie's pedagogical goals in writing *Star Light*, *Star Bright* are apparent in these two pieces. The music encourages young pianists to practice techniques that support musical growth. The shorter and less technically demanding elements in "Blue Sky I" serve to prepare students to play "Blue Sky II." However, in "Blue Sky II," Louie provides mindful notation to help pianists succeed despite these increased difficulties. For

instance, there is no meter change in the transition (mm.21-24), and a slightly slower tempo is indicated to balance out other technical demands such as fast, repeated chords. Louie further supports the acquisition of new techniques through using the full range of the piano and introducing arm crossing to reach the higher pitches. For some of the high notes to be played with the left hand crossed over the right, Louie accommodates physically smaller pianists by providing a footnote in the score offering the option to play them down an octave.¹⁶⁰ This accommodation is similar to the *ossia* in “Blue Sky I.”

Star-Gazing & Shooting Stars

The third and seventh pieces, “Star-Gazing” and “Shooting Stars,” are vignettes that take about one and a half minutes each to play. “Star-Gazing” is slightly faster (quarter note=84-88 bpm) than “Shooting Stars” (quarter note= 69-72 bpm). Both showcase Louie's timbral approach to evoking the shimmering brightness of stars. Despite these similarities, “Star-Gazing” reproduces the sensation of looking at an immobile star, whereas “Shooting Star” captures the movement of meteors across the night sky.

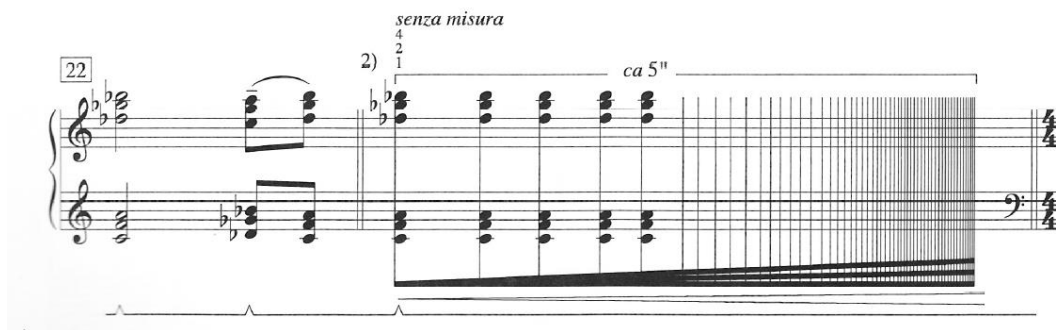
The long, sustained, *pianissimo* trills in the treble of “Star-Gazing” create the effect of twinkling, while the slow- moving notes in the left hand depict the spaciousness of the night sky. According to Louie, the trills and tremolos in these pieces serve also to “continue the sound and the resonance of the harmony.”¹⁶¹ This timbral effect is expanded in mm. 20-23. Here, Louie introduces a bichord combining G^b-Major and F-

¹⁶⁰ Louie, *Star Light, Star Bright*, 24.

¹⁶¹ Kim, 138.

Major triads and lingers on it. At m. 23, as shown in Example 3.6, the chord is repeated during five seconds of *senza misura*, with the instruction to “start slowly and make a gradual accelerando to prestissimo.”¹⁶² This notation advances the timbral effect by serving as a bridge between the speed of the trills and the harmonic resonance of a tremolo. Pedagogically, the freedom of *senza misura* allows students to experiment musically, while also offering a greater level of rhythmic forgiveness, thus potentially decreasing the difficulty of this section.

Example 3.6: Graphic Notation from “Star-Gazing” (m. 22-23)



The *senza misura* measure is the climax of a chorale-like passage from m. 16 to m. 31 that conveys the feeling of a mysterious and eerie requiem. Consisting entirely of FM/G^bM chords, singly or together, within a similar register, the limited harmony creates a stable quality despite the consonance of the pure triads and the semitonal dissonances of their combination. The static quality from these restricted harmonies can be interpreted as the limited motion of a person looking at stars, or the relative stillness of an individual when compared to the movement of the universe.

¹⁶² Louie, *Star Light, Star Bright*, 11.

Both pieces include rapid bursts of thirty-second notes spreading up or down, resembling the quick-flashing, glimmering light of meteors. The pitches of these fast notes are very close to each other, creating an effect similar to that of tone clusters when played with pedal. These figures occur only three times in “Star-Gazing,” but are much more frequent in “Shooting Stars,” where they are a representation of the speed and movement of meteors. Louie depicts the occasional meteor in “Star Gazing,” later making these meteors the main topic in “Shooting Stars.”

The companion piece of “Star-Gazing,” “Shooting Stars,” is the shortest of the set. In it, Louie captures the fleeting moments during which meteors cross the sky. Here the salvos of thirty-second notes begin the piece and become a meteor shower toward the end. Rapidly arpeggiated chords are a variant of this figure (Example 3.7, below, mm. 22-25). In the middle portion, mm. 8-14, repeated sixteenth notes divided between the hands create contrast, but the passage also recalls the FM/G^bM bichords of “Star-Gazing,” particularly in mm. 11-14. Louie's detailed directions for dynamic swells and tempo changes create undulating effects. The atonality of the piece also contributes to its depiction of the unpredictable fluctuations of shooting stars.

As “Blue Sky I” serves as preparatory exercise to “Blue Sky II,” “Star-Gazing” prepares young students for “Shooting Stars,” which is the more active and technically difficult. For example, the relatively stable chordal hand positions in “Star-Gazing” become the basis for performing the more complex chords of “Shooting Stars” with speed and accuracy. The repeated chord at m. 23 of “Star-Gazing” teaches students the

physical motion necessary for the more regimented and rhythmically strict tremolos that appear in “Shooting Stars” (Example 3.7, mm. 19-21).

Example 3.7: Tremolos in “Shooting Stars” (mm. 18-25)



In addition to these increased technical demands, the pianist also encounters more difficult devices of musical expression to achieve the overall effect. This difference is evident if one compares the relatively tame dynamic indications in “Star-Gazing” (limited to crescendos) to the more varied hairpin makings of "Shooting Stars" (marked in red in Example 3.7, above).

Rings of Saturn & O Moon

The fourth and sixth pieces, “Rings of Saturn” and “O Moon,” reveal Louie’s creative understanding of the planetary universe. Looking to the solar system, these two pieces compare the faraway mystery of one of its largest planets with the tiny body closest to Earth.

Both pieces share *senza misura* in the opening and ending sections, evoking a free and vast atmosphere. As the pieces mirror each other, the lengths of the *senza misura* passages in the opening and closing are opposite. “Rings of Saturn” begins with a short *senza misura* but closes with an extensive passage in this type of notation. “O Moon,” in contrast, begins with a full 75 seconds of *senza misura* and closes with only a few seconds in it.

Both pieces juxtapose shimmering, rapid figures with substantive chordal sections that evoke the physical substance of the planets. In “Rings of Saturn,” groups of extended grace notes appear frequently, taking up more than half the piece. In particular, the long series of flowing gestures in the closing section (Example 3.8) evoke the gentle motions of the debris that makes up the rings of Saturn.

Example 3.8: Closing *Senza Misura* from “Rings of Saturn” (mm. 20-23)

The musical score for Example 3.8 is presented in three systems. The first system, starting at measure 20, is marked *senza misura* and *p*. It features a melodic line with slurs and fingering (1, 2, 4) and a bass line with arpeggiated figures. A time marker *ca 10"* is placed above the right side of the system. The second system continues the melodic and bass lines, with time markers *ca 19"* and *ca 24"* above the right side. The third system, starting at measure 21, includes a tempo change to *rit.* and the instruction *una corda*. It features a melodic line with slurs and fingering (1, 2, 4) and a bass line with arpeggiated figures. A time marker *ca 30"* is placed above the right side of the system, and a tempo marking *♩ = ca 60* is placed below the right side.

In “O Moon,” rapid figures appear only in the opening *senza misura*. Circled in red in Example 3.9, these rapid figures are entirely in one whole-tone scale, unlike the seemingly random pitch collections in “Rings of Saturn.” With this difference, Louie may be contrasting the ephemeral nature of Saturn's rings with the familiarity and predictability of the Moon.

Example 3.9: Opening Senza Misura from “O Moon”

The image displays a musical score for the opening of "O Moon" from "Senza Misura". The score is divided into four systems, each with piano (p) and left-hand (L.H.) parts. The first system (0" to 23") features a piano part with a circled triplet and a left-hand part with circled chords. The second system (23" to 44") shows a piano part with a circled melodic line and a left-hand part with a circled chord progression. The third system (44" to 53") features a piano part with a circled melodic line and a left-hand part with a circled chord progression. The fourth system (53" to 1'15") shows a piano part with a circled melodic line and a left-hand part with circled chords. The score includes various annotations such as "senza misura", "una corda", "pp", "p", "poco cresc.", "mp", "R.H.", and "Rit.". The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4.

The chords in both pieces are primarily bichordal combinations of triads, added-tone chords, or quartal constructions. They are quite various in “Rings of Saturn,” whereas the chords in “O Moon” are often of fixed structure and transposed in groups with the Impressionist technique of planing or parallelism. For example, in the first line

of “O Moon,” the chords are all quartal in the right hand and triadic in the left hand (circled in blue, Example 3.9, above), making them easy to play. Similarly, the chords grouped together in the last line of the *senza misura* (also circled in blue, Example 3.9) are of the same structure until the last two.

These descending successions of chords anticipate the chordal passage that makes up the second half of “O Moon” (Example 3.10). The beginning of the second half continues with a new group of descending chords until m. 5, which begins a long, ascending passage. The slow unfolding of these shapes is like the Moon's motion across the sky. This ascent is largely stepwise in the top voices, resembling an augmentation of the rapid figures from the *senza misura*. The piece ends with the same chord with which it began. In the opening, this high chord initiated a descent, and here it is the peak of the long ascent.

Example 3.10: Second Half of "O Moon" (mm. 2-17)

♩ = ca 54

poco accel. loco *rit.* *più mosso accel.* *poco rit.*

8va

pp *p* *mp*

poco accel. ♩ = ca 76 *accel.* ♩ = ca 84

sub. pp

1 *1* *3* *5* *4*

tre corde

rit. *8va*

mf *p*

5 *4* *1* *2* *4* *1*

17 *senza misura* *8va* *laissez vibrer* *pp* *8va bassa*

“Rings of Saturn” and “O Moon” are useful for teaching students several different techniques. The most prominent technical challenges presented by these pieces are playing rapidly, controlling dynamics, and maintaining firm hand positions.

Both pieces contain rapid grace-note figures, but those in “Rings of Saturn” are preparatory to those in “O Moon.” Overall, the dynamic range of “O Moon” is softer, making the rapid figures more challenging to play with the required delicacy. The softer dynamics of “O Moon” pertain also to the chordal passages, making them more difficult for the young pianist to control. For instance, the eighth-note bichords in “Rings of Saturn” (mm. 13-18) maintain the dynamic range of *mezzo piano* to *mezzo forte*. Later in “O Moon,” bichords make another appearance, but this time in the dynamic range of *piano* to *pianissimo*.

Bichords serve the additional purpose of teaching students the importance of firm hand positioning. Particularly in “O Moon,” Louie contrasts an ascending succession of chords with an added bass line underneath them, so the left hand has to keep leaving the chord to jump downward and then return. Separating the hands in this way makes it difficult for students to look at both hands simultaneously. As a result, students develop an intuition about their hand placement on the keys and develop the ability to make wide leaps with the left hand. Also, the final part of the ascent, mm. 12-17, has a long *diminuendo* from *mezzo-forte* to *pianissimo*. Performing an ascent with a *diminuendo* is counterintuitive, so the student must develop the control to accomplish this effect.

Moonlight Toccata

“Moonlight Toccata” is the fifth piece and is placed at the center of the set's arch-like structure. As the centermost piece of *Star Light, Star Bright*, it does not have a companion like the others in the set. To establish the midpoint, Louie uses a conservative musical language, contrasting with the atmospheric quality of its surrounding pieces, “Rings of Saturn” and “O Moon.” The relatively traditional nature of this piece could represent a more grounded terrestrial realm. Here, Louie no longer describes the planets or the universe, but rather the experience of witnessing the moon from a place on Earth.

The notation of “Moonlight Toccata” is conventional, without any contemporary techniques. Louie describes her music as “Not so far away from traditional,” and an “extension of traditional music.”¹⁶³ Such an extension is evident in the similarities between “Moonlight Toccata” and the toccatas of J.S. Bach (BWV 910-916). Bach wrote these toccatas for harpsichord, a plucked instrument. Because of its naturally detached sound and light keyboard action, the instrument lends itself well to virtuosic passages of clearly-articulated, rapid notes.

The brilliant passages in Bach's toccatas are often in a consistent rhythm that contrasts with other, perhaps slower, figurations. Some typical figurations from the toccatas of Bach are circled in Example 3.11. Louie is evoking Bach's toccata style in “Moonlight Toccata” with the primary idea consistently in a sixteenth-note figuration and with the direction to play with “detached touch.”

¹⁶³ Kim, 138.

Example 3.11: Bach, Toccata in G Major (BWV 916), mm. 1-9

Bach's toccatas generally consist of a patchwork of short, contrasting passages set apart by changes of figuration and tempo. Similarly, “Moonlight Toccata” is divided into short sections that are also defined by figuration (circled in blue) and tempo (circled in red), as shown in Example 3.12. “Moonlight Toccata” goes through four such short sections in mm. 1-34. The first (mm. 1-9) and third (mm. 15-26) share the alternation of sixteenth notes divided between the hands. The second (mm. 10-14) and fourth (mm. 27-33) add longer rhythms to the sixteenth-note figures and are slower in tempo, as shown in mm. 10-14 of Example 3.12. The fifth section, mm. 35-51, the longest, begins as a return of mm. 1-8 and then continues the alternating figuration shown in Example 3.12 to form a conclusion for the piece. As discussed in the chapter on *Music for Piano*, Louie has an affinity for the music of Bach, and here she again evokes that composer.

Example 3.12: “Moonlight Toccata,” mm. 7-16

7 *mp* *p*
 Alternation between hands

10 *poco rit.* *p* *mp* *p* *mf*
 Running Arpeggios
tre corde

13 *a tempo*
 Alternation between hands
una corda

The tonality of “Moonlight Toccata” is ambiguous. As shown in Example 3.13, the opening juxtaposes F-Major and G \flat -Major triads, a bichordal combination that is featured in “Star-Gazing” and found elsewhere in the set. Although some sections of “Moonlight Toccata” surround G \flat -Major triads with pitches from that key, the prominence of F-Major triads through the piece, and especially the last chord, asserts F more strongly than G \flat as the tonal center, though the piece could be considered to be in dual tonality. This unique sonority of F/G \flat juxtaposition in “Star-Gazing” and “Moonlight Toccata” is perhaps Louie’s leitmotiv for the terrestrial realm. In both pieces

the observer, of starlight and moonlight, is in a fixed position on Earth.

Example 3.13: Opening Section of “Moonlight Toccata” (mm. 1-6)

Leggiero ♩. = ca 80
detached (with pedal)

Alexina Louie

pp

una corda

1

3

4

4

1

5

5

Although “Moonlight Toccata” is in a brilliant, virtuosic style, Louie modifies certain figurations to be easier to play and to fit her pedagogical intentions. Louie writes the sixteenth note figurations by alternating between hands, thus making them less difficult to play. The alternations allow each hand to take more time to move to the next note.

Louie further uses this piece to teach students a deeper understanding of sonority. Louie indicates this piece is to be played *leggiero*, with “detached” touch, and with use of both the damper and *una corda* pedals. This combination of detached, toccata-like touch with reverberance from the damper pedal can be conflicting. Through this apparent conflict, a student can learn the difference between sonorities created through physical

articulation and sonorities created through pedaling. This understanding encourages better control and discourages students from such common mistakes as using pedal in place of a true legato.

While easy to play steady rhythmic figurations mechanically, one must always remember Louie's goal of cultivating musicality. Louie provides detailed pedal, dynamic, and tempo markings as a staple in her music, offering direction to young performers on how to best create the appropriate sonorities. Her attention to detail is seen especially in the ascending and descending scales and arpeggios in the *poco meno mosso* section of "Moonlight Toccata" (mm. 27-33). Here, Louie creates dynamic swells through short and long hairpins as well as slurs, encouraging the performer to create a grander and broader character in contrast to the detached, *leggiero* sections.

CHAPTER 4

SMALL BEAUTIFUL THINGS (2016)

After composing *Star Light, Star Bright* in 1995, Louie produced only a few works for solo piano. She did broaden her style later with three additional piano pieces, *Put on Your Running Shoes* (2003), *In A Flash* (2006), and *Fastforward* (2008), all of which are in a jazzy, "boogie woogie" style. Louie continued writing in diverse genres, composing for opera, ballet, large ensembles, orchestra, and Inuit throat singers. After 2000, Louie focused more on topics based on common objects and daily life; examples include *Put on Your Running Shoes* (2003), *Pursuit* (2006), *Fanfare Z* (2006), *Take the Dog Sled* (2008), *Filigree* (2012), *Pond Mirrors Bright Sky/Wild Horse Running* (2013), *Altitude* (2014), and *A Curious Passerby At Fu's Funeral* (2015). This focus continued with the premiere of her work for solo piano, *Small Beautiful Things* (2016).

Small Beautiful Things was Louie's third pedagogical set for piano and was composed after an eight-year break from writing solo works. These pieces were premiered in 2019 by eleven local students from Mount Royal University at a concert in celebration of the composer's seventieth birthday, organized by John Kimura Parker, the director of the Honens Piano Festival. *Small Beautiful Things* was written with a simplicity aimed at early pianists as a response to piano teachers who found Louie's previous pedagogical pieces valuable.

To accomplish the goal of teaching young musicians, Louie incorporates foundational musical techniques such as eighth-note passages, sixteenth-note passages, basic techniques of contemporary notation, and a variety of articulations. To create these

works, Louie drew upon inspirations from everyday life to capture the beauty in simple things and common events. Louie then crafted these experiences into musical scenes, making the set's content relatable for younger audiences. Some of the eleven pieces are only one page long and have a duration of less than a minute. The short format displays Louie's creative and humorous ways of depicting subjects such as worms, birds, and snails or moments such as walking in the park or running for the bus.

Eighth Notes

Playing eighth-note rhythms evenly and musically is a fundamental goal of musical training for beginners. Even and musical playing can sometimes be compromised for students who inadvertently learned poor technique early on. Louie's music provides an opportunity for students to improve their counting as well as to learn the proper arm and wrist movements necessary for dynamic control and injury reduction.

Eighth notes are the primary focus of the first four pieces, "Rainbow," "L'escargot," "Little Grey Bird," and "That Darn Worm!" These pieces teach eighth notes in an engaging way that prepares the student for faster rhythmic patterns later in the set. The intentional dynamic, phrase, and tempo markings in these pieces further teach students to read their scores carefully and play sonorously. Ultimately, these pieces prepare students to have a firmer technical and musical foundation without the boredom of playing rote drills and exercises.

To prepare students for a variety of these eighth-note figurations, Louie focuses on slightly different expressive elements in each piece. "Rainbow" emphasizes what

Louie refers to as “two note drop wrist technique”¹⁶⁴ to perform pairs of eighths in which the first is given more weight, as shown in Example 4.1.

Example 4.1: “Rainbow,” mm. 8-11

The image shows a musical score for the piece "Rainbow" from measures 8 to 11. It consists of two staves: a treble clef staff (piano) and a bass clef staff (bass). The music is in 3/4 time and features eighth notes. The score is divided into three sections: measures 8-9, 10, and 11. The first section (measures 8-9) is marked *mf* and *mp*. The second section (measure 10) is marked *mf* and *poco rit.*. The third section (measure 11) is marked *p* and *a tempo*. Blue arrows point to the first note of each eighth-note pair in the piano part, illustrating the "two note drop wrist technique" where the first note is given more weight. Slurs are used to group the eighth notes into pairs.

Louie visibly groups the eighths into pairs with slurs so that young students can learn down-and-up movement from the wrist. The following piece, “L'escargot,” focuses on playing legato groups of eighths in five-finger patterns. “Little Grey Bird,” the following piece, advances the technical focus by bringing out the difference between legato and staccato eighths over a quarter-note left-hand accompaniment with large leaps. Finally, “That Darn Worm!” expresses its topic with groups of eighths in chromatic half steps, cultivating the finger independence and dexterity needed to accurately navigate the spaces between black and white keys.

Although these initial pieces are Louie's most deliberate use of eighth notes, similar techniques will appear in other pieces of the set. For instance, eighth notes appear in triplets in “Moonbeams” and “Running for The Bus.” “In the Moonlight” demonstrates Louie’s focus on the flexibility of tempo in her insertion of *senza misura* pauses into passages of eighth notes with the direction “Not in strict time.” In the final piece, “A

¹⁶⁴ Alexina Louie, “Program Notes,” *Small Beautiful Things* (copyright by Alexina Louie, 2016).

Walk in The Park,” constant changes in eighth-note groupings create rhythmic complexity.

Sixteenth Notes

Building from her exploration of eighth notes, Louie introduces the concept of sixteenth notes in “Little Sparrows,” “Moonbeams,” “Little Balinese Dancer,” and “A Little Water Music.” Pedagogically similar to eighth notes, sixteenth notes also require even playing and expressive flexibility. However, barring the exception of pieces in a slower tempo, sixteenth notes require greater speed. This acceleration presents the challenge of maintaining accuracy, in addition to increasing the activity of the fingers to maintain rhythmic clarity. Again, Louie presents different ways of utilizing sixteenth notes in these pieces.

Over the course of these four pieces, Louie helps the student learn how to develop speed, lyricism, and touch. In “Little Sparrows,” both legato and staccato sixteenths teach different articulations. Louie is often creative in how she coaxes youngsters to produce different performance styles. Referring to “Little Sparrows,” for example, she suggests, “See if you can make the passage at bar 5 sound like [birds’] little chirping voices.”¹⁶⁵ In contrast, she marks a flowing middle section as “Delicate, bird-like,” as shown in Example 4.2. Additionally, by dividing the melody between hands briefly in mm. 20-21, Louie helps young students to develop these sonorities equally between hands, as marked in blue in Example 4.2.

¹⁶⁵ Louie, “Program Notes,” *Small Beautiful Things*.

Example 4.2: “Little Sparrows,” mm. 15-21

Delicate, bird-like ♩ = ca. 80–88

15 *mp*

18

The alternation of hands introduced in “Little Sparrows” is developed further in “Moonbeams” (Example 4.3) and “A Little Water Music” (Example 4.4). In these pieces, students acquire the dexterity needed to transition a melody or figure smoothly between the hands.

Example 4.3: “Moonbeams,” mm. 15-22

Little slower ♩ = ca. 63

15 *p*

19 *poco a poco cresc.*

Example 4.4: “A Little Water Music,” mm. 1-6

♩ = ca. 100+

p

una corda

mf

tre corde

This skill is necessary to support accurate voicing of more complex pieces. In “Little Balinese Dancer,” the lyricism of sixteenth notes found in “Little Sparrows” is developed as a main focus, which is useful to teach steady but flowing sixteenth-note figurations in both hands. Students can learn to play such figurations lyrically by practicing the beautiful melodies evoking the Balinese *gamelan*. Later, in the tenth piece, “A Little Water Music,” Louie returns to the techniques introduced previously, but in the most advanced way. The tempo is faster (quarter note = 100-116 bpm); the basic rhythmic value is increased to the triplet; the range of dynamics widens, from *piano* to *forte*; and there is active alternation between hands. These compositional elements are useful to teach speed, accuracy, and expressiveness.

Contemporary Notation

Louie's goal of exposing young musicians to new music trends is evident in *Small Beautiful Things* in her use of contemporary notation and modern effects. These

unconventional devices are interspersed through the set and are integrated with passages in traditional notation.

For example, in “Moonbeams,” Louie introduces nail glissandos in *sulle corde*, as shown in Example 4.5, indicating “to play on higher strings inside a grand piano” with the damper pedal depressed. *Sulle corde* appears also in “In the Moonlight,” but on the lowest string of the piano using the flesh of the finger. By introducing this technique, Louie provides a way for students to achieve the calm, beautiful, mysterious sonorities appropriate for the topic of moonlight. Considering that young pianists might have physical difficulty reaching the strings and the pedal at the same time, she offers accommodations. Alternatives include playing a string in the middle range, playing a single chord cluster to emulate a similar sound, or bypassing the *sulle corde* altogether and playing the indicated pitches on the keyboard.

Example 4.5: “Moonbeams,” mm. 35-48

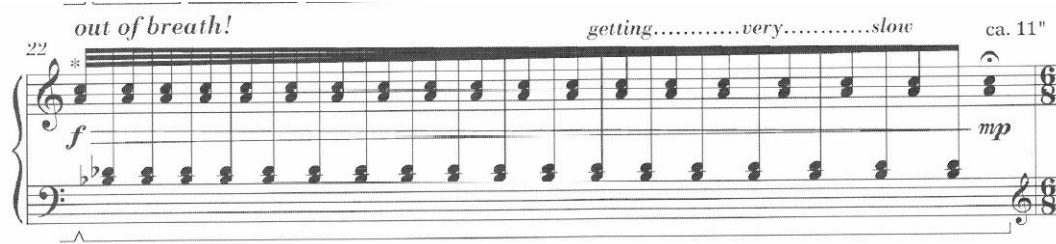
The image shows a musical score for the piece "Moonbeams" from measures 35 to 48. The score is written for piano and features a treble and bass clef. The tempo is marked as $\text{♩} = \text{ca. } 52$. The piece is in a key with one flat (B-flat major or D minor). The score includes a dynamic marking of p (piano). The notation includes a 8^{va} (octave) marking. The instruction "sulle corde" (on the strings) is circled in red, along with a star symbol and a circled note in measure 36. Another circled note is visible in measure 42. The score is divided into two systems, with the first system covering measures 35-41 and the second system covering measures 42-48.

In “Running for the Bus,” Louie introduces graphic notation in m. 22 with the instructions “Start as fast as possible. Gradually slow down”¹⁶⁶ to portray the action of running to catch up with a bus, as shown in Example 4.6. By writing in 11’ of *senza misura*, she gives more freedom to the student, indicating “The exact number of notes is left to the discretion of the performer.”¹⁶⁷ By allowing for rhythmic flexibility, students can engage their imagination and broaden their understanding of non-traditional rhythm.

¹⁶⁶ Louie, “Running for the Bus,” *Small Beautiful Things*, 12.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

Example 4.6: “Running for the Bus,” m. 22



* Start as fast as possible. Gradually slow down. The exact number of notes is left to the discretion of the performer.

This flexibility continues in “Moonlight,” with chord sequences at mm. 1 and 23 in *senza misura*. This rhythmic freedom is carried through to eighth-note figurations with indications for *ritardando* and *accelerando*, and with the explicit direction that the music should not be played in strict time.¹⁶⁸ By being introduced to flexibility of tempo and freedom of rhythm, students are prepared to handle changes of tempo and *rubato* in other musical styles.

Musicality

As a pedagogue and musician, Louie understands the importance of teaching timbre and sonority early on as a way to unlock the development of musicality as a young pianist matures. Sonority is prioritized not only in her virtuosic works, but also in multiple ways within a simpler musical frame. She wants her music to have musicality and flexibility regardless of difficulty.

This pedagogical philosophy is emphasized in *Small Beautiful Things* by Louie's detailed articulation markings such as staccato, legato, and tenuto, and by her precise

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

indications of pedaling. These details help students with phrasing, and they encourage development of the habits of analytical reading and close attention to the score.

Additionally, she fosters creativity by inserting metaphors, imagery, and actions that are easy for young children to understand. For instance, Louie describes qualities such as “Delicate, bird-like” in “Little Sparrows” (Example 4.2, above). These descriptions continue in “Running for the Bus,” with statements such as “Out of Breath” (Example 4.6, above), “Door Open!” “Climb up the Stairs,” “Doors Close!” and “Made it!” (Example 4.7, circled in blue).

Example 4.7: "Running for the Bus," mm. 23-49

Tempo I
running again *poco a poco accel.* 13

mp mf

23 27 33 38 44

poco a poco accel. *rit.* *molto rit.* *rit.*

mf dim. *p* *mf* *f* *mf*

L.H.

detaché with pedal *legato*

ca. 132 *ca. 132*

running again doors open! climb up the stairs doors close! made it!

These indications allow students to connect certain images to music in a concrete manner without the potentially confusing abstractions of dynamic and expressive markings alone.

In this way Louie encourages students to approach music as a vehicle to express their everyday moments and feelings, a core element in her personal philosophy.

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