

Erland Sjunnesson's *Nordic Piano Ballads* for Late-Beginning and Intermediate Students: Modern Enchantment

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Introduction

Swedish composer Erland Sjunnesson has composed modern and attractive pedagogical pieces in the two sets titled *Nordic Piano Ballads*.

Erland Sjunnesson (b. 1967): Background

- Studied at the Malmö Academy of Music (Sweden)
 - Jazz and classical piano
 - Master of Fine Arts in 1997
- Recording studio 7son Musik and Produktion
 - Website: 7son.se
- Teaches at a music school in Helsingborg
 - Primarily teaches jazz, pop, gospel, R&B, and rock; he instructs “both how to accompany the songs and how to play them like solo piano pieces.”

Compositional Style of the Nordic Piano Ballads

- *Musik för Piano*: pedagogical piano pieces in three volumes
 - The first two volumes are available in the U.S. as *Nordic Piano Ballads* (2005 and 2008)
 - (Available in online stores, and individual songs can be requested on composer's website)
- Composition style:
 - Reminiscent of movie soundtracks, creative titles, jazz influences
 - Lyrical melodies, various accompaniment patterns and key signatures, clear formal structures (often ABA)
 - Contrapuntal textures up to four voices
 - Some have complicated textures, but the easier pieces only have three voices
 - “Nordic Themes” have folk music influences
 - Natural minor keys, swung rhythm, open fifths and fourths, and primitive melodic motion

List of Pieces (Magrath's Levels 4-8)

Nordic Piano Ballads I: Nordic Theme Nr. 8, Mayfly, Nordic Theme Nr. 2, June Dance, Preludium in A Major, Fairy Tale, Vals in D Minor, Music Picture Nr. 1, Remembrance, Timeless, In Three Keys, Majvals (May Dance), Nordic Theme Nr. 11, Hymn, Another Story, Lull, Voicings

Nordic Piano Ballads II: Nordic Theme Nr. 1, Fridlyst (Protected), Vida Vingar (Wide Wings), Gauzy, Nordic Theme Nr. 4, Music Picture Nr. 2, Bara Vara (Just Be), Beyond, Vattenspegel (Water Mirror), Vals Simple, Music Picture Nr. 3, Preludium in D Major, Nordic Theme Nr. 12, Aprilvals (April Dance), Horizon, Sheltered, Piano Bells

Selections (Incipits taken from *Musik för Piano II*)

Vals Simple (level 5)

- Expressive melody and harmony
- 3-part texture

The image shows the beginning of the musical score for "Vals Simple" by Erland Sjunnesson. The title "VALS SIMPLE" is centered at the top. To the left, it says "LIGHT WALTZ" and "ca. 144". To the right, the composer's name "ERLAND SJUNNESSON" is written. The score is in 3/4 time and begins with a treble clef. The melody starts with a quarter note G4, followed by quarter notes A4, B4, and C5. The bass line consists of a steady eighth-note accompaniment. The first few measures include fingerings 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5.

Nordic Theme No. 4 (level 5-6)

- Traditional *polska* dance rhythm
- 3-part texture

The image shows the beginning of the musical score for "Nordic Theme No. 4" by Erland Sjunnesson. The title "NORDIC THEME NO 4" is centered at the top. To the left, it says "JOYFUL WITH A STEADY BEAT" and "ca. 114". To the right, the composer's name "ERLAND SJUNNESSON" is written. The score is in 3/4 time and begins with a treble clef. The melody starts with a quarter note G4, followed by quarter notes A4, B4, and C5. The bass line consists of a steady eighth-note accompaniment. The first few measures include fingerings 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5.

Pedagogical Contribution

- Refreshing, modern, and expressive pieces
- Unique “Nordic Themes”
- Short, quick-learn pieces
- Useful for teaching contrapuntal textures, swing rhythm, and jazz chords
- Composer’s recordings at 7son.se/musik-for-piano/

Bibliography

Sjunnesson, Erland. Interviewed by Shelby Nord. 2018.

Sjunnesson, Erland. *Musik för Piano I*. Helsingborg: 7son Musik, 2005. Print.

Sjunnesson, Erland. *Musik för Piano II*. Helsingborg: 7son Musik, 2008. Print.

Hage Musikverlag. “Nordic Piano Ballads #1.” J.W. Pepper. n.d. Accessed October 27, 2019.

<https://www.jwpepper.com/Nordic-Piano-Ballads>.