

5 Stages for Teaching Alberto Ginastera's *Twelve American Preludes*

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Twelve American Preludes is a great contemporary composition for late-intermediate to early-advanced students. Composed by Alberto Ginastera, the set of preludes is an attractive output for piano that skillfully combines folk Argentine rhythms and colors with modern composing techniques. In this collection, there are 12 short piano pieces each about one minute in length. Every prelude has a title, tempo and metronome marking, and each presents a different character or purpose for study. There are two pieces that focus on a specific technique, titled *Accents* (no. 1), and *Octaves* (No. 7.) Nos. 5 and 12 are titled with Pentatonic Minor and Major Modes. *Triste*, *Creole Dance*, *Vidala*, and *Pastorale* display folk influences. The remaining four pieces pay tribute to other 20th-century American composers.

In *The Pianist's Guide to Standard Teaching and Performing Literature*, Dr. Jane Magrath uses a 10-level system to list the pieces from this collection in different levels. However, in order to lead students to better progressive growth, I think it is important to group these pieces into five stages, so piano teachers can more easily choose repertoire from this collection for students based on their levels, styles and what specific study needs.

- First Stage: No. 2 *Sadness/Triste* (Level 6) and No. 5 *In the First Pentatonic Minor Mode* (Level 7)
- Second Stage: No. 4 *Vidala* (Level 7), No. 8 *Tribute to Juan Jose Castro* (Level 8), and No. 10 *Pastorale* (Level 8)
- Third Stage: No. 3 *Creole Dance* and No. 6 *Tribute to Roberto Garcia Morillo* (Level 8)
- Fourth Stage: No. 1 *Accents* and No. 7 *Octaves* (Level 8-9)
- Fifth Stage: No. 9 *Tribute to Aaron Copland*, No. 11 *Tribute to Heitor Villa-Lobos*, and No. 12 *In the First Pentatonic Major Mode* (level 9)

The first stage can be considered as introductory. The pieces in the second stage have similar textures and chromaticism, become harder and require good balance, voicing, and tone quality. The third stage is the transition stage. The pieces are faster, bolder, and more virtuosic and they can help students prepare for the next two stages. The fourth stage develops skill with accents and octaves. The fast tempo and large leaps increase the difficulty, which requires blocked-chord and slow practice. The pieces in the fifth stage are the most challenging in many aspects. However, with the preparation from the first four stages, students should be able to handle the difficulties. When students finish these five stages, they will have a thorough understanding of American folk styles, an overall idea of the tonality, harmonization, texture, sonority, rhythm, and techniques in 20th-century pieces by Ginastera and other composers, and will be ready to play at a more advanced level.