

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

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Hello everyone, my name is Qiwen Wan. I am a first-year doctoral student in piano pedagogy major at the University of South Carolina. I am really glad to be here and thanks to SCMTA to allow me to present online under this circumstance. The topic of my lightning talk is 5 stages for teaching Alberto Ginastera's *Twelve American Preludes*.

First, please let me introduce this collection. *Twelve American Preludes* is composed by Alberto Ginastera, who is known as one of the most important South American composers of the 20th century. It was published in two volumes in 1944. 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*, and *Octaves*. No. 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 20<sup>th</sup>-century American composers. This set of preludes is an attractive output for piano that skillfully combines folk Argentine rhythms and colors with modern composing techniques.

*Twelve American Preludes* is a great contemporary composition for late-intermediate to early-advanced students. 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)**

These two pieces are the easiest in this collection and are good introductory choices. Both are written in minor keys and both of them are two-voice works. The term “Triste” refers to a type of Argentina melancholy love song, and the pentatonic scale also results in a folk-like style. The accessibility of these pieces helps students focus on finger control, establish a higher level of artistic sound, and experience South American folk idioms.

### Second Stage:

#### **No. 4 *Vidala* (Level 7), No. 8 *Tribute to Juan Jose Castro* (Level 8), and No. 10 *Pastorale* (Level 8)**

All three pieces have similar melancholy characters to No. 2 (the piece we talked about in stage one,) but feature thicker textures and more complex rhythms. They are slow polyphonic works and establish the idea of chromaticism or folk idiom. The title of No.4, *Vidala*, refers to a slow Argentine folk song that shows Italian and Spanish influences. Both of the melody line in

No. 8 and No. 10 move in half steps that illustrates the idea of chromaticism. The melody line of No. 8 shows in the tenor voice while No. 10 is in the soprano line. Finger control and sensitive touch are essential. In addition, this stage requires students to have great voicing and balance between melody lines.

### **Third Stage:**

#### **No. 3 *Creole Dance* and No. 6 *Tribute to Roberto Garcia Morillo* (Level 8)**

The third stage is the transition stage. The pieces become faster, bolder, and more virtuosic. No. 3 is an Argentine dance in 6/8 meter and No. 6 is a toccata-like tribute to an Argentine composer, Roberto Garcia Morilli. Both of the pieces have polytonality. No. 3 is more challenging rhythmically because it has clear poly-metric combinations. No. 6 has easier rhythms throughout but contains some technical challenges which require finger evenness and independence between hands. The technical demands of both works make them excellent preparation pieces for the next stage.

### **Fourth Stage:**

#### **No. 1 *Accents* and No. 7 *Octaves* (Level 8-9)**

This stage focuses heavily on technique, develops skill with accents and octaves. These two pieces require a strong, continuous rhythmic sense. The fast tempo and large leaps increase the difficulty, which requires more blocked-chord and slow practice.

### **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)**

These three pieces are the most challenging in many aspects. However, with the preparation from the first four stages, students should be able to handle the difficulties. No. 9 pays tribute to Aaron Copland's Jazz style and No. 11 to Heitor Villa-Lobos' folk guitar influence. They both feature thick polytonal textures. No. 12 focuses on bell-like sonority and experiments with a large dynamic level and keyboard range. It also helps students read music in an orchestral setting.

In conclusion, organizing Alberto Ginastera's *Twelve American Preludes* into a five-stage leveled progression helps lead students to better progressive growth. 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 American composers, and will be ready to play at a more advanced level.

Here are the references for my research. Hope you enjoy it, thank you!