

# **Etudes for Pianist**

*Prompts and Suggestions- Maria Sappho*

Pianist need not play piano in all studies, choice of response is free

You can play all or some of the studies

Study III is not possible without study V

When playing both III and V, space them out in your program

These studies look to challenge the technique and training common to pianists

Undoing and remaking new interactions with body, instrument, and mind.

Some of these exercises challenge classical technique and training while others might be skills you never thought of using.

*These are stimulus for you to build and extend on your already unique sonic and physical sphere. Feel free to extend, mix, and adapt these exercises, for your own wants.*

# I. Letting Go

*For 7 Sounds*

Pick 7 notes or sounds  
*Can you remember these 7 sounds?*  
*Are they all different?*

Play each sound one at a time  
*Are they all the same dynamics?*

Play 7 sounds in a repeatable order, you may choose any rhythms and dynamics, as long as you can remember them

Repeat this order until it is easy to play

*Now begin to let go*

Let go of one sound, here you now have a silence in your pattern, equivalent to the space that sound once held. Allow your body to move to the creation space of the sound, but produce no sonic material.

Continue this pattern with the new silence for a while

Let go of another sound, now you have two silences in your pattern, and two spaces where your body moves, but does not create sound.

Continue this pattern with the new silence for a while

Continue to let go of sounds, repeating your pattern, as it is filled with more and more space, but your body is still finding the spots where the sounds once were.

The piece is over when you have removed all the sounds, but continued to imagine the patterns full rotation, silently with your movements, a few more times.

*Mistakes might happen, these are welcome*

## II. Terra

*For rhythm and direction*

Based on the poem of the same name by Decio Pignatari (1957)

Play any sounds (keyboard or otherwise), following the rhythmical patterns loosely

Red arrows suggest pitch direction. Rising, falling, or stationary  
*Consider-how might you play a repeated note which has moving pitch?*

*Tempo and dynamics are flexible and changing*

Repeat at will

The image displays 11 numbered staves of musical notation, each containing rhythmic patterns of notes and rests. Red arrows are drawn below the notes to indicate pitch direction: rising (upward arrow), falling (downward arrow), or stationary (horizontal arrow). The notation includes various note values, rests, and dynamic markings such as accents (>) and hairpins (> and <). The staves are arranged in two columns: the first column contains staves 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, and 11; the second column contains staves 2, 4, 6, 8, and 10. The notation is minimalist, focusing on rhythm and pitch movement rather than specific pitch values.

# III. Sight Reading

*For fear and error*

1. Find a piece of music you have never played before, at a level that challenges your sight reading abilities.
2. Sight read the piece
3. Improvise whenever you find reading hard, or when the mood takes you. Key signature need not be adhered to. Respond to what you hear in the present, past and future.
4. Enjoy your own sounds. Care less and less about the 'notes'  
*What are the upcoming shapes? What might they sound like? What gestures do they suggest? Read Macro, not Micro details.*
5. When you are on the last page of the piece, close your eyes, continue to sight read
6. When you feel you have said all that you wanted to say, open your eyes, end the piece in any way you want. *Possibly with the actually notated last notes? With your own gesture?*

*\*If this is for performance, and not just study, consider picking works that are less known to avoid cliché variations on a theme. You are using the act of sight-reading for your own creative stimulus, you are not attempting to further the original composers ideas.*

# IV. The Impossible Creation

*For re-generation and memory*

Begin by playing any few notes (keyboard)

These form a melody

Remember their rhythm, pitch, and dynamics

Play these few notes a few more times, add in one new note

Now you have an extended phrase

Play this a few more times, until you are ready to add a new note

Keep repeating this process, if you make an error, this is now a part of the next repetition

There will come a point, either quickly or in some time (depending on the day, and your focus) where repeatability will become impossible. When this happens, remember the general area and shape of your phrase, and improvise until you are able to return back to your starting fewer note phrase.

Play with the simplicity of the beginning, always returning to it, when developing becomes difficult.

## IV. (A) The Impossible Creation (inside)

*Apply all principles and directions, but this time to inside the piano work.*

# V. Memory

*For error, and recall*

Sit in silence for a few minutes, recall your sight reading Improvisation.

*Think back, what was its form, how did it sound?*

Try to re-create this piece to the best of your ability from memory.

Whatever you don't remember, make up.

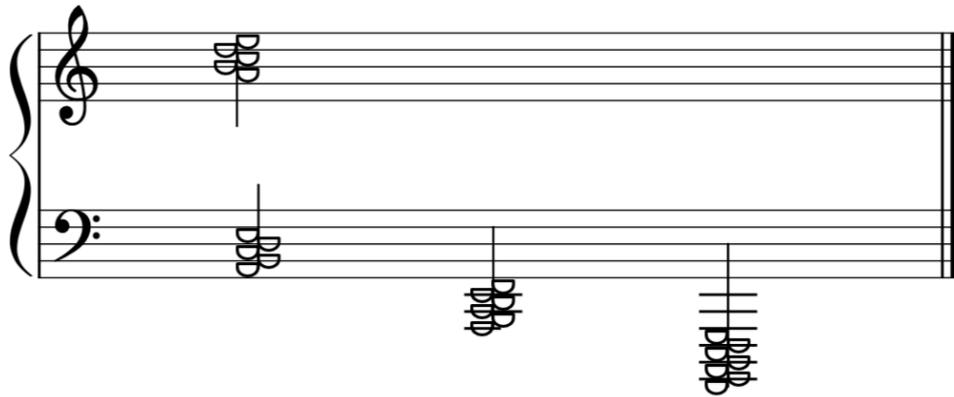
## VI. Forms

*For decisions and repetitions  
(Longer work, some preparation on piano)*

Take a variety of cards from your wallet (paper, plastic, metal?) and place under dampers (carefully) on the following clusters.

*\*It helps to use bluetack to adhere them to the strings, or else they fall inside the piano and you will not be happy trying to get them back out again.*

If you are performing, do this in front of the audience, they are happy to wait.



The following are suggestions for form. Create your own path through each A, B, C section, repeating at will whenever you like.

*Example. A A B C A C B A*

**A.** Repeated note to be played with alternating right and left hand, for as long as you like.

First and last dynamics are given, as well as speed directions (indicated by tremolo)

Play with all depths of (sustain) pedal, changing at random. Listen to how this effects your repeated note

You may use una corda, but experiment with this, like you do with the sustain

Notes not sounding? Enjoy the rhythms this creates

When you feel this note has been exhausted release pedal and note, let resonance sound.

Play another one? Or move on?

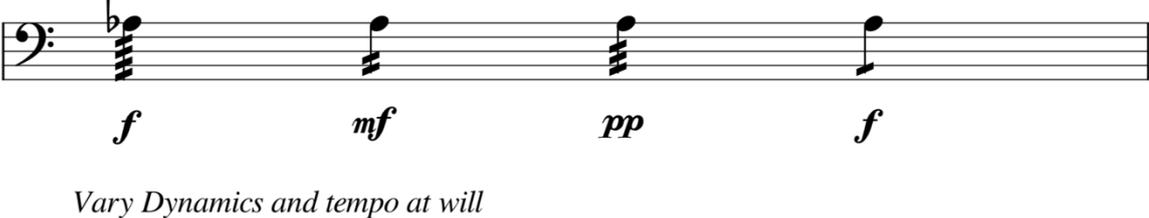
Pitches below are suggestions, whenever you come back to this section, choose a different repeated note to play.

1



*fff*  
*Accel.*.....

2



*f*      *mf*      *pp*      *f*

*Vary Dynamics and tempo at will*

3



*ppp*  
*Rit.*.....

**B.** Find some notes for a solemn melody. Improvise your melody using your chosen notes, moving further away from easy to reach octaves, allowing mistakes to creep in, and finding new notes which you welcome into the melody.

*Example.*



*If you are moving directly to C, fall into a repeated pattern of your melody notes, when you are comfortable with the repetitive pattern, slowly speed these up until you have a fast ostinato.*

*Example.*



*If you are moving directly to A, allow your melody notes to bring and find your next repeated note, slowly work this into the melody, for a sneaky transition.*

*Example.*



**C** Find some notes for an ostinato pattern.

Think about sliding single notes in and out. Think about dropping notes from your pattern, and changing the order of your notes.

Do any notes sound at once? Are they all separate? Do both hands play at once or in alteration?

Think about your practice in A with dynamics, speed and pedal.

# VII. Watching

*For eyes, hands and feel*

Place your hand on a location on the piano which makes you feel comfortable

Place your hands at this location, they are relaxed, waiting

Closely watch your hands

Do they twitch ever so slightly?

Do your hands shake when you are nervous?

Can you remember the first time you looked at your hands on the piano?

Tell a story about seeing your hands at the piano, *if you would like to.*

Now read the following sequence, as if reading a score, keeping the image of your hands in your mind-

1. Pick up your left pinkie, let it fall
2. Pick up your right index finger, let it fall
3. Pick up your left middle finger, let it fall
4. Pick up your left thumb, let it fall
5. Pick up your right pinkie, let it fall
6. Pick up your left hand, let it fall
7. Pick up your right wrist, let it fall
8. Pick up your left index finger, let it fall
9. Pick up your right thumb, let it fall
10. Roll your left hand, roll it back
11. Roll your right hand, roll it back
12. Pick up both hands, let them fall
13. Pick up both wrists, let them fall
14. Roll both hands, roll them back
15. Circles with left wrist
16. Circles with right wrist
17. Circles with both wrists
18. Thumbs together
19. Pinkies together
20. Palms together
21. Clap