Reviews

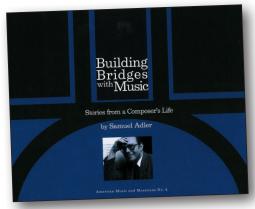
Reviews of books, videos, software and music for the professional music teacher

Books

Building Bridges with Music: Stories from a Composer's Life, by Samuel Adler, edited by Jürgen Thym. Pendragon Press, 2017. www.pendragonpress.com/; 264 pp., \$39.95.

Adler's *The Study of Orchestration* has resided within arm's reach of my desk chair since graduate school. The book is well worn, but my esteem for Adler is intact. I know now how much I *did not know* about Samuel Adler (1928–). My admiration has sharpened.

Adler's storytelling takes you straight to the heart of significant scenes from his remarkable life. Destiny, talent, passion, zeal and a touch of "workaholism" have placed Adler in key positions to witness events shaping America's 20th- and 21st-century musical history. His keen observance and amazing memory make this an extremely thorough account of modern musical life—at the top of the heap.



This transcends other memoirs by the enormity of its scope and the intimacy of its details. Not only does he tell great stories, but the author reveals his humanity. You feel as if you are having a cozy dinner with the utterly charming Samuel Adler (Okay, several dinners—the book is long). You become close friends because he shares his feelings as well as the facts.

No one is exempt from Adler's honesty, including himself. He tells it as he knows it, relaying an unflattering story about a famous musician as readily as he praises a young student's superior insight.

Surprisingly, there are spacing typos, misspellings, even an unfinished hyphenated word drifting off as an incomplete sentence ending Chapter 17; musicians notice such details! Also, some of the musical details will limit their appeal mainly to musicians and/ or avid history aficionados.

The magnificent *Introduction* by Jurgen Thym is the first of many places issuing political comment without intending to do so; it reads, "Adler's life story is an example of how much a society is enriched by welcoming foreigners and giving them a chance at a new beginning." Adler embodies the American story rising from the despair of a Jew in pre-World War II Germany to the rewards of a life in America reaching an exemplary artistic accomplishment, professional success and personal fulfillment.

Adler's unique narration of recent American musical history is not available in any textbook. Such even-handed and honest storytelling of a life so rich offers contemporary commentary with the benefit of hindsight. The footnotes alone are a *Who's Who* of 20th-century music giants. The author is one of the tallest. Recently retired from Julliard, more opportunities to *build bridges* appear on the horizon. Writing this book represents his definition of retirement! —*Reviewed by Ann Rivers Witherspoon, Houston, Texas*

Debussy's Paris: Piano Portraits of the Belle Époque, by Catherine Kautsky. Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, 2017. www.rowman.com; 254 pp., \$38.00.

This book is a must-read for Debussy aficionados. It explores the sociological and cultural background of the Belle Époque and its influence on Debussy and his music. Debussy's world was one of various contradictions in the areas of art, literature and popular culture. The author's brilliant mind sparkles with a profusion of ideas and interpretations, and this reader feels that each chapter could easily be expanded into a separate book. Carefully researched and augmented by dozens of black and white art reproductions and photos, the author favors long sentences and, at times, appears to detour briefly from the main objective of each chapter. Overall the book is not a casual read. I found myself stopping and contemplating the varied, sometimes opinionated and challenging ideas. The author's somewhat wordy, yet colorful, prose sometimes obscures the point of

the sentence or paragraph and I feel that some concepts could be expressed more succinctly.

The Belle Époque was the era influ-

enced not only by the Commedia delle'arte, but by circus performers, dance (both ancient and modern). new-world phenomena like the cakewalk, orientalism, Asia admiration, a child's world and make-believe. fairy tales, the world of Undine, peculiar hybrid creatures, watery subjects, hair (especially golden), Edgar Allen Poe and nationalism. A chapter is devoted to each

subject, and the author's transitions to the next chapters are careful and thought-provoking.

Literary, cultural and artistic research is abundantly obvious. The many references to the epoch's contemporary writers and artists suggest that a culturally aware reader will glean the most from this book. There is one small caveat to excellence and one which is of no consequence to

> the subject matter of the book. There appears to be a lack of scientific knowledge when referring to a tarantula (while explaining a Tarantella) as a "hapless scorpion." Nevertheless, while reading this book I imagine attending any one of Kautsky's riveting lecture/ demonstrations that I have enjoyed over the years.

On a light-hearted note, I never recognized the role that elephants, both fictional and toy, played in the Belle Époque. The chapter on orientalism forces me to **never** think about *Babar*, *le petit* éléphant as I did previously! On a different subject, now that I know Poe's influ-

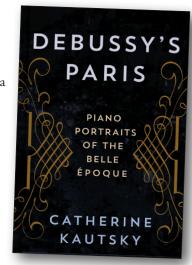
ence on Debussy, I will likely follow Kautsky's advice and view his music with more darkness than pastel. I thank the author for all her insights!

—Reviewed by Janice Larson Razaq, NCTM, Harper College

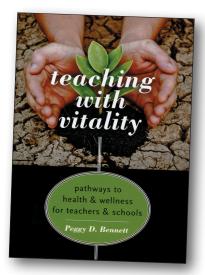
Teaching with Vitality: Pathways to Health & Wellness for Teachers & Schools, by Peggy D. Bennett. Oxford University Press, 2018. global.oup. com; 232 pp., \$19.95.

I thoroughly enjoyed reading the book Teaching with Vitality: Pathways to Health & Wellness for Teachers & Schools by Peggy D. Bennett, professor emerita of music education at Oberlin College Conservatory of Music. The book opens with a brief bio about the author, highlighting her background in mediation, teaching and mentoring. The goal of the book as stated by the author is to read, reflect, ponder, discuss and use her "nuggets of wisdom" to reflect on your own roles, thoughts and actions as teachers, mentors or educators.

What I loved about the book is that the chapters are all two pages! There







are no excuses to NOT read this book! She presents her thoughts and ideas briefly and in a straightforward manner in a concise two-page chapter. Each chapter is specifically focused on an idea, an emotion, a conflict, a way of thinking, a way of behaving or a way of understanding. In these chapters she covers such topics as "the Teacher's Creed," "boundaries," "listening," "assertiveness," "change," "confidentiality," "trust," "problem solving," "fear," "professionalism" and

"musicality" just to name a few. It provides a mirror for you to look at your own teaching, thoughts, experiences and actions as you continue to grow as an educator.

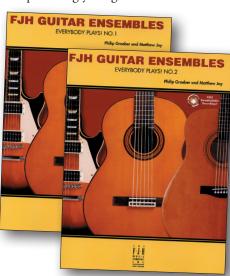
This book should be read by everyone involved in education, not just specifically music teachers. It could easily be used in a group setting and would be a great small text for any teacher education classes and mentoring programs as well as a guide for group discussions.

Each chapter in this book presents a myriad of great things to think about and discuss that are pertinent to our current educational environment. If you are a teacher or mentor and you are looking for a breath of fresh air in your teaching life or a way to get refocused and improve on yourself as a teacher then this is the book for you! This is a gem of a book and if you are looking for a great gift for a teacher, mentor or other educational professional, I can without a doubt say they will absolutely LOVE this little book! —Reviewed by Heather Korn, Trenton, Tennessee

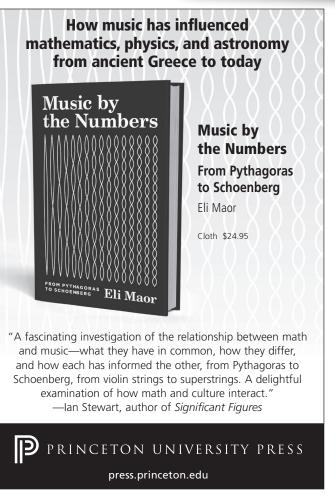
Guitar

FJH Guitar Ensembles: Everybody Plays! No. 1 and No. 2, by Philip Groeber and Matthew Joy. FJH Music Company Inc., 2017. www.fjhmusic. com; \$14.95 each.

The FJH Guitar Ensembles, Everybody Plays! No. 1 and No. 2 repertoire books are great resources to use in providing your guitar students







with the opportunity to learn and play music together. The repertoire is written for use with students of various skill levels, especially first-year students, so that "everybody plays." Each book contains five performance pieces suitable for recitals. The beautifully arranged pieces are scored for six different guitar parts but are flexible enough to be played with as few as two or three guitars. The selected pieces also include a variety of musical styles such as jazz, folksong, blues, rock, sacred and classical.

The books have a removable paper cover and include a teacher's guide, conductor's score and an individual score sheet for each guitar part. The teacher guide and conductor's score are bound together, while individual guitar part scores are loose inside the cover. The teacher's guide gives a quick overview, as well as important details about each of the performance pieces, which are listed in order by level of difficulty. Toward the back of the guide is a glossary of terms, and a listing of chord diagrams for chords used in the book, as well as a

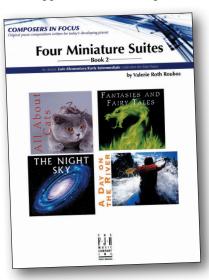
first position and 12th position note chart. Extra conductor scores and student guitar parts may be purchased separately. Additionally, there is a code inside each book to download the recordings of each piece from the FJH Music website. The recordings have a quality sound, and they can be very useful in providing a sense of ensemble during individual practice or lesson times. —Reviewed by Tracy Roberts, Panama City, Florida

Piano

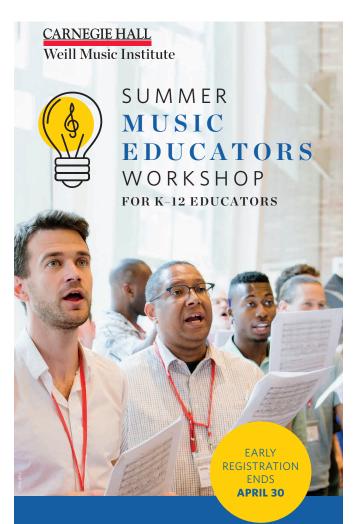
Composers in Focus: Four Miniature Suites, Book 2, An Artistic Late Elementary/Early Intermediate Collection for Solo Piano, by Valerie Roth Roubos. FJH Music Company Inc., 2017. www.fjhmusic.com; 28 pp., \$6.50. Late Elementary/Early Intermediate.

Valerie Roth Roubos has written 12 original compositions that are separated into four categories, and each category has three compositions pertaining to the category topic.

Fantasies And Fairy Tales includes "Dragon Roars," "Magic Mirror" and "Waltzing before Midnight." All About Cats includes "Cat and Mouse," "Midnight Crazies" and "Paw and Whiskers." The Night Sky includes "The Swirling Galaxy," "Comets" and "The Lost Star." A Day On The River includes "Running the Rapids," "Evening on the Water" and "Mississippi Steamboat Stomp."







"This was the most important event of my professional career."

—Zenda Swearengin, Choral Director and Fine Arts Chairman at J. H. Workman Middle School in Pensacola, Florida

SESSION 1

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JULY 11-14, 2018

SESSION 2

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JULY 25-28, 2018

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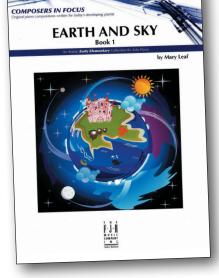
carnegiehall.org/MusicEducatorsWorkshop 212-903-9803 This book is 24 pages in length; each of piece is two pages. Each is notated clearly and large enough to be read easily. This Book 2 is for late-elementary/early-intermediate students, while Book 1 is for elementary-/late-elementary students.

These original pieces have a "faraway flavor," which would work well for the extremely creative student who enjoys a temporary imaginary world. While playing each piece the student can transport themselves to an imaginary place known only to them. These melodies incorporate pentatonic scales and very open harmonies. I do not believe this book is for every student but would work well with "that special student." These pieces do fit the composer's statement, "Ever wonder what it would be like to live inside a fairy tale?" —Reviewed by Jo Plunkett, NCTM, Orange Park, Florida

Composers in Focus: Earth And Sky, Book 1, An Artistic Early Elementary Collection for Solo Piano, by Mary Leaf. FJH Music Company Inc., 2017. www.fjhmusic.com; 24 pp., \$5.95. Early-Elementary.

Earth and Sky, Book 1, by Mary Leaf, is a set of eight early-elementary level piano solos for beginning piano students. Any of these pieces would make an excellent recital piece for a first-year piano student. All eight pieces are in middle-C position, take about a minute to play and they all include an optional teacher duet accompaniment.

In this set, three of the pieces are in 3/4



time, and the other five are in 4/4 time. All of the pieces have simple rhythm patterns with quarter and half notes. Each piece includes a metronome marking for the teacher to identify the appropriate performance tempo.

Within this set of eight piano solos, Leaf has composed a broad range of musical styles. "Papa's Pumpkin Patch" is a lively square dance, and is the only piece in the set to use staccatos. "Other Worlds" sounds very modern, and the student can make it more exciting by playing it two octaves higher while holding the sustain pedal. "Land Ahoy" is a charming sea chantey, while "My Special Star" has a beautiful, lyrical melody. "Still the Ancients Whisper" was inspired by the composer's visit to the cave dwellings at Mesa Verde, and sounds like a Native American song.

Beginning piano students from second or third grade through adults will be inspired by these piano solos, and they are a wonderful addition to any recital program. My students and I really enjoyed these pieces, both as solos and with the teacher duets, because they sound musically complex while being easy to learn and play. —Reviewed by Becky Hughes, Simpsonville, South Carolina

How to... Play Blues Piano By Ear, by Todd Lowry. Hal Leonard Corporation, 2017. www.halleonard. com; 64 pp., \$16.99.

The blues is a musical art form that evolved from aural traditions. In *How to Play Blues Piano by Ear*, Todd Lowry provides a step-by-step guide of developing this aural process through learning left-hand groove patterns and right-hand improvisation ideas in several different blues styles. Complete with audio tracks that can be downloaded from Hal Leonard's website, this publication is packed with a plethora of piano blues instruction through the aural process.

The aural learning process is a very different approach from the visual (note reading) process. In the first seven chapters, Lowry provides a clear and concise understanding of what playing blues piano by ear means and practice suggestions to achieve the desired results. This information is presented in a way that encourages, and makes the aural process accessible to, all types of learning styles. Music theory material is minimally presented to begin playing the blues without feeling overwhelmed.

Starting in chapter eight, Lowry introduces blues piano-playing techniques beginning at the most basic of levels. With the use of audio tracks (208 in all), concepts are introduced incrementally throughout the rest of the book, culminating in play-along tracks with a rhythm section. These tracks are in the keys of C, C minor and G, demonstrating the different blues styles learned in this book.

Piano technique is not emphasized in this book and music theory is slightly touched upon. I believe this book will be the most helpful to intermediate/ advanced music students, teachers and



visual
learners
who want
to learn
how to
engage the
aural process.
—Reviewed
by Beth
Trez, Trez
Music
Education
Center

Jazz in Focus: Wind Songs by Edwin McLean. The FJH Music Company, Inc., 2017. www.fjhmusic.com; 11 pp., \$5.50. Late Intermediate.



Wind Songs is a suite of five, twopage piano pieces originally published in 1991, and recently republished by FJH as part of their Jazz in Focus library. Composer Edwin McLean is a senior editor at FJH who has written some interesting pieces (such as Nocturne In Black and White), but in my opinion, missed the mark with his Wind Songs suite. If you are a teacher looking for pieces that explore jazz harmonies and rhythms for the classical student, these might fit the bill. But Wind Songs is not actually jazz, popular or classical music, falling stylistically somewhere in between 1970s TV theme songs ("Wind Song I") and Anime-type underscoring ("Wind Song III").

Throughout Wind Songs, McLean repeats phrases in multiple keys, which provides an opportunity for transposition study, but results in unimaginatively repetitive music. He presents some nice jazz changes, but they never deliver. If you're going to call it jazz, or even "meditative" (as the composer describes it), the music has to touch you somehow; it has to draw you in and tell a story. Jazz technique without heart is just a set of rules, and while McLean employs every rule of rhythm and harmony correctly, his Wind Songs meanders formulaically, without connecting to any emotion.

On the positive side, *Wind Songs* could be a stepping stone for intermediate students who would like to

dabble in jazz ideas before learning how to improvise and construct jazz voicings for themselves. The varied rhythms, key signature and key changes, and often surprising chord changes make for good reading practice, opening the mind to new ear-bending sounds. Search for "Wind Songs Edwin McLean" on YouTube.com and you can hear all five pieces for yourself. —Reviewed by Gaili Schoen, UpperHandsPiano.com

Piano Exotico: 28 Dream Journeys, by Barbara Arens. Breitkopf & Härtel, 2017. www.breitkopf.com; 56 pp., €17.90.

Composer Barbara Arens takes us on an imaginative, cinematic journey around the world to experience music from a variety of places and cultures. Arens describes these Dream Journeys as a way to satisfy one's own "Fernweh," or yearning for travel to distant lands. The publisher's layout of the score is superb. However, the cover did become separated just after a few days of use. The glossary at the back of the book provides concise translation from the German and is a great aid for students and teachers who may be unfamiliar with certain terms throughout the score. Breitkopf's website (www.breitkopf.com) allows one to access and download, free of purchase, mp3 recordings of all 28 pieces in the set! Furthermore, one can also find many more recordings of the composer's pieces on her YouTube channel.

Arens provides several helpful footnotes that shed light on the expressive

qualities, history and character of each solo piece. From the descriptions in the footnotes, one can appreciate and sense that the composer has been fortunate to witness all of these different sounds of music in



various places. This unique experience is brought to fruition through each solo work, and it impresses upon the per-



former as though they too are partaking in the "journey" to faraway lands. "Sitar Evening Raga," an improvisatory work free of barlines, contains several glissandi, feathered-beaming repeated notes and brilliantly mimics the sounds of the sitar found in Hindustani music. Arens's works are unusually accessible, and students will certainly enjoy the backbeat rhythms of "Jaman Reggae" and the fluid gypsy-flavored melodies of "Balkan Gypsy." One can also appreciate the cross-rhythms, and combinations of accents, legato and staccato articulations in "Sumatra Rain." These works are a delight and could easily be selected from and tailored to an individual solo recital, or a themed recital focused on world music. —Reviewed by Matthew Cash, Hutchinson Community College

Piano Works, by William Bolcolm. Edward D. Marks Music Company, 2017. www.halleonard.com; 192 pp., \$29.99.

This book features representative

piano works from the Pulitzer Prize and Grammy Awardwinning American composer, William Bolcom. For 35 vears, Bolcom served with distinction on the music faculty at the University of Michigan. This is the first major comprehensive collection for piano by Bolcom. It is a welcome addition since many of the works have previously only

WILLIAM BOLCOM
PIANO WORKS

V

been published separately.

These works require advanced pianism and musical sophistication coupled with a solid rhythmic foundation. They are all engaging pieces and imaginative sprinkled with a dash of wit throughout. Bolcom has a delicious sense of drama, wit and style that all captured beautifully in this collection.

The volume includes numerous sets of pieces including the enchanting and very popular three ghost rags. Other sets include: "Bird Spirits," "Conversations with Andre," "The Garden of Eden," "Night Meditations," "Nine Bagatelles," "Nine New Bagatelles," seven "Romantic Pieces," four "Spring Dances," "Three Ghost Rags," and "Three Dance Portraits." Individual pieces include: "Estrela: Rag Latino," "A Little Night Fughetta," "Lost Lady Rag," "The New York Lights (paraphrase from A Few from the Bridge)," "Seabiscuits Rag," and "A 60-second Ballet (For Chickens)."

In addition to the music, Bolcom

has provided informative information about each of the works in short paragraphs preceding each work. The edition does not contain fingerings that would be helpful for less experienced pianists. —Reviewed by Virginia Marks, distinguished teaching professor emeritus, Bowling Green State University

Play it Again: Piano, Book 1, by Melanie Spanswick. Schott Music Ltd., 2017. www.halleonard.com; 116 pp., \$19.99.

Play it again: Piano (Book 1 of 2) contains four units: Elementary, Late Elementary, Early Intermediate and Intermediate, each consisting of seven pieces. In the introduction, Spanswick indicates that the levels in Book 1 are comparable to Grades 1–5 of ABRSM and Trinity College London.

This is not merely a repertoire book. The focus of this collection is primarily on learning and practicing effectively. The following sections accompany each piece: Preparation, Practice Techniques and Interpretation. Musical incipits show two-octave scales and fingerings coinciding with the key of a piece, as well as rhythmic analyses and practice techniques. Included are black-and-white photos demonstrating physical technique. The content is insightful and engaging for adults who are independent learners.

Each level explores a wide range of compositional styles. This aspect offers the opportunity for learners to discover the diversity of piano literature, but could prove to be challenging for those in need of more horizontal learning opportunities. The collection highlights living composers John Kember, Elena Cobb, Tim Richards, Bill Readdy, Jürgen Moser and the author herself, in addition to familiar pedagogical composers such as Gurlitt, Burgmüller and Clementi. There are two pieces that include chord symbols, but there is no discussion of these in the introductory pages for the pieces. Inclusion of theoretical analysis for select pieces would enhance the learning process.

Currently, there are four well-produced demonstration videos available on YouTube associated with *Play it again: Piano*. Audiovisual supplementary materials prove to be invaluable for learners; however, online supplements are not mentioned in the book. Providing additional supplementary materials would serve the inquisitive and determined returning pianists well.

Teachers could use this collection as a model for how to systematically guide learners to independently apply appropriate practice techniques. Spanswick's approachable and method-



ical tone is appealing and emphasizes musicianship. —*Reviewed by Ruby Chou, Austin, Texas*

Primo & Secondo: 20 Balanced Arrangements for Piano Duet, by Martin Reich. Breitkopf & Härtel, 2017. www.breitkopf.com; 48 pp., €16.90.

Primo & Secondo is a collection of 20 piano duets for four hands. The collection includes arrangements of well-known tunes. Martin Reich has arranged familiar folk, classical, gospel, blues and ragtime tunes. Primo & Secondo offers a variety of styles. Some of the selections include: "Heigh-ho," "Anybody Home," "Frère Jacques," "Yankee Doodle," "Ode to Joy," "Happy Farmer," "Backwater Blues," "Go down," "Moses," "In the Hall of the Mountain King," "Libestraum" and "Maple Leaf Rag."



The arrangements in *Primo & Secondo* can be played on one piano. The two parts are well balanced so the main melody is heard in each part. The melody often begins in the secondo part and then transfers to the primo part. The primo and secondo parts are printed next to each other on the same page. This allows each player to see the other's part while playing.

Reich does not indicate tempo at the beginning of the arrangements, but does provide notes and teaching suggestions for each arrangement. The teaching remarks are found in the back of the collection.

In addition to a variety of styles, Primo & Secondo also offers duets of various levels. The duets in the book advance in difficulty. The first few duets are suitable for students in their first year or two of lessons, while the more advanced duets are suitable for students of the intermediate level. Reich suggests that the advanced arrangements are similar in difficulty to a Bach Invention. Because of the variety of levels, students would be able to use this book for several years. Primo & Secondo would be suitable for students of any age including adult students. —Reviewed by Lauren Lewandowski, NCTM, Harahan, Louisiana

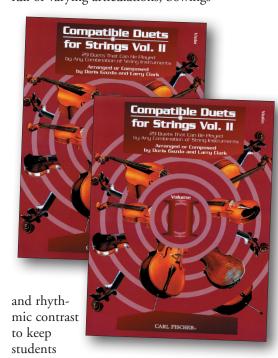
String

Compatible Duets for Strings Vol. 2, 29 Duets That Can Be Played by Any Combinations of String Instruments, for Viola and Violin, arranged or composed by Doris Gazda and Larry Clark. Carl Fischer, 2017. www.presser.com; 48 pp. each, \$14.99 each.

Doris Gazda and Larry Clark have compiled 29 duets in this fresh ensemble publication, which can be performed in any combination of two stringed instruments. Each piece is arranged so parts share both solo and accompanying roles. These include older works originally composed between the 1600s and late1800s along with three brand new compositions by Clark, set in order of difficulty, for violin, viola, cello and bass. These duets are printed in a modern format with easy to understand nota-

tions and editing, with most pieces playable without any page turns. Intermediate-level players should be able to manage these works, as all material is written in major keys up to three sharps and two flats.

Duets have been arranged from original works by well-known composers like Handel and Bizet, as well as more obscure ones such as Vanderhagen and Shuebruk. Private studio teachers can use these books with students to build sight-reading and ensemble skills, and orchestra directors will enjoy having them to form mixed pairs of string duets. Students will enjoy the new compositions like Clark's "Epic," which is a quick and cinematic tune full of varying articulations, bowings



on their toes. There is an arrangement of "The Star-Spangled Banner" and a well-known favorite canonic duet by Telemann that rounds out the collection. These duets are perfect for recital performances and contests for intermediate and advancing students, as well as a welcomed addition to a teacher's toolbox of musicianship building materials. —Reviewed by Eve Warner, NCTM, Cincinnati, Ohio

