THE PIANO ETUDES OF DAVID RAKOWSKI

I-Chen Yeh

A Dissertation

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Committee:

Laura Melton, Advisor

Sara Worley
Graduate Faculty Representative

Per F. Broman

Robert Satterlee
ABSTRACT

Laura Melton, Advisor

Since the early history of piano music the etude has played an important role in the instrument’s repertoire. The genre has grown from technical exercises to virtuosic concert pieces. During the twentieth century, new movements in music were reflected in the etudes of Debussy, Stravinsky and Messiaen, to mention a few. In the past fifty years, Bolcom and Ligeti have continued this trend, taking the piano etude to yet another level. Their etudes reflect the aesthetics and process of modernist and postmodernist composition, featuring complex rhythms, new techniques in pitch and harmonic organization, a variety of new extended techniques, and an often-unprecedented level of difficulty.

David Rakowski is a prolific composer of contemporary piano etudes, having completed a cycle of one hundred piano etudes during the past twenty-two years. By mixing his own modernist aesthetic with jazz, rock, and pop-culture influences, Rakowski has created a set of etudes that are both challenging to the pianist and approachable for the audience. The etudes have drawn the attention of several leading pianists in the contemporary field, most notably Marilyn Nonken and Amy Briggs, who are currently recording the entire set. Because of pianistic difficulty, approachability for the listener, and interest of noted pianists, Rakowski’s etudes seem destined for recognition in the contemporary standard repertoire. This doctoral document is the first to focus on the completed set of etudes and also provides the first method of categorization for the etudes.
In his etudes, Rakowski explored both traditional pianistic problems as well as the challenges of new music. The purpose of this study is to explore the relationship between Rakowski’s piano etudes, other contemporary etudes, and the traditional etude of past historical periods. The first chapter of this document consists of a historical and musical overview of the most important piano etudes in the standard repertory. The rest of the document consists of a more focused look at Rakowski’s etudes, providing an overview of styles, techniques, influences, and difficulties in the music. I have described the aesthetic and technical challenge of each etude and have placed them into categories based on their technical challenges. While the categories were my own invention, my decisions concerning the categorical placement of specific etudes were based on information gathered through secondary sources, interviews with Dr. Rakowski, and personal analysis and performances of the etudes.
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CHAPTER I: HISTORY OF PIANO ETUDES

Since the early history of piano music, the piano etude has played an important role in the instrument’s repertoire. According to the Oxford Companion to Music, etude was not the original term used for this type of piece. In 1804, J. B. Cramer called his Forty-Two Studies for Piano ‘exercises.’ He wrote two sets of studies for amateur players to improve their basic technique which were “interesting to play and tolerable to listen to.”1 Early etudes, such as those by Czerny and Cramer, began as simple finger exercises, while composers of the Romantic style such as Chopin, Liszt, and Rachmaninov brought the piano etude to a new level of depth and profundity. The form had changed from technical exercises played by amateurs and students in private practice settings to virtuosic concert pieces performed by soloists in the concert hall. During the twentieth century, new movements in music were reflected in the etudes of Debussy, Stravinsky, Messiaen, and other composers. In the past fifty years, Bolcom and Ligeti have continued this trend, taking the piano etude to yet another level. Their etudes reflect the aesthetics and process of modernist and postmodernist composition, featuring complex rhythms, new techniques in pitch and harmonic organization, a variety of new extended techniques, and an often-unprecedented level of difficulty.

Johann Baptist Cramer (1771-1858) may not be so well known to the modern pianist, but he was a renowned pianist during his lifetime. According to Simon McVeigh, Cramer’s biographer, “even Beethoven considered him the finest pianist of the day.”2 The most famous

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works by Cramer are his studies for piano, two sets of forty-two etude-like exercises composed in 1804 and 1810 and published as Studio per il pianoforte. McVeigh writes that “the studies are structurally simple; each is based on a characteristic pattern or mechanical problem, and although the shadows of Bach and Domenico Scarlatti are often apparent, the harmonic coloring and figuration variety in the Studio per il pianoforte are eminently modern and entirely suited to the piano.”

Studio per il pianoforte became an important inspiration and model for many composers of keyboard exercises and etudes. Soon after Cramer published his studies, Stiebelt and Wölfl released their own studies. Cramer’s complete Studio per il pianoforte also predate Clementi’s Gradus ad Parnassum by sixteen years, although Clementi claimed Cramer had stolen the concept and title from him.

Muzio Clementi (1752-1832) is best known for his piano sonatinas, but Gradus ad Parnassum (1826) is his largest work, including hundreds of pieces in three volumes. According to Plantinga, Gradus ad Parnassum “is essentially a series of exercises in musicianship: in expressivo playing and in the performance of contrapuntal styles, as well as in the mastery of difficult keyboard figurations.” The collections include not only piano exercises but also “preludes and fugues, canons, scherzi and other sonata-like movements, character pieces of various sorts, and compositions with suggestive titles.” The edition commonly used today is an abridged version of twenty-nine exercises, revised and published by Carl Tausig in 1865. The Gradus ad Parnassum includes exercises that drill various scale and arpeggio patterns, ornaments (trills and turns), singing melodies over active accompaniments, leaps, thirds, sixths, octaves, rotation, and articulation.

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3 Ibid.
4 Ibid.
5 Leon Plantinga, Clementi His Life and Music, (Great Britain: Oxford University Press, 1977), 270.
6 Ibid., 271.
Carl Czerny (1791-1857) was a talented student of Beethoven and a teacher of Liszt. He was an Austrian pianist, theorist, and composer whose career produced 861 numbered works and many more works without opus number. Czerny categorized his works into four groups “1) studies and exercises 2) easy pieces for students 3) brilliant pieces for concerts and 4) serious music.” While he is best known for his exercises, he also composed piano sonatas, sonatinas, transcriptions and many more short works.

Frédéric Chopin (1810-1849) was the first composer to name his exercises “etudes,” the French translation of “studies.” His etudes became so popular that composers from France and abroad adopted the term for their keyboard exercises. Unlike other composers who composed a wide variety of musical forms for different ensembles, Chopin wrote almost exclusively piano music. Along with his etudes, he wrote nocturnes, ballads, scherzos, preludes, sonatas, and various Polish dances and smaller forms. Chopin composed two sets of *Twelve Piano Etudes*, *Op. 10* (1828-1832) and *Op. 25* (1835). He also composed a smaller group of etudes, the *Trois nouvelles études* (1839), which were published in Moscheles’s and Fétis’s *Méthode des méthodes* in 1840. Chopin’s piano etudes were not mere finger exercises, but substantial compositions, doubling as technical training and mature compositions. According to Jim Samson, Chopin was the first composer to design his etudes not only to improve technique but also to give “substance and poetry to the genre.”

Chopin was influenced by many composers from earlier generations as well as his own. While his nocturnes show the clear influence of John Field, Chopin’s etudes show the influence of the Bohemian composer, Ignaz Moscheles (1794-1870), whose *Op. 95* etudes served as a

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starting point for several of the *Op. 10* etudes. Moscheles’ music was strongly grounded in the Classical tradition of previous generations. From a pianistic perspective, Chopin’s use of articulation, pedaling, phrasing, and figuration is more challenging than Moscheles’. Chopin’s etudes are virtuoso character pieces of the Romantic era, both in their expressive qualities and small scale. According to F. E. Kirby, Chopin’s piano etudes are in a small three-part form. Often he does not introduce new material in the middle section, and by modulating the thematic material to foreign keys, he makes the return of the opening material in the original key sound like a recapitulation. There are a few exceptions; *Op.25 No. 5* and *No.10* introduced different material in the middle section.¹⁰

One of the most important factors in Chopin’s piano etudes is his attention to the physical characteristics of the hand. Chopin strived “to use the hand according to its structure and to accept the varied power and characteristics of each fingers, preserving its unique quality.”¹¹ The new virtuosity found in the music of Chopin, Franz Liszt, and Robert Schumann challenged pianists, and Chopin’s etudes exemplified these technical challenges. He presented technical problems that were similar to those found in the keyboard exercises of earlier composers, but in a much more difficult and updated style. His etudes drill technical aspects of Romantic piano playing, including arpeggios, chromatic scales, singing melodies, black key playing, double thirds and sixths, left-hand dexterity, and octaves.

Franz Liszt (1811-1886) was a renowned concert pianist from an early age. Regarded as one of the greatest virtuosos of the instrument, his piano compositions reflect his extraordinary aptitude in their high level of technical difficulty. This unprecedented virtuosity was a product of Liszt’s personal ingenuity as well as his immaculate pedigree. According to Alan Walker, in

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Liszt’s music, the “influence of his teacher Carl Czerny is evident, the School of Velocity in particular.”¹² The concept of strengthening and equalizing the fingers was the goal of Czerny’s exercises, and Liszt used the idea as a basis for his etudes. Out of gratitude for his teacher, Liszt dedicated his twelve Études d’une exécution transcendante (1852) to Czerny. Lizst’s other etudes include three Études de concert (1848), the six Études d’une execution transcendante d’après Paganini (1851), and two more Études de concert (1862-1863).

While Liszt and Chopin were both fundamental in the creation of a new Romantic pianistic virtuosity, Liszt’s etudes are quite different from Chopin’s. Unlike the etudes of Chopin, Liszt’s are longer and can be performed alone instead of in sets. According to Stewart Gordon, Liszt’s etudes stand alone as concert works because they combine multiple technical problems with musical material with great character, rivaling the depth of Liszt’s orchestral tone poems. The combination of multiple technical problems within one etude is an important precedent, marking another step away from the one-dimensional etude and toward a mature musical work in miniature.

Liszt was deeply inspired by the virtuosity of Paganini, which can be noted in many of his etudes. In several piano etudes, Liszt imitates Paganini’s style by “placing physical obstacles on the keyboard which match the ones experienced on the violin.”¹³

Example 1: Paganini, Twenty-four Caprices for violin, Op. 1 in E-flat Major, mm. 5-7¹⁴

¹³ Ibid., 309.
Example 2: Liszt, *Études d’une execution transcendante d’après Paganini*, No. 2 in E-flat major, mm. 5-7.\(^{15}\)

Liszt also uses large chords as well as scales in thirds and sixths, octaves in parallel motion, and leaps across a wide register. These technical difficulties are paired with a demand of sensitive playing in the cantabile melodies that are so often found in Liszt’s many piano works.

Moritz Moszkowski (1854-1925) was a Polish-Jewish pianist, composer and conductor born in Germany. He showed exceptional talent at a very young age; however his concert career was cut short due to a nervous disorder. Chopin, Schumann and Mendelssohn influenced Moszkowski’s compositional style. The influence of these composers helped him to develop a highly idiomatic compositional style. According to Paderewski, “after Chopin, Moszkowski best understands how to write for the piano.”\(^{16}\) Moszkowski’s most well-known work for the piano is his volume of *Etudes de Virtuosité, Op. 72*. Consisting of fifteen etudes, Moszkowski’s *Op. 72* is clearly reminiscent of Chopin’s harmony and aesthetics. The eleventh etude in A-flat Major is an excellent example of the clear influence of Chopin in Moszkowski’s etudes.


Moszkowski’s rapid arpeggios in the right hand and light-hearted chords in the left are comparable to the material in Chopin’s *Etude in F Major, Op. 10, No. 8*.

Alexander Scriabin (1872-1915) was a composer and concert pianist who “showed little or no interest in the music of others, performing only his own works.” He is well known for his piano sonatas and many preludes as well as his synesthesia and eccentric personality. Scriabin composed several sets of etudes including the *Twelve Etudes, Op. 8* (1894), the *Eight Etudes, Op. 42* (1903), and the *Three Etudes, Op. 65* (1912), as well as a single etude Op. 2, No.1

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and other etudes without opus numbers. According to Gordon, Scriabin’s early piano works are reminiscent of Chopin in form, harmonic language, and melodic phrasing. As Scriabin matured, his style developed in a new direction where he used fragmented rhythm and melody. He also began to use his “mystic chord,” a chord made up of stacked fourths. This chord added ambiguity to harmonic direction.20

Claude Debussy (1862-1918), a French composer and pianist inspired by literature as well as oriental arts and sounds. His revolutionary take on harmony, melody, and color forever changed the shape of music. According to F.E. Kirby, “Debussy’s harmonies derived from various modes and scales of his own devising. His use of whole-tone and pentatonic scales, triads in parallel motion, harmonies built on the intervals of the fourth and fifth, and long bass pedal points” were key elements in a method that made a clear break with the Germanic sense of tonality.21 Debussy’s final works for the piano were the two sets of six etudes composed in 1915, which he dedicated to Chopin. The dedication is apt, as Debussy’s etudes follow in the tradition of Chopin’s etudes, challenging the pianist with difficult technical passages as well as color and interpretation. After completing the etudes, Debussy acknowledged the multiple layers of difficulty in his new work: “Beyond technique, these ‘études’ will serve as an apt preparation to pianists in understanding better, that one may not approach music armed solely with fierce hands!!...”22

In his etudes, Debussy covers all the basic technical problems, but in a different way from his predecessors. He covers typical elements, such as thirds, fourths, sixths, octaves, chromaticism, ornaments, repeated notes, and chords, as well as more modern techniques

including opposing sonorities and an etude that should be played without the thumbs, perhaps a sarcastic snub of decadent Romantic virtuosity. Debussy was not afraid to poke fun at earlier music that he considered to be in poor taste. In one etude, he even mocked Czerny, one of the most famous composers of keyboard exercises. In the first etude, *Pour les cinq doigts d’après Monsieur Czerny*, Debussy began with a simple five-finger exercise reminiscent of Czerny’s patterns. During Debussy’s exercise, the pianist quickly becomes annoyed, tossing in staccato dissonances and eventually breaking into much more difficult music.

![Example 5: Debussy, “Pour les cinq doigts d’après Monsieur Czerny,” mm. 1-4](image)

The fifth etude, *Pour les octaves*, shows the influence of Chopin on Debussy, specifically in Chopin’s *Op. 25, No. 10*.

![Example 6: Debussy, “Pour les octaves,” mm. 5-9](image)

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24 Ibid., 18.
Both etudes focus on octaves, but Debussy takes the technique to a different level of difficulty. In Chopin’s etude, he deals with octaves in parallel motion, but in Debussy’s, the pianist needs to jump around the keyboard in contrary motion.

Example 7: Chopin, Etude, Op. 25, No. 10, mm. 1-2

Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873-1943) was a Russian-born concert pianist, conductor and composer. Although Rachmaninoff was a contemporary of Scriabin, he did not experiment with new harmonic languages. He had no interest in the music of his time, but he professed great love of Chopin. “Chopin! From the time when I was nineteen years old I felt his greatness; and I marvel at it still. He is today more modern than many moderns…he remains for me one of the greatest of the giants.”26 The characteristics of his works are their extremely long and memorable melodies, traditional harmonies, and their remarkable virtuosity. Rachmaninoff composed two sets of nine Étude-Tableaux, Op. 33 (1911) and Op. 39 (1917), five of which were later orchestrated by Respighi.

Each Étude-Tableaux is a highly descriptive work that explores the interpretive and technical capacity of the pianist and the different colors of piano. Rachmaninoff’s biographer,

Geoffrey Norris describes them as “musical evocations of external visual stimuli.” Similar to Liszt’s *Trancendental Etudes*, Rachmaninoff combines several technical difficulties in one piece in these etudes. Because of the combination of several techniques and vivid musical imagery, Rachmaninoff’s etudes are also excellent pieces for the concert hall. Although they are not as long as Liszt’s etudes and therefore cannot stand alone as concert pieces, they operate quite well in sets, as do Rachmaninoff’s similarly descriptive preludes.

In the music of the twentieth century, few composers have made as distinct and lasting an impression as Olivier Messiaen (1908-1992). He was a French composer, organist and ornithologist. Over the course of his life he produced masterworks in many genres, ranging from solo and small chamber works to large-scale orchestral compositions and opera. *Mode de valeurs et d’intensités* from *Quatre etudes de rythme* (1949-1950) is known as one of the first works using total serialization. This is an example of a composer writing a work for the purpose of experimenting with a new compositional technique. Messiaen gives a detailed analysis at the beginning of each etude. *Etude No. 2* in particular uses a mode of pitches (thirty-six notes), of note values (twenty-four durations), of touches (twelve touches) and of dynamics (seven levels).

William Bolcom (b.1938) is an American composer, pianist and author who studied composition with John Verall (University of Washington), Darius Milhaud, Olivier Messiaen (Paris), and Leland Smith (Stanford University). He taught at several prestigious universities such as University of Washington, Yale University, New York University School of the Arts and University of Michigan where he stayed for 35 years (1973-2008). Bolcom is well known for his determination to keep his different compositional styles together. Anything that touches his heart will somehow eventually make its way into his compositions. Often people categorize him

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27 Geoffrey Norris, *Rachmaninoff* (Great Britain: Oxford University Press, 2001,) 84.
as a composer of eclecticism, a style “with its primary focus on stylistic cross-borrowing and
blurring of distinctions between “classical” and “popular,” vernacular and learned, oral and
written traditions.”

Bolcom won a Pulitzer Prize in 1988 with his Twelve New Etudes (1986) for piano. These
new etudes are related to the earlier set of Twelve Etudes for Piano, (1959-66). Twelve New
Etudes was originally written for Paul Jacobs. Bolcom said, “By the time I had completed the
first nine of the twelve, Paul had become ill and could no longer play them. When he died, in
1983, I just stopped working on them. I felt blocked.” It was 1986 before John Musto
premiered three of his etudes. Later in the same year, Bolcom gave all nine etudes to a young
Canadian pianist, Marc-Andre Hamelin, who had just won the Carnegie Hall international
American Music competition. According to Bolcom, “he played them so beautifully that when I
got home I composed the last three in a white heat, and gave him the whole set.” Bolcom has
extended his dedication to Musto and Hamelin in his score. The twelve etudes are divided into
four books with an even number of French and English titles. The particular problem for each
etude is addressed at the beginning of the piece. In this set of etudes, Bolcom stated afterwards
that he “embarked on a stylistic and harmonic synthesis no longer involved with any local style-
that of a fusion of tonality into non-centered sound (often miscalled “atonal”), as a planet in
space draws gravity toward itself. Within this spatial, yet tonal, universe, one can attempt to
calibrate one’s distance from a strong tonal center with greater accuracy.”

28 Elliott Schwartz et al., Contemporary Composers on Contemporary Music (New York: Da Capo Press, 1998),
481.
29 Allan Kozinn, “How the Spell Was Broken for Bolcom’s ‘Etudes,’” New York Times (July 31, 1988, Arts and
Leisure Desk, Late City Final Edition.)
30 Ibid.
György Ligeti was born in 1923 in Transylvania. After the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, he immigrated to Germany where he immersed himself in the instrumental and electronic music of Stockhausen, Berio, Boulez, Xenakis and Penderecki, “particularly the breaking down of rhythm and harmony and the way in which new conceptions of sound-structure inspired a fresh compositional approach,” according to Sean Rourke.\(^\text{32}\) However, Ligeti did not compose in the total serialist style of his models and teachers; instead, he sought out new musical ideas from a wide variety of sources. As Ligeti writes, some of his most poignant influences came from the “highly complex music for mechanical piano of Conlon Nancarrow, recordings from Simha Arom’s collection of Central African music and Benoit Mandelbrot’s fascinating ‘fractals’.”\(^\text{33}\) Despite Ligeti’s diverse influences, he did not forget his Hungarian heritage, “combining his native Hungarian musical tradition with experiments in complex rhythmic, melodic and harmonic structures, creating some truly extraordinary music,” as Lois Svard points out.\(^\text{34}\)

In the past decade, Ligeti’s eighteen piano etudes in three books have found their way into the standard repertory. The etudes were composed from 1985 to 2001 and have enjoyed a huge popularity among pianists, largely due to their synergy of extreme virtuosity with expert craftsmanship and coloration. One of Ligeti’s most popular etudes is No. 4 Fanfares. It features fascinating complexity in color, harmony, rhythmic patterns, and extreme technical difficulty, all taking place over a recurring ostinato scale.

Example 8: Ligeti, *Piano Etude No. 4 “Fanfare,”* mm. 1-12

According to Ligeti, his three books of *Eighteen Piano Etudes* are based on a “new conception of rhythmic articulation.” This new approach to rhythm was largely based on the use of simultaneous layers used to disturb one’s perception of pulse and tempo. Ligeti was always fascinated by “picture-puzzles and paradoxes of perception and ideas” as seen in the works of M.C. Escher, Lewis Carroll, or Franz Kafka, and looked to these models of perceptual

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experimentation for inspiration on the composition of his etudes.\textsuperscript{37} The concepts of these writers and artists had a great influence on Ligeti’s construction of shape, overall form, and combination of layers in his piano etudes.\textsuperscript{38} Ligeti wrote that he was also inspired by Chopin, specifically his “spiritual and poetic content and the concrete nature of the relationship between the instrument and the hands.”\textsuperscript{39} While Ligeti himself was not a pianist, he still appreciated ergonomic composition, writing that his “compositional imagination is unconsciously pre-programmed by these technical and anatomical factors.”\textsuperscript{40} While Ligeti’s etudes are incredibly demanding, they are all playable.

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., 6.
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid.
CHAPTER II: BIOGRAPHY OF RAKOWSKI

David Rakowski was born on June 13, 1958 in St. Albans, Vermont. His musical life began in a similar way to most young people of the time. He played the trombone in a community band and dabbled with keyboard in a local rock band called “The Silver Finger.” He was good enough at the trombone to be accepted into the Vermont All-State Music Festival, where he discovered his interest in composition.

After graduating from high school, Rakowski enrolled at the New England Conservatory, where he studied trombone with John Coffey and Randall Wheeler and composition with Robert Ceely and John Heiss. He graduated with honors and distinction from New England Conservatory in 1980 and immediately began work on a Master of Fine Arts degree at Princeton University. His composition teachers at Princeton included Peter Westergaard, Paul Lansky, and Milton Babbitt. He completed his master’s degree in 1982 and a Ph. D. in 1996, also from Princeton. Rakowski also attended the Tanglewood Music Center, where he studied with Luciano Berio.

During his second year of graduate school at Princeton, Rakowski was hired as a teaching assistant at the university, a position he would keep until 1984. His duties included teaching ear training for the second year theory course and working closely with computer music, writing programs and putting together printed documentation for the synthesis software used in the course. Rakowski’s next position was at Stanford University, where he was a lecturer in music theory from 1988 to 1989. After his year at Stanford, he was hired by Columbia University where he taught composition, music theory, and music history as an Assistant Professor of Music from 1989 to 1993 and as an Associate Professor of Music from 1993 to 1995. Rakowski left
Columbia in 1995, when he was awarded the Walter W. Naumburg Professor of Composition position at Brandeis University, where he continues to teach today. Since his move to Brandeis, Rakowski has also served as a Visiting Associate Professor of Music at Harvard University in 1998 and 2001 and as an adjunct faculty at New England Conservatory from 2004 to 2005 and again from 2007 to 2008.

While his piano etudes are his most well-known and performed works, he considers them to be a pet project. Some of his larger works include three symphonies, five concertos, three large wind ensemble pieces, and a large collection of chamber, vocal, and incidental music. He received a number of prestigious awards, including the Rome Prize, an Academy Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, the 2006 Barlow Prize, and the 2004-06 Elise L. Stoeger Prize from the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center. He has also received awards and fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Rockefeller Foundation, the Tanglewood Music Center, BMI, Columbia University, Concours international de piano d’Orléans (France), the International Horn Society, and a number of artist colonies. Rakowski has also received a number of high profile commissions by groups such as the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, “The President’s Own” U.S. Marine Band, Sequitur, the Network for New Music, the Koussevitzky Music Foundation, Collage New Music, the Kaufman Center/Merkin Hall, Boston Musica Viva, the Fromm Foundation, Dinosaur Annex, the Crosstown Ensemble, Speculum Musicae, the Riverside Symphony, Parnassus, the Composers

41 David Rakowski, Liner Notes, Winged Contraption, Marilyn Nonken and Boston Modern Orchestra Project, BMOP/Sound 1009, 14.
42 Ibid.
Ensemble, Alea II, Alea III, Triple Helix, and others. He has also been a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize in Music twice, once for *Persistent Memory* in 1999 and again for *Ten of a Kind* in 2002.

David Rakowski does not hesitate to identify himself as an “uptown” composer, a modernist association he has kept since a young age. In high school he heard various new music pieces that interested him, most notably the Charles Ives quarter-tone pieces, works by Pierre Boulez, and the compositions of Milton Babbitt, whom Rakowski deeply admired. He lists fellow Tanglewood classmates Martin Butler and Ross Bauer as being great influences on his own music, as well as Donald Martino, who taught at New England Conservatory during Rakowski’s undergraduate studies, and Mario Davidovsky, his colleague at Columbia.

As for composers of earlier generations, Rakowski places a great deal of importance on the music of Alban Berg. The American premier of *Lulu* with the newly restored third act took place at the Metropolitan Opera during Rakowski’s first year of graduate school at Princeton. He attended five rehearsals of the production and was transfixed by Berg’s unique approach to species counterpoint. “I spent ten years trying to sound like Berg, and then I found jazz chords (laughs). Berg used jazz chords too, but just with a different bass line.”

David Rakowski’s relationship with jazz is an interesting one. While many of his piano etudes have clear harmonic, rhythmic, and stylistic relationships to jazz, he insists that his background in the genre is limited. “I don’t play jazz, and I don’t listen to a lot of it,” he says. “I listen to more funk and blues.” In some ways, his use of jazz elements stems directly from his modernist upbringing. He often remembers reading a poignant bit of graffiti in one of the Princeton men’s rooms that read: “Uncle Milty’s secret formula for the composition of modern

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43 Ibid., 15.
44 Ibid.
46 Ibid.
music: take jazz chord and make strange.” While this quote initially was meant to point out the similarities between complex jazz harmonies and the results of Milton Babbitt’s integral serialism, it may fit even better with some of Rakowski’s works, particularly etudes like Purple, Bop-It, or Moody’s Blues, which have clear elements of jazz, blues, or funk, yet sound strange at the same time. Rhythmically, the jazz elements in Rakowski’s music occur because of a desire to try something new. Jazz syncopations do not appear in Rakowski’s music until later in his career. He said, “Once I was comfortable with straight pulse rhythm, I was looking for something else to do. Jazz was the easiest way to go.”

47 Ibid.
48 Ibid.
CHAPTER III: INTRODUCTION TO RAKOWSKI’S PIANO ETUDES

Genesis of the Etudes

In the early part of his career, David Rakowski did not compose much piano music. Although he had received requests from several pianists, he was hesitant to compose pieces for them for several reasons.

Quite a few composers my age and a little older had been making small reputations for themselves with big, Romantic, slurpy, heavy, loud, overdramatic and self-important piano pieces, and that seemed very unattractive to me. I wasn’t ready to write a big piano piece, and I didn’t feel I had anything to say in the form, nor was I all that good at writing for the piano.49

It wasn’t until 1988, while wintering in Phoenix, that Rakowski composed his first mature work for piano, *E-Machines*, the first piano etude. His initial obligation during this trip was to complete a chamber work for a Stanford University ensemble. He finished the work six days ahead of schedule and decided to write a piano piece for Martin Butler, who had been asking for a piece for several years.

Rakowski composed *E-Machines* as a sort of joke between friends. Martin Butler and Rakowski were both Composition Fellows at Tanglewood in 1982 and roommates at Princeton. Rakowski describes him as “an extremely accomplished pianist… and a very nervous kind of person, always with a jiggling leg, a cigarette, a drink of coffee, or something to keep his body moving very fast (I think sometimes his leg jiggles fast enough to enter another dimension briefly).”50 Rakowski cited Butler’s eccentric personality as well as his superior piano technique as a direct influence on *E-Machines*, writing: “He also was able to play repeated notes (such as in Bartok’s *Bear Dance*) with one hand, rather than with alternating hands, which was the only way

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49 David Rakowski, “The ‘other’ etudes” [Informal program notes, unpublished], TD, 1.
50 Ibid.
I could play them. This got to be a running gag – every time I left the house or came in, Martin would launch into a volley of machine-gun repeated notes.”\textsuperscript{51} Rakowski decided to use his extra six days in Phoenix to compose this short piece and appease his friend. He decided to go out to the playground near his apartment, compose the piece, and, as he puts it, “to work on my tan.”\textsuperscript{52} According to Rakowski, he set out to “write a silly piece, probably worthless, that made light of Martin’s perpetual motion and our running gag about repeated notes.”\textsuperscript{53} Even Rakowski’s initial title, \textit{Nocturnal E-Machines}, is a friendly jab at Butler, who had recently completed a piece for tape called \textit{Night Machines}.

It is important to note that \textit{E-Machines} was not originally meant to be an etude, nor was it part of a preconceived group of pieces. In fact, it wasn’t until Lyn Reyna, the pianist who premiered \textit{E-Machines} and later commissioned \textit{Nocturnal}, the third etude, pointed this notion out to Rakowski that he even considered it. Rakowski liked the idea and Peters Edition began publishing each individual work as an etude. Eventually \textit{Bam!} and \textit{Nocturnal} were published as a pair, and when Rakowski completed No. 16, \textit{Ice Boogie}, the editors at Peters suggested that the etudes should be published in books of ten. Rakowski hurried to complete \textit{Etudes Nos. 17 -20} in order to complete the second book, and by 1998, the first two books were finished, although they were not published until 2001 and 2002. In 1999, Rakowski took a year off from etudes but returned to them in 2000, completing all of book three in one year.

\textbf{Process}

Each etude is written for and dedicated to a specific pianist, composer, or friend. While some etudes are commissioned, he often simply sends out a mass email to friends and colleagues expressing his desire to write another etude and asking for ideas on what the next technique

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid.
should be. Although each etude is unique in its own way, each for a specific pianist, highlighting a different skill, Rakowski has created guidelines for himself that form a common bond between all 100 etudes.

After composing *E-Machines* over the course of six days, he decided to restrict himself to this amount of time for each etude. This six-day limitation was violated only in the composition of *Trillage*, while the composer struggled to learn the notation program *Finale*, and *Luceole*, which was interrupted briefly by more pressing work. Other restrictions include revisions and formal planning; each etude must be composed from the beginning to the end with no sort of revision. This rule was broken only once; Rakowski changed one note in *Wiggle Room* at the request of the pianist. Also, Rakowski composed from the beginning of an etude without any preconceived notion about how the piece should be laid out. Although this preconceived formal structure suggests a purely through-composed work, his etudes tend to be in a loose ABA form, sometimes even including a coda.

While these restrictions have led Rakowski to throw out two etudes, they have also created a unique compositional process and exercise for the composer. He writes that, at first, “Writing etudes functioned as a kind of creative recreation. The fun part was the seat-of-the-pants approach to composition, which was in opposition to my usual approach to longer instrumental pieces.” He also notes the benefits of this approach as a compositional technique builder.

At least half of the etudes I’ve written have functioned as a sort of compositional respite. When I’m having trouble working through things in longer pieces, I tend to put them aside and write an etude. Writing unrelated pieces that are brief and single-minded helps keep the gears moving and helps me return to the bigger piece with a fresh perspective (and reminds me that I know something about composing). Other etudes have served as little playgrounds, places where I can

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54 David Rakowski, “Unmanifesto and Narrative” [Informal program notes, unpublished], TD, 1.  
55 Ibid.
play games with ways that notes get put together, and where I can sharpen my chops for use in other pieces.56

In this respect, Rakowski’s etudes are just as much an exercise for him as they are for the pianists. “It makes my brain bigger,” he jokes. “It’s a playground, equally an etude for the performer as for the composer.”57

Typically, the last step in Rakowski’s process is coming up with the title. The titles of the etudes come from several sources. Whether Rakowski invents them himself or a pianist, a friend, or his wife suggests them, they almost always come after the etude has been written. There are a few exceptions in which a title has been so clever he felt obligated to write the piece, as was the case for Roll Your Own, a title proposed by Jason Eckardt. The titles are almost always light-hearted puns on the technique on which the etude is based. Titles like Madam I’m Adam for the palindromic Etude No. 42 or Menage à Droit, Etude No. 61 for the right hand exemplify David Rakowski’s playful sense of humor. The etudes themselves often seem to have a humorous, tongue-in-cheek character as well. Even though many of them are fiendishly difficult, they seem to relate to Rakowski’s personality better than any of his other works. Rakowski remembers speaking to an audience member after the premiere of E-Machines who told him “he’d never seen such a perfect fit between a composer’s personality and his piece.”58

Performers and Other Inspirations for the Etudes

Since 1988, Rakowski has had several important collaborators and promoters of his etudes. Early on, the previously mentioned Martin Butler and Lyn Reyna as well as Karen Harvey were important performers and/or commissioners of Rakowski’s etudes. Martin Butler

56 Ibid.
57 David Rakowski, interview by I-Chen Yeh, Ipod recording, Maynard, MA, March 9, 2010.
58 Rakowski, The “other” etudes, 1.
was responsible for requesting two of the first ten etudes, *No. 1, E-Machines* and *No. 7, Les Arbres Embués* (The Steaming Trees), as well as providing inspiration for many others. Karen Harvey is a pianist and a friend of Rakowski’s from Boston. According to Rakowski, “she wanted to play *E-Machines* on a recital, but she didn’t want to get guff from the critics for performing short pieces. She asked if I could add a movement.” The resulting piece was Rakowski’s second etude, *BAM!*, which she premiered in Boston in 1992. Lyn Reyna gave the premiere performance of *E-Machines* at Stanford University in 1989. She also commissioned *No. 3, Nocturnal*, for a concert tour in which she wanted to present *E-Machines, BAM!*, and one more etude as a set. She premiered *Nocturnal* in San Jose in 1993. She also commissioned *No. 12, Northpaw* for her friend Barbara Barclay, who had recently injured her left hand falling off a ladder. Other important performers of his early etudes include Steven Weigt, who premiered *No. 4, Trillage* and *No. 15, The Third Man* in 1998 at Brandeis University; Geoffrey Burleson, who premiered *No. 5, Figure Eight* at Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1998, *No. 18, Pitching from the Stretch* and *No. 20, Fourth of Habit* at Brandeis University in 1999, and *No. 19, Secondary Dominance* at Brandeis University in 2001; and Sandra Sprecher, who premiered *No. 6, Mano à Mano* and *No. 8, Close Enough for Jazz* at the American Academy in Rome in 1996.

Two of the most public supporters and performers of Rakowski’s etudes are Marilyn Nonken and Amy Briggs. Rakowski met Marilyn Nonken while he was teaching at Columbia. At the time, she was a graduate student and was forming Ensemble 21. Rakowski donated money to the group and attended their concerts; in turn, they performed some of his works. After performing for three years, Ensemble 21 was awarded a Koussevitzky Foundation Grant, which they used to commission several pieces from Rakowski, which eventually led to a CD recording

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59 Ibid., 2.
on the CRI record label called *Hyperblue*, which was released in 2007. This recording featured several of Rakowski’s compositions including *Hyperblue*, *Attitude Problem*, and *Three Songs on Poems of Louise Bogan*, but there was not quite enough music to fill an entire CD. Nonken decided to record *No. 1, E-Machines, No. 2, BAM!, No. 10, Corrente*, and *No. 14, Martler* to complete the recording.

Since their initial meeting at Columbia, Marilyn Nonken has commissioned and premiered a number of Rakowski etudes. She has also made video recordings of some of the more recent etudes, which can be seen on YouTube. In 2005, Rakowski was co-commissioned by the Koussevitzky Music Foundation and the Boston Modern Orchestra Project. The result of this commission was his *Piano Concerto, No. 1*, which he composed for Marilyn Nonken. The work is for full symphony, solo piano and toy piano. Rakowski recalls: “My thoughts of writing a concerto for Marilyn gravitated towards those etudes associated with her… I decided I would reference ‘her’ etudes, and either use them as the stepping-off point for the concerto music, or make specific references to them in the concerto.”60 In the first movement, he drew material from *E-Machines* and *Plucking-A*. The second movement features material from *Twelve-Step Program, The Third Man*, and *Corrente*. The fourth movement uses elements of *Sliding Scales*. In her liner notes, Nonken writes:

> Inspired by the second scene of Alban Berg’s *Lulu*, the third movement is an etude in itself, a ‘ritmicon’ built almost entirely on a short, four-note rhythm; for the pianist, this motive often occurs in the left hand octaves, while the right hand’s Art Tatum-esque runs provide some of the Concerto’s most challenging playing.61


61 Ibid.
Nonken premiered the work in 2007 and recorded it with conductor Gil Rose and the Boston Modern Orchestra Project on their label, BMOP/Sound. The recording, also featuring Rakowski’s *Winged Contraption* and *Persistent Memory* for orchestra, was released in 2009.

Rakowski came into contact with Amy Briggs through Augusta Read Thomas, who was planning a program for the Chicago Symphony Orchestra’s MusicNOW series. Thomas asked Rakowski to suggest four of his etudes that would be appropriate for the concert. Amy was the group’s pianist, and she immediately fell in love with his etudes. She decided to record all of the etudes and programmed only Rakowski etudes for two years. So far, Amy Briggs has recorded three CDs of Rakowski’s etudes for Bridge Records. The first CD released in 2002, features etudes from Books II, III, and IV. The second CD, released in 2004, features etudes from Books I, IV, and V. The most recent recording was released in 2009 and features etudes from Books V, VI, and VII.

Rakowski also has received inspiration from non-musicians. Rick Moody, a poet and friend of Rakowski’s, has left his mark on the etudes. Two etudes (*No. 52, Moody’s Blues* and *No. 65, Rick’s Mood*) reference his name, and three etudes were his idea. *Moody’s Blues* came up in a conversation between Rakowski and Moody in which Moody noted that several etudes embody a mixture of Rakowski’s modernism and some other genre. Moody then challenged Rakowski to compose an etude à la Jerry Lee Lewis.\(^{62}\) *Rick’s Mood* was also prompted by Moody, but this time in the form of a challenge. Rakowski writes, “He challenged me to write a piece using only major triads, and I challenged him to write a rhyming poem.”\(^{63}\) *No. 66, Less Is* was also Moody’s idea. In Rakowski’s notes, he writes “Moody mused about what I would sound like if I were a Glass-like minimalist using dissonant chords ‘and shit’ instead of

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63 Ibid., 14.
consonant ones, and moving faster harmonically.\textsuperscript{64} In this case, the title came from Amy Briggs. Moody’s most significant impact on Rakowski’s etudes occurs in \textit{No. 74, Not}, which is the only etude to use a text. \textit{Not} was commissioned by Adam Marks, a student of Nonken’s who was interested in piano pieces in which the performer also spoke. Rakowski set one of Moody’s poems entitled \textit{Not}. The poem consisted of only one line: “Not happy with it, not lying down for it.” In Rakowski’s version, the pianist plays chords and recites various fragments and combinations from the text of the poem.\textsuperscript{65}

\textsuperscript{64} Ibid., 15.
\textsuperscript{65} Ibid., 17.
CHAPTER IV: CATEGORIZATION OF RAKOWSKI’S PIANO ETUDES

In order to clarify the variety of keyboard techniques Rakowski used in his etudes, I have divided them into five categories: basic technique, gestures, restricted compositional techniques, extended techniques, and genres. Under each category there are sub-groupings.

Basic Techniques

In his Piano Etudes, Rakowski addresses issues of basic keyboard technique such as scales, intervals, chords, arpeggios, articulation, pedaling, repeated notes, and dynamics.

Scales

Scale etudes and exercises are likely familiar to every piano student, as proper scale technique is one of the first hurdles for most pianists. Rakowski composed three different etudes based on scales. The scales chosen by Rakowski are more exotic than those of the simple major/minor finger exercises. In his three etudes, he uses the chromatic scale, a variety of tonally ambiguous diatonic fragments, and a stepwise pattern of five to seven notes that continuously shifts accidentals, creating the illusion of many modes and hybrid scales.

The first etude addressing scale technique is Twelve-Step Program, No. 21 (1999), which was the first piece Rakowski wrote after a year-long break from composing piano etudes. The piece was written for Marilyn Nonken in memory of Earl Kim, a Korean-American composer. According to Rakowski, the opening chromatic material is “reminiscent of the vocal writing in Kim’s Exercises en Route.”66 This etude also features the challenges of a twelve-tone row in the right hand in counterpoint with the same row transposed down a minor sixth in the left hand as well as wide register jumps and difficult rhythms and meters throughout the piece.

Example 9: Rakowski, *Twelve-Step Program, No. 21*, mm. 1-3

While the chromatic scale initially appears in the form of a twelve-tone row at the beginning of the work, Rakowski eventually becomes more linearly driven in the B section, writing material that is true to the intricate finger-work of traditional scale exercises and etudes.

Example 10: Rakowski, *Twelve-Step Program, No. 21*, mm. 34-35

These additional difficulties along with the original challenge of the tricky chromatic passages realize Rakowski’s goal for the aesthetic of his etudes: to make them “sound as if they are nearly impossible to play.”

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68 Ibid., 4.
69 Rakowski, introduction to *Etudes for Piano, Book III*.
In Rakowski’s etudes one often finds the restatement of opening material in retrograde. This occurs in the final bars of *Twelve-Step Program*. From m. 58 to the second to last pitch, the right hand material is an exact mirror image of the opening material.

Example 11: Rakowski, *Twelve-Step Program*, No. 21, mm. 58-62

The etude, *Sliding Scales*, No. 33 (2001) is a scale etude that Rakowski said, “[m]ust hurt a lot to play.” This etude features fast sixteenth notes in perpetual motion and lacks a time
signature. It begins with a simple six-note pattern, which quickly changes into an irregular grouping of seven, and five-note patterns.

Example 12: Rakowski, *Sliding Scales, No. 33*, mm. 1-3

In m. 4, Rakowski begins to introduce the second layer of scales, which he continues to add onto until he reaches four layers of scales, each at a different rhythmic pace.

Example 13: Rakowski, *Sliding Scales, No. 33*, mm. 23-24

To add another level of difficulty to the etude, Rakowski displaces the scales across different octaves and composes passages featuring scales within pedal octaves.

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73 Ibid., 17.
Example 14: Rakowski, *Sliding Scales*, No. 33, mm. 45-47\(^74\)

Example 15: Rakowski, *Sliding Scales*, No. 33, mm. 67-68\(^75\)

The opening material returns towards the end of the piece, suggesting a loose ABA form which happens as in most of his etudes.

Rakowski’s third scale etude is *Kai’n Variation*, No. 81 (2007). The piece was originally composed as a variation, but Rakowski thought it was substantial enough to turn it into an etude. In 2007, Rakowski was approached by German pianist Kai Schumacher to write a variation set to be performed along side Frederic Rzewski’s *The People United Will Never Be Defeated!*. *Kai’n Variation* is an etude on variations of diatonic scale fragments based on a theme by Kai

\(^{74}\) Ibid., 19.

\(^{75}\) Ibid., 21.
Schumacher. The piece begins in simple counterpoint with five-finger patterns trading between the hands within one octave.

![Example of Rakowski's Kai'n Variation, No. 81, mm. 1-2](image)

Example 16: Rakowski, *Kai’n Variation, No. 81*, mm. 1-2

As the piece unfolds, the material and rhythm become more complicated with the hands traveling in contrary motion, utilizing a greater portion of the keyboard than the beginning material. This combination of elementary pianistic techniques with a more modernist sound implies a link to some of the studies in Bartók’s *Mikrokosmos*, which often feature similar passages in which the composer has written tonally unsettling music because of the concrete placement of the hands in a simple five-finger pattern.

**Intervals**

An interval is the distance between two notes. Intervals come in different qualities (major, minor, perfect, augmented and diminished) and sizes (seconds, thirds, fourth, etc.). The smallest interval is a half step. Rakowski composed fourteen etudes for ten different interval sizes.

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Seconds:

*Secondary Dominance, No. 19* (1998) is an etude built on continuous seconds. Although the piece looks very easy at the opening with simple alternating lines and repeated notes a second apart, the rhythmic relationship between the hands is out of sync. Multiple syncopations and slurs that do not align make this etude very difficult to play.

Example 17: Rakowski, *Secondary Dominance, No. 19*, mm. 3-4

From mm. 18-23, the long notes in the upper voice outline an octatonic scale.

Example 18: Rakowski, *Secondary Dominance, No. 19*, mm. 17-22

The texture becomes thicker in the B section where Rakowski starts using stacked intervals of thirds and fourths along with scales and jumps of ninths.

Example 19: Rakowski, *Secondary Dominance, No. 19*, mm. 37-38

78 Ibid., 57.
In m. 44, Rakowski sneaks in a well hidden quote from Carl Carlton “She’s a Bad Mama Jama” in the middle voice\textsuperscript{80}. The opening material returns shortly before the end.

Example 20: Rakowski, *Secondary Dominance, No. 19*, mm. 43-44\textsuperscript{81}

Contrary to *Secondary Dominance*, *Luceole, No. 35* (2001) has a constant flowing feeling achieved by Rakowski’s use of ascending arpeggiated seconds and thirds. “Luceole” is the Italian word for fireflies. This is the first etude written specifically for Amy Briggs. The challenges of this etude are the controlling of opposite dynamics between hands while aligning awkward rhythmic patterns that include frequent single sixteenth note rests.

Example 21: Rakowski, *Luceole, No. 35*, mm. 4-6\textsuperscript{82}

\textsuperscript{79} Ibid., 59.
\textsuperscript{80} David Rakowski, e-mail message to I-Chen Yeh, October 26, 2010.
\textsuperscript{81} Rakowski, *Etudes for Piano, Book II*, 60.
Thirds:

*The Third, Man, No. 15* (1997) is a slow and dreamy etude on stacked major and minor thirds. Steven Weigt premiered it in 1998.

Example 22: Rakowski, *The Third, Man, No. 15*, mm. 1-5

Rakowski was inspired by Debussy’s etudes, which made him want to write a collection of interval etudes. Rakowski considered this etude a teaching piece because of its slow tempo and simple texture with the most complex part in three-part counterpoint. Even without listening to the piece, the stacked thirds look like Debussy’s *Clair de lune*.

Example 23: Debussy, *Clair de lune*, mm. 1-3

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82 Rakowski, *Etudes for Piano, Book IV*, 27.
"Twilight, No. 75 (2006) is an etude on melodic thirds. Rakowski composed the piece around the time when one of his students just finished orchestrating Schumann’s Zwielicht (Twilight in German) from Liederkreis, Op. 39. Rakowski was particularly intrigued by Zwielicht’s repetitive accompaniment.

Example 24: Schumann, Zwielicht, mm. 1-5\(^{85}\)

The opening sequence of Twilight is repeated throughout the piece in different forms: augmentations, repeated notes, different registers and partial material.

Example 25: Rakowski, Twilight, No. 75, mm. 1-2\(^{86}\)

\(^{85}\) Robert Schumann, Zwielicht (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1881-1912), 18.
Fourths:

*Fourth of Habit, No. 20* (1998) is a swing etude based mainly on perfect fourths. A jazz pianist Geoffrey Burleson, who frequently plays new music, specifically requested an etude on the interval of a fourth. Many of Rakowski’s etudes were written for or played by Geoffrey Burleson. According to Rakowski, several people said the piece sounds “like McCoy Tyner on speed.”

Example 26: Rakowski, *Fourth of Habit, No. 20*, mm. 1-3

Fifths:

*Taking the Fifths, No. 37* (2002) is an etude on perfect fifths. The piece is divided into three sections: fast- slow- fast. Both A sections use neighboring parallel fifths and arpeggios built from perfect fifths.

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87 Rakowski, *Unmanifesto and Narrative*, "3.
88 Rakowski, *Etudes for Piano, Book II*, 64.
Example 27: Rakowski, *Taking the Fifths, No. 37*, mm. 7-8<sup>89</sup>

In the B section, fifths are stacked forming a chord reminiscent of Charles Ives’ music.

Example 28: Rakowski, *Taking the Fifths, No. 37*, mm. 29-31<sup>90</sup>

**Sixths:**

Rakowski’s favorite etude in Book IV is *Sixth Appeal, No. 39* (2002). This etude is based on one single thematic idea of parallel sixths, together with a C# and A# long-note motive that does not get developed. This motive is repeated in all registers.

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<sup>89</sup> Rakowski, *Etudes for Piano, Book IV*, 43.
<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 46.
Sevenths:

Before Durchrauscht Die Luft “Darting Through the Air,” No. 46 (2002), Rakowski had composed etudes on every interval except sevenths and tritones. In order to keep the seventh interval beautiful, Rakowski “tried to keep it as light as possible, beginning and ending at the top of the piano.”

Octaves:

Ice Boogie, No. 16 (1998) is an etude featuring broken octave leaps. Rakowski composed the etude for Steven Weigt, who premiered the work in 1998. The story behind this etude’s composition is quite interesting. Rakowski said, “Most of the piece was written in the cold or by

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91 Ibid., 58.
92 Rakowski, The “other” etudes, 9.
candlelight, during the Ice Storm of the Century, which hit Maine as I started it. The title is a nod to that storm.”

Example 31: Rakowski, *Ice Boogie, No. 16*, mm. 1-2

Unlike the fast tempo of *Ice Boogie, Eight Misbehavin’, No. 55* (2003) is a slow octave etude composed on the day of Rick Moody and Amy Osborn’s wedding.

Example 32: Rakowski, *Eight Misbehavin’, No. 55*, mm. 1-3

The whole etude is derived from the opening of the slow movement of the *Clarinet Sonata in F-minor, Op. 120, No. 1* by Brahms.

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94 Rakowski, “*Unmanifesto and Narrative*”, 3.
Example 33: Brahms, *Clarinet Sonata, Op. 120, No. 1*, m. 1\(^{97}\)

Unlike previous octave etudes, *Crazy Eights, No. 56* (2003) is an etude on fast octaves restricted to the white keys in one hand and black keys in the other. By the climax of the piece (m. 45), the restriction switches between hands. This compositional technique is reminiscent of Bartok’s use of bitonality.

Example 34: Rakowski, *Crazy Eights, No. 56*, mm. 1-2\(^{98}\)

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\(^{97}\) Johannes Brahms, *Clarinet Sonata No.1, Op.120/1* (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1926), 162

\(^{98}\) Rakowski, *Etudes for Piano, Book VI*, 40
Ninths:

*Boogie Ninths, No. 32* (2000) is another etude written to fulfill the challenge of composing at least one etude on all possible intervals. The etude is in a swing-like rhythm.

Example 35: Rakowski, *Boogie Ninths, No. 32*, mm. 1-3

Tenths:

*Pitching from the Stretch, No. 18* (1998) was written after Rakowski took a trip to Fenway Park to see Pedro Martinez beat his old team. This is another slow teaching piece. This etude uses nothing but tenths. The only requirement is to have a big enough hands to reach a tenth.

Example 36: Rakowski, *Pitching from the Stretch, No. 18*, mm. 1-3

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Tritones:

*Fra Diabolis (Among Devils), No. 47 (2002)* is an etude based on tritones, specifically centered on the interval between B and F. This interval opens the piece and recurs throughout until resolving outward to B-flat and F-sharp at the end of the etude. The combination of the keyboard’s lowest two Bs and highest two Fs first appears in m. 23 in fortissimo and happens six more times as if someone was trying to interrupt a conversation. The example shows the interval at its loudest.

Example 37: Rakowski, *Fra Diabolis, No. 47*, mm. 60-62

Chords

Some of the challenges of playing chords include voicing, stretching the hands, and controlling touch. Rakowski composed six chord etudes in five different styles: embedded melody in thick chords, rolled chords, fast chords, and chord building, and one etude on slow, thick chords.

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100 Rakowski, *Etudes for Piano, Book II*, 53.
Embedded Melody in Thick Chords:

Rakowski composed *Les Arbres Embués* “The Steaming Trees”, No. 7 (1995), an etude on a melody embedded in thick chords, at the MacDowell Colony for Martin Butler. He suggested Rakowski write a piece “like Debussy, with a simple melody floating over thick chords.” According to Ross Bauer, the title “refers to trees at the MacDowell Colony that were emitting a thick haze of steam in the sunlight in the morning after a heavy rain.” As in other etudes, Rakowski assigned a row to the name of the dedicatee.

Example 38: Rakowski, *Les Arbres Embués*, No. 7, row

This etude has an open sound similar to Debussy’s *La cathédrale engloutie*.

Example 39: Rakowski, *Les Arbres Embués*, No. 7, mm. 24-25

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103 Ross Bauer, Notes to *Hyper Blue by David Rakowski*, CRI CD 820.
A slow chord etude with an embedded melody, *Choral Fantasy, No. 34* (2001) is one of the etudes Rakowski can play. The title is an allusion to Beethoven’s *Choral Fantasy*. The etude is based on a row, which is stated in the opening and returns later in its retrograde, inversion, and retrograde inversion. The example below shows the prime form of the row.

Example 40: Rakowski, *Choral Fantasy, No. 34*, mm. 1-3

The second example shows the retrograde (R6) of the prime form in the left hand. The row is notated with larger note-heads.

Example 41: Rakowski, *Choral Fantasy, No. 34*, mm. 10-12

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105 Ibid., 65.
107 Ibid., 25.
Rolled Chords:

The idea of writing an etude on rolled chords was given to Rakowski by composer Jason Eckardt who also suggested the title *Roll Your Own, No. 29* (2000). Pianists often do not learn how to play rolled chords as part of their technical regimen. One needs to learn how quickly to roll a chord, which voice to bring out, and how to balance the rolled chord accompaniment with the melody. The piece begins in the middle register of the piano with constant half note rolled chords that gradually expand to cover the whole register from lowest C to highest C. While the rolled chords span the range of the whole piano, the melody stays in the same register of D-flat to G-sharp.

Example 42: Rakowski, *Roll Your Own, No. 29*, mm. 27-28

Slow Etude on Thick Chords:

Corey Hamm commissioned *Chord Shark, No. 57* (2003), a slow etude on thick chords for the Concours international de piano d’Orléans (France). The piece was paired with *Wound*

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**Tight, No. 58.** The etude is based on the opening chords of the Brahms *Intermezzo Op. 116, No. 6*. The opening chords of each piece sound similar except that Rakowski replaces Brahms’ bass. Rakowski’s soprano voice is identical to Brahms’s for the first five chords.

![Example 43: Brahms, *Intermezzo Op. 116, No. 6*, mm. 1-4](image)

Example 43: Brahms, *Intermezzo Op. 116, No. 6*, mm. 1-4

**Fast Chords:**

*Wound Tight, No. 58* (2003) was composed for Corey Hamm to be performed as a pair with *Chord Shark, No. 57*. The unusual characteristic of this particular etude is that both hands are in rhythmic unison, which is rare in Rakowski’s etudes. According to Rakowski, the piece

![Example 44: Rakowski, *Chord Shark, No. 57*, mm. 1-3](image)

Example 44: Rakowski, *Chord Shark, No. 57*, mm. 1-3

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“could possibly sound like constipated bebop. It also sounds like an animated conversation between two crazy people who stop listening to each other and scream a little bit.”

Example 45: Rakowski, *Wound Tight*, No. 58, mm. 1-3

*Chord Building:*

*Less Is*, No. 66 (2005) was composed for Rick Moody, who challenged Rakowski to write a minimalist etude in the style of Philip Glass. Rakowski called this etude an impatient minimalist etude on chord building. The etude is built from repeated E-naturals, to which notes are gradually added notes above or below.

Example 46: Rakowski, *Less Is*, No. 66, mm. 84-87

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The ascending arpeggio material comes from *Sex Songs* for voice and mixed quintet, which was composed at the same time as *Less Is*[^115].

**Arpeggios**

The execution of arpeggios is an essential technique for any pianist. Rakowski composed seven arpeggio etudes using different intervals.

*Keine Kaskadenjagd Mehr* (“no more chasing waterfalls”), *No. 17* (1998) is an etude on descending thirds and fourths premiered by Jeanne Golan in 1999. Although there is no quotation from the song, the title is an allusion to TLC’s song, “Don’t Go Chasing Waterfalls.”

![Example 47: Rakowski, *Keine Kaskadenjagd Mehr*, No. 17, mm. 1-3][^116]

Much of the etude features material in which the hands alternate, creating a single line with little overlap. When both hands play simultaneously, the single-line texture briefly changes with the addition of sustained notes in octave unisons, which occurs in mm. 32-36.

Example 48: Rakowski, *Keine Kaskadenjagd Mehr*, No. 17, mm. 32-33\textsuperscript{117}

The unison passage leads into a jerky syncopated rhythm section with random octave outbursts that explode to the loudest point directly before the recapitulation.

Example 49: Rakowski, *Keine Kaskadenjagd Mehr*, No. 17, mm. 48-49\textsuperscript{118}

Despite its title, *You’ve Got Scale*, No. 28 (2000) is more of an arpeggio etude than a scale etude. Teresa McCollough, who recorded some of Rakowski’s early etudes, suggested the concept for this piece. This etude is reminiscent of *BAM!*, one of Teresa’s favorites. The arch form of the piece starts and ends with perpetual running sixteenth notes in the low register of the piano, placing clear importance on the piano’s lower notes.

\textsuperscript{117} Ibid., 48.
\textsuperscript{118} Ibid., 50.
Contrary to the low register of *You’ve Got Scale, Cell Division, No. 53* (2003) is a treble etude on arpeggios. Rakowski thought of the idea when he turned on his cell phone; “the customary rising arpeggios on C Major 7 (coming out of my phone)” was the motive for the piece. Since the cell phone ring was high pitched, Rakowski kept both hands in the treble clef with the lowest note only reaching G below middle C. The arpeggios start in a closed position, steadily ascending as the C Major 7 chord is inverted, a quotation of the ringing cell phone. Gradually, the pattern expands to more than an octave apart with additional cell phones appearing in the left hand.

Example 51: Rakowski, *Cell Division, No. 53*, mm. 1-4

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120 Rakowski, *The “other” etudes*, 12.
By m. 16, the right hand plays the three-note melody, which represents the tones produced while dialing.

Example 52: Rakowski, *Cell Division, No. 53*, mm. 16-17

Initially, all the arpeggios are in the left hand. Later, the texture changes with the alternation of arpeggios between the left and right hand, which continues until the end of the piece. The piece ends with C Major 7 chord descending as if turning off the cell phone.

* A Third in The Hand, No. 64 (2004) is another etude on ascending and descending arpeggiated thirds. At the opening of the piece, the pianist is instructed to hold a cluster with the sostenuto pedal, creating an interesting resonance as the right hand enters. Rakowski creates an arch form in this etude by limiting and manipulating his use of register. The piece begins and ends with treble material, which is interrupted by bass material during the middle section.

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122 Ibid., 19.
Example 53: Rakowski, *Third in The Hand, No. 64*, mm. 1-4

Rakowski’s next arpeggio etude, *Fireworks, No. 80* (2007) was inspired by Debussy’s twenty-fourth prelude, *Feux d’artifice*.

Example 54: Rakowski, *Fireworks, No. 80*, mm. 1-2

The structure of *Fireworks* resembles a fireworks show, which starts softly with small gestures and grows to a huge climax. As the arpeggios gradually become faster and louder, the intensity builds to the climax. After the climax in m. 48, the fireworks gradually die down and the arpeggio motive becomes slower and softer.

An etude on escaping arpeggios, *M’aidez* (“Help Me”), *No. 83* (2008) was composed for Nathanael May, who premiered another Rakowski work, *Gli uccelli di Bogliasco* for

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flute/piccolo and two pianos. Nathanael May requested that Rakowski write an etude that has “undulating low register stuff that would occasionally be broken into by upward rising arpeggios.”125 The “undulating low register” includes fast, running sixteenth notes and a disruptive octave accent.

Example 55: Rakowski, M’aidez, No. 83, mm. 1-2126

To differentiate the texture, the “upward rising arpeggios” first appear in m. 11 in a slower rhythm with a softer dynamic. This material becomes prominent from mm. 39-59.

Example 56: Rakowski, M’aidez, No. 83, mm. 41-42127

125 Rakowski, The “other” etudes, 19.
126 Rakowski, Etudes for Piano, Book IX, 11.
127 Ibid., 15.
The sudden banging octaves from the opening return in m.65.

Example 57: Rakowski, *M’aidez, No.83*, mm. 65-66

An etude on fast arpeggios in both hands, *Mosso, No. 98* (2010), was composed for Geoffrey Burleson. He suggested that Rakowski write a piece “based on the rising and falling texture of the “Ocean Wave” etude of *Chopin, Op. 25, No. 12.*”


This etude is in a fast perpetual motion. Rakowski starts the etude similarly to Chopin’s, in that both begin with a fast arpeggiated pattern. However, in Rakowski’s etude, the hand shifts do not

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128 Ibid., 17.
129 Rakowski, *The “other” etudes*, 52.
happen at the same time as they do in Chopin’s. The following example shows the irregular shifting between the hands.

Example 59: Rakowski, *Mosso, No. 98*, mm. 1-2\textsuperscript{131}

According to Rakowski, the title comes from weather reports in Italian newspapers. The marine reports describe the degree of sea turbulence as “poco mosso,” “mosso” or “molto mosso.”\textsuperscript{132}

**Articulations**

Rakowski composed three etudes dealing with articulation as well as factors affecting articulations: finger pedaling, staccato-legato, and accents.

*Finger Pedaling/Staccato Legato:*

*Saltimmano, No. 49* (2002) is an etude on finger pedaling, a technique used when the pianist needs to play a sustained line with very little pedal while other notes around it are detached. Below is an example of a passage where the pianist must use finger-pedaling. The slow moving melody must be sustained by the fingers so that the accompaniment figures are not blurred by the pedal.

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\textsuperscript{131} Rakowski, *Etudes for Piano, Book X*, 52.

\textsuperscript{132} Rakowski, *The “other” etudes*, 25.
The atonal jumping texture accompanying the legato phrase gradually morphs into slow counterpoint in m. 40. According to Rakowski, the title is a pun on “the famous Italian dish saltimbocca, which means ‘jumps in your mouth’.”

Amy Briggs suggested the technique of staccato and legato in the etude Zeccatella, No. 59 (2003). The constant melodic line in the right hand fifth finger is accompanied by short staccato sixteenth notes below it. The “accompaniment” starts out in a tango-like rhythm.

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A thirty-second four-note motive first appears in m.14 and gradually takes over the texture.

Rakowski was bitten by a tick while writing this piece. Geoffrey Burleson suggested writing the piece in some type of dance form, but instead of calling it “Tarantella,” Rakowski thought of Zeccatella, as “zecca” is the Italian word for tick.

**Accents:**

_Accents of Malice, No. 60_ (2003) is an etude on accents with a strong emphasis on swing rhythms. Rakowski included swing rhythms in all etudes numbered with a multiple of ten up to No.60. Other examples include: _Fourth of Habit, A Gliss is Just a Gliss, Strident, No Stranger to Our Planet._ Accents of Malice was the last etude in this sense. The long-short swing rhythm is very clear from the beginning of the etude and continues throughout the piece.

![Example 62: Rakowski, Accents of Malice, No. 60, mm. 1-4](image)

From mm. 70-91, Rakowski uses random accents in running sixteenth notes to give the impression of jazz improvisation.

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136 Ibid., 64.
Pedaling

Pedal to The Metal, No. 54 (2003) is another etude dedicated to Rick Moody, who gave Rakowski the idea of writing an etude on pedaling. Moody also suggested that Rakowski quote the “39 Lashes” music of Jesus Chris Superstar in the etude. This etude uses all three pedals, often asking the pianist to use two at a time.

Example 64: Rakowski, Pedal to The Metal, No. 54, mm. 1-2

Since it is an etude on pedaling, Rakowski is very particular with his pedal markings, giving specific indications for which pedal to use and when to release it. The first section (mm. 1-38) is

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137 Ibid., 70.
138 Ibid., 27.
dominated by the use of the sostenuto and una corda pedals, while the second section (mm. 39-84) is mainly sostenuto pedal alone.

Example 65: Rakowski, *Pedal to The Metal, No. 54*, mm. 16-17

Repeated Notes

Playing repeated notes requires good control of sound and articulation in order to achieve clarity. Rakowski dedicated four of his etudes to four different types of repeated notes: fast repeating, slow repeating, fading repeating and uneven repeated notes and swirls.

The first piano etude *E-Machines, No. 1* (1988) was composed for Martin Butler and premiered by Lyn Reyna in 1989. This repeated-note etude is one of Rakowski’s most frequently performed pieces. Rakowski also sets the parameters to follow for his etude composition—written from beginning to end without revisions or prior notation of how the piece would go in no more than six days. Only *Trillage and Luceole* have violated the six-day rule. Already from the first piece of this monumental etude catalogue, one can see the humor of the composer. Like many of his other etudes, he includes both hidden and obvious quotations. The first quirky insertion of *Beethoven Symphony No. 6* happens in m. 64.

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139 Ibid., 29.
Another quotation occurs in m. 80 when a persistent E, which begins in the low register and gradually ascends, reveals itself as a quote from Beethoven’s *Für Elise* for one measure. The way Rakowski sneaks the quote into the material is very effective, and another example of his humor at work.

In contrast to *E-Machines, Nocturnal, No. 3* (1991) is an etude on slow repeated notes that lasts for four minutes, nearly twice as long as most of Rakowski’s etudes. It was composed for Lyn Reyna in 1991 and premiered by her in 1993. It begins with a quiet but persistent repeating F-sharp in the right hand along with two other lines in counterpoint, which begin in the left hand and gradually expand to both hands.

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142 Ibid., 8.
This syncopated F-sharp gradually descends to D-F-A-E-flat-G-E and returns to the original register F-Sharp in the last two measures with a faster tempo. As the repeated notes descend, the other contrapuntal materials expand in register. Right before the *Poco meno mosso* section, there is a written-in accelerando, progressing from three-against-two to four-against-three and finally, six-against-four.

Usually, pianists have problems with fast repeating notes but this etude explores a different type of problem with slow repeating notes. When there are changes of phrasing, dynamics or articulation, the repeated notes will need to match the note before and after, but they

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143 Ibid., 23.
144 Ibid., 25.
will also need to match the other material around them. The second challenge is to keep the simultaneous lines smooth and independent. In the interview with Rakowski, he suggested the first C-sharp in the left hand should carry all the way to the D repeated note in m.13. Therefore, at m. 8 when the top voice enters, it should be very soft. Also at the *Poco meno mosso* it should be very free and flowing with smooth sextuplets. The sextuplets are just for notational convenience. The repeated notes in this section should be smooth and unarticulated.

During a six-week residency at Civitella Foundation in Italy, Rakowski needed to write a piece incorporating jazz music for Merkin Hall. Having no idea what to write, Rakowski returned to his etudes, resulting in *Diminishing Return, No. 85* (2008) an etude on fading repeated notes. This etude shares specific traits with *What’s Hairpinning, No. 84* (2008), including identical notes at the beginning and ending of both pieces. These two etudes are two of only a few intended to be performed as a pair. The control of sudden dynamic changes in both hands makes the piece difficult to play.

![Example 70: Rakowski, *Diminishing Return, No. 85*, mm. 7-8](image)

*Flit, No. 95* (2010) is very personal to me. During an interview with Rakowski in March, 2010 regarding his works, I prepared five etudes to play for him. When the interview was

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finished, Rakowski said, “you can always suggest an etude to me,” which I did. I suggested a texture like Ravel’s *Gaspard de la nuit*. I also needed to choose what notes the etude would center around. I suggested G below middle C and the F a little less than two octaves higher. *Flit, No. 95* (2010) is an etude on uneven repeated notes and swirls. With the uneven repeated notes as the focal point, Rakowski attempts to depict “the motion of a moth around a flame.”

The etude can be divided into three sections. The piece begins with the uneven repeated notes between F and G.

Example 71: Rakowski, *Flit, No. 95*, mm. 1-2

In the middle section (m. 27), the Ravel-like arppegio texture in the lower register gradually ascends back up to the same F that started the piece.

Example 72: Rakowski, *Flit, No. 95*, mm. 27-28

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The final section begins in m. 42. Material from the first two sections is played at the same time.

Example 73: Rakowski, *Flit, No. 95*, mm. 42-43

*Dynamics*

**Pianissimo:**

The title for *Silent But Deadly, No. 38* (2002) was given by Amy Briggs after hearing that Rakowski planned to write “an etude of loud music that has to be played softly.” The etude was dedicated to Shehan B. Dissanayake, since the title of the piece had the same initials as his name. The entire piece is marked *sempre pp*. The main materials used in the piece are broken octaves and arpeggios with recurring sevenths and ninths. The pairing of soft dynamics with a fast-moving and thick texture poses a formidable challenge to the pianist. The performer must maintain a clear line and voice large chords, all within the confines of the *pianissimo* dynamic.

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148 Ibid., 34.
149 Ibid., 36.
Example 74: Rakowski, *Silent But Deadly, No. 38*, mm. 1-2\textsuperscript{151}

Fortissimo:

In contrast to *Silent But Deadly, No. 38, Heavy Hitter, No. 73* (2006) is intended to be performed at a constant fortissimo, as suggested by Michael Kirkendoll, who premiered the piece in New York. Rakowski recalled the piano at the performance “had at least one broken string; Michael was so forceful it’s a miracle he did not just chop the piano in half.”\textsuperscript{152} The piece is divided into three parts. It begins with written-out trills between a perfect fourth and a minor third with accented octaves in the bass

Example 75: Rakowski, *Heavy Hitter, No. 73*, mm. 1-3\textsuperscript{153}

\textsuperscript{151} Rakowski, *Etudes for Piano, Book IV*, 51.
\textsuperscript{152} Rakowski, *The “other” etudes*, 17.
\textsuperscript{153} Rakowski, *Etudes for Piano, Book VIII*, 18.
In the middle section (m. 51), the tempo is slightly slower. The texture alternates between broken-octave arpeggios and syncopated repeating chords. The chords move chromatically around a central pitch.

As the tempo begins to return to its original pace, the written out trill theme from the beginning is reintroduced in the texture. From mm. 67-81, the broken octaves are eventually mixed with unison octaves, which are then paired with the syncopated repeating chords that fill in each rest in the left hand. The final section (m. 81) alternates between the written-out interval trills and the syncopated repeating chords.

*Sharp Dynamic Contrast:*

*Stutter Stab, No. 70* (2006) is an etude composed on sharp dynamic contrasts. Beth Wiemann suggested the title, described by Rakowski as “a variation on stutter step, denoting the

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154 Ibid., 23.
egregious rhythmic irregularity."\textsuperscript{155} The piece is marked with very specific and rapidly changing dynamics ranging from \textit{pianissimo to fortissimo}.

Example 77: Rakowski, \textit{Stutter Stab, No. 70}, mm. 1-2\textsuperscript{156}

From mm. 32-55, Rakowski added another layer of sustained notes on top of the syncopated texture in the middle voice.

Example 78: Rakowski, \textit{Stutter Stab, No. 70}, mm. 38-39\textsuperscript{157}

\textsuperscript{155} Rakowski, \textit{The “other” etudes}, 16.
\textsuperscript{156} Rakowski, \textit{Etudes for Piano, Book VII}, 59.
\textsuperscript{157} Ibid., 63.
Echo:

Corey Hamm suggested that Rakowski write an echo etude in which “the echoes could encroach on each other and destroy or shatter each other.” The resulting etude, *Ecco Eco, No. 77* (2007), begins with a simple one-chord motive that repeats in various rhythmic patterns. As shown in the next example, each repetition of the chord is at least one dynamic level lower than the preceding chord, creating an echo effect.

Example 79: Rakowski, *Ecco Eco, No. 77*, mm. 1-3

The simple dynamic decay of the opening eventually morphs into a texture of complex and difficult counterpoint of multiple echo motives. In m. 5, Rakowski introduces a linear echo motive, the first to contrast with the unchanging chords. In m. 11, the single line becomes harmonized by another pitch, thickening the texture again. As the piece progresses, Rakowski uses a bigger rhythmic vocabulary by introducing sixteenth notes in m. 13, making the echo decays in different voices happen at significantly different rates. Eventually specific dynamic markings for each chord are abandoned in favor of large diminuendos in order to facilitate sweeping linear sixteenth-note gestures, as seen in m. 37.

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Perhaps the most difficult aspect of this etude occurs when the different echoes encroach on one another. As the piece progresses, uninterrupted decays become more and more infrequent, especially in the right hand. From m. 5 onward, the pianist usually has to juggle at least two separate echo lines in one hand. This is particularly challenging because the performer must be careful to control dynamics and shape the various lines in a way that the listener can clearly hear the different decays. This specific challenge is clearly shown in m. 11, which includes three separate echo lines. The first chord, marked fortissimo, is the beginning of a decay that will last until the downbeat of m. 12. The decay of this chord can be followed throughout mm. 11-12 on the first, fifth, and ninth eighth-note beats of m. 11 and the first beat of m. 12. The chord never changes pitches, but a clear decay can be identified in the dynamics fortissimo, mezzo forte, piano, and pianissimo. The second event of m. 11 is the E-natural in the right hand, which is marked piano; this pitch is a remnant of the previous measure and represents the end of decay. The third event of m. 11 is the minor third of C-sharp and E-natural in the right hand, which is marked forte. Again, this is the beginning of a decay that will last through m. 12. Like the first event of m. 11, this interval never changes pitches. This decay can be followed on the third and eighth eighth-note beats of m. 11 and the first, sixth, and eleventh eighth-note beats of m. 12 with a dynamic decay from forte to pianissimo.
Example 80: Rakowski, Ecco Eco, No. 77, mm. 10-13\textsuperscript{160}

*Dynamic Swells:*

*What’s Hairpinning, No. 84* (2008) is an etude on dynamic swells. Rakowski said, “I got the sound of crescendo-diminuendo repeated notes in my brain and wondered just how much I could slow down my compositional metabolism in an etude based on that figure”\textsuperscript{161} Rakowski did indeed slow down. The right hand figure starts with repeated D for five measures. By m. 6, Rakowski adds C-sharp to create a major seventh interval, which lasts for twenty-eight measures. Rakowski complicated the piece from m. 10 with simple polyrhythms such as three-against-two. Instead of having just repeated intervals, Rakowski adds a short and slow moving chromatic line in the left hand. One of the difficulties of playing the piece is to control the layers of dynamics within different polyrhythms while maintaining a sense of multiple lines, as exemplified in m. 34.

\textsuperscript{160} Ibid., 63.

\textsuperscript{161} Rakowski, *The “other” etudes*, 20.
Example 81: Rakowski, *What’s Hairpinning, No. 84*, mm. 34-35\textsuperscript{162}

**Cross-Accents:**

Most of Rakowski’s etudes are based on syncopated rhythms that disorient one’s sense of pulse. *Double Cross, No. 96* (2010) represents the pinnacle of this idea. Right from the beginning, the major seconds in both hands are not rhythmically aligned.

Example 82: Rakowski, *Double Cross, No. 96*, mm. 1-2\textsuperscript{163}

To make the piece even more difficult, Rakowski changes meters in almost every measure; the longest streak of unchanged meter lasts only three bars. Since the piece has perpetual sixteenth-

\textsuperscript{162} Rakowski, *Etudes for Piano, Book IX*, 22.
\textsuperscript{163} Rakowski, *Etudes for Piano, Book X*, 41.
note motion, the performer should set the sixteenth note as the basis of the pulse to overcome the meter changes and make the piece easier to practice and learn. This is Rakowski’s first etude named as a result of an online poll of his friends. Rakowski said, “I went to Facebook for a ‘title sweepstakes’ for this piece…Adam Marks won the sweepstakes by suggesting ‘Double Crossed.’”

Gestures

Under the gestures category, I divided etudes in three different subsections: swirls of notes, ornaments, and glissandos.

Swirls of Notes

Karen Harvey, a Boston pianist, received BAM! No. 2 (1991), an etude on swirls of notes, after requesting another piece from Rakowski to perform along with E-Machines. Rakowski suggested that one should perform BAM! after E-Machines since the beginning of BAM! comes from the retrograde of the end of E-Machines and some of the repeated-note motive in m. 84.

Example 83: Rakowski, E-Machines, No. 1, m. 97

164 Rakowski, The “other” etudes, 25.
165 Rakowski, Etudes for Piano, Book I, 8.
Another reason they make a good pair in performance is because of their use of opposite registers. *E-Machines* uses the low register, and *BAM!* uses the high register. Like *E-Machines*, where Rakowski quotes Beethoven, *BAM!* contains a quotation from Mozart’s *Symphony No. 40* in mm. 92-93. The quotation, in a different key from Mozart’s original, begins on the C-sharp in the lower voice in m. 92.

Inspiration for *Corrente, No. 10* (1996) was a dream Rakowski had while in Italy- a dream of “piano music with a lot of running figures that constantly descended to the bottom of

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166 Ibid., 9.
167 Ibid., 17.
the piano. The music was beautiful." Therefore, Rakowski puts all the descending running notes in the left hand along with long melodic line in the right hand, starting and ending on A.

Example 86: Rakowski, Corrente, No. 10, m. 2

According to Rakowski, the title refers not only to the dance form “but also in Italian, electricity. It’s also the word used in Italian newspapers that refers in weather reports to the jet stream.”

Solid Goldie, No. 90 (2009) is an etude on G-C-H (notation of G-C-B) in search of a lullaby. Rakowski composed the piece for a long time collaborator, Marilyn Nonken, in celebration of the birth of her first daughter Goldie Celeste Hunka.

Example 87: Rakowski, Solid Goldie, No. 90, mm. 7-9

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168 Rakowski, The “other” etudes, 5.
169 Rakowski, Etudes for Piano, Book I, 83.
170 Rakowski, The “other” etudes, 5.
171 Rakowski, Etudes for Piano, Book IX, 62.
The structure of the piece is ABA. It starts with the GCH motive in the top voice in dotted half notes in a three-bar phrase that repeats three times. Gradually, the motive compresses to sixteenth notes in the B section. The B section starting in m. 43 is in a fast perpetual motion with the GCH motive in the right hand and an irregular sixteenth-note pattern in the left.

Example 88: Rakowski, *Solid Goldie, No. 90*, mm. 43-46

Finally, the motive returns in m. 72 in long notes, and goes through the same rhythmic compression as is the A section.

*Ornaments*

*Trills:*

*Trillage, No. 4* (1993) is a rhapsodic and romantic etude on trills that Rakowski composed for Alan Feinberg. In 1998 Steven Weigt premiered the piece. In theme and variation form, this etude is based on two works by other composers. A quote in the sixth variation is from the cadenza of the *Piano Concerto* by George Edwards. Rakowski also uses a brief quote of *Concertino* of Ross Bauer. Rakowski marks both quotes on the score for easy identification. The way in which Rakowski approaches the trill is ingenious. He sets up the trill by introducing the notes before by gradually speeding up to the trill he wants.

172 Ibid., 64.
The inspiration for *Trillage* came after Rakowski heard Feinberg’s performance on George Edwards’ *Piano Concerto*. Rakowski was especially impressed by Edwards’ use of trills in his composition. Rakowski introduces B-C-sharp and G-A-flat trills as the first pair of trills in his etude as a nod to Edwards’ concerto. Rakowski also ends the theme and the coda with the same trills. The example below is the exact quote from George Edwards’ *Piano Concerto* in the Rakowski’s etude.

Example 90: Rakowski, *Triallage, No. 4*, m. 69

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Rakowski composed *Usurpation, No. 31* (2000), an etude on written-out trills, in celebration of Martin Boykan’s seventieth birthday. The title pays tribute to Boykan’s five little piano pieces called *Usurpations* where he quotes material from other composers. Rakowski did the same in this etude by quoting two passages directly from Boykan’s *Piano Sonata, No. 2* in mm. 1-3 and mm. 55-60.

Example 91: Rakowski, *Usurpation, No. 31*, mm. 1-3

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Example 92: Rakowski, *Usurpation, No. 31*, mm. 53-60

Besides the direct quote, Rakowski also inserts a melody from the slow movement of Mozart’s *Piano Concerto No. 23, K. 488*. This was a piece both Rakowski and Boykan loved. In reference to Boykan’s age, Rakowski ends the piece in measure seventy.

Example 93: Mozart *Piano Concerto, No. 23, K. 488*, mm. 1-2

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176 Ibid., 6.
Example 94: Rakowski, Usurpation, No. 31, mm. 67-70\textsuperscript{178}

Tremolos:

This Means Warble No. 89 (2009) comes from hearing birdcalls after cleaning up bird droppings on a very cold and bright January day in Maynard, Massachusetts. Rakowski described the birdcalls as “the two-note chickadee song, an occasional trumpeting blue jay sound, and lots of chips and chirps.”\textsuperscript{179} Rakowski thought it would be a great challenge for him to write an etude on two-note motives. Rakowski said, “it would force me into the very high register of the piano, which I don’t use a lot.”\textsuperscript{180}

\textsuperscript{178} Rakowski, Etudes for Piano, Book IV, 7.
\textsuperscript{179} Rakowski, The “other” etudes, 22.
\textsuperscript{180} Ibid.
This etude belongs in the tremolo section because of the use of two-note motives that rock back and forth like tremolos.

*Whole Lotta Shakin’ No. 91* (2009) is an etude on tremolos. Although composers commonly use tremolos to create massive sound and big crescendi, Rakowski avoids the loud, pedaled texture. Instead, he asks for no pedal and writes pianissimo tremolos in most passages.

Perhaps it was a difficult compositional process, as Rakowski said, “I was glad when it was over.”

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Mordents:

Once Bitten, No. 26 (2000) is an etude on mordents. The opening of Once Bitten alludes to the Bach Toccata in D Minor.

Example 97: Rakowski, Once Bitten, No. 26, mm. 1-2

Later, Rakowski makes reference to impressionistic writing with falling scales in stacked thirds in m. 60.

Example 98: Rakowski, Once Bitten, No. 26, mm. 60-61

The inspiration for this piece came from one of Rakowski’s composition students who used too many mordent figures in one of her pieces. Rakowski said, “Although I was dazed and confused

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184 Rakowski, Etudes for Piano, Book III, 34.
185 Ibid., 41.
during *Once Bitten*’s entire composition, it ended up being my favorite, Amy’s favorite, and the favorite of several other listeners.”

*Name That Turn, No. 62* (2004) is an etude on turns. Rakowski’s idea of writing an etude on turns came after hearing some “Haydn songs at a student recital at Brandeis, where a lot of phrases in the piano had turns at the incipit.”* Name That Turn* begins with simple turns in the right hand, switching to the left hand a few measures later. In the middle section (mm. 18-28), the etude sounds like a two-part invention on turns.

Example 99: Rakowski, *Name That Turn, No. 62*, mm. 19-20

To make the piece even harder to control, Rakowski adds broken octaves on top of the turns.

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186 Rakowski, “Unmanifesto and Narrative”, 5.
Example 100: Rakowski, *Name That Turn, No. 62*, mm. 29-30\textsuperscript{189}

\textit{Glissando}

The visual aspect of playing *A Gliss is Just a Gliss, No. 30* (2000) makes the performer feel like a rock and roll pianist. Since the number of the etude ends in zero, it is yet another swing-like etude. Although Rakowski’s inspiration came from the subtle white-note glissandos in Martin Butler’s piano piece “*On the Rocks,*” Rakowski “went all out and wrote a raucous sort of atonal honky-tonk piece that shifts from register to register in the coarsest and crassest way possible, with glissandi.”\textsuperscript{190} Example 99 shows the glissandos moving between in all registers.

\textsuperscript{189} Ibid., 12.
\textsuperscript{190} Rakowski, “*Unmanifesto and Narrative*,” 6.
Example 101: Rakowski, *A Gliss is Just a Gliss, No. 30*, mm. 43-44\textsuperscript{191}

Like many of his etudes where he quotes from other people’s work, Rakowski quotes “New York, New York” in this etude. The example shows the theme on the right hand.

Example 102: Rakowski, *A Gliss is Just a Gliss, No. 30*, m. 37\textsuperscript{192}

Restricted Compositional Techniques

There are thirteen etudes under the restricted compositional techniques category: use of specific fingers, use of specific hand, right hand on white keys/left hand on black keys, accelerando-ritenuto, major triads only, dominant seventh chord, half-diminished seventh chords,

\textsuperscript{191} Rakowski, *Etudes for Piano, Book III*, 66.
\textsuperscript{192} Ibid., 65.
based on parallel motion, particular chords, palindromes, mirrors, horn fifths, left hand/right hand unison, ostinato, pedal point, triads only, and Hebrew melodies.

Use of Specific Fingers

Thumbs and Pinkies Only:

Pollici e Mignoli “Thumb and Little Finger,” No. 9 (1995) or The Virus That Ate New York is a piece for thumbs and pinkies only. Rakowski composed the etude at the American Academy in Rome and in 1999 Stephen Gutman premiered the piece. Rakowski gave a performance suggestion at the beginning of the volume. “Pianists who wish to use the other fingers may do so at their discretion, but should also be very, very ashamed. For extra bravura, the performer may wear a mitten on the middle three fingers, or cut them off entirely.”

Example 103: Rakowski, Pollici e Mignoli, No. 9, mm. 1-2

Index Fingers Only:

Amy Briggs premiered Touch Typing, No. 11 (1996), an etude for index fingers only in 2002. Rakowski composed this etude when he was at the American Academy in Rome. The title

194 Rakowski, Etudes for Piano, Book I, 75.
came to Rakowski from his experience of amazement at a person typing very fast using only index fingers. The thematic motive is [asdfgh], the keys covered by the left hand on a computer keyboard. The motive is equivalent to [A-A flat-D-F-G-B] in musical notation. Rakowski used the motive in its original sixteenth-note form, as well as an augmented version that spreads out over a longer phrase. The piece is in a three-part fast-slow-fast form.195

![Example 104: Rakowski, Touch Typing, No. 11, mm. 1-2](image)

**Example 104: Rakowski, Touch Typing, No. 11, mm. 1-2**

**Melody in the Left Thumb:**

Geoffrey Burleson premiered an etude based on playing melody with the left-hand thumb, *Your Dirty Rag, No. 23* (1999) in 2001. This etude has two clear musical ideas happening at the same time. First is the slower sixteenth-note rhythmic pattern in the left hand, which also has the melody in the thumb. In contrast with the left-hand texture, the right hand plays much faster runs of thirty-second notes in broken octaves ripping through piano’s high register. While writing the piece, Rakowski thought about the dance parties at Tanglewood. Rakowski said, “Ross Bauer and I would do our regular white-guy lower-lip-biting dancing with Martin Butler double-timing and zipping around us.”197

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Five-Finger Pattern:

*Berceuse, No. 87* (2008), an etude on five-finger patterns to be performed on either piano, toy piano, or on both was composed for Rick Moody, Amy Osborn, and Hazel Jane. Rakowski wrote *Berceuse* as a gift to Rick Moody, as he and his wife Amy were expecting a child. The piece had to be simple enough for them to play (neither of them are pianists.) In order to send the gift to soon-to-be-proud parents, Rakowski wrote the piece, entered it into Finale and recorded it to upload on YouTube all in one day. Although he gave the performer the freedom to choose which instrument to play, he asked them to “emulate a music box.”\(^{198}\) Demonstrating his kinder side, Rakowski notated each new five-finger pattern in a box at its first occurrence so that it would be easier for the performer to identify which pattern would come up in the next phrase.

Example 105: Rakowski, *Berceuse, No. 87*, mm. 1-3\(^{199}\)

Use of Specific Hand

Right Hand Only:


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\(^{198}\) Rakowski, *Etudes for Piano, Book IX*, 44.

\(^{199}\) Ibid.
pianists, will always need exercises to strengthen the left hand. Ravel, Scriabin and Brahms all wrote works for the left hand alone.

Example 106: Rakowski, *Northpaw, No. 12*, mm. 1-4

Lyn Reyna asked Rakowski to write a piece for her friend Barbara since she just injured her left hand. According to Rakowski, the piece is “based around F-sharp and A, with a slow descent to the lowest A on the piano over a melody that stays close to the register where it begins.”

Example 107: Rakowski, *Northpaw, No. 12*, mm. 46-48

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Being an uptown composer, Rakowski said, “minor sixths are great, but not major sixths.” Therefore, when he found the interval F-sharp and A, he could not resist using it. This etude is very hard to play because the melody goes in and out of the texture, making pedaling and phrasing very difficult. When asked about his preference for pedaling and phrasing in the etude, Rakowski replied, “It is up to the performer to decide because I cannot. Use your ears to decide what is the right pedaling and phrasing.”

*Menage a Droit, No. 61* (2004) is another etude for right hand only. Rakowski composed the piece hoping to cheer Amy Briggs up when she had tendonitis in her left hand. The treatment of melodic notes and ornamentation in the score resembles Chopin’s writing.

Example 108: Rakowski, *Menage a Droit, No. 61*, mm. 1-2

The constant running sixteenth notes gradually morph into a swing-like rhythm that leads into the middle section. In this section, the pianist needs to hold the D pedal point with the sostenuto pedal- in order to maintain the held note over the drier bass material.

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203 David Rakowski, interview by I-Chen Yeh, Ipod recording, Maynard, MA, March 9, 2010.
204 Ibid.
Example 109: Rakowski, *Menage a Droit, No. 61*, m. 18\textsuperscript{206}

*Left Hand Only:*

A left-hand-alone etude, *Ain’t Got No Right, No. 67* (2005) is one of the most difficult etudes in Rakowski’s collection. This etude was composed for Corey Hamm and is yet another etude for a pianist with tendonitis, this time in the right hand. Corey Hamm premiered this etude in 2005.

Example 110: Rakowski, *Ain’t Got No Right, No. 67*, mm. 1-2\textsuperscript{207}

The rhythmically driven, tango infused opening contrasts with the middle section, which is played freely with a flowing character. Instead of having a chordal texture, this section features a slowly moving melody in the top voice with sixteenth notes below.

\textsuperscript{206} Ibid., 3.

\textsuperscript{207} Ibid., 40.
Example 111: Rakowski, *Ain’t Got No Right, No. 67*, m. 16\textsuperscript{208}

*Right Hand on White Keys/Left Hand on Black Keys*

*Halftone, No. 27* (2000) was an experiment for Rakowski in which he wrote “white-note and black-note music that could be played separately or together.”\textsuperscript{209} According to Rakowski, it was difficult to write a piece with limitations like this and not sound clichéd. He found the solution by initially separating the two parts, giving the right hand the high and fast material in the A section.

Example 112: Rakowski, *Halftone, No. 27*, mm. 1-2\textsuperscript{210}

In the B section, the left hand has low and slow material.

\textsuperscript{208} Ibid., 41.
\textsuperscript{209} Rakowski, *Unmanifesto and Narrative*, 5.
\textsuperscript{210} Rakowski, *Etudes for Piano, Book III*, 42.
Example 113: Rakowski, *Halftone, No. 27*, mm. 18-20\(^{211}\)

The last section combines the two materials and the two hands eventually cross.

Example 114: Rakowski, *Halftone, No. 27*, mm. 42-43\(^{212}\)

Although the sections are marked as A-B-C, the order of performing them is undetermined. The performer has to decide in which order he/she would like to play them.

*Accelerando-Ritenuto*

A nonsensical title, *Pink Tab, No. 45* (2002) is an etude on speeding up and slowing down. The idea is “modeled on the music for the Countess Geschwitz in Berg’s opera *Lulu*, for

\(^{211}\) Ibid., 43.

\(^{212}\) Ibid., 45.
whom speeding up and slowing down is a leitmotif.” The piece starts out in one single layer of accelerando and ritenuto.

Example 115: Rakowski, *Pink Tab, No. 45*, mm. 1-3

Each voice enters in a different speed and each phrase structure is a different length. The texture grows to be as thick as four lines at once.

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214 Rakowski, *Etudes for Piano, Book V*, 31
Example 116: Rakowski, *Pink Tab, No. 45*, mm. 10-13²¹⁵

**Major Triads Only**

Rakowski revised *Rick’s Mood, No. 65* (2002-2005) three times over the course of four years. It was originally written on a dare from Rick Moody to write a piece on major triads only. Rick Moody’s part in the dare was to write a rhyming poem. Since the original composition was not long enough, Rakowski added new phrases and rewrote passages in the two revisions resulting in a two-page etude.

²¹⁵ Ibid., 32
Dominant Seventh Chords

An etude on dominant seventh chords, Rakowski composed *Quietude, No. 97* (2010) for Augusta Read Thomas, a very close friend and a supporter of Rakowski’s piano etudes. As mentioned before, Rakowski included one etude he can play in each book of etudes. This is certainly one of them. This etude is in an ABA form. The A sections contain arpeggiated dominant seventh chords while the B section has a chorale-like vertical chord structure. The etude begins within a range of two octaves.

The span of the arpeggiated chords gradually grows further (almost four octaves) later in the A section. The chorale-like B section begins in m. 16. This *legatissimo* section requires the pianist

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to be sensitive to the smooth qualities of movement between each voice. The contrapuntal music requires the pianist to use fingers to create legato instead of the pedal.

Example 119: Rakowski, *Quietude, No. 97*, mm. 16-18\textsuperscript{218}

The A section returns in m. 24, but this time the arpeggiated chords begin further apart and expand even more.

Example 120: Rakowski, *Quietude, No. 97*, mm. 32-33\textsuperscript{219}

\textsuperscript{218} Ibid., 49.
\textsuperscript{219} Ibid., 50.
Half-Diminished Seventh Chords

After hearing Martin Butler’s chorale on major seventh chords, Rakowski wrote another slow short etude, What Half-Diminishes One (Half-Diminishes All), No. 48 (2002), using half-diminished seventh chords. Butler’s style of chorale writing reminded Rakowski of Schumann’s Der Dichter Spricht from Kinderszenen, Op. 15. Rakowski used the same four-note melody as Schumann to start the piece. According to Rakowski, “there are nothing but half-diminished seventh chords…, except for a few passing tones, suspensions, and arpeggiation.”

Example 121: Rakowski, What Half-Diminishes One (Half-Diminishes All), No. 48, mm. 1-4

Example 122: Schumann, Der Dichter Spricht from Op. 15, mm. 1-4

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Based on Parallel Motion

Amy Briggs suggested the idea of composing an etude on fast notes moving more or less in parallel motion. A three-minute-long etude *Wiggle Room, No. 43* (2002), is modeled after the Prelude in C Minor from *Well-Tempered Clavier, Book One* by J.S. Bach.

Example 123: Rakowski, *Wiggle Room, No. 43*, mm. 1-2

Example 124: Bach, *Prelude in C Minor* from *Well-Tempered Clavier, Book One*, mm. 1-3

Rakowski starts the etude in a simple two-part texture of running sixteenth notes in parallel motion. Gradually, the rhythm and texture become more complicated, first through the use of syncopation beginning in m. 21.

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Example 125: Rakowski, *Wiggle Room, No. 43*, mm. 21-22\textsuperscript{225}

Next, he adds another layer of sustained notes in m. 42, resulting in a more contrapuntal texture.

Example 126: Rakowski, *Wiggle Room, No. 43*, mm. 42-43\textsuperscript{226}

*Wiggle Room* is unique in the freedom Rakowski gives the performer by writing “all dynamics, articulations and pedaling are left to the discretion of the performer.”\textsuperscript{227} The main challenges in performing this piece are projecting the melody and keeping the sixteenth notes steady. Although Rakowski writes, “moving in parallel motion,” the piece is actually written with passages of contrary and oblique motion. In order to keep the hands together, one must practice short passages in a fast tempo while listening to one hand and making the other hand follow. After deciding which line to project, it is crucial to keep the sixteenth notes as quiet as possible.

\textsuperscript{225} Rakowski, *Etudes for Piano, Book V*, 18.
\textsuperscript{226} Ibid., 20.
\textsuperscript{227} Ibid., 16.
Based on a Particular Chord

*Purple, No. 36* (2001) is a short etude full of character and lasting only two and a half minutes. The piece is derived from Amy’s favorite chord, the right-hand chord that starts Jimi Hendrix “*Purple Haze*” (E-B flat-E flat). The piece uses three thematic ideas: fortissimo left-hand octaves alternating with syncopated right-hand chords (mm. 1-3), a pianissimo left-hand line alternating with melodic right-hand fourths and tritones (mm. 4-6), and a jazz-like swing section (mm. 41-43).

Example 127: Rakowski, *Purple, No. 36*, mm. 1-3

Example 128: Rakowski, *Purple, No. 36*, mm. 4-6

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229 Ibid.
The challenges in this etude include control of dynamic contrasts, maintaining even sixteenth notes as they are passed off from one hand to the other, and balancing the melody and accompaniment. The phrase groupings create an irregular pulse, which causes rhythmic complexity, another challenge for the performer. A normal 6/8 or 9/8 meter would be divided into two or three groups of three. In this etude the 6/8 meter is grouped 2+2+2 and the 9/8 meter is grouped 5+2+2.

One particularly challenging passage in terms of rhythmic complexity is the metric modulation that shifts from simple to compound meter. Although the left hand’s eighth notes in mm. 39-40

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230 Ibid., 39.
231 Ibid., 36.
seem to be the metric unit, the right hand’s sixteenth notes are already in groups of three
foreshadowing the upcoming shift to a triplet feel. A similar modulation happens in mm. 57-59
as the pulse shifts from compound meter back to simple.

Example 131: Rakowski, Purple, No. 36, mm. 39-43\textsuperscript{232}

When asked how particular the articulation and voicing should be, especially the opening accents
and tenuto marking, Rakowski responded, “Whatever is best for you as a performer is what you
should do.”\textsuperscript{233}

\textit{Palindrome}

Rakowski’s forty-second etude is based on this idea. Even the title of the etude, \textit{Madam I’m Adam, No. 42} (2002) is a palindrome. The example shows the opening phrase of the etude in
which not only the notes are in an exact palindrome, but the rhythm as well.

\textsuperscript{232} Ibid., 39.
\textsuperscript{233} David Rakowski, interview by I-Chen Yeh, Ipod recording, Maynard, MA, March 9, 2010.
Example 132: Rakowski, *Madam I’m Adam, No. 42*, mm. 1-3

The piece contains a palindrome on the level of a small phrase as well as the entire piece. Each half of the piece is an exact retrograde of the other. As seen in the example below, the center of the piece is in m. 20 in the middle of four eighth rests. The following material is a mirror image of the first half of the piece.

Example 133: Rakowski, *Madam I’m Adam, No. 42*, mm. 20-21

_Mirror_

Musical mirroring occurs when two lines move in contrary motion at the same interval. *Upon Reflection, No. 78* (2007) is a slow mirror etude suggested by and composed for Michael Kirkendoll. Both hands are in an exact mirror of each other.

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235 Ibid., 13.
Example 134: Rakowski, *Upon Reflection, No. 78*, mm. 1-3

Unlike the slower *Upon Reflection, No. 78*, *Narcissitude, No. 79* (2007) is a fast mirror etude. The two hands mirror each other, with the left hand sounding one-sixteenth note after the right hand.

Example 135: Rakowski, *Narcissitude, No. 79*, mm. 1-2

Toward the end in m. 65, the leading role shifts to the left hand. In addition, “the ending gesture calls for the hands to cross by about as much as they can, until the player looks straitjacketed.”

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237 Ibid., 72.
238 Rakowski, *The “other” etudes*, 18.
Horn Fifths

Horn fifths are “a two-part harmonic progression, playable on natural horns or trumpets. The harmonic intervals are actually a minor sixth, a perfect fifth, and a major third,” which constitute the opening three intervals of Horned In.

Example 136: Rakowski, Narcissitude, No. 79, mm. 71-72

Example 137: Rakowski, Horned In, No. 24, mm. 1-3

239 Rakowski, Etudes for Piano, Book VII, 79.
The title *Horned In, No. 24* (1999) is a pun on David Horne, for whom the piece is written. The piece starts out with one single line of horn fifths that eventually appears in three layers.

Example 138: Rakowski, *Horned In, No. 24*, mm. 12-13

Rakowski restricted the compositional material to use only the horn fifth, a third functioning as neighbor tones to the third of the horn fifths, and the retrograde of the horn fifth motive (3rd-5th-6th,) which also ends the piece.

*Left Hand /Right Hand Unison*

Geoffrey Burleson premiered *Figure Eight, No. 5* (1994) in 1998. Rakowski restricted himself to using only octaves moving in parallel and contrary motion. The piece begins with both hands playing a unison line in parallel motion.

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242 Ibid., 20.
Example 139: Rakowski, *Figure Eight, No. 5*, mm. 1-2

By the second page, both hands add another voice.

Example 140: Rakowski, *Figure Eight, No. 5*, m. 8

Gradually, the octaves move in opposite directions with huge leaps. Passages such as mm. 67-69 require good eye and hand coordination as both hands move in opposite directions towards the extreme ends of the keyboard. The pitch material remains identical for each beat.

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244 Ibid., 44.
Example 141: Rakowski, *Figure Eight, No. 5*, mm. 67-69

*Ostinato*

*Close Enough for Jazz, No. 8* (1995) is a rhythm ostinato etude composed at the American Academy in Rome for Sandra Sprecher, who premiered the piece a year later. There are three transformations of the ostinato motive to this etude. After starting in the left hand (m. 1), the motive moves to the right hand with altered articulations and missing sixteenth notes (m. 17).

Example 142: Rakowski, *Close Enough for Jazz, No. 8*, m. 1

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245 Ibid., 51.
In m. 22, the simple ostinato pattern turns into a complex one that leaps between both hands.

According to Rakowski, “the ostinato theme of the piece may have been modeled on Ligeti’s Hungarian Rock for Cembalo, which I had heard only once.”

**Pedal Point**

Many of Rakowski’s etudes were inspired by theoretical questions and compositional challenges. One of those questions was: “In a chromatic idiom with fast-moving harmony such

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247 Ibid., 71.
248 Ibid., 72.
249 Rakowski, The “other” etudes, 5.
as I write, could I sustain a piece that had a pedal note in it?”

He composed *Killer B’s, No. 63* (2004) an etude on pedal point Bs in an effort to find out. The piece begins with simple quarter note Bs, occasionally augmented with repeated dotted eighth notes added to create an irregular pulse.

![Example 145: Rakowski, *Killer B’s, No. 63*, mm. 1-4](image)

The repeated Bs later change into broken octaves across the entire keyboard, except for the lowest B, which Rakowski saved for the recapitulation in m. 82. According to Rakowski, from m. 43 on, the gradual speeding up of the Bs is “a veiled tribute to the B 52’s tune “Rock Lobster.”

*Triads Only*

Yet another composition Rakowski used to challenge himself is *Triaddled, No. 44* (2002), based only on triads. It is an etude on triads in all forms, including inversions (mm. 1-3), stacked triads (mm. 16-18), and arpeggiated triads (mm. 30-31). According to Rakowski, the

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250 Ibid., 14.
“arpeggiated triads are a consciously hyperextended version of the rising triad figures in

*Appalachian Spring.*”\(^{253}\)

Example 146: Rakowski, *Triadded, No. 44*, mm. 1-3\(^ {254}\)

Example 147: Rakowski, *Triadded, No. 44*, mm. 16-18\(^ {255}\)

Example 148: Rakowski, *Triadded, No. 44*, mm. 30-31\(^ {256}\)

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\(^{253}\) Ibid., 9.
\(^{255}\) Ibid., 25.
\(^{256}\) Ibid., 26.
Hebrew Melodies

_Dorian Blue, No. 72_ (2006) is an etude based on a Hebrew melody requested by Donald Berman. In order to call it an etude, Rakowski added alternating two-hand flourishes to the melody. The ancient Hebrew melody is presented three times in different styles. First, in mm. 1-14, the material is limited to the middle to high registers of the keyboard with simple modal harmony.

Example 149: Rakowski, _Dorian Blue, No. 72_, mm. 1-2

In mm. 15-30, there are fewer flourishes in both hands, but the harmony is more chromatic than in the first part. The lowest register used for this section is just an octave lower than middle C. Rapid flourishes alternate between both hands from m. 31 on. While the flourishes use the whole keyboard, the melody is still kept in the middle register.

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257 Rakowski, _Etudes for Piano, Book VIII_, 10.
Since the second half of the twentieth century, extended techniques have become common in Western art music. Rakowski’s Piano Etudes are no exception. Two etudes include playing inside the piano, one requires talking while playing, three explore playing with other instruments (celesta, toy piano, melodica), four explore different ways of playing the piano, and three use specific choreography of hand and body positions.

Inside the Piano

Plucking A, No. 13 (a) is one of several etudes in which the title came before the music. This etude has two different versions, one for Steinway A and B pianos and the other one for Steinway D pianos. The etude deals with playing inside the piano and was originally composed for Marilyn Nonken in 1997. Knowing Amy Briggs would be recording on a model “D”, Rakowski revised the etude in 2002 to better fit the piano. The bars are located in different places on Steinway A/B’s and Steinway D’s; this difference affects the pianist’s ability to reach specific strings in different models. Amy Briggs premiered both versions in 2002. Some of the techniques

\[\text{Example 150: Rakowski, } \textit{Dorian Blue, No. 72, m. 40}^{258}\]

\[\text{Extended Techniques}\]

\[\text{Plucking A, No. 13 (a)}\]

\[\text{This etude has two different versions, one for Steinway A and B pianos and the other one for Steinway D pianos. The etude deals with playing inside the piano and was originally composed for Marilyn Nonken in 1997. Knowing Amy Briggs would be recording on a model “D”, Rakowski revised the etude in 2002 to better fit the piano. The bars are located in different places on Steinway A/B’s and Steinway D’s; this difference affects the pianist’s ability to reach specific strings in different models. Amy Briggs premiered both versions in 2002. Some of the techniques}\]

\[\text{258} \text{Ibid., 15.}\]
used in this piece include slapping the bottom strings, dampening notes with fingers (mm. 1-2),
strumming strings (m. 4), plucking strings (m. 13), and playing harmonics (mm. 14-15).

Example 151: Rakowski, Plucking A, No. 13 (a), mm. 1-2

Example 152: Rakowski, Plucking A, No. 13 (a), m. 4, m. 13, mm. 14-15

_F This, No. 82 (2007)_ is an etude based on one note in a single register, specifically on F.

Rakowski the piece for Ken Ueno and Marilyn Nonken, and it was premiered by Marilyn

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259 Rakowski, _Etudes for Piano, Book II_, 13.
260 Ibid.
261 Ibid., 14.
Nonken in 2008. The idea of writing the piece came from one of Marilyn Nonken’s students who was looking for a research paper topic. Nonken asked if there was any piano music based on only one note, but the student found no piece focusing on one single pitch in one register. Rakowski said, “The idea of the piece was to make it sound fast, use lots of dynamic and color differentiation, and move rapidly from pulse to pulse via metric modulations.” From the beginning, he asked the pianist to depress the key silently and hold it down with sostenuto pedal to have the resonant sound of the overtone series. When the stem is marked with an x, the note should be stopped inside the piano. When the circle with a cross symbol is placed above the note, that means the note should be plucked.

Example 153: Rakowski, *F This, No. 82*, mm. 24-26

Talking while Playing

Out of all Rakowski’s etudes, *Not, No. 74* (2006) is the longest one. It is twenty-three pages long and lasts seven and a half minutes. Rakowski composed the etude for Adam Marks, a doctoral candidate at New York University. Marks premiered the work in 2007 in a recital in Paris sponsored by the Concours international de piano d’Orléans (France). Marks was working on his dissertation called *The Vocalizing Pianist* and suggested that Rakowski write a piece for the medium. The piece is based on a Rick Moody’s minimalist poem, *Not*. The text is simply

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“Not happy with it, not lying down for it.” Rakowski suggested the performer use a microphone and act out the text instead of just reading it. Rakowski said, “I wrote the piece as a kind of absurdist monodrama over a piano part that is by turns agitated and serene.”

Example 154: Rakowski, *Not, No. 74*, mm. 1-3

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**Playing Piano and Another Instrument**

Rakowski composed *Chase, No. 71* (2006) at the MacDowell Colony for pianist Donald Berman to perform on both piano and celesta. Berman premiered the work in 2007. The piece starts in unison sixteenth notes, but at m. 5, Rakowski adds one extra sixteenth note in the right hand, disrupting the unison by one-sixteenth note and creating a constant chase between hands.

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264 Rakowski, *The “other” etudes*, 17.
Besides managing to play two instruments at the same time, another challenge of the piece happens in mm. 19-22. A short passage is played solely on the piano but soon shifts back to both celesta and piano, requiring the performer to make a quick change between instruments.
Toyed Together, No. 88 (2008) is a work for toy piano and piano. Rakowski asks the performer to place the toy piano on the right side of the piano and play the piano with the left hand. This piece is reminiscent of his earlier etude Chase, No. 71, another work played on two different keyboard instruments. The piece begins in unison sixteenth notes followed by a short, abrupt passage at m. 11 where both hands play slower moving chords on the piano.

Example 157: Rakowski, Toyed Together, No. 88, mm. 9-11

With alternation between the two instruments, the etude sounds like what the title suggests, a conversation between the piano and toy piano.

You Blew It, No. 92 (2009) is an etude for melodica and piano. The idea and the title come from an organist, Alexander Lane, who wrote a handwritten letter plus an email to Rakowski full of weird suggestions. You Blew It was the result of one of his suggestions. The piece begins, like many of Rakowski’s etudes, in “unisons breaking into counterpoint and into harmony, and coming back together.” This piece challenges the player with difficult parts for both instruments. Rakowski notates the left hand on a grand staff, creating what could be an

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269 Rakowski, *The “other” etudes*, 23.
270 Ibid.
etude for left hand alone. While the left hand plays on the piano, the right hand plays the melodica on the performer’s lap. To make the etude even harder, Rakowski writes a melodica part that requires fast tonguing technique and good breath support. The skills needed to play this part are foreign to most pianists.

Example 158: Rakowski, *You Blew It*, No. 92, mm. 69-71

![Example 158: Rakowski, *You Blew It*, No. 92, mm. 69-71](image)

Different Ways of Playing Piano/Choreography of Hand/Body Position

Use of Fists:

*Fists of Fury* came from a program title George Steel gave to one of Marilyn Nonken’s recitals at Miller Theater in New York. It was a celebration concert for Milton Babbitt, in which she programmed two of his works and works from his students, David Rakowski, Martin Butler and Jeff Nichols. *The New York Times* reviewer praised Nonken’s playing but hated the concert title. “The urge to give concerts catchy titles should be reconsidered before it becomes too much of a nuisance.”

Fists of Fury, No. 25 (1999) highlights one of the most bizarre extended

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techniques used in Rakowski’s etudes, using the fists to play notated pitches. Rakowski asked the pianist to play with fists, but provided another title, *Fra Diavolo*, if one would like to play without fists, as Nonken opted to do. In the author’s opinion, the piece works best when performed with the fists because the visual and physical aspects of using one’s fist are a crucial element in achieving the ferocity this piece demands. When writing the piece, Rakowski wanted to have both hands playing with fists at the same time at some point in the piece. This occurs in m. 68.

Example 159: Rakowski, *Fists of Fury*, No. 25, mm. 68-69

He knew that people might identify him as a “gimmick composer” by using the fists to play. This did not bother him in the least. The piece is in three-part form, opening and ending with a rhythmic pattern of 3-2-3 grouping. The middle section uses left-hand fist clusters as a pedal point along with right-hand sixteenth notes ascending from the lowest register of the keyboard. As in many of his etudes, Rakowski quotes other composers’ works in *Fists of Fury*. Here he uses material from the finale of Beethoven’s *Symphony No. 9* in a different key (E-flat-E-flat-D-B-flat-C-C-B-flat-G-A-flat-A-flat-G-E-flat-C-C-B-flat). The two main challenges in this etude

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275 David Rakowski, interview by I-Chen Yeh, Ipod recording, Maynard, MA, March 9, 2010.
are keeping the sixteenth notes even with alternating hands and shifting quickly from fingers to fists, while playing the notated pitches. The angle of the fist changes depending on which combination of pitches are used. There are four ways of placing the fists: straight (m. 7), angle to the right (m. 17-18), angle to the left (m. 11) and using the tip of the fist (m. 13).

Example 160: Rakowski, *Fists of Fury*, No. 25, m. 7

Example 161: Rakowski, *Fists of Fury*, No. 25, mm. 17-18

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277 Ibid., 25.
Use of Nose:

*Schnozzage, No. 22* (1999) is an etude for the nose. The pianist must play phrases with the nose in the middle register of the keyboard while the hands play material at opposite extremes of the keyboard.

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278 Ibid., 24.
279 Ibid.
The piece alternates between the “tuttis” with the nose and the solo passages without the nose. The idea of the piece comes from a famous story about Mozart. He played a piano sonata that ends in five octaves Cs for Haydn, playing the fifth C with his nose. While this is certainly a myth, Rakowski found the story intriguing, and thought that using the nose to play the piano could be a good teaching tool. He said, “I also use my nose to demonstrate the pedal point in the middle voice when I teach tonal harmony: I play the bass and melody of the K. 331 sonata with my hands, and the tenor voice (repeated Es) with my nose. It usually gets the point across.”

Use of Flattened Fingers and Palm:

Palm de Terre, No. 69 (2006) uses an extended technique that asks the performer to play white-key clusters with the palm of the hand and black-key clusters with flattened fingers.

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280 Ibid., 9.
Since everyone’s hand size is different, Rakowski allows some leeway in playing clusters and did not demand clusters to occur between exact pitches. Unlike the stereotype of loud cluster music, this etude is soft, slow and beautiful.

**Hitting and Knocking:**

One of Rakowski’s composer friends, Harold Meltzer, gave him an idea for writing a knocking and hitting the piano etude while sitting at a dinner table. The etude, called *Knocksville, No. 94* (2010), is a piece without any actual tune, harmony or counterpoint, using only percussive sounds produced from using different methods of striking the body of the piano. According to Rakowski, in order to write a piece like this he had to videotape himself “knocking the grand pianos in various places, with various pedaling.” The example shows how specific his notation is for this etude.

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Example 166: Rakowski, *Knockville, No. 94*²⁸⁴

The score itself resembles a non-pitched percussion score rather than a piano score.

**Register Shift:**

*No Stranger To Our Planet, No. 50* (2002) is another swing-like etude. Throughout the piece, one can hear the repeated rhythmic pattern of eighth note to sixteenth note in a triplet style until mm. 56-57 where Rakowski superimposes a duple feel over the triple material, destroying the sense of regular swing pulse.

![Graphic representation of musical notation](image)

Example 167: Rakowski, *No Stranger To Our Planet, No. 50, mm. 55-57*²⁸⁵

According to Rakowski, “The undermining of the rhythm in this fashion together with a registral descent and diminuendo in mm. 47-48 are supposed to be funny and remind one of the way Milton Babbitt talks to the very end of his breaths, often ending sentences in a muttering way.”²⁸⁶

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²⁸⁵ Rakowski, *Etudes for Piano, Book V*, 64.
Alternating Hands:

After hearing Lisa Moore play Mario Davidovski’s Synchronisms, No. 6, Rakowski thought, “The speed (and altitude) of her hands at the two-hand tremolo of the climax looked wild.”

Mano À Mano, No. 6 (1995) was born. This is an etude for alternating hands playing on single notes, dyads and chords. Rakowski composed it at the MacDowell Colony for Lisa Moore, and Sandra Sprecher premiered it in the same year. Rakowski gives the motive of the dedicatee’s name in pitches on the first page of the score and throughout the piece, showing its original form, augmentation, and partial motives.

Example 168: Rakowski, Mano À Mano, No. 6

Example 169: Rakowski, Mano À Mano, No. 6, mm. 24-25

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286 Rakowski, The “other” etudes, 11.
287 Ibid., 4.
288 Rakowski, Etudes for Piano, Book I, 53.
289 Ibid., 55.
Unlike *Mano a Mano, No. 6*, which is an etude on regular hand alternation between single notes. *Mano War, No. 99* (2010) is an etude on irregular hand alternation with the focus on chords.

![Example of Rakowski, Mano War, No. 99, mm. 1-2](image)

Example 170: Rakowski, *Mano War, No. 99*, mm. 1-2

According to Rakowski, Geoffrey Burleson called this piece “a great piano piece, and a great conga piece, too.”

*Crossing Hands:*

*Martler, No. 14* (1997) is an etude for crossing hands. Marilyn Nonken premiered it in the same year. In this piece, hints of *Smoke on the Water* by Deep Purple can be heard in mm. 80-90.

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Example 171: Rakowski, *Martler, No. 14*, mm. 80-85\textsuperscript{292}

Since this is a hand-crossing etude, “the piece is really as much about the choreography of the hands as it is about the notes; the piece *looks* at least as good as it sounds.”\textsuperscript{293}

\textsuperscript{292} Rakowski, *Etudes for Piano, Book II*, 29.

\textsuperscript{293} Rakowski, “*Unmanifesto and Narrative*”, 2.
**GENRES**

*Stride*

*Strident, No. 40* (2002) is a stride etude suggested by Amy Briggs. Stride is “a solo jazz piano style that arose after 1910 in Harlem, NY…derived from ragtime, adapting ragtime’s left-hand patterns to form the distinctive ‘stride bass.’”294 This pattern always features the left-hand jumping from a low bass note up to a tenor chord in duple time. *Strident* begins with an opening section descending from high register to low in a jazzy-long-short rhythm.

![Example 172: Rakowski, *Strident, No. 40*, mm. 1-3](image)

The main section starts in m. 6 with a stride bass and swing-like melodic line in the right hand.

![Example 173: Rakowski, *Strident, No. 40*, mm. 7-9](image)


295 Rakowski, *Etudes for Piano, Book IV*, 64.
After writing the first genre etude for Amy Briggs, Geoffrey Burleson suggested that Rakowski write a bebop etude. *Bop It, No. 41* (2002) was composed for Burleson. Bop music is “a modernist movement in jazz developed in Harlem, New York during World War II by musicians such as Dizzy Gillespie, Thelonious Monk, Charlie Christian and Charlie Parker.”

The music is faster and more rhythmically and harmonically complex than earlier forms of jazz. Each phrase structure started with a syncopated chorale, which could be interpreted as Rakowski’s version of the “head.”

Example 174: Rakowski, *Bop It, No. 41*, mm. 1-4

This is followed by “amazingly technical stuff in the right hand that is too fast to swing,” which emulates the complex and hyper-expressive qualities of bebop improvisation.

### Tango

*Zipper Tango, No. 51* (2003) is a tango etude on grace notes composed for Amy Briggs. According to Rakowski, after listening to a bunch of tangos, he realized there are essentially two

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296 Ibid.
types: a “slow, sultry tango, and a faster, more headlong march-like tango.” Rakowski includes both in this etude. The opening and the ending represent the sultry, slow tango.

Example 175: Rakowski, *Zipper Tango, No. 51*, mm. 1-3

The middle section is in a faster tempo with frequent running sixteenth notes above the tango rhythm in the left hand.

Example 176: Rakowski, *Zipper Tango, No. 51*, mm. 52-53

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300 Ibid., 11.
302 Ibid., 5.
Rock and Roll

*Moody’s Blues, No. 52* (2003) was suggested by Rick Moody, who asked Rakowski to write an etude in “a rock and roll, Jerry Lee Lewis style with crazy chords.” This is exactly what Rakowski did in this etude for Rick Moody. Rock and roll is “an amalgam of American white country music and black rhythm and blues: the first definitive pop music of the 1960s and 70s.” In this etude, one hears constant repeated seventh chords in the right hand with punctuated octaves in the left hand.

Example 177: Rakowski, *Moody’s Blues, No. 52*, mm. 1-3

There are seven glissandos from high to low registers and one from low to high which, like the repeated seventh chords, resembles a rock and roll gesture. Rakowski gives the player some freedom by not specifying how many grace notes to play or whether to end with an octave, a hand cluster or a forearm cluster.

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303 Rakowski, *The “other” etudes*, 11.
Rick Moody suggested the concept of *Absofunkinlutely, No. 68* (2005) where he asked for an etude on funk rhythms. Adam Marks premiered the piece in 2005. Funk is “a musical style used in the 1950’s derived from rhythm and blues and soul, characterized by repeated rhythmic figures and a strong bass line…made popular by such performers as Stevie Wonder, Miles Davis, Herbie Hancock.”

Example 178: Rakowski, *Absofunkinlutely, No. 68*, mm. 1-2

To add an element of freedom, Rakowski wrote optional repeat for the first two sections. However, Rakowski did not totally give up control of the form. If one decides not to repeat the first two sections, then one must repeat the third section (mm. 23-48).

**Clave Rhythm**

Rakowski composed *Clave, No. 76* (2007), an etude on the clave rhythm, for Geoffrey Burleson, who premiered the piece in 2008. After *Bop It*, Geoffrey Burleson requested another genre etude from Rakowski to play at his recital, this time on the clave rhythm. Clave is “a

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rhythmic concept underpinning performances of salsa and related jazz styles.” Clave consists of “a two-bar pattern with two accentuations in one bar and three in the other,” as shown in the example below.

Example 179: Clave rhythm

The piece begins with a slow syncopated rhythm that disguises the pulse of the piece. The first five chords are in a rhythmic groove that repeats several times in different tempos.

Example 180: Rakowski, Clave, No. 76, mm. 1-3

310 Ibid.
311 Rakowski, Etudes for Piano, Book VIII, 55.
Gradually, Rakowski fills in the rests with triplets and running sixteenth notes, revealing the real pulse of the piece. The example below shows the combination of perpetual motion in the right hand with the left hand bass outlining the clave rhythm.

Example 181: Rakowski, Clave, No. 76, mm. 51-52

The slower opening material returns at the end.

Polka

Rakowski composed Polkritude, No. 93 (2009) for Jim Ricci. Rakowski wrote the etude after reading Jim Ricci’s blog about “how he was going to try to write a modernist polka.” A Polka is “a lively couple-dance in 2/4 time. It originated in Bohemia as a round-dance, and became one of the most popular ballroom dances of the nineteenth century.” The example below shows the basic polka rhythm.

312 Ibid., 59.
313 Rakowski, The “other” etudes, 23.
Although Rakowski calls his piece a polka etude, the rhythm does not simply stay in 2/4. From the beginning of the etude, the rhythm shifts from 2/4 to 5/8 and later to more complex meter changes like 2/4 to 5/8 to 3/4 to 9/16.

Example 183: Rakowski, *Polkritude, No. 93*, mm. 1-3

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315 Ibid.
Progressive Rock


The piece starts with two measures of material that repeats two to five times and could be played in octave transpositions if desired. The performer may also improvise flourishes between the notated material.

![Example 184: Rakowski, *Prog Springs Eternal, No. 86*, mm. 1-2](image)

This material changes slightly every two bars until it reaches perpetual motion in the middle section with octave doubling.

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Example 185: Rakowski, *Prog Springs Eternal, No. 86*, mm. 32-33\textsuperscript{319}

The opening material returns in m. 79.

\textsuperscript{319} Ibid., 38.
CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION

After twenty-two years of writing piano etudes, Rakowski composed the last etude with a twist. Although Rakowski has worked with numerous pianists, Adam Marks and Amy Briggs are the main promoters of his etudes. For many years Marks suggested that Rakowski write an etude for piano four-hands that he can play with Briggs. Rakowski set another challenge for himself—“writing two etudes that can be played separately or together with one of them as the Primo and the other the Secondo in a four-hands version.” After Rakowski described the form of the piece to his wife Beth, she suggested calling it “Two Great Tastes.” Taking Beth’s suggestion, Etude No. 100, Two Great Tastes (2010) consists of Etude No. 100a, Erdnußbutter (German for peanut butter) and Etude No. 100b, Cioccolato (Italian for chocolate), which can be performed separately or together. Etude No. 100a is an etude on chromatic scales using the upper half of the keyboard.

Example 186: Rakowski, Erdnußbutter, No. 100a, mm. 1-2

Etude No. 100b is an etude on crescendo and diminuendo repeated chords using the lower half of the keyboard.

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321 Rakowski, Etudes for Piano, Book X, 68.
Example 187: Rakowski, *Cioccolato, No. 100b*, mm. 1-2

In mm. 35-38, Rakowski cites the Reese’s Peanut Butter Cup television commercials by mixing material from one with the other; “you got peanut butter in my chocolate” and “you got chocolate in my peanut butter!” At this point, the etudes swap styles. *Etude No. 100a* adopts the repeated chords motive, while *Etude No. 100b* begins to feature chromatic runs. The next two examples shows the cross contamination of the peanut butter and the chocolate.

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322 Ibid., 75.
Example 188: Rakowski, *Erdnußbutter, No. 100a*, mm. 35-38\textsuperscript{323}

\textsuperscript{323} Ibid., 72.
Following the exchange of material, Rakowski alludes to two previous etudes in mm. 39-40. First, in *Etude No. 100a*, Rakowski quotes the opening harmonies from *Etude No. 74 Not*. The example below shows the opening chords from *Not* are being arpeggiated in the right hand.

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324 Ibid., 79.
325 Ibid., 73.
Etude No. 100b includes a direct quote from one of Rakowski’s favorite etudes, No. 37 Taking the Fifths.

Example 191: Rakowski, Cioccolato, No. 100b, mm. 39-40

In most of his etudes, Rakowski uses ABA form in which the beginning material returns at the end, either repeating the opening material or using partial motives from the A section. To end the piece properly in Rakowski’s style, the recapitulation begins at m. 43 with a direct quotation of the opening measures. The concluding gesture of No. 100b consists of the two lowest black keys played with the fist at pianissimo. According to Rakowski, the final interval in No. 100b is also the final gesture in E-Machines, No.1, but written in the opposite dynamic. These mirrored gestures provide a sense of symmetry across the entire completed set and an appropriate conclusion to Rakowski’s etudes.

Piano etudes tend to reflect the style of the time. Czerny’s etudes are short and concise finger exercises with simple chord progressions. The sole purpose is strengthening the fingers. While both Chopin and Liszt experiment with chromaticism, Chopin’s etudes are shorter, focusing on one particular aspect of technique. Liszt’s combine multiple technical problems with musical material that is reminiscent of his tone poems. Debussy, who was inspired by

326 Ibid., 80.
Rakowski’s etudes incorporate a mixture of genres from all styles. Like the historical composers of piano etudes, Rakowski covers all the basic techniques, including but not limited to various intervals, chords, scales, arpeggios, and different articulations. Like Chopin’s, most of Rakowski’s etudes emphasize a single technique. Similar to Chopin’s and Bolcom’s etudes, they are short and often played in sets. Similar to Debussy’s influences from different cultures and genres of music, Rakowski was influenced by the extra-classical musical styles of his time such as stride, bebop, funk and rock and roll. In Messiaen’s *Quatre etudes de rythme*, the etude is an exercise for the composer himself rather than the pianist. Rakowski also created compositional challenges for himself by setting certain parameters or restrictions such as finishing the etude in six days or not allowing himself to restart the composition. Liszt’s and Ligeti’s etudes often do not resemble an etude at all, functioning more as stand-alone concert pieces. Rakowski composed etudes in this manner as well. Etudes such as *Purple* and *Not!* Fit equally well as stand alone works as they do piano etudes.

Rakowski’s piano etudes are successful for several reasons. For Rakowski, the etudes are successful because they gave him a break from a larger work that he was composing at the time. He met his own challenges by completing each etude within six days and avoiding revision. Performers enjoy playing them because they are both challenging and pianistically written. Because of their abundance and diversity, they are also easy to program, either by themselves or in sets. Rakowski’s etudes are also audience friendly due to his use of accessible genres such as jazz and rock with syncopated rhythm and a strong sense of pulse. The fact that the pieces are short and often reflect Rakowski’s sense of humor also helps audiences to better appreciate the
music. Besides the benefits for the composer, the performer and the audience, this collection of etudes are also important as a pedagogical tool, introducing contemporary music to students. Rakowski composed at least one etude in each book that is at the level of an advanced high school student, providing teachers with new works that are contemporary and at an appropriate level for their students.

“And he lived happily ever after,” Rakowski stated after completing the collection of 100 etudes on June 16th, 2010. The reason Rakowski stopped at 100 was because he was “tired of seeing the collection described as ‘ever expanding.’” He wanted “the complete etudes’ to mean something.” Now, pianists are trying to schedule the first complete performance. When asked what is next for him and if he is feeling at all nostalgic about being finished with his etudes, he said, “I haven’t felt any need to write another etude, and have no nostalgia. I have taken my extra energy and started a blog.” During an interview in March 2010, Rakowski said that he does not feel comfortable writing a big piano work such as a sonata. When asked if he changed his feelings since the completion of the collection, he gave a humble answer. “Even after writing six hours of etudes, I am not sure I am ready to write a proper piano piece,” even though Piano Concerto No. 2 for Amy Briggs is already in progress. Rakowski comments that after he becomes tired of writing on his blog he would not “rule out starting another massive collection. Preludes?”

327 David Rakowski, e-mail message to I-Chen Yeh, August 9, 2010.
328 David Rakowski, e-mail message to I-Chen Yeh, August 9, 2010.
329 Ibid.
330 Ibid.
331 Ibid.
APPENDIX A. ETUDES FOR PIANO

Book I

_E-Machines, No. 1_ (1988): repeated-note etude
   For Martin Bulter
   Premiered by Lyn Reyna, Stanford University (1989)

_BAM!, No. 2_ (1991): etude on swirls of notes
   For Karen Harvey
   Premiered by Karen Harvey, Wang Center for the Performing Arts in Boston (1992)

_Nocturnal, No. 3_ (1991): etude on slow repeated notes
   For Lyn Reyna
   Premiered by Lyn Reyna, San Jose, California (1992)

_Trillage, No. 4_ (1993): trill etude
   For Alan Feinberg,
   Premiered by Steven Weigt, Brandeis University (1998)

_Figure Eight, No. 5_ (1994): octave etude
   Premiered by Geoffrey Burleson, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (1998)

_Manò à mano, No. 6_ (1995): etude on alternating hands
   For Lisa Moore
   Premiered by Sandra Sprecher, American Academy in Rome (1996)

_Les arbres embués, No. 7_ (1995): etude on melody and thick chords
   For Martin Butler
   Premiered by Marilyn Nonken, Krannert Center in Illinois (1997)

_Close Enough for Jazz, No. 8_ (1995): ostinato etude
   For Sandra Sprecher
   Premiered by Sandra Sprecher, American Academy in Rome (1996)

_Pollici e mignoli (or, The Virus That Ate New York), No. 9_ (1995): etude for thumbs and pinkies only
   For Sandra Sprecher

_Corrente, No. 10_ (1996): etude on left-hand running notes
   Premiered by Marilyn Nonken, Krannert Center in Illinois (1997)

Book II

_Touch Typing, No. 11_ (1996): etude for index fingers only
   Premiered by Amy Briggs, Barnett Foundation (2002)
Northpaw, No. 12 (1996): right-hand etude
   For Lyn Reyna and Barbara Barclay
   Premiered by Steven Weigt, Brandeis University (1998)

   For Marilyn Nonken
   Premiered by Amy Briggs, Barnett Foundation (2002)

   For Amy Briggs
   Premiered by Amy Briggs, Eastern Carolina University (2002)

Martler, No. 14 (1997): crossing hands etude
   Premiered by Marilyn Nonken, Krannert Center in Illinois (1997)

The Third, Man, No. 15 (1997): etude on thirds
   Premiered by Steven Weigt, Brandeis University (1998)

Ice Boogie, No. 16 (1997): etude on octave leaps
   For Steven Weigt
   Premiered by Steven Weigt, Brandeis University (1998)

Keine Kaskadenjagd mehr, No. 17 (1998): etude on falling thirds and fourths

Pitching from the Stretch, No. 18 (1998): etude on tenths
   Premiered by Geoffrey Burleson, Brandeis University (1999)

Secondary Dominance, No. 19 (1998): a curiously strong etude on seconds
   Premiered by Geoffrey Burleson, Brandeis University (2001)

Fourth of Habit, No. 20 (1998): etude on fourths
   For Geoffrey Burleson
   Premiered by Geoffrey Burleson, Brandeis University (1999)

Book III

Twelve-Step Program, No. 21 (1999): etude on chromatic scales and wedges
   For Marilyn Nonken
   Premiered by Marilyn Nonken, Ensemble 21 (2001)

Schnozzage, No. 22 (1999): etude for nose (or third hand)
   Premiered by Geoffrey Burleson, Brandeis University (2001)
You Dirty Rag, No.23 (1999): etude on melody in the left thumb
Premiered by Geoffrey Burleson, Brandeis University (2001)

Horned In, No.24 (1999): etude on horn fifths
For David Horne
Premiered by David Horne, Harvard University (1999)

Fists of Fury, No.25 (1999): etude for fists
For Marilyn Nonken
Premiered by Marilyn Nonken, Ensemble 21 (2001)

Once Bitten, No.26 (2000): etude on mordents
Premiered by Amy Briggs, Barnett Foundation (2002)

Halftone, No.27 (2000): Left-hand/Right-hand/Black-key/White-key etude
Premiered by Amy Briggs, Barnett Foundation (2002)

You’ve Got Scale, No.28 (2000): etude on scales and arpeggios
For Teresa McCollough
Premiered by Amy Briggs, Barnett Foundation (2002)

Roll Your Own, No.29 (2000): etude on rolled chords
For Jason Eckardt
Premiered by Marilyn Nonken, Ensemble 21 (2001)

A Gliss is Just a Gliss, No.30 (2000): etude on glissandi
Premiered by Amy Briggs, Barnett Foundation (2002)

Book IV

Usurpation, No.31 (2000): etude on a persistent slow trill
For Martin Boykan.
Premiered by Amy Briggs, Brandeis University (2003)

Boogie Ninths, No.32 (2000): etude on ninths

Sliding Scales, No.33 (2001): gonzo etude on scales
For Marilyn Nonken
Premiered by Marilyn Nonken, University of California Santa Cruz (2002)

Chorale Fantasy, No.34 (2001): slow etude on an embedded melody

Luceole, No.35 (2001): etude on rising seconds and thirds
For Amy Briggs
Premiered by Amy Briggs, Northwestern University (2001)
Purple, No.36 (2001): etude on a chord
   For Amy Briggs
   Premiered by Amy Briggs, Northwestern University (2001)

Taking the Fifths, No.37 (2002): etude on fifths
   Premiered by Amy Briggs, Kosciuszko Foundation (2002)

Silent But Deadly, No.38 (2002): pianissimo etude
   For Shehan B. Dissanayake.
   Premiered by Amy Briggs, Brandeis University (2003)

Sixth Appeal, No.39 (2002): etude on sixths
   Premiered by Amy Briggs, Kosciuszko Foundation (2002)

Strident, No.40 (2002): stride piano etude
   For Amy Briggs
   Premiered by Amy Briggs, Kosciuszko Foundation (2002)

Book V

Bop It, No.41 (2002): bop etude
   For Geoffrey Burleson
   Premiered by Amy Briggs, Brandeis University (2003)

Madam I'm Adam, No.42 (2002): little palindrome etude
   Premiered by Adam Marks, Manhattan School of Music (2003)

Wiggle Room, No.43 (2002): etude on fast notes moving in parallel
   Premiered by Amy Briggs, Brandeis University (2003)

Triaddled, No.44 (2002): etude on triads
   Premiered by Amy Briggs, Brandeis University (2003)

Pink Tab, No.45 (2002): accelerando-retenuto etude
   Premiered by Amy Briggs, Brandeis University (2003)

Durchraust die luft, No.46 (2002): etude on sevenths
   Premiered by Amy Briggs, Brandeis University (2003)

Fra Diabolis, No.47 (2002): etude on tritones
   Premiered by Amy Briggs, Brandeis University (2003)

What Half-Diminishes One (Half-Diminishes All), No.48 (2002): choral-etude on half-diminished seventh chords
   For Eric Chafe
   Premiered by Amy Briggs, Brandeis University (2003)
Saltimmano, No.49 (2002): finger-pedaling etude
   Premiered by Amy Briggs, Brandeis University (2003)

No Stranger to Our Planet, No.50 (2002): etude on register shifts
   Premiered by Amy Briggs, Brandeis University (2003)

Book VI

Zipper Tango, No.51 (2003): tango-etude on grace notes
   For Amy Briggs

Moody’s Blues, No.52 (2003): rock and roll etude on repeated chords
   For Rick Moody

Cell Division, No.53 (2003): treble etude on arpeggios (derived from cell phone sounds)
   Premiered by Augustus Arnone, Merkin Hall (2005)

Pedal to the Metal, No.54 (2003): pedaling etude
   For Rick Moody

   For Amy Osborn

Crazy Eights, No.56 (2003): fast octave/black-white key etude

Chord Shark, No.57 (2003): slow etude on thick chords
   For Corey Hamm
   Premiered by Corey Hamm, University of Minnesota (2005)

Wound Tight, No.58 (2003): fast chords etude
   For Corey Hamm
   Premiered by Corey Hamm, University of Minnesota (2005)

Zeccatella, No.59 (2003): staccato-legato etude
   For Amy Briggs
   Premiered by Geoffrey Burleson, University of Pittsburgh (2005)

Accents of Malice, No.60 (2003): accent etude
Book VII

*Ménage à droit, No.61* (2004): right hand etude
Premiered by Marilyn Nonken, San Francisco State University (2009)

*Name That Turn, No.62* (2004): etude on turns

*Killer B’s, No.63* (2004): etude on a pedal
For Danielle Ingram
Premiered by Danielle Ingram, Westminster Choir College (2005)

*A Third in the Hand, No.64* (2004): etude on arpeggiated thirds

*Rick’s Mood, No.65* (2002/4/5): etude on major thirds
For Amy Briggs
Premiered by Amy Briggs, Barnett Foundation (2007)

*Less Is, No.66* (2005): impatient minimalist etude on chord-building
For Rick Moody

*Ain’t Got No Right, No.67* (2005): left hand etude
For Corey Hamm
Premiered by Corey Hamm, University of Minnesota (2005)

*Absofunkinlutely, No.68* (2005): funk etude
For Rick Moody, premiered by Adam Marks (2005)
Premiered by Adam Marks, Manhattan School of Music (2005)
Fondation André Chevillion-Yvonne Bonnaud Composition Prize, Concours international de piano d’Orléans (2006)

*Palm de Terre, No.69* (2006): etude on clusters

*Stutter Stab, No.70* (2006): etude on sharp dynamic contrasts

Book VIII

For Donald Berman
Premiered by Donald Berman, Dinosaur Annex Concert in Boston (2007)

*Dorian Blue, No.72* (2006): etude on two-hand flourishes (on an ancient Dorian melody)
For Donald Berman
Premiered by Donald Berman, Dinosaur Annex Concert in Boston (2007)
Heavy Hitter, No.73 (2006): fortissimo etude
   For Michael Kirkendoll

Not, No.74 (2006): talking pianist etude
   For Adam Marks
   Premiered by Adam Marks, Salle Cortot, France (2007)

Twilight, No.75 (2006): etude on melodic thirds

Clave, No.76 (2007): etude on the clave rhythm
   For Geoffrey Burleson
   Premiered by Geoffrey Burleson, East Carolina University (2008)

Ecco Eco, No.77 (2007): echo etude
   For Corey Hamm.

Upon Reflection, No.78 (2007): slow mirror etude
   For Michael Kirkendoll

Narcissitude, NO.79 (2007): fast mirror etude
   For Michael Kirkendoll

Fireworks, NO.80 (2007): arpeggio etude
   Premiered by Seunghee Lee, Brandeis University (2008)

Book IX

Kai’n Variation, No.81 (2007): etude-variation on scale fragments, on a theme by Kai
Schumacher
   For Kai Schumacher
   Premiered by Seunghee Lee, Brandeis University (2008)

F This, No.82 (2007): single note etude
   For Ken Ueno and Marilyn Nonken
   Premiered by Marilyn Nonken, San Francisco State University (2009)

M’Aidez, No.83 (2008): etude on escaping arpeggios
   For Nathanael May
   Premiered by Marilyn Nonken, San Francisco State University (2009)

What’s Hairpinning, No.84 (2008): etude on dynamic swells and simple polyrhythm

Diminishing Return, No.85 (2008): Etude on fading repeated notes
Prog Springs Eternal, No.86 (2008): prog rock etude
   For Rick Moody and Geoffrey Burleson,
   Premiered by Geoffrey Burleson, St. Thomas University, Canada (2009)

Berceuse, No.87 (2008): five-finger etude for piano, toy piano, or both
   For Rick Moody, Amy Osborn, and Hazel Jane

Toyped Together, No.88 (2008): etude with toy piano

This Means Warble, No.89 (2009): etude on two-note warbling figures

Solid Goldie, No.90 (2009): etude on G-C-H in search of a lullaby
   For Marilyn Nonken and Goddie Celeste
   Premiered by Marilyn Nonken, San Francisco State University (2009)

Book X

Whole Lotta Shakin’, No.91 (2009): etude on tremolos

You Blew It, No.92 (2009): etude with melodica
   For Geoffrey Burleson

Polkritude, No.93 (2009): polka etude
   For Jim Ricci

Knocksville, No.94 (2010): knocking and hitting the piano etude
   For Harold Meltzer

Flit, No.95 (2010): etude on uneven repeated notes and swirls
   For I-Chen Yeh

Double Cross, No.96 (2010): etude on cross-accents

Quietude, No.97 (2010): etude on dominant seventh chords
   For Augusta Read Thomas

Mosso, No.98 (2010): etude on fast arpeggios in both hands
   For Geoffrey Burleson

Mano War, No.99 (2010): etude on irregular hand alternation

Two Great Tastes, No.100 (2010): four-hands combo etude or two two-hand etudes, or both

Erdnüßbutter, No.100a (2010): etude on chromatic scales

Cioccolato, No.100b (2010): etude on crescendo/diminuendo repeated chords
   For Amy Briggs and Adam Marks
Bibliography


______. *Winged Contraption*. BMOP/Sound 1009, 2009. CD.

______. Interview by I-Chen Yeh. Live Interview with David Rakowski, 9 March 2010, Massachusetts.

______. “The ‘other’ etudes” [Informal program notes, unpublished], TD.

______. “Unmanifesto and Narrative” [Informal program notes, unpublished], TD.


