

CREATUDES

("cree-A-toods")

By Scott and Jimmy McKenzie

These etudes are deliberately written without tempos, dynamics, articulations, phrase markings, and other expressive elements. All of those are left up to the individual player.

Our intent is to give players as much freedom to interpret these etudes as possible. Many of these pieces imply traditional harmonic progressions and phrasing, or tend to favor slow or fast tempos. Others are much more open to interpretation. In every case, we highly encourage you to take these "bare bones" and make them their own!

Why we created the CREATUDES:

- They're a great way to keep making music during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- They encourage thoughtful and expressive music making that can be developed and shared under less-than-ideal circumstances.
- They are easily adaptable for traditional or hybrid learning environments.
- They encourage peer-review exercises and collaboration. They invite musicians to offer constructive criticism in encouraging ways and require them to defend their artistic decisions. Teachers may then assess both performers and reviewers.
- For young musicians who find composing a piece from scratch too daunting, CREATUDES provide a melodic headstart but give students maximum freedom to manipulate the other expressive elements of music. We hope musicians who enjoy molding the CREATUDES into their own creations will dive deeper and compose their own musical lines.
- They encourage fun making music!

Consider this example:

The image shows two staves of musical notation in 4/4 time, B-flat major. The first staff contains a melodic line starting with a quarter note G4, followed by an eighth-note pair (A4, B4), and then a series of eighth notes (C5, D5, E5, F5, G5, A5, B5, C6). The second staff continues the melody with eighth notes (D5, E5, F5, G5, A5, B5, C6), followed by a quarter note G5, a half note F5, and a whole note E5.

How might you interpret this without even a tempo marking? Here are couple ways you could try:

The image shows two interpretations of the musical piece. The first interpretation is marked "Vivace" and starts with a dynamic marking of *f*. It includes accents (>) and sforzando markings (*sfz*) on several notes. The second interpretation is marked "Andante" with a tempo marking of a quarter note equal to 80 (♩ = 80) and starts with a dynamic marking of *p*. It includes a "rit. al fine" marking and a "ten." (tension) marking on the final notes.

These are only two suggestions. You could steal ideas from either, combine those with your own preferences, and make this music your own.

Suggestions for teachers:

- Have students choose etudes that they find interesting and want to tinker with.
- Students may sightread etudes with complete freedom, performing the music in an improvisatory way, or they may take hours or days to thoughtfully and methodically work through them.
- Encourage students to mark up the music with dynamics, articulations, tempo markings, etc. (in pencil so they can try it another way later!)
- Ensure students do not “compare notes” with others who have selected the same etude to prevent them from influencing someone else’s musical decisions. Only after some time alone with an etude should students share with each other. It’s our hope that students will be surprised at how differently another musician might interpret an etude. Those differences should provide the spark for new ideas and creative solutions.
- Challenge students to prepare and play the same etude in a completely different way. For example, if the musician takes a slow tempo, see if it works at a faster one. If a student writes a crescendo, challenge them to try a diminuendo. Such changes might have second-order effects for students to work through.
- If you have the opportunity, compare and discuss how different instruments interpret the same etude and if an instrument's timbre or other characteristics shape how a piece could be played.
- Encourage students to take risks. Don't accept that everything be played at a moderate tempo at a medium dynamic. Find opportunities to go for extreme dynamics or bold articulations if they seem appropriate. There are no wrong answers!
- After encouraging risk taking, challenge students to defend their choices. If a passage is repeated and the student plays it the same way both times, ask them if changing something isn’t more interesting the second time around.
- Students may choose to play a passage a certain way because of expressive reasons, but they might also make decisions based on their technical capabilities. Take advantage of these moments to encourage your students to “woodshed” in the practice room and overcome those limitations. Don’t let a little thing like finger-tongue coordination get in the way of how a piece should really be played!

We sincerely hope this music will be useful and instructive for students and teachers. Have fun with it, and be creative!

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How many different articulation patterns can you think of for the measures with repeated eighth notes?

#1

Musical notation for exercise #1, consisting of two staves. The first staff is in 4/4 time and contains four measures of eighth notes: two measures of eighth notes with stems up, and two measures of eighth notes with stems down. The second staff is in 3/4 time and contains four measures of eighth notes: two measures of eighth notes with stems up, and two measures of eighth notes with stems down. The key signature is one flat (Bb).

This etude repeats the same rhythmic pattern throughout, yet it has a natural arc. What could you do to shape the phrasing?

#2

Musical notation for exercise #2, consisting of three staves. The first staff is in 2/4 time and contains four measures of eighth notes: two measures of eighth notes with stems up, and two measures of eighth notes with stems down. The second and third staves continue the pattern with eighth notes, maintaining the same rhythmic structure. The key signature is one flat (Bb).

How might the way the eighth notes with larger intervals be further enhanced or emphasized?

#3

Musical notation for exercise #3, consisting of three staves. The first staff is in 4/4 time and contains four measures of eighth notes with larger intervals: two measures of eighth notes with stems up, and two measures of eighth notes with stems down. The second and third staves continue the pattern with eighth notes, maintaining the same rhythmic structure. The key signature is one flat (Bb).