



Striking the right keynote!

John Lenehan trawls the repertoire for some lesser-known gems

John Lenehan is one of Britain's most experienced, versatile and sought after musicians. He has a varied solo performing career and regularly accompanies instrumentalists including Nigel Kennedy, Tasmin Little and Julian Lloyd Webber. His unusually wide repertoire ranges from Dowland to Maxwell Davies and covers most style of music. With his astonishingly varied experience, John seemed the ideal person to trawl the repertoire and hunt down some gems for Faber Music's new piano series **Keynotes**.

When Faber Music asked me if I would like to choose and edit the pieces for their new collection of piano repertoire books I was thrilled. What an opportunity! The whole experience is one that I have enjoyed immensely over the two years or so that the series has taken to compile. Wherever my concert schedule has taken me (sometimes to distant lands such as Kazakhstan or Bulgaria) I have disappeared for a few hours to scour the local libraries or music shops for hidden treasures. An even better hunting ground proved to be second-hand bookshops and I would often return to concert venues with a pile of dusty old grade 2 sheets under my arm, much to the amusement of my colleagues.

Try as I might, the choice is an impossible one really and all teachers will know that, apart from a few pieces that seem to find favour with every pupil, the "hits" are unpredictable. They vary from one student to another often in a totally unexpected way. So it was important to make each book as varied as possible, hoping that there will be plenty of interest for everyone. Although I have attempted to avoid obvious and much repeated material there are, of course, a number of well-known pieces within these books (I had to keep reminding myself that even the most familiar Bach, Debussy and Beethoven is going to be a new discovery for many young players!). Occasionally I came across some works that have never (or only briefly) been in print before. These include a little prelude by Bizet, miniatures by Beethoven and Chopin (yes there really are still some to be discovered) and a lovely waltz by Oscar Merikanto. Merikanto is a name unfamiliar to many (me too!) but, in Finland his homeland, I am told that his work is much played and as well known as that of Sibelius.

There is plenty of contemporary music in all sorts of styles from the likes of Julian Anderson, Errolyn Wallen and Peter Sculthorpe as well as Bartók, Shostakovich and Schoenberg. Each book also contains a slightly quirky choice. In book 1 it's a piece called "Ghost in the attic" which is played by the right hand while the left holds down bass notes silently producing ghostly harmonics.

In the second it is "Burglar Music", which was originally written as a silent film cue and book 3 has a Haydn Minuet which sounds the same backwards and forwards. The final book contains a movement from a sonata based on themes from Mozart's "Magic Flute" written by Moritz Vogel.

Leo Ornstein was one of those extraordinary people who lived across three centuries (1893 – 2002). He also wrote some extraordinarily complex piano music (brilliantly recorded on Hyperion by Marc-Andre Hamelin) so it may be a surprise to see his name feature in the first two books. The pieces included come from his "piano sketch books" a collection written for his own children to play.

An engagement to play the solo piano part in a recent feature film was the circumstance in which I met Icelandic composer Hjalmarr Ragnarsson. So captivated was I with his music that I asked him there and then if he would allow his "at play in the wind" to be included in this series. Happily he said yes and the piece appears exactly as it is heard in the film "Kaldaljos".

Another feature of these books grew out of my own teaching experiences. Wanting to encourage pupils to experiment with improvising, I began to write little "identikit" pieces as I called them, where the materials offered can be assembled in very many ways. In each of these books I have provided the structure of a piece and the left-hand part. A selection of notes to choose from for the right hand to play and a possible rhythm to follow are provided and the students should be encouraged to play the piece differently each time!

As the project nears its end I am left juggling the last few pieces and making the final choices. It is going to be difficult getting out of the habit of looking for suitable repertoire and I am already regretting that a trip to South America later this year is too late to include any interesting finds that might turn up... oh well, maybe next time!



Keynotes

Keynotes Grades 1–2 **New**

Anderson, JS Bach, Beethoven, Blow, Daquin, Franck, Goedicke, Haydn, Kabalevsky, Lenehan, Milne, Neeffe, Ornstein, Pasquini, Rowley, Schumann, Tchaikovsky, Telemann.

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Keynotes Grades 3–4 **New**

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Albéniz, Arne, JS Bach, Beethoven, Chopin, Couperin, Debussy, Merikanto, Milne, Mozart, Ragnarsson, Satie, Schoenberg, Schubert, Schumann and Vine.

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