

# Poème-Étude

## pour Pianiste Récitant

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# Étude-Poème

## pour Pianiste Récitant

### Programme note

So, here's the idea; a piano étude where the pianist speaks to the audience, playing along with what she is saying. This idea has several things going for it, for one, hopefully nobody else will have hit on the selfsame thing. Also... here's what it says in the Oxford Companion to Music, under 'étude';

'The essence of the genre is revealed in the title of one of J. B. Cramer's sets, "Dulce et utile" ("sweet and useful"), as distinct from an 'exercise' which is merely useful.'

And that seems to me to be right, an étude should be entertaining as well as a technical challenge. Big drawback, of course, is that far from being original it's really far too much like that Tom Johnson piece 'Failing: A Very Difficult Piece For String Bass'. Oh well. Too bad.

### Performance instructions

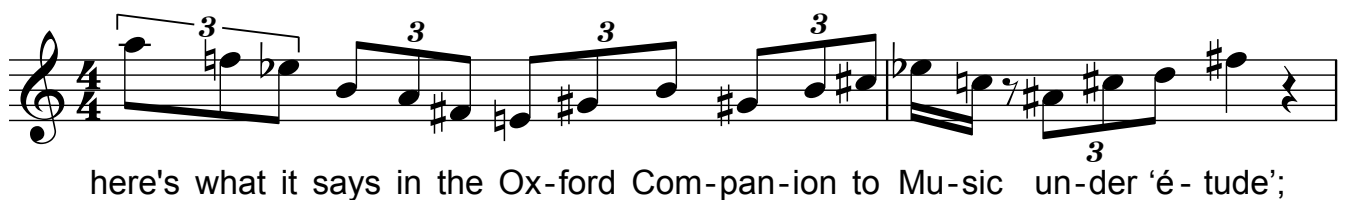
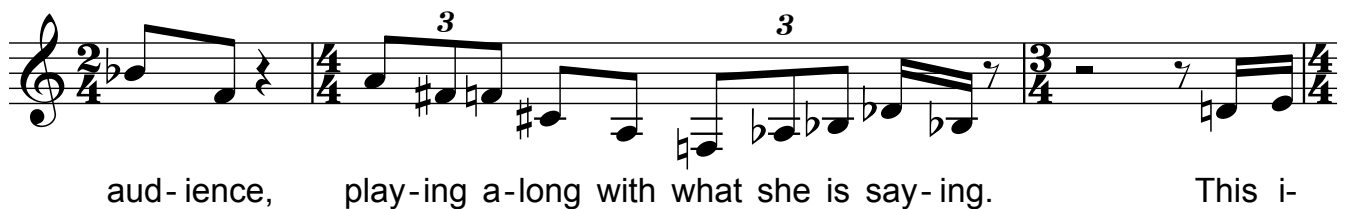
The essential idea of the piece is as stated, that the pianist addresses the audience, whilst accompanying his or her spoken words homorhythmically on the piano. To accomplish this, the pianist will need to turn through ninety degrees to face the front, and play the piano with the left hand only; possibly standing up.

By far the most important element in the performance of this piece is the spoken text, not the musical accompaniment. It may be that the pianist will have to undertake a great deal of study and practice in learning how to project the voice, perhaps even vocal coaching. The musical material is quite subsidiary; almost all the pitches and rhythms notated in the score may be taken as being in the nature of suggestions, and if a few of the notes come out wrong in performance, very little damage will be done to the piece. On the other hand, an inaudible text will completely ruin it.

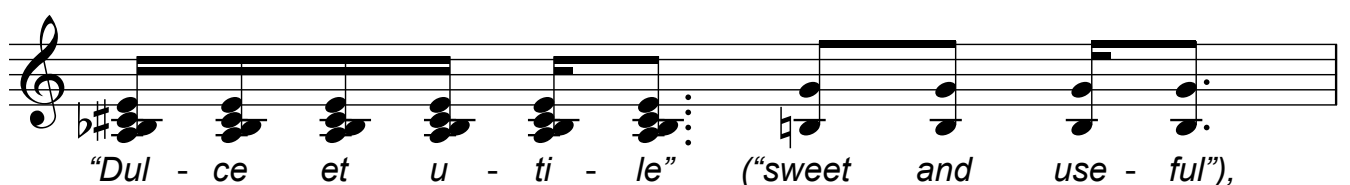
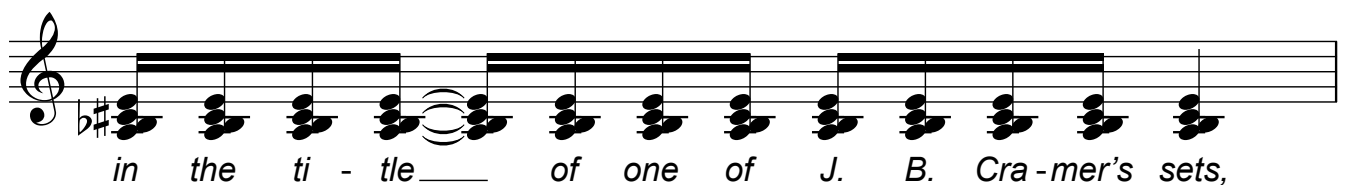
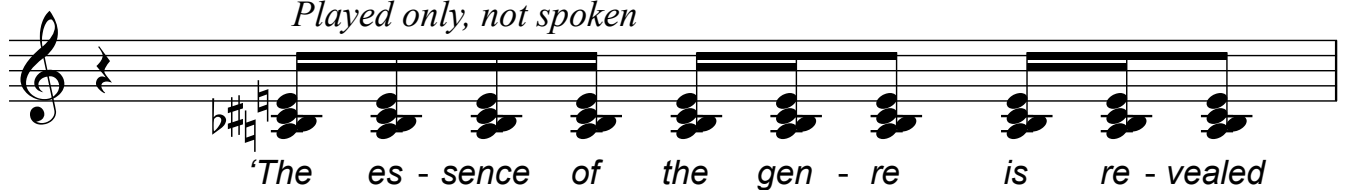
Specific points to note;

- The passage in italics starting '*The essence of the genre...*' is not spoken, only played. (This will not be entirely puzzling to the audience, on the assumption that they have seen the programme note beforehand!)
- The deliberate pauses marked after 'Does the pianist have anything to say?' and 'Does the piano have anything to say?' are... performative moments. In other words, we are waiting there to see if anything will happen, but nothing does. There might be scope for some subtle deadpan comedy here, but if in doubt just do nothing with great intensity and allow the audience to decide if it is funny or deeply philosophical.
- 'Or just the pitches' - five random notes anywhere across the whole range of the instrument, from low to high
- 'Pentameeters' is spelled incorrectly to indicate an elaborate joke; the preceding lines have indeed been iambic pentameters which, however, come unstuck on the final word; so the accent falls on the third syllable instead of the second.
- The three languages used near the end are Bahasa Indonesia, French and Afrikaans; none of these have been checked with native speakers and are possibly incorrect. The pianist is encouraged to substitute at this point a phrase or phrases of their own in any other language which they might happen to speak, adapting the musical accompaniment as needed.
- The ending is a joke, the musical elaboration of which is left to the performer.

♩ = 90



*Played only, not spoken*



as dis-tinct from an ex-er-cise which is mere-ly use - ful.' And

that seems to me to be right, an é-tude should be en-ter-tain ing as

well as a tech-ni-cal chal-lenge. What do you think?

En-ter-tain-ing? In-trigu-ing? Diff(e)-rent at a - ny rate.

With-out doubt an ex-er-cise in the ad-mit-ted-ly per-haps ra-ther

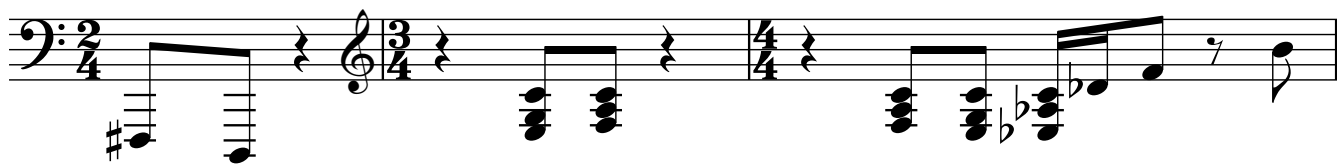
rare - ly called up - pon tech-nique of play-ing and speak-ing at the

same time! Big draw-back of course, is, that

far from being o - ri - gi - nal it's real - ly far too



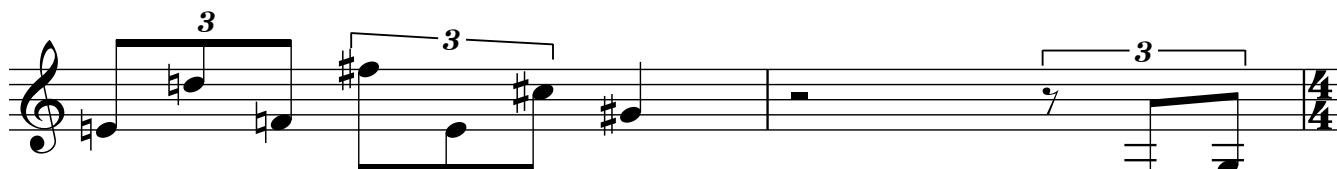
much like that Tom John-son piece 'Fail- ing: A Ve-ry Dif-fi-cult Piece For



String Bass' Oh well. Too bad. Act-u- ally, there's



more to think a - bout here. Like; whose voice is this?



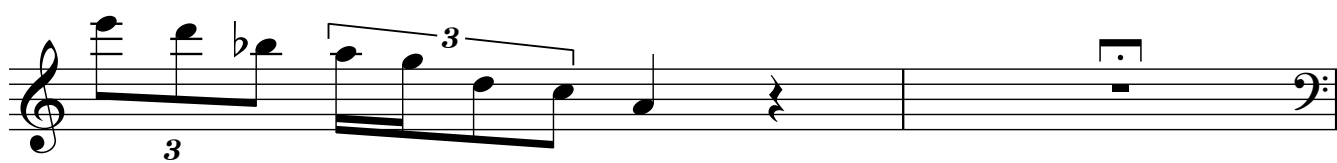
Who is the 'I' in the piece?

Does the



pi - a-nist have a - ny-thing to say?

Does the



pia - no have a - ny-thing to say?



Who here in the au-dience has been try-ing to ig-nore the words and just



lis - ten to the quote-un-quote 'mu - sic',

hmm?\_\_\_\_

What do you think, is it im-pro-vised? Or no - ta- ted? Is the

rhy- thm no-ta- ted, the pit- ches? It doe- sn't real- ly

just

or

sound im- pro- vided, so, how were the notes cho- sen? Ar - bit -

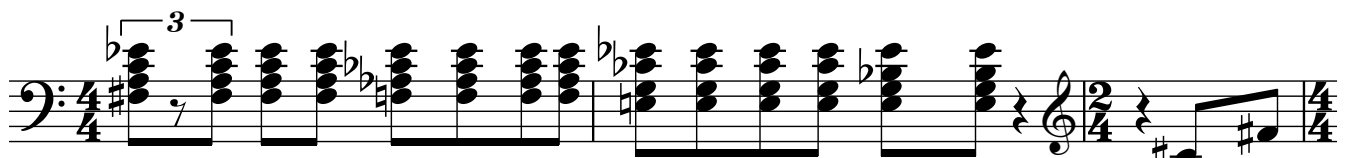
ra - ri - ly? Per- haps by some for- mal de- vice, some game or

al- go- ri- thm based on the words them- selves? What do you think?

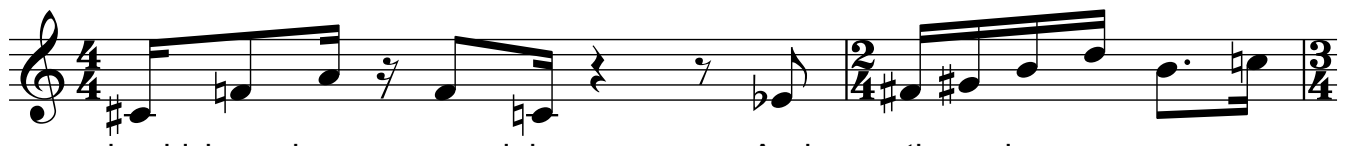
Well, what - ev- er an é- tude might be, it should be short, and we're

kind of out of time now. 'There's


lots of oth - er things we could have done, like



sneak-ing in quo - ta-tions or i - am-bic pen-ta-mee- ters?!' And there



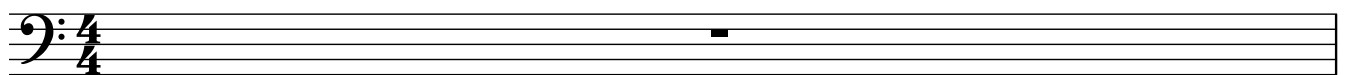
should have been more jokes. And oth-er lan-gua-ges a -



part from Eng-lish Ba - ha-sa-ba-ha-sa yang la - in.

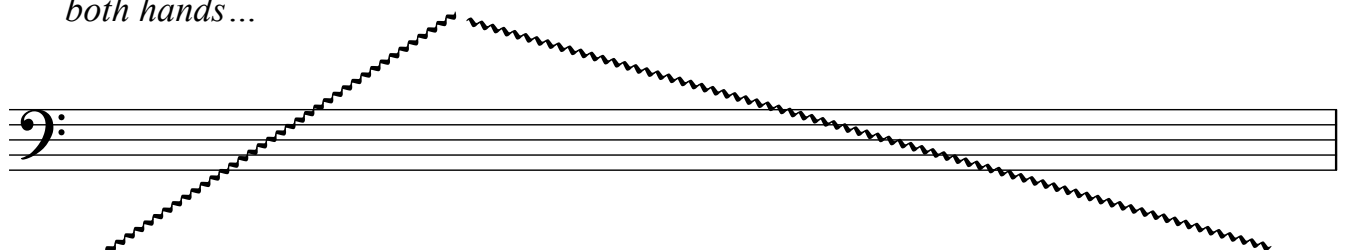


Plu-si-ers langues, meer ta- le. But def(in)-it - ly more jokes.

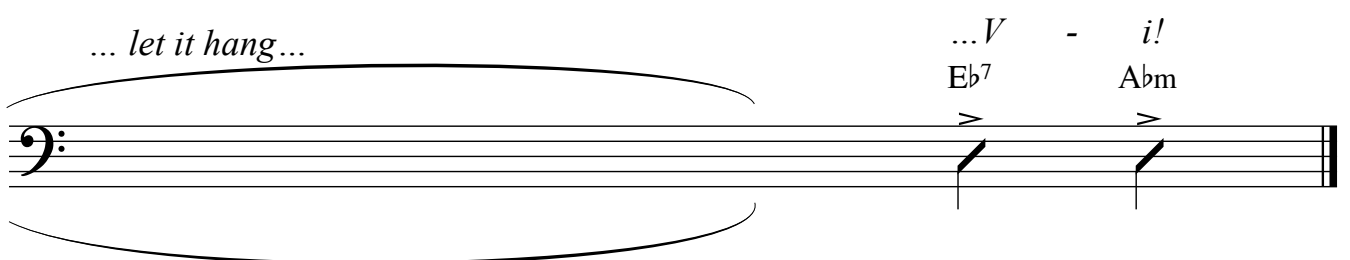


What do you get when you throw a piano down a mineshaft?

*Turn to piano; improvise virtuosic Ab minor arpeggio over full range of instrument, both hands...*



... let it hang...



...V - i!  
Eb<sup>7</sup> Abm