

# Three Etudes

**Composer:** Avner Dorman  
**Year:** 2012  
**Duration:** 7 min  
**Orchestration:** pf  
**Publisher:** G Schirmer Inc  
**Commission:** Commissioned by the New York International Piano Competition.

## Program Note

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Three Etudes (2006) I wrote Three Etudes in 2006 for the New York International Piano Competition. At the time, I was in my second year of teaching composition and post-tonal theory, and I often found myself short on time to compose. I also wanted to gain more insight into how my students experienced the assignments I gave them. So I decided to “do the homework” myself. Each of these etudes grew out of an assignment from that year, which is why they each have such a distinct structure and sound world. The first etude, Snakes and Ladders, is built from perpetual motion in groups of three chromatic notes, with accents to make the groupings clear for the listener. Against this motion, the chordal element follows the tresillo rhythm (3+3+2) and a harmonic progression inspired by figured bass. The piece is also a palindrome, reflecting the back-and-forth nature of the children’s game from which it takes its title. Its character combines mathematical clarity with playful unpredictability, drawing on influences from Ligeti, Afro-Cuban music, and Hindemith’s Ludus Tonalis. The second etude is written as a funeral march. It explores quartal harmonies (built on fourths and fifths) and is loosely based on the bass line of Chopin’s E-flat minor Etude, Op. 10, No. 6. The slow, heavy tread of the music creates a sense of solemnity, while the sparse pedaling indications leave performers the freedom to shape the resonance according to their own sound and instrument. The third etude was inspired during a residency with the Stockton Symphony, while I was staying in a house next to an artificial canal. The way the sun sparkled on the water was magical: irregular yet balanced, endlessly fascinating. The alternating meters of 3-4-5-4 create a sense of asymmetry that still feels natural, like ripples on water. With its flowing pedal and

shimmering textures, the music moves from serene beauty to more impassioned inner reflections, mirroring the way a quiet moment in nature can stir powerful emotions. Together, the three etudes connect the rigor of compositional study with vivid emotional expression. What began as classroom experiments became works that test pianistic skill while opening new landscapes for both performer and listener.

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Avner Dorman

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