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William Bolcom's "Twelve New Etudes for Piano".

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[Henry Scott Jones, Louisiana State University and Agricultural & Mechanical College](#)

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Abstract

This study examines William Bolcom's Twelve New Etudes for Piano as a contribution to the evolution of the concert etude for piano solo, describing them mainly from the point of view of technical requirements. Chapter One charts the course of the etude for piano solo in the twentieth century. Chapter Two looks at Bolcom's Etudes in detail, addressing the following: style and format, passage-work, leaps, chords, trills and tremolos, counterpoint, cross-rhythms, stretches, dynamics and tone, pedaling, and new techniques. In the course of the description, several areas are pointed out in which Bolcom has done something new or unusual within the genre, namely: the use of pop styles (especially those other than ragtime), programmatic titles, leaps as the technical focus of an etude, "split" chords, counterpoint combined with cross-rhythms, two completely new techniques (the lateral tremolo and the forearm glissando), and perhaps most importantly, emphasis on dynamics, timbre, and pedaling. It is these last emphases, together with the Etudes' humor and accessibility, that set these pieces apart and make them an important contribution to the modern piano repertoire. Chapter Three is a brief summary of the study, concluding that Bolcom's Twelve New Etudes are innovative in many ways, representing, along with his earlier set (Twelve Etudes for Piano, 1966), a significant contribution to the genre.

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