

## A cornucopia of New Year publications has kept **John York** busy

The New Year brought a huge pile of new publications so I must very carefully look for things of value. First to catch my eye with its brilliant title is the publication (from **Cadenza Music**, price undisclosed so go to [www.cadenza-music.com](http://www.cadenza-music.com)) of two volumes of **One Minute Wonders**, offering really new music, commissioned and collected by **Clive Williamson** from an impressive line-up of 36 British composers, some famous, some young and still unknown. Comparison with the various Associated Board *Spectrum* volumes is inevitable and several composers feature in both sets, as you'd expect. There has been no compromise in any composer's individual style; each piece is perfectly formed and distinct. I found much to enjoy here, none of it easy (at least grade 7 standard and many pieces very complex indeed, some of them quite abstruse) – all genuinely valuable and resourceful – and short! A CD of all the pieces, played by the compiler, adds another layer of inspiration, insight and information.

I turn next to what is certainly the most beautiful book this month, perhaps this year. **Easy Piano Classics** (from **Usborne** and extraordinarily good value at £12.99) has richly decorated hard covers and multi-coloured, delightfully illustrated pages containing a wide range of simply arranged melodies from the world's most famous classics, each enhanced by a brief contextual paragraph. Bearing in mind my oft-repeated appeal, when faced with such arrangements, for 'real' children's repertoire rather than thinned out famous bits, I must nonetheless congratulate **Anthony Marks** (the careful and skillful selector, arranger and editor), **Candice Whatmore** (the designer and illustrator), music-setter **Andrew Jones** and a great editorial team on their collective achievement in bringing out this book. It looks, feels and plays so well and carries a price which might lead you to expect something much plainer, whereas this collection is simply the best I've ever seen of its type.

It was interesting to examine my own reaction to two good new tutors, one German, published by **UE Doblinger**, the other a British self-promotion from **Elza and Chris Lusher** (you'll have to go to [www.dogsandbirds.co.uk](http://www.dogsandbirds.co.uk) for their prices and distribution). The UE Doblinger tutor, entitled **First Steps into the Piano World** (£11.95), is by **Uwe Korn** and **Elena Malycheva** and I was immediately attracted by its smart, lively presentation and pretty watercolour pictures. Their method (with German and English text), aimed at four- and five-year-old beginners, associates each new note with an animal character and follows the usual route from middle C upwards and downwards.

The **Lushers' Dogs and Birds** books are also for the very young beginner and come only in black and white, but they are even more generously adorned with pictures. They (coincidentally) do the same sort of

animal thing (D = dog, A = ant, E = egg-with-chick etc) but start more logically from D and actually depict the animal inside every note. You need keen eyesight but it's a great pedagogical idea, and progress is much quicker than in the German tutor. **Dogs and Birds** has good street cred too, developing the European methods of Kodály. Do give the website a click; the 'product' won't leap out at you from the music shop shelf but it is definitely an important contribution in an area not over-endowed with good things.

Two other books came to me from **UE**. **My First Blues and Boogie Piano Book** by **Uli Gruber** is, at £9.25, just about OK – the same easy things as ever, nothing we haven't played and heard many times before but this time in German; in consequence, one piece is actually called *Oldtimer-Fahrt* and ten-year-old boys'll love that! The other is the rarely played **Chopin Rondos** (his Opp.1, 5 and 16) in a new, erudite £12.95 **UE PWM Edition** – but it's not my favourite Chopin – too repetitive, charming enough but superficial.

From **UMP** came two entertaining reprints of characteristic French works from the glamorous twenties. **Alexandre Tansman's** witty **Sonatine transatlantique** is his 'reaction' to the fox-trots, blues, spirituals and charlestons of North America, these idioms neatly worked into a fairly tricky but potentially successful, three-movement recital piece; ideal diploma material. It's really good fun and costs only £14.95. However, **Reynaldo Hahn's** **Premières valse**, at a massive £32.95, while certainly idiomatic and very 'French', strike me now as derivative and dated. He was an important and very successful French musician whose works are generally better than this.

**Boosey and Hawkes** and **Schott** both sent me one interesting thing and a lot that has been reviewed already which I shall simply ignore. **Astor Piazzolla's** music is all the rage so I looked forward to trying out his **Vuelvo al sur** (£6.99). I was not disappointed. Here are some lovely sensuous, melodious and fairly complicated pieces, elegantly presented, that will entertain and instruct students and might provide some light relief in recital. **Hans-Günter Heumann's** simple arrangements of chunks of **Humperdinck's Hansel and Gretel** and **Rimsky-Korsakov's Scheherazade** (both £5.99) are nicely done and beautifully illustrated – but more useful in the classroom than the piano studio, I think. **Carsten Gerlitz** has been busy collecting and arranging other people's music for four volumes in **Schott's Piano Lounge Series**. I'll give just their titles – *Movie Classics*, *Celtic Lovesongs*, *Pop Ballads*, *Jazz Ballads* – each costing £9.50 – and say no more. And **Schott** is now publishing **Czerny's** essential **Etudes, Opp.599** (easy) and **740** (advanced) – in smart and economical volumes. They seem to be on a roll!

