

More About **Two Studies on a 12-Tone Set**

One of the most important trends in 20th Century music was pitch serialism, sometimes called “dodecaphony,” but best known as the 12-tone system. To very briefly summarize a really complicated compositional procedure, 12-tone music tries to do away with any hint of tonality by basing its music on “tone rows” or “sets.” A set is all 12 notes of the chromatic scale, in any order, so long as none is repeated. The composition is then created using various permutations of the basic set. Musical serialism can also be applied to other elements, such as rhythm and dynamics, but the 12-tone system is most common and best known.

12-tone music, which first appeared in the 1920s, grew to prominence in the 1930s with the compositions of Arnold Schoenberg and his followers Alban Berg and Anton Webern, sometimes called the “New (or Second) Viennese School.” They were followed by such composers as Pierre Boulez, Luigi Nono, and Milton Babbitt, who specialized in the system and took it to the next level. A few important mainstream composers, such as Igor Stravinsky and Aaron Copland, also experimented with serialism late in their careers.

While digging through a pile of ancient manuscripts looking for something else, I was recently surprised to find a serial composition that I had thought was lost. It was cast in two very short movements for horn and piano and called **12-Tone Sonatina**.

I immediately decided to revive and publish the piece, but that title had to go: it has nothing to do with sonata form and is too short to be called a sonatina anyway. So, after thinking of possible titles, I ended up calling it **Two Studies on a 12-Tone Set**. I also switched the solo instrument from horn to viola, which lies in the same range but is better-suited than horn for this composition.

For years I have considered **Sextuplets** for solo piano to be my only surviving serial composition, and I am now delighted to introduce a companion piece for it. Both compositions date from my early days, circa 1970, when I was searching for my “voice” and experimenting with various styles. I ultimately chose not to pursue serialism, and this is one of only two surviving serial compositions in my catalog.