Julian Yu — Czernissimo from Cutetudes

What does the title mean?

- Czernissimo refers to Carl Czerny, the nineteenth-century composer and pianist famous for his many piano studies.
- The ending -issimo is the Italian superlative meaning “very” or “extremely”, so the title jokingly suggests “very Czerny-like”.
- Cutetudes combines “cute” and “etudes”. An étude is a study designed to develop a particular instrumental technique.
- The connection can be heard in the rapid scale and arpeggio patterns, repeated technical figures and direct references to Czerny studies. Bars 1–2 use material from the opening of Czerny’s Étude Op. 299 No. 4.

Keys / Modulations

- bb. 1–4: C major
- bb. 5–8: G major
- bb. 9–16: C major
- bb. 17–24: C major, with a brief tonicisation of A ♭ major and chromatic harmony
- bb. 25–32: C major, with brief shifts involving D ♭ major and B major
- bb. 33–34: A minor
- bb. 35–40: G major
- bb. 41–48: C major, with brief A minor and A major colouring before the return to C major
- Final bars: chromatic B-major and D ♭ -major chords surround the final C-major tonic.

Period and Style

- Contemporary / Postmodern music of the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries.
- Uses pastiche and quotation: older Czerny-style material is placed within a modern harmonic setting.
- Mostly homophonic texture, with the melodic line generally in the right hand.
- Compound duple metre.
- Rapid scales, arpeggios and technical passagework recall nineteenth-century piano études.
- Functional tonal harmony is mixed with sudden chromatic chords and brief shifts to unexpected keys.
- Frequent sequences and short two-bar ideas.
- The work combines historical musical references with modern harmonic treatment and humour.

Julian Yu — Biography

Julian Yu (born 2 September 1957) is a Chinese-Australian composer born in Beijing. He began composing at the age of twelve and studied composition at the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing, where he later joined the teaching staff. From 1980 to 1982 he studied at the Tokyo College of Music with Joji Yuasa and Shin-ichiro Ikebe, and in 1985 he settled in Australia. In 1988 he was a Composition Fellow at Tanglewood, studying with Hans Werner Henze and Oliver Knussen, and received the Koussevitzky Tanglewood Composition Prize. Yu won the inaugural Paul Lowin Orchestral Prize in 1991 and won it again in 1994. His music has been commissioned and performed internationally, including by the BBC Proms, IRCAM and major Australian orchestras, and he contributed music to the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games. His music frequently brings together Western compositional traditions and ideas drawn from Chinese musical culture.

Genres

- Orchestral music
- Concertos
- Chamber music
- Solo piano and other solo instrumental music
- Vocal and choral music
- Opera and music theatre
- Arrangements and re-orchestrations

Structure / Form

- Through-composed: six main eight-bar segments, largely built from two-bar units.

A — bb. 1–8

- bb. 1–2: first main idea; sequential writing.
- bb. 3–4: contrasting chromatic response.
- bb. 5–6: opening idea transferred to G major.
- bb. 7–8: develops the response material and closes in G major, followed by an unexpected chromatic chord.

B — bb. 9–16

- bb. 9–10: second main idea.
- bb. 11–12: answering phrase ending on the dominant.
- bb. 13–14: new rising sequential material.
- bb. 15–16: recalls bb. 7–8 in C major; the expected close is again disturbed by chromatic harmony.

C — bb. 17–24

- Begins and ends in C major but is more chromatic.
- bb. 19–22: brief emphasis on A ♭ major followed by rapidly changing chromatic harmony.
- b. 24: ends on the dominant.

D — bb. 25–32

- Chromatic section centred on C major.
- bb. 25–28: alternation between C-major and D ♭ -major harmony.
- bb. 29–30: alternation involving C major and B major.
- bb. 31–32: earlier material returns; the C-major cadence is followed by D major.

E — bb. 33–40

- bb. 33–34: new phrase in A minor.
- bb. 35–37: phrase transferred to G major and extended.
- bb. 37–40: melody moves to the left hand; section closes in G major.

F — bb. 41–48

- Begins with material related to bb. 33–36, now centred on C major.
- Includes a brief tonicisation of A minor.
- bb. 43–45: rapid harmonic shifts lead to the final clear C-major cadence at b. 45.
- Final bars act as a coda, moving through chromatic block chords before the final C-major chord.

Notation and Terms in the Score

- **Allegro —** Fast and lively.
- **dotted crotchet = ca 80–92 —** The dotted-crotchet beat is approximately 80–92 beats per minute.

- **p —** Piano — soft.
- **mp —** Mezzo-piano — moderately soft.
- **mf —** Mezzo-forte — moderately loud.
- **f —** Forte — loud.
- **sf —** Sforzando — a sudden strong emphasis.
- **crescendo hairpin (<) —** Gradually become louder.
- **diminuendo hairpin (>) —** Gradually become softer.
- **accent (>) —** Give the note or chord extra emphasis.
- **slur —** Play the notes smoothly and connected as a phrase or gesture.
- **tie —** Join notes of the same pitch into one sustained sound.