



Oscar van Dillen

12 Etudes  
in all key signatures

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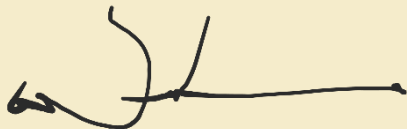
# 12 Eludes in all key signatures

The work on this recording was originally conceived for piano but should with some registration adaptations certainly allow for performance by various keyboard instruments too, such as organ and harpsichord, and beyond that for accordion, and marimba or vibraphone. The score is published by Donemus, Netherlands.

All works and cover art of this album were created by Oscar van Dillen.

*12 Eludes in all key signatures by Oscar van Dillen is dedicated as a musical offering to Elise van Rosmalen – van Dillen.*

*written 29 October – 7 November 2020*

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized, cursive 'O' followed by a horizontal line that ends in a small dot.

## Track list

1. I – All natural: time signature 2/2 (duration 2:59)
2. II – One flat: time signature 6/8 (duration 2:17)
3. III – Two flats: time signature 3/4 (duration 2:25)
4. IV – Three flats: time signature 2/4 (duration 1:34)
5. V – Four flats: time signature 3/2 (duration 4:37)
6. VI – Five flats: time signature 7/4 (duration 5:36)
7. VII – Six sharps: time signature 2/4 – theme (duration 1:29)
8. VII – Six sharps: variation and theme da capo (duration 2:17)
9. VIII – Five sharps: time signature 5/8 (duration 2:14)
10. IX – Four sharps: time signature 8/8 – theme (duration 2:54)
11. IX – Four sharps: first variation (duration 2:55)
12. IX – Four sharps: second variation (duration 2:55)
13. IX – Four sharps: third variation (duration 2:58)
14. IX – Four sharps: theme da capo (duration 1:34)
15. X – Three sharps: polymetric, time signatures 15/16 for lower, and upper part in 12/16 (duration 5:31)
16. XI – Two sharps: time signature 6/4 (duration 4:32)
17. XII – One sharp: alternating time signatures 3/4 and 4/4 (duration 2:48)

Total duration 51:35

## Key signatures, not keys

The title *Elude* is derived from the verb *to elude* = *to avoid cunningly or adroitly* (Penguin Reference 2001), which has as noun the word *elusion*. However, the composer chose to create for this music the new noun *Elude*, in assonance to *Prelude* and words like it, such as *Postlude*, *Interlude* etc. Therefore, as pre-lude means fore-play, inter-lude in-between-play, and post-lude means after-play, thus e-lude means outside-play. This music plays outside of and around tonal, modal and atonal systems, even outside a single style, and enters and leaves such *musics* at will, never completely bound to each set of formulas and conventions. It is precisely therefore that there are 12, each in its unique key signature, and not 24, as in keys (major and minor set apart), as is the case in similar keyboard collections by Bach, Chopin and Shostakovich. The 12 Eludes each have their own way of playing outside of mode and key, using a simple, technically mostly 2-voice based, setting.

The setting a technically 2-voice mostly, this leaves an open space in harmonic sound, because all redundant tones are left out. The overall sound created by the open intervallic structure of the work as a whole results in a transparent sound and a unique harmony. The contrapuntal score is written in a concise and precise way to achieve this openness and transparency. Moreover, the precise register placement of a wealth of pitches within the timeframe of each phrase, enables several parallel and simultaneous harmonic interpretations. The tonally trained ears may hear various tonal implications, whereas the more modally trained ears will be keener to pick up on some modal suggestions and meanings, all contained in this fully chromatic music. This *polysemy* is intentional and is what lies behind the original idea of the *Eludes* in the first place: a common reality for an audience, yet with a truly wide variety of experiences and interpretations, both emotionally and technically.

The score on purpose omits indications of tempo, dynamics, phrasing and pedalling; the performer instead

is trusted with all these to decide. Contrary to his custom in his other scores, van Dillen left this open, feeling that in this particular work the individual interpreter's choices, of course logically based on and connected to the note text itself, should be preferred. This *modus operandi* allows for a wider variety of possible performances and expressions.

## **Absolute tempo**

There are extremely talented musicians to whom a professional performance career is denied because of their overly compelling perfect pitch hearing. Perfect pitch, also called absolute hearing, is nothing more nor less than a musical memory that remembers the exact frequencies of tones. This generally totally overestimated capacity can be as much of a hindrance as it can be of help. It can prevent students an early development of aural recognition of the relative meanings of pitches, the enharmonic meanings, their mutual functions. Classical

musics especially, whether from Europe, the Middle East or Asia, are very much focused on the *relative* exactitude of pitches. In Bach or Mozart, there is a world of difference between say a D-sharp and the enharmonic equivalent E-flat, the first pointing upwards, the second downwards. Such tones are indeed differently intonated by singers and string players. In a very similar way intonations are handled in Arabian, Ottoman and Indian music, each tone having various options for intonations, depending on their relative occurrence. Musicians therefore need an extremely developed relative, not an absolute, hearing. If anything, musicians can however use an absolute hearing for tempo instead of pitch above all: *perfect tempo*.

It is in this vein, that a *single perfect tempo* was used throughout this whole recording, binding together all parts of the cycle in a *time-related* way, as does the identical basic framework of  $8+12=20$  bars for all Eludes.

After attentive listening, this recording should have made the perfect tempo of *56 bpm* known intimately.

## The eludes in detail

In a certain way, this book consists of two parts: the 7 parts I-VII and then the 5 parts VIII-XII, both parts being of similar duration, even though the second part of this cycle is slightly longer than the first. Thus, for performance purposes also a half cycle can be chosen, as can of course an individual piece.

All Eludes share the same basic Form: 8 bars (repeated) followed by 12 bars (repeated): a 20 bar form, being 40 including repetitions. Due to the various time signatures the same basic form can lead to various durations.

Moreover, in the two Eludes with variations (VII and IX), the original theme 20 bars without repetition is repeated with a *da capo*. In VIII between these two, just the beginning 8 bars are played as *da capo* ending.

Despite all the technicalities described here, this music is intended to be intelligible and enjoyable, and although complex, also simple in other ways, throughout using a *contemporary communicative musical language*.



## ***I – All natural: time signature 2/2***

(duration 2:59)

The beginning of the bass line 1 7 6 5 #4 5 6 etc is also used in IV and may be seen to quietly refer to Bruckner's pizzicato opening of his 5th symphony, which then goes into more extravert music after this so delicate and introvert beginning. The first Elude plays around the Lydian, Aeolian and Dorian modes, and the sense of C and G major, or E minor and A Dorian being the central pivot, the latter in absence seeming to be the ending.

## ***II – One flat: time signature 6/8***

(duration 2:17)

Found in abundance in Medieval music, *Querstände*, also known as *False relations*, *Cross relations*, or *Non-harmonic relations*, have been mostly taboo in Classical music since the reforms of official musical practice of the Council of Trent (16th century). In a contrapuntal texture however, such as in this Elude or in medieval music, they work very well in spicing up the harmony and keeping the voices

more individually standing out, if done well. In several instances E-flats, B-flats, C-sharps, F-sharps and G-sharps, clash with their natural versions, creating 2 quasi simultaneous versions of the same harmonic position, which make sense in their linear melodic lines, while adding tension to the harmonic field. In the exact middle, bar 10, the perfect octave of C-sharp is its complete perfect consonant opposite.

### **III – Two flats: time signature 3/4**

(duration 2:25)

Elude III features a reworking of the beautiful 14-15th century *Homme Armé* melody, on its original central tone G, but not in its traditional Mixolydian or Dorian modes, but ending in a Phrygian mode. Meanwhile the middle voices play a rhythmical layer of intervals adding to an almost impressionist harmonic coloring. Twice a time signature change from 3/4 to a single 2/4 occurs, just as the mensural change of its historical counterpart.

#### **IV – Three flats: time signature 2/4**

(duration 1:34)

Elude IV consists of basically 2 snake-like melodies in mostly seconds, but shifted in time so the pianist's hands play syncopations throughout. Many of these tones are then doubled in perfect fifths adding weight and harmony but mostly avoiding triadic tonality, especially in the absence of the formulas containing leading tones (not even the lowered ones), thus not leading to cadences.

#### **V – Four flats: time signature 3/2**

(duration 4:37)

A slow *perpetuum mobile* structure, dealing with larger and more complex chords. Exceptionally this Elude ends with an E-flat major triad, yet over an F in the bass, as if floating between the two centres. The 4 voice harmony is played in 6-voice chords, containing double octaves of the melodic tones at the beginning of each bar, setting a leisurely 3/2 rocking pace of movement.

## VI – Five flats: time signature 7/4

(duration 5:36)

Based on the *Hindustani* classical Raga *Puriya Dhanashree*, there is a semitone shifted pentatonic melodic development, including twice a *tihai*, the second one a partially sequentially developing *tihai*. The lower part consists of a drone C-G set to a slow 7 beats 3+2+2 time, as if the tanpura itself is at the same time playing *vilambit rupak tala*. Compared to the *modic* the harmonic field contains  $b2$ ,  $b3$ ,  $\#4$ ,  $b6$  and  $b7$ , but this in itself is a pentatonic scale, which is the oldest musical building block found in the archaeological record: the pentatonic scale itself is demonstrably at least 40,000 years old.



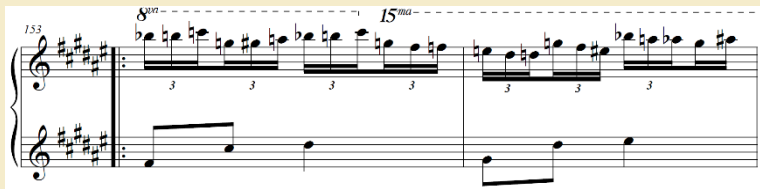
The image shows a musical score for Elude VI, measures 104-107. The score is written for a single melodic line in the treble clef and a drone accompaniment in the bass clef. The key signature is five flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat, D-flat, G-flat), and the time signature is 7/4. The melody begins with a *tihai* (a triplet of notes) and continues with a series of notes that form a pentatonic scale. The drone accompaniment consists of a steady C-G set, with the G note being a semitone higher than the C note. The score is labeled 'VI' on the left side.

Figure 1- opening measures of Elude VI with raga and tanpura in tala

## VII – Six sharps – time signature 2/4 – theme, variation and da capo

(duration 1:29 + 2:17)

Concluding the first half of the cycle, this high register theme emphasizes the effect of the 6 sharps key signature it is set to. It is also the first of 3 consecutive Eludes with a *da Capo* at the end, each briefly recapitulating its beginnings. Each of these 3 Eludes also features the use of chromatic scales. This variation in fast chromatic triplets twice reaches the extreme upper end of the piano, literally playing its highest tones possible. In the absence of triadic tonal formulas, both F-sharp major and D-sharp minor are treated like equal corner(s) tones.



The image shows a musical score for the middle of the variation of Elude VII. It consists of two staves, both in treble clef and 2/4 time signature. The key signature is six sharps (F# major or D# minor). The score begins with a double bar line and a repeat sign. The first staff contains a series of chromatic triplets, with notes marked with flats and naturals. Above the first triplet is the marking '8<sup>va</sup>' and above the second is '15<sup>ma</sup>'. The second staff contains a simple melodic line with a few notes. The score ends with a double bar line and a repeat sign.

Figure 2- middle of the variation of Elude VII

## **VIII – Five sharps: time signature 5/8**

(duration 2:14)

With Elude VIII the second cycle of 5 within the larger cycle of 12 Eludes begins.

Harmonically moving within the phrases, yet overall a more static modal feel is present in Elude VIII, the beginning of the second phase of the full cycle of 12. The mixed Lydian and Mixolydian modes are used here, mostly called Lydo-Mixolydian, or Lydian dominant, but more fancifully baptised *Lixomydian*. This name the composer used jokingly in his teaching for years, but it turns out this is actually a thing, and he is by no means the only one to use this name. The irregularly rocking complementary rhythms of the two part counterpoint follow a 5/8 time signature, but the upper voice follows a 2+3 pattern, whereas the lower follows a 3+2 pattern: a subtle inner polyrhythm. A brief da Capo completes this 48 bar total form.

## **IX – Four sharps – time signature 8/8 – theme, 3 variations and da capo**

(duration 2:54 + 2:55 + 2:55 + 2:58 + 1:34)

Elude IX is the longest of the cycle. It uses chromatic scales, distantly recalling a Baroque *Lamento* bass, or a *Passacaglia* theme. This monodic line, set to a 8/8 time signature with the compound rhythmical subdivision of 3+3+2, is first presented and then used to build more complex structures in the course of three variations. The first variation focuses on *contrary motion counterpoint*, melodies going in opposite chromatic ways. The second variation has a new melody on top, doubled in perfect fifths throughout. The third variation distils a bass from the “theme”, both being placed an octave lower here, going into the deep lowest register of the piano. Over this a new diatonic melody is played in parallel perfect octaves, again using the same principle of mostly contrary motion, as in the first variation. The first variation presented a chromatic contrary melody, here in the third variation it is a diatonic contrary melody, coming closer to a triadic feel

of harmony at times, floating in and out of C-sharp minor, the end floating between E major and C-sharp minor. After the variations, a *da capo* of the original chromatic melody concludes this larger form within the form of the cycle as a whole.

***X – Three sharps: polymetric, time signatures 15/16 for lower, and upper part in 12/16***

(duration 5:31)

Elude X mixes modal and tonal elements, featuring independent harmonic development between the upper melody and in the *variable tanpura ostinato* of the lower voice. Two overlapping linear stories evolve simultaneously, and along with them their respective implied harmonic background, which does converge at times, and then again going different dissonant ways. *False relations*, mentioned in Elude II, occur here as well, even as simultaneous harmonic phenomena, as intervals (harmonic augmented and diminished octaves). The top melody has a strong vocal quality, and is indeed quite singable, less so with the more complex bass. In the bass,



we hear a *variable developing ostinato* of five ternary beats with a shifting long sustained note, following the time signature of 15/16, while the melody follows a four beat phrasing in 12/16, but structured in five "bars". The overall sound hovers between major and Phrygian major. The second half is more chromatic, reminding of Elude IX just before, and harmonically more complex and dark. All the while the upper part maintains its vocal quality.

### ***XI – Two sharps: time signature 6/4***

(duration 4:32)

Elude XI uses all the means used and explored before, and presents these in the form of its many altered and constantly changing scales, over a rhythmically ostinato bass which seems to provide a harmonic scheme to the whole piece. Yet upper and lower voice live also their own harmonic lives, and here the music recalls perhaps some of Keith Jarrett's Sun Bear concerts passages, but also Brad Mehldau's improvisations on Bach's works come to mind. The use of sequences strengthens this polyphonic harmonic togetherness, but in a polyharmonic context.

## XII – One sharp: alternating time signatures 3/4 and 4/4

(duration 2:48)

Elude XII references the first *dodecaphonic* theme ever in music history by Ferencz Liszt, and keeps developing this as free *pantonal* 12-tone music, over a constantly switching time signature 3/4 and 4/4, concluding in an open fifth E-B.



The image shows a musical score for the last measures of the dodecaphonic Elude XII. The score is written for piano and features a treble and bass clef. The key signature is one sharp (F#). The time signature alternates between 3/4 and 4/4. The piece concludes with an open fifth interval of E and B. The score is numbered 347 in the top left corner.

Figure 3- last measures of the dodecaphonic Elude XII

## Steinway model D realization

A closely recorded and intimate realization has been created, with a sampled Steinway & Sons grand model D.

In the recording presented here, realized by the composer in his home studio in these Covid-19 times, a set of special choices for performance is presented: one single tempo quarter note = 56 bpm for all parts, a choice of articulations, phrasings and dynamics, as well as an “even eighths” interpretation throughout. Serving as a first presentation, this interpretation will present quite faithfully the *notes as text*. The written music has the various subjective tempi already suggestingly incorporated in the notation, by means of the *proportional counting values*, embedded in the respective time signatures.

Because the score itself leaves stylistic artistic choices to the performer, the composer has created this recording by taking decisions as to:

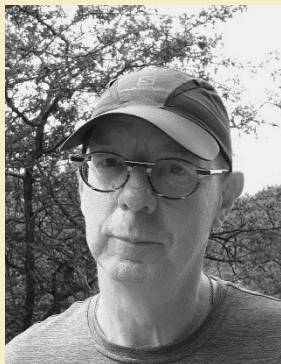
- *tuning* – stretched equal tempered tuning has been used, A = 440Hz
- *dynamics* – varied but with many *pianissimo* passages,
- *pedalling* – minimal, except in V and VI,
- *tempo* – drastically, one tempo 56 bpm has been used throughout.

## Oscar van Dillen

Oscar Ignatius Joannes van Dillen

('s-Hertogenbosch 1958) is composer and performer of music, professor of music at Codarts University for the Arts in Rotterdam, as well as visual artist. A polyglot and an erudite world citizen, he is also one of the pioneers from the early years of Wikipedia, having been founding president of Wikimedia

Nederland and serving as a trustee of the Wikimedia Foundation. Van Dillen has studied a wide variety of musical traditions with many renowned teachers. His music education having started at the age of 7, and performing both classical and rock music in his youth, van Dillen first studied North-Indian classical music (sitar, tabla, vocal) with Jamaluddin Bhartiya at the Tritantri School in Amsterdam and bansuri with Gurbachan Singh Sachdev at the Bansuri School of Music in Berkeley, California. Next he studied classical and jazz flute at the Sweelinck Conservatory in Amsterdam. He took composition lessons from Misha Mengelberg. As a flutist, he was taught by Lens Derogée and Dieks Visser, and followed masterclasses from Pierre-Yves Artaud, Geoffrey Gilbert and Barthold Kuijken.



After his following postgraduate studies of medieval and Renaissance music with Paul Van Nevel in Leuven (Belgium), he studied classical and contemporary composition with, among others, Dick Raaymakers, Diderik Wagenaar and Gilius van Bergeijk at the Koninklijk Conservatory in The Hague, with Klaas de Vries, Peter-Jan Wagemans and René Uijlenhoet at the Rotterdam Conservatory and with Manfred Trojahn at the Robert Schumann College in Düsseldorf, where he also received lessons in conducting from Lutz Herbig. As a composer he furthermore followed masterclasses from, among others, Isang Yun, George Crumb, Jan van Vlijmen, Marek Stachowski, Zbigniew Bojarski and Gerard Brophy.

A founding member of the Rotterdam School of composers and the author of its manifesto, he currently works as professor of music at the Codarts University of the Arts Rotterdam since 1997, teaching composing, arranging, world music composition, music history and music theory in the Jazz-, the Pop-, the World music, the Classical music and the Music Education Academies of Codarts.

Oscar van Dillen is the inventor of *original world music composition*, combining strictly composed with improvised classical and folk traditions, and their techniques and mentalities for creating music: a new and contemporary form of art music.

He is also founder, composer and artistic director of the Olduvai Ensemble for which he especially creates original world music compositions.

Van Dillen is a member of Nieuw Geneco and the Dutch-Flemish Society for Music Theory. As of 2020 his scores are published by Donemus. He collaborates with Donemus in publishing his recordings on OIJ Records.

Next to his fulltime work as composer, musician and pedagogue, van Dillen is also a visual artist. As composer, he has been a regular member of various juries, among which the yearly composition prize juries, in the Val Tidone Festival Competitions, since 2013.

Oscar van Dillen's personal website can be found at [www.oscarvandillen.com](http://www.oscarvandillen.com)

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