

13 (un)Lucky Etudes

*Horn playing has nothing to do with good or bad luck,
it is all about practicing!*

by Ricardo Matosinhos

To look inside, click on the cover to the right.

The story behind this book started in 2010, when the 12 Jazzy Etudes for Horn were published by Phoenix Music Publications. Then in 2013, two more etude books were published - the 10 Jazzy Etudes for Horn and the 15 Low Horn Etudes. There were 13 etudes missing to reach a total of 50 etudes, but 13 is a bad luck number, so...

Arts in general and particularly performing arts have a strong tradition of superstitions and lucky charms. People know conscientiously it's all merely hollow superstitions but they keep using them as a psychological support, something that increases their confidence and so ironically it ends up working out after all. This book does not intend to demystify these traditions, but rather simply reinforce the idea that horn playing has nothing to do with good or bad luck, it is all about practicing.

Practicing helps and it is definitely the key to good playing. But sometimes we need something more, some sort of lucky charm...

However be careful and don't expect these lucky charms to work without practicing! I encourage you to use them if you feel the need to do so, even if it is the placebo effect that gives you confidence. I strongly recommend you to use them wisely but only after making sure you've done your part by practicing, or your performance might end up a terrible disaster and you'll miss all the magic in music!

Good Luck or Bad Luck it's all up to you: What, Why, Where, When, with Whom, How and How much you practice!

But, most of all, please have fun while practicing!

Ricardo Matosinhos

1 - Maneki Neko - This is a talisman traditionally used in Japan, but today also all over the world. It consists of a beckoning cat made of ceramic or plastic. It is said to bring fortune to his owner, so that's why it is typically found at the entrance of restaurants, bars and other shops. It can be found either with his right or left paw raised. It is said that the left paw brings in customers, while the right one brings good luck and wealth. The Maneki Neko is the first etude of the book because of what it is believed to bring in. The etude is quite fast and should be played in a lightly manner. It is based on the contrast between a strong and a soft motive, so dynamics play a major role in this etude.

2 - I'm t(h)rilled! - Some horn players are fortunate enough to have good lip trills, but many struggle their entire life in order to achieve this. Well, part of lip trill technique is related to practice, but another part is also related to attitude. If we try to play a lip trill without being

confident, the air will tend to lack the proper speed required to get a good lip trill. So instead of saying: Oops I'm "trilled", you should enjoy it and say that you are thrilled to play a lip trill.

3 - Dancing Under a Ladder - Walking under a ladder is sometimes considered to be bad luck. There are several theories about it. Some go back to the early days of Christianity and how a ladder resembles a triangle (The Trinity). Walking under a ladder is seen as breaking the Trinity and the fact that the ladder might fall means one is defying death. It is hard to play the horn, it is even worse than walking. Sometimes horn players literally dance under a ladder when playing stunts that composers write in horn parts. For me, this is the thrilling part of playing horn, it is like doing a risky sport: you know you did your homework and you trust that everything will be fine, but the rope might break at any second. It is the fact of being in such a risky situation and surviving, that keeps us alive and full of adrenaline! In this etude there are risky jumps and stopped notes in the low range, which should be carefully prepared in order to survive, otherwise the "rope" might break and destroy the music.

4 Leaf Clover - In spite of originally being an Irish and Celtic superstition, four-leaf clovers are known internationally as a lucky charm. This etude is based on the perfect fourth music interval. Some really fast passages were written having B flat fingering in mind, so I recommend you carefully check which passages you will play on the F or on the B= side of the horn.

5 - Devil's Waltz - This is a waltz based on the augmented fourth music interval, known as the "diabolus in musica". There's nothing wrong with the augmented 4th interval, and devil won't catch you if you play it. It is a very expressive interval and it is precisely half an octave. Horn fingerings are based on the overtone series, that's why most of the octaves, 5ths and 4th can be played using the same fingerings. In the case of the augmented 4th, it appears between the 8th and 11th overtone which means for the horn player that, most of the time, augmented fourths will require different fingerings. So this etude is great to practice cross fingerings.

6 - The Broken Mirror - Breaking a mirror it is said to bring you 7 years of bad luck. This can be traced back to Romans who invented mirrors. Several cultures believed that mirrors could take some sort of power from the reflected person. So if the mirror was broken the soul became corrupted. This etude is based on the minor pentatonic and blues scale, it is very fast and it has some tricky jumps. Please be careful not to break these delicate passages. Consider yourself warned! There are some things you can do to avoid having 7 years of bad luck, and different cultures have several rituals. If this happens to you, I advise you to simply practice the next etude in this book...

7 Years of Bad Luck - Seven years of bad luck is internationally known as the penalty to those who break a mirror, but why? Romans, believed that the human body renewed every seven years, that's why you would need to wait seven years until you could have your soul like new again! This etude is based on diminished scales, which are built by the alternation of whole tones and half tones. There are both the H-W and the W-H version of this scale in a very fast tempo, making this etude very tricky and demanding for cross fingerings. It is very easy to mess up, and you might think that that is bad luck. There's no such thing as bad luck! I recommend that you practice this etude in small sections, using a metronome, and you will feel lucky again!

8 - Rabbit Foot - Several cultures around the world believe that a Rabbit Foot has magic powers and brings good luck to it's possessor. Also the number of this etude is said to bring good luck, as the 8 sounds like "prosperity" and "wealth" in the Chinese language. I've never used rabbit feet as lucky charms, but I can assure you that practicing this ragtime will give you a better control of range shifts all across the horn range.

9 - Adagio und Allegro - This etude is a homage to Robert Schumann, who wrote beautiful pieces for horn but unfortunately which are also very demanding. There is a particular octave slur up to the high C in his Adagio & Allegro that often scares horn players with bad luck, but again has nothing to do with good or bad luck. In this etude you will play this interval several times and even go a little bit higher just to feel more comfortable about it. This way when you get back to the original Adagio und Allegro you will probably feel a lot luckier.

10 - Black Cat - In different cultures it is believed that black cats crossing your path bring good or bad luck. In early Egypt for example, cats were seen as gods. In the middle-ages, witch hunting gave black cats a bad reputation, as they were connected with witchery rituals and it was believed that witches transformed themselves into black cats. I've had several black cats cross my path, and actually I adopted a few. They always brought me happiness and good luck just like any other cat of any other color. This etude is a written improvisation inspired by a strange cat "singing" in the night.

11 - Cursed Overtones - Playing overtones is both our blessing and our curse. A friend of mine once said "For the saxophone it is difficult to play overtones, but on the horn it is difficult not to play overtones". This etude follows the same idea of the 11th of the 12 Jazzy Etudes for Horn that I wrote, but this time using different metrics.

12 - Do it! - Horn playing has a lot of difficult aspects and sometimes we reach a point of being afraid of going further in the direction to the unknown. In these situations it is better to simply think "Do it!". The name of this etude is also related to the "do-it" given by the articulation and the half-stopped/open technique. It is a small written improvisation that if played on B flat horn fingerings requires (most of the time) the use of the 1st finger only. Relating to the foot tap accompaniment I recommend that you glue a small piece of wood or metal under your shoe or tap with hard shoes on a wooden floor.

13 Friday - Finally: Friday the 13th! Many consider this a really bad luck number and especially when it is on a Friday. There's no bad luck about Friday the 13th's, except the fact of the scary belief of many people. In fact this etude has nothing to do with Friday's. The Portuguese word for Friday is "sexta", which is precisely the same word used for the 6th music interval, the interval on which this etude is based.

But just in case, please avoid playing this etude on Friday the 13th... you never know what could happen... you might play a minor 7th instead of a 6th!

hornarama.com.au