

MIKOKOSMOS

These 16 easy piano pieces are inspired by the fascinating and magical world of mushrooms. We discover that each mushroom has a character, a traditional name and a more striking name in Latin. Sixteen different species of mushrooms are presented and illustrated in this book. They are representatives of a vast MIKOKOSMOS, each with its own voice and personality expressed by music. Those who - like the author - have been collecting, studying and cooking mushrooms since the age of six, are convinced that even mushrooms have their sounds. Indeed, if we walk in the woods with very attentive ears, we can listen to the *chanterelling*, the special song of these extraordinary organisms.

1. **Armillaria mellea** (honey fungus): It grows in autumn, on the trunks of living trees, but also on stumps and dead roots; sometimes it grows among the grass, sometimes solitary, sometimes in clumps. It is truly a good little family and sings a sweet, lulling mushroom melody. It reminds us of the subtle rains of autumn and of those colours we can only find in the woods at that time of year.

2. **Fistulina hepatica** (ox tongue): It really is shaped like an ox tongue. It grows on old chestnut or oak tree trunks and can be cooked like a cutlet. Its sound is tame and relaxing. Listening to it reminded me of delicate music, like a closed-mouth choir in an old chestnut forest in autumn, when the urchins with ripe chestnuts fall from the branches.

3. **Ramaria aurea** (little yellow hands): This is a cheerful and amusing mushroom. It belongs to a family of colourful and unmistakable mushrooms (a mix between a cauliflower and a sea coral). It grows in the woods, especially under conifers. Its sound is cheerful and playful, and so I thought of the hands of a pianist doing their exercises: "How boring the exercises are sometimes, but... how necessary they are!".

4. **Cantharellus Cibarius** (chanterelle): Another unmistakable, much sought-after, cheerful, golden-yellow coloured mushroom. It has a peach scent (almost like a flower...) and it is not difficult to understand why in Italian it is called cockerel (*galletto*). It grows in the woods, among the moss and often in groups. Its sound is easy to imagine: try to think of lots of cockerels and hens talking, singing and arguing all at once.

5. **Boletus Edulis** (cep): This is the king of mushrooms! It is much sought after and almost everyone is very fond of it. Sometimes it arrives in our homes preserved in oil in jars or dried in bags with a pleasant smell. It grows in the plains and in the woods where there are oaks, lime trees, beeches and chestnuts, but it is more commonly found in the mountains in fir woods. Its sound is important, classic and somewhat mysterious. It is not a fungus that likes to be easily found, so its song is worth keeping your ears open for.

6. **Boletus satanas** (Satan's bolete): The boletus family, to which this type of cep belongs, is very large and contains everything, including mushrooms that are quite

similar to the cep but which are very bitter and impossible to eat. There is also its evil cousin, the satanas, which grows in the same place as the good cep, but its colouring and unpleasant smell make it easy to distinguish. Despite its name and even though it is poisonous, if someone eats it by mistake. Most of the times they will only have a bad experience with their stomach. Play it and listen to it, but don't be too afraid, it just wants to scare us, but it is a good devil after all.

7. **Russula virescens** (green-cracking russula): This elegant mushroom grows in groups in birch, oak and chestnut forests. If you get to know it, you will see that it is very nice and also very good, even raw in salads. Its sound is delicate and singable and the piece of music you are going to play has a sweet and playful melody.

8. **Pleurotus ostreatus** (oyster mushroom): This is a much sought-after mushroom and, before it was abundantly available in supermarkets in the cultivated version, those who found it would gladly invite their friends to eat it. It can be cooked as a breaded cutlet and is very popular. It grows in clumps, especially on felled trunks and stumps of deciduous trees. When it sings, it is like a chorus, and its sound has the charm of the music that is played in ancient cathedrals.

9. **Lentinus tigrinus**: I have not found a traditional name for this fungus, but I have included it because when I lived near the river Po, I always found it on the trunks of the willows that were washed up by the river. It is a nice mushroom; if you touch and smell it you can see that it has its own character and personality. Moreover, it is not only tigerish in appearance but also in the swing-like music it emits. I have never eaten this mushroom and the information about its edibility is uncertain. Best just to watch and listen to it!

10. **Marasmius oreades** (fairy ring mushroom): Excellent mushroom, but until recently not very sought-after. Fragrant and tasty, it grows in groups and in circles (the famous 'witches' circle') from spring to autumn, along paths, in the grass, on sandy ground. Its melody is cheerful and snappy and invites us all to dance. That is why playing the score presented here, it can be thought as Boogie-fungi!

11. **Clitocybe nebularis** (clouded agaric): Fog is not a widespread phenomenon everywhere, but, where I used to live a few years ago, it was a common experience. Therefore, it is not difficult for me to think of a fog-inspired piece like this mushroom which is said to grow in the woods with the first autumn fog. Its appearance is a beautiful grey, almost pearly, like fog and uncertain landscapes. Its sound is peculiar and reminds us of French composers of the early 20th Century, in particular of impressionists such as Debussy.

12. **Cyclocybe aegerita** (poplar mushroom): This is one of the funniest mushrooms, as well as being excellent to eat! Where I come from, they are called *chiodini* ("little nails"), perhaps because they grow on wood (especially poplar), perhaps because - when they are small - they really do look like lots of small nails planted in wood. Their sound is also reminiscent of the rhythm of many small nails being driven into wood. Indeed, look at the score of the music you are about to play: what do the notes in the staves resemble?

13. *Psalliota campestris* (meadow mushroom): As its name suggests, this is a fungus that prefers to grow in meadows, especially where the soil is well fertilised. Like the *pleurotus*, the meadow mushroom is now abundant in fruit and vegetable shops and supermarkets, making it easy to recognise and cook. Its sound is classic and dedicated to the open spaces of nature, green meadows, running, dancing and festive occasions and is very similar to the musical themes dear to Vivaldi.

14. *Macrolepiota procera* (parasol mushroom): This is the mushroom of musicians, or rather drummers and percussionists, especially when young and not yet open. After a few days it opens up just like an umbrella and can become very large. It prefers meadows or the stubble of cereal fields. Its song is a cheerful, rhythmic march, not a war signal, but a smiling march, for tin soldiers. This mushroom is especially liked by children and adults who still know how to be playful!

15. *Amanita caesarea* (Caesar's mushroom): If the porcini is the king of mushrooms, the Caesar's mushroom is the emperor. In fact, the Latin attribute *caesarea* reminds us that this mushroom was known and appreciated even by the ancient Roman emperors. It is one of the tastiest mushrooms on the planet, but we must be careful because it has at least two terrible and very dangerous cousins (*amanita phalloides* and *amanita verna*). Anyone who wants to learn to recognize mushrooms must be on their guard and must first learn to recognize the poisonous, and deadliest species. The song of the *amanita caesarea* takes us back to Imperial Rome with the blast of horns and trumpets, hymns and dance motives.

16. *Mycena chlorophos*: The *mycena chlorophos* is a bioluminescent fungus widespread in subtropical Asia (e.g. Japan, Indonesia, Australia). The mechanism that causes its green luminescence is not yet known to science and is currently being studied. Understanding the biomolecular mechanisms behind these phenomena could help us, one day, to light up the streets with bioluminescent trees (or why not, even mushrooms)! To get the most out of this fungus, which always grows in fairly large groups, it was necessary to write a 4-hand piece!

Enjoy the music and have fun!

Tullio Visioli

Armillaria mellea

