

At the Piano

The series “At the Piano” is intended for all those who have some experience playing the piano and would now like to play easier original works by famous composers. Students, teachers and those returning to the piano will encounter a wealth of well-known works.

Contents

Each volume in the series is devoted exclusively to one composer. This is because each composer has his own style and thus places his own very personal demands on his piano works – not only from the point of view of technique but also as regards musical interpretation.

Technique

All of the pieces have been arranged in progressive level of difficulty. They enable you to practise very different pianistic skills, including runs, breaking chords, arpeggios, parallel thirds, trills, playing chords and polyphonic playing. Thus most of the pieces also prepare you for more demanding pieces by the composer in question. We have endeavoured to keep variety in mind when compiling the pieces: slower ones follow faster ones, dances come after studies, variations after sonata movements, etc.

Urtext

All of the pieces have been edited according to the strictest Urtext principles, as have all Urtext editions by G. Henle Publishers. In short, this means that the musical text is unaltered and presents the composer’s intentions. Additions that are essential – even great composers occasionally make mistakes – have been given in parentheses. And as we do not wish to dispense with the

aid of fingerings, we clearly differentiate between the ones we have added (in normal writing) and those that are original (in italics). Composers in the Baroque, Classical and even Early Romantic periods were extremely sparing with indications regarding articulation, phrasing, dynamics and tempo. This was because in those days they could assume that experienced players already knew how something was to be played. This might not always be immediately clear to musicians today. Nevertheless, in our Urtext editions we deliberately do without “well-intentioned” additions and questionable alterations, as are often to be found in other editions. Those who use our editions are free of such patronisation; they can be sure of the authenticity of the musical text and make the most of the ensuing flexibility for their own stylistically confident interpretation.

Guide

This cannot, of course, be done without any help at all. The series “At the Piano” provides an introduction to dealing with Urtext editions as well as a first pedagogical guide on how to get to grips with original works of an easy and medium level of difficulty from a technical and musical point of view. To this end, each piece is preceded by some information on practising it, on its history and on understanding the musical text. In so doing we would like to provide players with a foundation upon which they can develop their own approach to the work, their own personal interpretation and above all, enjoy making music. Pianists who are enthusiastic and prepared to put in a little effort – no matter whether young or old, starting to play or returning to the instrument – will then be able to play their Bach, Beethoven, Chopin, Brahms or even Liszt with conviction.

Playing Mozart

Although Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–91) only lived to be 35 years old, his works underwent an astonishing development – beginning with the first little piano pieces he wrote as a six-year-old, through the numerous sacred music and gallant-style works composed in his Salzburg years, the piano concertos and symphonies that originated in the Viennese years, to the increasingly mellow works penned in his last years. Mozart’s works offer us infinite wealth and variety.

 The sources for Mozart’s piano works – that is, autograph manuscripts, copies made by other musicians or early print editions – have unfortunately only survived in very incomplete form. Although at least over half of the autographs have been handed down for the piano sonatas (even if some are only fragments), hardly any sources in Mozart’s hand have been transmitted for the works with variations. His piano pieces, on the other hand, have been handed down to us almost exclusively through autographs or copies: only three of a total of over forty were actually published during the composer’s lifetime. The situation is reversed in the case of the variations, all of which Mozart had published – a notable exception and a clear sign of these works’ popularity if we bear in mind that only around a quarter of Mozart’s compositions were published before his death. When producing an Urtext edition, the loss of an autograph is extremely unfortunate as the print editions of the time are generally full of errors. These are not very easy to detect if one does not have access to an autograph. Yet the reverse is also problematic, as Mozart’s autographs often do not contain any information regarding dynamics (see nos. 7 and 8) – the composer generally added these kinds of markings only when preparing the work for publication (see no. 11).

 For those beginning to play the piano, Mozart is definitely one of the first composers whose name they will encounter. But only a few of the pieces written when he was young, and perhaps a few dances or one or two slow movements from his piano sonatas are really “easy” to play.

It was during his first years in Vienna (from 1781) in particular that Mozart had a great many piano pupils. Teaching was an important source of income for him. Unfortunately, we do not know which pieces he used. Only one single leaf of music bears witness to the fact that he taught (see no. 6).

But we can be sure that he did also use his different piano compositions for teaching purposes, such as the Variations K. 265 (see no. 13). It is, however, highly unlikely that his piano sonatas and variations were composed specifically for teaching purposes, apart from maybe one or two smaller individual pieces.

The “Sonate facile” K. 545 (see nos. 7 and 8) proves an exception. Aside from this work, Mozart hardly composed anything for beginners or pupils, instead for the main part always writing for himself – and he was one of the great piano virtuosos of the time.

Nevertheless, all too quickly we think of his piano compositions as being easy and simple. Artur Schnabel’s remark is well known: playing Mozart is too easy for children and too difficult for adults.

Yet it is safe to say that Mozart’s works are particularly demanding as far as their musical interpretation is concerned.

It was not for nothing that Mozart time and again asked for his music to be played “with taste” – and this is what we have to try to achieve, striking a balance between tenderness and strength, sensitivity and drama, cheerfulness and melancholy.