

# At the Piano

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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 Brahms

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Johannes Brahms (1833–97) was born into a musical family. His father played the horn and double bass and made money by playing in a wide variety of dance halls in and around Hamburg. His son was supposed to follow in his footsteps, so Johannes was given piano lessons from an early age and made appearances as a pianist in many different places, thus contributing to the family's keep. Throughout his life the piano remained the instrument with which he particularly enjoyed expressing himself. Aside from two piano concertos and 17 chamber music works with piano, he also composed 30 works for piano solo or piano four-hands. If the individual pieces contained in these works are counted separately, there is double the number. To all intents and purposes one should also add some 250 songs, duets etc. since the piano accompaniment also plays a substantial role in them.

 During Brahms's lifetime there were two musical groups that fought fiercely against one another, something that is almost unimaginable today. Whereas the "New German School" was centred on composers such as Richard Wagner and Franz Liszt, Brahms was regarded as the figurehead of the "Conservatives". Even today, he is often considered to be the composer who retained Classical genres and forms within Romantic music. Indeed, his opus 1 and 2 are conventional piano sonatas, and he even wrote seven important works dedicated to the traditional variation form. Nevertheless, Brahms was by no means a backward-looking composer; on the contrary, in many ways he was decidedly innovative, for example as regards new approaches to harmony or the asymmetry with

which he shaped his themes. It was not without reason that he was an important role model for numerous later composers, including such avant-garde ones as Arnold Schoenberg.

In addition to composing, Brahms also worked on several complete editions of music, such as those of Mozart, Beethoven, Chopin and Schumann. He also edited individual pieces by other composers, e.g. by Schubert, J. S. Bach and Bach's sons. His experiences as an editor meant that he was also very careful when preparing his own compositions for publication. Thus the first editions of his works contain relatively few mistakes. This does, however, also mean that the various performance and interpretation markings need to be closely adhered to.

 Brahms continued to give piano recitals right up to his death. He mostly played his own works, of course, in particular pieces from his Waltzes op. 39 (see nos. 1–3 and 7–9) or from his *Ungarische Tänze*, but he also played works by Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, Schumann and Chopin. Reviewers often wrote of his "tender sensitivity", "very intimate playing", "poetic charm", "the finest sound effects", "the fineness of his touch" etc., and also that the rich texture of his playing gave the impression of polyphony – that it was not just a mass of dense chords. This should always be borne in mind when playing his piano music. Brahms was also active as a teacher: In 1893 he edited a kind of piano method with the title *51 Übungen für das Pianoforte* (51 Exercises for the Pianoforte). Those who play his piano music would do well to look at these exercises because to a certain extent they form the technical quintessence of his piano music.