

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 Chopin

Poland and France can both take credit for Frédéric Chopin's (1810–49) fame in equal measure. His father, Nicolas Chopin, was French and moved from Lorraine to Poland in 1787 and got married there. His French-Polish parentage was to be decisive both for Chopin's biography as well as for his art. Although he spent almost half of his life in France, he always remained a fervent admirer of his Polish homeland. His music has its roots in both sides of his background: it not only encompasses the different dance forms of Polish folk music (the mazurka, polonaise, krakowiak, oberek) but also the forms and genres that were cultivated in French salons, such as waltzes, nocturnes and impromptus.



The son's extraordinary gifts soon became apparent in this music-loving family. When he was six years old, Chopin received his first piano lesson and a shortly afterwards he even composed his first little piano pieces. The young pianist was soon hailed as a child prodigy and performed in the salons of the Polish nobility. From 1822 onwards he received regular lessons in composition and music theory from Józef Elsner, the rector of the Warsaw Conservatory.

In summer 1829 and again in November 1830 Chopin travelled to Vienna so as to also gain international recognition as a pianist and a composer in this musical centre. The outbreak of the November Uprising in Poland (against the Russian authorities) prevented Chopin from being able to return to his homeland as planned. Thus he set out for Paris, as did many Polish exiles, and arrived there in mid-September 1831. His first performance in the French capital was on 26 February 1832. However, Chopin gave relatively few public concerts throughout his life because his preferred podiums were not the large concert halls but the many private salons in Paris. He had a great standing within these circles and became acquainted with artists such as Eugène Delacroix, Heinrich Heine, Honoré de Balzac, Hector Berlioz and, of course, Franz Liszt. It was there that he also got to know the French writer George Sand, who was to become his companion for many years. During the time that he was with her, he composed numerous im-

portant pieces, first during his stay on Majorca in winter 1838/39, during which time he completed the *Préludes*, and then later at Sand's country estate in Nohant, where Chopin was able to compose without being disturbed. The couple's separation in 1847 had a far-reaching effect on the composer. He had been suffering from lung disease for a long time, his health increasingly deteriorated and he only composed very few works. He died on 17 October 1849 in Paris and was buried there in the Père Lachaise cemetery.



As far as possible, Chopin had most of his works published simultaneously in France, Germany and England in order to prevent illegal reproductions. Yet these editions are seldom identical, neither compared to one another nor compared to the autographs. Thus it is often not possible with Chopin to talk about a definitive version of a work – usually there are several variants that stand beside each other on an equal footing. Only relatively few of his works were published without an opus number; today they are for the most part numbered following the catalogue of works edited by Krystyna Kobylańska and thus with the abbreviation KK. What is still fascinating about Chopin's works today is their unmistakable pianistic style, which has become the model of Romantic music par excellence. As was perhaps never the case before or after him, he was completely wrapped up in his instrument – almost all of his works are for piano solo – and opened up previously unknown expressive possibilities for it. He found his own, personal sound at a very early stage, so that already his opus 2, the Variations on Mozart's "Là ci darem la mano", occasioned Robert Schumann to note: "Hats off, gentlemen, a genius." Yet unlike Schumann Chopin found literary, programmatic tendencies and visual titles a complete anathema and many of his deepest creations are hidden behind harmless genre titles such as "Prélude", "Scherzo" or "Étude". Together with Franz Liszt he ushered in a new era of piano music that did not foster virtuosity as an end in itself, but rather put it in the service of poetic expression, thus at the same time allowing the piano to speak as it were.