

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 Grieg



Edvard Grieg (1843–1907) is amongst the greatest composers of the second half of the 19th century. As “Norway’s voice” he played a prominent role in the country’s search for identity – Norway had been under the influence of the Danish or the Swedish crown since the 14th century and only gained independence in 1905. After Chopin and Liszt, Grieg was one of the first representatives of those “nationalist composers” who consciously incorporated characteristics of the music of their homeland into their works, following the emergence of national sensibilities. In this respect he can be mentioned in the same breath as composers such as Dvořák and Smetana, with the Russians Mussorgsky, Borodin and Rimsky-Korsakov, or the Finn Sibelius. From early on, Grieg occupied himself intensively with Norwegian folk music and published numerous works that can be traced back to Norwegian or “Nordic” folk tunes. He co-founded the concert society Euterpe with the aim of fostering newer Scandinavian music; in 1898 on his initiative the first Norwegian music festival took place in his hometown Bergen, along the lines of German and English music festivals.

However, it would not be fair to Grieg if he were to be reduced solely to the romantic nationalist aspect of his compositions. He received his education at the renowned Conservatory in Leipzig, which already accepted him as a student when he was fifteen years old. It was here that he was taught by the greats such as Carl Reinecke, Ignaz Moscheles and Moritz Hauptmann. Grieg’s compositions thus always stand between the poles of Norwegian folk music and the Central European art music tradition. His most important works are indebted to the great Classical and Romantic genres – for example his Piano Sonata op. 7, his String Quartet op. 27, the three Violin Sonatas op. 8, 13 and 45 and of course his Piano Concerto op. 16, composed in 1868, with which he achieved his international artistic breakthrough. Grieg became one of the most popular figures of the European music scene of the time both as a com-

poser and as a pianist, performing in all of the musical centres of the time. The universities of Oxford and Cambridge awarded him honorary doctorates.



Within the Classical forms, Grieg developed his own new musical language, whose harmony reflects elements of the folk music of his country, but also at the same time clearly moves into areas of Impressionism (for example in *Bell Ringing*, see no. 1). In particular the 66 *Lyric Pieces* (see nos. 1–6, 10, 11, 14 and 15) number amongst Grieg’s best-loved compositions and were greatly responsible for the extraordinary renown that he enjoyed even during his lifetime. To a certain extent, they follow his artistic career: the first volume, opus 12, was composed in 1866, the last one, opus 71, was only written in 1901. Grieg himself admitted in a letter: “The 10 volumes of ‘Lyric Pieces’ represent a piece of intimate personal history.” One must be careful not to misinterpret the term “lyric” by thinking that it only refers to tender, sensitive pieces. They are very different as far as their technical challenges are concerned and can, on the contrary, also be very temperamental and powerful (see, for example, nos. 10 and 15).

A large number of Grieg’s melodies, in particular the pieces *Morning Mood* and *In the Hall of the Mountain King* from the first *Peer Gynt Suite*, have become veritable classical hits due to films and advertising, and distort our view of his other “more serious” compositions. Grieg himself appeared to have already sensed this danger and was in two minds as to the popularity of his *Peer Gynt Suites* (see nos. 7, 12 and 13) in particular but also of the neo-Baroque *Holberg Suite* (see nos. 8 and 9), all of which were actually rather pièces d’occasion. Yet Grieg was far removed from an elite notion of art; he wanted to be understood by the general public with his music: “Artists like Bach and Beethoven have erected churches and temples on the heights. I wanted [...] to build dwellings for people, in which they might feel happy and at home.”