

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 Bach

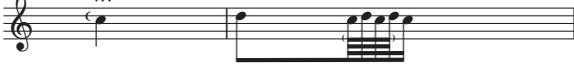
Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750) has such an outstanding place in the history of music that even regardless of genre he can be considered to be one of the most important artistic personalities ever to have lived. He perfected Baroque music both in his vocal and instrumental works, as well as in his sacred and his secular compositions. Aside from opera, Bach was at home in all of the genres of the period; his keyboard compositions hold a particularly important place within his instrumental works.

 Although Bach came from a family that had been musically active for several generations, he never received any regular tuition. Yet what his ancestors had in a sense done as a craft, Bach succeeded in developing to the highest art, bringing it to a degree of mastery that has perhaps occasionally been matched by subsequent generations but never surpassed. It is extremely interesting to follow this development from the early, still searching pieces (no. 7) to the great mature works (nos. 13–16). We can indeed assume that Bach was quite aware of the exceptional quality of his works. This is backed up by the great number of works he wrote, intending as it were to present a compendium of each genre and demonstrate his skill, such as for example the *Musikalisches Opfer* (A Musical Offering), the *Kunst der Fuge* (Art of the Fugue) or the *Wohltemperiertes Klavier* (Well-Tempered Clavier). Yet he did not see these works in any way as being “l’art pour l’art”, thus art for art’s sake, but rather he also sought a fitting and sensorial realization of his works. It was not by chance that a great many of the titles that he came up with for his keyboard works contained the note that they were “composed for connoisseurs, for the refreshment of their spirits”. At the same time many pieces also fulfil a pedagogical purpose, not only with regard to their execution on the instrument (see nos. 1–3) but also with regard to composition in general. Bach wanted, for example, the Inventions and Sinfonias (see nos. 5/6 and 9/10) to be seen as an “Honest Method to get a strong foretaste of composition”. According to the preface in the autograph of part I of the *Wohltemperiertes Klavier*

he said that he had drawn it up and written it for the “profit and use of musical youth who are eager to learn as well as for the pastime of those already skilled in this study”.

Already in the early 19th century attempts were made to collect and systematically order the extensive body of Bach’s compositions in a catalogue of works. But it was only in 1950 that Wolfgang Schmieder was able to present a catalogue – the *Bach-Werke-Verzeichnis* (BWV) that became the internationally accepted standard work and whose numbering system (from BWV 1 to 1128) is still in use today for the individual works. Schmieder’s catalogue groups the works according to genre, beginning with the vocal works. As far as the instrumental works are concerned, the ones for keyboard follow those for organ and bear the numbers from BWV 772 to BWV 994.

 The high regard in which Bach held his keyboard compositions in particular is shown by the fact that of the few works that he had printed, they were almost exclusively for keyboard. In so doing he wanted to establish his reputation as a virtuoso harpsichordist and organist, even if at the time printed music could only reach a smaller circle of specialists. There has been a great deal of speculation regarding the question of the instrument that Bach had in mind. His biographer Johann Nikolaus Forkel claimed that Bach preferred playing on the small, single-manual clavichord than on the double-manual harpsichord, considering it to be too soulless, a claim that is no longer considered to be reliable today. In fact, Bach probably chose the instrument according to the work and the circumstances in question. He might have already come across the newly invented fortepiano in 1720, which allowed the player to grade the dynamics more easily (thus its name). Yet the mechanism had not been perfected at the time so that according to Forkel Bach considered it to be “too clumsy”. In view of the enormous technical developments of the piano as regards action and register, nowadays it is completely acceptable to also play Bach’s keyboard works on a modern piano.

	Trillo
	Mordant
	Trillo und Mordant
	Cadence
	Doppelt-Cadence
	idem
	Doppelt-Cadence und Mordant
	idem
	Accent steigend
	Accent fallend
	Accent und Mordant
	Accent und Trillo
	idem

The correct execution of the ornaments, which are an integral part of the individual pieces, is of great importance for Bach's keyboard music. Bach included the above table in his *Clavierbüchlein vor Wilhelm Friedemann Bach* (Little Clavier Book for Wilhelm Friedemann Bach). In it he explains the most important signs. As far as the "Accent" is concerned, the player might occasionally also come across the markings > (rising) and < (falling).