



# Inspiring Artistry Repertoire Project

A Piano Magazine subscriber-exclusive digital resource

**Leonidas Lagrimas presents:**

**"Improvisation No. 1" from *Five Improvisations* Op. 148, No. 1 by Amy Beach**

## Preparation and Presentation

**Context:** pieces that are helpful to have experienced or played before approaching this one

- Robert Schumann: Selections from *Kinderszenen*
- Edvard Grieg: "Arietta" from *Lyric Pieces*
- Sergei Prokofiev: easier selections from *Visions Fugitives*
- Frederic Chopin: easier Nocturnes
- Claude Debussy: "Jimbo's Lullaby" from *Children's Corner*

**Get Ready:** creative activities to explore before the first encounter with the score, to prepare a student for deeper engagement and more immediate success

- Encourage older/more mature students to conduct their own research on Amy Beach before tackling this piece.
- Experiment with creating *p*, *pp*, and *ppp* dynamic levels (and even softer!)
- Explore different tone color through subtle physical means like articulation, attack, wrist movement, key release, and follow through, either on single notes or simple melodies
- How softly can a student play a simple melody like "Ode to Joy" and maintain rhythmic control and a sense of tonal color?

**Initial Focus:** features to pay attention to first; priority steps in reading and absorbing the music

- Locate the different textures of this music, usually within the same clef/same hand (mm. 1-3 or 4-7).
- Take time to explore this work and realize that conventional "rules" about harmony and key signature do not apply here!
- Locate "advanced" chords and just focus on reading/playing them comfortably, outside of the context of the piece (See RH of measures 14, 16, or LH of measure 31 for examples).
- Students might look at the key signature of this work and assume it is in C Major or A Minor – but is it?

**Coordination Essentials:** physical skills and drills for common technical challenges in the piece

- Practice voicing melodies with multiple textures in one hand. Specifically, practice bringing out a melodic line using the upper fingers of the right hand (fingers 4 and 5) against accompaniment figures in the other fingers.

- Practice applying constant legato pedal from start to finish, much like in a Chopin Nocturne or Waltz.
- Familiarity with executing ornamentation such as in Chopin nocturnes is helpful!

**Expressivity:** ideas to connect with the expressive and musical nature of the piece

- Discuss possible reasons why these pieces are entitled "Improvisations."
- Ask the student to come up with their own ideas for what this piece might be trying to depict or portray.
- Consider the unique harmonic language used in this piece.
- Encourage expressive playing through the ambiguous and open-ended nature of this work.

**Look Forward:** approaches to set up for success with refinements that will need attention a few weeks down the road

- Revisit and refine the pedaling consistently through the learning process.
- Explore what the marking *molto tranquillo* could indicate.
- Even the briefest hints of melodic ideas, such as the dotted-note motif in mm. 17-18, 22-23, and 25-26, can be wonderful opportunities for students to make musical and artistic connections in this work.
- The *rallentando* at the conclusion of this piece, which stretches out over the last 5 measures, will need constant refinement as well.