



Inspiring Artistry Repertoire Project

A Piano Magazine subscriber-exclusive digital resource

Ricardo de la Torre presents: Intermezzo No. 1 by Manuel Ponce

Preparation and Presentation

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

- Edvard Grieg: “Album Leaf,” Op. 12, No. 7 or “Solitary Traveler,” Op. 43, No. 2.
- Frederic Chopin: Preludes Op. 28, Nos. 4 and 6 or Waltz in A Minor, Op. Posth., Kk4B No. 11.
- Edward MacDowell: “Idylle” Etude, Op. 39, No. 7.
- Amy Beach: Arctic Night, Op. 64, No. 1 or Exiles, Op. 64, No. 3.

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

- Read about the composer, especially if they are unfamiliar to the student. The Wikipedia entry on Ponce is not a bad place to start.
- Listen to multiple recordings on YouTube to become familiar with the style and get a feel for the piece. After listening, forget about them for a while so they do not become too influenced. Choose recordings by pianists who may be familiar with the tradition the piece comes from, such as Mexican pianists Jorge Federico Osorio, Guadalupe Parrondo, and Abdiel Vázquez.
- Map out the form of the piece with a general diagram of how long each section is and where the main harmonic areas are.
- Sing the tenor line at mm. 16-21 before learning the notes to find a natural way to phrase it and get it in their ear.
- Review the concept of a circle of fifths progression, which is a sequence at mm. 24-28.

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

- Figure out the different layers of the texture and their importance relative to one another. The melody is mostly in the repeated thirds in the RH, which should generally be louder than the LH. An exception is in mm. 16-21 and 48-53, where the LH should be brought out.
- Practice the melody in the middle of the texture at mm. 16-21 with two hands in order to get an aural image of what it should sound like. Then look for a way to produce that sound image with just the LH.
- Choose a fingering for the RH thirds, determining when to use the 3rd or 4th finger along with the 5th in the upper ones. For a supple wrist/forearm, have the student use lateral motions that allow them to align their fingers and forearm with the keys. Practice

playing the thirds without repeating them to more easily find the melodic contour. See the above video for a more detailed explanation of this point.

- While practicing without pedal is useful, the pedal is an integral part of the sound of the piece and should be brought in early in the preparation process. It's a good opportunity for the student to use their ear to decide where to clear it. Encourage students to pay attention to harmonic changes and use their intuition.

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

- Practice mm. 33-38, marked *sciolto* (loose, in the sense of free or nimble), in groupings. Practice in pairs of short-long and long-short, as well as in groups of three: short-short-long and long-short-short. Eventually, group all six notes in one gesture. These figures should have absolute clarity and evenness.
- Pay attention to dynamics. The *pp* at the return of the A section at m. 40 should have a softer and more melancholic color than the *p* at its first appearance in m. 8. Look for a different color at the beginning of the B section in m. 24 and be careful to place and voice the *ppp* chord at the end.
- To pedal m. 39, let the full harmony of the previous bar sound for a fraction of a second in m. 39 and then clear it, letting only the LH B ring and fade away. One can either then clear the pedal and restart, or let the theme come out of what is left of the resonance of that long B. Experiment with ways of eliding or separating this juncture by means of the pedal and resonance.

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

- The vocal element was very important to Ponce, who had a gift for melody and wrote many songs. Think of this piece as a song without words. Look for ways to phrase in a vocal manner. Practice singing while you play.
- Aim for a beautiful tone quality. The coda is good practice, as it may be harder to achieve in the higher registers.

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

- Think about the function of the introduction. Try to find a sound and character that prepares the appearance of the main theme. It can be quite blurry and use very subtle *rubato*.
- Continue to look for smoothness and consistency of attack when playing all the repeated thirds. Voicing the top note of the third more than the lower note will provide more definition in the sound.
- Pacing the *accelerando* in the middle section, mm. 25-31, in a natural and gradual way can be tricky. Move in two-measure phrases and do not start pushing too soon.