



Inspiring Artistry Repertoire Project

A Piano Magazine subscriber-exclusive digital resource

John S. Ellis presents:

Knecht Ruprecht op.68 no.12 ("Knight Rupert") by Robert Schumann

Process and Practice

Fully Present: Tips for maintaining focus and engagement over time

- Create a story line with your student. Align the narrative with each phrase.
- Find key affective words with your student to apply to each phrase to give a clear motivation for them.

Break it Up: Useful practice segments; how to connect them and plug them back into the whole

- "Stop/Start" practicing on the first measure: extend the first sixteenth note of each beat to release any tension immediately after the accents and to keep the hands together.
- Play first beat accents with a free fall if the hand is stable. Otherwise, start on the key and begin with a wrist accent.
- Practice position shifts on two-note slurs in m. 2 and in similar spots: use "silent set" practice (i.e. jump to the new position, landing on top of the keys without depressing them).
- Chords in m. 4: voice the top notes in the RH by tilting the hand toward the fifth finger.
- Practice the B section by phrase: each phrase as a chorale, blocking the broken chords, voicing the top. First phrase of the B section: Do "stop/start" practice again to keep hands together. "Add-a-note" practice to ensure security and the legato quality of the frequent position shifts. For smaller hands, redistribute the RH afterbeats to the LH (A-flats at m. 38 and Fs at m. 46).

Layers and outlines: Tips for focusing on how the parts make up the whole

- Have your student play the underlying chord progression for each phrase.
- Have your student play the key centers corresponding to each section and subsection.
- Have the student sing in rhythm while playing the chord progressions discussed above. (The pitches can be approximated due to the range--it should be about the student getting the feeling of the line).
- In the B section, have the student play the strong beat notes without the sixteenth note afterbeats in order to hear the melodic line and its LH bass line accompaniment.

Achieving flow: Ideas for finding and maintaining tempo, managing modifications artistically

- Use the metronome to pulse eighth notes, quarter notes, half notes (i.e. one measure) and whole notes (i.e. two measures) in order to move from solidifying the tone on each note to achieving flow and direction throughout the phrases.

Make it mine: Tips for developing and refining a personal, internal sense of the piece

- The storyline development, referenced above, goes a long way towards helping the student feel engaged in the story of Knecht Ruprecht by uncovering what the music is saying to her or him in terms of affect.

Deep knowing: Tips for securing memory

- Have a student write out the chord analysis of the score and take note of the cadences and keys.
- Have the student sing while playing.
- Play the piece by phrase (4 measures at a time) trading off between you and the student (this is easiest when teacher and student are at separate pianos, but it can be done at one).
- Ask the student to play the piece in their head at the piano, in a tempo you decide on together. Have them to play out loud after 8 measures and then stop at the end of the A section. Then do the same for the B section.

Final stages: Tips for ensuring performance readiness, maintaining freshness and spontaneity, and reinforcing an expressive personal connection

- Have the student play the piece at a very slow adagio tempo with expression.
- Have the student play with a much louder dynamic level in the A section and a much softer dynamic level in the B section (experimentation with dynamics and touch in order to open up their creative listening). Record each one and discuss the effects with the student.
- Have the student play at a slower tempo and with a light staccato touch to confirm the fingering.
- Focus the student on expressive phrasing in 2 measure units.