



Inspiring Artistry Repertoire Project

A Piano Magazine subscriber-exclusive digital resource

Cathy Smetana presents:

Musette in D major from Notebook for Anna Magdalena Bach, BWV Anh. 126

Composer: unknown, though often attributed to J. S. Bach

Preparation and Presentation

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

- David Kraehenbuehl, *March of the Trolls* (detailed articulation, quick leaps over the keyboard)
- Favorite Jazzy pieces with ties and syncopations (e.g. Jon George, *Chattanooga Cha-Cha* from *Students' Choice*; Christopher Norton, *Driving Range* from *Connections 1*; Dennis Alexander, *Blue Boogie* from *A Splash of Color 1*)
- Beethoven, *Eccossaise in G major, WoO 23* (detailed articulation, style, syncopation)

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

- Clapbacks featuring key rhythmic patterns from *Musette* (specifically, mm. 13-14, 17-18, 1-2, 3-4) - this can be done in just minutes, for several weeks before starting the piece
- Playbacks in various five finger scales, featuring melodic and rhythmic patterns from *Musette*
- Allow student to improvise and/or compose using D Major, A Major, and E Major scales, dividing the scale between the hands as necessary. Create your own accompaniment patterns or use an app like MusiClock to provide musical and rhythmic support
- Harmonize RH five-finger pattern melodies with I and V in LH

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

- This piece lends itself to a combination of rote learning and note reading. I prefer to teach the A Section at least in part by ear, call-and-response style. This gives kids a “quick win” when they see the score for the first time and realize they’ve already played two-thirds of the piece!
- Identify the key of the piece; mark the form and notice the LH’s cycle from D to A, to E and back again. Since, by the time they play this piece, my students have harmonized melodies with I and V, it isn’t difficult to lead them to the realization that E is the V of A, which is the V of D. At this point I always mention the term “secondary dominant” - though I wouldn’t expect them to remember that term at this point, it never hurts to use real terminology!

- Focus on fingering and articulation from the beginning; isolate the physical gestures that automatically create a stylistic sound
- I teach the RH of mm. 13-16 by rote in layers, showing how it is based on the same three notes the LH uses throughout the piece: E, D, and A. I start with just those notes in rhythm, gradually adding in the half steps, then finally the “ping pong ball” lower E. This allows me to guide students to experience the rhythm and articulation with fluid technical gestures at a quicker tempo than they could sightread.
- The trickiest part of the piece is often m. 18. I have students practice it note by note HS and HT, covering up notes I do not want them to play with a 3x5 card, until I am confident a good fingering is built into muscle memory; at that point, I’m willing to send it home for them to practice on their own

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

- Major Five Finger Patterns in dozens of ways: various articulations (legato, staccato, two note slurs); different rhythms in each hand (LH playing quarter notes, RH playing eighth notes and sixteenth notes); in contrary motion; beginning several octaves apart then leaping quickly in towards the middle of the piano
- I think of the octaves and other quick moves as “ping pong ball” jumps. Once you drop a ping pong ball, it bounces all over the place, without any extra energy being applied. When I talk to my students about “ping pong ball” technique, I’m referring to the concept that Nelita True referred to as “double drops” – one physical impulse plays more than one note. This is easiest when notes are close together, but it’s also possible when notes are far apart. In the lesson, all by rote, I give kids these “ping pong ball” warm ups to practice the moves from the starting position in to m. 3 and back out to the starting position (m. 5): 3-3-3 (all on F-sharps); 5-3-5 (LH 5 on D, RH 5 on A, both 3’s on F-sharp); 1-3-1 (1’s on D, 3’s on F-sharp). This sounds complicated in writing, but in the video you’ll see just how quick and easy these warm-ups are. Kids love the challenge of trying them with their eyes closed!
- Relaxed, bouncing octaves pivoting around the 3rd finger (with the loose wrists of ping pong ball technique, but with an “anchor” - pivoting loosely around finger 3 allows kids to play the octaves easily, without losing their place on the keyboard).

Expressivity: Ideas to connect and re-connect with the expressive and musical nature of the piece

- Depending on the edition you are using, there may be a lot of editorial articulation and dynamics printed in the score. I like to be sure my students know these markings were not in the original score; while they are not “wrong” they are only one of several “right” ways to play the piece. With Musette, I tend to guide articulation choices but encourage my students make their own dynamic choices.
- Listen to Bobby McFerrin and Yo-Yo Ma’s version of Musette on the album “Hush” - the articulation and musical flow is exceptional, and kids always enjoy it. It’s fun to try to imitate the different styles they capture! Feel free to fast forward to 1:10 if your students won’t understand or appreciate the Jimi Hendrix reference!
- Assign “Ragtime Musette” from Renfrow’s Repertoire and Ragtime Book 2 – then encourage the student to either embellish it or create their own “jazzy” version

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

- Careful attention to fingering and articulation from the beginning will prevent a lot of struggle later
- Use lesson time to work through any new measures before sending them home
- Students will want to play the A Section very fast, only to slow down in the B Section. Be proactive and have students practice the B Section multiple times before playing the whole piece. I have a 20-sided die in my studio which I call the “Torture Device” - yet kids love rolling to see how many times they need to repeat the section. When they roll a huge number, I give them an “escape hatch” - if at any point they play the section 3 times perfectly IN A ROW, they are done and do not need to complete the rest of the repetitions!