



Inspiring Artistry Repertoire Project

A Piano Magazine subscriber-exclusive digital resource

Susanna Garcia presents:

Waltz in B Minor, Op. 69, No. 2 by Frédéric Chopin

Preparation and Presentation

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

- Pyotr Tchaikovsky, *The Sick Doll*, op. 39, no. 6
- Dmitri Kabalevsky, *Slow Waltz*, op. 39, no. 23
- Frédéric Chopin, *Waltz in A minor*, op. post.
- Edvard Grieg, *Waltz*, op. 12, no. 2
- Samuil Maykapar *Waltz*, op. 28, no. 5

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

- Dalcroze or other movement activities can help students feel the waltz style and can address issues of coordination, syncopation, and accents found in this piece. There are many great resources online and in print.
- Audiation of the melodic rhythm while tapping the pulse with the left hand is another way to internalize the coordination required for this piece.
- Listen to waltzes in different styles and by different composers to assist with stylistic understanding. In addition to piano music, be sure to listen to orchestras and string quartets play waltzes to help students hear the layering of the parts.
- Technical Preview: This waltz contains some unusual technical elements. Practice chromatic scale fingerings (using 4) and create some short double-note drills based on the patterns found in this waltz.

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

- The Harmony: There are only a few chords in this piece, with lots of repetition. A harmonic analysis will ease the reading load and help your student feel the phrasing. This is also really great for memorization.
- The Bass Line: It can be a challenge for students to hear the downbeat bass note as a melodic line. Isolate this part by playing it legato and singing along. I find that students are much more willing to sing if I am singing with them!
- The Melody: Model the physical gestures that are indicated in the melody (slur groups, accents, legato touch, etc.). My students enjoy a call-and-response approach to this where I model a short phrase and they try to imitate everything that I did.
- The Chromatic Scales: These can be tricky. Compare, contrast, and drill the measures where they are used - mm. 47-52 with mm. 56-60.

- General Tip: Practice in chunks, alternating reading with rote (ear) playing, with a focus on physical comfort and smooth finger crossings.

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

- Facility in the Keys of B Major and Minor: Comfort and fluency in these keys is essential for mastery of the complex coordination challenges of this waltz. These include scales, chords, and double thirds.
- Fluency with Chromatic Scales: Not all chromatic scale passages are limited to fingers 1, 2, and 3. The patterns in this waltz require the use of 4 as well.
- Fingerings: There are many expansion and contractions of the right hand in this melody resulting in complicated fingerings. Isolate complex fingering shifts such as in mm. 7-10 and mm. 12-16, until smooth and easy.
- The Jump Bass: This requires speed and accuracy, as well a relaxed hand and wrist. Understanding the choreography of motions is essential.
- Chord Voicings: Voicing the tops of the chords in the left-hand waltz bass can give shape and direction to the accompaniment.

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

- Review: My students enjoy playing their repertoire as a duet with me. I play one hand and they play the other, then we switch. If the piece is being memorized, they should be able to play their separate part by memory.
- Experiment: What would it sound like if the syncopated note were played on the beat? Or if you changed the short slurs to one long slur in the hemiola-like passage in mm. 6-7? Experiments like this can help a student to better understand the musical elements used by the composer.
- Rubato: As your student develops, experiment with rubato and timing. Listen to and compare three professional recordings of this waltz.
- Creativity: Help your student improvise a melody while playing the waltz accompaniment. This will also develop great coordination skills. Or work on a composition that uses this chord progression.
- Pedaling: There are several possible pedaling options (including no pedal). Trying out different options will keep the student's ear alert.

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

- Be Proactive: Understanding the problem spots and addressing them early will save time and result in a more artistic performance.
- Reading or Rote? While the composer's score is a road map to a successful performance of any piece, too much reliance on the score can hamper technical development and aural acuity. Try a variety of teaching approaches that involve reading, listening, and physical awareness. Teacher modeling is a very useful tool.