

Inspiring Artistry

Andrea McAlister presents Clowns, op. 39, no. 20 by Dmitri Kabalevsky

Preparation and Presentation

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

- Beethoven - Ecossaise in G Major, WoO 23
- Niamath - Playful Puppy
- Niamath - Penguins

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

- Learn the LH ostinato figure by rote. Play this pattern up the C major scale.
- Improvise a 5-finger melody against the left hand ostinato.
- Play/imitate 5-finger patterns in a variety of touches and articulations. Familiarize the ear and hand by using the exact articulations from the piece.

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

- Maintain the bounciness of the LH rote exercises.
- Encourage close attention to the movements of wrist while executing precise RH articulations.
- Discuss the character of the sections from the very beginning; these characters are great motivation for practice!

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

- Drill LH passages independently.
- RH articulations and wrist motions can be drilled by focusing only on the first three notes, alternating from major to minor.
- Practice RH staccato leaps separately from the slurred passages for accuracy.

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

- Write Emoji faces into the music to remind them of the characters chosen for each section.
- Compare LH ostinato figure to a clown rhythmically juggling balls.

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

- Encourage slow practice with attention to LH changes in mm. 13-17.
- The end can be tricky. Work backward for accuracy, starting with m. 25 and practicing slowly until mm. 22-25 are confident and comfortable.