

## EXPLORING THE REPERTOIRE

### Piano Grades 6-8

Linda Nottingham



In the final part of this series, examiner and piano syllabus consultant Linda Nottingham discusses the advanced grades of Trinity's 2021-2023 Piano syllabus.

For Grades 6-8, the repertoire list is divided into two groups, A and B. Candidates are required to choose at least one piece from each group when constructing their programmes, three pieces in all:

- ▶ Group A leans towards works with a technical emphasis, reflecting the typical challenges of the instrument. Most often (but not exclusively) these are from the Baroque and Classical periods.
- ▶ Group B comprises works that offer an imaginative array of compositional techniques, moods and opportunities for personal interpretation. It includes arrangements, works by winners of Trinity's Young Composers' Competition, pieces inspired by the jazz genre, repertoire from the Romantic period, and modern pieces up to the present day.

The groups are larger than ever before – up to 15 pieces in Group A and 22 pieces in Group B, so this article concentrates mainly on the pieces included in Trinity's graded exam books. Publishers for the other pieces are listed in the syllabus.



## Grade 6

### Group A

Alongside three works by J S Bach is the inclusion of a work by his son C P E Bach. The 'Adagio', 2nd movement from 'Sonata in B minor' is a highly ornate piece, the right hand enjoying the energy of reversed dotted rhythms and *coloratura* style embellishments. The lovely, gentle minor moments could be highlighted for intimate expression by finding a different colour, or by using *una corda*.

'Impromptu' by the French pianist Louise Farrenc has sinuous lines which are copied between the hands in an intimate dialogue and the part playing is rather challenging – separate parts practice is needed here.

The two Haydn movements on offer, one in the Trinity graded exam book and the other available separately, are both typical of the composer's predilection for humour, infectious keyboard patterns, sound structure, dramatic tension and a delight in the instrument.

### FARRENC / Impromptu

**Moderato** ♩ = c.40 (♩♩ = c.120)

*p dolce*

*con Ped. ad lib.*

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## Group B

'Epilogue' (from 'Tāwāhi') is a piece by Oliver Francis Huang-Hsu, one of Trinity's Young Composers' Competition winners. It begins simply, using a pentatonic sound world based on the melodic patterns of Taongo Pūoro – traditional Māori instruments. It then develops atmospherically, somewhat dreamily, in a lyrical style which is rather hypnotic and peaceful.

Burgmüller's 'The Gondolier's Song', op. 109 no. 14, available separately, has challenges due to decisions that must be made over pedalling and also because of the need for flexibility in the left hand around the keyboard to provide an undulating accompaniment to the singing line.

## BURGMÜLLER / The Gondolier's Song

**Andantino con moto** (♩ = 56)

*p* *cantabile* *dim.*

Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped.

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Now more specific ideas about some of the Grade 6 works on offer:

## COUPERIN / Allemande

One of two works by Couperin on the Grade 6 list, it is a delight to investigate the patterns in this piece, 'Allemande', to make personal decisions over the dynamics and articulation and to let the patterns themselves suggest things to us. During this period the French style was highly decorative in all the arts. As we are playing the piano, using dynamic contrasts is an expressive element available to us. Keyboard players of the time had the possibility of using a different stop or manual if available, but much of their expression was through agogic accent, placing interesting notes or harmonies to find personal means of expression. Practising with a metronome is always helpful, but in the end these phrases need to find their natural ebb and flow.

**Légèrement** ♩ = 63-72

(1) (2) (3)

5 3 2 3

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## COUPERIN / The Little Windmills

The second piece on the Grade 6 syllabus by Couperin, available in Trinity's anthology *Raise the Bar* for Grades 6-8, is this absolutely delightful musical representation of windmills, something that must have been a common sight in Couperin's time. In his 'Ordres', or 'Suites', the titles of movements are often very colourful, describing people or objects, and it is fun trying to tease out the detail. The sails are obviously going round in the wind and our hands are often close to each other. At other moments, having practised G major and E minor scales in tenths and sixths will give us an advantage. The movement is constant but, as in the other piece, we should not feel obliged to hurry on to the next pattern. Deft phrasing, articulative detail and use of the echo effect, which works so well for the 'fingertip touch' short motifs, can all add up to a beautifully descriptive and charming performance which conjures a bygone age.

**Très légèrement** [ $\text{♩} = 68$ ]

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## KHACHATURIAN / Ivan Is Very Busy

If you study this piece, then you will probably decide that Ivan is not very busy – he is SO busy that he must be exhausting to be with. He sounds like the kind of boy who can't sit quietly, even for a moment. This is from the set of pieces 'The Adventures of Ivan', which comprises eight glimpses into his life, such as him singing, being ill, going to a party and so on.

What his boundless energy means for us is that we are going on a whirlwind trip of *staccato* articulation and it will tire us very quickly if we are not careful. The right hand usually has the melody, which mostly uses insistent and stressed repeated notes combined with a chromatic, dancing quaver motif. The left hand is the driver here and the flicked finger *staccato* required can be exhausting if not prepared thoughtfully.

It might be a good idea to practise the two left-hand notes that form the 3rd interval of each group as a crotchet on the second and fourth beats of the bar, sinking into each one with a loose wrist and coming up again during the next beat. Then, doing exactly the same thing, combine with the right hand and you will find that there is a natural co-ordination taking place. Taking this to the next stage of flicking the quavers is now not too difficult a job, but aim to feel comfortable with the above method for every such phrase of the piece first. Remember to practise bars 30-35 like this too.

At bar 39, keep the right wrist up, out of the way, and the hand towards the fallboard to give the left hand plenty of room. The suggested fingering for the repeated Fs works very well – remember to keep that hand loose!

There are many wonderfully dramatic elements here, such as the stabbing accents, a huge dynamic range and a large dollop of humour. We can imagine Ivan going about what he obviously considers to be a serious job and finishing it triumphantly after a final energetic push from bar 67.

## REBIKOV / Con afflizione (from 'Feuilles d'automne', op. 29)

Vladimir Rebikov was born in Siberia in the mid 19th century. He studied at the Moscow Conservatory and later taught and gave recitals in many parts of Europe. Here he met other composers, Debussy among them, whom he later thought had gained renown as innovators, whereas he, who had experimented earlier with progressive harmony, music and mime and so on, was relatively unknown. One of his piano teachers had been a pupil of Tchaikovsky and some of his early miniature pieces are reminiscent of the great composer's pieces for children.

However this piece, the third of the composer's 'Feuilles d'automne' (Autumn Leaves) op. 29, is 'grown-up' music which requires fine control of the singing and deeply expressive right-hand melody. The title means 'with pain/sorrow' and the right hand often reaches skyward, whereas the left seems to sigh repeatedly as it gently resolves all the added ninths and sevenths.

If you listen to performances of this online, beware. So many do not actually manage the rhythms correctly and some that do are metronomic and shapeless renditions. Practising two against three is an art and nothing can substitute for using a metronome on crotchets, tapping quavers in the left hand for four beats, then triplets in the right for four beats. Do this a few times without stopping, carefully making sure that you are absolutely correct with your first triplet at the changeover. When you feel confident with this, keep the left hand going and add the right. If it is not easy, just start over again and it should soon work. Another way is to tap together from one beat to the next and stop – you can easily check whether you were correct or not. Some people say 'cold cup of tea', which reflects the rhythm produced by the hands together. Connoisseurs, however, progress to being able to say 'left, left...' and then 'right, right...' at the appropriate moments while tapping together!

When all the notes and fingerings are taken care of, there remains the rewarding work of shaping our performance. Which harmonies do you like most? Where are the climaxes of the phrases and the moments of reflection? How will you shape the dynamics (there are hardly any on the score, so it is up to you)? The examiner wants to hear your decisions. This music requires a stylish sense of *rubato* and if this is daunting, then make up some 'rules' to experiment with. Play all the semiquavers with forward movement – does that sound good? Delay the top note of each of the yearning right-hand motifs – is that too much/does it work sometimes? By experimenting like this you can find out what you actually want to do.

The middle section uses an interrupted cadence and the middle of the keyboard to create a slightly different mood. The last eight bars are in a beautifully pianistic pattern. Using alternating 1st and 2nd fingers for the descending scale and gently touching finger 5 on the upper notes (which will be held until the next beat by the pedal, changed on each crotchet) should work well. It is your decision whether to have one long pedal for the last four bars, or to change on the final chord, losing the lower register. Try both ways.

Elsewhere, the pedalling may seem obvious – changing every bar or every beat seems to be the choice at first. But if you try a 'breathing' pedal, as I call it (letting the foot go up then down equally during each beat), there is usually clarity where needed, with the bass octaves and chords carried through to the next beat as the hand moves around the keyboard. It helps the resolution of the harmony very much and is a good skill to have, as it can be used in so many situations.



## BURLEIGH / Through Moanin' Pines (from 'From the Southland')

Harry Thacker Burleigh (1866-1949) was born in Pennsylvania and was already an experienced church musician when he won a scholarship to the National Conservatory of Music in New York at the age of 26, to study singing. He was a baritone with an 'exceptionally melodious voice', who performed with deep sensitivity and emotion, as can be heard in this piano piece. It starts simply, with a pentatonic melody and develops into a very heartfelt and expressive declaration, subsiding pensively at the end.

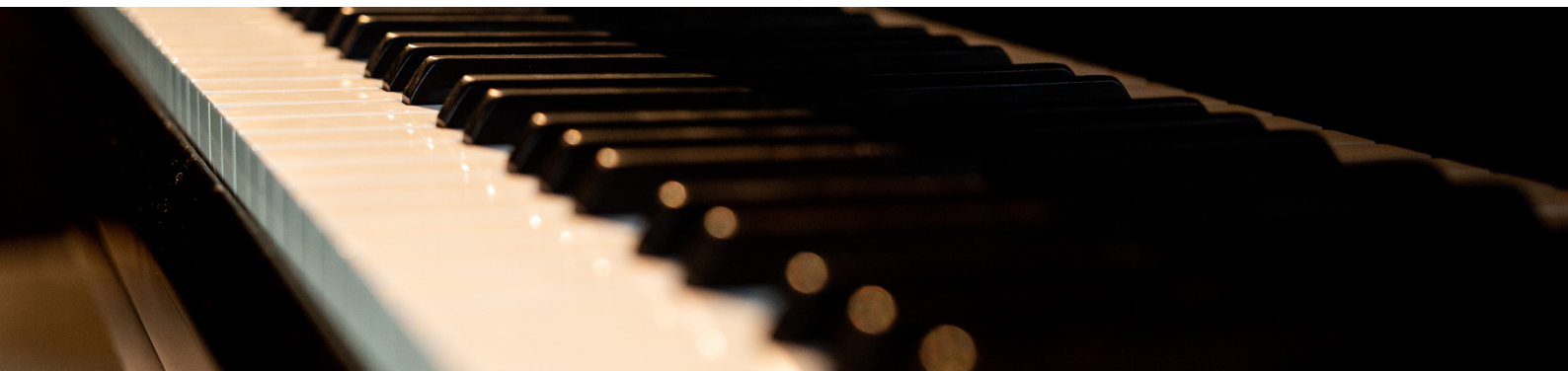
The director of the Conservatory at that time was the Czech composer Dvořák, who heard Burleigh sing and was inspired by his performances of American songs and spirituals. It was Dvořák who encouraged Burleigh to write arrangements of these and one of the first, and most famous, was 'Deep River'. Dvořák's 9th Symphony 'From the New World' seems directly linked to the mood, mode and colours he heard in such performances.

The melody needs to be supported by carefully balanced chords. The middle section has a rather lilting and gently syncopated character and is rather in the style of a vocal or string quartet. Then follows a more extrovert version of the first melody, this time in octaves, followed by a harmonically varied section during which we may need to take some lower stave notes with the right-hand thumb. You could experiment with *rubato* by highlighting your favourite harmonies, delaying slightly and/or spending time on them. How about writing words? – it is so obviously a song. The resonance of the pedal is needed in this piece, but watch out during the step-wise quavers where subtlety is needed too, as in the previous piece discussed. It is usually the soprano who has the main line here, but look at the end – the baritone has the final word. Try to imagine the composer's voice.

Andante semplice (♩ = 66) rit. . . .

*mf* *pp*

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## Grade 7

### Group A

J S Bach's 'Invention in A' offers the opportunity to convince with even fingerwork and an understanding of the structure. Bach, the great architect, shows us how beautiful something conceived as a study for independence of the hands can be. The compound quadruple time has many notes per bar, so long-term planning for phrasing is necessary. The wave shapes are buoyant and rather athletic, but with finesse. Experimenting with articulation and dynamics will be both educational and enjoyable and teachers can use this in so many positive ways.

### BACH / Invention in A

**Moderato** ♩ = 50

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Handel's 'Capriccio in G minor' is a true partnership of the hands. The dialogue is rigorous and decisions over articulative detail and fingering should be made and then practised slowly, carefully and separately for as long as is needed.

'Finale' from Haydn's 'Sonata in D', Hob.XVI:24 is an infectious romp, with syncopated details and some coy copying between the hands, with the left hand often leading. A light touch is needed, with stronger chordal detail at times (although we are free to choose our own dynamics). How dare that diminished seventh chord interrupt proceedings in bar 90! It heralds the final section however, ending in a typically humorous manner.



## Group B

Fanny Hensel's 'Mélodie', op. 4 no. 2 is a beautiful song with a constant, upward-flowing accompaniment. Allowing the melody to sing out is an obvious task for us, as is the need to make a seamless transfer from left hand to right in the accompanying figures. The dynamic markings are particularly meaningful and can lead our *rubato*, as well as offering possibilities for changing the colour by employing *una corda*.

**Allegretto** ♩ = c.48

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A performance of 'Soho' by Charlotte Botterill, who is another Young Composers' Competition winner, might be enhanced by thinking of a jazz trio or a larger ensemble. As always, an intense feel for the pulse is absolutely essential. It is a colourfully attractive piece, the main groove moodily relaxed and then upbeat later on. Each section is closely detailed in its markings to point us in the right direction, in the appropriate mood.

And now specific ideas about some of the Grade 7 works on offer:

## MARTINES / Allegro (1st movt from 'Sonata in E major')

Born in Vienna in 1744, this composer, singer and keyboard player was able to enjoy educational opportunities and a successful career which were not typical for women of her social standing at that time. Family friends such as the poet Metastasio, the Italian singing teacher Porpora and an at that time unknown young composer called Joseph Haydn (who lived in the same building) noticed her natural talents and supported her progression. She spoke four languages and wrote vocal music as well as music for the keyboard. Apparently, Mozart wrote some duets to play with her.

Her talents as a singer took her to perform at the Imperial Court, where she 'attracted attention with her beautiful voice and her keyboard playing'. She enjoyed the Italianate *coloratura* style, so popular at the time (think of The Queen of the Night's arias in Mozart's 'Magic Flute') and was able to produce the seamless runs, acrobatics and sensational ornamentation required. It seems that she was a natural performer. Hence the ebullience and zest for life that we find in this movement. There is such a confident first subject, with its ornamented anacrusis, strongly stated broken chord and a 'zip it up' scale. Some motifs sound as if they are inspired by vocal exercises, such as the passage from bar 8 to 16.

**Allegro** ♩ = c.100

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On the other hand, the second subject is charming and intimate, with sweet trills. The shapes are varied in the development. The ornamentation in this piece will need fluttery fingers and attack on the first note, relaxing away to give perspective and elegance.

This is a beautifully balanced movement with plenty of scope for subtle details of articulation, phrase shaping and dynamic colouring and will prove a delight to practise for those who choose it.

## BULLARD / Prelude no. 8

'Tightly rhythmic and bright' is the marking and herein lies the challenge. Yes, we need to practise the parallel chords, the *leggiero* quavers (along with the slightly varied combination of these two elements in bars 21-24) and the rising arpeggio of bar 41, but the challenge is to link all these together and make it sound easy!

Some pianists will opt to play one fingering for most of the RH triads, perhaps finding that this can guarantee the accentuation. Others will prefer a fingering decided by the length of the procession of chords. Note the different articulation (*non legato* quavers and some stresses in right hand) in bars 21-24.

The *pp* quaver figures require neat and delicate finger *staccato*, quickly stroking the key from the surface. Deciding on fingering and marking it in for repetitive practice is vital. As the great pianist Artur Schnabel wrote in his autobiography: 'Never experiment with different fingering in a recital' (or even your exam!). Although these patterns flow naturally once one has done the preparatory counting, it is challenging to start them immediately each time after playing the bright chords. It may help to think in colours here – gold for the fanfare-like chords and which colour for the tiny interjections? You decide. It is also possible to imagine that a door has closed or that the music is muted at this point. It definitely must not be slower when softer.

**Tightly rhythmic and bright** ♩ = ♩ ♩ = c.180

The musical score shows the first 10 bars of the piece. The right hand plays parallel chords with various fingerings (4 2 1, 5 3 1, 4 2 1, 2, 4, 2, 1). The left hand plays quaver patterns, some with *pp* and *leggiero* markings. The piece starts with a forte (*f*) dynamic and ends with a forte (*f*) dynamic.

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This Prelude is a dramatic piece and very exciting to play. The sudden changes between phrases remind me of organ music. Even modest people need to show off here – the unexpected bar 41 gives a nod to this and is also very humorous.



## GLIÈRE / Esquisse (no. 12 from '24 pièces caractéristiques pour la jeunesse', op. 34)

Born in Kiev in 1875, Reinhold Glière studied violin with the renowned teacher Ševčík and from 1891 was at the Conservatory in Moscow, where he concentrated on composition and conducting. His wide-ranging compositions include orchestral works, much chamber music for strings, stage works and numerous sets of piano pieces.

The word *esquisse* means 'sketch' or 'plan' and in music it is used for a short, imaginative piece in a particular mood. This one is rather turbulent and typifies the Romantic style, in miniature. In compound triple time, marked *Allegro*, the figures build to a climax and then ebb again. It is intense music which begins simply in A minor and then progresses through various keys, with rich seventh chords in the left hand in some phrases, providing the underlay for the right hand's imaginative and cascading shapes. Constant quaver movement and the swooping figures would suit the violin well, the bow providing the phrasing. Perhaps this was its inspiration. We need to take care to practise so that the shapes are even but malleable; once the music is under the fingers then imagination can take over.

It begins – we hold our breath – and it is over. It is well worth investigating.

## CAPERS / The Monk

Born in the Bronx in 1935, Valerie Capers was educated at the New York Institute for the Education of the Blind and the Juilliard School of Music. She is a pianist, composer, arranger and educator and her trio and ensemble have played all over the world. 'The Monk' is from a series of pieces titled 'Portraits in Jazz', which was inspired by 12 influential jazz musicians. The pianist Thelonious Monk is the subject of this particular portrait and bars 7-9 contain a quote from his piece 'Straight No Chaser'.

Capers grew up listening to all genres of music and has said that as a youngster she loved and valued being able to play the simpler pieces of the great composers and not just music written especially for children. Thus, she decided to write a set of accessible jazz pieces for young people and their teachers.

Although this work is therefore not overly complex, the colourful chords and punchy accents make it vibrant and exciting. The silences are so rhythmically vital here, but after checking our rhythms she wants us to play it 'in a playful and joking manner'. Investigation of all the seventh chords and blues thirds will lead to comfortable placing of the hands and enjoyment of the patterns. It does sound like the real thing.

**Moderato, in a playful and joking manner** ♩ = 144

The musical score is written for piano in 4/4 time. The tempo is marked 'Moderato, in a playful and joking manner' with a quarter note equal to 144 beats per minute. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The right hand starts with a forte (f) dynamic and features eighth-note patterns with triplets. The left hand provides harmonic support with sustained chords and bass lines, including sforzando (sfz) accents. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings.

'The Monk' by Valerie Capers from *Portraits in Jazz* © Oxford University Press Inc 2000, assigned to Oxford University Press 2010. Extract reproduced by permission. All rights reserved.

## Grade 8

### Group A

'Feodora' from Czerny's *Album élégant des dames pianistes*, op. 804 is the 16th of a set of 24 pieces. Each deals with specific technical matters and the titles (all women's names) indicate individual characters too. As we investigate the piece we become acquainted with Feodora and it is indeed helpful to imagine the facets of her temperament. The main section shows a forthright and confident personality, whereas the central one indicates a more introverted and thoughtful aspect, requiring control of *legato* phrases in up to four parts.

The image shows a musical score for 'Feodora' by Czerny. It features a piano part with a treble and bass clef. The right hand has a melodic line with a slur over a phrase starting with a triplet of eighth notes (fingerings 5, 3, 3) and ending with a triplet of eighth notes (fingerings 3, 5, 2, 5). The left hand provides a harmonic accompaniment with chords and moving lines. Dynamic markings include *cresc.*, *rf*, and *p*. The score is marked with a copyright notice: © Copyright 2020 Trinity College London Press Ltd.

Bartók's 'Dance no. 2' is from *6 Dances in Bulgarian Rhythm, Mikrokosmos vol. 6*. Constantly on the move, the energy dissipating only in the last four bars, this is a leaping dance with much percussive detail contrasting with simple scalic lines. The uneven beats create incredible momentum and the tempo needs to reflect the rather wild character.

### Group B

Lili Boulanger's 'D'un vieux jardin' from 'Trois morceaux' was written when she was studying in Rome, having won the coveted *Prix de Rome* in 1913. It requires a good octave technique, flexibility of tone, a singing *legato* and an appreciation of the luscious harmonies which do so much to shape the performance of this highly expressive piece.

The image shows a musical score for 'D'un vieux jardin' by Lili Boulanger. It features a piano part with a treble and bass clef. The right hand has a melodic line with a slur over a phrase starting with a triplet of eighth notes (fingerings 3, 3, 3) and ending with a triplet of eighth notes (fingerings 3, 3, 3). The left hand provides a harmonic accompaniment with chords and moving lines. Dynamic markings include *p en dehors, triste*, *pp expressif*, *intense*, *mf*, and *f*. The score is marked with a copyright notice: © Copyright 2021 Trinity College London Press Ltd.

'Land of the Misty Giants' is a movement from the jazz master Oscar Peterson's 'Canadiana Suite'. It is an intimate piece which will suit those who listen to jazz and understand that freedom needs to be tempered by a sense of structure and phrasing. Lush harmonies and an enjoyment of the keyboard combine to make a very expressive mood.

'Romance' by the Trinity Young Composers' Competition winner Dario Sciarra is in a way a homage to the composer of Nocturnes, Chopin. The lyrical right hand is highly decorative, full of turns, grace notes and filigree figures. The oscillating left hand needs to adjust to these details, with *rubato* judged naturally but carefully. The central section is more tempestuous, concluding with a Chopinesque chromatic transition to the even more decorative reprise.

And now specific ideas about some of the Grade 8 works on offer:

## KUHLAU / Rondo (2nd movement from 'Sonatina in A', op. 59 no. 1)

Kuhlau knew and admired Beethoven, introducing much of the great composer's piano music to audiences in Copenhagen, having moved to Denmark from Germany. His own music reflects the characteristics of the Classical style, with elegance of phrase and a feeling of balance, and what comes over is a true love of the keyboard. The typical building blocks of music of the period are here: scale patterns, broken chords, trill-like figures, clearly defined articulation and dynamic contrasts.

The extremely pert Rondo theme is infectious in its simple but effective opening chords, the hands skipping away from each other like two dancers, landing exactly in time on the stressed quaver. Indeed, the whole movement is very physical and overdoing in practice the gestures required to coax the articulation and the shapes needed is highly advised, toning this down as the music becomes familiar and we are moulding it into its final entity.

Kuhlau was very interested in the theatre and indeed wrote some operatic works and Singspielen. He also wrote music to accompany plays, including those of Shakespeare. It seems that looking at this movement in terms of characters may be helpful. The playful and exuberant mood of the opening does not last long before there is an interruption at bar 16. Is this a moment of false seriousness, a villain walking onto the stage or a man wearing a large black moustache in a silent film? We will all have an image in mind here to help conjure a new colour and approach. The dark mood does not last for long and the chromatic thirds, trilling away, cajole us into leaving such thoughts behind. It is helpful to practise this particular challenge with a gentle undulation of the wrist – these must be controlled but relaxed, so that evenness and dynamic shaping are possible. Forcing such technical details is uncomfortable and not productive.

The section in the tonic minor is full of repetitive fingering patterns and those pianists who have spent time on their five finger exercises and scales will be very pleased with themselves! Others, who did not always do what their teacher suggested, will have more work to do to achieve evenness and elegant shaping of the phrases. Another practical aspect is to take care to select the ultimate tempo from the speed at which the most challenging patterns can be played comfortably – the opening is relatively easy and needs to reflect the *scherzando* instruction of the marking. Look out for the high jump in bars 82-84!

80 *fp* *cresc.* *f sf* 8va

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When the Rondo theme returns, it is heralded with great anticipation by two silent bars (or perhaps Kuhlau is giving us some time to recover after all that whizzing about) and welcomed back with eagerness. The end of the movement is grand, with four perfect cadences confirming that the play is over. Curtain down!

Such familiarity with and utter enjoyment of the keyboard is shown here and it is surely a rewarding choice.

## JANÁČEK / Nelze Domluvit! (Lost for Words!)

This title is interesting in that Janáček's music is so influenced, and his rhythms so moulded, by the Czech language, especially by the speech rhythms of his native Moravia. Folk song and folk dance play such a part in his writing too and this piece comes from the set of 10 pieces which form 'On an Overgrown Path'. They are about village life, folk customs, family matters and nature.

The melodic line, to which accompaniment is gradually added, seems to be searching and yearning and becomes more and more expressive and overt each time we hear it. It uses modal notes, darkening the line, except when it appears in  $G\flat$  or at *dolce* approaching the end. It is continually interrupted by the active, intricate, descending chord patterns. This is typical of folk music, where a lament may be interrupted by a faster, dancing element. The harmonies are also typical, stepping down by tones. It produces an immediate feeling of unrest and the rising, dotted left-hand motif feels quite threatening. Bringing off these changes in performance is challenging.

First of all, a singing tone is needed for the expressive line; then nifty fingerwork in the right hand in order to cope with the repeated notes and the shifts for the rapid chords. A loose wrist is essential here and slow practice is a must. Some will find this challenging, but thinking in  $A\flat$  minor,  $G\flat$  minor and  $F\flat$  minor can help us understand the composer's aims here! Investigating his piano and violin sonatas confirms that he wrote in flat keys often.

Andante ♩ = 120

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Whatever the turmoil and doubt inherent in the music, there is a happy outcome, but we are left wondering until the final chord.



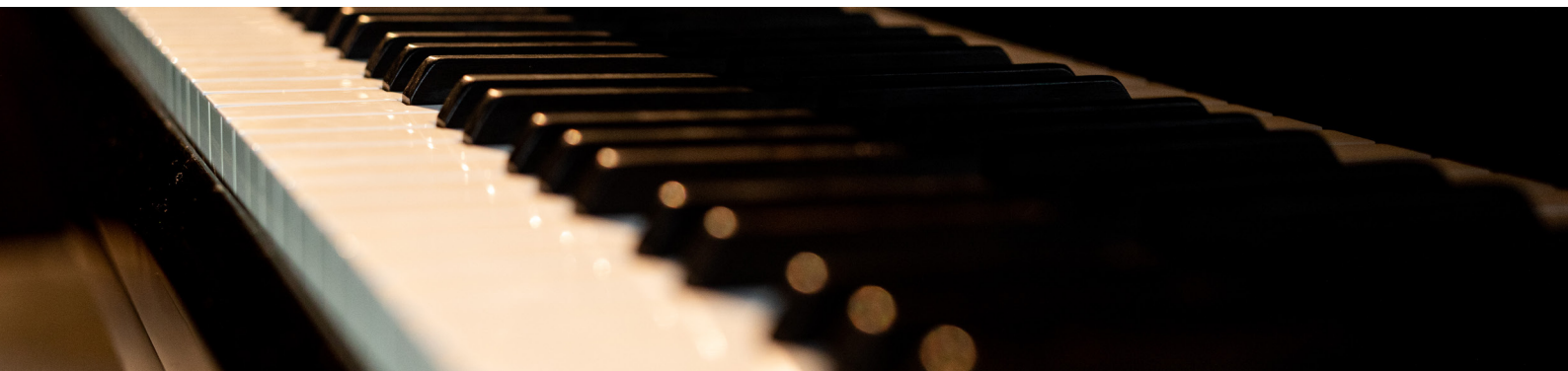


## GERSHWIN / Prelude no. 2

This Prelude is framed by nos. 1 & 3, which are virtuosic, highly syncopated and powerful. The first is energetic, driven and ranges over the whole keyboard; the third starts like a steam train gathering momentum and certain motifs certainly seem influenced by the age of automation. This one, however, is an oasis of languidness, with a hypnotic accompaniment and a plaintive, singing melodic line. Where can we look for our inspiration? Gershwin had a talent for orchestral colour and admired that master of orchestration Ravel. The feeling was mutual. If we look at the accompaniment, its repetitive figure which uses elements of the blues scale on tonic and subdominant could be played by strings, or is it low brass? The solo line seems to me like a muted trumpet, using the jazz player's manipulation of just two notes to begin. Note the stressed C#s, which suggest some *rubato*. As the line is doubled by the addition of the upper octave, does the instrumentation change?

Certainly, a new intensity is needed. To persist with the brass analogy, the contrasting middle section could be a trombone solo, the detail of bars 38 and 39 seeming to fit so well with this. Of course, the melody of this Prelude could also be a song and Gershwin is perhaps most famous for his songs. When Gershwin and Ravel met in New York in 1928, the younger man played his 'Rhapsody in Blue' and some songs, including 'The Man I Love', and the famous composer was impressed. At bar 56 I always hear the words 'I lost that man of mine'. Listening to Gershwin's opera 'Porgy and Bess' (particularly 'Bess, you is my woman now' and 'Summertime') may help absorb the atmosphere, colour and lyricism that this piece needs.

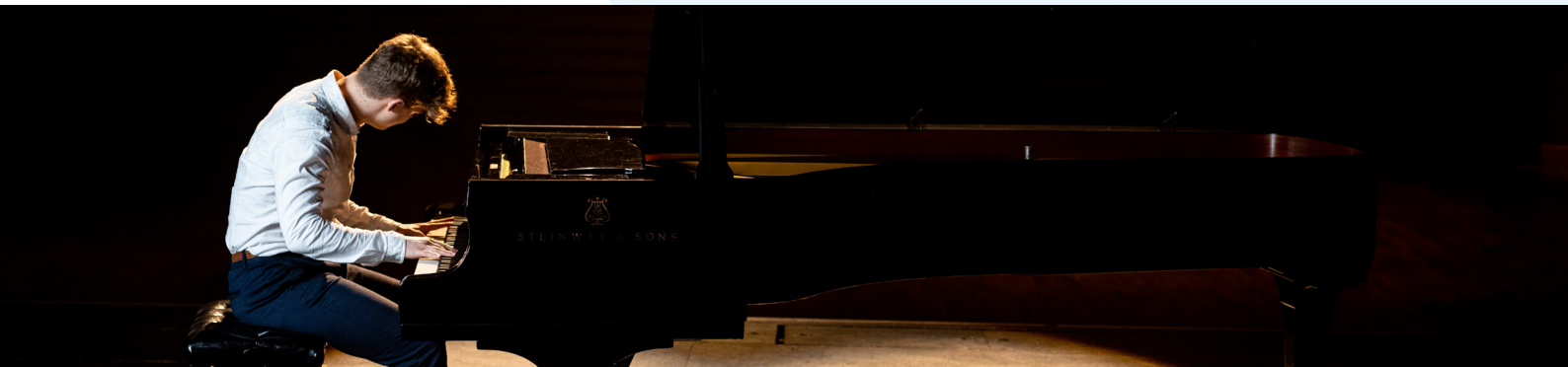
There are certain drawbacks in the writing for pianists who cannot stretch the 10ths involved in the accompaniment. A decision has to be made. Subtly spreading these chords is possible, with the bass note immediately before the beat so as not to compromise the shape of the 'tenor' line. At some points, it is possible to take some notes with the right hand and these are indicated in the score. Pedal produces resonance throughout and many changes are straightforward, but the central section requires a very subtle approach so as not to blur the singing line.



## Linda Nottingham

After gaining a BA in Music at Lancaster University, Linda Nottingham studied with Jan Panenka at the Prague Academy of Musical Arts under a British Council scholarship. Her performance work includes solo recitals, chamber music and working with singers, which is very close to her heart. Linda sang with the London Symphony Chorus for many years, and now leads the vocal group London Madrigalists. French and Czech music are of special interest to her, and she coaches Czech language to soloists and choirs.

Linda holds an LRAM in Performance, an ARCM in Teaching, and teaches piano both privately, and at Westminster Abbey Choir School. She joined Trinity as an examiner in 2012 and has contributed to the development of both the 2018-2020 and 2021-2023 Piano syllabuses, and the recording of the pieces and exercises. She now examines both grades and diplomas, and demonstrates the Piano syllabus to teachers at events in the UK and overseas. She greatly values how music acts as an international language that brings people together. She finds meeting candidates particularly inspiring, and is passionate about the vital role that examiners play in helping candidates have a positive exam experience.



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