

Learning to Waltz: Progressive Literature for the Chopin Waltz

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The Waltz was the most popular ballroom dance in the 19th century in Europe. During Frédéric Chopin's lifetime, the waltzes were the most favored of his compositions. Chopin composed 19 waltzes for the piano, but only 8 of them were published during his lifetime. At the request of the Chopin family, Julian Fontana edited and published an additional 5 waltzes after Chopin's death. Another six waltzes were preserved but later destroyed in a fire in 1863. Publication of the waltzes 14-17 occurred later.

The waltzes endure in the concert repertoire to this day. However, Chopin's waltzes require a high level of musical artistry and technical skill, which makes them inaccessible to elementary students. To prepare younger students for playing Chopin's waltzes, a repertoire review was conducted to provide a progressive repertoire guide. Ten pieces composed by Burgmüller, Shostakovich, Grieg, Beach, Bober, Berlin, and Chopin were chosen and categorized into difficulty levels from 1 to 10 according to Jane Magrath's leveling system. Through this leveled progression, students will be able to learn the artistic and technical features of Chopin's waltzes and be better equipped for advanced repertoire in this genre.

Features of Chopin's Waltzes

- Character: light and airy
- Tempo: fairly brisk in 3/4 meter
- Texture: mostly homophonic (subtle balance between graceful and sparkling melody line and waltz-bass accompaniment is required)
- Pedaling Marks: uses  and , and "rhythmic pedaling"
- Ornamentations
 - Trill  : usually begin on the upper note
 - Mordent  :  or 
 - Appoggiatura   : generally played on the beat, exceptions are anticipation of the following note, octave skips, and those written before bar lines
- Chopin's "Grand Manner"
 - Excesses of Sentimentality: poetic charm and emotional appeal
 - Exaggerated Rubato: time taken from one part of a measure must be added to another part.
 - Flashy Virtuosity: utmost clarity, rhythmic accuracy, and brilliant technique

Progressive Collection

Level 1: Boris Berlin, *A Skating Waltz*, from RCM Celebration Series: Preparatory A

- basic waltz pattern played by both hands

Level 2: Dmitri Shostakovich, *Waltz, Op. 69, No.2*, from Six Children's Pieces

- RH melody with LH waltz-bass accompaniment play alternatively

Level 3: Melody Bober, *Just a Little Waltz*, from Just for Fun Book 1

- waltz-bass accompaniment pattern in the LH
- expressive B section

Level 4: Friedrich Burgmuller, *Austrian Dance, Op. 100, No. 14*, from 25 Progressive Pieces

- RH: short motivic phrases; use of ornamentations
- LH: waltz bass with relatively few leaps

Level 5: Amy Beach, *Waltz, Op. 36, No. 3*, from Children's Album

- expressive melody and waltz bass with pedaling
- balance between hands

Level 6: Edvard Grieg, *Waltz, Op. 12, No. 2*, from Lyric Piece for Pianoforte

- A great study in articulations
- waltz bass with pedaling
- use of ritard

Level 7: Frédéric Chopin, *Waltz in A Minor, Op. Posth* from Waltzes for the Piano

- could be the student's the first Chopin waltz assignment
- large leaps in the LH
- occasional ornaments

Level 8: Frédéric Chopin, *Waltz in B Minor, Op. 69, No. 2*

- use of accents
- a touch of melancholy throughout the wandering melodic line
- Chopin's pedaling marks

Level 9: Frédéric Chopin, *Waltz in D-flat Major, Op. 64, No. 1*

- "Minute Waltz"
- finger control of the RH rapid passagework (triple to duple)
- triple against duple
- Chopin's pedaling marks

Level 10: Frédéric Chopin, *Waltz in A-flat Major, Op. 69, No. 1*

- lyrical writing with substantial filigree in the RH
- finger-pedaling in the LH
- poetic and personal rubato and constant dynamic changes

Bibliography

Chopin, Frédéric. *Waltzes for the Piano*. Alfred, 1992.

Magrath, Jane. *The Pianist's Guide To Standard Teaching and Performance Literature*. Alfred, 1995.