

PADEREWSKI

Nocturne in B flat op 16 no 4

The great virtuoso Paderewski composed barnstorming epics and salon miniatures such as this nocturne. Concert pianist **Jonathan Plowright**, who has recorded it, shares his playing advice

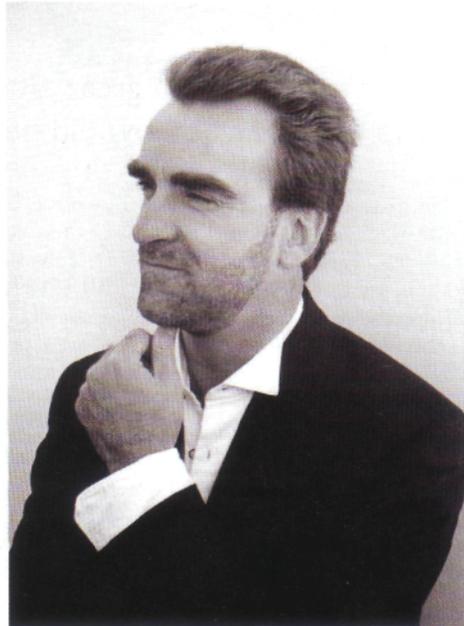
Ability rating Intermediate/Advanced

Info	Will improve your
Key: B flat major	✓ Tone
Tempo: Andantino con moto	✓ Melody and accompaniment
Style: Romantic	✓ Finger/hand distribution

Ignaz Jan Paderewski (1860-1941) was a Polish virtuoso pianist and composer who eventually became his country's prime minister. His musical output comprises both salon miniatures and barnstorming, note-splattered epics. I first discovered Paderewski's genius when I was very young, as my parents had an old vinyl recording of him playing some of his own compositions. I have played this nocturne ever since, and it has become one of my favourite encore pieces. Extremely romantic, it is written very 'pianistically', which is often the case with music composed by pianists. Who better to create textures and colours from the piano – and most especially understand how to write cantabile lines – than a player who knew the instrument intimately?

At first the Nocturne looks and sounds straightforward: it has a simple melody over a chordal accompaniment and uses a lot of the same material repeated throughout. However, closer scrutiny of the first few bars will reveal the main challenge of this piece – choreography of the right and left hands. Do not panic! It is not as complicated as it first seems, and when you have figured it out, the piece becomes easier to play.

We are conditioned into thinking that everything in the treble clef is played with the right hand (RH) and everything in the bass clef by the left hand (LH). Let's tear up the rulebook. Ultimately there is nothing to stop you playing notes with either hand (or your nose if you felt like it!). All that stands in the way is your own physical limitations. The score presented on page 49 has editorial markings that suggest which hands should play which notes. You may well discover that these suggestions do not work for you and your hands, and may even be confusing.



About Jonathan Plowright

Concert pianist, chamber musician and teacher Jonathan Plowright regularly appears with leading orchestras and ensembles worldwide. He has made several critically acclaimed discs for Hyperion, including two of Paderewski's music. To commemorate the 150th anniversary of Paderewski's birth in 2010, Jonathan gave a series of recitals in the US. One recital was at the annual Paderewski Festival, which Jonathan was instrumental in re-launching as an annual event in Paso Robles, a spa town with an historic association with the famous composer, pianist and statesman. To find out more about his Hyperion recordings, go to www.hyperion-records.co.uk; to learn more about Jonathan, go to www.jonathanplowright.com



Listen Now!

You can hear Jonathan Plowright play the Paderewski Nocturne on our covermount CD. The track comes from his disc *Jonathan Plowright, piano* and is available from Amazon and iTunes.

Try them out, but ultimately you should rely on what feels comfortable and practical for you, while maintaining a smoothness and naturalness. So how do you achieve this?

Creating a feeling of tenderness and grace is much easier if you have a relaxed hand. Everyone's hands are different – in size and shape. Take a look at yours. Stretch them out fully, but don't over-stretch, as this creates tension. Look at the spaces between your fingers compared to the space and angle between your thumb and the second finger (this angle determines how much natural 'stretch' your hands have). You'll find the stretch between your second and fifth finger is less comfortable.

To illustrate this, assuming you can stretch an octave, play the following:
1 RH ascending D-E flat-D (1-2-5), then LH ascending D-E-flat-D (5-4-1).
2 RH ascending D-C sharp-D (1-4-5), then LH ascending D-C sharp-D (5-2-1).

Which do you find the easiest? It should be the LH ascending D-E flat-D, and then RH ascending D-C sharp-D – that's because these options utilise the natural stretch between your thumb and second finger, and so are more comfortable. In this nocturne, for example, I find the final three chords of bar 5 are more comfortable to play with

the LH than the RH, as they make use of this natural stretch between thumb and second finger.

Now that you are thinking about this, look at the first four bars of the piece and work out how you will play the melody and the accompanying chordal figure. Here are a few suggestions (see examples on page opposite):

Version 1 The LH takes all the accompanying chords and stays stationary, while the RH crosses over.

Version 2 The accompanying chords are split between the two hands. This is more appropriate in other bars, e.g. bars 5 and 7.

Version 3 (in score on page 49) The RH takes all the accompanying chords and stays stationary, while the LH crosses over. This is my preference.

From bar 5, it's a matter of what works best for your hand, and start sharing the accompaniment between both hands.

So as well as being comfortable, you are also aiming to reduce your overall hand movements in the accompanying chords, enabling you to concentrate on the all-important melody. Once you have done this, you have the blueprint

for how to work on the choreography for the rest of the piece and you can start to work on your interpretation.

Setting the mood

The marking for the piece is *Andantino con moto*, which I personally feel is a little too quick. You can still achieve a feeling of forward momentum without necessarily playing it at a quick tempo.

The opening chordal accompaniment should be light and unobtrusive, but not flippant and should give a sense of breathing. The markings of staccato underneath a phrase mark, with the third chord being accented, seems very specific. However, the accent is merely there to ensure that the chord is not thrown away, and at the same time giving the music a sense of direction.

In bars 2 and 4 there is a lovely 'sigh' from the E flat down to the C, with a hairpin. This needs to be as plaintive as possible. You could practise this movement by imagining that you are gently stroking a pet, using your LH and fingers 2-4 in a continuous single movement. As you drag your hand towards you, you'll notice your wrist naturally lifts up. Also by using second finger on E flat and fourth finger on C, you are using the heaviest part of your hand first and ending the movement with the lighter part of your hand, thereby creating a natural diminuendo with this 'stroking' movement. This musical 'sigh' appears throughout the piece so you can use this same 'stroke' technique.

How best to pedal this piece? You will notice that the pedal markings coincide with harmonic changes, as you would expect. However, at times you will need to employ some 'half-peddalling' (a good example of this is bars 5-8). This will allow the residue of the bass notes to continue through a bar, while changing the harmony above it. In practice, as you change the harmony, quickly let the pedal up part way and very quickly put it down again, thereby letting the top notes go while keeping the bass notes sounding. This happens because the bass is far more resonant than the treble. This may take some perfecting. For all you motorists, it's a bit like finding the 'bite' on the clutch pedal of a car for the first time!

In bar 5 there is the first of eight 'spread' chords. When you spread a chord, you are not only using a practical technique in order to physically play all the notes in the chord, you are also causing it to be highlighted, and in some cases making it more beautiful. If you have ever heard recordings of Paderewski himself playing, you will know that he tended to spread quite a lot of chords. I would recommend that you take the same artistic licence that the composer did.

Version 1

Andantino con moto

Version 2

Andantino con moto

Version 3

Andantino con moto

The *con forza* in bar 20 shouldn't be taken too literally. Paderewski uses this marking frequently, and bear in mind this is still within the general *piano* dynamic.

If you have heard recordings of Paderewski playing, you will know he tended to spread chords - you can do that too!

The *molto cantando* in bar 25 can afford to be brought out strongly, as this is the first time that the melody is underneath the accompanying chords. You will notice some inconsistencies in the score from bar 25 when it comes to the phrasing of the LH. Look at the phrase markings in bars 25-28. Then turn to the phrase markings from bars 31 to the first note of bar 35. They are different. So, is the melody meant to be broken into two halves or is it a continuous four-bar melody? The best way to find out how to naturally play this is to sing it out loud, and discover where you need to breathe, if at all.

In the build-up to the climax beginning from bar 37, be aware that the intensity is driven by the melodic lines, so be careful not to make your accompaniment get too heavy. From bar 43, where the 'sighing' motif alternates

between treble and bass, it really needs to move forwards, because it is a *molto crescendo* and *accelerando*, which allows for a *molto rallentando* back into Tempo I.

There is an interesting effect at the end of the piece where a single F is held and the two final chords are played with a break in between. Imagine a lone French horn playing the note while strings play the chords underneath, finally leaving the horn isolated. I have to admit to taking a bit of artistic licence at this point, because at the tempo I prefer to play this piece (that is, slower), the effect doesn't work! However, if you prefer the quicker *Andantino* tempo, then it will. But make sure to play the note strongly enough for it to continue to sing after the final chord has been played and released. ■

Jonathan Plowright suggests similar pieces to try

Chopin Mazurka op 17 no 4

Honegger *Souvenir de Chopin*

Liszt *Liebesträum* No 3

Liszt Concert Etude No 3 'Un sospiro' (uses similar techniques, but it's much harder!)

Paderewski *Un moment musical* op 16 no 6

Scriabin *Prélude* op 17 no 6