

Franz Schubert

Swan Serenade



Austrian composer Schubert features for the first time in this series with a simple but elegant melody transcribed for us by **Bridget Mermikides**.

ABILITY RATING

Moderate/Advanced 

Info

Key Am Tempo 58 bpm CD TRACKS 31-32

Will improve your...

✓ Three against two rhythms ✓ Melodic phrasing ✓ Melodies in 3rds

In this issue we are going to tackle for the first time a work by the great composer Franz Schubert. Despite barely reaching his 30s, Schubert produced over one and a half thousand works, including 20 string quartets, seven completed symphonies, several masses and operas and a staggering number (over 600) songs for piano and voice.

In one year alone he composed over 20,000 bars of music (half of them for orchestra).


Throughout this remarkable productivity, he demonstrated an active experimentalism and brilliance; and developed his style to great maturity and sophistication. With his creativity and output only increasing, Schubert's life was tragically struck short by an illness. His genius was largely only recognised by a circle of friends and astute listeners but he has since joined the pantheon of great composers of Western Art music.

Here I've selected one of the last pieces Schubert composed, from his collection of 14 songs for piano and voice (written in his final year and only published posthumously) known as Schwanengesang (Swan Song). These songs were later transcribed for solo piano by Franz Liszt and since then for a range of ensembles and instruments. I've chosen No 4 from the set known simply as Ständchen (Serenade) a setting of a poem by the German poet Ludwig Rellstab in which the protagonist urges his sweetheart to fulfill him.

The simple and elegant melody is supported by a sophisticated bitter-sweet harmony that combines the chords from both A Minor and A

Minor with supple voice-leading with extraordinary deftness and accessibility. Rhythmically, there are number of examples of quaver triplets over crotchet accompaniments (eg bars 5-7) that require a relaxed absorption of that rhythm as well as technical coordination, so make sure that you

“YOU’LL NEED A DEGREE OF FLUENCY IN YOUR FRETTING HAND AS MANY OF THESE CHORD SHIFTS REQUIRE A LEVEL OF FAMILIARITY WITH THE WORK”

execute these correctly without rushing either voice. You'll also need to develop a degree of fluency in your fretting hand as many of these chord shifts require a level of familiarity with the work. It's also essential you understand what the melody is that you are trying to express, so do listen to the recording and the suggested listening so that you can play this wonderful piece with your own expression. 

NEXT MONTH Bridget transcribes Edward Elgar's rousing *Land Of Hope And Glory*

TECHNIQUE FOCUS

Nail care

Look after your picking hand fingernails! It's very important for tone production and control of technique to get your fingernails sorted. You need to work on finding the right length and angle of nail to produce a clean warm tone. The contact on the string should be both flesh of the fingertip and nail simultaneously. It can take a bit of time and experience to get it just right, then you need to maintain the condition of your nails with regular filing and polishing to keep the edges smooth and gleaming.



Franz Schubert: another genius who died young



TRACK RECORD There are many marvellous recordings of Schwanengesang (including James Rutherford and Eugene Asti's 2016 BIS release). You may also want to hear Liszt's glorious piano solo arrangement (Kissin plays Liszt 1987 Sony). The widely revered Schubert recitals by Mark Padmore (tenor) and Paul Lewis (piano) are also worth visiting to hear another interpretation of works such as this.

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PLAYING TIPS

CD TRACK 32

[Bars 1-16] We have a four-bar intro consisting of broken chords. Allow the harmony of each chord to sustain throughout the bar (picking hand fingering is indicated). The melody begins at bar 5 and, again, the picking hand fingering is indicated for four bars. We should aim to play the melody rest stroke where possible and try to make it project from the

accompaniment. There is a recurring triplet in the melody that is played over duplet quavers. It is therefore essential to internalise the rhythm of 'three against two'. At bar 6, watch out for the slightly awkward jump of the fourth finger to the A on the second beat. There is a similar fourth finger jump at bar 12 – the best tip is to relax and take your time here.

♩ = 58

Am F Dm6 E

E
B
G
D
A
E

1

Am Dm6/F E Am

E
B
G
D
A
E

5

E7 Am Dm6/F

E
B
G
D
A
E

9

G7 C G7 C

E
B
G
D
A
E

13

PLAYING TIPS

CD TRACK 32

[Bars 17-32] The combination of dotted rhythm and second beat chord shape makes bar 17 quite awkward to play. Keep your second finger on the lower G# throughout the bar and practise landing on the chord shape slowly at first. Again, I use rest stroke on the melody where possible. At bar 19 hold the low F for a whole beat and use a hinge barre to allow for the open E in the melody.

[Bar 23] Here the same dotted rhythm bar occurs but this time resolves to A Major instead of Minor. Watch out for the ornament on bar 25 – it's quite tricky so practise it slowly at first. Keep the third finger on the third string and use it as a guide, sliding it up to the D on beat 2. Continue to follow the indicated fretting hand fingering.

Musical notation for bars 17-20. Chords: E7, Am, F, C. Includes guitar tablature for E, B, G, D, A, E strings.

Musical notation for bars 21-24. Chords: G7, C, E7, A. Includes guitar tablature for E, B, G, D, A, E strings.

Musical notation for bars 25-28. Chords: D, A, E, A. Includes guitar tablature for E, B, G, D, A, E strings.

Musical notation for bars 29-32. Chords: Dm/A, A, E7, A. Includes guitar tablature for E, B, G, D, A, E strings.

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PLAYING TIPS

CD TRACK 32

[Bars 33-48] From bar 33 to 34 the fretting hand needs to move quickly from fifth position back to open position to accommodate the dotted rhythm. I keep the fourth finger on the second string and use it a guide finger, sliding it

quickly back down to the C# on beat 1 of bar 34. At bar 37 there is a repeat of the entire first section. Listen to my recording to see how the 'melody' notes should stand out from the accompaniment - one of this piece's challenges.

33

33

37

37

41

41

45

45

PLAYING TIPS

CD TRACK 32

[Bars 49-64] This is mainly the same material as before but the cadence at bar 59 is slightly different from the first time around, and at 61 we have a new ascending dotted rhythm motif. Picking hand fingering is indicated here and

I use rest stroke with the second finger on beats 2 and 3 for strong projection and neat rhythm. Again, that separation of melody from accompaniment is key to making this piece work.

Chords: E, Am, F, C

49

Chords: G7, C, E, A

53

Chords: D, A, E7, A

57

Chords: E, E7, Edim7, E7sus4, E7, E7/F, E, Edim7/F, E, Edim7/F

61

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PLAYING TIPS

CD TRACK 32

[Bars 65-82] At bar 65 we land on a C# chord, resolving to F#m in the following bar. Barres are needed in bars 66 to 68. At 72 we reach A Major and where the broken chord pattern reappears similar to the introduction. Following a

switch back to A Minor in bar 73 and a couple more cadences to A Major which becomes the final chord – this is the parallel Major of our starting key of A Minor and gives a nice tranquil feel to the ending.

65

Chords: C#/E#, F#m, Bm/F#, F#m

Fingerings: 9, 7, 7, 5, 4; 2, 4, 5, 2, 2; 7, 7, 7, 7, 7, 7; 2, 4, 5, 2, 2

Barres: 6, 6, 6, 6; 2, 2, 2, 2; 7, 7, 7, 7, 7, 7; 2, 2, 2, 2

Other: 8; 4; 9, 11, 7, 9; 4

69

Chords: D, A, E, E7, A

Fingerings: 2, 4, 2, 1, 2, 5; 0, 2, 2, 2, 2; 7, 6, 7, 10, 9, 9; 5, 2, 2, 2, 2

Barres: 0, 2, 7, 7, 7; 0, 2, 2, 2, 2; 9, 8, 9, 9, 9, 9; 0, 2, 2, 2, 2

73

Chords: Am, Dm6, E, A, Dm

Fingerings: 5, 5, 5, 5; 1, 0, 0, 0, 0; 0, 0, 0, 0, 0; 5, 0, 0, 0, 0; 1, 3, 3, 6, 6

Barres: 5, 7, 7, 7; 2, 2, 2, 2, 2; 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1; 2, 2, 2, 2, 2, 2; 2, 2, 2, 2, 7, 7

78

Chords: A, E7, A, A, A

Fingerings: 0, 0, 0, 0; 0, 0, 0, 0; 0, 0; 0, 0; 0, 0, 0, 0

Barres: 2, 2, 2, 2; 3, 1, 1, 0, 3; 2, 2, 2, 2; 2, 2, 2, 2; 2, 2, 2, 2