

# On the Pieces

The clues complement the specific tips given for the pieces and should definitely be needed.

Many pieces in this volume are suitable as encores!

## 13 Solveig's Song (E. Grieg)

After the great success of his dramatic poem *Peer Gynt*, the poet and dramatist Henrik Ibsen (1828–1906) adapted this work as a stage play and asked Grieg to write the music for it. The composer initially set to music the texts that he liked best, composing first of all *Solveig's Song*. Although the premiere was very successful, Grieg doubted the artistic value of his music, since he had had to make many concessions to the audience and for stage effectiveness. He revised his work essentially for a new production and later put together the two orchestral suites that became famous as *Peer Gynt Suites* 1 and 2.

Execute the ornamentation at the start and at the close as thirty-seconds on the beat, all others as fast double appoggiaturas before the main beat.

Try to discover where on the bow you want to put the final note: Too close to the frog, the pianissimo may become too loud or cause attack noises; too far towards mid-bow makes a very precise attack more difficult, and you will not have enough bow left for the closing fermata.

## 14 Spanish Dance (E. Granados)

The arrangement of an early piano piece by the Spanish composer seems a bit tricky at first glance due to the alternation of pizzicato and arco, but it is just this alternation that makes the dance enormously effective.

The pizzicato is executed over the fingerboard. Extend the index finger and pluck the string with the upper finger phalanx (not with the fingertip!) with a quick and short arm movement to the side. Stay close to the violin body so that you can start the first tone in the arco relatively close to the frog without losing any time. Before you bow, bring your index finger back to the bowing position and go with the bow in the direction of the bridge. Without stopping, alternate the two kinds of playing in a single flowing motion. Use the accent in measure 10 to get to the frog, and the one in measure 12, to get to the top half of the bow.

This sounds complicated, but it isn't! With practice you will soon find this special technique no longer difficult! In the *Prestissimo* your tempo should be much faster than in the *Allegro*. But play it only as fast as you can do so successfully without effort. Let the piece fade away to nothing without *ritardando*, and then hold the tension for a very long time before putting the instrument down.

## 15 Palm Leaf Rag (S. Joplin)

The *Rag* (short for *Ragtime*; derived from *ragged time*) had its heyday as a jazz forerunner in the United States at the start of the 20th century. Notably characteristic are a mostly simple bass line, strong syncopation in the melody, frequent chromatic runs and the 2/4 or 4/4 time. One of the most important representatives of this music genre was Scott Joplin, his best-known piece probably being *The Entertainer*.

Take the tempo indication very seriously. To quote Joplin: "It's never right to play ragtime fast."

For the present collection, the *Palm Leaf Rag* was transcribed for string quartet from the piano by clearly upgrading the three lower voices. Occurring in place of a melody in the upper part is often a duo by the two violins, the several parts are frequently equal, and the lower parts

important. Listen carefully and interact accordingly, then the piece will come alive.

Sometimes quarter notes are tied with eighth notes instead of being notated as dotted quarter notes, though these ties do not go over measure lines. This is not a mistake! The tied eighth notes have articulation dots and are to be shortened, the dotted quarter notes, however, have to be kept longer and softer. Make these differences clear, every dot is important here!

## 16 Prelude and Gavotte (D. Shostakovich)

Play the *Prelude* dreamily, the *Gavotte* lively, though not too fast. This music demands a lot of *rubato*, attention to detail, and large dynamic distinctions. Articulation and bowings are just suggestions, for there are other options in shaping the pieces.

*Prelude*: To be preferred in the introduction are the highest possible positions on lower strings.

That important in the quartet is not only the first violin should meanwhile be obvious to you, for a charming cello or viola cantilena can, for example, captivate just as much as an exciting dialogue between the middle and lower parts. Discover the possibilities in this piece of the two lower parts being equal with the violins over large sections. The cello may dominate from the upbeat to measures 14ff. on and even at the close.

*Gavotte*: Mainly from the viola and cello accompaniment, measures 18–23 are a bit reminiscent of the sound of street-organ music, and in measures 34–41b, the lower parts once again counterpoint the violins. Both should not be too quiet.

By the way: *Prelude* and *Gavotte* are musical forms, rooted long before Shostakovich. Whereas in the 16th century, *Prelude* already stood for an introductory, often improvised prelude with an open form and style, the *Gavotte* was originally a Baroque dance following certain rules. It is worthwhile to listen to gavottes from this period. Both forms have changed dramatically over time.

## 17 La Follia (A. Corelli)

Play the half notes and the tied notes with a distinct decrescendo, the same applies to the dotted and double-dotted quarter notes. Observe the dots above the dotted eighth notes in measures 56–71. Make the quarter and eighth note upbeats audible; some are not immediately recognizable as such, but are important for the music's division and structure.

Very rarely in this piece does a single part lead alone, several instruments mainly communicate with each other equally. Determine precise differentiations, pay attention to the viola in the middle register in measures 33–40, 56–71, and 88–96. From the upbeat to of measure 68, the cello and viola play stretto an ever-recurring fragment of the motif in this variation. In the case of stretto, one part (here the viola) already starts before another part (here the cello) has completed its subject or motif. Important: the viola will not be heard if the others are not holding back dynamically.

The many shifts among the instruments could easily lead to breaks in the music's tempo, volume, and character. Relieve each other exactly as in a relay race and adjust the bowing and contact points as well as bowing speed with each other. In order to achieve the best possible tonal homogeneity, you should even coordinate the bow tilting.

## 18 Variations on "Happy Birthday" (E.-M. Neumann)

Each variation is dedicated to a different composer and includes quotations from his works. At the same time, these variations are a journey through music history, where you can easily come to understand how the music has changed over the centuries. The "Happy Birthday" theme varies considerably in character, tempo, mode, meter, as well as rhythmically. If you always bring out the theme well, the audience will still be able to recognize it without effort. Unless otherwise stated, each quote comes from musical material in the first movements of concertos. It is worthwhile in preparing the variations to become familiar with the original works.

**Variation I – Juan del Encina:** Play this piece as a contrast to the theme, hazily, calmly, and with hardly any vibrato. It should sound as if coming from afar.

**Variation II – Antonio Vivaldi:** This variation would like to be played lively and transparently. This will work if you pay attention to the dots above the eighth notes, separate the quarter notes from each other, and play the dotted quarter notes, the half notes as well as the ties, dynamically relaxed, thus *decrescendo*. Clarify which sixteenth-note passages are melodious and which are figurations and should be held back dynamically. Close the piece with only a little *ritardando*. The variation lends itself to a dynamic shaping in terraced dynamics, i.e., in various levels without transitional crescendi and decrescendi; in larger ensembles, also as tutti/soli.

**Variation III – Johann Sebastian Bach:** This, unlike the previous piece, is clearly more polyphonic and tighter. In addition to the quotes and the "Happy Birthday" theme, contrasting parts often generate important counterpoints. Let this be heard! Give more bow to the first of the two slurred eighth notes in the theme and truncate the second with the articulation dot, to create the characteristic "sigh" for this music. From the upbeat to measure 57 through measure 58, the cello, viola, and first violin give the theme's initial motif *stretto* (see the explanation for *stretto* in the comment to no. 17).

**Variation IV – Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart:** What a contrast between Bach and Mozart! Compare them, find the differences, and consider what these could mean to your interpretation. A suggestion: Play the first four measures as two measures emphasizing measures 61 and 63, then measures 69–72 emphasizing measures 70 and 72. Combine measures 65–68 (with clear upbeats) and 73–76 under one musical phrase. Think about the shaping of the middle section as well as the reprise (repeat of the opening section with some changes) and do not cover the "Happy Birthday" theme here in the second violin. As so often in Viennese classical music, the lower parts have many accompanying motifs to play, but are sometimes also able to stand out a bit more. The tempo demands a position about mid-bow, the sixteenth notes will work well in the *sautillé*. Play it with restraint, but with clear harmonic changes. Don't let the bow bounce too high.

**Variation V – Frédéric Chopin:** Here, besides the "Happy Birthday" theme, the cello is especially important, for it largely plays the left-hand part of the wonderful B-minor *prélude*. Leading, though, in measures 110–112 and 118 with the upbeat is the second violin. The dynamic range between *forte* and the threefold *piano* demands of you a precise differentiation. Above all, practice the long *crescendo* in measures 112–114 and 117–120, as well as the *decrescendo* in

measures 115/116. If you get loud or soft too quickly, you will no longer have any possibility of intensification at the end and thereby take away the gravity of the piece. Pay attention to how renowned ensembles celebrate similar or greater intensifications or the gradual fading away of sounds – it is admirable and fascinating.

**Variation VI – Nicolò Paganini:** On account of his enormous virtuosity, Paganini's contemporaries called him "the devil's violinist" and celebrated him like a pop star. His melodies have inspired generations of composers, also including Franz Liszt (1811–1887), who used the *La Campanella* [little bell in Italian] theme in his piano variations *Grande Fantaisie de Bravoure sur "La Clochette" de Paganini*, also arranging it for piano in the third of his *Six Grandes Etudes de Paganini*.

The first part with the quote from Paganini's *20th Caprice* is graceful and dancelike, the *campanella* part is more virtuosic by way of the sixteenth-note passages, but the basic beat is only a little faster. Practice it slowly, increasing the tempo with the metronome. Here, playing in various rhythms is also helpful. Divide the sixteenth-note figures into two groups of three each and practice these in two variations: long-short-short and short-long-long. Increase the tempo of the short notes beyond the tempo required in the piece and then relax in the long notes. Determine the duration you want to maintain for these in each of the respective exercises.

**Variation VII – Film music:** The theme is in E minor, but ends surprisingly in C major in measure 160. Because here we expect E minor again, we call such a turn a deceptive cadence. Make this clear by somewhat hesitating before playing the first note in measure 160 and playing it with a little more bow than the following eighth notes. In measures 164/165, the cello plays the opening of the theme *pizzicato* in diminution, and the first violin varies the theme simultaneously. Both must be clearly audible.

**Variation VIII – Béla Bartók:** The closing variation is an uncomplicated "last dance at the ball," characterized by extreme dynamic differences and great cheerfulness. Do not play it too fast or it will sound rushed.

## 19 Slavonic Dance (A. Dvořák)

I have significantly shortened this dance for large orchestra. While the two upper parts of this arrangement largely follow the original, the others are only original in part, though always relating to Dvořák's style. This music is sometimes melancholic, but often overflowing with the joy of life and music-making. Captivate your audience, play full of daring and *con passione*. The *Allegro vivo* from measure 18 may be done faster than indicated. From measure 64 onwards, the two violins play reminiscences of the *Slavonic Dance* op. 72 no. 2, the second violin and the viola follow suit from measure 72. Let this dominate as a new facet.

## 20 Contrasts (E.-M. Neumann)

The contrasts in this piece not only affect tempo, volume and frequent major-minor alternation, but also very different moods to be captured accordingly.

The opening should be played in the stipulated, more comfortable tempo, the two *vivace* sections, however, may also be faster than suggested, if you can do it successfully.

The three lower parts alternate with a three-measure theme from measure 110. Be precise in shifting the parts and play expressively and very audibly.