

Level 2B Practice Notes

conductor, Melissa Robol

I look forward to hearing your audition videos in October! We have four very different pieces that give us a lot of variety. Our music goes from mysterious to romantic, from serene to rapid play. We even enjoy different dance beats!

Getting ready.

* Please put your name and phone number on the front of your music books, in sharpie.

* Add small measure numbers in pencil in the upper LH corner of each measure. (Don't number the first measure if it is just a pickup note or two.)

* Partners can trade between primo and secondo for different pieces. Decide which part you will play for each piece early on so you don't waste practice time.

**** It's really important to **practice regularly and often WITH YOUR PARTNER** to help each other follow all the directions for tempo and dynamic changes. You need to feel your partner's elbows and know when you have to move your hand quickly out of their way to be in sync. This is the fun of duets, taking turns with the melody and the fun tempo or technique challenges. When your partner has the melody or spotlight, the music usually tells YOU to get quieter!

General practice tips

* Practice starting from different measures. Maybe have your partner or parent call out an odd number like 17 or 32, to be able to start from anywhere like we will do in rehearsals.

* Put a favorite stuffed animal or photo of a friend atop your piano and try to glance at it a lot while you practice, to get ready to keep your eyes on your conductor. Once in awhile, ask your partner or parent to silently count how many times you look up at your conductor!

* You don't need to memorize your music but do need to switch your eyes often and quickly between your score and your pretend conductor. Musical leaders in any group are always following a conductor carefully. I will choose leaders to play on the louder grand pianos in our concert, based not only on their musicality but on who I can trust is watching me closely!

* **Secondo plays the pedal, while primo turns pages.** Please decide how to manage page turns with your partner carefully. The “turner” can leave some notes out but both of you need to keep a steady beat while the page is turned.

* In practice **always sit on your “side” of the bench**, not right in front of middle c.

* There is a difference between practice, where you fix mistakes and repeat short passages several times, and performance. In front of an audience or in an ensemble like ours, you NEVER try to “fix” a mistake. So sometimes at home, **practice performing.** Keep up with the piece; keep going no matter what! The easiest way for me to do this when I practice is with a metronome.

Mysterious Magician. MM quarter note = 116. (Evocative atmosphere)

The composer tells us to play this expressively, so we will pay careful attention to the crescendi, decrescendi and all the dynamics. Notice in M 1 - 8, the secondo starts this piece a tad louder than the primo. Then in M 9 - 12 the primo is a tad louder. We want to bring out that contrast.

Everyone, watch for the 8va (octave higher) and 8vb (octave lower) passages. It will harm the mysterious quality of the piece if even one of us misses those marks. I will indicate each beat in the last two measures, so practice watching the conductor ESPECIALLY CAREFULLY there.

The Jesting Juggler MM quarter note = 176. (A study in articulation)

This juggler is jesting, or having fun with friends, instead of jousting, or fighting! Let's take care to “play well with others” so we make our audience happier.

It's tricky, because primo and secondo are contrasting each other all the TIME. If one plays staccato, the other is usually legato. You rarely have the same rhythm. It's almost as if the music notes are balls the juggler is tossing back and forth between the partners! So take great care not only with staccato and legato, but with all the articulation symbols in this piece.

Take care: on the first page the secondo's are always quieter than the primo's. You are a light background! Maybe the juggler is spinning 4 little secondo balls constantly with his hands, while the primo shows some whirly legato scarf he's holding in his teeth and waving at the same time.

Primos: watch for the marcato symbol on third beats in M 13, 15, 24 and 26! It look like a rooftop and is a combination of staccato and an accent mark. You play those notes much louder or with a stronger attack. You might say to yourself, “Go to THERE ! ” The composer, Ms. Allred, adds crescendos in these measures, to emphasize the excitement.

Secondos have a tenuto third beat in M28. That just means hold that note for its full value. In other words, it is NOT staccato unlike all the other notes. It’s like you’re skipping along but suddenly stub your toe. You only have one accented note, in M 35, but you get the last word in the piece. Make sure to go down an octave for your last note, and bring out the ONLY marcato symbol you have in the whole piece. BAM!

Sunset at the Circus MM quarter note = 94 (catch your breath)

This reminds me of rocking a baby at the end of the day, and singing him or her a lullaby. Primos, remember you never get to play the pedal. Secondos, watch the lift marks at the first beat of every measure. If you don’t pedal carefully, this song will get very mushy: you have a big responsibility. Always use the pedal when you practice—don’t just add it after you learn the notes.

Primos, change your *mp* to a quieter *p* at M 13 (just mark out the “*m*”). We really want the secondos to bring out the melody here.

Please highlight the *molto rit.* and the *fermata* in M 20 and at the end from M 31 for both parts. Some people call the *fermata* the “**bird’s eye.**” That’s a good way to remember, **when you see a fermata put your eye on the conductor!**

This Old Man Steps Out MM quarter note = 120 for theme, var. 1 and finale BUT slows to 110 for variations 2, 3 and 4. (Our grand finale!)

What a showstopper! We have to be really tight on the tempo changes for this piece to snap, crackle and pop. PLEASE practice with the metronome to make sure none of you are tempted to speed it up. Think of the game of crack the whip. The person at the end where the speed keeps increasing usually falls down.

When you practice variations 2 (boogie) and 4 (“heart and soul” beat), try to smile as you play. Then when you change to c minor to play variation 3 (the blues) just look sad. See if you can portray all these emotions musically.

Shape your phrases, and breathe between them, to enliven this simple melody. Ask your teacher to make sure you understand this. Primos, the straight lines in the theme just show you that the melody is passing back and forth between your two hands. In Variation 1, primos, bring out the crescendi and decrescendi.

Secondo's, enjoy your relatively simple first page, because you get the boogie and jazz beats in later variations! Don't play them too fast. As Schumann would say, Nicht schnell!!! They are really fun to play, but don't neglect the other variations.

At the end of variation 4 secondo's will try a tremolo on the last beat at our first rehearsal. We will decide if we like it or not.

Most important are the last two measures. There will be a ritard and then, a sudden crescendo to full force fortissimo! We will practice this first each time. It has to be crisp and tight!

I hope you enjoy preparing for Pianorama 2021 and playing these duets for your friends, neighbors and family. As the old proverb goes, "one hand washes the other." Piano duets are such a great way to appreciate the full range of our beloved instrument, and its power to brighten our spirits.