

A Guide to Teaching Gershwin

©Tony Caramia

Prelude in E_b: Novelette in Fourths (1919)

- marked *Tempo rubato*
- play with a dance-like ease (and not too fast)

Prelude in A_b: Melody No. 17 (1925-26)

- marked *Slowly with feeling*
- Middle part contains two 4-measures passages which alternate between “dreamy” pedal point chords and textures with precise staccato articulation (*Allegretto*)

Prelude in B_b: Allegro ben ritmato e deciso

| <u>Measures</u> | <u>Comments</u> |
|-----------------|--|
| 1-2 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • take more time; stress the “blue” notes, C_# and A_b |
| 3-6 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • some performers add an octave to the bottom B_b (<i>col 8 _ _ _</i>) • be sure the 1st chord is short (♪), and the 2nd chord is longer (♪) <i>and accented</i> • use a short; upward stroke for the 1st chord and a downward stroke for the 2nd • pedal from the 2nd chord to downbeat of the next measure |
| 7-10 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • notice accents in melody, and in the left hand • continue pedal as in measures 3-6 (2nd chord to downbeat) |
| 11 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • notice the <i>mf</i> marking |
| 11-13 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • be careful not to pedal the right hand; rather, pedal the syncopations in the left hand |
| 13-15 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • try keeping the pedal down throughout these 3 measures for an interesting effect |
| 16-19 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • pedal the left hand so that the articulation in the right hand can be clearly heard |
| 20 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DO NOT RUSH!!!! (if you must pedal, pedal <i>each</i> eighth note) |
| 21-22 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • pedal the syncopations |

- 23-24 • hold down the pedal as in measures 13-15
- 29 • DO NOT RUSH!!! (if you must pedal, pedal each eighth note)
- 31 • notice the different rhythm from measure 22 in the right hand
- 32-34; 37-39 • pedal the left hand; keep the right hand light and clear
- 35-36; 40-41 • DYNAMICS!!!!
- 42-45 • pedal the left hand - the syncopated chord
- 46-49 • if you start measure 46 at *ff*, how loud can you be in measure 49?!
 - make measure 48 is one level less than where you want to be in measure 49
 - measure 47 another level softer,
 - measure 46 starts even “softer”
 - the half note chords should have a different sound from the syncopated inner chords
- 49 • take a ritard; it’s technically easier and musically valid
- 50-53 • no secret here, just good practice habits
- 54-57 • don’t over-pedal the right hand
- 61 • hear the decrescendo
- 62 • use “play-prepare” movement

Prelude in C \sharp minor (Blue Lullaby): Andante con moto

- guard against too slow a tempo: $\text{♩}=80-88$ seems appropriate for a bluesy mood
- 1-4 • follow example of stride players and roll the opening 10th
 - shape these measures with a subtle crescendo to the downbeat of measure 3 and a decrescendo beat 4 of measure 4
- 4-5-6 • go to the 5th note of the opening melody because it’s:
 - ◆ the minor 7th of C \sharp minor
 - ◆ a blue note
 - ◆ the 4th note in a 5-note phrase
 - ◆ falls on the downbeat
 - ◆ 1st note of a descending minor 3rd
- 6-7 • shape the melody to reach for the accented C \sharp on beat 4 of measure 7
- 8 • create a sighing effect with the grace note; don’t make it too fast
 - observe the distinctive articulation and the crescendo of the quarter note triplets

- 10 • roll the left hand 10th, then play the upper notes of the 10ths on beats 2 and 3 with the right hand thumb
- 13 • the ‚E’ should be stressed like the ‚B’ in measures 4 and 5
- 14 • observe careful pedaling to bring out the rising chromatic line
- 15 • the right hand melody in the bass clef is a question (crescendo to F \sharp)
- 16 • this is the answer (decrescendo to F \sharp minor)
- 19-22 • bring out this poignant bluesy inner melody (E—D \sharp —C \sharp —D \sharp)
- 31 • a refreshing key change suggests a slightly brighter tempo (in spite of or because of the confusing tempo indications)
- 32-34 • emulate Gershwin’s own sense of swing and gently swing the dotted 8th—16th, as well as the 8th notes in measures 32-34
- 33-37
 - crescendo to the A \sharp (3rd of F \sharp)
 - crescendo to the G \sharp (9th F \sharp)
 - crescendo to the E \sharp (raised 4th of B)
 - crescendo to the E (7th of F \sharp 7)
- 49 • note the slight variation from measure 7, with the addition of grace notes:
 - try to make them sound loose, not strict or classical
- 56 • marked drop in range and texture creates a *subito p* effect

Prelude in E \flat minor (Spanish Prelude): Agitato

| <u>Measures</u> | <u>Comments</u> |
|-----------------|--|
| 1-3 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • notice the 1st and 3rd chords in the right hand are eighth notes; the middle chord is a 16th; avoid overpedalling |
| 5, 7, 9, 11 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • keep the left hand light, airy; voice the upper notes (G\flat—A\flat) |
| 6, 10, 8, 12 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • bring out the accented G\flat’s; voice the G\flat |
| 13-14 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • make the 1st three eighth notes in the left hand light and <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ emphasize the 4th eighth |
| 15 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • pedal the 2nd beat: the 2-note slur |
| 16 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • be sure we hear the E\flat as the melody |

- 25-28 • slightly pedal to help voice the left hand top notes:
G_b—F—G_b—A_b—G_b—G_b
- 29-32; 37-40 • avoid over-peddalling—it masks the left hand ascending chromatic line
• emphasize the upper voice in the right hand, not the bottom
- 33; 41 • try these measures with *no* pedal (to bring out the interplay between the hands)
- 34; 42 • be sure the cut off is accented and short
- 47-48 • bring out the syncopation *and the rests*: avoid over-peddalling
- 50 • a slight ritard is in order
- 51-57 • very troublesome and awkward
• keep the left hand firm but not heavy; work at quick movements; voice the top notes of the 5ths
• try for light strokes in the right hand octaves; watch for signs of tension
- 58 • can be re-distributed

Recordings featuring Gershwin

- **Gershwin Performs Gershwin; Music Masters, (1991); Dist. by BMG Music #5062-2-C)**
- **George Gershwin, The Piano Rolls; Nonesuch (1995) #7559-79370-2**

Recommended recordings:

- **Keyboard Wizards of The Gershwin Era (Pearl)**
 - Vol. 3: Arden and Ohman
 - Vol. 4: Zez Confrey
 - Vol. 5: Felix Arndt, Mike Bernard, others

Music by Gershwin (all published by Alfred Publishing)

- **Three Preludes by Gershwin** (ed. Maurice Hinson)
- **The Complete Gershwin Preludes for Piano** (ed. Alicia Zizzo)
- **Transcriptions for Piano** (ed. Maurice Hinson)
- **George Gershwin at the Piano** (ed. Maurice Hinson)
- **The Complete Works for Solo Piano** (ed. Maurice Hinson)
- **A Tribute to George Gershwin** (ed. Dan Coates)
- **Gershwin at the Keyboard (18 songs arr. by Gershwin, 1932)**

References on YouTube

- **Lucky Roberts: *Palm Beach* (1914)**
- **Arden/Ohman Orchestra**
- **Mike Bernard: *Everybody Two-Step* (1912)**
- **Zez Confrey: *Kitten on the Keys; Nickel in the Slot; Dizzy Fingers***