

JOHN FIELD (1782-1837)

Nocturne No. 5 in B-Flat Major A GUIDE TO INTERPRETATION

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Field is credited with the invention of the keyboard nocturne (see article on John Field, [C9](#)), and he certainly had a great influence on Chopin and the Romantic Era in his composition and style of playing which was lyrical and intimate.

Liszt, a champion of Field, in his publication of the Nocturnes, wrote in the preface: “None have quite attained to these vague aeolian harmonies, these half-formed sighs floating through the air, softly lamenting and dissolved in delicious melancholy. Nobody has even attempted this peculiar style and especially none of those

who heard Field play himself, or rather who heard him dream his music in moments when he entirely abandoned himself to his inspiration.”

The tempo mark is *Andantino*, a diminutive of *Andante*, so choose a tempo that is not too fast but fast enough that your *rubato* (which is very important to this music) can get both faster and slower. In the first measures, set the tempo then allow yourself to move slightly faster and slower as the melody would suggest. Keep the melody well above the accompaniment. I suggest that it is *Mezzo Forte* to a piano accompaniment so that you may change the dynamic level in expressing this lovely theme. At measure 4, lighten the 16th notes in the right hand to make them more graceful.



(continued on next page)

At measure 8, make a *ritard* on the downward two-note phrases of the right hand, returning to tempo in the following measure.



In measure 14, lighten the thirty second notes of the right hand to allow them to move to the F and continue the motion of the melody to the D-flat on the first beat of measure 16 which is a climactic point.



At 18, be sure that the top note of the chord is prominent so that you will be able to make it expressive using dynamic changes, and that the left hand is light. When it repeats in measure 20, find something else to do with it in dynamic contrast or rubato. Perhaps use the *una corda* pedal for a color change.



At measure 23, on the ornamented repetition of the theme, perhaps choose a different range of sound for the piano start. Remember that each dynamic is a range of sound, so use a louder or softer piano than you choose for the opening.



ORNAMENTS

The ornaments should be light (think of a singer ornamenting a melodic line), and the attention should be to the right hand. Allow the left hand to be light and unobtrusive as it comes in.

At measure 30, the function of the two-note phrases in the right hand is different from their appearance on the first page. They lead us to the melody in the next measure so I would suggest a *ritard*, but now coupled with a crescendo.



Treat the chords at measure 38 much in the same way as in measure 18, but perhaps with a different dynamic and rubato.



The piece ends with three phrases, each of which gets slower and quieter. Be careful not to get too slow too soon so that we feel the rhythmic slowdown right to the last one. The same is true for the dynamics -- not too soft too soon. For color changes, think about the angle of your right hand fingers, the balance between the two hands and use of the una corda pedal.

