

'Bluebird'



Composer: Alexis Ffrench (b.1970)

Nationality: British

Date: 2017

'Bluebird' was a 2017 single release for British composer Alexis Ffrench. The song features a beautiful piano solo, performed by Ffrench himself, and includes an impressive accompaniment from the highly regarded BRNO Philharmonic Orchestra.

Alexis Ffrench began improvising with the piano at just four years old. Deemed a virtuoso, Ffrench received scholarships for several highly regarded institutes including The Royal Academy of Music, The Purcell School for Young Musicians and the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. The composer prides himself on combining his classical music training with his love for roots and R'n'B Music. He is a strong believer in diversifying classical music and feels it is important to ensure that the genre continues to move forward while engaging musicians of all ethnicities. Ffrench's discography includes two studio albums and four single releases.

Preparation



Take time to prepare the left-hand accompaniment part separately. While the pedal will assist in creating a *legato* feel, be careful to lift and place accurately to avoid a muddy sounding texture. Notice how the left-hand part has a held dotted minim (dotted half-note) with two crotchet (quarter-note) dyads on beats 2 and 3. Take care to hold the dotted minim for the full length of each bar, rehearsing quick hand position changes as the harmony progresses through the chord changes. Make sure that the crotchet dyads are placed in time, cleanly, but without being too heavy as to interrupt the melodic line above.

As the right-hand part moves into the continuous flowing quaver (eighth-note) pattern at bar 41, and again on the repeat at bar 81, it is important to avoid inadvertently changing the tempo or volume. Notice how a simple melody line is highlighted with the use of *tenuto* articulations. To hear this internal pattern, try playing the left-hand accompaniment along with the right-hand part only playing the notes marked with a *tenuto* placed above the noteheads. While this pattern helps to give shape to this section of music, take care to avoid exaggerating the balance between the *tenuto* and non-*tenuto* notes, allowing the music to flow effortlessly and lightly as a sparkling melody from a music box.

Once you have secured the notes and your finger patterns, your focus should be on developing an expressive and balanced performance. Much of the charm of the piece lies within the natural ebb and flow of the lyrical melodic lines. Take time to consider the shape of each phrase, treating them like musical sentences. By identifying the form and peak of each phrase, you can then use subtle dynamic variations and emphasis to bring your music alive, just as we do with speech patterns.

Performance



Although the lilting gentle waltz-like accompaniment and simplicity of the melody line evokes a nostalgic and dreamlike mood, make sure the tempo keeps the music pressing forward, never slowing down or with excessive *rubato*. A polished performance will have beautifully phrased melody lines with a well controlled and balanced accompaniment. Ffrench described this particular composition as born out of improvisation, and filled with influences including Debussy and Satie. It is recommended that the performer takes time to listen to some piano pieces by these two composers, as well as listening to recordings of this original piece, to help understand Ffrench's intentions for the style and mood of the piece.

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Alexis Ffrench

Tenderly

The first system of music for 'Tenderly' consists of two staves. The upper staff is in treble clef with a key signature of two flats and a 3/4 time signature. It begins with a mezzo-piano (*mp*) dynamic marking. The melody starts with a quarter rest, followed by quarter notes G4, A4, and Bb4, then a dotted half note G4. The lower staff is in bass clef and features a steady accompaniment of quarter notes G2, Bb2, and D3, with a half note G2 at the end of each measure.

Con pedale

The second system continues the piece. The upper staff features a melodic line with a dotted half note G4, followed by quarter notes A4, Bb4, and C5, then a dotted half note Bb4. The lower staff continues with the same accompaniment pattern.

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The third system shows the upper staff with a melodic line starting on a dotted half note G4, followed by quarter notes A4, Bb4, and C5, then a dotted half note Bb4. The lower staff continues with the accompaniment.

13

The fourth system continues the melodic and accompaniment lines. The upper staff has a dotted half note G4, followed by quarter notes A4, Bb4, and C5, then a dotted half note Bb4. The lower staff continues with the accompaniment.

19

The fifth system concludes the piece. The upper staff features a melodic line with a dotted half note G4, followed by quarter notes A4, Bb4, and C5, then a dotted half note Bb4. The lower staff continues with the accompaniment.

25

Technical Exercises

In this section you will be required to play a selection of exercises drawn from each of the groups below. The examiner will be looking for the speed of your response and will also give credit for the level of your musicality. Please see the syllabus guide for details on the marking criteria.

- Major scales, minor scales and arpeggios need to be played hands together, ascending and descending, in the keys and octaves shown.
- Candidates must choose to play **either** natural minor **or** harmonic minor **or** melodic minor scales in the exam. The examiner will ask the candidate to state which set of minor scales they have prepared.
- Pentatonic scales are right hand only.
- Groups A and B (scales & arpeggios) must be played from memory. You may use your book for Group C (Technical Studies).
- All groups are played unaccompanied (without metronome or click).
- Any fingerings shown are suggestions only.
- Candidates will be marked on tone quality and consistency, maintenance of pulse, and accuracy. Performances slower than the stated minimum tempo may be subject to qualitative judgement by the examiner, according to extent and commensurate with the grade.

Group A: Scales

The minimum tempo for this group is ♩ = 80 bpm.

1. E^b major scale

Musical notation for the E^b major scale, showing ascending and descending lines for both the right and left hands. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-5 above or below notes.

2. A major scale

Musical notation for the A major scale, showing ascending and descending lines for both the right and left hands. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-5 above or below notes.

3. C natural minor scale

Musical notation for the C natural minor scale, showing ascending and descending lines for both the right and left hands. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-5 above or below notes.

Sight Reading

In the exam, you have a choice between either a Sight Reading test or an Improvisation & Interpretation test. The examiner will ask you which one you wish to choose before commencing. Once you have decided you cannot change your mind.

In the sight reading test, the examiner will give you an 4–6 bar piece in A major or E \flat major, to be played unaccompanied. You will first be given 90 seconds to practise. After the practise time, the examiner will ask you to commence the test.

While the assessed part of the test is not played to a metronome click, you may ask to hear the minimum tempo on a metronome at the start of, or throughout your practice time. Additionally, you may ask to hear a few seconds of the tempo on a metronome before the assessed part of the test begins.

Sight Reading | Example 1

Andante ($\text{♩} = 90$)

mp

Sight Reading | Example 2

Andante ($\text{♩} = 90$)

mf

[4]

Please note: The tests shown are examples: The examiner will give you a different version in the exam.