

## **Pathways to Chopin (Preparing for standard Romantic repertoire)**

Some of the most satisfying and beautiful piano repertoire is found in music from the Romantic period. To bring a student to the level of Chopin Preludes or Nocturnes and Mendelssohn's Songs Without Words is, indeed, a fulfilling accomplishment.

There is much we can do to prepare students for this wonderful literature. Each stage in a student's development needs to contribute to future musical goals. In using less difficult music that is similar, but true in spirit to the Romantic composers, we can give students a musical foundation for the music they might aspire to.

It is important to move in incremental steps, both technically and musically. I have always felt that it's never too early to work on playing musically. With planning and diligence, students can learn to shape a phrase, execute slur endings, and play accompanying figures less loud in the first few years of lessons. Work often to capture the appropriate mood and character of the earliest level repertoire.

Each assigned lesson contains opportunities to build musicianship. Sometimes we might be tempted to hurry along to the next piece when it might be best to work more thoroughly on the current assignment. Have you discovered everything about the piece that can be useful for building a strong foundation? Is the student comfortable in executing touch, phrasing and dynamic requirements?

I tend to be particular about which repertoire I use because we play it and study it for several weeks. I try to seek out pieces that will "wear well" and will give a satisfying result for the effort involved.

The following suggested repertoire is appropriate for developing skills in pedaling, playing cantabile melodies, working with larger broken chord accompaniments and tonal control for communicating mood. This list focuses on developing the lyric qualities of Romantic piano playing.

### **Elementary**

Walk in a Rainbow by Nancy Faber  
FJH Music Co., Inc.

As I commented earlier, it's never too early to build musicianship. Each hand is given the opportunity to project the melody. Lyrics printed on the 1<sup>st</sup> page underscore the phrasing ideas. The contrasting middle section consists of easy, patterned arpeggios.

Sky Blue by Robert Vandall  
Myklas Music Press

The hand-over-hand broken triads float over four octaves in this serene piece. Dynamic control and pedaling are important. (note the "mini-trill" motif that Mr. Vandall introduces).

Touch A Rainbow by Dennis Alexander  
Alfred Publishing Co.

The left hand plays a broken seventh chord pattern - the shape always remaining the same (find the exceptions...always beginning on C). That alone makes this solo a reliable one for memory work! It has a very pretty ending.

The Great Frontier collection by Catherine Rollin  
Alfred Publishing Co.

This collection has some beautiful, lyric pieces in it. I think the entire book is enjoyable to explore the beauty, grandeur, spirit and fun of the western United States. These are notable works to communicate ideas and mood.

Willow Tree Waltz by Nancy Faber  
FJH Music Co., Inc.

This ABA 3 page solo is a clear representation of structure, dynamic and mood contrast, parallel Major and minor keys and passing melody from one hand to another within the phrase. Since the longer note value melody notes fall on beat one, it's an easier task to ask students to play the accompanying chords (beats 2 and 3) more softly.

### **Intermediate**

Nocturne by Nancy Faber  
FJH Music Co., Inc.

This 4 page solo gets my vote for one of the best teaching pieces that exemplifies a specific style and form. Nancy Faber has truly captured the essence of the romantic Nocturne for intermediate students. The piece begins lyrically in C Major with a fluid Chopin-like melody and movement. The B section is in the relative minor and has fuller chords with rhythmic interest. After the return to A, there is a lovely coda with a smorzando ending.

Prelude Majestic (Variations on a Ground Bass) by Margaret Goldston  
Alfred Publishing Co.

This is a compelling solo with opportunity to study the repeating 8 measure harmonic pattern. The minor key piece begins and ends simply with a grand build-up in the middle. Not as easy to memorize as it would seem, but it can be a very effective and dramatic solo.

Spotlight on Romantic Style by Catherine Rollin  
Alfred Publishing Co.

Ms. Rollins gives us five original teaching pieces – Nocturne, Waltz, Mazurka, Etude and Polonaise. These works are very useful for developing expressive, cantabile melodies and rich tonal qualities. I especially enjoy teaching the Nocturne and the Waltz.

Crystal Falls by Robert Vandall  
Myklas Music Press

This is an effective study of LH melody crossing over the RH in the first section. There is a beautiful contrasting second section of broken arpeggios that appeals. I have found this piece to work well with teen-agers or adults.

Summer's Nocturne by Catherine Rollin  
Alfred Publishing Co.

A languid, pleasant summer sound can be achieved in this three page solo. The LH accompaniment figure is a broken chord that extends to distances of 10ths and 11ths.

Glacier Majesty by Dennis Alexander  
Alfred Publishing Co.

A fun, majestic work! The body of this solo showcases a lyric melody that is played LH over RH. This section is surrounded by a bold introductory and exit statement using full harmonic sounds. The student must move quickly back and forth between treble and bass registers. Challenging and imaginative.

The Emerald Sea by Timothy Brown  
FJH Music Co.

Here is a stunning, perpetual-motion study that requires bringing out melodies within the RH arpeggiated figure. Rhythm groupings alternate between sixteenth notes and triplets. 4 pages.

Reverie by George Peter Tingley  
Alfred Publishing Co.

This is another one of my all-time favorite solos for pre-Chopin playing. The LH accompaniment moves over two octaves per measure. The RH begins with a single note melody and adds more harmonization as the piece builds to the peak area.

Preludes for Piano, Book One by Catherine Rollin  
Alfred Publishing Co.

These Preludes are intermediate pieces that explore the use of patterns and the development of lyric playing with rubato. There are seven original pieces in the collection.

Lyric Preludes in Romantic Style by William Gillock  
Alfred/Warner Brothers

Don't forget this wonderful album of twenty-four pieces in all keys. The pieces are short but offer valuable opportunities to work with a variety of interpretations, as well as key signatures.

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As always, the repertoire that I write about is meant to be suggested material that I have enjoyed and experienced some success with. It is presented in my approximation of difficulty (from easier to more advancing). One of the great challenges of teaching piano is to find the right repertoire for each student at the right time! There is a wealth of teaching repertoire in the early intermediate and intermediate levels that will create a solid foundation for standard Romantic piano music. I know that I have only touched on a few favorites selections. Would you share some of **your** favorites with me? Please e-mail me at [db-promusic@excite.com](mailto:db-promusic@excite.com).