
LESSON 4.4

READING ASSIGNMENT

Romantic music

The Romantic music period was between 1825-1900. This music is marked by expressiveness and a shift to using music to convey a specific mood or feeling. This tends to be the favorite category of my students – it's got all the flair and fanciness of Classical music, but still feels relatable in ways that Haydn or Bach don't.

I generally don't start getting my students involved in Romantic music until the early intermediate level, at which point easier pieces by Schumann and Tchaikovsky (from their respective *albums for the young*) can be attempted.

Most Romantic music I consider to be in the *core repertoire* is at an intermediate level and higher. Grieg's *Lyric Pieces* can be started at this point, as can a few Chopin Preludes and his *Waltz in A minor, posth.* There are a few lesser-known collections that I quite like, such as Amy Beach's *Children's Carnival, op. 25*, and Grechaninov's albums (of which his *op. 98 Children's Album* is accessible even to late beginners).

Staple Romantic repertoire for the advanced student includes Chopin's many compositions (waltzes, nocturnes, preludes and mazurkas to name a few), works by Brahms, Liszt's *Liebesträume* and *Consolations*, Mendelssohn's *Songs Without Words*, Schubert's *Impromptus* and *Moments Musicaux*, Tchaikovsky's *The Seasons*, and more.

Erik Satie's *Gymnopédies* are doable for the early advanced student, as are some of the *Woodland Sketches* by MacDowell. There are some easier individual pieces by Chopin that fall between a grade 6-9 level, and Liszt's *Consolations* are easier than most of his other works.

Intermediate Romantic/Early 20th Century collections

Beach: [Children's Carnival, op. 25](#)

Grieg: [Lyric Pieces](#)

Bartok: [For Children 1](#) and [For Children 2](#)

Chopin: [Waltzes](#)

Kabalevsky: [30 Pieces for Children, op 27](#)

Kabalevsky: [Four Rondos, op. 60](#)

Mendelssohn: [Songs Without Words, op. 30](#)

Prokofiev: [Music for Children, op 65](#)

Grechaninov: [Grandfather's Album, op 119](#)

Schumann: [Sonata for the Young, op 118](#)

Schumann: [Albumblätter, op 124](#)

Intermediate Romantic repertoire is full of collections “for children”. Try not to despair this as an adult – just because the collections were originally written for children doesn’t mean all the pieces are childish. Some are very sophisticated.

Amy Beach is a lesser-known American composer from the 20th century. Her *Children’s Carnival* is lovely, with pieces around a grade 5-6 level. It alternates between elegant and playful.

Grieg’s *Lyric Pieces* span a huge amount of music (10 albums of lyric pieces in total). They range in difficulty between grade 5-10 and cover the gamut of expressive possibilities on the piano. This is one collection I recommend to all my students because of its diversity.

Bartok’s *For Children I and II* covers a huge amount of ground, from grades 2-8. I love teaching Bartok because his early 20th century style is very distinct. I find students tend to either hate the sound of his music or love it – and many of my students are surprised by how fun Bartok is to play once you get used to it. I highly recommend trying at least a couple pieces out from these albums to get an idea of Bartok’s style.

I consider Kabalevsky to be in a similar vein to Bartok (though still quite distinct), and he has two collections I enjoy at an intermediate album – *Four Rondos* and *30 Pieces for Children*. *30 Pieces for Children* ranges in difficulty from grade 2-7 and is basically an extension of his *24 Pieces for Children* from the beginner level.

His *Four Rondos* are the next step up, all at a grade 7 level. This is transitional Kabalevsky, and well worth looking at.

Prokofiev’s *Music for Children* is on the upper end of intermediate repertoire, mainly around a grade 7 level. These are in the same vein as Kabalevsky. I especially love the ultra-fast Tarantella.

Grechaninov’s *Grandfather’s Album* is a great little album at a grade 4 level and fills the space nicely (as much of the core intermediate repertoire is a higher level).

Schumann has three collections at an intermediate level. His *Album for the Young* is a staple, with a variety of styles and pieces between grades 3-8. His *Sonata for the Young* is for the upper-intermediate/early advanced student, around a grade 7/8 level. Finally, his *Albumblätter* has pieces between a grade 6-9 level. They’re all good, but the *Album for the Young* is probably the most important one to have in your collection.

Tchaikovsky has a similar *Album for the Young* (and was directly inspired by Schumann’s when he wrote it). I tend to get my students to purchase one or the other, since they’re similar in a lot of ways.

We also have Shostakovich's *Childhood Notebook*, one of the easiest collections on this list, ranging from grade 1-5. This is another album I consider similar to the Kabalevsky ones, so I'd choose your favorite among them.

You don't need to get every album on this list. I strongly encourage everyone to get *Lyric Pieces* and one of the *Albums for the Young* (Tchaikovsky or Schumann). The rest comes down to personal preference and interest.

Advanced romantic collections

Brahms: [Brahms – The Shorter Pieces](#)

Brahms: [Ballades op. 10](#)

Brahms: [Waltzes op. 39](#)

Chopin: [Impromptus](#)

Chopin: [Preludes](#)

Chopin: [Waltzes](#)

Chopin: [Nocturnes](#)

Chopin: [Polonaises](#)

Chopin: [Mazurkas](#)

Chopin: [Ballades](#)

Liszt: [Consolations S. 172](#)

Liszt: [Liebestraume](#)

Macdowell: [Woodland Sketches, op 51](#)

Mendelssohn: [Six Children's Pieces op. 72](#)

Schubert: [Impromptus and Moments Musicaux](#)

Schumann: [Fantasiestucke, op 12](#)

Chopin is a composer who I almost never have to push on my students – pianists of all ages and stages gravitate toward his beautiful music. Pretty much all his music is at an advanced level, but there are some good starting pieces for intermediate/early advanced students, such as his Waltz in Am (posth.), preludes no. 4, 6, 9 and 20, and a couple posthumous polonaises (B1 and B3).

There is so much great Chopin music, and there are plenty of choices at each grade level starting at grade 7. I highly encourage you to check out each of these collections listed. It's more music than a reasonable person could play, but it's worth a listen and a study.

A lesser-known composer who wrote an excellent collection for the late intermediate/early advanced student is Edward MacDowell. "To a Wild Rose", a grade 7 level piece, is beautiful and students tend to quite enjoy learning it. Each piece is so unique from the next – "Will o' the Wisp" is about the opposite of "To a Wild Rose" in every way (and much harder!). In general, this collection ranges from grade 7-9. MacDowell has other similar-levelled books, but *Woodland Sketches* is my favorite.

Students are usually eager to get into Liszt, but Liszt's music tends to be very difficult (More so than many of Chopin's pieces). It's best to start with some of his *Consolations*, one of which is at a grade 10 level. His famous *Liebestraume* are beautiful and are between a grade 10/ARCT level.

Brahms' music tends to lean more difficult, with his *Intermezzos* between a grade 9-ARCT, *Ballades* harder still between grade 10-ARCT, and his *Waltzes*, one of which is a grade 8 level and is a good introduction to Brahms (op. 39 no. 15, Brahms' simplified version).

Mendelssohn's *Songs Without Words* is between a grade 8-10 level – I find the pieces in this collection to be very likeable and playable. It exemplifies the Romantic-style of music, but these often get overshadowed by Chopin.

Schubert's *Impromptus* and *Moments Musicaux* are between a grade 9-ARCT level. Schubert was such a unique composer, transitional between the Classical and Romantic eras, and every pianist should be familiar with these staple works.

Schumann wrote a lot of great music, some of which we looked at in the intermediate level. If I had to pick one collection to represent his advanced music, I'd probably pick *Fantasiestücke*, which leans very difficult (ARCT level). I think this comes down to personal taste more than anything else. If you liked what you heard of Schumann at an intermediate level please explore more of his compositions (and check out his wife Clara's music while you're at it).

Tchaikovsky's music is also considered transitional, falling toward the end of the Romantic period. His collection *The Seasons* is a classic, with a composition for each month of the year. These pieces fall between a grade 8-10 level and were written with the hobbyist in mind (so they're not fiendishly difficult).