



Daniel Grimwood

talks about

Field's Nocturne No. 5

The great Irish pianist, composer and inventor of the nocturne, John Field, was born into a musical family in Dublin. He received his earliest musical education from his grandfather, who was an organist, and later from Giordani before he moved to London with his father to take up an apprenticeship with Muzio Clementi. Under Clementi's guidance and, it has to be said, exploitation, he became one of the most famous concert pianists of his era. He later moved to Russia where he was the teacher of Mikael Glinka – who has been described as the father of Russian music. So it wouldn't be too far-fetched to call this Irishman the grandfather of Russian music.

The influence of bel canto

The nocturne seems to have its roots in the serenade and is vocal music translated into keyboard music. The vocal nature of John Field's piano writing is perhaps a reflection of the fact that all of his formal music education was received from Italians, so it was very natural for him to translate *bel canto* vocal techniques into a piano style.

John Field was most famous for his tone production and his ability to draw a voluptuous vocal tone from the instrument, so this is the first thing we need to focus on when playing his music. The word connected with all of this is *cantabile*, which means 'in a singing style'. 'In a singing style' should mean both a sustained tone, and the understanding that singers have to use diction. It's not so much to do with evenness, but understanding exactly how to shape and mould a phrase according to where words might fall.

Practising the left hand

If we think about the structure, tonally, of a serenade, we have the singer accompanied perhaps by a guitar. The left hand is taking the role both of a bass line and a guitarist. Starting at bar 1, let's think about these two components, because the bass line is taken

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by the fifth finger and the strumming guitar by the other fingers. So I would suggest first of all practising this accompaniment divided across two hands, with the left hand taking the bass note where the bass note strums slightly louder than the remaining notes, which

should just undulate above it. Repeat this until you're satisfied that it's with a slight bell-like repetition of the bass note, and then try to get exactly the same sound with one hand. Against this the melody is going to shine out above, rather louder, but still soft and sweet.

Ornamentation

With all music from this period, ornaments that precede notes should always be played on the beat and not before.

The first turn in this piece, in bar 14, is a written-out turn rather than a symbol. This suggests to me that perhaps it can be lingered over.

Nocturne No. 5

Andantino
mf cantabile

John Field (1782–1837)

The musical score for Nocturne No. 5 by John Field is presented in a grand staff format, consisting of a treble and a bass clef. The key signature is one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 12/8. The tempo is marked 'Andantino' and the dynamics are 'mf cantabile'. The score is divided into five systems, each containing three measures. The first system starts with a piano (*p*) dynamic and a 'legatiss.' marking. The second system begins with a measure number '4'. The third system begins with a measure number '7' and includes accents (>) over the eighth notes in the first measure. The fourth system begins with a measure number '10'. The fifth system begins with a measure number '13' and includes a crescendo hairpin. Pedal markings ('Ped.') are placed below the bass staff in measures 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, and 13. The notation includes various note values (half notes, quarter notes, eighth notes), rests, and slurs.