



more than the score...

ERIK SATIE

Gnossienne No. 3

for piano solo

Presented by Joanna MacGregor

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Joanna MacGregor

talks about

Satie's *Gnossienne* No. 3

Satie was very keen on inventing his own titles and making up words. 'Gnossienne' is a made-up word. No one really knows what it means, but it does derive from 'Knossos', and it reminds us of the island of Crete where people had just discovered this ancient city. It reminds us that's where the minotaur and the labyrinth come from. If you keep all these things in mind – ancient Greece, a labyrinth, a mystery that no one can solve – this is a pretty good zone for your head to be in when you're playing Satie.

Satie uses the Lydian mode; almost like white-note music. It's not the same scale or same tonality that Bach would have written in; it's more folksy, almost.

Gnossienne No. 3 presents a paradox because, in many ways, it's very free. It looks free because there are no barlines or time signatures, and there's very little in the way of dynamics. However, there is a left-hand pattern that's absolutely constant and consistent.

A very nice way of practising this is with four hands. You, or somebody else, could play the left-hand part in two hands, and somebody else could play the right hand. The reason why I suggest you practise this in two hands is that you'll begin to get a sense of the calm that you need just to move from harmony to harmony. It's the same rhythmic pattern all the way through, but it needs to sound rather neutral. You don't want ever to sound dramatic or agitated with it; you've got to have a kind of neutrality in the way you play.

Dynamics and pedalling

The main theme at the beginning of this *Gnossienne* repeats over and over again. It is slightly mysterious and sounds slightly Eastern-

European. Because this figure repeats so often, I think it's perfectly all right for you to choose different dynamics as you repeat.

Watch out for the pedalling, because you have long notes that have to last through the harmony, so you need to keep that pedal down. Change the pedal with each of the low notes. This is quite important because this will affect how you play your melody. It's

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very important that your pedalling is very accurate. You don't want to blur the harmonies. Don't try and make sense of the harmony. The point about Satie is that he writes in blocks. He's not like Bach who journeys from key to key. He's a different kind of composer.

Your right hand, in general, needs to lift it off from the keyboard. The reason for that is that the pedal unfortunately makes everything last, because you've got to pedal the left hand through, the harmonies through. But if you just remember to lift your right hand off the keyboard, at least you follow the shape of the right hand more. There are some breaths in the right hand, there's a sense in which there are rests where you're not playing, and so do try and lift the hand as you play, don't just let it sit on the keyboard.

Rubato

You have the chance to play with a bit of rubato in this music because, although you have this almost rocking, very consistent left hand, your right hand can weave a bit, and it's a little bit like playing a Chopin Nocturne. You want to find a way where there's some

Gnossienne No. 3

from *Trois Gnossiennes*

Erik Satie (1866–1925)

Lent

p

Conseillez-vous soigneusement

♩

Munissez-vous de clairvoyance

♩

Seul, pendant un instant

♩

De manière à obtenir un creux

♩