



# Clare Hammond

*talks about*

## Schubert's Impromptu in G flat major

One of the things that might be rather off-putting when first looking at this piece is the key signature: six flats do look rather formidable. The piece was actually initially published and popularized in the key of G major because it was believed that people would find this easier to read. It probably is easier to read, initially, but in G major the chords don't lie as well under the hand and become rather awkward. Once you've made the effort to decipher the key signature and work out which notes the double flats refer to, you'll find that the original key fits neatly under the hand.

### Time and timing

The time signature of this piece is particularly perplexing. Instead of writing 4:2 or four minims, Schubert has written that the bar should be split into two, so we have two bars of 2:2 within the bar. This gives it a lilt and it has a strong effect on the tempo that you ultimately choose to perform the piece. I try to feel that the first half of the bar is the stronger beat, and then the second half of the bar is a lighter impulse.

The most difficult aspect of this piece, and one that has caused me hours of angst, is trying to get the central quaver line even. It is extremely challenging – even more so than you might realize on first playing the piece. I learned the piece and played it quite a bit in concert, and then recorded myself. I was absolutely horrified by how uneven the central line was. So I would recommend recording yourself once you have some grasp of this piece.

One of the ways I found to practise it is to really zoom in on the line, and just repeat little units over and over again. Don't go on autopilot. You have to be listening very intensely to make sure that the quavers are even. The metronome is always helpful, but within

the metronome beat you need to make sure that it still lilts and that it's completely even.

### Phrasing and articulation

The lyrical and vocal element is important in this Impromptu, and it's difficult to recreate on the piano. One of the ways that I've found helpful to achieve this is to take the outer voices and play the piece at a slightly faster tempo initially, then you can slow it down,

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and try to make sure that the notes really connect and that they sustain. Once you feel confident with that, you can then add the central voice, but listen out for that connection, both in soprano and the bass.

I think there are various ways of interpreting the *staccato* in the first and fifth bars. Often in early Romantic music, and later quite frequently in Rachmaninoff, *staccato* is used over melodic notes to highlight those that have more emphasis, or perhaps are more important compared to other elements in the texture. In this case, you could interpret it in that way, but I prefer to think of them as lifted.

### Dynamics

The dynamic range in this piece is really quite extreme. We move from triple *pianissimo* up to *forte* and *sforzissimo*. Be aware of how the dynamics are terraced throughout the piece so that you can use this

# Impromptu in G flat major

Franz Schubert (1797–1828)  
Op. 90, No. 3; D899

Andante

3

5

7

9

11

*pp* (*legato*)

*p*

*cresc.*

*p*

*cresc.*

*cresc.*