

Erik Satie

Gnossienne No. 1



After last month's Olympian effort with Chariots Of Fire here **Bridget Mermikides** arranges and transcribes an evocative piece by pioneering French minimalist composer, Erik Satie.

ABILITY RATING



Moderate

INFO	WILL IMPROVE YOUR
KEY: C	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Knowledge of unusual scales
TEMPO: 58 bpm	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Fretting hand stretches
CD: Tracks 13-14	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Bass, chords, melody playing

THIS MONTH I'VE prepared an arrangement of Gnossienne No.1 by the highly influential French pianist and composer Erik Satie (1866-1925). Satie received much criticism by some of his contemporaries for what was deemed to be his unschooled, underdeveloped and bizarre music. However, his musical legacy has had an enduring impact on a huge range of composers - and entire genres - including Debussy and the Impressionistic movement, Steve Reich and Terry Riley (Repetitive, Process and Minimalism), Bill Evans and modal jazz, Brian Eno and Ambient music, and many subsequent forms of electronica.

In opposition to much of the prevailing musical features of the time, Satie eschewed quickly changing complex harmonies and rhythms, instrumental virtuosity and long forms, to write sparse and minimal works that

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possess an uncanny ability to capture the imagination (and lodge in the brain all day!), and which still sound fresh and entirely relevant to this day.


The Gnossiennes were three short piano pieces composed around 1890 and published in 1893, and have appeared in many TV shows and films including most recently Scorsese's Hugo (2011). Although Gnossienne No. 1 was written (with typical Satiesque idiosyncrasy) without bar lines, the rhythms imply a slow 4/4 with a lilting accompaniment pattern that stresses beats 1,3 and 4.

Although this piece lasts over three and a half minutes in performance, it has in fact only three different sections of musical material. These sections occur various numbers of times and are repeated each time they appear, giving the piece its minimal and relentlessly hypnotic character.

To make the piece that little bit more appropriate for the guitar, I've transposed our version from the original key of F minor down a semitone to E minor. Otherwise the GT arrangement is very close to the original, as compared to most piano transcriptions.

The underlying harmony is incredibly simple, particularly for the musical climate in which it was written, compromising just three chords (Em, Am, Bm here). But it is the use of exotic scales in the haunting melody that really give the piece its fantastically hypnotic, dreamlike quality. Although the key signature, accompanying chords and some sections are in E minor, much of the melody is drawn from a Dorian #4 scale (the 4th mode of Harmonic Minor) (E, F#, G, A#, B, C#, D),

the raised 4th degree (A#) and major 6th (C#) creating a compelling mystical atmosphere. Bars 14-19, and 36-41 use the equally magical melodic minor #4 (E, F#, G, A#, B, C#, D#).

Although this piece is slow, it will take some work to play the melody so it sounds lyrical and balanced against the underlying chords so, as ever, use the tab captions and enjoy the process of learning this beautiful work. And just for fun I've left in Satie's beautifully bizarre performance notes for you to enjoy. See you next month. 

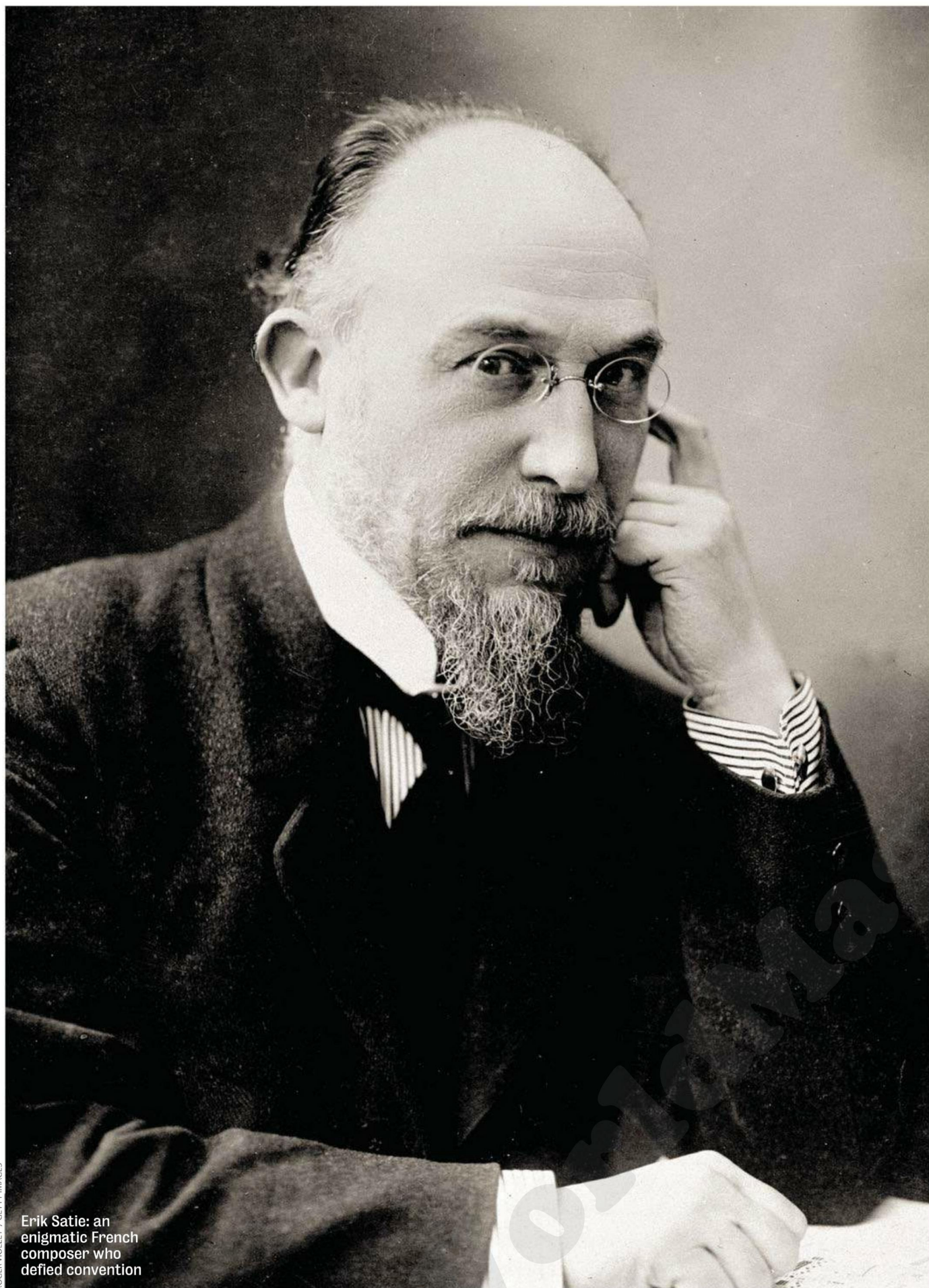
TECHNIQUE FOCUS

POSTURE

Classical guitar playing requires a specific posture to achieve the best possible position for both arms and hands in order to best serve a successful technique. The under curve of the guitar should sit on the left upper leg (for right-handed players) that is raised by a bespoke footstool and the larger bout of the instrument rests on the inner right thigh. The left knee points forwards so your knee is under your nose and the right leg points out the way to the right. Your right forearm rests on the top of the larger bout and the three points of contact keep the guitar securely in place. The plucking hand should now fall next to the strings close to the soundhole and the guitar neck should be angled slightly upwards for ease of hand movement along the fret board.



TRACK RECORD Aldo Ciccolini's 1992 EMI release, *Satie: Oeuvres Pour Piano* includes an excellent Gnossienne No.1 along with other solo works including *Gymnopédie No. 1* (GT202). Ophélie Gallard's mesmerising solo cello and orchestral arrangement with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra (Dreams Atlas 2009) shows how wonderfully evocative Satie's music is in a range of instrumental settings.



ROGER VIOLETTE / GETTY IMAGES

Erik Satie: an enigmatic French composer who defied convention

PLAYING TIPS

CD TRACK 14

[Bars 1-10] The first section is nine bars long and sets the mood with the main melody. It consists of two-bar, two-bar, three-bar and two-bar phrases, each one responding musically to its preceding phrase in a 'call and response' style. Technically the first bar is slightly stretchy for the fretting hand when the fourth finger reaches for the high D while the first finger needs to remain holding down and sustain the E note on the second string in the accompanying chord below.

The pull-offs in bar 2 are fingered fourth finger to second finger even though they are only one fret apart. This helps achieve a crisp sounding slur because the fourth (rather than the third) finger when pulled to the second has more space within the joint movement, pulling the string at more of a right angle and creating a cleaner "bite". However this can also be a matter of personal preference and some players are perfectly happy using the third finger. »

103

Em Em6 Emadd#11 Em Em6 Em

Em Em6 Emadd#11 Emadd9 Bm Emadd9 Em

Tres luisant Am Am6 Am Am6 Emadd9 Em

Questionez Em Em6 Emadd#11 Em Emma|7

Em Emadd#11 Emadd9 Em

PLAYING TIPS

CD TRACK 14

Deciding which fretting fingers to use for the hammer-ons in bar 4 is also down to personal preference; two to three, two to four or one to two are all fine. It's a question of what works best for you and what you find most accurate and secure.

[Bar 19] The next section beginning at bar 19 is entitled 'Tres luisant' meaning 'very shiny'. As musical instructions go this is unorthodox yet typical of Satie's

rather bizarre and eccentric style. Technically this is not completely simple to play, where the C on the 5th fret, third string needs to be fretted with the third then fourth finger alternating, in order to sustain the melody note above, and again with the purpose of making the slurs in the melody sound clear. A first finger barre is required here at the 2nd fret from beat 2 of bar 19.

Am Am6 Am Am6 Emadd9 Em

39, 43

Du bout de la pens e

Em Em6 Emadd#11 Em Em6 Em

47, 51

Am Am6 Am Am6 Emadd9 Em Emadd#11

55, 59

Postulez en vous-meme

Em Em6 Emadd#11 Em Emmaj7

63

Em Emadd#11 Emadd9 Em

66

PLAYING TIPS

CD TRACK 14

[Bar 27 to end] At bar 27 the third section is stated for the first time. This melody, described 'questionnez' (ask) by Satie, demonstrates the Dorian #4 scale (E F# G A# B C# D) starting from the 5th degree (B). The high note of the phrase – the A# is the #4 and the unusual interval gives this piece its mysterious character. There is nothing too tricky about this passage, so just aim to keep the pull-offs nice and clear.

After this, it's mostly a case of repeating the previous themes. When the first theme reappears at bar 47 it has the instruction: 'Du bout de la pensée' – 'from the edge of thought', and when the third section returns it has a new instruction for each repetition; 'Postulez en vous-même' – 'wonder about yourself'; 'Pas à Pas' – 'step by step', and finally the closing phrase: 'Sur la langue' – 'on the tip of the tongue'. All très intriguing!

Pas Pas

Em Em6 Emadd#11 Em Emmaj7

69

Em Emadd#11 Emadd9 Em

72

Am Am6 Am Am6 Emadd9 Em

75

Sur la langue

Am Am6 Am Am6 Emadd9 Em

79