

Erik Satie *Gymnopédie No.1*



You might not know its name but Satie's elegant piece is one of the most well-known tunes in all the classical repertoire.

Bridget Mermikides arranges it for solo nylon-string guitar.

ABILITY RATING



Moderate

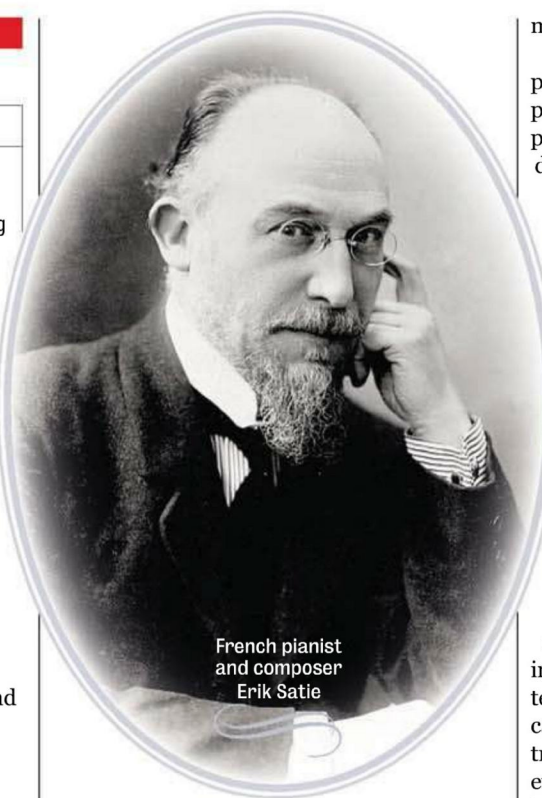
INFO	WILL IMPROVE YOUR
KEY: E	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Classical repertoire
TEMPO: 80 bpm	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Artificial harmonics
CD: Tracks 22-23	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Bass, chords, melody playing

THIS ISSUE'S CLASSICAL guitar column presents an arrangement of the well-known *Gymnopédie No. 1* by the French pianist and composer Erik Satie (1866-1925). When compiling a list of the greatest composers of all time the usual names of Mozart, Beethoven, JS Bach and Brahms rightfully appear, but it's very easy to overlook the influence of composers who may be less celebrated and prolific, but have had a profound impact on musical development. Satie is such a figure in Western Art music.

At a time when composers were pushing towards progressively deeper chromatic harmony and into the realms of atonality, and wrote long pieces demanding a technical virtuosity from performers and a suitably informed audience, Satie wrote pieces that were sparse and minimal, relying on simplicity and the succinct elegance of a small number of intriguing melodic ideas, scales and chords.

As is often the case with composers ahead of their time, Satie was somewhat overlooked by his contemporaries as an inconsequential eccentric. This was not helped by his labeling as "untalented" at the Paris Conservatoire, his eccentric score directions (such as "Open your head"), his association with the avant-garde

“Satie was somewhat overlooked by his contemporaries as an inconsequential eccentric.”



French pianist and composer
Erik Satie

and the revolutionary simplicity of his work.

Indeed, he himself didn't call himself a musician but a phonometrician - a measurer of sound - and described some of his output as furniture music; background music that 'furnishes' the atmosphere of our lives.

Despite his critics, there is a timeless beauty and musical vision in his works, that foreshadowed entire musical movements. These include impressionism (with contemporaries such as Debussy - who arranged Satie's *Gymnopédies* for orchestra), minimalism (John Cage and Philip Glass), repetitive and process music (such as Terry Riley and Steve Reich), and ambient music (from Brian Eno to multiple sub-genres of IDM (Intelligent Dance Music)). So Satie has been, and remains, an influence to many

musicians in a great variety of styles.

The *Gymnopédies* were three short piano pieces published in 1888 and inspired by the poetry of Flaubert and de Latour, from whose poem *Les Antiques* the title - with no clear definition - is taken.

Gymnopédie No. 1 is in a slow 3/4 and the famous opening alternates between a Gmaj7 (IVmaj7) and Dmaj7 (Imaj7) in the key of D. So simple, but the starting on the IV (rather than I) chord combined with the poignant melody which weaves through the harmony, is disarmingly beautiful and recognised and loved by many. This simply opening harmony and melody travels through some surprising parallel modes, but is always accessible and never obtuse, which is part of Satie's unique creativity.

In our arrangement the original key of D has been transposed up a tone to E, in order to work with the open strings and natural resonance of the guitar. The most important thing here is to work on the technical aspects of the piece (using the tab captions) so as to not get in the way of its tranquil beauty. If it's played simply and evenly with correct note lengths, a balance between bass, chords and melody and with no indulgent pulling about of rhythm, it speaks for itself. Bon chance and enjoy! 

TECHNIQUE FOCUS FREE STROKE, REST STROKE

Two common picking techniques in classical guitar are free stroke and rest stroke. With rest stroke the picking finger plucks a string and then comes to rest against the adjacent one. With the thumb this is the next string down (towards the floor) and with fingers it's the next string up (towards the face). With free stroke the finger doesn't rest on an adjacent string after plucking, but floats free until it's required to pick again. Rest stroke is often favoured for single note playing, while free stroke is for polyphonic playing (chords and arpeggios).

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TRACK RECORD For a beautiful CD with *Gymnopédie No.1* and other of Satie's solo piano works, try pianist Aldo Ciccolini's double-CD on EMI: *Satie: Oeuvres Pour Piano* (1992). Although most of Satie's works are for piano, he also wrote for orchestra, and Debussy orchestrated *Gymnopédies* beautifully. You can find all of these on the great value 1999 Naxos recording *Satie: Orchestral Works*.

PLAYING TIPS

CD TRACK 23

[Bars 1-10] Keep a nice even 3/4 (waltz time) at the start and aim to maintain the pulse without either rushing or dragging. Keeping the speed steady without rubato or overly 'expressive' phrasing is what helps to create a hypnotic effect in this piece. At bar 5 allow the tune to stand out a little from the accompaniment

and concentrate on giving sustain to the longer melody notes in bars 8 and 9. Where possible I am using a gentle downwards rest stroke with the thumb on the bass notes to give them warmth, depth and sustain through the bar (see box-out if you need a reminder on 'free' and 'rest' stroke usage)..

$\text{♩} = 80-84$ approx

1 p a m i

6

11

16

22

PLAYING TIPS

CD TRACK 23

[Bars 34-40] The fingering is fairly straightforward throughout this first section but becomes a little awkward at bar 34. The first finger of the fretting hand has to hop from the C# to the G# in the melody while the fourth finger remains on the bass note C#. On the 3rd beat (same bar) the first finger should extend to form a barre – this takes care of the C# melody note and prepares for the F# bass note which sustains all the way through bar 35. At 36 there is a stretch between the F#

and D# on the first beat – this time with the second finger on the F#. This finger must remain on the bass note F# for the whole bar and also for the whole of bar 37. At bar 40 the opening chords reoccur and the melody is repeated. This time I use artificial harmonics for a touch of guitaristic license. These are played by touching the string at the indicated AH fret with the first finger (plucking hand) while simultaneously plucking same string with your third finger.



The tablature is organized into five systems, each with a treble clef staff and a six-string guitar staff. Chord names are written above the treble staff, and fret numbers are written on the guitar staff lines. Artificial harmonic (AH) instructions are shown in diamonds on the guitar staff.

- System 1 (Bars 27-31):** Chords: Em7, A/E, Bsus4/E, E. Fingering: 7, 3, 5, 7, 3, 5, 7, 5, 6, 6, 5, 0, 4, 4, 4, 0, 0, 5, 4, 6.
- System 2 (Bars 32-36):** Chords: F#m, G#m, C#m, F#7sus4, Em/F#. Fingering: 5, 2, 2, 4, 4, 4, 2, 0, 2, 4, 4, 4, 4, 0, 2, 4, 0, 2, 4, 0, 1, 2.
- System 3 (Bars 37-41):** Chords: E/F#, Bm7, E, Amaj7, Emaj7. Fingering: 1, 2, 2, 3, 2, 4, 2, 0, 0, 1, 2, 2, 0, 4, 5, 6, 4, 4, 4, 0.
- System 4 (Bars 42-46):** Chords: Amaj7, Emaj7, Amaj7, Emaj7, Amaj7. Fingering: 4, 5, 6, 4, 4, 4, 0, 4, 6, 4, 4, 4, 0, 4, 4, 4, 0, 4, 4, 4, 0. AH instructions: AH 16, AH 18, AH 17, AH 16, AH 16, AH 18, AH 16, AH 17.
- System 5 (Bars 47-51):** Chords: Emaj7, Amaj7, Emaj7, Amaj7, Emaj7. Fingering: 4, 4, 4, 4, 4, 4, 0, 4, 5, 6, 4, 4, 4, 0, 4, 5, 6, 4, 4, 4, 0. AH instructions: AH 16, AH 18.

PLAYING TIPS

CD TRACK 23

[Bars 44-48] When playing a three-note chord with a top note harmonic, the strings are plucked with thumb (p, lowest note) 'm' and 'a' leaving the first finger free to touch the string over the relevant fret to create the artificial harmonic. When two notes are played together with a harmonic at the top, the strings should be plucked with thumb and third finger.

[Bar 62 to end] At bar 62 the second half of the melody reoccurs up an octave. At bar 66 there is a slightly awkward half-barre at the 15th fret and a high B natural harmonic in 67. At bars 74 and 75 a 'hinge barre' is needed: the first finger remains on the bass note F# while the barre manoeuvres on and off the string for the upper F# as required. The final chord uses natural harmonics at the 12th fret.

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System 1 (Bars 52-56): Chords: Amaj7, Emaj7, Amaj7, Emaj7, G#m. AH markings: AH16, AH18, AH17, AH16, AH16, AH18, AH16, AH17, AH16, AH16.

System 2 (Bars 57-61): Chords: C#m, F#m, Em, Bm, F#m/E. AH markings: AH16, AH16.

System 3 (Bars 62-66): Chords: Dmaj7/E, D6/E, E, Em7. NH marking: NH19.

System 4 (Bars 67-71): Chords: A/E, D6/E, E, F#m, Em/F#, G5/F#. NH marking: NH19.

System 5 (Bars 72-74): Chords: Bm/F#, Em7/F#, C#m7b5/F#, Bm7, Em. NH marking: NH12.