

# Jules Massenet

## Meditation



This month **Bridget Mermikides** has an exquisite piece for you to play, by a rare composer who was famous in his own lifetime but then later slipped into obscurity.

### ABILITY RATING

● ● ● ● ● Moderate/Advanced

INFO	WILL IMPROVE YOUR
<b>KEY:</b> D	✓ Melody, bass and chords
<b>TEMPO:</b> 53 bpm	✓ Melodic phrasing
<b>CD:</b> Tracks 29-30	✓ Romantic repertoire

DESPITE BEING AN extremely popular composer during the late 19th century, Jules Massenet (1842-1912) is not particularly well-known today, and for much of the 20th century his operas were rarely performed. However his work has recently received a strong revival of interest and critics have praised him as being one of the greatest melodic composers of all time.

Although he composed for a wide range of ensembles and performance contexts, Massenet was most famous for his operas and operettas, of which he wrote a staggering 32. He was also one of the rare composers who, rather than composing at the piano, wrote his works entirely in his musical mind, transcribing them directly to the score without needing to hear them played out loud first. This seemingly effortless, intuitive creativity is evident in his stunningly captivating Meditation from Act II of his 1894 opera, *Thaïs*.

Despite its popularity and fame as a piece in its own right, Meditation is actually a type

“Whereas a violin can focus on playing the melody as expressively as possible, we have the challenge of also providing chords and bass.”



19th century poster depicting a scene from Jules Massenet's legendary 1894 *Thaïs* opera


of operatic instrumental interlude occurring between scenes, known as an 'entr'acte'

However, it is most often performed as a stand-alone piece either with the original orchestration of a solo violin playing the melody with orchestral accompaniment, or in a variety of arrangements and instrumental combinations such as violin and piano, cello

and piano, or as I have provided here, as simple solo guitar.

I've kept the original key of D major but decided to adopt drop D tuning. Whereas the solo violin can focus on playing the beautiful melody as expressively as possible, this arrangement using just one guitar, has the added challenges of also providing a bassline and chordal accompaniment to that melody. So, as ever, slow and honest practice is needed in order to play the melody as sumptuously as possible while performing the lush harmonic accompaniment at an appropriate dynamic.

Massenet's melody is just exquisite and it's worth fully absorbing it by listening to my performance - or maybe check out Itzhak Perlman's astonishing violin rendition - so you come to this arrangement with a clear understanding of the composition.

I hope you enjoy learning this wonderful piece of music; do also check out some of the recorded versions performed on violin (Itzhak Perlman, Nigel Kennedy etc) and other instruments as detailed in Track Record. 

### TECHNIQUE FOCUS

#### USING FREE STROKE AND/OR REST STROKE

Practising free stroke and rest stroke as two separate techniques is essential for the good development of a classical guitarist. However, being able to combine these two strokes smoothly and seamlessly requires that the picking hand stays in much the same position for each and can therefore accommodate both. This is to provide us with the facility to play melodies and accompaniments simultaneously - as a rule using rest stroke for melodies and free stroke for the accompaniment.

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**TRACK RECORD** The Best Of Joshua Bell boasts a great violin performance with Massenet's original orchestration. The Essential James Galway, proves that a great melody works on any instrument, as demonstrated here by the Irish flute virtuoso. Yo-Yo Ma and Kathryn Stott's expressive cello/piano performance in Yo-Yo Ma, *Classics For A New Century* is also worth a listen.

## PLAYING TIPS

## CD TRACK 30

[Bars 1-3] This piece uses drop D tuning so tune your sixth string down a tone to start with. The opening arpeggios set the tempo and should be played clearly and evenly – there's picking hand indication under the tab. The final note (A) of bars 1 and 2 is an artificial harmonic played by fretting the A note on the third string, 2nd fret, lightly touching the string directly over the 14th fret with the first finger of the picking hand and simultaneously plucking it with the

third finger of the picking hand. The melody starts in bar 3 where picking hand fingering is indicated for a couple of bars. Play the melody notes rest stroke where possible and add expressive vibrato when you can. Classical guitar notation is polyphonic – more than one voice is notated on the same staff.

[Bar 4] On beats 3 and 4 a four-string barre should be used as well as following the fretting hand fingering. The same goes for bar 5.

**D**  
♩ = 53 *Andante*

1  
Sixth string tuned to D

2  
AH 14

3  
AH 14

4  
D6 Dmaj7 D

5  
Emadd9 Em/B Em9

9  
A7 G/B A7/C# Bbm/Db D D6 Dmaj7 D

13  
C/E B Emsus4 Em Emadd9/G

17  
D/A G/B Em/A Em/B Em G/A A7/C#

*rall*

*a tempo*

*rall*

Tablature notation for guitar, showing fret numbers and picking hand indications (p, m, i, a).



## PLAYING TIPS

## CD TRACK 30

[Bars 15-35] For much of the piece the melody is accompanied by ascending arpeggios. These are often simply broken chords and can be allowed to ring through the bar. At bar 15 for example a barre is placed across the 9th fret and

can be held in place for the whole bar. Half-way through bar 17 the melody switches to the bass notes right up until bar 21. Aim to bring out these notes as warmly as possible using the thumb.



21

25

29

33

37

*piu mosso - agitato*

*rall*

*a tempo*

*dolce*

## PLAYING TIPS

## CD TRACK 30

[Bar 40] The rall - rallentando or 'slow down' into 41 marks the start of a new section. All the aforementioned rules of bringing out the melody apply here. Some careful practice may be required from bars 32-35 and 51-52 - do follow

the indicated fingering for the best result and practise this - and any other sections that prove tricky - in isolation before continuing the piece. Learning tricky sections in isolation like this and slotting them back in can reap great rewards.

The sheet music is organized into five systems, each corresponding to a specific bar range in the piece. Each system consists of a treble clef staff with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#) and a four-string guitar staff with notes E, B, G, and D. Chord symbols are placed above the treble staff, and fret numbers and fingerings are indicated on the guitar staff. The systems are labeled with bar numbers 41, 45, 49, 53, and 56. The first system (bars 41-44) includes chords D6, Dmaj7, D, G, and Emadd9 Em/B. The second system (bars 45-48) includes Em9, A7, G/B, A7/C#, Bbm/D, and D/C. The third system (bars 49-52) includes G/B, D/A, C/G, and B. The fourth system (bars 53-56) includes Emsus4, Em, Emadd9/G, D/A, G/B, and Em/A. The fifth system (bars 56-59) includes Em/B, Em, G/A, A7/C#, D, and C#7. The music features various techniques such as triplets, slurs, and dynamic markings like 'rall' and 'a tempo'.

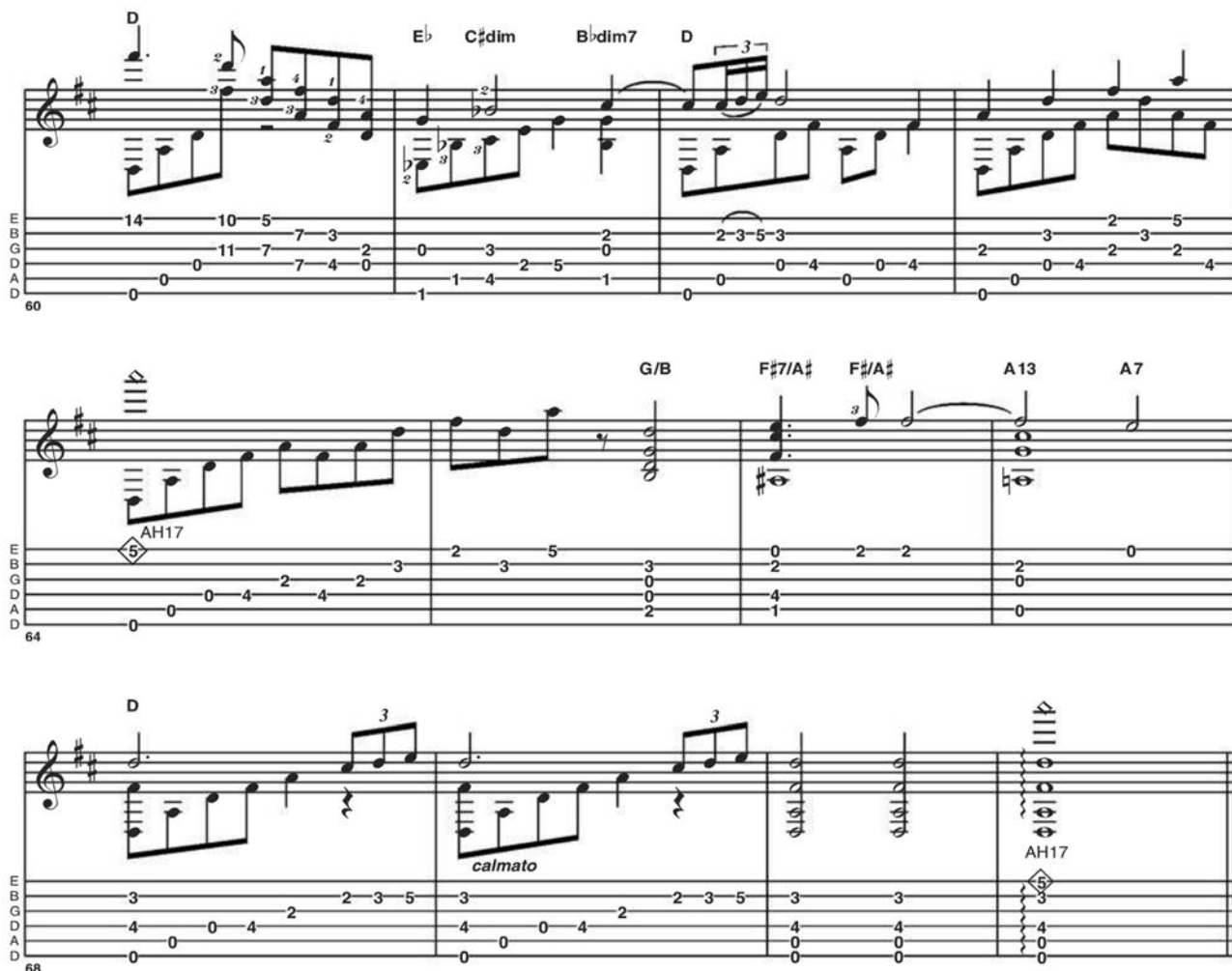


## PLAYING TIPS

## CD TRACK 30

[Bars 40 to end] Bar 40 brings us back to the main melody; however at bar 48 the harmony has changed to inverted chords, thus creating a descending bassline bar by bar. This gives a poignant vibe to the final rendition of the tune and this can be felt all the more when listening the to the orchestral version.

It does make it slightly more tricky to play on the guitar unfortunately, but is true to the original harmony so I hope you agree it's well worth any potential struggle. This leads us to the final few tranquil bars where an artificial harmonic is used for the top note of the final chord.



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