

Erik Satie

Gymnopédie No.3



Due to popular requests for some simpler pieces to play **Bridget Mermikides** returns with another work by that French genius of sparsity, the one and only Erik Satie.

ABILITY RATING

● ● ● ● ● Easy/Moderate

INFO	WILL IMPROVE YOUR
KEY: B minor	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Chordal playing
TEMPO: 70 bpm	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Melody/chord separation
CD: TRACKS 41-42	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Impressionistic repertoire

THIS MONTH WE are making a return to the work of the French pianist and composer Erik Satie (1866-1925). Largely dismissed in his time as eccentric - or even incompetent - Satie's sparse and seductive works have since been a great inspiration and influence in the diverse genres of impressionism, Western art music, minimalism, process music, ambient music and even electronica.

Here we look at an arrangement of Gymnopédie No.3, the last of his popular set of short piano works published in 1888 and known collectively as the Gymnopédies.

TECHNIQUE FOCUS

Rest stroke and free stroke

When playing rest stroke the finger 'pushes' down on the string and as the string is released it follows through and lands on the adjacent string. This is the stroke we use to play a melody because it has a fuller and stronger tone than free stroke. Free stroke however (when the finger plucks free of the next string) must also begin with a 'push' of the string and never a pull or outwards twang as this will result in a thin tone that does not resonate with quality. As the finger releases from the push, the trajectory of the finger follows through under the hand and then 'springs' back to its starting point.

These were truly revolutionary works, extraordinarily effective with their stunning melodic simplicity, sparse and lush chords, stillness and universal accessibility. They also have a quintessential 'Frenchness' that is



enormously appealing, and have been recorded, orchestrated (firstly by the great composer Debussy), arranged for various instrumentation and used in TV and films - in everything from *Chocolat*, *What Lies Beneath*, and even *Terminator* and *Star Trek: The Next*

Generation. You can also hear Satie's work used to great effect in the 2008 Oscar winning documentary film *Man On Wire*.

Gymnopédie No.3 is in 3/4 with the characteristic Gymnopédie repeating rhythm of bass on beat 1, block chord on beat 2 - here played 'slowly and solemnly'. I've transposed the original key up from A minor to B minor, which may at first seem less guitaristic, but I find it works best for the important alternating bass line (now B down to a low E, as in bars 1-4, bars 27-31 and 55-end); as well as using the natural resonance of the guitar, pedal tones and open strings. See for example the lush A9 chord in bar 13, which uses open strings to capture the sublime essence of the original voicing.

Although not the most technically challenging or fast arrangement in the series, this piece needs to be played really cleanly and evenly to evoke the necessary calmness. As always, refer to the tab captions to help with some of the trickier sections.

This is a really beautiful piece for you to add to your repertoire, and one that - if played with the right touch, timing and authority - will impress listeners as much as any technical workout. So Allons-y! (Let's go!) 

“I've transposed the piece up from Am to Bm, which may seem less guitaristic but it works better for the bass line (now B to low E) pedal tones and open strings.”



TRACK RECORD For a beautiful Gymnopédie No.3 and other Satie piano works, try pianist Aldo Ciccolini's Double-CD, *Satie: Oeuvres Pour Piano* (1992). Satie did also write for orchestra; Debussy orchestrated his Gymnopédies beautifully. You can find these on the 1999 Naxos recording *Satie: Orchestral Works*, by the Orchestre Symphonique et Lyrique de Nancy conducted by Jerome Kaltenbach.

PLAYING TIPS

CD TRACK 42

[Bars 1-6] This is a short piece containing a simple melody with chordal accompaniment. To make it sound musical and effective a good steady pulse should be established at the start and maintained throughout. The melody, which begins at bar 5 can be made to stand out from the accompaniment with the use of rest stroke where possible (see Technique Focus). Aim to give bass notes and harmony notes their full value - for example in bar 6 the bass note D needs to be held for the whole bar and

the F# note on beat 2 should be held for two beats (the open B sustains naturally) underneath the melody. Following the fretting hand fingering indicated in the tab will make this possible. Similarly in bar 7 the Am6 chord on beat 2 needs to be held under the melody note G on beat 3. The melody needs to be 'legato' (smooth) throughout and these principles should be applied to the whole piece in order to create the appropriate magical vibe. You'll soon hear when it sounds right and when it doesn't.

♩ = 84 approx **Bm**
Lent et grave

F#m/E **Bm** **F#m/E** **Bm** **Bm/D**

E B G D A E

1 7 0 7 0 7 5 3 2

Am6 **Em** **Bm** **F#m** **Em/A** **Em7**

E B G D A E

7 0 2 3 2 0 3 2 3 5 2 5 0 0 3 3 4 0 2 0

A9 **Em7** **F#m/A** **Asus9** **A** **A13** **Em7**

E B G D A E

13 0 0 3 5 7 7 0 2 3 2 0 2 4 3 0 5 4 0 0 4 2 0 3 3 4 0

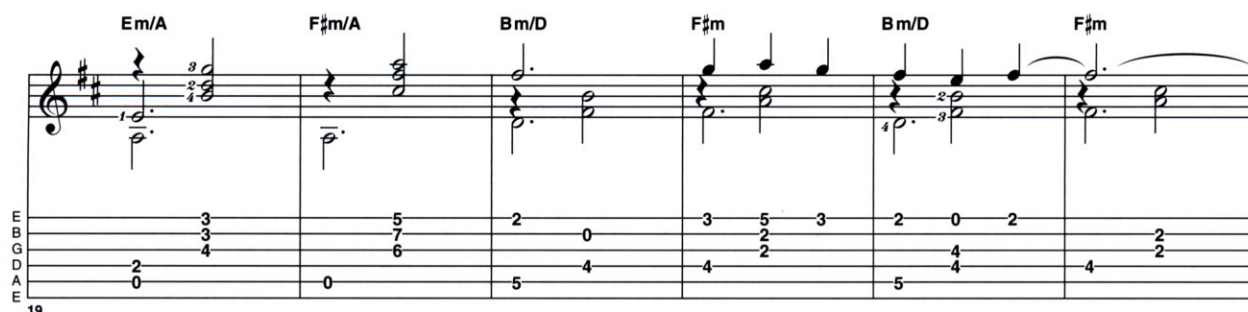
PLAYING TIPS

CD TRACK 42

[Bars 22-37] From bar 22 to 26 it is useful to keep the third finger of the fretting hand on the F# and use the third finger on the B note in bars 23 and 25. On the last beat of bar 23 add a half barre to prepare for bar 24. In bar 37 a full barre is needed for beats 1 and 2 and should be released on beat 3 but as a 'hinge' so that the tip of the finger remains on the string and

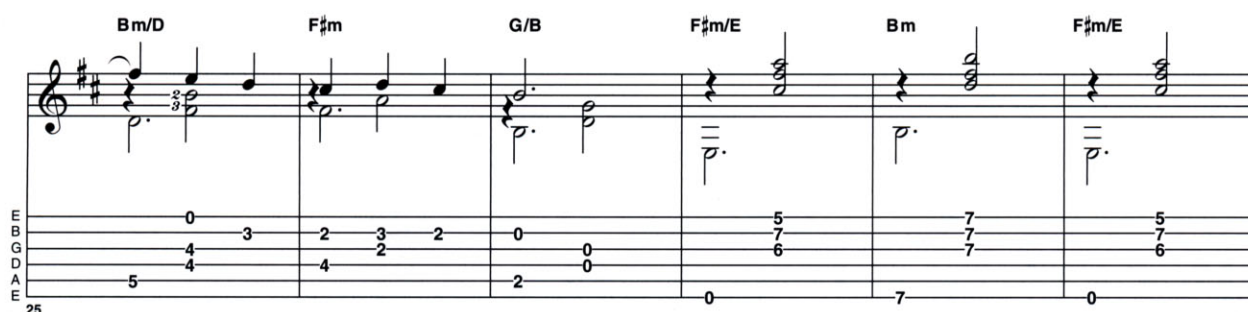
sustains the bass note F#. The full barre is then placed back down at the start of the following bar. Take your time with this piece. You should appreciate that a composition like this is as much about the space around the notes, as it is about the notes themselves. So work for absolute precision, think about that all-important space and your audience will be charmed to bits!

Em/A F#m/A Bm/D F#m Bm/D F#m



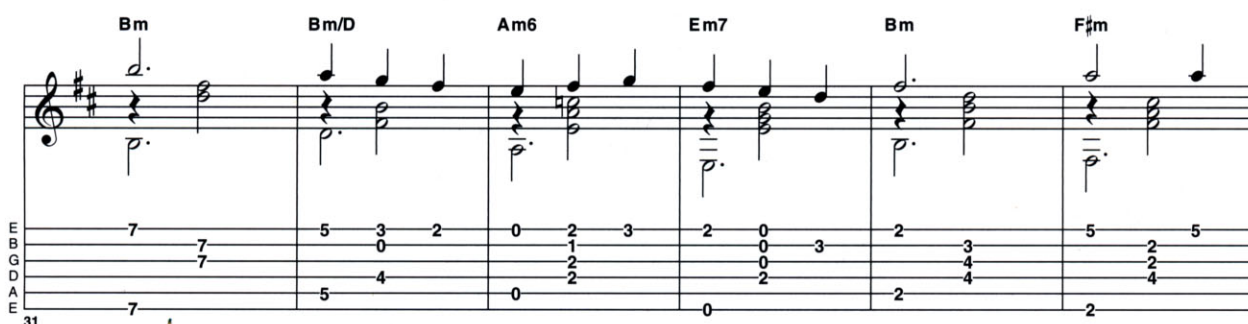
19

Bm/D F#m G/B F#m/E Bm F#m/E



25

Bm Bm/D Am6 Em7 Bm F#m



31

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Em7/F# F#m Em7 Bm/E Em7

37

A6 Em/A A13 Em7 Em7/A A6

43

Bm/D F#m Bm/D F#m Bm/D F#m

49

G/B A6 Bm F#m/E Bm

55