

Frédéric Chopin

Prelude in C minor



Welcome Take That, Donna Summer and Barry Manilow fans! This month GT's classical diva **Bridget Mermikides** arranges and transcribes a beautiful piece you may well recognise.

ABILITY RATING



Moderate

INFO	WILL IMPROVE YOUR
KEY: C# minor	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Fretting hand stamina
TEMPO: 35 bpm	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Dynamics and tempo
CD: TRACKS 39-40	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Overall expression

IN OUR ONGOING look at classical works that can be arranged as solo pieces for the guitar, we return to the catalogue of one of the greatest piano composers of all time, Frédéric Chopin (1810-1849).

Although Chopin had a short life and was often troubled by physical and psychological challenges, he achieved a phenomenal virtuosity and composed over 200 extraordinarily beautiful piano works that express the whole range of human emotion.

Chopin's 24 Preludes (catalogued as Opus 28 and


composed in his 20s) is a set of short solo piano works in every major and minor key, and have since come to be nicknamed by an



emotion, a moment in time, or an activity or object. No.20 of the set - often referred to as Funeral March or the Chord Prelude - is a short but powerful work in C minor (which I've arranged here in C# to make it fit better on the guitar). Despite its brevity and being largely composed with crotchet

block chords, it has an expressive depth due to its stunning and instantly recognisable harmonic progression, dynamic shape and tempo curves.

In fact the chord progression is so powerful that it is heard in film, TV and even video game soundtracks; other composers have also used it as the basis to form new works, such as Busoni's Variation and Fugue in Free Form on Chopin's C Minor Prelude and Rachmaninoff's Variations on a Theme of Chopin. This particular sequence of chords has even found its way to stylistically disparate genres: you may have heard it used by metal bands Angra and Pantheist, and perhaps most famously in the introduction of Barry Manilow's 1975 hit single, Could It Be Magic, which was later covered by both Donna Summer and Take That.

Sustaining these chords and switching seamlessly between them takes considerable fretting hand stamina and control, so it will require some work to get them feeling natural. However, once the technique is under your fingers, you can experiment with adding the expressive elements of dynamics and subtle tempo changes to bring sensitive phrasing to the piece. 

TECHNIQUE FOCUS

Plucking strings

There are two basic ways to pluck the string in classical guitar: rest stroke, where the finger or thumb rests on the adjacent string after plucking; and free stroke, where the finger or thumb plucks free of the adjacent string. This month's Chopin piece consists of chords throughout and is therefore played free stroke. When using this stroke it is important to master a good technique so be aware that in order to create a strong, warm tone the string should be 'pushed' by the fingertip and never pulled (or twanged!) outwards.

“You may have heard this Prelude used by metal bands Angra and Pantheist, and perhaps most famously in Barry Manilow's 1975 hit single, Could It Be Magic.”



TRACK RECORD Maurizio Pollini's CD Chopin: 24 Préludes; Nocturnes; Mazurkas; Scherzo (2002 Deutsche Grammophon) boasts an unpretentious performance of this month's piece, plus the whole set of 24 Preludes along with other Chopin works, making it a great addition to any CD collection. Also try Rachmaninoff: Variations on a Theme of Chopin (1999 Naxos) by the Turkish virtuoso İdel Biret.

PLAYING TIPS

CD TRACK 40

This piece consists of a dramatically expressive chord progression. The main technical focus is to make the chords sound balanced. Pluck the strings evenly within each chord to allow the harmony to be clearly projected. The thumb should be tackling the bass notes while the fingers of the picking hand take care of the upper notes. A fair level of fretting hand strength is required in order to hold down the barre chords and in bar 6 there are a couple of tricky stretches: relax the hand and straighten the fingers to reach these. Aim to give the notes their correct value and avoid harmonically

incorrect over-ringing bass notes by muting them with the thumb. To illustrate how this is done, let's look at the change from A to D in bar 2; when the chords are played one after the other it is normal for the open A bass note to continue ringing underneath the D chord. However, here this open A should be muted with the flesh of the picking hand thumb immediately after playing the D chord. This gives the bass note its correct value and gives the D chord its appropriate root note. Pay attention to other places where the bass note might over-ring and use the same technique.

Largo
♩ = 35 approx

Measures 1-11 of the score, showing chords and fingerings. The score is written for guitar, showing a treble and bass staff with chords and fingerings. Chords include C#m, F#m, G#7b13, A, D, E6, E7, G#7, C#7, F#madd9, D#7, G#, D#13, D#7, G#, C#m, A/C#, B#m6, G#m/B, A#m7, D#7/A, G# G#add9 G#/F#, C#m/E, F#m, G#B#, C#m, A, D, G#7b13, C#m, A/C#, B#m6, G#m/B, A#m7, D#7/A, G# G#add9 G#/F#, C#m/E, F#m, G#B#, C#m, A, D, G#7b13, C#m. Dynamics include *ff*, *p*, *rit*, and *pp*. A crescendo is marked in measure 11.