

Franz Schubert

Ave Maria



Bridget Mermikides transcribes Franz Schubert's haunting musical arrangement of a legendary Walter Scott poem, for solo classical guitar...

ABILITY RATING



Moderate

INFO	WILL IMPROVE YOUR
KEY: G	✓ Free stroke and rest stroke
TEMPO: 56bpm	✓ Two against three rhythm
CD: TRACKS 8-9	✓ Tonal consistency

THIS MONTH WE ARE LOOKING at an arrangement of Franz Schubert's *Ellens Dritter Gesang* (Ellen's Third Song). This is taken from his 1832 seven-song setting of Walter Scott's poem *The Lady Of The Lake* and is now simply known as *Ave Maria*.

Franz Schubert (1797-1828) is one of the greatest and most frequently performed composers of the Romantic era and - despite his tragically short life - left behind a huge repertoire of compositions including nine symphonies and over 600 songs.

Around this time, guitar arrangements of vocal accompaniments were often published and much in demand - parlour guitars were the order of the day, often played by 'ladies' - and there is good evidence that Schubert would have heard guitar arrangements of his own works, as well as composed pieces specifically for the instrument. So, although *Ave Maria* is not written for guitar, we know that the guitar is a stylistically appropriate accompaniment instrument for Schubert's songs.

Ave Maria falls into the category of *lieder* - a popular song form of the romantic era, often using literary texts and arranged for a singer and pianist. Although the lyrics and context of *Ave Maria* have changed from the original composition, the music remains the same and has been widely performed to this day in


concerts, ceremonies, film soundtracks and recordings by a diverse range of artists including classical tenors such as Luciano Pavarotti, Andrea Bocelli and Plácido Domingo; tango player and composer Astor Piazzolla, rock and soul keyboardists Rick Wakeman and Stevie Wonder; guitar virtuoso Chet Atkins; as well as vocal divas like Shirley Bassey, Celine Dion and even Beyoncé.

The usual challenges of creating a playable arrangement for solo classical guitar are found here: a full piano part and a vocal melody have to be combined into a single arrangement that captures the essence - ie both parts - of the composition. To help achieve this I decided to transpose the song from the written key of Bb

“Schubert left behind a huge repertoire with nine symphonies and over 600 songs!”

down a minor 3rd to G, while keeping the vocal melody as close to the original as possible; and re-voicing the harmony where necessary so it works well on the guitar.

This is a wistful and lyrical piece, originally written as a prayer to St Mary, so should be performed as smoothly as possible to emulate the serene vocal melody. With that in mind practise each bar so that it feels comfortable and controlled, using the performance notes above the music for advice.

As I always like to say, take your time with this and learn to enjoy the process of practising, in order to fully reap the rewards of performing this beautiful piece. 

Schubert:
one of the all-
time greats



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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).

TRACK RECORD There are countless recordings of *Ave Maria* out there, by a host of different classical guitarists. Some are done with the main melody played tremolo style and others non-tremolo. British born Canadian guitarist Liona Boyd does it on her Christmas Album and a quick trawl on Amazon will reveal many other versions, including an excellent recording by Dominic Miller on his album *Shapes*.

PLAYING TIPS

CD TRACK 9

[Bars 1-6] Use the second finger for the G bass note and keep it held down for the first five bars. Use p i m a m i free stroke in the plucking hand for the arpeggio pattern. There is a bit of a stretch in bar 4 where the first finger reaches back for the F note and from bar 6 the G bass note is played by the first finger.

[Bars 9-10] To help the melody stand out use rest stroke in combination with free stroke accompaniment. Plucking hand tab directions show how the thumb

can be repeated in this kind of counterpoint: use rest stroke on the 'a' finger notes. In bar 10 there is a 'two against three' rhythm separating the melody and accompaniment. This occurs several times throughout the piece.

[Bars 14-16] On the last E note of bar 14 use the third finger on the fifth string, 7th fret and simultaneously prepare the first finger for a half barre on bar 15. Take your time with the slightly awkward jump back to open position at bar 16.

♩. = 56 approx

G

1 p i m a m i etc

G7

C/G **Cdim/G** **G**

5

Em6 **G/D** **D7**

9 a p p i m i p p p i m i a p a i m i m i p p i m p a i

Em **Am/C** **D7**

13 a p p i m i p a p i a m a i a m

G **B7/D#** **Em**

17

PLAYING TIPS

CD TRACK 9

[Bars 17-24] From bars 17 to 22 the fingering should lie nicely under the fretting hand. Keep using rest stroke on the melody notes where possible and at bar 23 use a barre at the 5th fret until half way through bar 24.

[Bars 26-29] In bar 26 use the fretting hand's fourth finger on the melody notes

B and A and keep them fretted for sustain. A fully barred 2nd fret is needed at bar 27. Bar 28 has a couple of leaps up the fret board and jumps back down to a second position barre chord on bar 29. These leaps should not hinder the flow of the music; the main objective will be to keep the melody sounding smooth.

F#7sus4 **F#7** **D#dim7**

21

Em **Em6** **D/F#** **E/B** **E7/B**

25

D/A **A7** **D**

29

D7 **D7/F#** **G/D**

33

D7 **Em**

37

PLAYING TIPS

CD TRACK 9

[Bar 32 to end] The last D note of bar 32 is the up-beat of the melody so it should stand out from the accompaniment. The next few bars are fairly straightforward. Barre chords are needed in bars 41, 42, 46 and 47. The remaining bars are the

same as the beginning and there is an optional repeat, depending on how long you want the piece to last! This is a lovely piece to play once mastered, so I do hope you take the time to get it sounding as good as possible.

41

D B Am

45

Am/C C#dim D D7

49

G Em6 G/D D7

53

G G7

57

C/G Cdim/G G