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Piano Exam Pieces

ABRSM Grade 1

Selected from the
2015 & 2016 syllabus



Malaysia/Singapore
Edition

GRADE 1

TNG1/1

Students will usually have been learning for up to 18 months by the time Grade 1 is on the horizon. They may have taken the Prep Test during this time, in which case they will probably feel quite confident when facing their first graded exam. A wide choice of pieces should help to keep motivation high, so why not have some alternatives prepared, then choose the best three as the exam approaches? You can find the making criteria for all grades in the 2015 & 2016 ABRSM Piano syllabus and on our website.

A:1 Clementi *Arietta*

The title *Arietta*, meaning 'little Song', gives the clue to the character of this charming piece, with its clear phrase shape and singable melody. The notes should present few problems since there are no awkward changes of hand-position. The main challenge is to create a gentle mood with well-shaped cantabile lines accompanied by a less prominent left hand.

The main consideration in tempo choice is that the music should flow easily in crotchet beats. A constant pulse should be maintained when the quavers switch hands at bar 8, and the tendency to hurry at the final *forte* must be avoided. Phrases are usually four bars in length and a slight breath at the end of each one will help to punctuate the piece.

The characteristic 'sighing' appoggiatura, first heard in bar 2, becomes a feature throughout the piece. A little stress on the first note, followed by a gently released second note, will produce the desired graceful effect. Clear rests, released exactly on the second crotchet, will let air into the texture at bars 8–10. The rise in pitch in these bars seems to suggest a crescendo, to be reversed as the hairpins that follow effect a diminuendo for the return to *piano*. The two left-hand Bs add colour to the otherwise purely diatonic C major and the *forte* at bar 17 provides a welcome surprise for the ending.

A:2 Haydn *Minuet in G*

The majestic, stately mood of this dance seems to evoke perfectly the atmosphere of an eighteenth-century candlelit ballroom. Imagine a scene of sumptuously dressed people enjoying the elegant movements of a minuet to music provided by a resident orchestra.

The tempo should have an unhurried feel, with a mixture of strong and weaker beats giving definition to the dance steps. Phrasing is largely left to individual choice: either detaching all crotchets or incorporating some slurs, while sustaining the remaining notes, are both stylish options. Left-hand leaps may need individual practice, especially where the fifth finger needs to move up an octave without hesitation at the double bar, and in the right hand a few slight finger twists might trip up a less secure candidate.

A strong, confident tone, with secure fingerwork, immediately establishes the character. Tapering of the quavers in bar 3 will prepare the way for a sufficiently gentle *piano*; this in turn allows an exciting yet carefully graded and rhythmically poised crescendo as the music approaches the midway cadence in D major.

The second half follows a similar musical pattern. You may prefer to drop below *mezzo-forte* in order to provide greater scope for the crescendo. A well-paced ritardando through the final quaver group and a full-length final note will ensure that an elegant composure remains to the end of the performance.

A:3 Trad. English, arr. Davies *The Lincolnshire Poacher*

The inclusion of well-crafted arrangements is by now a familiar feature of the piano syllabus. The rollicking tune, together with the tempo changes and quirky harmonic touches, gives this lively piece an instant appeal.

Establishing the optimum tempo is often a challenge for inexperienced players, especially when exam nerves tend to get in the way. The natural stress and lift of the two-in-a-bar pulse can be felt by singing the melody, with or without the words. The slurs from the weak to strong parts of the beat form a major musical feature throughout the piece; special practice, perhaps using a scale or five-finger pattern, will help to define the separation of each two-note figure. The left-hand role is mainly to accompany, playing either smooth legato lines or more detached chords. Careful listening will ensure that all chord-notes sound evenly, especially the fifth finger, and confident co-ordination is needed for the independent phrasing in bars 3–4.

The dynamic contrasts can be enhanced if the *mezzo-forte* phrases drop further in volume. The crescendo and ritardando in bars 11–12 that lead to the pause on the augmented chord and the tempo changes in the final four bars help add touches of humour to a performance; this is particularly effective when followed by a light ending, played as quickly as is safe to do so.

B:1 Gurlitt *Das Schaukelpferd (The Rocking Horse)*

Horses, real or pretend, have inspired a diverse range of children's piano pieces from Schytte to Schumann, and the latter's 'Ritter vom Steckenpferd' from *Kinderszenen* is particularly worth comparing. Gurlitt combines elements of Schumann's wild abandon with a 'hunting horn' motif in the opening figures, making no secret of where we imagine we are. Conveying the horse's rocking is important to communicating the energy and excitement of the ride. The one-in-a-bar feel suggests a fast tempo; a firm emphasis at the start of bar 1 and a lighter emphasis at the start of bar 2 will give the impression of the leap forwards followed by the more relaxed backwards swing. The staccato anacrusis avoids the initial impetus becoming too forceful.

Dynamically the opening eight bars are all one phrase; a slight crescendo to bar 5 works well before dying away a little. This will help highlight the *forte* in the next phrase – a sudden dramatic and galloping A minor scale. These bars need a firm tone and rhythmic emphasis, which will add excitement; the tied E must be full-length – an abrupt lull in the rocking before the fading echo in the *poco rit.*

The opening returns, but this time there might be a sudden *piano* in bar 18 followed by a crescendo to the final dotted crotchet, as our imaginary horse prepares to leap the largest fence of all before heading off across the fields.

B:2 Knut Nystedt *Løvet faller (Falling Leaves)*

This piece may not only reflect falling leaves but also express a tinge of sadness that the dark, cold Norwegian winter is around the corner.

The suggested tempo conveys the gentle rocking drop of the leaves as they fall and is on the cusp of one in a bar. Feeling this across two bars (as if in 6/4 time) will give a lovely lightness and delicate end to the opening phrases. The excellent left-hand fingering will avoid any hesitation.

From bar 5 a longer four-bar phrase implies a breath of wind, but a slight flutter of the leaf is all that is needed as the phrase swells with the gentlest of crescendos. A lift after the first crotchet in bar 7 will provide the light touch required for the repeated notes.

Bars 9 to 12 move optimistically to the relative major, like sunshine warming up the red and golden leaves. The *mf* should not be too robust, needing simply a little more projection of the melodic line, with greater weight behind the right-hand fingers to carry the tune. Achieving the right balance between hands is crucial even in early grades and makes a huge, musical difference to the interpretation.

The smallest of ritardandos in bar 14 will give the leaf a soft landing, and a tiny breath before the delicate final chords will provide a moment of repose as the leaf settles on to the ground.

B:3 Trad. Catalan, arr. Marshall *El cant dels ocells (The Song of the Birds)*

For the imaginative pianist this piece is a gift; the song, bird-call and sound-world are evocative and entrancing. The title reveals everything about the colours and tempo, and detailed expressive markings guide the performer.

The musical challenges of the opening lie in creating a controlled and singing legato line, the sounds overlapped with enough weight to produce a vocal tone but with a gentle, expressive crescendo. The tone needs to be sustained through bar 2 and relaxed in the second part of the phrase without angularity or interruption from the left-hand accompaniment.

The *rit.* in bar 6 is best achieved by thinking in quavers, maintaining the slowing pulse through the minim and pause bar while relishing the atmosphere produced by the pedal. Putting the pedal down early would catch notes from the first half of the bar, so this should be avoided; the sounds finally lift for the breath (comma in bar 7) before the song resumes. Subtle control of the sound is required in bar 9 where the left-hand C could become intrusive, and bar 13 needs a sense of the melody going to the left hand's A.

The held left-hand 3rds and the pedalled effect across the right-hand motifs in the final bars are gorgeous. Lifting the pedal after the following 3rd sounds will avoid too abrupt an end to the beautiful bird-call; this will help the right-hand crotchet extend a little across the bar-line.

C:1 Stephen Clarke *The Giant's Coming*

Children always enjoy a scary story (as indeed do grown-ups!), so this will be a popular choice for players of all ages.

Distant rumblings herald the approach of the giant, and at first the accents should not be too loud but instead fit within the *pianissimo* level. If all the dynamics and accents are scrupulously observed your student will create an exciting scene.

For the right hand in bars 3–6 some players might prefer to place finger 2 on the A⁴ of the triplets. This will then allow the thumb to make the A⁵ accents and avoid a finger change in bar 6. Stronger fingering may also result from placing the thumb on the first quaver in bars 8 and 10.

The inclusion of the 5/4 bars gives a jolt to the rhythm, especially the second one (bar 6), which must be counted carefully. For the notes just before the pause it might be helpful to think of a whispered warning 'Look out!'. The excitement builds with the change to triple time and gradual crescendo, until the giant arrives in bars 12–14. The sudden *pianissimo* (bar 14) and the whole-bar pause that follows must not be overlooked. Everyone has run away, and the giant is left alone wondering, rather sadly, why nobody wanted to play with him.

C:2 Stephen Duro *Calypso Joe*

The West Indian calypso, with its syncopated rhythms and jaunty style, has a universal appeal. It conjures up pictures of white sands, hot sun and the wonderfully clear waters of the Caribbean.

The two main stresses of each bar lie on the first beat and the second half of the second beat. However, these should not be laboured – just felt as an easy but unequal swaying movement. The slur from quaver to crotchet (bar 2 and similar) should be treated like any other slur, with a down-up movement of the hand. This will make the crotchet quieter, and allow a tiny break in the sound before the hand drops into the following tied quaver.

Finger-changing on the first three notes is well worth practising, and should be matched with fingers 2-1-2 in bar 3. The left-hand part is very straightforward, lying comfortably under the five fingers (F–C) until a shift of hand-position in bar 14 for the last phrase.

Unless more dynamic variety is added, there will be very little contrast, especially when played without repeats. It should begin *forte* but at bar 5 it could change to *mezzo-forte*. Starting the second half *forte*, your student could make a stepwise decrescendo through the sequences to reach *mezzo-piano* at bar 13. Then a strong crescendo to *forte* for the last two bars will provide an exhilarating ending.

C:3 Eben *Na krmítku (Bird at the Feeding Box)*

Anyone who has a bird-table in their garden or who has watched birds feeding in the park will enjoy this delightfully descriptive piece. Teachers will also be pleased with the simple consistency of the fingering.

A light hand (wrist) staccato using a minimum of movement will imitate the quick, almost nervous effect of the pecking beaks. A little practice on a flat surface will create a crisp tapping sound that can then be transferred to the keyboard. The left hand provides a quiet, smooth background and should be played as legato as possible; all the fingering is provided to achieve this result.

One could imagine some jostling for position and ruffling of feathers from bar 6 when the music makes a crescendo and the left hand, with its squawking augmented 4ths, becomes more active. Care will be needed here to keep the hands co-ordinated while managing the different articulations. The dominant bird wins and resumes its pecking unchallenged (bar 10) until there is a querulous remark from the other contender in the penultimate bar. Without hurrying in the last two bars, your student should glide gently into the last chord, keeping the right hand very legato.

The suggested metronome mark does not pose any great demands, and the spacing-out of the ending rounds off the piece with no need of a *rallentando*.

Piano Exam Pieces

ABRSM Grade 1

Selected from the 2015 & 2016 syllabus

Name

Date of exam



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Editor for ABRSM: Richard Jones

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A:1

Arietta

Lesson Five from Op. 42

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Muzio Clementi
(1752–1832)

Allegretto [$\text{♩} = c.100$]

The musical score for 'Arietta' is presented in four systems, each with a treble and bass staff. The first system (measures 1-5) begins with a piano (p) dynamic. The second system (measures 6-10) features hairpins. The third system (measures 11-15) includes a piano (p) dynamic and a flat (b) in the bass staff. The fourth system (measures 16-20) includes a forte (f) dynamic. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-4. Slurs and hairpins are used throughout to indicate phrasing and dynamics.

Muzio Clementi, an English composer of Italian birth, settled in London in 1774 and established a successful career as a pianist and teacher. His most important compositions are his keyboard works, which include about 70 solo sonatas as well as sonatinas and variations. During a continental tour as a solo pianist in the early 1780s, he stayed in Vienna for six months, taking part in a famous piano contest with Mozart. Afterwards, Mozart commented on his 'remarkable technique at the keyboard'. In 1798 Clementi established a firm in London that not only published music but also manufactured pianos.

Clementi wrote two influential educational works, the *Introduction to the Art of Playing on the Piano Forte* (London, 1801) and *Gradus ad Parnassum* (London, 1817–26). This Arietta is taken from a revised edition of the *Introduction*, published in 1826. The first phrase (bb. 1–4), from which the rest of the piece is derived, is not unlike a folksong in character. All slurs and dynamics are Clementi's own, except the hairpins in bb. 14–16, which are editorial suggestions only.

Source: *Eleventh Edition, with Great Improvements, of Clementi's Introduction to the Art of Playing on the Piano Forte, Op. 42* (London: Clementi & Co., 1826)

Minuet in G

A:2

No. 2 from 12 Minuets, Hob. IX:3

Joseph Haydn
(1732–1809)

[♩ = c.120]

1. 5. 2. 3. 4. 1. *f* *p*

2. 3. 1. 4. 2.

5. 1. 4. *cresc.* *f*

5. 1. 3. 2. 1. *f* *mf*

13. 1. 4. 3. 4. 1. 2. *f*

1. 2. 3. 1. 2.

The great Austrian composer Joseph Haydn is noted for the inexhaustible variety of his treatment of the minuet, an elegant dance in moderate triple time, very popular throughout the 18th century. Haydn not only included minuets in his symphonies, but he also wrote over 100 separate orchestral minuets. Many of these, including the 12 Minuets of around 1763–7, from which this piece is selected, were later arranged by him for keyboard. Only the slur in b. 7 is original; all the others are editorial suggestions only, as are all the dynamics.

Source: autograph MS, Budapest, National Széchényi Museum (Esterházy-Archiv)

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A:3

The Lincolnshire Poacher

Arranged by Hywel Davies

Trad. English

Boldly ♩ = c.104

rit. **a tempo**

suddenly slower ♩ = c.69 **suddenly faster** ♩ = c.126

This piece is a modern piano arrangement of a traditional English song expressing a poacher's delight in his illicit activity. The song was first published in the late 18th century, and the first verse and refrain read:

When I was bound apprentice, in famous Lincolnshire,
Full well I served my master for more than seven year,
Till I took up to poaching, as you shall quickly hear;
Oh! 'tis my delight on a shining night in the season of the year.

Note that the first two left-hand notes are part of the melody, as shown by the dotted lines in bb. 2 and 14. This arrangement builds up to a pause chord at the start of the refrain (b. 12). Slowing down at b. 17 might suggest the poacher being more stealthy as the gamekeeper approaches, and then managing to escape after the pause in b. 18.

Das Schaukelpferd

B:1

from *Technik und Melodie*, Op. 228, Vol. 1

Cornelius Gurlitt
(1820–1901)

Vivace [$\text{♩} = \text{c.}100$]

Das Schaukelpferd The Rocking Horse

Cornelius Gurlitt was born in Altona, near Hamburg, and studied organ, piano and composition in Copenhagen. After travelling around Europe for some years, he settled in his native town, becoming organist of Altona Cathedral and professor at the Hamburg Conservatory. He composed over 200 works, including many small, attractive pieces for children. Typically, these are character-pieces with descriptive titles. In *Das Schaukelpferd*, the compound-time rhythms convey the rocking of the horse.

Source: *Technik und Melodie: Elementar-Klavierschule*, Op. 228, Heft I (Mainz and Leipzig: Schott, n.d.)

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B:2

Løvet faller

from *Barnebilder*

Knut Nystedt
(born 1915)

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music.

Andante [$\text{♩} = c.104$]

The musical score for 'Løvet faller' is written for piano in 3/4 time. It is marked 'Andante' with a tempo of approximately 104 beats per minute. The score is divided into four systems, each containing a treble and bass staff. The first system begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The second system continues the piano texture. The third system starts with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic. The fourth system concludes with a piano (*pp*) dynamic and a 'dim.' (diminuendo) marking. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-3. The piece concludes with a final chord in the bass staff.

Løvet faller Falling Leaves; *Barnebilder* Children's Pictures

The Norwegian composer Knut Nystedt was born in Oslo and studied organ, composition and conducting at the Oslo Conservatory. In 1947 he undertook further composition studies with Aaron Copland in the USA. He became organist and choirmaster at the Torshov Church, Oslo, in 1946 and a professor at the Oslo Conservatory in 1964.

Barnebilder, first published in 1952, is made up of ten easy character-pieces for children, each evoking something familiar from the child's world. The composer tells us that in 'Løvet faller' strict legato should be kept in both hands (this does not, of course, apply to b. 7).

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El cant dels ocells

B:3

Arranged by Mark Marshall

Trad. Catalan

Unhurried, expressive ♩ = c.96

The piano score is written for a grand piano in 4/4 time. It consists of four systems of music, each with a treble and bass staff. The first system (measures 1-4) is marked *mp cantabile* and features a long melodic line in the treble staff and a supporting bass line. The second system (measures 5-8) includes a *rit.* (ritardando) and a *a tempo* marking, with a *pp* (pianissimo) dynamic in the treble. The third system (measures 9-12) is marked *f* (forte) and features a more active bass line. The fourth system (measures 13-16) includes a *rit.* marking, a *lunga* (long) note, and a *dim. a niente* (diminuendo to nothing) instruction. Pedal points (Ped.) are indicated at the end of measures 8, 12, and 16. Fingering numbers (1-5) are provided for various notes throughout the score.

El cant dels ocells The Song of the Birds

This song, thought to date back to about 1600, comes from Catalonia – a principality that lies across the southern tip of France and north-eastern Spain – where the Catalan language is still spoken today. The words refer to Christmas, describing many different species of birds visiting the baby Jesus in his manger in Bethlehem. In modern times the carol has been revived in various arrangements, notably by the cellist Pablo Casals and the singer Joan Baez. In this piano arrangement, the birdsong is heard in bb. 7 and 14–16. The arranger, Mark Marshall, lives in Vivès – a village in French Catalonia.

C:1

The Giant's Coming

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Stephen Clarke
(born 1964)

Creepy ♩ = c.92

The musical score for 'The Giant's Coming' is written for piano. It begins in 4/4 time with a tempo of c.92, marked 'Creepy'. The first system (measures 1-4) includes a treble staff with chords and a bass staff with triplets and a 5-finger pattern. The second system (measures 5-8) continues the 4/4 time signature with more complex rhythmic patterns. The third system (measures 9-10) changes to 3/4 time, marked 'pp'. The fourth system (measures 11-14) returns to 4/4 time, marked 'ff'. The fifth system (measures 15-18) is marked 'Sadly' and 'pp', featuring a large sustained chord in the treble and a melodic line in the bass. Fingerings and dynamics are indicated throughout the score.

Stephen Clarke is a conductor, educator and composer. After a career conducting opera, he is now precentor (head of music) at Radley College, Oxfordshire. He has written about this piece: 'Having worked in theatres for 20 years before teaching, I really like dramatic music that paints a picture and tells a story, so I would perform this piece as if accompanying a scary children's cartoon.'

Calypso Joe

No. 9 from *Finger Jogging Boogie*

C:2

Stephen Duro
(born 1939)

Moderately [$\text{♩} = c.132$]

5

9

13

f (*mf* second time)

mf (*f* second time)

1. 2.

5 *f*

Stephen Duro studied at the Royal College of Music, London, after which he read music at Cambridge University. In 1962 he travelled to Boston, Massachusetts, where he studied jazz and taught the piano, returning to England in 1966.

Duro's *Finger Jogging Boogie*, from which this piece is selected, is a collection of 17 pieces in lighter styles for the younger pianist. One of these styles is that of the calypso, a West Indian dance and song, chiefly from Trinidad. Calypsos were first sung by slaves on the plantations. Nowadays they often have topical texts, are frequently sung during the carnival and are played on steel pans. 'Calypso Joe' illustrates the jaunty, syncopated rhythms of this style of music.

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Reproduced from *Finger Jogging Boogie* (ABRSM)

Na krmítku

No. 19 from *Svět malých*

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Petr Eben
(1929–2007)

Poco agitato [$\text{♩} = \text{c.}112$]

The musical score for 'Na krmítku' is written for piano. It begins with a tempo marking of *Poco agitato* and a metronome indication of approximately 112 beats per minute. The key signature is C major. The score is divided into four systems of music. The first system (measures 1-4) starts with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The second system (measures 5-8) features a mezzo-forte (*mp*) dynamic and a crescendo (*cresc.*). The third system (measures 9-12) continues with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic. The fourth system (measures 13) concludes with a piano (*p*) dynamic and a final piano (*pp*) section. The piece is characterized by rapid, pecking-like eighth-note patterns in the right hand and sustained chords in the left hand.

Na krmítku Bird at the Feeding Box; **Svět malých** The World of Children

The Czech composer, pianist and organist Petr Eben studied piano and composition at the Prague Academy from 1948 to 1954. He then taught at Prague University (1955–90) and at the Academy where he had studied (1990–4). During the same period he also pursued a career as a concert pianist, travelling widely in Europe and America.

Svět malých, from which this piece is selected, consists of 20 little compositions for the piano. They are written in a contemporary idiom and have programmatic titles, which show the player how they should be characterized. 'Na krmítku' evokes the quick pecking of the bird as it feeds.

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Piano Exam Pieces

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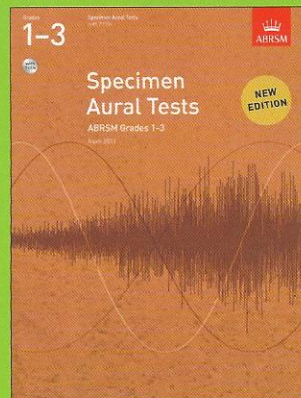
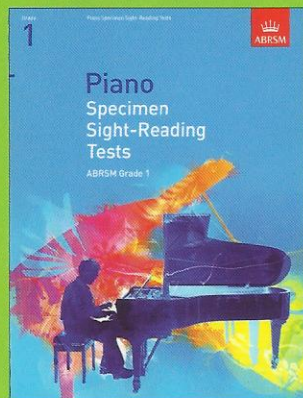
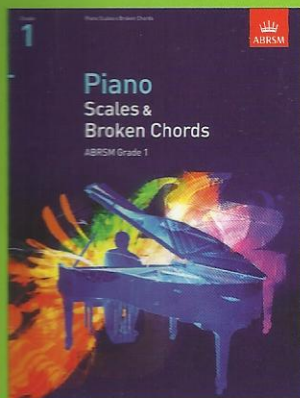
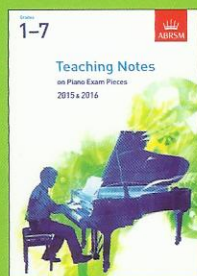
Key features:

- three pieces from each of Lists A, B and C
- appealing and varied repertoire
- carefully edited and clearly presented throughout
- helpful information about the pieces and the exam

CD

The CD features performances of all syllabus pieces by RCM Junior Department students Isaac Ettedgui and Tomoka Kan, and ABRSM examiner Vanessa Latache.

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