



Spooky Piano Pieces

Level 1 - First Frights

One hand at a time: five-finger melodies over single slow bass notes.

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1. Dies Irae

Key	Time Signature	Tempo	Difficulty	Measures
A minor	4/4	Lento (60 BPM)	Beginner - Level 1	16

About This Piece

The "Day of Wrath" is a medieval chant about the end of the world, sung for centuries at requiem masses. Its first four notes have become the most famous doom motif in music: film composers quote it whenever something terrible is about to happen, from horror classics to The Shining and The Lion King. You will meet it again in this book - Saint-Saens sneaks it into his Danse Macabre (piece 12). This is where all spooky music begins.

Notes and Hand Positions

Fingering Guide

Right Hand: G4, A4, B4, C5, D5

Five-finger position starting with the thumb on G4: G(1) A(2) B(3) C5(4) D5(5). The whole chant sits under one hand.

Left Hand: A2, D3, E3 (single whole notes)

A dark drone: pinky on A2, one whole note per measure, rising to D3 or E3 where the harmony turns.

Notes Used in This Piece

Right Hand

Note	On the Staff	On the Keyboard	Finger
G4	Second line of treble staff	Between first two of three black keys	Thumb (1)
A4	Second space of treble staff	Between last two of three black keys	Index (2)
B4	Middle line of treble staff	Right of three black keys	Middle (3)
C5	Third space of treble staff	One octave above middle C	Ring (4)
D5	Fourth line of treble staff	Right of C5, between two black keys	Pinky (5)

Left Hand

Note	On the Staff	On the Keyboard	Finger
A2	Bottom space of bass staff	Two octaves below middle C, white key a	Pinky (5)
D3	Third line of bass staff	Between the two black keys below middle	Index (2)
E3	Third space of bass staff	Right of two black keys, below middle C	Thumb (1)

Section A - The Day of Wrath (Measures 1-8)

The chant enters pianissimo, two slow notes per measure: C-B, C-A, B-G, A-A. The second phrase answers a step higher and touches the top note D5. Underneath, the left hand holds a single dark drone note per measure - the sound of a distant bell.

Lento (♩ = 60)



Dies Irae - Section A - The Day of Wrath

How to Practice This Section

Play the right hand alone first and sing along - this melody was designed for voices. Keep every half note absolutely even, like a slow procession.

Section B - The Echo and the Bell (Measures 9-16)

The first phrase returns a little louder, then the chant sinks back down: A-G, A-B, A-G, and a long final A under a fermata. Let the last note ring until it disappears.

Lento (♩ = 60)



Dies Irae - Section B - The Echo and the Bell

How to Practice This Section

The ending is the hardest part to play well because nothing happens - resist the urge to speed up. Count four slow beats on every whole note in the left hand.

Full Score

Here is the complete piece with all sections combined.

Lento (♩ = 60)



Dies Irae - Gregorian chant (13th century)

Step-by-Step Practice Guide

Step 1: Right Hand Alone

1. Place the thumb on G4 - the whole piece stays in this five-finger position
2. Learn phrase 1 (measures 1-4): C-B, C-A, B-G, A-A with fingers 4-3, 4-2, 3-1, 2-2
3. Phrase 2 climbs to D5 with the pinky - keep the hand relaxed, no stretching needed
4. Play the chant at 60 BPM, two even half notes per measure, no rushing

Step 2: Left Hand Alone

1. One whole note per measure: mostly A2 with the pinky
2. Move to E3 (thumb) or D3 where marked - the hand never leaves its position
3. Count 1-2-3-4 on every note and let it ring like a bell

Step 3: Hands Together

1. Start at 50 BPM: left hand lands on beat 1, right hand moves in half notes
2. The hands share a slow pulse - if they drift apart, count out loud
3. Build the dynamics: pp for section A, mp for the return, fade at the end
4. Target tempo: 60 BPM with a dark, calm, processional sound

2. The Hearse Song

Key	Time Signature	Tempo	Difficulty	Measures
A minor	4/4	Allegretto (100 BPM)	Beginner - Level 1	16

About This Piece

"The worms crawl in, the worms crawl out..." - soldiers sang this grimly cheerful tune in the trenches of World War I, and children have been delighting in its creepy verses around campfires ever since. It is the classic example of Halloween humor: a song about something scary, sung with a grin. The melody is a simple minor-key march that fits perfectly under five fingers.

Notes and Hand Positions

Fingering Guide

Right Hand: A4, B4, C5, D5, E5

A minor five-finger position: thumb on A4, pinky on E5. One position for the entire song.

Left Hand: A2, D3, E3 (single half notes)

Pinky on A2, thumb on E3: a steady walking bass of two single notes per measure.

Notes Used in This Piece

Right Hand

Note	On the Staff	On the Keyboard	Finger
A4	Second space of treble staff	Between last two of three black keys	Thumb (1)
B4	Middle line of treble staff	Right of three black keys	Index (2)
C5	Third space of treble staff	One octave above middle C	Middle (3)
D5	Fourth line of treble staff	Right of C5	Ring (4)
E5	Fourth space of treble staff	Right of D5	Pinky (5)

Left Hand

Note	On the Staff	On the Keyboard	Finger
A2	Bottom space of bass staff	Two octaves below middle C	Pinky (5)
D3	Third line of bass staff	Between the two black keys below middle C	Index (2)
E3	Third space of bass staff	Right of two black keys, below middle C	Thumb (1)

Section A - The Worms Crawl In (Measures 1-8)

The verse marches up the A minor chord (A-C-E) and winds back down step by step. Every phrase starts with the same cheeky upward leap. The left hand plods along on A and E like slow footsteps behind you.

Allegretto (♩ = 100)



The Hearse Song - Section A - The Worms Crawl In

How to Practice This Section

The melody outlines the A minor chord: A-C-E. Practice just those three notes (1-3-5) as a warm-up, then add the walking steps between them.

Section B - The Worms Play Pinochle (Measures 9-16)

The verse repeats, louder and bolder (mf), then the last line drops to a whisper (p) for the punchline and settles on a long low A. Classic campfire delivery: confident verse, creepy ending.

Allegretto (♩ = 100)



The Hearse Song - Section B - The Worms Play Pinochle

How to Practice This Section

Play section B exactly like section A but with the dynamic plan: mf for four measures, then suddenly p. The surprise IS the joke.

Full Score

Here is the complete piece with all sections combined.

Allegretto (♩ = 100)



The Hearse Song - Traditional American (ca. 1918)

Step-by-Step Practice Guide

Step 1: Right Hand Alone

1. Warm up on the A minor chord notes: A(1), C(3), E(5)
2. Learn measures 1-2: the leap up A-C-E-E, then the walk down E-D-C-B
3. Measures 3-4 answer with C-D-E-C and settle on A - the home note
4. Keep the quarter notes bouncy but even at 100 BPM - it is a march, not a race

Step 2: Left Hand Alone

1. Two single notes per measure: A2 (pinky) then E3 (thumb)
2. The pattern barely changes - once it is automatic, it drives the whole song
3. Phrase endings hold one whole note: count all four beats

Step 3: Hands Together

1. Start at 70 BPM: bass note on beat 1 and 3, melody on every beat
2. Lock the left-hand A to the melody's first note of each measure
3. Add the dynamic joke last: mf verse, p ending
4. Target tempo: 100 BPM with a sly, marching character

3. Ah, Poor Bird

Key	Time Signature	Tempo	Difficulty	Measures
A minor	3/4	Andante (92 BPM)	Beginner - Level 1	16

About This Piece

This mournful little round has been sung in England for centuries: "Ah, poor bird, take thy flight, far above the sorrows of this sad night." Like all rounds it is built to overlap with itself, which gives it a circling, hypnotic quality - perfect for a moonlit night. Its minor mode and gentle 3/4 sway make it one of the most beautiful first pieces in any key.

Notes and Hand Positions

Fingering Guide

Right Hand: A4, B4, C5, D5, E5

A minor five-finger position: thumb on A4, pinky on E5.

Left Hand: A2, E3 (single dotted half notes)

Pinky on A2, thumb on E3: one long note per measure, swaying between the two.

Notes Used in This Piece

Right Hand

Note	On the Staff	On the Keyboard	Finger
A4	Second space of treble staff	Between last two of three black keys	Thumb (1)
B4	Middle line of treble staff	Right of three black keys	Index (2)
C5	Third space of treble staff	One octave above middle C	Middle (3)
D5	Fourth line of treble staff	Right of C5	Ring (4)
E5	Fourth space of treble staff	Right of D5	Pinky (5)

Left Hand

Note	On the Staff	On the Keyboard	Finger
A2	Bottom space of bass staff	Two octaves below middle C	Pinky (5)
E3	Third space of bass staff	Right of two black keys, below middle C	Thumb (1)

Section A - The Bird Takes Flight (Measures 1-8)

The melody climbs steadily from A up to E5 - the bird rising - then circles back down and rests on B. The answering phrase starts high and sighs downward to the home note A. The left hand sways A-E-E-A, one note per measure.

Andante (♩ = 92)



Ah, Poor Bird - Section A - The Bird Takes Flight

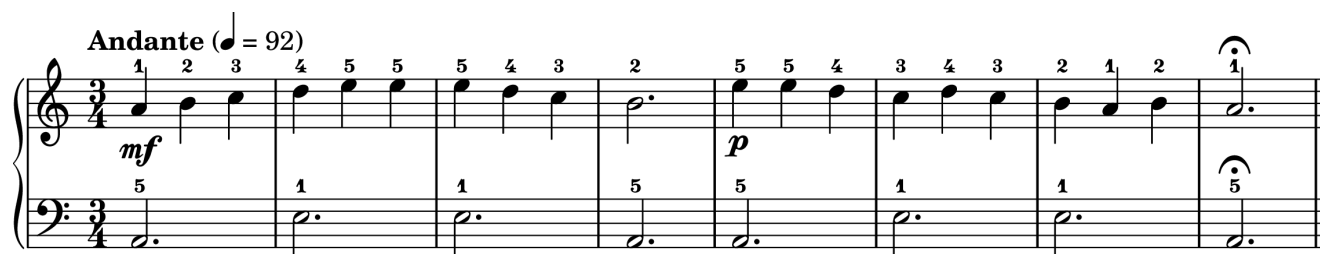
How to Practice This Section

Feel the 3/4 sway: a gentle push on beat 1, then two light beats. The climb A-B-C-D-E should sound like one long breath, not five separate notes.

Section B - Far Above the Sorrows (Measures 9-16)

The round repeats: once a little stronger (*mf*), once as an echo (*p*) that dissolves on a long final A. In a real round, another singer would enter here - imagine the second voice as you play.

Andante (♩ = 92)



Ah, Poor Bird - Section B - Far Above the Sorrows

How to Practice This Section

Play the repeat with contrast only from your touch - same notes, softer sound. Slowing down slightly in the last measure makes the ending feel like a farewell.

Full Score

Here is the complete piece with all sections combined.



Ah, Poor Bird - Traditional English round (18th century)

Step-by-Step Practice Guide

Step 1: Right Hand Alone

1. Learn the climb: A-B-C (1-2-3), then D-E-E (4-5-5) - one finger per note
2. The descent E-D-C then B needs no shifts: the hand never moves
3. Phrase 2 starts on the pinky (E5) - place the hand before you begin
4. Aim for perfect legato: connect every note like a singer would

Step 2: Left Hand Alone

1. One dotted half note per measure: A2 (pinky) or E3 (thumb)
2. Hold each note for all three beats - count 1-2-3 out loud
3. The pattern is A-E-E-A in each phrase: learn it as a loop

Step 3: Hands Together

1. Start at 60 BPM: left hand on beat 1, right hand flowing over it
2. Let the bass note ring through the whole measure under the melody
3. Shape each 4-bar phrase toward its highest note and away again
4. Target tempo: 92 BPM with a gentle, rocking sadness

4. Funeral March (Theme)

Key	Time Signature	Tempo	Difficulty	Measures
A minor (simplified)	4/4	Grave (56 BPM)	Beginner - Level 1	16

About This Piece

Chopin wrote his Marche Funebre in 1839, and it became the most famous funeral music ever composed - played at the funerals of Chopin himself, John F. Kennedy, and countless cartoon characters marching to their doom. The dotted "dum, da-dum" rhythm on a single repeated note is instantly recognizable. Our arrangement moves it to A minor and keeps just the iconic theme.

Notes and Hand Positions

Fingering Guide

Right Hand: G#4, A4, B4, C5, E5

Index finger on A4, thumb ready below on G#4: A(2), B(3), C5(4), E5(5). The famous rhythm repeats on one note - keep the same finger.

Left Hand: A2, C3, E3 (single half notes)

The tread: pinky on A2 and thumb on E3, marching in slow half notes.

Notes Used in This Piece

Right Hand

Note	On the Staff	On the Keyboard	Finger
G#4	Second space of treble staff (sharp)	Black key in the middle of the three-black	Thumb (1)
A4	Second space of treble staff	Between last two of three black keys	Index (2)
B4	Middle line of treble staff	Right of three black keys	Middle (3)
C5	Third space of treble staff	One octave above middle C	Ring (4)
E5	Fourth space of treble staff	Fifth above A4	Pinky (5)

Left Hand

Note	On the Staff	On the Keyboard	Finger
A2	Bottom space of bass staff	Two octaves below middle C	Pinky (5)
C3	Second space of bass staff	One octave below middle C	Middle (3)
E3	Third space of bass staff	Right of two black keys	Thumb (1)

Section A - The Procession (Measures 1-8)

The famous tread: a dotted rhythm hammered on a single A, rising briefly to C and B before sinking back through G-sharp - the one black key in the piece, and the note that makes the whole march ache. The left hand steps A-E, A-E, like slow boots on gravel.

Grave (♩ = 56)



Funeral March (Theme) - Section A - The Procession

How to Practice This Section

Master the dotted rhythm first by clapping: LONG-short-long-long. The short note belongs to the note AFTER it - snap it late, not early.

Section B - The Middle Bell and Return (Measures 9-16)

The march lifts to C and E - a moment of light (*mp*) - before the tread returns exactly as before, fading to a final long A under a fermata. The G-sharp neighbor gives the cadence its dark colour.

Grave (♩ = 56)



Funeral March (Theme) - Section B - The Middle Bell and Return

How to Practice This Section

In measures 9-10, keep the dotted rhythm identical even though the notes climb. The rhythm never changes in this piece - that relentlessness is the point.

Full Score

Here is the complete piece with all sections combined.

Grave (♩ = 56)



Funeral March (Theme) - Frederic Chopin, Op. 35 (1839)

Step-by-Step Practice Guide

Step 1: Right Hand Alone

1. Clap the rhythm of measure 1: LONG-short | long | long (dotted quarter, eighth, quarter, quarter)
2. Play measure 1 on the single note A with finger 2 - all four notes, same finger
3. Add the rise to C (finger 4) and the fall through B to G# (thumb) in measures 2-3
4. Play the whole theme at 50 BPM before trying the marked 56

Step 2: Left Hand Alone

1. The tread is two single notes: A2 (pinky) to E3 (thumb), half notes
2. In measures 9-10 the bass lifts to C3 (middle finger) - the only change
3. Absolutely steady: this left hand is a slow drumbeat, never louder than the melody

Step 3: Hands Together

1. Start at 44 BPM - yes, that slow; a funeral march earns its gravity from patience
2. Left-hand half notes fall on beats 1 and 3, anchoring the dotted rhythm above
3. Do not accent the short eighth notes - they lean into the following beat
4. Target tempo: 56 BPM, grave and inevitable, with a long fermata at the end

5. Aase's Death (Theme)

Key	Time Signature	Tempo	Difficulty	Measures
A minor (simplified)	4/4	Andante doloroso (63 BPM)	Beginner - Level 1	16

About This Piece

In Ibsen's play Peer Gynt, the wandering hero returns home just in time to sit at his mother Aase's deathbed. Grieg wrote for that scene the saddest music he knew: a slow rising phrase for muted strings that climbs, grieves, and lets go. It is the quiet companion piece to his wild Mountain King (piece 11) - both come from the same play, first performed in 1876.

Notes and Hand Positions

Fingering Guide

Right Hand: G#4, A4, B4, C5, D5, E5

Two positions: the phrase begins with A under finger 2 (thumb ready on G#), then shifts to plain A-position (thumb on A) for the climb to E5.

Left Hand: A2, B2, C3, D3, E3 (single half notes)

A complete five-finger bass position: A2(5) B2(4) C3(3) D3(2) E3(1). The bass walks slowly through it, one finger per note.

Notes Used in This Piece

Right Hand

Note	On the Staff	On the Keyboard	Finger
G#4	Second space of treble staff (sharp)	Middle black key of the three-black-key group	Thumb (1)
A4	Second space of treble staff	Between last two of three black keys	Index (2), then Thumb (1) after the shift
C5	Third space of treble staff	One octave above middle C	Ring (4) / Middle (3)
E5	Fourth space of treble staff	Fifth above A4	Pinky (5)

Left Hand

Note	On the Staff	On the Keyboard	Finger
A2	Bottom space of bass staff	Two octaves below middle C	Pinky (5)
B2	Second line of bass staff	Right of A2	Ring (4)
C3	Second space of bass staff	One octave below middle C	Middle (3)
D3	Third line of bass staff	Right of C3	Index (2)
E3	Third space of bass staff	Right of two black keys	Thumb (1)

Section A - The Grief Rises (Measures 1-8)

The theme sighs A-B-C, sinks to G-sharp, then gathers itself and climbs the full ladder A-B-C-D to a long E5 - the emotional peak - before descending step by step to a hushed cadence on the same G-sharp sigh.

Andante doloroso (♩ = 63)



Aase's Death (Theme) - Section A - The Grief Rises

How to Practice This Section

The hand shift is built into the music: play the first sigh with fingers 2-3-4, and after the G-sharp, start the climb with the thumb on A. The shift happens during the long half note - no rush.

Section B - The Farewell (Measures 9-16)

The entire theme repeats pianissimo - the same grief, remembered rather than felt. The final A fades under a fermata. Grieg asked for this movement to be played almost inaudibly.



Aase's Death (Theme) - Section B - The Farewell

How to Practice This Section

Play section B as an echo: identical notes, half the sound. If your piano has a soft pedal (left pedal), this is the perfect place to discover it.

Full Score

Here is the complete piece with all sections combined.

Andante doloroso (♩ = 63)



Aase's Death (Theme) - Edvard Grieg, Peer Gynt (1875)

Step-by-Step Practice Guide

Step 1: Right Hand Alone

1. Learn the opening sigh: A-B-C (2-3-4) falling to B-A-G# (3-2-1)
2. The climb A-B-C-D-E uses 1-2-3-4-5 after the shift - practice the shift alone
3. The descent from E5 retraces the same fingers backwards: 5-4-3-2
4. Shape every phrase like breathing: rise = inhale, fall = exhale

Step 2: Left Hand Alone

1. Place all five fingers: A2(5) B2(4) C3(3) D3(2) E3(1) - the bass never leaves this position
2. Two half notes per measure, following the harmony: A-E, B-E, C-E, D-E
3. Play the bass alone and listen: it is a slow, sorrowful melody of its own

Step 3: Hands Together

1. Start at 50 BPM with only measures 1-4
2. The left hand changes note exactly when the melody does - move together
3. Keep both hands soft; the peak at E5 is mezzo-forte at most
4. Target tempo: 63 BPM, doloroso - let the final fermata die away completely

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