

Wilhelm Stenhammar's Late Summer Nights, Op. 33: Rediscovered Swedish Character Pieces

Presented by Shelby Nord, NCTM

The late-Romantic Swedish pianist-composer Wilhelm Stenhammar is largely unfamiliar among the American teachers and students of classical music. Stenhammar's compositions did not reach the same international acclaim as those of other Scandinavian nationalists, such as Edvard Grieg. The primary reason for this difference is due to the historical events within the countries. Stenhammar's style also differs from the strong nationalistic sound of Grieg

in that he did not overtly employ folk music elements but, instead, based his works on German classical traditions, decorated with Scandinavian music features. Folk elements found in Stenhammar's music include traditional Swedish *polska* dance rhythms, melodies composed in modes common to Scandinavian music and troll-like characteristics similar to those heard in Grieg's *Lyric Pieces*.

Stenhammar's *Sensommarnätter* ("Late Summer Nights"), Op. 33 is a set of five character pieces that offer valuable lessons for advanced students. They are comparable to the levels of Brahms' *Klavierstücke*, Opp. 118 and 119 and Grieg's *Lyric Pieces*, and they demonstrate Stenhammar's unique harmonic language, virtuosic writing and a mature, reflective style. This set involves careful voicing in contrapuntal textures, balance and dynamic control, pedaling in thick textures and lower registers, and a high level of technical facility. ◀◀

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Stenhammar (1871-1927)

Background

-Born in Stockholm, Sweden
-Concert pianist, composer, and conductor

Style

German Classical foundation decorated with Swedish and Scandinavian music features

Piano Works

Five sonatas, two piano concerti, and several character piece sets

Contribution

Mature, reflective, and technically demanding pieces for late-intermediate to advanced students to supplement standard repertoire

Sensommarnätter (Late Summer Nights) Op. 33 as Teaching Pieces

Composition

-Published during his mature period in 1914
-Title reference to the dark evenings at the end of Sweden's short summers, and love for the scenic landscape

Five Character Pieces

-Well-suited for early- to late-advanced students
-Common musical skills: balance, voicing, and shaping
-Common technical requirements: contrapuntal textures, finger work, parallel octaves
-Uncommon ABAB forms and titles for character pieces

Available for purchase at:

<https://www.gehrmans.se/butik/instrument-ensemble/sensommarnatter-n06473>

I. Tranquilo e soave

Requirements: portraying a mature, serious character; clear voicing and shaping long phrases; four-part counterpoint



Musical score for I. Tranquilo e soave. The score is in 3/4 time and features a piano accompaniment with a four-part counterpoint. The tempo is marked *pp* and the dynamics include *una corda* and *sempre legatissimo*.

II. Poco presto

Requirements: voicing four-note chords; maintaining light touch with a loose wrist in quiet dynamic range; sense of forward motion



Musical score for II. Poco presto. The score is in 3/4 time and features a piano accompaniment with four-note chords. The tempo is marked *Poco presto* and the dynamics include *molto p ed un poco secco* and *una corda*.

III. Piano. Non troppo lento

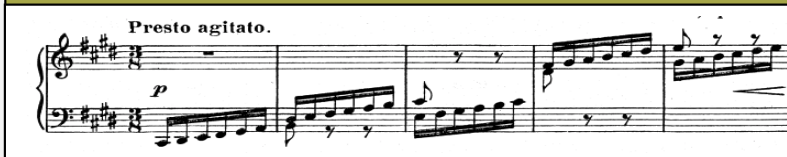
Requirements: Impressionistic character of theme and variations; shaping in a quiet dynamic range; voicing soprano and tenor



Musical score for III. Piano. Non troppo lento. The score is in 3/4 time and features a piano accompaniment with a focus on voicing soprano and tenor parts. The tempo is marked *Piano* and the dynamics include *sempre dolcissimo* and *sempre una corda o con pedale*.

IV. Presto agitato

Requirements: left hand arpeggiation; balance; evenness and clarity of the running notes; rapid arpeggios in contrary motion; dynamic range



Musical score for IV. Presto agitato. The score is in 3/4 time and features a piano accompaniment with left hand arpeggiation and rapid arpeggios in contrary motion. The tempo is marked *Presto agitato* and the dynamics include *p*.

V. Poco allegretto

Requirements: voicing and balance; folk character; variety of articulations and phrase markings; light left-hand with jumps; most accessible of the set



Musical score for V. Poco allegretto. The score is in 3/4 time and features a piano accompaniment with a folk character and light left-hand with jumps. The tempo is marked *Poco allegretto* and the dynamics include *p* and *dolce*, with the instruction *senza ped.*.