

A Little Cradle Song



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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH—NICOLAI VON WILM.

Born at Riga, Russia, March 4, 1834.



COMPOSER of vocal and instrumental works, the best known being a sextet for strings, and a piano-piece for two and four hands. Others of his many compositions are pieces for harp, songs, part-songs, choruses for male voices, and motets. Wilm was born at Riga, studied in the Leipsic Conservatory, became assistant director of music at the Riga City Theatre, and in 1860 was made a teacher of piano and theory at the Imperial Nicolai Institute of St. Petersburg, Russia, where he remained for fifteen years. He then returned and went to Dresden and later to Wiesbaden to live.

THE POETIC IDEA: When the mother undertakes to sing the baby to sleep, whether in her arms or in the cradle, it is always something very gentle, very sweet, quite simple, and usually with many repetitions. The object is not to impress the baby with the fact that one melody is following after another, but simply to make it gentle, soothing, quieting and persistent. The idea of the cradle song is one that appeals to all; it stands for the mother's love and care. Hence we need not wonder that many composers have written songs with splendid success. One composer has emphasized the monotony of the idea, Chopin, for instance, having in a song several times as long as this only two chords. Schumann, Mendelssohn and many other composers have tried their hands.

This of Von Wilm is one of the best. The melody is less monotonous than many, the harmony is more varied, yet the tenderness of the mother love is here, and the quiet mood and pervading atmosphere of care, such as permits the baby to fall asleep.

FORM AND STRUCTURE: This short Cradle song consists of four melodies, here marked A, B, C, D, the last being a repetition of Melody A, so far as regards the first phrase (measures 1 to 4), but from that point carried to a complete finish upon its own original key of E-flat.

The great beauty of this composition lies in two points: First in its singularly lovely melody; and, second, in its equally charming harmony, which is unusually varied and sensitive for a composition so short and so quiet.

DIRECTIONS FOR PLAYING: The first condition of artistic success in this Cradle song is to have the melody sing with a soft, yet full and satisfying singing tone, which must be connected from one tone to another in a perfect legato. In order to accomplish this, it is necessary when the same tone is repeated to make the break as slight as possible, by holding down the key for the first tone until there is only just time enough for it to come up level and go down again for the next tone. You will accomplish this by first practicing two long tones in succession, upon the same pitch, and trying to see how slight you can make the break between them. Do not add an accompaniment nor use the pedal; what you are after is to repeat the tone with as little break in tone as possible. In this way work out the two long G's, the two C-flats, the D-flats, the two high E-flats.

Next, the question changes to securing the closest possible connection of tone in moving to another tone. Sometimes this is prepared (in ascending scale passages) by changing fingers on the key played, substituting the 4th for the 5th which may have played and held the tone; and sometimes (in descending) by playing the 4th finger after the 5th, and the 5th again after that. Whatever the fingering decided upon, the point to gain is to make the stream of tone absolutely uninterrupted, through each successive four measures, excepting where, as in measure 16, the melody tone does not extend through the measure.

The finger rests earnestly upon the melody key, transferring its weight from one key to another as the melody moves; but never at all resting upon accompaniment keys. This is vital and must not be missed. The accompaniment keys are played with a very light finger, almost passive.

The proper rate of speed is that of two swings of a pendulum 30 inches long (any string with weight) to each measure, each dotted quarter having the time of one swing. This is fast enough and slow enough. In such places as measure 24 the movement slightly retards, resuming again in measure 25 where Melody A begins again.

All the chords are also to be closely connected. In the early practice count six in a measure, but be sure that the 8ths have a kind of triplet effect, yet not at all fast. Later on, count two in a measure, playing the 8ths as rather slow and easily moving triplets.

EXPRESSION: You will need to listen carefully for the close connection in the melody and for the light accompaniment.

In point of relative power, in a piece like this, the soprano, being the melody, is quite a bit stronger than either or the other voices. Next the melody in importance is the bass, which supports the harmony. And the 8th notes in the middle are lightest of all.

The first phrase diminishes in measure 4, but with a special emphasis upon the dissonance, E-natural; the second phrase increases to its close in measure 8; Melody B is a series of repetitions of the descending phrases, and as a whole it slightly diminishes as it comes down. Melody C is a suspense, and the sustained dissonances, such as the C-flat (measures 27, 18), D-flat (measures 19, 20), and other similar places, are accented and made appealing. From the climax in measure 31, the song diminishes to the close.

Note carefully that the long slurs do not tie notes. Hence the two G's in measures 1 and 2, 5 and 6, 13 etc., are not tied. So also C-flat, measures 17 and 18, D-flat, measures 19 and 20, E-flat, measure 21 are not tied. Only the short slur, connecting two notes of the same pitch, is a tie. The long slur shows the duration of the phrase, or such a short Melody as should be sung with one breath.

A LITTLE CRADLE SONG.

Revised, fingered and annotated
by W. S. B. Mathews.

N. v. Wilm, Op. 81.

Tranquillo. $\text{♩} = 30''$
Quietly.

A. 1 *p* 3 2 3 4 5

B. 6 7 8 9 *mf* 10 11 *p*

C. 12 13 14 15 16 17 *p*

18 1 19 *cresc.* 20 21 *f* 22 23 *dim.*

D. *riten.* 24 *p* 25 *pp* 26 27 28 29 *cresc.*

30 31 *f* 32 33 *dim.* 34 35 *pp* 36