



Baby Grand

Billy Joel

♪ Niveau 62/100 (Avancé)

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BABY GRAND

Words and Music by Billy Joel

From the album *The Bridge*, released in 1986.

"Baby Grand" featured Billy Joel with his idol Ray Charles, whom he met at the USA for Africa ("We Are the World") recording session. The song is tailor-made for Charles; its bluesy 12/8 feel is very similar to Charles's own classic recording of "Georgia on My Mind." The two singers sing a love song to their beloved—which happens not to be a woman, but a baby grand piano.

Both Joel and Charles play piano on the recording. Because it's impossible to know for certain who is playing which licks, the two piano parts have been reduced to one here, featuring the juiciest licks from both parts.

Figure 5 – Intro/Verse

The piano parts make use of several blues techniques, starting with the generous use of *grace notes* in the right hand. Grace notes are quick ornamental tones played directly before a main note. The two (or more) notes are usually connected with a small slur marking. Grace notes are sometimes called "crushed notes." Sometimes we also refer to the use of a grace note as "bending a note" because it sounds similar to a guitar player bending a note. Obviously, each note on the piano is a discrete pitch, so we can't *actually* bend a note like a guitar player can by pulling on the strings. Grace notes on the piano are the closest approximation to literally bending notes.

If the grace note is a black note, and the main note is one half step higher, you can try playing the black note and quickly sliding the same finger off the black key onto the white key. Alternatively, try playing the grace note with one finger and the main note with the next finger in very quick succession. Note that many of the grace notes feature the minor 3rd sliding into the major 3rd on major chords. These "blue notes" also give the song a bluesy feel.

Another standard blues technique used here is the use of parallel 3rds used as fillers in measures 5, 9, 10, and 11. Note particularly the parallel 3rds in the lick beginning on beat 3 in measure 4.

The song begins with a standard blues *turnaround* in F. A turnaround is a chord progression at the end of a section that leads back (i.e. "turns around") to the beginning of the next section. The turnaround used here features a chromatically descending bass line starting on #IV (Bm7b5).

Also note the use of altered dominant seventh chords in measure 15. Altered dominants (such as 7b5, 7#5, 7b9, and 7#9) create a richer and more colorful sonority.

Fig. 5

Intro
Slowly ♩ = 64

Piano Bb7 Bm7b5 Bbm7 F/A Ab7

mf

8

Full Band

9

Slow Demos

Piano meas. 1-4,
15-16