



THOMAS ATTWOOD

Allegro from Sonatina in G

Teacher and author **Melanie Spanswick** shows you how to bring clean, rhythmical delivery and a pragmatic approach to tonal colour and dynamics to this justifiably popular Classical gem

Ability rating Beginner/Elementary

Info

Key: G major
Tempo: Allegro
Style: Classical

Will improve your

- ✓ Articulation
- ✓ Balance between the hands
- ✓ Tonal shading

This beautiful little Sonatina is a fine example of the Classical style and can serve as a perfect first recital piece.

Melodic, cheerful and comfortable to play, it's a favourite with many pianists around the world, as the plethora of performances on YouTube suggest!

Thomas Attwood (1765-1838), born in London, enjoyed royal patronage from an early age. He was organist at St Paul's Cathedral, composer and organist at the Chapel Royal, and music teacher to both the Duchess of York and the Princess of Wales. One of the first professors at the newly formed Royal Academy of Music, and a founder member and director of the Philharmonic Society, he was apparently one of Mozart's favourite pupils.

The Austrian master's influence is clear from the outset. It has a diatonic, simple melody combined with an essentially Alberti bass (or broken-chord accompaniment). This Sonatina may look relatively straightforward but in order to give a convincing performance, several technical and musical challenges must be met.

Before you start, listen to the recording on this issue's covermount CD for an overall perspective. Doing so can help you with general tempo, aural perception and dynamics. The suggested metronome marking of crotchet equals 160 feels appropriate for the style and character, however, when you start to practise, a significantly slower speed would be better, allowing for complete assimilation of fingering and note geography.

Melanie's Top Tips

- Be sure to find the top of the musical line within each phrase, and colour appropriately.
- Use a free, loose wrist when negotiating the quaver passagework in the RH.
- Ensure the LH thumb is light and smoothly voiced throughout, especially during the Alberti bass figurations.
- Observe all the rests in the LH.

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Melanie Spanswick is a classical pianist, teacher, adjudicator, author and presenter. She regularly conducts workshops and masterclasses in Germany as well as for EPTA (European Piano Teachers Association). She adjudicates for the British and International Federation of Festivals and curates the Classical Conversations Series, where she interviews eminent classical pianists on camera. These interviews are published on YouTube. Her book, *So You Want To Play The Piano?* has been critically acclaimed and recently featured in the *Pianist* newsletter. Find out more at www.melaniespanswick.com and www.soyouwanttoplaythepiano.com

The Classical style requires a clean, rhythmical delivery. Separate hand practice is beneficial. Work the left hand (LH) broken chordal passagework by 'blocking out', i.e. playing all the notes of the first two crotchet beats in the bar, together. The first four notes in bar 1 (G, D, B, D) can be played in unison (as the tonic chord), followed by the second quaver group or last two crotchet beats in bar 1 (F# D, C, D) which is the dominant seventh chord; two chords will thus be sounded instead of eight separate quavers. Apply this method to the whole piece (where broken-chord passagework occurs) and you will rapidly learn the notes, fingerings and hand positions of the bass line. The LH crotchet chords and single notes (bars 7-11, 13-15 and 26-7) profit from a non-legato execution.

Articulation, that is, crisp fingerwork, is key to a successful performance. Rhythmic grasp and poise is required throughout. Set a slow tempo, and for really accurate articulation, sub-divide the beat. Count aloud in semiquavers, playing along precisely with your voice as you count. You could also experiment with a very slow quaver metronome pulse, being sure to 'sit' on the beat. Avoid pulling or pushing the pulse, as each quaver beat must be perfectly placed.

A particularly striking feature of this Allegro is the constantly flowing melody. It weaves its way around G major via a stream of mostly quaver movement in the treble clef. The A-B-A form ensures repetition of the tune and the cheery, fundamentally four-bar phrases provide measured punctuation.

A pragmatic approach to tonal colour and dynamic gradation is paramount. The balance of sound between each hand is important too. Work at creating a very fluid, silky musical line. Try to

master a perfectly smooth LH which should be softer and lighter than the RH. As you practise, evaluate carefully each sound produced, ensuring a consistent, equal match. Try practising with a full tone, after which a much lighter approach should reveal even articulation and sonority.

The RH requires a firmer touch, even in piano passages. This is because the melody must 'sing out' expressively. Sufficient arm weight and a free wrist can help. Use the fleshy part of your fingertip and sink right into the key bed to allow each note to ring, producing a warm timbre. You'll need control to change the sound from *piano* to *forte*, and to achieve a completely legato melodic line.

Adhering to dynamic markings will make for an interesting rendition. Especially significant is the change from *forte* in bar 16 to *piano* in bar 20 (for the recapitulation), where the texture is very sparse (just the RH alone). Practise many different touches to find the appropriate decrescendo.

Ornaments must be precisely incorporated in any piece. Here they can easily knock the rhythmic pulse, thus changing the whole dynamic. Practise the Sonatina without the acciaccaturas (or grace notes, which appear at bars 4 and 23) to begin with, adding only when the rhythm is firmly established. The acciaccaturas should be light, elegant and played on the beat (i.e. for the first acciaccatura, at bar 4, play the 'clipped' B of the RH at the same time as the D in the LH).

A little rubato at bar 19 into bar 20 and also in the last bar (27) could be stylistically attractive. Choice pedalling at cadential points (possibly bars 8, 26 and 27) keeps the Classical character alive, thus producing a full resonant sound and creating colour and depth in this sprightly miniature masterpiece. ■