



CORNELIUS GURLITT

Little Flowers op 205 no 4

This appealing Romantic era piece will need your best legato, a mastery of textures and a dose of rubato too. Follow the tips from teacher and author **Melanie Spanswick** to make it your own

Ability rating Beginner/ Intermediate

Info

Key: F major
Tempo: Allegro con moto
Style: Romantic

Will improve your

✓ Finger independence
✓ Tonal control
✓ Cantabile

This attractive little piece by German composer Cornelius Gurlitt is perfect for those who enjoy Romantic character music. Consisting of an A-B-A structure (or ternary form), the piece has a first section that is repeated after the second section, and is composed entirely of four-bar phrases.

The flowing thematic material in the outer sections has a waltz-like feeling, with diatonic harmonies and a simplistic, straightforward two-note accompaniment. The central passage in D minor presents a more dramatic aspect, with block-chord accompaniment in the right hand (RH) and running quaver movement in the left hand (LH). A particular feature of this piece is the variety of textures, one of which is counterpoint (part-playing or several lines of music played altogether), appearing in the first and last sections (bars 1-16 and bars 31-48).

Start by reading through the piece hands separately, making a note of all the fingerings. (I've written fingering in the score.) While some rhythmic flexibility does exist in a Romantic piece, it's wise to focus on keeping a firm pulse until the work is securely under your fingers. Sub-dividing each beat offers the best results, as does counting out loud (a metronome can be useful too).

When working at counterpoint, or any linear or contrapuntal piece, learn each 'line' or strand separately at first. Always use the fingering with which you intend to play the passage. The LH (at bars 1-16 and bars 32-48) is made up of two notes per bar; each one needs to be held for the entirety of the bar, adding to the texture, and affording a full sound above which the melody can soar.

Hold the bass notes (or dotted minims) for the whole bar. Play these alone, moving from one bar to the next as legato as possible, with no 'breaks' in the sound between each bar. Even if the fingering doesn't allow fluent joining, it's possible to give an impression of legato.



Melanie Spanswick is a pianist, author and music educator. Her piano guidebook, *So You Want To Play The Piano?* has recently been revised, expanded and republished in a second edition by Alfred Music. Melanie regularly conducts master classes and workshops in Germany as well as for EPTA, and she is a tutor at Jackdaws Music Education Trust. She adjudicates for the British and International Federation of Festivals and has curated the Classical Conversations Series, where she interviewed many eminent classical pianists on camera (published on YouTube).

Find out more about Melanie at www.melaniespanswick.com

Hold a note down until the very last moment before the next note is played, moving extremely quickly at the end of the beat, grading the sound appropriately, matching that of the previous note. Now add the upper note (second note in each bar; the minim beat) to the texture, playing it slightly lighter than the first note, proffering a dance-like lilt. The fingering at bars 15-16 (and bars 47-48) might seem unusual (the thumb placed on the B^b), but it is the easiest and nearest way to move in a legato fashion from the previous bar, dropping the second finger on the A lightly in bar 16 (and bar 48), and phrasing off neatly.

The RH melody requires a beautiful singing tone. Examine each phrase and decide where the top of the musical line occurs, i.e. where the fullest sound is needed. In the first phrase, for example, the interval between the C and B^b in bar 1 is a focal point. Place a heavier, richer sound on the B^b, then grade the tone away from this note, gradually getting quieter towards the F, the last note of the phrase in bar 4. The upbeat, while chromatic (a D^b) and providing Romantic essence, must also be soft and light. Similar melodic inflections are suggested throughout.

Cantabile is a prerequisite. Use plenty of arm weight in the RH, in the first and last sections particularly. When playing cantabile, it can be beneficial to use the finger's pad rather than the tip. Allow the pad to cushion the sound, playing deep into the key bed, supported by a flexible wrist and the full weight of your arm behind the wrist motion. This might take practice, but if you continually 'cushion' notes, you'll be pleased with the warm tone produced.

Counterpoint is prevalent in the RH too. From bars 9-15 and bars 41-48, two-part texture dominates. As with the

LH, practise each part separately, then work very slowly, holding the bottom of the musical line firmly (the A, B^b, C and D in bars 9-12), while swivelling the top part of the hand (the third, fourth and fifth fingers), so each note is completely joined and graded effectively. The outer fingers will become

Learning Tip

Establish a real contrast between the dramatic middle and serene outer sections.

accustomed to playing alone with repeated practice and a free wrist, thus encouraging easy movement.

The middle section (bars 16-32) reveals a different texture, with the emphasis on the LH. The RH chords will benefit from precise articulation; be exact with note lengths and observe all rests. Quaver passagework requires a completely mobile wrist, in order for the LH to turn under without any jerkiness in the sound or rhythm. Take a bar at a time, evaluating the necessary motion, then play each finger on its tip very firmly into the key bed, allowing the wrist to move freely, ensuring tension doesn't become an issue. After heavy practice, lighten your fingers to reveal even, accurate figurations.

By creating legato lines, pedalling can be kept to a minimum, as suggested in the score. For a fuller sound try using the sustaining pedal in every bar, depressing it on the first beat (during the outer sections of the piece) and clearing it on the third beat. Small amounts of rubato would also contribute to the expressive, tender mood of this work. Aim to slow down (*ritenuto*) slightly at the ends of each extended phrase, especially in the last three bars, bringing this piece to a tranquil close. ■