



# SCHUMANN

## Melodie, No 1 from Album for the Young op 68

With a tender melody and simple harmonies, this Romantic miniature nonetheless requires careful use of tonal control, wrist flexibility and cantabile, as teacher and author **Melanie Spanswick** reveals

**Ability rating** Beginner/ Intermediate

**Info**

**Key:** C major

**Tempo:** Nicht schnell

**Style:** Romantic

**Will improve your**

✓ Even left-hand playing

✓ Legato playing

✓ Ability to listen

**'Melodie' is an exquisite miniature with an endearing melody and simple harmonies.**

It's the first of the 43 short pieces in Schumann's *Album for the Young*, a collection intended for children (and for beginners of any age). The tempo marking, Nicht schnell ('not fast'), indicates a flowing, song-like character. A metronome marking of crotchet equals 96 beats per minute would be optimal. The texture consists of a melody in the right hand (RH), and accompaniment in the left hand (LH). The piece is formed mainly of short, two-bar phrases.

**At first glance, 'Melodie' seems fairly simple.**

Yet to be able play it with effective tonal control and nuance will take practice. Start by playing through the LH bass line slowly. Then secure the fingering (I've written some into the score) and locate all the notes. The LH line is stylistically similar to an Alberti bass (a repeated broken chord or arpeggiated accompaniment) in the way it meanders around various chord progressions. To play these progressions with ease, try to assimilate each pattern by 'blocking out' or playing the notes all together. In bar 1, for example, practise by playing beats 1 and 2 at the same time (a C, G, & F), then repeat this with beats 3 and 4 (a C major triad: C-E-G), which will establish the necessary hand position, fingering and movement required to play each bar accurately.

**Once you have digested the patterns, make your quaver movement accurate by using your wrist flexibly and in a rotational motion.**

As discussed, the LH line consists almost entirely of quavers. These should be 100 per cent rhythmical as well as tonally even. Use a degree of wrist rotation to give the bottom notes (which often provide a countermelody) in each bar greater colour and timbre than the repeated top notes. For practising purposes only, play each quaver heavily, freeing and rotating your wrist between every note, and, as always, ensuring fingers play into the



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 masterclasses 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](http://www.melaniespanswick.com)

key bed (the use of finger tips will help). When you have worked thoroughly in this way and can play through producing a big sound without tiring, particularly on the weaker fingers (generally the fourth and fifth), then lighten the touch.

**Your aim is to play lightly throughout, skimming the keys.**

Playing lightly will enable you to attain a rhythmic and even LH (it also helps to count aloud). The thumb must be light at all times, allowing the bass parts to sing out (for instance, notes C, F, E and C in bar 1 should be illuminated with a sonorous tone). You are essentially balancing the sound using the same hand. Some parts of the LH line (at bar 10 and 11, for example), will need a little more practice, requiring lots of flexible motion, in order to reach notes comfortably while still providing accuracy and colour.

**The RH will benefit from a clear, deep cantabile (or 'a singing style') in keeping with the song character.**

It must effortlessly soar above the accompaniment. Rather as you did in your LH practice, work by playing all notes into the key bed, using plenty of wrist motion and added arm weight to produce a warm, rich sound. Learn fingering and note patterns, and then determine the depth of key needed to really sing. Taking the first phrase, as you play the first note (bar 1), listen to the sound at the end of the first crotchet beat (an E) as it dies away, before playing the next note and match that sound. Try with a slower speed at first, as this will help hone legato and sense of phrase structure.

**The part-playing and chordal patterns at bars 8, 11, 16 and 19 will need complete legato.**

Keep the top line to the forefront of the overall sound by turning the wrist and hand slightly away from the body (to the right), thereby

supporting the outer parts of the hand, especially the fourth and fifth fingers, giving them extra strength to produce the sonority. Small hairpin crescendo/decrescendo markings over various notes

**Learning Tip**

The RH melody must reign at all times, so balancing the sound judiciously between the hands will be the deciding factor in the success of any performance.

(i.e., bars 5, 6, and 7) are akin to tenuto ('held or slightly emphasised') marks. Experiment with sound here, 'leaning' a little on the first note of each phrase, ensuring a Romantic flavour. The odd accidental – at bars 5 and 6 in the LH, for example – needs this approach too, colouring each note with a deeper sound, adding expressivity.

**I've put a few pedal markings into the score (the sustained right pedal is required).**

These markings are the minimum needed for a convincing interpretation. However, it's possible to pedal on virtually every beat. To do this, practise taking your foot up and down very quickly between beats, certainly between every crotchet beat, and occasionally on quaver beats too (i.e., bar 8, beat 2, taking the C and C# into account). Listening is vital. If pedalling proves tricky (smudging can cause issues), you can get a beautiful legato by joining the fingers. This will produce the desired (although less resonant) effect without using too much pedal.

**Rubato ('borrowing' time) can be employed tastefully at the end of sections.**

Once example is the end of bar 8; another is right at the end of the piece. Producing complete legato throughout is the goal when practising this Romantic jewel. ■