



# PETER NICOLAI VON WILM

## *To begin with, No 1 from 24 Pieces for the Young*

If you want to expand your tonal palette and improve your rhythm, give this tuneful miniature a try. Teacher and author **Melanie Spanswick** has advice on what to look out for from the start

### Ability rating Beginner

#### Info

**Key:** C major  
**Tempo:** Moderato  
**Style:** Romantic

#### Will improve your

✓ Legato technique  
✓ Balance of sound  
✓ Tenuto technique

German composer Peter Nicolai von Wilm's *Little Piano Pieces or 24 Pieces for the Young* opus 81 was published in 1889. 'To begin with', which is

essentially a prelude, opens the cycle of 24 pieces. It is ideal for honing your legato technique and working on the balance of sound between the hands.

**Calm, serene and diatonic (C major), the romantic, tuneful yet simplistic melody, combined with short phrases and a rippling bass, is a joy to play.**

Those who are keen to widen their tonal palette will appreciate the opportunities this little work offers.

**You could infer many speeds from the Moderato tempo marking.** However, a metronome marking of crotchet equals 100, or possibly 104, feels about right and will bestow a sense of direction while capturing the flowing character effectively. Fingering will be crucial, particularly for the quaver movement in the left hand (LH), so it's a good idea to write it all in your music. My suggested fingerings are printed in the score.

**An interesting feature of this piece is its use of the top part of the keyboard.**

With the exception of the final bar, the entire piece is centred round the treble clef, so good sound projection and balance are vital. Practising separate hands from the outset will prove fruitful. Begin by working at small sections (perhaps two bars at a time), until you have assimilated the fingering and securely placed the notes.

**The LH line requires careful practice due to the constant quaver movement, with its Alberti bass feel.** Ensure this musical line is light yet supportive to the melody. At no point must the wrist or arm feel tired. Start by practising with a heavy, full tone, working very slowly with a rotating, free wrist motion (this is crucial!), rolling the wrist from side to side or in a circular pattern. Try to ensure the tone on the lower notes, for example, in bar 1, the E and D on beats 1 and 2,



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and then F and E, on beats 3 and 4, is heavier or richer in resonance than the constant Gs, which are all played offbeat with the thumb. In this type of passagework the thumb should ideally be substantially quieter and in the background. Once the rotational movement has been mastered and the wrist feels flexible, lighten the tone to reveal even, well-balanced quavers.

**The LH rhythm must be even and consistent, so accurate counting is essential.**

You may prefer to use a metronome, but in any case subdividing beats (such as counting every semiquaver), will significantly help you in creating a perfectly placed quaver beat. Develop the habit of counting aloud if possible – if you count out loud, accurate rhythmic placing always seems to follow!

**The melodic material in the right hand (RH) is the primary musical line.**

It must appear in the foreground in the overall balance of sound. Although the notes might seem easy to play, creating a warm cantabile (a singing tone) with copious tonal variation takes some effort. You'll need to employ the appropriate wrist and arm weight. In order to clarify where the most sound is needed, decide where each climax appears within every phrase, becoming either increasingly soft or loud and grading notes accordingly.

**Each RH note here calls for a deep tone – this isn't the time to be skating over the top of the keys!**

Work at using a free arm, a rotating, flexible wrist, as well as the fingertip, to delve deep into the key bed, thus producing a constantly warmer, meaty sound. The rotating motion can also really help with legato playing: for example, in the RH, as the first note C is played in bar 1, allow a circular motion in the wrist to help move to the second note B, and then

permit the second note to sound before completely coming off the first C. This is 'overlapping technique' and it is the best way to produce endless smooth, legato lines. Team this with a wide dynamic range as well for maximum effect.

### Learning Tip

Make sure the balance between the hands is always weighted towards the right hand (melody).

**Balance the chords judiciously at the end of the development section.** (This piece basically has an A-B-A form, with the development starting at bar 9.) The RH chords in bars 15 and 16 can be projected successfully if the top notes ring out above the lower ones. To do this, practise the top parts alone (that is, the A<sup>b</sup> and G in bar 15, and the C and B in bar 16), only adding the lower parts once you are happy with the gradation of sound and finger strength. The RH fourth and fifth finger in bar 16 will need a very balanced hand position. Being the end of a phrase, and containing a slur, a drop-lift motion will work well too. Apply these ideas to the LH at bars 22-23.

**Make a small tenuto on the unexpected accidentals in the brief key changes.**

There's an example of this in bar 12 (the C<sup>#</sup> and the G<sup>#</sup>), and you will benefit by creating a small tenuto on those notes (tenuto means 'hold') – hence, linger on the notes a bit longer. This will add colour and create a yearning emotion.

**Once legato and balance has been mastered, and all the notes are suitably 'joined', introduce a smattering of sustaining (or right) pedal.** You'll probably choose to do this just at cadential points or the ends of phrases. I have marked in suggestions on to the score. Pedal will add a rich vibrancy to this compelling little miniature. ■