



# HEINRICH HOFMANN

## *Melodie, No 5 from Skizzen op 77*

While this lovely Romantic piece is quite straightforward on the surface, you can take it to a higher level with excellent legato and cantabile. Teacher and author **Melanie Spanswick** shows you how

### Ability rating Beginner

#### Info

**Key:** C major

**Tempo:** Allegro Moderato

**Style:** Romantic

#### Will improve your

✓ Cantabile

✓ Phrasing

✓ Legato technique

**This tuneful, attractive little piece, in the key of C major, is convenient and comfortable to play.** *Melodie*

was written by German composer and pianist Heinrich Hofmann (1842-1902) and offers an excellent study in legato technique.

**A tempo marking of crotchet equals 116 beats per minute feels appropriate.** This tempo will help retain the musical line and flowing character.

Short phrases suffice throughout, providing a slightly breathless demeanour, which is borne out in the twisting and turning melody that is combined with a forward-moving, slightly chromatic accompaniment. Hofmann sets out his musical ideas with straightforward clarity. The piece's structure is A-B-A (or 'ternary form'), with a very short coda at the end.

**Use the sustaining pedal sparsely when you play this piece.** Although *Melodie* is of a Romantic character, it will not benefit from too much pedal, as this will cloud the left hand (LH) accompaniment and smudge the melody too. It's probably a good idea to use the pedal at cadential points or at the end of a phrase, such as at bars 8 and 12. The chords at the end will need careful pedalling (as marked), preferably with a slight overlap. Remember to keep your foot firmly on the pedal (when taking it up and down), rather than 'hitting' it from above, as 'extra' sound effects won't compliment the smooth, legato lines! (You'll see that I have added suggested fingering and pedal markings in the score.)

**There is a natural dynamic rise and fall within each phrase, as you might expect from such a Romantic piece.**

Once the tempo and underlying pulse feels secure, allow some flexibility to capture the nuances in the tops of phrases. For example at bar 3, the second beat, a G, might need a little time or slight rubato (rhythmic flexibility or a relaxation of strict time) going from the



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preceding F to the succeeding E, providing the appropriate expressive feel. Similarly, the cadence (or end of phrase) at bar 12 might require a mini hiatus, giving time to 'breathe' before repeating the phrase again at bars 13-16.

**The opening four bars are repeated at bar 5, with brief chromatic flavour in the last two bars (bars 7-8).** Aim to colour with a deeper, more sonorous, yearning tone, by voicing and placing the second and fourth beats of bar 7.

Hofmann enjoys springing chromatic twists; at bar 15 and 16 the music flirts with E minor, and at bar 22 and 23, a chromatic downward passage in the LH heralds the coda, adding an intrinsically spacious quality.

**A crucial technique to master for this piece is the control of finger legato.** Good legato will provide the specific colour and smooth touch required. Both hands can benefit from this technique. Work hands separately to begin with, practising the opening melody by searching for a warm timbre within the key bed. In the first bar, keep the thumb (beat 1) on the key right up until the last millisecond, then transfer weight from the thumb to the second or index finger with a small rolled motion on beat 2 (an A), only leaving the G as the A is being depressed. This will need quick movement, but will be easy to implement with attentive listening; it can also help to imagine your fingers are stuck to the keys with glue!

**The LH continuous quaver movement really demands a creamy, fluid touch.**

Each note must lead to the next with no gaps in the sound, and with little note accentuation. Tone should be carefully graded from one note to the next, with the exception of odd chromatic colour. Again, listening is the best way to achieve this, as well as practising with strong

fingers initially, lightening the touch when the patterns have been assimilated.

**Balance between hands is key to a successful performance.** The soft, fluent quaver movement in the LH must support and nurture a predominant

### Learning Tip

The acciaccatura in the melody can be played lightly, fluidly, and on the main beat for a completely legato line.

right-hand (RH) melody. Cantabile, a singing style, is required. To 'sing' on the piano, each note must emanate a beautiful rich tone, so aim to use your wrist flexibly, combined with arm weight (which plays an important role in tone production), encouraging fingers to play to the bottom of the key, cushioning the sound with the pad of your finger tip. This technique will encourage a resonant melodic line, and can be applied to the whole piece. Try to ensure total evenness when playing each phrase too, so notes in the tune lead logically and without jerkiness to and from climactic points.

**Observe Hofmann's markings in terms of dynamics and tempo changes.**

Bars 17 and 18 will require a ritenuendo (slowing down), allowing the phrase to ebb away softly, before resuming with the opening theme, A tempo (in time). The last three bars, 24-26, can be enhanced by a highlighted top line. Balance the RH with hand weight biased towards the fifth finger. Take each chord down, making sure all notes sound concurrently. Play the top line alone, with plenty of colour, adding the other parts only when you feel ready to balance the tone, using appropriate wrist motion and finger cushioning; each top note should 'ring out', bringing this work to an expressive close. ■