



CPE BACH

Solfeggietto in C minor

In this short but brilliant piece, your hands will be like skilled trapeze artists, gracefully handing off to each other. Finessing that transition is vital, says teacher and author **Melanie Spanswick**

Ability rating Intermediate

Info

Key: C minor
Tempo: Prestissimo
Style: Classical

Will improve your

- ✓ Articulation
- ✓ Finger strength
- ✓ Keyboard geography

The Solfeggietto in C minor is one of the most popular keyboard works by CPE Bach, the second son of the great JS Bach. Played stylishly, it's an extremely exciting, energetic little work. Crotchet (quarter note) equals 120 beats per minute would be a fine tempo to choose, but for the brave, a faster *prestissimo* pulse will guarantee a virtuoso, flamboyant rendition.

Throughout this piece, there's a constant use of alternating hands.

This creates a dramatic quality, making the piece akin to a 'perpetuum mobile' (a steady, unstopping stream of notes). When playing music with such continuous movement, careful preparation, especially slow practice, will help you obtain the best results.

Secure fingering is vital. Mark your fingering in the score before you start learning the piece, and be quite sure your fingering allows for quick hand changes and total rhythmic precision. You will see there are some fingerings written in to the score, but if these don't suit your hand, feel free to change them.

After you've chosen the fingering, you'll want to find comfortable and flexible hand positions. Good hand positions will encourage and enable quick movement, and will help legato playing (keeping the musical line), and equal tone production on every note. Rapid keyboard geography can only be successfully negotiated with a very free, relaxed body position. One you've looked carefully at the piece hands separately, then immediately combine the hands and learn section by section (it's very easy to sectionalise).

In the first four bars, passages wind their way around C minor, using snippets of both the arpeggio and scale. This requires a strong rhythmic pulse, so think about dividing each crotchet into four semiquaver (16th note) beats, ensuring every semiquaver has equal tone and note length.



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.

Find out more about Melanie at www.melaniespanswick.com

Rhythmic accuracy is challenging here, and instilling insistent pulse-keeping is the most effective tool to improve this. Try counting aloud, as well as using a metronome. Choose a very slow speed, setting the metronome to either quaver (quarter note) beats, or possibly semiquaver beats. As you start to assimilate the pulse, it will become firm, steady and immovable.

There is lots of twisting passagework that is passed between the hands.

Plenty of wrist motion will allow the fingers to flow freely with lots of arm weight behind them, hence producing a full, velvety tone. While the fingers must remain near the keys, the wrists can move rotationally, providing depth and colour, even on the weaker fingers. Try to make the interchange between hands imperceptible to the human ear. You can improve the evenness by practising with very firm, strong fingers, using every finger joint actively, playing deep into the keys. Practise with full force, then lighten the touch for real evenness. Don't forget to pick fingers up cleanly after every note.

New patterns arrive in bars 5-8. The patterns in bars 5-6 are essentially variations on arpeggios, and the hand splits (sometimes on the semiquavers in between crotchet beats) demand perfect articulation. Bringing excellent clarity and crispness to the copious semiquavers is a major challenge of this piece, and will determine how well you are able to bring it off.

Always use your ear – make listening paramount.

Focus your attention on the ends of notes as well as the beginnings. How you play the notes, i.e. aggressively or softly, will help to refine articulation. Try practising using different touches: staccato, semi-staccato, martellato (which means strongly accented). Follow this with lots of dotted rhythm practice; using many types of rhythmic patterns (triplets for example). These practice tools will also be beneficial at bars 7 and 8, where the left hand (LH) answers the right hand (RH), in what appears to be a musical conversation.

Bars 9-12 are a repeat of bars 1-4, only in G minor. Then the composer adds some new material: G minor

broken chords with LH octaves in bar 13, followed by a bar of LH crotchet sixths with wide RH oscillating interval patterns (almost like tremolos) in bar 14. The LH octaves in the bar 13 must not last a moment longer than a crotchet, and need a full rich sound to support the RH figurations. The same applies to the sixths (in the LH) in bar 14, which work well if played slightly detached. The RH patterns in bar 15 need a small hand rotation motion. Bars 15 and 16 repeat this new material but in C minor, giving rise to sequential movement and heightening expressive qualities here.

Learning Tip

Dividing this piece into sections will define the structure, create a thoughtful interpretation and can help with memorisation too.

Material from the opening bars, this time in F minor, returns in bars 17-21. There's an added bar of cascading broken chords at bar 22, which propels the work into a brief respite from all the continuous semiquaver movement. Bars 22-25 contain a built-in pause: semibreve (whole notes) single notes in the LH (with minim [half note] rests in the RH), with intermittent passagework in the RH. The mordent, which appears in the musical line at bar 25, must be light and played on the beat – and it should be played as D-E-D (or even D-C-D, even though there's no line through it). Bars 26 and 30 are the climax of the piece; change the sound using the fingers only (keeping the foot off the pedal – see my comment in the final paragraph about pedalling). Bars 31-34 are a repeat of the opening, taking a slightly different turn in the final bar, bringing the piece to an abrupt, yet declamatory conclusion.

Once you've thoroughly absorbed the piece, work at changing finger power rapidly (from light to heavy, or vice versa) between bars in order to achieve 'echoes'. Echo effects are a recurring feature (bars 14-17, for example) and they provide contours, contrast and musical definition. If you use the sustaining pedal, you must use it to add occasional texture to bass lines (such as in bar 13 and 15), but a deft foot is necessary! ■