



BEETHOVEN

Sonatina in G Anh 5 no 1, first movement

Work methodically on the gentle melody and find a steady pulse for the accompaniment to achieve a sense of Classical refinement, says author and teacher **Melanie Spanswick**

Ability rating Beginner/Intermediate

Info

Key: G major
Tempo: Moderato
Style: Classical

Will improve your

✓ Rhythm
✓ Articulation
✓ Phrasing

There is no proof that Beethoven wrote this charming little Sonatina. However, it was found among his papers after his death in 1827, and published under his name a few years later, together with a companion work in F major. Both sonatinas are comprised of two brief movements. This G major Allegro has all the hallmarks of the early Classical style: an Alberti bass, scalic passages, a sparse texture and a firm sense of key. While Moderato is the suggested tempo, the movement flows nicely at approximately crotchet equals 120 beats per minute.

The structure of the movement is a highly compressed sonata form. It consists almost entirely of four-bar phrases: exposition, development (from bar 9), recapitulation (bar 17) and a coda (bar 25). Beethoven is very economical with thematic material – from just one thematic strand (heard at the start) the whole movement emerges.

Begin by working hands separately.

The right hand (RH) melody requires careful fingering (I've marked some suggestions into the score) in order for notes to be placed judiciously, avoiding too many changes of hand position and oscillating fingers. For example, in bar 2 the second, third and fourth beats – a G major broken-chord figure – can be played effectively by keeping the hand in the tonic chord position. Start by playing the G major chord: top G with the fifth finger, D with the third finger, B with the second, and the bottom G with the thumb, as you would when playing a G major chord. Keep this chord position when negotiating the phrased duplets in bar 2, moving onto the third finger for the C at the beginning of bar 3. If you keep your fingers in position, and as near to the keys as possible, wrong notes and unnecessary extra movement can be eliminated.

Short phrase marks or slurs articulate the melody. The slurs in bars 2 and 7 indicate that the notes could be played with a 'drop-roll' articulation. Bar 7,



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for example, contains four slur markings over pairs of quavers. Drop the wrist as you go to play the initial G with the fifth finger, and as you join it to the D using a legato touch, roll the wrist upwards, leaving the G completely. There should be a slight gap between the D and next note (an E), which is the start of another note-pair. Use the same technique for the repetitions of this phrasing in the rest of the movement. Other short phrase-marks should be carefully noted, such as in the RH at bar 1 (beats 3 and 4) and bar 3 (beats 3 and 4).

The melody line includes several acciaccaturas. These grace notes involve playing the small note with a line through it very quickly, with the emphasis on the main note after it. In bar 1 (beat 3) the acciaccatura is a B, moving on to an A. Effective practice will involve slow work, playing the notes equally, and with an accent on both notes at first. Play heavily using the suggested fingering of 3 to 2 in bar 1, then lighten your fingerwork, and play the B quickly, almost leaning on the A afterwards. A light, fluent acciaccatura will contribute to an elegant, graceful melodic line.

Move on to the scalic passages in bars 10-15. These will benefit from clean, clear articulation. Several hand-position changes may need a flexible wrist movement (such as at bar 10, beats 1 and 2): practise finding the note patterns and fingering by isolating each passage.

The LH accompanies the melody with chords and Alberti bass patterns. The chords should be soft and lightly articulated. The repeated pattern of two minims and a crotchet (from bars 1-2 onwards) should be joined together, creating a seamless legato with no gaps in the sound. Listen carefully to balance your sound, and ensure that all notes in

the chord sound in unison, avoiding any unevenness in tone or attack. The sequences of single crotchets (such as the conclusion to the first phrase in bars 7-8) are best played non-legato. This will create a sense of Classical refinement.

Learning Tip

Use the sustaining pedal to sustain chords and to add resonance at the ends of phrases.

The Alberti bass patterns require a different practice technique. The first example is in bars 5-6. Start by playing all the notes in the bar together as a chord, in order to become familiar with the shape and fingerings. Once you feel comfortable with the shape of the chord, play it rhythmically as written, with a loose wrist and taking care to place each note. This pattern almost always requires a light top note (i.e. the thumb), and weightier lower notes. In bar 5 the G, B, G, D (lower notes) should be clearly audible, and the Ds and F naturals should be softer. The overall balance between the RH and LH in this style will generally be weighted towards the melody (RH), with an unobtrusive LH.

When working hands together, find a steady pulse and stick to it. In this early-Classical style, every note should be correctly placed, without rushing or lingering behind the beat. Try counting every quaver beat, at first out loud as you play, and then by using a metronome set on a quaver beat.

The melody should have a deeper, richer tone. This is especially true of the coda (bar 25 onwards), which should gain intensity towards the close. Allow the chords of the last three bars to spread out and drift into the distance, and hold the final semibreve for as long as you can. ■