



# STREABBOG

## *Distant Bells Op 63 No 6*

It's time to tackle hand crossing with this Romantic miniature.  
**Melanie Spanswick** advises a slow and steady approach

**Ability rating** Beginner/Intermediate

**Info**

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

**Will improve your**

- ✓ Crossing of hands
- ✓ Soft accompaniment
- ✓ Even tone

**What an odd name, you may be thinking to yourself.** That's because it was made up. Streabbog is the pseudonym used by the Belgian pianist Jean-Louis Gobbaerts when he published his own compositions such as the first set of *Twelve Easy and Melodious Pieces Op 63*.

**The best known of the set is No 6, 'Distant Bells'.** It is sympathetically written to enable early-intermediate players to get to grips with hand crossing and the technique of evenly played accompaniment as well as effective use of the sustaining pedal. The score may appear simple, but it offers plenty of technical challenges and interpretative possibilities.

**Choose a stately tempo, around 80 beats per minute.** 'Distant Bells' has a straightforward ABA structure with essentially diatonic harmony.

**The LH crosses over the RH throughout the piece.** Begin your practice by focusing on the movements necessary to execute the hand-crossing smoothly and with a controlled tone. Starting with the LH, work on the first line. Place your 5th finger on the C (first note, bar 1), and locate the minim C on beat 3 (two octaves higher), with the 2nd finger. You could also use a 3rd finger for the 'crossed' notes, but the index finger gives a more precise, deeper touch, and it should feel comfortable to play.

**Look more closely at each LH 'jump'.** A considerable movement is required during every bar (two octaves, in the case of bar 1), so become accustomed to the feeling of the leap by landing firmly using the suggested fingers, using a relaxed motion of the arm movement to go back and forth between bass and treble registers. To improve your confidence and accuracy, practise using much larger intervals than those written; for example, the lower note could be played an octave lower in each case. When you revert to the written notes, the movement should feel easier and less daunting. Try practising the leaps more quickly than marked. Now add a



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steady pulse, and ensure the 2nd finger lands firmly on the third beat of the bar. It's important to work at the jump back down from treble to bass, from the third beat of the bar to the first beat of the next.

**The 'Distant Bells' of the title can be heard in the third-beat minims.** These high notes should be played marcato ('well marked'). They require a deeper touch (like an accent but without a sharp attack), combined with articulation similar to that of staccato. Land on each marcato minim with a rich timbre, rolling off with an upward wrist motion as the finger leaves the key. They should be clearly identified, yet soft and distant-sounding.

**The RH accompaniment should stay soft, light and even throughout.** Begin by blocking the quavers in every bar as a chord (such as the C major triad of C, E and G in the first bar). Work through the piece assimilating the harmonic progressions in this way (it's useful for quickly finding your way around the note patterns).

**There are two suggested fingerings for the quaver patterns.** The first fingering will be more suitable for those whose 4th and 5th fingers are yet to develop full strength. The second option requires more balance and control but, if worked at regularly, is comfortable and convenient.

**Play heavily and deeply into the key bed, using the full strength of your fingers.** Your practice of this RH figuration should be deliberately paced, so that you place each note with rhythmic precision. Work your way through the part playing like this, more powerfully than is marked in the score, but keeping wrists and arms relaxed. Then lighten your touch: play softly and with legato, but make sure the G and E (bar 1), and all subsequent patterns, are balanced so that these two

top notes sound together. Couple this with a light thumb (or 2nd finger depending on your fingering choice), as this should be

### Learning Tip

One sustaining pedal change per bar works for the majority of the piece, accumulating resonance and intensity, but be sure to change swiftly on the first beat of the bar to avoid smudging!

the softest part of the texture. In effect, weight your hand towards the right, moving the wrist outwards, supporting the weaker 4th and 5th fingers.

**Then try playing with hands together.** Take it slowly until you can cope with the continual movement of the LH while maintaining an even rhythm and tone in the RH. To get used to the hand-crossing movement, play with a full sound and perfectly even rhythm (count in semiquavers for accuracy, as each quaver needs to be exactly in time). Once you have learnt the muscle memory and sound of each hand-crossing movement, you will feel confident and relaxed. At that stage lighten your touch to produce soft and ethereal tonal colours.

**Don't forget that the LH is the star of the show.** The RH quavers should stay in the background, with the low LH crotchet (mostly on the first beat of the bar), slightly more prominent, making way for the minim on the third beat. The middle section (bars 9-16) moves into G major, and needs a gradual crescendo as it progresses towards the chromatic RH figuration at bar 15. Each RH G at bar 16 should be softer than the last. You may like to add the *una corda* (left pedal) during the closing bars. ■