



IGNAZ MOSCHELES

Scherzo Op 55 No 3

A lively little piece by a friend of Beethoven requires nimble fingerwork: follow the advice of **Melanie Spanswick** and you'll get up to speed

Ability rating Beginner/Intermediate

Info

Key: A minor

Tempo: Allegro

Style: Early Romantic

Will improve your

✓ Chordal balance

✓ Articulation

✓ Quick finger movement

Born in Prague in 1794, Moscheles is best known as a young admirer of Beethoven in Vienna. He became a formidable performer, a friend of Clementi and a teacher of the teenage Mendelssohn in Berlin. He wrote a great deal of teaching material such as nine pieces in a *Bonbonnière musicale* (Musical Sweetmeats) box, of which this elegant little Scherzo is the third movement.

At around crotchet = 176, this Scherzo fairly zips along. It requires nimble fingerwork around the keyboard, but don't be put off by the pace of the notes on the page: they are written in straightforward patterns. In fact these patterns can become repetitive if not coloured imaginatively and played with rhythmic poise.

Let's focus first on the LH. This largely consists of dotted minim chords. The tonic chord of A minor features heavily, often moving to the dominant. When playing these triads, follow the fingering carefully (or add your own in the score), and keep your fingers close to the keys. A relaxed wrist will help you to balance chords so that all three notes sound at the same time.

Look at the first chord in bar 2. Using the fingering 1, 2 and 4 (or 1, 3 and 5, but I find it easier to control the sound and speed with a 4th finger) play each note separately, using the tips of your fingers, and taking the key down into the key bed to produce a full sound. Now play the C and A together, locating the point in the key bed where the notes actually sound. This may take practice and patience but you will learn how to make them sound at exactly the same time.

Next, play all three notes together. Take the E, C and A up and down repeatedly, without your fingers leaving the keys. To improve the sensitivity of your touch, and become accustomed to the weight required for different dynamics, experiment with these chords by playing them from *fortissimo* to *pianissimo*. The hand may need to be slightly



Melanie Spanswick is a pianist, author and music educator. She selected the repertoire for *The Faber Music Piano Anthology*, and is the author of a new two-book piano course, *Play It Again: PIANO* (Schott Music) intended for those returning to piano playing after a break. Her popular guidebook, *So You Want To Play The Piano?*, is reprinted in a second edition by Alfred Music. Melanie has recently adjudicated and given workshops in the USA and the Far East, and runs a bilingual piano project in Germany. She is a tutor at Jackdaws Music Education Trust and curator of the Classical Conversations series on YouTube, where she interviews pianists on camera. www.melaniespanswick.com

weighted to the left (with the wrist moving to the left) to support the 4th finger, balancing it with thumb and 2nd finger. Listen to the balance of tone as you play. Once you've mastered playing the chord together, you could use the flatter part of the fingers for a softer, more muted sound. The chords should still sound together, but they will be lighter and therefore make a more sensitive accompaniment to the RH.

Aim to join chords wherever possible.

The first three chords (bars 2-4) are identical: keep the keys held down until the last moment, repeating them swiftly and softly, barely lifting the chord at the end of the bar, without moving the fingers. However, the wrist and arm should remain loose, light and relaxed.

The RH plays the melody line throughout.

Again, keep the fingers as close to the keys as possible. That way you give your fingers a better chance of learning the pattern of the notes, and your playing will be more accurate.

The first phrase uses a repeated motif.

You could use a fingering of 2-3-2-5-2 (E-F-E-A-E in bars 2-4) but I find 1-2-1-4-1 more convenient. Changing fingers on the last beat of the first bar from a 2 to a thumb should facilitate a light staccato articulation for this motif. Then play all the notes in bar 2 together (the term for this is 'blocking out') in order to find the appropriate hand and finger shape and position. When playing the motif as written, move the hand and wrist slightly to the right as you approach and sound the A. Your playing will be more even and more clearly articulated. One issue that arises when using weaker fingers is a tendency to rush and not 'sound' notes fully. To counter this, support your hand and wrist with suitable arm movements, so that there is as much

strength and energy behind your weaker fingers as your stronger ones.

Take note of all the phrase marks.

Shaping the music in short phrases, such as bars 2-4, will bring fluency to your playing. Articulation marks at the ends of bars 10 and 11 (and elsewhere) encourage you to find a tiny breathing space before the following bar, without losing the pulse.

Learning Tip

A firm pulse is crucial: count purposefully when practising, perhaps in semiquavers at a slow speed, accounting for every note.

At bars 21 and 46 there are longer slurs in the RH.

These phrases may need further reinforcement from the arm, hand and wrist. Even the 5th finger should be *forte* here with a full, warm tone. There is a major-key interlude at bars 33-40. Spend time over the accidentals in bars 34 and 36, positioning your hands and fingers over the keys so that you can play them as evenly as possible. Establish a connection with each key as you strike it, taking note of your fingertips for the ideal position and grip so that you don't fall off black notes when playing at speed.

When you play hands together, you will look to increase your practice speed gradually.

Move your hands quickly into position before playing: at bar 4, for example, move the fingers in preparation for bar 5, so you can focus on producing a warm timbre. The passagework in both the RH and LH can be practised with a deep, heavy touch for clarity, then when you play at full speed, lighten that touch in order to find an even, delicate tonal quality which is best suited to this lively scherzo. ■