



CLEMENTI

Sonatina in C op 36 no 1, first movement

An object lesson in the Classical style, this sparkling piece needs clever lateral wrist movements, solid rhythmic and judicious hands-separate practice, as teacher and author **Melanie Spanswick** explains

Ability rating Beginner/Intermediate

Info

Key: C major
Tempo: Spiritoso
Style: Classical

Will improve your

✓ Rhythm
✓ Articulation
✓ Wrist flexibility

Muzio Clementi's Six Sonatinas opus 36 are a good introduction to the quintessential elements of the Classical style for the beginner to intermediate player. This first sonatina in the set is in C major, and it falls comfortably under the fingers yet contains ample opportunity to develop finger strength and a variety of touches.

I advise a metronome mark of crotchet equals 138. While this tempo is quick, it catches the 'Spiritoso' character and will give the music a chance to breathe. It will also provide you with the necessary time to move around the keyboard.

Begin your study by practising hands separately, left hand (LH) first. Once the LH is thoroughly grasped, it will provide a bedrock of support to the main event – the right hand (RH)! The LH has two functions in this piece: to play completely rhythmically, and to enhance the melodic material with a soft yet distinctive accompaniment.

Ensure rests are always observed precisely, particularly in passages like the first four bars. The crotchet beats will be more effective if you play them non-legato, that is, you come off each note fairly quickly, leaving a small break (or gap in the sound) between one note and the next. This applies to all crotchet beats, particularly those in passages such as those at bars 6-8.

Alberti bass patterns play a small but significant role in this piece. (Alberti bass patterns are chords that are broken up and played as a separate note pattern; such figuration is generally used as an accompanimental figure.) These patterns appear in the LH at bars 9, 11, 32 and 34, and require slow work. Try playing all the notes in a bar together (as a chord). Then, when you separate the notes, they will seem easier to locate because you'll be more aware of their shape and position. When practising the Alberti bass patterns on their own, play into the key bed to begin with (play deeply into the keys



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using your fingertips), and give a slight accent on the first quaver of each beat. In bar 9, for example, the F#s and As require more sound, but the thumb (a D) can be played lightly. A rotational wrist motion will ensure optimum rhythmic precision. Unless stated otherwise, quavers should be played legato, and passages that 'join' sections (such as those on beats 3 and 4 of bars 4 and 23) must not feel rushed or rhythmically unstable.

At bars 16-19, hold the LH semibreve and minim beats right to the end of the bar. (Hold to the stipulated beat in bars 18-19.) Giving these beats their full value gives the melody continuous accompaniment and reinforcement. Use a slight rotational wrist motion to colour the upper notes in the crotchet pattern at bars 20-22 (i.e. the F, D, E^b, C and B^b). This is the only time the LH has any melodic interest, so make the most of it!

For ease of learning, block out the RH in the opening two bars. To achieve an even sound throughout this pattern, encourage your wrist to move laterally as the second finger plays the first note of the bar (C), rotating onto the second note (an E) with the fourth finger. If aided by support from the whole hand and wrist, a full sound will be produced. The third and fourth beats of many bars (in the RH) are staccato; again, use the hand to support fingers and leave the detached notes cleanly and lightly, as this confirms the work's elegant, graceful character.

Quavers abound in the RH. They must be perfectly articulated and extremely even. Start by playing them heavily and deeply into the key bed. Play on the tips of your fingers, picking them up cleanly after playing every note (listening to the ends of notes is a useful exercise). Doing this strengthens fingers, and, if combined with accurate rhythmic counting, will benefit overall finger technique.

Turning and rotating the hand will help in running passages such as the one at bar 7. Check your fingering and then allow the hand to turn over the thumb onto the fourth finger (beats 1 and 2) flexibly, with a rotating motion. When playing this pattern slowly, use a large movement and loose wrist to aid freedom and relaxation. Then, when you play up to speed, the movement should be smaller but still present. This will help you secure even, legato quavers.

Learning Tip

Dabs of sustaining pedal (as suggested in the score) will highlight the melodic material.

Note the quaver movement in the RH at bars 12 and 35 in which an arpeggio pattern is prominent. Here again your playing will be aided by lateral wrist movement, in which the hand and wrist moves from the left to the right (away from the body) supporting the weaker fingers (fourth and fifth). At bars 20-21, a tremolo type figure prevails in octave quavers. To play this evenly, make sure the fifth finger stands on its tip and is working fully (i.e. no collapsing joints). Together with the thumb, this fifth finger should form a bridge in the hand, so that the only motion needed is a quick rotation made by the hand and wrist. Work at this slowly until it is comfortable.

Rhythm is crucial. Once you have assimilated all notes, movements and fingerings, work hands together, placing each note carefully with an inner pulse or sitting on the metronome's beat. After you've practised playing heavily, return to a lighter touch that will reveal clean, clear and perfectly articulated fingerwork. Don't rush, especially in the rapid passagework. Clarity and rhythmic perfection are the keys to understanding the Classical style. ■