



DIABELLI

Scherzo from Sonata Op 151 No 1 in G

Face up to hand-crossing in this bright and breezy Classical scherzo
with the help of **Melanie Spanswick**

Ability rating Beginner/Intermediate

Info

Key: G major
Tempo: Allegro
Style: Classical

Will improve your

- ✓ Articulation
- ✓ Sense of rhythm
- ✓ Hand-crossing

This charming little Scherzo is full of joie de vivre and élan. Although the tempo marking of *Allegro* suggests a fairly brisk pace, the piece could be played effectively at either a slower or faster pace. A pulse of dotted crotchet equals 82-104 should both feel comfortable and allow you to bring out the playful character of the piece. It is written in a binary A-B form. Both sections are repeated before a short coda. The texture is melody and accompaniment throughout: Anton Diabelli was not only the commercially astute publisher who sent out his little waltz to countless composers, inspiring Beethoven's famous variation set, but also a composer in his own right, who knew how to write music that lies well under the fingers of student pianists.

Let's begin by focusing on the LH.

Bars 1-14 feature an Alberti bass (a broken chord or arpeggiated accompaniment built from triads), and this can be learned easily by playing each half-bar as a chord. 'Blocking out' in this way speeds up the learning process, through easy assimilation of the fingering, hand positions and note patterns. Once you have done this, play every 'chord' as written with a relaxed wrist and a slight lateral wrist motion, separating each note, moving the wrist from left to right on each group of three quavers. Avoid tension in the wrist and hand (a danger with repeated patterns) by releasing the muscles swiftly after each dotted crotchet beat.

When practising the LH quavers, use a relatively heavy touch. Ensure that all the notes sound even, both rhythmically and tonally; they should be played lightly, with just a hint of a 'push' or *tenuto* on the first note of each group. Rhythmic evenness can be secured by counting every single note, preferably out loud, and usually with a sub-division of the beat (in this case, semiquavers), or by using a metronome set to a quaver beat. This practice method can also be applied to the repeated chords in bars 17-29. These should be short and detached, and lighter than the melody line.



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

Let's turn our attention to the RH.

The opening phrase is sprightly and energetic, requiring careful articulation. Observing the rests is vital. The 'wedge' marks over the C and E in bar 1 denote staccato markings. Crisp playing is key in this Classical style, but don't short-change the crotchets; give them their full value. The RH acciaccaturas should be short and snappy, with the D sounding on the beat. Both notes in the acciaccatura must clearly 'sound' in order to convey the jaunty character. Practise them slowly at first, giving a distinct emphasis to the short note. Then reverse this technique, and accent the C on the main beat, playing the D softly. When played lightly and at speed, both the D and C should be elegantly enunciated and clearly articulated, but with more emphasis on the main note.

Crossing hands is the principal technical feature of the RH. As with any jumps or leaps, there are several methods of practice. After deciding which fingering suits you, slowly gauge the distance between the top and bottom notes of the leap – from the E in bar 1, beat 2, for example, to the C in bar 2, beat 1. When working at each leap, practise moving the distance extremely quickly (much quicker than necessary), using a light arm movement, skimming across the keyboard, landing on the C but without playing it. Now practise with an even larger interval, at an octave lower than written: a C two octaves below middle C, in this case. When you return to playing the written notes, slow the jump down to the suggested tempo. After the leap, depress the key heavily in order to play the marked *sforzando* accent. The leaps should be secure with hands separately, to the point where they can be played accurately: try to play them without looking at your hands.

Now the hand-crossing leaps are ready to be combined with the LH accompaniment. Let's practise hand crossing using both hands. Keep the LH Alberti bass and rapid chords light but very rhythmical; they should give the sturdy backdrop to the RH's flourishes. Playing the LH triplets as block chords should help to orient the RH leaps;

Learning Tip

Use the sustaining pedal to colour chords without obscuring the melodic passagework in the RH.

so will slow and painstaking repetitions, in which you carefully assimilate each hand position change, one by one. It may be useful to apply the same techniques as you used when practising the RH alone: moving quickly (over the LH), using larger leaps than written and accenting the lower notes. Work at both intervals upwards and downwards, and isolate these passages for separate practice wherever they occur.

Work at each four-bar phrase, one at a time. Once their challenges have been ironed out and the piece is under your fingers, play it through complete at a third of the recommended tempo, paying particular attention to each leap. When you are happy with the results, begin to raise the tempo. Don't forget to bring dynamic colour to your performance! The LH is generally soft throughout, but the RH should soar, quickly moving from *piano* to *forte*. The coda (bar 25 to the end) requires a full tone and a slight deceleration over the final two bars; place the last chord with a rich, powerful sound and a decisive touch. ■