



# ANTON REICHA

## Etude Op 97 No 1a

With its unusual 34-bar melody, this meditative study rewards a sustained cantabile approach, as **Melanie Spanswick** explains

**Ability rating** Early Intermediate

**Info**

**Key:** E minor

**Tempo:** Poco andante

**Style:** Classical

**Will improve your**

✓ Rhythmic precision

✓ Chordal balance

✓ Legato and cantabile

**This beautiful miniature belongs to a set of 12 *Etudes dans le genre fugué*.**

They were written by a contemporary of Beethoven, Anton Reicha. The opening study requires a smooth touch accompanied by well-balanced chords. The tempo of dotted crotchet equals 26 beats per minute allows time to place the repetitive rhythmic patterns which are present in almost every bar.

**Let's begin by assimilating the rhythmic pattern in the melody.**

The demisemiquaver beat should act as an upbeat to the next bar; don't rush it. Tap the rhythm on the lid of the piano while counting in demisemiquavers. You will be counting 12 demisemiquavers per bar; ensure the final demisemiquaver of each bar is perfectly placed. Once you have found a steady beat, reduce the counts to semiquaver beats, then add the other hand; this is a good way to understand the rhythmic structure and pulse.

**The RH contains the melody in bars 1-34, then it passes to the LH.**

The thematic material is frequently formed of a triad: bars 1-3 and bars 9-11, for example. Try practising each four-bar phrase by locating the note-patterns in this way. In the early stage of your practice, play the final note of each bar with the first beat of the following one: for example the G at the end of bar 1 with the B at the start of bar 2 – and don't forget to use the correct fingering. Working out such finger movements in advance, especially in quick rhythmic patterns, assists swift note-learning.

**Finger substitution plays a crucial role here.**

It will help you to create a smooth musical line. The slow tempo affords plenty of time to change fingers on a note. In bar 8, for example, I have suggested the third finger for the dotted crotchet B. After playing the



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note with the third finger, keep the key depressed and manoeuvre the thumb into its place, transferring the weight from your third finger to the thumb (without sounding the note again). By the end of the bar, the thumb will be holding down the B, keeping the sound alive, and the second finger should be poised ready to play the subsequent D in bar 9. Changing fingers in this way is necessary throughout the study if you are to play with a smoothly sustained cantabile.

**Both in RH and LH, the tune should always be clear.**

It should have a slightly deeper sonority than the accompaniment, without being strident or bold. Imagine a singer gently humming the theme. You're looking to make a firm connection with each key, and use your arm-weight to project the sound of each tied note at the start of the bar: for example, the quaver E which is tied to a double-dotted quaver in bar 1. Play into the key bed with the third finger in order to sustain the tone throughout the duration of the note, and then match the decaying sound to that of the subsequent demisemiquaver at the end of the bar (G in bar 1). Giving weight and colour to the demisemiquavers will generate momentum and direction in your playing of the study.

**Dynamic mapping is useful in such a piece.**

Decide where the climactic points occur within each phrase, and then you will know where to place the most tonal colour. Now look at the overall dynamic flow; where does the piece reach its peak? I have marked bars 29-33 as the musical climax (with a *mezzo-forte* marking). This means that the music up to this point

gradually becomes more intense, increasing in volume, and after this point, it will slowly die away to *pianissimo* at the end.

### Learning Tip

Keep rubato to a minimum; the repetitive pattern and structure demands a constant pulse and momentum.

**The chordal accompaniment should be carefully placed and voiced.**

All the notes in each chord should be played at the same time and balanced in order to complement the melody line. Your task is made easier by the fact that each bar has the same two chords. Move swiftly from bar to bar to absorb the note-pattern changes from chord to chord, learning note positions and fingerings as you go.

**For LH chords, weight your hand slightly to the left.** This will lend strength to your weaker fourth and fifth fingers when balancing the chords and playing all the notes within each chord at exactly the same time. Keep the chords soft and light, with a slight movement towards the second chord in every bar. There should be no gaps in the sound; grade and match every chord for a sustained legato effect.

**Discreet use of the sustaining pedal will lend resonance and colour to your playing.**

I've marked in some suitable places. Observe the pause in the penultimate bar, before softly sounding the last chord, complete with a richer timbre on the top E in the RH, bringing this atmospheric work to a close. ■