



KÖHLER

No 27 from The Easiest Exercises Op 190

Balance between RH melody and LH accompaniment is tested by this Romantic miniature:
Melanie Spanswick says that easy shouldn't mean careless

Ability rating Elementary

Info

Key: F major
Tempo: Allegro
Style: Romantic

Will improve your

- ✓ Balance between the hands
- ✓ Sense of phrasing
- ✓ Pedalling control

Like every good elementary exercise, this one has a particular point. It is

written so as to establish and refine dynamic contrasts between LH and RH parts. The tempo marking of a dotted minim equals 66 beats per minute is fairly swift. Let's begin by practising the scale, arpeggio and broken chord of F major; this can be a helpful method of consolidating fingerings, especially those required for the LH. Remember, the key of F major requires a single accidental (black note): keep the B \flat firmly in mind at all times!

The LH consists entirely of an accompanimental figure. It's similar to an Alberti bass, built from passage-work of rolling broken chords. To fix the note patterns in your mind and under your fingers, play through every bar as a chord, sounding all three notes together: a technique known as 'blocking out'. This is a quick and uncomplicated way to assimilate notes, fingerings and hand-position changes. Once you can do this slowly but accurately, increase the speed: this will augment note security and highlight any awkward hand-position changes.

Each bar in the LH has a short slur over it. These require a smooth, legato touch at the keyboard. Practise in short sections of four or eight bars at a time, using a heavy or deep finger touch (try playing on the tips of your fingers), ensuring that you transfer the weight evenly from one finger to the next.

The next stage is to work on overlapping finger legato in the bass. Keep the F in bar 1 depressed until a fraction of a second after the A has been played, making a fluid transition from note to note. Even when using the sustaining pedal, the best legato is achieved through your fingers. You can begin your practice using a fairly heavy



Melanie Spanswick is a pianist, author, teacher and composer. She selected the repertoire for *The Faber Music Piano Anthology*, and is author of *Play It Again: PIANO* (Schott Music), a course for those returning to playing. Melanie gives workshops in Germany, the USA and the Far East; she is a tutor at Jackdaws Music Education Trust, Finchcocks Music and Piano Week, and is now a Schott composer with a new collection of intermediate piano pieces entitled *No Words Necessary*. www.melaniespanswick.com

touch, but once you lighten it you should find yourself gliding from note to note with a light, soft and even touch.

A lighter touch will shape the accompaniment dynamically.

It should be soft throughout, briefly warmed by *mezzo-forte* (in bars 13 and 29). A musical approach to bars 15-16 and bar 24 will shape the downward LH note patterns which cadence into the following phrases. Try playing them with a calm diminuendo, placing the last note of the bar (in bars 16 and 24) with a slight hiatus on the barline.

The RH plays the melody. Like the LH part, it requires a smooth, legato finger-weight transfer from note to note. But the melodic line also requires a *cantabile* touch in order to project the sound above the LH. As before, begin your practice with a deep touch, playing every note into the key bed; put the weight of your hand and arm behind each note, via a flexible wrist action, for a rich sonority. The weaker fourth and fifth fingers in particular will be strengthened by additional arm weight. The C in bar 3 is marked with an accent and therefore needs a stronger tone; try moving the wrist and hand a little to the right, supporting the finger as it prepares to play the note. Watch your fifth finger as it depresses the key, ensuring you employ the fingertip for added strength and control.

Now return to the first phrase, but lighten your touch significantly.

Play softly but still using a firm tone. *Cantabile* is dependent on a rich timbre which results from developing a strong finger/key connection. Try to keep your fingers near the keys at all times, or

hovering over them, and use the finger-pad to cushion the sound instead of the tip, with the wrist and arm supplying the weight behind each note.

Learning Tip

Keep hold of a firm pulse, with just a subtle *ritenuto* at the ends of phrases.

Each phrase should rise and then fall away. Aim for the C in bar 3 before dying away to the A in bar 7. Likewise bars 9-15 reach a natural climax on the accented F in bar 13, before easing off on the B \flat and C.

Now you're ready to practise with hands together. Start by playing both parts at equal volume, and then gradually lighten the LH accompaniment so that it doesn't obscure the melody: try singing each phrase so that you establish a natural, flowing *cantabile* in your playing. You can make something of the chromatic touches in the study, such as the LH F \sharp in bar 19, by discreetly placing the accidentals with a fraction of space.

The sustaining pedal could be used in every bar. I have suggested lifting and depressing the pedal again after the first beat almost throughout. In bar 2 (and all similar patterns), lift the pedal on the third beat and depress it again on the first beat of the next bar so that you don't smudge the melody. You may also wish to lift the pedal on every beat of bar 30 for the sake of clarity. The *una corda* pedal would be an effective addition for a distant, muted tone in the last two or three bars of the study. ■