

HOW TO PLAY

ABILITY RATING LATE ELEMENTARY

ALBERT BIEHL FOR YOUR BIRTHDAY

A lively little piece by a relatively unknown German requires nimble fingerwork: it's all about the accent, though, says **Melanie Spanswick**

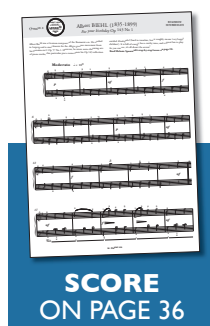
Key: C major **Tempo:** Moderato **Style:** Romantic
Will improve your: ✓ Articulation ✓ Pedalling ✓ Dynamic contrasts



Albert Biehl (1835-1899) wrote a substantial amount of piano music. This charming piece, from his Op 143 collection called *Kinderjubil* (literally meaning 'very happy children'), has a distinct dance-like character. In ternary form and set in C major, it moves along nicely at 160 crotchet beats per minute, and requires deft fingerwork to clearly enunciate the staccato and accent markings which prevail throughout.

Let's focus on the LH first. The bass has a straightforward role; it simply accompanies the RH melody. As the first section is repeated entirely (bars 33-48 are the same as bars 1-16), once the first 16 bars are under your fingers, you've already learnt much of the piece! Ensure you are satisfied with the fingering; I have made some suggestions in the score. Start by 'blocking out' each bar – that is, play beats 1, 2 and 3 together at the same time as one chord – as this will provide an overview of hand-position changes. The aim is to move through the piece swiftly, playing every bar as a chord.

Watch out for hand-position changes, e.g. at bars 5-6. Here, the first beat of bar 6 moves down to G from the previous A and F in bar 5. Encourage your arm to move quickly and lightly across the keys, landing firmly on the G. With large jumps, practise moving further than necessary; so try moving to the G an octave



lower than what's written. When returning to the original, the jump will feel more manageable.

The RH is characterised by its articulation markings. As always, learn fingering and note patterns first before attempting to add the articulation. Notes marked with staccato would benefit from a brief but firm touch. Aim to use the fingertip and a 'scratching' or quick inward movement from the first finger joint, the one nearest the fingertip (so creating finger staccato). This motion helps to give a crisper articulation and it also keeps the finger close to the key; the finger doesn't really need to lift off the note as it is merely swiftly moving inwards. Such a motion minimises unnecessary movement and, as a result, any note errors. It's a good idea to keep the hand and wrist relaxed when using finger staccato.

Accents add colour. Occurring on the second beat of the bar, they punctuate short phrases. The first two accents (bars 2 and 4) need a deeper touch from the thumb. Try to employ a small rotational wrist motion as you strike the note with your thumb. This will 'cushion' the key, avoiding a harsh tone. When negotiating the accented notes at bars 6 and 8, ensure the fifth finger uses its tip, and encourage the arm, hand and wrist to turn a little to the right in order to support this finger, providing weight and stability as it drops into the key.

A small but distinct 'placing' of the accented note will add more nuance and character.

LEARNING TIP

The LH must be smooth and light in contrast to the RH's bright and often spikey, but jovial, tune.

Keep in mind the key change to G major between bars 17-32. This section is to be played mostly legato. Now play the LH as it's written, and add a deeper touch on the first beat of the bar, while the second and third beats are lighter. This offers a dance-like lilt. Bars 19-20 and 27-28 are full of *joie de vivre*. Notice the patterns using the interval of a seventh at the beginning of the bar (the two quavers). Colour this interval with a rich sonority before lightly sounding the staccato crotchets.

Practise hands together only when secure separately. The sustaining pedal affords a rich resonance if used judiciously in the middle section. It can be depressed for the whole bar, but try to avoid smudging when harmonies change.

The meticulously-notated dynamic markings are there for a reason. The rapid changes demand plenty of attention and foresight. Try to address dynamic changes at least a beat before they occur, so there is ample time to 'prepare' the required movements needed for a lighter or deeper touch. ■