

# HOW TO PLAY

ABILITY RATING LATE BEGINNER

## BERENS STUDIES FOR CHILDREN OP 79 NO 4

**Melanie Spanswick** shows you how to bring balance, fine legato and a good tone to this elegant German Romantic study

**Key:** C major **Tempo:** Allegretto **Style:** Romantic  
**Will improve your:** ✓ Clarity ✓ Agility ✓ Legato



Agility of the LH is the focus in this study by German composer Hermann Berens. A smooth legato touch in the RH is also necessary, though, so a fine balance between the techniques needed in both hands is crucial. The piece moves along nicely at the suggested tempo marking of a crotchet equals 112 beats per minute. Set in Ternary form (A-B-A), it features neat four-bar phrases.

**Let's practise the LH part.** Bars 1-16 follow a similar pattern with a triplet quaver accompaniment figure. Aim to 'block out' these figurations – play each note within the triplet altogether at the same time, forming a chord. There should ideally be four separate chords for every bar. Play through the first 16 bars slowly, assimilating the chord shapes and position changes. It may be easier to work with four bars at a time.

**When practising the LH, use a slow tempo and a deep touch.** Practise the triplets attentively, playing into the key bed, assisting the development of firmer fingers. When speed is added, lighten the touch and the figurations should feel easier, with fingers running smoothly over the keys. The fourth finger, placed on the first note of the triplet figuration (for example, bars 4-7), may not be an obvious choice. However, it can promote easy movement, particularly when followed by use of the fifth finger, as at bar 6.

**Try to shape the triplet figures.** Adding a firmer touch to the first note of each crotchet triplet helps. The following two notes can be lighter – this is especially true of the thumb, which must remain light throughout the first 16 bars. The addition of a slight rotational wrist motion between each triplet beat will help release any tension. It will also help in attaining a steady pulse.

**From bar 17 to 24, the LH part follows a different pattern.** 'Blocking out' would also be effective here, but when practising as written, keep the figurations smooth and even. A small emphasis on the note played by the thumb would work well – that is, beats two and four of every bar. For example, with the first two beats of bar 17, aim to crescendo up to the G, and then die away afterwards.

**The RH part often contains two- or three-note chords.** The melodic material tends to appear in the top note of the chords. A *cantabile* touch on these melody notes will allow the tune to 'ring' out. Practise by playing the top notes of each chord-pattern only, using the correct fingering. For example, in bars 5-8 play the following notes with the fingerings marked on the score: G, G (bar 5), A, A (bar 6), B, C (bar 7), A, G, G (bar 8). Give every note a rich sonority, using arm weight coupled with a relaxed wrist and hand.

**Now play the whole passage as written.** Move from chord to chord with absolute legato – meaning no gaps in the sound – and try to voice and colour the top line. In order to obtain a highlighted melody, move the wrist and hand slightly to the right, supporting the fourth and fifth fingers as they sound the notes at the top of each chord.

### LEARNING TIP

Practise without the sustaining pedal until fluent and smooth.

**Let's practise hands together.** When playing the note patterns as written, practise the RH with a very firm touch. Keep the LH extremely light and soft, almost as though 'brushing' or skimming the keys. Now reverse this, with a lighter RH touch and much heavier LH. This type of practice can help to control the necessary balance between hands, and attune listening skills. When returning to the score as written, ensure the LH line is always softer, merely supporting the RH part.

**Chromatic notes would benefit from some nuance.** Those at bar 15 (F# and Eb in the LH, beat 1) and bar 22 (C# in the RH, beat 1) might be effective with a little rubato at the end of each four-bar phrase. ■

See what Melanie Spanswick is up to at [www.melaniespanswick.com](http://www.melaniespanswick.com).

