

# HOW TO PLAY

ABILITY RATING LATE BEGINNER

## MAYKAPAR 24 MINIATURES OP 33 NO 7

How musical can a melody comprising dotted semibreves be? That's the basic interpretive challenge for this hauntingly effective piece, says **Melanie Spanswick**

**Key:** A major **Tempo:** Andante, molto sostenuto **Style:** Romantic  
**Will improve your:** ✓Ability to sustain a melody ✓Staccato ✓Chord voicing

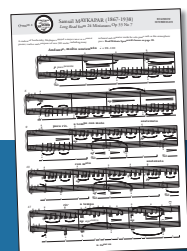


This evocative piece is called *Long Road*. Written by Russian Romantic composer Samuil Maykapar, it is the seventh piece from his set of 24 Miniatures and it exudes a dark character. The suggested tempo moves the music along calmly without feeling rushed. Astute phrasing and balanced chords are the key technical challenges.

**Let's start with the LH.** Look at the time signature of 6/4 and see how, within each bar, Maykapar is specific regarding phrasing. Between bars 1 to 9, the staccato accompaniment chords are phrased in dotted minims. To achieve the necessary staccato articulation, start out by practising each bar in isolation. Block out the two-note chords – that is, play one chord per bar – in order to learn the note patterns and fingerings swiftly.

**Balancing each chord is vital.** In bar 1, practise depressing the A and E at exactly the same time. A slower depression with less 'attack' will produce a softer sound. More weight may be required behind the fifth finger (or fourth, if you prefer), as it is generally not as firm as the thumb – we need to hear that bottom note. To achieve this, move the wrist and hand to the left, so that they guide the finger as it sounds the lower note.

**Every two-note chord should now feel balanced.** Try to keep fingers in contact with the keys



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at all times; it will be easier to produce smooth chords with no gaps in the sound between them. Listen carefully in order to ensure each chord matches the sonority of the last. Go through the first nine bars, playing each bar smoothly, changing chords with ease.

**Now try with a staccato touch.** As every chord is sounded, lift the fingers off the keys slowly and gently, offering a minuscule 'gap' between chords. Whilst staccato is marked, it will need to be a soft and sustained articulation in order to comply with the *sostenuto* marking and legato phrasing. The overall effect should be slightly detached. The RH accompanying material can be practised in the same manner in bars 10-17. Slow practice with a metronome will help achieve the rhythmic *pesante* character.

**The melody consists of long, sustained notes.** It starts out in the RH (bars 2-9) and is made up solely of dotted semibreves. This might not seem like a typical melodious 'theme', but if you play with a deep touch, you'll be able to achieve a sombre and sustained line. Some notes appear with tenuto markings (e.g. bar 2), whilst others are given accents (e.g. bar 4): the composer is asking for more depth and richness of sound. Use the arm and wrist for appropriate arm weight behind each note, 'cushioning' the sound as the finger descends into the key

bed. More weight on the upper notes of each two-note chord, as at bars 4 and 5, should help to achieve the desired *cantabile* in the melodic line.

### LEARNING TIP

Chromatic notes abound – give them a special colour, as they capture the essence of this music.

**The LH melody also demands a cantabile touch.** In bars 10-17, the bass consists of dotted minims with tenuto markings. These notes will need plenty of colour, particularly where they move over the RH part into the treble clef in bars 11-17. The *sostenuto* marking should be heeded towards the end. The rit. into the final four bars signals a short but expressive coda. Keep the dotted minim tonic-note as in the lower RH part firmly held. As the music oscillates between major and minor tonalities, aim to 'place' the top melody notes such as the F $\sharp$  at bars 18 and 20, the C $\sharp$  in bar 19, and the C $\sharp$  in bar 21.

**A word about pedalling.** Use the sustaining pedal in every bar. Clear the pedal cleanly on the first beat, depressing it a fraction after the first chord and holding it for the entire bar. Some 'flutter' pedalling may be necessary – where the foot moves the pedal quickly, up and down – at the ends of phrases. ■

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