

HOW TO PLAY

ABILITY RATING LATE BEGINNER

FRANCK VIEUX NOËL IN G MINOR FROM L'ORGANISTE

Think about the magic of Christmas when you play this sparkling piece, says **Melanie Spanswick**. Oh, and imagine you're playing the organ as well

Key G minor **Tempo** Poco Lento **Style** Late Romantic
Will improve your ✓Phrasing ✓Legato ✓Finger substitution technique



This piece sounds like a beautiful Christmas carol. Featuring a wistful melody, it hails from César Franck's *L'Organiste*, a collection of over 50 pieces written for the harmonium and intended to be played by church organists. Set in 3/4 and consisting of four-bar phrases, it will move along calmly at 62 crotchet beats per minute.

Let's begin with the LH. In bars 1-16 and 27-30, there are two, and, sometimes three, musical lines (or parts). It might be helpful to practise these parts separately, using the intended fingering (or that which will be employed when playing all parts together). From bar 1 to 3, the lower note (G) must be held throughout bar 1 and 2, until the first beat of bar 3. Ensure that it is played with a deeper touch than that of the upper notes. Tonic or 'pedal' notes, such as this G, which often occur in organ music, should ideally be depressed for their full value.

Keep the LH line smooth. The suggested fingering occasionally requires changing fingers on the same note. This is called finger substitution. This practice promotes a continuously joined musical line, and, if done judiciously, can quell the need for excessive pedalling. Beat 1 of bar 11 is one such example: the first two-note chord, a G and E \flat , will be played by the second and fourth fingers (as suggested in the score), but in order to play the following

D with the fourth finger (on beat 2), the G and E \flat must be quickly replaced by the thumb and third.

Finger substitution is easy! After sounding the G and E \flat with the second and fourth fingers, make sure both notes are held and swivel the thumb into place on the G, and the third finger in place on the E \flat . Keep the hand relaxed as you move. When the fingers are secure, allow them to take the weight of the held notes (whilst keeping them depressed), finally releasing the second and fourth fingers.

The LH's countermelodies demand colour. From bar 12 to 16, the lower part contains some melodic interest. You therefore need to decide which melody notes are most important – and then phrase accordingly.

The first beat of certain bars would benefit from a richer sonority. For example, the F \sharp in bar 13, the G in bar 14, and the E \flat in bar 15. Similarly, from the end of bar 16 to bar 20, make sure that the second two-bar phase (18-19) is softer than the first.

The LH takes centre stage from the end of bar 20 to bar 25. It takes on a descending theme which crescendos through to the D at the start of bar 25.

Throughout much of the piece, the RH part is to be played an octave higher. However, as this

work was originally written for the harmonium/organ, it's not imperative for you to do this. You might decide to play just the final few bars an octave higher, for instance (as Chenyin Li does on the *Pianist* album), or you could ignore the *8va* signs altogether.

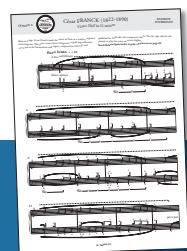
LEARNING TIP

Add the sustaining pedal discerningly, without obscuring the harmonic progressions.

In bars 17-25, a new texture appears in the RH. These chords, which act as an accompaniment to the LH, should be soft and light, even when the LH line plays *forte*. Aim to move from one chord to the next as smoothly as possible.

Finally, a note about capturing the right tone (or colour). The poignant theme could remind us of Christmases past; try for a firm *cantabile* touch and use your arm weight optimally, encouraging the fingers to delve deep into the key bed for full resonance. The opening phrase requires a little more tone on the first beats in bars 1-3, so aim for a slight crescendo to these beats, but without accenting. The secondary melody (bars 8-16), would be enhanced by a subtle nuance on the first beat of bars 9, 11, 12, 13 and 15. ■

More information on Melanie Spanswick can be found at www.melaniespanswick.com.



SCORE
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