

HOW TO PLAY

ABILITY RATING BEGINNER/INTERMEDIATE

CHOPIN CANTABILE IN B FLAT B84

Just 14 bars in length, this sentimental gem can easily be added to your Romantic repertoire. You'll need your best *cantabile* and an agile left hand to make it sparkle, though, says **Melanie Spanswick**

Key B flat major **Tempo** Andantino **Style** Romantic
Will improve your ✓ *Cantabile* ✓ LH chords ✓ Leaps



This beautiful miniature contains a joyful if not slightly sentimental character. The RH part consists of a florid, lyrical melody which is combined with a widespread LH chordal accompaniment. Lasting just 14 bars, it perfectly encapsulates the essence of Chopin's style; the opening eight bars tell the story, and the final six bars act as a reflective refrain. Quaver equals 88 beats per minute should keep the pulse moving along nicely, whilst allowing time for the necessary rubato.

Let's start with the LH part.

Aim to play the first beat of every dotted crotchet note-group alone: the B \flat and E \flat in bar 1, the F and B \flat in bar 2, and so on. I suggest using the fifth finger for the majority of the lower notes, and, when practising, be sure to use a deep touch. This will solidify the note patterns and the harmonic structure.

Now to turn our attention to the LH chords. The chords on the second and third beat of each dotted crotchet group will need careful preparation. The fingering marked in the score will help you to move from one chord to the next with relative ease. Work at each pair of chords in isolation, ensuring a very flexible wrist motion and a loose, lateral arm movement. Keeping the arm and wrist fluid will guide the fingers and hand from one chord to the next. Once secure, go through the

whole piece playing each chord with a full sound.

Combining the bass note with the chords is the next challenge.

As always when practising leaps, a useful exercise is to move an octave higher or lower than written. Therefore, in bar 1, begin by playing the first B \flat bass note an octave lower than written, followed by the two chords. Then do the same with the second-beat E \flat . Aim to practise the whole piece in this manner. When returning to the score, the leaps will feel much more comfortable. Now lighten your touch, and ensure the lower note is always played with a gentle staccato articulation; this note will be caught in the pedal, and therefore would benefit from a soft and deep touch – allowing for a rich sonority.

A rhythmical LH is vital. Set your metronome on a very slow pulse – perhaps a quaver equals 50 beats per minute – and play through the LH part, 'sitting' on the beat (or the tick). This slow speed will allow plenty of time to find all the correct chords as well as negotiate the leaps. Increase the speed when confident.

The sustaining pedal is crucial to the overall sound. Practise the pedal with the LH part, depressing your foot on the first note of each dotted crotchet beat (e.g. B \flat in bar 1), releasing it and then swiftly 'catching' the lower note of the

second dotted crotchet beat (E \flat in bar 1). However, you will notice that at bars 4 and 8-11, more pedal changes will be required.

LEARNING TIP

Rubato (taking time) can be deployed at the ends of phrases.

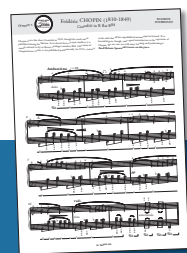
The RH part demands subtle phrasing and a *cantabile* touch.

Longer notes, such as the opening dotted-crotchet D, second crotchet D (both in bar 1), and the C in bar 4, need copious sound projection. This is achieved successfully with the help of arm weight. When playing such notes, try to use the wrist in a circular motion, supported by the weight from the whole arm. As the finger plays deep into the key bed, use a 'touch and press' motion in order to produce a rich tone – one that projects above the accompaniment as well as sounds for the entire length of the note.

It helps to practise the melody slowly, and with a deep touch.

But when playing up to speed, the semiquavers can be lighter. Employ a smooth, skimming legato touch, which is particularly important for the ornaments at bar 2 and 6. From bar 9, the music drifts off into the distance; play the final B \flat bass note as soft as you dare! ■

More about Melanie Spanswick at www.melaniespanswick.com.



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