

HOW TO PLAY

ABILITY RATING BEGINNER

NARCISA FREIXAS DIU QUE UNA ROSA...

This dreamy Catalan miniature will benefit from a steady bass line and an understanding of subtle pulse changes.

Melanie Spanswick talks you through it

Key A minor **Tempo** Moderato **Style** Late Romantic
Will improve your ✓Phrasing ✓Rhythm ✓Legato touch



Spanish sculptor, painter and composer Narcisa Freixas (1859-1926) was born in Barcelona.

She studied the piano with Juan Bautista Pujol, who numbered Enrique Granados among his pupils. Freixas published collections of Catalan songs and nursery rhymes, and she also implemented a musical education programme for school children.

The title of the piece, *Diu que una rosa...*, means 'They say that a rose...'. It stops right there, as if the start of a poem. The piece, which exudes a colourful exotic charm, comprises a simplistic melody in the RH and an almost continuous two-part accompaniment figure in the LH – the latter decorated by repeated acciaccaturas. The tempo suits crotchet equals 69-72 bpm.

Let's begin with the LH. There are two parts, or lines, to the LH, and a particularly useful exercise would be to separate them when learning. That is, practise the lower part (the repeated minim As) and the upper part (off-beat Es preceded by D# acciaccaturas) on their own.

Aim to keep the low As extremely smooth. Release the note by bringing up your fifth finger at the very last moment (just before the bar line), depressing the subsequent A fairly slowly for a soft sound, matching that of the previous A. Whilst the LH should provide a soft accompaniment, the minim As must always offer a rich

sonority – thus providing a stable and seamless tonic pedal.

The LH's upper part requires a smooth legato touch, too. First, work at the Es alone, without the ornamental D#s. The syncopated rhythmic pattern can be practised using a metronome: set a quaver pulse and be sure to precisely 'place' the crotchet/quaver Es in each bar. The crotchet needs a deeper touch than the quaver, which must be *piano* as indicated.

Now add the acciaccaturas. They must be soft yet quite insistent, as is typical of this style. Whilst it can be beneficial to practise acciaccaturas with a heavy touch (in order to encourage clear, clean articulation), when playing this musical line, keep the ornaments light and sound them on the beat almost at the same time as the Es. When working at the two LH lines together, remember that the As must be held for their full value, with the Es acting as a rhythmic 'murmur'.

Time to work on the RH part. An interesting feature of the melodic line is the staccato articulation on the first note of many phrases (as in bars 2, 4, 7, 11 etc). This adds the all-important Spanish inflection. This note must be quiet and not too short. The rest of the phrase should be legato and well-shaped, with a carefully 'placed' top E (as in bars 3 and 8). Observe the acciaccaturas in

bars 14 and 21; they will require a deeper touch and a different colour to those in the LH, as they are part of the tune. This melodic line is akin to a folk melody, so the embellishments can be articulated quite coarsely – or with a slight accent – as if sung by a folk singer.

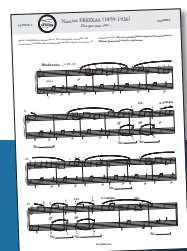
LEARNING TIP

In order to master the LH, learn its two parts separately.

Start practising both hands together. Set the metronome to a quaver beat, ensuring that all notes are secure and rhythmically placed. Phrase well, keeping the line smooth, and try to introduce the sustain pedal where indicated. Plenty of relaxed arm weight will be needed for the LH *fortissimo* chords (bars 9-11 and 18-20) which are then followed suddenly by two tender *pianissimo* chords. Make a slight *ritenuto* (slowing down) on the *pianissimo* chords.

Moments such as these act as 'punctuation' to the melody. Moments of reflection, maybe? There is also a real pause at bar 20 (notice the fermata sign). Tempo changes are a crucial feature for this style of music, so once you can play the piece rhythmically, relax the pulse for a true authentic Spanish character. ■

More about Melanie Spanswick at www.melaniespanswick.com.



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