

HOW TO PLAY

ABILITY RATING ELEMENTARY

THEODOR OESTEN

THE ECHO, NO 14 FROM MAY FLOWERS OP 61

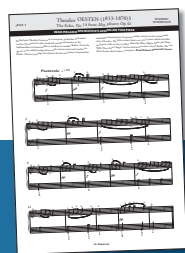
Enjoy practising the echo effect in this nostalgic piece by a neglected German Romantic composer who has plenty to say, says **Melanie Spanswick**

Key G major **Tempo** Pastorale **Style** Romantic
Will improve your ✓ Articulation ✓ Rhythm ✓ Dynamics



German composer Theodor Oesten (1813-1870) wrote numerous educational piano works and easy operatic transcriptions. His overtly sentimental style captured the mood of the era, and his set of 25 piano pieces, *May Flowers*, written for the younger player, is a case in point. This little piece lies well under the fingers and demands a steady tempo of 96 beats per minute in order to capture the splendid 'echo' effects.

Start out by developing a thorough understanding of the rhythm. The triplet quaver figure which features throughout must be carefully placed. Beginning with a slightly slower tempo than that suggested, tap the pulse of the RH part alone, ensuring that each quaver within the triplet is spaced evenly; a common error is to rush the final note of the beat (for example, the G in bar 1). Tapping these patterns should encourage you to 'place' them carefully. Now tap the note patterns again, but this time add an accent – or a heavier tap – on all notes that feature an accent. (Note: Do not overdo these accents at all. They should be very subtle.) Be sure to fully 'count' the minim beats and all of the rests, such as the minim notes in bars 1 and 2, and the crotchet rests on the third beat of bars 8 and 16. Finally, tap both hands together under tempo, and gradually work up to speed with the aid of a metronome.



SEE SCORES SECTION

It's time to play! To locate note patterns and learn fingerings, my favourite suggestion is to employ the 'blocking out' or 'chunking' technique. For example, in bars 1 and 2 play the notes in the RH part at the same time, forming a chord of B, A, G and D. This will be particularly helpful at bar 4, where note patterns change slightly. Once you have found the chords within every bar, 'play' through the piece in this manner.

Repeated note patterns tend to move around the keyboard. Observe how patterns of notes appear an octave higher between bars 1-2, 9-10 and 15/16-17/18 (these are the echoes). Aim to 'watch' your movement at first and, after a while, you should be able to gauge, or 'feel', the distance. To achieve this, practise slowly with a relaxed hand position guided by a loose wrist and arm, sliding up and down the keyboard, from one hand position to the next, using a decisive lateral motion. Gradually increase the speed of your leaps and try not to cut short notes which precede the jumps (such as the third-beat minim in bars 1 and 2).

Good articulation is vital. Using the fourth finger rather than the fifth at various points in the RH's passage work can really encourage clarity and can feel more convenient. For clean and clear articulation, aim to focus on the tip of the fourth finger on the first

beat of bar 4 and the third beat of bar 7. To ensure a deeper touch when employing the fourth or fifth finger on the first beat of bars 9, 10, 11, and 12, use the fingertips combined with a flexible, loose wrist and the support of arm-weight. And be sure to give the thumb plenty of freedom and leeway to move easily in order to comfortably navigate the notes on the second beat of bar 4, the third beat of bar 7 and the first beats of bar 15 and 17.

LEARNING TIP

Plenty of sustaining pedal will add sonority, but remember to release frequently so as not to smudge the echoes!

The 'echo' effect sets this piece alight. A beautifully rounded *forte* will work well in bar 1, but bar 2 must be soft, light, and 'in the distance' – yet still rhythmical. Achieve this by practising at a steadier tempo using a slower key depression for the *pianissimo* passages at bars 2, 6, 10, 12 and 17/18; the slower your finger depresses each key, the softer the tonal colour; however, this might need some experimentation because piano touches vary tremendously depending on the instrument. A slight ritenuo would be a nice interpretative touch during the final two bars. ■

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