



BURGMÜLLER

Petite réunion Op 100 No 4

Fingers and hands together – that’s the subject of this study
in sweet reunion, as **Melanie Spanswick** explains

Ability rating Beginner

Info

Key: C major

Tempo: Allegro non troppo

Style: Early Romantic

Will improve your

✓ Double notes

✓ Phrasing

✓ Staccato

Opus 100 is a collection of 25 ‘progressive pieces’.

It was featured in *Pianist* 100 with a piece by Graham Fitch looking at the value of Burgmüller’s collection as a whole. This bubbly little study in thirds is placed early on. The movement is swift: the editorial tempo marking suggests crotchet equals 132-152 beats per minute. I like to go with the minimum tempo of crotchet equals 132. The technical focus of the study is on pairs of notes played a third apart. They occur as rapid scale passages in bar 2, 4, 10, 22, and 26, and as melodic material, sometimes set between the hands, in bar 7-9, 11-12, 15-21, 23-25 and 27-28.

Let’s begin with the RH. Aim to practise all double notes using a legato touch at first, until you feel in control. Fingering will be crucial, and I’ve added some to the score, but you may like to mark your own. Practise each scale passage slowly (as at bars 2 and 4). It usually helps to work at such passages one line at a time; play the top notes only in bar 2 (F, E, D, C etc); but make sure you keep to the fingering you’d use when playing hands together. Now play the lower notes (D, C, B, A etc) on their own. The top line plays the melody, therefore the 3rd, 4th and 5th fingers will need more weight.

Combine the two musical lines and apply a deep touch. Each part should sound at precisely the same moment. This will require careful hand balance, so that both fingers find the key bed in tandem. I find it easier to balance the hand with a slight leaning towards the right, away from the body, because this can help to provide support to the weaker 4th and 5th fingers. The arm and wrist boost the hand and fingers by acting as a hinge, offering important arm-weight at the vital moment of impact.



Melanie Spanswick is a pianist, author and educator. She selected the repertoire for *The Faber Music Piano Anthology*, and is the author of *Play It Again: PIANO* (Schott Music) for those returning to piano playing after a break. Melanie has given workshops in Germany, the USA and the Far East; she is a tutor at Jackdaws Music Education Trust and curator of the Classical Conversations series on YouTube, where she interviews pianists on camera. www.melaniespanswick.com

Now you will need to work on the hand turns. The hand must turn over the thumb in order to continue the scale. You’ll need a flexible hand to achieve this fluently. Allow your palm to relax completely, so that you can turn over the thumb with ease while the thumb still holds down the previous note. A fluent motion should create an unbroken legato line, and even though these passages will be played staccato, practising the movement in this manner will enable efficient, relaxed playing, and will help when playing legato thirds later in the piece.

Now add a light staccato touch to the scale passages in thirds. Gently skim over each one; this is preferable to a short, sharp articulation. Let your hand glide from one five-finger position to the next, turning the hand with a fluid movement at the appropriate moment. Similar finger patterns recur in bars 10, 22, and 26. Wrist staccato will be useful at these points, with the hand bouncing from one third to the next. Keep your wrist as loose as you can, and try to monitor your hand movements until you can feel the distance needed to sound each note accurately; it’s too easy to fall prey to playing ‘in the cracks’ with such passagework!

There are short passages in sixths at bars 13-14 and 29-30. You’re looking to create the illusion of legato; play both lines separately, aiming to ‘join’ each one by matching the tonal dynamic of every note, so that the 5th fingers (playing the top line) sound legato. Phrase marks will also help in this respect. Thumbs can be softer, even though marked *forte*, and in the background.

The LH plays a supporting role.

Apply a *cantabile* touch to the opening four bars, making a crescendo to the

Learning Tip

Observe the pause marking at the end of the introduction (bar 6), as it heightens anticipation.

middle of bars 1 and 3, holding the semibreves in bars 2 and 4 right to the end of the bar. With the exception of bars 5 and 6, the entire LH part should be smooth. At bars 19-20 and bars 20-21, *sforzando* markings require a deep touch, before returning to the theme; phrase off the second crotchet of each pair.

Phrases in thirds are a feature in both hands throughout the study.

The theme is clearly stated in bars 7-9. After playing the first two beats at bar 7, the fingers swap round; a 3rd finger and thumb on the C and A in the RH part rapidly becomes a 5th and 3rd finger. Hold the quaver C and A on the second beat of the bar for as long as possible, changing at the last moment and aiming to match the sound of the new third (on beat 3) to that of the last. This is especially important in bar 18, where both hands play thirds in contrary motion.

Resist the temptation to rush these double-note passages. Your weaker fourth and fifth fingers are particularly susceptible in this regard. Pay special attention to each quaver beat, ensuring that they are completely even, both in terms of rhythm and tone. Quick dabs of pedal are all that’s needed for a convincing performance. ■