

# HOW TO PLAY

ABILITY RATING ELEMENTARY

## DANIEL STEIBELT ADAGIO IN A MINOR

Clean articulation, carefully-judged dynamics and an understanding of phrasing will bring this poignant miniature to life, says **Melanie Spanswick**

**Key** A minor **Tempo** Adagio **Style** Classical

**Will improve your** ✓ Articulation ✓ Finger placement ✓ Phrasing



Virtuoso German pianist and composer Daniel Steibelt (1765-1823) once challenged Beethoven to a 'piano duel', only to lose suffering public humiliation!

However, he did give regular recital tours around Europe and wrote numerous compositions, the majority of which are for the piano. This delightful piece champions his melodic style. It is written in Ternary form, or an ABA structure – in this case, an AABA structure. The title is 'Adagio' but it still needs to move along nicely allowing the exquisite melancholic melody to shine; a tempo of a crotchet equals 66-72 should work well.

**Practise hands separately for greater security.** Play with a deep touch to help gain control over note patterns. This will be particularly beneficial in the LH part, where there are many chord progressions accompanying the RH melody. For example, it's helpful to observe the A minor or tonic chord (chord I) in bar 1 moving to the E major dominant chord (chord V) in bar 2, which is a recurring pattern throughout; you may find it useful to go through each bar marking the chords and chord progressions.

**Thoughtful fingering is key to creating a well-phrased interpretation.** Short phrases dominate the RH part. On the quaver C upbeat to bar 1, I've suggested using a third finger which switches to the second finger

(playing the same note) on the first beat of bar 1. Such a finger change offers a clean break in articulation between the two Cs, allowing for a slight emphasis on the first beat of the bar which will help shape the theme. A similar emphasis is necessary on the first beat of bar 2 as well (the A), before tapering off beautifully on the second quaver beat (G#) as suggested by the decrescendo marking.

**Short slurs demand neat articulation.** At bars 5 and 6, you'll notice quavers grouped in pairs in the RH with what looks like a little phrase marking between the two. To play these slurred notes elegantly with a legato touch, try using the 'drop-roll' technique: Drop your finger into the key to play the first note of each quaver pair and as you do so, allow your wrist to fall in a loose, relaxed manner. As you reach the bottom of the key with your wrist in a lowered position, 'catch' the second quaver with your finger as the wrist and hand rolls upwards away from the second note. This technique allows for firmer tonal colour on the first note and a lighter touch for the second note – the finger leaving the key offering a minuscule break in sound before continuing to play the next quaver pair in the same manner.

**The LH takes hold of the melody between bars 17-20.** It is 'answered' by the RH in bars 21-24. This passage feels like a

brief moment of sunshine as the music moves into E major. In order to maintain a lovely legato line, be sure to turn the LH hand flexibly when the thumb goes under the third finger at bar 17. Similarly, the RH will need a swift movement from thumb to fourth finger between bars 21 and 22. A slight emphasis on the first-beat E at bar 22 will reinforce the key change before returning to the bittersweet tune on the upbeat of bar 24.

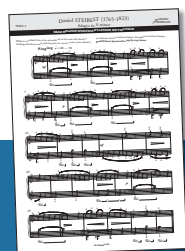
### LEARNING TIP

Resist the temptation to cut rests short – they play an integral part in this piece!

**Take note of the dynamics at the ends of phrases.** In order to capture the expressive mood, the end of almost every phrase has been marked with a decrescendo, so aim to round off each phrase with a softer sonority. To do this effectively, depress keys slowly – the slower you depress, the softer the tonal colour (it's worth experimenting to see just how softly you can play on your piano).

**Use the sustaining pedal sparingly.** It is employed merely to support chord progressions and punctuate chords at the ends of phrases. Don't linger too long, though; short dabs are often all that's required. ■

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