

HOW TO PLAY

KONSTANTIN EIGES

CANON FROM ALBUM FOR THE YOUNG OP 6 NO 4

This quirky piece by a Russian composer unfamiliar with us today is a great introduction to contrapuntal playing, says **Melanie Spanswick**



Konstantin Romanovich Eiges (1875-1950) was born in Bohodukhiv, eastern Ukraine. One of ten children, many of whom became distinguished academics and artists, he studied medicine and music in Moscow before becoming a composer, teacher and pianist. Musically influenced by his teacher Sergei Taneyev, composer Scriabin, and friends and colleagues Medtner and Rachmaninov, the majority of his music was written for solo piano, but he also wrote extensively on the subjects of music and philosophy.

Canon comes from *Album for the Young Op 6*. This collection of six pieces, of which Canon is number four, offers tuneful, instructional writing, with large expansive melodies and unashamedly Late-Romantic harmonies. The piece would benefit from a fairly leisurely pace, as suggested by its tempo marking, 'Unhurried'. Try a metronome marking of 84-88 crotchet beats per minute. However, if you feel a slower speed would allow for greater freedom, do experiment.

A canon is a compositional technique. The melody or theme is generally repeated by one or more parts, crucially after a set interval or period of time. The original theme is called the 'leader' and the following entries, or imitative voices, are called the 'followers'. The imitative entry can be at either the same or different pitch to the original, and can also have different note values, or it can appear reversed so that the tune is read backwards or upside down, which is known as 'retrograde'. This canon contains just two parts: one in the RH and the other in the LH.

The 'leader' theme is announced in the RH in bar 1. It lasts for 15 bars, which might be thought of as a single phrase. In bar 2 the 'follower' entry begins in the LH part, and it contains exactly the same material as that of the RH, but following on behind, just one bar apart and is played an octave lower. The two parts fit together perfectly forming what we know as 'counterpoint', a musical device

ABILITY RATING

Early Intermediate

KEY

G minor

TEMPO

Unhurried

STYLE

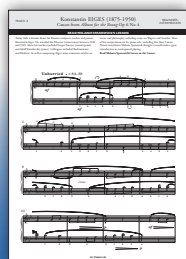
Late-Romantic

WILL IMPROVE

- ✓ Contrapuntal technique
- ✓ Hand flexibility
- ✓ Articulation

LEARNING TIP

Observe the accents, tenuto and staccato markings, and tied notes, which all add definition to the musical line



SEE SCORES SECTION PAGE 28

where two or more musical lines are independent in rhythm and melody, but are harmonically interdependent.

Carefully observe the two parts and how they fit together. After the 'leader' opening theme finishes at bar 16 (LH), new melodic fragments appear, and are again, imitated in the LH a bar later. That is until bar 24, where the music changes direction a little and the RH and LH are positioned an interval of a tenth apart from the last quaver beat in bar 24 until the first beat of bar 26.

The melodic line contains several noteworthy features. The RH diminished fourth in bar 2 (from B \flat to F \sharp) offers an unusual tonal colour. Give these intervals plenty of sonority as they add intensity. Larger intervals pervade, for example the diminished seventh in the RH on the first beat of bar 5 (E \flat to F \sharp). Another feature is the use of the theme in 'retrograde', or written backwards at bar 24 (RH): this is where the first four notes of the piece, D, E \flat , D, C, have been turned around and are now G, F \sharp , G, A. From bar 28-32, the inclusion of the interval of a diminished ninth in the melody heightens the drama (e.g. the RH quaver D at the end of bar 28 moving to the E \flat at the start of bar 29). Note the syncopated feel here, too, where the accent on the first quaver is followed by a crotchet beat.

Separate hand practice is key. I've added plenty of fingering to the score: turning the hand (or fingers over and under the thumb) is a prerequisite, so it's beneficial to keep your wrist and hand flexible. Aim to memorise both parts separately, encouraging each hand to become fully aware of the fingering and note patterns. Slow metronome work will pay dividends when working hands together. Keep the sustain pedal to a minimum, allowing the clarity of each hand's part to 'speak'. The climax at bars 26 and 27 demands your full attention and should be played with aplomb! ■

www.melaniespanswick.com