

HOW TO PLAY

EDVARD GRIEG PRAYER, NO 19 FROM 23 SHORT PIECES EG 104

Legato is of the utmost importance in this poignant miniature by the Norwegian colourist, says **Melanie Spanswick**, who offers strategies to ensure seamlessness in both hands



Grieg's *23 Short Pieces* is a collection of early works offering a glimpse into the composer's evolving style. Originally published in 1859, the set showcases Grieg's germinating musical voice, demonstrating his lyricism and his love for Norwegian folk music.

No 19 is characterised by a contemplative wistful theme in the tragic key of D minor. In Ternary form (ABA), section A (bars 1-8) states the musical material, and then throughout section B (bars 9-17) Grieg develops it. The third section (bars 18-26) is a repeat of the opening melody (hence, section A again), but it's more emphatically stated and with greater intensity.

This is highly chromatic Romantic music. The harmonic language with its thick chordal texture is a preview of a style found in many of the *Lyric Pieces* as well as the Piano Concerto in A minor. A metronome mark of a crotchet equals 38 beats per minute should suffice and the repeat of the first passage offers the perfect opportunity to colour and phrase the tune in a contrasting manner. A move to F major at bar 14 feels like a ray of sunshine before returning to the desolation of the final few bars.

Legato is crucial. The suggested fingering offers the chance to 'join' with your fingers as many of the chords and note patterns as possible. Why can't you use the sustaining pedal to do this? You can, but nothing is as effective as a continuous smooth musical line created by the use of the fingers alone, free from the smudging often caused by too much sustaining pedal. Start practising hands separately, go through each bar and move seamlessly from one chord (or note) to the next. If you can't immediately join them, aim to use the 'illusion of legato', where fingers hold a note or chord for as long as possible, moving to the next note or chord at the very last moment, carefully matching the sound to that of the dying previous notes or chords.

It might be helpful to start working with the RH part alone. To create a smooth phrase, practise the top musical line separately – that is, play it on its own with

ABILITY RATING

Early Intermediate

KEY

D minor

TEMPO

Andante moderato

STYLE

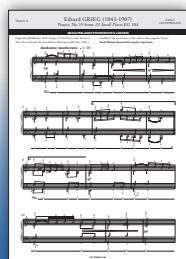
Romantic

WILL IMPROVE

- ✓ Cantabile
- ✓ Legato
- ✓ Phrasing

LEARNING TIP

Once you have learned the piece fluently, add the sustaining pedal to every crotchet – and sometimes quaver – beat for a rich resonance



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the suggested fingering, holding down every finger from one note to the next. You might begin with the upper part between bars 4-8 (for example, the A, G and F# in bar 4 followed by the E, G#, G# and A in bars 5 and 6). Use a full tone before adding the lower part softly underneath.

Fingers should ideally 'walk' over each other.

To keep a smooth line in the LH, try using a 5-4-5 fingering to help create continuous legato. The second beat of bar 2 to the first beat of bar 3 is a good example: after sounding the F# with a fourth finger, allow the fifth finger to slip under the fourth, landing on a G on the first beat of bar 3. This requires a very flexible hand movement with slow, firm 'spot' finger practice so that the F# keeps sounding right up until the moment the G takes over. Be sure to keep the upper tied crotchet D held throughout. Similarly, on the second beat of bar 7, the LH might use the third, fourth and fifth fingers to successfully join the low semiquavers in a 5, 4, 3, 4 sequence; the third finger moving over the fourth will take concentrated work but the resulting smooth line will be well worth it. Remember to hold notes for their full value, also encouraging an uninterrupted musical line.

Cantabile is required throughout but especially in the RH upper line. The fourth and fifth fingers will require some extra power to 'sing' out above the accompaniment: keep your wrist and arm loose so that you can employ arm weight here and use fingers on their tips for a more decisive, direct sonority. The tops of phrases should be shaped beautifully, such as in bar 7, where the RH texture suddenly thickens and quavers need to be 'voiced' above the semiquavers.

Ornaments or embellishments have been written into the musical line. As a general rule, ensure demisemiquavers are lighter than semiquavers and shaped with fluidity moving towards the main beat. Take your time over the final spread D minor chord, holding it for as long as you dare. ■

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