

HOW TO PLAY

ABILITY RATING LATE BEGINNER

GRIEG NO 12 FROM 23 LITTLE PIECES EG104

An understanding of harmony and chord progressions will help you master this gentle piece, says **Melanie Spanswick**

Key A minor **Tempo** Largo con estro poetico **Style** Romantic
Will improve your ✓ Chord progressions ✓ Voicing ✓ Legato



An intense, dark character pervades this beautiful little piece. In the key of A minor, it consists of just 13 bars, yet still manages to convey its solitary message effectively. The suggested tempo of crotchet equals 34-38 beats per minute allows sufficient time for each chord to be savoured, and the *ad libitum* marking grants even greater flexibility.

The work is built solely around chord progressions. Examining each chord and where it leads will help develop a convincing interpretation. Starting with the A minor tonic chord (bar 1), the music moves, rather surprisingly, to F major (or chord VI) in bar 2, and this leads to the dominant chord (chord V), and then the dominant seventh (V with an added G#) in bar 3, ending the first phrase. A dramatic pause at the beginning of bar 4 heralds an anguished diminished seventh chord (see explanation below), which is particularly powerful largely due to its rhythmic incision. Bar 5 features the sub-dominant chord (chord IV) with added chromatic inflections (G and F#), before moving to another diminished seventh chord on the first beat of bar 6.

Diminished seventh chords introduce an element of mystique. They consist of intervals built from minor thirds, creating the feeling of angst and uncertainty. A useful

exercise might be to play a series of diminished seventh chords, to become accustomed to their 'sound'; as an example, start with the notes C, Eb, F# and A, forming a diminished seventh chord.

The shift into C major on the second beat of bar 6 provides a ray of light. A further diminished seventh chord follows at the start of bar 7. B flat major features on the second beat of bar 7, also known as a flattened supertonic or Neapolitan chord (chord ii) – and at bar 8 a G# bass note indicates the first inversion of the dominant seventh chord (V7b).

The key of A minor reappears at bar 9. The last four bars revisit F major (chord VI) with heartfelt chromatic movement in the LH part (bar 10), before moving to the tonic second inversion (start of bar 11). The first inversion of chord ii (with an added seventh) appears on the second beat of bar 11, and finally, the dominant seventh at bar 12, before returning home to the tonic at bar 13.

Separate hand practice will be necessary. Whilst the sustaining pedal is necessary, aim to create legato lines without using the pedal – the overall result will be that much smoother. With the suggested fingering, move from one chord to the next; hold down each key until the end of every beat, moving to the next chord at the very last moment, so that your

LEARNING TIP

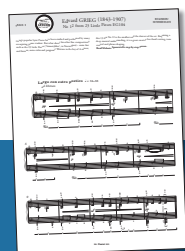
Keep the sustaining pedal depressed during every crotchet beat, but be sure to change swiftly so as to avoid smudging.

fingers are sustaining the legato. To produce a *cantabile* legato melody line, practise the top line alone, joining every note. (The melody generally appears in the top part of the RH, for example, C, E, E, in bar 1.) Next, work out where the focal point of each phrase occurs: in the first phrase, for example, a crescendo from the opening to the first beat of bar 3 is effective.

An understanding of voicing is also crucial. Inner lines, particularly, add to the expressivity. For example, in bar 3's RH alto line, highlight the A and the G#. Possibly the most poignant inner part, which needs careful voicing, is at bar 10, where the quavers in the LH tenor part ascend chromatically. Aim to 'voice' this musical line with a firmer touch, adding special nuance to the C# and D#.

Dynamics have been added to the score. You could of course also experiment by adding your own. In order to create dynamic variety, experiment with soft colours and velvety sonorities – remembering that the slower your key depression, the softer the sound. ■

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