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## WRIST FLEXIBILITY

In piano playing, flexibility of the wrists should be considered very important, as any tension or stiffness here usually hinders successful playing. A good rotational movement and wrist flexibility will enable you to move freely around the keyboard. This should ideally be accompanied by a loose forearm, for easy movement up and down the keyboard.

### *Flexible wrist: exercise 1*

Aim for constant movement in the wrist when playing as this will prevent rigidity; avoid holding your wrists in one position, or placing them too high or too low. In order to achieve this, try the following exercise:



Upwards movement



Downwards movement

- 1 Start by waving your hand from the wrist, first upwards then downwards, with the wrist acting as a hinge. Do this with both hands.
- 2 Now make a rotational movement as in waving goodbye.
- 3 Finally, make complete circles in the air, using the wrists as the hinge.

This might seem exaggerated, but it will help you to get used to the movement required to develop complete freedom.

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### *Flexible wrist: exercise 2*

- 1 At the piano, place your thumb on middle C.
- 2 Drop your wrist and hand whilst continuing to depress the key (the hand must ideally flop down on the keyboard in order to be really loose).

#### Rotate wrist between every note

# Elementary

## Air in D minor

Henry Purcell (1659–1695)

### Set up

**Key:** D minor

**Time signature:**  $\frac{3}{4}$

**Tempo:** Moderato  $\text{♩} = 115$

**Style:** Baroque

**Piano technique:**

- Independence of hands: playing two voices simultaneously

*This elegant Baroque piece uses counterpoint – a compositional technique typical of the period in which two or more musical voices (or lines) play together.*

### PREPARATION

This piece is in D minor, so let's prepare by learning the D minor scale. Note that the harmonic minor version shown below contains a  $B\flat$ , as indicated by the key signature, and an added  $C\sharp$ . Look at the suggested fingering and before you play, check your posture, ensuring shoulders are down and your arms, hands and wrists are loose.

Work at the arpeggio slowly, hands separately. Strong fingers are developed by playing deeply (and fairly heavily) into each key, playing on the tips of your fingers.

The image displays two systems of musical notation for the piano accompaniment of 'Air in D minor'. Each system consists of a grand staff with a treble clef on the upper staff and a bass clef on the lower staff. The first system contains four measures of music. The second system contains two measures. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-5 above or below notes. The key signature has one flat (B-flat) and the time signature is 3/4.

### PRACTICE TECHNIQUES

#### Left-hand practice

First look at the left hand. It contains a quarter note (crotchet) pattern, almost throughout, which keeps the momentum striding forwards. Play the first four bars through slowly, using the suggested fingering. Use a non-*legato* (or 'detached') touch, aiming for a definite 'gap' in the sound between each note. To achieve this allow each finger to leave the note, and roll the hand forwards and upwards, away from the keys.

Now work at the remaining three phrases in the left hand. Watch for the hand and finger position changes which occur at bars 4–5, 8–9 and 10–11; these will need slow, concentrated practice to develop the quick movements required.

### Tip

A phrase is like a musical sentence. Taper off the ends of phrases, and add a very slight break in the sound before the next.

### Right-hand practice

Divide the right-hand melody into four-bar sections and work through these slowly without worrying about the pulse. Watch out for the fingering and hand-position changes at bars 8–9, 9–10 and 14–15. Where there are large leaps in the right hand, such as those between bars 1 and 2, try to maintain flexibility by practising moving from one hand position to the next, allowing your wrist to be very loose in-between. This will help the fluidity, rhythm, and evenness of tone.



The right hand should be played *legato*: each note played very smoothly and 'joined' to the next. Where the phrase ends (at the end of each curved line above the notes, so the end of bar 1 in the example above), the finger or thumb can release the note, making a very slight gap or 'breathing' space before the next phrase.

When you can play the notes in each hand without any hesitation, you can start to work on the rhythm. First, tap the rhythms on your piano lid. Subdivide the beat into eighth notes (quavers) (counting 'one-and-two-and-three-and'), count aloud, and then play along to the pulse you have established.

### Hands together

When confident, take two bars and play them with hands together at a quarter of the intended speed. If you make mistakes at first, go even slower.

Work through the entire piece, two bars at a time. Practice slowly because playing non-*legato* in the left hand and *legato* in the right hand at the same time will require concentration, focus and probably much repetition. Working a beat at a time until hands are really coordinated also pays dividends.

### INTERPRETATION

Aim for a softer left hand which rises and falls alongside the right hand's melodic line. Keep it light throughout, occasionally allowing the right hand to experiment with a deeper touch. The addition of dynamics (*p* signifies soft, *mp*, moderately soft, and *f*, loud) will help to contour your interpretation.

## Spot-practice

- If you find it difficult playing with hands together, try working on one beat at a time.
- Take the first two notes (Ds in either hand), then play just to beat two (C# in the right hand, and A in the left), and stop.
- Practice as many times as is necessary to assimilate the pattern and feel comfortable with the coordination.
- Now try the same thing with the subsequent beats in the first few bars, each beat at a time.
- Once the hands are playing together fluently and without any hesitations, play each four-bar section all the way through as many times as is necessary to achieve accuracy, followed by the entire piece.
- Gradually increase the speed.

# Air in D minor

ZT 676

Henry Purcell (1659–1695)

Moderato ♩ = 115

The musical score is presented in three systems, each with a treble and bass clef staff. The key signature is D minor (two flats) and the time signature is 3/4. The tempo is marked 'Moderato' with a quarter note equal to 115 beats per minute. The first system (measures 1-5) starts with a piano (*p*) dynamic in the bass and a mezzo-piano (*mp*) dynamic in the treble. The second system (measures 6-10) features a piano (*p*) dynamic in the bass. The third system (measures 11-15) begins with a forte (*f*) dynamic in the bass. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-5 above or below notes. Slurs and accents are used throughout to indicate phrasing and emphasis.