

Piano

The perfect way to rediscover the piano

*Play it again*

**PIANO**

**BOOK 2**



Melanie Spanswick



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ED 13945

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## MUSICAL TERMS

Note values are given in the order American–British on their first mention within each section, then American terms alone thereafter.

whole note (semibreve)

half note (minim)

quarter note (crotchet)

eighth note (quaver)

sixteenth note (semiquaver)

thirty-second note (demisemiquaver)

See also the table in Book 1, page 113

Other terms follow British usage, for example:

bar (Br) = measure (Am)

whole tone (Br) = whole step (Am)

semitone (Br) = half step (Am)

stave (Br) = staff (Am)

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# From the author

*Play it again: Piano* is a progressive piano course consisting of graded piano pieces for anyone who has played the piano before and wishes to rediscover this fulfilling pastime. *Book 1* starts almost at the beginning, with a look at the musical basics, musicianship and a step-by-step guide on how to learn each piece effectively. *Book 2* follows on progressively from *Book 1*, so you can use *Play it again* whatever your current level of playing ability. You could start with *Book 2* or *3* if you feel confident enough, but I would always recommend first reviewing the fundamentals of music and piano technique in *Book 1*.

Each book contains carefully selected pieces which gradually increase in difficulty and cover a wide variety of styles and musical periods. By the end of the second book, you should be able to tackle fairly advanced pieces comparable to Grade 8 standard of the leading British exam boards.

For this second book I have selected 21 piano pieces which I hope you will find both interesting and rewarding to play. The book is divided into four sections: Late Intermediate, Early Advanced, Advanced and Late Advanced, with the following approximate comparable graded exams (of the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM), Trinity College London and London College of Music Examinations):

<b>Late Intermediate</b>	Grades 5 to 6
<b>Early Advanced</b>	Grades 6 to 7
<b>Advanced</b>	Grades 7 to 8
<b>Late Advanced</b>	Grades 8 or above

I have included photographs, diagrams and many musical examples to illustrate key aspects of piano technique such as posture, hand positions and basic flexibility, as well as advice on the most effective approaches to practicing. I will show you how to break pieces down in order to help tackle their technical and musical challenges. Once you have completed the *Play it again: Piano* course you will be able to select, analyse, practice and perform pieces with confidence and enjoy making real progress in your practice sessions. You can also find a selection of teaching videos on YouTube available at [www.youtube.com/user/SchottM](http://www.youtube.com/user/SchottM).

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# How to use *Play it again: Piano*

*The first part of this book is a refresher section covering Piano Technique and Practice Advice. This aims to quickly assimilate the core fundamentals of playing the piano; I will refer back to these during the course of the book.*

*Even if you consider yourself reasonably musically competent, I would recommend reading and reviewing this section; keeping these tips and practice ideas in mind will pay dividends when working at the repertoire.*

## **MUSICAL REMINDERS**

The *Theory* section at the end of the book focuses on music notation, the bedrock of all music learning. It may be helpful to review this section before you dive into work on the pieces. Key musical terms have been written in **bold** text on their first appearance in the book.

## **A NOTE ON REPERTOIRE**

After the refresher section, each of the four units in *Book 2* (Late Intermediate, Early Advanced, Advanced and Late Advanced) consists of selected piano pieces, including a technical study, and various styles and genres of Classical piano music.

Each piece offers a different focus in terms of technique and musicianship, and is preceded by useful information including preparation tips, practice techniques, tailor-made exercises and ideas for your interpretation.

# Piano technique

## Posture, hand positions, flexibility and alignment

*Technical proficiency becomes increasingly important in this book as we are working at a relatively advanced level. The following suggestions and exercises are intended to provide a helpful foundation for practice sessions and for the gradual improvement of technique, and should ideally be worked at regularly in conjunction with each piece in Play it again: Piano – Book 2.*

Correct posture and hand positions were covered in the *Piano Technique* section at the beginning of *Book 1*; these aspects are generally absorbed at the start of the learning process. With this in mind, I would recommend a revision of this section if possible. Once posture and hand positions have been covered, we can work at different exercises to create strong finger independence and flexibility.

Tension is one of the most prevalent problems in piano technique, and it's one which is difficult to correct. Stiffness can cause inaccuracies both in notes and rhythm, and creates a less-than-ideal sound quality. Therefore, this refresher section includes many ideas to help you eradicate stiffness as much as possible.

First, as you sit at the keyboard ensure your wrist and arm are aligned, like this:



### **FLEXIBILITY AND FINGER INDEPENDENCE**

The key to playing the piano successfully is to move with flexibility, and the wrist probably plays the most important role when developing a more flexible approach. Aim for constant motion in the wrist when playing; avoid keeping it in one position, or holding it too high or too low.

To develop good flexibility, begin by moving both the wrists freely away from the keyboard making circles in the air using the wrist as a hinge, with the hand almost 'waving' goodbye (see page 8 of *Book 1*).

Now play middle C with the thumb and release any tension in the arm, hand and wrist; in other words, allow the whole arm to go loose and floppy, but still hold the note in place (as shown in the photo below where my wrist is completely floppy and relaxed). Try this exercise with each hand in turn.



Relax from the neck and shoulders downwards – raised shoulders are a sure sign of tension. If you can encourage your body to feel relaxed, then, as you play, you will become accustomed to a more flexible, loose feeling. This takes practice!

**Study No. 1 in C major, from 101 Daily Exercises (Op. 261), Carl Czerny**

The following study is a helpful exercise for developing a free wrist and finger independence.

**Allegro**

**1** Take the first five sixteenth notes (semiquavers) of the right hand and play each note very slowly, encouraging the hand and wrist to flop down between each note, whilst keeping the key depressed. Note the feeling in your hand and arm as you relax your muscles; it's this feeling of flexibility and freedom which must be established and developed.

**2** Once five notes have been successfully negotiated, work at the entire right hand in this manner, playing extremely slowly and stopping after every note to make sure there's no tension in your hand or wrist. Move the wrist in a circular motion between each note, enhancing its flexibility and avoiding stiffness. This needs considerable attention because this feeling of freedom in the wrist is the key to playing smoothly, easily and accurately.

**3** Apply a deep touch with each finger (with the whole weight of your hand and arm behind every note), heavily and powerfully playing every note *fortissimo* (sometimes known as 'key bedding'). Play on the tips of your fingers and ensure each finger is active with all joints fully engaged. It's important that joints don't collapse but instead support the fingertips, as shown in the photos (below).

This, combined with a flexible, tension-free hand and wrist, will encourage strong fingers that work independently. The fourth and fifth fingers will need extra care and attention as they are naturally weaker, but if you allow them to 'stand' on their tips rather than collapse, and they are constantly supported by the hand, wrist and arm, they too will eventually become stronger.



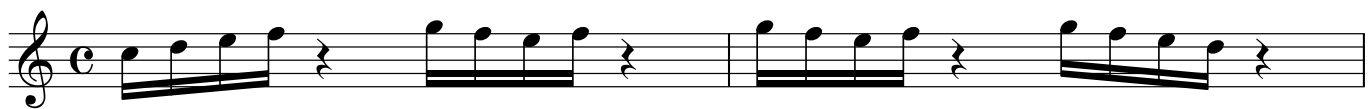
Correct



Incorrect



- 4 Take note of your hand; be aware of muscle tension between the knuckles and the wrist, as rigidity here can cause discomfort whilst playing. Your muscles should feel pliable and soft; if they are firm and taut, then practice ‘letting go’ and dropping your hand and arm at your side as you sit at the piano.
- 5 Now let’s work at playing groups of notes with one wrist motion, instead of one note at a time. The movement will be a swift ‘rotation’ to free your hand (and release any tension) after every group. Play with a gap of a second or two between each group of four sixteenth notes at first, allowing the wrist and hand to rest, as indicated by the quarter note (crotchet) rest in the example *below*. Over time and with practice the pauses between each group of sixteenth notes will eventually become progressively smaller and won’t disturb the pulse at all.
- 6 Remember to play deeply into the key bed, paying attention to finger positions; aim for a very steady, solid rhythmic pulse and an even tone (counting every sixteenth note aloud as you play will help to develop an accurate sense of rhythm). You need to be aware of the ‘feeling’ in your arm, wrist and hand at all times.
- 7 When you feel confident, you can increase the speed. To do this effectively, lighten your touch to attain even and rhythmical sixteenth notes (your fingers should skim over the surface of each note). This technique is the basis for much of what follows in many of the pieces in this book.



**Study No. 2 in C major, from 101 Daily Exercises (Op. 261) Carl Czerny**  
 Repeat this process with Czerny’s study for the left hand.

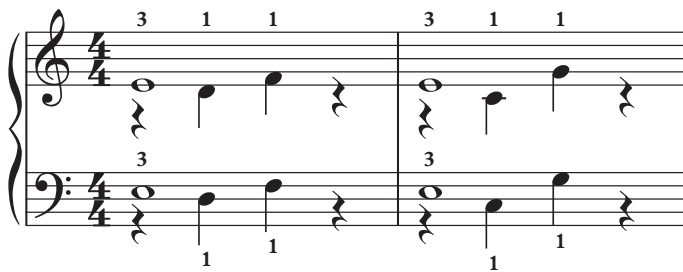
**Allegro**



## THUMBS

Thumbs provide a vital role: they can offer stability (especially in chordal or octave passagework), and enable seamless movement around the keyboard by turning under the hand. When the thumb moves freely, that movement stems from the base of the thumb (near the wrist). The thumb should connect to the keys at its tip near the nail (rather than with the whole flat side of the thumb), as shown in the photo (left). To master the movement of ‘sliding’ the thumb under the hand for scales and rapid figurations, and to develop thumbs which are able to move independently, try the following exercises:

### Exercise 1



This exercise provides good preparation for scales and arpeggios. Play each hand separately, hold the whole note (semibreve) with your third finger and gently rotate the thumbs under the hand to play the quarter notes (crotchets), ensuring the flexible movement of both thumb joints. Your hand will need to rotate, easily and with ‘loose’ joints, for comfort and flexibility.

### Exercise 2

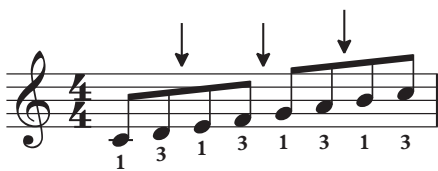


The second exercise is similar to the first but this time the fingers (and hand) rotate over the thumb. Practice slowly using a totally relaxed hand coupled with a flexible, loose wrist, arm and elbow.

### Exercise 3

Practicing scales with the thumb can also be helpful; use the fingering shown below for a one octave C major scale in the right hand:

Thumb moves under and hand rotates



For variety, swap the third finger for the second finger. Repeat this exercise with the left hand, using the thumb and either the second or third finger. As the intervals (distances between the notes) vary in scales, arpeggios and fast passagework, so the fingers and thumbs must alter their positions constantly and rapidly. This is a challenge, especially when playing more advanced repertoire; flexibility is necessary and for this reason, flexible movement will be an important topic throughout this book.

## ARM WEIGHT AND TONE PRODUCTION

How we produce sound on the piano depends on how we approach each note. Freedom and suppleness are important; stiff wrists, arms and elbows will typically produce an aggressive, harsh sound, usually caused by ‘hitting’ the keyboard from above. To produce a rich, full sound, keep your fingers in contact with the keyboard where possible, and use a dropping motion (or brief upward then downward ‘swing’ of the wrist coupled with the weight of your arm) to go deep into the key bed. Start by playing a note at a time, and listen carefully. Then move onto chords or **triads** (three-note chords) in both hands.

# Practice Advice

## Warm-ups

*It is essential to warm-up before a practice session. Preparing your hands and body (and mind!) will not only allow for healthy physical practice, but helps to instil a tranquil, calm approach to your work.*

### WARM-UP EXERCISE

How you choose to warm-up is completely personal, but I play very slow scales of two octaves (moving my wrist freely between every note) followed by a group of chords, with fingers sinking firmly into the keys. Play slowly, only increasing speed when fingers and hands feel sufficiently supple. Try the following warm-up exercise:

1 2 3 4 5 4 5 4    3 2 1 2 1 2 3 5    1 2 3 4 5 4 5 4    3 2 1 2 1 2 3 5

5 4 3 2 1 2 1 2    3 4 5 4 5 4 3 1    5 4 3 2 1 2 1 2    3 4 5 4 5 4 3 1

continue the ascending pattern using the same fingering

Regular work at sight-reading and scales will seriously improve your playing. The following tips are included in *Play it again: Piano – Book 1* and are relevant irrespective of level or standard.

### SIGHT-READING

In many ways sight-reading music is similar to learning to read; we gradually become accustomed to what will come next because we have seen the words and phrase patterns many times before. It's the same with music; until common note shapes, patterns and chords have been internalised, slow, careful and thorough preparation is important.

To sight-read fluently is a wonderfully rewarding skill but it requires regular, concentrated work. As it demands a lot of focus, it can be a good way to begin practice sessions.

### Tip

With practice you will be able to move through the seven sight-reading tips on the following page with increasing speed and confidence. Start with very easy piano music. There are several books dedicated specifically to sight-reading such as the *Piano Sight-Reading* books by John Kember (Schott Music). Above all, have fun experimenting with a range of styles. Ten to fifteen minutes devoted to sight-reading in each of your practice sessions will pay real dividends.

## 7 sight-reading tips

- 1** Note the key signature. This indicates which notes (if any) need to be sharpened or flattened throughout the piece. When playing, keep the key signature in mind at all times!
- 2** The time signature (placed after the key signature at the beginning), will show you how many beats to count (for example, if the piece is in  $\frac{3}{4}$  then there will be three quarter note (crotchet) beats in each bar).
- 3** Play through the music for each hand separately and slowly without following any rhythmic beat, but making a careful note of the fingering. This will help reading skills immeasurably and provides the opportunity to find the notes without the burden of keeping time.
- 4** Watch out for patterns, both rhythmic and melodic, as well as any scales, arpeggios and chords: these can all act as signposts.
- 5** To assimilate the rhythm properly, slowly tap the rhythm of the notes with two hands on the piano lid (the right hand tapping the top stave, and the left hand tapping the bottom stave). Count aloud all the time whilst tapping.
- 6** You are now ready to play with your hands together. Choose a very slow tempo (a third or even a quarter of the intended speed). If the piece consists predominantly of sixteenth notes (semiquavers), then count in sixteenths; if it is mainly eighth notes (quavers), count in eighths and so on. Starting your sight-reading practice material with a slow, steady speed is the key to playing fluently without hesitations. Gradually increase the tempo as you become more confident and fluent; becoming proficient at sight-reading takes time, so be patient!
- 7** Try not to stop or hesitate; keep on playing through your mistakes – maintaining a steady pulse is more important than playing all the right notes.

### SCALES AND ARPEGGIOS

Practicing and mastering scales and arpeggios is of enormous benefit for many reasons, including developing good hand coordination and secure fingering, strengthening fingers, learning all the keys, acquiring evenness and control, learning the geography of the keyboard, and developing a strong sense of rhythm, articulation and speed. Once fluent, scales and arpeggios can improve your sight-reading and will make it easier to learn new pieces.

Scales are sequences of seven notes (in 24 different keys), played up and down the keyboard; arpeggios are sequences of notes constructed from the tonic chord in all keys (a chord is a group of notes all sounding at the same time).